

# Shadow Kingdoms

*“Men were not always ruled by men!” – R..E. Howard*

February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010. In investigating a “sex ring”, the investigators – affiliated to a special police force – keep a run-down hotel under surveillance. The stakeout quickly degenerates into a bizarre crime scene.

The investigation eventually leads the investigators to London, where they uncover a global conspiracy and find out that their world is not quite what it seems. The investigators draw the attention of a secret organization and soon wind up in a nightmarish web of deceit and occult machinations.

At the center of this web lurks the influential Chinese businessman *Chih*.

## Keeper’s Information

The main theme of this scenario builds upon the premises of R.E. Howard’s “The Shadow Kingdom”, i.e. a conspiracy theory as old as humanity itself, in which *men were not always ruled by men* but by Serpent Men (see Play Aids for background information).

The plot consists of three layers: 1) first, an investigation into sex crimes and abductions that turn out to be linked to Mythos activity; 2) an increasingly stressful cat and mouse game as the meddlesome investigators draw the attention of the Serpent Men, their servants, and scarier entities become involved; 3) the investigators, with some outside help, must end their current *nightmare* by finding a way back to the 1021 AD *reality*.

## Mood

As in all Cthulhu games, mood is paramount. The keeper should not let the modern setting make the players comfortable. Counterbalance the apparent familiarity of the setting by building up an atmosphere of insecurity: create indoor locations that are consistently claustrophobic, gritty, dark, or depressing. Throw in miserable weather, with cold and rainy outdoor locations. The keeper can also destabilize the players by portraying non-player characters as ambiguously as possible – even the “good” ones.

## Apocalypse

*The following information should only be divulged to the players in the later stages of the scenario, if at all.*

Shadow Kingdoms is set in an alternate reality halfway between the world we know and one dominated by a Serpent civilization, where man is extinct. The “normal” world is the one in which the Dark Age investigators succeeded in thwarting Seth’s plan, and the non-human world is the one in which the Dark Age investigators failed.

In this alternate reality, on the night of October 31st, 1021, an *extinction event* destroyed 70% of all life on earth. The most widely accepted thesis is that a 2-miles asteroid known as “Wormwood” hit the earth west of London, obliterating Slough (UK), and creating a crater nearly 200 yards deep and 125 miles wide. The year long winter night that followed, the acid clouds and rains, the global disruption of ecosystems all nearly destroyed humanity; or so history books claim!

*At the beginning of the scenario, the investigators are unaware of the “abnormality” of the world they live in – they don’t know any better. As the plot of Shadow Kingdoms unravels, the players may note disturbing differences between the post-Wormwood world and our own. A special side story is available to stage the “awakening” of the investigators. As it turns out, Wormwood was none other than Yog-Sothoth, invoked by a Serpent priest to erase earth life back in 1021 and thus make room for a Serpent civilization. For some obscure reason the gate did not remain open long enough; in spite of the Wormwood extinction “event” and the year long Black Winter that followed, life prevailed, and so did human civilization.*

*Additionally, we recommend the keeper not inform the players about the connection of this scenario to the Pagan Call campaign. Instead, present the scenario as a stand-alone modern-day scenario and let the players create investigators from scratch. The scenario’s starting point can be any city familiar to the keeper or the players.*

## Shadow Kingdoms

The Serpent people depicted in this scenario are drawn from the tales of Robert E. Howard. This breed of Serpent people, hailing from the fabled prehistoric lands of Valusia, appear as human aside from a snake-like neck and head (and a predisposition for mottled skin).

Awakening from centuries-long slumber after the aborted apocalypse in 1021 AD, pockets of Serpent people found the human civilization still ruling the earth, but also weakened in the aftermath of Wormwood. Talking advantage of their sorcery and the prevailing chaos, the Serpents assumed the likeness of humans and slowly but surely infiltrated human society at all levels of power, thus influencing the course of human history. By the year 2010, the Serpents are firmly entrenched in all walks of life.

The modern-day Serpent people are sophisticated yet depraved beings. Their pastimes include participation in secret societies where abducted humans of all sexes and ages are tortured, abused, and eventually disposed off. A few elected humans (high-profile pedophiles, psychopaths, depraved politicians, etc.) are occasionally allowed into these secret circles, but they have no knowledge of the true nature of their hosts.

## Player's Information

*At the beginning of the scenario, all investigators are members of a special police force investigating sex crimes.*

*All the contextual information the players need at this point is contained in the daily newspaper - see handout #1 near the end of this scenario.*

The Investigators are affiliated to a special operations police force fighting sex crimes, with a focus on organized crime and recidivists. The team has had to operate within a context of dwindling budgets and reorganizations. Here are example occupations that the players could choose from:

- Medical Examiner (ME)
- Criminalist
- Computer Specialist
- (Police) Detective
- Forensic Psychologist
- Evidence Technician
- Undercover Agent

In the interest of the scenario, it is important to either have one investigator specialized in electronic surveillance (e.g. Computer Use and Electronics skills) or at least know a hacker non-player character that can provide such skills.

Recently, the team has been investigating a "sex ring". The investigators uncovered an internet network of unidentified persons sharing illegal pornographic material. They recently discovered that the activities of this ring go further than mere file swapping: the ring appears to be able to *produce* illegal material (photographs, movies) on demand, to organize "encounters", and to have connections with East European people traffickers.

Recently, the force succeeded in positively identifying one member of the sex ring, Mr. Yamamura. Mr. Yamamura is managing director of a small pharmaceutical company (see Statistics for more background information).

Every weekend, Mr Yamamura visits a shabby hotel in a suburb and meets there with underage prostitutes and other shady characters. The investigators have organized a stakeout in closed-down business offices opposite the hotel. So far, despite the surveillance, they have not yet established the probable cause necessary to arrest Mr. Yamamura and obtain the court warrant to search his flat.

To further the investigation, the suspect would need to be arrested. But to make the arrest, the investigators must have *probable cause*, i.e. reasonable belief or evidence that the suspect committed an alleged crime. Catching Mr. Yamamura red-handed with an underage prostitute would allow an arrest and issue a search warrant of the suspect's house to find further leads into the sex ring.

## The Man without a Head

*The keeper can relocate the first part of the scenario in any place of his or her preference. For this reason, locations are left as fairly generic, being listed as, for instance, "hometown" and "the flat". The starting location is the hotel where the suspect is currently staying.*

## The "California" Hotel

*The "California" hotel is located in a depressing part of the suburbs, a spread of second-rate stores, non-descript businesses and warehouses. At night, the area attracts prostitutes, dealers, and gangs. Now is only 4 PM, but a sudden rain has darkened the skies, and the rare occupied offices are lit, as if it were already winter...*

*The hotel has three floors, served by a single lift that creaks and groans. There is no restaurant or bar but the lobby does boast a vending machine.*

*An alley runs alongside the hotel leading to a parking lot at the back, where the suspect parked his Toyota Prius. There are no other customers besides him at that time.*

The suspect that the investigators are after is in fact a depraved Serpent man, disguised as Mr. Yamamura. Mr. Yamamura hired room 207. He is expecting a young Russian prostitute named Roksana, see Statistics, an androgynous character who enters the hotel half an hour later. After 15 more minutes, the Serpent man suffers the equivalent of a fatal coronary. Falling dead to the floor, the Serpent man's masking magic fails and his Serpent's neck and head are revealed. The prostitute screams and stares at the dead Serpent man in horror. Hotel owner Dimitri - a human goon of the Serpent people - rushes upstairs, finds the body, barks at Roksana to pick up her stuff and leave, then calls the "cleaners" on his cell phone. The cleaners tell him to quickly dispose of the Serpent head as a first measure; they'll be coming in 10 minutes to "clean up the mess". Between the moment that Roksana runs out of the hotel lobby - literally under the investigators' nose - and Dimitri throws the garbage bag with the Serpent head in the garbage container at the back of the hotel, no more than 2 minutes pass! It takes another 10 minutes before the "cleaners" are due to arrive in their white pest-control van, intent on removing all evidence.

Here is the sequence of events *assuming that the investigators do not intervene*:

### Timing (in minutes) and events

In bold are the events that the investigators can witness from their lookout position.

**0 mn. The suspect undresses in front of the window**

**1 mn. Roksana is spotted closing the curtains**

5 mn. The suspect dies of heart failure

6 mn. Dimitri checks on 207, finds the dead Serpent

7 mn. Dimitri tells Roksana to leave; calls the "cleaners"

9 mn. Dimitri grabs a fire axe and returns to room 207

10 mn. He severs the Serpent head, puts it in a garbage bag

**10 mn. Roksana runs out of the hotel**

12 mn. Dimitri bins the head and the fire axe at the back

**20 mn. The pest control van arrives, parks at the back**

21 mn. One cleaner picks up the Serpent head, not the axe

21 mn. The other cleaners start "cleaning" room 207

28 mn. The room is "clean"; cleaners carry garbage bags

**30 mn. The cleaners depart in the van**

The keeper may decide to play this sequence in real time in order to immerse the players into the action and at the same time confront them with a go/no-go dilemma. Room 207 has a window onto the street, through which one

investigator can see first the suspect starting to unclonthe, then the androgynous character coming to the window and closing the curtains. Here is the dilemma facing the players: *if* the androgyny is under eighteen, then the suspect is engaging in an illegal sexual activity and may be arrested. If however, she is above eighteen and consenting, arrest is unlawful and any evidence would be thrown out of court, thus weakening further investigation as well as alerting the sex ring of an intrusion: the investigators are “burnt”. The keeper is invited to explicitly state the dilemma to players who have to take a gamble.

If investigators do not act, only the events occurring outside of the hotel may be observed (in bold). If the investigators do act, they are likely to cross the path of the cleaners who will try to put them out of action - see Statistics to play a confrontation.

Here are things to consider for the follow-up:

- If the investigators do not interfere with the cleaners, the cleaners remove the body and the head. If they do interfere, the cleaners leave the **headless body** behind.
- If the headless body somehow lands onto the autopsy table, the Serpent organization tries to “replace” the **Medical Examiner** by one of their own kind.
- **Owner Dimitri** stays put in his little office until the investigators find him, smoking Russian cigarettes.
- The Serpent organization (behind the sex ring) tracks down the **prostitute Roksana** and tries to eliminate her, she has seen too much. This takes 48 hours.
- If the investigators look into the garbage container in the filthy courtyard at the back, they find the bloodied **fire axe** that served to cut the Serpent head off. It has the fingerprints of Dimitri all over it.
- The investigators find an **unmarked DVD** in 207’s DVD player; but they never find the **Serpent head**.

### ROOM 207: CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION

Moving up the elevator or the staircase that both reek of urine, then through the dimly lit corridors with stained carpets, one eventually arrives in front of the door to room 207. The door is ajar. Room 207 is a typical room; it has an *en-suite* bathroom, a work desk, a color television with a Chinese DVD player, and a small table with a chair. Here is the evidence that can be found, once the first officer to arrive has secured the crime scene:

- Room 207 is remarkably empty (apart from the eventual body, the blood on the carpet and the DVD in the DVD player, and the leather restraints hanging from the bedposts). The room strongly smells of cleaning fluid, as if room service just did the room. This is because the cleaners wiped all surfaces clean of fingerprints with detergent. The cleaners also used an “evidence vacuum” to remove as fibers, hairs, etc. from the crime scene.
- *If the cleaners were not able to dispose of the body:* the eyes are drawn to the **naked body** upon the floor. It takes a second to realize that it is **headless** – the naked torso terminating in the stump of a neck. The pale beige carpet around the upper half of the body is deep scarlet in color where the rapidly congealing blood from the decapitation has pooled. Two deep

dents in the carpet and the floorboards under the neck indicate that the head was cut *in situ* with a heavy blade, probably an axe. The suspect’s clothes are neatly folded at the foot end of the bed.

- *If the cleaners were able to dispose of the body:* the carpet is stained by a **pool of blood** in front of the TV. There are two **deep dents** in the carpet and the floorboards in the middle of the bloodstain, apparently made by some heavy sharp blade, possibly an axe. An investigator looking into the bathroom finds suspicious tool marks on the inside of the bathtub (where the cleaners quickly cut the body with an electric meat saw, to fit into garbage bags). The suspect’s clothes cannot be found anywhere.
- The queen size bed is relatively undisturbed, certainly not slept in, its purpose made obvious by the **leather restraints** hanging from the bedposts.
- The TV displays a grainy screen, flickering with static noise. A white “EXT 1” is displayed in the upper left, indicating that the TV is attuned to the DVD player. The DVD player has been playing a **DVD**, which has been paused after 5 minutes of play.
- An observant investigator (Idea roll) may notice that one fire axe is missing in the corridor of 207.
- If the players do not think of searching the back of the hotel, in particular the garbage container, the keeper may allow Spot Hidden rolls until one investigator spots **one drop of blood** (having dripped from Dimitri’s fire axe on the way down) in the corridor in front of room 207. The blood drops are sparse, but after careful back tracking lead to a spot in front of the garbage container. The missing **fire axe** can be found at the bottom, blade smeared with blood and handle bearing Dimitri’s fingerprints all over.

#### The “snuff” DVD

*The DVD is a read/write DVD of a known brand but further unmarked. It is a genuine “snuff” DVD: the moviemakers have staged and filmed an actual murder for distribution in illegal circuits.*

*Note that snuff movies are an urban legend: no real snuff movie has ever been found. All so-called snuff movies in circulation are fakes. The keeper should remind this fact to the players. For the purpose of this scenario however, the DVD found in room 207 turns out to be a real snuff movie, and possibly the only one in existence. The keeper is referred to the film “8mm” by Joel Schumacher, in which a snuff videotape plays a central role.*

The DVD has a single track, which lasts only 5 minutes. These 5 minutes however are intolerable to look at. Watching the movie to the end, viewers incur a 1D3 SAN roll. We leave the explicit description of the scene to the imagination of the keeper, who should take into account the sensitivity of the players. Suffice to say the grainy movie features a fat masked naked man, an underage victim (a 10-12 year old Asian girl), a badly lit and relatively bare bedroom, sexual abuse, torture, and ends with the brutal execution of the victim. A third person holds the camera and moves about. An open door in the bedroom reveals parts of a shower room .

*Analysis of the movie by experts doesn't reveal any noticeable special effect or inconsistencies. Also, forensic psychological investigation of the scene indicates that the emotion of the victim is real, not acted (corroborating one's gut feeling when watching the movie).*

*The actual location of the shot can be discovered by the investigators in the second part of the scenario, set in England. Observant investigators might notice the unusual make of the shower. An Internet search reveals it to be a Triton electric shower; electric showers are common in the United Kingdom and in some developing countries; Triton is a leading British shower manufacturer.*

*As to the victim, if the investigators do a search of INTERPOL's database of missing and abducted children, they eventually spot one possible candidate: the daughter Kanna Takahashi of a Japanese diplomat who disappeared about 3 months ago at school (The Nippon School in West London, UK). As it turns out, two girls have disappeared from that school: Kanna Takahashi and more recently Hisayo Yamamura, but in the case of Hisayo, no yellow notice was issued by INTERPOL so she does not appear in the database.*

#### DEAD ENDS

Investigators may want to trace phone calls made with Dimitri's cell and the license plate of the pest-control van.

Dimitri's call log shows two recent calls. The most recent call was placed at T+7mn to a contact named "cleanr". The second most recent call was placed a few hours before the events to a contact named "Roksana".

If investigators call "Roksana", they get her voicemail (girly voice with a Slavic accent): "Hi, I'm Roksana, can't take your call right now, please leave a message. Kisses!" If they call "cleanr", the service provider replies that the number is not in use (Serpents have remotely disabled the phone's access to their network just after the events).

Requesting a "trap and trace" court warrant to do cell phone forensics on Dimitri's device allows investigators to learn a few more things: the carrier triangulates Dimitri's position to be close to the California Hotel for both calls. Roksana's service provider can supply Roksana's address in "The Projects" social housing, and determines that Roksana was home at the time of the call.

Tracing the other phone number is more problematic. Contacting the NPAC (a center providing law enforcement agencies a "reverse lookup" system to determine the service provider of any phone number) is fruitless: the number is unlisted! This means that the cleaners cannot be identified nor located, but it has more profound implications too: a phone call was placed using a phone number and signal not known by any service provider!

A search of the license plate yields an equally disconcerting result: the number is not registered; it simply does not exist! The only thing the investigators can deduce is that the van came from a location within roughly 6 miles or 10 km of the hotel, as no more than 12-13 minutes elapsed between Dimitri's call and the van's arrival. However, this represents too large an area to be searched without additional information on the mysterious cleaners.

#### Hacking a Serpent cell phone

It takes considerable expertise to acquire information from or hack into a cell phone. Here is some keeper information in case one investigator decides to do forensics on a "Serpent" cell phone.

Dimitri's cell has a normal SIM card (Subscriber Identification Module) and operates with a normal Service Provider or Network Operator. However, two viruses or "malwares" hidden in the phone file system run in the background. One called "Shadow" allows the device to encrypt and secretly reroute specific calls towards the secret Panopticon Switching Office and through that to access the Serpent communication network. The Shadow virus also deletes all such call log data after 24 hours. The other virus is called WatchDog and as its name implies "listens" for specific events. It can for instance recognize the use of certain keywords (typed or spoken) and sends that information with a time stamp to the Panopticon offices. It also provides a "backdoor" to Serpent People surveillance experts who can remotely activate the microphone of the cell phone and thus eavesdrop onto conversations held in the vicinity of the device, should they want to.

An expert or a hacker skilled with "acquisition toolkits" is able to image the file system of the cell phone. There is no further incriminating data on the device. A successful Computer Use skill roll or equivalent locates the two viruses. A second skill roll is required to understand the function of the viruses, in broad terms, e.g.: "there is this one program, not sure if it's a Trojan virus or some kind of watch-dog app, which seems to listen to key strokes. It could be voice activated too but I'm not sure. It also does encryption and sends data through the carrier control channel that I can't make sense of. The other program called Shadow is an odd one. It somehow hijacks the normal carrier protocol and reroute calls to unlisted numbers, god knows whereto though. Escapes me. Is this a military device or what?"

#### INTERROGATING DIMITRI

The keeper must be sensitive to the fact that the crime scene is so bizarre that the players might be initially clueless. Help them focus on the few tangible clues and suspects. Thinking murder, there are three likely suspects: the prostitute, Dimitri, and/or the elusive cleaners. The only one close at hand being Dimitri, it is important to arrest him and interrogate him about what happened.

The axe found in the garbage container plays an important role in the interrogation and its outcome, since it bears Dimitri's incriminating fingerprints.

Dimitri tries to appear cool and indifferent. However, Dimitri worries about the events and his role in particular, replaying in his mind every minute and trying to preempt the police's questions. Dimitri knows all too well that his fingerprints are on the fire axe, and is wondering if the cleaners took care of the axe, or if they left it behind for the police to find. The perceptive investigator notices telltale signs of Dimitri's anxiety beyond his cool stance, and the keeper should allow appropriate skill rolls to further the interrogation. Simply pointing out to Dimitri

that his nervous tension shows and is “evidence” of his guilt should set him talking.

Several interrogation approaches can be tried on Dimitri, but only the “direct” approach really works, which consists of accusing him of Mr. Yamamura’s death and stressing the evidence against him:

- Dimitri’s fingerprints on the fire axe.
- As telecom forensics will reveal, he called Roksana a few hours earlier, telling her to come for a “job” with a client: the “Jap”.
- He also called a cell number that does not seem to exist, yet the cell phone log shows the conversation lasted 90 seconds!

Conversely, Dimitri’s goal is to come out clean; after all, he didn’t kill or harm anybody right? Note that although Dimitri is afraid of being imprisoned, he is even more afraid of failing his masters: the Serpent People. How much the investigators can get out of Dimitri is a delicate balance between the two drives: tell enough to get him out of jail, but not so much that the Serpent People want to “take care of him”.

Here is the leverage that investigators have on Dimitri, in order of importance: 1) closing down his business (on the charge of operating an illegal brothel), 2) accusing him of criminal homicide (based on the fingerprints on the fire axe handle), 3) suggesting that he is associated to an occult transnational criminal organization, possibly involved in *crimes against humanity*.

Below the keeper will find information Dimitri can provide when asked specific questions. Answer 1 is the default position of Dimitri to each question. Answer 2 can be elicited by using proper leverage and interrogation tactics, at the keeper’s discretion. Answer 3 is provided as reference and shows what Dimitri *really* knows; however, Dimitri only provides such information faced with certain death, or worse, threatened by retribution from the Serpent People. It is conceivable that at a later stage of the scenario, when investigators know more about third terrible foe and would question/threaten Dimitri again, he would provide answer 3.

#### How well do you know Mr. Yamamura?

1. Never seen the guy before.
2. I don’t know him, he’s just a guy, you know, he likes to do young girls, mostly streetwalkers, that kind. He came... maybe 10 times or less. I’m just the hotel guy, what people do in my bedrooms is their business.
3. Well, I, kind of helped him get in contact with, you know, the kind of girls he likes, that’s it. I knew he was one of *them* and some hot shot in the company he works for and that’s about all. If you’ve been around them long enough, you can pick them out you know...

#### You killed Mr. Yamamura.

1. No I didn’t, you can’t prove that.
2. Shit, ok you know, I chopped the man’s head with the f\*\*\*\*\*g axe, but he was already dead you know. I swear he was. I never killed anybody, never did no fly no harm, you can check my record.

3. Mr Yamamura was one of *them*. She saw his true face and freaked out. People... are not ready to handle the truth yet. I was just doing my job removing his head. Nobody should be allowed to see this. Not now.

#### Why did you cut Mr. Yamamura’s head off?

1. I didn’t. Why would I do that?
2. Yeah, well, I was... I kind of freaked out I think: dead man in my hotel, so I... I needed to dispose of the body so, I don’t know... I just grabbed the axe in the corridor and... started to chop him into more manageable bits you know?
3. I was just doing my job. If something happened Yamamura told me to call them cleaners. They tell me to remove the head quick? I remove the head. Quick.

#### What killed Mr. Yamamura if it wasn’t the axe blow?

1. I don’t know why he was dead, I wasn’t even in the \*\*\*\*\*g room, heard the girl shout, go in the room, the fellow is f\*\*\*\*\*g naked, dead on the floor you know.
2. You are f\*\*\*\*\*g CSI no? You go figure out why the man died. Can’t you tell from his blood or something?
3. Look, nobody killed Mr. Yamamura. I don’t know, maybe he got a bit too excited and, you know, he had a heart attack or something, who knows? Who wouldn’t get all worked up with the pretty little package I got him (winks).

#### Who is the girl who was in room 207?

1. Don’t know. Never seen her before.
2. Come on, she’s a streetwalker, who cares. Name is Roksana I think, she came here a few times meeting with Dr. Yamamura.
3. Yeah well, sue me, I know Roksana, turns out she’s from the same town as me, back in Russia. I was doing her a favor you know, she has to eat too, can’t blame her. She lives in “the projects” (social housing). Yeah, I even have her cell number here.

#### Who were the pest control guys?

1. Don’t look at me, how should I know? You figure out.
2. Well, ok, I remember I think, I have this cockroach problem so I got this number from this guy you know, so I called them to come clean the hotel. I don’t know them and why they did what they did. Whatever man!
3. They’re the cleaners, you know. You call them when there is a cluster f\*\*k that you can’t take of on your own. They clean up your mess. Got the number from Dr. Yamamura with instructions, that’s all...

#### Where did you get your cell? What is this number you called?

1. Like everybody, in a shop stupid! What number?
2. Look, I don’t know what you’re talking about – if the phone is rigged or something I didn’t do it. I don’t have the brains right?
3. It’s my cell phone all right, but *they* have, like, modified it. Yamamura sent me an SMS with a virus or something, which “upgraded” my phone. You can call phone numbers that don’t exist in any phone book you know. You could call *them* if you wanted to and if you knew their numbers; but all I have is the number of the cleaners...

## The Autopsy

If the authorities recovered Mr. Yamamura's headless body, it ends up on the autopsy table of the medical examiner's neon-lit office. Given the circumstances a full medico-legal autopsy is in order. After identification of the body and toe tagging, the body is photographed, weighed and measured by an assistant. The medical examiner then proceeds with the external examination, toxicological tests, dissection and internal examination. For the purpose of the game, highlights of the autopsy are rendered in spoken form, as dictated by the medical examiner on her voice recorder. The keeper can read the account aloud if the investigators witness the autopsy first hand. Alternately, adapt the account in the form of the autopsy report.

"This is case number 10-0229, assumedly Mr. Yamamura. The body is that of a well-developed, slightly overweight Asian male. The body is 59 inches long and weighs 158 pounds. If the head were not missing I'd estimate length to be, say 67 inches and weight about 170 pounds..."

"Note the closely shaven genitalia and arm pits. The skin is rather thin and of abnormal texture, showing patchy discolorations or dyschromia. Apart from the rigor mortis, there is obvious swelling of extremities. The two taken together could hint at arterial occlusion, maybe a heart failure. I see a small tattoo on the right thigh that looks like... a phallic symbol maybe? No visible scars, bruises, or skin lesions: the victim didn't struggle. The obvious thing is the missing head and the neck wound. Question is: is the neck wound the fatal wound or not? In any case, decapitation was quick: one stroke, maybe two, with a relatively sharp and heavy instrument, probably an axe. The single stroke and accurate aim, cutting C4 (fourth cervical vertebra) in two, precludes that the victim was standing or sitting, or lying on a soft mattress. He must have been lying on the ground and lying pretty damn still. It's not unreasonable to think that the victim was unconscious or already dead before the decapitation..."

"I've performed the Y incision, removed the breastplate with the Stryker saw, and exposed heart and lungs, as well as... Wait a minute... I'm opening the pericardium and removing the heart, let's have a good look. There are clear signs of myocardial infarction, possibly acute based on the pallor of the myocardium after so many hours. I need to confirm this under the microscope but it looks like this fellow suffered SCD (Sudden Cardiac Death) before decapitation! I'm doing a section of the coronary artery. Bingo! Major roadblock of the artery caused by a thrombus (blood clot). Death was rapid, think minutes..."

"The heart shows abnormalities! It looks as if there are only three chambers instead of four, could be a congenital heart defect. Incredible that this man has gone undiagnosed for so long – and lived! I wonder if it caused the heart attack... Kidneys are small; again a likely congenital maldevelopment... The small intestine seems relatively short, but I can't yet find signs of surgery..."

"It is my opinion that Mr. Yamamura, a 45 year old Asian male, died of a heart attack. The cause of death was a blood clot obstructing the coronary artery. There is some evidence of a rare chromosomal disorder (7p2 monosomy?) that could explain the small kidneys, small intestine, and the congenital heart defect. The mechanism

of death was restricted blood supply to the heart, leading to an Acute Myocardial Infarction and Sudden Cardiac Death. The manner of death was natural."

Keeper's note: the abnormalities observed by the medical examiner are of course not due to a chromosomal disorder, but to the semi-reptilian anatomy of the Serpent people.

### THE MEDICAL EXAMINER

The medical examiner is Dr. Marcella Scarpa (see Statistics). The subplot fork to consider here is whether the investigators meet with Dr. Scarpa *before* or *after* a Serpent has replaced her. Both options are interesting from a role-playing point of view and the keeper must weigh their respective advantages and drawbacks. If one investigator is a medical examiner, coroner or pathologist, the keeper could also opt to let the player role-play the autopsy.

The key difference between a human Dr. Scarpa or a Serpent Dr. Scarpa is the following: with a human Dr. Scarpa, it is the body of Dr. Yamamura that is abnormal (see full autopsy above, as well as the result of the toxicological examination – see "Serpent blood" below). In contrast, a Serpent Dr. Scarpa omits any evidence of Serpent anatomy during the autopsy and in the autopsy report: the keeper must leave out the underlined text in the autopsy account. Instead, it is the behavior of the look-alike that presents some oddities: the Serpent may have some difficulties finding things, and generally not be herself (as her assistant may confess – investigators may catch a surprised look or two by the assistant towards the doctor); in her defense, Dr. Scarpa alias the Serpent may lie that she feels unwell ("I think it's the flu") and absent minded. The keeper is referred to Dr. Scarpa's Statistics to role-play her character. One possibility, if an investigator attends the autopsy and succeeds a Medicine skill roll, is to notice what Dr. Scarpa leaves out during the autopsy (the skin condition, the phallic tattoo, the three-chamber heart, etc.) The keeper should let the investigator or Dr. Scarpa come up with the 7p2 monosomy hypothesis to explain the congenital anomalies.

#### Serpent blood

*Note: if the body of Dr. Yamamura hasn't been found, all that can be recovered of him at the crime scene is his blood soaking the carpet. In that case, the information below is the only thing that the medical examiner or her assistant can provide about him.*

While the medical examiner proceeds with the autopsy, the assistant runs a number of toxicological tests on various bodily fluids, including blood. Tests are negative: no evidence of alcohol, drug, or poison is found.

However, the blood sample is problematic (due to its reptilian nature): first it clots very easily, especially in small amounts, which complicates blood analysis. The pathologist is not be able to make sense of any test result or analysis of blood smears under the microscope. Most readings are "out of range": no sensible interpretation should be offered by the keeper at this stage of the scenario – just leave the players in the dark for now.

## The Projects

*At some stage the investigators will have identified Roksana (a potential suspect) and decide to pay her a visit at her home address “for questioning”.*

Roksana lives in a flat in The Projects, a depressing neighborhood of public housing: low-rise, gray tower blocks. Neglect and rampant poverty have turned The Projects into a focus for drug problems, crime, and prostitution. The police usually avoid the area because of gangs that resent any form of authority; there have been incidents in the past in which police officers have been cornered and attacked, and police vehicle damaged and burned down. Suffice it to say that investigators going in blind are not welcome.

Roksana’s flat is in the Woodside Block, investigators must first wriggle through a crowd of hostile teenagers hanging around the entrance, take the urine reeking lift to the third floor, and find apartment 302 down the dirty corridor. Roksana’s flat is small, extremely untidy, dirty, and dark – Roksana has closed all the blinds and has lived the last day or two as a recluse.

As with the medical examiner Dr. Scarpa (above), the keeper faces a choice. If the investigators have displayed due diligence and concern in identifying Roksana and finding her, the keeper should reward them: she is still alive. If however the investigators have been slow or negligent, then let the Cleaners find her first and eliminate her: investigators find her dead in the flat.

### ROKSANA, ALIVE AND ANXIOUS

Roksana can be overheard rummaging in her apartment and talking in agitated fashion (to herself). The incident with the serpent man has shaken her sanity. The keeper is referred to Roksana’s Statistics to role-play her. Specifically, she is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): retrograde amnesia of the 2 hours preceding the event (she can’t remember anything from the moment she left home to fleeing the hotel). Additionally she is plagued by intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and anxiety. Since the events she hasn’t dared leaving her flat and mistrusts all human beings including her best friend who she wouldn’t let in, although she can’t articulate why.

Initially, she won’t let the investigators in, shouting through the door that she doesn’t want to be disturbed and please leave her alone. Roksana needs some solid convincing on the behalf of the investigators before she lets them in. We leave it to the keeper to decide what constitutes success: role-play the conversation (showing understanding and offering help, or threatening with arrest and jail wins over Roksana), require some appropriate skill rolls (e.g. Fast Talk or Persuade), or a combination.

Once inside, investigators with the psychology or psychoanalysis skill may be able to establish that Roksana suffers from PTSD and retrograde amnesia. She cannot remember the last two hours before fleeing hotel room 207. The only way to restore some of her memory is to help her relive the events just before the trauma; obviously the investigators weren’t there to witness those, but may

still be able to reconstruct some of the events. It is important not to rush Roksana but instead give her enough space and time to recollect. Depending on how well the players role-play the questioning, here are recollections they can elicit from Roksana, from vague to more specific:

- I don't know, I, I'm sorry... I'm confused. And I'm scared – no, I don't know why, it's awful!
- I remember coming out of the hotel, into the daylight... As if I walked out of a dream and into the waking world.
- Yes, I remember now... Oh my god I forgot his name, how could I? Dimitri? Yes, Dimitri. I think. I had to come to... To do something. What was it? A client?
- Yes, I've done this before. It's... A hard world to live in. You have to earn money you know – to eat, to have a place of your own. I do this (prostitution). And... I've been at the hotel a few times; this was not the first time... Maybe Dimitri knows something?
- You say I met this man? Dr Yamamura (she flinches)? It's not the name – he's Japanese right? Yes (tears run down her cheeks, she's visibly agitated). I don't think this is a good idea. Could you please leave now? I'm sorry, maybe come back tomorrow. I'll feel better. I can't take this anymore...*(If investigators leave now, they won't see her alive anymore – see below)*.
- I was in this room. Oh no! It's like a mist, horrible. This man... He stands there, he's naked I think, but his face is so... Blurry (she sobs). My god, he looks like a ghost. Something happens, I can't... (She frowns, crying). Something happens to him, I watch but... I didn't do anything. I'm so sorry. Can you help me? I'm so scared that I feel like I'm going to die!

### ROKSANA, OD'ED

If the investigators wait too long, the Cleaners have paid Roksana a visit, broken into her flat (so the door is open) and subdued her, injecting a lethal dose of the “Serpent drug” CI 582 into her left leg. Investigators find her dead in her flat, lying peacefully at last on the grimy couch. Autopsy reveals a shriveled bladder with blood in the urine sample and some evidence of cell death in the brain. The toxicology screening report indicates that a 2-mg/L concentration of a psychoactive drug has been found in the urine sample, either PCP or an analogue of PCP.

The investigator may request a more advanced forensic toxicology test. Such a test confirms the presence of a drug resembling Ketamine but with a different molecular structure.

The case file mentions an injection needle mark on her left leg, inside the thigh on the iliac artery. The opinion of the medical examiner is that she OD'ed from an unidentified psychoactive drug, possibly self-administered.

Investigators may notice a detergent smell hanging in the apartment, which may remind them of the smell in room 207 of the hotel.

No fingerprints other than Roksana’s are found in the flat. Oddly, no syringe or needles are found to explain the needle mark, which may indicate foul play. In fact, Roksana did do drugs, including CI 582, but she would typically ingest it. A flat search comes up with a small plastic bag containing 10 grams of the stuff.

### Serpent drug

*Note: the game mechanics of the Serpent drug are explained in the appendix of this scenario. Here we only provide some contextual information for the keeper.*

The “Serpent drug” is not the name by which this illegal drug is known. Recreational users call it K-loch, Green Matter, Tunnel, Sleepwalker, Little Death or Dream Drug. Users liken its effects to PCP or Ketamine. When taken in the dark, high doses induce extremely vivid out-of-body experiences, hence the name “Dream Drug”. However it lacks the unpredictable mood-altering effects of PCP and users of the dream drug retain a sense of self. As a result the effects of the drug are all the more “realistic”, and often experienced as traveling to other worlds and dimensions. The drug has a very high abuse potential.

The Serpent drug started as compound CI 582 developed by S&K laboratories (controlled by influential Serpent people) while researching a revolutionary fast-acting antidepressant and anxiolytic. The compound was abandoned because of its pronounced hallucinatory side effects but drew the attention of the Serpent People for that very reason. The Serpent People discovered that the drug opens a temporary gate to the Dreamlands in the user’s mind – worse still, if the user died while under the drug’s influence, his or her soul would be trapped there, forever. Add the high addiction potential and the Serpent organization decided to stimulate illicit production in 2005. In recent years, helped by its very low price, demand for the drug grew explosively and it is becoming one of the most popular psychoactives – with the potential to create a major social problem: an entire “lost generation”.

Of course the secret history of the drug is not known by law enforcement agencies, yet. The Serpent people’s hand has long withdrawn, and humans are diligently working at their own demise. The investigators only know that a new drug is hitting the streets and touching all strata of the population: young, old, poor and rich. Special teams around the world are being put together to understand the threat and contain it. So far without success.

### Dr. Yamamura’s Daughter

*By now the investigators should have obtained the court warrant to search Dr. Yamamura’s house, which also grants authority to do electronic surveillance of his computer and intercept emails, etc. in the next 48 hours.*

Dr. Yamamura, being the CEO of a subsidiary of pharmaceutical giant S&K employing 30 staff, owns a large house in a well-to-do neighborhood of the town. After breaking the lock of the front door, the investigators find a strangely cold, dark, and empty house, which doesn’t seem to be lived in at all. Although records indicate that Dr. Yamamura lived in this house since entering the country 3 years ago, it is virtually devoid of furniture and immaculate. The keeper should ask the players if they switch on lights (or alternately use a torch). It takes about 10 minutes to walk through the entire house, and sounds echo strangely in the emptiness. After 10 minutes, the investigators converge to the only upstairs

room that seems inhabited: the master bedroom. The bedroom features only a mattress in the middle of the floor, a desk with a high-end laptop lying on top, as well as a pen and a pad of yellow post-it notes. Dr. Yamamura’s attaché-case is next to the desk. It takes half an hour to sift through its contents, which is largely business-related – nothing suspicious. A cell phone is found inside, of the same make as Dimitri’s, but empty of data and call logs; Dr. Yamamura must have made a point of regularly deleting the contents of the device.

The walk-in closet is typical of a workaholic businessman, full of suits and shirts, and little casual clothing.

Eventually, investigators turn their attention to Dr. Yamamura’s humming laptop. In order to login, the investigators need to provide the required password. Dr. Yamamura changed password every two or three days. His security mania had one flaw: he often needed to write down passwords in order to memorize them. He wrote the last one on a post-it note, which is long gone. However, the subtle imprint of the ball pen can still be felt and even spotted on the topmost post-it. The keeper should allow one investigator to notice the imprint: the password “PanOptic0n” can be revealed by carefully shading the post-it with a pencil. Once logged in, here is the information that can be found within an hour or two of rummaging through the laptop’s file system and emails:

- Dr. Yamamura has a 12-year old daughter, Hisayo Yamamura. Father and daughter exchange polite emails every Sunday. Hisayo attends a boarding school in the London area, UK. The email exchange abruptly stopped about 6 weeks ago on both sides. There are a few pictures of Hisayo in the image folder. The most recent one shows her in company of a friend, also Asian, posing smiling in front of what could be the boarding school (The Nippon School in West London, UK). The picture electrifies investigators who have seen the snuff DVD, as they recognize in Hisayo’s friend the face of the little girl in the movie (Kanna Takahashi)!
- The computer contains scant personal information besides the pictures, almost all data relates to the business of managing his pharmaceutical company.
- Dr. Yamamura’s company Yamamura Tech develops in collaboration with WSU (Wayne-State University, Michigan, USA), battlefield psychoactive drugs that enhance the mood and cognition of soldiers in the heat of action, or to deal with disorders such as PTSD. Although the Ministry of Defense is the main customer of Yamamura Tech, a few spin-off products have been commercialized.
- The computer contains an encrypted folder that cannot be opened without knowing a password. Dr. Yamamura actually stores all incriminating data relating to his sex ring there – pictures, movies, contact information, incl. archives of emails - unfortunately breaking into this folder proves too difficult even for an expert computer user within the time limit of the court warrant; the players can decide to sidestep the law and hand the laptop to a hacker friend, but by the time the folder’s contents are revealed, the investigators will be in London and already know more than they need to.

Well into the computer search, investigators are startled by a loud “ping” bringing up a live messaging window from “8mm” with the following text:

8mm [13:57]:  
Hi Doc, you online?

This is a crucial moment for the investigators: they have the opportunity to pose as Dr. Yamamura and obtain information about his double life, the sex ring and the whereabouts of Hisayi Yamamura. The trick is to make 8mm talk without getting burnt (i.e. 8mm discovers his interlocutor is *not* Dr. Yamamura). The keeper must play 8mm and improvise the chat. Some scripted interjections are provided below to help the keeper, arranged in order of increasing information content, and they are interspersed with questions to test the players’ wits. The keeper is invited to read the Statistics of Dr. Yamamura and 8mm before role-playing the “encounter”. 8mm is the cold-blooded cameraman involved in the making of the snuff movies, however he has no ties with the Serpent People and knows nothing about their worldwide conspiracy. He is however uneasy about the fact that Hisayi Yamamura, the sex ring’s next victim, is Dr. Yamamura’s daughter! If the players fumble their replies to those questions, 8mm realizes the con and closes the communication.

Long time no chat doc. Don’t think we’ve spoken since I sent you the last DVD. Whad’ya think of it?

The little jap was great. Screamed her heart out, damn sight better than the polish chick. What do you want us to do with, er, Hisayi? Dunno but, given her connection with you wouldn’t it be easier to, you know, pick another girl?

Here the players have a choice, one that can save the girl. They can ask 8mm to keep her alive, in which case she’ll ultimately be found at the “studio”, alive. They can ask 8mm to free the girl, sedated, in which case the police finds her after 24 hours and place her temporarily in foster care. Players may come with other surprising schemes that the keeper may agree to follow-up on.

Players may want 8mm to reveal his location. Direct questions arouse his suspicion. What works is asking 8mm indirect questions such as the weather at his end, what he is going to do in the week-end/holidays, was it difficult to locate the girls, etc. The keeper should improvise a casual answer that includes “South London”, but 8mm is not used to small talk from “doc” so add to it:

Why do you ask? You ok doc? You don’t seem yourself. Is there trouble? Why don’t I call you on your cell?

Btw doc, your spelling is awfully better than it was. What happened to your typos?

The only way to obtain information about the sex ring is to bring about the topic of the next snuff movie. Note that the scenario is constructed such that investigators are able to

unravel the mystery even if they do not succeed here. Make the information hard to get: if the investigators show they know too little or ask too pressing questions, they are burnt. Draw the players out of their comfort zone by asking them to decide about the next girl’s fate:

Customers are getting impatient; so here’s my question: you’re the boss doc, what you want done with the next cute little butterfly I’ve got? It’ll be #3 you know, nice milestone, how time flies!

The investigators must answer or fail. The keeper can require a Sanity roll (0/1D3) for providing a reply that may doom the sex ring’s next victim. The only way out is to return the question, e.g. what do the customers want? Here are replies the keeper should work into the chat:

The Ring, they have plenty of sick ideas you know. The way they write the emails, I can tell they must be hot shots, educated and stuff like you. Who am I to judge, the customer is king as they say!

The bodies? Ah, don’t worry Doc, we bury them in the basement, no one will ever know. I may be an artist but I’m not dumb.

I’ll continue to drop each master DVD in a bag locker at the train station as we agreed doc: has worked well so far no?

Studio is in a big abandoned warehouse on the south side, nice and quiet, good lighting for my camera work. Just Sex Machine, the girl and me. Sometimes a f\*\*\*\*\*g homeless we have to snuff out and dump in the Thames, no one gives a s\*\*\* about em. Parasites. Hey that’s an idea: have one play with the next girl and Sex Machine kills em both, you like that?

Note that inquiring about dead homeless people fished out of the Thames River is a clue that can lead to locating the studio in the next part of the scenario. The bag-locker story is another vital clue, since only one major London train station has them: London Victoria Station. 8mm does not reveal anymore about the people in the Ring or its *modus operandi* at this stage, and quickly gets suspicious of the investigators if they press. If the investigators have successfully conducted the chat without getting burnt, here is the last message of 8mm:

As I told you tomorrow I’ve got a trip up north, boring family stuff. After that I’m back in London ready for the shoot with Sex Machine and miss lucky number, 7 days from now. Have to call Machine see if he can free himself from work. Who would know that he’s a f\*\*\*\*\*g computer scientist in real life LOL.

Now the investigators have a mission (save the girl), a location (London), and a deadline: 7 days.

### The Cleaners 2

*In order to spice up the search at Dr. Yamamura's house, the keeper can have the Cleaners stop by while the investigators are chatting with 8mm. The cleaners come to check the house and are intent on removing Dr. Yamamura's effects, in particular his laptop.*

An investigator looking out of a window sees a white van stop in front of Dr. Yamamura's house. This is the same van as in the opening scene. It is up to the keeper to decide how far the cleaners go this time. In any case, the cleaners won't knowingly interfere with law enforcement personnel. If the investigators switched lights on to ease their progression through the house, the cleaners will be very wary. Three of them step out of the van (the driver stays), casually look left and right and start walking towards the house. Investigators may spot that at least one of them carries a concealed weapon (see Statistics). Two cleaners stop at the front door and use the doorbell. After ten seconds however, they open the door with their own key of the house, walk in, and draw their weapons. The third cleaner walks around the house and checks the house at the back.

*The rest of the encounter is left at the keeper's discretion.*

## Flight 301

*At this stage, it is a good idea for the keeper and players to pause, take stock of the situation, and plan their next move. Below is a summary of the necessary leads the players should have learnt in order to progress the scenario to the next level.*

- Dr. Yamamura's daughter Hisayi has possibly been abducted 6 weeks ago by the sex ring and could be its next victim; she was attending a boarding school in the Greater London area and was seemingly befriended by the girl featured in the snuff movie, Kanna Takahashi, who disappeared 3 months ago. Kanna attended the Nippon School in West London.
- The snuff movie was shot in an abandoned warehouse, ("the studio") possibly not far from the Thames on the south side. The cameraman is a shady figure that goes by the nickname "8mm" and works together with a brute he calls "Sex Machine". Bodies of dead girls are buried in the basement, and it seems that 8mm and Sex Machine also killed one or more homeless squatters and dumped their bodies in the river.
- Master copies of snuff DVDs are dropped in a bag locker at a train station, likely a major London train station. A member of the sex ring most likely picks up the DVD or DVDs for further distribution.
- The investigators have 7 days before the next girl is being sacrificed.

The logical next step for the investigators is to contact their counterparts at the Metropolitan Police Services (MPS or simply "the MET") and share their story. After a few phone calls, they end up talking to Chief Inspector mac Morna (role-played by the keeper) heading a sex crime unit for Greater London. Role-playing the phone call

– mac Morna has a dark voice and a strong Scottish accent - gives the keeper an opportunity to engage the players in a discussion around what they know so far, and help them where necessary to structure their thoughts and indirectly fill them in on what they might have overlooked (see bulleted leads above).

If the players do not think of contacting their English counterparts, have Chief Inspector mac Morna call them instead: "your investigation has come to my attentions, and there are certain matters of importance that we need to discuss, etc."

The Chief Inspector is very interested in what the investigators have to say, and hint to them that some of their findings connect with an unsolved case they've been working on, and lead to a breakthrough. The players may want to press him for more information; instead the Chief Inspector asks them to pack and jump on the first plane to London, to help his team at New Scotland Yard; he will obtain proper authorization through INTERPOL. If the players hesitate, the Chief Inspector reminds them that time is the essence, lives are at stake, and that both teams need each other to unravel the operations of a sex ring that seems to operate like an international crime organization: "we have in our hands the only snuff movie in existence, let's make sure that this is the last we'll ever see."

### Paranoia points

Initially, the investigation moved on the fringes of the Serpent conspiracy, and the investigators, not drawing too much attention from the Serpent People, have been more or less in control of their comings and goings. This is about to change. As the investigation delves deeper into the Serpent People's schemes, invisible alarms are triggered that elicit counter measures from the Serpents or their servants. In order to simulate this in the game, we add "paranoia mechanics" to the scenario. It works as follows:

- Every time the investigators get burnt (e.g. by confronting a Serpent person in human guise, or interfering with a Serpent operation, or looking into Serpent information systems) they gain one or more "paranoia points."
- Above certain thresholds, the Serpent organization launches counter measures. The investigators' current number of paranoia points, i.e. how "burnt" they are, determines the level of the counter measure. This can vary from simple police obstruction, to assassination attempts, and in the last stages even sorcery.
- A list of pre-cooked counter measures, which read as scenario sub-plots, is provided in Appendix. Counter measures and mini-plots are organized according to threat level and described in a generic way to ease integration with the current storyline.

As the investigation progresses, the investigators become increasingly aware that they are being watched and caught in a vast web of intrigues. The keeper should do his or her best indeed to instill a sense of diffuse threat, mistrust, and increasing paranoia as game play progresses.

Having come this far, the keeper must count paranoia points incurred by the investigators in the first part of the scenario. Add points as follows:

- Investigators confront the Cleaners and find the headless body: 3 points.
- Investigators arrest Dimitri: 1 point.
- Investigators highlight the anatomical abnormalities hidden by Dr. Scarpa (who has been replaced by a Serpent): 2 points.
- Investigators find Roksana alive and question her: 1 point.
- Investigators report that in their opinion, Roksana was murdered: 1 point.
- Investigators confront the Cleaners at Dr. Yamamura's house and/or take custody of the doctor's computer: 2 points.
- For every week in which paranoia points did *not* increase, subtract 1D3 points from the total.

Add up the paranoia points:

- 0-2 points: Serpent People ignore the investigators.
- 3-5 points: Serpents conduct covert surveillance of the investigators (intercept communications, hire people to tail them and report back, etc.).
- 6-8 points: Serpents obstruct the investigators' police work (eliminating evidence and witnesses, setting up cons to defame investigators or get them arrested, scare them off, etc.).
- 9-11 points: Serpents try to kill the investigators in an accident, or using drugs and poisons.
- 12+ points: overt attacks, both physical and magical, and summoning of Mythos beings.

## The Terrorist

*If the investigators' paranoia points exceed 7 points at this stage, the keeper should consider playing the following "terrorist attack". The Serpent People, alerted by their informants of the investigators' meddling into the case of Dr. Yamamura, decide to eliminate them in one go.*

As the investigators wait at the boarding gate for their flight to London Heathrow, they notice or observe a number of interesting co-travelers. The keeper is free to sketch a few colorful characters that may draw the investigators' attention. Amongst those, mention an attractive young person (man or woman at the keeper's discretion – below we assume a "she"), late twenties, casually but smartly dressed, who returns one of the investigators' inquiring look. This occurs two or three times, enough to arouse one's curiosity: romantic interest, something else? If that person is approached and questioned, she declines her first name and nationality ("Sacha, I'm Irish, how do you do?"), politely indulge in small talk, but excuses herself if questions become too inquisitive ("sorry, I need to go to the washrooms").

Sacha turns out to be a Christian extremist, member of a national unity group implicated in political murders and terrorist attacks, and indirectly sponsored and manipulated

by the Serpent organization. Under false pretenses Sacha has been instructed to blast flight 301 in midair, and with it all sinners on board – especially the investigators who she was told are envoys of Satan!

The flight is pleasantly uneventful after the events of the last few days. One hour before landing however, the investigators notice Sacha walking down the aisle from business section where she was sitting, towards them. A few meters away she stops, and by the look of her face, hysterical and determined at the same time, all realize that something is very wrong. She raises her right fist above her head and shouts: "I AM THE ANGEL OF GOD! Ask forgiveness for your sins NOW, as you meet your Maker!" On a Successful Spot Hidden roll, an investigator fleetingly notices that Sacha holds a small device in her right hand. Players have a few seconds to react (the keeper can mentally count 3 seconds in real time): if they do not wrestle Sacha to the ground, she detonates a PETN (pentrite, a high explosive) "body bomb" using the pager/transmitter in her right hand.

What follows is a flash of light and deafening explosion, instantly killing 18 people. Investigators incur 1D6 Damage each and incur a 0/1D3 SAN roll for witnessing Sacha blown to bits. An entire segment of the fuselage blows out leaving a gaping hole right in front of the investigators and causing explosive decompression: the cabin floor caves in next to the huge hole and three rows of seats are instantly sucked out of the cabin with their passengers (4 additional fatalities), with one flight surviving attendant frantically clinging to a seat leg. The ensuing noise and confusion are overwhelming, oxygen masks dangling wildly above the passengers' heads, and debris flying through the cabin. Investigators can feel the plane free falling rapidly and have difficulty breathing (pilots perform an emergency descent down to breathable air). The debris from the explosion and the ejected rows of seats have visibly damaged the left wing and set the two left engines on fire (all thrust lost). Within minutes the pilots realize that they will not be able to safely reach an airport or even land with the damaged airliner, and so have to "ditch" it, i.e. attempt a water landing! The controlled descent takes 10 minutes and the keeper should tell the players of the nearing crash into the Atlantic Ocean...

Although water landings of commercial airliners are rare, the survival chances are surprisingly high. The keeper leaves players contemplating certain doom, but in truth the experienced captain of flight 301 successfully glides the airliner above the Atlantic Ocean before ditching it. Immediately after crashing into the water, the fuselage twists near the hole yet does not break, and the plane slowly fills with water. The pilots and flight attendants urge passengers to put their life vests on, climb over seats and evacuate the sinking airliner through the gaping hole. Apart from the suicide and the 22 fatalities right after the explosion, all remaining passengers and crew survive the crash and are eventually rescued by nearby vessels and military helicopters. The whole experience costs 0/1D6 SAN; failed rolls result in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

**Cane Hill Hospital**

If Flight 301 crashed, the first task of the keeper is to care for the shaken or injured investigators. In the interest of the unfolding plot, the period of recovery period should be short and effective. The rescued investigators are flown by helicopter to Gatwick Airport, 35 miles South of London, then on to Cane Hill Hospital. The Hospital is located 15 miles to the South of Central London, a 45-min drive. The keeper may grant 1D4 Hit Points to each investigator for First Aid and Medicine provided by rescuers and medical staff. Assuming light injuries, investigators are discharged after one night of observation.

Two notable events can take place at the hospital: Chief Inspector mac Morna pays the investigators a visit, accompanied by one of his subordinates (see Statistics). The purpose of the visit is the same as described in “The MET” section, only taking place at Cane Hill Hospital instead. This twist helps the players to reclaim some of the time lost in the plane crash and reconnect to the main plot. In the middle of the night, hospitalized investigators are awakened by spine chilling wailings and howlings that resonate through the empty corridors. One cannot identify what causes these sounds: man, hound, or something else. In fact, Cane Hospital has an important role to play at the end of this scenario, and the howling is a cue to its darker nature. The sounds continue intermittently for a long hour, and eventually subside. If investigators ask the staff about it, a nurse or doctor dismissively mumbles something about a “difficult patient”.

**New Scotland Yard**

The investigators soon meet Chief Inspector mac Morna and his team at “The Yard” in Westminster. The headquarters of the Metropolitan Police is a sterile, polished long office block adjoining a 20-stories tower, rising like the prow of a ship at the Y-shaped intersection of Broadway and Victoria. Notably, the entire building is surrounded at ground level by concrete blocks (a terrorist counter measure), imparting the whole a forbidding appearance. The headquarters – as mac Morna tells them while escorting them inside, out of the pouring rain, and through the neon-lit corridors and open offices – houses the MET’s senior management team and the national Police communication command core called “Panopticon”.

After having made acquaintances with mac Morna’s Sex Crime Unit (see Statistics) and making themselves comfortable (bad coffee, English tea and biscuits), mac Morna and the investigators brief one another on what they know about the sex ring. The keeper/mac Morna should let the players summarize their progress, listening carefully and asking questions to elicit any information that they may be overlooking. The investigators notice that mac Morna is writing down notes on a sheet of paper while they’re talking. In turn, here is what mac Morna has to say:

*“From now on you’re officially an IRT, an INTERPOL Response Team operating on British soil. Your visitors’ badges grant you access to this building for a whole week. Here is the address of the hotel you’ll be staying at. You’ve been deployed to provide specialist expertise and*

*investigative support to my team on operation ‘Ring’, named of course after this sex ring. Formally you will be reporting to the local INTERPOL liaison office but time is of the essence, so let’s not worry too much about process. Under the Crime International Cooperation bill, you are allowed to pursue your investigation and carry out surveillance as a constable in the execution of his or her duty. However, and this is important, you will NOT be allowed to carry firearms on UK soil, you CAN’T arrest anybody (that’s our job), and you DON’T enter private premises without permission from the owner. Also, under the new INTERPOL arrangement you officially need to report to the British police – that’s me, every five hours!”*

*“We think that the snuff movie is the real thing, sadly. Searching through INTERPOL’s database of missing and abducted children, we believe the victim to be Kanna Takahashi, daughter of a Japanese diplomat. Indeed she had been reported missing by the Nippon School in Acton and by her parents 3 months ago. The girl you’re looking for, Hisayo Yamamura, was attending the same school and the two were befriended, like sisters. Hisayo disappeared in broad daylight six weeks ago in the same mysterious circumstances: no witnesses, no clues! The Takahashis called 999 but the information never got to us. You made the connection, but too late! You should know that with her expat father working in the US, Hisayo was staying with the Takahashis in West London; in fact, she’s the only reason they stayed in the UK after the disappearance of their daughter. With Hisayo gone, they went back to Japan a week ago. Thanks to your investigation and the finding of the DVD, we know now what happened to Kanna, and we must find Hisayo before it’s too late!”*

*“You probably know more about the ring than we do. We accidentally found out about it after the arrest of a few pedophiles, going through their files. All were referring to this sex ring, maybe a handful of online individuals, one of them (“doc”) assumedly Dr. Yamamura, the other ones like “8mm” still unidentified. We haven’t been able to track down their IP addresses. What caught our attention like you is that intercepted chats and emails suggest that the ring can produce material on demand. Well, the snuff movie is the evidence of that I’m afraid.”*

*“Did you know that Dr. Yamamura lived in London for a while with his wife and daughter before moving on to set up his subsidiary in the US? He actually left the UK shortly after his wife unexpectedly died of a heart attack. That’s when Hisayo moved in with the Takahashis.”*

At a fitting moment, mac Morna silently hands the piece of paper he was writing on to an investigator. The note reads:

*“We’re burned. The Ring is only the tip of the iceberg. They have infiltrated the Met. Can’t talk aloud. We’re being watched. Forget INTERPOL and the Crime bill. You report to me. Find weapons. Do what you have to do. Trust nobody, only your instincts. I’ll explain, but not now, not here. I’ll be in touch but low tech. Check your message inbox at the hotel reception.”*

Investigators suddenly become very conscious of the stern and tired expressions on mac Morna's staff. All eyes are intently fixed on them. The Chief Inspector continues:

*"Thanks to you we have a number of new leads, yet none of them very specific. It still is a bloody needle in a haystack. Five days! Where do we start?"*

Let the players answer. Here are the workable leads:

- The Nippon School in Acton, West London
- A train station with bag lockers
- An abandoned warehouse near the Thames
- Men called "8mm" and "Sex Machine" implicated in the illegal/amateur porn circuit

If the players forget to mention one of those locations/persons, have one of mac Morna's team complete the list. Apart from the Nippon School, the other leads may seem unspecific and useless as such. However, asking through narrows down possibilities as explained below. It is most rewarding if the *players* find this by themselves, but if they get stuck, the keeper should provide additional hints, e.g. through mac Morna, in order to put them on the right track:

- The only major train station with bag lockers is station London Victoria. Further, 10,000 surveillance cameras (close-circuit televisions or CCTVs) cover Central London, including stations, and feed through the Panopticon network, the MET's communication center at New Scotland Yard. With a proper time stamp and angle, it may be possible to analyse suspicious activity around the bag lockers area.
- Searching all abandoned warehouses around the Thames River is a nonstarter. However, mentioning bodies of murdered homeless people that may have been found drifting downstream provides a breakthrough (see the chat with 8mm in the "Dr. Yamamura's daughter" section): two bodies have been found in recent months, badly decomposed, on the south shore of the Thames. A jogger found the most upstream body just East of the Bermondsey wharves; the most downstream body was found past the Old Salt Quay. This narrows down the search to a 1.5 miles walk between Bermondsey and Rotherhite. About 10% of warehouse complexes in the area are disused.
- A good idea to start the search for 8mm or Sex Machine is to visit the skuzzier Adult Shops in London, the ones that may be selling amateur and illegal material under the counter.

## Cat and Mouse

*The players have now reached a turning point in the scenario, where each lead is about to branch off into parallel plotlines. The remainder of the scenario is organized around locations (the Nippon School, Victoria Station, "K" Cold Store warehouse, Adult shops and Clubs, etc.) that the investigators can visit and find clues that lead them on to new locations and Non-Player Characters. To enrich the London experience and give the*

*players a real sense of space, the keeper can augment the plot with "random" events as provided for instance in the Appendix. Use these events when players decide to investigate a location not scripted in this scenario, or in response to the investigators crossing another "paranoia points" threshold. It is therefore important for the keeper to keep count of the team's paranoia points – you are referred to the Appendix for the paranoia mechanics, which are linked to the aforementioned events. Use your imagination and do not hesitate to improvise sub-plots as suits the adventure.*

On the first day of investigation in London, simply let the investigators loose, and assess the players' progress in unraveling the sex ring and the overarching Serpent conspiracy. If progress is too slow, remind the players that some tasks can be delegated to mac Morna's police officers (see Statistics). This may lead in turn to interesting subplots and role-play (one of the constables being a "mole"). The Chief Inspector's staff also provides either cannon fodder or unexpected threats (if "replaced" by a Serpent) in the later stages the scenario, when the investigators become an overt assassination target of the Serpent People.

In terms of mood, the weather above London is cold and rainy at this time of year, with occasional snow. The days are still relatively short, and the city is often shrouded in a white mist in the morning and in the evening, turning streets and buildings into a ghostly diorama.

### Panopticon

*At some point, curious players are bound to ask questions about "Panopticon". Here is the publicly available information that the keeper can provide them.*

Panopticon is the world's largest security and protection service company. Historically, Panopticon started as a prison builder (advocating the "panoptic" prison design) and rapidly expanded to provide a wide array of security and protection services. With the age of information, Panopticon diversified further, and now dominates the market of electronic security systems and recently developed into a mobile network operator. Panopticon built the UK's nationwide CCTV network, and also provided the total solution for England and Wales' 43 police forces: a wide-area telecommunication network called "Panopticon", the central server of which – the "core" – sits in the basement of New Scotland Yard.

*In reality however, Panopticon is controlled by the Serpent People, who use it to exert wide-reaching electronic surveillance of Internet traffic and phone calls. For instance, it allows them to remotely switch on a mobile phone and eavesdrop on nearby conversations, as well as use secret telephone channels to communicate with one another or with their servants*

*The Panopticon company majority owner is Chih Corporation, the CEO of which is billionaire Mr. Chih, none other than the modern-day avatar of the Serpent Priest Seth-heh!*

## London

*The objective of the investigation is to unravel the Sex Ring and save Hisayi Yamamura before she becomes the sex ring's next victim. The investigation is divided into two chapters. The first part "London" follows on the initial leads of the players. The keeper should keep track of paranoia points as explained in the Appendix, and be ready to throw in sub-plots as the situation demands, progressively increasing the pressure on the investigators. Resolving the mysteries of this first part, new locations and events will be unlocked in a second part - "Cane Hill".*

### The Nippon School

While in Anglo-Saxon times *Ac Tun* had been a farm surrounded by oak woods, in 2010 Acton is a sprawling suburb of West London. From a distance, the main noticeable landmarks are the rows upon rows of run-down block flats of South Acton Estate.

The Nippon school is situated in West Acton, a more sought-after part of the suburb. West Acton is a labyrinth of streets lined with little semi-detached houses that attract young professional commuters as well as Japanese expats living near the school. With its four tube and three railway stations, Acton is easily accessible from Central London.

The independent Nippon School Ltd on Creffield Road provides Japanese-language education to more than 400 pupils of ages 6 to 16. The school grounds are surrounded by a six-foot brick wall, above which looms a narrow and long three-storey, century-old red brick building that looks more like an Edwardian textile mill than a school.

As the investigators walk towards the main school building, somebody shouts: "where are you going? Excuse me, yes you!" The janitor, a balding man in his forties, briskly walks towards the investigators: "who are you? You know you can't just walk up here like that. This is private property. What is your business?" Let the players explain themselves. The janitor isn't easily impressed and asks the investigators' identification, and studies them for a long minute, comparing photos with the investigators' faces. If the investigators refuse to show their identification or play tough, he says: "I can be stiff too you know, it's my job. You're trespassing. I ask you to leave the premises, we have our rules". The janitor won't hesitate to call the local police if necessary. Once things are clarified one way or another, the janitor barks: "This will do. Follow me. I'll take you to the director".

Little do the investigators know that the janitor is none other than "8mm" (see Statistics)! 8mm is of course suspicious of them but won't show it, and he is shrewd enough to keep his curiosity in check and not to arouse their suspicion. He has memorized their names and faces, and plans on asking the director what they're up to later on. He'll keep silent all the way to her office and won't speak unless spoken too. If asked he'll decline his name (see Statistics), and his role ("I'm the janitor"). On the topic of the disappeared girls he'll limit his comments to some variant of: "a tragedy. I've told everything I know to the police, which don't amount to much. You understand now why we have strict security rules. Ok, here we are..."

### The janitor and the girls

If they ask about the janitor at the MET, some of the personal information provided in his Statistics can be shared. The janitor has been questioned by Mac Morna who recalls: "we interrogated him six months ago after the disappearance of the Takahashi girl, but neither him - or teachers or parents for that matter, could provide us with any clues. We only know that the girl disappeared in broad daylight between school and her home, a fifteen minutes walk. No witnesses... The same happened with the Yamamura girl. We didn't suspect him because he was at school both times, seen by several teachers or parents."

In reality, Sex Machine, not 8mm, picked up the girls with his car both times, just around the corner of Creffield Road, hence 8mm's strong alibi. 8mm had instructed Sex Machine beforehand to tell a believable story he got from Dr Yamamura, and warned him when the girls left school.

The school director is Ms Sadako-Morgan, a tall stern-looking woman. After greeting the investigators, she launches into a long monologue about the school's high standards, imported directly from Japan, and stresses her focus on discipline and safety. A successful Insight/Psychology skill roll reveals that her somewhat contrived lecture on safety hides a profound anxiety that she developed since the awful events around Kanna and Hisayi. If the investigators tell her about the likely fate of Kanna, and the current situation of Hisayi, she becomes very emotional. Her voice falters and her eyes brighten with tears. She quickly regains control of her emotions however and tells the investigators everything she knows about the disappearances – unfortunately the information is trivial and does not hold any relevant clues.

Eventually, Ms Sadako-Morgan escorts the investigators back through chalky corridors now alive with Japanese girls in uniform, who eye them with a mixture of curiosity and suspicion. Halfway down the hall, the group meets an attractive Caucasian teacher; the school director introduces her as Eva, the mentor of both Kanna and Hisayo: "these are good people working with the local police, hoping to find our Hisayo." Eva frowns: "and Kanna?" After a brief exchange, Eva shows the investigators into an empty art classroom where the girls once studied together. The classroom walls are alive with students' artwork and colorful posters announcing diverse art exhibitions. The investigators' attention may be drawn to one poster in particular featuring a large stylized "O" or ring shape: "The Divine Snake Ouroboros: from prehistory to Eve and beyond – archaeology, ancient art, and symbolism; a fantastic exhibition and lectures at the British" (the keeper is referred to the British Museum section). In the conversation that follows, the keeper role-plays Eva:

- "Kanna and Hisayi were as inseparable as sisters can be. They were both very studious and bright."
- "It is obvious why the kidnapper singled them out: both girls were remarkably pretty. Tragic, no?"
- "Hisayi was withdrawn since the death of her mother and the disappearance of Kanna." Eva looks into a drawer: "ah! Here are her drawings..." Investigators

may notice a solitary figure of a man on a few drawings, the head scribbled out in black ink. Eva: “I think it represents her father, although she never admitted to it. After the death of his wife he was changed and the father-daughter relationship, er, suffered... I believe the Takahashi’s even sent her to a therapist to help her through... It’s all I know.”

### The shrink

If the investigators want to identify the psychotherapist Hisayo was seeing, in reality a psychiatrist, they have to meet with the Takahashi’s living nearby in West Acton. Ms Sadako-Morgan can give them their address. They find a devastated father and mother, both Japanese, speaking rudimentary English despite having lived in the country for the last 3 years or so. There is little to be learnt in the house Takahashi, and the mother insists on showing them loads of posed photographs of their daughter, as if this might summon her back from wherever she is. The father nods repeatedly at any question relating to Hisayo and a doctor: “doctor? *Hai* doctor! Doctor Tso” and eventually produces a business card with the address of Dr. Tso, Psychiatric Services Ltd, West Acton Road.

Dr. Tso runs a successful private children psychiatry practice in West Acton and is clearly a well-off man. Dr. Tso only describes Hisayo in the broadest terms, invoking medical secrecy. With successful role-playing or an appropriate skill roll, Dr. Tso reveals that in the last months; the girl had developed resentment towards her expatriate father, and possibly some misplaced fear. She was torn between her desire to talk and some huge block with regards to her father. Dr. Tso’s believes Hisayo to suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and besides therapy he had been prescribing a low dose of the novel anti-depressant *Morphée*, recently approved for use with children and adolescents.

Investigators nosing about the office while Dr. Tso is being questioned, notice considerable promotional material from pharmaceutical giant S&K, suggesting an affiliation of the renowned psychiatrist to the company.

As it turns out, S&K is on the verge of facing British lawsuit for paying psychiatrist Dr. Tso £150000 over the last 3 years to promote its new drug. Tso will be accused of preying on more than three hundred patients, children, over-prescribing *Morphée*. Tso has a long history of collaboration with S&K, and received substantial consulting fees and speaking fees to promote the drug worldwide and conduct supporting research at the Cane Hill Center for Mood Disorders as Psychiatry Chair.

Obviously, the above information is not readily available to the investigators. We leave it to the keeper to properly dose the information to the players, ultimately pointing to Cane Hill Hospital, setting the stage for the finale.

### The Sex Shop

*It’s been suggested to the investigators that London’s sex shops provide a way into the underground of snuff movies. A look in the business directories reveals a number of shops with names like “Love Palace” and “Temptations”. All have a similar fronts and sales areas to the eRotica*

*shop (below), but any attempts to get unusual or under the counter material is rebuffed, with a grudging recommendation that they try eRotica, who does “that sort of thing”. Asking the MET also elicits the suggestion they try eRotica, as they have suspicions but nothing has been proved or followed up. In reality, this is because the Serpent People are protecting it.*

Having recently changed its name to cash in on the craze for all things internet, eRotica has a small shop front on a Soho side street, with wooden panels covering all the windows, a stout wooden door, and the shop name spelt out in pink fluorescent lights across the top. Inside is a large open area with floor to ceiling shelves down all the walls and waist high shelves in rows across the floor space. A counter sits partially across the back wall, with a door out. The only light is from the somewhat dingy strip lights. The shop is filled with sex toys, bondage clothing, videos and films ranging from the conventional softcore to the truly bizarre hardcore, and there is a section devoted to sexually violent imported computer games. A fur suit in the shape of a cartoon bear dominates one corner. Out of the back of the shop are a small toilet, a packed stockroom, and a private viewing room with a projector and screen. There is a back door at the far end of the stockroom that leads to a dirty courtyard and from there, onto a busy Soho street through a narrow alley. Observant investigators notice a wide-angle security camera in a corner.

Steve sits behind the counter with a cigarette in his mouth (despite the ban on smoking in the workplace). He is busy tapping away at a laptop computer with an inbuilt webcam. He’s as thin as a rake, very tall (six foot four), with a number of obvious facial piercing, hair shaved at the sides but jelled up into a fin in the centre, and a chain smoker. He wears a black t-shirt and jeans, and there are a number of “gothic” rings on his fingers.

### What’s really happening in eRotica

Steve makes a modest income from legal pornography and marital aids, but has a wealthy sideline in supplying bestiality, other illegal pornography and, recently, 8mm’s snuff films. He has an equally profitable sideline in blackmailing certain people who both buy this illegal material and aren’t part of the Serpent’s network of corruption, although Steve has no knowledge beyond there being a “ring” of powerful people watching over him. The shop is configured to give Steve clear video clips of anyone coming over to the counter; alternately he can rotate the laptop’s small webcam and point it to the shop area. Steve has a mole in the MET who checks out any prospective “specialist” customers. Steve is thus slightly wary of new faces, but confident he can quickly get them checked out. He is also keen to be connected with politicians, lawyers, doctors and other wealthy professionals. Steve keeps all the “under the counter” material on his laptop ready to be burnt off as required on a recordable DVD, and the master copies in a safe under the counter.

### GAINING STEVE’S TRUST

Any investigator who comes out and asks Steve if he’s got any “snuff” meets a half-hearted response that it’s strictly

against the law. Investigators have to broach the subject and try and talk Steve round to it. He plays coy at first, responding to vague questions by directing them to legal footage. At one point during the conversation, Steve's laptop makes a beep. He goes over to it – still talking – and ejects a disk, on which he writes and drops it into a jiffy bag. He nods to the investigators and say it's an order. This is a clue designed to attract players to Steve's laptop.

We leave it to the keeper to decide if the players manage to ease the talk onto snuff movies or not. If the role-playing is sub-standard or if required skill rolls are failed, Steve can set the investigators a last challenge to gain his trust – see the “corruption” text box. In addition, if the players have performed really poorly, Steve checks them out at the first opportunity – see the “mole” text box.

If the investigators win his trust, Steve tells them he's gathered some films, and invites them into the back to have a viewing, decide whom they want to pick. The back room is dark, crowded and sometimes used for private viewings, so has a surprisingly large 50” television. Steve remains in the room during the judging session, showing them the start of all 6 of 8mm's films, allowing them to “choose” between various children.

If the investigators are burnt or stuck, they need to follow a more tortuous path to collect the clues they need: Steve's laptop, the snuff DVDs, as well as a link to the Black Ring Club. The keeper should use the optional storylines in the “theft” or “assassination” text boxes, or improvise an alternate sub-plot so that the players obtain the information that may lead them further, e.g. to the Black Ring Club.

### THE MOVIES

There are six labelled “8mm 1-6” snuff DVDs. Each movie takes place in the same location now familiar to the investigators, and depicts the murder of a young girl. Investigators suffering under the strain of this dark investigation will be troubled by the experience: request SAN rolls, 1D3 loss if failed for seeing a single movie, and 3 points loss for watching two or more.

Each film costs £300 in cash, and Steve gets difficult if nothing is bought, asking them to leave the store, after which he checks on them through his contact at the MET (see “the Mole” text box).

If the investigators buy more than one film, Steve attempts to make himself look like some sort of hotshot spy by divulging that the films come from a secret pickup at Victoria Station. He'll also brag that the guy in the films – Sex Machine - set his computer system up in return for a load of the equipment used in the films. He can't give any more info, not even a real name, he just meets him at the Black Ring Club's S&M night. He won't say anymore, his hubris only goes so far.

#### Optional storyline 1: Corruption

*This optional storyline is designed to give the players a verbal workout, gain Steve's trust, and in passing introduce them to one of the deviants flourishing in the Snake People's corrupted society.*

*Steve - “Look, I think I know what you're getting at. I first need to know I can trust you. Deliver a package for me, get the payment, come back here, and then we'll talk.”*

Steve hands over an addressed A5 padded envelope, and tells them to come back with the payment: “£400 pounds, nothing less.” He doesn't tell them anything else. Steve does really want a package delivered, but he's not too worried if it gets there: he's not sending them with anything incriminating, he's just winding up a particularly arrogant politician who's annoyed him while testing the investigators' eagerness. If the investigators at any stage catch sight of the photographs inside the envelope, they'll see a bundle of wildlife animal pictures.

The package is addressed to John Howick, a Member of the British Parliament who has an office at 53 Celtry Street, a thirty-minute journey away from the Sex Shop. When the players arrive, they find a tall, white stone building that runs the whole length of the long street, with many front doors. 53 is the office where John meets his constituents, and at whatever time the investigators arrive he is in. Saying they have a package for him allows ingress to a wood panelled office with a large, heavy desk. On it is a pile of papers, and investigators looking around notice a rather bizarre poster advertising a special lecture at the British Museum's “Extinction Level Event: 1021 AD” exhibit and a framed tabloid newspaper cover proclaiming “Howick's War on Whores”.

John is a tall, handsome man with a thin moustache and an expensive suit. He gets visibly excited for a second or two when the package is given to him, before regaining composure and remembering the investigators are looking. He'll tear the envelope open and extract some photographs. The investigators see him first smile, then frown, and despondently throw everything in the dust bin next to his desk. Howick's lips tighten and a cold rage seems to take possession of him:

*John - “Okay. What is this? A f\*\*\*\*\*g joke or what? Did Steve send you? Who the f\*\*k are you anyway?”*

Howick grows as explicit as the keeper wants, demanding where “the real stuff is”. The investigators have to handle Howick, who isn't keen on paying, even though they might not wish to return to eRotica having seemingly failed. When the keeper thinks the players have performed enough, Howick ushers the investigators out but demands they come back soon. If the investigators prove impressively smooth talkers, he hands over half the cash, £200. If the investigators start to agree to supply the material, this might start to build on the moral strain they're under (Sanity Roll, 1 point loss if failed.). The players may decide to fetch £400 of their own bank account and give that to Steve, pretending that the business transaction was successful.

In any case, if the investigators return with £200 or £400, Steve is surprised at first, then smiles and lowers his guard – they have gained his trust.

Footnote: there are many ways the keeper can spice up this episode and make the players uncomfortable. If for instance the investigators tamper with the package to try to look up its contents they may damage the envelope. If they come back to Steve with their own money, Steve may want to call Howick, or Howick may call Steve, etc. Anything that can expose the players' own machinations is a good lever to increase the tension they're under.

### Optional storyline 2: The Mole

*If the investigators have aroused Steve's suspicion in any way, he contacts his police insider using an instant messenger on his laptop, and sends over a picture of the investigators taken from the camera in the shop.*

At a minimum, the mole reports back to Steve that the investigators are from Interpol. As soon as he receives this information, Steve becomes very formal towards the investigators, ushers them out of the shop with some lame excuse: "sorry but there's been a death in the family, I have to close shop – there is nothing that might interest you here, goodbye!" Steve locks the door from the inside, flips the "closed" sign, grabs his laptop and a few incriminating DVDs (though in his haste he forgets the ones in the safe), and swiftly leaves the shop via the back door (investigators may hear the metal door slam shut). Even if the players react without delay, they cannot intercept Steve in time before he either disappears into the Soho crowd or gets killed – see the Assassination text box.

If investigators ever take a peek at - or get hold of Steve's laptop, the keeper may let the players find the following chat between Steve (DrWatson) and the MET insider (Holmes). Steve could also have saved the chat onto his desktop to cover himself should he get caught:

[DrWatson] Hey copper, you have to do a job for me

[Holmes] Don't call me that. Can't you get someone else? I've done enough already!

[DrWatson] Hey IT guy: you ARE f\*\*\*ing Scotland Yard literally sitting inside Panopticon's big ass. Do you want me to tell your bosses that you've been naughty? Just look these punters up and the next DVD is on the house

[Holmes] F\*\*\* you. Just send the pics over

[Holmes] Shit, we're so f\*\*\*\*\*

[DrWatson] What?

[Holmes] They're Interpol. They're here coz a Jap girl got killed on tape. Your stuff stupid. Oh yeah, they're onto you

[DrWatson] Shit. Can't you send them home?

[Holmes] Me? Who do you think I am king of the world? Wait there's a confidential file on them. Can't open it. Ah. SOMEONE very high up is watching these little rats: I think they're dead they just don't know it yet

[DrWatson] F\*\*\*, what do WE do?

[Holmes] You lay low. I'll take care of myself. Burn your stash before they get you. And delete all your f\*\*\*ing chat files. You don't keep records do you?

*Note that the above conversation can lead the players to investigate operators of the Panopticon system at the MET. The keeper is referred to the "Inside Panopticon" section to follow this lead.*

### Optional storyline 3: Theft

*If the investigators failed to gain Steve's trust, or are burned one way or the other, breaking into the shop is a pragmatic if unlawful option to gather clues. The players find eRotica surprisingly hard to break into, protected by a rolling steel curtain at the front, and a hollow metal door at the back.*

Once inside, the investigators discover incriminating material hidden in the large code operated safe under the counter (a range of DVDs and memory cards, 6 with 8mm's name on), and on a password-protected laptop. They also find a handwritten ledger book, giving a list of names, jobs, addresses, and a set of dates. A quick browse reveals little to the investigators, but any check on the names exposes local politicians, doctors, teachers, and several members of the police force. Running a search on the names prompts a phone call from mac Morna, saying he'll follow the ledger up while they concentrate on the bigger fish.

There is a calendar on the back wall featuring naked women in explicit poses. One date has been circled in red, with the words "SM, Club, 21:00". A quick look around reveals flyers for the Black Ring Club (with address) amongst other seedy promotional material.

### Optional storyline 4: Assassination

*If the investigators are burnt, or if Steve contacts the MET insider, or if their paranoia points are above 9, the keeper may trigger the assassination sub-plot. In it, the Serpent People decide to eliminate Steve, because he is a weak link that may lead the investigators to them.*

*The keeper may also opt for Steve's assassination if investigators are failing so far to obtain the necessary evidence for the remainder of the scenario, are stuck, or simply to spice up the game.*

*The specific location and timing of the assassination attempt are left generic on purpose: the keeper should adapt the write-up to any location suiting the storyline.*

The investigators first hear a nerve-jangling cry of distress. Upon getting close, they find Steve twitching on the ground, some smoke rising above his head, a large bag dropped by his side. A quick examination reveals his face charred and blackened beyond recognition. Steve is in shock from the third degree burns that destroyed his face, nose and lips down to the muscle, and also melted his eyes. There is no sign of the attacker. Passers-by look in horror at the body on the ground. One woman shouts to a nearby man "do something! Call the police!"

The investigators now have ten minutes before the call to the police is answered and the MET arrive to take over. First Aid should be attempted on Steve to raise him above 0 Hit Points, else he will die before the ambulance arrives. Talking to any of the retreating crowd reveals that a "tattooed man" approached Steve and "grabbed his face

with his left hand, like that”, after which Steve started screaming and his head started smoking. The man held Steve for at least ten seconds, even as Steve was dropping to the ground. A witness offers: “it must have been acid, like what happened to this model on TV”. The attacker was then seen dashing into a side street, and no further details can be provided. Descriptions of the attacker are contradictory at best and left to the keeper. Witnesses only agree to the man being “young”, wearing a hooded sweatshirt, and covered in tattoos, at least his left arm was. Searching Steve’s body or bag will elicit a reaction from at least one outraged man (the one who called the police): “what do you think you’re doing?” The keeper should challenge the players in role-play and be obnoxious and self-righteous enough to make them feel stressed and guilty, or force them to reveal their identity.

*Keeper’s note: what really happened is that a servant of the Serpent People attacked Steve with the “Black Hand”, a variant of the Shrivelling spell. Examination of the burns indicates that an intense fire has probably caused them, rather than chemicals. Of course, none of the witnesses remembers a fire. Investigators incur a 1D3 SAN roll for the entire incident, unless they tried to save Steve, in which case no Sanity loss is incurred. If Steve survived the attack, he will eventually be brought to Cane Hill Hospital, which is renowned for its one-of-a-kind “Adult Burn Centre”. The ultimate fate of Steve and what happens if the investigators pay him a visit at Cane Hill is left at the keeper’s discretion.*

*To add to the mystery of the event, the keeper may tell the players that their investigators feel uneasy and “watched” all the time until distracted by the arrival of the police on the crime scene. For instance, make a few dummy dice rolls and ask the investigators to look up to the rooftops...*

A search of Steve’s bag reveals a bundle of R/W DVDs, a laptop, and a ledger. The investigators also find a “Black Ring Club” business card with an address and “SM 21:00” scribbled on the back. The laptop is obviously on and still has a peripheral (mouse) attached, as if Steve had been in a hurry. Opening it enables the investigators to see what Steve was doing shortly before he panicked: having a conversation with his mole in the MET – see “The Mole” text box for details. Searching Steve’s laptop further reveals a set of password protected folders with names like “Animals”, “Pre-teen”, “Teen”, “8mm”, and the rest of the laptop is a testament to the time and soul wasting powers of online games, internet sex, and proof of everything bad that has ever been uttered about chat rooms.

After ten minutes, a police car pulls up; an ambulance arrives thirty seconds later. The MET officers swiftly find Steve’s body, and proceed to corner off the area, restricting the investigator’s movements. The officers question the investigators, calling HQ if necessary to see if these really are Interpol officers, and ask what exactly they were doing. If the investigators admit that the bag and laptop were Steve’s, the items will be removed by the police. If the investigators try to portray themselves as civilians, the police will arrest them until their ID is sorted out. At a stage of the keeper’s choosing, an irate policeman radios back to HQ and reports what has happened. This

exchange costs the players a paranoia point. A short time later one of the investigators gets a cell phone call from mac Morna. He admonishes the investigators for someone being murdered in their investigation and asks if they actually managed to find anything useful.

## The “K” Cold Store

*Following the lead of homeless people dumped in the Thames, the MET are able to point the investigators in the direction of a mile and a half stretch of abandoned warehouses on the shores of the river between Bermondsey and Rotherhithe.*

As they travel to this area the investigator pass through a set of redeveloped wharves full of trendy housing and shops, but once they pass Tower Bridge life comes to an end, and they find an almost totally abandoned landscape full of rotting industrial architecture. The buildings are tall, long and imposing, all once connected to a bustling trade from abroad, but now dull, grey concrete and fading brick, weeds slowly trying to reclaim them. There are many entrances wide enough to fit a pair of cars at once, and taller than humans, but the metal of their heavy shutters is rusting. There is graffiti, one protesting the creation of a helipad next to stranger text like “IS lives” or “the Dark Man is here”, random pieces of twisted metal seemingly dumped at random, and decaying signs leaving bizarre names.

It is impractical for the investigators to start a fingertip search of the area, but a walk up and down the mile and a half stretch of River Thames – which looks somehow thicker and more lifeless in this region – make a few things very apparent: there is little life or transport, aside from burnt out cars; many of the old warehouses are abandoned, and those that aren’t are in poor condition. The only people they see are homeless huddled in the dirty corners of doorways or adjoining buildings.

## WAY IN

There are too many locations for the investigators to find the right one without help; random searches should produce a lot of corroding industrial equipment, but little else. Investigators looking for human life, or those who pass either an Idea or Spot Hidden roll, eventually find a few homeless people. Either the investigators approach one of the homeless from around the area, or they demur and are actively engaged in conversation by one asking for aid. In either case, they soon speak to Mick, a schizophrenic man who’s been in poverty for a long time and who twitches when talking. The investigators discover the following if money, alcohol or something stronger is offered, or if a Fast Talk check is passed:

*“Oh, no, we don’t go near Rogers Wharf anymore, people don’t come back. Police don’t care, think we’re all so f\*\*\*ed we fall in the river on our own, but spend the night by the Cold Stores and you’re a goner...”*

Further bribes or success can prompt Mick to reveal groups of men come and go every so often and there's one there now.

### THE COLD STORE

The Cold Stores at Rogers Wharf is a decrepit building with three levels, one below ground, spread around three sides of an oblong large courtyard. There are a range of large entrances for trucks, all blocked down by shutters rendered immovable by time, and small wooden doorways with rusting locks.

Ingress can be made through a door at the side of the Cold Store, the lock of which appears permanently broken, but on which an open, suspiciously new padlock hangs. Inside they find themselves in what used to be the storage area for frozen or chilled goods. There are very few windows, so the Cold Store is cast in darkness and progression can be slow and demoralizing. They enter into a small room which has a decaying desk and a pair of filing cabinets in which damp has eaten away at the paper files. This office has one exit, into the main unloading area, which is two storeys high and leads off into six cold storage areas. The unloading area is the only area filled with light, which is raining down a broken skylight onto large pools of water littered with wrecked, rusty shop trolleys (an indication that homeless people once used the space). The cold storage areas are now filled with rubbish, and used to have heavy sliding doors lockable by a lever on the front, but now five hang open; the sixth is slid closed, but unlocked. Each door is big enough for a forklift truck to pass through. At the back of the main room is a set of stairs that leads up and down. When exploring, the investigators may find:

### BASEMENT

*The damp, gritty, pitch dark basement level has a winding corridor with a set of smaller storerooms leading off. The keeper should make the basement as creepy as possible for the players: fill the darkness with strange echoes and occasional scurrying sounds (rats, something bigger?). Let the darkness and confined spaces play tricks on the investigators' senses and mind: maybe one fancies hearing ghostly sounds of a sobbing girl echoing through the corridors, or footsteps behind the party, etc. In short, prime the players, so that any Cold Store scare you planned will come twice as hard on them.*

**The Bodies:** One of the storerooms in the lower level has had its slab flooring lifted up and piled to one side. The floor is now stamped down soil, and less than a minute of inquisitive digging reveals the rotting remains of a corpse, no more than 5 feet long. (1d3 San Loss) Depending on how long the investigators spend digging (1d3 san loss if they spend another ten minutes), they uncover more bodies in various states of decay, which a skilled investigator reveals are largely young females. There are six bodies in total, all children.

**Hisayo Yamamura:** One of the storerooms is shut, and has a combination padlock in place. This door has clearly been reinforced, and the padlock is impossible to open without either cutting equipment, or the code. The digits

are 81313, or 8mm turned into numbers, M being the 13th letter of the alphabet.

What's inside depends on the paranoia point score of the players, e.g. how well the investigators have done so far in avoiding being burnt. Either they are rewarded for their skills so far with Hisayo, at which point the camera upstairs points them towards a way to stop 8mm and save the next girl, or they are punished for sloppy work by instead giving the investigators further to go to get Hisayo. If they didn't arouse any suspicions while talking to 8mm, and their paranoia points are under 6, then the conspirators haven't been panicked and Hisayo is present in the room; the players are given clues to the Black Ring Club via the video camera upstairs (see below), in order to save the next girl. If they've been burnt at all by 8mm, and badly elsewhere, then Hisayo has been hastily moved to 8mm's flat while he awaits instructions from Dr Yamamura, not aware that Hisayo's father is dead. The players have to try and follow the video camera's clues to the Black Ring Club and onto 8mm's flat to save Hisayo.

### Hisayo Present:

Inside is Hisayo where she's been kept for the last few weeks, along with a large glass of milk, a bowl with some sort of food in, and a bucket. She is terrified and almost catatonic, and still wears her school uniform, soiled. If the investigators open the lock, either by guessing the code, getting Sex Machine's clues, speaking to 8mm later in the scenario, or are returning with cutting equipment, the girl responds with fear to any male members of the party, but responds cautiously to any females or uniformed officers. She is unable to speak at all about what has happened to her and instead sinks into a thousand-yard stare. If the investigators succeed in freeing Hisayo and getting her to safety, the keeper must increase the investigators' paranoia points by 3 as a result of 8mm discovering this and raising the alarm within the Sex Ring. This will bring the players to the next threat level and the keeper should plan an appropriate response to increase the pressure on them...

### Hisayo Absent:

The Investigators find an empty room with traces of a cruel habitation: a bowl with scraps of fairly fresh food, a glass of unsour milk, an empty bucket, and a torn school shirt with the initials "H.Y" sewn just inside the collar. Hisayo has evidently been here fairly recently, but been moved. The players can quickly identify the uniform as coming from the Nippon school, either on sight if they've been there, or enlisting police aid.

### GROUND FLOOR

*When the investigators slide open the heavy door, they are first overpowered by a nauseating stench – a strange mixture of mould, rot, and plastic. The entire cold store area (25 x 25 yards), is covered in white tiles, many broken; the ceiling is lined by a zigzagging meat rail system complete with rail hangers and meat hooks. Black pools of water cover the tiled floor. Everywhere hang thick greyish plastic curtains and sacs, which transform the cold*

room into a kind of plastic labyrinth. Many improvised weapons can be found littering the floor, e.g. meat hooks.

**Serpent Scare:** If the investigators have a Paranoia Point score of over 8, then the keeper can stage a quick, jack-in-the-box scare. The shut cold store door conceals a Serpent Man who has come along for some unnameable reason, but has detected the danger and hides. When the investigators search the area, the serpent man tries to avoid them and moves around them to be able to exit the cold room and escape. The snake man won't be noiseless though, so investigators quickly realise *something is with them* in the room. If cornered, the snake man bursts out with unnatural speed, bites the closest investigator in the face, slithers past them evading all tackles, and escapes. The investigators can notice he's stark naked, with the mottled body of a man but the head of a huge snake. 1D3 Sanity loss for all who see him.

### UPPER FLOOR

The upper floor has a corridor that loops round three sides of the main truck entrance, leading into two long rooms. One of these used to be the locker room for the Cold Store workers, but is now empty of lockers; at the far end is the disused shower room, fitted with six Triton electric showers. However, the locker room is not totally empty, and it gives the investigators a worrying sense of Déjà Vu, for they have seen it before on the video. At one end sits a cheap bed, restraints bolted into the uprights and a stained mattress lying on top. A chest of draws stands nearby, close enough to be in view in the camera frame, containing a range of tools and props, like sex toys, lengths of chain and power tools, many of which seem to be covered in blood, as well as bondage clothing. There is enough room to the side to set up a camera and get the bed in shot, and a small digital camera is present on a stand. There is also a cupboard and a chest of draws.

**The Camera:** The camera is charged and has a memory card containing a few minutes of film. If the investigators have found Hisayo, the recording directs the players to the Black Ring Club, where they can try and catch 8mm red handed and save the next girl(s). As such, features Sex Machine standing at one end of the bed mopping up fluid stains. The voice of 8mm comes from out of shot, and they are discussing where to get their next victim:

*8mm: "I'll pick another girl up in the next few days."  
Sex Machine: We could do two at once, a new one and that Jap, Yunno make them do stuff...  
8mm: Yeah, good idea. I reckon I'll get one of the girls from the next Black Ring Club night. Loads of jailbait there and everyone makes a point of not remembering what they saw!*

If the investigators haven't found Hisayo, the video features a few minutes of her sat on the bed, dressed in an oversized kimono, as 8mm alternately threatens and questions her from off screen, for the perverse amusement of the viewers. Keepers are urged to gauge the tolerance of the players before giving any details, but if the investigators gave any suggestions at all to 8mm when discussing the films with him via the doctor's computer,

then 8mm is heard telling these to Hisayo, making the player's actions come home to them. At the end of the piece, 8mm can be heard saying "right, time to get you back to my flat."

### SEX MACHINE

If the investigators have remained largely quiet, Sex Machine is still in the video room on the upper floor. He is stood to the side of the chest of draws, examining a reciprocating saw; if for some reason the investigators make a racket downstairs, then Sex Machine is hiding in the unlit shower room adjacent to the 'bedroom', hoping they'll go away without noticing him. If they discover him, he barges out and tries to dodge the investigators and escape, or else fights using the reciprocating saw as a weapon (see Statistics). The investigators are confronted by a man they recognise all too well from the film, largely because he's naked just like the video! Sex Machine is an obese man about six foot five tall, whose face is covered by a black leather mask. He squeals when hurt or grappled, and after losing one HP or more he backs off and start begging the investigators not to hurt him:

*"Stop, no, stop, you got the wrong person."*

Assuming the investigators let him live they can try to cajole Sex Machine into giving information away. He has only limited knowledge of the operation, but reveals a love of sexual violence and a recent involvement in the torture and murder of abducted youth. The "wrong person" he referred to is the cameraman, who he only knows as 8mm. Sex Machine insists it's 8mm who organises the production of snuff, from abducting the girls to dropping the footage off at Victoria Station "somewhere", and they only meet here or at special nights at the Black Ring Club. Sex Machine gives a deliberately vague description of 8mm - \*\*\*\*\* - but then starts to imply he has the protection of powerful people, and they'd better not mess with him. If the investigators keep Sex Machine talking, he starts to suggest these shady figures he doesn't really know anything about will also protect him.

If Hisayo is in the basement, Sex Machine knows she is and will tell; if she's at 8mm's flat – depending on the investigator's actions – he'll explain she was there until 8mm got panicked by something. He'll also tell them the padlock code is 8mm, he doesn't know how that turns into a five digit code. He tells them he is waiting for 8mm to show so they can record a final sex film with the girl, but any attempt to stake out the building fails when 8mm doesn't show, instead sending Machine a text saying he'll meet him at the Black Ring Club.

If Sex Machine manages to take an opportunity to escape, either before capture or during questioning – and he will take advantage – then the investigators lose him in the streets outside the Cold Store because of Sex Machine's superior knowledge of the area. He won't be seen again until telling 8mm what happened at the Black Ring Club. If he escapes, if the investigators kill him, or even if they search the room having let him live, they can rifle through his clothes that lay on a table out of camera shot. Aside from a standard set of jeans, jumper and grubby

underwear, they discover a wallet with £120 in cash, a receipt from the eRotica Sex Shop, and a crudely printed black and white flyer for a forthcoming S&M night at the Black Ring Club.

Calling the MET in to take Machine into custody, to look after Hisayo, or anything else involving the Cold Store, adds another paranoia point.

(Under construction...)