

L I M I N A L



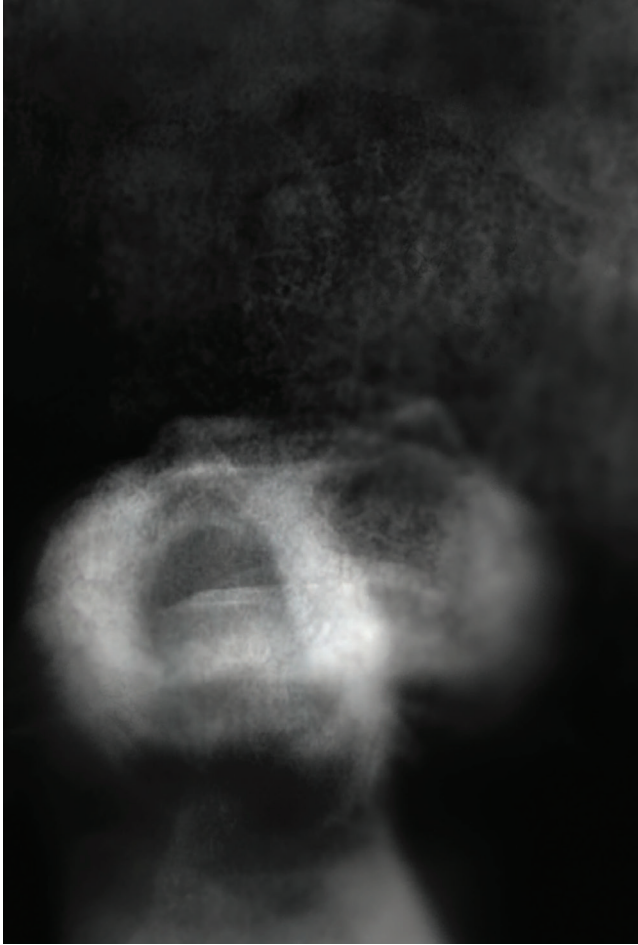
THE HAUNTING HOUSE

A Case Note for Liminal

Paul Mitchener

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Background

This scenario involves the legacy of the magician Sir Tatton Northcott, and a haunting in the village of Thornhill in West Yorkshire. Sir Tatton and Thornhill both featured in the scenario *Prodigal Son*. You can run this scenario as a sequel to that one, or independently.

The village holds the grave of the Saxon King Osbeht, and was once the base of the werewolf gang, the Heirs of Osbeht, but the most notable thing about it is the ghost of Thornhill Hall- a medieval manor on a moated island, destroyed in the civil war, which now reappears in the world at night. Most of the ghosts of the manor are trapped and cannot escape, but a few have slipped out, invisibly attacking people at night and causing inexplicable wounds, which tend to get explained away as accidents.

A dread surrounds the place, and has so far prevented anyone unaware of from approaching. But, if nothing is done, the ghosts will escape in greater numbers. The attacks are increasing and the walls between worlds are already dreadfully thin.

The Hook

The wizard and former senior member of the Council of Merlin, Sir Tatton Northcott, is dead, after a long illness. When he died a letter was sent to the player characters, who may have done him some service in the scenario *Prodigal Son*. If not, he has heard of them by reputation, and believes they are best placed to fulfil some of his final wishes.

The Letter

Honoured sirs,

Pray forgive the cursory nature of this note, for I am soon to no longer be amongst the living, and when you receive it I will surely have passed away. I find my concentration lapses, and I have no time for polite flourishes and small talk, even in a letter.

The fact is I need you. I need you to come to my home, Northcott Manor, and take away a book from my library before those vultures of the Council of Merlin come to swoop. There is a book they cannot be trusted with. The book is *On Geomantic Hauntings* by Bishop Ferrar. My butler will be expecting you, but alas the protective spirit guarding the library will be unleashed, and you will have to deal with that, for which you have my apologies. I lack the energy and mental discipline for the necessary banishment magic. Still, forewarned is forearmed!

That is, alas, not the only issue I need you for. The other issue concerns a particularly dangerous haunting in the village of Thornhill. My wards have kept it in place, but my death will see those slip away, and it is a place of dangerous power. You will find the means in the book to secure it again. Do not trust the ghosts, and do not allow wizards to attempt to exploit the place's power.

It must be secure or a terrible evil will be unleashed upon the world. I find I cannot trust the Council of Merlin, to which I belong, to secure the place as is sensible rather than to try to exploit it.

I hope this letter finds you in good health, and that you are able to carry out my dying wishes.

Yours in a debt which I cannot discharge,

Tatton

Research

There are a couple of references in the letter the player characters may wish to chase up - the book and Bishop Ferrar, and records of hauntings in Thornhill. Research and an Education test at challenge level 8 finds out that Bishop Robert Ferrar was bishop of Carmarthen and had frequent clashes with the local clergy. When Queen Mary took the throne in the 16th century, he had no protectors within the church, and was burned at the stake in 1555.

A Lore test at challenge level 8, if one of the crew managed the Education test, or challenge level 10 if they did not, reveals that Bishop Ferrar was particularly interested in finding ways to lay ghosts to rest, and Carmarthen had many ghosts. He had possession of magical texts expunged from the so-called Black Book of Carmarthen, an early work of Welsh literature. It seems reasonable to conjecture that the book mentioned in Sir Tatton's letter is associated to these texts, and to ghosts.

As for Thornhill Hall, the Hall is a ruined Medieval Manor. It is easy to find out that the Hall was besieged by Parliamentary forces during the English civil war, and although the defenders surrendered at the command of the lady of the manor, Anne Saville, the house was "accidentally" blown up, leaving nothing but ruins.

Contacts in the police or local press will reveal the story that the original house reappears on the hill each night, and locals are reporting mysterious injuries caused by invisible assailants shoving them. A feeling of dread discourages anyone from investigating the former ruins. Nobody official outside of Thornhill is taking the reports remotely seriously, even those from the Hidden World.

First Location: Northcott House

Northcott House is a Georgian era stately home in perfect condition, and a grade I listed building. It is surrounded by parkland designed by the famous landscape architect Capability Brown. The house has been in the possession of the Northcott family since it was built. The Northcott family were traditionally magicians, and members of the Council of Merlin. With the death of Sir Tatton Northcott, that tradition is at an end.

The only person in the building, assuming the player characters respond to the letter fairly promptly, is the family butler Sean Daley, who is busy making funeral arrangements. He will let the player characters into the library if they can prove their credentials, but warns them that the family spirit is restless.

The library feels colder than the rest of the house. As soon as the player characters enter the library, the spirit will attack with its power of terror, invisibly to any who lack The Sight or a similar power. Should the player characters even touch a book, the doors slam shut and the spirit attacks with its poltergeist power.

The Guardian Spirit

The first baronet Northcott, the Tatton Northcott who had Northcott House built, chained a guardian spirit to the library to prevent intruders from stealing from it. Normally it will attack anyone who is not part of the Northcott family who attempts to remove a book from within, or to destroy a book- though it may itself cause damage in its zeal to punish intruders. Since the latest Northcott death, and lack of an heir, the spirit is more aggressive than usual.

Drive:	Chained guardian spirit
Physical Skills:	Awareness 2, Melee 3, Stealth 3
Social Skills:	Taunt 4
Traits:	Insubstantial, Invisible, Poltergeist, Terror
Endurance:	8
Will:	8
Damage:	d6+1 (with Poltergeist; spend 1 Will to act) d6 Will (with Terror)

Despite its aggression, the spirit is not beyond reason. It will not cease its attacks, but an opposed social skill test, backed up by the letter, can convince it the characters are there under the wishes of its master. Skillfully roleplaying, backed up by a further skill test and evidence, can even lay the spirit to rest, convincing itself that its purpose on Earth has come to an end.

The Lead

Bishop Ferrar's book describes the ghosts which arose from the Medieval Plague Pits of Carmarthen and speculates that their presence in such numbers indicated they were empowered by a source of geomantic energy as well as the trauma of their own death. It describes the ritual the bishop used to drain the geomantic energy at the source of the Ghost Realm, and cautions a would-be exorcist not to take the tainted energy into himself.

Any magician can cast the ritual, but it can only be done at the heart of the Ghost Realm, which is found at Thornhill Hall.

Thornhill Hall is on a hill outside the village, surrounded by a moat. A feeling of dread fills any who approach the moat; if one seeking to cross fails a Conviction test, they are at a -1 penalty to all actions until they turn away. At night, the Hall appears in it was during the English Civil War, a medieval manor with recent fortification.

Most pressingly, there is a police presence. The police are not aware of the Hidden World, but have a cordon across the lane leading to Thornhill Hall, and are keeping a watch on the place should anyone try to go there- or come out. Getting there means sneaking or talking one's way past them.

Seargent Priya Sanyal

Priya Sanyal is in charge of the police posted here. She thinks it is a waste of time them being here, but cannot deny something odd is going on. Still, she has orders from "high up" to keep the place safe. Despite still being in her 20s, Seargent Sanyal has been known to say, "I'm too old for this shit".

Drive:	Keeping people safe
Physical Skills:	Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Melee 2, Vehicles 1
Mental Skills:	Education 1, Science 1, Technology 2
Social Skills:	Conviction 2, Empathy 2, Streetwise 2
Traits:	Breaking and Entry, Investigator, Jack of All Trades
Endurance:	9
Will:	10
Damage:	d6+1 (combat baton)

The other police officers are as described in the main Liminal rulebook.

Complications

Everything on the island within the moat is a Ghost Realm, and there is no easy way to leave. One who knows the ways of such places will know that one way out is to follow a small anachronism. An Awareness test at challenge level 10 will spot an incongruous tarmac path at the back of the house. Following it takes one out of the Realm. Raise the challenge level to 12 for a character who does not know they are seeking something anachronistic.

The way out is not the main complication, however. Sir Tatton Northcott was right about the dangerous magic of Thornhill Hall being a draw for magicians, and half right about the Council of Merlin, for indeed a dangerous magician is already present, and he used to belong to the Council.

The magician in question is Chales Gardner, an infamous enemy of Merlin involved in the "Glasgow incident", where a backlash of energy from a forbidden necromantic ritual destroyed the Council's Glasgow club house, but exposed what Gardner was doing him, forcing him to go into hiding from the Council.

Charles Gardner is present to take the energy of Thornhill Hall for himself; he does not believe that it is tainted, but even if he did, he would not care. He has been in and around the house for some time, depending on when the player characters arrive; he is currently within the Ghost Realm, but outside the house itself, placing stones as geomantic markers as a preparation to drain the house's energy. A few ghosts are around, common people in 17th century clothing, but are paying the magician little attention.

The magician is willing to talk to the crew. He will claim that his geomantic ritual will disperse the magic of the ghostly hall, which is true, and so deal with the problem. However, in the process, it will release the ghosts into the world, making it far from an ideal solution. Gardner is willing to fight with his magic to prevent disruption to his ritual, and the stones are warded. Simply moving a stone is actually enough to stop the magician, but inflicts $d6+4$ damage on the one who does it.

Gardner is not interested in fighting when he seems overmatched, nor will he bother confronting the crew once the ritual is disrupted. He can even, probably inadvertently, provide useful information for the crew- he knows where the heart of the Ghost Realm is, and knows the way out. The heart of the Ghost Realm is described below, but is also the exact geometric centre of the circle of stones, and the player characters can work that out with a Science skill test.

Charles Gardner

Drive: Power at all cost
 Physical Skills: Awareness 1
 Mental Skills: Education 3, Lore 4, Science 2
 Social Skills: Conviction 3, High Society 2, Rhetoric 2
 Traits: Countermagic, Geomancy (Tap Power), Necromancy (Life Stealing, Touch the Darkness), Ward Magic (Personal Wards)
 Endurance: 8
 Will: 17 (boosted from previously tapped energy)
 Damage: d6 (cost 2 Will, and d6 Will and Endurance with Touch the Darkness), d6+4 using a Ward

Final Location: Thornhill Hall

Despite the 17th century fortifications, Thornhill Hall is at heart a Medieval Manor, consisting of a central great hall and family solar off to the side. Guards dressed as cavaliers from the English Civil War guard the entrances, and a visitor will be taken to see the ruler of the house, Lade Anne Savile. Within the realm, all ghosts are solid and physical. The ghosts do not know how to leave of their own volition, though each night a few slip out.

Lady Anne Savile

Lady Anne Savile is the ruler of the house, commander of the royalist soldiers, and a powerful spirit. She will happily receive visitors, question them about the state of the world, and express her desire to see it again, even if it ends her afterlife. But this is a lie; Lady Anne and all the ghosts here are lethal and dangerous, see the outside world as fallen to "Parliamentarians" and are determined to fight them. Everyone who is not explicitly a friend, and in Lady Anne's service, is an enemy.

In other words, the lady of the house is mad and dangerous. In life, Lady Anne was a minor magician, and this power has grown in the afterlife.

Drive: To reassert dominion in the outside world
 Physical Skills: Awareness 2, Melee 3
 Mental Skills: Education 3, Lore 4
 Social Skills: Conviction 4, Empathy 1, Rhetoric 1
 Traits: Blessings and Curses (Physical Curses), Countermagic, Insubstantial, Monstrous Toughness (x2)
 Endurance: 16
 Will: 12
 Damage: d6+1 (knife), d6+2 Will (curse; spend one Will for physical damage as well)

The Cavaliers

Drive:	Prevent any from escape, living or dead
Physical Skills:	Awareness 2, Melee 3, Stealth 3
Social Skills:	Taunt 4
Traits:	Insubstantial, Invisible, Poltergeist
Endurance:	8
Will:	8
Damage:	d6+1

The hearth in the Great Hall is the heart of the Realm, and the ghosts here refer to it as such. The hearth is the place to perform the ritual in Bishop Ferrar's book, should the crew choose to do so. However, they will not allow the player characters to perform magic there unless somehow tricked.

There are two ways to perform the ritual. One way is to disperse the energy, which requires a Lore test at challenge level 12, or even higher if there is interference from the cavaliers or Lady Anne. The other way is to absorb the energy, which is a mere challenge level 8. The ritual takes about a minute to complete, or three combat rounds. At its end, the Ghost Realm and its inhabitants are gone from the world, and the crew will find themselves back on the Earth, amongst the real ruins of Thornhill Hall.

If a magician opted to absorb the energy rather than to disperse it, there are consequences. Firstly, they gain d6 points of Will. This can even take the character above their normal maximum, but once spent, it is gone. Secondly, the character gains a new Drive, as well as their initial Drive. This Drive will always be directed to do something evil or unclean- for instance, to kill, to drink the blood of living people, to exhume and consume the flesh of dead bodies. But it can be called upon as well as the main Drive in a game session, for a second restoration of Will - there's always a temptation. Ridding oneself of this Drive will require further investigations - possibly to find an outlet for the foul energy absorbed - the details of which are left for the Crew to develop

Handout: The Letter

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