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A Fossil

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HOOK:

An investigator is contacted by **Emelia Carpel**, a book dealer who has secured a copy of that rare text they had been looking for (and recently lost out at auction to a collector called **Graeme Perrikins**).

TRUTH:

Carpel is an avatar of the incubation aspect of Shub-Niggurath. It is spreading memetophores through the books it sells, which infect the locals with an extinct arthropod - a *eurpyterid*. Perrikins has succumbed to the illness and apparently drowned in the harbour. The incubation is enabled by a fossil on loan from the National History Museum which is currently on display in the town hall.

THREADS:

- Acquiring the book exposes the investigators to memetophores
- Other customers in the shop display signs of the illness, and soon one dies in the ornamental gardens
- News reports and a library plate from the book point towards the recent death of Graeme Perrikins, whose wife and files reveal signs of the illness
- Posters and flyers entice locals to the *eurpyterid* fossil, whose presence is enabling the illness

Investigators can prevent the spread of the infection and its subsequent deaths by destroying the fossil or sending it away, or by killing Carpel.

TIMELINE:

- *Three years ago*: Emelia Carpel moves to Kinstow and establishes its bookshop
- *Two months ago*: the investigator loses out on their desired book to Graeme Perrikins
- *Two weeks ago*: Carpel is loaned a *eurpyterid* fossil from the National History Museum
- *One week ago*: Perrikins begins having bad dreams and sells the book back to Carpel
- *Three days ago*: Perrikins' illness reaches its peak and he dies in the harbour
- *Yesterday*: Carpel contacts the investigator looking to sell them the book
- *Today*: the investigators visit Carpel's bookstore and the scenario begins
- *Tomorrow*: another customer of the bookstore is found dead in the ornamental gardens
- *One month from now*: Carpel returns the fossil to the museum; the mysterious water deaths end after two dozen victims
- *Seven years from now*: the hundreds of larval *eurpyterids* reach full size and choke the local waterways

MEMETOPHORE INFECTION AND ILLNESS:

If the investigators have spent at least six hours in the presence of one of the books (or three hours in Carpel's shop), they must make a **POW save** the next time they sleep. Investigators who fail become infected with memetophores that twist and knot their neurones into larval simulacra of *eurypterids*:

1. Their sleep becomes fitful and full of confusing dreams (see **memetophore dreams** sidebar on page 3.) The dreams return on subsequent nights, each bringing with it **another POW save** to prevent stage two.
2. Their waking hours are wracked with painful headaches. These are lessened if the characters spend time beside a body of water. After a day of headaches, victims make a **CON save** to prevent escalation to stage three. The dreams return at night, free of headache.
3. Soft tissue areas of the victim's face begins to layer with translucent cocoon-like scales. Victims who are aware of others with this condition (from speaking with Perrikins' wife or seeing them in the bookstore) or who have dreamt of cocoons (dreams three or four) suffer a **SAN check**. Each evening thereafter, victims make a further **CON save** or the illness develops to the final stage.
4. Instead of going to sleep, the host is compelled to find the nearest body of water and submerge their head. As this happens, their skull bursts forcibly from the inside and d20 palm-sized *eurypterids* pour out.

It would take significant research into the anathema to Shub-Niggurath to cure the disease. Its incubation is empowered by the presence of Emelia Carpel in the town and catalysed by the fossil on display. Being more than a mile away from either of them will prevent the illness progressing and lessen its symptoms, but it will not cure on its own.

Much of the tension in this scenario comes from the illness' advance. Where reasonable, look to delay investigator actions to the following day. For example, Perrikins' widow is happy to lend his journal to investigators if they visit her the next morning.

MEMETOPHORE DREAMS:

Investigator-hosts to the *eurypterid* incubation experience dreams each night. Roll d4 to determine which dream. The text of the dreams is repeated in the handout section at the end of this scenario.

1. you're aware of the movement before the colours themselves come to sight and then every edge of your vision is full of twisting vibrant greens coiling and twisting unfurling with the knotting pattern falling further and further from your view eternal fractal ferns
2. it feels like a bruise on your right-hand brow all soft and puffy but when you reach your right hand up to touch it there's only wetness and cool sharp depths like a rockpool or a well and it goes so deep so very very deep
3. you're late to the party again and your friends are looking at you angrily no not angrily their brows are hidden by a puffy growth like a cocoon or the scale of a leaf and when they bare their teeth not in a smile it's the teeth that peel away and fall out and away and apart
4. your back is cold and you look up at the stars and the sky but they aren't your stars they might once have been perhaps not now but once and you feel it more than you see it because the stars you see they cover in a cocoon all wet and hard and the light oh it dims

EMELIA CARPEL - AVATAR OF SHUB-NIGGURATH'S INCUBATION FACET:

Carpel seems a staid woman on the cusp of being called elderly. In reality, it has never been human - its true form is a pillar of semi-stable woody flesh, looking like a coagulated film over a crop of molluscs. Seeing it in this form calls for a **SAN check**. In human form, it has a long reedy neck upon which its head never shifts. It always wears two thin pastel cardigans, often accidentally fastened to each other.

Carpel goes to great lengths to avoid being caught out. It feels secure in Kinstow and isn't keen to draw attention to itself. If cornered and attacked, it will kill and eat its assailants.

INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS:

- Tell your players that two months back, one of them lost out on the purchase of a rare book they've been seeking for a while. Ask who would like to be this person and ask them what book they are seeking. (If it is an especially costly or dangerous Mythos text, call for a **Credit Rating check**.) That investigator receives a message from Emelia Carpel who secured a copy of the book and offers a good price.
- Ask another one of the players what they have heard about Graeme Perrikins, the man who won the auction. Make notes so you can weave these facts in when investigating Perrikins' death.
- If the other investigators do not wish to come along to the bookshop, give each pair of them leads on the mysterious death of Perrikins and the *eurypterid* fossil (**handouts C and F** respectively).

ACQUIRING THE BOOK:

Lead-ins: N/A | **Lead-outs:** cocooning crowds, corpse of a collector, fossil display

Carpel's bookshop festers on the edge of the town centre in a building still bearing a sign for "Kinstow Public Library". It specialises in rare and antiquarian texts with a particular focus on outdated medical journals. All of the books are kept locked inside glass cabinets. Carpel keeps the keys on its person at all times.

- The sought-after book is in excellent condition for its kind. An **Intelligence check** from the purchaser reveals this is the exact book recently auctioned off. (*Ask that player to describe how they know this.*) On its front endpaper is a bookplate saying "ex libris Perrikins" (**handout L**).
- **Spot Hidden** finds a sandwich board across the street from the bookshop detailing Perrikins' death (**handout C**) and a poster in the bookshop foyer for the fossil exhibition in the town hall (**handout F**).
- There are a few other people in the bookshop: ask your players to give a couple of interesting facts about them. **Spot Hidden** or **First Aid / Medicine** notices something odd about their skin around their ears, eyes, nose, or mouth.

Spending three hours in this location puts investigators at risk of the **memetophore infection**.

- Investigators able to get into the office (with an effective plan or appropriate save) can use **Spot Hidden** or **Library Use / Accounting** to find a letter from the Natural History Museum agreeing to loan the *eurypterid* fossil and

ledgers and inventories (entirely above board and determining that Perrikins sold the book to Carpel one week ago).

COCOONING CROWDS:

Lead-ins: acquiring the book | **Lead-outs:** corpse of a collector, fountain fatality | **Refer to:** memetophore dreams

A handful of other customers are browsing Carpel's bookshop, jotting things in dog-eared notebooks or filling in request forms. They may be named things like Agnes, Kieren, Nicol. Allow the players to suggest their particular areas of interest if the need arises.

- Up close, the puffy leaflike scales beside the soft tissue of their faces is impossible to ignore. The customers are embarrassed by them and try to keep them covered.
- They happily discuss book collection, often going into too much detail on their chosen specialty.
- **Persuade / Charm** opens them up about Perrikins' recent death. He wasn't greatly loved, as he had a habit of undercutting deals or pushing auction prices. He didn't love books but he did realise you could churn them for money.
- **Spot Hidden / First Aid / Medicine** notices that someone keeps massaging their temples. They have been suffering from headaches and weird dreams for about a week. Pressing them on the dreams calls for **Persuade / Fast Talk** and reveals the repetitive recursive nature of them: images of twisting fronds and unfamiliar skies. This triggers a **SAN check** for investigators who have had similar dreams.

CORPSE OF A COLLECTOR:

Lead-ins: handout C, acquiring the book, cocooning crowds, fossil display | **Lead-outs:** Perrikins' prognosis, dead man's diary

Kinstow was once used as a commercial shipping port and has never had a fishing fleet. On rainy days a few fishermen may try and catch fry but they never talk with each other. Similarly conspicuous is the absence of gulls, though waders and crakes feed by the harbour wall.

Graeme Perrikins died three nights ago in Kinstow harbour. His body was discovered that evening by **Cherie Flatten** who was walking her dog Jerrie (a small mastiff) - something she does four times each day. Cherie is rarely seen out of a man's waxed jacket that matches the hue of her dog's coat.

- **Fast Talk / Persuade** can get solid information from either fisherman or Cherie. Perrikins had a severe headwound when his body was pulled from the water but nobody else had been sighted in the area. Perhaps he fell into the water and broke his head open? The fish were especially vigorous that night but Perrikins' waterlogged body wasn't nibbled upon, nor were his clothes.
- Each evening, Perrikins' widow Gail stands at the harbour wall. She wears a stoic face and her late husband's heavy cardigan. **Persuade / Charm** opens her up to discussing Perrikins' recent illness (**Perrikins' prognosis**) and his belief that he had been cursed by his recent purchase of the book. Investigators who agree to investigate the strange death are given loan of his journal (**dead man's diary**).

Perrikins' body has yet to be cremated. It lies in Brant and Sons' funeral home until a simple

funeral service tomorrow, attended solely by the funeral directors. Investigators with appropriate backgrounds and occupations might access the body. Those unaccustomed to corpses suffer a **SAN check**.

- **Medicine / Natural World** to examine the corpse corroborates the information from the conversations. Perrikins' body has no bitemarks from fish and his skull has suffered a severe break - in fact the entire brain is missing. A closer look determines that the break originated from inside the skull.

FOSSIL DISPLAY:

Lead-ins: handout F, acquiring the book, off the beaten path | **Lead-outs:** corpse of a collector, Emelia Carpel

The Kinstow town hall quietly festers a few roads back from the coast, a patchwork of yellowing wallpaper and exposed red brick. A small council uses these rooms rarely and the offices are small and poorly equipped. Phenomenally secure filing cabinets are host to uninspiring documentation.

- **Spot Hidden** discovers a torn poster in the foyer with the headline news of Perrikins' death (**handout C**). It looks like someone has tried to dislodge the information.
- The *eurypterid* fossil is displayed prominently in the central room of the town hall - a block of peculiar stone the size of a door. Visible on its ridged surface is the pale white shape of the *eurypterid*: a "sea scorpion" the size of a grown man and the general shape of a colossal silverfish.
- **Natural World / Science (Geology)** or investigators professionally familiar with rock (e.g. architects, geologists, &c.) notice that the striations in the rock seem to radiate from the fossil like tree rings. You wouldn't get this sort of fossil in a metamorphic rock like this - a strangeness that calls for a **SAN check**.
- A brushed brass plaque is displayed beside the fossil (**handout P**).

PERRIKINS' PROGNOSIS:

Lead-ins: corpse of a collector, dead man's diary | **Lead-outs:** cocooning crowds, dead man's diary, fountain fatality

Anyone who spent a lot of time with Perrikins near the end of his life will be able to describe his worsening condition. This is most likely to be his widow Gail, though it may be through conversations with Carpel or some of the customers of its store. Either way, this calls for **Persuade / Fast Talk / Charm** or a hard **Intimidate**.

- About a week before he died, Perrikins seemed to be suffering from especially bad headaches and sensitivity to light. He began to spend a lot of his free time either at the coast or in the open space of the ornamental park. He said the fresh air helped.
- A day or so before he died, he developed a number of yellow scabs on his face but couldn't remember an injury that caused them.
- Gail Perrikins has possession of Graeme's journal and is happy to lend it to investigators who promise to look into the death (**dead man's diary**).

DEAD MAN'S DIARY:

Lead-ins: corpse of a collector, Perrikins' prognosis | **Lead-outs:** cocooning crowds, Perrikins' prognosis, fountain fatality | **Refer to:** memetophore dreams

Investigators might be lent Perrikins' journal by his widow Gail or they might make ingress to his home or offices and locate the journal itself (having checked **Spot Hidden** or **Charm** to do so). Refer to your notes from the initial questions to the players - if any of Perrikins' features would contradict the physical description of his diary, change those features to suit the continuity of your game.

- The journal is a battered and unassuming exercise book, its cover heavily creased and its spine broken. Several pages are scarred with dog-ears and the ink colour and texture varies across entries. It is *just* too big to fit into a rear trouser or inside jacket pocket.

The late pages of the journal contain the following information (repeated in handouts section - **J**).

Woken again today by that dream of ferns falling away from my vision. Mouth feels dry and throat sore. Early morning headache again (pregnancy?!) (hangover)

Splitting headache continued all day and drugs no use. Phone doctor later.

Two days now. Much hassle. Took an early walk through the park, things felt better in the open by the fountain. Dreaming still and also a new one about unfamiliar stars.

I don't trust that book. Carpel better buy it back.

Investigators suffering from the dreams or headache stage of infection must make **SAN checks**.

FOUNTAIN FATALITY:

Lead-ins: cocooning crowds, Perrikins' prognosis, dead man's diary | **Lead-outs:** corpse of a collector, fossil display | **Refer to:** memetophore infection and illness

- A few hours after sunset on the first night of the investigation, one of the customers from Carpel's bookshop wearily drifts towards the ornamental gardens. (This should be a customer that the investigators especially took to.) When they reach the fountain, they plunge their head into the water for a moment before there is a sickening rending sound and the body goes stiff. The skull breaks open and dozens of rat-sized *eurypterid* larvae swirl into the bloody water.

Observing this sickening death calls for a **SAN check**. Investigators who aren't present could instead learn what happens from a particularly ashen-faced gardener named **Glory**, using **Intimidate** / **Fast Talk** to get her to open up.

Police officers remove the corpse by mid-morning. Carpel visits that evening to transfer the *eurypterid* larvae from the fountain to the ocean.

OFF THE BEATEN PATH:

Lead-ins: N/A | **Lead-outs:** fossil display

Investigators looking in risky environments for additional clues run into rat-sized larval *eurypterids*. Observing one up close calls for a **SAN check**.

CONCLUDING THE SCENARIO:

Carpel is unwilling to draw attention to itself and plans on returning the fossil to the National History Museum after two dozen fatalities. It sweet-talks anyone asking questions too closely, often gifting them with rare books for their collection (and to engender the memetophore infection, thus removing them from the picture). Carpel reveals its true form to attack a solitary investigator if there is no risk of being observed.

Destroying the fossil or Carpel prevents incubation and development of symptoms. Those who have succumbed to the dreams or headaches suffer from these indefinitely. The facial scales clear up within a week. Any hatched *eurypterids* continue to live in the bay, growing to the size of a tall man within seven years.

Removing the fossil from Kinstow similarly halts the infection and illness. Carpel waits twenty years before trying again.

REWARDS & REPERCUSSIONS:

Investigators who halt the spread of the memetophore illness gain **1D10 Sanity**.

ANTAGONISTS:

Emelia Carpel, herald of Shub-Niggurath

STR 90 CON 115 SIZ 55
 INT 80
POW 90 DEX 35 APP 05
 EDU 80

hp 16 SAN 0 mp 18

Build: 1

Damage bonus: +1d4

Move: 7

Combat: Fighting (Brawl) 60%, crenellated slam 1D6+1D4; Dodge 80%

Armour: 4-point viscous film

Skills: Accounting 80%, Bookbinding 40%, Cthulhu Mythos 25%, Persuade 50%

Spells: Contact Shub-Niggurath

Sanity Loss: 1/1D8

Larval eurypterid

STR 80 CON 50 SIZ 20
 INT 20
POW 70 DEX 100

hp 8

Build: -1

Damage Bonus: +0

Move: 6/10 on land / in water

Combat: Fighting (Brawl) 75%, pincer 1D10; Dodge 50%

Armour: 1-point scale

Skills: Hide 30%, Swim 65%

Sanity Loss: 0/1D4

HANDOUTS:

Permission is given to photocopy these pages.

Handout C

LOCAL ANTIQUES DEALER DIES IN HARBOUR

Kinstow Police have released the identity of the body taken from Kinstow Harbour two days ago as Graeme Perrikins, the noted antiquarian and divisive figure amongst collectors. Police ask anybody with information that might help their investigation come forward, though they are not regarding the death as suspicious. Perrikins is survived by his wife Gail.

Handout D-3

you're late to the party again and your friends are looking at you angrily no not angrily their brows are hidden by a puffy growth like a cocoon or the scale of a leaf and when they bare their teeth not in a smile it's the teeth that peel away and fall out and away and apart

Handout D-1

you're aware of the movement before the colours themselves come to sight and then every edge of your vision is full of twisting vibrant greens coiling and twisting unfurling with the knotting pattern falling further and further from your view eternal fractal ferns

Handout D-4

your back is cold and you look up at the stars and the sky but they aren't your stars they might once have been perhaps not now but once and you feel it more than you see it because the stars you see they cover in a cocoon all wet and hard and the light oh it dims

Handout D-2

it feels like a bruise on your right-hand brow all soft and puffy but when you reach your right hand up to touch it there's only wetness and cool sharp depths like a rockpool or a well and it goes so deep so very very deep

Handout F

SIX WEEKS ONLY

Kinstow Community Hall is pleased to announce the loan of a *eurypterid* fossil from the National History Museum. This remarkable specimen would once have been found in similar waters to our own over two-hundred and fifty million years ago. Entry is free but donations are appreciated.

Handout J - extract from Perrikins' journal

Woken again today by that dream of ferns falling away from my vision. Mouth feels dry and throat sore. Early morning headache again (pregnancy?!) (hangover)

Splitting headache continued all day and drugs no use. Phone doctor later.

Two days now. Much hassle. Took an early walk through the park, things felt better in the open by the fountain. Dreaming still and also a new one about unfamiliar stars.

I don't trust that book. Carpel better buy it back.

Handout L

[a stylised watercolour illustration of a fountain and sextant]

EX-LIBRIS PERRIKINS cat. no. 250m

Handout P - brass plaque beside fossil

EURYPTERUS REMIPES
(467 - 250 million years ago)

Informally known as "sea scorpions", *eurypterids* were the most diverse order of Paleozoic chelicerates. These creatures were amphibious but would often be found in brackish or saltwater.

On loan from the National History Museum by appointment of E. Carpel, Kinstow