

Neighborhood

A Call of Cthulhu Scenario

By
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Introduction

This is a game about neighborhoods, as the name would suggest. It's a game about closed doors, and what happens behind them. It's a game about all the things you take for granted not being quite what you're expecting. The horror in this scenario comes from making your players believe they're safe in their environments, and then taking that safety away from them in a variety of ways. We'll be playing on a number of "safe" images along the way, and injecting a little humor into the game to throw our horror into a little bit of stark relief.

The entire game takes place in Rowan Towers – A block of flats in the highly densely populated downtown of Dullsville USA. We're saying Dullsville because we can separate from any particular town and suburb in the US. Given that the town we're in is fictitious we can free ourselves from the shackles of reality around using a particular place that actually exists. Rowan Towers is a building with 20 floors. The basement houses car parking facilities and there is a roof garden on (surprise surprise) the roof. On the first floor there are a number of other facilities – A laundry area, a gym, and the super's desk. Yes – The building does have a "super." He's a guy around the age of fifty who goes by the name of Stan. But more on him later - we're just setting the scene for the place where the game takes place.

In terms of the game itself, we can play on a number of factors to make our environment work for us. Firstly, the interior of Rowan Towers will be dark whenever we're outside of an apartment area. This is because, as of about ten minutes into the game there's a power cut. The shadows move in the lights of whatever the players rig up for themselves. Feel free to throw in as many cheap shots as you like into the mix – There's ample fun to be had giving the players a moving shadow, or the idea that something is moving in the shadows. You can make it something tangible and bad, or perhaps the kitten that Mrs. Prosser three doors down owns.

In terms of imagery, Poltergeist II uses a similar motif to this scenario – A building that's gone mad. If you've seen the movie, think on it while you're describing the inside of Rowan Towers to your players. For a slightly more up-to-date image, think of the building in Friends. The apartments are easily mapped in your mind, and the idea of a descending iron stairwell is one that we're going to be using.

Windows. Rowan Towers is in a busy suburb of Dullsville, so there's no reason to expect that there should be anything other than a busy (for 3am) street outside. And if the party looks out at all, that's exactly what they should see. Outside the Towers, the whole world seems normal. There's a man walking his dog and stopping for it to pee against a fire hydrant. There the bagel shop on the corner is just opening. Everything is as it should be, except it isn't.

A quick word about weaponry. It's to be expected that players could well ask for weapons in this game. After all – We're about to give them access to pretty much whatever they might want from their apartments. And we all know that 99% of American citizens hide a handgun in their nightstands. You can handle this in several different ways. One of them is to just look sarcastically at your players as if to say "Do you really think you have that?" Another is to let them have everything but deny them the benefits of any kind of training whatsoever. I'll promise you now that handguns will not be a skill on anyone's character sheet.

Background

What if the windows of the buildings we inhabit were eyes? Not eyes that look out on the world and the passers-by and the events that happen in the outside world, but eyes that look inward. What if all the time, whatever we do in our houses and in our private places, those places were watching us, keeping a protective eye on us. Whenever we allow someone into our houses we show them a carefully cultivated image. We clean the house. We do the washing up. We vacuum the carpets. But we also put up a guard. Our houses see the private us – The one that we only show to ourselves.

Of course our houses spend most of their time slumbering, watching us as if out of the corners of their eyes. We're pleasant for the most part, but what if the inward-staring eyes of a building saw something they didn't like? What if our houses woke up in a temper? What if the houses we live in decided one afternoon that they didn't like looking at those private faces we wear. What if they decided that we weren't fit to live there anymore? What if they decided to get rid of us?

Rowan Towers has decided it doesn't like its occupants. Having seen some things that most of us would balk at, and having seen its body used to protect the perpetrators it has decided something should be done. It is currently in the process of trying to get rid of all of its occupants, and as the scenario progresses it intends to employ more and more unpleasant methods.

Scene One – “Wake up. BOO!”

So we kick off the game at about 3am. I'd start by asking everyone what their characters are doing at 3am, and unless there's a particularly good reason for it, I'm expecting all of them to be asleep. Or watching the TV. Drunken stupors might be funny but you might want to disregard any of those. If you don't, let them ham up the drunkenness for a while for the humor value, and then slam them with something that'll sober them up very fast whilst at the same time dropping some penalties on the offending character's agility scores. That'll learn 'em.

In any case – So we're all woken up by strange noises in the night. Here's a paragraph you can read out loud or choose your own words. In this particular case it's supposed to be a bit of a trippy and existential paragraph, the better to catch that “just woken up” feeling...

You know that feeling when you wake up and you don't know why you've woken up? You glance at the clock, smile to yourself. It's not time to get out of bed yet so you can go back to sleep. You turn over, snuggling down into the covers, and then you hear the bang again. A loud bang, like a gunshot. Blinking you roll onto your back, looking at the shadows on the ceiling. Silence deafens you as you inwardly wish that there's nothing you can hear. It's all part of that dream you were having and you can cuddle down again. Was that a scream? Was that someone's TV? The bang again – This time it's got to be real. You felt that through the bed. You pull yourself out of bed, an icy claw clutching at your chest. Something is very wrong.

You'll need to build up slowly as you do this, but let each player get their moment in the light. Find out what they want to do about it. Our goal is to get everyone out into the hall where they're going to run into each other, and you'll easily be able to do this, but let them do this in their own way and their own style. This will be the chance for the characters to get together. They may need to describe their apartments and what they have in them, so if you're at all unsure, or feel you may need the information later on, let them describe. Take notes – It's important if you're going to be using the locations later down the line.

An important note here is to try and make the players at ease. Maybe they stumble in the semi-darkness. Maybe two bodies run into each other. Maybe it's something other than that, but it's time for GM banter at any case. Make your players smile a little because we'll slam some fear into them in the next scene.

In any case. Let your players wake themselves up. Let them get to a point where they're hearing

things. Feel free to add as many noises to coax them out of the apartment and into the hall to meet up with the other people that live on their floor. Let's note that at this point, the power hasn't gone out. In a perfect world, we'd like for the power to cut the moment they've met on the landing and they're trying to figure out what they can hear. Try and be patient with your players, but if you don't manage to have reasonable ones, then have the power go when they're still bumbling around their apartments. Failing that, tip a nod to a reasonable player and have them knock on a door.

Scene 2 – “Let's Get Together”

So by the time we get here, we have all of the party together and they're gathered in the landing of the thirteenth floor of Rowan Towers. So far so good - Time to discuss the possibilities, and some of the geography of the building. Also time for the group to make some sort of plan. Lastly, this is the point where we make things difficult by turning off the lights.

Probably best to leave the description to you here. There's going to be a bunch of differences in the way your party works to what's in my head anyway. Best to actually describe the hallway. It's done in a sort of cross shape, with two doors facing each other on each side of the “crosspiece” of the cross. The stairs are in the long piece, with the elevators at the tip of one end of the cross. Sensible money is on everyone (who will all be a little jumpy at the moment, judging by the events of the evening so far) either piling into an elevator, or if they're really nervous, forming a group and climbing downstairs.

At this stage we need to start making things a little difficult for them, so we're going to start making sounds. You can do this in a couple of different ways. Laugh quietly under your breath. When they look at you, say something like “Did you just hear a laugh?” Scratch the underside of the table. Sooner or later someone's going to ask you if they can hear that in-character. “Oh” you should reply. “Didn't I mention that? Something's making a scratching sound.” The real cheap-shot is to slam your open hand down on the table, then say very softly “You hear a bang.” All of these need to be used sparingly, but I'd suggest you use all of them as the party travel through the building in the next couple of scenes.

When the party has gotten themselves into order and have a nice plan organized, it's time to hit them with the next obstacle – The Darkness (and yes – I have images of the party being suddenly jumped by a glam rock band as well.) Here's a suggested paragraph:

Suddenly it hits you like a bucket of iced water tipped over your head. Darkness floods the landing. With it comes its sister Silence, telling you instantly that this is some kind of electrical failure. No air conditioning. No sounds of television or radio from another room. Nothing but the slightly rapid breathing of yourself and your colleagues. A moment passes. Then another. Then from somewhere around you but not too close comes a single sound. A long, drawn-out scream of what can only be described as agony. If that was anything other than a death scream, you hope never to see the victim.

And now we worry about being able to see. The power is gone. There's not a lot the players are going to do about it. So for the rest of the game they're going to be in the dark. Firstly you'll need to have them worry about light and torches and candles. Again, I suggest you let them have whatever they think they have in their apartments as equipment, short of a portable generator (and if they have one of those, let's just point out that it's going to make a hell of a lot of noise when they turn it on.) If we're doing our job correctly, by this stage our heroes (such as they are) aren't going to want to spend any time alone and they'll head immediately into the apartments in groups.

Everything I said above about shadows and flickering shapes applies now. And for the rest of the game. Feel free to have as much fun with this as you like.

From here the party is going to want to get the hell out. The elevators are now not working

(though I suggest you leave the doors open so they can walk in and you can have some fun with the creaking and squeaking elevator cables) and won't go anywhere. Considering that there's no way the party is going to be able to escape by jumping out a window on anything other than the first floor they're either going to want to go up or down. It doesn't really matter which direction they decide to take. We're working up to having them meet the Super at some stage, but we want to give them some idea of what's going on first. We'll do this by driving them past a couple of vignettes. The theme here is bad people and the comeuppances that they have. Watch how your players react to each of these and whether they're in favor of the bad guys or the victims...

So what follows from here are a couple of scenes which we're going to use to fill up the exploration of the building. Use as many or as few of these as you like, depending on time constraints. Use them in whatever order you like as well, but for drama's sake it might be nice if the amount of "supernatural" stuff increases as the party progresses.

Scene 3A – "Roofies"

This scene concerns a man who has drugged a woman at a nightclub and brought her back to his flat for his own nefarious purposes. This scene can be played as simply that – A bad person and a date-rape. It could also have even darker connotations depending on your player group. The trick to this is to balance what you think is going to freak your players out against what's necessary to keep the antagonist "pitiable."

The party are drawn to an apartment by noises primarily – A thud. A cry of pain. The swoosh of something moving fast. A muffled gasp. When they enter, here's what I suggest you use to portray the scene to them:

The noises come from the bedroom of this small flat. A woman, in a partial state of undress lies on the bed. She's wearing raver clothes – Fishnet tights, bright red shorts, although these latter are around her ankles. A still fitfully glowing glowstick rests in the cleft of her chest. Her eyes are open, unseeing. She stares at the ceiling, mouth slightly open. Across the room by the window there's a bulge in the curtains. Something is moving there in fitful spastic movements. Is someone hiding?

So the girl is alive. She's in a very heavy trance. Any kind of medical attention is going to indicate she's spaced out on something. She has pupils the size of Newfoundland and she's unresponsive to stimuli. Which is just what her captor wants. We'll call him... Russell. Beside the bed there's a small bottle of pills – Rohypnol. Russell has been grabbed by the Towers. As the building came alive it reached out with the curtains and caught him.

Let's pause here for a moment and describe some other salient features. This is where you can play with your players' heads. There could be any number of other things in this room – Fetish wear. A knife with dried blood under the bed. Who is Russell and has he lured any other young women back to the apartment? We don't know, and all you can do is lay thoughts into your players' heads. Let them make the decisions, but you need to make them believe that this is a Bad Man. Whatever he is doing here is distasteful. And that's why his fate lies in the balance.

The curtains aren't going to come off Russell. He is tightly bound and gagged – Possibly in danger of stopping breathing. Smart players will be prodding the curtains and then trying to free the man. We want several things to happen. Firstly, we'll get him free enough to start talking. There's some dialogue and separate questions and answers below. However – This is not about freeing Russell. We do not want the party to take him with them. Sure they can try and free him (he's tangled up real tight) and sooner or later they'll try something more extreme. I'm guessing blades or fire, but all parties are different and your people may have some bizarre suggestion I haven't thought of (battery acid, anyone?) As soon as they have something that's going to work, we bring the other curtain into action.

Someone will notice it shifting at first, though that could be the shadows. Then it will lift of its own accord and start to move, as if in a breeze, though there's no breeze in the room. It will go to attack whoever is trying to free Russell, and it's damned good at hand to hand combat. The party will eventually get the idea. They're not saving this man.

Should Russell end up talking, here are some possible questions and answers:

Q: Why are you tangled up in the curtains?

A: I wasn't doin' anythin' wrong! She was lookin' for it dressed like that! She won' remember anything in the morning anyway... I didn't do anything wrong. It caught me – It's caught me!

Q: Who's that on the bed?

A: I don' know her name – You think this's a date? You think I love her? <He starts to laugh (and if you can manage it, it's an insane laugh.)

Q: Stay still. We're trying to get you free.

A: You can't! It's got me, an' it's been whispering to me. Says it's going to punish me for what I did. I'm sorry but it doesn't care. It knows all about me... I'm gonna die here...

When the party gets the idea that they're not going to save anyone here they might try and tell Russell what they're up to. He's resigned to his fate, so he's not about to try and tell anyone to save him or anything. What he will do, on the other hand, is to point at the pills on the dressing table as best he can.

"If I'm gonna die here at least I don' wanna know what's happening to me..."

Scene 3B – “Poisoning Pigeons in the Park”

Use this one in the corridor. You can either have the party discover a bundle on the floor or have them hear it first – A gentle mewling sound. Yep – This is a bag of cats, ladies and gentlemen. A stone's throw away is the garbage disposal chute. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The mewling sound is coming from a leather bag. It's a Gladstone bag like a doctor would have used in days gone by. The handles are twisted together and the whole thing is zipped tight shut but it's easy to see it twitching slightly as something within it moves. And mews.

So basically someone's been about to throw a bag of kittens down the waste disposal chute. There's nothing here but the bag and the kittens now, and if the party want to open it they'll find them inside, week-old kittens, still with squinty-shut eyes glinting in the torchlight and shying away. There's five of them in total – All different colors.

Sooner or later someone's going to figure out what's going on. If not, have them hear a thud from the garbage chute. Things to note about it – It's not wide enough for a person to fit down, and now that someone's close enough they can see that there's signs of something being forced down there. There's a discarded shoe down on the floor beside it. If anyone peers down the chute then there's nothing but darkness. Perhaps they might hear a whispered “help me.” But that would be their imagination, right?

The building thinks it's not cool to throw kittens into the garbage disposal chute.

Now the group may or may not want to experiment with what's down the chute (I think we should agree that he's pretty much dead, whoever he is or was.) Likewise they may wonder how he got sucked in there, assuming they think there's someone down there and that the building did it. Best not to think about it, and as the GM we're not going to be giving them any clue. Instead, let's worry about the kittens. The best thing to do is close them in some empty apartment out of the

bag, but somewhere where they'll be warm and safe.

Of course, some parties aren't going to be able to leave kittens to their fates. If that's the case with yours then who are you to disagree? Just remember it's more difficult to do everything if you're carrying a bag of cats.

Scene 3C – “The Obligatory Combat Scene”

Now ideally we want to avoid running this scene until after Scene Four. On the other hand, it's perfectly reasonable that your party might be combat monsters. In which case feel free to throw this in early (or twice. Combat monsters can never get enough blood! In fact – Odds are that if you ran the scene twice in exactly the same way they'd not notice.)

What concerns us here are three skinheads who live in the Towers. We aren't going to say out loud what they've seen, but it's something horrible. They've been driven mad, and now they're running toward the exit as fast as they can. The party happens to be in their way.

The combat is bloody – The skinheads are fewer in number, but they're vicious. Play it that way, though ideally we don't want anyone to die. If it looks like things are going badly for the party, have them given a last minute reprieve by the building itself.

Scene 4 – “Super Duper Super.”

When the Towers came to life they took Stan the building Super over. The Supervisor of an apartment block is typically the visible soul of the building anyway. He's the one that fixes the leaks and tightens the nuts on the pipes. He takes care of the building, and the building in return takes care of him. While Rowan Towers was slumbering, Stan was there to take care of it. Now that the Towers are awake they are taking care of Stan. To all intents and purposes, Stan is now the voice of Rowan Towers. He looks no different to usual, well... to the casual observer at least.

I'm suggesting you bring Stan into the equation when the Party reaches wherever they're looking to go to – Either a couple of stories below the roof garden or a couple of stories above the lobby. The reason we're not letting them get all the way is that the endgame is going to take place in the roof garden and the lobby... well... that would be too much of a taste of freedom and they'd want to start thinking the endgame had already arrived. And we can't have that, can we?

Time to describe Stan on a good day: He's a portly guy, probably in his mid fifties. He has male pattern baldness which makes his black hair appear a little sparse. Possibly his beard is an attempt to make up for this loss – It's a huge bushy affair which (in true ZZ Top fashion) reaches down to his chest. Generally he wears dungarees over a t-shirt. In short, Stan looks a bit like a biker, and has gained the nickname “Stabbin' Stan.” This is only for the residents of the Towers who don't know him, though. Stan is a diamond in the rough – A man with a true heart of gold beneath his brash exterior. If you can manage a Southern US accent for Stan it'll make it a little nicer, and that's because he's currently possessed by the Towers. He's fighting against it, though, and alternating between accent and non-accent would be a great way of indicating who's talking. Southern accents are always good for a giggle as well.

Right now, Stan isn't looking so good.

The figure lurches out of the shadows, some twenty feet in front of you – a hulking figure dressed in denims and with an enormous beard obscuring whatever t-shirt he has on beneath. He turns to gaze into your eyes with his own wide and staring, clearly unseeing. For a moment there's a familiarity to his face – This is Stan the Super. But Stan's always ready with a smile. Stan never looked like this. One arm stretches out toward you all, and as if he can feel your heat, he lurches forward.

Okay. How to play Stan in several easy steps. One – Make your eyes unseeing like a zombie. But keep your voice clear and soft like a woman scorned (guys, you know that voice. Girls – You’ve practiced it.) That’s when he’s speaking for the Towers. When he’s speaking for himself, close your eyes and talk in your Stan accent. Sound panicky.

Stan is the scenario’s explainitect – He’s here to explain what’s going on (in his “Rowan” persona.) He’s also here to explain how the party can stop it.

Rowan is in possession of the body to start off with. She’ll move to within striking distance of the party (and they’re going to be thinking it’s a zombie, we hope.) Then she’ll start telling them to get out. The important thing is that even now, Rowan is judging the party. She’s seen everything they’ve done inside the building, and she’ll react appropriately. Either she’s going to be telling them to get out (if the party are good people), or she’s going to be toying with them (if they’re not.) Let’s give her some dialogue.

If the party are “good people”: *“You’ve seen my improvements here... You have to get out. I’m going to keep them, you know – The ones who don’t deserve to live. You... I don’t care about. Get out while you still can.”*

Otherwise you can go with a soft chuckle, followed by *“You really think you can escape? I’m controlling this place now. Just like I always have, but now I’m taking an interest in all of your petty, puissant lives. You’re mine.”*

Give the party some time to react to Rowan’s words before you bring Stan back into the equation. Ideally have him talk just as the party is attacking the body (they’re that dumb?) or as they’re running toward the exit. Remember – All of the party know Stan, so hearing his voice is probably an arresting thing.

“It’s the towers... It’s Rowan. She’s been watching us for all of this time... Watching! She’s killing everyone that’s done bad things while she’s been watching – I’ve seen through her eyes! Please... I’m part of Rowan and she’s part of me... I can’t stop this!”

I’m going to throw in a question and answer section here, and you can throw Rowan and Stan together as much or as little as you like. This is a great place to show off your “acting as two people in the same body” skills, and with the amount of times this sort of thing crops up, aren’t all GMs experts in that?:

Q: Who’s Rowan?

A: <Rowan> I’m the building you’re standing in, you fool. I’ve seen what you do in your bed before you go to sleep. I’ve watched you in the shower. I see you go to work and come back tired.

Q: How do we get out?

A: <Stan> The door’s open, I think... Or... I can keep it open. She can. But there’s hundreds of people in here still! The children!

Q: Where are the children?

A: <Stan> In the garden. She’s keeping them safe!

Q: How can we stop this?

A: <Rowan> Stop this? You’re mine now... All of you are.

<Stan> There’s a Rowan Tree in the centre of the garden. Destroy it! <Rowan> But you’re mine! You helped me! Why would you tell them how to kill me? It doesn’t matter, though... They won’t make it...

Scene 5 – “The Heart of the Building”

So here we are at the endgame. Or pretty much at the endgame anyway. The party's next objective is to get to the roof garden as quickly and easily as possible. As GM you can throw as much stuff in their way as you like, and I'm recommending at least one of the "floating" encounters go in here. Remember that the party is still being judged on whether or not they're "good" people. If you want to embellish around here, feel free as well – there's all sorts of bodies lying around inside apartments. If the players are the wrong sort of players you can do all sorts of things in terms of looting etc.

In any case, the roof garden should be an interesting but not fatal journey. It's reached from a stairwell on the top (twentieth, remember? Are the party's legs starting to ache yet?) storey. The stairwell exits in one of those "shed on the top of the roof" arrangements.

First things first – Rowan has locked the door. The party is going to have to break it down in some way, shape or form. This can be accomplished the old-fashioned way (shoulders) or they can use some tool or other. There's a metal banister rail here that could conceivably be used as a club for this purpose. The door is also going to resist attack – Splinters will attempt to lodge in the skin of whoever squeezes through a partially broken door. Wooden shards from smashing the door will fly at party members. Nobody should get through this without a wound or two.

This is the roof garden's suggested description:

The roof garden is a little lighter than the inside of the building. Moonlight and the orange sodium glare from the streetlights of Dullsville. It's easy to see out here, and suddenly your torches seem a little useless. Around you is what could loosely be considered a garden – It's walled on all sides, high enough to stop a child from jumping. Potted shrubs are dotted in a vague arrangement that could indicate a cross, helped out by the paving stones. In the center of the cross is the Rowan Tree – Slightly bigger than all of the other shrubs. Only it's different now that it was. Taller, and somehow... Anthropomorphic. Clustered around the bottom of the tree are maybe ten or fifteen children, ages somewhere between eight and fourteen. All of them have been crying. All of them look up at you as you crash through the door.

So probably best to describe what can happen here. Rowan has been taking care of the children. You can assume that the homes all these children came from are Bad homes. You can likewise assume that some of these children are going to fight to protect Rowan. Rowan has promised them they'll be safe now. Yes – That anthro tree is alive. And can talk. And move. But we're not going to let the party know that yet, are we?

So the party is going to be itching to kill the tree. And the kids are going to try and stop them. This one is all about the moral decision of what to do with the kids and what to do with the tree. It's basically a chance for the party to get into a bit of a moral struggle. For the sake of argument we'll give the kids' leader – An older kid called Donna – A voice and a name. Donna has the spooky English kid accent to better fit into the horror genre (have you seen "Resident Evil"? You know the voice of the computer? Unlikely as it was? No? You know spooky kids in movies with English accents. And go watch "Resident Evil", dammit.) If you want to explain the situation to the party, then be my guest.

As far as potential ends to the scenario are concerned, you have one right here. If the party choose to leave the kids with Rowan (or choose to lead the kids out and CAN CONVINCe THEM that it's the right thing to do...) We have a winner. We'll call this one the "It's a Wonderful Life" ending.

However, many parties like to pretend they're the A-Team and come up with some insane plan which will get them to their objective, such as "you hold the kids and we'll chop down the tree." My advice is that anything sensible should work. Rugrats aren't going to put up too much resistance, so really it's not going to be hard for six adults to overcome a dozen kids - Especially if the adults have thought to arm themselves in some way.

It was then that the tree came to life and tried to kill everybody.

For the hell, I'm including some text for this, but to be frank you're probably going to end up describing this your own way. If you're a cinematic GM describe it from the point of view of someone other than the person chopping at the tree.

The first blow lands on the Rowan tree. It shudders, leans, begins to... It's not falling. It's stepping out of the pot it's housed in. One earthy root bole lifts down onto the paving stones, then another. Branches slowly lower down and an obscene gap in the wood yawns cavernously. Then all hell breaks loose.

Chaos ensues. Rowan knows she's battling for her life, so we won't expect her to pull any punches or hold any quarter. If the group haven't armed themselves, this isn't going to go well. So our second game ending possibility is that the group flees for their lives.

Final ending, then. Let's assume that the party destroys the Rowan Tree. The building is **not** going to just give up. Rather it's going to self-destruct. Our endgame has our party running down through the stairs foisting a gaggle of children in front of them as the building collapses. You can either run this or summarize it, depending on how much time you have and how sadistic you feel. However – And this is the crux of the matter. The foyer needs to be narrated.

The foyer looks like it always has, though Stan is nowhere to be seen. The streetlights beckon a friendly orange glare through the doors, but they're shut. From nowhere a voice speaks. Rowan's voice. "I have judged you all – All those whose lives I have watched. And now I stand in judgement over you."

Boys and girls – The doors are locked. But you knew that.

Rowan will now dispense her justice. Remember how we've been keeping an eye on the party for whether or not they're "good" people? Here's where we choose whether or not to let them go based on what they've seen. Odds are not everyone's going to die, but Rowan can kill people pretty easily. Collapsing building? Falling masonry? Ankles trapped between sundering paving stones? Be creative. Note that she's not going to let the children, die, though, even if she has to specifically drop slabs around them.

So that lets our heroes escape. One last thing – An epilogue.

It has been said that everything has a soul. And that the eyes are the window into that soul. If a building's windows are its eyes, what does it say about that building if all you can see through them is hate and fear? Sometimes, just sometimes, a building can aspire to something greater.

Appendix – Dramatis Personae

Stan (the possessed Super)

Your average Zombie meets ZZ Top.

STR	15	INT	16
CON	12	POW	20
SIZ	13	DEX	10

HP 20

Attacks: As per any unarmed person

Stan's solid and dependable in character as well as form. He's a good guy, but he's been taken over by something he fears. Even more fearsome is the fact that he knows what's taken him over and knows that at some level he doesn't fear it.

Yer Average Skinhead

They're hate-filled, stupid, and these ones are also insane. Bad mix.

STR	14	INT	16
CON	12	POW	20
SIZ	12	DEX	12

HP 17

Attacks: As per any unarmed person

Animated Rowan Tree

Half scarecrow, half tree, half spirit of vengeance.

STR	11	INT	18
CON	13	POW	12
SIZ	17	DEX	12

HP 26

Damage Bonus: 1D4

Attacks: Claw Branch (40%, 1D6+db)

Name : Tabitha Brennan
Occupation : Dilettante (independently wealthy)

Background :

Your parents kept you grounded, thank all the Gods. You always knew that they were well-to-do, but you didn't realize how fabulously rich you actually are. On your 18th birthday you were told everything about the family fortune, and your parents advised you to do what they had done – Live an honest and hardworking life and keep the money for the things you'd want in your life. A car, a house, a dowry.

You haven't got much use for any of those. You have enough money to live comfortably off of, and devote your life to doing the things you want to do. And those are many and varied. You fancy yourself as a bit of a singer, and being as how you have the time to practice a lot, you actually aren't bad. You're good enough that you have an agent and have sung on stage in a variety of concert halls. You'd fancy yourself as a bit of an artist as well, but that's going to take a little bit of practice yet.

Another thing in your life that keeps you grounded is your best friend Giselle. You were friends at school, though you were in a year above her. She's always seen you as something of a hero, and that's probably why she ran to you when her marriage collapsed. She turned up at your door, soaked through from the rain outside, still in her wedding dress. You've taken her as something of a project (as well as a flat mate) ever since, and she's come on leaps and bounds in the past five years – She's a children's entertainer on television now, and though you still refuse to charge her rent you know she could pay it.

Something neither of you talk about is the fact that she's never had a boyfriend since she moved in with you five years ago. You talk, and her response has always been "I promised I'd never go with another man after Peter", Peter being the philandering fiancée she ran away from marrying. You can't help but wonder if there's some other reason, and if it were the case that Giselle counted you as... well... a girlfriend of more of a romantic kind... you wouldn't argue. But you'd never push her – Without her you'd be alone in your apartment, and you aren't sure you'd enjoy that. Sometimes Rowan Towers can seem to have a life of its own when you're alone there. The noises it makes, the blowing of the curtains in a certain light...

Role-Playing Hints :

You are strong and well-adjusted. If you have any flaws whatsoever it might be that sometimes you can come off as a bit bossy. You just like to organize folk around you. You are serious about not wanting a regular paying job. Your wealth means you can do what you want, and part of your strength lies in the fact that you do only those things that you want to in life. You have never been truly out of control, and that might be a scary experience for you. Your relationship with Giselle is something important to you – Far too important to risk it over something as dangerous as romance.

The Others :

Giselle Deprez Your best friend. You don't know what you'd do without her. You'd certainly be alone. You might also be heartbroken.

Matt Coan He's the quiet guy down the hall. You know he talks to himself and can't help but wonder what he's all about.

Ben Richardson He's a lawyer and he's cute in a boy-next-door kind of a way. But if he's a lawyer, he doesn't seem to go to work a whole lot...

Earl Grist He's just some angry old man who lives down the hall who annoys you.

Francis Russell

You think Francis is a night worker, but there's always a furtive manner there that you can't put your finger on.

Name : Ben Richardson
Occupation : Lawyer

Background :

Some things are just right. It's a value that was instilled on you by your parents – Stoic Methodists who never drank a beer in their lives. They've always stood you in good stead by your morals, and maybe it was those morals that persuaded you to become a lawyer.

You went to Dullsville to study Law, and you graduated summa cum laude. It seemed to make sense that you stay in Dullsville, and so you did. You weren't really concentrating on anything other than your career at the time. You know the score – Home becomes a dormitory for you to sleep in, while work becomes the place where you do your living.

Only it isn't living – Not really. Work is a place where you work, and if you spend all the time in the world there, then where do you have your fun? That's what you discovered when you had your nervous breakdown, anyway. You ended up lying on your expensive oak paneled desk, curled up in a foetal ball and crying. That's where they found you, and you've been on paid vacation ever since.

Not that paid vacation is a bad thing. In fact, you're pretty sure that now you've discovered the life outside of work (you've been away from the office for eight weeks now) you don't want to go back. There's a whole life out here that you've been missing for the past few years.

It's probably also natural that you've found a woman to keep your eye on – Giselle Deprez. She's the girl down the hall who lives with her flat mate Tabitha. You talk to both of them in the laundry room, say hello in the hall, but you've been trying to screw up enough courage to ask Giselle on a date for a while now. Not that you know what you'd do if she said yes.

Role-Playing Hints :

You are the boy next door. Good-looking and well-paid for your job, although that's sort of a bit up in the air, being as how you don't really have a job right now. You're also hiding that bit because "had a nervous breakdown and is semi-permanently on vacation" doesn't sound particularly attractive or normal.

The Others :

Giselle Deprez She's cute, single, and she works on a kid's show on TV called "Vicky Verky and the Twilight Express." You haven't missed an episode in six weeks.

Matt Coan He's the quiet guy down the hall. You know he talks to himself and can't help but wonder what he's all about.

Tabitha Brennan Giselle's flatmate. You're friendly enough with her, but she's really a means to get to know Giselle.

Earl Grist He's a grumpy old man, but he's also a cripple with a prosthetic leg. You try and help him out, not that he appreciates it.

Francis Russell You've never spoken. Definitely a night worker.

Name : Earl Grist
Occupation : Marine (retired)

Background :

You hate Rowan Towers. It's not that you hate the place, or the people, although those are pretty much on your hit list as well. More it's the fact that you hate your situation, and the Towers is an integral part of that.

You are a retiree, but not because of old age. You spent fifteen years in the Marine Corps, rising through the ranks from Boot camp through to commanding officer, and you believe strongly that it was something you were good at. Leastways you enjoyed it. To have gone from grunt to commanding officer's got to be worth something as well, hasn't it?

You didn't ask to have your leg run over by a tank in an accident. Your lower left leg was crushed so badly that it was amputated just below the knee. You wear a prosthetic these days, and, the wound being where it is, you're not too handicapped. But you're handicapped enough that it spelt the end of your career in the military. You have military pension and state disability benefits now, and it pays enough that you can live comfortably. Or at least as comfortably as a one-legged man who frequently has to climb the stairs because the lifts are broken can be.

And so it goes. You have become something of a stereotype in the five years you have lived at the Towers. You are staunchly anti-liberal, and have been known to write angry letters to newspapers that publish views that you don't agree with. War is a particular bugbear of yours – You support it, and can't understand how anyone would want to dispute it in any way.

This same "elderly" attitude carries over into your interpersonal relationships. You know that your neighbors see you as a "grumpy old man" and you revel in the fact. You're not even putting up a front to hide a soft interior – This is who you are.

Role-Playing Hints :

You act like a grumpy old man. No, scratch that – You **are** a grumpy old man, though you're not really old. You don't tell stories about the good old days so much as telling stories about "when you were in the Marines." Your leg hurts you in bad weather and when you have to exercise on it too much. But for all of it you can still do a hundred chin-ups on the doorframe between your living room and kitchen nook in the apartment.

You also have a good idea of the people who live around you and their strengths and weaknesses. Others might call it being a peeping tom. You would call it... Intelligence gathering.

The Others :

Giselle Deprez One of the two girls that live together. You suspect they might be gay. Certainly neither of them ever have any male friends visiting their apartment.

Matt Coan He's the quiet guy who rarely leaves his apartment. He may talk to himself, but you've listened. He talks to himself in five different languages and you know he gets royalty checks from a publishing company.

Ben Richardson He's supposedly a lawyer, but if that's true, why hasn't he been to work in eight weeks now?

Tabitha Brennan Giselle's flatmate. Or girlfriend. She's rich and more liberal than anyone else on the floor.

Francis Russell

Too furtive, works the wrong hours irregularly. Never receives a pay check but always seems to have money. You know a criminal when you see one.

Name : Francis Russell
Occupation : Criminal

Background :

It's a living... Crime, that is. You never really intended to break the law for a living, but... well... that's just something that folk end up doing, and you ended up doing it. You could explain about not being able to get a job you really enjoy, or how you need more money than anyone else and this is the best way of getting it... But it wouldn't cut it. You're just a criminal.

You're not even a violent criminal. Sure you can use a gun, but that goes wrong far too quickly. You're more of a cat-burglar. Or the modern equivalent, because there isn't a market anymore for the likes of the dashing Rex Harrison type of burglar in the Pink Panther movies. Or even Catherine Zeta-Jones in Entrapment, for that matter.

You live in Rowan Towers, but you keep mostly to yourself. You don't believe in putting down ties. That's where people start to know who you are and what your habits are. That's the sort of information that you use to case a joint before you strike.

And strike you have. You keep a good sum of money beneath the mattress in your apartment and you have a reasonable amount stashed away elsewhere.

Given the choice, you sometimes think you might go legit. But it's a bit of a pipe-dream. An apartment needs rent, and rent needs to be paid monthly. The cycle, once begun, is difficult to break. And at the end of the day you don't feel you need to break it.

Role-Playing Hints :

You are the smiling criminal, intent on making sure your cover isn't blown whilst being reasonable to everyone else around you. Sure you have some skills that aren't going to be easily explained, but odds are you'll never need to use them around folk that are going to get suspicious anyway. You've organized your life this way, and this way it's going to stay.

The Others :

Giselle Deprez She lives with Tabitha Brennan and works on a TV station

Matt Coan He's the quiet guy down the hall. Talks to himself and mumbles all the time.

Ben Richardson A boy-next-door businessman of some sort.

Tabitha Brennan She's a rich kid who's a wannabe artist.

Earl Grist He's the stereotypical grumpy old man down the hall.

Name : Giselle Deprez
Occupation : Children's Entertainer

Background :

Sometimes you wonder if you've reached a crossroads in your life. Five years ago everything was perfect. You were due to be married to Peter Riley, and he was everything to you. You were a good girlfriend, and you'd promised yourself you would be a good wife. That was, until you accidentally ran into him at the church, enthusiastically kissing one of the bridesmaids in the corridor. He blustered and tried to persuade you it was a last final fling, but it was the final nail in the coffin of your relationship. All the indiscretions you'd refused to see; all of the mornings you'd washed a collar you were sure had lipstick on it. You stormed out of the church, vowing never again to have another boyfriend.

Five years later, you haven't. And the time you've spent on your own has been wonderful. You've discovered parts of yourself you didn't know existed, most recently that you have a flair for entertainment. But that's getting ahead of yourself. Best to start... with Tabitha.

Tabitha was where you ran when you and Peter broke up. Tabby's wealthy and a year older than you. You used to live near each other when you were kids, back in Milwaukee and you idolized her. She answered the door to her plush apartment in Dullsville and saw the sobbing mess that was you. She took you in and you've been flat mates ever since. Flat mates and best mates – You can't imagine living anywhere else.

It took you six months to get yourself together. Tabby paid for everything. Being rich and able to do pretty much whatever she likes with her time is good for something at least. When you eventually went out to get a job you managed to find yourself as the janitor in a local television studio.

It seems amazing to you now that you managed to land a job as a childrens' television presenter, but you did. Your bubbly nature and your easy smile make you a natural. Not only that but you have learned how to operate the puppets on your show "Vicky Verky and the Twilight Express." You're almost a celebrity, even if it is to kids aged five to seven.

Your life is back on track. And yet... There's still something missing. Lying alone in bed some nights and thinking to yourself you wonder if it isn't Peter Riley.

Role-Playing Hints :

You are a woman who has rebuilt herself, and you've come out stronger for it. You have skills you never dreamed you would have, and you have achieved success. However, you still have a few doubts about yourself, not least that you could have had a very different life if you hadn't walked away from Peter when you did. You love your current life and are deathly afraid that something will come and take it away from you. Tabby is your best friend and confidante. You are quite protective of her.

The Others :

Tabitha Brennan Your best friend. You don't know what you'd do without her support and friendship.

Matt Coan He's the quiet guy down the hall. Quiet, but you heard from a friend in Hazel Towers next door that she saw him walking around his apartment naked.

Earl Grist He's the grumpy old man down the hall. Doesn't say a lot and you keep clear of him.

Ben Richardson

He's kinda cute and very polite but a bit of a non-entity.

Francis Russell

Someone you don't see a whole lot. He's on a different timezone to you; probably a night worker.

Name : Matt Coan
Occupation : Author, autodidact, and generally strange guy

Background :

You are fantastically booklearned. You don't have a photographic memory as such, but you remember pretty much everything you read. It's all filed away in your head somewhere. While you're not as much right-brained as left-brained it all goes in there. You have a smattering of several languages. After college you wrote a book on learning Japanese. Supposedly a hard language to learn, your book seemed to make it easier and has gone into fifth print. You have a simple life and you use the money you have gained in royalties on this book and the three you have written since (one on cookery, two thrillers) to live comfortably.

But living comfortably on your own does strange things to your mind. Simply put you have a lot of free time, and you use it for information gathering. Information gathering can really mean anything to you as well. You can watch CNN and exist on beans and toast for weeks. Sometimes you visit the library day after day and just read books. Sometimes you watch several television programmes at once.

It's not that you can't function on your own, but perhaps in your apartment, in your comfortable little womb you've lost all the social airs and graces. And sometimes it takes a while for them to re-establish themselves when you're out in the real-world.

So it is that you've come to talk to yourself. Just a little running commentary, but it keeps you company. Sometimes you describe to yourself what you're doing in quiet tones "Walkin' to the fridge now, just walkin' to the fridge. Takin' out the cornflakes. Whole lot-a-milka." Sometimes you forget basic social graces like dressing as well. You distinctly remember the day a girl across the road in Hazel Towers saw you shuffling around the apartment naked.

But it's okay to be different, right? You've nobody to pretend to be normal with, and you are really far more honest when you're alone than any of these people who live around you, pretending they're something that they're not in order to fit in. So what if they think you're strange? At the end of the day, you think the same of them.

Role-Playing Hints :

You are a little weird, and probably the one that everyone thinks is out of his mind. But you're almost painfully sane. You just live alone and have a powerful ability to rationalize your behavioural problems. You mumble to yourself a lot and you have a wealth of useless facts and figures at your mental fingertips. Although you don't spend time actively spying, you know a frightening amount about the people who live around you, what time they come in and go out. You like to watch.

The Others :

Giselle Deprez She turned up at Tabitha Brennan's apartment five years ago in a wedding dress. She's lived there ever since and now she makes puppets talk on a TV show for kids called "Vicky Verky and the Twilight Express."

Tabitha Brennan She owns the apartment she and Giselle live in. She's obviously wealthy because she never goes out to a regular job. She has been advertised as a singer at a number of local concert halls, but not frequently enough to constitute a career.

Earl Grist He's an ex-army officer who lost his lower leg in an accident. He makes up for his loss by being generally grumpy.

Ben Richardson He's a lawyer. Or was – He's not been at work in eight weeks.

Francis Russell

Your curiosity knows no bounds – You know nothing about Francis at all.