



# THE WIVES OF MARCH

A “No Security” Horror Scenario



Written by CALEB STOKES

Art by EAN MOODY and CHRISTOPHER CIRILLO



A Hebanon Games Product



## Wives of March

### INTRODUCTION

The Wives of March is a horror mystery set in Barefoot Crossing, a sharecropping community on the rural outskirts of Savannah, Georgia. Four to six players take on the roles of investigators examining the murder of a Methodist preacher and accidentally reveal an ancient, inhuman conspiracy in the process. Thematically, the game confronts players with a supernatural evil masquerading as the banal atrocities so commonly perpetrated by mankind.

This adventure starts with an overall description of the setting and plot for the GM's use. Information for the players can be found in the gameplay section, the details of which should only be revealed to the characters through roleplaying.

### July 1933: Barefoot Crossing, GA:

The Depression hits the South hard. The drought of '31 reduces cotton yields by half, and financial desperation leads to an excessive planting of the lucrative cash crop in the following years. The market flooded, sharecroppers find themselves receiving mere fractions of the former price per pound. Forced to last the winter with far less food and stuck with fields drained by continual use, entire communities get caught in a death spiral of poverty. People flee to the city's slums only to find 50% unemployment rates. Children starve. Disease runs rampant. Landowners go bust and sell out to those unscrupulous enough to survive. The new paymasters demand only one thing of their beleaguered tenants: more cotton.

Boll weevils continue to plague the crops, reducing the state's yearly production by over 30 million pounds in the 10 years since their arrival. The cotton saps the soil of nutrients even as it starves the farmers, only to die inevitably in a swarm of hungry pests. And still, the landowners demand the farmers repeat the process.

There isn't much of Barefoot Crossing left: a dry goods shop, a post office, some ancient, boarded-up plantations. Everything else is made up of dirt roads and small, failing farms.

The only hope comes in the form of the Unifying Word Revival, a Methodist ministry. Holding services every Sunday under a massive tent, the minister Dashell March claims to have chosen Barefoot Crossing by providence. Supposedly, the devastating forest fire that wiped clean the property the church now rests on spoke to March

with the voice of God, like the flaming bush spoke to Moses. Founding a church in that failing rural community was his divine duty.

And by all accounts, he might be telling the truth. The Unifying Word provides work and food to all those in the congregation with need. Attendance is spectacular, and many have moved to the otherwise destitute Barefoot Crossing to bask in the bounty of its spiritual wealth. Remarkably, even the land appears to be recovering, reporting some of the healthiest crop yields in all of Georgia for the past two years. The March family has become the pillar of the whole area, purchasing a huge plantation home and farm with funds generously donated by the attendees. Though still suffering from the hard times gripping the rest of the nation, Mr. March is set to lead the people of Barefoot Crossing to prosperity like a divine savior.

But as in all things, sorrow merely uses hope to sharpen its blades. When March is found in his study with a stomach full of buckshot, the whole community launches into an uproar. Who would want to kill such a noble man? What will happen to the Unifying Word? Will the fate of the congregation mirror that of their champion?

As the community of Barefoot Crossing recruits those capable of finding answers, they may not like what the unfortunate investigators uncover. The philanthropy of Dashell March was neither as selfless, nor as human, as it first appeared.





## GM INFORMATION

### The Tragedy

On a quiet Sunday evening after supper, a single lamp burns in the study of an ancient plantation home. A gunshot rings out. A woman screams. The screen door smashes open, and a young girl with blood all over her church dress goes sprinting off the porch into the night. Minutes later, a truck screeches to a halt on the main road. The man inside knows that to be caught alone with the terrified creature huddled in the road is to invite death, but he can already see the torches and lanterns amassing at the top of the hill, rolling towards the road like an angry wave. He opens the door, the blood-soaked girl crawls in, and he speeds off as fast as the old truck will carry him, praying it's too dark to make out the color of his skin.

Dashell March is reported dead the next morning by his family, his body found gunned down behind the desk in his study, murdered with his own shotgun. The media reaction in Savannah is immediate and ravenous: the death of Barefoot Crossing's savior is the most deliciously tragic story in a nation already obsessed

with its own pain. The family's reluctance to take interviews only manages to stir the feeding frenzy: why keep the accusations so secret? Why not let the public help find the killer? The mobs are geared up to execute every black man they can find in hopes of getting the killer. Why hold them back with the silent treatment? What is the March clan trying to hide? Is it something to do with their money? Are they trying to cover up some scandalous sin?

A month after his death, Dashell March's murder remains as mysterious as ever, tempting more and more interested parties to come tug at the threads. If someone actually manages to unravel the whole web of intrigue, they might not like what they expose beneath...

Or survive long enough to tell anyone about it.





## The Monsters: The Companions

*The Companions are complex and subtle monsters with a history stretching eons. The origins and mechanics detailed here are enough to play through scenario. For a more complete exploration of the immortal couple, please check out the short story "A Cult of Two" at Smashwords.*

Dashell March is not dead. He *quite literally* lives on in the bodies of every male member of his family. Lydia March, though alive, inhabits an identical fate. She comprises the female half of the March family – the *entire* female half.

Put simply, the males and females are all clones: the same man and woman, identities masked by varying ages, diets, disguises, and scars. The entire March family, all Carter children, all the Lee children, and many other undiscovered clans around the world are genetically composed of *only two people* that differ solely in terms of bodily experience. Mentally, they all share the same memories.

And they are older than recorded history.

"March" is merely the latest permutation of countless aliases. Their true names have been lost to history along with the language that once spoke them. Those that would have known what to call them long ago decomposed down to carbon in the remains of a nation so old it isn't known to have ever existed. But they remain, the eternal He and She – The Companions.

The Companions predate the invention of agriculture by an age. They lived in a time where brutal death was the norm and survival a moment-by-moment struggle. If disease, predators, warfare, or other accidents allowed one to survive into maturity, mating was at best a pragmatic concern to replenish the ranks of the tribe, at worst an act of desperate slavery and force.

But the Companions were in love. Theirs was a deeply passionate romance, in a time where the savage conditions made such a concept unthinkable. Considering the non-existent records of the period, it's quite possible they invented love as a concept; and considering the daily strife required to stay together, it may well have

been the first form of insanity. Like all firsts in the world, the Companions' love was terrible and bloody to behold.

To defend His bride, He fought with ferocity unheard of in the tribe's memory. He even eschewed sacred rights of conquest demanded by the ancestral law and killed all of His slave wives. And when the tribal elders objected to His blasphemy, He killed them too.

She was just as vicious; Her devotion grew inseparable from the ruthlessness required for survival in general. She learned dark arts, picked forbidden herbs of the forest, and hid flint blades throughout Her leathers and hair. Competitors seeking to steal Her mate found themselves poisoned and convulsing by the campfire. Rival warriors that tried to usurp His place in the hierarchy were found screaming in the night, cradling missing appendages and bleeding out. She came to be worshipped as the most powerful witch in the land.

Their love was so fierce it refused even the interference of death. And as the Companions aged, they sought to defeat mortality itself, the one true threat to their union.

That early in man's history, the things that prefaced the human age still lurked in the dark corners of the earth. *Un-things* and *not-Gods* that murdered even the comforting definition of language, creatures of the void forced to retreat from an encroaching reality they found abhorrent. Back then, there were still places that housed such nightmares, places that would become the basis of every subsequent culture's idea of Hell. Forbidden paths still connected our worlds in those times, though they were secret and tenuous even then.

The Companions, brazen in their love, strode down the secret ways and made a deal with the Un-things. They would carry the monsters back with them, serving as the bridge into a reality that denied their forms. In return, the abominations from the darkness before history would teach them how to defeat Death.

In whatever amounted to language for them, the terrors out of time agreed to the terms.

The Companions returned to the world, and the Hell behind them shriveled to nothing in their wake. The forbidden paths collapsed at their passing, no longer necessary. The entire *non-space* ceased to exist in the world as a physical place, the entire fathomless cosmos now carried inside its new hosts.

Returned, they looked into each other's eyes and saw them free of humanity's defining fear. They celebrated, and the very first coupling made Her swell with life. It was their first child: the beginning of millennia of regret.

The child was not human. It wasn't even natural. It was one of the Un-things, making good on the bargain. A universe with stars wasn't meant to contain such darkness, and flesh couldn't hold such pure, abstract negation. The creature writhed on too many limbs and screamed shrill nightmare sounds from countless beaked mouths. In their attempt to put the abomination down, the Companions were killed by their own spawn's tentacles and claws...

... Only to be born again out of one of the thing's countless black orifices. Confused, and screaming with the voices of babes, each lover had to relearn to open their eyes. What they saw was their opposite transformed into an infant, writhing in a muddy pool of pestilent afterbirth next to them.

There were more of the Un-things to bring into the world. Countless more. And death, even if carried out by the same unholy seed infesting the pair, would not free them from their contract. The nightmares from before time would respawn the Companions into the world ceaselessly until the bargain was fulfilled. As this terrible truth dawned on the adult minds trapped in the weak, frail, infant bodies, the lovers realized what a terrible mistake they had made... and how far away they were from the nearest village.

The dark creature resurrected them every time they died, but it was no nursemaid. Thus, the long starvation began.

Nomads eventually found the infant pair amidst a field of tiny skeletons, but by then it was too late: the endless minds housed inside the babies were already quite mad.

The love of the Companions, once strong enough to escape death itself, had turned to an equally powerful hate under the hot sun, biting predators, and endless hunger. By the time they were rescued and allowed to grow, each had already suffered countless agonizing deaths. They separated in disgust as soon as they were old enough, determined to find partners that would not remind them of terrible agony for all eternity.

But as He tried to sire a new heir and She attempted to birth her first human child, both brought new insult to their existence. No matter how many wives he took, they birthed only girls... the same girl. Girls that said hateful, jealous things to their mothers as soon as they could talk, and referenced the old ways as if they'd lived through them. They grew into a coven of identical toddlers that knew more of the dark arts than the most ancient witch doctor.

She got the worse horror of being the mother of Her former husband, a devil baby whose cold eyes had seem more death than the worst warlords of legend.

If they sleep together, the Companions will bring more nightmares into the world. If they sleep with other humans, they reproduce only copies of themselves, complete with the same haunting memories of every previous version. It is a nightmare existence, offering complete isolation even as it denies solitude.

Despite the risk of their passions sparking anew and bringing another monster into the world (which happened, many times), the Companions were driven back together. Spawning such eerily identical families inflamed superstitions quite easily back then, and things only grew worse as the pair's immortality deepened. They grew increasingly distant and alien in their thinking, each copy possessed of untold knowledge but distracted by the memories of a thousand deaths. The Companions could only speak and relate to each other. Their wish to stay together forever was thus granted, an exponentially expanding madness cementing their bond rather than passion.

They have persisted this way for millennia, preferring the endless cycle of proliferation to the agony of renewal and starvation through their dark spawn. Despite their best efforts, they've been culled many times over: starved during the fall of Rome, hunted down by holy orders, plagued by the Spanish flu, etc. But they always return – sometimes gifted a different skin tone or features by their dark mother. Their work fathering the apocalypse never ends.

The Companions accept their roles as harbingers of doom. They will either spawn an army of monstrosities that will consume the world, or they'll drown out every human bloodline with their seed. Despite the hatred they feel towards each other, the couple grows more dedicated to this goal with every century. It's the only chance they'll ever have to know death.

### Roleplaying Companions

The Companions can present a challenge to GMs. They are neither so human as cultists nor so mindless as monsters. When roleplaying a Companion NPC, the GM should remember that there is likely no tactical lesson that the eternal lovers have not learned many times over. In most situations, they have epochs of experience more than the characters they face.

In *The Wives of March*, the Companions plan to speed along their own deaths by spawning as many of their clones as possible in an isolated



location. They do this by building a network of human confederates through financial, emotional, and physical coercion. These humans spend their lives serving as the surrogate parents of various clones, their livelihoods dependent on their ability to obscure the truth. Once someone joins the family, they can only leave in a casket. Most don't realize this until it's too late.

The clones themselves are birthed in the most discrete environments possible. Female Companions will impersonate women of loose morals in far away urban environments, returning home with good news for their fake "husbands." Occasionally, a male surrogate willingly serves as father to an entire harem of female Companions, but only the most deluded or sick men find this little fantasy enjoyable after encountering the dead-eyes and perfunctory love-making of their many wives. More often, male companions will visit human prostitutes, monitor them in secret for the duration of a pregnancy, then send deniable assets to kidnap the newborns (see **The Deformed, p. 21**). The male half will also seduce deluded or desperate women into becoming a wife, promising them a lifetime of financial support in exchange for their discretion. Those aware of the truth from the start are paired with male surrogates in sexless marriages that serve as a cover for the children. Those that think that a Companion truly loves them only discover the truth after giving birth to a clone, but by then it's too late to escape.

The Companions avoid outright sexual violence. This has not always been the case, and it surely isn't due to any ethical impulse; they are inhuman monsters comfortable with every imaginable sin. They abstain because such horrific crimes risk exposing their plans, and spur otherwise docile financial slaves into rebellion. All humans that join the family eventually come to suspect the truth, but they remain silent primarily out of fear. So long as surrogates maintain secrecy and foster clones on paper, they aren't forced to do anything against their will. Only in the rare instances where threats of poverty prove inadequate are cooperating humans threatened with murder.

If all goes according to plan, after a family has matured, the clones disperse and repeat the process elsewhere. The Companions have been working on this conspiracy to hurry along the apocalypse for centuries, but world events, superstitions, and brave investigators have thus far kept their numbers in check.

Exposed, the Companions will first try to stonewall inquiries through lies, silence, and political pressure. Failing that, their considerable accumulated wealth makes bribery an option. In rare instances where investigators can't be fooled or bought, the pair will then tap deniable assets (see **The Deformed, p. 21**) to coerce silence through intimidation or assassinate troublemakers outright. The failure of their deniable assets means discovery is inevitable; the Companions then prepare an ambush for whatever response is incoming, every clone at their command executing suicidal violence in sudden, rehearsed unison. The goal of this process is to cause as much damage to the investigators and surrounding area as possible to discourage pursuit, allowing clones of various ages and sex to escape. Finally, years later, survivors start the process anew somewhere else.

Mechanically, Companions are merely human. They have neither special resistance to damage nor unique attack abilities. If the rules set supports magic, Companions know pretty much *all* of it, but they resist using it in most instances for fear of making themselves more noticeable. Young and elderly versions of Him and Her are naturally more weak and frail; their muscle development and coordination still follow human timelines. However, in both hand-to-hand combat and melee weapons, all Companions are peerless warriors, especially if able-bodied adults. They've had centuries to hone their skills, find physical pain boring, and harbor no fear of death.



PCs must find some weaknesses if there's any hope of besting such experienced killers. Thankfully, the source of the Companions' power can also be exploited to destroy them:

1. The unwieldy weight of their lived experience makes adapting difficult for Companions. Generally, treat any skill that's been around for a thousand years or more as mastered, anything newer as a "fad" the clones are just getting familiar with. For instance, while they can use firearms, the Companions aren't nearly as supernaturally skilled with them compared to other armaments; the pair was just getting used to muskets when repeaters hit the scene. An even better idea would be to take the fight to the streets using cars. The newer the technology, the better off the PCs are using it in a contest.
2. The Companions do not have a hive mind; they merely behave in remarkably uniform patterns engrained by centuries of shared experience. A male companion will only gain the experience of His dead brothers between death and rebirth. Even then, He must wait a year or more before biology allows the infant body to convey anything learned to other living clones through writing or speech. Female Companions suffer the same restrictions. Without traditional communication such as letters or phone calls, one hand of the conspiracy doesn't know what the other is doing. Thus, players can divide and conquer, gaining the benefit of surprise many times over if they are clever.
3. The sheer volume of memories triggered by everyday associations can slow the Companions down, especially in stressful situations such as combat. This can provide a bonus to PCs, even though witnessing the result will likely cause deep psychological scars (see **Optional Rule: Suicide Fugue State, p. 10**). This could also be an excuse for GMs to exercise a little mercy: the relentless onslaught of the Companions could be halted by nothing more than their own ennui. After all, the plot of *The Wives of March* represents the thousandth or so attempt at speeding along their own demise. Perhaps the mere presence of investigators disheartens the Companions to the point of surrender; what is the point of fighting when they can just die and start anew? The entire clan won't succumb to this nihilism at once, but it can take out a few targets if PCs talk up the hopelessness of the situation.
4. The two halves of the Companions *hate* each other. Each harbors a millennia's worth of unresolved grudges, both real and imagined. But as each pair requires the help of the other to stay free of their monstrous child's womb, they are forced to swallow that resentment a thousand times every day. PCs that recognize this perverse "staying-together-for-the-kids" dynamic can manipulate Him to attack Her and vice versa. After all, there is nothing the Companions will fight more fiercely for than getting free of each other.
5. More poisonous than their relationship to each other is the Companions' relationship to their true children. They need to keep one of the creatures close at all times (**Clue 12E, p.42**) lest they be trapped again in another cycle of rebirth, abandonment, and starvation in the wild; yet the abomination scares them more than anything else. The creature has no care for its parents' safety (it can always make more), and it would much rather kill them than be restrained again. Letting the baby out of its crib, so to speak, is the most devastating attack available to PCs, but the violent repercussions of loosing such a horror on the world are likely to reach far beyond the Companions (see **Expose, p. 44**).

In terms of narrative, Companions reveal themselves primarily through perfection. Brothers and sisters playing games never fight or disagree about rules. The use of local accents and customs are exacting enough to imply a purely academic understanding. No one ever displays unpopular opinions, and family members operate in harmony and eerie unison. They are disconcertingly eager to please guests if they believe they can be brought into the conspiracy. Homes display unusual splendor, usually employing as decoration the same inexplicable antiquities with which clone families maintain their wealth.

The physical similarities of the Companions often betray them. Though they can shift skin tone and features according to the whim of their dark children, their genotypes remain purely identical for hundreds of years. Attempts to disguise this fact are just as telling to those already clued-in. Body modifications are commonly used to create the illusion of difference among members, masquerading as amputations, tattoos, and accidental scars. Hair dye, regimented over-eating, anorexia, false glasses, and deceptive cuts of clothing are also widespread.

When characters talk to a Companion, they never speak to the actual Him or Her; they speak to the cover identity being played at the moment. After millennia of persecution, the pair never breaks character. However, in those rare instances where “the jig is up,” most Companions cannot resist a bit of conversation before going in for the kill. They’ve had no one to speak to for centuries other than the one they’re cursed to hate forever. Exploiting this impulse is usually the last chance characters have to turn defeat into victory, but never believe that the clones aren’t aware that pausing to chat is a bad idea. They just don’t care all that much; there’s always next time, after all.

In *The Wives of March*, a Companion might express some of the following ideas to PCs before silencing them forever:

- Offering victims one last chance to “join the family” as a mother/father.
- Remarking that they haven’t had so worthy an opponent since Ferdinand II.
- Musing that it has been a long time since they scalped anybody and wondering aloud if they’ve still “got it.”
- Critiquing the PCs tactics, including an argument for the use of the Tetsudo formation. Bemoaning the shield’s fall from fashion.
- Apologizing for all the hostility. Claiming things would have been much easier for everyone if slavery were still around.
- Assuring victims of their envy. They’re about to take a journey they imagine to be truly wonderful.
- Giving characters a choice, the choice the Companions face every day: feel the sting of the knife, or go meet their dark offspring face-to-face.

## Optional Rule: Suicide Fugue State

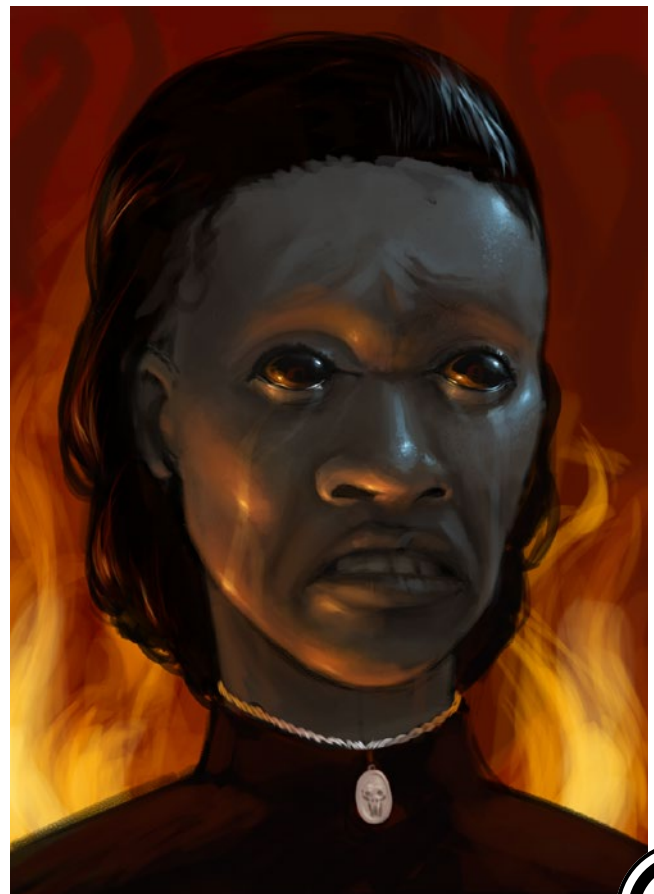
If the system selected for play utilizes fumbles, critical failures, or botches, GMs should consider punishing the Companions for failed dice checks. It might even be a good idea to set a certain range of possible dice values as automatic failure for the Companions, such as a 1 on a d10, or 0-10 on a d100.

The reasons for this are two-fold: firstly, the mechanic will make the game a bit easier for PCs likely to be outnumbered and outmatched. “Nerfing” the Companions ensures the pulp adventure experience that some groups prefer. Secondly, such failures are easily in line with the narrative. Everyone gets lost in the past sometimes, and the Companions have a lot of past to get lost in. Stressful situations may trigger decades’ worth of associations within them at once, effectively overloading their minds. This glitch might be the

only chance PCs have to survive an attack. In games with a madness mechanic, a failed Companion attack should just mean they rip into the PC's sanity rather than their flesh.

When a Companion fails a roll, pick one of the results off the following table or roll a d10.

1. The Companion starts muttering to itself in a dead language, talking to someone only it can see.
2. The Companion carves into its flesh with a sharp object, seemingly fascinated by the blood spilling out. It watches the crimson trickle, ignoring all other activities, even if other wounds are being inflicted on it at the time.
3. The Companion is crippled by a sudden surge of memory. It falls to the floor and curls into the fetal position, completely catatonic.
4. The Companion is drawn to stare at the sun or moon, falling into the religious awe of its proto-human origins as an escape from stress.
5. The Companion completely forgets how to use all modern technology: crashing the car, tearing off clothes, using a machine gun as a club, etc.
6. The Companion, having lost all grasp on standard human behavior, begins unreasonable negotiations for peace. For instance, it might try to apologize for killing a character's loved one by paying a blood debt to the chieftain in the form of fatted cattle.
7. The Companion is somehow reminded of the futility of it all and violently commits suicide with the nearest available weapon.
8. The Companion mistakes the PC for a long dead human lover; one who briefly distracted them from their endless pain and temporarily restored their humanity. The Companion rejoices and shouts for joy in the language of their love affair. It tries to embrace the character, looking hurt and confused if attacked or scorned.
9. The Companion mistakes a PC for another Companion. If in combat, it will move to the character's side and look for a new target. If out of combat, it gives the PC an order in an ancient language, looking confused if the player ignores the command.
10. The Companion drops to its knees, starts chanting, and prepares an honest-to-god magical spell. The air kicks up around it as magical blue ley lines start spiraling outwards from the ground. Its eyes turn red and roll back in the sockets. The Companion can't defend itself in this state, and letting it finish the spell is a very, very bad idea (at the GM's discretion, of course).





## GAMEPLAY INFORMATION

### Character Selection

Characters should all be people who are recognized for finding hidden information, enough so that they might be hired to look into March's death. Private investigators are the obvious choice, but there are many other aspects of the situation under examination besides the murder itself. Nearly any learned profession would do. Trusted community doctors might be consulted, or local historians, amateur journalists, thugs willing to do some extra-legal snooping, etc. So long as someone might realistically hire the PC for their discretion and investigative abilities, a character can come from almost any 1930's occupation.

Aside from having a realistic skill set, players should be concerned about which faction would hire their character. This is something players should pick for themselves. There are four possible employers, and what follows is all the information players get before deciding which one they'll work for.

- Rathbone, Rathbone, and Wilks: the most prestigious law firm in Savannah, charged with executing the March estate.
- The Prophetic Baptist Assembly: concerned with possible violence towards the black community as a result of March's murder.
- The Chatham County Sheriff's Office: seeking March's killer.
- Atticus Wambles: a carpet-bagger claiming to be March's illegitimate son and seeking a portion of the inheritance

It should be noted that factions will not hire indiscriminately. It's unlikely a prestigious southern law firm in the Jim-Crow South would hire anyone of color for any reason. It's equally unlikely a black pastor would trust a white man to protect his flock. A lot of this is going to depend on how the GM intends to deal with issues of race, gender, and class in the game (see **The Problem with**

**History, p. 12**). Just be open with players about how you intend to tackle historical issues and urge players to pick a realistic employer for the time period.

### The Problem with History

It's fun to delve into the past for a game setting. It provides escapism by separating us from our lived experience with a vast gulf of time. It allows us to make the setting more alive than any purely fictional place, using history to infuse the locations with vitality and depth. But placing a game in the past (especially America's past) also forces us to deal with the undeniable racism and sexism that ruled in those times, issues which justifiably still cause a lot of discomfort today.

Thematically, *The Wives of March* seeks to engage this subject directly. Part of the terror the Companions represent is derived from the casual cruelty that is so ubiquitous in mankind's past. Yet it's possible to go too far with such material and sap the fun out of the game.

There are a few options for dealing with this situation. The simplest is to ignore the subject completely, never mentioning a character's race and keeping occupations open to all sexes. While this might hurt verisimilitude, it will sidestep any delicate issues that could come up. Never sacrifice fun for realism.

The other option for "ignoring it" is to make all the PCs share the same race and gender. Keep in mind that this only prevents PC-on-PC conflict; issues might still come up in interactions with NPCs. Furthermore, practicing eugenics during character creation (i.e. "All of you have to be white males!") is really tasteless. Make sure if the characters all share the same race and gender, it's just a coincidence of player choice.

This writer's preferred option is to incorporate real historical struggles into the narrative as another source of conflict. Female journalists are even more admirable for doing the job in a time as patriarchal as 1933. Black investigators that risk their lives against the institutional hatred of the old South

AND eldritch horrors are that much more heroic. In general, the story will be richer for including such delicate issues alongside the escapism of a supernatural investigation, and refusing to “white-wash” the uncomfortable truths shows respect for the gravity of such issues. The only downside is that this approach requires a lot of maturity from everyone at the table.

First off, make sure everyone takes care to avoid racial and sexist slurs of all kinds. Abstract such language where it would naturally occur in a paraphrase, whereas all other character dialogue can appear in “direct quotes,” so to speak. Keep in mind that RPGs are a primarily verbal medium. A racist NPC is still going to be using the voice of the GM to spout their hate; make sure no one starts finding their buddies loathsome when it’s the NPC that deserves a lesson in tolerance. Abstracting hate speech helps make this distinction clear.

In general, everyone should enter the game fully aware of the first maxim of a writer’s workshop: the author is not synonymous with his or her characters. Even if a player wants to play a racist and/or sexist character for the sake of realism, make sure it’s understood that flaw belongs to the character rather than the person rolling the dice. Leaving nasty words out altogether helps remind everyone of this fact.

Though realism is nice, players are much better off using their more enlightened place in history as an advantage. After all, even the most small-minded character is going to have to cooperate if they want to survive (which could make for a nice character arc towards tolerance, incidentally). Characters should use their anachronistic acceptance of each other as a source of power over the prejudiced environment. A black investigator can pick up gossip in the West Savannah slums; a white investigator can interrogate an upscale antiques dealer; a female investigator can shame the “chivalrous” officer into letting her see the police report. But only by cooperating together can they put all the pieces together and get a clear picture. Prejudice separates people in the real world; use it to strengthen the bonds between characters instead.

## Plot Hooks (Getting Characters Together)

The game starts on a Saturday afternoon. Players begin at the location of the faction responsible for employing them. Since their bosses want them to succeed, characters should be provided all the clues available at that location immediately. NPCs will be more reluctant to give information to PCs working for other parties, but it’s still possible to get those clues by visiting that location later in the game and making dice checks. For instance, someone working for Columbus Rathbone will learn everything his employer knows at the very start, but that doesn’t mean the character can’t go pump the Sheriff for information later.

Once their employers brief the characters, encourage each investigator to attend the next service at the Unifying Word Revival (**Location 0, p.14**). It’s the best way to see what is going on with the March family and hear the gossip from those closest to them. Once they arrive at the service, make sure that the one clue everybody notices is the presence of other investigators. None of them seem to really fit in, for some reason...

Once everybody is aware of all the characters on the case, it’s up to players to decide between being cooperative or cagey. If they talk things through, they’ll realize none of the factions are really at odds. Working together only increases everyone’s chance of success. If they still insist on working alone, the GM has provided an opportunity and it’s a matter of player choice.

## LOCATIONS AND NPC'S

### 0. Unifying Word Revival

The Unifying Word Revival isn't an actual church. Services are held under a gigantic tent set up in a field by the main road entering Barefoot Crossing. Pews are moved in by truck. The stage and altar, such as they are, get reassembled every week. Attendees park cars and wagons in the area surrounding, and the popularity of the services are making the area quite a spectacle on Sunday mornings. The congregation is entirely white, but a number of local black sharecroppers make extra money setting up the tent before everyone arrives. Many then return to their own church (**Location 2, p.18**), but a few can be found smoking in the makeshift parking lot as they wait for services to end so they can strike the tent down. As such, The Unifying Word Revival is strikingly progressive for the time and allows access (to some degree) to all races.

Since the tragic passing of Dashell March, his eldest son (Dashell March Jr.) has become the pastor. In his 30s, the young man bears a striking resemblance to his father and commands the attention of the crowd with the practiced ease of a man 20 years his senior.

#### 0A. Well-behaved Children

Anyone that attends services regularly will notice the remarkable discipline of the children at The Unifying Word Revival. With very few exceptions, the typical shenanigans of bored church kids are absent, regardless of age. No one is fidgeting in their seat or messing with stuffy Sunday clothes. No one falls asleep or tries to sneak a funny book into the hymnal. Parents are free to devote their full attention to the lesson; in some cases, they actually seem less attentive than the children. There's nothing overtly supernatural about the lack of bad behavior: perhaps The Unifying Word is merely doing things right or the community is particularly godly. Still, characters will have a tough time remembering another congregation so... focused.

### List of NPCs

**Dashell March** – pastor of the Unifying Word Revival Church, deceased

**Lydia March** – wife of Dashell and matriarch of the Church

**Lorraine Carter** – wife of Dave, church patron, and pregnant with her fifth child

**Dave Carter** – husband of Lorraine, church deacon, and “father” to Carter clan

**Annabelle Lee** – widowed church patron and mother of four

**Atticus Wambles** – possibly a bastard son of March; claiming inheritance for mother

**Becky Spratt** – impoverished church attendee and mother to Claudette

**Claudette Spratt** – teenage girl suspected of shooting Dashell March

**Alphonso Banks** – black sharecropper that assisted in Claudette's escape to the city

**Theo Phillips** – pastor of the Prophetic Baptist Assembly, concerned for Banks

**Columbus Rathbone** – lawyer hired by Lloyd's of London to invalidate March's will

**Sheriff Reed Ritson** – beleaguered lawman tasked with solving the March shooting

**Caiden Garrod** – visiting Lloyd's of London investigator gone missing in town

Players with any kind of skill in history, especially theological or local, will notice that the attention is that much more odd. The sermon itself seems downright archaic, both in terms of vocabulary and religious doctrine. The lesson is academically dense, makes almost no mention of current events, and employs few modern metaphors. Those familiar are reminded of John Wesley's historic writings upon landing in Georgia in 1735.

#### 0B. Pastor's Pets

The front pews in most churches are typically reserved for the pastor's family. Lydia March – recognizable from her photo in the Savannah papers covering her husband's murder – sits on the left-hand pew with her son's wife, grandchildren, and extended family. It seems as if the March clan stretches onto the right-hand pew as well, but



there are a few faces that don't seem to belong. A dark-haired woman corrals a whole group of young girls to sit down, and a couple which appears to be as old as Lydia fills the rest of the space with their sizable family. Some of the March children seem peppered in amongst the right side, mingling with the other families.

Asking around the church will let players know that the two families on the right are the Lee and Carter clans. They are long-time favorites of March's, and a few of the back pew families backhandedly express their resentment towards the favoritism. Questioned subtly enough, these malcontents might even give up where the pastor's pets live (**Location 8, p.31** and **Location 9, p.34.**)

### *0C. Rough Crowd*

The people of Barefoot Crossing apparently live hard lives. Facial scars and eye patches are disconcertingly common. There are a number of cleft palettes amongst the congregation, slightly more than the PCs can recall ever seeing in the same place. A few amputations dot the crowd, even a few children missing arms and legs. The majority of the crowd appears healthy and happy, but even considering the rough existence of a sharecropper, the community seems unsettlingly prone to disfiguring accidents. On the other hand, no one likes to see a little girl walking around with one sleeve of her dress empty. Perhaps the characters are being unfairly prejudiced or alarmist...

### *0D. Collections and Tithes (location 7)*

A few coins are to be expected in the collection plate: enough to show piety, not enough to make the hard times harder. But everyone in the tent is putting a disconcerting amount of money in the collection plate. There are a couple of ten dollar bills in the mix, and any character not emptying their wallet as the plate is passed receives side-long glances of disapproval. How can these struggling farmers afford to tithe so much? What makes them so enthusiastic to do so?

Questioning attendees after the service reveals that the church "takes care of everyone." Pushing the issue reveals that the Marches use their land

to operate a communal farm to which everyone in the congregation contributes labor at least one day a week. In return, the church takes care of the whole community's food needs, and the Marches themselves donate any other money or services required by needy members. By expressing interest in joining the church, characters can be told where the farm operates and instructed to go sign up for a shift (**Location 7, p.27**).

### *0E. Church Gossip*

There has never been a more readily accessible source of intelligence than church gossip. Characters that insinuate themselves into the meet-and-greet session that occurs after the sermon ends can learn a ton about Barefoot Crossing. This source is available to investigators of color as well, seeing as they are moving about the crowd loading pews and breaking down the tent. Listening in can reveal the subtle resentment some feel towards the Lee and Carter families as well as the existence of the communal farming operation. Other gossip includes whispers about the continuing scandal of Dashell's murder. Rumors about an illegitimate heir seeking inheritance circulate and get scolded for being disrespectful. Parishioners complain about the slow progress of the sheriff's investigation and express hateful, unreasoning suspicions toward the black community. Everyone resolves to pray that Lydia's troubles in seeking the elder March's inheritance are soon resolved.

Uniquely, the otherwise positive prattle of the church families grows downright venomous on the subject of Becky Spratt. Her absence at the morning's service seems simultaneously offensive, predictable, and welcome. More Pollyanna-ish attendees commend the sense of mercy that compelled the Marches to let such a piece of white trash into their church. Younger congregants remark that they don't miss the daughter's "slutty" black singing during the hymns and gossip about her having something to do with the "negroes" that killed Dashell. The general consensus seems to be that everyone would like the Spratts to stay in that "little swamp shack they call a house" every Sunday (**Location 10, p.36**).

(GM NOTE: *In game terms, GMs should use the murmurs of the crowd to clue investigators in on what they may have missed during the service itself. More importantly, the bustle and chatter of the congregation is an opportunity to spot investigators working for other factions and speak with them without attracting too much attention.*)

## 0F. Greeting a March

If the characters work their way to the front, they can greet Lydia March or one of her adult children. Immediately upon making one-on-one contact, characters notice the sheer intensity of a March gaze. It seems to both look past and into them simultaneously. Characters with experience in war might recognize the stare in victims of shell shock, whereas the more religiously-minded might be impressed by what appears to be a deep, fathomless piety. Either way, the eye contact that occurs during conversation – though not in any way outwardly inappropriate – leaves a nagging sensation of awe in any who experience it.

March children, when speaking to an outsider, will eagerly and politely introduce PCs to talk to Lydia. If characters comment on the sermon or express interest in the Unifying Word, the matriarch will generously greet them and ask if they need anything. The church is there to serve, after all, and she wants to see that everyone has their essentials taken care of: Dashell would have wanted his family to work through their grief by rededicating themselves to God. Of course, Lydia needs to know where the character lives so the charity truck can add their address to the rounds...

If characters are open about their role in investigating the March murder (revealing that they work for Rathbone or the Sheriff, for instance), Lydia offers any assistance she could possibly give and thanks them for their service. Even if working for a faction openly hostile to the family (such as Pastor Phillips or Atticus Wambles), mother March insists that Dashell was a godly man with nothing to hide and expresses hope that the investigator will stick around after realizing how baseless the claims against her family are. In either instance, Lydia March subtly does everything in her

power to ingratiate herself with the PCs. She'll offer to help with any businesses they operate in Savannah (she seems familiar with them, somehow) by introducing lucrative new clients or becoming a patron herself. She'll introduce single investigators to eligible suitors and southern belles in her family. She may even invite them over for Sunday dinner. It's clear by the end of the conversation that the whole March family is either on the investigators' side or really wants to get the investigators on *their side*.

## 1. Offices of Rathbone, Rathbone, and Wilks

The offices of Rathbone, Rathbone, and Wilks are housed within a renovated townhouse in downtown Savannah that predates the Civil War. Inside its warm walnut halls, the Depression might as well be occurring on another planet. Servants in full formal dress get the door and serve drinks to the firm's lucrative clients. The hallways reek of cigar smoke and money.

Columbus Rathbone is the only lawyer not out of town on business, and he urgently needs someone to help with the most lucrative contract in the firm's impressive history. He's been subcontracted by the prestigious Lloyd's of London to help with a claims investigation regarding Dashell March's will. The pastor was known to be well off, but nothing ever suggested he possessed enough wealth to have multiple accounts with the most prestigious banking and insurance operation in the world. While Rathbone is not the executor of the state himself, he's been promised a considerable fee if he can help the Brits resolve the issue, and complications with the previous inquiries made in the last month have caused him to seek outside help.

### 1A. The March Will

For legal reasons, Rathbone does not have Dashell March's complete Last Will and Testament. However, he has been informed of the particular clause that is causing concern for Lloyd's:

*"I, Dashell Mann March, do hereby bequeath my residuary estate, constituting all property and money held in escrow by Lloyd's of London, under*

*the consolidation of the Unifying Word Revival Church, and in the name of Dashell Mann March, to my second wife, Lydia Fille March. In the event my second wife does not survive me, the aforementioned residuary estate will transfer to my first wife, Virginia Gurwilon Maia. In the event my first wife does not survive me, the aforementioned residuary estate will transfer to my third wife."*

There are records of a divorce between Virginia Maia and Dashell March in the state of Missouri dating back to 1918. However, authorities in the region report that Virginia Maia has been missing and presumed dead since a house fire in 1927. The mere existence of this former spouse makes the case a delicate matter: a pastor having undergone a secret divorce is a massive scandal. Revealing this information to the public would make both Lloyd's and Rathbone liable to a civil suit neither could hope to win. More importantly, why give all one's property to an ex-wife rather than one's children? Yet despite all that, the Missouri wife isn't the problem.

The third wife in the will is never named, and Dashell's marriage to Lydia is still active and recognized by the state of Georgia. Who is this third wife, and why was she not named when March updated his will a scant three months before his death? What was Dashell March hiding when he was unexpectedly gunned down in his study?

Rathbone wants to know. If there is any illegal activity being carried out via the will, the document becomes null and void. That would mean the assets held by Lloyds' of London (which are apparently vast) revert immediately to the bank, and all property held by the church would go through probate in Georgia before moving to next of kin. Columbus Rathbone would not only be entitled to the percentage fee paid by the state, it would net the lawyer a huge bonus from Lloyd's and their professional gratitude. While the firm doesn't want any part in illegal activity, the partners are seeing dollar signs. Rathbone and his cohorts will be extremely grateful to anyone that can reveal March's transgressions while maintaining discretion and the appearance of working for the family.

Rathbone's first suggestion for investigators is to familiarize themselves with the March family (**Location 0, p.14**). He also suggests ferreting out a paper trail on the family by sifting through the Chatham County Records Office for deeds held in the family or church's name (**Location 5, p.23**)

### *1B. Missing Predecessor*

Lloyd's of London's reliance on Rathbone is new. They originally paid to send their own investigator to the states and merely used the law office for its in-house wire service. However, Caiden Garrod has been missing for over a week now.

Rathbone has been stymied in his attempts to access Garrod's room at the Hotel de Soto. The man paid for his accommodations a month in advance out of his own pocket, and the prestigious hotel is refusing anyone access until the payment is up. If, somehow, the investigators were to stumble through the locked door into his room, there is nothing Rathbone could do to stop it (hint nudge wink). The firm certainly wouldn't care to know anything discovered within because they are solely focused on the results of a successful investigation (HINT NUDGE WINK).

Rathbone provides the address of the Hotel de Soto as well as Garrod's room number (**Location 6, p.25**).

### *1C. Accusations of Misconduct*

Complicating the disappearance of Caiden Garrod are accusations that he may have stolen from his employers. It was discovered only after the investigator's departure that Garrod accessed a vault owned by Lloyd's in a Swiss bank using false credentials. It's uncertain yet what he may have done there or if anything was taken, but it certainly casts suspicion on the man's sudden vanishing.

### *1D. The Atticus Wambles Angle*

Finally, Rathbone is concerned about recent claims in the press that a northerner by the name of Atticus Wambles is the bastard son of Dashell March. Though the young man has remained vague in the press and cagey about hiding his presence in town, it's possible that



his claim could be true, especially in the light of March's suspicious will. The lawyer has no idea where the young man is staying, but he encourages investigators to question the man if they see him and provides a photo pulled from his newspaper clipping service.

## 2. Prophetic Baptist Assembly

The Prophetic Baptist Assembly serves the black sharecropping community outside Savannah. It's modest in every sense of the word, though they do operate out of a building unlike the Unifying Word Revival. The sudden popularity of the neophyte white church is a matter of some concern among the black congregation, but most are wisely determined to mind their own business. Pastor Theo Phillips, however, has put out some subtle inquiries into the community looking for help into a delicate matter.

*(GM NOTE: The danger posed to a black community in the years of Jim Crow was omnipresent and brutal. Reprisal could occur for completely imagined offenses and was almost always outside the due process of law. Any characters employed by Pastor Phillips need to have history that explains his trust for them, especially if they are from another race. While the pastor himself is a progressive and tolerant man, the risk presented to his congregation is too great to seek help from anyone but the most trusted of friends.)*

### 2A. A Late Night Confession

Pastor Phillips is concerned about a member of his congregation, Alphonso Banks, who came banging on his door in the middle of the night over a month ago. It was the night of the murder, and Banks sat on the porch shaking and covered in blood. While Phillips couldn't get many details out of him, the panicked young man managed to get out that he'd gotten in "some trouble with a white girl out by the March place." The pastor immediately advised he get out of town – out of Georgia, if possible – but Banks refused. He said the girl was in a real bad spot and he was the only one that could help her.

Unaware of the situation but completely certain it could spell death for the young man, Phillips urged Banks to run anyway; the white woman could take care of herself. Banks remained unconvinced, arguing that he had to help her or he couldn't live with himself as a Christian. He begged for money. Phillips gave him what little he had and hasn't seen Banks since.

Recently, the pastor has heard rumors that Banks' bed-less '24 Model TT was seen in Savannah. He's scared that the young man is still around town. The mob is already screaming for justice and needs no excuse to kill a black man without evidence; if they discover Banks in the presence of this mysterious white girl, there'll be no stopping them from lynching an innocent man. He wants Banks found and smuggled out of town for his own safety.

While the reverend is doing his best to track Alphonso down through his own means, the angle he can't pursue is the rescued white woman. He encourages investigators to attend a service at Unifying Word (either as worshippers or hired help to strike the tent, depending on race) to see if they can discover the identity of this woman (**Location 0, p.14**).

### 2B. The Missing Bluesman

Reverend Phillips knows that Alphonso Banks is making a name for himself in the West Savannah Slums as a blues singer under the name "Country Large." If Banks is trying to make money to support the woman he's taken under his protection, his only real option is taking gigs at juke-joints in the area. Phillips, obviously, can't be seen in such disreputable establishments without drawing too much attention, but he hopes investigators might be able to find Banks by asking around about his blues persona or just scouring the streets for his distinctive truck (**Location 11, p.38**).

### 2C. Garrod's Questioning

What sparked Phillips' urgency is an interview he had with Caiden Garrod two weeks previous. The Englishman seemed unaccustomed to the racial divide in the South and had a conversation with the pastor as an equal. This peaked the holy man's paranoia, and it only deepened as questions focused increasingly on Dashell March, the Unifying Word Revival, and the shooting. Concerned for the safety of Banks and the community at large, Phillips feigned ignorance at every turn. Garrod eventually left discouraged, but not before revealing he was working for Rathbone, Rathbone, and Wilks. Nothing about the Brit's pressing interrogation implied the relaxed inquiry of an insurance investigator, and Phillips thinks there might be something to discover at the law firm (**Location 1, p.16**). After all, if incontrovertible evidence of wrong-doing can be proven of some other party, it might distract the increasingly bloodthirsty press from directing suspicion towards the black community.

### 3. Chatham County Sheriff's Department

Located in Savannah proper, the Sheriff's Department is far more sophisticated than any other law enforcement agency that might be found elsewhere in Georgia. Still, about all this amounts to is a few functioning jail cells, some desks, and a reception area. While more equipped for murder investigation than anyone else, the department is still woefully understaffed and poorly trained. Couple these woes with the distance from the station to the crime scene and the odd political pressure coming from all sides, Sheriff Reed Ritson finds himself out of his depth. If he doesn't get a lead soon, an angry mob is going to take all the credit for finding the killer, whether they actually do or not. He's calling in outside help in the form of consultants to supplement his inept deputies.

#### 3A. Police Report

Sheriff Ritson begins by familiarizing investigators with the police report from the incident itself. On a Wednesday evening six weeks previous, Dashell March was shot in his study some time around 9 p.m. The murder weapon was March's own shotgun, which rested above his mantle and should

not have been loaded. Lydia March, after hearing the shot, rushed into the room to find her husband already dead. She then heard an engine starting up outside. When she went to the window to see, she witnessed Claudette Spratt getting into a "getaway truck with a negro man."

While the presence of a black man has been leaked to the public (or perhaps just sadistically imagined), Claudette Spratt's presence has been kept a secret for the sake of sparing the family any gossip that might result from a young woman having been left unattended in the house of a married man. Lydia insists that Claudette was merely there as a guest for dinner. The pastor often had her and her mother over for supper to help alleviate their crushing poverty. Additionally, Claudette is reported to be a sinful and indiscreet young girl; Mr. March used the free meals as an excuse to minister to the teen. Claudette Spratt is still missing.

Ritson's prevailing theory – an alarmist, sensationalist, and completely unsupported hypothesis – is that Claudette Spratt is under the thrall of the black male driving the truck. He thinks the black man used the girl to break in, the robbery went bad, and the pair fled. He's afraid this is just the beginning what is "surely" to be a long and bloody crime spree by interracial Bonnie and Clyde copycats. He suggests investigators get a fresh perspective on the case by re-interviewing witnesses after Sunday services at the Unifying Word Revival (**Location 0, p.14**)

#### 3B. Becky Spratt's Statement

To Ritson's credit, there is at least some corroborating testimony to back up the claims in the police report. Becky Spratt, Claudette's mother, gave a sworn statement two weeks ago that confirmed her daughter's wild ways. In the deposition, the woman admits to attending dinner at the March home multiple times and bemoans her daughter's "consorting with the lowliest trash in all of West Savannah." Upon reviewing the report, investigators can copy down directions to Spratt's little shack tucked away in a swamp (**Location 1, p.16**). The officer taking the

notes did write in the margin “Under duress?” It might be worth checking up on.

### 3C. Lydia March's Statement

A few details from Lydia March's account of the murder stand out. The presence of a negro man obviously received the majority of her emphasis. Sheriff Ritson doubts that a black man from Savannah proper would be familiar enough with March to plan a robbery, and he can't even fathom the notion that it may have been Claudette's idea. Thus, he suggests his private investigators check at the Prophetic Baptist Assembly (**Location 2, p.18**). The church serves the rural black sharecroppers around Barefoot Crossing, and as such it's the best bet for finding someone that knows the mysterious man in the truck.

Lydia March also made out the make and model of the getaway vehicle: a bed-less '24 Model TT truck. The Sheriff suggests that if no one at the church is willing to talk, characters should ask around about the vehicle in the West Savannah Slums (**Location 11, p.38**). It's the only location nearby where a black man could hope to hide, and if he's gone to ground in the country or left the state, the case is hopeless anyway.

### 3D. Letter from the Governor

Eugene Talmadge, the governor of the great state of Georgia, has sent Reed Ritson a letter. It can be spotted lying on the Sheriff's desk, but he's just as likely to show it to characters to emphasize the importance of speed and discretion. The governor is a personal friend of the Marches (asking around reveals that they donated quite generously to his campaign and are very civic-minded). In the flowery language of a politician, Talmadge promises to generously reward anyone responsible for seeing this “grievous crime against Christendom avenged” in the same breath that seems to imply anyone incapable of the task can expect unemployment very soon.

### 3E. Protection Order for Wambles

As an afterthought, the Sheriff will tell investigators to watch out for Atticus Wambles. The man is currently in town filing a civil suit against the March family under the claim that he is Dashell's illegitimate son from a previous marriage. Some northern lawyers have already filed a restraining order with the Sheriff's Office requiring that Wambles be kept 500 yards away from all members of the March family at all times. The order was granted in Indiana, so there is no telling what evidence of abuse was used to sue for the order – or indication if any was provided at all. Still, violating the order would complicate matters in an already tangled situation. The sheriff informs those in his employ that Wambles is currently staying at the hotel Le Fruit de la Rose (**Location 4, p.20**). He urges everyone to make sure he stays away from the March family, even if his name comes up in their inquiries.

### 4. Le Fruit de la Rose (Atticus Wambles' Room)

While not of the legendary quality of the Hotel de Soto, Le Fruit de la Rose is a pleasant alternative. It sports a popular restaurant next to its lobby and fine service despite its location in a less-reputable part of town. Atticus Wambles has been trying to find a lawyer he can afford to hire. He wishes to sue the March family for the entirety of Dashell's inheritance, arguing he is the man's firstborn heir. His claim on the estate is based on being the beneficiary of his mother, who he claims March neglected and abandoned.

Until such time as he can secure counsel and begin filing papers, Wambles gathers evidence against the March family. Since they might recognize his face, he needs outside help to do so.

### 4A. March or May?

Wambles is in his forties and not hard up for money; he owns a lucrative shipping business up north. However, no wealth could ever ease the sting of what his father did in abandoning his mother. His entire adult life, he has employed a national news clipping service to look for mentions of his



disappeared father. Much to his surprise, they found a hit three weeks ago... though only for two out of three names.

Atticus claims that Dashell Mann March was originally named Dashell Mann *May*. The portrait printed of March standing at the pulpit is identical to his childhood memories, and Wambles is convinced he has finally found his quarry in death. The scorned son doesn't need the money from the March estate and has no special hatred for the other members of the family, but he is determined to get revenge for what March/May did to his mother all those years ago. He plans to bankrupt the corrupt and fraudulent church that he suspects March of founding solely to hide his former crimes (**Location 0, p.14**).

#### 4B. *The Fate of Gibson, Indiana*

Wambles was born in 1902 in Gibson, Indiana. It was a coal-mining town. His mother, Bertha Wambles, had been previously married, but her first husband died in a tunnel collapse a few short months after their wedding. Left alone and without any means to support herself, she soon found companionship with Dashell May, a foreman at the same mine. They married quickly: he took care of her finances, and Atticus was born shortly thereafter.

The marriage was loveless from as early as Atticus could remember. His father maintained a constant attitude of approachability and humor at work, but he'd immediately become cold and distant upon returning home. He rambled about nonsensical historical and quasi-academic subjects, then grew furious when Atticus and his mother failed to show interest. The two sisters born in subsequent years suffered some sort of mental imbalance that kept them from laughing or crying. The pair rarely even spoke to anyone save themselves, and they seemed to hate their father almost more than they hated their brother. Of course, all of this weird behavior was stamped out in public. Dashell insisted his family maintain the appearance of perfection at all times... or else.

### The Deformed

The Companions maintain a contingency of specialized soldiers to dissuade any curiosity into their affairs. Though all versions of He and She share the same martial prowess, this tiny squad of duplicates knows from birth that this life is dedicated solely to the protecting the clan. Their births are never reported. They never attend school. They spend their whole lives in the most isolated residence the Companions can secure. Each member's first mission is essentially His or Her debut in society.

Though meant to kill or intimidate everything from law enforcement officials to military personnel, the Deformed do no actual training for war. The Companions long ago realized that physical perfection does nothing save reveal their identical nature. Malady and misfortune are far easier to pawn off as unique. As such, every member of the Deformed has clearly visible, self-inflicted mutilations.

They pluck out their eyes, brand their faces, and scar their flesh. They starve themselves or gorge to manipulate their weight. Amputations aren't at all uncommon, and each is performed in isolation without anesthetic. To the Companions, pain is no more than another hellish tedium to be endured.

If witnesses manage to survive an attack by the hideous death squad, they only ever report the assailants' distinguishing deformities, never even noticing an otherwise perfect resemblance to many other functioning members of the community. If ever captured, a Deformed has no ID, no record, and no one that recognizes them. They never, ever speak under interrogation, passively staring at nothing no matter what is being done to them. Once this disconcerting tactic drives captors into other rooms, the modified Companion bites off its tongue.

What's really terrifying is the realization that *every* Companion, even the ones passing off as normal citizens, goes through each day with multiple memories of having lived such a Spartan life that ended choking on blood.

In 1912, when Atticus was ten, he returned home from school to find his mother nearly beaten to death. Later, she would claim that two men came by that morning. They looked like professors and had a lot of questions about Bertha's husband. In the middle of the questioning, Mrs. Wambles claimed that both her daughters suddenly went running out the back door. The two men gave chase, ignoring the woman's screams.

No more than a half hour later, Dashell May came home early from work with only one of his daughters in tow. He proceeded to beat Bertha to a pulp, screaming that she had "ruined everything." He then packed a bag and left with the girl.

As young Atticus was tending to his mother, shots could be heard in the distance. Apparently, there was some altercation between strangers at the coal mine. The fire spread into the tunnels and dynamite got used in the wrong vein. The coal mine burned with nearly fifty men still inside. The town of Gibson still burns today, no more than a smoldering crater with a spiderweb maze of hell blazing beneath it. Atticus managed to help his mother escape the inferno only to watch her sanity whither away until she committed suicide when he was fifteen. Dashell May was never seen again... until Wambles found a picture in a Savannah newspaper nearly two decades later.

*(GM NOTE: March and May are the same Companion under a different alias. It should be noted that Wambles is not the Companion's biological son: the first husband conceived Atticus before his death and his mother never told the truth. Atticus's "sisters," on the other hand, are female Companions and part of the conspiracy. That is why they never bore him any affection and disappeared with their "father.")*

#### 4C. The Fire of '29

In his weeks in town, Mr. Wambles has only become more and more certain that March is the man he is looking for. The holy man apparently settled after witnessing a wildfire as he "drove through" Barefoot Crossing. March frequently cited the event in his sermons, claiming that the fire was a signal to him that the people needed him.

But Atticus doesn't think it was a coincidence that the former white church and its pastor, Thomas Atkins, suffered the most damage in the bushfire. The abandoned son has no way to prove it, but he suspects his runaway father set the fire to carve a place for himself in the community, just like he destroyed Gibson to cover his escape from the law. The Atkins place has since recovered and is again a functioning farm run by the March clan (**Location 7, p.27**). Wambles wants to go check it out, but he fears he'd be recognized.

#### 4D. Meeting with Garrod

The best lead Wambles has is Caiden Garrod. The Lloyd's of London investigator, despite the conflict of interest between his employers' motivations and Atticus's case, met with Wambles and discussed matters a few weeks previous. Mr. Wambles got the impression that Garrod was legitimately on his side; the Brit seemed interested in everything he had to say and spared him the usual disbelief. But shortly after agreeing to meet again soon in a safer location, Garrod disappeared. Wambles has been unable to reach him at his room in the Hotel de Soto for over a week and fears the worst. While the man is too paranoid to go investigate himself, he'll give characters Garrod's room number and suggest they search his room (**Location 6, p.25**).

#### 4E. The Deformed Attack

*(GM NOTE: This event only occurs if PCs find and talk to Wambles as a secondary location, not if he hires them initially. The illegitimate heir is under surveillance, and while talk with strangers in the hotel lobby can be dismissed as friendly chatter, seeing the "new members" of the Unifying Word Revival pop up at Wambles hotel in the same week is too much of a coincidence. The Companions decide to put a scare into Wambles and the PCs to get them off the trail.)*

*Wary characters can notice an odd group of unfortunates loitering around Le Fruit de la Rose, dispersed around the lobby, in the restaurant, and on the street outside. Each appears to be noticeably scarred in some obvious way (see **The Deformed, p. 21**). One woman is missing an arm, another is morbidly obese – there's a man with an eye*

patch and another barely conceals the burn marks covering his head under a fedora. If they're noticed at all, characters can see that the group obviously looks to a hulking brute propping up the lunch counter for leadership. The man-mountain has a startling cleft palette that dribbles as he nurses his tea, and his eyes can be caught straying towards Wambles when he's not launching discouraging glares at anyone who tries to start a conversation.

If characters don't notice the Deformed, or if the Deformed don't know they've been spotted, they will wait until Wambles returns to his room with the PCs or goes to some other secluded place. Once isolated, the whole group will attack in freakish, uncanny unison.

Seeing this human hive mentality in action strikes a blow against any sane person's mind, and actual blows are soon to follow. While the Deformed don't want to kill Wambles and the PCs yet (it would draw too much attention), they intend to terrify and cripple anyone looking into the March family. Their broken frames don't disguise the ferocity and tactical precision of their hand-to-hand attacks. They'll keep attacking relentlessly until their victims are at the point of death. The hare-lipped leader then lisps a warning: "Stay away from the Marches or you die. Get out of Savannah and don't come back." Finally, the raiders do their best to escape, leaving Wambles and the PCs broken and unconscious.

If PCs manage to best the attackers' simply astounding hand-to-hand skills, the Deformed that can flee will do so. Any captured by the police say nothing, no matter the interrogation method. Any killed don't carry ID on them, but their corpses provide a whole new set of problems to everyone involved.

## 5. Chatham County Records Office

Were it not for the efforts of the Historical Preservation Society and the building's utility in financial disputes, the Records Office would have likely decayed into a heap of rubble years ago. Housed in one of Savannah's oldest civic buildings, the dusty file cabinets and mildewed

bookshelves might as well be holding up the ceiling rather than resting underneath it. Between the incompetence, deregulation, and outright graft of local officials, proper paperwork was only ever a polite suggestion for citizens of Chatham County. Only the fastidious and paranoid bother to get their forms filled out, and even then the records are thrown onto the whims of whatever disinterested clerk gets charged with filing them. The document a man needs might very well be there, but finding anything means a long, sweaty day in the stacks.

### 5A. March Birth Certificates and Marriage Licenses

March's marriage to Lydia occurred in 1925. Care appears to have been taken to transfer this document to Georgia from Kansas – which is odd – but their marriage is still remarkably fresh for people of their advanced age. The March children don't appear to have had their birth certificates re-filed since coming to the state though, and all appear to be single on paper. Anyone that's seen the family's pew at the Unifying Word Revival knows this isn't true; Dashell March Jr., for certain, was seen holding hands with a woman wearing a wedding band... a woman that looked like a younger version of his mother.

### 5B. Lee Birth Certificates and Husband's Death

Those that noticed the favoritism shown towards the Lee family might be inspired to look up their paperwork (**Clue 0B, p.14**). While their direct connection to the March family isn't immediately apparent, investigators with a keen eye notice similarities between the family's address and the Church deeds (**Clue 5D, p.24**) as well as the close proximity of the signing dates. Intrinsically, the family's documents don't make mathematical sense. If the dates on the Lee birth certificates are correct, of the four children in the family, the youngest is two months old. That means Annabelle Lee had the child when she was *forty-six years old*. Furthermore, her marriage license notes that her husband, Frank Lee, died in 1928. But there are no records of a Frank Lee having died in Chatham County that year. If characters have the wherewithal to call for Annabelle's maiden



name in other states where March was known to have lived, they find more information in Missouri. A kindly clerk will inform them that there are no records of a woman with that maiden name, but they do have an Annabelle Cipolla married to a man named Frank Cipolla in St. Louis. Frank Cipolla died in 1915 under mysterious circumstances. If asked, the Missouri clerk doesn't think the couple originated from his state; there are notes that Annabelle originally came from Indiana and went by the maiden name of Rosetti.

Lastly, the family's address is listed (**Location 9, p.34**).

### *5C. Carter Birth Certificates, Marriage License, and Felonies*

Those that noticed the favoritism shown towards the Carter family might be inspired to look up their paperwork (**Clue 0B, p.14**). While their direct connection to the March family isn't immediately apparent, investigators with a keen eye notice similarities between the family's address and the Church deeds (**Clue 5D, p.24**) as well as the close proximity of the signing dates. A number of other inconsistencies and red flags show upon further investigation. The marriage license for Mary Beth and David Carter is dated Oct. 11th, 1929. If the birth certificates of their children are to be believed, this means that 3 out of 4 of their children were born out of wedlock, the earliest over a decade before the pair wed. There are also notes that indicate David Carter's name should be stricken from all ballots either as candidate or voter. Further inquiries are to be directed to the Sheriff's Office. Characters with the credentials to follow up on this find that Mr. Carter has an impressive list of felonies on his record: assault, assault with a deadly weapon, burglary, and a number of domestic disputes with various women. His criminal career only appears to have died down after marrying Mary Beth.

Lastly, the family's address is listed (**Location 8, p.31**).

### *5D. Unifying Word Revival Deeds*

For a church that holds services out of a tent every week, the Unifying Word Revival owns an alarming amount of property. The largest tract of land is the Old Atkins place (**Location 7, p.27**) and was purchased for no more than a song after being ravaged by the wildfire of 1929 (**Clue 4C, p.22**). The March clan also owns the homes of Carter (**Location 8, p.31**), Lee (**Location 9, p.34**), and a few other family farms in the area. In regards to Lee, the church owned the home from the very start. The date of sale for the Carter home is the same day Mary Beth and David filed their marriage license.

### *5E. Alias Deeds (if known)*

If characters have already discovered Caiden Garrod's bibliographic notes (**Clue 6B, p.25**), they can find more revealing information. Garrod discovered that the past few years have seen a lot of property change hands in Chatham County. In addition to bills of sale for all the March property and that held under the name of the church, every failed farm in Barefoot Crossing (of which there are many) has been quickly bought out after foreclosure. The same names that purchase the farms also deal with very lucrative storefront and dockside properties in Savannah.

A particularly sharp mind can spot similarities amongst all the owners, and anyone familiar with the March Will (**Clue 1A, p.16**) finds one of the names (Gurwilon Maia) familiar. All the names involved in the Chatham County land grab share eerie similarities: the last names are all names of months in varying languages (March, Mars, Maart, Marz, etc) and the middle names translate the typical gender assigned to the first name (Dashell Mann March, Steve Macho Abril, Liam Kerl Januar, Tony Ragazzo Augustus, etc.)

The system is too perfect to be coincidence. The huge amount of property being purchased in and around Barefoot Crossing is either the work of a single man using systematic aliases or the focus of a vast conspiracy whose members use their own names as code.

## 6. Hotel de Soto (Caiden Garrod's Room)

Savannah's finest lodging establishment boasts gourmet chefs, professional service, and a lavish décor. Only the city's elite can afford the decadent accommodations, making the De Soto's restaurant infamous for hosting negotiations of international finance and political power. The hotel's reputation for excellence is only matched by its reputation for discretion.

Behind a "Don't Disturb" sign, Caiden Garrod's room couldn't further undermine the building's opulence if it tried. The bed and desk are littered with documents, scraps of torn paper, and barely legible notes. Dirty clothes are strewn about everywhere. There's an elaborate hierarchy of names and strange tribal doodles painted onto the walls in ink and...something else. The bathroom has been converted into a makeshift dark room. A half-finished plate of food that's been sitting on the nightstand for over a week writhes with maggots.

### 6A. Tailed

If players advertised their interests or otherwise revealed their identities, the March family will tail them (see **The Deformed, p. 21**). They know that Garrod was staying at the De Soto, but they don't know in which room. They'll hang back and monitor any characters looking for the man, striking if they find the room. Their hope is to secure whatever evidence the Lloyd's employee gathered against them.

If the characters haven't revealed themselves to the Marches yet, they'll just notice an unusually large number of mutilated people looking oddly attentive outside the lobby. The sight of so many suspicious people with cleft palettes, missing eyes, and amputated arms is enough to put the most tolerant of people on edge and warn them to use subtlety.

Discovering Garrod's room number requires knowledge gleaned from Columbus Rathbone (**Location 1, p.16**), Garrod's key (see **Clue 7E, p.30**), or successfully persuading the front desk manager (not easy without some elaborate deception). The room is located on third floor. Gaining entry requires acquiring the key,

picking the lock, scaling the building to the window, or kicking the door open. Even then, characters that failed to notice their tail will be quickly attacked by The Deformed.

### 6B. Bibliographic Notes

As an insurance investigator, Garrod was a consummate professional. The man did his homework on the targets of his case. Amongst the nonsensical scraps littering the room, investigators can find a wrinkled sheet with bibliographic notes for finding documents at the Chatham County Records Office (**Location 5, p.23**).

In game terms, possessing this sheet of paper provides all the clues available at the Records Office without a dice check and in much less time. Garrod used his knowledge of the Lloyd's of London accounts to discover all the aliases operating in the area and every paperwork inconsistency.

### 6C. Annotated Photograph

In the bathroom-turned-makeshift-dark-room, PCs can find Garrod's cover. It appears the Brit was making inquiries of the Marches disguised as a reporter for the *Savannah Daily News*. The ruse seems professional: the dark room has a complete outfit, forged press credentials, and "drafts" of a human interest story on the Unifying Word Revival. A number of pictures of the congregation hang about the room. In the sink, one photograph has been extensively annotated and modified using information Garrod found in his records research (show players the handout "Sunday 6.25.1933"). On the back, the amateur detective pasted a copy of his "caption notes" taken when the photo was shot. It reveals the addresses of the Carters (**Location 8, p.31**) and Lees (**Location 9, p.34**).

## 6D. Annotated Contents of Bank Vault Under Alias

A typewritten inventory of items in a Swiss bank vault sits submerged under a tide of documents on the bed. The list is written on official Lloyd's of London letterhead; it appears this is the vault that Garrod used his credentials to access before coming to America. The vault apparently belongs to a Finnish national named Abel Homme Iokakuu. The inventory is heavily annotated in Garrod's own handwriting, which appears in parentheses:

- Owner: Abel Home Iokakuu (account number the same as the March case, in reverse. Can't be a coincidence. Must check on holiday)
- Spanish Land Holdings (El Castillo! I thought it was a dead end, but those paintings in the cave...I MUST REMEMBER. Was there really something in the woods, stalking me, the entire time. What does it know? Is it the thing from the painting? I MUST REMEMBER.)
- Assorted Family Portraits (dear god! What is going on!? Needed for evidence)
- Five Faberge Eggs (missing for years!)
- Gold (stamped as CSA currency...how? Why ship overseas?)
- Assorted Mesoamerican Objects (the infamous La Noche Triste treasure?)
- Turkish Tapestry (lost in the Vault of Snagov)
- French Tapestry portion (Missing Bayeux section? Impossible!)
- Altarpiece ("Raising of the Cross" thought lost in bombardment of Brussels)
- Numerous paintings (I should have taken these too, but I'm no thief)
  - "The Fisherman's Daughter/ Mender of Nets" Jules Breton, missing WWI
  - "Time Saving Truth From Envy and Discord" by Nicolas Poussin, missing 1840
  - Numerous works by Sandra Botticelli, lost in Bonfire of the Vanities
  - "The Circumcision" by Rembrandt, lost in the 18th century

Any characters with a background in art history recognize this as a list of some of history's greatest lost masterpieces. If such treasures truly survived squirreled away in a secluded vault, the contents would be worth millions of dollars.

## 6E. Folio of Portraits

Sharp-eyed characters notice that the vent grate underneath the nightstand sticks out. Tampering with the screws reveals that the grating was removed and improperly replaced. Inside, a rolled up artist's folio has been concealed. It appears this bit of paranoia was done in a hurry since "rolled-up inside a vent" is the absolute last place one would want to store some of the more aged contents.

The folio contains dozens of family portraits. The artistic medium varies from oil painting to watercolor to photographs of sculptures and woodcuts. The perceptive notice an eerie similarity between all the images. Mothers look like time-lapse photos of daughters, even as paintings turn to black-and-white photography. The bust of a patriarch bears striking resemblance to the younger brother in another painting. Identical twins abound. Nobody ever smiles.

Those with a working knowledge of art can arrange the pieces in a rough chronological order. If this is done, it becomes apparent that some of the portraits were taken simultaneously. Italian and German brushstrokes, contemporaneous in the art history, are used to depict the families with identical features in strikingly different locales. Regardless of time period or setting, everyone depicted displays a startling resemblance to the men and women of the March family.



## 6F. Recreated Cave Painting

As Garrod's global inquiry into the Marches grew increasingly strange, the man's calm seemed to degrade. The slovenly disarray and the obsessed world travel certainly suggest this fact, but nothing advertises the educated young gentleman's descent into madness quite like the walls of his room. Above the bed – using paint, ink, food dyes, and other mysterious substances – Garrod spent his nights in Savannah trying to recreate a painting from memory. Though players have no access to the original, the insurance investigator actually did a passable job (see **The Monsters, p. 5**). Characters with sufficient knowledge of the occult, anthropology, or archeological can learn a bit from the mad scribbling. The note about the vault contents (see **Clue 6D, p.26**) indicates the deeds he found led him to Spain before he made his way to America. Apparently, the insane mural is a recreation of what he found there. If Garrod accurately mimicked the style and his label of “El Castillo” is to be believed, the original paintings would be more ancient than anything ever discovered and located somewhere within a labyrinthine Spanish cave system.

*(GM NOTE: The truly knowledgeable are able to piece together a condensed narrative from the pictures. Read the following to a player that dares parse the ancient images: “A great warrior and a... witch woman, I guess? They fall in love. But they feared death as all do. They went to the Gods and... parleyed? Communed? They would let Gods into the world if they could beat death.*

*So they agree, and there is much death among the people – indicated by the bloody palms. But the God killed the couple when it came into the world and... rebirthed them? Many times? And now the warrior gives birth to the witch, and the witch gives birth to the warrior. Forever.*

*And the pair of them, if they touch, give birth to the God...but they don't want to, I think. So they just keep birthing each other, over and over, and then there is nothing but the warrior and the witch. See? They even drown out the bloody hands, the deaths of the people. I think there aren't even any people left to*

*die, by the end. Just those two.”*

## 7. March Farms

The farmland formerly owned by Thomas Atkins is largely unused. Granted, its previous owner sold to the March's at a cheap price when fire devastated much of the acreage, but years have passed since that day. The areas cleared by the fire now offer rich, fertile soil in countryside otherwise drained by cotton, yet huge tracts have gone to seed or been left as piles of ash. The only landmarks on the massive property are the barns for the food growing operation, some forest that survived the '29 fire, and the dilapidated former Atkins residence located on the outskirts.

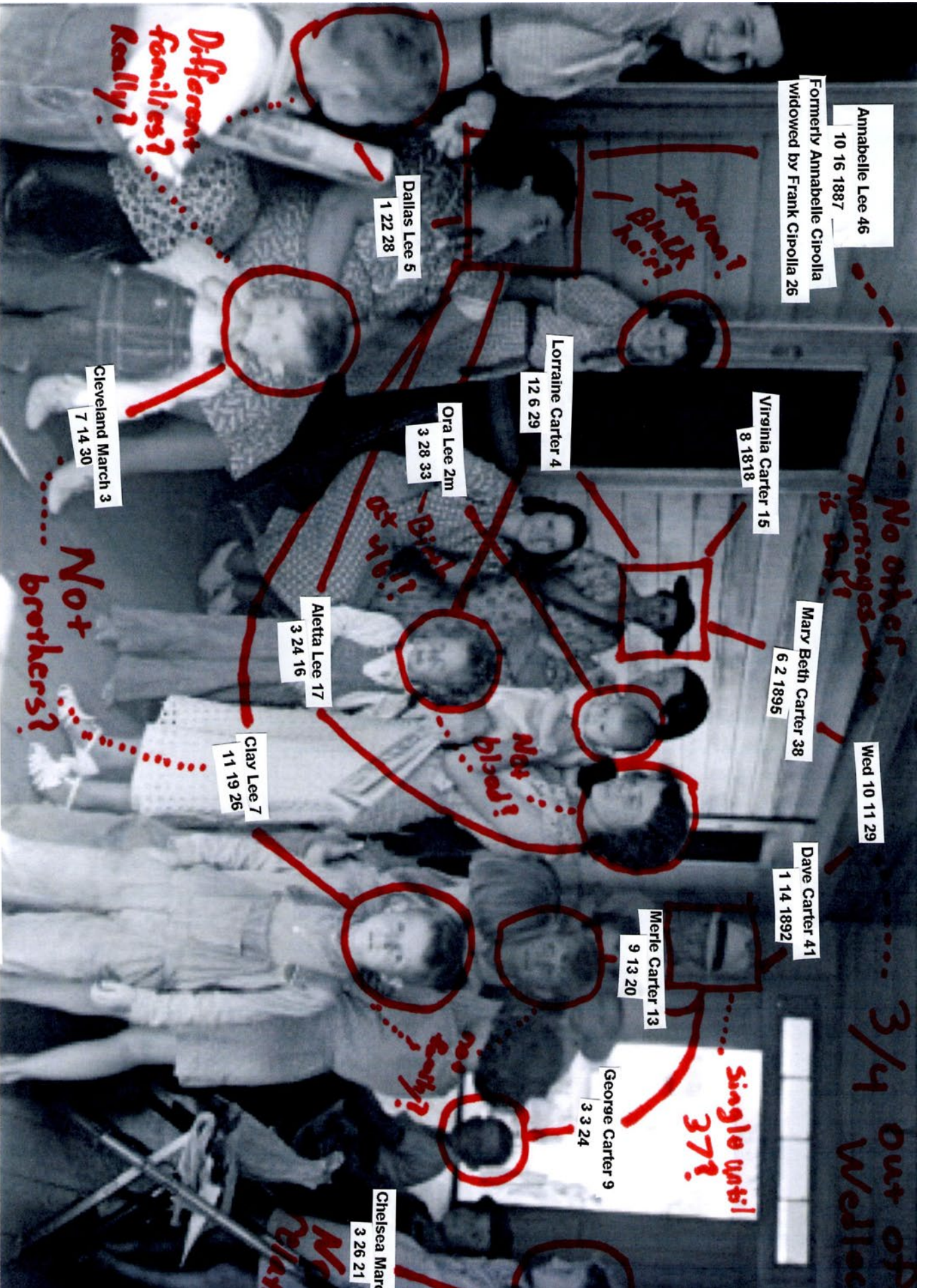
The only people ever present are the volunteer field hands from the church and a single member of the March clan operating as foreman. Though many are suspicious to see outsiders at the farm, they won't be outwardly hostile. Most merely have too much to do to waste time on curious parties, and they have nothing to hide besides. They're merely cooperating to feed their families... as far as they know.

### 7A. Where are the Weevils?

Though used entirely for food farming now, it appears that at one time some of the fields on the property were used for cotton crops. The stalks remain withered where they were planted in previous seasons; some have sat so long that wild cotton springs up between the rows. Characters with any experience in agriculture know this makes no sense. Even if the Marches could afford to practice proper crop rotation (most can't), leaving the stalks planted does nothing for soil recovery and is in clear violation of Georgia quarantine protocols. Boll weevils can still breed amongst dead stalks and leaving them after a harvest is an invitation for the creatures to decimate every crop for miles around. Yet Barefoot Crossing is one of the few places in Georgia supposedly recovering from the infestation.



Clue 6D



Sunday 6 25 1933



Investigating the dead fields closer, amateur botanists can see that there are absolutely no signs of boll weevil infection amongst the fields. More startlingly, the cotton bolls are still full. No one ever harvested these cash crops; they were planted, cultivated, and left to rot.

Anyone asked about the abandoned cotton crops dotting the property doesn't know anything about it. They've only ever seen the farm used for church food production since the Marches took over. They claim it must have been the Atkins' that planted and abandoned the cotton, despite the fact that the rotting plants couldn't have stuck around since '29.

### 7B. Duty Schedule

Characters that get inside the barn notice a thick clipboard hanging from a nail. The sheaf of papers attached reads "Duty Schedule" at the top and contains an exhausting list of names. Players that take the time to study the ream of dates and names discover that every member of the church appears at semi-regular intervals for years. It seems that members of the Unifying Word Revival dedicate one out of every six days to farming for the church. While dates and times for each member are listed, there are neither payroll records, crops sales receipts, nor share agreements. The people do the work for no other pay than food to feed their families, apparently dedicating the entirety of their land to cotton production. In short, the Unifying Word Revival has transformed its congregation into a socialist food collective, leaving the workers five days a week to profit from their inexplicably pest-free cash crops. How the Marches manage to pay for all livestock, seed, and equipment required to run such an operation remains a mystery.

At the back of the clipboard rests a separate list of contact information for all the workers. The additional names of Annabelle Lee and Dave Carter (locations **8, p. 31** and **9, p. 34**) appear in the contact list without ever showing up for a scheduled shift. Those checking for the name of Spratt won't find an address, but the names of Becky and Claudette Spratt show up a few times before ceasing work a month ago.

### 7C. Ancient Practices

The volunteers at the March farm use archaic practices. Plowing is done by a horse-drawn plow, not the shallow disc plows of recent invention. Tractors are used rarely, if ever, instead opting for beasts of burden. Seeds are planted by hand. It seems to be quite an adjustment for some of the sharecroppers used to more modern conveniences, but such things are apparently forbidden on the premises.

### 7D. Arcane Borders

Those that spend an extensive amount of time wandering the miles of empty farmland will notice grid lines cut into the grass, criss-crossing the entire property. Nothing seems to grow on these perfectly straight mounds of dirt, and they aren't very practical compared to a fence as a means of separating property. There's no explanation as to why the grass doesn't grow over them besides the possibility of salting the earth. At over two feet across, it's possible the lines operate as fire breaks, but that seems a remarkably paranoid and labor-intensive precaution considering the relatively barren fields.

Really curious investigators might get the urge to dig beneath the dirt: perhaps some massive pipe could explain the grid of exposed earth. If they do so, PCs find an odd braid about six inches deep and in the center of the disruption. The braid appears to be made of leather, hair, and raw cotton entwined together, and knots tie the materials together into lines that stretch for miles.

While initially confusing, the buried braid gets more disturbing the longer characters think about it. What's the purpose of the entire endeavor? How long would it take to create miles of such a braid and bury it? What kind of surveyor would map out the geometrical perfection required of the grid for such a useless project? Why is all the hair brunette? How long would it take to tie that much hair together? To grow it? What animal is that leather made out of?



## 7E. The Abandoned House

The farmhouse of Thomas Atkins has been empty ever since the sale of his burned property in 1929. Broken windows, peeling paint, and knee-high grass advertise the property's abandonment. The only thing that appears to have been maintained is the new barbed-wire fence that has been installed around the building.

The interior is barren, but characters with experience in tracking can tell it hasn't been empty all these years. Amongst the glass shards and animal droppings, drag marks can be seen leading towards the basement door. Characters that brave the lightless stairwell wish they hadn't. Propped against one of the dirt walls sits a weeks-old rotting corpse.

Those with the stomach to overcome the stink can investigate closer. The putrescent, bloated body appears to be the freshest of several corpses. It rests on a pile of mummified flesh and human skeletons. Forensics experts can tell that the methods of murder varied, but all victims appeared to have died violent deaths with the latest corpse resulting from multiple stab wounds. Were it not for the bloodstains and necrotic excretions, the victim would be wearing a very sharp suit. Otherwise, decay makes identification impossible on the spot.

Fighting off the rats and roaches proves not to be worth it; the man carries no ID (the Marches already took it). However, in gnawing at the man's shoe leather one of the vermin has revealed something shiny. Hidden away in a hidden compartment within the heel rests a hotel key. The chain identifies it as belonging to the Hotel de Soto, Rm. 315 (**Location 6, p.25**).

Most horrifying of all, the body appears to have been bound postmortem. Braids of hair, leather, and cotton lead from both wrists – their ends actually embed into the dead man's veins surgically. Each oddly constructed tether buries itself into the earthen walls of the unfinished basement. Players familiar with the odd grid running throughout the entire compound (**Clue 7D, p.29**) recognize these weird restraints.

If characters keep their heads after seeing such a grisly sight, they may notice the parcel resting in the opposite corner of the basement. On a pile of bloody rags rests a tin of boot black, a lighter, and a flint knife. The chemicals in the tin haven't dried out and the lighter still works, so it appears as if someone is regularly visiting the basement to use these items.

*(GM NOTE: Players have no way of knowing for certain that the body is that of Caiden Garrod until they visit the Hotel de Soto. Furthermore, take note of whether or not characters were seen headed towards the abandoned house. The March family only keeps one member at the farm at any given time, and they won't risk an attack if they're outnumbered. The more likely tactic would be to report to the rest of the family and ambush PCs later.)*

## 7F. Blood Sacrifice

Players might get the idea to stake out the abandoned farmhouse to see who returns to the crime scene. Those with knowledge of the occult might already recognize the workings of dark magic and realize that, with the approaching full moon, the mad culprit is likely to return soon. PCs that manage to stay hidden and observe are rewarded for such diligent detective work.

Anyone on stakeout spots a lantern approaching from the northwest at around 11 p.m. A hooded figure riding a mule ambles towards the house, dismounts, unlocks the gate, and enters. Along with the lantern, the figure is carrying some sort of parcel wrapped in cloth close to the chest.

The figure stays inside for a few moments. If allowed to exit without being disturbed, the figure disrobes and can be recognized upon exit. Naked save for cloth undergarments, Wilhelmina March – the eldest March daughter – is recognizable in the lantern light. She’s painted her entire body with unrecognizable arcane symbols. In her left hand, she holds the lantern; in her right, a flint knife. The parcel turns out to be an infant child, asleep in a sarong wrapped around her body. Equipped, the savage lady returns to her mule and walks towards the nearest abandoned cotton field.

Players can easily follow the strange young woman: it’s far too late and secluded to expect company, and she seems preoccupied with chanting something in an incomprehensible language. Tailing her and the mule once they get to the dried cotton stalks becomes more problematic, but it’s still possible for those that step lightly.

Wilhelmina stamps out a perfect circle in the middle of the field and steers the mule to its center. She lays down the swaddled infant and, fast as a snake, lashes back to cut the mule’s throat with the flint knife. The move is preternaturally fast and kills the animal almost instantly in a spray of blood. The practiced ease of the movement is deeply unsettling to behold.

As the animal collapses, Wilhelmina immediately begins gutting the poor beast. She raises the entrails to the full moon, now at its apex in the witching hour, and lets the offal rain down upon her bare skin while continuing her inexplicable chant. The air hums with a dark energy and wind begins whipping towards the field from every direction.

If characters have managed thus far to suppress their screams, the task grows harder as, seemingly from nowhere, thousands of boll weevils begin blanketing the field. The tiny insects crash into the stalks in a living downpour, lifted up on a supernatural wind and carried farther than their wings could ever hope to fly. They writhe across everything, but none fly up to leave. They seem held in place by some invisible force.

If PCs *still* haven’t intervened or fled, Wilhelmina reaches towards the infant. She places the babe into the body cavity of the dead mule, finishes her incantation with a fierce cry, and dashes the lantern against the ground. As the March’s savage daughter flees, the bone-dry field bursts into a conflagration. The boll weevils don’t flee from the heat, burning with the stalks in the most unnatural manner. The baby, terrifyingly, never screams.

If Wilhelmina is captured or stopped, she’ll try and fight to the death. After all, there is nothing they can do to her that won’t be explained away as the depravity of the poor white girl’s murderers. In the unlikely event she is captured, investigators can’t expect anything save unsettling taunts, though her very presence is enough to indicate that the March plantation is the origin of all this madness (**Location 12, p.40**).

Rescuing the infant is equally unrewarding. The baby is just another male Companion, born off the books and sacrificed as no more than a magical pesticide. The horrible little thing just stares at them with its ancient dead eyes.

*(GM NOTE: GMs should feel free to introduce unforeseen consequences if PCs tamper with the magical spell. Side effects might be codified in some systems, but keep in mind that there is no type of arcane secret the Companions haven’t had time to learn. Perhaps cutting the braided cord that segments the land releases the boll weevils and sends the burning little creatures flying like a swarm of sparks. Maybe ending the incantation early magically revives the mule and flays the sanity of anyone forced to hear its undead bray.)*

## 8. Carter House

The Carters live on the outskirts of Savannah, too close to town to own a farm. The “parents” are Mary Beth and David Carter. They have four children: Virginia (15), Merle (13), George (9), and Lorraine (4). When players arrive, Merle is playing jacks with Virginia on the porch, George is reading a book in a rocking chair, and Lorraine is walking her doll down the steps. They somehow give the impression that they could be found here at

any time of day. It could be four in the morning – there would still be the jacks, the book, and the doll.

The children try to tell any visitors that their parents aren't home, but David Carter can plainly be seen drinking alone at the kitchen table. The kids will reluctantly retrieve him to speak to any visitors if pressed. Mrs. Carter can be seen through the window in the family room. She sits on the sofa... just sort of staring straight ahead.

## 8A. *Squandered Wealth*

The house could be nice – *really* nice. It has electricity, spacious rooms, and tasteful decoration. It's a better property than could be found anywhere but downtown Savannah, yet everything looks sullied by filth and neglect. The exterior paint has mildewed and peeled. The fragments of a broken vase in the hall have collected a thick layer of dust, apparently abandoned where it fell. Clothes and dirty plates lay strewn about. What does David Carter do that he can afford a place like this during such hard times? And how can he care so little for it?

## 8B. *"Gifted" Children*

Wary characters notice that the games and dalliances of the Carter children exhibit more dedicated skill than is typically ascribed to grandmasters in other fields. Virginia and Merle seem caught in a war of perfection: each one trades off grabbing all ten jacks with a lightning fast sweep of the hand, neither ever commenting on the other's superb reflexes. George can be caught reading some dusty tome in Latin behind his children's book. Lorraine walks her doll down the stairs with the predictable movements of a factory line. Upon closer inspection, it's uncertain if the little girl is putting the doll's feet onto worn patches in the step's paint or if the doll's feet *made* the worn patches through thousands of repetitions. This unnatural perfection seems only to grow more pronounced the more the character notices it, seemingly increasing in intensity the longer visitors keep asking questions.

## 8C. *Eerie Similarities*

Characters that first encountered the Carters at the Unifying Word Revival suffer some cognitive dissonance. It seems they mistook some of the Carter children as part of the Lee family, or perhaps some of the Lee family as Carter children. In fact, even characters with photographic memories can't recall exactly who was sitting with whom. The children of the two families bear far more resemblance to each other than to their parents. If they hadn't already, characters should begin to suspect the Lee family (**Location 9, p.34**).

## 8D. *Hair Dye Manufacture*

If players manage to get upstairs, they'll find the Carters to be living in a sty. Only one of the four rooms appears to be occupied by a bedroom, and this is furnished with filthy mattresses that cover the floor. The whole group sleeps on the floor together. Strange vats of liquids and bushels of various herbs take up every other available space. Characters with backgrounds in chemistry or cosmetics recognize these strange concoctions as hair dyes of various color. Each appears to be made using an ancient herbal recipe, yet it's prepared with a factory-like concern for volume. Bottles and boxes sit ready to ship the various dyes, but no labels are present. If they aren't selling the stuff, what could possibly be the use of that much hair dye?

## 8E. *Mr. Carter's House*

David Carter will not be pleased to see anyone visiting his home. Instead of the passive demeanor displayed at church, the "patriarch" behaves like a drunken psychopath at home. He'll immediately threaten characters with violence if they don't leave his property, angrily waving around a half-finished (and illegal) whisky bottle as he slurs threats. Attempts to calm him only stir his fury. The only thing that checks Carter's irrational rage is his daughter, Lorraine. As conflict escalates, the "young" girl tugs on Carter's overalls and says, "Daddy, stop."

The frenzied man reaches back to actually backhand the four-year old, but the child's unearthly glare stops him mid-swing. With



a chilling certainty more fitting a monarch's execution sentence, the little girl continues: "Calm down, Daddy. You might get yourself hurt." She then returns to silently playing with her doll.

This interaction between father and daughter calms the madman down, but it's far from comforting. Carter is plainly not past hitting a child, but he seems to back down more out of fear than shame. After a half-hearted apology, Dave begins poorly feigning ignorance to all the PCs' questions. The only thing that breaks his stonewalling is mention of Mary Beth. He refuses to let anyone speak to her and the merest attempt is enough to set him off again. This time, nothing save a sound beating will stop the crazed drunk. A physical confrontation begins (clue 8F, next).

### *8F. Confrontation/ Carter's Arrangement*

Carter is an older man that drinks heavily and rarely labors. While a smack from his bottle remains dangerous, he isn't too hard to best in combat. Once beaten, so long as he still lives, Carter pleads for mercy. He promises to tell PCs whatever they want so long as they do so in a secluded place "away from the children."

Once alone, Carter spills everything he knows about the Companions. He doesn't know their origins, but he's aware of their immortality and reproductive habits. In his halting, uneducated speech, he explains that his past run-ins with the law for drinking and violence were what drew "Her" (it's all he knows to call Her; she has no real name) to him in the first place. In exchange for getting him out of jail for what would have been his last offense, Carter would join Her extended family. He would marry whomever they told him to and pretend to raise some children. His payment would be all the money he could ever spend and a chance to have sex with Her or any of Her "daughters" whenever he wished. Thus, Carter was released and married to the catatonic Mary Beth, a woman's whose mind is so broken by life with the Companions that she lives in a perpetual state of shock.

Soon enough Carter realized something was amiss: "Whenever I'd throw one of them a screw, they all acted the same way. Laid there like a dead fish with those hateful damn eyes. Never fought or nothing. Took all the fun out it." Dave is sure he's fathered numerous bastards with women of the March family and others, but he doesn't know which children and doesn't care to. While Lydia is the first one to contact him, he's lost track of how many versions he's taken to bed. Obviously, the Marches have something to do with Carter, even if he just used them to concoct an unbelievable lie.

While Carter knows something is deeply abnormal about his situation, the stupid, misogynistic asshole has fooled himself into thinking he's penetrated the conspiracy of *all* women to control and destroy men. He hates the Companions as he seems to hate everything, but he begs the characters to let him go and not tell anyone what he's told them. His fear of his secret wife is as total as his loathing for Her. She knows magic, he claims, and can use it to do terrible, abhorrent things.

*(GM NOTE: If PCs don't take Carter far away to talk (as in getting in a car and leaving), the "children" will eavesdrop. The Companions do not tolerate betrayal by those coerced into their service. The children strike around the time Carter finishes his confession, each moving with a lightning grace that would be the envy of professional soldiers (see **Roleplaying Companions, p. 7**). They'll try to kill Carter first, then move to eliminate the PCs. The older ones, Virginia and Merle, strike with masterful martial arts techniques. Little George fetches a cleaver from the kitchen. Lorraine, being the smallest, uses the distraction of battle to slowly shift a chair underneath the phone. She intends to warn the other cells of their blown cover and the PCs' suspicions. Mary Beth, as always, remains in her stupor on the couch.*

*The Companions will fight to the death. Surviving the encounter means killing the inhuman things that look exactly like children. No amount of knowledge can rationalize the memory of such a monstrous act. Those that survive might come to wish they hadn't.)*

## 9. Lee House

Located on the easternmost edge of the expansive March landholdings, the Lee household is a conspicuous jewel amongst an impoverished setting. The house itself is beautiful, perfectly staged on a background of lush forest and green fields. Lee is a widow, left to raise four children on her own: Aletta (17), Clay (7), Dallas (5), and Ora (2 months). If players arrive at any time of day, Aletta will be found hanging laundry up on the line. Clay and Dallas fence with toy swords. Ora sleeps in her crib as Annabelle bakes in the kitchen. If characters visit at night, the entire family can be found knitting and sewing in the living room. Even the young boys participate with impressive skill.

The children summon Annabelle to greet any visitors. The woman behaves as graciously as one could want from a host, inviting characters inside for coffee. Ora, as an infant, is always at her mother's side, feigning sleep as her mother feigns ignorance to every question asked.

### 9A. Suspicious Opulence

For being located in the middle of sharecropping land, the house is disconcertingly modern. Phone and electric lines have been run out all the way from the city, no doubt at great expense. The furniture is all brand-new or tastefully antique. The interior looks as if it has been cleaned professionally, devoid of the grime that comes with a farmer's life. In fact, it seems the wide-open fields around the house are completely uncultivated. One wonders what a widow like Annabelle could possibly do to maintain such a lavish home. If it's not farming, how did she come to live so far outside the city? What did her former husband do for a living?

### 9B. Barren

Medical experience or extensive knowledge of horticulture enables characters to recognize the bugwort plants being cultivated in pots around the house. The herb is known for its ability to relieve hot flashes and fatigue, both symptoms of menopause. All folk remedies ascribed to the plant, such as blood pressure and arthritis relief, have superior prescription drug

treatments that the Carters can obviously afford. In fact, treatment for menopause is the only sensible reason to cultivate the plant at home. The only woman possibly old enough to be having hot flashes is Annabelle, and she apparently had a child no more than 2 months ago. This shouldn't be possible, and Annabelle has no explanation for it.

### 9C. Odd Sewing

Anybody in view of the clothesline for a few moments notices something odd. Either Annabelle Lee has taken to doing other's peoples washing, or the family operates some sort of textile operation on the premises. There is no consistency in the types of clothes Aletta is hanging up to dry. Some are fancy evening gowns and suits, but there are also overalls and homespun dresses. Further investigation reveals sizes that match no one in the Lee family. Most startlingly, a trained eye can see many of the garments have been deceptively cut. Some use every trick in the book to be more slimming while others use distressed seams and billowing fabric to make the wearer look huge. If characters can get close enough, they'll notice some of the dresses even have false breasts sewn into the bust. One such disguise bears a floral pattern familiar to the dress Lydia March was wearing at Sunday service (**Location 12, p.40**).

### 9D. "Playing" War

The boys fencing on the porch appear somewhat bored with the game, lackadaisically touching the sticks that serve at their imaginary blades. However, they never seem to grow tired enough to quit and find some other distraction. They remain visible throughout the PCs' conversations with Annabelle, waging their fake duel just outside the sitting room window. Every time a character looks back the pair seem to grow more and more enthusiastic in their play. They clash wooden swords faster and faster, seeming to actually attack rather than intentionally clatter against each other like most boys playing swords. The *tap tap tap* of their conflict gets ever more frequent the longer characters take questioning Annabelle, the boys seemingly mirroring their mother's nervousness. Eventually, the fake battle rises to such a pitch that witnesses grow unsettled by the impossible skill

of the little combatants. Only someone schooled in fencing or other bladed weapons will recognize the boys are doing ancient and deadly kata at speeds that would be beyond even master swordsmen.

### 9E. Confrontation/ No Mother of Mine

*(GM NOTE: If PC's don't have enough intel yet to question Annabelle seriously, the Companions may not deem them a credible threat. In this instance, they'll hold off the attack. The eternal couple won't risk exposure on a mere possibility. The likelihood that players get put under surveillance (see **The Deformed**, p. 21) goes up substantially though.)*

Annabelle is not a very good liar, but she has no truths she can provide. She'll claim she doesn't know anything about March's murder, Claudette Spratt, or Caiden Garrod. She can only suggest that PCs must be mistaken when they bring up inconsistencies in both her home and her past. Each deflection is less convincing than the last, and the frazzled woman is all but in tears, begging characters to leave.

If characters ask where Annabelle's husband is at, who fathered her children, what happened to Frank Cipolla in St. Louis, or why she hasn't reverted to her maiden name of Rosetti, the woman completely loses it. She begins wringing her hands, rocking frantically, and repeating the phrase, "Mi dispiace." The worldly recognize this as Italian for "I'm sorry" before Ora Lee begins crying.

Using the sleeping infant as both a spy and alarm, the Companions now know that the characters are too close to the truth. Clay and Dallas cease their play and run to retrieve real blades from the garden shed and kitchen. Meanwhile, Aletta dives into battle with the intensity of a Viking berserker. The 17 year-old is in peak physical condition and has more combat experience than an entire army. Taking her on one-on-one is all but impossible for even the hardest of men. While she attacks with suicidal fervor, the boys will try to sneak in and strike killing blows from behind. During all this chaos, Ora continues to cry and Annabelle cowers on the floor in her continued panic.

At this point, the Companions' best chance of

survival is to kill the PCs, burn down the house, and leave the fate of the Lee family a legend in Barefoot Crossing. They'll fight to the death to achieve this end. Survival for the characters means killing what looks like a 17 year-old girl and two young boys. If characters manage to do this and don't go mad from disgust, Annabelle suddenly snaps out of it. She rushes to the hallway, grabbing a packed suitcase from underneath a loose floorboard. She promises that she'll tell everything if they can get her on a bus out of town, her only other condition being that they abandon Ora as they flee.

If characters agree, Annabelle relates her sad story on the way to the Savannah bus station. She fell in love with a man in Indiana, but he died of TB only a few years after the marriage. Starving and alone, she was saved by a brilliant young gentleman beyond her imagining, so wealthy and full of class as to be from a storybook. He was fluent in Italian despite his anglo features, and he loved her instantly. They married and she had her first child. Everything was going well until she had her second child... which was the same child.

Annabelle can't rightly describe how she knew, but once she let her husband know her suspicions all the pretense of love stopped. He told her that if she breathed another word about the kids to anyone he'd see her back on the streets where he found her. He said that if she didn't want to give him anymore children, he'd find others, but she'd still be their mother if she wanted to keep a roof over head.

Over the years, Annabelle discovered much of how the Companions' relationship and reproduction works. She knows they are older than time, that each gives birth to the other, and that they hate each other with intensity beyond imagining. Due to the fierce restrictions on her travel, she even suspects they've imprisoned something terrible and unnatural in the plantation's cellar (**Clues 12D and 12E**, p. 42). While many times people too smart for their own good have caught the Companions' trail, this is the first opportunity Annabelle has ever had to escape. Rather than be dragged behind like a slave when the Marches change their names and start over yet again, she plans on getting free once and for all: "I'll



starve to death or I'll die alone as a fat, old woman. It doesn't matter. Just so I don't have to look those... those things in the eyes any longer and pretend they're my children."

Before parting for good, Annabelle reveals that the March family is the center of the Companion operations (**Location 12, p.40**). They find it easier to do their work on a large scale when one family elevates itself to a central status. She doesn't know what happened to Dashell, but she suspects his attempts to get another "wife" went wrong; she certainly wishes she had shot the man that approached her all those years ago. Her final warning before fleeing is to stay away from the plantation. Whatever they keep in the basement, even the Companions fear it. She can't imagine anything so terrible as it could scare the monsters that enslaved her for so many years.

## 10. Spratt Shack

In a country ravished by poverty, the Spratt home manages to somehow look more pitiful than most. The one-room hut is surrounded on all sides by swamp and the few patches of land not occupied by bog have refuse rotting atop them. The back is occupied by a moonshine distillery that looks like it would cause its customers to go blind. The place is a disgusting little hovel that could only house the most achingly impoverished trash. When PCs arrive, that trash is readily visible through the open door. Becky Spratt is passed out on her bed inside, obese, surrounded by empty bottles, and snoring in her sweaty nightgown.

### 10A. Signs of Forced Entry

What amounted for a lock – a leather thong hooked between the door and frame – has been busted off by a sharp kick. The boot print is still visible near the handle, but considering the general lack of maintenance on the property, there is no telling how long ago the damage was done. The broken chair and table inside might have resulted from the same attack, or they might have been that way for years.

### 10B. Forgotten Coin

It initially appears to be just another hole in the rotting floorboards, but the sharp-eyed can notice that the gap in corner flooring is actually man-made. Somebody tore into the wood looking for something. Considering the empty secret compartment beneath, they must have found it. Really thorough characters find something glinting in a crack at the bottom of the space. It's a gold coin, seemingly lost in the shuffle to retrieve whatever other treasures rested there. If any players took skills related to history or antiquity, they recognize it as a Spanish doubloon minted in 1798. If the secret compartment had indeed been filled with them, it would have amounted to a small fortune.

### 10C. Spratt's Face

The injuries on Spratt's face are apparent the instant she rises up from her drunken slumber. The bruises are a few weeks old, but the purplish hue on one side of her face still conveys the savage beating she must have received. Becky Spratt lamely claims that she fell if anyone asks about it. She'll then try to redirect conversation towards what people are doing in her home uninvited.

### 10D. Claudette's Hangouts

If asked about her daughter's whereabouts or what happened on the night of Dashell March's murder, Becky is honest: she doesn't know. If she did, she'd happily tell. She says the reason she joined the church is to make sure her hellion of a daughter found Jesus.

Last year, Claudette was catching rides into Savannah with local men on some excuse or another. Becky couldn't have given a damn what the girl did with her time until word got back that Claudette was going into the West Savannah slums blues clubs (**Location 11, p.38**). Though Becky has as much love for her daughter as "that lowdown bastard what left her to devil us all," she wasn't about to tolerate having the family name "dragged through the mud" by the girl consorting with "the negroes."

Spratt took the girl to get some Jesus from Reverend March that very week, but she imagines since it didn't take Claudette long to go back to her sinful ways. The drunken hag claims she'd go looking for the teenager herself, but she's a lady and won't be seen amongst such "low company."

### 10E. Confrontation/ The Dowry

Becky Spratt's version of events – in addition to being racist, hypocritical, and generally abhorrent to hear – doesn't have much credibility. Some of the evidence in the woman's own home contradicts her statements, not to mention clues available at numerous other locations. While willing to slander her daughter all day long, Becky is unprepared to defend her own character. Pressuring her with threats, intimidation, lies, or downright persistence will cause Becky Spratt to break; she is nothing if not a coward.

Becky did force Claudette to attend the Unifying Word Revival with her, but it was the first religious observance Claudette had attended in her young life. Despite the hostility of many parishioners towards the Spratt's low-class lifestyle, the young girl actually managed to make friends. Jealous of her girl hogging all the attention, Becky was prepared never to attend again when she was approached by Lydia March.

Lydia confided in Becky: she had been diagnosed with cancer and would soon die. Lest the congregation grow distraught, this news had been kept a secret from everyone outside the family. However, Lydia truly believed in God's will and his order that she was to serve her husband, even in death. The middle-aged woman admitted that she'd seen Dashell admiring young Becky from afar and during their counseling sessions to cure her of her love of sinful music. Eager to see the love of her life taken care of after her death, Lydia hoped Becky could get Claudette to agree to marry Dashell after her passing.

Of course, Claudette would find the idea repulsive due to the preacher's age and the fact he was still happily married. But if Becky could convince her... well, a mother couldn't hope for a better match

than a pastor's wife, especially one as successful as March. Furthermore, Dashell would, of course, pay a sizable bride-price befitting a Southern gentleman.

Spratt agreed on the spot to the terms, but once returned home, the dull-witted alcoholic couldn't think of a way to break the scandalous news in such a way that would get her tomboy daughter to agree. Always the product of her environment, Becky eventually decided to let Claudette's marriage start off like hers had: one night of confused violence, an unwanted pregnancy, and a lifetime of bondage. It was the girl's own damn fault for disgracing her mother, she rationalized.

One night, two hulking men Spratt had never seen before showed up to the shack to take Claudette to the March house (**Location 12, p.40**). Becky got her in the truck with a lie about late-night "spiritual counseling." Before they left, they unloaded an apple box filled with honest-to-god gold and told her to keep her mouth shut.

That was the night of the murder. The next day, Becky was dragged into the police station to give a confused statement. She did what she was told: she kept her mouth shut. By the time she got back home, the men from the previous night were kicking in the door. They beat her savagely, took back the treasure, and encouraged her to find her daughter lest she wanted to drown in her own swamp. Becky's been looking ever since, at least when she's not drunk. The woman thinks she's done nothing wrong; she found a rich husband for her daughter like every mother should, and the ungrateful brat has repaid her with suffering.

*(GM NOTE: If players are familiar with the March will, they'll know that Spratt's version of events is based off faulty information. March revised his will three months before the night of the shooting. If he'd known his wife was dying of terminal cancer, he'd have taken her name off the will altogether. But then why would Lydia approach Spratt? A public divorce would destroy the church faster than a fire, and Dashell couldn't have married a second wife without going to jail. The plot only makes sense if Lydia was somehow planning to die suddenly and*

wanted to keep the family assets from reverting to the missing wife in Missouri while still avoiding the lose of funds through probate taxes)

## 11. West Savannah Slums

The 50% urban unemployment rate of the Depression looks downright rosy when compounded by pervasive, institutionalized racism. The colored residents of West Savannah doggedly persist by maintaining the infrastructure themselves and sharing what little they have. Signs of crushing poverty dot every street, and few white people ever dare show their faces there. To some residents of the slums, this is the neighborhood's one great virtue.

### 11A. *Bed-less '24 Model TT*

Alphonso Banks' distinctive ride is the best method for learning his whereabouts. It's parked near a cheap flophouse near the outskirts of town, only a few blocks away from the road that leads to Barefoot Crossing. Finding the truck requires knowledge of its existence and hours spent aimlessly wandering the streets. This task can be sped up if the character is familiar with the area or can enlist the help of locals. Characters accepted in southern white society will find the task much, much harder (see **The Problem with History, p. 12**). While they won't be accosted, anyone questioned will lie or feign ignorance in an attempt to get as far away from the interrogator as possible. Inquiries that are too obtuse might even tip Banks off and cause him to flee.

### 11B. *Flophouse Landlord*

Allie Turnbull rents out the spare rooms of her house to supplement income. The occasional renter and her laundry service is enough to keep the old grandmother from burdening her family, but a merciful god would have let the woman retire years earlier. She's keen to avoid cleaning the rooms if at all possible, but she plays it off as a reputation for maintaining guests' privacy. As such, Mrs. Turnbull will be loath to answer any questions about Alphonso Banks or even admit to having met him. However, mentioning that he's suspected of murdering a white pastor



and consorting with a white woman will change her tune very quickly. Allie has too many children and grandchildren that depend on her to risk that much trouble with the law. She says that Alphonso rented a room nearly a month ago. He's late on the rent and about to get thrown out. There's a more reliable tenant that wants the room, and Mrs. Turnbull isn't sure why Banks rented it in the first place; she knows for a fact that the Steel Puncher's Ballroom always lets him stay in the spare room upstairs when he comes into town to play. She urges characters to seek Alphonso there since he only comes to her house to sleep, arriving late at night and leaving first thing in the morning.

### 11C. *The Steel Puncher's Ballroom*

The Ballroom is the most popular speakeasy in the slums. Though nightlife is never really hopping due to Prohibition, black men with a few dollars to spare can always go to the Steel Puncher to escape with a sly beer, passable food, and some good music. The owner actually pays for musicians to play (not much, but any compensation is a rarity) so the place gets the best acts in the area. A chalkboard out front reads, "Country Large on git-fiddle all night!" Anybody that asks the owner for Country Large gets pointed to where the man is strumming guitar on a makeshift stage. Anybody that asks for Alphonso Banks gets met with blank stares and shrugs. The owner is lying, of course, and will continue to do so until he can find a way



to distract or detain the investigators. Once they're obstructed from pursuit, he'll yell for Alphonso to get the hell out of there and the chase is on.

### 11D. "Country Large" Banks

The only person Alphonso is going to talk to willingly is someone working for a radio station or record company. He's done some recordings of popular country songs posing as a white man before. The money for such gigs is good and sorely needed at the moment. Otherwise, Alphonso flees from anyone else looking for him. Nobody is supposed to know where he is, and the man reasonably assumes investigators bring trouble. He'll throw his guitar at any questioners and make a break for the backdoor.

If Alphonso wins the foot chase, he'll head back to his truck and try to get out of town. If he's caught, he can be interrogated. Once trapped, Banks spills everything; the truth was too unreliable while he still had his freedom, but he knows that he's a dead man once he's brought into the authorities.

Alphonso lives in Barefoot Crossing where he owns a small stake. On nights when he can get a gig, he'll drive into town to play guitar for some extra money. He was headed to do just when he almost struck a terrified Claudette Spratt as she sprinted across the road. The girl was spattered with blood and her dress was torn. Always a blues fan, she recognized Alphonso as "Country Large" and begged him for help. She'd be killed if he didn't give her a ride. Against his better judgment, Banks agreed, and when he heard the girl's story, he knew he couldn't let his responsibilities end there.

When asked where Claudette is now, Alphonso leads investigators back to the Steel Puncher's Ballroom.

### 11E. Claudette Spratt's Confession

Claudette Spratt has been holed up in the spare room of the Steel Puncher's Ballroom the entire time. The reason Alphonso is renting a room with Turnbull is so that he doesn't have to share the mattress with the young girl. Though it's apparent by looking around the untidy room that

Claudette has been staying out of sight of her own volition and why Banks went through such pains to keep the young girl hidden. The seclusion and blacked out windows help conceal what would be interpreted as race mixing or outright kidnapping by most men of the South, regardless of Claudette's testimony. Alphonso would certainly be lynched if discovered, along with every other black man the mob could lay hands on.

For being the daughter of white trash like Becky Spratt, Claudette is remarkably progressive. She regards Alphonso as her savior and would happily start a romantic relationship with him if he showed any interest. She loves blues music and jazz, dreaming of one day leaving that stupid hut in the swamp for a big city like Chicago. She's a bit of a rough-and-tumble tomboy, but the events that occurred in Dashell March's plantation home that night have shaken her to her core.

Claudette never much cared for the church her mother forced her to attend or intended to mend her "wicked ways" of listening to "devil negro music." She went along with the old hag because it was easier than fighting her. Claudette was out hunting one day when her mother bellowed to her. Men from the church were there; the reverend had invited her to supper (**Location 12, p.40**). Claudette was going to change, but Becky said the preacher didn't care for putting on airs and she was fine in the dress she was wearing. Thus, Claudette went to the March house with a couple of shotgun shells still in her pocket.

There was no supper. Claudette was ushered straight into the study where Mr. March waited. He had a number of legal documents he needed her to sign and Mrs. March needed to take her measurements. When Claudette asked what for, Lydia responded that she had to be fit for her wedding gown.

Becky hadn't told her daughter she'd all but been sold to Dashell March. She didn't know about Lydia's supposed cancer, the bride-price, or any of it until that night, her drunken coward of a mother just figuring everything would work out. Claudette threw a fit. The Marches tried to calm her down, then threatened her when that didn't work. She'd been bought and paid for, said Dashell. She'd seen too much to be outside the family now. She was a wife of March, until death bid her part.

Claudette tried to run, but March leapt over the table and struck her down "fast as a snake." As she lay bleeding, Lydia March pulled the man off her with some kind of crazy throw: "If that old woman has cancer, it must be the kind what makes you strong as a hell," Claudette claims. The two began screaming at each other in a language Claudette had never heard before, and that's when she glimpsed the shotgun mounted over the fireplace.

The pair was so engrossed in their screaming match that they didn't notice Claudette until she already had the gun down and both barrels loaded. Dashell instantly made a move for her, still too fast and graceful for any middle-aged man of God. Claudette gave him one barrel in the guts, held the other to keep the rest of the family at bay, and sprinted away into the night. She found Alphonso, and he's been hiding her from the law, the March family, and her own mother ever since.

## 12. March Plantation

The March home might be the most lavish house in Georgia outside the governor's mansion. Apparently restored by the family itself, the home is massive, spotless, and tastefully furnished throughout. It sports both indoor plumbing and electricity. Even with the extreme tithes from the Unifying World Revival, there is no way to explain the lavishness of the home.

The family is keen to take investigators in once they learn about their interest in the murder. So long as they don't know that the characters have discovered anything that can't be explained away, the March clan will do everything to ingratiate itself and present the appearance

of openness. This could mean tours of the home, invitations to supper, and even sexual advances in an attempt to bring the suspicious into the fold. The locations that follow are places that family members will steer players away from. To access the following locations, characters need to get free from March supervision through deception, distraction, or other means.

### 12A. Office

The office looks somewhat bare since missing a carpet and bookshelf that kept the furniture arrangement symmetrical. Both were removed after being splattered with the Reverend's blood. There are still pockmarks in the walls where some buckshot missed, and a few drops of red stubbornly remain on the floor. Otherwise, the library is mostly innocuous save its contents. The book selection is exhaustive and varied. There are texts in every Romance language and many others, some appearing to be hundreds of years old. While no one would have mistaken Dashell March for an idiot, the humble revival preacher has a library fitting a world-class scholar. A true academic recognizes that amassing such a collection would require more funds than it would take to buy the house itself many times over.

### 12B. The Lost Masterpiece and the Hidden Room

One of the things damaged in Claudette's shotgun blast is a painted wooden panel hanging behind Dashell's desk; one corner has been peppered with buckshot and stained by blood. The panel depicts Christ's resurrection, looks quite old, and utilizes a gold background.

True artists and historians have a small chance of recognizing the piece, though the impossibility of its existence makes such a realization indistinguishable from hallucination. The panel is by famed Italian painter Duccio di Buoninsegna and appears to be the missing panel from his Maesta titled "Christ in Majesty." The work has been lost since the 14th century. To own a lost Buoninsegna would mean wealth beyond imagining, but how could something so priceless and rare have made its way secretly to a study in rural Georgia?

Regardless of the panel's origins, characters that stay focused on the main investigation see something glint through one of the buckshot holes. Examining the damaged masterpiece reveals the panel is removable; a recessed compartment hidden behind holds a small lever. Pulling this causes one of the corner bookshelves to pop away from the wall and swing outwards, revealing a door. Similarly, characters with experience in construction can figure out that the house is hiding secrets even without finding the lever merely by familiarizing themselves with the floor plan well enough to compare it to the outside to the house.

Behind the secret door lays a treasure trove of information on the Companions' operations. A large chalkboard runs the length of the wall divided into twelve vertical columns, one for each month of the year. Each column is filled with dates, abbreviated locations, and either the letter M or F. A huge ledger sits near a bank of phones; it's filled with the typical gender/month aliases of the Companions, prearranged and crossed out with a date corresponding to one on the board. Filing cabinets full of documents line the walls, and those with the time to snoop can find records of the March holdings brokered through Lloyd's of London, the Swedish bank Garrod visited, and a dozen other financial institutions.

Investigators discovering this treasure trove of information suffer the terrible realization that the strange events occurring in Barefoot Crossing are just the beginning of an organized international conspiracy.

### *12C. Upstairs Nursery*

Only one of the oddly modest bedrooms upstairs remains locked. If opened, the intruders find a darkly lit nursery. At least a dozen cribs line the room in neat rows. The exterior walls are decked with changing stations and spare bottles. There are no toys, and rather than murals of animals or festive colors, the wallpaper in the room decays and peels as if the place had been abandoned for years. Whoever maintains this nursery obviously has neither care for the babies' entertainment nor any desire to decorate.

Of the dozen cribs, five are occupied by infants of both sexes and uncertain parentage. Their names are nowhere to be seen, and their beds are completely bare except for a single sheet. Some of the babies are young enough that to go without swaddling should send them into a fit, yet none of the children cry. Two are even asleep.

The babies can't be seen over the sides of the crib, but as investigators edge closer they notice a reflection of moonlight glinting off the ceiling. There, amongst the rafters, a mirror has been secured above each bed. Looking up, players can see the babies without being seen in turn. Aside from the two asleep, the three infants are engaged in a strange activity. Each moves in unison, holding up both hands and touching their thumbs to each finger in a cycle that concludes in making a fist. Simultaneously, each makes different shapes with their mouths, biting at the air with the same eerie uniformity.

The infants' deeply unnatural movements can be understood by anyone, and the unison is downright supernatural. Those with a deeper knowledge of child development can only hope to be more terrified. Babies grow stronger and gain muscle control through repetition. Similarly, this neurological development is required for speech. If a baby somehow possessed the discipline to practice simple movements in time to the ticking clock, it could develop these skills much faster. But such a thing would mean those children were possessed of adult minds.

If the characters get too close to the babies and fall within their line of sight, all the Companion children begin screaming. The alarm brings every adult Companion within earshot to the room.



## 12D. Root Cellar

The root cellar is secured with a padlock and only accessible from the outside. The steps lead much deeper than is typical of Savannah's boggy climate. There is no light inside the earthen walls, but lanterns hang from a nail near the entrance. The cellar has a concrete floor and leads forward in a long corridor. The hallway is lined with thick wooden doors. Cells have been constructed and run underneath the entire property. Some beds inside appear to have been abandoned for years, while others have fresh bloodstains on the floor. All are equipped with manacles that have seen use in the past.

It's unclear if this nightmare dungeon is a holdover from the time of slavery or if it's something the Marches had specially constructed. It runs into the earth for hundreds of yards, the hallway delving deeper and deeper at slight decline.

## 12E. Vault

Either the financial means of the March clan must be truly unfathomable, or their dedication and skill beyond human understanding. They've managed to construct, in secret, a massive bank vault in an underground chamber. The height dwarfs a tall man and a cavernous space had to be dug out of the raw earth just to allow the door to swing open. A key rests on a tiny table off to the side, which implies a question: what could possibly require so much steel yet remain so easy to unlock?

Characters get all the answers they can hope for when the thing trapped inside senses their presence and slams itself against the door. The impact seems to shake the very ground itself. Dirt and pebbles rain from the ceiling as the thing's muffled rage shakes the foundations of the earth. Black, viscous liquid smelling of death leaks from the doorframe. Whatever is imprisoned inside, it's could be the only thing capable of defeating the Companions. However, if it's released, characters that see the monstrous prisoner have no choice except to run, go mad, or die.

*subject to one of their monologues, they have no way of knowing for certain what is inside the vault. Without the proper intelligence, opening the door can be no more than a calculated risk; a wild hope that whatever is kept inside is somehow better than the terrors they face outside. In actuality, the steel vault contains one of the dark children from before reality who the Companions agreed to birth into the world. The eternal couple keep it caged so that, in the event that all of the copies are killed, someone will open the vault out of greed or curiosity. The hope is that when the creature murders everything in its escape, the chaos will draw attention to the site. Thus, the infant Companions will be rescued and save themselves countless lives spent dying of exposure in whatever secluded place the abomination chooses to call its lair. This insurance policy's risk lies in the creature's rage if it's released before all the Companions are dead; it will not take kindly to being locked up by its servants.)*

## Describing The Un-Thing

The entities that existed before time made a deal with mankind only because they needed a medium with which to translate themselves into flesh. Their very essence is the antithesis of physical existence, but through the loins of the Companions they've formed a monstrous body capable of containing them, at least partly. This means that the creature locked in the vault fundamentally does not fit into dimensional space, yet it has manifested regardless. The very act of perceiving it is innately wrong and unnatural. Just looking at something so basically unsuited for corporeality results in all sorts of side effects: nose-bleeding, nausea, vivid hallucinations, madness. Essentially, the *un-Thing* is beyond description.

However, players want to be immersed in the game and might not buy the GM shouting "words fail to describe the thing killing you right now!" Consider reading one of the following descriptions instead. The goal is to give players an idea of how their characters attempt, and ultimately fail, to make sense of the nightmare before them.

(GM NOTE: *Unless characters have managed to successfully interrogate a March or been*

1. “You remember building a mud fort with your friends as a child. You used a pillowcase from the house to carry the wet earth from the creek to your little castle. How your mother scolded you that night.... The thing before you has flesh like the pillowcase. While it may have once been shapely and pristine, the flesh is now stained and lumpy after carrying that which it was never designed to hold. Just like that pillowcase, wet filth seeps from between the woven sinews. Sections cave in and expand as the poorly suited contents shift inside. The pillowcase didn’t have so many teeth though, nor was it screaming.”
2. “It doesn’t have legs or arms or tentacles or wings, but then it does. It alternates between bipedal, tripedal, quadrapedal...or maybe it’s more like a centipede or snake, perhaps the peristalsis of a swallowing throat? Regardless, it’s kind of...rolling towards you. All the appendages seem vestigial until they push the cancerous mass closer, but they somehow go back to looking superfluous and tacked-on again. A bad joke written in flesh that remains nonetheless terrifying.”
3. “You visited an asylum once. It was a limited tour. You weren’t allowed to see the ones they kept chained to the walls and hosed down. You only heard them through the ducts, in cells deep below, their screams vented through the place like a gas. The ones up top – on the ward they’d actually allow outsiders to see – they sat there and choked on that gas all day. You remember thinking that each one was aware the madness leaking from the walls would one day send them to the basement cells too. As you watched them, they angrily drew what they imagined lurked down there, gashing nonsensical scribblings into the paper while they waited for the end in the common room. This thing before you, it’s like those drawings came alive.”
4. “That night in the French Quarter, before the temperance movement. Too much wine and hot-blooded youth. It was all a blur except for that fortune-teller you dared each other to visit right before sunrise. In the haze, her words still shine in your memory undiminished. Gone were the vague predictions of marriage and happiness your friends scoffed at. She saw your cards and started screaming, wailing in some language you’ve never heard before or since. You masqueraded your fear as skepticism to match the scorn of your pals, but even after you left she ran after you, screaming. Desperate to stop you from meeting whatever she’d seen. And though you still don’t understand a word of what she said, you’re certain her warning was about the thing in the vault.”



## ENDGAME

There is no true victory scenario in *The Wives of March*. The Companions have superior numbers, boundless experience, and all the time in the world. Their victory is mathematically inevitable. The most PCs can hope for is a futile attempt to frustrate the immortal pair's plan. There are a number of ways PCs might slow the apocalyptic breeding program, each with their own special risks and rewards.

### Cleanse

Simple – burn it all down. Kill every March, Carter, and Lee. Destroy their hoarded antiquities and treasures so nothing remains. The benefit of this tactic is obvious: their plans won't work if no one is alive to carry them out. Those clones that survive see their power structure crippled and are forced to start the coercion of a community all over again under new identities. If the tunnel in the Root Cellar gets destroyed, even the dark spawn in the vault might be neutralized.

The downside of waging holy war is that the warriors are unlikely to survive it. The Companions will levy their deadly military skill to destroy their foes, and even if PCs somehow triumph against all odds, the only rewards waiting will be revulsion and condemnation. To society, they will appear as violent psychopaths guilty of murdering innocent men, women, and children. Meanwhile, each dead Companion will be remembered as a martyr killed for trying to help the community. No one will ever believe the real story, and the other cells of the Companions' cult will continue operating unhindered as the heroes flee from the law or await execution.

### Convict

The March clan is guilty of countless crimes that leave mountains of evidence in their wake. If investigators can convince authorities to act despite the family's political power, the combined force of law and order can overwhelm even the Companions. Claudette's sale into a

polygamous relationship is the tip of the iceberg. The murder of Caiden Garrod and the events of the cotton field can level death-penalty charges at certain family members. Even the socialist overtones of the church's farming operation would be enough to spark some public outrage. Any raids on the plantation reveal numerous shady financial dealings, stolen artwork, and a full-blown dungeon.

The benefit of this route is that it leaves PCs in a relatively safe position; any open retaliation is instantly going to throw more light on the conspiracy and is therefore unlikely. It also allows the fallout from Barefoot Crossing to ripple outwards to other cells in the conspiracy as investigators follow the paper trail and seize financial assets. However, the leads will eventually run cold. The law is bound to rationalize some motive other than "magic immortal monster-breeders" and call the case closed. Some Companions will escape.

### Expose

No amount of evidence will convince the public that Lydia and Dashell March are two immortal souls seeking to bring about the apocalypse by tainting the bloodlines of mankind with their clones. The premise is too far-fetched and the Companions are too subtle in their tactics. The only way to expose the whole truth is to present humanity with something so terrifying that it can't be denied. That means releasing the *Un-thing* from the vault and presenting it to the world.

The monster from outside of space and time is unstoppable: it is a force of pure negation wearing a suit of skin. The betrayal of He and She will provoke the abomination's bloody fury so much so that eating its way through all the local Companions won't be enough to quench the rage. Before the vault creature knows satisfaction and slinks off to some abandoned corner of the world to await its brothers, it will rampage through Barefoot Crossing, the city of Savannah, and beyond. The death toll could reach into the hundreds.



The strength of this tactic is that no greater damage can be done to the Companions. A global panic about “The Savannah Massacre” will ensue, and it won’t be hard to trace the creature’s path of destruction back to the splintered remains of the March plantation. Government agencies around the world will investigate the cover identities and seek to bring the entire conspiracy to justice. The public, forever disillusioned, will revert to the superstition and small-mindedness that kept the pair in check for so many centuries. History will play out very differently and the Companions will be hunted everywhere they go.

But at what cost? Assuming that investigators manage to escape the nightmare they let loose, their minds will be blasted by witnessing a thing abhorrent to the very fabric of reality. Recovering from such trauma would be the work of years, and the return to lucidity would only mean realizing responsibility for countless deaths. Sure, humanity’s survival might be dramatically lengthened, but how can the “hero” really know that for certain? And is such a thought comforting when faced with a city full of widows and orphans?

## Flee

PCs ignore the truth and deny the apocalyptic family that grows around the world. They do the job they were paid to do: finding a murderer, helping the accused leave town, discrediting a will, etc. Characters leave all the crazy stuff out of reports, take their money, and move as far away as possible.

Obviously, this plan is the safest and the sanest. The Companions have no reason to strike at the PCs because no real damage was done, and it’s not like they could be truly stopped anyway. But the price of this peace of mind is the damnation of soul. The character becomes complicit in an ongoing atrocity, tortured daily by the knowledge that every vaguely familiar face in the crowd might be one of “Them.” The character’s cowardice has wedded them to the family, helping them sow their evil through silence.

# Flowchart of Clues and Locations

