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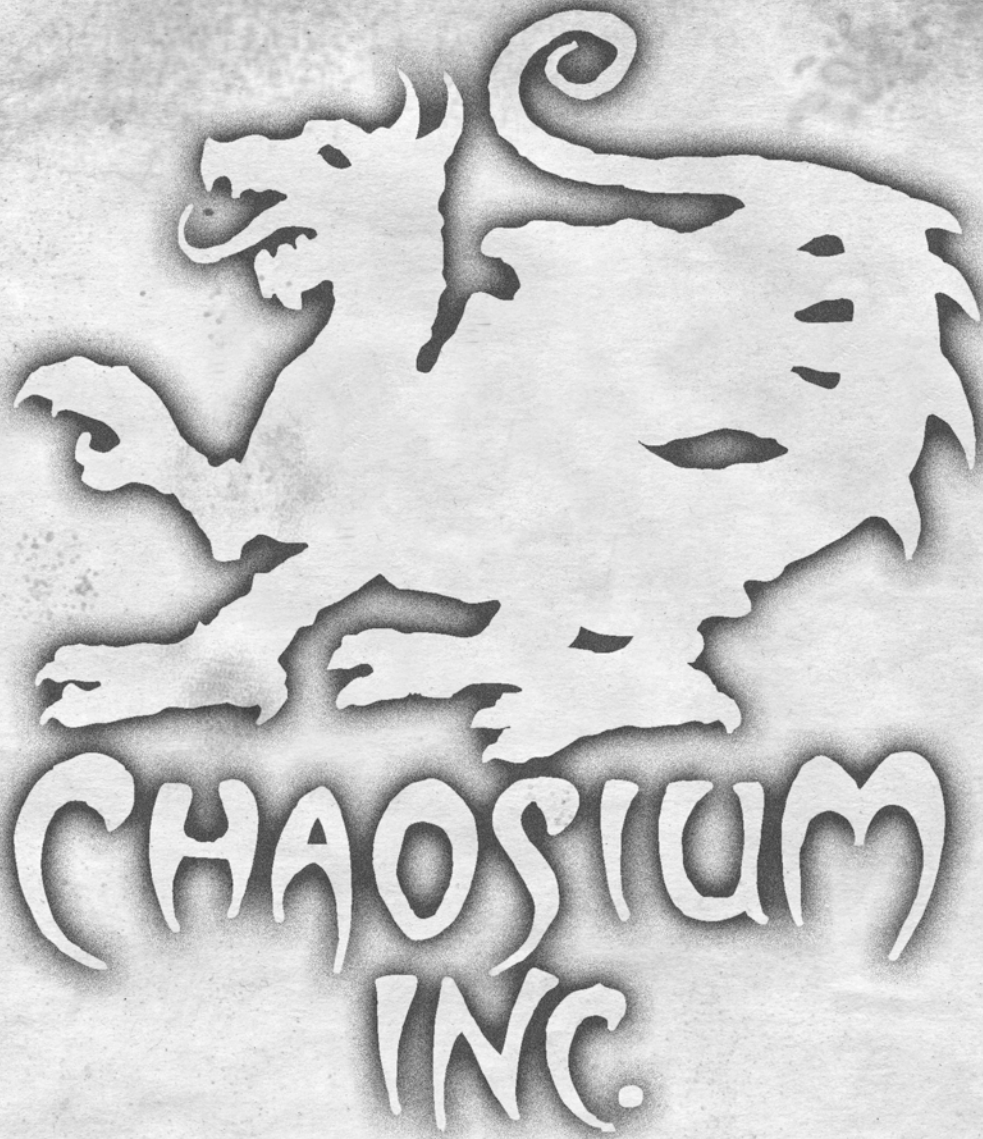


# CHILDREN OF THE STORM



## Call of Cthulhu in the Great Depression





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# CHILDREN OF THE STORM: CALL OF CTHULHU IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION

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For the Losers' Club and the Wicked Muffins

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## INTRODUCTION: THE STORM

A prominent expert in crime predicts that the want and suffering of the Great Depression will create “a generation of cannibals.” Panicked people flee their homes to escape a devastating invasion and poison gas attack. Good people lock their doors as a bedraggled man stumbles down the street, eying their town as he waits to disappear on the next train. In Washington, DC, life comes to a standstill as people watch a strange dust descend from the sky.

The 1930s saw a level of uncertainty, suffering, and doubt that most of us can never imagine. There had been problems during the 1920s, but the decade’s sense of fun and optimism swept them into the background as the United States returned to “normalcy” after the Great War. The spread of the Great Depression and the first rumblings of a new World War, however, ripped people from their moorings and caused a general sense of angst and doubt to grow.

The problems and crises caused by the economic collapse and beginning of another war were made far worse by a sense of dread fueled by rumors, media, and a personal expectation that things had the potential to get even worse. The apocalyptic sight of dust storms sweeping across the continent and newsreels showing the collapse of Europe and Asia sparked fears in some that Orson Welles’ War of the Worlds broadcast was real; concerns about family breakdown and the closure of public schools in poor districts made adults worry that the next generation would grow up to become criminals and barbarians. For some, no bad news sounded too implausible, no crisis seemed too unbelievable.

The themes found in *Call of Cthulhu* and the writings of H. P. Lovecraft mirror many of the fears faced by ordinary people in the 1930s: perceived chaos and disintegration, the threat of being swept aside by forces that were difficult to understand, a sense of growing hopelessness. Scenarios set during the years of crisis give Keepers and players an opportunity to explore new facets of these themes and learn about another side of American history. Even though separated from the classic *Call of Cthulhu* setting by only a few years, campaigns set during the

Depression and early days of World War II can give a new tone to gaming sessions.

### THE CRASH

Creating adventures in historic settings poses a number of challenges for Keepers. In general, historically-oriented games work well as long as you have the basic feel of the period and enough hard detail to make the past seem dynamic and immediate for players. Falling in the years between the classic *Call of Cthulhu* setting and World War II, the 1930s overlaps the two enough to allow Keepers improvise stylistic details: fashions, prices, technological trends. The defining events of the 1930s—the Depression and the beginning of the Second World War—give the period a darker, more desperate edge than the classic setting, however. The first years of the decade saw skyrocketing unemployment and a sense that the American dream had come to an end. As the nation worked to get back on its feet, news reports from China, Ethiopia, and Spain described atrocities and the first rumblings of another Great War.

This desperate edge existed in the classic setting of the 1920s, but lurked on the margins of the investigators’ lives. Isolated rural hamlets where incestuous clans practiced dark rituals, remote farms where insanity or an unknown horror destroyed a family, and similar settings grace the works of Lovecraft and the adventures created by CoC Keepers. A sense of danger existed in America of the 1920s, but it seemed remote for most people. Newspaper stories described raving fundamentalist in Tennessee and the Ku Klux Klan gaining power in Indiana, bootleggers gnawing at morals in Chicago and tensions in Germany, but these threats seemed far away from everyday life.

Even though some people exaggerated or simplified the menace found in other areas (such as Lovecraft’s own wariness of rural life and fears of immigration), they felt relatively safe and thought that, overall, America was prosperous and bustling. Radio was taking off, the wonder of aviation captured hearts and minds as air mail delivery became more common and Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic, vacation homes sprouted up



in Florida. As national life took a turn for the better, even individuals seemed more masterful and dynamic. In surreal way, the crossword puzzle fad and flagpole sitting craze reflected the notion that everyone could leave a mark on the world while having fun. If any darkness existed in this world, it lurked far from the light of Lucky Lindy, new dances, and the hum of radio. The problems of racism, poverty, and the failure of individuals and nations to really adjust to life after World War I were pushed into the background.

The economic woes that started in the fall of 1929 knocked the legs out from under this sense of optimism. The stock market crash sent the first ripples through the carefree mood, but life began a downward spiral as banks closed, jobs disappeared, and schools shut their doors. For the first time in years, the social ills that existed had a sense of immediacy. Rather than viewing problems as something distant—isolated in small towns or dysfunctional families—the average person began to feel a sense of deep pessimism about his or her own life and potential. Every new headline brought fear that someone in your immediate family would lose a job, that a neighbor's business would go under, or that violent crime would cast a shadow over your quiet street. The problems of society became immediate and personal, and fear and uncertainty began to shape how people saw their lives.

Even as this sense of hopelessness spread, people struggled to find solutions. They latched on to charismatic figures that seemed to offer hope. Some of these guides seemed to threaten the society they were trying to save. The autocratic Huey Long and the increasingly pro-Nazi "Radio Priest," Charles Coughlin, drew supporters from groups whose desperation made them blind to their leaders' messages. Communism gained more supporters, drawing people concerned with social justice while concealing a core with more violent ambitions.

While these destructive paths lured some, most people found rays of hope in the experimental government programs of the New Deal. Originally a scattershot attempt to prop up social services and provide employment, by 1935 President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal began to see itself as a tool for helping Americans build a stronger community life while they fought the Depression. From early projects that gave food aid to families and tried to create jobs for men,

the New Deal evolved into a very broad set of programs that celebrated democracy, diversity, and local life.

For inspiration and some insights into the New Deal and the Depression, Keepers can visit the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute's New Deal Network ([www.newdeal.feri.org](http://www.newdeal.feri.org)) and the American Life History project of the Library of Congress ([memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaintro](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaintro)), which includes interviews conducted by the Works Progress Administration during the late 1930s.

## HISTORY, TRUTH, AND POETIC TRUTH

Scenarios set in the 1930s need to address the strange relationship between that emerged between paranoia, rumor, and fact. Every generation sees odd half-truths and urban legends spread and mutate. The sense of unease caused by the Depression, though, made many people more willing to accept disturbing news. The continued spread of national mass media, including radio and newspaper wire services, made it easier for bad news to travel and become part of the miasma of disaster that enveloped society.

In this environment, isolated instances originally spread through small-town papers and word of mouth to become dangerous new trends in the minds of the public, and sensational events took an a strange new role in the light of media coverage. This style of journalism had been around for a long time before the Great Depression, but the number of voices bearing bad news and the status of some of the doomsayers (FBI head J. Edgar Hoover and some respected academics, for instance) gave even more credibility to dire stories. Oddly, though, many people began to identify with the stories even as they fueled the fear and doubt that gnawed away at society. Bank robbery was an example of both trends. Newspapers repeated stories of parents robbing banks only to return home and kill their families and commit suicide when they realized the shame they had brought on their children. Other accounts described machinegun-wielding preteens holding up tellers—sometimes munching on candy as the terrified bank employees emptied their tills.

Even though these stories frightened people, they also appealed to the victims of the Depression odd ways. Bank robbers were violent thugs, but many people followed their exploits



and saw them as folk heroes who were willing to challenge the banks that had caused so many to suffer. The dirty shambling hobo was a serial killer waiting to happen, but the idea of hitting the road to start a new life had a romantic appeal. In a perverse way, stories of stockbrokers jumping to their deaths from elegant hotels fit the same bill. Suicides happened, but the popular image of hordes of businessmen rushing to end it all when the stock market crashed exaggerated events. The prevalence of suicide seemed to grow as the stories spread. Details—the expensive hotel room rented just for the jump, a shaking hand loosening a collar and tie at the last minute—added a sense of grim justice to events.

These stories had a kind of poetic truth about them, becoming myths that accurately reflected states of mind and concerns even though they sometimes were not rooted in objective truth. The explorations of urban legends by Jan Brunvald (essential reading for anyone getting ready to run a horror campaign) give a good description of the connection between social fear, personal anxiety, and the willingness to believe that the most bizarre stories are true.

## CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY

This chaos, though, opens a range of possibilities for both Keepers and investigators. The turmoil of the decade, for example, gives more leeway for travel and a greater range of settings and encounters. From hobos slipping from one town to the next in boxcars and desperate families setting off across the country to find work all the way to roving documentarians and academics traveling at the behest of the government, stories of the Depression feature travel and the adventure of new environments.

International travel takes on a new dimension during the 1930s. These were the years of majestic ocean liners and sleek airships, but a shadow loomed over the world. The growing tensions in Asia, Africa, and Europe made travel more dangerous as foreign affairs began building to a new world war. Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and fought with China sporadically from 1932 until a full-scale invasion in 1937. Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935. A civil war led to brutal fighting in Morocco and Spain beginning in 1936. Germany began expanding in 1938, absorbing Austria and Czechoslovakia before invading Poland in 1939.

The economic crisis and later the way New Deal agencies assigned tasks also open the possibility of investigators essentially changing jobs during the course of the campaign. In the early days of the Depression, some middle class and professional workers found themselves in situations where they had to redefine their careers, relying on existing skills and a willingness to learn as they faced new challenges. This situation popped up for the unemployed as well as altruists who took new positions to try to help others. Later in the Depression, the fluidity of some New Deal agencies meant that staff members moved between dramatically differing assignments. Keepers and players should work together to make certain that character development and new skills reflect the experiences of the investigators and the overall narrative flow of the campaign.

The opportunities presented during the 1930s will be most significant for female investigators. Keepers running historical campaigns—in either the core 1920s setting or the Victorian world of *Cthulhu by Gaslight*—often find themselves facing questions about the relationship between the historical role of women and the dark, destructive narratives of *Call of Cthulhu*. *Cthulhu by Gaslight* creatively addresses this problem with the Adventuress occupation, which gives female investigators flexibility while recognizing the social and cultural stigma attached to outgoing women.

Changes in media, education, and the nature of some professions gave women a much greater public role during the Depression. Faced with a massive humanitarian crisis, nonprofit groups and government agencies in the early 1930s felt that an innate maternal instinct and an orientation toward service made it easier for women to meet the needs of poor families. The New Deal asked female journalists and photographers to travel the country and report on the distress they encountered; state governments employed many upper-class women with no experience as case managers and public relief coordinators. While opening new opportunities, the Depression also gave a higher profile to professions traditionally seen as the domain of women, such as teaching and nursing.

## DAILY BREAD: OCCUPATIONS

The backgrounds and occupations available in the classic *Call of Cthulhu* setting generally

remain available during the 1930s and early 1940s, although some have changed in tone or appeal. The fad for spiritualism and other strains of the occult that peaked after the First World War waned somewhat during the Depression, for example, meaning that occultist investigators will be a bit long in the tooth. Generally, investigators will spend more time out in the field than in drawing rooms, libraries, or academic departments. The belief that people—especially professionals—needed to use their skills to help others drove many to become involved with aid projects in areas they never could have imagined visiting a few years earlier. The romantic faith in the American people also led many to go out into society to connect with the populace. Reporters left their urban routines to explore the countryside; history professors taught night classes for workers; ministers spent summers helping sharecroppers.



### *Transient*

The classic 1920s *Call of Cthulhu* rules include the hobo occupation. The sons of the rails had wandered America since the growth of the industry in the 1800s. Hobos became a sad, menacing, part of the public consciousness during the 1930s.

The number of people on the roads grew dramatically during the early 1930s. As unemployment rose, teenage boys and young adults left home to find work and reduce the burden on their families. Grown men who had lost everything pulled up stakes and headed for the rails, hoping to find work or unable to cope with their new poverty. In the first part of the New Deal, from 1933 to 1934, the government set up special camps for young hobos and worked to relocate the nomads. Later programs continued to work with transient individuals and families, and expanded their focus to include migrant farm workers. The somewhat utopian Weedpatch Resettlement Administration camp in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* or the informal community in King Vidor's *Our Daily Bread* give a good idea of what these efforts were like.

In the popular imagination, hobos had an aura of danger and dark romance. Living in squalid camps, slipping in and out of communities, driven to desperation, they seemed like threatening outsiders. In some ways, transients became stock villains for the middle and upper class. The 1934 gubernatorial election in California, for example, saw insurgent candidate Upton Sinclair's opponent smearing the author by funding faked newsreels in which armies of hobos descended on the state— attracted by Sinclair's proposed policies. Even something like the legendary hobo signs seemed menacing: a secret map of communities that communicated details of each household in order to guide night travelers and beggars.

Running a hobo campaign could be an exciting challenge for Keepers. The wanderers live outside of the staid academic world that provides a backdrop for many CoC games, and face unique challenges as social outsiders. However, their status gives Keepers and players a chance to experiment with the tone of the game. A hobo-centric campaign can embrace an atmosphere of gritty realism—with the horrors of the Cthulhu Mythos lurking in the background as transient investigators struggle to survive in a harsh world. On the other hand, groups that favor the Dreamlands setting and a lighter atmosphere could opt to give a hobo campaign an aura of magical realism, with fantastic events and strange adventures—rather than doom, suffering, and horror—greeting the hobo investigators wherever they travel. This more fantastic hobo setting could be viewed as a sort of dark fairy



tale, allowing Keepers to incorporate many elements from folklore and literature. Keepers interested in this approach should spend time looking at many of the folklore collections created during the 1930s—especially the work of Vance Randolph—and peruse works that update myths to the period, such as Howard Waldrop’s *A Dozen Tough Jobs*, Joel and Ethan Coen’s *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, or James Vance’s graphic novel *Kings in Disguise*.

Of the adventures in *Children of the Storm*, “The Tractate” is least suited for transients. The other three can easily accommodate wanderers. Keepers need to use their own discretion when deciding what resources investigators can access (especially sources of information) and how they will be received by locals. NPC attitudes will be especially important in “To the Dust Returned” and “Entr’acte,” where outsiders are seen as threats.

Given the tendency of madness to slip into the lives of investigators, it is important to remember that hobos begin the campaign as sane PCs. Economic despair or a sense of adventure has driven them to take to the road rather than any struggle with reality. All of the basic Sanity rules apply to hobos, although the Keeper should construct effects and madnesses that reflect the specific background and fears of the investigator.

For a change of pace, Keepers could use the hobo occupation as the basis for a campaign featuring teenage investigators. If you follow this path, reduce the base level for information and information-based skills (e.g., History) depending on the age of the character.

*Teen Hobo*

- Climb
- Conceal
- Fast Talk
- Hide
- Jump
- Listen
- Spot Hidden
- Sneak
- Swim

*Radical*

The anarchist occupation makes a brief appearance in the classic CoC setting. The original anarchist could cover a wide range of activities during the 1920s, including labor

organizer for the International Workers of the World, a journalist on the radical fringe, or a raving soapbox speaker trying to persuade the masses. While fears of anarchy and Bolshevism haunted the 1920s—especially during the first years of the decade—radicalism became more visible in the 1930s and in some ways more mainstream. As factories locked their gates and families fled failing farms, more people picked up the language of revolution. Large movements like the Communist Party and smaller regional groups such as Minnesota’s Farmer-Labor Party and urban tenants’ unions tried to organize people for social change.



Radical investigators in the 1930s can fall anywhere in the progressive camp, ranging from community organizers trying to help sharecroppers to lawyers fighting to protect tenants to communists working under orders from Moscow. Overall, radicals in a Depression setting would be less violent and more articulate than the anarchist occupation of the classic game, although popular stereotypes still depicted them as potential bomb throwers.

*Radical*

- Fast Talk
- History
- Law
- Library Use
- Persuade

Sociology  
One blue-collar occupational skill

### *Social Worker*

Observing the US in the midst of the Great Depression, one commentator noted that the country was known for its output of gangsters and social workers. The latter became the local face of the New Deal and other antipoverty programs. Social workers could be found at all levels of the new government programs, from frontline offices in rural communities to byzantine agencies in Washington.

Social work had a surprisingly dark edge. Many critics associated it with social engineering and attempts to control the lives of immigrants and the poor. Henry Ford's Department of Sociology represented the malign end of the spectrum in the 1920s, while a Northeastern social worker who complained that Hispanic and Native American women in the Southwest were essentially too stupid to cook for their families stood firmly in this ignorantly judgmental camp during the late 1930s. The stereotypical social worker—an overly educated New Englander with a zeal for tinkering in the lives of others despite no experience in the real world—became the butt of jokes during the Depression and a source of concern for many.

A lack of training caused many of these problems. In a rush to meet demands caused by the Depression, many state and federal agencies assumed that members of the upper class had the life skills and compassion needed to help the poor. A lingering sense of noblesse oblige and a bored yearning for adventure led many ill-prepared elites to enter the field, although fortunately their numbers started to decline by the last half of the 1930s. Using this style of social worker as an investigator requires great skill on the part of the player. Players and Keepers must carefully balance the dilettante background, potential humor, and social conflict this occupation represents.

### *Social Worker*

Fast Talk  
First Aid  
Anthropology  
Persuade  
Photography

Psychology  
Sociology  
Speak Other Language  
Spot Hidden

### *Dilettante Social Worker*

Credit Rating  
Fast Talk  
Sociology  
Speak Other Language: French or Italian  
One Art skill  
Two Other Skills agreed upon by Keeper and player

### *The Federal Bureau of Investigation*

While the Federal Bureau of Investigation (originally called the Bureau of Investigation or the Division of Investigation) may look like an exciting choice for PCs in the classic 1920s setting, the agency had limited power through most of the decade. The FBI engaged in action-packed activities like intelligence sharing, prevention of commerce-related crime, and forensic accounting. The role of the bureau—and its power—changed dramatically in the 1930s. The bureau became an independent branch of the Justice Department in 1935, and received its current name. A national fear of crime and high-profile episodes such as the kidnapping and murder of Charles Lindbergh's twenty-month-old son gave the newly-independent agency a chance to define itself as an aggressive, dynamic, force. From 1935 until the beginning of World War II, the FBI tracked bank robbers, fought organized crime, and investigated kidnappings. Director J. Edgar Hoover made certain that the exploits of agents were well publicized in articles, sensationalistic books, and newsreels.

The FBI looked like an unstoppable, efficient, machine to outsiders, but the source of its public strength could make the lives of investigators rather complicated. While the agency's power expanded dramatically during the 1930s, many local and state law enforcement officials were wary of the bureau, which threatened their autonomy. Whispers about J. Edgar Hoover's record from the late 1910s through the 1920s gave credibility to rumors that he was a manipulative and self-serving political hack.

More importantly for investigators, Hoover's media blitz took its toll on agents. The bureau held agents to the highest standards and

reacted quickly to actions that challenged the image presented in dime novels and tabloid news accounts. Anyone taking an unusual approach to solving a case will receive a quick reprimand; any investigator who rambles about tentacled horrors beyond the ken of man will spend some quality time being interviewed in a windowless room before losing his job. While working for the FBI gives investigators a broad skill base, official connections, and prestige, it also limits how they can respond to the more macabre or outré threats they may encounter.

*FBI Agent*

Accounting

Drive

Forensics

Handgun

Law

Persuade

Psychology

Spot Hidden

Rifle, Shotgun, or Submachine Gun

*The CCC and PWA*

The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Public Works Administration were two of the most dramatic programs of the New Deal. The CCC built parks, reforested farmland, fought wildfires, and engaged in a range of conservation activities. The Public Works Administration oversaw the large building programs and engineering projects of the 1930s.

Most of the members of the CCC were young men in their teens or twenties who worked and attended classes in isolated barracks built by the US Army. Despite exhausting work and a regimented life, corpsmen generally saw their experiences as an adventure. While making money for their families, they worked in exotic locations, developed a strong sense of camaraderie, and learned about the world beyond their hometowns. Upper-level CCC members came from more diverse backgrounds. Army officers served as camp supervisors; WPA employees taught night classes; experts from the US Forest Service oversaw projects.

The PWA helped put blue-collar workers back into action on a large scale. Working on roads and public buildings, the PWA was associated with some of the most visible and lasting efforts of the New Deal. Members came from a wide range of backgrounds, but tended to

have a solid background in mechanical, craft, or technical skills. Supervisors were often bureaucratic in their outlook, and very territorial in the way they viewed other public agencies. They were especially wary of the Works Progress Administration, which relied on loopholes in funding laws to compete for projects.

The CCC and PWA offer options for players and Keepers interested in moving away from the academic and artistic focus found in many investigators. It is important to remember that because of the nature of their work, CCC and PWA employees often remained in the same place for quite some time. While the agencies would be a good tool for getting investigators to remote or unusual areas in the first stages of a campaign, they also limit the ability of the group to travel freely. When creating investigators from these backgrounds, the Keeper may consider allowing a +1 bonus to either STR or CON.

*Civilian Conservation Corpsman*

Climb

Craft (Carpentry) or one blue-collar occupational skill

Drive Truck

First Aid

Jump

Listen

Mechanical Repair

Natural History

Track

Weapon (Axe)

*PWA Construction Worker*

Two blue-collar occupational skills

Bargain

Drive Truck

Electrical Repair

Fast Talk

Locksmith

Mechanical Repair

Operate Heavy Machine





*The Works Progress Administration*

From chaos comes opportunity. The Works Progress Administration (later renamed the Work Projects Administration) was a far-reaching effort to fight the worst effects of the Depression while promoting cultural development and community life. By modern standards, its mission was almost unbelievably broad. Created in 1935, the WPA engaged in activities ranging from creating local histories to experimental art projects to building school cafeterias. Spend an afternoon walking around almost any community in the 48 mainland states and you'll stumble across sidewalks stamped with the agency's diamond-shaped logo, murals in public buildings, or library additions funded by the WPA. Investigators with any professional, academic, or artistic background can find a home in this far-ranging agency. Blue-collar investigators can find themselves swept up in the WPA's many small construction projects. Through the National Youth Administration, the WPA even made an effort to combine social service and vocational training for teenagers.

The WPA can serve as a motivating force in the campaign. Its disparate activities can bring together an odd collection of investigators, while the scope of its programs can help Keepers vary the settings and backgrounds of scenarios. The nature of many of its projects—especially the writing program and efforts to preserve folk life—also create a natural connection to folklore and the hidden, sanity-sapping, secrets that lurk in small communities and isolated hamlets. Other arts programs—such as theater, painting, and sculpture—could open doorways to the arcane recesses of the unconscious mind.

The WPA's mixed history makes it a tool for building scenarios and campaigns while

preventing it from becoming a *deus ex machina* capable of swooping in and saving investigators. While the agency provided some funding and an institutional base for its workers, many of the artists and researchers it employed were left to their own devices in the field. The mix of local, state, and federal decision making would slow the group's response to the investigator's needs. Depending on the time and the area of the country, popular suspicion of the WPA would also limit its ability to help workers in the field. The scenario "Entr'acte," for example, was inspired by the dismal opinion many people held of the New Deal's theater program.

A player wishing to create a WPA worker should choose an occupation from the existing templates and work with the Keeper to create a back story linking the investigator to the agency and add appropriate skills. The artist occupation given below can be used as an example.

*WPA Artist*

- Anthropology
- Bargain
- Credit Rating
- Photography
- Psychology
- Any Art skill
- Any Craft skill



## Documentarian

Photographers had been exploring inner cities in America since the 1890s, and reporters had set out for small towns and rural hamlets to find colorful and amusing subjects since the beginning of print journalism. The 1930s, though, saw the birth of modern documentary photography, filmmaking, and journalism. Papers and nonprofit groups made a concerted effort to explore social conditions during the first days of the Depression. Reporters and photographers followed aid workers and volunteers into collapsing coal communities in Illinois and West Virginia and flood-ravaged towns along the Mississippi.

These activities exploded after 1933. The first wave of the New Deal sent photographers and social workers across the country to describe the conditions faced by incoming president Franklin Roosevelt. The book *One Third of Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression* gives a good overview of this wave of research and a good selection of field reports by a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt. Over the rest of the 1930s this research was incorporated into other programs such as the WPA and the Farm Security Administration. Newsmagazines like *Life* opened more avenues for journalism that relied heavily on visual appeal to create a base of readers.

Documentarian  
Cinematography  
Drive  
Fast Talk  
Library Use  
Persuade  
Photography  
Sociology  
Spot Hidden

## NEW SKILLS

**Sociology (05%)** The skill gives investigators the ability to examine social systems and a theoretical understanding of issues like crime and poverty. The turbulence of the early 1930s gave a kind of pop sociology a good deal of visibility in newspapers and magazines.

**Forensics (00%)** The preserve of coroners and more skilled law enforcement officials, forensics

allows the investigators to draw inferences and make conclusions based on elements found at a crime scene or (when used in conjunction with the Medicine skill) to examine postmortem data.

**Cinematography (00%)** The core skill includes use and upkeep of a motion picture camera. The greater the degree of success when filming reflects the artistic strength and visual appeal of the finished film.

## ADDITIONAL SCENARIOS

Keepers can let their imaginations run rampant as they flesh out these short plot prompts. Use these suggestions to create adventures after your group has played through the four included in *Children of the Storm*, or intersperse them with the longer scenarios to create an ongoing chronological campaign.

### *Tenants' Union (1931-1934)*

Learning that residents of a huge rickety wooden slum in Boston face eviction, idealistic investigators rush to publicize their plight and help them form a tenants' union. The residents—one extended family descended from Irish immigrants who arrived in the 1840s—are wary of outsiders and rebuff their aid. While working to learn more about the situation and make connections to the tenants, the investigators realize that they never see lights from the tenement's windows and that other people who live in the area avoid the dilapidated building, crossing themselves and spitting in the direction of the tenement as they pass

### *The Bequest (1933-1934)*

When a bank in St. Louis fails, investigators find the will of mobster Angelo Camonte in a lockbox. The will had been invalidated and Camonte's assets frozen after he committed suicide in prison. The document directs four of his closest associates to meet in a secret chamber hidden under a grocery store, with tunnels leading to bars that were speakeasies in the 1920s. The chamber is painted deep red, and a single lit candle sits in the center of the room.

### *Dry Bones (1933-1938)*

A group of hobos hop a train as it makes its way through the industrial cities of Michigan. Draped in an old piece of canvas in the back of the freight car, a corpse lies atop a packing crate.

Cryptic rune-like tattoos cover the leathery body, which appears carefully laid out with the legs straight and the arms folded across the chest. Fighting to avoid the police and railroad detectives, the investigators struggle to understand the origins of the macabre display.

*The King of the Wood (1935-1938)*

The investigators pick up rumors that the Army has “lost” a Civilian Conservation Corps camp. The officers in charge of CCC programs in the region deny the claim but have started preventing outsiders from visiting the site. Intrepid investigators who make their way to the missing camp find that the men seemingly walked away from the area in the middle of a normal day, with tracks leading off into the forested hills. Two signs disrupt the apparent calm: a blood stain splattered on the outside wall of a workshop and the moaning of the strange, high, wind at night.

*Ritual (1936-1937)*

While doing ethnographic research in a remote Southern community, a WPA employee makes a recording of old folk songs. Listening to the record later that night, a strange whispered chanting seems to emerge from disc.

*Foundation (1937-1938)*

The Public Works Agency has started work on a new high school in central New York state. Digging into the earth, the workers uncover a eight-foot marble figure depicting a prone, slender-featured, figure with a hole carved into the chest. In the days that follow, people in the area have vivid nightmares about a massacre that took place during the Revolutionary War.

*Foodways (1936-1939)*

A WPA worker paid to explore regional cooking disappears while traveling in Minnesota. Police and WPA officials find his car smashed into a tree along a dirt road. Damage to the side of the car shows that someone forced it off the road. The researcher has vanished and his notes have been taken, but the searchers find film in the car’s trunk. Once developed, it shows a poor family slaughtering and eating a large, unidentifiable, animal with more legs than one would expect.

*Children of Light (1937-1940)*

A documentary crew begins filming life in a small planned farming community supported by

the US Department of Agriculture in the Southwest. Residents—a blend of Hispanics, Anglos, and Native Americans—are open to the visit, but their children refuse to participate. They avoid the documentary crew and hide to escape being caught on camera. If pressed, some of the children explain that a “glowing cone” warned them in dreams never to be photographed.

*Spirit Radio (1939)*

Ansell Cabell, an old man who makes a living repairing radios, claims that a set he has built is picking up secret German and Japanese transmissions. A local paper in southeastern Ohio runs a short story on him as a humor/human interest piece. Meeting the tinkerer, the investigators learn that the weird hissing voices are not speaking either language. After refining his radio, the investigators discover that the voices are describing a strange alternative version of the small town, a place where events play out in different ways and life is dominated wealthy lawyer Ansell Cabell.

*The Elder (1937-1938)*

While traveling on business in Hong Kong, the investigators meet a Chinese artist working to smuggle artifacts out of Shanghai and Guangzhou (Canton) as Japanese incursions on the mainland become more common. He’s taken a bribe to help an Australian national who appears to be in his mid sixties escape the country as well. Arranging for the man to travel back to the US when they return, the investigators learn that the stranger first arrived in Australia in the 1790s, and has been wandering Asia and the Pacific since he escaped the penal colony.

*Blackout (1941-1942)*

After the first night of a civil defense drill in New York, police find the body of an office worker drained of blood and every metal object in her apartment drawn into a twisted sphere. On the next two nights, others die as every light in the city flickers out as part of the exercise. The investigators learn that similar murders have taken place in the city’s subway tunnels, and that a city worker locked away in an asylum claims to know the truth behind the crimes.

## THE STARVING ONES (1935)

*“The state police had a devil of a time keeping it out of the papers,” Jenkins explains as he rummages through the drawers of his desk. “They had the corpse shipped to Charleston and pressured the doctor and local police to write it off as a tragedy and forget the whole thing. The way the body was mutilated it was easy to see that the poor boy had done it to himself.*

*“Insanity, despair—that’s what they said until they found more bodies.”*



### A CALL FOR HELP

The West Virginia State Police have asked federal officials to investigate a series of mysterious deaths in a small town. Because the evidence the state police forwarded to the FBI points to a sad combination of malnutrition and mental illness, the bureau bounced the request to the WPA’s human services office in Morgantown, near West Virginia University. The office’s director, Mark Jenkins, has gathered investigators from a wide range of backgrounds. Uncertain how to proceed, he has turned to characters with backgrounds in medicine, social work, and the humanities to travel to the town

and learn if the deaths are morbid coincidences, the beginning of a disease outbreak, or crimes.

Jenkins has letters of introduction from the WPA for the investigators, and a broad letter from the state police explaining that the aid agency is assisting in an investigation.

### THE PLAGUE

Jenkins has the initial police report, the doctor’s notes, and the photos and some of the note taken by the state police when they arrived two days after the body was found. A teenager who had been dared to go into an abandoned home found a dead man in the old dining room. The corpse

was shirtless and curled into the fetal position. The teenager left without disturbing anything to find the police and a doctor.

The first adults on the scene discovered that the man had brought his forearms up to his face before death. The flesh had been torn from his fingers and the palms of his hands, and large chunks had been ripped from his forearms. Blood smeared on the man's face and the later discovery of skin and muscle in his mouth proved that he had inflicted the injuries himself.

A short investigation revealed that the man was a hobo. Ejected from a train in Elkins, he had set off in the woods. The wanderer broke into at least one home during his journey, stealing a coat and some bread. He had apparently arrived in Pine Grove at night, seeking shelter in the abandoned house that overlooked the town.

Roughly two weeks after the state police removed the hobo's body, two other residents of Pine Grove were found dead. On Thursday Laura Hanford, the mother of the teen who had found the body, locked herself in a root cellar while her son was at school and her husband at work in the small post office. She smashed jars and devoured their contents, tore through a bin of potatoes, and finally began gnawing the skin from her own fingers. The state police ruled that she had choked to death on her own vomit when the fingers in her mouth had caused her to gag.

The next Monday, the owner of a small boarding house contacted the doctor because one of her residents had not left his room all weekend and was not answering the door. The doctor found Myron Johnson twisted in the blood-soaked sheets of his dead, his body mutilated in the same way as the transient. Johnson was a day laborer who had turned up in the town to help farmers with the fall harvest and butchering.

Myron Johnson's connection to the house is unclear to the police. They have refused to publically draw a connection between his death and the others, although Deputy Stubbs will privately admit to investigators that he feels Johnson died of the same cause. In reality, the day laborer visited the Gallatin house early Friday morning as he walked to the small farm where he worked. Johnson had heard rumors about the house when he first arrived in Pine Grove, and whispers connecting the hobo's death to an alleged haunting. He dismissed the suggestions of the supernatural, but felt curious about the site. Although farmer Elmer Oldaker

remembers talking to Johnson about the house on Thursday, he doesn't remember the hired hand saying anything about it on Friday, only recalling that Johnson asked to go home early because of dizziness.

## THE OTHER INVESTIGATOR

Journalist Alan Holden was waiting for a train at the Elkins station after wrapping up a series of interviews with the families of loggers. Smoking a cigarette near the office as he watched people on the platform, he saw a state police trooper speak to the manager about arranging a secure space on one of the freight cars bound for Charleston, and noticed a nervous trooper board with a lone pine box. Nosing around at the station brought no details, but an informant at state police headquarters offered vague hints that something horrific had happened up in the hills. When Holden learned that the state police had returned to investigate two more crimes, he decided to spend some time in the area.

Holden's queries about the hobo's death spooked the police, who feared how the grisly story would appear in the papers. The state police know that he has gone to Pine Grove, and the local police urged the boarding house to deny him a room. Unknowingly missing a chance to sleep near one of the death scenes, Holden bribed a widower who lives near the village to let him stay in a spare room. So far, his inquiries have only yielded a vague connection between the hobo's death and the abandoned Gallatin house that overlooks the town.

Holden's personality is a strange blend of cold shrewdness and subtle insight. His streak of selfish cynicism is tempered by a desire to help others, although his manner sometimes alienates those he wishes to aid. While many of his most successful articles of the past five years have him very close to the people of the area, he still views the people as bumpkins or research subjects. Holden's sense for an unusual story has drawn him back to the area, and he cares little about how the grisly events will reflect on the community or about the local impact of what is happening.

The people of Randolph County have a mixed view of Holden. Many praise him for the time he took getting to know area families and for the sensitivity shown by his writing; others feel that he is an outsider who is only using the area to build a name for himself. These attitudes



have filtered to Pine Grove. His personality has not endeared him to locals who have spoken to Holden directly. Although slender, his gluttonous fondness for food (a recently acquired habit) has also alienated some townspeople. If it were not for the money he received, Ezra Cobb, Holden's host, would have kicked him out of his rented room because of his aggressive habits at the table.

During his travels, Holden began carrying a .22 revolver at all times. Although he thinks of himself as cool and worldly, he will brandish the pistol if he feels threatened. His lack of practice makes him a danger to anyone nearby.

### THE COMMUNITY

Pine Grove sits nestled in the hills of central West Virginia, about fifteen miles from the nearest railroad station. Land speculators sold parcels to settlers in the 1820s by explaining that the forests could be cleared and the hillsides turned into lush, profitable, farms. The first arrivals cleared the valley where the town is located, but beyond small plots, a few herds of cattle and hogs, and a little logging, the yeoman's paradise never appeared among the steep hills.

By the Civil War, two landowners controlled most of the land in and around the town. Wyatt Gallatin's family had been involved in the first wave of speculation. He made a fortune for himself following in their footsteps.

"Modest" is the word that first comes to mind when the investigators arrive in Pine Grove. A large old house overlooks the town from a hill, and a somewhat garish stone church looms at the other end of town, but most of the homes and businesses seem rather quaint and cozy. While the residents were poorer than average during the 1920s, they have kept the town up well over the last few years, avoiding any obvious signs of distress. Most of the men who live in Pine Grove work on small farms in nearby towns or spend summers in the logging operations that spring up in the surrounding hills. Despite its relatively small size, the town has a doctor and post office, which also serves as an informal archive for the town.

Bearing a letter from the WPA office in Morgantown, the investigators receive a somewhat cordial welcome from area residents. Deputy Stubbs is happy to have help on the case, although he wishes that the state police had

lobbied harder for aid from the FBI. The rest of the townspeople—unless otherwise noted—will be cool but not hostile to the investigators. The residents of Pine Grove are generally hospitable, but the strange deaths have put them on edge.

While relieved that he has received some outside help, Stubbs will warn the WPA agents to avoid drawing too much attention to the strange nature of the deaths. In particular, he fears that any obvious exploration of the Gallatin house—the scene of the first death—will attract people to the source of a potential plague. As far as the deputy is concerned, the outsiders are in town to clear up a few details relating to natural but tragic deaths.

### THE GALLATIN HOUSE

The first victim was discovered in an abandoned house sitting on a hill overlooking Pine Grove. Deputy Stubbs will point out the house to the investigators and give the following background, but refuses to revisit the scene of the first death. Growing up in the town, Stubbs heard too many odd stories about the place, and maintains a lingering sense of dread about the large home.

The old Gallatin house has stood abandoned since its owner died in early October of 1876, three months after he allegedly killed one of his closest friends during a card game. The house is an imposing brick federal-style house (seen at the beginning of this chapter), with two main stories, a dormered attic, and a half-submerged basement. Sitting behind the house on the very crest of the hills stands an old storage shed—the only one of the original outbuildings to remain.

Wyatt Gallatin built the home when he settled in the area in the 1850s. Within the first few years of his arrival the house had become infamous for its owner's gambling, debauched parties, and efforts to manipulate the community. A slave owner, Gallatin became the only supporter of the Confederacy in the area and bitterly opposed West Virginia's secession from Virginia during the Civil War. He maintained his position in the community by opening his home to Confederate marauders, who intimidated the locals. After the war he claimed that he had been as much a hostage as the other townspeople.

Now freedmen, three of Gallatin's former slaves surprised the town when they announced that they would remain at the home after the war. Officially, they confirmed

Gallatin's story that he had been a victim of the raiders, thereby helping him avoid the gallows. Rumors circulated, though, that they had decided to stay only after learning that one of Gallatin's former slaves had been mysteriously and brutally murdered after settling in Elkins, the nearest large town.

The home became even more infamous in the years leading up to the death of Gallatin's friend, Jamison Rhodes. While Rhodes brought much money to the town and singlehandedly paid for the new church, his personal habits never appealed to the residents. His gluttony and glowering menace seemed to emerge most clearly when he spent time with Gallatin. Gallatin's parties became less raucous—although the card games never disappeared—but the lights and low atonal sounds that emanated from his house late at night showed that they continued.

The home became quieter—although more reviled—when Rhodes died. The friend's death marked a change in both Gallatin and the house. Gallatin kept to himself for the remaining months of his life, relying on his servants for food and communication while he hid away from the public. With no new offenses or disturbing incidents, rumors about the old house became less common, although the locals continued to view the house as a place of fear and wickedness.

### The First Floor

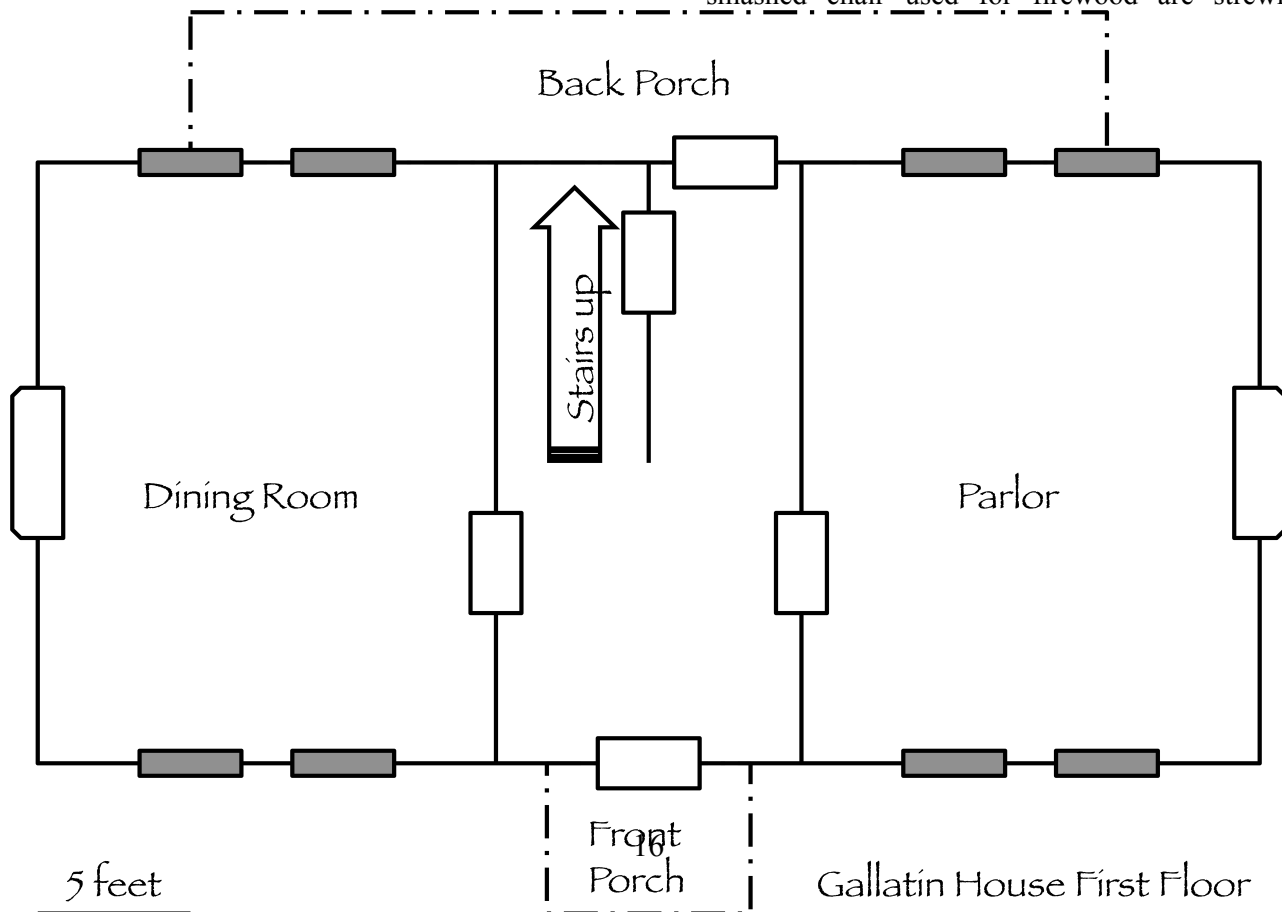
Investigators can enter through either the front or back of the house. The broad stairs and small porch on the front of the house face the town of Pine Grove and are visible during the day. Steps lead to a much larger porch in the rear which is shielded from general view. The back porch is rotting in many places, however, requiring a successful DEXx5 roll to cross safely (-15% if attempted at night). Anyone who fails the roll will suffer 1-2 points of damage as the boards give way under one of their legs.

The two entry doors face each other (creating a breezeway when the house was occupied). Stairs lead to the second floor, doubling back before they reach a small landing (making it impossible to see the top of the stairs from the first floor). A doorway opens to the old dining room, and a closed door separates the hallway from the parlor.

### The Dining Room

Especially when viewed in daylight, the dining room shows signs of recent activity. The

hobo's entry disturbed the dust that had built up over years of neglect, and the remains of a smashed chair used for firewood are strewn



around the fireplace. Signs of the police visit also appear around the room: a discarded broken pencil, sets of booted footprints, a cigar stub.

A massive oak dining table dominates the room. Five sturdy chairs remain: a heavy chair with arms at the head of the table and two dining chairs on either side. A tarnished silver candleholder remains at the center of the table, with a lone black candle literally encrusted in dust.

A large sideboard sits along one wall. Anyone forcing its doors and drawers will find moldering table linens, blue willow dishes, and tarnished silverware. Framed by two windows, a small cabinet holds an old candlebox (all the candles are off-white) and a box of cigars that have seen better days.

A disturbing painting hangs over the mantle. Through dark muted colors, the image shows satyr-like creatures dancing in a forest clearing as a woman slouches against a tree weeping. The twisted muscles, matted fur, gleaming horns, and insidious features of the fauns convey a feeling of cruelty and lust. Even though the approach to color differs radically from the paintings in the church, a scrawled signature in the right corner shows that the scene is the work of Jamison Rhodes. It costs 1D3 SAN to view the painting, 0 SAN if the roll is successful.

A closer examination of the destroyed chair will reveal that it matched the chair standing at the head of the table. The remains of the arms and two front legs show gouges worn into the wood, although they have faded with time. A Carpentry skill roll will allow an investigator to conclude that the chair was so easy to dismantle because the joints had been damaged. The one remaining joint—the intersection of a rear leg to the seat—appears very wobbly. Although the chair’s location would indicate that the hobo had intended it to fuel a fire, the grate stands empty.

### *The Parlor*

The door leading to the parlor has warped in its frame. Investigators can force it open on a STRx4 roll. The closed door and relatively intact windows have sheltered this room for fifty years. Overstuffed mohair sofas, now mildewed, sit against the north and south walls. An old piano-forte stands in one corner,

while a small table with a chess set sits on the other side of the fireplace. A drawer in the table opens to reveal several decks of cards.

A portrait hangs over the mantle. While not as overtly strange as the painting in the dining room, the callous intensity of Wyatt Gallatin’s face gives the image a wicked presence all its own.

A small cabinet along the western wall is tightly locked. A Lockpicking roll or brute force will open the ornate doors and small drawer. The drawer holds matches and black candles—more pristine than their mate in the dining room. The larger chamber houses two levels of shelves and a set of books. While most are pornographic, one is an illustrated and rather grisly history of blood sacrifice. Anyone viewing the engravings will lose 1D4/1 SAN; an investigator reading the text will lose 1D6/1D2 SAN and gain +1 in Mythos skill.

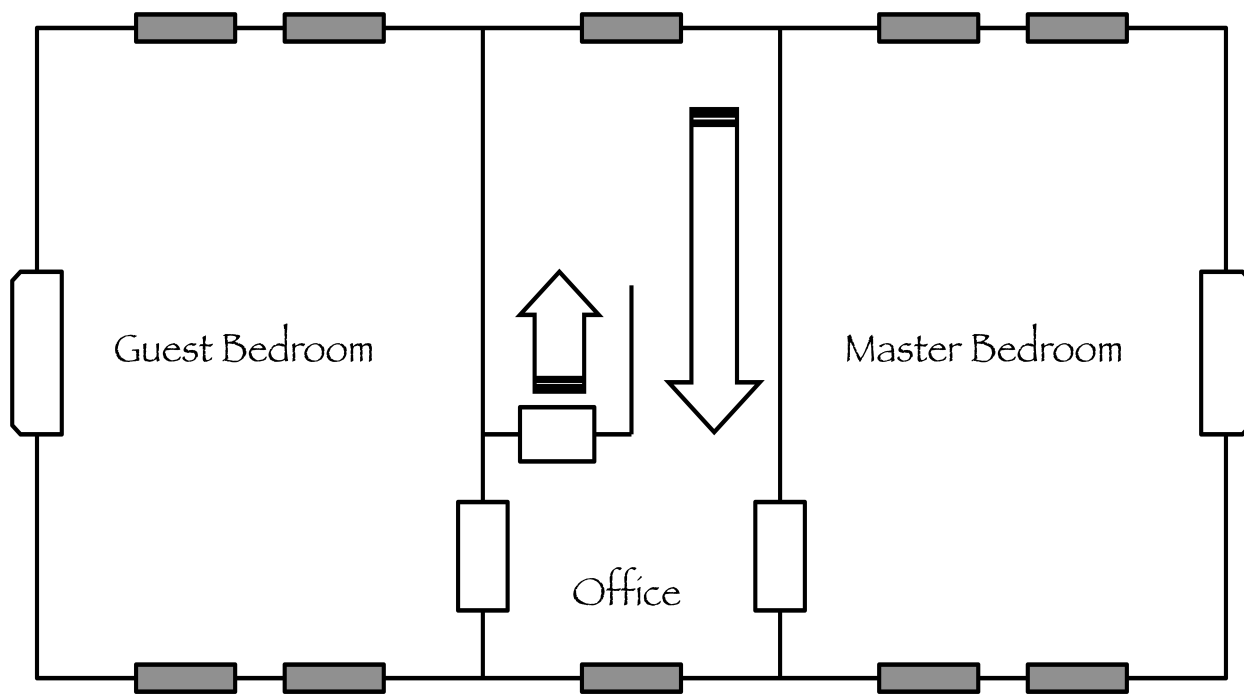
### *The Second Floor*

The stairs leading up reach a small landing halfway between floors before turning to reach the second floor. The stairs open on a broad landing with a window facing the town of Pine Grove. A low desk sits below the window, with the chair pushed back as if the owner had just left. To the east and west, ajar doors lead to bedrooms. Just before the entry to the western bedroom, a narrow door opens to reveal steep, ladder-like wooden stairs, to the attic.

While the desk holds some correspondence and financial reports, the only items of interest to the investigators are a notarized letter transferring the deed to a parcel of land in Pine Grove to Jamison Rhodes and a canceled check tucked in a pigeonhole. If the investigators have visited the church, a Know roll will reveal that the deed describes the same plot. The check for \$200 was made out to Morgan Greene in August 1871. If asked, the older residents of the town will know that Greene was the sheriff at the time.

### *The Master Bedroom*

The eastern bedroom was the lair of Gallatin himself. Moldering with age, a huge four-poster bed sits in the southeastern corner, where it



Gallatin House Second Floor

reaches from the fireplace to one of the windows. A stand holds a cracked water basin and pitcher along with a dingy round mirror and a straight razor. Trunks and an imposing wardrobe housed Gallatin's clothing.

#### *The Guest Room*

The western bedroom is relatively sparse. A small bed tucked in the corner with a nightstand and an old oil lamp, a washstand, a cheap print hanging over the mantle, and a large trunk are the only real furnishings. Investigators who are determined to search the room will find (with a Spot Hidden roll needed to see below the layer of dust) traces of black wax on the mantle, although there are no candlesticks. The print shows a hunting party surveying a forest from the crest of a hill.

#### *The Attic*

Gallatin's slaves slept in the single large room of the attic. Three south-facing dormers and small inset windows on either end of the attic admit enough light for daytime exploration. The single large room appears stark and decayed. The sleeping mats that once lined the southern wall

have mildewed and rotted. Cobwebs cover the handful of crates that served as impromptu tables and nightstands. Exposed rafters keep the investigators ducking as they move through the attic; many of the wooden surfaces are still roughly hewn. Even if visited during the day, the attic seems cold and uninviting.

A careful examination of the attic, though, will reveal a few interesting remnants.

Three nubby old pencil stubs litter the floor in the northeastern corner. An investigator looking at the unfinished walls and ceiling nearby will find scrawled messages, jokes, and observations left by the former occupants. Anyone craning his or her neck to look at the tops of the rafters and beams in this corner will see desperate scribbles.

The hidden messages are undated, but seem to fall within the last two years of the blighted house's heyday. They give veiled hints as to the nature of the parties hosted by Gallatin during his close friendship with Rhodes. Furtive references to strange music and chanting run along the beam. The writer was especially concerned about the acrid odors that accompanied the gatherings, and the deep voice that echoed throughout the house—more felt than heard—during some dark nights. Short

references to card games are interspersed with the more macabre entries.

One set of notes was written in complete darkness, and is almost unreadable. Investigators will need to pass an Idea roll to make out each entry:

1. Screaming all night—banging the chair.
2. Screaming screaming.
3. Moaning like a dog—the devil’s come for him.

The more readable script of the other messages returns in the next entry: “Made us cut him up.”

The final message is much clearer: “Gone to Hell.” A single black jab shows where the writer jammed his pencil down—almost in a stab—to create the period.

Investigators who search the entryway to the attic will find more visible signs of the growing concern of the nineteenth-century occupants. Crosses cover the side of the doorframe facing the steep wooden stairs, gouged into the wood with a knife. Although worn

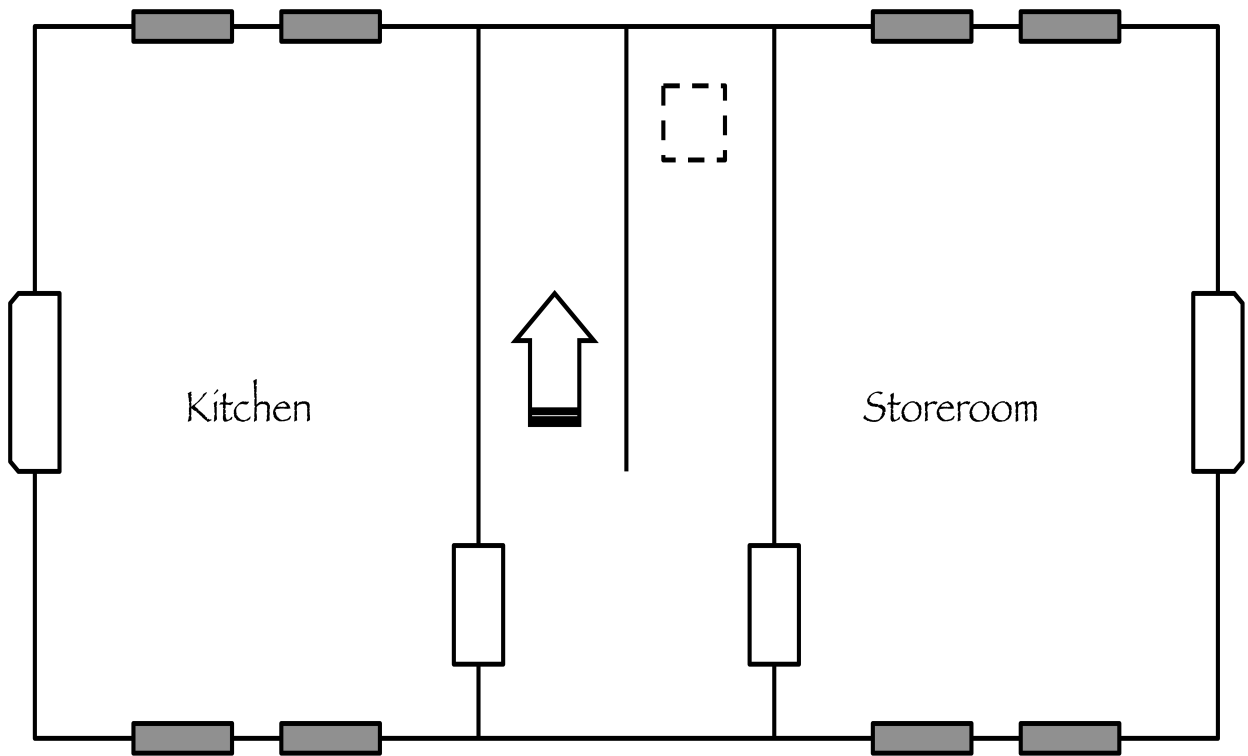
slightly by age, the forms remain clear. The space above the door appears at first glance to be bare, but a closer look reveals three iron nails—now rust-covered—driven into the lintel. The nails mark an equilateral triangle. The cold iron arranged in the sign of the Trinity was traditionally used to ward off witches or demonic influences (as can be discerned with an Occult roll or an Anthropology roll with a -20 modifier).

Beyond the carvings and hidden messages, the workers removed anything of interest from the attic when they fled the house.

### *The Basement*

The basement is divided into three large rooms. The stairs lead down to an empty windowless space, which remains almost black even in daytime. The central room stands bare except for a raised footing or foundation of some sort. The slab is about three feet square and rises about six inches above the level of the floor.

Huge hearths dominate the eastern and western rooms. These provided heat to the house, and a set of hooks and battered kitchenware show that the western room was

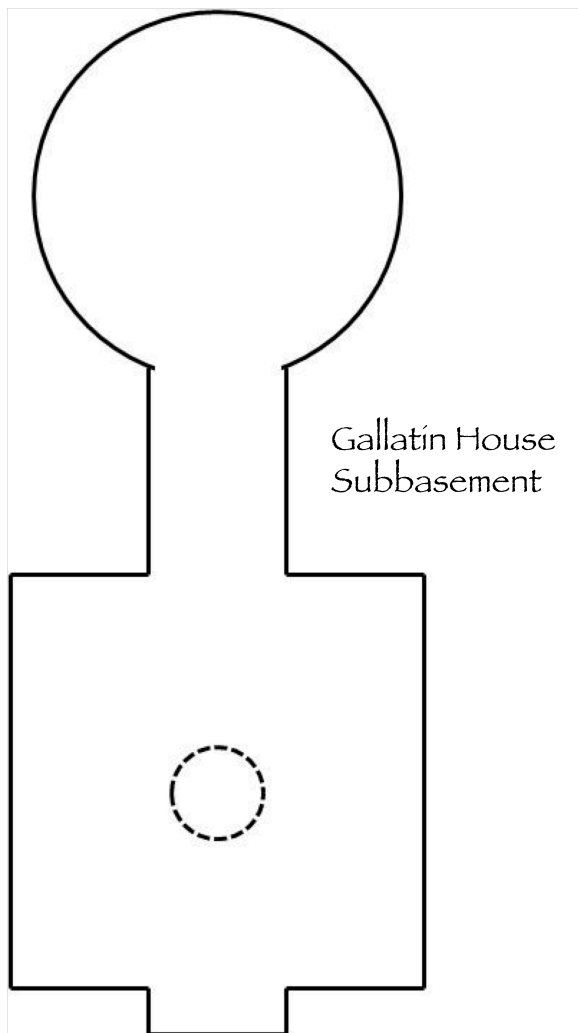


Gallatin House Basement

used for cooking. Small windows set high in the walls provide light during the day.

The eastern room appears to be an old storeroom. Decaying shelves hold tools used by a nineteenth-century household. Tossed randomly along the back wall the investigators will find chains and three rusted padlocks.

A thorough search of the central room and some tinkering with the odd foundation will reveal that the structure pivots sideways. Two investigators working in conjunction will need to make STRx5 rolls in order to move the slab far enough to access the passage it conceals. A round tunnel—about 30 inches in diameter—drops straight down. Judicious use of a flashlight will show a few crude rungs placed seemingly randomly down the shaft and a bare packed earth floor. The tunnel runs down for five feet before opening into a low room with a five foot ceiling.



### *The Subbasement*

Gallatin added the concealed subbasement shortly before the Civil War. He used the chambers to hide some of his more valuable possessions when guerillas quartered at his home during the conflict. The hidden rooms fell into disuse after the war until Gallatin and Rhodes needed a secluded place for their more offensive entertainments. The narrow shaft leading to the rooms proved problematic for Rhodes, however, whose girth made him a bit claustrophobic.

Entering from the central room of the main basement, the investigators find a square room with a low (5') ceiling. A tunnel leads to the north and a small alcove opens on the southern wall.

A few empty bottles are scattered around the room, and a small rubbish heap sits in the northeast corner. Searching through the debris will reveal a few broken human ribs.

The alcove holds the more morbid items collected by Gallatin during his friendship with Rhodes. A low shelf holds two skulls. One is plainly human, but the other has an alien, primal appearance. A heavy brow marks the upper face, and the jaw and muzzle seem elongated, with wicked-looking canine teeth dominating the face. The yellowing bone bears a design painted onto the forehead: a dull red spiral. A Natural History or Anthropology roll will determine that the skull came from a chimpanzee. Viewing the skulls costs 1D4/1 SAN.

An old hatbox rests next to the skulls. It contains a severed hand—almost mummified with age. The fingers have curled up to give the relic a claw-like appearance, and a stubby candle sprouts from the center of the palm. The sight of the strange artifact costs 1D4/1D2 SAN. Investigators with some knowledge of the occult will note the similarities between the grim trophy and the Hand of Glory described in folklore. The item allegedly gave its owner powers of concealment or made his enemies fall into a slumber.

Near to the shelf lie items not placed in the macabre gallery by Gallatin. The desiccated, shriveled bodies of mice and rats litter the floor below the human skull, and several are clustered around the skull itself on the shelf. A Biology or Natural History roll will reveal that the animals starved to death, although many of the tiny corpses show tears and bite marks where dying rodents had desperately sought sustenance.

Anyone handling the human skull will feel a faint wave of nausea and anxiety. If a CONx4 roll is failed, waves of crippling hunger wash over the unfortunate investigator. Anyone remaining near the skull for longer than a few minutes will feel the same effect. Investigators experiencing the hunger pangs lose 1D6/1D4 SAN.

Heading to the north, the passage gains height as it progresses, opening to a round room with a seven foot ceiling. Lines radiating along the floor from the center of the room divide the circle into nine portions. Timeworn inscriptions along the edge of the room give the place a ceremonial air. The words are too faded to read, although an investigator with the appropriate background will find that the fragments seem to be in a mixture of Phoenician and ancient Persian. Even more faded, the dim remnants of painted images grace the circular wall. The ceiling has been painted jet black.

The remains in the center of the room, though, dominate the scene. The mangled limbs and torso of Jamison Rhodes sit in a jumbled pile—now mostly skeletal. A Forensics or Archaeology roll will note the wicked cut marks that severed the joints. Strong-stomached investigators who search the remains will learn that the skull is missing. Gallatin severed the head when he moved the body away from the shaft, later placing the trophy on the shelf along the chimp skull. Coming across the mangled heap in the darkness of the hidden chamber costs 1D6/1D3 SAN.

The inscription around the circumference of the role is unintelligible. The surviving writings are too fragmentary to judge the nature of the text. The few remaining portions of the painting, however, yield a few clues. The images are a mishmash of astrological and geomantic diagrams combined with icons for death from various cultures. The most complete painting seems to show a robed specter—either an allegory or a depiction of some deity—looming over a city.

If the investigators disturbed the hand in the first room, their light sources will begin to fade slowly as they study the inscription and the images. Flashlights will flicker and dim slightly; the flames of lanterns or candles will twist in the still air. As the examination reaches the most complete image, the lights fail completely. An orange glow emanates from down the corridor: the candle in the hand burns brightly. The

realization that the relic is alight costs 1D6/1D2 SAN.

As the party turns to face the candle, a quick shape flits in front of the light. A dimensional shambler—summoned decades ago to do the bidding of Gallatin and Rhodes—has returned to investigate the violation of the unholy shrine. The creature will wait in the first room for 10-15 seconds before moving to the circular room—its long arms dragging on the packed earth as it lopes down the corridor. The candle provides enough light to silhouette the shambler, allowing the investigators to fight it without penalty.

Due to the poor lighting, anyone seeing the beast as it moves down the hallway or engages the investigators in the second room will gain a +15% bonus to their SAN roll. More proactive investigators who rush into the first room will gain a better view of its unsettling form and face normal SAN loss of 1D10 points if the roll fails, no loss if the roll is successful.

#### Dimensional Shambler

STR: 17  
 CON: 17  
 SIZ: 15  
 INT: 6  
 POW: 9  
 DEX: 14  
 Hit Points: 16  
 Move: 7  
 Weapon: Claw (30%) 1D8+1D4  
 Armor: Thick skin (3)

#### AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

When the investigators emerge from the basement, they hear someone whistling a Cole Porter song behind the house. Alan Holden steps forward as the investigators leave the house, greeting the explorers in a friendly yet slightly condescending way. After a few moments of small talk, he will offer to compare notes about the odd events that plague the town.

Holden knows that the events started at the Gallatin house, although his fear of a possible plague and some of the eerie stories he has heard have given even the jaded newspaperman pause. He has been keeping a close eye on the site, however, and made his way to the house when he realized that the investigators had entered the building. He will begin by trying to bargain information—implying that he knows more about

the story than he actually does. As he works to feel out what the investigators have discovered, he will also try to get them to reenter the house, serving as guides as he explores the doomed chambers.

If the party fought the shambler, the depth of the basement would have prevented Holden from hearing any gunfire, although injuries will immediately draw his eye. If Holden sees that an investigator is injured, he will quickly offer to escort the party to the local doctor, peppering the group with questions the whole way and even interviewing them in the waiting room of the small office. While this will prevent Holden from pressuring the party to immediately return to the house, he will urge them to visit with him as soon as possible.

Returning to the house with Holden, the investigators find everything as they left it. With care they can steer the reporter away from some of the more macabre or unusual discoveries, although Holden has a good sense for when he is being manipulated (-15% to Fast Talk rolls). The hidden entrance to Gallatin's subbasement should be easy to conceal from the reporter—unless the investigators make any major blunders. In the investigators' favor, Holden will show little interest in the dilapidated shack on the hill behind the Gallatin house.

While similar on the surface, the two visits have drastically different consequences. Holden noses through the rooms of the house looking for anything sensational to give his article color and gore while continuing a barrage of questions aimed at understanding the nature of the doom that has befallen Pine Grove. The more time the reporter spends in the house, the less convinced he becomes that some kind of plague has struck the town, although he has no alternative explanation for what has happened.

In the dining room, Holden hovers over every inch of the death scene, asking investigators even more detailed questions while berating them for tracking around the key locale. He picks through the shattered wreckage of the chair as he tries to reconstruct the hobo's last minutes, then lies down near the old fireplace. Observing the room from the floor, he plots the wording of his report. As he rattles through a melodramatic description of the old dining room and the town he muses on the nature of suffering caused by the Depression.

Holden will leave the scene when he is convinced that there is nothing more of value to

his story. If the investigators show him the subbasement, he will rush from point to point viewing the strange tableau. Approaching the human skull, he feels none of the strange effects experienced by the investigators during their initial exploration, although the grisly trophy continues to have the same influence on others.

## THE UNMARKED GRAVE

The doctor summoned to aid Gallatin in his final hours left no written record of what he saw. Doctor Malon duly attributed the man's death to "divine visitation," a judgment not questioned by the county clerk who accepted the death certificate.

Having witnessed the occult rituals practiced by Gallatin and Rhodes, the freedmen who had remained at the house feared leaving Gallatin's body above ground after his death. They removed the floorboards in a small storage building behind the house. Working through the night by the light of flickering lanterns, they dug a deep, narrow grave. The men interred Gallatin, then carefully replaced the floor over the course of the next day. They fled to other parts of the state soon thereafter.

Battered by the years, the small shed still stands on the slope rising behind the Gallatin house. The tools used during the unusual burial remain scattered around the interior of the shack: shovels, hammers, a crow bar, and two battered lanterns. Damage to the floorboards (as revealed by Spot Hidden, Forensics, or Carpentry) show that they were pried aside years ago.

The somewhat unusual nature of Gallatin's burial will require a successful Archaeology or Forensics roll to avoid damaging the corpse. The workers buried the old man standing upright, with a small silver cross draped around his neck. As investigators remove the earth to reveal Gallatin's form, they will find a thin, leathery, cadaver. The intervening years have obliterated evidence of many of the self-inflicted injuries, but a Diagnose Disease, First Aid, or Forensics skill roll will allow viewers to identify tears in the flesh on Gallatin's forearms. More visibly, the teeth appear chipped and two are missing. The unnatural position of the corpse will cost investigators 1D3/1 SAN, anyone who understands the nature of the mutilation will lose an additional 1D3/1 SAN.

The small shed stands behind the house, out of sight of the town. If the investigators open



the grave during the day, there is a chance that they will be seen from the town (an event avoided with a Luck roll). If they leave the grave open after their visit, there is a 30% chance that Holden will find it when he is nosing around the property. If the investigators tell Deputy Stubbs about the discovery the lawman will quietly destroy the remains.

## THE ORIGINAL VICTIMS

The clues found in the Gallatin house hint at the fates of Jamison Rhodes and Wyatt Gallatin and their connection to the events of 1935. The two had become close friends soon after Rhodes arrived from England soon after the war. The migrant's sybaritic interest in the occult gave Gallatin a new focus for his wicked energies and helped lift his spirits after the scandals that followed the Civil War.

Gallatin turned on his new comrade, however. After murdering Rhodes, he ordered the freedmen who had remained in the house to cut up the body and toss the remains into the subbasement. Gallatin took the pieces to the old ritual chamber, where he severed the head and stripped the skull.

Although the crime seemed to satiate Gallatin's hunger for cruelty, it marked the beginning of his last days. Within a few months of his former friend's murder, Gallatin died mysteriously and the freedmen hid his remains. Based on the condition of his corpse and information and photos related to the new cases, it is obvious that Gallatin was the first victim of the blight that threatens Pine Grove.

## THE PINE GROVE RECORD

A backroom in the post office houses the entire run of a small weekly paper that began publication during the political debates of the 1850s and finally disappeared during the economic uncertainty of the 1890s. The owner of the *Pine Grove Record* understood the realities of life in the tiny town well enough to avoid openly discussing the problems created by Gallatin and Rhodes. A careful search, however, will reveal a few articles whose true significance escaped the wary managing editor.

A series of articles from the early 1870s detail Rhodes' involvement in the construction of the new church. Portrayed as a benefactor, the stories make no reference to the strange

conditions he placed on his gift to the town. One article, dated mid April 1872, describes a Methodist bishop arriving to consecrate the church and cemetery after much prodding from Rhodes. "It'll have to do, but at least we made it in time," Rhodes apparently said at the event.

Later articles, in a gossipy effort to fill space, mention Rhodes' fondness for strolling through the little churchyard. A successful Library Use roll will reveal a letter Rhodes sent to the editor in which he proclaims his desire to enjoy his privacy in the scenic hamlet. The articles stop soon thereafter.

A short obituary dated July 22, 1876 mentions that Rhodes died at the home of a friend. Beyond a short reference to the world travels that brought him from his native Cornwall to West Virginia, and the benevolence shown to the church and community, the obituary provides little information. It lists no cause of death, nor does it include information about a funeral or next of kin.

References to Gallatin are even more circumspect. The paper records his death on October 4, 1876, but gives no cause. A somewhat terse obituary describes him as the prominent landowner in Pine Grove and vaguely mentions that he played an important role in the town's history. A survey of articles from the autumn of 1876 reveals no information about funeral arrangements or next of kin.

## THE WITNESSES

Gallatin and Rhodes met unnatural, unholy, ends. The doctor who saw Gallatin's body died long ago. The three freedmen who were first-hand witnesses of the pair's evil fled the area and died years later. Some residents of the town, however, have direct experience with Gallatin and Rhodes, and remember the months leading up to their deaths. Most of the witnesses were children at the time, and their memories have been influenced by childhood perceptions and information received from their parents.

Finding people with living memories of Gallatin and Rhodes will prove easy, although convincing them to talk depends on the tack taken by the investigators. The local police, post master, and Reverend Parsons will all be able to name people in the community known for their memories of the dark days. The elders will be unwilling to talk to outsiders, though, fearing the motives of visitors and the possible damage their

sensational memories could do to their hometown.

This reluctance can work to the favor of the PCs. The tenor of Holden's questions and the somewhat smarmy tone of his personality have alienated the older members of the community. In fact, his earlier articles about the effects of the Depression on the area have raised their hackles. Written in a fairly balanced style, the older generation sees the pieces as sensationalistic rubbish that highlight problems the community could handle on its own. If the investigators can approach the surviving witnesses through a local whom they respect, or convince them that they are working to protect the town and will keep the information secret, they will be able to piece together more of the abandoned house's story.

Elvin Kaiser was born in Pine Grove in 1860. His earliest memories include hiding in a crawlspace below his childhood home as Confederate guerillas based at Gallatin's mansion prowled the town looking for supplies. As a boy he picked up rumors about the house from friends and an older brother. Kaiser also has a few personal memories of Gallatin's troubled relationship with the town after the war.

Eva Tenney's father moved to the town after the war to claim a house that had belonged to his brother—one of the victims of Gallatin's guests. Then twenty years old, she followed and secured a job as teacher in the small school that served Pine Grove. Tenney actually visited Gallatin's home to invite the former slaves to attend classes, and also has clear memories of Gallatin's ominous friendship with Rhodes. Now ninety years old, Eva remains a matriarch in the community.

John Marsden's family lived within sight of the Gallatin house. Four years younger than Elvin Kaiser, Marsden grew up with the weird droning strains of Rhodes' rituals drifting through the night air. An old rumor circulating in the town blames the strange goings on for the alcoholism that plagued Marsden's father until his suicide in 1875.

From the survivors, the investigators will gain a clearer picture of Gallatin's evil. The two men who grew up in the community both remember being ordered to stay inside at night by their parents, and have vague recollections of someone or something sniffing and scratching at their shuttered windows on nights when Rhodes and Gallatin held their more ominous revels. John Marsden has more vivid impressions.

When he was ten, he peered through a crack in a shutter one foggy morning and saw something loping up the hill to the infernal house. It "ran with its arms," he explains, stooping and scampering in a weird caper. If pressed, he will admit that his father also saw the creature at least twice.

According to Elvin Kaiser, Marsden's father may have seen it on the night he committed suicide, when he came home late from helping a family frame a house. Deathly pale, he staggered through the door of his small home whispering "It touched me." Although he seemed more settled by the time the family went to bed, he slit his wrists with a straight razor sometime during the night.

Marsden also shares an incident that has puzzled him for decades. From his family home, he heard Rhodes's drunken voice calling for more food during a card game. While common enough, a strange silence settled on the Gallatin house after about half an hour. The next morning, he heard Rhodes's Cornish accent yelling "Turn me loose, damn you!" The shouting continued for the rest of the day—threats and begging alternating—until Marsden's mother took her children to stay with her parents for about two weeks.

Kaiser remembers seeing the freedmen fleeing the town—the only person who saw their escape. The teenager had gotten drunk at a farmers' house where he was helping with the harvest. Making his way back to Pine Grove, he saw the three men just at dawn, walking along with road with shattered expressions on their faces. He clearly remembers the streaks of dirt on freedman Thomas Underwood's arms and face.

Eva Tenney remains active and mentally vigorous despite her age—blessings she attributes to her fondness for dandelion tea. Gallatin and Rhodes reveled in their strange status: outsiders who had to be respected due to wealth and their aura of menace. She will tell the investigators openly that Rhodes was "in league with the devil" and that Gallatin picked up his friend's fondness for the occult. However, she mentions that despite Gallatin's respect for his friend's evil knowledge and Rhodes's sense of connection to Gallatin, the two often argued. Gallatin hated Rhodes's immense girth, and often insulted his friend in front of others. He also complained bitterly about the amount of food Rhodes consumed during their many card games.

Eva encountered the pair in the Pine Grove general store soon before the fateful night (In fact, Eva met Rhodes and Gallatin the afternoon of Rhodes' death, although she will not mention the fact to the investigators since she is not entirely certain). Seeing the pair bickering more the normal, she heard Gallatin joke that "a bit of starvation" would do his friend some good.

## THE PINE GROVE METHODIST CHURCH

At first glance, the church strikes the investigators as stately and perhaps a little grand for the small community. Sandstone blocks make up the main body, and a wooden steeple rises dramatically overhead. The building has been a centerpiece for the town since it opened in the early 1870s, and the high point of the steeple is visible from the hills for miles around Pine Grove.

Reverend Sheldon Parsons currently has charge of the church. A native of the state capital, Charleston, Parsons attended a seminary in Buckhannon, about thirty miles away from Pine Grove, and fell in love with this region of the state. Personable and talented, he quickly endeared himself to the townspeople.

Through his discussions with witnesses, Parsons knows more about the strange deaths than most people in town other than the doctor and deputy. The incidents—which he assumes—are an outbreak of a virulent yet entirely natural disease—have saddened the minister deeply. He will help the investigators in any way that seems reasonable. Unfortunately for the investigators, he views the town's unusual past as a blend of superstition and an exaggerated reaction to the horrors of the Civil War. He honors Rhodes as the eccentric yet well-intended benefactor of the church, and will avoid repeating any of the more outré tales he has heard about Gallatin or his British friend.

Responding to the letter of introduction from the WPA, Parsons will gladly meet with the investigators at the church. If asked about the building's background, he will mention that an English immigrant donated the funds for the building in the 1870s—leaving Rhodes unnamed. He will also give the party a brief tour of the sanctuary, pointing out details and discussing the style of the pews and other furnishings, and mentioning some entertaining but banal items of the site's history. He will not show investigators

beyond a small door opening beside the choir stand unless explicitly asked.

If investigators explore the area behind the sanctuary, they will find four black-draped paintings hanging in the narrow hallway. Rhodes created the watercolors in the 1860s. He told the board of trustees that he would only finance the church's construction if they agreed to display the works. The trustees reluctantly agreed, hanging them in the little-used hallway and finally covering them after Rhodes died. Parsons will unveil them if the investigators have specifically asked about Rhodes, but will not mention them unless asked if the PCs are just touring the church. Before pulling aside the coverings, he will sternly warn the investigators that the style is unusually vivid and will refuse to show the paintings to a female investigator unless she makes a Persuade roll.

The paintings appear bland and lifeless at first, especially due to the drab use of color. However, the vaguely unnatural backgrounds and the angular yet contorted human forms have an unnerving effect on anyone who views them for more than a moment.

"The Wages of Sin" depicts a man fleeing in terror through a dense forest as a robed figure stands solemnly in the distance. The man's face is partially turned as if trying to look over his shoulder while running, revealing an expression of absolute desperation. A deep cowl conceals the robed figure's features.

Parsons explains that the second painting shows the Resurrection of Lazarus. It shows a robed figure, his features again concealed by an oddly draped cowl, standing on an outcropping of rocks in the midst of a long forgotten cemetery. A bony arm is lifted in the air in a gesture of command, the hand bent back awkwardly at the wrist. A shrouded figure pulls itself out of the rocks, the shroud falling away to reveal heavily muscled arms.

The third and fourth works strike the investigators as the most disturbing. "The Healing of the Blind Beggar," according to Parsons, the image shows the same hooded figure standing above a man writhing on the ground while clutching his eyes. The agony of the man seems almost photographic, despite the strange style of the painting. Even though a cowl again conceals the standing man's features, the painting conveys a sense of bemused aloofness.

Parsons tells the investigators that the final painting depicts divine punishment befalling



the Philistines for stealing the Ark of the Covenant. Thin—almost skeletal—figures writhe on the ground as a strange light falls from the sky. An Idea, History, or Theology roll will reveal an obvious problem with the explanation given by Parsons: the painting does not depict anything recognizable as the Ark.

If investigators make an Idea roll while viewing the paintings, they will notice that only the first, “The Wages of Sin,” has a small brass plaque with the title affixed to the frame. Parsons will explain that it was indeed the only one of the four to receive a title from Rhodes, but that a minister determined the nature of the scenes in the other paintings in the 1890s.

A rope hangs almost to the floor at one end of the rear hallway, falling parallel to a simple ladder. Investigators who explore the steeple in daylight hours will find the bell housed in a small open chamber, about six feet square. Etched into the sills overlooking the town and surrounding hills are crude, almost pictographic characters. The inscriptions are in a variant of Phoenician. Any investigator capable of reading them will find a mix of astrological references and seasonal invocations.

A nighttime visit to the steeple offers a radically different view. While darkness renders the strange inscriptions almost invisible even to a lantern or flashlight, they will glow faintly in the hours between midnight and three in the morning. The faint blue-purple light flickers on the edge of perception, and seems to be an optical illusion. Anyone seeing the unnatural light will lose 1D4/1 SAN.

Beyond viewing the strange legacies left by Jamison Rhodes, a meeting with Parsons will flesh out the basic information investigators already possess. Parsons did not see the interior of the Gallatin house, but he did visit the death scenes of Laura Hanford and Myron Johnson. The “brain fever” had a horrible effect, Parsons will assure his audience. He absolutely believes that Johnson died of the same disease, but the question of transmission troubles him greatly.

As the meeting ends, Parsons will warn the team about Holden’s investigation. The minister worries that newspaper stories will bring umbrage on the small town and dishonor the dead. On a more practical level, he fears that the reporter’s visits to sites associated with the strange deaths will lead to him developing the disease.

## *The Churchyard*

A small graveyard lies on top of a hill behind the church. Parsons will explain that it is another bequest of Rhodes, who personally planned its location and invited a bishop from Wheeling to consecrate the ground. The stones cover a wide range of years, including a few veterans of the Revolution whose graves were moved to the site by their families. In one corner, a low stone sits shaded by boxwoods. The grave of Jamison Rhodes lists his date of birth and describes him as a “gentleman from Cornwall.” The marker lists no date of death.

The weathered stone holds clues about Rhodes’ background and arcane interests. Although worn, the investigators can still see relief carvings of frogs decorating the stone. A Theology or Occult roll will reveal that the beasts symbolize uncleanness. A more ominous—and less recognizable—symbol is centered below the inscription: the Yellow Sign (identifiable on an Occult roll at -20 or a Mythos roll). Seeing the sign costs 1/0 SAN; recognizing the dire glyph costs 1D3/1 SAN. Despite Rhodes’ vanity, the monument does include an engraving of a shoe hidden amongst the frogs (seen on a Spot Hidden roll)—a reference to his cobbler father.

## LIFTING THE CURSE

As the investigators have pieced together, Rhodes viewed his time in Pine Grove as a sort of demonic holiday, twisting the locals to his interests whenever possible. The ruthless and sybaritic Gallatin saw the strange rituals as another form of amusement—a bloody adventure to help him forget the losses he suffered during the war.

Although the two seemed natural allies, Rhodes found Gallatin dull and provincial while the Englishman’s gluttony became a target for Gallatin and his vanity offended the lord of Pine Grove. Gallatin intentionally chose the subbasement as a lair for their rituals, knowing that the entry was uncomfortably narrow for Rhodes. This tension reached a breaking point during one of the pair’s card games, when Rhodes’s appetite seemed to grow in pace with his winnings.

As the evening wore on, Rhodes mocked Gallatin’s losses and bellowed for more food and whiskey. When Rhodes sank into a drunken, gluttonous, stupor, Gallatin ordered his servants

to chain him to his chair. He remained there until he starved to death—cursing Gallatin the whole time. During his struggle to free himself, Rhodes rocked back and forth in the chair, his bulky form straining the carpentry as the chain wore into the wood.

Gallatin paced throughout his home during his friend's long, nightmarish death, inwardly anxious about Rhodes' dying ravings. His mood lifted when Rhodes finally fell silent. Ordering the servants to cut up the body and dump it in the ceremonial chamber, Gallatin believed he had put his fears—and his relationship with the occultist—behind him.

The malediction struck about eighty days later. Awakened by Gallatin's screams, the servants ran down the stairs to find him tearing through some leftover food sitting on the dining room table. Biting through meat and bone as he ate the cold food, Gallatin shattered some of his teeth before rushing to attack the servants. The three escaped the dining room, holding onto the doorknob to prevent Gallatin from getting near. Trapped alone, Gallatin's appetite forced him to turn on himself.

Gallatin wasted away and his servants fled, seemingly ending the curse. When a hobo entered the home and smashed the chair where Rhodes had died to start a fire, however, the curse returned to the town. It spread slowly from person to person, affecting people who had some contact with the home or the bodies and who were driven by some inner hunger.

The magical effect strikes one person at a time, driving them mad with an all-consuming hunger while wasting their bodies away in a matter of hours. The skull hidden away in the subbasement of the Gallatin house creates a similar effect, although victims can escape its influence by leaving it alone if they are able.

The spell had faded into the background once again until Holden explored the dining room. Stretched on the floor, the reporter allowed his lust for fame and recognition to outweigh his concern for the death that had taken place in the house. The malediction began slowly, gnawing through the reporter's being as he worked the story into something sensational.

When Holden realizes what has happened, he locks himself in his rented bedroom and calls for farmer Cobb to find the investigators. By the time the group arrives, Holden accepts the fact that he has little time left.

Visibly wasting away, he demands an honest explanation of what is happening.

In the doomed man's presence, the investigators do not feel any ill effects or the same unnatural cravings they experienced if they handled the skull. Holden himself is more of a danger. Almost skeletal, his body appears tense and surprisingly energetic as he lies in bed. Only his astounding willpower has kept Holden from trying to consume his own body; investigators who approach too closely must make a Luck roll in order to avoid being grabbed. If Holden snags one of the investigators, a STR versus STR resistance roll (against Holden's STR of 10) will allow the victim to break free before Holden bites for 1 damage.

As the investigators tell all or part of the story, Holden's breathing becomes more labored as he struggles to pay attention. When they finish, he will offer an account of the curse. Before visiting the Gallatin house with the investigators, Holden had tracked down many of the people connected to the first deaths, although they refused to answer his questions about details of the cases. Their reticence only made him more determined to learn what had happened and expose the nightmare of Pine Grove in the most sensational way possible.

Holden admits that he began eating more than normal soon after he arrived in Pine Grove, and that he often felt a gnawing emptiness. This strange feeling began as a slight anxiety and dizziness, then grew into a constant hunger and sense of longing. The most dramatic effects, however, began the evening after Holden stretched on the floor to see the room from the perspective of the hobo. Settling down with his host, Holden plunged into dinner, shoveling food into his mouth as the widower looked on in horror. Seeing Cobb's reaction, Holden fled to his room and locked himself inside.

The skull holds the key to unraveling the curse. If the investigators have handled it, they will know that it produces an effect exactly like the symptoms described by Holden. Gallatin salvaged the ghoulish trophy from the dismembered remains of his former friend. Sitting on the shelf, it became a focus for his callousness and for the energy unleashed by Rhodes' curse. The skull, ironically, connected Gallatin to the evil force of Rhodes' spell more efficiently (if the investigators are thinking along these lines, an Anthropology or Occult roll will allow them to make a firm connection).

The investigators need to separate the skull from the site that was a focus for so much of Rhodes' evil. Removing the skull (and any other remains) from the subbasement and interring them in the cemetery at the Pine Grove Church seems the most direct way of breaking the curse. While Reverend Parsons and the local police will be supportive of this plan, any visible effort to bury the remains will rouse the interests of the locals. As their curiosity spreads, the dark legends about Rhodes and Gallatin will be given new life. Although the investigators will leave Pine Grove feeling they have solved the problem, the return of a more expansive version of the

curse will lead the Army to quietly relocate the survivors from the town and raze the buildings.

As an alternative, they can remove the remains and make certain that they fall beyond the ken of humanity. Traveling deep into the hills that surround Pine Grove, investigators can abandon the remains or bury them, leaving them to crumble into dust as the memory of Rhodes and his evil fades.

## TO THE DUST RETURNED (1935)

*Her parents rushed through the small house, slamming shutters against the coming storm. Eliza watched her sister Christina tear strips from a tattered dress and cram them in the chinks around the door and windows. As the wind picked up, the family huddled against an interior wall, a flickering lantern growing brighter as the sun disappeared.*

*The first blast of wind howled around the crude house, straining the frame as its fury rose and fell. Eliza felt her parents tense as she clenched her eyes shut. The wind rose again, before settling into a dull roar.*

*As her family clung together, Eliza opened her eyes. A stream of dust blew between the cloth strips below the door, illuminated by an electric blue light. Something scratched at the creaking window frame.*



### JUST PASSIN' THROUGH

The last few days of travel have taken their toll on the investigators. Whether WPA employees, journalists, academics, or random wanderers, they have found themselves bumping along the narrow, featureless, roads of the northern Plains. Driven by personal or professional reasons, they have entered southern South Dakota, where a small town offers respite from drifting dust and

the monotony of travel. Asking around town, the investigators find a family willing to offer a room for a few nights.

### THE COMMUNITY

Rose Blossom, South Dakota, lies among wind-swept hills punctuated by rugged gullies and a few patches of trees. The small farming town was hit hard by the slump of the 1920s, and the beginning of the Depression saw most of the



teens and young adults hit the roads for better prospects. The town makes a dubious living by selling alcohol to dry counties nearby, including one twenty miles to the south in Nebraska. The dust storms sweeping up from south have grown worse over the past two years, hitting the town hard each summer and spring. Beginning in the spring of 1935, the storms have disrupted telegraph and phone lines passing through the town, and often block the few roads that wind away from the small community.

As the storms became more severe, life in the town has become more tense and claustrophobic. The swirling dust has entombed the town, blocking sight of the horizon and dimming the sun. Families shelter in their homes, haunted looks darting between parents and children as storms lash the town. Domestic animals have disappeared, running away to escape the supernatural danger hidden in the swirling dust. Although friends and neighbors remain cordial, the stress of the town's entrapment occasionally breaks through, leading to fights or arguments.

## THE STORMS

1935 marked the worst year for dust storms in South Dakota. The ominous clouds appeared over Rose Blossom in April. By the end of the month, the darkness they caused and difficulty keeping roads cleared led the school board to cancel classes and caused life in the town to come to a complete standstill on some days.

The non-supernatural storms of the Dust Bowl present spectacular displays. Huge columns of sand, grit, and dust loom on the horizon. The last rays of sun to light the sky before the clouds overtake the world cast strange colors in the flying dust. Seething shades of green, blue, and purple appear in the clouds—fascinating observers as they flee the approaching storms. Any investigator who sees a natural storm approach must make either a Luck or Idea roll to avoid remaining in place for 30-60 seconds to watch the cloud. PCs or NPCs trapped in a storm must roll against CONx4 to escape inhaling dust or having grit blow into their eyes. Temporarily blinded or choked by dust, the physical skills of investigators are reduced by half for 1D4+1 minutes. Investigators who suffer from claustrophobia or a fear of darkness will lose 1D4/1D2 SAN when confronted by a storm.

The majesty of the storms disappears as soon as the first waves of dust hit. The billowing dust gets into everything—including the most carefully sealed rooms—and creates unbelievable problems. Cars stall as dust chokes the engines, hospitals cancel surgeries as thin layers of dust settle on medical instruments. On a larger level, dust drifts in dunes across the landscape, blocking roads and trapping families inside homes. The closest thing the people on the Plains had experienced had been the brutal, sudden, blizzards of the 1880s that appeared on a clear February day to decimate the region.

Investigators who have not spent time in areas directly affected by the Dust Bowl will find the Plains an alien place. Even though some of the larger storms sent dust as far as Washington DC and Philadelphia, the crushing tides of dust are impossible for outsiders to imagine.

## ARRIVING IN ROSE BLOSSOM

The small Plains town sits just across the border from Nebraska at the intersection of minor rural highways. Rose Blossom could draw the investigators for many reasons. Case workers and relief officials could visit the town as part of a tour of areas affected by the Depression; radicals could find examples of economic injustice in the area; journalists and documentarians could be nosing around the blighted area looking for a new story. The community's proximity to two Sioux reservations could draw academics, authors, or artists.

Hobo investigators will find Rose Blossom a particular challenge, although they will ultimately have greater insights into the eldritch doom facing the town. As discussed under the description of the local police, area officers have become violent towards sons of the road. Hobos with a stealthy step or a silver tongue will be able to elude the police or find refuge with a friendly family, although the threat of arrest or violence will hang over their heads during the adventure.

No matter how the investigators arrive in Rose Blossom, they will find themselves in the home of the Arleth family. Kelvin Arleth is a retired minister who spent several years working with schools on nearby reservations to record Sioux culture; Catherine Arleth served as a nurse in Chicago's Hull House before marrying Kelvin and moving to the Plains. The couple's connections outside of the area and their inborn



empathy make them natural friends of investigators new to the region.

Gathered around the dinner table, the elderly couple will give investigators an overview of life in Rose Blossom. Life in the small town has become more interesting and challenging in recent weeks. The couple will warn outsiders to steer clear of Police Chief Earl, who has become taciturn and possibly violent as he sees the community overwhelmed by the Depression and Dust Bowl. In this background of disaster and strained authority, another challenge has emerged to the stability of the town. Kelvin will shake his head as he describes the local celebrity: a teenage minister whose ramblings have moved from amusing to fantastic. Kelvin and Catherine originally thought the boy, Caleb Ekes, amusing but now find menace in the odd appeal he holds for some members of the community. On a brighter note, the couple will mention (if any of the investigators has an academic or scientific background) that the USDA has sent someone to set up a lab in the town. While the two have only met Jennings Anderson in passing and do not know the details of his research, they found him to be a pleasant young man. Catherine hopes that the project will bring more attention and aid to the area.

Neither Catherine nor Kelvin will mention the more unusual aspects of the storms to the newcomers. Although they are aware of the concern about missing animals, they feel that panic has led the townspeople to exaggerate something with a perfectly rational cause. Kelvin will briefly mention Caleb's claims about strange dreams and visions, but views the whole thing as a dangerous attempt to get attention. Surprisingly, both Kelvin and Catherine have had strange dreams related to the storm, but both dismiss the experiences as normal nightmares.

Nor will the couple mention the unfortunate vagrant who arrived in Rose Blossom unless the investigators are hobos (see The Police Station below). Given Earl's personality they suspect what happened, although they have not even discussed the outcome of the incident between themselves.

Over the course of the conversation, the sky quickly darkens outside. Kelvin and Catherine continue to play the roles of gracious hosts, but both seem wary of the changing weather, casting glances toward the windows and seeming ill at ease. Before showing the PCs to the small spare bedroom, the Arleths will ask

their help in sealing the house. The couple crams old rags into crevices around doors and windows, and hangs heavy blankets over the frames.

## THE DREAM

The night of the first storm, secretly roll against the investigator's Dreaming skill or Idea score. The investigator who makes the roll by the greatest margin (or misses by the least amount if your players are unlucky) will have an intense dream.

If the roll was barely passed (or missed), the dream will appear vivid but chaotic. The investigator will find him or herself on the flagstones of a busy square at noon. The city appears fantastic—like something from the Arabian nights or the travels of Marco Polo—and bustles with people wearing exotic beautiful silks and ornate jewelry. Despite the constant crowded movement and the din of the scene, the investigator feels cold and empty.

More moderate success in the roll will allow the investigator to see that he or she is trying to reach out to the people in the scene, but that they are intentionally turning their backs. The dreamer seems to be asking for help.

A very successful roll reveals a different scene. The square stands abandoned although brightly lit by moonlight reflecting off of the alabaster walls. The dreamer drags himself to the fountain. Hoof beats echo on the flagstones as the dreamer cups water in his hands to drink.

The dreamer turns to find a man riding to the fountain. He wears intricate chainmail armor under a flowing silk cloak, and a spired metal helm glistens in the moonlight. The warrior rides straight toward the dreamer, pulling his horse up indignantly when the dreamer does not move out of the way.

“My horse thirsts, slattern.”

The dreamer still does not move. The mounted man draws a tulwar and brandishes it in the air. At the site of the blade, the dreamer speaks in a hollow yet firm voice.

“You're blind. You're asleep—all of you.”

The dream ends with these words. Anyone who listens to the third version of the dream and makes a Psychology roll will feel that the narrative seems too connected and too

focused to be a normal dream. Later nights spend in Rose Blossom will find haunting images of a ruined city with disquieting clumps of vines growing on some buildings. If the investigators mention the strange dreams to the Arleths, the couple eventually confess that they had similar nightmares.

#### EXPLORING ROSE BLOSSOM

The next morning, the investigators find the sun shining over a dry land. Dust dunes spread across the Arleth homestead, and Kelvin has already headed outside to clear a path out of his small garage. He offers to give the investigators a ride into town when he heads to the post office, giving them a chance to get a closer look at the community.

A single long street dominates the town. At one end of town sit a church and small high school; city hall and a police station/post office mark the terminus of Main Street. Small businesses and a few residences line the avenue, with smaller houses fronting the few streets that meander away from the main thoroughfare.

The dunes and drifts of dust scattered throughout the town give Rose Blossom an aura of age and abandonment. Many windows have been boarded over, and even on clear days many of the remaining windows remain tightly shuttered. High winds have twisted away the wooden facades of some buildings. Residents try to maintain a strong front, despite the kerchiefs many wear to cover their mouths and noses and the stooped, hurried, pace the storms have forced them to adopt.

The sandstone post office and police station, the largest building in town, also shows scars from the dust storms. A series of heavy cracks run along a section of exterior wall high on the first floor. The cracks radiate from odd craters where the stone seems to have been pulverized. Knowledge of Archaeology, Architecture, Geology, or Forensics will reveal that the damage does not square with any kind of storm or wind abrasion damage one would typically find. Other strange cracks come to light if the investigators explore Rose Blossom.

A paved parking lot behind a modest grocery store has two of the weird radial areas. Probing the center of each pattern, the investigators will learn that the concrete has been pulverized by some force. A Spot Hidden roll will uncover a fibrous growth—about half the

diameter of a pencil—embedded in the pavement.

#### *The Police Station*

Rose Blossom's chief of police and two officers work out of a set of rooms above the post office. A dank basement houses holding cells and randomly boxed papers.

Constant complaints from the parents of runaways, a spike in petty crime caused by people coming to town to buy booze, and the deterioration of the town have pushed Police Chief Randall Earl to the wall. Provincial by nature, he has become even more suspicious of outsiders since the beginning of the Depression. He also sees the storms as the result of some sort of personal failure—either on his part or that of the town's residents.

Recent events have increased Earl's stress. He views the arrival of Jennings Anderson as a challenge to his authority. The new direction taken by Caleb Ekes' prophecies has put the whole town on edge. The disappearance of most of the town's pets is another symbol of the area's decline.

The arrival of a hobo who hitched a ride into town in the back of a delivery truck has conjured up fears of a wave of vagrants—and questions about how Rose Blossom's lost generation is doing in the outside world. Earl charged the man with vagrancy and drove him out of town after he'd spent a night in jail. Only one of Earl's officers knows the truth: Earl took the wanderer a few miles out of town where he shot him and dumped the body in a gully.

Rose Blossom's vanishing pets seems trivial at first glance, but Earl sees it as another indication that the town is being punished. Cats and dogs fled just before the year's first big dust storm, horses kicked through fencing to escape. The animals that remain appear constantly frightened, and will hide in terror during storms. The animals that fled have either become semi-feral or disappeared in the billowing dust.

Randall Earl

STR: 13

CON: 14

SIZ: 14

DEX: 11

APP: 10

SAN: 48

INT: 11

POW: 12  
EDU: 12  
Idea: 55  
Luck: 60  
Know: 60  
Damage Bonus: +1D4  
Hit Points: 14  
Weapon: .45 revolver (65%) 1D10+2  
12-gauge shotgun (50%) 4D6/2D6/1D6  
Fist (65%) 1D3+1D4  
Head butt (45%) 2D4

### *The Researcher*

While Randall Earl will prove taciturn and suspicious, the investigators will find a friend in a thin young man they see measuring the depth of dust dunes along Main Street. Jennings Anderson arrived in Rose Blossom in late winter in order to observe the storms and report back to the Extension Service about the needs of the town and ways to fight the dust. Trained in both geology and meteorology, he has little practical experience with farming. Although bookish and somewhat awkward, his general good nature has eased any conflict with the people of the town, who see him as a genial but slightly inept outsider. His has become more popular with area children, who love to watch him tinkering with aerometers and barometers and treat each weather balloon like the Fourth of July.

The broken telegraph and telephone lines have made Anderson frantic. He desperately wants to share a discovery with the USDA, the US Geological Survey, and the South Dakota State College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts. From passing references made by Anderson to residents of the town, investigators will gather that he found something of value as a scientific curiosity. His inability to contact colleagues, however, has made the scientist slightly obsessive about his find.

Given the opportunity, Anderson will tell the investigators that some of the dust plaguing the town “isn’t dust.” He will briefly explain that in Texas and Oklahoma the storms are normal sandstorms exacerbated by eroded topsoil, and that topsoil destroyed by years of over-farming clouds the rest of the land. If the investigators demonstrate knowledge of Geology, Geography, or Chemistry, he will explain that the dust in Rose Blossom is topsoil mixed with ashes and an unknown coarser, grittier, material. Anderson has no idea where the ashes have come from, and

needs access to a lab to determine the composition of the heavier particles.

### THE PROPHET

As they explore the town, the investigators learn more about the young visionary who has become a guiding voice as the storms worsened. Small talk overheard on Rose Blossom’s central street shows that most residents view the boy with a mixture of awe and mild dread. People discuss his prophecies of doom and judgment in hushed towns, and anyone making light of his pronouncements receives fearful, scathing looks. A few of his more strident supporters will greet the outsiders with the words “the reckoning has begun.”

As a young child, Caleb Ekes had the uncanny ability to sense emotions and an aura of focused calm that suggested wisdom. By the time he started school, he had a reputation for being able to soothe injured animals. Over the years the minister of the small church that serves the town started giving Caleb a chance to “prophesy” to the congregation. Until recently, most of his addresses were vivid retellings of stories from the Bible mixed with veiled references to events in the town. Kelvin Arleth describes these early statements as a bit overly theatrical in tone but harmless enough in content.

While trusted if perhaps overly revered in the town, Caleb’s latest statements have disturbed many. At a Halloween party held at the Rose Blossom School in October 1934, the boy collapsed. Over the next week he remained unconscious and suffered from a high fever, during which he called out “Help me, sires” and asked for food. The night before his fever broke, his parents heard him shout “You’re blind, you’re asleep all of you.” He fell silent for the rest of the night, then got out of bed for the first time a little after dawn. Still weak, he asked to return to school that afternoon.

Caleb says he does not remember the illness, although his parents and teacher will admit that he became very brooding after the illness. The tone of the statements he makes in church has also changed. Originally comforting albeit a bit mystical, the boy now describes visions of a city cursed by God and makes frequent references to the descriptions of the ruins of Babylon and the Biblical book of Lamentations.

Although the new tone alarmed many, Caleb still has his supporters. Durwood Dawson built a small “chapel” for the boy to use for prayer and meditation. The small shack sits nestled between ridges about two miles outside of town. Made from salvaged materials, the drab weather-beaten wood almost blends into the surroundings. The windowless building is about twelve feet square, with a crucifix mounted between deer antlers hanging over the door. Caleb began spending more time at Durwood’s Chapel after his new visions caused the minister to waiver in his support.

## THE FIRST STORM

Another dust storm strikes the town later that afternoon. While the details will play out slightly differently depending on where the investigators are, the supernatural outcome will remain largely the same.

Traveling to the chapel, the investigators wind their way between the low ridges that surround the town. As they move farther from Rose Blossom, the sky darkens in the southwest and a column rises from the bare earth to the sky. The pillar of dust darkens the sky, and investigators will see strange shifting clouds of purple and green around the storm. These effects are not supernatural, but should be played for maximum effect. The party reaches the crude shrine just before the storm.

Caleb is lost in prayer when the door opens, but he will rush to light a lantern and cover every crevice with old blankets as the storm approaches. After the initial flourish of activity, Caleb’s greeting will be mixed. The teenager is curious about the outside world, although the veneration he has received from the other townspeople has created a sense of vanity and entitlement.

As the storm lashes the building, tendrils of dust and wind spiral around the door. Caleb grabs an old book and motions for the investigators to huddle around the lantern as he explains his visions. Any investigator who had a dream during the storm will feel strangely drawn to the old Gustave Dore illustration the boy holds, which shows the destruction of Babylon.

The conversation remains largely one-sided as Caleb expounds on his visions, relying on Biblical language that often obscures what he truly witnessed. Caleb’s eyes seem to glow in the gloom as he describes the destruction that

will befall Rose Blossom unless the townspeople change their ways. Presented in a rather rambling fashion, his solution seems to revolve around the town cutting itself off from the corrupting influences of the outside world, purging bad internal influences, and turning to a simpler way of life.

Caleb will turn questions around to either avoid answering if he feels threatened or confused or to reinforce the message of his visions. References to the strange dream, however, will throw him off his stride. Caleb will listen intently as investigators recount their nighttime experiences. At first he will try to use the strangers’ dreams to bolster his arguments, but investigators who work to persuade him that their dreams were different in theme and content (through either roleplaying or a Persuade roll) will lead him to give a more objective account of what he witnessed during his illness (see *The Prophet’s Dream*).

As the investigators interview Caleb, the small wooden structure groans under the pressure of the raging wind. A Listen roll, however, will catch an odd sound in the midst of the chaos. The boards in the wall behind the small pulpit creak in a way that seems out of sync with the rising and falling wind. If the conversation is hushed, everyone will be able to hear the steady creaks and pops coming from the dark wall. Bringing the lantern closer will cause a weird nest-like patch of shadows to dance on the wall until the light is steadied. Grey rootlets that are forcing their way between the boards are causing the sound. The thin but tough and fibrous growths are about 3-4 inches long and a little more than an eighth of an inch in diameter. Seeing the strange growths working their way through the wall, gradually tearing at the structure as they probe the safe shelter of the interior costs 1D8/1D2 SAN.

Any sort of damage to the rootlets will cause them to withdraw suddenly with a loud squeal. Touching the structures with bare flesh, though, will make them freeze for a moment before the rootlet that made contact begins gradually exploring the air in search of exposed skin. Prolonged contact will lead to a burning tingling sensation (which will fade after 1D10 minutes). If the creature does retreat, Caleb and investigators will not be able to hear its movements (which are admittedly slow) over the sound of the storm.



The wind howls outside as the investigators watch the strange creature, wisps of dust billowing between the boards. Anyone brave enough to venture outside will need to make a CONx4 roll to avoid being blinded by blowing dust until they return inside. Anyone taking precautions (e.g., wrapping their face or closing eyes and feeling along the outside wall) will get a +15% bonus. Reaching the rear of the building, the investigator will find that the creature is gone, and that a faint light in the west shows that the storm is blowing over.

Wherever the investigators are in Rose Blossom, the strange creature appears with the storm. Scratching at a door, a tentacle silhouetted against a window for a brief moment—the details of the devourer’s can be made to fit the situation. The investigators will not be able to get a good look at anything other than the rootlets, however. The reaction of any NPC who sees the rootlets will vary wildly. Jennings Anderson and the Arleths will respond with cautious curiosity; Randall Earl will erupt into anger.

#### THE PROPHET’S DREAM

If the investigators convince Caleb to explore the dream more consciously, they will uncover a fuller version of the dream they experienced the night of the first storm.

Caleb’s dream shows the scene from the perspective of an outsider. He describes a city glistening in bright moonlight and a figure half crawling to the fountain. The woman, dressed in a ragged filthy robe, collapses at the edge and begins to drink deeply as a rider approaches along the broad street leading from the city gate. He heads straight for the fountain, stopping only when the woman refuses to move.

The conflict plays out as in the detailed version of the investigator’s dream, but the woman’s response is longer. She turns to the warrior and says, “You’re blind. You’re asleep—all of you—dreaming in your palaces while we starve at the gates. You’ll sleep as your world turns to dust.”

A sneer spreads across the warrior’s face as he draws his sword. The woman looks to the sky and cries out, “By the Three Mothers, you will sleep until your kings are beggars!”

Hearing the oath, the rider signals his warhorse to rear back and lash out at the beggar with its hooves. The blows kill the old woman,

and the rider dismounts to water his horse as if nothing had happened. Sitting down on the edge of the fountain, he removes his helmet and looks up to the two moons. Rubbing his eyes, he slouches and slips to the ground. The warhorse turns to nuzzle him before staggering and collapsing.

#### THE SHAPE IN THE STORM

The dust storm lashes the area. Residents take shelter when the cloud first looms on the horizon. As the column of dust settles over the area, many glimpse a strange shape in the storm (anyone who traveled outside of the chapel to pursue the creature will see the strange buildings). For a fraction of a second, they will see an ornate onion-domed tower rising in the swirling darkness, with an elaborate arched door opening to the street. Although seen only briefly through the chaos, the form’s outlines seemed too distinct for a mirage or optical illusion.

Over the course of the evening, Caleb will venture outside and see the structures ghosting in the distance. He calls the investigators to see the sight, admonishing them if they do not see the buildings or deny the vision.

The storm lasts until nightfall, with the full moon seeming to shine through the dust to illuminate fate traces of the fantastic city. The next morning, a farmer stops by Durwood Chapel to see if the boy is okay. Caleb hitches a ride into town (the investigators can get a lift from the farmer with a Persuade or Fast Talk roll). In Rose Blossom, the truck parks along the busiest street. Standing in the bed to loom over his audience, Caleb launches into an apocalyptic explanation for the new vision. Even though the adults of the town will be reluctant to discuss the half-seen buildings with the investigators, Caleb’s words seem to strike a chord with them.

Questioning the townsfolk will yield denials and confusion on the part of adults. Although further questioning will make it apparent that the adults have not seen the otherworldly city, a strain of fear and defensiveness suggests that they feel something is lurking in the clouds. Children, on the other hand, will discuss their fear of the storms more openly. A few of them will mention seeing towers and buildings “from Arabian Nights” hidden in the clouds.

## CROSSING THE BARRIER

Oorma stood as one of the great cities of the empire. The merchants who dwelt in its alabaster palaces ruled the caravan routes of the Salt Desert and the ships that sailed the edges of the Dark Sea. Oorma's might lasted until a chance encounter and a desperate cry brought supernatural fury down upon the glowing city. The beggar's curse cast the pall of sleep over the merchants and decadent warriors, who dreamt as their palaces turned to dust.



The power of the dreaming minds and the unusual natural factors created by the earthly dust storms, however, have weakened the barrier between the two worlds, allowing shades of Oomra to appear in Rose Blossom. The most direct connection between the two realms—so far—has been the dust and ash that has puzzled Anderson so greatly and a handful of devourers that have slipped across the abyss during the most violent storms. The fine gritty dust comes from the breakdown of marble and alabaster buildings in Oorma, and the ash that drifts over Rose Blossom is the same that drifts through the air of the blighted city.

As the investigators spend more time in Rose Blossom, the dreams of the townspeople become more vivid and the ghostly cityscape appears more often in the dust that rises over the plains. As the boundary between the two worlds becomes more fluid, Rose Blossom's connection to earth threatens to fade as the small town disappears in the dust and ruins of Oorma.

### *Exploring the Doomed City*

As the strange sightings become more common, investigators can try to reach Oorma intentionally. Successful Dreaming rolls (or rolls against half of the investigators' Idea scores) will allow them to walk amidst the crumbling ruins. The city is a strange mixture of alabaster and basalt, although many of the towers and sweeping spires that once dominated the skyline have crumbled away. One massive tower dominates the skyline. The city appears dark and desolate, with two crescent moons offering a faint glimmer.

Vines cover many of the crumbling buildings. Seen from a distance, they look like heavy rope-like ivy. Investigators who try to approach will have the odd feeling that they are being watched with great patience and anticipation.

Bones appear occasionally along the streets. The remains of people, horses, and dogs, the bones have been scattered violently. A First Aid, Archaeology, or Forensics roll will help the investigators realize that the remains have been torn apart by some powerful animal. Making a History or Archaeology roll, the investigators will realize that the dust-covered clothing found near these bones generally belongs to people who would be outside at night: guards on patrol, prostitutes, and thieves.

As the PCs explore Oorma, they will occasionally hear sharp clicks echoing down abandoned alleys and across the haunted cobblestones. The sounds come from the devourers' beaks clacking shut as they sense the outsiders roaming the streets.

In general, entering a residence will show that life simply stopped for the people of Oorma. The curse took effect in the middle of the night, as most of the city's residents slept soundly in their beds. When investigators enter a dwelling, there is a 50% chance that they will find the residents dead (anyone found out in the street has been killed and skeletalized). The bodies are in varying states of decay, ranging from ravaged skeletons to fresh corpses (with a layer of dust) torn open by cruel maws. Although the survivors have not aged while sleeping, a heavy pall of dust has settled on the city's residents. A First Aid or Diagnose Disease roll will show that they are still alive, although it will be impossible for investigators to wake them.

If the investigators try to leave the city through one of the main gates, they will find blinding dust storms surrounding Oorma.

Although the storms will most likely force them back into city, anyone determined to leave will stagger around in the swirling dust and sand for 1D3 hours (losing 1D2-1 HP per hour) until the storm lifts, revealing that they have walked in their sleep into the outskirts of Rose Blossom.

### *The Devourers*

The eerie vines seen by dreaming investigators (and encountered directly on the day the ruins of Oorma first became visible) are actually the source of Oorma's rapid deterioration. As the curse spread and Oorma became cut off from the rest of the empire, dark creatures attracted by decay and desolation found their way to the dreaming streets. The devourers appear to be heavy greenish-grey vines radiating from a pulpy central mass. The mass opens to reveal a cruel curved beak and a warty prehensile tongue. Fine rootlets connect the devourer to a surface and quickly breakdown even the hardest substance.

The devourers spread throughout the city, wearing down the ancient structures and covering surfaces with a tangled skein of vines. While they do not actively seek out the flesh of men, they are not averse to consuming residents of Oorma. Given the centuries they have roamed Oorma, they have stumbled across many of the sleeping residents—leading to the carnage found by investigators.

The creature can use its vines and tongue to grab investigators and draw them to the heavy snapping beak. When roused, the vines are as agile and flexible as tentacles. Their length (up to thirty feet) makes them especially dangerous. Although powerful in their own way, the rootlets are not useful as weapons against mobile humans and limit the ability of the devourers to move quickly.

#### **Devourers** (Lesser Race)

STR 1D6+6 (9)  
CON 3D6 (11)  
SIZ 1D4 (3)  
INT 1D6 (3)  
POW 2D6 (7)  
DEX 3D8 (tentacles) 1D4 (main body) (13/2)  
HP: 7  
Move 1  
Weapon:

Tentacle (40%) 1D4 and match STR or DEX against devourer's DEX to avoid being grappled. Investigator can match scores again to try to escape each subsequent round.

Beak (10% for mobile opponents, 75% for grappled foes) 4D10

Rootlets (100% against immobile foes) 1D10 per minute

Armor: The tough, fibrous body deflects 2 points of damage from each attack.

SAN: 1D8/0 loss

Note: the investigators will not see the devourers clearly during their first fleeting glimpses of Oorma. Even in the dreaming city, they appear as harmless clumps of vines from a distance.

### *The First Victims*

Fear has made the animals remaining in the town almost wild. Chained dogs howl piteously, housecats arch their backs and hiss at unseen opponents, farm animals struggle to escape barn stalls. A few nights after the ruins of Oorma rose over quiet Rose Blossom, Jack Morris heard horrific screams coming from his barn—sounds rising over the heavy wind that forced his family to huddle in their small house. Morris sent his son to get the police when the storm settled and the first traces of light appeared on the horizon, and the set out to examine his barn.

Inside he found the shredded remains of a horse and mule. Lash-like slashes crisscrossed their bodies, and something had cut huge gouges into the carcasses. A closer examination by the police revealed that many of the inner organs had been sucked out of the bodies.

The carnage was the work of three devourers that crossed the dream barrier from Oorma and happened upon the confined animals. Although Randall Earl tries to keep the incident quiet, the officer who accompanied him to the farm, Morris' son, and the farmer's neighbors quickly begin spreading rumors about something unspeakable happening during the storm. As word spreads in the town, conflicting stories blame wandering hobos, abrasive dust, and some supernatural (or infernal) agency.

If the investigators try to talk to Morris, the farmer will turn deathly pale and refuse to describe what he found. His son, Junior, is more forthcoming. Although he did not see the dead animals, he will give a harrowing account of the sounds he heard during the storm. He also saw the two policemen covered in blood after they

finished examining the scene and helped his mother comfort his father when the man spent the day hiding in his bedroom, starting violently at any sound.

## THE SACRIFICE

Caleb's influence in the town grows as the barrier between the two worlds fades. The ghostly images of doomed Oorma's towers and the arrival of the devourers have caused even moderates in Rose Blossom to be more accepting of the boy's ravings. Rumors of the gore at the stables will push Caleb—and the whole town—over the edge.

Caleb announces a meeting in the town's small high school. A storm grows as the evening wears on, making the building creak under punishing winds and sending spirals of dust through crevices around covered windows. Using the storm to full effect, Caleb announces that the dust and bizarre dreams are punishments for the town's sins. Rather than recognizing the fact, the townsfolk have made the matter worse by mocking Caleb during the first days of the storms, relying on their own ingenuity (the improvised dust masks and crude shelters), and—worst of all—turning to a sorcerer to fight the will of the Lord. The necromancer in question is Jennings Anderson, whose experiments Caleb views as a secular effort to thwart the storms and deny their true meaning.

Anderson is present at the meeting, although his efforts to defend himself and divert the town from panic and chaos sound flustered and confused. As the rage in the room grows, Caleb offers a solution to the town's problems. Every man will write the sins of his family on a small wooden token; Caleb will then offer the confessions to the storm and avert further disaster. The winds outside seem to abate as the boy explains his plan to propitiate the powers punishing the town.

Anderson literally throws up his hands in resignation and leaves the meeting as Caleb explains his plan. Within a few minutes the boy begins handing out wooden chits with holes drilled through them and urging the town to repent. As the meeting devolves into tearful prayer and loud lamentations, a Spot Hidden roll will allow the investigators to notice Caleb

signaling Randall Earl, who quietly slips out of the school.

If the investigators manage to shadow Earl, they will find him meeting with his brother-in-law, Len Rutherford (another one of his officers) by a truck. Rutherford hands Earl a 12 gauge shotgun and the two head off to arrest Anderson, who by this time has arrived at the general store above which he boards. Both Earl and Rutherford carry .45 revolvers at all times. Rutherford carries a .30-06 rifle during the expedition.

Len Rutherford

STR: 13

CON: 15

SIZ: 14

DEX: 11

APP: 9

SAN: 40

INT: 9

POW: 8

EDU: 9

Idea: 45

Luck: 40

Know: 45

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Hit Points: 15

Weapon: .45 revolver (50%) 1D10+2

.30-06 rifle (50%) 2D6+3

Fist (55%) 1D3+1D4

As the two officers arrest the scientist, Caleb gathers the wooden amulets and hangs them from leather thongs. He then leads his flock to the open area in front of the school. If Earl and Rutherford have completed their mission, they will return with Anderson after cuffing his hands behind his back and draping a burlap sack over his head. Caleb will hang the sin tokens around Anderson's neck, then Earl will march him out of town to wander in the wilderness and ultimately die in the storms.

While the investigators will be able to dissuade a few individuals from joining the ritual during the meeting, they will not be able to turn the tide. They can try to fight the police as they stalk Anderson, or warn the researcher (assuming they have spent enough time with him to know where he lives, and they head to his apartment immediately). If Earl fails to return with Anderson, Caleb will be left without a scapegoat. Despite his madness he realizes that he will have a hard time redirecting the crowd's anger at



anyone other than Anderson. He will keep the amulets, and later meet with Earl to pick a new victim—most likely one of the Arleths or an investigator. Earl and Rutherford will try to grab the new target in the middle of the night. Caleb will then spread word the next morning that another victim had been sacrificed to the storm.

If the ritual plays out, Caleb and the townsfolk will remain near the school praying until dawn. Once Anderson has staggered out of town, Earl will return to the police station. The investigators can free him at any time, although they will need to find a place of refuge for the victim. If the police grab one of the Arleths for the ceremony, the couple will want to leave town immediately if the investigators rescue the victim.

## THE DEAD DREAMERS

The power of the curse brought down on Oorma opened the first small rents in the barrier between the two worlds. As the people of the doomed city fell into centuries of dreaming, the collective energy wore away at the veil between the two worlds. As they dreamed, though, many died as devourers spread throughout the abandoned streets—killed by the creatures' cruel beaks or dying as buildings collapsed.

The three most powerful dreamers in Oorma are still alive—their nighttime fantasies working with the strange electrical effects of the Dust Bowl to draw Rose Blossom into the strange world. The guardians—two princes and a princess who ruled the city—remain safely on their thrones. Although affected by the same curse as their people, the devourers have not breached the heavy walls of the citadel that looms over the city.

Dreaming investigators will have seen the citadel in the distance. Compared to the delicate spires and alien curves of Oorma's architecture, the heavy Gothic form seems ominous. The citadel's stout stone walls are dull brownish red, and purplish stained glass windows reflect the little sunlight that reaches through the swirling pall of dust.

Only a few faint cracks mar the surface. A handful of devourers slowly prowl around the outside of the tower, trying to work their roots into the heavy wall. Investigators can enter the building by striking a heavy bell found near a set of high-arched double doors. Inside, the citadel stands completely silent, although the layer of

dust and grit that covers the rest of the city is absent.

The rulers of Oorma sit on a dais in a large audience chamber on the fourth floor of the tower. The braziers that once lit the space burned out many years ago, but a ghostly light filters through windows set high in the walls. Faded scrolls have slipped from their fingers, dropping away in when the curse struck in the midst of an emergency conference. Scattered around the room, guards in glistening bronze armor slouch half-fallen around the walls.

Even in sleep, the three monarchs look youthful but callous. The three had lived for centuries before the curse, and their long slumber has prevented any aging. The princess and princes were the ones responsible for both Oorma's wealth and its corruption. As revealed by the scrolls, the late night meeting interrupted by the curse was in fact a discussion of a plan that would have placed a stranglehold on food shipping routes—increasing Oorma's power while driving others to starvation.

The beggar's warning in the dream hints at how the investigators can lift the curse. The strange spell will end only if someone finds a way to reverse the position of the monarchs. Killing them—while possible—will have no real effect. If the three are made into outsiders and outcasts, the remaining residents of Oorma will rouse from their slumber and the dream energy that has opened a rift between the two worlds will fade.

Casting them out into the storm that surrounds Oorma will break the spell. Investigators can find a cart or wagon and maneuver the group to the city gates, but will have close calls with devourers as they struggle to move the load through narrow streets. If the investigators manage to move the three beyond the city gates, a deep rumbling will sound across the land. The remnants of Oorma fade from view as a massive sandstorm strikes the area. The three monarchs wake up as a column of dust settles on the city, lifting to reveal a wind-swept empty plain. The final fate of the city will not harm investigators (although the Keeper should play up the drama of the situation), unless they try to return through the gate for any reason—in which case their fate is up to the Keeper. As the city finally fades, the sky clears and the monarchs face the prospect of wandering the now trackless desert.

A more effective approach would involve finding a way to transport the group to Rose Blossom. If the investigators can use either magic or Dream skills to move the trio, they will awaken as soon as they arrive in South Dakota. They will be unaffected by their long sleep, but their sudden arrival in a new world will leave them disoriented. The ultimate outsiders, they will not fare well in the new world—especially if they encounter Randall Earl. Earl will treat the monarchs the same way he treated the unfortunate hobo who visited Rose Blossom—robbing them before dumping their bodies outside of town. Investigators with a morbid sense of poetic justice could leave the rulers of Oorma in the hands of Caleb Ekes, who will try to convert them to his unique worldview or expel them from the town if they refuse to cooperate.

An especially bloodthirsty investigator may try to kill the monarchs while in Oorma. If any is injured, the flesh around the wound will turn to stone. This strange petrification continues so long as the sleeper is attacked, leaving a frozen statue. Locked in a lifeless body, any of the monarchs “killed” in this manner becomes impossible to move—leaving Rose Blossom to fade into the dust and wind.

If the investigators fail to “exile” the monarchs in some fashion, the barrier between the two worlds will continue to dissolve. The strange storms tower over Rose Blossom, deterring travelers from visiting the small town. Over the course of time, the landscape of Oorma will superimpose itself on the small South Dakota town. All but the most determined residents try to flee the town—although only a handful manage to escape the strange storms encroaching on the town. The die-hard residents of Rose Blossom—including Randall Earl and Caleb Ekes—eventually wake one morning to find themselves in the ruined streets of Oorma. This process will take about one month, with the town suffering continued isolation from the outside world as communications lines remain down and roads are lost under sifting dust. If the investigators feel they have no hope of saving the town and try to flee, they will find themselves traveling a strange landscape, one in which the ridged plains around Rose Blossom and the deserts around Oorma bleed together. As they gain distance away from the town, the world returns to normal until a solid, straight road appears with a milk truck chugging along the

lane, honking at the investigators to warn them out of the road.

## ENTR'ACTE (1939)

*"Is everything all right, dear?" David's mother called after him as he ran through the door and up the stairs to his bedroom. She could hear him breathing heavily—almost panting—as she started up the stairs after him. Looking through the door she saw the nine-year old curled in a ball on his bed, shaking in fear. Neva followed her son's gaze to the window. On the street below she saw three men walking in the summer dusk, the one in the middle tunelessly piping on an old flute.*

### TABOR'S COVE

Nestled along the Pacific coast near the border with Oregon, Tabor's Cove, California, has struggled since its founding in the 1840s. The number of families grew slowly, and the community found its footing by relying on fishing and the orchards that dot the hills around the town. The residents of Tabor's Cove recognize that their village is out of the way and removed from the flow of modern life, but most value it as a quiet place to live out their lives.

The town remained peaceful and pleasant even through the worst of the Depression. Most of the 1700 residents remained in the area. The WPA built a small library for the community, and the US Department of Agriculture has helped coordinate seasonal laborers to work in the orchards. The mayor of Tabor's Cove touted the town as an example of a community pulling together to get through a crisis. The townspeople even got along well with the migrant laborers who worked in the area of part of the USDA program.

This idyllic world started to collapse in the summer of 1939. A few weeks after the end of school, two boys disappeared. The local police have only run into dead ends in their search for the missing youngsters, and the California Highway Patrol has taken an interest in the case but offered no concrete information to the families. Over the hot days of July terror spread throughout the small town. Children had nightmares about the abductions, parents feared that a sociopath roamed the area, and frustration focused on newcomers to the once quiet community.

### THE CRIMES

Sullivan Peters, an eight-year-old boy who had lived all of his life in Tabor's Cove, disappeared the last week of June, 1939. His family claims

that he was angry and anxious on the day he disappeared, and that he went to bed a little later than normal on and had some trouble going to sleep. However, no one entered or left the home until his mother found his room empty and called the police the next morning.

Ten days later, ten-year-old Bobby Clegg failed to return home after going to play baseball with some of his friends behind the school. His friends have stated that he stayed the entire evening, although he often seemed annoyed and distracted as he played. He became more taciturn when Frankie Mullins complained about his tuneless humming and whistling. When the game ended, Clegg's friends saw him cut through an apple orchard on his way back to his parents' house. He never returned home, and a cap near the edge of the orchard is the only sign of his movements.

### THE INVESTIGATION

Wary of alarming the public and alerting suspects, California state troopers have quietly taken an interest in the case. Although there is little to suggest foul play, the disappearances bear a resemblance to a series of incidents that took place the previous summer farther south along the Pacific coast. Authorities found some similarities in disappearances in four towns, but nothing to conclusively prove that the children were not simply runaways. In one case, from a town near San Francisco, the parents claimed that their daughter had yelled for help before disappearing from her second-story bedroom. The inaccessibility of the room from the outside and the fact that it faced a busy, relatively well-lit street, made an abduction seem unlikely, however.

The investigation in Tabor's Cove has been low key. An officer visited the local police to look through their files, and another called the boys' principal from the office in Sacramento to ask questions about the children and their



families. Authorities have contacted the FBI to ask for assistance. The bureau has dragged its feet on the request, however, believing that the disappearances are simply a sad pattern of juvenile delinquency rather than evidence of kidnapping. If the group of investigators includes an FBI agent, he will be in the area to gauge if the incidents are part of a larger trend.

### *Interviewing the Families*

Sullivan's parents blame his foul mood on his older brother, Hutch. Hutch had been teasing Sullivan since the two had finished school for the summer. While the parents blame boredom (and the father threatens to make the fourteen-year-old find a job in the orchards), they are concerned by the maliciousness of some of the teasing, especially Hutch's efforts to frighten Sullivan after the two visited a carnival at the school to mark the beginning of summer vacation.

Hutch denies any role in his brother's disappearance. If he is interviewed in the presence of his parents, he will answer questions in a short, direct, manner and not volunteer information. He admits he teased Sullivan a couple of times about the fact that he was crying as they walked home from the end-of-school carnival, but he has no idea what upset his brother. Hutch himself spent most of the carnival hanging around with his friends behind the school building and only saw Sullivan a few times before they headed home for the night.

Bobby Clegg also displayed a foul mood in the days before he disappeared. Although his parents offer no explanation for his unease, they will acknowledge that the boy had difficulty sleeping and seemed to be "daydreaming." Clegg attended the same school as Sullivan, although there is no evidence they knew one another well. Clegg did not attend the carnival, although he did stop by the school afterwards because a teacher had offered to pay him to help clean up.

### *The Witness*

Police have only found one person who might have information about the disappearances. Two children in the small orchard town of Cataldo, about twenty miles southeast of Tabor's Cove, were attacked on the night of April 30. Carter Smith and Evan McCay disappeared while riding their bikes near the edge of town. Two days

later, Smith appeared at a diner three miles out of town. He was nude and covered in blood, and appeared almost catatonic.

A trip to the hospital revealed that Smith was malnourished. More disturbingly, his hair had turned completely white and a strange bruise or burn marked his left forearm. Beyond this, his wounds were mostly psychological. Smith has returned to his parents' home, where he is largely bedridden. He no longer speaks, and seems to have developed a deathly fear of pine trees.

Police and doctors have failed to explain what happened to Smith, or to gather any information about McCay's disappearance from the boy. They have avoided making statements about his eerie physical injuries, although a few of the diner's patrons caught a glimpse of the wound on his arm when a waitress tried to clean up the boy.

The arm injury has actually caused the most speculation. Seemingly branded into the flesh, the mark clearly shows four digits: two fingers wrapped around one side and two opposable thumbs on the other. Beyond the unnatural arrangement, the fingers are narrower and longer than any human appendage. Police have tried to keep the story under wraps, but word that someone survived an attack began to leak to nearby towns. Most people in Tabor's Cove are aware that a boy escaped from his abductors, but they know little beyond this. The lack of information and police secrecy have allowed rumors to flow freely. While police and hospital staff have remained tight-lipped about the boy's condition, the people who saw him at the diner have told others muddled versions of what they saw when Smith turned up. If the investigators ask any of the patrons, there is a 20% chance they will get an accurate description of the mark of Smith's arm and his blood-covered condition (blood in his hair prevented anyone at the diner from seeing the color change). A botched roll will yield an exaggerated version of his injuries, with the wounds becoming more bizarre and gruesome in direct relation to how badly the roll was missed.

Contacts in the state police will be unable to provide any insights beyond the sketch given above. McCay is presumed dead, although his body has not been found. Smith's family will rebuff any attempts to see the boy unless police accompany the investigators or one is a psychiatrist or physician. Smith appears wan and

clammy, his sunken eyes giving strangers a haunted look. Long-sleeved pajamas conceal the mark on his arm, but his stark white hair is impossible to hide. The boy's appearance will cost investigators 1D4/1 SAN.

Carter Smith remains secluded in his room, the curtains tightly drawn against the outside world. He will not speak to investigators, but an attempt to hypnotize the youth will yield some information. He will speak—albeit with a hollow, grating, voice. He gives a disjointed, imagistic, account of riding his bike with McCay. After a confusing reference to going “into the ground,” he will shriek in terror and began flailing to escape “the Night Man.” If the investigators are unable to hypnotize Smith, they will hear a strange moaning coming from his room while speaking to his parents. Talking in his sleep, the boy will give a more fragmentary version of the statement. His parents think that the service station is a reference to a gas station on the edge of town that had gone out of business two years ago.

**The Statement of Carter Smith**

Past the service station. . . . Evan trying to ride with no hands. Music, can't see where. Lean our bikes against the white fence and take a look. Evan caught his foot in the mud. The fairies dancing. Wants to follow them into the barn. Take him into the ground. The Night Man!  
 The Night Man!

*The Cataldo Fairground*

An afternoon of driving around Cataldo (or asking locals) will turn up the area described by Smith. An old fairground—built to showcase the town's crops during harvest festivals in the 1910s—stands about a mile and a half away from Main Street. A steady rain falls as the investigators arrive at the site. An open field, with grass and mud churned by trucks, a white fence surrounds the central fairground. With the exception of a crude wooden stage and a few barns for livestock, there are no other buildings.

The stage rises about three feet above the ground, with stairs leading up on either side. Wooden planks along the front and sides prevent audience members from seeing beneath. Below

the stage, investigators will find wooden supports resting on packed earth and two trap doors leading up through the stage that open from below.

During the storm—which becomes worse as the investigators explore the fairgrounds—the space has a disorienting, claustrophobic, feel. The low stage forces investigators to crawl or double over, while the size of the performance area creates the illusion of endless space stretching into the darkness as the storm grows in intensity. As the rain hammers away at the exposed wood above, the sound fills the low space in a way that makes the outside world seem menacing. Looking back through the open rear of the stage, the band of light that marks the outside world seems dim and bleak even in comparison with the growing darkness of the cramped space.

The confined space appears empty as the party moves to explore it with flashlights or lanterns. A couple of empty beer and soda bottles have rolled under the stage along with a few pages of the county newspaper. Near the center of the area below the stage, a Spot Hidden roll will draw the investigators to scratches in the earth and wood. Two sets of marks—each a pair of thin lines—score the earth below one of the trap doors. The sets of marks are about two feet apart. Gouges scar a wooden support beam nearby.

The bottom of one of the trapdoors shows even more ominous signs of damage. Faint claw marks crisscross the wood, becoming deeper and more vicious looking. Something waited below the trap, tentatively scratching at first and then becoming savage as the minutes passed.

The three barns standing at the rear of the fairgrounds are even gloomier. Rushing through the rain to reach them, the investigators struggle to open the doors in the downpour and throw themselves inside. The first is a small building lined with stalls. Other than a few breeding records left hanging on one wall, the investigators find little of interest in the bare stalls and empty mangers.

The slightly larger second barn has more to offer investigators. Broad double doors open to reveal two carts for moving feed and supplies as well as gear for taking care of the grounds. A row of four stalls stands along one side—overflow spaces that have remained empty since the fairgrounds opened. A narrow loft runs

above the stalls. A Spot Hidden roll made as the investigators first enter the barn will reveal a trail of water running down the wall behind the stalls.

Reaching the loft via a ladder built into the rear wall, the investigators find a few random hand tools hanging from nails driven into the wall, a length of rope carelessly tossed into the loft from the floor below, and two shuttered windows facing the main fairground and the stage. The window farther away from the ladder has been partially wrenched open, with claw marks tearing into the wood of the frame and shutter. The covering has been twisted open enough to give a view of the front of the stage a few hundred feet away and the space where audiences had sat on wooden benches to watch the performance.

The third barn stands slightly away from the main fairground. Significantly larger than the other two, age and weather have worn away the white paint that once covered the building. The pall of rain makes the grey structure loom out of the earth as the investigators approach. The double doors facing the fairgrounds are barred from the inside, but an opening connecting the barn to a small corral provides access.

Smith and McCay followed the “fairies” to this barn when they returned to the fairgrounds. The interior of the barn seems oddly quiet and peaceful after the dash through the now driving rain. Stalls line the rear wall near the opening leading to the corral, and a large wooden bin holds wisps of hay left behind when the fair left town. A loft looms over most of the barn, holding more supplies for the fairgrounds, bails of hay, and three pitchforks. Opening toward the fairground, a large window and winch in the loft gives access to the outside world.

The earthen floor in the center of the barn shows slight signs of disturbance. A Spot Hidden, Archaeology, or Forensics roll will lead investigators to a circle traced on the floor. Roughly eight feet across, the circle seems to enclose an area where the earth has been churned up without a sign of the hoof prints found near the stalls. Digging through the clumpy earth reveals a handful of Byzantine silver coins, black feathers matted in mud, and a gold tie clip. The latter was a gift from McCay’s grandfather, and the boy carried the clip for luck even though his parents warned him that he would lose it if he did not keep it tucked away safely in a drawer.

## THE TABOR’S COVE CARNIVAL

The annual school carnival is the only connection between the two boys who disappeared in Tabor’s Cove. The fair has been a fixture of life in Tabor’s Cove since the 1890s. A simple affair, the carnival offers games and competitions to visitors, along with food and a few craft booths.

The carnival comes to life every year in the large field behind the school. Originally a pasture, the two acres have served as a playground and improvised football and baseball field since the school opened in the 1880s. The field still shows tire tracks from some of the cars parked along the edge during the carnival, and deeper gouges where trucks crossed the grass.

Milt Powell, the school’s handyman, can give investigators a rough idea of how the carnival was set up. Walking along the tracks still visible in the old field, Milt points out where farmers set up a jury-rigged dunking booth and stands to sell strawberries, and the skid left when some volunteers dragged a homemade merry-go-round onto the field. He nods to where “the Japanese” set up a snack stand. “Yummy stuff,” he explains, “looked like goo though. One of ‘em was blowin’ on a flute ‘til it just about made your ears bleed. Principal Anders had to ask him to stop.” Milt dolefully points out the places where kids got sick: seven-year old Timmy Haas as he got off the merry-go-round and twelve-year old Anna Bouis near the “stage.” Milt guesses that she overate.

The stage was set up almost one hundred yards away from the rest of the carnival. A lone set of tire tracks cross the grass, marking where a truck carried plywood sheets that were laid on the ground to create a crude stage. Milt stayed away from the area during the carnival, preferring to feast on the food on hand but also wishing to stay away from the “clownin’ and jumpin’ around” on the stage. “Scary fairy tales with this funny little clowns runnin’ around everywhere. Made my skin crawl.”

A little more prodding of Milt or questions to Principal Anders will yield a list of adults who participated at the carnival. Most of them were parents or grandparents who had helped out for years. The only new faces were a group of Japanese-American workers who recently settled in the town and a group of

traveling carnies who performed as the Ashwood Theater Company.

### *The Fishermen*

In the summer of 1938, three Japanese-American fishermen relocated to Tabor's Cove from farther south in California. Henry Yamamoto, Akira Hoshi, and Aki Suzuki began renting dock space near Tabor's Cove and an apartment above the town's grocery store. Although the three kept largely to themselves when not working, they were amiable when around the dock and helped out other fishermen when needed. Still viewed as newcomers and foreigners (although all born in the US), the town's response to them has been cool but gracious.

Henry is more visible in the town due to his weekly attendance at the town's small Presbyterian Church. He encouraged his two comrades to volunteer for the school fair, where they set up a booth selling manju to the other townsfolk as Aki tried—with mixed success—to play some songs on an old flute. The sticky rice and bean snacks proved popular with children, and the trio had fun playing carnival games after they sold out of food. As the evening drew to a close, the three headed back to their apartment. Yamamoto and Hoshi pushed the cart they had borrowed from their landlord while Suzuki tunelessly piped at his flute as they walked down the darkening road.

### *The Ashwood Theater Company*



The carnival had another new attraction at the end of the school year: a traveling troupe of actors performing oddly stylized plays. The Ashwood Theater Company arrived in the area a few days before the school carnival and the

manager quickly offered to take part in the event. The group has spent much of the past year roaming along the Pacific coast, performing for school children wherever it can find a venue.

The group performs darkly realistic versions of fairy tales. The troupe uses simple sets that seem starkly minimalistic at first glance, but which take on strange depth and variety as the plays unfold. A few heavy posts set around the edge of the stage look like a dark forest, the beams of an old cottage, or a hangman's hill depending on presentation. The unsettling set dressing is often forgotten when audiences catch sight of the performers. A few adults lumber across the stage, but many of the company's members are small and slender. Appearing on stage with strange masks, the little performers seem childlike at first glance but move in ways that seem too sensual and menacing. For part of the evening, a few of the children dress completely in black and manipulate shambling disjointed puppets.

The performance opens with short vignettes drawn from folklore, episodes in which adult actors narrate and provide dialogue as the child actors and puppets convey the action. After twenty or so minutes of this, the company launches into its showcase piece: a long work entitled "Children of the Wood." The play features no dialogue, only music to accompany the dancing of small spritely actors. The droning, almost atonal, music sounds at times as if it emerges from beneath the stage; at others the notes literally seem to drift through the air over the audience. The troupe times its performance to coincide with the end of the day. Shadows lengthen and the day fades as the uncanny fairy tales unfold, leaving the audience in darkness as the first notes of "Children of the Wood" sound.

Even though it has appeared at some New Deal venues, a call to either state or federal officials will reveal that the Ashwood Theater Company is not a public agency. Officials who have heard of the group are unclear about its ownership and funding. However, the WPA connects the troupe to the arson that damaged a New Deal theater in Valenta-Pencille a few days after a performance. Contacts in the Highway Patrol will reveal that one of the first disappearances occurred in the Valenta-Pencille area. A call to the WPA regional office will also uncover the fact that the agency has received complaints from parents about the dark, fantastic, tone of some of the performances.

If investigators travel to the regional WPA office in San Francisco to look for more information, they can read the letters for themselves (a Persuade or Psychology role will convince the WPA office to explain the gist of the complaints over the phone). Parents claim that their children experienced violent nightmares after watching the performance, and few explain that their children have even started sleepwalking. The complaints focus on two aspects of the performance. The grim, mysterious tone receives the most discussion. A number of letters, however, describe feelings of unease and fear caused by the costumes. The parents detail the unsettling masks worn by the small, childlike, actors who play the sprites in “Children of the Wood” and the characters in the fairy tales. They seem oddly proportioned and in some ways too vivid. One adult describes the unsettling effect as “living faces with dead eyes.” The body movements of the small actors have also made viewers uncomfortable. Alternating between a seemingly superhuman fluidity and strange, syncopated, jerking, the body language of the sprites strikes many as unnatural. Another angry parent focused on the puppets used during part of the show, claiming that her daughter had nightmares in which one (“a skeleton bird”) moved by itself.

The sprites are in fact all that remains of the children who have disappeared up and down the coast. Intrigued by traces of eldritch traditions found in theatrical lore and by occult references in mystery plays, a group of cultists in Los Angeles created the Ashwood Theater Company to perform rituals and provide a cover for their activities. Over the past eighteen months, the group has used the “Children of the Wood” to lure youngsters into its clutches. While adults find the play unsettling, the images and atonal songs plant themselves in the minds of children. Most are haunted by nightmares and a gnawing sense of unease; a few are driven to seek out the theater troupe.

Gerard Villers, the theater company’s manager, is the only one of the occultists traveling with the group. The others remain based in Los Angeles, performing nighttime rituals on the beaches and occasionally traveling into the Mojave Desert to sacrifice drifters they lure into their confidence.

Wandering north along the Pacific coast, Villers has had remarkable success weaving his macabre spells. The “Night Man” mentioned by

Smith is a manifestation of Nyarlathotep. The horror appears briefly during the ceremony to turn children into the unholy sprites. Only the children who are the victims of the ceremony can see him, however. The desire to actually see the demonic god has pushed the cultists to intensify their rituals. During the first year of the troupe’s existence, they performed the conversion seven times. Over the last six months, they have added five more sprites to the ensemble.

Calls to officials in Cataldo reveal that the Ashwood Theater Company performed at the fairgrounds. Contacts in the Highway Patrol will be able to confirm that the group appeared near other towns that experienced abductions.

## ON THE ROAD

Attempts to trace the Ashwood Theater Company’s movements will run into a wall. The group briefly appeared in southwestern Oregon, but suddenly left town before a performance after a local church was vandalized. The Highway Patrol stopped the troupe as it crossed back into California in the middle of the night. The officer gave the trucks a cursory search; his notes do not mention children or the weird sprites.

After returning to California, the theater company decided to lie low while planning its next move. The break would give the odd rumors time to die down enough for the troupe to start visiting schools and towns in the fall, building up to the night of Samhain as summer fades from the hills and forests. Following back roads and often traveling at night, the group made its way to a haven where it could bide its time.

Even though the Ashwood Theater Company is trying to keep a low profile, its malignancy continues to affect its victims. A few days after the last reported sighting—the encounter with the Highway Patrol—tragedy struck a town about fifteen miles south of the Oregon border. An eleven year-old boy who had suffered nightmares after visiting his cousin in Cataldo died in an accident. According to police, the boy crashed through the window of his garret bedroom and fell three stories to a paved walk.

Officially, local authorities have labeled the death an unfortunate accident. If the investigators have a chance to visit the town of Meadowland or speak to any police officers or reporters, however, they will learn that a great deal of dissention marks the investigation. While



the coroner ruled that the boy shattered the window and fell to his death while horsing around in his bedroom, others feel that he may have been trying to sneak out and that the window sash fell—destroying the glass—as he slipped onto the roof. A more dire theory holds that the boy committed suicide by throwing himself through the panes. While no one has been able to offer a reason why the eleven-year old would kill himself, supporters of this view point to his anxious and fearful behavior the day before the incident, and the strange nightmares that had started to haunt the boy again the night before.

The Meadowland incident stands as the most tragic and dramatic example of the theater's power, but other families face the same evil influence. Moving south from Meadowland, the investigators can find reports of haunting nightmares, nameless fear, and a dread of the outdoors among children. Contacts in the Tabor's Cove police force will mention the same sense of angst; parents of children affected by the carnival who have spoken to the investigators before the theater company went to ground will report that the dreams and terror of trees have returned. The surge of fear, however, seems slightly less pronounced in Tabor's Cove, as if the source faded away before exposing the small town to the full brunt of its corrupting force. A few witnesses, however, can make the connections that prove that the traveling carnival has returned to the area.

Franklin Johns, a retired teacher, called the sheriff's office after he found his dog dead. Something had torn out the shepherd mix's throat and then ripped into the abdomen to reach the internal organs. Johns lives north of town, near an intersection where an older road branches away from the state highway. Johns assumes that an animal killed the dog, and wanted the police to warn other people in the area. The deputy who visited the home told Johns that it was probably a cougar or group of coyotes, but he felt unease about the small, narrow footprints he saw in the dirt along the road in front of Johns' property. The officer noted the bare footprints in his report, although he did not tell the old man about what he had seen.

In Tabor's Cove, some migrant orchard workers visiting the town to buy supplies seem shaken. Finishing their errands, they settle into the town's one small bar, patiently nursing warm beers while glancing furtively as the lengthening

shadows outside. Of the five men in the group, only one speaks more than pidgin English, and he is reluctant to explain why the men appear frightened. He will mention that he and his friends will be pulling up stakes as soon as they get paid, never to return to Tabor's Cove.

Investigators who speak Spanish can try to learn more. The men were working late, and their supervisor had told them to sleep on blankets near the site so they could start clearing brush early the next day. Sometime late that night, they saw a group of children "skipping and dancing" along the dirt road running beside the orchard. The unearthly children pranced around a group of inhumanly tall, almost stately, adults. As they danced, the children seemed to shimmer faintly as they passed behind the trees that line the road. Hiding in a small copse of trees until dawn, they emerged to find a "discus" near a fence post marking where the driveway meets the narrow road. The artifact is a flat metal disc about seven inches in diameter with a hole about two inches in diameter in the center. Made of lead, strange stick figures are carved into the surface. Oddly angled and proportioned, the figures appear to be dancing. In the minds of investigators with an interest in detective fiction or English literature, the figures will call to mind the Sherlock Holmes story "The Adventure of the Dancing Men," although the investigators cannot decipher the odd glyphs.

Mount Fergus, a transient who has wandered Oregon and California since the beginning of the Depression, can offer more information about the group's movements. He turned up on the doorstep of the local police station and begged to be placed in the drunk tank. The previous night, Fergus was traveling from one rural home to another, searching outbuildings for food, when he heard whispering in the underbrush. He made his way toward the main road, but as he moved he heard someone keeping pace nearby, stopping when he stopped and moving with rapid agility when he tried to sprint across a clearing. Just before he made the road hands grabbed him from behind, wrestling the hobo to the ground and tickling him until he fainted. Fergus did not get a good look at his attackers, but he says they giggled and whispered "like they was Chinese."

## THE MOB

After the second disappearance, families in Tabor's Cove began a desperate search for answers. Getting no answers from the police and seemingly ignored by the Highway Patrol, a group of parents began trying to piece together what had happened. They correctly traced the abductions back to the school carnival. A series of aggressive—almost abusive—interviews with children who had been upset that evening led them to focus on the strange droning that haunted the youngsters.

In a heavy-handed way, the group stumbled across two important clues: the carnival and eerie music. However, they have connected the information to the old flute that Aki Suzuki had played throughout the evening of the carnival, notes that flitted across town as the sun set and Aki returned home playing as he walked through the streets. The rage that has focused on the three fishermen is fueled by rumors of the attack on the hobo Fergus, whose vague alcohol-influenced comment about the "Chinese" has given the families more reason to blame the Asian-Americans.

Rumors continue to circulate in the town as the theater goes into hiding, driven by the lack of viable information and the strange fear that the end of disappearances means that the true culprits will escape. After hearing about the attack on Fergus, a group of angry townspeople will finally take action. The night after the hobo's odd tale begins to circulate, a group of about twenty gathers near the warehouse where buyers bid on fruit harvests. They march to the grocery store where the three fishermen rent rooms, loosely surrounding the building before one shouts for the three suspects to surrender.

Henry Yamamoto is not at the apartment. He had volunteered to help refinish some of the pews at the Presbyterian Church, and has not returned home by the time the mob arrives. Akira Hoshi, and Aki Suzuki are in the apartment, playing go when they hear voices yelling from the street. The two peer cautiously from the windows to gauge the size of the mob. With only one entrance—an external stairwell leading to an alley beside the store—the two begin debating what to do. The apartment has no phone, and residents not involved in the mob fled to their homes at the sight of the crowd moving down the street with such evil determination.

The two decide to wait out the situation. As the last faint rays of sunlight fade, a few people in the mob light torches and one man

throws a rock that smashes through a front window in the apartment. Henry Yamamoto arrives on the scene as the mob becomes more angry and desperate. Walking along a darkened street, Yamamoto sees the trouble ahead and runs to the Tabor's Cove Police Station.

These events unfold as the investigators work to find some meaning in the strange sightings reported from rural areas around the town. The Keeper should determine how the PCs learn about the mob—a rumor from a concerned resident, the sound of the group marching along the street, an encounter with Henry as he looks for help. If the party decides to intervene, they find a group of about twenty people surrounding the grocery store, four of whom have pistols (three .22s and one .32). In addition to a couple of homemade torches, about a ten people in the mob carry improvised weapons such as heavy wrenches, tire irons, or baseball bats.

The investigators receive a few wary glances when they arrive at the store—looks marking them as outsiders in the town—although no one in the crowd meets them aggressively. The PCs can easily call for attention, but how they approach the situation once the crowd has turned their way can take the crisis in any direction. The investigators can try to stall until the police arrive. More charismatic characters might be able to disperse the crowd themselves. A well-played argument (or a successful Persuade roll with the players outlining what the investigators say to the mob) will draw the focus of the vigilantes' anger away from the three men—either by showing them the danger of the path they have chosen or by offering hope that the true culprit will be found and punished.

More glum scenarios find the investigators confronting the mob violently or trying to turn them away from violence through weak arguments. In these instances, the investigators only rouse the anger of the mob. Shoves and angry words fill the night, and the vigilantes' anger threatens to turn against the party.

If the investigators choose not to intervene in the confrontation, the situation degenerates. Losing patience as Hoshi and Suzuki lay low in the apartment, one of the vigilantes throws a Molotov cocktail through the smashed window. As flames explode across the front room, Suzuki runs for the door, only to be shot down by one of the townspeople when he appears on the landing. The crowd panics and

scatters at the sound of pistol reports echoing above their angry yells. By the time police arrive, Hoshi has pulled Suzuki's corpse down the stairs, huddling over it as flames shoot into the dark sky.

## THE CAMP

Pieced together, the accounts of the witnesses can give investigators a rough sense of the carnival's movements. Moving south from Oregon, the troupe began talking back roads, briefly returning to the main state highway at night before detouring near Franklin Johns's house. The sprites chased down and killed his dog when they saw it flee at their approach. The rural road wends its way between some isolated homes before becoming a dirt track that runs behind a few medium-sized orchards. The group camped in some of the hidden hollows and abandoned orchards found along the road during the day and moved at night, encountering the migrant laborers and Fergus the hobo as they made their way inland. As investigators visit the area, they will find some signs of activity along the shoulder—including some of the mysterious footprints seen by the deputy. As the pavement and gravel give way to dirt, tire tracks from heavy trucks become visible.

Seeking a haven to regroup and plan its next move, the theater company has set up camp about five miles inland from Tabor's Cove at an abandoned farmhouse. The two-story home has stood empty for about twenty years, too far from any point of interest even to attract more than the occasional passing vagrant. A few storage buildings—all in a sad state—dot the property, and the vegetable plots and old orchard are overgrown. A long narrow driveway curves away from the dirt road and leads to the old farm, although investigators could easily reach the site by hiking over the wooded hills that surround it.

Six heavy trucks sit in a semicircle around the front of the house. Even though a fire can be seen in the middle of the camp and members of the troupe are milling around, the whole scene seems unnaturally quiet and subdued. The carnies check supplies, mend gear, and gather for meals around the continuously burning fire, but lack any emotion or sense of life. From the distance, only the manager can be heard barking a few orders.

The scene takes on a new life at night. The fire still blazes in the middle of the camp,

throwing distorted dancing shadows around the scene. Occasionally, the light flickers against the white costumes of tall, ambling figures that move with a deliberate gait between the buildings. The tall creatures—the same ones reported by the migrant farmworkers—are actually carnies wearing costumes that distort the proportions of their bodies. Sets of foot-tall stilts create their unearthly walk, while tall conical hats exaggerate their height. Narrow wooden rods strapped to each wrist give shape to long flowing sleeves. While the carnies are quite practiced in using these surreal costumes, they are still not as fast or agile as a person on foot. Seen from a distance, the costumes cost the investigators 1/0 SAN (with a +5% bonus to the roll).

While the light of the campfire dances on the scene around the house, a lone flame can be seen moving around the first floor of the house, often stopping for long periods in a room at the southwest corner or disappearing for a few hours beginning around midnight. Between midnight and 3 a.m. anyone scouting the property will hear hollow, droning, flute music. Investigators will find it difficult to pin down the location of the instrument, and even a successful Listen roll will not reveal the origin of the strange music.

The members of the troupe camp near their vehicles, occasionally making use of the outbuildings for shelter and illicit carnie encounters. Observers will note (with an Idea roll) that the theater workers do not venture near the house with the exception of the manager, Gerard Villers, who spends nights in the old residence.

An investigator making an Idea roll while observing the camp will also realize that the child actors who play the sprites are nowhere to be seen in the crew milling about the campfire. If the investigators scout the site during the day, a Spot Hidden roll will reveal a pale face quickly peeping from a second-story window of the old house. Anyone visiting the area at night will have a 15% chance of seeing one of the sprites crawling around the roof of the house, its body flat against the surface as it moves with a skittering, lizard-like motion. Because of the distance between the house and the investigators' observation post, it only costs 1D2/0 SAN the first time a sprite is seen moving this way.

Carnie

STR: 2D6+1D8 (12)

CON: 3D6+3 (14)

SIZ: 2D6+1D8 (12)  
 DEX: 3D6 (11)  
 APP: 2D6 (7)  
 SAN: 50  
 INT: 3D6 (10)  
 POW: 3D6 (10)  
 EDU: 1D6+1D4 (5)  
 Idea: 50  
 Luck: 50  
 Know: 25  
 Damage Bonus: +1D4  
 Hit Points: 13

Weapons: About half of the carnies carry knives (40% attack, 1D4+1 damage). The others will grab improvised clubs if the investigators are discovered (30% attack, 1D6+1 damage). The carnies can also fight unarmed, with any scratch or bite having a 15% chance of becoming infected. Beginning one or two days after the fight, the infected wounds will reduce the investigators' STR, CON, and POW by 1D4 points for two to three days.

### The House

The spacious two-story house testifies to the ideals and ambition of the Summers family during the nineteenth century. When domestic violence and suicide shattered the family, distant relatives stripped the house of its furnishings and left it to rot back into the earth. Perhaps this dire

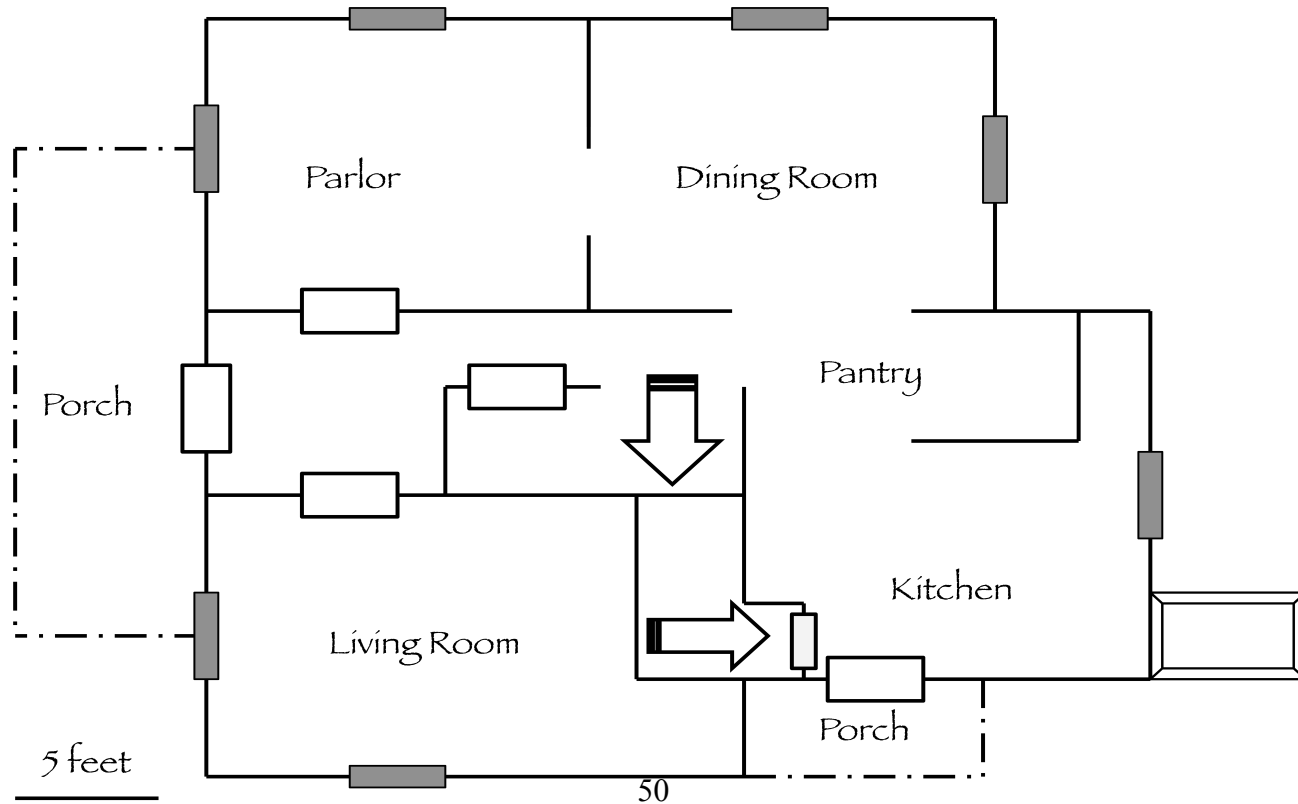
history attracted the Ashwood Theater Company to the site; perhaps they stumbled across the isolated, forgotten building during their travels.

Observing the house during the day, the investigators see a weathered building, faded to grey over the past forty years. Some of the windows have been smashed over the years (20% chance for each), and a tangle of brush has grown in clumps around the yard.

An Idea or Spot Hidden roll will bring the investigators' eyes to the center front window on the second floor. The glass remains intact, but through the grime one can see an odd latticework arranged in front of the window. From the outside of the house it is impossible to tell the structure's function.

The adult carnies generally stay clear of the house, driven by a lingering fear that lurks in their hearts even after the weeks and months they have spent with Villers and his faery spawn. With the exception of Villers, they refuse to set foot inside, giving the investigators some degree of safety if they gain access to the building. Villers has turned one of the rooms in the first floor into a crude bedroom.

The sprites live on the second floor, although they have taken to exploring the house. They crawl along ceilings and walls, using old transoms to move stealthily throughout the building. They even creep above the door to Villers' sanctuary, scurrying down the walls to



Summers House First Floor

sniff at the sleeping wizard as he sleeps fitfully. There are currently eight sprites in the house. Of the original twelve, Villers killed one and three have taken to wandering in the countryside.

### *The First Floor*

The home has two entrances on the first floor: a door in the front opening into a hallway and another under an overhanging section of the second floor that leads into the kitchen. Neither door is locked. A storm cellar door in the rear of the house (discussed below) and broken windows offer other points of entry.

The front door leads to a broad hallway. A broad swath in the dust and heavy scratches in the wooden floor show where Villers dragged a large trunk through the door to his personal quarters in the old living room. Heavy doors to the immediate left and right give access to the parlor and living room, with light streaming through the broken transom above each doorway. Farther down the hall, a small cupboard stands below the stairs leading to the second floor, and open doorways give access to the dining room and pantry. A damp, meaty smell wafts through the lower floor, and faint buzzing sounds from the back of the house.

Exploring the first floor by day will give the investigators relatively more safety. Steering clear of windows, they can avoid detection by anyone in the yard fairly easily since the carnies avoid the area immediately around the house. If they do not say they are taking precautions to avoid being seen, however, secretly make a Luck roll (with a modifier depending on the investigators' behavior) to determine if a carnie spots them and raises the alarm.

While examining the first floor of the house, the investigators have a 10% chance of encountering a sprite in one of the rooms (randomly pick which one). The creatures laze during the day, rarely venturing from the second floor unless Villers commands them to do so. If a sprite appears downstairs during the day, a Spot Hidden roll will let the investigators see it clinging flat to the one of the high ceilings. If the roll is made, the PCs have the initiative; otherwise the sprite rouses to action when it sees the party enter the room.

Built like a lithe child, the sprite has pale bluish-white skin and slender arms that end in four long claw-like fingers. The creature has no

facial features, only vague contours that suggest a face.

With luck, the investigators can dispatch the creature without too much noise. Gunfire will immediately alert Villers and the carnies; a good melee will escape notice if the investigator with the lowest Luck rating successfully makes a roll. If the noise of a brawl does attract the carnies' attention, Villers will rush through the front door to investigate while the others form a loose cordon around the house.

Any combat—noticed or unnoticed by the carnies—will alert the other sprites. During the day they will scatter throughout the second floor, including one that lurks on the ceiling above the staircase. After the fight a Listen roll will let the investigators hear their furtive scampering. The too fast rustling crawling sound seems to echo faintly throughout the house, drifting down the stairs and rattling the ceiling, costing 1D2/0 SAN.

Trying to reach the house at night will make it easier to slip past the carnies, but opens the investigators to a new set of dangers inside the old home. The sprites roam the house freely before midnight, boosting the chance of an encounter to 25% (roll each time the investigators enter a new room, rather than once for the whole floor). Any combat will bring 1-2 sprites to the scene, with the remainder preparing to ambush the PCs as they explore the rest of the house.

A few moments before midnight the eight sprites rush to the cellar stairs in the kitchen. They run and scamper like excited children, sprinting or crawling quickly along surfaces. If the investigators are near the stairs or kitchen/pantry area, they will be swarmed by the sprites as they hurry to the ritual. The creatures twitter and giggle in an odd faceless way, but do not attack. The experience of being swarmed, however, costs 2D8/1D6 SAN. A little after three in the morning the sprites make their way back to the second floor. The urgent lust of the ritual has passed by this time, however, leaving them free to harass and attack any intruder whom they know is in the house. The investigators can escape immediate attack by hiding away from the kitchen, hallway, and stairs, although there is a 30% chance that one of the sprites will stumble upon their shelter while meandering back up to the creatures' lair.

From midnight to three in the morning the investigators can move freely throughout the

first and second floors, although any incautious use of a light will attract the attention of the carnies. During the hours of the ritual, the piping droning music seems to ooze from the walls of the house itself, costing 1D8/1D3 SAN and creating a feeling of disorientation and vertigo. When using the stairs during this time, each must make a DEXx5 roll to avoid falling for 1D2 damage. Entranced by the ritual, the residents of the house will not hear the sound of anyone tumbling down the stairs.

With the exception of the living room and the kitchen, the rooms stand empty. The investigators will find weather damage in rooms with broken windows, and a thick layer of dust covering the floors. The dust shows tracks in odd places—scurrying across a room from one wall to another with no sign of entry or exit, or small handprints and crude childlike drawings traced on the stairs.

Stairs turn sharply away from the hallway to reach the second floor. The hallway cupboard opens easily, revealing a pile of dead rats left by playing sprites.

#### **Sprites** (Lesser Servitor Race)

STR 2D8 (8)  
CON 2D8 (8)  
SIZ 1D4+1D6 (5)  
INT 3D6 (10)  
POW 4D6 (13)  
DEX 4D6 (14)  
HP: 7

Move: 11 (sprites can climb vertical surfaces and ceilings on all fours without a penalty to their movement rate).

Weapon:

Claw (33%) 1D3

Armor: None, although most sprites have dodge skill of 30-40%

SAN: It costs 1/0 SAN to see a masked sprite, and 1D8/1 to see one's featureless face. It costs 1D4/1D2 SAN the first time an investigator sees one crawling across a wall or ceiling

Note: When killed, the body melts into a thick, pale ichor that eventually dissolves over the course of 1D4 hours.

#### *The Living Room*

A bedroll and a pile of blankets lie in the southwest corner, arranged so as to be out of

sight of the room's two large windows, while a heavy trunk in the middle of the room serves as a stand for a battered lantern and a worn old book. The tome—the Golden Goblin Press edition of *Nameless Cults*—is of recent imprint, but has suffered during Villers' travels. The unlocked trunk contains a few changes of clothes, a locked metal cash box with \$200, an address book (which includes the names of the cult members who remain in Los Angeles), and a padded case with vials of morphine and a syringe. With the exception of the hours of the ritual, a narrow flute carved from ancient, yellowed bone rests on top of these items, greeting the investigators when they open the trunk.

If the investigators manage to gain the house by stealth, Villers will be unprepared for them. During the day he remains with the carnival crew, overseeing their activities as he smokes cigars and plots his next move. At sunset he retires to his room, where an injection of morphine gives him a few hours rest before he descends to the basement for the midnight rituals. He returns to his room around 3:30, grabbing an hour or so of troubled sleep before heading outside to keep the carnies in line.

The notes above about exploring the house during the day apply to the living room. Anyone entering the chamber between sunset and midnight will find Villers sprawled in his crude bed, breathing heavily as a low flame glows in the lantern. The keeper should secretly roll 1D6. On a roll of 1-3, Villers's drugged sleep is undisturbed. A roll of 4-5 finds a lone sprite descending the wall above the bedroll, pausing for a few seconds just above its master, then lowering its face almost to his and gently reaching out to stroke the occultist's grizzled hair. On a roll of 6, two sprites crouch on the ceiling above Villers' bed, twittering quietly to themselves as they look down at the wizard.

Gerard Villers

STR: 9  
CON: 10  
SIZ: 10  
DEX: 12  
APP: 13  
SAN: 50  
INT: 16  
POW: 15  
EDU: 13  
Idea: 80  
Luck: 75

Know: 65  
Damage Bonus: +0  
Hit Points: 10  
Weapons: Villers carries scalpel with a piece of cork slipped over the blade when the weapon is concealed.  
Scalpel (45%) 1D4-1  
Spells: Summon Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath, Bind Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath, Summon Hunting Horror, Call Nyarlathotep, Brew Space Mead

### *Kitchen and Pantry*

A horrific scene greets the investigators as they enter the kitchen. The mangled bodies of two large dogs lie in the middle of the floor, with blood splashed everywhere in the room. A quick glance shows small hand and footprints in the dried gore; an Idea roll will reveal that strange long swipes in the blood were left when someone tried to lick up the ichor. The blood is strewn everywhere on the cold cement floor of the kitchen and splattered on the heavy cabinets and cast iron cook stove. Finding the gruesome scene costs 1D8/1D3 SAN.

A dark stairway leads from the kitchen to the old cellar, with a thin wooden door hanging ajar at the top of the stairs. Careful listening (-15% to a Listen roll) by the investigators—who must strain to hear above the sound of buzzing flies and sounds echoing from the lawn—will detect a faint rustling sound, as if someone draped in flowing fabrics were moving quickly. Opening the door during the day (or shining a flashlight beam down the stairs at night) will lead to a sudden sound of flight followed by silence.

### *The Second Floor*

Mounting the stairs, the investigators make their way to a landing in the front of the house that overlooks the carnie camp. A crudely-made screen of woven sticks stands in front of the window. Oblong distorted masks sit mounted on the latticework, seemingly arranged in some pattern but at slightly odd angles to one another. The sight of the whole structure—with the number of weird masks, the primal appearance of the screen, and the seemingly planned yet random appearance of the arrangement—costs 1D6/1D2 SAN. For more information about the masks, see “False Face” below.

Over the past few days the sprites have turned the second floor of the abandoned farmhouse into their lair. In addition to the outré monument they have built to store their masks, they have jammed the doors leading to each of the four bedrooms (requiring a STRx5 roll and a bit of noise to open). The creatures have torn open the transoms above the four doors (as well as the ones in the first floor hallway leading to the parlor and living room). The door to the storeroom at the rear of the floor remains functional, as do the doors to the four closets—all of which lack transoms.

Beyond the physical modifications, the atmosphere itself seems somehow different. The air feels cooler, the crispness strangely contrasting with the vague odor of animal staleness that pervades the second floor. The smell—suggestive of urine and close bodies—has a nauseating effect on investigators, and manages to somehow rise above the odors given off by the dog carcasses in the kitchen. Investigators with weak stomachs will find the stench progressively more disturbing. Investigators lose one point of SAN if they fail to roll against their CONx4.

Eight sprites are traveling with the camp—the fruits of the long magical experiment that led the theater troupe to form and begin roaming the Pacific coast. During the day they sleep in the southeastern chamber (Bedroom 4), occasionally venturing to other rooms and peering out the windows at the activities on the lawn. At night they explore the rest of the house and creep out the second story windows to watch the carnie camp from the roof. A few seconds before midnight they race to the cellar as noted above. The investigators will face this swarming push if they arrive on the second floor just before midnight; otherwise the sprites will tease and fight them as they explore the floor.

If the investigators manage to enter the house between midnight and three in the morning, they can explore the rooms freely. As noted above, the rapture of the blasphemous ritual in the basement will prevent the sprites or Villers from reacting to any but the loudest disturbances. Any attempt to break down a door will escape notice on a Luck roll by the unluckiest investigator involved. Even then, only one sprite will creep up the stairs, giving the party an opportunity to dispatch it quietly while the others settle back into the arrhythmic cadence of the ritual.

### Bedrooms 1, 2, and 3

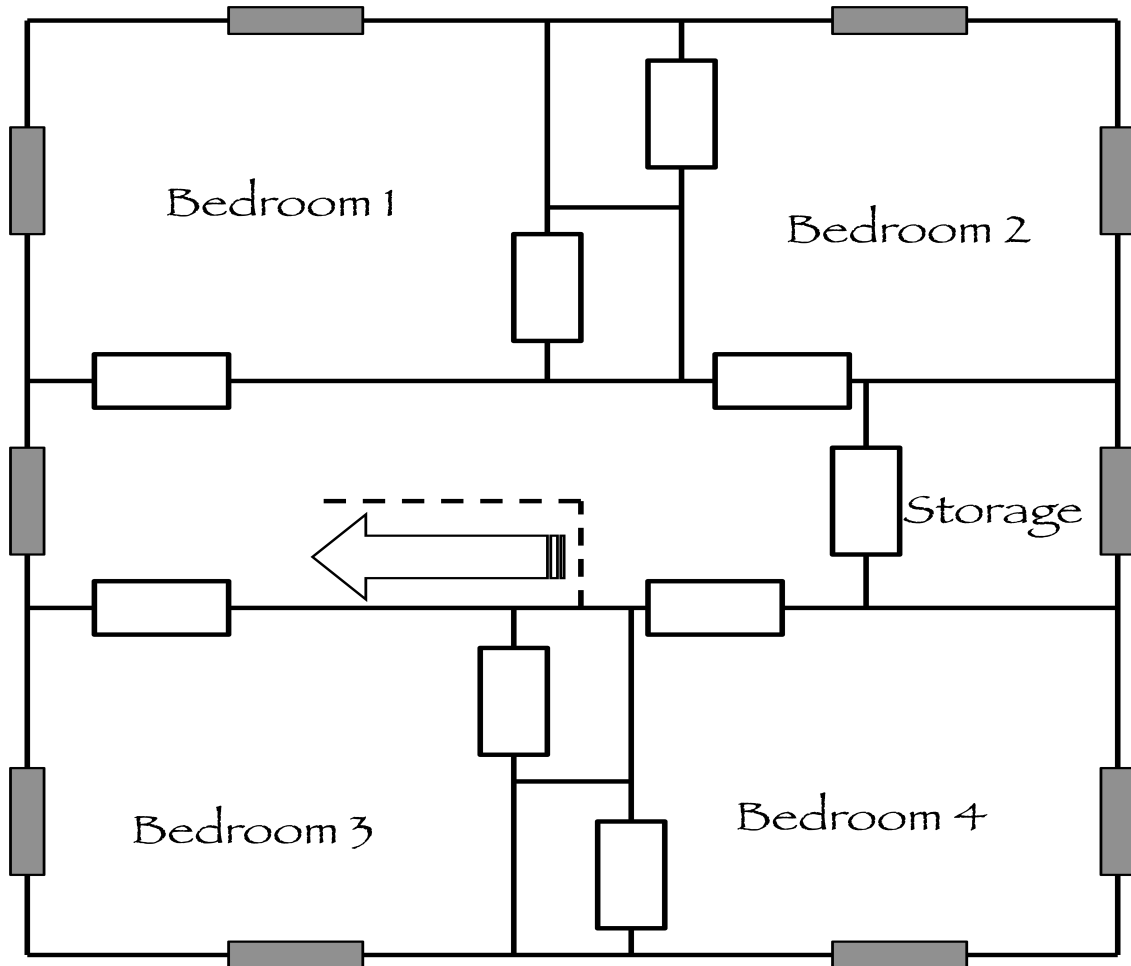
Built to house what Summers imagined would be the first generation of a large and thriving clan, the four bedrooms are spacious and give stunning views of the rolling hills that sheltered the family's ambitions. The three rooms stand empty, with gouges left in the floor where distance relatives dragged away the heavy bedsteads and dressers Summers had purchased for his new home.

### The Lair

The eerie odor seems more stabbing as the investigators approach Bedroom 4. A pile of canvass twists in the middle of the room—an old tarp Villers gave the sprites for bedding—while

and other toys. The crude shrines hold the most cherished items the children carried with them when they fell under the sway of the traveling theater company. The toys appear to be the only things in the house that have received any kind of care or loving attention.

The number of sprites in the room will vary wildly depending on the time of day. During the ritual, the room stands empty. In daylight hours, the sprites rest in a tangle of pale arms and legs on the old tarp, except for any encountered on the first floor or any alerted to the investigators' presence. Peeping through the keyhole will show a slender, bluish-white arm with four distended fingers resting on a pale leg with abnormally long toes. Trying to look through the broken transom will give a better view of the room (and cost the spy 1D10/1D2 SAN), revealing most of the unmasked sprites



Summers House Second Floor

small trinkets rest carefully on the window sills: lead soldiers, wooden farm animals, small dolls,

asleep as one plays thoughtfully with a toy, its back to the door. However, as the investigators



scramble to boost someone up for a look there is a 1 in 3 chance that the noise will attract the playing sprite. As the spy's face rises to peer over the door, the sprite's face rises in tandem, its featureless visage inches away, a faint curious murmuring becoming more agitated as the moments pass. If this close encounter takes place, the investigator loses 1D6/1D3 SAN, and the sprite leaps backwards, landing near the mass of slumbering imps and excitedly shaking them awake. The sprites begin pouring out of the transom 1D4+2 seconds later.

During hours of darkness, the sprites play on the roof and explore the rest of the house. Generally 1-2 will be found in the lair, but it is likely that their fellows will have encountered the investigators before the party reaches the rear bedroom.

The toys are a bridge between the child victims and the horrors that have twisted their bodies and minds. They represent a small glimmer of normality and sanity for the shred of the child's personality that remains in each sprite, while the alien minions find the toys to be sinks for the vibrant, chaotic emotions of humans. Going near the little window shrines—let alone touching any of the toys—will put the sprites on alert, ending their strange cooing muttering and fluid, agitated movements as they focus their attention on the threat to their treasures. Any sprites elsewhere in the house will rush to the lair to monitor the threat.

Investigators can use the toys to buy time, by pretending to threaten them or admire them. As long as no harm comes to the items in the windows, the sprites will keep their distance. Any damage to the toys will bring an immediate attack, with the sprites mobbing the investigators. If, for some odd reason, the investigators happen to have a small toy with them, they can use the new treasure to distract the sprites. Placing it on the floor for them to examine (or handing it over directly, if the PCs are especially brave) will cause the creatures to gather around the new artifact, trilling and cooing excitedly as they pass it one to another. This will distract the sprites for 1D6+1 minutes. If the investigators are lurking near the toys just before midnight, the sprites will remain on guard, causing Villers to angrily ascend from the cellar to learn why the creatures have not arrived for the ceremony.

### *The Storage Room*

A large closet—about seven feet across and a little over six feet deep—stands at the rear of the second floor. Shelves line either side of the closet, and a large trunk sits along the back wall below a window that overlooks the roof above the cellar entrance.

Except for some battered boxes and long empty bottles the shelves stand empty. The sprites have not explored the closet, preferring to crawl and play in the large spaces offered by the house. They have left the debris on the shelves undisturbed, and have given passing attention to the trunk, although the heavy lid put an end to their curiosity.

The trunk holds treasures purchased for children of the house before madness and death destroyed the family. Beneath a coverlet the investigators will find a metal wagon about two feet long, a mechanical bank made to resemble a hunter aiming a gun at an angry bear, a wheeled wooden horse, and a set of dominos. The sprites remain unaware of this hoard of treasure, and will treat the toys with the same reverence accorded the ones in the lair if they discover them. Handing the stash over to the sprites will distract them for 10+1D10 minutes, even delaying their departure for the midnight ritual.

The unbroken window is about 28 inches square. Investigators can lower themselves from the storage room to the roof and then drop to the ground to escape the house. A DEXx4 roll is needed for a safe leap from roof to ground; failure marks a hard landing that does 1 point of damage.

### *The Cellar*

A doorway built into a low artificial bank behind the house leads investigators to the old cellar, which can also be reached via a set of stairs in the kitchen. One large room in the rear is almost half as large as the first floor; an open doorway leads to two smaller rooms in the front.

Since the theater troupe has been forced into hiding, Villers has turned his attention to nightly rituals meant to strengthen his control over the sprites and maintain his tenuous, maddened connection to the Outer Gods, particularly Nyarlathotep. Lacking new victims to offer to the Haunter of the Dark, Villers resorts to the basement to reenact the transformation. The sprites hum and drone as they twirl about in

their atonal tarantella, and Villers' morphine-hazed mind struggles to peel away the layers of reality that keep him separated from the dark presence he senses lurking the old cellar, laughing at his efforts.

Foolhardy investigators who visit the cellar during the three-hour ritual will find themselves largely ignored by the participants. Villers huddles in the middle of the large chamber, staring into a polished tin mirror as he drools and mumbles incantations. The eight sprites dance around the perimeter, while the bone flute seems to play of its own accord by the doorway leading to Room B. Witnessing the scene costs 1D10/1D8 SAN; investigators who lose 6 or more SAN briefly join the dance.

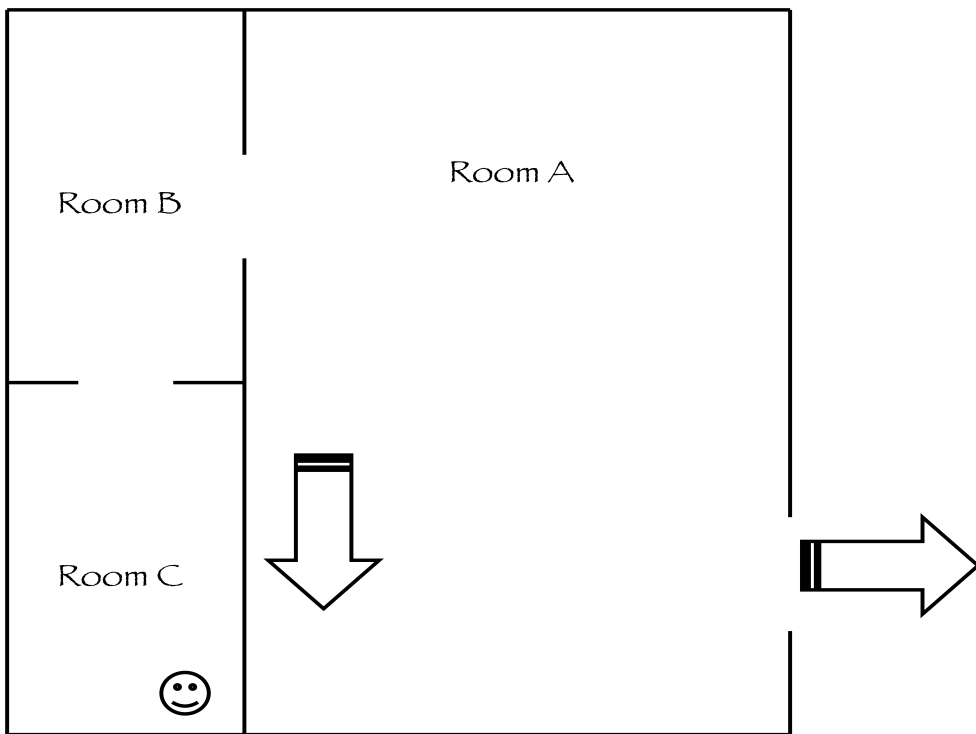
Beyond accidentally crashing into the investigators as the creatures dance wildly about the room, the sprites will largely ignore the PCs. If the investigators try to interfere with Villers, however, or if they direct a light too close to the mirror (shining a flashlight directly at Villers, for example), the sprites will begin a mewling shrieking and turn on the intruders.

Taking in the chaotic scene, investigators who make an Idea or Mythos roll sense a presence lurking deeper in the basement. An occasional flutter is heard above the debauch, and

Villers' eyes flicker to the opening leading deeper into the basement when he catches the sound. The random play of a flashlight beam or a lantern taken near the door will cause an audible retreat. Villers will stop his mumbling chant and attack if the investigators intentionally menace the rear of the basement with light. The sprites continue to dance, unless Villers succeeds in putting out the light.

The cellar becomes a maelstrom of violence if the illumination disappears. Villers will continue to grapple with the investigators while the sprites swarm toward them to attack. Moving with a weird hissing chittering sound, the creatures claw at the investigators and try to trip them, attempting to hold them for the occupant of the next room. A STR versus STR roll will allow a character to struggle free of Villers or the faeries. As they struggle the sounds in the smaller rooms become louder as the strange rustling fabric noise literally assumes body. Another roll—this time with -2 penalty to the investigators' STR scores—will allow them to free themselves and flee from the basement. Any character who fails to escape after the second attempt will face Nyarlathotep in the blackness of the cellar.

During the rest of the day, the cellar seems to have an aura of abandonment and hungry patience. The home's original owner slashed his wrists in Room B after strangling his wife. This memory gives the packed earth floor, bare walls, and empty wooden shelves an even greater sense of bleakness. Since the cult has occupied the house, however, the cellar has become more concretely evil. Something lurks in the subterranean rooms, hiding from the light and watching Villers' little performances with an alien blend of scorn and delight.



Summers House Basement

The faint lines of light shining through cracks in the outer door generally keep Nyarlathotep secluded in the two smaller rooms, although he is able to venture into the large room on occasion, creating the stirrings heard by investigators in the kitchen. If the party leaves either the kitchen door to the cellar or the exterior door open during the daytime, Nyarlathotep will vanish completely, as he will if they succeed in taking a flashlight or lantern through all three rooms of the cellar.

Exploring the cellar at any time other than the ritual hours, the investigators find a cheap tin mirror lying in the center of a diagram drawn in chalk and dried blood (Villers' own, drawn by his scalpel). If they have closed the door behind them before descending the stairs, Nyarlathotep waits in Room C. As the investigators move toward the smaller rooms, their flashlights dim and flicker and lantern flames twist as if caught in a heavy wind. Open flames such as candles or torches will snuff out almost immediately. A Luck roll will keep the lights alive; otherwise, a rustling form rouses itself and rushes toward the party, with the investigators only escaping by passing a MOV versus MOV roll against the 12 MOV of Nyarlathotep's human form.

Moving deeper into the cellar, the investigators hear a hollow sigh if they are able to cross into Room B with illumination—the sound of Nyarlathotep vanishing temporarily from the earth. Room B is empty: a cold space with small pools of water and empty shelves. Room C has the same strange cold, musty odor as the second floor. The remains of a sprite lie in the middle of the floor. Villers ordered one to remain behind after a nightly ritual in order to satiate the Elder God while the troupe waited to hunt new victims. The body has been dismembered, and all fluids have been drained through circular welts on the torso. The sight costs investigators 1D6/1D4 SAN.

A crude wooden stand sits in one corner of Room C. Lashed together with a tough fibrous material that resembles ligaments or tendons, a cluster of narrow sticks forms a tripod. A close look at the strange ligatures costs 1D4/0 SAN; investigators with any medical skill rating above 50% suffer a -10 penalty to the roll. Perched atop stand is a mask, much simpler but in some ways more chilling than the ones worn by the sprites.



FALSE FACE

The theatrical masks have sparked fear in children and an unfocused unease in adults. The strange elongated faces, carved from a pale grey-white wood with dried grass for hair, have a mocking demeanor. Seen on their own, the masks cost investigators 1/0 SAN. When worn by the sprites, the masks become vivid and leering. The expressions look almost fluid, although the changes often seem more suggested by movements of shadows and changes in the angle of perception. Seeing a sprite wearing a mask for any longer five minutes costs 1D6/1D2 SAN.

Any child (below age sixteen) seeing a mask will suffer the SAN loss noted above. However, he or she will also experience nightmares if an Idea roll is made—allowing the child to sense the alien nature of the masks. A roll below 20% of the Idea rating will lead to an obsession with the distorted, disturbing faces. This is what happened to most of the children who have disappeared up and down the coast during the company's tour. While a few have been kidnapped from lonely houses or dark roads, most found themselves haunted by the

strange faces and eventually ran away to seek out the theater troupe.

The masks worn by the sprites are tributes to a much more sinister artifact. The original mask—an unholy gift from Nyarlathotep—is tinged a dull reddish brown rather than the pale grey of the sprites' masks. Carved from an unknown wood, the features seem less menacing at first glance than those of the masks used by the theatrical troupe. Less oblong in appearance, careful study will reveal triangular forms faintly scratched into the surface—vaguely suggestive of cuneiform. The round face with simple openings for eyes and mouth is in fact prehistoric. An Archaeology or Anthropology roll will reveal that the apparently simple desire could very well predate the Neanderthal, making the mask easily 500,000 years old. Although it costs no SAN to view or handle the mask, the artifact conveys a sense of depth and age that some find chilling.

Touching the mask found in the basement of the old Summers house poses no danger to the investigators, unless an especially curious one decides to don the ancient device. As soon as the investigator can see through the eye slits, he or she has the feeling of body and soul being torn asunder, with the consciousness racing into the cold depths of space. As the universe flits by, the investigator feels immense ages passing. The investigator faints for 4D4 minutes and loses 1D12/1D8 SAN from the experience.

The mask plays a key role in Villers' plan to explore the dark arts. He discovered the artifact while exploring a cavern in southern Mexico, the last settlement of a community of witches wiped out by the Mayans. While the sorcerer has not yet mastered its astral projection abilities, he has been able to use it to convert children into the unearthly sprites. The process drains the power from its victims, releasing magical energy that is consumed by Villers and Nyarlathotep.

Destroying the artifact will end Villers' magical experiment. While weapons will gouge and score the unknown wood, only fire will completely destroy the mask. Because of the psychic connection generated by the conversion process, any harm done to the mask will immediately draw Villers and any remaining sprites to the cellar.

## A MYSTERY SOLVED?

Killing Villers or handing him over to the police will bring an end to the child abductions. If the investigators stop Villers but do not destroy the mask, his associates from Los Angeles will make their way to Tabor's Cove to pick up the pieces of their project. The Keeper should determine how successful they are in tracking down Villers' last hideout, and if their actions alert the investigators. Even with the mask destroyed and Villers out of the way, there is a chance that the Los Angeles sect may seek revenge.

Confronting Villers and the sprites at the abandoned farmhouse brings an end to the immediate threat posed by the occultists and his associates. However, the lifting of the eldritch shadow of Nyarlathotep does not end the mystery for the families and communities who suffered at the hands of the Ashwood Theater Company.

The destruction of the cult's experiment leaves many questions unanswered for people involved in the case. Without a believable explanation for the crimes or a culprit in hand, the people of Tabor's Cove and nearby towns will be left in limbo. Over the coming year they will continue to look for scapegoats and become obsessively protective of their children. As more time passes, the families of victims will psychologically fragment as they are left to wonder what happened to their children.

To fully resolve the mystery, the investigators need to help authorities and families connect Villers to the crimes. Two obstacles stand in their way. First, the PCs must find a way of keeping the supernatural aspects of the case from coming to light. It will be possible to raise the otherworldly as a motive—depicting Villers and his associates as madmen who thought that murdering children would give them occult power—but references to the strange appeal of the masks or the true nature of the sprites will only lead to the police ignoring the investigators.

The second obstacle will appear when the investigators consider how to bring closure to the families of the victims. Villers will not reveal a way to restore the sprites to human form; in fact, he does not even know if this is possible. While the creatures have some dim emotional flickers of their past lives, the transformation ritual has turned them into something so beyond the pale of humanity that restoration is not

possible. Convincing the families that their children were murdered will be difficult without remains.

Properly filtered, the evidence that led the investigators to Villers can be used to paint him as a suspect. The connection between the missing children and the Ashwood Theater Company will pique the interest of the police, but they will demand additional proof in order to arrest Villers if he survived the conflict at the farmhouse or declare the case closed if the investigators killed the wizard.

The enshrined toys offer one solution. The victims' parents will readily identify the toys their children were carrying when they disappeared. Their presence at the farmhouse—miles away from where the children were last seen—provides a concrete link between Villers and the abductions. This evidence will lead to a conviction for kidnapping, putting Villers behind bars for the rest of his life while prosecutors weigh the possibility of charging him with multiple murders.

Working with the families will prove more difficult. If Villers is pinned, some will accept that their nightmare has come to an end and recognize that their children have been murdered. Others will insist that, while Villers did kill some children, their own kids managed to escape the madman. Without the final proof offered by remains, these families will spend years torn between the quiet hope that their children are well and trying to work their way back home and the gnawing—almost unconscious—understanding that their children are really dead.

If left alive after the encounter at Summers farm, the sprites will scatter into the area around the abandoned house. Over the next few years, rumors will swirl about strange pale creatures haunting the roads and groves in the area—stories passed along by teenagers and whispered in school classrooms. The sprites do not attack anyone, only appearing fleetingly to dance in the distant darkness, or lurking near the road cooing and chattering in their eerie thin voices.



## THE TRACTATE (1939)

*The students stopped whispering as he walked around the corner of the building. Guilty, nervous glances flicked his way as they greeted him, followed by silence as he walked toward the front door of Locksley Hall. The faculty dining room had been much the same during lunch. Subdued conversations and an aura of sorrow, with nervous glances cast through the high windows at the police officers who had just arrived on the Commons. As he made his way up the stairs he knew one would be waiting in front of his office, his hat held respectfully in his hands. His pace slowed slightly as he weighed how much of the secret to reveal.*

### RETURNING TO ARKHAM

As summer starts to fade the investigators find themselves in Arkham, Massachusetts. The town draws them for a number of reasons: research, a WPA assignment to collect the folklore of the quaint towns in the region, a chance to return to the classroom after spending a summer teaching humanities courses in night classes in the South. The investigators return, and the feeling of ancient secrets that looms over the city lulls them into a reverie.

The investigators settle into the quiet life of Miskatonic University. Although nothing seems to have changed in the town, the troubles of the outside world have created some ripples in the community. The dean of students is debating what to do about a handful of boys who have returned from fighting in Spain and wish to resume classes. The sons of wealthy alums, the four disappeared in 1937 and popped up fighting against Franco in the civil war. The German and Soviet invasion of Poland in early September dominates conversations at faculty receptions and has created a state of tension on campus as students and instructors wait to see what will happen next in Europe. The normally sedate campus has been torn by shouting matches between pro-Communist students trying to defend Stalin's actions and disillusioned radicals who see him as no better than Hitler.

The university has welcomed a handful of refugees from the Nazis—intellectuals who fled Europe as the authoritarian regime expanded its reach. These visiting professors first began to appear in 1937, but the invasion of Poland has put them in the spotlight. The history department moved to create an evening lecture series where the refugees could discuss their experiences. The more conservative members of the board of trustees quashed the plan, however.

### THE MURDER

Mordechai Leibowitz arrived in Arkham, Massachusetts, in early February, 1939. Fleeing Prague after the German annexation of Czechoslovakia, the scholar found a haven in the small college town. Leibowitz spent the spring giving guest lectures in the literature and philosophy departments. The dean arranged for him to teach one class on ethics in the fall in addition to his guest appearances.

Leibowitz gained the respect of the students for his knowledge and ability to help them engage complex issues. While he had friends on the faculty he had met before the war and was well liked by other professors, many of his colleagues felt Leibowitz seemed haunted. He was less willing than the other refugees in Arkham to discuss his experiences in Europe and often appeared on edge. Leibowitz settled into a small rented house a few blocks from campus, where he devoted his time to preparing lectures and writing about philosophy.

On the morning of Tuesday, October 17, a housekeeper found the door of Professor Leibowitz's residence unlocked when she arrived at 9:30—a half hour after he usually left for his campus office. She ran to call police as soon as she stepped inside and saw the destruction in the front reading room. Someone had thrown books from the shelves; furniture was overturned and upholstery slashed. A neighbor called the police and tried unsuccessfully to reach Leibowitz at his office.

Police found the professor's body in an office in the back of the first floor. They believe he was surprised by a burglar in the reading room and dragged struggling to the office, where the intruder killed him with a stab to the throat. They feel that most of the looting occurred after

the murder. Even though the burglar ransacked every room, the cleaning woman and the professor's friends have not noticed any missing items.

Although the police have said publically that the tragedy was the result of a burglary gone wrong, they remain puzzled by the search that took place after the murder. Valuables were untouched, but the extent of the destruction indicates that the criminal did not flee from the house immediately after the killing. The damage done to some of the furnishings, especially bookcases, shows that the burglar became increasingly angry and frustrated.

While not openly challenging the official conclusion of the police, Leibowitz's friends at the university remain concerned. Some of them were brought to the site to answer questions about missing items, but none could help the police piece together a motive or find any leads. They feel that the police are too willing to treat the incident as a burglary that turned violent. Although Leibowitz was well liked by his new colleagues and had no known enemies in either the United States or Czechoslovakia, murmurings at Miskatonic University connect the crime to the persecution that forced the professor to flee Europe. However, his friends in the US have no concrete proof, and cannot offer a reason why the Nazis would continue to hound someone who had sought refuge half a world away.

Given the seeming randomness of the crime and the professor's connections to Europe, the police quietly contacted the FBI. Federal agents have reviewed the local investigation and looked at entry visa applications that might shed some light on a link to central Europe, but have failed to turn up any real clues. Every Friday afternoon, an agent from the Boston field office takes the train to Arkham to spend time with local police reviewing new information. While initially concerned about possible espionage or a brutal politically-motivated murder, the lack of evidence has driven Agent Brownlow to tacitly accept the botched burglary explanation the police have given the public.

## PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

### *A Friend in Need*

As the university community reacts to the brutal murder and police focus their attention on the burglary theory, a young member of the

philosophy faculty contacts the investigators. Harold Bradley had spent part of the summer working on two articles with Leibowitz, and had become fairly close to the older scholar. Bradley had tried to understand the professor's lingering fear in order to help assuage his concerns, but Leibowitz refused to discuss his fears even with his new friend. During the months they spent together, however, Bradley realized that Leibowitz felt responsible for some great burden. Leibowitz also seemed deeply concerned that he had been followed from Europe—a fear that Bradley felt bordered on paranoia.

While never unfriendly, Bradley believes that the professor never really made connections in the university community beyond those demanded by polite society. During the hours they spent working together in Leibowitz's home, he never received any phone calls nor had anyone drop by for a visit. On some deep level, Bradley concludes, the old man feared that he might draw any new friends into the web that threatened to ensnare him.

Two episodes stand out in Bradley's mind, however, and one has made him reconsider Leibowitz's inchoate fear. While discussing an article one evening, a student stopped by to drop off a book Leibowitz had requested from the library as well as some mail that had arrived at the department after the professor had left for the day. Leibowitz tore open an envelope with multiple stamps and postmarks (Bradley believes there was no return address, although he only caught a fleeting glimpse). The older professor unfolded a blank sheet of stationary, which he regarded for a few moments before putting a match to the paper and tossing it in the fireplace. Bradley is certain that the page was blank except for an imprinted heading of "an elaborate knot and a few words."

More ominously, Bradley recalls that Leibowitz refused to sit with his back to a door or window unless absolutely necessary and that he often took meandering routes as he walked between his small home and campus. To humor his colleague, Bradley agreed to follow the path taken by Leibowitz after they had spent an evening working at the library together. Bradley thought that this would show the professor had nothing to fear, but he saw a man keeping about half a block behind the professor. Bradley shadowed the stranger after Leibowitz safely reached his home, but he lost the man somewhere on a residential block on Walnut Street. Even

though he convinced himself it was a coincidence at the time, Bradley did not tell Leibowitz about the incident out of fear that it would upset him further.

Bradley described the latter incident to the police after the murder. His vague account of a well-dressed man with a regal, almost stiff, bearing walking down the street did not arouse their interest, especially since no one had been able to prove why Leibowitz had seemed so anxious and no other witnesses had mentioned the stalker. Police dismissed the clue as lingering paranoia from his experiences in Europe.

Discussions with other faculty members, students, and Leibowitz's housekeeper will yield the same general portrait painted by Bradley. The visiting professor was an extremely intelligent yet pleasant and approachable man, who seemed trapped in a maze of fear. None of Leibowitz's other acquaintances knew of the episodes described by Bradley, although the department secretary, Karen Rowe, says that the professor received an envelope from Prague about once every ten days, and that most did not bear return addresses. Rowe saw the knot letterhead when she went to Leibowitz's office to deliver a message one morning. Rowe is certain that the sheet she saw that day had a short handwritten note. She is also certain that she has seen the knot symbol before, but cannot place it.

### *The Crime Scene*

Mordecai Leibowitz's bungalow remains sealed by police when the investigators first begin their inquiries. Anyone who can claim a connection to the law enforcement or a member of university community and who makes a Persuade or Fast Talk roll will be granted a brief visit to the home. The officer arranging the visit will insist on chaperoning. Investigators can also visit the site more informally (or illegally). The crime has the neighborhood on alert, though, and any lights seen in the house at night or any suspicious figures lurking near the building could lead to a phone call to the police.

If the investigators search the surrounding area while visiting the site (rather than focusing all their energies on the house itself), a few clues will emerge. An alley running on the opposite side of Leibowitz's neighbor contains a small charred area with a tar-like residue. Even though the substance is unidentifiable, it has a sulfuric smell and contains

what appear to be partially-burned fingernails. The odd scene is located in a section of the alley that would be invisible to surrounding houses if the fire were kept low enough. An Idea roll will reveal that the alleys running through this section of faculty residences are—in general—poorly lit at night. While the area has a reputation for being safe, the alleys would provide a quick and easy way for an intruder to travel.

The house itself has mostly been put back in order. If a police officer has accompanied the investigators, he will show them where Leibowitz's body was found and quickly sketch out how the struggle unfolded.

While the most violent signs of the crime have been put back in order, the investigators will notice that the professor's books—mostly works of theology and philosophy written in English, Hebrew, and German—have been stacked in piles one atop another on the shelves, rather than being replaced. The officer will explain that the books were scattered everywhere in the house, and that even the cleaning lady did not know how they had been arranged on the shelves. If the investigators manage to sneak a look at the shelves (by distracting the policeman or during a nighttime visit), they will find that some of the covers have almost been wrenched from the books by someone jerking them open and casting them aside.

### *The Office*

Acting on advice from the police, the philosophy department has left Leibowitz's office intact until the investigation is closed. Bradley can arrange for the investigators to see the small office suite on the third floor of Locksley hall at night.

Prowling through the abandoned office with flashlights, the investigators find the rooms striking in their barrenness. Leibowitz met students in the shelf-lined front room, sitting at an oak table to discuss issues raised in the class. Beyond some basic reference books and a small pile of works from the library, the shelves stand empty. The library books were materials for Leibowitz's lectures.

The rear room has more of a personal feel. A desk sits below an east window overlooking the quad. A sheet of paper in the typewriter bears the return heading of a letter dated two days before the murder, but no information about the intended recipient. Opening the drawers reveals the secret vice the



scholar developed after moving to America: a box of candy bars for his sweet tooth. The top drawer holds some scraps of paper, mainly German notes and reminders Leibowitz wrote to himself, a receipt for a mantle clock he bought for his house, and a program for a performance of *Faust* he attended in Boston. Some seashells sit atop a low shelf—souvenirs of a trip to the coast with Professor McNeely in July. A narrow door connects the guest lecturer’s office to a forgotten departmental storeroom.

Bradley stands by the door during the search. When the investigators find the theater program, a sharp hiss draws their attention. Bradley spotted the flashing beam of a campus night watchman’s light at a T intersection at the end of the hall. Panicked, he closes and locks the door before moving quickly to the back room. Bradley looks around in desperation, fumbling for his keys when he spots the door to the storeroom. He motions for the investigators to hide as the footsteps echo louder outside.

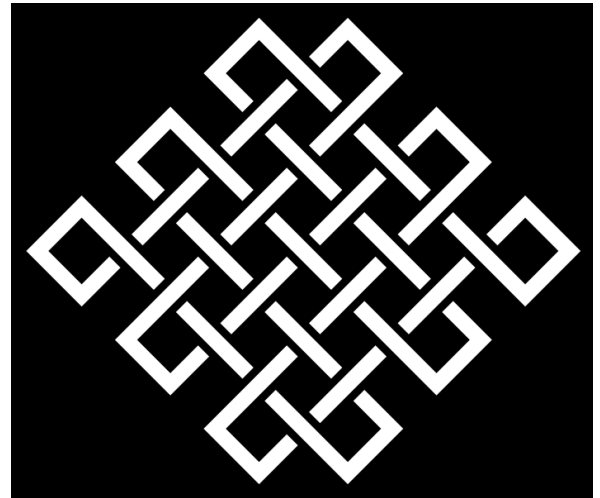
The six by eight foot space is made more cramped by the boxes of old books, forgotten globes, and broken typewriters crammed inside. Bradley cautiously pulls the door closed and waits with baited breath. After an eternity the sound of a key grating into a lock fills the room, and the outer door opens. The guard steps through the outer chamber and enters Leibowitz’s old sanctum. His movements seem to stop by the window before he turns and starts to leave. He pauses again, just in front of the storeroom door, standing for a few seconds before a loud yawn fills the room and he makes his way back to the main hallway.

Bradley cautiously turns on his flashlight, concealing most of the light with his hand. After straining his ears for the slightest sound, he motions that it is safe for the investigators to leave. Turning the light to the storeroom as he prepares to close and lock the door, he gasps in surprise. A framed certificate sits atop a box of books, bearing the same elaborate knot symbol Bradley had seen on the letterhead.

The dusty frame has been tucked away for several years. The seal and the words “Lux sapientiaque” (light and wisdom) dominate the certificate. The ornate script, written in Latin, welcomes department chair Professor McNeely on his “journey.”

*The Order of the Gordian Knot*

Daytime questions will reveal that Leibowitz never had a key to the storeroom. If asked about the certificate, McNeely will seem quite surprised—almost shaken—before nervously admitting that it commemorates his admission to a drinking club during his grad school visit to central Europe. He denies any knowledge of the letters received by Leibowitz while in Arkham, but for an instant seems taken aback if he learns of the blank sheet seen by Bradley.



A little digging in the library yields some information. Beginning with the motto and the knot design, the investigators find (on a Library Use roll with a -10% penalty) that the clues seem to be connected to a student group called the Order of the Gordian Knot. Created by Cambridge students during the height of the spiritualism and “psychical investigation” fads of the nineteenth century, the student club was originally a social group where members could discuss more arcane matters of science and metaphysics. The club spread to other universities in Europe, but faded after one of its members was connected to the murder of a prostitute in Paris in 1905. Accounts generally paint the organization as a blend of drinking club and debating society that was open to experimentation with the occult.

## THE BOOK

The force driving the crime remains safely hidden away from both the murderer and the authorities. An accursed book of unknown age, it has a long and dark history.

A few accounts of the sack of Constantinople by Crusaders in the early thirteenth century include brief references to a conflict between Flemish knights over an artifact called the *Codex Aeneo*. Historians and occultists have debated the origins and nature of the book, which disappeared from the written record after one knight murdered his liege and fled west to escape trial, apparently taking the work with him.

*The Bronze Tractate*, as it came to be known, reemerged in the hands of a disgraced scholar in fifteenth-century Prague. Known only as the Seeker, the scholar had received a writ of *cherem* (a form of excommunication) from the synagogue for the controversial and esoteric ideas he taught some of his closest students. Rather than changing his ways, the Seeker viewed the writ as a release from the constraints that had impeded his work. He more openly pursued arcane topics and traveled to the darkest and most depraved corners of Europe. The Seeker returned to Prague with the *Tractate*, and announced to his few friends that he would devote the remainder of his life to unlocking its secrets. The Seeker died mysteriously in the spring of 1462. Records indicate that a group of rabbis burned or hid away his possessions in order to protect the community. In the centuries that followed, students of the occult debated the Seeker's exact identity without reaching a solution, and reached no firm consensus about the exact fate of his collection.

The text itself seems to range across a number of topics from math and astrology through fertility rituals and philosophy. Secondary accounts say that the book is unreadable to the uninitiated, but that it "opens itself" to people whose minds can handle its insights. The fabled opaqueness of the text is due to the fact that it was written in code. Although sources do not describe the nature of the cipher, the Koine Greek text was written in a substitution code that used characters based loosely on letters from the Phoenician alphabet. The key letters change from one section of the text to the next—sometimes in the middle of a line of thought—making it laborious to wade through the book.

Investigators with access to the special collections department of Miskatonic's library can learn the above information (except for details of the code) with a successful Library Use roll. Although the surviving records and comments from occultic bibliographies indicate

that there was a good chance *The Bronze Tractate* disappeared into the flames, the book actually survived. The tome remained hidden away under the care of one rabbi who would reveal the book's secret location only to his



chosen successor. No one made an effort to study the work or even read the *Tractate* during this period. In the early 1870s, the guardian of the *Tractate* arranged to have it locked away in a palace owned by the Hapsburg family, which became a museum in 1919.

The tome remained under lock and key at the old Hapsburg museum until the Nazis annexed western Czechoslovakia in 1938. Realizing that the occupation of the whole nation would soon follow, the curator secretly removed the most precious artifacts and texts and hid them with individuals he knew would protect them from the Germans. Mordecai Leibowitz received the book late in the summer, and promptly hid the book under the floorboards of his apartment. Working through several layers of friends, he arranged for *The Bronze Tractate* to go to the chair of the philosophy department at Miskatonic University. The book left Czechoslovakia in December of 1938. Leibowitz traveled to

Holland a few weeks later, leaving for the United States in January 1939.

After the Nazis occupied Prague in 1939, a group of SS officers began searching for the artifacts removed from the museum. Most would go to government or private collections in Germany, but a few of the more obscure items—including *The Bronze Tractate*—were intended for study by the SS. The network of friends and fronts created by Leibowitz protected the book until the curator of the museum was tortured into admitting where he had sent the text. The Germans quickly tracked Leibowitz's movements and dispatched an officer to learn where the professor had hidden the book.

## THE ASSASSIN

Heinrich Nauhaus presents himself as Henry Newton—an alumnus who is visiting old professors while arranging for his nephew to begin classes next fall. He speaks unaccented American English, and has a passable knowledge of life in the US that he picked up during a visit as a student. Nauhaus arrived in Massachusetts in August, and began shadowing Mordecai Leibowitz.

Nauhaus broke into the professor's home on the night of a reception at the dean's house. A case of heartburn had sent Leibowitz home early, however. The SS officer grabbed the professor as soon as he entered, hoping to drag the man to the rear of the house and subdue him. Nauhaus panicked due to the noise and unexpected energy of Leibowitz's resistance, and stabbed him in the throat. Certain the scholar was dead, he spent the next five hours searching the house before slipping out the back door at about 3:00 a.m.

Nauhaus is convinced that the book is in Arkham. An unsuccessful attempt to find the book in the special collections department of the university library led him to conclude that the tome was either in Leibowitz's possession or had been given to a colleague. After the murder, the SS officer has resigned himself to watching Leibowitz's friends for any sign that the book is being moved or for any information about its current location. Unless they are too obvious in their actions, Nauhaus won't focus on the investigators until they visit the victim's house.

Nauhaus carries a 9mm pistol concealed under his jacket. The cut of his clothing makes it extremely difficult to see, although he will never remove his suit coat in order to avoid exposing

the weapon. He also uses a dagger, which he keeps in a briefcase.

Heinrich Nauhaus, SS captain

STR: 12

CON: 12

SIZ: 11

DEX: 14

APP: 14

SAN: 45

INT: 16

POW: 15

EDU: 16

Idea: 80

Luck: 75

Know: 80

Damage Bonus: +0

Hit Points: 12

Weapons: 9mm automatic (65%) 1D10

Dagger (70%) 1D4+2

Spells: Contact Hound of Tindalos

## THE ROOM UPSTAIRS

Heinrich Nauhaus has taken a room in a boarding house a few blocks from campus, near the intersection of High and Walnut Streets, close to the spot where Bradley lost track of Leibowitz's stalker. Appearing as an inquisitive but benign outsider, he has largely avoided alarming the other residents. Daniel Masters, the twelve-year-old son of the owner, has his suspicions about the tenant. Hearing a sound the night of Leibowitz's murder, he rushed to his window to see the boarder climbing the downspout and scampering across the low garage behind the house. Daniel did not see Nauhaus return via the same route, and as of yet has not connected the strange scene to the murder. He did notice, however, that two of the mysterious boarder's fingernails were torn at breakfast the next morning.

Daniel has developed his own theory about the lodger. Born of fantasy, the boy's speculations strike close to the facts. After seeing Nauhaus sneaking out of the house, Daniel began keeping tabs on him. Strange smoky smells, low murmurings in an unknown tongue, and the odd outing have convinced Daniel that Nauhaus is a spy who is hiding in their quiet community while he makes bombs. An illicit search of Heinrich's room while the visitor was at Miskatonic revealed a few vials of strange powder (incense, in fact) and arcane-looking books in German.



Alerted by her son, Dorothea Masters pretended to find the items while cleaning Nauhaus/Newton's room. The guest casually explained that the books were old texts from his days as a European lit student, and that the powder is medication for asthma. His earnestness convinced Mrs. Masters, who prohibited Daniel from harassing the guest further. Although the boy has kept up his vigil, he has not heard any odd mumbling coming from the next room.

If befriended (and more, importantly, believed) by the investigators, Daniel will help them gain access to Newton's room when his mother and the boarder are away. At first glance, most of the items in the room suggest the quiet life of a middle-class traveler. One book sits on the nightstand. The volume Daniel insists is a code book is actually a German-language guide to Prague museum collections published in 1910. A second, older, book that Daniel recalls from his snooping appears to be missing. Although he says the cover bore no title, the boy claims the text was also in German.

Nauhaus has shoved the second book to the back of a high shelf in his closet, along with a shaving kit containing vials of the mysterious powder. The title page of an older volume reveals it to be *Das gehörnte Andachtsbuch (The Horned Liturgy)*, printed in Freiburg in August 1892. Investigators who can read German will find the book an incoherent jumble of rites and formulae at first glance, interspersed with Norse runes and arcane geomantic diagrams. Anyone spending time studying the liturgy will learn that it is a series of rituals, incantations, and meditations written to help students of the occult "descend the eight spheres." The alien cosmology and descriptions of grueling exercises will cost readers 1D4 SAN and increase their Mythos skill by +4%. Although the book hints at the effects of magic, readers will not learn new spells by perusing the liturgy.

Three blue glass vials with heavy rubber stoppers contain Newton's "bomb making kit." Access to a lab and a successful Chemistry role will reveal an amalgam of sulfur and other elements. Any investigator making an Occult role will realize that it is an obscure incense intended to heighten sensitivity to ebbs and fluxes in cosmic energy.

The sitting room in the boarding house more information about the lodger. Piled next to the chair where Mr. Newton enjoys an after-

dinner cigarette each evening, the investigators will find a few popular magazines and about ten days' worth of back issues of the *Arkham Clarion*. Nauhaus/Newton has circled two articles. Both are unrelated to Leibowitz and the *Tractate*. The first announces that police have closed their investigation of an accidental death at the Four Winds Theater. The second states that the theater's owners have decided to leave the business closed through at least Thanksgiving.

## THE FOUR WINDS THEATER

Located within walking distance of the residential neighborhoods favored by Miskatonic's faculty, the Four Winds Theater became Nauhaus's new base of operations after Daniel Masters stumbled on his activities. The building has stood abandoned since the hazing death of a Miskatonic student in mid-September. A member of the fraternity involved worked part-time as a janitor at the cinema, and used his key to open the building for his brothers. No charges were filed, although the university quietly sent the other students home for the term and have moved to suspend the fraternity.

Nauhaus gained access to the theater by picking the lock on a service entrance and jamming open the latch. Steering clear of the front box office, his use of the theater has remained unobserved. The large open space gives him the room he needs to perform the rites detailed in the *Horned Liturgy*, while the decision to close the cinema after the tragedy has given him the privacy he needs to complete his mission. The assassin hopes that the abandoned theater will also be useful if he needs to perform any rituals related to the *Tractate*. Although he continues to keep some of his occult supplies in his room at the boardinghouse, the agent has moved materials related to his search for the book to the old cinema.

Investigators who case the location will easily find the unlocked alley door. Nauhaus—fearing more trouble from Daniel—will not visit the site in the dead of night unless he has the *Tractate* or he suspects someone has found his new base. Characters exploring the theater at any other time have a 30% of encountering the Nazi agent, unless they have arranged with Daniel to know when he has settled into the boarding house.

Nauhaus has hidden his notes and equipment under a trapdoor in the narrow stage the runs in front of the screen. The cache includes scribbled pages (in a mix of German and English) filled when he searched the catalog and patron records at Miskatonic's library. A Library Use of Idea roll will allow PCs to discern a web of interconnected books and individuals, all coming to center on Professor McNeely. The space below the stage also holds candles, a copper knife with a narrow undulating blade, and three extra clips for Nauhaus's pistol.

## TIGHTENING THE NOOSE

Frustrated by his failure to find the book at Leibowitz's residence and alarmed by his close call with Daniel, Nauhaus changed his line of approach. Although he realized that the *Tractate* had not been cached in the special collections department of the library, he guessed that whoever had the tome would try to learn more about the legendary book. Nauhaus successfully hid inside the library prior to closing, and spent the night perusing records related to *The Bronze Tractate's* history and the themes it allegedly explored as well as snooping through patron records

The search turned up only one viable lead: Laurence McNeely, the chair of the philosophy department. Based on information about McNeely's visit to the special collections department, Nauhaus studied his background and learned that the professor had spent a semester in Prague while completing his doctoral studies in Europe.

Based on this information, Nauhaus plans to break into the professor's office. The weekend after the investigators meet Daniel, Nauhaus enters Locksley Hall early on Sunday morning and successfully locates the book. To cover his trail, Nauhaus will ransack the secretary's office and steal some student files as well. The police will focus on this aspect of the burglary, believing that someone rifled through the files to find blackmail information about students' families.

Professor McNeely does not tell the police about the *Tractate's* disappearance. The department head had earlier concealed the book from the police when questioned about possible leads in Leibowitz's murder. Now that it is apparent to him that *The Bronze Tractate* is at the center of the crimes, he will begin taking steps to

secure the ancient treatise. If the investigators have contacted McNeely prior to the break in (in order to ask questions about Leibowitz's migration, for instance) he will contact them to ask for help. He will explain that the refugee's murder seems to have been connected to an art object or historical curiosity, and will not divulge the nature of the *Tractate* to the investigators.

Although McNeely will conceal the true nature (as he understands it) of the *Tractate*, he will offer other information to the investigators. After Leibowitz became concerned with the possibility that someone was stalking him, he asked McNeely to stay at his house while he slipped to Boston visit a friend. On a Saturday evening, as McNeely sat in Leibowitz's front room reading magazines and listening to the radio, he saw a man stop in front of the house to tie his shoe. Over the course of the evening, he saw the same man pass by three more times, tying his shoe or finding some other pretext to linger near the house.

McNeely will also reveal more about his connection to the Order of the Gordian Knot. While continuing to claim that it was a harmless drinking club he had joined as a grad student, the professor admits that its members have connections to many of the top universities in Europe and that a core had never given up the fascination with the paranormal that had driven the group's founders. One of its members, he surmises, kept Leibowitz updated on the search for the book. McNeely does not know the significance of the blank page Leibowitz received.

## THE INVOCATION

Nauhaus was a dangerous choice for the mission to America. Fascinated by the occult, he had the background necessary to understand the nature of the book and piece together the trail of the unhallowed tome. His personal interest in the subject, however, makes it impossible for the SS officer to view the assignment objectively. After he acquires the *Tractate*, Nauhaus will spend one week consuming its contents, leaving his room at the boarding house only for meals. He has decided not to inform his superiors that he has found the book until he feels he understands it himself—and has had a chance to try some of its rituals.

If the investigators have made contact with Daniel, he will tell them that Mr. Newton



has locked himself away in his room. Seeing the agent when he drops off trays of food, Daniel has noticed a dramatic change in the SS officer's mood. The cool civility of the visitor has disappeared, replaced by a mood of strangely furtive exultation.

Nauhaus has devoted himself to the central ritual in the book: a ceremony to summon the god Avyctes. Avyctes dwells 2600 lights years away in the Owl Nebula. Historically, his cult on earth worshipped fire and blood, and occultists believe it was the inspiration for the worship of Moloch in ancient Phoenicia and the rites of child sacrifice practiced by some groups in the Andean highlands. In his distant home Avyctes looks like an oily, smoking, bubble. In the atmosphere of Earth, however, his body seems to swirl and shift, with the faces of humans, animals, and untold cosmic beings appearing in the chaos of the sphere and surging forward to escape. While mutating, his form smells of burning blood.

Late in the week, Nauhaus returns to his hideout to turn the narrow stage into a crude altar. He suddenly leaves the boarding house on Saturday, carrying a small valise and telling Mrs. Masters that he will not be returning.

Daniel will alert the investigators if they have gained his trust. If they track Nauhaus to the theater, they will find him deep in the unhallowed ritual. Two heavy black candles rest on either end of small, high table he salvaged from the manager's office, their flames dancing across the open pages of the *Book of Bronze*. Standing before the book, Nauhaus chants the invocation necessary to summon Avyctes. He uses his dagger to draw blood from the palm of each hand, letting the drops fall into the sputtering flames of the candles as he intones the rites found in the text.

As he mouths each syllable, a hollow orange glow gives faint light to the entire room. High above, a circle of fire has appeared in the center of the ceiling. Only one or two feet in diameter, the arcane fire still casts weird dancing shadows among the rows of empty seats. A faint droning chant fills the theater, seemingly emerging from the circle of fire above.

As the unholy fire spreads across the ceiling of the theater, a black shape swoops high around the outside of the room. In the flickering light, what appears to be a large, distorted crow flutters near the ceiling before swooping to attack the investigators. A byakhee has appeared,

drawn by the energy of the ritual. Seeing the creature flying through the air costs 1D6/1 SAN.

STR: 18  
CON: 10  
SIZ: 18  
INT: 10  
POW: 10  
DEX: 14  
HP: 14  
Move: 5/20 in flight  
Weapon: Claw (35%) 2D6  
Bite (35%) 2D6+ plus blood drain  
Armor: Tough hide (2)

Killing Nauhaus will not stop the ceremony once it is underway. The Nazi will try to continue the invocation if attacked, his voice rising to a shriek as he fends off the investigators with his dagger. If he is slain the fire will seem to die down for a moment (and the byakhee will disappear into shadows if it has not been killed), only to erupt with new fury as a strange bellowing voice emerges from the pages of the book itself. Anyone within ten feet of the *Tractate* will see the words light up in turn as the voice continues the ritual. Hearing the voice alone costs 1D5/1D2 SAN; hearing the voice and seeing the glowing letters costs 1D8/1D4 SAN.

Nauhaus recited enough of the ritual (and invested enough of his own energy and sanity) to reach a point where the summoning has taken on a life of its own. As the droning chant continues, part of the flame spreading above the investigators seems to separate itself from the ceiling and form a burning sphere. The chanting dies away, and distorted, malevolent faces begin to swirl in the god's body.

Avyctes drifts slowly in the direction of the book. While formidable, Avyctes attacks rather blindly. If his form drifts against an investigator, it causes 2D6 burn damage. There is a 25% chance that one of the chaotic faces will snap at the victim as well, causing an additional 1D4 damage.

STR: 26  
CON: 65  
SIZ: 45  
INT: NA  
POW: 66  
DEX: 5  
HP: 55

Move: 4  
Weapon: Burn (10%) 2D6  
Bite (25%) 2D6+1D4  
SAN: 1D20/1D8 loss

As Avyctes takes stock of his surroundings, the fire continues to spread overhead. The edges of the blaze lap away at the upper walls while the fire works its way to the joists high above. Within 3+1D4 minutes smoke fills the main theater; the aching cracks of the ceiling beams begin to sound after 5+1D6 minutes. Roughly fifteen minutes after Avyctes appears, the blaze becomes visible to passersby, who call the Arkham Fire Department.

The investigators can banish the god back to the Owl Nebula in two ways. His earthly form is tenuous and unstable—continuously morphing in the strange gravity and mixture of atmospheric gasses. Physical damage or a magical attack will force him to give up his connection to Earth and flee to his distant home. Firearms or melee weapons do half damage unless the attacker rolls an impale result—representing a strike to one of the ghastly heads. A successful impale does double damage as per normal. If the investigators think to grab the emergency fire hose in the rear of the lobby, they can inflict 2D8 damage per attack with the improvised weapon, although the hose's accuracy (25%) leaves much to be desired.

Rather than attacking the god's form directly, investigators can try to sever Avyctes' bridge to Earth by damaging the *Tractate*. The ancient book rests on the narrow stage in front of the screen. Avyctes will react if the investigators try to reach the altar Nauhaus build for his ceremony, dropping toward the stage and snapping with his multiple mouths as they try to reach the text.

The investigators must deal 10 points of damage to the book to destroy it and banish Avyctes. The book smolders when attacked, adding a thick oily smoke to the haze in the room. Each round, the investigators must make a CONx5 roll with a -5% penalty for every 2 points of damage the book has suffered. If they miss a roll, they are overcome by the purplish-black vapor, falling to the floor coughing and gasping for breath.

Normal flames do not damage the book. If the text is left in the theater as the building burns, it will emerge covered in heavy ash, with soot clinging to every page. Although the tome

appears useless, a simple yet somewhat time-consuming process will restore the damaged pages and once again allow the book to circulate.



## SAMPLE INVESTIGATORS

### BEAN-BELLY THORNTON

Hobo

Bean-belly decided he wanted nothing to do with property and possessions after a rooster attacked him as a child. A daydreamer, he muddled through the eighth grade before leaving home to take odd jobs. He joined the Army in 1917, but hopped a train headed the other way when his unit set to disembark from a station near Fort Benning.

Age: early 40s

STR: 11

CON: 14

SIZ: 10

DEX: 11

APP: 10

SAN: 45

INT: 12

POW: 9

EDU: 12

Idea: 60

Luck: 45

Know: 50

Damage Bonus:

Hit Points: 12

Skills:

Bargain 35%

Climb 50%

Conceal 25%

Fast Talk 45%

First Aid 50%

Hide 40%

Law 15%

Listen 45%

Natural History 20%

Pick Pocket 25%

Sing 25%

Sneak 30%

Spot Hidden 45%

### SANDY SULLIVAN

Occupation: Documentary Photographer

Sullivan helped out at her uncle's photography studio when she was a teenager. Her knack for being in the right place at the right time allowed her to pick up work as a freelance photographer for papers in southern California. Her growing skill brought her to the attention of the USDA, which hired Sullivan to record the Depression.

Age: 25

STR: 10

CON: 10

SIZ: 9

DEX: 11

APP: 11

SAN: 70

INT: 12

POW: 14

EDU: 13

Idea: 60

Luck: 70

Know: 65

Damage Bonus:

Hit Points: 10

Skills:

Drive 40%

Fast Talk 35%

Library Use 45%

Mechanical Repair 40%

Persuade 45%

Photography 80%

Sociology 45%

Spot Hidden 50%



RANDOLPH CLINE  
WPA Folklorist

Cline's widowed father, a doctor in Brooklyn, took the boy with him when he made house calls. Cline became enthralled by the family stories he heard, and loved to talk to older residents about the changes they had seen in the old neighborhoods. He studied anthropology at the City University of New York, and his advisor connected him to the WPA.

Age: 23  
STR: 9  
CON: 10  
SIZ: 10  
DEX: 10  
APP: 12  
SAN: 50  
INT: 12  
POW: 10  
EDU: 14  
Idea: 60  
Luck: 50  
Know: 70  
Damage Bonus:  
Hit Points: 10  
Skills:  
Anthropology 70%  
Bargain 25%  
Fast Talk 25%  
History 70%  
Law 25%  
Library Use 60%  
Speak Yiddish 40%  
Speak Hebrew 20%

THEODORA FRANZ  
Social Worker

Friends connected Theodora Franz to the New York Catholic Worker house when she began seeking a direction in life during college. She barely finished her degree in English, spending a growing amount of time working with needy families. A friend of Dorothy Day, the movement's founder, helped Franz get a social work license. Extremely devoted to social justice issues, she rankles at any hint of unfairness and responds quickly to combat suffering.

Age: 26  
STR: 10  
CON: 11  
SIZ: 10  
DEX: 11  
APP: 12  
SAN: 60  
INT: 14  
POW: 12  
EDU: 13  
Idea: 70  
Luck: 60  
Know: 65  
Damage Bonus:  
Hit Points: 11  
Skills:  
Drive 35%  
Fast Talk 30%  
First Aid 60%  
Listen 45%  
Locksmith 35%  
Persuade 45%  
Psychology 50%  
Sociology 55%  
Spot Hidden 40%

ANNETTE THOMISON  
Dilettante Social Worker

On the bright side, Annette Thomison does not hate poor people as does her husband, Dr. Clive Thomison. After the bad publicity he received when a woman he turned away from his office died in childbirth, Annette Thomison began a campaign to salvage her family's reputation for compassion. While she lacks the professional and personal skills needed to be a good social worker, she has gradually grown in acceptance and empathy as she has worked with down-and-out families.

Age: 37  
STR: 10  
CON: 11  
SIZ: 8  
DEX: 10  
APP: 16  
SAN: 50  
INT: 11  
POW: 10  
EDU: 12  
Idea: 55  
Luck: 50  
Know: 60  
Damage Bonus:  
Hit Points: 10  
Skills:  
Art (Painting) 45%  
Credit Rating 70%  
Driving 25%  
Listen 45%  
Persuade 45%  
Photography 25%  
Ride 40%  
Speak Other Language (French) 40%

WILLIAM MADSEN  
Historian

Madsen settled into a position at a medium-sized college teaching undergrads and writing articles about Andrew Jackson. A friend from graduate school invited him to teach history classes for immigrants in New York during the summer. The change of pace sparked an interest in cultural and social history, which he has been exploring through connections with the WPA.

Age: 38  
STR: 10  
CON: 9  
SIZ: 10  
DEX: 11  
APP: 12  
SAN: 45  
INT: 13  
POW: 9  
EDU: 15  
Idea: 65  
Luck: 45  
Know: 75  
Damage Bonus:  
Hit Points: 10  
Skills:  
Drive 35%  
Handgun 45%  
History 75%  
Law 50%  
Library Use 75%  
Natural History 35%  
Persuade 65%  
Sociology 30%

FRED HALLER  
FBI Agent

A genuine numbers person, Haller's friends have always told him he was born to be a bookie or a gambler. His interest in structure and eye for detail drew him to the FBI, however, where he has developed a reputation for his analytical skills and his ability to dive into anything from accounting to geometry. Quiet by nature, Haller finds the publicity surrounding the FBI amusing.

Age: 32  
STR: 10  
CON: 10  
SIZ: 12  
DEX: 10  
APP: 9  
SAN: 50  
INT: 14  
POW: 10  
EDU: 13  
Idea: 70  
Luck: 50  
Know: 65  
Damage Bonus:  
Hit Points: 11  
Skills:  
Accounting 65%  
Forensics 40%  
Handgun 45%  
Law 50%  
Library Use 55%  
Persuade 40%  
Psychology 35%  
Spot Hidden 40%

LEON INGALLS  
Communist Journalist

Ingalls joined his parents in a small three-person parade celebrating the 1917 Russian Revolution, marching along the street in front of the family's bungalow. As he matured they encouraged him to turn his artistic abilities to political purposes. By the time Ingalls finished college, he had already published a number of articles in radical newspapers and journals. Although he is worried about the obsessive love many other American communists feel for the Soviet Union, he shares their concern for the economic problems facing the United States.

Age: 29  
STR: 9  
CON: 11  
SIZ: 10  
DEX: 9  
APP: 11  
SAN: 50  
INT: 15  
POW: 10  
EDU: 14  
Idea: 75  
Luck: 50  
Know: 70  
Damage Bonus:  
Hit Points: 11  
Skills:  
Conceal 30%  
Fast Talk 35%  
Hide 25%  
Law 50%  
Listen 40%  
Library Use 55%  
Persuade 60%  
Read/Write English 85%  
Sneak 25%  
Sociology 50%  
Spot Hidden 40%

## SARAH TALBOTT

Nurse

Sarah Talbott spent two years in high school working for the National Youth Administration, where she helped teach in a job training program for former domestic servants. She remained part of the NYA while taking classes at a teaching hospital to become a nurse, providing first aid during summer camps. Setting out on her own, Talbott wants to continue helping others.

Age: 24

STR: 10

CON: 11

SIZ: 10

DEX: 9

APP: 11

SAN: 65

INT: 13

POW: 13

EDU: 12

Idea: 65

Luck: 65

Know: 60

Damage Bonus:

Hit Points: 11

Skills:

Biology 35%

Drive 35%

First Aid 70%

Medicine 70%

Pharmacy 40%

Psychology 45%

Spot Hidden 30%

Swim 30%

## CHRISTOPHER DUNN

Minister

Reverend Dunn served a small but well-established Presbyterian Church near Chicago. He spent summers traveling to work with relief and assistance programs in the Midwest. After a trip to help start an education program for sharecroppers in Alabama, some of the stodgier members of his congregation pulled strings to have him removed from his post. Dunn is now at a crossroads in his life, trying to find a way to explore his new interests while looking for ways to rebuild his career.

Age: 34

STR: 9

CON: 11

SIZ: 10

DEX: 10

APP: 12

SAN: 65

INT: 14

POW: 13

EDU: 13

Idea: 70

Luck: 65

Know: 65

Damage Bonus:

Hit Points: 11

Skills:

Archaeology 20%

History 50%

Latin 30%

Mechanical Repair 30%

Natural History 30%

Occult 20%

Persuade 45%

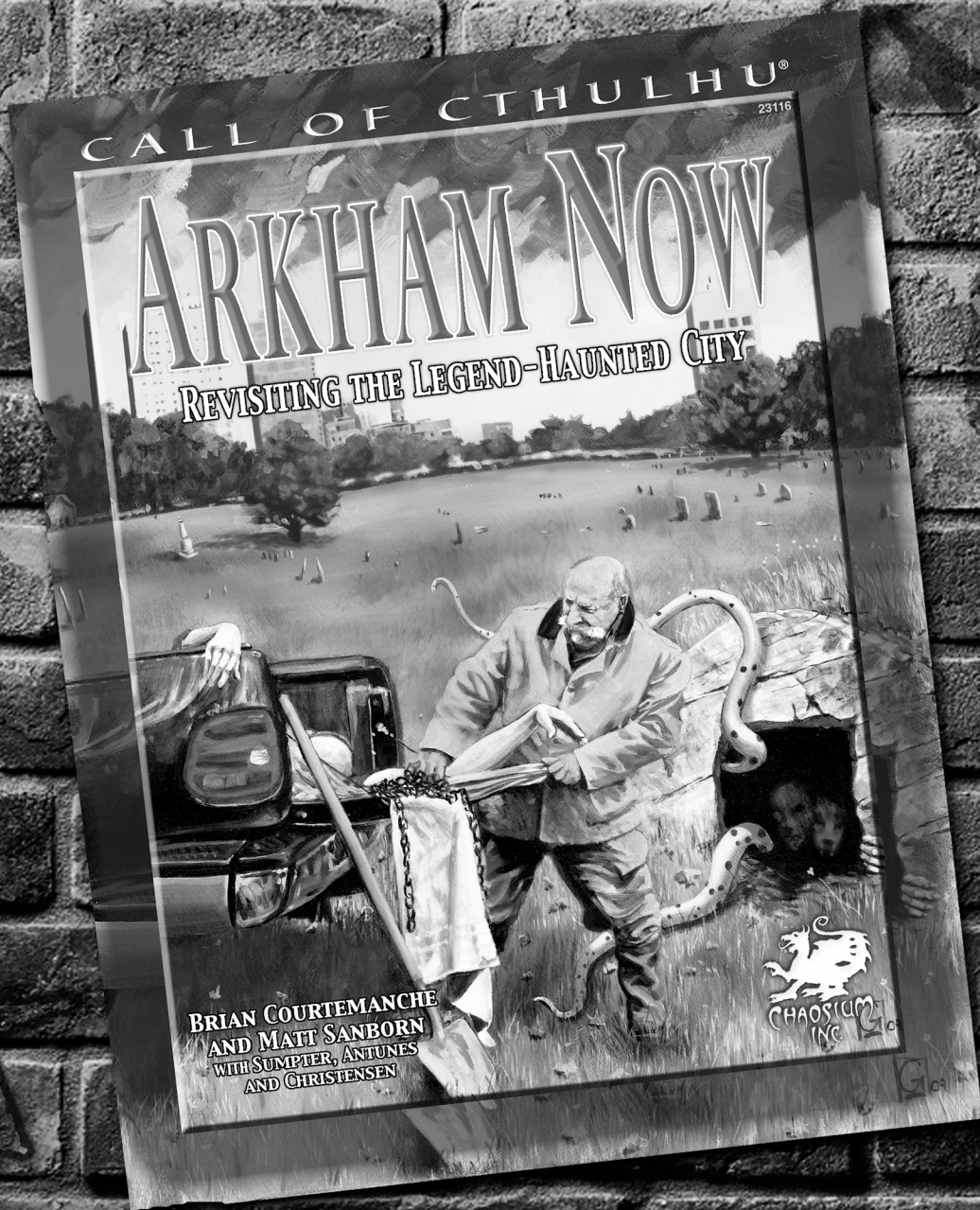
Psychology 30%

Sociology 40%

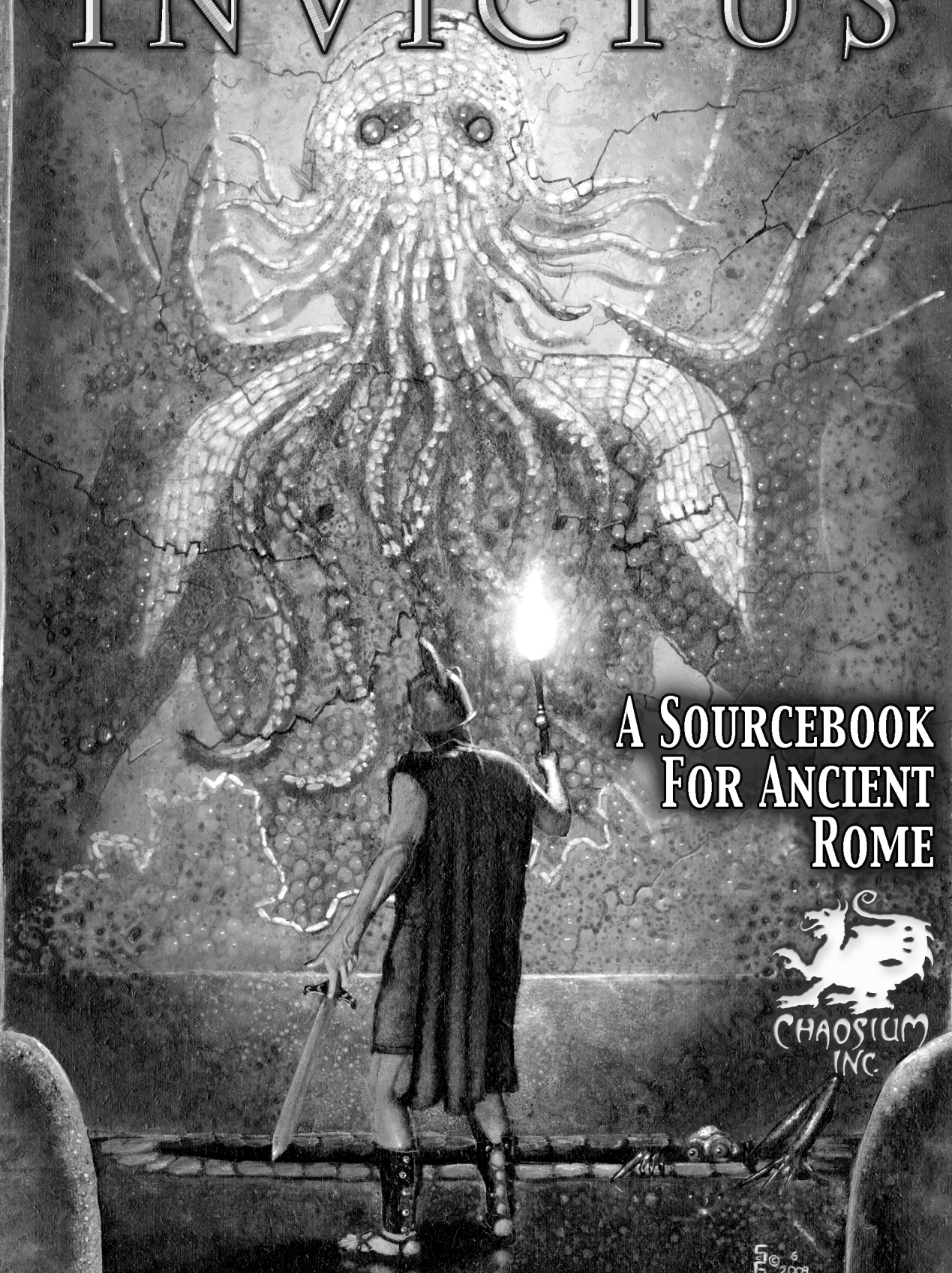
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