

## IN THIS ISSUE

**4 SAMHAIN'S CHILDREN***An Adventure**by Dave Schuey**for Dark Conspiracy® 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> ed.***14 DREAD TALES OF MYSTERY***A Red Herring**by Paul Hebron**for Call of Cthulhu®***17 MY MISSY'S EYES***Poetry**by Lester Smith***18 ROCK 'N' ROLL QUEEN***An Adventure**by Linden Dunham**for Dark Conspiracy® 1/2 ed.***32 GET YER GOAT***A Ride**by Jason D. McEwan**for Dark Conspiracy® 1/2 ed.***34 ZOMBIE LUNE***Poetry**by Lester Smith***35 SMITH & WESSON****MODEL 500 MAGNUM***New Hardware**by Lee Williams**for Dark Conspiracy® 1/2ed.**and Call of Cthulhu®***36 PENNY TUSKS***Darkness Today Fiction**by CW Kelson (Tad)***46 WHERE THE WOLVES ARE?***An Adventure**by Tim Bissaillon**for Little Fears® 1 ed.***51 LAMP POSTS IN BLOOM***An Adventure**by Scott Dorward**for Unknown Armies®***64 HUNGRY OAKS***A Carnivorous Protodimension**by CW Kelson (Tad)**for Dark Conspiracy® 1/2ed.***71 STATE OF NATURE***Fiction**by Joshua Mackay***77 UNDER THE FLOORBOARDS***A Column**by Lee Williams***78 ARKHAM TRICK-OR-TREAT***Humor**by M. Nixon and S. Dietz***DEMONSEEDS****33 THE FAITH HEALER***by Paul Hebron***62 TIGER ON THE LOOSE***by Linden Dunham***68 ROBOT WARS***by Linden Dunham*

# protodimension magazine

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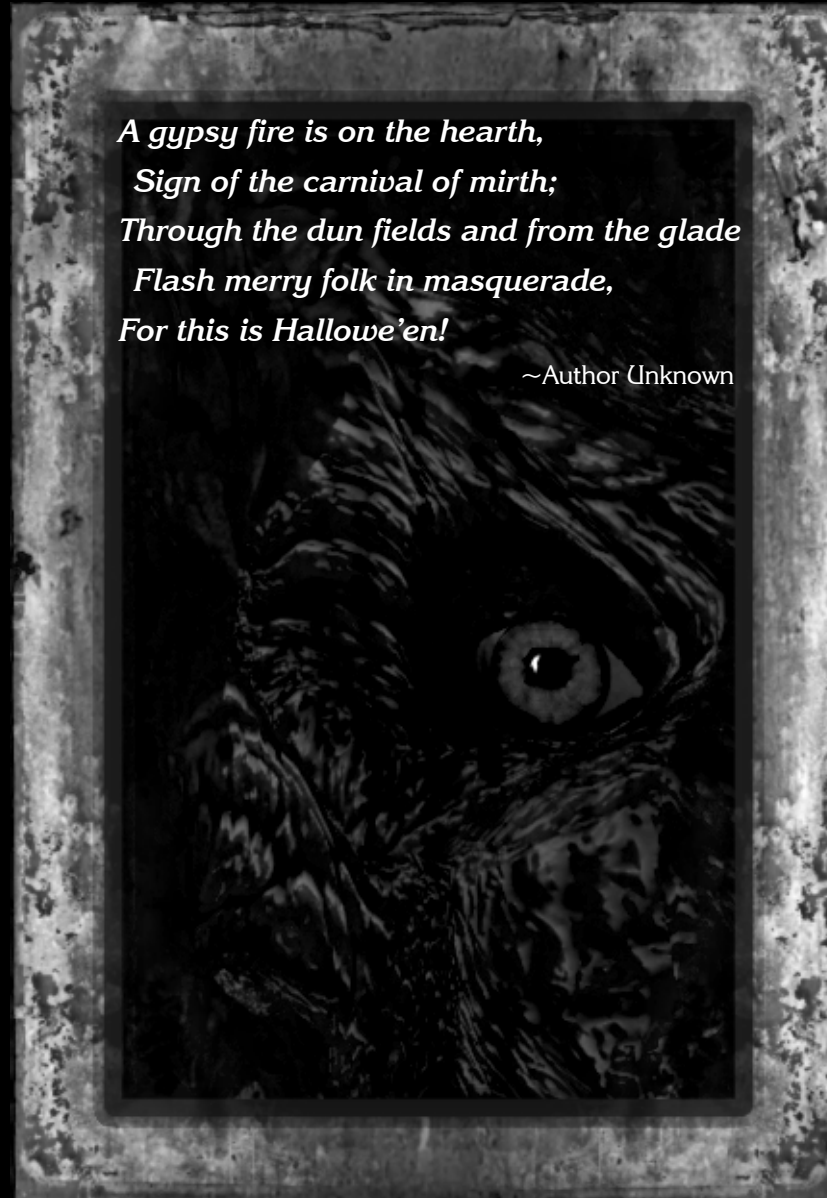
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Queries for alternate submission methods can also be made to this email address.



*A gypsy fire is on the hearth,  
Sign of the carnival of mirth;  
Through the dun fields and from the glade  
Flash merry folk in masquerade,  
For this is Hallowe'en!*

~Author Unknown

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# FROM THE SHADOWS

Chief Editor  
Lee Williams  
(morthrai)

[www.protodimension.org/zine](http://www.protodimension.org/zine)

Welcome one and all to Protodimension Issue 2! Yes, we're here again.

Once again we have a varied selection of horror gaming goodness, with adventures, items and stories that should keep you entertained for at least a little while. This time around we have another *Dark Conspiracy* adventure from Linden Dunham, entitled *Rock 'n' Roll Queen*, which just goes to show you can't trust the entertainment industry. Linden also gives us two short tabloid-style adventure seeds, *Robot Wars* and *Tiger On The Loose*.

Also for *Dark Conspiracy*, Dave Schuey has graced us with an all-new adventure called *Samhain's Children*. Just like in that most horrific of movies, E.T., not everyone out and about on Halloween is wearing a disguise... some of them actually look like that.

Tim Bisailon has sent us his *Little Fears* scenario that he wrote and ran at the CanGames 2009 convention, *Where The Wolves Are*. A simple and effective fable of childhood fears is how I would describe it. With the new **Nightmare Edition** of the game due out around the same time as this issue, our first *Little Fears* submission makes a timely appearance.

We also have a couple of new contributors. Joshua Mackay's tale *State Of Nature* describes the aftermath of a strange event and its effects on a regular North American small town. Personally I like the story, it reminds me of the kind of thing you get in the old '50s and '60s movies. Our other new guy is Paul Hebron, who sends us behind the scenes of a late 1920s pulp magazine of the type Lovecraft himself wrote for. I couldn't resist the title: *Dread Tales Of Terror!* Paul also gives us a *Demon Seed*, *The Faith Healer*.

Our other main piece for this issue is for *Unknown Armies*. *Lamp Posts In Bloom*. Like *Where The Wolves Are*, this was originally written for convention play. Authored by my fellow Brit Scott Dorward, I am pretty sure I have played through this adventure at some con or other, it certainly seems familiar. As with much UA writing this has what they call a mature theme, but then we are all grown-ups here right?

The rest of the material for this issue was either written, drawn or photo-manipulated by three guys calling themselves editors. Me, being me, decided to write up another big-ass handgun, this time remembering to add stats for more than one system. I forgot to do that in Issue 1.

You will also be seeing my name again right at the end of this issue, in my regular column *From Under The Floorboards*. This time I ramble on about music, its merits as a GM tool both as backing for game sessions and especially as inspiration for adventures. I know it's been done before but with a rock 'n' roll adventure this issue allied with my column being named after a song, it just all sort of came together that way.



Cheers all!  
Lee Williams



# SAMHAIN'S CHILDREN

## *An Adventure*

by Dave Schuey

for *Dark Conspiracy*® 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

*“Whenever a thing is done for the first time, it releases a little demon.”*

*-Emily Dickinson*

## BACKGROUND

One contribution of the Ancient Celtic people is the festival of Samhain (SOW-en). Literally meaning ‘Summer’s End’, it was recognized as the beginning of the Celtic year, as the skies darkened and the world descended into winter. In modern civilization this festival has become known as All Hallow’s Eve, or Halloween.

In 112 A.D. there occurred a horrible and tragic event. During a 133,000-year alignment of planets and stars, the addition of a rogue comet, now long since collided with Saturn, caused a rift between our world and another to be opened. During the yearly Festival of Samhain, the land was overrun with mischievous miniature demons. They caused as much fear and chaos as they could, only to disappear at sunrise.

The resourceful Celts, barely surviving the initial onslaught of tiny darklings, devised a method of sealing the rift. By their calculations, the ceremony would be sufficient to hold the

rift for 21 years, at which point it would need to be repeated. So it was incorporated into their celebration of Samhain and passed down.

As the centuries wore on, however, fewer and fewer of the Celt’s descendants carried on the tradition, and the demons observed and learned. They began to disguise themselves as trick or treaters. Sometime in the mid twentieth century, the ritual was abandoned altogether and the rift’s power began to grow. Originally, the rift opened only on October 31 (April 30 in the southern hemisphere). Over time, and by the era of Dark Conspiracy, it now spans three days on either side of that date.

The rift is at it’s most powerful on October 31, which sees the most traffic in the little darklings. Upon the passing of this period, they disappear until the next year, but the evil they can sow in one week can be disastrous.

Their protodimensional lord, *Lu’khai’ax*, ultimately wishes to cross over to Earth himself, but this can only be accomplished at midnight



(Samhain's Children from page 4)

on Halloween, when his minions have sowed enough fear to bolster his energies for the trip.

### THE PC'S INVOLVEMENT

The player characters may become involved with this adventure in a number of ways. As this situation has been going on for some time, records of "monster children" may have caught their attention. Anyone in Law Enforcement or a Medical or Scientific profession may be called in through normal channels. Bounty Hunters, Journalists or Clergy may be alerted through contacts within the police department. An Environmentalist may catch wind of the incident and mistakenly believe the Darklings to be an endangered species. Government Agents, Paraphysicists, and Mystics will likely be alerted via the methods for which they are best known. A Paramedic may be involved in the initial transport of the first Darkling corpse. In short, with a little thought, many of the Dark Conspiracy professions could be called in to see the body. Hopefully, your group will include one of these. If all else fails, have the PCs witness the accident, perhaps noting that the "mask" of the Darkling remains firmly attached even after death.

Note: While there are a series of specific encounters listed here, the truly insidious part of these Darklings is their superficial resemblance to human children in costume. Between the encounters, remember to give the PCs the opportunity to mistake real children for Darklings.

### AND SO IT BEGINS...

#### Night One:

In an initial stroke of bad luck for the Darklings, one of the manifesting creatures is

# DARK CONSPIRACY™





## THE CORONER'S OFFICE

Low lighting and light blue tile characterize these rooms. Stainless steel is also much in evidence. Almost everywhere you look there are the tools of the forensics trade. Microscopes, scales, cameras, and preserved human organs in jars dot the tables and shelves. Above each exam table is a bright surgical lighting fixture. Reaching down from the ceiling is a microphone on an extensive boom that allows it to be positioned anywhere over any of the exam tables.

To the North is an area with hoses, sinks and a table with drainage channels around the sides. Bodies are washed here prior to autopsy and the water filtered for particulates and other evidence.

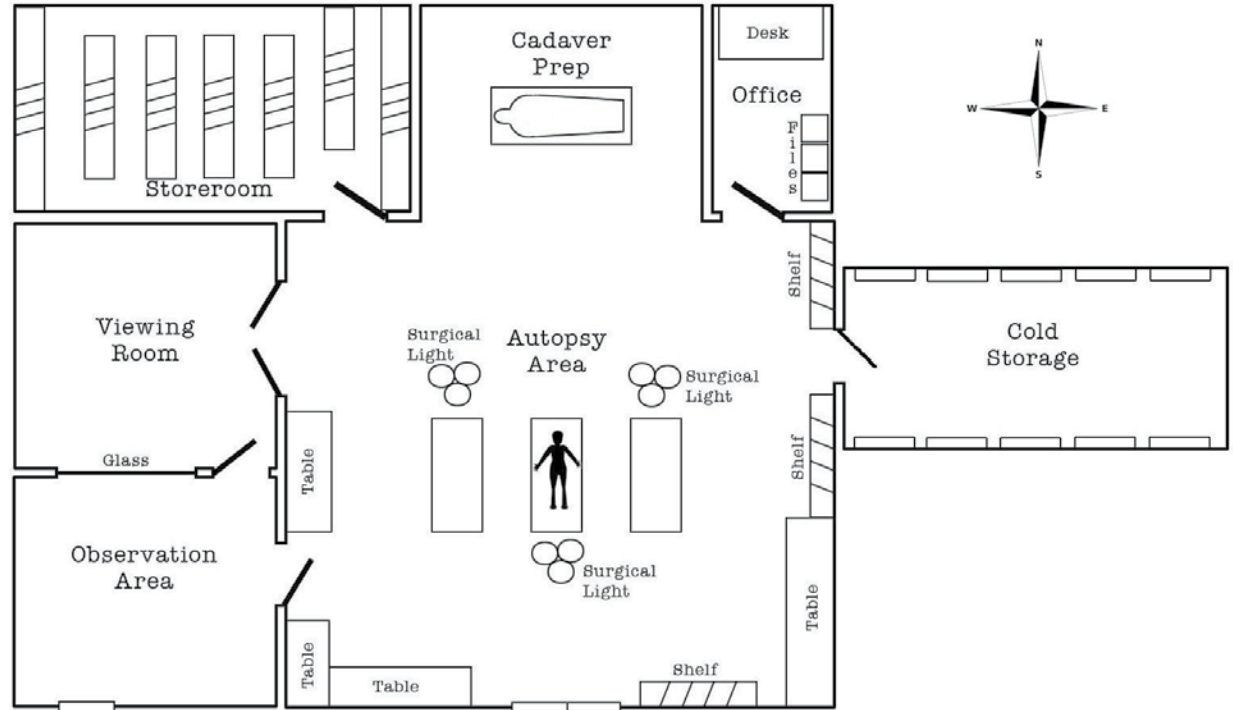
To the West of this room is a large storeroom where chemicals, scalpels, plastic bags, paperwork and other items are kept.

South of the storeroom are two rooms separated by a thick pane of glass. Both are well lit. The first is where bodies are identified when there is time for preparation. The second is the room where the deceased relatives and friends wait while the body is brought in. These rooms are also sealed for bio-safety so that others may observe an autopsy when the corpse is suspected of harboring a hazardous contaminant.

In the Northeast corner is a small office where the coroner does his paperwork.

To the East is the cold storage area. This long narrow room is lined with stainless steel doors, three high. When opened, the "slab" upon which the deceased is resting can be slid out. Identifications are sometimes carried out here, if there are circumstances that prevent the use of the room to the West.

## THE CORONER'S OFFICE



Drawing by Dave Schuey

(Samhain's Children from page 5)

accidentally struck and killed by a motorist. The PCs are alerted when the hideous mask turns out to be real flesh. They must either examine the body that night or the next day.

The coroner has never seen physiology of this sort in all his years. While the body appears to be that of a human child, the internal organs are unrecognizable. What appears to be a heart is located where the stomach should be, and there seems to be no system for digesting food. He is at a loss how the

body can maintain itself. While genetic testing is pending, he expects the results to be inconclusive.

Most disturbing to look at is the "mask". Upon closer inspection it seems to be more the result of primitive cosmetic surgery. Scars and bone fragments inserted under the skin give the impression of a large structure than is actually present. The skin itself seems almost dead.

While examining the body a force of darklings Teleport into the surrounding rooms and begin

(Samhain's Children from page 6)

rushing in. They will attempt to retrieve their fallen comrade. Designate which one has Dimension Walk, this will be the one trying to reach the body. All the others will act as support. If this Darkling is successful it will begin taking the body back to their home dimension. If killed the others will flee.

While the Darklings do not speak much, they will coordinate with one another, speaking several different languages. The most unusual and idiosyncratic is ancient Celtic. The PCs may not recognize it at first, but allow a Language roll per Dark Conspiracy rules. If they fail at this time they may research later on a computer and identify it.

Allow an Average (INT) check to deduce that if Celtic is the oldest language they speak, their origin must lay somewhere in that culture. Educated characters may make an Easy (EDU) roll to be aware of volumes pertaining to ancient Celtic civilization in the Special Collections section of the library. Whether the Darklings are successful or not, a trip to the library will be necessary.

#### Day Two/Night Two:

Much information can be found online, particularly the belief of one researcher that the ancient rituals and ceremonies of the Celtic people served dual purposes. However, this information is all very general. The library maintains a special Celtic collection where the works of researchers from the past four centuries promise more specific information.

The library hours are 9:00 AM to 10:00 PM. Breaking into the library may be one course of action, if the PCs are feeling the urgency of the situation. Using contacts to gain after hours entry may be a safer course of action, but the

PCs will obviously require such contacts. In most cases going during normal hours will be best.

See the *Breaking into the Library* sidebar.

The Special Collections section is an environmentally controlled room with two adjacent reading rooms. Only those with sufficient academic credentials are allowed access. The specific nature of the ritual needing to be performed can only be found in volumes transcribed from the notes of a 19th century anthropologist and occultist, Lord John Kingsley. These are volumes that have never been made available electronically.

Information retrieval via this method will require a series of Difficult (EDU) rolls. For this task only, borrow the Empathic Power Level system to determine how many pieces of information are gained from each roll. Each Stage of success allows one roll on the following chart. Record the total number of Stages during this process. This number will be used as a success modifier when conducting the actual ritual. Eventually, the following items may be learned.

1. The Festival of Samhain was the celebration of the beginning of the New Year, as was passed down publicly, but was also a time to bind a rift between our world and another.
2. This other world was filled with dangerous, dark creatures intent on the spread of evil and chaos.
3. The ritual must be performed in the presence of nature, such as trees, grass and rocks.
4. The greater the height at which the ritual is performed, the better.

## BREAKING INTO THE LIBRARY

Security is Average for the library. Security systems will need to be overcome at three (3) points to gain entry. Failure on any of these tests will result in an alarm being raised. It will take ten minutes for authorities to arrive. Give the players a strict countdown of this unknown deadline if they choose to abscond with the volumes in the Special Collections section. There is one night guard, unarmed. If confronted, he will not risk his life to protect the library, especially if the PCs are armed.

### Entering The Library Via Contact

Less of a problem logistically, contacts that can gain after hours access will nonetheless be concerned for the safety of the volumes in the Special Collections. They will insist on accompanying the PCs and monitoring their activities.

5. The ritual must be performed under the open night sky.
6. Wine must be consumed and spilled during the ritual. One sip for each drop.
7. Specific ceramic cups must be used.
8. The ritual must be performed on October 31.
9. The mind must be focused on the task at hand.
10. The chant of closure must be repeatedly intoned (see Samhain's Chant)



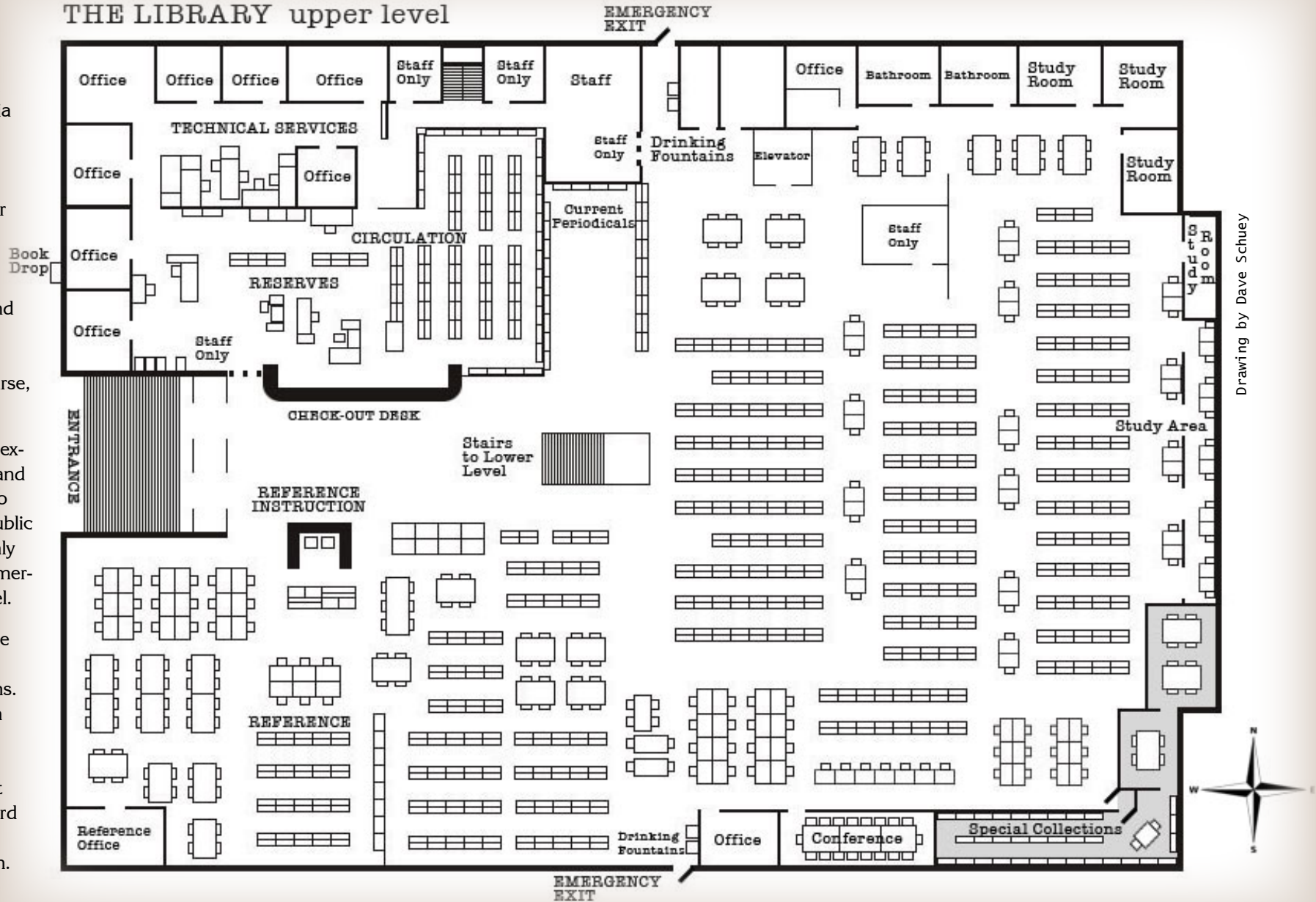
## THE LIBRARY

The Library is essentially a two-story building entered via an external staircase leading to the Upper Level. This is the main level, while books not currently in circulation or otherwise in storage are on the lower level. It is a large room, with a series of offices and study rooms around the perimeter. There are numerous tables, computer terminals, desks and, of course, shelves filled with books.

There are two emergency exits to the North and South, and to staircases leading down to the lower level, one in the public area and one in the Staff Only area. There are additional emergency exits on the lower level.

In the Southeast corner are three positive pressure environmentally controlled rooms. These are entered through a pair of doors that open only one at a time. About two persons could go through at a time. A magnetic swipe card controls these doors. This is the Special Collections room.

## THE LIBRARY upper level



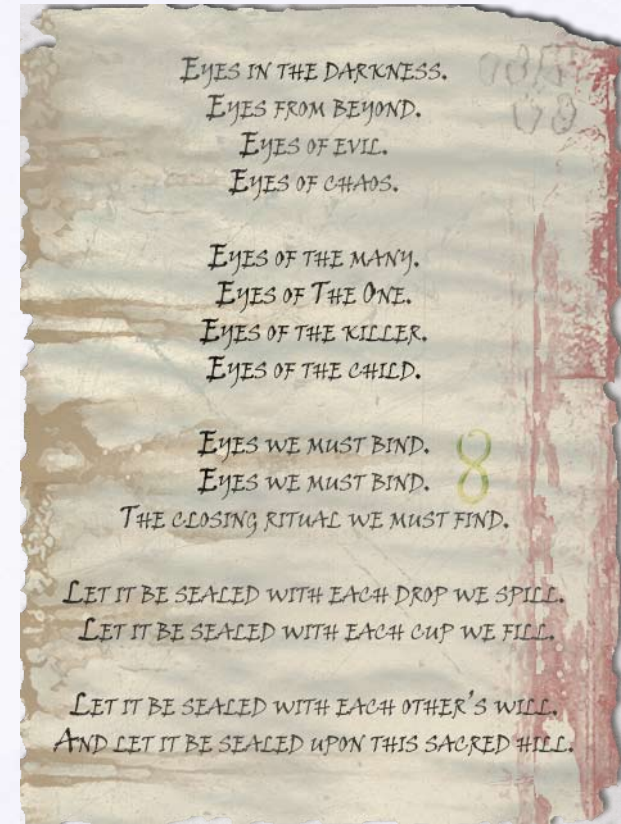


(Samhain's Children from page 7)



Image by Dave Schuey

Demons in the Stacks



EYES IN THE DARKNESS.  
EYES FROM BEYOND.  
EYES OF EVIL.  
EYES OF CHAOS.

EYES OF THE MANY,  
EYES OF THE ONE.  
EYES OF THE KILLER.  
EYES OF THE CHILD.

EYES WE MUST BIND. 8  
EYES WE MUST BIND. 8  
THE CLOSING RITUAL WE MUST FIND.

LET IT BE SEALED WITH EACH DROP WE SPILL.  
LET IT BE SEALED WITH EACH CUP WE FILL.

LET IT BE SEALED WITH EACH OTHER'S WILL,  
AND LET IT BE SEALED UPON THIS SACRED HILL.



(Samhain's Children from page 9)

All this information will take some time to accumulate, and at some point after night falls the Darklings will return to hinder their progress. They will be noticeably more powerful during this second encounter. They will not Teleport into the special collections rooms, for some reason (the environmental controls affect their unique physiology). They will attack anyone in the main area of the library, and may attempt to set the library ablaze if they cannot stop the PCs.

#### Day Three/Night Three:

The cups supposedly needed for the ritual can be found at the Museum of History, in the Celtic Culture exhibit. The PCs might have the contacts to simply acquire them, and if so they may proceed to All Hallows Eve. If not, a robbery or con job will be involved. If they choose to break-in, they will find the museum's security superior to the library.

See the *Breaking into the Museum* sidebar.

If the PCs attempt to obtain the cups in any manner other than through contacts the Darklings will return to stop them, this time at near full power.



Image by Dave Schuey

There are numerous swords, daggers and clubs in the exhibits. The Darklings will not hesitate to use them. Some are recreations and will be sufficient to actually do damage. Most are real artifacts and will not only be useless in combat, will most likely be destroyed in the attempt. There will almost certainly be other damage to the museum, a situation they will need to deal with after the adventure.

This could be a running battle, which rages all over the museum, or at least this wing. The other wings of the museum will be locked up, and it will require more Difficult Security rolls to get into them.

Note: the darklings will always attempt to retrieve their dead, and will stop their attack when they have suffered 50% casualties.

#### ALL HALLOWS EVE:

Any number of locations are possible for the ritual, but the most fun will be the private rooftop of a wealthy nomenklatura. High atop a skyscraper, this locale will give a large bonus for success that the ancient Celts could never hope to achieve. During the midnight ritual, Darklings at full power will do their best to stop the PCs.

Participants must make an Empathy roll as they walk the circle. Record Empathic Success levels and watch for Catastrophic Failure. As each circuit is completed they must take a sip of wine and spill a drop. As they walk the circle they must recite the chant. Remember the Empathic Success levels from the research phase, adding the levels rolled during the ritual. An average size hill will add nothing, the skyscraper +10. Determine any other location's modifier based on this scale. If they have obtained the cups add +1 for each cup used.

#### BREAKING IN TO THE MUSEUM

Security is Difficult for the museum. Security systems will need to be overcome at five (5) points to gain entry. Failure on any of these tests will result in an alarm being raised. It will take five minutes for authorities to arrive. Give the players a strict countdown of this unknown deadline. There are five night guards, all armed with handguns. If confronted, they will fight to protect the museum exhibits.

#### The Museum Con Job

Convincing the curator to allow the use of his 2000-year-old artifacts by unknown persons for unknown reasons will be Difficult. It should be handled as a series of Act/Bluff, Bargain and Persuasion rolls. Have the players devise a plan that you feel might work, then determine a series of plot points at which they will need to make rolls.



(Samhain's Children)

## THE MUSEUM OF HISTORY

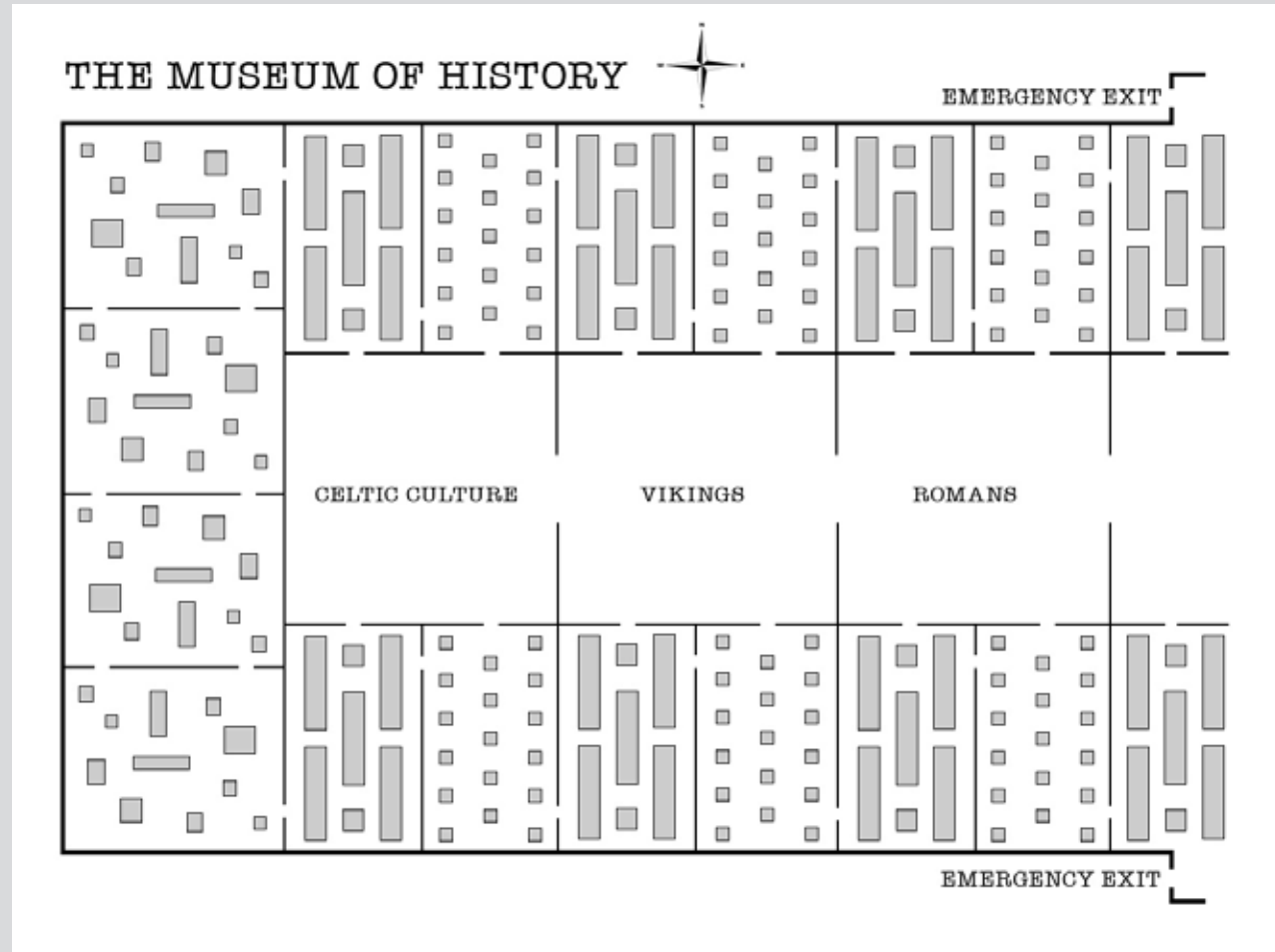
The wing of the museum shown here is devoted to the British Isles. The rooms around the edges all present artifacts and exhibits detailing various periods in the history of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. These are comprised mainly of glass cases, which broadcast audio commentaries to devices rented to museum patrons. A touch-sensitive area on the case activates these commentaries.

The three large galleries in the middle house special interactive exhibits:

The Roman room has an example of a Roman road, a sturdy Hadrian's Wall for kids to play on, and several artifact-laden cases around the edges. Wall murals also depict life in Britain under Roman rule.

The Viking room houses a full-scale mock-up of a long-ship. The deck, however, is composed of Plexiglas, beneath which can be viewed a representation of an unearched Viking burial. Here, too, the walls are decorated with murals depicting the centuries of pillage and trade between the Vikings and the people of Britain.

The Celtic Culture room is filled with a circle of artificial Standing Stones. These stones are actually cases containing artifacts, which can be viewed much like the other exhibits. In the center of the circle are tables upon which are activities designed to show children and adults how the ancient Celts lived. These walls are also decorated with murals.



Drawing by Dave Schuey

(Samhain's Children from page 10)

The number they are trying to reach is 100. If the rolls for the ritual are less than adequate, failure will be the only result. If, however, anyone performing the ritual rolls a Catastrophic failure, the Dark Lord of the other dimension will cross over.

If they can keep trying to seal the rift they may eventually succeed. When this is done the Dark Lord and his minions will be pulled back through and barred entry for another 21 years (although the PCs may not have learned of this timetable, your call). If they never succeed in the ritual, the Darklings and their lord will continue to cause mayhem for the next three nights, losing power each night, until on the fourth night they seem to have stopped. The PCs may be involved in battling them on these additional nights, but further attempts to close the rift are fruitless.

Make no mistake, however, when All Hallows Eve again approaches, they will be back. Perhaps next time the PC's will have more success. They certainly have a year to gather powerful empaths to their cause.



## Samhain's Children

### Night One

Strength	6	Education	15	Move	6/12/24/48
Constitution	12	Charisma	22	Skill/Dam.	12/1D6
Agility	15	Empathy	8	Hits	15/30
Intelligence	12	Initiative	5	# Appearing	3-18

### Night Two

Strength	12	Education	15	Move	6/12/24/48
Constitution	20	Charisma	22	Skill/Dam.	14/2D6
Agility	25	Empathy	10	Hits	20/40
Intelligence	12	Initiative	5	# Appearing	4-24

### Night Three

Strength	15	Education	15	Move	6/12/24/48
Constitution	25	Charisma	22	Skill/Dam.	14/2D6
Agility	30	Empathy	12	Hits	25/45
Intelligence	12	Initiative	5	# Appearing	5-30

### All Hallows Eve

Strength	15	Education	15	Move	6/12/24/48
Constitution	25	Charisma	22	Skill/Dam.	14/2D6
Agility	30	Empathy	12	Hits	30/50
Intelligence	12	Initiative	5	# Appearing	10-60

**Special:** While Samhain's Children are not restricted to operating on All Hallows Eve, their power is at its greatest on that night, from Midnight to 6:00 AM. They typically possess such powers as *Project Thought*, *Project Emotion*, *Willpower Drain*, *ESP*, *Hypnosis* and *Teleportation*. In every group there will be one creature with *Dimension Walk*.

**Description:** Resembling human children in brown or black clothing and the most hideous Halloween masks imaginable, these Darklings engage in all manner of cruel and mischievous pranks. They delight in causing fear and pain, as this feeds their Dark Lord. They are fast and unnaturally agile, dodging cars and causing accidents.





## THE DARK LORD LU'KHAİ'AX

Strength	30	Education	25	Move	5/10/20/40
Constitution	50	Charisma	50	Skill/Dam.	20/6D6
Agility	25	Empathy	40	Hits	125/250
Intelligence	35	Initiative	6	# Appearing	1
Note: Lu'khai'ax's skin acts as 2 levels of ballistic armor.					

**Special:** Lu'khai'ax has the Empathic skills Project Thought, Project Emotion, Willpower Drain, ESP, Hypnosis, Teleportation, Dimension Walk and his unique skill, Masque. Masque physically transforms the target's face into a grotesque parody of humanity. When his Empathic Success Levels equal or exceed the Constitution of his target, their features have been fully transformed. This is Lu'khai'ax's first step in transforming someone into one of his "Children". Over the course of the next year they will steadily decrease in size until they reach the stature of a child. Their mind will also transform during this period, until they know nothing of themselves and worship only the Dark Lord. Banishing the Dark Lord will end this process.

16' tall, slender, but clearly powerful, this dark lord has black, bark-like skin and glowing yellow eyes. His clothes, if they can be called such, appear more like a swirling black mist clinging to his body. Long, cruel fingers direct his minions like puppets while oversized feet seem to crush whatever they step upon.

Ultimately, Lu'khai'ax intends to transform Earth as he has his dimension. He is a ravenous expansionist, with no other goal than to remake all of creation in his warped image. All beings will be changed into his "Children", and all civilization reduced to abandoned rubble.

*"He is a ravenous expansionist, with no other goal than to remake all of creation in his warped image. All beings will be changed into his "Children", and all civilization reduced to abandoned rubble."*

# DREAD TALES OF MYSTERY

**A Red Herring**  
by Paul Hebron  
for **Call of Cthulhu®**

*“This dread was not exactly  
a dread of physical evil —  
and yet I should be at a loss  
how otherwise to define it.”*

E. A. Poe, *The Black Cat*

Founded in 1924 to exploit the pulp market, *ala Weird Tales*, *Dread Tales of Mystery*, a monthly magazine, collects stories of the supernatural, science fiction, mystery, and horror (the title is an alphabet soup the editor thought would be ‘exciting’). This magazine contains a few stories that investigators may tentatively think of as being Cthulhu Mythos related and could be found when investigators search a scene or presented as a clue to stoke their paranoia. The editor is one Lloyd Telford of Omaha, Nebraska, where the magazine is produced. It is sold for 30 cents and averages about five stories an issue, a full colour cover page, an editorial and some comments sent in by readers. It is printed by Telford’s company in Omaha on cheap paper (hence pulps) and makes a fair profit. The magazine folded in 1934 due to economic difficulties but there are still collectors as some of the stories within are very rare.

## KEY PERSONNEL

**Lloyd Telford**, Editor, 46: A paunchy, unfit man who runs many businesses

in Omaha who started the magazine to generate some extra cash and add editor to his resume. He funds the magazine himself, but has little interest in reading and doesn’t particularly care for weird fiction: its all ‘trash’ to him. He possesses the contact details for all of his writers and could be persuaded to part with them for the right price. He’s not one for moral scruples. He resides in an opulent office in the city’s business centre.

**Eli Steinberg**, Illustrator, 21: Steinberg is a native of Providence, Rhode Island and whose particular style has meant the pulps are the only way he can make a living. The drawings he creates are *outré* and morbid, some might say obscene, causing him to be banned from the clubs and galleries of Rhode Island. Or so he says. The truth is that Steinberg’s a hack who can only make his money through the pulps; the persecution he experiences only exists in his



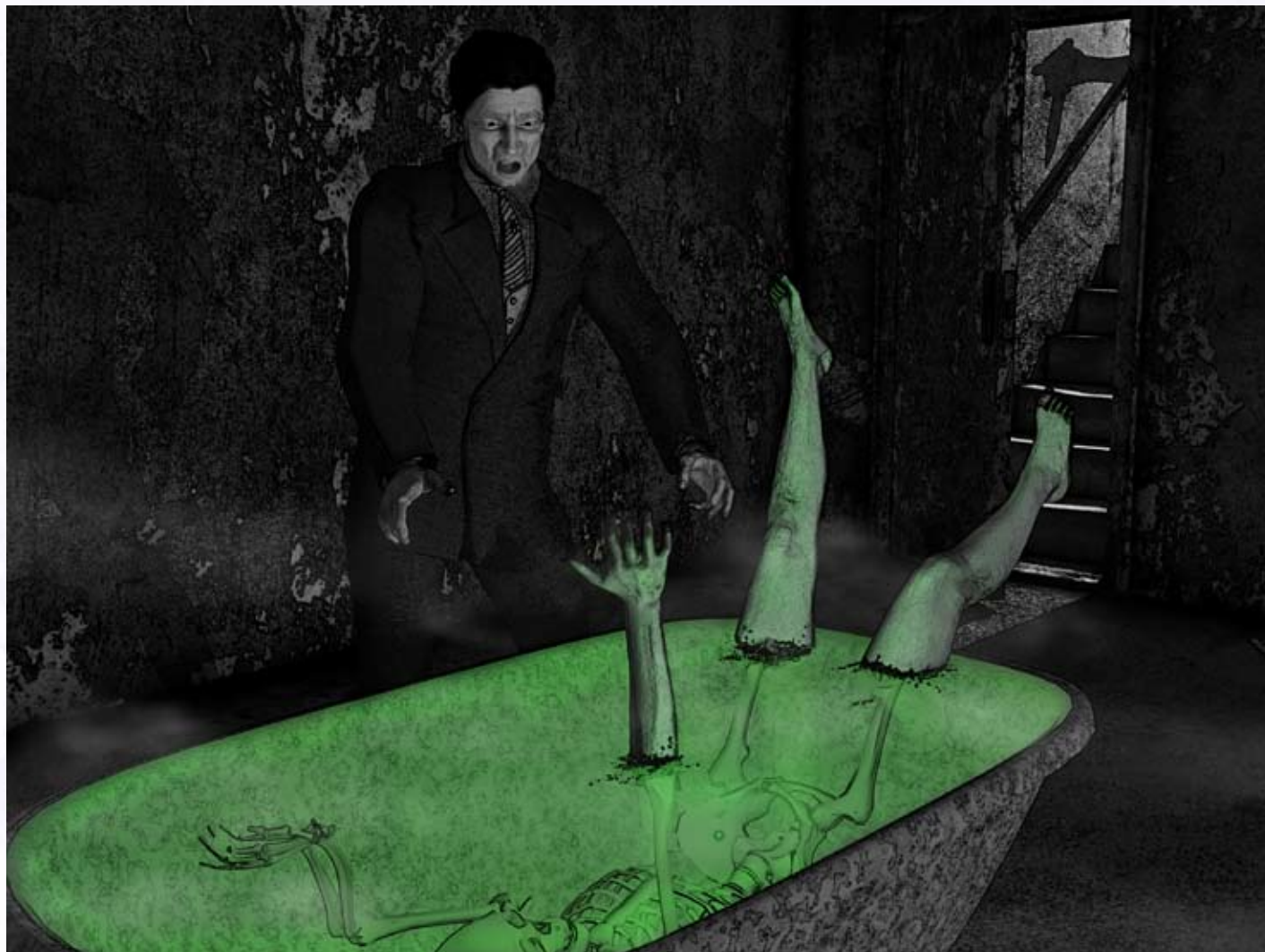


(Dread Tales from page 14)

head and it is his boisterous reaction to criticism that has found him ostracized. Investigators studying his covers find many bizarre, otherworldly creatures, perhaps drawn by someone who doesn't understand basic geometry. Steinberg's one claim to fame is that he once met Richard Upton Pickman in a bar in Boston, but found him a bit unsettling.

**Miguel Herrera**, Writer, 37: Migrating from Cuba to New York in the late 1890s, Herrera is a writer ahead of his time in the field of science fiction: his desk is littered with novels and short stories that feature concepts quite close to space travel, mobile phones, computers, the Channel Tunnel, the nuclear bomb and even the internet. Herrera has failed to reach any real success and lives in relative poverty in a tenement, because, as he says, some find his concepts too outlandish, although discrimination might be a truer cause. Investigators might suspect Herrera of knowing more than he should about future events, but the truth is that Herrera is both lucky in predicting trends and very intelligent. Herrera dies in 1929 of a blood clot and his works are thrown out by his family, forever lost except in Dread Tales back issues.

**Doug Sandforth**, Writer, 55: Sandforth is a polyglot whose horror tales are just one of his wide inventory of ventures. Residing in Baltimore, Sandforth teaches law, writes a local history journal, collects antique books, speaks four languages and





(Dread Tales from page 15)

produces prodigious volumes of fiction and poetry. He contributes to numerous magazines under a variety of aliases. Investigators may find cause for concern in his short story 'The Tale of Ensign McNamara of Jersey'. It is a story about a sailor who is adrift in the ocean and visited by the ghosts of the dead crewmates of his last ship and contains references to 'Chu-Lyuo', 'Ri-Lay' and those 'found deep'. Sandforth doesn't know what the words mean; "Just something I made up or read about." He doesn't recall which book he might have read it in. Other than that most of his fiction is fairly standard.

**H. Horvath Thackeray**, Writer, 25: A writer living in Washington for whom information is scarce. Unlike the other writers Telford has never encountered him. Thackeray's output is interesting: of particular note are his narrative poems that read like transcripts of dreams, often dark and laden with mystical references. Mostly though he writes supernaturally tinged detective stories. H. Horvath Thackeray is in fact Henrietta Horvath of Seattle, Washington, the wife of a police officer and school teacher.

### SAMPLE ISSUE: DREAD TALES OF MYSTERY No. 14, 1925

Cover art by Eli Steinberg depicting a stereotypically hardboiled private eye with a horrified expression approaching a bath overflowing with glowing green ooze and a pair of shapely female legs dangling over the side. Garish red font reads "*The Acid Bath Murderer*, by H. Horvath Thackeray."

The first few pages are editorial and adverts (most for Telford's own businesses), plus information for contacting the publishers in Omaha and submitting stories and art. There is then a page of fan mail and 'it happened to me' type stories, which range from the plausible ("I live next to Mt. Shasta, California and spotted a floating orange light hovering close to the summit, has anyone else seen something like this?") to the unlikely ("I have found myself lately pondering Atlantis and its mysteries, in particular my grandparents who died at sea and talked often of how they were going to go there. Contact Dwight Ericson, Columbia Road, Boston for some genuine Altantean jewelry and curiosities"). There are two other stories ('The Paradox Conundrum' by R.F. Warden and 'The Ghouls of Delight' by Francis Coleman) not really worth reading, but the others might be:

- "Prowler in the Yard" by Doug Sandforth. A first person account of someone (or something) searching a graveyard at night for a lost love. He encounters a mourner by a grave, has a brief conversation, and then leaves her. The protagonist is shot when he tries to break into the caretaker's house and is found dead in the morning clutching a tombstone over one hundred years old.
- "The Acid Bath Murderer" by H. Horvath Thackeray. A surprisingly grim and gritty tale of a Seattle police detective (Trainer Bowen, a running character) investigating a gruesome discovery made by sewer workers and the subsequent investigation. Vividly portrays poverty-ridden slums and a

psychopathic killer who drenches himself in occult tomes and ancient mysteries.

- "The Privateers" by Miguel Herrera. A scientist who regulates the 'information industry' finds that a fault has been added to the system, causing all kinds of chaos organised for profit by a sinister 'other'.

Finally, there is one piece of work that has been submitted to the magazine that almost certainly connects to the Cthulhu Mythos: a piece of fiction by Robert Harrison Blake who dies under mysterious circumstances in his room in Providence, 1935. "The Skull of the Unspeakable Master" is a parable-like story set in an undetermined city in the Middle East where an archaeologist is persuaded to accompany a wise Arab to Irem, the city of pillars, to uncover the corpse of the god Nyarlathotep, said to be entombed there. The man and his companion search fruitlessly and upon emerging into the deserts finds that Irem is once again alive with blasphemous worshippers. The man is revealed to have been Nyarlathotep himself at the end. Although extravagantly written, there are some grains of truth within about the Outer God.



"Hold on, man. We don't go anywhere with 'scary,' 'spooky,' 'haunted,' or 'forbidden' in the title.

From *Scooby-Doo*





## MY MISSY'S EYES

(with apologies to Shakespeare's mistress)

*My Missy's eyes cannot behold the sun;  
Some corpse lips are more red than her lips' red;  
If breath be life, why then her life is done;  
She spends her days asleep among the dead.  
I've seen undead unmasked who fled in fright;  
My Missy never could be thought so weak;  
Although I fear her and her sanguine bite,  
I am compelled to sit with her and speak.  
She warns me not to tell of what I know,  
Yet I feel obligated to expound:  
Unlike that gal, Lenore, described by Poe,  
My Missy clawed her way out of the ground;  
And now she prowls by night like some Goth hooker,  
For though she's dead, my Missy is a looker!*

— Lester Smith

*Poetry*

*by Lester Smith*

## SONNET 130

*My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress when she walks, treads on the ground.  
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.*

— William Shakespeare

Lester Smith is the President of the **Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets**. Visit his website at [www.LesterSmith.com](http://www.LesterSmith.com)

# ROCK 'N' ROLL QUEEN

## An Adventure

by Linden Dunham  
for **Dark Conspiracy**® 1/2 ed.

*We play our Monster Rock 'n' Roll,  
Raise your glasses high,  
On a trip to burn your soul!*

Zombie Ghost Train  
Monster Rock 'n' Roll

## INTRODUCTION

*Rock 'n' Roll Queen* is a scenario for 3-4 PCs of any experience level. It isn't particularly gun heavy and is suitable for use as an introductory adventure. The PCs are drawn into the search for a missing teenager who is believed to have fallen in with bad company. Subsequent enquiries reveal that he has joined the retinue of an underground rock singer. The singer is actually a Dread Sidhe bent on causing mayhem before doing a disappearing act. I've set the scenario in London, but adapting it to other urban locales shouldn't prove difficult. There is a general assumption that, in keeping with the milieu of the original game, items like computers, PDAs, and mobile phones aren't as pervasive as they are today. Their prohibitive cost tends to limit ownership to people in higher income brackets, or those who require such devices for their work. Consequently, there is still a healthy "dead tree press" both professional (newspapers and magazines) and amateur (fanzines, pamphlets and free sheets).

## BY HAMMERSMITH BRIDGE I SAT DOWN AND WEPT

It is early evening. The PCs are walking through their home neighbourhood. This is assumed to be the West London borough of Hammersmith but any other London district with sizeable *Mike* and *Prole* populations will do. The PCs may be on their way to their favourite bar, pub, or club, or have some other reason for being out in the evening. In any event, as the PCs pass the local police station, a woman in her mid-30s comes out of the main doors, and walks past them with tears streaming down her face. She heads in the direction of the Thames before sitting down at a graffiti covered bus shelter where she continues to cry. PCs who go to her aid discover that her name is Kim Malin and her sixteen year old son Steven has gone missing. She has reported the relevant details to the police but they have made it clear that with all the other demands on their time, including numerous other runaways and disappearances, they can hardly make the case a priority. Mrs Malin believes that Steven has gone to join one of



(Rat King from page 18)

his favourite bands on tour, something he frequently talked about doing. Given Steven's relative youth and the fact that several of the groups he follows have a reputation for outrageous behaviour, his mother is concerned for his safety. She asks the PCs to help find her son. She has some savings and can pay them a small daily fee, plus expenses.

## REFEREE'S INFORMATION

Mrs Malin isn't too wide of the mark in surmising that her son has left home to go on tour with a rock band. He has been recruited into the entourage of a Dread Sidhe who is performing a series of gigs in London. The Sidhe's plan is to build up a sizeable following, then mount one final concert that will climax in an orgy of violence. When the smoke clears the Sidhe will move on elsewhere to begin the process again. As the PCs investigate Steven's disappearance they should become aware of the Sidhe's plan, and realise that not only do they have to bring Steven home, but they also have to prevent a major riot.

## INITIAL ENQUIRIES

### THE MALIN HOME

Kim and Steven Malin live in a modest flat on an estate in one of the Miketown sections of Hammsmith. Kim is a single parent, her husband Paul died after being beaten by police during a protest against the former government of the Socialist People Party.

#### Kim Malin

Mrs Malin can fill the PCs in on the events leading up to her son's disappearance: The previous evening he went to see a band playing a gig in the

north London borough of Camden. He told his mother that he would be probably be back late but he would get a lift to and from the gig. When Kim went to wake him up for school in the morning she found that his bed hadn't been slept in. She spent the day phoning around his friends as well as looking for him in his usual hang out spots: the shopping centre, record shop and the amusement arcade. At her wits end she finally went to the police (whom she doesn't much like, for obvious reasons).

If the PCs question Kim at length she will recall that one of Steven's friends, Richard Fenton, was distinctly off with her when she spoke to him: "Like he didn't want to talk to me. He couldn't wait to get off the phone." Kim dislikes Fenton because he's involved in petty crime and she believes he is a bad influence on her son.

#### The Flat

Spartan in the manner of most low income housing post Greater Depression, but the flat is clean and tidy nonetheless. The notable exception is Steven's bedroom which is a shambles of stereo equipment, video and audio discs, and music magazines. The walls are covered in posters featuring bands with leather clad singers and guitarists sporting lots of make-up, and in some cases fake gore. PCs may be mildly disturbed by this but anyone succeeding in a Difficult: Education roll (increased to Average for those with a suitable background e.g. an entertainment career, or still relatively youthful) will know that all of the bands are signed to major labels. They are strictly corporate and any bad behaviour they might indulge in is tightly regulated by their label and mostly done for promotional purposes.

PCs who succeed in an Average: Observation roll notice a photocopied A5 sized flyer stuck to

the wall, facing the bed. It advertises a gig the previous night by a band called Dark Star at The Hellfire Club, a venue in Camden, North London. There is a picture of a dark haired woman on the flyer, presumably Dark Star's singer. Despite the poor quality of the reproduction it is apparent that the woman is very beautiful and possesses an almost otherworldly glamour.

## STEVEN'S FRIENDS

A group of around a dozen Mike teenagers share Steven's taste in music. They can usually be found hanging around the places previously visited by Kim Malin. In the evening they can often be found drinking in the local park. They don't particularly like adults and any communication skill rolls the PCs make when talking to them will be at Formidable difficulty. Only two of them, Shaun Naylor and Richard Fenton, went to the Dark Star gig. If the PCs can get Naylor to open up he talks enthusiastically about how great Dark Star are and how singer Tanya Bergman is the best front person he's ever seen: "She makes you feel that it's only you that she's singing to but at the same time you feel like you're part of something bigger, something special.

Naylor tells the PCs that Steven disappeared backstage after the gig trying to get Bergman's autograph, he thinks. He and Fenton waited for nearly an hour outside the venue for Steven to come out but he never showed. Figuring that their friend had somehow talked his way into a backstage party they decided to go home without him.

Any PC making a Difficult: Psychology or Observation roll will notice that Fenton lets Naylor do most of the talking. He will enthusiastically endorse



((Rock 'n' Roll from page 19)

Naylor's comments on Dark Star but otherwise only speaks when directly spoken to and even then gives near monosyllabic answers. The PC gets the feeling that Fenton is hiding something. If pressed hard enough (perhaps with the use of empathic skills) Fenton admits to stealing a car to drive the three of them to the gig. If the PCs insist he can show them where he dumped it, but by the time the PCs get to the location the vehicle has been stripped by local gangers and is now a burned out wreck.

### MUSIC PRESS

Further information on Dark Star can be gathered via the music press which can be accessed via the Internet (Average: Computer Operation roll) or reading through the various magazines in Steven's bedroom (Difficult: English Language roll).

### Fanzines

Amateur magazines and a few websites of varying degrees of sophistication, but fairly uniform in their high degree of enthusiasm. They tend to cover bands who aren't signed to major labels due to not being discovered yet, being unwilling to sell out, being too cultish, or just too strange to appeal to mainstream audiences. Dark Star feature prominently in more recent publications. They seem to have come from nowhere in the last couple of months. Led by the charismatic Bergman they have developed

a strong live following after playing a series of gigs in London's Miketown districts. Such is the word of mouth that has developed around the band major labels are starting to take an interest in them. The chance of any music corp signing the band seems remote though. Bergman is openly contemptuous of music industry suits, saying in one interview: "We play real music for real people and we're going to carry on doing it. When we make a record it's going to be on our terms. We will never, ever, sell out to the corporate machine."

### Mainstream Press

Professionally published magazines and, for the Gnomes, websites concentrating on mainstream (i.e. Corporate) bands but with occasional features on up and coming acts. A few briefly mention Dark Star. However one mag, "KABOOM!" (an expression supposedly meant to represent the sound of an amplifier exploding which gives an idea of the sort of music it covers and its target audience) has a rather hectic review of a Dark Star gig from a couple of weeks ago. See the Sidebar: A Star is Born.

If the PCs try to contact Waterston via KABOOM!'s offices an Average: Persuade roll is needed to convince the magazine's editor Jim Daniels to tell them Waterston resigned a week ago. An outstanding success elicits the information that Waterston became obsessed with Dark Star and refused to

## A Star is Born!

### Dark Star at Brixton Bogshed

by Glen Waterston

Dark Star stride on stage and make it clear that they mean business. Or rather singer Tanya Bergman does. A raven haired Valkyrie with the voice of a fallen angel she owns the stage, the venue, the whole of bloody Brixton. It's not surprising that the rest of the band fade into the background, even when you can see them through the dry ice.

Musically, there's nothing new here. The likes of Garbage and Curve set the template thirty odd years ago: A charismatic front-woman backed by a gang of anonymous blokes making a right old racket. But... Dark Star do it brilliantly. You heard it here first Bergman will be on every magazine cover and all over the net before the year's out, and you want to be able to tell people you were here at the start. You can do. Dark Star are sure to be playing a toilet near you some time soon. See this band first chance you get, every chance you get. Beg, borrow, steal or sell your soul for a ticket. Do it now. Bathe yourself in the light of the darkest and yet most brilliant star.



## HAMMERIN'!!!

### ANVIL AT THE FORGE

BY ZUNI PEDERSEN

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# MISSED IT!



## KABOOM! AT THE BRIXTON BOGSHEAD

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## ER...SORRY

DUCK BACK AT CAMDEN GARDEN

BY ZACK HOSEN

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((Rock 'n' Roll from page 20)

write anything that wasn't about them or, more specifically, Tanya Bergman. Daniels thinks Waterston has suffered some kind of breakdown: "You've seen the review. What's so special about this Dark Star mob anyway? A pretty girl fronting a bunch of anono-blokes with guitars. Bands like that are ten a penny and Glen's trying to tell me they're the future of rock 'n roll? Do me a favour."

### Additional Information

If at any point the PCs roll an outstanding success while researching Dark Star in the mainstream press they come across an American tabloid report from a year ago relating to a riot in the Seacouver metroplex. Trouble flared at the climax of a gig by Black Sun, an up and coming band fronted by one Jennifer Meyer. The article, entitled "She'll Put a Spell on You", alleges that Meyer goaded the crowd into a violent frenzy, inciting them to rampage through the venue and into the streets beyond. Police were called and a gun battle developed between officers and the band. Four band members and one roadie were killed. Meyer plus two roadies escaped, and remain at large. Arrested rioters were at a loss to explain their violent behaviour but a common refrain is "I had to do it, she told me to." The article concludes by suggesting Meyer's rabble rousing powers might not be entirely natural and may involve ESP or hypnosis.

The article features a poor quality black and white picture of Meyer on stage along with the caption "Voodoo Queen". Meyer resembles Bergman, but it requires a Formidable: Observation roll to be absolutely sure they are the same person.

If the PCs research skills aren't up to scratch then, at the referee's discretion, this clue could be fed to them via Kim Malin or Amanda Vine (see Waterston below). Either woman may decide to do some more research into Bergman and Dark Star in an attempt to understand what has happened to their loved ones. They pass the information on to the PCs in the hope that it will be of some use.

### WATERSTON

Another Average: Persuade roll is needed to make Daniels give up Waterston's address, home and mobile phone number. Alternatively he can be found by diligent scouring of the telephone directory (Easy: Computer Operation or INT roll as the referee feels appropriate).

### Waterston Residence

If the PCs telephone Waterston's home phone number, or visit his Docklands flat, they find themselves talking to his fiance Amanda Vine, a newspaper journalist. She is initially hostile to any questions about her partner but PCs who make an Average: Psychology roll realise that she is actually deeply upset over Wa-





Hellfire Club

terston. Some gentle questioning soon elicits the statement that he left her five days ago to be with “that Gypsy”. Vine confirms Daniels’ information that Waterston underwent a change in personality after seeing Dark Star play in Brixton a couple of weeks ago. He is infatuated with Bergman and has gone to be with her and her band. Vine doesn’t know exactly where he is but thinks the band will be camped in an open space somewhere as they have a trio of mobile homes that they live in, plus some vans.

#### Waterston’s Mobile Phone

If the PCs call Waterston on his mobile (cellphone) he answers within a few rings. Traffic noise can be heard in the background as he speaks. He sounds extremely wary and the PC talking to him needs to make a Formidable: Persuade roll to keep on the phone for any length of time. PC’s able to strike up a rapport with him find Waterston happy to extol the virtues of Dark Star and Tanya Bergman in particular. He claims that she represents rock ‘n’ roll in its purest form and he is privileged to be able to accompany her. He intends to write her and her band’s biography and is in no doubt that it will be one of the greatest books ever written about rock music: “Up there with “Hammer of the Gods”, “No-one Here Gets Out Alive”, and “The Dirt”. This band are gonna be massive, and I’m here, right at the start. Every gig, every party, every day on the road, who said what to who. It’s all gonna be in there.”

The conversation terminates after a sudden pause and a now fearful sounding Waterston saying, “All right, all right. It’s just some friends. I’m hanging up now.”

## THE HELLFIRE CLUB

At some point the PCs are likely to want to visit the place where Steven was last seen. Ideally this should be before Dark Star play their next, and final, gig.

## CAMDEN TOWN

This area of North London has long enjoyed something of a bohemian reputation and often been a favourite haunt of musicians, notably in the Britpop boom of the 1990s. In the 21st Century it is defiantly Miketown with a vibrant street life that draws people in from the surrounding districts and further afield. Camden’s main thoroughfares are crowded with cars jammed nose to tail, the pavements are full of people. The overall impression is that everyone is on their way somewhere, and are determined to have a good time when they get there. Most of the people are young Mikes from assorted youth sub-cultures, plus a fair sprinkling of slumming Gnomes.

With so many punters around there is no shortage of people wanting to make a few quid selling them stuff: market stalls, boutique shops and fast food joints are plentiful as are pubs and clubs. PCs will also encounter various street hustlers offering drugs, sex, “tax free” cigarettes and booze, dubious electronic gear and whatever else the referee considers appropriate. The following “In the City” encounters from the Dark Conspiracy rulebook (p158-159) are also possibilities: Security Sweep (but by regular police rather than corporate goons), Mugging, and Street Thugs.



((Rock 'n' Roll from page 22)

## THE CLUB

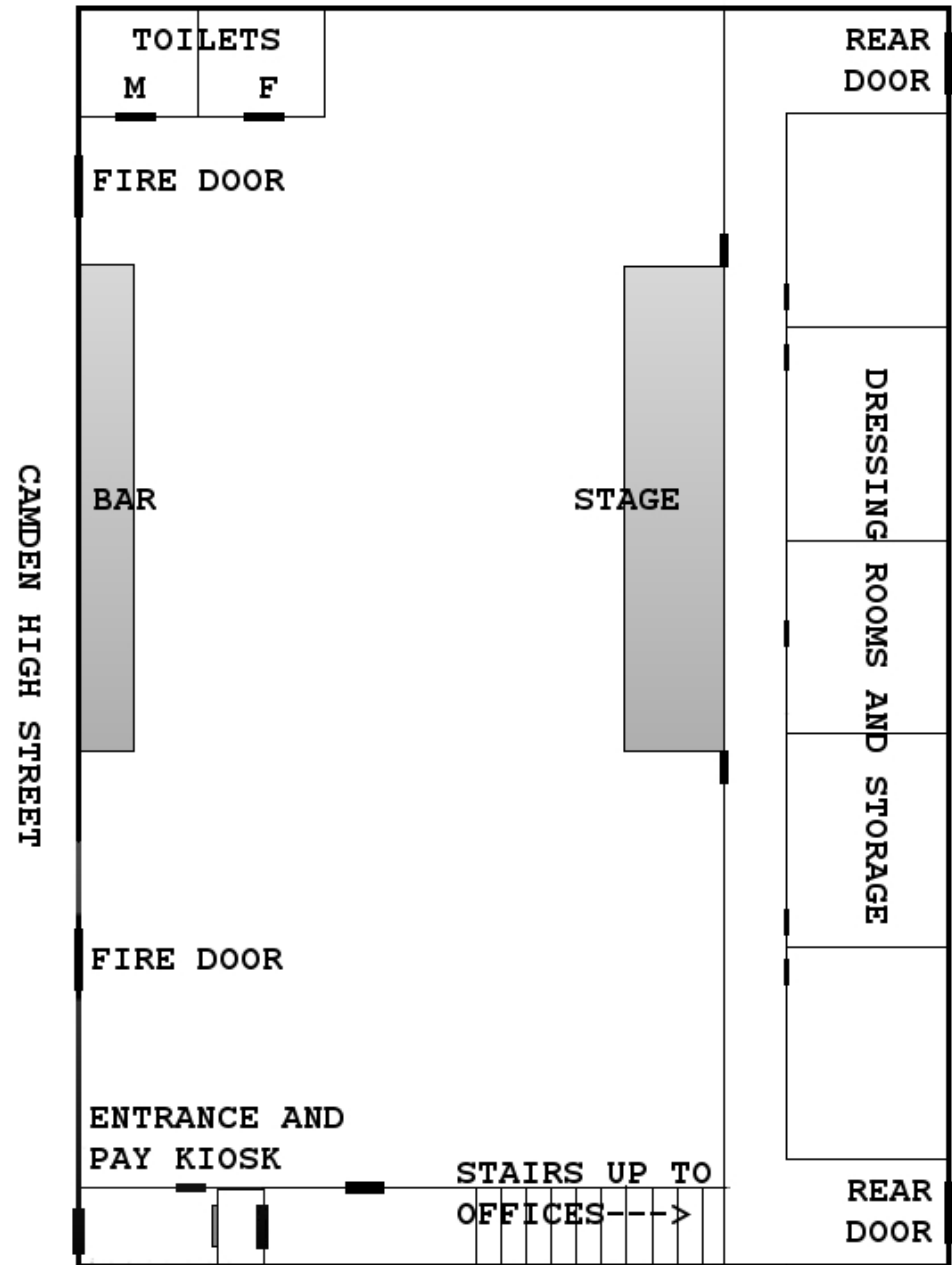
The Hellfire Club is situated on Camden High Street. The main venue is on the ground floor, with the floors above being office and living accommodation for the owner Nick Vardy. The place is dingy, badly lit, and has a noticeably sticky floor. It caters for an “alternative” crowd, i.e. people who are into noisy music.

If the PCs visit during the morning they find the club shut, with the main entrance doors locked. If they make enough noise outside they will be able to attract the attention of one of the security staff inside but he is unwilling to let the PCs in or wake his employer up. A Formidable: Persuade roll is needed. The subsequent interview with a dressing gown clad Vardy is ill tempered in the extreme and all skill rolls to elicit information from him are at Formidable level. An evening visit finds Vardy in a more congenial mood but he is still wary about answering questions, so all information gathering skill rolls are at Difficult level. Task rolls can be made one level easier if the PCs manage to convince Vardy that their search for Bergman will also be of benefit to him e.g. by posing as record company A&R people interested in Dark Star and willing to pay cash for an introduction to the band or to give the club where they were “discovered” some free publicity.

### What Nick Knows

If Vardy is persuaded to talk then he confirms that Dark Star played at The Hellfire Club two nights ago and “they went down a storm.” The gig went so well that Vardy has booked the band again, to appear tomorrow night. He is confident of repeating the success of the last gig: “They were sold out, we had to turn people away at the door. I’ve never seen a band with a buzz about them like this.”

Vardy’s opinion of Tanya Bergman is that she is “One smart lady. Very beautiful, very tough. Quite scary looking when she shows you those teeth of hers. Rip her off at your peril I would say.” Vardy believes Bergman is foreign, possibly German, or Scandinavian. If questioned about his reference to Bergman’s teeth he tells the PCs that Bergman has noticeably enlarged canines, “like vampires in films.” Apparently they’re a cosmetic alteration she had done when she was younger. Vardy thinks it might have been some “gang thing” but admits he didn’t press the subject.



(Rock 'n' Roll from page 23)

Some prompting is needed to make Vardy remember Steven Malin: "Oh yeah, the kid. After the set he tried to get backstage to see Tanya. One of my lads was going to chuck him out but Tanya said to let him in so we did. No skin off my nose. Don't know what happened to him after that."

As to Dark Star's current whereabouts Vardy know but is highly reluctant to divulge this information. He doesn't want to upset Bergman by sending a load of strangers round to visit her. The PCs will have to convince him that a meeting with Dark Star is an urgent necessity and will be of mutual benefit to all parties. If they succeed in this Vardy tells them that "they're camped out by The Westway, the old gypso site." Vardy also has a mobile (cell) phone number for Bergman but won't hand this over unless severely pressured. If the PCs strong arm him he will phone Bergman after they've gone and tell her that some "very heavy people" are coming to see her.

#### **Club Staff and Customers**

If the PCs make a mess of interviewing Vardy they may be able to get the above information from people who work at, or patronise, The Hellfire Club. No single staff member will have all the information and the PCs have to talk to several people before they get the whole picture. The club's security staff are quite loyal to Vardy so anyone attempting Persuade, Act/Bluff task with them start off at the Formidable level. Bar, booking office, cloakroom staff are less loyal but none of them want to lose their jobs so any task rolls involving them are Difficult. If any PC makes a catastrophic failure then they have attracted the attention of venue security who move to throw them out.

#### **PUBLICITY**

This is an encounter the referee can insert if the PCs have been unlucky with their inquiries and leave The

Hellfire Club not knowing how to find Bergman and her band: On the street outside two well built men can be seen loitering near an advertising hoarding. One is carrying a bucket and paintbrush, the other is carrying a sheaf of papers. The two men look around as if to make sure nobody is watching them and then quickly paste a small poster to the hoarding. If the PCs examine the poster they see it is advertising tomorrow night's Dark Star gig at The Hellfire Club. The two men are roadies sent by Bergman to do some advertising by the time honoured method of fly posting. The roadies carry on down the street sticking up posters at irregular intervals until they run out (or notice the PCs following them), after which they make their way back to a VW Kartoffeln van and drive off. The van heads west towards The A40 Westway (see below). Vehicle Use rolls are at the Referee's discretion. A Failed roll by the PCs needn't necessarily mean that they lose the van, but does allow the roadies to get back to Bergman in plenty of time to warn her that someone is coming.

### **WESTWAY**

The Westway is an eight lane, two-and-half mile long overpass that carries the A40 above the streets of West London. A motorway in all but name, the A40 is the main western arterial road into and out of London. It is constantly busy and the traffic noise can be heard from well over a mile away.

Underneath the flyover is a large shanty town that has grown up around the original Traveller site at the junction of the Westway and the southbound A3220. Many of the residents are local people forced from their homes by corporate security forces when the Westway was widened shortly before the SPP came to power. These kind of abuses by big business,

and their quiescent government partners, almost certainly contributed to the SPP's electoral success.

The shanty town still has a Gypsy character to it. Many of its dwellings are caravans or mobile homes, and quite a few of these have spilled over into the car park of the old BBC buildings nearby. The Westway is also notable for its open air market, which is renowned for its fresh produce, and a nearby organic cafe/diner with a reputation for reasonably priced good food.

The people living beneath The Westway mostly have a "live and let live" attitude along with a strong community spirit. They are usually friendly to the people who come from outside the area to visit the market or the cafe/diner. They do have a strong dislike of corporate and official types though. PCs with slightly shady backgrounds such as Gangers, Drifters or Proles will probably get on with the locals famously. Cops, Government Agents and Politicians probably won't. PCs antagonising the residents will soon find themselves surrounded by an angry mob wielding baseball bats, knives and the odd shotgun.

### **MEET THE BAND**

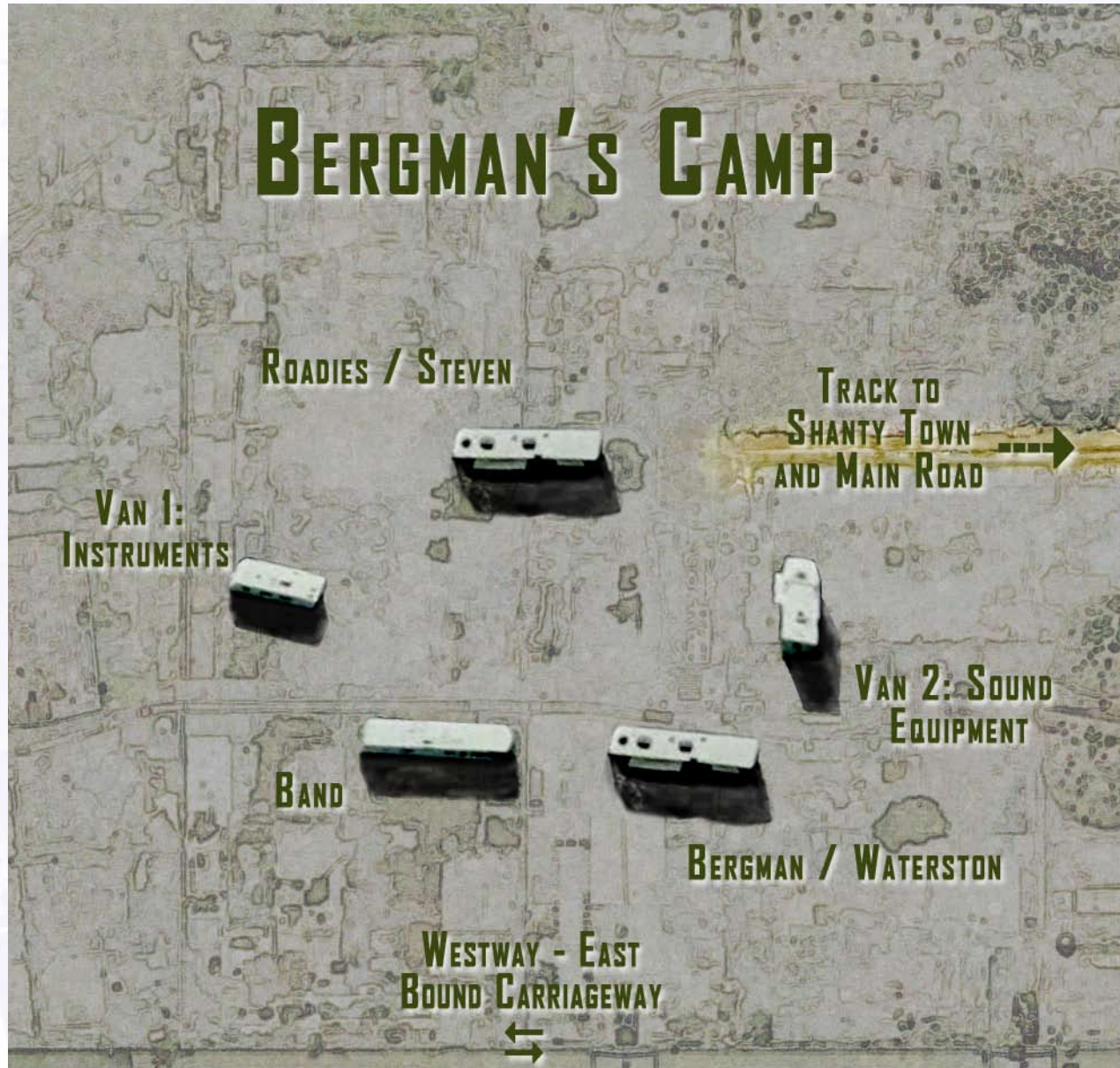
At the edge of the shanty town, just under the carriageway, is a small encampment of three Winnebago Nomad campers and two VW Kartoffeln vans, one of which the PCs may have followed earlier. See Map 1 for details of how the vehicles are parked, and who sleeps where. The PCs have the choice of openly approaching the encampment, or using more clandestine methods to get inside:

#### **The Direct Approach**

The PCs can just walk into the encampment and announce themselves. They are met by Tanya



((Rock 'n' Roll from page 24))



Bergman who agrees to talk to them but without inviting them into her Winnebago. Her entourage are also in attendance, standing in a wide circle, watching their leader meet with the PCs. Any PC making a Difficult: Observation roll notices two roadies with shotguns lurking behind one of the vans.

Despite the menacing atmosphere Bergman deals with the PCs politely. She answers any questions they might have about her music, her anti-corporate stance and nomadic lifestyle. She even admits recruiting Steven into her entourage: "I like him, he's a bright kid. He's wasted living in some drab Proley suburb."

If the PCs insist that Steven should come with them, Bergman suggests that Steven himself should be the one who decides. Steven steps forward from the circle and in a shaky voice says that he wants to stay with Dark Star. Appeals for him to see sense prove fruitless no matter how eloquent the PCs are. Successful Persuade and similar skill rolls sway him briefly: There is a noticeable pause before his eyes take on a glazed look and he says firmly that he's not leaving. PCs succeeding in a Difficult: Psychology or Formidable: Observation roll get the impression that Steven is acting under duress, possibly even some sort of brainwashing. The blank expressions on the faces of the other members of Bergman's entourage may arouse similar suspicions. If the PCs spoke to Waterston earlier and know what he looks like (perhaps having procured a photo of him from his employer, or Amanda Vine) they notice that he has a black eye and some bruising to his face. Bergman beat him as punishment for speaking to "outsiders" without her permission. She also confiscated his mobile phone



(Rock 'n' Roll from page 25)

Bergman tells the PCs that the meeting is at an end. Refusing to leave quietly results in the two shotgun toting roadies stepping forward. PCs opting to shoot it out stand a fair chance of coming off second best. Although only Bergman and the two roadies are armed, the rest of the groupies will attack the PCs in frenzied hand to hand combat. In such a situation there is a high risk of Steven being seriously injured or killed. Also 1D10+5 rounds after the first shot is fired, local residents begin to arrive on the scene. They don't like strangers shooting it out in their backyard, and are quite willing to take the law into their own hands to put a stop to it. The locals are all Experienced PCs armed with an assortment of double barrelled shotguns, and basic pistols such as the High Standard .22, Browning HP35 or S&W Model 36. The police may also turn up if the battle escalates beyond a simple skirmish between the PCs and Bergman's followers.

Sensible PCs will probably accept Bergman's dismissal and withdraw to consider their options.

#### **The Clandestine Approach**

The PCs may decide to try this instead of, or as well as, The Direct Approach described above. It assumes some sort of stealthy infiltration of the camp, probably after dark, with the object of rescuing Steven.

Bergman isn't complacent about security. There is always a shotgun armed roadie on watch during the night. Avoiding him requires an Average: Stealth Roll (bonuses due to the cover of darkness and the constant traffic noise from the overpass are at referee's discretion). If the PCs knock him out they have 2D10 minutes before his relief finds him missing and raises the alarm.

Any protracted fight with the guard, or discharge of firearms, results in the camp being roused.

Searching for Steven involves a lot of creeping around parked Winnebagos, peering in through the gaps between half drawn curtains. A Formidable: Observation roll is required to spot Steven, asleep on the floor of a camper he shares with the road crew. An Average: Lockpick roll is needed to gain entry to the camper. If woken Steven proves unwilling to come quietly and he will need to be quickly subdued before he wakes the other occupants of the Winnebago.

In the event that the PCs do manage to get Steven away any subsequent pursuit is at the referee's discretion depending on how quietly the PCs got in and out of the camp. If Steven is missed then Bergman dispatches two roadies (one driving, the other literally riding shotgun) in a VW van to bring him back. If the van fails to catch up with the PCs after five rounds the roadies give up and turn back towards the Westway.

Although the PCs may rescue Steven he is still subject to Bergman's empathic hold. The first chance he gets he escapes, runs back to camp and tells Bergman everything he knows about the PCs.

#### **Do Nothing**

The PCs may decide not to confront Bergman in which case nothing much happens in the camp until the afternoon of the next day (there is a marked lack of rock n' roll behaviour). At a signal from Bergman all the vehicles move out and head north in a convoy to Camden and The Hellfire Club. On arrival they park on some waste ground at the rear of the club. Bergman gets out and goes straight inside. The band and road crew start transferring instruments,

amplifiers, drums and other gear into the club. The rest of the afternoon is spent setting up the gear and sound checking after which the band and entourage retire to the dressing rooms until the start of the gig.

## **LIVE EVIL**

If the PCs have been unable to wrest Steven away from Bergman the gig at The Hellfire Club is their last chance to do it, as well as prevent the Dread Sidhe from starting a full blown riot.

Admission into the club is by ticket only. If the PCs don't have a ticket, getting past the bouncers on the door requires some impressive verbal dexterity (any applicable skill roll is at Formidable). The PCs may be able to sneak around the back of the building and break in through the rear door (Stealth and/or Lockpick rolls as the referee deems necessary). If the referee is feeling generous the PCs are let into the club through a fire exit by a couple of friendly audience members who take pity on them thinking they can't afford a ticket.

By the time the PCs get into the club there is a lacklustre support act playing (booked by Vardy). They aren't going down too well with the audience who throw things at the stage, stamp their feet and in the gaps between songs chant "Tanya...Tanya..." over and over again. The PCs have 30 minutes before Dark Star come on stage. If they've got a plan to stop Bergman now's the time to try it.

If the PCs fail to stop Dark Star getting on stage the band plays for around ninety minutes. Bergman prowls the stage whipping the crowd into a frenzy by a combination of her intense musical performance and provocative rabble rousing banter. As Dark Star





play their last song of the night she throws her arms in the air and exhorts the audience to "Go Crazy!"

Within seconds fights break out, bottles are thrown and a couple of fires are lit. The trouble soon spills outside with audience members running out of the club and attacking passers by in the street. Vardy or one of his staff will call the police but it takes a couple of hours to restore order. 1D6 x 1D6 people will be killed in the mayhem.

Once the riot kicks off a visibly excited Bergman orders Dark Star to dump their instruments and gear and head for the rear exit. Shotgun wielding roadies will blast a way through any rioters, recalcitrant club staff, or PCs who try to block their escape. Counting on the police not being able to pursue due to having their hands full with the riot out front, they get aboard their vehicles and drive north. Their destination is up to the referee but it will be a major city where Bergman can repeat the process of several low key performances leading up to a climatic orgy of violence. Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester or Newcastle are all possibilities as are any of the Scottish conurbations.

### RESOLUTION

The most obvious way to keep Steven permanently out of Bergman's clutches is by killing her. If Bergman dies so does the empathic micro-organism she uses to control her groupies. The Dread

Sidhe's death will also end her career of riotous mayhem. That said, murder can be difficult to get away with, and Bergman herself is no pushover. The PCs need to be very careful, or lucky, if they try to permanently dispose of Bergman. As an alternative to such drastic action the referee could perhaps rule that groupies can be cured with a suitably high powered Empathic Healing roll, or by treatment with Virophage (see Dark-Tek p24-25). The PCs may

manage to free Steven, and the other groupies, from Bergman's malign influence, but the Dread Sidhe gets away. Maybe the PCs will meet her again?

### Experience Point Awards

The following are suggested:

Rescuing Steven	1
Preventing the riot	1
Killing/Neutralising Bergman	1
Freeing Bergman's entourage from her control with no groupie fatalities	1

### Variations

These are suggested if the referee wants to make the scenario more complex by providing the PCs with another set of antagonists, and/or a potential ally. The PCs find that they are not the only people interested in Bergman. The Dread Sidhe's past is beginning to catch up with her...

### We Want You

The Dread Sidhe's talents for rabble rousing have attracted the attention of CANSEC, a Seacover based security corporation. CANSEC maintains its own psi-ops department and wants Jennifer Meyer as a new recruit. The company believes that she is a high level human empath and hopes to mould her into an elite operative. CANSEC's intelligence section has noted Meyer/Bergman's appearance in the UK, and the company has sent a team of agents to acquire this potentially valuable empathic asset. The team will be equal in size to the PCs' group and is primarily equipped with non-lethal



(Rock 'n' Roll from page 27)

weaponry such as tranquilliser rifles and stun guns. Their plan is to render Bergman unconscious at an opportune moment then transport her to a private airport just outside London where a CANSEC owned McDonnell-Sukhoi Nightwind is on standby. Discovering that their quarry isn't human won't change the team's orders one bit.

### Get Bergman

Bergman is being hunted by John Kenneth Walker, an Royal Canadian Mounted Police inspector whose son, Paul, was killed in the Seacouver shootout. Paul played guitar in Black Sun and his father holds Jennifer Meyer responsible for his death. Walker has been keeping a watch on the music media, and has tracked Meyer to London where she now has a new name and a new band. He has taken leave of absence from the mounties and travelled to the UK to wreak his revenge on Meyer/Bergman. Having visited London before Walker knows his way around and has managed to acquire an illegal Colt Krait pistol. He intends to try and kill Bergman as soon as the opportunity presents itself.

## SOURCES/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea for this scenario came from watching the documentary film "Hated" (Dir: Todd Phillips 1994). Hilarious and appalling in equal measure (often both at the same time) it chronicles the nomadic life of punk mad man GG Allin and his band The Murder Junkies. Allin had a pure, uncompromising vision of what rock 'n' roll should be: Raw, honest, and above all, dangerous. Ultimately though, as the film itself acknowledges, he fell short of this radical manifesto: His live performances concentrated on brutal audience confrontation, and scatological outrage. Most of Allin's gigs ended in a welter of

violence and bodily fluids, which was plainly how he liked it. Dangerous if you happened to be in the immediate area, but nothing that was going to destroy the music industry. His last performance, before he died from a heroin overdose, climaxed in a mini-riot on the streets of New York.

Reading the entry for the Dread Sidhe in *Dark Races* for the first time I was instantly reminded of Allin: The rootless existence, little or no interest in fame or its trappings, but plenty of interest in aggro for its own sake. Watch the film and you'll see what I mean.

The title "Rock 'n' Roll Queen" comes from the song of the same name by *The Subways*. A glorious ear splitting racket used to good effect in the otherwise underwhelming Guy Ritchie flick *Rocka Rolla*.

*London* by Lee Williams, from *Demonground* issue 6, provided the location for Bergman's camp.

My thanks to Zvezda for reading the first draft and doing his usual thorough job with suggestions and comments.

Information on real locations mentioned in this adventure can be found at:

The Westway:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westway\\_\(London\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westway_(London))

Camden Town:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camden\\_Town](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camden_Town)

## ROADIES

**Level:** Veteran

**Skills:** Electronics 6, Mechanic 6, Small Arms: Rifle 3, Vehicle Use (Wheeled Vehicle) 6

**Physical Description:** Big, hairy, uncouth men of indeterminate age, but probably early to mid thirties. There are three of them.

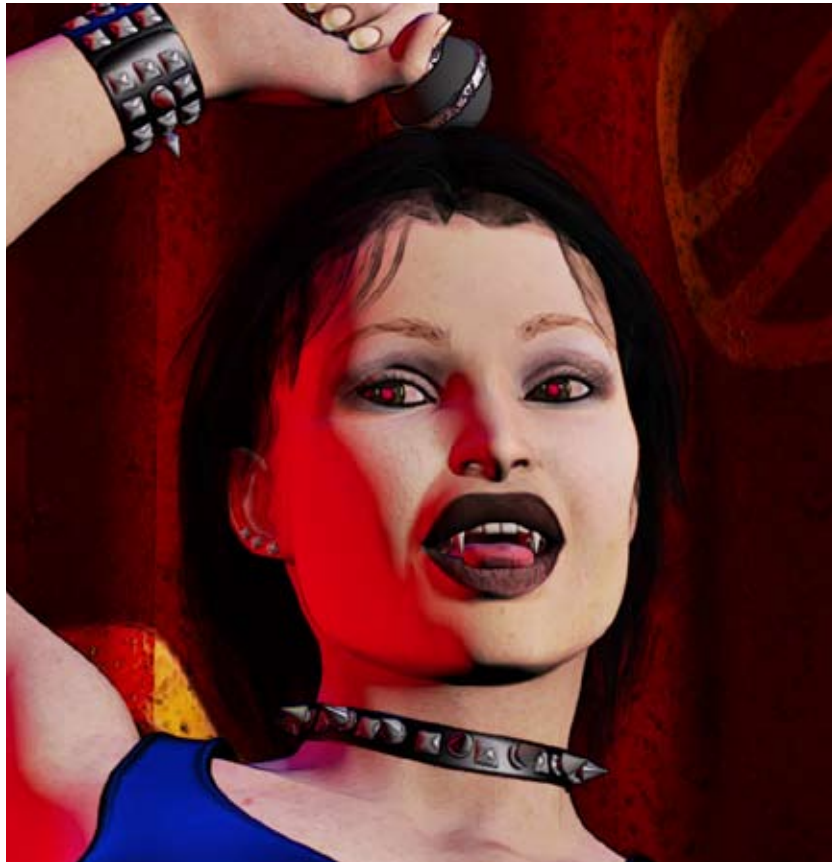
**Notes:** These three do most of the heavy work: Setting up equipment at gigs, driving, and security. If anyone thinks to ask their names are Roger MacReady, Larry Victor, and Phil Grant. Roger and Larry are American (and survivors of the Seacouver shoot out), Phil is English. Not much given to reflection they obey Bergman's orders without hesitation.

**Equipment:** Basic, Electronic and Electrical Tool kits, Power Hand Tools, sometimes armed with double barrelled shotguns equivalent to the Savage 311-R.





## TANYA BERGMAN — DREAD SIDHE



<b>Strength</b>	8	<b>Education</b>	4	<b>Move</b>	3/9/19/32
<b>Constitution</b>	7	<b>Charisma</b>	13	<b>Skill/Dam.</b>	7 / 1D6+2
<b>Agility</b>	9	<b>Empathy</b>	8	<b>Hits</b>	40/60
<b>Intelligence</b>	7	<b>Initiative</b>	4	<b># App.</b>	1

Skills: The usual Darkling skills (see Dark Conspiracy p209) plus Psychology 7, Small Arms (Pistol) 3, Vehicle Use (Motorcycle) 4

**Special Abilities:** Special: Ability to create empathic slaves, or “groupies”, by using her fangs to inject an empathic micro-organism via her bite. See Dark Races p25 for further information. I’d suggest the stated poison damage should only be applied to the target’s INT characteristic. What’s the use of being able to create a platoon of fanatical followers when most of them are going to die in the process? Alternatively the micro-organism could be treated as a fast acting form of Empathic Viral Subjagator (see Dark-Tek p27).

**Physical Description:** Bergman’s appearance is striking: She is just under six feet tall and of statuesque build. She has long black hair, blue eyes, pale skin and appears to be in her late twenties. Her look is patterned on 1980s goth style: She is invariably dressed in black. The “vampire teeth” are an unsettling detail but she explains them away as a cosmetic enhancement made when she was initiated into a Black Metal loving Norwegian motorcycle gang during her misspent youth. Bergman speaks with a faint north European accent that is just generic enough to resist identification.

**Notes:** Bergman is adept at presenting the image of an uncompromising artist who’s come up the hard way. She is articulate and passionate when speaking about her music, her unwillingness to

play the corporate game, and her desire to build a grass roots following. Of course what she really wants is to feed off human emotions, preferably those released during outbreaks of mass violence.

Bergman is as callous as the rest of her kind and regards her groupies as entirely expendable. If it becomes expedient to sacrifice any of them (e.g. by using one as a human shield against gun toting PCs) Waterston will be the first to go. Bergman originally recruited him thinking a journalist might be useful in creating publicity. However, she is now starting to tire of him and has no intention whatsoever of allowing him to write his biography of Dark Star. The last thing she wants is a written record of her activities. Waterston’s constant pleading to be allowed to work on his book has become an irritant, one that she isn’t prepared to put up with much longer.

Bergman’s recruitment of Steven was pure opportunism, and done on a whim. She was amused by the boy’s persistence in trying to see her after her first show at he Hellfire club. Despite his youth she thought such devotion might be useful. Turning him into a groupie wasn’t difficult.

**Equipment:** Czech Vz-52 pistol plus two magazines, Zenith FX2 Portable Computer, 2 x Tojicorp VHC 13 phones (includes the one confiscated from Waterston).



(Rock 'n' Roll NPCs)

## STEVEN MALIN

**Level:** Novice

**Skills:** Observation 3, Streetwise 4

**Physical Description:** Steven is sixteen years old and tall for his age. His clothes hang loosely on his gangly frame. His hair is an untidy, dyed black mop.

**Notes:** Steven is infatuated with Bergman, becoming her groupie has only intensified his feelings. The fact that she treats him with complete indifference most of the time doesn't matter. He lives for the occasional moment when she utters some faint word of praise for him or asks him to do some minor task for her.



Steven doesn't much like the rest of Dark Star's entourage. They treat him as the "new boy", so that he ends up having to do much of the menial work around the camp, as well as sleeping on the floor of the Winnebago. He believes this is only temporary until he proves himself to his beloved Tanya's satisfaction. Steven particularly hates Waterston, of whom he is insanely jealous. Bergman has noticed this and is considering getting Steven to kill the troublesome journalist as a test of his loyalty to her.

## GLEN WATERSTON

**Level:** Experienced

**Skills:** Act/Bluff 6, Computer Operation 5, Persuasion 6

**Physical Description:** Waterston is in his late 20s, but appears younger due to his boyish features. He is of slim build and has fair hair. He wears rimless "John Lennon" glasses.

**Notes:** Waterston was entranced by Bergman the first time he saw Dark Star. Convinced he'd discovered a major new talent he tracked them down to the Westway campsite intent on interviewing the band's enigmatic singer. Bergman graciously agreed to see him, and one short conversation later he was a groupie. Waterston abandoned his previous life, believing that he had been swept up into a great rock 'n' roll love affair. He also believes that his lover is going to be a big star and he intends to document her rise in a best selling book. Over the last couple of days though Bergman's vicious treatment has made him start to resist her commands. If the PCs need an inside man in the camp then Waterston is the obvious candidate. He can be contacted via his



Notebook (Bergman is unaware that it is communications enabled) or he may initiate contact himself. The fact that he is still largely subject to Bergman's empathic control means his assistance will probably be limited. If the PCs ask too much of him he will probably fail and Bergman will then have him killed.

**Equipment:** Toshiba Notebook (T12866sx) with integral portaphone and modem. The only file of interest on the notebook is a document entitled "Dark Star Bio". If the PCs open it they find the words "Tanya Says No" typed over and over again. Waterstone has tried to defy Bergman's prohibition on writing but hasn't had much luck.



## THE BAND

**Level:** Novice

**Skills:** Appropriate Musical Skill 6

**Physical Description:** Four slightly androgynous young men in their early 20s. Like Bergman they dress in black, but with considerably less style.

**Notes:** These four made the mistake of answering a “female lead singer seeks band” advertisement on a music shop wall. Recruitment as Bergman’s groupies soon followed. All four have highly developed egos and would be at each other’s throats over the inevitable “musical differences” if the Dread Sidhe’s empathic control didn’t keep them in check. Their rivalry now tends to manifest itself in a constant competition to see who can obtain the greatest amount of praise from Bergman.

When not on stage the band loaf about smoking cigarettes looking down their noses at anyone who isn’t a musician. Their names are Sean Wallace (guitar), Bruce Martin (bass), Patrick Jensen (Keyboards), Ray Wiseman (drums).

**Equipment:** Musical Instruments





# GET YER GOAT



## A Ride

by Jason D. McEwan  
for **Dark Conspiracy**® 1/2 ed.

For all you young-uns, the Pontiac GTO was called a "Goat", a take on the initials and not its performance. It was the hottest street racer of its time.

1965 PONTIAC GTO	
Cruise Speed: 89 (96)	Price: \$23,500 ( n/a)
Com Mov: 50/10 (60/ 10)	Fuel Type: G,A
Fuel Cap: 86	Load: 0.6 tons
Fuel Con: 6(8)	Veh Wt: 1.7 tons
Crew: 1+4	
Night Vision: Headlights	
COMBAT STATISTICS	
Config: Stnd	HF: 1
Susp: W(3)	HS: 1
	HR: 1

The stats in parenthesis are for the rare '63 421 cubic inch engine that was at about 500HP. The rest of the stats show a mid power 389 cu. in. with a few extra HP to represent mods to the engine. Wile not equal to a *LeBoeuf*, it is only a mid sized sedan.

During research for a **GURPS 3E** campaign I discovered that several third world companies make hard to find parts to restore classic/collectable cars. In my DC campaign these are now owned by Megacorps or by the remnants of the governments who import weapons in exchange for the parts. Eccentrics restore original vehicles and the lower classes get cheap retro-tek. General Dynamics Motors sells Bel Airs and GTOs, Ford-Revlon has the T-Birds. The engines may be new designs for Nome upgrades to collectibles, but older, easier to maintain and cheaper powerplants equip the template retros.





# THE FAITH HEALER

*A Demonseed*  
by Paul Hebron

Somebody the players know has been seriously or terminally ill for some time now; as far as they know, the condition is incurable. Suddenly the person disappears for about a month, completely untraceable: it's as if they've fallen off the face of the Earth. After the month is up, they return, healthier, happier and apparently no longer afflicted. He or she refuses to elaborate on how they've been cured; all they'll give away is that the miracle cure was expensive and took place out of the country. After a while their fortitude is worn down and with a weary smile the person hands them a business card: "Emilio Mendoza, Traditional Healer". He scribbles a phone number on the back and tells them that if they ever need help, the people on the other end can arrange transport and a meeting with Mendoza in one of his clinics (located in the Philippines, Brazil or Uganda). The players also notice that their friend has started acting strangely: going out at odd hours, spending lots of money and meeting questionable people in remote places. Eventually he quits his job and becomes more reclusive.

## 1. The Sorcerer

Mendoza is a sorcerer who genuinely has the power to heal people and uses the materials he harvests to control the minds of those he treats. He does cure their sickness, but he also exploits them for money, power and other favours. This corruption of the victim's soul gives him favour with the dark gods which he worships. Mendoza has built up a veritable network of agents and helpers across the world to put him in touch with the rich and famous desperate for healing. Their friend's actions will either lead to self destruction, to Mendoza's glee, or to them joining Mendoza as a mindless servant.

## 2. Parasites

Mendoza's powers are genuine and his intentions are actually to help people with his incredible gift (if he makes enough money to afford clinics on three continents, a mansion on Long Island and a contract list including celebrities, billionaires and world leaders, then that's just one of the perks). Mendoza grew up in Manila and discovered at an early age that unlike the other so-called 'faith healers' he had a genuine ability. This is because Mendoza was born to a mother and father originally from a remote island community involved in the testing of new biological weapons. His parent's death from what the doctors identified as a 'wasting disease' was in truth the work of parasites introduced into the bloodstream by the testing. Emilio however is able to better manage the parasites, which by their nature provide their hosts with good health but also cause a mental unbalance leading to insanity. The healer is completely unaware of his infection.

## 3. The Fraud

Mendoza's powers are total fiction; his abilities instead rely on legerdemain and confidence trickery. Mendoza has been careful in building up his reputation and mystique as having a gift from god, allowing him to become extremely powerful and wealthy. Sceptics might have exposed Mendoza long ago as a fraud were it not for Mendoza's powerful criminal friends who make a mint off the gullible and desperate begging for the healer's blessing. The player's friend has resolved in light of his (perceived) new chance at life that he's going to spend every second enjoying it, which in this case involves gambling, prostitutes and other pleasures.





## ZOMBIE LUNE

*not the least offense  
of zombies  
is their offal breath*

*Poetry*

*by Lester Smith*

*a tune is like a haiku,  
except shorter, with a  
5-5-5 syllable count  
instead of 5-7-5*



# SMITH AND WESSON MODEL 500 MAGNUM



S&W Model 500 Magnum (Revolver)

	ROF	DAM	PEN	BLK	MAG	SS	BRST	RNG
.500 Magnum	SAR	5	2-2-Nil	3	5R	4	—	25

Released in 2003, the Model 500 Magnum is the largest handgun ever built by the famous Smith & Wesson company. Based on what they call the X-frame chassis, the 500 is surprisingly familiar internally and shares the majority of its mechanism's design with their longer-serving revolvers. It is a large weapon, though not on the scale of the hand-built Zeliska for example. The Model 500 with a 10.5 inch (27 centimetre) barrel is approximately 25% larger than the Model 29 in .44 Magnum (Dirty Harry) which makes it large enough anyway! It is also available with 4 inch or 8.75 inch barrels.

Oh, the quote to the right of the article is a genuine one from my pal Robert, who was at his local firing range in Iowa when a guy turned up with a Model 500 just after they had gone on sale. The whole place stopped and watched after the owner took his first shot!

## New Hardware

by Lee Williams  
for *Dark Conspiracy*® 1/2ed.  
and *Call of Chtulhu*®

*"There is no such thing as a S&W 500 handgun, but there IS such a thing as a S&W 500 man-portable anti-aircraft cannon!"*

—Robert J Hansen, 2005.

DARK  
CONSPIRACY™



## S&W Model 500 Magnum

Base chance to hit:	20%
Damage:	2d10+2
Range:	25 yards
Attacks per round:	1
Capacity:	5 bullets
Hit points resisting attack:	14
Malfunction:	99

Originally conceived as a  
six-part serial, here it is  
presented in its entirety.  
Enjoy -- ed.

# PENNY TUSKS

*Darkness Today Fiction*  
by CW Kelson (Tad)

© 2009 CW Kelson III (Tad)

Editing courtesy of Max Cardella

The various Lyrical snippets come from the following artists: *Bang Bang* by Nancy Sinatra, *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood* as recorded by Santa Esmerelda, *Changes* by David Bowie, and *Neon Bible* from Arcade Fire

## PART I

### ANOTHER DAY SAVED FROM BEING REMARKABLE

Frankfurt Van Collins, Coll for short, so named for his father who had fallen into true love in Frankfurt while in the Army, and years later Coll was conceived in the back of a conversion van, and Collins, well the last name is the last thing on a birth certificate. He was born at the same sort of time as the start of his existence, on the same sort of overcast day. All of these discrete elements were a presage to the life that would be his. Culminating in dull days, dull ways, dull clothing all beige and grey making his way to and from work in a lonesome existence devoid of meaning except what a greasy burger could provide.

Unlike butter which can be clarified, Mr. Collins' life was anything but clear, it was more like raw butter, thick, greasy in that special way that only butter is greasy, filled with sustenance and little else. Consumption was his primary past time, in between working for several different temporary staffing agencies. Every morning was the same ritual for him, to rise, conduct the ablutions, dress,

wait to receive the call stating where and what he would be doing that day, depending on which agency called first, or if they even called at all.

His hair was the same, short and coarse, thick and bristles, with a perpetual five o'clock shadow on his face. Standing right about at six foot in height, coming in at a hefty about two hundred and fifty pounds, Coll carried it well, somewhat broad of shoulders and heavy of mid-section. Slab hands, short blunt fingers and toes would stand out if he made a point to even move them more than necessary for the task at hand. His closet filled with clothing that has been in style, gone out, come back in, and is once more out of style in tones that would resemble browns and beige were some of them not faded almost into dirty white linen in flavor.

He has and lives a penny filled life. One spent collecting them and saving them up to someday move out of, the three steps above hovel of a place that he dwells in. He is a still life painting that used dull watercolors to hold down the noise and excitement of life.



(Penny Tusks from page 36)

There is some compensation to this life and existence. He does have a job; he has a girl friend, who is pretty in her own special way, a steady flow of simple entertainment via postal delivered movies, all to keep his attention focused on the here and now, instead of what could be so much better in fact. Making for a sense of the normal in what is considerably a less than exciting set of circumstances linked together and called a life.

Still the occasional splurge on coffee bought at a small shop with a cute person; they always seem to be cute whether they are male or female, they are just always cute; behind the counter making it for him and the other customers calling each other baristas or other strange sounding names, shouting out the orders and lending a sense of urgency to steaming milk to the correct temperature.

That is the real highlight of Coll's life, that act of getting coffee. The standing there in line with the other people who are all getting their coffee. It is a ritual of worship to the cacao bean and all of its relatives. Everything else seems to pale in comparison. The new people he meets all the time in his temporary assignments, the new businesses and locations he goes to weekly if not daily, the paychecks that are more than adequate due to rent control and a very Spartan lifestyle, the look on his girlfriends face when they have spent time together, all pales in comparison to coffee, and a good pastry. For him there is nothing to compare to that solitary enjoyment.

Still the days pass in a blur, the main difference is when the seasons change, but the light is always about the same, the clouds all act the same, the heat is no different than the cold, he feels little difference, or perhaps is it just an indifference,

to the changing of the seasons. The weeks have blurred into years in duration. This is the life that Frankfurt Van Collins, Coll for short, lives, day in and day out with distressing regularity.

A Monday comes, a Monday leaves, and it is all the same to him. The sun rises in the east, sets in the west, the planet spins under his feet without a single scrap of consciousness put towards the question of why? Why does it do that? Why is he here in this city filled with strangers masquerading as humans? Why are things the way they are?

Instead Coll takes his time walking to work, all the same, not enough change in his pocket to warrant the expense of a bus ride, so worn leather soles slap the cracked and worn concrete sidewalks, all the while vehicles fueled by petrochemicals rush by in a mad dash to get to wherever they are going.

At work now, up the few flights of stairs to the office, get the assignment of the week, this time, a change and a rare sense of continuity.

"Hey Coll, back over at that office you were at a few weeks ago. They got a bunch more filing for you, should last the week." Meredith, the receptionist, since before Coll started temping for this one agency, gives him a smile. At least it looks like a sincere one. As far as he knows, she might even like him; she is cute and perky in a young stud in the nose brunette sort of way. A figure that would be worth looking at twice, if she ever got up away from behind her receptionist desk in the few minutes he is in the office.

"Thanks Meredith sounds good." He looks down over the paperwork, all the forms are in order, all the right signatures, about twenty five cents over his

usual rate and the address where he is supposed to report to, in about an hour based on the start time.

"Catch you later then, have a nice day." Frankfurt Van Collins, Coll for short, leaves to tend to the tasks about to be at hand. But not before Meredith nods at him with a wan smile as both phone lines sound off simultaneously, and then he heads out and down the stairs towards his destination, there is nothing out of his ordinary to mark this day as different. The same as it has been for a steady and solid thirty seven years of life, cradle till this day.

This was a day just like all the other thirteen and a half some thousand, give or take, that he had been drawing a breath on this planet.

## PART 2

### A NEW ASSIGNMENT

*(days or weeks or sometimes later)*

The office air was stale and musty, much like the hardcopy files Coll has had to wade through to generate the information. "Not worth the time." Muttering all day long under his breath, buried practically in the under basement of the huge office complex, down where the rats did not even go, as there was nothing save nesting material available to them and without food, why nest?

"Not worth the time at all, or the money."

Down here the boxes were stacked to the ceiling, the shelving looked custom built to accommodate the file boxes to a height of nine packed in tight as they can be. The width was barely enough to slide a few fingers in on each side to pull them out, and all were almost to a container well over



(Penny Tusks from page 37)

fifty years old, some of them much older and in fact made of thin slat boards of wood held with twine or with reinforcements on the inside with tiny nails barely adequate to the task of support.

The rows went back for hundreds of feet, there in a sub-basement that lay below the level of the subways and underground piping, the distant rumblings gently rattling the metal supports; where present; holding up the shelves. The entire place was a deathtrap of mold and allergens. An environment that sparked off bouts of sneezing and coughing every morning; after Coll had climbed the several flights of stairs down to the bolted shut door, that he had one of the few keys for; and opened it out and the overall olfactory impression assaulted his sinuses.

Maybe it was the whole sense of it all having been forgotten. There was a service elevator that came down into the middle of the space, showing that the storage facility extended past the confines of the property above ground, but he had been assured it had not run for at least thirty years, and the writing on the sides of the banker boxes just outside of it, the last shipment, seemed to substantiate that claim. The boxes and crates closer to the elevator were not near as old as the ones on the shelves.

Then again there were a few oldsters back in sales and in accounting that remembered the elevator actually working, and one worthy had made the trip down the sub-basements on multiple occasions ferreting away boxes once they were deemed full. They were the only human connection to the storage facility prior to Coll's arrival on site and his tasking to pull certain data and files based on what was requested somewhere in the many floors of offices above ground in this company.

It lent a rather surreal edge to Coll's day, to come in at ground floor, ride the elevator up to the tenth floor to check in and verify the day and the tasking, then back into the elevator to the subbasement, then walk a few blocks of distance to get to the stairs leading down into the darkness. At least, he once thought, at least they sent spare light bulbs and an extensible changer with him for when they would go out, but his flashlight is his own. It is just one of the small prices to be paid as a temporary, and free to work how and when he needed or wanted to, freedom for him.

Down here there was a sense of peace for him though. No one watched him, he was not bothered at all, just there looking for particular boxes, files, documents, using the printed out files created from microfiche back when the company had catalogued what they were able too. Not all of it was indexed, Coll had figured that out the first day down there, and so he had taken to keeping a yellow pad updating what he found randomly that did not match up, or was not indicated based on what he was looking for that day.

Then at the end of each day, when he headed back up to the tenth floor to clock out and verify his hours for the day, he would leave the notes taken along with what he was able to find with his point of contact, afternoons it was someone different sitting at the area reception desk, not a single repeat in the time he has worked here, to take the files, notes, and to wish him a pleasant





(Penny Tusks from page 38)

evening. This was the routine, one he was grateful for as continuity is one of the strong suits in his life.

“Have a nice evening,” mindless drivel that day when it was all over. “Take care.” Just words out of his mouth and the name tagged could be paper doll of a person does not even respond.

Down and out the hallway, not even enough energy to mutter something under his breath, Coll took his time, the air conditioning worked fine inside, but being on foot meant no fan for him until he made it home. Rent control and declining prices along with living just outside the main office district, all contributed, along with his income level, to no automobile.

“Why would I want one anyways, hard enough to find space to stand never mind pay for parking?” As he steps out, the elevator dropping like a powered stone heading into the ground, asteroid in comparison, then across slick marble and near chandelier lobby and onto the street. It is about a quarter past the end of the work day, it takes a few minutes to get up to the tenth floor in the leviathan of steel and glass that looms above his back, a man-made monolith to consumerism.

Tonight the streets are not as crowded as usual. The mood is different, not something that is tangible to put his finger on, but Coll can tell there is something in the air this early evening, something that warrants a closer look.

Music plays, from years gone by. Two different sentiments echoing carried on the waves of pressure. Both older than he is, one much so the other only slightly, give or take. The main one kept going on and on.

The song drifted down along the alley way, following Coll down along the busy city street, echoing the sentiments of life, love, relationships and eternity. Talking about how love will not be lost; and even if it begins in childhood; it can be sour from the beginning.

*“Bang Bang, My baby shot me down.”*

Over and over playing from AM stations tuned, the static lending to the reality, while the newer FM stations carry the one version of the other song he recalls from playing on the radio on hot summer days,

*“Please don’t let me be misunderstood.”*

Again an echo as all the radios seem to be playing the same two songs, at the same time, as the sun sets to Coll’s left, walking northward.

## PART 3

### THE STRANGEST THINGS

*(that have happened so far)*

As the sun sets there to Coll’s left, there while he is still walking northward. Now he is heading back towards his solitary home. Solitary as his girlfriend does not live with him. There it happens, a riot erupts about him. Tearing him apart in a mental frenzy of klaxons, air horns, kazoos, trumpets, cymbals, drums and stomping feet, a parade has run over Frankfurt Van Collins, Coll for short. Drums, kettles, pots and pans all banging in a cacophony of thunder and asynchronous assaults drowns his mentality. Men and women in an orgiastic display of power and enthusiasm leering with keen lusts and open disdain flows and washes over him. Chinese Dragons float and drift among the throng with

masks and heads of masks shriek and caper in his eyes, melding into his mind as well as dogs, cats, lions, insects, strange fired clay heads all jabbering and primal coupling while fireworks explode inside the throngs flames and sparks shooting in all directions as tides and rip currents tear asunder stable footing to be crushed into the press of flesh and bodies as darkness falls and all the stars in the heavens come out and dance in concentric circles drowning him in a tempest of flesh and experience unlike life has ever bestowed upon him while rain and darkness sleet into his eyes and the dancers grow more frenzied and lust and heat wash over him in waves of uncontrol taking away his mortality and replacing it with something more primitive, feral, ancient, dragged from the depths of ancestral times and manifesting in the flesh as all sense of control leaves and his teeth flash and his flesh roars and surges taking it all in around and about him until consciousness slips away like a dream leaden and pregnant with alterations.

Dropping down into unconsciousness, dropping down into the street, dropping down into the earth, down past the sewer lines, down past the conduits filled with cables and pipes, down past the underground train lines that he did not know existed, down past the ruins of ancient beliefs and into the thick humid cloying soil filled with the small burrowing creatures., down and down until even that strata is left behind and still he fell, or falls, of has fallen, farther and father into Father Night and out again into the farthest recesses of the mind and subtle currents of magnetic beliefs.

Down into a cavern filled with lurid glows of scarlet and crimson, flecked with edges of bone and cartilage white, steeped in the mud of past eons. There



(Penny Tusks from page 39)

and then coming to his feet, coming to his senses, coming into madness in an impossible distance from light and life and mundanely lived cursed existence. Moving along in streaks of clay pulsing in beats seventeen to a minute feeling his blood pound and heart skip and stammer with each pulse, bringing on a sense of relief and despair and the lack of connection to all that remains above far far impossibly above in the waking world, here in a nightmare brought on by the insanity of the modern age spilling over into the night and raucous behaviors.

Cold and naked, shivering in the place he has found himself, only to realize the shivers are not from the cold, but from fear and terror as the shape coalesces from within the shadows extant in all directions. Dropping down from the ceiling and pulling up from the stone walls and separating from the mud sticking and cloying on his feet turned painful with the caress of granite edges. The shape coming into view with its wide snuffling face, and thick wire brush bristles, laid over with a hide all rendered in coal black and gunmetal blue with scars of distress and lies. Thick hooves appearing and leaving their imprints on the stone, rough textured knife floor with each cloven step, one, two, three, four, bringing down the ceiling, threatening to crush the life from him as the mud moves slowly up his legs, his torso, covering his chest until all that is left is the sight of the snout with the four terrible tusks gazing down with eyes dead as the headlights on a train or a bus.

There are two children, just standing there, looking down at him and staring at him, at Coll, there in the aftermath of the onslaught. They have on hand lettered white t-shirts. He sees one is male, one is female, both of them are in jeans and sneakers, but there are no details save their shirts. In a chunky

handwritten, block print, from top to bottom, taking up almost the entire space, their chests proudly state,

STRANGE IS AS STRANGE  
WILL NOT BE

“What the hell does that mean?”  
In a voice throaty and rough as from a night of binging on scotch and Havanas., setting off an earthquake force wave of racking sobbing coughs of phlegm, that brings up blood and pale green and brown mucus up and out and from his lungs, throat, nose and sinuses. It is a spray of disgust leaving his body in a long drawn out moment of physical pain different than any poor Frankfurt Van Collins, Coll for short, has endured to date in his life.

“What is the matter with me?”  
Getting to his feet and starting the staggering down the road, the two children or apparitions already discarded like a used disposable coffee cup, the carnival or parade or disturbance, what ever it was gone, like it had never been there in the first place. The temporary madness that had gripped him, shared in the cold in his clothing, the cloying feeling in his mouth, the spent nature of his insides proving that he had done things he has never done before. Proof of his existence and of the change wrought in moments.

“What has happened to me?”  
question he sends out into the deep-





(Penny Tusks from page 40)

est portion of the night, hours have been lost in the encounter he had. Running hands over skin rough and raw, like the sunburn that will not go away, heat radiating from deep within the flesh, deeper than the skin is, down into the bones and marrow and twisting turning organs moving the necessities of life to and fro all the while encased in an animate bundle of human flesh.

“Where did it all go to?” confusion rapt and attained as a rarified state of existence, showering him with uncertainty greater than the debt he feels that has accumulated in a span of unknown hours.

There is another damned song playing somewhere, telling the story, if only he could listen or even hear it in the aftermath, “Cha Cha Cha Changes.”. But Frankfurt Van Collins, Coll for short, is in the deep end of the pool with bricks on his feet and a weight tied around his middle and no one is there to help him escape now, not ever.

## PART 4

### HUNGER

*(for that which should not be hungered for)*

Daylight streaming into his window, bright already before it has barely rose above the level of the skyscrapers that surround his building all bruising the sky with their antennas and shiny plate glass windows reflecting the unreality of the inner city.

Sunlight coming in and hurting his eyes, Coll squints and counts the dust motes for a moment before his vision blurs and the world much farther away than his own hand goes slowly, gently, out of focus. Sunlight lending a touch of stark truth to the filth, blood, dirt and spent covering his garments and self.

His sleep, tormented with the recital of the past evening. Reliving it over again in his thrashing alone on an old twin bed, frame shuddering under the near assault of limbs and torso contorting, following along with the incarnate activities of the night just past. Body heaving and aching as the throes are revisited in their entirety, until the act of unconsciousness comes and robs him of mobility. Then lying there as of the deceased, Coll continued to relive his journey into the depths of the city and into the ground to meet that thing once again. To come face to face with hunger in all the worlds imagined. He is coming face to face with an inner nature that will no longer be denied.

The alarm goes off again and again, the sound driving railroad spikes far into his psyche and farther into memories not his own. The television sets in the neighboring apartments all clamoring for his attention, while all the cabs draining life and sustenance from the wallets of those too slovenly or too slothful to make their own way by foot, car, or other conveyance, all babbling in his ears and echoing round and round as a rip current of magma and mud sluicing through his very essence.

“Shut Up, SHUT UP SHUT UP!” Over and over the noise and the pain deafening, creating pain and suffering in his skull aching from the drains made courtesy of the time since that afternoon before this time period.

More pounding on the door, more pounding in his skull, more throbbing in his joints feeling all twisted and stretched into unfamiliar configurations. The door pounding is real, a palm or slight fist banging on it, with some muffled cries, or a voice familiar.

“What do you want?” his voice cracked, unintelligible to his own voice, “Who is it?” staggering to the door, feet not moving in their accustomed patterns, harsh staccato disjointed pattern feeling his nails on the hardwood floor, a legacy of some previous owner.

Checking the peephole and she is out there, his girlfriend, what is her name again, he wonders, it has fled his mind like some errant wisp of a passing fancy.

“Open this door right now or I will kick it in.” strong words from his occasional friend and once companion, but some distance he senses has come about, even in his exhausted daze. The sun is setting in the one window looking out to the western side of the city, and the slanting rays remind him he has potentially missed a day of work, and somehow missed an entire day.

“Don’t feel good, come back tomorrow, sick or something.” Feeble answer to strong words, the feminine half of the species has come to get a reckoning, for what he is unaware.

“No, open this door, where the hell have you been?” Click, the door knob turns and she is there stumbling as the door slams open into Coll and ricochets off, banging back into her before he had a chance to move out of the way. Down at the bottom the edge of the door catching his foot and leaving a crease instead of welt or torn flesh with the accompanying blood and mess.

“What the hell is the matter with you? I kept calling, came back three times, no answer, now finally you decide you want to talk to me, what the hell is the matter with you? Your work keeps



(Penny Tusks from page 41)

calling me, wanting to know what the hell has happened, did you quit there or what?" The tirade goes on with a litany that is foreign to his ears as is the back and forth between two immigrants in the language of their ancestors.

"Hell Coll if you are this sick after a week, why the hell haven't you gone to a doctor yet? I know you got insurance at those places you work, you could at least go get checked up, get something for it. Damn you smell bad too? What the hell haven't you showered in a week or what?"

"A week?" lame response, but a week, what is she talking about.

"What do you mean in a week?"

"Hello, it has been a week since you left work, well four days missed work, the one place already said you come back tomorrow with or without a doctors excuse or you are no longer welcome there. The second place is just calling me daily. Calling you two if I believe the girl that is checking on you. She someone I should know about Coll?" The ranting is madness, what the hell does she mean he lost four days, he stood up, got a headache this morning and now she is yelling at him, and damn it was just last night that he had the horrid dreams.

"Go shave, shower, delouse or something, lets go eat and sort this out." She stands there, long light brown hair, and figure more suited to a statue than statuesque. Hands on hips, face full of indignity and lips just pursed in a fashion reminding him it has been a while since she last stayed the night with him in his narrow, with them both in it, bed. Being full of figure at close to his own weight to boot, it is a close fit for them both. Looking there, realizing she

has on perfume, catching a scent of her shampoo, cheap and from the store, filled with chemicals that strip the natural from her follicles and scalp, she is the loveliest thing on the face of the planet.

"Closer, get closer to me," with a growl in his voice, moving towards her a little, pushing her back into the room with his presence, closing and locking the door behind him, reaching out and pulling her close, standing close to him now, he feels the heat of living flesh and it is overwhelming.

Darkness again, the streetlights come in the windows, illuminating her skin there on the bed, rise and fall of her chest showing deep slumber there in the darkness. Now he is fully awake, fully alive, feeling every inch of his skin taut and muscles moving underneath in an irresistible play of containment.

The clock tells him it is the low point in the night, almost 3 A.M. and he is wide awake and there is no memory of the hours since she came to his door. Time to shower, time to eat something, could eat just about anything. Padding over to the bathroom to take care of the first need and a third one as well, the truth confronts him there in the mirror, thick stubbly beard, more than a single days worth, or even three. More like a weeks worth of growth, thick and coarse, stiff and bristle like, thicker along his cheeks and mouth, more like brush bristles than his normal beard growth.

"Looks good." Mumbled around the tooth brush, the little brush fibers getting caught in his teeth and pulling out while he brushes. The front canines tender to the stroke of the brush, hurting in a different way not too difficult to ignore. Taking care of other necessities there, before turning the water on and moving into his shower the hair all over has changed

in a subtle way, closer to how it is on his face vice the hirsute nature he has had since puberty.

Frankfurt Van Collins, Coll for short, scrubs away the old left on his flesh, leaving new layers that are slowly emerging. Finger nails the longest ever in his life, toe nails even that are noticeable, thick and horny, closer to blunt claws in a way. Still the scalding hot water is soothing to muscles aching, the pain leaching away under the steady onslaught of water and soap.

"Time for a stroll." Standing there after the shower, looking over his stomach the tightest it has ever been since turning fifteen or so, standing there feeling a denseness to his persona that has not been there before. His feet, toes spreading out for purchase, and in need of something on the bottom of them, the most calluses he has had. Not even as a child going barefoot were they this durable seeming.

Shoes are tight, jeans are tight, shirt fits well, no need for a hoodie or jacket, he is plenty warm on the inside. She is still sleeping, looks exhausted and he knows she will sleep until she has recovered. No need to wake her, when he cannot explain the sudden depth to the night, the scents he senses just beyond reach, the movement of others in the dark going about their routines as if nothing is amiss, and other things as well. There are strange questions forming in the back of his mind. This is the beginning to answers.

The clock chimes, somewhere he hears a clock chime, four bells, and into the street he heads to see the night city he does not know, but might belong to.



(Penny Tusks from page 42)

## PART 5

### DARKEST ALLEYS

*(around every corner)*

The night is full of the richness of scent. Amazing, Coll thinks to himself, amazing he has never noticed it before. Good ones, bad ones, ones that tease and tantalize, ones that let you know don't go down that alley unless blood is to be spilled. Amazing the scents the night holds.

The streets are different as well at this hour. The night workers are mostly done, all trade is over, the homeless are tucked away somewhere out of sight mostly, and there are only a few stalwarts like Coll wandering around. Couple in front of him, down the street, hard to pick out, eyes are poor at best and worse this night, they are male and female but different somehow. More primal, more alive, reminding him of night time, and old stories told to frighten children of how wolves will eat the old and trick the young into their bed as well. Much as he almost feels like at that moment. Much like how he feels.

The couple drop into a stairwell. Takes a few moments, and Coll looks down, a coffee cup is flashing pale blue neon just next to door, wood with glass in it, and the aroma of coffee comes up and drags him down inside.

Stairs, door, open, small café style tables with two or at the most three chairs at each, booths thick and heavy in the back, recycled church pews perhaps, the scent comes to him of incense and betrayal thick as cream out of the carton.

"Can I get a cup around here?" Asking the barrista there working on his own behind the thick heavy wooden counter, more like an old style western bar to belly up to than any coffee place he has been too.

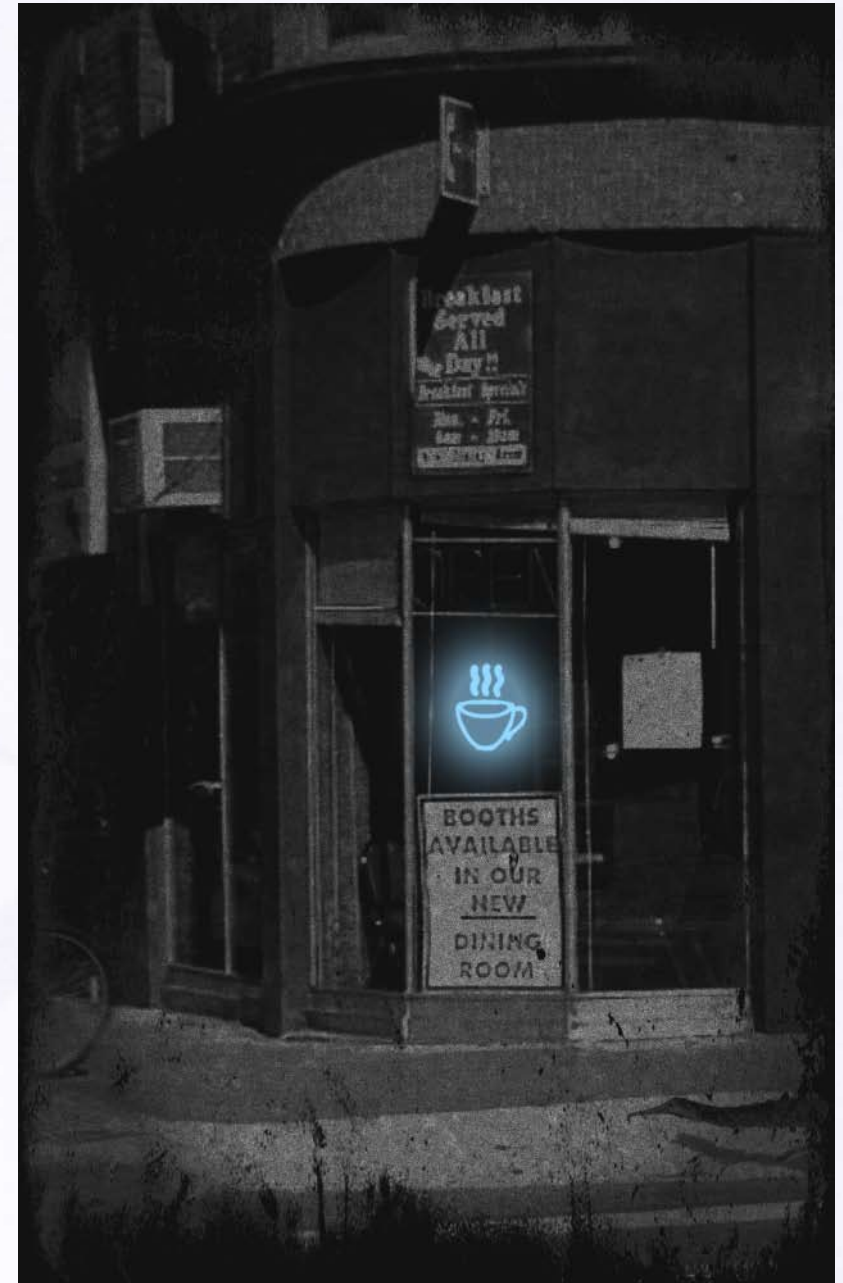
"Sure, how?" Gruff bark of a voice, the guy working is the hairiest man ever, thick curls coming up out of the top of his shirt, showing on his arms, more animal in look than human hair. Like one of those old school sideshow freaks.

"Black tonight, strong as you can make it."

"Sure, drop a donation in the bowl," arm jerks out and arrows to a large bowl, looks a lot like a Tibetan Prayer Bowl or a Steel Drum than anything else, pitted and worn with the green that only years of neglect can give to brass, or that substance that is there on your glasses on the nose pieces if you do not clean them for a while. That shade of green.

Moments, sheer moments, and heady intoxicating odor comes out of a thick porcelain cup, black as a flash drive leather case, or the handles on the old steel scissors your mother had to sew with when you were a child. Black and as hot as steam punches it up to, and filled with the scents of the world, dirt, coffee, roasting, sour bite of caffeine and the tang of the metallic implements used to produce the coffee its self.

"Here, noobs tend to end up in back on the right, plenty more where that came





(Penny Tusks from page 43)

from.” Pointed finger nail aimed down at the cup in his hand, and then back to work without asking a single question. He smells of sweat, weird, Coll thinks, he even smells the man making the coffee, who smells like coffee, sweat, cured meat and the tang of a wood smoke fire, bringing up memories of the one time he went to camp, there with all the other boys his own age, and the way the leader had made a fire to keep the dark at bay, and wondering what lay outside the circle of flames.

Down to the booths, passing men and women together or alone, talking, holding hands, kissing or just reading. Different drinks, some from outside the place in obvious bottles and flasks.

Walking past one older man, elicits a grunt, and in pausing, Coll hears him speak to him around teeth jagged and chipped more like flint knives flaked from larger pieces than human teeth.

“Something inside you boy, you ain’t domestic no more. Welcome to the other world, where we all belong to.” Dark skinned, teeth like knives, nails like claws with tendons standing out like rubber bands wrapped too tight, the hands holding a cup much like the one Coll holds in his own hand,. The swarthy complexioned fellow states, making it sound like a sentence of some sort. Welcome to the other world. What other world is there, Coll muses, as he tips his head and hand as if he has a hat on, and heads back farther into the coffee haus.

“Gee, thanks, didn’t know I was invited.” Snippy, much more so than his normal mode.

“The call comes, you listen or die. Guess you heard enough to stay. Watch out for the ones in green and black, jealous of the young and eager to show them a thing or three. Watch the green and black. Go, no patience for the

young here anymore. “Then ignoring, deliberate ignoring now taking a long drink of something closer to milk than coffee to suit Coll’s taste.

“Thanks.” Then finish walking to the back and an empty seat to drink the coffee down, donation forgotten till the bottom of the cup is reached. Coins tossed into the bowl as he leaves no idea what time it is anymore.

Time seems to be on pause, the MP3 player that is the world no longer on shuffle along drag the feet but instead a new soundtrack is in the machine and he is a neophyte in this soundscape he finds himself in. Strange things look out from empty alleys and catch his eye before nodding to him. Shadows where no one is move out of his way in a courteous fashion, driven by the lack of sleep or perhaps by some twist in his mind that has come undone and so now Frankfurt Van Collins, Coll for short is insane, he thinks. But he can smell the shadows, and the senses so rarely lie, he knows this as he has known most anything in his life. The senses so rarely lie, and normally only when tricked. So this is how it is in this post traumatic incident existence.

Alleys show up where he swore he has not seen them, stairs leading up the sides of stucco and wicker buildings where steel and glass should be, as well as glows coming from manholes, glows that give off scents of hot machine oil and the aftereffects of human interactions. All twisting in his mind, leading him farther from home, and farther into somewhere else, where trees grown, fields exist, and steel and leather herd beasts roam in groups of five or more all in a row under steady red, green, and yellow will-o-the-wisps.

Till somewhere far away, farther than the sun rises from and sets in, he comes to a land green as

insects and black as tar, where the sky pinwheels sinister making patterns to twist the mind if gazed at for too long and he knows, this is the green and black and it is time to be home instead of here.

But these things walk along the streets in the day or at night, just there, flickering in and out of sight sometimes noticed by regular folks, most of the time not. Hiding in the alleys, in the refuse strewn back rooms that feed off of the abandoned opium dens and art deco coffee haus that litter the small streets that only the poets and drunkards frequent, with any regularity. Another world sitting right there, right there just at arms reach, and with a simple stumble, it can be accessed and then all the rules have changed.

Frankfurt Van Collins, Coll for short, now walked a different world than before.

## PART 6

### ANOTHER DAY SAVED FROM BEING UNREMARKABLE

Till somewhere far away, farther than the sun rises from and sets in, he comes to a land green as insects and black as tar, where the sky pinwheels sinister making patterns to twist the mind if gazed at for too long and he knows, this is the green and black and it is time to be home instead of here.

“Time to go home, if I knew what that was?” Out loud, to self, musing into the slowly streaming sky, reminding him of MP3s and streaming audio only with a cool visual track instead.

“I wonder if I can stream this view into my mind, what would it do?”

“As young as you are, rot your mind until it oozed out your ears and nostrils leaving you the



(Penny Tusks from page 44)

beast you are inside, reveal the truth it would.” From the land, from the shifting shadows, from the air just behind his right ear come the dulcet tones making the simple proclamation.

“Really, and you are?” Feral grin splits wide open Coll’s face, revealing the power in his heart now, long suppressed by the act of his birth, and now revealed in the thick cords of muscles, the heavy tissue and cartilage he feels crawling under his skin in response to the perceived threat. Here in this land of green and black, like insects and tar, his canines respond as well they should, uppers curving up and outward and lowers curving outward and swept backward ready for the challenge ahead.

Thick hairs on his chest, face, legs, bristle and piece the clothing covering them as his nose rounding and moving of its own volition seeks out the scent of the source of the impending confrontation.

“You are? How rude of a statement, what do you expect from the young and weak.” A long pause as if a breath is being indrawn that takes miles to accomplish, then, “I am the place you see before you, the essence of life and ennui, where it sits and spins all day long going no where, you know where you are. Little spirit you are home finally, once again. Welcome back.”

“I think not, last week this was true, no longer.” Coll knows this inside, truths are revealed when tusks are shown, this is a truism that bubbles up from his fiercely beating heart buried these long thirteen and a half thousand some days that he has merely existed up to this stage, now that his heart beats and lives, it is true no longer.

“That is true no longer. Thank you for showing me this, it is a gift I take freely with no regrets.”

Coll turns all around slowly, surveillance of the place he used to live, at least in his spirit unknown, “I take my leave now. Have a pleasant day.”

Turning and looking down and seeing his own tracks there, as well as scent telling him which way he had come from, Coll heads out and away from his past, made manifest and available to all others that are like him, and he heads towards his home, far away but close to his heart.

A few days, hours, heartbeats later the landscape has changed to unknown alleys and hidden doorways and gaping mouths of sewers that roar garbage and filth in tone and demeanor at him. Still the world stays half and half, dream and nightmare overlaid with urban decay. Does time really matter, there under the under belly of reality, where dream intersects with vibration and the mind is the master of the flesh.

Does time really matter when you see a slender, slight, scarecrow, actual scarecrow, of a girl get dragged down into a sewer mouth by a tongue made of electrical cables and PVC pipe gone muscular, does it all really matter when her cries are muffled by concrete rippling in peristaltic motions.

“No reason not to, she did nothing to me, and that just looks wrong.” As the sky changed shade to a deeper hue of rust and old rotten tin.

So down the next manhole cover he goes, tusks still engaged and the hackles still raised from the whole time so far. Down there the daylight streams into the sewers, piercing the gloom through the grates that dot the upper land and aid in separating it from the underworld lurking. It was some in-between time just as he headed down, and now it is daylight up there, where he can see. The tunnel is a tunnel, with trickling

sewer water down the middle, and thing reedy cries for help coming directly before him.

He goes, farther and farther, down closer to the source of the cries and gurgling of water and old gear on gear grinder sounds, leaving shoulders on edge and mucus membranes on alert. It is taking all too long to transverse the distance. By the time he gets there, might not even be straw left to salvage for this expedition. Still no reason to stop now, make the decision, stay with it. Perseverance is one of the key traits he planned to hold on here as a new person.

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“I cannot go back.” Coll to the young lady he realizes is important, if she will realize it. “My time in that world is complete. You can come join me in the night, or stay here. I cannot stay and I will not make up your mind for you.” Simple as can be to lay it all out that way.

She is biting her lip, he sees, her hands are fidgeting, she is toe tapping and that is enough to let him know. She is not ready, might not ever be ready, but at this point in creation, she is not ready to step over with him.

“I understand. Good Bye.” With a kiss, three, to seal the deal on her dead lips, and then he picked up the bomber jacket that had tagged along with him from the sewers and the dead scarecrow girl.

Frankfurt Van Collins, Coll for short, so named for his father had fallen into true love in Frankfurt while in the Army, but years later Coll was conceived in the back of a conversion van, and Collins, well the last name is the last thing on a birth certificate. His birth into the material world was the same sort of time as the start of his existence, on the same sort of overcast day. His birth into existence was anything but that.



fin

# WHERE THE WOLVES ARE?

## An Adventure

by Tim Bissailon  
for **Little Fears**® 1 ed.

“There are not many persons who know what wonders are opened to them in the stories and visions of their youth; for when as children we learn and dream, we think but half-formed thoughts, and when as men we try to remember, we are dulled and prosaic with the poison of life.”

H.P. Lovecraft  
“Celephaïs”

“Is it true Sammy?” Dougie wanted to know. He couldn’t sleep, his 6-year old brain was swimming with images of beasties surrounding Sara Ceirquera. “Is it true what they say about them?”

Sammy turned in his cot to face Dougie. He was two years older and wiser, and he made sure Sister Alma Vent had passed by them before he spoke in a hushed tone. It would be lights out soon and Sister Vent didn’t like anybody talking once the lights went out.

“I think it is,” he said.  
“And I think it’s our time to do something about it.”

“Is Colleen coming with us?” Dougie asked.

“Of course she is. Sara is her best friend.” Sammy replied, “We’re to meet in the courtyard right after lights out.”

“Will the monsters be out there?” Dougie inquired as he stole a glance at the closet at the end of the dorm to see if the door was shut tight. Ever since he was brought to the orphanage he was plagued

with sounds coming from the closet.

“Don’t worry Dougie, True is coming with us,” Sammy told him. “She is an expert at this kind of stuff.”

Dougie smiled when he heard True was coming along as well. She was 9-years old and she knew a lot about the things that go bump in the night.

“Hush Time!” Sister Vent barked. Her hand hovered over the light switch like an axe blade over a condemned criminal. The whole room suddenly become quiet as the kids had put away books, magazines and journals onto their nightstands.

Then the room went dark, except for the light from the courtyard which cast long shadows. “Good night!”

Sister Vent’s footsteps receded into the darkness and before they were totally gone, Sammy threw off his covers. He was dressed and ready to go get his sister.

Dougie sat up as well and slipped into his

“Will the monsters be out there?”





(Where Wolves from page 46)

shoes, and he pulled the velcro tight. He didn't want to be losing a shoe in this rescue mission. He grabbed Rook from the pillow as well: the ragged teddy bear had been with him since day one, and if he was going anywhere, Rook had to come as well.

## INTRODUCTION

This adventure is a stand-alone scenario I ran at CanGames 2009. Even though Little Fears is a game of childhood terror, I just had to add some of my own mythos and put my own spin on things.

Our adventure begins in The Sacred Grounds Orphanage. The Orphanage was built on a hill overlooking the town just a few miles away, and the town itself is a stones throw away from a major metropolis. The children that make up the residents here have been orphaned, abandoned, mistreated or what not. These kids are damaged goods from the city when brought to the Sacred Grounds.

The Orphanage has a Catholic school as well, run by the Abbess Sister Clarice. There are 22 nuns who also reside here to help take care of the children and teach them. Sister Alma Vent and Sister Verna Broom are just two of the nuns that help the children.

## OUR ADVENTURE

There's something weird happening the children know about, but the sisters at Sacred Ground Orphanage cannot see it for some odd reason. It has to do with Dr. Gray Garou and his wife Foxie, who reside in the town below. Dr Garou is the only dentist in the small town. .

What the children know is: every six months the Garous come to the orphanage to adopt a child, and bring them back into town to raise. Every time the



*"Prying curiosity means death."*

H.P. Lovecraft  
*The Rats in the Walls*



(Where Wolves from page 47)



Garous have adopted a child from the Orphanage, the child is never seen or heard from again. The children at the orphanage know this to be true but they realise the adults seem to be blinded to this fact: there seems to be a fog bank in their memories.

This year a sibling of one of the players has been “adopted” and taken to live with the Garous in the town below. And exactly on the eve of a night of a new moon the Garous come to collect. This time around though, the kids are planning a rescue operation and also plan on uncovering what the Garous did with the kids they adopted before.

Once the lights are out, the kids go into action. They meet up outside the dorms to proceed as a group and head into town.

### The Orphanage

The kids have to sneak out on their own and regroup to move onto the next phase. It’s an old building having been built in 1954 by the Catholic Church and houses 200 to 400 kids at one time. There is a boys wing and a girls wing, a cafeteria, gymnasium and workshops as well. A virtual haven for the lost children. Getting out of the orphanage shouldn’t be a problem at all, but have the kids make “Sneak” rolls in order to get out and about.

### Encounter

Sister Verna Broon (an elderly old-school nun) is walking through the halls. She has a slight hearing problem, so if the kids make any noise have them make another test.

### Outside in the World

Having made it this far the kids must now proceed downhill to the town, though they must either go through a dark and foreboding forest or follow the hairpin highway. The woods are dark and scary and have many sounds to make the kids minds overactive, and wolves have been spotted close to the Orphanage.

### Encounter

No matter what route the children take they will encounter 1D3 wolves. Though the wolves may growl at the children, the wolves will not attack but will turn and run off. Have the kids make a Smart quiz, those who pass the test notice that one wolf had a look of recognition in it’s eyes and then scampered off.

### Note

During the game I ran I didn’t factor in that a player had the bright idea of stealing a car and driving off into town. The character who had the highest smarts and “I’m lucky” quality was the driver. They piled into the vehicle and begin to drive down the hill. Coming up to each hairpin curve I made the driver make a Quiz. Normally, there would be three, but to a child the road can be as long as it needs with each hairpin turn hairier than the last.

### Cornfields & Scarecrows

Once the kids make it down the hill and through the woods they are on farmland. Here there is a patrol car stopped on the highway and the children can hear the police radio telling the officers that a couple of the kids from the Orphanage have gone missing and





(Where Wolves from page 48)

might be on their way into town. The quickest way to town is through the cornfield.

#### Note

When I ran this adventure, the kids didn't want to travel through the cornfield and wanted to walk around it but it seemed like the cornfield went on for miles and miles and miles.

#### Encounter

There is a scarecrow who watches over the rows and rows of corn. One minute he is there looking over the field and as the kids notice him, they see him turn his head and look in their general direction. Then he grabs a scythe and jumps off his post...

Scarecrow: Claw 2 Bite 2

*"There are nights when  
the wolves are silent and  
only the moon howls."*

-- George Carlin

### Here Be Corn Harvesters

Once past the cornfields and onto a farmer's property the kids stumble upon a tractor (corn harvester) which is red in colour and has big white teeth by the shed. It's a menac-



(Where Wolves from page 49)

ing type of mechanism and once it senses their fear it will animate and approach the kids.

## The Town Without A Name

The town is quiet and peaceful. As the kids proceed down the streets of the town they will hear a fluttering sound overhead. Make a Smarts quiz to see if they notice a winged mouse that lands on the window ledge and walks through the glass. Seconds later the creature will walk through the glass and take flight again. It is the tooth fairy and she is going about her business of collecting.

## The Toll Trolls

Three teenage bullies who are up past curfew causing trouble will notice the kids and ask what they are doing and will intervene. Butch, Dave and Gobs will approach the “rejects” and taunt the “unwanted”. They demand a toll from the kids to enter the town and cross their turf. Butch is the alpha male of the group, while Dave and Gobs are the hangers-on. Once Butch goes down in the fight the other two will flee.

Bullies:

- Smarts 2
- Feet 3
- Muscles 3
- Spirit 2
- Hands 3

## Here Be Wolves

Dr Gray Garou’s office is not hard to find. It’s the only dentist office in town here. Nestled in the downtown core, it is an old two story building that has the business downstairs with living space

upstairs. The offices consist of a reception area, a large waiting room with about a dozen seats, three examination rooms and a unisex bathroom.

It seems the Garous are burning the midnight oil as well, as the lights are on in the dentist office. The Garous and Sara are in one of the examination rooms, as Sara is about to have some teeth pulled. Sitting in a jar are two canine teeth from a wolf, fresh and ready to be put in place of Sara’s own.

The Garous, as the name implies, are Wolfweres, wolves that become human. Since the Garous are wolves by nature and turned into humans for reasons unknown they cannot have children themselves. They have decided to “adopt” lost children and make them part of their pack as there are a number of wolves in the woods around the orphanage. If the Garous successfully implant the wolf teeth into one of their adopted children they take on lycanthropy and go to run with the others out in the woods.

What the Garous have done is simply not an evil thing, more misguided.

“Unhappy is he to whom  
the memories of childhood  
bring only fear and sadness.”

H.P. Lovecraft  
*The Outsider*





# LAMP POSTS IN BLOOM

## *An Adventure*

by Scott Dorward  
for **Unknown Armies**®

## INTRODUCTION

*Lamp Posts in Bloom* is a one-shot street level scenario for **Unknown Armies**. It is designed for exactly five players. It may be possible to introduce additional characters or play one or more of the player characters as GMCs, but this is less than ideal as the scenario is designed to be propelled by the tensions defined by the characters' backstories.

The default setting is a generic town in England, but it could easily be adapted to most other countries by changing details like the football team that Simon Ockley supports. Setting it in a town familiar to the players would probably help make the game smoother and a bit creepier.

It should take between two to four hours to complete.

## BACKGROUND

Two years ago Keith Whitney's teenage daughter Gemma was killed by a drunk driver while walking

home from a friend's house. As Whitney found himself unable to cope, becoming obsessed with the injustice of what had happened, the rest of his life fell apart. He lost his job at the town library, his wife left, he grew distant from his friends and he withdrew from the normal world. None of this mattered, though. His experiences on the edge of the Occult Underground had shown him that anything was possible, for a price. He would find a way to make things right.

A little over a year later Whitney followed a lead to a flea market at a disused church in Wiltshire. There he found a man who promised that he could sell Whitney justice; all it would cost him was an eye. Whitney didn't hesitate.

Justice took the form of a ritual within a ritual (the rituals are presented as handouts). The first layer showed how a loved one could be brought back from the dead for the price of the life of another loved one. Even if Whitney had given up on justice, simply deciding to get his daughter back, it wouldn't have helped: there was no one left who he loved.



(Lamp Posts from page 51)

The second layer of the ritual held the answer, though. If ten people in the same town performed the first ritual over the course of a year, the lamp posts could be brought into bloom, harvesting yet more lives. Once they in turn had taken ten, the stolen lives could be used to perform a miracle.

It was too much for Whitney to resist. Not only could he bring Gemma back, but he would do so at the expense of ten dangerous drivers. The symmetry was perfect. He made copies of the first ritual and placed them where they may be found by the right people: in hospitals and funeral director's offices, in the waiting rooms of bereavement counsellors and tucked between the pages of books about dealing with grief. And then he waited.

Now Whitney's plan is almost complete. The tenth ritual was performed yesterday. Today he has travelled through town, gathering flowers from all the lamp posts. Tomorrow he will have his daughter back.

## PLAYER CHARACTERS

Six months ago, Jeremy Rowle died in a car accident. He and his partner were involved in a high-speed chase when his partner lost control and crashed into a parked car. Jeremy's wife, Natasha, went off the deep end upon learning this. Her friends drew close, but she was inconsolable. One of her friends, Len Trevelyan, thought he knew a way he could help.

A couple of weeks previously, Len, a librarian by profession, had found an odd piece of paper tucked inside a returned library book (a copy of *Coping With Loss*, last checked out by Keith Whitney

– the name will ring a bell with Len as a former colleague, should he look at the records). It was a copy of the Fair Exchange ritual, scrawled on the back of a menu from a Chinese takeaway. His interest and belief in magic had led to him keeping it as a curiosity. After the accident, he gave it to Natasha, not really believing it would work, but just out of a desperate need to do something.

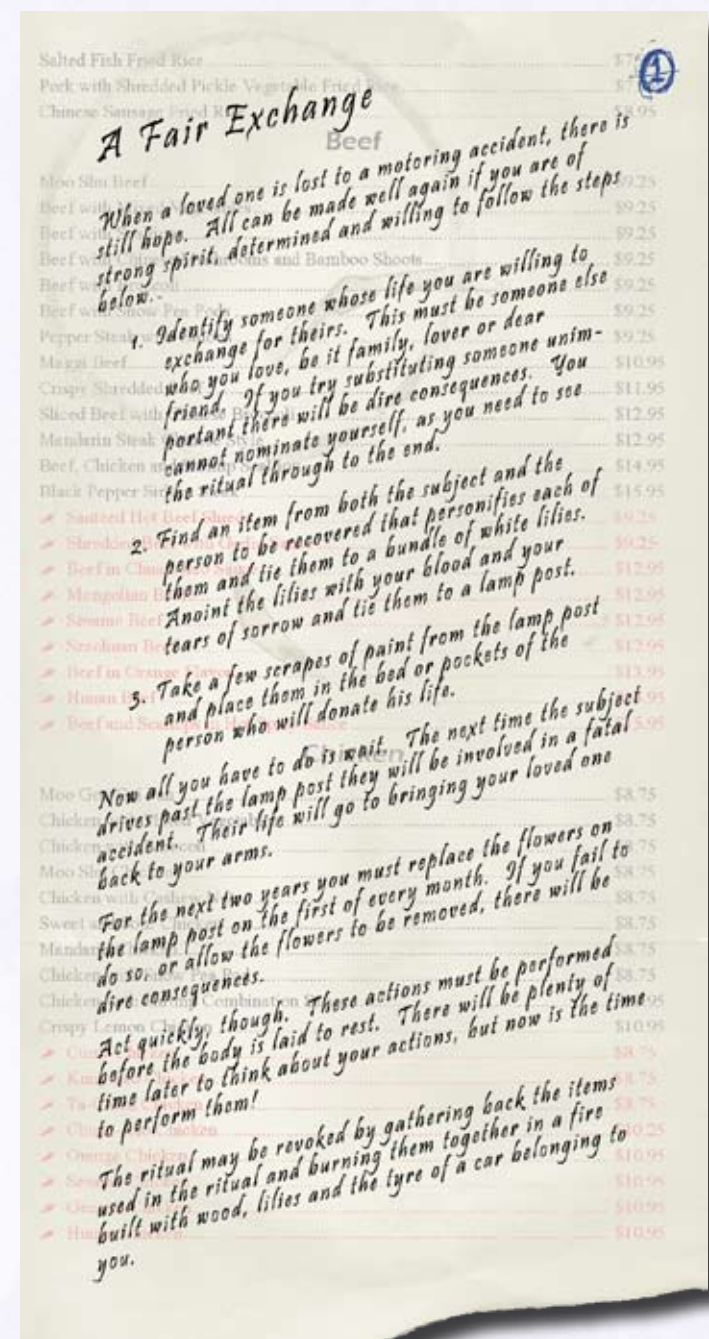
Natasha, in her fragmented and desperate state of mind, seized upon the ritual as a real hope. She selected her godson, Simon Ockley, as the target; no matter how much she loved the boy, Jeremy came first. She made all the preparations and waited. Then the unexpected happened: the ritual worked.

Not that anyone remembers it, but Richard Ockley was driving his son to the cinema when they were involved in a side-on collision with a van. Simon died instantly, his body crushed by the impact. At that point the world rewrote itself. Jeremy had never had the accident. The Ockleys had never had a child. No one remembers anything different.

No one except Natasha, that is.

Unable to cope with the guilt, she shared her burden with Len. It was his fault, after all. Things got worse from there. She could hardly face her sister and brother-in-law, although they carried on like nothing was wrong and tried to care for her, seeing how troubled she had become. Her relationship with Jeremy started to falter, as she could hardly bring herself to touch the dead man who shared her bed. And Len... Len's acting very strangely nowadays, especially around the Ockleys.

The Ockleys are also having problems. While neither of them remember their son, they can both





(Lamp Posts from page 52)

feel the void in their lives. They're desperate to have children, but don't know why they've left it this late to try. This is putting a strain on their marriage.

Richard has been coping with this by working and drinking too much, but these were things he always did to some extent. Evelyn, on the other hand, has tried to bring a stabilising influence into her life by having an affair with Jeremy, who in turn is delighted to find a woman to meet his sexual needs. They're keeping this very quiet, but Richard is beginning to suspect something is wrong. What has further complicated this is that Evelyn is beginning to think she might be pregnant, and she isn't sure who the father is.

Today, though, the Ockleys are having a barbecue. It's a nice summer evening, and they're going to have a few drinks (well, maybe not Evelyn, if there's a baby to think of) and try to rekindle their friendship. This is also the day that Keith has taken down all the flowers.

## NPCS

### KEITH WHITNEY

As described in the Background section. He is an unremarkable man in his late forties who lives alone in a flat on the other side of town. His flat is chaotic and neglected, cluttered with many of the effects that once filled his family home.

He is desperate and obsessed, excited to be so close to his goal. He will fight desperately to ensure its success, though he has no special skills to help him. His stats are flat fifties and he has the basic 15% in Dodge and Struggle.

### SIMON OCKLEY

Richard and Evelyn's dead ten-year-old son. He was a fairly normal boy, obsessed with Liverpool FC and Star Wars. When his bedroom starts reverting, the toys, posters, clutter, etc. should reflect these things.

The wounds that killed him were horrific. His spine was snapped and twisted, his left leg crushed and his head caved in and disfigured. When he starts coming back, these wounds should be played up in the way he moves, the way his silhouette looks and in the constant trails of blood he leaves.

Once Simon manifests fully, anyone who actually manages to engage with him in a human way will find him frightened, confused, angry and largely incoherent, but his mother may be able to calm him down. His head injury prevents him from speaking comprehensibly.

His stats are Body 20, Speed 20, Mind 30, Soul 60, and he has 15% in struggle.

### CHRISTIAN NEWLEY

A Sleeper who has picked up on rumours in the Occult Underground that the dead have started rising in an otherwise quiet town. He is aware of the Fair Exchange ritual, but not the larger ritual of which it is part. His main goal is to track down everyone using the ritual and make sure they keep their peace, even if that means killing them.

He is doing so with the aid of a demon trapped in a snow globe -- it appears as a constantly shifting black cloud of snow that occasionally shows an eye or snarling mouth -- stuck on the dashboard of his

large black BMW. The demon is skilled in identifying people who should be dead and will lead him to Jeremy Rowle. When there are normal people around, he will tuck the globe in his leather briefcase.

Newley is a Plutomancer, and exudes calm authority. He will try to get his way through verbal bullying, but will fall back on magick when need arises. He has one significant charge and eight minor charges when the PCs encounter him. He also carries a small silenced pistol.

He does not want other parties involved in this mess, especially the police. He will use magick to call the police off by posing as a superior officer, and may even go as far as killing them or any other witnesses should the situation fall apart completely.

His stats are Body 50, Speed 50, Mind 50, Soul 70, and has 40% in Authority, 25% in Firearms, 20% in Struggle and 50% in his obsession skill of Plutomancy. Physically, he is a tall, well-dressed man in his mid-forties, who speaks with a *cut-glass* English accent.

## EVENTS

As the game progresses, the following events can be brought in to move things along. Not all of them may be necessary. In general, they should be used whenever the action is slowing, or tension needs to be built. If the players are taking things in different directions and creating tension and drama all on their own, particularly towards the end, pull back and let them get on with things, or retool these events as you see fit.

☞ Initially it's just going to be the Ockleys and the Rowles present at the Ockleys' house.



## Lamp Posts in Bloom

If ten people in the same town can be convinced to perform the ritual outlined below in the course of a year then the lamp posts may be coaxed into bloom. After the tenth enactment, visit each of the sites and remove the flowers. Bind them together onto a wooden staff. After the stroke of midnight the sites used for the rituals will come to life, until each one has taken at least one life. The life energy expended is then yours to command with the staff of flowers. Use these lives wisely!

It's a pleasant summer evening and they're all out on the patio. A few light bits of tension might get the characters interacting. Perhaps Richard's just burned the steaks, or someone's teasing Evelyn about not drinking. Start with that and see if the players bite. As soon as things start to slow, have Len arrive.

- ⌘ At some point, have Richard or Evelyn notice something strange when they're walking through the living room to get drinks, plates or the like. They have a wall of photographs, most showing one or both of them on holiday, or in places like a park, a playground (why do they have pictures of themselves in a playground anyway?) or similar. One of the pictures especially catches the eye. It's a large photo of the two of them in Disney World, standing in front of

other pictures will also change to include Simon at various stages of his life, often making the context of the picture less bizarre. Seeing the pictures change is a rank-2 unnatural check.

- ⌘ Anyone going or looking upstairs may notice that there's a pair of children's football boots hanging by their laces from the handle of the door to the spare room (used for storing boxes). The room itself looks much the same as everyone remembers – a number of boxes lying around, some on the floor, some on the desk. The ones on the bed have been cleared off, though. When was there ever a bed in here? Every time someone comes into the room, something will have changed. The bed will be made up; there will be a Star Wars poster up,

Cinderella's castle. They remember getting an American tourist to take it for them. The picture's always looked a bit odd, as they both look happy, but are standing apart. Now it seems like there's a small human shape in between them. It's faint, but very slowly becoming more distinct. Over time it will develop into Simon standing between the two of them, holding their hands. Some of the

then one for Liverpool FC; a selection of toy robots will be on the window ledge; a laundry basket will be full of a child's clothes, including a bloody Liverpool strip; there will be the misshapen outline of a child – its shape matching Simon's wounds – pressed into the bed, leaking blood stains into the linen. Seeing any of these changes is a rank-4 unnatural check.

- ⌘ Richard and Evelyn will start having flashes of memories involving their son: birthday parties, days out at the beach, him losing his first tooth. Initially they will be vague, just images. At some point, if they're talking about the child who's appearing to them through all these means, the name Simon may slip out of their mouths without them realising.
- ⌘ A child's laughter or footsteps (but with a leg dragging) may be heard around the house. Simon actually starts appearing (which will trigger unnatural and violence checks, given his injuries), but in dark places first of all. He's not quite physical yet, and is capable of passing through walls or floors. Every time he does this, though, he leaves a bloody outline.
- ⌘ The next time Jeremy goes to bed, he once again dreams of dying in a hospital bed (as outlined in his character sheet), but this time the dream goes backwards in time, leading back to his fatal car accident. He wakes up splattered with blood. The next time he dreams, even if it's just while nodding off while sitting down, he dreams of the accident again, only Richard is driving the car and Jeremy is dressed in a Liverpool strip.



(Lamp Posts from page 54)

☠ Simon will start stalking Jeremy once he becomes more substantial. He will do things like try to smother Jeremy if he falls asleep, although he is only a child – one with hideous injuries – and stands no real chance of success. His instinct tells him that if he can kill the man who stole his life he will get his life back. This is wrong. If Jeremy dies, nothing changes.

☠ The following day, all the lamp posts which had been used in the rituals around town come into bloom. White lilies grow from the metal or concrete, their stalks blending from inorganic to organic seamlessly. As this happens, cars in their vicinity are drawn to them as if to an impossibly strong magnet. A successful major Driving check will keep control of a car passing one, otherwise each will pull in vehicles until each one has taken at least one human life. The PCs should probably encounter the after-effects of one or two of the accidents before they have one themselves. Seeing one of these lamp posts prompts a rank-2 unnatural check.

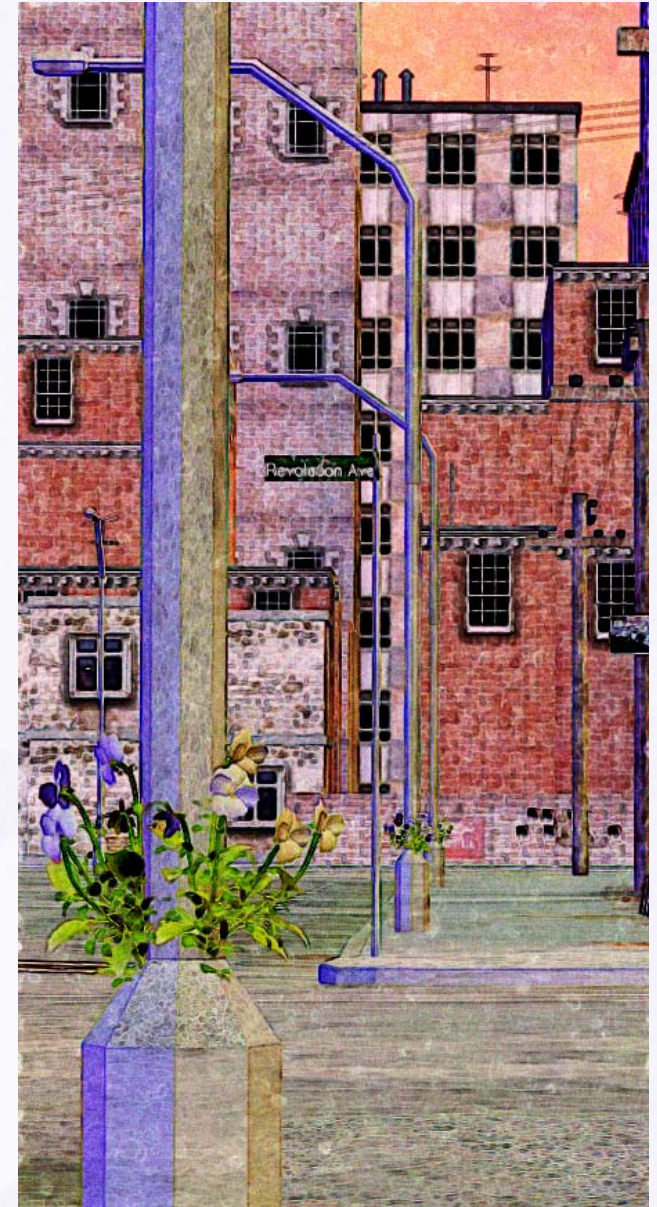
☠ Christian Newley arrives in town and starts hunting Jeremy. Choose some suitably dramatic moment for him to meet the PCs. If they are aware of Keith Whitney at this stage, Newley will use the PCs to get to him, with the idea of killing him first and then Jeremy, Natasha and Len. He likes tidy endings.

## WRAPPING IT ALL UP

There are a few obvious ways that the game can conclude, but these are by no means exhaustive.

*He who fights with monsters  
should be careful lest he thereby  
become a monster. And if thou  
gaze long into the Abyss, the  
Abyss will also gaze into thee.*

-Friedrich Nietzsche  
*Beyond Good and Evil*





(Lamp Posts from page 55)

- ☠ Natasha may have a crisis of conscience and reverse the ritual, or Len could intervene and do so. This would undo everything, and leave Jeremy long dead, Simon alive and well, and no one apart from those present at the reverse ritual with any memory of what happened.
- ☠ It's entirely possible, depending on what secrets are revealed, that the PCs will start behaving violently towards each other, building up to murder. This should be encouraged!
- ☠ Christian Newley is keen to make the whole situation go away. At the very least he will want to kill Jeremy and intimidate the rest into silence. Ideally he'll want to kill Natasha and Len as well, if he learns of their involvement in the ritual. They represent an unacceptable risk. If it comes down to it, he may try to kill everyone. He's not the most tolerant of people.
- ☠ The PCs may uncover Whitney and attempt to stop his ritual. They should reach him just before the last charge goes into the staff he's made (from a broomstick and the flowers he's gathered from the lamp posts). Someone else in control of the staff who has the foresight to make a wish involving life and death could make it come true, leading to Simon being resurrected, Jeremy being killed, any other PC who's died being brought back or some combination of these. Failing that, Keith will bring his very confused daughter back, which may elicit some response from the PCs.

## MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

Any attempt to correct things by reattaching flowers to the lamp post will fail. The flowers will simply wilt and die in the course of a few minutes (rank-2 unnatural check for any witnesses).

Len may attempt to perform some pagan rituals to affect the situation. The best these will do is comfort some of the participants. He will not be able to reverse the ritual, put Simon's spirit to rest, etc.

It's possible that Len will miss the connection between the returned library book and Keith Whitney. If you think it will help the game, you may want to drop hints. Whitney is listed as the last person to check the book out before Len found the insert, and the address shown for him on file is accurate, so tracking him down won't be hard. It's not vital that the PCs find Whitney, though.

## HANDOUTS

The handouts are the character sheets and both rituals. The first ritual, A Fair Exchange is the one known to two of the PCs and should be given as a handout to the players of Natasha Rowle and Len Trevelyan at the start of the game. The second, Lamp Posts in Bloom is only in the possession of Keith Whitney and should be given to the PCs only if they recover it from him.

Sheets for all five PCs follow. Be sure to advise the players not to discuss their contents until they've read them all ("Jeremy? But it says here that you're dead!").



(Player handouts on the next 5 pages)



## RICHARD OCKLEY

**Age:** 38

**Occupation:** Journalist

**Personality:** A seeker after truth

**Obsession:** Uncovering the truth\*

### Passions:

**Rage Stimulus:** Betrayal

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Car Accidents

**Noble Stimulus:** Helping those who can't help themselves

**Body:** 40 (middle aged spread)

**Speed:** 55 (good reflexes)

**Mind:** 70 (sharp cookie)

**Soul:** 60 (empathetic)

### Skills That Matter (Obsession Skill in Bold)

**Body:** General Athletics 15%, Struggle 15%, Go Without Sleep 20%, Hold Your Liquor 20% **Speed:** Dodge 15%, Driving 30%, Initiative 25%, Sneak About 20%

**Mind:** *Journalist* 40%\*, General Education 25%, Notice 25%, Conceal 15%, Eidetic Memory 15%

**Soul:** Charm 25%, Lying 15%, Convincing 25%, Ferret Out the Truth 25%

### Madness Meter (Hardened/ Failed):

**Violence:** 1/0

**Unnatural:** 0/0

**Helplessness:** 1/0

**Isolation:** 0/0

**Self:** 0/0

Your Ferret Out the Truth skill will allow you to not only tell when someone is lying, but possibly even use verbal trickery to get them to admit something they are trying to hide.

Your Eidetic Memory skill will allow you to recall exact details of something you've read or heard at some time in the past.

### Background

Your relationship with your wife, Evelyn, has been strained recently. You never had children and this has become very important to her over the last several months. The doctor has suggested holding off on IVF, as both of you seem to be fertile. You've suggested adoption, but Evelyn's determined to be, as she puts it, a "real mother". The tragedy is that you're just as keen on having children as she is, but somehow the situation is driving a wedge between you.

This afternoon you found a used pregnancy tester in the rubbish. Assuming you know how to read it, it's positive. Surely Evelyn would have mentioned something, especially after all the fuss she's been making about having a baby. Maybe she just needs a bit of time.

All of this is compounded by the fact that Evelyn has been uncharacteristically distant recently. If you didn't know her better, you'd think she was having an affair. Len Trevelyan, a friend of Natasha's, has been insinuating himself into your life recently, and you're beginning to wonder...

On top of it all, you've had a strange feeling of wrongness recently. You can't put your finger on it, but it's like you've lost something important, but you just don't know what it is. It's silly and irrational, but strong enough that you've been thinking about getting psychiatric help (not that you'd tell Evelyn!).

### Relationships to Other PCs:

**Evelyn Ockley:** Your wife of fifteen years, the love of your life and a psychiatric nurse by profession. She's been a bit distant recently.

**Natasha Rowle:** Evelyn's sister. She and her husband live in the same town as you, and you all spend a lot of time in each other's company. She makes some money by writing horror stories, although Jeremy is the main breadwinner. She has never seemed to like you very much, and she's been a bit odd around Evelyn recently.

**Jeremy Rowle:** Natasha's husband. He's a policeman, and can be a bit severe, but he's a pretty uncomplicated chap. He likes to talk about his work, especially to share the emotional burden of difficult cases, and sometimes the details are a bit too juicy not to find their way into print. The irony is that if anyone found out that his confidant was printing this stuff Jeremy would be the one to get hauled over the coals.

**Len Trevelyan:** A creepy friend of Natasha's who keeps turning up unannounced, bringing presents and being needlessly cheerful. He works at the local library and keeps talking tosh about the occult. Evelyn seems to like him, which just makes things worse. They seem a bit too close, in fact...



## EVELYN OCKLEY

**Age:** 36

**Occupation:** Psychiatric Nurse

**Personality:** Everyone's mum, with no kids of her own

**Obsession:** Having children

**Passions:**

**Rage Stimulus:** Being ignored

**Fear Stimulus:** (Violence) Dead bodies **Noble**

**Stimulus:** Protecting children

**Body:** 50 (solidly built)

**Speed:** 60 (trained to look after yourself)

**Mind:** 50 (think on your feet)

**Soul:** 60 (bonds easily with others)

**Skills That Matter** (Obsession Skill in Bold)

**Body:** General Athletics 15%, Control and Restraint 40%, Hard to Move 15%

**Speed:** Dodge 35%, Driving 15%, Initiative 40%, Horseback Riding 15%

**Mind:** General Education 15%, Notice 25%, Conceal 15%, Medicine 30%

**Soul:** **Comforting 40%**, Charm 25%, Lying 25%

**Madness Meter** (Hardened/ Failed):

**Violence:** 1/1

**Unnatural:** 0/0

**Helplessness:** 0/0

**Isolation:** 0/0

**Self:** 0/0

Your Comforting skill will allow you to help calm someone who is deeply upset, for example someone who has just failed a madness check and is acting violently. You work with mentally ill people on a daily basis and are good at helping keep things under control.

Your Control and Restraint skill is a specialised form of Aikido, taught to the police and some mental health professionals. It deals mainly with putting people in locks and restraining them when they're violent. It is focused on defensive action.

### Background

You recently realised just how loudly your biological clock is ticking and you're becoming quite frantic. The doctor says he can't find a reason why you and Richard haven't had children and hasn't put you forward for IVF yet. Richard has mentioned adoption and can't seem to understand why having your own child is the only answer.

All of this is putting a bit of strain on your relationship. Luckily, your relationship with Jeremy has given you strength. You didn't mean it to turn physical, and the stress of keeping it secret from Richard and Natasha is far from easy, but there's something reassuringly solid about Jeremy that gives you the strength to cope with everything.

Everything may be getting a lot more complicated soon. You're three weeks late with your period and finally summoned up enough courage to take a pregnancy test this morning. It was positive. You haven't told Richard yet; after all, is the child his? While you think things through you'd better start avoiding things like alcohol.

On top of it all, you've had a strange feeling of wrongness recently. You can't put your finger on it, but it's like you've lost something important, but you just don't know what it is. It's silly and irrational, but frightening enough that you've started talking to one of the psychologists at work about it.

### Relationships to Other PCs:

**Richard Ockley:** Your husband of fifteen years, and a journalist by profession. You love him dearly, but things have felt broken and empty between you recently. Keeping secrets from him has been hell, partly because of the guilt, but also for fear of getting caught out. He has a good nose for a lie, and it's a wonder that he hasn't figured out what's going on with Jeremy yet.

**Natasha Rowle:** Your sister. She lives in the same town as you, and you spend a lot of time in each other's company. She makes some money by writing horror stories, although Jeremy is the main breadwinner. She seems troubled and distant these days. Maybe she suspects your affair with Jeremy, or maybe she's in some kind of trouble.

**Jeremy Rowle:** Your sister's husband and your lover of the last three months. His police training has made him calm, stoic and a source of strength. You and he are having a clandestine affair.

**Len Trevelyan:** A friend of Natasha's who has been spending a lot of time in your company recently, always bringing little treats he's baked. He's full of interesting stories as well, so you're usually glad when he drops by for a chat. The problem is that you're beginning to wonder if he fancies you. If so, the feeling isn't mutual; he's a nice chap and good company, but too wishy-washy to be your type.



## NATASHA ROWLE

**Age:** 38

**Occupation:** Writer

**Personality:** Mild-mannered writer of horrors, burdened with guilt.

**Obsession:** Protecting your husband

**Passions:**

**Rage trigger:** Irrational behaviour

**Fear trigger:** The idea of dying alone (Isolation)

**Noble trigger:** Creativity

**Body:** 50 (Naturally wiry)

**Speed:** 40 (Desk jockey)

**Mind:** 70 (Well read)

**Soul:** 60 (Good judge of character)

**Skills That Matter** (Obsession Skill in Bold)

**Body:** General Athletics 15%, Self-defence 30%, Cycling 20%

**Speed:** Dodge 25%, Driving 25%, Initiative 30%, Needlework 15%

**Mind:** Writing 35%, General Education 35%, Notice 25%, Conceal 15%, Horror Trivia 15%

**Soul:** Charm 15%, Lying 25%, Ask Insightful Questions 25%

**Madness Meter** (Hardened/ Failed):

**Violence:** 0/0

**Unnatural:** 1/0

**Helplessness:** 0/1

**Isolation:** 0/1

**Self:** 1/0

## Background

Six months ago your husband, Jeremy, was killed in a car crash. He was in pursuit of a suspect when his police car was involved in a head-on collision from which there were no survivors. Your life fell apart afterwards: you couldn't work, you couldn't face dealing with people, even close friends, and you had even started contemplating suicide. And then Len Trevelyan saved your life.

Len gave you a copy of a ritual that he said he'd found that claimed to be able to bring a loved one back from the dead. There was a price, though: you had to exchange the life of someone else you loved. Looking back, you can see that you were desperate and more than slightly mad. You exchanged his life for that of your nephew, Simon Ockley. You tied his football boots and your husband's warrant card to a lamp post, with some flowers and some of your blood and tears, then put some paint flakes from the lamp post in Simon's bed, and waited.

The next day everything had changed. You woke up next to Jeremy, who had no memory of any car accident. The Ockleys had never had any children. The world rewrote its memory and moved on. Only you remember.

You couldn't keep this to yourself, so you told Len. It was his fault, after all. He remembered giving you the ritual, but doesn't remember why. Slowly, though, he seems to have come to believe you and the strain of knowing is affecting him. He seems to be developing an unhealthy bond with the your sister and brother-in-law.

As part of the ritual, you have to put fresh flowers on the lamp post every month and make sure that they stay attached. You last did this three days ago. It never gets any easier.

You haven't written anything in months. You've made your reputation by writing horror novels, but now all the blood, death and weirdness seems to hit a bit too close to home.

## Relationships to Other PCs:

**Jeremy Rowle:** Your husband. Since his resurrection, things have been difficult between you. The guilt of what you had to do to bring him back eats away at you. Sometimes his flesh feels cold and clammy, and you're reminded of the fact that you're sharing your bed with a dead man, which makes sex too distasteful to contemplate. He seems to have been sensing this, as he's been distant recently. Given everything that you've done for him, you can't let yourself just give up on your marriage, though. You still love him as much as ever, and maybe there's a way to work through it all.

**Evelyn Ockley:** Your sister, and, apart from Jeremy, the person to whom you feel closest in the world. Since the ritual, though, you find it difficult to even look her in the eye. She's your closest friend and she seems concerned about you. The guilt of your actions makes you want to help her, but what could ever make up for what you've done?

**Richard Ockley:** Evelyn's husband. He's seemed a bit odd recently, almost like he's started realising what's missing from their lives. You know the safest thing to do would be to keep away, but they seem to need a friend now more than ever, and it's all your fault.

**Len Trevelyan:** A librarian, a retiring white witch and your saviour. Len has been an acquaintance of yours for a few years, ever since he helped you with some research into ritual magic for a novel of yours. His new closeness to the Ockleys worries you, but even if he said something who would believe him?



## JEREMY ROWLE

**Age:** 40

**Occupation:** Police Officer

**Personality:** A strong man in a crisis

**Obsession:** Maintaining order

### Passions:

**Rage Trigger:** Selfishness

**Fear Trigger:** Losing control of the situation (Helplessness)

**Noble Trigger:** Protecting women

**Body:** 70 (Gym-goer)

**Speed:** 60 (Learned to dodge and weave the hard way)

**Mind:** 50 (A doer, not a planner)

**Soul:** 40 (Calm but reserved)

### Skills That Matter (Obsession Skill in Bold)

**Body:** General Athletics 30%, Control and Restraint 45%, Police Baton 25%

**Speed:** Dodge 35%, Driving 35%, Initiative 35%

**Mind:** General Education 15%, Notice 35%, Conceal 15%, Police Procedures 30%, History 15%

**Soul:** Maintain Order 35%, Charm 20%, Lying 15%

### Madness Meter (Hardened/ Failed):

**Violence:** 2/0

**Unnatural:** 0/0

**Helplessness:** 0/1

**Isolation:** 0/0

**Self:** 0/1

Your Maintain Order skill allows you to take control of a difficult situation, exerting calm or your authority on groups of panicked people. It can also be used to bully the vulnerable.

Your Control and Restraint skill is a specialised form of Aikido, taught to the police and some mental health professionals. It deals mainly with putting people in locks and restraining them when they're violent. It is focused on defensive action.

### Background

Your marriage to Natasha has been long and happy, which just makes the last six months all the stranger. Your sex life suddenly stopped, when it had been healthy and regular. Natasha hardly seems to want to touch you now, although she's also more attentive and loving in other areas than ever before. Every time you try to talk about it she changes the subject.

The one thing that's kept you going is your relationship with Evelyn. It seems too tawdry to have an affair with your wife's sister, but there's always been an attraction there, and given the lack of a love life with Natasha your needs had to be met somehow. You know you don't love Evelyn and are pretty sure she feels the same, but you're both getting something out of the relationship. Over the last few days, though, she hasn't wanted to speak to you. You'll never understand women!

To top it off, you had the strangest dream last night. You were lying in a hospital bed, unable to move properly, with wires and drips all over you. Natasha was there, holding your hand and crying floods of tears. You remember the feel-

ing of peace as everything went dark. It was almost a disappointment to wake up again.

### Relationships to Other PCs:

**Natasha Rowle:** Your wife and the love of your life. You know you're not the most demonstrative of men, but that doesn't explain why she won't even touch you now. There has to be some way of saving your marriage. While you're the main breadwinner of the family, she earns a modest living writing horror novels.

**Evelyn Ockley:** Natasha's sister and best friend, and your lover for the past few months. A homely, motherly sort of woman, given to unexpected passion. She's a psychiatric nurse by profession.

**Richard Ockley:** Evelyn's husband. When you did your police training one of the instructors suggested that you find someone with whom you could share all the more harrowing details of your work, to help you cope. Somehow Richard has drifted into this role. His work as a journalist has made him a good listener. His work also means he's the last person you should tell some of the things you share, but you do so need to get them off your chest!

**Len Trevelyan:** An acquaintance of Natasha's who seems to have been popping up a lot recently. He seems obsessed with the occult and is often full of wild stories. Luckily he seems to have latched onto the Ockleys recently. He does seem to give you a lot of odd looks, though. Maybe Evelyn has told him of the affair.



## LEN TREVELYAN

**Age:** 44

**Occupation:** Librarian

**Personality:** White witch, with a touch of grey

**Obsession:** Wicca

### Passions:

**Rage trigger:** Judgemental people

**Fear trigger:** Black magic (Unnatural)

**Noble trigger:** Bringing people together

**Body:** 40 (Easily tired)

**Speed:** 40 (Built for comfort)

**Mind:** 70 (Eclectic)

**Soul:** 70 (In tune with the cosmos)

### Skills That Matter (Obsession Skill in Bold)

**Body:** General Athletics 15%, Struggle 20%, Ecstatic Dancing 20%, Stay Sober 25%

**Speed:** Dodge 20%, Driving 15%, Initiative 25%, Play darts 20%, Sleight of Hand 15%

**Mind:** General Education 25%, Notice 15%, Conceal 15%, Occultism 40%, Sci-fi Trivia 25%

**Soul:** **Witchcraft 40%**, Charm 25%, Lying 25%, Play Flute 15%

### Madness Meter (Hardened/ Failed):

**Violence:** 0/0

**Unnatural:** 0/0

**Helplessness:** 0/0

**Isolation:** 1/0

**Self:** 0/1

Your Witchcraft skill allows you to perform pagan rituals, know about the history of the Craft and, under the right circumstances, convince people of the effects of spells. There is no mechanical effect from any rituals you perform, but they may help comfort, enliven or even frighten the right person.

### Background

It's all your fault and you don't even remember doing it. Sure, you remember finding that odd ritual written on the back of a Chinese takeaway menu and tucked in a returned library book (a copy of *Coping With Loss*, now that you think of it – surely not a coincidence!). You only vaguely remember giving it to Natasha, though, but from what she's said that's just part of it.

Through your devotion to the Craft (you're careful about who you tell about your beliefs – why won't some people realise it's just a religion like any other?) you've encountered magic before. You've even taken part in healing rituals and maybe a curse or two, but they're nothing like they are in the films. They work subtly; to the untrained or unbelieving eye it may even look like nothing happened.

This ritual was different, though, or so you're told.

One day, six months ago, Natasha came to you in floods of tears, incoherently thanking you and berating you, telling she'd done it and how you were both damned now. She said how she'd used the ritual to trade the life of her nephew, Simon Ockley for that of her husband, Jeremy. You tried to calm her down, saying she was mistaken and that the Ockleys (you know them through Natasha) had never had a son and that her husband was just fine. This only made things worse.

At the very least, Natasha believes that she's done something real. Maybe she has. You don't remember any of the things she says happened, but she swears that reality has

been rewritten. She's been diligent about keeping the flowers fresh on the lamp post she says she used for the ritual.

You passed by the lamp post today, though, and there were no flowers there. Maybe something is wrong. You know Natasha and Jeremy are visiting the Ockleys for a barbecue this evening. They wouldn't mind if you dropped in.

### Relationships to Other PCs:

**Natasha Rowle:** You helped Natasha with some research for a novel of hers a few years back. She writes horror stories, and this one involved witchcraft. When it turned out the heroine of the book was a witch, you decided you liked Natasha and have stayed friends since. If only you'd known where that would lead...

**Jeremy Rowle:** You probably wouldn't think much of Jeremy if you didn't know he was dead. He's a quiet man, but with an imposing air that's probably related to him being a policeman. Now that you know about his secret he does give you the creeps. It's even worse knowing that he doesn't know...

**Evelyn Ockley:** Natasha's sister. You met the Ockleys socially a few times before the incident, through Natasha and Jeremy. Evelyn in particular struck you as being a nice woman. She works as a psychiatric nurse, and always has great stories. Since the ritual, though, she's seemed a bit lost, which plucks at your heartstrings. It's almost like she knows what she's missing. You know you can't help, but you keep finding yourself turning up at their place with little treats that you've baked.

**Richard Ockley:** Richard doesn't seem to like you much. He's always asking questions (although he is a reporter, so that may just be habit) and looking at you like you've done something wrong. The guilt of what you've done stops you from complaining too much, and you really would like to find a way of helping the poor man.



## TIGER ON THE LOOSE

*A Demonseed*

by Linden Dunham

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### THE STORY

*Detmold, Germany* — A North Rhineland town received an unwelcome reminder of the past yesterday when a World War II vintage Tiger tank appeared on its streets. The tank left a trail of devastation, demolishing several buildings with its cannon, squashing over a dozen cars beneath its tracks and sending residents fleeing for cover with bursts of machine gun fire. The Tiger's five hour rampage was finally halted by German Army units who destroyed it with an anti-tank missile.

At a hurriedly convened press conference afterwards Bundeswehr spokesman Hauptmann Hans Fischer told reporters, "this is a highly unusual incident, but one which we are taking very seriously. It is extremely fortunate that nobody was killed."

Hauptmann Fischer confirmed that no bodies had been found in the wreckage of the tank and that its "crew" were believed to have escaped: "We will be working closely with the police to apprehend those responsible. Enquiries are being made with museums, militaria collectors and far right organisations."

### THE TRUTH

There is an underground complex outside Detmold which dates from the second world war. It originally served as a vehicle repair depot and contains a motley assortment of tanks and other armoured vehicles scavenged from battlefields in Spring 1945. The repaired vehicles were to be given to an SS training unit in order to create a scratch panzer battalion for deployment against the allied drive to the Ruhr. Ultimately the allied advance was too rapid for the weakened German command structure and the battalion was never committed. The depot was captured by the allies, sealed up and more or less forgotten about.

The depot has recently been occupied by a group of Dark Elves. They are busy installing Animators into the stored vehicles. Once all the vehicles are under Animator control they will be used to launch a surprise attack on Detmold. The panzers may be obsolete but there are enough of them to overwhelm any local opposition. The Elves' objective is to kill or drive away the population as a prelude to Detmold and its surrounding area becoming demonground.

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# DARK CONSPIRACY™

(Tiger from page 62)

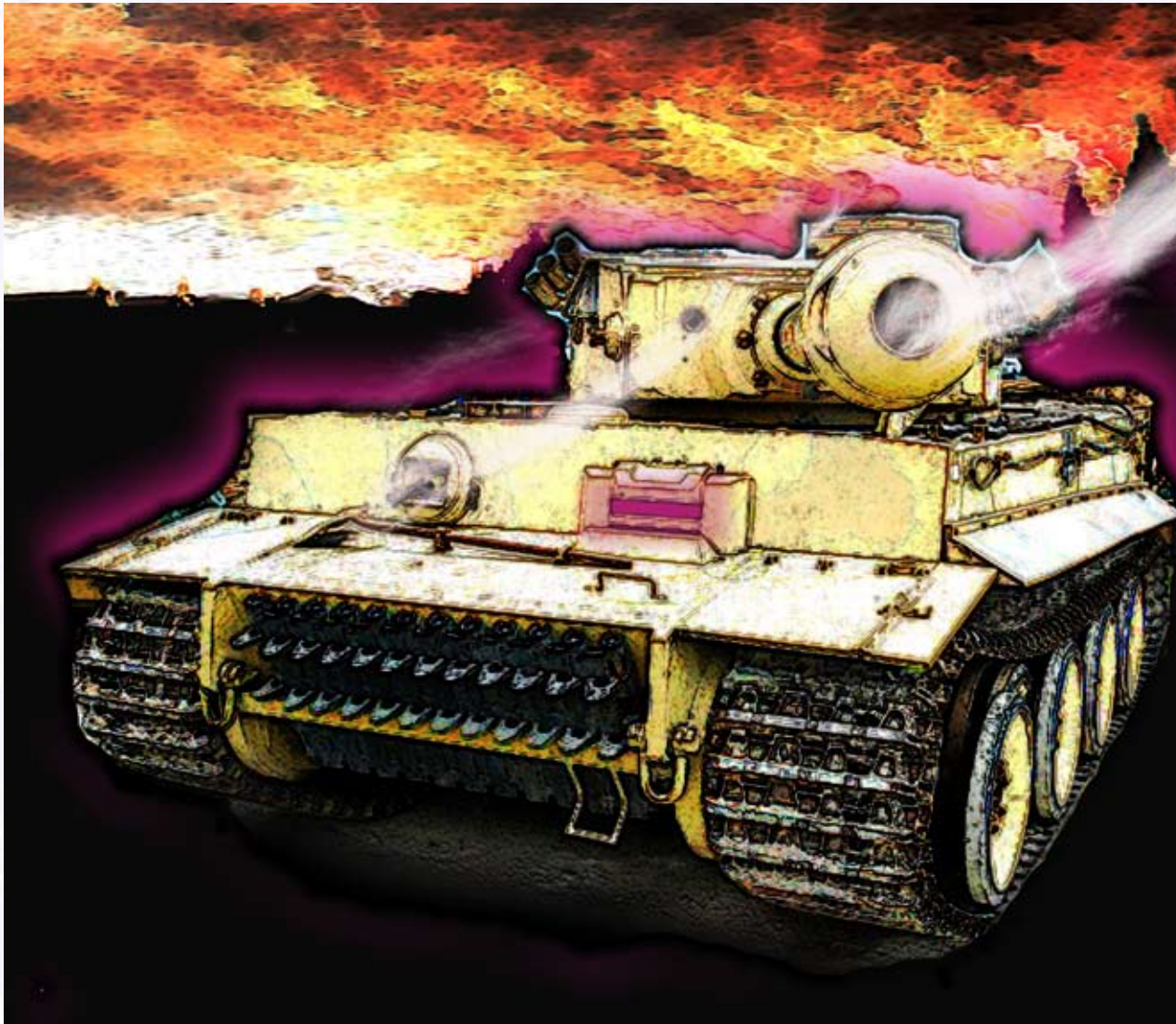
Unfortunately for the Dark Elves the Animator installed in the rogue Tiger tank was more independently minded than its fellows. It rebelled against its masters and broke out of the depot. Entering the streets of Detmold it became confused and lashed out causing the incidents reported in the paper.

PCs who look into this report should eventually discover the underground depot and the Dark Elf plan. The Dark Elves have co-opted a local neo-Nazi organisation and are using its members (treat as Igors) to guard the perimeter of the complex. Other members have remained in Detmold to keep an eye on the town and disrupt any enquiries that seem to be leading towards the depot. This latter group may well cause trouble for the PCs. As with most Igors the neo-Nazis are dupes. They have been taken in by the Dark Elves' story that they are fellow Aryans, imbued with occult powers, which they are using bring about a new Reich.

## SOURCES

The idea for this adventure came from a discussion at the Demonground Yahoo group. Check it out if you want the full story.

Dark Conspiracy compatible statistics for WW2 German AFVs can be found at <http://www.ludd.luth.se/~antenna/t2k/saul/vehicles/ww2tanks.txt> although if you need a lot of these I'd suggest that you're really playing some kind of weird retro version of Twilight 2000 rather than Dark Conspiracy.





# HUNGRY OAKS

Name	The Hungry Oaks
Type	Halfland
Discontinuity	0
Assimilation Effect Value	2

## ***A Carnivorous Protodimension***

*by CW Kelson (Tad)*

for ***Dark Conspiracy***® 1/2ed.

The forest seems endless, which perhaps it is. The oaks and rowan tower over the barren seeming soil, the leaves all dried and crackling to step on. There is a silence that aches, the pain of the still air, the dead senses that leave the nerve endings tingling in trepidation. The leaves move in the slight winds, or on their own, rustling as small unseen creatures lurk and scurry under the cover of broad leaves turned brown in the perpetual late fall climate here.

Under the soft voice of the whispering winds, lie the padding and scrape of pad and claw on stone and marrow. The winds tell a tale of roots and vines with thorns akin to razor blades, which thirst for the dripping of blood from opened veins. The bark tells the story of jaws rending open flesh, laying bare

the internal organs for the bloody feast that ensues after the hunt has completed. The fallen leaves tell the endless cycle of death and the nourishment of the environment at the expense of the living. The trees stretch for as far as the eye can see, they are always reaching out into the distance never ending.

Calm patience sits under the loam and dirt, where the roots all tangle into a morass of interconnections, where one tree ends another one has already begun. It is really a single entity intertwining into and around each other.

The sun never seems to rise, always there are clouds obscuring the sky, the early hours of light dominated with the creak of trees, the rustle of wind, the silence of the early hours, the dense stillness of fog thick enough to nearly cut with a sharp knife. This is the land, the environment, where cold and wet seem to be everywhere, and fall is here to stay without turning into the icy cold of winter, but there are sometimes hints of the snows that could arrive in different circumstances in the frost on the ground in the early mornings,



(Hungry Oaks from page 64)

At times, visibility is often reduced due to the atmospheric conditions, while the sounds can echo for miles as hunting pack predators bay in search of their prey, and feathered hunters wend their way at times in and out of the dense trunk dominated stage.

This is the dimension of *The Hungry Oaks*, where the soil cries out for the payment of warm, sticky blood, and the trees are happy to oblige in that tasking. Where dark thoughts lie slumbering and dread can hang in the air with the fog and mist.

### Assimilation

As assimilation occurs, the blood gets thicker, the people become hairier, their fingernails slowly turn into claws, and eventually once at full assimilation they become wolf-man hybrids braying during the hunt. (Use statistics for Large Wolves, just running more upright instead of on all fours. All other statistics are as per Large Wolves)

### Damage

Characters spend 1/10th their total health per week spent in the p-dim as a tithe to the ground to feed it and help it grow, this is during assimilation. Once assimilated this damage ceases to occur. However once assimilated then a hunger for raw meat and blood does ensue and while it can be suppressed, it is now a natural want of the body so assimilated, as is the loss of higher level sentience and animal bestial nature is ascendant.

Additionally each hour spent in the woods moving will cause the equivalent of a knife wound, caused by scraping against bark with sharp edges, the roots just on the surface slicing and pricking bare feet, hands brushing against the vegetation, at all

times while moving, the forest causes damage to non-assimilated beings, and once assimilated then damage will still happen when encountering the larger stands of razor vines and other creatures.

### Possible Connectors

*Gothic*, any protodimension that is forest oriented, dark undiscovered forests on Earth, forest Demongrounds could also lead to this location, or provide a feeder into the Demonground from this Halfland.

### Creatures

There are many packs of Wolf-like carnivores, tongues rasp away flesh and then the targets ooze blood adding to the forest floor. (Statistics at the end). While they will and do bite to feed, their tongues are just as damaging as their fangs. This is also the form that assimilated humanoids will assume.

Raptor-like winged creatures appear similar to large almost furry eagles, with sharp hooked owl like claws, keen eyesight and an uncanny sense of tracking warm blooded targets, especially ones not assimilated into the protodimension.

The roots of the trees have razor like thorns on them (damage as if passing through razor or concertina wire with each step). Many of the trees will have large clusters of roots that break out of the ground into a tangle or morass of razor thorns. Treat it like moving through the same amount of Razor or Concertina wire in those areas, which can stretch for hundreds of yards around clumps of trees.

### Core Idea

Forests, Fur, Running, Hunting, feeding the hungry soil the tithe that flesh and blood must pay to keep the trees alive. A slumbering evil intelligence that perhaps lurks under the ground and directs the predators to search for new blood to nourish the soil, or perhaps not, there is always a sense of menace to the air.

### Use

This protodimension is normally easy to reach. The usually sticky nature of Gothic will prompt Dimension Walkers to feel at least a small amount safer once they reach the towering oaks and other trees of this dimension. Not until the tithe starts in, and perhaps assimilation begins, will some of the dangers be shown. Random attacks from ravenous packs of the wolf like creatures, or a dive bomb clawing and raking from the arboreal hunters, will the dangers start to become realer. The flesh of all the animals here is edible, the plant life a lot less so since it feeds mostly on blood and flesh as well as the tithe, but the small mammals and rodent like forest dwellers will make for a meal if necessary. There are no other special properties to the protodimension, besides the assimilation.



(Hungry Oaks continued)

### Creature Statistics for use in this P-Dim

Others are possible, having Dimension Walked to this place and not yet assimilated. Or perhaps if something like an Ogre or Morlock is assimilated it might retain the same abilities it had, be a great deal tougher to fight against or even use crude hand weapons.

#### Wolf Carnivores / Assimilated Creatures

# Appearing	2D6	Initiative	6	Agility	9
Attack	80%	Strength	6	Skill/Dam.	7/1D10
Move	15/30/60	Constitution	5	Hits	8/16

Like a wolf, the creature in The Hollow Oaks also receives two simultaneous attacks during its first phase of combat. One is a diving blow that represents it leaping upon its victim, and the other is a biting melee attack. Because of space restrictions, however, no more than two wolves can perform diving attacks on a single target in any combat phase. If others are also attacking the target, they get only their melee attacks. Note that the diving blow is made only during the first phase in which it attacks a character. As long as that creature remains engaged with a character, it may make no further diving blows.

#### The Raptors

# Appearing	1-2	Initiative	5	Agility	10
Attack	70%	Strength	3	Skill/Dam.	6/6
Move	40/80	Constitution	5	Hits	3/6

These raptors are the size of giant owls or small eagles, they are covered in metallic like feathers, very agile and able to hover while striking with their long fish eagle like legs and claws doing tremendous damage. They are like the wolf creatures in that blood is clotted, caused by flying, their nests even causing wounds do to the nature of the vegetation. They are not sentient, and will tend to only attack smaller groups, solitary individuals that are not yet assimilated.







# ROBOT WARS

## *A Demonseed*

by Linden Dunham

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### THE STORY

Longbridge, Birmingham, UK. — Seven people were killed yesterday when a top secret military robot malfunctioned during tests at the premises of British National Engineering Ltd. The robot opened fire with an automatic rifle on a group of observers made up of BNE staff, MOD officials and senior army officers before fleeing the scene.

“It’s as if it had a mind of its own,” said one eyewitness to the demented machine’s vicious assault.

A spokesman for BNE Ltd admitted that there had been an accident at the firm’s premises and that there had been a number of fatalities. He emphatically denied the involvement of any company robot in the deaths saying that the initial investigation by BNE Ltd suggests the accident was caused by improperly stored explosive materials.

### THE REAL STORY

British National Engineering Ltd is a relic of SPP rule. Shortly after taking power the SPP nationalised the rump of the British automotive industry, one of the party’s first steps towards creating a socialist command economy. The resulting conglomerate, British National Engineering was as badly run as every other SPP project and the initials BNE soon became synonymous with comically unreliable vehicles and robots. After the overthrow of the SPP the

Recovery government denationalised BNE: Production plants and other assets confiscated by the SPP were returned to their original corporate owners. Post break up there were sufficient unclaimed assets for BNE to be reborn as a medium sized private company, the sale of which raised badly needed funds for the Recovery administration. Based at the old SAIC-Rover plant at Longbridge, BNE Ltd as it’s now known, turns out decent quality, if unexceptional cars, at a reasonable price. These tend to appeal to well heeled UK Mikes with a patriotic urge to buy British. The company maintains close contact with the government via two subsidiaries, BNE Defence Ltd and BNE Technology Ltd. The former has a number of contracts to supply APCs, light tanks and robots to the British armed forces and police. Little specific is known about the technology arm but it is generally assumed to be engaged in R & D work for both the parent company and the defence subsidiary. This is correct, but BNE Tech, as it’s known, also conducts classified research for the government. This sometimes involves examining items taken from ETs and other dark minions.

BNE Defence Ltd’s latest project is the Robot Infantry Soldier Programme (RISP). This is an attempt to supplement, and eventually replace, the human soldier on the battlefield. The design brief called for a humanoid robot, able to act autonomously, capable



(Robot Wars from page 68)



# DARK™ CONSPIRACY

of transmitting real time sensor data to a human operator many miles away who could, if necessary, take direct control of the machine and direct it accordingly. BNE Defence struggled to meet these requirements mainly because the government wanted a unit with a level of artificial intelligence beyond existing robotics technology. Then, BNE Defence took delivery of a quantity of robot parts supplied by BNE Tech. The technology subsidiary had acquired the parts during an expedition to Mechaniaca using government supplied dimension walk devices recovered during an SAS raid on a Tentacular ET outpost. The BNE Tech operatives who entered Mechaniaca came across a battle site littered with the remains of numerous Symbiods and Steriloids. They were able to gather up a sizeable amount of robotic wreckage before being attacked by a Symbiod scavenging party and forced to return to Earth with heavy losses.

The Mechaniaca components enabled BNE Defence to make radical improvements to its RISP prototype: The unit's artificial intelligence capabilities in particular were greatly enhanced by the use of advanced processors recovered by the BNE Tech team. Some RISP project staff expressed disquiet about installing "foreign" components in the prototype. They were concerned that the processor chips weren't yet properly understood and were impossible to duplicate in the event that the RISP unit entered general production. These objections were brushed aside by management: The project had incurred serious cost overruns and it was essential to present a fully functional prototype to the Ministry of Defence in order to secure additional funding. The prototype could not be made to work to specification without the Mechaniaca chips. BNE management reasoned that once additional funding had been obtained any bugs in the chips could be ironed out and a way found to mass produce them.



(Robot Wars from page 69)

The chips installed in the prototype came from both Symbiod and Steriloid units. When combined with conventional processors they gave the RISP prototype a high degree of artificial intelligence bordering on true self-awareness but also made it subject to the main directives of both Symbiod and Steriloid programming: BNE's robot soldier was born with a desire to destroy all biological life and then cannibalise it for repairs or replication. The unit suppressed these programmed urges throughout its initial testing and trials, biding its time until an opportunity to escape presented itself. The machine's chance came when it was wheeled out for a major demonstration in front of various MOD and Army bigwigs. As part of the demonstration the unit was ordered to undertake a live firing exercise with an L201 Personal Assault Weapon. It rapidly turned its weapon on the assembled dignitaries and then proceeded to blast its way out of BNE's test facility and escape into the maze of the Longbridge bot city district. Frantic attempts by its human operators to recall or shut down the robot proved ineffective.

In the weeks since its escape the RISP unit has preyed on the inhabitants of the nearby Selly Oak Miketown and the Northfield Anthill and Conzone. Now free to obey its combined Symbiod/Steriloid programming the robot carries out random murders, mostly at night, and takes body parts from its victims with which to augment itself or build other semi-Symbiod units. Several factory burglaries in Longbridge can also be attributed to the RISP unit as it scavenges for tools and machine parts or uses BNE manufacturing facilities for its own ends.

## ADVENTURE IDEA

The PCs are contacted by Dr Stephen Murtagh, Senior Robotics Designer at BNE Defence Ltd. Dr Murtagh was one of the RISP project personnel who objected to the installation of the Mechaniaca chips in

the prototype unit. He leaked the story of the escape to the tabloids hoping to spark a government enquiry into the incident and the way in which the RISP project was handled. Instead, the government sent MI5 agents to Longbridge charged with discovering the source of the leak and recovering the RISP unit.

Dr Murtagh wants to enlist the PCs help in destroying the robot. He regards the machine as uncontrollable and thinks that any attempt to capture and reprogramme it is dangerously misguided. The doctor believes the robot is responsible for a number of murders in the South Birmingham area which have been attributed to a serial killer whom the media have dubbed "Metal Face". Eyewitnesses/survivors report that the killer wears a chrome effect mask, presumably to hide his identity. Dr Murtagh of course knows different...

If the PCs agree to help Doctor Murtagh they find themselves engaged in a hunt through the Birmingham badlands for a cunning, remorseless killer whose attacks become more and more sophisticated as time goes on. With it's programming placing equal weight on augmentation and mayhem it's quite possible for the RISP unit to progress from single murders to mass shootings and bombings.

Possible encounters in the adventure include the local streetgang ("the Zulus" - descended from the old Birmingham City football hooligan firm), police looking for Metal Face and MI5/Army special forces teams searching for the RISP unit. Clues could come from Dr Murtagh and his colleagues, witnesses to Metal Face's killings, or evidence left by the robot at the scene of a murder or break in. Complications could include Dr Murtagh being arrested, a human copy cat killer emulating Metal Face, harrassment from the authorities and the RISP unit deciding to hunt the PCs rather than wait for them to come to it.

If the PCs finally track the robot to its lair they find it holed up in a disused factory on the edge of bot-town. The place is guarded by several hideous bio-mechanical constructs which the robot has manufactured to its own design. The sophistication of these constructs will depend on how long the PCs have taken to find the RISP unit. If they've been quick then they will be facing half a dozen assassinoids made from human hands. If they've been tardy then the factory is protected by several zombie like creatures. These are human corpses crudely animated with electronics and machine parts to give them a semblance of life (treat as Type II Changelings with penalties of -3 to Intelligence and Agility). Other Dark Tek horrors are at the referee's discretion.

The RISP unit itself will try to engage the PCs at close range with an assortment of rotary blades built into its arms. If forced to fight at range the unit will utilise its L201 or any other firearm it has managed to acquire in the course of the adventure.

## SOURCES

The original idea for this tabloid came from a link posted by Chris Carpenter in the DC Mail List to an article in a Scottish newspaper

*Dark Britain* by Lee Williams (**Demonground 3**)

*FIST of Iron* by Lee Williams (**Demonground 5**)

*Protodimensions Sourcebook Volume 1*  
by Ted Kocot and Loren Wiseman

Also my thanks to Gerry Harris from the *Dark Conspiracy Yahoo Group* for answering my queries about the physical differences between Symbiods and Steriloids.





# STATE OF NATURE

## *Fiction*

*by Joshua Mackay*

"I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright."

—Henry David Thoreau

Detective Jack Halloway, commonly known as Sleepy Jack or just Jack, stepped out of his black and white squad car into the chill morning air, his bleary eyes and hair looking as if he had just woken up. Jack's thick reddish brown hair had a mind of its own and his slightly too wide eyes spoke of long hours napping, not an aspiring police detective with hopes of advancement. Jack hated his nickname but there was little he could do about it. Sleepy Jack had stuck.

The town of Eden lay barely a mile over the ridge but ever since the accident the town had been under quarantine. Detective Halloway walked up to the car of the patrolman on duty. Jack tapped on the window and after a moment, the window rolled down an inch, as if the patrolman didn't really believe anyone had tapped on his window and wanted to verify there had in fact been a tap. Jack flashed his badge and soon the two were talking about the situation past the quarantine line.

"It's the damnedest thing detective, the whole town has animal heads" the young patrolman said

from his car seat. Jack, leaning on the roof of the patrol car, tried to wipe the sleepy look from his eye and get his hair in order before crouching again and fixing the patrolman with his serious face.

"Animal heads?" Jack asked, looking up at the morning sky wondering what he meant by that.. The Patrolman nodded, "Animal heads, Detective, animal heads. It's kinda revolting actually".

Jack shot a seriously disapproving look at the Patrolman at the mention of revolting. Jack thought to himself, "I don't care what happened: these are still people here, stuck here for months while every has-been and nobody in Red Tape land tried to figure out what happened to them. That's what's revolting."

The patrolman didn't notice his serious face, no one really did. The patrolman went on as if he was talking to himself, "Animal heads, if it ain't the Damnedest thing. I saw a few myself, a man with the head of an alligator of all things". The patrolman has an earnest sound





(State of Nature from page 71)

to his voice, as if the man should have known better than to have an alligator for a head.

Jack stood up stretching his back and then crouching back down next to the squad car. The patrolman defensively says, "It's for real, you must have read the reports! It was an accident of some kind or other," continuing to mumble in protest of Jack's incredulous looks. The patrolman's face burst into a wide smile. "You're about to meet your first citizen of Eden, Detective." The patrolman

got out of the car and then walking along with the detective, went up to the quarantine signs and tape that now surrounded the little cow paddy fence that had been erected over the road. On the far side, a tall man in a white lab coat was walking down the road. The man looked normal, except for his head. He had the head and neck of a long necked brown bird with a down-turned beak. All together including a somewhat confusingly turned neck, the man's head was about the size of two smallish grapefruit. Jack could see the man nervously swallowing, an

action that involved lifting his tiny head up and back to some height before lowering it again.

The patrolman whispered the man's name to Jack. "Dr. Portmanteau, and it's an Ibis, an Ibis head"

The Doctor waved to the two men on the far side of the barrier. Sleepy Jack went up to cross over the barrier and the patrolman caught at his hand, to stop what he was about to do. Jack smiled, "It's what I'm here to do patrolman, assess the situation". The patrolman let the detective go and





(State of Nature from page 72)

soon Jack was shaking hands with the Ibis headed scientist, Dr Portmanteau. Back on the far side of the paddock the Patrolman returned to his car.

"No need to worry my fellow," the doctor started, "The medical teams have cleared any chance of it catching, or of us spreading communicable diseases or anything like that." Jack started a little, giving the doctor a quizzical look. The Doctors voice had a low down husky quality that Jack was not expecting from such a tiny head. Jack, a little ashamed that he had thought that, it had really only been on the very back of his mind. Jack knew there was no risk, all of the scientists had found no reason to keep the quarantine up and the doctors had found no reason to keep the quarantine up and the politicians had found no reason to keep the quarantine up. In the end smaller and less important organizations had been sent in to do their own investigations, in the forlorn hope that someone would find a reason why to keep the entire animal headed town locked up and in quarantine forever. Jack was the last line of defense, a lowly police detective from the surrounding region. Sleepy Jack had read all the reports that the scientists and doctors had written about their findings, and had been following the progress of events in this little town for three months, ever since the accident. Jack felt bad for these people: to have something like this happen to them and then have all the scientists and politicians and doctors that they were supposed to put their faith in, abandon them for these months seemed downright cruel.

Strange, anomalous, but not dangerous was the conclusion. That had been months ago.

The doctor and the detective started walking up the lane to get into town proper. The doctor continued talking as they went "So you are here

to see about removing the quarantine? Good, good. This is your first time seeing one of us isn't it?" Jack nodded. "Quite different seeing the pictures and comparing it to the real thing isn't it." The Doctor twittered a bit bobbing his head and convoluted neck a few feet up and down and making a distinctly birdlike sound before continuing "But don't worry you'll get used to it, we did." Jack thought the twittering was laughter.

The doctor kept up the small talk as they entered what Jack thought was the most idyllic town he had ever seen. Full of immaculate white picket fences and long but good looking lawns surrounding the homes. Jack turned to the doctor and was face to face with the Doctor's tiny Ibis head. Jack stopped. Apologizing profusely Jack continued doing his best not to stare. It was uncanny; Dr. Portmanteau looked like he belonged in a movie. "So there was no property damage, you just woke up like this, no one was trans..."

The Doctor then continued for Jack. "No one was transformed while awake. The latest we have someone staying up was one of the younger people who went to bed a bit after three in the morning and the earliest we have someone getting up is some of the farmers and working men a bit after 4. " Jack floundered a bit unsure of what to say next before the Doctor continued, perking up a little, lifting his head and tilting it to bring an eye forward. "The only real mystery is what caused it; no one has any answer for that really. We've heard from priests and scientists and even a geneticist but no answers there. We even heard from an Astrophysicist, who says he correlated the change to the neutrino burst that Quasar TH-014 displayed that night at 3:45 local time. "

Sleepy Jack, now thoroughly confused, looked at the doctor and Dr. Portmanteau leaned his head back a bit and to the left. The Doctor was smiling Jack realized after sheepishly leaning his head the same way. The Doctor nodded and continued. "A Quasar, a kind of very bright and very far away galaxy. Very old, Quasar TH-014 flared so to speak, at roughly 3:45 the night of the change. It would have been the first time it flared in our direction for over 6000 years the astrophysicist says."

After that Jack and the doctor continued their walk into town center in silence.

Jack stopped; they were at town center, which was abandoned except for a child of perhaps 10 or 12 years old who had a Jackal head. The kid's brown and spotted hair looked a lot like Jack's own hair. Jack, not being very good with either children or pets, squatted down and tried to cajole the kid to come over here. Doctor Portmanteau said "It is okay, that Andy should do as the man said." The child looked at them both through jackal's eyes before running away, giggling. Jack breathed out a sigh of relief. It was nice to know some things hadn't changed.

Soon the adults started coming out, taking a bit of a stroll around town center, to see the summer night and the new detective before eventually introducing themselves. All of the people had animal heads but a few had other changes as well: some feet had changed, some hands, some had tails, or their skin was furry. All of the people seemed terribly nice, if concerned. The young single people, the older couples, the newly wed, and the very pregnant all leisurely strolling the town center. They had seen this song and dance before and they wanted the quarantine to finally end. Jack, taking the improvised



(State of Nature from page 73)

stage on a picturesque gazebo on the common, assured them that this is why he was here, one last check before they removed the quarantine.

Some of the animal people shook their animal heads, but everyone was polite, eventually milling and dispersing back to their homes, their town, their lives, all of which had been put on hold, by men like Jack. Jack didn't think he would be able to match the grace these people had if the situations had been reversed.

Doctor Portmanteau led Jack to the Orvis household, where Jack would be staying for the next night or two. Getting out of the quarantine zone required quite a bit of paperwork and Jack was happy to spend the night as a guest rather than in his squad car again.

The Anteater-headed Orvis's ran the tiny motel that were the only accommodations in the town of Eden. Mr. and Mrs. Orvis were a middle aged couple and quite adamant about not charging the detective. Jack wondered how many politicians and scientists had taken this little bribe without thinking of the hardship that a motel in a quarantine zone must be going through.

Jack was nothing if not sincere in his effort to make the government pay for his lodging. Getting the Anteater-headed Mr. Orvis to not only take his government account numbers but to double the amount on the bill was no easy task, but eventually Jack, and his sleepy demeanor, convinced Mrs. Orvis that the Detective wouldn't be able to sleep well otherwise. "No skin off my nose" Jack remarked, and then realized that Mr. Orvis as a kind of anteater may take exception, so Jack made exactly the sleepy dumbfounded face that earned him his nickname. Mr. Orvis just

laughed and clapped him on the shoulder, inviting him to have dinner with "me and the missus"

Jack demurred and then accepted and quickly found himself seated in the Orvis's dining room. Jack enjoyed himself talking with the couple, until finally Mrs. Orvis came out with a huge roast and mash potatoes and green beans and peas and corn. Jack, being more accustomed to instant noodles from a Styrofoam bowl than real genuine home-made food, tucked into the meal, getting himself a sizable plate before realizing that the Orvis's had very little on theirs. "Don't let us stop you lad, eat up, Maude here is an excellent cook, it's just that since the change our appetite has changed some as well. "

Jack looked a little confused, and asked "How?" Mr and Mrs Orvis made a bit of a puzzled face and said. "Well if it won't bother your meal, we'll show you." At that Mrs. Orvis went out into the kitchen and returned with what looked like two candy skewers. It took Jack a while to figure out that they were covered in ants.

Blanching a little, Jack made himself watch as the Orvis', using the long and sticky tongues that they now possessed, delicately lifted the insects off the honeyed skewer and into their mouths with a little lispng sound. Jack, taken a bit aback, looked down at his own meal. Now he was feeling a little off and badly about it. The Orvis, careful hosts that they were, quickly finished their snack before checking to see that Jack was all right

"Don't bother yourself about it, its a bit much to take in all at once. To tell you the truth if a year ago the positions had been reversed, I'm not sure I would handle all of this so well."

The three ate in silence, Jack grimly finishing up his plate while Mr. and Mrs. Orvis somewhat embarrassedly ate what little potato and vegetable they had on their plates. Jack thought they were mostly moving it around for show.

Mr. Orvis took Jack to his room, to get him settled. After he turned down the sheets and put on the heating and cable television, apparently the only thing getting in through the quarantine, Mr. Orvis said delicately, "I hope you won't hold that against us". Jack, somewhat startled, said "No no, I was going to say the same thing, it's just a bit strange that's all,"

"But this whole thing is strange isn't it?", Mr. Orvis replied. "You got that right", and then suddenly it was all alright. The last thing Jack asked before Mr. Orvis left was "If you could change things, back to the way it was, would you?"

Mr. Orvis stood in the doorway, being very quiet for a moment before saying "Not for the world. Before the change I had gout, and I had high blood pressure, and the first thing I thought after the change was ' I feel great, that may be the best sleep I've had in years', and I still do, feel great that is. Its like life's for living again, and I wouldn't change that for the world".

Jack nodded, not really sure what to say, and the two men parted company. That night Jack slept soundly, except for the nagging fear in the morning that he too had sprouted an animal head.

The next day, Jack began the real work with Dr. Portmanteau, cataloging the changes that had happened, attempting to explain how they happened and if they had to worry about 'man



(State of Nature from page 74)

eating animal headed monsters' as some of the low down press hacks had taken to calling them.

"Over...over...over 90% mammalian, with the remainder split between avian and reptilian." Jack looked expectantly at the Doctor and then apologized, not realizing that the doctor stuttered. The Doctor merely shook his avian head, his hard dark eyes looking serious until he cocked his head again. "Nu..nu...numbers are not my forte anymore, they give me troubles."

"So you have noticed changes in ability and inclination then..." Jack stopped, realizing it was a leading question, half apologizing before the doctor cut him off "Yes, but always for the better." the Doctor stated. "I used to stutter constantly, but now only nu.. nu.. numbers bother me."

Continuing through the day, the two covered how the process had affected digestion, sleep, speech, reproduction and aggression patterns. The digestion, while still that of a single stomached omnivore for the most part, had changed to allow whatever the normal food of the animal head was. A handful of people had developed gizzards; most noticeably the alligator-headed Mr. Clack who had left quite an impression on a certain patrolman. Others had developed second stomachs; most noticeably the Govinders who had taken on bovine characteristics.

"Most people have been eating normally but, and I can speak from experience, the appropriate food is a preference. Sleep has organized itself to mostly whatever the people had been used to before the change, although there is some inclination to napping," the Doctor said with a knowing smile, his tiny head practically on his shoulder. He continued, "The pregnancies seem to be going normally and as for aggression and crime, it has stopped."





(State of Nature from page 75)

Jack's head shook as he looked at the Doctor. Tilting his head to the side again the Doctor smiled "There has been no crime or violence in this town since the change, it's hard to explain. There is just such a feeling of wellness, which had come with the change. There was no panic when we awoke, just curiosity. We all gathered in the town center and then as the resident doctor I tried to explain what happened." The doctor clucked and twittered a little in what must pass for a laugh, "I couldn't of course, but it was obvious that getting excited would be of no help. I called the government and eventually the disease control people responded and that got the rest of the government organizations to respond."

Jack, still shaking his head, asked the doctor "Nothing at all, no crime, no angry outbursts, no flared tempers, in the three months or so since the accident?" The doctor with a somewhat puzzled expression hunched his shoulders and said nothing. Jack excused himself for the afternoon and sauntered over to the local sheriff's office, where the fat and now boar-headed Sheriff Hoag confirmed it. The Sheriff just shook his head ruefully at Jack's incredulous face, "Why would anyone want to do that after all this, it's hard to explain really." The sheriff dropped his face a bit before looking back up at the Detective. "Its just like we know our place in the world now, like the accident was no accident. How could an accident change us like this, with no mistakes, no incompatibilities, no one with child, so that we can all still talk and think and get along with each other? How could an accident feel so right, detective?" Jack nodded his consent to the Sheriff. This was a lot more like a miracle than an accident he had to agree. Jack returned to the Doctor's office and continued working through the government mandated checklist. New

agencies and protocols had been made especially for this town, and Jack and the Doctor diligently worked into the night, finishing them off one at a time. Jack returned to the motel that night to find an insulated bag with a plateful of food still hot inside it. Smiling, Jack turned in and this time he slept well with no thoughts of animal heads.

The next day, Sleepy Jack met with the doctor again. "Good news, Doc, I see no reason to continue with the quarantine. Smarter people than me have already been all over this town, and there is no risk. As for everything else," Jack shrugged, "Its funny how something like this can bring people together isn't it. No crime for 3 months, no signs of the mad animals, if you'll excuse the term Doctor. I've approved the removal of the quarantine, I'll go call it in and fax off the paperwork, if I can use your fax?"

The doctor rather ecstatically shook the Detectives hand. "That's excellent news" the doctor beamed, leading Jack to the office. The Doctor obviously excited watching the last of the red tape disappear as Jack filled out his report forms and filled them electronically. Shaking Jack's hand again the Doctor continued in his excited state, "We have so much to do here in Eden." Jack stopped for a second, and looking at the doctor with a sleepy face asked "Like what?"

Doctor Portmanteau started explaining how the town had pooled its resources, it needed to start building, in the wake of the change. "But, building what?" Jack responded, somewhat blurry eyed. "Why, the houses and expansions of course. The Meadows are expecting soon as are several other families, and the apartments they are in now just won't do." Jack looked at the doctor somewhat quizzically, and the doctor returned the look his

head to the side. Jack continued "But how much of a surprise could it have been Doctor, the mothers, have all had the better part of a year to get ready."

The Doctor shook his Ibis head, "Oh no Jack, not a year, not even three months now." Jack stopped tilting his head to the right, which the Doctor quickly mimed with a well meaning smile.

Looking somewhat astounded, Jack declared "Wait ... there were no pregnant women on the initial medical surveys!" The Doctor, nodding, continued "No one was pregnant when the change happened Jack; it is just another one of the miracles that happened that night, you might say" Jack, still looking confused, blurted out "But the pregnant woman... I met them, last trimester at least."

The Doctor cut him off. "You're right, there are several families close to birth, that's why we need more buildings." The Doctor nodded, his Ibis head bobbing, "It's great news isn't it, Jack?"

Jack sat down, hard, on the floor. "But how far along are they?" The doctor nodded, "Only two months, three at most, but you must remember many species in nature have a far shorter gestation period then humans. I've checked on the sextuplets myself and they are all looking healthy, and due within three weeks."

The Doctor continued, not seeming to notice the growing panic on Jack's face. "We're going to make this town a real paradise you know, we talked about it a lot before you came Jack. If we all just work together a little, we can solve all of the problems we have. The children will be coming soon, and we will be ready for them. With just some simple hard work we're going to be making a new start here, the way we were meant to, in a state of nature."





# From Under The Floorboards

**MUSIC** is, and always has been, a powerful force in human existence. Ever since our sloping-browed forebears first realised that you can get a pretty decent rhythm from banging two bits of wood together (or even on each other), it's been with us. HP Lovecraft's quote about fear being the oldest human emotion is probably true, but the gratification that human beings derive from making a noise is probably close.

Obviously, we as gamers are used to playing with emotions; after all, that's what a good game session is made of. Therefore, if done properly, the use of music during a game can enhance the experience. Here are a few simple and probably obvious things that I have picked up during my time at the table.

## 1 - CHOICE OF MUSIC.

This must be appropriate to the type of game that you are running. By this, I do not mean that you have to run down to "Ye Olde Medieval CD Megastore" for some banging crumhorn tracks if you are planning a high fantasy thing. What I am getting at here is that the music should suit you and the people at your table. I have used classical-styled movie soundtracks in full-on Terminator-themed adventures, and The Orb as accompaniment to a Ravenloft game. Remember though, I'm not laying down the law here...if you're facing down a demon lord who has been released from his binds after 500 years, by all means stick some Blackmores Night on! He'd probably love it.

## 2 - VOLUME.

Unless you are going for the whole theme tune thing where the party and their recurring nemesis have their own tune, keep the music

to a reasonable level. This is a tricky one, but I would say aim for a level where the music can be heard during quiet spells at the table, but is not so loud as to distract the attention of players during the important bits.

## 3 - THE METHOD.

If you are using a room where there is a hi-fi or stereo system, use it if you wish. However, an older system will be suitable for CDs only so some burning will be required if you do want to design a soundtrack. An MP3 player with reasonable speakers has the advantages of small size, light weight and large capacity. I usually game in the room where my desktop computer is, so I personally use that. As laptops and netbooks become ever-more popular, the same principle can be applied. The main advantage here is that backups of character sheets and so forth are available, plus Internet access allows for easy checking up of such things as errata.

## CONTENT

As for actual musical content, I have already mentioned soundtrack albums. Best thing to do, unless you are running something for a licensed game, is avoid the main title theme. Incidental music can really help. In the main, I recommend instrumental music of whatever genre, as singing can intrude. One thing that most gamers don't need is another voice to compete with! For specific examples, try Midnight Syndicate. They are gamers and know how to knock out a decent tune.

Ambient can also be good; I myself use such artists as Phillip Glass, Brian Eno and The Orb as previously stated. For something with a bit more "oomph" there's the Chemical Brothers



(Floorboards from page 77)

or the more mellow Nine Inch Nails stuff. I love rock and metal but it can be tricky trying to find something that I don't immediately want to crank up to 11. A bit of searching around can yield good results though...a very good starting point would be Iron Maiden's "Losfer Words/Big 'orra", or (if you can find it) the Angelwitch track "Doctor Phibes".

We even have a musician as one of our regular contributors. Tim Bisailon has composed many tracks, a lot of which are directly aimed for use at the game table. Check out his catalogue of work to date here: [http://www.acidplanet.com/mana\\_junkie](http://www.acidplanet.com/mana_junkie)

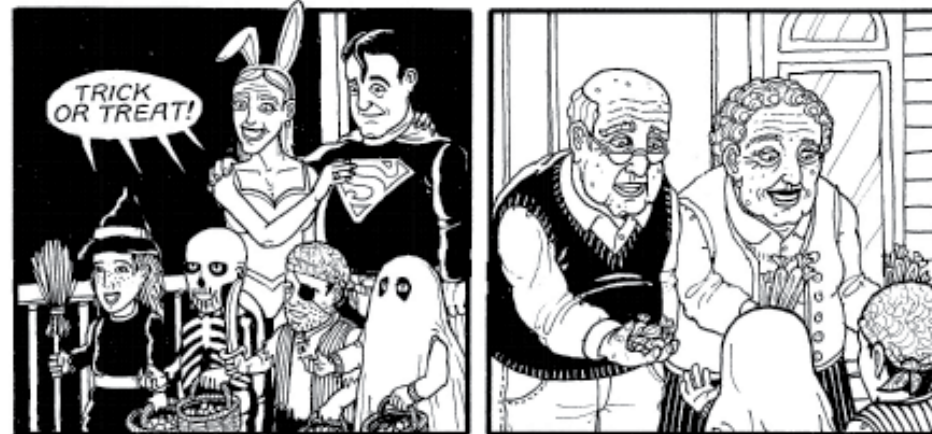
My fellow editor Tad Kelson has also suggested using the work of the Razbaque Dirge Project. Their material can be found here: <http://www.soundclick.com/TheRazbaqueDirgeProject>

As my parting thought for this issue, song lyrics can be a great source of inspiration. Why not go and listen to some of your favourites, and then think about how you could use the concepts and imagery in the songs as adventure fodder? Already doing it, aren't you!



Lee Williams  
(Morthrai)

*Me? I'm into the  
Nekromantics and Mid Sin  
Step Into My Coffin, rocks!  
-ed*





# protodimension magazine

<http://www.protodimension.org/zine>



*“Besides, he added, my constant talk about “unnamable” and “unmentionable” things was a very puerile device, quite in keeping with my lowly standing as an author.”*

H.P. Lovecraft  
*The Unnamable*