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MURDER
OF

10¢

CROWIES

ICONS
SUPERPOWERED ROLEPLAYING



WHISPER

Kenson • Houser



THE HANGMAN

INTRODUCTION

Murder in a small town! The unexplained and brutal death of a high schooler and the mysterious disappearance of a seemingly ordinary scarecrow lead to mayhem in a rural community. Can the heroes uncover the truth and bring those responsible to justice before an even greater tragedy? To do so they must unravel ... **The Murder of Crows!**

This adventure for the **ICONS** *Super-Powered Roleplaying* game is intended for a small group of four to six heroes, but can easily be run with just one or two. A good deal of the challenge in the story involves either investigation or confronting some difficult decisions, although there's also plenty of action and ways to keep several heroes occupied. You can scale the adventure by varying the number of challenges the heroes must face. In particular, from **Chapter 2** onward, lower the Fast Attack levels of the heroes adversaries by 1 for every member of the group below 6. You may likewise want to eliminate one or more of the simultaneous challenges in **Chapter 3** to allow the heroes to address them all at once even with reduced numbers.

The heroes are drawn to investigate the death of a rural high school teen and quickly discover something out-of-the-ordinary is going on and targeting some of the young men in the town. However, not all of the "victims" are entirely blameless, nor is their attacker quite the monster he first appears to be. The climax of the adventure involves the heroes in a ages-old conflict between justice and bloody vengeance.

LOCAL HEROES

If this is your first **ICONS** adventure, you may want to consider having the players create their heroes as students at the fictional Fields High School, making them classmates of the Fields students in the story. Perhaps whatever gives the players' heroes their powers is also the source of the unexplained powers in the adventure. It could be anything from radioactive meteor rocks to soil or water contamination or the presence of an ancient and powerful mystical artifact buried beneath the town, now exerting its power. How the new young heroes deal with their powers, and how their presence impacts the town, can become the focus for a whole series, if you want.

CHAPTER 1: DEATH IN FIELDS



The adventure begins with the tragic death of Jacob Crowes, a sophomore at Fields High School, in a rural community reasonably close to the heroes' stomping grounds. It might be just outside of the city, or close to some place one or more of the heroes are likely to visit, such as their home town(s) or where a friend or family member lives. Ordinarily, the death of a single teen would not draw a lot of attention from superheroes, but Jake

Crowes' death was unusual in a number of ways, and potentially connected to other strange incidents going on in the town.

HERO HOOKS

You can get the heroes involved in the events of *The Murder of Crowes* in a number of ways:

- One or more of the heroes may have known Jake Crowes, or his family, in which case they could simply be in town for the funeral and memorial service.
- Heroes with legal investigative authority (in their costumed or civilian identities) could be looking into the circumstances of Jake's death.
- Teen heroes might even attend Fields High School, or a nearby neighboring school, in their secret identities. Perhaps they were acquainted with Jake Crowes and the other young men involved in the adventure. If the young heroes attend some sort of "prep-school" for supers, they or their teachers might have even known about Jake Crowes' "potential".
- Tommy Grinaldi contacts the heroes anonymously—via phone, email, text message, or even handwritten note—asking them to meet him in Bowes Field concerning the matter of Jake Crowes' death. When they show up for the meeting, go to **Chapter 2**.
- A concerned parent, teacher, or sheriff contacts the heroes about Crowes' death and strange sightings and events in town since then, asking them to investigate.

JUST THE FACTS

Once the heroes start investigating, they can learn the following about what has been going on. The exact order in which they learn these facts, and where they learn them, depends on their methods. Some heroes may talk directly with the local authorities (sheriff, hospital staff, and so forth), while others do some skulking or sleuthing on their own. Some heroes may even be able to pick things up using telepathy, postcognition, or other powers.

- Three days ago, Fields High sophomore Jacob Crowes was found dead in a corn field owned by Allen Bowes, a local farmer. Crowes was strung-up on the wooden framework Bowes used to hold his scarecrow, which was also missing. There were indications Crowes had been beaten, but an autopsy could not determine an exact cause of death.

His injuries did not appear severe enough to have killed him and the coroner believes Crowes suffered sudden heart failure.

- Jake Crowes was an excellent student at school with a high grade point average and ambitions of attending college. He was known to be somewhat shy, the occasional target of teasing and bullying, but not particularly depressed or involved in anything dangerous. He lived with his father, John Crowes, his mother having passed away from breast cancer when Jake was eleven.
- John Crowes works as a mechanic at a local garage. He is grief-stricken by his son's death and firmly believes Jake was murdered by local bullies who felt threatened by his intellect and academic achievements. He's angry that the sheriff's department has not turned up any solid leads and wants action.
- The locals are largely in shock over the crime: there hasn't been a murder in recent memory, and Fields High School administrators have brought in counselors to talk with students about the incident. The sheriff, Bill Macklin, is conducting an investigation, but has no solid leads as yet.
- Heroes with psychic or mystical abilities may sense a further "presence" lingering in the community beyond just the malaise associated with such a sudden and violent death: there is a strong feeling of being watched, and they may notice an unusual number of crows perched in various places—telephone wires, windowsills, tree branches, and so forth—their dark eyes appearing to follow their every move.



CHAPTER 2: THE CROWS ARE WATCHING

The heroes get their first break in the investigation, and their first brush with the power threatening the town.

A Fields High student named Tommy Grinaldi contacts the heroes, most likely by calling the sheriff's office while there are there, but potentially another way, if there are known public means of getting in touch with them. He says he has information about Jacob Crowes and asks the heroes to meet him at Bowes Field that evening.

The call is too brief and the voice too muffled to easily trace. Far simpler for the heroes to simply go to the appointed place and see who shows up. Still, if the players insist on trying to track down the caller beforehand, let them. Simply move the following events to wherever they happen to find, Grinaldi, who is doing his best to lie-low until he can talk to the heroes.

THE BIRDS

The corn is high in Bowes Field, save for patches that have been trampled and torn by police and others who have passed through to investigate the Crowes murder. There are paths between the rows, but otherwise the cornfield makes it difficult to see very far without the vantage of being able to see over the cornstalks.

Moments after the heroes arrive, there is a loud burst of wings from the corn and a veritable cloud of black crows take to the air, squawking and cawing, followed almost immediately by a yell of alarm!

When the heroes rush to the source of the sound, they find a teenager in a Fields High School letterman jacket thrashing on the ground between the cornstalks, trying to fend off the massive flock of crows attacking him. The birds dive bomb and flap all around the boy, pecking with their beaks and

scratching with their claws, breaking off while others swoop down out of the mass circling overhead.

When the heroes attempt to intervene, the crows attack them as well. What is more, the cornstalks also move to attack!



CROW FLOCK

Prowess 4, Strength 1, Coordination 4, Intellect 0, Awareness 4, Willpower 3 • Stamina 12 • Aerial Combat • Fast Attack 8 (3 attacks per panel), Flight 2, Strike 1 (slashing)

CORNSTALKS

Prowess 3, Strength 2, Coordination 1, Intellect 0, Awareness 0, Willpower 0 • Stamina 12 • Wrestling • Extra Body Parts (Tentacles) 6, Fast Attack 6 (3 attacks per panel), Immunity to Mental Attacks

Both the birds and the nearby cornstalks continue attacking until the heroes disable them (such as tearing up or burning the plants) or drive them away. Reducing either threat's Stamina to 0 does the trick, dispersing the flock or eliminating all of the nearby plants, for this reason, both threats have increased Stamina. Treat both of them as single opponents, capable of multiple attacks; the individual components aren't much of a threat to the heroes, but combined they are!

Heroes who became aware of a presence or the sense of being watched previously (see **Chapter 1**) feel it even more intensely during the attack, along with an almost overwhelming anger. Tommy manages to cry and plead for mercy before passing out. If the heroes rescue him from the attack, he's left catatonic by the trauma. If they do not—being unable to overcome his attackers, for example—then Tommy's last, choked plea for mercy seems to be heard. The attacking creatures withdraw and he collapses, catatonic, as before. Before Grinaldi loses consciousness, the nearest hero hears him mutter, "Mike... Pete..."

While considerably bloodied and mud-stained, clothing torn, Tommy Grinaldi's injuries are not severe. He seems to be suffering far more from exhaustion and trauma from the savage and frightening attack. The police or nearby medical center can see that he gets care. The heroes can either take Tommy to them, or call in an ambulance and the sheriff, as suits their means.

CHAPTER 3:

DEMON IN A BOTTLE

Matters escalate as something is attacking young men connected to Jake Crowes' death.

While the heroes are with Sheriff Macklin, either at the medical center or at Bowes Field tending to Tommy, they overhear a call on the police radio: a pickup on US Route 2 just outside of town driving erratically, endangering other traffic, pursued by what looks like a flock of crows!

It is a simple matter for the heroes to get directions: Route 2 is the main road leading in and out of town. If they can't get there quickly under their own power, Sheriff Macklin volunteers to help get them there, given that he's short-handed and could use their help. Good thing, too, because the situation is about to get messy!

THE PICKUP

A beat-up old pickup truck is swerving and speeding along Route 2. At the wheel is Mike Trevor, a half-empty bottle of cheap booze swiped from home on the passenger seat. A dark cloud of angry crows pursues the truck, which is trying to escape them. Mike is increasingly panicked and losing control of the vehicle.

THE SUV

Coming from the opposite direction on the two-lane rural highway is a family SUV with a married couple, Ted and Joanna Almont, and their two children Scott (age 8) and Melissa (age 6). When Mike Trevor's pickup swerves into their lane, headed right at them, Ted turns the wheel hard to avoid him, causing the top-heavy SUV to roll on its side as it skids to a stop, but not quite fast enough...

THE GAS STATION

The Almont's SUV slides sideways into one of the supports for the canopy of the roadside gas station just outside of town. The canopy folds, now supported by the side of the vehicle, pinning the side doors closed. The

crash damages one of the pumps and a puddle of gasoline is spreading across the pavement around the SUV.

At the same time, Mike Trevor, who tried to avoid hitting the SUV, plows his pickup right into a telephone pole. The front of the truck crumples, Mike's head violently meets the steering wheel (no airbags in the old clunker), and the pole snaps, falling to crush part of the truck's cab and lying partially across the road. What's worse, it brings down several power cables, now sparking and sputtering perilously close to the damaged gas pumps!

INTO ACTION!

This is the situation that greets the heroes when they arrive. Feel free to hand them a point of team Determination, if they have an established team pool, because in short order they need to:

- **Get Mike Trevor out of the truck cab.** Trevor is unconscious and damage to the cab has jammed the doors, which are Strength 6 to open by force. Knocking in the rear or passenger side windows is effectively automatic, given they're largely shattered already. Lifting and moving the unconscious teen (who is a big football player type) takes Strength 4 (so two Strength 3 heroes could do it together using the Combining Abilities rule).
- **Get the Almonts clear of the SUV.** The damaged canopy, a rigid wood and metal structure, has the sideways SUV pinned beneath it. It takes Strength 6 to lift it and the same Strength to open the SUV's doors by force. Knocking out the windows is automatic, if a hero takes a panel to do so. Helping one of the family out of the damaged vehicle takes an panel, and requires Strength 4 (3 for the kids) to lift them out bodily, although they are capable of getting out under their own power once the way is clear.
- **Contain or prevent the explosion.** Three pages after the crash, stray sparks ignite the spilled gasoline, creating an explosion that does Blast 7 damage to everyone within close distance of the station, and sets them on fire, doing further Blast 5 damage each page until the victim takes at least two panels to roll around to put out the flames or otherwise smother them. Heroes with the right powers (Electricity Control, Force Fields, etc.) may be able to prevent the explosion or contain it. Otherwise they have to get everyone clear as quickly as possible.

To complicate matters, the flock of crows (same traits as the one listed in **Chapter 2**) attacks Mike Trevor and anyone trying to help him, making it harder to get at the damaged pickup. The gas explosion disperses the

flock, if the heroes do not do so before then. The crows scatter and fly off. The same happens if they reduce the flock to 0 Stamina.

If all of this isn't challenging enough, feel free to up the ante for the heroes with additional challenges, like having one or more of the Almonds knocked unconscious by the crash and/or trapped by a damaged seatbelt, having one or more gas station workers or another car pinned under the fallen canopy, or even having a stray broken power cable strike one of the heroes (for Blast 6 electricity damage) or electrify the framework of the pickup, making rescue even harder. You should probably award the hero Determination for this level of challenge, however.



AFTERMATH

Mike Trevor is left unconscious from the crash, with a possible concussion, while the Almonts are suitably grateful to the heroes for the last-minute rescue. The local fire department takes charge of the containment and clean-up, and EMTs treat the injured and get them to the medical center as quickly as possible.

If none of the players think to ask, you might want to roll a secret Awareness (4) test for the heroes to see if any of them notice that Mike Trevor also wears a Fields High School letterman jacket. He and Tommy Grinaldi are on the high school football team together. Anyone who inquires about the connection and the name “Pete” can find out from virtually anybody in town (including Sheriff Macklin) that Pete Connors is the quarterback of the Fields High Huskers football team.



CHAPTER 4:

BARN BURNER

The heroes confront those responsible for the attacks and for Jake's death, and have to choose between justice and vengeance.

The heroes can follow up on the leads from the attacks on Tommy Grinaldi and Mike Trevor to the Connors family farm on the outskirts of town. If they're completely unable to piece things together, a panicked 911 call from Pete Connors parents reaches Sheriff Macklin (and the heroes) right before it is cut off. All that they get is there is someone—or something—outside their house.

INSIDE THE BARN

By the time the heroes arrive, the Connors are unconscious inside the farmhouse, trussed up with plant stalks, but otherwise unarmed. Pete Connors is in the barn, likewise bound and helpless, but entirely conscious for what is about to happen. Heroes can smell the strong scent of gasoline, poured from several discarded cans used to fuel the tractor and other farm equipment. Standing over Connors and taunting him is the missing scarecrow from Bowes Field!

If the heroes pause for even a moment, they overhear:

"Please," Pete begs, "Don't do this!"

"*Please,*" replies the hollow, mocking voice of the Scarecrowe. "How does it feel to beg for mercy, Pete? It didn't stop you and your buddies when you took everything from me, when you made me into this ... this *freak!* *When you took away my life!*"

"Jake...?" Pete mutters in astonishment, but the Scarecrowe rants on, tossing aside the last gas can.

"Now you're going to *pay* for it!" And he strikes a match...

The heroes might think they have the drop on the Scarecrowe, particularly if they have approached the barn using stealth and hidden out, listening to

the previous exchange. Unfortunately, they may not have taken into account the crows Jake Crowes has roosting on the eaves and rafters of the barn, or his ability to sense what they do. Before the good guys can stop him, the Scarecrowe turns and looks right at them with his distorted, burlap covered “face” and declares in his hollow voice:

“And you won’t stop me! *Attack!*” The flock of crows surges out at the heroes in a flurry of dark wings and fierce cries as Scarecrowe drops the match onto the gas-soaked straw.

BURNING WITH VENGEANCE

The Scarecrowe, who was once Jacob Crowes, does not intend to survive this final encounter. He means to end his twisted existence in a blaze of glory, so long as he takes his hated tormenter and “killer” with him in the process. Thus his goal is to keep the heroes occupied and away from Pete Connors long enough for the fire to do its job.

Flames spread quickly throughout the barn, catching on the gasoline soaked straw and dry wood. Scarecrowe has actually left an “island” untouched by accelerant around him and Connors, intending to draw out his enemy’s end. Anyone moving through the burning barn to try and get to them must make a Coordination (6) Test to avoid 5 points of fire damage, with the result of the test read like a shooting (lethal) attack; so failure results in Stamina damage, while failure by 3 or 4 is a possible stun, and failure by 5 or more is a possible killing outcome, both requiring a Strength test.

Scarecrowe himself catches fire by the second page; his Damage Resistance and Regeneration mitigate some of the damage. He only takes 1 point per page, and recovers 1 point every other page (meaning he effectively loses 1 Stamina every other page from the fire). Being aflame also effectively gives him Aura 5 (fire) if any hero touches or grabs him.

In addition to commanding the crows to attack, Scarecrowe causes plant stalks to burst up through the wooden barn floor to wrestle the heroes. Use the Crow Flock and Cornstalks stats from **Chapter 2**. The plants immediately begin withering in the intense heat, taking fire damage each page. This can burn through plants holding the heroes, but they suffer the damage as well!

EXTRA CHALLENGES

If all of this isn’t enough challenge for the heroes, you can also throw some additional ones in their path, such as: having part of the barn’s loft or roof collapse, pinning someone beneath a heavy beam or pile of debris; having

the fire reach a remaining few gas or kerosene canisters, which explode in a fiery Blast 7 that also blows out part of the barn wall; additional hostages in the form of Pete Connors' parents, or possibly Tommy and Mike, abducted from the medical center by Scarecrowe and some animate plant "henchmen" to face the fate of their ringleader.



STRAW MAN ARGUMENTS

How the heroes choose to deal with the Scarecrowe is up to them. They have a fair chance of figuring out that their foe is the psychic "ghost" of Jake Crowes, cruelly transformed. They might want to try and talk him into turning away from the course he has chosen before it's too late. Most likely, at this point, no one has died. Those responsible for Jake's death can be

brought to justice. Perhaps there is even a way to reverse what has happened to him, if he gives it a chance.

Don't force the players to rely too much on successful tests to convince Scarecrowe to show mercy; it should be a roleplaying moment. By all means let them spend Determination to tag their own relevant Qualities, or to try and tag Jake's, in order to reach him. Even if they are able to convince him not to destroy others' lives to satisfy his sense of vengeance, they may not necessarily be able to ward off his self-destructive impulses.

If the heroes go for the straightforward option of fighting Scarecrowe and his minions in order to rescue Pete Connors, their foe rails against the bitter injustice of the so-called "heroes" siding with a bully and a murderer against him, the real victim. He says that everyone will pay for what has been done to him, that he won't stop until he has shown the whole world!

ENDGAME

The most likely outcome is for the good guys to get Connors, and themselves, out of the burning barn. They get one last look at Scarecrowe before the building collapses on the raging or despairing figure, completely obscuring him in flaming wreckage. By the time the heroes can put out the fire and dig through the rubble, all they find are some charred remains of the once animate construction of wood, cloth, and straw, with nothing else left behind.

If you feel the heroes truly convinced Jake to give up his quest for vengeance *and* his efforts to end his new existence, then Scarecrowe leaves the barn with them, either to face the authorities or to escape and reconsider his new role in the world (depending on what the heroes said and do).

THE SCARECROW

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| PROWESS | AVERAGE | 3 |
| COORDINATION | AVERAGE | 3 |
| STRENGTH | FAIR | 4 |
| INTELLECT | FAIR | 4 |
| AWARENESS | INCREDIBLE | 7 |
| WILLPOWER | AMAZING | 8 |
| STAMINA | | 12 |

POWERS

Animal Control 7

Limited to crows

Damage Resistance 4

Life Support 10

Plant Control 6

Regeneration 5

Resistance 10

Biological Afflictions,
Blinding, Cold, Radiation

Strike 4

QUALITIES

Burns With Vengeance

Not Truly Alive

Straw Man



BACKGROUND

Jacob Crowes remembers his mom telling him what a smart, special kid he was, before she lost her battle with cancer. That loss devastated his father, although he tried to do right by Jake. For his own part, Jacob wanted nothing more than to do well in school and get the grades he needed to

earn a scholarship and a ticket away from the one-horse town and the redneck hicks he grew up with.

Bookish, shy, and awkward, Jake was a target for guys like Pete Connors and his football buddies from day one of high school. He tried ignoring them. He tried avoiding them. Nothing worked. Eventually, Jake had had enough, and he struck back in the only way he knew how. Nobody knows exactly who put the hidden locker-room video up on the Internet, but Pete and his buddies figured it out fast enough. They cornered Jake one night and decided to teach him a lesson.

Beaten up and dragged into a cornfield at night, hung up with the scarecrow, Jake's terror and humiliation triggered something inside of him. His mind and heart seemed to explode, and suddenly Jake wasn't in pain any longer. Indeed he felt nothing at all, because he was no longer himself. His limbs were wood and burlap, stuffed with straw and rags. His mind touched upon the life around him: the birds and the crops, and he could bend them to his will. But his body—beaten and bloody, hanging from the scaffold—was cold and lifeless. Jacob's mind broke.

The three jocks, Pete, Mike, and Tommy, ran off when their victim appeared to convulse and die and when the scarecrow started to move. Jacob lay low for a while, confused and trying to sort out what happened, trying to right it, but he couldn't. All he could do now is avenge what had been done to him, as the Scarecrow!

Deep down, the Scarecrow is still a terrified and traumatized teenager, lashing out at those responsible for his condition. He hates bullies and normal people in general, believing he has become a monster because of them. Jake Crowes' psychic powers have allowed his spirit to survive in some fashion, controlling a body of suitable organic materials, and tapped into and influencing nearby life-forms. What becomes of the Scarecrow and his potential is largely up to the heroes and how they deal with Jacob's tragic fate in this adventure.

EPILOGUE

With the revelation of the Scarecrowe's role in recent events, and his rescue or destruction, the immediate threat is over. Sheriff Macklin places the three Fields High students under arrest on assault, kidnapping, and manslaughter charges on the strength of the heroes' statements. Although they'll be tried as juveniles, it's likely the judge will take the seriousness of the charges into account. Fields High School starts a scholarship fund and anti-bullying program in Jacob Crowes' memory.

If Scarecrowe survived the final encounter with the heroes, he may choose to disappear before the authorities arrive, with or without the heroes' permission. He spends some time pondering his new existence and searching for purpose and meaning in it. This can lead to changes in his powers and motif as well as his motivations. Jake could become a ghostly presence able to animate different objects or materials, or work through local plant or animal life. He may become a student or protégé of the heroes who helped him or grudgingly agree to part on equal terms for now, with no promises as to the future.

While he might abandon his thirst for vengeance, Scarecrowe does not have to become a hero. He may obsessively pursue ways to "cure" his condition and regain some kind of human existence. That can easily involve theft, extortion, and even darker crimes, especially if one of his options is sinister magic or even a literal deal with the Devil! Similarly, Scarecrowe may retain his hatred of bullies and become a "hero" who protects the weak and helpless, but does so with brutal and even lethal means.

Even if the Scarecrowe was seemingly destroyed at the end of **Chapter 4**, that by no means ends his usefulness as a character in your **Icons** series. After all, who knows how extensive his regenerative powers truly are? Perhaps Scarecrowe also has Immortality and can recover even from his destruction. Similarly, perhaps the destruction of the physical form he occupied somehow freed Jake's spirit, allowing him to possess another form: inanimate, animal, plant, or even human. You can have Scarecrowe return in virtually any form you want, and with any motivation. The experience may have softened his attitude and inclined him towards turning over a new leaf or driven him deeper into bitterness and madness, such that his return is a threat to not just one small town, but to the entire place the heroes call home, or even the entire world!

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