



TRAIL OF CTHULHU

THE MURDERER  
OF THOMAS FELL

by Will Hindmarch



Pelgrane Press

# THE MURDERER OF THOMAS FELL

A man close to you—father, business partner, informant, friend—has gone missing. The search begins at his house... which is not as it seems. Following the trail of this missing man leads you on a startling and perilous adventure. Finding him may change your life, and his, forever.

Tonight you meet the murderer of Thomas Fell.

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

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# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Credits



Publisher: Simon Rogers

Written by: Will Hindmarch

Art and Layout: Jérôme Huguenin

GUMSHOE Guru: Robin D Laws



Playtesters: Alex Jeffries, Scott McKillican, O'Rourke Nirvan Wynn, Michael Marshall, Amy Poynter, Will Ludwigsen, Scott McClellan, Ed Cain, Don Rochester

Trail of Cthulhu was written by Kenneth Hite, based on the GUMSHOE system by Robin D Laws

Trail of Cthulhu was created by arrangement with Chaosium, Inc.

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GUMSHOE is the game engine humming inside a collection of sleek, focused horror and investigation RPGs. It is a precision instrument, designed to tell stories through roleplaying by giving players a greater degree of control over the moments when their characters succeed. In part, it does this by removing the random element in investigative scenarios and replacing it with that core element of all good gameplay: decision making.

In a GUMSHOE scenario, the question isn't whether you can find the clues in some kind of randomized equivalent of a pixel hunt. Rather, your characters—presumed to be capable investigators—are assured to find the clues they need. The question becomes whether you can piece those clues together in time to solve the dramatic, and often horrific, mysteries your characters confront.

Whether you're looking for a game centered on bold detectives scouring dark places for the truth behind occult crimes, or you want to recreate the sweaty desperation of survival horror movies, in which ordinary people face extraordinary terror, there's a GUMSHOE game to create the perfect experience.

## TRAIL OF CTHULHU

In the tradition of the RPG classic, *Call of Cthulhu*, comes fan-favorite author Ken Hite's adaptation of the game for the GUMSHOE system: *Trail of Cthulhu*. If you're reading this, you have some idea what this game is, or will soon. Probably you enough about the Cthulhu mythos tales of H.P. Lovecraft to understand that the perils of following the trail of Cthulhu are madness and death, and that it's the selfless bravery of the investigators who

dare to face the withering existential truths of the cosmos that makes them heroic.

What you may not know, yet, is what makes *Trail of Cthulhu* distinctive, beyond just a new kind of game rules and a ten-year time shift to the 1930s. Beyond the specially honed investigative rules common to all GUMSHOE games, this game features simple new ways to humanize investigator characters and detail their motives and personalities. In game terms, these are

their Drives, Pillars of Sanity, and Sources of Stability.

*Trail of Cthulhu* also supports two distinct styles of play, so you can face Lovecraftian horrors exactly the way you want to. In the Purist mode of play, investigators are fragile, wary souls whose sanity is finite and always in peril of being blasted away to nothing by the unearthly truths to which they expose themselves. You can also play *Trail of Cthulhu* in the Pulp style, throwing punches at sinister cultists and emptying Tommy guns into the drooling maws of mythos creatures. Each style of play is a simple matter of degree, so learn one simple set of rules and you're ready to play either way.

You'll need the *Trail of Cthulhu* rulebook to play this adventure, but you'll find the format of GUMSHOE adventures is so clear and concise that you can appreciate this scenario even if you haven't yet read the rulebook.

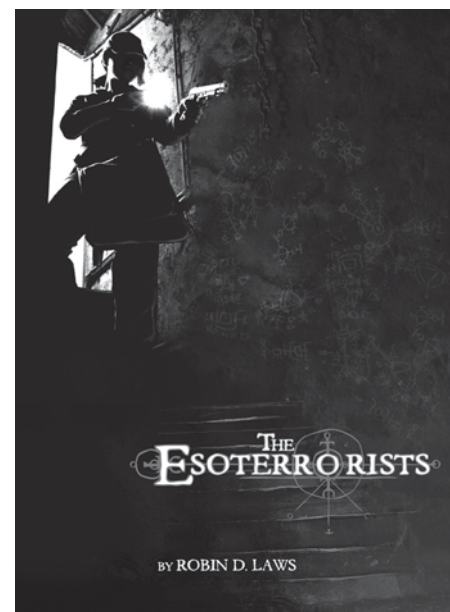
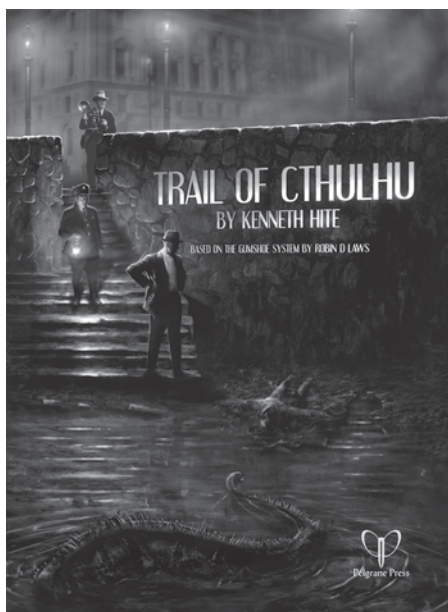
## THE ESOTERRORISTS

You might be afraid to face the Esoterrorists. You should be. But they must be stopped. It's up to you.

The bold and intriguing debut of the GUMSHOE system, *The Esoterrorists* is a complete investigative horror game from RPG mastermind, Robin D. Laws. As part of a global conspiracy called Ordo Veritatis, your expert detective character pursues and confronts occult terrorists wherever they lurk. If you don't stop them, they'll shape reality to their insane whims, warping the world into a vision of horror in which the viciously mad are kings and good people live in fear.

Your weapons? Cunning, reason, courage, and the truth. Use the clues you discover, combined with your knowledge and exposure to occult truths, to solve the mysteries of the esoterrorists, fight their crimes, and avenge the dead. Sometimes that means outwitting the enemy, sometimes it means shooting him dead.

*The Esoterrorists* is a razor-sharp roleplaying game of mystery and the occult, with concrete guidelines to get you designing your own compelling investigative scenarios right away. Inside you'll discover the secret ambitions of the loosely-aligned



cults of the Esoterrorists, horrors to confront, more than 35 investigative abilities to hone, and a complete, advanced scenario of geopolitical terror called “Operation Slaughterhouse.”

## FEAR ITSELF

In the tradition of the greatest slasher films and survival-horror tales, *Fear Itself* pits ordinary people against extraordinary horrors in scenarios in which few—if any—characters will survive. Explore a modern world of gritty, desperate confrontations against an alien menace from the Outer Black. And escape, if you can, with your life.



*Fear Itself* puts players in control of characters very much like themselves, then plunges them into the kinds of brutally terrifying survival-horror scenarios that make you afraid to walk home alone afterwards. An ideal platform for one-shot games of relentless, unforgiving terror, *Fear Itself* is the gutsy, gory instrument of fear you’ve been looking for.

If your characters escape murder and madness long enough to survive, *Fear Itself* easily unfolds into a series of compelling adventures in which your ordinary characters become extraordinary over time—and get their chance to make the monsters of the Outer Black afraid of *them*.

## THE BOOK OF UNREMITTING HORROR

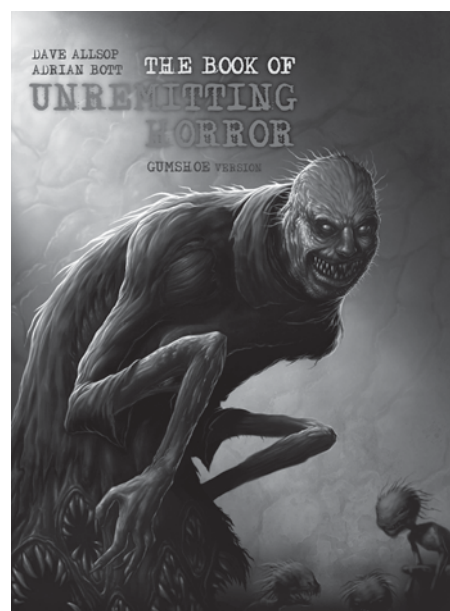
Intelligent. Insidious. Inhuman. These are your new nightmares.

*The Book of Unremitting Horror* is a bold and mature menagerie of terrifying, grotesque, and cunning new monsters for *any* GUMSHOE game. No simple catalog of simplistic beasts, this is a detailed examination of horrors more sophisticated than simple vampires and zombies, exploring not only how these creatures behave but what they want, how they think, and why.

Beyond that, each monster is presented through the lens of legendry, rumor, and hearsay. Read the accounts of brave, poor souls who have faced these things before. Learn what to look for, what evidence they leave behind, and how best to fight them. And when to run.

Don’t just shop for new creatures to chop to bits. Take your antagonists to a new level of terror.

Remember what it was like to be afraid of monsters. Remember what *monstrous* really means.



## MUTANT CITY BLUES

In a world not so unlike our own—except that super-powered vigilantes and criminals are real—someone must keep the peace. Someone must solve the crimes perpetrated by and against those with mutant powers. You are that someone. Using your own unique powers, drawn from more than 95 choices including Regeneration and Self-Detonation, you follow the clues and uncover the mysteries of Mutant City.

With a default play mode casting characters as expert investigators in the employ of the Heightened Capacity Investigative Unit (HCIU), *Mutant City Blues* plays as a provocative, super-powered police procedural. With its detailed history of emerging mutant powers and the effect they have on the world, *Mutant City Blues* is also flexible enough to accommodate your own unique brand of crime-fighting.

Any city—your city—can become Mutant City. This complete roleplaying game from acclaimed designer Robin D. Laws, gives you everything you need to play out intelligent, thrilling police tales with a stunning super-powered twist.



## The Murderer of Thomas Fell

### Introduction to the Adventure

This adventure is designed to show off integral parts of the GUMSHOE game system that powers *Trail of Cthulhu*, but also to give you a taste of the many kinds of thrills waiting for you in future adventures for this game, from investigative suspense to perilous violence to eldritch madness. At the same time, this adventure pays weird homage to the noir classic *The Third Man*, by centering the tale on an absent man—a man the players will help bring to life through their own roleplaying and the actions of their characters. Like *The Third Man*'s Harry Lime, Thomas Fell should be a figure the characters *thought* they knew... until their investigation revealed things about him that they might never have suspected. The climax of the story hinges on the dramatic entrance of Thomas Fell and the revelation of his dreadful fate.

For the sake of manageability, *The Murderer of Thomas Fell* puts the PCs in a closed environment, so you don't have to worry about a sprawling city-wide investigation or the possibility of characters hopping on a train and riding away from the scenario. (*Trail of Cthulhu* makes it easy to play out such large-scale investigative tales, but this short adventure assumes you don't have the time for that.)

Within this closed environment, however, the players have a great amount of freedom to investigate, attack, retreat, regroup, and roleplay. The choices they make will contribute to everyone's mental image of Thomas

Fell, as well as his actual game statistics, thereby setting up the players and their characters alike for his shocking appearance at the end of the story. (See "The Truth About Thomas Fell" on p. XX to see how.)

### Using This Story

This scenario is designed to be played as a stand-alone or one-shot tale—a taste of *Trail of Cthulhu* before you create characters of your own. That makes this a good scenario to play at a convention or as a first foray into the GUMSHOE system.

This isn't to say you can't easily adapt this story for use in an ongoing *Trail of Cthulhu* series. "The Murderer of Thomas Fell" makes a fine introductory story, or a prologue to a ongoing series, if you want to follow up on the exploits of these characters or make continued use of the artifact described herein. See the section called "Aftermath," at the end of this story, for more on that.

To make this part of a *Trail of Cthulhu* series that's already begun, simply don't worry so much about the personal connections between the players' characters and Thomas Fell himself. Your series' characters are probably already intrepid investigators with their own reasons for looking into the mysterious disappearance of a local antiques dealer. Here are some easy ways you can set up Thomas Fell, and thus this story, in an ongoing game:

- Insert Thomas Fell as a player character's contact.

- Introduce Thomas Fell in an earlier story as a witness or expert consultant on an unrelated case. Then have the characters hear from Kenneth or Roger, Thomas's sons, that Thomas hasn't been seen in several days and his house dark. "Will you go with us to look around his house?" they ask.

- Set Thomas Fell up early in your series as a Source of Stability for a player character, especially one with points in Archaeology, Art History, or even Occult.

The only downside to using this story in the midst of an ongoing series is that you may not get to take advantage of the opportunity to have the players define Thomas Fell through their own roleplaying.

### Reading This Story

Throughout this story, you'll find text describing the story's settings, characters, monsters, and events. Some of this text is suitable for reading aloud to your players. Don't. This text is meant to be inspirational, giving you a concrete details you can use in your own descriptions and account of events.

Reading directly from the text feels stiff and overly formal most of the time. Worse, when you read from the text, the players can tell when you're winging it and when you're not. This might tip them off to details that are important, versus details that are red herrings or just for color. Rather than giving them these meta-clues, if you will, stick to paraphrasing the text you

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Introduction to the Adventure

find in this book, glancing at it before you describe the setting and actions unique to your version of this story. Your focus, after all, should be on the players and the tale actually unfolding around them—not the version of the story we predict here.

This adventure demonstrates all the parts of a scenario described on page 192 of *Trail of Cthulhu*.

### The Hook

Thomas Fell has gone missing. For days no one in town has seen him. He hasn't answered his phone. He hasn't picked up his mail. His house has been dark. Where is he?

The scenario begins with the characters assembled on Thomas Fell's front porch and unlocking the door to his house.

### The Horrible Truth

Thomas Fell has departed his home through the use of a mystic artifact—a standing stone in his cellar which interacts with other alien standing stones to magically teleport persons across the globe. He has used the stone in his cellar once already, without telling anyone, and collected a strange stone artifact—egg-shaped and etched with glyphs—on his journey. (This is rather what it appears to be: an egg. Inside is a fearsome alien predator.)

Thomas' scheduled trip is part of an expedition funded by Jan Joyce-Cleveland, but it began somewhat sooner than expected, when Thomas and the four expeditionary partners he hired (with Joyce-Cleveland's money) met at his house to plan out the trip. The teleportation effect, accidentally triggered, relocated them to a mysterious mountaintop deep in a remote and dangerous mountain range.

Driven mad by Mythos revelations he has discovered while researching the stones, Thomas tried to kill the rest of his expedition to keep them away from his fragment of a broken standing stone, which allows them to teleport back to his house. He succeeded in killing one of his comrades and fatally wounding another; the other two fled into the mountaintop's strange wilderness, where they were attacked by the egg-tending beast that dwells *inside* the rocks there. They remain alive, for now, as they are gradually encased and penetrated by ribbons of stone that will store them for the monster and its young to eat later.

Meanwhile, using a spell engraved on a mountaintop stele, Thomas has absorbed the stone fragment into his body, and it's the only hope of getting off the mountaintop. His plan is to capture at least one more off the monster's eggs to take "back to the world." His plan beyond that is sketchy and irrational: he believes that he needs to bring these eggs to other teleportation destinations, hatch them, and train them to serve as protectors. Anyone who gets in his way must, in his mind, want to exploit the teleportation stones for their own purposes; killing such persons will save lives, he thinks.

If the player characters want to see home again, they must get the stone fragment out of Thomas Fell, which requires cutting him open and tearing it free. Fatal, to be sure. This is the price, however, of achieving the scenario's **victory condition**: escape from the mountaintop.

### The Spine

This adventure consists of two main parts, each set in a different part of the globe and each containing scenes that can be played in just about any order.

The first part of the story puts the characters in Thomas Fell's house, parts of which have been replaced, impossibly, by jutting boulders and tangled jungle trees. There they seek evidence of his whereabouts and any clues that might suggest just where the hell the kitchen has gone. This part's scenes occur when the PCs visit particular parts of the house but once the scene "Cellar," is complete, the story moves irrevocably into its second part.

The second part of the story begins when an ancient artifact in the cellar mystically transports the PCs to the remote and alien mountaintop where Thomas Fell's expedition of occultists and archaeologists met its awful end. There the characters struggle to find Thomas Fell and make sense of all available clues in the hopes of finding a way home. At the same time, they strive to avoid being bitten and turned slowly to stone by the strange and lethal creature that dwells upon the mountaintop. These scenes occur either when the PCs physical location or your sense of drama dictates that they do.

This story offers numerous opportunities for embellishing detours and short tangents, but the barest **spine** of the tale is quite simple. To complete this scenario, the characters must:

- Be supernaturally transported to the bizarre mountaintop ruins
- Discover the nature of the artifact that brought them there
- Locate Thomas Fell... and kill him to secure escape from the mountain

Along the way, the characters have opportunities to learn the truth about Thomas Fell's doomed expedition to the mountain (which may be of use



# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## The Murderer of Thomas Fell

should you choose to turn this one-shot story into the beginning of an ongoing campaign), and the fates that befell his colleagues.

Meanwhile, the players use their character's abilities to add personality and details to the persona of Thomas Fell, with the help the Keeper, as described in the special game system on p. XX.

### OVERVIEW

#### Part One:

##### Thomas Fell's House

This first part of the scenario is a collection of simple investigative scenes designed to reward almost any manner of investigative approach and give the players a chance to get into character (or show off their skills) before the mayhem begins. As such, the clues available in many of these scenes are attainable with a variety of Investigative Abilities. Be flexible. It's more important for the characters to learn *how* to gain clues in these scenes than it is for them to properly assemble them.

Most of the clues revealed in this first part are **leveraged clues**, useful when the characters locate survivors of Thomas Fell's expedition in Part Two. Likewise, this is where the players are most likely to detail Thomas Fell's character with their own actions.

Pacing in this first part is vital—don't let the PCs get bored enough to leave the house. When one of them tries to do that, it's your sign to trigger "The Stone Activates" clause in the scene "The Cellar." This immediately transports the character to Part Two.

#### Part Two:

##### The Mountaintop

Once the characters have activated the stele in Thomas Fell's basement, the story moves to this second part, a survival and investigation situation in which the goal is to locate Thomas without being slain by a fearsome monster first. This part of the story is set in a remote Andean mountaintop, transformed into a temperate, alien refuge by ancient and forgotten mysticism.

By locating and following clues based largely on **Evidence Collection**, **Outdoorsman**, **Art History**, and **Interpersonal Abilities**, the characters are able to discern just what is necessary to escape the mountaintop. The clue chain takes the characters across various optional encounters centered on the scenes of multiple attacks and dying survivors, where they may learn clues that prepare them for their final encounter, before culminating in the discovery of Thomas Fell at a bizarre shrine. There they are faced with the moral dilemma at the heart of this story: who will be the murderer of Thomas Fell?

All along the way, the characters have opportunities to use their General Abilities as they flee from or fight an unearthly monster: The Mouth in the Stone.

##### Antagonist Reactions

There are two antagonists working against the PCs in this scenario: Thomas Fell and the supernatural creature called the Mouth in the Stone.

Thomas Fell reacts to the arrival and investigations of the PCs by withdrawing from them and remaining hidden for as long as possible—that is, until you're ready to trigger the final scene of the story. If it suits your purposes, he may track or shadow

the characters while they wander the mountaintop, but this undercuts the final reveal of Thomas at the end of the story; it's best if the PCs don't know Thomas is still alive until after they've learned that he is the one who has turned on the expedition members. Leave them wondering where Thomas is and just who has killed him for as long as possible.

The Mouth in the Stone is a fearsome monster, vaguely cunning but no more intelligent or sinister than any earthly predator. It reacts to the presence of the investigators by stalking them and, if possible, securing them as a source of food with its petrifying bite. The timing and appetite of the creature is entirely a matter of Keeper fiat. It attacks when you think the adventure needs a dose of desperate peril or gruesome violence, or when you need to conveniently remove an NPC that's bogging things down.

Neither of these antagonists, therefore, is working actively against the PCs. The primary opposing force generating the conflict in this story is the characters' predicament: they are trapped in a hostile place. Everything—the threat of the creature, the lurking danger of Thomas Fell, the possibility of starvation or a fatal fall—should be empowered by the antagonism of the environment itself.

#### Special Game System: The Truth About Thomas Fell

**Who is Thomas Fell? That depends. Who do the PCs think he is?**

Thomas Fell's personality, abilities, and background reflect the way the players roleplay their characters and what they presume their relationship with Thomas was like. By reacting

## Overview

to the players' cues (intentional or incidental) you ensure that their choices have meaning and that Thomas has a personal connection with the characters when they finally meet.

For example, if Kenneth's player makes it clear that Kenneth finds his father to be a harmless old kook, you have a scrap, a datum, to absorb into your characterization of Thomas. He is, on some level, a gentle and perhaps even eccentric fellow—when he's not crazily murdering. Maybe he continues to wear and adjust his glasses, or straighten his bloodied tie, or speak with a start-and-stop shyness. If, on the other hand, Knox's player suggests that Thomas was a stubborn bastard, you should play him as a stubborn bastard, at least in his dealing with Knox. Remember, no one behaves the same way with everyone.

Beyond that, and more specifically, the spends players make in Thomas' house should influence his abilities, his interests, and his vulnerabilities—the things which affect him, even through his madness. Players may make spends with almost any skill in this way just to detail Thomas's character. As a rule of thumb, no player may make a second spend on Thomas' details until every other player has made his or her first spend to do so.

This sets up Thomas to react to leveraged clues in the final scene of the story, essentially creating the possibility for every Investigative spend describing him to turn into a **leveraged clue**, as described on p. 194 of *Trail of Cthulhu*. If it's an Archaeology spend that reveals Thomas' secret library (in the scene "The Den") is hidden by a latched door behind an etching of Knossos, then using symbolism or archaeological references may get his attention in the final scene, enabling an Interpersonal ability to penetrate his mad thoughts and reach the mind within.

So, an Academic, Technical or possibly even a General spend in the first part of the scenario can reveal a piece of information about Thomas Fell—the prerequisite clue—that can be leveraged in the final scene with an Interpersonal Ability.

Here are a few examples of Investigative Abilities the pre-generated characters possess and how they might be leveraged with an Interpersonal Ability in the final scene. Remember, these are examples, not restrictions:

**Art + Flattery:** "Dad, you remember how mad I got when I was having trouble with figure drawing in school? I was furious because I wanted it to be easy, but it wasn't. You told me, 'things are often hard when they're worth doing.' I know it's hard for you to put down the gun, Dad, but... it's the right thing to do. You taught me that. You know it's the right thing to do. You're smarter than this."

**Latin + Assess Honesty:** "You taught me the Hippocratic Oath in Latin because you said, if I really meant it, I should learn it twice. You believed in me for learning it, and following it, didn't you? 'Do no harm.' You're not going to shoot me, are you, Dad?"

**Evidence Collection + Interrogation:** "You put two rounds into that man's back, Thomas. You shot a man in the back! What the hell is wrong with you? What were you thinking? How did you expect to get out of here without your partners? Tell me!"

**Occult + Intimidation:** "You read the stones, didn't you, Thomas? You used them. So you know how to get us home. Now you listen to me: your boys will die here, starved or eaten, unless you tell me how to get us out of here. You tell me, or we die and you're finished in 'back in the world.'"

**Library Use + Bargain:** "We've seen Hanson's journal, Thomas. I saw your notes back at the house. We know about the stones and those creature's eggs. If we agree to bring the eggs back, will you take us home?"

### Letting the Players In On It

Do the players know they're defining Thomas Fell with their actions? The default assumption is that they do not. This minimizes the ability of the players to abuse the mechanism.

On the other hand, if you're running the kind of game in which the players are able to add details to the setting by asking about them—e.g., "There's probably a box of cigars in here, right?"—and they're not throwing the whole game experience out of whack, then you should let them in on the game system so they can specifically add details to Thomas Fell as a means of adding reflective details to their own characters. For example, Roger's player might suggest that Thomas Fell failed out of medical school and was always a little jealous of his son's success, just as a means of explaining a bit of Roger's arrogance.

Only you know your players well enough to judge the right course of action, here. We certainly don't.

### Essential Traits

While Thomas' interests and personality quirks are subject to the inputs of the players, a few essential traits must be in his repertoire in order to make this scenario unfold with a bit of logic. At least as of the moment when the PCs finally encounter Thomas Fell, he must have the following traits or Abilities:

- His Sanity is eroded to nothing—a rating of 0. Thomas is irretrievably insane, broken by his exposure to Mythos spells and the effects of the one he cast upon himself. His Sanity was probably never very



## The Murderer of Thomas Fell

high to begin with.

- His Stability is low, but not gone. It's this semblance of normalcy that enabled him to get the jump on his expedition partners. His exact Stability must be determined by you, the Keeper, to reflect the difficulty and tone of the final scene as you want to present it. It can also be fudged to reflect the inputs of the players, who may suggest something of Thomas' Stability prior to this expedition.
- Thomas reads and writes an ancient language that none of the PCs do, and it is in this language that the Mythos secrets on the stelae are carved. Perhaps it's an ancient Incan dialect or a bizarre derivation of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Whatever it is, this language is the barrier that stands between the characters and the ability to use Mythos knowledge or spells in the final scene. You want to allude to a greater, unknown horror, not get bogged down in the minutiae of how Thomas' ill-fated spell works.
- Firearms, Scuffling and Weapons: Thomas needs a rating in at least one of these Abilities sufficient to be a threat in the final scene. More than likely, his advantage is not his expertise in any of these Abilities but, rather, his shotgun: a Winchester pump-action with 5 shots. It deals +1 damage.

(If it's helpful for exposition purposes, Thomas Fell used to hunt quail with Makepeace. From this he's picked up a rating of 8 in Firearms; enough to be dangerous in the final scenes of the story.)

### Player Characters

To get you playing the game right away, you have here five pre-generated characters, each with its own personal connection to Thomas Fell. If you're

using this story for a convention game, the information provided herein is all the players have to go on when imagining Thomas Fell, or when discussing him in-character.

If you're using this story to kick off an ongoing *Trail of Cthulhu* series, consider extracting some of these characters' relationships and experiences with Thomas Fell and assigning them to the characters your players presumably make for themselves. Although Thomas Fell's personality and history should remain close to what's described here, give him siblings, friendly rivals, ex-wives or whatever else is necessary to build a compelling dramatic connection between him and the players' characters.

Whether you're using pre-generated characters or not, it's important that every player's character have some personal history with Thomas Fell built into her backstory, even if that rapport isn't so important that Thomas Fell is one of their Sources of Stability. In fact, for characters you expect to carry over to follow-up stories, it's best if Thomas Fell *is not* a Source of Stability, since his death is all but guaranteed. Perhaps the characters know Thomas from a function at the Joyce-Cleveland estate, or perhaps they've met him through dealings with Makepeace or Detective Wright. Any of the relationships established with the pre-generated characters can be dialed down to something less than Source-of-Stability levels.

A prior connection to Thomas Fell helps not only to heighten the moral dilemma at the end of this story, but it gives each player material to draw on when roleplaying the search for their missing friend. Are they afraid for his safety or afraid that he'll make some great discovery without them? Do they blame Thomas for their troubles or expect him to save them all? Each character's unique relationship with

Thomas Fell gives each player another way to define to individualize her character.

### Kenneth Fell

**Occupation:** Artist

**Drive:** Ennui

Broke, bohemian, and haunted by a sense of powerlessness, you are a true artist. Not in the sense of the Masters, but in the real-world sense of the working, toiling creator, living in squalor but proud that at least you don't have to demean yourself with embarrassing, soulless work. You can count on your fingers the number of pieces you've sold—some sculpture, some paintings—but every one has gone to people with decent taste and good money; people you can respect yourself for selling art to. By eating tins of beans and living in your studio with a communal bathroom down the hall, you even manage to live for several months off a single sale. Somebody, you might make it big. But, you realize, probably not. You get by.

Nature is one avenue of inspiration for you, particularly the way the world sculpts itself. Volcanoes, desert bluffs, ocean-side cliffs and other natural rock formations captivate you. These are what you paint and sculpt, sometimes realistically and sometimes not.

You are the younger of Thomas Fell's two sons. Your older brother is Roger, a doctor. He's the respectable one, the success story. He took after your father's academic side, the rational side, and got through medical school with discipline and more than a little arrogance. You can't really relate to that. Ambition, arrogance, duty—these are admiral traits, but they belong to other people. You're more sensitive, observant, and sympathetic; you tell yourself that these are what make you a good person, even though

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## Player Characters

you're not healing the sick. You two don't talk much.

Your dad is a kindly old coot, prone to getting in over his head, especially in regards to business. He's owed money in the past, but not to especially bad people, and he's been taken by forgers and deadbeats before. Fingers crossed, that's as bad as it is this time, and he's just laying low, trying to figure out how to make some money to pay back some debts and keep his antiques consultancy and dealership in business. You don't know what you'd do if he's really in trouble. Surely you'd do anything to find him, but you're not sure what you'd do if something were to happen to him. You've come to dad's house because you're genuinely worried about him.

### Pillars of Sanity:

- The goodness and honesty of the natural world
- The reliability of humankind's predictable selfishness being undermined by generosity
- The power of art to impact the heart and mind of any person, if done right.

**Sources of Stability:** Thomas Fell (your father, who is difficult but reliable), Jeannie Corman (your on-again-off-again girlfriend), Hans Siegler (a friend and artist whose work you admire and emulate)

### Investigative Abilities:

Architecture 2, Art 6, Art History 4, Craft 4, Credit Rating 1, Flattery 4, Geology 2, Occult 1, Photography 2, Reassurance 4

**General Abilities:** Driving 4, Filch 5, Firearms 2, Fleeing 12, Health 9, Psychoanalysis 8, Sanity 9, Stability 10, Sense Trouble 5, Stealth 5, Weapons 2

## What the Characters Know About Each Other

The following information should be paraphrased to all the players, probably through straight narration, before the story begins, so that everyone understands what their characters know about each other:

This concern for Thomas Fell's wellbeing started with **Jan Joyce-Cleveland**, who grew worried when the men hired to plan the expedition with Thomas never reported. Worried, but not yet willing to declare Thomas missing (for her own reasons), Joyce-Cleveland called **Knox Makepeace**, who Thomas had considered bringing into the expeditionary team, but then decided against. Makepeace and Thomas are old friends and colleagues, so Joyce-Cleveland hoped they might have been in contact recently.

Makepeace, however, had already been worried about Thomas. The last time they saw each other, Thomas was acting strangely—paranoid, disinterested in work beyond his “current project” and quick to anger. They'd met for lunch, and it had ended with Thomas leaving in a huff. So, when Thomas' current financier Joyce-Cleveland called on Makepeace to ask him if he'd seen Thomas, Makepeace got worried and called Thomas' old friend, **Detective Norman Wright**, for his professional opinion.

Detective Wright got in touch with Thomas' two grown sons, **Kenneth** and **Roger**, as part of his casual pre-investigation. When Detective Wright mentioned that he wanted to go by Thomas' house to poke around, both sons volunteered to come along—out of guilt. Neither had spoken with their father, Thomas, for several months. That he could go missing and they'd not be among the first to notice is embarrassing for them both. Though it's possible that they know their father better than anyone else, they probably know the least about his work, and his sometimes close contact with antiquities of questionable legality.

Phone calls lead to more phone calls, and soon everyone back along the chain of worry is on the sidewalk outside Thomas Fell's house, each looking to find him for their own reasons. So it is that these five souls meet in the space left behind by Thomas Fell.

## Roger Fell

**Occupation:** Doctor

**Drive:** Duty

A husband and a doctor, you consider yourself an upstanding citizen and, one day, a family man. You work hard, you make good money, you support your wife and don't mess around. What else is there?

For you, medicine is a profession, not a calling. You help people because

the money is good and it's important work but... you don't really like doing it anymore. You have to check the chart to remember your patients' names sometimes. You're a little tired of seeing the same cases again and again—tennis elbows and stomach aches all the time.

You are the elder son of Thomas Fell. Your little brother is Kenneth, the “artist.” How does he manage to live the way he does? Eating beans from the tin and sleeping in his hole of a



# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## The Murderer of Thomas Fell

studio—he has no self-respect and no ambition. It's pathetic, but you can't spend your life trying to change him. Some day he'll outgrow his artistic fantasy and get a real job. Life is work, after all, whether you want to do it or not. You need money to live and keep your family well. Unless you're Kenneth, and then you don't have to worry about anyone but yourself.

Your father understands this to a point. He works hard, but he doesn't show the best judgment. He gets distracted by art and antiques that appeal to him but don't have sufficient resale value, letting his fun get in the way of his work. In this way, he's almost exactly halfway between you and your brother.

It's most likely that your father isn't missing at all, but rather has no paid his telephone bill or been checking the mail or something. Still, if the old man fell down in his house and hurt himself, that'd be your fault, in a way. You haven't checked up on him in a while, like a good son should. If he's not okay, you know you'll end up blaming yourself. And Kenneth.

### Pillars of Sanity:

- The beauty of God's creatures, especially the human form
- Physical laws and the validity of scientific knowledge
- The Hippocratic Oath—a few duty-bound people can save lives

**Sources of Stability:** Muriel Fell (your wife of 8 years), Thomas Fell (your father, who is a stubborn headache sometimes but your father all the same)

**Investigative Abilities:** Accounting 2, Assess Honesty 2, Biology 4, Credit Rating 4, Forensics 4, Languages (Latin) 2, Medicine 4, Pharmacy 4, Reassurance 2

**General Abilities:** Driving 2, First Aid 20, Fleeing 10, Health 10, Psychoanalysis 10, Sanity 12, Stability 7, Scuffling 6

### Detective Norman Wright

**Occupation:** Police Detective

**Drive:** Curiosity

You're a local police detective, in it for the mysteries. A fan of detective fiction and puzzle games of all sorts, you love a good question and the search for a good answer. Your devotion to your job, then, isn't out of revenge or a need to judge people, but a self-indulgent interest in solving crimes rather than fighting criminals. You're a capable cop, and you've fired your gun, but your wits are stronger than your fists and you know it.

You met Thomas Fell a couple of years ago, when he helped you out on a case of missing antiques from a robbery-homicide case in town. Thomas posed as a buyer for the thieves in a sting operation you designed. You felt like a real policeman, that day.

Since then, you've been friends with Thomas because of your shared enthusiasm for the stories behind things—the tales of how objects come to be in the hands of their current owners, for example. He's a curious man selling curios, and that leads to good conversations. Still, you don't spend that much time with him, just a visit to his house now and again, but if he's in a rough patch, you'll return his favor by using your job to help him out. You wouldn't break the law for Thomas Fell, but you'd devote on-duty time to making sure he's all right.

When Makepeace called and went so far as to say he was *missing*, well, you were intrigued. Thomas is no misfit, so he can't be in too much trouble. But what has he gotten himself into

that he'd go missing for a few days? You called around to dig up some information and ended up getting the attention of his sons—more trouble than you meant to stir up, but what's done is done. If they can help you solve the case of the missing antiquarian, that's just fine.

### Pillars of Sanity:

- The innate goodness of people. Crime makes people bad, which leads to more crime, but people are inherently good.
- Patriotism. America is an exemplary nation, admirable and true.
- Love for Chicago, your home town. A hard-working, American town.
- Law. When people abide by society's codes, we can be a great people.

### Sources of Stability:

Captain George Gough (your precinct captain, a weathered old dog of a man who has kept his sense of humor through dark times), Thomas Fell (a good local soul who helped you handle the estate sale when your parents died—you've since become friends)

**Investigative Abilities:** Assess Honesty 6, Cop Talk 4, Credit Rating 3, Evidence Collection 4, Forensics 2, Interrogation 6, Law 2, Outdoorsman 2

**General Abilities:** Athletics 12, Driving 4, Firearms 14, Health 11, Mechanical Repair 4, Sanity 12, Stability 8, Scuffling 10, Sense Trouble 14, Stealth 6

### Jan Joyce-Cleveland

**Occupation:** Dilettante

**Drive:** In the Blood

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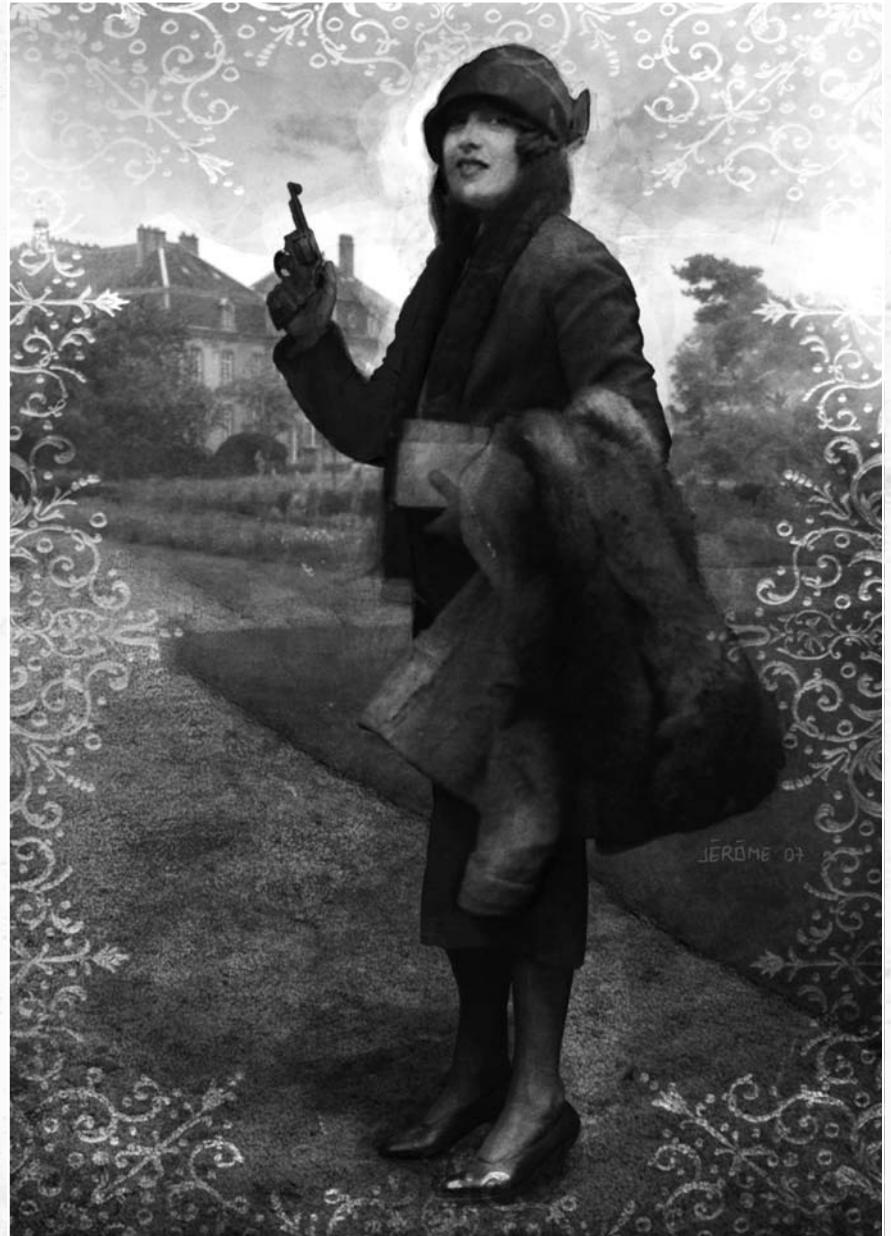
## Player Characters

(Jan is specifically named to be gender-neutral. Whether the name is short for Janice or is a male name of Norwegian descent is up to you, the player, to decide.)

The Joyces and the Clevelands have long been wealthy. Some families are just more capable than others, and it's the responsibility of such families to do things like solve the world's mysteries (but not necessarily publicize them), protect the world's treasures (but not necessarily share them), and give the little people a chance to support themselves. Long have the Joyce-Clevelands been globe-trotters and collectors of fine antiquities, and long has each generation sought to outdo the previous' collections in terms of rarity and mystery.

You heard word of Thomas Fell through Knox Makepeace, who has helped your father acquire some of his antique and archaeological collections over the years. Fell is a believer in the occult, like you, unlike your father. You sent Thomas Fell a stone stele, etched with alien markings, from your father's estate while he was out of town. Your hope was that Thomas Fell would be able to tell you what the object was and where it came from—and he did that quickly. He said Peru. So you cut him a check big enough for him to hire some men and go off in search of similar objects that you could bring back to impress your father... and possibly convince him that some of his collection has properties more fantastic than he believes.

Thomas Fell hired four men—diggers, drivers, explorers—and was having meetings to plant their trip, but then they all stopped writing or calling. No sign of them. They didn't board a plane or a train (and Thomas had said "Oh, I don't think we'll be flying there," the last time you spoke to him), so where did they go? Have the stolen the stele and secreted away



to some hiding place? You funded them, so whatever is happening, it's happening on your dime.

Damn it all, though, Makepeace went and called a police detective. Now you may have to pay him off if the provenance or proper ownership of the stele comes into question—or the fact that you hired men to loot antiquities. Even with the law being as sketchy as it is, you'd rather have kept the police out of it. And now that Fell's sons are involved, the whole business

may become emotional and personal, and that's no help. Unless you can use them to get Thomas Fell out of the woodwork.

### **Pillars of Sanity:**

- Aesthetics and high art—beauty benefits mankind
- Family. Some families are greater than others. A great family can lead and inspire.

**Sources of Stability:** Grover



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## The Murderer of Thomas Fell

Joyce-Cleveland (your investment-banker father, and the reason why you're rich), Thomas Fell (your secret investment project, the quaint antique expert who's going to certify your find and help you make your own fortune)

**Investigative Abilities:** Accounting 1, Art 4, Credit Rating 7, Flattery 4, Intimidation 4, Occult 2, Outdoorsman 6, Photography 2, Reassurance 4

**General Abilities:** Athletics 12, Firearms 10, Health 10, Preparedness 12, Riding 4, Sanity 8, Stability 12, Weapons 5

### Professor Knox Makepeace

**Occupation:** Professor

**Drive:** Antiquarianism

You know better than most folk just what history is worth—intellectually and financially. It's not right to leave artifacts in the hands of those who won't care for them or appreciate them, regardless of inheritance, cultural associations, or weak international laws. If a Wall Street collector is going to provide a good home for that Greek amphora, and let you study it and record its history, then the object is better off in his hands.

And your time is valuable. You should be paid for finding good homes for these works. The lawmakers in Washington don't quite appreciate the antiquarian perspective, so you'll bend the law if you must.

You went to graduate school with Thomas Fell and have been a business acquaintance, and sometimes partner, with him for years. You're two sides of the same antique coin: you, the purveyor of rare antiquities with questionable provenance, him the expert in determining that provenance. Thomas could be a

wealthy man, in his line of work, if he was willing to tell better stories about the antiques he sells... and if he was willing to sell more illicit pieces. Still, his conscience is admirable, and useful to you as a fill-in for the space where your conscience should be.

Beyond that, you're friends with the man. You'd be heartbroken if he decided to finally take your advice, get involved in something a little shadowy, and end up getting hurt. If this is somehow your fault, you'll feel awful. But keep it yourself. If his sons or Detective Wright can blame you, somehow, they probably won't let you claim any of Thomas' fine collection.

### Pillars of Sanity:

- History is a guiding force; study of it saves humanity from strife and repeated mistakes
- Artifacts of history and the arts have a value beyond simple money; they belong in wiser hands show they can be appreciated

**Sources of Stability:** Thomas Fell (your friend and colleague in the commercial antiquities business, he's the one you turn to when issues of the occult come up, because he believes in that sort of thing), Dorothy Chapman (your secretary, who handles your paperwork and appointment schedule—a real savior), John Allen Ward (a black-market antiquities dealer from whom you've bought the artifacts that have earned you respect and authority in the field)

### Investigative Abilities:

Anthropology 2, Architecture 2, Art History 4, Astronomy 2, Bargain 2, Credit Rating 4, History 4, Languages 2, Library Use 4

**General Abilities:** Conceal 10, Filch 10, Firearms 5, Fleeing 20, Health 7, Preparedness 6, Sanity 7, Stability 10, Stealth 5

### In the Event of Fewer Players

If you don't have five players in attendance when you play out this scenario, the players may be left at a considerable disadvantage. The characters presented here were designed to interact with the clues in this story in particular ways, and were created with a number of built points based on the assumption that four or more characters would be in play. Without some of the investigative abilities linked to each character, people's fun might seem to be at risk.

Consider one of these solutions to the problem:

First, substitute other investigative abilities for certain clues, if necessary. Alternately, put a book or two into Thomas' den that can help out in later scenes by supplying, for example, a few points of Geology or Biology to the investigators if Kenneth or Roger is missing.

Second, consider playing the leftover characters yourself, as NPCs. You might only need to do this long enough to relate some key exposition in the first half of the story, thereby turning unmanned characters into useful experts, and have those characters be left behind when the teleportation effect occurs in the scene "The Stone, Activated." If you like, these NPCs might travel with the PCs into the second half of the story, where they can be savagely attacked by the mountaintop monster or brutally murdered by Thomas Fell whenever it's dramatically appropriate.

## Thomas Fell's House

### PART ONE: THOMAS FELL'S HOUSE

#### The House

##### Scene Type: Introduction

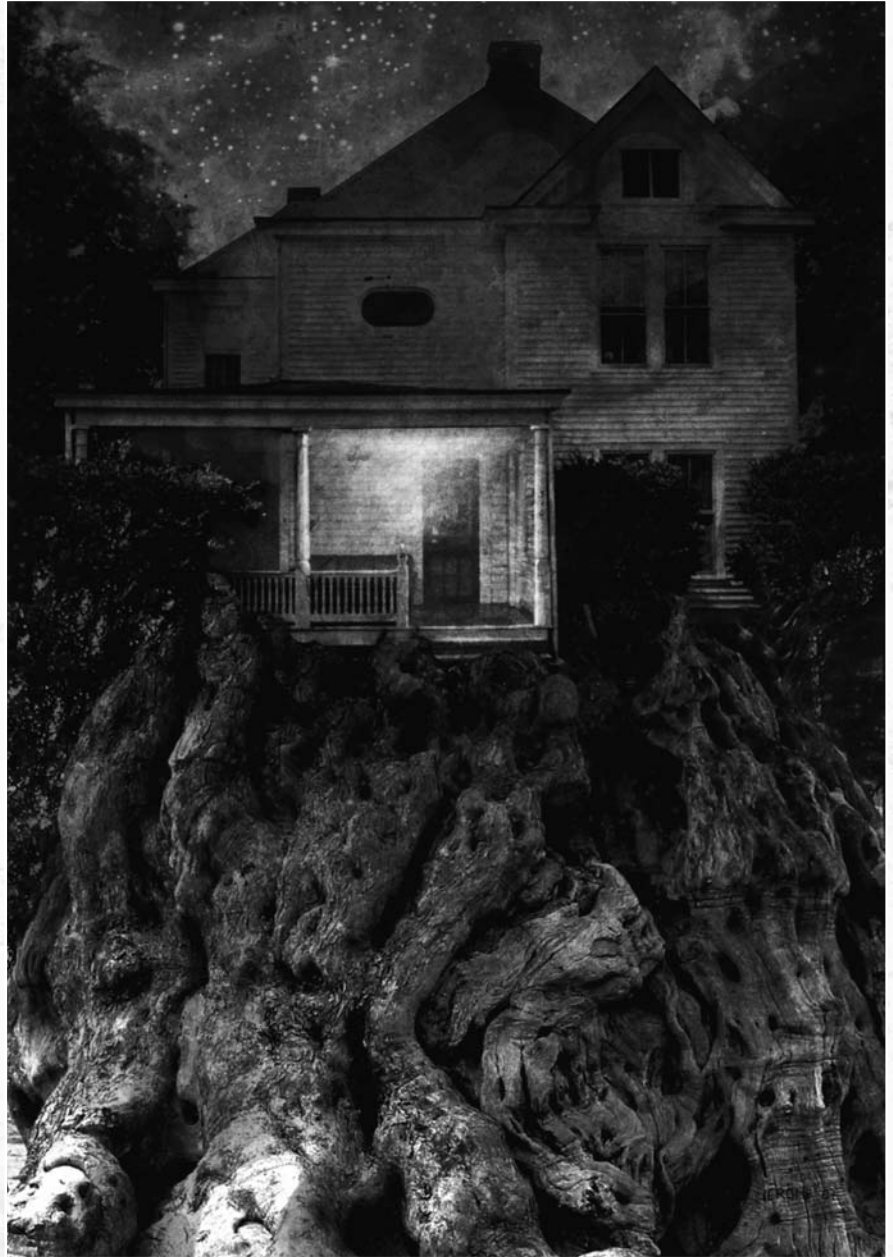
This first scene is meant to introduce the PCs to each other and to the bizarre situation within Thomas Fell's house: The kitchen and master bedroom are missing. Where they should be is, instead, a stretch of alien stone—solid, smooth, the color of cement, and bristling with brown clinging vines—and the trunk of a huge, dead tree stretching from the soil piled in the center of the house, up into the space where the master bedroom should be. It's as if the inside of the house has been swapped out with a patch of some strange, rocky wilderness.

(In truth, that's exactly what's happened. These are the same kind of unearthly rocks that make up the mountaintop in Part Two. The)

The kitchen walls have been removed, revealing the exposed frame of the next rooms over (living room, dining room). Its ceiling is likewise gone, apparently taking the floor and all possessions of the master bedroom with it. The walls of the master bedroom are still present—pictures still hang on nails hammered into floral wallpaper—but vines have already begun to spread from the rocks to the house and stiff, dead tree branches have torn through the plaster under the wallpaper.

A fine dust is inside the house, as if someone has been tearing out plaster or sawing stone. It's all throughout the still, dead air.

Even casual digging around reveals that the kitchen's tile floor is still present under about two feet of loose black soil,



riddled with obsidian-like rocks.

Stairs lead up from the front room of the house to the second floor, which no consists solely of Thomas's den (and secret library). Stairs lead down from the kitchen to the house's cellar, which consists of the cellar proper and the storage room where the stele is located.

**Evidence Collection** finds Thomas Fell has recently been receiving mail from companies specializing in outdoorsman equipment and

adventuring gear (kayaks, backpacks, climbing tools, etc.).

**Architecture** reveals the house to still be stable; there's no danger in taking the stairs up to Thomas' den or down to the cellar.

**Art History** or **History** notices that Thomas has dug out many of his Pre-Columbian American artifacts from his office and placed them throughout the house, on the mantle, on window sills, etc.



# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## The Murderer of Thomas Fell

No additional clues remain to be found here, though photographs and prints on the walls and antiques all over can be used to reveal bits of Thomas Fell's personality.

### The Den Scene Type: Core

Thomas Fell's den is a hardwood-paneled room made up almost entirely of bookshelves, framed maps, and decorative antiques. It's cave-like and dark, all of its windows hidden behind bookcases. A small wood-

burning fireplace punctuates one wall. It smells like a used bookstore in here. The floor is covered in stacks of paper—newspapers, invoices, maps, condition reports on various artifacts, correspondence, etc.

Use this scene to foreshadow the feral, isolated, and animal-like behavior they'll see in Thomas later on. This room is his lair, where he nests amid papers gathered from all over.

Thomas' camera is here, loaded and ready to be used. It's sitting on a stack of photographs depicting some

rocky location very much resembling the stones in the house. Several photographs focus on a tall obelisk covered with strange glyphs.

One of these photographs shows Thomas and four other men—two nondescript white men, a tall man with a serious mustache, and a young Asian man—standing in the living room in front of the strange rocks that have displaced his kitchen. (Core clue)

**Art History** or **Art** notices an odd mix of styles in the obelisk in the photos: it has an almost Egyptian shape but is strangely adorned with Pre-Columbian, Incan-looking glyphs.

**Library Use** can make sense of his organizational method and sort out where his attention was when he was last in this room. Thomas was focused on maps of South America, with a handful of circles drawn over points along the whole length of the Andes. Books on Mesoamerican art and culture are open all throughout the room, as are texts dedicated to stelae and standing stones all over the world, from Stonehenge to Egyptian obelisks. **Art History** and **History** recognizes his focus on standing stones as well.

**Accounting** recognizes that Thomas has tapped his savings to buy expeditionary gear (via mail order but not yet arrived), plane tickets, a shotgun, and to get \$2,200 converted into various South American currencies. It also reveals that Thomas' savings have been recently bolstered, substantially, by checks from Jan Joyce-Cleveland.

**Evidence Collection** finds all the plane tickets revealed by Accounting, unused and still in their envelopes. Destinations include Ecuador, Chile, and Peru. There are tickets for five travelers in each case.

A hidden door leads from behind a



# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Thomas Fell's House

bookcase in this room to Thomas' secret library, behind the fireplace. A two-point spend is required to find this secret door, but just what ability is necessary to find it is up to the Keeper to decide, depending on which characters are in the den and what abilities the players are focusing on during their investigation. The point, here, is to reward players for actively bringing their own abilities to bear, thereby teaching them how to be proactive investigators and use the GUMSHOE rules to their advantage. Alternately, you could offer the two-point spend to a player who has not yet had a chance to shine by selecting one of that PC's abilities.

For example, **Anthropology** might recognize a statuette of Anubis is facing the wrong way on a shelf and discover it swivels, unlatching the hidden door. A **Craft** spend might realize that this room is too short to account for the space on the second floor of the house, suggesting there's a closet behind the fireplace. **Architecture** might be spent to realize that, while there's a fireplace here along the wall, there's no visible chimney along the outside of the house.

### The Secret Library Scene Type: Bonus Information

Little more than an unfinished room the size of a walk-in closet, Thomas' secret library is dusty and stuffy. One wall is the exposed-wood outer wall of the house, the other is the chimney of his den's fireplace. A naked light bulb dangles from the ceiling. A handful of books are here—all of them rare occult texts of questionable academic value but a rarity that makes them worth money—as well as a small roll-top writing desk and wooden chair. Pictures of Thomas' two sons as children hang on the walls here.

The prize for finding this room



is the discovery of Thomas' diary, which includes photographs of, and his personal notes on, each of his expeditionary partners:

- **Franco Gruber:** German archaeologist specializing in Incan sculpture; has been to Peru on seventeen digs. His English is poor.
- **Jules Farquarson:** French-Canadian transportation and travel expert with contacts throughout South America.
- **Wu Han:** Chinese mountaineer and digger-for-hire. Working cheap in exchange for his shot at the Andes.
- **James Kellerman:** American game hunter, trapper, and general outdoorsman. "Between that handlebar mustache and the revolver he's always got, you'd think he was a cowboy."

This information can be useful for dealing with Kellerman or Gruber in Part Two by inspiring players to pursue lines of questioning or offer up spends in associated abilities to leverage clues out of these guys.

### The Cellar

#### Scene Type: Core

Thomas Fell's cellar is located below the front room of the house and is little more than an unfinished space with walls made of the house's foundation and a ceiling made of the exposed supports of the floor above. Cobwebbed pipes run along the ceiling. There's a drain in the stone floor. Old luggage is stacked in one corner, next to a rusted bicycle. A ragged wooden door occupies a rough gap in one wall. **Architecture** reveals that the room on the other side of the door would be directly beneath the kitchen. (Beyond this door is the stele and the scene "The Stele.")

The standout feature of this room is a birdcage hung with metal wire from a pipe on the ceiling. Inside this cage is an ovoid rock, about the size of an ostrich egg, with raised bands all along it, resembling foreign runes perhaps. **Anthropology** can make no sense of these markings, but tellingly so—they may be naturally occurring. **Geology** decides that it would be quite unlikely that they are naturally occurring unless something is inside the stone, to create those ridges.

Getting the stone out of the cage requires a 1-point spend of **Athletics** (to force the door) or **Crafts** (to finesse it). Other abilities may be allowed as well. A PC carrying the stone—which is, of course, the egg of the alien monster called the Mouth in the Stone—is likely ignored by the creature in the scene "The Creature Attacks."

### The Stele Scene Type: Core

On the other side of the ragged door is a small storage room, dank and crowded. Filling the space is a four-



## The Murderer of Thomas Fell

foot stone, etched with strange glyphs, standing in a nest of shredded papers and broken-down wooden-crate fragments. **Anthropology** recognizes the glyphs as being vaguely like Incan writings. **Art History** recognizes the stone as a fragment of a larger standing stone, resembling something like a Viking stele or Incan road marker. **Geology** is unable to identify the kind of rock that makes up the stone. **Art** and **Craft** see the etchings are exquisitely crafted with painstaking detail.

**Accounting** discovers a packing slip within the dismantled crate, revealing that the stone was shipped to Thomas Fell by Jan Joyce-Cleveland just over a month ago.

If any character touches the stone, and the PCs have split up to search the house, consider “cutting away” to the characters in another part of the house, giving them a last chance to wrap up their investigation, and leaving the characters in the cellar hanging in suspense. Then describe “The Stele Activated” from the perspective of the characters not in the cellar, with arcs of red lightning reaching up through the floors and into their feet, thereby capturing the sudden, bizarre surreality of their situation.

### The Stele Activated Scene Type: Core

This scene occurs either when a character touches the stele or whenever you, the Keeper, sees fit. It is essential that this scene occur before any characters successfully leave Thomas Fell’s house, as this scene begins Part Two of the story.

The stele has been operating erratically since Thomas first attempted to use it with a botched Mythos spell. As such, it now periodically reacts to vibrations in the house, haphazardly teleporting, for example, helpless souls and

### How the Stones Work

Simply put, they work dramaturgically.

In the world of the game, they operate by transmitting objects across the mystical conduits of ley lines. Successful teleportation depends on a complex set of metrics based on the intersections of ley lines and sympathetic connections between the “departure” stele and the “target” stele where the teleported object(s) are intended to arrive. The whole process is controlled through sorcery and witchcraft requiring the Cthulhu Mythos Ability.

The stone fragment that Thomas Fell has embedded in his guts is broken off the stele in his basement, so using it teleports objects back to his basement. The stele there, in his basement, is carved with glyphs to give it a sympathetic connection to the monument on the mountaintop, so those two stele are forever connected. (Whether they are connected *only* to each other is up to you.)

In truth, there *is* no empirical system behind the operation of the teleportation stones. They are plot devices designed to force tough choices onto player characters. The most obvious: what are you willing to do to get back home? The stones function or malfunction as you need them to. Chalk it up to Unknowable Ancient Powers. The truth is the teleportation stones run on your own narrative impulses.

kitchens to the Peruvian mountaintop where Thomas Fell has gone. While the PCs are still in the house, it activates again, and anything in contact with the dust in the air (definitely the PCs) is fair game for displacement to Peru.

First, the stone thrums like something electric. It vibrates. A delicate red arc of lightning reaches out and touches the closest character, even if it must pass through floors or walls to do so. That character vanishes in a blinding white flare of light, leaving behind a few strange rocks and bits of clinging vine. A moment later, all other souls in the house are struck by similar arcs, and vanish.

The sensation is, at first, like burning oneself on the stove—a sudden recoiling gasp. Then: falling. Then: impact.

A dining-room chair, a lamp in the living room, and any other objects you feel would be amusing or helpful,

are mystically transported along with the characters to the mountaintop monument and Part Two of this adventure.



## The Mountaintop

### PART TWO:

### THE MOUNTAINTOP

#### The Geography of the Mountaintop

The characters have no map to guide them on the mountaintop, so they may be largely at your mercy as they follow narrow canyon floors from one scene to the next. On the other hand, they may actively search for a way to visualize their surroundings and plan a course through the canyons, rather than wandering hopefully or following blood trails from one sad scene to another. Thus, you'll need a sense of the mountaintop's simply geography.

Picture an archetypal mountain shape with the top sheered off, creating a flat, almost circular plateau. This plateau is littered with gray, alien stones pressed together in strange patterns, creating a labyrinth of narrow, irregular canyons, like tangled corridors criss-crossing the plateau. Some of these corridors let out at the edge of the mountain, which drops away dramatically into snowy, hostile stretches of frigid mountains. Every corridor is draped and adorned with thick, clinging vines the color of coffee. In some places, these vines must be pushed aside to make it through the narrow canyon-corridors.

The south edge of the plateau is a wide clearing punctuated by a huge, vine-encrusted obelisk (see the scene "The Monument"); it's here that the characters arrive. On the far north edge of the plateau is a similar clearing, occupied by a primitive shrine made of stacked stones and squat stelae; it's here that Thomas Fell is researching the mystic powers of the teleportation stones (see the scenes "The Shrine" and "The Killer"). Between these two clearings, in small clearings at the intersections or dead-ends of various canyons, are all the



intervening scenes.

A fall from the mountaintop is fatal, and anyone peering over the sheer edge, down the smooth face of the mountain, can instantly see it. Abandoning their circumstances in favor of a brave descent and death in the Andes snow is no viable escape. Fortunately, there is no wind coursing through these narrow canyons to push anyone off the mountainside.

Travel across the top of the alien rocks, avoiding the canyon routes, is possible only if you want it to be for the sake of speeding up the action or rewarding proactive characters; alternately, movement might require a Difficulty 3 Athletics test.

Otherwise, travel across the top of the rocks is presumed to be impossible because it undermines the labyrinthine atmosphere of the alien mountaintop in favor of niggling, mundane details



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## The Murderer of Thomas Fell

about handholds and jumping distances. Say it's due to the jagged, cutting edges at their peaks, leaving little space to grip or balance one's self without causing bloody gashes (worth 1 point of damage) across one's hands and feet.

Just inches above the top of the corridor-like canyons, the freezing winds that should be expected at this altitude are found to be howling and fierce, as they should be, so that attempting to climb up out of the maze is like trying to crest a mountain in your shirtsleeves. Treat characters in the extreme cold beyond the mountaintop's strange temperate zone as **hurt** until they return to the temperate zone.

### Clues

The following information on the mountaintop and its layout can be gained by proactive characters who make 1-point spends or succeed on actions using the relevant skills:

- A Difficulty 4 **Athletics** test is necessary to reach the top of the alien rocks and get a look out across the mountaintop. This reveals the two clearings to the north and south, as well as a view of the red train car (from the scene "Train Car") to the east and any of the other odd objects you choose to include from the "Victims of the Monster" scene.
- **Geology** recognizes the region beyond the plateau as the Cordillera Blanca ("White Range") of the Andes, in the Ancash area of Peru. (If spends were used to discover Thomas' secret library, this vista is instantly recognizable from his books.)
- **Outdoorsman** and **Biology** can make no sense of the clinging vines—conspicuously so. They do not quite resemble any vines the

character has seen before. Thin veins carrying a clear sticky sap run along the thickest vines, which isn't something the character has ever heard of before. They're as much like roots as vines.

- **Occult** or **Anthropology** sees a pattern in the rocks and canyons, as if they form the shape of some Mesoamerican glyph. (Only **Cthulhu Mythos** can truly make sense of the glyph, however, which is either an Aztec approximation of some summoning symbol or a link to any follow-up adventure you like.)

### New Creature:

#### The Mouth in the Stone

Little more than a mouth on the end of a lithe, eel-like body, the Mouth in the Stone does nothing except stalk and eat and lay eggs. Brought to Earth from a distant and virtually featureless alien moon by ancient witchcraft and the teleportation powers of the mystic stela, this creature obeys few of our planet's biological properties. The Mouth in the Stone functions on a metabolism that measures time in millennia rather than days. It is as much a geological phenomenon as it is a biological thing.

Capable of traveling through topsoil or solid rock with ease through a combination of an ammonia-scented excretion and a kind of geomantic warp, the Mouth in the Stone is often seen only as a stony proboscis ending in a ring of black obsidian-like teeth, slick with grainy slime. It typically hunts by lurching out and biting its prey once, to slowly petrify it with its germinating bile, but it is willing to bite and shake a target until it comes apart and can be swallowed immediately.

The Mouth in the Stone is protected by a pebbly hide of pliable silicon, highly sensitive to vibration (and thus sound) and light. It has no eyes or other sensory organs, and only its flat tail and mouth give its body appreciable features. Its insides are little more than a geo-organic engine, digesting biological material for energy. Some of this material is regurgitated, wrapped in soft flakes of its own hide, and kept as eggs in which a new Mouth gestates until the egg is cracked from the outside. A new Mouth begins existence as a famished alien appetite the size of a dog and doubling in length each day until it is roughly the size of a great-white shark.

The Mouth's mission on Earth, in the minds of its ancient summoners, is to patrol and defend the grounds where the mystic stelae are kept. Eggs, buried beneath rings of standing stones across the globe, wait to be hatched and bound through sorcery on similar missions. The Mouth's instinct on Earth, however, is simply to eat all comers and lay eggs. One day, perhaps an eon from now, perhaps tomorrow, it will hatch them.

**Petrifying Bite:** The Mouth in the Stone bears an alien germ between its teeth. This mystic germ replicates rapidly upon contact with blood, transmuting aerial particles and skin cells into a completely inorganic compound as hard as rock. This stone-like substance grows out from the area of the bite, both into the victim's body and across its flesh and clothing. This growth renders victims unable to move, while the germ preserves their bodies for later consumption by the Mouth.

In game terms, the compound slows and eventually traps a victim, reducing Athletics and/or Fleeing by one point every ten minutes. Alien germs keep a subject nourished on its own flesh and liquids for a number of days equal

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## The Mountaintop

to the victim's Health, even after the victim is completely encased in stone. The Mouth uses this ability to store food, eventually biting through the compound to eat the flesh within.

### Game Statistics

**Abilities:** Athletics 11, Health 21, Scuffling 25

**Hit Threshold:** 3 (big)

**Alertness Modifier:** +2 (only against creatures standing on exposed rock, not soil)

**Stealth modifier:** +2 (invisible when in stone)

**Weapon:** +4 (teeth)

**Armor:** -5 vs any (tough, rocky hide)

**Stability Loss:** +2 if attacked directly, +2 if seen emerging from bare rock

Investigation

**Biology:** The stone "growing" on the victim is like a resin or calcifying agent, except it doesn't seem to be organic, which doesn't make any sense. Spars, or more like ribbons of stone are growing like icicles into the body. The damage is already irreversible, and will eventually kill the subject for certain. (Medicine)

**Geology:** Stone doesn't do this. Whatever kind of rock this is, growing on the body, it isn't... earthly. It's growing as fast as coral, but it's more like granite. The rock this "beast" ran to is solid granite, too, with no cracks a creature could get through. There's no way an animal could move through that. (Forensics)

**Outdoorsman:** Damnedest thing: the tracks lead right to this scuff on the rocks, these grooves, like something rough wore down the rock face.

### Regarding Stability

This story is designed to severely tax the characters' Stability, as a means of ensuring that *Trail of Cthulhu's* central theme of mental fitness eroded by horrific events is immediately visible. In all likelihood, most of the PCs will be devastated by the attacks, revelations, and actions they are called on to perform in this story; the other PCs probably die. Encourage the players to embrace the atmosphere of terror and anxiety, to play up their characters' withering Stability by describing specific examples of their fear that *the other characters can see*. (You can find some specific examples in the sidebar on p. 72 of *Trail of Cthulhu*.)

Don't internalize the fear in this short story; put it out there for all to see. Remind the players (and, thereby, their characters) that they are alone, and have no onlookers to impress or hide their emotions from. When a character's Stability takes a hit, the other characters should see it—people scream, shake, cry, curse, and plead.

Even if you're playing this story in the Pulp style, don't let the players off the hook. Their characters may react with more resolve or vengeful ire, but they must still *react*. Even heroically confident types might damn their circumstances, declare "My God!" or stop to catch their breath and assure themselves while they reload.

You have many more opportunities to check for Stability loss than the few that are specifically detailed in this scenario. Keep an eye on p. 71 of *Trail of Cthulhu* for examples of possible Stability tests during this adventure.

And that smell... like musk or urine, beaded up like the rock is sweating it out.

**Sense Trouble:** You smell something. Ammonia? There! Something, the color of lime, in little drops on that rock, like condensation on a glass.

### The Monument

#### Scene Type: Core

It is no great fall to the ground after the teleportation, but there is a risk of injury. Any character who fails a Difficulty 2 Athletics test loses 1 point of Health to injured ankles, scrapes or bruised bones.

The characters have arrived in the southern clearing, scattered around the foot of the large quasi-Egyptian

monument from Thomas' photographs. Its raised markings, vaguely Incan, resemble those carved into the stele in the cellar.

The ground is gravel. The rocks give way to three canyon-like corridors (north, north-east, and north-west), cluttered with vines. A frigid wind blows in from the cliffs behind them, uncomfortable but not dangerous.

Thomas Fell's kitchen is here, too—a strange sight in the midst of alien rocks and vines. Its walls are strained but intact. Its cabinets have vomited out dishes onto the gravel-covered ground. The refrigerator leans like a drunk against the island in the center of the kitchen. The ceiling, and the floor of the master bedroom above, forms a kind of bizarre roof, capped with a bed, dresser, and ottoman.



# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## The Murderer of Thomas Fell

Amidst the broken dishes is a body, crumpled and bloody, its face shocked and pained. This is one of the nondescript men from Thomas' photograph. (Specifically, it's Jules Farquarson, though the investigators recognize him only if they've been to Thomas' secret library. Otherwise, this is deducible after all the other expedition members have been found.)

**Evidence Collection** identifies the means of death as numerous small stab wounds to the back, like from a folding utility knife. **Forensics** recognizes spatter patterns suggesting not just stabbings but slashes: there's blood on the dishes here not from the victim on the scene.

Additionally, **Evidence Collection** uncovers a blood trail leading from the kitchen into the tangled roots and vines of the surrounding, surreal jungle. **Evidence Collection** or **Outdoorsman** can be used to track this trail, which leads to the scene "Train Car." **Outdoorsman** also reveals a trail leading along another route through the rocks, this one to the "Victims of the Monster" locations.

**Geology** reveals unsettling details about the rocks here: they don't belong in frozen mountains. They'd make more sense in the sea. They are smooth like obsidian, colored like limestone, and punctuated with ribbons porous like dried sponges, not at all like the snow-capped peaks visible beyond the cliffs, and not at all like the mountainside supporting this strange, temperate plateau. And why isn't there any snow up here?

### Train Car Scene Type: Alternate Core

Over the years, attempts to transport various teleportation stele or their fragments have resulted in odd things being transported to the mountaintop. Things like Thomas Fell's kitchen and this red, metal train car, wedged into the rocks.

Other possible examples of teleported objects you might scatter throughout the mountaintop to mystify or amuse your players include the tail section of a light cargo plane, a half-petrified camel, a sleigh, about half of an automobile, and the very top of a church's bell tower. A suitably rationalized Investigative ability spend—especially **Occult**—can grant a character the sudden realization of how these things got here: At one time or another, they were each within proximity of some teleportation stone, somewhere on Earth, when that stone was activated.

The blood trail leading away from the Monument ends here. Inside the train car, behind its shut sliding door, is the corpse of Wu Han, who has bled to death from injuries inflicted by Thomas Fell. Painted on the floor in his own blood is this final message from Wu Han:

- (Core Clue) "Thomas Fell killed me." The message has been smeared as if someone tried one good swipe to erase it, but the blood was already too dry.

**Forensics** or **Medicine** reveals Wu Han died of blood loss resulting from three slashes across his side and stomach, probably from a straight-razor.

**Evidence Collection** determines with confidence that Wu Han's body has been searched once already. His hands are covered in his own blood.

The **Outdoorsman** recognizes that Wu Han was in no way equipped to be out here—he's wearing good boots, but has no backpack, canteen, or anything. He's dressed for day-to-day living.

A 1-point **Evidence Collection** spend gets a character a confident hunch that Wu Han did not lie in his dying message—people never do.

### Victims of the Monster Scene Type: Alternate Cores (2)

This is really two scenes, one for each of the remaining expedition members who fled Thomas Fell's attack at the Monument. The information that's possible to retrieve from each scene is the same. The reason there are two survivors is so that you, the Keeper, have some flexibility when revealing information in each instance of this scene. You might want to have the first victim be dead already, allowing only hints of the monster, or you may want the testimony of one survivor to be punctuated by a sudden attack by the Mouth. You might simply want each survivor to respond to different Interpersonal abilities, to give more characters chances to shine.

The attack split up these survivors, so they each suffered their attacks separately and are now languishing in slow petrification in two different parts of the mountaintop canyons. It's quite possible one of them has already died, if that suits your purposes.

In addition to giving characters a chance to investigate evidence of the Mouth of the Stone, each of these victims is able to reveal the following clues (requiring a 1-point Interpersonal spend where noted):

- (Core clue) Thomas Fell has gone mad from exposure to the stones. He killed Farquarson and attacked Wu Han shortly after they arrived.

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## The Mountaintop



- (Core clue) Thomas has with him the stone necessary to travel back to the stele in his cellar. He said anyone who could get their hands on it could compel the stones to transport people.
- (Core clue) The petrifying process is achingly slow. "I should've died of thirst days ago, I figure."
- (1 pt.) Kellerman dropped his gun when the monster attacked. It's out in the canyons not far from here. (It can be found automatically once this clue is obtained.)

- (1 pt.) Thomas doesn't seem to be afraid of the monster. He said it wouldn't attack someone with one of those "eggs" either.
- (1 pt.) The creature attacks right out of the rock. If you smell the stench of animal urine, it's probably near by.

### The Lair

Scene Type: Side Challenge/  
Obstacle

This shallow cave is discovered at the

intersection of two canyons. Inside, the cave is dark and reeks of rot. The floor is solid rock littered with loose bones and naturally mummified flesh encased in cocoons of rock. These are the remains of the Mouth's ancient petrified victims, sucked dry of meat and juices.

Beyond this grisly chamber is a crack in the rock leading to another chamber. Crossing this savage ossuary requires a 3-point Stability test, and leads to "The Nest."

This is an ideal place for the Mouth to attack, lunging from the stone floor in a shower of brown, rotten bones.

### The Nest

Scene Type: Bonus Advantage

This chamber—little more than a large crack in the rocks—has a floor of collected sediment gathered around a pile of smooth, ovoid stones like the one found in Thomas' cellar. These are the eggs of the Mouth. There are a dozen eggs here, each about the size of an ostrich egg or football and each weighing about ten pounds.

See the scenes "The Cellar" and the entry for the Mouth in the Stone for more information on clues in this scene. See the scene "The Creature Attacks" for the effects of carrying one of these stones.

### The Shrine

Scene Type: Core

On the far northern end of the mountaintop, some ancient peoples have erected a shrine of stacked alien rocks and woven vines. At the heart of this shrine is a stele carved with ancient Mythos secrets in several dead languages. The words on this stone shine in the sunlight like they were glass. The stone is hot to the touch, smeared with bloody fingerprints, and emits a low, electric hum.



## The Murderer of Thomas Fell

- (Core clue) Several of Thomas Fell's personal effects are here: his jacket, his pocket journal, a blood-encrusted straight-razor, his shoes, a photograph of his boys as young men.
- (Core clue) Thomas' pocket journal reveals his accelerating madness. His writings become more fevered, less orderly, and less scientific, culminating in his eager report of his meddling with the shrine's stele: He has successfully cast a spell and is ecstatic about it. He has "absorbed" the "mystic traveler's keystone" and may now "travel freely from stone to stone, it seems!"
- (Core clue) Thomas journal also reveals that he is in search of additional "eggs" to take with him on his journey.
- **Evidence Collection** or **Outdoorsman** reveal that someone has been living here, apparently eating vines and drinking sap, for several days.
- **Anthropology** recognizes the style of this shrine as similar to an Incan traveler's shrine, but the stele more resembles a Viking cross-roads marker. The etchings on its surface are much more orderly and complex than those on the stele in Thomas' cellar; they are likely a complete text, rather than simple signage or ceremonial writings.
- **Occult** use surmises that this stone is another "transmitter" for objects, but it's easy to determine that it doesn't seem to work with simple contact. The etchings on the stele must be a spell and, if so, the stele is probably "hot" because it has already been cast.

This scene is meant to foreshadow the madness and dangerousness of Thomas

Fell. More than that, it is meant to make the players and their characters think they are too late—Thomas Fell has already teleported away without them. They seem to be stranded here.

This scene transitions directly into "The Killer" when you think the dramatic timing is right to introduce Thomas Fell, who is still on the mountaintop with the characters. (He's still looking for the Mouth's lair, so he can bring its eggs to other lands.) When the time comes, Thomas returns to the shrine's clearing and finds the PCs going through his things.

### The Creature Attacks Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction

Whenever you need a dramatic punch or a dose of desperate action, have the Mouth in the Stone lurch out from some nearby rock and attack the PCs. Most of the information you need to describe the attack can be found in the monster's write-up on p. XX. The Mouth is just as prone to dramatically strike out and bite off the head of a half-petrified survivor in the scenes "Victims of the Monster," if you like. Witnessing such an attack risks a 4-point Stability loss.

The Mouth attacks a character carrying one of the eggs only if *all* characters are carrying eggs. The Mouth is mystically compelled to *want* its eggs to be carried away for hatching in other rings of standing stones, but is simultaneously instinctively compelled to horde its eggs for hatching by itself, later. It balances these impulses by attempting to feed on subjects without its eggs first, and attacking egg-carriers only if no other targets are available.

If this is a one-shot adventure for you, don't be afraid to have the Mouth devour a PC or two. Death is expected in Cthulhu adventures.

### The Killer

#### Scene Type: Core (Climax)

This scene, which may overlap the scene "The Shrine," if you decide Thomas Fell is present when the characters reach the shrine, is the climax of the adventure. It's a simple scene, playable in any number of ways. Let the approach of the players determine the final tone, here. (Be aware, however, that if Thomas Fell attacks the PCs outright, he may be critically injured in the resulting fight, which can diffuse the tension when it comes time to cut the stone from his gut since "he's dying anyway.")

When Thomas Appears in this scene, he is half-naked, gray with grime, and illuminated from within by glowing red runes carved into the stone he has absorbed into his body. If necessary, he may explain how he has become "one with the stone" with a bit of villainous soliloquy.

Thomas gives up fighting once he is **seriously wounded** (see *Trail of Cthulhu* p. 63). For dramatic purposes, he automatically succeeds on all Consciousness rolls so that he is able to deliver essential exposition. Should he somehow be injured to the point that he is technically dead (Health –12 or lower), he lingers on the edge of death, conscious and lucid, claiming "It's the stone, I think... keeping me alive!" This is fine, as it won't let the characters off the hook—the only way home is to murder Thomas Fell.

Leveraged clues or Interpersonal ability spends (2 points' worth) may be used to reduce the stakes of the Stability test for killing Thomas by coercing him into putting down his shotgun and standing his ground—making it clear that he is choosing to force a life-and-death issue. Thomas, mad and obsessed with the stones in the shrine, won't go back home. "Why go backward when I can go forward,

## The Mountaintop

to new places and new sights?” he says. “Why not see where else these stones can take us?!”

If forced, he challenges the characters: “If you want this stone, you’ll have to kill me. I won’t go back to my pathetic little house when there’s a whole world to see.” He **Scuffles** in his own defense, and is willing to kill, but is probably outmatched by the characters.

One of them must step up, then, to slay the man and take the stone. This is a scene of pure roleplaying, in which the relationships the players devised for their characters finally resolve in a difficult choice. Make sure they have time to debate amongst themselves and play out each PCs reaction to the situation, but not so much time that their debate stalls. The Mouth in the Stone draws near if they dawdle.

In the off chance that the characters choose to travel somewhere new with Thomas Fell, you have a few other options for ending the story:

- Thomas Fell teleports without them, leaving them stranded on the mountaintop to die—a sad ending that ironically betrays the title of the story.
- Thomas Fell teleports them all into the ruins of some vast and impossibly alien city, perhaps on an alien world. The characters find themselves surrounded by standing stones... and enormous tentacles stemming from a great, hovering, quivering mouth above them. They are all consumed by this enormous maw, including Thomas Fell. Perhaps their ghosts appear in a follow-up tale.
- The characters all teleport away with Thomas Fell into a deferred climax, their destination never revealed, unless you choose to bring these characters back (possibly as NPCs) in some follow-up tale.

### Aftermath and Sequels

Any characters who survive can of course continue on in other stories now that they have been exposed to the truth of the stelae. To mix traditional investigative scenarios into the potential globe-spanning adventures possible with the teleportation stones, consider the following options:

- The stones themselves become the subject of follow-up investigations, as the characters seek to recover them from wicked cultists, greedy black-market art-brokers, and lost cities throughout the world.
- The stones become the motive behind various thefts and murders as the characters pursue another organization looking to recover the stones for their own nefarious purposes.
- The characters discover that most of the teleportation-stones across the globe are smashed and ruined, useful now as guides only to the possible locations of ancient mysteries and lost cities, which must be reached through traditional travel. In this case, the stones serve only to introduce the characters to the world of the occult—and whatever Mythos spells you choose to hide in the mountaintop shrine the characters now have ready access to.

An alternate, more complex style of follow-up tale turns this story’s introductory PCs into NPCs. Your sequel adventures cast the players’ new, personalized characters as investigators looking into the disappearance of Jan Joyce-Cleveland (for example) or artifacts appearing on the black market thanks to Knox Makepeace (for example).

Whatever it is that draws these new investigators into the mix, the players find themselves learning the ultimate

fates of their previous characters only by pursuing clues with their new characters. They may work with Detective Wright while investigating the murder of Makepeace. They might be part of a city-wide search for a kidnapped Joyce-Cleveland. They could find themselves facing off against a stele-using cult of traveling looters led by an insane Kenneth Fell.

Once this story ends, all of the survivors are yours to play with.





# The Murderer of Thomas Fell

# The Murderer of Thomas Fell

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

The Investigator



# The Murderer of Thomas Fell