

# THE UNSPEAKABLE OATH™



ISSUE 24 • JULY 2014

A DIGEST OF ARCANE LORE FOR CTHULHU MYTHOS ROLEPLAYING GAMES



# DELTA GREEN

## TALES FROM FAILED ANATOMIES

STORIES  
OF THE  
CTHULHU  
MYTHOS

BY DENNIS  
DETWILLER

INTRODUCTION BY  
JOHN SCOTT TYNES

FOREWORD AND AFTERWORD  
BY ROBIN D. LAWS

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# THE UNSPEAKABLE OATH™

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## CONTENTS

### COLUMNS

THE DREAD PAGE OF AZATHOTH	2
THE EYE OF LIGHT & DARKNESS	8
DIRECTIVES FROM A-CELL	57

### MYSTERIOUS MANUSCRIPTS

FRAGMENTS OF THE SIMEON BIBLE	60
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### TALES OF TERROR

THE BLACK-EYED CHILDREN	4
HIDDEN PASSAGE	6
SMUGGLING	56

### SCENARIOS

THE MARDLER HOUSE	10
AGENT PURPLE'S GREEN BOX BLUES	32
HOLDING CELL	34
SECRET SHOPPER	36

### FEATURES

THE CULT OF A	40
THE CHOSEN OF EIHORT	53

### MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

NOTES, TXTs, AND A TWO-INCH ARTICLE	72
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### OUR SPONSORS. RAVENING FOR DELIGHT

WHERE THE DEEP ONES ARE	4
SWORD & MYTHOS	19
H.P. LOVECRAFT FILM FESTIVAL	21
ARKHAM GAZETTE	23
GOLDEN GOBLIN PRESS	25
CALL OF CTHULHU	39
CTHULHU MYTHOS ENCYCLOPEDIA	46
HORRORS OF WAR	52
DELTA GREEN: STRANGE AUTHORITIES	64

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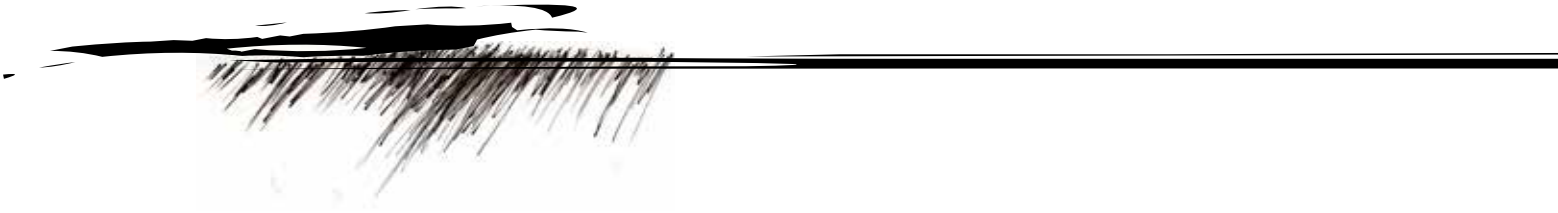
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# THE DREAD PAGE OF AZATHOTH

BY SHANE IVEY



“When age fell upon the world, and wonder went out of the minds of men; when grey cities reared to smoky skies tall towers grim and ugly, in whose shadow none might dream of the sun or of Spring’s flowering meads; when learning stripped Earth of her mantle of beauty, and poets sang no more save of twisted phantoms seen with bleared and inward-looking eyes; when these things had come to pass, and childish hopes had gone away for ever, there was a man who traveled out of life on a quest into the spaces whither the world’s dreams had fled.”

—H.P. Lovecraft, “Azathoth (a fragment)”

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**Fear is the object of every Cthulhu Mythos** roleplaying game. Fear is what moves us, whether we're trying to evoke a chill of horror in players or release it in a shotgun-shooting blaze of catharsis. But there are many kinds of fear. The Cthulhu Mythos thrives not just on the shock of one human death but on the crawling dread of a world where humanity itself is meaningless. There is often a vast gulf between gory horror and cosmic terror.

Lovecraft knew that gulf better than anyone. His life's work was reaching for the cosmic, yet he never completed his deepest exploration of it. He wrote one page of "Azathoth" and abandoned it. He drafted *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* by hand but never meant to publish it. *Dream-Quest* encapsulated themes that he evoked again and again, but he worried that the breadth of its fantasy was overwrought—that "the very plethora of weird imagery may have destroyed the power of any one image to produce the desired impression of strangeness."

Many readers agree. For all its attention to Nyarlathotep and Azathoth, *Dream-Quest* is an outlier in the Cthulhu Mythos, especially in games. It's like a separate body of work and myth, ignored most of the time. Lovecraft's Dreamlands and his harder Cthulhu Mythos stories seem hopelessly disentangled.

But the Dreamlands distill and concentrate something that's essential to Lovecraftian terror. Randolph Carter's great quest to regain a dream that he lost, to return to a hopelessly beautiful place

that might be forever beyond his reach, awakens him to astounding revelations. Carter is a jaded old veteran of dreaming but the reader can't help but start at the awful and magical things he encounters.

The quickest way to mine the Dreamlands for wonder is to actually play them in the game. But that can be tricky. There's a common sense that the Dreamlands are gentler than the ordinary worlds of Cthulhu Mythos games. Just see how Randolph Carter defied Nyarlathotep and escaped the slaughter of the moon-beasts. The Dreamlands tempt gamers to expect the tropes of Lovecraft but the mode of heroic fantasy—swords shining, spells crackling, courage rewarded with victory over tentacular monstrosities. Be wary that dashing those expectations doesn't cheat the players of the game they want.

Dennis Detwiller and I faced this challenge developing *The Sense of the Sleight-of-Hand Man*, his long Dreamlands campaign for *Call of Cthulhu*. In my home game, players who prefer high action felt frustrated with the sensation that in some parts they were being driven along from horror to horror, victims and spectators. But that's a deliberate feature of some parts of the campaign—the way dreams sometimes carry you along unwilling. Lovecraft's vision lingers in the imagination not for its heroism but for its moods: the melancholy of beauty that will soon be lost, the drifting timelessness of lassitude, the creeping fear of secrets and hateful schemes, the weirdness of trusting and befriending evil and

hungry things. That can make for a very different kind of game. The special challenge for the Keeper is evoking those moods so effectively that they seduce players more jaded than Randolph Carter.

Even outside the Dreamlands themselves, every game can take lessons from Randolph Carter's dreams. A cosmic fantasy like *Call of Cthulhu* or *Trail of Cthulhu* must evoke a yearning for other worlds—a yearning that can be fulfilled only in the realization of what those other worlds truly hold. That yearning is not just the province of idealism, and certainly not just the province of Lovecraft. Robert Chambers' fragmentary mentions of Carcosa ("Strange is the night where black stars rise") leave you breathless with fascination even knowing the Yellow Sign signifies decay and death. The urge to be touched by a larger meaning, even if an alien one, rises from the terrible meaninglessness of mundanity. That fascination can drive monstrous evil, dangerous curiosity, and tragic self-destruction.

Lure players with curiosities of beauty and awe beyond the reach of everyday life. Awaken their sensitivity to unknown possibilities. Then let the most dizzying and terrible revelations unfold alongside the worst gruesomeness. The bridge between deadly horror and cosmic terror is wonder.

Randolph Carter found his golden city, forever part of him and forever lost. What will your players find when the white ship comes to bear them away in the night? ☞





*They Came from the South Seas with Captain Marsh...*

# WHERE THE DEEP ONES ARE



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# TALE OF TERROR: THE BLACK-EYED CHILDREN

BY SCOTT CARTER

There was a man in our town  
And he was wondrous wise.  
He jumped into a bramble bush  
And scratched out both his eyes.

—“The Bramble Bush”

Not all horrors are ancient. Some coalesce newborn from the stress and fears of modern life, or else take on new forms heretofore unknown. Reports of the Black-Eyed Children raced across the Internet starting in February 2013 beginning with an MSN Entertainment segment called “Weekly Strange.” Prior to that one can find a smattering of articles in 2011 and 2012 from *The Examiner* and *Mysterious Universe*. Both claimed the phenomenon had been reported for over a decade.

Strange, unknown children are seen playing in deserted or abandoned places, often singing an old nursery rhyme such as “The Bramble Bush.” Occasionally one appears outside a door, seemingly from nowhere. These children, singly or in pairs, approach an adult who is home alone. The children do everything to convince the adult they need to enter the house—to use the phone, to escape some unspecified danger, to use the bathroom. The Black-Eyed Children are said to be preternaturally confident and eloquent but seemingly shy. This perception of shyness may come from their efforts to hide their eyes at all costs.

Investigators encountering these children are immediately disquieted, filled with a sense of unspecific dread. Eventually the child’s eyes are seen to be large black pools lacking any trace of white or color. At this point the children become angry and insist that they be allowed in. Witnesses report feeling irrationally compelled to do so but being able to fight it off. No reports have surfaced of anyone who has actually let one of these black eyed children in, which suggests that doing so may have fatal consequences.

## POSSIBILITY 1: THE SPAWNING CHAOS

The BECs are spawned when Nyarlathotep’s attention is drawn to a particular area, unintended byproducts of his working in the world. They form from his energies and the anxieties of the community. Investigators searching for manifestations of the weird could be drawn to the area by numerous reports of BECs showing up on the usual websites; or one of them may have a disturbing evening vis-

it. The BEC’s targets are random, having no correlation to any cult or cultist other than proximity, both geographically and temporally, to their meetings. However, all it takes is a nervous cultist to unintentionally clue the Investigators in to the bigger picture.

## POSSIBILITY 2: REVENGE

BECs, while odd, bear some resemblance to summoned beings in occult lore. Perhaps they are servants of a witch summoned to terrorize victims who have threatened the witch or obscurely insulted her decades ago. A disappearance or two should spur the Investigators to action.

## POSSIBILITY 3: A GREAT WORK

The BECs are the ghosts of ritually murdered children, their spirits bound up in dark magics and newly awakened in the world. Each appearance correlates to the site of one of these killings, a series of which took place across the country about a decade ago. The killings were orchestrated by a well-organized group who used the energy gained from them in a great project that is on the verge of completion. The ghosts are looking for shelter lest they be consumed completely. It is up to the Investigators to determine whether that comes to pass. ☸



HANSEN

## THE HIDDEN PASSAGE

BY BEN RIGGS

**While moving boxes in the basement, an Investigator feels a draft. She follows it to a gap in the masonry of a wall. With a little light fingering a whole section of the wall pops open, revealing a secret passage!**

### POSSIBILITY 1: PANDORA'S BOX

**The passage leads down to a granite door large enough to accommodate an elephant. There are no apparent locks on the door but it is sealed with wax and rusty spikes. Mystic sigils have been imprinted on the wax and carved in the door. An Occult roll identifies the sigils as wards created by Renaissance wizard John Dee. A faint shuffling is audible beyond the door, and whispered words. Inside, a 600-year-old witch, Georgette Saint-Loupe, waits.**

She came to the New World and joined a colony, bringing death. Through a foul ritual Saint-Loupe granted herself immortality, but not youth. To not look like an antediluvian crone, she must feed on the living. Once a day, a successful touch attack robs her target of a point of CON and a point of APP and restores Saint-Loupe to youth and vigor. She was discovered when one of her servant girls, a 13-year-old suddenly withered and shuffling with age, escaped the dungeon where she was imprisoned.

The wise men of the colony applied countless methods of execution to rid themselves of Saint-Loupe. All failed—eventually her body reknit itself, even dismembered. Georgette

left her heart buried under the nave of a church in Champagne, France, and is immortal as long as it is safe.

At last the wise men entombed Saint-Loupe in a granite crypt, seal its door with unholy signs, and bury it. Perhaps a diary from one of those colonial patriarchs might be found at a local historical society.

If the door is opened, an impossibly aged woman in clothing patchy with rot begs for aid. She claims that a wizard condemned her to eternal life without eternal youth. She begs the Investigators to help her find a cure. As they chase a phantom solution she finds opportunities to feed, while her victims sleep if possible, until she grows younger, stronger, and more magically potent.

### POSSIBILITY 2: THE STASH

**The passage leads to a small door which is locked from the inside. Once they break it down, the Investigators discover a small earthen room containing a large quantity of illegal drugs or liquors. There is no other exit.**

A recently transformed ghoul was in mortal life a gang member. Now he is continuing his career. The ghoul recently robbed a rival of his stash and murdered a few of his underlings. Elder ghouls forbade any participation in his past life, so he hid his stash in the secret passage, tunneling in and out and locking the door from inside. The contraband is sought after by the ghoul, the ghoul's human gangland rivals, and corrupt local

police. ("Nothin' sees the street 'less the sheriff gets a taste.")

Whether the Investigators sell the stuff, transport it, or destroy it, word leaks out. The ghoul, the gang, and the cops come looking for what they see as theirs. Tough talk, intimidation, street violence, and arrests may ensue. The Investigators may very well end up saved from in-jail assassination by gang members only because they are broken out by the ghoul, who demands the return of his contraband.

A successful Cthulhu Mythos roll, or questioning other ghouls, reveals that selling drugs goes against numerous traditions of ghoul culture, which begs the question of what the local ghoul elders would think. But to find the ghouls, the Investigators must go underground.

Investigators who seal up the stash and ignore it receive a nocturnal visit from the ghoul, who smells them on his goods and is convinced that they must have sold him out to his rival.

### POSSIBILITY 3: PSYCHONAUT

**The door leads to what is apparently the bedroom of the Investigator who owns the house. She sees herself sleeping in the bed (SAN 0/1D4). The duplicate can be awakened and questioned. She is unperturbed to be talking to herself. The previous owner of the house was a wizard, but instead of lusting for power or summoning a terrible monster or similar apocalyptic nonsense, he used magic to better understand himself. After a reading Freud, he**



created a portal in the basement to lead to his own mind. After he died, the magic adapted. The portal now leads to the mind of whoever owns the house.

The Investigator can wander the “house” that is her mind. It is populated by alternate identities informed the wizard’s Freudian theories. The version of her in

bed is her ego. Her id is a pair of anarchic teenagers tearing around the property vandalizing and fornicating. Her superego is her own mother, who is constantly trying to stop the teenagers and clean up after them. Anyone the Investigator has ever met, historical figures she has studied, and even novels she has read can be entered

by simply finding the right room in the house, which seems to have infinite space within its walls. So, of course, can any Cthulhu Mythos tomes the Investigator has read. And heavens forfend any enemies learn that her mind can be accessed by a door. What would happen if her ego were killed or the house burned down? ☹



HANSEN

# THE EYE OF LIGHT & DARKNESS

BY VARIOUS CULTISTS

Reviewed items are rated on a scale of one to ten phobias:

- 1-3: Not worth purchasing.
- 4-6: An average item with notable flaws.
- 7-10: Degrees of excellence.



## TRUE DETECTIVE, SEASON 1

DISTRIBUTED BY HBO  
CREATED BY NIC PIZZOLATTO  
REVIEWED BY SHANE IVEY

**True Detective is such a surprise** as a piece of Lovecraftian storytelling that it's hard to know how to review it. To write a useful review you must assume that readers haven't seen it. Yet how could they have missed it?

As soon as Episode Two aired on January 19, 2014, the Internet lit up with the blown minds of fans of the Cthulhu Mythos and Robert Chambers.

Saying "Lovecraftian storytelling" might be misleading. The supernatural is understated in *True Detective*—or is it there at all? The story is not about a lone, sensitive academic uncovering the cosmic awfulness of the universe—although one of the two protagonists is as sensitive an academic as you can be while carrying a pistol for a living. And he is mired in cosmic dread straight out of Thomas Ligotti.

*True Detective* is about two detectives, their obsessive pursuit of a murderer or cabal of murderers, and the many ways in which people (mainly men) who have power prey on people (mainly women and children) who lack it. And yet there's a backdrop of ruminations on meaninglessness and existential terror so stark that the early revelation of Carcosa and the King in Yellow seems not just appropriate but inevitable.

*True Detective* opens in 1995, when Louisiana detectives Martin Hart (Woody Harrelson) and Rustin Cohle (Matthew McConaughey) are called to a bizarre crime scene. A young woman has been propped dead in a kneeling posture of worship against a large solitary tree, nude but for a crown of antlers and marked with a strange spiraling tattoo. A cornfield has been burnt all around. The ritualistic scene convinces studious Cohle that this is the work of a murderer who has killed before and will kill again.

His partner, senior detective Hart, is skeptical.

Soon we see the detectives years later, in 2012, when they haven't spoken after some confrontation drove them apart in 2002. They're being interviewed by two other detectives who want to hear the story. *True Detective* is a story about stories, about the ways we try to control others by controlling the ways that they understand us, and about the terrible power of the stories we tell ourselves.

Marty, never a deep thinker, clings to the stability and authority of family while ignoring the responsibility. Rust, profoundly traumatized, rejects the solace of the supernatural so steadfastly that he clearly yearns for it. The investigation takes them across 17 years of heroism, viciousness, lies and cover-ups. It shapes their relationships with each other and with the people who love them. It reveals bitter roots of cruelty running through the South Louisiana plains. And it's never clear whether solving the case can truly solve anything.

With such a close focus on two male protagonists over eight episodes, there's not much room for female characters to come into their own. Women sharply impact the lives of Rust and Marty mostly as loved ones they might let down and victims they want to avenge. That limits the scope of the story. Yet that very limitation echoes and reinforces the limitations of the men who are telling it. Unlike Rust and Marty, *True Detective* knows exactly what it's about. Ten phobias.



# MASKS OF NYARLATHOTEP

PUBLISHED BY CHAOSIUM, INC.

WRITTEN BY LARRY DiTILLIO & LYNN WILLIS

REVIEWED BY MATTHEW POOK

**Originally published in 1984, *Masks of Nyarlathotep*** is widely regarded as the best campaign for *Call of Cthulhu* and possibly the best campaign ever written for the gaming hobby. Its “fourth edition” features glossier stock and a wholly new introduction from the original author, Larry DiTillio.

The campaign opens in 1925 in classic style. The Investigators’ good friend Jackson Elias requests their aid in probing into the fate of the Carlyle Expedition, a high-profile archaeological mission to Egypt led by the socialite Roger Carlyle, whose members were murdered in Kenya in 1920. Arriving at his New York hotel, the investigators discover both Elias’ gruesomely mutilated corpse and his murderers in his room, in what is arguably *Call of Cthulhu*’s most iconic scene. Once the fiends have either been dealt with or chased off, the Investigators face the first handful of innumerable clues cleverly presented as physical hand-outs. Who killed Jackson Elias and what has it to do with the lost Carlyle Expedition?

Following the clues takes the Investigators to the highs and lows of New York society before finally exposing them to vile practices imported from abroad. It sets the pattern for the campaign—an investigation into a cult devoted to the Crawling Chaos with numerous clues, red-herring scenarios, and side quests that explore both Nyarlathotep’s reach and his opposition. The red herrings and side quests add color to the campaign, contrasting with the climatic face-offs that come at the end of each chapter. None of the scenarios ever give the players an easy ride, and this is a tough, challenging campaign from start to finish.

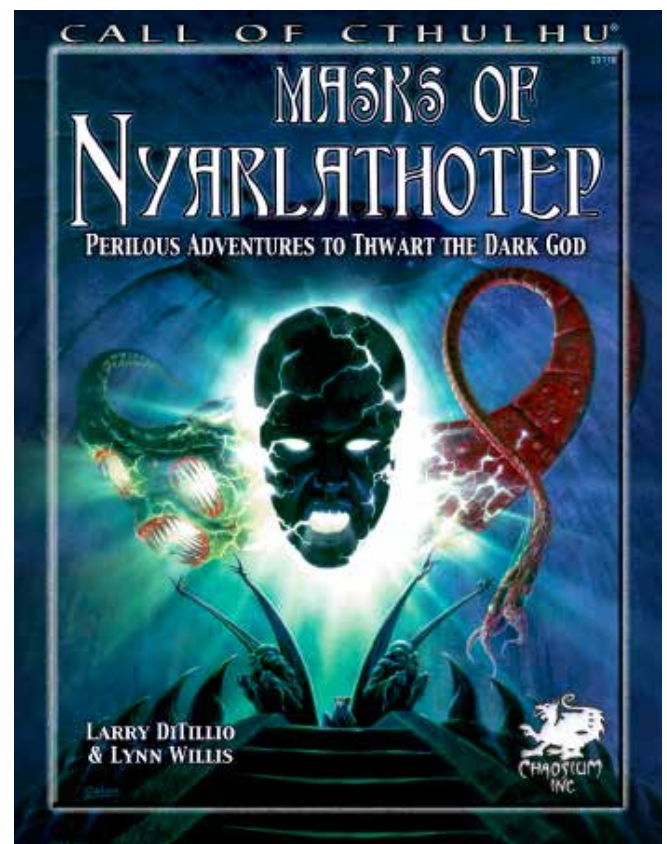
Right from the start, players and Keeper are presented with a wealth of information and possible directions. While the book helps the Keeper in controlling this, the players can be left to sink or swim. Since they are free to follow the clues where they may, without guidance they could send their Investigators off to the last stages unprepared. The campaign does have a natural path. There’s too little advice for the Keeper to fully realise and enjoy the scope and grandeur of the campaign and Nyarlathotep’s intentions.

This is the first of the campaign’s several weaknesses. Another is establishing the Investigators’ connection to Elias, their initial contact and motivator, always a problem in *Call of Cthulhu*. Then there is campaign’s infamous lethality and the danger of a total party kill, requiring a supply of replacement Investigators, each ready to play and with reason to join the investigation. Two key NPCs towards the campaign’s finale should be handled more effectively, such that a full Hong Kong

chapter would have been useful. The cults often seem static, rarely reacting to the Investigators’ actions. And the campaign has a somewhat pulpy nature in its rollicking action scenes and, though it never quite tips over into cliché or racism, in its frequent presentation of the cultists as scurvy natives.

Physically, *Masks of Nyarlathotep* is cleanly presented. While Larry DiTillio’s introduction is an excellent addition, it would have been nice to have had both it and the rest of the book edited from earlier printings. The maps and artwork are well done.

Few campaigns for any RPG possess the scope or stature of *Masks of Nyarlathotep*. It manages to be densely plotted but still freeform in structure, the only time constraint being the cultists’ final plans. *Masks of Nyarlathotep* truly is an epic affair, its grandeur having been a template for others to aspire to for over the last 25 years. Few have come close. *Masks of Nyarlathotep* was an instant classic in 1984 and still deserves ten phobias today.



< CONTINUED ON PAGE 65 >



HANSEN

# THE MARDLER HOUSE

A MODERN-DAY *CALL OF CTHULHU* SCENARIO BY GREG STOLZE

**What do they say about the old Mardler place?** What *don't* they say? The rumors are wild. It was built on a cursed tomb, possibly by Satanists. It was originally home to Bruce Mardler, who mysteriously vanished along with his wife and son. It was attached to a parish where the priest habitually sexually assaulted his housekeeper until she killed him. The church was deconsecrated to make room for a grade school, which was burned down by the Mardler House's next owner, a deranged child-hating old man who'd seen too much in the war. When nothing is confirmed, how much is true?

Well, 'true' is a word that gets tricky around the Mardler house. There's one truth inside and one without, and crossing them up is a perilous endeavor. Leaving the house, scarred by its disenjambment from normal causality, is a good way to wind up with a reputation as a hysteric, a liar, or a delusional paranoid. It's a good way to *become* hysterical, false, or insane. But departing is still safer than entering a place where the regular rules don't apply.



## WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

**The Mardler House makes things weird.** If you walk in and walk out and never return, its effect on you is negligible. If you live there—lots of physical proximity and emotional investment and time spent vulnerably dreaming asleep—it affects you deeply.

While you're in the house, it subtly encourages imagination, particularly of a selfish or perverse sort. It pressures you to be your worst self: Your vices seem a little more attractive, and your good impulses a little less compelling. (There's no game mechanic for this and, indeed, you don't need to mention it to Investigators at all. Having it an unspoken effect on NPCs is both simpler and more effective.)

People who lived in the house but died outside it come back. The house creates a 'Resident'—possibly a duplicate of the dead person, possibly a sort of villainous ghost from an alternate reality. Whatever a Resident is, it's like the living homeowner with those negative traits cranked all the way up. It's not just the person's personality that changes, though: History rewrites itself so that the Resident was always a bad person doing bad things. Inside the house, those changes are fact. Outside the house? No sign of them.

The Residents can never leave, and are absolutely convinced that the only way they can be free is by killing someone else inside the house, freeing that victim in the process. None of them have yet succeeded, so it remains to be seen whether their instincts are correct. It's equally possible that the person slain would take the murdering Resident's place. Or be erased from reality, like LeRoy Mardler. Or that the Resident might be 'reset' with no knowledge of the crime and remain, primed and programmed to lure and destroy someone else.

## THE MARDLER HISTORY

**In the late 1930s Bruce Mardler** put his money into artificial rubber research, and World War II made him rich enough that he could design and build his dream house. He named it "Cockaigne." While Mardler made weak protestations that it was a reference to a French utopia, it was well known that he'd been fond of cocaine back when it was legal. Back when he was an architecture student drawing up plans for his dream house. Back when he was a well-dressed dandy, sporting a jonquil in the lapel of his checkered suit. Before he got a curious, persistent cough that recurred in strange symmetry with the phases of the moon. Before his wife's humiliating public breakdown (screaming "No mask? No mask!" at a performance of *Aida*, honestly!). Before his son's arrests for petty theft and "acts of public deviance." But Mardler never lost his money and could afford alienists and lawyers (and discrete drug deals). If his family got reclusive, well... is that really so surprising?

Between bouts of his mystery ailment, he designed an arching, asymmetrical home with a curious three-fold gable roof, inspired in equal parts by Frank Lloyd Wright and the Art Deco movement. Inlaid throughout with bold geometrical designs in ocher brick, blonde pine and chartreuse-painted plaster, it's aesthetically stunning, almost overwhelming in its indifferent grandeur.

Bruce married a perky beauty who masked a vindictive intelligence by feigning decorative vapidness—character traits now recalled only in moldering journals in area attics. Her name was Martine, and she and Bruce had some pretty wild parties. Cockaigne was the site of dozens of disastrously poor decisions, wine-fueled brawls, tearful confessions and stuttering humiliations. The rich and weird and cruel thrilled to parties there, at first. As the years went on and the hallucinations,

sexual indiscretions and nervous collapses piled up, they began to attend with a mixture of dread and fascination. No one wanted to be the protagonist of the next story set at the Mardler's house, but no one wanted to be left out, either.

Eventually Martine and Bruce had a son (LeRoy) and the chefs and mediums and jazz musicians stopped coming by for flowing champagne and *coq au vin*, while the Mardlers were seen with decreasing frequency.

Cockaigne went from a place of strange beauty to one of twilight peril. Bruce really did force his son LeRoy to kill his wife. (When she understood, clearly, that Bruce would murder LeRoy unless he complied, Martine begged him to do it. Cruel and bitchy, but she loved her son.) Bruce really did slay the child after that, but the boy's body was never found.

With his death, LeRoy Mardler ceased to exist in the history of the world outside.

As far as external sources can tell, Bruce and Martine died without heir in the Mardler home in 1951. LeRoy's only mark on this world is in the ephemeral form of rumor and memory and gossip. There's no *proof* of a 'LeRoy Mardler.' But those friend-of-a-friend stories always get his name right, and always agree that he was disemboweled from navel to crotch.

As far as verifiable history *outside the house* is concerned, Father Tyrone Bradie lived there from 1952 through 1959, when he died of coronary arrest—while on vacation in the Florida Everglades, it should be noted, not in the house itself. His former housekeeper, Madeline Pfeiffer, never made any claims about sexual impropriety. Father Bradie's parish was consolidated with another after a lightning-started fire left the church building unsafe for occupancy. Nothing sinister to be found, despite all rumors.

Inside the house it's another matter. The dining room (page 17) and attic (page 20) both contain

tangible evidence of the priest's life as a torture-obsessed, violent madman. In the attic, it's a diary and a blood-stained riding crop. In the dining room, a bloody knife is hidden beneath a loose stone by the fireplace.

The pattern has repeated with every owner. On the outside, a typical life. Within the Mardler house, an overheated gothic horror show.

From 1960 to 1977, Donald Holmes and his family lived there. Donald worked at a local insurance firm while his wife Debbie kept accounts for a printing shop. Their kids got into some scrapes in school but were fine until they went off to college. Donald died of cancer in 1984 after selling the house and retiring, and Debbie held on until 1990. After leaving the house, everyone in the Holmes family forgot the nightmare of shadowy figures, nocturnal assaults both physical and emotional, and a desperate horror of what they knew as home. This happened every time they left for

17 years. Their memories torqued over to the normal timeline with its quotidian struggles and mild family drama. Even when they entered the house, they remained ignorant of its horrors... until the Black Priest grabbed one of them and it all came flooding back. Memory betrayed them all, countless times, until the vicissitudes of 'everyday reality' led them to sell the house and move out. All the wickedness they'd endured faded like a dream until Debbie and Donald passed away. In their final, horrorstruck moments they remembered everything.

The Holmes children, Alexander and Mary-Kate, remember slight creepy events in their family home...though 'remember' is perhaps the wrong word. They have a sense that eerie and uncomfortable things happened, and that they'd be able to recall them with just a little more effort. But they always find excellent reasons to forget the whole thing.

The tenants from 1979 to 1993 were a nice couple that suffered a string of miscarriages before divorcing. In the house, they delivered each of those three children, killing and eating them before going insane. Their names were Bill and Nanette Smith.

In 1993 a rich old woman named Edith Helena Crandell moved in, and even people who only knew her outside the Mardler house think she was pretty nasty. A handsome young man lived with her, reportedly her nephew but rumored (of course) to be a gigolo lover. Unlike the Holmes family, Edith had the strength of will to search for answers to the weirdness of her palatial home. She found them in studies of anthropology and occultism, researches that eventually led her to stab that 'nephew,' Oscar Vorhees, in the middle of a the lunch rush at their favorite restaurant. She's locked up now, getting the help she needs.

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## WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

Cockaigne is a bulge of another, different reality sticking into our world like a loop of intestine through a hernia. If your Investigators aren't constituted to chase after gore-tales, there are other ways to get the interested. Maybe they inherited it. Maybe they've been asked to investigate it. Or maybe it's their job. However it happens, it works best if they

move in and set up residence. The sense that there is a separate reality inside, divorced and differentiated from the general world, is the core reveal. That isn't easy to perceive if you're only dipping your toes into the house. If they insist on staying in hotel rooms and commuting to the horror, keep things slow and confusing. Let's take a closer look at each option.

## LEGACY

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You could do a lot worse for a long campaign than having brothers and sisters as Investigators. Bonds of blood are tight even when they're not really friendly. You don't leave your sister behind, not if you ever want another peaceful Thanksgiving dinner.

If you take this route, Mardler House is a home base full of mysteries and secrets. Investigators can scrape away at it while other, external adventures entangle them with unrelated mysteries. You can model this like a season of a TV adventure show, with the house as the Big Bad they can't escape. It draws them together. It doesn't seem that bad at

first—you need to play up the otherworldly beauty, and possibly have it be helpful on occasion—but it is, clearly, a link to a bigger picture of supernatural reality.

Have them learn a few things about the house, then have a "monster of the week" one-off outside. Then they learn something else offputting about the house. Contradict that, then put in another unrelated adventure. Then have the house get rapidly nastier until it drags them to their doom or until they burn it to the ground with all its mysteries.



## OoH! A REAL HAUNTED HOUSE!

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Is your group an established cabal of obsessed occult meddlers? That's exactly who the widow Crandell's superstitious *guardian ad litem* is looking for.

Since professional searchers are more likely to focus on Cockaigne until they get to the bottom of it, it's better to start with threats and injury and only have it show a more beautiful, seductive or clement side later. Maybe even let them think they can influence its 'moods' before they realize it's a completely separate (though related) schizo-reality.

It's also important to keep the effects of the house deniable outside it. If they bring in someone from the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, Mardler House might be 100% normal for the entire visit. Or it might totally convince the skeptic...until she steps outside and promptly forgets her harrowing experiences. Make the characters question their own sanity. They remember old Mardler's ghost breaking their arm with a sledgehammer, but today the injury is just an ordinary bruise, like you'd get clumsily banging into the corner of your desk.

## DOING THE JOB

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For a *Delta Green* game, the house could get fenced up by the EPA while the Agents carry out their mission. Or if the Investigators are media investigators, a combination of *The Dead Files* and *Big Brother* could buy the house off the Crandells. If the Investigators are telegenic enough, the combination of trying to get along while under constant surveillance, and while being haunted, could make for compelling TV until someone dies.

There are likely to be interfering agendas. How do you keep Delta Green Agents from burning the house down the instant they confirm that it's a true locus of otherworldly weirdness? The solution is to hit them hard and early with real danger, get them very confused about what's real and what isn't, and possibly have someone important vanish into the house. Make them think their longtime partner can still be extracted.

TV personalities, on the other hand, want *everyone* to see, whether it's real or not. They're going in armed only with cynicism and good hair, and when the house starts toying with them, their producers won't pull them out. Sometimes the footage looks

like the Investigators are faking their way towards ratings gold. Other times, stuff that was vividly present to them looks entirely different on tape. The Investigators saw Father Bradie coming at them, naked and bloodstained. They screamed and fled and bled when he slashed them. But the footage just shows them sitting around, reading and playing cards. Their injuries? Gone.

This setup benefits from a slow build. That leads them to get deeper and deeper in, with their producers offering ambiguous praise that makes the stars think the people outside are seeing the same things they are. Once they're in too deep, they can learn that their producers think it's all part of the gag and insist that they honor their contracts.

A third option—playing as mundane P.I.s—is one of the few where the Investigators can start out as skeptics dismissing their gullible employer. Start out with things that can be rationally explained and throttle back if anyone seems too freaked out. Make sure their employer is ridiculous enough that they're subtly disinclined to be like her. Keep it deniable until it's too late.

## SWEETENING THE POT

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The Mardler House has peculiar effects on people with remarkable inner strength that's starting to degrade. People whose POW is above average and who have seen awful, awful things are drawn, transfixed...fascinated. Only characters with POW of 13 or greater are at risk of this particular benefit, and then only if their SAN is equal to POWx3 or less.

Such degraded people find the house unusually compelling. It's beautiful. It's interesting. It becomes like a drain that their thoughts spiral around when they're bored with other matters.

Every time someone like this enters the house, he or she makes a POWx5 roll. If the roll succeeds, the character gains a magic point and has an intense sensation of being bound to the house. Warn the player that leaving is going to be miserable.

Every time someone like this leaves the house after gaining a magic point, it means losing 0/1 SAN. Going away feels like giving up—or like missing out.

You can't gain more than 1 MP per 1D6 hours this way. They last 24 hours or until spent.

## THE HOUSE ITSELF

**The Mardler house is a lovely** old pile of brick and pine, gracefully curved and packed full of elegant architectural detail. It's effectively two curving wings, meeting at a 120-degree angle with a turret in the center and a single, straight wing emerging from the back. From the air, it would look a bit like a letter Y. Or the old Blue Öyster Cult logo.

From the ground it's just a charmingly eccentric home, generously sized and elegantly harmonized with the surrounding terrain. One curving wing ascends, the other follows the slant of the land downward, and the single straight hall anchors it and keeps it from being too fanciful. Some of the original furniture (built by Bruce Mardler himself, or at least to his specifications) is included with the house, but each room is something of a grab bag. Unless the Investigators are buying the house outright, its owner's furniture remains. Even if they are buying it, they have the chance to get the furnishings as well, since Crandell's *guardian ad litem* is happy to sell without having to fly in from Hawaii.

**Episodes:** For each location an "episode" is described. This is a spooky, creepy or deadly event that can occur there. If things are going along at a good clip—if the Investigators are engaged and active—then you probably don't need an episode. On the other hand, if things are going a little too well and you want to slow the pacing by giving them something new and confusing to deal with, an episode may be just the ticket. Episodes against lone characters are generally more effective. (If Character A is in the middle of a solo episode when Character B intrudes, you can simply cut the episode off flat. "Character A is just kind of staring off into space," you tell Character B's player, calm and slightly puzzled.)

If you're using Mardler House as a home base and central problem

## TIMELINE WITHIN THE MARDLER HOUSE

- 1939 Bruce Mardler marries Martine Stimmons and begins construction on 'Cockaigne.'
- 1941 Bruce and Martine Mardler have a son, LeRoy.
- 1951 Bruce coerces LeRoy into killing Martine, then kills the boy in turn. Bruce ceases to be present in the house.
- 1952 Father Tyrone Bradie moves in to Mardler House, accompanied by Madeline Pfeiffer.
- 1954 Bradie and Pfeiffer begin a brutal sadomasochistic relationship.
- 1959 Bradie kills Pfeiffer, who rises from the grave and murders him in turn.
- 1960 Don and Debbie Holmes move in.
- 1964 Mary Kate Holmes born.
- 1969 Alex Holmes born.
- 1977 Don Holmes kills his wife Debbie and inters her under the bedroom floorboards, then locks himself in a basement room and commits suicide via self-cannibalism.
- 1979 Bill and Nanette Smith move in. Over the next 14 years, they conceive, deliver and cannibalize three children.
- 1987 Edith Crandell meets the Smiths and becomes fascinated by the house Cockaigne.
- 1993 The Smiths move out, selling the house to Edith Crandell.
- 2010 Edith Crandell stabs her 'nephew' Oscar Voorhees and is institutionalized.

in the background behind other, shorter scenarios, episodes should be rarer, only happening when the characters are between other pressing mysteries or when you need to distract them from something.

### THE ENTRYWAY

**The front door is between the** rectangular wing (which houses the dining room, bath and kitchen) and the descending wing (music and living rooms). The ascending wing (parlor and greenhouse) branches off a lovely spiral staircase with a gorgeous carved bannister. It curls

all the way up into the cupola library. There's a mosaic floor with a geometric pattern of yellow curves, chartreuse lines and ocher angles.

Mostly the entryway is ordinary, open, with a charming slant of light playing on the tall mirrored umbrella stand that Bruce Mardler built with his own hands to sit just so when you enter.

**Episode:** The stairs grow and shrink, capriciously and retroactively. That is, when you first come in you might count the steps to the second floor and conclude that there are thirteen steps, each with a nicely carved newel post. Another



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## TIMELINE OUTSIDE THE MARDLER HOUSE

- 1939 Bruce Mardler marries Martine Stimmons and begins construction on 'Cockaigne.'
  - 1951 Bruce and Martine disappear without a trace.
  - 1952 Father Tyrone Bradie moves in to Mardler House, accompanied by Madeline Pfeiffer.
  - 1959 Father Bradie dies of a coronary arrest while on vacation in Florida.
  - 1960 Don and Debbie Holmes move in.
  - 1964 Mary Kate Holmes born.
  - 1969 Alex Holmes born.
  - 1977 The Holmes family moves out when Don changes jobs. The house is bought by an absentee real estate speculator who plans to tear it down, but his sudden death leaves it sitting vacant for two years during lengthy probate court proceedings.
  - 1979 Mardler House's loan goes into default. The house is sold out of foreclosure, to Bill and Nanette Smith.
  - 1984 Madeline Pfeiffer dies of breast cancer.
  - 1987 Edith Crandell meets the Smiths and becomes fascinated by the house Cockaigne.
  - 1990 Don Holmes dies of complications arising from colon cancer.
  - 1993 The Smiths move out, selling the house to Edith Crandell.
  - 1997 Debbie Holmes dies of chronic emphysema.
  - 2010 Edith Crandell stabs her 'nephew' Oscar Voorhees and is institutionalized.
- 

time, you might consistently count fourteen (and doesn't one of those posts look a little newer than the others? I wonder if that's the one that Father Bradie slammed his housekeeper's head into!) If one post breaks and the characters remove it for repairs, they might notice later that the step that had the broken post is now gone—instead of thirteen steps, there are now twelve. But it's back the next time they check.

Most people don't count steps, of course, unless they have some kind of obsessive-compulsive disorder. But people do get used to

the stairways in their homes, automatically adjusting their gait at the bottom and top. This is why it always feels so strange and *wrong* when you expect one more step up (or down) and your foot crashes into the wrong place. That happens far too often in the Mardler House.

When things get seriously surreal and an investigator is attempting to flee up or down these stairs, that's when it seems to grow to infinite length, letting a pursuer close in gradually but effortlessly...or when it seems impossible to cover the last few steps up or down to where a comrade is screaming for help.

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## THE PARLOR

**Up two steps (always two) from** the entryway, in the back, one comes to a small, cozy parlor with a wonderfully comfortable oxblood leather armchair and a loveseat. Edith Crandell had them restored just a month before the...unpleasantness. These both face a small fireplace. A coffee table is right between them. A low bookshelf is well stocked with collections of poetry and short stories by Jerome K. Jerome, P.G. Wodehouse and O. Henry. According to the bookplates, these go all the way back to Father Bradie's tenure.

**Episode:** Characters feel comfortable and safe here, as if a friendly and compassionate figure is listening to them without judgment. If a character is alone, the sense of presence becomes almost undeniable and, after a few times of feeling that some benevolent individual is watching, a character may get a glimpse of Father Bradie out of the corner of one eye. If the Investigator attempts to make contact, eventually he appears, converses, feels solid to the touch. He is quite vague and regretful when it comes to answering questions about being 'a ghost' but does admit that the Old Testament acknowledges contact between the living and the spirits of the dead. In this room (which old parishioners remember as the place where he took them to talk and drink excellent coffee), he is (initially) a gentle, wise and forgiving soul. He only switches over into the alternate-reality 'sexual sadist' mode if a character is particularly vulnerable. If a female character flirts with him in this room, he puts it off gently, but gradually allows himself to be seduced...after which he transforms into the cruel and murderous version of himself.

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## THE GREENHOUSE

**A few short steps up from the** parlor brings one to the highest point on the first floor: The green-

house. As first seen, it's disused. The real estate agent has cleaned it up, but mostly it's empty tables for dirt trays and planters and a well-used deep sink in the corner. Anyone who gardens can see the incredible potential here. The light is terrific and it has everything you need to start flowers and vegetables away from the dangers of weather and insects. The sink knocks and rattles when turned on, before sullenly spitting out a gout of discolored water.

**Episode:** Anyone who attempts to fix that sink finds a corroded pipe, which explains that rusty discharge. Inside the pipe is a badly decayed human finger.

If an INTx5 roll succeeded, the character identifies the sink as being produced in 1953, during Father Bradie's tenure. Moreover, the Investigator realizes that the digit is in the fresh water supply, not the drain pipe, and it barely fits—it couldn't have gone up the faucet when covered with flesh. The only logical way it could get there is if someone took the pipe off, stuck the finger in, and then put it back in place. If the INT roll fails, the Investigators just find the finger and only get the extra info by asking questions.

Any attempted Medicine roll identifies the finger as a trio of phalanges, clearly human (especially with the undecayed fingernail). A success indicates that it's probably female and was cut off with something very sharp moving in two directions—a bolt-cutter or heavy scissors, for example.

A successful Spot Hidden roll spots just a tiny bit of red nail polish on the fingernail.

The real fun with this episode starts when the characters attempt to investigate it or alert somebody. Police called to the house take it very seriously, but never call back once they leave (because they forget all about it as soon as they leave) and seem condescendingly tolerant if called from outside the house. If phoned from within Mardler

House, forensics identifies the finger as belonging to Madeline Pfeiffer, whose murdered body was found in the area in the early 1960s missing the pinkie of her left hand. But no one ever follows up. If the Investigators investigate *outside* the house they can find an obituary for Pfeiffer stating that she died in 1984 of breast cancer. There are photos showing all her fingers intact.

## THE MUSIC ROOM

**The upright piano here looks nice, the keys are shiny, but it's terribly out of tune. A few ladder-back chairs are scattered about for amateur performances, and the floor is beautifully inlaid wood—not mere squares or angles, but a variegated whorl, swirling together under the piano as if going down a drain.**

If the room is searched, a musical score for *Die Himmlisch Tänzerin* by Erich Zann is tucked away in the hollow piano bench. It's scored for violin but someone's been annotating it for piano in pencil. If removed from the house, it becomes *Celestial Dancers* by Eric Ewazen.

**Episode:** People outside the music room sometimes hear a single note or a short phrase played on the piano. If they rush to the chamber, there's no one there (of course). If a piano tuner is hired to put the instrument back in order, he shows the Investigators the reason it sounds bad: There are desiccated rat heads in the housing, crowding up against the strings. The tuner does not seem to regard this as strange at all—as if people cutting the heads off dozens of rats and stuffing them in pianos is just another hassle of the job, like people putting thumbtacks in the hammer felts to get a honky-tonk sound. If asked if he's seen this before, he says no. Asked if it seems weird, he shrugs. He's just here to fix the piano, not to psychoanalyze people after the fact.

If contacted outside the house, he has no recollection of the rat

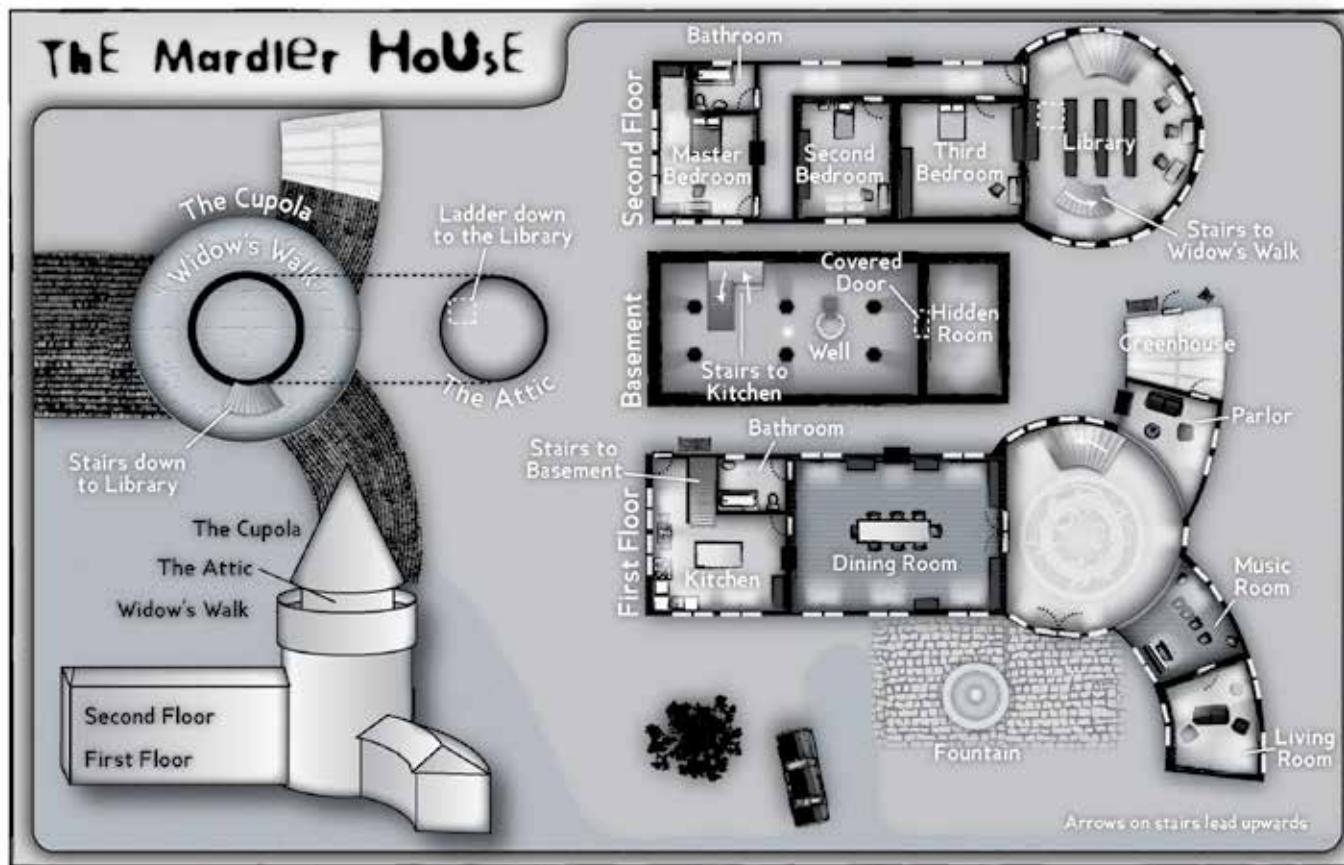
heads, and acts like he's been told a distasteful joke if queried about them. His memory is that he came in, tuned the thing, took his check, said thanks, and left. He has zero recollection of rat heads, and he'd certainly remember something like that!

## THE LIVING ROOM

**A four-piece sectional faces a blank wall where the real estate agent expects a TV to go. Gorgeous built-in shelves with elaborate carvings up the side are now empty of books and memorabilia. Someone put down wall-to-wall carpet. It's not bad.**

**Episode:** The carvings on the shelves are usually variants on Greek myth, wood nymphs and satyrs chasing each other, the occasional seahorse, but if you go in the room alone, you can see sculptures of the house versions of deaths that occurred within. You get nine-fingered Madeline Pfeiffer stabbing Father Bradie in the temple with a filet knife (he's naked, her clothes are torn), just for a moment before it turns back into nereids and fauns. Another time, the flicker of that new-fangled plasma TV makes it look like Nanette and Bill Smith are pulling a baby apart, tug-of-war style. That one might remain changed long enough for a single observer to examine it (the craftsmanship is exquisite!) only to change back if anyone else enters the room. If one of the Residents has attacked an Investigator, that assault is reproduced in the wood and can clearly be shown as a change to anyone in the house. It can be photographed, sketched and charcoal-rubbed... but photographs change, while rubbings and sketches remain. It goes back to normal when unobserved. If a video camera is set up to watch it, it may look changed to the naked eye and unchanged through the viewfinder.





## THE DINING ROOM

**The long, heavy table here has** six matched wood chairs on its sides, along with one more apiece at the head and foot. A fireplace with a gorgeously carved mantelpiece provides warmth and ambiance. The floor is the original hardwood, in this case inlaid in a simple geometric pattern so as not to clash and distract from the *trompe-l'œil* ceiling mural. That's a night sky, fantastically dense with stars and comets.

Note that the filet knife from the kitchen block is hidden under a loose stone in the fireplace. The blood on it is long dried and could test out to be Father Bradie's, or it could just be beef juice, depending on the whim of Cockaigne.

**Episode:** That fantastic sky gets a dark patch. At first, it looks like a simple gap between celestial objects. A later look (as long as it's not a close look) makes it seem almost as if there's something big

and winged, silhouetted against the unfamiliar constellations... but a second glance indicates that this is just a trick of the eye, it's just that same dark patch, kind of shaped like two question marks, or a stylized letter Y.

Only after things have gotten seriously weird can the final act of the dining room episode occur. When an Investigator enters, the stain on the ceiling is big and dripping, reddish black. (It's fun to have this happen during a big meal!) Standing on a chair to examine it, one finds that it's cold, sticky, a mixture of black pigment and watery reddish fluid. Then, as they poke at it, the ceiling abruptly crumbles, dropping the long-murdered corpse of Debbie Holmes (who, in Mardler-history, was killed by her husband and interred under the floorboards of the second bedroom) right onto the table. She's rotting and has a good six stab-wounds in the torso as well as a lot of decay to the face. She lies there until someone touches her.

Then she lunges up and attacks. Her stats are on page 31.

## THE DOWNSTAIRS BATH

**If a real estate agent shows** them this room, there's a heavy smell of piney-fresh disinfectant hovering around the elegant (though obviously old) sink and the functional (and obviously new) commode. The longer one lives in the house, the more a stink of must and decay gathers here.

**Episode:** Nothing unnatural here, just ordinary grime and mildew under the floorboards. A DEXx5 success and a few trips to the hardware store can fix it. A DEXx5 failure is lengthy, expensive, and saps a magic point. But there's no mystery to be found here.

## THE KITCHEN

**It's large, and the brand new** high-tech stove and fridge are a jarring contrast with the house's

measured antique stylings. A huge block of steak knives, boning knives, paring knives and chef's knives sits in the middle of the granite topped island, right under hanging copper-bottomed pots and one sledge-heavy iron frying pan. (The filet knife is missing.) There's a roomy pantry right next to the stairway down to the basement.

**Episode:** This is where Madeline Pfeiffer's spiritual residue is strongest. She communicates in here with words written on windows above the sink, where the steam of dishwasher makes them appear. She likes to give people warnings, especially about her nemesis, the Black Priest. After weeks or months, this escalates to pencilled notes tucked under the knife block or stuck to the fridge with magnets.

She can only be seen and take material form after someone attempts to contact her, be it through séance or just by writing back to her notes. She shows up at the back door, her ghostliness deniable. Sometimes she only has nine fingers, sometimes the full ten. Whichever it is, she doesn't want to talk about it and doesn't perceive any disparity. "Of course I have nine/ten fingers, I've always had, what are you *talking* about?!" However she's summoned, she can only exist for multiple people within the kitchen. In other rooms of the house, she can only show up for individuals alone. (Should someone intrude on a one-on-one, she vanishes as soon as the original conversant looks away at the newcomer. The newcomer heard nothing, and only saw the original speaker gazing aimlessly into space.)

Madeline knows she can only get free by killing someone else within the house, but she's conflicted. She'd like to find someone she can consider 'bad,' gain his trust, and then strike when he's least expecting it. Failing that, she just uses the process of elimination by deciding who's 'least good.'

## THE BASEMENT

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**If there's a spooky and unlivable** place in a purportedly haunted house, it's always the basement (or attic) where people spend few of their hours. Basements are unfinished and have no natural light and are closer to the wormy soil than the warmer rooms above. The Mardler House is no exception.

The basement is dank, the concrete floor has suspicious cracks, it's lit by bare bulbs, and the walls are covered over by cheap paneling from the 1970s. A sump pump in a well groans and churns whenever it rains (and sometimes when it doesn't). In fact, that little domestic antique is likely to conk out during the first thunderstorm, flooding the basement in 3-4 inches of reeking opaque water. Naturally, the fuse box is down here, on the far side from the stairway off the kitchen. Should the power go out during that flood-storm, someone has to wade through ankle-deep water before poking around with the electrical works. (Let's call that a INTx5 roll. Success restores power, though the sump pump remains inert. A failure knocks the Investigator back a good eight feet and deals 1D10 shock damage, along with a valuable lesson about mixing water and electricity.)

**Episode:** There's another room down there. It's not so much "hidden" as "walled up." Bruce Mardler built it as a wine cellar, and Cockaigne's version of Donald Holmes used it as a makeshift prison for his kids or wife or anyone else he could get in there. (The sane world's Donald found it useless, musty and full of spiders, so he closed it off to keep his kids from playing in it.) The door to the wine-and-torment cellar is behind the cheap paneling—Donald just locked it, took off the knob, and covered it over. A Spot Hidden success notices a curious bulge in the fiberboard, and a gap along the bottom. Alternately, once the basement floods the boards pull

away from the wall and reveal it without a roll.

Inside, it's unlit and claustrophobic, poured concrete on five sides and a drain in the floor. There are attachments sunk into the walls, which held up shelves for Mardler and supported restraints for Holmes. There's a sense of presence, too, something sinister and scary and...compelling. The Investigator with the highest POW finds herself drawn to the room. Periodically give the Investigator a random urge to go check out the wine cellar. If she resists, she loses a magic point. If she agrees, she gains one (up to her maximum). She feels a curious, perverse sense of empowerment when she goes. She's not going in spite of knowing it's a bad idea, she's going because she knows it's a bad idea, and doing it anyhow asserts her autonomy.

Searching the room reveals scratches on the back of the door, consistent with a makeshift implement (the handle of a spoon, say). They're tally marks—three, then eight, then seventeen, then thirty-three.

Sometime around the third visit to the room (alone), the high-POW Investigator opens the door and finds that someone has attached chains to the walls. The room is definitely empty when she opens the door, but when she enters, Donald Holmes slams the door and says "I've been waiting for you." Maybe he talks for a while, trying to convince the Investigator to put the chains on and really understand what's going on in Mardler House. Or maybe he just attacks. He's on page 31.

## THE MASTER BEDROOM

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**On the second floor of the square** wing, this room's right over the kitchen. It's a big room with a walk-in cedar closet (shelves decorated with geometric designs that look a little like a blend between stylized letters M and Y and question marks) and built-in book cases, now empty. There are no murals, floor inlays





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(it's carpeted) or ostentatious decorations beyond its simple quality and pleasing proportions. The Investigators are free to furnish it (or not) as they see fit.

**Episode:** Surprisingly, there's no paranormal stuff going on here, yet. If someone who lived in Mardler House dies outside it, though (likely candidates are the Smiths, the Holmes kids, Edith Crandell and the Investigators themselves), this could become the locus of their otherworldly duplicate.

## THE SECOND BEDROOM

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**Really nice parquet floor in this one**, with a starry geometric pattern that continues up on a headboard built into the wall and is referenced in the abstract stained-glass window. There's a little water damage on the ceiling, but the chandelier, while small, is exquisite. The closet space is pretty limited though. It's directly above the dining room.

**Episode:** Thumps from under the floorboards at night. At first, just one. After a time or two, if someone thumps back, they can get a response. (For instance, a "shave and a haircut" pattern gets the "two bits" reply.) If an Inves-

tigator is alone, he can call out to the thumper and set up a "one knock for yes, two for no" kind of exchange. The spirit contacted in this fashion is Debbie Holmes.

Anyone who tears up the floor finds her curled up and squished under the beams and she lurches up to attack. Alternately, attempting a séance to contact her succeeds, no roll. At first she answers questions through a ouija board (or pendulum or whatever) before the device flips or lurches around, possibly even bursting into oily yellow flames. Then she materializes, transparent aubergine in color, naked and nasty and attacking. Her attacks are unchanged from her corpse-form, as described on page 31.

## THE THIRD BEDROOM

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**The third bedroom seems almost like an afterthought.** It's the smallest and plainest, though it does have a nice built-in shelf and decent closet space. It's also over the dining room.

While it has no windows, there's a latch hidden in the shelf's scrollwork (which depicts Art Deco dolphins). It can be found by anyone who searches, regardless of the success or failure of their Spot

Hidden roll. (It is, of course, much fun to act as if it matters a great deal.) If released, it opens a panel containing sepia photos of a white man having sexual intercourse with several black women. A successful Photography roll indicates that these are antiques—Civil War era or earlier.

**Episode:** After they've found the photos, Investigators start seeing the man and women depicted, but only from viewpoints within the house. They might appear briefly in commercials on TVs played in the house, or posed in magazine ads. But they can't be contacted by anyone who's outside the house, nor will they physically come inside. If seen through the window, driving by in a Cadillac El Dorado, the Investigator who runs outside after them can't catch up to the car.

It's possible that someone might call (from inside the house) to find out information about the hypothetical magazine ad and get hold of an agent for the 'models.' The agent is happy to set up a photoshoot, but the 'models' never show up. Should the Investigator call back, the agent insists that they were there and that no one opened the house.

Alternately (or, better yet, concurrently) Investigators may pursue leads about the photos. A failed Library Use roll gets the photos in the hands of an expert who can confirm that they're late 1850s vintage, but nothing more than that. A success finds other photos of the man, a plantation owner and photo fancier named Antoine Latimer.

Note that the photos remain exactly the same inside the house as outside.

## THE UPSTAIRS BATH

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**Completely redone some time** in the 1980s and shows it. Not that it's specific to that era, but after the loving handcrafting poured into other Mardler rooms, a bathroom with plain white tile, a shower-tub and unadorned porcelain seems a little bit of a letdown. If Bill Smith (page 27) or his ex-wife Nanette (page 28) are asked about it, they say that the sink squeaked, the water pressure was irregular, and the place had kind of a bad smell so they decided to rip out everything and replace it.

**Episode:** Just a bathroom.

## THE LIBRARY

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**The spiral stair from the entryway** leads up into this charming round chamber. A widow's walk encircles it, accessed by French doors, and the upstairs bedrooms are available through a small door and hallway. A target-like floor pattern mirrors concentric circles molded into the ceiling, centered on an elaborate (and now nonfunctional) electric chandelier. No roll is needed to fix the lights, but it does require getting into the attic. The only access to the attic is through the library ceiling, by way of a pull-down stair currently blocked by a tall book case.

**Episode:** Nothing is too weird here, except the copy of *The King in Yellow* tucked away on the shelf under the pull-down attic access. It can't be removed from the house.

One might think one has carried it out, only to find that it's an old copy of Hans Zinsser's *Rats, Lice and History* instead. A group might remove it, staring intently, taking turns blinking to ensure that it is never unregarded and that the title has not shifted, only to have everyone to whom they show it act as if it's a copy of Gaston Leroux's classic *The Phantom of the Opera*. Whether it's read inside the house or out, it has its typical baneful effects.

## THE ATTIC

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**One of the two quintessential** horror-house locations, the attic is a low-ceilinged dome on top of the library, unfinished, a spider-choked, asthmatic's nightmare. There are boxes of moth-eaten old clothing from decades past, forgotten best-sellers that no one wants anymore, rolls of mildewed replacement carpet and backup wainscoting strips, and no lights except what leaks in. If the light in the library is on, there's a shaft of light from the pull-stair, along with a few streaks from the base of the chandelier (providing it's been repaired). During the day, a few lances of light are visible through the clouds of dust.

**Episode:** Searching the attic at any time turns up two concrete clues to Mardler House reality, without requiring a roll. One is a riding crop with Pfeiffer's blood long dried on it. The other is Bradie's encrypted diary describing the degradations to which he subjected her, his depraved fantasies of her "purported reluctance" and the threats by which he kept her quiet. Unlike some artifacts of Mardler House, the diary can be removed from the house without it changing into an innocuous form. (With an INTx5 or Computer Use roll, a character can decipher the journal's first page with only a couple hours of effort. If the roll fails, it's still deciphered but costs 1D6 magic points. Once the cipher's cracked, it's an hour per page to translate it by hand, or about a quarter that time to type

it into a computer. The diary is 40 pages long.)

Moreover, anyone who peeks outside the house through the tiny cracks in the exterior walls may not see the grounds and neighbors. Instead, a foreign vista under an alien sky can be seen, blurry and distant. (Playtesters found it useful to have it be raining in our world but to have shafts of sunlight visible in the attic.)

Attempts to tunnel to the other world are ineffective, at least initially. Prying out ceiling boards and pushing aside shingles just puts a hole in Cockaigne's roof. The rain might get in...from either sky. Successfully stabilizing or predicting the times or conditions that bridge the attic 'here' and the strange sky 'there' might allow a person, or persons, to pass through, but return is not guaranteed, and what that strange realm (Carcosa? The Plateau of Leng? Somewhere with no written name?) holds is beyond the scope of this article.

## THE PLOT LINES

**You've just read a laundry list** of locations, and the next section is a roster of involved characters. Those are the pieces from your chess set. Like a good grandmaster you need to have an idea of some opening moves, some mid-board gambits, and an endgame. This section takes five disparate plot threads that run through Mardler House and walks you through how your Investigators might pursue them. The Mardler Thread is the frame, including the start and (possibly) an ending to all the others, even if the Investigators don't winkle out every separate perverse secret.

Each thread contains four elements.

'**Setup**' indicates how the thread is initially presented and how characters can get involved with it.

'**Investigation Paths**' suggest some possibilities for chasing down the truth. (Certainly, your players





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may come up with other options, and kudos to them if they do.)

**'Yields'** are revelations that keep the story humming along—the sorts of creepy events or useful information that should arise from diligent inquiry.

**'Closure'** is how the plot can be concluded.

### THREAD ONE: THE MARDLERS

**Bruce Mardler built the place** and it kinda looks like a Yellow Sign, which is certainly suspicious to most *Call of Cthulhu* players and possibly to Investigators who've had the misfortune of seeing that dire sigil. He and his wife vanished without a trace in the early 1950s. The divergence between In-House and Outside evidence is that inside the home you can find birth announcements for his son LeRoy (even if you're sitting inside looking up old scanned-in articles on your tablet) while outside? No, he and Martine died without heir. The story about Bruce forcing her to kill LeRoy? Oral history only, and people are sketchy about where they heard it.

**Setup:** It's not hard to find out the basics of Bruce Mardler's life,

and his name is right there on the historical registry. Asking "Why's it called 'Mardler House' indicates engagement with this thread.

**Investigation Paths:** Searching the house itself and noting its architectural details; looking up the past of the Mardlers.

**Yields:** Gossipy historians know the story that Bruce had a son and forced Martine to kill him, but they are quick to scoff at that story as unsourced oral history and urban legend.

His wife's public breakdown at a performance of "Aida" (specifically the bit about howling 'No mask? No mask!') is cattily recounted in a local socialite's autobiography "To Climb Steep Hills," available in with a Library Use roll. The phrase she shrieked can then, with a Computer Use or further Library Use roll, turn up references to the play *The King in Yellow*.

Once characters have examined the Master Bedroom (page 18), an Idea roll lets them realize the mark on the bookshelf looks quite a bit like the house's overall footprint on the land. Pursuing that shape can get them information on the Yellow Sign.

Looking out the cracks in the attic walls sometimes reveals an entirely separate reality, of course.

**Closure:** There are four basic ways the Investigators can achieve closure in the matter of the Mardler House, and one of them is 'they all die or go crazy.' Keepers can handle that themselves, surely. Another option is 'exeunt omnes via attic,' which is beyond the scope of this article. So let's look at the others.



HANSEN

**This looks like a job for our ol' friends Jerry Can and the Matchsticks.** After all, it's not like it can run away. On the other hand, there are fire departments to deal with this exact circumstance, so the degree of destruction depends on (1) how serious the arsonists are and (2) how skilled.

Investigators who don't want a felony arson conviction need to make it look like an accident, which means not using much in the way of accelerants. ('Accelerants' are substances that burn well, like gas or kerosine. Their presence at a fire makes it a lot worse, but leaves telltale signs that fire department investigators might find.) Lacking an appropriate skill, roll EDUx4 to burn down the house. On a failure, there's a couple grand's worth of damage to 2-3 rooms, but the structure is still sound. On a success, there's serious damage to interior walls, floors and roofs, but the outside walls remain.

If the EDUx4 roll failed, the fire lighting was as undetectable as it was incompetent. But if the roll succeeded, roll Conceal for the coverup. Should that roll fail, the police have enough evidence to press charges. Success means that while the fire chief may give the Investigators the stink eye a few times (or think they're daft for keeping that many oil soaked rags in the kitchen), no legal action is immediately forthcoming.

What if they use lots of accelerants? Characters who grab one of everything with a "Caution: Flammable!" tag at the hardware store are likely to cause a merry blaze, if not a deadly explosion.

First, ask them if they're using 'moderate' or 'heavy' accelerants, or 'all the accelerants I can lay my hands on.' Then have them roll EDUx5. If they went with 'moderate,' that roll has a +10% bonus. 'Heavy'? +20%. 'All'? +30% bonus!

If that roll fails, the house is still badly damaged and uninhabitable.

If it succeeds, the roof is gone, the exterior walls are ruptured and the building is uninhabitable. Also, the Keeper rolls to see if the flames spread. 'Moderate' accelerant use gives the Keeper a 50% chance that the fire went out of control. 'Heavy' is a 60% chance and 'All' is 70%. Should the Keeper roll 02-05 on this, it means that 1D6 persons were injured during the resulting blaze. On an 01, somebody died.

Whether it spread or not, however, there's that same Conceal roll for coverup. For every percentile of improvement the EDUx5 roll got, two percentiles are deducted from the Conceal roll. That is, 'Moderate' means -20%, 'Heavy' means -40% and 'All' means -60%. On a success, the police are extremely suspicious and try to sweat the Investigators and their associates, but they don't quite have enough to press charges. On a failure, the cops have them dead to rights—to the extent that there's a -20% penalty to any Law rolls made to defend them.

The question is, does a simple chemical reaction sever the ties between Earth and...wherever? Up to the Keeper. If it doesn't, the Residents (see page 24) could start showing up in public, in either their affable or destructive guises, and be troublesome until they get some form of closure or another.

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### ABRACADABRA

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#### **Successfully casting Dismiss**

Hastur would return the house to normal (or, at worst, make burning it down a lot more permanent). But the only person involved who knows that spell is Edith Crandell, and she didn't write it down anywhere. Investigators who convince her to instruct them can learn it, but she's not tractable, as described under the 'Closure' of Thread Two.

She also knows the spell Banishment of Yde Etad, and that one's in her personal journal (though it's under the name "Expulsion of Gods Beyond"). Stealing that out of her room, learning it and casting it

may be more straightforward than convincing her to give private Dismissal lessons. But the Banishment doesn't get rid of the Residents (who resist its casting by whatever means they can muster), it just prevents anyone from taking their place if they get removed. They still leave the house if they kill someone, but tenants who die away from the house don't get remade. If each Resident is permitted to kill someone (or manages it without permission), the House becomes inert...until someone else who lived there dies outside of its walls.

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### THREAD TWO: MISS EDITH CRANDELL

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**Edith Crandell (born 1946, married in 1979, widowed in 1997, committed in 2014)** is remembered mainly as a forceful, cutting, vindictive woman. She was fascinated by the Mardler House the first time the Smiths invited her inside. She lived there, loved the place, bragged about how great it was, then stabbed her purported 'nephew' Oscar in public while babbling about immortality. She's in an asylum now.

Edith would rather die than sell Mardler House, so if the Investigators bought it, they got it from her niece Gloria, who lives in Hawaii and handles her aunt's commitment and finances long-distance. If they don't own it, Gloria is the one who hires them to investigate it. If it was seized legally...well, Edith doesn't like that one damn little bit and has the financial resources to fight back, if she can convince the authorities she's lucid.

**Setup:** She was the owner-of-record previous to the Investigators' arrival, so she's an obvious resource. Gloria, the absentee legal trustee, is extremely cagey about her aunt's fate, requiring some Persuade rolls or the like before she admits her aunt went stabbingly insane.

**Investigation Paths:** Finding out about Crandell's assault on Oscar Voorhees doesn't even require a Library Use roll, should

an Investigator think to ask about it; visiting Edith in the asylum; talking to Oscar.

**Yields:** When she attacked Oscar, she babbled about “The house can let us live forever, you ungrateful little retard!”

Oscar’s contribution to the investigation is summarized on page 28. Edith’s statements (both lucid and crazed) are similarly dealt with in her character writeup on page 28.

Edith has her journals with her at the madhouse. If the Investigators read them, they might learn the spell Banishment of Yde Etad, or they might just observe how the House works on those who dwell within it—amplifying their most personally overheated and selfish notions, deadening empathy for others, and stimulating creativity of a morbid sort.

**Closure:** If Edith can get into the house, she might offer herself to the Black Priest (or Donald Holmes, she ain’t picky) because she believes she can get ‘murdered in’ and live forever. The House version of Edith (if she’s right) is up to the Keeper to design.

Alternately, if convinced to give up on her designs on immortality, she could teach the Investigators

the spell Dismiss Hastur, though it would be up to them to cast it. If they finagled a release from the madhouse so she could do the ritual, she’s likely to rush the house and try to die by a Resident’s hand, unless the players’ efforts have made bringing her in to cast the spell a sufficient and satisfying end to the story.

### THREAD THREE: THE BLACK PRIEST

**As described on page 25, Father Bradie** was initially just a priest who got aroused by some kinky stuff, back in the days when there wasn’t a public vocabulary of S&M to enable him to name his interest. His Hasturized reflection in the House is far darker, hoping to murder someone in order to earn freedom from its fate. But before doing that, he wants to find the likeliest victim and optimize his odds.

**Setup:** The rumors about a kinky priest who murdered his housekeeper have a life of their own, and Father Bradie is the only minister to have resided in Mardler House. The parlor (page 15) is where he most easily manifests.

**Investigation Paths:** Search the parlor; search the attic; do online research from within the house and find out one version of events; check the research from outside the house and get another.

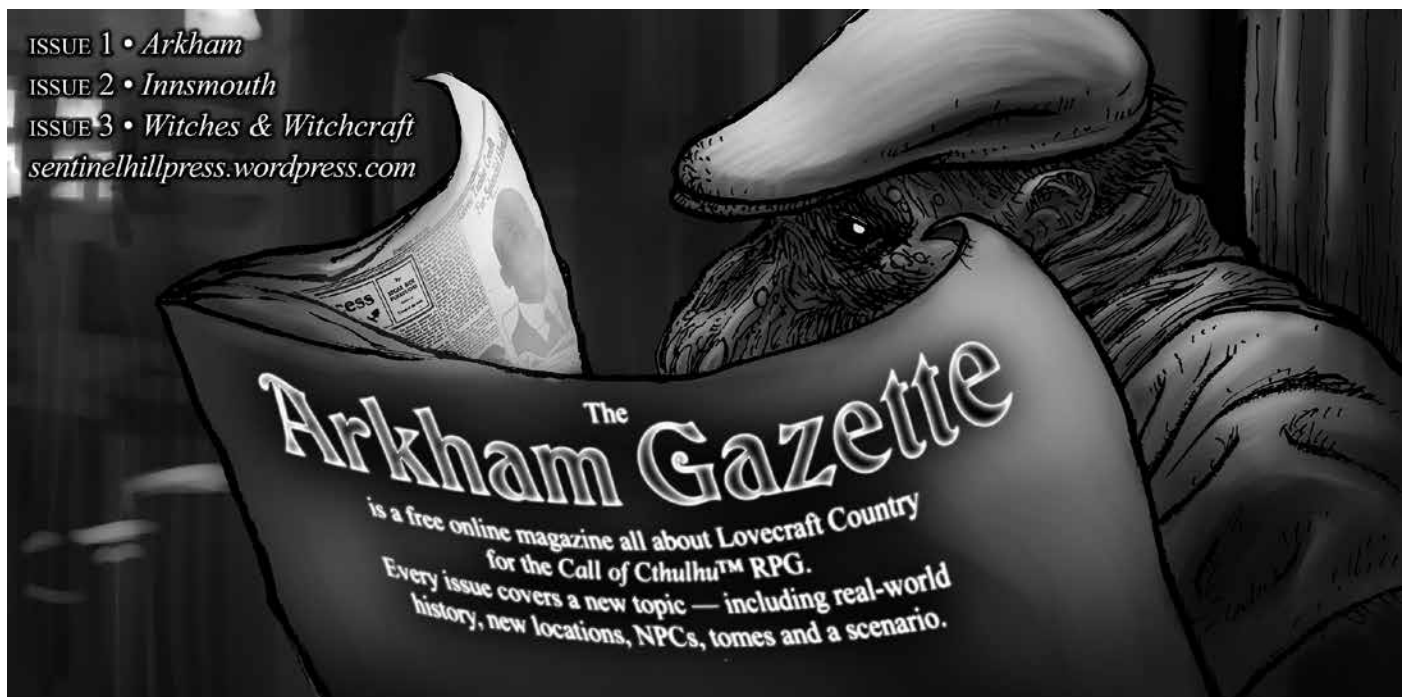
**Yields:** Comparing the articles can muddy the waters, or can provide a clue that death inside is different from death without. His journal, in the attic, can provide an example of how the house operates on the minds of those within its grip.

The Bradie in the house now is absolutely dishonest, eager to listen a lot so that he may, in time, tell the most attractive and persuasive lies. The goals of his lies are to get him a victim.

**Closure:** The most likely outcome with Father Bradie is, he gets alone with someone who seems vulnerable and kills that person in order to escape. If that fails, he sulks but tries again.

### THREAD FOUR: HOLMES’ SWEET HOME

**The Holmes family, who lived** in Mardler House between Tyrone Bradie and the Smiths, had a different experience than many who dwelt there. While the typical





bifurcation of experience between in and out occurred, in their case it went all the way down to their memories. The surviving members of the family have repressed memories of abuse and horror at Donald's hands when outside of the house (or when spoken to from outside it) but if they return, or are contacted from inside, the full experience is recalled.

**Setup:** There are the omnipresent 'friend of a friend' rumors, as well as spectral phenomena specific to the dining room and basement.

**Investigation Paths:** Alex and Mary Kate Holmes are both still alive; search the basement; search the dining room.

**Yields:** The dining room's growing ceiling stain can reveal the Yellow Sign, leading in turn to the Mardler and Crandell plot threads. The dining room also contains the hidden knife that ties in with the Black Priest thread.

Interviews with Alex and Mary Kate Holmes, both from within and without Mardler House, are covered in their character writeups, on pages 26 and 27.

Interacting with the basement chamber (especially when done alone) can lead to the Donald Holmes Resident revealing himself. Checking out the dining room and the bedroom above it can lead to a meeting with Debbie Holmes.

**Closure:** Donald Holmes might lure someone to their doom, freeing himself. Debbie's appearance could do the same.

## THREAD FIVE: THE CANNIBALS NEXT DOOR

**The owners before Edith Crandell** were Bill and Nanette Smith, a very quiet couple who left no real impression on their neighbors. Their home's operation on them took (or caused) a series of miscarriages and elaborated them into acts of ritualized cannibalism. After moving out of Mardler House, they divorced.

**Setup:** There isn't a lot of physical evidence of the Smith

tenure, since no one actually died. (Arguably, this bland and average pair managed an heroic feat by escaping from oppressive forces attempting to mold them into debased psychopaths. All it cost them was their marriage.)

**Investigation Paths:** Bill and Nanette are both alive, though living far from each other and their onetime home.

**Yields:** The investigative possibilities of interviewing Bill (page 27) and Nanette (page 28) are both covered in their character writeups.

**Closure:** The best outcome for the Smiths is to keep as far away from Mardler House as possible. Investigators who encourage them (especially Nanette) to return are likely to regret it. If Nanette or Bill kill themselves rather than succumb to the lure of the House, they do *not* become Residents. This is anomalous, as they'd seem to fulfill the conditions of return: They lived there and (presumably) die outside of it. But perhaps their resistance freed them on more than one level. Or perhaps the functioning of an Hasturian incursion on Earthly space just doesn't behave predictably.

## THE RESIDENTS

**Despite the rumors on the outside** (which mirror the sub-reality inside Mardler House), only three people have died inside the Mardler House (which is a lot by any reasonable standard, but not an impressive number for an urban legend). The horrid irony of the house's nature is that those who perished there (Bruce Mardler, his son LeRoy and his wife Martine, in reverse order) escaped its entrapping taint. It's those who live there and die elsewhere who find the house serving as an imprisoning purgatory.

Onetime dwellers who escaped the house in life, only to be flypapered in it in death, are listed here as "Residents." Depending on what you believe about the afterlife, these could be entirely separate from

the "souls" or "ghosts" one finds elsewhere. They might be more like funhouse mirror portraits, twinned off ordinary souls and reframed by the powers of Hastur as murderers, madwomen and victims. In the same way that a novelist might write a friend (or bothersome critic) into his work, magnifying or changing certain traits to fit his aesthetic, the Mardler House revisits its onetime dwellers in forms more fit to its nature.

The Residents don't even know if they really are who they think they were. It's occurred to Father Bradie specifically that he might be a demon whose punishment is to forget its own past and remember the past of a wholesome mortal, so that the sufferings he undergoes are further embittered by regret, remorse, and a crushing sense of injustice. But that doesn't stop him from trying to kill anyone.

For one thing the Residents *do* know (or are *absolutely certain* that they know) is that the only way to stop being Residents is to kill someone inside the house. They know that their victim won't be trapped as they are, and they know they, themselves, will move on from Mardler House into some other state of being. They know this the way you know how to breathe, or how to hope.

They know that the Mardlers 'went on,' though whether to Hell or the 'real' Land of Cockaigne or some other place they have no idea.

All these characters, however, are there for the Keeper to use and distort into whatever form is best for terror (much as the House itself uses and distorts them). If the Investigators pursue contact with one Resident or another, by all means have the Residents be helpful, or confused. Let them confide their suspicions or fears to the Investigators and warn them off in no uncertain terms...until they switch to their dark sides. Or, if it makes for better scares, have them start off in murder-mode.



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It's possible that a Resident might get reduced to zero hit points (though that's not easy). If that happens, the specter goes away for a week or so, and gradually returns, first as a voice, then as a figure out of the corner of the eye, and then back at its full potential.

### FATHER TYRONE BRADIE

**Outside the Mardler House, Tyrone Bradie** was a shy young man who answered a calling to the Catholic priesthood, becoming the pastor of Saint Jerome's Parish. While there he performed typical pastoral duties—weddings and baptisms and confirmations, as well as raising funds and hearing confessions and sitting with the dying. He performed unremarkably, though the rumors that he was forced out due to some kind of scandal with his housekeeper dogged him until his death.

In actual fact, Father Bradie did struggle with his faith and his sins. A congregant told Father Bradie of his tormenting lusts, his fascination with forbidden images and stories. While counseling this unhappy young man, Bradie came into possession of the boy's pornography, which he promised

to destroy...and didn't. (That's hidden in the second bedroom.) Realizing that he had explicit photos of a master abusing a slave, Bradie became more and more fixated on what a modern audience would call sadomasochism. But he had no name for it.

He kept a journal of his filthy thoughts (described in the entry for "The Attic" on page 20), which centered primarily on his housekeeper Madeline Pfeiffer, but he never acted on them, despite the subtle pressures of his home. He was greatly relieved to move out, and through an effort of will left behind his journal and photos. Resisting and recovering from that obsession was the great fight of his life and it taught him tremendous compassion for his parishioners. In the right circumstances, this is the Tyrone Bradie the characters speak with.

But what was fantasy in the world outside became reality within the Mardler House's walls. That other edition of Tyrone Bradie—the Black Priest—is a sexual sadist who tortured and abused his housekeeper, then threatened her into silence and compliance. It all came to a head when she made one last attempt to free herself, and he killed her

while struggling for a knife, mangle her body afterwards. As the Black Priest remembers events, it was not even a fortnight later that her body broke free of its hiding place and planted that same knife in his forehead.

### MADELINE PFEIFFER

**Father Brodie's housekeeper** did not come from an affluent or even middle-class background. She was never terribly smart or pretty. She always tried to do the right thing; she was reverent and well-behaved; she worked hard in school but didn't want to be a nurse or a school teacher. No one ever wanted to marry her. She never really wanted to have kids.

That's how she wound up as the housekeeper for a Catholic priest in the 1950s. She didn't live in the house, she commuted in every day to make his lunch, dust the shelves, clean laundry, cook supper and run errands. Their relationship started out formal and became calmly relaxed. She'd have come to him if she had any kind of spiritual crisis (which she didn't). If he'd propositioned her, she probably would have resisted a little but eventually given in,

though her libido was, by nature, quite low. She never suspected for a second that he was writing filthy, filthy things about her in a secret journal.

Since she never lived in the house, it affected her less than it did Father Bradie, though she did have persistent dreams about savage pain and cataclysmic sexual excitement, always forgotten by noon the next day. Her life outside the House was entirely quotidian.

Her Hasturian reflection is a victim who was carefully conditioned and entrapped. Someone whose accusations society would never accept or believe. Someone who would be locked up as a delusional hysteric or regarded as a blackmailing liar. She was pushed too far when the Black Priest, over-excited by blood and power, struggled with her over a knife, cutting her finger off. Enraged that she now had a wound that couldn't be denied, he told her he was going to kill her, and in a burst of panicked strength she blinded him with the blood jetting from her hand, wrenched the knife from his aging fingers, and slammed the blade through his head.

Terrified of discovery, she concealed his body, only to have it rise from its basement concealment (after three days, in a grotesque parody of their shared faith). It chased her through the house and strangled her, and they've shared the house as ghosts ever since, loathing one another in ectoplasmic eternity.

If given the opportunity to stalk more than one mortal, she applies fairly standard morality in search of someone the world won't much miss. But failing that, she kills whoever.

## DONALD HOLMES

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**An ordinary insurance salesman** with two kids and no insurmountable marriage problems, Donald Holmes was proud of getting such a fantastic home at a reasonable price. But he

was always uneasy and jumpy after purchasing the Mardler House, until his kids went to college and he retired with Debbie to Florida.

Any time the Holmeses left the house, their memories reknit to conceal the horrors within, disguising them as dreams or half-remembered fantasies. The forgetting lasted through returns, until something else happened to terrorize them—either the Black Priest seizing them in the night, or Donald and Debbie themselves giving in to alien, evil urges.

At some level, Donald knew that these longings and reveries were being imposed on him from without, and that it was always his choice to resist or acquiesce. But knowing that choosing to give in would be flawlessly covered up, edited out of memory and even reality outside the house, he gave in just once. After that, he was no longer free. He had to give in over and over.

At least, that's how he knows it now. Perhaps, as a dead man, it doesn't matter either way.

He and his wife are both imprisoned in Cockaigne now, and Donald is always looking for someone to lure into his basement torture chamber for a gradual piecing-out. (That's where he died, in his Mardler history. He locked himself in, cut off pieces from his legs, and ate himself raw until he reached the femoral arteries.)

## DEBBIE HOLMES

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**The biggest conflict between** Debbie and Donald Holmes, in their current configurations as undead caricatures of their living selves, is about who was the real victim back when they were alive. Of course they know that Donald killed her and hid her body under the second bedroom floorboards before his slow suicide in the basement, but his understanding of their life in Mardler House was all about him—him

torturing his family, intimidating them into silence, playing in the gore fresh cut from their bodies. Debbie's story, on the other hand, is one in which she manipulated them like fractured Barbie dolls in secretive conflicts with one another. She tricked Donald into abusing their son, then armed the boy to scar his father in return, while the women on the sides allied to keep the conflict fresh, until Debbie betrayed her daughter to her husband's unspeakable lusts out of mere caprice.

Those parts of ghost-Debbie that most clearly reflect life-Debbie have considered the idea that the children's history of abuse and molestation she recalls is, for them, only fiction...until they die. This element of her dreads the day they join her, and their father, as their worst selves, undying and trapped until they, too, kill someone unfortunate enough to stumble into Mardler House.

## THE LIVING

**Not everyone who ever lived in** Mardler House is dead. It's perfectly possible to find previous owners for interviews, or to just track them through news archives. But as with all things Mardler, there's a decisive difference between research from within the house (especially over the phone or internet!) and face-to-face encounters outside it.

## ALEX HOLMES

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**Alex lives about an hour's drive** from Mardler House but always has a reason to not come back for a visit. He's amenable to talking with anyone who's willing to meet in public and buy him a tall white chocolate mocha. He's cheerful and chubby, quick with a joke, but has bags under his eyes and won't meet your gaze when you ask about the ol' homestead. He's a database



administrator for an ISP and a recovering alcoholic.

Outside the house, he remembers the years they lived there as a tense time for the family. He suspects that his mom and dad were both drinking heavily and hiding it from him and his sister (though it takes a little trust-building to get that out of him). If asked about “haunting,” he laughs and says how silly that sounds before looking down into his cup and mumbling something about “...believe in that sort of thing.” If pushed, he admits that he had some “crazy nightmares” in that house, and of course he’d heard the stories about the Mardlers and about Father Bradie, but insists that his family, while unhappy in its own way, was not terribly unusual.

Talking to him on the phone from within the house, or reading emails or letters from him while inside, reveals something a bit darker. He warns about evil influences that radiate within the house, “raining down from the dome and collecting in the basement, urges that could make a good man do bad things, and turn a bad man inhuman.”

## MARY KATE HOLMES

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**She has never forgotten Mardler House**, since she’s the type of high-POW, low-SAN human being it likes best. She’s a school nurse, never married, no kids. Doesn’t drink often, but when she does, she makes sure to get good and plastered. She’s highly superstitious but she hides it well.

If approached with questions about the house, she agrees to meet in public but insists up front that she does not want to go back there. (In actual fact, she wants to go back *very much* but is resisting with all her willpower. If pressured, or drunk, she goes.)

She’s haggard and nervous if met outside the house, and she reacts combatively to any suggestion that she’s being neurotic or that everything is all in her head.

She asks how reasonable it is that 100% of the tenants in a house for three generations—her family, the Mardlers, Father Bradie—all had sadistic, murderous darkness hanging over them? No, she insists that there’s something poisonous in that building, something that rots the human spirit from the inside out.

She also implies that it affects memories. She says she remembers her father cutting her with a sort of curved knife, like a bird’s beak, on her thighs and the sides of her stomach...but there are no scars. She knows, rationally, that these memories have to be false, but they’re there and feel as solid as anything else she recalls.

If presented with evidence that Father Bradie did not kill his housekeeper, she’s visibly taken aback and has no idea what to make of it.

Called from inside Mardler House, she’s flirtatious and confident and would love to visit the old pile again. She practically invites herself and she intimates that she knows a lot of secrets about the house and is eager to show them all. But unless the invitation is extended or referred to *outside* the house, she doesn’t show up. “Outside Mary Kate” has no idea of it. When told (on an outside line) that she agreed to return to the house, she gets hysterical with her denials.

If she is persuaded to come inside, her demeanor changes the instant she steps over the threshold. She goes from haggard and wary to confident and even kittenish. She takes the Investigators to the basement and reveals the hidden room (if they haven’t found it yet). She does what she can to get one Investigator isolated in it and then lock the door, at which point Donald appears and she tries to help him kill the Investigator. “This is good, isn’t it, daddy?” she asks. “This is how I can live forever?” “You’ll live forever in the house, baby girl. Until you kill your way out to somewhere even better. Watch how I do.”

Removing her from the house after she’s helped her dad kill someone (or tried) sends her catatonic.

## BILL SMITH

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**Bill and his wife were, in some ways, more susceptible to the Mardler House than Donald and Debbie Holmes.** Bill remembers, very vividly, delivering his wife’s children and then killing and eating them as newborns. At the same time, he knows this did not happen—he has hospital records of her three miscarriages and he remembers those horrible trips also. His mind is totally divided between what happened and what didn’t. He loved Nanette very much, but is it any surprise that he can’t look her in the eye?

He moved all the way across the country and unabashedly talks about Mardler House as “Hell intruding on Earth.” He warns anyone who lives there to get out, preferably after soaking every room in gasoline and tossing in a lit match. “I feel like I was lucky to escape...if I even have,” he says. “Everything seems more and more washed out and fake since I left Mardler House, but those memories...those awful, awful things! They seem real. The ‘now,’ even this conversation...it’s like I’m on the outside looking in, or watching an actor play me on TV.”

Bill manages a Wal-Mart in Ohio (unless your Mardler House is there, in which case he’s in Idaho). He lives very simply, spending a lot of his income on psychiatric treatment. He’s on a low dose of lithium these days.

Contacting him by phone from within the House reaches a snarling, foul-mouthed weirdo who wants to come back and get fed. He’s vulgarly envious of the Investigators and warns them that he’d crack their heads open like eggs to get another chance at the Mardler House mysteries.

## NANETTE WILLIAMS

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**Like her ex-husband Bill Smith,** Nanette moved far away from Mardler House (to New Mexico) but unlike Bill she's not medicated. She remarried, adopted a daughter who works as a nurse practitioner in Austin, and reacts very, very badly to hearing about Mardler House.

Anyone asking questions about it from an outside phone line gets a brief period of polite disinterest and "Oh, it was long ago." But if they persist she starts screaming about how horrible Bill was and that nothing was true about Mardler House, nothing was true *in* Mardler House, leave her alone and don't call again!

Calling from within? She sounds quietly, creepily crazy. "Oh, I wish I was still there. I've been hungry ever since I was forced out. Do you think I might be worthy to come back? I've been waiting ever so long, only...I can't have babies any more. Whatever would I live on if I went back?"

The first day after an outside call, the Investigators get a very angry call from her current husband Andrew, who wants to know what they said that upset his wife so much. He's a lawyer (he says) and if they call him back, it's harassment and he will sue them penniless.

A few days after that, a Resident version of Nanette shows up after the real-world version kills herself.

## OSCAR VORHEES

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**A name that's unlikely to turn** up without a bit of gossip and prying, Oscar Vorhees was Edith Crandell's gigolo. He's sponging around Los Angeles, house-sitting for rich people he met while in Edith's extended orbit, doing a little bartending and light burglary.

Oscar is handsome, affable, quite often stoned, and not very bright. He's open to the idea of horrible alternate realities (thanks to a few terrifying peyote trips in his teens) and warns anyone who contacts

him (from inside or outside) that the Mardler House is an evil place. He suggests that Edith chained him up and beat him "in, like, an alternate reality or something." He absolutely refuses to step foot in Mardler House ever again.

It takes some persuasion (financial, sexual or simply social) to get Oscar to talk about the day Edith took him out to lunch and tried to gut him in the middle of a busy restaurant. That done, he does his best to explain, but (1) she didn't fully understand the House and (2) he didn't fully understand her, so there's a fair bit of garbling. But his impression is that she believed some outer-space alien star god was looking at the House, and could see people there, and that just the weight of it looking made everything "kinda weird." Her theory at the time of the stabbing was that death under the eye of Hastur extended a normally singular lifeline into "like, other dimensions and stuff?" He ends with "Yeah, she said that she was killing me so I could live forever and that when she got back to the house, I'd be there, like, re-alive? And then I could kill her and she'd live forever."

## EDITH HELENA CRANDELL

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**"Childless housewife" was way** too small a role for someone as intelligent, ambitious and driven as Edith Crandell. She got married, got bored, and got involved with politics. (She first set foot in Mardler House while doing door-to-door politicking, and persistently attached herself to the Smiths. When they mentioned selling the house, she pounced and made a great offer so they wouldn't even have to go on the market.)

An affluent widow, Edith's experiences in the house convinced her to investigate, and between researching the Yellow Sign and talking to the Black Priest, she's convinced that the door to eternal life lies within Mardler House.

(Whether she's right or wrong is entirely up to the Keeper.)

Her otherworldly obsessions clashed with the more human concerns represented by Oscar Voorhees' easy smile and ridiculously taut abs. The Black Priest convinced her that those who died under the gaze of Hastur returned perfected. (It's amazingly easy to persuade people when they're hearing what they want.) She hoped Oscar would come back in the house, a little smarter and more focussed, ready to repay her by killing her into perfection as well.

She now lives at St. Dymphna's Rest Shelter. She seems to be responding well to her perphenazine, though it has left her sleeping 10 to 12 hours a day, very sensitive to light, and plagued by akathisia. (These are all common side effects to powerful antipsychotics, but be sure to play up the dimness of her surroundings, her pacing and her inability to be still.)

If spoken to when she's lucid, she explains that the house is haunted and that she can help the Investigators settle the unhappy ghosts within, if they only help her straighten out the mistake that has left her imprisoned at the madhouse. She (like the Black Priest) is a stone-cold liar and tells the Investigators anything she thinks might further her goals (to escape and return to Mardler House). She might claim to have been possessed when she attacked Oscar. She doles out occult and historical facts as needed to encourage dependence from the Investigators.

On the other hand, if visited during one of her 'episodes,' she paces, natters about the secret rulers of the Empire of America, draws a Yellow Sign and explains that it's both "Hastur's signature" and the footprint of Mardler House, then produces the knife she pocketed while on kitchen duty and tries to eviscerate whichever Investigator seems to be taking her the least seriously. As she's subdued (by Investigators or orderlies) she

shrieks, "I alone among the living know how the door was opened! I'm your only hope to get it shut!"

Investigators who are primarily pursuing the Mardler or Crandell plot threads should probably see her lucid the first time. Those who latch on to other plots first could meet her mad when they visit, only

to have her lucid if they come back to see if she knows how to seal it. Alternately, they can take her Mythos notebooks in pursuit of the Banishment of Yde Etad spell, but commandeering her stuff *legally* is a tough sell to any local judge. They all know her (political involvement, remember?) and are going to be very

skeptical that a poor crazywoman's letters and journals are relevant to any kind of criminal investigation, especially since she's already been committed. Those same social connections could make things tough on Investigators who beat her bloody, even in self-defense.

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## PLAYTESTERS

Steve Dempsey with Dave, Steve Ellis, Simon Rogers and Cat Tobin; Stuart Dollar with Alexander Dollar, Grantham Dollar and Suzette Dollar; Dennis Harlow with Karla Braun-Kolbe, Autumn Berg, Eric Berg, and Elizabeth King; Andy Lilly with Peter Darton, Ross Darton, Sarah Lilly and Matt Rivers-Latham; Chris Malone with John Becker, Steve Derosier, Mark DiPasquale, Preeti Gupton, Seth Gupton, Sarah Holmberg and Colleen Riley; Shannon J.E. McNamara with Tyson Fultz, Morgan Hua, Darren T. Priddy, Kevin Shrapnell and "Ramon Veracruz"; Jon Stimson with John Bergeron, Katie Gudmundsen and Joy Solomon.

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HANSEN

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## STATISTICS: THE LIVING

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### EDITH CRANDELL

*Self-Taught Cultist*

STR 7    CON 8    SIZ 8    INT 16    POW 15  
DEX 10    APP 10    EDU 14    SAN 0    HP 8

**Damage Bonus:** -1D4

**Weapons:** Small Knife 55%, damage 1D6+db  
Fist/Punch 50%, damage 1D3+db  
Grapple 25%, damage special

### MARY KATE HOLMES

*On the Verge*

STR 9    CON 9    SIZ 9    INT 13    POW 15  
DEX 13    APP 13    EDU 13    SAN 15    HP 9

**Damage Bonus:** +0

**Weapons:** 9mm handgun 25%, damage 1D10  
Fist/Punch 50%, damage 1D3+db

### NANETTE WILLIAMS

*She Remembers*

STR 10    CON 13    SIZ 9    INT 14    POW 13  
DEX 14    APP 13    EDU 13    SAN 15    HP 11

**Damage Bonus:** none

**Weapons:** .22 pistol 50%, damage 1D6  
Fist/Punch 50%, damage 1D3+db



## STATISTICS: RESIDENTS

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### FATHER BRADIE, THE BLACK PRIEST

*Murderous Sado-Sensualist*

STR 13 CON 9 SIZ 13 INT 10 POW 12  
DEX 13 APP 10/0 EDU 14 SAN 0 HP 11

**Damage Bonus:** +1D4

**Attacks:** Throttle 50%, damage 1D8+db

Fist/Punch 50%, damage 1D3+db

Grapple 50%, damage special

Secateurs 60%, damage 1D8+db

**Special Effects:** Normal weapons or attacks cannot do more than two points of damage. Impales can do as many as five points.



### MADELINE PFEIFFER

*Haunting Housekeeper*

STR 11 CON 9 SIZ 11 INT 11 POW 13  
DEX 14 APP 11/0 EDU 12 SAN 0 HP 10

**Damage Bonus:** none

**Attacks:** Kitchen Knife 65%, damage 1D6+db

Fist/Punch 40%, damage 1D3+db

Grapple 60%, damage special

Throttle 60%, damage 1D8+db

**Special Effects:** Normal weapons or attacks cannot do more than two points of damage. Impales can do as many as five points.



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**DONALD HOLMES**

*Hungering Husband*

STR 12 CON 8 SIZ 15 INT 9 POW 14  
DEX 14 APP 9/0 EDU 11 SAN 0 HP 11

**Damage Bonus:** +1D4

**Attacks:** Sickle 45%, damage 1D6+1+1D4

Grapple 45%, damage special

Throttle 45%, damage 1D8+1D4

**Special Effects:** Normal weapons or attacks cannot do more than two points of damage. Impales can do as many as five points.

**DEBBIE HOLMES**

*Monstrous Mother*

STR 9 CON 10 SIZ 10 INT 13 POW 15  
DEX 10 APP 14/0 EDU 12 SAN 0 HP 10

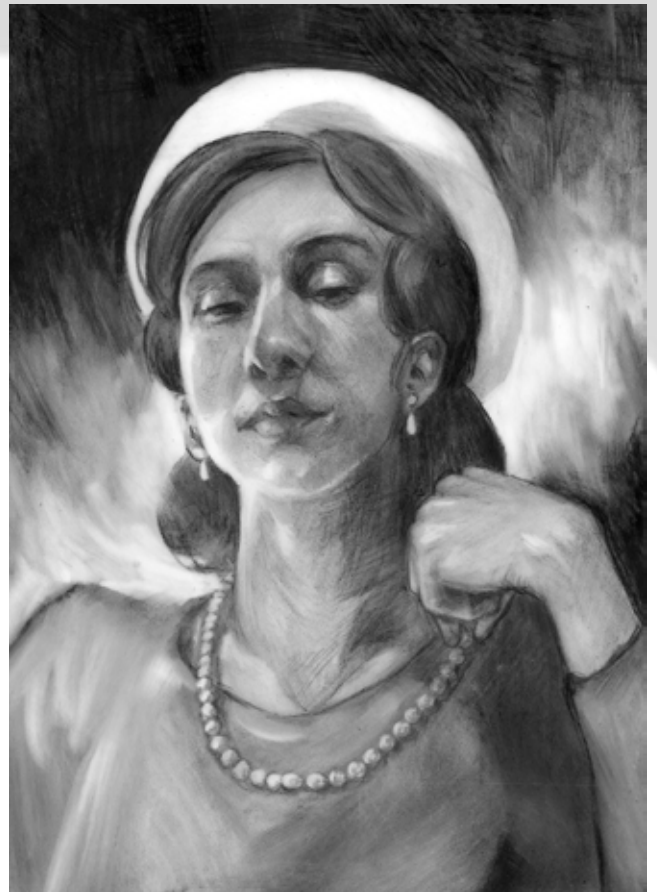
**Damage Bonus:** none

**Attacks:** Grapple 65%, damage special

Throttle 65%, damage 1D8+db

Punch and Kick 30%, damage 1D3+db

**Special Effects:** Normal weapons or attacks cannot do more than two points of damage. Impales can do as many as five points. ☹



HANSEN

# AGENT PURPLE'S GREEN BOX BLUES

BY JAMES HAUGHTON

## A Shotgun Scenario for Delta Green

**The Agents are contacted by** A-cell according to their usual protocol. They are ordered to help Agent Purple of P-cell, from the FBI office of a nearby large city, investigate a possible breach of Delta Green security.

The agents of P-cell found an artifact of paranormal significance, which was believed to have been secured in a Green Box, when they infiltrated the headquarters of a gang with potential occult connections. P-cell was discovered, and in the ensuing firefight Agent Partridge and Agent Peter were killed. Agent Purple needs the player characters to do legwork so that he can spend time in the office ensuring the connection to Delta Green is not uncovered in the official investigation of Partridge's and Peter's deaths.

A-cell tells the player characters that Purple is a highly experienced agent who has cracked several difficult cases, but due to the deaths of his cellmates and his own knowledge of the occult they should be alert for any signs of mental instability. The Agents receive Purple's secure phone number and are told to contact him to arrange a rendezvous.

A-cell will not give details of any of Purple's former cases, but if they are specifically asked and the Agent asking makes a Luck roll, A-cell admits that this is the second time Purple has been the sole survivor of P-cell.

Agent Purple's real name is FBI Special Agent Erik Baetz, though he wants to keep things on a pseudonym-only basis. He comes across as cold and implies, without saying so openly, that he could finish this

case without the Agents' help if not for the necessity of preserving his legitimate FBI job.

Purple doesn't show much emotion when talking about his cellmates' deaths. A Psychology roll suggests that he may be suffering from some dissociative disorder. If asked about previous cases he eases up slightly. Over drinks he becomes quite garrulous with stories of ghosts, monsters, aliens, sorcerers and other weird shit.

Purple explains that the gang in question, the White Snakes, were running drugs and artifacts for "a bigger outfit." (It could be the Fate, the Disciples of the Worm, Tiger Transit, or the Karotechia, whichever suits your campaign.)

The artifact is a dagger made of some form of mashed-together, razor-edged wire. If they watch it for a few minutes, the Agents see that the wire is slowly, constantly reweaving itself into subtly different blade shapes (0/1 SAN loss). The dagger—actually a Mi-Go appliance retroengineered into a dagger by a long-forgotten cult—is a magic weapon that harms supernatural creatures. It was placed in the Green Box by F-cell. If contacted, F-cell's agents can tell whatever harrowing story you like about its discovery, which unfortunately has no relevance to the case at hand. They confirm that they told A-cell that they placed it in the Green Box and list some of its other contents. (Use the Green Box Generator if you like. There's a link at [www.delta-green.com](http://www.delta-green.com).)

Agent Purple suggests that the cell get hold of one of the gang members and "extract" information

about their contacts, then do the same to those contacts. "Eventually we'll either find the leak or the clueless burglar who opened the Box." The Green Box, a rented storage unit on a years-long lease, does indeed show signs of having been broken into.

It may occur to the Agents to check other Green Boxes in the region to see if any other artifacts are missing. This is a large city and there are a few scattered around it and the satellite towns. Purple thinks this is a waste of time: "A-cell never knows what people have stashed in those things anyway." But the Agents know a few nearby and can ask A-cell for a list of what's inside. A-cell's lists of Green Box contents are uneven, but after searching three or four of them it's clear that some others have been burgled.

Stolen artifacts are likely to turn up as the agents track down members and contacts of the White Snakes.

## THE PROBLEMS WITH P-CELL

**Agent Purple has been somewhat insane** since his first partners in P-cell were eaten by byakhee in front of him. He is pathologically (or is it healthily?) afraid of the supernatural and, more than anything else, never wants to go on a Delta Green mission again. If Purple loses any SAN due to the supernatural, he either flees screaming or curls up in a fetal ball. He has also become the kind of pathological liar who believes his own stories.

Purple found a novel way to get out of Delta Green duty. Knowing A-cell's recordkeeping is extremely spotty, Purple has been raiding



Green Boxes for occult artifacts. He informs (or anonymously tips off) Delta Green of fictitious leads on supernatural activity, which are actually mundane crimes. Purple salts the scene with an artifact so it can be “discovered” when DG arrives, resulting in him being credited with a successful Opera. Then when a real Opera is called in, Purple, on behalf of the newly constituted P-cell, can plead the need for recuperation or other priorities, point to P-cell’s busy achievement record, and get the call rotated to some other cell.

A-cell has noticed that P-cell often “calls in sick,” but has put it down to stress rather than deception. For a while Purple felt bad about this, but he has convinced himself that he really is busting dangerous supernatural cults.

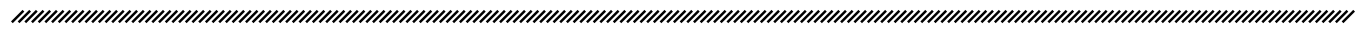
The White Snakes are a completely mundane, though violent, drug gang, whose crack house Purple salted with the dagger. It was all going swimmingly until Delta Green’s record-keeping actually worked and showed that the dagger had been found before.

Purple knows that under sufficient questioning or torture, people tell you anything you want to hear. He is therefore confident that with a few hints and his “assistance” in interrogating White Snake gang members, the Agents can be persuaded to follow a chain of meaningless confessions and planted artifacts until either someone “confesses” to robbing the Green Box, or the furious White Snakes take the Agents out, or the Agents head out of town on a wild Alzis chase.

The Agents’ best chance of figuring out the truth is to covertly surveil Purple until they catch him either going to his own unrecorded Green Box, where he keeps the stolen artifacts, or salting a site. If Purple’s scheme seems likely to fool the Agents, the Keeper may want to make one of the artifacts something from the cell’s own investigations.

If the Agents simply report suspicions to A-cell, they will be ordered to investigate further but treat Purple very cautiously for the risk that he’s gone bad. If they directly confront Purple with his delusions and deceptions, he is likely to turn either homicidal or catatonic.

Killing Purple costs 1D4 SAN. There are no SAN rewards for this scenario. ☹



**AGENT PURPLE**

*Special Agent Erik Baetz, age 43*

STR 10 CON 13 SIZ 11 INT 14 POW 13  
DEX 12 APP 10 EDU 16 SAN 28 HP 12

**Damage Bonus:** none

**Skills:** Bald-Faced Lying 98% (he believes everything he says), Cthulhu Mythos 10%, Locksmith 60%, Martial Arts 45%, Occult 35%, Sleight of Hand 70%, Spot Hidden 70%, Stealth 85%, other FBI-related skills 60%.

**Attacks:** Handgun 63%, damage 1D10  
Fist/Punch 60%, damage 1D3+martial arts  
Grapple 60%, damage special

**Indefinite Insanities:** Xenophobia; paranoid delusions.

**TYPICAL WHITE SNAKE**

*Will Put a Cap In Your Ass, age 21*

STR 13 CON 12 SIZ 13 INT 9 POW 10  
DEX 14 APP 9 EDU 6 SAN 40 HP 13

**Damage Bonus:** +1D4

**Skills:** Drive 70%, Sell Crack 65%, Smoke Crack 40%, Talk Trash 80%

**Attacks:** Handgun 30%, damage 1D10  
Fist/Punch 70%, damage 1D3+db



HANSEN

# HOLDING CELL

By BRET KRAMER

## A Shotgun Scenario for Delta Green

**Delta Green needs all its agents,** even the broken ones—and some are more broken than most. Play this scenario with a single Agent who has suffered a serious Sanity loss or a critical injury and is ‘grounded’ from regular missions.

The Agent receives a coded message from A-cell. The Agent is assigned to Project Theta, a repository for unnaturally disabled Agents and Friendlies. The message includes instructions for retrieving a magnetic pass-card and directions to the facility from a drop box.

Project Theta is contained beneath a large parking deck. The directions lead to pass-card locked door in the sub-basement. Beyond the first door is another door keyed to a thumbprint reader. It recognizes the Agent’s print.

The room itself is large but unremarkable, with concrete walls and industrial lighting. There is a desk and chair, a 1970s-era remotely linked terminal, an empty mini-fridge, a chemical toilet, and a cot. The room is visibly rigged with military-grade explosives, wired to the door, the walls, to a covered switch on the wall labeled “FUBAR,” and to each of the “residents” described below. A Demolitions roll reveals that the charges are designed to destroy the contents of the room without causing a collapse. The charges are expertly placed and can be disengaged only with a halved Demolitions roll. A fumble sets them off, ending the adventure and the Agent.

A message is displayed on the terminal: DO NOT INSPECT RESIDENTS UNLESS INSTRUCTED. FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS VIA THIS TERMINAL. GATHER intel AS REQUIRED. IF BREACH/CRISIS/BUGOUT HIT SWITCH, 60 SEC DELAY.

### RESIDENTS

**The room holds five “residents.”**

#### RESIDENT A

**A weird metal cylinder covered** by a sheet. The cylinder is inscribed with an unknown script and filled with an unknown liquid and a pulsing, living human brain. A jury-rigged set of speakers and a headset microphone are nearby. If they are connected to the cylinder, a constant stream of synthesized human speech is heard. An Anthropology roll recognizes it as a form of K’iche’, the spoken language of the modern Maya. An Agent who specializes in the Maya identifies it as an archaic form of Ch’olan, not spoken for over a thousand years. Sanity cost: 0/1 if the speaker remains unconnected; 0/1D2 if the speaker is attached; 1/1D3 for recognizing Ch’olan.

#### RESIDENT B

**A sheet-draped, mummified** human female in modern dress. The mummy is grimacing as if in pain, hands raised as if to block the eyes. A series of wires and probes connect her head to a laptop computer running an unknown program. The laptop displays the words YES and NO seemingly at random. A Medicine, Psychology or Psychoanalysis roll identifies the setup as a partially invasive brain-computer interface, with electrodes inserted into the skull but not the brain. A Computer Use, First Aid or Medicine roll realizes the mummy’s brain is still alive. Sanity loss is 0/1D3, or 1/1D6 if the Agent realizes the subject’s brain remains alive.

#### RESIDENT C

**Draped with a green plastic tarp** is a water-filled 20-gallon fish tank containing a complete human nervous system (including brain) attached to an intact pair of eyes. The nerve tissue is stained blue. Careful examination determines that the eyes dilate in response to light (SAN loss: 1/1D3). An unused EKG machine is beside the tank.

#### RESIDENT D

**A wooden crate about three feet** on a side is stamped with shipping invoices from Morocco. A pry-bar sitting on top can open it. Within appears to be a translucent three-foot-diameter sphere of some unidentifiable solid substance. It contains an Arabic male head and portions of the torso and arms, all severed perfectly along the exterior of the sphere, still clothed in fragments of an old-fashioned business suit severed along the same lines. The right hand is outstretched, touching a curious sinuous symbol chalked onto a fragment of dry-wall. Close examination notices that the symbol is very slowly changing shape. The sphere has a weird, rough texture as microscopic fluctuations in the stasis field slough off skin, molecules at a time. Trying to chip away at the sphere only results in the tool itself being chipped. SAN loss: 1/1D2, 1/1D4 if the Agent realizes the nature of the sphere.

#### RESIDENT E

**A perfectly executed marble** statue of a man, probably in his mid-forties and dressed in clothing of the 1940s or 1950s. The statue appears to be peering around an absent corner and once held something in the right hand, though several fingers have broken off. Careful examination discovers that the statue is perfect to a microscopic level, including body hair, skin texture, and, if examined microscopically, individual cells. SAN cost to discover this is 0/1.



HANSEN

## QUIS CUSTODIET IPSO S CUSTODES?

**Five minutes after the Agent** arrives, the terminal flashes a set of instructions. The Agent is to question Resident B, who is identified as Jennifer Hsiao. Hsiao was a CDC physician Friendly who was assisting a Delta Green cell four months ago when she disappeared. She was recovered five days later in this condition.

The Agent is instructed to tell Ms. Hsiao that she should think of running up stairs for “Yes” and think of singing for “No,” and that they are monitoring her brain and can understand her. If she can understand these instructions she is to use Morse code—Yes for a dot, No for a dash—and answer further questions.

The Agent is then given a list of questions. They suggest that whatever Delta Green operation Ms. Hsiao was involved with went very badly and that at least two of the Agents involved are still missing. It is left to the Keeper to create questions as desired.

The Agent is instructed to keep Hsiao alive.

Questioning Hsiao establishes clearly that her brain remains alive within its withered shell, which costs 1/1D6 SAN if the Agent didn't figure it out before. It is clear she is in a state of extreme mental distress. The Agent needs a Persuade, Psychology, or Psychoanalysis roll to calm her enough that she responds usefully. An additional roll is required for each additional hour of questioning.

Engaging in this distasteful interaction costs 0/1 SAN per hour. Her answers are ultimately unimportant unless the Keeper wishes to draw the players into a campaign against a Ghatanothoa cult. Save with the aid of a Great Old One or greater power, Hsiao is doomed.

## THE RESULT

**Ultimately the interview's result** depends on what the Keeper desires for the function of this scenario: a straightforward investigation, a psych evaluation of the Agent, or a complete delusion.

### STRAIGHTFORWARD

**A-cell is trying anything to find** their missing Agents, including this rather unconventional interview. Many hours of questioning are required to draw out what little Hsiao knows about the investigation and the cultists who left her in this state. When questions turn towards the process by which she was petrified, Hsiao becomes wholly unresponsive. Unless the Agent makes a successful Psychoanalysis roll she refuses to answer any questions. Perhaps through the yes-or-no questioning she hints that it was a living face too horrible to recall.

Eventually Hsiao refuses to answer any more questions and demands that the Agent end her unnatural existence. Refusing to kill Hsiao costs 1/1D4 SAN. Repercussions from A-cell, if any, are left to the Keeper. Her death or her refusal to answer more questions ends the Agent's assignment.

## PSYCH EVALUATION

**A-cell is concerned about the** stability of the Agent. This assignment is a ruse to gauge his or her sanity. Events proceed as above until Hsiao—her responses programmed into the laptop—refuses to answer questions and asks to be killed. On the monitor, A-cell instructs the Agent to punish her in increasingly cruel ways including threats, electrical shocks, and even a chemical solution that activates the pain receptors in her brain. Hsiao always refuses, pleading for mercy as best she can in their yes-and-no dialog. Torturing her costs 0/1D6 SAN. The scenario ends if the Agent kills or or refuses to torture her. How A-Cell responds is up to the Keeper.

## COMPLETE DELUSION

**Again as before, but in this case** there is no assignment, no Project Theta at all. The Agent has had a complete psychological breakdown and imagines the whole affair. Other Agents might see the Agent enter an empty store room in a parking garage, then sit silently for hours in a chair, then finally depart. How this plays out for the Agent is left to the Keeper.

## CONCLUSION

**If Hsiao and her plight are real,** an Agent who ends her suffering despite risking the displeasure of A-cell gains 1D3 SAN. Even the most damaged Agent might take some small comfort in the fact that there are far worse fates than death. ☞



# SECRET SHOPPER

By Ed Possing

## A Shotgun Scenario for Delta Green

**In the U.S., the day after Thanksgiving** is the first day of the Christmas shopping season. Crowds of consumers get out early to hunt for special offers. This year something is hunting the consumers.

Gideon Bonner owns and manages an independent bookstore, Bonner Books. His family has run it for generations. Like many small bookstores, Bonner Books has experienced a steady downturn in business due to increased competition from national chains and online marketplaces. It didn't help that Bonner is a lifelong occultist whose mind has been twisted over a lifetime of studying things which man was not meant to know.

Bonner resents the big book stores, in particular the one that opened in the shopping mall across the street, a Wharton's Bookstore branch. Every day from his store window he sees Wharton's doing brisk business while his shop slowly dies. As a result Bonner has had to shutter the family business.

His life in shambles, Bonner found a way to get revenge. In recent travels to the Mojave Desert he acquired a collection of rituals of the disbanded Hotethk tribe, *Blood Prayers*, which contains the spell Become Spectral Hunter. Bonner plans to use this on himself, in the shopping mall, during the busiest shopping day of the year. A massacre will follow unless the agents can intervene. The key to stopping him rests in destroying a small kachina doll which contains his life essence.

Bonner Books and the shopping mall across the street can be located in whatever town or city suits the Keeper's needs.

### DINNER INTERRUPTED

**Agents are contacted by A-cell** early on Thanksgiving Day for a simple black bag job. They are informed a dangerous manuscript, *Blood Prayers*, is in the possession of Gideon Bonner, owner of Bonner Books. They are told to retrieve and destroy this document. Be sure to play out scenes of family strife as the agents announce they are going to miss another family holiday.

### BONNER BOOKS

**Agents arrive at Bonner Books** late in the evening. A "Going Out of Business Sale" sign hangs from the window. The store is closed and there are no lights on. The front door and the back alley door are both locked. Agents need to succeed at a Locksmith roll to get in or they can force either door with a STRx5% roll. If they attempt to break in the front door, they must make a group Luck roll to see if they attract unwanted attention.

The building has two floors. The lower floor contains the bookstore. The upper floor is the apartment where Bonner lives. He is not home.

Most of the store shelves are empty. Several boxes on the floor contain popular books. Spot Hidden rolls or close inspection reveals:

- A ledger in a drawer under the cash register. An Accounting roll reveals the bookstore has been failing for several years and Bonner has acquired considerable debt attempting to keep it afloat. A handwritten receipt shows Bonner purchased *Blood Prayers* from a book dealer in Los Angeles a month ago.

- Across the street, the mall parking lot is filling with cars. The Wharton's Bookstore sign blinks silently in neon red.
- A framed newspaper dated February 13, 1895, hangs on the wall near the front door. It features an advertisement for the grand opening of Bonner Books.
- An advertisement has been slipped through the mail slot of the front door. "Wharton's Black Friday Mega-Madness Book Sale! 20%-50% off select items! Open at midnight!"
- A hidden shoebox full of receipts for sales of Bonner's occult grimoires to would-be adepts around the world. Bonner sold his treasures to keep his store going.

Bonner's apartment has one bedroom, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a living room. On the kitchen table is a small bowl filled with blood. Bits of cornhusk and torn cloth are spread about on the table. Spot Hidden rolls or close inspection reveals:

- A folder under the living room couch contains used boarding passes to and from Los Angeles International Airport dated a few weeks ago.
- A bedside table drawer holds a handwritten letter. This is Bonner's manifesto, a rambling tirade against corporate greed, the Internet, and sheeple. See page 38.
- A wallet on the dresser contains Bonner's driver's license.
- The bedroom closet contains a gun safe, open and empty.

By the time agents finish searching the building it is 11:45 p.m.

## THE MALL

**The mall opens its doors at midnight for the Black Friday Midnight Sale.** This event has been thoroughly hyped and stores are expecting record sales. Most of the stores in the mall are participating, including Wharton's Bookstore.

Although some of the stores have outside entrances, there are two main entrances on the north and south ends of the mall. Wharton's is five shops up from the southern entrance. As it approaches midnight the parking lot fills and people line outside both of the main entrances.

Bonner is among this crowd, waiting at the southern entrance with a kachina doll made of cornhusks and bloody rags, *Blood Prayers*, and a gun all hidden in his coat.

Any Agent who saw Bonner's driver's license may spot him waiting in line with a critical success Spot Hidden roll. (It's dark, crowded, and the driver's license photo isn't the best quality.) If Bonner is stopped by the Agents here, he tries to flee, firing his handgun at them and at people in line. If he finds a hiding spot, he begins the Become Spectral Hunter spell.

## TIMELINE OF TERROR

**Once the mall opens and Bonner is inside it becomes impossible to find him in the crowd.** Events follow this timeline:

**12:04 a.m.** Bonner enters the mall at the South End.

**12:10 a.m.** Bonner enters a restroom and begins the Become Spectral Hunter spell. This takes three rounds to complete. Transformed, he clumsily hides his kachina in the ceiling, leaving a ceiling tile ajar. (Noticing it requires specifically searching the ceiling or a Spot Hidden roll.) Bonner leaves *Blood Prayers* and his gun on the restroom floor. (*Blood Prayers*: 1D4 SAN to read or 1 SAN to skim. +1 point Cthulhu Mythos. *Spells*: Become Spectral Hunter.)

**12:16 a.m.** As a spectral hunter, Bonner savagely kills a customer who enters the restroom. Bonner becomes invisible, leaves the restroom, and heads toward Wharton's, bumping into confused shoppers along the way.

**12:20 a.m.** A shopper discovers Bonner's victim and calls for help. Charlie Vance, captain of mall security, calls police and tries to

secure the scene. He orders his staff to be on the lookout. A concerned crowd forms around the restroom.

**12:25 a.m.** From the video room, security officers glimpse Bonner as he passes by security cameras—he is invisible only to the naked eye. Frightened security relays what they are seeing to a baffled Vance.

**12:30 a.m.** Bonner arrives at Wharton's and begins slaughtering customers and staff. Wholesale panic spreads.

**12:35 a.m.** Vance orders all mall doors locked until police arrive. Shoppers flee Wharton's. Bonner finishes off stragglers and returns to the mall at large.

**12:45 a.m.** Police arrive and surround the mall, not entering until they get a better idea of what's going on. Bonner continues killing.

**1:00 a.m.** SWAT and backup arrive.

**2:00 a.m.** Police launch concussion grenades and tear gas and storm the mall. Bonner hides invisibly and immaterially in the restroom, waiting for the day to start the killing all over again.



HANSEN

## THE HUNT

**Depending on the Agents' actions, the timeline** may not reach the final stage. The sooner they stop Bonner the better. If he kills few victims, the Agents lose 0/1D3 SAN. Every dozen or so new victims he claims costs the Agents another 0/1D6 SAN, up to a maximum of 6.

Any security guard who notices the Agents brandishing guns assumes they are part of the problem and either attempts to apprehend them or runs screaming into a walkie-talkie. Agents identifying themselves as law enforcement get security's grateful cooperation.

In the form of a spectral hunter, Bonner is over seven feet tall. His flesh is rubbery and inky black. He has large red eyes and an oversized mouth filled with rows of sharp tiny teeth. His arms end in grotesque, crab-like pincers. He sometimes seems to hover slightly over the ground.

Bonner can attack once per round with either bite or pincer. He remains invisible most of the time. While invisible, he can only be seen by security cameras, camera phones, or night-vision goggles, not the naked eye. Bonner stays in the mall, close to the kachina which contains his soul. There is no shortage of victims, although he prefers to strike isolated shoppers. If severely wounded, Bonner becomes invisible and immaterial before returning to the restroom. If the kachina is destroyed, Bonner instantly dies and reverts to human form.

## AFTERMATH

- **Killing Bonner:** +1D2 SAN
- **Destroying *Blood Prayers*:** +1 SAN
- **Erasing video record of Bonner from security tapes:** +1 SAN

## STATISTICS

### GIDEON BONNER

*Bookseller*

STR 8    CON 12    SIZ 10    INT 13    POW 15  
DEX 10    APP 9    EDU 15    SAN 0    HP 11

**Damage Bonus:** none

**Skills:** Hate Life 80%, Rant 85%, Self-Pity 90%

**Attacks:** Handgun 35%, damage 1D10

### GIDEON BONNER, TRANSFORMED

*Spectral Hunter*

STR 20    CON 4    SIZ 24    INT 13    POW 27  
DEX 10    Move 8    HP 14

**Damage Bonus:** +2D6

**Skills:** Listen 30%, Spot Hidden 30%

**Attacks:** Pincer 50%, damage 1D6+db

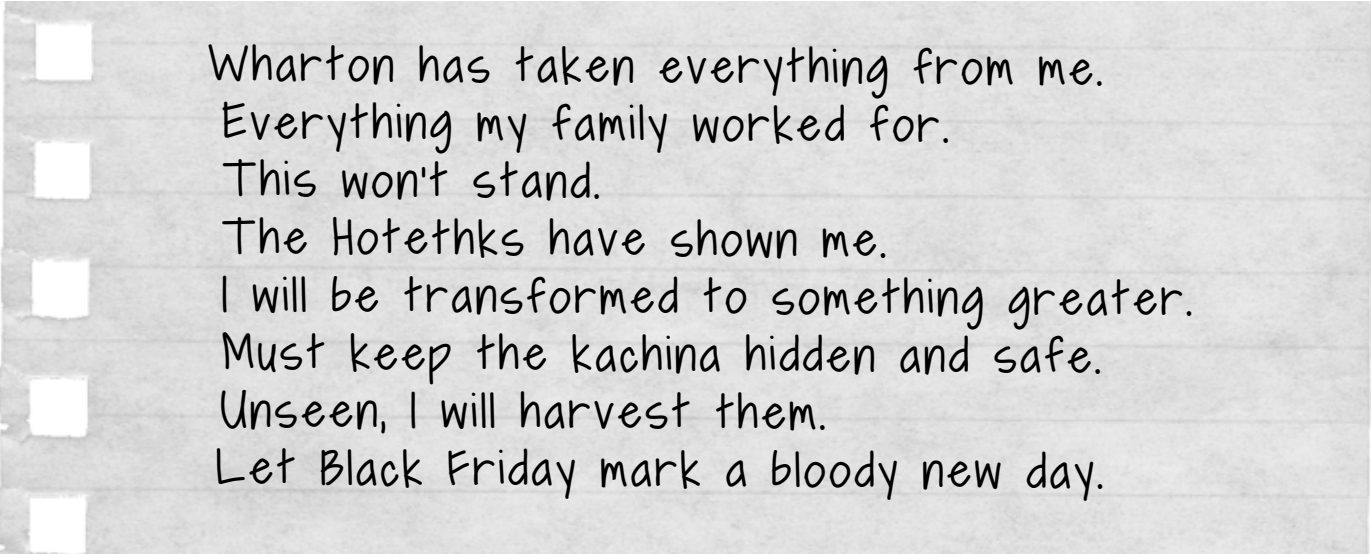
Bite 30%, damage 3D6

**Armor:** 1-point hide

**Sanity Loss:** 1/1D6 +2 Sanity Points

As a spectral hunter, Bonner can become both immaterial and invisible. While invisible he can be hit only at 1/5 the attacker's chance. He gains a +20% chance to hit others. He can be seen through any digital camera. Attacking the invisible Bonner while using a camera phone for sighting incurs a -20% penalty to hit. While immaterial, Bonner can be hurt only by magical weapons or spells.

*Playtesters: Jon Hook, 'Keeper Murf' and Hugh Ashman. ☞*



Wharton has taken everything from me.  
Everything my family worked for.  
This won't stand.  
The Hotethks have shown me.  
I will be transformed to something greater.  
Must keep the kachina hidden and safe.  
Unseen, I will harvest them.  
Let Black Friday mark a bloody new day.





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# THE CULT OF A

BY BRET KRAMER

The Clown turned his powdered face to the mirror.

“If to be fair is to be beautiful,” he said,  
“who can compare with me in my white mask?”

“Who can compare with him in his white  
mask?” I asked of Death beside me.

“Who can compare with me?” said  
Death, “for I am paler still.”

“You are very beautiful,” sighed the Clown,  
turning his powdered face from the mirror.

—Robert W. Chambers, “The Prophet’s Paradise”

**Madness comes in many forms,** from the raving lunatic to the silent sociopath. In *Call of Cthulhu* madmen are typically ranting cultist and soulless sorcerers seeking to unleash supernatural horrors upon the world to fulfill their need to dominate or to destroy. The Cult of A is no less a Cthulhu Mythos cult than the Brotherhood of the Black Pharaoh or Starry Wisdom; but instead of turning its power out against the world, devotees of A direct Her dark powers against themselves.

## EATING DISORDERS

**For the bulk of human history,** securing a sufficient caloric intake was a constant struggle. Only after the advent of agriculture did many of the health concerns of the modern world—obesity, heart disease,

age-related illnesses—even become possible. Eating Disorders, the catch-all phrase this article uses for conditions like *anorexia nervosa*, *bulimia nervosa*, and like illnesses, are one such ‘modern’ ailment.

Anorexia is a modern diagnosis, but there have been incidences of similar behavior dating as far back as the Middle Ages. Certain Catholic saints were known to abstain in part or entirely from eating, often as part of the mortification of the flesh. Called *Anorexia Mirabilis* (miraculous starvation) or *Inedia Prodigia* (prodigious fasting) these so-called ‘miraculous maids’ include Catherine of Sienna. In the 18th and 19th century a similar phenomenon of so-called ‘fasting girls’ gained notoriety, publicized by breathless newspaper accounts or as part of freak shows.

The first clinical identification of Anorexia Nervosa was published by William Gull (yes, *that* William Gull) in 1873. Popular awareness took nearly a century more. Anorexia, bulimia, and other eating disorders today are well known if not always well understood.

## THE PRESENT DAY

**Two cultural trends have greatly** compounded the problem of eating disorders in the past decades. Obesity has steadily increased since the 1950s in most of the developed world while at the same time society’s definition of beauty have shifted ever thinner. Miss America contestants in 1999 were 2% taller than their counterparts of 1922 but 12% thinner. Likewise, while the desired clothing size for female fashion models is 0 (or even



“00”), the average American woman wears size 14. The confluence of an ever-thinner standard of beauty and a continuously increasing average weight has created a growing disconnect between society’s collective ideals and reality. It is unsurprising that the incidences of eating disorders in the developed world run as high as 1% of women and 0.1% of men.

## THE ‘PRO-ANA’ MOVEMENT

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**The ‘pro-Ana’ movement** developed in the late 1990s, born like so many other social movements on the Internet, out of a combination of connectivity and anonymity. For those suffering from eating disorders, the new communities they formed online via websites, chat rooms, and later the burgeoning panoply of social media, provided a support network that reinforced individual notions that their behavior was not a sign of illness but rather a desirable lifestyle under attack by the forces of failure, weakness, and obesity.

Pro-Ana websites typically include:

- Discussion of weight goals and a support network that encourages further weight loss. This usually includes a forum for members but might simply be a comments section.
- Tips for weight loss and exercise including purging, suggestions for concealing weight loss from parents and teachers, suggested



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## DISCLAIMER

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Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia harm millions of people, directly and indirectly. The author does not wish to trivialize these illnesses or make light of the very real suffering of the afflicted. Keepers wishing to use the Cult of A should consider how their players might react to the inclusion of these illnesses in the game. The author is not a trained psychologist and the material presented here should not be used for diagnostic purposes.

If you or someone you know might be suffering from anorexia, bulimia, or some other eating disorder, please contact a medical professional. The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders maintains a help-line from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (U.S. Central Time) at (630) 577-1330, as well as a website at [www.anad.org](http://www.anad.org).



excuses for refusing food (veganism is very popular), and coping with the side effects starvation.

- ‘Thinspiration’: images of hyper-thin celebrities and models, often photo-manipulated.
- Mottos and aphorisms including ‘Ana’s Creed’ and the ‘Ten Commandments of Ana.’

The members of these sites are typically young women between middle-school and college age, though older members and men are not unknown. These communities tend to be literate and zealous to defend against criticism or condemnation. Due to the significant damage to health caused by practices espoused on pro-Ana sites, hosting sites are frequently pressured to remove them.

## THE CULT OF A

**The Cult of A, such as it exists,** is a very small subset of the pro-Ana movement. It is primarily an Internet phenomenon, spread from person to person via pro-Ana forums,

chat rooms and websites. There is no leadership, central authority, or clear objective to the cult outside of its continued propagation and expansion.

## HISTORY

**In its current form, the Cult of A** began with a series of now-deleted posts to PerfectMe (an early pro-Ana website) in the fall of 1999. A commenter using the name CassieD described conversations she had with A—Ana in the flesh. A told CassieD that she was special and that, unlike all the other people in the world, A understood how very difficult it is to be beautiful. A also revealed that Ana is but one of Her names, that She has many, and that only those blessed by Her might know Her true name. These conversations grew longer and more elaborate. CassieD described how A walked with her throughout the city (never clearly identified but probably Austin, Texas), as first the people and then even the city faded into another place, an amalgam of all

the cities of the world. At the end of one such walk CassieD swore herself to A, afterwards discovering that not only had she reached her goal weight but her parents had ceased worrying about her appearance. At last, she was beautiful.

When questioned by other members of the community, CassieD insisted that she had talked to A and that A was real. Despite the doubts of some posters, many members of the site expressed support for CassieD and asked her to share her secrets. She did so, though only through email, to a few of the most vocal posters, then ceased posting to the site.

Several of CassieD’s supporters expressed concern over her absence, but this was overshadowed by two other posters claiming that, using her techniques, they had spoken to A as well. At least seven members of the site claimed to have been contacted by A before the site was shut down in mid-2000 due to unrelated complaints about the pro-Ana content. One of those claiming to have been contacted by A stated

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### ANA'S CREED

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I believe in Control, the only force mighty enough to bring order to the chaos that is my world. I believe that I am the most vile, worthless and useless person ever to have existed on this planet, and that I am totally unworthy of anyone’s time and attention. I believe that other people who tell me differently must be idiots. If they could see how I really am, then they would hate me almost as much as I do. I believe in oughts, musts, and shoulds as unbreakable laws to determine my daily behavior. I believe in perfection and strive to attain it. I believe in salvation through trying just a bit harder than I did yesterday. I believe in calorie counters as the inspired word of god, and memorize them accordingly. I believe in bathroom scales as an indicator of my daily successes and failures. I believe in hell, because I sometimes think that I’m living in it. I believe in a wholly black and white world, the losing of weight, recrimination for sins, the abnegation of the body and a life ever fasting.

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### THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF ANA (AKA THE THIN COMMANDMENTS)

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1. If you aren’t thin, you aren’t attractive!
2. Being thin is more important than being healthy!
3. You must do anything to make yourself look thinner!
4. Thou shall not eat without feeling guilty!
5. Thou shall not eat fattening food without punishing oneself afterwards!
6. Thou shall count calories and restrict food intake!
7. What the scale says is the most important thing!
8. Losing weight is good, Gaining weight is BAD!
9. You can never be too thin!
10. Being thin and not eating are signs of true will power and success!

that Her true name was “Astra” (Latin for “star”) but others who had made similar contact insisted she had told them something else.

Since that initial appearance, CassieD’s stories about A, her walks with Her, and her eventual pledge to Her, have continuously circulated within the pro-Ana community. This narrative is generally called *Walking with A*, though there is much disagreement about the

specific content. Even within the pro-Ana community the story has a mixed reputation. Some regard it as a helpful metaphor or fiction to inspire readers to keep up the ‘lifestyle.’ Others worry that it makes pro-Ana devotees to appear foolish, even unstable, and gives ammunition to those who would suppress the movement and diagnosis its adherents as mentally ill. While awareness of the narrative is

widespread as one of many pieces of ‘thinspiration’, few admit to having read it or even to know where to find it. There is anecdotal evidence to its effectiveness but such stories are always second-hand, friend-of-a-friend claims.

On rare occasions, a member of a pro-Ana site claims to be in possession of *Walking with A*, circulates it among some of the site’s members, and then disappears. Those who receive a copy and follow its instructions proclaim the effectiveness of A and soon cease posting to the site, usually claiming to no longer need the community to achieve thinness. Sometimes, afterwards, family members or concerned parties post to these same sites, looking for information about the whereabouts of these same posters, who have recently disappeared.

## MEMBERSHIP

**The followers of A call themselves “Her Chosen.”** They are always drawn from the pro-Ana community, usually from a small circle of online acquaintances, though sometimes a cluster of real-world friends becomes ensnared. Typically an individual posts portions of *Walking with A* to a pro-Ana site or promises to share it privately. The promise of guaranteed weight loss and self-control attracts great interest, from which a small circle of the most trusted (or perhaps most vulnerable) members are selected. Due to the malign nature of contact with A, such groups are ephemeral at best and tend to break apart within a few months.

As with the pro-Ana community, cult members are generally (75% or greater) female and tend to be age 13 to 18, though adults are not uncommon (especially among those pledged to A). They tend to be affluent, educated, and technologically proficient.



HANSEN

## ACTIVITIES

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**While lacking any organization** or planning mechanism, the Cult of A still has goals, of a sort, though these tend to be a side effect of the fundamental nature of A worship. Disturbingly, there does seem to be some coordination to the activities of the cult, suggesting that perhaps while the cult lacks central human leadership it possesses some supernatural direction.

The primary activity of Her Chosen is the dissemination of Walking with A, usually through pro-Ana websites. Due to the nature of A, She is only drawn to those already suffering from an eating disorder; the narrative is almost always directed toward those open to Her malign influence. Simply posting the narrative to a file-sharing site would have little effect and would likely go unnoticed among the ceaseless avalanche of pirated music, films, and pornography.

Typically a poster reports possession of the narrative on a pro-Ana site, discussing the positive benefits she has gained from A. Sometimes, rarely, it appears in its entirety, posted spontaneously and apparently without human agency, only to be removed within a few hours. The poster then selects a few candidates from the interested members of the community and shares *Walking with A* with them. Some, though not all, make contact with A and a portion of those pledge themselves to Her. The ones who don't answer the call inevitably delete the file or inexplicably lose track of it and find it missing from their computers. Within a few months, the pledged disappear. Sometimes they return to post the narrative to a new site and the Cult of A grows a little larger.

Outside of expanding the cult, there seems to be a secondary activity for those who have pledged to A. Occasionally they become involved in the mass media—in fashion, advertising, and publish-

ing—almost always in a background position. They appear to have the goal of pushing societal norms ever closer to the anorexic standard to beauty, increasing the prevalence of eating disorders among the wider population. These activities are subtle but ever-expanding.

## PSYCHOLOGY

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**The best way to explain the** worship of A to use a metaphor: Those drawn to Her have a hole within themselves that has already manifested as their illness. A is a scalpel that can cut away at the edges of the hole; the pain the hole creates goes away for a time... and the hole grows slightly larger. After a time the pain returns, so they cut a little more of it away. Eventually all that is left is a hole where a person used to be.

It is possible that there is a biological component to being receptive to messages from A. The physiological effects of starvation cause a variety of changes to the brain and fasting has long been used to improve one's connection to the divine.

## WALKING WITH A

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**Walking With A consists of a** series of conversations between an unnamed narrator and A, an angelic and ideal being that personifies the physical and emotional ideals of those with these sorts of eating disorders. A, described as a beautiful, impossibly thin woman, tells the narrator that she is special and that, like A, she understands the difficulties and challenges it takes to be beautiful. At first A appears to the narrator while she is alone in her room, but soon the pair begins to go for prolonged walks in her town (which can be identified as Austin, Texas with a Know roll). Unlike most 'thinspiration', A's guidance to the narrator is compassionate, almost motherly. As the narrator begins embrace A's

guidance, she discovers that all of the difficulties she faced in living the 'lifestyle' begin to fade.

As the walks continue, they grow longer and ever more expansive. The city itself apparently transforms into an amalgam of all the cities that the narrator dreamed of seeing once she became 'beautiful'. Later, A shows her a place that she calls home, a great city by a lake, where faint twin suns float in the sky. It is here that A introduces her to the Beautiful Salon, a gathering of others who, like the narrator, have been taught A's secrets. The women (and a few men), are described in such a way that it is impossible to know if they are perfect and beautiful or simply radiant, polished bones.

At the end of the narrative, the narrator declares her love and eternal devotion to A. A tells the narrator that she knows that she is loved and in turn loves the narrator. She asks the narrator to pledge herself to A so that they might be bound together, forever. The narrator accepts without hesitation.

Reading this text functions as an unconscious casting of the spell Contact A (see below) if the reader meets the criteria for the spell's casting.

**WALKING WITH A.** In English. +1% Cthulhu Mythos. -0/1D3 SAN (1D3/2D4 if the reader suffers from an eating disorder). Study Time: 2 hours. *Spells:* Contact A, Mask of A, Sight of A, Pledge of A.

## SPELLS

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**MASK OF A:** The first of the prayers A teaches those who walk with Her, Mask of A, causes everyone to see the caster in an idealized state: healthy, beautiful, and very thin. Typically this manifests as an APP of 18. Those viewing the caster at a distance see only this false surface. Those inspecting more closely can roll Spot Hidden to recognize that there is something off about the caster; but the viewer must overcome the caster's POW to see through the



illusion. To suddenly perceive the face behind the mask costs at least 0/1 SAN, perhaps more depending on the condition of the caster. The spell also grants a bonus of +25% to Fast Talk rolls against those who fail to resist its power.

Photographs and digital recordings display the mask, but careful examination (a successful Photography or Computer Use roll) discovers weird visual artifacts that suggest something very unnatural about the individual. This discovery costs 0/1 SAN.

This spell costs 1 point of POW and remains in effect so long as the caster is a worshiper of A.

**SIGHT OF A:** The second prayer causes the caster to see herself as others would see her under the effects of the Mask of A. This provides a feeling of peace that allows the caster to overcome most kinds of scrutiny from parents and doctors. All Psychology rolls fail against the caster and the caster receives a +25% bonus to all Persuade rolls.

Sight of A costs 1 magic point to cast and its effects last about twenty-four hours.

**WALK WITH A (CONTACT HASTUR):** A variation of Contact Hastur, this spell can only be cast by someone who has fasted for at least three days and has read *Walking with A*. The initial casting costs 1 point of POW; subsequent castings cost 5 MP. After a short while, A appears unexpectedly in the vicinity of the caster and engages her in prolonged conversation, as in *Walking with A*. Sometimes the caster and A walk together. After multiple castings it is increasingly likely that they will cross over into Carcosa temporarily during their communion. During these conversations, A seeks to convince the caster to pledge herself to Her and may also teach other spells.

**THE PLEDGE TO A:** This is a version of the Unspeakable Promise,

costing 2D6 SAN and 2 point of POW. The caster is granted a number of bonuses to their statistics: STR 18, CON 18, POW +6, DEX +4. Additionally, A instructs the Pledged additional spells (from those listed below) and reveals Her true name. This name is different for each person. As the Pledged is no longer alive, she has no need for food, water, or sleep and can consume alcohol and narcotics without lingering ill effect.

The caster is now a semi-autonomous Unspeakable Possessor (statistics at the end of this article) which still appears human thanks to the Mask of A. Should the Pledged fall to 0 hit points (or should A will it), she will immediately arise as a mindless Unspeakable Possessor and lash out at anyone present. Unlike the Unspeakable Promise, there is no transference of the spell at the death of the caster.

**IMPART HUNGER:** This is one of the few aggressive spells that A teaches Her Chosen. Usable only by one Pledged to A, this spell allows her to inflict her hunger on a target or targets. Victims feel an overwhelming hunger and must roll POWx5 to avoid consuming anything at hand. Concentration is nearly impossible. No action can be taken without a POWx1 roll, and even then skill use requiring concentration is at half chance. The hunger remains while the caster is present and for 20-POW minutes after. Sanity cost to be affected 1/1D3, or up to 1D2/1D6 if victim cannot resist eating.

The spell costs 3 MP plus 1 MP for each victim. Area of effect is line of sight.

## OTHER SPELLS

**Those Pledged to A may learn** from Her the spells Circle of Nausea, Dominate, Impart Hunger, Implant Fear, Mask of A, Mind Blast, Pledge of A, Shriveling, Sight of A, and Wither Limb.

## INVESTIGATION

**Investigators researching the** Cult of A have a number of potential leads.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Basic information on eating** disorders and the pro-Ana movement can be obtained with a Library Use roll (or alternately Psychoanalysis or Medicine). The current state of the pro-Ana movement can be ascertained with a Computer Use or halved Psychoanalysis roll. Anyone who completes such a survey discovers passing references to *Walking with A* in the literature but cannot locate a copy or further details.

## HER CHOSEN ONLINE

**Finding an copy of *Walking with A*** or an active outbreak of A worship is much harder. It likely requires Library Use, Computer Use, Psychoanalysis, and Luck rolls unless the Investigators are tipped off at the outset. There is a good chance that forgeries or only partial copies of the text might be located; the Cthulhu Mythos skill will allow investigators to determine the veracity of a copy.

Gaining access to an active Cult of A requires the Investigator to impersonate someone suffering from an eating disorder, likely requiring Persuade and Psychology rolls at a minimum. The specifics of this interaction is left to the Keeper.

## SURVIVORS

**Not everyone who has been** exposed to the cult becomes a member. Some fledgling cult members are brought back from the brink by personal choice or timely intervention by parents and/or healthcare providers. These individuals will have at least interacted with members of a nascent Cult of A and may even have read *Walking with A*, but none will have Pledged themselves.

While their knowledge of A and Her Chosen is incomplete, they may prove helpful in locating an active cult or differentiating between bogus and legitimate copies of *Walking with A*. Unfortunately these survivors tend to be psychologically fragile and potentially susceptible to A's influence, especially if re-exposed to the text.

Parents, siblings, doctors, friends, and lovers of members of the cult might be located, though their knowledge is far more limited, especially on the specifics of *Walking with A*.

## HASTUR

**Some sources that deal with Hastur** might give hints of A and Her cult. A Cthulhu Mythos skill roll may recall some hint that references the cult or A Herself, albeit likely in some oblique manner. Here are a few examples. The Keeper must tailor these clues depending on what Mythos texts the Investigator has studied.

**The King in Yellow:** Throughout the play *Cassilda* is chided by other members of the royal family for neglecting to eat ever since the arrival of the Stranger. Camilla goes so far as noting "How pale the princess is! Never have I seen her so pale, white as bone!" For her part, *Cassilda* claims that she has only grown more beautiful and that the others are jealous. At one point she muses what it might be like to be the Queen to the King in Yellow, and how all her courtesans would be as pale and beautiful as she.

**The Turner Codex:** In one section discussing the nature of Kaiwan, the translation notes that he is "the Hunger of the World" or possibly "He Who is Hungry for the World." Further discussion of the members of His court describes a lady made thin by hunger for she was too sacred to eat anything but the flesh of a god. This lady is said to sit at Kaiwan's left hand and to wear only a necklace of polished finger bones.

**The Revelations of Hali:** Amid Bayrolles' footnotes regarding his translation of one of the hymns

contained within this work is the following comment: "The identity of the 'lady' mentioned here is unclear. She is not a member of the royal court and she is not named anywhere in the text. From the honorifics bestowed upon her, she must be very beautiful, for all are said to be enthralled by her. It is hard then to understand how she can also be the 'lady' mentioned in the next verse: 'Lady of Bone, Lady of the Ravenous Mouths, who swallows up the weak yet hungers still. Fleshless queen of the ceaseless void, we beseech you for succor.'"

**Azathoth and Other Horrors:** One of Derby's nightmare poems, "Our Lady of Silk and Bones," describes a young woman who has been forced into a harem and elects to starve herself to death to escape her fate. She grows more and more beautiful as she withers away, driving man and woman, Sultan and pauper, mad with passion. At the poem's conclusion, the members of the court, driven mad by their lust for the skeletal woman, fall upon her perfect corpse and devour her bones and withered flesh.



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# MANIFESTATIONS

**Due to its connections to Hastur,** the Cult of A might generate bizarre manifestations of the Unspeakable One's malign influence. The Keeper is encouraged to inflict any of these encounters upon the Investigators to create the proper atmosphere of fear and menace. These effects often manifest as a waking dream.

## THE BEAUTIFUL SALON

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**Someone troubled by their contact** with A or who has lost a loved one to Her malign influence dreams of a glittering gathering of beautiful people, perfect specimens of human beauty, all speaking of their love of beautiful things. A, beautiful as ever, can be seen at the edges of the party, bringing joy to everyone. Those who have lost someone to A see the lost loved one there as well, happy and surrounded by admirers. Slowly the afflicted realizes that the others at this gathering are not quite what they seem. Indeed, each wears a perfect mask of a human face behind which is nothing but a fleshless skull. At this realization, the afflicted discovers he or she has been holding a mask before his or her own bony face this whole time. A hand at the shoulder is revealed to be that of A, who welcomes the afflicted to stay with Her for as long as he or she should desire. Sanity loss: 1D2/1D6.

After experiencing the Salon, the afflicted later might catch glimpses of it in a distant window or behind a closing door at the end of a long hallway, or faintly hear the clinking of glasses and the melodic laughter of the masked guests. The afflicted may also feel an overwhelming urge to touch his or her face, just to be sure. Recurrences like these can cost up to 0/1 SAN.

Should unfortunate Investigators somehow find themselves in Carcosa, those who have been exposed to A find themselves drawn to Her court there and find them-

selves again within the Beautiful Salon, perhaps, at last, forever.

## GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

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**Many of those who fall under** A's thrall disappear from the mortal world, but sometimes they linger online. The Investigators may receive email or chat requests from cult members they know to be dead. The deceased claim to be alive in a better place. They know that the Investigators are worried but say they should not worry. A has taken the best care of them and they want for nothing now.

These conversations frequently turn mocking, even threatening, should an Investigator question the beneficence of A or the fate of the deceased. It is possible that even A Herself deigns to speak with Investigators in this way, particularly to mock and discourage their inability to stop Her from taking those who seek Her. Conversations with the dead or with a god are unnerving at best; Sanity loss should begin at 0/1 and increase depending on the connection between the Investigators and the deceased.

These communications may prove difficult to share with others. Chat logs spontaneously delete themselves and email becomes scrambled text. These communications with A and Her Chosen may be wholly supernatural and impossible to record. They may even be a delusion on the part of their sufferer.

## THE FALLEN MASK OF BEAUTY

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**Investigators who have particu-**larly displeased A may find themselves increasingly unable to appreciate human beauty. They see only the worst flaws in every face, the imperfections in every body. Even the most beautiful by ordinary standards appear to be decaying; flawed garments worn by crumbling bones. This malign influence is only temporary and may be imparted as an indefinite insanity suffered by

someone driven mad by A or her cult. A Psychoanalysis roll alleviates the symptoms, as might medication. Likewise, total isolation from others (and from mirrors) might stop the pain. Sufferers lose 0/1 SAN per day until they find relief.

## WATCHED BY A GOD

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**A sometimes toys with humans** who have crossed Her path—or at least those who fall under Her malign gaze feel as if they are being toyed with. A appears to the victim on the faces of people in a crowd or as a newsreader on television, the face of a magazine, or in the victim's own reflection. She is everywhere and she torments and mocks. Sanity loss for such divine displeasure is 0/1D2 per day; investigators may be required to make Idea rolls to sort the real from the imagined—to avoid lashing out at A's phantom as it flashes across the face of another or the victim's own reflection.

## DELTA GREEN AND THE CULT

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**Delta Green has some exposure** to the Cult of A but these interactions have been mostly in passing. Agents who contact A-cell may be informed of one or more of these past encounters, though little in the way of practical help is forthcoming.

## THE MAGGIE FULLER DISAPPEARANCE

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**In February 1999 Margaret (Mag-**gie) Fuller, daughter of Tennessee congressman Lloyd Fuller, disappeared from the Beech Grove Rehabilitation Clinic near Dudley, Massachusetts. Ms. Fuller had been forcibly committed by her parents due to anorexia. Three weeks into her confinement, Ms. Fuller disappeared from the lockdown ward of the facility. A state-wide manhunt was conducted but no trace of the congressman's daughter was ever found. A Delta Green friendly participated in the search and brought certain occult elements to the group's



attention. Fuller vanished from a locked cell seconds after passing out of sight of a security camera; she seemed to be having a conversation with an invisible companion she called “Annabelle”; she had been repeatedly scratching a strange curlicue symbol onto her skin (a Cthulhu Mythos roll recognizes an attempt at the Yellow Sign); and finally the girl had not eaten anything for almost two weeks when she vanished.

Subsequently three other girls at the facility disappeared, as did an orderly who had been suspected of abusing some of the patients. The authorities determined the missing orderly had been sneaking Fuller food in exchange for sexual favors, but there was no evidence for this allegation. Additionally two of the treating physicians at the facility took their own lives within the next twelve months and another was killed in a suspicious accident.

A-cell determined that the events here were definitely supernatural but were unable to ascertain the cause or any useful action that Delta Green could take.

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#### DOMINIQUE CORCORAN

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**A former model, Corcoran was** working at a recruiter for TLE, a photography agency in Miami. On the night of July 19, 2003, she was assaulted in a parking structure in the city’s Design District. The attackers were thought to be in the employ of a local drug gang seeking to pressure the agency’s chief, Jose Acevedo-Montez, who was a regular client and owed a substantial sum.

Corcoran was recorded walking through the parking structure when she was approached by three men, one of whom produced a pistol. She is seen to struggle with the men and then, unexpectedly due to her size and apparently lack of muscle strength, she breaks a man’s arm. There is a struggle and shots are fired, to little effect. At this point the quality of the video

degrades for reasons unknown. Corcoran seems to transform into some parody of a human form, her limbs telescoping outwards as they strangle one attacker and throw another across the garage. Viewing the footage costs 1/1D2 points of Sanity. An Idea roll notes that her face remains perfectly serene. Delta Green recovered the footage after a source in the Miami P.D. alerted the group to the horrific content.

Corcoran has not been seen since the attack. A police search of her apartment determined that not only did she not own any means to prepare or serve food, but the water had been shut off and the bed had been unslept in for some months. Her clothes had disappeared along with a few personal items. Coworkers described her as very driven and very skilled at finding new girls to model for the firm.

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#### DR. RUDOLPH SCHRIEBER

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**A German researcher and former** assistant of Dr. Hans Eppinger, Schrieber was involved with human experiments at Dachau and later at the Dłutów concentration camp. There in the summer of 1944 the doctor conducted research into the effects of starvation on a group of Roma and Jewish female prisoners. During this research Schrieber claimed to have contacted the “Reinweiss Dame” or “Pure White Lady,” an angel who promised to teach him all the secrets of the flesh in exchange for his love. The advancing Soviet Army caused Schrieber to abandon his work, fleeing to neutral Istanbul though means unknown.

In Istanbul Schrieber apparently murdered at least a dozen women, carving their bones into small female figurines. His case was discovered in the spring of 1948 by a former OSS agent (and Delta Green member) who was following leads on an unrelated case and heard from a contact in the local police about a mass killer who had taken his own life. The agent recovered

Schrieber’s notes and took photos of his rooms, including a wall-sized mural of the “Reinweiss Dame” done in blood and feces showing a skeletal human female and bearing the motto “The Beautiful One is Watching.” Schrieber’s autopsy indicated that he died of prolonged starvation and ritual self-mutilation including numerous occult symbols carved into his flesh. The report only exists as a summary now; the photos and Schrieber’s research are lost.

## USING THE CULT OF A

### Scenarios involving the Cult of A

A should focus more on personal horror than on combat. A’s cultists are not raving lunatics seeking to unleash the End Times; the only human sacrifices they make are typically themselves. This change of pace may be a welcome break from visceral encounters, though some players may be frustrated by the lack of a foe they can fight directly. They must find a way to fight a cult that is little more than a Cthulhu Mythos text, the fragile minds it preys upon, and the goddess who hungers for them.

When crafting encounters with the cult, highlight these particular challenges:

- **Nature of membership.** A’s cultists tend to be young people. They are treated differently by the law and often have family members who go to great lengths to protect them. Most members do not pose a physical threat to others and therefore provide little justification for violence against them.
- **Structure of the cult.** The Cult of A is almost entirely decentralized, has no human leadership, and lacks the usual flunky/initiate/leader pyramid.
- **Nature of the cult’s goals.** The cult does not have the usual apocalyptic intentions, at least in the short term. Their victims are primarily their own

members. Inexplicable disappearances and unusual Internet activities are more likely hooks than gruesome murder.

- **Nature of the threat.** The greatest threat posed by the cult is the text *Walking with A*. How one might neutralize a text that solely exists on the Internet and that is actively seeking to disseminate itself is a challenge left to your Investigators.

## SAMPLE NPCs

**These characters show the impact of the Cult of A in detail.**

### DANIELLE ROHM

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**Chaos is Danielle's enemy.** It destroyed her parents' marriage, took away her grandmother, and made her move five times in four years. She has discovered the one thing she has total control over: herself. The grades came easily; no one can be unhappy with her GPA. The extracurricular activities only cost her time and cut out any chance of dating, but there would be time enough for friends or even a boyfriend once she had her life in

order. It was easier that way, and colleges ask what club you were in, not who you dated. The hard part was fixing her body. Exercise was not enough. Diets were not enough, at least not the ones that her mother approved. She had to learn to ignore pain, to ignore hunger, to show her body who was in charge. That is when she discovered that she was not the only one at war for control of her self. There were others and they were online.

The pro-Ana community was a revelation for Danielle. Not only were there others like her but they listened to her for advice and support. People cared about what she said. She was respected, even admired, but she was still not yet satisfied. Her parents were beginning to ask questions, to take her to doctors—doctors who wanted her to give up, to fail. Again, her friends online provided the solution: *Walking with A*. She was doubtful at first since the link to it was posted anonymously to her Tumblr, but when A appeared in Doctor Kleinberg's waiting room and took Danielle away from all his questions she became a believer.

A showed her the prayer that made the questions stop, that calmed down her parents, that made people see the beautiful, perfect girl inside Danielle. A will show her how to finally fix herself, to fix the only thing that was ever really broken to begin with. All she asks is for her love and to help others find their way into A's loving embrace.

Though Danielle cannot admit it to herself, there is something about A that terrifies her and has caused her to hold back on that final step.

### LYDIA O'NEIL

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**Born Tammy Lynn Swoboda** in Fort Wayne, Indiana, "Lydia O'Neil" has spent a lifetime escaping that fact. From childhood she felt ignored and unloved by her parents and siblings; as the fifth of eight children it was easy to get lost in the shuffle. She found there were other people, men mostly, who would pay attention to her once she reached adolescence and she reveled in it despite the protestations of her family. She ran away at the age of 15 with her boyfriend of the moment to Chicago. For the next several years Tammy swapped boyfriends,

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### DANIELLE ROHM

*Teen cultist and disciple of A, age 17*

STR 8 CON 8 SIZ 10 INT 16 POW 9  
DEX 13 APP 18 EDU 11 SAN 29 HP 9

**Damage Bonus:** -1D2

**Skills:** Computer Use 38%, Cthulhu Mythos 6%, Deny Self 83%, Drive Auto 15%, Fast Talk 33%, History 11%, Listen 28%, Persuade 23%, Spot Hidden 29%

**Spells:** Mask of A

**Notes:** Danielle's STR, CON, and DEX are currently at a reduced state due to her severe malnutrition. Her APP has been increased due to her use of the spell Mask of A; without it her APP is 8, as above due to the effects of starvation. Should she return a healthy weight, she would have STR 10, CON 14, DEX 15, and APP 14.

### ROBERT ABELIAN

*Mourning parent, age 47*

STR 13 CON 16 SIZ 14 INT 12 POW 11  
DEX 11 APP 13 EDU 14 SAN 46 HP 15

**Skills:** Persuade 56%, Psychology 39%

### PATRICIA ABELIAN

*Mourning parent, age 47*

STR 12 CON 10 SIZ 9 INT 12 POW 15  
DEX 12 APP 11 EDU 14 SAN 63 HP 10

**Skills:** Computer Use 29%, Credit Rating 36%

### LYDIA O'NEAL (AKA TAMMY SWOBODA)

*Talent scout and Pledged of A, age 49 (appears 29)*

STR 18 CON 18 SIZ 10 INT 14 POW 19  
DEX 16 APP 18 EDU 13 SAN 0 HP 14

**Damage Bonus:** +1D4

**Skills:** Computer Use 31%, Credit Rating 59%, Critical Remark 95%, Drive Auto 49%, Fast Talk 71%, Identify Modeling Talent 88%, Sneak 61%, Spot Hidden 72%

**Attacks:** Punch 67%, damage 1D3+1D4  
9mm pistol 52%, damage 1D10

**Spells:** Dominate, Impart Hunger, Implant Fear, Mask of A, Pledge of A, Shriveling, Sight of A

names, and cities, always looking for a better option. Unfortunately Tammy's lifestyle took a heavy toll on her looks, the tool she had used to escape her old life. Desperate for anything that would bring back her beauty, she explored many elements of alternative medicine and the occult. When she discovered rumors of the Cult of A, she was doubtful, but tried it anyway. After her first walk with A, she was wholly devoted. Very soon she promised herself to A completely.

Today 'Lydia' works as a talent scout for Apogée, a major modeling agency with offices in New York, Los Angeles, Paris, and Milan. She subsists entirely on vodka, cigarettes, and cocaine (she is effectively immune to all of them) and for the pleasure she gains in destroying others' sense of self. Her work on behalf of A includes subtly encouraging an ever thinner standard of beauty in the fashion community, recruiting models directly from treatment facilities for those suffering from eating disorders, and, occasionally, anonymously removing problems on behalf of the cult with money or with violence.

While she can no longer be identified as Tammy Swoboda, 'Lydia' still keeps tabs on her family back in Indiana. She toys with the idea of having them all killed, but for reasons she cannot fully explain she prefers to instead hire private investigators to photograph them and report the mundane details of their lives.

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## PATRICIA AND ROBERT ABELIAN

**Patricia's and Robert's daughter** Melissa, Missy to her parents, has been gone for two years. The police say that she's run away. The private detective they hired could not find her and tried to convince them that she was likely dead. Neither believes this to be true. Melissa continues to contact them in email and text messages, and sometimes in short, whispered telephone calls.

The Abelians' horror began seven years ago when their fifteen-year-old daughter, twice hospitalized for bulimia, suffered a relapse after becoming involved with a 'pro-Mia' website. Her parents again had her committed but inexplicably the facility released her within a week, saying that she was cured. Patricia and Robert were overjoyed, if incredulous, but when they saw Melissa they could not deny that she looked happier and healthier than she had in several years. They would later confess to each other than they had an inexplicable fear of their daughter and that there was something fundamentally wrong with her, but neither could explain why nor tell the other. Indeed Melissa, over the next few months, became the center of attention at school, at church, and in their small California community. Then, one day, she was gone. All she left was a note saying, "I am going home."

Investigating their daughter's activities in the months before her disappearance, the Abelians learned of Melissa's involvement with the pro-Mia movement, including much discussion of someone called 'A' (or 'Angelique' in Melissa's diary) among the members of the community. Melissa attempted to destroy her computer before her disappearance, but there was enough evidence to suggest she had been a part of something...unnatural. When her parents learned that several other members of the website had also gone missing, worry turned to fear. They know that there is something that preys on people like their daughter, but they do not have any idea what to do about it. They have become active in attempting to have pro-Ana and pro-Mia websites shut down. They may come into contact with Investigators in this way.

Even worse, for the past few years both parents have received messages—sometimes loving, sometimes desperate, sometimes cruel—from their daughter. They have told no one about them save each other, and even then they would prefer to

pretend they were not happening. Despite all that, they take comfort in knowing that, somehow, somewhere, Melissa is out there.

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## A

*"You ask me to describe Her. Words are inadequate. She IS perfection—She IS beauty. She is thin and radiant and flawless. She is what I have wanted to see in the mirror every day of my life. I am shit. She is a diamond."*

—CassieD

**A is a manifestation of Hastur**, a sort of nightmare mirror of the self projected back at the viewer, at once accentuating all that is beautiful overlaying a ravaged and nearly fleshless body, skin pulled taut over angular bone. She is both things at once; she may show those she encounters Her beautiful aspect or Her horrific aspect. Those who survive such an encounter realize that both aspects were identical.

A's specific appearance depends on the viewer. Typically She reflects the ethnic background and general appearance (hair and eye color) of the viewer, though on some occasions she takes the appearance of someone the viewer loves or desires.

So long as She presents Herself in Her 'beautiful' aspect, no human can do anything but gawk at Her without matching INT or POW (whichever is higher) against Her APP.

The spell Dismiss Hastur banishes A.

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## THE PLEDGED

**These beings are created when** a member of the Cult of A makes the Unspeakable Promise. They are in some way like animated corpses; they do not need to eat, drink, breathe, or sleep (though they may do all but the latter if they wish). They typically employ the spell Mask of A, granting them exceptional beauty. Without it they are skeletal and horrific, with a hint of decay.



## A, THE BEAUTIFUL ONE

*Avatar of Hastur*

STR 20 CON 106 SIZ 10 INT 50 POW 35  
DEX 27 APP 20/3\* MOV 15/at will HP 58

**Damage Bonus:** n/a (she never attacks physically)

**Attacks:** None. A refrains from combat and instead uses Her superhuman beauty to parlay or else uses spells against her opponents. Should She need, She may spend 1 magic point to summon 1D6 Byakhee to defend Her.

**Armor:** None

**Spells:** Circle of Nausea, Create Gate, Dominate, Free Hastur, Imbue Hunger, Implant Fear, Mask of A, Mind Blast, Pledge of A [Unspeakable Promise], Send Dreams, Shriveling, Sight of A, Song of Hastur, Stop Heart, View Gate, Wither Limb, Wrack

**Sanity Loss:** 1/1D3 for Her beautiful form, or 1D4/2D6 for Her hideous form.

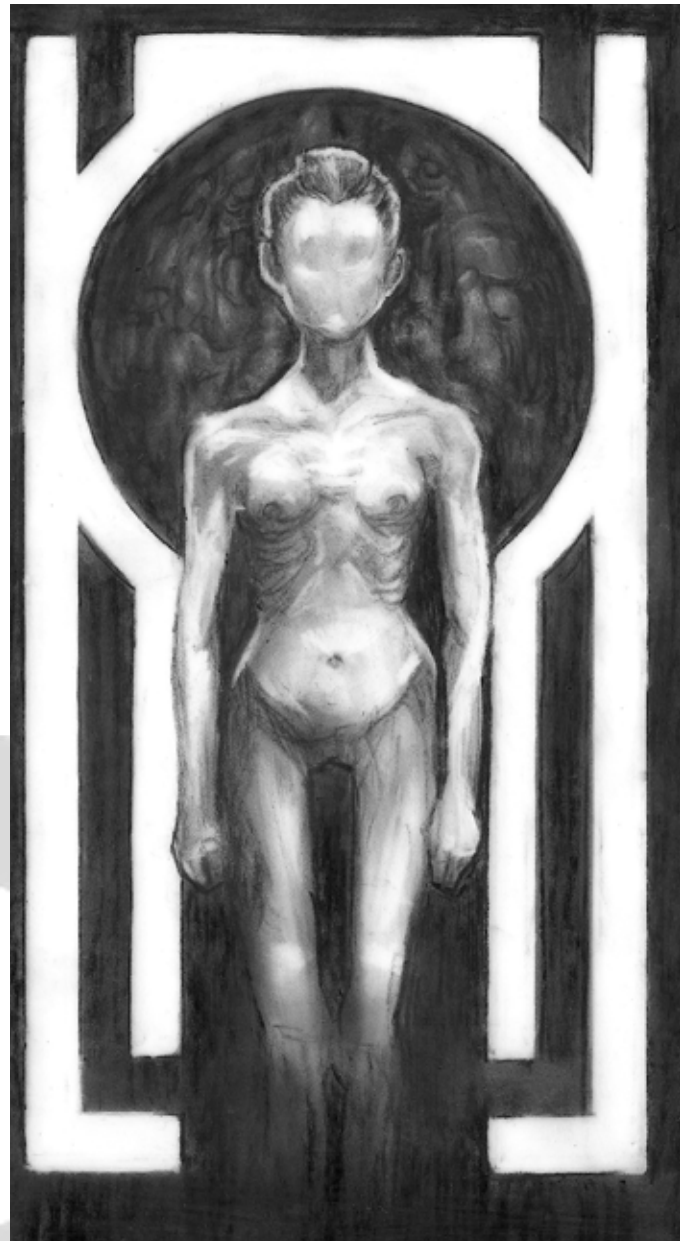
## THE PLEDGED

*Unspeakable Promisor*

Statistic are as they were before taking the Pledge, save as follows:

STR 18 CON 18 POW +6 DEX +4

Should one of the Pledged be killed, it immediately arises again as an Unspeakable Possessor, as per the *Call of Cthulhu* rules, and attacks anyone who caused it harm before death. Should A desire it, the Pledged may return to human form and continue in Her work after 1D4+1 days. ☸



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# THE CHOSEN OF EIHORT

## LESSER SERVITOR RACE

BY BRIAN M. SAMMONS

“...the man’s face tearing, a rent appearing from temple to jaw, opening the cheek to hang revealed; for there had been no blood—only something pale as things that had never seen the sun, something that poured down the man’s body, which collapsed like a balloon.”

—Ramsey Campbell, “Before the Storm”

**The Great Old One Eihort** eternally roams a lightless labyrinth deep beneath the earth. An entrance to his Stygian abyss can be found beneath a rundown, reportedly witch-haunted house in England’s Severn Valley. Other entrances can be found all over the world in deep, dark places shunned by sane people. No one knows whether this is because the ancient labyrinth is so large that it actually spans the globe or if instead its alien geometry warps time and space.

Most who know of Eihort write off the bloated, ovoid Lord of the Labyrinth as a parasite, existing only to impregnate those unfortunate enough to cross paths with its brood. Eihort cares not for the adulation of human worshipers. It only desires the time when its countless offspring will emerge from their hiding places to claim the world for their progenitor. To ensure that outcome, Eihort desires lots and lots of offspring.

With that purpose in mind, Eihort does recognize one use for humans who have struck a dreaded bargain with it: to help it find even more people for its endless supply of young. Unfortunately Eihort’s brood mature in a few months, to a year at most, and then completely rip apart their screaming meat-cocons when they emerge. Those infested with the brood don’t have much time to become chosen by the foul deity.

### THE TWO BARGAINS

**The majority of those that become the Chosen of Eihort** do so by happenstance. A victim unlucky enough to encounter the Great Old One in the flesh must agree to its bargain, and become infested with its brood, or die. Eihort makes this deal itself via a psychic link and the specifics are usually kept vague. That’s not out of any need for deception on the part of the Great

Old One; it usually just asks, “Do you want to live?” Those that say yes are held down and pumped full of Eihort’s immature brood. This usually happens via the victim’s mouth but any orifice will suffice.

Once impregnated, the new vessel has his or here mind wiped of the last few hours by Eihort, forgetting the horrors that were just inflicted. Eihort does this lest the bargainer tries to escape his or her fate and attempt to expel the brood growing inside, or flees to the relative peace of suicide before the god’s offspring are fully grown. As the brood gestate, they fill the thoughts and dreams of their infested incubator with visions and whispers of the Cthulhu Mythos. These visions are random, chaotic, and are not limited to Eihort. Dreams of other Great Old Ones, outer gods, alien landscapes, diabolical cult practices, and more soon begin to invade the victim’s sleeping mind. Through these hallucinations and nightmares a victim may learn how to beseech Eihort into accepting him or her as a Chosen one.

There have also been a few evil or insane individuals through the years that first learned about Eihort’s Chosen in ancient tomes. The sixth volume of *The Revelations of Glaaki* has a lengthy chapter on the Lord of the Labyrinth. Armed with this knowledge they willingly approached the Great Old One with the desire to become impregnated by it and become one of its special few. This is incredibly dangerous, but some believe the rewards are worth the risk.

However the knowledge is gained, in order to become chosen one must strike a second bargain with Eihort after becoming impregnated by it. This can be done either face to face or through the use of the Contact Deity: Eihort spell. During this negotiation, the infected person promises to bring others to the Great Old One for it to infest. Eihort rewards such service by giving the chosen one a bit longer to live before the brood fully mature and come exploding out in



a geyser of gore. To gain this stay of execution, the Chosen brings a victim to Eihort and the new potential host must agree to the god's bargain and accept a new brood. To help assure that this bargain is struck, the Chosen usually tries to convince the terrified scapegoat to agree to the infernal pact. This is in the Chosen's best interest, because if the new vessel rejects the brood Eihort will not only kill the rejecter but will do nothing to delay the Chosen from being torn apart by the brood. Should the time of the brood's release be close, the Chosen might not have enough time to find another victim.

If a bargain is struck, then Eihort rewards its Chosen by de-aging the brood inside the Chosen to their initial larval state. The Great Old One can easily do this for he has total control over his issue. This buys the Chosen a few more months to a year of life, until the next time the brood gets close to the time of their birth. Then the Chosen must find a new victim. And again. And again.

## WISDOM OF THE CHOSEN

**Becoming one of Eihort's Chosen** has the enviable side effect of reverting the age of the Chosen back to the time when he or she was initially impregnated by Eihort, as the Chosen and the brood are linked on a metaphysical level. As long as the Chosen keeps bringing new people to accept Eihort's bargain, he or she can essentially live forever and never age. But one wrong misstep, one time not finding a new vessel to accept the bargain in time, and this very dangerous game ends messily. This callous sacrificing of others to save one's own skin has a SAN loss of 1D10 per victim.

Those infested by Eihort soon learn that there is no medical or scientific way to rid oneself of the brood, but there is a spell called Balk Brood that can do the trick. Unfortunately that spell is only found in *The Revelations of Glaaki*, Volume Six.

Those that have read that particular dark book and come looking to become a Chosen of Eihort usually already know the Balk Brood spell and seek the wisdom and knowledge that the brood impart to their host. Such an adept might play the part of Chosen to amass secrets and spells, and then use the Balk Brood spell to escape a grisly fate. At least this is often the plan, but often the Chosen of Eihort makes a mistake and ends up paying a terrible price.

The visions that the brood impart to their vessel show strange alien vistas, deities and minions of the Mythos, ancient history long forgotten, and many more arcane secrets. This has the effect of adding +1% to Cthulhu Mythos (and costing -1D4 SAN) per month. If an INT x 2 roll is made for that month then some sort of lasting knowledge can be gleaned from the dreams, such as spells, forgotten languages, locations of lost treasures or cities, or anything that the Keeper wishes. If the Chosen can stay alive with the brood inside for 50 months, just over four years, then the bonus to the Cthulhu Mythos skill maxes out at +50% as the brood simply have nothing else to teach the now completely insane Chosen. In this fashion, the Chosen can learn a variety of spells and become quite a powerful threat; an immortal sorcerer of considerable power that must sacrifice others to their dark master in order to remain alive. To augment all that knowledge, the Chosen also gains 1 point of POW per year that the brood are alive due to the parasitic, now turned symbiotic, nature of their connection. This POW increase maxes out at +10 should the Chosen manage to play this deadly game for a decade or more.

But such power is not without a price. The Chosen never truly gets use to the brood living inside. One of the Chosen is hard to kill but is constantly sick from the brood infestation. Each year the Chosen is infected, he or she loses 1 point of CON. The Chosen continually suffers from unexpected bouts of

nausea and vomiting. The vomit often contains blood, bits of meat, or 1D3 mature brood who try to skitter away into darkness. Vomiting out baby Eihorts costs 1D8 SAN the first time it happens and, at the Keeper's discretion, possibly more SAN after that. Combine this nausea with the voracious appetites of the Chosen, as the Chosen is not just eating for one anymore but literally hundreds to thousands inside, and you have a recipe for unpleasantness.

Furthermore, the brood sometimes travel close to the skin of the Chosen, showing visible budes and nodes that twitch and move about just under the flesh. Therefore most Chosen soon learn to wear long sleeves and pants whenever possible. Lastly, sometimes a mature broodling or two exits the hosts' body on their own accord through any available orifice. This can not only be very painful but embarrassing. This costs 1D4 SAN whenever it happens until the Chosen has gone completely insane. Anyone witnessing this loses 0/1D6 SAN.

## COMBAT AND ATTACKS

**Due to the rejuvenating energy** pumped into the Chosen by their Lord of the Labyrinth ever few months or so, and the myriad of brood bolstering his or her reserves, a Chosen of Eihort is preternaturally strong. The Chosen can use any weapon anyone else can use, which means they can be very potent in mundane combat—but they also have a number of spells which makes them even more terrifying. Furthermore, once every month the Chosen can vomit out a large number of semi-mature brood. Usually the brood of Eihort just skitter away to the darkest places available, but due to the special connection between the Chosen and the brood, this squirming, writhing horde of white spider-like things is under the control of their expelling vessel.

This brood swarm has 10 Hit Points but ignores singular attacks like gunshots, melee weapons, stomp-

## CHOSEN OF EIHORT, willing vessel

char.	rolls	averages
STR	4D6+6	20
CON	3D6	10-11
SIZ	3D6	10-11
INT	2D6+6	13
POW	3D6+10	20-21
DEX	3D6	10-11
Move 8		HP 11

### Av. Damage Bonus: +1D4

**Attacks:** Any weapon as a personal specialty at DEX x 5%, damage varies

Vomit Forth Brood Swarm 100%, damage suffocation + SAN loss

**Armor:** None, but all weapons do half damage to a young Chosen, or only 1 point of damage to middle-aged or older Chosen, who are also immune to drowning, poisons, and gas. The eldest Chosen gain all the previous benefits and regenerate 2 hit points per round.

**Spells:** A Chosen of Eihort knows a number of spells equal to half its POW score. One spell must be Contact Eihort; the rest are left for the Keeper to choose.

**Sanity Loss:** 1/1D6 for seeing a Brood Swarm; 2/2D6 for being a victim of a Brood Swarm suffocation attack; 1/1D8 for seeing the Brood tearing their way out of a dead Chosen.



HANSEN

ing feet, and the like. Only attacks that deal damage in an area will harm the swarm, such as fire, explosions, jugs of acid, electrifying the floor they're crawling over, driving a steamroller over them, etc.

The tiny spider-things can't really attack. If a victim were somehow immobilized, then the brood could gnaw the person to the bone in time, doing 1 Hit Point of damage per 1D10 minutes. The Chosen uses this flood of awfulness to suffocate a target. Seeing these nasties cost 1/1D6 SAN, but the one targeted by this attack loses much more as the brood clamber up his or her body and try to crawl down the victim's nose and throat. This causes 2/2D6 SAN loss and the Keeper should consult the drowning/suffocation rules in the book. Only destroying the brood swarm completely will stop this attack. Jumping into water or rolling on the ground has no effect as there are just so many creatures to crush and they don't need to breathe. Area-affecting attacks which are effective against the brood, like fire and acid, also damage the one being suffocated by

the tiny terrors. Luckily the swarm moves slowly, only at a MOV of 4, or about half that as the typical person. So the Chosen typically only uses this attack on unsuspecting targets or in small, tight places where escape is difficult.

## LIFE AS THE CHOSEN

**As one of the Chosen of Eihort** continues to exist, he or she become harder and harder to kill. The brood inside continue to multiply as they grown, then become aged, and then grow and multiply again. In this endless process, the brood consume bones, muscle, and even organs inside their host to make room for their ever-increasing numbers. The innate magical and parasitical nature of the brood allows them to effectively mimic the organs and other internal bits they consume, so the vessel can continue to live as they mature inside. This makes the Chosen very resistant to damage as attacks against them have fewer and fewer vital things to destroy. A relatively young Chosen (less than a year of

service to Eihort) takes half damage from all weapons. Older Chosen (one to three years of service) take only 1 point of damage per attack, impaling or not, and are immune to drowning, poisons, and gas. The eldest Chosen (three or more years of service) regenerate 2 Hit Points per round as the brood have become so accustomed to the vessel that they try to repair any damage to their host.

As daunting and imposing a foe as a Chosen of Eihort may be, they do have one very exploitable weakness: the Balk Brood spell. While normally used to free a willing participant from infestation, this spell can have a devastating effect if directed at a Chosen of Eihort. The spellcaster's assembled magic points must oppose 25, regardless of how long the Chosen has been in the service of Eihort. If successful, the spell forces all of the brood out, which causes the Chosen to revert to their true age and become halloed out and quite dead shells of flesh and blood. Seeing this grisly demise costs 1/1D8 SAN. ☹

# A TALE OF TERROR FOR DELTA GREEN:

## SMUGGLING

By CHAD J. BOWSER

**An intermodal container with its ISO indicators scratched off washes up on a beach.** Such containers are weatherproof but not waterproof; if adrift, one slowly takes on water until it reaches its deadweight and sinks. Until that time, it floats.

Inside is a grisly scene. The twenty-by-nine by ten steel box doesn't contain consumer goods. It's filled with human skeletal remains.

The Agents can stumble upon the container on the beach or they can be called in after it has already been found. Running down leads isn't easy. Forensic examination estimates there were twenty people in the box, all of Asian descent. The container's been in the water for four to six months.

A search of cargo manifests and shipping records indicates five possible ships of origin. Each of these five ships lost one or more containers during rough weather within that time frame. The missing containers held teddy bears, MP3 players, handi-cams, books, and an automobile.



HANSEN

### POSSIBILITY 1: HORRIBLE BUT PLAUSIBLE

**The people in the container were refugees who gave everything they had to be smuggled out of their homeland.** During the voyage, the unscrupulous captain demanded more money. When the refugees were unable to pay, the ship's crew massacred the victims with machetes before tossing the container overboard. Mundane sea scavengers finished destroying the bodies. Heavy winds and a strong current eventually pushed the semi-buoyant container ashore.

Inside the container, buried among the bodies, the Agents find evidence that one of the victims was also a member of the conspiracy—an agent who has gone missing or a friendly they have worked with in the past.

### POSSIBILITY 2: NEW FLESH FOR THE SACRIFICE

**The ship's captain and crew are devout worshipers of supernatural sea spawn.** To appease the creatures, the crew ritually sacrifices people who paid to be smuggled out of their native country. Once the ship sails over the sea spawn's lair, the crew push the container overboard. As it settles to the sea bed, the spawn pounce. They probe the container with pseudopods and crush anything they find inside, using suckers to feed off the flesh.

The sea spawn aren't mindless bottom dwellers, however. They know the food comes from somewhere, and they decide to push the container to shore to see what comes to investigate. If a group of tourists sees the container first, the sea spawn attack. One tourist

escapes and the grainy cell phone footage they shot shows up on the Internet. Alternatively, an ICE or Border Patrol agent goes missing when she goes to check out a mysterious container reported by a transient surfer.

### POSSIBILITY 3: A SORCEROUS END

**A powerful sorcerer was discovered by a rival cult and fled his homeland to avoid execution.** He stowed away on a ship. When the crew found him, he used magic to enthrall them. The few unaffected crew managed to force the magician and his followers into a container and throw it overboard.

The sorcerer employed his spells to steer the container to land. Along the way he sustained both his body and his magical energies with the flesh of his thralls, reducing each one to pulp. When the container hit land, he slipped out and shut the door behind him, disappearing into his new home.

The first images to come across the wire are strange sigils drawn in blood across the interior of the container. Media 'experts' say the writings are those of a cult playing at being mysterious. Someone close to the conspiracy recognized the script as Aklo and lets Delta Green know. Searching the ship turns up the bolt hole where the sorcerer stowed away and numerous effigies to dark gods spread across the floor. But where can they find the missing murderer? ☸



# DIRECTIVE III: 'THE WORLD NEEDS BAD MEN'

A RETURN TO SMALL 'C' CONSPIRACY WITH *TRUE DETECTIVE*

BY ADAM SCOTT GLANCY

**Back in February 2005, I wrote** my second Directive From A-Cell for *Worlds of Cthulhu* magazine. It was titled “Conspiracy with a Little c.” That Directive provided advice, particularly for non-U.S. players, on how to create Delta Green-style campaigns set in their home countries. You can read it at [Delta-Green.com](http://Delta-Green.com).

Part of that directive addressed developing foreign government agencies into campaign settings by building Mythos-aware conspiracies around local law enforcement agencies. Certainly the most likely point of contact between the civil authorities and the Mythos is local police. Servants of the Mythos, and the sort of creatures they consort with, have a tendency towards murder and mayhem. That draws the attention of law enforcement officers even if it does leave them baffled. Lovecraft himself mentions them often; think of the five unfortunate state police officers who disappear when they try tracking down the spawn of Yog-Sothoth in “The Dunwich Horror.”

In fact, destructive or lethal Mythos incidents are more likely to draw the attention of state and local law enforcement entities long before the federal agencies that Delta Green has infiltrated. From their lofty vantage as federal agents there's a good chance that Agents of Delta Green won't find out about the situation until after the locals

have encountered it and either thoroughly muddied the waters or made the situation even worse. Even getting Delta Green an invitation to the party might be hard to come by if the local authorities don't ask for federal assistance. If the Delta Green Agents want to use the authority of their day jobs during a Night at the Opera, the Keeper or the players must come up with a jurisdictional justification for federal involvement. That's sometimes easier said than done. I certainly have no trouble hand-waving some of that detail with a successful Law roll.

While the local police have jurisdiction to investigate the sort of murder and mayhem that accompanies close contact with the Cthulhu Mythos, they certainly lack the knowledge and skill base to deal with it. In the game they're usually NPCs, who rarely have the same capacity to grow and develop as much as player characters.

Of course, things would be different if the players were running local cops investigating a Mythos incident.

I've always wondered what such a campaign might look like, run from the point of view of hard-bitten police officers working to unravel a mystery that makes no rational sense. Fortunately, HBO came to my rescue in the winter of 2014 with the epic first season of *True Detective*.

## THE LITTLE 'C'

***True Detective* is a brilliantly** written crime drama whose atmosphere, character and plot mixes the bleakness of a gritty police procedural with nihilistic cosmic horror. For those who haven't had a horde of friends and fans beat a path to their Facebook page to pour out bucket after bucket of spoilers, I'll be as discreet as possible. But it is almost impossible not to spoil *True Detective's* best moments when describing its usefulness for Keepers and players of *Call of Cthulhu*. Since the series is now available on DVD, I suggest you stop reading this directive, get a copy, and watch it. You can see all eight episodes in about nine hours. Then come back and continue reading.

Now that you've seen the whole season, we can proceed.

Rather than talk about the plot of *True Detective*, or rattle on and on about all the weird fiction and cosmic horror elements that make cameos throughout (especially that heaping dose of Thomas Ligotti that's poured right on top), this Directive is going to concentrate on the series setting and its relevance to playing Delta Green, specifically its connection to “conspiracy with a little c” scenarios.

What I mean by “conspiracy with a little c” is a scenario involving a smaller investigative team which begins utterly ignorant of the existence

of the Cthulhu Mythos. Through the course of their investigations they become more and more aware of the true nature of reality. With that awareness comes the responsibility to act against the threat posed against humanity, not just by the denizens of this carnivorous Lovecraftian universe, but also the threat posed by the awareness of humanity's place in that universe. In such a campaign setting, the players do not start off as members of Delta Green conspiracy, but instead build their own conspiracy within whatever law enforcement organ they call home.

*True Detective's* two protagonists, Det. Rustin Cohle (played by Matthew McConaughey) and Det. Martin Hart (Woody Harrelson), are homicide investigators with the Louisiana State Police. Their jurisdiction covers the entire state of Louisiana, with their powers of arrest, investigation and the use of armed force overlapping every with that of every parish sheriff and every municipal police chief. In practice, however, they operate in those backwater parishes where there aren't large enough municipalities to support a specialized homicide investigation unit. That means they are out in the boon-docks, in isolated rural locations that are hard to find if you are from somewhere else, and even harder to get out of if you are born there. These are the kinds of places that slowly kill their residents with a combination of crushing poverty, brutal ignorance, and learned helplessness. People tend to forget that the vast majority of North America is not urban or suburban, but rural and poor. The vacation homes of the one-percenters aside, wealth concentrates in the cities, not the countryside. Out there in the tall and uncut, beyond help or rescue, is where the horrors wait, human or otherwise.

As homicide investigators, it's Cohle's and Hart's job to turn over rocks in those parts of the state everyone else would prefer to ig-

nore. Both are patient, observant professionals, hardened by years of working cases. As they begin to unravel a murder case that appears to have been motivated by occult beliefs, they're unwilling to allow the case to be derailed by conventional superstitions. They're also unwilling to ignore uncomfortable connections between the killer and several old, powerful families who've acted as state power brokers for generations. Louisiana has an ugly history of these sorts of families, from the Long brothers in the state capital and the Perez family of Plaquemines Parish to the DeMonte Clan of New Orleans. It's the historical facts that make the fiction easier to sell.

And because of that history and localized setting, *True Detective* siezes an opportunity for telling stories with a unique conspiratorial edge. Like Tip O'Neil was fond of saying, "All politics is local." The same might be said of conspiracies. In *True Detective's* first season there is a conspiracy at work, wound deep around those who work the levers of the state's political machinery and those who style themselves as God's representatives on earth. It's not a conspiracy that will end the world, free the Old Ones or hasten the End Times. But there are dozens and dozens of poor, dead women that no one in charge really gives a shit about. The story is very much a confrontation between bad men and evil men.

Sound familiar?

## PLAYING PROS

**State and local police investi-**gators don't get a lot of love in Delta Green. The local police are usually treated as either the blundering bumpkins who blindly step on the supernatural land mine or as the arrogant idiots who think they've solved the problem when they haven't even scratched the surface. While the professionalism of law enforcement was certainly a complete crap-shoot during the so-called "classic era"

of Call of Cthulhu (i.e. the period between the two World Wars), by the 21st century you've got to go a long way before you can find a police department doesn't know how to process a crime scene, let alone one that is so incompetent that it actually thinks it can. Most agencies and officers at least know what they do not know and understand when it is time to call in the specialists. Sometimes that means the small-town department calls in the larger sheriff's department. Sometimes that means the sheriff calling in the state police.

Most state police criminal investigation divisions are nothing to sneeze at. State police forces are often close to a century old and some, like the Texas Rangers, are even older. That gives them institutional memories even longer than most federal law enforcement organizations. State police laboratories have all the strengths and weakness one expects from crime labs across the country. Perhaps the only failing of these state investigators is that they generally have a smaller budget than their federal counterparts. Nevertheless these are formidable agencies with large pools of manpower, talent and experience. And they have one serious advantage over the feds: they are operating in familiar territory.

Starting a campaign with the players representing a state police agency, like the California Bureau of Investigation or the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, offers the players an opportunity to peel the Mythos onion from the very first layer. If they're already seasoned investigators, the players' encounter with a crime motivated or executed by occult means will be their first step down the rabbit hole. The expectation of the mundane horrors that humans inflict on each other will be stripped away with each revelation until the Investigators must start seriously questioning the consensual reality in which everyone puts so much faith. Now they're through the

looking glass. Up is down. Black is white. And monsters are real. The only questions that remain are how do they find the monsters, how do they kill them, and how do they get away with it?

## MAKING IT RIGHT

**Unlike a standard Delta Green** campaign, the players have to contend with what I consider the biggest problem facing police investigators tackling a case with supernatural elements: credibility. As the investigation encounters more and more supernatural means, motives and suspects, the more the players must work harder to obscure these facts from their superiors. And the Keeper must decide the repercussions if they don't. At least when Delta Green Agents are working a Night at the Opera, they don't have to justify their actions to A-Cell every step of the way. Players working on an official case for a legitimate agency are going to get taken off that case if they admit to their superiors where the evidence is taking them. They don't just have to worry that servants of the Mythos have penetrated the inner working of their agency. The real trouble begins when they bring their superiors an unprosecutable mess that is only explainable via supernatural or occult factors. The best case is it makes the Investigators look too insane to remain cops.

So, in order for the Investigators to be effective, a layer of deception must be created between the investigators and their superiors. Such a deception might jeopardize the case and the Investigators' careers, but the only alternative is to tell the truth, and that is a guaranteed disaster. By telling unbelievable truths Investigators' credibility will be damaged and they will lose the confidence of their superiors. If their superiors cannot rely on the Investigators for a clear-eyed and rational approach to the evidence, the case will be assigned to another "less imaginative" team of Investi-

gators. Those will either pursue a mundane explanation or let the case linger and die with no resolution. Meanwhile, the Investigators will find themselves exiled to some kind of law-enforcement Siberia, like the evidence room or prisoner transfer, and piles on punishments for trivial rulebreaking until they get fed up and quit.

The Investigators have to make progress towards a resolution of their case, but they also have to disguise their progress so that it appears they are moving towards a believable motive executed by rational means. This brings us back to the shop-worn technique of bad-jacketing the cultists: framing the servants of the Mythos for prosecutable crimes in order to pursue the investigation and justify an arrest. Or at least to justify an arrest warrant that can get the Investigators close enough for a confrontation. Considering the nature of the crimes and criminals who fall into the Mythos' orbit, the Investigators will probably want a case resolution that involves the suspects being killed "while resisting arrest."

## MEETING THE COUSINS

**A campaign set among state** police investigators could be a very interesting way to introduce the players to Delta Green. Nonplayer Delta Green Agents might appear on the scene only to push the players' paranoia into overdrive. Getting Delta Green involved as events progress is fairly easy if the players have been collecting inexplicable evidence. The state crime lab could have sent this impenetrable evidence off to the FBI's lab at Quantico, where Friendlies alerted A-Cell to the presence of paranormal or preternatural involvement. The Investigators' superiors may have called in the FBI's Behavioral Research and Instruction Unit to work up a psychological profile on the UNSUB. Something in the criminal M.O. could tip off Delta

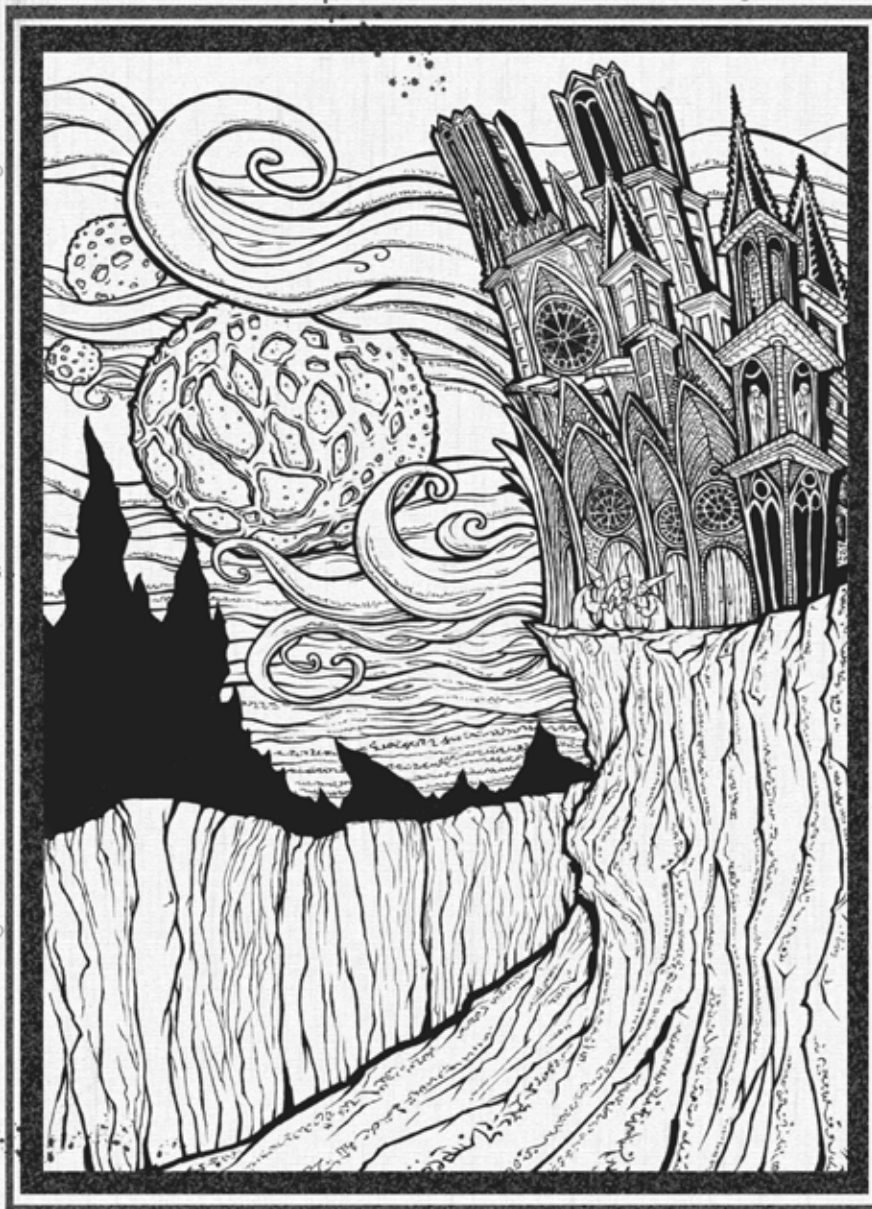
Green that something inhuman is at work. Of course, since it's player characters who are running the investigation, they're not going to be quite as willing to accept outside help as well-scripted and (frankly) all-too-trusting NPCs would if the roles were reversed.

For the local Investigators, these out-of-town feds represent a completely unknown agenda. Are they here to hijack the investigation and freeze out the local Investigators? Are the feds involved with the supernatural? How much do they know? Are they protecting something? Or are these straight-laced boy-scouts going to get in the Investigators' way by playing everything by the book? Could these feds end up putting the Investigators in jail for violating the rights of a suspect? It's hard to imagine the tightly knit team of Investigators taking these feds into their confidence. The risks most likely outweigh any obvious benefits.

A Delta Green team might not make themselves known to the Investigators at all during their investigation. Their role might be nothing more than to keep the Investigators under discreet surveillance and sanitize any crime scene where they were a tad sloppy cleaning up, possibly policing up any suspects that slip through the Investigators' fingers. There is always the possibility that if the players distinguish themselves in the fine art of vigilante justice, Delta Green might approach them for recruitment. And of course, all that lying to their bosses, all that manufactured evidence, all that illegal surveillance and unconstitutional searches—all of that is just finishing school for a Delta Green Agent.

As Rustin Cohle says: "The world needs bad men. We keep the other bad men from the door." ☞





Quam qui volunt divites fieri, incidunt in  
tentationem, et in laqueum diaboli, et  
desideria multa inutilia, et nociva, quæ  
mergunt homines in interitum et perditionem.

ANASTAS

MYSTERIOUS MANUSCRIPTS

# FRAGMENTS OF THE SIMEON BIBLE

By BEN RIGGS

**In May 1297, Simeon the Recluse** was accused by the Holy Inquisition of heresy and devil-worship. Unlike countless thousands of other unfortunates, the inquisitors got this one right.

As the second son of a Bohemian baron, Simeon's hopes for inheritance were slim. At age 12, on his father's orders, Simeon took vows at a Benedictine monastery. He found the life of a monk boundlessly dull, and his only release was in the monastery's scriptorium. Simeon learned the arts of calligraphy and illumination and spent whatever idle time he could steal from the abbot reading. The poems of the ancients were his texts of choice, followed by the "blasphemous" letters of Epicurus. He would often give recitations of Catullus and Virgil after prayers and became famous at the monastery for his near-eidetic memory.

Simeon might have spent his days as a happy antiquarian until a passing traveler took advantage of the hospitality offered by the monastery. The traveler, whose tongue had been ripped out for crimes the monks could only guess, died in the night leaving no hint of next of kin. The monks gave the man an honorable burial. Among his possessions was a strange book written in a language none of them could read. They placed the book

in the scriptorium and returned to their daily offices.

Simeon was taken with the book. Geometric illustrations suggested a work of mathematics, but the swirling and incomprehensible script was as impenetrable as it was haunting. Simeon dreamed of the book and began to spend his days attempting translations, ignoring mass and prayers and the austerities decreed as his punishment.

After a whipping, Simeon stole the book and headed to Prague to identify the language. After consultations at the university, he discovered the book was a Syriac translation of an infamous Arabic book of occult blasphemies, its name now forgotten or erased from history. Simeon began his own translation of this forbidden work in secret but fled the city after a curious servant girl read a few pages and ropey vines began to grow from her ears. The local laity informed the Holy Inquisition of his activities.

Simeon hid in a tiny cave in the Alps where he completed his work. Ecstatic and quite mad, Simeon dreamed of vengeance against the people of Prague, the brothers at the monastery, and his father who forced Simeon out of his own home to live among strangers.

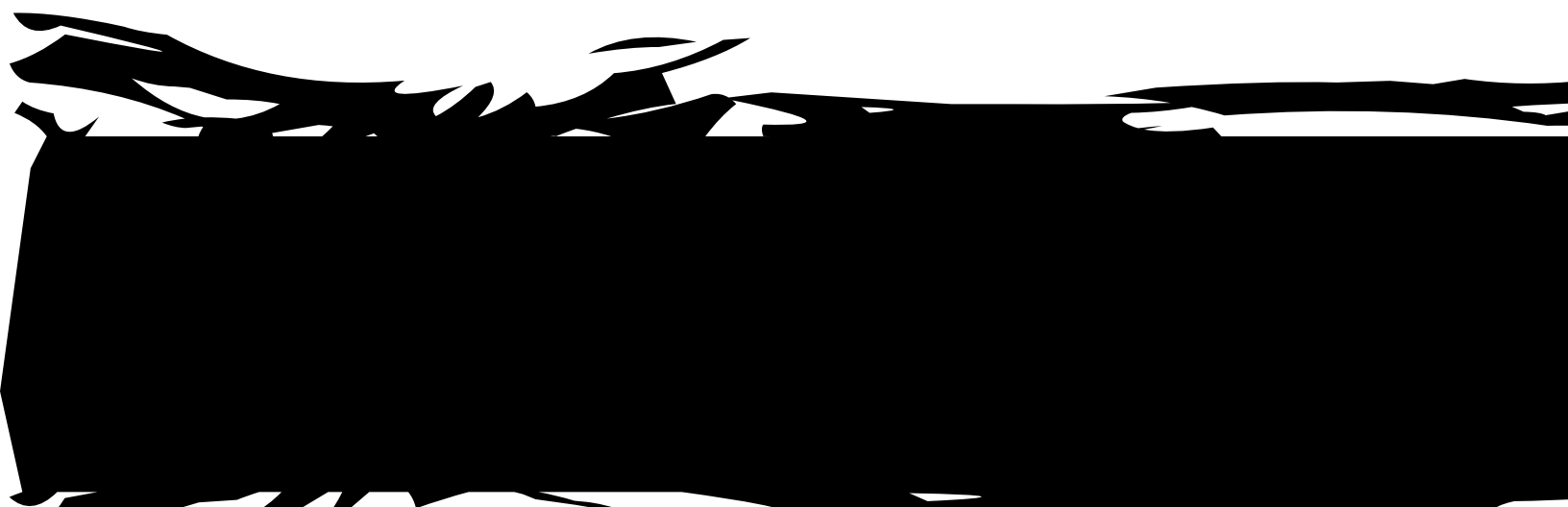
None of his plans would ever come to fruition. The inquisitors from Prague discovered him.

## A HOLY WORK

**Simeon's books were burned as** blasphemies. The head inquisitor sentenced Simeon to death after an ad hoc trial on the side of the mountain. But Simeon, knowing Bohemian law, demanded a trial by contest. The head inquisitor asked what contest he would choose. Simeon asked to be left in his cave for one night, during which the Holy Spirit would guide him in the creation of an entire illuminated Bible from memory. The inquisitors laughed, knowing the creation of illuminated Bibles to be the work of years, and agreed. They left him stacks of vellum and pots of ink, and posted a guard to see he did not escape.

In the morning, Simeon emerged from his cave. He appeared five years older, and presented the inquisitors with a Bible unlike any they had ever seen. It was complete but its illuminations were outrageous. Prophets lurked half in shadow. Saints and kings appeared as ants in titanic landscapes whose backgrounds swirled with action, as though the world itself were more alive than the people in it.

Strange as the book was, the inquisitors took it as proof of his innocence. How could the Holy Book be written so fast without the help of God? They let him go, though



they kept the Bible. Simeon headed south and disappears from history.

As years passed the Simeon Bible acquired a sinister reputation. A church that housed it burned down, the Simeon Bible “miraculously” surviving by falling into a stone baptismal font. Insanity and plague struck the Czech village that kept it, and hundreds of people ripe with pustular boils danced themselves to death. A priest who kept the Simeon Bible in his chambers disappeared. At high mass the following Sunday, his disembodied voice was heard shouting fearfully about pursuit by shadowy nightmare creatures. The voice screamed that it was caught and then screamed of its torments, fading to whimpers and then to naught in the following weeks.

Wishing to be rid of the book but afraid to treat the word of God with disrespect, a parish priest finally held a funeral for the Simeon Bible and buried it in 1845. It was dug up in less than a fortnight by a beggar and sold to Bert Musil, an antiquities dealer who branded it “The Devil’s Bible” for its outré illustrations and sinister reputation. The dealer decided that the surest way to fatten his purse was to chop up the Devil’s Bible and sell it piecemeal at auction.

Musil commissioned a historian to research the history of the Simeon Bible. He included this history—the passage above—in the 1846 Sotheby’s catalog. This catalog can be found in the microfiche department at any library of moderate size, or scanned on Google Books in a modern campaign. Fragments of the Simeon Bible were sold to private collectors, Catholic colleges, and art museums.

## THE BOOK AND THE CODE

**The Simeon Bible is a large work** of ink on vellum. If fully reconstructed it is a complete copy of the Vulgate Bible in a stolid gothic script, with bizarre illustrations illuminating key passages.

The heretic monk Simeon did indeed create a Holy Bible in his trial—a night that lasted years thanks to powerful magic. But he encoded within its illuminations excerpts of the blasphemous tome which he had been translating. In vivid vistas and shockingly modern backgrounds he hid Syriac numbers and letters. These refer to chapters, verses, and words. “REV 1 1 3,” for example, refers to the book of Revelations, chapter one, verse one, third word in the verse, which in this case turns out to be “of.” When put together, these letter-number combinations spell out passages from the *Necronomicon*.

Decoding Simeon’s code requires a knowledge of cryptology and several dead languages. Identifying the Syriac numbers and letters in the drawings requires knowledge of Syriac or Arabic. Constructing a passage out of the number-letter combinations requires a skill roll for the and takes one hour. The reconstructed passages are in Latin. A Cthulhu Mythos roll identifies them as being from the *Necronomicon*.

Reconstructing the Simeon Bible is terribly dangerous. As a trap, Simeon imbued the book itself with summoning spells. When fully reconstructed, it has a 5% chance every month of summoning a monster or alien of the Keeper’s choosing. (Feel free to simply use the proximity of the Simeon Bible

as an excuse to deploy the abomination of your choice.)

Worse, Simeon coded sorcerous effects into the passages. Merely reading aloud sections of the *Necronomicon* translated from the Simeon Bible often produces disastrous effects.

## FRAGMENTS

**Four sample fragments are provided.** Decoding and translating each provides +4% Cthulhu Mythos and teaches the Investigator a spell.

### AT WIDENER LIBRARY

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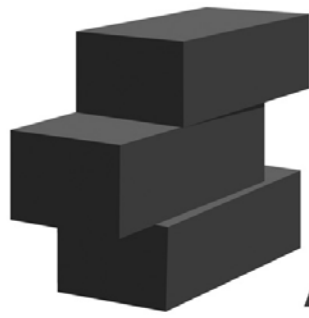
**Illuminated Verse:** Revelation 10:6 “And swear by him that made from naught Heaven...that time shall be no more...”

**Verse from *Necronomicon*:** “Time’s bitter seas roll ceaseless in the dark, / Future, past, and present gnashing life between their teeth.”

**Special Effect:** When the translated sections of the *Necronomicon* are read aloud, everyone present is instantly transported to the Cenozoic era (or period of history of the Keeper’s choice) for 6D10 minutes. At the effect’s expiration, they return to discover the world has been transformed by the actions they took in the past—the present reflects an alternate history as bizarre as you like. The Investigators must learn and use the attached spell to go back in time and prevent themselves from disrupting the time-continuum.

**Spell:** A variant of Create Time Gate. It inflicts 1 HP damage to the caster per MP spent, but it is accurate to to a specific target time within one week.





# BITS AND MORTAR

If you bought *The Unspeakable Oath* in print, anywhere, you can get the PDF free.  
[www.theunspeakableoath.com](http://www.theunspeakableoath.com)

## AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**Illuminated Verse:** Ezekial 28: 7 “I shall bring on thee aliens, the strongest of the heathens. And they shall make naked their swords on the fairness of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness.”

**Verse from *Necronomicon*:** “And they ride on the breath of Nyarlathotep, night-bearers of violation, and wrack the face of the Earth.”

**Special Effect:** When the passage is read aloud, a hunting horror is summoned. If this occurs in broad daylight, the thing pulses once or twice before exploding in black gore. In a shady or dark location, the horror makes a single attack on the person who summoned it, then flees. It seeks some dark spot for a burrow during the day and begins hunting by night.

**Spell:** Summon Hunting Horror.

## AT SACRED HEART SEMINARY

**Illuminated Verse:** 1 Timothy 6:9 “For they that would be made rich fall into temptation and into the snares of the devil, and into many unprofitable desires and lusts, which drench men in death and perdition.”

**Verse from *Necronomicon*:** A letter addressed to the translator!

**Special Effect:** The ostensible passage from the *Necronomicon* is a message that addresses the translator by name and begs her to cast the spell contained within the text. In return, it promises the translator that all her hopes and dreams, which are laid out in specificity, will be fulfilled.

**Spell:** Summon Nyarlathotep.

## AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

**Illuminated Verse:** Joshua 24:2 “Your fathers dwelled beyond the Euphrates...and they served alien gods.”

**Verse from *Necronomicon*:** “Old Ones will rise,/ The Earth their prize.”

**Special Effect:** The reader becomes infected by the intelligence of Simeon the Recluse. Simeon built a pocket reality which has protected his mind from death. Reading the verse draws Simeon’s mind into the Investigator subconscious. He can control the actions of the Investigator when she is asleep or hypnotized.

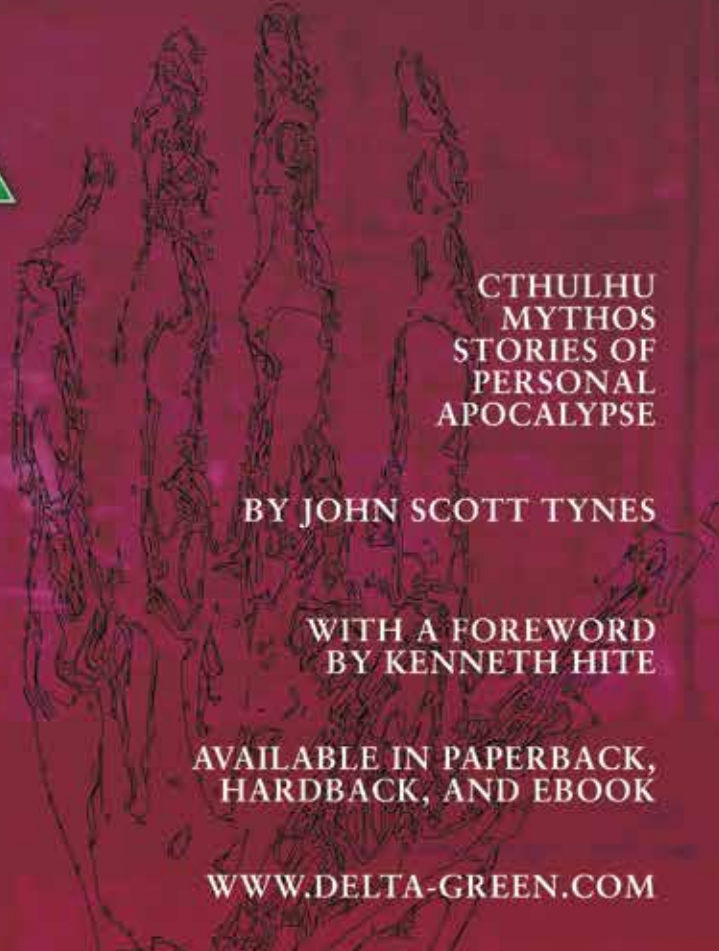
Simeon, unhappy with the state of his resurrection, begins searching for his mortal remains that he might reanimate his body and inhabit it again. He robs libraries and museums and works foul magics in his search. The Investigator awakens in strange places and finds disturbing items in her bedclothes, such as stolen artifacts and half-eaten human organs.

**Spell:** Mind Transfer. ☸



# DELTA GREEN

## STRANGE AUTHORITIES



CTHULHU  
MYTHOS  
STORIES OF  
PERSONAL  
APOCALYPSE

BY JOHN SCOTT TYNES

WITH A FOREWORD  
BY KENNETH HITE

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# THE EYE OF LIGHT & DARKNESS

< CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7 >

## SOUTHERN GODS

PUBLISHED BY NIGHT SHADE BOOKS

WRITTEN BY JOHN HORNOR JACOBS

REVIEW BY BRIAN M. SAMMONS

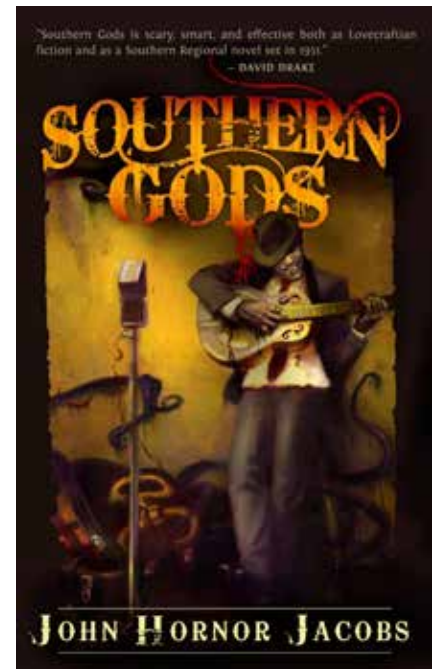
**Dark Lovecraftian cosmic horror** set in the 1950s with a blues soundtrack and sautéed in a deep, rich Southern Gothic sauce? Mmmm, yes please. If the above ingredients sound good to you, then you will want to get a taste of this entrée for yourself. Do you need further enticing? Just remember me when it comes time to leave a tip.

*Southern Gods* follows a vet from WWII named Bull Ingram, who works as a leg-breaker for local crime boss because he's a big guy who is used to violence. He takes a side job for a radio DJ who is looking for a mysterious blues man named Ramblin' John Hastur. Yes, you read that last name right. I expect you'll know where elements of this is leading even before the lyrics of "Have You Seen the Yellow Sign?" start to wail.

The second protagonist of the novel is a battered wife named Sarah Williams who flees with her daughter, Franny, from her abusive husband back to her ancestral home called "The Big House." Naturally the old Southern Gothic mansion has a history steeped in blood, madness, and mystery. Dark sacrifices are only the start. Before long, Bull

and Sarah meet and together they have to uncover what Ramblin' John Hastur, his haunting music, and the dark history of The Big House all have in common.

*Southern Gods* is a period noir mystery with an authentic Southern Gothic feel and major Lovecraftian overtones. From its tonsils to its toenails this is absolutely a Cthulhu Mythos story, but it is also much more. It is an example of the very best of modern Lovecraftian fiction as it leaves a lot of the tropes behind and uses the essential themes in new and compelling ways. This is the first novel by John Hornor Jacobs, yet it reads like someone who has been putting books out for years. Fans of the Hastur mythos and anyone looking to set a *Call of Cthulhu* campaign in the American South or the colorful 1950s could crib a lot of good things from this book. Consider *Southern Gods* very highly recommended to the wailing tune of 9 out of 10 phobias.





# WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE

PRODUCED BY COMMON PLACE BOOKS

WRITTEN BY JOSEPH FINK AND JEFFREY CRANOR; NARRATED BY  
CECIL BALDWIN; MUSIC BY DISPARITION

REVIEWED BY SCOTT CARTER

**Imagine a sleepy Lovecraftian town where the horrors walk the streets, hold public office, and are debated in town meetings. That's the desert town of Night Vale. Now imagine they have a local radio program dedicated to the gossip and goings-on of a town where everyone is stubbornly trying not to know things not meant to be known. That's *Welcome to Nightvale*, the podcast by Common Place Books.**

*Welcome to Night Vale* is our often surreal yet hilarious window into a world of mysterious helicopters, hooded figures, faceless old women (who live in your house but you cannot see but who nevertheless would like your vote for mayor), mutant star quarterbacks, and questionable and invisible public works commissioned by the Town Council in all of their meat-crowned glory. Not to mention the Dog Park—actually it is best not to mention the Dog Park. Do not look at the Dog Park. Do not go into the Dog Park. Do not go near the Dog Park. There is no Dog Park. Other things that are best not to mention are Old Lady Jossie's glowing friends, who are not angels because as we know angels do not exist and it is illegal to know anything about them or the workings of the hierarchies of heaven; the man in the camel-colored coat with the leather case full of flies; that thing that lives in the park but everyone pretends not to notice; and of course Station Management.

It's best to listen to episodes in order. Knowledge of past episodes is not necessary to enjoy the latest offering, but many figures and themes weave in and out to create a dynamic picture of a little town that could not possibly exist. Each episode features a musical segment, known as "The Weather." Song choice is eclectic and ranges from memorable to "why am I listening to this."

*Welcome to Night Vale* is highly recommended. Not every episode is a gem but all are enjoyable. Stay for the proverb at the end of the show. Nine phobias.



*Do not look at the Dog Park.  
Do not go into the Dog Park.  
Do not go near the Dog Park.  
There is no Dog Park.*

# ASTONISHING SWORDSMEN & SORCERERS OF HYPERBOREA

PUBLISHED BY NORTH WIND ADVENTURES

WRITTEN BY JEFFREY TALANIAN AND ILLUSTRATED BY IAN BAGGLEY

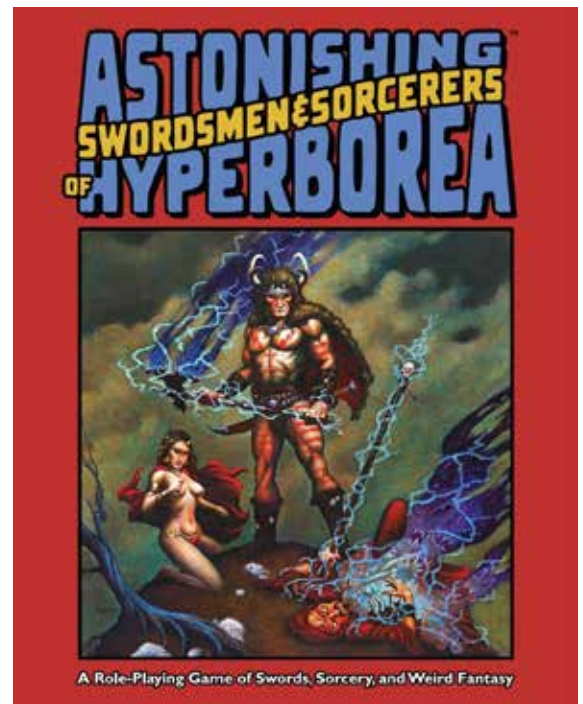
REVIEWED BY BOBBY DERIE

**It may be that no man save Randolph Carter** has ever known Kadath; but if Kickstarter were a night-gaunt then the stream of pilgrims to the city of the Elder Gods would be steady enough to find the gates guarded by a Starbucks and a duty-free shop. For the backers of North Wind Adventures, the prize is “a Role-Playing Game of Swords, Sorcery, and Weird Fantasy” unlike anything else on the market. A retroclone by any other name, *Astonishing Swordsmen & Sorcerers of Hyperborea* is a throwback to old-school roleplaying. It’s effectively a new edition of the very first version of *Dungeons & Dragons*, but with the fresh face that comes from electronic word processing and the organization afforded by forty years of hindsight. The box set, if you can afford it, is a thing of austere and functional beauty. This is what *D&D* might look like if the world had taken a different path.

While some gamers might bask in the nostalgia of actually rolling up a character instead of assigning a pile of points, the real selling point for the game is the *Hyperborea Gazetteer*. This default setting for the game seems torn from the pages of *Weird Tales*, combining aspects of Robert E. Howard’s Hyboria, Clark Ashton Smith’s Hyperborea, Lovecraft Country, and more obscure weird geographies, without being identical to any of them. Players who venture in these lands will encounter names familiar but strange. Instead of sighting the peak of Mount Voormithadreth from the rooftops of Commorium, they might catch sight of Mount Vhuurmithadon from the city-state of Khromarium, which is threatened by the Keltic tribes of Kimmeria. The planets in the sky include Saturn, called Kyranos by the Xathoquans, Poseidonos, and dark, mysterious Yuggoth; and sorcerers and inhuman races worship gods like Ythaqqa, Xathoqqua, and Kthulhu.

*ASSH* is either a complete success or a total failure. In embracing the old D&D system so completely, it has taken upon it all the strange, idiosyncratic flaws of that system. The setting is a wild mishmash of historical periods and names, where R’lyeh coexists with Atlantis, Kelts with Vikings, Mi-Go and vhuurmis with Men of Leng and snake-men. The creations of A. Merrit and William Hope Hodgson stand elbow-to-elbow with those of Smith, Howard, and Lovecraft. If you want old-school swords-and-sorcery action in a setting of weird fantasy, I can’t think of a single game on the market to compete with it. Adventure books are also available.

Nine phobias.



*The setting is a wild mishmash...where R’lyeh coexists with Atlantis, Kelts with Vikings, Mi-Go and vhuurmis with Men of Leng and snake-men.*

# No Security

PUBLISHED BY HEBANON GAMES

WRITTEN BY CALEB STOKES

REVIEWED BY BOBBY DERIE

America during the Great Depression was a curious and lonely country where the last rains did not cut the scarred earth, and at evening folks gathered around the radio at night to listen to the man who proclaimed the only thing to fear was fear itself. How little they knew of the horrors that dwelled in the long-neglected corners of the nation. *No Security* takes players and gamemasters beyond the well-known borders of Lovecraft Country, from Barefoot Crossing in Georgia to the tunnels beneath the meatpacking district in Chicago to the slopes of Mt. McKinley. They face unknown forces beyond the familiar horrors of the Mythos.

*No Security* is a collection of five system-free scenarios for 3-6 players set during the 1930s. Begun as a Kickstarter project, the individual scenarios are available in PDF for pay-what-you-want at DriveThruRPG. The paperback collection is print-on-demand and well worth the price. While the paper is a bit thin, the art, design, and page layout are first-rate, a cut above what passes for professional from many larger game publishers. The map of Toil City in particular could have been cut from a Chamber of Commerce brochure.

“The Wives of March” has investigators looking into the murder of Methodist preacher Dashell March in Barefoot Crossings, Georgia—only to find that the sharecropper community is more than just another picturesque piece of American Gothic.

“Bryson Springs” is set in Southern California after the Dust Bowl, where the displaced, unemployed Okies have turned a temporary camp into a shantytown. A string of strange murders attracts investigators to see what horrors desperation may have unleashed.

“Revelations” is an apocalyptic scenario set in the small town of Toil, Illinois, playing off the mixture of desperation and religiosity characteristic of the period.

“The Red Tower” is set in Chicago in the months after the fall of Al Capone, a murder



mystery that involves the unknown things that live and feed in the tunnels beneath the infamous meatpacking district.

“The Fall Without End” sees the player characters attempting to scale Mount McKinley to win a government prize for mountaineering; but the stormy peak holds dangers that the climbers never counted on.

All five scenarios are well-researched set-piece investigations in the familiar *Call of Cthulhu* mode. Flowcharts help gamemasters keep track of the plot. The immersive descriptions really sell the Great Depression setting, and the plot is geared less for investigators whose traditional approach involves burning books and dynamite than gumshoes with a talent for legwork and shining the light on darker corners.

Eight phobias.



## WHERE'S MY SHOGGOTH?

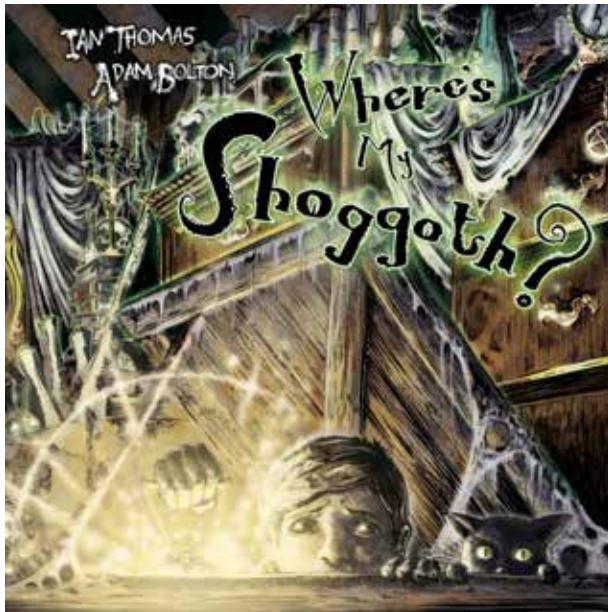
PUBLISHED BY ARCHAIA ENTERTAINMENT LLC, \$11.95

DESIGNED BY IAN THOMAS AND ADAM BOLTON

REVIEWED BY MATTHEW POOK

**Every small boy should have a shoggoth as a pet.** A shoggoth is malleable. A shoggoth always ensures that the carpets and floors are clean. A shoggoth always cleans up after the other family pets. A shoggoth always keeps at least one eye on said small boy. A shoggoth always, always likes a hug. But boys can be careless and pets can be lost, even if they are as big, as clawsome, and as tentacular as a shoggoth.

Which is where *Where's My Shoggoth?* begins. A young boy has lost his shoggoth and together with his black cat must go in search of it. Their search takes them to the damp, briny places; the back rooms; the graveyards and the high gables; the arcane laboratories; the deep seas; and the places hidden and in-between and beyond that author H.P. Lovecraft warned us of. At each location, the young boy and cat find something that might just



be the luminous protoplasmic pet, or might just be something else.

*Where's My Shoggoth?* is a children's story for most ages. Well, at least for the ages that appreciate the odd and the odious. Published by Archaia Entertainment, best known for the comic book series *Mouse Guard*, it combines the cosmic horror of Lovecraft's creations with a tale told in rhymes that owe just a little to Doctor Seuss.

As much as author Ian Thomas' words delight the ears—and they deserve to be read aloud—it is Adam Bolton's art that brings the boy's hunt for his shoggoth to darkly brilliant life. In bold, beautifully meticulous scenes the artist infuses the creatures with menace and desire, giving them alien wants of their own while filling full-color double spreads with small details that are worth hunting for in themselves. Alternating with the full-color spreads, others are starkly simple inks over swathes of white page. These silently give the story its emotional tone, invoking sympathy for the boy and his cat as a counterpoint their ever so slightly fearful encounters.

*Where's my Shoggoth?* is a parody, but clever one. In its rhymes, and its boy having to hunt for a lost pet, it parodies the children's story by placing its against the cosmic dread that comes of the writings of H.P. Lovecraft. Not once, though, does it parody the alien entities of the Mythos. These beings are as strange and as sinister as you would expect. In particular Bolton's depictions of the "gods" Azathoth, Cthulhu, and Yog-Sothoth capture just some of the brooding menace that even the slightest sight of them exudes.

A delightfully exquisite combination of the whimsy and the weird, *Where's My Shoggoth?* is worthy of a paedophobic seven.

# THAT WHICH SHOULD NOT BE

PUBLISHED BY JOURNALSTONE

WRITTEN BY BRETT J. TALLEY

REVIEWED BY BRIAN M. SAMMONS

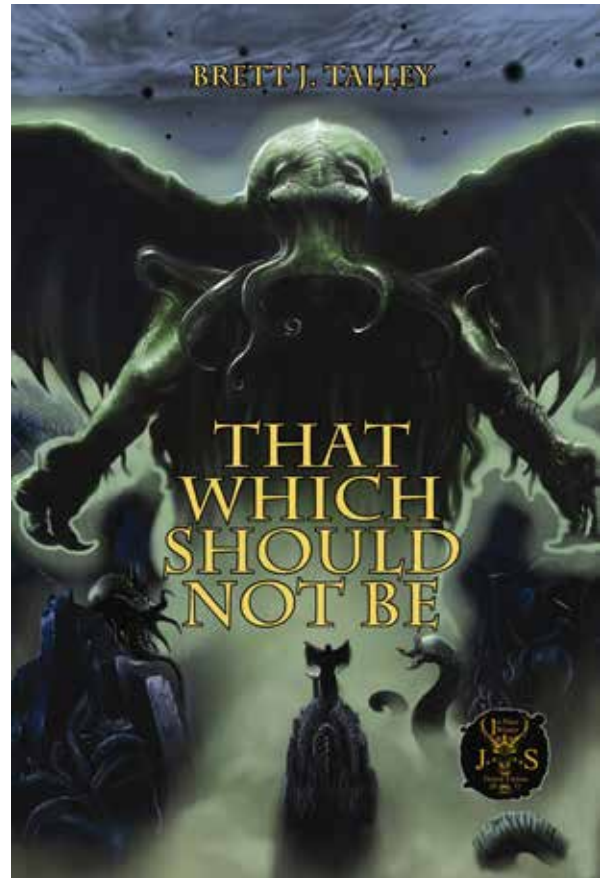
*That Which Should Not Be* wears its Lovecraftian heart proudly on its sleeve with not only its title but the cover art, featuring the winged and squid-faced Big Daddy C itself. While it starts in familiar Lovecraft country—the esteemed halls of higher learning and mortal soul damning, Miskatonic University—it quickly shifts to its own setting.

*That Which Should Not Be* does what very few other novels dare attempt and fewer still get right: solidly blending separate stories told by five different characters in a single novel. Each of these individual tales adds something to the whole of the book and each could be read as a very good short horror story in itself.

The main plot concerns a college student named Carter Weston who is tasked by his professor to find and retrieve a very rare book of damnable lore. No, it's (thankfully) not the *Necronomicon*, but the two tomes would sit side by side on the same bookshelf in Hell. On his ill-advised journey Carter meets four men who share with him their own tales of coming face to face with the supernatural and the horrific. The threats in these individual snapshots of horror cover a nice wide range, focusing on different mythologies throughout time. These stories often break with the well-defined norms of what is and isn't Lovecraftian cosmic horror, and such departures are welcome interludes indeed. After these tales are shared, Carter continues his hunt for the elusive book, a little more aware of the wider and weirder world. Things wrap up very quickly, but that only left me wanting more.

Not everything is perfect in this debut novel by author Brett J. Talley. Occasionally Talley begins to sound a bit too much like 'Lovecraft lite' for my taste. These momentary lapses are not as egregious as in many Cthulhu Mythos pastiches, but still I would have preferred to have heard more of Talley's own voice in this novel and less of a H.P. Lovecraft imitation.

Still, *That Which Should Not Be* is a fast, fun, and engaging read, featuring some truly well-written and very frightening scenes. This is not a horror story that's had its fangs pulled. It left me with much anticipation to see what Mr. Talley does next. If you are a Cthulhu cultist, a Mythos maven, a lover of Lovecraft, or just a fan of more classical horrors, then I highly recommend *That Which Should Not Be*. It gets 7 out of 10 phobias.



*A fast, fun, and engaging read, featuring some truly well-written and very frightening scenes. This is not a horror story that's had its fangs pulled.*

# TREMULUS

PUBLISHED BY REALITY BLURS

WRITTEN BY SEAN PRESTON

REVIEWED BY JOHN MARRON

**tremulus: A Storytelling Game of Lovecraftian Horror** (yes, the lowercase “t” is on purpose) is a horror roleplaying game in the style of Lovecraft’s stories based on the *Apocalypse World* Engine (AWE). It focuses more on the story aspect of RPGs than the mechanical aspects by having the game mechanics (referred to as “moves”) only come into play when needed and allowing the fictional actions of the characters and the unfolding story to stay the main focus of play. Like other games based on *Apocalypse World* (*Dungeon World*, *Monster of the Week*, *Monsterhearts*), it relies on a simple core mechanic: Roll 2D6+attribute; 10 or more = full success, 7 to 9 = success at a cost, 6 or lower = failure and the GM presents a new challenge. The game engine is surrounded by a slew of particular vocabulary but it keeps the play experience focused on the unfolding narrative rather than the system itself.

Character generation consists of choosing an archetype and making a few decisions (such as what value to assign to stats, what handful of special abilities to take, and what gear to start with). This process is fast and simple. The base game provides eleven classic character archetypes of Lovecraftian gaming—Artist, Author, Detective, Devout, Doctor, Professor, and so on—and PDF expansions increase add many more. One of the great features of AWE games is that all of the rules that the player will need to reference during play are on the playbook/character sheet. The base playbooks are available free at [DriveThruRPG.com](http://DriveThruRPG.com).

*tremulus* doesn’t focus primarily on the Cthulhu Mythos, but instead on investigative scenarios in which weird horror slowly becomes revealed. Like most AWE games, it

is designed to support low-prep to no-prep play, and includes a good set of tools to help the Keeper manage the game and improvise. One of those tools is a very handy situation or scenario generator (a “playset”) that uses player responses to a brief questionnaire to create a creepy small town (called Ebon Eaves) for the characters to explore. The situation generator that comes with the core book does a good job of giving the Keeper enough backstory and NPCs to get the ball rolling.

Play unfolds according to the actions players have their characters take. One of the focuses of AWE games is to “play to find out what happens” (i.e., don’t have a set storyline or plot). That requires a fair amount of flexibility and improvisational ability on the part of the Keeper. This is a definite positive for me, since I get to be as surprised as the players are about how the story unfolds, but some Keepers used to more defined adventures may find it frustrating. (I believe that you could use existing adventures for *Call of Cthulhu* and *Trail of Cthulhu* with *tremulus*, but I suggest using the opening situation of that adventure as a starting point and being willing diverge fairly wildly from the course of the story as play unfolds.)

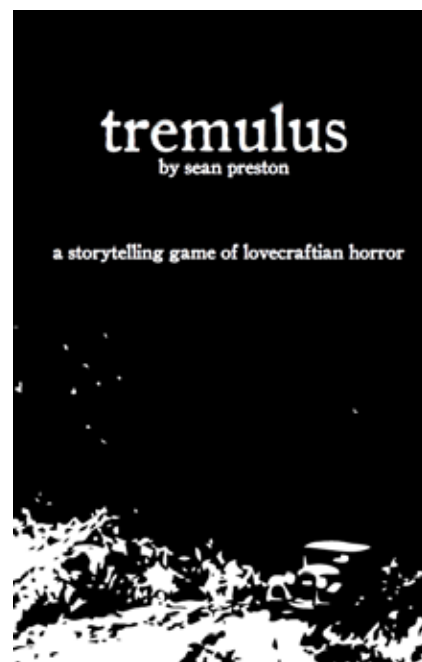
In *tremulus*, the Keeper never rolls dice, which allows him or her to concentrate on coming up with engaging scenes, weird and horrific imagery, and playing the NPCs rather than worrying too much about the game mechanics. As a horror game, *tremulus* promotes tension through a mechanic called “hard moves”. On certain results of player die rolls, the Keeper gains a point of “hold”, a currency that they can spend later in the game to spring harsh negative events on the characters without warning. Players soon learn to dread the slowly growing pile of “hold” tokens (I use skull-shaped beads), knowing that each one is a calamity just waiting

to happen. Damage (both physical and mental) is fairly harsh and time-consuming to heal, further adding to the tension and giving players a reason to seek alternative solutions to problems.

One frequent criticism of *tremulus* is that it doesn’t move far enough from its *Apocalypse World* roots. The game reads as if the author had played AW a few times and saw the potential for using the system for playing Lovecraftian stories, but didn’t really understand the underlying system or how to tweak it that well. Another weak aspect of the game are the playbooks. The playbook moves are sometimes boring and unimaginative, and some have limited utility in a typical investigation (I’m looking at you, Dilettante).

Nevertheless, I and my players have always enjoyed *tremulus*. The easy character generation, good situation generator, unobtrusive core system, rules that ratchet up tension, and the fact that the Keeper can focus on story and NPCs rather than game mechanics all support a good horror RPG experience that can be enjoyed by new gamers as well as veterans.

Seven phobias. ☿





# MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

## NOTES, TXTS, AND A TWO- INCH ARTICLE

BY BEN RIGGS

 Crime

### Funeral director slain and corpse taken

By Journal-Sentinel Staff  
April 7, 2014

Albin Borkowski, owner of Borkowski Funeral Home, was slain late Sunday night when assailants broke into his establishment, killed him, and stole the body of Cassie Somerville, which was awaiting embalming. The parents of Cassie Somerville, Aaron and Kristen Somerville, have both disappeared. Anyone with information on the break-in or the whereabouts of the Somervilles is asked to contact the police at 1-800-\*\*\*-\*\*\*\*.

Aaron, we are at hospital. Cassie suffered massive blood loss. Only injuries deep puncture or bite marks in thigh. Doctors want to talk to you. Plz come to St. Luke's emergency ASAP. She might die

meet me on corner of 5th and national in 2 hours. can't come to hospital but i have info which will save c's life. -a

Kristen Somerville <ksomerville@ctmail.com>

to me

Cassie's cold as a block of ice and fighting to breathe. She's spitting up blood. And when I get home she's not even under the covers! All that and you take off for work? You are an unnatural father, and we're going to St. Luke's!

Kristen

Dear Kristen,

Cassie's not looking too good. She's all pale and coughy. You might wanna keep an eye on her. I'm going out. Work.

Aaron

Where did you get all this money? I counted it and it's \$11,325 exactly. The stack is sitting on the kitchen table here staring at me. It's terrifying. More money than I've ever seen in one place and you leave it on the kitchen table like it's \$20. And the blood on your shirt! My God, Aaron. The whole shirt's red with it. Was the guy shot in the head? And it was still damp when I pulled it out of the hamper.

Talk to me tonight. You're not in trouble, are you?

Kristen

Hey K,

Last night this guy got into a bar fight and I had to help clean him up. Head wounds bleed like nobody's business. Can you try to get the blood out of my shirt? Also, rent money acquired. It's on the kitchen table.

And I found some work, so I'm going out.

-A

Aaron!

I went to the bank and we only have \$573.27! Last I checked, we had \$2,390.32. The teller said that there was a withdrawal of over \$1,000 and charges at bars all over town. Rent's due next week and we can't cover it. I know I cheated on you and don't have the right to say word one, but don't make the same mistake I did. Remember, we got a good thing here. I know you hate it, but I'd bet you anything that the car dealership would take you back. It's just for now. The guitar's not going anywhere.

I tried to wake you up this morning to talk all this over but I couldn't even get you to stop snoring. Remember back before we had Cassie, how you'd wake me up some mornings so we could watch the stars wink out together? Today I opened the shades when I saw the first touch of orange on the horizon and without so much as waking up you ordered me to close them. I wanted to tell you to screw off, but I didn't. Instead I closed the shades.

And you know what else I found in bed with you? A rat, dead and damn cold. I shoulda left it in the sheets for you to find, but right now I'm doing you one better than you deserve.

I'm getting angry now, and I think I'm within my rights. So don't even think about going out tonight unless you're gonna come back with rent money.

Kristen

PS: Dentist says Cassie needs braces and soon if we don't want her getting snaggle-toothed.



iMessage

Send

THE UNSPEAKABLE OATH