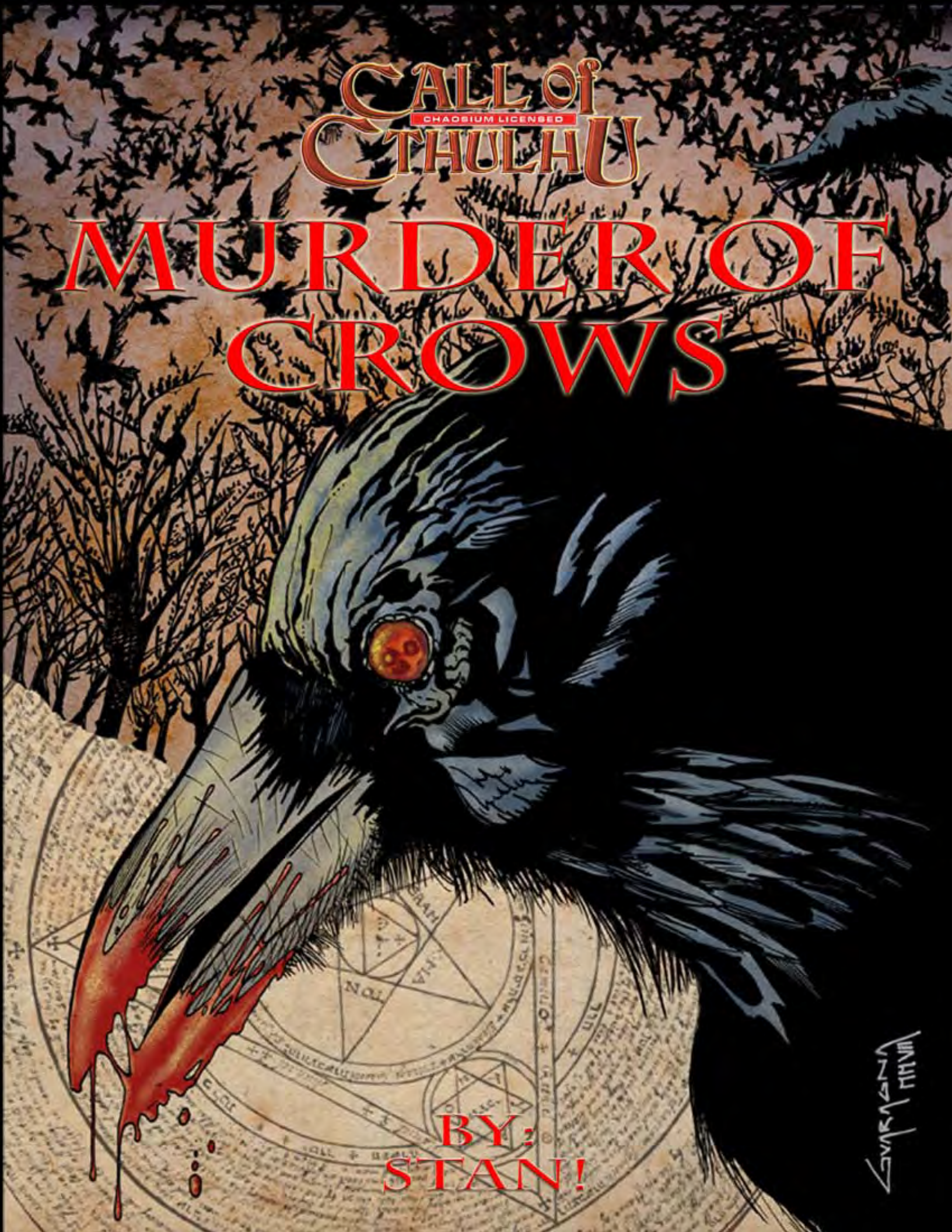


CALL OF
CHAOSIUM LICENSED
CTHULHU

MURDER OF CROWS



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1998

CALL of CHAOSIUM LICENSED CTHULHU

Murder of Crows

A 1920s CALL OF CTHULHU Adventure

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For centuries, crows have been regarded as creatures of ill omen. They have been linked to death, pestilence, and the Devil himself. Merely seeing a few of these birds perched on the roof of a house has, at times, been enough to give rise to rumors that the residents dabbled in the black arts.

Of course, all of these examples are just superstition. Crows have no actual supernatural powers, they are no more than scavengers that go wherever there is likely to be enough weak prey or rotting carcasses to keep them well fed. Perhaps that is why we feel so uneasy when we see flocks of them wheeling in the sky—it means that somewhere nearby an unsavory feast is about to take place.

But in a world filled with things man was not meant to know, the common crow may have access to information beyond our mortal ken. So when a flock of crows takes up roost in the woods surrounding in a sleepy little town, and the number in the flock grows daily, perchance these birds *are* heralding some great evil soon to befall the town and its inhabitants. Maybe they see what we cannot—that a feast is coming soon, and we are on the menu.

Using This Adventure

Murder of Crows is a short adventure for four to eight investigators. Most groups will be able to resolve these bizarre occurrences in one or two evening's worth of play (about 4–6 hours of game time). In case your players do not have characters of their own, four pre-generated investigators have been provided on the final pages of this book.

The events as described occur during the late 1920s, and are suitable for most any group of investigators from that era. For Keepers who prefer to set games during other eras, conversion notes are provided later in this text.

Background

Murder of Crows takes place in Bethlehem, New Hampshire, a tiny town in the state's northern reaches. Nestled among the White Mountains, Bethlehem is surrounded by miles of thickly wooded land. It is approximately 80 miles north of Concord, NH, and about 150 miles north of Boston. No train lines run through or even particularly near the town. In fact, the only access is a long, twisting logging road that leads eventually to the crossroad town of Littleton about 6 miles away.

From the start, Bethlehem was a logging town. The first permanent structure in the settlement was the Walker Lumber Works, and that site



remains the literal and figurative center of town to this day. Shortly after the end of the Revolutionary War, the Ephram Walker and his family came up into the hills with a handful of other families—the McPhees, Ballards, and Devereuxs—most of whom were more interested in hunting and trapping than logging, but saw the value in using the mill to make Bethlehem the seat of local commerce and politics.

Although the Walkers did make a good deal of money providing building supplies to nearby settlements, the town itself never became a hub of regional activity that the founding families envisioned. Its isolated location, halfway up deeply forested hill, made it too inaccessible, and eventually it became clear that other settlers tended toward Littleton when they needed to go to town. But when they needed lumber, everyone still came to the lonely little town of Bethlehem.

Although it's always been a remote town, in recent years Bethlehem's isolation has become more pronounced.

Bad Times in Bethlehem

Bethlehem's fortunes began to falter with the advent of the automobile or, more correctly, the logging truck. Until then, it was too difficult and time consuming for the large logging companies (that used Lake Champlain and the Hudson and St. Lawrence rivers to transport most of their wood) to move their products inland, particularly when there was a working sawmill in the area. With a reliable fleet of trucks and a quickly expanding network of paved roadways, though, those large companies could now get their lumber to the farthest reaches of the state as quickly as the local mills could harvest from the forest. What's more, the companies could use their economy of scale to undercut the local mills on price. In other words, it was cheaper to buy the lumber they drove in than to cut down and prepare local wood.

Try as they might, the people of Bethlehem eventually came to realize that there was nothing they could do to prevent the Walker Lumber Works from being driven out of business and, with it, the town into extinction. All seemed hopeless until one man stepped forward with a vision for how to save the town of Bethlehem. Ironically enough, it was the last remaining member of the family had been keeping it alive for so long—Prescott Walker.

Prescott Walker

Since the Lumber Works first opened more than a century and a half ago, the Walker family has seen its roll as more than being merely the owners and proprietors of a mill—they've considered themselves to be responsible for the lives and well being of every resident of Bethlehem. The

Historical Bethlehem

There is, in fact, a real town of Bethlehem in the state of New Hampshire. The town has been in existence since it was incorporated on December 25, 1799, though it had formerly been incorporated as "Lloyd Hills" in 1774. (There is no record as to why the name was changed on that long ago Christmas Day.)

The Bethlehem in *Murder of Crows* bears little resemblance to the real town, which in the 1920s was a popular summer resort for people seeking to escape the miseries of hay fever. Bethlehem, NH, it turns out, is the birthplace of the National Hay Fever Relief Association.

Walkers have always acted in the best interests of the town and the people, even if that sometimes meant taking a little less profit for themselves. After all, the family amassed more money than they could spend in several generations thanks in great part to the contributions of the ordinary townsfolk who worked in the mill. The Walkers considered that they, in a very real and binding way, were in the debt of the Bethlehem citizenry.

Five generations of Walkers passed this sense of indebtedness down from father to son, like a great moral legacy. And, when he was young, Prescott Walker accepted the commitment fully, even though as the third child, it was never supposed to be his burden to bear. By the time he was old enough to go away to boarding school, Prescott's older brothers were already working in the mill with their father. There was no need to bring young Prescott in as well, so he was left to follow his own passions—orienteeing, bird watching, and nature conservation. Prescott loved to spend time in the woods, particularly those around his beloved hometown.

The course of his life changed irrevocably, as so many people's did, in the winter of 1918. The great influenza pandemic spread throughout Bethlehem as it did across the entire world. More than a third of the citizenry died of the disease, including every last member of the Walker family save Prescott. Suddenly, he found himself thrust into filling all the rolls previously taken by his parents and siblings, and all while the town teetered on the edge of catastrophe.

As it turned out, though, Prescott was more than up to the task. He was a natural leader, and he remembered all the lessons his father had taught him about running a business and running a town. If not for the problems brought on through the rise of motorized lumber shipping, Prescott would have carried his familial burden with grace, pride, and aplomb. However, through no fault of his own, he now seemed doomed to hold watch over the complete dismantling of all that the Walkers had built over five generations.

Then Prescott Walker had an idea.



Don't Sell Wood—Sell The Woods!

The notion came to Prescott as he was taking one of his long walks through the forests surrounding Bethlehem. It was late September, and although he was mulling over the near certainty that the Walker Lumber Works would be bankrupt inside of five years, Prescott found that his spirit was buoyed by the incredible cascade of colors running through the canopy above.

Autumn had always been his favorite time of year, when the mountains seemed to catch fire as leaves turned innumerable shades of yellow, orange, and red. It only lasted for a few weeks each year, but they were weeks that Prescott never missed—weeks he wished he could share with his friends from boarding school. And now he realized he could.

If paved roads and motorized transportation could take jobs away from Bethlehem, then they could also bring people to the town. People with money, Prescott had learned, were pretty much always willing to spend it on things of great beauty. And there was nothing in this world more beautiful than autumn in Bethlehem.

At a town meeting the next week, Prescott told his plan to the people of Bethlehem. Despite the fact that the Lumber Works was still turning a slight profit, he planned to shut it down and sell off the company's assets. That money, plus a substantial portion of his personal wealth, would be spent on fixing up the town and giving it the quaint, homey feeling that city folk expected from a rural New England town. All of the work had to be completed by next summer, so that the town would be truly ready to receive visitors the following autumn.

Changing the Locale

The town of Bethlehem as described in *Murder of Crows* is presumed to be in New England, classic "Lovecraft Country." However, with just a few adjustments a Keeper can drop the town into almost any setting in which the investigators find themselves. The following elements should be maintained no matter what Bethlehem's locale:

- **Rural Isolation**—Bethlehem should be far off the beaten track, not the sort of place one just happens into on a lark.
- **Deep Woods**—The surrounding country should be thickly forested, preferably by primeval woods; somewhere that logging is a viable profession.
- **Distrust of Strangers**—The residents of Bethlehem do not trust outsiders, it would be helpful if that was a characteristic of the people throughout the region.

At first, the citizenry balked. They did not want to give up the lumber mill—it was all they'd ever known. But Prescott convinced them of the truth in his words and the purity of his vision. The Lumber Works were going away no matter what the townsfolk did, so they had to get used to the idea. Even more, they had to start moving on if they hoped to keep Bethlehem from becoming a ghost town.

Eventually, Prescott was able to convince the majority of Bethlehem that his vision was the only way to save the town. Even though a great deal of the populace disliked the notion of strangers coming to town in such numbers, they liked even less the idea of having to leave their ancestral home for good.

With the Walker family fortune and the hard work of practically every ordinary citizen, the town of Bethlehem transformed itself from a lumber mill town into a sightseeing attraction. Although many locals remained skeptical of the plan, they agreed that city folk did some terribly strange things, and that Prescott's scheme seemed like the only possible way to save Bethlehem.

It took fewer than three years to prove Prescott Walker completely correct in all his assertions. By 1924, Bethlehem became the spot for socialites, flappers, and captains of industry to go for "High Autumn." They drove their Model Ts, Studebakers, and Haynes sedans up into the mountains to drink bootleg whiskey, dance to hot jazz, and engage in general frivolity under the fiery canopy. Then, three or four weeks later as the trees shed their colorful leaves, they packed up and left, taking their roaring parties back to Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.

In their wake, Bethlehem was depleted of nearly every consumable substance, had physical damage to nearly every building the tourists visited, and smelled like a cheap speakeasy. But, on the other hand, the locals had enough money to keep them solvent throughout the whole of the coming year.

Walker in The Woods

Prescott Walker was understandably proud of himself. In the face of financial ruin, he had saved not only his family fortune but also the entire town of Bethlehem. Still, it was something of a hollow victory because he found himself the target of as much resentment as thanks from his neighbors.

The townsfolk considered the tourism solution to be at best a mixed blessing—they had always been leery of outsiders, and considered the tourists to be loud, spoiled, petulant boors. But though they had to admit that Prescott had fulfilled his promise, they could not bring themselves to be fully happy about this annual invasion of their home during the most beautiful time of the year. Add to that



the fact that Prescott was the only person in town that the visitors considered a peer (as opposed to “hired help”), and the end result was a widening emotional gulf between the town and the last remaining member of the Walker family.

Prescott Walker became practically an outcast in the town he loved so dearly. People were polite to him, practically deferential, but they no longer considered him one of their own. So he took to indulging himself in his love of the great outdoors, spending days and sometimes weeks hiking through and camping in the hills surrounding Bethlehem. No one asked where he went during these absences. In truth, the ordinary citizens were glad to have him out of sight for a few days.

On one particularly long outing, Preston came across the strangest patch of forest he’d ever visited. The trees hung heavy and still even in the stiffest breeze. No birds could be heard singing in the boughs, nor could any squirrels or chipmunks be seen frolicking anywhere. He had the unshakable feeling that he was being watched by a malevolent presence. And no matter where he turned, he could not find a way out of this patch of woods—the trees seemed to rearrange themselves to keep him moving in one single direction.

Prescott began to run in a senseless effort to escape something he wasn’t even sure was there. He crashed blindly through the woods until he eventually stumbled and fell face first to the ground. And there in the grass, mere inches from his nose, was the most amazing thing Prescott Walker had ever seen—the Abenaki Spirit Stone.

Strange Totem

The Spirit Stone was a triangular piece of stone about the size of a man’s fist, carved and polished so that it had a smooth raised edge and a flat recessed face. The face was etched with a large image of a crow and smaller images of frogs, snakes, and spiders in the style of art found on artifacts of the Abenaki, a Native American tribe that lived in these hills for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. The totem was attached to a weathered loop of leather decorated with small, nearly petrified bird bones. (See the New Artifacts section for more about the Abenaki Spirit Stone.)

Prescott picked up the totem and suddenly the forest no longer seemed dark or menacing. In fact, he was able to make his way back to Bethlehem without any further incident. He returned to Walker Manor without talking to anyone in town, locking himself away and closing all the curtains tightly.

For the next few weeks, Prescott remained locked in his home studying this newfound prize. No one in town saw him at all, and the only

evidence that he was still in residence were envelopes that would occasionally appear tacked to the door of the general store containing lists supplies that Prescott required (canned foods and other daily necessities) and enough cash to pay for the goods. The instructions invariably said to leave the items on at the door of Walker Manor but not to ring the bell or make any other attempt to contact him inside the house. Prescott would come out and get the packages when he was ready. And, although no one ever saw him do so (even when curious neighbors

Changing Eras

Murder of Crows is presented as an adventure 1920s, the era of “Classic Cthulhu.” But with only a few minor adjustments a clever Keeper can use it in practically any era. Below are suggestions for how to make this adventure suitable for two of the more popular settings for tales of the Mythos.

Gaslight

Very little needs to be changed to make *Murder of Crows* work in a campaign set in the 1890s. In fact, except for modifying the goods sold at the general store and equipment owned by the townsfolk, the only major change is that a reason other than the advent of motorized trucking must become Bethlehem’s downfall. Replace references to trucks and paved roads with a proliferation of steamboats plying the waters of the regional lakes and rivers, and everything else should fall into place. Rather than influenza, have the Walker family meet its unhappy end due to an outbreak of smallpox or scarlet fever.

Modern

Very few changes need to be made to use *Murder of Crows* in a modern Cthulhu campaign. In fact, except for modifying the goods sold at the general store and equipment owned by the townsfolk, the only major change is the reason for Bethlehem’s downfall. Place the blame on the sluggish economy and cheaper lumber being imported from Canada thanks to the North American Free Trade Act. Rather than influenza, have the Walker family meet its unhappy end as the result of a plane crash in their private jet or, if you prefer, being caught in an act of terrorism such as the 9/11 attacks. The Keeper may also wish to make a point that Bethlehem’s mountainous locale makes it nearly impossible to get decent reception for cellular phones and other mobile communication devices.



stayed awake all night watching the manor from their bedroom windows), somehow the supplies were always gone and presumably taken inside when the sun rose the next morning.

This behavior continued until the middle of September when the first group of Boston socialites arrived to enjoy the changing the leaves.

The Birds

With the arrival of the first tourists, all communication from Prescott Walker ceased. For nearly ten days there was no sign of life from within Walker Manor—no lights behind the curtains, no notes at the general store, no sounds from the property—nothing.

Then one evening, as a foppish dilettante sat in McPhee's Public House describing a "horrid little patch of forest" he and his group had stumbled upon, Prescott burst into the room like a wild man. His eyes were wild, his hair and beard wild and unkempt, and his clothing rumpled and soiled as though he'd been wearing it for weeks.

Prescott stormed up to the Boston dandy, grabbed him by the throat, and lifted him out of his chair and clear off his feet.

"Stay out of the woods!" Prescott roared then looked around the room at all of the visitors. "That goes for all of you! You aren't welcome here. Go home while you still can!" Then, just as quickly as he'd appeared, Prescott

Walker released the young man's throat, left the pub, and disappeared into the night.

All the visitors had a nervous laugh at what a rum fellow old Prescott was turning into, and that it would serve him right if they did leave. But no one really wanted to. The leaves were just reaching the height of color and everyone had plans to go walking in the woods the following day.

When they awoke the next morning and looked out their windows, however, the foliage no longer seemed colorful. In fact, all the trees around Bethlehem were tainted black. At first people thought that a blight or fungus must be attacking the trees, but upon closer inspection, they saw that the trees were in fact filled with thousands of large, black crows.

Where they'd come from, no one could guess, but the determined city folk were not about to let a few birds ruin their fun. They put on their excursion gear and set out from the inns and boarding houses in high spirits. As soon as they set foot on any of the walking paths, though, their merriment came to a screeching end.

Crows swooped from the trees and attacked any person who made a single move to enter the woods. At first the birds merely flew perilously close by their heads but, if the offenders refused to turn back, the crows began to scratch with their claws and peck with their beaks. Several of the more determined visitors ended up severely bloodied before they all fled back to the inns, packed their bags, and left Bethlehem as fast as their motorcars would carry them.

The incident was reported in all the Boston papers, and eventually got picked up by news sources around the country. Follow-up stories reported that the crows had not left Bethlehem and, while they left the townsfolk alone as they went about their daily business, they unmercifully attacked anyone who tried to enter the woods.

And, although it was not covered in any of the news reports, Prescott Walker had not been seen by anyone since the incident in the pub the night before the first attack.

Synopsis

The adventure begins when the investigators arrive in Bethlehem, NH. At this point they may only know the facts that have been reported by the newspapers or, at the Keeper's discretion, they may have been allowed to interview some of the out-of-towners who witnessed the attacks firsthand. In either case, they come to Bethlehem only with whatever suppositions or inferences they draw from their own minds.





Murder of Crows is broken into three acts, but Act I (where the investigators poke around town and ask questions of the locals) actually happens concurrently with Act II (where odd events occur in response to the investigators' actions). The Keeper should read both acts carefully and be prepared to improvise the exact blending of action based on how the investigators proceed.

Interviewing the townsfolk is difficult because the locals are already leery of outsiders and furthermore are hesitant to do or say anything that may jeopardize their newfound tourism industry. However, like any small town, each person has gossip about his or her neighbors and will conjecture about what caused so many crows to descend upon their community, and with the right persuasion they will share these thoughts with the investigators.

At first there will be no logical way for the investigators to tell idle rumors and petty jealousies from outlandish facts. However, every time they are provided a clue that can actually be helpful in solving this mystery, the crows (and later other wild creatures) will react. Eventually, they should be able to determine that the creatures are reacting to a specific sub-set of the clues, and then use those clues to move on to the adventure's climax.

Act III features the final confrontation with Prescott Walker, who by this time has gone irrevocably insane and is using the power of his amulet to control all of the woodland animals in the area. He has supernatural capabilities but no particular resiliency, so taking him down should be an unnerving and bizarre affair, but not especially difficult. More dangerous, though, is how the investigators deal with the Abenaki Spirit Stone that Prescott wears around his neck. There is a chance that one or more of them will fall under the artifact's spell before the adventure's conclusion is finally reached.

Starting the Investigation

As Keeper, you know best how to involve your players and their investigators in an adventure. *Murder of Crows* is not designed with any specific sort of characters in mind, so adapting it to the investigators your players bring to the table should be relatively easy. The information they need to begin the scenario comes from that most ubiquitous of sources, the newspaper, so it is completely feasible that this is a mystery that the investigators chose to take on of their own independent volition.

However, if you want to give them a deeper reason for involving themselves in the happenings around Bethlehem, you can use the following

adventure hooks to spur your imagination, modifying them as necessary so that they suit the particular investigators and the tenor of your campaign.

- One or more of the investigators comes from (or at least is familiar with) the town of Bethlehem. Perhaps he or she is a member of the extended McPhee, Ballard, or Devereux family. (Do not, however, make the investigator a member of the Walker family—it is important that Prescott be the sole remaining member of that clan.) This investigator can convince the others to help solve the problem because of his or her nostalgic affection for the town.
- The investigators are ornithologists, bird watchers, or other hobbyists or professionals interested in the behavior of birds in the wild. They come to Bethlehem to study the strange actions reported in the newspapers—perhaps to gather evidence to prove a personal theory regarding changing migratory patterns of the common crow.
- One or more of the investigators is a wealthy socialite who brings his or her entourage to Bethlehem for a lark. The investigator thinks that the newspaper reports are so much bunk concocted by the other socialites who simply were bored with looking at leaves and wanted some excuse for leaving town before the season was through. Perhaps the other group is made up of business or social rivals of the investigators and solving this mystery will be a proverbial feather in this group's cap.
- The investigators work for a newspaper that was late in reporting the events in Bethlehem. In order to make up for that oversight, the editor has hired the investigators to dig out the real story behind the attacks and provide an exclusive story for his paper.

Prologue

Murder of Crows is a site-based investigation where all the action takes place in and around the town of Bethlehem, NH. The investigators should arrive in town armed with basic information about the situation, but not much more.

The Keeper should begin by providing the investigators with Player Handout #1, an article that can be from any newspaper the investigators would reasonably have access to. Or, if they receive the article from an employer or other source, it can come from any paper at all. (If no other papers seem appropriate to the Keeper, say it comes from the Boston Herald.)



Player Handout #1 - Keeper's Copy

Crows Blacken Autumn Foliage

Bethlehem, NH—This sleepy mountain town, best known for the spectacular vistas it affords of Mother Nature's autumnal splendor, has instead become the site of what can only be called the most unusual mauling attack in recent memory.

On Sunday last, Adrian Ferrell together with his fiancé, Katherine Merriman, and four other friends set out for a stroll through the woods. Before they got fifteen feet outside town, however, the group found itself being viciously attacked by what has been described by witnesses as a flock of several hundred crows.

"It was horrible," said Ferrell. "Suddenly they were all over me, pecking and scratching. I couldn't see a thing. I couldn't see Katie standing next to me, but I could hear her screaming."

The group made it back to Ballard's Boarding House with only superficial scratches, but it was enough to bring an end to their vacation.

"They packed up quick as you please," said Alma Ballard, proprietress of the establishment. "Them and all of the others. Inside of an hour they all left. Didn't even bother checking out."

Crows are not an unusual sight in the White Mountains, but rarely in such large flocks. There has previously never been a recorded incident of crows attacking humans en masse.

"I been hunting and stuffing crows here abouts for fifty years," said Marshall Devereux, local taxidermist, "and let me tell you, these aren't any natural birds. They're twice as big as your average crow, and their claws are twice as sharp."

Other reports varied, but most people claim that there is nothing unusual about the crows except the sheer number of them.

"People around here like to tell tall tales," said Arthur McPhee, the mayor of Bethlehem and owner of several local businesses. "Crows are nasty birds, and the more of them there are the bolder they get. But there isn't enough food around here to keep this many of them happy. You mark my works, they'll fly off in a day or two and everything will go back to normal."

Certainly, that's what all the residents of Bethlehem hope will happen. Once a prosperous lumber town, the people now rely on what tourism autumn leaf viewing brings for their livelihoods.

It is now nearly a week after the initial attack and, according to the good folks of Bethlehem, the crows are still with them. If anything, their number is growing.

Depending on the reason the investigators undertake this assignment, they may have had time to do further research before setting out. At the Keeper's discretion, investigators may attempt *LIBRARY USE*, *HISTORY*, *NATURAL HISTORY*, or other appropriate skill checks to gain some or all of the following additional information.

- The general history of Bethlehem from its founding through the closing of the lumber yard (as described in the Background section).
- Basic information about the Walker family history (as described in the Background section). Although Prescott is mentioned by name as the only remaining family member, there are no details of his efforts to revive the local economy—that's just not something of interest to news sources outside the town.
- Reports that, in recent years, the town has become a popular autumn vacation spot for wealthy youngsters from all over New England. Some society pages have printed exhaustive articles about who was seen doing what under the colorful leaves of Bethlehem.
- General information on crows. This will confirm that this large a flock and this sort of aggressive behavior are both exceedingly rare. But it will also confirm that crows are antisocial birds and have been known to attack other animals (including humans) whom they perceive as threats.
- Any other information from the Background section that the Keeper feels is appropriate.

Firsthand Reports

The Keeper may, if the investigators ask, allow them to interview some of the victims of the initial crow attack. This could be Adrian Ferrell and Katherine Merriman, the couple mentioned in the newspaper article, or other well-heeled characters of the Keeper's creation.

None of these people know very much, but they can certainly serve to give the investigators a sense of trepidation regarding their upcoming mission. They will talk in general about how terrifying the situation was, how viciously the birds attacked, and how they will never go back to Bethlehem again.



If the investigators succeed at *FAST TALK*, *PERSUADE*, or other skill checks the Keeper deems appropriate, the interviewees may reveal some or all of the following information.

- The crows only attacked when people actually entered the woods. And as soon as the person went back into town, the crows flew back to their perches.
- The residents of Bethlehem never really liked the visitors. They always made them feel like unwelcome outsiders.
- The crows arrived out of nowhere. There were almost none in the woods during the days previous to the attack—they just seemed to appear out of nowhere on that morning.
- The night before the crow attacks there was an incident at the pub. Some crazy hobo came in and started yelling at everyone to stay out of the woods. They chased him away and no one saw him again after that. (If the investigator impaled the skill check for this information, the interviewee is able to identify the “hobo” as Prescott Walker.)

Act I: O Little Town of Bethlehem

In Act I, the investigators are at the very beginning of their inquiries. The presumption is that they will want to spend a good deal of time poking around and asking questions of the local populace. If, however, they have other plans, the Keeper shouldn't force them into these conversations. After all, the citizens of Bethlehem don't actually want to talk to the investigators even if they claim to be here to help the town. (The locals have a strong distrust of outsiders.) However, bear in mind that where the investigators go and what they do may still trigger the events detailed in Act II.

Mood is important in any adventure, but even more so during the early phases of *Murder of Crows*. Bethlehem is a quaint little town—purposely quaint. Remember that over the past few years Prescott Walker has overseen a renovation of the town so that it has just the sort of rustic appeal that city folk expect to find in a rural New England town. The perfect quaintness is, in itself, a little unsettling, but add to it the overabundance of large, black crows perched all over and Bethlehem becomes downright creepy.



The entries below describe some of the most interesting sites in town and detail the sorts of things the investigators are likely to learn from the locals they talk to. Note that there is much more to Bethlehem than what is listed here. The town's population is approximately 350, a comparatively small number but still far too many to list them all individually. If the investigators want to find specific other businesses or go off Main Street looking for people to talk with, the Keeper should improvise and use the details below as templates from which to model the opinions and behavior of the other residents of Bethlehem.

As the investigators speak with various members of the community, the information they receive will cause certain unusual occurrences to take place. In particular, if the investigators try to go into the woods, the crows will attack in ever increasing numbers until the humans turn back. This and other events are described in Act II, so the Keeper should read both sections thoroughly before beginning play.

Rumors and innuendo

The people of Bethlehem are as mystified about the recent mass-arrival of crows as the investigators are. No one has ever seen anything like this before, and no one has any real idea how to explain it. Of course, that doesn't mean that they won't make up explanations.



Bethlehem, NH

Main Street of Bethlehem, NH, looks exactly like a New England town ought to—a combination of squat, square brick buildings and century-old colonial-style homes surrounded everywhere by towering maple, elm, pine, and oak trees. It would be exactly the scene you'd expect to find on a penny postcard if not for the fact that every tree limb, rooftop, electric line, and lamppost is covered end to end with crows.

Perhaps even more disturbing than this sight, though, is how still and quiet the birds are. Despite the fact that you can see hundreds, if not thousands, of them, the crows stare at the goings on in Bethlehem with unearthly calm.

In addition to the opinions attributed to the characters below, the Keeper may want to also have various locals propose some or all of the following false explanations.

- It's God's revenge for one of any number of presumed sins. This could be everything from closing the lumberyard to secretly serving alcohol at the pub (in defiance of the 18th Amendment). Mostly, though, it will be a more general statement about the populace having "lost their fear of God" or "taken sin into their hearts."
- One or another of the people in town is a witch or warlock—or perhaps there's a whole coven. Generally, there won't even be a pretense of evidence for this claim, and it will have grown out of a longstanding feud between neighbors.
- This is something that happens every hundred years. (Between the Bethlehem Chronicle and the Public Library, there is actually a very accurate record to prove that this sort of thing has never happened in the town's history.)
- This would have happened long ago, but the sound and vibrations caused by the lumberyard kept scaring the crows away. All that must be done to get rid of them is to start the mill back up again.

A. Walker Lumber Works

This is the complex around which the town was built. Without the Walker Lumber Works there would be no Bethlehem, NH.

Behind a chain link fence sits what remains of the Walker Lumber Works. The yard is scattered with piles of unsold 2x4s and roofing shingles. Toward the back is a tall, square building with the single word "Mill" painted above the big barn doors. Near the front of the lot, just behind the single "Closed" sign that hangs on the chained and locked gate, is the long rectangular main building.

The town still has not come up with a suitable use for the lumber mill. Some want to turn the space into a park, others want to keep the mill in working order in case its ever needed again, and still others want to keep the chains locked tight and let it rot where it stands. Opinions vary based mostly on the individual's feelings about the Walker family in general and Prescott's efforts to revitalize Bethlehem in specific.

The gate is closed with a sturdy chain and padlock, the keys for which are held by Mayor Arthur McPhee, Sheriff Henry Ballard, and Maude Devereux, owner of the General Store. Any of these individuals will gladly open the gate if asked. But if the investigators are in a hurry they can go over the fence with a successful CLIMB check or pick the padlock with a successful LOCKSMITH check. However, if any citizens of Bethlehem who see the investigators doing either of these things, they will immediately call the sheriff.

Inside the gates, the investigators will find only sawdust and memories. There is nothing of interest to the investigation, though the Keeper is invited to add whatever red herrings might seem appropriate.

The wood stacked in the yard is all miscut and would have been unsellable even if the yard remained open.

The Mill building contains a gigantic primary saw as well as a half dozen or so medium-to-large sized saws used in cutting lumber. They were all installed during the 1890s, and so are not the most modern equipment available, but they all still fully functional. If the power was reconnected, the saws could begin cutting again immediately (though they would shortly require oil and grease or they'd begin to overheat).

The main building contains the last of the salable lumber—a few small piles of boards cut at different lengths. It also contains the abandoned foreman's office.

B. Maude O's General Store

Across the street from the Walker Lumber Works is Bethlehem's only general store. It is stocked with the sorts of supplies one would expect—canned and dried goods, basic hardware and tools, work clothes, household items, and all manner of generally useful items. It also has a small display of locally grown grocery items.

The owner and proprietress, Maude Devereux, is a hardy woman in her mid-fifties. Hers was one of Bethlehem's founding families, and the general store is the oldest remaining business in town (having been second to the lumber yard for nearly 150 years), both of which she considers significant points of personal pride.

MAUDE DEVEREUX, Age 57, Business Woman
STR 10 CON 11 SIZ 13 INT 15 POW 14
DEX 11 APP 10 EDU 13 SAN 70 HP 12

Damage Bonus: +0

Weapons: 20-gauge shotgun (behind counter)
65%, 2d6 +2

Key Skills: Bargain 78%, Electrical Repair 35%,
First Aid 65%, History 40%, Law 35%, Mechanical
Repair 50%, Natural History 55%, Spot Hidden
65%

Opinions: "The crows are just another natural disaster, like that freak blizzard last May that nearly buried the town. They'll go away soon enough."

"This town can't catch a break. The tourists were the best thing we had going and this is going to drive them away for sure. The worst thing we can get is more publicity because of these crows."

"I'd blame all this on Sheriff Ballard, if I could figure out how he'd make those crows do his bidding. He hates those out-of-towners coming in and tromping through the woods right before hunting season starts."

"The town owes everything it has to Prescott Walker. He's just about the only person in Bethlehem who has true vision."

C. The Bethlehem Chronicle

Established in 1804 when the town of Bethlehem was pressing to be named the county seat, the Chronicle was originally published three times a week. It contained items on towns all over the White Mountains not to mention the latest news of the world only four or five days after it was reported in the Boston papers.

Dutton Peabody, the current owner, editor-in-chief, and publisher of the Chronicle, bought the paper from the Ballard family in 1887. In his youth, Peabody had gone west and founded a newspaper in the frontier town of Shinbone, AZ. However, the idealistic young journalist championed the cause of the common sod busting homesteader, which put him at odds with the local cattle barons. He was shot and his newspaper burnt to the ground. Peabody was, he knew, lucky to have escaped with his life. So he came back east and bought a quiet little newspaper in the quietest little town he could find. Now he sits behind his desk drinking bootleg whiskey and pontificating on what's wrong with the world in general and Bethlehem in specific. He has a general dislike for the Walker family on sheer principle—they have always wielded too much power in this town based solely on the basis of their bankroll.

Today, the Bethlehem Chronicle is published only once a week, and mostly it carries ads for stores and mail-order services in towns closer to the lowland.

The investigators can use the Chronicle and Dutton Peabody's memory to get basic information about the history of the town and its citizens. Doing so requires a successful *LIBRARY USE* check to search through the stacks or a successful *PERSUADE* check to get Peabody to talk.

DUTTON PEABODY, Age 68, Editor In Chief

STR 9 CON 9 SIZ 9 INT 16 POW 16
DEX 10 APP 10 EDU 18 SAN 80 HP 9

Damage Bonus: +0

Weapons: none

Key Skills: Fast Talk 65%, History 56%, Law 40%,
Library Use 73%, Listen 80%, Natural History 40%, Occult
30%, Persuade 65%, Psychology 55%, Spot Hidden 80%

Opinions: "This is the first decent bit of news this backwater burg has seen since the Ballard boys marched home from the Great War, each with a silver star on his chest."

"I'd say this crow business was the work of God, if I wasn't an atheist."

"In the end, this is all Prescott Walker's fault. Too much power in the hands of one man—a boy, really. He set us up to fail by putting all our eggs in one basket. It reminds me of how the McKendrick family ran things out west in Shibone"

D. McPhee's Public House

Once a fine pub in the Irish tradition, Prohibition has forced McPhee's to focus more attention on the food that came out of its kitchen. Over the past few years, it has become a fine local restaurant. McPhee's serves fried fish on Fridays, prime rib on Saturdays, and Irish stew every night of the week. Though visitors from the big cities at best call it "passable," the citizens of Bethlehem consider it the height of their restaurant scene.

After dinner hours, McPhee's is still the most popular place for the people of Bethlehem to gather and socialize, though they serve nothing stronger than watered down beer—at least, not to strangers. A secret room behind the now largely decorative bar still contains a full complement of alcoholic beverages (brought in across the Canadian border by bootleggers). A successful *SEARCH* check of the room will reveal the secret door, and a successful *LOCKSMITH* or *MECH. REPAIR* check will trigger its mechanism revealing the hidden trove. Likewise, anyone who observes Ham Campbell, the town drunk, as he leaves the bar may notice, with a successful *SPOT HIDDEN* check, that he is actually drunk. (When actually interacting with Ham, this fact becomes obvious.)

Kenneth McPhee, who runs the Public House for the owner (his younger brother and Mayor of Bethlehem, Arthur), has taken pity on Ham. Over the past two years, everyone Ham has ever loved or cared for has died in a series of tragic accidents and painful diseases. The poor man's life has crumbled around him and the only way he has been able to deal with it is to crawl inside a bottle of whiskey and not come out. Ham has, as near as anyone can tell, been more or less drunk for the better part of eight months. Some people think he will snap out of it soon while others think he will drink himself to death before too many more months have passed. Either way, the people of Bethlehem wish Ham only peace of mind and spirit.

For his part, Ham is more cognizant of his behavior and surroundings than most people would give him credit for. The crows just seem like another blight in a long list of tragedies that have befallen him in recent years. In fact, this seems so apocalyptic that it gives him some hope that a merciful God may finally be ready to end his suffering.

KENNETH MCPHEE, Age 58, Proprietor

STR 14 CON 14 SIZ 14 INT 10 POW 11
DEX 10 APP 12 EDU 9 SAN 55 HP 14

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Weapons: baseball bat (behind counter) 35%, 1d8 + 1d4;
fist 60%, 1d3 + 1d4

Key Skills: Conceal 45%,

Opinions: "I think all these crows are the government's doing. They big wigs down in Boston and Providence don't want all them crows messing up their cities, so they're leading them out here to the country. What do they care if it ruins our lives? It's not like we're important."

"Sometimes, when those city kids get too high and mighty, I put a beetle or a waterbug into their stew. Oh, I'd never do that to you ... but I wouldn't eat from your buddy's plate, if you catch my drift."

"I'm a bartender ... errr ... restaurant host, I know how important it is to keep people's secrets. You ought to be careful what you go digging up. People can get very testy when you start discussing their private problems in public."

HAM CAMPBELL, Age 54, Town Drunk

STR 11 CON 10 SIZ 13 INT 14 POW 8
DEX 11 APP 9 EDU 15 SAN 40 HP 12

Damage Bonus: +0

Weapons: none

Key Skills: Bargain 18%, Dodge 33%, Fast Talk 45%, Hide 45%, Listen 37%, Sneak 62%

Opinions: "I seen all them crows fly in. It was the middle of the night and I was ... ummm ... resting behind the general store. Must have been three o'clock in the morning. Craziest thing I ever seen."

"I was walking home the other night and I must have tripped because suddenly I was lying down under a tree. And just as I started having the nicest dream I got woke up by a bunch of crows scratching at my face and squawking at me. I didn't know what to do. I thought they were gonna kill me when all of a sudden someone reaches down and pulls me to my feet. Do you know who it was? None other than Prescott Walker. He dusted me off and told me not to sleep under anymore trees."

E. Lodge #82

On the north end of Main Street sits the structure that serves as the lodge house for the local chapter of the Fraternal Brotherhood of the Tiger.

This plain, brick, single-story building has only a single circular shingle to identify it. Hanging next to the sturdy, oaken door it bears only the silhouette of a leaping tiger and the text "F.B.O.T. #82."

The Fraternal Brotherhood of the Tiger is a social organization similar to groups like the Lions Club or the Order of Elks. Rather than being associated with agriculture, a religious denomination, or past military service, the Tigers organization encourages international relations and world travel. Because of the money involved in such endeavors, the Tiger organization hasn't caught on as broadly as the others. However, the fact of the matter is that one need not travel oneself in order to be a Tiger, simply appreciate the knowledge that is to be gained by learning about and interacting with other cultures.

It may seem strange that such a lodge would thrive in as insular a place as Bethlehem. Indeed, it likely would never have taken root here except for the fact that Anton Walker (Prescott's grandfather) was one of the organization's founding members. The Walker family exerted its influence not only to open a lodge in Bethlehem, but also to see to it that none of the other lodges gained support in the town. If a Bethlehem resident was going to be part of the local charitable and social scene, then he would have to be a Tiger.



The initial strong-arm tactics notwithstanding, the Tiger Lodge has become a beloved staple of the community, and nearly everyone in town is a member. The lodge is most often used for town meetings, weddings, and wintertime social gatherings (when the weather is far too cold to do so outdoors). It is also used as the town's polling place for regional, state, and national elections.

On most days, the only people to be found in the building are Cyrus Newton, the administrator, and Stella Ballard, his clerk and assistant. Together, they have near encyclopedic knowledge of all the social affairs, charity drives, and political functions that have taken place in Bethlehem for the past forty years. A successful *FAST TALK* or *PERSUADE* check will get them to talk about such matters or give the investigators access to the club's records (which may be searched with a *LIBRARY USE* check). However, there is nothing of special interest to be gained by doing so, unless the investigators are looking for local gossip.

STELLA BALLARD, Age 57, Clerk

STR 9 CON 10 SIZ 9 INT 14 POW 13
DEX 12 APP 11 EDU 14 SAN 65 HP 10

Damage Bonus: +0

Weapons: none

Key Skills: Accounting 65%, History 66%, Law 58%, Library Use 45%, Psychology 26%, Spot Hidden 59%

Opinions: "I'm sure I don't know what to make of all this. It certainly is a shame, though. These fall weekends are the only times we get visitors from other lodges. With this crow business, our annual Brotherhood Dinner had to be cancelled. And I planned for that all summer long."

"I think I read somewhere that this sort of thing happens all the time in Fiji ... or is it Bora Bora? Anyway, the natives say that it has something to do with a sleeping god underneath the ocean. Isn't that the silliest thing you've ever heard?"

CYRUS NEWTON, Age 84, Administrator

STR 9 CON 12 SIZ 13 INT 14 POW 11
DEX 12 APP 11 EDU 16 SAN 55 HP 13

Damage Bonus: +0

Weapons: none

Key Skills: First Aid 45%, History 70%, Library Use 40%, Occult 45%, Persuade 38%, Psychology 42%, Rifle 63%, Spot Hidden 68%, Shotgun 82%, Throw 40%

Opinions: "It's a small world we live in, but there are still more things we don't understand than we do—forces beyond our reckoning, and I think that's what's going on here. There's a meaning behind all this, mark my words!"

"If old Anton Walker was still around, he'd have done something about this. There was a man who knew how to get things done. But his son never learned that lesson, and I'm not even sure his grandson Prescott even knows that there's such a lesson to be learned. How far that family has fallen in such a short time."

F. Town Hall

Standing at the far end of Main Street is the most ostentatious building in Bethlehem—the town hall.

Sitting on a small rise on the north end of Bethlehem is an impressive, three-story-tall granite edifice in the classical Roman style—Corinthian columns, a great triangular pediment carved with figures representing Truth, Law, and Equity, and the motto "Ad lucem, ad laus."

Back when the town was vying to be the county seat, Ephram Walker decided it would be a good investment to make the seat of local politics look as important as he wanted it to become. So, at the Walker family's own expense, he commissioned Town Hall to be built with a granite façade, with masonry brought all the way from Boston on a series of mule carts.

The courthouse motto (which translates roughly as "Towards the light, toward glory") was made up by Ephram Walker rather than taken from any actual source. He liked the way it sounded when spoken aloud and figured, rightly so, that practically no one who saw it would actually speak Latin.

Inside, the town hall is much less impressive. The granite façade backs up against a very plain brick building. The space is fairly evenly split between the two most powerful men in Bethlehem politics—the mayor and the sheriff.

The Mayor's Office

A small set of offices, filing cabinets, and a single meeting room make up the heart of politics in Bethlehem. For the past fifteen years, that post of Mayor has been held by Arthur McPhee, and before that it was held by his father, Gerald McPhee. In fact, a member of the McPhee clan has always been Mayor of Bethlehem since the town's incorporation.

Arthur McPhee is a good mayor, serving in the town's best interest. He is also the owner of McPhee's Public House and several other businesses in Bethlehem. He has even gone so far as to open stores in the nearby towns of Franconia and Sugar Hill. While his heart remains devoted to Bethlehem, he doesn't see the sense in tying his entire fortune to this dying town.

He and his staff (two part-time secretaries) will be happy to help the investigators with any part of their inquiries as long as he believes they have the town's best interests at heart. If he thinks the investigators have goals that would harm Bethlehem's reputation or drive away the tourist-dollars which are now its only source of income, the mayor's office will suddenly be closed every time the investigators try to visit.



ARTHUR McPHEE, Age 48, Mayor of Bethlehem

STR 12 CON 15 SIZ 14 INT 16 POW 14
DEX 10 APP 17 EDU 16 SAN 70 HP +1d4

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Weapons: none

Key Skills: Bargain 72%, Conceal 40%, Credit Rating 45%, Drive Auto 50%, Fast Talk 85%, History 40%, Law 78%, Spot Hidden 45%, Sneak 45%

Opinions: "Bethlehem sits on the loveliest piece of God's green earth, and you can quote me on that. Those crows simply want to see what all the fuss is about."

"I think that this is actually a sign of good luck. Crows and people have a lot of things in common, and if the crows are coming back in such numbers, I think it's just a matter of time before people do, too. Yes sirree, I think this is the beginning of a boom time for Bethlehem, and you can quote me on that."

"This is the strangest damn thing I've ever seen. It creeps the hell out of me and I sent my wife and kids to go visit the in-laws for a few weeks until this all blows over. But don't quote me on that."

The Sheriff's Office

The sheriff's offices consist of a large open room with a large desk for Sheriff Ballard and a pair of smaller desks for deputies to use. There are currently four deputies, all part-time and none of them in the office unless there's some sort of ruckus or emergency. In the back is a small holding cell where the sheriff puts out-of-towners who disturb the peace. Occasionally, he puts Ham Campbell in there when the poor man needs someplace safe and warm to sleep off a particularly deep inebriation.

Henry Ballard, the current sheriff, has been in the post for a dozen years. He is a no nonsense man who simply tries to maintain the peace. Henry does not particularly revel in the power his position grants, but he is not hesitant to use his authority heavy-handedly when he thinks the community is threatened. He's a fair man, and will treat the investigators with respect and deference as long as he thinks they are trying to help the good people of Bethlehem. If, however, he thinks they are being overly rowdy or present a danger to the populace, his manner will take a dramatic turn.

Sheriff Ballard will begin by making suggestions regarding how the investigators should and should not act. If these are not followed, he will threaten to run the group out of town if they don't change their ways. And finally he will take the opportunity to arrest a single investigator, preferably while he or she is separated from the rest of the group. For all the other investigators, it will appear as if their friend simply disappeared without a trace. After a few hours (or perhaps as much as a day), Sheriff Ballard will come to the group to let them know that he has their friend and tell them that unless they all want to end up

sharing the same cell, they ought to pack up and leave Bethlehem as quickly as possible. If it appears they are taking this advice, he will release his prisoner with a similar warning.

Once you get on Sheriff Ballard's bad side, it is difficult to regain his trust. However, if the investigators prove that they do actually have the town's survival as a goal, he will eventually come around.

HENRY BALLARD, Age 45, Sheriff

STR 15 CON 14 SIZ 16 INT 10 POW 17
DEX 14 APP 9 EDU 13 SAN 85 HP 15

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Weapons: .32 revolver 50%, 1d8; 12-gauge shotgun (pump) 75%, 4d6, fist 75%, 1d3 +1d4

Key Skills: Dodge 70%, First Aid 40%, Hide 40%, Law 80%, Listen 80%, Locksmith 35%, Persuade 45%, Psychology 65%, Sneak 40%, Spot Hidden 70%, Throw 50%

Opinions: "This used to be such a quiet little town."

"If the crows don't go in a couple of weeks, hunting season will start. I don't think we'll have a problem after that."

"If everyone keeps his wits about him, we'll get through this together. What we don't need is someone else losing his head and running off into the woods like Prescott did. Oh, and let me know if you see him anywhere. That boy needs to be locked up for his own good."

G. Bethlehem Public Library

Just to the east of Town Hall is a small wooden structure that might easily be mistaken for a large residence. However, a wooden sign on the lawn clearly marks it as the Bethlehem Public Library.

This building was the original Walker family home, but they donated it to the town when construction was finished on Walker Manor. Similarly, most of the books contained in the library were donated by or bought with funding from the various members of the Walker family.

Inside, the library still very much has the feeling of a residence, albeit one belonging to a raging bibliophile. Nearly every available inch of wall space is covered with bookshelves (including along the staircase as one ascends to the second floor), but the rooms themselves have leather reading chairs, reading lamps, and end tables set in welcoming arrangements. In the foyer is a small desk where Dorice Gallagher, the current librarian, spends her days.



Dorice is a daughter of the Devereux family who left Bethlehem to marry a railroad worker from Boston. Unfortunately, her beloved died in a horrible freight car accident, and Dorice returned home, widowed at the age of 27. She never had any other prospects and, since she needed something to focus her life on, decided to take over the library (which had basically been a storehouse before she started organizing and running it).

The Bethlehem Library is very well stocked compared to institutions in other towns of similar size. It contains broad collections of American fiction (often first editions), American history (with a predictable slant toward events that happened in New England), and a surprisingly deep stack of regional newspapers (including the Boston Globe and Boston Herald as well as the Providence Journal and the Maine Sunday Herald going back nearly a century). A unique feature of the library is the Walker family private collection, featuring family journals and diaries dating back to pre-Revolutionary days. At the Keeper's discretion, the library may contain a Mythos tome such as *Thaumaturgical Prodigies in the New England Canaan* or some other text that has a historical tie to the region. Finding the tome in the library should require at least one successful *SEARCH* check.

With a successful *LIBRARY USE* check, the library can be used to gather basic information about the history of Bethlehem or the Walker family as well as general interest news of the world.

DORICE GALLAGHER, Age 48, Widowed Librarian

STR 10 CON 13 SIZ 10 INT 18 POW 15
DEX 11 APP 13 EDU 19 SAN 75 HP 12

Damage Bonus: +0

Weapons: none

Key Skills: Art 40%, History 75%, Law 25%,
Library Use 90%, Listen 65%, Natural History 25%,
Occult 25%, Spot Hidden 55%

Opinions: "It's amazing how the arrival of a few birds can affect someone. I've had people in here all week asking if we have any books on how to remove the curse from the town. Books on curses! Can you imagine?"

"I don't feel safe. It's not just the birds, either. Sometimes when I'm in the back room making tea and looking out the window I'm sure I can see some ... well ... *something* in the woods behind the library. I'm certain it's just my imagination, but I don't go out back alone anymore."

H. The Old Gray Church

Properly known as the First Presbyterian Church of Bethlehem, most residents (and just about all visitors) simply call it the "Old Gray Church."

Just north of the lumberyard is a site common to most New England towns—a small, steepled church in a lot surrounded by a picket fence. Rather than being painted white, though, the church, fence, and every other detail are painted a flat, dull gray.

The church is painted gray specifically because it is next to the lumberyard. On a daily basis while the mill was operational, clouds of the sawdust and small particles thrown into the air by the saws would cover the church in tan chips giving it a constant spotty, mud-spattered appearance. For decades, the minister and staff would wash down the building every morning and night only to have to repeat the process again the following day. Then, one year when it was time to repaint the church, the minister at the time suggesting painting it a darker color because of the debris.

"Reverend," one member of the congregation said, "changing the color won't stop the sawdust from settling on the church."

"No," the minister replied. "But on a darker background the dust will make the church look like it's sparkling in the sun rather than soiled by the dirt."

The current minister, Edward Grayson, does not have one tenth the imagination or optimism that his predecessor had. He is an aging man who has seen his faith in God dwindle with the strength in his limbs. Now half-blind and facing a church whose pews are rarely more than a quarter full, Reverend Grayson knows that when he leaves his post no other minister will be sent to replace him.

Rather than take any responsibility himself, he sees it as a fault of the townsfolk who have let themselves be lured from the righteous path by modern conveniences and easy tourist money. Grayson blames Prescott Walker for everything bad that has happened in not only the past five years, but during the entirety of the young man's life—including the deaths of the rest of his family. It is only an odd coincidence that, at least in the case of the recently arrived crows, Reverend Grayson has actually placed the blame correctly for once.





EDWARD GRAYSON, Age 73, Aging Minister

STR 11 CON 10 SIZ 12 INT 15 POW 17

DEX 10 APP 13 EDU 15 SAN 75 HP 11

Damage Bonus: +0

Weapons: none

Key Skills: First Aid 45%, History 75%, Library Use 65%, Listen 35%, Occult 75%, Persuade 65%, Psychology 65%, Spot Hidden 45%

Opinions: "The Devil's messengers have taken roost in our town and no one dares to shoo them away. Look into your hearts and see how they have grown as black as those birds."

"The crows are everywhere, but where do the biggest ones roost? On the home of our tormentor! See for yourself! The town is surrounded by the foul beasts, but Walker Manor is awash in them!"

"Repent! Repent of your sins before it is too late!"

I. Ballard's Boarding House

Near the southern end of Main Street, one of the first buildings you pass when entering Bethlehem is a large, colonial home with a sign hanging from the oak tree in the front yard. "Ballard's Boarding House. Polite Guests Welcome."

Run by Alma Ballard, there are ten rooms to let, each capable of accommodating two adults. Juice, coffee, and fresh baked muffins are served every morning, and a traditional New England dinner is served every night promptly at 6:00 (those who are late will not be served). Guests have access to the common room from 10AM till 10PM, and must vacate their rooms between the hours of noon and 3PM each day so that they may be cleaned.

The Ballard Boarding House is considered to be the best place to stay in all of Bethlehem and the quality of Alma's cooking is such that many have urged her to turn the inn into a restaurant. As a result, Alma can afford to be quite choosy about whom she lets stay in her house. She insists that people rent her rooms by the week (\$3 per person). If a potential guest seems pushy, noisy, overly demanding, or worst of all rude, Alma will simply refuse to let him or her stay. What's more, if someone she has already allowed in turns out to be unpleasant, Alma will pack the person's bags during the cleaning period and show them out before supper—without a refund.

Alma is a good-hearted woman, but much more independent and brash than most men of this era are comfortable with. She is unfailingly polite, though never shirks from telling you what's on her mind in the most direct way that is respectful. She has no patience for people who are deceptive or rude. Perhaps it was because of these idealistic ways that she never married. But when her mother passed away, Alma turned the family house to this new use and found the true calling of her life. She loves running the boarding house and is supremely protective of it and all the guests who stay under her roof.

ALMA BALLARD, Age 52, Proprietress

STR 11 CON 12 SIZ 11 INT 13 POW 16

DEX 12 APP 11 EDU 14 SAN 80 HP 11

Damage Bonus: +0

Weapons: none

Key Skills: Bargain 55%, Conceal 45%, Electrical Repair 35%, First Aid 60%, History 45%, Listen 70%, Natural History 25%, Occult 15%, Sneak 40%, Spot Hidden 45%

Opinions: "Those poor people who were attacked, most of them were staying here. I tried to get them to at least let me clean their cuts, but they couldn't leave fast enough."

"I don't think anyone who lives in Bethlehem has been attacked. Doesn't that seem strange to you? You'd think that we'd all have crow feathers in our hair from all the swooping and scratching. But we don't. Do you think that means someone from town's responsible?"

"Wipe your feet before you come in, dear."

J. Devereux's Fine Pelts

In the midst of Bethlehem's Main Street shops is a door that seems to go nowhere. It is not attached to the store on either side, and the building is only one story tall so there is no second floor for it to access. Painted on the door in crisp but weather-faded stenciled letters are the words "Devereux's Fine Pelts." Opening the door reveals a long, dark hallway that leads all the way to building's rear and a single, cramped workspace.

The first thing you notice as you enter the room are eyes. Green eyes, blue eyes, brown, yellow, red, and orange eyes stare at you from near the ceiling, along the counter tops, and nearly every corner of the room. After a moment it becomes clear that these eyes are made of glass and set into the carefully posed, mounted and stuffed bodies of local fauna.

When Marshall Devereux first rented this space, it was to serve as a private taxidermy workroom. His family was unnerved by having so many bobcats, squirrels, boar, and hawks around the house—all set with snarls eternally on their lips and posed as though they would strike at any moment. However, as curious people found their way back to his little studio and marveled at his skill, he soon began taking on commissions. Pretty soon, his reputation had grown to the point where it was important that would-be customers be able to find him.





In consideration of the businesses that faced out onto Main Street, Marshall was hesitant to put "Taxidermist" on the door—too many people were put off by the notion and he was afraid it would scare them away from the entire block. Briefly he thought about listing himself as a "furrier," but he balked based on the idea of well-heeled out-of-town women coming down his dark hallway only to faint when they saw a whole stuffed lynx rather than just a stole and muffler. Instead, he decided to simply say his business was "fine pelts," leaving out the fact that they were complete pelts that were still in lifelike poses.

Marshall is an acerbic man who has never been comfortable in groups larger than three. He has a finely honed sense of paranoia and distrusts anyone whose family hasn't been in Bethlehem for at least three generations. Of course, he also distrusts Mayor McPhee, Sheriff Ballard, Prescott Walker and anyone in a position of political, legal, or societal authority. But in his heart, Marshall Devereux loves his hometown and the people who live here—he just has a difficult time showing it.

MARSHALL DEVEREUX, Age 65, Taxidermist
STR 11 CON 14 SIZ 12 INT 12 POW 10
DEX 13 APP 12 EDU 13 SAN 50 HP 13

Damage Bonus: +0

Weapons: none

Key Skills: Anthropology 15%, Biology 35%, Chemistry 25%, History 45%, Medicine 15%, Occult 50%, Pharmacy 10%, Rifle 40%, Shotgun 40%, Spot Hidden 35%, Track 25%

Opinions: "These are not ordinary crows. They're bigger, tougher, and meaner. Here, look at this. This mounted crow is the kind we usually see around here. Don't you think the ones outside are much larger?"

"Sheriff Ballard could have done something about this, but he hasn't. I mean, he's got all the guns and the ability to deputize as many of his hunting buddies as he wants, right? It's strange that he's chosen not to—or is it?"

"I heard that Mayor McPhee was contacted by the governor asking if we needed any help, as in some armed members of the National Guard. They could have cleared the crows out of here in less than a day, but the mayor conveniently turned the offer down."

"Prescott Walker could certainly have nipped the situation in the bud if he'd just started up the lumberyard again. Cut down their trees and where are the crows going to go. You mark my words, when all is said and done, this mess is going to trace back to Walker Manor!"

K. Walker Manor

Walker Manor represents many different things to the residents of Bethlehem. To some it is a symbol of the best of times, when the mill was running and honest labor built a hardworking town of good, decent folk. To others it represents the most selfish aspects of the American Dream—the Lumber Works thrived for more than a century, but only one family in town ever profited enough from the business to afford more than a modest living. And now that the yard is closed the rest of the town struggles while the sole remaining Walker lives behind walls built of avarice.

Behind a seven-foot tall brick wall and a wrought-iron gate sits Walker Manor. Built in the style of the great English manor homes, it was constructed on the highest point of land in Bethlehem so that the entire town could see it and take heart in the fact that the Walker family was there building a better future for all the citizens.

Now the windows are dark, the great lawn has grown wild, and the front door is locked. And all along the rooftop and the manor's protective wall, crows are perched staring down at Bethlehem with black, soulless eyes.

Getting onto the manor grounds is easy. The iron gate may be closed but it is not locked. The building itself is another matter. Prescott locked and bolted the front door after finding the amulet in the woods, and no one else has been inside the building since. Sheriff Ballard has a key, though he will not volunteer this information and will be hesitant to give the investigators free rein in the home of Bethlehem's leading family. However, a series of well executed *FAST TALK* or *PERSUADE* checks might convince him to chaperone them through a search of the building.

Alternatively, the investigators may attempt *LOCKPICKING* checks to open the front or rear doors (or even one of the ground floor windows). Or they may attempt *CLIMB* checks to get in via a slightly opened second floor window. If they choose any of these routes, though, the Keeper should also have them make *SNEAK x 3* checks periodically as they explore the house, in order to avoid being noticed by Sheriff Ballard as he makes his rounds. If he catches them, the sheriff will be very unhappy that the investigators are "saving the town" by means of trespassing then breaking and entering into the only house in Bethlehem that contains anything worth stealing. This will definitely turn him from an ally to an adversary for the rest of the adventure.

The Grounds

Walker Manor sits on a five-acre lot. The great lawn takes up the first third of the property. For most of its existence, it has been kept immaculately. However, once Prescott discovered the Abenaki Spirit Stone, he dismissed the manor's entire staff, including the gardener. The lawn





has been left to grow wild for over a month now and, even though it is late in the season, the grass has shot up to almost knee-level.

The effect this miniature jungle has is to make the manor itself look long deserted—more like a haunted house than someone's home. There isn't anything of interest to find in the long grass, but that doesn't mean that the investigators won't want to spend time and *SPOT HIDDEN* checks looking. If they linger too long, the Keeper should make it clear that they are barking up the wrong tree.

In back of the house is a fine set of gardens complete with footpaths, fountains, reflecting ponds, and benches from which the natural splendor can be appreciated. Because they are so carefully maintained, the gardens have not grown as wild as the lawn, but patches of grass and weeds have sprung up in places they would normally never be allowed. However, the gardens are well past their bloom for the year, so this may be difficult to notice for anyone who isn't a botanist or avid gardener. In fact, many of the bushes are changing colors as wildly as the nearby trees.

The First Floor

Once inside the manor house, the investigators can wander freely from room to room looking for evidence that will connect the Walkers to the current goings on. The fact of the matter is, though, that there is only a single item of interest in the whole house—Prescott Walker's Journal, which can be found in the library on the second floor. However, the Keeper may wish to play the investigation out, if only to keep things more mysterious.

On the first floor of the house the investigators will find the grand entrance, sitting room, dining room, an expansive kitchen, and a large hall suitable for holding grand parties. Everything is designed in an opulent, European style and decorated with exquisite (if fifty years out of date) taste. This would all be very comforting and cozy if not for two unsettling details.

First, the floors and rugs are all covered with muddy footprints. Some of them are shoe or boot prints, but others clearly are from bare feet. A successful *TRACK* or *ANTHROPOLOGY* check will reveal that all of the prints are made by the same sized foot. In fact, these are all marks of Prescott's making as he wandered around the house under the Spirit Stone's influence.

The second detail, also caused by Prescott in his stupor, is that the place is an unholy mess. Plates of half-eaten meals sit on banisters and sideboards, papers and books are strewn about often with indecipherable notes scribbled in the margins. The Keeper should fill in any details that might, at first, lead the investigators to think that someone has trashed the place, but eventually bring them to the conclusion that Prescott has become a man obsessed with some kind of Native American artifact.

The Second Floor

The manor's second floor is in a state similar to the first floor—a terrible mess with muddy footprints leading all over (though the prints will be less discernable because the mud will have dried up or been wiped off by the time Prescott got upstairs).

On this floor are all the bedrooms (eight of them in total), a private library, a large bath and dressing room, and a balcony that looks down over the grand entrance. Prescott still lives in the room he grew up in as a boy, never having had the heart to move himself into the master bedroom after his parents' deaths. (Indeed, all the other bedrooms remain as they were in the days before the influenza pandemic.) In his bedroom, a successful *SPOT HIDDEN* check will turn up items that paint an accurate picture of Prescott before he found the amulet—a rich young man who enjoyed the sorts of things that rich young men of the era do, but especially bird watching and orienteering.

The library is the messiest room of all and is the source of the books scattered around the house. There are, of course, plenty of books remaining in this room, but most of them are no longer on the shelves. Prescott has taken them off in his frantic search for information and inspiration, but never bothered to put them back. Piles of books, both orderly and chaotic, now dominate the library floor and one of the reading chairs. A successful *SPOT HIDDEN* or *LIBRARY USE* check will allow the investigators to find Prescott's journal.

The journal is, for the most part, quite pedestrian. But the final entry will be of interest to the investigators. The Keeper should give them a copy of Player Handout #2. Investigators who read the entry may attempt *OCCULT*, *ART*, or *ANTHROPOLOGY* checks. If successful, they reveal that the animal drawings on the sketched item are of style used by the Abenaki tribe. However, the Abenaki did not make pendants out of stone, nor did they use triangles in their totemic art. (They considered the shape to be bad luck, and preferred using circles, half-circles, and squares.) That would make Prescott's amulet, if the drawing is accurate, a very important archeological find.

The Cellar and Attic

There is nothing of particular interest in either the cellar or the attic, but it is certainly possible the investigators will want to search these places anyway.

The cellar is mostly taken up with three small apartments that would have belonged to the servants that lived and worked at the manor in happier times—a maid, a cook, and a gardener.



Since the last occupants took all their belongs with them when Prescott dismissed them, the rooms are now filled only with bare walls and unused furniture.

Just beyond the servants' quarters is a small, but well stocked, wine cellar. Prescott is not as fond of wine as his father was, so it has gone unused for quite a while. Any investigator who is a wine enthusiast or makes a successful *CREDIT RATING* check notices some rare and expensive vintages gathering dust on these racks.

The attic has even less in it than the cellar. This space was only used for storage and very rarely even for that. Investigators who go up there will find old dressmaking dummies, some trunks of clothing at least fifty years out of date, and handmade children's toys of various descriptions.

In fact, the only thing disturbing about the attic is that while in there the investigators can hear the crows walking about and cawing on the roof above.

Act II: Unnatural Events

Act II of *Murder of Crows* is actually a series of escalating events that the Keeper should interject into the investigators' exploration of Bethlehem in Act I. There is no particular right or wrong way to use these events as long as they achieve the desired effects. Namely:

- Giving Bethlehem a feeling of a town in the grips of an unnatural or supernatural event.
- Making the investigators feel at first uncomfortable. then building that feeling to the brink of outright paranoia. It should be clear to them (or at least become clear over time) that these events are happening in direct response to their actions.
- Create the feeling that wherever the investigators go in town, there is someone watching them.
- Give the investigators a sense that there may be no limit to what the force controlling these animals can do.

A Thousand Eyes Are Watching

The preponderance of crows in Bethlehem are, in truth, there for a reason. They have been called by Prescott Walker under the influence of the Abenaki Spirit Stone (see *New Artifacts*, below). Through the crows' eyes and ears, Prescott can know almost anything that goes on in town and react accordingly.

Player Handout #2 - Keeper's Copy

From the Journal of Prescott Walker

I came across the most unusual patch of woods today while walking along Fulton's Ridge. The canopy closed so tight overhead that I thought the sun had been blotted out entirely. And even though it was a somewhat blustery day, not a leaf stirred nor a branch moved. In fact, there was no noise whatever—no birds in the trees or insects buzzing about. It was as if Death itself had claimed the grove.

It is silly, I know, but I became convinced that Death was there with me, or some other malevolent force for which I could find no name. A panic gripped my heart and I wanted nothing more than to leave that cursed patch of forest, but I could find no way out. Everywhere I turned seemed darker and more foreboding than the last. So, I am not proud to say, I broke into a run trying to find with my feet and exit I could not divine with my eyes.

I ran through the woods heedlessly. I dare say I even screamed as a frightened child might, or someone woken from a night terror. No matter how I tried, I could find no way out. And the trees seemed to grow closer, grabbing my coattails and scratching at my face. Eventually, my foot hooked through a brambly root and I came crashing to the ground.

When I opened my eyes, there it was—right in front of my nose—a stone amulet or pendant of some sort, obviously made by the local Indian tribe. Who knows how long it must have lain there? The tribe was moved off this land before the War Between the States. Wherever it came from, seeing it cleared my head of the ridiculous notion that I was being chased by some unseen figure or that there was anything unnatural about that patch of woods.

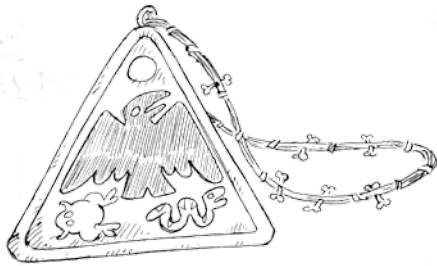
It is truly a remarkable piece and I find I can't stop thinking about it. I've put it on and it feels so light and natural I almost immediately forgot I was wearing it. But I must know more about it. I can find examples of similar artwork in the library, but nothing about this type of amulet. Is it a warrior's fetish? A shaman's talisman? A chief's totem? I MUST know!

The longer I wear it, the more I feel certain that it is an item of power. I can hear the sounds of its former owners buzzing in the back of my mind—whispering in a language I cannot comprehend. And yet, I feel just on the cusp of understanding its meaning.

Every time I think the medallion's secrets are about to be revealed, I am interrupted. A crow pecks at the window or a spider lands on the bridge of my nose. But before I can shoo them away, as soon as the thought flits through my mind, they respond by

flying or crawling away. At first I thought it was coincidence, but the last time I tried something new. After the crow flew away, I called out to it with my mind, beckoning it to return. Not only did it do so, it brought three of its flock mates back with it!

Truly there is more to this pendant than anyone would ever guess. If only I could comprehend those incessant, buzzing voices. I'm sure they are trying to tell me what I long to know.



The truth of the matter is that Prescott does not have a grand plan. He is a man who has lost his grip on reason and is reacting in an almost reflexive way to the things he sees and hears. In general, he wants to protect the woods from human incursion. Although his pendant looks like it is Native American in origin, it is actually extra-terrestrial and the echoed thoughts of its creators urge Prescott Walker to keep their secrets safe from prying human eyes.

Additionally, Prescott retains enough reason that he is trying to hide his actions, not to mention his current physical state, from the townsfolk. His altercation with the snide outsider in McPhee's Public House scared him—Prescott had never performed a violent act in his life before then, and he felt himself on the verge of actually killing that young man. So he has run off to the woods in order that no one see what a madman he's become. In his few rational moments, he hopes to get more stable control over himself and then return home as though nothing untoward had ever happened. In his more frequent raving moments, he wants to drive all humans from the woods forever.

Triggering Events

For the most part, Preston Walker wants to prevent anyone from Bethlehem (particularly any outsiders, such as the investigators) from entering the woods. He also wants to be sure that they are not saying bad things about him or his family. Through the eyes and ears of his animal thralls, Prescott can see and hear just about everything in town. Unless the investigators take extraordinary measures to keep their conversations from being heard by birds, rats, and spiders, the Keeper should simply presume that Prescott is listening in on every word they say.

Whenever one of the following things happens to the investigators, Prescott will respond by causing an "event."

- Someone mentions Prescott or any other member of the Walker family in a negative way. He wants to protect his good name.
- Someone gives the investigators factually correct information about the meaning or power behind recent events.
- The investigators prepare to call in more outsiders to help with the investigation or to spread news of these events to the world at large.
- Any time that Prescott feels personally threatened by the events taking place.

Events should escalate in severity. The first couple should just be unnerving or eerie, but as the investigators press deeper into the situation the events should grow more and more threatening, dangerous, and sanity threatening. By the time the investigators are on the verge of solving the mystery, they should be dodging dangerous attacks at every move.

The Crows

Most of the events caused by Prescott Walker will involve the crows. They are the most plentiful and menacing implements at his disposal.

Crows are not particularly hardy creatures, so the investigators should not have any difficulty dealing with any individual bird. Doing a single hit point of damage will kill a crow. The problem is that there are hundreds of crows in the area, and only a handful of investigators.

Being There

The first event is simply to have crows arrive and be waiting for the investigators. The minute they finish the conversation in which they trigger Prescott's defense mechanisms, they find that while they were talking a large contingent of crows has quietly flown in. The birds sit around pointedly staring at the investigators (and in particular whichever investigators led the discussion in question). The birds do not attack or even make any threatening sounds, they simply watch. If the investigators try to scare them away, the crows leave but return in a few minutes. When the investigators leave the site of the conversation, the crows leave as well.

A more advanced version of this event will have the crows actually follow the investigators wherever they go. Again, the birds do not attack,



simply fly or walk behind the investigators as they travel around the town. When the investigators go into a building, the crows wait outside. If the investigators simply stand still, so do the crows.

An even more disturbing version of this event will have a single crow sitting atop the luggage or bed when an investigator returns to his or her room at night. The bird apparently has been there for a long while but no one can figure out how it got into the room. Although they successfully shoo it out into the night, when the investigator awakens in the morning, the crow is back in the same place again.

Fly By

When merely following the investigators around proves ineffective, Prescott Walker will begin having the birds swoop in a dive bomb them. By this time, the investigators will probably be used to seeing so many crows around, so they must make successful *SPOT HIDDEN* checks in order to recognize that the birds are acting differently. Any investigators who fail the check, they are taken completely by surprise when a group of two or three crows swoops close by, perhaps knocking hats off heads but not doing any greater damage. The first time they are pestered this way, the investigators must make *SAN* checks, failure resulting in the loss of a single *SAN* point. Once the investigators who are aware of the crows' new tactic, they can easily avoid the shock and embarrassment by ducking out of the way.

Attack

As it becomes clear that the investigators will not be easily scared off, Prescott has the crows begin to make actual physical attacks. The investigators must make successful *SPOT HIDDEN* checks in order to recognize that the birds are changing their tactics again. Any investigators that fail the check are unable to act in their own defense during the first round of the attack.

A group of two or three crows will automatically hit a defenseless target for 1d3 hit points of damage. Once the investigators are aware of this threat, they may attempt *DODGE* checks to avoid each attack. If the check fails, the investigator takes 1d3 hit points of damage. An investigator who makes this *DODGE* check cannot perform any other action that combat round.

In the future, investigators do not need to make new *SPOT HIDDEN* checks unless they are unaware of the crows' presence entirely. It is presumed that in the name of self-preservation, they will be more leery of nearby crows as a matter of course.

Swarm

As the investigators grow perilously close to identifying Prescott Walker as the culprit and the Abenaki Spirit Stone as his source of power, Prescott will resort to overwhelming force. Rather than just a handful of birds making a single attack against his foes, Prescott will send dozens or hundreds of crows at once.

The crows will wait until the investigators are out in the open (at least ten yards from any building or enclosure) and then swoop down in force. Unless the investigators make successful *SPOT HIDDEN* checks, they do not notice the new tactic until it is too late. Any investigator who does succeed at this check sees a great swarm of crows descending on the group and may take one action before the birds arrive. Unlike when the crows attacked in smaller groups, a *DODGE* check will do the investigators no good when facing a swarm.

Anyone caught in a swarm of crows automatically suffers 1d6 hit points of damage every combat round. The affected person is effectively blinded as the swirling mass of black-feathered bodies, wings, and talons blocks practically all view of the world around the victim. Because of the noise made by the crows, all *LISTEN* checks are made at a penalty of one-half the investigator's normal skill number.

The first time an investigator is attacked by a swarm of crows, he or she must make a *SAN* check. Those who fail the check suffer 1d2 points of *SAN* loss.

Investigators may attack the swarm, but it will do them little good. Each successful attack will kill a single crow (two if the investigator impales the attack), but that still leaves a dozen or more birds to continue the attack. If the investigator manages to kill half the birds in the swarm, the remaining crows will break ranks and fly away.

The only sure way to escape a swarm of crows is to get out of the open and into some kind of enclosed space or shelter. Unfortunately, while engulfed in a swarm of crows it is quite difficult to move about with any certainty of your destination. Investigators trying to escape an attack in this way must make a *LUCK* check to see if they can blindly stumble into a suitable safe haven. This *LUCK* check is made every round until the investigator either finds respite or falls unconscious. If the investigator is intimately familiar with the area (it is his or her home or local neighborhood, for example) or succeeds at an *IDEA* check made during the first combat round of the swarm, his or her *LUCK* checks are instead made at *LUCK x 2*.

It is up to the Keeper to decide what the crows do when a victim falls to the ground unconscious. Prescott Walker can either order the birds to leave the fallen body alone or urge them to go on pecking and clawing at the body. If the birds do peck a victim to death, all those witnessing the event or the mutilated corpse it leaves behind must make a successful *SAN* check or lose 1d4 *SAN* points.



Nighttime Forays

It is entirely possible that a clever investigator will know that crows are generally only active during daylight hours. At night, like most birds, they tend to roost in tree branches, on electrical poles and wires, and anywhere that's off the ground and safely away from predators. It would be a mistake, though, to presume that since most crows act this way, the ones surrounding Bethlehem will necessarily follow suit.

The Keeper may have the crows behave identically whether it is day or night, spurred on by Preston Walker's supernatural instigations. If so, then any investigator who knows about the species usual habits (is an ornithologist, or merely succeeds at a *NATURAL HISTORY* or *IDEA* check) must make a *SAN* check, with failure causing the loss of a single *SAN* point.

If, however, the Keeper wishes to have the crows behave more realistically, there are still other threats lurking in the New Hampshire night.

Bats

The White Mountains are home to many different species of bats, none of them especially large or fierce but all of them subject to control via the Abenakin Spirit Stone. Since Prescott Walker does not the investigators poking around in the woods at all, and especially not at night when most of the creatures he controls are inactive, he does not use as broad a range of implementations for the bats—he simply has them swarm around the investigators. This swarm functions identically to the swarm of crows with the following exceptions.

- The investigators must make *LISTEN* checks rather than *SPOT HIDDEN* checks to notice the bats' approach. The sound they hear is the beating of hundreds of leathery wings and the high-pitched squeaks of the creatures' sonar.
- Bats are known to carry some fairly horrific diseases. So at the Keeper's discretion, any investigator who is bitten by a bat must make a *CON x4* check. Those who fail will become ill. Symptoms of the illness begin in 1d6 hours and are a high fever and general lassitude. Sick investigators take a -20% penalty on all actions (though a roll of 05% or lower will still always be a critical success for combat checks—this can be applied to other skills as well, if the Keeper wishes).

Nocturnal Encounters

Bats are not the only nocturnal creatures in the New Hampshire hills. The Keeper may wish to have the investigators encounter foxes, owls, raccoons, or even brown bears. All of these are too large for Prescott Walker to control using the Abenaki Spirit Stone, but the investigators won't know that.

Wandering in the Dark

It has always been easy to get lost in these woods, even more so at night, and now even *more so* with unnatural powers holding sway. As soon as the investigators wander out of sight of the lights of Bethlehem (which really won't be more than a few hundred yards into the forest), there is a chance that they will lose their sense of direction.

For every fifteen minutes the investigators spend in the woods have one person in the group (preferably the most skillful member) make a *NAVIGATE* check. If even one of these checks fails, the investigators are no longer going in the direction they intend. The more of these checks that fail, the further off course they go.

It is up to the Keeper to decide exactly where lost investigators end up. Perhaps they walk back into Bethlehem when they thought they were miles away. Alternatively, perhaps they *do* end up miles away from town, unable to find their way back until daylight. Of course, once the sun comes up, the crows will become fully active again.

Plague of Frogs

The Abenaki Spirit Stone is not limited to controlling crows. It gives Prescott Walker the ability to command any of the small creatures that inhabit the local woods. One way he can do this for potent emotional effect is to recreate the Biblical plague of frogs.

At some point when the investigators are beginning to put hints and clues together that will eventually point toward Prescott as the culprit, he uses this tactic as a way to try to scare them off the case. The intent is to make the whole thing seem like an act of God—something in which the investigators would do well to stop interfering.

The next time the investigators leave a building, they find frogs everywhere—on the ground, on the cars, in the street, climbing the trees, on people's hats—*everywhere*. Seeing this tableau requires a *SAN* check that, if failed, costs the investigator 1d3 *SAN* points.



If asked about it, any of the locals will say that it was the most amazing thing they've ever seen. The frogs simply started coming out of the woods, leaping out of storm drains, crawling out from under buildings, and a few people claim that they rained from the sky. If any of these witnesses were paying particular attention to the investigators' actions, those people can confirm that the frogs began to appear the minute the investigators went indoors. If there is no such witness, a successful *IDEA* check will give the investigators that particular insight.

Cleaning up a town full of frogs is not an easy task, but the good people of Bethlehem will try. If the investigators want to help, they can—it will be nearly a whole day of labor. However, the next time all of the investigators are indoors at the same time, the frogs will leave of their own accord. Even if the investigators are only inside for a few minutes, when they come back out all the frogs will be gone.

Private Plague

In addition to the town-wide plague (or in lieu of it, if the Keeper prefers), Prescott can cause a much smaller plague of frogs to appear only around places that the investigators visit. The frogs can appear while they are inside, as above, or the frogs could be waiting for the investigators when they arrive at their next place of inquiry. The frogs can sit quietly or begin to leave the minute the investigators arrive.

To be particularly disturbing, the frogs may launch themselves at the investigators in a mass amphibian attack. The frogs can't cause any physical damage, but witnessing this behavior does necessitate a *SAN* check, with failure causing a single point of *SAN* loss.

The most unsettling tactic of all would be for the frogs to appear in an investigator's room. This could happen either when he or she is about to go to bed or, worse yet, first thing in the morning when the investigator awakens to find that frogs somehow came in during the night.

River of Vermin

Using the Abenaki Spirit Stone, Prescott Walker is also able to control the actions of snakes, spiders, worms, and creatures too tiny to be of any impact individually. They can, however, be used to disturbing effect when they act as a coordinated body. Unless an investigator is allergic to the bite of one of the insects being used, this mass of vermin will present no danger at all, but they may well cause the most visceral distress of all the events in Act II.



The "river of vermin" can occur any place, but it is most effective when used either somewhere very isolated and lonely or in a place where the investigators feel safe. It begins with a *SPOT HIDDEN* check that, if successful, allows the investigators to notice a dozen or so spiders, insects, and worms crawling from a single dark location (a crack in the wall, under a closet door, through a partially opened window, etc.) When the investigators examine this phenomenon (or just a few minutes later if none of them succeeded at the *SPOT HIDDEN* check), a flood of tiny creatures streams from the darkness—literally thousands of bugs, worms, spiders, and snakes flow out across the walls, floors, or ground and over any people or objects in their way.

The first time an investigator sees a river of vermin, it requires a *SAN* check, with a single *SAN* point being lost if the check fails. In addition, the first time an investigator is overrun by a river of vermin, it requires an additional *SAN* check, with failure causing a loss of 1d2 *SAN* points.

If the investigators are particularly blasé about the river of vermin, or if the Keeper is feeling particularly cruel, the tiny creatures could attempt to crawl into an investigator's mouth and throat in an effort to asphyxiate him or her. It is relatively easy to escape such an attack, taking only one combat round of coughing, spitting, spewing, and wiping away the bugs. However, it also calls for a third *SAN* check, this time with 1d4 points of *SAN* loss if the check fails.



Sending A Message

Prescott Walker can also use the river of vermin to send a message to the investigators—not just a figurative one but a literal message spelled out on a wall or floor in a slimy mass of living words. “Go Away!” “Stay out of the woods!” “Leave my house!” These are all potentially useful messages that will have a much stronger and more terrifying impact because they are delivered by a swarm of writhing bugs.

This event can be a way for the Keeper to present the investigators with a clue they will have a difficult time ignoring, helping to set them on the right track to finish the investigation. It might also be used if the investigators have gotten all the clues they need to identify Prescott as the person responsible for the problems in Bethlehem, but cannot figure out a way to find or confront him (details of which are discussed in Act III).

Act III: The Master of Beasts

The third and last act of *Murder of Crows* features, predictably enough, the final confrontation between the investigators and Prescott Walker filled with the powers of the Abenaki Spirit Stone. Of course, as is so often the case when dealing with situations born of the Mythos, things are not always what they seem to be. For a well-prepared group of investigators, Prescott himself will probably be only a mediocre challenge. Dealing with the Spirit Stone, on the other hand, might test the limits of their ingenuity.

The Last Piece of the Puzzle

It is possible that the investigators will come to the end of the trail, having discovered for certain that Prescott Walker is the person behind these problems, yet still be uncertain how next to proceed. It is even possible that the investigators will not realize that they have all the evidence they need, searching still for some final thread to tie it all neatly together or explain a last mysterious concept. In the end, it doesn't really matter. Prescott will know when they have uncovered all his secrets, and once that happens he will feel compelled to deal with the investigators directly.

It is, of course, completely up to the Keeper's discretion to decide when that point has arrived. The players may be enjoying the mystery and the eerie events transpiring in Bethlehem. When the investigation begins to lose its appeal, though, it is time for Prescott Walker to press the issue.

The Gauntlet is Thrown

If Prescott Walker feels it is time to deal with the investigators personally, he will tell them so using the “Sending A Message” aspect of the River of Vermin event (see Act II). The Keeper can set this final showdown up in whatever milieu suits the events of the investigation—while he is certainly insane, Prescott is still quite clever and will use the investigators' fears, suppositions, and misunderstandings against them.

All other things being equal, he will arrange a showdown in the woods, away from the eyes of Bethlehem. Using vermin to spell out an invitation, Prescott will tell the investigators to meet him in a glade a quarter-mile from town, promising that the crows and other animals will give them free passage. Since he can use the vermin to see and hear the investigators, he can answer any questions they have (which should be a fairly unsettling conversation since Prescott's half will be spelled out in a constantly changing mass of bugs).

The walk through the woods should be a fairly unnerving experience as the crows fly about from branch to branch, but leave a clear path for the investigators to walk. The investigators may well wonder whether they can trust Prescott to keep his word and give them full safe passage to the appointed place. In the end, though, he will.

Prescott Walker

Wherever, the final confrontation is to take place, Prescott Walker is waiting when the investigators arrive.

Certainly the filthy specimen you see before you is roughly the same age as Prescott Walker, and has hair that would be the right color if it were washed and combed. But the wild, far away look in his eyes seems almost feral, and the soiled hiking gear looks as though it has been worn and slept in for more than a week. Can this be the “favorite son of Bethlehem”?

If the investigators attempt to talk with Prescott, he answers but seems constantly distracted. (He is still trying to understand the buzzing voices in his head.) Mostly, though, he blusters and threatens the group, telling them that if they do not leave the forest, the town, and the mountains immediately, nature itself will rise up and smite them down.

All the while, he holds the Abenaki Spirit Stone clutched protectively in one hand. A successful *PSYCHOLOGY* check will reveal to the investigators that Prescott's posture indicates he's holding it more for his own safety than the amulet's—he believes that it has the power to protect him from whatever danger the investigators present.

The Keeper should allow the investigators to set the tempo of this scene. Prescott is in no rush to end this interview—he hopes to convince the investigators to leave peacefully. In his mind, he is the reasonable one and the outsiders are the ones acting irrationally. It is not until the investigators make some kind of move against him or the animals that Prescott will resort to violence.

Final Flight

When combat does ensue, Prescott uses the powers of the Spirit Stone to the best of his ability. His first goal is to keep the investigators away from him. Once that seems in hand, he will use the pendant's powers to try to have his thrall animals take them down one at a time. If an investigator falls, Prescott will redirect the crows from that target to one that is still standing. (Investigators who fake falling unconscious must use the Resistance Table to make a *SNEAK* or *HIDE* check opposed by Prescott's *SPOT HIDDEN* skill.)

The battle ends when either Prescott Walker falls, or all the investigators do. If the latter happens, Prescott will have the crows insure that the investigators never awaken again.

PRESCOTT WALKER, Age 28, Possessed Dilettante
STR 13 CON14 SIZ 15 INT 17 POW 8
DEX 14 APP 16 EDU 17 SAN 13 HP 15

Damage Bonus: +1d4

Weapons: Abenaki Spirit Stone (see New Artifacts)

Key Skills: Dodge 58%, Fast Talk 45%, History 45%, Listen 45%, Natural History 65%, Occult 65%, Persuade 35%, Rifle 50%, Shotgun 50%, Sneak 65%, Spot Hidden 55%, Throw 40%, Track 65%

Taking the Stone

Defeating Prescott should, when all is said and done, not be especially difficult. While he may have supernatural forces at his command, but he is otherwise a normal human and the investigators probably outnumber him at least four to one. Once he is down, though, it is quite conceivable that the investigators will want to take the Abenaki Spirit Stone away from him, and that is where things can really get dangerous.

As described in the New Artifacts section, merely touching the medallion requires a *SAN* check which, if failed, will result in the investigator picking up where Prescott left off. The remaining investigators will then have to face one of their own, and still need to worry about what to do with the artifact afterward.

It should become clear in short order that it is the act of touching the stone that triggers the *SAN* check. If the investigators see two of their own fall prey to the artifact and still haven't made the right connections, allow them to attempt *IDEA* checks to figure out how to handle the item safely.

As long as they do not touch the Spirit Stone with their bare skin, they investigators can handle the object safely. Wrapping it in cloth, sticking it in a satchel, even carrying it in a jacket pocket will be enough to neutralize the threat.

Once the investigators have safely secured the Spirit Stone, the adventure has been successfully completed.



Epilogue

The meat of *Murder of Crows* may be finished, but the investigators may wish to have a better sense of closure by playing through their departure from the White mountains before conceding that everything is done. At the very least, they may want to tie up some of the biggest loose ends.

Loose Ends

The most obvious bits of unfinished business are the dispositions of Prescott Walker and the Abenaki Spirit Stone. While neither of these are technically the investigators' problems, it seems unlikely that they will consider their jobs fully done until these issues are resolved.

Prescott Walker

Although the investigators spent most of the adventure in conflict with him, the fact of the matter is that Prescott Walker is a tragic figure. His entire family perished in the great influenza pandemic, he was forced into a leadership position that he was never groomed for, and he had the best of his mental faculties blasted away by a maleficent Mi-Go artifact. His ultimate fate lies squarely in the hands of the investigators.



If the group decides to simply leave Prescott out in the woods, his fate becomes a matter for the Keeper to decide. The crows he commanded for so long might, in retribution, descend upon his unconscious form and pick him clean to the bone. Alternatively, Prescott may awaken and run deep into the mountains, relying on his knowledge of the area and survival training to keep him safe. In this way, he could become a legend in the region—the millionaire who lives in the woods. In this incarnation, he might make an interesting recurring character for future adventures.

More likely, though, the investigators will bring Prescott back to Bethlehem and leave him with the town elders. They will work with lawyers for the Walker family to have Prescott institutionalized and get him treatment from the best specialists available. His ultimate fate is left to the Keeper's discretion, but should he recover there are two distinct possibilities. The first is that, having been told the facts of his case, he believes that the investigators saved his life and decides to become a benefactor to them in their ongoing work. The second, more sinister possibility is that, despite his psychiatric treatment, Prescott believes that the investigators denied him his rightful glory and, now that he has gotten free of the sanitarium, he will spend all of his considerable time and money making the investigators' pay for their meddling.

The Spirit Stone

This is clearly an evil artifact and great care should be taken in its disposition.

The investigators may, if they have any ties to Miskatonic University, want to take the Abenaki Spirit Stone there. The university's private collection has many similar items of power, and the staff there is trained in the care, handling, and protection of such things. Likewise, if the investigators have ties to any other organization that specialized in matters related to the occult and the Mythos, they may want to hand the artifact over to that institution's care. Either way, this is probably the safest thing to do with the Spirit Stone. The investigators can feel they have made the world a safer place and walk away with their heads held high.

Alternatively, the investigators may decide that no one can be trusted with an artifact this powerful, and that they should watch over it themselves. This should not be extraordinarily difficult. All the group will have to do is place the artifact in some sort of container where it cannot be touched by human hands. Of course, if word ever gets out that they have this item, it is entirely possible that some group of cultists (or even a group of Mi-Go themselves) will eventually try to steal it for some unknown nefarious purposes. The problem with having items of power is the need to properly defend them from the inevitable villains who try to gain control of them. This leaves the Spirit Stone as an ongoing loose end that the Keeper can weave into the campaign whenever it makes the most sense.

Leaving Bethlehem

Depending on how their inquiries in town went and what promises or commitments the investigators made, they may be able to walk out of Bethlehem, NH, and never look back. Of course, the people of the town don't have that option and may not want to let the investigators get away that quickly.

If, in the course of the adventure, the investigators broke into any homes, threatened or enacted violence on innocent citizens, stole or destroyed private property, or committed any other serious offenses, they will have Sheriff Ballard to deal with. Effective use of the *FAST TALK* or *PERSUADE* skills might get him to drop the matters so that he doesn't have to explain the supernatural events to a Circuit Court.

In a more general sense, various Bethlehem citizens may consider the investigators to be heroes for saving the town from the predations of the crows and rescuing what is left of the tourist season. Of course, if the tourists don't come back because of the rumors about how horrific it was during this incident, then those same citizens may decide to blame the whole thing on the investigators. Either way, the group may be hearing from townsfolk for months or years to come.

Aftermath

As at the completion of any *CALL OF CTHULHU* adventure, the investigators may attempt Experience Rolls for any skills they used successfully during the course of play.

In addition, the investigators all gain 1d4 SAN if the matter was successfully resolved. They gain an additional +1 SAN for each of the following conditions that are met at the time the adventure concludes:

- The Abenaki Spirit Stone has been given to Miskatonic University or a similarly reliable organization.
- Prescott Walker survived the adventure and has now been institutionalized.
- None of the investigators was successfully possessed by the Abenaki Spirit Stone.

Finally, the investigators each increase their *CTHULHU MYTHOS* skill by +1% (and subsequently lower their *MAX SAN* by -1%).





Continuing the Horror

The source of Bethlehem's crow problem has been identified and dealt with, bringing *Murder of Crows* to its ultimate end. But that doesn't have to be the last time these issues will trouble the investigators. There are a handful of ways that the Keeper can use the events and characters from *Murder of Crows* in future adventures.

The Doom From Below

In just a few weeks, Super Genius Games will publish its second *CALL OF CTHULHU* adventure—*The Doom From Below*. Although this new adventure is designed to be a stand-alone investigation, it also dovetails smoothly with the conclusion of *Murder of Crows*, making a logical next step for the investigators.

In *The Doom From Below*, the investigators explore a mysterious circular chasm in the woods outside Bethlehem, NH—the very same stretch of woods where Prescott Walker found the Abenaki Spirit Stone. As they descend into the earth, the investigators discover strange new species of animals and evidence that a highly intelligent race visited these mountains millions of years ago. Strange markings on the cavern walls seem to tell a story about the earliest days of mankind—and our eventual demise.

Look for *The Doom From Below* on sale at quality game stores in just a few weeks.

Lingering Effects

Any investigators who succumbed to the power of the Spirit Stone, even for only a brief while, may feel lingering effects for weeks or months ahead. A clever Keeper can use this in upcoming adventures, giving these investigators flashbacks, ongoing neuroses related to crows, or even inexplicable insights into the minds of other Mythos creatures. All of these possibilities, naturally, run the risk of doing further damage to the affected person's sanity.

A Dish Best Served Cold

Some of the citizens of Bethlehem may feel wronged by the investigators and how they went about their work. It is possible that one or more of them might become fixated on exacting revenge for these offenses (real or merely perceived). There are powers, entities, and cults throughout the world that thrive on taking thoughts of vengeance and turning them into power for the Great Old Ones—and many of them can be found in Lovecraft Country.

Interested Parties

The Abenaki Spirit Stone is a powerful artifact. Such power eventually draws the attention of dangerous people and organizations. Whatever the investigators decided to do with the relic, it is possible that some cults, shamans, sorcerers, or creatures from the Mythos will get it in their heads to try to liberate the stone and use it for their own nefarious purposes. When this happens, the investigators will be the only readily available source of accurate information on the item in question. And, if the investigators decided to keep the Spirit Stone themselves, then their homes would be the targets of these attacks.

Beautiful Bethlehem

On a less ominous note, Bethlehem, NH, is a beautiful town and would make a charming spot for the investigators to use as their base of operations. It is remote enough that they would be able to know friend from foe. The investigators have already saved the town once, so the chances are that the townsfolk will be happy to have them around in case anything else untoward crawls out of the woods. And, with the town still struggling in the wake of the lumber mill's closure, homes and property can probably be bought at a good price.

New Artifacts

Murder of Crows introduces a new piece of Mi-Go alien technology in the guise of a Native American item of power—the Abenaki Spirit Stone.

Abenaki Spirit Stone

At first glance, the Spirit Stone can be described as follows.

A triangular piece of stone about the size of a man's fist, carved and polished so that it has a smooth raised edge and a flat recessed face. The face is etched with a large image of a crow and smaller images of frogs, snakes, and spiders done in a Native American totemic style. The stone is attached to a weathered loop of leather decorated with small, nearly petrified bird bones.

As they examine the artifact more closely, investigators should attempt *GEOLOGY* and *SPOT HIDDEN* checks. If the *GEOLOGY* check succeeds, it becomes obvious that this is not a naturally occurring stone but some kind of petrified resin unlike anything currently in use. If the *SPOT HIDDEN* check succeeds, the investigator notices that the surface of the face is lined with minute geometric patterns (similar to modern computer circuit boards, if that reference will mean anything to the investigator).

If either of the previous checks succeeds, have the investigator make a *CTHULHU MYTHOS* check. Success indicates that the investigator recognizes this as item as having been crafted by Mi-Go.



Touching the Stone

When a person touches the Spirit Stone with his or her bare skin, the artifact immediately attempts to take control of that person. The victim begins to hear insectoid voices whispering in his or her mind and has the uncomfortable feeling of chitinous digits poking through his or her memories.

The victim must immediately make a SAN check. If the check is successful, the person holding the stone loses a single SAN point. If it fails, the person loses 5 points of SAN as he or she is mentally dominated by the Spirit Stone.

This possession lasts for 1d10 combat rounds, at the end of which time, the victim must make another SAN check in order to regain control of his or her faculties. (This and all future checks only happen if the victim is still touching the Spirit Stone. If a period of possession ends and the victim no longer has the stone, he or she automatically recovers self-control.) If this second SAN check fails, the victim loses 1d3 additional SAN point and remains possessed by the stone for a full 24 hours.

At the end of that day, the victim must make a third SAN check. Again, if the check is successful, the person regains his or her faculties. If the check fails, though, the victim loses an additional 1d6 SAN points and will remain possessed by the Spirit Stone until the next new moon. From this point forward, the victim may only try to regain control of his or her body with a single SAN check on the night of each new moon. A failed check costs the victim another 1d6 points of SAN and another lunar cycle of servitude to the Spirit Stone.

Under the Influence

An investigator who has fallen victim to the Abenaki Spirit Stone retains all of his or her personality and intellect. However, the victim also gains an uncontrollable sense of protectiveness over the nearest large forest or stretch of undeveloped countryside. This compunction seems utterly reasonable to the victim, and any attempt to convince him or her otherwise will be unsuccessful.

The victim insists that all humans, human structures, and human-built technology be removed from the appointed land and backs that demand up with acts of violence using the powers granted by the Spirit Stone as well as any weapons or abilities at his or her command.

If the stone is ever taken away, the victim will focus all his or her energies toward getting it back.

It is possible for more than one person to fall victim to the Spirit Stone at the same time. If more than one investigator is possessed, they will work together to banish humans from their forest. Once that is accomplished, they will begin fighting one another for possession of the Spirit Stone.

Powers of the Stone

The Abenaki Spirit Stone grants its possessor influence over certain animals in the immediate area. (Note that while the stone is able to possess more than one person at a time, only the person actually holding the item can make use of these powers.)

The stone allows its possessor a psychic connection insects, spiders, worms, frogs, toads, snakes, and birds weighing about two pounds or less. The holder of the stone can see and hear through the eyes and ears of controlled creatures. In addition, the holder may order these creatures to perform specific actions. Using the Spirit Stone does not require the expenditure of MAGIC POINTS. However, the number of orders the holder may issue per combat round is based on his or her current MAGIC POINTS total.

Current Magic Points	Number of Orders
0	0
1-10	1
11-13	2
14-16	3
17-20	4
21+	5

The orders the stone's holder may issue are as follows.

Summon: Any creatures of the specified type within a two-mile radius automatically respond to this mental summons. Although the reaction is immediate, it will take the creatures an appropriate amount of time to get from where they are to where the stone holder is.

Sit: The creatures will go to any spot the stone holder specifies and stay there until they are told to leave or are physically moved.

Pester: When the stone holder specifies a target, the controlled creatures will crawl, hop, or fly as close to the that target as they can get without actually touching it. (This is the ability the crows are using in the "Fly By" section of Act II.)

Attack: When the stone holder identifies a target, a small group of the controlled creatures will attack that target to the best of their ability. (This is the ability the crows are using in the "Attack" section of Act II.)

Attack En-Masse: When the stone holder identifies a target, every available controlled creature will attack the target at the same time. (This is the ability the crows are using in the "Swarm" section of Act II.)

About the Author

Stan! is the award-winning author of 2 novels, 15 short stories, more than 50 gaming products, and innumerable cartoons and comics. In his time, he has been an Associate Art Director for West End Games, an Editor and Designer for TSR, Inc., a Senior Designer and Creative Director for Wizards of the Coast, and Creative Content Manager for Upper Deck Entertainment. Stan! is a founding member of both The Game Mechanics, Inc. and Super Genius Games.

Stan! lives in Vista, CA, where he hopes one day to be the owner of a Sony Aibo robot dog. Visit him online at stannex.com and see daily doses of his drawings at doodle-a-day.com.



Player Handout #1

CROWS BLACKEN AUTUMN FOLIAGE

Bethlehem, NH—This sleepy mountain town, best known for the spectacular vistas it affords of Mother Nature’s autumnal splendor, has instead become the site of what can only be called the most unusual mauling attack in recent memory.

On Sunday last, Adrian Ferrell together with his fiancé, Katherine Merriman, and four other friends set out for a stroll through the woods. Before they got fifteen feet outside town, however, the group found itself being viciously attacked by what has been described by witnesses as a flock of several hundred crows.

“It was horrible,” said Ferrell. “Suddenly they were all over me, pecking and scratching. I couldn’t see a thing. I couldn’t see Katie standing next to me, but I could hear her screaming.”

The group made it back to Ballard’s Boarding House with only superficial scratches, but it was enough to bring an end to their vacation.

“They packed up quick as you please,” said Alma Ballard, proprietress of the establishment. “Them and all of the others. Inside of an hour they all left. Didn’t even bother checking out.”

Crows are not an unusual sight in the White Mountains, but rarely in such large flocks. There has previously never been a recorded incident of crows attacking humans en masse.

“I been hunting and stuffing crows here abouts for fifty years,” said Marshall Devereux, local taxidermist, “and let me tell you, these aren’t any natural birds. They’re twice as big as your average crow, and their claws are twice as sharp.”

Other reports varied, but most people claim that there is nothing unusual about the crows except the sheer number of them.

“People around here like to tell tall tales,” said Arthur McPhee, the mayor of Bethlehem and owner of several local businesses. “Crows are nasty birds, and the more of them there are the bolder they get. But there isn’t enough food around here to keep this many of them happy. You mark my works, they’ll fly off in a day or two and everything will go back to normal.”

Certainly, that’s what all the residents of Bethlehem hope will happen. Once a prosperous lumber town, the people now rely on what tourism autumn leaf viewing brings for their livelihoods.

It is now nearly a week after the initial attack and, according to the good folks of Bethlehem, the crows are still with them. If anything, their number is growing.



Player Handout #2

From the Journal of Prescott Walker

I came across the most unusual patch of woods today while walking along Fulton's Ridge. The canopy closed so tight overhead that I thought the sun had been blotted out entirely. And even though it was a somewhat blustery day, not a leaf stirred nor a branch moved. In fact, there was no noise whatever—no birds in the trees or insects buzzing about. It was as if Death itself had claimed the grove.

It is silly, I know, but I became convinced that Death was there with me, or some other malevolent force for which I could find no name. A panic gripped my heart and I wanted nothing more than to leave that cursed patch of forest, but I could find no way out. Everywhere I turned seemed darker and more foreboding than the last. So, I am not proud to say, I broke into a run trying to find with my feet and exit I could not divine with my eyes.

I ran through the woods heedlessly. I dare say I even screamed as a frightened child might, or someone woken from a night terror. No matter how I tried, I could find no way out. And the trees seemed to grow closer, grabbing my coattails and scratching at my face. Eventually, my foot hooked through a brambly root and I came crashing to the ground.

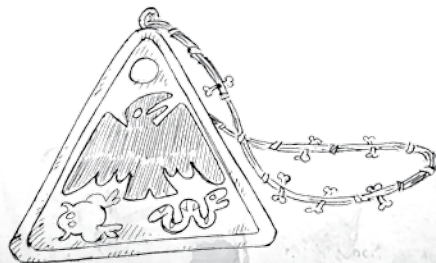
When I opened my eyes, there it was—right in front of my nose—a stone amulet or pendant of some sort, obviously made by the local Indian tribe. Who knows how long it must have lain there? The tribe was moved off this land before the War Between the States. Wherever it came from, seeing it cleared my head of the ridiculous notion that I was being chased by some unseen figure or that there was anything unnatural about that patch of woods.

It is truly a remarkable piece and I find I can't stop thinking about it. I've put it on and it feels so light and natural I almost immediately forgot I was wearing it. But I must know more about it. I can find examples of similar artwork in the library, but nothing about this type of amulet. Is it a warrior's fetish? A shaman's talisman? A chief's totem? I **MUST** know!

The longer I wear it, the more I feel certain that it is an item of power. I can hear the sounds of its former owners buzzing in the back of my mind—whispering in a language I cannot comprehend. And yet, I feel just on the cusp of understanding its meaning.

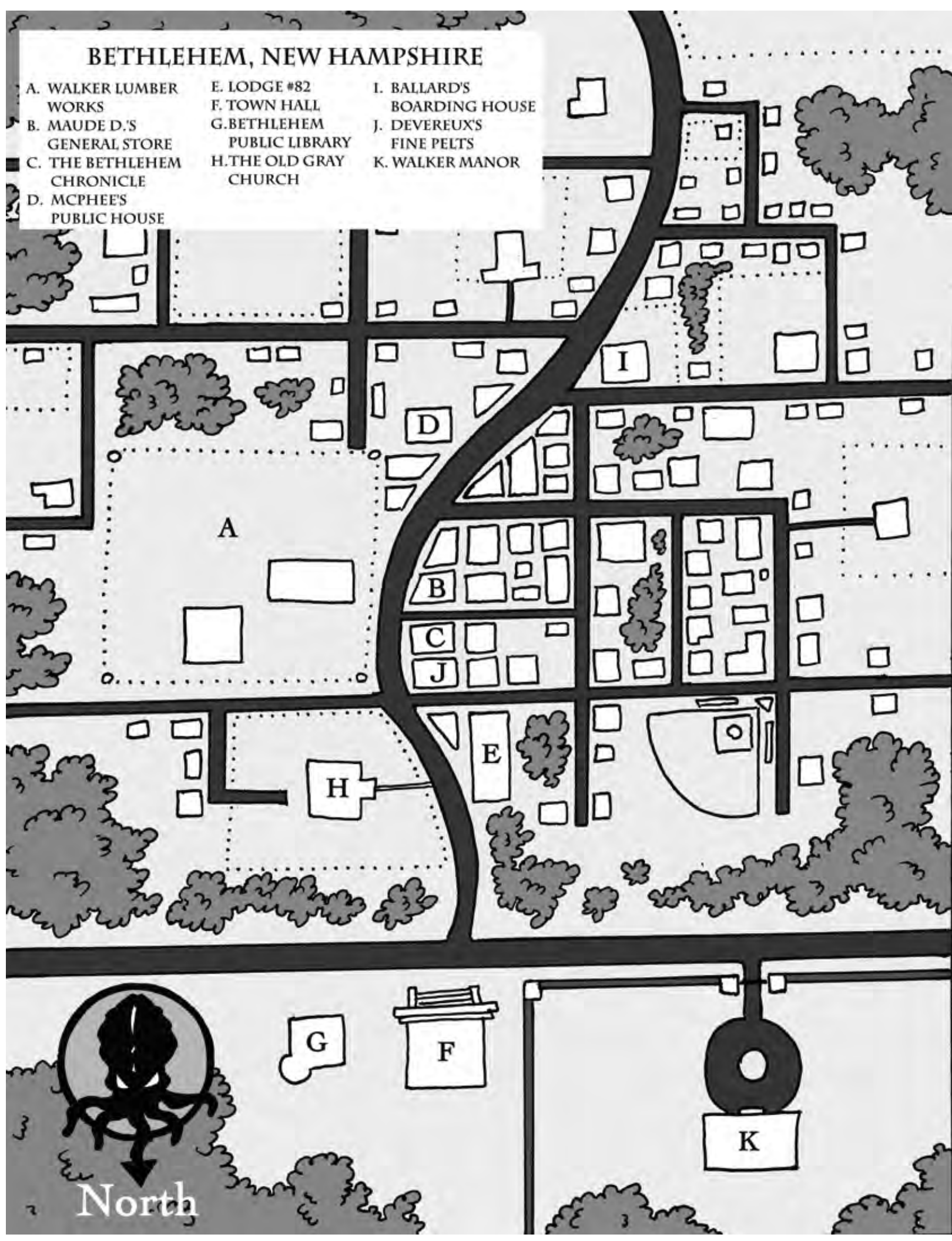
Every time I think the medallion's secrets are about to be revealed, I am interrupted. A crow pecks at the window or a spider lands on the bridge of my nose. But before I can shoo them away, as soon as the thought flits through my mind, they respond by flying or crawling away. At first I thought it was coincidence, but the last time I tried something new. After the crow flew away, I called out to it with my mind, beckoning it to return. Not only did it do so, it brought three of its flock mates back with it!

Truly there is more to this pendant than anyone would ever guess. If only I could comprehend those incessant, buzzing voices. I'm sure they are trying to tell me what I long to know.



BETHLEHEM, NEW HAMPSHIRE

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| A. WALKER LUMBER WORKS | E. LODGE #82 | I. BALLARD'S BOARDING HOUSE |
| B. MAUDE D.'S GENERAL STORE | F. TOWN HALL | J. DEVEREUX'S FINE PELTS |
| C. THE BETHLEHEM CHRONICLE | G. BETHLEHEM PUBLIC LIBRARY | K. WALKER MANOR CHURCH |
| D. MCPHEE'S PUBLIC HOUSE | H. THE OLD GRAY CHURCH | |





Pregenerated Characters

John Roberts, Local Expert

STR	16	Damage Bonus	+1d4
CON	15	Hit points	15
SIZ	14	Magic Points	10
INT	13	Idea Roll	65%
POW	10	Luck Roll	50%
DEX	15		
APP	13		
EDU	14	Know Roll	70%
SAN	50		



Key Skills

Climb 50%, Dodge 50%, Electrical Repair 40%,
First Aid 70%, Hide 30%, Mechanical Repair 40%, Natural
History 60%, Operate Heavy Machinery 20%, Rifle 75%, Sneak
50%, Spot Hidden 25%, Track 40%

Gear

Working clothes, .30-06 Rifle (2d6+4, 50 yards, RoF 1, Shots 5), Box of 50 .30-06 Shells, .38 Revolver (1d10, 15 yards, RoF 2, Shots 6), Box of 100 .38 Shells, other items as appropriate.

Background

John grew up on a dairy farm outside Littleton, NH (about 10 miles from Bethlehem). Since his family only bought the farm in 1878, he's still considered a "newcomer" by most locals. The eighth son of the family, there wasn't much work for John to do on the farm, so he took to wandering the woods. No one knows the hills around Littleton better. John sometimes earns money serving as a guide for visiting academics (including Dr. Young), but always in the lowlands. Now he's been hired to go up to Bethlehem, a place he's avoided since a boy from there stole his sweetheart back in 1911 (this despite the fact that the couple eloped to Concord in 1916).

Dorothy Edwards, The Art Collector

STR	8	Damage Bonus	+0
CON	13	Hit points	12
SIZ	11	Magic Points	12
INT	17	Idea Roll	85%
POW	12	Luck Roll	60%
DEX	12		
APP	16		
EDU	18	Know Roll	90%
SAN	60		



Key Skills

Art 75%, Bargain 75%, Credit Rating 60%, Cthulhu Mythos 10%
Dodge 24%, Egyptian 30%, Handgun 30%, History 80%, Law 25%,
Library Use 55%, Persuade 65%, Physics 20%, Psychology 70%,
Spot Hidden 85%,

Gear

Fine Clothing, \$2,000, Inventory and contact book (large ledger book), other items as appropriate.

Background

Dorothy not only knowa art, ahe knows what other people like. She's built a fine life arranging gallery shows and selling original paintings to the best families in Boston and Providence. This year, she's staked her whole gallery on an upcoming show that is supposed to feature paintings of prominent socialites enjoying the autumnal splendor of rural New Hampshire—paintings that haven't been done because both the artist and the subjects were scared away from Bethlehem. Dorothy won't sit by and let her life be ruined by a few ravens, drunk ramblings, and bucolic superstitions. All she really cares about is getting those paintings done on time.





Frankie Reinard, Lost Soul

STR	14	Damage Bonus	+1d4
CON	17	Hit points	16
SIZ	14	Magic Points	13
INT	13	Idea Roll	65%
POW	13	Luck Roll	65%
DEX	10		
APP	15		
EDU	14	Know Roll	70%
SAN	65		



Key Skills

Accounting 20%, Astronomy 15%, Bargain 35%, Climb 60%, Dodge 40%, Drive 60%
Handgun 70%, Jump 50%, Knife 50%, Mechanical Repair 30%, Occult 30%,
Pilot Boat 60%, Rifle 70%, Swim 45%

Gear

Jacket, Warm Sweatshirt, .45 Revolver (1d10+2, 15 yards, RoF 1, Shots 6), Box of 100 .45 Shells in cabin, Fighting knife (1d4+2+db), other equipment as appropriate.

Background

Frankie is a simple man, born on the Louisiana bayou and raised listening to his Creole grandmother's tales of the spirit world and helping her mix potions and poultices for friends and neighbors. The first time he saw a building taller than two-stories was when he was drafted and shipped off to Europe. In the Great War, Frankie claims to have seen the souls of men twisted by an evil from beyond this world, and has sworn to fight that evil wherever he finds it. A war buddy invited Frankie to Boston and introduced him to Dorothy Edwards, who told a story about evil inhabiting a nearby town. Frankie has volunteered to help her resolve the issue.

Dr. William Young, Obsessed Scholar

STR	9	Damage Bonus	+0
CON	11	Hit points	11
SIZ	11	Magic Points	14
INT	18	Idea Roll	90%
POW	14	Luck Roll	70%
DEX	15		
APP	13		
EDU	20	Know Roll	99%
SAN	70		



Key Skills

Anthropology 40%, Archaeology 80%, Credit Rating 35%, Cthulhu Mythos 10%,
Dodge 30%, German 50%, Library Use 65%, Locksmith 20%, Medicine 55%,
Natural History 30%, Occult 45%, Other Language 80%, Persuade 55%,
Psychology 65%, Rifle 35%

Gear

Tweed jackets, Briar-stem pipe, three books on local Indian cultures, one book on occult practices of the Native Americans.

Background

Dr. William Young is one of the foremost experts on native New England cultures. He has a theory that the local religious practices are directly linked to those observed in central Asia, and that the two traditions worship the same pantheon of deities. The key to his theory lies in the figure of the crow (as worshipped in America) and the raven (as worshipped in Asia). Dr. Williams heard about Dorothy Edward's intention to investigate the crow-related happenings in Bethlehem, he volunteered to join her expedition and recommended John Roberts to serve as a local guide.



MURDER OF CROWS

Trouble in Bethlehem

Thousands of crows have taken roost in the woods surrounding Bethlehem, NH, mercilessly attacking anyone who tries to enter the forest. The human population is outnumbered more than ten-to-one, and the birds are growing more bold every day. Can the investigators solve the mystery behind this unnatural infestation? Can they save the town of Bethlehem from a disaster of biblical proportions?

Murder of Crows contains everything a *Call of Cthulhu* group needs for an evening's worth of Mythos-inspired fun, including pregenerated characters. It is the first in an innovative new series of *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios and supplements from Super Genius Games.

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