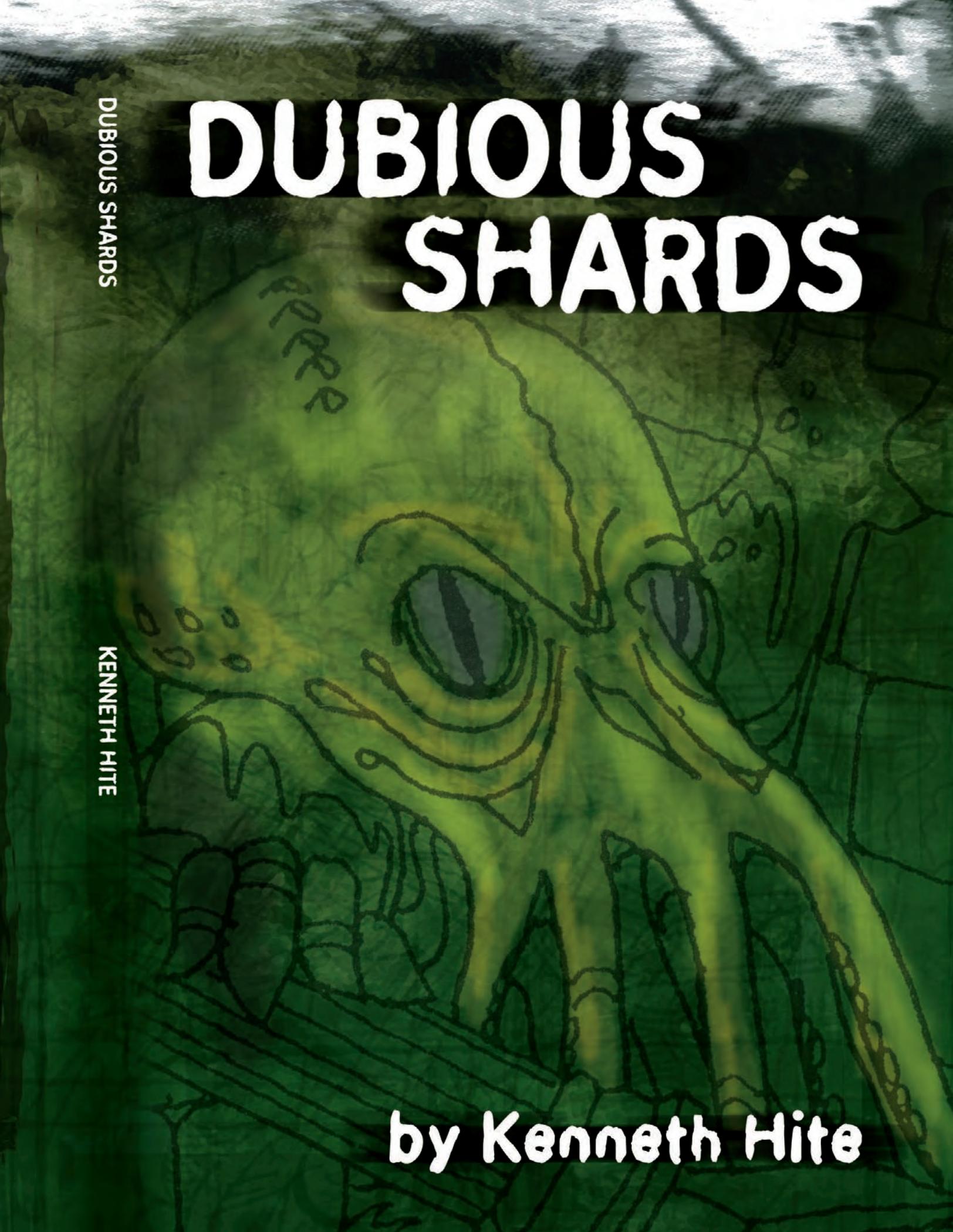


DUBIOUS SHARDS

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KENNETH HITE

by Kenneth Hite



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# CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgements and Clear Credit .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Lore .....</b>	<b>5</b>
The “How” of Hastur .....	5
The Trail of Dagon .....	15
Irem, the City of Pillars .....	19
Vampish Vapours in the Shunned House.....	24
Down to Dunwich .....	30
The Shadow Out of Lovecraft.....	36
<b>The Winslow Project.....</b>	<b>41</b>
2006 Preface .....	41
Keeper’s Information .....	43
Investigator’s Information.....	44
Welcome to Winslow .....	47
The Investigators Arrive.....	59
Courses of Investigation.....	60
Homecoming Night.....	60
Aftermath .....	62
NPC Statistics .....	62
<b>Criticism .....</b>	<b>66</b>
The Shadow from the Right.....	66
The Man Who Shot Joseph Curwen.....	72

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“The ‘How’ of Hastur” appears here for the first time anywhere. I ran across the Clark Ashton Smith quote that sparked the whole piece in David E. Schultz’ “Notes Toward a History of the Cthulhu Mythos” in *Crypt of Cthulhu* #92. Likewise, “The Man Who Shot Joseph Curwen” is original to this book. I discovered the connection between *Call of Cthulhu* and the Western on my own, but very profitably mined Donald R. Burleson’s “Lovecraft: An American Allegory” in *Crypt of Cthulhu* #78 while constructing this piece.

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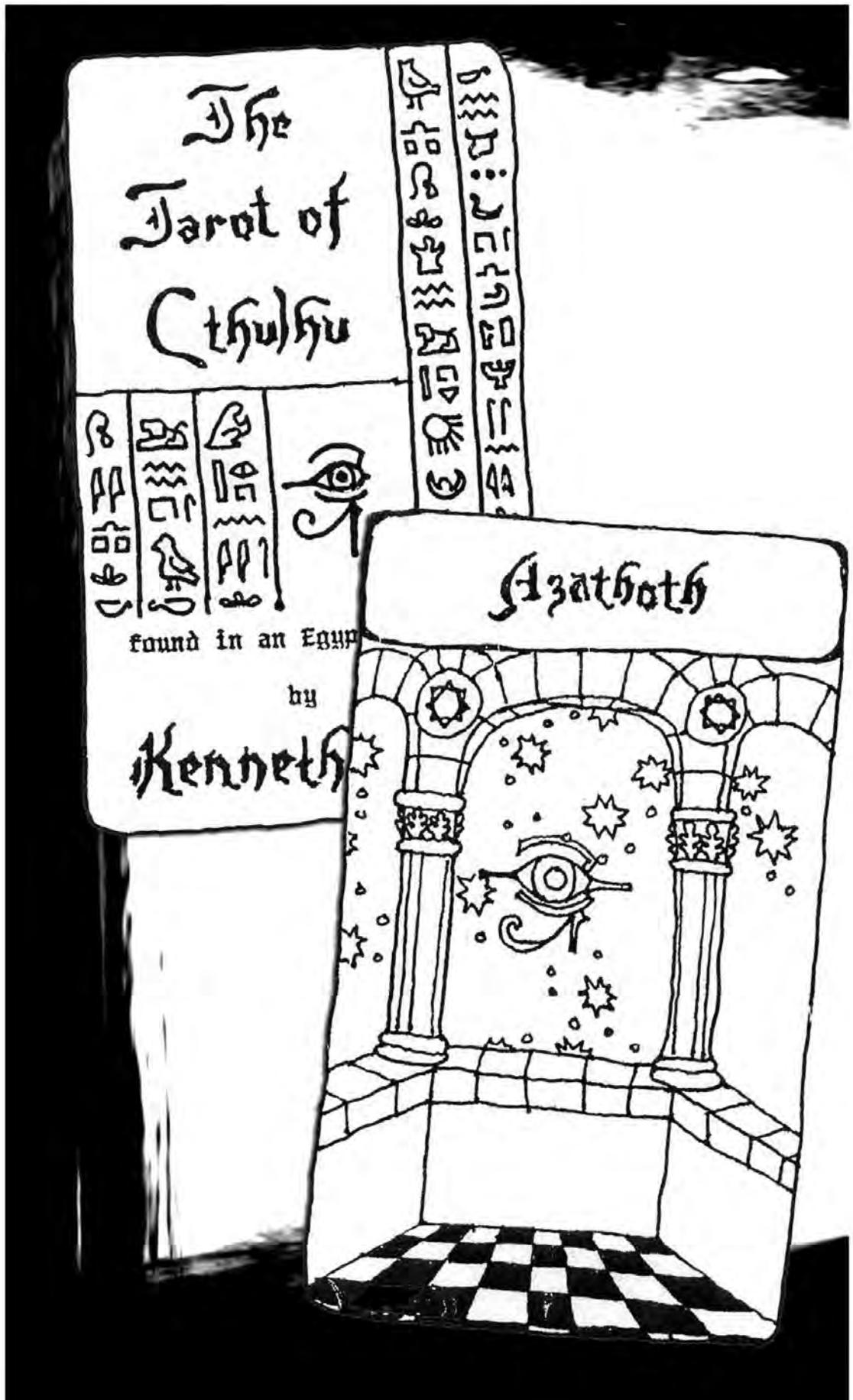
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# THE “HOW” OF HASTUR: RUMINATIONS ON APPLIED YOG-SOTHOTHERY

*“[T]here is something that secret histories give you that is very different, because you are trying to uncover the histories of groups and forces that always avoid history. In order to narrate those stories, you must become a little paranoid, though not in the sense that They are out to get you. I mean you must become a little paranoid as a critical method. You must start jumping across vague and shadowy realms of ambiguous data, weaving patterns that won’t hold up in court, pointing out strange synchronicities that occur, names that reappear. Suddenly possibilities that exist outside of what we can conventionally narrate start to cohere, many of them bordering on the incorporeal and the imaginal. Patterns resonate in ways that seem to undermine conventional historical thinking itself.”*

-- Erik Davis, April 1997

Much as a Lovecraft narrator might begin with the assurance that he is not mad, let me begin with the assurance that this is not another “what is the Cthulhu Mythos” essay. From a literary-critical perspective, I’m happy to adopt S.T. Joshi’s basic definition, that a “Cthulhu Mythos story” is one featuring a location, entity, or book created (or significantly adumbrated) by Lovecraft or his circle. From a thematic perspective, you can hardly do better than to read John Tynes’ chapter “The Cthulhu Mythos,” in the d20 adaptation of the *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game. Just one irresistible quote: “[The Mythos is] so alien and strange that it’s like mental plutonium: get too close, and your mind sickens and dies.” From a historical perspective, thanks to the careful research of David E. Schultz, we even have a pretty good idea of who invented the Mythos as a concept, and when. Although Frank Belknap Long wrote the first Mythos story not by Lovecraft, “The Space Eaters” in 1928, it took until May of 1931 for August Derleth to suggest that Lovecraft’s invented gods and monsters were a unified myth cycle. He proposed that Lovecraft call it “The Mythology of Hastur.” The bemused HPL pointed out that Hastur was Ambrose Bierce’s

No, this essay attempts to answer, even if fitfully and sketchily, the perhaps more immediate question “How?” How do you detect the Cthulhu Mythos, how do you construct it in a roleplaying game or campaign? This tentative exploration of that question seeks to tease out some techniques for adding the Mythos to something, or building the Mythos into something, or perhaps merely for accustoming your mind’s eye to the dimness and training yourself to see the Mythos where it already exists. It’s about adapting the frame of mind, or the narrative perspective, that Lovecraft jocularly called “Yog-Sothothery,” and applying it to your game. (Or, I suppose, to any narrative construct, be it RPG adventure, short story, novel, film, what have you.) The Mythos is as much a way to look at phenomena, a perspective or parallax or lens, as it is a set of phenomena. Applying Yog-Sothothery is like switching on Crawford Tillinghast’s “detestable electrical machine” and seeing things previously invisible.

*“The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.”*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu”

So how does Lovecraft do it, first of all? The secret lies, as might be expected, in the seed story of the whole Mythos, “The Call of Cthulhu.” Indeed, in the opening lines of that tale, quoted above. How do you see the outlines of the Mythos? You correlate the contents of your mind, or of your library at any rate. You “piece together dissociated knowledge,” rather like solving a jigsaw puzzle. Instead of putting all the blue pieces together to reveal the sky, you put all the “Mythos-colored” pieces together to reveal the “terrifying vistas of reality.” From within, discovering the Mythos is like any other problem in detection, but the evidence can come from anywhere. In the story, Angell pieces together not only his own experiences with the sculptor Wilcox, but Inspector Legrasse’s police report from New Orleans, theosophical pamphlets, press clippings of all sorts, and a ship’s log. This approach works not only for elderly anthropologists but for us, as well.

It’s important to remember, at the outset, that Angell wasn’t building up a picture of the “Cthulhu Mythos.” He was uncovering the activities and nature of what he called “the Cthulhu Cult,” specifically centered on the images of Cthulhu created by Wilcox and discovered by Legrasse in Louisiana. Like Angell did, then, it makes sense for story designers to build one piece of the Mythos around something -- either a person, a phenomenon, a place, whatever you can use to focus the attention of the story. And once you pick your starting place, you’ll start to see it everywhere. We’re all familiar with this common phenomenon. Let’s say your birthday is the 15th of September. Your whole life, you’ll be more alert to other things that happen on that date. Robert Anton Wilson famously ran riot with the number “23” in the *Illuminatus!* trilogy, and everybody who reads it is guaranteed to notice that arcane integer from then on. Sometimes it happens without a specific stimulus; if you’ve suddenly noticed a specific symbol, or font, or graffiti tag, you’ll start seeing it everywhere. You may have run across an obscure poet or musician or painter -- and suddenly you seem to see their art a lot more often. All those data -- dates, numbers, symbols, art -- were always there, but your interest make them jump out at you, from the cognitive background to the cognitive foreground. This kind of data sorting is second nature to us; it probably evolved with us monkeys in the forests when the ability to spot nuts or smaller animals was a strong survival trait. Data sorting is key to what psychologists call “pattern matching.” Our monkey eyes take that blurry shadow under the leaves and turn it into a cluster of nuts.

*“But for the purposes of my work, especially plotting it, and outlining it, it’s real valuable to think: ‘Nothing is a coincidence. Everything contains a message. There are no random events, no coincidences. And whatever someone really means, it’s not what they just said....’ Even when I’m dealing with real history, I can arrange our perspective on it and emphasize some bits and kind of shadow out other bits, so it seems that real history illustrates my point, that it really is arranged with some structure in mind, rather than just all tumbling around like gravel down a hillside.”*

-- Tim Powers, *Locus* interview, March 1998

Like everything else in our bodies and minds, Nature built a certain amount of sloppiness and error into pattern matching. Pattern matching malfunctions (or more precisely, over-functions) in a number of related ways. The next step up from simple pattern matching is pareidolia, the mistaken matching of pattern within randomness. This is what makes people see faces on Mars, or the Virgin Mary in a grilled cheese sandwich. A linked category of error is apophenia, the detection of nonexistent connections between phenomena. Apophenia manifests itself in the belief in “lucky socks” and conspiracy theories alike. Time-series apophenia is called “hindsight bias” or “the narrative fallacy.” The construction of narrative -- this happened, so that happened -- is seemingly inherent in human psychology. Where life is, in actuality, “just one damn thing after another,” we see a story, a story driven by the narrative thrust of True Love, guardian angels, our Destiny ... or malevolent cults of Cthulhu worshipers. The secret to correlating your mind’s contents such that the Mythos appears is to harness these mental malfunctions creatively. In other words, to see the Mythos, you appropriately have to go a little bit mad. Invoke paranoia in yourself, look at everything through a jaundiced eye. Seek the outline of the King in Yellow, not Jesus, in that tortilla. Draw dark connections between widely separated things, and look hard for that one piece of the story you just know has to be there to Explain It All. And because that’s how all our minds work, you’ll find it.

*“I really agree that Yog-Sothoth is a basically immature conception, & unfitted for really serious literature.... But I consider the use of actual folk-myths as even more childish than the use of new artificial myths, since in employing the former, one is forced to retain many blatant puerilities & contradictions of experience which could be subtilised or smoothed over if the supernaturalism were modelled to order for the given case. The only permanently artistic use of Yog-Sothothery, I think, is in symbolic or associative phantasy of the frankly poetic type; in which fixed dream-patterns of the natural organism are given an embodiment & crystallisation.”*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, letter to Frank Belknap Long, Feb. 27, 1931 (*Selected Letters* III, p. 293)

What you’re building is not history or narrative, but “secret history,” a riff on history. It is, in Lovecraft’s words above, “symbolic or associative phantasy,” and it has more in common with “the frankly poetic type” than it does with real hard-core prices-and-battles Events. If Lovecraft called it poetic, you can also call it musical. You’re laying down a dance mix, with samples from all over. The Salem witch-cult is one track, modern architecture might be another, and Antarctic geology a third, all playing at once to a Cthulhoid bass beat. Where do you get these tracks, these missing links in the apopheniatic narrative of paranoia you’re constructing? Lovecraft may have dismissed “the use of actual folk-myths” in the letter above, but this would be a clear case of “do as I say, not as I do.” Lovecraft used “actual folk-myths” by the carload lot. Genuine folklore from western Massachusetts, such as the soul-catching role of the whippoorwills, appears in “The Dunwich Horror.” “Dagon” was an actual Philistine god. There was actually a “Shunned House” in Providence, and the vampire and werewolf myths Lovecraft harnesses to it were also authentic legendry. Lovecraft eagerly pillaged magical chants from the *Britannica* for “The Horror at Red Hook,” and mined theosophical pamphlets sent him by J. Vernon Shea for the dizzying “aeons” of such works as “At the Mountains of Madness” and “The Shadow Out of Time.”

He read Sabine Baring-Gould's recondite *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, from which he took the central incident of "The Rats in the Walls," and owned Lewis Spence's magisterial *Encyclopaedia of Occultism*. And of course he read widely and well in the esoteric witchlore of his native New England.

*"It was not from any empty system of antique legendry that Western Europeans of the 17th century and before got their significantly consistent idea of what witches were, how they made their incantations, and what they did at their hideous convocations on May-Eve and Hallowmass. Something actual was going on under the surface, so that people really stumbled on concrete experiences from time to time which confirmed all they had ever heard of the witch species."*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, letter to Robert E. Howard, Oct. 4, 1930 (*Selected Letters III*, p. 178)

Lovecraft just happened to be working, moreover, at the high point of academic respectability for secret history. In his letter to Robert E. Howard, he gives all "honour for this step" to Margaret Murray, who published *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* in 1921. Her thesis -- now, needless to say, completely discredited by anthropologists and historians -- is just as Lovecraft gives it above, although elsewhere in the letter he combines it with Arthur Machen's equally daft notion of a hidden race of "Mongoloid 'little people'" pushed into the margins of Europe by the invading Indo-Europeans. But at the time, it was top-flight historical thinking, Apophenia in the saddle booted and spurred. Murray was, herself, heavily influenced by another pioneering work of anthropology and comparative religion, *The Golden Bough*, first published in 1890 by Sir James George Frazer. Frazer's thesis was that all "primitive religions" recapitulate the same basic story, of the Dying Corn King, in locally various baroque fashion. This was pareidolia with a vengeance, compounded by fashionable Darwinism as Frazer explained the evolution of myths and religions from earlier, more primitive forms. Frazer was too discreet to note the parallels between his reconstructed ancient myth and the Christian story, but academic anti-clericalism helped drive Frazer to the top of the theoretical heap in the increasingly materialistic modern era.

*"I awakened each morning in a fever, sometimes frantically trying to verify or discredit such information as fell within the range of modern human knowledge. Traditional facts took on new and doubtful aspects, and I marvelled at the dream-fancy which could invent such surprising addenda to history and science."*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Shadow Out of Time"

Likewise anti-clerical, resolutely Darwinist, and scientifically minded, Lovecraft devoured Frazer, who definitely "fell within the range of modern human knowledge." Frazer's theory, as quaint as it may seem to us, was cutting-edge science in Lovecraft's day, independent scholarly confirmation of Lovecraft's artistic need for a narrative fallacy in anthropology. Lovecraft even added his work (and Murray's) to Angell's notes in "The Call of Cthulhu." Lovecraft never directly applied Frazer to the Mythos (although you can detect hints of the Dying God in "The Dunwich Horror" of all places), but you can see an even more inspired genius, Robert Graves, apply Frazerian pareidolia to Greek mythology in Graves' *The Greek Myths*. Still selling well today, Graves' compendium combines brilliantly synthesized classical texts with completely loopy end-notes on the "secret history" of Greek religion as revealed through subtle hints and arcane analogies. There is probably no more accessible, complete worked example of how to add a hidden mythology to an existing blend of history and belief. A differently Lovecraftish take on Greek mythology can be found in

the work of Jane Ellen Harrison, whose 1903 *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* peeled back the later, rationalized, classical Greek mythology to uncover a primitive cultus of madness and fear, held in place by Frazerian ritual. There's not much distance between Harrison's Demeter and Lovecraft's Shub-Niggurath. Like Frazer, Harrison is no longer considered the final word, although her insight that there is a deeper, less polished stratum beneath classroom Greek mythology remains valid.

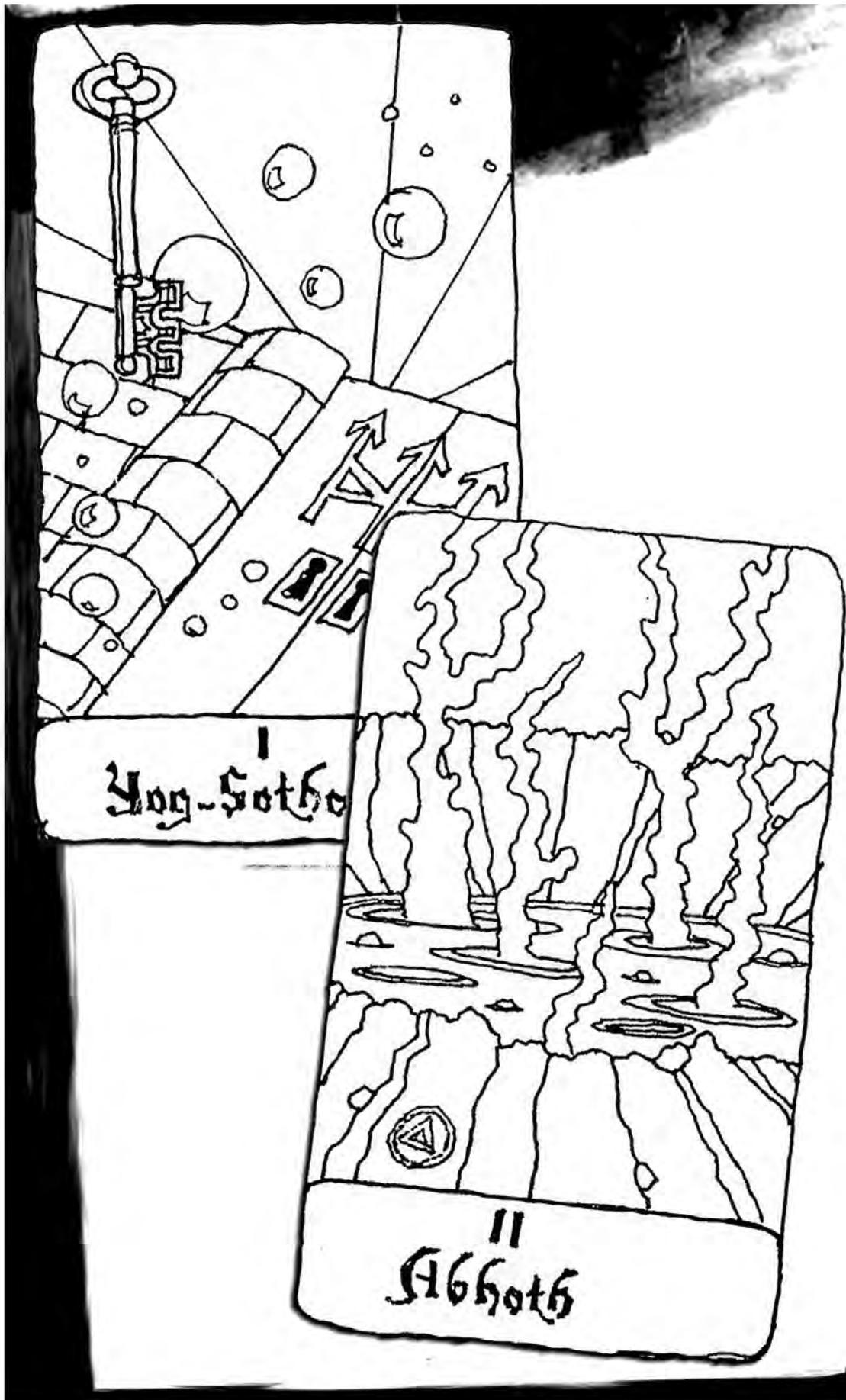
Of course, Lovecraft went well beyond "actual folk-myths" into his "new artificial myths," his "Cthulhuism and Yog-Sothothery." He took Lord Dunsany's concept of an artificial pantheon (from *The Gods of Pegana*), and turned it to the purposes of horror. Even moreso, he brought it from the Dreamworld into the real world of phonograph records and multi-engine seaplanes and anthropological conventions. Lovecraft's was the first fictional mythology to co-exist with the real world. With that insight, "traditional facts took on new and doubtful aspects," as Wingate Peaslee says above. He was free to invent, and to recombine, "surprising addenda to history and science," and, as we've seen above, legendry.

*"As to the varying references to the mythos in different tales: I wonder if they weren't designed to suggest the diverse developments and interpretations of old myths and deities that spring up over great periods of time and in variant races and civilizations? I have, intentionally, done something of the sort in my own myth-creation.... I believe the theory I have outlined above will afford the best explanation of the discrepancies: HPL wished to indicate the natural growth of a myth-pattern through dim ages, in which the same deity or demon might present changing aspects."*

-- Clark Ashton Smith, letter to August Derleth, Apr. 28, 1937

As an example, take Lovecraft's treatment of the mi-go. The *mi-gö*, or *migyū*, is the "fast-moving man" of Tibetan legend, what the Nepalese call the Yeti. In "The Whisperer in the Darkness," Lovecraft begins with the "queer footprints or claw-prints" left after the Vermont floods and the malign footprints seen by Henry Akeley. Clearly, a mysterious monster lives in the hills. Lovecraft then hints that "fauns and dryads and satyrs ... the *kallikanzari* of modern Greece" and the "terrible hidden races of troglodytes and burrowers" of "wild Wales and Ireland" are all aspects of the same thing as "the dreaded Mi-Go." But he's not satisfied to write a story about Bigfoot, or even about yet another iteration of "the magnificent horror-fiction of Arthur Machen." Casting around for something else creepy in the vicinity of Vermont, where he has laid his tale, he happens upon the *bmola*, flying spirits of the Abnaki that dwells on mountain tops. In "Whisperer," HPL calls the *bmola* the Winged Ones, and ascribes its legend to the extinct Pennacook tribe for extra creepiness -- and so that his addition of extra details to the story isn't as obvious. With this blending, Lovecraft has created something entirely his own, a demon that turns out to be an alien crustacean-fungi species, the Outer Ones, lurking on the Earth for millions of years.

What the addition of his own anti-mythology (as it has been dubbed) gave Lovecraft was the best of both worlds. He could latch onto anything that seemed creepy or interesting anywhere in the world's stock of folklore or myth, and then "subtilise" and smooth it over where he needed to, modeling it, as he put it, "to order for the given case," without worrying about consistency. Don't worry if your vision of the Cthulhu Mythos contradicts some aspect of legend, or even of Lovecraft. If, per Emerson, consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, surely consistency about hobgoblins is a positive bane. Contradictions within myths are nothing new -- Greek myth gives varying lineages to its gods as surely as Lovecraft does, and the Bible itself still contains two separate stories of the creation of mankind. Real mythology, real legend systems have the kind of organic, messy variation that Lovecraft gave to his Mythos. He assembled it from a thousand sources, and sent it



in dozens of directions. “The Whisperer in the Darkness” is a classic example of Mythos kudzu at its finest and most baroque. In the course of that one story, Lovecraft draws not only on global monster legendry, but the Bierce-Chambers “Hastur Mythos,” the alien visitations mooted by Charles Fort, and his own creations Azathoth and so forth. Each of these elements leads off into a whole different “symbolic or associative phantasy,” and all of them interconnect in the vastness of the Cthulhu Mythos. In the introduction to *The Hastur Cycle*, Robert M. Price argues that the Cthulhu Mythos is merely one branch on the great family tree of the fantastic, but surely if Lovecraft teaches us anything, it is that perspective is relative. Open the other eye, and see the trunk as hanging from the branch. One measures a circle beginning anywhere, as Charles Fort reminds us, and one can center the universe on anything. The trick is to put Azathoth at the center and see what the universe looks like then.

*“In my own efforts ... I try to utilise as many as possible of the elements which have, under earlier mental and emotional conditions, given man a symbolic feeling of the unreal, the ethereal, & the mystical ... Accordingly, I have tried to weave them into a kind of shadowy phantasmagoria which may have the same sort of vague coherence as a cycle of traditional myth or legend -- with nebulous backgrounds of Elder Forces & transgalactic entities which lurk about this infinitesimal planet, (& of course about others as well), establishing outposts thereon, & occasionally brushing aside other accidental forces of life (like human beings) in order to take up full habitation. ... Having formed a cosmic pantheon, it remains for the fantasiste to link this ‘outside’ element to the earth in a suitably dramatic & convincing fashion. This, I have thought, is best done through glancing allusions to immemorially ancient cults & idols & documents attesting the recognition of the ‘outside’ forces by men -- or by those terrestrial entities which preceded man. The actual climaxes of tales based on such elements naturally have to do with sudden latter-day intrusions of forgotten elder forces on the placid surface of the known -- either active intrusions, or revelations caused by the feverish & presumptuous probing of men into the unknown.”*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, letter to Harold S. Farnese, Sept. 22, 1932 (*Selected Letters IV*, pp. 70-71)

The result is a mosaic, a puzzle built from different colored pieces, giving rise nonetheless to a single overarching image. Each piece, each datum, has an angle from which it appears most menacing -- the job of the would-be Mythos interpreter/creator is to tilt each piece of the puzzle to sharpen that angle. Not merely to highlight that element that is most Yog-Sothothish, but to shadow those elements less evocative. And because, in our Lovecraftian mind at least, the Cthulhu Mythos underlies all legendry and all science equally, anything can be made to fit.

How, then, to pick what aspects to include, and what to emphasize? That is more properly a question of aesthetics than of engineering, but it is still answerable within the realm of Lovecraftian architecture. Although the smallest stories can be relevant -- such as the slow death of a single backwoods farm family in “The Colour Out of Space” -- the Mythos is never small. It is cosmic, more than humans can conceive or comprehend. (Whitman could be speaking as the Mythos when he asks: “Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself. I am vast, I contain multitudes.”) The keys to the Mythos are scale and scope. The Mythos is huge, it is enormous. “A mountain walked or stumbled.”

Take, as an early and perhaps unpolished example, the “five-headed monster as large as a hippopotamus” in “Under the Pyramids” that is revealed to be “the merest forepaw” of the actual creature. Another example is the “mammoth soft blue-white stovepipe” in the basement of “The Shunned House” that the horrified narrator discovers is but the “titan elbow” of some “unthinkable abnormality.” Both of these examples date from 1924,

relatively early in Lovecraft's professional career. This crude technique ("No, it's a *really big* elbow!") prefigures the full-blown cosmicism of "The Call of Cthulhu" and its successors. Things are not what they seem -- they are much larger, and they do not care about us. The seemingly marginal and transient Cthulhu Cult turns out to spread worldwide, and to recall an entity millions, even billions, of years old. Over and over, from "The Call of Cthulhu" to "The Shadow Out of Time," what we expect to be the merely human concerns of elderly professors turn out to be incidental non-events in the vast scope of cosmic forces. The truth is that we are not the truth. Titanic beings colonized our solar system "vigintillions of years ago" and we are an afterthought of their biological warfare. What Clark Ashton Smith called Lovecraft's "prehistoric and infra-mnemonic world" is larger than the history of mankind, or even the mythology of mankind. The conspiracy that is the Cthulhu Mythos is vaster than we can imagine, it transcends our dust-speck planet and our mayfly species. It even exceeds space and time itself.

*"The Old Ones were, the Old Ones are, and the Old Ones shall be. Not in the spaces we know, but between them, They walk serene and primal, undimensioned and to us unseen. Yog-Sothoth knows the gate. Yog-Sothoth is the gate. Yog-Sothoth is the key and guardian of the gate. Past, present, future, all are one in Yog-Sothoth. He knows where the Old Ones broke through of old, and where They shall break through again. He knows where They have trod earth's fields, and where They still tread them, and why no one can behold Them as They tread. By Their smell can men sometimes know them near, but of Their semblance can no man know, saving only in the features of those They have begotten on mankind; and of those are there many sorts, differing in likeness from man's truest eidolon to that shape without sight or substance which is Them."*

-- the *Necronomicon*, quoted by H.P. Lovecraft, "The Dunwich Horror"

In addition to being vast, the Mythos is uncanny. It does not play by Earthly rules, much less human ones. Lovecraft's constant harping on the "non-Euclidean geometry" of Mythos structures is intended to indicate that the Mythos is from Outside; our perceptions break down when we try to see it. When we change our perceptions to match reality, we go mad -- our blindness is our only defense. In "The Dreams in the Witch-House," mathematician Walter Gilman discovers the mathematical key to hyperspace -- and discovers what dwells there. (And again, Lovecraft ties in actual witch legendry to this science-fictional horror.) The Mythos violates our normal rules of geometry and physics. Similarly, Mythos entities violate biology, or rather exceed it. The Outer Ones are fungoidal, but also like crustaceans and bats. Cthulhu is octopoid, but batlike, or perhaps like a dinosaur. Even the most humanoid spawn of Yog-Sothoth disobeys the laws of ontogeny and anatomy.

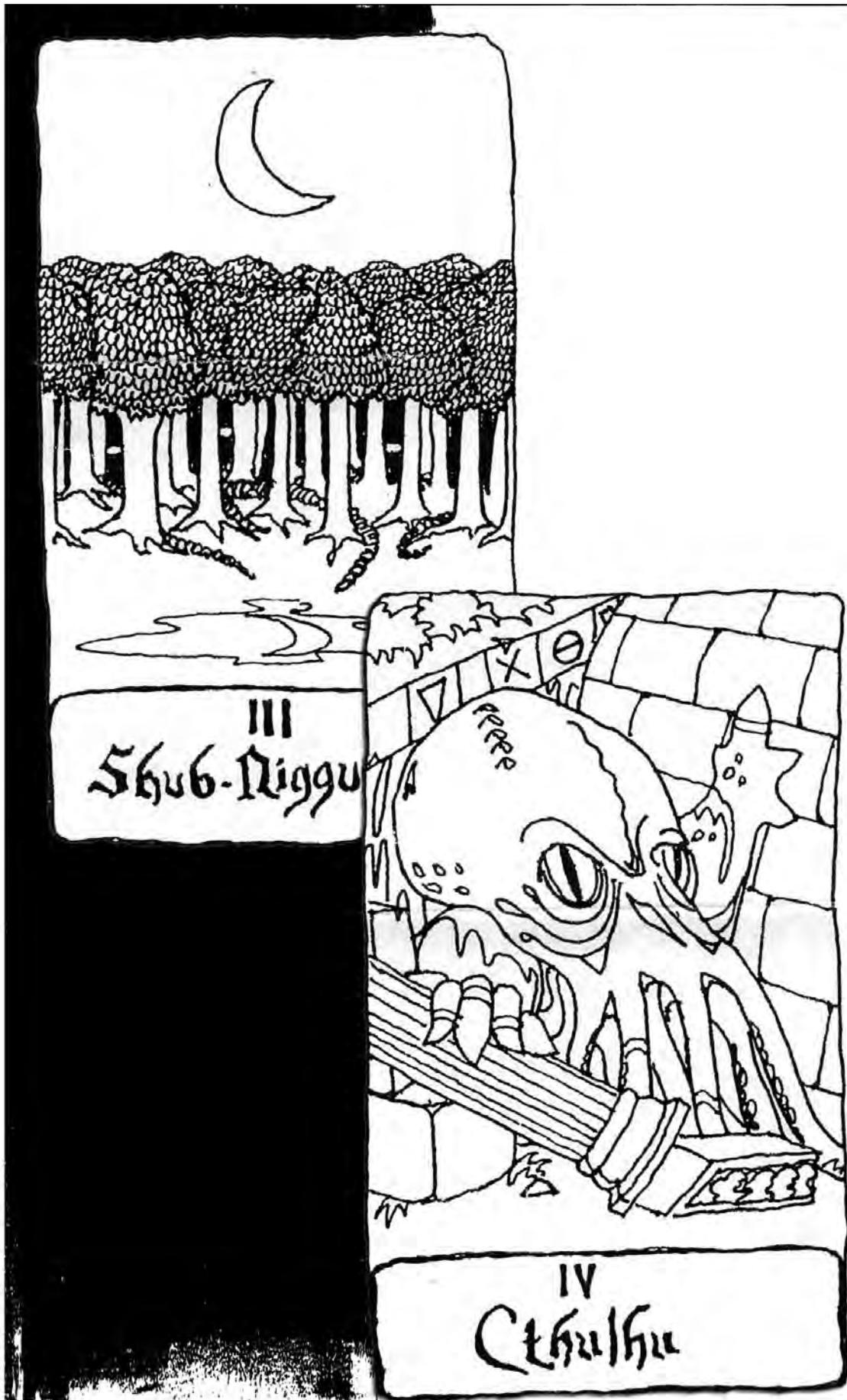
But how to wrap our human heads around it? Just as Wilbur Whateley or Walter Gilman turned to the *Necronomicon*, we can turn to another parable of communication with the Outside. I speak, of course, of *Flatland*, by Edwin A. Abbott. This 1884 satire of Victorian mores also manages to demonstrate the sheer alien-ness of something from outside conventional dimensionality. The viewpoint of the book is that of two-dimensional beings; the protagonist, for example, is A. Square. He encounters a Sphere, and can only perceive it as a series of Circles; the Sphere can do such things as turn invisible, teleport things through unconnected reaches of Flatland, and turn poor A. Square inside-out by propelling him into the third dimension. Although I know of no evidence that Lovecraft read *Flatland*, the parallel with his description of "the shocking form of fabulous Yog-Sothoth" in "The Horror in the Museum" as "only a congeries of iridescent globes, yet stupendous in its malign suggestiveness" is quite a coincidence.

What seems to us, then, like unconnected interruptions in the universe may be merely the fingers of some extra-dimensional hand breaking the surface of our mere three dimensions. The Mythos shows itself in such breaks, in the “out of place objects” and missing eclipses and falls of frogs beloved of Charles Fort. This is true not merely in space -- the “strange, far places” of Lovecraft’s cults -- but in time. The Shining Trapezohedron leaves a few dubious traces in the past, in Antarctica and Valusia and Atlantis and Khem. And when it does reach history, at the court of the Pharaoh Nephren-Ka, it blots it out: with the crystal, Nephren-Ka “did that which caused his name to be stricken from all monuments and records.” Biology and physics, like history, shrinks away from the Mythos. Where They walk, They leave trails of broken reality, shards and pieces of the normal, blasted lives and insane cults and strange weather, and hills where no grass grows. All the things of the Mythos leave a slimy trail of un-nature wherever they impinge on human perception. “As a foulness” -- in cosmic terms, a smell of something Not Right -- “shall ye know Them.” Follow those trails, then, that scent, and you will find where the Mythos lurks.

*“The one test of the really weird is simply this -- whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe’s utmost rim.”*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, “Supernatural Horror in Literature”

You can capture that smell, that sense of Not Rightness, by creating in yourself the same sort of apophenia that a Lovecraftian narrator stumbles into. Mine and sift ancient folk myths, modern scientific anomalies, the higher reaches of psychology and philosophy, or whatever takes your fancy. Lovecraft was interested in astronomy, Antarctica, and the history of Providence -- and lo and behold, all those things turn out to be crucial elements in Lovecraft’s conception of the Mythos. Cthulhu, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Build your secret history out of varying materials, mix it up well and your players or readers will believe that Yog-Sothoth is indeed everywhere. Extend the scale and scope of your threat beyond the mere planetary. (It’s wise to reveal that scope only in glimpses and hints and mangled verses from the *Pnakotic Manuscripts*, or in the lightning flash on Tempest Mountain, lest your players simply exclaim “a giant elbow?”) And then, when you have your titan, press it against the world until reality bends and cracks. There, you have the Mythos, in the negative space left behind. This is the “profound sense” that Lovecraft called the “weird.” He summarized it admirably above, and he brought it about by evoking a full-blown “symbolic or associative phantasy” that I, at least, will argue is of the “frankly poetic type.” Go thou and do likewise.



## THE TRAIL OF DAGON

*“[M]y rescuers knew nothing; nor did I deem it necessary to insist upon a thing which I knew they could not believe. Once I sought out a celebrated ethnologist, and amused him with peculiar questions regarding the ancient Philistine legend of Dagon, the Fish-God; but soon perceiving that he was hopelessly conventional, I did not press my inquiries.”*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, “Dagon”

Like Lovecraft’s narrator, we shall amuse ourselves with peculiar questions. Unlike him, we shall press our inquiries. In Fred Chappell’s Cthulhu Mythos novel *Dagon*, the protagonist follows his curiosity and his lust to mutilation and death. We’ll try to stop short of that. The point of this exercise, and of the essays that follow, is to track the trail of a Lovecraftian concept hither and yon wherever it leads us. Some of it may prove useful for a game or story, whether as the central conceit or a whispered anecdote told in a remote cabin. All of it is potential fodder for Mythos sub-creation, connections on which to hang the threads of apophenia until the Pattern emerges.

*“Dagon his Name, Sea Monster, upward Man  
And downward Fish: yet had his Temple high  
Rear’d in Azotus, dreaded through the Coast  
Of Palestine, in Gath and Ascalon  
And Accaron and Gaza’s frontier bounds.”*

-- John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I: 462-466

If we all know one thing about Dagon, it’s what Milton knew -- he’s a Sea Monster. Dagon’s depiction as a merman goes back at least to St. Jerome, who based it on the notion that Dagon’s name came from the Hebrew *dag*, meaning “fish.” (The *-on* part gets glossed as “sun,” “sadness,” “young,” or “lord” depending on who’s glossing it.) In the 19th century, archaeologists in Syria and Mesopotamia stumbled upon coins and a few seals depicting a fish-man -- obviously, Dagon, and never mind the lack of labels or other evidence. (So what was the fish-man actually called? Well, in Babylonian, “fish-man” is *Kulullû*. I am so not kidding.) But Dagon would not be hooked so easily as that. Eventually, someone noticed that the almost as distinguished Eusebius transmits a tradition that referred to Dagon as the corn-god. Shortly thereafter, spoilsport linguists pointed out that *dagan* actually means “grain” in Hebrew, just as *dagnu* means grain in Ugaritic, and that unlike the putative mer-deity, there are scads of references to the fertility god Dagan throughout the Fertile Crescent.

The earliest such references date back to about 2500 B.C. at Mari in the upper Euphrates valley; over the next thousand years, worship of Dagan spread to Ugarit on the coast and thence south to, apparently, the Philistines and Phoenicians. In Mari and Ebla, Dagan was the “lord of the gods,” worshiped at the “house of the Star” from whence his priests emerged to give prophetic advice to kings. Sargon of Akkad, Hammurabi, Naram-Sin, and Ashurnasirpal II all credited Dagan with some of their conquests. In various myths, Dagan became the father of Baal (who rapidly supplanted him in Ugarit), prison warden of

the underworld, and “lord of sacrificial victims.” His wife was variously known as Shala, Ishara, or (in the west) Atargatis.

Atargatis, especially under her Greek title Derceto, is almost always pictured as a mermaid. Interestingly, around 1750 B.C., the Mari records mention Dagon’s promise (made in a dream) to “have the kings of the Yaminites cooked on a fisherman’s spit.” Suddenly, Dagon’s fishy self comes roaring back, and it gets even fishier. Because the Chaldean historian Berossus, when discussing the ichthyoid god Oannes, apparently mentions another god, “having the same complicated form between a fish and a man,” named Odakon. O, Dagon, indeed. And what did Oannes and Odakon do after emerging from the sea? Why, they built cities and taught mankind how to grow grain, just as Eusebius reports about Dagon. Which makes it even more interesting that in the archaeological record the name “Dagon” appears well before the word *dagan* is used for “grain” -- almost as if the grain was named for the god, rather than the other way around.

*“When the terrestrial and aquatic fish  
Is beached by a strong wave,  
Its form strangely attractive, yet horrific,  
Emerging from the sea, the enemies soon at the walls.”*

-- Nostradamus, *Centuries*, I:29

Robert Temple’s marvelous book *The Sirius Mystery* says that Oannes and Odakon - also known in high Lovecraftian fashion as “the repulsive ones,” the Annedoti -- were Nommo aliens from Sirius. Much like Lovecraft’s Dagon, they seeped down from the stars (remember Dagon’s “House of the Star” in Ebla?) and interfered with mankind, cultivating us like ... well, like so much grain. The parallels with the Elder Things’ creation of humanity, and their use of “repulsive ones” -- shoggoths -- as servants, bear some investigation. Nostradamus’ quatrain above seems to eerily echo the Oannes-Dagon legend -- was he somehow taken out of time, perhaps by the Great Race of Yith, or by Gilman-esque hyperspatial manipulation? That might explain another odd coincidence; in Century III:21, he mentions that “by the Adriatic Sea will appear a horrible fish with its face human and its lower body aquatic.” And just off the Adriatic coast, in the anomalously advanced Lepenski Vir culture of ca. 6500 B.C., what do we find carved into sandstone idols? Fish-gods. Relics of a prehistoric Innsmouth in Croatia?

*“When the Philistines took the Ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the Ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the Ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him. Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon’s house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.”*

-- 1 Samuel 5:2-5

But enough of nameless gods and lost civilizations. Let’s get back to Dagon, who when we left him around 1200 B.C. or thereabouts had just become the chief god of the Philistines. Unfortunately for Dagon, the Philistines were trying conclusions with Yahweh, the storm-and-mountain god of the Hebrews. In their first tussle, it might be

called a draw -- Dagon did, after all, capture Yahweh's solar champion Samson, bound and blinded at Gaza. Although Samson pulled Dagon's house down, would such a mass death during a feast of Dagon really discomfit the "lord of sacrificial victims?" But the second round was worse. When the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant (which Robert Graves, based on nothing whatsoever, describes as "covered in the skins of sea monsters") they brought it to Dagon's temple at Ashdod as a trophy. And as the Bible reassures us, Dagon fell on his fishy face, losing his head and both hands, leaving only the "stump of Dagon" intact. Interestingly, the specific Hebrew words of Samuel say that "only Dagon was left upon him," implying that the human face and hands were not truly Dagon in some fashion. Were they growths? Parasites? Waldoes and interfaces? Severed sacrificial mummy parts? (The Philistines also displayed the severed head of Saul at Dagon's temple.) A mask of some kind, meant to hide Dagon's "horrible" true face, like the mask of the Mi-Go in Lovecraft's "Whisperer in Darkness"?

*"To fashion myself in the image of an old god,' he murmured. 'That is a crass way of putting it. There are no old gods. There are only new gods, gods builded out of our invincible wills and forced by the strength of intelligence into the domains of high powers.'"*

-- Westcott, in *The Place Called Dagon*, by Herbert Gorman

Yahweh cuts Dagon back, trimming him from manlike grain god to his essential fish self. Kabbalistically, you can read "DGWN" two ways -- a large value, with the terminal-N, or a small value without it. "DGWN" equals 713 with the terminal-N value -- the same as "ShBThAY," or Saturn. Saturn, of course, was the Roman god of agriculture, the king of the gods overthrown by Jupiter (as Dagon was by Yahweh) and sent into exile in the West. And there's another connection as well -- Eusebius' source, Philo of Byblos, ties Saturn and Dagon together explicitly, saying that Saturn and Dagon are brothers, both sons of Ouranos. Overthrown, we recalculate Dagon's value, without the terminal-N (without his head and hands) as 63, the value of "feces" -- the repulsive matter at the center of both grain and fish. Judah Maccabee burns down Dagon's temple at Ashdod, by then called Azotus, in 163 B.C., but Dagon has shifted once more. (The Arabic word *dajjan* means "cloudy," the Sanskrit *da-ghana* means "fog.") In Gaza, he is Marnas, "the lord," identified by Hadrian as Jupiter Cretagenes. Jupiter, son of his old incarnation Saturn; Dagon continues to slide down his own genetic line much as Lovecraft's shoggoths do. In 402, the Empress Eudoxia orders Dagon Marnas' temple burnt to the ground with pitch and lime. Surely Dagon is gone forever.

*"They also set up a May-pole, drinking and dancing about it many days together ... like so many fairies, or furies rather, and worse practices. As if they had anew revived & celebrated the feasts of the Roman Goddess Flora, or the beastly practices of the madd Bacchanalians. Morton likewise (to shew his poetrie) composed sundry rimes & verses, some tending to lasciviousness, and others to the detraction & scandal of some persons, which he affixed to this idle or idol May-pole. They changed also the name of their place, and in stead of calling it Mounte Wollaston, they call it Merie-mounte, as if this jollity would have lasted ever. But this continued not long, for ... that worthy gentleman, Mr. John Endicott ... visiting those parts caused that May-pole to be cutt downe, and rebuked them for their profaness, and admonished them to looke ther should be better walking; so they now, or others, changed the name of their place againe, and called it Mounte-Dagon."*

-- William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation*

But Dagon is still there, mutilated but preserved in Yahweh's own scripture, immortal parasite on his overthrewer's glory. Dagon's number 63 is the number of the "prophet," the seer in dreams, like the man of Mari or Nostradamus -- or H.P. Lovecraft, who dreamed of the coming of Dagon in 1917 and wrote it down. Dagon thus bubbles through timeless dimensions, broken and even bowed but always returning to "the stump of Dagon" to be reborn. He lurks under the surface of history, dubious and debatable. The "sea-born" Merovingians, who bore the (Innsmouth?) "mark" of their blood, no doubt picked the name "Dagobert" for their kings from Frankish words for "bright sun," but having witnessed Dagon's linguistic gymnastics, can we be sure?

Is there a connection between Dagon's unseemly fertility and the Grail, or is King Arthur's fool named "Sir Dagonet" for some other reason? Does Dagon the fertility god hold the secret of life? Is the alchemical secret, the Elixir Vitae, thus known as "Azoth" after Dagon's city Azotus? Why do the Templars build a castle on the "hill of Dagon" outside Jericho? Just why does Morton's Shub-Niggurath cult in Massachusetts, driven underground, its maypole a mutilated stump, become "Mounte-Dagon"? Here's a genuine Esoteric Order of Dagon, just down the road from Innsmouth, being suppressed in 1628 by Miles Standish. Its founder, Thomas Morton, somehow managed to escape from an island off the coast where the Puritan fathers were holding him prisoner...

Here's one last cluster of data, one last foam of bubbles on the surface of history. The first Earl of Shaftesbury, one of the proprietors of North Carolina, supported Monmouth's rebellion in 1682 and was exiled for it. An anonymous ballad entitled "Dagon's Fall" celebrated his destruction. It purported to be about "Anthony, King of Poland" -- Shaftesbury's name was Anthony, which is fair enough. (It's unlikely, however, that a London balladeer knew that the first duke of Poland was named Dagon before he was baptized as Mieszko I.) The fourth earl of Shaftesbury, 60 years later, gave a private reading of Milton's *Samson Agonistes* at which Georg Friedrich Handel began composing -- almost as if possessed -- an oratorio on Samson in the house of Dagon. Immediately after he finished it, Handel went to Dublin for a concert series at Mr. Neale's Great Musick Hall -- on Fishamble Street. Upon his return in 1743, he conducted *Samson* -- and almost immediately suffered a "Paralytic Disorder," a palsy of the -- wait for it -- head and hands. Let's leave the last word for Handel's librettist Charles Jennens: "it is reported that being a little delirious with a Fever, he said he should be damn'd for preferring Dagon ... before the Messiah." And He shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah! Amen.

## IREM, THE CITY OF PILLARS

*“Of the cult, he said that he thought the centre lay among the pathless deserts of Arabia, where Irem, the City of Pillars, dreams hidden and untouched.”*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, “Call of Cthulhu”

The center of the cult, the pathless desert, the City of Pillars, the hidden and untouched center of dreams. Like competing mirages forming in the heat distortion, Lovecraft’s words call images of many possibilities to mind from archaeology, to Arabian Nights entertainment, to horror, to mystery and back again. As a city on the edge of Never, Irem truly bisociates itself, a crossroads for the rich trade between History, Legend, and Tale. Its name multiplies as well: Irem, Irâm, Aram, Ubar, Wabar, Omanum Emporium, Civitas Iboritae. In fact, with so many names, it approaches, paradoxically, Lovecraft’s “Nameless City” deep in Arabia, haunted by lizard-beings from before history.

*“Dost thou not consider how thy Lord dealt with A’ad,  
With many-columned Irem,  
The like of which was not created in the lands;  
And with Thamud, who clove the rocks in the valley;  
And with Pharaoh, firm of might,  
All of whom rebelled against Allah in these lands,  
And multiplied iniquity therein?  
Therefore thy Lord poured on them the disaster of His punishment.  
Lo! thy Lord is ever watchful.”*

-- The Koran, Sura 89: 6-14

Irem has almost the best imaginable pedigree for a city of myth: It’s in the holy Koran, dictated to Mohammed by the Archangel Gabriel. In the Koran, Irem is similar to Sodom and Gomorrah -- destroyed by Allah for its sinful ways. Pious legend elaborates thusly: The people of Irem, the people of A’ad, were dissolute and drunken in the extreme, and rejected the words of Allah’s prophet Hud (a name cognate with “Jud” as in “Judean”). Hud invoked Allah’s wrath, plaguing Irem with infertility and drought. The A’adites sent a delegation to Mecca to pray to the Ka’aba (this being before Mohammed, indeed only three generations after Noah, the Ka’aba was still worshiped in itself as a holy Stone from Heaven) but got drunk and distracted. Allah and Hud lose patience, and as the delegation (having finally made their petitions) returns, the city is destroyed by a series of powerful winds from three clouds. In other versions, Irem is destroyed by a Shout From Heaven or by holy fire, or sinks beneath the sands.

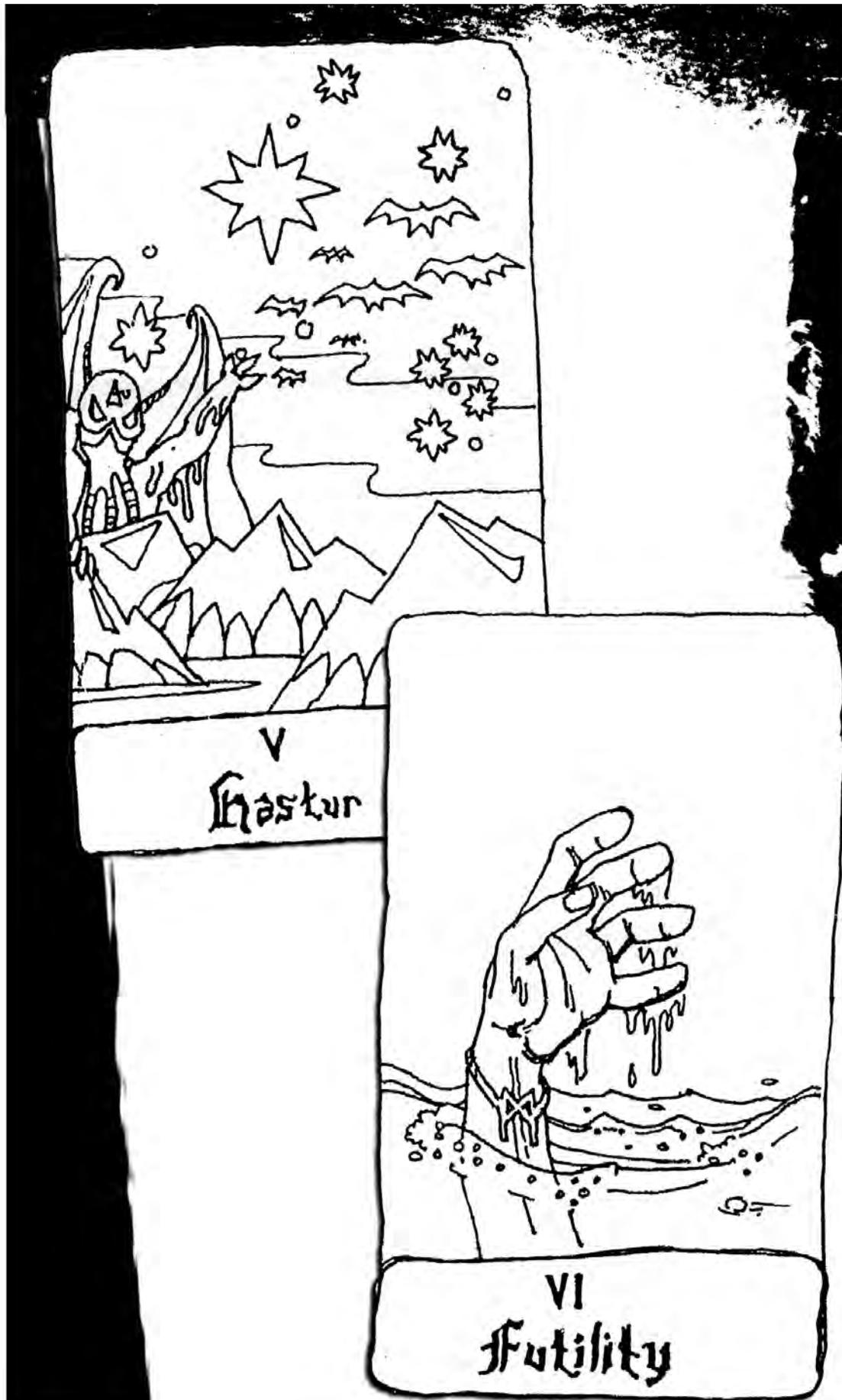
*“It hath reached me, O auspicious King, that Shaddad bin Ad fared forth, he and his host, rejoicing in the attainment of his desire till there remained but one day’s journey between him and Irem of the Pillars. Then Allah sent down on him and on the stubborn unbelievers with him a mighty rushing sound from the Heavens of His power, which destroyed them all with its vehement clamour, and neither Shaddad nor any of his company set eyes on the city.”*

-- Richard Burton (trans.), *The Thousand Nights And A Night*,  
“The Tale of the City of Many-Columned Iram and  
Abdullah Son of Abi Kilabah”

In the *Arabian Nights*, Irem is a treasure-house city built by the proud King Shaddad determined to create Paradise on Earth. Having spent 70 years in its construction, Shaddad is killed by Allah before he sets foot in it; the city remains a pristine treasure-house out in the desert sands, with gems lying around for anyone to pick up. Of course, other medieval legends say that Irem is haunted by the one-eyed, half-skulled, monopodal, single-armed nisanas demons; by the dreaded petrified corpses known as masqut; and, of course, by the djinn. Indeed, it is implied many places that the djinn’s legendary City of Brass -- usually located deep in the Libyan Desert -- is somehow coterminous with Irem. (In fact, in “The Tale of the City of Brass,” the dead king of that City is called “Kush, son of Shaddad bin Ad.”) The non-human, infra-dimensional djinn are sometimes identified with, or as, the builders of Irem, which brings us back to Lovecraft’s “Nameless City,” built by nonhuman -- or prehuman -- entities to unguessable plans.

For Lovecraft, who cribbed from the Britannica on the topic, Irem served as a sort of touchstone, a gateway to the world of the “Arabian Gothick” that he so loved in William Beckford’s *Vathek* and Burton’s *Nights*. (By an odd coincidence, Beckford also built a sumptuous pleasure-dome, a 300-foot tower at Fonthill that collapsed before he could set foot in it.) Thus, the “Nameless City” is said to be somewhere near Irem, and a scene in its bas-reliefs “shewed a primitive-looking man, perhaps a pioneer of ancient Irem, the City of Pillars, torn to pieces by members of the elder race,” thus recapitulating the story of Hud and Irem.

In “The Call of Cthulhu” quote that opened this essay, Lovecraft hinted that the Cthulhu Cult was centered at Irem -- surely an odd place for a sea-prisoned deity to hold sacred, although Irem, like R’lyeh, had sunk beneath human sight and history. “Through the Gates of the Silver Key,” like “The Nameless City,” places Irem on the threshold of the Mythos. Randolph Carter claims that the Silver Key will “unlock the ... very Border which no man has crossed since Shaddad with his terrific genius built and concealed in the sands of Arabia Petraea the prodigious domes and uncounted minarets of thousand-pillared Irem.” Note that the Border isn’t necessarily near Irem in space, but in time -- Shaddad was the last to cross it, in the days of Irem. Of course, later Carter claims that the Border is visited by “half-starved dervishes ... and thirst-crazed nomads,” and features “garnet-strewn sands,” completing the identification with Irem. Thus, in “The Last Test,” Lovecraft tells of “an old man who had come back alive from the Crimson Desert -- he had seen Irem, the City of Pillars, and had worshipped at the underground shrines of Nug and Yeb.” And in his “History of the Necronomicon,” he implies (as does Randolph Carter) that sorcerous pilgrims might also seek the Border within Irem: “Of his [Alhazred’s] madness many things are told. He claimed to have seen the fabulous Irem, or City or Pillars...” Intriguingly, Alhazred’s rough contemporary, the Umayyad Caliph Mu’awiya, is reputed to have discovered Irem by following a strayed camel.



*“In finding what fitted with what, there had been no magic ‘Eureka!’ moment, no time to proclaim ‘This is Ubar!’ and unleash the formidable party potential of our ... volunteers. Instead, a picture had slowly formed of a distant time, place, and people, a picture that seen in its entirety was a convincing match for the legendary lost Ubar.”*

-- Nicholas Clapp, *The Road to Ubar*

Such excitement led to Irem’s fame as “the Atlantis of the Sands,” in the words of T.E. Lawrence “of Arabia.” Unfortunately, nobody knew just where Irem was hidden. Old maps and Bedouin legendry alike pointed to the Rub’ al-Khali in southeastern Arabia, the largest single sandy desert in the world, an area roughly the size of Texas with neither landmarks nor water. (The Rub’ al-Khali’s well-known “singing sands” have been adduced as an explanation for the legends of djinn.) Two explorers, Bertram Thomas and Harry St.-John Philby, both crossed the Empty Quarter competing to discover Irem. In 1930 Thomas’ Bedouin guides pointed out the “road to Ubar” and in 1932, pouting at Thomas’ victory, Philby misidentified a meteor crater as a volcano and claimed that the sight of a volcanic eruption started the whole story.

And there it would have rested, except that an American documentary filmmaker named Nicholas Clapp talked NASA into taking earth-penetrating radar pictures of the area from the space shuttle *Challenger* in 1984. With those photos, he rediscovered Thomas’ “Road to Ubar,” and then (with the archaeologists Juri Zarins and Sir Ranulph Fiennes) found a City of Pillars (well, a biggish frankincense-trading fort of eight towers) at the southern end of said road. Irem, if it was Irem, now lay under a village named Shisur in western Oman, on the edge of the Rub’ al-Khali. Clapp’s Ubar, rather than being built by prehuman lizards, was founded around 900 B.C. When the fort’s spring dried up, around 400 A.D., it collapsed into a sinkhole -- not a bad match for a city “swallowed by the sands.”

*“‘Asadum Tal’an, son of Qawmum, servant of ‘Il’ad Yalut, king of Hadramaut, of the inhabitants of the town of Shaba, undertook according to the Plan the town of Sumhuram, its siting and the leveling of the ground, and its flow from virgin soil...”*

-- inscription on the gates of Sumhuram, in Oman

The tangled story of Irem rests, then, on many pillars, and they rest in turn on some interesting soil indeed. For example, Ubar (if the Shisur fortress is, indeed, Ubar) is aligned to the cardinal directions in proper geomantic fashion -- much like the Hadrami city Sumhuram, which took much of the incense trade away from Ubar. Is it just a coincidence that “Sumhuram” can be translated as “the place of the Grand Plan”? It’s interesting that crucial Arabian explorers suffered mysterious deaths -- Johann Burckhardt, the discoverer of Petra, died suddenly in Egypt only a year after penetrating the Arabian desert in 1816. Lawrence himself died in a motorcycle crash while planning his own expedition to Ubar. Burton crossed Arabia -- and took great care to learn Islamic and Indian sex-magic thereafter. (Fertility magic to parry the desiccation of Irem, with Shub-Niggurath being set against Quachhil Uttaus?) His translation of the *Arabian Nights* no doubt conceals rituals of great puissance.

Harry St.-John Philby, of course, was the father of Communist traitor and spy Kim Philby -- and a scholar of Arabic lore and of chess. One of the anomalous artifacts on the Shisur site is a chess set at least 300 years out of place. Did Philby seek the Ubar Chess Set? Does the sinkhole beneath Shisur conceal ghoulish warrens, those crypts of Nug and Yeb, or the passages to the Inner World, across Randolph Carter’s Border? Is this what occultists mean when they equate the Empty Quarter with Daath, the Door to the Void of the Qlippoth? Is the inner world, then, metaphysical; the world inside us? The Door to

Dreams? (Shisur, like Dream, had two gates.) Are the djinn here actually genii loci, the spirits of a magickal place? Is it just a coincidence that “Irem” is phonetically identical to the Hebrew “IRIM” meaning the “Watchers,” known as *egregores* in magical parlance? The Watchers, of course, recall the Grigori, the sons of the Nephilim -- Islamic legend holds that the people of A’ad were, in fact, Nephilim; the giants in the earth.

Nephilim, kabbalistically, is N-P-L-Y-M, equaling 210 -- which also equals the value of A-W-B-A-R: “Ubar.” Irem, meanwhile, becomes Y+R+A+M = 251 = Vril, the power of the Hidden Race below the earth -- of the Deros, or the lizard-men in the Sishur sinkhole? Vril is cognate with Uriel, one of the “angels of the towers” -- another reference to Irem? (The angel Gabriel, who started all this foolishness, is another.) If the *egregores*, the Grigori, are winged, inhuman watchers from high places, who dig up rare gems from the earth -- perhaps they are the Mi-Go, dictating their buzzing scripture to “thirst-crazed nomads.” Of course, the Greek root *egeiro* can also mean “wake” or “build.” Could the Irim, the *egregores* of Irem, be Those Who Waken (who waken Whom? Or What?), or The Builders -- more literally, “those who raise up” -- a wall, or, say, many pillars. Is Irem “most lofty” a place “raised up” by the Old Ones? Is it one of the “high places” condemned in the Bible and the Koran? Or is it all those things -- the City of the Pillars, the City of Watchers, the City of Brass, where all the high places meet. Here, in Irem, the Nameless City of a Thousand Names, Kadath in the Cold Waste and the Brocken and deadly dreaming mountains all across the globe resonate, like struck tuning-forks, throughout the eternal wasteland of space and time.

## VAMPIRISH VAPOURS IN THE SHUNNED HOUSE

*“Florella’s body was all gone to dust,  
Though ‘twarn’t much more’n a year she’d be’n buried  
But her heart was as fresh as a livin’ person’s,  
Father said it glittered like a garnet when they took th’ lid off th’ coffin.  
It was so ‘live, it seemed to beat almost.  
Father said a light come from it so strong it made shadows  
Much heavier than th’ lantern shadows an’ runnin’ in a diff’rent direction.  
Oh, they burnt it; they al’ays do in such cases,  
Nobody’s safe till it’s burnt.”*

-- Amy Lowell, “A Dracula of the Hills”

What lies in the stony fields of New England, in graves marked and unmarked? Why would good, sober Yankees, upstanding Christians all, dig up the bodies of their loved ones and burn their hearts? We can only find the answers in hints and legends; propriety forbids that we should know the names of all the families cursed by the undead. Let’s look in the light of the glittering hearts, and with H.P. Lovecraft, follow the shadows to the dusty tracks of New England’s vampires.

### *“EXHUMED THE BODIES.*

*Testing of a Horrible Superstition in the Town of Exeter.*

### *BODIES OF DEAD RELATIVES TAKEN FROM THEIR GRAVES.*

*They Had All Died of Consumption, and the Belief Was That Live Flesh and Blood Would Be Found That Fed Upon the Bodies of the Living.”*

-- headline of the *Providence Journal*, March 19, 1892

The Mercy Brown case, in Exeter, Rhode Island, is typical, and it was known to Lovecraft from a book in his library. In December 1883, Mary Eliza Brown of Exeter died of “consumption” (a contemporary term for tuberculosis), leaving her husband George and four children. The next year, a daughter, Mary Olive, died of consumption, and in 1889 and then 1891 both Edwin (the only son) and Mercy Lena became infected. Mercy died in 1892 (of the “galloping” variety of consumption) while Edwin was in Colorado taking a rest cure; he returned home that year, having seen no improvement in his condition. George Brown and the other men of Exeter, in a fog of loss and fear, decided to dig up Mercy’s grave to discover whether some unwholesome spirit lurked within her corpse. On March 17, 1892, they did so, and found liquid blood in Mercy’s heart. They burned it to ashes, and may have given the ashes to Edwin to drink. This gruesome medicine could not reverse his decline; he died shortly thereafter.

Reports of cases showing the same etiology -- a mysterious illness (usually tuberculosis) in the family, an exhumed corpse, the discovery of blood in the heart, and its ritual burning -- go back at least a century in New England, to a vampire exorcism in Manchester, Vermont in 1793. Vermont suffered further outbreaks in the Spaulding family of Dummerston in 1794 or 1798, and the Ransom and Corwin families of Woodstock in 1807 and 1830. Exeter had a previous case of vampiric tuberculosis around 1799, in the household of Stukeley Tillinghast, and again in 1874 in the Rose family. One case, reported from Old Plymouth, Massachusetts, is said to have happened

in 1810. If so, it would be the only case in the Puritan heartland of the region, although Old Plymouth is very close to the border with heretical, witch-loving Rhode Island.

Two vampires, Lemuel and Elisha Ray, were exhumed and their hearts burnt in Jewett City, Connecticut in 1854. Other Connecticut cases were anonymous, and at least one case would still be completely unknown if the vampire's skeleton, complete with tuberculosis scarring and bones ritually re-arranged in a skull-and-crossbones fashion, hadn't popped up in a gravel pit near Jewett City in 1990. There is only one known piece of documentary evidence for the practice, besides the occasional lurid newspaper article (usually written in a tone of shocked horror by a journalist from a larger city). In the town records of Cumberland, Rhode Island, the council approved the exhumation of Abigail Staples by her father, "In order to Try an Experiment" on his (consumptive?) wife.

*"[D]escriptions of New England's vampires do not correspond to the Dracula image ... Can we, with justification, label as 'vampires' the New Englanders whose bodies were exhumed and deemed to be unnatural? Certainly not, if we use the standard vampire model, the 'classic vampire' of our imaginations ... But, what if we begin with a blank slate and ask, again, what is a vampire?"*

-- Michael E. Bell, *Food for the Dead*

All of the above information is courtesy of the indefatigable folklorist Michael E. Bell, whose *Food for the Dead* assembles every known case of New England's vampire spirits, and adds a few more that Bell himself helped uncover. According to Bell, the New England cases differ from the received Eastern European vampire tradition, most notably in the absence of any actual biting or blood sucking by the dead, and the failure of the dead to leave their coffins. Both of these features appear prominently in the Hungarian and Slavic vampire legends gathered in the 1730s and 1740s by Dom Augustin Calmet, the father of modern vampirology, but show up in none of the New England stories.

Instead, the New Englanders saw the vampire as a spirit that lives in the dead corpse, invisibly draining the blood of tubercular victims into the corpse's heart. There are, however, Romanian legends of vampires who leave the grave in the form of insects, or drifting motes of dust, or even tiny balls of light. Some of the New England stories do mention anomalous lights such as "corpse lights" or "ghost lights" over the graves of the various vampires. In the Lovecraftian half-light, more may be going on here, and in Eastern Europe, than Dom Calmet (or Bram Stoker) took the time to uncover.

*"Voice hoarse, neck slightly bent, tender not flexible, somewhat extended; fingers slender but joints thick; of the bones alone the figure remains, for the fleshy parts are wasted; the nails of the fingers crooked... Nose sharp, slender; cheeks prominent and red; eyes hollow, brilliant and glittering; swollen, pale, or livid in the countenance; the slender parts of the jaws rest upon the teeth, as if smiling; otherwise of a cadaverous aspect ... the whole shoulder blades apparent like wings..."*

-- Aretaeus of Cappadocia, describing a tuberculosis sufferer

Bell believes that the difference in New England's cases is tuberculosis, which as Aretaeus' description above indicates, could well be the vampire bacillus. Tuberculosis sufferers resemble the stereotypical vampire, at once pallid and florid, existing in a kind of walking living death. A 1799 medical text about consumptives indicates that a consumptive's "emaciated figure strikes one with terror" and that among other nosferatu type features such as sunken, glittering eyes are long fingernails, "bending over the ends of the fingers" in a horrible, clawlike fashion.

Vampires have often been decoded as embodiments of disease -- Stoker's *Dracula* has been read as Victorian syphilis, for example; the rat-accompanied nosferatu of Wallachia as the bubonic plague and the fear of unburied bodies. With the bent posture, foul breath, and (perhaps most tellingly) bright foam of arterial blood on the lips of its sufferers, tuberculosis -- "consumption," in the interesting term of the day -- is more vampiric still. Bell interestingly notes that the New England vampire panic almost exactly matches the era of endemic tuberculosis in New England, as industrialization and urbanization created the unsanitary, crowded conditions in American cities where the bacilli could breed. Koch isolated the tuberculosis bacillus only a decade before Mercy Brown's heart was burnt to save her family. "The vampire," Bell says, "is consumption in a human form, embodying an evil that slowly and secretly drains the life from its victims."

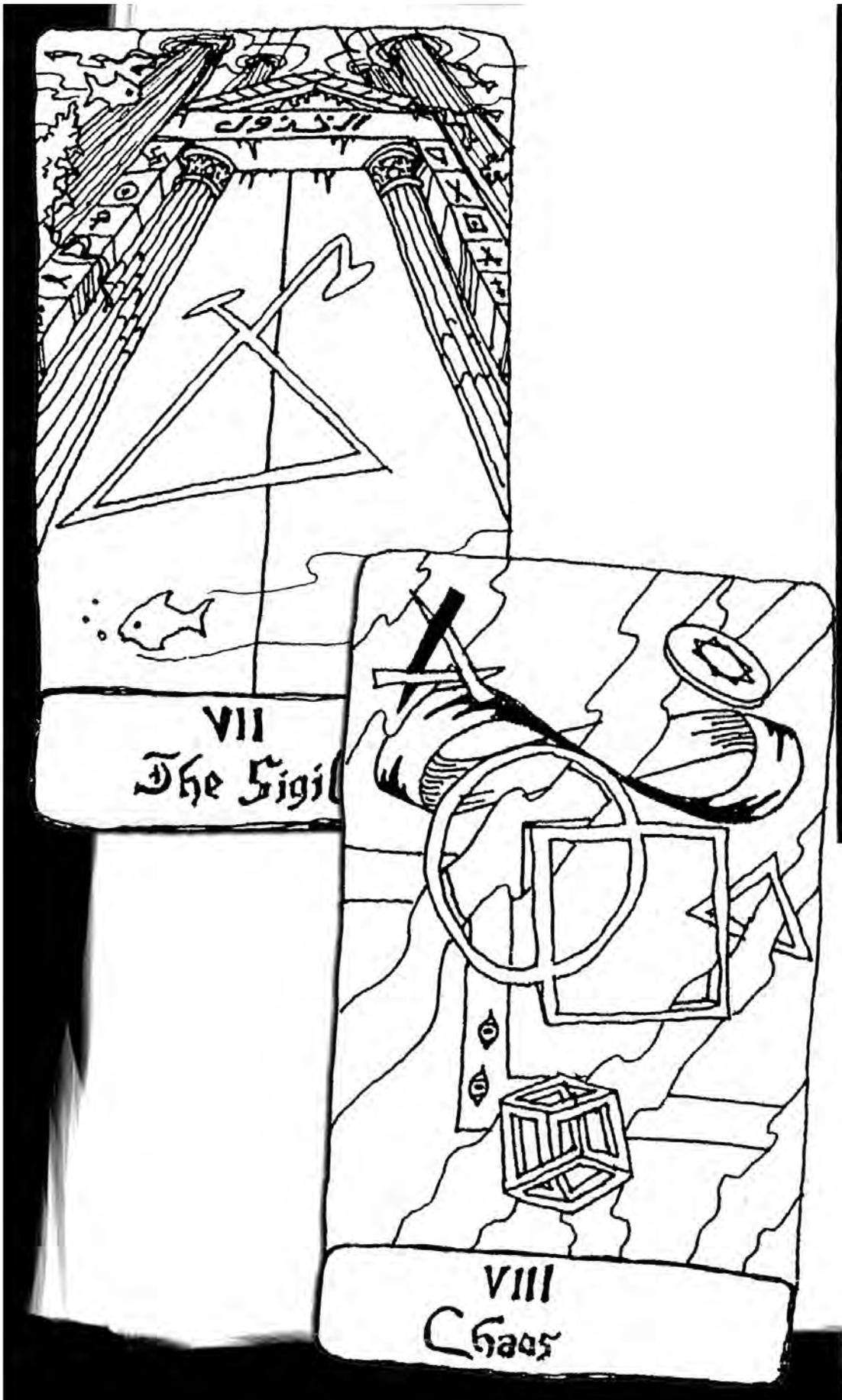
*"Sitting down, I tried to conjecture as nearly as sanity would let me just what had happened, and how I might end the horror, if indeed it had been real. Matter it seemed not to be, nor ether, nor anything else conceivable by mortal mind. What, then, but some exotic emanation; some vampirish vapour such as Exeter rustics tell of as lurking over certain church yards?"*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Shunned House"

But before we let the comforting light of the 20th century bacteriology and anthropology wash over the graves holding New England's vampires, let's follow the folkloric trail down the shadows, especially those "runnin' in a diff'rent direction," as Amy Lowell put it in the poem we opened with. Michael Bell is not the first Rhode Islander of great erudition and persistence to dig up these stories; H.P. Lovecraft shows clear knowledge not just of the Mercy Brown case, but of the (considerably more obscure) Tillinghast case as well. He alludes to both of them in "The Shunned House," which involves a miasmatic spirit, a "vampirish vapour" that slowly kills the families living in the house at 135 Benefit Street in his native Providence. The house really exists, and really belonged to the Harris family. Lovecraft includes the real (and really mysterious) deaths of the Harris family from a "wasting-away" condition in his tale, only slightly concealing the family's identity. He ties the deaths to a werewolf spirit that migrated to America with exiled French Huguenots (who actually settled in the Exeter area for a time). Lovecraft also tells the story in the first person, and mentions a fictional uncle "Dr. Elihu Whipple," whose personality, nonetheless, matches Lovecraft's real uncle Franklin Clark, with perhaps a dash of his grandfather Whipple Phillips.

All this makes one suspect that perhaps more is going on than meets the eye; that perhaps Lovecraft stumbled not only on the tales of New England's vampires, but on the trail of such a thing. In another, clearly semi-autobiographical novel, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, Lovecraft presents a malign presence in a graveyard, Joseph Curwen, who he explicitly describes as kin to the "Corwin" family -- who suffered their own spate of vampirism in 1830! In the novel, the Curwen/Corwin spirit is "a lean, lithe, leaping monster with burning eyes" (again the werewolf imagery comes to the fore) engaged in "revolting cases of vampirism" in the neighborhood, while Ward/Lovecraft suffers "continued anaemic decline and increasing pallor," later describing himself as "phthisical," which is yet another term for "consumptive" or "tubercular." (Lovecraft's health was never of the best, and his mother withdrew him from high school because of it.) More hints recur in "The Shunned House," in which Lovecraft seemingly pointlessly introduces his story by saying that Edgar Allan Poe walked past the house every day "during his unsuccessful wooing of the gifted poetess, Mrs. Whitman."

Poe, of course, was badly scarred by tuberculosis: his foster mother Fanny Allen died of it in 1829, as did his wife Virginia Clemm in 1847. Poe also wrote stories of desecrated bodies and vampiric emanations, most notably "Ligeia," in which the "will" of a woman transcends the grave and drains the energies of her successor. (Both Ligeia and her rival Rowena's disease sound very much like tuberculosis, and Ligeia has more than a little in



common with Lovecraft's Asenath Waite from "The Thing on the Doorstep.") Perhaps Poe was not so "unknowing" as Lovecraft says. The "gifted poetess, Mrs. Whitman" may also have known what would be her fate; she wrote to Poe, "had I youth and health and beauty I would live for you and die with you. Now were I to allow myself to love you, I could only enjoy a bright brief hour of rapture and die." Poe's equivocal response: he would willingly "go down with you into the night of the Grave." Perhaps Lovecraft knew full well what stalked Poe, and mentioned Poe and his courtship in "The Shunned House" as a word to "persons in possession of certain information." Information such as, perhaps, the exact circumstances of the death of Poe's mother Elizabeth -- who died of tuberculosis in 1811.

*"'Begone, foul dream!' he cried, gazing again  
In the bride's face, where now no azure vein  
Wander'd on fair-spaced temples; no soft bloom  
Misted the cheek; no passion to illumine  
The deep-recessed vision: -- all was blight;  
Lamia, no longer fair; there sat a deadly white."*

-- John Keats, "Lamia"

The year before that, John Keats' mother also died of tuberculosis, as did his brother. Amy Lowell, the poetess of the New England vampire, was fascinated by Keats and collected many papers and letters associated with the poet. As Tim Powers points out in his terrific vampire novel *The Stress of Her Regard*, Keats seemed ambivalent about vampires. In both "Lamia" and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," although the hero's health fails and he grows pale and bloodless, he is unable to throw off the vampiric influence that destroys him. In due course, Keats himself died of tuberculosis in Italy in 1821, causing Percy Bysshe Shelley to write, in "Adonais":

The breath whose might I have invoked in song  
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,  
Far from the shore.

A year after Keats' consumptive breath descended upon him, Shelley was dead as well, drowned in a small boat, a bark "driven far from the shore" and named after an "airy spirit," Ariel. After his death, Byron burned Shelley's body, but the dubious character (and possible secret agent) Edward John Trelawny snatched his heart from the fire unburnt -- and Byron's daughter died of tuberculosis the following year, followed by Shelley's son Charles four years after that. Shelley had miraculously thrown off a previous tuberculosis infection diagnosed in 1815; he was in perfect health two years later. In between, he had been present at the Villa Deodati circle where the classical vampire first took literary form -- did he cut a deal with the entity, offering it a life in legend, and his heart as a host? Did that deal cost the lives of his children, two of whom died of "wasting diseases" in 1818 and 1819?

*"He was at once a devil and a multitude, a charnel-house and a pageant. Lit by the mixed and uncertain beams, that gelatinous face assumed a dozen -- a score -- a hundred -- aspects; grinning, as it sank to the ground on a body that melted like tallow, in the caricatured likeness of legions strange and yet not strange."*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Shunned House"

Perhaps Shelley romanced La Belle Dame Sans Merci at the unknown grave of the Duchess of Malfi, the werewolf wife from John Webster's play who vanished on her way from Ancona to Milan -- and might well have passed along Shelley's track south to Pisa. Is this why her brother, as Webster put it, would "steal forth to church-yards in the dead of night/And dig dead bodies up"? Was he looking for a vampire heart to eat, to make him immortal? Vampires, werewolves, and spirits all mingle in Istria in the 17th century, when some of the shapeshifting, astral-projecting Benandanti confessed to vampirism -- and where a vampire plague gripped the natives in the 1640s. From Istria, the Grand Tour takes us to Venice, and thence to England and to America; the vampire entities spread around the world, concealed in glowing hearts. Were they a hive mind built up by a critical mass of tuberculosis bacteria, or did the bacterium merely serve as an interface, drawing energy into a Lovecraftian hyperspace built up from words and nightmares? Lovecraft's story hints at just such a collective entity, "at once a devil and a multitude."

Stories of Shelley's unburnt -- and stolen -- heart recall the burned -- or stolen -- heart of Mary Kelly, last of Jack the Ripper's known victims. One of the Ripper's other victims, Annie Chapman, was in the final stages of tuberculosis, which ran rampant in the East End. Could the Ripper have been trying to catch and kill a vampire, chasing it from victim to victim, desperately searching the organs for the one that "glittered like a garnet" and gave off light stronger than a lantern? Or was he a rival vampire? One of Scotland Yard's Ripper suspects, a "Doctor Merchant," died of tuberculosis in December of 1888; another possible Ripper, the mystical poet Francis Thompson, was suffering from tuberculosis while wandering the East End in his leather apron. Either way, going looking for vampires seems an excellent way to go mad or die coughing up your heart's blood. Let's leave the last word for Lovecraft, and wonder whether it contains an oblique warning: "Some secrets of inner earth are not good for mankind, and this seemed to me one of them."

## DOWN TO DUNWICH

*“[The Suffolk coast is] quite new to me except that I read of it in the Odyssey as the shore of Hades. Do you know it? It is unlike any other known to me. Fancy a cathedral city, which had its Bishop and members and six great Churches, one a minster, and an immense monastery and hospital for lepers -- and now the sea has slowly swallowed all but two shells of ruined masonry, and just twenty cottages, inn and school included. This is Dunwich -- literally built on the sand -- on and behind a high crumbling sea-bank, looking out to a sea where the nearest land is Denmark.”*

-- Algernon Charles Swinburne, letter to Edwin Harrison of Jan. 10, 1876

At once quotidian and mythical, the town of Dunwich is Suffolk's best known sacrifice to the sea. Its desolation inspired poets and horrorists, but sprang from nothing more mysterious than the wind and the waves. Slowly, however, the tides and storms built up a skerry of legend and lore running from the throne of Tristram to the land of the dead. With that in mind, let's go down to Dunwich.

*“Her town of Dunwytche is by Rage and Surges of the Sea daylie wasted and devoured, And the Haven of her Highness' said Towne, by diverse Rages of Wyndes continually landed and barred, so as no Shippes or Boats can either enter in or oughte...”*

-- from the royal records of Queen Elizabeth I (1578)

Although three Roman roads point resolutely to Dunwich, nobody has managed to find the slightest sign of Roman occupation, despite what must have been a tempting harbor. Hence, the history of Dunwich town begins rather abruptly with the Saxons, or rather the Angles, under whose King Sigebert in the 7th century Dunewic was briefly the capital of East Anglia and seat of the bishopric of St. Felix. Dunwich went from strength to strength, repelling a rebel siege by Robert of Leicester in 1173 and gaining a Templar “temple” in 1185 and a charter in 1199 -- its population was probably over 3,000. By the mid-13th century, Dunwich's eighty galleys were fighting the king's wars, shipping golden Suffolk corn to Flanders, and raking in huge catches of herring from the North Sea. But the burghers of Dunwich had already been forced to build a sea wall (at their own expense) and continuously dredge the mouth of their harbor as the shores slowly crept south and west. And then the storms began.

On the night of the vernal equinox in 1286, “through the Vehemence of the Winds, and Violence of the Sea, several Churches were overthrown and destroyed,” and Dunwich began to falter. Citizens turned to piracy and smuggling, gaining the town a bad reputation at court, which cost it dearly in lawsuits with the Bishop of Ely and with other towns along the coast. On January 14, 1328, another storm blocked the harbor entirely, and one in 1349 washed away 400 houses in Dunwich. Without their harbor, the people of Dunwich could not pay to rebuild; the relentless sea consumed building after building. Four churches drowned by 1385, two were demolished in 1540 before the sea could take them, and in 1608 the Temple went “over the cliff.” Cemeteries slid down the cliffs, bones and

coffins sticking out of the shingle on their way into the deeps. The Dunwich marketplace drowned in 1677, ending the town's economic existence. In December of 1739, a great storm leveled the remains of the village, and on November 12, 1919 the last church tower in Dunwich collapsed into the strand. Dunwich had ceased to be a place long before its last resident was buried in its last churchyard, in 1826. But like the all-consuming sea itself, the idea of Dunwich continued to erode and undermine the brittle, bright rationalism of post-Enlightenment Britain.

*“Tombs, with bare white piteous bones protruded,  
Shroudless, down the loose collapsing banks,  
Crumble, from their constant place detruded,  
That the sea devours and gives not thanks.  
Graves where hope and prayer and sorrow brooded  
Gape and slide and perish, ranks on ranks.  
Rows on rows and line by line they crumble...  
Earth, and man, and all their gods wax humble  
Here, where Time brings pasture to the sea.”*

-- Algernon Charles Swinburne, “By the North Sea” (1880)

The printer John Daye, a resident of Dunwich, commissioned John Stowe to write a history of Dunwich in 1573, to capitalize on the Elizabethan taste for “ancient Britain.” Although for some reason the history never wound up getting published, London antiquarians kept the memory of “sunken Dunwich” alive long enough for the ruins to become a picturesque spot for Gothic tourism. One such picturesque Goth, the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne, was powerfully affected by the Dunwich *genius loci*. His poem “By the North Sea” sets out a cosmology of human works -- including God and the gods -- drowned in the all-devouring sea of Time. It uses the “one hollow tower and hoary/Naked in the sea-wind” of Dunwich’s All Saints Church as a central image, and alludes to the “displaced, devoured and desecrated” graves of Dunwich’s cemeteries. Swinburne was an excellent and devoted swimmer, but the sea in his poetry is always both numinous and terrifying: “impelled of invisible tides, and fulfilled of unspeakable things/White-eyed and poisonous-finned, shark-toothed and serpentine-curved.”

And in that respect, he resembles the other bard of Dunwich, whose works also speak of the transience of pitiful human gods and histories beneath the tread of Time -- and who also warns of the “unspeakable things” beneath the sea -- H.P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft’s Dunwich was inland, although intriguingly based in part on towns drowned by the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir in 1939. (The plans for which may have also inspired “The Colour Out of Space.”) But his once-prosperous, now wracked shipping town of Innsmouth also echoes Dunwich’s later history of murder and inanition. (The fen country around Dunwich still leads England in webbed feet and other deformities.) Lovecraft (like Swinburne) got ideas from dreams and visions; like Swinburne, he was occasionally subject to fainting spells or even fits. Lovecraft read Swinburne, and must have been affected by Swinburne’s lines in the “Hymn to Proserpine”:

All ye as a wind shall go by, as a fire shall ye pass and be past;  
Ye are Gods, and behold, ye shall die, and the waves be upon you at last.  
In the darkness of time, in the deeps of the years, in the changes of things,  
Ye shall sleep as a slain man sleeps, and the world shall forget you for kings.

The whole poem is like that. It's no wonder that Lovecraft adopted a Swinburnian meter to some of his poetry (especially "Nemesis"), described Swinburne as "the only real poet either in England or America since the death of Mr. Poe," and eventually placed himself and Swinburne in the same "aesthete-pagan tradition."

Other writers were also seemingly trapped in the Dunwich undertow. H. Rider Haggard visited Dunwich often, and mentioned it in (intriguingly female-titled) novels like *Red Eve*, *Stella Fregelius*, and *The Witches Head*. Edward Fitzgerald, who translated the Sufi mystic Omar Khayyam, also seemed drawn to Dunwich, visiting it constantly between 1855 and 1878 despite describing it as "rough lodging." Even Jerome K. Jerome, whose hapless boaters seemed to symbolize Victorian innocence, found Dunwich irresistible, and was on his way there when he died of a sudden stroke in 1927.

*"The coldest winter in memory was 1709  
The sea froze off the coast of France all along the Neptune line  
By the lost town of Dunwich the shore was washed away  
They say you hear the church bells still as they toll beneath the waves."*

-- Al Stewart, "The Coldest Winter in Memory" (1989)

But if Swinburne and Lovecraft are working to wash Dunwich out into the sea of myth, it seems that Dunwich itself is an outcropping of fact joined to the peculiarly British legend of the "sunken city." In Dunwich, they say, you can hear the church bells still ringing deep under the sea -- despite the decree of Queen Elizabeth that the bells of Dunwich churches be melted down to pay the town's increasing debts. But Britain is ringed round with submerged church bells -- lost Shipden in Norfolk, Selsey in Sussex, Kilgrimod in Lancashire, and Ravenser on the Humber for instance.

Spectral bells also ring out from the famous Cantref y Gwaelod in Wales and Lyonesse in Cornwall. Both claim to be the original of the Breton legend of "Ker Ys," in which drunken lust leads the princess Dahut (*probably* no connection to the Duat, the Egyptian Underworld) to open the bronze sea-gates and submerge the town, from which one single rider escapes. Dunwich, in Stowe's legendary history at least, had "brazen gates" in its "stone wall," and even today boasts a spectral horseman riding across the heath by the full moon -- although the offshore bells only ring on moonless nights.

One is inevitably, if only intuitively, reminded of Lovecraft's tossed-off allusion from "The Descendant": "In London there is a man who screams when the church bells ring." In this context, it's also interesting that Swinburne wrote an epic on "Tristram of Lyonesse." It ends with the lovers entombed, "and over them, while death and life shall be/The light and sound and darkness of the sea." Swinburne's Tristram, like King Arthur and the other heroes of Britain, has gone not just "over the water" but under it as well.

“On the opposite coast, in Frankish territory but exempt from taxation, dwell the mariners who, without catching sight of their passengers, carry the dead across the Channel. At midnight they are notified in a mysterious manner, and go to the shore. There they see empty boats, not their own, but strange ones. Upon setting out, they see the boat is laden choke-full, but see no one. Even with their heavily laden boats they succeed in reaching the island of Brittia in a single hour. Upon their arrival the souls are called out by name, and the ferrymen thereupon return with their empty boats so light that they only dip a keel in the waves.”

-- Procopius, *History of the Wars* (ca. 555 A.D.)

Scyld, Balder, Arthur, Sigmund, Iarlmagus, and the Maid of Ascolat all take boats to the land of the dead -- as do the nameless ghosts in Charon's barge and in Procopius' "heavily laden boats." And where, then, do they go, these heroes and ghosts? This land has many names, although Greeks, Gauls, and Egyptians all knew it to be an island to the West. For our purposes, though, it can be *Tir fo Thuinn* -- the "Land Under the Waves." The legendary Irish voyages of Maelduin and Ruadh both lead to an Otherworld beneath the ocean, a golden paradise and timeless shadowland alike.

This may be somehow cyclically connected to the ancient notion of the sea (and the sea-goddess) as the home of all life -- for example, the Gothic *sáivala* -- "the soul" -- is cognate with *sáivs* -- "the sea." Were I intending to make some heavily Freudian allusion to Lovecraft's chilly attitudes toward women and the sea, this would be the point. But I'd rather chase the sea-foam for a bit. "Sea-born" Venus was also a goddess of the dead, and as such came in for special attention by (you know it) Swinburne, whose poem "Laus Veneris" recasts the Tannhäuser legend as a hymn to the Queen of the Underworld. (Perhaps here lies yet another connection to Dunwich habitué H. Rider Haggard, who also wrote his greatest work in praise of a mysterious Queen of riches and eternal beauty, in an ancient cavern-temple.) Swinburne's previously cited "Hymn to Proserpine" (an even more explicit death-fertility goddess) goes even further out to sea:

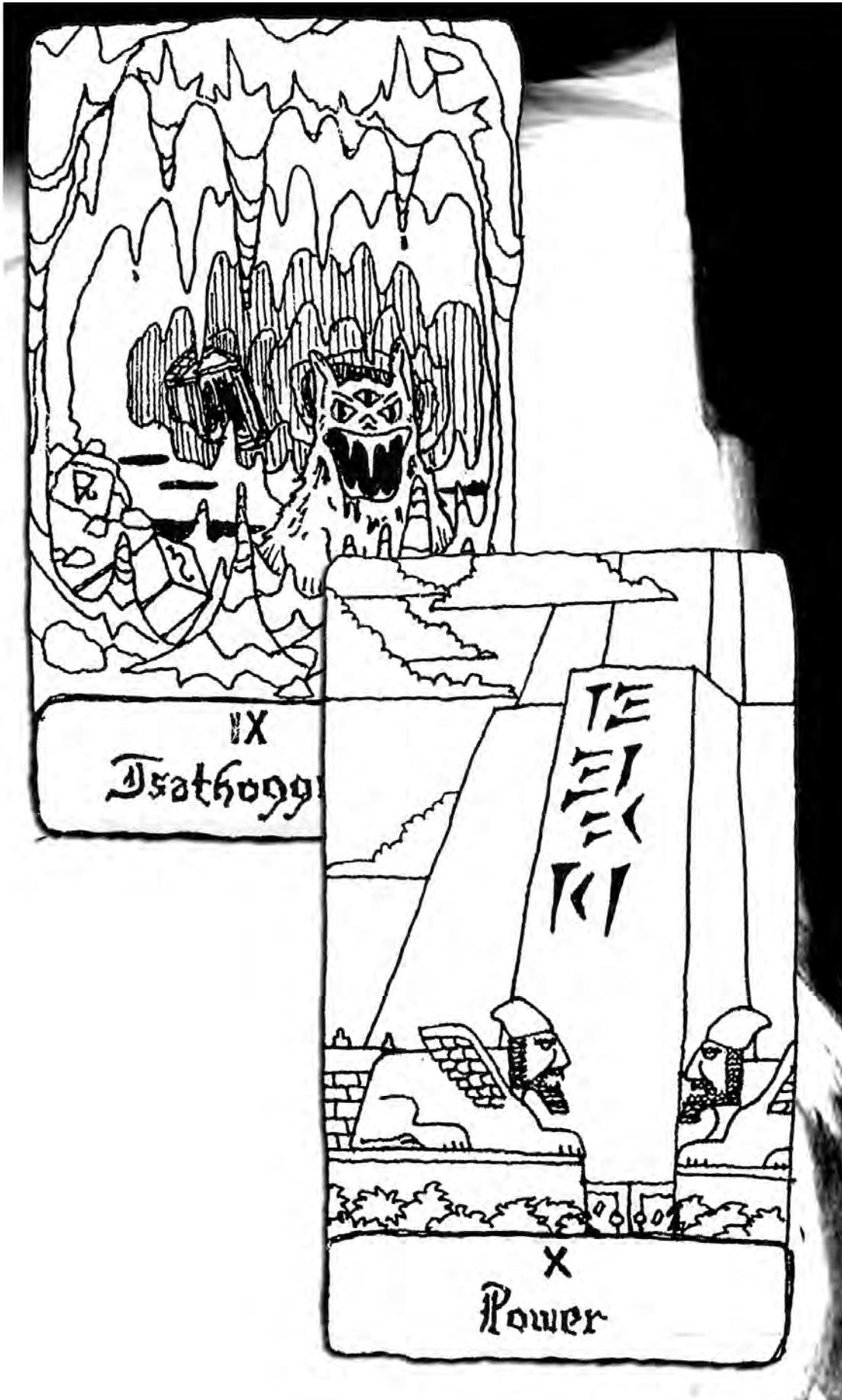
Where beyond the extreme sea-wall, and between the remote sea-gates

Waste water washes, and tall ships founder, and deep death waits.

In this context, it's interesting to note that the historian Marcellus, commenting on the legends of the ineffable (and deadly) Amazons, and on their foes in (the sunken land of) Atlantis, claims that the British Isles are sacred to Proserpine -- and that Britain itself is sacred to Pluto. We seem to see above that Procopius identifies Britain explicitly as the Land of the Dead -- as Lovecraft observed in a 1936 letter, "Procopius seems to have been the first who fused the classic [Atlantis] with the Celtic legends of western lands." We see above, though, that Procopius differentiates between "Britain" (the former Roman province, now settled by Angles) and "Brittia." The latter is divided in two by a great wall, with an earthly paradise on one side and snakes and poisonous fumes on the other -- and to that island, the dead are ferried from Europe. Essentially, Procopius' two-fold Brittia echoes a two-fold Britain -- one overlaying the other, with daylight history on top and a shadowland of death beneath. Where the two overlap, you hear the bells ring in sunken churchyards -- such as those in Dunwich.

Dunwich, which seems to have sprung full-grown from nothing in the sixth century -- just as Cantref y Gwaelod and Lyonesse sink under the waves. In legend, it even appropriates their stone sea-wall and "brazen gates" as the Dolorous Blow destroys Arthur's Logres and drives them into the Otherworld. Just then, too, the sober historian Procopius is testifying to the existence of two Britains, one a shadow realm of the dead. Is Dunwich upthrust by a great reality quake? Did its vibrations stir up a tidal wave of images, decanted by the Queen of the

Dead, to pour into the unsuspecting mind of Swinburne, and from his poetry like a psychic virus into the neurasthenic H.P. Lovecraft? Does Swinburne's "woman in all tales" echo Lovecraft's Magna Mater, or his Mormo, the Thousand-Faced Moon, or Shub-Niggurath Herself? Did Queen Elizabeth know of her submarine rival, and withhold the bells of Dunwich to secure her own throne from erosion? Does the Queen of Brittia yet wait beneath Dunwich to "drench our steeples" and "crack nature's moulds," feasting meanwhile on the ghosts of Templars and the flame of poets? The Dunwich horror waits on the dry salvages of Time, as Swinburne says, "white-eyed and poisonous-finned, shark-toothed and serpentine-curved." Don't hesitate to ring.



## THE SHADOW OUT OF LOVECRAFT

*“[T]he Great Old Ones spoke to the sensitive among them by molding their dreams; for only thus could Their language reach the fleshy minds of mammals.”*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu”

Lovecraft’s life was even more bland and prosaic than many a New England writer before or since, but the legendry woven about it after his death rivals even the most lurid of the fictions he penned. If the sleep of reason brings forth monsters, the sleep of reason about Lovecraft must bring forth Things Man Was Not Meant To Know, But Was Very Much Meant To Slip Into Horror Games. Dream, then, a little dream with me.

*“‘But that’s absurd! The facts of Lovecraft’s life are fully documented!’ ‘Not all of them.’ ‘What about the biographies I read, and the memoirs by Derleth and others?’ ... ‘Derleth never set eyes on him at all. Neither did most of HPL’s correspondents or today’s scholars. They rely on hearsay and the letters he wrote. Well, hearsay is inaccurate. As for the letters -- what better way for a man to hide his real persona than behind a wall of words?’”*

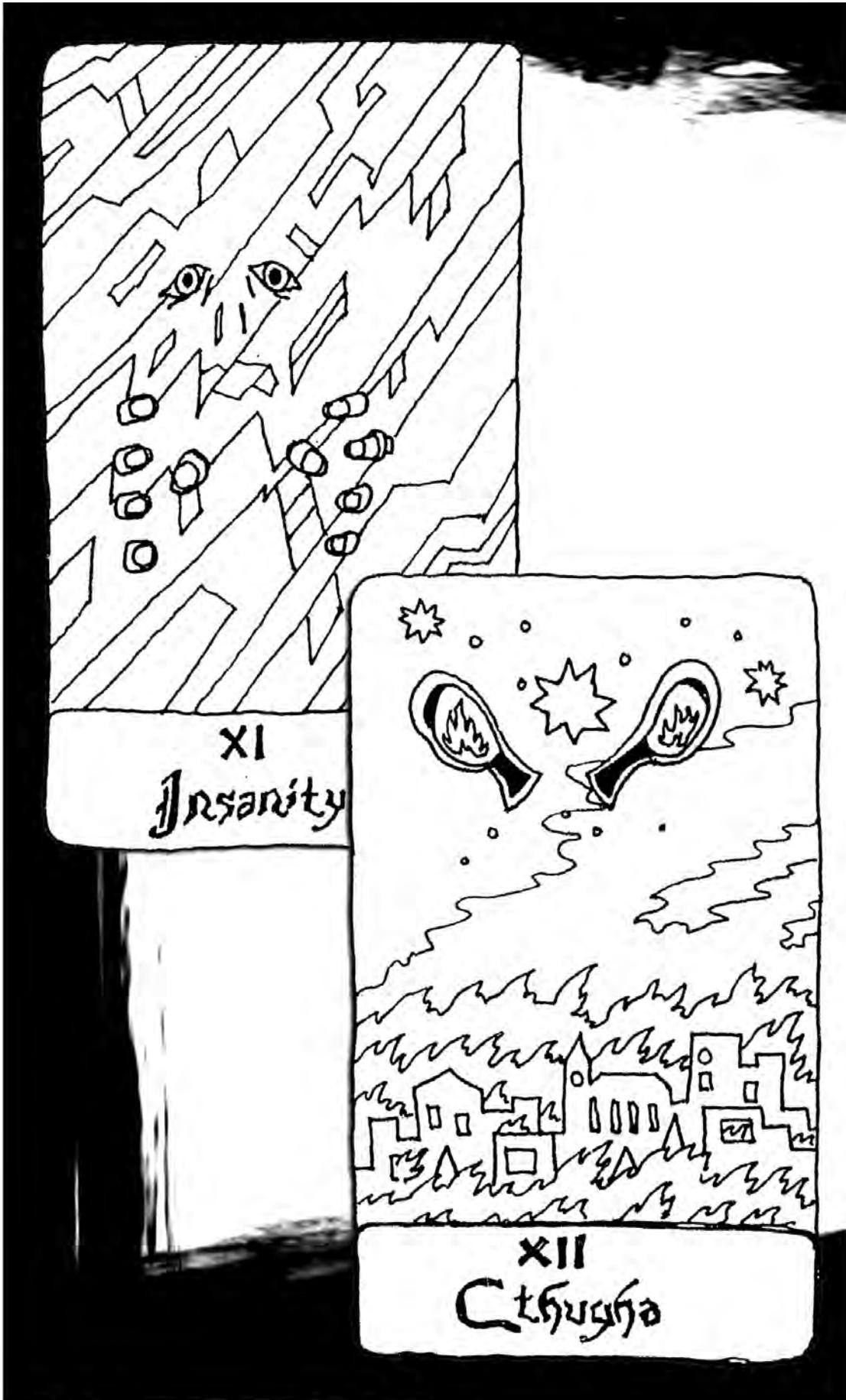
-- Keith and Waverly, in *Strange Eons* by Robert Bloch

Even the solid and sober facts of Lovecraft’s life can give one pause, if looked at correctly. A writer obsessed with ichthyoid beings from the deep, he suffered from abnormally acute sensitivity to cold -- “poikilothermism” or “fish temperature.” A loudly self-proclaimed materialist and empiricist, he remained fascinated by New England legendry and witch-trials all his life. His father died a raving syphilitic madman -- and HPL wrote stories of men driven mad by miscegenation for the rest of his life. All these, rather than being grist for tedious mills of literary criticism, can set the stage for greater parallelisms between Lovecraft’s life and work in games. For the Keeper wishing to find a proximate source for Lovecraft’s magic, HPL himself identified the library of his maternal grandfather, Whipple Phillips. Phillips was a prominent investor and world traveler, rumored to have been an Egyptian Rite Freemason. One itinerary of his travels mentions the Cahokia mounds, Mammoth Cave, ancient archaeological sites in Italy, and Egypt. Primordial mounds, the underground, Rome, and Egypt -- Lovecraftian “strange, far places” in a nutshell. Phillips died in March of 1904 of a stroke, bearing a “grotesque, twisted expression on [his] face” that even the coroner found “quite disconcerting.”

*“My own dreams usually go back very far in time ... But the real scenes frequently merge into unknown and fantastic realms, and include landscapes and architectural vistas which could scarcely be on this planet.”*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, letter to Willis Conover, Jan. 10, 1937

Inheriting his grandfather’s wanderlust, Lovecraft traveled himself -- all throughout New England, of course, but also ranging as far afield as Cleveland, New Orleans, St. Augustine, and Quebec. Always he sought out old graveyards, strange hilltops and stones, and local legendry -- research for his fiction? Or investigation into nonfiction? Many of



Lovecraft's most exotic -- and informative -- trips took place in dreams. Lovecraft had been a terrific dreamer since 1896-1897 (the years the "mysterious airship" cruised America), seeing monsters, strange locales, and other times, especially Roman Britain. Many of his stories and poems (including almost all of the *Fungi From Yuggoth* cycle), such as "The Statement of Randolph Carter," "Dagon," "Celephais," and "The Call of Cthulhu" derive wholly or in part from HPL's vivid nightmares. His dreams inspired "The Nameless City" (where the *Necronomicon* is first quoted) and he composed "Nyarlathotep" in a dream, writing it as he awoke -- the Messenger of the Old Ones, quite literally, then, appeared to Lovecraft in a dream. This was hardly the first god HPL ever saw -- as a youth, he saw Pan in his grandfather's back garden.

*"One is reminded of the recent case of an Adept who attempted to use a vehicle which, from sheer terror of that which lay beyond the spatial pylons, vehemently denied its master and was prematurely snuffed out of existence. I refer to Howard P. Lovecraft, whose occult experiences, disguised as fiction, vividly adumbrate the awful possibility at which Crowley but vaguely hints..."*

-- Kenneth Grant, *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God*

Dig much deeper into this, with the proper blithe disregard for truth, and you get mighty close to Kenneth Grant's thesis, that Lovecraft was an unconscious adept, a "channel" for extra-dimensional beings from outside Time. Grant draws explicit parallels between Aleister Crowley's Aiwass and Choronzon and Lovecraft's Azathoth and Yog-Sothoth. To Grant, Lovecraft saw the Door Between The Planes, Daath, and recoiled -- and the recoil is what killed him. Colin Low goes even further, asserting baselessly that Crowley romanced and initiated HPL's wife Sonia Greene and that she taught Lovecraft Crowleyan magick. Occasionally, someone looking for a Crowleian connection in Lovecraft's work will point to the allusion in "The Thing on the Doorstep" concerning "a notorious cult-leader, lately expelled from England." Wiccan pioneer Doreen Valiente wrote (perhaps with tongue in cheek) that the *Necronomicon*, and Lovecraft's work in general, was a *terma*, a Tibetan term for a book to be hidden away until the world was ready. Meanwhile, one W.H. Müller claims, in *Polaria: The Gift of the White Stone*, that Lovecraft was "America's secret alchemist," who worked in secret to unravel, and then encode, the "genuine Polar Tradition."

It is interesting that Lovecraft died on March 15, the death-day of Attis, consort of Cybele -- who HPL identified as an aspect of Shub-Niggurath. Lovecraft's birthday is also the birthday of the Moon, appropriately for a nocturnal wanderer preoccupied with lunacy -- and the feast day of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the "Illuminatus of the West" and patron saint of beekeepers. Bees, of course, symbolize the Merovingian lineage -- the *rois faineant* born from a mysterious sea-being, bearing the mark of their blood -- does the Priore de Sion lie behind the Esoteric Order of Dagon?

*"At night, I go invisibly in spirit and the body remains behind; we go forth in the service of Christ, and [we fight] the witches of the Devil..."*

-- Battista Moduco, under interrogation by  
the Inquisition, Jun. 27, 1580

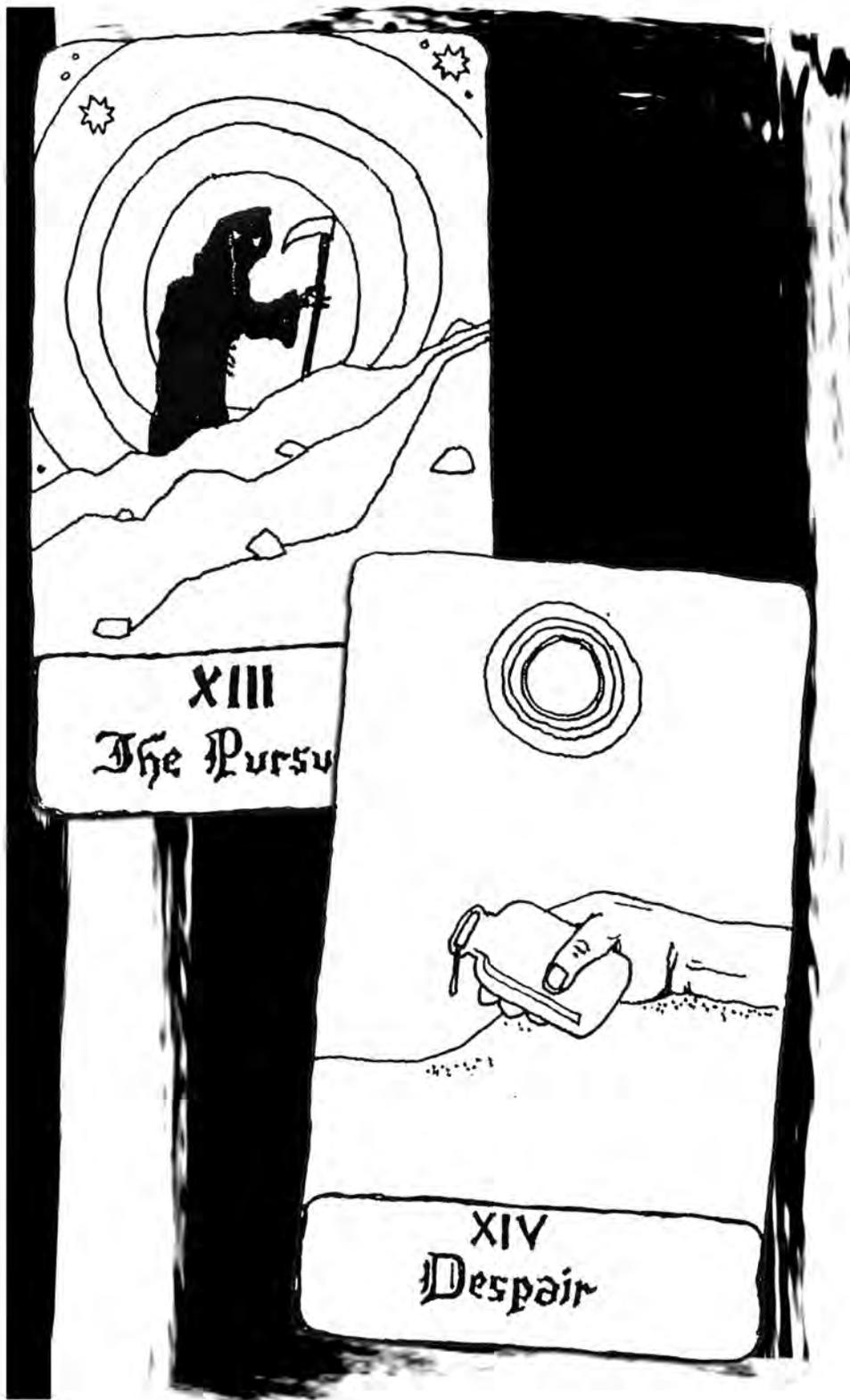
And if so, wouldn't Lovecraft fight them as only a New England gentleman can? Perhaps Lovecraft's oneiric journeys caused him to enlist in -- or be recruited by -- the Benandanti, that mysterious north Italian secret society whose members battled witchcraft and devilry in their dreams before the Inquisition drove them underground. Perhaps Lovecraft faked his death so that he could more easily wander the world safe from the notice of the Outer Ones -- perhaps retracing the steps of his grandfather from Mississippian mound to Egyptian tomb. (Speaking of Egyptian tombs, it's pretty interesting that Lovecraft's "Under the Pyramids" posits secret tunnels below the Giza plateau; tunnels that Egyptologists are only now, based on sonar maps of the area, beginning to suspect actually exist.) At the other end of his life, Lovecraft's whereabouts from 1908 to 1913 (from age 18 to 23, prime adventuring years) still remain a nearly complete blank. He wrote no letters, left no trail of words. 1908 is when the mysterious airship returns, visible primarily over (wait for it) southern New England. Speaking of peculiar coincidences, it's intriguing to note that Wingate Peaslee in "The Shadow Out of Time" spends precisely those years (1908-1913) under the control of the Great Race of Yith. Better yet, Charles Dexter Ward (perhaps Lovecraft's closest fictional stand-in) spends his time from age 18 to 23 investigating occult lore first in Providence and then in Europe.

*"There surely is an actual Hitler peril -- yet that cannot blind us to the honest rightness of the man's basic urge... It may be that Hitlerism's function will be to point out certain needs which wiser heads & hands will ultimately rectify in a more moderate way -- not only in Germany but in other nations where similar needs or problems exist."*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, letter to J. Vernon Shea, Sept. 25, 1933

Of course, if HPL was wandering prewar Europe in secret, it might not have been a good thing. In 1908, Guido von List founded the Armanen Initiates in Vienna, precursor to the Thule Society and the Nazi Party. We tend to like Lovecraft -- which means that he makes a perfect villain. There's sadly little doubt about Lovecraft's strongly-held beliefs in Nordic superiority, anti-Semitism, and kindred racist ideologies. He was just the kind of fellow, in other words, that the Old Ones are looking for. For crying out loud, he's the person who channeled Nyarlathotep and revealed more blasphemous lore than any ten men before him! Thanks to his "warning" writings, "chaos magickians" and "Typhonian OTO" groups now perform Golden Dawn-derived Enochian rituals dedicated to contacting and evoking the Great Old Ones. Is the kabbalistic reading of "H.P. Lovecraft" as 436 -- "Sathanas" -- truly a coincidence? Anton LaVey incorporated calls to Cthulhu into his Satanic liturgies, and his successor Michael Aquino has explicitly performed "Lovecraftian workings" in the old SS cult center at Wewelsburg. Returning to kabbalah; "Necronomicon" reduces to 555, "darkness" in Hebrew -- and Hitler's Nazi Party membership number. And of course, Lovecraft himself describes the Elder Sign, before which the inhuman Deep Ones flee, in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" as "what ye call a swastika naowdays."

One last coincidence, one last evidence. "Unknown vandals" violated Lovecraft's grave in Swan Point Cemetery on October 13, 1997 -- the same week "a large, triangle-shaped" UFO appeared over Cranston, Rhode Island, less than 15 miles away. A Shining Trapezohedron, or a Mi-Go craft returned for some essential saltes? Wherever you put Lovecraft in the fictional cosmic scales, as pulp shaman, cryptic alchemist, reluctant magus, eldritch explorer, oneiric paladin, or servitor of the Thule Society and Those they worshipped, there's no stopping the Caller of Cthulhu.



# THE WINSLOW PROJECT

## 2006 PREFACE

I originally wrote this scenario in 1998, for Pagan Publishing. It was intended for their then (and still, so far as I know) forthcoming *Cult of Transcendence* sourcebook for *Delta Green*. Given the length of time elapsed since its submission, Scott Glancy was kind enough to allow me to reprint it here, for which I thank him.

### Cults and Subcults

For those who don't immediately recall page six of the *Delta Green* core book, the Cult of Transcendence is an Illuminati-type organization that worships Nyarlathotep. Originally interested only in power, they now seek to spread fear, hatred, anger, and blasphemy. Like most conspiratorial masters, they work through a variety of subordinate conspiracies and front groups. Since the Cult is a part (albeit an obscure one) of the Delta Green universe, I've left it in the scenario as presented, but I have changed somewhat the names and natures of its subordinate groups from the original Cult manuscript. This is to avoid spoiling surprises in the event the Cult sourcebook does see the light, to avoid stepping on the toes of Greg Stolze, who created the various subordinate groups therein, and to give readers something a little new and original to chew on.

**The Brotherhood of Dion** began with a group of disaffected New England aristocrats, disgusted by the growing support for Jacksonian populism in the 1820s. Classically educated blue-bloods at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, they named themselves after Dion of Syracuse, a tyrant who attempted to apply Plato's theories of the "ideal republic" to the rule of Sicily in the fourth century B.C. They, likewise, sought to create a moral and intellectual elite to govern America by secrecy if need be, to save it from the consequences of mere democracy. Over the next century and a half, their "old boy network" completely infiltrated the East Coast Establishment of business, law, government, the universities, and the press. With this power as bribe and bludgeon, they have recruited willing tools and

developed eager chapters even in mere state universities. Most Dionites remain dedicated to nothing more than their own aggrandizement in the name of knowing what's best for the country. But in 1844, two Harvard Brothers pursued Platonic mysticism as far as the Widener Library's copy of the *Necronomicon*, and there has been an inner core of the Brotherhood increasingly devoted to the service of Nyarlathotep ever since.

Anyone who reads the ads in the back of *Road & Track* or *Cosmopolitan* knows about **HelpLink!**, although they might be a bit fuzzy on what it does besides Make You A Millionaire In Your Spare Time At Home. Somewhere on the shady line between spam and targeted marketing, between temporary employment services and Amway-style pyramid schemes, HelpLink! provides a range of job possibilities, rote "pink-collar" technical training, and stuff to sell to your friends and neighbors. It may have begun as a desperately unfocused business or as a scam preying on the economically vulnerable, but it now belongs to a Brotherhood front corporation, Brewster Holdings LLC. HelpLink! has always assembled vast amounts of consumer data as part of doing business -- by now, that's its main *raison d'être* for the Brotherhood. Aside from its information gathering potential, HelpLink! temps serve as ad hoc corporate spies, and its employee training helps identify the easily led, the desperate, and the expendable.

Not all Mythos cults are made up solely of isolated hermits and inbred hill folk. Some cultists have initially uninvolved spouses or romantic partners, close friends, even children. These unfortunates encounter the Mythos by proxy, as it were, and then eventually find it poisoning their lives. And then, something happens -- a summoning, a possession, an irruption of insanity that cannot be denied. A very few of the bystanders escape into amnesia or even a semblance of normalcy, perhaps moving across the country and completely severing their ties with the past. Most go mad or die in blind shock. A very few emerge on the other side -- not sane, but not utterly destroyed. The Cult calls these last the **Annealed**. They serve as occult hatchet men, easily remolded into whatever the local conspiracy needs -- cold-blooded assassins, passive channelers, or even recruiters to breed future Annealed victims.

## Using This Scenario

This adventure can be played as written, or tied into whichever overarching bad guy group your own Delta Green campaign is focused on. (For instance, Majestic-12 would have plenty of reasons to launch something like the Winslow Project; anything from studying the effect of revealing alien truths to America to determining the precise social resistance to Mi-Go colonization. And of course, power for its own sake is always valuable.) It can also be the opening of a more traditional *Call of Cthulhu* game, as I note in the box *Non-Delta Green Investigators* on p. 00.

I wrote this scenario focusing on a traditional conspiratorial fear, the fear of universal surveillance, to tie into the more "traditional conspiracy" nature of the Cult of Transcendence as plotted out by Scott and Greg. Ironically, therefore, the transcendent nature of the Cthulhu Mythos (what I've talked about elsewhere in this book) gets short shrift in this scenario. But that same oblique approach to the Mythos makes it a pretty good scenario for a non-Mythos conspiracy game, such as *Conspiracy X* or *Mage*. All it really requires is a conspiracy interested in social engineering, possessed of a magical "cleaner." In a pinch, the whole scenario could be completely non-magical. Ritter then becomes a "wet work" specialist, acquiring targeting data for a September 30 attack by black helicopters using chemical submunitions. Finally, this scenario is inevitably somewhat dated, written as it was several data-mining revolutions ago. (You'll want to update the dates in the handouts if you aren't running a late-90s "historical" *X-Files* game.) Perhaps my 1998 concerns with omnipresent surveillance, social engineering, and the callousness of self-appointed elites don't register as strongly in 2006. Or maybe, in this age of "Why Did Amazon.com Recommend This Book For You?" and NSA-compiled domestic telephone lists, they still do.

“And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”

-- Revelation 13:16-17, King James Version

Control. Not an end in itself: controlling people means little to those who have realized the meaninglessness of humanity. The Cult of Transcendence seeks domination only as a gesture of submission to their dark Lord; a spasm of pettiness as a gift from a dying dictator to an eternal master. But control does mean freedom for the controllers; freedom from interruption, freedom from distraction, freedom from interference. And for its own freedom, the Cult of Transcendence willingly sets its servants working hard to enslave others.

## **KEEPER'S INFORMATION**

Ever since the 1960s, the Brotherhood of Dion has been trying to refine its mechanisms of social engineering. In Winslow, Iowa, the Brotherhood has built its own laboratory population: an entire town monitored, tested, measured, and stimulated to develop ever more sophisticated methods of pushing buttons on a national scale. An increasing battery of demographic analysis, psychological testing, and economic manipulation of two generations of townfolk gave the Brotherhood reams of data on the “man in the street” reaction to any conceivable occurrence. By carefully monitoring every possible transaction and with careful time-management studies of the entire population over a span of decades, the Brotherhood created psychographic profiles of unparalleled sophistication. In 1985, the Brotherhood opened the HelpLink! regional training headquarters in Winslow. HelpLink!’s data-accumulation programs could be used as the “control” group against which Winslow was dissected. Banks of computers spun increasingly complex sociodynamic models and Winslow moved from a town under a microscope to a community of lab mice. The Brotherhood tested mechanism after mechanism of domestication here, from ATMs to “voluntary” drug testing. Like all good things, however, the Winslow Project is about to come to an end.

A number of suspicious strangers have tried to find out the story of Winslow; all of them have been silenced following a campaign of harassment (especially late-night phone calls urging silence and suicide, playing on known psychological weaknesses). Some of these silencings have been deadly -- data mining uncovered a college professor’s addiction to child pornography, and he committed suicide rather than face exposure. An official of the Census Bureau who became too curious about Winslow found herself fired after evidence of her alcoholism and occasional drug use made its way to her supervisors; after a year of harassment, she drank herself to death. A Marine recruiter had his adulteries exposed to his wife; the divorce cost him everything but his boat, from which he jumped. Most recently, an FCC inspector stumbled on evidence of HelpLink!’s activities, a sheriff’s deputy beat him to death on September 25 as he attempted to call a friend at the NSA with his suspicions. It is this killing that transformed the Winslow Project from an asset to a liability. The Brotherhood has decided to shut down the Project, and the town with it. After consulting certain tomes, and interpreting some little-noticed geomagnetic data for the area, the proper means of disposal was decided. The Brotherhood has called in an Annealed “cleaner” to summon the Dry Corn Goddess, an aspect of Shub-Niggurath, to kill everyone in town. Thus a town full of questions will become a town full of sacrifices for the Dionites’ god. A mysterious fire and explosion will destroy the HelpLink! building, and the whole thing will be blamed on an illegal pesticide truck overturning on the county road. A suitable truck, and a driver who will not be missed, have been procured and held ready. Sheriff Taylor, the Dionite Watchman in town, and the HelpLink! regional head have been promised new identities; everyone else is to be paid off or killed in the disaster. Unfortunately for the cultists, the college professor was a Delta Green friendly; when the Delta Green computers finally did a cross-reference on Winslow

after the FCC agent was killed, enough of the pattern emerged to get a Delta Green team sent in. They'll arrive on September 27; the ceremony is set for September 30 (the last day of the HelpLink! fiscal year, and an auspicious one for the calling of the Dry Corn Goddess).

This scenario is designed to introduce HelpLink! as a major target and foregrounds its devilish routines. It also contains threads of HelpLink!'s connection to the Brotherhood of Dion and the existence of the Annealed and the Mythos; Keepers wishing to direct their players in one or the other direction can accentuate these clues. The coming of the monster in a *Call of Cthulhu* scenario traditionally means that it's too late; in this scenario, it's been too late for three decades. The most the investigators can hope to do is find out why, get the information out of town, and, if they have time, save a few thousand lives.

## INVESTIGATORS' INFORMATION

The investigators should all be Delta Green agents or friendlies; they are summoned in a suitably melodramatic manner to a briefing at 10:00 a.m. on September 27 in Washington, or wherever the campaign base city is. They are met by a nondescript-appearing man identical to the hundreds of thousands of bureaucrats swarming over the capital in an undecorated conference room somewhere in a big, faceless government building. He introduces himself as Agent Gomez, and explains the situation: a number of Federal personnel have died after spending some time in Winslow, Iowa. Following the possibly questionable death in Winslow of Neil Badagian, an FCC investigator, the Delta Green computers turned up the long-forgotten suicide of Delta Green friendly Jerry Heathcliff after publishing an article on Winslow in 1987. The coincidence of names raised a red flag and triggered a subroutine in the computer: it cross-checked all federal government files for deaths following overnight stays in Winslow, Iowa (as determined from itemized expense accounts). Two more deaths turned up, bringing the total to four in ten years, far above statistical norms.

The first was Heathcliff, a sociology professor at the University of Iowa at Ames who had published an article profiling Winslow in *American Demographer* (see box on p. 00 for abstract). On July 15, 1987, nearly two months after his article appeared in print, he committed suicide rather than be fired from the University; evidence of his obsession with child pornography was found in his home. Nobody knew how his unsavory interests had become known to the University, as the whole matter seems to have been hushed up. Heathcliff was in the Delta Green computer system as a friendly; he'd served in Vietnam as a State Department analyst from 1971 to 1973.

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### *Winslow, Iowa: The New Muncie?*

by Jerry Heathcliff (Univ. Iowa at Ames)

*American Demographer* Summer 1987 pp. 961-977

Abstract: At the turn of the century, sociologists studied Muncie, Indiana as an "ideal type" of the American mentality. Demographically speaking, Winslow, Iowa is an even more accurate picture of modern America. Winslow's breakdown of income, age, gender and employment groups is identical to that given by U.S. Census data for the nation as a whole. Winslow's demographics have matched national trends for 25 years. This should make Winslow an ideal subject for followup studies. Only in racial breakdown does Winslow not match national averages, since it is nearly all-white.

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The second, Shelley Emmett, was a researcher with the Census Bureau, based in Kansas City. She visited Winslow four times between October of 1988 and March of 1989. On April 10, 1989, she failed a drug test, showing signs of cocaine and marijuana use; she was fired a week later. Unable to find a new job and suffering from clinical depression, she died of exposure aggravated by alcoholism on December 5, 1990. Captain John Rush was a Marine recruiter stationed in Des Moines in 1994-1995. He visited Winslow several times during his tour; following a painful and expensive divorce, he committed suicide by jumping off his sailboat in Chesapeake Bay on February 17, 1996. The only common factors in the deaths of Heathcliff, Emmett and Rush are their presence in Winslow and a large number of late-night phone calls they received in the two months previous to their deaths. Tracing the numbers, where possible, turns up nothing -- a random scattering of business, cell phone and personal phone numbers. Either the calls are coincidence or someone is cleverly covering their tracks in the system.

The latest victim is Neil Badagian, who died in an automobile accident on the night of September 25 on the business highway just outside Winslow. Forty-five minutes before his fatal crash, he placed a call to his older brother, John Badagian, who works for the NSA. In that call, he said he'd uncovered something "more in your line" than his; what he meant is unknown (see box on p. 00 for a transcript of the call). Because of the Badagian family's connections with the Republic of Armenia (they are second-generation Armenian-Americans), the NSA's internal investigation has been diverted overseas -- the NSA won't be looking over your shoulder for a couple of days, at least. John Badagian claims not to know what, if anything, his brother meant. Your job is to find out.

Seats for the investigators are booked for the noon flight to Des Moines; if they have any special gear that they don't want going through airport scanners, Agent Gomez will ensure that it's waiting in their rental car at Des Moines Airport. If the investigators have cover identities, Gomez encourages their use. He can also provide FBI credentials for any investigator who needs them, although they won't pass muster with the Des Moines FBI office (which hasn't been informed of the operation). The investigators can be in Des Moines by 4:30 p.m. and from there, they're on their own. It's a little under an hour and a half drive from Des Moines to Winslow; if you push it and risk a ticket, you can get there in an hour.

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### **Non-Delta Green Investigators**

Investigators who are potential Delta Green material (i.e., in campaigns that the Keeper intends to transform into Delta Green campaigns) can be from any branch of the Federal Government or have any set of useful skills; the NSA and FBI, especially, would show an interest in investigating this case.

"Civilian" investigators need some connection to Winslow such as the traditional long-lost uncle, college roommate or old family friend. The investigators' connection can be a victim like Badagian, a relative or friend of any of the victims, or just a suddenly-suspicious citizen of Winslow. Sheriff Taylor and the HelpLink! will have much less compunction about jailing investigators without federal government connections "on suspicion" until the ritual, however; such investigators must step very lightly indeed to avoid notice.

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NSA Telcom Transcript

2227 hrs EST 25 September 1997

Incoming call to Chevy Chase, MD home number of JOHN BADAGIAN from cellular phone number registered to NEIL BADAGIAN; packet retrace places origin of call within 15 mile radius of Winslow, IA cellular tower.

Unidentified Male Voice (presumably NEIL BADAGIAN): John, pick up. Pick up, John, it's Neil.

JOHN BADAGIAN: Hello? Neil?

NEIL B.: Look, I don't have time to go into details right now. I'm in Iowa, in a town called Winslow, on FCC business, and I think I've found something more in your line than in mine.

JOHN B.: My line? What are you talking about? Are you drunk, Neil?

NEIL B.: Look, I don't have time. Call me back at the scrambled number in exactly one hour, okay? I can't stay on too long.

JOHN B.: Look, should I call anybody else?

NEIL B.: Not until I can fill you in. An hour. I'm deadly serious.

JOHN B.: One hour. Right. Take care, Neil.

NEIL B.: You know it, John.

(conversation ends)

(Case officer notes: Neil Badagian apparently had access to a cellular scrambler with its own number; no further calls were received or made on either of Neil Badagian's cellular phone numbers. John Badagian did not report the call until after learning of his brother's death. At that time, Agent FENCHURCH debriefed him; John Badagian was unable to complete any calls to Neil's numbers, receiving only a "cellular phone not in use" recording.)

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## WELCOME TO WINSLOW

Winslow, Iowa, is the county seat of Taylor County, Iowa. In appearance, it resembles every small town in every American movie of the last twenty years: red brick and granite downtown, leafy side streets lined with modest ranch homes, local-brand gas stations and convenience stores on the corners and on the highway exit ramps. The “Welcome to Winslow” sign where U.S. Highway 65 turns into Main Street claims a population of 5,707, sports the emblems of the Lions, Kiwanis, Elks, United Church of Christ and other respectable organizations, and proudly boasts of being the “Home of the Fighting Cornhuskers -- Division Champs 1977, 1981, 1987, 1990 and 1992.” Winslow is about 30 miles northeast of Ames; the closest other towns are 10 to 15 miles away in any direction over rolling, sparsely-wooded farmland.

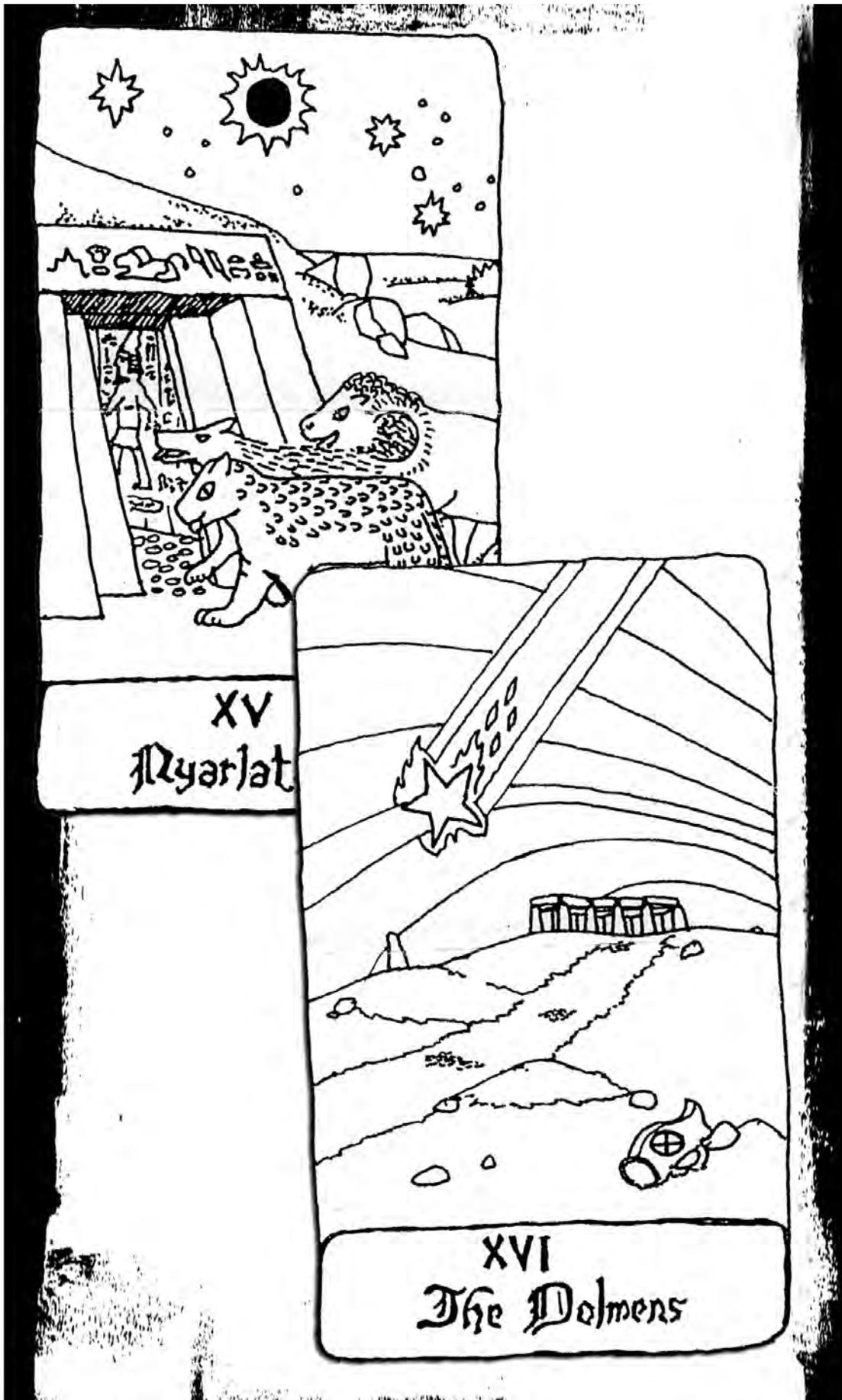
In Winslow, savvy or suspicious investigators will notice that there are a lot of things named “Taylor” -- Taylor Street is the other main street, crossing Main in the center of downtown; the Taylor Savings & Loan is the local bank, any houses for sale sport “Taylor Realty” signs, there’s a Taylor Home & Fire Insurance office, etc. Investigators with a small-town background will not find this unusual; most small towns were built by one extended family that often founded, and sometimes still owns, most of the sinews of the local business community. Investigators should also eventually notice the many opportunities for observation that exist in this placid community (see box).

Banners hanging over Main and Taylor Streets, and flyers all around town, announce the Corn Queen Pageant at the high school, which coincides with the Cornhuskers’ homecoming game on the 30th.

### The Eyes Of Winslow Are Upon You

Everyone, every transaction, every trip to the store, every phone call, every right turn on red is grist for the Brotherhood information mill. The more they know about every citizen of Winslow, the better their models of Middle America get. One theme of this adventure is paranoia, especially paranoia of government-industrial surveillance. As the investigators move around Winslow, they should begin noticing these things. Don’t introduce them all at once, just mention them as they seem to become obvious. Call for Spot Hidden and Idea rolls if the investigators don’t seem to be looking in the right places. Although any one of them might seem normal (or even accepted outside Winslow), the picture drawn by all of these elements should unnerve the investigators a great deal. The following are some of the overt signs of the Winslow Project:

- Babysafe signs (“Foil kidnapers: Fingerprint your baby”) are hanging in stores or offices where young mothers might go, such as grocery stores, day care centers, or the elementary school. This is a psychological experiment; the Brotherhood is trying to determine how much, if any, resistance there is to the notion of a universal fingerprint file.
- “Three forms of ID for personal checks, please.” If the investigators buy anything with a check, they’ll hear this refrain. If they are buying supplies in Winslow, or even just stopping for a sixpack and a bag of Fritos, they might overhear this. Little red signs on most cash registers around town also carry this motto. This policy helps the Brotherhood keep track of any new credit cards, and of any out-of-town visitors.



- Everybody has cable, nobody has a satellite dish. (Spot Hidden or Idea rolls to notice this, if the investigators drive around the town.) Ads in the *Winslow Weekly Shopper* tout the very low price for a hefty package of channels, including “Three Shopping Networks!!” Similar signs hang in the windows of Winslow Cable & Electric. Channel choices, and especially purchases made from home shopping networks, are key parts of the HelpLink! psychological profile on everyone in town. The Brotherhood subsidizes the town’s cable service to make gathering these data easier.
- Every building has either a security system or an automatic electric-eye door or both. Every entry or exit from a building in Winslow is monitored by HelpLink! surveillance and fed into sophisticated traffic-pattern analysis programs.
- Lots of bar code scanners. Even the mom-and-pop stores in Winslow’s “downtown” have them. Every transaction, of course, goes straight into the HelpLink! computers.
- Almost everyone in town has a debit card, from Taylor Savings & Loan. That way, the Brotherhood can continually monitor bank balances and has a cross-check on out-of-town transactions.
- All bills larger than \$10 are passed through a scanner at every store in town. If asked about the scanners, clerks explain “it’s for stopping counterfeiters.” None of the clerks seem to think it’s odd; it’s just another part of their boring work routine to them. Investigators with Secret Service backgrounds will recognize these as fairly sophisticated and expensive scanners which can read the serial number on each bill from the little strip of magnetic tape embedded in it. Individual currency flows are, again, tracked by HelpLink! computers.
- Lots of ATMs, which look older than normal. Each ATM has a motion-sensitive camera inside; a Spot Hidden roll will let investigators see it tracking people who pass within 10 feet or so. Winslow was one of the initial test sites for the Dionite ATM pilot program, now wildly successful nationwide. HelpLink! and the Brotherhood gain reams of data from the ATM records, camera surveillance, etc.
- The street lights on the corners have cameras mounted on them. (Investigators making Spot Hidden rolls will notice them easily.) Locals, if asked, will tell the investigators that they are there “for traffic safety” or “to stop drunk drivers.” The real reason, of course, is to let Sheriff Taylor keep an eye on the town, and for HelpLink!’s traffic-pattern data gathering.
- Like businesses, houses also have security systems on entrances, and for the same reason.
- Investigators listening to the radio might hear more-frequent-than-usual ads for Lowjack, a radio device that car dealers can put in cars allowing the police to track them down in the event of a theft. Most cars in Winslow have GPS trackers or Lowjack or both. Needless to say, Sheriff Taylor doesn’t have to wait for a car theft to activate anyone’s Lowjack tracker.
- This last element is optional; for some Keepers and some parties of players, it can be the coup de grace that puts the final paranoid piece in the puzzle. For other groups, it can go over the top and ruin the sense of realism. Decide which works best for your party before introducing it; if the players seem perfectly creeped out by the cumulative impact of all the other elements, feel free to leave it out. The Brotherhood was planning to cap the Winslow Experiment by seeing how long it would take to get the townfolk to voluntarily get openly visible tattooed ID numbers. For now, everyone in town has their Social Security Number tattooed on their forehead in infrared-visible ink. Brotherhood-stooled medical personnel applied the tattoos during the big flu scare; possibly some people still have their “health monitor tape” on their foreheads. Instead, or in addition, the “flu shots” could have injected subcutaneous transponder implants into the townfolk’s forearms to allow the police to track their movement should it become necessary.

## Sheriff’s Office/Town Hall

Located right in the middle of town on the intersection of Main and Taylor Streets, the town hall is a two-story limestone building in a venerable Prairie Gothic style. Windows of glass brick along the base of the building indicate the presence of a basement, and the likelihood that it doubles as the town jail. There are parking spaces for eight vehicles outside; seven are marked “Police” and one

is marked “Sheriff.” Usually four to six dark brown Ford Explorers with “Taylor County Sheriff” markings and lightbars are parked in these spaces; the rest are on patrol around town at various times. Each Explorer has a police radio, road flares, Mossberg Model 500AT8 shotgun with ammo, multiple sets of handcuffs, industrial flashlight, bulletproof windows, etc. Flags of the United States and Iowa fly side by side in a small park in front of the building near a Civil War cannon on a granite pedestal.

*First Floor:* The front door opens into a reception area; stairs continue up to the second floor. The receptionist is a middle-aged woman (during the day) or a sheriff’s deputy (at night). Behind the reception area is a large bullpen holding 2-3 deputies (by day) or 1-2 (by night). If Sheriff Taylor has any reason to suspect inquisitive strangers in town, the number of deputies in the office is increased by one. In addition to the desks, calendars, chairs, cameras, fingerprint files, etc., there is a locked gun cabinet on one wall holding eight Mossberg Model 500AT8 12 gauge shotguns, three Colt .357 Magnum pistols, ten speedloaders (for the Magnums), and a hundred rounds for each gun. Any deputy has keys to this cabinet, as well as to any set of handcuffs used by the station. A file cabinet holds arrest and police reports, but not the police report on Badagian’s death. This room also holds a bank of six security monitors and an expensive-looking computer that seems to be controlling them. A Computer Use roll will determine that it is, indeed, flipping between screens on a preset pattern -- currently, it shows the jail, the transformer lot at Winslow Cable & Electric, the inside of the HelpLink! offices, Archer Wrecking, and two random scenes from anywhere in town. If the investigators have made themselves conspicuous to Sheriff Taylor, one of the monitors will show their motel, their car, or something of that sort. A second roll will let the user examine any location in town with a camera nearby (which is to say, virtually every outdoor location and a large number of indoor ones). The computer is also linked to a lighted map of the town; when any security system alarm goes off, that location lights up on the screen accompanied by a buzzing alert signal. The computer also controls the Lojack transmitters in local vehicles (and the GPS transponders in the police vehicles and in other local cars). Sheriff Taylor’s office is a corner cubicle with translucent glass partitions set in a wood frame around it.

*Sheriff Taylor’s Office:* A battered metal file cabinet (locked) holds Taylor’s personal files on various Dionite small fry (and one folder on Taylor’s Sentinel, who sits on the Brewster Holdings board) interspersed with the arrest records of Winslow’s local troublemaker population. At least forty minutes and a successful Library Use roll are needed to sort them out. The cabinet also holds the police report on Badagian’s death (see box on p. 00). His desk, in addition to a computer (networked to the one outside; it can also display any surveillance camera image on its monitor) and a telephone (speed-dial to Clark’s office phone) holds a second .357 Magnum, ten rounds of ammunition, and the supporting documents (passport, birth certificate, etc.) for Taylor’s future new identity as “David F. Houston,” including a first-class airplane ticket for Taylor/Houston on an American Airlines flight from O’Hare to Acapulco on October 1.

*Second Floor:* This floor holds the town meeting room, which doubles as a courtroom, judges’ chambers, a justice of the peace office, the office of the town comptroller, county clerk, and other local functionaries. It also holds the town and county records, building plans, etc. Inquisitive strangers asking the county clerk for the plans to, say, the HelpLink! building, will be stonewalled (“I’m afraid those plans are out right now, but try back tomorrow”) and reported to the Sheriff. If the investigators somehow get covert access to the records, three hours of research and a successful Library Use and Accounting roll will reveal that the town’s finances are subsidized in large part by Brewster Holdings, LLC (a front group for the Brotherhood, which owns HelpLink!).

*Basement:* The rear wall of the basement has three jail cells partitioned by floor-to-ceiling metal bars. Each cell has two cots and a toilet facility. The locks are large and crude (no penalty on Locksmith or Mechanical Repair rolls to pick), but prisoners are

professionally searched by the deputies before being put in a cell. The keys are on a hook on the wall near the jailer's desk. This desk also holds the booking log, indicating that the prisoner in the far cell has not been charged with any crime. Said prisoner is Peter Travis, a truck driver, pulled over and arrested on the morning of the 26th. Travis is being kept prisoner in preparation for the events of the 30th (see p. 00, below), with drugs in his food keeping him senseless and deranged. He is unshaven, wild-eyed, and looks like a vagrant. With Psychology or other appropriate rolls, investigators can get some coherent phrases out of him: "the cops stole my truck," "Business 65," "Peter Travis, it's on the license," "what's the problem, Officer?" etc.

## Archer Wrecking & Salvage

This is a small operation (one tow truck) on the edge of town with an attached junkyard/impound yard next door. A 10-foot high cyclone fence (with an alarm) surrounds the impound yard; entry is by a buzzer, although there is a 50% chance that the gate is left open during the day. Neil Badagian's FCC motorpool car is sitting in the impound yard at the back with a tarp draped over it. A simple Spot Hidden, Mechanical Repair or even Forensics roll (at the Keeper's discretion) lets investigators spot a number of things inconsistent with a fatal car wreck: the windshield is smashed inward rather than outward, the impact doesn't seem to have damaged anything past the front crumple zones, and the chassis and drive train still appear to be relatively intact (indicating a slower impact than that in the police report), and the airbag did activate (which also contradicts the police report). Fred Archer, who runs the yard, will call the Sheriff if any "nosy strangers" go poking around without checking with him, although a successful Fast Talk beforehand accompanied by suitably impressive credentials (FBI, NSA, etc.) will convince him to keep his mouth shut. A deputy will torch the car on the night of the 30th, or totally strip it earlier if the investigators have announced their presence to Sheriff Taylor (who will blame the condition of the car on "local vandals" and express his regrets that "we can't keep an eye on the car every minute like you big-city boys").

## St. John the Divine Hospital

This small hospital is primarily for urgent trauma care; anyone needing more involved medical treatment is transferred to Ames if possible. The hospital also serves as the town morgue on the rare occasion that one is needed, such as now. Badagian's body is stored here now in a small facility on the first floor. Dr. Thomas Francis, who performed Badagian's autopsy, will let investigators with a particularly convincing cover story (and a Persuade roll) or impressive credentials (and a Fast Talk roll) see the body for themselves. It's quite obvious that the autopsy was hastily done; Dr. Francis will hover over the investigators nervously explaining that it was late, the Sheriff was looking over his shoulder the whole time getting in the way, etc.

Investigators making a successful Forensics roll (or Medicine at -30%) will be able to discover that the cause of death was blunt trauma to the head and abdomen caused by a short, rounded club (like a police truncheon or baseball bat). Cuts and lacerations on the body are inconsistent with being thrown through the windshield, and spinal and cervical damage is also inconsistent with the stated cause of death (crash impact). A copy of the police report on Badagian's crash is on file in a filing cabinet here along with Dr. Francis' autopsy report; a successful unobserved Library Use (or browbeating poor Dr. Francis) will let investigators find it.

If the investigators have already tipped off Sheriff Taylor (either officially or accidentally), he will ask to see a court order or a warrant before violating "the family's privacy" by letting outsiders look at the body. He will also waste no time and have the body cremated and the ashes shipped to Badagian's family in Champaign, Illinois, blaming "a mixup with these damn computers" if he is questioned about this unorthodox procedure. If they tip off

Taylor after talking to Dr. Francis, Francis will “disappear.” A deputy will grab him from the hospital parking lot at night, torture or browbeat him into telling everything he knows about the investigators, shoot him and bury him in a cornfield somewhere. Taylor doesn’t have any time to let loose ends unravel.

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**Police Report on Badagian’s Death**

Taylor County Sheriff’s Report

Incident: Auto wreck w/fatality

Time of Incident: appx 9:35 pm (officer arrived on patrol 9:47 pm)

Reporting Officer: Larry Funderburk

Location: 300 yards past mile marker 9 on Business 65

Reconstruction: While traveling at a high rate of speed, subject swerved suddenly, ran into a tree growing in the drainage ditch, and was thrown from the car. Swerving may have been caused by headlights of oncoming truck, as many truckers in a hurry use 65 as an alternate route to the Interstate.

Notes: Subject seemed dead when officer arrived; officer took him to St. John’s after examining scene (9:50 pm). Subject wallet ID’d as Neil Badagian, FCC official from Des Moines.

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## **Winslow Cable & Electric**

Winslow Cable & Electric boasts “Lowest Rates in Tri-State Area” and “Three Shopping Channels Free With Basic Cable Hookup” in the windows. A smaller sign informs passersby that this is also “your one-stop location for Ameritech phone services.” Brochures in the office give details (and the rates are low), and brag about the 95% satisfaction rating WC&E has with cable customers. The office is small and functional. The employees here know little or nothing about the HelpLink! agenda; they install boxes and hookups with no real knowledge of their function. They call the manager (a HelpLink! asset) if something goes wrong. There is a space for a cable van and for a power-line truck; the first is usually out on a call and the second is usually parked. The telephone switching equipment is in a back room, which is kept locked (only the manager, Dr. Clark, and Sheriff Taylor have keys).

The power transformer is fenced off (10 foot cyclone fence, labeled DANGER! HIGH VOLTAGE!) in a graveled vacant lot behind the building; the cellular tower is in that same lot. A successful Electronics roll allows investigators to realize that some of the boxes and machinery on the cellular tower are unusual; if they break into the lot, climb the cellular tower (Climb rolls at +30%), and jimmy open the boxes, a second Electronics roll will let them discover the time-delay features (see below) and the cellular modem that rebroadcasts all incoming and outgoing calls to the HelpLink! mainframe. Any clambering over the transformer fence sets off alarms in the police station, and police response is guaranteed within 1d6 minutes.

Getting into the switching room, using NSA telcom scanners and software, examining the extra equipment on the cel tower, or any similar sort of investigation (Electronics rolls, etc.) will likely turn up at least some of the following intriguing extra features to phone service in Winslow:

- All telephone calls (including cellular calls, modem connections, etc.) in town are on a half-second time delay, both incoming and outgoing. Before a phone call is completed, the number called is checked against the HelpLink! database; “problem” numbers (FBI, NSA, etc.) are red-flagged for immediate investigation by a HelpLink! controller or by a Sheriff’s deputy (or both).
- These calls (and any others) can be diverted to completely wrong numbers, given a busy signal, sent into an innocuous-sounding voice mail system, or simply allowed to connect, if Sheriff Taylor or Dr. Clark thinks it’s advisable. Deputies are sent to the source of the call, if it looks like trouble.
- The phone switching equipment sends two signals, one to (or from) the phone in Winslow in use, and one to a second number (the mainframe in HelpLink! headquarters -- a Computer Use or Electronics roll will let the investigators trace that number). Cellular calls are similarly monitored using a cellular modem in the cel tower box. These calls can be recorded or monitored live, of course.
- Similarly, the contents of any modem call, cellular or otherwise, are immediately downloaded to the HelpLink! database -- encrypted messages, messages to .gov domains, or messages using any “trigger words” (HelpLink!, Brewster, Heathcliff, Rush, Emmett, Badagian, NSA, FBI, etc.) sound alarms at Taylor’s desk and at the HelpLink! controllers’ stations.

## **The Walkright Inn**

A local establishment consisting of two wings of motel rooms; one is the quick-assignment wing for locals, and the other is the out-of-towner wing. Jerry Heathcliff stayed here. Electronic room keys and guest registry, of course; the data are immediately downloaded to HelpLink! and flagged for Sheriff Taylor and Dr. Clark’s observation.

Many of the rooms here are taken up by young, male, slightly desperate-looking temps here for training at the HelpLink! center. Investigators coming and going anywhere between 8 and 9 will run into them hurrying to work in their JC Penney suits.

## **The Motor 6**

Part of a national chain, it boasts clean but cheap rooms. Badagian stayed here, as did Rush and Emmett. Room keys and guest registry are handled the same here as at the Walkright Inn, above.

Many of the rooms here are taken up by 30-ish, female, slightly desperate-looking temps here for training at the HelpLink! center. Investigators coming and going anywhere between 8 and 9 will run into them hurrying to work in their JC Penney business ensembles.

## **Computer City**

This is the local electronics shop; dumpster diving behind it will reveal that its biggest customer by far is the HelpLink! office with the Sheriff’s office not far behind. This is also the site of the local Internet Service Provider, run by a former HelpLink! temp in too deep to rebel. Like the cable service, its prices are quite competitive.

## **Postboxes, Inc.**

This is the local substitute for the U.S. Post Office (a drab building a couple of streets away from the Town Hall). Here, residents rent boxes and send packages using UPS, FedEx, etc. Such packages from outside are always dropped off here to be delivered locally. If the investigators are receiving packages from Washington (or wherever), the tracking software here will notice it; Taylor may look into it if something dangerous or uncommon (guns, laptops, magic books) shows up here for the investigators.

## Elbow Lounge

This local bar is an excellent place to get the gossip on Badagian's death ("damn trucks got no business blowing through here") and his behavior ("he seemed a little jumpy, but them big-city folks are like that, ya know") and activities before then ("kept poking at the phone wires and readin' dials off a computer he had"). Fast Talk, Persuade, or pure role-playing can all work here, at the Keeper's discretion. With an Idea roll, the investigators should be allowed to remember that anyone who will freely discuss the last nosy stranger in town will likely be happy to discuss *them* if anyone asks ("Sure enough, Sheriff, they were asking a lot of questions about that government feller. Didn't think nothing of it at the time...").

## Winslow Weekly Shopper

The local paper is run out of a red brick building near the center of town. The editor, Franklin Walters, is a useless old fogey who thinks the world rises and falls on sales at Wal-Mart and the score of the Lady Cornhuskers basketball game. This week's issue has a short squib on page 3 about the "tragic car accident" and spells Badagian's name wrong. Perusing back issues is difficult at best; they're kept in a big metal file cabinet in no discernible order. Four hours of work and a successful Library Use roll will uncover two more suspicious deaths: the suicide of Merle Vaughn, pastor of the Winslow Evangelical Baptist Church of God in 1991 (his church closed shortly thereafter) and the fatal electrocution of Steve Gibbs, an Ameritech telephone repairman who was helping bring the town's phone system back up after the 1993 flood. Walters doesn't remember anything about either incident, feeling that such bad news reflects poorly on the town.

Nobody in town will remember much about the phone repairman, although they might recall his death if prompted (it was five years ago, after all). Pastor Vaughn was a more colorful fellow, and carefully roleplayed pumping might get some folks to recall that he was "hopping mad about the Devil's work in Winslow" and that he'd refused to get cable because "it let Satan see into your house." Oh yeah, he'd also thought that Social Security numbers and UPC symbols were the Biblical Mark of the Beast, and supermarket scanners were "doing Satan's work." Still more careful pumping will reveal that he committed suicide when somehow it got around that he was a closeted gay man. "It's a shame," they'll say, "he was quite a character."

## Winslow High School

The "Home of the Fighting Cornhuskers" is a large red-brick and concrete high school on the northern edge of town. Banners all over proclaim the incipient crowning of the Corn Queen on the night of the 30th and the homecoming game against Eudora High. Ironically enough, although this particular archaic survival has no direct connection to the events in Winslow, the evening of the pageant is both propitious and convenient for the summoning of the Dry Corn Goddess, since most of the town will be at the game and pageant.

Behind the football field is a stand of cottonwood trees about 30 yards thick; behind that is the first of many miles of cornfields on the edge of town. A subterranean creek is the reason for the cottonwood growth; it has shoved a number of granite boulders to the surface over the centuries. This tangled patch of trees (and the boulders scattered through it) is a major makeout spot for the high schoolers, although they'll all be at the game on the night of the 30th. The Keeper may allow two of the students to have seen Trey Ritter marking locations on his map the night of the 28th or 29th, if the investigators ask around the school.

## HelpLink! Regional Training Center

This blocky building sits in a parking lot on the east edge of Winslow's "downtown." It was built for HelpLink! when they moved into town in 1985, and its strip-mall architecture doesn't really mesh with either Winslow's older frame buildings or with the quickie concrete box jobs thrown up in the 1940s and 1950s. The building itself is rectangular with windows only on the front wall. A satellite dish sits on top of the building alongside a fairly ornate air-conditioner vent and pump unit. If the investigators are already suspicious, the Keeper might allow an Architecture or Mechanical Repair roll to notice that the AC system is more powerful and sophisticated than the building would need. Similarly suspicious investigators who make a Spot Hidden roll can notice that there is no utility pole in the rear parking lot: apparently, the HelpLink! building has a buried power and phone line instead.

Dumpster diving behind the building will turn up a number of FedEx and other package wrappers from something called Central Data Processing in Newark, New Jersey. There are many fewer envelopes of any kind from the HelpLink! headquarters at a Post Office box in Midland, Texas. If the investigators need a little extra help, some discarded print runs might be in the dumpster as well giving a sample telephone survey script, complete transaction records of the local Wal-Mart for the past two weeks, the complete traffic analysis of Winslow's downtown for last Saturday, or the number and kind of products ordered from all three shopping channels by every woman in Winslow. A successful Psychoanalysis or Psychology roll indicates that the sample telephone survey script is a cleverly rewritten version of the standard MMI personality profile test using consumer brand preferences, movies enjoyed, etc. to develop the same type of scores.

*HelpLink! Building Security:* The building has a fairly sophisticated alarm system (Locksmith or Electronics at -20% to defeat); the Training Evaluation door and the back door both have keypad entry systems (Locksmith or Electronics at half to defeat). Closed-circuit cameras pan the bullpen and the training evaluation office from the centers of their ceiling regularly, although nobody pays any attention to what it shows except at night. A sheriff's deputy is theoretically watching the screen in the police office to make sure nobody breaks in, but he usually blows it off (checking only every 2d10 minutes or so). If the sheriff has decided that there are, in fact, nosy government investigators in town, he will make sure that the deputy is paying better attention. If so, a roll of 1 on a d6 indicates the deputy is watching at any given moment; if the roll is 2-6, he will check the screen in that many minutes.

*The Reception Area:* Staffed by a clueless cornfed local girl, the reception area holds some teal vinyl couches, copies of *Business Week* and *People* on the formica end tables, and a couple of fake-looking plants. The receptionist's desk has the normal phone, computer, etc.; one button on the phone is marked "Dr. Clark"; the others all just have extensions. The receptionist will press the "Flash" button on the phone if anyone from out of town shows up and asks for Dr. Clark. The final ornament to this room is a brochure rack holding promotional brochures about HelpLink! such as "Selling Fun For Spare \$\$\$," "Work In The Fast-Growing Targeted Marketing Industry," "Set Your Job To Fit Your Hours," etc. These brochures cover (and obscure with happy-talk and persiflage) the basic "overt" story of HelpLink! as given on p. 00. The rear wall of the reception area is a window looking into the bullpen.

*The Bullpen:* This large space is divided into serried ranks of cubicles, full of harried-looking twentysomethings in JC Penney officewear talking on phones, typing on computers, working at keypunch stations, etc. These are the most promising temps from HelpLink! operations in the Midwest; here they are being tested and trained in the phone surveys, traffic-pattern and mailroom analysis, and so forth that HelpLink! does so well. It will take a detailed examination of an individual workstation to determine that this training differs from standard "office assistant" or telemarketer training. The office manager, a large and

ill-tempered woman in her 50s, will make sure that no strangers go poking around in the bullpen, and keeps all the temps being trained here under close scrutiny. She has been warned by Dr. Clark that HelpLink!’s competition would dearly love to find out about HelpLink!’s training techniques: she is a dupe, but a dedicated one. Her cubicle is in one back corner of the bullpen; a door marked “Training Evaluation Office” is in the other.

*Training Evaluation Offices:* This room holds three workstations running the sociodynamic modeling software tracking every door of every building, every monetary exchange, every “rolling stop,” every phone conversation, every cable channel change, etc. in Winslow. The mainframe is in the basement, as even a cursory Electronics or Computer Use roll will reveal from the direction of the coax cables running off the workstations. Three HelpLink! high-level staffers work here checking for anomalies, monitoring experiments, etc. under Dr. Clark’s direction. Even a glance at the screens will tell the casual observer that this place has very little to do with temp training; a few minutes and a successful roll in Anthropology, Computer Use or Psychology will discern the basic function of the software. A shelving unit holds racks of blank CD-ROMs, FedEx envelopes preaddressed to Central Data Processing in Newark, and a printer. Some of the final data from the Winslow Project may already be on CD-ROM here ready to be sent off, at the Keeper’s discretion. An open concrete stairway leads into the basement; opposite that is the door to Dr. Clark’s office.

*Basement:* This concrete-lined room is dominated by a very large mainframe of some sort, nearly obscured by the cooling hoses, static guards, etc. around it. A terminal and keyboard allow diagnostics and adjustments to the system. One corner of the basement holds a propane tank for heating and for running a small emergency generator (if the power goes out in town). A thick (3 or 4 feet in diameter) tangle of cables runs from an opening in the wall through a bank of surge protectors and into the mainframe -- these cables carry power, surveillance data, phone/cable connections, etc. Nothing in this room can be used to cut them, but characters with axes could conceivably chop through the entire cable net in a matter of minutes (Electrical Repair roll to avoid being caught in a shower of sparks; on a fumble, the axe-wielding Investigator is jolted for 2d8 points and stunned). A smaller tangle of coax cables runs from the ceiling down a wall and into the mainframe at a different entry port -- these cables connect to the workstations upstairs. After the night of the 28th, there are also a number of C-4 triggers and smaller propane tanks strategically placed around the room -- a successful Demolitions or Architecture roll lets investigators know that those triggers are set up to destroy the building. The triggering mechanism is a cellular phone, which Sheriff Taylor and Dr. Clark (and nobody else) know the number of.

*Dr. Clark’s Office:* This small and windowless office holds a desk, a workstation, and an uninspiring office shelving unit. Computer printouts are stacked neatly on the desk; investigators examining them will need a successful Anthropology or Psychology roll to understand the nature of the HelpLink! operation here, although describing things like a complete traffic-flow map of Winslow or graphs showing “likelihood to call phone-sex lines by demographic subcategories” may give some clues anyway. The other main clues in the office are Dr. Clark’s phone, with a speed-dial to Taylor’s private line; airline tickets on an October 1 flight from Minneapolis to Newark locked in his desk drawer and made out to “Edward Mandell,” a New Jersey driver’s license for Mandell (the picture, of course, is of Clark) is in the ticket envelope; and Clark’s “insurance policy,” a fairly complete rundown of the Winslow Project, a selection of emails from mysterious highers-up in HelpLink! and Brewster Holdings, a detailed dossier on Sheriff Taylor that reveals his membership in the Brotherhood of Dion (Clark doesn’t realize the significance of this fact, but he knows Taylor is the real power in this op), all kept on a CD-ROM inside a jewel case racked with other innocuous-seeming software in the shelf above his desk. (Keepers might allow a Spot Hidden or Computer Use roll to notice that that particular software doesn’t run on Clark’s workstation.)

## Business 65

Business 65 is a stretch of U.S. Highway 65 that runs around Winslow on the west; travelers who don't wish to slow down to pass through Winslow on Highway 65 proper can avoid the speed zones and take Business 65 instead, rejoining U.S. 65 on the far side of town. Trucks, especially those carrying unlicensed cargo, often take Business 65 to avoid the more heavily policed Interstate. Two locations along Business 65 are notable for this scenario, the actual scene of Neil Badagian's death, and the barn where Peter Travis' pesticide truck is being stored.

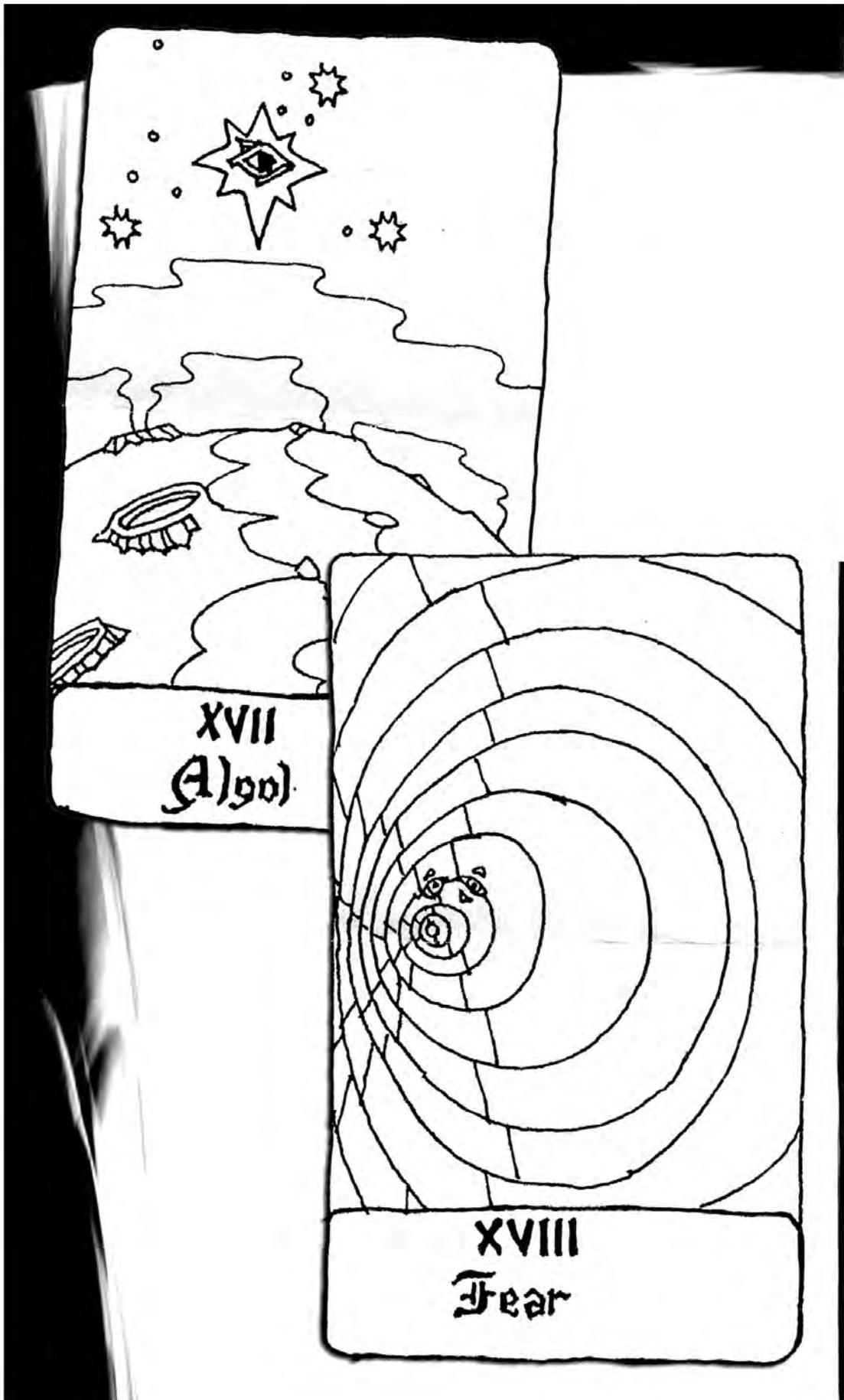
*The Scene of the Accident:* The police report on Badagian's "accident" gives a location 300 yards past mile marker 9 on Business 65 as the site of his death. Unlike the time and cause of death reported, the location is fairly accurate. A Forensics or Spot Hidden roll at the site will uncover a few clues that all is not as it seems.

- Safety glass from the side window of Badagian's car can be found in the gravel on the shoulder of the highway, but very little can be found in the drainage ditch where he theoretically burst through the windshield.
- There are no signs of skid marks indicating a high-speed exit from the highway into the ditch; rather what few marks there are seem to indicate the car made a standing start from the shoulder and then went into the ditch.
- The tree, supposedly struck by the car at high speed, is still standing, and shows less impact damage than it should.
- An extra Spot Hidden roll might also uncover a few bloodstains on the gravel shoulder near the window glass; none can be seen anywhere in the drainage ditch or nearby.
- Investigators putting it all together (with another Forensics roll, or even an Idea) are likely to come to the wholly accurate conclusion that Badagian had stopped for some reason (such as being pulled over by a Sheriff's deputy), that his window had been broken by the officer's truncheon, and that he was beaten to death on the side of the road after being dragged out of the car. His car was then sent into the ditch with a brick on the gas pedal and a cursory breaking of the windshield to replicate a fatal accident.

If the investigators have announced their presence to Sheriff Taylor, he will take the earliest opportunity to order a deputy to erase these clues -- drive over the skid marks, chop down the tree, dump a few gallons of water around and generally obscure things. The Keeper may decide how successful these efforts are, or whether the evidence of a cover-up is enough to spur the investigators onward.

*The Abandoned Barn and Pesticide Truck:* Although investigators are unlikely to prowling the entire length of Business 65 looking for clues, they might be led here by discussions with Peter Travis or some other means. Investigators with a sufficiently sound reason to go looking for them (and a successful Spot Hidden) will spot very deep truck tire tracks (such as might be made by an 18-wheeler or two) in the dirt road leading off to a local barn. Plenty of other barns sit in eyeshot of Business 65, but a successful Track roll will reveal that tractor tracks or even pickup tracks look very, very different from these. This particular barn had been empty for a decade until Sheriff Taylor used it to store Peter Travis' truck.

Travis was pulled over by Taylor, knocked out, and taken to jail by a deputy while Taylor and his men pulled the truck off the highway and into the barn. The truck's registry is already suspect (Taylor used an Iowa Highway Patrol list of trucks suspected of illegal freight hauling to make the selection of Travis -- enough such trucks use Business 65 that it wasn't really a gamble), and the changes HelpLink! computers have made to the relevant companies' records make it even more so. The truck's cargo of pesticides has



been enhanced with teratogenic toxins, deadly PCBs and other hazardous waste trucked in from a Brewster Holdings-controlled chemical plant in Gary, Indiana. This truck is the prop for the pre-planned coverup, to be orchestrated through Brotherhood assets in the press. The coming of the Dry Corn Goddess and the destruction of the town will be blamed on its deadly cargo, and the existence of deadly biohazards will ensure that the bodies and burned buildings won't be examined too closely.

## **THE INVESTIGATORS ARRIVE**

The way the investigators initially approach Winslow will determine much of what follows. Investigators who announce themselves to Sheriff Taylor as government officials (whether using their false FBI cover or an actual government agency involvement) will get a bland promise of cooperation and a quick whitewash. Any attempts to independently interview witnesses, examine putative crime scenes, etc. will be hampered by the Sheriff whenever possible. If the investigators seem unwilling to accept Sheriff Taylor's assurances, he will bring up their lack of jurisdiction in the matter (with a great show of reluctance), and regret that his cooperation is not enough for them. He will also take steps to cover up or destroy any evidence regarding Badagian's death. Investigators using the phony Delta Green FBI IDs face a more serious problem: if they make a nuisance of themselves, Taylor will call the SAC in Des Moines -- when the Des Moines FBI office denies any knowledge of such an investigation, Taylor will arrest the investigators for "impersonating Federal agents." The closer to the 30th that such arrests occur, the more likely Taylor is to simply execute them in jail and bury the bodies in a cornfield. (The Keeper should give the players time to try an escape, or at least time to hear Peter Travis' story, before gunning them down unarmed.) Regardless, he can hold them without formal charges for 48 hours completely legally, as a Law roll will inform the players. Taylor will not actively restrain announced Federal agents with legitimate cover until shortly before sundown on the 30th, when he will order seven deputies to waylay and kill them, using the full extent of the HelpLink! surveillance to set up the best possible ambush. If there is any evidence that Federal agents have uncovered the true nature of the Winslow Project (as opposed to the suspicious death of Neil Badagian), Taylor will order the ambush immediately.

Nosy strangers without Federal (or Iowa State Bureau of Investigation) credentials can poke around for a while without attracting official notice. However, they are continuously under HelpLink! surveillance, and any suspicious phone call or attention to critical areas (the HelpLink! building, Archer Wrecking & Salvage, the hospital) will draw Taylor's attention. (The Keeper can give the players as much of a lead time as she sees fit, but Taylor will definitely react by the day of the 30th.) Taylor and his deputies certainly stonewall any inquisitive types without "legitimate credentials." However, this is Iowa, and the ordinary folk are open and willing to talk to a friendly stranger. Low-impact surveillance by the investigators is most likely to give the longest lead time. However, any suspicious stranger who tries to leave town will be pulled over by a deputy and arrested ("the computer shows this car is stolen, sir"), jailed as long as the Keeper desires, and if they are let go, they'll be warned not to leave town. From that moment, Taylor will have them under observation, with orders to kill them at dusk on the 30th. (If the Keeper is using the implants from p. 00, a deputy may inject an implant into the arm of any arrested investigators.) Scofflaw investigators (such as, for instance, those caught breaking into the HelpLink! building at night) will also be arrested, regardless of their cover story.

## COURSES OF INVESTIGATION

The two primary areas where the Winslow Project is centered, the HelpLink! building and the Sheriff's office, are the two areas where the investigators' suspicions should be eventually aimed. A number of courses of investigation point that way:

- Investigators might see the explosives and tanks of propane being carried to the HelpLink! building the night of the 28th by deputies. If they interfere, of course, they can be arrested on any trumped-up charge imaginable.
- The murky nature of Badagian's death will point to the Sheriff's office as the only place that such a death could be covered up.
- The simple pattern of oddness in town will center on the creepily omnipresent police cars (allowing a Spot Hidden roll to spot one of the ubiquitous Ford Explorers on patrol is an excellent way to build mindless paranoia) and the conspicuous nature of the HelpLink! building and personnel will also attract attention. (Investigators staying at either motel are sure to run into the temps training there, for example.)
- Simply tracing any of the surveillance equipment will also lead back to the HelpLink! building or the Sheriff's office, or both.

The third main avenue of investigation is Trey Ritter, the Annealed sorcerer brought in to set up the sacrifice of the town. Ritter is conspicuous: he's black, first of all, which is enough to stand out in a small town like Winslow. Furthermore, he doesn't dress, talk, or carry himself like a Midwesterner -- he has an arrogant "East Coast" way about him and a subtly expensive Italian wardrobe. He arrives at the same time the investigators do, dusk on the 27th. He tells any curious questioners that he's working for an oil company. He spends his time tramping around the cornfields near the high school, taking careful readings with an expensive compass and theodolite and comparing them to a map of geomagnetic anomalies. This equipment, his map, a hunting knife with a bone handle (Forensics to notice that it's human bone), and an escrima stick are the only things that distinguish him from a conventional business traveler, and he keeps them with him at all times. (Keepers can give the investigators an edge by making Ritter a fellow guest at whichever motel the investigators have selected as their own base of operations.)

Killing Ritter will force Taylor to call in another adept; if Ritter is killed after noon on the 30th, it will effectively prevent the ceremony. Taylor will, of course, continue with his plans to destroy the town, but he will have to make a great deal more effort to round up stragglers. Of course, killing or attacking Ritter will draw the attention of Taylor and HelpLink! to the investigators; they will immediately strike back at the investigators with all available force, killing them "while resisting arrest" if at all possible. If they successfully flee Winslow, Taylor will charge them with murder (or attempted murder) and put out an APB on them.

## HOMEcomings NIGHT

Barring some unforeseen difficulty (like the death of Ritter), this is the Cult's plan for homecoming night, September 30. Two deputies will roust and handcuff three random teenagers on the fringes of the game crowd (underage drinking, possession of marijuana, or what have you). The deputies will take the teens into the cottonwoods near the high school, meeting Ritter and Taylor at a spot pre-selected by Ritter as proper for the sacrifice. Ritter will sacrifice the teens, smear their blood on his head and on the heads of Taylor and the deputies, timing the arrival of the Goddess for the height of the pageant (to ensure that as many townsfolk as possible will be in the football stands). Taylor and

his two deputies will each take one of the teenagers' livers, to smear blood on the other deputies and on Dr. Clark. Once the Goddess appears, Ritter will make his way to his car (parked nearby) and drive off, his work here done. Clark, meanwhile, has assembled his inner staff (the three controllers and the office manager) at the HelpLink! building, ostensibly to give them their payoff money for completing the project.

While the Goddess rampages through the town killing all in her path, Taylor will rendezvous with Clark at the HelpLink! building, kill all the other HelpLink! personnel and destroy the building. Clark will then get in his car, and drive to Minneapolis to catch his flight to Newark and assume his new life. Taylor will then meet up with three of his deputies at the abandoned barn on Business 65 where they've stored the truck; the deputies have brought Travis, now hopped on Benzedrine, along. Taylor and the deputies will duct-tape Travis' foot to the gas pedal, cut the brake cables, SuperGlue his hands to the wheel, and point the tanker truck down Taylor Street to slam into the Civil War cannon in front of the Town Hall and overturn, filling the town with deadly, toxic clouds of PCB-laced pesticides.

That accomplished, Taylor will leave town for Chicago, leaving his deputies to burn any inconvenient bodies and handle things with the media.

## Getting Weapons

Investigators who either brought no guns, or had theirs confiscated by the police, can always acquire them from the Wal-Mart or a pawn shop once the chaos ensues. (Unkind Keepers can force them to do battle with frothing, shotgun-wielding proprietors first, of course.) Other weapons, perhaps more effective against the Goddess, include a propane truck (available somewhere in town at the Keeper's discretion), firebombing a gas station as the Goddess passes by, or the tanker truck itself, loaded with deadly poisons, and perhaps primed to explode cinematically on impact.

### The Dry Corn Goddess

An avatar of Shub-Niggurath worshipped under many names across North America, the Dry Corn Goddess comes in a rustling cloud of pale-yellow limbs and stalks that closely resemble, unsurprisingly, a cornfield after a drought. She gives off a deadly cloud of golden pollen which does 1D6 points of suppurating damage to any exposed flesh it touches -- the flesh dries up and rots off the bone. Without expert plastic surgery, the target also loses 2 points of APP permanently if the pollen hits the face or head. She can shoot clouds of that pollen at selected targets; repeated exposure does additional damage. Inside her nest of stalks is a dark cloud of pure decay, like the rotted stubble left in the middle of the cornfield after harvest. Sharp-toothed skulls seem to bob and hover in her body and around her stalks; this may be a hallucination caused by the psychoactive nature of her pollen, however. Even though the skulls may not exist, something (whether the skulls or the serrated edges of her thicker ropy limbs) flenses and slices the flesh of anyone she grasps in her tendrils.

Anyone, that is, except those with the blood of a sacrificial victim on their forehead; before killing someone she will first grasp them with a limb and rub their forehead with a stalk covered in dry, scratchy cilia. If they do not bear the mark of her unholy Passover, she rips flesh from bone and moves on like the hot summer wind over a cornfield.

## AFTERMATH

Investigators who prevent the summoning of the Goddess should receive 1d6 Sanity points; those who destroy her receive 1d10 Sanity points. If they also save the majority of the town's citizenry from Taylor's murderous plot, they should receive an additional 1d6 points as a reward.

If the investigators also recover hard evidence of the Winslow Project, it can open up many avenues for further investigation, primarily of HelpLink! Taylor's ties to the Brotherhood of Dion, and Ritter's ties to the Cult, can be accentuated (and more evidence planted in their offices or suitcases) to propel the investigators onto the trail of either group.

## NPC STATISTICS

### Sheriff Woodrow "Woody" Taylor, Brotherhood of Dion Watchman

**Hearty Feudal Lord, Age 42**

Race: Caucasian

STR 17	CON 15	SIZ 17	INT 15	POW 15
DEX 15	APP 15	EDU 16	SAN 60	HP 17

Damage Bonus: +1D6

Skills: Credit Rating 80%, Demolitions 25%, Dodge 40%, Drive Auto 75%, Cthulhu Mythos 1%, Hide 40%, Jump 45%, Law 60%, Listen 55%, Martial Arts (freestyle) 35%, Navigation/Land 30%, Sneak 60%, Spot Hidden 65%, Throw 50%, Track 55%

Languages: English 70%

Attacks:

Fist/Punch 75%, 1D3+db

Grapple 70%, Special

Kick 55%, 1D6+db

Colt Python .357 Magnum, 60% 1D8+1D4

Remington Sportsman .30-06 Rifle, 70% 2D6+4

Mossberg Model 500AT8 12 gauge Shotgun, 75% 4D6/2D6/1D6

Armor: Light Kevlar Vest, 5 HP

### Dr. Herbert Clark, HelpLink! Regional Training Center Manager

**Amoral Applied Sociologist, Age 50**

Race: Caucasian

STR 11	CON 14	SIZ 13	INT 18	POW 14
DEX 14	APP 11	EDU 21	SAN 55	HP 12

Damage Bonus: none

Skills: Accounting 55%, Anthropology (Middle America) 90%, Conceal 35%, Computer Use 60%, Cthulhu Mythos 1%, Drive Auto 30%, Psychology 50%

Languages: English 90%, German 55%, Russian 55%

Attacks:

Fist/Punch 50%, 1D3+db  
Grapple 25%, Special  
Kick 25%, 1D6+db  
9mm Glock Pistol 25%, 1D10

## **“Trey Ritter,” Annealed And Refashioned**

**Superior To These Rubes, Age 31**

Race: African-American

STR 14	CON 16	SIZ 14	INT 16	POW 17
DEX 16	APP 12	EDU 20	SAN 0	HP 15

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Anthropology 25%, Archaeology 40%, Astronomy 15%, Cartography 40%, Cthulhu Mythos 24%, Drive Auto 40%, History 40%, Library Use 50%, Martial Arts (Escrima) 65%, Occult 65%

Languages: English 80%, Nahuatl 55%, Haitian Creole 65%

Attacks:

Fist/Punch 65%, 1D3+db

Grapple 45%, Special

Kick 45%, 1D6+db

Club 65%, 1D6+db (doubled for escrima attacks)

Spells: Command Ghost, Command Dog, Summon Fire Vampire, Call Dry Corn Goddess

### **New Spell: Call Dry Corn Goddess**

This spell must be cast at a site near a cornfield at night. The specific spot for the site will depend on local conditions; a consecrated altar is the best, but failing that a proper site can be determined using ley lines, earth energies, or numerological interpretations of geomagnetic anomaly maps. As with the spell Call Shub-Niggurath, 40 SIZ points of human blood sacrifice are needed to call the Dry Corn Goddess. The sacrificial victims must be ritually scarred in a process that takes about twenty minutes. The officiant, and any observers who do not wish to be slain by the Dry Corn Goddess, should smear some of the sacrificial blood on their foreheads.

## **Taylor County Sheriff’s Deputies**

**To Observe and Protect, 20s and 30s**

STR 15	CON 15	SIZ 16	INT 11	POW 12
DEX 13	APP 11	EDU 12	SAN 60	HP 16

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Drive Auto 60%, Hide 40%, Law 35%, Listen 60%, Sneak 50%, Spot Hidden 65%

Languages: English 60%

Attacks:

Fist/Punch 75%, 1D3+db

Grapple 60%, Special

Kick 40%, 1D6+db

Colt Python .357 Magnum 45%, 1D8+1D4

Mossberg Model 500AT8 12 gauge Shotgun 65%, 4D6/2D6/1D6

Armor: Light Kevlar Vest, 5 HP

## **HelpLink! Functionaries**

### **Drones In The Hive of Souls, 20s to 50s**

STR 11	CON 11	SIZ 13	INT 14	POW 10
DEX 13	APP 13	EDU 17	SAN 50	HP 12

Damage Bonus: none

Skills: Computer Use 60%, Hide 15%, Listen 30%, Psychology 25%, Sneak 15%, Spot Hidden 40%

Languages: English 85%

Attacks:

Fist/Punch 45%, 1D3+db

Grapple 20%, Special

Kick 25%, 1D6+db

## **The Dry Corn Goddess**

### **Avatar of Shub-Niggurath**

STR 72	CON 170	SIZ 120	INT 20
POW 70	DEX 19	HP 150	Move 15

Damage Bonus: +11D6

Attacks:

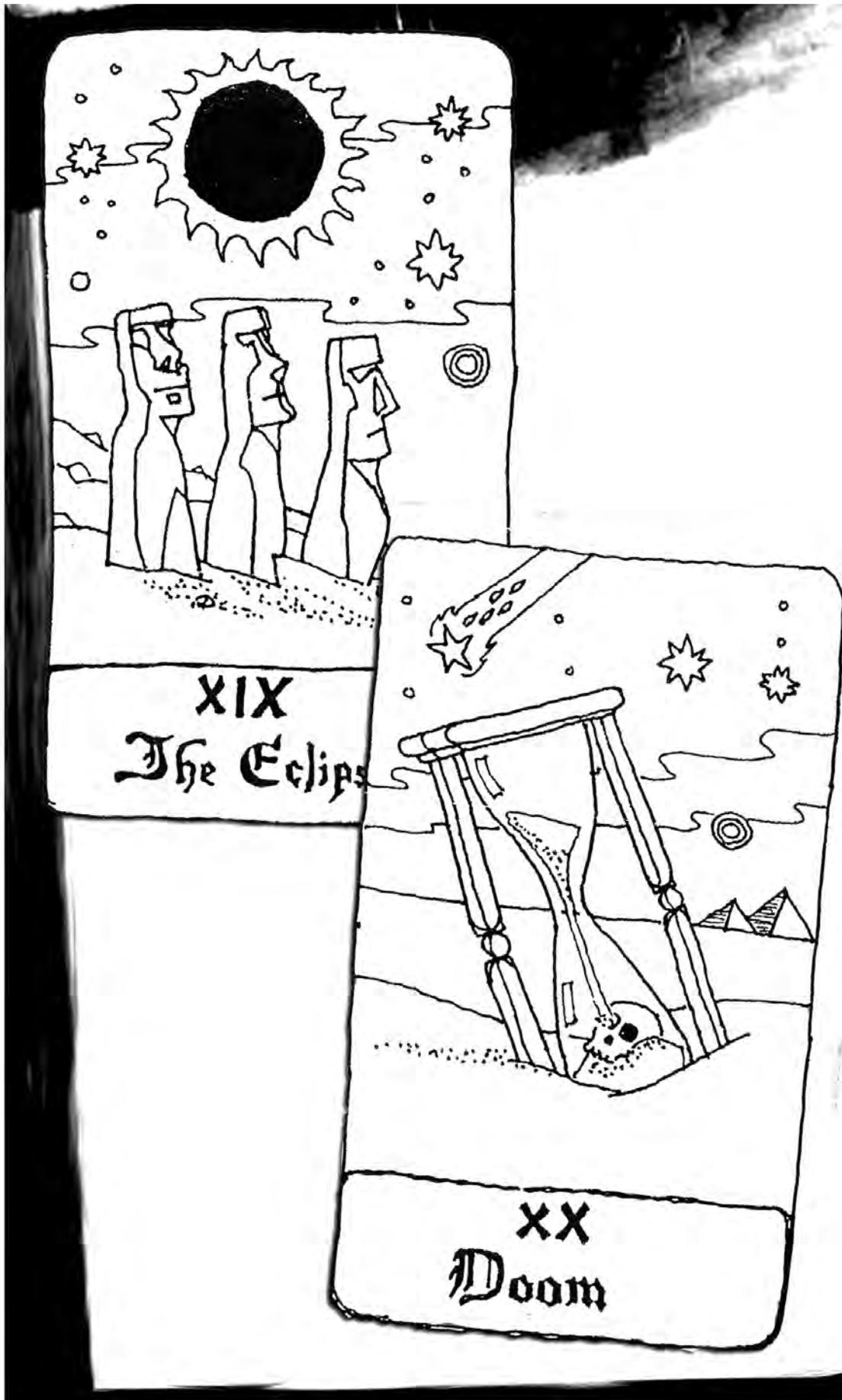
Suppuration Cloud 70%, 1D6 points to exposed flesh; 2 APP lost if the cloud strikes the target in the face

Flaying 90%, each successful limb grasp does 1D6 attacks for 2D6 points of damage each round; STR vs STR (or, more likely, burn the limb and the target) to escape

Armor: The Dry Corn Goddess is immune to physical weapons; bullets and blades pass through her cloud of floating stalks and pollen harmlessly. She takes normal damage from magical weapons, electricity, and especially fire. Each magic point she expends allows her to heal 2 points of damage.

Spells: Summon Dark Young, Shrivelling, Implant Fear, Wither Limb, any other spells the Keeper sees fit

SAN Loss: It costs 1D6/1D20 to see the Dry Corn Goddess; her examination of one's forehead for sacrificial blood costs 1D10/1D100.



# THE SHADOW FROM THE RIGHT

A book review of

*H.P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life*

Michel Houellebecq, 247 pages

Believer Books, San Francisco, \$18.00

Michel Houellebecq appears the very model of the modern litterateur -- essayist, novelist, poet, art-house screenwriter, even (to refute any hidebound notion of the tyranny of the word) a published photographer. French but not too much so (born on the island of Réunion in the deep Indian Ocean, currently living in Ireland), he's the winner of various high-sounding awards such as the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and the Prix Novembre, whatever that is. Even if it turns out to be for the biggest parsnip in Grenoble, you could probably get a fellowship in any East Coast university just by putting it on the application form. But not, however, if under "recent publications" you put "a savage appreciation of the work of H.P. Lovecraft." Not even one with a classy subtitle like *H.P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life*. No, the doors of the Academy must remain closed to such noisome, squamous utterances. So what's a nice guy like M. Houellebecq doing down here in the gutter with us pulp fans?

First of all, what's he doing? The opening chapters of Houellebecq's book (available at <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,1497922,00.html> from the *Guardian*, of all places) set out an initial claim to the worthiness of Lovecraft as a subject (Stephen King, in his amiable galumphing way, writes a prolix introduction to the same end) and immediately follow up with a clinching argument. Put perhaps over-simply: in an era where the Real is hateful, a mechanistic era without God, horror is the only true Realism. And Lovecraft is the twentieth century's unquestioned master of horror, a writer whose unflinching acceptance of the Real created a fantasy universe so powerful as to have become myth in our time. Lovecraft saw that the work of Darwin and Lyell and Shapley and Einstein fundamentally demonstrated that "human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large." His reaction to this realization, quite rightly, was existential terror. Lovecraft would no doubt consider my own reaction to the implications of deep time and relativity -- a fervent embrace of the pure Protestant doctrine of Faith -- to be cowardice, although he might have cut me the same slack he cut his Puritan forebears. ("I admire them more every day," he wrote to Long.) However, he was made of sterner stuff. In his letters and conversation, he faced up to the implications forthrightly and imperturbably, as a New England gentleman should. But in his fiction, Lovecraft let out the shrieks.

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Houellebecq does not center his analysis of Lovecraft's terrors on geology and cosmography, however, but on Lovecraft's racism. Specifically, Houellebecq argues that HPL's ego-shattering experiences in New York City -- the wreck of his marriage, his joblessness, the sheer experience of New York's polyglot crowds -- drove him over the edge. He moved to New York and initially experienced it as "hysterical exaltation" -- a primarily architectural reaction (Houellebecq is excellent on the architectural core of Lovecraft's aesthetics) and one that I certainly share. (Especially considering that he saw New York in 1924, before the butchery of the International Style took hold.) Even more importantly, the parochial, stiff Lovecraft was married to a cosmopolitan, sensual woman -- a Jew, even! The combination of New York and marriage cracked HPL's New England sang-froid forever. But his wife lost her job, Lovecraft couldn't find literary, or any, work (this in the Coolidge boom, the Jazz Age of Fitzgerald and the great pulp magazines), and what began with the "incredible peaks and pyramids" of architecture became "squalor and alienage" among "throngs" of "squat, swarthy strangers." These quotes all come, by the way, from the same 1925 story, "He," which Houellebecq convincingly reads as Lovecraft's autobiographical rejection letter to New York.

And Lovecraft's genteel, almost unconscious Rhode Island racism shattered along with the rest of him, replaced with characteristically Lovecraftian howls against "monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and amoebal ... suggestive of nothing but infesting worms or deep-sea unnamabilities." This isn't some monstrous species from his fiction -- this is a letter to Frank Belknap Long, describing the "Italo-Semitico-Mongoloid" natives of the Lower East Side. Houellebecq argues that this explosion of hysterical racial hatred -- and that's what it is, without question -- becomes the tsunami that thrusts Great Cthulhu above the waves in 1926, after Lovecraft has fled New York for the peace and safety of Providence. Unlike most Lovecraft aficionados, Houellebecq does not diminish HPL's racism or clothe it in contemporizing excuses. Here, he says, is the core of what turns a second-rate fictioner into the greatest horror writer of the century. This was the necessary wound (as much to us Lovecraftians as to Lovecraft) that filled him with not just rejection of the world, but rage and hatred of it. This is what took Lovecraft off the sidelines and set him "against the world, against life." Houellebecq notes (correctly) that Lovecraft did not take the easy way out, and feed "mongrels and Negroes" to the Elder Gods. His racism did not become power fantasy. No, Lovecraft's victims are invariably white, Anglo-Saxon scholars, the very model of HPL's idealized elite -- and, Houellebecq hints (though does not go far enough to say, as he is running rapidly out of pages), the very model of his audience. And further, of the modern literary world, or the portion of it that counts in the back pages of the *Guardian* once our multicultural obeisances have been made. We moderns *are* Lovecraft; his fears are our fears, and only he had the architect's eye to see it, the "rage" to write it, and the courage to claim it "without weakness."

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From the look of things, then, Houellebecq, and that portion of the modern world that does appreciate Lovecraft, appreciates Lovecraft the way the townsfolk appreciate the gunfighter in a John Ford Western -- from a distance, and after he is safely dead. But Houellebecq cuts deeper still. In the course of wrapping up his discussion, Houellebecq says:

The value of a human being today is measured in terms of his economic efficiency and his erotic potential -- that is to say, in terms of the two things Lovecraft most despised.

Horror writers are reactionaries in general, simply because they are particularly, one might even say *professionally*, aware of the existence of Evil. It is somewhat curious that among Lovecraft's numerous disciples none has been struck by this simple fact: the evolution of the modern world has made Lovecraftian phobias ever more present, ever more *alive*.

There are a lot of directions these two paragraphs can take us. I'm curious, for example, about how unconsciously (or consciously, for that matter) Houellebecq shares "Lovecraft's phobias." What *is* a nice guy like Houellebecq doing down here in the gutter?

Houellebecq has, as it happens, not been shy of controversy. He describes himself (aggressively, to the French literary establishment) as "petit bourgeois," and claims to have no political position. (To the question "right or left?" he responds, "No.") He seemingly hates both France and America, which is quite the trick in European letters. He despises 1968, and was ejected from the board of a leftist newspaper for writing the anti-liberal novel *Atomized*. Certainly, a good, progressive, literary Frenchman would most likely be eager to describe Michel Houellebecq as "against the world, against life." But is Houellebecq serious? A *Guardian* profile by Suzy Mackenzie in 2002 says "he uses the language of the left to launch a rightwing assault" and quotes him: "I don't begin by wanting to be provocative exactly, no. But when I realize that what I say is provoking, I don't change it because of obstinacy. It's up to me. Nobody asked me to say it again." But if anything, Houellebecq seems to be a satirist first and a moralist second, with politics a distant third. With that said, though, at the end of the day his characters have more in common with HPL than I or the *Guardian* find comfortable. "We envy and admire the Negro because we long to regress like him to our animal selves ..." Houellebecq puts those words in the mouth of Bruno, a most un-Lovecraftian hedonist and madman -- but whose words are they?

For myself, I prefer to center Lovecraft's fictional power in his appreciation for 20th-century science, rather than his embrace of 19th-century racialism, and will note that as HPL's "great texts" go on, we hear ever less about "nautical-looking Negroes" and ever more about the indifference of the cosmos to all men of whichever color. Perhaps Houellebecq would consider that interpretation of HPL as cowardly as Lovecraft would consider my Calvinism.

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But I was primarily taken by Houellebecq's assertion that "horror writers are reactionaries in general." (It's useful, if not important, to note that this applies to writers, not to filmmakers -- the radical, or at least liberal, horror film dominates the field at least as much as reaction, or at least conservatism, does the horror story.) Perhaps this explains the more usual distaste of the *Guardian* books section, and our imaginary East Coast university, for horror writers? Conservatism, surely, can't create Art. "If horror writers are reactionaries, they can't be Artists, after all, and we're only in the Art business here." It's time that someone took this particular canard out and staked it in the heart. Leaving aside, say, Dante and Shakespeare, for whom more or less respectable arguments can be made about politics as foreign to us moderns as Lovecraft's crinoid-creatures, look at Coleridge and Eliot. Indisputably Artists, with a capital Art, and cutting-edge Artists, too, on the wave-front of Artistic Progress. And likewise, indisputably reactionaries, conservatives of the deepest dye in any aspect worth the name. Theocons, even, both of them, pure Religious Right, none of your libertarian tat. Sure, their lifestyles were occasionally Bohemian, but if being a rich factory-owner doesn't

disqualify Engels from the Left, the occasional bout with opium or adultery shouldn't take you out of the lists of the Right.

And, interestingly, both horrorists. Look at Coleridge's "Christabel" or Eliot's "The Dry Salvages." (Eliot quotes *Dracula* in "The Waste Land," to boot.) Lovecraft's reactionary, even archaic, conservatism is questioned only by his fervent acolyte S.T. Joshi, who is yet forced to admit that HPL's Depression-era conversion to socialism focused primarily on its elitist, technocratic, dirigiste aspects rather than springing from any urge to empower the people. ("A sort of fascistic socialism," is how HPL explains the enlightened government of the unthinkably advanced time-traveling cone-beings in "The Shadow Out of Time.") Other horrorists likewise: Ambrose Bierce (whose cynicism almost equaled Lovecraft's nihilism) rejected politics and implicitly democracy itself, Machen was of that peculiar High Medievalist sensibility that occasionally intersected with radicalism (as with William Morris) but not in his case, and Edgar Allan Poe was a Whig supporter and a self-conscious "Southern gentleman."

With some authors, placing them politically is trickier -- Bram Stoker, for instance, seems to have been a "single-issue voter" on the topic of Irish nationalism, which drew him toward the British liberals much as being a Palestinian nationalist does today. But *Dracula* is as clear a paean to Victorian middle-class values (Houellebecq's "petit bourgeois") as any novel ever written. Mary Shelley, likewise, was radical by birth and marriage, but was considerably to the right of her father or her husband (and in her later life, spent much effort muddying the waters of Percy Shelley's radical beliefs). *Frankenstein*, although more politically fraught than *Dracula*, can easily be read as a pure refutation of Rousseau's "natural man" and a horrified reaction to the implications of Percy Shelley's (and her own) atheism. (The parlor radical Polidori's *Vampyre* likewise can be read as a reaction against the rejection of social values by a Byronic aristocrat.) Certainly the business of reading politics from fiction is a minefield -- one might not ever guess from Hawthorne's works that he was an intensely partisan Democrat. (How much of that was cronyism rather than conviction I shall leave for others to discern.) But it's not entirely illegitimate. A reading of *Tommyknockers* or *Dreamcatcher* isn't likely to leave you deluded into thinking that Stephen King is a Republican. But although he is as stereotypical a Maine liberal (giving \$150,000 to the Maine Democratic party in 2002 alone) as HPL was a WASP reactionary, King is condemned out of his own mouth, from his own study of horror, *Danse Macabre*: "The horror story, beneath its fangs and fright wig, is as conservative as an Illinois Republican in a three-piece pinstripe suit." The art is conservative, the fear is reactionary. And if you fear the implications of that truth, Michel Houellebecq will welcome you to the club.

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But does even the anti-modern, rage-provoking Houellebecq -- reactionary or no -- really get Lovecraft? Let's recast Houellebecq's argument, that "Horror writers are reactionaries in general, simply because they are particularly, one might even say professionally, aware of the existence of Evil," into the following logical form:

**Clear Premise One:** A reactionary can be defined as one who is aware of (or, less confrontationally, believes in) the existence of Evil.

**Slightly Less Clear Premise Two:** Horror writing is particularly bound up in, or somehow intimate with, the concept of Evil, and thus requires some awareness of Evil from its practitioners.

**Conclusion:** Horror writers are reactionaries “in general.”

**Empirical Demonstration:** Horace Walpole, Lovecraft, Machen, Poe, M.R. James, and Bierce were all (political) reactionaries of one or another stripe, and every horror masterpiece can at least be read convincingly as a politically reactionary (or at least conservative) work, despite the confused (Stoker, LeFanu -- both Irishmen, of course), liberal (Bloch, King), or outright radical (Mary Shelley, Maturin) beliefs of their writers. This is certainly outside the normal political distribution for writers and works in general in the last 200-odd years.

Let’s unpack these premises. Premise One is fairly unexceptionable, to historians of political philosophy, at any rate. On a broad scale, albeit in the flat, impoverished, one-dimensional language of post-1789 political discourse, one may contrast “reactionaries,” who believe in capital-E Evil as an absolute entity, with “progressives,” who, following Rousseau among others, believe in the existence of “evil” as a social construct. I’m aware that some political philosophers, most recently and significantly John Rawls, try to get around that sticky spot by attempting to define the Good such that with or without Evil it withstands analysis. To them, I say “good luck with that.” If Kant couldn’t do it, nobody can. As far as such things go, then, Houellebecq’s dividing line between “reactionaries” and “progressives” is on solid, or at least recognizable, ground.

Premise Two is actually an argument rather than the axiom that Houellebecq dresses it up as. Certainly “supernatural horror,” to use Lovecraft’s phrase, assumes the existence of Evil. The devil is in the details; to what extent is *Psycho*, say, about Evil, much less *Cujo*, which is about a being (a rabid St. Bernard) without any moral agency whatever -- even if a dog could be good or evil, surely a rabid dog cannot be said to hold any *mens rea*. Houellebecq, one imagines, would argue that a novel like *Cujo* depends for its horror, for its effect, on the subtle (or un-subtle) ways that Stephen King annexes the traditional tropes and signifiers of supernatural horror, of Evil, to a sad story about a dog that kills a few people. To produce horror that “feels like” horror, a horror writer must import elements that “feel like” Evil into his story, and therefore must, pace Houellebecq and King, import elements of Reaction into his thought. If we grant that assumption (for the time being) we may not be any happier in fine, but we can at least follow the axiom along and check our conclusion.

The Conclusion is thus on the order of: “Writers of religious music are devout in general.” This seems unexceptionable as well, and a similar search through the great church composers turns up people like Luther and Bach and Pope Gregory and John Chrysostom and so forth. So, is Houellebecq right?

Well, that church search also turns up Mozart, whose *Requiem* is, if not *the* greatest, certainly among the greatest pieces of religious music ever. And who would almost certainly qualify as “impious” (our imaginary counter-category to “devout”) by any stretch, what with the Freemasonry and the whoring.

And here we hit on the problem with Houellebecq, and, by French-style extension, with French thought in general -- it’s beautiful, and perhaps even occasionally illuminating, in theory, but its keel will grind on the occasional reef of the specific. Houellebecq runs aground, for example, on Mary Shelley, not merely a progressive but an atheist at the time she wrote her masterpiece. Although one might save the argument, and Mary Shelley’s progressivism, by reading *Frankenstein* not as horror but as “metaphysical science fiction,” on the theme “what if the absence of God actually did have consequences for human nature?” I personally think any reading of *Frankenstein* that doesn’t treat it as horror is cheating. And more to the point, we run far more seriously aground, of all places, where our voyage began -- with Lovecraft.

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Because Lovecraft, although indisputably a political, aesthetic, and temperamental reactionary by anyone's definition (even, grudgingly, by S.T. Joshi's) when he produced his greatest works, was not ever a believer in Evil. (Good and Evil and indeed morality were, to Lovecraft, "Victorian fictions.") Even the most casual dip into the Selected Letters demonstrates his deep, unbending dismissal of anything remotely supernatural, whether divine or demonic. If you go by sheer word count, Lovecraft was a prolific epistolarian defender of pure "mechanistic materialism" (pace Houellebecq, progressivism) who occasionally dabbled in horror stories. (One begins to suspect that's how Joshi reads him, too.) Not even Lovecraft's horror believes in Evil; the extinction of humanity by Cthulhu, HPL tells us, has no more moral content than Cujo's rabies. Can Houellebecq's argument withstand his own putative divorce between Lovecraft the materialist and Lovecraft the horrorist, a divorce that Houellebecq's own argument makes mandatory, but that any conventional reading -- whether mine or Joshi's, or even Houellebecq's -- of Lovecraft's fiction makes risible?

I don't know. There's a lot of there, there, and I suspect the truth lies more in divorcing political reaction from philosophical reaction or, better yet, a long-overdue abandoning of the whole post-1789 framework.

But I'll leave the last word for the father of the horror genre, the category-breaking gay, conservative Whig, Horace Walpole: "I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew on my hands, and I grew fond of it -- add that I was very glad to think of anything rather than politics..."

# THE MAN WHO SHOT JOSEPH CURWEN:

Prolegomena to a Critical  
Approach to *Call of Cthulhu*

*“And as I said before, I haven’t any mental energy to spare on unamusing side-lines. It’s just the same with games. Meaningless spotted pasteboards, carved castles and horses’ heads ... No, Grandpa ain’t made to relish sech didoes! All these things are, in their superior form, simply by-products of excess intellectuality -- which I haven’t the honour to possess. In their inferior form they are of course simply avenues of escape for persons with too poorly proportioned and correlated a perspective to distinguish betwixt the frivolous and the relevant...”*

-- H.P. Lovecraft, letter to James F. Morton,  
Feb. 2, 1932 (*Selected Letters IV*, p. 13)

H.P. Lovecraft would think I was wasting my time. And, if you go by the vast majority of roleplaying games out there, you’d be hard pressed to prove him wrong. Almost without exception, the most popular games are the ones that encourage “avenues of escape,” usually into the purest adolescent power fantasy. In *Dungeons & Dragons*, for example, you are stronger, faster, and better at killing things than most people, you have magic powers (or magic items) that are sheerly impossible, and there’s nothing to prevent you from killing things and taking their belongings, by which deeds you grow ever more powerful. Especially in early versions of *Vampire*, the power fantasy was even more explicitly adolescent -- you had all manner of cool, romantic abilities that centered around staying out all night and cruising, but the Elders kept frustrating you for their own arbitrary reasons. Throughout it, your vampire is urged to wallow in his own sense of anguish, a pain that *nobody* can understand, worse than *anybody’s* pain, *ever*. Occasionally, games will present adolescent power fantasies with a scrim of morality -- alignments in some versions of *Dungeons & Dragons*, or the superheroic models of games like *Champions*. Sometimes the adolescent fantasy is merely one of “getting out of here,” complete with cool “free trader” spacecraft in *Traveller* or at least the vicarious thrills of Luke Skywalker’s adolescent escape in *Star Wars*.

But it’s all fundamentally adolescent power fantasies at bottom, or at the very most innocuous, escapism. And there’s nothing wrong with that -- we’ve all got that mistreated, misunderstood ego inside us who wants nothing more than to supercharge the old id and slaughter orcs. It’s worth recalling, as well, C.S. Lewis’ observation that the usual enemies of escapism are jailers. But it’s just not that important to think about. It’s not worth any more time than it takes to fill up the dungeon or stat out the starship. The whole medium of roleplaying is grossly underexamined by narratologists and scholars of drama, and deserving of far more critical attention. And this isn’t to say that no roleplaying game can be the subject of critical thinking -- if only as a product

of its times, *Vampire* repays a good deal of critical examination, for example. And some games -- the various *Lord of the Rings* games, for example -- might borrow the weight of their source material. But aside from such historicism or refraction, how much importance, how much moral weight, can you really attach to these narrative structures? I would say -- and I would expect most RPG designers to say -- pretty much none whatsoever. Almost the sole exception is Sandy Petersen's *Call of Cthulhu*.<sup>1</sup>

In *Call of Cthulhu*, your character explicitly starts no better than any other. There is no levelling up, no percentile strength, no special class skills or feats separating your character from any other citizen of Arkham. Yes, your character may well gain magical powers and travel to exotic destinations, as in other roleplaying games. But such "improvements" come at a cost, at the cost of lowering your irreplaceable Sanity. In *Call of Cthulhu*, the player knows at the outset that his character will go insane and die. That's a very different proposition from hoping that your character will become the vampiric Prince of Pittsburgh or get a Helm of Command at 18th level. Of course if that was all it was, *Call of Cthulhu* would simply be nihilistic, an exercise in masochistic masturbation. At best, its characters would resemble the decadent aesthetes of Lovecraft's short story "The Hound," seeking ever more outré pleasures, or perhaps the shortsighted Tillinghast in "From Beyond," accepting insanity as the necessary visa for interdimensional tourism. And in many of Lovecraft's stories, this is the case -- Lovecraft was, after all, a nihilist (albeit a gentlemanly nihilist) himself, who considered morality "mere Victorian fiction." The object of terror, for Lovecraft, is terror.

But a surprising number of Lovecraft's stories back away from that precipice. In those stories, terror provokes a response. In *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, Dr. Willett boldly investigates Ward's fate, and avenges him. In "The Thing on the Doorstep," Daniel Upton does the same for his unfortunate friend Edward Derby. Walter Gilman kills the witch Keziah Mason in "Dreams in the Witch-House," although he dies in the attempt. Although the narrator, Robert Olmstead, succumbs to "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," his warning inspires the FBI and the Navy to destroy the town. Professor Armitage exorcises "The Dunwich Horror," the police break up "The Horror at Red Hook," and the narrator dynamites the Martense mansion at the end of "The Lurking Fear." And most uncharacteristically of all, the Whipples armor up with "Crookes tubes" and flame-throwers to burn out the demonic entity within "The Shunned House." Some critics (such as S.T. Joshi) feel that these "naïve narratives" backpedal from Lovecraft's pure "mechanistic materialism" by positing responses to cosmic horror other than fetal surrender or panicked flight. However, in this context we can recognize them not as failed models of Lovecraftian philosophy, but as the successful seeds of *Call of Cthulhu* adventures. (The core rulebook, in fact, apotheosizes *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* as the ideal model for *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios.) In *Call of Cthulhu*, you suffer inevitable madness and danger and death for a purpose -- to defend the rest of Arkham, or the world, against the Cthulhu Mythos.

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1 One can make the argument, and I have, for a handful of other RPGs as bearers of moral weight, and thus worthy of serious critical examination. The world of Ray Winninger's *Underground* is explicitly designed as a critical examination of the superhero genre. Further, the direct connection in *Underground* between the characters' advancement and the increase in social justice in their neighborhood is almost nonexistent in other games, though Greg Stafford and Robin Laws' *HeroQuest* presents community service and improvement as one goal of heroquesting. John Tynes and Greg Stolze's *Unknown Armies*, although replete with cool powers and secret destinies, strongly foregrounds the question of consequences in a way most RPGs do not. And Vince Baker's *Dogs in the Vineyard* is the first Western RPG to genuinely confront the moral core of the genre, and it mechanically enforces that confrontation to produce a masterful examination of the twinned concepts of justice and responsibility.

That is a moral decision, to place your body and your sanity “between your loved homes, and the war’s desolation.” *Call of Cthulhu* is almost entirely unique in roleplaying games in that its characters are moral *adults*. They recognize something larger and more important than themselves or their safety. They accept self-sacrifice as the necessary price to pay to keep children safe in bed at night. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Or better yet, for complete strangers. And this is not merely the self-sacrifice of a fireman or a Marine. The Investigators in *Call of Cthulhu* adventures know that the true world is more terrible than fire or fascism, more horrific than anyone can imagine. They alone know the worst thing in the entire cosmos that can happen to a person -- and they bring it on themselves to keep it away from others. Now *that’s* a game worth playing. And more to the point, one worth thinking about critically.

“Make no mistake: Oklahoma is a lot more than a mere pioneer’s and promoter’s frontier. There are old, old tribes with old, old memories there; and when the tom-toms beat ceaselessly over brooding plains in the autumn the spirits of men are brought dangerously close to primal, whispered things.”

-- H.P. Lovecraft and Zealia Bishop, “The Mound”

So, granting our premise that *Call of Cthulhu* is, in fact, worthy of critical examination, how do we go about it? Well, in any literary pursuit, it’s best to start off with Aristotle’s *Poetics*, because nine times out of ten, you’ll find yourself back there anyway. Even without Aristotle’s hand-holding, it’s clear that *Call of Cthulhu* is a framework for tales of tragedy, ending in death and madness. A full campaign played to the end arouses, in Aristotle’s words, “pity and terror.” The central *agon* -- the conflict -- of the game, however, is not that between Investigators and the gods. It is, appropriately, larger -- more cosmic -- than that. It is not the heroes who have *hamartia*, the “tragic flaw.” It is, per Lovecraft, the universe that is flawed. (Or more Real than mere humanity can stand. It all depends on one’s perspective.) The *agon* is centered not on the heroes but on the universe. The universe, when faced squarely, will drive you mad, as it has at its heart the Cthulhu Mythos. However, scattered accidentally through the universe are innocent beings, the byproducts of monstrous ancient warfare. The heroic Investigators’ tragic *choice* is to choose to face the universe squarely, to learn about its truth -- the Mythos -- and by so doing, go mad. Only by dooming oneself to tragedy can you preserve the illusion -- again, per Lovecraft, that’s all we have -- of safety and goodness for those innocent others.

And that, as it happens, is also the central *agon* of the other great American narrative art form (besides fantastic fiction), the Western film. The *agon*, the central conflict, of every classic Western from *The Toll Road* in 1920 to *Unforgiven* in 1992 is as follows:

- Barbarism can only be defeated with the gun.
- All those who pick up the gun are barbarians.

This central tension is most visible in the Westerns of John Ford, such as *The Searchers*, in which John Wayne’s violent Indian-killer Ethan Edwards is needed to rescue Debbie from the Comanche, but his violence and hatred have no part in the civilization he returns her to. Another, even clearer example is Ford’s *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. This 1962 film tells the story of three men: Lee Marvin’s Liberty Valance, an outlaw who terrorizes the town of Shinbone, John Wayne’s Tom Doniphon, a rancher and deadly shot who keeps Valance at a distance, and Jimmy Stewart’s Ransom Stoddard, an Eastern lawyer who rejects the gun and tries to use the law and social pressure to defeat Valance. In a tense showdown, Valance is shot and killed. The town hails Stoddard as “the man who shot Liberty Valance,” and thanks

to this reputation, he is able to secure statehood -- and therefore peace and civilization -- for Shinbone's territory. However, this is a lie. The man who actually shot Liberty Valance is Tom Doniphan, firing from the shadows across the street. From that moment, Doniphan's life falls apart. He is rejected by his ideal woman in favor of the newly confident and lionized Stoddard, and dies a failure, drunken and unmourned. To secure the blessings of peace for Shinbone, Stoddard must allow the world to "print the legend."

This is the fate of the *Call of Cthulhu* Investigator, then. He is the Tom Doniphan of Arkham. He must defeat the Mythos in secret, from the shadows. To do so, he must understand, and perhaps even utilize, the Mythos -- spells from the *Necronomicon*, or greenish star-stones from the Elder Things' necropolis. Even telling the world of his actions endangers it, and should a Ransom Stoddard learn the truth, he must erase it, "print the legends" of decency and morality and conventional Euclidean geometry. And by those legends, those rules, the Investigator cannot be allowed. The Investigator becomes that which he destroys, a being tainted by the Mythos, eventually driven mad by it. Recasting the tension:

- Those Outside can only be defeated by understanding the Mythos.
- Those who understand the Mythos have moved Outside.

The "gun" of the Western becomes the Mythos tome, or star-stone, or Gate spell, or simple understanding of the threat in *Call of Cthulhu*. Mechanically, it's the Cthulhu Mythos skill, creeping upward and always eroding Sanity as it does. Lovecraft's stories bear this out less mechanically -- some of his heroes, such as Professor Armitage and Doctor Willett presumably remain useful members of society. Others, such as Robert Olmstead or Walter Gilman, give way to the horrors. Some few have their veracity, or their very sanity, questioned. In general, Lovecraft's less sane narrators are the ones who failed -- Thurston in "The Call of Cthulhu," Dyer in *At the Mountains of Madness*, etc. But you can see the skeleton (perhaps in pieces) of the *Call of Cthulhu* *agon* present in Lovecraft's overarching narrative structure none the less.

There is a way out, and it's one that Robert E. Howard, for example, would have jumped at. The Western is almost always about the moment in time in which the frontier moves on and civilization arrives, the "frontier moment." But presumably in the past, before that moment, the "necessary barbarian" could stay on, if only on the outskirts. The gunfighter Tom Doniphan begins the movie, after all, as Shinbone's favorite son. Another example: in the "past" of *High Noon*, Marshal Kane once rallied the townsfolk to drive out the villain Frank Miller. But in the filmic "present," the town is too civilized to help him. At the end Kane takes on Miller alone -- and leaves civilization behind.

Lovecraft will occasionally set his "frontier moment" in the past. Take, for example, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*. The evil sorcerer Joseph Curwen (the "Frank Miller" or "Liberty Valance" of the tale) meets a fiery doom in 1771 at the hands of a posse of heroic Investigators. They were able to go on with their lives, and Lovecraft notes that "every man of those leaders had a stirring part to play in later years." (HPL populates the posse with a number of Revolutionary War heroes from Rhode Island history.) But even then, they had to print the legend, to keep silence. "There is something frightful," Lovecraft writes, "in the care with which these actual raiders destroyed each scrap which bore the least allusion to the matter." Even in the wide-open heroic past, too much heroism was dangerous: "Hardest to explain was the nameless odour clinging to all the raiders..."

Although it may be less immediately apparent, one other parallel between the Lovecraftian story or *Call of Cthulhu* scenario and the Western obtrudes itself. That is the role of space, physical extent, and of the hostile and forbidding landscape. John Ford was fond of filming his heroes small and insignificant against the vast vistas of Monument Valley, emphasizing the mighty challenge of civilizing such a desert. Almost every Western worth the name is an interaction with the setting, with the land itself, if only in the cinematography. (*Liberty*

*Valance*, filmed mostly on a backlot, is a rare exception -- although Tom Doniphan's abandoned ranch has a very Dunwichian aspect to it.) Sometimes, as in *Shane*, the landscape almost becomes a character, and its character becomes an issue. Is it destined for (barbarian) ranching or (civilized) farming? Which will the land choose? Lovecraft, of course, used the wild hills and woods of western New England just as surely as Ford used the Arizona desert, and in almost exactly the same way.

HPL himself ascribes the American horror impulse to the landscape, in "Supernatural Horror in Literature," where he describes the Puritan reaction to "the strange and forbidding nature of the scene ... the vast and gloomy virgin forests in whose perpetual twilight all terrors might well lurk." Lovecraft even notes "hordes of coppery Indians [with] strange, saturnine visages and violent customs" that might come right out of the John Ford playbook. (Although Ford was far fairer to the Indians than was the racist Lovecraft.) And as Philip Shreffler notes in *The H.P. Lovecraft Companion*:

The scope of Lovecraft's horror stories becomes cosmic in nature; vast sweeps of space and time are the rule rather than the exception. And this is what gives Lovecraft such a peculiarly American character. From the days when English Anglicans hacked Jamestown out of the Virginia swamps and the Puritan Separatists braved the hostile environment of eastern Massachusetts on through to the present time, American writers have responded one way or another to the sheer immensity of their national landscape. What Daniel Boone used to refer to as "elbow room" has been transmuted in the hands of our artists into a kind of huge blank canvas on which grandiose philosophical ideas can be painted on a cosmic scale.

Thus the Western and Lovecraftian cosmicism spring, at least in part, from precisely the same stimuli. Is it any wonder that their responses to the demands of drama are so similar? Once you begin to look for it, you see the frontier everywhere in Lovecraft -- the pure exploration of *At the Mountains of Madness*, the terrors of native captivity in "The Whisperer in Darkness" (where the Mi-Go are the real First Americans), the frontiers of time itself in "The Shadow Out of Time" and "The Call of Cthulhu." But the frontier means danger, and the danger to Arkham and the world cannot be plowed under by sodbusters or talked away by Ransom Stoddards. It requires constant vigilance, and constant sacrifice. Every moment of mankind's history is the "frontier moment," because the Mythos transcends time. We must all of us -- from 1890s Golden Dawn members to 21st century Delta Green ops -- become the man who shot Joseph Curwen.

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