

The Kirkwood Farmhouse Investigation



A modern-day investigatory prelude to
'The Kirkwood Farmhouse Massacre' for 2-5 investigators



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CREDITS

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INTRODUCTION

KEEPER'S NOTE

This document provides a brief modern-day scenario for two to five investigators in a modern-day *Call of Cthulhu* setting and acts as a prologue for *The Kirkwood Farmhouse Massacre*, a haunted-house scenario also available at the Miskatonic Repository. This document allows investigators to uncover background details on the Kirkwood family and the abandoned town of Wintry Creek, Iowa, which will make for a more rewarding experience for groups playing through the companion scenario. Groups that complete the encounters detailed here can jump seamlessly into *The Kirkwood Farmhouse Massacre* or the keeper can come up with an original scenario to follow up on the mysteries introduced here.

SYNOPSIS

This scenario assumes the investigators are looking into the Kirkwood family massacre because they are a team of bloggers working for the website NewsSpin.

The team intends to put together a multimedia project on Clarence Thackery, a convicted serial killer sentenced to death for a series of grisly murders across Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas in 1924 and early 1925. The Kirkwood farmhouse, located in Bleak County in rural Iowa, is one of the murder sites linked to Thackery's rampage, and the bloggers want to collect photos, video and first-hand observations of the farmhouse for their web series.

KEEPER'S NOTE: Additional suggested motivations are available in *The Kirkwood Farmhouse Massacre*, which is also available at the Miskatonic Repository.

The investigators can gather clues regarding the Kirkwoods at various locations in Sunderland, the county seat of Bleak County. Locations of interest include the Bleak County Courthouse, the Bleak County Sheriff's Office, the Sunderland Observer-Gazette newspaper office and the Sunderland Area Historical Society. Through good role playing (and maybe some lucky dice rolls), the investigators will unearth clues calling into question the official story regarding the Kirkwood murders. A successful investigation may even lead them to a descendant of the undertaker who prepared the Kirkwoods' remains for burial.

BACKGROUND FOR THE KEEPER

The Kirkwood family bought several tracts of farmland southwest of the small village of Wintry Creek, Iowa, in the early 1900s. The family grew corn and other crops on the land, though the family's main motive for moving to the region centered on the First Church of Stoic Penitence, a hotbed of secret Mythos experimentation devoted to the imprisoned deity Cyaegha.

Boris Kirkwood rose to a position of prominence within the small church community, but his meditations on the Mythos drove him mad, leading him to ritualistically murder his wife, son and daughter in the cornfield near their home during the winter of 1924. Boris was convinced that the key to awakening Cyaegha from its long slumber required the mastery of travel through other plains of existence, including the Dreamlands. By murdering his family, he unleashed the sheer magical force required to open a permanent gate into the Dreamlands from the altar to Cyaegha hidden in the basement of his farmhouse. He has remained in the Dreamlands for years, growing ever more powerful in his quest for extra-planar knowledge. But his madness and the evil poisoning his heart have transformed him into something monstrous and inhuman.

Shortly after the murders, church officials discovered the slain Kirkwood family and immediately set out to cover up the crime as a means of diverting attention from their supernatural exploits. The church staged similar murders in several surrounding states and framed Clarence Thackery, an escaped convict who was easily portrayed as a deranged serial killer. A short time later, the First Church of Stoic Penitence dissolved and Wintry Creek unincorporated, leaving a desolate ghost town to decay on the dreary Iowa landscape. Church officials intended to demolish the Kirkwood property, but law enforcement agencies stepped in to preserve the crime scene. Eventually, the Sunderland Area Historical Society had the farmhouse added to the state's registry of historic places and provided paid tours of the house. Interest in the Kirkwoods gradually waned throughout the 1980s, and the farmhouse has stood abandoned and untouched since then.

But the spirits of the murdered Kirkwoods – Della Mae and her children Louise and Benjamin – haunt the farmhouse to the present day and cannot rest until someone uncovers the truth about their deaths. The spirits also wish to warn the world that even darker powers remain hidden in the nearby ghost town of Wintry Creek.

GATHERING CLUES

GETTING STARTED

When beginning play, the keeper should read the following:

You're a team of journalists, photographers and videographers working for the website NewsSpin. Your editor has sent you to rural Iowa to put together a multi-media piece on the Kirkwood Farmhouse Massacre, an incident in 1924 in which an entire family was slaughtered by a serial killer named Clarence Thackery, who was later convicted of carrying out several gruesome murders in three states and was executed.

You've decided to begin your investigation in Sunderland, the seat of Bleak County and the city nearest to the location of the Kirkwood murders, before you visit the farmhouse in the countryside where the family of four was killed. Online searches turned up several likely places to start your investigation: the Bleak County Courthouse, the Sunderland Area Historical Society and the Sunderland Observer-Gazette. How do you wish to proceed?

Visiting each of the three locations listed can turn up a list of clues that fill in the picture of what happened in 1924 and may even sow doubts among the investigators about the official story of what happened to the Kirkwoods. Particularly good role playing or a lucky break from the dice may turn up a lead to a fourth location, the home of Sandra Raef, the granddaughter of the undertaker who examined the remains of the Kirkwoods. Keepers should let the investigators visit each location in whatever order they choose, or even split up to cover ground faster. In that case, keepers should cut between the investigators at dramatic moments.

This investigation should provide the players with two key pieces of information. First, the investigators must determine the location of the Kirkwood property before they can explore it. They can find that information by speaking with Mrs. Tilly Hilton, president of the Sunderland Area Historical Society. If the investigators fail to get directions from Mrs. Hilton, the keeper must work that information in the scenario elsewhere. Additionally, the investigators should unearth enough clues during the course of their inquiry that they start to question the official story of how the Kirkwoods died.

LOCATION 1: THE BLEAK COUNTY COURTHOUSE

The courthouse stands in the center of a town square in the heart of Sunderland. The run-down brick building houses the county sheriff's office, which is the only local law enforcement agency in the area and where the investigators will be referred if they ask any questions about the Kirkwood massacre.

A sheriff's deputy with the name "Farrar" imprinted on his badge and a bored expression on his mustachioed face greets the investigators from behind a large wooden desk. Deputy Ernest Farrar will grudgingly admit that the department keeps a box of documents and evidence connected to the murders, and that the box is now part of the public record because the case was closed so long ago. If the investigators ask to see the box, Deputy Farrar makes it clear he's not thrilled to have to retrieve it from storage, though he eventually agrees. He sluggishly makes his way into the back office for several minutes before returning with a yellowed cardboard box and drops it on his desk with a thud.

"Take as long as you want," he says, though the expression on his face says something more along the lines of "make it quick."

Going through the box turns up a police report filed shortly after the discovery of the bodies, along with plastic evidence bags containing a soiled pair of gloves and a heavy axe head. A tag on the axe head labels it as the murder weapon, and a tag with the gloves indicates they were found at the scene and believed to be worn by the murderer.

The police report turns up the following key pieces of information:

- The victims were Boris Kirkwood (41 years old), Della Mae Kirkwood (38 years old), Louise Kirkwood (7 years old) and Benjamin Kirkwood (5 years old).
- The assailant snuck into the unlocked Kirkwood farmhouse sometime in the early morning hours of December 4, 1924, and bound each of the four members of the Kirkwood family. Their dismembered remains were found in the cornfield north of the home, along with a bloody pair of gloves and an axe head.
- The county coroner carried out autopsies on each of the victims, but the results of the autopsies remain under a court-ordered seal to "protect the privacy of the victims."
- Following the investigation, the remains of the Kirkwoods were turned over to undertaker Darwin Raef and the bodies were interred in a cemetery near the First Church of Stoic Penitence in Wintry Creek, Iowa.

If the investigators ask Deputy Farrar about the sealed autopsy results, he'll tell them he can't violate the court's seal. The keeper may call for an investigator to make a **Charm**, **Intimidate**, **Persuade** or **Fast Talk** roll. A success (and perhaps some good role playing by the players) will force Deputy Farrar to admit the seal likely has expired after 90-odd years. Reluctantly, he'll come back with an old file containing the autopsy report.

"It's funny that no one ever noticed the autopsy results before," he remarks as he hands it over.

Inside the file are several flimsy forms cataloging the carnage of the massacre. The first item of note is the coroner's conclusion that the Kirkwoods died some time before the bodies were dismembered, perhaps a day or more passing between when the Kirkwoods died and when their bodies were hacked apart. The coroner's report also notes that nearly all the remains of Della Mae, Louise and Benjamin were recovered by police, but none of Boris Kirkwood's remains were located.

If the investigators ask Deputy Farrar, or virtually anyone else in Sunderland, about the town of Wintry Creek, they explain that the town was unincorporated decades ago. The highway that went through the town was torn up, and most locals don't have a clear idea of exactly where the town was located.

LOCATION 2: THE SUNDERLAND AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The historical society is housed in what was once an old bank building bordering the town square. Members of the historical society converted the building into a modest museum containing exhibits on the history of the region. Most of the exhibits highlight the community's agricultural and pioneer heritage.

When the investigators enter the building, the only other person in the museum is Tilly Hilton, the historical society's elderly president, who enthusiastically greets the investigators and offers to show them around the museum.

If asked about the Kirkwood murders, she explains that the historical society actually owns the Kirkwood property where the massacre occurred. The historical society successfully got the property added to the Iowa Registry of Historic Places in the 1970s and restored the farmhouse to how it looked in 1924. However, interest in the Kirkwoods faded over the years, and now the house is boarded up and locked.

At first, Mrs. Hilton hesitates to divulge the exact location of the property since it's locked up and abandoned. But, if the investigators succeed on a **Charm, Persuade** or **Fast Talk** roll, she'll tell them the most direct route to the property using several gravel roads in the countryside. "It probably won't hurt if you just go take a look at the property, but don't tell anyone I gave you directions," she says. "And for heaven's sake, don't try to break into the house. It's probably about ready to blow over anyway."

Mrs. Hilton also will direct the investigators to a display case in the museum that contains an "order of service" handbill for the funeral of the four slain Kirkwoods. The handbill shows the funeral was held at the First Church of Stoic Penitence in Wintry Creek, Iowa. It lists Rev. Vincent Schmidt as presiding over the services with help from undertaker Darwin Raef.

If asked about Wintry Creek, Mrs. Hilton explains the town unincorporated after a flood decimated the area decades ago. She says the town was situated along the southern shore of the Bleak Rapids River, which flows through the northern edge of Bleak County. Because the town unincorporated, the highway passing through town was never rebuilt. She's not sure how anyone would get to that area today. "It's probably just a cornfield now anyway," she says.

Mrs. Hilton doesn't know anything about the First Church of Stoic Penitence, other than it was located in Wintry Creek and that the name sounds strange to her.

LOCATION 3: THE SUNDERLAND OBSERVER-GAZETTE

This relatively small community newspaper produces an afternoon edition, mostly filled with coupons for local businesses and coverage of Sunderland Senior High School sports, five days a week. The office is a short walk north from the Sunderland town square. The managing editor, a young journalist just a few years out of college named Teresa Strickland, ushers the investigators into her cluttered office but makes it clear she doesn't have long to talk before she has to leave for a school board meeting in a neighboring town. Strickland says she doesn't have any in-depth knowledge regarding the Kirkwood killings, but a successful **Charm, Intimidate, Persuade** or **Fast Talk** roll from the investigators will convince her to allow them into the newspaper's archive, which she refers to as "the morgue," if they promise to put everything back the way they found it.

The investigators will find the archive far from complete and largely unorganized. A successful **Library Use** roll will allow the investigators to track down a microfiche containing most of the editions of the newspaper from 1924 and 1925. Loading the microfiche into the nearby reader will allow the investigators to read a series of stories reporting the investigation of the Kirkwood murders and the eventual trial of Clarence Thackery.

Thackery, according to the reports, escaped a mental health institution in Independence, Iowa, in early December 1924. Authorities immediately suspected him of murdering the Kirkwoods after eye witnesses placed him in the region around the time of the massacre. He fled west through Nebraska before he was apprehended by police at a gas station in Salina, Kansas. He was convicted of the Kirkwood murders as well as similar axe murders in Geneva, Nebraska, and Concordia, Kansas. He was put to death by hanging in a federal prison in Leavenworth, Kansas, in late 1926.

An Associated Press report printed in the Observer-Gazette recounts how Thackery began raving about "the one in darkness awakens" as his death sentence was being read in the courtroom. A later report claims his last words in the death chamber before he was hanged were, "I see it! The great green eye! The black arms!"

An extreme **Occult** roll may allow an investigator to connect snippets of Thackery's quotes with the Mythos deity Cyaegha.

LOCATION 4: THE HOME OF SANDRA RAEF

The unsealed autopsy report at the sheriff's office and the funeral program from the historical society mention an undertaker named Darwin Raef. If the investigators follow up on that lead, either by asking around or perhaps looking in a phone book, they may learn that a woman named Sandra Raef still lives in Sunderland. Keepers may consider rewarding particularly good role playing by having Deputy Farrar or Mrs. Hilton mention Sandra Raef to the investigators as well.

Ms. Raef is a middle-aged woman who lives in a spacious home in Sunderland. She greets the investigators suspiciously and doesn't immediately invite them in. It'll take a successful **Charm** or **Persuade** roll to get her to open up about what she knows of the Kirkwood burial.

If the investigators get on her good side, she'll invite them into her well-appointed living room and offer them coffee. She then tells a story that she attributes to her grandfather, Darwin Raef, who was a long-time undertaker in Wintry Creek before the town unincorporated.

Ms. Raef explains that her grandfather told her when she was a girl that he was hired by Rev. Vincent Schmidt of the First Church of Stoic Penitence to prepare the remains of the Kirkwoods for burial. Darwin noticed immediately that there were only three sets of remains, those of Della Mae and the two children, when he took custody of them following the autopsy. Darwin Raef asked Rev. Schmidt about the missing remains of Boris Kirkwood, and Rev. Schmidt insisted on having four caskets at the funeral anyway and bought Raef's silence about the matter with a great sum of money, paid in cash. The caskets were kept closed at the funeral, so the public never learned that Boris Kirkwood's casket was empty.

"I always thought Grandad was just trying to tell me a scary story," Ms. Raef tells the investigators. "But, after all these years, I'd love to know if he was telling the truth."

CONCLUSIONS

The investigators' inquiries in Sunderland should provide them with the location of the Kirkwood farmhouse and enough clues that they begin questioning the official story about the murders. But the only way to uncover the truth is by exploring the Kirkwood farmhouse and confronting the nearly century-old evil waiting there. Keepers that wish to delve further into these mysteries may do so by downloading *The Kirkwood Farmhouse Massacre*, a haunted-house scenario of mind-bending terror available at the Miskatonic Repository.