

The Button

Briefing

Delta Green's SigInt geeks keep an eye on a number of academic journals in case something dangerous slips through and ends up in the public domain. They've flagged a paper published by one Roshan Singh, an electronics engineering graduate at [university] as containing "possible hypergeometric markers". Friendly assets are working to discredit and bury the paper before anyone looks too closely; the Agents are brought in to visit [university] and work cleanup detail. While The Group will be content with Singh's silence - and preferably a minimum of violence - The Program may be interested in recruiting him.

What's Going On

Working late one night on a custom circuit die for a term project, Singh stumbles upon a curious arrangement of transistors that fails to pass a signal; rather, Singh discovers that his circuit seems to receive signals before they are sent. Since this is impossible, he explores the arrangement further.

Singh builds a simple hand-held testing device; a battery, his mysterious circuit, an LED and a small red button. In every test the LED illuminates less than a second before he presses the button. Puzzled, Singh shows this device to two of his classmates, Sarah Meyer and Elijah Felding; they are likewise stumped, and resolve to build their own devices to test.

Confident he's stumbled onto something that will make his career, Singh returns to his apartment and starts collating everything he's discovered about his circuit. He sends an email to his friends and family that he will be out of communication for a while, and disconnects completely from the outside world. Meanwhile Singh's two classmates, having built test devices of their own, become increasingly obsessed with "solving" them. Eventually, their obsession drives them to a breaking point. Felding has a violent psychotic break and is committed to a psychiatric hospital. Meyer withdraws into a catatonic state, leaving her housemate to care for her.

Singh submits the final draft of his paper to a journal published by the university, and emerges from his apartment. Upon learning the condition of Meyer and Felding, he is shocked. He speaks to Felding at the hospital, then visits Meyer, then returns to his lab and picks up his testing device.

Roshan Singh

Singh is either in his lab or his apartment (whichever the Agents visit last), sitting on the floor with a testing device in his hand, occasionally clicking the button and cursing to himself. A successful HUMINT roll will reveal that he is close to his breaking point. Singh has no reason to lie about his work; given a plausible reason for the Agents' interest, he will gladly explain the circuit and the device - see below.

Asked whether there are any other devices, Singh will confirm that Meyer and Felding also built copies - he will not volunteer this information unless asked. He will discuss, reluctantly, their mental state when last he saw them.

Singh can be persuaded to drop his research, given a logical argument/successful Persuade roll. Having been a victim of schoolyard bullies in his formative years, Singh will respond negatively to intimidation; he will threaten to call security, seek legal representation, and use any means at his disposal to defy the Agents if they issue an ultimatum. Financial incentives will be more effective; Singh can be bribed

into silence in exchange for clearing his student debts and a stipend sufficient to live comfortably on - this would, after all, have made his career.

Singh is weary of mysterious government men offering unlimited budgets, but a Persuade roll will convince him that the Program are the good guys. He'll want assurances that his friends will be looked after, and that his work will not be used for anything unethical or illegal; the Program can satisfy the first condition, but the second is left to the interpretation of the Keeper.

Sarah Meyer

Sarah spends most of her time in her room, staring at the testing device cupped in both hands. Every so often the light blinks and she clicks the button. She is unresponsive to conversation, though somewhat responsive to physical stimulus; she will stand or sit if prompted, walk if led, and can feed herself if presented with a meal. She requires assistance bathing, dressing, and using the bathroom; her roommate Molly is a nurse and is capable of providing care, but between her studies and caring for Sarah is nearly at her wit's end. She will very soon have Sarah placed in a care facility, and will break into tears if made to divulge this.

Elijah Felding

Elijah is violent and easily agitated, yelling incomprehensible obscenities at the cosmos from inside his padded cell. For flavor, consider shouting variations of "You can't control me" and "I'm the one who chooses!" and "I decide when to press, not you!" Actually getting to speak with Elijah will require convincing his doctors.

If a meeting is successfully arranged, Elijah is brought into a visiting room in a straightjacket by two guards. He will greet his visitors with sarcastic mirth, and cooperate should they wish to question him. Elijah will answer questions truthfully, if in a somewhat aloof and indignant manner, but if asked about the device he will quickly become hostile; Persuade tests may be necessary to keep him cooperative. To him the device is an object of hatred and loathing, but also fear. He has projected anthropomorphic qualities onto the circuit, and may believe some outside entity is using it to trick him/drive him mad. No matter how well the Agents coddle him, Elijah will rapidly become violent and soon be escorted forcibly from the room, thrashing and screaming(see above) all the while.

The Device

A simple plastic tube, with an LED light at one end and a red button at the other. Pressing the button will illuminate the LED light half a second before it is pressed. No amount of trickery or scheming is sufficient to "fool" the device; unless the user actually clicks the button, it doesn't light. Using the device once is harmless; attempting it several times provokes a SAN test (0/1, Helplessness).

The device can be easily disassembled with the proper tools. If the examiner has at least 30% in Occult, or any percentile in Unnatural, they recognize certain mystical runes or glyphs in the arrangement of transistors; a successful roll will suggest something to do with fate, or time. If the examiner has at least 30% in CompSci or Electronics, they will realize that the circuit shouldn't actually work at all; there is no path for a signal to take. Either realization provokes a SAN check (0/1D4, Unnatural). A character with both must make an additional SAN check (1/1D6, Unnatural). Studying Singh's paper or diagrams will yield the same as examining the circuit.

Players will doubtless try to "beat" the device by clicking the button before it lights. This fails; the device lights a fraction of a second before they hit the button, every time. Players may also try create

a paradox where they resolve not to press the button if they see the light; this too fails, as the device will never light unless the button is pressed. If a player tries to create a paradox where they press the button but will abort if it lights, resolve as above. If a player simply waits for the light to illuminate on its own, ask how long they wait. Nothing happens until they decide to press the button.

Both Singh and Meyer have their devices on their person. Elijah's device is in his (trashed) apartment.

Madness

A character who understands the function of the device will accrue sanity damage as they continue to study it. Track all sanity lost to the device; once five SAN has been lost, the character becomes obsessed with the device and the SAN loss for studying it worsens (1/1d4). Eventually they will realize the awful truth - that free will is an illusion, and that every action they take is predetermined. There is nothing unnatural about the madness induced by the device, other than its atemporal nature itself. What should be clear is that, if every garage electrician knew how to build one of these, the result would be mass hysteria.

Felding and Meyer are both at zero SAN. Singh is one or two points from his Breaking Point.

Adding Tension

If philosophical horror doesn't capture your players, Hounds of Tindalos would doubtless be attracted to the device. However since no people are travelling through time, only electrons, a Hound will manifest first as unexplained malfunctions in electronic devices. Eventually the hound will manifest as digital apparitions - an animal-like shape in the corner of a photo on your phone, for instance - before finally acquiring a human target.