

THE
ESOTERRORISTS

SIX PACKED

by Paolo F. Bongiovanni



SIX PACKED

A fast-play adventure for The Esoterrorists

by Paolo F. Bongiovanni

CREDITS

Publisher: Simon Rogers

Author: Paolo F. Bongiovanni

Art: Torture Dog and Key, Dave Allsop; background images Jérôme Huguenin

Cover: Jérôme Huguenin

Editor: Simon Rogers

Torture Dog: Concept Dave Allsop, written by Adrian Bott

Playtesters: Simon Rogers, Dave, Steve Dempsey, Wai Kien, Alessandro Feletti, Mattia Grazioli, Massimiliano Enrico, Lorenzo Trenti

©2007 Pelgrane Press Ltd. All rights reserved.

Similarities between characters and places in this book and real persons and places are coincidental.

CREDITS	2
CONTENTS	3
INTRODUCTION	4
BACKSTORY	4
Investigative Trigger	4
Sinister Conspiracy	4
Trail of Clues	6
SCENES	7
The Debriefing	7
The Slaughterhouse	7
The Black Cherry Pub	12
The Alexis Hit Team	14
Fred's Apartment	15
Options	17
York's Mediterranean Catering	18
Showdown at the Ancient Farm Hotel	19
TORTURE DOG	23
Game Statistics	23
Hush-Hush	24
APPENDIX	25
References	25

INTRODUCTION

Six Packed is a fast-paced adventure for The Esoterrorists, where the players are short on time before a major supernatural attack: monsters of unremitting horror attempting to derail the Northern Ireland peace process.

Characters should have a plausible reason to be in London, and one of them at least should be a UK law enforcement officer. The scenario can easily be expanded to fill one or two further sessions, by reducing the pace in the initial scenes and middle scenes and using optional scenes provided. This adventure makes little use of Academic skills, is heavy on Interpersonal ones and light on technical ones. Be generous when giving out clues; if a suggested ability is plausible, go for it.

The next section gives a brief summary of the events which pre-date the beginning of the scenario, and what the plans of the esoterrorists are. The likely scenes the player will play and their interrelation are also presented in a graphical format with a very brief description of each of them.

The following sections will present one scene at a time, by providing a brief description of its context and purpose, a description of all the characters the players can interact with, the core clues which are available and the optional clues which can be gathered by spending investigative points.

BACKSTORY

Investigative Trigger

A brutal mass-murder in a London slaughterhouse has the hallmarks of an Esoterrorist ritual. An OV team, partly consisting of local law enforcement and partly under cover agents is dispatched to investigate.

Sinister Conspiracy

George Bingham and Fred Seymore are members of the Ulster Loyalist Defense Force (ULDF), a loyalist terrorist splinter group in Northern Ireland.

The recent peace process taking place in Northern Ireland, where a shared Catholic and Protestant government is being installed, is the nemesis of what George has always fought for. He is determined not to let it happen, by every means at his disposal. When their original group signed up to the peace accord, he signed up with the ULDF.

Fred has been his friend and accomplice since the day they were kids roaming the streets in Belfast. Their relationship has always been skewed towards a dominance of George over Fred, at least until 12 months ago.

One of the last efforts to break up the peace talks performed by the still united ULDF movement has been the killing of a seventeen years old boy, son of a renowned IRA leader, Jeremy O'Leary.

Fred and George were chosen to carry out the murder. Jeremy went every Wednesday to football training by bike; the plan was to drive him down at fast speed. Fred, when seeing

how young the boy was, steered the car clear at the last moment, hitting a tree. The kid just fell on the ground. George, though, carried out plan B, by shooting the boy.

After that episode Fred has begun to nourish doubts about his life and his relation with George, who is becoming increasingly distant. George, on the other hand, has come to despise his former brother-in-arms. He is not fit for the tasks which lie ahead. He still needs him, but not for too long. And he suspects his weak friend might be thinking about retiring, and that would be far too dangerous.

As months passed by, most of the ULDF members left the group, convinced that the peace process was irreversible. Not George, who, without the support from the old members, was forced to search out for other alliances. He got in contact with several other terrorist groups, until he met Deborah McArgill, a Scottish woman who didn't initially state her affiliation, but who promised spectacular weapons to block the peace process.

Deborah is a standalone Esoterrorist operative, who thinks a terrorist attack carried out by means of creatures of unrelenting horror is the most efficient method for rending the membrane, and bringing her personal power.

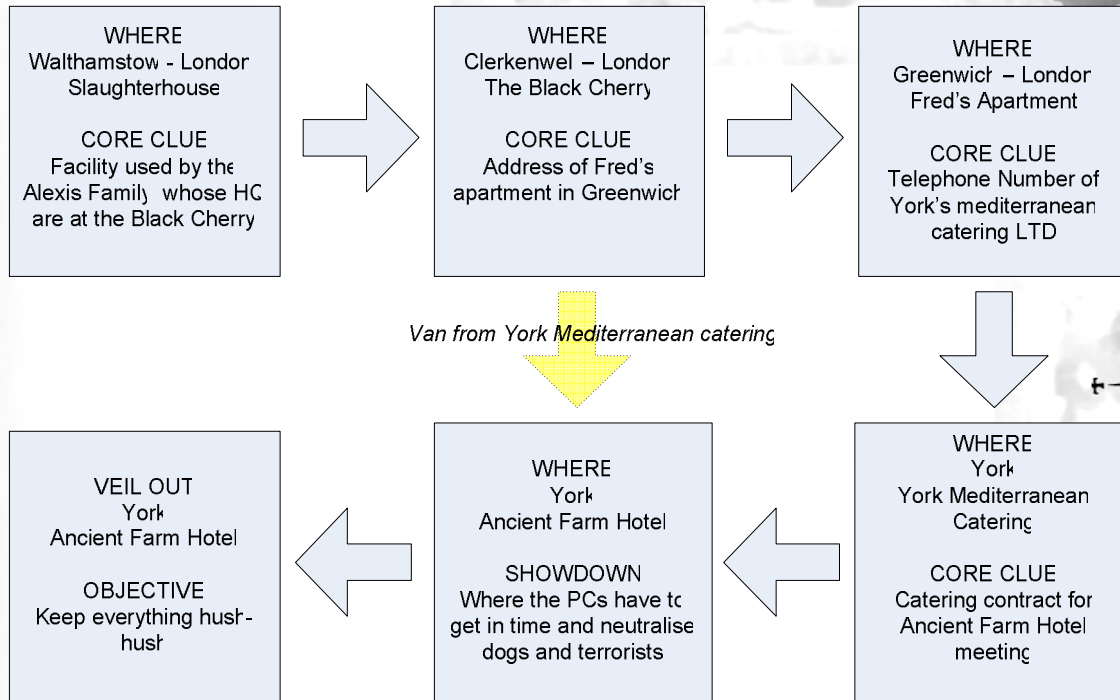
The plan has been shaped in the last few weeks, when the news broke of a meeting of Catholics, Protestants and the UK's prime minister. Deborah was able to perform a summoning ritual which brings to reality a group of torture dogs, infernal creatures who feed on pain. The ritual needed the human sacrifice of children, four per torture dog, and a central sacrifice which works as a focus. The fulcrum victim should be someone who will suffer both physically and spiritually, who will be betrayed by someone he loves.

Fred represented, not too surprisingly, the focal sacrifice. The ritual was carried out in a slaughterhouse in London, city which has been chosen partly because it is far from York, the end target of the plan.

The ritual succeeded, and Deborah and George manage to summon and capture five torture dogs. The ritual happens on a Tuesday night. The plan is to drug the hellish beasts and carry them to York using a van belonging to York's Mediterranean Catering, Deborah's civilian work cover.

The Scottish lady has been awarded the catering contract with the hotel which will host the North Irish Catholic delegation in York. The dogs will be left in a hotel lounge where the delegates will meet up in preparation for the conference which will occur on Thursday. Food for the infernal creatures will be plentiful.

Trail of Clues



The illustration shows the default sequence of scenes which will allow the player characters to stop the esoterrorist attack.

The scenario is structured in such a way that the GM can decide to skip some scenes completely, by providing earlier a core clue which is presented in one of the following scenes. This might also happen because of the cleverness of the PCs in getting crucial information before the proposed scene.

An example of a jump which was performed during a playtest of the scenario was from the second scene to the final stand off, since the scenario was risking of taking much longer than the time allowed by the convention where it was being played, as outlined in Illustration 1.

The first scene is designed to be gruesome and set the tone of the scenario: a lot of human blood in a slaughterhouse and a body hanging from a meat hook which has been "six-packed", a typical punishment of the IRA against their own members who betrayed or failed.

A six-pack consists in being shot through both feet, both ankles and both hips. It is intended to be a non-lethal punishment, and that's the first oddity in the investigation; it's not typically used in conjunction with execution.

The meat grinder will then show the presence of more human remains, the remains of many children.

Here is where the ritual happened. The core clue will come from the slaughterhouse line manager, who "rents it" from time to time the Alexis family, a renowned criminal family operating in Clerkenwell, London. The two thugs who rented the venue are Sonny and Perry, who are usually found at the pub-night-club **The Black Cherry**.

The second scene takes place at The Black Cherry, where the players will have to muscle or outsmart the two thugs and Michael Davis, barman and messenger for John Alexis, patriarch of the mob family currently in prison. Michael is the one who knew Fred and who rented the place out, without the boss knowing of it. He will provide the core clue, being the temporary address of Fred in London.

→ The third scene takes place in Greenwich, at Fred's apartment. Here the core clue will be delivered by a female friend of him, Sailey Hoggart, who is in the possession of his laptop where the phone number and address of a catering company in York is stored.

The fourth scene is in York, at the York Mediterranean catering. The core clue here, delivered by Kate Mowbray, co-owner of the business with Deborah, will be that Deborah has picked up the food and gone to the Ancient Farm Hotel where they will take care of the food and drink of the North Irish Catholic delegation.

The fifth scene is the final showdown between player characters, the two terrorists and the torture dogs. The players will have to hurry, neutralise separately terrorists and demonic creatures, all without other persons noticing it, at the Ancient Farm Hotel.

The veil out will be explaining how the havoc will be covered-up: how to keep the hotel personnel unaware of anything, how to keep the MI5 operatives outside the hotel perimeter happy, and how to handle the Catholic delegation.

SCENES

The Debriefing

SCENE TYPE INTRO

The player characters are awoken very early on an Autumn Wednesday morning. The Ordo Veritatis operatives are not usually part of the same team, they have been contacted because they all live in London, and the matter seems to require immediate attention.

Mr Verity orders them to convene in the 2Ts Cafe, a greasy spoon in Walthamstow

Mr Verity will brief them on the fact that a body was found 90 minutes before, at around 5:30 in the morning, in a slaughterhouse close to where the PCs are convened. The status of the body and the patterns of blood have the hallmarks of an Esoterrorist ritual.

Two of the pre-generated PCs don't have to provide a cover for this investigation, one being member of the Walthamstow CID (Crime Investigative Division), the other one being a criminal pathologist. Only the remaining two PCs should provide themselves with a covering story.

Mr Verity will ask them to be as quick and as discrete as possible with the investigation as this is the PC's home turf, and the law enforcement officials at least need to keep their jobs.

The Slaughterhouse

SCENE TYPE CORE

The slaughterhouse is where 20 children and Fred Seymore have been sacrificed in order to summon the five torture dogs. The place has been used in the past by the Alexis family to dispose of undesired corpses. George has used Fred as intermediary to obtain the

location, who knew Michael Davis, the current “prince regent” of the Alexis activities, as long as Gregor Alexis, the patron, will remain in prison.

The line manager at the slaughterhouse, **Vince Goddard**, has ensured no-one would have been in the slaughterhouse during Tuesday night. He is the contact of **Sonny** and **Perry**, the best thugs of the Alexis family, who came around last week to arrange the “lease” of the facility.

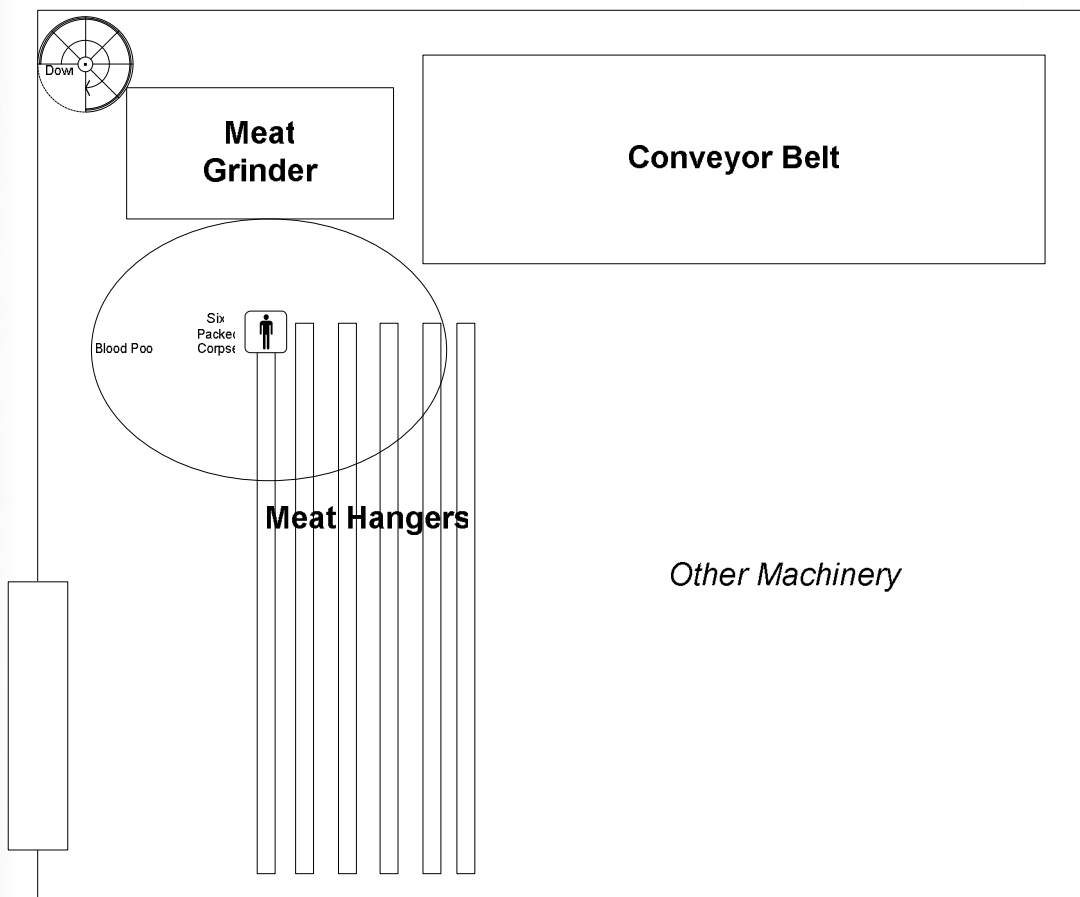
ARRIVAL

When the team arrives at the scene only a couple of uniformed police officers will be at the place. One of them is clearly sick from what he has seen.

The uniformed officers have done their best to send home the workers who weren't at the scene when the body was discovered. In the office there will only be Vince and Jenny.

They will inform the PCs that SOCO (the scientific team) and other CID officers are stuck in traffic and they are estimated to arrive in about 30 minutes. **Cop Talk** or **Impersonation** (if necessary) will give them access to the crime scene. The scenario should from the outset instill in the PCs a sense of urgency. Make it also clear to the PCs that some of their findings might be best kept hidden from the scientific folks, for the Veil-Out.

When the PCs get in the slaughterhouse, they enter close to the end of the processing line, where a conveyor belt brings the unusable remains of the animals to a huge meat grinder, and where rows upon rows of animal carcasses hang from hooks.



Close to the meat grinder hangs, lifeless and horrible, the six-packed body of the late **Fred Seymore**. After being shot six times, with long pauses between one shot and the next one, the killer sliced his throat open to finish him off. A very large pool of blood extends from the bottom of the body. There is obviously far too much blood on the 10m diameter pool for it to come from a single body.

What happened is that the children were positioned at equidistant intervals around Fred, and killed slowly one by one while he was being tortured. **George** tortured and finished Fred, while **Deborah** carried out the horrific slaughter of the north-African orphans.

The children were obtained by sinking a boatload of asylum seekers which was trying to make its way across the Channel. George and Deborah kidnapped the children at gunpoint and sunk the boat containing all the parents of the children. George and Deborah kept them in an industrial estate in South-West England for about a month.

Stability

This scene is pretty gruesome to even the most hardened pathologist or war veteran, so don't be shy of asking some Stability rolls. The body in itself might be a good initial test (Risk Factor 2 points), finding out about the children is worth another Stability roll (with Risk Factor 3 points), as is finding out that multiple creatures have actually been summoned (perhaps 2 or 3 points, depending on the mood you want to set for the scenario.)

After they performed the ritual, the dogs materialized in a state of semi-stupor. Using an esoterror artifact called the torture dog whistle and the cattle prod Deborah forced them into big crates, though not before one of them drilled a hole in Fred. Then, they loaded them into a van they had stolen the day before, they threw the bodies of the kids in the meat grinder, splashed animal blood over the children's one, and left the body hanging to let it look like the IRA punishment for one of its members. Finally, in a lock-up garage in New Cross, they transferred the dogs to a **York's Mediterranean Catering** van.

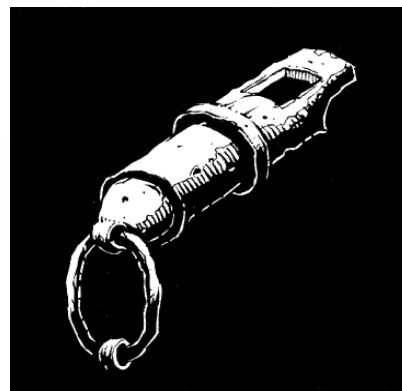
By examining the blood pool, the following information can be determined using **Forensic Anthropology** or **Natural History**: Animal blood has been thrown over other previous pools of blood

A simple search reveals that there are about 20 smaller pools of blood positioned in a circle around the hanging body

A 1-Point spend of **Evidence Collection** or **Natural History** reveals some animal-like shape impressed on one of the small pools of blood. A dog-like foot, it would seem – Natural History will reveal that it is a very large dog, which they haven't come across before.

An examination of Fred's body with **Forensic Anthropology** or **Ballistics** will reveal that shots weren't lethal, and that whoever took the shots knew what they were doing. They must have been extremely painful. Exsanguination through the slit throat was the cause of death.

A 1-point **Trivia** or **History** spend will reveal that the six-pack punishment is typical amongst the IRA against traitors.



A 1-point **Evidence Collection** spend reveals a 1 cm hole is visible in the corpse's sternum, perhaps caused by a drill.

Background checks on Fred Seymore:

Fingerprinting will identify Fred, and about his association with the ULDF (a Loyalist terrorist group rather than a Nationalist one)

By spending 1 point of **Bureaucracy**, **Cop Talk** or another appropriate investigative skill, they will discover:

- Fred Seymore has been linked often to George Bingham, but none of the two have ever been charged
- They are believed to be behind the killing, about 12 months ago, of a young 17 years old boy in Belfast, son of a local ex-leader of the IRA
- He had been spotted twice in the last week in south-east London, in Greenwich and Blackheath

Occult Studies: This has clearly been the theatre of a demonic summoning ritual, which might have worked. A 1-point spend says that he ritual has been definitely successful, and multiple creatures have been summoned. 2 points reveals that not less than four and no more than eight creatures have been summoned,

MEAT GRINDER

A simple search reveals that human remains have been fed through the meat grinder. By sifting the remains at the lower level, it is obvious that they came from one or more children

A 1-point **Forensic Pathology** spend reveals that the remains of 20 children, probably of African descent, are present, and they were killed last night.

JENNY POLESZNY

Jenny is the only worker who has any useful information.

Jenny is one of the many Polish girls who have come to the UK in search of better jobs. Notwithstanding her Polish degree in Marketing, she has ended up working in the slaughterhouse, mainly because her written and spoken English are very poor.

She has been sexually harassed a fair bit by Vince, and she has resigned. She has one week of her 30 days notice period left.

After the initial shock (let the players deal with that) she will be more than happy to mention about the meeting between Vince and two very big men in the manager's office about one week ago. She remembers how Vince was gloating after the encounter.

She has seen the two blokes other times in the past, and "they are not farmers for sure."

By Spending 1 point of **Reassurance** (so that she doesn't fear reprisal from Vince) or **Intimidation** (to make her fear the OV more)

She has also noticed how nervous and angry Vince was soon after the discovery of the body. He muttered something about "those crazy bastards". Later he also swore about his preferred electric cattle prod which had gone missing.

VINCE GODDARD

An obese 45 year-old East Ender, whose best description is summed up in one word: slimy.

Vince enjoys the control and power he has on the line workers at the slaughterhouse. He has a long history of harassment of his female workers.

Vince has come to know **Sonny** and **Perry** at the **Black Cherry**, where he has used a considerable proportion of his salary on lap dancers. He has earned extra cash in past years by lending the facility for some "disposal" work by the Alexis family.

He is a typical coward: strong with the weak, squeaking like a mouse with the strong.

- **CORE CLUE: Interrogation** or **Intimidation** gets the name of Perry and Sonny, thugs of the Alexis family, who can be found night and day at the Black Cherry pub in Camberwell. This information can be gathered by interviewing Vince. Let the players sweat just a bit for this information, but point them in the right direction using Jenny if needed.
- He has "lent out" the facility to Sonny and Perry for a small amount of money. He will use phrases like "you know what's like, with so little money", and seek understanding from the interrogator. He will ask for police protection, because he is afraid of the Alexis family.
- By spending 1 point of a **Reassurance** or **Intimidation**, he will admit he has let the place out to the two gangsters regularly in the past. He suspected what the place was used for, but feigned not to know it. They have never been that messy before though
- Examining footage from security cameras in the neighbourhood during the night using **Electronic Surveillance** shows that a van was seen arriving at around 1 A.M last night, and leave around 4 A.M. Using **Data Retrieval** allows the number plate to be enhanced: the vehicle has been reported stolen the day before. If you want, you can have the police find the abandoned van and report it to them.

By making inquiries about the source of the kids' bodies:

Spending a point in **Bureaucracy** or **Trivia** reveals that about a month ago a boat had been reported sunk close to the English South-East coast, with a load of North-Africans trying to make the crossing from France. Only a woman survived the wreck, but not for long. Before dying she managed to say something about a boat which boarded them and the children being taken away. No bodies of children were recovered.

The Black Cherry Pub

SCENE TYPE CORE

Lead in: Interviewing Vince at the Slaughterhouse

This is meant to be a relatively short scene, where the players discover who the real players are. They might get to the pub thinking that the **Alexis** family is involved in the rituals, but they should soon find out that that is not the case.

Michael lent the slaughterhouse to the esoterrorists without the knowledge or consent of John Alexis, the family's patriarch, and he will get in big time trouble when the boss discovers it.

The PCs will get to the pub when there are no customers yet; just **Sonny**, **Perry** and **Michael**. The three of them are hard men used to dealing with the Force, especially Sonny and Perry. They will hardly be intimidated, but it will be quite easy to exploit the hate Sonny and Perry feel against Michael.

To get the most out of this scene let the PCs have fun in trying to squeeze out information from Sonny and Perry: let them play the good cop - bad cop routine or some more sneaky approach.

MICHAEL DAVIS

A 35-year-old man from Northern Ireland, long and slim, fairly good looking and full of quick and witty conversation. When he was 20 he decided to leave Belfast in search of his fortune in London. Since that time he has been doing a mix of legitimate work as a bar tender, and a long list of minor crimes, mostly fencing stolen property.

He has been known for some time as a facilitator in the criminal underworld, a bloke who can easily bring in contact persons who might have some common interests.

His breakthrough has come when John Alexis has been convicted and imprisoned. The patriarch needed quickly someone presentable and with a mostly clean criminal sheet to act as his deputy in the Camberwell headquarters.

Michael hasn't made a lot of friends in the six months he has been acting as a deputy, but he hasn't fully realized it yet. The pleasure he takes in the exercise of power has somehow blinded him.

Core Clues: Michael is the source of all the important information in this scene. He can provide the players, after **Streetwise**, **Interrogation** or **Intimidation**, with the following clues:

- Michael will spill out pretty soon that he did a favor for an old mate of his, Fred Seymore, who was searching for a quiet place where he could dispose of a corpse. The let was agreed about one week before
- Michael will also say that he met Fred some weeks ago by chance in Greenwich, for the first time in years. They had a few drinks together, and Fred showed him where he lived in a flat in Greenwich.

By spending one point in an appropriate investigative skill, for example **Reassurance** to keep all this off the record:

- Michael has seen another man waiting for Fred the previous week when the arrangement and payment were finalized. He thinks it might have been another mate of his, George Bingham.

By spending two points in an appropriate investigative skill:

- Michael knew that Fred and George were members of the ULDF in the past. He thinks they still are.
- Michael rented out the facility, but they don't know who to.

Once Michael spills out the truth, he will suddenly realize how compromised his position is now with the Alexis family. He will try to obtain police custody in exchange of information on the family dealings. **Negotiation** will get the PCs a good deal if they want to pursue this.

SONNY AND PERRY

Sonny and Perry could be brothers, such is their physical likeness. Try to remember some thugs you have read in some thriller or crime story, with hard boiled fiction a preferred source, and use that as an inspiration on how to play them. Ian Rankin, James Ellroy, Raymond Chandler are three good sources for interesting thugs.

The two criminals are going to be their usual threatening selves, without any intention of giving out information which could be damaging to the family. On the other hand they are very keen to get Michael in trouble. They savor the idea of having to make use of another disposal facility, in the not too far future, in order to get rid off his body.

Interrogation or **Negotiation** will reveal

- They have received money from Vince, true, but they didn't know who would have used the slaughterhouse that night. They only executed orders
- There is hardly concealed antipathy against Michael from the both of them, probably resenting the fact that an outsider who didn't go through the ranks is telling them what to do

By spending 1 point of **Interrogation**

- Strictly off the record, the slaughterhouse has been already used regularly in the past by the Alexis family. John will probably take action against anyone who blew the facility up.

If you feel like making this scene last longer, you could decide the pub is already after all, with naked ladies dancing on poles, high music and a lot of loud punters. Finding Sonny, Perry and Michael might become a bit more challenging.

An old-London-style brawl might erupt in the venue when the word "cops" begins to fly around.

The Alexis Hit Team

SCENE TYPE OPTIONAL ACTION SCENE

This scene should be run if you feel your PCs wouldn't mind some action before getting back to the investigation. This scene can also be played after the next one, when the PCs decide to travel up north, destination York.

Sonny and **Perry** have realised too late that the information released to the PCs is far too compromising for the **Alexis** family. They therefore resolve, in a sudden hurry, that **four dead coppers** are going to cause less trouble than four witnesses.

Not even five minutes after the PCs have left the pub the thugs will pick up a black BMW with dark windows and be on their way in pursuit of the PCs. In the car there will be Sonny, Perry, a Kalashnikov and two hand guns. Sonny will be driving. They will pursue the PCs car, and try to pull up to one side of the PCs' car, lower the passenger window, and open fire.

If you plan to run this scene, ask who's driving the car. In the UK only specialised units are armed, so if they haven't already stated whether any of them has a weapon, have them make a Preparedness roll, Difficulty 7.

Avoiding the first shot burst will entail two rolls: a first roll of either **Surveillance** or **Infiltration** at Difficulty level 5, in order to spot the villains' car before it draws up. A second **Driving** roll at Difficulty level 6 will be required in order to avoid the burst in time. Ask the PC who is Driving how he will try to avoid the bullets.

If either of these rolls doesn't succeed, decide or pick at random which PC receives a wound at 1d6+2 against their **Health**.

From here on it will be a deadly car chase. Shooting the other car while in motion will require a roll Difficulty 4 in order to hit one of the two toughs, or 5 if it is a "called shot" to a specific opponent. Shooting to a tire is also an option, with a Difficulty 6.

Every failed shot by either party will probably mean some other car is hit, the windows screen bursts, or a trail of petrol will begin to leak from a car. Make the chase quick and dramatic.

It will also be possible to escape the thugs by winning a Driving contest, which if won would mean the PCs have lost their pursuers by sheer speed and cunning driving.

These are Sonny's and Perry's relevant skills:

Skill	Sonny	Perry
Driving	6	3
Shooting: 8	8	6
Athletics: 5	5	8
Scuffling	6	9
Health	8	9

Sonny and Perry have been long in the game, they are still keen to survive, and if luck will seem to escape them they won't try to push it too hard.

The PCs might decide to pursue further the matter after the shoot out. You might want to introduce the timer described in the next section at this point of the game.

Fred's Apartment

SCENE TYPE CORE

Lead in: Michael's revelation of Fred's address at the Black Cherry pub.

The purpose of this scene is to make the connection with **York**, where the real trouble is going to start soon, very soon.

The PCs, by examining **Fred's laptop** and by talking with **Maggie**, they will discover he was planning to leave the ULDF once this last action was carried out.

The presence of a mysterious lady might also be mentioned, as well as the increasing difficulties in his friendship with George.

Once the PCs get to this scene, an interesting ingredient which can add flavor to the session is to set up an alarm clock visible to all players, showing how much real time they have left before the torture dogs begin bringing havoc in the Ancient Farm Hotel (90 minutes or 2 hours, depending on the speed of the players and the time available). The players have obviously no clue yet as to what exactly this means.

ELLAINE PAXLEY

Ellaine is an old widow who lives in the flat opposite Fred's one. She is as nosy as Mrs. Marple but sadly nowhere as witty, loving to chit chat with everyone who happens to pass her door.

The PCs won't even have finished knocking on Fred's door before she comes out and says something on the lines. "He is not at home, the youngster hasn't come back. He is in trouble, ain't he? Well, he's Irish, what more can I say".

She can be the source of some juicy information. The price will be a lot of mumbo jumbo together with a lot of: "eh, things were far better then".

Flattery or Flirtation (or just being friendly) will give

- **Core Clue:** Ellaine will say that she has noticed Fred hanging around with a very pretty lady, **Maggie**, who she had a good chat with once, and who told her she is a student or something at the university down the road.
- "Oh, that guy had very strange friends. There was this bloke, also Irish, who came a couple of times and who gave me the creeps. He shouted me to go back to my lair once!"

By spending one point in **Interrogation, Flattery or Flirtation**:

- "And then there was this lady, Scottish may be, curly 'air, not pretty but not awful, who was even more creepy. Ooh, her eyes were spooky. It was as if I saw the devil".

Optional Core Clue: This details of this clue are optional, as they might allow the PCs to skip the next couple of scenes.

- "I saw a van pull up outside his flat early this morning. It was brown. It said York and Catering or something on the side."

They may be able to trace the company from this information alone.

MAGGIE HOGGART

In her late twenties, Maggie is a psychology student completing her PhD at the university of Greenwich. She met Fred couple of months ago in a pub. She felt more and more attracted to him as time went on. The interest was twofold: on one side he was a

handsome man in his mid-thirties, who had several layers of mystery surrounding him. On the other side he was complicated and host to an internal battle, an intriguing subject for her studies on human psychology. She noticed Fred was going through a portentous crisis in his life, and kept a diary of their meetings.

In the last week it has been very hard for her to keep separate the attraction for the man and the distance and impartiality she should have maintained with a research subject. She didn't fail to notice how the tension in him approached breaking point, and though shocked from the news of his death, she will think that it fits the pattern.

Showing any police credentials, or **Interrogation** will get her to reveal:

- **Core Clue:** Maggie has in her possession **Fred's laptop**, which he dropped at her place the day before, asking to send it to the police if anything happened. She'll give it to the PCs.
- Fred was very nervous during the past week; he seemed to be somewhere else for much of the time they spent together. She tried to make him open up to her, but without any result.

By spending one point in an appropriate investigative skill:

- "He has talked me about this friend of his, George, who he was probably scared of, even if he didn't realize it. I've seen him once at a distance, together with this lady with black curly hair. If I believed in all that alternative stuff, I would say she radiated a very negative aura. But that is just me being fanciful and maybe a bit jealous."

By spending two points in an appropriate ability (**Flattery** of her psychological insights into Fred, for example):

- "I believe he has done something terrible in his past, something he was still feeling the burden of. He wanted to get rid of it. He saw a light out of a very long and dark tunnel, and he was desperate to follow it. They stopped him."
- Fred felt both proud and ashamed of something which occurred about a year ago. She did some research, and she has the suspicion Fred and George killed a 17-year old guy in Belfast. She thinks he wanted to stop the killing at the last moment, but his friend finished the job off. That's just her conjecture, but one she is positive might correspond to what really happened

THE APARTMENT

Someone has been here recently. This studio-apartment consists of a single room with en suite toilet, a double bed, a small table and a mini kitchen. All the drawers are open and it seems someone searched for something in a hurry. There are still valuables in the room. (George came in search for the laptop, didn't find it, but he didn't have more time to spend on it).

Evidence Collection will reveal that the person who was here probably didn't find what he was looking for. Everything has been opened, there is no place where they could have kept looking

There is a wifi router for an internet connection, but no laptop or desktop computer

FRED'S LAPTOP

Data Retrieval or **Cryptography** will reveal:

- **Core Clue:** On the laptop, in a file on the desktop called "To the police: If I'm dead", there is the phone number and address of **York's Mediterranean Catering**, together with the names of George and Deborah.

By spending a point in an **Data Retrieval** or **Cryptography**

- There is an encrypted file containing a letter Fred was planning to send to her mother. In the letter he says he feels no anger anymore against the Nationalists. He apologizes for how much she has suffered because of him, and says he has done too many things he is now regretting. But he has met this girl, and soon, very soon he will get a normal life. They might try to be a family again

By spending an additional point in **Data Retrieval** or **Cryptography**

- In another encrypted file, his diary, there are notes about his meetings with George and the "devil's whore". The lady gives him the creep, and she must be nuts, talking about "Torture is what they feed on, we need to keep that in mind in order to summon them". George must be losing his grip to reality as well, if he believes in all the rubbish she is talking about. He begins to be scared of George
- They mentioned York several times, but he didn't know what that had to do with their being in London. The peace talks meeting maybe? But they were planning something in London!?

Options

There is a lot of scope to prolong or shorten this scene. More clues, maybe misleading ones, can be disseminated in the apartment, when the PCs initially get there. An example could be an address book containing names and phone numbers. One of these numbers will be associated to a certain "Zed", who, if phoned up, will immediately hang up. If the PCs follow this line of enquiries they will be able to discover that that is the codename of an investigative journalist who is renowned for operating often undercover in order to produce his reportages. He has been meeting Fred from time to time in the hope of infiltrating the old ULDF ranks, and discovering how a terrorist organization was disbanding after the peace talks.

The entire scene might be split in two separate ones, where the first one will consist in finding out who Maggie is, while the second one will focus on getting access to Fred's laptop. The young doctoral student might be in real shock at the news of his friend's death, and might be suspicious about who the PCs really are.

If you feel like some action should break up the investigative scenes, you could decide to anticipate the meeting with one of the torture dogs (see p. XX) to when the PCs enter Fred's apartment. George might have thought that a good precautionary measure and a further means of advertisement of his terrorist motives.

York's Mediterranean Catering

SCENE TYPE ALTERNATE

This scene is in several ways optional, and might very well happen in very different terms to the ones hereby described. By now the players could have established the connection with York themselves, and begin to wonder if there is anything of notice going to happen in the northern city.

An event which hasn't been advertised but which the PCs might get to know of is a meeting between the Prime Minister and representatives of the political parties in York during the next two days.

There are several ways for the players to get to know where the **nationalist delegation** will be lodged. Impersonate, Cop Talk or Bureaucracy are good investigative abilities which could be employed, but your players will probably display a higher degree of sagacity in their choices.

This scene is therefore described in case the players haven't connected all the dots together, or if they still are unsure about the exact location of the hit. At **York's Mediterranean Catering** they will find out what the final target of the unnatural attack will be.

Even more important is by which means the PC manage to arrive to York. The pre-generated characters have the means to get there in a very short time given their connections, which in game's terms translates in investigative abilities points. If they spend none you might want to detract 15 minutes from the alarm clock. If they spend one point worth of investigative skill, the time doesn't change. If they spend two points, which would mean something like a helicopter flying them there, you can add 10 minutes to the countdown.

KATE MOWBRAY

Kate has been in business with Deborah for six months. Kate is absolutely unaware of the hidden agenda of her business companion. She is one of those very positive people who are outrageously cheerful all the time, and are over-helpful all the time.

Core Clues : Kate very excited to have have been awarded the task of providing food and drink for the peace negotiations at the Ancient Farm House hotel just outside the city. Deborah worked tirelessly to get the contract.

By spending 1 point in an appropriate investigative skill

Deborah left about an hour ago together with this fairly new hire, an Irish chap, and she has asked her to man the shop while they were away. This is hurting her a bit; she thought they should have been together for such a triumphal event. But at the end Kate was convinced that this choice made more business sense.

Showdown at the Ancient Farm Hotel

SCENE TYPE CORE



This is the final scene, where quick action and decision will be essential.

As a first obstacle, the hotel will be under **MI5 surveillance**. Once the PCs will get within the perimeter they will meet, going in the opposite direction, a **van** with written on it "York's Mediterranean

Catering". A first **choice** will have to be made about whether to stop the **esoterrorists** or protect the nationalist delegation and dispose of the **torture dogs**.

Thereafter the PCs will have to find out where the nationalist delegation will meet up, stop anyone from getting there, and destroy the creatures of unrelenting horror, while keeping it all hush-hush. Most likely not everything will be accomplished to perfection, and this will give interesting hooks for the veil-out phase.

GETTING INTO THE HOTEL GROUNDS

The perimeter is patrolled and guarded by a group of six MI5 operatives, while two more are within the hotel grounds. The first obstacle will be therefore to obtain access without arousing suspects. Several possible techniques are acceptable, be flexible on the ideas the PCs propose to get in. The MI5 are relatively relaxed since Northern-Ireland is not considered anymore a big threat to national security as it used to be in the past. Some strategies the players might employ to get in are:

- Use MI5 connections and any appropriate investigative ability spends (**Cop Talk**, **Bureaucracy**),
- Use of any appropriate interpersonal skills, like pretending to be guests of the hotel or staff (**Impersonation**)
- Sneaking into the perimeter using **Infiltration**, the hotel grounds are quite large and only a handful of operatives are around, mostly around the main entrance
- A possibility is that the players will ask collaboration from the MI5 men. That would make for juicy role-playing material in the veil out phase: spooks tend to be nosy.

MEETING THE TERRORISTS

Whatever the means by which the PCs enter the grounds, when they are getting close to the main building a van will be on its way out of the hotel. Driving it is **George Bingham**, in the passenger seat is **Deborah McArgill**. They have left the torture dogs close to the room where in less than 30 minutes the Irish delegates will meet (**Queen Mary hall**), in preparation of tomorrow's peace conference in the York's ancient merchant hall.

The PCs might choose to let them go, which might be considered a reasonable action if their focus is to neutralise quietly the torture dogs. On the other hand they might produce essential information in order to destroy the horror creatures without raising suspicion.

Both terrorists are armed and dangerous with silenced weapons, the idea being that the Irish congressmen should get into the Queen Mary hall even if they have to fight their way out.

The two terrorists, if overwhelmed, will not talk, assuming they are still conscious. If the PCs use violence (1-point **Intimidation** spend) or the threat of it (2-point **Intimidation** spend), though, they can get information about the whereabouts and number of the creatures.

THE ESOTERIC TERRORISTS

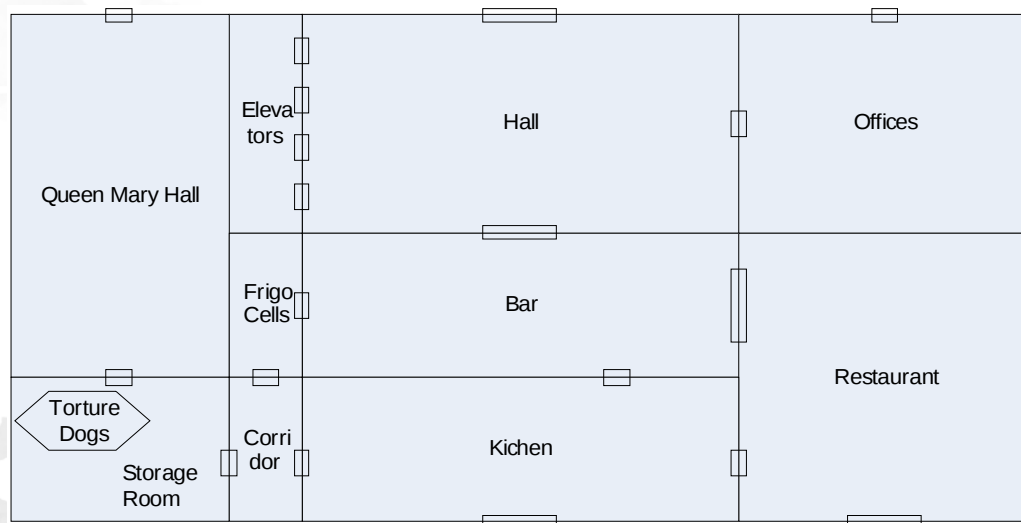
20

Skill	George Bingham	Deborah McArgill
Athletics	10	6
Driving	6	2
Health	12	8
Scuffling	8	4
Shooting	10	6
Hit Threshold	4	3
Weapon	Silenced pistol, army knife	Silenced pistol

Make this struggle violent and quick. Remind your PCs, if needed, what the final target is. Should shots be fired by the PCs, the MI5 operatives will get into action as well, but it might take a while for them to get where the fire exchange has happened. An obvious consequence is that within 20 minutes from the shot being fired, a lot of people will start crawling around the hotel, a lot of them asking a lot of questions. All this would make for an even juicier veil-out phase.

ERADICATING THE HORRIFIC CREATURES

The meeting of the nationalist delegation will happen in the **Queen Mary hall** of the hotel. This is a private area which is accessible from an independent entrance and from a single door connected to the kitchen through a storage room, as shown in the floor plan.



The terrorists have left the drugged **torture dogs** in cages, but the creatures are going to wake up very soon. They have also left the door between the storage room and the Queen Mary Hall slightly ajar, so that when noise will originate from it the infernal beasts will go into a killing frenzy.

The hotel is manned by the usual staff you can expect in a classy hotel, with liveries still on show among the personnel. The PCs could enter by any of the available doors, and will need to find out where the Hall of the meeting is in a certain hurry, if they didn't get such information beforehand.

Feel free to put some obstacles on their way if you still have time and the players seem to have fun. Some possibilities are:

- A very chatty and nosy kitchen helper who continues asking: "are you the CIA? Are you on a secret mission?"
- A receptionist who smells "cop" and "troubles" emanating from the PCs, and who will make their life as difficult as possible. His distaste for the less refined PCs will be quite obvious as well, especially if foreign-looking.
- One of the MI5 operatives questioning the purpose and identity of the PCs while they are wondering around the rooms of the hotel.

Here is where the alarm clock becomes the protagonist: what you see is what you get. The alarm trilling means that the torture dogs have begun their banquet. If the nationalist delegates are in their rooms because of previous shots, let the designated victims be some of the MI5 operatives.

There are **five torture dogs** in the **storage room**, a deadly menace for the PCs. At the first sight of them the PCs are standing to lose 3 or 4 Stability points, by just being close to them. Reduce their Health points or numbers if you think they are too much for the PCs to handle.

If any of the players is **bitten** by one of them, make another stability roll, this time with the potential loss of **5 Stability points**.

The death of one or more PCs is more than a remote possibility here, especially if they are not all together and with appropriate weapons to confront the beasts. There is nothing wrong with that, it would come at the appropriate dramatic moment.

A draconian decision in order to eliminate proof and danger, like setting fire to the Queen Mary and storage rooms, is more than acceptable, but at least one of the dogs should get out of the flames and charge the PCs.

Don't transform the battle into an accounting exercise, if you feel it's time to put an end to it, gently fade it out.

TORTURE DOG

Game Statistics

- Athletics 8, Health 7, Scuffling 9
- Hit Threshold: 4
- Alertness Modifier: +1
- Weapon: +1 (Drill), +3 (Mandibles); or fired spines (+0 Shooting and venom, see below)
- Armor: +2 vs. Shooting, +1 vs. Scuffling

The torture dogs originate from the Outer Black and we are fortunate that only a few have slipped into our world. As with all of the denizens of this dark, remote dimension, very little is known about them. They are believed to be a trained hunter-killer creature, dispatched in packs to bring down foes of particular status or significance, but this may be mere supposition. Other theories believe them to be information-gatherers, whose savage methods ensure that the victims can keep no secrets locked away.



Their minds are not human and they operate according to an alien logic.. For reasons of their own, they always spare one of their victims, although "spare" is perhaps a misleading choice of words. The dogs first inject their victim with a hallucinogenic drug, secreted from their own glands. This has the effect of making the victim ultra-sensitive to physical stimuli (so much so that he even experiences some agonizing sensations as almost pleasurable) and links him telepathically with his torturers, so that he is forced to become an accessory to his own mutilation. Then, he watches through their eyes and feels what they feel, as they peel back his skin and drill down to his bone marrow. This horrible fusion is what leaves the victim with such bizarre, intimate knowledge of the creatures, even if he is too insane to articulate it. The telepathic link exposes him to the torture dogs' own memories and experiences. After five hours, the beasts depart.

Horrific: Torture dogs are steeped in the mind-wracking essence of human agony and the fear that ordinary humans have for suffering. All Stability loss incurred from encountering them is at +1.

Toxin: The spines that a torture dog fires from its back transmit a potent toxin. Victims who are struck by the Torture Dog's spines risk having this poison sent coursing through their veins, as well as suffering **Health** damage. They must make immediate **Health** tests (difficulty 5); on a failure, they are reduced to shivering, cowering wrecks, overcome by agony. The toxin heightens all sensations to unbearable intensity, increasing the difficulty of **Stability** tests by +2, and making it impossible for the victim to take any action at all.

The toxin also mentally fuses the recipient with the torture dog that delivered it. While the venom is seething in his blood, the victim can see, hear and feel everything that the dog does. He not only gets to watch himself being devoured (or tortured), he gets to experience himself doing it, too. For the torture dog, this may give some kind of voyeuristic satisfaction; for the victim, it is a living hell, and calls for a fresh **Stability** test every time the creature attacks.

After 1d6 hours, the toxin wears off but leaves the victim with permanent nerve damage, increasing the difficulty of all **Stability** tests by +1. Immediate medical attention *may* help the victim and prevent this outcome, but three consecutive successful **Medic** checks (difficulty 4) are needed to achieve this, along with a supply of antitoxins.

Telepathy: A torture dog may communicate telepathically with others of its kind, with its masters or with a creature that it has poisoned with its toxin.

Hush-Hush

SCENE TYPE VEIL-OUT

The PCs have by now probably made a mess of the storage room and the Queen Mary hall.

MI5 operatives, hotel personnel, and the delegate might all be coming towards them searching for information on what is happening.

The PCs need to quickly dispose of the torture dogs' corpses without causing a diplomatic incident.

The task seems impossible, but the PCs should have at least some clever ideas on how to get out from here. They might engineer a short circuit even if it seems such a strange coincidence. An outbreak of an animal disease might require immediate evacuation of the hotel.

The veil out might not take too long, but if there is still time at hand and the players are eager, there are plenty of opportunities for role-playing and make use of the last investigative points the players have available. Some possible hooks are:

- MI5 wants to arrest the PCs under suspicion of terrorist activity
- One or more waiters might have seen something during the battle, and begin to talk about infernal beasts sucking blood using a drill like mouth
- If you like some grotesque melodrama, the hotel manager might be hysterical and threaten suicide if the meeting is called off
- The nationalist delegation thinks the PCs are loyalist terrorists and will try to disarm and neutralise them.

If they've done their job, the newspapers will report, the day after, about a curious minor incident at the hotel, but the peace process is well under way nevertheless.

APPENDIX

References

→ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mortal_Causes

The six pack and the loyalist terrorist cell were inspired by Ian Rankin's novel *Mortal Causes* which was set in Edinburgh.