

Operation Antler

An Esoterrorists adventure

By Richard Hardy

This short scenario is intended for a British group of OV investigators, although with some modifications can probably be amended to run anywhere. The scenario is designed as a quick single session investigation, although it can be augmented with extra scenes if required. The investigators actually have a “ticking clock” of the Countryside Alliance protest which is due to start in London the day after the players are called to investigate the ritual – however the players aren’t aware of this until the end of the scenario, so feel free to change the timing and date, if the players are dragging their heels and obviously aren’t going to get there on time.

Hours of darkness and daylight used in this scenario, assume that it is set around March. (3rd March if you want to follow the theme of 3s being a ritually significant number)

Backstory

Investigation Trigger

Ritually slaughtered deer are found on a farm in Cumbria. The team is given the cover identity of DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) officials sent to investigate the occurrence. It is suspected that the deer have been sacrificed in an Esoterror ritual and the real task for the investigators is to discover if this is really the case, and what the ritual is intended to do.

Sinister Conspiracy

The British arm of the Esoterrorists have dreamt up a new “Esoterric” creature, which they plan to use to spread mayhem in London.

The British Esoterror boffins have come up with a creature design that resembles the legendary horned man and a ritual that will create it. The creature is to be released in Westminster during a protest by the Countryside Alliance against parliament’s interference in rural affairs. The resultant televised rampage is hoped to spread fear and terror that can augment any rituals carried out on British soil.

Trail Of Clues

Talking to farmer leads to UFO enthusiast. UFO enthusiast gives location of cattle truck. Note at the truck gives phone number which leads to service station and Horned Man.

Antagonist Reactions

The Esoterrorists have tried to cover their tracks as much as possible in the planning for this operation, and as they are working to a deadline do not really have time to upset the investigators’ plans...

Scenes

Operation Antler includes four core scenes. Although not fully described there are also suggestions for extra / alternate scenes.

Briefing

Scene Type: Intro

The team are contacted in the early hours of the morning and asked to meet at a service station near Carlisle (It can be reached by road or, if the investigators are further afield, by Carlisle airport). As dawn is

breaking, they are briefed in the service station café by a smartly dressed, bowler hatted Mr Verity (think Steed from the Avengers) over a cup of tea and a bacon sandwich. He lets them know about a deer mutilation that has occurred at a farm by the village of Brunstock by Hadrian's Wall (with Hadrian's Wall being such an ancient and obvious land mark, it is often used in British Esoterror rituals in the north of the country). The investigators are provided with cover documents identifying them as government officials sent by DEFRA, to assess any contamination to the environment and possible disease risk from the mutilations. There will be a police incident unit on site. The investigators are shown to a small van painted with the DEFRA logo, given a map to the farm and left to their own devices. Cover IDs are provided in the names of: Thomas Newton, Melina Crosier, James Warton, Phillip Throwburn, Samantha Dodd.

Cold Comfort Farm

Scene Type: Core

Arriving at Wall Cross Farm, just as the early morning mist is clearing, the players find a police incident tent already erected over a large proportion of the field (and actually covering a section of Hadrian's Wall), several police cars and a BBC Cumbria outside broadcast van.

There are approx 6 police currently on site.

The news team attempts to interview the investigators as they approach the tent. As the day progresses more news teams will appear.

Showing their ID to the policeman on guard will allow them in to the tent.

Inside it's clear why the tent is so big:

- 27 deer are laid out in an approximate triangle shape (9 a side, each side approx 54 foot wide), with a flat side running parallel to Hadrian's Wall
- Hadrian's Wall is daubed in what appears to be a combination of primitive cave drawings, geometric shapes (resembling crop circles) and celtic knot work – all drawn in deer's blood
- The deer have had their heads cut off and arranged in a circle in the centre of the triangle (heads looking inwards)

The scene is overseen by police Sgt Mark Piper, who has been asked to leave everything untouched until the characters arrive. He is fairly surly and unfriendly unless COPTALK is used to win him around. He will tell the players that they were called at around 4:00am this morning (around 5 minute before the players were called) by the farmer reporting a disturbance. The farmer, Burt Hawser, is up at the farmhouse about half a mile up the farm track and is available to be questioned.

EVIDENCE COLLECTION: tire tracks from a big truck, ground churned up from deer hooves, amount of blood on-site suggests deer were slaughtered here

1 point spend: tire tracks from a big truck, identify boot prints in churned up ground

2 point spend: identify number of men (3) from the variation in boot prints, and approx size and weight of truck

FORENSIC PATHOLOGY: deer killed by rifle shot to base of the skull before the head was removed.

The farmer, Burt, isn't that cooperative especially after his dealings with DEFRA (and its predecessor) during the CJD and foot and mouth scares.

REASSURANCE that the investigators are not there to take away any of his livestock will get him to open up. He will reveal the following:

- He couldn't sleep and wandered out at around 3:30 to get some fresh air
- **(core-clue)** Saw car lights in one of his furthest fields and wondered if it was that "UFO nut" again
- Got into his land rover to drive over there, by the time he arrived no one there, dead deer everywhere
- Called Police
- Does not normally have deer on his land

When asked about the "UFO nut" he will mention that there's a young lad that's been hanging around since he found the crop circle in his field last summer. He often finds him "trespassing" and out watching the

skies on some of his higher fields. He has reported him to the police, and they've warned him off. Burt says the police know all about him and who he is, Burt doesn't care as long as he's off his land. Sgt Piper can give the Investigators his details almost straight away. His name is Lance Baron and he lives in Brunstock. He has been chased from several local land owners' fields for trespassing and regularly rings the station reporting UFOs.

Watch the Skies

Scene Type: Core

Lead-In: Sgt Piper gives Lance's details to investigators

Lance is your typical UFO / crop – circle enthusiast. His little cottage is covered in Gillian Anderson, UFO and crop circle photos. He is initially very suspicious of the players, suspecting that they are men in black and will not talk to them.

IMPERSONATE will convince Lance that they are really from DEFRA and are not interested in abducting him. He can tell them:

- Strange things seem to happen around Hadrian's wall
- The police won't listen to anything he says
- Wall Cross farm is on a crossing of three major ley-lines (funnily enough exactly where ritual took place) and the UFOs follow the ley lines
- **(core-clue)** He was out watching the skies last night, but was nowhere near Wall Cross Farm. On his way home (around 3:40am) he was nearly knocked over by a speeding blue cattle truck, not far from the farm

PHOTOGRAPHY: (core-clue) A lot of the photographs on one wall are aerial shots of the surrounding landscape. Asking Lance about this, he says that he's been using his microlight aircraft to photograph the area, to prepare for crop circle season in the summer. He has taken pictures during the day yesterday and they are developing in his dark room - One picture shows a blue truck parked outside a barn in a remote field. Lance can tell them where it was taken.

DATARETRIEVAL: 1 point spend can use a computer to enhance the picture to show two flat capped figures climbing out of the truck, one carrying a rifle over his shoulder.

Possible Extra / Alternate Scene suggestions:

It's possible that with a 1 point FLATTERY spend, the players can borrow his microlight and find the blue truck themselves, which will lead to a microlight flying scene which can be used to call on ATHLETICS and DRIVING to keep the thing flying.

It could be that Lance did not take the photographs himself but has a friend that owns a hot air balloon. Players could then find his friend and maybe even take a hot air balloon trip to find the truck.

Barn Storming

Scene Type: Core

Lead-In: Identification of truck location and barn

The barn is located about 45 minutes away from Wall Cross farm. When the players arrive they will find the truck parked up outside the deserted barn. There is no one here and the truck's cab has been burnt out. The truck reveals the following:

- Deer dung, blood and torn apart deer carcass in the back of the truck (a meal to keep the Horned Man subdued) A difficulty 3 STABILILTY test is required for anyone seeing the carcass.
- The cab of the truck is burnt out and is still warm to the touch and smoldering
- Tracing the number plate reveals that it belongs to a yellow mini.

EVIDENCE COLLECTION:

- boot prints in the back of the truck, and in the mud on the ground (the prints match to those found at Wall Cross farm)
- There is a discarded petrol can (obviously used to start the fire) to one side of the truck.
- There are more tire marks in the mud, indicating at least one other vehicle +1 spend identifies 2 other vehicles, +2 spend identifies vehicles as Land Rover with trailer, and small car, two people got into the car, one into the land rover)

- There are many deer tracks in the mud

The barn itself looks run down and disused. Both the main doors and side doors are both standing open. The floor in here is also covered in deer dung, although no obvious blood. The middle of the floor is dominated by an empty oil drum which is still warm and has obviously been used to burn clothes, papers and any other easily disposable evidence.

EVIDENCE COLLECTION: (core-clue) A piece of singed paper can be seen perched on one of the cross beams above the oil barrel (paper that has wafted out of the barrel by an updraft from the fire). An **ATHLETICS** test (difficulty 3) can be used to retrieve it. It is a piece of notepaper with a legible phone number handwritten on it.

+1 spend will identify further pieces of paper scattered around the barn in various difficult to reach places that have also escaped the barrel - about four in total. One is illegible, one has what looks like tomorrows date on it, one reads "...time speci..." and another "...liance protest."

Calling the number gets a recorded message:

"Hi! Sorry but we're out at the Countryside Alliance protest in London at the moment, however if you want to join us we'll be meeting up at South Mimms service station tonight and heading into London tomorrow at six in the morning. If you want to join us for our ride through Westminster, please feel free to bring your horse box, cheers."

The number belongs to a Darren Masterson, who lives in Kent. He is one of the main organizers of the recent Country Alliance protests. He is not an Esoterrorist.

Hopefully they should now realize that the Esoterrorists are planning something for the protest and should think about getting to the service station.

Possible Extra / Alternate Scene suggestions:

The investigators may wish to visit Darren Masterson's home, although they'll find no-one home. If they break in (**INFILTRATION**) they'll find lots of paperwork to do with gaining permission for this and several, other Countryside Alliance protests.

Destination Nowhere

Scene Type: Core

Lead-In: The phone message for meeting at South Mimms.

South Mimms is a typical motorway service station, located near the junction of the A1 and M25. However the players arrive, if by plane (flying down from Carlisle to Heathrow, Stansted or Gatwick) or car (taking a 5-6 hour drive) it will be dark by the time they arrive. The car park is full of cars, trucks, vans, land rovers, farm vehicles and quite a few horse boxes. If the investigators have realised that they're looking for a horse box, they can single these out for particular attention, otherwise they'll have to wander around looking for anyone or anything suspicious.

There is a kind of a party mood with about half the protestors standing out in the car park drinking and chatting and half inside in the on-site pub. There is a small police presence (a few vans and about 10 officers) to keep an eye on things.

Using **COPTALK** reveals that the police don't really expect there to be any trouble tonight (except for maybe the odd drunk and disorderly arrest), but tomorrow morning there'll be a lot more police arriving for when all the protestors move out onto the roads.

The protestors just seem intent on having a good time and the investigators will probably be offered a swig from assorted bottles as they walk around the car park. The Police shouldn't really be letting the protestors drink outside the service station, but as long as the mood stays good they won't push the matter.

IMPERSONATE will allow an investigator to pass himself off as a protestor and get him directions to Darren Masterson. He is sitting on the floor of the noisy pub with a guitar, singing off-key folk songs to a similarly drunk and off-key audience. **FLATTERY** will get the players a long way with Darren, especially about his singing skills. He's very drunk, but can just about slur out what he knows:

- He knows quite a few people here, but not everyone
- They plan to head in to London at six tomorrow, but they plan on driving really slowly to disrupt the traffic – they don't really have permission for this

- They plan on parking up horse boxes outside of the Houses of Parliament and riding across the lawns – again they don't have permission for this either
- **(core-clue)** There was a miserable bloke that turned up but, wouldn't have a drink with him. He describes him as the grumpy man and his grumpy horse, because it was "making all kinds of strange noises". When asked where this man is now Darren says in the car park, giggles and falls over.

The investigators should now know they're looking for a horse box (and a grumpy man). A 15 minute walk around the car park will reveal one land rover with a horse box attached (parked in the corner of the car park furthest away from the revelers, police or service station, where the driver is still sitting in his vehicle glancing about and looking shifty.

This is Peter Gregson he's a fairly low level Esoterrorist who has been given the task of taking the Horned Man into London and letting it loose. He has been assisted in the summoning of the creature by two higher up Esoterror members, but they've left him to carry out the dirty work. He's expendable and he knows it.

Peter Gregson

Athletics 8, Health 6, Scuffling 4, Shooting 8, Stability 2, Surveillance 4

Damage Modifier: +1 (Shotgun, one barrel), +2 (Shotgun, both barrels), +1 (Electric cattle prod)

SHRINK will reveal he's very, very nervous, tired, scared and paranoid. If they get too close to his horse box or land rover, he opens the window and tells them to "B*gger Off". If they persist he'll step out of the land rover showing them he's got a shotgun and try to warn them off.

Any show of aggression will make Peter believe his number is up and start blasting with his shotgun. He'll blast a path to the back of the horsebox, and throw the latch to let the Horned Man out, before trying to make a run for it. If he's surrounded and obviously about to be captured he'll turn the gun on himself.

An INFILTRATION test will allow them to get close to the horse box or land rover without being spotted. Anyone next to the horse box will hear a strange grunting, crunching and tearing sound from inside the horsebox (the Horned Man enjoying another meal of deer). The only way to see into the horsebox is by opening the back. No matter how quietly the characters try to pull back the horse box's latch the creature will suddenly go quiet as they do so (as it prepares itself to make a break for freedom). If they open the door even so much as a crack the creature will spring for the door and try to force it open (whoever is holding the door will need to make an ATHLETICS contest to hold it in). Once out the Horned Man will attack the first person it sees. A difficulty 4 STABILITY test must be made by anyone seeing the Horned Man.

Horned Man

Athletics 10, Health 8, Scuffling 10

Hit Threshold: 3

Weapon: +2 (Antlers/horns)

Armor: +1 vs. Shooting, +1 vs. Scuffling

Description: Long, thin and bony. Although man shaped the creature's bones appear to be twisted leading to movement on all fours, although it can stand upright on its two legs. The facial features are unseen behind a mass of long greasy hair from which two huge antlers protrude on either side of the head. The creature's entire body is covered in short, vicious looking horns of various lengths. It's "arms" and "legs" terminate in deer-like hooves. The creature attacks by charging or flailing it's limbs in a kind of macabre dance that uses the horns on it's body to tear it's victims apart. It has a liking for deer meat. It does not like electric shocks.

The Investigators are unarmed, although at the GMs discretion they may have a tranquilizer gun and darts in their kit with a suitable PREPAREDNESS test (although they're unlikely to have anything more lethal).

The tranquilizer gun should use the usual rules to hit, but its effects should be handled in a suitably dramatic fashion. It will probably take at least a few darts to take the Horned Man down.

Peter has a shotgun and pockets full of shotgun cartridges, depending on events up to this point the players may have access to this. There is also an electric cattle prod on the passenger seat of Peter's land rover. This works as a scuffling weapon (+1 damage), but Peter and his Esoterrorist friends have been conditioning the Horned Man to the cattle prod, so it can be used to ward the creature off. The protestors will mostly run away although one or two do have shotguns or rifles.

Peter will try and make a run for it if someone lets the Horned Man out.

The Police will immediately radio for backup when trouble breaks out, and are currently only armed with tasers, and night sticks. They will concentrate on getting people to safety rather than engaging the Horned Man. They will only call in an armed response unit if things get really out of hand.

If everything goes badly wrong, and the investigators can't see any way of controlling the situation a heavily armed OV special forces clean up team will arrive to "clean-up" the problem.

No Return

Whatever happens, OV will probably need to be called in to clear up at least some of the mess. If by some miracle everything is contained and dealt with quickly and quietly it'll be congratulations all around and commendations will go on all of the OV investigators' files (which means they will be assigned to more dangerous and high profile missions in the future). Minimizing destruction and loss of life will also be applauded. If things turned really bad the investigators may not get quite so enthusiastic a response (and will be assigned the less high-profile, but probably no less dangerous, missions).

Peter Gregson, if captured, can give little information on his co-conspirators. He will give names and descriptions but these are fake. He fears his Esoterrorist masters more than the OV.

The Veil-Out

The veil-out is really up to the investigators but a suggestion is that the mutilations could be written off as pro-hunt fanatics slaughtering deer and the Horned Man attack could be explained away as a bull in heat (on the way to a cattle market) escaping in a service station car park.