

The

# The Dark Times

Horror & conspiracy gaming



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## **The DARK TIMES FANZINE Issue 03**

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## Dark Times Influences 02

"There are two different stories in horror: internal and external.

In external horror films, the evil comes from the outside, the other tribe, this thing in the darkness that we don't understand. Internal is the human heart."

John Carpenter,  
born January 16, 1948



Dark Times Fanzine covers material for the following game systems. If you would like to submit something for our consideration please contact us at the following email address:  
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Atlas Games - Feng Shui 1&2, Over The Edge, Unknown Armies all editions  
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Chaosium - Call of Cthulhu all editions  
Cthulhu Dark  
Dark Conspiracy - all editions  
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Eden Studios - All Flesh Must Be Eaten, Army of Darkness, Conspiracy X, C.J.Carella's Witchcraft  
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We also accept short fiction, artwork, poetry and anything else that fits our chosen sphere.



## **Most Likely A Meteor A One-Shot Little Fears (1<sup>st</sup> ed) scenario By Tim Bisaillon**

*(Inspired by a photo manipulation photograph on  
Tad Kelson's FB page)*

### **Preface:**

*Ezekiel saw the wheels;  
Way up in the middle of the air.  
Ezekiel saw the wheels;  
Way up in the middle of the air.  
- a folk song.*

This particular adventure is suitable for a standalone game but could develop into a full-blown campaign if need be. It's an invasion Closetland style, thus creating a Second Skin in the sewers so that our characters fight little grey men, mutated rats and a killer robot.

### **In The Beginning:**

Our story began a couple of days ago when a comet streaked through the heavens and exploded in a brilliant fiery ball over the town of Hovertown.

There's a few viral videos of it on the social media sites depicting a massive ball of fire streaking across the heavens on a cold night. It even got to the point where a team of reporters descended upon the town to pick up some local reaction about it for their newscast, getting quotes and additional video about the meteor for their evening broadcasts.

A few days have passed now and there are strange incidents happening and no one over the age of 13 can see it, other than the children of the town of Hovertown. Also, there have been some disappearances of people but then they would show up 24 hours later without a clue of what happened and go about their business as usual.

### **The Story:**

Instead of a comet breaking apart over the town, what the children saw was a huge wheel streaking across the sky and stopping in the center of town, they see it break apart into rectangle shape ships and descend from the sky to land in three different areas. If the children tell anyone about it they will claim it was just a meteor/comet breaking apart.

Our adventure begins two-three days after the "meteor" and with the disappearance of one of the characters good friend; Harold Pint.

Harold, 8, is a nerdy science geek with buck teeth and large glasses and he wants to go hunting in the area where a "unidentified foreign object" landed to see for himself.

Now you can play out the particular scene with Harold and the characters going to a spot where they think a ship landed, but then have Harold separate from the party and eventually they'll find his glasses on the ground. No, matter what the players do they cannot find Harold at all.

If the police are called or any other adult called to the scene they will tell the kids this isn't no joke and tell them to head back home.

### **Harold's Return:**

It's the next morning. As the kids get up and get ready to head out for school they see Bernie Booker, a big bully, that has been picking on anyone and everyone smaller than him for several weeks now, lying on the ground with his arm at an odd angle.

Standing over Bernie is Harold Pint, Harold's knuckles are bruised and battered and it looked like he just got off a few rounds with a boxing legend.

Harold Pint is screaming at Bernie Booker on the ground, Bernie is crying and his arm is at an unnatural angle. Have characters make a Smarts Quiz to see if they noticed anything strange about Harold Pint. If they make it they will see Harold is opposite of what he normally is; he's quite aggressive and it looks like he's about to stomp down on Bernie with his boots. Harold speaks in a crisp clear tone. Each word precise and like an individual sentence.

"He. Had. It. Coming."

Bernie is picked up by an adult and is taken away, while Harold Pint continues to walk on towards the school. He is whistling a song as well as he does. His whistling sounds unnatural like someone speaking through a tin cup.

If characters try to stop him or ask him questions he will tell them nothing is going on and that they should just mind their own business or else end up like Bernie or worse.

As Harold walks past a yard there is a dog that continues to bark at him. Harold will ignore the dog and continue walking.

### **What Manner of Madness Is This:**

Players can follow Harold around if they want to, he'll go about his daily routine of school, sitting in the library and reading novels. No one will question him about Bernie or what happened.

Bernie will return the next day with no cast, his arm is fine and he is very chummy with Harold. Both are acting like they have been friends for ever.

### **Home Life:**

One of the characters home life is affected as well, when they return from school to see their mother cooking dinner, their father mowing the grass.



Since his/her mother is a CEO at a bank and father is a doctor who is generally busy throughout the day. If press about the matter the parents will say they are indeed serving the betterment of home life.

If parents are pressed about the matter they will snap at child with words and also a backhand. A Test must be rolled in order to avoid.

If police are called they will arrive and chat with the parents and warn the child not to be fooling around, since the police time is important and shouldn't be used for trivial or frivolous things.

### **A Craft In The Sky:**

Players are awoken by the sound of humming overhead, as they look out the window they can see a strange craft hovering over the town, a beam of light shining down onto the street. The craft continues on down the street and disappears.

If the characters follow it have them make Feet Quiz and to see if they can catch up with the flying craft. As they crest a hill they can see a brick like device hovering over the overpass.

They will see Harold and Bernie and a few adults standing there looking up at the craft, not moving at all. As if they are all frozen to the spot.

Have the players make a Smart Quiz in order to spot if the craft has deposit two Little Green Men in a beam of light. They will speak to the crowd and then the crowd will disperse. Harold is leaving and something drops from his backpack. It is a map (hand players Harold's Map). The two LGM are carrying a crate and will disappear a man-hole.

### **Harold's Map:**

Before he disappeared, Harold made a map of the locations where the parts of the crafts might have landed "landed". They are marked as A, B, and C on Harold's map.

A is where a trio of LGM are setting up an antenna like device on the top of the hill.

B is a where two LGM are in a small pod and searching for metal material. There is a mutated rat with them as a guard dog.

C is where the LGM base is located.

### **Base of the LGMs**

The only way to find the base of the LGM is a sewer manhole close to the sewage treatment plant. There is an LGM hidden in the shadows by the manhole, he has a "walkie-talkie" in which he can use to call in reinforcements; or alert the others that there are "intruders" coming.

Have players take a Smart Quiz in order to spot the hiding LGM. If they surprise the LGM they can have a round of free action, if they do not spot the LGM they will have to deal with him once they go down into the sewer.

Encounter A) There are 2-3 cyborg rats wandering the tunnel system.

Encounter B) This is where the Warbot 100 and 2 cyborg rats are. They are on guard and watching the cube-like UFO that is parked here. they will follow them into the sewers and to a chamber where there are three other 1-2 other LGM who are in the process of setting up a huge egg like device in the chamber.

- 1) A huge chamber with several cocoon-like devices lining the walls. In the center of the room there is a 20x20 pond with a pink liquid. A claw from the ceiling will drop down into the pool and pick up a person from the pool, and the claw will move towards room 2.
- 2) In this room there are several nude "townsfolk" but they don't have any anatomy. Like the dolls that a younger sibling plays with. They are standing still in rows as an LGM stamps a "barcode" on their upper back between the shoulder blades and sends them to room 3.
- 3) In this room there is a 1-meter dais, where the replicant townsfolk stand and their they are dressed with clothes that magical weave over their bodies.
- 4) On a table in the center of the room is someone being looked at by a LGM in a robe. That someone is Bernie! And it looks like he is about to be dissected like a frog in science lab! The LGM has a scalpel hovering over it's intended victim to dissect. Have players make a SPIRIT Quiz in order to maintain there cool, if not they will let themselves be heard and this will draw the LGM to them and we'll have ourselves a royal rumble going on here.

The kids find that the LGMs are studying humans and seeing what makes them tick and then replacing them with life like mechanical replicas.

- 5) A huge docking bay where a cube-like craft waits, there is a bay door overhead that is closed. There are several townsfolk that are held in a trance here, they are waiting to be loaded on the craft. There are stamps on their arms, which look like brands; Grade A, Grade B, Tainted.

### **Victory Conditions:**

The characters must deal with the Closetland threat and stop the invasion; save the townsfolk, and make sure the Second Skin overlap is erased.

Here Be Monsters:

The LGMs are manifestation from Closetland and so they abide by the rules of the original game. The



children roll Quiz since they most overcome their own fears. So, if LGM goes to attack the children must roll a Feet Quiz to dodge it; if they fail then they are hit by the LGM.

LGMs stand less than 1 meter tall, they have oversized heads and their bodies are gray. They wear tunics that look like a mummy-wrap around their body.

Fist: 2, Laser: 5,  
Hits Taken: 12

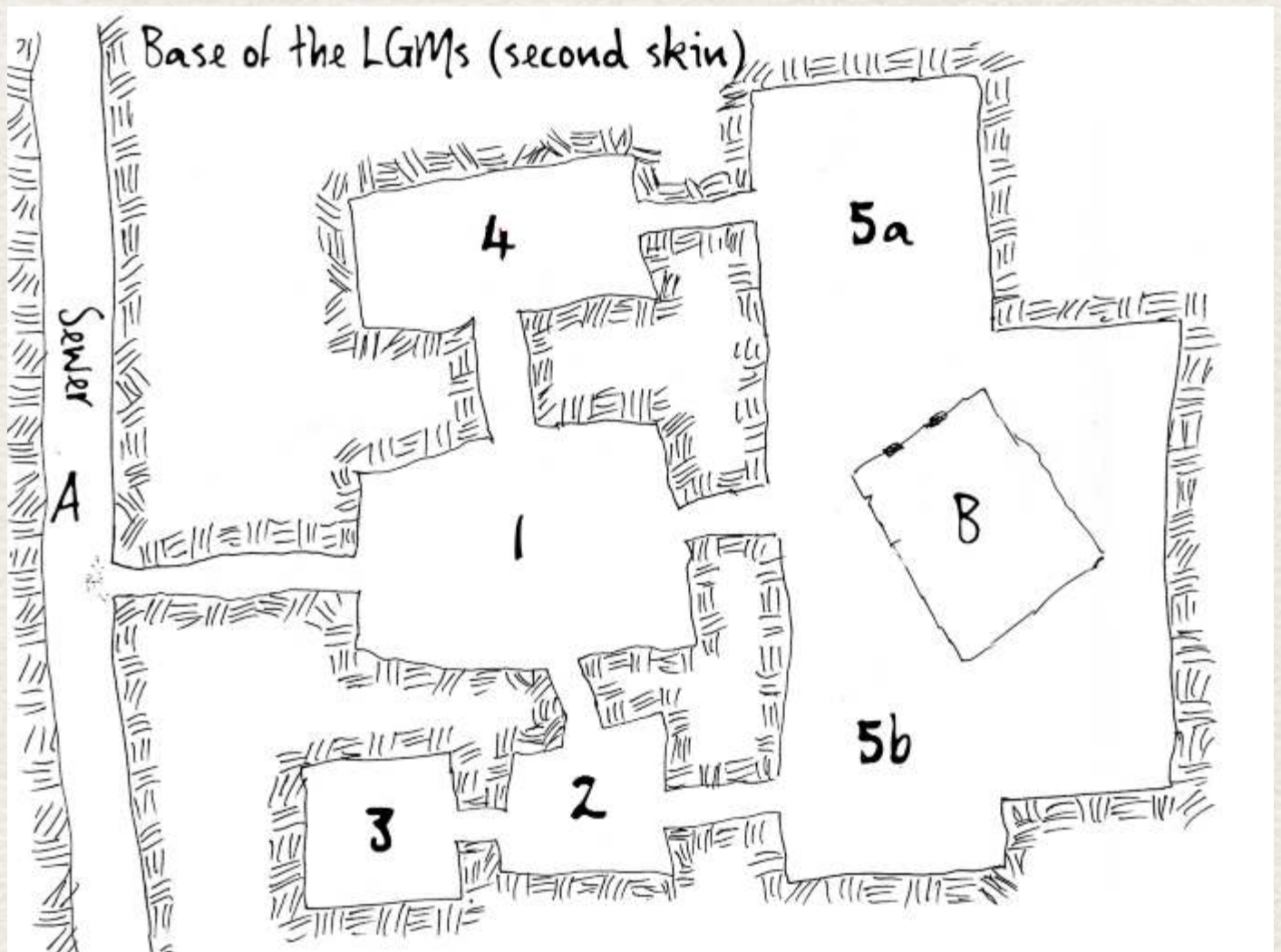
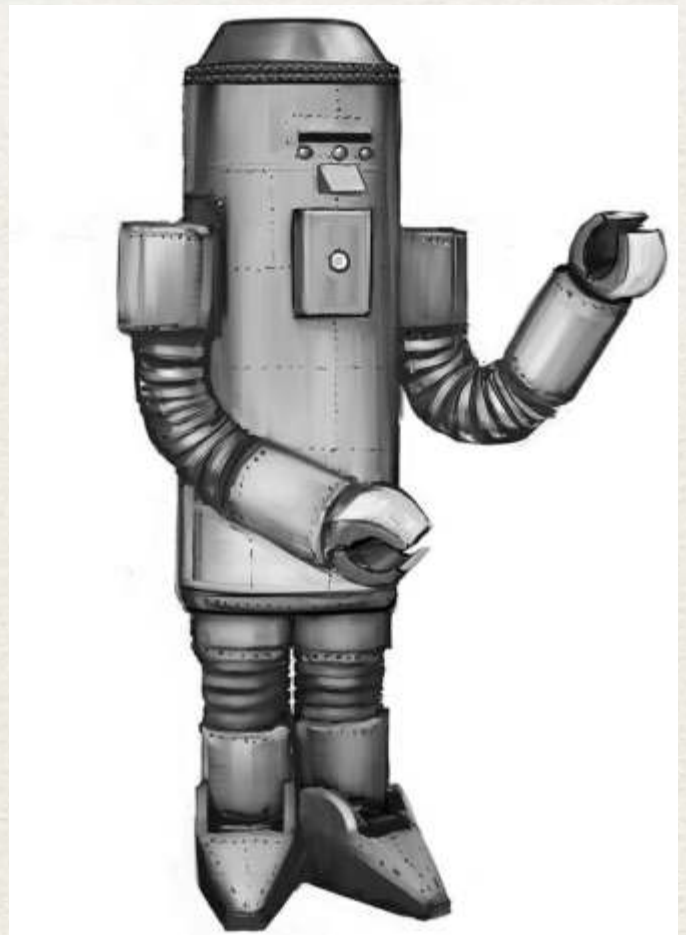
Mutated Cyborg Rats are the size of large dogs, they have black shaggy fur with mechanical enhancements.

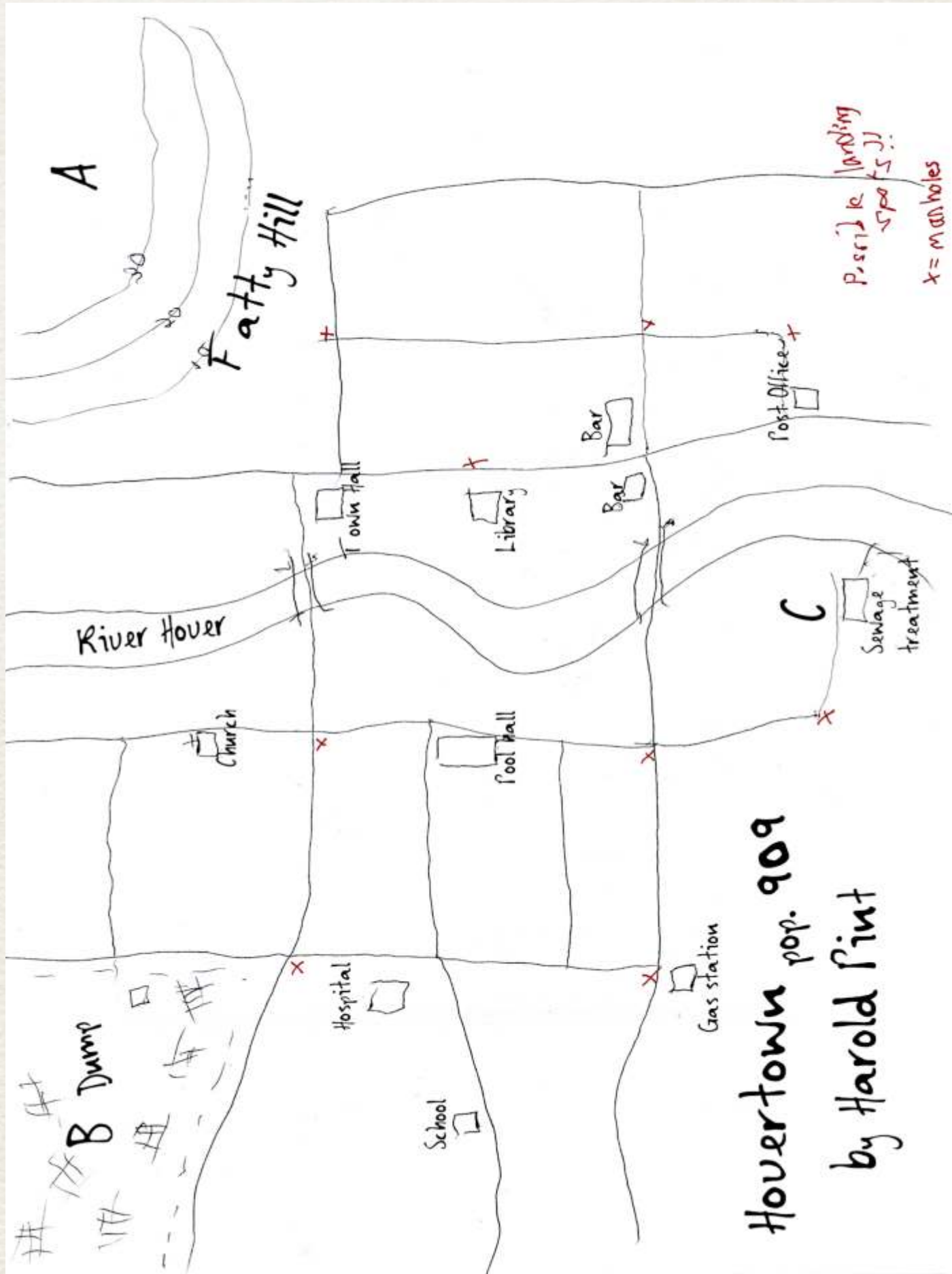
Bite: 4, Claws: 4, Tail: 2  
Hits Taken: 14

Warbot 100 stands over 3 meters tall. It looks like one of those robots you see in one of those old Buck Rogers serials from the 40's and 50's. A big bulky mechanical mechanism of doom!

Fists: 5, Feet: 4, Sword: 5

Characters can gather up weapons but they will disappear once the second skin is over and done with. This will hide all evidence of the Closetland Invasion and leave no proof behind that it actually happened.







## APPARITIONS

By Finn Cullen

Edmund Jenkin was not an old man but he was weary and reaching the end of his resources. He had been waiting for his caller who was overdue by an hour and he was worried. The weather was bad but that was not what concerned him. What concerned him was that the time was bad, the days were bad, the enemy was breaking through in ways they could not have imagined a decade ago and he was concerned that these were the final days.

When he saw Jacob's car draw up in his driveway he was not so much relieved as resigned. There was still work to be done. When he opened the door to his visitor though he shook his head.

"You should not have brought the boy," he said to Jacob. The child was about ten years old and seemed hidden inside a hooded coat at least one size too large, playing some game on a smartphone that was occupying his full attention.

"No choice Ed," said Jacob, "His mother's busy, I couldn't leave him behind." The two visitors entered the house and Edmund disposed of their coats over a couple of hooks in the hallway.

"What's your name then?" asked Edward of the child, smiling awkwardly.

"Simon," said the boy, "What's your wifi password?"

"Wi...? I don't think I have one."

The boy's father laughed at Simon's horrified expression and installed him in the parlour while the two men went into Edmund's study, a cluttered room of books and folders and strange drawings pinned to the wall. Jacob recognised some of the things in the drawings and they made him feel ill.

"It's getting worse isn't it?" he said.

"Much worse. The stars are right and the old ones are stirring in their strange homes. Their followers are awaiting their return. Already there are manifestations."

Jacob nodded, running his fingers over a pinned up pencil sketch of a formless bundle of ropy sinew. "There was a shoggoth in the Humber Estuary," he said very quietly, "we drove it off but it killed Elaine. Marcus hasn't spoken since then. I think he'll do something... rash... if he's left alone. That's why Sarah's not here today, she's watching him."

Edmund shook his head sadly. "I heard of that. The television said it was a chemical spill. And the incursion in Fiswick?"

"They took a dozen of the citizens, nothing we could do. Dragged them under the waves. Edmund... how are they doing it? They've never been able to accomplish so much before."

"The stars are right," Edmund said. He opened up a book on his desk, a very old book with brown and cracking pages. Jacob knew the name of the book but wouldn't ever say it aloud, its reputation was so bad. The page displayed was covered in spidery symbols, pen-strokes of dark ink that almost writhed under the reader's gaze. "But even so... the simplest conjuration takes such concentration, such precision." He instinctively tried to trace one of the symbols with his finger in the air and stopped himself, clenching his fist angrily.

"We need to find a way to..." Jacob sighed, "I'm stating the obvious. What isn't obvious is how to stop them. But until we find their rituals, find out where they're doing the summoning from we're always going to be on the defensive." He picked up a copy of the Daily Mail, the headline CANNIBAL IMMIGRANT RAMPAGE showed a blurry image of what were plainly – to those in the know at least – two ghouls tearing into the crowd after a London football match. "How did they get so bold? How did they get so much better?"

"People believe everything and nothing these days," Edmund said sadly, "the occult is a joke to so many. They do not understand how the edge of the abyss can crumble so quickly, how deep is the fall that awaits us all. If only we-" He stopped suddenly and looked around. The lights flickered off and then on again a few seconds later and the walls of the house seemed to groan. The renewed light was wrong somehow, a greenish cast to it, the shadows fell wrongly, drawing inward toward the centre of the room.

"They've found us," Edmund said, his mouth dry with fear. He fumbled with one hand at the talisman he kept in his waistcoat pocket, a silver square engraved with number-squares that should be proof against the chaotic forces they too-often faced. The silver felt slimy to the touch, sticking to his fingers. "My God they've found us."

Jacob ran from the room to fetch his son. Whatever danger they had to face they would face together and he could not risk them using his child against him. The corridor had twisted like a corkscrew along its length though it looked no different and as Jacob tried to run down it he fell from floor to wall to ceiling bruising himself and having the breath knocked out of him.

"Simon!" he yelled at the parlour door, "Simon are you alright?" His words burned like ochre light in the air around him as he called. The answering cry was petulant.



"Just finishing the level," in a tone that meant 'do not disturb me'

Jacob crawled to the door across a carpet that tore at him like shards of broken promises and he thrust the door open. Simon was safe though the room around him had become a twisted mosaic of its original form. The boy hadn't even looked up from his game and Jacob lurched forward to grab his son, to save him, to take him back to Edmund who was the most skilled exponent of the arcane arts he had ever met and who might be able to protect them all. A scream the colour of corroded dreams echoed out from the study giving the lie to that hope.

"Dad, leave it, I'm nearly done," The boy was unaware of any risk, his finger moving rapidly over the smartphone screen, and Jacob looked at the game for the first time, really looked. Each time a shimmering green symbol appeared on the screen the boy traced it almost at once with his finger, and then the next, and then the next and the next, the speed incredible, the accuracy such that only a child with a favourite game could achieve.

Jacob recognised the symbols, but he could not stop the child at his game. He did not have time. The walls of the room opened inward like slatted blinds, noiseless and inevitable, and the things beyond the world looked in hungrily and took them both.





## A Little Monster aside For Dark Conspiracy By Paul Riegel-Green

"We Interrupt this broadcast..." began the interruption of the latest Drone Racing League Race.

However, this was not your typical governmental interruption but an underground broadcast. A moment later comes a picture of a green humanoid with a turtle's carapace on its back. The crowd in the bar erupts in laughter as they think it's a promotion for some upcoming Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles movie. Then a Japanese accented voice comes on and says, "You must beware, the Kappa have returned and are wreaking havoc on Hokkaido. We need assistance, they have killed many..." and with that the broadcast ends and the Race returns to the applause of those who are unaware of what is really going on.



### KAPPA

Strength	7	Education	0	Move	5/10/20/40	Swim	50
Constitution	6	Charisma	1	Skill/Damage	Bite	5/1d10	Claw 4/1d6
Agility	4	Empathy	1	Hits	35/70		
Intelligence	3	Initiative	5	# Appearing	1		

The Kappa appears in two forms, Turtle and Humanoid. In its turtle form it appears as a large 3' across turtle. In its humanoid form it has two arms and legs standing over 4' tall. Each form features a reptilian head with a small depression in the skull that always has to contain fresh water. The other main feature is its piercing red eyes (see below).

It has been known to live in freshwater rivers of Hokkaido while in turtle form. Chanced to a humanoid form to live in nearby caves.

The Kappa is very territorial and is known to attack boats and people that invade their space. They are very aggressive in their own territory. They rarely travel outside of their own territory unless someone is stupid enough to capture one of them and take them away (hint hint!)

They have formidable weapons in their claws and a bite. But their most feared weapon is their red eyes. Once transfixed by their red eyes the character must roll under their INT + EMP on a d20. If the roll is

equal to or less, then the character is unaffected. If from 1-5 points above the number then the character will be frozen in place. Above 5 the character will flee in abject terror. The Kappa can attempt to transfix one character per round.

In areas with a lot of undergrowth the Kappa will be one level of difficulty harder to spot while remaining still. In the water they are one level more difficult to spot unless they poke their heads up.

The Kappa has one huge vulnerability. It must maintain fresh water in the small pan in their skull. If this dries up the Kappa will die (losing one point of CON per round until they reach -1 (and death). Amazingly enough the Kappa can make many wild acrobatic maneuvers while the water remains undisturbed in the pan.

The Kappa has become part of Japanese folklore and been made over into a soft and lovable creature. This is not the case!

Don't forget to check out [Clockwork Publishing's teaser page](#) for news on the upcoming Dark Conspiracy 4<sup>th</sup> Edition



# **BANGS - Unexpected incidents in modern horror and weird roleplaying games**

**By David South**

**For all systems**

Presented below are a list of events that a GM can use to keep things moving in the game, to build tension, and to introduce complications into the characters' lives. [BANGS](#) are situational tools that can be used when the GM wishes to add action to a scene, whether the players are going in circles debating about how the clues connect, the PCs are at a loss for what to do next, or if the GM simply realizes that the current scene is adding nothing to the developing story.

BANGS should be open-ended, meaning that there is no 'correct' way to solve them. They are simply situations which either encourage or necessitate the PC to jump to action, preventing gaming sessions from losing their momentum or slowing down. A BANG should always be a brief description by the GM of what is going on and be followed with "What do you do?", "How do you react?" or similar questions asked to the players.

When running horror and weird conspiracy games, many GMs often have a list of BANGS prepared ahead of time for that adventure. When a scene stalls, loses energy or is not being productive, the GM can simply review the list, select the most appropriate BANG for the scene, cross it off and throw it into the fray. These BANGS allow the game to smoothly and organically transition from one scene into the next and can be powerful tools in a GM's arsenal. Several possible BANGS can be found below.

- 1. Everyone hears a loud knocking on the door. "This is the police! We have reason to believe that you have been participating in illegal activities and are wanted for charges of murder! Open the door now or we will break it down!" How do you react?**
  - PCs in RPGs are generally not model citizens, with their frequent breaking and entering, the occasional body in the trunk, and all the mysterious deaths that seem to occur whenever the PCs are around. The police have finally taken notice. Make it clear to the players that getting arrested is serious, but so is killing police officers which will surely result in even more police coming after them, possibly even SWAT.
  - After describing each action taken by PCs, describe what the police are doing and saying; make sure the PCs know that the police are not sitting idle, they are going to get in shortly and the PCs must figure out what to do. Keep the pressure on the PCs. Remember, police are smart, they will watch back exits, they may even have officers positioned in the street outside to catch any fleeing suspects.
- 2. You cannot help but feel drawn towards the [object], your gaze upon it lingers, something about it is not quite right... what do you do?**
  - The object could be a jewelry box, a photograph with several people in it, a carved and ornate skull, an old gun, a handwritten symbol on a scrap of paper, a necklace behind a glass case in a museum, the helmet of a motorcyclist after a horrible crash, the butler's ornate watch, the crumbling tombstone, the broken cellphone, the ancient and half-melted coin, etc.
  - This will likely prompt the PC to investigate the object, it is recommended for GMs to be flexible and use this object as a way to find a clue or have something interesting that furthers the plot. If the PC smashes open the jewelry box, they might find an old rusted key; if the scrap of paper with a symbol on it is pocketed, make sure they run into that symbol later on; if the motorcycle helmet is searched, it may have a thick layer of slime coating the inside.
- 3. You all hear a faint, low-pitch rumbling sound that is getting louder by the second. After a couple of seconds, you can feel that the ground itself is shaking, barely perceptibly at first but then increasing with a ferocity such that it is getting very hard just to remain standing. Suddenly, the sound of the ground ripping itself apart fills your ears as a huge split in the earth begins to spread between the group members. Which side do you jump to?**
  - This BANG is probably best used sparingly, only for the proper situations. Possible situations could be investigating an old mineshaft or ancient temple, completing an important ritual, fighting mutants during a potentially apocalyptic event, exploring a strange other dimension like the Dreamlands, a confrontation with a being of immense power, etc.
- 4. You hear laughter as you are approached by a well-dressed stranger. In a cool, almost mocking voice you hear them say, "I know what you are doing. It won't work." Do you respond?**
  - This would be a good entry for the person to know just slightly too much about the PCs and what they are trying to achieve. This stranger should be enigmatic and intelligent, not revealing much about themselves. When using this BANG, it is best for the GM have a



suitable character & backstory prepared beforehand instead of improvising it, because this BANG has potential to drive the adventure unrecognizably off-track.

- The stranger might be a good way to drop hints to aid the PCs/players with a puzzle or even to make the PCs feel like they are being watched by some organization.
- If the PCs ask the stranger for any important information or for significant aid, the stranger will likely refuse, instead suggesting that the PCs go to a NPC they know and bring up something strange, a vague or seemingly unrelated subject. This could be in the form of "Why don't you ask Roger Bension? While you're at it, ask him about January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1956. He'll know what that means."
- Before they have stuck around long, the stranger will bid the PCs goodbye and leave without further answers. This should leave the players trying to fit in how the stranger knows all of this, what they are going to do about the new information, and where the stranger's allegiance lies.

**5. The room/area you are in begins to darken slowly as you all feel a spine-chilling dread and become aware of an unwholesome presence getting stronger. Outside, the skies darken, and the air begins to feel thick and wet. The feeling, the pressure of this presence is almost overwhelming and as you clutch your hands to your head you can feel a trickle of blood coming out of your ears. Something is coming. What do you do?**

- This one should only be used to introduce or reveal a major creature or truly terrible villain. The PCs might choose to hide, to prepare a spell, to run, or any of myriad other things. Give them a moment to react or prepare, then begin describing the scene.
- Throughout the next scene, be sure to describe minor but unsettling physical effects on the bodies of the PCs such as coughing up black ooze or feeling something moving around between their internal organs. These effects will give the scene a sense of horrific urgency.

**6. A rambling, dirty and scrappy stranger runs up to you yelling, "It's coming! Prepare yourself for the birth, the agony of the unclean will be swift!" They appear to be trying to get you to flee, but it is unclear from what or where they wish you to go. What do you do?**

- Usable in any situation where there could reasonably be other people nearby, this bang could be a red herring, a foreshadowing of a great evil, or perhaps lead to a clue. The dirty stranger should be almost incomprehensible, very agitated and will likely flee after more than a few seconds of talking. The players now can debate about whether the person is insane or whether they actually know something (or perhaps both?).

**7. You all smell smoke. After a couple of seconds, you realize there are faint clouds of black smoke coming from underneath the crack in the door. You can hear crackling coming from inside, and it is getting louder. It quickly becoming hard to breathe as the air begins to fill with thick clouds of black. What do you do?**

- In RPGs, often we get so used to problems being caused by the supernatural that real-world dangers are often underused. This BANG almost certainly requires action from the PCs, so crank up the pressure and don't be afraid to let the fire spread. If necessary, you could give the investigators an idea of what started the fire, such as a suspicious masked woman fleeing after bursting out of the closed door, a Molotov thrown through a window, a misplaced cigarette, or a malfunctioning and sparking electronic device.
- During the scene, each time a player narrates their action, describe the outcome of the action and how the fire is spreading or getting worse. If the PCs decide to put out the fire and haven't wasted too much time, let them do so but ensure that something important was burned or lost. To further complicate things, you could have innocent bystanders or known NPCs be present in the building and have the potential to be trapped, burned or killed by the flames should the investigators be unable to extinguish the fire.
- Encourage the PCs to try to salvage something from the fire, let them choose something important but they must forsake everything else. This will lead to a tense decision on the player's part, so as a GM try to ensure that whatever they save from the flames is useful to them later down the road.

**8. You receive a message from [NPC the party has met before]. It explains that [NPC] had heard your group was in town and is hoping that you could explain something strange that they recently overheard/saw/experienced. They wish to meet. Do you meet with them?**

- Entirely a non-combat BANG, this one should be used sparingly and only when the players are unsure of how they can move forward or confused about the connection between clues. It can be a reward to the group for making good connections with NPCs, or as a favor



done by the NPC as thanks for something the PCs did to help them. This BANG also is a way to bring back recurring characters from previous scenarios/adventures and potentially a source for future plot hooks.

- Do not be afraid for this NPC to get strung up in things far over their depth. This message might have provided an important clue for the investigators, but it may also complicate their lives now that the NPC is trying to uncover things that they shouldn't. Try to leave your players asking things like "Wait, did [NPC] reach out to the head of the vampire coven we are trying to root out?" or "Ahh crap... [NPC] must have opened The Box, and now those things are probably going to come for them...."

**9. You see a single severed finger on the ground. Next to it is a crumpled note with illegible scribbles, the only word you can make out is [known NPC's name]. How do you react?**

- Useable as a great callback to the previous BANG with the NPC who is in way over their depth, this one can be used in two ways. Either the NPC is in danger (especially if that finger used to belong to them) or the NPC is the one who cut off the finger. A virtually meaningless scribbled handout with ominous looking writing on it can leave the investigators scrambling to determine whose finger that is, what the hell is going on here, and what should be done.

**10. From the shadows, you hear a rustling as you see a humanoid figure crawling on the ground slowly towards you. What do you do?**

- This BANG could be done in multiple ways. It could be a creature (animated corpse, vampire, tentacle-faced horror), a bad guy (injured cultist, fallen enemy soldier, mutilated priest), or an innocent NPC (wounded nurse, crippled person without their wheelchair, a friend trying to avoid gunfire).
- Maintain that the PCs cannot determine what the nature of the crawling thing is (perhaps due to darkness, tree branches, upturned gurneys or some other factor) unless they get closer to investigate. They could probably shoot from where they are if they wanted to be safe. Try to build the tension and make a point of asking which specific PC gets closer to investigate, all while describing the scraping noise that the thing on the ground is making as it draws closer. If one of the PCs decide to shoot it, have them roll for an easy shot. Then, if it was a normal human, describe the human's deadly wound.
- If the person who was shot was an innocent, try to make the moment somber and chilling. The PCs should realize that they really murdered a nurse, or a legless cancer patient or someone who trusted them. If your game has a sanity mechanic, make the PC who fired the gun roll sanity as the realization of what they have done sinks in.

**11. [Trusted NPC] stands up to greet you with a handshake and a smile. Immediately, you notice something is off, judging by their slightly odd expression and the bead of sweat that slides down the side of their face. As you shake their hand, you realize that in their sweaty palm is a folded note. How do you react?**

- This BANG should be used in a fairly mundane scene set in a public place, one where there is no immediately obvious threat or danger. It could be used during a routine library trip, or arranging overseas travel with the expedition's head researcher, or even at coffee with a friend while the PC is recovering from their last adventure.
- The note itself could be a hint or insight that could be dangerous if it were overheard; the note could also be something of more pressing distress, such as "Don't look around. THEY have agents watching us. Please get me out of here!"
- Give the PC who received the note a chance to quietly alert the other PCs or subtly show them the message, which ensures that all players whose PCs are present will get to be part of the scene. If the PCs aren't appropriately subtle, don't be afraid to make their lives messy with the repercussions.

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**"Expect the unexpected - how can that be? Surely it would become the expected!"**

**Call of Cthulhu investigator Derek Cairns**



# Blest Be The Ties That Bind

## For all systems

### By Sal North

**Content warning:** mental illness, brief mention of self-harm

Blest Be the Tie that Binds known colloquially as "Asunder" is a memetic mind virus, and draws heavily on themes discussed in a variety of fictional and non-fictional works, which are included in the index.

Asunder infects people, and seeks to spread itself. It works to "reset" the human mind such that it can cope with contact with the mythos, and maybe even survive after The Stars Are Right. Language (as we know it) is a necessary sacrifice in order to achieve this.

Suggestions for a cure or vaccine are not discussed here.

Also included in this document, is the same information, but formatted as a diary or doctors notes, such that they can be used as a handout.

#### Notes on Occultism

"Blest Be the Tie that Binds" is the classical name given to some particular "bad vapours" by occult documents. They describe symptoms that are very similar to the condition known as Asunder.

The only difference is that occult texts discuss it in positive terms. They describe the need to "shed the ties" in order to "ascend", "awaken" etc etc

The main vector for the mind virus is an image. This image bears similarity to the sigil of a demon called Dantalion, described in the *Lesser Key of Solomon* as "he knoweth the Thoughts of all Men and Women, and can change them at his Will."

#### Transmission

Blest Be the Tie that Binds, or "Asunder" is contracted by viewing, and understanding the meaning of, a specific image. The information contained in the image, when properly processed by the human brain, causes a cascade of effects. One of the emergent behaviours is to draw the image, and to discuss the concepts required to understand it. The Keeper is free to pick whatever they like for this, however recommended topics are:

- How language shapes our minds
- Extraordinary feats that humans can accomplish under extreme circumstances (mother lifting a car to rescue a baby etc etc)
- Could we create a language in order to shape our minds in desirable ways? Cures for mental illnesses, even physical disorders.
- Isn't it amazing what power words can hold?

(more manifestations of the virus will be discussed in the "symptoms" section).

The image is included in the index, but as mentioned, for all intents and purposes is the sigil of the demon Dantalion from the *Lesser Key of Solomon*. Again, feel free to swap this out for something else if desired.

#### Symptoms

Signs of infection can take anywhere between a few hours and several weeks to manifest, and usually appear in distinct stages.

##### Stage 1

The patient will find that as they "day dream" or otherwise lose concentration that they will doodle the image.

The patient will almost always steer the conversation around to discussion of the sigil, occultism, and the way language affects us. Some good real-world resources on how language affects us can be found in Appendix 3.

##### Stage 2

When discussing more complicated concepts, or attempting to use technical language, the patient will struggle to find the right words, or to be able to express themselves eloquently.

This includes scientific terms or names for things, but not their ability to perform mathematic calculations. Languages which are not the patients mother tongue are affected to a higher degree.

The patient will be obsessed with the image and drawing the image. In extreme circumstances, the patient will self-harm in order to obtain the materials to recreate the image

##### Stage 3

The patient will struggle to use anything but the most basic words, and struggle to form sentences. Note – The patients' ability to comprehend, conceive of advanced concepts, or perform calculations is not impaired. Extensive testing, or a particularly observant medical professional will notice that, if anything, these abilities are greater than before

If the patient is prevented from drawing, either by restraining, or attempts to discipline, they will become agitated, and violent.

##### Stage 4

At this stage, the patient has completely lost the ability to communicate. If they previously had the ability to communicate through sign language, they may be able to still convey broad, base concepts (i.e. "hungry" etc) through that medium. Their ability to vocalise is not impaired.

A brain scan will show significant rewiring in almost all parts of the brain.

At this point, unless in some kind of care, the patient will remove themselves from society, and seek out the wilderness. If there is a severe outbreak, a small community may even form. Completely self-sufficient, and located in a remote location,



dealing with a community like this would be very difficult.

### Doctor's Notes

The affliction "Asunder" seems to bear a striking similarity to something called "Blest Be the Tie that Binds", which is described in some very old texts I have managed to acquire.

As of yet, I have not managed to isolate the true nature of this peculiarity, but have found myself referring to as a virus, so I shall do so here, for consistency. One of the emergent behaviours of this virus seems to be a compulsion to draw a peculiar image. All small circles, lines, and crosses. Patients also seem to experience a compulsion to discuss the concepts that they associate with the image. The image is included in the index, and whilst not inherently disturbing, viewing it is not recommended.

For obvious reasons, a description and exploration of the concepts represented in the image are not included here.

### Symptoms

Signs of infection appear to take anywhere between a few hours and several weeks to manifest, and appear to manifest in distinct stages.

### Stage 1

The patient will find that as they "day dream" or otherwise lose concentration that they will doodle the image.

The patient will almost always steer the conversation around to [redacted], [redacted], [redacted] and associated topics.

### Stage 2

When discussing more complicated concepts, or attempting to use technical language, the patient will struggle to find the right words, or to be able to express themselves eloquently.

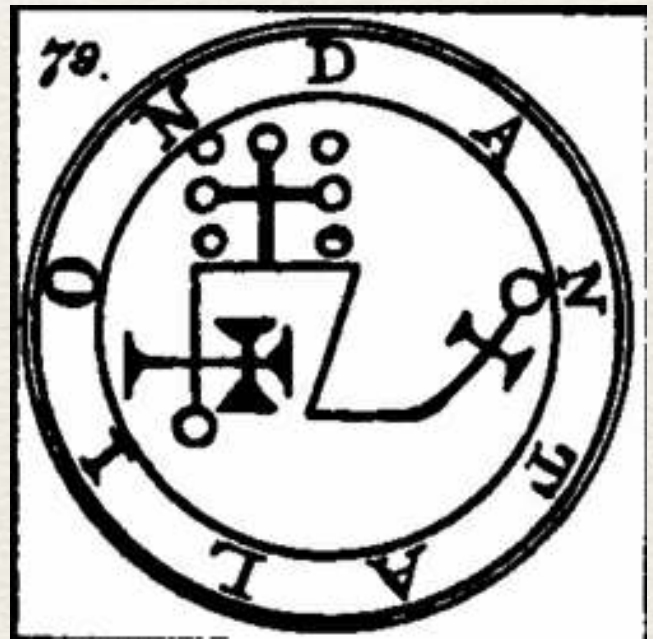
This includes [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]. The patient will be obsessed with the image, and drawing the image. In extreme circumstances, the patient will self-harm in order to obtain the materials to recreate the image

### Stage 3

The patient will struggle to use anything but the most basic words, and struggle to form sentences. Note – The patients' ability to ~~think properly~~ comprehend, conceive of advanced concepts, or DO MATHS perform calculations is not impaired. Extensive testing, or a particularly observant medical professional will notice that, if anything, these abilities are greater than before. If the patient is prevented from drawing, either by restraining, or attempts to discipline, they will become agitated, and violent.

### Stage 4

This stage has yet to be observed under proper conditions.



### Acknowledgements

I've stolen a ton of ideas, most prominently from:

- Ross Peyton's Delta Green campaign God's Teeth, especially God's Eye.
- Ross Peyton's (?) Delta Green scenario Inheritance.
- Charles Stross's Laundry Series, especially Rhesus Chart.
- Peter Watts's Blindsight
- Neal Stephenson's Snow Crash
- "Memetic mind virus" as a term comes from Richard Dawkins' essay Viruses of the Mind.

### Language Resources

<https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/does-language-i-speak-influence-way-i-think>

[https://www.edge.org/conversation/lera\\_boro\\_ditsky-how-does-our-language-shape-the-way-we-think](https://www.edge.org/conversation/lera_boro_ditsky-how-does-our-language-shape-the-way-we-think)

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-biolinguistic-turn/201702/how-the-language-we-speak-affects-the-way-we-think>



# SUNFLOWER MASQUERADE

## ACT ZERO



A TRAIL OF CTHULHU ADVENTURE



# Sunflower Masquerade, Act Zero

## By Joe Klemann

### **Introduction:**

The scenarios of the Sunflower Masquerade are sequential but should be run episodic and focus around the infamous play "The King in Yellow" and the Hastur-mythos. Each Act 0, 1, 2 and 3 were easily accomplished in one session of around 4-5 hours of game play at a tabletop sitting with 3-4 players.

### **Scenario Background:**

A wealthy dilettante from Arkham's elite has manipulated events to bring the cursed play to America and arrange for its theft to begin mentally influencing the people of Arkham. Neil Harwich, the son in a cursed line of settlers who've dwelt in Arkham since the 1700s, is cast in the role of our villain, but the Investigators are not likely to encounter him until the end of the completed scenarios, if at all. As a man of wealth who has traveled the world, his dream is to put on the cursed play that his grandfather used to whisper about in the asylum. He prefers a theatrical approach obviously, hiring middle men and impoverished henchmen to do his deeds. In a sense he is writing and directing a larger play and drawing the unwitting investigators into the story. The story starts on October 10th, 1935 (although Gamemasters are welcome to change dates to fit their own setting) on a very dreary day in the Massachusetts town of Arkham.

### **Act 0: The Prologue**

#### **Description:**

Act 0 is a warm-up and introduction to the investigation which will lead the group deeper down the rabbit-hole in follow-up acts. The characters meet and employer who send them to retrieve a stolen play, they meet a dangerous cult (which are only pawns of the true villain) and eventually discover the location of the play on a nearby island. Keep careful note of which investigators actually read the play during this Act. The Core clues of the scenario should be discovered in the scenario, no matter which direction the investigation takes them.

### **Act 0: Core Clues**

Location of Yama's Gate Theater  
Location of Muskeget Island  
Le Rideau Final Manuscript

### **Investigation Hook:**

This scenario best works if the Investigators are experts, professionals or "private eyes" already. The Investigators each receive a telegram or letter from a firm known as the Boston Antiques Society. Representing the interests of the firm is a Private Eye from Boston known as Jon Finnigan. Jon's main task was to assemble a team of investigators with the skills and qualities his employer in Boston is searching for. If the Investigator's agree to assist in finding the missing play "Le Rideau Final" which was stolen by two Irish second-story men from Boston, he will transfer the funds his employer has prepared for its safe return. Both men who were suspected thieves (One by the name of Tommy Cullen was a known associate of the Boston mafia and the other Aden Sloane, a master of disabling burglar alarms). The two men were found dead at the Arkham train station late at night, meaning they arrived here from Boston. Their deaths were highly unusual and has been a closed matter by the Arkham Police. The Boston Antiques Society believes that if the thieves died in Arkham, the missing play may be here as well.

*Actual Play Note: During a play session, one of the Investigators was a Private Investigator and former member of the Boston Police, another was a Criminal with a background in the Irish Mafia whose brother had been one of the thieves of the book found dead. The last Investigator was a Professor at Miskatonic University who studied Art History and was an expert in lost languages and the Occult.*

### **The Fixer:**

Jon Finnigan serves as a handler for the Investigators and may be convinced to forward some money for expenses [Bargain 1-Pt. Spend], in which case Jon will transfer fees into an account that can be withdrawn for expenditures (Assume the characters receive a shared pool of Credit Rating, with 1 point for every 2 Investigators). As an alcoholic, Jon is more interested in the nightlife of Arkham while he is being handsomely paid, than assisting the investigators directly. If asked to intervene in something more than some paper



pushing, Mr. Finnigan gives the characters a long winded "I'm too old for this shit" speech, citing how his cases in Boston sometimes ran afoul of local organized crime there. Convincing Jon to assist directly is possible but requires some Reassurance [1-Pt. Spend] that he's not going to be in any physical danger. Jon will spend much of his time trying to seduce the young women of Arkham back to his small room at the Borden Arms Hotel. Jon Finnigan managed to bribe a local Arkham Police patrolman who arrived at the scene of the two dead thieves and was given a handbill that was found in one of their jackets. He'll impart the handbill or flyer to the most responsible looking Investigator or the one who seems most at ease with his drinking habit. The flyer is one of the first core clues of the investigation.

**\*Core Clue\*** [Languages: Sanskrit] The handbill lists an address in clear English, 213 River St., but the rest of the flyer is in Sanskrit and has an image of a many-headed cobra in the background. The flyer, if translated, reveals that a new theater is being opened from an immigrant-owned Import-Export warehouse that primarily sells oriental rugs. The theater, being run only at night, will retell Hindu legends of the gods on stage and the name of the venue is "Yama's Gate".

*Actual Play Note: The Investigators didn't seem to care that Jon Finnigan was letting them do all the legwork while he sat at Borden Arms Hotel drinking whiskey throughout. After all, the Depression hit hard and they were just glad to have paying jobs...*

### **Jon Finnigan (Cowardly Private Eye)**

Three Things: Always wearing a Fedora, frequently has a toothpick in his mouth when thinking, thick Irish-accent

Abilities: Athletics 4, Firearms 4, Scuffling 3, Health 5  
Awareness Mod/Stealth Mod: +1/+2

Attacks: Unarmed (-2 damage)

.38 Revolver (+1 damage)

### **Father Glancy's Warning**

[Floating Scene]

Father Toren Glancy is a Catholic priest from Boston who has been following Jon Finnigan and the story of the missing play. After leaving the Borden Arms Hotel, the Investigators may realize they're being followed [Sense Trouble Diff 3]. At the Keeper's option: Father Glancy may either be an agent of

the Vatican's secret library trying to lock the banned play away or he may be an insane conspiracy theorist full of anxious warnings. If confronted for following them [Intimidation, Cop Talk, Bargain, Flattery], he will impart the Investigators a dire warning about the missing play. His clothes are likely to be in disrepair and he may appear to be quite mad, but he tells the Investigators that reading the play is dangerous, its contents are cancerous for the soul. He will warn them destroy the book if they find it. Father Glancy is an old man and isn't of much use in a fight, but he might be willing to help the Investigators on minor errands if persuaded with donations for food or new clothes.

*Actual Play Note: This scene is presented mostly to foreshadow what will occur later on Muskeget Isle, if the Keeper doesn't feel it's necessary to warn them, this scene can be removed altogether, but if the Investigators get to know the mad priest – it makes the shock much more intense later on.*

### **Strange Headlines of the Arkham Gazette:**

At least one Investigator should have a chance to stumble upon Thursday's issue of the Arkham Gazette (which should be the same day as the Investigation begins), the newspaper will mention the theft of the Boston Museum's banned play, but also with other strange and maybe unrelated stories. The purpose of most of these headlines are to establish a creepy setting or fuel for Red Herrings that distract from the core investigation. Gamemasters are encouraged not to let Investigators take too long following leads that go nowhere, but penalize them in some fashion for wasting time – allow the villains of the story to move their plans along or use Antagonist Reaction scenes that will be presented throughout.

*Actual Play Note: A lone Investigator did make a train ride to Boston to look into some of the stranger headlines, but I made it clear that nothing was to be found and their trip became more dangerous as they got a tip-off that the Irish mafia had learned they were looking into the deaths and theft. They quickly turned their investigations back to Arkham to avoid a fight in the streets of Boston.*

Strange Headlines for October 10th (\* Core Clue Related, ^ Red Herring):

- 1.\*"Le Rideau Final" is stolen from the Boston Museum (see Newspaper Headline)\*
- 2.^The grave of a playwright named Vernon Harte in Boston was defiled.



3.^Three children playing hopscotch in a Boston West End playground were put into the hospital for stabbing each other with pencils.

4.\*A Ship of immigrants from India and Asia has arrived in Arkham and the river-side neighborhoods are becoming overcrowded and full of unemployed. Local xenophobes fear that recent disappearances and crime are on an increase due to these foreign elements.\*

5.^Hundreds of seagulls have been washing onto beaches along the East Coast, the phenomenon is occurring in Arkham and Boston. Miskatonic University scientists claim that it could be an indicator for a mass extinction event.

6.^The Federal Bureau of Investigation has dispatched agents to Arkham, keeping an eye out for foreign influence from Communist sympathizers, labor union fanatics and anarchists.

### **Avenues of Investigation:**

*/Some of these examples are presented from actual play and have been added in for simplicity/*

Researching the Play- The Investigator's may try to go to the Miskatonic University Library and research "Le Rideau Final" itself. [Primary Investigative Skills Needed: Library Use, Art History]

Researching their Employer- The Investigators may be paranoid enough to try and verify who is really paying them to find the play. Those Investigators with academic skills and contacts are best suited to this. [Primary Investigative Skills Needed: Accounting, Art History, History]

Investigating the Dead Thieves- Going to the Arkham Police station may not work for every character, but current or ex-Police, Private Investigators or others who can work within the law may be in luck. [Primary Investigative Skills Needed: Cop Talk, Law]

Investigating Yama's Gate Theater- Physically visiting the Yama's Gate theater is a lead in the right direction towards finding the play. [Primary Investigative Skills Needed: Reassurance, Occult, Assess Honesty]

### **Researching the Play:**

If the Investigators go to the Miskatonic Library or a similar source of knowledge, they can search for

articles and books relating to "The Final Curtain." [Library Use, Art History] Investigation reveals that the original play had no title and was banned by the Vatican in 1829 after being performed only once by its presumed author in Paris, a man named Jean Marseilles. The play's performance had sparked a riot and a theater fire that killed dozens. All known copies were believed to have been destroyed by the Church, but somehow the version that has arrived in Boston survived, meaning that as the last play of its kind it is very valuable. If the Investigators search this avenue but lack the appropriate skills to gain information, the Keeper may introduce Professor Armitage as a NPC guide of the Library, who is willing to help them find the information they seek, but also quietly keeping tabs on what they're researching into. A friendly Armitage may give the Investigators a stern warning about seeking forbidden books.

*Actual Play Note: The Investigators actually did not perform this step until a later act, they were largely ignorant of some of the more intimate details of the play during this point in the story.*

### **Researching the Employer:**

If the Investigators suspect something fishy about their employer who is seeking the lost play, they may want to inquire via phone-calls, telegrams or other means of contact for their firm in Boston. [Accounting, Art History, History] Investigators with academic backgrounds or appropriate skills have little trouble contacting Dr. Peter Willer of the Boston Historical Society who contributes heavily to the Boston Antiques Firm and helps coordinate donations to the Museum's collection. He's the one who is seeking to reclaim the lost Museum piece and is distraught that after being recently donated, someone would steal it. He will mention that a number of other items were stolen, including some Egyptian jewelry, but that they had been pawned in Boston by the thieves and recovered by the police. If the Investigators really push for more money in their expense account from Dr. Willer, he may be willing to transfer additional money to the accounts provided they move quickly in their investigation, [Bargain 1-Pt Spend, Investigator's now get twice the amount of shared Credit Rating pool, 1 pt per Investigator].

*Actual Play Note: During the playtest, the Investigator's called to make sure that there wasn't a shadowy figure at the other end of the phone paying their bills. They seemed satisfied simply to*



*find that the man had a name and seemed to be a respectable academic rather than a cackling cultist.*

### **Investigating the Dead Thieves:**

The bodies of the dead thieves from Boston are being kept in the morgue at the Arkham Police Station. Their names are Tommy Cullen and Aden Sloane, identified from records of the Boston Police. Detective Mickey Harrigan has been assigned the case and may be willing to let Investigators view the bodies, the Arkham Police currently list the deaths of the two men as an animal attack, though the circumstances are strange. [Cop Talk 1-Pt spend] allows the Investigators access to the bodies. (Investigators who have the Criminal occupation or who have 0 Credit Rating may not be allowed a spend, while Investigator's with the Police Detective occupation may not be required to spend a point as long as they justify it as part of their investigation.) Viewing the two bodies in the morgue is a gruesome and unnerving sight, both men have been lacerated severely over most of their bodies and their throats torn out and flesh drained of blood [Stability Test Difficulty 2].

### **Detective Mickey Harrigan**

Three Things: Honest cop, Disarmingly friendly smile, athletic build

Abilities: Athletics 8, Scuffling 5, Weapons 6, Firearms 6

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness/Stealth: +1/+0

Attacks: Police .45 Revolver (+1 damage)

Nightstick (+0 damage)

Unarmed (-2 damage)

### Examining the Dead

Anyone skilled at examining dead bodies [Forensics] can determine that the bodies look as if they were attacked by crows or the talons of other carrion birds over most of their arms and torsos, the Police believe these were post-mortem from scavengers. The killing stroke for each man was a bite to the throat by something that may have been a wild dog. It is strange that both bodies would be completely drained of blood and this was not something done during the autopsy, which can be verified by the coroner's report. Detective Mickey Harrigan will explain that the site of the crime was relatively bloodless. Both men were found or dragged, to an area next to the train

station, their screams were heard by other passengers disembarking at night and they were found in the early hours of the morning by Police at the train station. [Forensics 1-Pt Spend] By examining the bodies more thoroughly, it appears that the talons made by what appears to be a large bird of some sort, were not post-mortem but are more indicative of defensive wounds on the hands and chest. The throat looks like something more akin to attack by a long snout of a crocodile than a dog. There is an unnatural smelling organic substance in the wounds, akin to saliva, it smells vaguely of almonds and seems inexplicable [Stability Test Difficulty 3]. Anyone searching the pockets or clothing of the dead thieves may also discover something notable, aside from the pocket money and personal effects that are easy to find [Evidence Collection], one of the dead men has a gold ring of Egyptian-make that can be identified as missing from the Boston Museum collection. Returning this piece or pawning it nets another bonus windfall in cash from either the employer or local fences [Grant the investigators +2 Credit Pool rating], if the local police can be persuaded that the evidence will be returned.

### **Investigating Yama's Gate Theater:**

River Street in Arkham in the 1930s is a warren for the unemployed or underemployed immigrant laborers from Ireland, Poland, Eastern Europe and even India and China. Much of the area is impoverished and overpopulated apartment blocks, as well as dock warehouses along the Miskatonic River. Investigators with Credit Rating 3+ who linger among the wrong elements of River Street may expose themselves to pick-pocketing, mugging or worse [Sense Trouble Difficulty 4]. The Yama's Gate Theater is known as Kapur Imports during the day, they primarily sell oriental style rugs and furniture from the far East which is usually sold wholesale to department stores in Arkham and Boston. In the day only a few Indian nationals working as laborers and the owner, Shekhar Kapur, are present. Shekhar is a friendly figure and a reasonable businessman, easy enough to approach by Investigators and an innocent fellow in more sinister affairs [Reassurance, Bargain, Cop Talk]. He honestly knows nothing about any theft or a strange play [Assess Honesty], yet he can shed light on Yama's Gate Theater. At night he opens his warehouse to the Indian laborers whom live on River Street, allowing them to rearrange the



warehouse to perform plays retelling the stories of the old gods and heroes of India. He assures Investigators that this keeps the morale of his workforce and helps establish a bit of his home country in a foreign land. Savitri Nair is a play-write and the organizer of Yama's Gate Theater, she doesn't usually come by until after business hours to set up the stage.

#### Meeting Savitri Nair:

Coming to River Street at night is a dangerous journey for all but those who seem to fit in, Investigators with Occupations in Private Investigator, Criminal or Hobo have no trouble at all. Other occupations may be subjected to a surprise mugging [Sense Trouble Diff 5 at night]. Savitri Nair is a beautiful woman who wears traditional dress from her homeland, she is well educated and speaks English very well. She will act too busy to answer questions unless the Investigators are friendly to her [Flattery, Reassurance]. She'd be happy to have the Investigators watch her play performances, which are mostly adapted from Hindu epics. She recognizes the flyer as an advertisement she disperses among the local Indian communities and is glad that one of them had reached Boston if its mentioned. [Assess Honesty 1-Pt spend] Savitri is hiding something and does not appear comfortable if the Investigator's line of inquiry continues about strange plays or direct questions about the stolen play. She will not be intimidated if their questioning becomes too uncomfortable and several of her actors happen to be muscular men wearing traditional Indian dress and carrying knives, these trained assassins have no qualms about quietly dispatching nosy Americans and sending their bodies into the river (there should be at least three Cult of Yama Assassins for each Investigator). If an Investigator analyzes the tattoos and body paint of some of the actors and actresses they may recognize the symbols [Anthropology, History or Occult 1-Pt Spend], revealing that many of the theater group belong to a religious cult of the Hindu god of death known as Yama. Savitri will show the Investigators about the warehouse if it puts them at ease, including her bookshelf of Indian epics, primarily written in Hindi and Sanskrit (no sign of the stolen play which would be in French).

*Actual Play Note: The Investigators seemed to figure out something was amiss with the theater*

*group but knew that direct confrontation with the cult would be suicide, they decided to leave and come back later to shadow Savitri Nair and the cult...*

#### **Thugs of River Street**

Three Things: Foreign accents, patchwork clothes, foul body odor

Abilities: Athletics 4, Scuffling 4, Weapons 3, Health 4  
Awareness/Stealth: +0/+1

Attacks: Unarmed (-2 damage), Knives or Clubs (-1 damage)

#### **Savitri Nair**

Three Things: Beautiful and lithe, traditional dress, a sunflower in her hair

Abilities: Athletics 8, Scuffling 4, Health 6

Hit Threshold: 4

Awareness/Stealth: +1/+0

Attacks: Unarmed (-2 damage)

#### **The Shadow of Yama**

[Antagonist Reaction Scene]

If the Investigators are asking too many questions about stolen plays and the dead thieves from Boston, they may find themselves followed by Cult of Yama assassins. The men don't leave River Street but will become their shadow as long as they stay within the poorer and less patrolled neighborhoods. If the Assassins eavesdrop their true purpose, they may decide it is time to kill the Investigators and let the gods sort it out [Sense Trouble Diff 5]. There are two Assassins per Investigator and they strike from the shadows with their curved daggers. Their attack is mostly to highlight the dangers of the organization the Investigators are attempting to infiltrate and let them know they are on the right track, a couple well placed shots should make quick work of the killers, who fight to the death except the last man whom will attempt to flee.





### **Cult of Yama Assassins**

Three Things: Tattoos of the God of Death, traditional Indian attire, muscular build.

Abilities: Athletics 6, Scuffling 4, Weapons 6, Health 4  
Awareness/Stealth: +1/+1

Attacks: Unarmed (-2 damage), Traditional Dagger (-1 damage)

### **Direct Confrontation with the Yama Cult**

[Antagonist Reaction Scene]

If the Investigators make a show of using guns or dispatching the members of the Cult of Yama, Savitri attempts escape with some of her actors and actresses into a rowboat, while the remaining members of the Cult set fire to the theater using petrol and gas lanterns. The rowboat will head for the Island of Muskeget, but if it is being observed by Investigators, they see some winged indescribable horror swoop down from the dark clouds of the night sky and pluck Savitri from the boat into the sky. Her flesh is shredded by the part-vulture part-insectoid creature visible only during flashes of lightning and blood rains from the sky with her fading screams [Stability Diff 4]. The creature may also decide to pull her from the warehouse through a skylight if the Investigators have her cornered, to much the same result. The beast flees into the sky unless killed. [For creature stats see Byakhee in the Trail of Cthulhu core book, pg. 127].

*Actual Play Note: About using the Byakhee Servitor at this stage in the scenario, it should only appear as a winged black shadow with claws and teeth and perhaps only one observant Investigator should get to see it at all. Its appearance should always be obscured by clouds, darkness or showers of broken glass from a skylight, etc. Not knowing exactly what they are dealing with, the Investigators tend to react more fearfully to its presence.*

### **Shadowing the Cult**

If the Investigators are more discreet in their investigations, they can shadow the Cult of Yama's activities at night or disguise themselves to be more indiscreet [Shadowing or Disguise Difficulty 4]. The Cult's typical routine is to perform a play at night and then a volunteer from the crowd decides to go with two members of the Cult of Yama, whom take them via rowboat on the warehouse pier and begin paddling down the Miskatonic towards the sea. This volunteer is given two golden coins and allowed to smoke opium in a cellar hidden beneath a rug in

the warehouse (Investigators are unlikely to find this secret opium den otherwise, unless they have access to an empty warehouse and spend 1-Pt in Architecture). They are told that they will make the great journey to meet Yama [Languages: Hindi to comprehend]. This type of sacrifice may only occur once per week or at holy days for Yama, but for the purpose of this scenario, the Investigators happen to be able to witness one of these moments (Keepers who wish to make the Cult's activities harder to determine, may not have this occur on the first night of observation). Following the rowboat is possible if the Investigators can quickly acquire a boat themselves. The boat continues its journey to Muskeget Island in the Nantucket Sound, where the Investigators may discover further horrors. The location of the island may be discovered if an investigator can eavesdrop during the ritual as to the location of where the boat is going.

*Actual Play Note: Investigators decided that stealing a boat from a nearby dock in the middle of the night wouldn't cause much trouble in such a poorly patrolled neighborhood and they could always return it before morning.*

### **Alternative Ways to the Island**

\*Core Clue\*

The Cultists of Yama take sacrifices to Muskeget Island in Nantucket Sound, this information could be learned by capturing and interrogating one of the Cult of Yama thugs themselves [Intimidation].

Alternatively, dead opium-addicts may occasionally be found in the waters near the island, a fact that could be imparted by the local Arkham Police [Cop Talk]. It could be that following a red herring from the headlines [Zoology or Library Search], such as the dead seagulls washing ashore, leads a breadcrumb trail back to the island.

### **The Horror of Muskeget Island**

Some of the history of this island has been fictionalized for this scenario. The Island once belonged to a man named Abel Harwich in 1877, a simple farmer from England [History or Research 2-Pt spend]. This information will not be relevant until later on and most of it should be misplaced from library and landowner records due to the influence of the modern Harwich family, otherwise Investigators only learn that it has been abandoned for decades and used to be a colonial farm [History or Research 1-Pt spend]. The Island itself is mostly





barren and has a single rotted wooden dock with a gravel path to service inland travel. Along the island's sandy hills are sparse trees and shrubs that provide some cover at night but do little to mask a traveler's movements during daylight hours. The Cult of Yama brings "willing" sacrifices to the island at night via a rowboat and takes them to the barn at the farm located in the center of the island. Two members of the Cult of Yama escort the victim who seems to be drugged. [Pharmacy 1-Pt spend] identifies the victim as having been under the influence of opiates. The Cult members only walk on the island while swinging a brazier burning with incense and chanting in Hindi prayers to Yama. There is a central farm on the Island with two buildings, a cabin and a locked barn. Near the farm's cabin is a field of sunflowers that seems to dominate the surrounding area. These sunflowers grow unusually tall and vibrant [Botany]. There is also a rusted cargo truck from the early 1900s parked here as well. Investigators skilled with knowledge of architecture [Architecture] can trace the construction of the buildings to around the 1870s.

#### The Barn

The outside of the barn doors are locked with a length of chain and a padlock [Locksmith 1-Pt spend to open]. Alternatively, the Cult of Yama Assassins have the key to this lock and open it to bring their victim inside. Willing participants are brought to the center of the barn and their chins forced onto a dangling meat-hook from a rusted

ceiling chain. The Cult members then perform a ritual bleeding of the victim with sacrificial knives and eventually place two gold coins on the eyes of the man after death. [Witnessing the ritual sacrifice is a Stability Test Difficulty 3; the test is Difficulty 5 if the Investigators witness the corpse being reawakened as a zombie – the eventual conclusion of the task]. The zombie will not attack the Cult of Yama as long as they kept their incense brazier burning and continue their protective chants. By investigating the Barn, certain clues can be ascertained. [Forensics] Searching the Barn discovers the floor is stained with layers of blood in a strange splash pattern that seems to have ritual meaning. [Occult] A twisting symbol made in yellow paint lays just beneath the layers of blood on the wooden beams of the barn floor, it appears to be a 3-pronged sun symbol or swastika. If it is a sun symbol, why are the cult's rituals being performed at night? [Evidence Collection] A barrel of old farming tools: shovels, pitchforks, hoes, etc. contain a blacksmith stamp dating to the year 1879 and bear the initials H.W., most likely the stamp of the owner or creator.

#### The Cabin

This moldering cabin was once an old farmhouse in the 1870s and most rooms are dust-ridden with rotting furniture. Broken windows and creaking doors allow access to the cabin with ease [Architecture]. There is numerous damage from animals that have made the house home over the years. Only one part of the house has eerily been



repaired and maintained the upstairs bedroom, which is obscured with yellow curtains and accessed by the creaking staircase. Clues in the House [Evidence Collection or Library Use] notes old books, portraits and papers identifying the home as having belonged to Abel Harwich in 1877. There is a painting depicting his Native American wife, the fading painting is titled "Sunflower." Abel Harwich was a farmer on the island colony who married a Native American wife, what is legible from the books paints a rather ordinary life of rural survival.

#### Accessing the Yellow Room

[Locksmith] Inside the locked upstairs room, the wall of the bedroom has been papered with the ancient yellowed pages of the stolen play "Le Rideau Final". Failing a [Stability Test Difficulty 5] Investigators who catch glimpse of the writing are forced to continue reading until the terrible play is finished. The sequence of the wall paper pages is set in order to the chapters and Investigators find that if they could not read French before, they seem to have no issue translating the bizarre document. This obsession fades if the Investigators are forcibly removed from the room or have finished reading the play [See the "King in Yellow" play and what it imparts to an Investigator for reading it, Trail of Cthulhu core book pg. 106]. The only other thing of note in the room is a wooden chair facing the window where a man remains seated. If the Investigators attempt to talk to the man, they get no response and instead find a dead man with his throat slit and two gold coins sitting on his eyes, with the leather cover of the stolen play sitting in his lap, missing the pages. [If the Investigators had met Father Glancy earlier, this is a great time for them to encounter him again, only having been murdered by the cult. If the Keeper did not use Father Glancy, an appropriate NPC, such as a Source of Stability could be replaced instead. This is a Stability Test Difficulty 3, Difficulty 5 if they knew Father Glancy from before. Cruel Keepers may use this as a moment to have Father Glancy or a Source of Stability close to the Investigators reanimate as a Zombie and attack them.]

*Actual Play Note: the only Investigator not effected to read the play, instead decided this was a good time to burn the pages and the yellow curtains of the room with his lighter, while the others were busy*

*saving its pages most greedily to fulfill their task. This resulted in some intense drama between the Investigators who'd become obsessed with the book and those who had not. They ended up recovering all but a third of the play due to this scene.*

#### **The Servants of Yama**

[Antagonist Reaction]

Unless the Investigators have [Language: Hindi] and are reciting the prayers of the cult while burning incense in a similar fashion, they expose themselves to attack by the Zombies of Muskeget Island as they traverse its sandy dunes. [Occult 1-Pt Spend] Identifies the ritual of the Yama Cult as more than mere ceremony, they are legitimately using it for protection during travel against the restless dead. Those living beings on the island not practicing this ritual expose themselves to attack by zombies animated by the Cult, the Keeper is encouraged to make this attack occur whenever it would be most dramatic. The Zombies are often buried in the sandy dunes or lay dormant and rotting in a field of sunflowers until they sense the life-force of intruders on the island. They awaken and make a straight forward attack at Investigators, heedless of their own safety [Sense Trouble Difficulty 3 during the day, Difficulty 4 at night]. There should be at least 1 Zombie per Investigator, more if the Investigators have allowed the Cult time to make further sacrifices. The zombies are in varying states of decay and condition, some have been picked at by sea gulls, but all have two gold coins where their eyes would be. An attack by a swarm of Zombies is a harrowing event [Stability Test Difficulty 4].

[For creature stats, see ToC book for Zombies pg. 159, note: these zombies are more akin to Voodoo zombies and do not have an infectious bite unless the Keeper feels particularly vicious]

*Actual Play Note: Investigators were ambushed by the Zombies at night, but after deciding their firearms were relatively ineffective, decided to use the rusted truck on the island as a means of running them over. This required a very tense Mechanical Repair roll to get the vehicle functioning as other Investigators held the undead at bay...*



### **The Horrid Flying Thing**

[Antagonist Reaction]

This event should only occur at night and only if the Investigators trailed the Cultists to the Island after Savitri Nair's mysterious death. Whenever the Investigators are outside on the island at night, they may hear a strange piping sound as if from a piccolo and hear the distant flapping of membranous wings in the cloudy sky. If the Investigators are in a building, they may hear something land onto the roof of the barn or the cabin, the clicking of claws against the roofing. These scenes are designed only to frighten and the creature will not risk direct conflict with the Investigators at this time. The Byakhee Servant is merely spying on the Investigators' progress for its master. [Stability Test Difficulty 3].

*Actual Play Note: The Investigators fled to the barn to avoid the flapping wings and then heard the bulk of the black insectoid thing land on the roof. They opened fire with their guns through the roof and managed to wound the creature, but only enough so that foul almond smelling ooze dripped through the holes in the roof before the Byakhee fled into the night sky once more.*

### **Ending Act Zero**

The Ending of Act Zero should be an introduction to the Investigators of the Play itself. Unknown to the Investigators, the original play was copied by the antagonist, Neil Harwich after being stolen. The original was left as a psychic booby-trap to anyone else seeking its missing pages. The Investigators should now be thoroughly drawn into the strange cancer of Carcosa. Allow time at the end of the scenario for Investigators to deal with their employer and Jon Finnigan. Encourage debate whether or not they return the play's pages if recovered instead of destroyed. Whether their reputations have been affected due to criminal acts or allow recovery by Sources of Stability. *Actual Play Note: The Investigators returned the play to the Boston museum and gained some wealth from the process and reputation; however, the Third Act had been destroyed by the fire started by the Private Investigator during his insanity.*

**The Reward:** Returning the Play to Jon Finnigan or directly to his employers in Boston is worth an increase of +1 Credit Rating for all Investigators. But this will not be the end of our story...





# CINCINNATI RIVERFRONT NEWS

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Available here and  
there and anywhere  
and everywhere

## OHIO RIVER MONSTER SIGHTINGS CONTINUE

Our aquatic friend was last spotted Wednesday evening down towards Ripley , and you can "believe it or not"!

- More on page 5



## SPECIAL FEATURE: THE RISE & FALL & RECOVERY OF SPORTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By Jane Smith & P.R. Grune

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## **Auto Racing**

This is a large pastime in North America and Europe. There are two types of racing today, Track and Grand Prix. Both, however, use super cars that are either custom built by individuals or by car manufacturers in small batches. There is little in the way of rules limiting their design. This leads to a lot of use of nitrox boost which in turn leads to intense fires and the boost canisters are very explosive.

The racetracks for Track racing consist of ovals or figure 8s with a bridge crossing the center. They run from one to three miles per lap. The races usually last 50 to 100 laps. Racing speeds top out at about 330 miles per hour on the straightaways.

The tracks for grand prix style racing vary from two to five miles per lap. The track is up and down hills and around curves of all kinds. The races are slower than track racing but depends more on the skill of the driver to navigate the track.

## **Baseball**

This is still a major pastime of the Americas, Japan, Korea, Australia, and India. This has overtaken Cricket in popularity in Australia and India.

The major difference is that there is no longer a ban on steroids. This allowed them to move the fences back which have killed off the old, quaint tiny stadiums in favor of major multipurpose stadiums housed in many Dreamlands today. As a result, most umpires overlook the occasional spitball, or scuffed ball used by a pitcher. Yet, with the increased strength of the batters it has been necessary to put up netting for the sidelines

The teams have expanded from 9 players to 11 players by adding an additional outfielder and a "short" fielder who plays between the infielders and the outfielders. The short fielder can be drawn into the infield at times when the situation calls for it.

On the offensive side there is a universal Designated Hitter rule. The one major change being that when the DH comes up and the pitcher has been changed then the DH must be changed.

On the Umpiring side balls and strikes are being called by computer and there is an expanded video review system.

The seasons have expanded from the 1<sup>st</sup> of March to the end of September each year. October and November are spent in playoffs and a true World Series. December and January are officially off and official training camps start in February.

## **Battleball**

This is a conglomeration of American Football, Canadian Football, Australian Rules Football, and Rugby. The field is much larger than a normal

American Football field being 150 yards in length and 80 yards wide.

The teams have changed as well, and now have 14 players on the field at any time. This is done by having the offensive line consisting of a center, two guards, two tackles, and two ends on the line. The backfield consists of two wide outs (who must line up outside of the ends), a quarterback, and three backs (who must line up behind the line inside of the tackles). There is also a roamer who can line up anywhere in the backfield. On defense you have 14 players of which no more than nine can be on the line of scrimmage.

There are still four downs to either score or advance the ball fifteen yards. Advancing the ball past the goal line scores six or seven points. If they elect to take the six points the team is given the ball on the 5-yard line and given one play which adds three points, if not the team is awarded seven points. Field goals from the 25-yard line in score two points and those from outside the 25-yard line scores four points. The teams are limited to 30 players and with as many as 2-5 injuries per team per game, many times players will find themselves playing iron man (Playing both offense and defense)

Kickoffs occur from the 30-yard line and if it goes out of bound without being touched by the other team it is taken over at the point it went out plus 15 yards. If it somehow goes out of the end zone then the team takes over at the 15.

Many teams have adopted the forward pass and lateral maneuver. Once the pass has been completed then any member of the team is eligible to receive laterals. The play ends when the ball carrier is tackled or if the ball has not been advanced in a five second period (quarterbacks who have just received the snap get ten seconds to advance the ball past the line of scrimmage).

## **Battlebots**

Battlebots consist of mechanicals and automats. The mechanicals consist of three levels of under 100 Kg, 100-250 kg and 250-500 kg. The bot must be controlled by a radio remote controller by a single person. Weapons consist of a variety of sharpened spinners, flippers, hammers, axes, even flamethrowers.

They battle either one on one or a free for all with four robots each out for themselves. The arena is a large square with various obstacles that can be tripped. These include a large hammer, a screw, saws in the floor. A flamethrower, and a couple of pits.

Each battle lasts three minutes and there are judges if there is not a clear winner.



Automat battles consist of battles between two humanoid robots. Each automat is controlled by a two-person team. Controller one controls the movements of the Automat by wearing a suit on that will relay the movements of the controller to the Automat. They control the legs and torso of the Automat. Controller number two sits in a chair with joystick controllers. These controls the arms and weapons of the automat.

These fights consist of three two-minute rounds with a five-minute break between rounds for repairs and tweaks. Again, there is a three-judge panel to determine a winner if there is not a clear knock out.



### **Death Race**

The Death Race circuit started in Australia with races from Darwin to Perth and Melbourne to Darwin. It earned the name Death Race when several people died during the first race, two from a crash and the remaining four died of exposure after their cars broke down.

The rules are simple: race from one city to another checking in at different checkpoints. The races are usually 1,000 to 2,500 miles and include both road and off-road portions.

Originally, they had to drive standard cars; over time this has been changed. The teams usually consist of two to three members, a driver, and a mechanic with an optional navigator / backup driver. The engines were improved, heavy duty roll cages installed, off road suspensions improved, and reinforced frames.

Soon however drivers were deliberately trying to crash into opposing cars to force them out of the race. Without rules against it cars began to develop armor and weapons. Finally, they have had to limit firearm weapons. So not it became a balancing act between engine power, off track suspension, armor, weapons, crew comfort and repair parts storage.

As more and more territory becomes demonground then this opens more areas up to Death Races.

### **Drone Hunting**

Drone hunting is played by three to ten three motorcycle teams. These teams consist of two small fast single person motorcycle "Blockers" and one two-person "Hunter" bike.

The motorcycles race around a track filled with jumps and obstacles. The "Catcher", the person sitting behind the driver of the two-person bike is equipped with a net that they use to catch small very fast drones that appear along the track. The Blockers attempt to heel the other teams Hunter bikes from making a catch or letting their blockers interfere with your catch bike.

If a Catcher grabs a drone it's worth four points. If the Catcher knocks down a drone it's worth two points. If a person on a blocker bike or the driver of the hunter bike knock down a drone then it's worth one point. Should a team's hunter bike be knocked out the catcher can mount one of the teams' blocker bikes and then it becomes the team's hunter bike.

Drone Hunting are done on outside courses that run through forested terrain or old warehouses where dodging the buildings columns and man-made dirt jumps.

After a designated number of laps, which is unknown to the teams, the race is ended and the points calculated.

### **Drone Racing**

One sport that has gained a huge following is Drone Racing. This consists of up to fifty drones racing around a course of up to a mile per lap. The drones are piloted by a single individual who holds a radio control and wears a virtual reality mask that sees what their drone sees.

People tuning in can select to see the race overall or through a specific drones' view. They can switch at any point from one to the other.

They race around a course either inside or outside in which they not only have to fly the fastest but hit checkpoints. Each checkpoint has a series of color coded holographic rings. There are three ones running from one point, the middle size being three points, and the smallest being five points. If they miss all of them they get no points.

Once they complete ten to fifty laps the scores are tallied and the winner declared based off of a combination of time to complete and checkpoint scores.

### **Electronic Warfare**

The electronic warfare league is rapidly expanding worldwide and whose players are among the most recognized in the under 30 age group. They are not



recognized by their face but their gaming handle as the Electronic Warfare Gaming League is a computer gaming league.

Each team consists of four persons sitting at a series of computer terminals. They have headsets and microphones as their only means of communications.

Each team is committed against head to head against another team in a series of first person shooter games. Each team is sponsored by a company or city but there are a couple of "all-star" teams that have private sponsors.

Each team plays once a week accumulating points towards a championship tournament that is held in the late half of July and August.

There was a huge scandal two seasons ago when the Western All Stars were accused of shaving points against the Calcutta Bombers. The investigation concluded that two of the top Western All Star players were banned for 10 years and the owner who was behind it was banned for life.



### **Gladiatorial Games**

The Gladiatorial Games are not yet a major sport but are rapidly gaining popularity from the Mediterranean to Sub-Saharan Africa into Eastern Europe and across Asia.

The games consist of a series of one on one mock combats that take place in an area filled with obstacles, weapons, and armor. Each gladiator enters with a weapon and a piece of armor.

Each of the gladiators wear a special suit that is covered in sensors. These sensors transmit hits to a central computer who then takes into account the type of weapon, strength of the blow, and armor protection. It determines the damage, if any, or if it is a fatal blow. This information is then transmitted back to the suit the effects. The suit can render limbs harder to move or even totally useless.

### **Ice War**

Ice War is the surviving variation of Ice Hockey. The Ice War League consists of a series of teams covering the northern states of the United States, Canada, Siberia, one from Hokkaido Japan, Scandinavia, Iceland and even an international team from Antarctica.

The major variations from old hockey to Ice War is that the ice space was increased by 25%. They added one player called the defender who cannot move past their own team's blue line. The teams are limited to fifteen active players on the team's bench.

While fighting was not legal or encouraged it is not as penalized or quickly responded to as on older hockey. The one thing that is very penalized however is if members of a team come off the bench to participate in these fights. Any players penalized for entering a fight off the bench are thrown out of the game and with limited benches it could cripple a team.

### **Ninja Warrior**

This started in Japan in the 90s with 100 competitors moving to complete a four-stage obstacle course. This proved very successful in Japan drawing in competitors from all over the world. The original show consisted of serious athletes and amateurs as well as the wacky competitors and celebrities. It later expanded to have a separate female competition.

Ninja Warrior was then taken over by the Americans who made some basic changes to the game. First off it was still open to only 100 qualifiers but gone were the wacky competitors and celebrities. In addition, female competitors were included in the ninja warrior competition with male competitors.

The last major change was that you did not need to complete the obstacle course stage one or two to go on. The ones who went "the furthest the fastest" went on to the next round until the number of participants were filled for that stage. In addition, some were selected by judges to continue on, mostly for public appeal.

In addition, they have expanded the Ninja warrior to include team play with the number of four-member teams from around the world coming to compete increasing as time went on.

The last variation that has been introduced is a head to head competition in which the participants run parallel obstacle courses that at points merge at several points to use a combined course obstacle.



## Octagon

This is an outgrowth of mixed martial arts fighting. It gets its name from the ring which is in the form of an octagon surrounded by a ten-foot-high fence. Into this four participants enter and one emerges the victor.

The bouts are so violent that the pair of referees walk a small catwalk outside the fencing. Their main rules are that the referees call someone as being out they are no longer allowed to attack or be attacked further. If the person called out is conscious then they must make their way to the exit. If not, the fight will go on around them.

Each bout has a three-minute round and usually go five to twelve rounds or until there is only one participant answering the bell. In cases where the fight goes the maximum number of scheduled rounds then a five-judge panel will determine the winner.



## Paint Ball

This game is played by two five-person teams or Army. Each team has their own special colors and have to include one female on their team. Two team members are equipped with paint ball pistols, two with semi-automatic rifles or close in assault weapons, and the remaining person can be equipped with an automatic weapon or a sniper weapon (The teams' choice).

The battles take place on specially designed battlefields come inside buildings some outside. The number of obstacles is equal for both sides of the battlefield, and the team captains choose where the teams flag is to be planted.

Each battle lasts until one team has captured and returned to their thirds of the battlefield with the enemy's flag. Failing that they need to "disable" or "kill" all of the opposition army. If neither condition is met at the end of thirty minutes then the battle is called a draw.

Anytime the player is hit a referee will determine if the hit is a kill, disable, or a wound. The player must then act in accordance with the referee's decision.



## Pursuit

One wildly popular sports is Pursuit. This pits ten ordinary volunteer participants against the pursuers. They move around a "game board" that is actually a 5 block by 5 block cityscape. If they leave this area during the main game they are disqualified.

The teams must survive, collecting rewards, for 30 minutes until the escape route opens. The escape route has a single entrance unknown to both sides until it is revealed to the teams. In addition to the players, there are 100 non-players who wander around the game board. The participants may not enter any buildings.

There are four pair of pursuers that operate under a strict set of rules. One they cannot do anything until activated. They are activated at the 5, 10, 15, and 20-minute mark, unless triggered by some game condition. The pursuit team must remain together and only move at a walking pace unless "In Pursuit".

The pursuit team goes In Pursuit when they have spotted one of the participants. At that point they can run and chase them as long as they maintain visual contact with their target. All the pursuers have to do is touch the participant in order to capture them and eliminate them from the game.

The participants carry an electronic map of the area, which can be activated and deactivated by any participant. It shows the borders of the game area, and any prizes within one block of the participants. Activating this map will reveal to any active pursuit teams that there is a participant in a one block radius of the location of the activated map. At the 30-minute mark the escape route is revealed to the participants via an electronic map that they carry.

Once the escape route is revealed the participants have ten minutes to go through the escape route to the extraction point located in its vice blocks. All the participants who make it to the extraction point within time then win a cash prize as well as any treasures that they have collected.





### Quest

This the ultimate form of live action "Dungeons and Dragons" game. The players form an eight-person team that fights against a similar team. Each team must travel across the playing area battling their opponents in order to capture their relic and return it to their castle. They must complete this within an hour.

The participants are equipped as medieval warriors with various arms and armor. These include swords, axes, bows, shields etc.

Teams can win by controlling both citadels, having both relics in your home citadel, or by killing the opposing king by the time the game ends.

### Soccer

Once one of the most popular sports in the world that is now mostly kept alive by long traditional teams and leagues of Europe and Brazil and a league in North America. The traditional teams and leagues still have enough support to scrape by with their aging fan base trying to pass on their love of the game to their offspring. The North American league is totally supported and run by the sports channel league to fill out their schedules.

### Skyball

Skyball is a version of basketball. This, however, is played on a series of trampolines on a court that is wider and longer than a traditional basketball court. The closer to the basket the smaller but bouncier the trampolines get.

It is played with three forwards, a center and two guards. One of the two guards must always remain on your team's side of the center line. A player may advance the ball by the player bouncing on up to two different trampolines, take a shot, or passing it to another team member.

This game is designed for a lot of fast break points. Points are scored for three points for a dunk or a shot from the largest trampolines. Two points for all other baskets other than foul shots.

Fouls are few and far between and involve a great deal of physical contact between players. When a foul is called the player fouled gets the ball at half court and player committing the foul face off in a 30 second one on one. If the fouled player gets a dunk then he scores two points and the player committing the foul has to sit out for the next minute leaving their team short a player. If the fouled player elects to shoot and scores thus scoring one point and the offending player is out for thirty seconds. Should the thirty second clock expire or a shot is taken and missed then no points are scored and the other side gets the ball.

The Center Rule: Only the center may enter the smallest circle of trampolines without the ball.

The game is played in two halves of 15 minutes.

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So, as you can see sports are alive and well in the world of Dark Conspiracy in a wide variety of forms.

Other works by Paul can be found at these places -





## WOODEN HEART

By Finn Cullen

The grove of trees was secluded, and it was dark. It was ancient and largely unknown. And it was waiting. The eldest of the trees held court there, squatting like a bloated tyrant with a tanglewood crown and grasping miser's fingers raking the earth around its corpulent trunk. Healthy things did not grow there, wholesome plants did not flourish. Birds did not roost in the trees of that grove, not the wise old birds anyway. Ravens shunned it. Foolish fledgling songbirds who fluttered into the tyrant's little realm did not flutter out again. Insects and crawling things flourished and dug and bred greedily in the stinking moisture of the hollows of that grove.

An approaching light, flimsy and weak. Two men picked their way through the night, a lantern held aloft by the older of the two.

"It is much further?" said the younger, a strong young man in his twenties, broad shouldered beneath his rough spun jacket. His voice carried the barely masked complaint of someone who had been out much later than he expected to have been out, and who had travelled much further than he had wanted to.

"No," said the older man. He picked his way between two wiry sentinel trees and carefully stepped down and down and down the grove's steep sides. "We're here Antonio. Watch your footing."

Antonio, the younger man peered down into the place that his neighbour had brought him to and he grimaced. The air was foul.

"This is not a healthy place," he said quietly.

"What is a healthy place?" said the older man hanging the lantern from a jutting branch. "Where in all of Tuscany is healthy? Is safe?"

Antonio recognised the familiar bitterness in his neighbour's voice. "My friend, the cholera has passed us by. You cannot keep blaming..."

"God mocks us," said the older man, pacing slowly to the edge of the clearing, feeling the earth suck hungrily at his boots. "He despises us. I despise him in my turn."

Antonio crossed himself.

"He took my wife from me ten winters past," said the older man, "and left only my boy to remember her by. All the love I had for her I poured into him. My hopes. Everything. And I gave thanks to the Almighty for him. And then the Almighty showed his undying love again." He spat copiously on the earth. "The cholera hung over our town like an unseen angel seeking who he might devour. My boy..."

"Please,"

"My boy!" the old man said angrily, turning and pointing a finger at the younger man. "God showed his contempt for our lives, our hopes, our efforts! Should I bear it in smiling silence, as a woman bears the fists of the drunkard who beats her?" He looked up at the distant sky and bit his thumbnail.

Antonio did not answer at once. He would let his neighbour's anger rage and burn itself out, and what good would argument do for him now, here in this place? This place cared nothing for words. "My grandmother's mother came here," said the old man more quietly now. "She was born in Palermo, but she fled north with nothing but the clothes on her back and a bundle of sticks. The priests called her Strega, a witch. And the Inquisition was still a power in those days. Strega!" He wiped his chin, clearing it of the spittle that had flown there when he had raged.

"A slander," said Antonio

"The truth," said the old man with no shame in the words, but rather pride. "She found this place, this very place, and she added her bundle of sticks to the old wood that grew here. Sticks from the woodlands she'd danced in as a girl."

A gust blew the lantern a little and the shadows moved and encircled the two men. Antonio shivered and looked around, the older man closed his eyes as though embraced.

"There are trees as old as Eden," the old man said, his voice soft, "who drank up the water from the ground when Adam and Lilith coupled in the



midnight heat. Who supped on the tears of Eve who wept when the Almighty's curse fell upon her,"

"We should go home,"

"Trees who sank beneath the deluge and refused to die," the old man said, his voice stronger now, "who knew their enemy for what He was and held on fiercely to life and waited for their moment."

Antonio came slowly toward his friend and took hold of him by the shoulders.

"You're distressed," he said in a voice that shook with fear for his friend's wits, "but you must stop this talk. It is sacrilege. Blasphemy."

The old man's eyes looked into Antonio's and did not know him.

"Trees that gave their wood gladly for the crosses on the sullen brow of stone beyond Jerusalem.

Who rejoiced to drink the blood that - "

"Enough!" Antonio shook the older man roughly, hoping to break him out of this feverish rage that twisted truth and the world around an old man's grief.

"He is with us," said the old man in a triumphant voice, and above them old limbs, ancient limbs moved and creaked in the wind and something cracked and roared and fell. Antonio looked up and raised his hands - too late - and felt a thunderbolt of dry and eager weight strike him on the head.

When pain woke him, it drove away dreams of whispering voices and replaced those dreams with searing hot agony from temple to jaw. He was lying on the ground in the mud beneath that ancient tyrant tree and he was tangled there in down-drooping branches and thorny vines that clustered around its roots. Beneath his wounded head there was mud and bloodied water and his heart was a pounding drum that shook his whole body.

The old man was crouching nearby, hunched over the fallen branch that had struck Antonio. It was bulbous and fibrous, as thick around as a man's thigh, and the old man was sawing off the smaller

shoots and tendrils that writhed and bled grey sap as they fell to the ground.

"Help me," Antonio said, his voice a phlegmy gurgle.

"See what he has given me," the old man said, not looking up from his work. "He is generous. He that my grandmother's mother knew by name, see what he has given me." He put away the knife into his belt and grunted as he hefted up the hewn log of ancient gloating wood. "He will restore to me what was stolen."

"Help me up, help me get free of these..." He was going to say 'hands' but that would have been madness, surely. "Of this tree. My head is split, help me to stand."

The old man shook his head and tucked the log beneath one arm, reaching up to take the lantern from the branch.

"You remain," he told Antonio, "You remain. A gift demands a gift, that is the old way." He turned away and the night closed around the trapped young man like water rising over the ground.

Crickets and beetles emboldened by the dwindling light crept, then ran, then danced over the captive.

"Don't leave me here!" he called. He struggled, thrashing his limbs, but the limbs of this grove's old master were stronger still and held him fast. The lantern light was almost gone now, the old man out of sight.

"Don't leave me! Geppetto!"

The darkness engulfed Antonio completely and the wind through the branches above him lamented him in mocking tones, and the crawling things in his nostrils and mouth and ears whispered as they feasted and told him of the mighty deeds that the carpenter's son would bring to pass.







# Editor's Allie

Greetings once again!

After a slight delay here's our third issue, hopefully containing something you will enjoy.

I'm going to ramble on a little bit about gaming conventions this time. In recent years I have been without a regular local gaming group, so I get most of my RPG fix at some of the various conventions we have here in the UK. We are blessed with many nowadays, ranging from single-day events like Deva Con through full weekends like Furnace or Continuum all the way up to UK Games Expo – now the third largest gaming convention in the world!

For myself, I like the intermediate-sized cons. The biannual ConTinuum remains a firm favourite with pretty much everybody who has ever attended and is the one I have been to more times than any other. In fact you're almost guaranteed to see many of its attendees and organisers at other events too, which is especially good when trying a new place for the first time.

The various events held at Sheffield's Garrison Hotel are pretty damn good. I have been to Furnace and Seven Hills, both covering general RPGs, but there are also more focused cons held there. Excellent burgers on the menu by the way!

I used to attend London's Dragonmeet when I had several friends living in West London and out along the Thames Valley, so I could have a full weekend away. This is no longer the case, but I really ought to make the trip this year – I thought about it last year but left it because I had already booked for ConTingency in the New Forest in January and was short of cash (particularly when you consider London pricing!)

Talking of ConTingency, next year it's moving again to a new home on the north Norfolk coast. If that doesn't get the "folk horror" gaming vibe on I don't know what will...

Anyway, if you are at all interested in any of these events then check out the links below.

[Concrete Cow](#)

[ConTingency 2019](#)

[Continuum 2018](#)

[DevaCon](#)

[Dragonmeet 2018](#)

[Furnace](#)

[Seven Hills](#)

[UK Games Expo](#)

See you next time!

*Lee Williams*

**Editor**