

THE HORROR IN HOLYOKE

A free Halloween adventure for Savage Worlds
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The Setup

Your friend Jared Swinson had been passing the word around school that this Halloween his parents were going to be out of town, and that he is going to have an epic Halloween party at his house. Well, today's the day, and you've piled in the car with all your other friends, using the map Jared provided to drive all the way out to his (surprisingly) isolated farmhouse, about 20 minutes out of town. As you're driving out, you passively note some of the scenery of the area: farmhouses, every now and then, some in much better shape than others; an old white church, paint peeling off the walls and impossible to tell whether it's still actively being used by a congregation or not; a small, old looking cemetery, the headstones mostly simple affairs, some tipped over. But most of the scenery is dominated by freshly threshed cornfields, baled hay and straw dotting large, empty vistas, and fallow grassland, filled with sickly looking brownish yellow wild grass that would probably be up to waist deep. It is remarkable how few people live out here; Jared's closest neighbors can't be less than 23 miles away.

At long last, you arrive at his house, which is, compared to the other farmhouses you've passed, a relatively standard affair: near to the road, two story, surrounded by azalea bushes and some juniper and yew, it looks inoffensive. There is even a little hand-painted "Welcome" sign affixed to the mailbox post, with ducks on it. There are already 7 cars in the driveway when you arrive. The sun has already begun setting, but there's still at least another hour left in the day before it's truly dark.

Inside, you can find that the party has already started. There are decoratively carved pumpkins on the floor, on the mantel, in the kitchen, many with lively little candles inside, snacks, a punchbowl (Jared remarks it's his personal recipe; there's a bottle of vodka, completely empty, lying on the floor underneath the table), and music blaring out of the stereo in the living room. While you may not agree with Jared's taste in music, it is at least energetic. Most of the other guests are people you are aware of at school, but are not members of the same social circles as you; you tend to stick together as a group, since you all know each other better than you know anyone else, excluding Jared. Jared's boyhood friend, John Mason, has not arrived yet, though the day John misses one of Jared's parties is probably going to be a sign of the impending Apocalypse.

More people arrive, the sun sets, the party gets going in earnest. Jared's punch is, as expected, very popular, and soon its role as social lubricant has been fulfilled. It is around this point when you realize that you haven't seen Jared nearly since the beginning of the party. His car isn't missing (nor could he get out if he tried; it's blocked in by at least 10 other cars), and nobody else seems to have seen him around either. What's more, his best friend John never showed up either, which is pretty doubly weird. Or maybe he did, and the two of them went off together to paint the countryside red for a little while.

As you're pondering all of this, the lights suddenly go out. There's a collective gasp that goes around from all the partygoers, including a couple people who let out involuntary little cries, because it is seriously dark; a couple people even laugh, assuming it's a prank, and you hear "ha ha, screw you Jared, turn the lights back on," but they don't come back on. The only light, currently, comes from the few flickering pumpkins that still have good candles inside, and some other pillar candles up on the mantel over the fireplace. Besides that, a few people take out their cell phones and use the bright display to look around.

After a couple minutes, though, the complete lack of Jared jumping out of somewhere and being a jackass makes you start to wonder what's really going on.

Exploration

On the ground floor of the house is a small entryway by the front door, which opens into the living room, where most of the party is happening. Adjacent to that room is the family room, which has a small home office set up on the far side. Accessible from either room is the kitchen, which also has access to the backyard. There is a staircase on the far west wall. The kitchen is in the northeast corner of the house, the bathroom is right before the stairs, the family room

looks north, the living room looks south. All of the rooms have large and spacious windows. The road, to the south, runs east and west.

At the desk in the family room, there is an older PC that is turned on, though password protected. The desk is flanked by two short filing cabinets, which, though unlocked, have rather unremarkable contents. Receipts, documents, invoices, summaries; the sort of normal stuff you'd find in any family's office space. There is a gun cabinet against the wall across the room, but it, and the drawer underneath it, are tightly locked. The cabinet has glass windows, reinforced with chicken wire, but one can plainly see (in a lit room), that it contains 3 or 4 low caliber rifles, nothing with more stopping power than a 30.06, but also a couple shotguns. One is a double barrel 12gauge, the other appears to be a pump action 16. If one were to gain access to the gun cabinet, one would also find, by rummaging around, wrapped in oily leather, a very old and weathered looking Mauser HSc, which otherwise appears to be in good working order (and a full magazine). In the drawer, one can find ammunition. Overall, there is one carton of 16 gauge ammunition (with 4 shells missing; 21 shells total), one full carton of 12 gauge ammunition, a carton of 30.06 (20 rounds), a large carton of .22 rounds (50 rounds), and a leather strap fitted with 8 .32 pistol rounds. If the HSc hadn't been found by that point, the pistol rounds should suggest a more thorough search of the cabinet to reveal it.

Upstairs, which has been functionally "off limits," are three more bedrooms. The two smaller bedrooms along the hall belong to the kids, with the master bedroom occupying the eastern side of the house. Jared's bedroom is the slightly larger of the two and sits along the north wall, his little sister's bedroom sits along the south wall. There is a bathroom attached to the master bedroom, and another one in the hall. All of the doors upstairs besides the bathroom door in the hallway are locked, and would require substantial force to access (these old farmhouses have solid doors, none of that veneer nonsense). However, if one were to force entry into any of the bedrooms, their contents would be rather conventional; Jared's sister Molly is still in the pink princess phase, and her bedroom is replete with white iron four-poster bed with a tulle veil hanging from the ceiling that wraps around the bed. There are My Little Pony figures arranged on the desk, including the coveted Twilight Sparkle Twinkling Balloon and the battery-powered, lightup, talking Celestia. Truly this is the room of a connoisseur. Molly is around 8 or 9, last you checked, and is actually way cooler than Jared (but nobody is going to tell him that). She is out of town with Jared's parents; he never mentioned where they were going

Jared's room you've all been in before. He's got a laptop, a TV, a PS3 (and terrible taste in games, though one or two stand out; they're probably on loan from someone else), basketball posters (really? who actually likes the Lakers?), a pretty big bed, an even bigger dresser (contents, unremarkably, are clothes), and a BB gun leaned up in the corner. This BB gun has been here for forever, the last anyone remembers taking it out was like, in middle school. Yet there are remains. Jared has never been much of a reader, as far as anyone can remember, and his collection of books is underwhelming. Unless you count the 70s Playboys that he keeps stuffed under his mattress that he found out in the garage and commandeered when nobody was looking, in which case you could describe him as an avid reader; hey, Kurt Vonnegut used to get published in Playboy. "It's a 'gentleman's' magazine," after all.

Jared's parents' bedroom is like an exercise in minimalism. A king-sized bed dominates the scenery: obviously this house was built before anybody could have imagined beds were going to get that size, and, even though it is by far the largest room in the house, after they upgraded this piece of furniture there wasn't much room for anything else. Add in the fat that they have two dressers, two armoires (no, wait, one is an honesttoGod chiffarobeyou listen for the sound of mockingbirds, before remembering that this is Minnesota), a TV, and a couple bedside tables, there are only a few feet to move around in between one piece of furniture and another. They do have their own bathroom, which is surprisingly messy. It is clear that they don't, as a general rule, put things away in their own private bathroom (though the rest of the house is pretty tidy; or it would be if not for the party). The plot the house is sitting on is about an acre, and the house sits pretty near to the road, leaving a pretty spacious backyard to the north. Depending on the light source(s) in possession of the PCs, they will be able to see more or less of the area behind the house without actually setting forth in to it. There are hedges around the house (azaleas), a small garden in the back with vegetables coming into ripeness, a few rose bushes, a clothesline, and then, beyond the yard, taller wild grass where it is not cultivated. This stretches off quite a ways. If it is explored thoroughly, one can find a decrepit looking hunting blind, about 100 feet back from the house, its roof barely visible above the grass. If it is investigated, there is a hatch door in the apparent floor, which goes down into a tunnel. If the hatch is discovered early, the zombies will have to attack early; skip forward to the section labeled "The Attack." Otherwise, it is just a nondescript hunting blind, cause for no further comment.

There is no entry to the basement from within the house. The easiest way to get to it is to exit via the kitchen door, walk along the wall ten or so feet, and open some large, bulkhead-style doors to walk down in to it. It is a classic midwestern basement: unfinished, dirt floor, low ceiling. If any characters want to locate or access the fuse box (presumably to see if the fuses blew or if the electrical problem is from further afield), it is in the basement, as is the

furnace, water heater, and washer and dryer. Besides those appliances, there are roughly built (but sturdy enough) wooden shelves along the walls nearest to the stairs, stacked with jars labeled as various jams and jellies, pickles, and tomato sauce. There is a full complement of gardening tools on another wooden shelf, including whole and broken terracotta pots, a basket full of seed packets, a battered polyethylene seedling tray, potting soil, a bag of RoseTone, and some bottles of liquid fertilizer (353 and 848). Some summer toys (slip and slide, yard darts, bean bags) sit together with camping gear (lantern, sleeping bags, camp stove, tent), and winter toys (sleds, snowshoes). It could be any wholesome family's farmhouse basement. If a PC specifically searches for it, they'll be able to find a Coleman lamp with plenty of fuel and mantles.

However, the most obvious feature of the entire room is the gigantic, 15foot wide pentagram, carved deeply into the earth of the floor, surrounded by spent pillar candles, and splashed with dried blood. In fact, there are various macabre things hanging from nails all over the basement, pounded into the support pillars: a slaughtered chicken, feathers drenched in blood, hanging from its wired together feet; an animal's heart, completely desiccated, nailed to a pillar with three nails; a bowl, filled with dried blood, hanging by wires nearest to the pentagram. There are various metal cutting, rending, and tearing implements hanging from the ceiling and off of nails as well, rusted and stained. Nearly all of the poles have crude sconces, holding more pillar candles, as well. In the middle of the pentagram is a pile of torn, filthy rags.

Closer inspection of the rags in the middle of the pentagram (only possibly by stepping over the pentagram) prove that it is in fact a (cheap) tuxedo, partially decayed, very dirty, with an off, musty odor. The shirt, the coat, and the pants are all slit down the backs. Over in the corner opposite to the fuse box is a patch of disturbed earth, roughly 7 feet in length and 4 feet wide. There are deep boot impressions in the dirt around it. A battered and rusted coal shovel is propped against the wall nearby. In the off chance that anybody thinks of digging around to see if there is anything buried, there will be a naked dead man's body inside, which may be recognizable as the father of the family in the photos hanging on the walls upstairs. The fuse box seems to be intact, as far as anyone knows anything about fuse boxes, and swapping fuses around has no effect. If the main wires are traced back to the outside, eventually it can be discovered that they have been severed, at the pole, and completely impossible to repair.

All of this time, guests at the party had been getting more and more frantic, some setting out down the road attempting to walk down to neighbors' houses (which are several miles down the road, and it is getting cold at night). Most others are just gathered together in the downstairs rooms, huddled around candles, glow sticks, and flashlights. At least one couple attempted to drive off on their car rims, without getting too far away before the wheels fall apart, the engine gets over-torqued, and the car will not move at all. But, by and large, the general tenor is people settling down for the night, becoming less scared at the sudden power loss, less angered over the vandalism, and consigned to wait out the night and try to flag someone down the following day. By this point, quite a bit of alcohol has been consumed by certain members of the party-going demographic and the food has been more or less knocked out.

However, just as everybody is winding down, someone might become aware of a glowing in the distance, to the north. It is past midnight, so it is not the sun. The glow is steady and orange, but only lights up the distant horizon.

The Attack

Without giving much time to contemplate this, a scrabbling noise will be heard in the basement. The sound of something dragging and shuffling, some of the stuff down there being scraped around, pushed over, perhaps one of the wooden shelves collapsing and the jars on it shattering as they hit the ground. The body buried down in the basement has reanimated, and is dumbly looking for a way out. If the bulkhead doors were left open, it will eventually find its way out, but if the doors were closed, someone might go out to investigate the sound (and get attacked). If this doesn't happen, it will start pushing on the doors, making a terrible racket in the process, and probably eventually get out. This is more or less a solo encounter to learn the system (and jostle the players) with not a very strong enemy (though this zombie has been slightly energized by the dark ritual involving its body).

Give a brief period of time for the PCs and NPCs to gather their wits after this first encounter; this is a roleplaying opportunity. But if they aren't highly into that, proceed quickly into the next wave, when the neighbors start to show up. Many of them have their throats slashed, bullets through their skulls, or have been impaled through their eyes or ears or necks; in other words, they're very unambiguously dead. But still walking. A few of the partygoers will proceed to flip out, some will try to run away (and get eaten; perhaps show up later with the cemetery zombies), some will go catatonic, some will want to fight (if the PCs haven't broken into the gun cabinet yet, maybe one of the NPCs will get the idea). The neighbors will be a bit slower than the man from the basement, but a lot more insistent. In typical zombie fashion, they will think nothing of having their arms or legs torn off, but, unlike most movie zombies, they are not disabled simply by destroying their brains. These zombies need to be more or less completely taken apart. However, if their heads are disconnected from their bodies, the bodies will slow down after only a little while, and

then stop completely (however the heads will still attempt to bite). They will tend to come in waves, 34 at a time (perhaps by family), and have 34 waves in all. After that, he will begin animating those interred in the graveyard down the street, and those zombies will be much weaker and more decayed, many being just skeletons in various states of decay. Lastly, the partygoers who attempted to run away will appear, maimed and bloody.

Most of the party-goers will be terrified of the zombies, and will not help in any attack. If too much time is spent fortifying the building, another wave will show up, increasing the risk. If most or all of the people in the house survive until dawn, the zombies will fall over and not get up again; the necromancer will also never have his true nature revealed, instead making up a story about how he had to go take a piss in the field, heard scary noises, and hid in the hunting blind out back. He will also have not succeeded in his "mission." As long as the PCs are still alive, there is still a fighting chance that they will be able to defeat the zombies and stop him. However, if the majority of people at the party die, he may come out of his hiding spot and take a more proactive role in trying to kill everyone, walking about among his thralls, attempting to gain entry to the house and strike everyone down with necromantic energy.

The majority of the time during the zombie attack can be spent however the GM sees fit; if the zombie attacks want to be spaced out and spend the majority of time having roleplaying interludes, that is an option, but if the GM also wants to continue wave after wave of zombie and not give the players much time to breathe (and potentially run out of ammunition) that is very possible as well. This can easily be judged by how much time the players spend talking, in character, and planning or exploring, versus sitting around silent and waiting for something to happen next. It will be observed that most of the zombies (at first) tend to come from the north, wading through the tall grass and pounding on the back windows and kitchen door. Only after do they start to circle the house. The cemetery residents come from the south (from the direction of the cemetery), and, lastly, the partygoers who have been turned will appear, again, from the north. Also by this point a steady purplish, orangish glow will be slowly emanating from a point in the field behind the house, licking up into the air like slow motion flames, 20 or 30 feet tall. Particularly adventurous characters will be rewarded by discovering that they are centered around the hunting blind.

The Hunting Blind

The hunting blind is a low, grass-colored plywood building, hardly large enough for two people to sit down inside, with small slit windows around the top of the enclosure. However, there is a wooden trapdoor in the middle, which opens to reveal a hole and a rope ladder leading down in to it, where chanting can be heard emanating from, and there is a yellow glow like there are many candles lit down below. The walls are carved out of the earth and reinforced with some sort of concrete, with strange sigils drawn all over them. The room is about 17 feet by 11 feet, with the "business end" on the opposite side of where the rope ladder is. There are small shelves made out of piled and compressed earth containing macabre and arcane implements. Immediately recognizable on the opposite side of the room will be the host of the party, Jared himself, clad in robes and standing in the center of a pentagram, similar to the one in the basement of the farmhouse (although only about 8 feet in diameter). He will be completely unaware of the intruders at first, as he pours blood from a chalice around the circumference of the pentagram, only noticing when he is facing them (if not before). If they attempt to shoot him unaware, the bullet will bounce off of an invisible barrier around him, and he will stop what he's doing and glare at them, shouting "how could you disturb me in my great work? Do you know what you have just done!?" Unbeknownst to the PCs, as soon as he falters in his ritualizing, the zombies will begin acting erratic and confused, possibly ignoring the people in the farmhouse completely and instead wandering around aimlessly, but later he might begin summoning them to him.

Besides the PCs, Jared is the only Wild Card in the entire adventure. However, he too is bound by the same weaknesses as all other player characters, though he does have limited access to necromantic blasts. The blasts also weaken him; hitting more than one PC at a time with necromantic energy will leave him Shaken, hitting them while Shaken will leave a Wound on the Fatigue scale. He will not intentionally Incapacitate himself, but will freely use these necromantic bursts and blasts as long as he is healthy. If he has any zombie thralls, he can take one down to remove a Wound; if a PC is Incapacitated, this also enables him to remove a Wound. He can (and will, given the opportunity) animate any of the other partygoers (who, like the zombies, are all Extras), and all of the necromantic effects described above apply to them as well. This does mean that he could intentionally attack a large group of partygoers, killing several at once, and remove that many Wounds from his damage track. He will not stop or be talked down, he needs to be put down. If anybody attempts to reason with him, he will madly shout that they just don't understand the work that he's doing there, and that now that he has started he can't stop until it is complete. If they ask him what "work" he is doing, he will say that they will never be able to understand, because they have not seen the same things that he has seen.

After he dies, all of the zombies will fall over, truly dead. The party will have to decide what to do with the ritual spaces they've discovered, including what to do with all the dead bodies lying around and the resultant carnage of the

scene. Shortly after dawn, there will begin to be traffic on the roads that can be flagged down, and the adventure can be wrapped at any time. If the players are interested, however, the following is a brief epilogue that can be played out or just simply read.

Epilogue: A Sick Man

News vans begin to show up as the extent of the carnage becomes known, and very soon thereafter Jared is reported to have been a serial killer, taking out his family, then his neighbors, then digging up dead bodies from the graveyard, and collecting and mutilating them, cutting their bodies apart, scattering them around his house, and firing bullets into them. The characters are described as unwitting heroes, finally bringing a stop to the carnage (after a lot of questioning by the police). Depending on whether or not the characters destroy the occult evidence before the police and reporters arrive, that may be reported on as well, that his psychosis may have fueled a belief that he was some sort of warlock. It also turns out that Jared has burned down the houses of the people he murdered, which explains the red glow in the background. Firefighters manage to contain the fires, but large acreages of dry brushland have been destroyed, as well as the houses themselves. Overall though, the fires were more or less self-contained, thanks to the fact that most of the corn in the area had been harvested only a few days prior.

Over the course of the day, tow trucks and mechanics show up to cart off the broken cars, the coroner's office begins to pick up and categorize all of the deceased, and the police do their best to keep the whole grisly scene cordoned off from curious passersby and even more curious reporters. It is all suddenly so very mundane, compared to the mind-bending horror of the previous night. Everybody can go back to their homes and lie in their beds, but it is very unlikely that anybody will get much sleep tonight.

NPC Statistics

Partygoer (15-20)

Attributes: *Agility* d4; *Smarts* d6; *Spirit* d4; *Strength* d6; *Vigor* d6

Skills: *Notice* d6; *Throwing* d6

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 5

***Jared Swinson, necromancer**

Attributes: *Agility* d6; *Smarts* d10; *Spirit* d8; *Strength* d6; *Vigor* d4

Skills: *Fighting* d6; *Notice* d6; *Knowledge (Arcana)* d8

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Delusional (major), Arrogant

Edges: Arcane Background (magic); New Power; Power Points

Power Points: 15

Powers: Armor, Blast, Bolt, Zombie

Special Abilities

Power Siphon: Jared can destroy one zombie for an immediate downgrade of one Wound as a free action; he can do this as many times as he wishes on his turn, only he can not improve past no longer being Shaken; any zombies destroyed after improvement to full health have no effect. Alternately, Jared can destroy one zombie to recover 2 PP, which are immediately available for his use. He may not use both of these methods in one turn.

Unstable Energy: At any time during his turn, Jared can cast or improve Armor, Blast, or Bolt at the cost of one Wound (becoming Shaken first) on the Fatigue track. He will not Incapacitate himself this way. The attack still needs to be rolled for, but getting a raise does not negate the Wound; rather, it is resolved as normal.

Zombie

Attributes: *Agility* d6; *Smarts* d4; *Spirit* d4; *Strength* d6; *Vigor* d6

Skills: *Fighting* d6; *Intimidation* d6; *Notice* d4

Charisma: n/a; **Pace:** 4; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7

Special Abilities

Claws: Str.

Fearless: Zombies are immune to Fear and Intimidation.

Undead: +2 Toughness; +2 to recover from being Shaken; called shots do no extra damage (except to head).

Weakness (Head): shots to a zombie's head are +2 extra damage.