

protodimension magazine



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DITHERING IN THE DARK



WELCOME TO 2014.

2 YEARS PAST THE Apocalypse of 2012 and we are still here, still putting out *Protodimension Magazine*, still supporting the horror and modern gaming communities with quality and style. Still sharing great content with our fans and doing the best we can each and every issue.

So with this New Year this editorial will get a little bit longer. It is all about goals and systems. On the first of this year, 01/01/2014, I ended up reading an article about Goals (related to New Year's Resolutions). Rather liked it, very topical at that moment and for me as I am changing some personal career paths and ideas.

The article I read boiled down to the point that Goals (Resolutions) are less important than the means taken to achieve them (the system used). Of course for us gamers, system has a very specific meaning. In the context of the article it referred to the steps needed to achieve a Goal. For gamers, system is of course that shared ruleset governing the gaming environment; the skeleton so to speak. The rest is the flesh covering the skeletal system. One way to look at it is that the game (system) is the means to achieve the Goal (in game) for the players.

So the Goals in gaming differ from person to person, player to player, character to character, setting specifics to metagame concerns. From telling stories to advancing a character as far as it can go, there are many Goals in gaming. Within each game the system defines the underlying reality to the fantastic. From one game to another a player's Goals can differ. In Call of Cthulhu for example a player Goal could be to get their Investigator access to a new tome and then onto a summoning spell (regardless of the long term viability or actual worth) of that tome. In Conspiracy Lives! it could be a new contact to make access to Dreamland NPCs simpler or easier, or just a big armored van to drive around in. In other games like Spycraft it could be the leveling up to get the skill points needed for that cool class sitting in the core rulebook. All of these are Goals that the system can allow for and facilitate.

One part of these Goals and systems is how characters advance and how it changes their character sheets. For me, I often think that a character sheet should be more like a resume, showing off what the character has done and could do. More a recitation of what the character can do than a list of cool gear and big guns and armor they have gotten in the course of their adventuring. This for many players is a main Goal all in its self, with some systems more conducive to that than others.

So how does this tie in with Protodimension Magazine? We obviously we have the Goal of providing the best content for our readers and for the systems we support. Our system to do so is the submissions we get and how we put them together to create each issue we put out. Naturally we cannot do this without the gracious support of our contributors, the Facebook and forum participation, and each other of us on this staff. So as always Thank You to everyone that helps out and reads Protodimension Magazine.

So here in Issue 18 we have some excellent items for you: useful articles for inspiration in any conspiracy-fueled game as well as an assortment of fiction and the extended version of a superb article that ran a few issues ago. Another piece of the Socotra puzzle is revealed and some nice art rounds it all out for you, our loyal readers. So enjoy and welcome to Protodimension Magazine Issue 18.

Good Gaming.
Tad Kelson
Editor in Chief

Protodimension Magazine

CORRIGAN'S FURY

A pitch set in the Dark Conspiracy universe

by Geoff Skellams

FOR THE DRAMASYSTEM SERIES

A NOTE ON TONE

Corrigan's Fury is designed to be a dramatic series, not a procedural one. The series' aim is to explore the survivors' emotions and see how they handle living in a world where they don't know who to trust, or who is out to get them. Inter-player arguments and drama should be encouraged, with a constant to-ing and fro-ing of emotions and trust.

It's not designed to be your standard gestalt entity party, where the players act with a common accord and gang up on an external enemy, using copious amounts of firepower and high explosives to solve their problems. While such elements may appear in occasional procedural scenes, they should not be the series focus.

NUTSHELL

After they are almost wiped out, a formerly successful empathic underground cell licks its wounds and tries to regroup, while figuring out who they can still trust.

SETTING

Helen Corrigan didn't plan on starting an empathic underground cell, let alone one of the most successful liberator cells ever. She originally just wanted to find her cousin, Jacob Rienes, who had gone missing under what she considered suspicious circumstances. After the police didn't do anything, believing that Rienes had just run away of his own accord, Helen took matters into her own hands and started digging.

Along the way, she made contacts in shadowy circles, people she would have never encountered in her mundane, Gidget-style life. They were hackers, smugglers and conspiracy theorists; people who believed that the world was being controlled by forces outside the norm, forces hell bent on keeping the Earth and its population under control and mindless of what was really going on. Corrigan learned new skills and become a master strategist, forever

leaving behind her boring suburban lifestyle.

It took her two years before she found her cousin, but eventually she tracked him down to a secret corporate research facility in the middle of nowhere. With the help of some her new contacts, she staged a break in and carefully extracted Rienes and two others, who were all being used as empathic test subjects. The extraction team managed to not only liberate the subjects; they were able to do it without loss of life, without being seen and without leaving a trace.

But they learned a lot. The conspiracy theories only told part of the truth. After debriefing Rienes and the other extractees, Corrigan learned that the major mega-corporations had been subverted by extra-dimensional forces, forces who thought of humanity as nothing but cattle. People were disappearing all the time, and being used by these dark forces to be components in elaborate empathic devices, or worse.

And thus, the **Corrigan's Fury** empathic underground cell was born. Corrigan and her team spent the next six years tracking dark minion influence, and where possible, breaking in and extracting those who had been taken. The cell had feelers out

everywhere, gaining information from the most bizarre sources. Several members were experts at reading between the lines, and were able to figure out where the people were being held and the best ways to get them free again.

Time after time, the cell raided secret locations and helped empathic victims – and the occasional renegade ET – escape and helped put them in contact with their loved ones, or at least get them to a safer location. The Fury's fame among the underground grew, and they made their fair share of allies and information sources along the way. If the Fury wasn't in a position to liberate people themselves, they passed the information onto others and helped in whatever way they could.

But their infamy also grew. Subverted cells were outed along the way and enemies made. Minion plans were upset or destroyed. Helen and her cell knew they were causing waves and knew that they dark minions were going to strike back at some point.

What they didn't expect was how that attack would come. Instead of a frontal assault, the dark forces played the long game, turning the Fury's methods against them. Data channels began to run dry. False information and rumours were circulated. Key allies were subtly manipulated and subverted, little by little. Over time, the dark forces made it look like it was Corrigan's Fury who had been subverted, and the allied underground cells turned against them.

Two weeks ago, everything came to a head, and the Fury was caught in its own trap. Formerly allied cells raided the Fury's safe house, blowing it up and either capturing or destroying most of the cell's resources. Helen herself was apparently killed in the explosion, after having gone back inside to retrieve a captured piece of DarkTek. The building collapsed and no one has seen or heard from her since.

Most of the Fury's members were injured in the raid and several have since died of their wounds. Their resources are gone, their contacts turned against them. They have to start over, without knowing who they can trust.

CHARACTERS

Player characters make up the surviving members of the Corrigan's Fury cell. Tensions are running high between the survivors, with finger pointing and guilt trips being the norm. Some remain loyal to Helen Corrigan, with others blaming her for what happened to them. But underlying all of that, they still recognise the need to stick together for their mutual survival, even if they are unsure of the direction they will take.

Corrigan's Fury's members could come from any walk of life. What joins them together is their desire to strike back against the darkness that is taking over the world from other dimensions. Because of that, character concepts could include:

- ☠ A much loved Clergy, who believes that while there is evil in the world, it can be opposed by good people.
- ☠ A paranoid Computer Hacker, worried that it was one hack too many that tipped off the enemy.
- ☠ An emotionally cold Cyborg Escapee, who's being actively hunted by the Dark Minions.
- ☠ An unemployed Drifter, who's seen too much and wants to help.
- ☠ A former (or perhaps even current) Military Intelligence Analyst, who has inside information, but wonders if it's trustworthy any more.
- ☠ Enlisted Military Personnel, who run very close to getting court martialled for their extracurricular activities.
- ☠ An angry Ganger, pissed because of run ins with other gangs, that might be backed by Dark Minion forces.
- ☠ A Government or Corporate Agent who resents the things they have been forced to do to the general public.
- ☠ A curious Journalist, who wants to know just how far the corruption in the government and the corporations really goes.

- ☠ A burnt out Law Enforcement Officer, who has witnessed too much violent crime and struggles to deal with it any more.
- ☠ A de-registered Medical Doctor, who still treats people who can't afford to see a proper doctor.
- ☠ A Military Officer, who has supplied the Fury with materiel in the past, knowing full well the gear might be traced back.
- ☠ A fretting Mystic, who feels the world getting darker every day, and sometimes wonders if it's still worth fighting back.
- ☠ A Nomenklatura (Idle Rich), who's slumming it to live life to the fullest, but who has contacts with the rich and famous.
- ☠ A curious Paraphysicist, who will stop at nothing to gather more information on the Dark Minions, particularly the ETs.
- ☠ A jaded Private Investigator, who isn't shocked by much at all these days.
- ☠ A world-weary Prole (Corporate Welfare Recipient), who lives off the corporate teat, but would like nothing more than to strike back for the little guys.
- ☠ A Psychiatrist who's seen too much weird stuff to believe that it's all in people's heads.
- ☠ A freaked out rescued Psychic Test Subject, who suffers flashbacks and empathically feels when the Dark Minions are searching for them.
- ☠ A Renegade ET, who Corrigan's Fury helped escape from the Dark Minions before, and may still be being empathically tracked.

DEALING WITH EMPATHY

Empathy is a cornerstone of the **Dark Conspiracy** game universe. It gives the player characters access to abilities beyond the realm of normal human experience, but it brings with it a heavy cost, as the Dark Minions are highly empathic and use it as a means to subvert humanity.

In the DramaSystem, treat **Empathy** as a custom action type. Any character that would have an empathic ability in **Dark Conspiracy** should take Empathy as one of their Strong action types, noting they have to then take three other standard action types at Weak, rather than the normal two.

THEMES

Safety: the cell's old hideout was destroyed in the attack that nearly wiped out everyone. The group has to find somewhere safe to hole up, so they can regroup and start getting back on track.

Paranoia: the cell has already been attacked and nearly wiped out. Are there going to be any more attacks, and where are they going to come from?

Trust: The blame game continues as everyone points the finger at everyone else for tipping off the cell's enemies as to their whereabouts and plans. No one outside the cell trusts them anymore, and even the cell members suspect the others had something to do with the attacks.

Misinformation: the Dark Minions and their forces are still spreading misinformation about the cell, both to other minion hunters, as well as the mundane authorities. Even the information that the cell receives makes them suspect each other.

Hunted: former allies come hunting for what's left of the cell, believing the Fury betrayed them to the Dark Minions.

Relationships: how does a Minion Hunter explain their double life to the other people in their life? How do they deceive their loved ones about what caused their wounds, or why they're having a mental breakdown?

Help: when you can't trust anyone and no one trusts you, where do you turn for help? Is getting help even possible, or are you in this alone now?

TIGHTENING THE SCREWS

- ☠ Local law enforcement start sniffing around, investigating crimes that appear to be linked to the cell somehow. How can the cell members prove their innocence? Are they even innocent at all?
- ☠ The Fury start receiving weird, cryptic messages through the computer network. Decoding them brings them in touch with people who claim to be able to help. But is it just another trap?
- ☠ Strange objects that may or may not be DarkTek spying devices start appearing in the areas where the cell members are staying. Who put them there and what have the enemy learned about the cell's new plans?
- ☠ Just as the cell begins to find people they think they can trust, an encounter with a Dark Minion causes them to question those relationships, causing further tension.
- ☠ Resources are running dangerously low, and the cell's contacts won't supply any more gear after hearing stories about what the cell did and how everyone is after them now. Can they convince their suppliers to restock them again, or do they need to find other places to get their supplies from? How far are they willing to go to get what they need?
- ☠ A former enemy secretly reaches out to the cell, offering help. Can he be trusted, or is this another plan by the enemy to lure them out of hiding?
- ☠ Rumours start to circulate that Helen Corrigan wasn't killed in the attack, but was instead captured by another cell and handed over to forces subverted by the Dark Minions. Do the surviving cell members go after her, or cut their losses? Even if they do manage to find her, how do they know that she hasn't been subverted?
- ☠ A freshly escaped Renegade ET comes to the Fury for help, but she's being hunted by a whole plethora of Minion forces. Are the Fury willing to help, or would helping her just invite too much trouble they can't afford to deal with?
- ☠ Character with the Empathy action type start feeling strange probings in their mind, as though someone or something was scanning empathically for them. Who or what is behind it and do they mean the cell harm?

NAMES

1. Andrea von Baibus
2. Ava Davis
3. Chuck Thornton
4. Claudia van der Merwe
5. Consuela Arias
6. Diego Sanchez
7. Donna Liebowitz
8. Ebonique Bustani
9. Emily Curruthers
10. Erika Butler
11. Hynalla
12. Jackson R. Donnelly, Jr.
13. Jarrod
14. Jennifer Powell
15. John Smith
16. Julian Chan
17. Kathryn Walker
18. Lars Mickelson
19. Li Jing
20. Lloyd Jones
21. Lucas Anderton
22. Mohammed bin Ahmed
23. Pari Bhola
24. Sebastian Garcia
25. Takiko Saitou
26. Ulrich Kloffmann
27. Vassily Uvarov
28. Yvette Reed
29. Zoe Flores
30. Zoran Smolensky



NAZIS, CTHULHU AND MUTANTS, OH MY!

Interview with Chris Birch

by Lee Williams

GAME BUSINESS INSIGHT

WE RECENTLY CONTACTED Chris Birch of Modiphius Games seeking permission to cover their “Achtung: Cthulhu” line in **Protodimension**. Not only did Chris grant us that permission, he was kind enough to let us interview him. Let’s find out more...

PDM: *How did you first get into gaming? Where and when did you start out?*

One of my two brothers introduced me to playing **Dungeons & Dragons** aged 8 with their older friends, I then picked up an early copy of Steve Jackson’s **Ogre** game in an Arts & Crafts store and I was hooked! I then got in to war-games and taught my other brother Napoleonic war-games and became a gamer like me

PDM: *What prompted you to start designing your own games? Was it just an extension of your existing gamer creativity or is there more to it?*

I’d been coming up with better ways to play games since I was a kid, I still remember the first time I suggested to my friend next door who I used to play ‘soldiers’ with that we should roll a dice to see how many soldiers we should knock over accompanied by machine

gun sounds! Not having friends who were gamers nearby and my brothers being away at college prompted me to design solo rules and to teach myself to play vs. my alter ego. I started to enjoy the process of designing games as much as playing them - from RPG campaigns to board and war games rules. More recently I had the chance to write the **Starblazer Adventures RPG** for **Cubicle 7** (I had suggested they turn it in to an RPG as it had so much great art and they invited me to have a go!) then last year (2012) I decided to set up **Modiphius** and create some PDF adventures. They sold so well we decided to grow the business, run a Kickstarter and here we are!

PDM: *What game or games other than your own creations do you most enjoy playing, and which do you most enjoy refereeing?*

I love refereeing **Dungeon World** as I do like the more freeform yet strangely quite structured style of play. I’ve been using it to test an idea for a post apocalyptic setting. I love playing **Defenders of the Realm** the fantasy twist on **Pandemic**, **Flames of War** for the wargame itch and now I’ve discovered **Firestorm Armada** and those lovely model ships...sigh!

PDM: *Do you have a favourite gaming genre, or a preferred style of gameplay?*

I think I’d say sci-fi - it’s full of ancient ruins, lost alien worlds, mile long starships and epic adventure that blows your mind in galaxies of billions upon billions of stars. I love stuff that’s so big you can’t imagine it.

PDM: *How have the internet and social networks impacted your work and business? What were your experiences of Kickstarter?*

We use Twitter and Facebook a lot to grow the business, and my own personal identify is as important to the company as our official page as these days people follow ‘you’ not the company and I’ve loved growing our little family business with such a fantastic group of fans. It’s given us the opportunity to do so much that was really quite difficult before. Kickstarter was a hugely fulfilling experience - working so hard night and day (finishing 4am most days) was draining to say the least however it was also so rewarding seeing the hard work pay off as the funds went up and knowing we were giving people such great value for money. Now were about to do it all over again for the **Mutant Chronicles Kickstarter** and I can’t wait!

MODIPHIUS ENTERTAINMENT

PDM: On a related note, where did the idea for the miniatures come from? Was it always going to be part of the whole thing?

Well I'm a big lover of miniatures and was hoping to create our own wargame too. Originally I was going to do the miniatures Kickstarter first, then we realised that the majority of fans wanted the books and this was kind of important as setting the storyline foundations in place for why the miniatures and heroes were so important. So I added the minis in half way through the Kickstarter in stages and that let us fund a good chunk of them. Now having **Spartan Games** (www.spartangames.co.uk) get on board to launch the Skirmish game means we can massively expand on the offering.

PDM: Where does the inspiration for new products come from? Do you keep much in reserve or does the buzz from 't'internet affect product decisions?

I listen to the fans, but I'm also a believer in having a strong vision and leading from the front. I have a big 'story' in my head for where **Achtung! Cthulhu** is going - it's not just a setting, it's more like the role-playing game of the graphic novel. Having strong writers, editors and artists involved at every stage ensures that visions become a high quality commercial product that people get excited about. We're launching a free product on **RPGNow.com** over Christmas - Tales

From The Crucible - which introduces the 6 lead characters who are the main heroes in our narrative and they appear in the forthcoming boardgame, miniatures, skirmish game, much of the artwork

throughout the books, and some audio drama's we'll be producing and pretty much anything with the Achtung! Cthulhu name on.

PDM: Which product of your own are you most pleased with, thus far?

Definitely the **Keeper's Guide** - it's the beginning of everything, it sets the tone for the Secret War and is everyone's first point of contact with us really.

PDM: How much do you use freelancers and how does their use impact your product's budget?

We use a lot of freelancers as being a small business you can't really keep people on full time salaries unless you have guaranteed income. Right now we had money in the back but little income - hopefully that will change over the coming months as the Kickstarted products go in to retail and the new projects come online. We budget carefully to pay as fairly as we can and when we have budgets from Kickstarter we always pay freelancers immediately rather than having to wait.

PDM: Finally, is there anything else you want to add? This can be anything you might like to share, or not! :)

Well I guess look out for the **Mutant Chronicles Kickstarter** in January - you can keep an eye on it here: <http://www.modiphius.com/mutant-chronicles.html>

PDM: Thank you very much for taking the time to answer our questions!

Thanks!
/Chris



THE TOLL OF MADNESS

A vignette encounter

by CW Kelson III (Tad)

FOR CALL OF CTHULHU

The Toll of Madness is a vignette Location/Trap/Adventure seed for the tired and unwary to fall into. On the face of it, there is sanctuary of sorts within the grounds of an old church. The reality of the situation is less than helpful to any or all that stay on the grounds.

With a strange taint from unknown sources permeating the entire church grounds it is not a safe place to spend the night: when Madness tolls like a bell, all those that listen can be affected.

BEING A SHORT AND GENERALIZED HISTORY OF THE LOCATION:

Several generations ago a small church and the associated grounds fell into disuse. The parishioners all had moved away or died of old age. and then the grounds fell into disuse. It sat there, long forgotten, and only within the last few decades has anyone or anything paid attention to the area. During that time however, the stone grew cold and the small graveyard overgrown with thistles and brambles.

The stone path disappeared under a slow moving tide of weeds and bric-a-brac with wooden doors and window coverings rotting away from a lack of care. The entire place was falling into old age, falling into a state of despair, were it a living entity.

So came about this state of affairs, where once a small community lived and thrived, with this church as a central facet of their

lives. There is now only a distant relation of the last caretaker who maintains a discreet and low-key sense of attention to the grounds. By only performing the absolute lowest amount of maintenance to keep it in one, yet still nearly rotted and full of decay and dismay, piece. So that it is still intact after a fashion, but not a cozy place to stay or even visit. Still shelter from storms or danger is shelter to be sought.

The small township it was once attached too is no longer. A few partial walls remain a short walk away, while the bones of the former inhabitants dwell forever by the church.

A FEW SIMPLE PLOT SUGGESTIONS:

Depending on what the Keeper wants, when the characters spend the night safe from the elements in this run down church the madness that lurks in the soil and stone and mortar will seep out and potentially infect, for the duration, those within who are weak of will or spirit (POW).

Another use would be to place it close to where an adventure is taking place, and perhaps there are no other lodgings within a convenient distance. This can become a disconcerting base of operations in such a circumstance.

A third potential way to introduce the location is as a safe haven, during

another investigation or in some time of distress or danger, the characters seek shelter within the, perceived, hallowed halls of the church. Whether it will provide that shelter is up to a Keeper, the rest is up to the die rolls.

These are just a few simple suggestions for a Keeper to incorporate this location into an existing or new storyline.

THE OVERALL SETTING DESCRIPTION IS AS FOLLOWS:

- ☠ A small church
- ☠ The grounds about the church
- ☠ A Disheveled Cottage
- ☠ Outlying building for storage
- ☠ Attached small graveyard
- ☠ A fence about the entire property

HERE IS THE SETTING AND SOME DESCRIPTIONS:

The church and its environs are encircled by a rusted metal fence around the entire grounds, and for those who can hear the call is a magnet or siren to paranoia and insanity. There is a small church, associated graveyard, and a small cottage where the priest or minister (depending on what the Keeper decides) once lived in.

The church is more than a few hundred years old, exact details are not necessary to give out. Inside the pews are gone, a few rotted out pieces remaining, along with the stone pulpit, there are no interior decorations. The stained glass windows are remarkable still intact, while no light filters in due to accumulated grime and dirt.

There is the main entrance area towards the rear of the church. The interior, with two roofs, is a single open section. There is a small office area just off the end of the church while a tower dominates the other end, with a corroded brass bell that no longer is connected to a rope.

The description is left vague and simple to allow for customization and to add details as an individual Keeper might see fit to.

GAME STATISTICS:

CHURCH AND GROUNDS:

The Trap Effect

After 6 hours within the grounds or buildings, SAN Loss of 2d6 will occur to those that fail a POW roll. Those that pass it will suffer a 1d6 SAN loss, Further, if a second Will roll is failed then +2 to the SAN loss will be endured as well. Visions of the gaping maw lying in the center of all creation, endlessly devouring all that approach it (symbolic of Azathoth) will fill their mind and eyes, leading towards Rabid Paranoia.

A special effect of the location is that, staying there most times will have no effect. Only on Full Moons, Equinoxes, Solstices, and other strong POW times (Keeper discretion) will trigger the full effects. Otherwise a POW roll to avoid a 1 point SAN loss to stay within the grounds and buildings at night, while daytime access leads to poor sleep at night and formless nightmares for a few days afterwards (a special effect with no game play effects, which could lead to more time spent there and the potential for SAN loss).

The place has a caretaker, a descendant of one of the religious people that attended the place when it had followers that listened to sermons within the walls. Now only a distant throwback to a relative remains, mowing monthly or so and checking for gross damages once or twice a month as well, even this scant contact has led to a warping of the mind and flesh.

THE CARETAKER:

Abel Jowchet: past middle age and looking the worse for the wear for it as well.

He is of average height while a bit on the less than average in weight size, thinning grey hair, somewhat long and greasy most of the time, with a face that avoids sunlight if at all possible, making him paler than most men his age, which carries over to his arms and hands, the sun not bestowing any blessing on his flesh.

With his long, hooked nose, weak chin, watery blue eyes and fingers that look more like a seamstress than a caretaker of a run down church and its grounds. However his nails, yellow and fungus eaten, tell a truer tale of what sort of man he might be.

He dresses in simple clothing, more likely to have on old pants from thirty years before than not, and a shirt buttoned all the way to

the top with a tweed jacket over it even when indoors while around others. Other personal accessories might vary, but do include a prominent brass cross on a leather chain about his neck. For the fiendishly oriented, it can conceal a small very thin bladed knife that comes out with a twist of the lower arm of the cross. In this case it should appear more like a Maltese Cross than a traditional one, letter opener handle in size for each arm to allow for an acceptable blade to be concealed inside.

The only weapon that is obvious is an old fowling piece more than a few decades older than he is that he carries about the grounds with him. He will say "To tend to vermin" if he is asked about it.

Credits: Original photograph of St Giles Church, Goodrich, Herefordshire taken by Linden Dunham and graciously donated to the Protodimension community for use. The author expresses great gratitude to him, as well as his excellent photography skills.

Image Manipulation conducted with GIMP.



ABEL JOWCHET, NEAR-DERANGED CARETAKER

STR: 6 CON: 8 SIZ: 8 INT: 8 POW: 13
DEX: 7 APP: 5 EDU: 6 SAN: 65 HP: 8

Damage Bonus: -1d4

Weapons: Fowling Piece 25%, damage 1d6+2; Small Knife 20%, damage 1d4 + db

Skills: *Craft* (Carpentry) 45%, *Electrical Repair* 10%, *English* (Or local language is appropriate) 50%, *First Aid* 30%, *Mechanical Repair* 20%, *Natural History* 10%, *Rifle* 25%, *Sneak* 30%, *Track* 30%

THE MYSTERIES OF VAAL-AL, PART 1

Dark history catches up

by Ron McClung

FOR DARK ROLE PLAYING



Authors Note: inspired by an article from Viralnova.com, *These 10 Unsolved Mysteries Will Give You Chills And Leave You Baffled*. (November 9, 2013) re-interpreted into **Dark Conspiracy**. This work is a work of fiction based on mysteries and tragedies that actually happened. No disrespect is meant to the victims or the investigators.

THE COSMOS HOLDS many mysteries and many dangers. The Dark Lords and their intentions are just one of them that face humanity as they survive in the Dark Times. The influence was never so obvious to those sensitive to such things than when the Dark Times and the Greater Depression befell the countries of Earth. However, many theorize that the Dark Lords' influence has been felt in other subtle ways throughout ages, manifesting in legends, folklore and mysteries that make up our history.

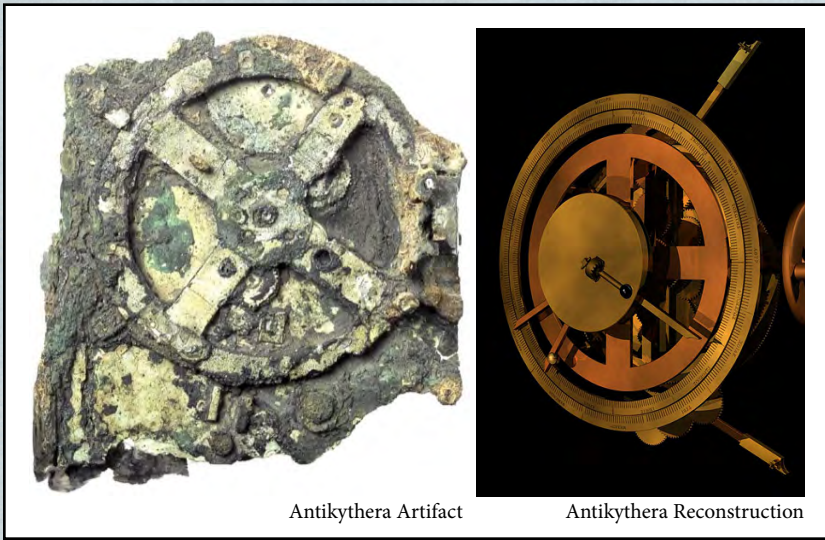
Many also ask "why Earth?" Some would say Earth was special and others would question that statement. One can only guess. One accepted theory was developed by predominant scientist, Dr. Rudolf Corman of the New University of Northern New Boswash. It has become known as the Corman Theories of Proto-Dimensional Physics. Of course, his research is only known to the minion hunter networks. If these were publically known, Dr. Corman would be ridiculed out of the University. Or worse – hunted down by Dark Lord servants for delving too far into their realm.

The surging energies of the multi-verse are in constant flux, according to Corman, and points where these energies converge create unique and special locations. Corman commonly called them Universal Dimensional Convergence points or Planar

Ley Points. According to his theories, they are points of great power as well as great opportunity for dimensional manipulation. It is Corman's theory that quite often, Earth is one of those points. At these points at certain times, the dimensional fabric is weakest, giving opportunity for things to briefly reach in from other proto-dimensions. These moments of weakness may explain the Bermuda Triangle, the Lost Colony or various other folklore and urban legends. It is only now, during the Dark Times, that the fabrics have finally torn and the Dark Lords are reaching further than they ever have before. But it isn't their first time influencing this world.

It was these convergences, weaknesses and other dimensional activity that lead a group of Ancient Greek empathics to create what is known today as the Antikythera mechanism. But what few know is that artifact labeled the Antikythera mechanism was only a small part of a much larger machine. This group of dimensional sensitive and astral walking Greek scholars sensed the changes in the dimensional fabric and sought to study them. Through their study, they theorized that the weaknesses could be predicted and built what they called the Scarthios Machine.

The Antikythera mechanism was simply a key to the Scarthios Machine



Antikythera Artifact

Antikythera Reconstruction

and was always in the possession of one of the Order's members. Eventually calling themselves the Order of Scarthios, they stored the machine in a since-forgotten temple, surround by a library of knowledge the Order gathered in their studies. The location to this temple and their work were kept secret for decades. They all worked together to study the meanings of the convergence and the beings they were sensing beyond.

Unfortunately, their secrecy was not immune to the influence of the Dark Lords. One of

their Order, influenced in such a way, betrayed them, stealing the Scarthios Key in the middle of the night, lighting the temple afire, and smuggling the Key onto a ship that would eventually sink under mysterious circumstances. That Dark Lord, later to be revealed as *Vaal-Al*, was able to influence one of their own and arrange for a kraken-like beast to pull the ship into the ocean, entombing the Key for millennia.

The Order was devastated. Many were killed while trying to save the library's knowledge in the fire that consumed the temple. Much of their work destroyed and the machine useless, those that survived salvaged what they could and sought out the predictions the machine had already made in hopes one day of understanding why they were betrayed and more of what was beyond. They had no idea what dark forces they had awakened.

One particular prediction was to lead one lone Greek monk east. It would be a millennia before any evidence of this convergence would manifest, so the Greek monk settled in the Far East. His descendants would learn the secrets he kept and would be the ones to watch for this convergence.

It came early in the 12th century at the birth of a Mongol named Temujin. A Dark Lord – *Vaal-Al* – reached through the dimensional fabric at a particular weak point and influenced a family of Mongol nomads, promising their children great power and influence. Thinking themselves chosen by the gods, the family dedicated their child Temujin to this Dark Lord. The young boy was secretly trained in empathic powers as well as dimensional travel and grew to be the most powerful ruler in Asia - Genghis Khan.

Unbeknownst to Temujin or his family, the influence was changing him internally. His anatomy was slowly changing to something not-human. Outwardly, Temujin appeared normal, but *Vaal-Al* was slowly honing him to be a vessel for his arrival to this world. Temujin in his moments of solitude and meditation to his family's "god" knew nothing of the manipulation and change *Vaal-Al* was sending through the dimensional veil. He only knew he was the Chosen One of *Vaal-Al* and secretly doing everything in his name. Granting his Chosen One knowledge, strength, powers and artifacts, Genghis Khan grew to become the Emperor of legends we know of today. It was under this influence that Genghis Khan's rule of law, the *Yassa*, was born. Unknowingly, all those appealing to this law were granting *Vaal-Al* more and more power.

There were others among the Mongol society that were sensitive to this Dark Lord's influence but only grew aware of it too late. By then, no one challenged the great Genghis Khan. Lead by a young monk of mixed Greek and Asian heritage, they called themselves the *Kharakh*. This group of warrior monks fought loyally for the Khan on the surface while at the same time, worked to learn more of the evil influence within the Emperor's ranks. Their leader, *Koudu Zhuo*, was a close and trusted advisor to Genghis Khan, who knew nothing of *Zhou's* heritage and secrets.

It was during the Battle of *Yinchuan* that *Vaal-Al* saw fit to attempt a crossing of the dimensional veil and lay claim to his vessel. Fortunately, the *Kharakh* were there to witness this event and affect its outcome.



Deep within a temple while the battle rages around them, the Kharakh monks and the avatar of the Dark Lord *Vaal-Al* fought viscosly, with the fate of mankind at stake. In the end, although they were not able to kill *Vaal-Al*, the Kharakh were able prevent his manifestation through his avatar, using their extensive magic and empathic abilities. It was only these supernatural abilities that were able to penetrate the Dark Lord's defenses and finally kill the human once known as *Temujin*.

The body of *Temujin* remained intact after the battle and there was some debate as to what to do with the body. Zhou knew there was a possibility of a return of *Vaal-Al* through the body and wished it to be destroyed by fire. Unfortunately, there were too

many loyalists to Genghis Khan, the man. Entrusting the wrong people to destroy the body, a group led by a Khan-loyalist named Jin Yong Kain was tasked to destroy the body of the great Genghis Khan. Unfortunately, that is not what they did.

Kain and a group of his loyalist soldiers took the body and entombed it. They killed anyone and anything that crossed their path along the journey, in order to conceal where he was finally buried. After the tomb was completed, the slaves who built it were massacred, and then the soldiers who killed them were also killed. All that remained was Kain and a few of his most loyal soldiers, who disappeared after the funeral. To this day, Genghis Khan's body remains a possible vessel and entry point to this world for the Dark Lord.

Koudu Zhuo and his monks scattered to the four winds, preserving what knowledge they had from Zhou's ancestors as well as what they learned serving Genghis Khan. Seeding hidden cells throughout the known world with this knowledge, the groups are waiting for the next sign of a convergence and what else might attempt to come through. Meanwhile, the movement created by Kain did not die. It continued to live under the belief that the Khan could return one day to rule a new Empire.

Around two hundred years later (around 1410), a lone Italian monk named Brother Gavino Evaristo, stumbled over a collection of scrolls of unknown origin in a monastery library in Italy. Little did he know they were fragments from the Order of Scarthios Library. Fascinated, Brother Evaristo studied the scroll fragments and began to transcribe it to a book that would later become known as the Voynich Manuscript. However, what he did not realize was that the pages were empathically imprinted. These pages awakened Evaristo's own latent empathic powers, and he transcribed far more than the actual contents of the fragments, transcribing it in the original encoding created by the original scholars of Scarthios. Before he knew it, he had transcribed a considerable tomb of some of

the core alchemical, astrological and metaphysical knowledge of the Order.


Brother Evaristo drew the attention of the Syanka Brotherhood in Bulgaria, an off-shoot order seeded by the Kharakh monks. Residing in the Rila Monastery in Bulgaria, they were gathering what knowledge they could from fragments of the Scarthios Library. When Evaristo made empathic contact with his pages, it did not go unnoticed. Syanka agents were sent to Italy right away to contact Evaristo and perhaps recruit him.

Vaal-Al, quiet in his prison realm beyond the dimension curtain and recovered from his last battle, also noticed the empathic contact. Some of the knowledge the young monk was gleaming pertained to Vaal-Al himself and the nature of his imprisonment. Vaal-Al mustered sufficient energies to contact his now burgeoning cult on Earth. This cult, germinated by the efforts of Jin Yong Kain and his followers, also sought out the young Evaristo. They called themselves the King's Sword as they believe that the sword of Genghis Khan holds the secret to the return of their king. Vaal-Al lead them to believe that the information being transcribed by the monks had clues to the location of the sword.

The impending collision between the two factions, with the young monk caught in the middle, took place in the most unlikely of places. Fleeing the King's Sword, the Syanka Brotherhood recruited the help of a rogue group of hunted warriors from France and Italy. They were the descendants of a fragment group of The Knights Templar, lost and forgotten. Hidden in a lost Crusade-era fortress in the Turkish wilderness north of the Holy Land, the Syanka Brotherhood convinced these Templars their secrets were of holy significance and could lead to the return of the Templars. The King's Sword set siege to the fortress and it remained that way for weeks. This became known as the Unknown Crusade, as few people know about the epic battle.

In the end, the sons of the Knights Templar and most of the Syanka Brotherhood were slaughtered, as was most of the King's Sword. Brother Evaristo and the surviving Brotherhood, escaped in secret tunnels under the fortress as it burned and collapsed above them. Brother Evaristo was later killed in Athens as they trekked across Europe to try and return to Italy. The Brotherhood thought it best to lead the King's Sword away from their home in Bulgaria. The Manuscript that remained, pages missing, damaged and torn, was returned to Italy where it remained until its rediscovery in the early 20th century.

Today, the Manuscript holds little value to anyone unfamiliar with the Scarthios code. Additionally, the missing pages that were lost in the trek across Eastern Europe and Near Asia held a few secrets of their own. Some of these pages still exist in private collections of less than honorable people while others are in the possession of Vaal-Al followers – members of various splinter cults throughout Eastern Europe and Asia. If one was to bring all these fragments together, one might be able to save the mystery of the Manuscripts. Or one might release knowledge that man was not meant to know.

It was the events surrounding the hunt for these fragments and the groups involved that lead to many more mysteries to follow. 



BRESHINGRIDGE CENTER

A mad, mad location

by Ron McClung

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

Editor's Note: an early version of this article appeared in issue #16, due to a slight mistake on my part! This is the full, revised version which Ron had in mind all along – the “director’s cut” if you will!

–Lee

The Breshingridge Center is many things to many people. Publically the **Breshingridge Center** is a private mental health hospital - an asylum - for the Dreamlands of Boston. It is a place where the wealthy can house their mentally ill relatives and know that they are safe and in good hands. Completely private, the Center charges considerable fees for the services but with the level of mental illness across America skyrocketing, places like this are more commonplace.

However, few know that since the collapse of society around it, the Breshingridge Center has expanded its operations outside routine mental health care. Secretly, it has started to investigate much of the strangeness that goes on. Investigations into the causes of some of the mental illnesses that come to the Center have lead to deeper and darker discoveries. Now, in the time of Dark America, the Center has several teams of agents out in the field, investigating these mysteries, preventing further trauma that might lead to the mental illnesses they see and hunting down the sources of these traumas. Through the mad ravings of the mentally insane, the agents of the Center have found themselves deeply involved in fighting the conspiracies of the coming Darkness.

HISTORY

In the latter half of the 1800s, the state of mental health care in America was entering a sort of renaissance. The US government had funded the building of dozens of mental hospitals and asylums per year. Research into mental illness

was growing and new and more modern treatment methods were under development. It was during this time that **Lord Granger Breshingridge**, inspired by the works of **Dorothea Lynde Dix**, funded the building of a private asylum called the Breshingridge Mental Hospital.

Lord Breshingridge, a philanthropic British noble with relatives in America, was personally touched by the heart-break of mental illness as his sister, while in America, fell ill with multiple disorders. Her husband, writing to Lord Breshingridge weekly, relayed the horrors that he experienced while his wife slowly went mad. Lord Breshingridge soon set sail for the Americas to help his sister in any way he could.

From this desperate situation, over a long period of tragedy and despair, Breshingridge Mental Hospital was born. North of Boston in a remote (at the time) rural area, the facility was built – a massive redbrick structure ominously perched on a grassy hill. Based on floor plans of the Kirkbride Plan style, it was originally built with three massive wings and a central administration wing, three stories high and each wing having a level beneath the ground. It sprawled out across the hill like a giant bird, the East and West wings of the building appearing like the wings of the giant bird. Ironically, it was built on a hill once called Crow’s Landing by the local Native American tribes. It is said that an inordinate number of crows were commonly seen there and the hill was a meeting place for the spirits.

Through the late 19th century and most of the 20th century, the hospital

thrived and treated thousands, some successfully while others not. Lord Breshingridge passed on before the turn of the century, passing on his legacy to his extensive family. The facility grew, erecting various other buildings throughout the campus, including a church, children’s hospital, and other important utility buildings. A cemetery eventually formed at the bottom of the hill for the inmates that passed while in treatment and had no other place to go. The cemetery remains even to this day, dozens of graves with only a patient number to mark them. Some say it is one of the more haunting places to go.

During the 1920s, a prominent doctor and researcher, Dr. Gunther Remberg, developed a theory that had a major effect on the hospital’s future. Inspired by the theory that blindness enhances other senses, Remberg theorized that mental illness enhances other portions - perhaps unused portions - of the brain. Expecting to find various heightened cognitive abilities hidden in otherwise impaired brains, Remberg was surprised to find much more. Some remarkable cases showed signs of latent empathic and psychic ability. The Breshingridge family, known for their forward thinking, gave the funding Remberg needed to further his research. Specific subjects were put through extensive experiments, done in secret due to their unorthodox and controversial nature.

Named “Project Delta” after the floor on which the experiments took place (which was the bottom floor of the East Wing), Remberg made significant



the Shelly Wing (after his assistant, Alexis Shelly). By the 1950s, the hospital was in full swing again. Although there were some attempts to resurrect Remberg's research, Project Delta was never fully reinstated at Breshingridge Hospital.

By the 1970s, the Breshingridge estate hit on hard times and operations at the hospital were reduced considerably. By the mid-1980s, the hospital was all but abandoned and being cared for by only a handful of caretakers. The patients had long been transferred to state-run hospitals. The Remberg and Shelly wings fell into disrepair and eventually were demolished. By the late 1990s, all that remained was the central wing and the administrative building as well as a few utility buildings. During that time, it was used as a secondary

advancements in not only empathic abilities but also mental health treatment. Many of the cases were people who did not know they had these abilities and did not know how to handle them. Despite its secret nature, his research did draw some attention from other covert sources, in particular in the intelligence arena. As war loomed, Remberg's research became very popular within the US government intelligence services.

Some say this covert popularity led to the fire of 1944. Others say it was old construction finally giving into age. No one really knows. The fire destroyed the East Wing of the hospital, killing hundreds of patients and staff, including Dr. Remberg himself and his assistant. It was assumed his research was destroyed with him. The fire devastated the Breshingridge family as well. Dissent within the family for the hospital grew as some saw it as a money pit. However, the family patriarch at time, **Lord Graham Hammonds Breshingridge**, mandated the hospital be rebuilt and its work continued.

The East Wing was rebuilt, while at the same time, the surviving wings were renovated and updated. Ironically, the fire gave the hospital new life heading into the latter half of the 20th century. The East Wing was named the Remberg Wing and the West Wing was named

manor when needed, but few really wanted to stay there for rumors of haunting and ghosts. For many years, it remained the empty haunted asylum on the Crow's Landing.

The tide of the Dark Times was a slow one. In that time, the Breshingridge family, led by matriarch Calla Breshingridge Hildred, regained some of its stature within the elite. The family was able to take advantage of many opportunities ignored by others and gain back its wealth. Lady Calla is highly regarded in the family for these efforts. Her vision seemed almost supernatural in predicting these opportunities. Her focus eventually turned to the hospital. Her goals were to reopen it as a center for the hope that Lord Breshingridge originally foresaw. The Breshingridge Center was opened a few years after the initiative was started, as a private hospital for a variety of mental disorders, addictions and psychoses.

The Greater Depression and the Dark Times beset the world. Wars, overt and covert, shattered civilizations throughout. Megaplex sprawls spread in the US and across the world, as countryside was taken over by outlaws and worse. It was as if a shadow befell the world and the Divine had turned its back on the Earth. The hopelessness and despair of humanity was more than many could handle.

The elite gnomes of the Dreamlands were not immune to it. Despite all the privilege and luxury, many gnomes were breaking under the pressures of the new dark world. New and more severe psychoses were arising from the dark shadows of the Dreamlands and few were willing to talk about them. Something was driving the elite insane and it was more than just the trials of life in a Dark World.

Families of these mentally ill gnomes turned to the Breshingridge Center for help. Some honestly wanted their loved ones treated, while others simply wanted to avoid the public embarrassment of having an unstable relative. For whatever reason, the elite were willing to pay whatever price the Breshingridge Center asked. Before Lady Calla passed, the Center expanded to a modern mental health facility like no other. Childless, Calla passed the torch on to her nephew, Gallagher Callan "Cal" Breshingridge-Ford. As the Dark Times grew, Cal took the Center to a new level – the level that it is today.

The psychosis and mental disorders the Center was seeing were requiring deeper investigation beyond simple therapy and drugs. The ravings of many of the inmates gave further clues that there was something darker behind the Dark Times. Freelance investigators were hired to dig deeper into the causes of some of these disorders. Sometimes these lead to dead ends. Others lead to darker and more sinister discoveries. This only drove Cal's curiosity. Freelance agents became full time Center agents. These agents formed teams. Their missions evolved from simple investigation to prevention – preventing the evils that caused the disorders in the first place, so that no one else will suffer the same fate.

The Breshingridge Center entered the realm of minion hunting.

Eventually, the Center's efforts drew attention both bad and good. The Center's efforts found resistance as their new enemies pushed back. Agents went missing or died horrible deaths. Others were admitted with incurable psychoses. They had annoyed whatever dark masters were behind this and now the Center knew they had an enemy. The question then was – were there any allies?

A team of friendly Gray ETs contacted a field agent team about 10 years ago. These aliens were eventually brought into the Center and agreed to work there. The Center gave them refuge and protection against malevolent forces. In exchange, they helped with the Center's operations, internally and externally. With their help, Project Delta was resurrected. Deep under Crow's Landing, the Remberg Research Wing was secretly reopened as an underground facility.

Secrecy is of the utmost importance to the Center. Only a few at the Center know the true nature of the enemies they face, and not even they think they know the whole truth. Corruption within the ranks is their greatest fear, which is why unprecedented levels of security surround Cal and his board of directors.

IMPORTANT & NOTABLE PEOPLE

THE AGENTS

The Center now has a few dozen teams that go out and solve mysteries, fight the Darkness and kill minions. They vary in skills and are obtained from varied walks of life. Most potential agents come up on the Center's radar through networking with existing agents' contacts. Eventually, these contacts encounter the Darkness in some way or another. With the help of the Grays, their recruitment division watches these individuals for a time until it is determined they would be a good candidate.

Some agents may require help from the Center's mental health facilities first. If so, they are brought in to the Center without actually knowing the underlying nature of the facility. The hospital is just an extension of the Center's facilities and the agent never knows they are sitting right on top of the command center of the group they are about to join.

Within these agent groups, the Center is very secretive. Only the leaders and special agents know the true nature of the Center and only these few have actually visited the Center site. Training occurs in the field, simply because the Darkness continuously throws new and evil challenges that the Center simply cannot train for. Agents are paid in various ways. Lead agents are salaried but paid through a secret network. Field agents are paid based on contract and cultivated over time to be lead agents.

An agent team is made up of 4 to 5 agents. They each have their specialties and are trained in basic hand-to-hand and fire arms skills. Some are former military while others are former corporate employees. They may also be people found on the street that have unique skills and abilities. Most have had a brush with the strange and dark and have an idea that there is something else going on.

Agents that are aware of the Center are allowed to live on the Center's grounds if they so choose. Those that are not made aware of it yet live on their own, staying in constant contact with their lead

agent. Most lead agents are either housed within the Center's housing or in the Facility. Only senior lead agents are told of the Facility (a secret underground installation under the Center). Basic field and new lead agents only know of the Center.

CALLA BRESHINGRIDGE HILDRED

Although not an official title, Lady Calla is greatly regarded within the modern Breshingridge family as the matriarch that saved the family and restored its name. With her inexplicable vision that regained much of the family fortune and reputation, as well as the Breshingridge Center, her stories are told in the halls of the family mansions throughout the world. They have called her the Golden Lady or the Lady Luck. She was a true lady and a true leader.

The truth about the Lady is even stranger than the rumors and legends and is one of the best kept secrets of the family. It started when Calla was a young girl, walking home from a late night with friends.

The abduction she experienced was like many others reported by other abduction "crazies." However, it was also somewhat different. The Grays that abducted her did not force her against her will in anything they did. They informed her of the Darkness coming and promised to arm her with abilities that could help fight it. They enhanced her already latent empathic abilities in multiples ways, but she was particularly talented in divination, clairvoyance and visions. They implanted her with a crystalline device that would help her continue to enhance her abilities as well as stay in contact with them. This device, and this encounter, as a whole would be at the heart of what changes the fate of the Breshingridge family.

Her enhanced abilities gave her the fore-knowledge she needed to prepare her family for the coming Darkness. Every action she performed, every plan she executed, and every investment she made was all in preparation for what the Grays told her was coming. After establishing the Center, she proceeded to build the Lady Calla Facility, or simply the Facility. A vast bunker built in the hills just north of the Center, it was intended to house and protect whatever family chose to live there. She kept the construction relatively secret, even within the family. As the Center grew and expanded, its role in the fight against the Darkness also grew. More and more people came to the Facility and in turn the function of the Facility grew.

Lady Calla also gained another benefit from her Gray enhancements. She lived unnaturally long and, after living over 110 years (and not looking like it), she and her closest family thought it best

to do something about it. Her first death was expertly arranged and many attended the extravagant funeral. World leaders and corporate executives alike attended. Even the family was amazed at how well she was regarded by the public.

From that point until her true death, she resided in the bunker, only her closest council knowing of her presence. Her estate was passed to her nephew, Cal, and even he did not know of her presence until her real death bed. When her human frailty could not be overcome by her supernatural ability, Cal was informed of the truth and brought to her side. She passed on one last thing to her successor - instructions on how to remove the Gray implant. She did not explain why but she insisted that the implant be removed.

Following the instructions to the letter, Cal had a crack medical team remove the strange crystal. As Cal soon learned, the crystal contained the essence of his aunt's life force and allowed him to remain in contact with her even after her death. Hidden in an amulet that Cal commonly wears, she continues to lead the family indirectly through the capable hands of her nephew.

GALLAGHER CALLAN "CAL" BRESHINGRIDGE-FORD

Some call him a recluse. Others consider him the re-incarnation of Lady Calla. Others think he speaks to Lady Calla's ghost. But no one questions his leadership. The Dark Times were in full swing when he took over and his decisions were all in response to that. No one in the Breshingridge family is more cloistered than their patriarch. Knowing the dangers of the Dark Times, Cal is rarely seen in public and if he is, he is surrounded by considerable security. His Inner Circle is also not far away as well as members of the Ganymede Council (the Grays who aid the Center in their efforts). Cal and his aides know their enemy.

One of the deepest secrets about Cal is his marriage to Dr. Katie Aileen Browne and his 4 children. They live in the Facility under constant guard and the protection of the Grays. It is a tough life of seclusion and security but for good reason. The enemies of the Center would not pass up a chance to go after its leader's family if they knew it existed. His 3 sons (16 year old Cal Jr., 13 year old Kramer, and 10 year Daniel) and his 8 year old daughter, Grace, want for nothing but lead a very strange and sequestered life. However, they are well aware of the risks and no secrets are kept from them. From the day they were born, they have been trained and honed to be their father's successor.

Cal's Inner Circle is made up of his closest advisors in the fight against the Darkness. As the role of the Center grew, so did his Circle. Throughout the Facility, there are many projects and studies headed by these leaders and all are under the direction and decision-making of Cal.

CAL'S INNER CIRCLE

Dr. Katie Aileen Browne – Lead medical professional, specializing in anatomy, biochemistry, biophysics and pharmacology, Dr. Browne's special projects include medically enhancing agent's abilities (without side effects) and heightening existing empathic abilities through pharmacological solutions. She is also one of the heads of the new Project Delta. She discovered her own empathic ability early in life as a child and continues to use it for the benefit of the Center.

Dr. Brandon Buckman Carlisle – Lead neuroscientist and psychologist on staff, Carlisle leads the heart of the Center's operation. He heads up special psychiatric units for the agents to give them special care to deal with the sights they have seen. He is also one of the world's leading experts on psychic phenomenon. He jointly heads the Project Delta program with Dr. Browne.

Dr. Lois Anne Garland – Once one of the world's leading geneticists, Dr. Garland was part of a major corporate human cloning effort. When she realized that the corporation was simply growing clones for organ harvesting for the elite, she left with all her secrets. To this day, the corporation is still hunting her.

Dr. William Enoch Sterling – Formerly a NASA scientist, Dr. Sterling is the lead engineer and physical scientist for the Center. Sterling never had a problem with the corporate take-over of the space program. It was what they were doing with it that concerned him. He does not talk about it much but most believe his falling out with the new NASA was extra-terrestrial in nature. All most know is that he needs the Center as much as they need him. He makes regular visits to Dr. Carlisle.

Lord Mason Smith Guthridge – Lord Guthridge represents the closest ally the Breshingridge family has from the old country.

He brings an extensive political and social network that helps the Center maneuver the politics of Dark America. Lord Mason's encounters overseas in war torn Europe was enough to bring him to America, the only place he thought could do anything about it.

Commander Anthony Davenport - Commander Davenport is a former US Army Ranger and veteran of the Mexican Border Wars, as well as several other campaigns he is not allowed to talk about. He handles all of the Center's and Facility's security, and Cal ensures that Commander Davenport has everything he needs at his disposal. He is the gruff and silent type but has a heart of gold. Among the staff and faculty, he is revered like a folk hero.

SECRETS OF BRESHINGRIDGE

THE GANYMEDE COUNCIL, THE GRAYS OF BRESHINGRIDGE

The Ganymede Council is made up of a number of human-friendly Grays that secretly staff the Center. They were a part of the original team that abducted young Lady Calla. They help the Center and the Facility underneath in its defenses against empathic incursion and detection from the Dark Lords. They also help in the Center's studies where they are permitted; however, it is quite apparent that the Council is not sharing everything. Some greater power is strictly preventing them from sharing all that they know. In many cases, they speak in riddles and hyperbole to shroud just how much they really know.

No one knows exactly how many make up the Council, not even Cal. They also are not sure if it is always the same group. They may be rotating over time without anyone really knowing. All anyone knows is that they are invaluable to the efforts against the Darkness.

The Calla Facility

The Facility was built under Lady Calla's orders for various purposes in support of the Center. It is connected to the Center by part of the Labyrinth, through several security checkpoints and hidden armed drones. There is one hidden entrance from the surface as well as several hidden emergency exits if the Facility were to become compromised. The forest above is covered in an automated security net that rivals even that of the White House.

The Facility is divided up into 3 major sections – Operations, Residential and R&D. Operations handle the essentials behind the investigations and support for the agents. From basics needs like hardware to less tangible needs like intelligence gathering, Operations is at the heart of the covert operations of the Center. Residential is the housing for agents, any staff that needs it, and any of the Breshingridge family members that choose to stay. Everything that can be provided is provided and everyone that is housed here help out in some way. R&D (Research and Development) covers a wide variety of sub-departments but all are focused on helping the Center in their efforts to fight the darkness.

THE VAULT

The Vault is a special section of the Facility that R&D and Operations share. Here, behind hardened steel and titanium alloy blast doors and walls, is the holding area for artifacts that the Center agents stumble across in their investigations that might need further study. The walls of this Vault are specially treated by the Grays with empathic re-enforcement to prevent detection.

Dr. Graham Korinzki is in charge of the Vault, and most believe only he knows the complete catalog of items inside it. He has a complex computer system he uses to index, monitor and secure all items brought into the Vault. He has a special unit of agents that helps him in gathering items such as Dark Tech, ancient alien artifacts and the like.

PROJECT DELTA

The research performed by Dr. Gunther Remberg was secretly hidden after the destruction of his labs and was one of the first additions to the Vault once it was built. It wasn't until Dr. Katie Browne and Dr. Brandon Carlisle re-awakened the project that it was removed.

Dr. Remberg's research delved deep into the brains of patients of the Center (Hospital, at the time), and the parts that perhaps were enhanced due to the lack of use of other parts of the brain. It took some time to find the right tests and the right candidates, but he did get results. With the limited technology he had at that time, he had to improvise in a lot of areas in ways that might be considered unorthodox. As government money started coming in as part of the war effort, he gained access to more technology as well as more

candidates. It seemed that the government had its own similar program and were getting nowhere.

His results were so conclusive that it drew the attention of enemies known and unknown. Most assume this is what led to the fire, but that is not entirely the truth. In truth, the government had Dr. Remberg playing with fire, quite literally. A German patient, captured off the front lines, was displaying extraordinary abilities. Unfortunately, he was wounded and unresponsive. The OSS brought the patient to Dr. Remberg with very little information. A very important piece of information they left out – that he was a pyrokinetic. The OSS hoped to turn this German into a weapon, of course, and it caused the destruction of the original Delta Project and the death of Dr. Remberg and many others.

With new and more humane technologies, Dr. Browne and Dr. Carlisle have been able to resurrect his research. Reinventing it for the resources she had available, she was not only able to recreate Dr. Remberg's results; she was able to make progress in curing some patients. Her new research has helped the Center understand empathic abilities on many levels.

JANET GRANGER COLLINGSWORTH, THE BABBLING SEERESS

Ms. Collingsworth, or as some call her Grams, is a very unique patient at the Center. Years ago, she arrived in a near catatonic state, only responding for the basics – food, water, and bodily functions. Otherwise, she never interacted with anyone or anything. It wasn't until she went through the Delta Project that she began to say things. It was mostly gibberish or random sentences it seemed. It was not until someone started recording her periodic rants and studying them, that they realized that there was a pattern to her nonsense; a method to her literal madness.

Piecing the seemingly random sentences together revealed that she had incredible precognition abilities. The pieced together sentences formed coherent thoughts and these thoughts formed predictions that actually came to be. Dr. William Enoch Sterling developed a complex computer system to analyze and compile her intelligence. She is now is one of the best sources of intelligence.

REVEREND SAMUEL COLLINS, THE POSSESSED MAN

Contained in the lower bowels of the Center in a special holding cell, Samuel Collins is constantly under Gray empath guard. He was

once a reverend and doctor of theology. He had an encounter in the Philippines that forever changed him. While helping a village to rebuild after a major typhoon, he stumbled over a strange ancient alter or shrine beneath the ruins of an old building. Curious, he investigated further. He climbed into the ruins of the building and was not seen again.

Unknown to anyone that would have known him, Reverend Collins re-surfaced six months later somewhere in Thailand. No one would have recognized him, if they had seen him. Arising from some deep unknown depths, a beast of a man prowled the alleyways and shadows of Bangkok. During that time, 12 prostitutes were horribly mutilated. When the police were close to hunting him down, Collins vanished. He was never identified by the authorities.

Another 8 random victims were similarly mutilated in Tokyo, Japan a year later. He again was never identified as the killer and disappeared once the authorities drew near. Then it happened again in South Korea, this time with 10 victims. The sheer randomness and viciousness of killings drew the attention of the Center. Multiple agent teams mounted a massive covert manhunt utilizing all the resources of the Center. Using the help of the Grays, they found the figure that was once Reverend Collins in the old sewer tunnels of Vladivostok, in Eastern Russia. However, oddly, it seemed to the agents that he allowed himself to be captured, as if he was waiting for the Center agents.

Collins is no longer considered a man. Most assume he is possessed by some other-worldly entity. But as of now, no one has been able to identify what or who the entity is. He currently remains a very dangerous being and is perhaps contained in the only place that can contain him. His behavior ranges from normal conversational tones to wild animalistic bouts of rage. He has displayed various empathic abilities including teleportation, astral projection and empathic manipulation. This explains why a Gray is always guarding him – to suppress any ability he attempts to use.

At times, when it serves the entity's interests, the creature within Collins will release information that the Center can use. Most believe there is an underlying agenda behind this intelligence and it is probably why the creature chose to allow itself to be captured. The Center does not always act on the intelligence directly and approaches each lead with extraordinary caution. It is always a game of chess with the intelligence Collins leaks and it is the goal of the Center to try and stay one step ahead.

THE LABYRINTH

The Labyrinth is a complex series of tunnels, crawlways, natural passageways and bunkers built at various times in the history of the Center. It is also made up of old sewers, old and new maintenance tunnels, construction tunnels for the Facility and other various tunnels and access ways built throughout the lifetime of the Center.

One section of interest was once an archeological dig into an ancient burial ground. There are a number of hobbyist archeologists among the staff that occasionally spend some time in the dig, continuing the work. Most assume that it was some kind of ancient Native American burial ground or shrine. Few have really done extensive research into it, and most finds end up in the personal collections of the hobbyists.

Few people know the true vastness of the Labyrinth. There are sections being rediscovered and revitalized every year. The only person that really knows the Labyrinth well is Commander Anthony Davenport. He uses much of the Labyrinth for security purposes, stationing various security monitors, check points and armories at certain points.

The Labyrinth also connects the Center with the Facility. There are multiple ways to get to the Facility and those routes are intentionally complex and labyrinthine. There are security check points and automated security drones stationed throughout these routes.

Also hidden in the Labyrinth is the Council Chamber of the Ganymede Council. Only the Grays truly know the route to it, however. No human is permitted to enter the Chambers, and no Gray is allowed to lead a human to it. When the Grays are needed, they simply appear. It is rumored that they violated their own mandates once, with Cal Breshingridge-Ford, in a time of emergency. However, there is no confirmation of that on either side.



DERRIN

A character...A Mouse...

by Tad Kelson

FOR ATOMIC HIGHWAY

CHARACTER CONCEPT:

2014 is the Year of the Post Apocalypse. From settings to characters to tables of ideas this is the year I explore the genre in all of its permutations, starting off with Atomic Highway. Way back in Issue # 6 we ran an interview with the author of Atomic Highway, Colin Chapman. After leaving it for so long, to get you started here is a character suitable for use (or as an NPC) in your Atomic Highway games.



Atomic Highway is powered by the V6 Engine, which is a simple and fast playing game system that emphasizes a more movie or cinematic style of game action with clear examples to support play.

More information about it is available at the website <http://radioactiveapedesigns.com/>

<i>Name:</i>	Derrin
<i>Player:</i>	TadK
<i>Race:</i>	Human
<i>Rearing:</i>	'Steader
<i>Pursuit:</i>	Scavenger
<i>Description:</i>	Average height, tends to be slender, long dexterous fingers, long light brown hair, slender, with dirt under his nails all the time.
<i>Personality:</i>	Derrin longs to discover ancient cities and technology to bring back to his 'steader relatives to make their lives easier and to help provide for his family that way.
<i>Background:</i>	Raised in a multi-family homestead Derrin found an interest in old technology and in digging through the ruins in search of items to make his life and the rest of the steader's lives easier.
<i>Attributes:</i>	Muscle 2, Understanding 3, Tenacity 2, Appeal 2, Nimbleness 3, Toughness 3, Senses 3
<i>Skills:</i>	Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Lore 3, Melee 2, Notice 3, Persuade 2, Ride 1, Scavenge 2, Shoot 3, Stealth 2, Survive 3, Tech3
<i>Health:</i>	14
<i>Armor:</i>	None
<i>Weapons:</i>	Knife
<i>Clothing:</i>	Homespuns, leather belt, thick soled boots reclaimed from scavenging,
<i>Gear:</i>	A Sledgehammer, Crowbar, gas mask, Geiger counter, assorted scavenging tools (hammer, saws, files, pliers, wrenches, etc.), large pack, paper book, 8 bottles of Shampoo, Polaroid Camera with 11 Rolls of Film, 4 Fire Starter Kits
<i>Transport:</i>	Horse and Tack

ALL I HAVE LEFT IS THIS LOUSY SHIELD MADE OUT OF A STOP SIGN

Discussion on the post-apocalypse genre

by CW Kelson III (Tad)

FOR THE GM

Many are the tales of the end of the world. They range from fiction and religious texts, to clinical scientific studies of the potential effects of changes on our planet, to stories and myths from all cultures. We as a species have devoted a great deal of words to what might cause the end of everything.

The genre of the Apocalypse is one of the main ones I recall encountering once I started reading voraciously. I first recall really starting to read when I was in the 6th Grade. I had discovered the Public Library in North Adams, Massachusetts. I mostly recall the books I read were on the second floor of this large, old building. So I recall that it was up the wide stairs to the second floor to where my love of reading and books was first fostered. Inside the main space on the second floor I found books on tanks and fighter planes, as many young boys do. At the top of the stairs and around, overlooking the stairway, I found the science fiction and fantasy section. That is where my real love lay in the reading.

<http://www.naplibrary.com/> Also in North Adams there was a small bookstore that Mom would let me go to, in a little strip mall I think is where it was at. There I recall buying my first books, the Jandor of Callisto Series by Lin Carter.

I recall the library was a few blocks down the street from where I went to school, which sat behind a large Catholic Church. So after school I would turn Left and go to the Library before walking home. After we moved to Iowa in the 7th Grade I really dove into reading, going through 3 to 5 books a week, pretty much reading the entire SF & F Section there as well. This is when I found the Post Apocalypse genre, filled with Nuclear Winters, Fallout, Mutants, and blasted cities from the aftermath of the wars causing the destruction. This naturally has informed me on what I thought the entire genre consisted of. A reasonable presumption based on that was all I found and read and all that there was in the RPG world at that time as well. So from Gamma World to The Morrow Project, from Damnation Alley to books dealing with survivalists evading cannibalistic mutants, this is what I thought it all consisted of.

With time I have expanded my views of the Post Apocalypse, but it still has roots in that first irradiated exposure. The end of civilization based on something that man has done, or some sort of natural catastrophe. This is the genesis of the genre (from my perspective), and so the next questions are how will people survive and get along, maintaining or building a new society. Add in the



- A Sample of RPGs in the Nuclear War Aftermath:
- ☛ Aftermath
 - ☛ Atomic Highway
 - ☛ Deadlands: Hell On Earth
 - ☛ Gamma World
 - ☛ The Morrow Project
 - ☛ Twilight 2000

projections of what authors and other creative types think will happen to society, such as shown in The Mad Max Movies or in other films where a plague has wiped out the world and what is left bands together to keep out the remnants of the victims. This is the root of much of what I originally read.

The deeper I look into what others consider Post Apoc the more I realized my initial concept was rather limited. While it might have been the main genesis, now it has moved well past those ideas and

into much wider fields. It really has crossed over and merged into the dystopian field especially in the wake of manmade disasters such as the Zombie Apocalypse or similar events. So now beyond the wake of an Atomic War lie many other end game scenarios. This is the overall genre of the Post Apocalypse. Zombies, Plagues, Asteroids, Floods, Ice Ages, collapse of Society, all are the starting points leading to the end of the world as it currently is.

Beyond books and movies lie the many worlds of gaming such as tabletop and computer/console games, titles enough to whet any appetite for surviving the end of the world. They run the gauntlet from graphically realistic to absurd and humorous in tone. Most all of these RPGs have detailed rules for disease, poison, radiation, and similar exposures. In them the environment is as much a hazard as are other creatures or diseased/changed leftovers of the human race in the setting. Add in how a mutant comes about and throw in some lists of random events and there you go a readymade Blasted America or similar location to recover.

So take your favorite RPG system, or a current one such as Pathfinder Roleplaying Game from Paizo Press. Toss in radiation and acid rains, freak storms and mutants, and there you go. There you have an almost ready made Post Apoc Lite setting to go run around in. If you want some more ideas slide over to this site and pick and chose <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ApocalypticIndex>.

So to get you started in the wide open Worlds of the Post Apocalypse here are a few short flavor text lists as well as some charts. These charts are oriented to the Post Nuclear War tone. Other lists and charts will explore the other variations of this genre.

Additionally Atomic Highway has some excellent charts for found items in their Scavenger Section.

(more tables on the next page)

Flavor Texts and Stereotypes of the Core Genre (Aftermath of Nuclear War)

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. A-Bomb | 38. Lack of Water |
| 2. Acid Rain | 39. MOPP Level |
| 3. Alpha Particles | 40. MOPP Suits |
| 4. Atomic Bomb | 41. Mutants |
| 5. Atropine Injector | 42. NBC |
| 6. B52 Stratofortress | 43. Neutron Bombs |
| 7. Bad Food | 44. Nomads |
| 8. Beta Radiation | 45. Nuclear Winter |
| 9. Blast Radius | 46. Overpressure Wave |
| 10. Blast Zone | 47. Paramilitary |
| 11. Cannibalistic | 48. Radhaz |
| 12. Cannibals | 49. Radiation |
| 13. CBR | 50. Radioactive Decay |
| 14. Cesium | 51. RADs |
| 15. Chemical Agents | 52. Remaining Military Takes
over |
| 16. Craters | 53. Road gangs |
| 17. Decon | 54. Ruins |
| 18. Decontamination | 55. Scavengers |
| 19. Depleted Uranium Rounds | 56. Scavenging |
| 20. Deserted Cities | 57. Small Towns |
| 21. Dirty Bomb | 58. Toxins |
| 22. Diseased Townspeople | 59. Trefoil Symbol |
| 23. Dosage | 60. Underground Safety |
| 24. Dosimeters | 61. Uranium 232 |
| 25. Downrange | 62. Uranium 235 |
| 26. DP Rounds | 63. VX Gas |
| 27. Electromagnetic Pulse | 64. Wastelands |
| 28. EMP | |
| 29. EMP Strike | |
| 30. Fallout Shelters | |
| 31. Gamma Radiation | |
| 32. Gasmasks | |
| 33. Geiger Counters | |
| 34. Half life | |
| 35. Hazmat | |
| 36. H-Bomb | |
| 37. Hydrogen Bomb | |

Lists to refer to for use in filling out your game:

Items in a Household

1. Box of Tissues
2. Cast Iron Skillet
3. Ceramic Flower Pot
4. Coffee Cups
5. Coffee Maker
6. Crock Pot
7. Dish Washer
8. Dryer
9. Floor Lamp
10. Game Console and
Controllers
11. Mattress and Box Springs
12. Picture Frame
13. Plastic Spatula
14. Plastic Water Bottles
15. Refrigerator
16. Round Dining Room Table
17. Sauce Pan
18. Stove
19. Washer
20. Window Frame

Items on a Military Base

1. Ammo
2. Ammo Bins
3. Camouflaged Uniforms and
Boots
4. Gas Mask
5. Geiger Counter
6. Helmets
7. MREs
8. Pneumatic Tools
9. Shovels
10. Uniform Items

Items found in a Mall Store

1. Cardboard Boxes
2. Cash Register
3. Cleaning Supplies
4. Clothes Hangers
5. Clothing Items
6. Hanging Fixtures
7. Metal Shelves
8. Pallets
9. Plastic Bins (Large)
10. Plastic Bins (Small)

THE LAST GUARDIANS #1

Fey fiction

by Herb Severson

FOR INSPIRATION AND ENJOYMENT

Authors Note: I started writing this as an adventure seed to another game I was running. It should work well with any game using the Fey as an antagonist/hero aspect. Works well with my homebrew “Dresden Files after the Fey War” setting. Thanks again to the editors for putting up with my offbeat settings!

~Herbie~

AS I WANDER around Central Park in the dead of winter looking for traces of what we call “wrongness” in the feel of the place. I come to one of the closed portals that is located at a junction point of some pathways with an old oak tree in the center. On close inspection the Iron Spike that keeps the gate closed is still in place. Now I wonder why I am out here, in the freezing cold and not quite dressed for it. Wearing only jeans and a sweat-shirt! Well, on to the next checkpoint. As there are only 4 of us left we have to expend too much time and energy ensuring that the Portals to the Fae Realm are closed and secured. Next way point is cross town and a small park in a gated community that is well policed so I will have to cloak myself prior to transporting in.

The only thing about closing most of the portals is that we have also diminished our own abilities and have not only handicapped the Fae Creatures but ourselves as well. We are the last of our kind and finding others with the “talent” of feeling the Ley lines of power that are still left are few and far between. We are the last Druids of this age and hope to find a student or two to pass the Lore on to but the advent of the Electronic Age hinders their perception of the Earth itself.

Even before the smell of fresh blood hit my nose the rings on my hands throbbed and sent warning tingles throughout my arms. On the left hand one of platinum, one of copper reacted and on the right all four Iron and the Rowan wood ring started to glow. There was a Fey here and it had made a kill in the area we have set as a Truce Meeting Area. Pulling what power I could reach from the Ley Line that runs under here I will challenge the offending Fey, it has to be a Dark Court minion because the Queen would not break the truce for a minion of the Court of the Light...

“I, Sean Inness call you to task, by the powers of the Earth and Iron, by the Powers of those that came before me; I bind and hold you for Judgment by the Courts. As once said I say Thrice and Bind Thee!” The howl that ripped out was louder than a fire truck and as pain wracked as a tortured soul! Well now what? I caught it, what is it and how do I send it back?

As I walk toward the area where I trapped the creature the entire parking lot shimmered and a pale horse dripping salt water and draped with kelp stood and spoke to me. “My Mistress wishes words with you Elder One, I am to carry you to her without delay”. As I looked at him/her/it, I never felt a



disturbance in the Ley Lines when it appeared. How are the Fey crossing again?

Walking up to the Kelpie I ask the ever favorite question..."When ridden may I not be drowned, may I dismount as I want, and will you take me to your Mistress as fast as possible." The Kelpie answers "My Mistress wishes to speak as soon as possible so a yea to all and please mount so we may be to the Court of Light as soon as we can." As I now walk close to this creature of the Queen I check myself, all rings in place and empowered prior to this trip...12 rings...One for each Moon, 5 on the left hand for defense, 5 on the right for attack, and one in each ear for mental shielding versus Glamour: the Fey use it as you would perfume. After mounting the Kelpie it just looked over and smiled in a horse's way and then I felt the shift. Again in Fairie my powers

both enhanced and faded in different aspects but were still there and I could feel the pulse of the Ley Lines here.

Looking forward all I could see was the Golden Palace of the Light. It had been many years since I have seen this as the world of Iron Man and Fey have been in conflict for the last 1000 years or more and I have been banned from setting foot here...upon pain of Death...by the Queen herself and now I am here by Her invite? Our conflict didn't end well and one can only wonder how the two Courts have been fairing. The Court of Light and The Court of Darkness have been scheming against each other before Mankind even walked upright!

I also want to know how some of these Fey are able to enter our realm even though we have closed most of the major portals. That would take an enormous amount of energy to circumvent our Wards and Protections that no few of our

Brethren gave their last Life Energy to secure.

"This is as far as I am bid to go" said my mount and went to kneel for me to dismount and I detected the slight shift in weight where he was ready to toss my ass into the wind so I grabbed his mane with my right hand...the one with the Iron Rings and all I heard was a loud gasp. "I meant no harm, release me please!" As I dismounted slowly I remarked to it: "Promise kept, fare thee well until next time."

Now to meet my Fate, or to tempt it.



THE LAST MAN ON EARTH

Movie inspirations

by Eric Fabiashi

FOR INSPIRATION!



Look at any five dollar DVD collection of horror and there's one film that always seems to stand out. The nineteen sixty four public domain movie, *The Last Man on Earth* with Vincent Price. Based on Richard Matheson's 1954 novel, *I Am Legend*, the film seems to fit to a tee the world of horror and depravity that seems to always be boiling under the surface of *Dark Conspiracy*. The film was directed by Ubaldo Ragona and Sidney Salkow, and stars Vincent Price.

The film opens in the plague ridden future of 1968 only four short years from the film's release. Dr. Robert Morgan gathers his gear and then it's out the door of his home to kill vampires. A plague has taken his world down the dark road of the undead. Through a series of flash backs we're carried into the tortured memories of Dr. Morgan and watch as his daughter and then his wife become victims of the horrid plague that sweeps his world. He ends up staking his wife like so many others who fall victim to the plague.

Unlike other films that don't go into the role of animals during a zombie infestation. *The Last Man on Earth* shows a very poignant scene where Morgan rescues a dog only to have to later stake it and dispose of its body in one of the many burn pits around the

city. The animal too was infected with the horrid disease of the undead.

Finally there is the appearance of Ruth. Dr. Morgan sees a woman in the distance after burying the dog. She runs from Morgan terrified but he finally convinces her to return home with him. He suspects her true nature. Finally after waving some garlic in front of her his suspicions are confirmed. Ruth is infected but able to hold the horrid infection at bay with combination of vaccine and blood.

She draws a gun but surrenders it to Morgan. Ruth is part of a group of infected who are under treatment but was sent to spy on Morgan. She is able to function once the vaccine is in her bloodstream but then the infection takes over once again. She explains that she and her people are going to build society once those who have become full vampires are destroyed. Many of those whom Morgan has destroyed were in fact part of her group.

They were technically alive!

While Ruth sleeps Morgan gives Ruth a transfusion and instantly she is cured! Morgan sees hope for humanity for the first time! But then Ruth's people attack and Morgan is forced to flee. Ruth's people kill the vampires who gather around Morgan's home every night. This gives Ruth and Morgan the chance to escape with a gun.



Morgan and Ruth pick up a tear gas grenade from a police armory and delay Ruth's people until Morgan is shot. Morgan is cornered in a church (the same one his wife is interned in) and despite Ruth's protests killed. He declares his murderers 'Freaks' and that he is the last true man on Earth.

USING "THE LAST MAN ON EARTH" FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

Believe it or not I cannot count the number of times I've used this Vincent Price tour de force as fodder for a proto dimension for *Dark Conspiracy*. The movie has lots to offer. First of all the world of *Last Man* is a 'splinter world' from the Proto-dimension Sourcebook page ten. If you watch the film there's something a bit well off about the 1960 world of the film. It doesn't quite look right. The reason is because the film was shot in Italy. It was filmed in Rome, Italy, with some location shots taken at Esposizione Universale Roma. This gives the locations a weird 'old world European' quality to the world of the movie. This makes the film perfect splinter world fodder. Sort of our world but not quite.

Then of course there is the vampirism. We are never told its true origins but the usual weaknesses are there minus the aversion to religious objects. Time and again I've used the 'half vampires' from the *Last Men on Earth* as plague carriers who have shown up in out of the way locations on the world of *Dark Conspiracy*. These fools act as carriers for the strange plague that infects a small town or other location allowing adventurers to go in, investigate, and deal with the problem.

An infection might require a trip to the 'World of the Last Man on Earth' a very daunting and dangerous task indeed. Perhaps the recovery of Dr. Robert Morgan's journals might provide an insight into the disease and its effects. There might also be an expedition into this world to keep such journals from the wrong hands, for example the bio-weapons division of one of the mega corporations of *Dark Conspiracy*.

Perhaps the world of Dr. Morgan has recovered and instead the PC's are confronted with advanced scouts from a world of the undead. The world of the *Last Man* might come under the influence of one of the Dark Lords of *Dark Conspiracy* which might well cause all kinds of issues for

both worlds. An expanded campaign featuring the world of the *Last Man on Earth* isn't out of the question.

Many of the events of the 'Ravening Wolves' adventure from *Dark Conspiracy* first edition could and have tied in directly with the events depicted in *The Last Man on Earth* in my games. Here the United States Army has conducted some intel and operations onto the world of *The Last Man on Earth*. The Bloodkin Vampires of the adventure are actually the end result of the plague which began in 'Last Man on Earth.' The incidents of Ravening Wolves occur after the monster crossed into the world of *Dark Conspiracy* and the PC's become involved. The PC's in my campaign were forced to follow the clues in the aftermath of the adventure and make the crossing to the 'Splinter Land' of *The Last Man on Earth*. As always your mileage with public domain films may vary but for me this classic is always good starting point to draw my players into the shattered worlds of both the *Last Man on Earth* and *Dark Conspiracy* or even *The Conspiracy Rules* set.



THE RUKH

Socotran denizens

by Norm Fenslon

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY



RUKH

# Appear:	1D2	Initiative:	3	Agility:	3
Attack:	50%*	Strength:	6	Skill/Dam.:	6 / Claws or Bite: 1D6 ***
Move:	10 / 60**	Constitution:	3	Hits:	20 / 50

*Unless the victim is within 1 kilometer of the nest, then the chance of attack is 100%.

**Hopping / Flying

***Falling damage from 300 meters. See below.

THE MYTH

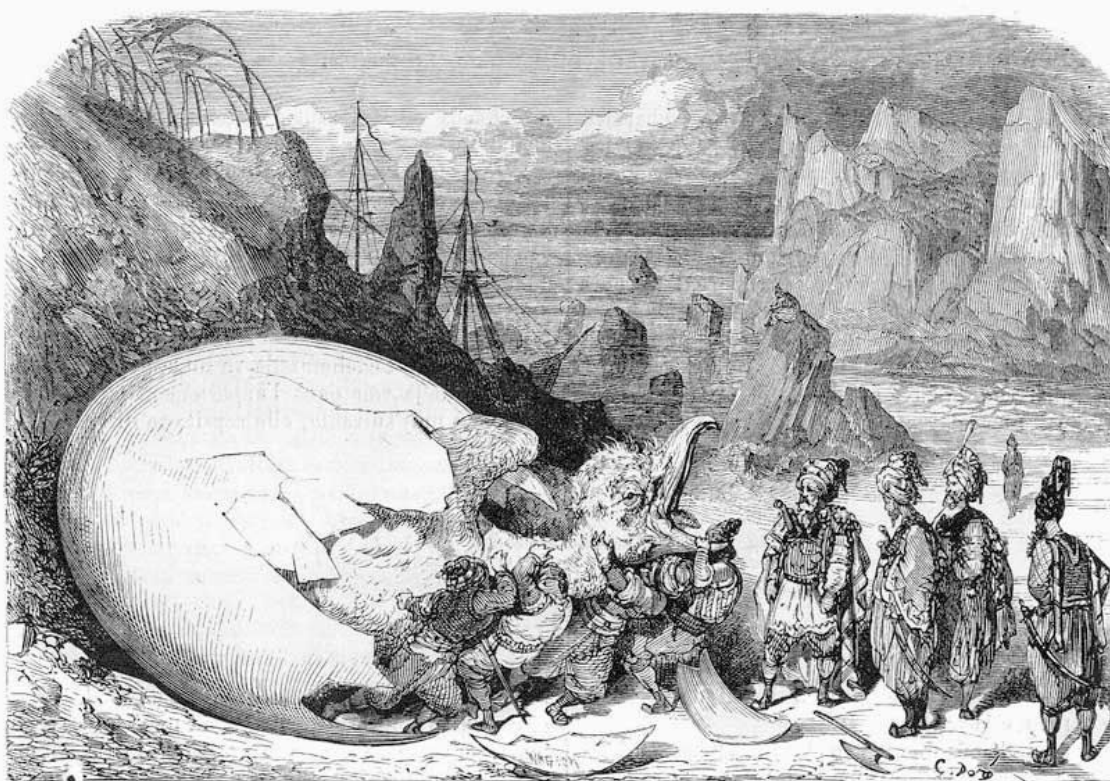
The *ruk*h or *roc* is identified in the Ethiopian holy book, *Kebra Negast*, as a giant bird responsible for delivering the blessed piece of wood to King Solomon thereby enabling the great king to complete the Temple. This piece of wood also is said to have transformed the Queen of Sheba's foot from that of a goat to that of a human. The piece of wood that the rukh brought was therefore given an honored place in the Temple and decorated with silver rings. The wood was probably from a native Socotran tree with special properties.

Ancient Hebrews relate stories of the rukh where shipwrecked sailors escaped from deserted islands by wrapping themselves in animal-hides and letting the rukhs carry them off as if they were cattle. In the 13th century, Marco Polo was quoted as saying "It was for all the world like an eagle, but one indeed

of enormous size; so big in fact that its quills were twelve paces long and thick in proportion. And it is so strong that it will seize an elephant in its talons and carry him high into the air and drop him so that he is smashed to pieces; having so killed him, the bird swoops down on him and eats him at leisure". Marco Polo explicitly distinguishes the bird from a griffin, another large birdlike carnivore.

THE REALITY

The rukh is actually a very large reptilian creature similar to the *archaeopteryx*. In spite of this fundamental difference, the behavior of the Socotran rukh is very consistent with the creature's legend. This creature was originally an inhabitant of Socotra for eons, finally dying out in the early 18th century. The current rukhs are creatures of the past emerging in this dimension as a result of the current disruptive bubble-portal



Les marchands cassèrent l'œuf. (Page 147, col. 1.)

RUKH NESTLING

# Appear:	2D6+2	Initiative:	3	Agility:	4
Attack:	75%*	Strength:	4	Skill/Dam.:	4 / Claws 2, Bite 1
Move:	10	Constitution:	3	Hits:	10 / 25

The nestlings are large and while guileless, are still unpredictable and more dangerous for it. They look more like predatory dinosaurs before their feathers come in as they are not hatched with feathers. The nestlings attain their full growth before acquiring flight. If this is the case, use the adult rukh's statistics without flight. Rukh nestlings taste like chicken, but cause disorientation due to chemicals in their fatty tissues. These cause a mild euphoria and confusion.

mess. A bubble-portal blown on the winds has lodged in the peaks of the Haghier Mountains. This time-distorting portal has caused a temporal bridge that allows flying creatures from the Early Cretaceous period of Earth's past to enter the current timeline.

DESCRIPTION

The rukh has a wingspan of almost 40 meters and really can carry off an elephant. It is completely covered in feathers with a dark brown and blue mottling on the back giving way to light blue and white colors underneath. Like birds of prey, the rukh has two very large legs with massive claws and a predator's beak used to pull apart its food, the parts of which it swallows whole. The rukh is adept at spotting movement on the ground and to a depth of about 5 meters below the ocean's surface. The rukhs living on Socotra have taken to the sea for their food source, making meals of the whales and other large creatures that can now be found in the ocean.

The rukhs mate in permanently formed pairs. The two will build a nest to contain their brood. The normal brood for a rukh is 4 to 14 (2D6+2) eggs. While the eggs are unhatched, one of the rukhs will try to remain in sight of the nest at all times with the other one hunting, usually at sea. Sometimes the nest-bound rukh will chase predators away leaving the nest unguarded for short periods of time. Once the nestlings are old enough to fly, they will depart and find their own hunting range, usually in the mountains of the African mainland.

SPECIAL ATTACKS

If characters are seen moving around near the rukh's nesting area, the creature will attack with 100% certainty. The normal method is to swoop down and grab its victim, fly high into the sky and drop them on nearby rocks at the water's edge. If the rukh cannot grab its prey it will beat with its wings, then bite and pull the prey into the open, where it then grabs it with the hind legs. It will then fly off and drop the grabbed created as normally. Sometimes small prey is not dropped, but rather taken directly back to the nest to feed nestlings, should the rukh's eggs have hatched.



THE WHISTLEBLOWER

Investigating corruption is a dangerous business

by Richard Hayden

DARK CONSPIRACY FICTION

How could I have known that a simple inter-office envelope would almost lead me to my death? It was just like any other, used a dozen times over and covered with scratched out names and office numbers. It did not seem at the time to be very menacing. That could explain my overconfidence, but let me stick to my description of that week's events without going off on a wild tangent.

I had opened the correspondence by accident. I was talking to a friend of mine in the Baltimore District of New Boswash on the phone and just absent-mindedly opened the manila envelope the kid from the mailroom left on my desk without taking note of where it came from, or more importantly, who it was actually addressed to. The contents were confusing to me.

It contained a series of papers with attached carbons. Stuck to the top of the stack was one of those yellow sticky notes which indicated my boss was to, "review and sign, ASAP," apparently because, as the note indicated in underlined script, "transfer to be made Thurs night!" The documents indicated a transfer of assets from the Department of Corporate Affairs to a small firm, Arête Private Corrections.

The papers were rich in details: current status of the listed assets, current location and final destinations, date to be

transferred, and individual handling fees of assets. There was also an account number for the company to remit payment. This was odd. Corporate Affairs was one of those departments in the government responsible for cutting checks to companies, not receiving them. Stranger still was the one field on the documents that had been left blank, "Description of Assets."

I had never suspected Mr. Weaver of wrong-doing, not once in the year of working for the Department. Quite the opposite, actually. Omar Weaver seemed to be a fantastic boss of upstanding moral character. These documents put those feelings into doubt. Was he selling government property to a private industry? What was it that he was moving? Just to cover myself, I ran to the machine and made copies of the envelope, the sticky note, and all of the individual papers before sealing it all back up using that tricky little string and shoved it into Omar's mail slot.

For the moment I had decided to give Omar the benefit of the doubt. This was probably just a project that I hadn't been briefed on. Disposal of old furniture, no doubt. Still, if I just looked the other way, and something later turned out to be amiss, I'd regret my lack of action. So after lunch I took the time to pull some accounting information. There were monthly invoices going back to well

before I started in Corporate Affairs. “See!” I tried at first to convince myself, “Nothing wrong here, just a project that you never knew about because it was already old news when you began.” But I had no sooner completed that thought than I had noticed something suspect.

About six months ago, the departments changed their account codes to a new format when our account management contracts switched to a new company. However the account number being paid in these documents hadn’t changed. For a moment I had believed I’d saved the government some money by finding missing revenue. Revenue from...what though? Certainly they hadn’t been disposing of old office furniture on a monthly basis for the last two years. I decided I may have only found some criminal’s blunder, not the government’s, and so I took my copies, as well as fresh print-outs of the extended history I had found, home to conduct some further research.

Using my personal computer, rather than my government-issued one, I began my research with a little background on Arête. Their site showed photos of green lawns surrounded by multiple layers of razor wire fences. Within the verdant fields stood a series of single-storey buildings, flanked by two larger three-storey structures. The tallest building, by far, was the single watchtower which stood at the center of the complex. A descriptive paragraph beneath described “humane, non-lethal use of corrective technology”. I had no clue what, precisely, that meant. The campus lay some eight or nine miles north of the District of Columbia itself. At the bottom of the site was a friendly photo of a man smiling and balding at equal, extreme, intensity who was listed as, “Warden John Terry.” I could not reconcile business between a private prison and our Department, but Arête appeared to be what their name indicated.

I knew that I had something big here, though I would readily admit to not knowing its depth. I made up my mind to file a report with the ethics office in the morning. Then I could consider my due diligence satisfied and place the mystery in the hands of professional investigators. Which is exactly what I did in the morning. As soon as I filed the electronic report, I received an automated email confirming my report and providing me with a case number. As Omar was out that day anyway, I put the matter out of my mind and completed some tasks I’d ignored the previous day while chasing my boss’ potential corruption.

As of the next morning, I was certain to have received an email commending me on my honest actions. Or at the very least

something to tell me the case was under review. I saw nothing in my email. By lunchtime I still had not heard anything, and Omar, back in the office today, was as friendly as ever with the staff.

“Oh, Mr. Weaver, that’s okay, you don’t need to buy us lunch!” giggled the young intern, “But we sure do appreciate the offer,” piped up her compatriot over the stack of envelopes he was stuffing. It was a Wednesday tradition for him to pick up lunch for the interns, and every Wednesday they replayed the same script of humility followed by childish graciousness and profuse thanks.

I checked again after lunch: no email.

Before I left for that evening I double-checked the previous day’s automatic confirmation email. It wasn’t there! I verified in my archived files: no email. I tried to recall the case number, but it was a good eight digits long. I was certain I had submitted the report and received the email. Something went wrong with the system, that’s all it was. A glitch in the computer. So I refiled. No confirmation email arrived this time. I sat until long after everyone else had gone home, refreshing my email client, waiting for that confirmation. At long last, perhaps an hour or two after the last staffer had left, I received an email. It wasn’t from the ethics people. It was from the accounting office and read as follows:

From: Melvin Mumford, GAO
 To: Your Narrator, Deputy Under Secretary of Corporate Affairs
 Re: Discrepancies with recent expense report
 Dear Sir,
 Upon reviewing your most recently submitted expense report, we have noted a discrepancy between your reported expenditures and requested reimbursement. As this is not the first time we have taken note of such reporting from you in the past, we have launched an audit on your recent expense reports and suspended your department purchasing rights.

I had not submitted any expense reports in months, not since that convention in Richmond, and never have my reports been considered suspect in the past! This email showed an attached report, submitted and signed by me, for a trip I didn’t take. I was stunned. It was a warning of some sort. They were telling me to back off. I couldn’t let these thieves hijack the government, not after everything we’ve been through over the past few decades. I had to restore some integrity

somewhere, and this was my chance. That evening I prepared to visit the prison myself, following work on Thursday night.

In the intervening time, I kept up appearances before my coworkers and plotted the supplies that I would need. I considered myself well prepared with flashlight, camera, directions to the prison, water, and snacks. I didn't know what I expected to find, or indeed do, but at the time I had decided I was ready. I did anticipate being turned away at the gate, no matter what my excuse was for visiting the prison, and so I decided to park about a half mile away and hike through the woods to get a close-up view of the facility for myself. Hopefully, whatever transfer was taking place would be after my arrival.

Indeed, after trekking through a fair amount of undergrowth and light trees, I discovered that I had not missed the delivery. I also discovered that Arête's facility was most surely not a prison. The site instead appeared to be an industrial block of some sort, complete with two large warehouses and a factory building of some sort.

Curious, and disarmed from shock, I wandered toward the fence, which I would note was the only thing that resembled the photos I'd previously seen, and watched as several large men helped to unload a shipping container from the back of a flat-bed truck. They were removing large metal cases, roughly six square feet each, and bringing them into one of the warehouse buildings. I was still no closer to figuring out exactly what it was I was on to, but I snapped several photos all the same. Then I moved around the perimeter of the fence, hoping to find a better glimpse into the complex.

Towards what I judged to be the rear side of the facility, at least the side opposite the entrance road, I located a tree which was both climbable and within sight of a large series of windows in the factory building. Setting myself out as far as possible on one of the sturdier limbs which stretched over the fence and almost touched the building, I used the camera's zoom

to improve my view. Within was an open space filled, not with machinery as I would have expected, but with a series of metal scaffolds. From these scaffolds hung flat platforms, power and hand tools of every variety, heavy chains, metal hooks, and a tangle of weathered leather straps. I didn't know what they were producing at the factory, but it seemed to be labor intensive to say the least.

As soon as I snapped a few pictures of the factory floor, a forklift bearing one of the metal crates drove into view. It gently laid the cargo down before the scaffold, then retreated to the room it originated from. Two burly men opened the crate, but not before violently thrusting a large metal stick into the box, and promptly carried out a dazed, naked man.

For now, I was more confused than repelled. I didn't know what was going to happen next, though thankfully only because my brain must have comprehended on some primeval level and shut itself down from thinking clearly. What I saw turned my confusion and shock into terror. They were taking the beaten man and securing him to the leather straps. He was positioned in such an unnatural position. His body was elevated to about thirty degrees, but his head was pulled up and away so that he formed a sort of "check" shape.

Then the revulsion finally came as one of the bruisers unceremoniously slit the throat of the man and walked away calmly. Later my mind would realize in horror that he acted as though it was just the last step in his job: one last switch to throw before calling it a night. As rich arterial blood spilled out of the man's body, I took note of a beam of light perhaps a few hundred yards from the tree I was in. My mind screamed to run as fast and as far as possible, and in my nervousness I fell from the tree.

I lay on the ground stunned by what I had seen and forgetting for a moment that I might be discovered by murderers. Then my body reacted to the pain of falling some eight or nine feet. Rolling in agony for a few moments was rough, but nothing felt broken, so I considered myself very fortunate. I stood, shakily, and

attempted to make my way back towards the woods. The flashlights were near, and accompanied now by quiet voices. In a panic I tried to run in the opposite direction. My shaking legs weren't ready for a run, and instead dropped me back onto the ground.

That was when a shape flew out of the darkness and enveloped me briefly in some sort of fabric. I thought of the burly men and imagined I was headed for that harness, but then I heard a hiss. It was the universal signal for "hush!" I tried to stay as quiet as possible, even holding my breath. After several long moments, the dark fabric that had blocked my vision receded and my eyes readjusted to the moonlight.

A woman was looking at me. She seemed young, or at least, younger than me and was dressed in dark, plain looking clothing. "Come on," she ordered me, grabbing my arm and pulling me deeper into the woods and away from where my car was.

We moved as quickly as my legs and the darkness would allow and after several minutes reached a steep hill. Upon climbing to the top of the hill I was startled by the presence of two men. Both were dressed like my savior, but that was the only resemblance any bore to one another.

The first man was a mountain of dark skin and muscle. His face was aged like a farmer's or construction worker, as though he spent a lot of time working in the sun. I guessed he was around or about forty-five. The other man, a kid really, stood in stark contrast to the first and looked frail with ashen skin.

"Not much to look at, Beth, this is the guy you aborted the op for?" This was the first man speaking to the girl that saved me. "No, you're right, if he had been caught, then security would have kept looking for trouble all night. Probably all week."

"They'll still be on alert for a while, Cap," I was startled by a voice behind me. Another man, nearly as large as the first man, had silently stepped out from the brush behind me. "We're not coming back to this joint anytime soon, if ever." The newcomer unsettled me on some level I can't define. He looked just like

the others, except that despite the nighttime, he was wearing a pair of extremely expensive sunglasses. “Glad this was just recon and we weren’t lugging any artillery around.”

“I agree with Tennessee, the guards are searching for an intruder right now.” This was the sick kid. He wrapped his arms around his body as though he were feeling a chill. “And there is something else here.” Almost as though they were waiting for his pronouncement, the complex lit up with floodlights and the sounds of men shouting could be heard in the distance.

“Alright, here’s what we do,” the big one they called Cap began to lay out a plan to escape quietly. No one spoke to me, or about me, at least about me as a person. I was reasonably sure that I was the “baggage” that Beth was expected to deliver. No plan, however, could have accounted for what happened next.

A deep and loud howl made my rescuers stop cold. For the first time I felt that they were as scared as I was. Cap asked the kid, “Riley, what is that?” His response was to vomit. The one they called Tennessee reached into his pants and removed a pistol while uttering a comment meant to vocalize his bravado.

Beth grabbed me with a quick, “Come on!” and took off into the woods without waiting for new orders and instead continuing with her plan to deliver her baggage. I resisted for a moment, and then I saw two burning orbs in the distance and knew instantly it belonged to whatever howled and ran with her into the woods. I had a feeling that she was looping around the long way, but we didn’t end up back at my car, but back at what was apparently hers. “Get in.” She did not seem to be one for words.

“Okay,” we’d been driving a long time in silence before she spoke up, “I don’t know why you were there, what you saw, or what you were thinking, but I’m going to tell you what you were doing. You were committing suicide, Mikey. Do you know that?”

“I do now...” I sounded so weak.

“And what good did knowing now do you an hour ago?” I thought it was one of those rhetorical questions, but she prodded me for an answer, “Hey, I’m asking you, what good did it do you then?”

“My name isn’t Mikey.” She glowered at my response, then slowed the car to a stop.

“If you don’t want to walk from-” she glanced outside, we were in a rough part of the Columbia District of New Boswash, one of the millions, “wherever the hell we are, then answer the question.”

“None. It didn’t do me any good.” An important lesson, but it would not sink in that night. “And my name isn’t Mikey, I want to get that straight.”

“However you like it, jack. Now let me tell you what you did tonight, as far as the rest of the world cares. You came home from work like a good worker bee and cooked a frozen dinner. Then you sat down and listened to some crappy music before passing out early for the night. Understood?” She hit the accelerator and we zoomed off into the night again. I nodded in answer to her most recent query and drifted off to sleep.

When I awoke I asked her where we were headed. “Metro,” she told me in a terse voice. Back to monosyllabic Beth. I went back to staying quiet until arriving at the station when I turned to her and broke the silence. “But what about the others,” I asked her as we got out of the car, “Shouldn’t we make sure they’re okay?” I hadn’t figured out that I wasn’t part of their group.

“No! For now,” Beth whispered harshly, “Just keep your head down. Go to work. Do you have time to clean up first?” I nodded weakly. “Good, get home, clean up, go to work. Normal day. Last night you came home, nuked some frozen garbage, listened to some music, and fell asleep early. ‘Kay? You got that?” I nodded again and stumbled off toward my Metro platform. I never listened to music at home; I had one of those fancy TV systems with the theater sound. I kept repeating what she told me in my head anyway. “And we’ll be in touch soon, mikey, just keep your head down.”

Somehow I managed to drag myself into the office and put on a cheerful face. I may have even used an outdated and still off-abused acronym noting that it was the last day of the week on my way to the desk. That morning is still a blur in my memory, so I desperately hope I did not. When no one was watching, I shredded the copy I had made of my gathered evidence and sealed the original photocopies in an envelope which I nestled deep in a folder of boring monthly status reports. One day I’ll find a way to bring those atrocities to light and make everyone responsible pay, but for now, I had to do what Beth instructed: keep up appearances, act normal.

When the mail boy came, he accidentally delivered another manila envelope for Omar Weaving, from the same sender as the one on Monday. Despite the long night, my mind wearily noted that the requests usually came monthly, not weekly. Still, I chose to ignore the contents of this one and file it into the correct mailbox. Act normal, right?



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EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL INFECTED ZONE

DARK SEED: THE GIN MILL

A liver-challenging proto-dimension

by CW Kelson III (Tad)

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

THE SITUATION:

There is a proto-dimension where the Gin still flows freely and men are able to indulge in drink till their bodies give way. Welcome to the Gin Mill. Feel free to partake of all that is available to enjoy while visiting all of the fine establishments here. No need to leave anytime soon. Honest, no need to ever leave at all.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON:

Simply put this is a proto-dimension modeled after the Gin Houses and Palaces of London of the Mid-1700s. At some point a part of reality succumbed to the lure of Gin and so The Gin Mill came into existence. The sole point to the proto-dimension is to keep the Gin flowing for any and all that are fans, or addicts, of Gin.

The Gin Mill is a section of London from mid 1700s that has been pulled and copied into a small splinterland. It is a faithful duplication of the several dozen blocks of land that has been replicated. It is of course a little evolved and more run down in the several hundred years it has existed. Over time the correspondences between the Earthly Location it had been pulled from and this location have allowed for more people to arrive here, normally in a drunken stupor. The

SOME RULES AND SUCH FOR DIRECTION:
When The Gin Mill is used as a Splinterland then this location has the following attributes

Name: The Gin Mill

Type: Splinterland

Rating: 0

Assimilation: (Special)

Damage: Special (See Write-up)

Aspects: Sticky (once assimilated)

homeless and destitute have also found themselves walking the London Streets and having perhaps micro-dozed or just closed their eyes for more than a few moments, and when their eyes opened, they found themselves in The Gin Mill. On rare occasions a person will end up there from a city other than London. These are normally those people with a taste for Gin, who in a fashion of correspondence, have arrived in The Gin Mill to satiate their own drives and tastes.

Raw materials arrive in The Gin Mill several times a day. This is a by-product of

waste and overruns on Earth that the proto-dimension pulls into the location, ensuring the continued production of Gin. The raw products and materials arrive in barrels and on carts that come trundling along out of the alleys that lead into The Gin Mill. Oftentimes a Hansom Cab will arrive from the twisting winding streets, seeming to just appear, with a new arrival to The Gin Mill or with more supplies of some specialized nature such as barbering materials or leeches. This location summons such items when the need is great enough there to warrant.

The deliveries are made by the agents of the proto-dimension which are just simple humanoid shaped blobs, dressed in pants, boots, heavy overcoats and thick leather gloves. They are not statted out as they will not engage in combat and if a PC wants to attack one it will not defend its self, so consider it to have no armor and take a total of 6 hits to the chest region before it falls to the ground effectively dead. They will pay no mind to anyone or anything, so if someone is unconscious and they drive in a laden wagon full of fermented barley or other substance, they will drive right over without noticing. The carts, wagons, cabs are all drawn by the equine appearing equivalent which would take 24 points of damage to the chest region before falling dead. At this point the drivers would unhitch it and after 1d6 hours another beast will walk out of the alleys to continue pulling the load to the destination.

ASSIMILATION:

Simply put, when someone drinks enough in The Gin Mill to become inebriated roll a Difficult: Will Test. Success means they have not been assimilated. Once the test is failed then they are assimilated and the Sticky Nature of the Splinterland comes into play. The Gin Mill is only Sticky to the Assimilated. Otherwise it has normal Entry and Exit as a proto-dimension with a factor of 0 the same as Earth.

There is a further complication based on the historical nature of the production of Gin. This entire splinterland is considered to be Black Market production, which research into mid 1700s Gin Production states that Illicit Gin was often cut with Turpentine or Sulfuric Acid. In the context of this proto-dimension this means all of the Gin produced has these products included in it. This naturally leads to severe physical difficulties over time. So the rules for poisoning come into play for any character that drinks the Gin available in the proto-dimension.

The damage rating for the Gin produced here is as follows 0p1(daily) making it a 0 Penetration so contact on skin will not produce poisoning. It requires ingestion and the amount of Turpentine or Acid included in the Gin is such that only a single damage roll is made per day reflecting the amount of alcohol ingested. So a single 1d6 Damage to the Chest Region will be assessed per day of consumption. Referee discretion is advised in this, a single drink or perhaps three will not result in poisoning, while a day of assimilated drinking steady for several hours will result in the damage being taken. A further danger is renal failure (Failure of the kidneys) which would lead to death. To reflect this, for characters that spend more than 1 month in The Gin Mill, imbibing the local alcohol, for each six (6) month period spent there in drink make a Easy: Constitution Task Roll to avoid Renal Damage. If this roll is failed it indicates imminent failure and from that point on it is a Difficult: Constitution Task Roll. Once that is failed there is Renal Failure and death will occur within several weeks depending on overall health. A good rule of thumb would be 14 – the Difference in the failure of the Task Roll to Avoid Renal Failure. This would indicate how long a character would have to seek medical assistance outside of this Proto-dimension to potentially survive.

If the Referee prefers to make these die rolls for the players, then the following symptoms indicate Renal Damage. The Referee can use this list to describe

what is happening to the player character, or use it to describe the conditions of NPCs that are failing.

- ☠ Abnormal heart rhythms
- ☠ Blood in the urine
- ☠ Bone damage
- ☠ Dehydration
- ☠ Foamy or bubbly urine
- ☠ Itching of the skin or seeming of internal organs
- ☠ Less frequent urination, or in smaller amounts than usual, with dark colored urine
- ☠ Muscle cramping
- ☠ Muscle paralysis (in progressing amounts)
- ☠ Nausea and Weight loss
- ☠ Nocturnal urination
- ☠ Shortness of breath due to extra fluid on the lungs (may also be caused by anemia)
- ☠ Swelling of the legs, ankles, feet, face and/or hands
- ☠ Vomiting and/or diarrhea

APPEARANCE:

The land of The Gin Mills is a section of old London duplicated in a proto-dimension. The entire land covers a few dozen blocks of land, with a plethora of gin mills or palaces, sleeping places, a few simple eateries as well as ample space for the drunk to fall asleep along the sidewalks and cobbled stones.

The houses and buildings are made of wood, all several hundred years old at best. They are in an advanced state of disrepair, little effort being taken to repair or replace damage caused by time. Much of the wood is close to petrification, aiding in the durability of the landscape. There are some supportive industries, barbers, brothels, a few eating places, those sorts of things. These are all supplied also on irregular basis from the actions of the Proto-dimension and so are a

hit or miss for having supplies. But there is always enough Gin to go around for all.

The original Still operators are all still alive. There are several dozen of them and they are all well over 200 years old. Time and the effects of their trade have resulted in their being turned into leathery near carcasses, continually caressed by the effects of the Turpentine added to the still mixes and the life as an eternal distiller. They all are almost uniform in appearance and are no longer human, being utterly dedicated to the creation of their drink. Picture their complexion as deeply tanned leather the dark brown color of pure turpentine with a perpetual odor of gin and fermentation oozing from their flesh. Their eyes have slowly disappeared and so empty sockets peer out to measure somehow the ingredients, while their noses are mere slits worn away over time.

TRAVEL AND TIME:

If the flowchart method of Proto-dimensions is used by the Referee, then link this directly to Earth. If the Correspondences method is used, access is easiest in London where the streets were pulled from, and Only a Difficult Test from any bar, drinking establishment, etc.

Time flows at a slightly slower rate than on Earth, to reflect how time slips away when someone is drunk. Effectively this means that for every hour spent in The Gin Mill, 2 hours pass by on Earth. The inhabitants only experience a single hour, so healing is effectively one half as fast as being on Earth.

DARKLINGS:

Few Darklings or dark minions visit The Gin Mill. Occasionally a Pale or Dark Elf will come through looking for food or entertainment. But there is only so much to do when most of the population is addled from drink. This makes this an essentially safe place to visit, so long as a taste for the drink is not obtained.

INSPIRATIONS:

The sole inspiration for this Seed is the following image titled *Gin Lane* sourced on Wikipedia Media and is considered Public Domain by Wikipedia. My thanks to Seth Godin as well for mentioning Gin

Mills and the effects on factory life and the rise of the capitalist state in his talk *The Linchpin Sessions #1* April 2010 available at the following link:

<http://sethgodin.typepad.com/files/linchpinsessionsethgodinapril.mp3>

He asks that you download it and listen instead of streaming it.

LINKS:

Many thanks to Wikipedia for the article on Gin that was used for ideas and information:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gin>

An excellent secondary website to review is the Victorian London site with a Gin page at:

<http://www.victorianlondon.org/entertainment/ginpalaces.htm>

Gin Palaces at Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gin_palace



THE WHITE PEOPLE

A horror story

by Arthur Machen

REMEMBERING THE HERITAGE

PROLOGUE

SORCERY AND SANCTITY,' SAID Ambrose, 'these are the only realities. Each is an ecstasy, a withdrawal from the common life.'

Cotgrave listened, interested. He had been brought by a friend to this mouldering house in a northern suburb, through an old garden to the room where Ambrose the recluse dozed and dreamed over his books.

'Yes,' he went on, 'magic is justified of her children. There are many, I think, who eat dry crusts and drink water, with a joy infinitely sharper than anything within the experience of the "practical" epicure.'

'You are speaking of the saints?'

'Yes, and of the sinners, too. I think you are falling into the very general error of confining the spiritual world to the supremely good; but the supremely wicked, necessarily, have their portion in it. The merely carnal, sensual man can no more be a great sinner than he can be a great saint. Most of us are just indifferent, mixed-up creatures; we muddle through the world without realizing the meaning and the inner sense of things, and, consequently, our wickedness and our goodness are alike second-rate, unimportant.'

'And you think the great sinner, then, will be an ascetic, as well as the great saint?'

'Great people of all kinds forsake the imperfect copies and go to the perfect originals. I have no doubt but that many of the very highest among the saints have never done a "good action" (using the words in their ordinary sense). And, on the other hand, there have been those who have sounded the very depths of sin, who all their lives have never done an "ill deed."'

He went out of the room for a moment, and Cotgrave, in high delight, turned to his friend and thanked him for the introduction.

'He's grand,' he said. 'I never saw that kind of lunatic before.'

Ambrose returned with more whisky and helped the two men in a liberal manner. He abused the teetotal sect with ferocity, as he handed the seltzer, and pouring out a glass of water for himself, was about to resume his monologue, when Cotgrave broke in—

'I can't stand it, you know,' he said, 'your paradoxes are too monstrous. A man may be a great sinner and yet never do anything sinful! Come!'

'You're quite wrong,' said Ambrose. 'I never make paradoxes; I wish I could. I merely said that a man may have an exquisite taste in Romanée Conti, and yet

never have even smelt four ale. That's all, and it's more like a truism than a paradox, isn't it? Your surprise at my remark is due to the fact that you haven't realized what sin is. Oh, yes, there is a sort of connexion between Sin with the capital letter, and actions which are commonly called sinful: with murder, theft, adultery, and so forth. Much the same connexion that there is between the A, B, C and fine literature. But I believe that the misconception—it is all but universal—arises in great measure from our looking at the matter through social spectacles. We think that a man who does evil to us and to his neighbours must be very evil. So he is, from a social standpoint; but can't you realize that Evil in its essence is a lonely thing, a passion of the solitary, individual soul? Really, the average murderer, quâ murderer, is not by any means a sinner in the true sense of the word. He is simply a wild beast that we have to get rid of to save our own necks from his knife. I should class him rather with tigers than with sinners.'

'It seems a little strange.'

'I think not. The murderer murders not from positive qualities, but from negative ones; he lacks something which non-murderers possess. Evil, of course, is wholly positive—only it is on the wrong side. You may believe me that sin in its proper sense is very rare; it is probable that there have been far fewer sinners than saints. Yes, your standpoint is all very well for practical, social purposes; we are naturally inclined to think that a person who is very disagreeable to us must be a very great sinner! It is very disagreeable to have one's pocket picked, and we pronounce the thief to be a very great sinner. In truth, he is merely an undeveloped man. He cannot be a saint, of course; but he may be, and often is, an infinitely better creature than thousands who have never broken a single commandment. He is a great nuisance to us, I admit, and we very properly lock him up if we catch him; but between his troublesome and unsocial action and evil—Oh, the connexion is of the weakest.'

It was getting very late. The man who had brought Cotgrave had probably heard all this before, since he assisted with a bland and judicious smile, but Cotgrave began to think that his 'lunatic' was turning into a sage.

'Do you know,' he said, 'you interest me immensely? You think, then, that we do not understand the real nature of evil?'

'No, I don't think we do. We over-estimate it and we under-estimate it. We take the very numerous infractions of our social "bye-laws"—the very necessary and very proper regulations which keep the human company together—and we get frightened at the prevalence of "sin" and "evil." But this is really nonsense. Take theft, for example. Have you any horror at the thought of Robin Hood, of the Highland caterans of the seventeenth century, of the moss-troopers, of the company promoters of our day?'

'Then, on the other hand, we underrate evil. We attach such an enormous importance to the "sin" of meddling with our pockets (and our wives) that we have quite forgotten the awfulness of real sin.'

'And what is sin?' said Cotgrave.

'I think I must reply to your question by another. What would your feelings be, seriously, if your cat or your dog began to talk to you, and to dispute with you in human accents? You would be overwhelmed with horror. I am sure of it. And if the roses in your garden sang a weird song, you would go mad. And suppose the stones in the road began to swell and grow before your eyes, and if the pebble that you noticed at night had shot out stony blossoms in the morning?'

'Well, these examples may give you some notion of what sin really is.'

'Look here,' said the third man, hitherto placid, 'you two seem pretty well wound up. But I'm going home. I've missed my tram, and I shall have to walk.'

Ambrose and Cotgrave seemed to settle down more profoundly when the other had gone out into the early misty morning and the pale light of the lamps.

'You astonish me,' said Cotgrave. 'I had never thought of that. If that is really so, one must turn everything upside down. Then the essence of sin really is——'

'In the taking of heaven by storm, it seems to me,' said Ambrose. 'It appears to me that it is simply an attempt to penetrate into another and higher sphere in a forbidden manner. You can understand why it is

so rare. There are few, indeed, who wish to penetrate into other spheres, higher or lower, in ways allowed or forbidden. Men, in the mass, are amply content with life as they find it. Therefore there are few saints, and sinners (in the proper sense) are fewer still, and men of genius, who partake sometimes of each character, are rare also. Yes; on the whole, it is, perhaps, harder to be a great sinner than a great saint.'

'There is something profoundly unnatural about sin? Is that what you mean?'

'Exactly. Holiness requires as great, or almost as great, an effort; but holiness works on lines that were natural once; it is an effort to recover the ecstasy that was before the Fall. But sin is an effort to gain the ecstasy and the knowledge that pertain alone to angels, and in making this effort man becomes a demon. I told you that the mere murderer is not therefore a sinner; that is true, but the sinner is sometimes a murderer. Gilles de Raiz is an instance. So you see that while the good and the evil are unnatural to man as he now is—to man the social, civilized being—evil is unnatural in a much deeper sense than good. The saint endeavours to recover a gift which he has lost; the sinner tries to obtain something which was never his. In brief, he repeats the Fall.'

'But are you a Catholic?' said Cotgrave.

'Yes; I am a member of the persecuted Anglican Church.'

'Then, how about those texts which seem to reckon as sin that which you would set down as a mere trivial dereliction?'

'Yes; but in one place the word "sorcerers" comes in the same sentence, doesn't it? That seems to me to give the key-note. Consider: can you imagine for a moment that a false statement which saves an innocent man's life is a sin? No; very good, then, it is not the mere liar who is excluded by those words; it is, above all, the "sorcerers" who use the material life, who use the failings incidental to material life as instruments to obtain their infinitely wicked ends. And let me tell you this: our higher senses are so blunted, we are so drenched

with materialism, that we should probably fail to recognize real wickedness if we encountered it.

‘But shouldn’t we experience a certain horror—a terror such as you hinted we would experience if a rose tree sang—in the mere presence of an evil man?’

‘We should if we were natural: children and women feel this horror you speak of, even animals experience it. But with most of us convention and civilization and education have blinded and deafened and obscured the natural reason. No, sometimes we may recognize evil by its hatred of the good—one doesn’t need much penetration to guess at the influence which dictated, quite unconsciously, the “Blackwood” review of Keats—but this is purely incidental; and, as a rule, I suspect that the Hierarchs of Tophet pass quite unnoticed, or, perhaps, in certain cases, as good but mistaken men.’

‘But you used the word “unconscious” just now, of Keats’ reviewers. Is wickedness ever unconscious?’

‘Always. It must be so. It is like holiness and genius in this as in other points; it is a certain rapture or ecstasy of the soul; a transcendent effort to surpass the ordinary bounds. So, surpassing these, it surpasses also the understanding, the faculty that takes note of that which comes before it. No, a man may be infinitely and horribly wicked and never suspect it. But I tell you, evil in this, its certain and true sense, is rare, and I think it is growing rarer.’

‘I am trying to get hold of it all,’ said Cotgrave. ‘From what you say, I gather that the true evil differs generically from that which we call evil?’

‘Quite so. There is, no doubt, an analogy between the two; a resemblance such as enables us to use, quite legitimately, such terms as the “foot of the mountain” and the “leg of the table.” And, sometimes, of course, the two speak, as it were, in the same language. The rough miner, or “puddler,” the untrained, undeveloped “tiger-man,” heated by a quart or two above his usual measure, comes home and kicks his irritating and injudicious wife to death. He is a murderer. And Gilles de Raiz was a murderer. But you see the gulf that separates the two? The “word,” if I may so speak, is accidentally the same in

each case, but the “meaning” is utterly different. It is flagrant “Hobson Jobson” to confuse the two, or rather, it is as if one supposed that Juggernaut and the Argonauts had something to do etymologically with one another. And no doubt the same weak likeness, or analogy, runs between all the “social” sins and the real spiritual sins, and in some cases, perhaps, the lesser may be “school-masters” to lead one on to the greater—from the shadow to the reality. If you are anything of a Theologian, you will see the importance of all this.’

‘I am sorry to say,’ remarked Cotgrave, ‘that I have devoted very little of my time to theology. Indeed, I have often wondered on what grounds theologians have claimed the title of Science of Sciences for their favourite study; since the “theological” books I have looked into have always seemed to me to be concerned with feeble and obvious pieties, or with the kings of Israel and Judah. I do not care to hear about those kings.’

Ambrose grinned.

‘We must try to avoid theological discussion,’ he said. ‘I perceive that you would be a bitter disputant. But perhaps the “dates of the kings” have as much to do with theology as the hobnails of the murderous puddler with evil.’

‘Then, to return to our main subject, you think that sin is an esoteric, occult thing?’

‘Yes. It is the infernal miracle as holiness is the supernal. Now and then it is raised to such a pitch that we entirely fail to suspect its existence; it is like the note of the great pedal pipes of the organ, which is so deep that we cannot hear it. In other cases it may lead to the lunatic asylum, or to still stranger issues. But you must never confuse it with mere social misdoing. Remember how the Apostle, speaking of the “other side,” distinguishes between “charitable” actions and charity. And as one may give all one’s goods to the poor, and yet lack charity; so, remember, one may avoid every crime and yet be a sinner.’

‘Your psychology is very strange to me,’ said Cotgrave, ‘but I confess I like it, and I suppose that one

might fairly deduce from your premisses the conclusion that the real sinner might very possibly strike the observer as a harmless personage enough?’

‘Certainly; because the true evil has nothing to do with social life or social laws, or if it has, only incidentally and accidentally. It is a lonely passion of the soul—or a passion of the lonely soul—whichever you like. If, by chance, we understand it, and grasp its full significance, then, indeed, it will fill us with horror and with awe. But this emotion is widely distinguished from the fear and the disgust with which we regard the ordinary criminal, since this latter is largely or entirely founded on the regard which we have for our own skins or purses. We hate a murderer, because we know that we should hate to be murdered, or to have any one that we like murdered. So, on the “other side,” we venerate the saints, but we don’t “like” them as we like our friends. Can you persuade yourself that you would have “enjoyed” St. Paul’s company? Do you think that you and I would have “got on” with Sir Galahad?’

‘So with the sinners, as with the saints. If you met a very evil man, and recognized his evil; he would, no doubt, fill you with horror and awe; but there is no reason why you should “dislike” him. On the contrary, it is quite possible that if you could succeed in putting the sin out of your mind you might find the sinner capital company, and in a little while you might have to reason yourself back into horror. Still, how awful it is. If the roses and the lilies suddenly sang on this coming morning; if the furniture began to move in procession, as in De Maupassant’s tale!’

‘I am glad you have come back to that comparison,’ said Cotgrave, ‘because I wanted to ask you what it is that corresponds in humanity to these imaginary feats of inanimate things. In a word—what is sin? You have given me, I know, an abstract definition, but I should like a concrete example.’

‘I told you it was very rare,’ said Ambrose, who appeared willing to avoid the giving of a direct answer. ‘The materialism of the age, which has done a good deal to suppress sanctity, has done perhaps

more to suppress evil. We find the earth so very comfortable that we have no inclination either for ascents or descents. It would seem as if the scholar who decided to “specialize” in Tophet, would be reduced to purely antiquarian researches. No palæontologist could show you a live pterodactyl.’

‘And yet you, I think, have “specialized,” and I believe that your researches have descended to our modern times.’

‘You are really interested, I see. Well, I confess, that I have dabbled a little, and if you like I can show you something that bears on the very curious subject we have been discussing.’

Ambrose took a candle and went away to a far, dim corner of the room. Cotgrave saw him open a venerable bureau that stood there, and from some secret recess he drew out a parcel, and came back to the window where they had been sitting.

Ambrose undid a wrapping of paper, and produced a green pocket-book.

‘You will take care of it?’ he said. ‘Don’t leave it lying about. It is one of the choicer pieces in my collection, and I should be very sorry if it were lost.’

He fondled the faded binding.

‘I knew the girl who wrote this,’ he said. ‘When you read it, you will see how it illustrates the talk we have had to-night. There is a sequel, too, but I won’t talk of that.’

‘There was an odd article in one of the reviews some months ago,’ he began again, with the air of a man who changes the subject. ‘It was written by a doctor—Dr. Coryn, I think, was the name. He says that a lady, watching her little girl playing at the drawing-room window, suddenly saw the heavy sash give way and fall on the child’s fingers. The lady fainted, I think, but at any rate the doctor was summoned, and when he had dressed the child’s wounded and maimed fingers he was summoned to the mother. She was groaning with pain, and it was found that three fingers of her hand, corresponding with those that had been injured on the child’s hand,

were swollen and inflamed, and later, in the doctor’s language, purulent sloughing set in.’

Ambrose still handled delicately the green volume.

‘Well, here it is,’ he said at last, parting with difficulty, it seemed, from his treasure.

‘You will bring it back as soon as you have read it,’ he said, as they went out into the hall, into the old garden, faint with the odour of white lilies.

There was a broad red band in the east as Cotgrave turned to go, and from the high ground where he stood he saw that awful spectacle of London in a dream.

THE GREEN BOOK

The morocco binding of the book was faded, and the colour had grown faint, but there were no stains nor bruises nor marks of usage. The book looked as if it had been bought ‘on a visit to London’ some seventy or eighty years ago, and had somehow been forgotten and suffered to lie away out of sight. There was an old, delicate, lingering odour about it, such an odour as sometimes haunts an ancient piece of furniture for a century or more. The end-papers, inside the binding, were oddly decorated with coloured patterns and faded gold. It looked small, but the paper was fine, and there were many leaves, closely covered with minute, painfully formed characters.

I found this book (the manuscript began) in a drawer in the old bureau that stands on the landing. It was a very rainy day and I could not go out, so in the afternoon I got a candle and rummaged in the bureau. Nearly all the drawers were full of old dresses, but one of the small ones looked empty, and I found this book hidden right at the back. I wanted a book like this, so I took it to write in. It is full of secrets. I have a great many other books of secrets I have written, hidden in a safe place, and I am going to write here many of the old secrets and some new ones; but there are some I

shall not put down at all. I must not write down the real names of the days and months which I found out a year ago, nor the way to make the Aklo letters, or the Chian language, or the great beautiful Circles, nor the Mao Games, nor the chief songs. I may write something about all these things but not the way to do them, for peculiar reasons. And I must not say who the Nymphs are, or the Dôls, or Jeelo, or what volas mean. All these are most secret secrets, and I am glad when I remember what they are, and how many wonderful languages I know, but there are some things that I call the secrets of the secrets of the secrets that I dare not think of unless I am quite alone, and then I shut my eyes, and put my hands over them and whisper the word, and the Alala comes. I only do this at night in my room or in certain woods that I know, but I must not describe them, as they are secret woods. Then there are the Ceremonies, which are all of them important, but some are more delightful than others—there are the White Ceremonies, and the Green Ceremonies, and the Scarlet Ceremonies. The Scarlet Ceremonies are the best, but there is only one place where they can be performed properly, though there is a very nice imitation which I have done in other places. Besides these, I have the dances, and the Comedy, and I have done the Comedy sometimes when the others were looking, and they didn’t understand anything about it. I was very little when I first knew about these things.

When I was very small, and mother was alive, I can remember remembering things before that, only it has all got confused. But I remember when I was five or six I heard them talking about me when they thought I was not noticing. They were saying how queer I was a year or two before, and how nurse had called my mother to come and listen to me talking all to myself, and I was saying words that nobody could understand. I was speaking the Xu language, but I only remember a very few of the words, as it was about the little white faces that used to look at me when I was lying in my cradle. They used to talk to me, and I learnt their language and talked to them in it about some great

white place where they lived, where the trees and the grass were all white, and there were white hills as high up as the moon, and a cold wind. I have often dreamed of it afterwards, but the faces went away when I was very little. But a wonderful thing happened when I was about five. My nurse was carrying me on her shoulder; there was a field of yellow corn, and we went through it, it was very hot. Then we came to a path through a wood, and a tall man came after us, and went with us till we came to a place where there was a deep pool, and it was very dark and shady. Nurse put me down on the soft moss under a tree, and she said: 'She can't get to the pond now.' So they left me there, and I sat quite still and watched, and out of the water and out of the wood came two wonderful white people, and they began to play and dance and sing. They were a kind of creamy white like the old ivory figure in the drawing-room; one was a beautiful lady with kind dark eyes, and a grave face, and long black hair, and she smiled such a strange sad smile at the other, who laughed and came to her. They played together, and danced round and round the pool, and they sang a song till I fell asleep. Nurse woke me up when she came back, and she was looking something like the lady had looked, so I told her all about it, and asked her why she looked like that. At first she cried, and then she looked very frightened, and turned quite pale. She put me down on the grass and stared at me, and I could see she was shaking all over. Then she said I had been dreaming, but I knew I hadn't. Then she made me promise not to say a word about it to anybody, and if I did I should be thrown into the black pit. I was not frightened at all, though nurse was, and I never forgot about it, because when I shut my eyes and it was quite quiet, and I was all alone, I could see them again, very faint and far away, but very splendid; and little bits of the song they sang came into my head, but I couldn't sing it.

I was thirteen, nearly fourteen, when I had a very singular adventure, so strange that the day on which it happened is always called the White Day. My mother

had been dead for more than a year, and in the morning I had lessons, but they let me go out for walks in the afternoon. And this afternoon I walked a new way, and a little brook led me into a new country, but I tore my frock getting through some of the difficult places, as the way was through many bushes, and beneath the low branches of trees, and up thorny thickets on the hills, and by dark woods full of creeping thorns. And it was a long, long way. It seemed as if I was going on for ever and ever, and I had to creep by a place like a tunnel where a brook must have been, but all the water had dried up, and the floor was rocky, and the bushes had grown overhead till they met, so that it was quite dark. And I went on and on through that dark place; it was a long, long way. And I came to a hill that I never saw before. I was in a dismal thicket full of black twisted boughs that tore me as I went through them, and I cried out because I was smarting all over, and then I found that I was climbing, and I went up and up a long way, till at last the thicket stopped and I came out crying just under the top of a big bare place, where there were ugly grey stones lying all about on the grass, and here and there a little twisted, stunted tree came out from under a stone, like a snake. And I went up, right to the top, a long way. I never saw such big ugly stones before; they came out of the earth some of them, and some looked as if they had been rolled to where they were, and they went on and on as far as I could see, a long, long way. I looked out from them and saw the country, but it was strange. It was winter time, and there were black terrible woods hanging from the hills all round; it was like seeing a large room hung with black curtains, and the shape of the trees seemed quite different from any I had ever seen before. I was afraid. Then beyond the woods there were other hills round in a great ring, but I had never seen any of them; it all looked black, and everything had a vooor over it. It was all so still and silent, and the sky was heavy and grey and sad, like a wicked vooorish dome in Deep Dendo. I went on into the dreadful rocks. There were hundreds and hundreds of them.

Some were like horrid-grinning men; I could see their faces as if they would jump at me out of the stone, and catch hold of me, and drag me with them back into the rock, so that I should always be there. And there were other rocks that were like animals, creeping, horrible animals, putting out their tongues, and others were like words that I could not say, and others like dead people lying on the grass. I went on among them, though they frightened me, and my heart was full of wicked songs that they put into it; and I wanted to make faces and twist myself about in the way they did, and I went on and on a long way till at last I liked the rocks, and they didn't frighten me any more. I sang the songs I thought of; songs full of words that must not be spoken or written down. Then I made faces like the faces on the rocks, and I twisted myself about like the twisted ones, and I lay down flat on the ground like the dead ones, and I went up to one that was grinning, and put my arms round him and hugged him. And so I went on and on through the rocks till I came to a round mound in the middle of them. It was higher than a mound, it was nearly as high as our house, and it was like a great basin turned upside down, all smooth and round and green, with one stone, like a post, sticking up at the top. I climbed up the sides, but they were so steep I had to stop or I should have rolled all the way down again, and I should have knocked against the stones at the bottom, and perhaps been killed. But I wanted to get up to the very top of the big round mound, so I lay down flat on my face, and took hold of the grass with my hands and drew myself up, bit by bit, till I was at the top. Then I sat down on the stone in the middle, and looked all round about. I felt I had come such a long, long way, just as if I were a hundred miles from home, or in some other country, or in one of the strange places I had read about in the 'Tales of the Genie' and the 'Arabian Nights,' or as if I had gone across the sea, far away, for years and I had found another world that nobody had ever seen or heard of before, or as if I had somehow flown through the sky and fallen on one of the stars I had read about where

everything is dead and cold and grey, and there is no air, and the wind doesn't blow. I sat on the stone and looked all round and down and round about me. It was just as if I was sitting on a tower in the middle of a great empty town, because I could see nothing all around but the grey rocks on the ground. I couldn't make out their shapes any more, but I could see them on and on for a long way, and I looked at them, and they seemed as if they had been arranged into patterns, and shapes, and figures. I knew they couldn't be, because I had seen a lot of them coming right out of the earth, joined to the deep rocks below, so I looked again, but still I saw nothing but circles, and small circles inside big ones, and pyramids, and domes, and spires, and they seemed all to go round and round the place where I was sitting, and the more I looked, the more I saw great big rings of rocks, getting bigger and bigger, and I stared so long that it felt as if they were all moving and turning, like a great wheel, and I was turning, too, in the middle. I got quite dizzy and queer in the head, and everything began to be hazy and not clear, and I saw little sparks of blue light, and the stones looked as if they were springing and dancing and twisting as they went round and round and round. I was frightened again, and I cried out loud, and jumped up from the stone I was sitting on, and fell down. When I got up I was so glad they all looked still, and I sat down on the top and slid down the mound, and went on again. I danced as I went in the peculiar way the rocks had danced when I got giddy, and I was so glad I could do it quite well, and I danced and danced along, and sang extraordinary songs that came into my head. At last I came to the edge of that great flat hill, and there were no more rocks, and the way went again through a dark thicket in a hollow. It was just as bad as the other one I went through climbing up, but I didn't mind this one, because I was so glad I had seen those singular dances and could imitate them. I went down, creeping through the bushes, and a tall nettle stung me on my leg, and made me burn, but I didn't mind it, and I tingled with the boughs and the thorns, but I only

laughed and sang. Then I got out of the thicket into a close valley, a little secret place like a dark passage that nobody ever knows of, because it was so narrow and deep and the woods were so thick round it. There is a steep bank with trees hanging over it, and there the ferns keep green all through the winter, when they are dead and brown upon the hill, and the ferns there have a sweet, rich smell like what oozes out of fir trees. There was a little stream of water running down this valley, so small that I could easily step across it. I drank the water with my hand, and it tasted like bright, yellow wine, and it sparkled and bubbled as it ran down over beautiful red and yellow and green stones, so that it seemed alive and all colours at once. I drank it, and I drank more with my hand, but I couldn't drink enough, so I lay down and bent my head and sucked the water up with my lips. It tasted much better, drinking it that way, and a ripple would come up to my mouth and give me a kiss, and I laughed, and drank again, and pretended there was a nymph, like the one in the old picture at home, who lived in the water and was kissing me. So I bent low down to the water, and put my lips softly to it, and whispered to the nymph that I would come again. I felt sure it could not be common water, I was so glad when I got up and went on; and I danced again and went up and up the valley, under hanging hills. And when I came to the top, the ground rose up in front of me, tall and steep as a wall, and there was nothing but the green wall and the sky. I thought of 'for ever and for ever, world without end, Amen'; and I thought I must have really found the end of the world, because it was like the end of everything, as if there could be nothing at all beyond, except the kingdom of Voor, where the light goes when it is put out, and the water goes when the sun takes it away. I began to think of all the long, long way I had journeyed, how I had found a brook and followed it, and followed it on, and gone through bushes and thorny thickets, and dark woods full of creeping thorns. Then I had crept up a tunnel under trees, and climbed a thicket, and seen all the grey rocks, and sat in the

middle of them when they turned round, and then I had gone on through the grey rocks and come down the hill through the stinging thicket and up the dark valley, all a long, long way. I wondered how I should get home again, if I could ever find the way, and if my home was there any more, or if it were turned and everybody in it into grey rocks, as in the 'Arabian Nights.' So I sat down on the grass and thought what I should do next. I was tired, and my feet were hot with walking, and as I looked about I saw there was a wonderful well just under the high, steep wall of grass. All the ground round it was covered with bright, green, dripping moss; there was every kind of moss there, moss like beautiful little ferns, and like palms and fir trees, and it was all green as jewellery, and drops of water hung on it like diamonds. And in the middle was the great well, deep and shining and beautiful, so clear that it looked as if I could touch the red sand at the bottom, but it was far below. I stood by it and looked in, as if I were looking in a glass. At the bottom of the well, in the middle of it, the red grains of sand were moving and stirring all the time, and I saw how the water bubbled up, but at the top it was quite smooth, and full and brimming. It was a great well, large like a bath, and with the shining, glittering green moss about it, it looked like a great white jewel, with green jewels all round. My feet were so hot and tired that I took off my boots and stockings, and let my feet down into the water, and the water was soft and cold, and when I got up I wasn't tired any more, and I felt I must go on, farther and farther, and see what was on the other side of the wall. I climbed up it very slowly, going sideways all the time, and when I got to the top and looked over, I was in the queerest country I had seen, stranger even than the hill of the grey rocks. It looked as if earth-children had been playing there with their spades, as it was all hills and hollows, and castles and walls made of earth and covered with grass. There were two mounds like big beehives, round and great and solemn, and then hollow basins, and then a steep mounting wall like the ones I saw once by the seaside where the big

guns and the soldiers were. I nearly fell into one of the round hollows, it went away from under my feet so suddenly, and I ran fast down the side and stood at the bottom and looked up. It was strange and solemn to look up. There was nothing but the grey, heavy sky and the sides of the hollow; everything else had gone away, and the hollow was the whole world, and I thought that at night it must be full of ghosts and moving shadows and pale things when the moon shone down to the bottom at the dead of the night, and the wind wailed up above. It was so strange and solemn and lonely, like a hollow temple of dead heathen gods. It reminded me of a tale my nurse had told me when I was quite little; it was the same nurse that took me into the wood where I saw the beautiful white people. And I remembered how nurse had told me the story one winter night, when the wind was beating the trees against the wall, and crying and moaning in the nursery chimney. She said there was, somewhere or other, a hollow pit, just like the one I was standing in, everybody was afraid to go into it or near it, it was such a bad place. But once upon a time there was a poor girl who said she would go into the hollow pit, and everybody tried to stop her, but she would go. And she went down into the pit and came back laughing, and said there was nothing there at all, except green grass and red stones, and white stones and yellow flowers. And soon after people saw she had most beautiful emerald earrings, and they asked how she got them, as she and her mother were quite poor. But she laughed, and said her earrings were not made of emeralds at all, but only of green grass. Then, one day, she wore on her breast the reddest ruby that any one had ever seen, and it was as big as a hen's egg, and glowed and sparkled like a hot burning coal of fire. And they asked how she got it, as she and her mother were quite poor. But she laughed, and said it was not a ruby at all, but only a red stone. Then one day she wore round her neck the loveliest necklace that any one had ever seen, much finer than the queen's finest, and it was made of great bright diamonds, hundreds of them, and they shone

like all the stars on a night in June. So they asked her how she got it, as she and her mother were quite poor. But she laughed, and said they were not diamonds at all, but only white stones. And one day she went to the Court, and she wore on her head a crown of pure angel-gold, so nurse said, and it shone like the sun, and it was much more splendid than the crown the king was wearing himself, and in her ears she wore the emeralds, and the big ruby was the brooch on her breast, and the great diamond necklace was sparkling on her neck. And the king and queen thought she was some great princess from a long way off, and got down from their thrones and went to meet her, but somebody told the king and queen who she was, and that she was quite poor. So the king asked why she wore a gold crown, and how she got it, as she and her mother were so poor. And she laughed, and said it wasn't a gold crown at all, but only some yellow flowers she had put in her hair. And the king thought it was very strange, and said she should stay at the Court, and they would see what would happen next. And she was so lovely that everybody said that her eyes were greener than the emeralds, that her lips were redder than the ruby, that her skin was whiter than the diamonds, and that her hair was brighter than the golden crown. So the king's son said he would marry her, and the king said he might. And the bishop married them, and there was a great supper, and afterwards the king's son went to his wife's room. But just when he had his hand on the door, he saw a tall, black man, with a dreadful face, standing in front of the door, and a voice said—

Venture not upon your life,
This is mine own wedded wife.

Then the king's son fell down on the ground in a fit. And they came and tried to get into the room, but they couldn't, and they hacked at the door with hatchets, but the wood had turned hard as iron, and at last everybody ran away, they were so frightened at the screaming and laughing and shrieking and crying that came out of the room. But next day they went in,

and found there was nothing in the room but thick black smoke, because the black man had come and taken her away. And on the bed there were two knots of faded grass and a red stone, and some white stones, and some faded yellow flowers. I remembered this tale of nurse's while I was standing at the bottom of the deep hollow; it was so strange and solitary there, and I felt afraid. I could not see any stones or flowers, but I was afraid of bringing them away without knowing, and I thought I would do a charm that came into my head to keep the black man away. So I stood right in the very middle of the hollow, and I made sure that I had none of those things on me, and then I walked round the place, and touched my eyes, and my lips, and my hair in a peculiar manner, and whispered some queer words that nurse taught me to keep bad things away. Then I felt safe and climbed up out of the hollow, and went on through all those mounds and hollows and walls, till I came to the end, which was high above all the rest, and I could see that all the different shapes of the earth were arranged in patterns, something like the grey rocks, only the pattern was different. It was getting late, and the air was indistinct, but it looked from where I was standing something like two great figures of people lying on the grass. And I went on, and at last I found a certain wood, which is too secret to be described, and nobody knows of the passage into it, which I found out in a very curious manner, by seeing some little animal run into the wood through it. So I went after the animal by a very narrow dark way, under thorns and bushes, and it was almost dark when I came to a kind of open place in the middle. And there I saw the most wonderful sight I have ever seen, but it was only for a minute, as I ran away directly, and crept out of the wood by the passage I had come by, and ran and ran as fast as ever I could, because I was afraid, what I had seen was so wonderful and so strange and beautiful. But I wanted to get home and think of it, and I did not know what might not happen if I stayed by the wood. I was hot all over and

trembling, and my heart was beating, and strange cries that I could not help came from me as I ran from the wood. I was glad that a great white moon came up from over a round hill and showed me the way, so I went back through the mounds and hollows and down the close valley, and up through the thicket over the place of the grey rocks, and so at last I got home again. My father was busy in his study, and the servants had not told about my not coming home, though they were frightened, and wondered what they ought to do, so I told them I had lost my way, but I did not let them find out the real way I had been. I went to bed and lay awake all through the night, thinking of what I had seen. When I came out of the narrow way, and it looked all shining, though the air was dark, it seemed so certain, and all the way home I was quite sure that I had seen it, and I wanted to be alone in my room, and be glad over it all to myself, and shut my eyes and pretend it was there, and do all the things I would have done if I had not been so afraid. But when I shut my eyes the sight would not come, and I began to think about my adventures all over again, and I remembered how dusky and queer it was at the end, and I was afraid it must be all a mistake, because it seemed impossible it could happen. It seemed like one of nurse's tales, which I didn't really believe in, though I was frightened at the bottom of the hollow; and the stories she told me when I was little came back into my head, and I wondered whether it was really there what I thought I had seen, or whether any of her tales could have happened a long time ago. It was so queer; I lay awake there in my room at the back of the house, and the moon was shining on the other side towards the river, so the bright light did not fall upon the wall. And the house was quite still. I had heard my father come upstairs, and just after the clock struck twelve, and after the house was still and empty, as if there was nobody alive in it. And though it was all dark and indistinct in my room, a pale glimmering kind of light shone in through the white blind, and once I got

up and looked out, and there was a great black shadow of the house covering the garden, looking like a prison where men are hanged; and then beyond it was all white; and the wood shone white with black gulfs between the trees. It was still and clear, and there were no clouds on the sky. I wanted to think of what I had seen but I couldn't, and I began to think of all the tales that nurse had told me so long ago that I thought I had forgotten, but they all came back, and mixed up with the thickets and the grey rocks and the hollows in the earth and the secret wood, till I hardly knew what was new and what was old, or whether it was not all dreaming. And then I remembered that hot summer afternoon, so long ago, when nurse left me by myself in the shade, and the white people came out of the water and out of the wood, and played, and danced, and sang, and I began to fancy that nurse told me about something like it before I saw them, only I couldn't recollect exactly what she told me. Then I wondered whether she had been the white lady, as I remembered she was just as white and beautiful, and had the same dark eyes and black hair; and sometimes she smiled and looked like the lady had looked, when she was telling me some of her stories, beginning with 'Once on a time,' or 'In the time of the fairies.' But I thought she couldn't be the lady, as she seemed to have gone a different way into the wood, and I didn't think the man who came after us could be the other, or I couldn't have seen that wonderful secret in the secret wood. I thought of the moon: but it was afterwards when I was in the middle of the wild land, where the earth was made into the shape of great figures, and it was all walls, and mysterious hollows, and smooth round mounds, that I saw the great white moon come up over a round hill. I was wondering about all these things, till at last I got quite frightened, because I was afraid something had happened to me, and I remembered nurse's tale of the poor girl who went into the hollow pit, and was carried away at last by the black man. I knew I had gone into a hollow pit too, and perhaps it was the

same, and I had done something dreadful. So I did the charm over again, and touched my eyes and my lips and my hair in a peculiar manner, and said the old words from the fairy language, so that I might be sure I had not been carried away. I tried again to see the secret wood, and to creep up the passage and see what I had seen there, but somehow I couldn't, and I kept on thinking of nurse's stories. There was one I remembered about a young man who once upon a time went hunting, and all the day he and his hounds hunted everywhere, and they crossed the rivers and went into all the woods, and went round the marshes, but they couldn't find anything at all, and they hunted all day till the sun sank down and began to set behind the mountain. And the young man was angry because he couldn't find anything, and he was going to turn back, when just as the sun touched the mountain, he saw come out of a brake in front of him a beautiful white stag. And he cheered to his hounds, but they whined and would not follow, and he cheered to his horse, but it shivered and stood stock still, and the young man jumped off the horse and left the hounds and began to follow the white stag all alone. And soon it was quite dark, and the sky was black, without a single star shining in it, and the stag went away into the darkness. And though the man had brought his gun with him he never shot at the stag, because he wanted to catch it, and he was afraid he would lose it in the night. But he never lost it once, though the sky was so black and the air was so dark, and the stag went on and on till the young man didn't know a bit where he was. And they went through enormous woods where the air was full of whispers and a pale, dead light came out from the rotten trunks that were lying on the ground, and just as the man thought he had lost the stag, he would see it all white and shining in front of him, and he would run fast to catch it, but the stag always ran faster, so he did not catch it. And they went through the enormous woods, and they swam across rivers, and they waded through black marshes where the ground bubbled, and the air was

full of will-o'-the-wisps, and the stag fled away down into rocky narrow valleys, where the air was like the smell of a vault, and the man went after it. And they went over the great mountains and the man heard the wind come down from the sky, and the stag went on and the man went after. At last the sun rose and the young man found he was in a country that he had never seen before; it was a beautiful valley with a bright stream running through it, and a great, big round hill in the middle. And the stag went down the valley, towards the hill, and it seemed to be getting tired and went slower and slower, and though the man was tired, too, he began to run faster, and he was sure he would catch the stag at last. But just as they got to the bottom of the hill, and the man stretched out his hand to catch the stag, it vanished into the earth, and the man began to cry; he was so sorry that he had lost it after all his long hunting. But as he was crying he saw there was a door in the hill, just in front of him, and he went in, and it was quite dark, but he went on, as he thought he would find the white stag. And all of a sudden it got light, and there was the sky, and the sun shining, and birds singing in the trees, and there was a beautiful fountain. And by the fountain a lovely lady was sitting, who was the queen of the fairies, and she told the man that she had changed herself into a stag to bring him there because she loved him so much. Then she brought out a great gold cup, covered with jewels, from her fairy palace, and she offered him wine in the cup to drink. And he drank, and the more he drank the more he longed to drink, because the wine was enchanted. So he kissed the lovely lady, and she became his wife, and he stayed all that day and all that night in the hill where she lived, and when he woke he found he was lying on the ground, close to where he had seen the stag first, and his horse was there and his hounds were there waiting, and he looked up, and the sun sank behind the mountain. And he went home and lived a long time, but he would never kiss any other lady because he had kissed the queen of the fairies, and he

would never drink common wine any more, because he had drunk enchanted wine. And sometimes nurse told me tales that she had heard from her great-grandmother, who was very old, and lived in a cottage on the mountain all alone, and most of these tales were about a hill where people used to meet at night long ago, and they used to play all sorts of strange games and do queer things that nurse told me of, but I couldn't understand, and now, she said, everybody but her great-grandmother had forgotten all about it, and nobody knew where the hill was, not even her great-grandmother. But she told me one very strange story about the hill, and I trembled when I remembered it. She said that people always went there in summer, when it was very hot, and they had to dance a good deal. It would be all dark at first, and there were trees there, which made it much darker, and people would come, one by one, from all directions, by a secret path which nobody else knew, and two persons would keep the gate, and every one as they came up had to give a very curious sign, which nurse showed me as well as she could, but she said she couldn't show me properly. And all kinds of people would come; there would be gentle folks and village folks, and some old people and boys and girls, and quite small children, who sat and watched. And it would all be dark as they came in, except in one corner where some one was burning something that smelt strong and sweet, and made them laugh, and there one would see a glaring of coals, and the smoke mounting up red. So they would all come in, and when the last had come there was no door any more, so that no one else could get in, even if they knew there was anything beyond. And once a gentleman who was a stranger and had ridden a long way, lost his path at night, and his horse took him into the very middle of the wild country, where everything was upside down, and there were dreadful marshes and great stones everywhere, and holes underfoot, and the trees looked like gibbet-posts, because they had great black arms that stretched out across the

way. And this strange gentleman was very frightened, and his horse began to shiver all over, and at last it stopped and wouldn't go any farther, and the gentleman got down and tried to lead the horse, but it wouldn't move, and it was all covered with a sweat, like death. So the gentleman went on all alone, going farther and farther into the wild country, till at last he came to a dark place, where he heard shouting and singing and crying, like nothing he had ever heard before. It all sounded quite close to him, but he couldn't get in, and so he began to call, and while he was calling, something came behind him, and in a minute his mouth and arms and legs were all bound up, and he fell into a swoon. And when he came to himself, he was lying by the roadside, just where he had first lost his way, under a blasted oak with a black trunk, and his horse was tied beside him. So he rode on to the town and told the people there what had happened, and some of them were amazed; but others knew. So when once everybody had come, there was no door at all for anybody else to pass in by. And when they were all inside, round in a ring, touching each other, some one began to sing in the darkness, and some one else would make a noise like thunder with a thing they had on purpose, and on still nights people would hear the thundering noise far, far away beyond the wild land, and some of them, who thought they knew what it was, used to make a sign on their breasts when they woke up in their beds at dead of night and heard that terrible deep noise, like thunder on the mountains. And the noise and the singing would go on and on for a long time, and the people who were in a ring swayed a little to and fro; and the song was in an old, old language that nobody knows now, and the tune was queer. Nurse said her great-grandmother had known some one who remembered a little of it, when she was quite a little girl, and nurse tried to sing some of it to me, and it was so strange a tune that I turned all cold and my flesh crept as if I had put my hand on something dead. Sometimes it was a man that sang and

sometimes it was a woman, and sometimes the one who sang it did it so well that two or three of the people who were there fell to the ground shrieking and tearing with their hands. The singing went on, and the people in the ring kept swaying to and fro for a long time, and at last the moon would rise over a place they called the Tole Deol, and came up and showed them swinging and swaying from side to side, with the sweet thick smoke curling up from the burning coals, and floating in circles all around them. Then they had their supper. A boy and a girl brought it to them; the boy carried a great cup of wine, and the girl carried a cake of bread, and they passed the bread and the wine round and round, but they tasted quite different from common bread and common wine, and changed everybody that tasted them. Then they all rose up and danced, and secret things were brought out of some hiding place, and they played extraordinary games, and danced round and round and round in the moonlight, and sometimes people would suddenly disappear and never be heard of afterwards, and nobody knew what had happened to them. And they drank more of that curious wine, and they made images and worshipped them, and nurse showed me how the images were made one day when we were out for a walk, and we passed by a place where there was a lot of wet clay. So nurse asked me if I would like to know what those things were like that they made on the hill, and I said yes. Then she asked me if I would promise never to tell a living soul a word about it, and if I did I was to be thrown into the black pit with the dead people, and I said I wouldn't tell anybody, and she said the same thing again and again, and I promised. So she took my wooden spade and dug a big lump of clay and put it in my tin bucket, and told me to say if any one met us that I was going to make pies when I went home. Then we went on a little way till we came to a little brake growing right down into the road, and nurse stopped, and looked up the road and down it, and then peeped through the hedge into the field on the other side,

and then she said, 'Quick!' and we ran into the brake, and crept in and out among the bushes till we had gone a good way from the road. Then we sat down under a bush, and I wanted so much to know what nurse was going to make with the clay, but before she would begin she made me promise again not to say a word about it, and she went again and peeped through the bushes on every side, though the lane was so small and deep that hardly anybody ever went there. So we sat down, and nurse took the clay out of the bucket, and began to knead it with her hands, and do queer things with it, and turn it about. And she hid it under a big dock-leaf for a minute or two and then she brought it out again, and then she stood up and sat down, and walked round the clay in a peculiar manner, and all the time she was softly singing a sort of rhyme, and her face got very red. Then she sat down again, and took the clay in her hands and began to shape it into a doll, but not like the dolls I have at home, and she made the queerest doll I had ever seen, all out of the wet clay, and hid it under a bush to get dry and hard, and all the time she was making it she was singing these rhymes to herself, and her face got redder and redder. So we left the doll there, hidden away in the bushes where nobody would ever find it. And a few days later we went the same walk, and when we came to that narrow, dark part of the lane where the brake runs down to the bank, nurse made me promise all over again, and she looked about, just as she had done before, and we crept into the bushes till we got to the green place where the little clay man was hidden. I remember it all so well, though I was only eight, and it is eight years ago now as I am writing it down, but the sky was a deep violet blue, and in the middle of the brake where we were sitting there was a great elder tree covered with blossoms, and on the other side there was a clump of meadow-sweet, and when I think of that day the smell of the meadowsweet and elder blossom seems to fill the room, and if I shut my eyes I can see the glaring blue sky, with little clouds very white floating across it, and

nurse who went away long ago sitting opposite me and looking like the beautiful white lady in the wood. So we sat down and nurse took out the clay doll from the secret place where she had hidden it, and she said we must 'pay our respects,' and she would show me what to do, and I must watch her all the time. So she did all sorts of queer things with the little clay man, and I noticed she was all streaming with perspiration, though we had walked so slowly, and then she told me to 'pay my respects,' and I did everything she did because I liked her, and it was such an odd game. And she said that if one loved very much, the clay man was very good, if one did certain things with it, and if one hated very much, it was just as good, only one had to do different things, and we played with it a long time, and pretended all sorts of things. Nurse said her great-grandmother had told her all about these images, but what we did was no harm at all, only a game. But she told me a story about these images that frightened me very much, and that was what I remembered that night when I was lying awake in my room in the pale, empty darkness, thinking of what I had seen and the secret wood. Nurse said there was once a young lady of the high gentry, who lived in a great castle. And she was so beautiful that all the gentlemen wanted to marry her, because she was the loveliest lady that anybody had ever seen, and she was kind to everybody, and everybody thought she was very good. But though she was polite to all the gentlemen who wished to marry her, she put them off, and said she couldn't make up her mind, and she wasn't sure she wanted to marry anybody at all. And her father, who was a very great lord, was angry, though he was so fond of her, and he asked her why she wouldn't choose a bachelor out of all the handsome young men who came to the castle. But she only said she didn't love any of them very much, and she must wait, and if they pestered her, she said she would go and be a nun in a nunnery. So all the gentlemen said they would go away and wait for a year and a day, and when a year and a day

were gone, they would come back again and ask her to say which one she would marry. So the day was appointed and they all went away; and the lady had promised that in a year and a day it would be her wedding day with one of them. But the truth was, that she was the queen of the people who danced on the hill on summer nights, and on the proper nights she would lock the door of her room, and she and her maid would steal out of the castle by a secret passage that only they knew of, and go away up to the hill in the wild land. And she knew more of the secret things than any one else, and more than any one knew before or after, because she would not tell anybody the most secret secrets. She knew how to do all the awful things, how to destroy young men, and how to put a curse on people, and other things that I could not understand. And her real name was the Lady Avelin, but the dancing people called her Cassap, which meant somebody very wise, in the old language. And she was whiter than any of them and taller, and her eyes shone in the dark like burning rubies; and she could sing songs that none of the others could sing, and when she sang they all fell down on their faces and worshipped her. And she could do what they called shib-show, which was a very wonderful enchantment. She would tell the great lord, her father, that she wanted to go into the woods to gather flowers, so he let her go, and she and her maid went into the woods where nobody came, and the maid would keep watch. Then the lady would lie down under the trees and begin to sing a particular song, and she stretched out her arms, and from every part of the wood great serpents would come, hissing and gliding in and out among the trees, and shooting out their forked tongues as they crawled up to the lady. And they all came to her, and twisted round her, round her body, and her arms, and her neck, till she was covered with writhing serpents, and there was only her head to be seen. And she whispered to them, and she sang to them, and they writhed round and round, faster and faster, till she

told them to go. And they all went away directly, back to their holes, and on the lady's breast there would be a most curious, beautiful stone, shaped something like an egg, and coloured dark blue and yellow, and red, and green, marked like a serpent's scales. It was called a glame stone, and with it one could do all sorts of wonderful things, and nurse said her great-grandmother had seen a glame stone with her own eyes, and it was for all the world shiny and scaly like a snake. And the lady could do a lot of other things as well, but she was quite fixed that she would not be married. And there were a great many gentlemen who wanted to marry her, but there were five of them who were chief, and their names were Sir Simon, Sir John, Sir Oliver, Sir Richard, and Sir Rowland. All the others believed she spoke the truth, and that she would choose one of them to be her man when a year and a day was done; it was only Sir Simon, who was very crafty, who thought she was deceiving them all, and he vowed he would watch and try if he could find out anything. And though he was very wise he was very young, and he had a smooth, soft face like a girl's, and he pretended, as the rest did, that he would not come to the castle for a year and a day, and he said he was going away beyond the sea to foreign parts. But he really only went a very little way, and came back dressed like a servant girl, and so he got a place in the castle to wash the dishes. And he waited and watched, and he listened and said nothing, and he hid in dark places, and woke up at night and looked out, and he heard things and he saw things that he thought were very strange. And he was so sly that he told the girl that waited on the lady that he was really a young man, and that he had dressed up as a girl because he loved her so very much and wanted to be in the same house with her, and the girl was so pleased that she told him many things, and he was more than ever certain that the Lady Avelin was deceiving him and the others. And he was so clever, and told the servant so many lies, that one night he managed to hide in the Lady Avelin's room behind

the curtains. And he stayed quite still and never moved, and at last the lady came. And she bent down under the bed, and raised up a stone, and there was a hollow place underneath, and out of it she took a waxen image, just like the clay one that I and nurse had made in the brake. And all the time her eyes were burning like rubies. And she took the little wax doll up in her arms and held it to her breast, and she whispered and she murmured, and she took it up and she laid it down again, and she held it high, and she held it low, and she laid it down again. And she said, 'Happy is he that begat the bishop, that ordered the clerk, that married the man, that had the wife, that fashioned the hive, that harboured the bee, that gathered the wax that my own true love was made of.' And she brought out of an aumbry a great golden bowl, and she brought out of a closet a great jar of wine, and she poured some of the wine into the bowl, and she laid her mannikin very gently in the wine, and washed it in the wine all over. Then she went to a cupboard and took a small round cake and laid it on the image's mouth, and then she bore it softly and covered it up. And Sir Simon, who was watching all the time, though he was terribly frightened, saw the lady bend down and stretch out her arms and whisper and sing, and then Sir Simon saw beside her a handsome young man, who kissed her on the lips. And they drank wine out of the golden bowl together, and they ate the cake together. But when the sun rose there was only the little wax doll, and the lady hid it again under the bed in the hollow place. So Sir Simon knew quite well what the lady was, and he waited and he watched, till the time she had said was nearly over, and in a week the year and a day would be done. And one night, when he was watching behind the curtains in her room, he saw her making more wax dolls. And she made five, and hid them away. And the next night she took one out, and held it up, and filled the golden bowl with water, and took the doll by the neck and held it under the water. Then she said—

Sir Dickon, Sir Dickon, your day is done,

You shall be drowned in the water wan.

And the next day news came to the castle that Sir Richard had been drowned at the ford. And at night she took another doll and tied a violet cord round its neck and hung it up on a nail. Then she said—

Sir Rowland, your life has ended its span,
High on a tree I see you hang.

And the next day news came to the castle that Sir Rowland had been hanged by robbers in the wood. And at night she took another doll, and drove her bodkin right into its heart. Then she said—

Sir Noll, Sir Noll, so cease your life,
Your heart piercèd with the knife.

And the next day news came to the castle that Sir Oliver had fought in a tavern, and a stranger had stabbed him to the heart. And at night she took another doll, and held it to a fire of charcoal till it was melted. Then she said—

Sir John, return, and turn to clay,
In fire of fever you waste away.

And the next day news came to the castle that Sir John had died in a burning fever. So then Sir Simon went out of the castle and mounted his horse and rode away to the bishop and told him everything. And the bishop sent his men, and they took the Lady Avelin, and everything she had done was found out. So on the day after the year and a day, when she was to have been married, they carried her through the town in her smock, and they tied her to a great stake in the market-place, and burned her alive before the bishop with her wax image hung round her neck. And people said the wax man screamed in the burning of the flames. And I thought of this story again and again as I was lying awake in my bed, and I seemed to see the Lady Avelin in the market-place, with the yellow flames eating up her beautiful white body. And I thought of it so much that I seemed to get into the story myself, and I fancied I was the lady, and that they were coming to take me to be burnt with fire, with all the people in the town looking at me. And I wondered whether she cared, after all the strange things she had done, and

whether it hurt very much to be burned at the stake. I tried again and again to forget nurse's stories, and to remember the secret I had seen that afternoon, and what was in the secret wood, but I could only see the dark and a glimmering in the dark, and then it went away, and I only saw myself running, and then a great moon came up white over a dark round hill. Then all the old stories came back again, and the queer rhymes that nurse used to sing to me; and there was one beginning 'Halsy cumsy Helen musty,' that she used to sing very softly when she wanted me to go to sleep. And I began to sing it to myself inside of my head, and I went to sleep.

The next morning I was very tired and sleepy, and could hardly do my lessons, and I was very glad when they were over and I had had my dinner, as I wanted to go out and be alone. It was a warm day, and I went to a nice turfy hill by the river, and sat down on my mother's old shawl that I had brought with me on purpose. The sky was grey, like the day before, but there was a kind of white gleam behind it, and from where I was sitting I could look down on the town, and it was all still and quiet and white, like a picture. I remembered that it was on that hill that nurse taught me to play an old game called 'Troy Town,' in which one had to dance, and wind in and out on a pattern in the grass, and then when one had danced and turned long enough the other person asks you questions, and you can't help answering whether you want to or not, and whatever you are told to do you feel you have to do it. Nurse said there used to be a lot of games like that that some people knew of, and there was one by which people could be turned into anything you liked, and an old man her great-grandmother had seen had known a girl who had been turned into a large snake. And there was another very ancient game of dancing and winding and turning, by which you could take a person out of himself and hide him away as long as you liked, and his body went walking about quite empty, without any sense in it. But I came to that hill because I wanted to think of what had happened the day before, and of the

secret of the wood. From the place where I was sitting I could see beyond the town, into the opening I had found, where a little brook had led me into an unknown country. And I pretended I was following the brook over again, and I went all the way in my mind, and at last I found the wood, and crept into it under the bushes, and then in the dusk I saw something that made me feel as if I were filled with fire, as if I wanted to dance and sing and fly up into the air, because I was changed and wonderful. But what I saw was not changed at all, and had not grown old, and I wondered again and again how such things could happen, and whether nurse's stories were really true, because in the daytime in the open air everything seemed quite different from what it was at night, when I was frightened, and thought I was to be burned alive. I once told my father one of her little tales, which was about a ghost, and asked him if it was true, and he told me it was not true at all, and that only common, ignorant people believed in such rubbish. He was very angry with nurse for telling me the story, and scolded her, and after that I promised her I would never whisper a word of what she told me, and if I did I should be bitten by the great black snake that lived in the pool in the wood. And all alone on the hill I wondered what was true. I had seen something very amazing and very lovely, and I knew a story, and if I had really seen it, and not made it up out of the dark, and the black bough, and the bright shining that was mounting up to the sky from over the great round hill, but had really seen it in truth, then there were all kinds of wonderful and lovely and terrible things to think of, so I longed and trembled, and I burned and got cold. And I looked down on the town, so quiet and still, like a little white picture, and I thought over and over if it could be true. I was a long time before I could make up my mind to anything; there was such a strange fluttering at my heart that seemed to whisper to me all the time that I had not made it up out of my head, and yet it seemed quite impossible, and I knew my father and everybody would say it was dreadful rubbish. I

never dreamed of telling him or anybody else a word about it, because I knew it would be of no use, and I should only get laughed at or scolded, so for a long time I was very quiet, and went about thinking and wondering; and at night I used to dream of amazing things, and sometimes I woke up in the early morning and held out my arms with a cry. And I was frightened, too, because there were dangers, and some awful thing would happen to me, unless I took great care, if the story were true. These old tales were always in my head, night and morning, and I went over them and told them to myself over and over again, and went for walks in the places where nurse had told them to me; and when I sat in the nursery by the fire in the evenings I used to fancy nurse was sitting in the other chair, and telling me some wonderful story in a low voice, for fear anybody should be listening. But she used to like best to tell me about things when we were right out in the country, far from the house, because she said she was telling me such secrets, and walls have ears. And if it was something more than ever secret, we had to hide in brakes or woods; and I used to think it was such fun creeping along a hedge, and going very softly, and then we would get behind the bushes or run into the wood all of a sudden, when we were sure that none was watching us; so we knew that we had our secrets quite all to ourselves, and nobody else at all knew anything about them. Now and then, when we had hidden ourselves as I have described, she used to show me all sorts of odd things. One day, I remember, we were in a hazel brake, overlooking the brook, and we were so snug and warm, as though it was April; the sun was quite hot, and the leaves were just coming out. Nurse said she would show me something funny that would make me laugh, and then she showed me, as she said, how one could turn a whole house upside down, without anybody being able to find out, and the pots and pans would jump about, and the china would be broken, and the chairs would tumble over of themselves. I tried it one day in the kitchen, and I found I could do it quite well, and a whole row of plates on the

dresser fell off it, and cook's little work-table tilted up and turned right over 'before her eyes,' as she said, but she was so frightened and turned so white that I didn't do it again, as I liked her. And afterwards, in the hazel copse, when she had shown me how to make things tumble about, she showed me how to make rapping noises, and I learnt how to do that, too. Then she taught me rhymes to say on certain occasions, and peculiar marks to make on other occasions, and other things that her great-grandmother had taught her when she was a little girl herself. And these were all the things I was thinking about in those days after the strange walk when I thought I had seen a great secret, and I wished nurse were there for me to ask her about it, but she had gone away more than two years before, and nobody seemed to know what had become of her, or where she had gone. But I shall always remember those days if I live to be quite old, because all the time I felt so strange, wondering and doubting, and feeling quite sure at one time, and making up my mind, and then I would feel quite sure that such things couldn't happen really, and it began all over again. But I took great care not to do certain things that might be very dangerous. So I waited and wondered for a long time, and though I was not sure at all, I never dared to try to find out. But one day I became sure that all that nurse said was quite true, and I was all alone when I found it out. I trembled all over with joy and terror, and as fast as I could I ran into one of the old brakes where we used to go—it was the one by the lane, where nurse made the little clay man—and I ran into it, and I crept into it; and when I came to the place where the elder was, I covered up my face with my hands and lay down flat on the grass, and I stayed there for two hours without moving, whispering to myself delicious, terrible things, and saying some words over and over again. It was all true and wonderful and splendid, and when I remembered the story I knew and thought of what I had really seen, I got hot and I got cold, and the air seemed full of scent, and flowers, and singing. And first I wanted to make a little clay man, like the one

nurse had made so long ago, and I had to invent plans and stratagems, and to look about, and to think of things beforehand, because nobody must dream of anything that I was doing or going to do, and I was too old to carry clay about in a tin bucket. At last I thought of a plan, and I brought the wet clay to the brake, and did everything that nurse had done, only I made a much finer image than the one she had made; and when it was finished I did everything that I could imagine and much more than she did, because it was the likeness of something far better. And a few days later, when I had done my lessons early, I went for the second time by the way of the little brook that had led me into a strange country. And I followed the brook, and went through the bushes, and beneath the low branches of trees, and up thorny thickets on the hill, and by dark woods full of creeping thorns, a long, long way. Then I crept through the dark tunnel where the brook had been and the ground was stony, till at last I came to the thicket that climbed up the hill, and though the leaves were coming out upon the trees, everything looked almost as black as it was on the first day that I went there. And the thicket was just the same, and I went up slowly till I came out on the big bare hill, and began to walk among the wonderful rocks. I saw the terrible voo again on everything, for though the sky was brighter, the ring of wild hills all around was still dark, and the hanging woods looked dark and dreadful, and the strange rocks were as grey as ever; and when I looked down on them from the great mound, sitting on the stone, I saw all their amazing circles and rounds within rounds, and I had to sit quite still and watch them as they began to turn about me, and each stone danced in its place, and they seemed to go round and round in a great whirl, as if one were in the middle of all the stars and heard them rushing through the air. So I went down among the rocks to dance with them and to sing extraordinary songs; and I went down through the other thicket, and drank from the bright stream in the close and secret valley, putting my lips down to the bubbling water; and

then I went on till I came to the deep, brimming well among the glittering moss, and I sat down. I looked before me into the secret darkness of the valley, and behind me was the great high wall of grass, and all around me there were the hanging woods that made the valley such a secret place. I knew there was nobody here at all besides myself, and that no one could see me. So I took off my boots and stockings, and let my feet down into the water, saying the words that I knew. And it was not cold at all, as I expected, but warm and very pleasant, and when my feet were in it I felt as if they were in silk, or as if the nymph were kissing them. So when I had done, I said the other words and made the signs, and then I dried my feet with a towel I had brought on purpose, and put on my stockings and boots. Then I climbed up the steep wall, and went into the place where there are the hollows, and the two beautiful mounds, and the round ridges of land, and all the strange shapes. I did not go down into the hollow this time, but I turned at the end, and made out the figures quite plainly, as it was lighter, and I had remembered the story I had quite forgotten before, and in the story the two figures are called Adam and Eve, and only those who know the story understand what they mean. So I went on and on till I came to the secret wood which must not be described, and I crept into it by the way I had found. And when I had gone about halfway I stopped, and turned round, and got ready, and I bound the handkerchief tightly round my eyes, and made quite sure that I could not see at all, not a twig, nor the end of a leaf, nor the light of the sky, as it was an old red silk handkerchief with large yellow spots, that went round twice and covered my eyes, so that I could see nothing. Then I began to go on, step by step, very slowly. My heart beat faster and faster, and something rose in my throat that choked me and made me want to cry out, but I shut my lips, and went on. Boughs caught in my hair as I went, and great thorns tore me; but I went on to the end of the path. Then I stopped, and held out my arms and bowed, and I went round the first time, feeling with my hands, and there

was nothing. I went round the second time, feeling with my hands, and there was nothing. Then I went round the third time, feeling with my hands, and the story was all true, and I wished that the years were gone by, and that I had not so long a time to wait before I was happy for ever and ever.

Nurse must have been a prophet like those we read of in the Bible. Everything that she said began to come true, and since then other things that she told me of have happened. That was how I came to know that her stories were true and that I had not made up the secret myself out of my own head. But there was another thing that happened that day. I went a second time to the secret place. It was at the deep brimming well, and when I was standing on the moss I bent over and looked in, and then I knew who the white lady was that I had seen come out of the water in the wood long ago when I was quite little. And I trembled all over, because that told me other things. Then I remembered how sometime after I had seen the white people in the wood, nurse asked me more about them, and I told her all over again, and she listened, and said nothing for a long, long time, and at last she said, 'You will see her again.' So I understood what had happened and what was to happen. And I understood about the nymphs; how I might meet them in all kinds of places, and they would always help me, and I must always look for them, and find them in all sorts of strange shapes and appearances. And without the nymphs I could never have found the secret, and without them none of the other things could happen. Nurse had told me all about them long ago, but she called them by another name, and I did not know what she meant, or what her tales of them were about, only that they were very queer. And there were two kinds, the bright and the dark, and both were very lovely and very wonderful, and some people saw only one kind, and some only the other, but some saw them both. But usually the dark appeared first, and the bright ones came afterwards, and there were extraordinary tales about them. It was a day or two after I had come home from the secret

place that I first really knew the nymphs. Nurse had shown me how to call them, and I had tried, but I did not know what she meant, and so I thought it was all nonsense. But I made up my mind I would try again, so I went to the wood where the pool was, where I saw the white people, and I tried again. The dark nymph, Alanna, came, and she turned the pool of water into a pool of fire....

EPILOGUE

'That's a very queer story,' said Cotgrave, handing back the green book to the recluse, Ambrose. 'I see the drift of a good deal, but there are many things that I do not grasp at all. On the last page, for example, what does she mean by "nymphs"?'

'Well, I think there are references throughout the manuscript to certain "processes" which have been handed down by tradition from age to age. Some of these processes are just beginning to come within the purview of science, which has arrived at them—or rather at the steps which lead to them—by quite different paths. I have interpreted the reference to "nymphs" as a reference to one of these processes.'

'And you believe that there are such things?'

'Oh, I think so. Yes, I believe I could give you convincing evidence on that point. I am afraid you have neglected the study of alchemy? It is a pity, for the symbolism, at all events, is very beautiful, and moreover if you were acquainted with certain books on the subject, I could recall to your mind phrases which might explain a good deal in the manuscript that you have been reading.'

'Yes; but I want to know whether you seriously think that there is any foundation of fact beneath these fancies. Is it not all a department of poetry; a curious dream with which man has indulged himself?'

'I can only say that it is no doubt better for the great mass of people to dismiss it all as a dream. But if you

ask my veritable belief—that goes quite the other way. No; I should not say belief, but rather knowledge. I may tell you that I have known cases in which men have stumbled quite by accident on certain of these “processes,” and have been astonished by wholly unexpected results. In the cases I am thinking of there could have been no possibility of “suggestion” or sub-conscious action of any kind. One might as well suppose a schoolboy “suggesting” the existence of Æschylus to himself, while he plods mechanically through the declensions.

‘But you have noticed the obscurity,’ Ambrose went on, ‘and in this particular case it must have been dictated by instinct, since the writer never thought that her manuscripts would fall into other hands. But the practice is universal, and for most excellent reasons. Powerful and sovereign medicines, which are, of necessity, virulent poisons also, are kept in a locked cabinet. The child may find the key by chance, and drink herself dead; but in most cases the search is educational, and the phials contain precious elixirs for him who has patiently fashioned the key for himself.’

‘You do not care to go into details?’

‘No, frankly, I do not. No, you must remain unconvinced. But you saw how the manuscript illustrates the talk we had last week?’

‘Is this girl still alive?’

‘No. I was one of those who found her. I knew the father well; he was a lawyer, and had always left her very much to herself. He thought of nothing but deeds and leases, and the news came to him as an awful surprise. She was missing one morning; I suppose it was about a year after she had written what you have read. The servants were called, and they told things, and put the only natural interpretation on them—a perfectly erroneous one.

‘They discovered that green book somewhere in her room, and I found her in the place that she described with so much dread, lying on the ground before the image.’

‘It was an image?’

‘Yes, it was hidden by the thorns and the thick undergrowth that had surrounded it. It was a wild, lonely country; but you know what it was like by her description, though of course you will understand that the colours have been heightened. A child’s imagination always makes the heights higher and the depths deeper than they really are; and she had, unfortunately for herself, something more than imagination. One might say, perhaps, that the picture in her mind which she succeeded in a measure in putting into words, was the scene as it would have appeared to an imaginative artist. But it is a strange, desolate land.’

‘And she was dead?’

‘Yes. She had poisoned herself—in time. No; there was not a word to be said against her in the ordinary sense. You may recollect a story I told you the other night about a lady who saw her child’s fingers crushed by a window?’

‘And what was this statue?’

‘Well, it was of Roman workmanship, of a stone that with the centuries had not blackened, but had become white and luminous. The thicket had grown up about it and concealed it, and in the Middle Ages the followers of a very old tradition had known how to use it for their own purposes. In fact it had been incorporated into the monstrous mythology of the Sabbath. You will have noted that those to whom a sight of that shining whiteness had been vouchsafed by chance, or rather, perhaps, by apparent chance, were required to blindfold themselves on their second approach. That is very significant.’

‘And is it there still?’

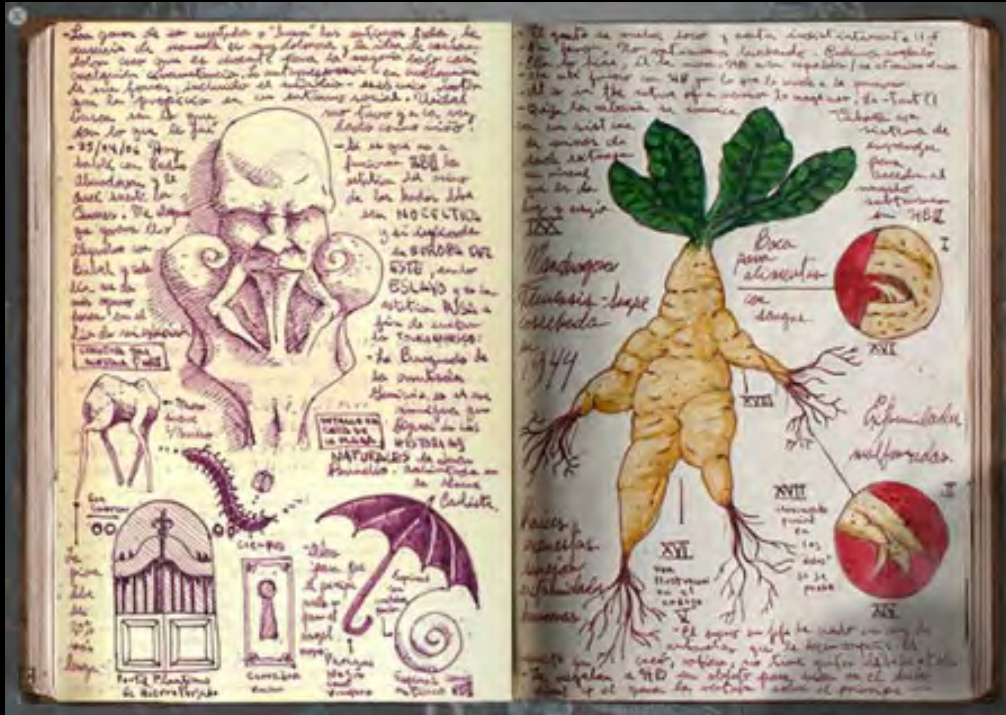
‘I sent for tools, and we hammered it into dust and fragments.’

‘The persistence of tradition never surprises me,’ Ambrose went on after a pause. ‘I could name many an English parish where such traditions as that girl had listened to in her childhood are still existent in occult but unabated vigour. No, for me, it is the “story” not the “sequel,” which is strange and awful, for I have always believed that wonder is of the soul.’



protodimension magazine

ARTHUR MACHEN



Arthur Machen was a Welsh author and mystic of the 1890s and early 20th century. He is best known for his influential supernatural, fantasy, and horror fiction. His novella “The Great God Pan” (1890; 1894) has garnered a reputation as a classic of horror (Stephen King has called it “Maybe the best [horror story] in the English language”). He is also well known for his leading role in creating the legend of the Angels of Mons.

–Wikipedia

Born	Arthur Llewellyn Jones 3 March 1863 Caerleon, Monmouthshire, Wales
Died	15 December 1947 (aged 84) Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, England
Occupation	Short story writer, novelist, journalist, actor
Genres	Horror, fantasy, supernatural fiction, weird fiction