

Dinner With Susan

A modern-day *Call of Cthulhu* scenario

by Kelvin Green, November 2008

v1.4

This short scenario is intended to be run for beginning investigators, and should take about three or four hours to play through.

It is based – very loosely – on Clive Barker's short story *The Madonna* from his *Books of Blood*; I say “loosely”, because when I wrote the scenario, all I knew of the original story was a short synopsis appearing in Barker's own *A to Z of Horror*. As such, the story plays out in a somewhat different manner.

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You have gathered at DiTillio's to meet your friend Susan Ambridge, a professional photographer, and to have a fancy dinner to celebrate the impending publication of her new book. It's been a while since you've seen her and each other, and you're all looking forward to catching up. However, Susan is late.

One investigator will receive a phone call, apparently from Susan's phone. An unfamiliar male voice speaks: "I know this is hard to believe, but it's Susan. I don't have much time. I need help. Please." Attempts to call back ring through to the answering service.

Susan's House

Locked up, but the spare key is where it always is, hidden in a flower pot by the front door. Inside, the house is untidy, but there is nothing untoward.

Garage: The garage is open, but Susan's car is not there. Otherwise, the garage is full of the usual tools, boxes and so on.

Living Room: There is an answering machine, which has not been checked in about a week and a half.

Kitchen: Quite messy, with lots of washing up to be done, and little left in the cupboards beyond some dried pasta and some tins. In the fridge is a jam jar half-filled with a greenish-white cream (Mother's Milk).

Bedroom: A pile of library books by the unmade bed, and lots of dirty and half-drunk coffee cups on the bedside table. Curtains are drawn and the table lamp is on and hot to the touch, suggesting it's been on a while. While there are various titles about urban decay and constructed landscapes – the subject of her book – there are also a number on the Gaia Hypothesis, visions of the Earth Mother and similar themes, but it's all light, airy, hippy stuff. On one book – *The Quest for Gaia* – there is a Post-It with "Allbooks" scrawled hastily upon it.

Bathroom: On top of the toilet, and all around the sink are lots of hormone drugs. A medical type will recognise them as used in hormone therapy, although none of the investigators know of Susan undertaking such therapy.

Office: Most of the material in here is more relevant to Susan's project, but there are one or two Gaia-type titles.

Darkroom: Most of the recent photographs here are of a derelict city building. A photograph of a street sign identifies the area as Hobb's End. A number of photographs have been developed, but destroyed through scratching and burning, so it is impossible to make out the subject. The negatives are nowhere to be found.

Susan's computer: An advanced Mac. Lots more photographs, but no copies of the missing pictures. The sequence of filenames is incomplete, suggesting that some pictures have been deleted. A computer expert may be able to retrieve them, and they show something large and pale resting in a wrecked indoor area. The pale object has an organic shape, but is heavily blurred; no amount of

image processing can clarify it. The rest of the picture, background and foreground, is quite clear, and those who know about photography will realise the impossibility of the image, causing a loss of 0/1 Sanity.

Doctor Arthur Moul

As per the Hippocratic Oath, Moul is barred from discussing a patient. Should the investigators manage to get him to talk, or read his files, they will find notes on aggressive masculinisation, although Moul has yet to place the source. Hormone therapy was prescribed to counter the effects until more was known.

Allbooks, 13 Little Bevan Street, Bloomsbury, London WC1

A tiny, cramped shop with no discernable shelving system. Owned by Bernard, a dishevelled and nihilistic Irishman, possibly drunk. "Yes, some arsey City photographer came in looking for a copy of *Nameless Cults*, of all things. As if we have *Nameless Cults*! And if we did, we wouldn't sell it for the prices she was offering, successful photojournalist or not. Bah!"

Hobb's End

A slightly run down area of the city, bustling in the first half of the century, but slowly abandoned by the 1950's. Now it is mainly lower-cost housing, attracting a blend of immigrants, students and squatters. There is plenty there to interest a photographer looking for urban decay, including an unfinished Tube station, a world-famous cinema now in private ownership, and a public swimming pool designed by a famous architect (Ivo Shandor), but nonetheless abandoned with everything else.

There are many missing person ads posted up on poles and disused shopfronts, mostly for homeless folk, as well as a number of posters alerting passers-by to missing pets. There are very few people out and about, and even fewer at night.

Most people will complain about the state of the area. Some will complain in particular about the increase in dogs running wild in the streets at night – these are Mother's Children – and some will have noticed a female photographer hanging about the area in the last six weeks or so. Almost everyone is terse and uncommunicative. 1 in 10 locals will show a random mutation as a result of exposure to Mother's Milk.

Susan's Car: A Luck roll leads to the discovery of Susan's car. It has been robbed and vandalised, but there is a ringbound London A-Z guide in the glove compartment, and an empty jar in the boot. The A-Z is opened to the Hobb's End area, and a number of areas are marked – including the Baths and the Tube station, but mainly just particularly photogenic areas. The jar has a dry residue inside, roughly the same colour and scent as the creamy substance from the jar in Susan's fridge.

Hobb's End Underground Station

Due to an administrative error, the station was built in the 1960's but the line was never extended to it, having been diverted elsewhere as Hobb's End became less of a desirable area. The completed station stands as an embarrassing reminder of governmental folly. Susan has been seen here, but not of late, and there are no clues as to her whereabouts.

The Swimming Baths

Still a very handsome design, despite its condition, the building is stately and bombastic, invoking a more proud and positive time. There is a chain fence surrounding the plot, and the building itself is heavily boarded. Towards the back, accessible through a small locked gate in the fence, is a small square building. Lights can be seen inside. Heavy weed growth runs from the building right up to the fence.

Caretaker's Cottage: A bedsit-type layout with a kitchen/living room and a separate bathroom/bedroom. It is very clean and tidy, in stark contrast to the surrounding area. In the fridge are a number of jars of cream. Some of the floorboards look to have been recently removed. Underneath is a large bundle wrapped in a dirty sheet; within is a slightly mummified body of a young woman. She is dressed and is wearing a wedding ring. An expert will be able to discern that she died within the past year, and was recently pregnant at the time of death. Discovering the corpse costs 0/1d3 Sanity.

In the bedroom/bathroom are a number of containers for drugs. Medical types will recognise these as a treatment for skin disorders. All of the containers seem to be quite old, and have passed their expiration dates.

Steven Ham, the Caretaker: A tall, wiry man with ginger hair and no sign of a skin condition whatsoever. There is a 50% chance that he will be either in his cottage or with Mother. He is fidgety, as if he's bursting with energy and just wants to go for a run. He will attempt to size up the players; if he deems them a threat he will try to end them, either here, or by leading them to Mother and the Children. Alternatively, he will send them away, claiming that the photographer did come here and spent some time taking pictures, but that he hasn't seen her for a good week or so.

Inside the Baths

Large growths of weeds and fungus can be found everywhere inside the building. They are normal varieties, but are prodigiously healthy.

Basement: Pump and boiler room. Everything is in poor repair. There is a 2 in 6 chance that a Child will be found here, lurking about.

Upstairs: A balcony runs around the main room, with three rows of benched seating. There is a 3 in 6 chance of at least two Children frolicking about

up here. The main office is up here at the back of the building, with a broken window overlooking the pool area.

Downstairs: The main doors lead past a front desk area towards segregated changing rooms, and then on to the main pool room. Susan can be found in the female changing rooms, while a Child lurks in the other.

Susan is haphazardly clad in dirty clothing, and is lying in one corner of the room, oblivious to the players, clutching a small backpack and slurping messily from a jar of cream. It is recognisably her, but she looks more male than female, with a stockier build and the beginnings of a beard. Worse, a lump on her back underneath her shirt is revealed to be a small child-like hand and the first few inches of a forearm. This sight costs 1/1d6 Sanity.

Susan has gone quite mad. She will not recognise the players unless they succeed with some kind of persuasion, and even then she barely communicates with them, mumbling "Send it back!" over and over again. She will fight back if the players attempt to move her or take the jar from her hands.

Inside the backpack is Susan's prized camera and a notebook in which there are some scribbled notes beginning with "Send it back!". Susan did end up finding a copy of *Nameless Cults*, and discovered a spell which may expel Mother from the world.

"Send it Back!" The spell has been written in good detail, imparting a x2 spell modifier. It takes the form of a chant, as follows:

Ang cinicrote doprothisis tothisam anis pofis dongicis frole.

Angic thel pranil moil thering illel thilero mote.

Ang anthag te ifris acrispro winthel te whe to.

Chanerofis sama acrilack.

Chathat hicinis promangin thantris agiack.

Te te amo anthe pewhick.

Mo bamag omo theric hintofic iamoc.

The chanter(s) must bend their will to expelling the entity, and any interruptions ruin the spell. The notes suggest that a group has a better chance of success than a lone caster. The spell has a minimum cost of 4 magic points and a minimum chance of success of 5%. For a 100% chance of success, 23 magic points must be spent.

Pool Room: The main room is a wreck. Fallen masonry makes footing precarious, the walls are filthy and cracked, and broken skylights let the elements in. The whole place reeks of faeces and the hot coppery scent of blood. The main pool is a filthy brownish green, with a thick oily sheen upon the surface, and in one corner of the pool sits a bloated, humanoid figure about the size of a car. Atop a pale flabby body is a flat round face, vaguely resembling that of the caretaker, with tiny black pinprick eyes and a wide mouth full of

needle-like teeth. A brown tentacle-like tongue occasionally flicks from between the teeth, leaving a glistening trail. If the creature has lower limbs, they cannot be seen past its vast, distended belly. This horror inflicts a 1/1d10 Sanity loss.

This is Mother. Once the human child of the caretaker and his wife, it has been corrupted and inhabited by some unearthly force – possibly an avatar of Shub Niggurath – into its present state. The caretaker has since been mating with it, as well as forcing kidnapped innocents to do the same.

Any characters who go insane at this point try to clamber into the pool and embrace Mother, requiring Swim rolls. Mother cannot move fast enough to be a threat to wary players, but will swipe at or bite anyone coming close enough, and will call for its Children, which will arrive in the second round. There is a 50% chance that Susan will also come to Mother's defence in the second round. If the caretaker is still alive, he will arrive in the third round.

The banishment spell forces the entity out of the physical body. Without the animating supernatural force, the body cannot sustain its unnatural size, and it suffocates under its own weight. When Mother is killed or banished, any living Children flee.

Aftermath

Once the spirit has left the body, Mother is quite human, although the circumstances surrounding her life and death are anything but ordinary. The Children are another matter, but once Mother is banished or killed, the creatures flee if alive, and merely dissolve away to a substance very much like the ever-present cream if dead. It is fairly likely that there will be a criminal investigation, putting the investigators in a difficult position.

Defeating Mother and her brood nets each of the investigators 2d6 Sanity points as a reward. Although nothing can be done for Susan's physical condition, players receive 1d6 Sanity points for ensuring she receives proper care. Susan never recovers, and one day, the investigators receive word that she is dead, having bashed in her own head against the wall of her room.

Statistics!

Steven Ham, insane caretaker and incestuous cultist.

STR 20 CON 18 SIZ 11 INT 10 POW 10
DEX 20 APP 13 EDU 12 SAN 0 Move 8 HP 15
Damage Bonus 1d4

Attacks: Axe 40% 1d8+2+db Head Butt 30% 1d4+db

Skills: Dodge 40% Hide 30% Sneak 30%
Regenerates 1 hit point every two rounds.

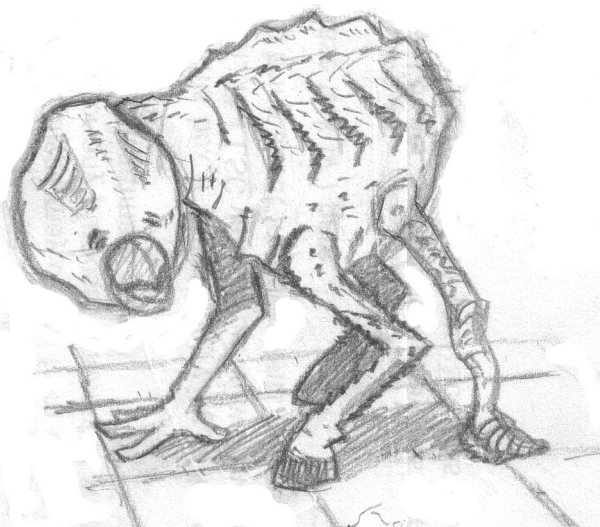
Children, corrupted monstrosities.

The size of a large dog, this thing has a round hairless head, devoid of features aside from a short black beak through which it occasionally croaks. The body is unnaturally round, with an asymmetrical bone structure evident beneath the bluish-white skin and patchy grey fur. It has four limbs, irregularly spaced along the torso; two are sheep-like legs with lumpy hooves, while one seems to be some kind of scaly tentacle, and the final, most horrifying of all, seems to be an emaciated human arm.

STR 8 CON 12 SIZ 8 INT 10 POW 10
DEX 12 Move 10 HP 10
Damage Bonus -1d4

Attacks: Bite 40% 1d6+db

Skills: Dodge 24% Hide 20% Sneak 20%
Sanity Loss: 1/1d6+1.



Mother, abominable avatar of vitality.

STR 20 CON 60 SIZ 20 INT 25 POW 20
DEX 8 Move 4 HP 40
Damage Bonus 1d6

Attacks: Claw 40% 1d6+db Grapple 40% Special
Armour: 1 point of fat and blubber.

Sanity Loss: 1/1d10

Mother's Milk

Those who consume the cream are taking part of Mother into themselves, spreading its unnatural vitality throughout their body. The same fate befalls those who mate with Mother. Roll 1d6 and add or subtract from the total based on the character's CON score:

CON Modifier

3	-3
4-5	-2
6-8	-1
9-12	+0
13-15	+1
16-17	+2
18+	+3

Drinkers lose 0/1d4 Sanity if aware of the origin of the Milk. Sanity loss for experiencing a mutation is at the Keeper's discretion, but should be no less than 1/1d6.

Compare the result to the table below:

- 1 Devolve into one of the Children over 1d6 months.
- 2 Minor mutation, see below.
- 3 Switch gender over 1d6 months
- 4 Heal a major physical condition; returns after 1d6 months unless more Milk is drunk to maintain (same effect; do not roll again)
- 5 Heal a minor condition; returns after 1d6 months unless more Milk is drunk to maintain (same effect; do not roll again)
- 6+ No effect

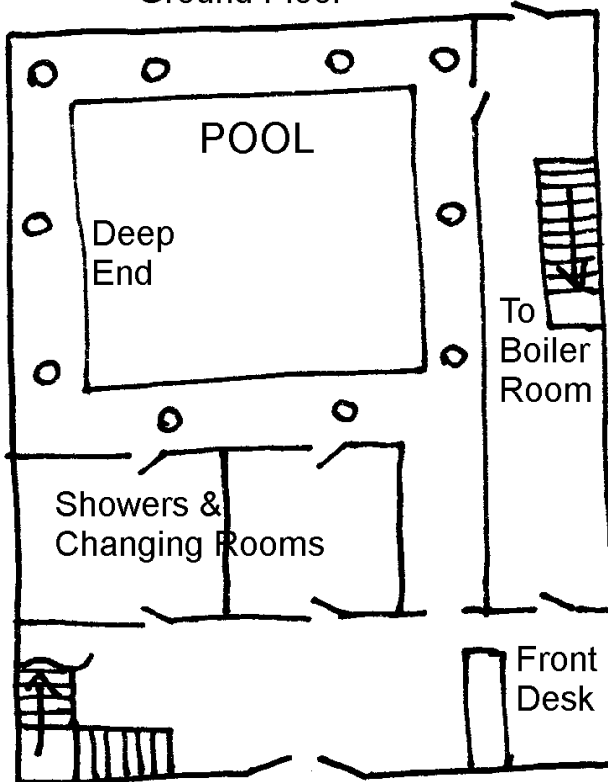
Mutation Table (1d6)

- 1 Drinker's height increases; +1 SIZ
- 2-3 A painful lump develops somewhere on the drinker's body – see below – eventually opening into an extra eye.
- 4-5 A painful swelling develops somewhere on the drinker's body – see below – eventually forming into a 1-3 extra hand, 4-6 extra foot.
- 6 Drinker's muscle density increases; 1-3 +1 STR, 4-6 +1 DEX

To determine the location of a mutation, roll 2d6 on the following table.

- 2-3 Head
- 4-5 Arm (50% left or right)
- 6-8 Torso
- 9 Abdomen
- 10-12 Leg (50% left or right)

Ground Floor



First Floor

