

IRRATIONAL EXPRESS

Call of Cthulhu d20 Adventure

It is late afternoon when your National Express coach pulls into a small West Country village. It's a still several hours from your destination – you've been travelling all day and you're very tired. The coach stops and Dave, the driver, gets out, swearing quietly.

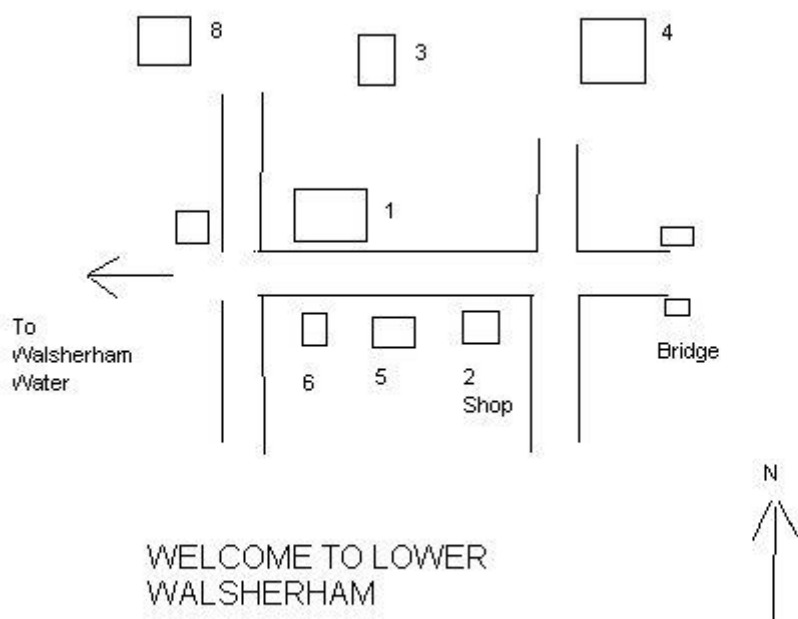
He walks to the back of the coach and you see smoke billowing up as he opens the engine cover. He swears again, rather more loudly. A couple of the villagers are coming out to see what the commotion's about. One of them is a vicar, a tall, grey-haired chap with small round glasses and an overbite. He talks for a moment with Dave and Dave comes back into the coach.

Basically, the coach is shagged. It'll take a fair few hours to fix and they can't get a replacement coach here before tomorrow evening.

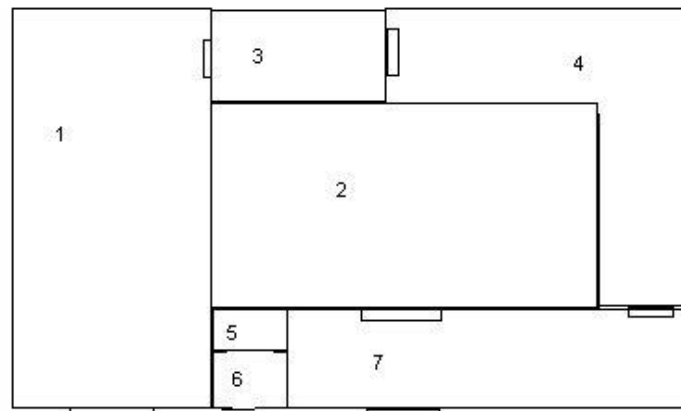
The vicar introduces himself as Reverend Toby McVey. He's afraid that Lower Walsherham is rather off the tourist trail and they don't have any guest houses. But some beds can be put up in the community centre for you – hardly perfect but it's all they can do. Dave is resigned to spending the night fixing the coach. Unless they want to stay up all night, the PCs will be similarly resigned to sleeping in the community centre.

As the PCs leave the coach, a tall, wiry man in oil-stained overalls and a baseball cap and sporting a mullet arrives and speaks with Dave. He walks off and a few minutes later comes back with a tractor. This then tows the coach away in the direction of the garage (PCs who don't witness this won't have any idea as to where the garage is).

Lower Walsherham is a small village in some quite picturesque country. The road the coach arrives by goes over a bridge crossing a small stream. The village consists of a main street with a community centre and church, a village shop, doctor's surgery, and café. There is the inevitable pub a short distance away. The buildings are mostly of stone with slate roofs, except from the modern whitewashed brick of the community centre. It is a clean and generally pleasant-looking place, with lots of window boxes and flower beds.



1 - COMMUNITY CENTRE & CHURCH



Lower Walsherham Community Centre
And Church

This is a modern single-floored building of white brick. A small community centre is attached to an equally small church building, of the same modern design. A large pair of double doors leads into the church with a smaller pair leading to the centre. The building is fronted by a well-tended lawn and flower beds.

Reverend McVey will make PCs welcome on the first night, apologise for the Spartan conditions and the lack of tourist facilities in Lower Walsherham, and generally try to make the PCs feel at home.

During the night, the PC who makes the highest Listen check will wake up and hear muffled voices from behind the back wall of the function hall. One voice will be lower and louder than the other – this is Jerry Vyne as he argues with reverend McVey.

1 – Church. This is a single largeish room, evidently for a very small congregation. A table with a cloth over it serves as an altar and the seating is provided by plastic chairs arranged either side of an aisle. Each chair has a battered old Book of Common Prayer. The room is plain and unassuming – though it is clean there is little indication that great attention has been lavished on it.

2 – Function hall. This is used for keep fit classes, village gatherings, bring-and-buy sales and various cult activities. There will be a camp bed set out for each PC (with those for female PCs partitioned by a curtain) along with a towel and bedding.

Paranoid PCs searching the hall thoroughly will find dark stains and scratch marks around one corner of the hall.

3 – Office. This is where Reverend McVey and Jerry Vyne will be arguing on the first night. If a PC gets into the church or the L-shaped corridor and walks up to the door, they will hear two voices, one deeper and louder, along with another they recognise as Reverend McVey. In the unlikely event that they've already talked to Jerry Vyne, they may recognise him as the other speaker.

VYNE- ...I don't care. They could have seen anything.

MCVEY - Look, no-one has ever suspected, ever. We can't just have anyone who passes through ending up...

VYNE – We can and we bloody well will. This is too important for you to get squeamish. You don't even have to get your hands dirty, Reverend. I'll handle it.

MCVEY – Vyne...

Vyne stomps out into the church and leaves. He will bump into anyone in the church who isn't hiding. He will say something like 'Up already?' with a smile. If the PC comes up with a plausible explanation (they were looking for toilets or something), he will leave them alone. Otherwise he'll grapple them to the ground, knock them out and stash them in the van he has parked outside. They might be found by the PCs later if they get into/steal the van.

The office itself has a desk, a table lamp, a couple of chairs, a filing cabinet, and a bookcase. The bookcase has books on theology, history and biology. Carefully going through the contents of the filing cabinet will reveal a simple tally of dates and corresponding numbers. Each month has a number listed beside it – numbers are mostly between 0 and 6 and there is no indication as to what they might signify. The records go back for about fifty years.

4 – Museum. This is an L-shaped corridor with exhibits in dusty glass-fronted cabinets. From the door into the entrance hall to the door into the office, the exhibits are –

A collection of fossils found by Victorian archaeologist Patrick Carruthers. There are ammonites and several dinosaur teeth, plus several others that cannot be identified. Above the assembled items is a sepia photograph of Carruthers, a rugged-looking fellow in leather outdoors gear wielding a pick. The caption notes that he was a well-respected scientist and adventurer before he was lost on the countryside around Lower Walsherham in bad weather.

A set of period photographs of Lower Walsherham. It hasn't changed much over the years.

A number of books and texts. A couple are records of births, deaths and marriages – there are mostly illegible with old and damp and of no use. The only readable item is Carruthers' journal. The journal can be read in depth:

CARRUTHERS' JOURNAL

Study time 4 hours. DC - . San 0/D2. Mythos +1.

This is the journal of Victorian archaeologist Patrick Carruthers. It describes how he found some curious fossilised remains associated with much later Stone Age ruins. As the journal continues the language becomes ever more feverish and broken. Legible lines from towards the end of the book include –

"I am convinced that the settlement here was controlled by some outside force that required sacrifice so regularly that it was as if they believed they were feeding it directly..."

"The phonetic translation could be Va'Gar or veh-Gurr, which remained consistent from the Stone Age up until the days of the English Civil War..."

"...It must have a fresh water home, it must be fed for it cannot find the food it needs on its own. I can only hope it has not seen me, too, with its three great eyes..."

More period photographs, including one of an unnamed fisherman and his son. The caption notes that they were lost, feared drowned, on Walsherham Water during the 1930s.

Parts from a German bomber, thought to have strayed off-course during a raid and shot down near the village in 1941.

Nothing in the cases is less than fifty years old.

5 – Men's toilets.

6 – Women's toilets.

7 – Entrance hall. There is a large noticeboard announcing various events. Examining it with care will reveal there is a bring-and-buy sale in a fortnight and three town meetings scheduled for next month. Apart from this the hall contains some folding chairs, a table, and a couple of pot plants.

3 - JERRY VYNE'S HOUSE

This is a three-floor house, ramshackle and run-down with an overgrown front garden with rusting car parts scattered around. The back garden is so unkempt it is like wading through a jungle.

Only the living room, the kitchen, one of the bathrooms and the cellar are used. Everything else is abandoned – the furnishings are covered with mouldering sheets and there is dust everywhere. The furniture looks very old – much of it has been ruined by mice and damp.

The living room is where Vyne lives. The curtains are drawn and the place stinks. There is a sleeping bag on the couch and microwave food packaging all over the floor. There is a television in one corner and a table covered in papers. The papers are in handwriting too cramped to be read but one legible word, written larger than the rest, reads V'GARR.

The kitchen is in a similar mess. The back door leads out onto the garden and is left unlocked. Convenience food packaging spills from the bin onto the floor where it is rotting. There is nothing in the sink, suggesting that the occupant doesn't use cutlery.

There is a door leading down from the kitchen to the cellar. It's locked and can be picked (DC18) or forced (DC15). The cellar is too low-ceilinged to stand up in and smells of someone unwashed. In the cellar is Daisy, a young woman in her late teens or early twenties with lank, dirty blonde hair, dressed in the greying rags of a t-shirt and jeans. She is barefoot and chained to a water pipe. The padlock on the chain can be picked (DC15) or smashed, but Daisy is weak and has to be helped (Daisy and her helper move at half-speed) if the PCs want her to go anywhere.

If none of the PCs have tangled with Vyne yet, he'll pull up in his van (Listen check DC12) as the PCs get Daisy out of the cellar or while they're looking around the house. If the PCs don't get the hell out of the house (probably through the kitchen door) Vyne will catch them and open fire with his shotgun, using spells if the PCs put up a fight. If he sees Daisy is free he will body warp, attack her, and possibly let the PCs escape as he pauses to eat her (San D3/D6 to witness).

Vyne leaves his keys in the van, since no-one in town would dare try to swipe it. The PCs can use this to escape Lower Walsherham. If Vyne's van is currently at the bottom of Walsherham Water, Vyne will have acquired a dilapidated estate car from one of the other villagers.

Daisy is the best source of information the PCs can get on what is happening in Lower Walsherham. She knows that something is dominating the villagers, making them go along with things they wouldn't normally dream of doing. The thing, named V'Garr, lives in Walsherham

Water, although Daisy has never seen it. It feeds on newborn babies and the villagers conspire to produce lots of children and feed it to the creature. All the village women (although not including Daisy herself) produce children for the sacrifice. Reverend McVey and Jerry Vyne are primarily responsible for ensuring things go smoothly, but Daisy thinks Vyne would do it regardless of whether V’Garr was tampering with his mind. Everyone in the village, especially McVey, is terrified of Vyne, even more than they are of V’Garr.

Daisy is twenty-one years old. She shook off V’Garr’s influence and tried to escape, but Jerry Vyne ran her down and brought her to his house. She’s been in the cellar for two months, being fed off leftovers. She doesn’t know why Jerry hasn’t killed her, but she suspects it’s so she can be fed to V’Garr as an extra-special sacrifice.

Daisy doesn’t know how long this has been going on in Lower Walsherham, for her earlier years seem dreamlike and fragmented. But she’s sure it’s been going on a very, very long time.

4 - GARAGE

The garage is a rectangular fenced area with a single large corrugated iron shed along one side. This is where the National Express coach is being kept. Dave actually managed to perform most of the repairs before Jerry Vyne killed him sometime during the night.

The fence can be climbed or the padlock holding the front gates closed can be picked (DC 18). The door into the garage isn’t locked, but the large double doors at the front must be opened from the inside.

Beside the garage is a pile of scrap metal. On this pile is the dismembered body of Dave (San 0/D4), recognisable from the ‘Hello, my name is DAVE’ badge still pinned to the front of his bloodsoaked uniform. Searching the body nets the keys to the coach’s ignition. Searching the body after failing the initial San check costs an additional 1 San for each round the affected PC is in contact with the body.

The garage is a single large room, mostly taken up by the coach. The coach still needs repairs made (DC 18, remember PCs can take 20) but is good to go after that. There are a few tools lying around, like large wrenches and screwdrivers, along with some canisters of fuel, but little else of use.

5 - DOCTOR’S SURGERY

The surgery is located above a small reception area and waiting room. There is no receptionist and no patients waiting. The PCs can walk right into Dr O’Connor’s surgery, up a short flight of stairs. The surgery is a small room with an examination bed, a screen on castors, and several shelves and cupboards. Dr O’Connor sits in a chair, staring out of the window, initially oblivious to the PCs. Dr O’Connor is bald and loose-skinned, as if he was a plump man who suddenly lost a lot of weight.

O’Connor’s patient records reveal that most appointments (about 80%) are for women, with no complaint details given. Cathy Deiss has been in several times – careful examination of the records, which go back maybe twenty years, show she has been in hundreds of times. Thirteen of those times have the word ‘Delivery’ instead of complaint details.

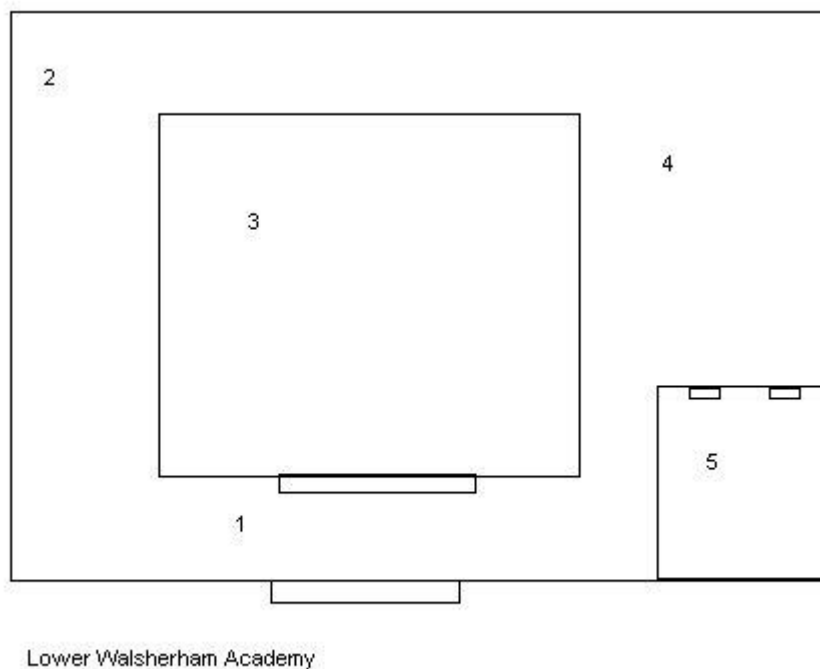
Dr O’Connor’s mind has been shattered by his contact with V’Garr. He will only speak to the PCs if they address him directly and he will keep drifting off. He knows that the village women produce huge numbers of babies which are then fed to V’Garr, but will keep drifting off-subject. He also knows that there are some children who were allowed to survive and are being raised in the village school, but he will only mumble this information if directly asked about any surviving children.

6 - CAFÉ

The café is small but homely. Cathy Deiss, a plump and unflinchingly jolly woman, serves above-average home-cooked fare to villagers and hungry PCs. She is happy, polite and friendly. If at all able, she will slip in a mention of her daughter, Vicky, who is seven. Cathy is massively proud of Vicky and can't help telling people about her. Vicky is currently at school, and will be at school at all times.

Cathy Deiss has produced thirteen children, of which twelve were fed to V'Garr. One, Vicky, was allowed to survive and is living at the school. This is a source of immense pride to Cathy. Her mention of her daughter should serve as one of the indicators that there is something wrong with the children in Lower Walsherham and, once the PCs have discovered what V'Garr lives off, that there might still be some children to be saved.

8 - SCHOOL



The sign outside this unassuming single-storey brick building reads 'Lower Walsherham Academy'. It is surrounded by very neat gardens with lots of flowers. There is never any sign of any children or teachers around it.

In reality, the school is a prison/dormitory for the seven youngsters who have survived V'Garr's predations and are allowed to survive in the hope of breeding an obedient new generation for V'Garr's benefit. PCs who rescue these children will have done something remarkable, but doing so will not be easy. Should the PCs look like they're going to escape with the children, the children themselves can form the primary obstacle – they do not want to leave and will try to make sure the PCs are punished by the big friendly monster in the lake.

1 Entrance Hall. Decorated with lots of children's pictures, most of them of a woman with blonde hair.

2 Annie's corner. This is where Annie Shoemith plans her lessons. She will be here if the PCs enter the school during the daytime. She will politely enquire what she can do for them and

then try to get rid of them, refusing them access to anywhere else in the school and becoming more and more flustered until she is screaming at them to leave. If the PCs get into the classroom, she will fly into a rage and attack anyone threatening 'her' children with her teeth and nails.

Annie sits at a desk covered in lesson plans. She is in her late twenties with shortish blonde hair, wearing a slightly frumpy long skirt and blouse. She has a plain but friendly face, until she goes crackers.

3 Classroom. Seven children, aged three to eight (one of whom is Vicky Diess) spend their days here. There is a large blackboard on one wall, a bookshelf with lots of children's books, and lots of beautiful, expensive toys like rocking horses, huge teddy bears, toy soldiers, building blocks, and all manner of other delights. During the day sunlight will be streaming in through the skylight.

The children are frightened of outsiders and will huddle in the corner if the PCs enter. They will have to be cajoled into going anywhere (Diplomacy DC 18). If this fails, or if the PCs are in a hurry, they can carry off one child each (but have to drop them to attack, etc.).

4 This section of the corridor is the dormitory, with four sets of double bunk beds and washbasins.

5 Washrooms. These include toilets, sinks, and a couple of shower cubicles.

THE LAKE

Walsherham Water is a large lake, its waters still and calm. Its banks are spiked with dead trees, and the earth around it is black and dank. There is no birdsong (Listen DC18). The only road out of Lower Walsherham passes close by the lake, following the curve of its bank.

Walsherham Water forms the lair of V'Garr. V'Garr sits beneath the centre of the lake, constantly hungering for infant flesh, exuding a baleful influence that has corrupted generations of villagers to do his will.

RED VAN MAN

If the PCs aren't getting anywhere, Jerry will find them in his red van. He will tell them that Dave hasn't been able to fix the coach, and that he can give them a lift in his van to the nearest town where there is a B&B and someone should be able to take them the rest of the way.

If the PCs accept, he will show them into the back of the van, then drive to the edge of Walsherham Water. He will get out, leaving the handbrake off, and centrally lock the doors. He will then proceed to push the van into the water.

The van will fill with water in three rounds, whereupon anyone still inside the van will begin to suffer the effects of drowning. PCs can kick out the windscreen (DC 18) or the back doors (DC 20). One PC can exit though either of these per round. Three rounds of swimming will get them to the shore. The last one in the water will feel something cold and sticky brush against their leg and must pass a Str test – failure means they are dragged beneath the surface for a moment by something clammy, seething and strong, before kicking free (San 0/D3).

The temperature around the lake will now seem noticeably colder than elsewhere. PCs who stand on the shore arguing about what to do while soaking wet must pass a Fort save (DC 15) or become fatigued with cold.

THE SHOWDOWN

The ultimate aim of the adventure is to find a motor vehicle and get out of Lower Walsherham. This can happen in a few different ways:

- Fix the coach in the garage and drive it away.
- Steal Jerry's van.
- Steal the car Jerry acquires after his van ends up in the lake.

All these vehicles have enough fuel in them to escape.

PCs who simply try to walk for it will wander for a couple of hours then arrive back at the village. They must pass a Fort save (DC 15) or become fatigued by the wasted effort.

If the PCs drive towards the road they arrived by, the bridge will be blown up. There will be a sudden sharp crack, impossibly loud, and the old bridge will disappear in a cloud of dust. When the debris clears the shattered bridge and steep-banked stream will form an impassable obstacle. Trying to jump it will result in a wrecked vehicle.

The only way out is along the other road, past Walsherham Water. If the PCs have not yet tackled Jerry, he will stride out into the road with his shotgun ready and fire one shot at the driver before the vehicle reaches him. If the driver tries to run Jerry over, Jerry will jump in through the fractured windscreen and body warp the next round. Jamming the brake on will cause him to fly back out through the broken windscreen, along with anyone else on the vehicle not passing a Reflex save (DC 18). Landing on the road after being thrown through the windscreen does D4 damage (the vehicle probably isn't going very fast at this point).

Being run over by the vehicle causes 2D10 damage (with an extra 2D10 for the rear wheels if the victim is Jerry and the first lot of damage is low).

Careering past the lake causes V'Garr to rise hideously from the lake. V'Garr is a titanic writhing black mass of worms. Two massive yellow eyes open up to stare at the PCs. Seeing V'Garr costs D2/D8 Sanity. V'Garr extrudes a tentacle of seething wormlike darkness and uses it to batter the coach or car. The following sequence assumes that the vehicle is being driven at full speed. V'Garr automatically goes last in the initiative count.

Round 1 – V'Garr's third eye opens and it casts Mindblast

Round 2 – V'Garr's tentacle attacks. Drive (DC 18) to avoid it.

Round 3 - V'Garr casts Suggestion on one of the PCs, trying to force them to attack the driver.

Round 4 – V'Garr attacks again. Drive (DC 18) to avoid.

Round 5 – V'Garr casts Mindblast on another PC (this time, the driver).

Round 6 – The road veers away from the bank of the lake and away from V'Garr. As the PCs escape, V'Garr's eyes close and its monstrous bulk sinks back beneath the surface of the lake.

If V'Garr hits the vehicle, it will require a Drive check (DC 15) to keep on the road. If the vehicle is hit twice, the front axle will snap and it will go out of control, grinding to a halt as it swerves off into the trees. In this case V'Garr will attack and eat all the PCs. This can only be avoided if one of the PCs heroically distracts V'Garr. V'Garr's slam attack is at +9 and causes 2D10 damage. If one PC keeps it occupied and lasts more than a couple of rounds (V'Garr can occupy itself for a few rounds absorbing the unfortunate PC if required), the other PCs can escape

on foot down the road. V’Garr will attack and cast spells on alternate turns, attacking the distracting character and casting spells at the rest.

If Daisy is alive and with the PCs at this point, she will do her best to distract the monster. Witnessing her death at the tentacles of V’Garr is good for D2/D4 Sanity.

V’Garr can be killed if the coach is driven into it at full speed. This requires the coach to stop and turn around. V’Garr will move towards the bank, closing in for the kill – the coach can then be driven at full speed off the bank and into the mass of V’Garr’s body. V’Garr will explode in a storm of writhing darkness that seems to blot out the sun and turn the whole sky dark, to the accompaniment of hideous atonal screaming. This is the only way in which V’Garr can be killed.

AFTERMATH

If the PCs all die, Lower Walsherham has claimed yet more lives at the behest of V’Garr.

If they get away, they’ll probably be speeding along country roads in a stolen vehicle. They get back onto the motorway after about half an hour and begin to run low on fuel. They reach a motorway service station, and are able at last to head back into the embrace of civilisation.

The PCs have ‘succeeded’ if any of them survive the escape from Lower Walsherham. They will have done particularly well if they kill Vyne and/or rescue Daisy or any of the children from the school. Killing V’Garr is very unlikely indeed but should it happen, the PCs can bask in the knowledge that they have pushed back the darkness some considerable way, at least in that particular corner of the West Country.

Sanity rewards:

Rescue Daisy: D3
Rescue any kids: D3
Destroy Jerry Vyne: D3
Destroy V’Garr: D6

STATISTICS

JERRY VYNE: Use the 5th Level Cultist stats on P. 189. Vyne replaces Point Blank Shot with Weapon Proficiency: Shotgun and Precise Shot with Iron Will (giving him an attack bonus of +3 ranged and a Will save of +4).

Vyne has a loaded pump-action shotgun and a van (later a battered old car if his van is lost).

His spells are Contact V’Garr, Body Warping of Gorgonoth, and Curse of the Putrid Husk. Vyne uses Body Warping to turn into an utterly hideous, hulking creature. His skin splits to reveal wet ribbed slabs of muscle, his face distorts into a bestial toothed beak and his spine distorts to give him a stooped, loping gait. This costs 0/D4 San to observe, and uses the stats for a Leopard on P. 199 (except he counts as a Large creature, and retains Vyne’s Hp).

ANNIE SHOESMITH: Annie uses the 1st-level Cultists stats on P. 189, except that her feats are Trustworthy, Martial Artist and Weapon Focus: Unarmed (she only gains the benefits of these last two if ‘her’ children are threatened and she becomes enraged). Annie is unarmed. Killing her costs D4 Sanity.