

CTHUIHII
Confidential

**THE HOUSE
UP IN
THE HILLS**



Robin D. Laws

ONE-2-ONE
GUMSHOE



Pelgrane Press



THE HOUSE UP IN THE HILLS

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THE HOUSE UP IN THE HILLS

The investigation of an odd automobile fatality plunges Dex Raymond into a case involving sorcerous members of L.A.'s business elite, a wave of rat attacks, and a child's disappearance.

The text of this *Cthulhu Confidential™* scenario assumes that you're using the default Dex Raymond character, as seen in the *GUMSHOE One-2-One™* core book. Are you instead using a customized character? Mentally swap in that character's name, adjusting as needed where he or she diverges from Dex.

This scenario takes place sometime in 1937. Moving it ahead in time requires you to either adjust the description of the Los Angeles River given in "The Accident", or fudge a minor geo-historical detail.

When run as part of a series of Dex Raymond adventures for the same player, it works best as the second or later scenario in the sequence. We've left its ending a little more open-ended than others in the L.A. series, so be ready for a bit of improvising.

Cast

Louis Ahlberg, 62. Founder of Ahlberg Oil. Also a former warlock, now living alone in the strange haunted mansion he commissioned to bring about the end of the world. Brittle and paranoid.

Phillip Bailey, 52. Former architect, now mental patient. Designed the Ahlberg House.

Amelie Bailey (1916-1928), young victim of a sacrificial murder perpetrated with her father's acquiescence.

Sweet Amelie, a supernatural, intelligent rat with a face horrifically resembling Amelie Bailey's. Acts at the behest of the malign intelligence ritually

conjured into Ahlberg's house at the time of its construction.

Catherine Hare, 61. Authoress and coven member. Of the former occult conspirators, she shows the greatest interest in resuming the interrupted ritual that left the house intact. (We at Pelgrane wouldn't refer to a woman writer as anything other than a writer or author. Catherine, however, uses the phrase to describe herself. It highlights both her pretentious side and her cultivated persona as a powerful woman who thumbs her nose at feminism.)

Willard Classon, 67. Chief executive officer of Classon's Baked Goods, a local bread manufacturer, and former member of Ahlberg's coven. Wishes to forget the past and preserve his cloak of respectability.

Henry "Hank" Easterday, 58. Wealthy rancher and former coven member. A rough-hewn bully.

Stuart Margrave, 38. Black sheep of the family that owns Margrave's Department Store, now a fight promoter. Former coven member.

Chadwick Fortner, 49. Vice-President of Fortner Property Management and former coven member. First to be targeted by the house's vengeance, as a message to the others.

Gil Dutton (1899-1937) Architect; victim of the fatal apparent accident that kicks off the case.

Rose Dutton, 29. Dex's client, Gil's distraught young widow.

Marie Price, 49. Phillip Bailey's ex-wife and legal guardian, now remarried to an Air Force captain.

Elmer Keenholts, 44. Overzealous insurance investigator.

Harry Chandler, 73 (1864-1944). Newspaper and property mogul whose keen interest in L.A.



DEXTER “DEX” RAYMOND

Hard-boiled Shamus

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

- Accounting
- Assess Honesty
- Bargain
- Cop Talk
- Cryptography
- Evidence Collection
- Intimidation
- Inspiration
- Law
- Locksmith
- Photography
- Reassurance
- Research
- Streetwise

GENERAL ABILITIES

- Athletics
- Cool
- Conceal
- Devices
- Driving
- Filch
- Fighting
- Preparedness
- Sense Trouble
- Shadowing
- Stability
- Stealth

STORY

Archetypal hardboiled private investigator Dex Raymond prowls Los Angeles’ haunted streets as an outsider by choice. With his smarts and grit, he could have wormed his way into its corrupt power structure. Instead, he operates on its fringes, righting wrongs for a modest fee, plus expenses. In addition to his contacts, he counts one more key friend—LAPD Detective Sergeant Ted Gargan, a rare honest man in a town where cops can be bought by the barrel.

architecture stems from his desire to maintain a lock on its ley line power. A real historical figure.

What Happened

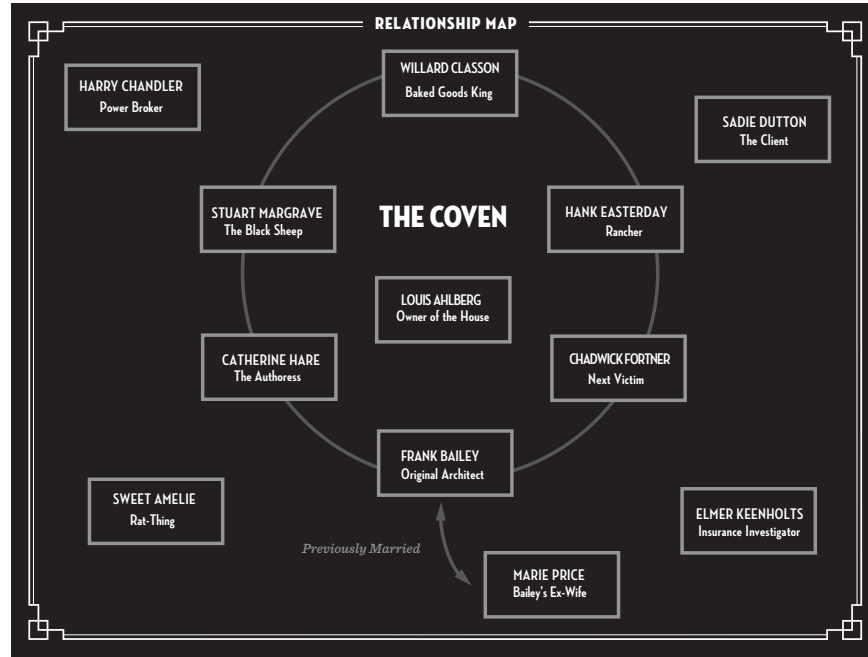
Nine years ago, in 1928, wealthy oil executive Louis Ahlberg decided to build a home as part of a great ritual to summon Yog-Sothoth, accelerating the cosmic doom foretold in his collection of occult tomes. He engaged the services of talented but suggestible architect Phillip Bailey to build a Bel-Air manor with a subtly insane geometry.

Abetted by fellow members of his well-connected coven, he exerted such an influence over Bailey that the architect agreed to sacrifice his twelve-year-old daughter, Amelie, as part of the working. She would be murdered early on

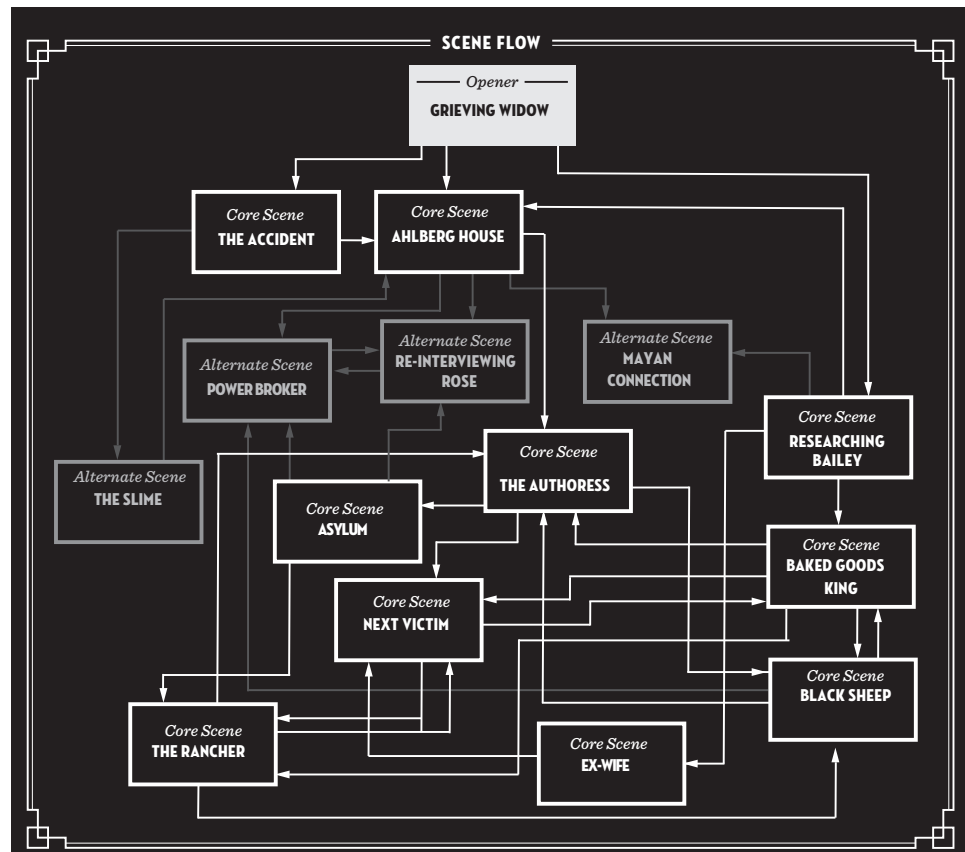
in its construction; after it was finished, and the stars were right, a second ritual would summon Yog-Sothoth. The absolute center of time and space, where Yog-Sothoth dwells, would shift to the manor itself. This would allow the Old One to manifest on Earth, transforming its summoners into the immortal court who would rule humanity’s survivors under his aegis.

But after they killed the girl and interred her corpse in the foundations, Ahlberg and his fellow sorcerers got cold feet. Did they really want to rule over a vastly changed world, or simply continue to enjoy the material fruits of their magical prowess in this one? And which of them would wield ultimate authority over the others? As the house neared completion, they quarreled and split up.

RELATIONSHIP MAP



SCENE FLOW DIAGRAM



The plan fizzled. Ahlberg's home became just another weird Los Angeles building. Bailey saw that he'd killed his daughter for nothing, attempted suicide, and wound up permanently committed an insane asylum.

The Texts, As Ever, Remain Obscure

If the final ritual actually occurs at the end of the case, it transpires that Ahlberg and Hare have rather overinterpreted key passages of their grimoires. Or perhaps it's because the ceremony can now only proceed in a grudging, diminished manner. In the immediate aftermath, an aspect of Yog-Sothoth looses itself on Los Angeles, increasing its ambient level of eldritch menace. But the world does not immediately end. Nor do any of the coven members, all slain in the ritual, promptly rise as mighty avatars of a new inhuman age. Maybe a key seal has been broken, but other events must unfold before Los Angeles as we know it crumbles utterly.

Pacing the creaking chambers of his non-Euclidean manor, Ahlberg decided that a terrible reckoning awaited him, which he could forestall only by ensuring that the house remained intact. Like many structures in Bel-Air, his manor perches atop a steep, lushly forested hill. Two months back, flash flooding eroded the foundations. So he sought out ambitious but financially stretched architect Gil Dutton to ensure that the house would continue to stand.

The house didn't like that. As Ahlberg suspects but does not allow himself to fully recognize, the structure itself gained a malign intelligence during the initial sacrifice of Amelie Bailey. The manor yearns for its own destruction, as this may still bring Yog-Sothoth into this world—especially if the original warlocks are inside when it comes apart. It brought the rains that eroded its perch, and finds it intolerable that Ahlberg would attempt to reverse its hard-won gains. Spurred to action, it sought a way to kill Gil Dutton. It reached into its own impossible angles and found a swarm of

rat-thing minions. The house impelled them to materialize in his car, causing him to swerve off the road into the Los Angeles River, with fatal results.

This new ability extends the house's grasp outside its own confines. As Dex looks into Bailey's death, it uses its freshly realized powers to ensnare the former members of Ahlberg's coven, intending to finally bring about the demise and transformation it was built to achieve.

What the House Can Do

The house may lash out at Dex or other principals in the case in the course of his investigation. To portray its powers consistently, restrict it to these supernatural abilities:

Once a person has been inside the house, it can send rat-things to materialize either in his current location, or in a location heavily imprinted with his presence, usually a home or office. Dispatching the rat-things more than once in a twenty-four hour period taxes the house's awareness, so it tries to space out its attacks parsimoniously.

A swarm of rat-things dwell within the house and can follow its orders at any time. Where possible the house respects their innate inclinations to skulk and hide and act by indirection.

The main rat-thing dubs itself Sweet Amelie. It looks like a particularly large brown rat, weighing a pound and a half, with two exceptions: its front claws have the manipulative power of human hands, and its head looks like a distorted human face. Specifically, it horrifically parodies the features of Bailey's murdered daughter, Amelie. It speaks in a squeaking, chirping human voice.

Sweet Amelie speaks on behalf of the house, sharing its desire for its destruction and the ascendance of Yog-Sothoth. It is however its own being with a consciousness separate from that of the house. Despite its awful physical resemblance to the dead child, Sweet Amelie does not share the real Amelie Bailey's memories or personality.

The other rats in the swarm it leads all seem at a quick glance to be ordinary rats, except for their hands. Examined up close they show various deformities, including soft bones and a coating of slime. For more, see "The Slime" p. 11.

Should Sweet Amelie be destroyed—for example if a frantic Dex beats it to a pulp with a garden shovel—another member of the swarm regenerates into a new version of it, when sundown next comes. The regenerated Sweet Amelie shares memories of its past incarnations. And bears a grudge; see Antagonist Reactions, p. 32.

Once every three months, on a solstice or equinox, the house can summon a massive downpour over the Los Angeles area. It last did this a couple of months ago, so this detail appears in only in the backstory and not in the events of the scenario itself.

Being inside the house at night renders people vulnerable to horrific hallucinations. These may reflect the victim's previous brushes with Mythos forces, the worst things they've seen, or their pre-existing fears. The house can force these visions, but they also happen spontaneously, without its conscious intervention.



SCENES

THE GRIEVING WIDOW

Scene Type: Introduction

Lead-Outs: The Accident, The Ahlberg House, Researching Bailey

If a continuity Problem card from a previous scenario still hangs over Dex's head, start by inviting the player to describe a frustrating or dispiriting situation arising from that card. For example if the player has the "Murder For Hire" card from "Fathomless Sleep", she might describe:

- a routine but unnerving police inquiry about the case
- waking up from a nightmare in which Dex confronts the victim
- someone sidling up to Dex in a bar, asking if he's in the rubbing people out business, because hypothetically in future there's someone that might need just that sort of treatment

Should the opening scene take place in Dex's office, the following occurs immediately. Otherwise it happens soon after Dex's return to his office.

A woman in her late twenties, an infant cradled in her arms, enters, clearly agitated. Neither glamorous nor plain, she wears inexpensive but smartly chosen and well-maintained clothing. The dark colors of her wardrobe suggest mourning.

She introduces herself as Rose Dutton. If asked, she says the baby's name is Louisa. "I've never had cause to hire a private detective before, but I'm desperate and don't know where to turn," she says.

Rose explains that her husband, Gil, died in an automobile accident three nights ago. He ran off the road late at night and into the Los Angeles River.

Yesterday she spoke to his life insurance company and was told that they would be withholding any pay-out on his claim until suicide could be conclusively ruled out. She tried to explain to the claims adjuster that Gil would never do such a thing, especially now that he's a new father. It had to be either a mechanical failure, or worse: someone drove him off the road and then left the scene.



Without proof to that effect, the insurance people will stall her for months if not years, and in the meantime how's she supposed to put food in baby's mouth? Rose bursts out crying.

Reassurance calms her down enough for Dex to pose questions to elicit more information from her:

- (core, "The Accident") She can supply the location of the accident, and contact information for the highway patrol officer, Claude Yancey, who wrote up the report.
- The insurance company has a man on the case, but he'll be trying to prove suicide, to save them money. The claims adjuster would not give her contact information for him. He did threaten that this man would be coming to grill her.
- Gil worked as an architect. He'd started his own firm but had yet to establish himself.
- (core, "The Ahlberg House") The possibility of a new, deep-pocketed client had him cautiously optimistic. It wasn't a prestigious job by any means but would help him catch up on his firm's outstanding bills. A man named Ahlberg was having trouble with the foundations of his Bel-Air manor. Rose can get the address and phone number for Dex if desired. In fact, Gil was likely on his way home from Mr. Ahlberg's when the accident happened.
- (core, "Researching Bailey") Gil kept mentioning the name of the original architect, Phillip Bailey, as if Rose would understand why this was exciting.
- The difficulty of getting his firm off the ground frustrated him at times, but Gil never succumbed to despair or showed any signs whatsoever of suicidal impulses.
- Gil hardly ever touched alcohol. Maybe a single drink when a client offered it, but he didn't much care for the stuff.
- He never treated her unkindly in any way. Gil was a loving father to the baby and came from a good, stable family himself. His worst fault was worrying too much about work.

A glance at a map shows that the riverside road he was traveling would be a perfectly sensible route from Bel-Air to the Dutton home in Altadena, a modest neighborhood just north of Pasadena.

THE ACCIDENT

Scene Type: Core

Lead-In: The Grieving Widow, The Ahlberg House

Lead-Outs: The Slime, The Ahlberg House

The accident took place on a roadway slated to be replaced by a highway, to be called the Arroyo Seco Parkway. Gil's Ford coupe smashed through a guardrail and sailed into the Los Angeles River. The torrential rain from a couple of months ago still swells its banks.

(Next year, after a disastrous flood, work begins on the Los Angeles Aqueduct, which tames the river to the concrete-encased trickle you have probably seen in a bunch of movies and TV shows.)

Forensics allows Dex to find the skid marks where the car left the road. They suggest a very sudden wrenching of the wheel. Although inconclusive, they are much more consistent with swerving to avoid something than a seizure or heart attack. Nor do they suggest that Gil was speeding at the time of the accident.

If it was a suicide, it was decided in a split second. **Streetwise** tells Dex that few suicides go this way. When people kill themselves they usually work up to it. When using a car to do it they usually speed up toward a solid impediment like a wall or tree. Veering suddenly sideways into a river is not a particularly certain way to die. Nor is it a good way to show people your need for help and then get rescued. Further, people who kill themselves in cars tend to be young, troubled, heavy drinkers. Gil was settled and supposedly steady.

A call to Highway Patrolman Claude Yancy arranges a meeting in the Altadena station. Young, blond and taciturn, Yancy responds to a private investigator with a mixture of curiosity and suspicion. **Cop Talk** prompts him to answer questions.

He becomes a little friendlier if Dex plays up the tough situation Rose faces. Even so, Claude sticks fast to the suicide theory, mostly because it's the first thing he thought of when he came upon the scene, and makes for the easiest paperwork.

He counters any points Dex might make about the details not fitting with a shrug and a "you never can tell what's in a person's mind." Answers

he might provide include:

- Dutton might have swerved to avoid an animal, sure. If so, he succeeded, because no recent roadkill was found at the scene.
- No one reported seeing the accident. It was Yancy himself who first saw the car in the river.
- The medical examiner called cause of death as head trauma. Dutton's head hit the steering wheel on impact with either the guard rail or the river.
- The vehicle landed on the bank, with only the hood fully immersed in the water. About a foot of water was found inside the car. Dutton did not drown.
- The car remains in the CHP garage for the Los Angeles County area. Yancy can call ahead if Dex wants to look at it. But he won't find anything.
- (alternate, "The Insurance Man") Someone else was asking about the case already—an insurance man, name of Elmer Keenholts. Yancy can supply his contact information if Dex wants it. He gives the impression of not liking Keenholts very much.

Should Dex head to the garage, Yancy proves good as his word. The police mechanics escort him to the wrecked automobile and then leave him alone to inspect it.

Mechanical Repair: The damage to the vehicle does fit Yancy's account of the aftermath of his accident.


(alternate, "The Slime") **Evidence**

Collection: One thing is strange, though. A green-tinged slime of some kind lightly spatters the car's interior. It is heaviest on the dashboard and passenger side window. The pattern suggests that maybe something was thrown at the latter, and splattered from there. Dex can collect the slime for later testing.

A Difficulty 4 Preparedness Quick Test allows him to have a suitable jar on hand. Otherwise he has to ask the garage men for one. They half-heartedly razz him about the unprofessionalism of private detectives before giving him a none-too-clean receptacle.

Forensics convinces the coroner handling the case, Dr. Lawrence Quigg, to let Dex inspect Gil's body. Grizzled and squinting, Quigg smells


strongly gin and incompetence. Dex immediately spots dozens of tiny lacerations on Gils face, neck, and hands—anywhere his skin would have been exposed. Quigg disinterestedly dismisses these as injuries from flying glass when the car windows broke. But if Dex inspected the vehicle, he knows the windows were only cracked.

 Dex might show a photograph of the cuts to his Source on matters medical, Dr. Leyland Haskins. Haskins says they look more like animal bites than injuries from glass shards. Looking at the photo through a magnifying loupe, he says they most resemble the damage from a rat attack.

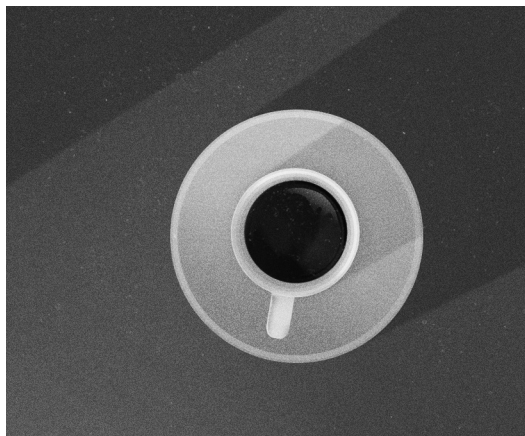
THE SLIME

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-Outs: The Ahlberg House

 Dex's science Source, Virginia Ashbury, can perform a test on the slime as he waits. She offers him a mug of tea and makes comforting small talk.

Her eyes widen in delight at the results of the test: the slime is organic, but appears to be animal, not plant, matter. Amid the slime she found some rodent hairs, perhaps those of a rat. How those contaminated this unknown material she can't begin to guess.



THE INSURANCE INVESTIGATOR

Scene Type: Alternate

Portly, rumpled insurance investigator Elmer Keenholts never saw a customer claim he thought was on the level. If Dex seeks him out he takes offense: as far as he's concerned, the only honest investigators work for insurance companies.

Worrying the unlit stub of a stogy between his teeth, he attempts to intimidate Dex. "You wanna know how many sleazy P.I.s I've sent down the river for abetting insurance fraud? Plenty, that's how many."

Keenholts continues to needle Dex throughout their interaction. Should the player portray Dex as bristling at all, call for the following Challenge.

RESIST KEENHOLTS' NEEDLING

Cool

Advance 6+: You don't let Keenholts get your goat. You've had your cage rattled by tougher birds than him. Gain Edge 1, "*Cool as a Cucumber.*"

Hold 3-5: Keenholts can tell you're steamed, but at least you didn't take a poke at him.

Setback 2 or less: You blow your top and take a poke at Keenholts. Showing a surprising strength and speed, he blocks the punch. A slow grin widens across his gargoyle mug. He gives you the look of a man who's sure he's sized you up, and found you wanting. Gain Problem 1, "*Keenholts Vendetta.*"

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Cool or General/Mental.

Extra Problem 2, "Delayed Aggression"

With his best sardonic smirk, Keenholts provides any information that supports the insurance company line. He says he went to talk to Louis Ahlberg, who described Dutton as having been distracted, sweaty, and obviously agitated. "Exactly the outward appearance of a suicidal man," Keenholts crows.

On a **Cop Talk** or **Reassurance Push**, Keenholts concludes that Dex isn't crooked, just thick. This becomes impossible if Dex took a poke at him. Keenholts might, if pressed, agree that there was something creepy about the set-up of the Ahlberg joint. "And he may live in Bel-Air but the old boy has a rat problem." Asked to elaborate, he says he heard the telltale scurry of rodents in the walls. And not small ones, either.

Without the Push, Keenholts decides that Dex is planning something fishy and starts to shadow him, adding additional friction to the case and opening the door to Antagonist Reaction scenes, as found on p. 32. Should the player hold the "Keenholts Vendetta" card, he definitely causes trouble, whether or not Dex ever Takes Time.

This scene can take place as an Antagonist Reaction if Dex does not seek Keenholts. In this version, Elmer shows up to get Dex's measure after hearing he's been making the rounds questioning his nice, neat suicide angle.



THE AHLBERG HOUSE

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: The Grieving Widow, The Accident, The Slime, The Insurance Investigator

Lead-Outs: The Authoress, Researching Bailey, The Power Broker

Louis Ahlberg's house shares a hilltop perch with a row of other lavish Bel-Air homes. Together they look down on a winding roadway.

As Dex approaches the house, it strikes him with a sense of foreboding. Call for a **Difficulty 6 Stability Quick Test**. On a failure, Dex can either take a swig from his flask of bourbon to steady himself, or accept Problem 3, "Rattled By the House". The house's strangeness is hard to pin down. It can't be the Mayan revival facade, which can be found elsewhere in Los Angeles. (For Dex's possible research on the architectural style, see "The Mayan Connection.")

(core, "The Authoress") On his way to ring the doorbell, he sees a woman departing, headed to a Ford Deluxe Coupe parked in the driveway. A tall, thin, stylishly dressed woman in her early sixties, she breezes past Dex with an air of unapproachable indifference. Should Dex try to greet her, she says "I don't believe we've been introduced, young man," and keeps on going. If the player asks, Dex can memorize the woman's license plate, allowing him to make a more formal approach later.

When Dex rings the doorbell, Louis Ahlberg answers the door himself. He wears a smoking jacket, silk shirt, dress slacks, and slippers. Even though he was just receiving a visitor, he looks like he hasn't shaved for a couple of days, and could also stand a shower. His nose shows the threaded veins of sustained alcohol and tobacco abuse. Ahlberg blinks muzzily at Dex, clearly in no mood for a new conversation. Mention of Gil Dutton's name secures his grudging cooperation. In response to questions he supplies the following information:

- He engaged Dutton to shore up the foundations of his house, which have been placed in danger by soil erosion. Concern for the integrity of the building is the one subject that animates him. He offers to take Dex around the back to see the trouble areas. The big deluge two months ago

caused the damage to the hillside.

- (core, "Researching Bailey") He commissioned the house nine years ago, from an architect named Phillip Bailey. Unfortunately Bailey has retired due to illness and so was unable to supervise repairs.
- Ahlberg volunteers nothing of the tragic events in Bailey's personal life at the time of his house's construction (see "Researching Bailey".) If Dex asks he confirms that Amelie Bailey disappeared during construction of the house, and that it was the last of Bailey's designs ever built.
- Ahlberg chose the Mayan Revival style for its ancient grandeur.
- He made his money in oil and then retired. The company he founded still bears his name but he has not been associated with its management since the mid-20s.
- Dutton seemed agitated during their last meeting, which indeed took place just before his fatal accident. As they were on professional terms only, Ahlberg did not feel free to inquire as to the source of Dutton's distress. (If the player asks to use **Assess Honesty** on this statement, Dex suspects Ahlberg not of lying, but of holding something back. What Ahlberg isn't saying is that he assumed that the house's malign influence was beginning to wear on the young architect. He did not consider him at risk of harming himself, but now wants people to believe it was suicide and move on, leaving his affairs unexamined.)
- (alternate, "The Power Broker") Dutton did mention some kind of contretemps at a recent meeting of young architects with Los Angeles Times publisher Harry Chandler. Perhaps this bore some bearing on his mental state.

This interview occurs on the veranda unless the player spends a **Push** or **Reassurance** to soften Ahlberg up, in which case he gains an invitation to sit in the parlor.

The house's interior radiates oppressive gloom. Dust on surfaces and cobwebs in the corners indicate a lack of housekeeping. If asked about this, Ahlberg mutters about the difficulty of finding good help. (**Accounting:** This is still the Depression, a buyer's market for household labor.)

About two dozen empty brandy bottles stand on the floor near a full case of the same expensive brand. Ahlberg offers a snifter to Dex and refills his own.

If the player asks for more of a description of the interior, say that Dex finds it hard to concentrate. He feels a sudden exhaustion and a slight dizziness.

A Challenge ensues.

SOMETHING WEIRD ABOUT THIS HOUSE

Sense Trouble

Bonus: +1 with Problem 3, *"Rattled by the House."*

Advance 9+: You can't shake the feeling that you're being watched. Also, you hear a scurrying in the walls, as if from a rodent infestation. Gain Edge 2, *"Eerie Feeling."*

Hold 3-5: There's something weird about this house, but you can't put your finger on it.

Setback 4 or less: As per a Hold. Also, if you have a Mythos Shock card in hand, gain Problem 4, *"Edritch Stirrings."*

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Sense Trouble or General/Mental.

Extra Problem: 24, "Sensitive."

THE MAYAN CONNECTION

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-Ins: The Ahlberg House, The Grieving Widow, The Accident,


Lead-Outs: Researching Bailey, The Ahlberg House

 Dex can ask his production designer source, Max Weyl, about the Mayan Revival style.

- The most famous exponent of the Mayan Revival style would be Frank Lloyd Wright. His son, Lloyd Wright, has also made buildings in this style.
- As the name implies, it draws inspiration from Mayan archaeological sites, like the temple at Palenque.

- Other notable L.A. examples include:
 - Hollyhock House at 4800 Hollywood Boulevard, built for oil heiress Aline Barnsdall, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.
 - Ennis House, 2607 Glendower Ave, built for clothier Charles Ennis and his wife Mabel, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.
 - the headquarters of an esoteric organization, the Philosophical Research Society at 3910 Los Feliz Boulevard, designed by Robert Stacy Judd.
 - the home of film star Ramon Navarro, at 5609 Valley Oak Drive in Los Feliz. His manager commissioned the structure, but Navarro took it over as a settlement when he found out that the man was embezzling from him.

Hit up Wikipedia as needed for more on these buildings and Mayan Revival architecture.

 Alfred Kelham can discourse on Mayan magic and mythology. The Mayans believed that the gods required blood to keep the universe going and so engaged in elaborate and gory human sacrifices to feed it to them.

If asked about Mayan temples and strange geometries, the prof finds a reference to a temple destroyed by Spanish colonists in Chiapas in 1528. Where other structures were allowed to remain standing, this one, "whose subtle obscenities of shape drove men to madness", the Spaniards dismantled stone by stone. The author of the account, a Dominican priest, called it a temple to Bolon Yokte, or Nine Strides, a Mayan mythological entity of great obscurity.

Dex could also glean the above through **Library Use.**

RESEARCHING BAILEY

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: The Ahlberg House, The Grieving Widow

Lead-Outs: The Ahlberg House, The Baked Goods King, The Ex-Wife

Library Use turns up the following about retired architect Phillip Bailey.



Dex could also learn this from his production designer Source, Max Weyl.

- In the mid-20s he was touted as an up and coming rival to Frank Lloyd Wright.
- In 1928, tragedy struck. Bailey's twelve-year-old daughter Amelie went missing from her home. She was never found. The press drew comparisons to the Lindbergh baby case, but Bailey's situation never reached that level of notoriety.
- Months later, his wife Marie announced that Bailey was suffering from nervous exhaustion and would no longer speak to the press.
- (core, "The Baked Goods King") Prior to the disappearance, bakery magnate Willard Classon announced plans to build a performing arts center designed by Bailey. No such building ever came to be.
- (core, "The Ex-Wife") In 1933 Marie, evidently divorced from Bailey by that point, remarried an air force officer named Steven Price. A few calls reveal that a Captain Steven Price is stationed as a military attaché to Caltech's Rocket Research group.

THE EX-WIFE

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: Researching Bailey,

Lead-Outs: The Asylum, The Next Victim

If Dex seeks Maria Price through her husband, Captain Steven Price, he'll likely find him at his job, observing experiments at Caltech's Rocket Research Group. Captain Price needs **Reassurance** before contacting his wife on behalf of someone who wants to dredge up the horror of her past.

The Prices live in a modest bungalow used as off-base housing for Air Force officers on attaché assignment. Should Dex look, he sees no photographs of Amelie. Maria Price, a thin brunette, dresses casually for her meeting with Dex. She wears a brace on her elbow—if asked she explains that she hurt herself playing tennis.

Assess Honesty checks this statement as truthful.

- Marie starts by saying that nothing about Phillip could possibly pertain to Dutton's accident.
- She says that she wants only to forget her old life and its sorrows. Once she thought Amelie would be found but now she understands that her fate will always hang over her as a terrible unanswered question. As she replies to Dex's queries about her ex-husband, old trauma wells up, obliterating the calm front she attempts to present.
- Amelie had to have been taken by a wandering tramp or other intruder. No one who knew them would ever try to hurt her, or Phillip, by harming their child. The police did everything they could to find her but nothing ever turned up.
- Work on the Ahlberg house did preoccupy Phillip, but that was always his way. He threw himself into his work with each new project, desperate to step out of the shadow of Frank Lloyd Wright. At first he didn't want to work in the Mayan Revival style but Ahlberg insisted on it. He and Ahlberg became quite close. She was looking forward to the project being done so she could have her husband back. Then her daughter was taken, and everything changed.
- Amelie's loss struck him even harder than it did her.
- Phillip didn't just have a nervous breakdown. He shot himself in the head. Thank goodness he put the barrel to his temple instead of against the roof of his mouth. She managed to keep the truth out of the papers.
- (core, "The Asylum") Phil now resides at the Rancho Los Amigos Hospital in Downey. She had him declared incompetent. Though she serves as his legal guardian, she has not seen him for over four years. Perhaps that makes her

a cold person, but she must think of her new husband and new life.

- She pays his upkeep from his real estate investments. They aren't worth what they used to be since the Crash of '29 triggered a property sell-off, but his bills aren't so high.

Most days Phillip can barely form a coherent sentence. Although she can't imagine how he could possibly help Dex, she agrees to call the hospital and grant formal permission for a visit.

As she says this, try to convey the impression that she's doing this to get Dex out of her life as quickly as possible.

(core, "The Next Victim") Neither Ahlberg nor any of Phillip's other old clients ever inquire as to his present condition. Maria understands. In this town, a successful person is always one turn of the roulette wheel away from disaster. They don't want any of Phillip's misfortune to rub off on them.

Only one person occasionally phones to ask if he's making any progress—a real estate man named Chadwick Fortner, who once considered him as possible designer of an apartment complex. He calls once a year, around the anniversary of Phillip's suicide attempt, and always sounds broken up about it.

If Dex has the scrawled note from "The Message" and shows it to her, Marie turns white as a sheet, screaming: "It's her! It's her!" She grabs Dex by the lapels and demands to know everything about it. The handwriting exactly matches Amelie's, she sobs. "She's still alive, she's still alive!" Marie runs to a closet and pulls out her mementos of her daughter. Among them is her diary. Dex can see the resemblance between the diary and the note, but Forensics shows him that the new note was produced by someone who held the pencil much differently. It's as if the individual who produced the note learned to write by studying the handwriting as seen in the diary.

Marie refuses to believe this: she wants it to prove that Amelie still lives. If Dex points out that she would not now write like a child, Marie lurches for a shelf of knick-knacks and starts hurling them at him. Dex probably knows to leave on his own; if not, Steve shows him the door.

Dex might find her reaction to the note unnerving.

MARIE'S DISTRESS

Stability

Penalty -2 if Dex suspects the writing to be inhuman

Advance 9+: You feel sorry to see the woman upset like that. But if you want to do the job, you can't always sugarcoat the tough side of life. Gain Edge 3, "*Tough Cookie*."

Hold 5-8: You can't help but share in the poor woman's distress. The P.I. game can be cruel at times.

Setback 3 or less: The distress you've inadvertently caused her will be hard to forget. If you could do it over again, you'd never have shown her that damn note. Gain Problem 5, "*Trail of Pain*."

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Stability or General/Mental

Extra Problem: Problem 6, "*The Cost of Empathy*."

THE ASYLUM

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: The Ex-Wife

Lead-Outs: The Rancher, The Power Broker

If he lacks Maria's permission, make Dex work hard for access to Phillip Bailey. He might bribe a corrupt orderly (**Bargaining Push**) or convince a nurse of the therapeutic value of allowing Phillip to meet someone new (**Inspiration Push**.)

However he gains entry, an orderly escorts Dex to Bailey's small padded cell in the high security ward. Only in the case of a bribe, and specific instructions from Dex, does he not find the patient trussed in a straitjacket.

Having been confined to a '30s psychiatric ward for nearly a decade, Phillip looks terrible. The scar from his failed suicide attempt visibly snakes across his right temple. He drools and rocks back and forth. When he doesn't have an answer for one of Dex's questions, he hums "The

Good Ship Lollipop”, badly. If asked how he knows that song, which first appeared in a film released four years ago, he says that his daughter taught it to him. In response to specific questions he gives the following answers, perhaps not entirely straightforwardly:

- He has never heard of Gil Dutton but the fellow probably did kill himself. Architects are always trying to kill themselves.
- Why? Because if they don’t kill themselves, their buildings will try to commit suicide. Buildings always want to commit suicide, and it’s the job of the architect to make sure they don’t.
- He’s sorry he missed when he shot himself in the head. If he’d been successful maybe Louis’ house wouldn’t still be suicidal.
- His daughter isn’t dead. He knows that because when he closes his eyes, he can still see her face. Sometimes she sings to him.
- Amelie lives with her uncle Louis, in the house her daddy built for her.
- The house wants to die, and take Amelie away for good. You can’t let it do that.
- (core, “The Rancher”) It was Hank Easterday who took Amelie to live with her uncle Louis. But he would never hurt a child.

At some suitable point Bailey volunteers the following:

- (alternate, “The Power Broker”) Architecture is a form of magic. If you don’t believe me, just ask Harry Chandler. Listen up at night when it gets quiet and you can hear the buildings of the city singing to Harry Chandler. They sing his power to him.
- If shown the note from “The Message”, Phillip laughs in delight. “See? She’s not dead! I told you she’s not!”

Dex receives only one meeting with Phillip. If he attempts a follow-up he discovers that Phillip died in the night. Hospital administrators block his efforts to inquire further into the incident. They claim heart failure as cause of death. An **Intimidation** Push, or using **Cop Talk** to have Dex’s cop friend Ted Gargan intercede, gets him in the room with the body.

Phillip has been gnawed to death. Forensics

indicate that the bite marks match those of rats. Seeing the body requires a Stability Challenge.

SEEING PHILLIP'S BODY

Stability

Advance 9+: A corpse isn’t a source of horror. It’s a source of information. If this gets you closer to the truth, there’s nothing upsetting about that. Gain Edge 4, **“Show of Resolve.”**

Hold 5-8: You wince in horror, but the moment passes.

Setback 3 or less: This sight will stick with you for a good while to come. Gain Problem 7, **“His Rat-Gnawed Visage.”**

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Stability or General/Mental.

Extra Problem: : Problem 8, “Denial.”



THE AUTHORESS**Scene Type:** Core**Lead-Ins:** The Ahlberg House, The Rancher**Lead-Outs:** The Black Sheep, The Next Victim

Dex can discover Catherine Hare's identity by using **Cop Talk** to run the license plate number he sees in "The Ahlberg House," or can learn of her through Phillip's ex-wife. A spot of **Library Use** reveals the following:

- Her best-selling novels typically place young career women in international jeopardy. Titles include *The Cold Ground*, *Seven Spanish Nights*, and *The Hawk Papers*.
- Hare's works initially seemed to show a rightward political streak, with Reds or anarchists as the villains. But her most recent book, *A Hanging at the Border*, pits its heroine against a Nazi plot to draw the US into war against England.
- Capitol Pictures has purchased the rights to this last title and hopes to lure British director Alfred Hitchcock to America to turn it into a film.
- A skim of her novels turns up no obvious mentions of the occult or supernatural.

In her sixth decade but still damnably elegant, Catherine Hare reacts coolly to Dex should he just appear at her Beverly Hills doorstep. Arranging a meeting through her agent gets the interaction off on the right foot. In this instance she meets him for lunch at a swell tea room on Hollywood Boulevard.

Of Ahlberg's original cult members, only Catherine still wants to assist the house in its transformation into the earthly gate of Yog-Sothoth. She tempers the information she provides Dex according to this agenda. Does he appear open to assisting her in a dread ritual?

She feeds him what he needs to know to serve her as a useful pawn. Does he presents himself as an ordinary detective unaware of the cosmic truth? She tries to convince him that the house ought to be condemned and demolished. Mundane destruction isn't as likely to complete the ritual as a spontaneous event with several members of the original cult inside, but has at least a chance of working.

Ultra-competent yet utterly insane, Catherine fully intends to be inside the house when it transforms. She thinks she will metamorphose into a new and more powerful form along with it.

However, as a sincere nihilist, she does accept the possibility that she'll be extinguished forever, along with most everyone else on the planet.

After speaking with her for a few minutes, Dex makes the following Challenge.

Remember that a player can always elect to suffer a Setback rather than undergo a Challenge.

CATHERINE'S ALLURE**Cool****Penalty -1 for each Mythos Shock card held**

Advance 5+: Years appear to melt away from Catherine as you behold her. Taken aback, you blink your eyes, and the odd visual effect instantly dissipates.

Hold 4: You feel the hypnotic pull of Catherine's charisma and get the sense she'll reciprocate if you make a pass at her.

Setback 3 or less: Years appear to melt away from Catherine as you behold her. You feel yourself pulled into her hypnotic eyes. The next thing you know, you're waking up on the silk sheets of her bed in her stylishly appointed home. She enters the room with orange juice and coffee, ready to revive you after what has clearly been a bout of amorous exertion. Though still lovely for a woman in her early sixties, the image of Catherine's preternatural youth lingers no longer. Gain Problem 10, "*Under Catherine's Spell.*"

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Cool or General/Mental, or gain an extra die by spending any Edge that can be used to counter a Mythos Shock problem

Extra Problem: Problem 9, "*Well-Honed Paranoia.*"

Should Catherine's extra-normal seductiveness lure Dex into bed, she figures she can use him and answers his questions accordingly. Remember, this is not the only way to get her to say more than she ought.

Incautious Catherine

Even when speaking indiscreetly Catherine holds back the full truth. She responds to relevant questions as follows:

1. She has long been a seeker of secret knowledge.
2. She met Ahlberg, a fellow occultist, fifteen years ago.
3. Bailey also had esoteric inclinations, which of course he never shared with his idiot of a wife.
4. Catherine did much to bring these out in him.
5. Well, yes, of course, she and Phillip fell into a tempestuous affair.
6. Together the three of them worked on the Ahlberg house, which would be not only a building but an invocation.
7. It was supposed to invest members of Ahlberg's coven with great white magic power.
8. They should have stopped it when Bailey's daughter went missing. But she and Ahlberg foolishly accepted his desire to distract himself from the tragedy by continuing work on the house.
9. His grief infected the house, subtly altering its angles. It became a locus for black magic, driving poor Ahlberg to the brink of madness, and causing all manner of other havoc in Los Angeles.
10. To dispel its fell emanations, the original members of the coven must all participate in a healing ceremony inside the house, and then allow it to be destroyed.
11. Coven members put on masks before meeting. Ahlberg recruited all but one of them.
12. (core, "The Black Sheep") Catherine brought in one member: department store heir Stuart Margrave.
13. (if Fortner has not yet been found dead: core, "The Next Victim") She once saw a member briefly take off his mask to scratch an itch. It was Chadwick Fortner, a businessman with property interests.

Catherine's sociopathy allows her to shade the truth without tweaking Dex's **Assess Honesty** ability.

Distrustful Catherine

If Dex has not lowered her guard, Catherine decides to tell him as little as possible, while still using him to spook Stuart. She hopes Stuart will come running to her, giving her a chance of drawing him back in. This version deviates so much from reality that it does register as untruthful if the player asks to use

Assess Honesty.

1. She and Ahlberg met as fellow architecture enthusiasts and particular fans of the Mayan Revival style.
2. Ahlberg allowed her to sit in on some planning sessions for his home.
3. Bailey greatly impressed her; she had hoped he would design a beach house for her.
4. But then his daughter disappeared. Ahlberg pushed Bailey to keep working on his house.
5. Bailey designed his distress into the structure, hence its gloomy atmosphere.
6. Catherine worries about Ahlberg, whose outlook has badly deteriorated after years in that house. She keeps telling him to have it demolished and then move somewhere else.
7. (core, "The Black Sheep") Before Amelie Bailey disappeared, Catherine always had a bad feeling about another of Ahlberg's friends, the department store heir Stuart Margrave. She was there when Bailey introduced his daughter to Ahlberg's friends, and in retrospect remembers the glazed, sweaty look on Margrave's face.

Showing Catherine the Message

Asking Catherine to examine the message from Sweet Amelie (p. 33) opens her up to sharing the incautious version of the story, if she hasn't already. She modifies it to suggest that Amelie's ghost haunts the house, jealous that her father cared more about it than protecting her. The ghost is now telling her that the building must be destroyed, after a healing ceremony involving as many members of the original coven as possible.

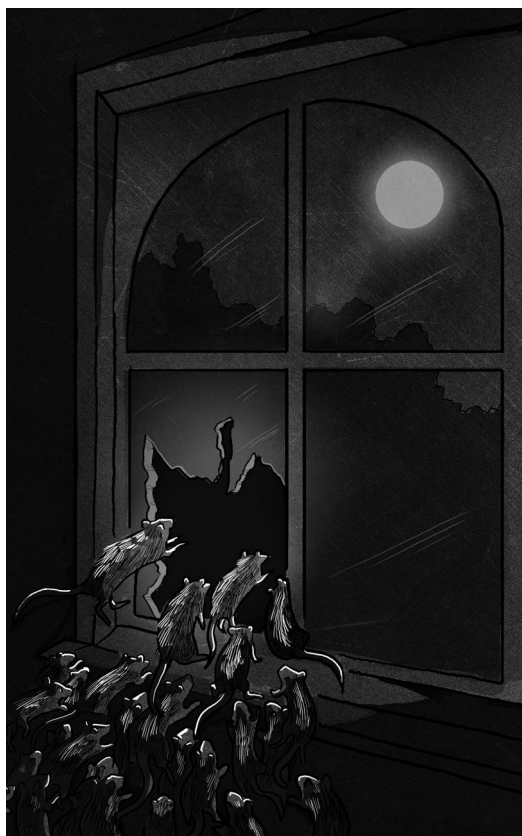
If this happens during a follow-up encounter with encounter and Dex has not yet identified all the members of the coven, Catherine points him to one he hasn't found yet. She does all she can to manipulate Dex into getting all the coven members together in the house at one time.

THE NEXT VICTIM

Scene Type: Core*Lead-Ins:* The Black Sheep, The Authoress,*Lead-Outs:* The Baked Goods King, The Rancher

Accounting tells Dex that Chadwick Fortner is one of several brothers running the rental property holdings of Fortner Property Management, founded in the oughts by their father, Hugh Fortner. He knows the firm's downtown address and can either call to make an appointment or show up and use **Reassurance** to convince his secretary, Lida Jennings, to escort Dex in.

When she opens the door, she faints dead away. Dex sees a swarm of rats scurrying toward the office's window and onto the fire escape. A rat with a human face—which reminds him horribly of Amelie's, if he has seen a photo of her—pauses on the sill long enough to glower terrifyingly at him. Fortner's corpse, covered in bloody chew marks, lies splayed and exposed on the plush carpeting.



SEEING THE RAT THINGS

*Stability**Penalty -2 if Dex knows what Amelie looks like*

Advance 9+: This is horrible all right, but you're not going to dwell on that. You're too busy grabbing a large brass paperweight from Fortner's desk and hurling it at one of the rats. It explodes in a great splatter of foul-smelling, green-tinged slime.

Hold 5-8: The horrible sight sends you reeling. You have to sit down in a chair and recover before you can help the secretary, or examine the place for clues.

Setback 4 or less: You have to sit down in a chair and recover before you can help the secretary, or examine the place for clues. The horrible sight gnaws at your very perceptions of reality. Gain Problem 11, "*Rat-Thing Sighting.*"

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Stability or General/Mental

Extra Problem: Problem 12 "*Fainting Spell.*"

Whatever the outcome of this Challenge, after looking at the visage of the chief Rat-Thing, Dex feels in his bones that Amelie Bailey is not just missing but dead.

Dex can revive Miss Jennings with ease, but might prefer to prop her up in her chair outside the office and poke around for a bit before doing that.

The office's thick walls substantially soundproof the room, so it is no surprise that Miss Jennings heard no sign of anything amiss until she opened the door for Dex.

Fortner evidently put up a fight before succumbing to the rat swarm. Several dead rats lie beside his desk. Their fur exudes green-tinged slime, which Dex may have already found in Dutton's car.

(core clue, “The Baked Goods King”) In Fortner’s typewriter is an unfinished letter, addressed to Willard Classon of Classon’s Baked Goods. See Handout #1, Fortner’s Letter, p. 32.

(core clue, “The Rancher”) The entries in Fortner’s appointment book consist almost entirely of items written in Miss Jennings’ impeccable hand. One however stands out, in a hasty masculine scrawl. For 3 pm the next day, it reads simply “Hank” and gives a phone number corresponding to a nearby rural exchange. That plus **Library Use** leads Dex to Henry Easterday.

Once revived, Miss Jennings becomes hysterical again. **Reassurance** calms her down enough to show how little light she can shed on the situation. Neither Classon nor this Hank fellow ring any bells for her. She describes her boss as staid and formal and says she would never have inquired about his life outside business hours.

His brothers Hugh Jr and Edwin recoil when they learn of their brother’s fate. Under no circumstances do they want it getting out that he was killed by rats in his very own office. That’s the worst possible black mark for a company that rents commercial space! If Dex sticks around for the cops to show up, he sees Hugh Jr. call Mayor Shaw for assurances that it will all be hushed up. Clearly the mayor will be receiving consideration for this favor. The player may be glad to see Dex relieved of the difficult task of explaining this to police.

Neither brother has anything interesting to say about Chadwick. He kept to himself, never married, and did his job. Back in the late twenties he took a haphazard view of his family responsibilities.

However, by the time of the ‘29 Crash he recommitted himself to the health of the firm and became the exemplary corporate officer his father had always wanted him to be.

(If for some reason Dex doesn’t want to approach Fortner in his office, restage the scene elsewhere. Dex still comes upon him just as Sweet Amelie and the rats have finished making a meal of him. He then likely must gain access to the office to find the core clues.)

THE BAKED GOODS KING

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: Researching Bailey, The Next Victim

Lead-Outs: The Authoress, The Next Victim, The Black Sheep, The Rancher

Tall, thin, white haired, with a vocal twang pointing to his Texas Panhandle origins, Willard Classon tries to put Dex off his stride by taking him on a tour of his bread factory as he asks his questions.

Dex already knows Willard’s face well. Countless times it has beamed out at him from billboards, magazine ads, and the packaging on the loaf of bread he used to make toast this morning. He also remembers Classon from various newspaper appearances touting his charitable work with children’s hospitals. Photos of him pictured alongside adoring sick kids come to mind. In person, he sets Dex’s **Streetwise** alarms clanging. Willard reminds him of various bent businessmen he’s met over the years. He might be the kind of guy who believes more in his public image than anything else about himself.

Classon, who met Ahlberg in the mid-twenties, believes he owes his empire to the magical energy generated by the sacrifice of Amelie Bailey. He thinks that the house, where she is interred, acts as a conduit for this force, conjuring it from the spirit realm and directing it to him

According to this theory, if the ritual the house was designed for ever took place, he’d lose everything. So he not only wants his role in a child murder concealed forever, he will do what he can to ensure that the house remains standing, and in Ahlberg’s control.

Catherine Hare doesn’t know who he is, but Ahlberg, who also wants the house kept intact, has warned Classon about her. Classon’s responses depend on how Dex presents himself. If several of the conditions below apply, use the first one in the listed order.

If Dex Has Fortner's Letter

Upon seeing the letter, Classon's complexion turns ashen. He staggers over to a support beam to steady himself. After he recovers he asks Dex to join him in his office, at which point he offers him \$10,000 for the letter. If Dex refuses, he pulls a gun from his desk drawer.

GET CLASSON'S GUN

Fighting

Advance 6+: You leap over the desk and snatch the revolver from Classon's hand. Gain Edge 5, *"Show of Mastery."*

Hold 5-8: As per Advance, without Edge.

Setback 3 or less: Screaming something on the order of "No, no, I knew this day would come, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry," Classon sticks his gun in his mouth and blows his brains out. Gain Problem 13, *"A Sticky Demise."*

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Fighting or General/Physical

Extra Problem: 14, *"No Good Deed."*



Classon, if Dex saves him, reveals all, or at least "all" as he knows it. As always, the player must still pose the relevant questions.

Back in the crazy days before the Crash, Classon fell in with Ahlberg's occult circle.

They met with masks on, so he only figured out who a couple of the other members were:

- (core, "The Rancher") One of them was rancher Hank Easterday.
- Yet another was the architect Frank Bailey.
- [if Dex already knows about Easterday but has not identified all of the other coven members, Classon also reveals a random unrevealed name]
- Ahlberg and Bailey built a house meant to be destroyed in a great ritual.
- During this ritual, Bailey was supposed to kill his daughter.
- When he wouldn't, Easterday drew a pistol and forced Classon to slit her throat.
- Classon did this, but at the last minute Ahlberg interrupted the ritual.
- This infuriated the sole woman in the coven.
- But everyone else was relieved, when Ahlberg revealed that the rite would collapse the house while they were still inside. This would either kill them all, or transform them beyond recognition.
- Since then Ahlberg has preserved the house, while the woman has schemed to destroy it and complete the interrupted ritual. (If the other cultist revealed above is Catherine, Classon mentions her by name. Otherwise, he never learned it.)
- The house must be left standing. Classon offers to pay Dex to ensure that it does. If pressed, Classon admits that he credits its continued existence with his own good fortune ever since the incident.

If Dex Seems to Be Allied With Catherine

Classon says that he and Ahlberg moved in the same social circles before the Crash. Ahlberg and a few others, including Bailey and Catherine Hare, dabbled in the occult. Classon went to a few parties, hoping that they would turn wild and orgiastic.

But Catherine was the only woman there, and it was not at all the sort of funny business he was angling for. Since then he has put such

childish nonsense aside. But Catherine, unlike the others, seemed to truly believe in it. Over the years she grew crazier still, and Classon fears she's dangerous. She suffers from the bizarre delusion that destroying Ahlberg's house will grant her great mystical powers. Anyone getting mixed up with her is headed for trouble.

Assess Honesty shows this to be deceptive. A skeptical response to Classon's warning leads him to call Hank Easterday, who sends ranch hands to beat on him. Adapt the circumstances surrounding the Challenge "Ranch Hand Beatdown," p. 24, to this situation. If Dex hasn't yet identified Hank as a figure in the case, one of the ranch hands stupidly mentions his name while warning Dex to stay out of the Ahlberg case.

If Dex Simply Mentions

Catherine

Classon tells basically the same story as above, but dismisses Catherine as merely dotty, not dangerous, and doesn't say anything about her wanting to destroy Ahlberg's house. Unless Dex alarms him in some other way, he does not call Hank to request a beatdown for Dex. Instead he drops Hank's name, then calls him and warns him to expect a detective to show up asking questions. In other words, he delegates to Hank the task of deciding whether Dex constitutes a threat, which may or may not entail a ranch hand beatdown.

When put to the **Assess Honesty** test, this also registers as shift.

If Dex Plays It Close to the Vest

Classon says he moved in Ahlberg's circles before the Crash. At the time Classon was considering financing a performing arts center. Ahlberg recommended Frank Bailey to him. Classon went as far as announcing the project until he discovered that both men were involved in the occult. He then abandoned it for fear of damaging publicity. If asked for the names of other Ahlberg associates at the time, he mentions Hank Easterday or, if Dex knows that name already, that of another cultist he has yet to discover.

Unless Dex names Catherine, Classon assures him that this person also lacked awareness of any occult nonsense.

And again, **Assess Honesty** says he's fibbing.

THE RANCHER

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: The Asylum, The Next Victim

Lead-Outs: The Black Sheep, The Next Victim

Prior to visiting Easterday's Big E Ranch near Palmdale, an hour and a half north of the city, Dex can use **Accounting** to learn that he used to have a larger spread, inherited from his father. Over the course of the depression he has decreased the size of his herds. He makes most of his money supplying high-end beef to top L.A. restaurants, and renting out both his place and his stock for movie shoots.

Barrel-chested rancher Henry "Hank"

Easterday has lost his usual no-nonsense air since the rat with Amelie Bailey's face started coming around demanding that he agree to return to the Ahlberg house to complete the ritual. This started around two months ago, soon after the big rain storm.

Since the aborted ritual, Hank has tried to put the whole Ahlberg affair, and his past flirtation with the occult, out of his mind. He wants this business to end, and the rat to go away. Understandably, he does not want it revealed that he personally kidnapped Amelie Bailey and forced Willard Classon to murder her.

If asked for a meeting with Dex, Easterday agrees, because refusing would appear suspicious.

The story he wants to tell goes like this:

He approached Ahlberg in the twenties, because he was an oilman and Easterday wondered if there was oil under his land. There wasn't, but they remained friendly for a while. Through him he met the young roue Stuart Margrave (core clue, "The Black Sheep") and Chadwick Fortner (core clue, "The Next Victim.") He pulled away from Ahlberg when he and his architect friend Bailey tried to induct him into some weird secret society. That smelled downright un-Christian.

Assess Honesty says that's all bunk.

Under suitable pressure, Hank tells a different story. But though he's on the verge of cracking, he won't go easy. An ordinary attempt at **Intimidation** merely impels Hank to sic a gang of ranch hands on Dex. They jump him as he leaves the property after Hank sends him away.

On a Hold or Setback, the boys dump Dex in an old shack near a small standing movie set of a Western town. They intend for him to cool his heels for a while, then come back for another round. **Evidence Collection** turns up a girl's pink hairband buried under the dirt of the shack, which Dex partially disturbs when tossed in the shack. Marie Price can confirm that it belonged to Amelie.

The ranch hands have locked the shack door from the outside but **Locksmith** takes care of that. Armed with knowledge of the hairband, Dex can confront Easterday in a follow-up interview. He might wait until Easterday leaves his ranch to do business in the city, to separate him from his homespun goon squad.

Another way to get Hank to crack, with or without an intervening beating, would be to show up carrying a box with a scurrying rat inside and imply that it contains Sweet Amelie. Hank then spills it all, begging for mercy all the while:

- Yes, he belonged to Ahlberg's coven. His ranch was facing hard times and the oil man sold black magic as the road to prosperity.
- It sounds crazy, but Ahlberg convinced him to kidnap Amelie and take her to the house on the night of the preliminary ritual.
- Bailey was supposed to slit her throat, but balked. By this time even Ahlberg was losing heart, but Catherine Hare (core clue, "The Authoress") spurred them on.
- Easterday didn't want to murder the girl, so he pulled a gun on Classon and forced him to do it.
- The coven then interred her in the house's foundations.
- Months later, when the house was finished, they were supposed to attend a second rite, in which its impossible angles would collapse in on themselves.
- By this time Hank realized that none of the ritualists were meant to survive this second ceremony, and decided he wanted nothing more to do with it.

RANCH HAND BEATDOWN

Fighting

Advance 9+: After a few standard issue slaps and punches, you escape from the Easterday boys. Invite the player to describe Dex's means of escape, and the ranch hands' fruitless pursuit.

Hold 4-8: You let them slap you around a little, ducking the worst of their blows while giving them the impression that they've hurt you worse than they really have. Considering their work done, they stalk away, leaving you with only superficial nicks and bruises.

Setback 3 or less: Easterday's boys beat you senseless, leaving you in a crumpled heap. Gain Problem 15, "*Black and Blue.*"

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Fighting or General/Physical

Extra Problem: Problem 16, "*So Much for Dignity.*" Requires the player to narrate a particularly humiliating action undertaken while attempting to get away from the ranch hands.

- Fortunately Ahlberg himself seemed to lose heart, too.
- He heard nothing more about it until a couple of months ago. He read in the L.A. Times that Ahlberg's was one of several homes threatened by hillside erosion after the big rains.
- After that, the weird dreams started. And the rats began to scurry around. One of them had the girl's face, and hissed Hank's name at him before he scared it off.
- It sounds insane, but he is sure that it was one of the rats that left a message on his pillow, in girlish cursive. (Provide Handout #2, "Sweet Amelie's Message to Hank")

THE BLACK SHEEP

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: The Rancher, The Authoress

Lead-Outs: The Baked Goods King, The Power Broker, The Authoress

Dex can find dissolute former department store heir Stuart Margrave in Cranston's, a sweaty Central Avenue gym. **Accounting** research beforehand tells Dex that Margrave, implicated in several scandals in the late twenties and early thirties, was disinherited by his wealthy family. Since then he's bounced from one ill-advised venture to another. Now he's managing a young boxer, Wellington Stokes, on behalf of silent partners who wish to remain anonymous.

Dex sees young, thuggish gangster Mickey Cohen watching the sparring when he enters the gym, so **Streetwise** suggests that Stokes' real backers are the eastern-based Siegel mob. (Omit this callback to the action of "Fathomless Sleep" if you didn't run that scenario for the player and want to restrict the number of red herrings in play here.)

Portray Margrave as suave, well-spoken, and sardonically aware of how far he has fallen in life.

Margrave has been having bad dreams about the events at Ahlberg's ever since, but over the past two months they've grown more intense. He wishes to unburden himself, but before he talks he requires **Reassurance** that Dex will not breathe a word of what he says to anyone, especially his investors. "The fine gentlemen in my line of work prefer not to do business with those who have quite blatantly flipped their lids."

His story goes like this. Give the player space to elicit it with a series of questions.

- (core, "The Authoress") He joined the cult at the behest of Catherine Hare, with whom he'd been having an affair.
- If asked about Catherine's claim of an affair with Bailey, shrugs says it wouldn't surprise him. He wasn't faithful to her either.
- He found the group delightfully mad, but had no idea how far it would go.
- (core, "The Baked Goods King") Group members wore masks to hide their identities from one another, but he recognized one of

them as baked goods tycoon Willard Classon.

- There were to be two ceremonies surrounding the house: one when the foundation was poured, the other after it was completed.
- He missed the first ceremony, because he had been drinking heavily at Musso and Frank and was busy heaving his guts out in a Hollywood parking lot.
- After that the mood of the group changed. He sensed that something terrible had happened. Then he learned that Amelie had disappeared, and feared the worst.
- But he had no proof and had no idea how connected the rest of the cultists might be, so he knew better than to go to the cops.
- (alternate, "The Power Broker") During this time something else spooked him: a reporter from the Times came around asking about Bailey and the house. He posed very odd questions that suggested he had heard of an occult angle on the place. Margrave told him nothing, of course. He sported an unforgettable name: Malvin Scrivens.
- He meant to go to the final ritual, never believing that it would destroy the house, much less the world. But Ahlberg kept delaying it, which was fine by him.
- When Catherine could talk of nothing else but forcing the ritual to occur, he concluded that she had become supremely tiresome and stopped seeing her. "This town is full of wealthy, high-strung older women, if you like that type, which alas I do."
- Over the past two months he's been dreaming of Amelie's murder as if he was there. He sees one masked cultist back away from the terrified girl, then another of them pulls a gun on yet a third and makes him slit her throat. Then he sees them enter the body in the house's foundations.
- He also keeps hearing a skittering in the walls, wherever he goes. He looks over at the gym's cinder block walls and says:

"Even though I know there can't be anything scurrying in those walls, I hear it nonetheless. I hear it now!"

THE POWER BROKER

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-Ins: The Ahlberg House, The Black Sheep

Dex might have heard that Gil Dutton had a run-in with Los Angeles Times publisher Harry Chandler. Or he could have learned that a Times reporter named Malvin Scrivens posed occult-tinged questions to Stuart Margrave after Amelie's disappearance.


In the latter case, the Times' receptionist wrinkles her nose in confusion. Scrivens retired and has since passed away. But he was never a reporter: he was Chandler's head of security.

Dex finds all manner of obstacles placed between him and an interview with Chandler, unless he mentions Frank Bailey, the Ahlberg house, or passes along any hint of an esoteric angle on his case.

Streetwise tells Dex that Chandler is perhaps the city's ultimate string-puller. Like any observer of the L.A. power structure, he can recall the following facts:

His real estate dealings helped transform the city from a rural backwater to what it is today. Not so long ago he was America's largest landowner.

- He helped build or is helping to build such projects as Union Station, the new sanitized Chinatown, the Los Angeles Coliseum, Hollywood Bowl, Ambassador Hotel, and the real estate development the Hollywood sign was erected to advertise.
- He uses his paper to reward allies and punish foes.
- He either accepts the System or is an integral part of it.
- It's Reds he truly hates.
- His editorials promote eugenics.

 A visit to Madame Eva to ask about Chandler and the supernatural reveals his reputation in the city's esoteric circles. It is whispered, she says, that his frantic real estate dealings direct ley line energy to him. This flow of geomantic force maintains his lock on civic power, greater than that of the Mayor or Governor.

"Of course to buy that you have to believe in weird

forces beyond our ken," Eva carefully adds.

White-haired and slim, Chandler emanates WASP respectability. He deals with Dex from a position of lofty superiority.

Unless Dex tips his hand to reveal the supernatural element of his case, Chandler blandly stonewalls him:

- Mal Scrivens was not a reporter, and so would not have been asking questions about anything.
- He dimly recalls meeting this poor Dutton fellow. An avid follower of the field, he sometimes hosts receptions for up-and-coming architects. Dutton would have been invited to the most recent one, but Chandler recalls no untoward incident.

With **Assess Honesty**, either statement reads as false. But absent a reason to confide in Dex, Chandler cannot be budged.

However, should Dex either reveal his encounters with the rat-things, or past brushes with the supernatural from a previously played scenario, Chandler decides to treat him as an ally, giving away as little as possible about his arcane activities.

On an **Academic Push**, Dex has heard his Sources Alfred Kelham and Max Weyl talk about the esoteric references in many Los Angeles buildings, some of which, like City Hall, Chandler himself had a hand in. Dex can recall enough of these to indicate to Chandler that he is in the know on such matters. He need not explicitly mention ghouls, Mi-Go, or whatever else you've had him bumping up against.

Chandler's side of the ensuing back-and-forth goes something like this:

- Los Angeles stands on the brink of an abyss between progress and the improvement of mankind on one hand, and utter destruction and entropy on the other. Without it not just America but the world faces doom.
- The city functions only as an engine of betterment if its innate power is permitted to flow in that direction. A few key men ensure that this happens.
- Well-constructed, harmonious buildings and neighborhoods bend the city toward betterment. Buildings constructed with certain deliberately harmful angles corrupt that

energy, and the auras of the people who come into contact with them.

- Chandler can instinctively sense when a person has come under the influence of corrupt energies. When he met Gil Dutton at his recent reception for the city's young architects, he recoiled from the man's aura.
- As it is essential that Chandler's aura remain uncontaminated, he had Dutton ejected from the meeting forthwith. Naturally he did not inform him of the reasons for his forced departure.
- Dutton's tainted spiritual essence reminded Chandler of an encounter many years ago with Frank Bailey. Bailey's aura bore the same pollution—but infinitely worse.
- Chandler has no specific knowledge of the Ahlberg house, but if Bailey had anything to do with it, he would not be surprised to hear that it exerted a dread influence over those who entered it.
- As a general observation, Chandler ventures that instead of looking at this case as whodunnit, Dex might indeed be facing a whatdunnit.

Dex may decide that Chandler himself sounds sinister. And he does, though not in a way that impinges on the mystery at hand.

If he either ignores or suppresses that reaction and impresses Chandler as a willing ally, Chandler reaches into his desk drawer (or pocket, if the conversation takes place elsewhere) and places a small piece of sandstone in his hand. A sigil carved into the stone resembles a stem with three double-sided branches jutting from it. Chandler says he might be able to use it as a ward to arrest intrusions by malign, otherworldly intelligences. "Used with a fervent heart, you might be able to slumber an entity by as much as 89 years. That's a Fibonacci number, you know."

If Dex takes the stone, give the player Edge 6, "Chandler's Stone." As Chandler concludes the interview he says that he wants the stone back at the end of Dex's case.



Later, Madame Eva can tell Dex that this is one of the symbols some grimoires call the Elder Sign. It can supposedly be used to hold at bay

monstrous incarnations of cosmic degeneration.

Virginia Ashbury can explain that the Fibonacci sequence consists of numbers derived by adding up the previous two numbers in the series. Numbers in the sequence occur frequently in nature, from the internal arrangement of a Nautilus shell to the arrangement of stems or leaves on many plants. Some call it a mathematical expression of nature's inherent order.

Dex might already know that he needs to shore up the house indefinitely. If asked, Chandler agrees to find a construction firm to complete the work laid out in Dutton's plans. Dex can get those blueprints from either Ahlberg or Rose Dutton. Chandler makes it clear that he won't be using any of his usual contractors, who he would not dare contaminate. Should Dex later check on who Chandler hires, he discovers that he chose a struggling operation owned and operated by a black family from Central Avenue.

RE-INTERVIEWING ROSE

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-Ins: The Power Broker, The Ahlberg House, The Asylum

Lead-Outs: The Power Broker

Asked about the untoward incident between her husband and Harry Chandler, Rose says that Gil spoke to her about it but was mystified by what had happened. Along with other young architects, he received an invitation to meet with Chandler in an event in the ballroom of the Van Nuys hotel, downtown.

A major landowner in the city, Chandler participates in many property developments and influences various public projects as well. This excited Gil enormously: a good impression on Chandler can make an architect's career. But when Gil shook his hand in the reception line, Chandler broke contact and reeled back, as if he'd touched a live wire. Before Gil knew it, the off-duty cops who act as the great man's plainclothes security detail were hustling him out of the hotel. This unexplained rejection threw Gil into a funk. But not enough to kill himself.

Asked about timing, Rose says he went to the reception after a meeting with Ahlberg a few days ago. So yes, he likely headed from the Ahlberg House straight to the Van Nuys.

PROWLING THE HOUSE

Scene Type: Core

Lead-In: The Ahlberg House, any other

Entering the house alone without Ahlberg's knowledge requires a quick **Stealth** test, **Difficulty 5**. Otherwise Ahlberg finds him and scolds him for the intrusion.

(core) During this exchange Ahlberg may blurt out his fear that Dex has fallen under the house's spell and is trying to fulfill its desire for destruction. Or he might ask if the house sent rats to kill him, as it clearly did to Dutton.

Unless Dex has aligned himself with Catherine (truly or seemingly), a successful intrusion causes the house to retaliate. It either sends a swarm of rats, led by Sweet Amelie, to attack him. Or it tries to do him in with an illusion: as he explores the upper floor of the house, it creates an imaginary staircase for him to descend—when he's really climbing off a balcony into thin air.

ILLUSIONARY STAIRCASE

Sense Trouble

Advance 9+: You realize before you step over it that the staircase is shimmering, and thus unreal. It's the house itself, trying to kill you!

Hold 5-8: You step into thin air as the staircase vanishes beneath your feet. You dangle from the balcony and must either cry out to Ahlberg for help, revealing your uninvited prescence in his house, or accept the Setback result.

Setback 4 or less: You fall one story to the wooden floor, landing on your face and elbows. The house itself tried to kill you! Gain Problem 23, "*Nasty Spill.*"

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Fighting/Physical

Extra Problem: Problem 24, "*Blurred Vision.*"

The rat swarm attack requires Dex to undergo the Stability Challenge "Maintain Bearings After Rat-Thing Sighting", p. 30 at a -1 penalty, which combines with any bonuses or penalties accrued from the attack Challenge itself.

RAT SWARM ATTACK

Fighting

Advance 9+: You find a way to send the rats scrambling. (Invite the player to describe how.) You sense that the rats were not sent by any human force, but by the house itself. You may attempt to capture Sweet Amelie. (Use Challenge on p. 29) +1 bonus on imminent Stability Challenge.

Hold 5-8: Rats swarm over you, trying to kill you. They bite you, but you escape them and the house without serious injury. You sense that the rats were not sent by any human force, but by the house itself. -1 penalty on imminent Stability Challenge.

Setback 4 or less: As per Hold, but gain Problem 17, "*Rat Bite*" and penalty on imminent Stability Challenge is -2.

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Fighting or General/Physical


Extra Problem: Problem 22, "*Blurred Vision*"

THE MESSAGE

Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction

The house becomes aware of Dex when he first steps inside it. It identifies him as potentially a threat, but perhaps an ally, and dispatches Sweet Amelie to send him a message. If the player specifies that Dex sleeps in his office, he discovers the message when he wakes up in the morning. Otherwise he finds it waiting for him the first time he returns to his office after his first visit to the house.

A sheet of paper Dex didn't put there juts from the cushions of his office couch. A couple of dirty, rodent-size paw marks blemish the rumpled page. Several of his pencils, bearing fresh chew marks, like on the floor beneath the couch. The message appears as Handout #3, on p. 33.

 Virginia Ashbery can confirm that the indentations on the pencils match chew marks left by rodents—most likely the common brown or black rat.

SWEET AMELIE

Scene Type: Alternate / Antagonist Reaction

Unless Dex appears to be working with Catherine to destroy the house by the night after his receipt of the Message, Sweet Amelie comes to call on him. The Rat-Thing scuttles into Dex's bedroom in the wee small hours. Dex awakens with the creature perched on his pillow, staring down at him—so that her face appears upside down from his perspective. In a squeaky parody of a young girl's voice it again demands that he help Catherine destroy the house. Once it has given its quick message it scampers away—but Dex can attempt to entrap it.

CATCHING THE RAT-THING

Athletics

Advance 9+: You capture the creature.

(Invite the player to describe exactly how Dex does this - an overturned wastebasket maybe?)

Hold 5-8: The creature gets away, but at least it didn't bite you.

Setback 5 or less: The creature gets away, biting you in the process. Gain Problem 17, "*Rat Bite.*"

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Athletics or General/Physical

Extra Problem: Problem 18, "*Broken Toe.*"

Having caught the rat-thing, Dex can then use

Intimidation to demand answers from it.

Sweet Amelie knows the house will reconstitute it if it dies, but that would still hurt quite a lot. And Sweet Amelie hates pain. Sweet Amelie also refers to itself in the first person. Asked corresponding questions, it supplies the following information:

- Sweet Amelie is not the spirit of the stupid girl. Sweet Amelie merely borrows girl's pretty face and voice.
- The human world is doomed. The age of the rats is coming.
- And in that new age Sweet Amelie will be the greatest rat of all.
- The end of the world will start when the rite is finished and the house destroyed.
- Of all the humans who started the rite, only Catherine Hare is not a mewling coward. She will help Sweet Amelie complete it.
- The more of the original ritualists who are in the house when it slides down the cliff and unfolds unto itself in oblivion, the sooner the turning of the ages will come.
- Then the house will become a gate, beckoning Yog-Sothoth, transforming it from malign mathematical construct into embodied reality.

- Then much carnage to feed upon. Much!
 - Sweet Amelie is not the boss. Sweet Amelie is but the humble servant.
 - Who commands Sweet Amelie? The house, stupid human, the house!
- Dex may wish to dispose of the creature when its answers become repetitive.

DESTROY THE RAT-THING

Fighting

Advance 9+: Invite the player to describe how Dex dispatches Sweet Amelie. +2 bonus on subsequent Stability Challenge.

Hold 5-8: Despite your best efforts, the creature eludes him, scampering through a near invisible crack between the floor and the floorboards.

Setback 4 or less: You stomp the rat into a slimy paste. But as it dies, it squeaks, "See you again soon, Dexxxx RAY-mond!" -2 penalty on subsequent Stability Challenge.

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Fighting or General/Physical

Extra Problem: Problem 19, "Slime Splatter."

MAINTAIN BEARINGS AFTER RAT-THING SIGHTING

Stability

Advance 9+: Most people are afraid of rats with faces. somehow, for you, the two things cancel out. Gain Edge 7, "Shrug off Weirdness."

Hold 5-8: The sight of that unholy thing leaves you shaken. Take Time to knock a few back in your favourite tavern, or accept a Setback as a result.

Setback 3 or less: That girl's face on a rat's head... this is an image that will reverberate in your skull for a good long time to come. Gain Problem 20, "The Only Thing Worse Than Seeing a Rat-Thing Is Hearing it Talk"

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Fighting or General/Physical

Extra Problem: Problem 22, "Deep Repression."



CONCLUSION

Dex can crack his actual case when he knows who killed Gil Dutton—the house, with a rat swarm as the murder weapon. He must then take some kind of action to neutralize it as a threat, at least for a while. The surest road to success lies through the stone supplied by Chandler in “The Power Broker.” Whether he explains the truth to Rose or can help with the insurance company is a different question.

Dex could solve the insurance issue by getting Keenholts to show up for the climactic cultist meet, so that he witnesses something sufficiently uncanny that he decides to rubber-stamp the Dutton claim in order to forget about it forever and ever. Reward a player who thinks of this by narrating the outcome so that Keenholts winds up drooling and slack-jawed but not too insane to complete the paperwork.

Dex may also decide that Amelie Bailey’s surviving killers must be brought to justice.

How this happens is up to the player. React accordingly, staging the most exciting possible climax around Dex’s actions.

Dex could gather them all at the house to prompt a classic detective scene in which he confronts the cast with the truth, here wringing from them a collective confession. Amid the house’s weird atmosphere, one admission prompts the others to incriminate themselves in Amelie’s slaying. (Dex may already have a confession lined up from Classon.)

After a confession, Hank Easterday, if he is present, draws his six-shooter and attempts to kill everyone there, to cover his tracks. (see pg 34, Hank Opens Fire)

Catherine attempts to plant dynamite on the weakened hillside, ready to blow it up with a detonator in her pocket. Dex can spot the explosives on the way in if the player describes him as looking for signs of danger. Or, on a **Difficulty 5 Sense Trouble Quick Test**, during the confrontation inside the house, he notes the detonator concealed in the pocket of her stylish suit jacket. (pg 33, Keeping the House Intact)

Is Catherine already dead for some reason? Any other coven member could have a rat-inspired

change of heart and succumb to the house’s demands.

Alternately, Dex could come upon the surviving cultists gathered at the house, convened by some combination of Catherine, the house and Sweet Amelie, when he goes there to tie up loose ends.

Or, when he has basically cracked the case and isn’t moving toward a solution, he could discover that the cultists are heading to the house to perpetrate something final.

Be ready for the player to precipitate a different ending somewhere else. It might still involve Easterday opening fire on everyone, or the house collapsing from afar.

Has your scenario so far been sadly lacking in rat swarm attacks? Prior events have surely foreshadowed this, so if it makes any sense to throw one in here, adapt the “Rat Swarm Attack” Challenge on p. 28. Depending on the circumstances it could be going after Dex plus any cultists still resisting the house’s demands to perform the final rite, or Dex alone. Here Dex can spend the “Chandler’s Stone” Edge to, on an Advance or Hold, dematerialize Sweet Amelie and the rat-things and prevent the house from summoning more. On a Hold, the stone blackens and crumbles to dust in Dex’s hand. (see pg 33, Using the Stone)

Adjust these Challenges as needed, or improvise more appropriate ones.

KEEPING THE HOUSE INTACT

Athletics

Advance 8+: You wrestle the detonator from Catherine's hand, preventing the explosion.

Hold 3–7: Catherine hits the detonator. An explosion ripples through the house. As it teeters over the blasted hillside, you are able to leap clear of the structure before it topples. The others remain inside; no one but you survives.

Setback 2 or less: Catherine hits the detonator. The house topples over, down the hillside. Along with the others, you tumble inside it as it transforms into a whirlwind of deadly debris. They are all killed. Make a Difficulty 3 Athletics Quick Test. On a failure, gain Problem 26, "*Debris Injury.*"

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Fighting or General/Physical

The house's eldritch presence only rouses itself when the cultists start performing the rite or Catherine attempts to destroy the house. When it manifests, Dex can try, if he has the "Chandler's Stone" Edge, to use it to arrest its ability to act in the material world.

USING THE STONE

Stability

Advance 12+: The house's resident entity becomes visible as the entire structure seems to distort into a weird vortex. You see a representation of Amelie's spirit rise from the floorboards, then escape the confines of the house. The vortex shrieks at you in a nameless, inhuman tongue, and then collapses in on itself with a curious pop. You can tell that you have imprisoned it for decades. Counter any Mythos Shock card you hold.

Hold 4–11: The house's spirit becomes visible as the entire structure seems to distort into a weird vortex. You see a representation of Amelie's spirit rise from the floorboards, only to be ripped apart. The vortex shrieks at you in a nameless, inhuman tongue, and then dissipates into a million black needles. You can tell that you have imprisoned the entity for years. However, the stone blackens and crumbles to dust in your hand.

Setback 3 or less: The house's resident entity becomes visible as the entire structure seems to distort into a weird vortex. You see a representation of Amelie's spirit rise from the floorboards, fly towards you, and devour your soul and consciousness. Everything about you, save the physical husk of your body, is obliterated.

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Fighting or General/Physical

HANK OPENS FIRE

Fighting

Advance 8+: You shoot Hank dead.

Choose which of his intended victims (in addition to you, natch) remains still alive, and narrate the situation accordingly.

Hold 3–7: You shoot Hank dead, but not before he blasts everyone else present.

Setback 2 or less: You shoot Hank dead, but not before he blasts everyone else present, including you. Gain Problem 25, *"Bullet Hole."*

Spending Edges: Any benefit to Fighting or General/Physical

If the house is destroyed in Dex's presence without a prior Hold or Advance in the "Using the Stone" Challenge, he senses an invisible but terrible force coalescing from it. The word Yog-Sothoth penetrates his consciousness. Somehow the summoned entity is unseen and a collection of abstract shapes that defy known geometry and bears the distorted face of Sweet Amelie.

He realizes that he had the chance to prevent an unspeakable doom from visiting itself upon the city, and failed. Dex receives Problem 27, "Yog-Sothoth Loosed."

Denouement or Grim Coda?

Dex could die, or suffer permanent catatonia, during the conclusion. If not, the denouement consists of whatever he has to say to Rose about her husband's fate. Then, as usual, if Dex has Problem cards still in hand, prompt the player to narrate a grim coda. Otherwise, prompt a moment allowing him to savor this moment of relative triumph in ongoing struggle against human corruption and cosmic terror.

ANTAGONIST REACTIONS

Trigger	Reaction	Setback	Hold	Advance	Extra Problem
Word gets around that Dex is trying to disprove that Dutton killed himself	Scene "The Insurance Investigator," p12 (if it has not already occurred)				
Dex has met Keenholts	Keenholts shadows Dex at an inconvenient time <i>Stealth</i>	1 or less: Keenholts' presence makes a witness skittish	2-4 Dex gives him the slip	5+ Dex circles back on him, making a fool of him and thus convincing him to back off	Problem 28, "Car Trouble."
Dex has been to the Ahlberg House but not seen the Rat-Things	Detects ominous scurrying at the scenes's periphery <i>Cool</i>	2 or less: Problem 29, "Antsy"	3-5: Scurrying, schmurring. Dex keeps on going.	6+: Edge 8, "The Tough Get Going."	Problem 8, "Denial."
Dex has antagonized Keenholts	Cop friends of Keenholts, Detectives Liebzeit and Ridgel, show up to bust Dex's chops and ask nosy questions. Bargaining Push bribes them to lay off; otherwise this antagonist reaction might recur.				
Dex has alarmed Hank Easterday but Challenge "Ranch Hand Beatdown" has not occurred	Ranch hands show up to threaten Dex. <i>Cool.</i>	1 or less: Dex can't help mouthing off to them, triggering "Ranch Hand Beatdown."	2-5: Dex stays stoic in the face of their hayseed threats	6+: they decide they're never gonna rattle his cage; next entry never occurs	Problem 2, "Delayed Aggression."
Dex got Hold in above reaction scene	Trigger "Ranch Hand Beatdown."				
Dex has killed Sweet Amelie	A regenerated Sweet Amelie tries to kill Dex through sabotage: chewed breakline, arson, ect.	1 or less: Dex suffers minor injury; gain Problem 30, "Cuts and Bruises."	2-4: Dex sees the sabotage and neutralizes it before it can harm him	5+: As per Hold. Player can counter one of the following Problem cards, if currently held: 3, 7, 11, 16, 20, 21, 29.	Problem 29, "Antsy."
Player has Problems "Eldritch Stirrings", "Sensitive" or "Rattled by the House"	Dex hallucinates that he is in the Ahlberg house, where he witnesses something horrible. <i>Stability</i>	2 or less: Gain Problem 32, "Crumbling Reality."	3-5: You realize that a nap is in order. Nothing's amiss.	6+: The weird vision prompts and insight. The Keeper supplies a hint steering Dex in a fruitful direction.	Problem 31, "Twitchy."
Dex has Chandler worried	Tom Treadwell, ex Red Squad cop and head of security for Chandler, shows up to make polite but menacing inquires				

HANDOUTS

#1. Fortner's Letter

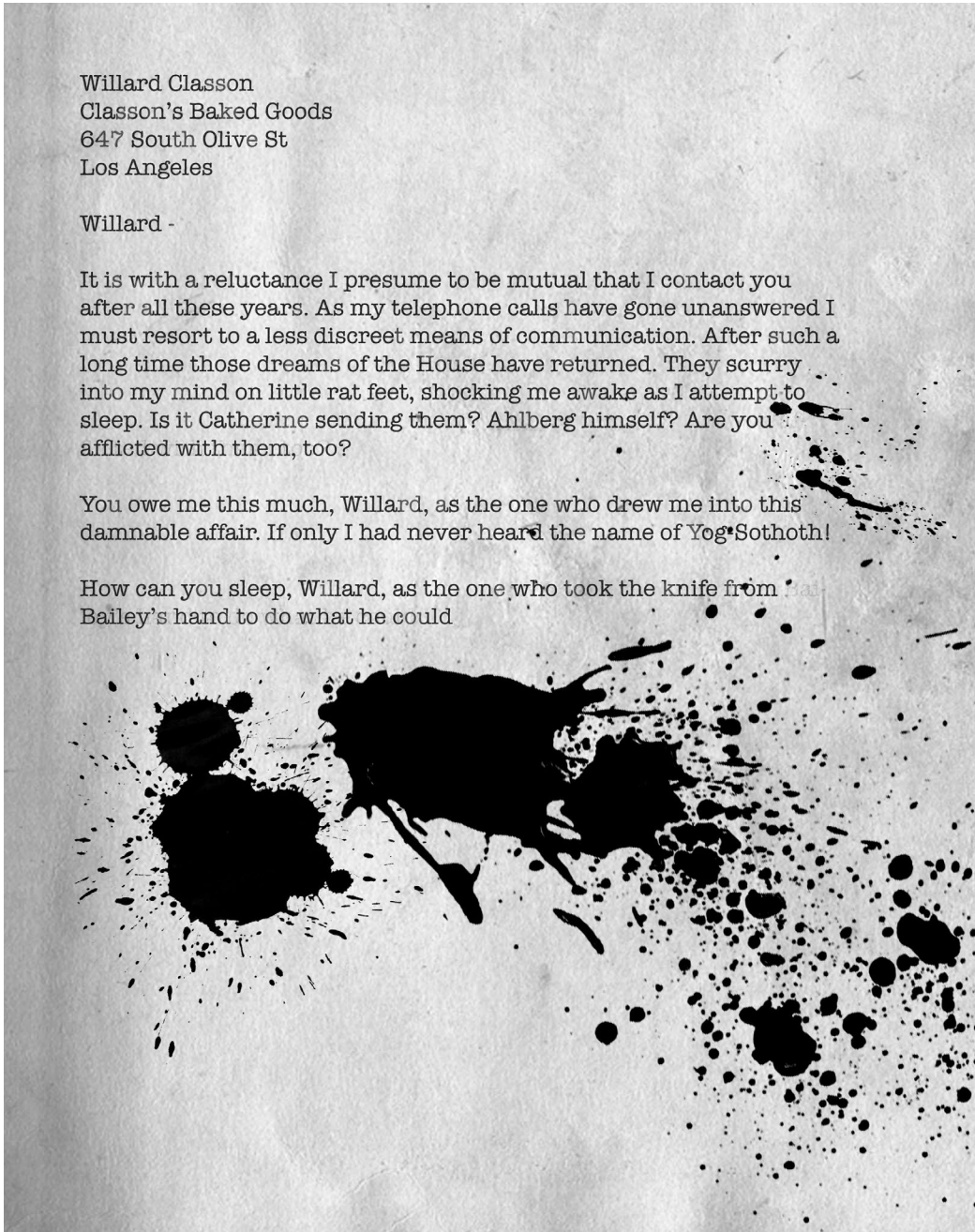
Willard Classon
Classon's Baked Goods
647 South Olive St
Los Angeles

Willard -

It is with a reluctance I presume to be mutual that I contact you after all these years. As my telephone calls have gone unanswered I must resort to a less discreet means of communication. After such a long time those dreams of the House have returned. They scurry into my mind on little rat feet, shocking me awake as I attempt to sleep. Is it Catherine sending them? Ahlberg himself? Are you afflicted with them, too?

You owe me this much, Willard, as the one who drew me into this damnable affair. If only I had never heard the name of Yog Sothoth!

How can you sleep, Willard, as the one who took the knife from Sam Bailey's hand to do what he could



#2. Sweet Amelie's Letter to Hank

Hank Easter Day
You Cheated House
The House Calls You
Hwen The Time Comes U Will No
You Must Come
Come or Die
Finish whAt U Started
Come or Die!!!

#3. Sweet Amelie's Letter to Dex

The House Must Be Destroyed
Catherinehair Knows
What Must be Done
Help Catherinehair
Help Or Be Doomed
Only Warning!!!

The House Up in the Hills Problem Cards

PROBLEM 1

Keenholt's Vendetta *Continuity*

Insurance inspector Elmer Keenholt has decided you're a bad apple. Out of sheer cussedness, he intends to see to it that the cops revoke your P.I.'s license.



PROBLEM 2

Delayed Aggression

You swallowed your anger. But it won't stay swallowed for long.

Lose an Interpersonal Push. If you don't have one, lose the next new Push of any kind you gain. Get the Push back the next time you start a fight.



PROBLEM 3

Rattled by the House

Something about the Ahlberg House sets your nerves on edge.

-1 penalty on all Challenges undertaken within sight of the house.



PROBLEM 4

Eldritch Stirrings *Mythos Shock* ☼

Uh-Oh. The hairs on the back of your neck writhe, just the way they did when you encountered that last situation. You know the one. Countering Mythos Shock Problems also costs you an Academic or Interpersonal Push.



PROBLEM 5

Trail of Pain

That interaction left you feeling like a Grade-A heel.

You can't gain new Interpersonal Pushes. Counter by Taking Time to have someone remind you of your essential decency.



PROBLEM 6

The Cost of Empathy

You show someone you understand their agony. But now that you've opened up, how are you going to close it all down again? -2 on all Cool tests. Counter by Taking Time for heavy drinking (Or the indulgence of another self-destructive vice.)



PROBLEM 7

His Rat-Gnawed Visage

In a moment of stress you suddenly see the victim's face and the telltale bites of the rodents who devoured his flesh.

-2 on your next General/Physical Challenge, then discard.



PROBLEM 8

Denial

Your mind builds a wall around the terrible truth. Hope it doesn't crumble!

After the next scene in which you gain evidence of a supernatural force or entity, lose a Push. If you have no Pushes, you lose your next Push as soon as you get it.



PROBLEM 9

Well-Honed Paranoia

You resist being drawn in by reminding yourself to be distrustful of everything and everyone.

-2 on your next Stability test, then discard.



PROBLEM 10

Under Catherine's Spell

You know the hold Catherine has over you is wrong and will lead to trouble. But there it is, all the same. Taking any action against

Catherine requires a difficulty check of 6 Cool Quick Test. Discard after two such successful tests.



PROBLEM 11

Rat-Thing Sighting

Mythos Shock

The sight of that girl's face, distorted and on the body of a rat, sears itself into your consciousness, undermining your sense of reality. -1 to all General/Mental tests. Counter by finding and laying to rest Amelie Bailey's remains.



PROBLEM 12

Fainting Spell

You faint dead away, seeing only flickers of the full horror. On the way down, you smack your head on something.

-2 General/Physical tests. Discard after 24 hours pass for Dex in the game setting.



PROBLEM 13

A Sticky Demise
Continuity

Until the cops say otherwise, you're a suspect in Classon's death. Sure, they'll probably clear you. Eventually. But until then the boys on the force who dislike you can drag it out and watch you squirm.



PROBLEM 14

No Good Deed

You get the gun out of Classon's mouth, but it goes off anyhow - nicking your arm.

-1 on General/Physical tests until you Take Time to get the wound patched up.



PROBLEM 15

Black and Blue

That was some beating you just took.

-2 on General/Physical tests for the next 24 hours in the story; -1 for subsequent 24 hours, then discard.



PROBLEM 16

So Much for Dignity

You did something particularly humiliating while trying to extract yourself from that situation.

You can't spend or gain benefits from Edge cards. Discard the next time you score an Advance.



PROBLEM 17

Rat Bite

The rat-thing's bite leaves a small but suppurating wound on your hand.

Until countered by Taking Time for a penicillin shot, take a penalty to all Cool and Stability tests equal to the number of Mythos Shock Problem cards you hold.



PROBLEM 18

Broken Toe

In your haste to act, you badly stub your toe on a hard object.

-1 on Athletics and Fighting tests. Discard at the end of scenario.



PROBLEM 19

Slime Spatter

In your haste to destroy the creature, you get some of its blood on you. And by blood, we mean acidic slime.

For next 24 hours in story, -2 on Fighting and Athletics tests.



PROBLEM 20

The Only Thing Worse Than Seeing a Rat-Thing is Hearing it Talk
Mythos Shock

That such a grotesque being can exist, and scheme, and think, and talk... You thought you've seen everything. Now you're afraid that you understand nothing. Until countered, when making General/Mental tests, you can't gain die rolls from by taking on an extra problem.



PROBLEM 21

Deep Repression

Push all those fears deep down inside you. You can deal with them later, when there's time.

If you haven't countered this Problem by the end of the case, you do something crazy and/or self-descriptive during the denouement.



PROBLEM 22

Blurred Vision

While escaping the rats, you smash your head on a door frame, injuring an eye.

-2 to General/Manual tests. When you next see a Source, he or she insists that you Take Time to recover and won't take one for an answer. Discard at end of case.



PROBLEM 23

Nasty Spill

That was one hell of a fall you took.

-2 on your next General/Physical test and -1 on your next General Manual test. Then discard.



PROBLEM 24

Sensitive

*You're becoming sensitive to otherworldly activity. Perhaps **too** sensitive.*

Make a Difficulty 5 Stability Quick Test when countering a Mythos Shock Problem, then discard. If you fail, the Mythos Shock Problem is not countered.



PROBLEM 25

Bullet Wound

You've been shot.

If this is your worst problem at the end of the climactic scene, you die.



PROBLEM 26

Debris Injury

You are in the Ahlberg House as it blows apart and topples down the hillside.

If this is your worst problem at the end of the climactic scene, you suffer fatal injuries and die.



PROBLEM 27

Yog Sothoth Loosed
Continuity

An aspect of the vastly powerful Mythos entity Yog-Sothoth now prowls Los Angeles. Weird manifestations will increase throughout the city. You won't always be able to tell the mystic horrors related to your current case from the random emanations of this new, pervasive threat.



PROBLEM 28

Car Trouble

You pushed your oft-abused automobile a little too hard.

-1 on Driving and Shadowing for tests undertaken in your car. Counter by Taking Time for repairs or spending Technical Push.



PROBLEM 29

Antsy

Something creepy keeps happening just outside the range of your peripheral vision.

-2 on your next Cool or Stability test, then discard. Or counter by spending an Interpersonal Push.



PROBLEM 30

Cuts and Bruises

Even superficial injuries can make the difference in a pinch.

-1 to Fighting and Athletics tests. Flip a coin after any such test, discarding this card if it comes up heads.



PROBLEM 31

Twitchy

If you are still holding this card at the end of the case, you develop a permanent nervous tic. If you have it in hand at the beginning of a case, lose 1 Interpersonal Push.



PROBLEM 32

Crumbling Reality

A hallucination leaves you doubting the veracity of your own senses.

Each time you suffer a Setback, check to see if you have a Push token corresponding to the ability used in the Challenge. If so, lose 1 Push token of the type. Describe the hallucination you have during the incident. Counter by Taking Time for shrink treatment.



The House Up In The Hills Edge Cards

EDGE 1

Cool as a Cucumber

You don't show your anger easy. Instead you keep it where it belongs - deep in your roiling gut.

Spend an extra die on any Cool or Stability test.



EDGE 2

Eerie Feeling

There's something weird about the Ahlberg House, and it has you looking in every corner for skitters and scurries.

+1 to Sense Trouble tests. Spend for an extra die on a Sense Trouble test.



EDGE 3

Tough Cookie

The P.I game ain't for bleeding hearts. You don't let others' distress stop you from doing your job.

Discard to counter a Problem that penalizes a General/Mental ability (but is not a Mythos Shock)



EDGE 4

Show of Resolve

When the going gets tough, you get tougher.

Discard for an extra die on any General/Mental or General/Physical test.



EDGE 5

Show of Mastery

Your deft handling of a tough situation gives you a bracing jolt of confidence.

Discard for an extra die on any test, or to counter a Problem that penalizes any General/Mental ability.



EDGE 6

Chandler's Stone

Harry Chandler gave you a piece of sandstone with a mysterious sigil on it. He says it can arrest the influence of the otherworldly. When you're done with it, he wants it back.



EDGE 7

Shrug off Weirdness

Yeah, that was strange. But you're getting used to strange.

Spend to counter a Mythos Shock Problem.



EDGE 8

The Tough Get Going

You turn the adrenaline rush of inchoate fear into determination to press on, ever harder.

Spend an extra die on your next Challenge.

















DEXTER “DEX” RAYMOND

Hard-boiled Shamus

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

Accounting 
 Assess Honesty 
 Bargain 
 Cop Talk 
 Cryptography 
 Evidence Collection 
 Intimidation 
 Inspiration 
 Law 
 Locksmith 
 Photography 
 Reassurance 
 Research 
 Streetwise 

GENERAL ABILITIES

Athletics 
 Cool 
 Conceal 
 Devices 
 Driving 
 Filch 
 Fighting 
 Preparedness 
 Sense Trouble 
 Shadowing 
 Stability 
 Stealth 

STORY

Archetypal hardboiled private investigator Dex Raymond prowls Los Angeles' haunted streets as an outsider by choice. With his smarts and grit, he could have wormed his way into its corrupt power structure. Instead, he operates on its fringes, righting wrongs for a modest fee, plus expenses. In addition to his contacts, he counts one more key friend— LAPD Detective Sergeant Ted Gargan, a rare honest man in a town where cops can be bought by the barrel.

SOURCES



VIRGINIA ASHBURY, Scientist
 Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry,
 Forensics, Geology.

A slim, somewhat birdlike woman typically seen in her white lab coat, Dr. Virginia Ashbury dotes on Dex as she would on a younger brother.



MADAME EVA, Fortune Teller
 Cthulhu Mythos, Occult.

This harmless grifter can assist Dex with information on the world of cults, spiritualism, and hermetic magic.



DR. JEFF “MACK” MACKINTOSH, Shrink
 Medicine, Outdoorsman, Pharmacy, Psychology.

Dex bounce questions off him, provided he can sit in his chair and puff on his pipe while doing it.



ALFRED KELHAM, Professor
 Anthropology, Archaeology, History,
 Languages, Oral History, Theology.

Proudly pedantic and a touch paternalistic, Kelham sees in Dex an echo of his own son, a soldier killed in WWI.



MAX WEYL, Production Designer
 Architecture, Art History, Bureaucracy,
 Craft, Flattery.

He's always willing to entertain Dex's questions on the art world or movie gossip, provided he doesn't have to stop moving.