

# The Book of Unremitting Horror



Dave Allsop  
Adrian Bott

Thomas Pepper  
1523 South Dupont Avenue  
Minneapolis 55403

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Dear Mr Cosgrove,

I have some information I think might interest you. I hope you think that's a good opening line, because I've thought about it a lot. How to write a letter asking someone I've never met to read something they won't believe. That last bit's not so good, is it? I used to read a lot of fiction, horror and stuff like that, and in those books the protagonist often says "I can't remember when I first realized..." but this one won't. Because it's not fiction. I can remember. I often wish I couldn't, but I can. And now I need to tell someone else who can remember, or at least make sure that the information isn't lost. I suppose I'd better begin at the beginning, because it's a strange story. I'm almost certain you won't believe it - I wouldn't have, if I hadn't seen it - but if I tell you the way it started you might believe it enough to keep reading.

I'm an artist, you see. I really can't remember learning to draw, to see things with my eyes and to put them on paper so others could see them too. I never wondered what I would do for a living, just honed my skills in college, and walked straight into a job as a technical illustrator for a publisher producing academic textbooks. I spent my days in a small office drawing whatever was put in front of me: bones, fossils. Dissections, even, for medical texts. I suppose the students never think about where the drawings come from, and other people would be horrified if they thought about it, the nice, clean black and white as red and blue and purple, and the smell - but I liked it. I was comfortable in my office, or other people's labs, observing, translating color, texture, light and shadow into shades of black on white. Most people don't often see what's really there, you know, or rather they see it, but their brains edit the information, filling in any gaps with what experience has shown them in the past. I think that if they see something truly strange, completely beyond their experience, their brains edit that, too, substituting something that makes more sense in the world they know. I'm an artist, a trained illustrator. My brain doesn't do that. I see what's really there.

It started as a lovely day. I'd been working flat out all week to make a deadline, drawing fish, all staring eyes and spines and flabby grey flesh. I had to go in on Saturday to ink the last drawing. By the time I'd finished all I could smell was fish and formalin, so I decided to walk home the long way, through the park to get some fresh air, or I'd have to skip dinner. The sun was sinking into the lake and families were packing up their picnics to go home when I reached the park, parents closing the coolers and kids dragging their baseball bats back to the cars. It was wonderful. The grass was green, the poplars were every shade of yellow, gold and bronze in the low sun, and the sharp smell of their leaves flushed the formalin out of my sinuses. I slowed my pace as I came to the edge of the park, admiring the colors. A young couple was walking along the edge of the trees, holding hands. He said something, she turned and kissed him, laughing. As I watched, two dogs bounded up, looked like those black ones, labs? that seem to laugh at people. The dogs just stood, tails wagging, looking expectant, and after a moment the guy shrugged, picked up a stick and threw it. It flew through the air behind me and the dogs barked happily and took off after it. They ran past me, grinning mouths full of teeth. Lots of teeth, gleaming white against floppy pink tongues. The couple turned and walked off, her head on his shoulder. The dogs ran past the stick, around it and back towards the couple disappearing into the trees. One of them ran a little closer this time, its head swivelling up to look at me as it went past. I, too, walked away. My legs kept moving as my brain wrestled with what my eyes had seen, teeth, too many teeth? I carried on walking, listening to the high distant screams of the gulls over the lake, watching memory rather than the cracks in the sidewalk. Their laughing mouths were too big, the sharply serrated teeth too big, and the claws on their hind feet had left gashes in the green turf. That couldn't be right, I didn't see them, I must have imagined it. Do you understand what I'm telling you? Do you? I didn't believe my eyes. I. Did. Not. Believe. My. Eyes. I kept walking, all the way home.

On the news that evening they reported a horrific murder. A young woman had been ripped to pieces by a frenzied attacker in the lakeside trees. There were shots of blue flashing lights and blood, red against gold leaves, but it was alright, they'd caught the murderer. Her boyfriend hadn't left the scene, was found semi-comatose, drugged out of his mind. They showed him being bundled away and the reporters talked wisely about the effects of illegal substances. Except he - they'd - been fine when I saw them, about 15 minutes before she died, red and gold in the setting sun.

The police called for witnesses. I told them about the dogs, but they didn't believe me. They knew I'd been drinking, they could smell it on my breath.

I took Wednesday off, when the park opened again, walked there all day and saw nothing but trees and leaves and grass, and silent gulls. It was colder when I went the next Saturday. I sat on a bench, feeding the gulls and watching the shadows under the trees. I caught a glimpse of movement, something black, but it was only a jogger running the paths. Did something move under the trees? I couldn't be certain. I didn't trust my eyes, you see.

That night I went into town and tried to get drunk, but I drank too much and was sick, and spent the night walking instead. And while I was walking, trying not to think, I saw something else, and this time I believed my eyes, and that is how it started.

Did you see Blade? I often see him in my dreams, all black and silver, striding through the night, killing them. But I've never seen it. I've never seen one die.

Do you believe me? Are you interested? I hope so. I'm tired. I'm afraid. And I'm so very tired of being afraid, of wondering when I'll make the mistake that kills me. They're cunning, they're very good at what they do, and I might have missed one, not seen it. Read the files I've sent. There are other copies, I've sent them to other people I thought, I hoped might be interested, but YOU might be the only person who sees reality instead of something your brain thinks makes more sense. There must be someone else who will believe their eyes.

Yours most sincerely

THOMAS PEPPER.

PS. It's interested me for years, the difference between the pen and ink on paper and the bone on the table, the words on the pages and the ideas the words convey. Reality and what we perceive it to be. There's a finely honed distinction between perception and madness; it's a razor's edge I've been walking for years, and I'm bleeding.

For a while I wondered if I was going mad, so I watched the mad and the drunks. They cringe and weep at things drawn from their past that exist only in their minds: Harvey left no piles of dung, no footprints in the grass. The things I see leave bloody corpses ripped limb from limb, the stench of dead meat seeping out beneath a locked door, fragments of lives like pieces of a jigsaw to be assembled from reports in the press. They are real, far more real now than the people they've destroyed. Please believe me.

# The Book of Unremitting Horror

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Dave Allsop • Adrian Bott



New times demand new nightmares.

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## How To Use This Book

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Players in horror campaigns are a little too accustomed to the nightmares their characters face; even the most eldritch of tentacular horrors is less intimidating when you know exactly what it is, because your PC has faced it before on some other evening. New times demand new nightmares. This, therefore, is a book of horrors, not a manual of monsters. You won't find any of the conventional and well-respected monsters of folklore, like vampires and werewolves, or a sampling of the walking dead. The creatures in this volume don't stand around in rooms, guarding treasure, nor do they lurch through graveyards, grunting for brains. There is, of course, nothing wrong with such creatures, and it is a lot of fun to fight them, but we have tried to take this book in a different direction. Our horrors are nightmarishly intimate, often created from human vice, or let loose by human greed. They show us the ugliness that underlies reality. They are the crawling things under the rock of the everyday, sane world. Consequently, we've detailed our creatures in depth. Each one has its own agenda, its own reason for existence and its own legend. We've made these creatures unusual, frightening and bizarre, yet sufficiently comprehensible that they players realize they are up against something intelligent, if inhuman. We hope that the fun of playing in an adventure in which these creatures appear will lie just as much in the steady uncovering of what they actually are, with all the dread associated with that, as it will in the attempt to confront them. We've designed every entry for far more than one combat encounter; indeed, it's entirely possible to base a whole adventure around the activities of just one of these horrors.

We suggest that GMs use one, or perhaps two of the horrors as the focus of a single story within a campaign. The creature itself doesn't even have to appear until the final scenes, when the PCs have pieced together all the clues and are destined for the decisive confrontation.

Ideally, the PCs should spend the initial stages of the story investigating the signs of a horror's presence, rather than encountering the creature in the flesh. Where it's pertinent, we've described what a forensic team is likely to find when one of the creatures' victims comes to light. The

GM should be able to build up the tension and mystery surrounding the creature, so that when they finally face it, the PCs are already terrified.

Reading through the creature descriptions should provide plenty of ideas for scenarios, and there are many additional adventure ideas included in the *Artifacts* section; this part of the book describes several items, from a mask made from a human face to an ancient altar, all of which have links of various kinds to the horrors. There are also further suggestions and advice in the *Campaigns* chapter. Finally, we've included a sample adventure, *The Final Case*.

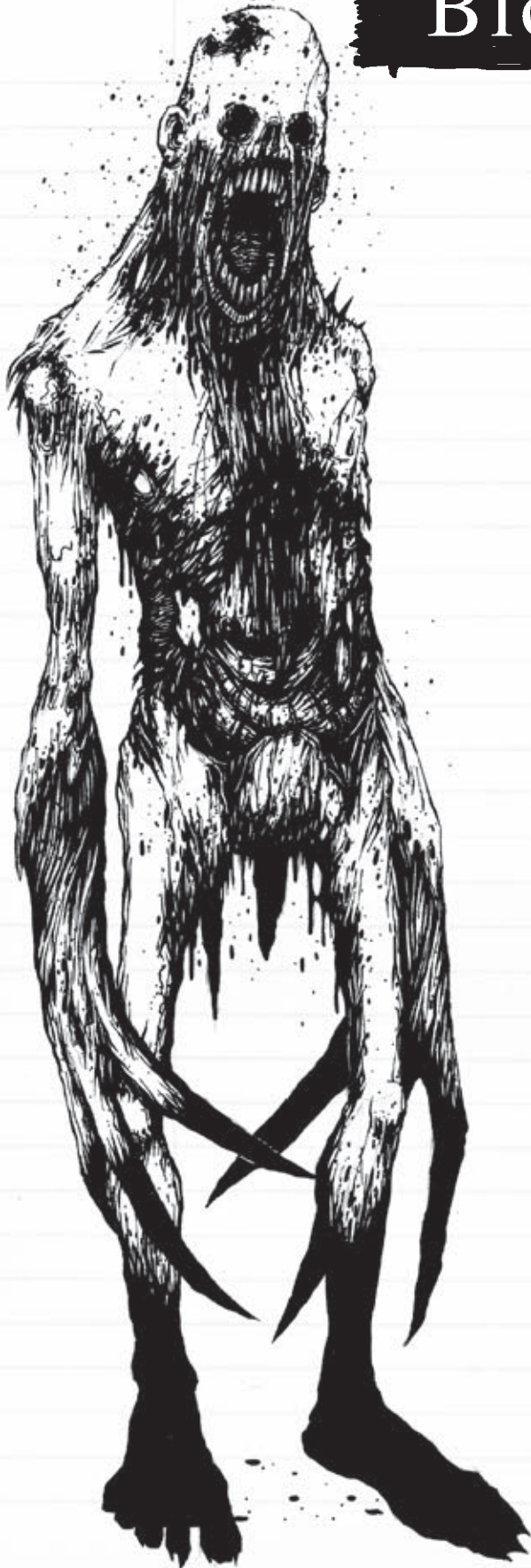
### *A Note For Those Using OGL Horror*

Players and GMs using the *OGL Horror* game rules from Mongoose Publishing will note that the creatures in this volume have a Horror entry in their stat blocks. This determines the kind of Horror saving throw called for – Panic, Fear or Madness – and the required DC. Some creatures provoke more than one saving throw.

A few especially ghastly entities have Horrific as a special quality. This grants the entity a bonus to one of its Horror saving throw DCs. The relevant DC is indicated in the creature's descriptive text.



# Blood Corpse



is this how I will die?

The thing has me. I hear a popping, tearing sound and feel a searing pain. It only lasts a second and then a watery giddiness washes over me. My vision mists over. I am floating, weightless. Dimly I recognize that part of my body burns, is impaled, but it is someone else's pain. There is a spasm in my lungs and a tickle in my throat, as if I had inhaled water; I cough and an alarming rush of blood fills my mouth. My limbs tingle, prickle and become strangely cold. Something is shaking me like a rag doll. I hear a pumping, rushing sound, like the beating of a huge unnatural heart. With every pulse, there is a sharp tug in my guts.

I am fading away, falling into dark water. I should feel panic, something, anything, but can scarcely make my hands move. I try to speak but hear only a bloody gurgle. My head sags. A wave of hot, choking copper floods into my mouth. A black dot with a red, shimmering halo is coming clos

12/9/2000  
BC?

**From the diary of Thomas Pepper:**

A back alley in a big city, empty but for wind-blown heaps of trash, food papers and dented cans. In the shadow of a doorway, a pale figure in a tattered coat. The head is scabbed and flaking as if with psoriasis. A boy is before him, on his knees, probably no more than sixteen. The jacket he wears was once blue. Nights spent sleeping rough in other doorways have grimed it like a garage floor. The figure rocks the boy back and forth.

The boy, limp, offers no resistance. His name is not important. None of his friends knew what his parents had called him anyway. This is an anonymous place; only the hot meat of the body matters, not the name. On the streets, everything feeds off everything else. You do what you have to, to survive.

Strong fingers dig into the boy's neck in rhythmic spasms of pleasure. There is almost no noise, only a soft moan rising and falling with the wind. There is the sound of suction, a grunt of satisfaction. Dribbling and dripping follow, fluid pattering on old newspaper.

Move nearer and a stew of stinks is strong in the air: rot and urine, vomit and cheap vodka, the smell of humanity gone to waste. Where the figure stands, the air is rich and rank with the smell of a butcher's shop window on a hot day. Then you notice the decay, the sick, intimate, coughed-up lump of stink like a tooth gone rotten in the mouth. The man smells worse than food forgotten at the back of a fridge, sunk to brown liquid and pulp.

The boy is pale. His neck lolls loosely. His mouth hangs open, a thread of saliva trailing from it. Dead eyes see nothing, or something far, far away.

Scabbed paw-hands with pulsing veins grip his shoulders tightly. Claws like two-foot catheters, gray as filthy glass, have speared through the padding of his jacket and into his body cavities. A red bubbling flow races through them, sucked up by the groaning thing. It rocks back and forth, back and forth in its pleasure.

The dead boy's face becomes concave under the suction. The eyes retreat into the skull. The lips draw back from the teeth in an involuntary grimace. He shrinks and crumples like a deflating rubber toy with bones in. The thing shakes him harder, trying to loosen more fluids from deeper within. It sucks harder and faster.

The boy's body convulses. There is a rattling gurgle like a child finishing a milkshake. Slowly, reluctantly, the slick claws withdraw. The body silently gives in to gravity, collapsing backwards into the alley without any fuss. It has nothing of the human about it any more. The limp white carcass is just a thing; cold veal.

The creature's car wreck of a face is happy. It closes the teabag-colored gobs that were eyes. Most of its jaw is hanging off and the lips are burst and ragged, but it smacks them anyway, as if it remembered finishing a bowl of hot soup on a winter day.

The coat it wears is sopping with mucus and blood. But for that, it is a naked, rotten bulk of muscle, livid with wriggling veins. Hot blood vessels thread under the skin like fat cables, pulsing, bursting the surface. The little veins under its skin are livid and mobile as mealworms, itching. Those in its arms are swollen massively like sausage balloons, gross, taut and shiny, needing only a touch to burst them. The whole creature throbs. A little blood sprays from the head, like a leak in a garden hose, where there are shallow pink trenches ploughed in the skull. The boy tried to fight.

Later, no doubt, hardened forensic investigators will turn pale when they analyze the necrotic matter under the boy's nails. The skin and flesh belongs to a body that has been dead for months.



**Game Statistics: Large Undead****Hit Dice:** 4d12**Initiative:** +3 (Dex)**Speed:** 30 ft.**Defence:** 14 (+3 Dex, +2 natural, -1 size), touch 12, flat-footed 11**Base Attack/Grapple:** +6/+11**Attack:** Talon impale +7 melee (1d8+4/19-20x2)**Full Attack:** 2 talon impales +7 melee (1d8+4/19-20x2)**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.**Special Attacks:** Blood drain, blood euphoria**Special Qualities:** Horrific +4, undead traits**Saves:** Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +6**Abilities:** Str 20, Dex 17, Con -, Int 15, Wis 15, Cha 8**Skills:** Climb +11, Hide +9, Intimidate +5, Listen +8, Move Silently +9, Spot +8, Survival +8**Feats:** Toughness, Track<sup>b</sup>, Weapon Focus (talon)**Challenge Rating:** 5**Horror:** Fear 15

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Blood corpses are putrid blood junkies. They feel the urge for warm life fluids as a constant itch and craving in their puffy veins. All they want is to pump more and more of it in, sucking it up through their needle talons, moaning as they do.

Unlike the shambling zombies of Romero's movies, these creatures are crafty and cunning. They lurk in places where the dregs of society go, like railway arches where the homeless sleep or dark back streets where sleeping drunks can be snatched up and drained. As they exist to feed, rather than to kill, they don't necessarily feel the need to take on all comers, or fight at a disadvantage. A blood corpse will never mount a last stand unless it is so hungry that it has to drink.

Physically the blood corpse looks like a tall humanoid with long limbs. Its arms end in huge dagger-like talons, which are hollow and sharp as razors. Depending on its state of decomposition when it rose,

its body is either scabbed with mould or has broad craters of leprous corrosion in its flesh, revealing yellow bone. The creature's veins always bulge out visibly and pulse. The vascular system decays much more slowly than the rest of the beast.

The blood corpse will literally drain its victim dry if given the opportunity. Once it enters this perverse euphoria the creature will not attack anyone else, unless in self-defense. It wishes to savor the warm sensation in its veins, undisturbed, for as long as possible.

The creature's ecstasy soon fades. The longer a blood corpse lives, the more often it needs to feed. It no longer gets the same rush as it used to for quite so long and has to hunt several times a night to slake its lust. Some of the more ancient, shriveled corpses keep living victims stored in their lairs, in much the same way that an alcoholic will cache liquor around house. They then work through each victim in turn, taking up a whole night with an orgiastic binge of blood draining.

The state of the body of a person killed by a blood corpse depends on whether the beast is able to take its full pleasure from the kill. When the corpse has been interrupted, the body is pallid and contorted. Deep puncture wounds are found on the shoulders or abdomen, the body's bones bent aside or splintered by the intrusion of some stake-like foreign object. Massive blood loss is evident, with much more blood soaking the clothes than the wounds would ordinarily account for; it oozes liberally from even light scratches. This is because the blood corpse's talons have an anticoagulant effect, causing blood to thin so that it can be sucked up easily. Forensic examinations of the blood detect an anticoagulant similar to that used by blood-draining insects.

When the corpse has been able to feast to its full extent, the victim's body is shriveled and stark white. The same wounds are found, their edges ragged, but practically no blood is evident. The

tremendous suction means that some of the softer viscera and body fluids are drained along with the blood, emptying out part of the body cavity as if a gross straw had sucked out the liver and lights.

#### **Where They Come From**

When a person dies in the grip of an addiction or need so strong that it overwhelms their thoughts and blots out their personality, the craving can sometimes hold the diseased spirit bound to the body.

The first recorded blood corpses were dead Roman aristocrats, who perished weeping because they would never see the games, or watch slaves butcher an actor in a degenerate performance of *The Bacchae*. Blood corpses in the Middle Ages were often starving peasants, who died whining for a moldy crust of bread, or flagellant monks addicted to prayer and the pursuit of God. In later years, they arose when men and women addicted to drink or vice died in bedlam, their minds rotted by their insatiable desires. The blood corpses of the modern era (and there are many more than there used to be) are most likely to be the result of death through drug overdose, when an addict just could not cram enough sweet satisfaction into his veins.

A blood corpse can result from any fatally compulsive behavior. There is even one straggle-haired horror, stalking the streets after dark and preying on happy women. Her bulimia killed her, and she now binges on hot blood instead of on chocolate bars.

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**Blood Drain (Ex):** The blood corpse can drain blood from its victim by making a successful grapple check. If it pins the foe, it drains blood, dealing 1d4+1 points of Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained. For each point of Constitution that it drains, it gains a +1 enhancement bonus to its Strength ability score and three temporary hit points, to a maximum of double its ordinary Strength ability score and hit point total. It also suffers a -4 penalty to its AC, as it is distracted by the blissful sensations in its veins. This euphoric glory lasts for one hour, unless the corpse was unable to drain less than 5 total points of Constitution, in which case it lasts for 15 minutes.

A blood corpse that has successfully drained from its victim (even a single point of Constitution) goes into a state of ecstasy. The corpse will not attack during this phase, except to continue feeding from a target that it is latched on to; it counts as flat-footed whilst ecstatic.

**Improved Grab (Ex):** The corpse can attempt to grasp its victim and drive its talons in to feed. If it successfully hits with a talon attack, it can immediately attempt a Grapple check to drain blood without provoking an attack of opportunity.

**Horrific:** The blood corpse has an increase of +4 to its Fear save DC.

**Sneak Attack (Ex):** Blood corpses instinctively try to drive their talons into soft vital spots, where the juicy viscera are. The corpse's attack deals extra damage at any time its target would be denied a Dexterity bonus to Defence (whether the target actually has a Dexterity bonus or not), or when the blood corpse flanks its target. This extra damage is 2d6. Should the corpse score a critical hit with a sneak attack, this extra damage is not multiplied. The corpse can sneak attack only human beings. Its intuitive grasp of anatomy does not allow it to sneak attack animals or machines.

**Track Blood (Ex):** Blood corpses can sniff out even tiny amounts of freshly spilled blood, such as from a wound, or even a

nosebleed, within 30 feet by sense of smell. If the source of the scent is upwind, the range increases to 60 feet; if downwind, it drops to 15 feet. For the purposes of this ability, fresh blood is that has been shed no longer than one hour before.

When the blood corpse sniffs blood on the air, the exact location of the source is not revealed but only its presence somewhere within range. The corpse can take a move action to note the direction of the scent. Whenever the corpse comes within 5 feet of the source, it pinpoints the source's location.

Blood corpses can also track creatures that are bleeding or that have blood on them. They make a Survival check to find or follow a track. The typical DC to follow freshly spilled blood is 10. This DC increases or decreases depending on how much blood was shed and the length of time since the creature passed through the area. The ability otherwise follows the rules for the Track feat. A blood corpse tracking by scent ignores the effects of surface conditions and poor visibility.

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# Blossomer



*Explanatory Note: The following is an amateur transcript of an .mp3 file, blossom.mp3, which purports to be a genuine police interview. It was uploaded to the Web in September 2002 and makes its first appearance in a binaries newsgroup, alt.sex.cthulhu. It has since become something of an urban legend. Most sources deem it to be a hoax, almost certainly the work of drama students.*

*The supposed names of the persons involved and the context were derived from a very small .txt file uploaded along with the sound clip. These are the most telling evidence of a fake, since no research has yet turned up police officers with the given names; moreover, the interview does not appear to follow standard police procedure – there is, for example, no parent, guardian or responsible adult present, although “Sandy” is obviously of school age, and probably quite young, given her use of the word “tummy”. The voices have Scottish accents.*

*The furor surrounding the item has long since died down and only a few websites still archive it. There is one discussion group dedicated to the clip, on which self-appointed experts argue with one another at length about who was ultimately responsible for it.*

From: Gareth Michaelis (kakraf00n@hotmail.com)  
Subject: Blossomer mp3 transcript  
Newsgroups: alt.sex.cthulhu  
Date: 2002-09-22 00:14:56 PST

Interview 4.22.02 with Sandra P. Bickenstaff

Present: Det. Insp. Crockford, Sgt. Manfrey

CROCKFORD: Sandy, we know this is difficult, but we need to ask you some questions. We need to ask you about the school, about the group you and your friends started. The group Mr. Wabe made you start. We've got him now, Sandy. He's in custody. You're safe. You can tell us anything you want to, now.

(Silence)

Sandy, can you tell us what happened to Stephen?

BICKENSTAFF: No.

CROCKFORD: Why not?

BICKENSTAFF: I don't have the words. Nobody does. (pause) It was too beautiful.

CROCKFORD: Beautiful?

BICKENSTAFF: What he did. For me. For all of us. It was his precious love. Sacrament. He gave himself.

CROCKFORD Did they make you take drugs, Sandy?

(Silence)

Did Mr. Wabe make you do anything?

(Silence)

MANFREY (aside): She's taking the piss, Jack. She's not telling us anything.

CROCKFORD: But she will. Just give us time. Sandy? Stephen was your boyfriend, wasn't he? We think he may be in trouble. We think you know something that can help us find him. Will you help us?

BICKENSTAFF: (laughs) You think he's dead, don't you?

CROCKFORD: Why don't you tell us, Sandy? Tell us what happened at the school.

BICKENSTAFF: You keep calling me that. Sandy is gone. I am Sister Sardonica now. (Muttering) It is right that you ask questions and that I answer them. I bear witness.

CROCKFORD: That's not a real name, is it, Sandy? That's one of the role-playing characters you like to pretend to be, isn't it? In your game?

BICKENSTAFF: Stupid fat man. You don't understand anything. You will. When the babies come. (Manfrey sighs audibly. Someone lights a cigarette.)

CROCKFORD: Sandy, do you remember Mr. and Mrs. Leverson? (Pause.) That's right. They're Stephen's parents. You have to understand that they're very worried about him. They desperately want him to come home. Can you help us find him?

BICKENSTAFF: You will never find him. He's in my tummy. He is in all our tummies

CROCKFORD: (gently) It's Stephen's baby you're carrying, isn't it?

BICKENSTAFF: No. (laughs) Yes.

CROCKFORD: Sandy, what did Stephen do to you?

(Silence)

Yes, have a cigarette if it would help. Take your—

BICKENSTAFF: You corpulent, patronizing bag of pus. Stephen no longer exists. (She begins to speak in a flat monotone, as if reciting from memory.) Mr. Wabe held him down on the altar we made from one of the school filing cabinets. He did not scream as he was tied down. He did not scream as Jennifer Mackauley bit off his big toe with her buckteeth. He did not scream as little Gavin Prendle pulled out his tendons like gummy worms. He bit through his tongue but he never screamed once.

(sounds of sucking and exhalation)

We pinched his arteries shut and held them that way to keep the life within him. You cannot tie them off. Blasphemy, that is. Then Cathy and Penny and I did our part as it is written. We broke his thighbones tenderly and sucked the marrow and passed it back and forth between us in reverent mouthful kisses. Mr. Wabe did the readings. He is awfully good at that, you know. We picked Stephen's veins from our teeth and swallowed lumps of the gristle from behind his knees, and though some of us gagged, we held to our duty, just as he held to his. Mr. Wabe had the honour to tear off his phallus with his teeth. I had the first bite of the glistening musculature where it had been. His face was the face of a man in rapture. Your dead boy nailed to a stick had no idea.

CROCKFORD: Jesus. Jesus Christ.

BICKENSTAFF: (high-pitched giggles) Wouldn't say that name if I were you. Baby doesn't like it. Do you, now, sweetheart? Do you?

CROCKFORD: Get... get her out of here. Interview concluded nineteen oh seven.

BICKENSTAFF: We did right. We kept him alive and it heard us. And then he got up on his arms. His eyes filled with holy (?) and his guts all spillin'. He got up and he did it to us. With his face. Over and over.

CROCKFORD: I said get her out! I don't want to look at that b—

*With an abrupt clunk, the recording ends. If the volume is turned up high enough, you can hear that while Crockford speaks, Bickenstaff is whispering the same words again and again. Distortion makes them hard to discern but the general consensus is that these words are either 'All of us' or 'A vassal'.*

### **Game Statistics: Small Undead**

**Hit Dice:** 8d12 (52 hp)  
**Initiative:** +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)  
**Speed:** 30 ft. climb 20 ft.  
**Defence:** 19 (+3 Dex, +1 size, +5 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 16  
**Base Attack/Grapple:** +4/+6  
**Attack:** Slam +9 melee (1d3+5)  
**Full Attack:** 2 slams +9 melee (1d3+5)  
**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.  
**Special Attacks:** Demonic Virility, Impregnation Madness, Pounce  
**Special Qualities:** Damage reduction 5/-, Horrific +2  
**Saves:** Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +12  
**Abilities:** Str 20, Dex 17, Con -, Int 6, Wis 22, Cha 23  
**Skills:** Climb +12\*, Hide +9, Intimidate +9, Jump +12\*, Listen +9, Move Silently +7, Spot +6  
**Feats:** Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility  
**Challenge Rating:** 7  
**Horror:** Madness 20  
\*Blossomers benefit from a racial bonus of +4 to all Jump and Climb checks.

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Most demonic cults are nothing more than pleasure-seekers looking to break a few taboos and get kicks. They have no real magical power at their disposal and do not succeed in anything more than shocking their parents, which is usually their intention. Trash like this is of no use to the legions of the damned. A few rare cults have genuine connections to the Outer Black. If these manage to prove their worth, both by making offerings and by using their cunning to go undetected (the demons have no use for the stupid or the careless) then they may be chosen for a rare and wonderful honor. This is the Blossomer Host ritual.

Qualifying for the Blossomer Host is not an easy task. Thirteen or more devotees must have been established an active, mixed-sex, demon-worshipping group, and have managed to perform bloody sacrificial perform rites for at least a year without discovery. They need not have a single

meeting place; what matters is they smear an image of their patron demon with innocent blood again and again, while howling praises to it. The blood of a family member is the most prized, but any blood will do. When the group has earned sufficient merit without making any stupid mistakes, then its patron will send a sign that it is ready to blossom inside the cult's female members.

For this, the demon needs a host, usually a high-ranking male member of the cult who is willing to die for the cause. The ritual only succeeds if the volunteer stays alive until he expires from blood loss; he must thus prepare himself thoroughly, whether by meditation, contemplation and privation, or with self-debasing excesses - drugs, drink, certain sex acts, and violence (traditions vary). Then, when his cult decides that it is time, he gives his life to his patron. The group places him on an altar and begins to eat his body, from the waist down, using only their teeth and fingernails. If the volunteer can survive the pain and shock to stay conscious and willing, his patron sends a demonic agent into the sacrifice's body at the moment he is exsanguinated. The cult continues its feast until they have gobbled up everything below the ribcage, at which point, the corpse comes to life as a blossomer.

The demon/host will then - apparently orally - impregnate all female members of the cult. These women will then give birth to daemonic servants - perfect hybrids of human flesh and demonic spirits (see the entry below for the demonic servants). These children when grown to maturity and gifted with the powers of their heritage will go out into the world and draw new followers to the cult.

Once the blossomer has impregnated all the available women, the mothers-to-be eat the remainder of its body; the unnatural fetuses need their father's demon-enriched flesh to develop properly.

### **Appearance and Behavior**

The blossomer is little more than a human corpse terminating at the waist. Although

it pads around on its hands, dragging shreds of intestine and skin around, it is surprisingly swift and assured; the creature can scuttle across a floor and scramble up a wall with ease.

The blossomer's only function is to create demon babies, and it will only fight in furtherance of this aim. If anything is impeding it from mating with a cult member, it will attack the obstacle, and if anyone attempts to interrupt it, it will fight back but, otherwise, it will ignore everything apart from the next available woman. When it has finished, it becomes inert, and waits for the cultists to eat it.

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**Damage Reduction (Su):** The presence of the demonic spirit within the blossomer's dead tissues gives it unnatural resilienceto physical injury. While it is impregnating its harem, it ignores the first five points of damage from any attack.

**Pounce (Ex):** The blossomer's staggering, ungainly motion gives no hint of its ability to launch itself through the air on its powerful arms. It can charge (or leap) and make a full attack, rather than being restricted to a standard action after a charge.

**Impregnation Madness (Su):** The victim of a blossomer's impregnation suffers a massive assault on her sanity. Immediately following impregnation, she must make a Will saving throw (DC 20). The saving throw DC is Charisma-based.

Failure means a descent into madness. The victim can still attempt to converse rationally but lapses into babbling or monotonous chanting after a few sentences. It is possible to relieve this madness with two consecutive successful Profession (psychiatrist) checks (DC 20), with one such check being allowed every month.

If the saving throw is failed by more than 10, the victim withdraws into herself. She neither speaks nor notices her surroundings, but spends the rest of her life rocking back and forth. It is possible, though much more difficult,

to heal this condition. It requires three consecutive successful Profession (psychiatrist) checks (DC 25), with one such check being allowed every month.

### **Demonic Servants**

The offspring of a blossomer resemble ordinary human children at first but their rate of growth and development is staggeringly greater. They age at a rate of five years for every year that passes, gaining knowledge and insight whether they have been formally educated or not. Their subtle connections to the demonic realms grant them intelligence that human children have to earn. In four years, when they are apparently twenty, they begin to age normally. They are usually black-haired and green-eyed, with a talent for sadism that puts that of normal children to shame; they will happily pull a beggar to pieces to find out how he works, or drown a playmate for fun. As the demonic children can attract unwelcome attention by growing up so quickly, they are usually kept in the cult's protection until they are of age.

Use the half-fiend template from Core Rulebook III to generate a demonic servant character, with the important difference that demonic servants look completely normal. They do not have horns, vestigial wings or any other demonic feature, nor do they gain claw and bite attacks. One in four will have a forked tongue, which is relatively easy to conceal. It cannot be seen unless the observer is within 10 feet and even then a Spot check (DC 25) is needed to notice it.

### **Interrupting the Ritual**

The blossomer ritual is horrific and protracted, and its results are by no means certain; the sacrifice might die prematurely, or the congregation might inadvertently touch his body with something other than their own naked bodies. Both of these circumstances terminate the ritual immediately, and win the cult their patron's disapproval; at the very least, they must work long and hard to earn another chance to host a



blossomer.

Outside interference can be, if anything, even more catastrophic. The disruption of a ritual by the cult's enemies, whether rival co-religionists, demon-hunters, or mundane authorities like the police or the army, or even local vigilantes, threatens the failure of the patron's plans. The celebrants will stop at nothing to keep this from happening. Once they are alerted to an external threat, the female members of the cult will attempt to consume the sacrifice as quickly as they can, while take all appropriate steps the enemy. If the demon has possessed the corpse before the attackers break in, the men will fight to the death to give the demon time to impregnate the women, and for them to escape with - then eat - the blossomer. If the invaders get through the defensive perimeter and begin to interfere with the creature, the women will fight them while the monster carries on impregnating its worshippers. If the cult's opponents obstruct or attack the blossomer, it will fight them off (see Appearance and Behavior, above).

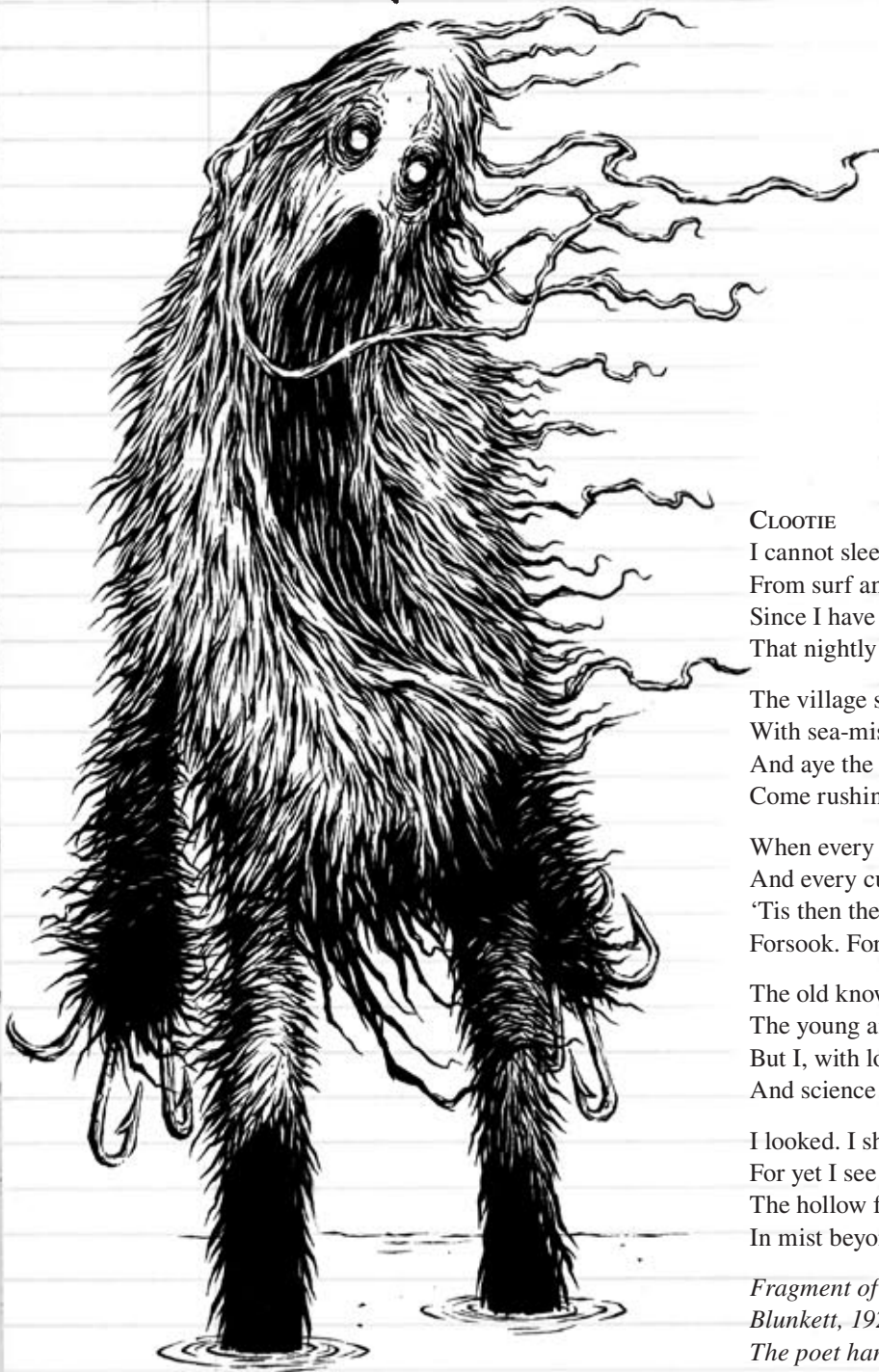
If the attack is successful, and the ritual fails, the cultists must make Will rolls to avoid intense psychological and psychic trauma; this has the same in-game effects as Impregnation Madness (above); they have failed their patron, who is royally displeased with them. The uneaten remains of the blossomer putrefy five times more quickly than they should, and show an obvious cause of death; blood loss.

Should a cultist miscarry (which can only happen following a disrupted ritual), the fetus looks strange and lumpy (see Demon Fetus in a Jar, in the Artifacts section).

Any children born to mothers who failed to eat part of the blossomer are human, but seem slightly odd; they gain +1 CHA and an extra - appropriate - feat, on creation. In a game that uses alignments, they aren't necessarily evil.



# Clootie



## CLOOTIE

I cannot sleep. I hide my face  
From surf and swell and blow  
Since I have seen the queer grey men  
That nightly come and go.

The village squats in sodden dusk  
With sea-mist draped, and drear.  
And aye the waves, and aye the waves  
Come rushing far and near.

When every door is locked and barred  
And every curtain drawn  
'Tis then they come, unseen, but heard.  
Forsook. Forgot. Forlorn.

The old know better than to look.  
The young are fast abed.  
But I, with lonely cynic's pride  
And science in my head,

I looked. I shall not look again.  
For yet I see them pass,  
The hollow faces of the drowned  
In mist beyond the glass.

*Fragment of verse by A. P. Morton-  
Blunkett, 1921, discovered with his body.  
The poet hanged himself in the room he  
was renting from a family on the Scottish  
island of Islay, where he had gone to seek  
inspiration.*

## The Clickety Man, by Rowan MacKenzie, aged 8

Where I used to live it was very old. All the houses were old. There was no school only a church. We had lessons in the church and Mrs. Wilson did the lessons. We played in the street but we were not allowed to when it was dark. When it was dark you had to go and say your prayers and close your eyes very very tight and then go to sleep. You weren't allowed to look out into the village.

If you did look then the clickety man could get you. The clickety man is all gray and wet and he has hooks instead of hands. He has a proper name but I always call him the clickety man. He makes a clickety noise with the hooks. It is like when Dad carves the turkey at Christmas.

Nobody used to come and see us on the island. We weren't famous for anything. That meant we were poor. Some people wanted tourists to come but most of them didn't. In the end the people who wanted it to be different just moved away.

There was one person who came to see us. Sometimes this English man would come. He had glasses and no hair and smelled like pencils. He used to talk into a tape recorder and get us to sing songs or tell stories. Then he would look happy and go away. Granddad once sang a rude song that sailors used to sing and the man liked that very much. They didn't think I understood it but I did. We used to make up stories and tell them to the tape recorder man. We only ever told him made up things. We didn't tell them about the clickety men or other real things like the guppies.

I used to have a little sister Becky but I don't any more. She stayed out too late and didn't come home and the clickety man got her and took her away. When we found her she was all white and her eyes were empty. They took her away to the mainland and put her in a hospital and now she has all machines around her. She can't do a wee on her own or even eat. That's why we came here and I went to the new school. My mummy wants to be near Becky. She cries a lot and has got very thin. Daddy sometimes gets cross and has to shake her to make her stop crying.

There aren't any clickety men here. You can't hear the sea. It's never dark because there are lights in the street. Perhaps if all the lights went out then the clickety men could come here too.

from the Urban Legends website, *friendofafriend.org*

"This seems to be a version of the 'hooks for hands' archetype that I hadn't heard before. Anyone else know what the 'clickety man' could be? Is this just some Scots version of the Hook?"

### All That Remains

The clootie's hooks tear rents in the body, so victims die quickly from blood loss and shock, but their attacker never leaves any physical evidence behind: any detached part reverts to sea water. The deceased's clothes are always drenched in seawater, sometimes with particles of weed or sand grains, so the initial examination frequently gives the impression that the body washed up from the sea. As there is, no water in the lungs, the assumption is that the victim was killed on land, then dumped in the water.

Anyone who loses his soul to a spirit gouge attack lapses into a coma with no apparent physical cause beyond strange red marks on the torso. The victim then irreversibly wastes away. Even when given nutrients, they still appear sallow and continue to starve. Brain activity is erratic and unpredictable.

### Game Statistics: Medium Fey

**Hit Dice:** 6d6+12 (33 hp)

**Initiative:** +5 (Dex)

**Speed:** 30 ft. swim 60 ft.

**Defence:** 17 (+5 Dex, +2 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 12

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +3/+3

**Attack:** Hook slash +8 melee (1d6/19-20x2)

**Full Attack:** 2 hook slashes +8 melee (1d6/19-20x2)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Bowel Rake, Dreadful Gaze, Fearful Howl, Spirit Gouge

**Special Qualities:** Discorporation

**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref +10, Will +8

**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 20, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 17, Cha 20

**Skills:** Bluff +12, Climb +7, Hide +12, Intimidate +12, Jump +7, Listen +10, Move Silently +12, Spot +10, Swim +7

**Feats:** Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Weapon Finesse

**Challenge Rating:** 6

**Horror:** Fear 18

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### **What They Are**

Clooties, sometimes referred to as 'Auld Clootie', are ancient water spirits that exist on the islands off the west coast of Scotland. The locals believe them to be the wandering souls of dead sailors who have died centuries ago. The island villagers respect the clooties but fear them, so dissuade tourists from visiting their region.

During the daylight hours and all through the summertime, the clooties are not seen; there is always someone who will wonder whether they will stay away for good this time. Inevitably, in the dark months of the year, the clooties drag themselves out from the sea at night and wander into the village. The reason for these nocturnal visitations can only ever be guessed at. Perhaps they simply want to witness the ways of the living and remember what they have lost.

The clooties never physically interact with the environments they visit. Instead they look, listen, remember and then go back into the sea. These visitations are, nonetheless, terrifying. According to legend, one must never look upon an approaching clootie or else it will steal away the soul and drag it down into the sea, forever.

These creatures have voices like those of old men, and make low drawn-out sorrowful moans wherever they go. Although they are wrongly believed to be the souls of dead men, these monsters are fey, not undead.

Despite the terrifying nature of clooties, the older members of the village community know that their visits are just part of the way things are and will resent any attempt to do away with them. Angering the creatures can bring grim retribution. The sea has claimed more than one village overnight, with monstrous waves flooding inland and drowning the

settlement forever. Legends tell that the church bells of sunken villages can still be heard ringing under the water.

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**Bowel Rake (Ex):** Clooties can use their hooks to rip grisly trenches in victims' bodies; if both hooks hit the same target they automatically rake for a further 1d6 damage.

**Discorporation (Su):** Physical damage cannot destroy a clootie. Reducing its hit points to zero causes it to collapse into a gush of salt water, which then trickles away back to sea. The clootie can then manifest again on another night.

The only way to rid a region of clooties is to depopulate it. Some villages where they used to walk in years past have simply died out and turned into ghost towns, as the people have migrated away. The clooties no longer wander these streets, as there is nothing for them to look at and remember. Of course, should people move back, the creatures might very well return.

PCs might want to try to expel the monsters, using whatever passes for powerful magic or religious faith in the GM's campaign world. This might very well work, depending on the GM's whims although, there is, of course no way to know whether such an act has been effective.

**Dreadful Gaze (Su):** The clootie's empty-eyed gaze fills any person who sees it with deep terror, as if freezing ocean currents were moving through his bones. The attack takes effect when opponents look at the creature's eyes, and has a range of 30 feet. The victim must make a Will saving



throw (DC 18) or become frightened.

Each opponent within 30 feet must attempt a saving throw each round at the beginning of his or her turn in the initiative order. The clootie can also make a dreadful gaze as a standard action, actively gazing at a given target who must then make a further saving throw. Only looking directly at the clootie leaves an opponent vulnerable to its gaze attack. Opponents can avoid the need to make the saving throw by not looking at the creature. A person who is averting his eyes (or closing them) does not need to save against the clootie's gaze attack. However, the clootie gains concealment against that person if his eyes are averted and total concealment if his eyes are closed.

The clootie can tell when a person is averting his gaze. It will not molest anyone who does so, neither with its gaze nor with its hooks. There is no risk of an accidental gaze attack happening if a person is deliberately refusing to look. So long as a person does not look at the clootie, it will not do anything to harm him, even if it comes close enough to brush against him.

**Fearful Howl (Su):** When the clooties raise their voices and howl, a thrill of pure fear goes through those who hear the sound. Their strength floods out of them like water. A clootie can howl up to three times a night. Any person within 180 feet who can hear the howl must make a Will saving throw (DC 18) or suffer 1d4 points of temporary Strength damage. This is a mind-affecting sonic effect and the saving throw DC is Charisma-based. In addition, those who fail their saving throws become shaken. Opponents who were already shaken become frightened, while opponents who were frightened become panicked.

**Spirit Gouge (Su):** The clootie can choose to rake the victim's spirit instead of his body if it wishes. In this case the hooks tear away shreds of the victim's very life force. They inflict no hit point damage but every hit bestows one negative level on the target. The hook blows leave red

weals when they gouge the spirit, which look fearsome but do no physical damage.

If the clootie scores a critical hit, it tears away twice the given amount. The monster gains 5 temporary hit points (10 on a critical hit) for each negative level it bestows on an opponent. These temporary hit points last for a maximum of 1 hour.

An opponent who gains a negative level takes a -1 penalty on all skill checks and ability checks, attack rolls and saving throws and loses one effective level or Hit Die (whenever level is used in a die roll or calculation) for each negative level.

If these things are generally effective in the Game Master's world, occult or religious rituals that involve the restoration of the soul can remove negative levels. If a negative level is not removed before 24 hours have passed, the affected character must attempt a Fortitude saving throw (DC 18). On a success, the negative level goes away with no harm to the victim. On a failure, the negative level goes away but the victim's level is also reduced by one. A separate saving throw is required for each negative level.

A character who accumulates so many negative levels from clootie attacks that they equal his current level can die outright. Alternatively, if the clootie wishes, it can drag its victim's soul is dragged away on its hooks (it resembles a ragged wisp of grey mist). The body collapses in a coma; mental ability scores (Intelligence, Constitution and Charisma) drop to zero. Nothing can be done for him until and unless the clootie releases his soul.

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# Death Tapper



The prison cell was old, an adobe relic of past colonialism, although someone had painted the inside yellow earlier in the week. Several flies had become stuck in the tacky paint and died there; living ones buzzed at the barred window. Rush mats barely covered the excrement-streaked floor. An energy-efficient fluorescent bulb glowed behind a wire bound shade. The table, arguably of World War Two vintage, was stained, pitted and burnt; pale wood showed through where prisoners, pulling against their restraints, had cut into the varnish. The metal chair, once securely bolted down, now prone to shifting and rocking, was more recent, perhaps 1960s, perhaps a gift from the Soviets. The crocodile clips, cables, multi-socket extension lead, transformer, induction coil and soldering iron were new, recently ordered online, as was the bonded leather pilot's case that they traveled in.

There were three African men in the hot fug. Two, one in a cream linen suit and one in a sand uniform, stood over the third, the one in rags, the one stained with feces, urine, mucus, drool and blood, who had slithered off the chair and slumped to the floor.

The guard was nervous and wanted to leave. He cradled his machine pistol in sweaty hands. He'd always regarded himself as a hard man, but the smell of paint and filth was making him feel sick; the prisoner had been tortured earlier in the afternoon and had fouled himself.

The man in the suit was sleek, unfit and well fed. He was self-consciously, fussily stylish; even indoors, he affected a pair of mirrored aviator shades. He smoked Gitanes and carried a heavy cane. The man in front of him was sprawled crookedly, as if his arms and legs had been put in the wrong way. 'People in your village are making trouble for us. They say you have spoken to them of curses. They say that you have told them to kill the Government soldiers. Is this true?'

The skinny wretch on the mat said nothing. The man in the suit began to remove his jacket and tie, folding them fastidiously. He held them out to the guard who, momentarily at a loss, slung his weapon, and took the clothes. They smelled of sweat and cologne. 'They want the land and they shall have the land,' said the man who, theatrically, drew a heavy vinyl apron from his case, and put it on. He rolled up his shirtsleeves. He picked up his cane, and patted his palm with the weighted handle. He addressed himself to his prisoner. 'You must give up your crops. Do you not care that your neighbors are starving? Are you that selfish?'

The shrunken figure on the floor did not move. Only his lips moved, soft and spittleless, mouthing silently. Then his white teeth began to click together, in a curious rhythm; tick, tick-tick-tick-tick, tick.

With a grunt, the man brought his cane down. There was a muffled crunch and a wet squelch. The stick came back bloody; the torturer's forearms his apron and the wall were covered with crimson spots. He hit twice more.

The guard at the door looked carefully away. There was a cracking, then a final wet sound, like rotten fruit being thrown against a wall. The guard thought of cold beer and of the wife who would be cooking for him by now. He felt guilty, thinking of her face in this place of blood and shit.

The sounds of killing stopped, only heavy panting could be heard. The guard looked again. Nothing was left but an impression of spindly limbs and mess. The guard thought of burst insects smeared across the windshield of a truck. The man in the suit poked at the corpse with his foot. 'I am not afraid of you. You were nothing but an old man. There is no place for witch doctors in my Mabutu.' Sweat ran from him in fat drops. Dampness stained his shirt in wide underarm circles. He was shaking like a leaf. The guard knew that it was from exertion. The man was not scared. The guard bit his lip, because he was terrified. He believed that a very bad thing had happened, and that worse was to come.

The man in the suit dressed and left the room without a word. The guard went to follow him. Knowing that it was a bad idea, the guard looked back from the doorway. With his head split and lolling at an impossible angle, the old man was clearly dead. His jaws were still champing reflexively, the teeth clicking slowly like an clock work toy running down. The guard turned away, then something like a clot of blood groped from under the bloodied tongue, legs wavering. The guard ran.

Later that night, the man who had worn the suit was drinking scotch, smoking a Cuban cigar and reading a pornographic magazine; whores were suddenly in short supply, so he had resigned himself to masturbating



alone in a large bed, reclining on a mound of pillows. It was a hot night, and power did not buy air conditioning, so his window was open to the night and to the sound of dance music. He licked a finger and turned a page. He heard a faint ticking sound, like an old, electrocuted, beaten man's teeth chattering. He was not superstitious and blamed it on the plumbing, then something scalded his leg like a drop of molten solder and he threw away his magazine with a shriek.

There was a reddish-black thing stuck to his thigh, something the size of a groundnut; it looked like an inflamed growth. Repelled, he took it between finger and thumb and to his horror it wriggled under his fingers. He reached for his cigar, and thrust it at the creature. Unlike a grotesque tick, it did not fall off, but tore its mouth parts free, and jumped across the room. He sat up, reaching for a heavy glass ashtray; his blood ran freely from a new wound in his leg, staining the starched white sheets. An angry hissing came from the insect and tiny legs scabbled. The man caught the bug between the ashtray and the carpet, scraped it off on the window frame. He was angry that it had made him cry out like a woman. (He had once had a botfly larva under his scalp; he was not squeamish.) In the bathroom, he found surgical alcohol and swabbed at the stinging wound. Yellowish ooze seeped from it, as if it had become infected in seconds. His head began to throb, the pulsing veins like a tight headband.

He had a glass of whiskey and lay back down.

Ten minutes later he was sliding down the wall of the shower to collapse to his knees, like a pathetic supplicant, pleading for his life, the bathroom tile cool against his forehead. The cold water was running full blast. He vomited. He had already vomited eight times; his stomach was in spasm, pumping like a second heart. This time the substance ejected from his guts was thick and mucilaginous. The matter slowly washed towards the plughole. There seemed to be nothing left to throw up.

His nausea subsided. He was calm, blissfully calm. He had time to breathe deeply before his stomach quaked and blood exploded in scarlet fury from his mouth as if he had been punched. His mouth could open no wider. The tendons cracked. The gush of fluid ebbed, then with a deeper gurgle, a spray of gore and bile drenched the white ceramic walls.

The trucks did not leave the village laden with cassava. The village did not eat well, but its people had enough. No one asked any questions. The new governor was a superstitious man and knew when to leave well enough alone. He was afraid and the people respected him for it.

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### **All That Remains**

Discovering the corpse of a person who died from Churning Rot is a stomach-turning event. The stench of bile, fecal matter and blood is overpowering. Much of the viscera, in a disintegrated state, have usually been expelled from the mouth. They are in a semi-liquid state, with the tougher tissues softened and turned into a jelly-like substance. Without this liquefaction, it would be impossible for the internal organs to be propelled from the body, as they are too large to pass through the throat.

Several feet of prolapsed intestine typically protrude from the anus. The substance of the intestine is perished and eaten away as if by acid damage, not torn. In the near vicinity, having been expelled anally, are the majority of the large intestine and the small

intestine. In some cases, when the victim has not been discovered for some time, the skin is also partly liquefied in the same manner that the viscera are. Organs that have been partially liquefied become semitransparent, including the skin.

### **Game Statistics: Fine Outsider (Native)**

**Hit Dice:** 1d8 (4 hp)

**Initiative:** +6 (Dex)

**Speed:** 20 ft.

**Defence:** 23 (+5 Dex, +8 size), touch 23, flat-footed 18

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +1/-15

**Attack:** Bite +7 melee (1 point and disease)

**Full Attack:** Bite +7 melee (1 point and disease)

**Space/Reach:** 2 1/2 ft. / 0 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Disease

**Special Qualities:** Resistant, Jump to Cover, Ticking

**Saves:** Fort +2, Ref +7, Will +2



**Abilities:** Str 1, Dex 20, Con 11, Int 6,  
Wis 10, Cha 10  
**Skills:** Hide + 13  
**Feats:** Weapon Finesse  
**Challenge Rating:** 4  
**Horror:** Panic 10

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This minute creature resembles a bloated, repulsive flea. It is in fact a demon that injects a deadly agent to kill its victim in a matter of hours. The death tapper is so-called because of the knocking sound that comes from its abdomen. This noise indicates that the demon is making a dose of the fluid that passes on the disease.

The death tapper lands on its victim and bites, infecting him with The Churning Rot. Churning Rot begins with violent diarrhea and vomiting. Once the victim sheds the contents of its stomach and bowels, the virus starts to liquefy his organs. The victims dies conscious and in horrendous pain as he vomits and excretes his own innards.

The death tapper is most commonly found in the developing world, where its greatest enemy, immediate surgical intervention, is unlikely. Fortunately, these demons are rare. Certain traffickers in dark magic know and respect them. It is sometimes possible for a death tapper to be sent on an errand to infect somebody who must be gotten rid of, but, in general, they spread their grisly plague indiscriminately so that it seems to strike completely at random.

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**Disease (Su):** When bitten, the victim must immediately make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 15). This saving throw is Constitution-based and includes a +4 racial bonus. Victim who fail immediately become infected with Churning Rot. This disease is supernatural in origin and cannot be treated with antibiotics or serums. Churning Rot deals 1d4 permanent damage to Strength, Dexterity and Constitution with every failed saving throw. The victim must save again every 30 minutes. Success simply means that no damage is suffered this time. Unlike ordinary diseases, the victim does not

recover if he makes two successful saving throws in a row.

Major surgery to remove any organs already infected is the only way to treat Churning Rot. This alone may kill the sufferer. Treating Churning Rot with surgery requires the Surgery feat and a Treat Injury skill check against DC 20. Given the time constraints, the character performing the operation cannot take 10. The removal of the internal organs inflicts 1d4-1 points of permanent Constitution damage whether the Treat Injury skill check is successful or not. If the skill check fails by more than 5, then the victim must succeed at a Fortitude saving throw (DC 20) or die on the operating table. If it is successful, then the victim can begin recovery of ability score damage caused by the disease, but can never recover points of Constitution lost to the surgical process.

Once the death tapper has infected a victim, it has to secrete another dose of fluid before it can make another disease attack. The demon must take a full-round action to 'tap' before it can infect again. A Listen check (DC 20) pinpoints the creature's location, if the listener is within 5 feet. Within 30 feet, the creature can be heard but not pinpointed.

**Jump to Cover (Ex):** A death tapper can spring on its powerful legs, moving from one hiding place to another. It can jump in a straight line up to its maximum movement distance on to a surface where there is cover available, such as a shag pile carpet or a heap of clothes. On completing its movement it can take cover immediately as a free action, immediately making a new Hide skill check. When it attacks again, an observer must beat this Hide skill check with a successful Spot skill check in order to notice the death tapper jumping to its target. If the demon's target makes this roll, the demon provokes an attack of opportunity. Players can substitute a sport (baseball, cricket, table tennis etc), roll for an attack, the target DC is the creature's total Hide roll; damage is 1D3 (table tennis bat) to 1D6 (baseball or cricket bat). Swatting the creature with a bare hand does not

# Dementia Larva



## The Transformation of Julia Browne

*18th March*

Today she got a postcard in the mail from Korensky, the private investigator. He had addressed it to 'Princess'. He was having a 'kickass time' in Kingston, sunning his scarred flesh, and hoped she was doing well. The message did not have any of his usual flirtatious banter in it.

She stuck it to the wall above the fridge. Korensky was a good man, probably the only truly decent one of the group. She wished he had been a better one. She swallowed her medication.

At least he wrote. The others did not. She only knew from newspaper reports that the Professor had exhibited the artifacts from Cairo and vindicated himself completely; nobody would call him a quack again. There was even talk of a Balzan Prize. Marco was back on the boats, and back on the booze by now. Connie – well, she would be married again by now, to some leathery magnate. Marrying was what Connie did. Her allowance had funded most of the Cairo expedition.

She hated them all. Yes, even Korensky. She hated them for having run, for having left her there, for not having seen it.

*20th March*

She lay in the bath and wailed. The water was pink. It was not supposed to be pink.

*28th March*

Korensky's postcard lay among the muck behind the fridge.

Letters were piled on the mat. A few more had been stuffed into the letterbox and had wedged there.

It had all been a lie. They had never been a team. They were not 'investigators' or even 'heroes'. They were just greedy people bound together by common need. Connie wanted excitement, the Professor lusted after information, Korensky needed to find out what had happened to his friend, Marco had to be the big strong protector. As for her, she had wanted the story.

In her stories, she wrote about disasters and how they changed people. She wrote about ocean liners

that broke apart and airship skeletons falling in a slow holocaust of fire. She was looking for something with suffering in it in Cairo, something with the human angle. Suffering sells papers.

It had all been so very romantic at first, so much like a pulp novel. True, Egypt had stunk and she could not bear to look at the lepers; but the hotel was modern, cool and plush. The expedition was going to be the climax of it all. The maps, the ancient talismans, the crumbling texts... it was supposed to be an adventure.

She ate raw eggs from the fridge, one by one. The cold shells burst in her mouth, a quag of slime. She crunched the grit and imagined that each one was the skull of one of her friends.

### *3rd April*

In a spasm of remorse, she stuck Korensky's postcard back above the fridge, using a piece of her thumb that had come off as glue. It held there for a moment, then slowly began to slide and fell, fluttering.

Numb from too many punches to her mind, she cried. Hot salty snot flowed from the holes in her face.

### *7th April*

It was not so bad now. Now she could see it again in her mind, it was not so bad.

It was calling to her, calling across the cold spaces. The heaving, goggling thing in Cairo was only part of it.

In Cairo, she had wet herself and curled up and clawed at her skin and screamed and screamed until the injections finally took effect and the strong straps held her tight to the bed. The Professor had tweaked his yellow moustache gravely and talked nonsense, while Marco held her hand and told her that she would be all right, that they were going home to New York.

Of course, she was never going to be all right. That had been the last of her, flaking away like a scab.

### *10th April*

When she had finally torn her itching skin off, it had made quite a mess.

The hands had been the worst. They had itched abominably, like athlete's foot. Cramming them into the waste disposal unit and pressing the switch with her chin had been absolutely the right thing to do. A few minutes of chunky, lacerating pain, then with a choked whirr and grind, they were off, and soon after, they were stuff like dog food.

Now, she felt quite chipper.

### *13th April*

There had been a disturbance today. People had come, looking for a body. They had noticed the smell and the locked door and the mail, uncollected, wedged in the letterbox. Now they broke down the door and gasped to see all the furniture torn and the brown slime splattered up the walls.

She compressed herself into the dusty space beneath the floorboards and listened.

They thought she had been murdered. She understood.

Now, she stroked her skinless face with the tip of the slug-like object that had replaced her hand. A burning sensation like bile was heaving in her. The petty little people were in her apartment. One held a cloth to his face. The other made notes in a pocketbook. They reminded her of Marco and Korensky.

She oozed up through the floor. It made a noise. The humans turned round and began to jabber and squeak.

There were only two of them. Furless apes. Thick, fatty lumps of ignorance. Yes. Just like Marco and Korensky. They were infection, an irritation, like boils. So, like boils, she took them and squeezed them. They burst.



### **All That Remains**

The victims of demonic larvae are coated with a brown slimy residue. Chemical analysis shows it to be similar to human saliva. The body typically shows signs of having been crushed to death by a muscular, coiling appendage, much like a constrictor snake. Occasionally, bodies are discovered decapitated, the head - which is missing, and which never comes to light - having been sliced off by a set of shark-like. There is much less blood than one would expect.

### **Game Statistics: Large Aberration**

**Hit Dice:** 6d8+30 (57 hp)

**Initiative:** +1 (Dex)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Defense:** 12 (+1 Dex, +2 natural, -1 size), touch 10, flat-footed 12

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +3/+14

**Attack:** Bite +9 melee (1d8+6) or tentacle +9 melee (1d6+3)

**Full Attack:** Bite +9 melee (1d8+6 and 2 tentacles +4 melee (1d6+3)

**Space/Reach:** 10 ft. / 10 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Burning envy, decapitate, constrict, improved grab

**Special Qualities:** Regeneration 2, gelatinous body

**Saves:** Fort +7, Ref +3, Will +5

**Abilities:** Str 23, Dex 13, Con 20, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 9

**Skills:** Climb +8, Escape Artist +11\*, Hide +3, Listen +2, Move Silently +3, Spot +2

**Feats:** Cleave, Dodge, Power Attack

**Challenge Rating:** 7

**Horror:** Madness 12

\* The larva's gelatinous body and slimy coating give it a +8 racial bonus on all Escape Artist skill checks.

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Supernatural entities that dwell in realms unknown to science sometimes reveal themselves, or aspects of their existence, to certain luckless individuals. This can happen spontaneously, or because the person has been seeking some form of spiritual or occult revelation, perhaps

through drugs, meditation or obscure rituals. The human mind and spirit almost never survive; a person exposed to these monstrous visions or soul-rending vistas of nightmare dies internally and the shell of the person stumbles away from what he has seen, forever changed. Over time, his external appearance also changes to reveal the spiritual wreckage within. The most extreme result is a complete transformation into something inhuman, misshapen and savage: the dementia larva.

These creatures are wrenched from their mortal lives to be reborn as grotesque hybrids. The people they used to be are steadily digested by the horror to which they have been exposed. In the end they are completely devoid of humanity and will attack former brethren on sight. It takes some weeks for the final vestiges of mortal life to be broken down. Once the terrible transformation is complete, these unfortunate creatures depart from our time and space and return to the source of their degradation. This is usually the entity that caused their initial breakdown, which will typically accept the larva as its thrall.

Dementia larvae attack humans with incredible ferocity. Perhaps some fragment of their former selves recalls what has been lost, increasing the violence with which they react. The extraplanar masters who govern the Larvae relish this misery.

**Burning Envy (Ex):** The larva has an insane loathing for human beings, as they remind it of what it used to be. A larva can go into frenzy when it encounters humans, especially if it knew them previously. While the larva is in a frenzied state, it immediately attacks the nearest target (treat this as a charge move), with no attempt at stealth. In this state, which lasts 10 rounds, it has a +4 enhancement bonus to Strength and Constitution and a -2 penalty to Defense.

A larva that wishes to remain hidden must make a Will saving throw to avoid entering frenzy. The DC is 15 if it is facing humans that it did not know and 20 if it is facing former acquaintances.

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**Constrict (Ex):** Larvae twine thick tentacles around their despised human victims and crush them. If the larva makes a successful hit with a tentacle and made a successful Grapple check, it constricts for a further 1d6+6 points of damage.

**Decapitate (Ex):** Larvae have horrendous knife-like teeth that can shear off a victim's head with one snap; on a critical hit (natural 20) with its bite attack, a larva always decapitates an opponent.

Depending on how much threat the larva faces, it will then do one of two things. Faced with multiple opponents, it will spit the head at one. This is resolved as a ranged attack (+1 attack, damage 1d6+4, range increment 10 ft.) Alternatively, if it does not perceive much danger in the area, it will swallow the head and tilt the cadaver up to drain the contents, as if it were drinking from an uncorked bottle. This keeps it occupied for 1d4+1 rounds. The larva will always attempt to retrieve a severed head that it has spat at an opponent, once it has taken care of any obvious threats.

**Gelatinous Body (Ex):** A dementia larva is mostly composed of tough, jelly-like matter that exudes awful slime. It can squeeze itself into places that are apparently too small for it ; it can move through a space up to 5 feet across with no penalty to movement. Squeezing through a gap between one foot across and two and a half feet across costs it a move action.

Squeezing through a gap between six inches and one foot across requires two move actions. Squeezing through a gap any narrower than this requires two move actions and a successful Escape Artist skill check (DC 25). Between the first move action and the second, the larva is partially squeezed through the gap. While the larva is in mid-squeeze, it cannot apply any Dexterity bonus to its Defense.

A larva's gelatinous body and slimy coating give it a +8 racial bonus on all Escape Artist skill checks.

**Improved Grab:** In order to use this ability, the larva must hit with a tentacle attack. If it successfully hits, it can immediately make a Grapple

check and constrict (see above) without provoking an attack of opportunity.

**Regeneration (Ex):** All damage that the larva takes, except damage from fire, acid, chemical and electrical sources, is considered non-lethal damage. The larva regenerates two points of non-lethal damage per round. If it is rendered unconscious from non-lethal damage, then it can be killed by a coup de grace, though this must be from an attack that deals lethal damage to the larva.



# Dream Tearer



As observers have been moved to comment throughout history, the dividing line between genius and lunacy is perilously thin. When a mighty idea's time has come, the fragile human being whose duty it is to bear the news to the world had best be of stout constitution, for he is treated by the Fates as if he were merely an instrument. The idea, which is greater than him, may obsess, consume and ultimately overwhelm him. What matters it if the great Author of the earth's destiny should break the nib of his pen, wherewith he writes? He can surely find another. Who can say, then, how many shattered wrecks in Bedlam-houses and suicides' graves would not have been souls as great as Galileo or Newton, had they been but strong enough to bear their burden?

Indeed, with some men, it is not their bodies that are weak but their very genius that blazes too brightly. They neglect to eat, to attend to the regular duty of their lives, even to bathe, because all these things take them away from pursuit of the one Goal that they must achieve, from the work that only they (so they see it) can do.

Few cases of this kind have been so celebrated of late as that of Paul Gregory. A young and singularly talented student, he had achieved much in the field of electrical science, bearing the phosphorescent torch of Edison into realms that the good American could not have foreseen. Whether he would have gone on to introduce some invention comparable to Edison's bulb is not for us to know, for as the papers were keen to tell us at the time, he is dead...

It was Gregory's mania, rather than the merit of his work, which warranted attention from the Press, for Gregory evidenced a notable obsession in the weeks before his demise. He was frantic to avoid sleep. His notes (which were first believed to be written in cipher, such was their illegibility) reveal that he was convinced he was on the verge of a breakthrough. The mysterious 'electrovisual telegraph', which resembles nothing so much as the scrying apparatus of some mediaeval magician, would (so Gregory firmly believed) relay a constant and faithful image of events across many miles to an illuminated screen, presumably by Marconi's methods or some further refinement thereof.

This would assuredly have been a great boon to mankind, were it possible! One envisions telegraph parties held in gentlemen's salons, where the activities of a single demimondaine in Paris are transmitted to an audience of thousands; but we digress. If the electrovisual telegraph is meant to be, then perhaps another shall discover it. In this age of science, shall we deem anything impossible?

One gleans from Gregory's writings the sense of 'a noble mind o'erthrown'. His scribblings are interspersed with imprecations, pleas to archangels for protection, hints that a black and terrible thing pursued him through his dreams, but that only in his dreams could he see what he calls the 'trans-historic perfection' that informs his inventions. Sleep, it was clear, must be avoided at all costs, or the beast would claim him.

It is a sign of Gregory's rapidly decaying reason that he turns to superstition and occultism, while simultaneously pursuing his technical researches with ever-increasing zeal and (as has been confirmed) a startling level of mathematical competence.<sup>1</sup> Gregory describes a visit to a spiritualist medium, who is discarded as 'useless'. Later visits to Theosophists and to traveling Hindoo mystics are dismissed equally succinctly. One sheet of paper is covered with notes on a 'caul ceremony', in which Gregory evidently invested some hope, though he despairs of being able to perform it; from the notes he left, it is the opinion of this writer that his poor soul is the better for not having done so. May he find his rest.

The devices that Gregory devised to remain awake are too horrible to describe. We shall note only that a man who began the last week of his life as a gaunt waif, haunting coffee-houses and consuming cup after cup of the strongest coffee available, ended it in a bath filled with ice, with a galvanic generator attached to a part of his anatomy. So desperate was the poor wretch to remain wakeful that he had devised for himself a hand-grip, which would deliver a tremendous jolt of electricity to his body if his hold upon it slackened. In this way, should sleep overtake him and his grip weaken, the electric shock would waken him again.

Evidently, this device was overly strong for Gregory's frame, weakened as it was by many days without sleep. The conclusion of the coroner is that the shocks that should have woken him instead stilled his heart, so that when his rooms were opened and his sad corpse discovered he was quite dead. His face, twisted almost beyond recognition by the electric surge, was swiftly covered with a sheet...

From *The Martyrs of Progress* by Jonathan P. Ashford (1902)

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1. It is surely a matter of note for our physicians that even as one part of the man's brain breaks down, another functions at levels of which it should not ordinarily be capable.

### All That Remains

Those who die from dream tearer assaults usually have no physical injuries at all. Their hearts simply stop. It is common for their faces to be contorted in fear, though their eyes will always be closed, since they were asleep at the point of death. When the victim has been pursued over the course of more than one night, he will typically have taken precautions against falling asleep. The blood will thus contain high levels of stimulants - caffeine, amphetamine sulfate, taurine (from energy drinks) and such like.

If the victim died indoors, then it is also likely that he will have taken plenty of measures to remain conscious. The television will be on and the volume turned up, as will the radio and any other sources of noise. Some especially desperate victims even wound themselves, sticking needles under their skin or hammering nails into their hands, just so that the pain will keep them awake.

### Game Statistics: Medium Outsider

**Hit Dice:** 8d8 (36 hp)

**Initiative:** +4 (Dex)

**Speed:** 30 ft. fly 80 ft (perfect) (only in dreams)

**Defense:** 18 (+4 Dex, +4 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 14

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +8/+9

**Attack:** Bite +9 melee (1d8+1)

**Full Attack:** 2 bites +9 melee (1d8+1)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Dream Intrusion, Soul Shred

**Special Qualities:** DR 10/-, resistance to fire, cold and electricity 15, nonphysical

**Saves:** Fort +6, Ref +10, Will +7

**Abilities:** Str 12, Dex 19, Con 10, Int 6, Wis 13, Cha 21

**Skills:** Climb +6, Hide +15, Intimidate +16, Jump +7, Listen +12, Move Silently +15, Spot +12

**Feats:** Improved Natural Attack (bite)

**Challenge Rating:** 8

**Horror:** Madness 19

Dream tearers are malevolent creatures with the power to enter dreams and slay the dreamer. These horrors wander a strange plane of existence, where sleepers' subconscious minds bubble up, killing and feeding suitable prey. Although their abilities and powers are great, dream tearers have only an animal's intelligence and they always hunt instinctively. They prefer to feed on the souls of those whose dreams are rich and interesting, full of creative energy. When they have found a suitable meal in a sleeping mind, the monsters invade and tear it to shreds. The body dies a moment later.

One school of thought contends that, although unwelcome in their own right, these creatures are particularly dangerous because powerful, unseen hands guide them, and conjectures that dark, ancient gods use the dream tearers to keep humanity on its knees, stunting its spiritual and intellectual growth. This conspiracy theory holds that many great discoveries and advancements have never come to fruition because, mere hours before their invention, the dream tearers intrude on the sleeping mind that would have created them. But for this invasion - the argument runs - civilization would have developed twice as fast, so the masters of these terrible creatures must spy on great minds, watch them reach the verges of medical, social, and creative breakthroughs and then rip them to shreds, reveling in the tragedy they have wrought.

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**Dream Intrusion (Su):** From a dream tearer's perspective, a sleeper's dreams are hazy, colorful bubbles, distending the membrane that separates the subconscious mind from the creature's gray, misty home; the larger and more intense the bubbles are, the more intense and appetizing the dream is. The dream tearer comes snuffling at an attractive intrusion, then tries to claw itself a way in, rending the barrier apart. Unless the victim succeeds on a Will saving throw (DC 19), the tearer enters the dream. The saving throw DC is Charisma-based.



Once the attacker is inside the bubble, it spends 2d6 rounds searching for the dreamer. Once it has found its prey, it attacks, using its Soul Shred ability. Sometimes, when the target offers some resistance, the hunter will attempt to change elements of the dream to suit itself. For example, if the dreamer has taken refuge in a white castle protected by an army of loyal knights, the dream tearer could dispel the latter and tear down the former. To alter or destroy any dream element, it makes a Charisma ability score check, to which it adds a +4 racial bonus. This then functions as lucid dreaming, for which see the feat below. The dream tearer can destroy dream elements as a standard action. It can also introduce its own elements, such as thickened air (which slows down those trying to run away, halving their movement rate) and collapsing floors (which leave fleeing dreamers stranded).

At the GM's discretion, some charms and talismans can help the sleeper resist predation. For example, the hanging circular web called a dream-catcher (available in New Age stores) adds a +2 circumstance bonus to the Will saving throw. Note that such items only help prevent the creature from entering dreams, and offer no defense once it is inside

If the sleeper is woken, the bubble bursts and the tearer is forcibly ejected back into its own realm. It is, however, difficult to wake a person once an invader has entered his dream. Shouting, slapping and similar tactics only have a one in three chance of waking the dreamer on any given round. An injection of stimulants administered by a competent professional can wake the dreamer instantly. This requires a successful Treat Injury check (DC 15) and access to appropriate drugs.

A dream tearer can only attempt to enter a given dream once. If the attempt fails, it must wait for the its victim to wake, then enter REM sleep again, thus creating a new bubble.

**Nonphysical:** A dream tearer exists wholly in the Dreaming Realm, although it can be forced to manifest physically (see The

Caul of Ninghizidda, below), and killed. The above statistics apply both to this involuntary material form, and to the creature's true - insubstantial - state, because the monster enters combat both in dreams, and in the real world. The difference is that only harm inflicted on its physical form can be fatal: within the Dreaming Realms, it can be hurt (say with bullets from submachine guns 'dreamed' into being) but all such damage is treated as non-lethal. If rendered unconscious from accumulated non-lethal damage, it cannot sustain dream intrusion and is ejected from the dream-bubble.

**Soul Shred (Su):** A dream tearer that has successfully entered the dreams of a target with dream intrusion (see above) can attempt to shred the target's soul, although it might not do so in one invasion, maybe preferring, or perhaps being directed, to take its time. When the creature uses this ability, it attacks the target - use the prey's waking world statistics - with its talons. It must successfully score a hit in order to shred the soul. If it hits, it deals 1d4 points of Charisma damage but no physical damage. (The physical body of the dreamer convulses when this damage is dealt, a sure sign that he is being assaulted.) A dreamer's heart stops the instant his Charisma drops to zero, and he dies, his sleeping body torn into fragments that do not stop screaming.. Should he survive, the victim recovers this ability score damage at the normal rate.

Each point of Charisma damage that the dream tearer deals grants it five temporary hit points.

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### **The Dreaming Realm**

The tearers live in the Dreaming Realm. This is, for the most part, a vague and insubstantial plane of existence that connects the dreams of individual people. Sleeping characters always enter these realms, whether they are aware of it or not, when they enter REM sleep. For game purposes, treat dreaming as if it were astral projection, with the limitation

that every person has their own closed 'dream plane' that others cannot enter. This appears as a bubble blown in the matter of dreaming space. A person with the Lucid Dreaming feat (see below) can alter the features of his or her own dream plane voluntarily.

A given dreamer's plane is populated with images drawn from his or her life, which appear as solid objects, both to the sleeper and to any other entity in the bubble.

The dream tearer is one of the only creatures that can cause actual harm from within a dream, otherwise, characters who suffer damage from dream sources lose "dream" hit points, and wake with a start when these drop to zero. Once woken they cannot enter REM sleep again for an hour; when they do, their dreaming bodies are at full hit points once again.

Entering other people's dreams is dangerous and very difficult. Special scientific equipment or occult rituals are needed to achieve this, so the process varies according to the magical and scientific realities of the campaign world. Should entering dreams be possible, the intruders cannot alter the plane's features. Only the dreamer himself can do this.

#### **The Caul of Ninghizidda**

It is possible to force a dream tearer to manifest in the physical world. A ritual called the Caul of Ninghizidda draws the creature forth and forces tangible form upon it, wrapping it in a 'caul' or membrane of ectoplasmic matter. When the dream tearer is rendered solid, can be attacked and killed. Once dead in the real world, it is gone completely it does not reform in the Dreaming Realm.

The ritual requires certain objects: a portion of the amniotic sac of a stillborn child, a net woven from human hair, dragon's blood incense, and a piece of snowflake obsidian.

To perform the ritual correctly, the practitioner must have access to the text

and the proper implements and make a Knowledge (occult) skill check (DC 20). The practitioner must also have spent at least six hours purifying and preparing the room where the ritual is to take place. The victim does not have to be present for these preliminaries, although the Caul of Ninghizidda must take place over his sleeping body, when the tell-tale convulsions show that the dream tearer is assaulting it.

The ritual proper takes one full-round action to complete. If the skill check is successful, the dream tearer manifests in the physical world, with strands of ectoplasmic goo trailing from it. The creature is not visible in the material world except where this whitish-gray webbed matter clings to it, so a manifested dream tearer is like an incomplete, ghostly nightmare. Observers can see parts of its body but not the whole, which is probably just as well...

A manifested dream tearer cannot use its Soul Shred ability but it is both able and eager to tear the bodies of those present into pieces instead. Attempting to exorcise a person who is the victim of a dream tearer is a very dangerous business.

#### **New Feat: Lucid Dreaming**

**Prerequisites: Charisma 13+**

A character with this feat can attempt to alter details of a dream. This involves either introducing, changing or removing a dream element. For example, a lucid dreamer might introduce a huge oak tree, change a dragon into his grandmother or cause a high wall to dissolve away.

A Charisma ability score check is needed to work any of these alterations. The DC of this check depends on the dream element's own ability to work changes in the environment or its use value as a tool. For example, a flower has very little effect on its surroundings, so it is easy to create. A sword, chainsaw or motor vehicle can work significant changes, a club-wielding giant, medical scanner or ten-foot thick wall, even more so.

As a rule, any kind of technology works in the Dreaming Realm unless its object is information retrieval. Nothing you can voluntarily dream of can tell you something you did not know already: they can offer inspiration based on existing thoughts and concept. You cannot deliberately be inspired with new information by a dream.

What an object looks like is really immaterial; what it does is important. You could therefore dream up a gun, a locomotive, a matter transporter or even an atomic bomb but not a technical genius who told you how to build an atomic bomb in the real world or a magic crystal ball that told you where your enemies were hiding.

Dreamers can introduce wildly incongruous elements, if they choose. There is nothing to stop a dreamer who is floundering in the sea from being rescued by a World War I biplane, which then flies through a hyperspace portal and lands on the head of a gigantic robot made from children's building blocks. The GM has a free hand to introduce new dream elements or to think up new outcomes for failed attempts to alter dreams.

#### Typical Dreaming Check DCs

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Item Significance	DC
Insignificant element (bag of potato chips, lit cigarette)	10
Moderately significant element (fence, shield, shallow ditch)	15
Majorly significant element (rifle, burning fire, airplane)	20
Massively significant element (city, earthquake, missile)	25

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# The Drowner



## Spirit of Dark Water

The mid-1970s were great days for the British public information film. These short broadcasts were intended to drive home the dangers of play in unsafe places: too near electricity pylons, inside abandoned fridges or on working farms. They were often deliberately terrifying, so that the young audience would remember the lesson. Children were shown being crushed by runaway tractors, suffocated inside refrigerators and electrocuted on power lines, with the final scene often depicting a funeral, weeping parents or an empty coat flapping in the breeze.

One such film achieved a notoriety all its own. It was called *The Spirit of Dark Water* and was supposed to scare children away from dangerous ponds. Shot like a horror film, it showed a dark shape that gloated over the children it had lured to death.

The piece did its work too well; while it certainly frightened the children away from standing water, they suffered nightmares for days after they saw it. Parents complained, and the authorities quickly pulled the item from the broadcast schedule. It was replaced by a less disturbing film called simply *Lonely Water*, starring Donald Pleasence. Today, adults who watched the original film as children discuss it on Internet forums dedicated to TV nostalgia, and shudder. Clips of the broadcast are extremely rare.

Urban legend, for once correctly, has it that *The Spirit of Dark Water's* writer was a man by the name of Nick Rowley. Rowley is, of course, better known as the Windermere Drowner, the man tried in 1976 for drowning children near his lakeside home.

Naturally, the urban legend is that Rowley's name on the film's credits was hastily changed following his arrest, so that associations with a child-killer would not mar the film. (Of course, public information films don't have credits, giving the story less credence.) Lurid speculation depicts Rowley identifying himself with the child-drowning spectre of *Spirit of Dark Water* and relishing the thought of children across the country going to bed terrified by this image of him.

Rowley, who is still alive, has always protested his innocence. He has privately claimed that the rumors are true and that he did indeed write the script for the film, but insists that he did so to warn children of the real dangers. On this point he becomes irrational, still exhibiting the insanity that had him transferred to a secure mental hospital some months after his conviction for murder: Rowley claims that 'they' drowned the children, not he.

Rowley described the events before a shocked courtroom. It was always the same. The child approached the water's edge slowly, curious, as if it were something fascinating. Sometimes there would be two or three children together, approaching the lake on a dare.

From his window, Rowley watched, helpless, as 'pale dead things' swam up through the lake, like bodies bobbing to the surface.

Too frightened to scream out a warning, unable to turn away, he bit his knuckles and watched them hold out bony arms to the children, who would hesitate, as if unsure what to do next. Was it safe? Rowley prayed for them to turn away.

Rowley's silent prayers were never answered. Always, the children would begin to wade into the water, holding out their arms for balance, as if they were paddling in the sea. The white forms drew close. Then, in an instant, they and the child were gone, gulped down by the black water, with only ripples left behind.

Rowley rocked back and forth, wept and wailed. Sometimes, he would walk down to the lakeshore and look at the little footprints, then carefully smooth them over with his foot. That way, it was easier to pretend that it had never happened. If a visitor had not seen Rowley doing this, he would never have been caught and arrested. The immediate assumption was that he was destroying evidence of a struggle.

The lake was, of course, dredged for remains. What came up was incomplete. Enough was recovered for the missing children to be identified, though a good deal of the bodies remained missing.

Rowley was found responsible for the death by drowning of no less than five local children, whose partial remains were laid to rest in a ceremony of remembrance. Bones from five other bodies unexpectedly discovered when the lake was dredged, were never identified, nor was their death attributed to Rowley. It was assumed

that they had drowned by misadventure. Although the discovery of a Roman brooch among these remains has caused speculation that some of the bones are many centuries old, no firm archaeological opinion has yet been expressed either way.

The myth of Spirit of Dark Water continues to grow. If we believe Rowley's claim to be the author, what were his intentions? Was the spectre in the film a glorified image of himself or a depiction of some water-horror in which he seriously believed?

All that is certain is that children are dead.

Rowley is now in Park Lane mental hospital; the authorities transferred him there when the tabloids got bored and stopped writing about his cushy life in solitary confinement; his house is a collapsed ruin.

Now, although Rowley is securely locked away, it appears that the nightmare is beginning again; little Michael Morris, who had often told his friends that he was going to go and see the 'nutter house' by the lake, has not been seen for two weeks. Two days ago, Mandy Cateshall, 14, never met the boyfriend she had arranged to see. The community is living in terror of a copycat killer. Its oldest members, who now suspect Rowley is innocent, fear something far worse.

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### All That Remains

The body of a person who has died at the hands of the drowners is rarely recovered complete; dredging will yield a reasonably intact torso, perhaps a skull and a detached jaw, and a collection of limb bones. Astute pathologists might find the torso particularly interesting; ordinarily, unless a killer has taken special precautions such as weighting or slitting, both of which leave physical evidence, a drowned body returns to the surface for a few hours, made buoyant by the gases produced during decomposition; it sinks again when they dissipate. Not so with the drowners' victims: the creatures keep the remains as far below the surface as they can, tearing off entire limbs to carry to their own lairs, where they feast, chewing the flesh from the bones. It is thus extremely unlikely that the body will ever reach the surface, or that the body of a person who has died at the hands of drowners will be recovered complete. It is a minor incongruity, often overlooked when a specialist assembles the fragmentary, dismembered remains, but a particularly astute practitioner who is examining the dredged-up body of a victim might wonder why it is that a body with an intact torso that shows no signs of having been weighted down should never have risen to the surface.

### Game Statistics: Medium Outsider

**Hit Dice:** 6d12+6 (42 hp)  
**Initiative:** +1 (Dex)  
**Speed:** Swim 60 ft.  
**Defence:** 15 (+1 Dex, +4 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 14  
**Base Attack/Grapple:** +3/+10  
**Attack:** Slam +6 melee (1d4+4)  
**Full Attack:** Slam +6 melee (1d4+4)  
**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.  
**Special Attacks:** Chill Grasp, Captivating Gaze, Terrible Cramp  
**Special Qualities:** Waterbound, Water's Gravity  
**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +7  
**Abilities:** Str 17, Dex 13, Con -, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 15  
**Skills:** Hide +10, Listen +9, Spot +9, Swim +12  
**Feats:** Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Improved Grapple<sup>b</sup>, Toughness  
**Challenge Rating:** 7  
**Horror:** Fear 15

The drowners are water spirits, not fay, and not undead. They prey on the living, transfixing their victims and then dragging them down into the depths to feast upon them. They inhabit deep tarns and old marshes places children are warned not to visit, and appear as

the naked corpses of their most recent victims. Their skin is semi-transparent, pearlescent, with the pale bones and putrefying musculature visible beneath the cloudy surface.

Drowners can be found anywhere that the water is deep, dark, and cold. They may never leave while the waters are still there. If a marsh were drained or a pond dredged, then their existence might come to an end... but then again...

**Captivating Gaze (Su):** A drowner's empty eyes, like some dragging vacuum, draw warm and living creatures into the cold, dark abyss of water. Once you meet the gaze of a drowner, it is next to impossible to overcome the urge to let go of the world and dive down to where it is eternally cool and peaceful.

Those who are subjected to a drowner's dread gaze (see the rules regarding gaze attacks in Core Rulebook III) must make Will saving throws (DC 15) or become captivated. The save DC is Charisma-based. Captivated victims walk as directly toward the drowner as is possible, and can take no actions other than to defend themselves. Thus, a character cannot run away or attack but takes no defensive penalties, and will enter the water without a thought. Once they are under the surface, they begin to drown. As they are not holding their breath, they begin to drown immediately. See the drowning rules in Core Rulebook II.

A drowner can only captivate one creature at a time. Note that captivation can override Terrible Cramp; a victim who is paralyzed can be freed to move if the creature wishes to draw him in.

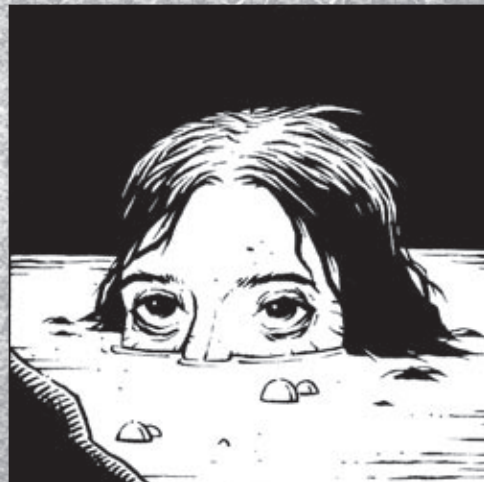
**Chill Grasp (Su):** The touch of a drowner is icy cold and enervating. A drowner can make a Chill Grasp attack as a single attack action; if it hits, it deals 2d4 points of Strength ability damage as well as hit point damage. The creature can use this ability a number of times per day equal to its Charisma ability score bonus, with a minimum of one use.

**Terrible Cramp (Su):** The very presence of a drowner is enough to cause the blood to run cold in a living body. A person exposed to this aura is stricken with paralysis, like the cramp that afflicts a person who has gone swimming in icy water. Any person coming within 30 feet of the drowner must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 15) or be paralyzed for 1d6+1 rounds. The saving throw is Charisma-based. This ability is always on; the monster does not have to concentrate to activate it. Any character who successfully saves against the effect cannot be affected by the same drowner's terrible cramp for 24 hours.

If the person is in water when he is exposed to the drowner's terrible cramp ability, the DC of the saving throw is raised by 2.

**Waterbound:** A drowner cannot leave water. So long as some part of its body remains in contact with water, it can still manifest. If it is removed from water, it disintegrates into pale grey slush.

**Water's Gravity (Su):** A drowner is the embodiment of treacherous currents that drag floundering swimmers down to their doom. When a target is in contact with water (such as when the target is immersed, swimming, or even standing ankle-deep) then the drowner gains a +4 circumstance bonus on any grapple checks made against the target. Drowners rarely grab their victims, preferring to entice them into the water.



# Feral Drowner





*Tell us a story, Mrs O'Connell!*

You always want stories. I'm a tired old woman. Let me alone.

*But it's time for a story! I'm boooored!*

And why should you be bored, now, with all these lovely toys about you? People have spent a lot of money on those. You might be more grateful.

*I don't care. I'm bored of them now. I want a story.*

Don't care was made to care. I think you, young sir, and you, young madam, should be sent straight to bed.

*If you don't tell me a good story I'll scream, and I'll tell Father you hit me.*

Oh, will you now, Miss? That's a wicked thing to threaten your poor nanny with. Why, it's blackmail, so it is.

*You'll be put out of the house and he won't give you a reference, and you'll have to go back to Ireland, and you'll be poor and have to eat grass.*

And what would you know about what we eat in Ireland?

*You only eat potatoes!*

And I suppose you'd know all about it, would you? I'd sooner eat a nice, fat, wicked little girl than eat a mouldy old potato. I'd gobble you all up like a pooka would.

*Like a what?*

Never mind. Some things you're best not knowing.

*Oh, pleeease tell us a story.*

Very well. Since you are both wicked children, you shall have a wicked story.

*Hurray!*

Now, let me see, how does it begin. Oh, yes. Once upon a time, there was a woman of Rossccommon, and this woman lived by a deep lake. At the bottom of the lake there was a pooka.

*Oh, tell us what a pooka is! You have to! There's one in the story!*

I was coming to that. A pooka has horns like a goat and smells like the oldest, rottenest bog in the world. This pooka was very old. He had been there since before Saint Patrick came and drove all the evil things away. He hid away at the bottom of the lake and Saint Patrick never found him.

Now, this woman was a wicked gossip and told many lies about people. She loved nothing more than the sound of wagging tongues, telling some filthy lie or other. So long as she had something bad to say about someone, her black heart was happy.

One day, she told lies about a young woman of the village. She said the young woman was working

witchcraft, because she was so well loved by the young men. She called her many other bad names, too, that I won't repeat. Names you don't give a decent woman. It was jealousy, so it was, and she had no right to go calling anyone a whore.

Well then, said the young woman, if I am going to be called a witch, then I shall act the part.

And she went to the lake shore, where the woman lived, and she called three times, *pwca pwca wak thysel*, which is how you wake up a pooka. I oughtn't to be saying the words out loud, but if a pooka comes and carries you off tonight, it'll be no less than you deserve. So, she said the words and then she waited. Then there was a horrible smell and the water boiled up and the witch-woman ran back to watch. Out of the water the pooka came.

*I don't like this story!*

Oh dear. Shall I stop, then?

*... no... tell us what happened next...*

Oh, I'll tell you what happened right enough. It went into the house and it found Aisling Farrell, the lying bitch that she was, and it grabbed her in its arms and ripped her clothes to pieces with its big hands. Then it had her on the floor, and oh! didn't I laugh at it! oh, to hear her screaming! And do you know what it did then, children? It took her by the hair, and it dragged her like a hunter dragging a hare, all the way to the edge of the water, and she bumped along the stones and her bones went crickety-crack! And still she was keepin' it up with the moaning! Still alive, she was, after all that! Right by me it went, and didn't it smell awful? Like a bucket of muck pulled up from the marsh where the old wives chuck out the slops. Down went Aisling Farrell, down ye go and fare thee well, and all her screams went to bubbles, and that was the end of her, and they never ever knew what happened. Her tidy kitchen was black with mud.

They never found her, children. Nobody knows to this day. Nobody will care, neither, if I tell a couple of spoiled brats the truth.

There's a story for yeh, ye wee shites. Why, look at the time. Lights out, now, and no talking. Goodnight, Miss Amy. Goodnight, Master Russell. Sleep tight.

*Secret taping by the parents of Amy and Russell Edwin. Mrs O'Connell was dismissed without notice, and the matter referred to the police.*

### All That Remains

Feral drowner victims rarely come to light. When they do, they are horribly mangled and decomposed from many days spent underwater. The water damage to the body obliterates a large amount of forensic evidence, though some can still be retrieved. The body, whether male or female, shows signs of violent sexual assault. Combing through the pubic hair reveals coarse, wiry hairs tangled therein, which forensic analysis identifies as a goat's. There is no sign of human bodily fluids, but the thick slime found in the ravaged orifices, has goat DNA. The cause of death is always drowning, rather than the physical battering that came before the victim's submersion.

The marks of the feral drowner's strong hands leave bruises that clearly show the victim has been physically assaulted. Most of the bruises the creature leaves are on the arms or legs, which, pathologists can infer, shows where the assailant's handholds were when it hauled its victim into the water.

### Game Statistics: Large Monstrous Humanoid

**Hit Dice:** 12d8+48

**Initiative:** +1 (Dex)

**Speed:** Swim 60 ft.

**Defence:** 19 (+1 Dex, +9 natural, -1 size)

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +11/+23

**Attack:** Gore +20 melee (1d8+7)

**Full Attack:** 2 claws +17 melee (1d6+3) and gore +20 melee (1d8+7)

**Space/Reach:** 10 ft. / 10 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Ancient Musk, Derive Power, Drown, Oppressive Legend

**Special Qualities:** Amphibious, Horrific +4

**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref +8, Will +8

**Abilities:** Str 25, Dex 13, Con 19, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 21

**Skills:** Climb +13, Intimidate +11, Jump +13, Swim +13

**Feats:** Ability Focus (Oppressive Legend), Cleave, Improved Grapple<sup>b</sup>, Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (Gore),

**Challenge Rating:** 12

**Horror:** Fear 21, Panic 25

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The feral drowners are long-lived, bestial creatures, apparently hybrids of men and goats. Their attack differs greatly from the more common drowner; they physically assault and often violate the victim physically the victim during the drowning.

These creatures are incredibly strong; they have an ancient aura of power that hangs over them. The feral drowners smell foul, yet this stench only becomes apparent upon the moment of their attack.

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**Amphibious (Ex):** A feral drowner can live in water as easily as air.

**Ancient Musk (Ex):** A feral drowner exudes a stink that words simply cannot describe. The only way to replicate it would be to bury an old, mouldy goatskin in reedy mud for a couple of weeks; even this would not have the suffocating tang of sweat that the thing gives off.

Any living creature within 10 feet must succeed on a DC 20 Fortitude save or be nauseated for as long as it remains within the affected area and for 1d4 rounds afterward. Creatures that successfully save are sickened for as long as they remain in the area. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same feral drowner's ancient musk for 24 hours. The save DC is Constitution-based.

**Derive Power (Su):** Feral drowners can actually increase their own power by feeding on the psychological horror they force their victim to endure. The more terrified their victims are, the more energy the monster can generate.

For every creature that the feral drowner causes to be either afraid or in extreme discomfort (such as from the sexual assault) the horror gains a +1 enhancement bonus to Strength and Constitution, to a maximum enhancement bonus of +5. This bonus (and any temporary hit points that result from it) lasts for 24 hours. Individual creatures that are especially terrified may, at

the GM's discretion, confer a higher enhancement bonus to the feral drowner.

**Drown (Ex):** A feral drowner who successfully pins an opponent while they are both in at least three feet of water can hold the opponent under water, keeping him from breathing. If the opponent breaks the pin, then he may be able to fill his lungs again. If he is standing on solid ground and is only partly immersed in water, then he does not need to take any action in order to breathe. If he is on the surface but there is no solid ground beneath his feet, then he must make a Swim check (DC 10) as a free action in order to breathe; failure means that he cannot breathe this turn. If he is under the surface, then he must first swim to the surface or to a source of air if he can before he can breathe again.

Feral drowners are extremely good at diving down with victims in their grasp. A feral drowner who is grappling an opponent can swim up to half its movement rate without breaking the grapple, if it can succeed at a Swim check (DC 15). If it

fails the check, the opponent is entitled to make an opposed Grapple check (or an Escape Artist check, if preferred) as a free action in order to break the grapple.

**Horrific:** The goatish hybrids terrify many of their opponents, so their Panic save DCs increased by +4.

**Oppressive Legend (Ex):** People are somehow, perhaps instinctively, frightened of feral drowners - they are reminiscent of medieval and pop culture depictions of the devil, after all. Whatever the reason, when a one of them rises from the waters and bellows, opponents within 30 feet must make a Will saving throw (DC 23) or become frightened for 5d6 rounds. This saving throw is Charisma-based. This ability affects only opponents with fewer Hit Dice or levels than the feral drowner has. An opponent that succeeds on the saving throw is immune to that same feral drowner's oppressive legend ability for 24 hours. Oppressive legend is a mind-affecting fear effect.

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# Kooks



They first appeared in the late 60s; the 'Summer of Love' was dying out and a new, darker season was beginning. It was time to play. It was the time of the kooks.

The kooks are small, malicious entities that resemble horribly disfigured children. Their eyes are pitch black, reduced to slit like cracks under swollen eyelids. Their mouths are contorted into hideous leering grins that stretch from ear to ear. If a kook is happy or excited it grinds and gnashes its sharp, miniscule fangs.

The kooks prey on children. They always choose a lonely and ostracized victim; one who is bored, frustrated and in need of friendship. The child's cries for companionship are answered slowly, and quietly...

Kooks commence their hunt on the first day of summer. They listen intently for the cries of help echoing around and are drawn to ones they feel are the most profound. At first the kooks are little more than a whisper in the woods that reaches out to the child's bedroom window. If she hears their calling, the victim is drawn to them inexplicably. The first call of the kooks only comes during daylight hours; it is not the time to draw the attention of adults.

The child may spend her first days of summer vacation wandering the woods in search of the friendly, laughing voices. All through this time the kooks are stalking their victim, analyzing her, probing her, looking deep inside her for what they need.

Mere moments before the child gives up her search, the kooks will appear. To the innocent child the kooks appear as nothing less than beautiful fey children, bathed in sunlight. In that single instant the child yearns to be with them, to be just like them. It is what she has always wanted.

Naturally, the kooks will oblige.

Then, the fun begins; endless summer days playing in the fields and meadows; warm, bright hours packed with jokes, games and laughter. It all seems so wonderful and timeless.

Each day that the child spends in the company of the kooks draws out longer and longer. She returns home during late afternoon at first, then as the kooks' work begins in earnest, it gets later, and later. Eventually their prey arrives back in the darkening evening, pale, exhausted yet eerily content.

By now, even the most neglectful parents are becoming concerned. At first they were happy that their little angel had found new friends, these... kooks, is that what she called them? It was strange; how come she had never brought them home with her?

Then, one day, their child doesn't come home at all and they panic. The unnaturally long, hot summer is ending. The skies cloud over slate gray. A chilling breeze picks up in an alarmed community where an innocent child has gone missing.

More often than not, the child is never seen again; she vanishes without trace. Only the most determined parent will discover the terrible truth of the kooks.

The father searches the woods frantically all night until dawn; and then he finds them, his daughter's two best friends, and he screams. His little angel has her back turned to him, he calls for her to come home, but she can't, not now.

She turns her grossly distorted head and looks at him with narrow black eyes. She doesn't want her daddy anymore. She's a kook.

All that will ever be found is her father's remains, a terrible, shredded mess. The police think rabid dogs did it; only animals could do that to a man.

The summer is over, and the kooks are little more than a name to chill those left behind.

### All That Remains

The victims of kook attacks are ravaged by multiple bites, and some of the tooth marks could be mistaken for a dog's. The flesh is viciously torn away from the bone and the throat is always bitten out. It is evident to a forensic pathologist that multiple assailants attacked the victim at once, since the deceased suffered many bites within a short space of time while still alive. None of the corpse appears to have been consumed and torn-off chunks of it can be found in the area around the body. Kooks rip out the flesh of their victims, but they do not swallow it; they subsist wholly on the vital energies of children.

### Game Statistics: Small Fey

**Hit Dice:** 3d6 (9hp)

**Initiative:** +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

**Speed:** 20 ft.

**Defense:** 14 (+1 size, +3 Dex), touch 14, flat-footed 11

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +1/-3

**Attack:** Bite +5 melee (1d4)

**Full Attack:** Bite +5 melee (1d4)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Essence Drain, Radiant Haze

**Special Qualities:** Lust For Life

**Saves:** Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +5

**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 19

**Skills:** Climb +6, Escape Artist +9, Hide +9, Jump +6, Listen +9, Move Silently +9, Spot +8

**Feats:** Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse

**Challenge Rating:** 3

**Horror:** Panic 15

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The kooks always arrive on the outskirts of a town upon the first day of summer. They always travel in groups of two to four, and only ever target one child, just enough to sustain them until next season when they start all over again. They may need to spend some time searching for a

suitable candidate.

They need the child's essence in order to survive. Once they have lulled her into playing with them, they begin to drain her. This process is conducted over a period of a month. It is a slow cycle during which the child and her hunters will play games, build hiding places and roam the woods (or other areas, such as deserted building sites or city streets) beyond the detection of her parents, or any other adults for that matter.

The child-victim spends a little more time with the kooks each day and grows paler and thinner the longer she is in their presence. At the end of the transformation, the child has become a fully-fledged kook, a ruthless monster that feeds on the essence of other children.

The kooks then disappear without trace.

People who have passed through puberty and thus are no longer children can see the kooks in their true form. The kooks cannot afford to have their feeding cycle ruined and they will attack and kill anyone who sees them for what they truly are.

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**Radiant Haze (Su):** This is an illusion the kooks use to deceive the child they are hunting. Radiant Haze creates an aura of beauty and enjoyment. The sky is bluer; the sun seems warmer and the smell of a soft breeze on the grass take on a euphoric quality. The kooks appear as stunning, angelic children, radiating love and friendship. The kooks do not have to concentrate to maintain this illusion.

A child caught under the spell is completely enthralled, and the effects of the glamour will not subside unless the kooks are banished or destroyed. Radiant Haze has no effect on post-pubertal targets or on younger children who have lost their childlike innocence.

All children who meet a kook must make a Will saving throw against this illusion (DC 15) or be enthralled. The saving throw DC is Charisma-based. This enchantment makes the child regard the kook as

its trusted friend; treat the victim's attitude to the kook as friendly. If the child has some reason to fear the kook, such as the urgent warnings of an adult who can see it for what it really is, it receives a +5 bonus on its saving throw. A child is only considered to be under the enthralling influence of one particular kook, even if they are more in the group. Killing that kook destroys the illusion.

Radiant haze does not enable the kooks to control the enthralled children as if they were puppets, but the child does perceive the kook's words and actions in the most favorable way. The kook can try to give the child specific instructions, such as 'go and steal your daddy's house key,' but it must win an opposed Charisma check to convince the child to do anything that it would not ordinarily do. Retries are not allowed. An enthralled child never obeys suicidal or obviously harmful instructions, but the kooks might convince it that something very dangerous is worth doing, such as walking on the edge of a high building.

Any act taken by the kooks that threatens the child overtly breaks the radiant haze effect.

**Essence Drain (Su):** This vicious ability allows the kook to drain the living essence from his victim and sustain its own existence. The target is always a child. A kook must spend at least a week in the company of the child (daytime company is sufficient) before it can attempt to drain her essence. It does this simply by making a touch attack. The touch of the kook drains 1d4 points of Charisma, which cannot be regained unless the kook is destroyed or leaves at the end of summer without having drained the child completely. The kook gains five temporary hit points per point drained. Once this takes place, it cannot drain her again until it has spent another week in her company. Note that as the child's Charisma is drained steadily away, she becomes more susceptible to the kook's suggestions.

It usually takes a kook about a month and a half to drain the victim, meaning

that she is totally drained by the end of summer. Once the last point of Charisma is drained the final transition occurs and is the transformation into a kook, who then joins its companions and then fades out until next summer.

The final transition of Essence Drain cannot be reversed. Once a child has become a kook, she is lost.

**Lust For Life (Su):** If the kooks are discovered before they have finished converting their victim into another kook, they summon the lust for life to slaughter their opponents. Lust for life allows the kook to temporarily increase its physical abilities. While this lust lasts, the kook gains a +4 enhancement bonus to Strength and Constitution. The gums peel back from its tiny fangs, which elongate; this increases the damage of its bite attack to 1d6. This effect lasts for 10 rounds. A typical kook under the influence of Lust for Life has the following changes to its attributes:

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**+6 temporary hit points**

**Base Attack/Grapple: +1/-1**

**Attack: Bite +5 melee (1d6+3)**

**Full Attack: Bite +5 melee (1d6+3)**  
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This is a powerful ability, which exhausts the kook when the effects ebb. The kook must kill its opponent while the ability is active, as it is very vulnerable when Lust For Life wears off. It is fatigued, suffers a -2 penalty to Strength and Dexterity and cannot charge or run.

# The Man at the Bar



Guys, it was three years ago. I can't remember which bar it was. Jesus, I can't even remember what the guy looked like. I just needed to talk to someone and he was there.

It was the kind of conversation when you don't even know how badly you needed to talk until you start. We were both sat at the bar, staring into our beers. You know how guys are when they're sat side by side and they don't know each other. You screen the other fellow out, like when you're taking a piss in the same urinal. Only, this time it was different. He glanced at me and I glanced back, and something clicked. A line from Billy Joel fell into my head and before I knew it, I'd spoken it aloud.

'And they're sharing a drink they call loneliness...'

'... but it's better than drinking alone,' he finished, and grinned. 'You know what most people never figure out about that song?' He waited for an answer, eyebrows arched.

When he saw that I didn't know, he ground out his cigarette carefully and turned around on the bar stool, facing me.

'Here's what it is. Everyone thinks it's all about compassion, like, he's the Piano Man and he makes these screw-ups feel better about their lives, right? But it ain't a compassionate song. It's all about self-pity. The guy who's singing it, he's a bigger tragedy than any of them. You got to remember that it's not famous Billy Joel who's singing that song, it's just Bill the Piano Man. He's got talent; he knows he does. He can really play. But is he playing to a stadium? Is he cutting a record deal? No way. He's playing in some cruddy bar, to the same faces every week. It's killing him one day at a time, and he's really feeling it.

'That's why the microphone smells like



a beer. You remember that line? It's his own beer he can smell on the mike. He's just another washed-up act who never made the most of his potential. That's what it's really about. That's the guy Billy Joel would have been, if he hadn't a been a success.'

It was mean, but it made sense. 'So that's why they say "man, what are you doing here?"'

'You got it. A guy who can play that good, he oughta be somewhere bigger. What's he doing in a shit hole like this? That's why the song works. It's all about shoulda, coulda, woulda. It all leads to the same conclusion.'

'What's that?'

'Have another beer and forget about it.' He winked.

I held out my hand. 'Michael. Michael Stewart.'

'John,' he said, shaking it. 'John Doe.'

I laughed. 'Whatever. Suit yourself. I won't pry.'

'Nobody believes me,' he said with a shrug. He sparked up another smoke. 'So what's your trade, Mike?'

This is the part where I usually lie. This time, I didn't. It was weighing on my mind. 'I'm in the adult movie business.'

'You makeporno.' It wasn't a question.

I sighed. 'Yeah. I make soft porn.' I waited for the Comment. Every single guy who finds out what I do for a living makes the Comment, every single damn one. They all ask me how they can get into the industry, and they always do it in that I'm-just-goofing-around-but-maybe-I-ain't kind of a way. Some drop a few names - Monica Sweetheart, Jade Marcella - and ask if I 'get to' work with them.

The guy didn't come up with the Comment. He frowned. 'Hell. A man does that for a living, it's going to eat away at his soul a bite at a time.'

It was like when you put your tongue on a sore tooth. You push right on the spot and there's pain, but you relish the pain because it's right on the spot, you know what I mean? Most guys would love to point a camera at naked chicks for eight, ten, twelve hours a day and watch them get busy. Most guys would think it would be the job from heaven. Let me tell you, it's not.

The novelty wears off real quick. After a while it's just bodies.

He put his hand on my shoulder. 'A man with that kind of a livelihood, well, he ain't going to have children. Not that can look him in the face, anyhow. How in hell are they going to go to school with the other kids all knowin' about how daddy makes titty flicks to put food on the table?'

Right there it started to get hazy. I lost track of time, the way you do. All I could think about was what this guy was saying to me.

'If I was you, Michael, I'd be thankful that I don't have children. It's a mercy, that's what it is. A mercy.'

'Why, I reckon you don't have much of a relationship with that girlfriend of yours either, do you? Not your fault, man. I mean, how could you? You weren't lookin' for anything lasting.'

'Men who date porn stars aren't after the conversation, now, are they? Just as well she's good at what she does. Hey, let me buy you another. Reckon you could use it.'

He kept on talking like that. He knew things. Everything he said cut me to the bone.

Every time, more beer washed away the fresh blood in my brain. I could feel his hand heavy on my back.

'Yeah, sure you could have been a contender. Who couldn't? But you weren't a contender, Mike. You just went from one thing to another. Now look at you.

'You remember what you wanted to be when you were sixteen, don't you? Of course you do. We never forget. You just never made it. What would your sixteen-year-old self say to you now? I think I know. I think you know, too.'

You'll be wondering how it is that I let him say all that to me. It didn't make me mad, that's the thing. It all just went straight in, straight to the heart. All I could think was, thank God, thank God someone knows how much of a mess I've made of my life. He's not telling me to be strong or turn my life around or nothing. He was just telling me to give up. And you know, I did.

What he was saying was true. Carla was just a doll with silicon tits, a bed-warmer. I was a forty-five year old guy who earned a living by making movies of people fucking. There wasn't a whole lot to a life like that.

'Have another beer. It dulls the pain. Have another beer. ANOTHER BEER.'

My head was on the bar in a puddle of my own tears. There wasn't anything more to say. I was dying and I didn't care.

I woke up to the smell of coffee, in Carla's apartment. She'd made breakfast.

I just grabbed a hold of her and hugged her like I'd never let her go. She was surprised but she held me and heard me out when I said I was going to change and make it all better and give up the business. When I was sane again, she told me she'd gotten worried that I was out so late and had come to find me. I was at the bar, alone, out cold, an empty stool next to me.

'Your face felt so cold, hon,' she said. 'I thought you were dead.'

So, you know the rest. You were all at the wedding, and the kids are growing up just fine. All's well that ends well, and all that.

Well, that's not quite the end of the story. I wish it was.

See, they found a guy dead in a bar that night. A different bar, in the same part of the city. The body was just sunk down across the bar top, his head in a pool of Bud, like he was sleeping off a bender. He was forty-five, same age as me. He was a cleaning product salesman, divorced. House repossessed the week before. Not much of a life. Not a mark on him, but for one little thing.

When they pulled his head up off the bar, they saw his eyes were gone. Nothing left but shriveled scraps of... stuff. It was like he'd cried his eyes right out.

I don't go drinking alone any more.

### All That Remains

There are two factors that link all victims of the Man in the Bar. They all have large quantities of alcohol in their bloodstream and they are all missing their eyes. On examination, the remnants of eyes are found to be present in the sockets, with the aqueous humor dried up completely and the eyeball collapsed. Some force must have desiccated the eyes while leaving the rest of the body's surface undamaged. The body also shows signs of massive dehydration from within. The liver, most commonly, is a flaking mass of dry papery stuff like a wasp's nest.

Forensic evidence cannot provide much more than this, unless the victim was wearing a garment that could hold fingerprints, such as a leather jacket, or vinyl trousers. If he was, investigators will find a human handprint on it, where the Man in the Bar touched the deceased. The characteristic whorled fingerprints are, however, completely absent; there are marks from fingers, but these are blank ovals with no identity in them.

### Game Statistics: Medium Humanoid

**Hit Dice:** 4d8 (18 hp)  
**Initiative:** +1 (Dex)  
**Speed:** 30 ft.  
**Defense:** 11 (+1 Dex), touch 11, flat-footed 10  
**Base Attack/Grapple:** +3/+3  
**Attack:** Knife +3 melee (1d4/19-20)  
**Full Attack:** Knife +3 melee (1d4/19-20)  
**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.  
**Special Attacks:** Captivating conversation, strip soul  
**Special Qualities:** Empathic scan  
**Saves:** Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +4  
**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 19, Wis 17, Cha 20  
**Skills:** Bluff +14, Diplomacy +14, Listen +7, Gather Information +9, Knowledge (local) +7, Intimidate +11, Sense Motive +12  
**Feats:** Persuasive, Negotiator  
**Challenge Rating:** 4  
**Horror:** Fear 17 (only when seen in true

form)

\*The Man gains a +3 insight bonus on all Bluff, Diplomacy and Sense Motive skill checks against targets within 30 feet, because of his empathic scan ability. This is included in the above skills list.

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He is simply known as the 'Man in the Bar'. It is not clear what he is; this ambiguity is his own creation and suits his purposes. He can be found in any city where there are bars, drawn to any place where alcohol is served and depressed people come to take advantage of it.

He appears to all onlookers as a tall, otherwise nondescript man, standing alone at the bar. He is typically drinking a bottle of beer and smoking a cigarette with a contented expression on his face. When PCs first encounter the Man at the Bar, they should make a Will saving throw (DC 25). On a failure, the character simply sees the Man at the Bar as he wishes to be seen. Adventurers who succeed see him as he truly is; he has no eyes, just a blank expanse in the upper part of his face. Where the GM allows psychic sensitivity, characters with that ability gain a +2 circumstance bonus on this check.

If the Man at the Bar can see the observing character's reaction, he is entitled to a Sense Motive check, opposed by the character's Bluff check (both made as free actions) to notice that someone has seen his true face. He does this by observing subtle clues, not by telepathy. A character does not, of course, need to keep his observations secret.

The Man in the Bar scans customers for the drinker with the weight of the world on his shoulders. Using his empathic scan ability (see below) he finds the person with the most bottled-up depression, who most needs a sympathetic shoulder to cry on. A moment later he will approach the drinker and strike up a conversation. This is, of course, a use of his captivating conversation ability; the target finds the discussion fascinating, though to an eavesdropper it sounds like any other

trivial exchange of views in a bar. The Man then offers to buy his target a drink.

What then follows is the Man's complete annihilation of his victim's character and nerves. The fiend exposes weaknesses, gives weight to the most insignificant worries, all the while telling the victim things about himself that he already knows, but casting them in the worst possible light. The sufferer cannot but agree and find himself slowly dying, minute by minute, as he listens to his life being taken apart.

To everyone else in the bar it simply looks like two good friends, one with his hand on the other's shoulder, plying him with drinks and gently consoling him. In reality, the Man is stripping his victim's soul, draining the poor drunk's essence, body and mind. This can take hours (see the StripSoul ability, below), and by the time the creature abandons him, his target is a dried out husk.

The Man in the Bar only has to make the simplest physical contact, like a hand on the shoulder, to form a conduit, down which he sucks out his victim's power. This can be a real battle of wills (see Strip Soul, below), but not many have resilience to stand up to this attacker's verbal barrage, especially when alcohol has made them morose. While draining his victim, the Man prefers to whisper in his ear, slowly pressing him down till he is slouched dead on the counter, looking like nothing other than a passed out drunk. Then, the Man gets up and goes. On his way down the road, he hears a scream from the bar he just left, and smiles.

Note: the Man in the Bar is not a fighter. All his attacks are mental and highly social. If PCs confront him, he will either talk his way out of the fight using his Bluff and Diplomacy skills, or if he can, scare them off with talk of power he doesn't actually possess, using his Intimidate skills. He can also use his captivating conversation ability to delay a character or lead his inquiries off track.

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**Captivating Conversation (Su):** Once the Man in the Bar starts to talk to you, it is difficult to stop listening. He has a way of putting things that is just so precise, so adroit, so keenly observed, that it makes you wonder why nobody has said them before. You just want to sit there and listen to him talk. If he talked about you, you know that what he said would be true. Even if it hurt you to hear it, it would do you good; don't they say that truth hurts?

To use this ability, the Man in the Bar must be within 10 feet of his target and able to see him. If there is something excessively noisy or dangerous going on nearby then this ability won't work. The Man can only target one person at a time with this ability.

To use the ability, the Man makes a Diplomacy check, representing the skill with which he converses with the target. His check result is the DC for the target's Will saving throw against the effect. If the target's saving throw succeeds, the Man cannot attempt to engage the target in captivating conversation again for 24 hours. If the saving throw fails, the target sits and converses with the Man, taking no other actions other than to drink when drinks are served, for as long as the Man continues to engage him in conversation.

While captivated, a target takes a -4 penalty on skill checks made as reactions, such as Listen and Spot checks. Any potential threat requires the Man to make another Diplomacy check and allows the target a new saving throw against a DC equal to the new Diplomacy check result. Any obvious threat, such as someone aiming a weapon at the target, automatically breaks the effect, as does the victim winning the opposed Charisma check associated with the Strip Soul attack. After the threat has passed, the Man may still attempt to re-engage his victim in a captivating conversation.

If a friend or ally tries to draw the affected target out of the conversation, then the target makes another Will saving throw for every round of interference. The

target will not willingly leave the Man's presence until he has made his saving throw, except in the case of an obvious threat as described above.

**Empathic Scan (Su):** The Man has powerful empathic abilities, which allow him to 'read' the emotions of people in an area. He cannot detect thoughts, only emotions. This ability is always on and does not require concentration. The insights it offers him into others' moods make him much more competent at manipulating others and analyzing their behavior. He gains a +3 insight bonus on all Bluff, Diplomacy and Sense Motive skill checks against targets within 30 feet. This is especially useful when he is using the captivating conversation ability (see above).

**Strip Soul (Su):** To use this ability, the Man must first succeed at a touch attack against the target. This is not considered to be an 'obvious threat' for the purposes of breaking captivating conversation (see above). In almost all cases, the Man simply places his hand on the target. If he successfully hits, he may then make an opposed Charisma check against his victim. If the Man wins this check, the victim gains one negative level and the Man gains five temporary hit points, which last for a maximum of 24 hours. If the

victim wins, then the strip soul attempt fails. Once the Man has made a Strip Soul attempt, he cannot make another for 1d4x10 minutes. If the victim gains as many negative levels as he has levels of experience, then he dies.

An opponent who gains a negative level takes a -1 penalty on all skill checks and ability checks, attack rolls and saving throws and loses one effective level or Hit Die (whenever level is used in a die roll or calculation) for each negative level.

Depending on the campaign world's cosmology, occult or religious rituals that involve the restoration of the soul, (a shamanic 'soul retrieval,' perhaps) might remove negative levels. If a negative level is not removed before 24 hours have passed, the affected character must attempt a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10). On a success, the negative level goes away with no harm to the victim. On a failure, the negative level goes away but the victim's level is also reduced by one. A separate saving throw is required for each negative level. The saving throw DC is Constitution-based.

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# Mystery Man



TKS. 0900  
RING M.

### Last entry in the weblog of Iain Masterson

I sat at the table opposite him.

The cup of coffee shook in my hands, spilling over. I had bought it to give myself something to hold on to, something nice and mundane and sensible, but it looked like muddy water and the thought of drinking it made me nauseous. I could not tell whether it was ceramic or plastic. It seemed part of an alien universe. I could not even remember if I had put sugar in it.

All around me people were talking loudly. It seemed exaggerated and therefore false. Were they doing that because they were pretending they could not see him? Their voices seemed so loud, the words so sharp. Was this all a façade? I was sick of it, sick of the unreality, of worlds peeling away like old damp wallpaper, faces dissolving while I was talking to them.

I was tired of overhearing police radios in my head, talking about me, making the fillings in my teeth hurt, filling my mouth with the taste of metal. I did not want to spend half an hour every morning finding the piece of furniture that had been moved half an inch overnight, just so that I could find it. Most of all, I did not want to feel the people watching me, only for them to turn back and pretend they were not looking before I could catch them at it.

For a while, I was tempted to tear out my eyes. I came close to obsessing over it. At least I would not have to see the faces, the graffiti spelling out my name amid obscenities, the recorded scenes on the walls of lavatories and subway tunnels played out over and over again, just for me.

It is a terrible thing to live in a relentless nightmare.

It is a far more terrible thing to become used to it.

I came so close to going mad, so many times. But I didn't let myself. I know, I just know, that nobody can ever make you insane against your will. You have to give in; then they've got you. Until you do that, you're not insane. You're a sane man fighting for his soul.

If you can keep that going for long enough, without choosing insanity – and believe me, it is more tempting than you might think – then maybe you will come to where I was then, sat opposite the puppet man, the puller of strings, the shadow behind the shadows. He's interested in the likes of me, you see. You know what children are like. They break something and then they lose interest. When something does not break, when it keeps surprising you, then you become interested. That was how I chose to play this, and now here he was. Finally. Face to face.

I looked up at him. He seemed ordinary.

Then his arms came up from under the table and I wanted to start screaming and not stop. Only some stubborn, dogged piece of me refused. I knew that part well. It was the fused lump of what used to be my heart, exposed to shock after shock, horror after horror. If I started screaming, then everyone else in the café would turn and look, and suddenly there would be nothing wrong. I would look like a lunatic. Frankly, I was unshaven and wild-haired enough to be taken for one already.

I could not look at his face, so I looked down. The fabric of his coat seemed to be made of spiders, an entangled mass of them, moving, struggling to pull themselves free. Little trapped legs waved feebly.

'Why are you doing this?' I said.

'Enough of Because,' he responded, quoting Crowley. 'Be he damned for a dog. Is it not enough that I choose you? Why are you not grateful?'

'Chose me?'

'When you were a little boy, living with your aunt in Brighton, you played a game one summer's afternoon. You probably do not remember. You called it the game of 'Blob'. It involved a piece of putty and some ants. You found it amusing to roll the ants into the putty, pretending that the Blob was engulfing them. They didn't

matter. They were only ants.'

'So you're punishing me, is that it?' In defiance, I made myself drink some of the coffee.

It was stringy and tasted wrong. It wasn't coffee. I looked.

I spat it back out. It was mostly blood. But not just blood.

My stomach kicked up at my throat and I gagged. It was a reflex. I couldn't help myself. I could hear him smiling as I clutched at my abdomen.

'No,' he said. 'This isn't punishment. It's more of an entertaining game. Like the game of Blob.'

I looked up. The table was awash with my stomach contents and the chair opposite me was empty. People near me were gasping, muttering, making noises of disgust. I was the madman in the café, the filthy, revolting tramp. They had seen nothing. They knew nothing. I looked at them all, the wet still drooling from my mouth. It was too much.

'What!' I screamed. 'What are you bastards looking at? Eh?' I flailed my arms at them. 'Stop staring at me! Just leave me alone! Just go away! Go away!'

I held my head in my hands and bent over the table.

That was when I knew he'd won. It was over.

Only one more thing to do, really. My fingers closed on the metal of the coffee spoon.

I decided to do the left eye first.

From a scrap of paper found in a park bin:

*There are two ways to beat the Man. Play his game, the Ocean Game and win, or refuse to play his game, forever. Neither works.*





## **Game Statistics**

The Mystery Man is simply a title best suited to this character for game book purposes. He will most commonly choose a title or central persona for his victim to know him by. Even this, though, is still just a mask resting on top of countless others. One can never know exactly what the truth of the creature's identity is. Nevertheless, this character is undoubtedly the most powerful creature in this book. He is not a 'monster' in the ordinary sense and game statistics are thus not given for him.

The Mystery Man is a godlike entity who targets one or all the PCs involved in an ongoing campaign. The characters will never know the Mystery Man's true intentions, other than that he wishes to destroy them utterly, body and soul, and not necessarily in that order. He never assaults any PC directly, working instead through catspaws, puppets and intermediaries.

The Mystery Man will take on a variety of forms and personas in order to achieve his ends. The PCs will be familiar with some of these. He will, for example, assume the form of a family member, but distort the character's perception of them, introducing dark and perverse elements that throw everything that seemed secure into doubt. The Mystery Man will do anything to confuse, disturb, mislead and utterly terrify the characters he has targeted. Indeed, once introduced into a game, the Mystery Man should be so pervasive that the characters will see and suspect him everywhere. He will either be leading or following them in some hellish cat and mouse game. Eventually, it will seem that every encounter, creature or situation is in some way connected to the Mystery Man.

The Mystery Man's limitations are as important as his powers. He cannot fully affect any person to whom he has not formally presented himself. For this reason, he will always reveal himself to a group of characters who he is persecuting, announcing himself as the cause of their woes, though he will not explain how he

is causing them, much less why.

One cannot destroy the Mystery Man. One can only thwart him, and even this is seldom permanent. You can only do this by disrupting his plans, which involves finding out who his agents are and confronting them.

One thing is certain about the Mystery Man; he thrives on terror. This is why he will never simply snuff out a person's life. He would rather have them descend into gibbering madness.

Sometimes the Mystery Man may even help the PCs, but if he does so, this is always connected to some complex and malicious scheme towards which he is guiding them

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**Distort Reality:** The Mystery Man is not a perfect mimic; he actually alters the environment to suit his purposes. He can, for example, recreate a time and place that one victim is familiar with and then turn everything the victim knows on its head. The victim might, for example, wake up in bed, only to find the walls pulsing and flowing, the text on newspapers melting off the page and household animals speaking to him in human voices. He cannot make any element of the environment injure the PC physically. His intention is to drive the character mad, break his grip on reality or destroy his trust in his companions. He cannot distort reality around one person for longer than 24 hours.

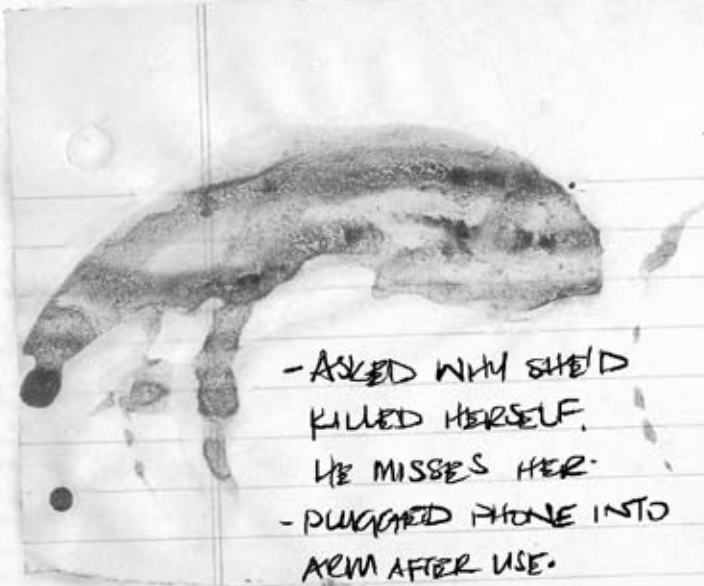
**Flawless Imitation:** The Mystery Man may take on the appearance and assume the voice of any person who he has met before, even if he spent only seconds in their company. This imitation is flawless. The only clue that it is not the real person is out-of-character behavior, which has to be noticed in-game rather than by die rolls. If a PC challenges the Mystery Man while he is impersonating a Non-PC and accuses him of being who he truly is, the PC may make a single Sense Motive skill check (DC 25). If the check is successful, the Mystery Man is recognized for who he is. He will not sustain the deception after this point, though he will not usually relinquish the form he has

assumed. The voice alone will change.

**Pull The Strings:** The Mystery Man may wholly dominate any Non-PC, reorganizing the contents of their mind. He cannot use this ability on PCs, which, of course, makes them particularly interesting to him.

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<http://www.livejournal.com/users/daver2323/>



WHAT IS THIS?

# The Organ Grinder



### Jormungandr – lost genius or just crap? Jason Ardill tells all...

The Blair Witch Project of shock rock video is *Anus Dei* by the mercifully obscure Scandinavian black metal band JORMUNGANDR. The song is the usual shrill torrent of incomprehensible gibberish with a lot of umlauts in it, punctuated by guitar torture. But it's not the song that's memorable; it's the visuals.

The video has clearly been ineptly shot and edited. No attempt has been made to synchronize what's happening on the soundtrack with the action on the screen. Most of it is a languorous art-house rolling shot of subway tunnels, trash piled up against walls and sleeping tramps. This is interspersed with images from occult books, mostly woodcuts of Satan and his witches, as if someone had held a video camera directly above an open book. At various points, heavily made-up male faces leer into the camera from a few inches away.

After several viewings, the obvious conclusion is that the video is half JORMUNGANDR prattling about in their bedroom, and half someone else's film project footage, which JORMUNGANDR just happened to come across and edit into their video.

Although – perhaps that's what we're *meant* to think? Maybe this film looks so cheap because someone spent a lot of money to make it look that way? One thing is certain. By the time the monster appears, you know damn well you're looking at a sky-high special effects budget.

It's enough to give Aphex Twin nightmares. There's no face, just a peeled back skull and something like a huge set of dentures in the middle. Industrial limbs extrude from its shoulders, tipped with whirring claws – remember, this was made *before* Trent Reznor grossed us all out with *Happiness in Slavery* – which must have taken *months* to build.

When you first see it, the thing has its back to us and is tearing up dummies filled with offal, made to look like homeless people. This part looks a little fake, because of the over-the-top blood sprays and flying body parts, and it's hard not to laugh. Then it stops, like a dog sniffing the air, and turns round. It starts to stride towards the camera.

At that point, it's not funny any more. The thing moves with a horrible lurching gait, like Sadako from *Ringu*, as if it were broken inside. I've heard that they shot it running *backwards*, then played the tape forwards to get that disturbing stop-start lurch. Of course, from that point on it's all shaky-cam running, then there's the Blair Witch ending with the camera lying on the floor. Game over, man, game over.

As rock video monsters go, it's an unsung classic. If the camera would only hold still, we would get a better idea of how it was done. It's clearly not CGI, because that kind of technology wasn't available in 1992, when the video first surfaced. *Fangoria* did a special feature on the *Anus Dei* monster and came to the conclusion that one of the JORMUNGANDR members must be a genius with latex.

The film has been the source of rabid debate among those who have seen it, because it just does not make sense. Nobody has ever heard of JORMUNGANDR. Other than that one infamous track, they do not appear to have recorded any music. So, why spend tens of thousands on a video to promote a band that does not seem to exist any more?

There's more to tell. Contrary to popular belief, the video was never screened on MTV, nor was it sent to any other stations. The first person to broadcast it was Billy Two-Four (sic) an nineteen-year-old media student, who put it out on his public access show, *Billy's Horrorday*. He claims an anonymous donor sent it to him, which has, of course, led to speculation that he made the video himself, at college. Whatever the truth behind the *Anus Dei* monster, we know this much.

No one ever hired Billy Two-Four to make any more videos.

And, the track sucks

From *Cult Rockers, Tracks that shook the World*

### All That Remains

The victims of an organ grinder are rarely identifiable, even after consulting dental records, because the creature does not simply slaughter and move on. It obliterates its kills, pulling them to pieces like a glutton eating a lobster. Multiple portions of a single victim can be discovered spread over an area of several hundred square feet.

The body is never recovered in one piece (all of it is usually at the scene unless the organ grinder has retained some ribs or a skull as a trophy). It is always reduced to fragments, by a combination of slicing and tearing. Going by the blood splatters, it is obvious that this process continued long after the victim was killed; death was probably caused by a single massive wound after which the remains were torn up and scattered. It is very difficult to ascertain which wound was the first to be inflicted.

The wounds have traces of machine oil and metal slivers in them, and the remains are mangled as if the body had fallen into heavy equipment. As there is never a wood chipper or a sugar-cane press nearby, pathologists would like to decide that the victim died elsewhere and was deposited at the site post-mortem. Unfortunately the blood dispersal argues to the contrary. Hence, investigators might conclude that persons unknown brought something big and industrial to do the deed, although the even distribution of bloodstains suggests that only the machine was present; people would have caught some of the spatters, producing shadows and footprints.

### Game Statistics: Large Aberration

**Hit Dice:** 10d8+40 (85 hp)

**Initiative:** +2 (Dex)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Defense:** 21 (+2 Dex, +10 natural, -1 size)

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +6/+17

**Attack:** Pneumatic cleaver +13 melee (2d6+8/x3) or swarf cluster +9 ranged (2d4+5)

**Full Attack:** Pneumatic cleaver +13/+8

melee (2d6+8/x3) or swarf cluster +9/+4 ranged (2d4+5)

**Space/Reach:** 10 ft. / 10 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Blood Lubricant

**Special Qualities:** Camouflage, Horrific +4, Least Action, Mechanical, Regeneration 2, Serial Number, Standing Orders Thorough, Trophies, Upgrade Construction.

**Saves:** Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +11

**Abilities:** Str 21, Dex 15, Con 19, Int 6, Wis 19, Cha 10

**Skills:** Climb +9, Hide +3, Jump +9

**Feats:** Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Sunder, Power Attack

**Challenge Rating:** 10

**Horror:** Panic 19

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The organ grinder is a ten-foot colossus, a horrendous amalgam of rotten flesh and metal. The creature has its origins in a distant, bleak plane of existence that occultists call the Outer Black, where it acts as some kind of sentry or ambush unit, as directed by its masters. A metal and organic construct, it has no volition of its own, and follows a standard operating procedure: conceal yourself in a defensible position, and await instructions; if detected, eliminate or escape enemies (as appropriate) and find a new hideout; if defeated, adapt in response. Unless it receives orders the contrary, the organ grinder does no more than butcher anyone who sees it and fails to escape, then hides, slaughtering anyone who discovers it, then moves to a new location, taking care of all hostiles, and most of the witnesses along the way.

No occultist ever deliberately calls on one of these beasts. They are instead drawn to the material realm by botched rituals. When novices try their hand at summoning - perhaps using formulae downloaded from the net - the result is most usually nothing at all. However, on occasion, magicians will get much more than they expected. The candles flicker and go out, then with a terrible din like an eighteen wheel truck crashing in slow motion, the organ grinder clambers through into reality. The celebrants are

the first to die, after which the creature runs to ground, eliminating witnesses and bystanders along the way.

Once it has disposed of its summoners, the organ grinder usually tries to hide in the subterranean depths below a city. Subway tunnels are usually too close to the surface; deep, abandoned sewers and maintenance tunnels, or disused metro stations or nuclear shelters are more to their taste.

An otherworldly killing machine, the creature needs no food or fuel and can operate indefinitely - indeed must do so, because it cannot return to the Outer Black under its own steam. Nevertheless, good soldier that it is, it prefers to sleep whenever possible and can lurk unsuspected and undetected for years. Unfortunately, should someone uncover it, the organ grinder makes a fully committed attack, and fights tenaciously, unless overmatched (fighting for five consecutive rounds without killing an opponent), in which case it tries to run away. If defeated, it regenerates and rebuilds, then improves itself, adapting so that the same method won't work on it again. Examples of how the organ grinder can modify itself through its different iterations are given below.

While a GM can use this creature as a repeating nightmare for the players and their characters, by getting worse every time it is encountered, the organ grinder is best employed sparingly; in the end, players get bored and frustrated when a campaign forces them to contend with a recurring, unstoppable killer. Nevertheless, with careful staging - research by other occultists pointing to some kind of unique identifier, accounts of botched "true name" rituals in blood-spattered work books, a lucky find while picking over an incinerated specimen - the adventurers might be able to work out how to get rid of the thing.

In case the players ever become confident that they know what to expect from an organ grinder, bear in mind that the adventurers are not the only hazards in the creature's world, so it may have

upgraded itself several times since they last met it. It might have wandered across a freeway and been smashed down by a truck, leading it to invest in additional Strength, armor or even the Improved Bull Rush feat. Nevertheless, there should also be opportunities for the PCs to guess what will turn up next; reports of bizarre traffic accidents or eccentric robberies from warehouses might give them some clues as to its new abilities, but the machine should still have a few surprises. It might not even be humanoid the next time the characters meet it; an insect-like torso and multiple legs could have replaced the body below the shoulders. Alternatively, it could have equipped itself with spikes from which the mangled bodies of the players' allies now dangle.

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**Blood Lubricant (Su):** As a machine, the organ grinder takes a while to start; it grinds and groans into action and then builds up its pace as the blood starts to fly, until it is tearing through its victims like a like a food grinder.

As soon as the creature kills an opponent, the blood lubricates its parts, allowing the monster to move more quickly than usual; the machine runs at an ever higher setting, with accompanying grinding noises and mechanical whines. So long as it continues to slaughter living beings, it remains lubricated. If five rounds pass without the organ grinder having killed an opponent, then the increased speed and efficiency subside and cannot be recovered for 10 rounds, even if the creature goes on to kill again in that time. The following apply while Blood Lubricant is in effect:

When making a full attack action, the organ grinder may make one extra attack with any weapon he is holding, including his natural weapons. The attack is made using the full base attack bonus, plus any modifiers appropriate to the situation. It does not, however, get an extra action.

A lubricated organ grinder gains a +1 bonus on attack rolls and a +1 dodge bonus to Defense and to Reflex saving throws. Any condition that makes it lose

its Dexterity bonus to Defense also makes it lose these dodge bonuses.

The organ grinder's speed increases by 30 feet. This increase counts as an enhancement bonus, and it affects the organ grinder's jumping distance as normal for increased speed.

**Camouflage (Ex):** As a stationary organ grinder looks very much like a pile of random junk, it is very well suited to concealing itself among trash, rubble and construction material. If the organ grinder is lying prone among this sort of detritus, it gains a +6 circumstance bonus to Hide checks. This bonus is negated as soon as it moves or stands up.

**Horrific:** Taken together, the organ grinder's monstrous appearance, the mechanical whines, the rotting trophies, and the stench of fresh and stale blood grant it a +4 increase to its Panic saving throw DC.

**Least Action:** The organ grinder will do as little as it must to comply with its orders. Thus, if it gets encased in something, through which its enemies cannot harm it, the beast will decide that it has successfully evaded detection and found a safe hideout. This also means that an organ grinder on the receiving end of a severe beating might choose to jump into a tar pit, or deep, newly-poured concrete. Of course, should this covering ever get chipped away, the creature's standing orders will reassert themselves.

Least Action also limits the organ grinder's upgrade ability (below); it will do the minimum possible to improve itself, hence it wouldn't work through a whole slaughterhouse, increasing its muscle



mass with bits of cow, but will stop as soon as its STR rises by one.

**Mechanical (Ex):** As a demonic machine, the organ grinder is immune to fatigue, exhaustion, ability score drain and level drain. It can sustain hard activity, such as running, continually without having to make any checks.

**Regeneration:** Damage dealt to the organ grinder is treated as non-lethal, of which it automatically heals two points per round. Only one kind of energy damage (fire, cold, sonic, electric, acid or radiation) can deal lethal damage to the organ grinder. The GM chooses which type applies before the creature is first encountered. A regenerating creature that has been rendered unconscious through non-lethal attacks can be killed with a coup de grace, using lethal damage.

**Serial Number:** Each organ grinder has a unique serial number, etched somewhere inside its chassis. Magicians can use this identifier as a true name in a dismissal ritual, and send the creature back to the Outer Black. Finding the number involves careful scrutiny of an inactive machine (Search skill, DC30; if the investigators want to take 10 or 20, they have to make Will rolls, DC 15 and 20 respectively; they can see the monster regenerating while they look, and may even have to pare back re-grown flesh). Guessing the number's significance requires Knowledge (Occult, Arcana, Planes - whatever the GM's preferred OGL rules set uses) rolls, DC 15; using it as a true name calls for a Spellcraft or Knowledge roll (as above), DC 15. Note that knowing its the serial number does not allow a mortal practitioner to give the organ grinder orders other than "go away," although it's fun to let PC magicians to find that out the hard way ...

**Standing Orders:** The Organ Grinder is a machine, a learning machine, granted, but it has strict operational parameters. Unless its master tells it to attack a specific target, all it will do is kill people who discover it, or who are a present threat to it (i.e. are hitting it), before hiding to await new orders.

If it is defeated it must improve itself, if it is losing badly, it may attempt to escape, again disposing of threats and obstacles in its way.

**Thorough:** This creature reduces its victims to strips of shredded meat. This is behavior straight from the battlefields of the Outer Black: like the organ grinder itself, most of its adversaries regenerate damage, so, when it has vanquished an opponent, the machine immediately rips it limb from limb to make sure it stays dead.

Once the organ grinder has killed a victim (see Blood Lubricant, above), it will spend 1d4 rounds tearing the body into pieces. While it is absorbed in this grisly task, bystanders have a chance to escape; the monster will not pay any attention to other opponents unless they cause direct harm to it, in which case it will roar and go after them.

**Trophies:** The organ grinder sometimes mounts pieces of its kills on its body, partly to show its masters that it is an accomplished killer, partly to scare new opponents.

**Upgrade Construction (Su):** The organ grinder can, and does upgrade itself, learning from each defeat and improving systems, so that it becomes stronger and tougher; it is almost impossible to actually destroy one of these horrors, unless the PCs have administered a lethal damage coup de grace. Of course, the characters may wrongly believe that they have successfully done so (see the description of the Regenerate ability above). In game terms, the creature gains an additional ability. It takes the organ grinder 1d4+1 days to upgrade itself. It also needs access to raw materials, such as metal and machine components, so it will raid nearby sources; perhaps stripping gear from trains in sidings, cannibalizing parts from electrical ducts or pumping stations, or even raiding scrap yards and car-crushing plants to get the pieces it needs. It may even break into factories if it requires specialized items, although, the beast commonly draws upon the objects in the near vicinity to fortify itself; for example, if the

adventurers smashed a truck into it, it might reappear with pieces of the truck embedded in its body and blazing headlights for eyes.

The type of upgrade the creature gains depends on how it was defeated last time. The primary purpose of the improvement is to do the minimum possible (see Least Action, above) to prevent the same thing from happening again. The GM should therefore choose something appropriate from the list below; for example, if it was blasted with small arms fire until it fell over, it would fit itself with armor plating, while if it was torched with multiple flamethrowers and reduced to a blackened, peeling skeleton, it would use chemicals and replacement organs to proof itself against fire. There is no limit to the number of times an organ grinder can upgrade itself, though it can only do so after it has been defeated.

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#### **Upgrades**

**Additional Hit Die:** The organ grinder gains one hit die, with associated increases to base attack bonus and other affected statistics.

**Additional Terror:** The creature uses protrusions from its body (such as barbaric spikes and tumors) and ornamentation made from the remnants of the dead to increase its fearsomeness. The DC of Will saving throws against its fear effects increases by one. The organ grinder will use this upgrade if it does not think it was able to use its derive power ability (see above) often enough, or if it believes that its opponents are getting used to its appearance.

**Attribute Increase:** This upgrade is only applied when the creature fails in a specific type of task. It increases one of its attributes by one point. For example, if it was knocked off the top of a tall building and smashed on the streets below (failed Balance check) it would increase Dexterity; if it was pinned by fallen debris that it was not strong enough to move (failed Strength check) it would increase Strength; if it failed to spot



a strike team sneaking up on it, it would increase Wisdom. It cannot increase its Intelligence.

**Change Vulnerability:** The organ grinder must always have an Achilles' heel, but may change the type of energy that deals lethal damage to it, from electricity to fire, for example..

**Damage Resistance:** The GM might apply this upgrade when overwhelming damage of a given type (such as ballistic, slashing or fire) was what defeated the organ grinder last time. The creature gains either a single point of damage resistance against damage inflicted by weapons (slashing, bludgeoning, piercing or ballistic) or three points of energy resistance against a specific kind of energy damage.

**Improved Armor Plating:** If the organ grinder did not last long enough in combat, it will opt to fortify itself with bulky metal plates sewn into its skin, or by developing thick clumps of tough callus. Each time the GM assigns this upgrade to the creature, its natural armor bonus rises by +1.

**New Feat:** The creature may choose a new feat for which it meets the prerequisites. It typically does this if it does not think that it has a sufficiently broad range of abilities, or that a given attack needs fine-tuning. Put simply, if the creature thinks that it would have been able to win next time if it had the feat, then it gains the feat.

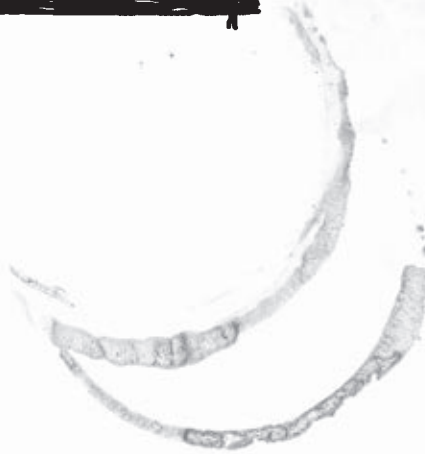
**Saving Throw Boost:** When the creature was defeated because it failed a crucial saving throw of a given type, then it will increase its saving throw bonus accordingly. One of its three saving throws is increased by +1. Note that the organ grinder will give itself new feats

instead (such as Iron Will) if it does not already have them; this option is for when the feat alone has not increased the saving throw bonus sufficiently.

**Size Increase:** This happens automatically when the organ grinder gains enough additional hit dice (see above). It increases to Huge at 22 hit dice and to Gargantuan at 35 hit dice.

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# The Outsiders



These enigmatic creatures are also known as the Men in Black or the Strangers. Alone of all the beings in this volume, they are not necessarily malign - just very alien indeed. They are drawn to extreme emotions, such as panic, terror and rage, and the emotional radiation given off by a collapsing mind that cannot take any more torment is fascinating to them. When PCs confront terrors beyond those faced by ordinary people, they may attract the attention of the Outsiders.

According to the case histories available, the Outsiders are drawn to certain people when their anxiety reaches a certain peak and a complete nervous breakdown is imminent. These creatures do nothing to increase or diminish the anxiety. They have no major interaction with their victim; for the most part, they simply stand in the background of the person's life, and watch. These silent, subtle ghosts are always present, noticeable but not intrusive, which can make the sufferer's breakdown come all the quicker. The paranoid mental patients who rave that 'they' are watching and controlling them, may be referring to the Outsiders.

It is not known whether or not these strange, shadowy creatures mean any harm but recorded encounters with them are disturbing. Their behavior is noticeably wrong - they do not seem familiar with human interaction, their speech is stilted and they make elementary mistakes, like forgetting to tie shoelaces or walking out of a shop without paying. The most common theory on the Outsiders is that they are aliens who are researching the stress factors in human life.

Typically, Outsiders appear as blurred, indistinct people who lurk in the corner of one's vision. At other times, when they decide to approach closer, their appearance is more like that of business-suited men and women in dark glasses. Their skin seems a little too smooth, as if it were made of plastic. Their lips are very red and their expressions never seem to change. Terrifying sounds and flashing images typical of a UFO encounter can sometimes accompany their arrival; see the Psychic Interference ability.

### All That Remains

The Outsiders do not kill their victims, as a rule. However, a person can die as a result of an Outsider's interference: when an Outsider has heightened a person's emotions, he is more vulnerable to shock and can literally be scared to death. The bodies of such victims show all the signs of having suffered coronary arrest. Adrenaline levels prove them to have been highly agitated and the expression on the face is one of stark terror. Further analysis, puts together an image of a person who had recently been suffering from extreme stress.;

### Game Statistics: Medium-size humanoid

**Hit Dice:** 6d8+6

**Initiative:** +2 (Dex)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Defense:** 12 (+2 Dex)

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +4/+6

**Attack:** Unarmed strike +6 melee (1d3+2)

**Full Attack:** Unarmed strike +6 melee (1d3+2)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Electrical Grasp, Heighten Emotion, Repel

**Special Qualities:** Partial Reality, Psychic Interference

**Saves:** Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +2

**Abilities:** Str 15, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 19, Wis 10, Cha 10

**Skills:** Computer Use +12, Decipher Script +12, Hide +10, Knowledge (any scientific) +12, Listen +8, Move Silently +10, Search +12, Sense Motive +8, Spot +8

**Feats:** Dodge, Endurance, Toughness

**Challenge Rating:** 6

**Horror:** None

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In the context of a game, the Outsiders represent two things: the worsening of terror that already exists and the presence of an unknown, enigmatic, potent force. While these creatures could intimidate PCs, they are not necessarily hostile. They might even provide a bizarre kind of assistance, as they view other

alien entities' meddling with humans as a corruption of their experiments. Consequently, when entities from the Outer Black (such as the organ grinder or the torture dogs) are persecuting the adventurers, the Outsiders may be able to keep them at bay. This is entirely in the interests of science. The Outsiders are wholly neutral and alien, not allies of the players.

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**Electrical Grasp (Ex):** The Outsiders are not combatants. If menaced, they will retreat. They do, however, have means to defend themselves. The Outsider can deliver a touch attack that inflicts 2d6 points of electrical damage and stuns the victim for one round. A successful Fortitude saving throw (DC 13) halves the damage and negates the stun effect. Once a given Outsider has delivered an electrical grasp attack, it cannot use the ability again for 1d4 rounds. This is a product of subdermal technology and thus an extraordinary ability.

**Heighten Emotion (Ex):** Outsiders find human emotions fascinating. To understand them better, they magnify the emotions, much as a scientist uses a microscope to increase the size of the tiny creatures he is studying. Human beings who are monitored by Outsiders often find that their own feelings of panic, hope and rage are much harder to bear. They fear they are going mad, which just adds to the stress and causes more intense emotion.

An Outsider can heighten the emotions of one person per point of Intelligence modifier. The range of this ability is line of sight. The target is entitled to a Will save (DC 17, Intelligence-based); after a successful save he cannot be affected by that Outsider's heighten emotion ability for 24 hours. A person suffering from heightened emotions suffers a -2 morale penalty to all Will saving throws or ability score checks made to resist intense negative emotion, such as saves against fear effects or rolls to oppose Intimidate checks. Subjectively, as a roleplaying element, they perceive other people as much more frightening, or charming, or depressing than they are.

Medical treatment with appropriate psychiatric drugs can remove the condition. A successful Treat Injury skill check (DC 20) is needed to diagnose that there is something specific wrong with the victim (they are not just highly strung). Treating this condition once it has been diagnosed requires a second successful Treat Injury skill check (DC 15) and access to psychiatric medication.

There is, however, a positive side. Affected characters receive a +1 enhancement bonus to all Sense Motive checks, as they are more sensitive to emotional stimuli and can detect other people's emotions more easily. A person afflicted with heightened emotions remains in that state for 24 hours.

**Partial Reality (Su):** Until they decide to become solid, the Outsiders are not fully 'real'. They can occasionally be seen, as blurred figures out of the corner of the eye. Those who they are stalking see the Outsiders reflected behind them in shop windows, watching from across the street, or even standing outside the house looking in through the window. As soon as they are looked at directly, they cannot be seen at all.

While in this state of partial reality, the Outsiders can only observe. They cannot interact with the material world, nor can they be interacted with. When they choose to enter this world fully, then they become solid and tangible and can be seen clearly.

This ability hinges on whether the Outsider can be seen or not. An Outsider can shift from full reality to partial reality at will, but only if nobody can see it. It cannot use this ability to teleport or become insubstantial. It could, however, disappear while someone's back was turned. Keeping your vision fixed on a manifested Outsider prevents it from becoming partially real again.

**Psychic Interference (Su):** The arrival of Outsiders into an area is accompanied by a night of bizarre manifestations. Ghostly lights are seen in the sky, behind the clouds, too vague to make out properly. Strange grinding noises

and echoing metallic twangs are heard in the distance, again impossible to place. Television pictures and radio shows dissolve into bursts of static. During phone conversations, indistinct, buzzing voices are heard in the background, like a crossed line but far more sinister.

Most distressingly, electrical and mechanical appliances malfunction. It is as if power were surging through them one minute and being drained the next, without any logic to the process; cars stall without warning, their engines simply dying and their headlights fading, and will not restart. Electric food mixers go into overdrive, smoke pouring from them and do not stop even when they are unplugged.

All of this is essentially atmospheric. The GM can improvise any effect that the scene requires. The key points are that power surges into items or is drained from them and that some other signal is interfering with the ordinary channels of communication. The morning after these disturbing phenomena take place, the Outsiders begin to appear, silent and observant...

**Repel (Su):** Outsiders can telekinetically shove objects or people away from them. As a standard action, an outsider can project a 30-foot cone of invisible force. This projects all unanchored items in the area of effect in a straight line away from the Outsider, to a distance of  $3d10+30$  feet. Creatures that strike solid objects (such as walls) suffer damage as if they had fallen the distance they had traveled and are knocked prone. Creatures that end their flight in an empty space are also knocked prone but take damage as if they had fallen only half the distance they have crossed.

Objects and creatures heavier than a human child are entitled to a Will saving throw to resist this effect; the DC is 21. This is Intelligence-based and includes a +4 racial bonus.

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# Ovvashi



### **Jimbo**

Howyeh. Heh, pal, I'm talking to yeh. Gie us two's up on yer fag, aye? Whassat? All of 'em? Ey, tha's generous of yeh. Very generous. Gentleman.

Cam oan, cam oan, thessa fire goin' here. Move round, youse lot. This is a pal o' mine. His name's er... yeh. I dinnae recall, but he's me mate. He's crashin' the ash. Decent cigs an' all. Bensons. Doesnae talk much but he's sound, eh?

So, where ye from, pal? Don' tell me. Yeh a foreigner, in't yeh? From the thing. Asylum seeker. Well yeh very welcome, you are. Welcome tae the land o' plenty. Nae predjudice here, is it? All one big family, eh? Here... would that Netto bag have a wee bottle in it by any chance? Aye, let's have a bevy then. Guid man.

Tha's Mary there, then tha's Nick Fingers, so called 'cos he'll nick anything that's nae tied doon. Yon big bastard's Baz, he's got the horrors again, he hasnae got his pills tae take, not since they closed the centre doon and chucked him on the street. Care in the community, issa wonderful thing, eh? Tha's Welsh Dave pissin' his troosers, says it keeps him warm, eh Dave? Who, him? Eh, dinna pay nae attention to yon gobshite, that's Mickey Bastard, he's all mooth ...

### **Mary**

I'm cold. What I was going to tell you? Yes. Don't tell anyone. I had a child. A little girl. She died. She found my methadone. It was when we were living in the ca-ca-ca-caravan. She drank it all and she duh-duh-died. I miss her so much. I just want to see her again, to hold her again. She's gone. Look, the pigeons are eating the chips. I don't believe in God, do you? It doesn't make sense to believe in anything that cuh-cuh-could do that to me. I just want another chance. I'm so sorry, Melissa. I'd do anything to hold you again. Anything. Even if it was just for a moment. Anything.

### **Nick Fingers**

Cheers, fella. Sorry, I can never remember your name. Weird that. Where was I? Oh, right. Yeah, ten years inside for something I never even done. Dying a bit more every day. When I came out, when I saw the sky and the streets again, that wasn't real. It still don't feel real now. I get angry all the time. I wouldn't be here if that judge hadn't taken one look at me and decided I deserved to go to prison. That's where 'my sort' go, y'know.

He yawned. Just before he pronounced sentence, he yawned, like he was saying he wanted it over with. Then ten years of my life go by in pure hell. You think you know what hell is. You don't. Do I want justice? Well, I'm a criminal now, inn' I? Wasn't before. Learned a few things while I was inside, though. Wonderful thing, the British penal system. And to think they say the kids don't get a decent education these days... Look, mate, there is no justice. Not for you, not for me. It's all bollocks. It's just a pile of bullshit and enough scapegoats behind bars to keep the Mail readers happy.

I'll tell you something. Not joking this time. I'll tell you what justice would be. If I had a gun in one hand and the address of that judge in the other, I'd sort a bit of justice of me own out. That's all I really want. That's all that keeps me going. The rest of my life's just shit, really. No point lying about it. It's all shit.

*I don't suppose ...*

### **Mickey Bastard**

Don't you try and mess me about. I'm not afraid of you. I want what's mine. I kept up my side of it. I done him. Just like you said. Shanked him between the ribs. What, didn't you think I had it in me? It's a piece of piss, offing a bloke is. He wasn't any bloody use to anyone, was Jimbo. Nobody'll miss the old bugger. Quick flick of the wrist and it's done. By the time they fish him out the Thames, he'll be too manky for anyone to tell what

happened. I know places no one ever goes. See, I done what you said. Hand it over. Jesus, I'm losin' my rag here, hand it over!

Ahh. Now that's more like it. None of your brown rubbish, this stuff's the business. Pure as virgin's piss. Got a bit of foil in there too? Magic. Hey, we work well together, you and I do. You ought to get me connected with your dealer. Stuff this good, you oughtn't to be givin' it away ... well, except to me, know what I mean? This is class stuff, this is. We should go into business...

### **Welsh Dave**

Thought I might find you here. I need them. Yes, again. You don't understand, do you, what it's like to lose everything? You've never been more than shit, have you? I was up there, I was. See that silvery tower? Canary Wharf? I worked in there, I did. Earned more than you can imagine. Don't you bloody smirk at me. You can't imagine me in Versace, can you? Well, I bloody owned a wardrobe full of it. Parties on the riverboats, we used to have.

The City, they call it. Don't need to say which city, do they? There's only one. Babylon was a city, and a whore. Same thing.

If you can't handle the heat, then you end up here. Too much coke did it. And Vanessa. She's a killer, she is. Cold bitch. Set me up for a tumble. It only takes one bad call, one afternoon of disasters. She got her arse out, oh yes. She had her back covered. Muggins here was the one who made the papers. City trader loses a fortune. What, you think I should go on the streets and sell the *Big Issue* after that?

Look, I'm sorry I called you shit. It makes me angry. I've come down so far. I don't know how you got them, but I need them.

I need the keys. I need to get into the XJS and drive to the apartment and let myself in. It was so good to do that last time. It was like none of this never happened. Like this place, the drinking, the stink, like that was all the dream. Please. You don't know how much it means to me. Please give me the keys. I'll do what you ask. Of course I will. They're not like me. They belong here, they'll die here, they're just scum. I was never meant to be here with them.

You're going to make me kill another one, aren't you? Oh God ... oh God.

All right. Give me the screwdriver. I'll be right back. Don't move.

### **Baz**

*please just make it stop make the voices go away make the faces stop staring at me make it quiet again give me the lovely silence the sweet silence no more mad people screaming no more whispers in the dark please mister please just make it all go away again make it quiet again let me sleep please god let me sleep whatever it takes just give me peace yes I will bring you the heads yes I will bring you all the heads you want yes all of them yes I will yes.*





### All That Remains

An ovvashi kill looks like the victim of a shark attack, although the body shows no signs of having been in the water. Even more awkwardly, a thorough post-mortem examination will reveal that the cause of death was an overdose of high quality, high purity narcotics, and that the lacerations were inflicted on the still-twitching corpse. Happily pathologists seldom have to present evidence on shark-eaten, drug-saturated bodies to coroners, because ovvashi seldom do their own butchery. Instead, they delegate, duping their victims to into slaughtering each other, then rewarding the survivor with presents from its bags. The dead thus show the signs of brutal, desperate murder. Stabbings are common, as are other violent causes of death such as strangulation or braining with a blunt instrument. The ovvashi's stooges want to get the job done as quickly as they can, so that they can get their hands on their heart's desire. Similarly, they do not usually take a great deal of care over disposal of the bodies. Thus, victims tend to be dumped on rubbish tips, thrown into canals, abandoned in telephone boxes or (at most) buried in very shallow graves.

### Game Statistics: Medium-size Outsider (native)

**Hit Dice:** 8d8 (36 hp)  
**Initiative:** +1 (Dex)  
**Speed:** 30 ft.  
**Defence:** 15 (+1 Dex, +4 natural)  
**Base Attack/Grapple:** +8/+11  
**Attack:** Bite +12 melee (1d8+4)  
**Full Attack:** Bite +12/+6 melee (1d8+4)  
**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.  
**Special Attacks:** Extract Secrets, Wish Fulfilment  
**Special Qualities:** Bone Pipe, Disguise Self, Derive Power  
**Saves:** Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +6  
**Abilities:** Str 17, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 20  
**Skills:** Bluff +15, Craft Bone +10, Diplomacy +15, Disable Device +12, Gather Information +15, Hide +13,

Intimidate +15, Listen +10, Move Silently +13, Search +12, Sense Motive +10, Spot +10

**Feats:** Improved Natural Attack (bite), Stealthy, Weapon Focus (bite)

**Challenge Rating:** 7

**Horror:** Fear 19 (if seen in true form)

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The ovvashi is a demonic entity, resident on the material plane. It seeks out the little knots of homeless derelicts scavenging on society's margins and steadily corrupts them, manipulating and feeding their need until they are utterly lost. It targets them because they are ideal for exploitation. The homeless have nothing; they are hungry, desperate and alone and they understand need like no other.

Physically, ovvashi look like nondescript vagrants. They can be male or female, filthy and wearing many different garments at once, laden down with plastic bags containing their worldly belongings. They do have one eccentricity, though; they smoke little pipes (see Bone Pipe, below). As it prays on the homeless, it makes itself at home in the places where they congregate, such as soup kitchens, railway arches, burnt-out buildings and bridge pilings; sheltered places away from the wind, the rain, or the sun's glare. It never finds it hard to integrate itself into the homeless community; as soon as the cheap vodka and cigarettes come out of its bags, the ovvashi's popularity is assured.

Once it has settled into the homeless people's world, it goes about listening to their woeful histories. Whenever it can, it will pull from a plastic bag an object its chosen victim feels he most needs. This could be drugs, money, photographs from the victim's past, a cherished doll or teddy bear not seen since childhood, or even just food. What really matters is that the victim needs it badly, to the point where he would kill for it. In time, he will have to.

The ovvashi intends to exploit these needs, which it first feeds to the point of obsession. It loves to destroy a

fragile community of vulnerable people from within, tempting and tormenting its victims with material gain or satisfaction of a more personal kind. To an ovvashi, any human being is worth corrupting and can always fall a little further. It is not just the business magnates and crime lords who draw the attention of the Outer Dark. One can always find souls to destroy, even when it means going right down to people who have already reached rock bottom in their lives.

The ovvashi's first gift is always free. After that, there are price tags attached. The demon will demand that the victim carry out little favors, such as robbing a fellow vagrant or telling lies about him. The ovvashi knows how to do this properly; it always starts small and works up. By the time it has been in the community for a few weeks, it has the members at each other's throats. The first killing is always a happy time for the Ovvashi. It especially likes its dupes to kill off the old and vulnerable members first, since they contribute so little. The easiest way is to set them on fire while they sleep, as if they had been smoking huddled up in their filthy sleeping bag and had set themselves alight accidentally. It happens - who is going to know any different?

Of course, the first death is only the beginning. After that, more and more killings will be demanded. The victim is now imprisoned not only by his overpowering need for the gifts of the ovvashi but by the knowledge the ovvashi holds - he could have the victim arrested for murder, or killed by his fellows. The only way forward is to descend into further degradation. Push this person in front of a bus, slit that one's throat, slip rat poison into another's bottle of cheap whiskey ...

The ovvashi will only move on to a new disadvantaged community once all the people it has been in contact with have killed each other off. It is usually left with one victim standing, who has disposed of all the others. This one, of course, the ovvashi must kill itself. It usually arranges for the death to happen with an

overdose or surfeit of the very thing that the victim craved. The last victim is thus given his due reward, in such a quantity that it kills him. With that final futile horror accomplished, the ovvashi's work in the area is done.

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**Bone Pipe:** Each ovvashi has a little pipe, incorporating a bone from one of its victims (usually in the stem) which the creature uses to smoke the souls of the dead (see Derive Power, below). An ovvashi is particularly fond of its pipe and, if it is lost or taken, will negotiate to get it back, and will stick to the letter of any agreement reached (opposed diplomacy checks). Should the pipe break, the ovvashi loses all benefits from any active derive power bonuses (see below), and cannot smoke any more souls until it makes itself another one. If someone destroys its pipe, then the new pipe must incorporate part of the culprit or culprits.

**Derive Power (Su):** An ovvashi derives fierce joy and satisfaction from causing its thralls to kill one another. It also claims their poor ragged souls, drawing them into itself. To do this, the ovvashi takes some small part of the latest victim's body such as a tuft of hair, or a ripped off fingernail or scrap of skin, stuffs it into its pipe, and smokes it. The process takes a full-round action to perform, and the stinking, ectoplasmic fug that results is sheer ambrosia to the ovvashi.

Once it has smoked a victim's soul, it gains a temporary energy boost. This grants it an additional 1d8 hit points plus any Constitution bonus, a +1 enhancement bonus to attack and damage rolls and a +1 bonus to all saving throws. The benefits last for 24 hours. If an ovvashi is confronted on a night in which it has caused several deaths, it can be much more lethal than the players were expecting.

A soul that has been smoked is utterly gone. It leaves no ghost behind. There is nothing for clairvoyants or mediums to communicate with. However, the ovvashi can

only consume the soul of a person that it has corrupted, who was slaughtered by another person that it has also corrupted. It cannot feed on any other kind of soul.

**Disguise Self (Su):** The ovvashi uses a form of psychic projection to disguise itself as a vagrant. It already looks remarkably similar to one, with its filthy clothing and hunched-up gait. Even so, when viewed up close, its rows of shark-sharp teeth reveal it to be something unusual. The ovvashi does not so much cloak its own true form as mentally persuade an onlooker to ignore its non-human traits. When in its presence (within 60 feet) all characters perceive the ovvashi as a short, ugly human. Only if they examine it closely are they entitled to a Will saving throw (DC 19, Charisma-based) to see it as it truly is. A character must specify that he is examining the creature carefully to make this saving throw; it is never granted from mere passive observation.

**Extract Secrets (Su):** The ovvashi has a supernatural ability to draw any secret from its victim's past - no matter how sordid or guilty - from a victim. Mostly, it just sits and listens, occasionally, subtly guiding the conversation until the victim ends up confiding in the creature utterly. To use this ability, the ovvashi makes a Gather Information skill check. The check result is then the DC of the Will saving throw that the victim must make in order to keep any piece of information secret from the ovvashi. The ovvashi can tell when a person has secrets but does not know what they are. It scents them, like a hog can sniff out truffles. A person who successfully saves against the ovvashi's extract secrets ability is immune to the effect for the next 24 hours.

This ability can only be used when the ovvashi is having a peaceful conversation with a person. If the ovvashi is perceived as an enemy or as a threat, then it cannot use the ability. A fresh Gather Information check (and saving throw) must be made for each new secret that the ovvashi is going after.

**Wish Fulfilment (Su):** This is the ovvashi's most formidable power; the demon can produce, from one of its many bulging plastic bags, an object of desire, which it then offers to his victim. This ability can produce any item of up to Medium size. However, the item only remains in existence for as long as the ovvashi wishes, and never for more than 24 hours. If it is consumed, as most items of this kind tend to be, then the satisfaction that results is genuine. Food fills and nourishes the victim, wine intoxicates and cigarettes provide a nicotine kick.

While the ovvashi can always use this ability to produce small, satisfying things in order to keep its victims interested, it can also attempt to produce a person's heart's desire. The ovvashi must first have ascertained what it is that the target most desires. It will do this by means of the Extract Secrets ability (see above). The heart's desire exerts a nigh-on irresistible effect on the victim.

When first presented with the heart's desire, the victim must make a Will saving throw (DC 24, Charisma-based, including a +5 racial bonus). Success means that the victim resists the allure of the heart's desire for a day; he will still be desperate to possess it, but will not do anything that goes against his moral code. If he can get his hands on the heart's desire without violating his principles, then he will try to do so, but the ovvashi is hardly likely to let this happen. Having made his saving throw, he is immune to the effect for 24 hours.

Failure on the saving throw means that the victim will do anything in order to possess the heart's desire. He will lie, murder, rape, steal and violate what remains of his humanity.

The ovvashi can never draw items from its bags that are useful to it personally. It cannot whip out a flamethrower or chain gun if a group of PCs confronts it. The nature of the wish fulfilment is temptation.

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# The Practice

You are hovering near the ceiling, looking down at your own body.

Your face is mostly covered by the oxygen mask. Surgeons bend over you, their attention fixed on a crimson spread of tissue, exposed by a hole in the center of a white sheet. Glinting forceps have peeled your skin back. Clamps protrude from the red mass. The thought that you might be dead occurs to you, but brings no panic. There is only an oceanic calm, as if you were floating in the womb again. Perhaps there will be a tunnel soon, with a white light at the end. You have heard of this. You are having an out of body experience.

The billows of the respirator rise and fall. Your pulse traces a glowing trail across a screen. The lights in the room are bright; everything is moving in slow motion. It is like being drunk, or drugged. It is real and yet it is not. No tunnels have appeared, nor any white light. Everything is surprisingly ordinary.

You feel yourself rising. The ceiling offers no resistance. The dusty hollows of the void behind it are a secret space, where only ghosts like yourself linger. There are cables and ventilation ducts, and pipes that nobody bothered to paint, because nobody would ever see them.

You emerge from the floor. The room you are entering is much darker. It is a space like your own room. The bed stands silent in the center. It is not empty.

They are bending over him. You cannot see their faces, only skin like tree bark, knotted with stitches like clots of blood. Their uniforms are ragged and anachronistic. One of them wears a once-white Florence Nightingale gown that has a Rorschach butterfly of blood across the back. You catch the gleam of a raised scalpel. The only sound is a steady stream of blood spattering wet on the floor, as if a man were urinating there. It flows from the foot of the bed.

You cannot make yourself look away.

They move slowly, patiently. They nod to one another. They do not speak. Dripping things are lifted out and laid aside. You recognize the dark purple bulk of the liver.

One of them moves aside and for a second you see the face of the man on the bed. Tubes lead from his nostrils. His mouth is closed with a succession of Xs in tight black thread. A single mad eyeball rolls around, then fixes itself on you. He is still alive.

As he notices your presence, they notice it too. Or perhaps they already knew and were in no hurry. As one, they turn to look at you. Their grins are fixed. Their eyes are dry sockets. Heads tilt to one side and then the other, examining you.

Silently, gliding, they approach.

The body they move away from is no more than an excavated crater with arms and legs. The ribs have been snipped off and discarded. Intestines lie in curious designs. Lungs inflate and deflate. The head still jerks spasmodically. The mouth tries to speak and cannot, because of the stitches.

They crowd around you. Eyeless faces peer down at yours.

When the morning comes and you wake, with the drip in your arm and the stitches from your own operation crisp on your chest, you try to dismiss it as a dream, even when you learn of the death in the room above yours. There were no traces of foul play. He simply died in the night. It happens all the time in a hospital.

They claim that you are making an excellent recovery. You think otherwise.

You lie awake that night, too afraid to sleep, listening for the sounds of feet treading light as shadows in the sterile corridors. You know about them. They know that you know.

It is only a matter of time.

### All That Remains

The victims of the Practice are found in varying states, depending on how thoroughly the surgical team has been able to clear up after itself.

The great majority of Practice teams will be meticulous in tidying up the scene. The mortician in attendance will close the ravaged body up again, sealing it shut and smoothing over the wounds. Bloody surfaces will be wiped clean, so that only microscopic traces remain. A body that has been violated by the Practice is only revealed to be such once the body is opened. Then, it is immediately obvious that some horrible surgical butchery has taken place. Organs have been snipped free, grotesque stitches connect parts that do not belong together, and some of the viscera even appear to have been fused by an unknown means, so that the organs are merged, as if they had grown like that. There is no sign of an entrance wound.

If the Practice have been interrupted, the sight is altogether more terrible. The body is sliced open with long, deft cuts, the skin peeled back and the innards scattered around with careless abandon, as if the carcass had exploded from within. Forensic evidence, in particular the blood flow, the adrenaline levels and the absence of anaesthetic chemical residue in the bloodstream, lead to the conclusion that this surgery was performed while the victim was both alive and conscious. Moreover, the procedure went on for some time without killing the victim, which seems miraculous given the extent of the injury.

This evisceration, performed as it is with evident surgical skill, is reminiscent of the infamous 'Ripper' murders in Whitechapel, the victims of which were also missing certain internal organs. The Practice do not make a habit of leaving their victims like this, as it would lead to their detection, but occasionally a given surgeon will be more obsessed with the operation than with the clean-up procedure, or some outside force will interrupt the operation.

In a very tiny number of cases, a victim will be found still alive. These unfortunate wretches may live for several hours before dying from blood loss and system breakdown caused by absent internal organs. They are opened up and disemboweled as above, but their eyes are open and moving and their lungs still inflate and deflate. If the left lung has been removed, then the heart can be seen clearly, pulsing among the ribs. Some form of muscular paralysis is preventing them from moving, though they are obviously in agony.

### Who Are They?

The Practice is an ancient organization of monstrous entities that were once medical practitioners and scholars that dabbled in things they should not have. They appear as vaguely human, yet horribly mutilated and disfigured. Their faces are covered in scars and stitches, where they have replaced parts of themselves or practiced surgical techniques on their own bodies. The Practice has been around for a very long time. Its members stood by Galen's side as he made his pioneering incisions into cadavers. They sniffed the wounds in the bellies of disemboweled Vikings, and chuckled over illuminated tracts on the four humors,, they tore leeches from diseased peasants and eagerly unwrapped the latest delivery from the 'resurrection men' in Victorian times.

The intentions of the Practice are ambiguous at best and their habits are only vaguely documented. They creep into hospitals at night, like silent ghosts, always passing through their doors at the stroke of three, when the body is closest to death. Somehow, security cameras and human senses are blind to their passage so, undetected, they go about their grim business, torturing and mutilating patients in the interests of science. If someone comes across the Practice at work, they will see bizarre, gruesome men and women dressed like nurses, surgeons and morticians. Often, the clothes are very dated, and occasionally they span centuries of style. Some practitioners even wear medieval, Hellenistic or

Ancient Egyptian costume. These are to be feared greatly for their advanced age and the power they have accumulated. When discovered, the Practice will, depending on the circumstances, flee or fight.

If the operation has gone successfully, hospital staff will find a dead patient the next morning. The body will show no obvious sign of mutilation. As far as any of the staff will be concerned, the deceased passed away overnight, quietly in her sleep. Sometimes a 'salmonella outbreak' will be blamed, sometimes an epidemic in the ward, sometimes malfunctioning equipment. Usually, no member of the hospital staff who examines the corpse will notice anything unusual. An outside investigator, on the other hand ...

There are those who have made it their business to study the Practice over the years. Many believe the Practice come for organs and other body parts from healthy patients, to replace their own rancid innards, and cheat death for another century. There is some truth in this. Others suspect an even sicker purpose, that this organ stealing and swapping is in the interest of research, that the Practice studies us, looking for new ways to weaken and conquer our civilization. Whatever they once were, they are now servants for a far greater and more sinister entity; perhaps even a god.

#### **Common Abilities**

All members of the Practice, whatever their function, have the following special abilities.

**Ethereal Jaunt (Su):** A member of the Practice can shift from the Ethereal Plane to the Material Plane as a free action, and shift back again as a move action (or during a move action). The ability is otherwise identical with ethereal jaunt (caster level 15th). This ability may be used a number of times per day equal to the member's Intelligence modifier plus one (minimum of twice per day).

**Eyeless Vision (Su):** Although they no longer have eyes, the Practice can see

perfectly well. They also have darkvision to a range of 60 ft.

**Heal Injury (Sp):** Any member of the Practice can stitch itself, or a wounded associate back up again. With ten minutes of suturing, cauterizing and clamping, it can heal any member of the Practice, including itself, of 2d8+2 points of damage. This action requires a successful Treat Injury check with a DC of 10 plus the total damage that the victim has suffered. If it fails the check by less than 10, it heals itself of only 1d8+1 damage; if it fails the check by 10 or more, it cannot heal any damage at all and cannot use the ability again on the same creature for 24 hours.

This crude surgery is only effective on members of the Practice or upon certain flesh-based constructs and leaves hideous scars behind. If it is attempted on a living creature, it deals damage instead of healing it.

#### **--+--+-- Mortician**

The morticians of the Practice have the duty of cleaning up once the surgeons have done their work. They are putrescent artists, with a supernatural understanding of dead flesh and an appreciation of its beauty. If necessary, they can dismember a dead body in seconds and incinerate the remains. The Practice will always do this if it is not possible to reshape a corpse so that it appears to have died a natural death.

#### **Game Statistics: Medium Outsider**

**Hit Dice:** 8d8+40 (76 hp)

**Initiative:** +5 (Dex)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Defence:** 16 (+1 Dex, +4 natural)

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +8/+13

**Attack:** Bone saw +13 melee (1d4+5)

**Full Attack:** Bone saw +13/+8 melee (1d4+5)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Animate Carcass, Incinerate, Mould Dead Flesh, Sever Limb

**Special Qualities:** Ethereal Jaunt, Heal Injury

**Saves:** Fort +11, Ref +7, Will +7

**Abilities:** Str 20, Dex 13, Con 20, Int 17, Wis 13, Cha 10

**Skills:** Climb +11, Concentration +16, Craft (flesh) +13, Jump +11, Knowledge (anatomy) +14, Knowledge (history) +14, Knowledge (medicine) +20, Listen +12, Move Silently +12, Spot +12, Treat Injury +16, Search +16

**Feats:** Cleave, Improved Initiative, Power Attack

**Challenge Rating:** 8

**Horror:** Fear 14, Madness 14

\* Members of the Practice gain a +4 racial bonus to Treat Injury and Knowledge (medicine) checks.

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**Animate Carcass (Sp):** An operating theatre can be a busy place, with instruments to hold, machines to work and, sometimes, doors to barricade. Occasionally, an unwilling patient will attempt to escape, or resist the paralyzing grasp of the nurse. To prevent the surgeon from becoming distracted, it is often helpful to have a few silent, reliable assistants standing by. The mortician can create ad hoc assistants from dead bodies by using this ability. These are conventional zombies, created as if by the animate dead spell, for which see Core Rulebook I. The mortician can use this ability at will but cannot have more zombies under its control than its Intelligence modifier +1.

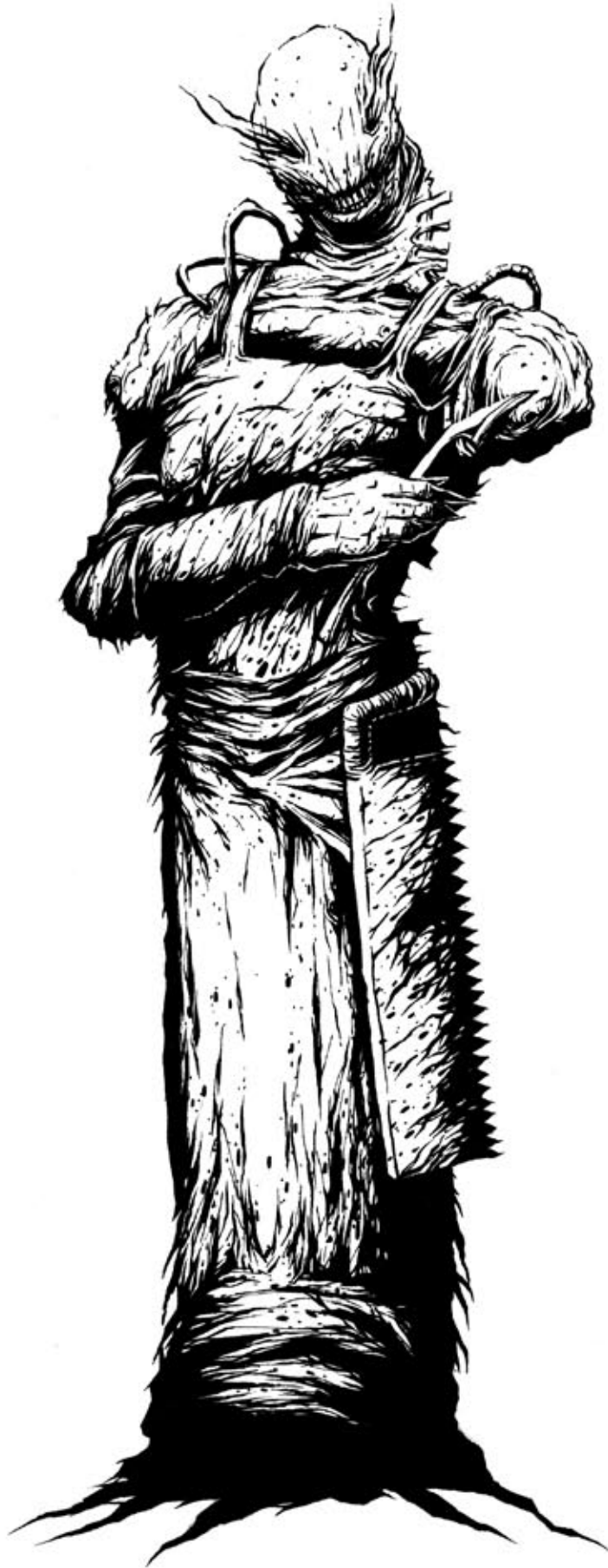
**Incinerate (Sp):** The touch of a mortician can cause bodies to burst into strange colorless flames. They burn flesh, hair and bone, while leaving the surrounding environment untouched. Once set on fire, the body is quickly consumed, leaving only a gray ash that can be swept up. This ability works with complete reliability on dead bodies. The mortician can also use it on living beings, but the fire is not quite so controlled, nor does it necessarily consume the body altogether, leaving a greasy lumpy residue is left, with parts of limbs still recognizable. Many cases of 'spontaneous human combustion' can be

attributed to morticians trying to burn up someone who saw too much.

To use incinerate on a living victim, the mortician must succeed at a touch attack. The victim suffers 2d4 fire damage each round, with a Fortitude saving throw (DC 19, Constitution-based) allowed each round to negate the effect. The damage continues until the victim successfully saves. Many victims, of course, die screaming.

**Mould Dead Flesh (Su):** A mortician can shape dead flesh as if it were clay, but cannot create new dead flesh. With a successful Craft (flesh) check (DC 15) it can perform simple changes, such as smoothing over the rent in the belly of a disemboweled cadaver. More thoroughly mangled corpses, such as the victims of serious car crashes, can be restored to a normal appearance with a more difficult check (DC 20). Incomplete bodies can be made to appear healthy at the point of death, but the missing parts cannot be recreated. Ordinarily, this is enough for the Practice, since they usually remove internal organs and seal up the incisions. If an observers examine a corpse that has been treated with the mould dead flesh ability, they should make a Treat Injury or Knowledge (medicine) check opposed by the mortician's Craft (flesh) check to detect the tampering. A full post-mortem will, automatically reveal the absence of internal organs.

**Sever Limb (Su):** The mortician's bone saw can zip through bone as if it were soft cheese. So long as the mortician can get a good grip on his victim, he can easily sever a limb in seconds. (The head is treated as a limb for the purposes of this ability.) To use this ability, the mortician must already be grappling and must make a successful grapple check. If the check is successful, the mortician deals bone saw damage to the victim, who must then make a Fortitude saving throw. The DC varies according to which limb the mortician is trying to sever; see the table below. A successful saving throw means that the target takes only the hit point damage, while a failed saving throw means that the limb of the mortician's





choice has been sawn clean off. This automatically deals damage equal to 25% of the target's maximum hit points along with additional ability damage as noted below, as well as the obvious game effects of missing a limb, such as not being able to hold an item in a severed arm. Ability damage from bleeding continues until a tourniquet or similar is applied, which requires a Treat Injury check (DC 15) and a standard action.

Reattaching a severed arm or leg is extremely difficult but possible. It requires a Treat Injury check (DC 30), access to hospital facilities, the Surgery feat and eight hours of intensive medical treatment.

#### Severed Limbs

Limb	Fortitude save DC	Effect if severed
Head	10 + damage taken	<del>2x4ch</del>
Arm	18 + damage taken	1 point Strength and Con damage every other round from blood loss
Leg	14 + damage taken	1 point Strength and Con damage per round from blood loss; cannot walk or run

#### --+--+-- Nurse

The nurses of the Practice are eyeless, shriveled horrors that reek of antiseptic. They wear the tattered remnants of uniforms. Their main function is to prepare the patients for surgery by immobilizing them. This ensures that the suffering is heightened as much as possible but the victim's thrashing about will not spoil the surgeon's work. The nurses also insert catheters and intravenous drips whether necessary or not (usually not) and assist the surgeons during the operation. If the mutilation from surgery risks killing the patient too quickly, the nurse can provide a surge of life energy to keep the patient alive.

#### Game Statistics: Medium Outsider

**Hit Dice:** 6d8+18 (45 hp)

**Initiative:** +5 (Dex)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Defence:** 17 (+2 natural, +5 Dex)

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +6/+7

**Attack:** Cleaver +11 melee (1d6+1) or claw +11 melee (1d4+1 plus immobilizing venom)

**Full Attack:** Cleaver +11/+6 melee (1d6+1) or claw +11/+6 melee (1d4+1 plus immobilizing venom)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Immobilize

**Special Qualities:** Ethereal Jaunt, Heal Injury, Life Surge, Vital Sign Awareness

**Saves:** Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +8

**Abilities:** Str 13, Dex 21, Con 17, Int 15, Wis 17, Cha 10

**Skills:** Concentration +12, Knowledge (anatomy) +11, Knowledge (history) +11, Knowledge (medicine) +15, Listen +12, Move Silently +14, Spot +12, Treat Injury +16, Use Rope +14

**Feats:** Weapon Finesse

**Challenge Rating:** 6

**Horror:** Fear 13, Madness 13

\* Members of the Practice gain a +4 racial bonus to Treat Injury and Knowledge (medicine) checks.

**Immobilize (Ex):** When the nurse lays her twisted hand upon a human body, spurting needles emerge from under her fingernails and dig into the victim's veins. Paralyzing liquors, burning like stinging ants, flood from the wound and into the circulation. In seconds, the victim is unable to move or speak and can only stare as the surgeon's gleaming blades descend.

The nurse must hit with a claw attack in order to immobilize. If the attack is successful, the target must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 21) or be paralyzed by the injected toxins. This saving throw DC is Constitution-based and includes a +4 racial bonus. Paralysis lasts for 1d4+2 hours, though most victims are long dead by the time the toxins would wear off.

**Life Surge (Sp):** A nurse can pump energies into living creatures in order to keep them alive, (and worse, conscious) even when their innards are lying all around them. This can either bring a creature up to 0 hit points when it is on -1 or fewer, or heal it of 1d3 points of damage. The nurse may choose which. The nurse can use this ability at will, but each use costs it one hit point.

A nurse will only ever use life surge when a patient is in danger of dying too soon, or in similarly dire circumstances. The ability does not work on members of the Practice.

**Vital Sign Awareness (Su):** Part of the nurse's job is to monitor the patient's condition and make sure that he does not perish too quickly. They can hear the blood rushing round the circulatory system and sense the flickers of consciousness in the brain as if they were precise medical instruments; the Practice does not need mere human technology, and never has.

Nurses are automatically aware of the state of health of any being within 30 feet. They do not have to concentrate; the awareness is constant. In game terms, they can tell how many hit points a creature has, what its ability scores are and what its current condition is, such as nauseated, scared or crippled. They must be aware of the creature first in order to use this ability; it does not reveal any creatures that the Nurse does not already know are there. Nurses use this knowledge to their advantage in combat. It is impossible to avoid notice by pretending to be asleep, unconscious or dead. Nurses know better.



-+--++-

### Surgeon

The surgeons are the senior members of the Practice. Many of them are over four hundred years old. Only rarely do new members qualify for acceptance into their distinguished society. Like the rest of the Practice, they are corpse-like manikins of contorted and scar-laden flesh, with pathetic scraps of uniform over the top. The surgeons are even more scarified than the rest of the Practice, because of the surgical work that they perform on each other.

The oldest surgeons look like unwrapped Egyptian mummies, which is exactly what some of them are; the combination of dark magic with the removal and replacement of preserved internal organs was what first caused the Practice to come into being, many thousands of years ago.

#### **Game Statistics: Medium Outsider**

**Hit Dice:** 10d8+50 (95 hp)

**Initiative:** +11 (+7 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Defence:** 20 (+7 Dex, +3 natural)

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +10/+14

**Attack:** Scalpel +18 melee (1d4+4/19-20x2)

**Full Attack:** Scalpel +18/+12 melee (1d4+4/18-20x2)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Deep Gash, Necrotic Transplant, Suture

**Special Qualities:** Ethereal Jaunt, Heal Injury, Pliant Flesh

**Saves:** Fort +13, Ref +14, Will +11

**Abilities:** Str 18, Dex 25, Con 20, Int 20, Wis 19, Cha 10

**Skills:** Concentration +18, Hide +20, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (anatomy) +18, Knowledge (history) +18, Knowledge (medicine) +22, Listen +17, Move Silently +20, Sleight of Hand +20, Search +18, Spot +14, Treat Injury +21, Use Rope +20

**Feats:** Combat Expertise, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse, Weapon



Focus (scalpel)

**Challenge Rating:** 10

**Horror:** Fear 15, Madness 15

\* Members of the Practice gain a +4 racial bonus to Treat Injury and Knowledge (medicine) checks.

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The statistics given above are for a typical surgeon. It is not unusual for a given surgeon to have a single ability score that is much higher than the others, due to repeated necrotic transplants (see below). Many surgeons stuff their skulls with additional brain matter until they begin to split like over-boiled eggs and need sutures to hold the brains in, while others graft muscle tissue on to their arms and legs until they resemble bloated and partially burst sausages.

**Deep Gash (Ex):** Surgeons can draw upon their anatomical knowledge to disembowel a target with a stroke. They can rip their scalpel blades through the spinal cord, paralyzing the victim, or slice through important organs, killing the victim immediately. If a surgeon studies his victim for three rounds and then makes an attack with a melee weapon that successfully deals damage, the attack has the additional effect of possibly either paralyzing or killing the target (surgeon's choice). While studying the victim, the surgeon can undertake other actions so long as his attention stays focused on the target and the target does not detect the surgeon or recognize the it as an enemy.

If the victim of such an attack fails a Fortitude saving throw (DC = the surgeon's number of Knowledge (anatomy) skill ranks + his Int modifier) against the kill effect, he dies. (The skills in the above stat block already include the Int modifier.) If the saving throw fails against the paralysis effect, the victim is rendered permanently helpless and unable to act. If the victim's saving throw succeeds, the attack deals normal damage. Once the surgeon has completed three rounds of study, he must make the death attack within the next three rounds.

If a death attack is attempted and fails

(the victim makes his saving throw) or if the surgeon does not launch the attack within three rounds of completing the study, three new rounds of study are required before he can attempt another death attack.

The victim of a paralysis attack can only recover if he receives surgical attention. A Treat Injury skill check (DC 20 + the surgeon's Int modifier) and full surgical procedures are needed to restore mobility to the victim.

**Necrotic Transplant (Su):** The rumors that the Practice steals organs so that its members can replenish their own putrefying organs are true. This is not their only purpose in butchering human beings, but it is a handy side effect. If this were not bad enough, there is a dark metaphysical aspect to their work. An organ is only useful to the Practice if it is charged with negative energies, such as those that result from fear, panic and agony. They cannot use organs taken from sleeping or anesthetized patients, as these are just so much bland flesh to them. Only an organ extracted from a living, conscious human will do. This is the reason why the Practice dissect their victims while they are still alive.

A surgeon can remove one or more organs from a living victim and place them in the body of a member of the Practice. This requires a successful Treat Injury roll (DC 20) and ten minutes of work. Depending on the organ removed, the patient is either killed outright (if the organ is essential) or suffers 1d4 Constitution damage (if the organ is non-essential). The effect upon the member of the Practice is to increase one of his ability scores by 1d3 points. The ability increased will depend upon the organ taken; hearts increase Constitution, sections of the brain increase Intelligence, Charisma or Wisdom, nerve tissues (or, indeed, hands) increase Dexterity and so on. The GM will no doubt be able to improvise on this theme if necessary ...

While the transplant is taking place, the member of the Practice receiving the

organ is helpless, though he can revive himself (and abort the surgery) with a full-round action. A surgeon can attempt to transplant organs into his own body, but he suffers a -6 circumstance penalty to his Treat Injury skill check if he does this.

**Pliant Flesh (Su):** The lamp affixed to a surgeon's skull is not just for illumination. Its radiation renders flesh even more malleable than usual, so that it almost begs for the touch of the blade. Wounds inflicted by the light of the lamp are deep, deliberate and sure. Within a 15-foot cone (directed by the surgeon at the start of his turn as a free action), all weapons have their effective critical ranges increased by one when they are wielded against living flesh and all uses of the Treat Injury skill to perform surgery (see the description of the Treat Injury skill) are made at a +4 enhancement bonus. The surgeon will usually employ this ability to assist him in his surgical work, though it is also useful when slicing the faces off those who are stupid enough to disturb him. Finally, the unearthly light of the surgeon's lamp increases the DC to save against his deep gash ability by +2.

The lamp can be removed or attacked. It is a Tiny object with Hardness 5 and 10 hit points. The surgeon receives a +4 circumstance bonus to oppose disarm attacks, as the lamp is stapled to his skull. Successfully ripping the lamp off deals 1d4 damage to the surgeon plus the attacker's Strength modifier.

**Suture (Ex):** The surgeon can use a needle and thread to stitch an opponent's flesh with blinding speed. Gnarled hands move in a blur, and an ugly row of black stitches knots across the skin. This can be used offensively - and the results are disgusting. To use the suture ability, the surgeon must succeed at a Grapple check against an opponent he is already grappling. If this check is successful, the victim has his flesh stitched either to another part of the body or to a soft object nearby, such as his own clothes or a mattress. The surgeon might, for

example, stitch an opponent's lips together, or his legs, or stitch him down on a bed.

The suturing process inflicts 1d4+4 points of damage. If the victim attempts any action that would tear the stitches, such as walking when his legs are stitched together, he must make a Will saving throw (DC 19) to rip the stitches. This inflicts an automatic 2d4+8 points of damage upon him. A fellow character can cut the stitches away without causing harm by making a successful Treat Injury skill check (DC 20). This process takes 1d3 rounds.

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# Residue Daemon



When I was only a sapling, this was a peaceful place. The wind was gentle in my branches and the frosts of winter never bit too deep. The other trees around me kept their own quiet counsel, brooding with the deep wooden wisdom that humanity once respected but has long since lost.

Finding nothing amiss in my little world, I sent my roots down into the clean earth and spread my branches wide. Little deaths, little births, all happened around and in me. Rabbits mated; foxes stalked. Eggs hatched; stoats killed. Birth and death, day and night, warmth and cold, back and forth, a balance.

Then the man came, and the girl, and I thought they were only lovers. There was talk of money, of what was allowed and what was not. Next there was a fumbling, and then a struggle. She lay still at the base of my trunk, unconscious. He was breathing hard. He had a pair of scissors.

She was not beautiful, but she was female and that made him mad. I could feel his madness hot inside him, his blood like boiling water. He stuffed her mouth with earth and held it in place with a stocking. He used his scissors and he made her unrecognizable. He cut off the soft parts of her first. Then, when her face was no longer a face and white bone showed through the holes in her body, he went to work on the other places.

There should have been screams. The screams were choked by earth.

Agony spurted into me. Bitter blood drenched my roots and I was forced to drink. She did not die for many hours. He went away and left the remains there. She looked up at the moon. A fox came and sniffed at her, then fled.

When he came back, he had a spade. He buried her without a sound, just as he had killed her without a sound. He left her bones down among my roots, to sink into the black earth of time.

Blood and rags and a rusty pair of scissors hung in absolute darkness among my agonized roots. Her lower jaw slowly moved down, over the months; her spine arched; her skull was screaming, too slowly to be seen. Something still lived in the rot of her. It craved to scream.

The angry, eager, pious man brought others to share her grave; a pale factory girl from Rochdale, on her first night on the job, and an aged syphilitic insensible on cheap spirits. It was always a fresh pair of scissors.

Then they caught him and hanged him, for something he had done in a different place. He liked to do this very much. Some pieces he had taken with him, and he had left an ear in a coat that he mistakenly took to the dry-cleaners. So he was caught, and so he ended, and nobody ever knew about my three, though many questions were asked.

Down into the dark they fell, between the spread fingers of my roots. Women's bones jumbled together, broken things holding silent conversations in the silent ground. Remnants undecayed. A scrap of silk stocking, a stained, once ivory denture-plate. (And three sets of scissors, red-brown with rust.)

All of them had thought this kind of thing happened to other people. None of them had ever thought that they would come to this. They would never be found. Nobody ever came here. The earth had choked the only screams they could ever have made. Only I knew. There was a scream in my branches, far too loud for anyone to hear it. It never ceased. I was continually thrilled through with the pain and the rage and the denial. My leaves trembled with it. I bore it for years upon years, like black rot through the very heart of me. Their fury raged and swelled against the crust of the earth as an abscess rages and swells beneath the skin, unable to burst and find relief.

It was on a summer's morning, a hundred years or so after the man was hanged, when the boy



struck the other boy. It was not even meant in anger. They were playing at superheroes and became overexcited. A sharp crack; three drops of blood from an eight-year-old's nose fell on the mossy earth. One fled in howling misery, the other followed in howling fear.

A bubble of blood lay below me. It was a bridge, at last; a chance of release. I groaned and let the decades of putrid evil back into the world.

It was slow for a moment. The little scarlet spots only sweated more blood, a feeble trickle. The awakening seemed impossible after so long.

Then it was like a puffball growing in the forest floor. There was a swelling, a blooming, a detonation. It burst and bubbled and burst again. Something spurted from the pool. It spurted again, then again; a pulse, or a purging. My branches, my whole trunk shook with the relief of it.

Something was being born. It was born piecemeal, as its mothers had gone piecemeal into the ground. A spine without limbs lashed like a severed tail in the puddle. A tiny skull squealed in shrill madness. A claw like a mouse's flexed. It grew. They knotted and writhed together, wriggling with mad life. It grew. I felt sweet green peace return as I finally emptied my bowels of their nauseous hate. It grew.

The moon rose over my highest branches. Horror unfolded and stood.

A giant shadow turned this way and that. It bayed, and its voice was many voices in a harmony of shrieks. Long jaws closed and opened, closed and opened.

They made a sound.

The sound of rusty scissors.

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#### **All That Remains**

More than any other creature in this book, the residue demon has the ability to baffle forensic pathologists. It drains every drop of blood from the creatures it kills, but it does not do this through its mouthparts. Instead the fallen bodies are sucked into the earth within its zone of influence. Once under the soil, they rapidly begin to decompose until they reach the state of the other bodies buried (or concealed, or bricked up) within the same area.

Within three days, a fresh corpse is in the same state as a murder victim buried in the same place three decades ago. All the applicable factors - insect activity, staining and so on - point to the victim having been killed and buried around the time of the original murders. Most bizarrely, the items the victim was carrying are also aged accordingly. Metal items rust, papers decay and clothes rot away to almost nothing. Dental records confirm that the victim is indeed the missing person, but the forensic evidence makes for an impossible time of death, many years in the past.

#### **Game Statistics: Large Construct**

**Hit Dice:** 10d10+30 (85 hp)

**Initiative:** +0

**Speed:** 40 ft.

**Defence:** 18 (+9 natural, -1 size), flat-footed 19, touch 9

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +6/+20

**Attack:** Bite +13 melee (2d6+7)

**Full Attack:** Bite +13 melee (2d6+7) and 2 claws +8 melee (1d6+3)

**Space/Reach:** 10 ft. / 10 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Improved grab, frightful presence, rend

**Special Qualities:** Blood healing, construct traits, zone bound

**Saves:** Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +5

**Abilities:** Str 25, Dex 11, Con -, Int 6, Wis 15, Cha 13

**Skills:** Listen +7, Spot +7

**Feats:** Improved Natural Attack (bite), Weapon Focus (bite)

**Challenge Rating:** 9

**Horror:** Fear 16, Panic 16

-----  
Murder, especially horrifically brutal murder, leaves scars behind. The minds of



those involved are never the same again. The town where the murder happened must live with the memory forever after. Even an entire country can feel stained and disgraced by such events. The pain and sorrow may fade, but there is always something that remains.

The worst murders of all leave a spiritual blemish behind, a running sore on reality. Invisible, it deepens and suppurates, creating an atmosphere of sickness, apprehension and despair that effects anyone who happens across it. Communities take what action they can; houses where murders have happened are torn down; outdoor places are shunned and tales of hauntings are told. This makes little difference: this psychic wound festers over the years to the point where if so much as one drop of blood is spilled on its grounds, something terrible will occur.

The worst possible occurrence is a residue demon. (Which, to the more pedantic savants, is actually a construct.) The accumulated energies seize upon the spilt blood and pour themselves into it, finally given form after decades of stifling silence, finally birthed into the world. The spot becomes a bubbling patch of scum, then a mewling fetal skeleton, then a skinless thing the size of a greyhound. It grows with obscene speed, nurtured by the putrid memory of horrors past but not forgotten. In less than 24 hours, the creature is complete.

A residue demon is truly a daunting adversary. It is composed of dried blood and pure rage. It stands approximately twelve feet tall, rippling with muscles and taut sinew, giving off a stink of excavated flesh. Its only purpose is to embody the terrible acts that led to its creation, and will torture and slaughter anyone or anything that comes with close proximity of its location. It will do this in a manner that fits the original event, which often leads to frantic speculation in the local press about 'copycat killings' or the return of a serial killer. Some may even wonder if the right man was caught the first time around ...

Blind rage, terror and agony of past events govern the residue demon. In games where religion and magic have palpable effects, the horror will not rest or dissolve until it is destroyed, and its grounds exorcised. The GM might like to specify that this will require discovering and burying the victims with appropriate rites.

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**Blood Healing (Su):** Those who try to face down a residue demon often find they cannot prevail against it. The more party members are torn asunder, the more robust the creature seems to get. This is because it thrives on the shedding of blood within its zone of influence (see the zone of influence quality below). Whenever blood is shed on to the earth within the residue demon's zone, and the creature is itself in contact with the ground, it is healed of 1d8+1 points of damage. The GM must decide, based on the nature of wounds inflicted and damage dealt, whether blood was shed or not but as a guideline, It can only regain its strength when other people suffer and bleed.

The players may realize what is happening. Whenever the blood healing ability is used, any person within 30 feet of the shed blood can make a Spot check (DC 20) to notice that the blood is disappearing as soon as it lands on the earth. Any person who does nothing but observe the demon for one round during which Blood Healing takes place may make a Sense Motive check (DC 15) to figure out the connection between the creature's self-repairing ability and the shedding of blood on to the earth.

Note that the blood has to land on the earth in order for this ability to work. If any barrier (bandages, rubber boots, a groundsheet, quick-drying cement) prevents its - the blood's or the demon's - contact with the earth then the residue demon cannot benefit. Similarly, if the adventurers somehow manage to lift the residue demon into the air, it cannot regenerate until it touches the ground again, and fresh blood falls there.

**Frightful Presence (Su):** The residue demon can express the full horror of the events that caused its creation, sending out a psychic shock wave that floods the minds of witnesses with primal terror. It does this as a standard action and may do so once per day. (This is above and beyond any ordinary fear reaction that characters may have when confronted by a residue demon; see the Fear rules later in this book.) The shock wave is discharged in a 30 foot burst. Creatures within this range may become frightened or shaken. The duration is 5d6 rounds. This ability affects only opponents with fewer Hit Dice or levels than the residue demon has.

An affected opponent can resist the effects with a successful Will save (DC 18, Charisma-based, including a +2 racial modifier). An opponent that succeeds on the saving throw is immune to that same residue demon's frightful presence for 24 hours. Frightful presence is a mind-affecting fear effect.

**Improved Grab (Ex):** To use this ability, the residue demon must first hit with its bite attack. If successful, it grips with its jaws and can make a grapple check without provoking an attack of opportunity. This allows it to rend (see below).

**Rend (Ex):** A residue demon uses its monstrous jaws to rip its prey to pieces. A residue demon that wins a grapple

check after a successful bite attack establishes a hold, latching on to its victim's body and rending the flesh. This attack automatically deals 2d6+14 points of damage.

**Zone of Influence:** The residue demon is entirely the product of the violent events that created it. It has no existence outside of that context. As such, it is limited to a very narrow area, six hundred feet across. This zone is circular and centred on the remains of the original victim. If there are multiple victims, then it is centred upon the first one.

The demon cannot leave its zone of influence. If by some means it is forcibly removed from the zone (such as by resourceful characters trapping it in a truck and driving it over the boundary) then it disintegrates into a grisly slush of blood and bone fragments. However, it will regenerate in the centre of the zone at midnight the next night. This therefore does not destroy the creature but does give the party some vital time to investigate the demon's home ground. Artful players might think of removing the creature, then covering its zone of influence with concrete or tarmac. This won't work, although GMs should certainly let their players try - the demon just bursts through the obstruction.

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Wish You were here.

? WATER RESERVOIR  
TEXAS?  
2/11/62

# The Scourger



From his Lexus, pulled up by the Greyhound station, Russell checked that Clovis was in position, and watched the cars grind slowly past. Going by the plates, Virginia, and Maryland, mostly, commuters outnumbered the locals, who had a snide, whiney slogan "Taxation without Representation." If you really thought that senators actually represented you, then yes, living in a big city with none of them on your side might just piss you off. Russell didn't mind though; he'd met quite a few politicians, and none that he could ever have respected. He wasn't alone in that opinion; he'd once read that more teenage boys wanted to be pimps than be politicians, and whore-mongering was a fine way to make a living.

As the cars trucks and buses crawled by, Russell mused on his career highs, particularly one little bitch – Marie? – he'd thrown into the Potomac, while he scanned prospects who'd just arrived and were wandering around outside the exit. He wanted kids looking poor, clean, and alone. When a prospect came out, some hick from West Virginia, probably, he sent a text to Clovis' cell "redhead, jeans, crop top," and his partner was off. Clovis's job was to rob her and run away, so that Russell could come to the rescue. It worked quite often, and was going fine, until he caught a finger-lickin' good eye-ful. The pimp always looked for merchandise that would fill the occasional special orders that he got from high-paying clients. One of them was a superior court judge who had a thing for what he called "mambo chickens;" short strong-looking Latino kids, and Russell had just seen some prime meat. A little guy, broad-shouldered and muscular in a baseball shirt, sneakers and baggy jeans, wandering aimlessly between the rundown houses across from the station.

He quickly called Clovis off, got out of his Lexus and followed his target. After a couple of blocks, the kid stopped next to a vacant lot and turned round. Big, liquid black eyes, glistening like crude oil, cinnamon skin and a huge mouth. Russell grinned; chicken just didn't get any better. "Hey, kid," he began.

The Latino smiled. His lips pulled back to reveal a huge eyeball. The pimp stopped, mid-sentence, and the thing disappeared.

Next morning, Russell got a package in the mail. In it were a contact sheet and a series of photographs of a client of his with Marie, then of him taking her body, weighting it, and dumping it in the river. The panderer scanned the images with mounting panic – he'd been so careful. Then, his cell rang. "Russell Baliol?" said a chipper, preppy voice he didn't recognize. "We'll be in touch."

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#### **All That Remains**

Scourgers hardly ever kill their victims and, when they do, it is to avoid being discovered. If the scourger's true identity is found out, it will usually flee but, if the person who discovers it is alone and weak, the scourger will try to finish them off quickly and hide the body.

Victims eventually have their throats torn out, although it is apparent that they were first brought to their knees; the pattern of wounds on a typical adult victim shows a strong concentration of claw slashes around the thighs and lower abdomen. This is because the scourger is about the size of an eight-year-old child and cannot reach any higher. When the body is fresh these claw marks are puffy around the edges, suggesting that some form of irritant toxin was introduced into the wounds. Analysis of the blood reveals high levels of fast-acting, unidentifiable toxins, suggesting that the initial wounds caused the victim to drop to the ground, after which the assailant tore the throat out as a coup de grace.

#### **Game Statistics: Small Outsider**

**Hit Dice:** 4d8 (18 hp)

**Initiative:** +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

**Speed:** 40 ft. climb 40 ft.

**Defense:** 17 (+3 natural, +3 Dex, +1 size), flat-footed 14, touch 14

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +5/+2

**Attack:** Claw +5 melee (1d3 plus poison)

**Full Attack:** Claw +5 melee (1d3 plus poison)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Conceal identity, poison

**Special Qualities:** Darkvision 60 ft., final gaze, spider motion, transfer knowledge

**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref +7, Will +8

**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 17, Wis 19, Cha 10

**Skills:** Bluff +7, Climb +7, Disguise +7, Gather Information +7, Hide +7, Jump +7, Listen +7, Move Silently +7, Spot +7\*, Search +7, Sense Motive +7, Sleight of Hand +7

**Feats:** Alertness, Improved Initiative

**Challenge Rating:** 4

**Horror:** Madness 12

\*Scourgers receive a +4 racial bonus to all Spot and Search skill checks, due to their excellent vision. They receive a +8 racial bonus to Jump checks, as they are created to spring from wall to wall and from roof to roof. A scourger does not need a run-up to make a long or high jump.

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This is a particularly loathsome little demon, one of the class that is generally called the servitors, is little more than an ambulatory spying device and research tool. Periodically, dark masters will dispatch a scourger, perhaps to study a city, organization, building, cult or similar institution, or even an interesting person. This may simply be a surveillance or reconnaissance mission for general information purposes, or it may involve trying to find weaknesses in an organization, a way into a building or even a suitable candidate to become a blossomer (see above). Then the creatures will descend upon the location, sect or institution and make it their own, either taking direct control, infiltrating and subvert it.

The scourger is not a particularly dangerous adversary, no matter how freakish it may appear. The reports that it sends back are what really matter. A group of PCs may find that the enemy is consistently one jump ahead of them and able to set horribly efficient traps, simply because the enemy has a scourger observing them so that its superiors can analyze their weaknesses.

Scourgers don't establish lairs, scrounge for food or even eat (they can't) and are always on the clock, concealed near their target.

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**Conceal Identity (Sp):** The scourger can use a magical trick to make itself look different. It can seem one foot shorter or taller, thin, fat, or in between. It cannot change its body type; for example, it could not seem to be a dog instead of

Campaign Note: Scourgers can be very useful at the beginning of a horror campaign, as their arrival can represent the start of something terrible. The best thing the PCs can do is to locate the scourger and slay it as quickly as possible, to prevent their enemies learning even more about them. (Obviously, they must have had experiences with scourgers or creatures like them before in order to know that this needs doing.) This will not guarantee the demonic masters will move to different opportunities, but it does buy the party time to prepare for whatever the masters send next..

a humanoid. Otherwise, the extent of the apparent change is up to the scourger. It could add or obscure a minor feature or look like an entirely different person. It will typically use this ability to take on the appearance of a nondescript human being. As it is a small demon, the form of a child is especially useful to it.

The spell does not provide the abilities or mannerisms of the chosen form, nor does it alter the perceived tactile (touch) or audible (sound) properties of the scourger or anything it might be carrying. The scourger cannot speak (there is an eye affixed where its mouth should be!) so this means that any person it pretends to be cannot speak either.

The scourger can use this ability to disguise itself as someone else of similar size. If it does so, it gets a +10 bonus on the Disguise check.

A creature that interacts with the illusory body gets a Will saving throw (DC 15, Intelligence-based) to recognize it as an illusion.

**Transfer Knowledge: (Su):** The scourger can show its masters what it is seeing through the huge eye located in its mouth. This ability is continuously active. The masters scry into a dish full of dark fluid to receive the scourger's transmissions. The images are startlingly clear and well defined, even if obtained in the dark. They may make Spot and Search checks as if they were the scourger itself. The scourger does not need to sleep, so 24-hour surveillance is a possibility. The masters cannot, however, contact the scourger other than by means of a third

party messenger, or some mundane device such as a pager or cell phone (they can text). Once the scourger has been given his instructions, he obeys them until told to do otherwise

If a sheet of lead (even a thin sheet) comes between the scourger and his masters, then the transmission is interrupted. Running water, such as heavy rain or a shower inside a cubicle, distorts the signal but does not block it; the scourger's masters make all Spot and Search checks at a -4 circumstance penalty. Note also that the scourger only sends visual information, not sound, although it could show written accounts of what it had heard, or even send text messages or emails, if instructed to do so.

**Final Gaze (Su):** When a scourger dies, its remains are automatically recalled to the summoning circle from whence it was originally dispatched. This means that those who summoned it can examine it and find out how its life ended. Moreover, a scourger's great glistening eye is potent even in death. The last thing it saw is imprinted upon its cornea if great care is taken, the creature's eyeball can be removed and the cornea peeled off in a square section. This is then fitted into a device similar to a projection slide. Light is shone through it to reveal the last image.

Extracting the scourger's cornea requires the Surgery feat and a Treat Injury skill check (DC 20). If the check is failed by 5 or less, then a blurred but still possibly useful image is recovered. If it is failed by more than 5, the cornea is useless.

**Poison (Ex):** Scourgers have tiny venom sacs under their fingernails. The wounds they leave cause a maddening itch that makes it impossible to coordinate one's actions properly. When an opponent is scratched, he must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 14, including a +2 racial bonus) or suffer primary damage of 1d6 temporary Dexterity. One minute (ten rounds) later, he must make a second Fortitude saving throw at the same DC or

suffer secondary damage of 1d6 temporary Dexterity.

**Spider Motion (Su):** Scourgers often need to maneuver themselves into out-of-the-way places, such as gloomy upper corners in rooms or the spaces behind walls, in order to observe without being noticed. To aid them in this, they have the unpleasant ability to climb up any surface effortlessly. They never need to make Climb checks when ascending or descending a surface and can climb up even the smoothest of walls at the listed speed, though they cannot ascend a surface made slippery with grease. They can even hang upside down; indeed, they often do so, as high ceilings are excellent vantage points. A scourger retains its Dexterity bonus to Defense while climbing and opponents get no special bonus to their attacks against it.

A creature can attempt to pull a scourger from a wall with an opposed Strength ability score check; the scourger gains a +4 racial bonus on such checks.



# Shatterer



Dear Stevie,

I'm writing this letter because the counselor told me it would help me process what happened. I think that's bullshit. You're dead, you're not going to read it. Nobody who does read it would ever believe me, either, so what's the point? But they're making me, so I have to.

Today is the day you died. Happy Deathday. I should make you a big black cake. I could do that. It would only need food coloring. Then I'd put eighteen candles on the top. You would have liked that, I think. You and your gothier-than-thou attitude. I wonder if they'd let me.

They wouldn't, of course. I don't get on with the people here. When I say that you weren't ripped to pieces by a murderer, they think I'm in denial. When I say it was my fault, they call that bereavement guilt. I mustn't blame myself, everyone goes through the stages of grieving, blah, blah, blah.

It was my fault, though. You know that.

It was because of you and your obsession. You just never seemed to be there for me any more. There was no time for anything but the Great Work. Your magic.

You remember when we first met? When I told you I was into Wicca, you laughed and spent the night explaining how it was all made up. Goddess, I was so humiliated. You knew so much, but it only ever made me feel stupid. I still craved you, though. Everyone was in awe of you. You were everything I wanted to be. There was a darkness around you I could taste.

That first night was amazing. I would have believed anything you'd told me, then. You said we were going to be like Aleister Crowley and Leila Waddell, remember? Hot beast-on-whore action, with black robes, and candles burning.

I was jealous, that's all. I thought you wanted me for me. I didn't just want to be your vessel. I was into the whole sex magic thing when it was kinky and weird, but you just wanted to keep taking it further and further. I wasn't ready for the things you wanted to do. It was all slipping out of control.

The problem, Stevie dear, was that you were too good at it. Everything you tried, worked. You never had a ritual fail. You weren't one of those spotty jerks who wears a trench coat too big for him and has a wall full of fantasy swords. When you said the words, things happened. Jesus, people actually were afraid of you. That's how it's supposed to be when you're into the occult. I saw you make that drunk guy crap his pants, literally. The way you laughed scared me.

That's why I did it. I got into your files and changed some of the words.

I'm sorry.

I wanted to make one of your rituals fail. That's all I wanted. I needed you to stop being the great magician and just be my boyfriend for a change, like we used to be. I didn't know what would happen. I feel like I cut your brake cables or something. I'm crying now. This is just a stupid shitty letter to a dead guy and I'm crying.

I was in the next room with the door closed. I knew you were going to do the ritual without me. I knew it was the one I'd messed around with. I honestly thought nothing was going to happen. Then you'd say 'oh well' and come to bed and we'd just have regular, ordinary you-and-me sex.

I heard it happen, Stevie. All of it.

I heard you screaming and trying to send it back. Then the other noises, and then you screeched. That's the only word for it. Like that time when you got burning incense in your hair. I ran away then, because I was too scared to stay. Out the door, down the stairs, into the street, down the hill, like the Bernstein Bears. All the way to the police station.

I saw what it did to you. I wasn't supposed to, but someone downloaded the pictures from rotten.com and sent them to me. I think it was your mother. She thinks I killed you myself. I guess she believes that my satanic powers give me inhuman strength or something.

I used to like running my fingers over your ribs. I can't think of that anymore. I think 'ribs' and my brain keeps flashing up those pictures.

Now I'm here, in the hospital, writing you this. It's been a year. I still think of you. Your mother's right. I murdered you, Stevie.

All my love, Toni



## All That Remains

Shatterers are not subtle. When they go into a feeding frenzy, they rip their enemies limb from limb, taking greedy bites and swallowing bitten-off extremities whole. The carnage that is left in the wake of a shatterer can send veteran police officers back out into the street to vomit up their last meal.

At first sight, it is quite difficult to tell how many bodies there actually are, because the residue is a carpet of gore. None of the bodies will be recovered with all of the parts will never be accounted for. All the corpses will have bits missing, typically those that protrude most from the body. For example, heads and hands will be bitten off, but hips, shoulders and internal organs will usually be present.

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## Game Statistics: Large Outsider

**Hit Dice:** 10d8+30 (74 hp)

**Initiative:** +5 (Dex)

**Speed:** 40 ft. climb 20 ft.

**Defence:** 20 (+5 Dex, +6 natural, -1 size), flat-footed 15, touch 14

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +9/+19

**Attack:** Bite +14 melee (2d6+5)

**Full Attack:** Bite +14 melee (2d6+5) and 2 claws +12 melee (1d6+5)

**Space/Reach:** 10 ft. / 10 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Countermagic, feeding frenzy

**Special Qualities:** Greater invisibility, horrific +4, spell resistance 20

**Saves:** Fort +10, Ref +12, Will +7

**Abilities:** Str 20, Dex 20, Con 16, Int 5, Wis 10, Cha 13

**Skills:** Climb +18, Hide +14, Intimidate +14, Move Silently +14, Jump +18

**Feats:** Cleave, Great Cleave, Multiattack, Power Attack

**Challenge Rating:** 10

**Horror:** Madness 20, Panic 16

Occultists who have heard of it speak of the shatterer with horror. Though it is a lesser entity in rank than the likes of the sisterite (see below), and

is not especially intelligent, it is no less deadly. The shatterer's name derives from its curious innate ability to break practically any enchantment, including magical protections and bindings placed upon demons.

Its favorite meal is careless would-be demon-summoners. There are stories of magicians who died, dismembered, while attempting to call up and control something that they believed to be well within their competence. Some of them reflect how easy it is to make nitroglycerin with an alchemist's tools, others are just horror stories, whilst a few relate to the shatterer.

These nightmarish demons can found on all planes, so it is difficult to create effective barriers against them. They cannot, however, enter the physical realm under their own power, which is fortunate for mortal magicians. Since no sane magician would summon a shatterer deliberately, occultists have speculated as to how it is that the shatterers ever manage to enter our world at all.

The answer is simple but has implications so terrifying that many students of the occult who have heard it refuse to acknowledge it. Shatterers have the ability to sense summonings and are drawn to them like a shark to a thrashing swimmer. (See the vortex sense ability below.) The shatterer enters the physical world by hijacking the summoning vortex that was meant for some other, lesser creature. Unless the magician performing the ritual is extremely careful, he may find himself with a ravening shatterer in - say - his Triangle of Art instead of a weak, easily controllable spirit.

Upon entry into the physical realm, the shatterer goes into a feeding frenzy, devouring everything in sight. Once its appetite is finally sated, the demon shifts back to its previous realm; it can leave whenever it pleases, and does not care to stay on the material plane any longer than necessary. A shatterer simply gorges itself and goes home.

The shatterer's deadly powers make it a favored pet of greater demons. These

will sometimes punish importunate or disrespectful covens by sending the shatterer in response to a petition for aid. Some groups of diabolists have been literally torn apart when their demonic patron dispatched a shatterer into their circle instead of a servitor.

In form, shatterers resemble something between a spider and a plucked turkey with a neck full of teeth. They are quick and agile despite their heft.

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**Countermagic (Su):** A shatterer can attempt to counter any spell that is cast within 60 feet of it, whether the spell is aimed at the shatterer or not. It does this as a free action. The shatterer makes a dispel check, calculated as the shatterer's Hit Dice + its Charisma modifier, with a target DC of the caster's level (or Hit Dice) + his ability score modifier + the level of the spell cast. If the shatterer is successful, the spell is immediately countered and does not take effect.

If the GM's campaign supports d20 magic, the shatterer gains a +6 racial bonus on this check if the spell that it is trying to counter involves the control, banishing, subduing, charming, binding or similar restriction of outsiders. Examples: dimensional anchor, binding, holy word.

GMs using systems that do not use spell levels should reconfigure the above dispel check accordingly. Similarly, GMs rules sets that do not employ the d20 magic system at all should bear the intended effect of the Countermagic ability in mind; it can negate any spell cast within 60 feet.

**Feeding Frenzy (Ex):** Shatterers turn into berserk killing machines as soon as they taste blood. Once a shatterer has slain a creature, it will attempt to devour the body. This will keep it occupied for 1d3 rounds, during which it will not attack except to defend itself. From the point at which it begins to devour the body, it gains a temporary enhancement bonus of +4 to Strength and Constitution and a temporary penalty of -2 to Defence. This state lasts for 10 rounds.

If the shatterer manages to kill and begin to eat a second victim before the feeding frenzy has worn off, then a new feeding frenzy commences at that point. A shatterer can keep up a feeding frenzy for several minutes if there are enough victims to devour.

**Greater Invisibility (Sp):** A shatterer can choose to be invisible when it first manifests. It does this to fool its prey into thinking that their summoning ritual has been unsuccessful. The shatterer remains invisible even when it attacks a foe.


This invisibility continues indefinitely until an event occurs that cancels it. Other than such tricks as paint sprays or throwing a sheet over the thing, there are only two events that can render the creature visible. When it attempts to break a ward (see the shatter circle ability below) it becomes temporarily visible as a transparent version of itself surrounded by sparks of energy, so characters who are observing this can see roughly what it looks like and where it is. Secondly, when it enters feeding frenzy, it becomes fully visible.

A shatterer can use greater invisibility once per hour.

**Horrific:** The shatterer's mind-warping presence increases the DC of Madness saves by +4.

**Shatter Circle (Su):** Shatterers have a strange innate ability to struggle through protective spells and boundaries that would hold other evil or chaotic Outsiders back. In games using d20 magic, a shatterer benefits from a +6 bonus to its Spell Resistance when attempting to overcome any of the following spells: protection from evil, protection from chaos, magic circle against good, magic circle against chaos, repulsion or antipathy. This ability also gives the shatterer +6 turn resistance if a character should attempt to turn it with the Planar Turning epic feat.

**Vortex Sense (Su):** When a summoning ritual is performed, a temporary conduit is opened between this world and the



realms beyond. A shatterer can feel the interplanar conduit opening and can hijack it, so that it appears instead of the summoned creature. This ability will have a slightly different application according to the rules the GM is using for demonology and summoning. Depending on the system, a shatterer may be attracted to a summoning under the following circumstances:

- + The caster is using a variety of planar ally and the GM rules that the caster's deity is unable to assist him or her directly, such as if the spell were to be cast in a thoroughly desecrated temple, or some external force were interfering.
- + The caster is using a version of planar binding and does not have the proper items, shirks the ritual preparations or has some incorrect information. By far the most likely condition for a shatterer to appear is the absence of the correct name for the entity being summoned. If the summoner uses a name that belongs to a different entity from the one he thinks he is calling, then he is likely to get the creature whose name he uses. However, if he uses a name that does not actually belong to any entity at all, then he effectively creates an open channel into which any being can jump. The shatterer's ability to sense a summoning vortex makes it the most likely creature to respond to such a botched summoning.

# Sisterite

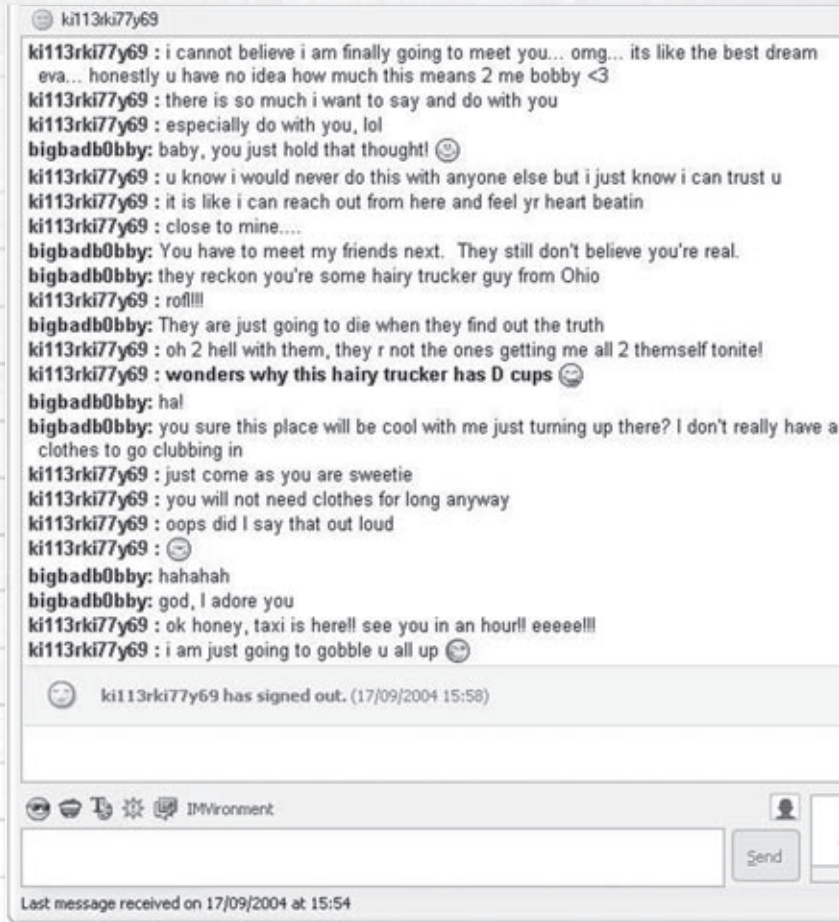


## Hunt for missing computer technician goes on

By Riaz Matharoo

Fears are growing for the safety of a computer technician who has been missing for more than three weeks. Robert Dobbins, 21, of West Addison, Chicago has not been seen since 7pm on July 9 when he told his roommates he was going to meet a woman he had befriended over the Internet. His green Volvo 244 was found parked at a vacant lot the following day.

Searching Mr. Dobbins' computer for leads, police discovered several gigabytes of hard pornography. Encrypted chat logs show that he believed he was to meet a woman, who gave her name as Michelle Schwester, and provided a nonexistent address. Though the logs mention them, no images of his companion have been located. Police are anxious to trace Ms. Schwester, whose name does not appear in any public records.



**Game Statistics: Medium Outsider (Native)**

**Hit Dice:** 8d8 (36 hp)

**Initiative:** +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Defence:** 21 (+7 natural, +4 Dex), touch 14, flat-footed 17

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +8/+12

**Attack:** Bite +12 (1d6+4)

**Full Attack:** Bite +12 (1d6+4) and two claws +10 (1d4+2)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Addictive Presence, Bewitching Sigil, Establish Rapport, Improved Grab, Rend

**Special Qualities:** Blindsight, Devour, Dormancy, Horrific +4, Natural Interface

**Saves:** Fort +6, Ref +10, Will +7

**Abilities:** Str 19, Dex 18, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 22

**Skills:** Bluff +15, Climb +7, Computer Use +14\*, Concentration +7, Craft (trapmaking) +6, Craft (website design) +6, Diplomacy +9, Disable Device +6, Disguise +13, Escape Artist +9, Hide +11, Intimidate +11, Jump +6, Knowledge (occult) +6, Knowledge (web) +6, Listen +6, Move Silently +11, Search +4, Sense Motive +6, Spot +6, Survival +6

**Feats:** Deceptive, Improved Initiative, Multiattack

**Challenge Rating:** 8

**Horror:** Madness 24

\* Sisterites receive a +4 racial bonus to all Computer Use skill checks.

The sisterites are demonic entities that dwell on the material plane. They make their homes in secluded and easily defensible places where they are not likely to be found, such as the attics of abandoned houses, underground railway tunnels, deep caverns such as those of disused mines and unvisited archive rooms in the basements of universities.

From their lairs, the sisterites use their bizarre powers to access the Internet, using the Web, to lure in lonely and unwitting prey. They make use of dating websites and other less salubrious 'adult connection' agencies to cultivate

potential victims, targeting lonely and gullible men - for preference unhealthy and overweight specimens - who reside within easy distance of a lair. All sisterites appear to use the same ISP; whatever name she uses, her email address will always end with @sisterite.com.

Those who are familiar with the sisterites' insidious ways will delete any message that comes from a sisterite.com source, unless they are putting together some kind of rash plan to track down and kill the creatures. This is a very dangerous undertaking, as sisterites take great pains to avoid detection and will often booby-trap their lairs.

Sisterites typically seduce their prey over an extended period; often weeks or months; complimenting and soothing them until they have established trust or, preferably, incited a degree of lust that clouds the victim's judgement. Once the prey has been thoroughly gulled, with the help of the sisterite's bewitching sigil (see below), he is invited to a suitable location for a meeting 'in the flesh'. The sisterite warps the victim's perceptions, so that he sees a nightclub or bar instead of an empty barn or derelict house. He hopes for sex, and, hopefully, a lot of sex. What he gets is a night of being dismembered, disemboweled and devoured.

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**Addictive Presence (Su):** The sisterites know what sad, lonely men want. The creatures are experts at giving their victims enough attention to feel good about themselves, while holding back enough to make them want more. When a sisterite first makes contact with her prey and spends at least one minute talking to him online, he must make a Will saving throw (DC 20) or become fascinated. (The saving throw DC is Charisma-based.)

While fascinated, he does not want to do anything other than sit at his computer and converse with her, though he will react to life-threatening circumstances. The sisterite will always end the session after several hours have passed, giving a time and date for the next online rendezvous.

Once the victim has been fascinated once (failed a Will saving throw) and has the opportunity to spend more online time with his new friend, he must make a further Will saving throw at the same DC in order to do anything else. For example, if the target knew that his sisterite was going to be online on a given night, he would have to succeed at a Will saving throw in order to attend the party he had previously promised to go to. If he failed, he would simply rush back to his computer and log on.

**Bewitching Sigil (Su):** A bewitching sigil is a form of magical attack delivered over the Internet. When she eventually agrees to send a photo of herself, a sisterite will always send an image file, usually in .gif or .jpg format. Once this file is opened and the image looked at, any person looking at it must make a Will saving throw (DC 20). (The saving throw DC is Charisma-based.) Those who make their saving throws see the sigil as it truly is, a tangled white symbol on a black background. Those who fail, however, see instead a gorgeous and enticing female. Any person who has ever seen a sisterite's true form, or has previously saved against a different bewitching sigil, receives a permanent +4 bonus to save to all such saves. You only ever have to save against any given sigil once.

All those who fail their saving throws when looking at one particular sigil



see the same beautiful woman, but do not suffer any other negative effect. However, whenever the sisterite sends out her bewitching sigil, she always has one specific - primary - victim in mind, whom she must select in advance. This unfortunate is plunged into far greater danger if he fails his Will saving throw. First, a sisterite always knows the exact location of her primary victim, even if he is out of range of her blindsight (see below).

Secondly, the creature can twist her primary victim's perceptions at will, provided that he is within range (ten miles plus two additional miles per hit die of the sisterite.) The predator can mentally convince her prey that a ruined shack is actually a nightclub, that a glass of brackish water is champagne and that she is not a ghastly apparition but a luscious blonde dream girl. The sisterite typically uses this power to create a suitable hallucinatory venue her meeting with her victim, when she decides to summon him to his doom.

The victim is allowed no further saving throw until the sisterite is killed (at which point he is freed from the effect) except under the following circumstances:

- + Deleting the image file allows the victim to make a second Will saving throw to break the bewitchment effect. However, this is not as easy as it sounds. The image is a magical effect that actively resists deletion. On the mundane plane, the file uses unpleasant programming tricks to evade removal and is thus difficult to delete, requiring a Computer Use skill check (DC 25) to eradicate completely. If the person trying to delete it fails his skill check by more than 5, then he believes that he has deleted the file successfully when in reality it still resides on the potential victim's hard drive. Spiritually, the sigil's magic subverts the will of anyone attempting to remove it. Hence, the victim or anyone trying to help him out will have to make a will roll, DC 25, to even consider trying to purge the file; whether by deleting it, reformatting

the hard disk, or even, as a last resort, destroying the computer.

- + Giving the victim a dose of an anti-hallucinogen can cause him to see the world as it truly is for d4x10 minutes, suspending but not removing the effects of the sisterite's bewitchment. Administering the correct drug effectively requires a successful Treat Injury skill check and access to psychiatric medicines.
- + If the sisterite goes into hibernation, she can no longer actively control the victim's perceptions, though he is still under her spell. The dupe still perceives the sigil as the photo of a beautiful woman. When the sisterite awakens from hibernation, she can resume her control of the victim's perceptions, provided that the sigil has not been deleted in the interim.

A sisterite can only control the victim's perceptions of the environment and of herself. She cannot make other people seem to be different or to do things that they are not doing. She may, however, create and sustain a number of hallucinatory creatures equal to her Charisma ability score bonus, such as bartenders, additional club attendees and the like, in order to make her unreal environment seem less empty.

**Blindsight (Ex):** A sisterite has a metal plate nailed over each eye socket. This apparent blindness does not impede her, as these horrors do not have a sense of sight. Instead, they use psychic imaging to perceive their environment, modeling it in virtual form inside their unspeakably twisted minds. As a result, conditions that hamper vision for ordinary people, such as darkness and obscuring smoke, do not interfere with the sisterites' ability to perceive their environments at all.

Sisterites have blindsight out to a range of 60 feet, and can sense nothing outside that radius, aside from the victims of their sigils (see above). They do not need to make Spot or Listen checks to notice creatures within this sensory field, even if they are hiding behind solid objects. Their blindsight is continuously active

and does not need to be 'switched on,' though it functions to a lesser degree while the sisterite is hibernating (see below).

**Devour (Ex):** When sisterites feed, they do so thoroughly, and their stomachs distend as they fill with meat, gristle, bone and fabric. Their powerful jaws grind up every morsel of the victim, clothes included; even teeth and bones are crunched and swallowed. Unless a sisterite is interrupted at her grisly feast, the only sign that the slaughter has taken place is the riot of bloodstains. It is next to impossible to find any other trace of the unfortunate him, however, even so much as a fragment of bone or a scrap of skin. Anyone looking for physical remnants must make a Search check (DC 25) to find anything at all other than blood. At this level of success, the investigator will discover shards of keys, coins, jewelry, spectacle lenses or plastic cards, all showing deep bite marks. Any PC who makes the check at DC 30 will find some tiny organic remnant; perhaps a hair, an eyelash, or a sliver from a fingernail.

**Establish Rapport (Su):** The sisterite's predatory methods depend on wearing away the victim's skepticism and inability to believe his luck. Through simple online conversation, sharing of intimacies and clever flattery of the victim's ego, the huntress steadily lowers her prey's defenses. For every week in which a potential victim spends at least three evenings conversing with the sisterite online, his Will saving throws against her supernatural abilities suffer a cumulative -1 circumstance penalty, to a maximum penalty of -5. This penalty also applies to the victim's Will saving throws to resist the sisterite's addictive presence ability.

**Dormancy (Ex):** When a sisterite has fed she goes into a trance-like dormancy for about six months, so that she can digest her victim. Before doing this, she will barricade herself away behind as much movable junk as she can find, so that anyone trying to reach her will create noise and wake her up. During this critical and dangerous time, her hideously



distended form slowly contracts back to its usual proportions. A dormant sisterite is helpless and can be targeted with a coup de grace.

In their dormant state, these horrors do not enjoy the full benefits of their blindsense. While in a digestive trance, they must make Spot or Listen checks to detect any creature within 60 feet; as if they were ordinary creatures. Hence, a dormant sisterite's primary defense is her sense of smell, which is so acute that it can waken her if she detects an unexpected scent in the area. On any round on which an unexpected scent is present within 30 feet, she may make a Survival skill check to notice it and awaken herself. More powerful scents, such as strong chemicals, smoke or an overweight male who has not showered in over a month, can be detected at a range of up to 60 feet.

Sisterites try to arrange their lairs so that they will have plenty of time to waken before they have to confront any intruder, because a dormant sisterite needs to take a full-round action to rouse herself before she is no longer considered helpless and can take actions. For the next 1d4 rounds, she is sluggish and can only take a move action or a standard action in the round but not both.

**Horrific (Ex):** Sisterites are pallid, gruesome figures of nightmare. Even those who think they are inured to the worst a mortuary room or battlefield can offer can be driven shrieking mad when they see a sisterite looming over them. Sisterites receive a +4 bonus to their Madness horror save DC.

**Improved Grab (Ex):** To use this ability, the sisterite must hit with her bite attack. She can then attempt to start a grapple (and thus rend) as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

**Natural Interface (Su):** A sisterite can access the Internet without the need for a computer, modem or any external paraphernalia whatsoever. A sisterite can 'log on' as a full-round action. Once connected, they can compose and send

emails, model or remodel websites and even hold conversations through Internet Relay Chat (IRC) or messenger programs. While a sisterite is using her natural interface ability, she must concentrate. If she suffers distraction, such as from taking physical damage, she must make a Concentration check (DC 15 + damage dealt) or be abruptly 'disconnected'. Attempts to track the sisterite's IP address through conventional means are always fruitless. The domain sisterite.com does not appear to be registered to a user, though name servers clearly recognize it.

The secondary application of the sisterite's natural interface ability is remote usage of computers. A sisterite can control any powered-up computer within 60 feet of her as if she was sat at the keyboard; her blindsight tells her that it is there; and these creatures can also attempt to operate a computer secretly while another person is also using it. If she does so, make opposed Computer Use skill checks before the sisterite attempts whatever operation she is undertaking. If she is successful, she goes undetected. If not, the other operator realizes that someone else is manipulating the computer at the same time, though he is not automatically unable to counter what the sisterite is doing, nor does he automatically recognize what she is trying to do. A sisterite's remote computer use provokes attacks of opportunity and requires concentration exactly as if she were sat at the machine and making the skill check from there.

**Rend (Ex):** Whether they are fighting or ripping the flesh from the bones of their screaming prey, sisterites like to close their jaws on a soft part of the victim's body and rend out whole masses of tissue. A sisterite that wins a grapple check after a successful bite attack establishes a hold, latching on to her prey's body and tearing the flesh. This attack automatically deals 1d6+6 points of damage.

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### **Description**

When they appear in their true forms, the sisterites stand about seven feet tall. They are usually naked and have deathly pale skin. They might once have been human but now show the evidence of horrible butchery, as if a serial killer's victim had somehow been restored to a semblance of life. The skin on their abdomens is always shredded, exposing muscle tissue and glistening viscera. Their arms end in talons; they are usually slathered up to the elbow with the fat and juices of the men whose bodies they have eagerly ripped open to get at the offal.

The face is perhaps the worst of all: sisterites have carbuncular metal plates nailed over their eyes, making them look almost insect-like and their lipless mouths are almost always thickly crusted with the blood of their last unfortunate meal. They prefer obese males as their food, since they contain substantial fatty deposits and plentiful meat.

### **Sisterite Hunting**

Although the sisterites are usually content to look for potential victims on the Web by simple searching and registering on dating websites, this is not always practical. The vast number of lonely human beings using the same facilities can easily drown out even a sisterite's compelling presence.

The sisterites use two methods to increase their number of potential victims. One is to send out hundreds of thousands of unsolicited emails, purporting to be from lonely women craving male attention—all from sisterite.com, of course. The sisterite has no supernatural ability to make the reader of such an email pay attention to it. His own natural curiosity must lead him to visit the indicated website.

The other method is the free promotional CD. This is sent to all the men in a given region that match a particular profile, namely the single, love-seeking variety. Once the CD is inserted into a given computer, it installs software that automatically logs the individual on to the sisterites' web site. It is extremely difficult to uninstall, requiring a Computer Use skill check (DC 30) to get rid of. Like the sigil above, the CD carries a magical charge, and those who see it have to make a DC 25 Will check to want to get rid of it. As the CD is a physical object, it can act as a minor talisman; the psychic radiation with which it infests the computer adds +2 to the DC of saving throws against the abilities of any sisterite working through it.

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# Sleep Hag



I told them again and again but they did not listen.

The first time it happened was about two years ago, I think. I was seven then. I woke up in the middle of the night. I could see it was twelve eighteen because the clock was glowing. It was the only light in the room and then something moved in front of it. There was a strong breeze and it was warm. The curtains were blowing in. I was really frightened. I could not move and could not scream though I wanted to. It lasted for about thirty seconds and then it was gone. I didn't see anything that time apart from the thing that moved in front of the clock for a moment. I could not get back to sleep and did not want to get out of bed and turn the light on in case something happened.

Then a few months later it happened again. I was lying in bed and again I woke up all of a sudden. I felt something holding me down. It was really strong and I could not sit up. I tried to scream for my mummy and daddy and could not make any noise come out. I tried to bang on the wall so they would hear me but I could not move my arms at all. I was more scared than I have ever been in my life.

I told a couple of people at school. Tommy Pryce said it was the old witch that comes in the night. We all laughed at him and he cried but secretly I thought he was telling the truth. Nobody ever talked to Tommy much. He didn't have any friends. His mum died in the night and her face was all screwed up and scary. She had a heart attack. Tommy believed in the old witch and the more I listened to him the more I believed in her too. He said she climbs in the window and sits on your chest and steals your breath.

Whatever you do you must never ever look. You have to lie still and wait for her to go away. If you turn on the light and look, you will see her, and she will see YOU, then it's all over. That was what Tommy said. It's all over. I told mum and dad about it in the evening and they just cuddled me and told me not to be afraid. Tommy was having emotional problems and I must be sympathetic, they said. He had had a lot of tragic things happen in his life.

They said it was not a ghost. My dad made me go and sit with him while we looked it up on the Internet. We found a place that said it was a thing called sleep paralysis and lots of people got it. It is what happens when your brain is still full of dreams but your body wakes up, so you are stuck in the bad dream. When I went to bed I was not quite so scared as before because I knew it was all in my head. I went to sleep. There was a bright moon shining.

I woke up again. The curtains were blowing and I had a heavy thing on me. I was scared all through my body. I wanted to turn on the light but I couldn't. I wanted to open my eyes so I could see there was nothing there. I was scared too, though. What if I did see something? I thought about the website and the sleep paralysis and I knew I was being a big baby. I opened my eyes.

The old lady was looking right into my face.

Her mouth was all open wide, like this: Oooooooo.

Now I'm really frightened. I can't move at all. I haven't been able to move for ages. My mummy and daddy are crying. Some men came and took me out of bed and took me away to the hospital. That was days ago.

A man cut me with knives and took things out of me. Then they painted my face to look healthy because it was all twisted up and didn't look like me any more. They put me in a little suit.

I can't move. I'm scared.

I don't want to be in the coffin.

I don't want to go in the oven and be all burned up.

## All That Remains

When a sleep hag drains all the life from a victim, they die without any wounds being left on the body. Death appears to be from asphyxiation (there are burst blood vessels) but the airways are not blocked, nor is there any sign of fluid in the lungs. The most bizarre feature of a sleep hag death is the expression of the corpse. The victim's face is twisted in an alarming way, as if it was frozen in an exaggerated grimace of terror, or someone had molded it like clay after the victim's death.

## Game Statistics: Medium-size Monstrous Humanoid

**Hit Dice:** 6d8 (28 hp)

**Initiative:** +1 (Dex)

**Speed:** 30 ft. fly 30 ft. (poor)

**Defense:** 12 (+1 Dex, +1 natural), flat-footed 11, touch 11

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +6/+12

**Attack:** Claw +8 melee (1d4+3)

**Full Attack:** 2 claws +8 melee (1d4+3)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Drain life, paralyzing touch

**Special Qualities:** Silent, heavy

**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +5

**Abilities:** Str 15, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 16

**Skills:** Bluff +12, Disguise +12, Hide +10, Listen +9, Intimidate +12, Move Silently +10, Sleight of Hand +10, Spot +9, Tumble +10

**Feats:** Alertness, Blind Fight, Great Fortitude

**Challenge Rating:** 5

**Horror:** Fear 16

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The scientific explanation - sleep paralysis - makes sense and probably does account for many cases. Nevertheless, occult scholars who note that this creature - or phenomenon - occurs in many peoples' folklore, ranging at least from China to the Fertile Crescent, feel that there is an old and terrible truth behind the legend of the sleep hag. It

is a genuine entity that feeds off living creatures, by squatting on their chests and inhaling their breath. This is not usually fatal, as the hag will take a little breath each night, coming back for more and keeping the victim alive. This can continue indefinitely, so long as the hag does not believe that it has been discovered. Should the creature believe that its victim or a third party has seen it at work, it will attempt to suck away victim's remaining breath in one inhalation, killing the sleeper.

**Drain Life (Su):** The sleep hag may drain an opponent with a successful Grapple check. This is usually performed against a helpless victim whom the monster has first paralysed, and automatically wakes a sleeping target. This attack deals 1d4 points of temporary Constitution damage, and each point confers 5 temporary hit points upon the hag. It will not usually drain the victim to the point of death unless it believes that the victim has seen it. Note that the hag does not have any supernatural means of telling whether it has been detected or not. Usually, the monster must notice a person looking at it, before it tries to use the drain life ability to kill.

**Heavy:** The sleep hag is a strangely heavy creature, with mass than one might expect from its shriveled appearance. It is very difficult to dislodge one of these monsters once it has a hold. Sleep hags gain a +4 racial bonus to all Grapple checks, and to all opposed checks that involve keeping footing, such as Strength checks made to resist bull rush attacks.

**Paralyzing Touch (Su):** The touch of a sleep hag causes the famous paralysis described above. Unless the victim is asleep when the creature touches him, it must grapple a victim first. When touched, the target is entitled to a Fortitude saving throw (DC 16, Constitution-based). If the save fails, the victim cannot move for 5+1d4 rounds, though he can open his eyes. He wakes up and is aware of his surroundings but cannot move a muscle, nor can he speak. If the save is successful, the victim is not paralysed and cannot be affected



by the same hag's paralysis ability for the next 24 hours. Unlike the drain life attack, the paralyzing touch does not wake the target.

**Silent (Su):** A sleep hag makes no noise at all, thus never needs to make Move Silently checks when it moves. Her feet do not touch the ground when she walks. The only time when this monster's actions result in sound is when it moves objects about, such as opening a door or window, or when items that it has interacted with encounter other physical things. A vase that a hag knocks over will make noise on impact with a floor. If the creature is trying to manipulate an object quietly, such as moving a curtain aside, it must make a Move Silently check, opposed by the Listen check of any person who is near enough to hear.

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# Snuff Golem



Dictaphone record of Special Agent Gail Moncrieff

*Click.*

Janet, I'm standing in the house where the bodies were found. Seven days have passed since they took them out of here. Nobody has been inside but the investigating officers and the forensics team.

The house is a beachfront property. It belonged to Jefferson Thomas, alias Candy Apple Joe, alias Monsignor. Thomas' body was found in the center of the room, hanging from the chandelier. The bodies of the Manez brothers, Pepito and Esteban, were in the upstairs bathroom and the kitchen respectively.

Thomas had been strung up by his arms. He was naked and had his mouth bound with tape. It would have been easy to kill him then, but he did not die at that stage. Ergo, the killer, or killers, wanted him kept alive. Thomas bled to death from multiple wounds in the thigh, one of which opened the femoral artery. I am looking at the splash patterns on the carpet. Thomas was swinging from side to side while he bled.

The pathologist found that the penis and testicles had been smashed repeatedly between two wooden surfaces, and were crushed to a pulp. The blows were so forceful that the penis was almost entirely severed. Splinters of wood were recovered, suggesting that a ruler or wooden pole was used. The impression the report gives is of a repeated slamming between two wooden surfaces. I had thought that they did this with a drawer or a cupboard door, but I now believe the injuries happened after Thomas was hung up. I will look at the crime scene photos tonight and see if anything clicks.

*Click.*

I'm standing in the upstairs bathroom. Pepito Manez was found dead in the bathtub. Death was apparently from electrocution. He was fully clothed. It is thus safe to assume that he did not enter the bath voluntarily. There is no sign of any electrical appliance nearby.

*Click.*

I am making a circuit of the kitchen. The toaster does not appear to have been moved. The George Foreman grill is similarly undisturbed. I cannot find any evidence that an electrical appliance from this house was thrown into the bathtub.

Esteban Manez was found on the kitchen table. The contents of the cutlery drawer are missing, and seem to have been thrust through his body. The table is marked in several places, where the knives penetrated it. Death did not result from a single blow but from blood loss, following a series of wounds sustained over time. I can only conclude that this was deliberate. Manez was supposed to suffer.

*Click.*

Janet, I am looking at the home entertainment system. It's a Bang & Olafson, top of the range, and it stands away from the wall at an angle of about forty-five degrees. It is undamaged, and it's been unplugged. Were they attempting to steal it when Thomas interrupted them? The DVD and music collection seems to have been left undisturbed. The report says that no valuables were taken. Why did the killers move the entertainment system?

An armchair has also been moved away from the wall. Why was the armchair moved? Janet, there is a double wall socket behind the armchair, just like the one behind the entertainment system.

So, they moved the entertainment system and the armchair to get to the electrical sockets. The entertainment system was plugged in, so they unplugged it. That means they needed as many sockets as they could free up. They had some equipment, then, that they needed to power with electricity. What was it?

*Click.*

Thomas is the central figure here. Thomas was a pimp and drug dealer, with God only knows how many sources of income. Whoever did this was saving Thomas until last. He was supposed to die slowly. So was Esteban.

Why not Pepito? Why was Pepito taken out so quickly? Why such a bizarre death? Electrocuting a fully clothed man in the bath isn't practical. It isn't quick to arrange. Why would anyone want to do it? Just to see the look on his face?



The damage to Thomas's genitals doesn't make sense. If you're going to cut someone, you cut him. His thighs were hamburger, for Christ's sake. Wait. Stop. Getting frustrated here.

*Click.*

Janet, I'm standing just beside where Thomas bled to death. I need to know what caused that genital bruising. None of the other wounds appear to have been made with a wooden object. I can't think of any wooden object that would crush flesh like that, as if it had been slammed in a door.

If I were the killer, then to make those wounds, I'd have had to reach across Thomas' naked body, like this, and hold the item with both hands, and slam it like a –

A clapperboard.

Janet, it was a clapperboard. They mashed his genitals with each take. Someone was making a movie. That's why they needed the power outlets. It was for the film equipment. Someone was filming all of this.

Each time they shot the scene, they slammed his genitals in the clapperboard and they gashed him in the thighs again.

Jesus.

I need to know if Thomas was ever involved in movie making. See what we can dredge up. I've got a hunch here, and it's an ugly one.

---

#### **All That Remains**

The condition of a snuff golem's victim is entirely dependent upon the amount of time that the golem had to 'shoot the scene'. If the creature was simply defending itself, then the victims are only bashed and slashed; they died from the impacts of large metal objects. Some will have sharpened metal spikes driven through them with sufficient force to pin them to the wall. These spikes prove to be pieces of film-making equipment, such as boom mike stands and slivers of film canister.

If the golem had time to get 'creative' then the scene is far more horrifying. The bodies of its victims show signs of protracted torture. Their deaths are also bizarre and ritualistic, having a strong element of display about them. For example, a victim might be found crushed between two pieces of strong glass, or hanging from a meat hook with her limbs removed, or bloated with water from tubes inserted into the body's orifices. A sharp-witted investigator studying the scene could conclude that there was a cinematic sensibility at work. Whoever did this was even more interested in creating a gruesome spectacle that could be savored by an audience, than in finishing the victim off.

#### **Game Statistics: Large Construct**

**Hit Dice:** 14d10+30 (128 hp)

**Initiative:** +0

**Speed:** 20 ft.

**Defence:** 19 (+10 natural, -1 size)

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +9/+27

**Attack:** Limb smash +23 melee (1d6+19) or high-pressure metal spike +9 ranged (1d6+13)

**Full Attack:** 2 limb smashes +23 melee (1d6+19) or high-pressure metal spike +9 ranged (1d6+13) Space/Reach: 10 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Electrocute, driller killer, studio lights, zoom in

**Special Qualities:** Construct traits (except darkvision), craft homunculus, electrical recharge, tape vision, water vulnerability

**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +8

**Abilities:** Str 27, Dex 10, Con -, Int 8, Wis 19, Cha 16

**Skills:** Craft (homunculus) +6, Listen +9, Spot +9

**Feats:** Cleave, Great Cleave, Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (limb smash)

**Challenge Rating:** 12

**Horror:** Panic 20, Madness 16

-----  
The Romans reputedly had snuff theater,

and public executions remain crowd-pullers but, to tabloid journalists, snuff movies are entirely new, unique, the darkest product of the information age. They're mostly urban myths, of course, tales of hard-faced sadists and perverts working in Rio's slums, exclusive Party-only clubs in China, and remote barns in the Midwest, making black market films that change hands for hundreds - no, thousands - of dollars. These stories, of poor-quality videotapes that show the rape and torture of hapless victims, always end in murder; the stars get snuffed.

In the 21st century, the rumors seem less incredible, as the anonymity and global penetration of the Internet might actually have turned snuff movies into a practical proposition. The theory goes that these films require only the most basic ingredients: a camera, a secure location and one or more victims. Immediate revenue is assured and the market is constantly growing.

There are consequences of course; consequences unexpected by the criminals who just want to make quick money off other people's suffering. When something is recorded, it can generate an occult charge; horrific events very often do. Indeed, the making of a snuff movie, preserving a victim's last agonized hours on a black ribbon of tape, can sometimes result in the creation of something even more nightmarish than the film itself; the right kind of movie, with a budget and serious equipment, a movie that's big enough and depraved enough will create a snuff golem.

This monster is one of the most repulsive constructs to walk the earth. It begins to coalesce when the damage to the movie's star becomes irreversible. Then, when death comes, the movie's dark energy pulls together materials from the shoot; body parts, recording equipment, knives, power drills and saws; and builds itself a body from them. The result is a sickening mass of human (and sometimes animal) matter, butcher's tools and electrical equipment. Once the creature arises, it goes to work.

First, it destroys everyone associated with the production, such as the director and any of the surviving cast, slaughtering them in mordantly appropriate ways. Some of those few scholars who study these creatures, think that it is a strange avenging angel, tracking down the star's killers, but they are wrong; the snuff demon is simply cruel, and it knows its makers well. Although they only contributed subconsciously, the movie director, his crew, his supporting cast and financial backers, all readily gave the monster their thoughts and lusts. Their unconscious urges, their greed, hunger, and excitement, as much as the star's agony, terror and desperate need to escape, all flowed into the construct, and the golem feels, embodies and savors the filmmakers' sick desires, as well as the pain, panic and resignation of those that died during the shoot.

So, the golem kills its creators. Then, when the blood has settled, it sets about making its own movies, strange, intensely intimate first person perspective movies. It circulates these on the Internet and deposits them anonymously with the contacts the producers used to have, thus keeping the demand for new material going. It carries on shooting films until someone or something stops it, and never makes arrangements to collect any fees or royalties - some thing that the distributors occasionally wonder about.

Another, slightly more alarming trend is the steady disappearance of other snuff movie moguls; whom the fences and middlemen suspect their new producer is eliminating. They are correct; in its career, the snuff golem frequently hijacks other shoots, killing the cast and crew in the process of shooting its own movie, and crafting new assistants out of the dismembered bodies and damaged equipment.

-----

**Craft Homunculus (Ex):** The golem can build its own stunted servitors from the remains of its victims and any handy electrical equipment it can find. One victim in relatively intact condition yields one homunculus. A more mangled body yields 50% of the organic material

necessary to make a homunculus. Multiple bodies can be combined to create a single homunculus, which is often necessary if the golem has been especially eager with its butcheries.

It takes two hours to make a homunculus and, if it matters in the game, the golem must make a Craft (homunculus) skill check. The result determines how many hit points per hit die the crafted homunculus has. If the golem is in a hurry, it can build a homunculus in half the usual time, with a -6 circumstance penalty to the skill check.

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Craft Check Result	Hit Points Per Hit Die
Under 10	1
10-14	3
15-20	5
20-24	8
25-30	10

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**Electrical Recharge (Ex):** Snuff golems thrive on electrical power. Electrical damage restores hit points to them on a three for one basis, instead of harming them. (Three points of electrical damage received heals one hit point.) As a standard action, a snuff golem can plug itself into an electrical outlet and heal an automatic 4 points of damage per round. Unplugging itself (or being unplugged), removes this benefit.

Given sufficient time and the assistance of a few homunculi, a snuff golem can rig itself an extension cable; this can be of any length, but more than 30 feet is impractical. If the cable is cut, the golem is not harmed but it does lose the benefit of continual hit point recovery.

A typical electric cable has hardness 2 and 4 hit points. A character cutting through one without adequate protection (heavily insulated handle, non-conductive soles) sustains 2d6 points of electrical damage and must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 15) or be knocked unconscious by the shock for 2d6 rounds.

**Electrocute (Ex):** The golem can divert

some of the energy powering its own systems and use it to fry its victims. To use its electrocute ability, the golem must sacrifice 2 hit points for every 1d6 damage that its electrocute attack will inflict. This 'charging up' is a standard action. The golem can inflict a maximum of 8d6 damage.

Once charged, the golem must then strike its victim with a melee touch attack. If the attack is successful, then electrical damage is dealt to the target. The target may make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 20, Charisma-based) in order to take half damage. If the golem misses, the charge is lost.

The golem can 'hold the charge' once it has charged up the attack, instead of discharging the electrical energy immediately. It can hold the charge indefinitely.

**Driller Killer (Ex):** This gruesome act involves the golem holding the victim immobile and extruding whirling drill bits to pierce the target's skull. A golem that begins its turn with both limbs clamped to the opponent's head and that makes a successful grapple check automatically drills right through the center of the opponent's forehead and out the other side. This automatically kills the victim.

**Improved Grab (Ex):** To use this ability, the golem must hit a Small or Medium-size creature with a limb attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it succeeds in the grapple check, it establishes a hold and clamps one side of its opponent's head in place.

If the golem begins its turn with one of its opponent's arms clamped in place, it can try to attack the remaining arm with a single grapple check. The opponent can escape with a single successful grapple check or Escape Artist check, but the golem gets a +2 circumstance bonus for every limb that was clamped in place at the beginning of the opponent's turn.

**Studio Lights (Ex):** The golem does not have the ability to see in the dark but it can project strong light from its body,

drawing upon the studio lights left over from the movie shoot. It uses these to light its way and to blind opponents.

When used to light an area, the studio lights ability projects light in a 120-foot cone or a 60-foot circle. The golem can turn its lights on or off as a free action.

To use its lights offensively, the golem must make a ranged touch attack against a target. This is an attack action. The maximum range of this ability is 60 feet and it has a range increment of 10 feet. (This is effectively a ray attack.) A target that is struck by the beam must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 17, Dexterity-based) or be blinded for 1d3 rounds and dazzled for a further 1d3 rounds. A target that makes its Fortitude saving throw is dazzled for 1d3 rounds. If the beam misses, there is no effect.

A victim wearing sunglasses, welding goggles or similar protective equipment gains a +4 equipment bonus on his saving throw. If he fails his save, he is dazzled for 1d3 rounds, rather than being blinded. He is not dazzled at all if he successfully saves.

**Tape Vision (Ex):** A snuff golem can videotape anything that it sees, transferring the feed to a videocassette in its abdomen. It uses this ability to make its own snuff movies, torturing and killing the victims and filming itself doing so.

**Water Vulnerability:** Nothing can ruin a film shoot quicker than rain. Water on a camera lens blurs the image and makes it useless to continue. As snuff golems have so many electrical parts, even a small amount of water in the mechanism can cause malfunctions.

A snuff golem that is drenched in water (such as from a bucketful being thrown at it or from heavy rain) is slowed for 2d6 rounds. While it is slowed, it can take only a move action or a standard action each round and all its attacks are made at a -2 circumstance penalty. It is obvious that the water is affecting it adversely. Sparks fly from it and a high-pitched whine

(like a jammed video recorder) comes from its internal workings.

A snuff golem that is completely immersed in water (such as a handy swimming pool) is immobilised. It cannot move and can take no actions, nor can it heal damage. To a casual observer, the golem seems to be dead. However, it is still very much alive. It can still move itself, albeit at a very slow rate, drawing upon the residual hate and anger left in its system. The golem moves at a rate of one inch per round, which is enough for it to crawl out of most bodies of water in which it might be immersed.

**Zoom In (Ex):** The snuff golem can take a move action to zoom in on a single opponent with its camera eye. This grants the golem a +20 insight bonus to its next attack roll against that opponent, so long as the attack is made on the golem's next turn and the golem has continuous line of sight contact with the target. If the target ducks out of sight or is obscured by an intervening object or character, then the insight bonus is wasted.

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#### **Snuff Homunculus: Small Construct**

**Hit Dice:** 6d10 (but see above) +16

**Initiative:** +2 (Dex)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Defence:** 17 (+2 Dex, +4 natural, +1 size), flat-footed 15, touch 13

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +4/+2

**Attack:** Slam +6 melee (1d4+3)

**Full Attack:** 2 slams +6 melee (1d4+3)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Bind

**Special Qualities:** Construct traits (except darkvision), repairable

**Saves:** Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +3

**Abilities:** Str 15, Dex 15, Con -, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 10

**Skills:** Craft (electrical) +3, Hide +3, Move Silently +3, Use Rope +1

**Feats:** Dodge, Mobility, Stealthy

**Challenge Rating:** 5

**Horror:** Panic 13

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Some snuff golems build dwarf-like

homunculi from the remains of their victims. These stubby creatures then help the golem to create more and more ambitious film projects. They kidnap future victims, track down rival producers, arrange sets and see to such complicated matters as lighting and electrical rigging.

As the snuff golem usually does not have a full set of body parts to work with, the homunculi it produces tend to have a squashed-up appearance. They have random pieces of technical equipment poking from their bodies, which the snuff golem has substituted for the missing parts. For example, a homunculus might have a camera tripod for a leg, an articulated mike stand for an arm, or bulbous light bulbs in place of eyes.

The golem is often surprisingly creative and is not limited by anything as sane as human biology; its creations live, no matter how absurd they are. Many golems create at least one homunculus which has a camera jammed into its neck instead of a head, so that it can act as 'second cameraman'.

**Bind (Ex):** Snuff homunculi can extrude cables, tapes and loops of adhesive gunk from their bodies, and ship it into useful lengths. They usually use this ability to tie or stick things together. Binding an item in place requires a Use Rope skill check (a full-round action) at DC 10; bound items can be cut apart in a whole round, or can be ripped free with a Strength skill check at DC 23. If the homunculus uses its bind attack to tie up a foe, it adds a +4 equipment bonus to the Use Rope skill check.

A homunculus can attempt to bind an opponent while it is grappling them. To do this, the homunculus must succeed at a grapple check against an opponent who was already being pinned. (As this is not possible for a single homunculus, they tend to attack in groups, piling on to a single foe.) If the grapple check succeeds, the homunculus can attempt to bind the victim as if he were an object, making a Use Rope skill check as a free action. It gains the +4 equipment bonus

to this skill check.

**Repairable (Ex):** Snuff homunculi cannot heal damage on their own, nor do they have the electrical recharge ability that the snuff golem has. However, a snuff golem can restore a homunculus to its full original hit point total with a Craft (homunculus) skill check (DC 15) and half an hour of work. Failure means that the homunculus is impossible to repair.

If the homunculus has been destroyed, it cannot be rebuilt, but the mangled remnants do count as 50% of the raw materials needed to build a new homunculus. The snuff golem will frequently destroy an irreparable homunculus and use the parts towards building a new one.

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# Strap Throat



Strap Throat

for all of the broken daughters  
cheaper than porcelain, with eyes  
glass could too easily replace

for those whose fingers  
were brushwood to a father's  
blows

for every plum pudding of  
bruises and every cherry tart of  
sweat in cotton silence

force-fed and fattened on fists  
brewing their own bitter blood  
stewing apple jack poison

under ice

for all of the broken daughters  
for all of the stump-split green ones  
gingham cribs for bastards

finding tongues too thick to speak  
and minds too slow to argue  
dumb bitches, bitch-dumb:

for all of the broken daughters  
turned stubborn as stones  
but easier to bleed

for them i clasp my hands  
bow my head  
and scream.

'Strap Throat', Alyson Starkey  
in *Not So Fresh: Poems by Women Anarchists*

Puberty is a time of rituals and ordeals. It is attended by more monsters, real and imaginary, than any other time of life. The urges of the body are answered by cautionary tales as old as the campfire itself, which warn of the fate of those who yield to them unwisely. Superstition and taboo are unavoidable.

Couples making out on deserted lanes encounter a hook-handed maniac, young girls looking into the water in a toilet bowl see Bloody Mary looking back at them. The stories vary from state to state. Every teenage girl in the Upper Peninsula, and upstate Wisconsin has heard of Strap Throat. The story has been passed down from mother to daughter, from classmate to classmate, for over a hundred years. Her name is spoken with the same respectful dread reserved for the likes of Lizzie Borden, Sadako Yamamura, Brenda Spencer and Samara Morgan.

As with many legends, the truth behind Strap Throat is mundane. She was a tragic, pathetic figure. Her real name was Mary Beth Spaulding, and she was the daughter of Ernest Y. Spaulding, a widower who ran a general store in Black River Falls, Wisconsin. Until the death of his wife Nancy in childbirth on 14th January 1872 – something he never forgave his daughter for – Mr Spaulding had been a moderately successful shopkeeper. Subsequently, he lost interest and business slowly deserted him for competitors and mail order catalogs. In time, the loneliness, the pressure and the poverty finally became intolerable to the store owner, now a hopeless drunk, and he killed his only child.

Mary Beth probably contributed to her father's decline; she was commonly regarded as mad, perhaps even possessed, and her ways were well known in the town. She had terrible fits in which she would soil herself and black out for hours at a time. The little girl frequently ran away from home, hiding out in the woods for days, and coming back – or being forcibly returned – to her father, starving and dirty.

Then, one morning, Spaulding caught her spitting on the holy cross and cursing God's name, and decided to keep her locked in her room. Mary Beth spent her waking hours throwing herself against the walls and beating her head on the floorboards. She raised Cain with banging and yelling and occasionally a shrill, piercing shriek that made the skin crawl. It sounded more like a little girl trapped inside a devil than the other way around. The older Mary Beth got, the worse Spaulding coped – it certainly did not help that she was the image of her mother – and the more he drank. On Mary Beth's thirteenth birthday, the worse for an entire bottle of Scotch, the shopkeeper decided that it was time for Satan to get the hell out of his little girl, thrashed her senseless with his belt and tied her to a chair.

Mary Beth began to choke and froth. Foul-smelling foam sprayed from her mouth and nose, followed by a stream of bile. Spaulding reasoned, with drunken logic, that this was it; the devil was emerging.

This terrified him. What would he do if the devil squeezed out of his daughter's mouth and stood there staring at him? Suddenly, it was not such a fine idea as it had seemed. The more the yellow bile frothed up and dripped, the more scared he got. He was so afraid that Satan would leap out of her throat and kill him that he gagged her with his belt. That would keep the son of a bitch in there. He staggered off to his bed and fell asleep.

Twelve hours later, when he finally came to, Mary Beth Spaulding was dead. She had choked on her own tongue.

Spaulding was tried for murder. In mitigation, he told the court that Mary Beth had 'the devil living in her throat.' She had been damn fool enough to drink spunk-water from a tree stump and the devil had lodged in her throat like a leech. Spaulding calmly explained that he had no choice; that he only did what any God-fearing man and father would have done. This plea did not help his case; the jury found against him after cursory deliberations, and the judge condemned the shopkeeper to death.

The sentence was never executed, though; somehow – a common belief is that Mary Beth's ghost obliged – Spaulding's leather belt found its way inside his cell and he hanged himself with it. Following his death, the belt was lost. From time to time, an item that the seller claims is Spaulding's belt will show up on Ebay or at a private auction, accompanied by suitable faked provenance.

The specter of Mary Beth still haunts the backwoods of Wisconsin. The locals call this mysterious ghost 'Strap Throat'. They warn tourists not to camp in their woods in case Strap Throat should appear before them, screaming like a banshee. Teenagers dare one another to call her name in remote clearings.

According to folklore, Strap Throat's piercing cry can petrify the human soul. It sounds like nothing human and is more like a wolf's howl than the scream of a young girl. Over the last fifty years, Strap Throat has supposedly killed 34 people with her terrible baying. The official record attributes these deaths to more mundane causes, such as pneumonia and cardiac arrest.

Researchers have all reached the same conclusion. It is unlikely that anything was spiritually wrong with Mary Beth. The most likely explanation is that she was suffering from epilepsy and a mild mental illness. Ironically, she was not a monster in life, but folklore and superstition have turned her into one after her death.

*Wolves at the Door: Myths of Adolescence*, Renee Carter



## All That Remains

The majority of Strap Throat's victims die of heart seizures. They hear her shrill shrieks echoing through the gloomy pines then shooting pains travel up their left arms, their vision blurs and their world turns dark forever. Those that she has visited personally sometimes have black finger marks on their necks, the signs of strangulation.

## Game Statistics: Medium-size Undead

**Hit Dice:** 8d12

**Initiative:** +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Defense:** 12 (+2 Dex)

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +6/+18\*

**Attack:** Slam +8 melee (1d6+3)

**Full Attack:** 2 slams +8 melee (1d6+3)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Improved grab, shriek, strangulation

**Special Qualities:** Indestructible, manifestation, victim empathy

**Saves:** Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6

**Abilities:** Str 17, Dex 15, Con -, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 20

**Skills:** Listen +11, Spot +11

**Feats:** Cleave, Improved Initiative, Power Attack

**Challenge Rating:** 8

**Horror:** Fear 19

\* Strap Throat receives a +8 racial bonus to Grapple checks, as her hands are supernaturally strong.

-----  
Strap Throat is a malignant ghost, wracked by insanity and the violence of her life and death. She does, however, have limitations and does not prey wantonly on anyone who happens to be nearby. She reserves her assaults for only three classes of people: those who enter the woods where she walks, and those whom she feels should die, and some of those who perform the simple, and well-known (DC10 Knowledge: Occult check) ritual that calls her forth.

Those who camp in the woods and hear her

fatal howling are most usually killed outright. These are accidental deaths. She does not deliberately set out to cause them; they just happen. Strap Throat wanders randomly in the woods, manifesting as and when she chooses and screaming without provocation.

The majority of those who call her up, however, she kills deliberately. Several adolescents have been found strangled to death, sat in front of a mirror, sometimes with a burned-out candle beside them. Nobody says so out loud, but everyone thinks that they know the truth; someone summoned Strap Throat and sent her to kill the unfortunate teenager. Everyone knows how to do it, and why: Mary Beth, who spent her last years locked in a room, sympathizes with the lonely, the awkward and the isolated, and hates bullies so much that she came back from the grave to kill her own father. Consequently, she will intercede on behalf of kindred spirits, and reach out of a convenient reflective surface to throttle the summoner's most persistent persecutor. As to the question of why the deceased was sitting in front of a mirror with a candle, well, everybody's heard that occultism and witchcraft - which are nothing to mess with - are on the rise among high school students.

The common belief that Strap Throat will kill your enemies for you is only true of the special cases; those very few people who have survived summoning Mary Beth, and is based on rumor more than it is on actual accounts. Very few people talk about it - after relief of being free from the teasing and bullying fades, guilt and denial set in - but those who do report that the operation went without a hitch. Hence, desperate people will attempt to call on this avenging angel.

The ritual to summon Strap Throat is simple, involving a reflective surface of some kind, such as a pool, a mirror, or, on one occasion, a cake slice and a birthday candle. The hour has to be midnight and the celebrant has to be alone. The only light comes from a candle behind and to the summoner's left. The petitioner looks into the mirror, without

blinking, and counts slowly to ten, then the summoner says the creature's name five times (opinions differ as to whether the correct appellation is "Mary Beth" or "Strap Throat"), closes her eyes and opens them again, to see Strap Throat looking back at her, instead of her own reflection.

The first problem with this ritual is that it doesn't guarantee Strap Throat's response - she may not choose to appear at all, and often doesn't, and she cannot be controlled, should she show up. Further difficulties are that Mary Beth Spaulding's criteria for being the victim of bullying are stringent, and that she kills summoners who don't meet her high standards of personal suffering. Hence, the majority of Strap Throat's victims called on her themselves, usually frivolously or, sometimes, out of bravado.

In game terms, calling on Mary Beth requires a Concentration check (DC 10) and a Charisma check (DC 15). Even if both these checks are successful, Strap Throat will only appear if she the GM feels it is appropriate. On manifestation, she will usually scream (and kill the summoner) or thrust her pale hands out of the mirror and grab the petitioner by the throat. See the strangulation ability above. If the summoner is a victim like herself, however, she may well choose to listen to their story and go after the person Mary Beth believes to be their worst enemy, strangling the victim the next time he or she is alone and looking into a mirror. If the petitioner has a series of tormenters, then Strap Throat will kill one per summoning.

-----  
**Improved Grab:** In order to use this ability, Strap Throat must hit the same target with both slam attacks in a single round. She can then make an immediate Grapple check to begin grappling her target without provoking an attack of opportunity. This means that she can then go on to strangle her victim (see below).

**Indestructible:** Strap Throat is a ghostly entity and cannot be destroyed. Although it is possible to dispel a given

manifestation by reducing her to zero hit points, she can never be wholly eradicated while people still remember her and tell stories of her. If a given manifestation is dispelled, she is prevented from appearing again for 2d4 days.

**Manifestation:** Like all ghosts, Strap Throat can manifest but, when she does so she is solid, can attack physical



targets, and be harmed by them in turn.

Strap Throat typically manifests through a mirror. The arms that emerge and encircle the victim's throat are completely solid. For game mechanic purposes, treat the mirror as if it were an open gate, with the rest of Strap Throat's body behind it. Assailants facing the mirror can attack her through it, but they do so from its back. Once she has emerged completely, the mirror is just a mirror again.

**Shriek (Su):** Strap Throat's terrible cries can stop a person's heart dead. Those who survive are usually rendered half-mad with fear. She can only utter a shriek when she is manifest. Once she has shrieked, she will not shriek again for 1d4+1 minutes. Whether she is able to or not, she simply does not shriek more often than this.

The shriek is made as a standard action and affects all creatures within a 60-foot spread. Creatures with fewer levels (or Hit Dice) than Strap Throat must make Fortitude saving throws (DC 19, Charisma-based) or die immediately. Those who make their saving throws are panicked for 2d4 rounds. All other creatures must make Fortitude saving throws (DC 19, Charisma-based) or be panicked for 2d4 rounds; those who save suffer no ill effect. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected by Strap Throat's shrieking again for 24 hours.

**Strangulation (Ex):** At close quarters, Strap Throat dispatches her victims by locking her chilly hands around their necks and squeezing.

In order to strangle, Strap Throat must first be grappling her victim. A target she manages to pin is unable to breathe, speak or cry out and remains so for as long as the ghost maintains her grip. Refer to the drowning rules in the PHB to see how long a character can go without air before passing out and subsequently dying. Characters who are taken by surprise do not have the chance to hold their breath and can only remain conscious for half the usual amount of time.

The victim can free himself from the stranglehold by breaking the pin. This

allows him to take a breath, though he is still grappling.

**Victim Empathy:** Strap Throat can tell whether a person has truly been persecuted through no fault of his or her own. She is not fooled when a person calls her out of curiosity or because of a dare and then protests that they did it because they needed help.

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# Torture Dog



SUB ROSA

In the keeping of the Priory

Access: Inner Order, Adeptus Primus and higher  
ONLY

File under: Subtle Planes, Outer Black

Doc. 8b

Transcript of surveillance of the Caulksmere flat  
(see the case notes)

I have just swallowed an enormous mouthful of  
poison.

That was what Rimbaud said. I have followed his  
example. Our poison is, of course, not of the fatal  
kind, unless it be fatal to the mortal ego, to the  
undeveloped self; the death is thus the serpent's  
kiss, the initiatory death, the shedding of one of the  
veils of the Absolute. Through the toxic, we become  
intoxicated. The root word, toxos, means an arrow.  
Poison and drunkenness are the same thing. The  
Pythoness of Apollo inhaled the poison gases of her  
home, and was gifted with prophecy.

I am calm, most terribly calm.

I have barricaded the door. I have moved the chest  
of drawers, uh, the second altar in front of it. The  
idiots are downstairs watching a video, but I do not  
wish to be disturbed. The working is too important.

I pause before I begin. It is pleasant to reflect on  
their state, so like that of cattle. I do not bear them  
any animosity. It is not their fault that they are not  
chosen. The servants of the Light are few and  
secret. Many greater than I have suffered for the  
benefit of others, without any acknowledgement  
being given. The world is bound in secret knots; it is  
my burden, that I keep the world safe for the likes of  
them. It is not given to them to know what strange  
things people the universe.

The temple is that of Saturn. Three black lamps  
burn about me. The shew-stone is my obsidian  
mirror, after the fashion of Dr. Dee. Tonight I will  
scry into realms that the Doctor never guessed at.

The invocations must be spoken. I shall pause the  
record so that the words be not profaned. Think not  
too hardly (?) of me, O posterity, that I share not  
my secrets. Let those who would come after me  
research, even as I have researched.

It is the hour. It is the time.

(Sound of tape being paused and restarted)

It is done. A great silence falls. I turn to the shew-  
stone. It is dark. Alas!

I cry aloud: Show yourselves! Open the mysteries  
of your creation! May I be made a strong seer-of-  
things!

I wait; yea, I wait.

(pause)

With the patience of the pyramids, I wait, giving a  
certain Sign known unto me, that I may –

Oh my God. Oh my God.

Something's actually happening.

It's a ripple. It's definitely there. It's like light, like  
moonlight on a pond, or something like that. It's not  
just a visual effect from the drugs, I put my hand in  
front of it and it blocked it out. Visuals don't do that.  
Dear God in heaven.

This is really disturbing. I'm not imagining it. It's  
getting bigger. This has never happened before. It's  
worked. It's bloody worked. (laugh)

Right. Focus. I must maintain my resolve. Very  
well. There is a rippling light in the mirror. In the  
stone, I mean. How would Crowley have put it?  
Yes. The seer beholdeth a great light in the shew-  
stone, portending... portending he knows not what.  
He stands in the Sign of Silence and awaits the  
appearance of the Guardian.

In the name of the Great Order, I petition for  
admittance to the Mysteries!

Nothing is happening. It is just... shiny and empty.  
I keep checking and it is still definitely there. The  
rippling light, that is. It's in the glass. It is cloudy and  
transparent and sort of swirling, like... like milk... or...  
holograms? The drugs are beginning to cloud my  
perception. I cannot lose this vision, not now that  
something's coming through.

? All's enough very Sarge! ? (words unclear)

Something else here, something new. There's a  
shape in there. No... one, two, three... three shapes.  
Turning and twisting.

They are coming close, coming out of the rippling  
light. I cannot see them clearly. They look rather like  
tadpoles, or little fetuses. Getting bigger, getting  
bigger. Ahh. I don't like... they look a bit like sea-  
monkeys, really big ones, but...

Now... oh God, oh shit, oh Jesus God no they're  
coming OUT.

(sound of furniture being moved and repeated  
screams)

Oh fuh oh god this isn't happening aaa

(sound of growling, heavily distorted, as if through a synthesizer)

mummy Jesus pleeeeeese

(sound of tearing fabric)

(clattering sound of many heavy objects falling or running down stairs)

(faint sound of multiple voices screaming and shouting)



#### **All That Remains**

The victims of torture dog assault are thoroughly savaged, as if wild animals had attacked them. Deep gashes from claws and teeth are left in the flesh. Some victims are pulled limb from limb, as the dogs fight over the remains as over chew toys. Not all of the wounds are this straightforward, though; among the tears and bite marks, there are occasional, deep puncture wounds that are frayed on the inside. These appear to have been caused by a sharp metal item rotating at high speed, the most obvious culprit being a conventional electric drill. Since no wild animal could possibly have a drill in its mouth, the usual conclusion is that the massacre was the work of a demented human and a pack of savage dogs, trained to rip humans apart. The size of the lacerations suggests that the dogs were one of the Great breeds, or possibly even wolves, though these would be less easy to explain in an urban setting.

As noted below, the dogs leave one victim alive. If he is hospitalized within three hours of the attack, the blood samples reveal high concentrations of some hallucinogenic chemical in his body. A typical attempt to reconstruct the events of one of these incidents involves a human maniac injecting one victim with hallucinogens, killing the other victims with an electric drill and setting his dog pack on the corpses, possibly in the hope that they would devour the evidence. The drugged state of the victim neatly accounts for his babbling about bizarre biomechanical creatures from the Outer Black.

#### **Game Statistics: Medium-size Outsider**

**Hit Dice:** 8d8+32 (78 hp)

**Initiative:** +5 (Dex)

**Speed:** 60 ft. fly 80 ft. (good)

**Defense:** 22 (+5 Dex, +7 natural)

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +8/+11

**Attack:** Drill-bite +11 melee (2d6+3) or spine +13 ranged (1d4 plus toxin)

**Full Attack:** Drill-bite +11 melee (2d6+3) and 2 claws +9 melee (1d3+3) or spine +11/+6 ranged (1d4 plus toxin)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft. / 5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Lacerate, pounce, toxin

**Special Qualities:** Dimensional leap, horrific +4, telepathy

**Saves:** Fort +10, Ref +11, Will +7

**Abilities:** Str 17, Dex 20, Con 19, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

**Skills:** Balance +16, Climb +9, Hide +10, Jump +14, Listen +12, Move Silently +16, Spot +12, Survival +12, Tumble +16

**Feats:** Multiattack, Power Attack, Track

**Challenge Rating:** 8

**Horror:** Panic 20, Madness 20

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The torture dogs originate from the Outer Black (see the Organ Grinder, above) and we are fortunate that only a few have slipped into our world. As with all of the denizens of this dark, remote dimension, very little is known about them. They are believed to be a trained hunter-killer creature, dispatched in packs to bring down foes of particular status or significance, but this may be mere supposition. Other theories believe them to be information-gatherers, whose savage methods ensure that the victims can keep no secrets locked away.

Their minds are not human and they operate according to an alien logic. For reasons of their own, they always spare one of their victims, although "spare" is perhaps a misleading choice of words. The dogs first inject their victim with a hallucinogenic drug, secreted from their own glands. This has the effect of making the victim ultra-sensitive to physical stimuli (so much so that he even experiences some agonizing sensations as almost pleasurable) and links him telepathically with his torturers, so that he is forced to become an accessory to his own mutilation. Then, he watches through their eyes and feels what they feel, as they peel back his skin and drill down to his bone marrow. This horrible fusion is what leaves the victim with such bizarre, intimate knowledge of the creatures, even if he is too insane to articulate it. The telepathic link exposes him to the torture dogs' own memories and experiences. After five hours, the beasts depart.

What remains after the torture dogs have faded through gaps in reality, is barely recognizable as human, and babbles incessantly about the Outer Black, mostly demented raving but occasionally a sentence slips out that gives a clue to what the dogs are and what they want. Naturally, few can glean more than a few coherent sentences from them; the more forthcoming survivors babble about the torture dogs themselves, that they are from the 'Great Razor Plains' and that they 'glide along the agony breezes'. To the listener, the inference is that the dogs leave a tortured victim as a warning, to give those who would interfere with the operations of the Outer Black a very clear idea of the fate that awaits them.

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**Dimensional Leap (Su):** Torture dogs can glide along strange planes unknown to conventional science. They can leap from one place to another along a line that appears straight to them but leaves the dog facing in the opposite direction, or on the other side of a solid wall.

A dog can take a move action to make a Jump skill check. It may then teleport to a maximum distance of 5 ft. per point of

skill check result.

To an observer, the dog appears to have jumped through some sort of wormhole or impossible angle in space. It is impossible to tell where the dog will appear from watching it jump. Torture dogs always teleport flawlessly and do not have to see the place they are jumping to, though they do not have any precognitive awareness of what awaits them there. A torture dog can pounce upon an opponent by using a dimensional leap but must be able to see that opponent first.

If it chooses, instead of moving within the material plane, it may take a dimensional leap to return to the Outer Black. The dog will not usually do this unless it has done what it came to the material plane do, or it is severely wounded.

Once a torture dog has used its dimensional leap ability, it cannot use it again for 1d6+1 rounds.

**Lacerate (Ex):** When a torture dog is grappling an opponent, it can rake with its hind legs. These attack with a +11 melee bonus and deal 1d3+3 damage.

**Horrific:** Torture dogs are steeped in the mind-wracking essence of human agony and the fear that ordinary humans have for suffering. They thus gain a +4 DC increase to both their Panic and their Madness horror saving throws.

**Pounce (Ex):** If a torture dog charges a foe or dimensionally leaps upon him, it can make a full attack, including two lacerate attacks. This gives it five attacks in total (bite, claw, claw, rake, rake).

**Toxin:** The spines that a torture dog fires from its back carry a potent toxin. This has a Fortitude save DC of 20 (Constitution-based including +2 racial bonus) with initial damage of paralysis, 1d6 Wisdom damage and 1d6 Intelligence damage, and secondary damage of paralysis, 2d6 Wisdom damage and 2d6 Intelligence damage. The toxin lasts for 1d3+3 hours. The secondary ability damage is permanent, not temporary.

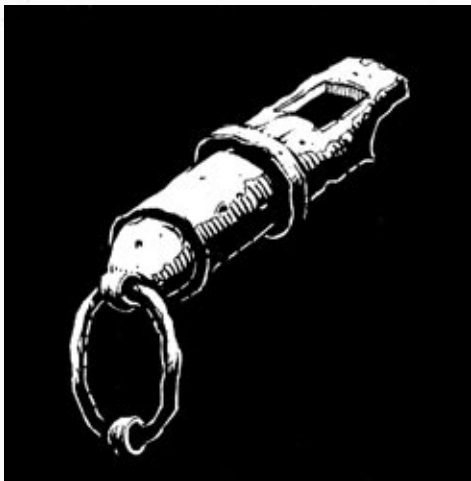
There is a slim chance to render it

temporary: if medical assistance is received within 10 hours of the toxin being delivered, then a Treat Injury skill check (DC 30) turns the ability damage temporary instead of permanent. The person administering medical assistance must have access to antitoxins.

The toxin also mentally fuses the recipient with the torture dog that delivered it. While the venom is seething in his blood, the victim can see, hear and feel everything that the dog does. He not only gets to watch himself being devoured (or tortured), he gets to experience himself doing it, too. For the torture dog, this may give some kind of voyeuristic satisfaction; for the victim, it is a living hell, and calls for another panic or madness roll every time the monster concerned makes a successful attack.

**Telepathy (Su):** A torture dog may communicate telepathically with others of its kind, with its masters or with a creature that it has poisoned with its toxin, at ranges of up to 200 feet.

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# Artifacts

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These are items that have a connection of some kind with the creatures described in the first part of the book. Be aware that the artifacts are not necessarily intended to give the players power over the horrors, or to protect them. They are part of the creatures' mythos. Possession of an artifact can sometimes give a character a greater insight into the beings he is facing but is often likely to place him in greater danger than he would otherwise have been.

These artifacts can be used as the basis of a story or even a campaign. For some of the artifacts, a selection of possible histories is given. The GM can either use these alternate histories as blind alleys for the players to investigate, using them as rumors that increase the mystery of the item, or simply pick one history as true and omit the others.

§§§§§

## THE FIRST ALTAR

This is a ring of gray-black rock, measuring three and a half feet across, and one foot thick, with a two-foot hole in its middle. Once, it stood by a lake, and on it – and for some time – priests tied living human victims for the feral drowners to take.

The practice of leaving sacrifices at the First Altar continued for centuries, although, after the monsters stopped coming to claim the victims. None can tell why. It may be that they slept, or that they moved away, or even that the majority of them died out. Discovering the altar still laden with its sacrifice, instead of empty and bloodstained, made the priests uneasy. Perhaps the monsters had become invisible. Perhaps they wished to be fed, instead of taking the food themselves. Obviously, the sacrifice would not work if the victim was not killed, so the priests would just have to carry out the sacrifice themselves. Thus began perhaps the practice of ritual slaughter of humans by humans, to emulate the feral drowners' claiming of mortal victims. The priests were a little perturbed at having to make the sacrifices themselves, but they were far more afraid of what would happen if the sacrifice were not made. In time, this cultic practice died out, and the altar was forgotten.

The fate of the First Altar is unknown, but any of the following rumors might prove to be true.

- The Altar was floated into the center of a lake on a raft, which was then set on fire. The Altar now lies at the lake bottom, waiting for the day when changes in the local environment will drain the lake to reveal it once more.
- The Altar is a major museum, on public view in the foyer, passed by hundreds of people every day. It remains there thanks to the efforts of a secret society dedicated to protecting mankind from supernatural evil. While it is in such a public place, it cannot be used for occult purposes again.
- The Altar was captured by a secret sect, who posed as Christian clergy but were in fact pagans carrying out bloody rites. They arranged to have the First Altar made into part of a well-known British cathedral, where it stands to this day. It lies underneath the main altar, as if to say that beneath all the trappings of Christianity, there is still an abiding darkness. The sect is, of course, still active.
- The Altar is in the possession of the Freemasons, who still use it in some of their more obscure rituals. Their interest in the item is purely historical and they are unaware of its original use.
- The Altar was tipped into a local rubbish dump. Several centuries later, it was taken to the local manor house by laborers and used as the base of a table. The Altar, along with the rest of the house, was shipped over to America when a visiting tycoon decided to buy the whole historic property and have it sent home brick by brick. It can now be found in Salem. Ironically, the reconstructed house where it now lies does not have any known connection with witchcraft.

### *Function*

The purpose of the Altar is to facilitate the only kind of interaction between humans and feral drowners that the drowners themselves will permit. When a sacrifice is placed upon the altar, a feral drowner will come to collect it if there is one within 10 miles. It will normally recognise the person who makes the sacrifice as 'special' and will not attack them unless they first attack it.

The altar possesses the supernatural ability to call out to the feral drowners. The mere presence of a victim on its cold stone surface sends out a psychic message reinforced by countless centuries of ritual observance. The feral drowner who comes for the sacrifice is not in any sense bound by the person who makes it, nor is the drowner obliged to offer any kind of service in return. The drowner may also judge that the offering is inadequate, in which case it will take the celebrant as well.

The First Altar is supernaturally hard and resilient. It has Hardness 10 and 800 hit points. The stone of which it is made seems to be an igneous rock similar to obsidian but darker in color. It cannot be reliably identified.

§§§§§

## DOCTOR MOXON'S APPARATUS

This device is only useful in games where the GM allows mediumship, ectoplasm and all the accoutrements of the Victorian spiritualist to be something other than an elaborate con.

Doctor Peregrine Moxon went one step further than those peers of his who attempted to photograph the soul as it left the body, or weighed the body at the point of death to see if anything escaped. He developed techniques of recovering ethereal information by means of mechanical devices. Sensing that there was something of truth in spiritualism but aware of the gullibility of human beings and the deceptive (not to say emotionally unstable) nature of many mediums, he sought to replace the human medium with a mechanical interface.

Moxon reasoned that the ability of some people to channel the forces of the spirit world could be emulated by a machine, so long as that machine was equipped with similar faculties to a human being. In much the same way that the vibratory disc within an early telephone emulated the human eardrum, so too would the bell jars and networks of wiring within Moxon's device emulate the human brain and nervous system.

Moxon never finished his work. Moxon's intention was to pave the way for a revolution in telecommunications that would have made the telephone and television (and even the eventual Internet) seem insignificant by comparison. It would have been possible for living people to access the world of the dead simply by activating a Moxon machine. A new era would have dawned in which the living and the dead were in everyday contact. The stranglehold of tyrants

upon their subjects would have been broken, for no one would fear death. Murder would diminish massively once the victim was able to testify at the trial. The wisdom of long-dead minds, of Socrates and da Vinci, would have been at humanity's fingertips. Small wonder, then, that the dream tearers intervened. Geniuses like Moxon are stifled by the dark powers that wish to hold humanity back. His mind was torn to pieces as he slept, by strange floating shapes with grinning many-toothed mouths, and the nascent Eidolon Device was never built.

All that survives is an early, flawed version of the machine. Moxon's prototype Apparatus is a grotesque object resembling a brass samovar, clustered with wires and dials. A thick cable trails from it like a tail. In the heart of the thing is a green glass chamber, in which floats the pulpy mass of a human brain, previously resident within the skull of the clairvoyant Maxine Sosatrice. Although he had hoped to have sensitive electrical fields do the same work as a medium's brain, Moxon was unable to substitute for the real thing; the design simply could not be refined sufficiently in its early stages. Beneath the glass chamber is an odd brass trumpet, protruding some six inches and shaped rather like a flower.

In order to function, the device needs a powerful electric current. When active, the brain vat glows from beneath, the dials flicker and the whole device vibrates in an alarming way. The device cannot function for more than 30 minutes without overheating and blowing a valve.

Repairing the machine if it suffers minor damage (such as overheating) can be achieved with a successful Craft (electrical) skill check at DC 15. A similar check is needed to activate the device if it has spent several years in storage. The outer electrical components are not especially arcane. Only the heart of the thing was crafted according to Moxon's own invention. For safety, the central core of the device is kept shielded behind a thick metal plate (Hardness 10, 20 hit points). A section of this plate slides down over the brain jar to protect it.

Should the inner core become damaged, the machine is almost guaranteed to be irreparable. A Craft (electrical) skill check at DC 35 and the advice of a consultant with at least 5 ranks in Knowledge (occult) are needed. Damage to the brain within the glass jar renders the machine inoperable unless the brain of a second psychically gifted individual can be found. Even in that event, the machine must still be repaired as if its inner core had become damaged.

The current whereabouts of Moxon's apparatus is unknown. Any of the following might prove to be true.

- The device is kept in one of the cellars of the Institute for Psychical Research building in Brighton, England. It has the status of a morbid relic rather than a functioning scientific instrument, as it contains part of a deceased human's body.
- The apparatus is part of the décor in a tattooist's studio in New York. The current owner, Mickey Blaze, is unaware of the object's provenance and does not think that the brain is actually real. As far as he is concerned, it is a gorgeous piece of sculpture. He bought the item on Ebay from a seller in Europe. He recently loaned it out to a local theatre group for their production of the Rocky Horror Show.
- The machine is an exhibit in a travelling Museum of Curiosities, alongside two-headed babies in the obligatory dusty jars, model classrooms populated by stuffed kittens in little costumes, waxwork figures of notorious murderers, implements used in torture, composite 'mermaid' creatures created from monkeys and fish stitched together, and all the usual grotesquerie associated with such endeavors. The owner, Mr. MacHenry, is a stout, red-faced alcoholic who could be persuaded to part with the apparatus for a suitable sum. It is not an especially popular exhibit. People are usually more interested in the pickled brain than in the device's supposed purpose.

### ***Function***

The machine's function is twofold. It gathers data and assists manifestation. A character must first make a successful Knowledge (occult) skill check (DC 20) in order to work out what the machine's various controls and readouts mean. If the character has access to Moxon's design notes, or has the machine explained to him by someone already familiar with it, then this check is not necessary.

When functioning as a gatherer of information from the spirit world, the machine simulates a human psychic medium. It is sensitive to 'vibrations' in an area, exactly as a psychically gifted human would be (if such people exist in the game). When an especially violent, malicious or tragic event has taken place (such as the events that give rise to a residue demon) the psychic 'memory' clings to the area, causing the phenomena that manifest as hauntings, poltergeist activity, nightmares and so forth. The machine detects these memories and can, to some extent, articulate them.

A large dial, with glowing numerals, shows the level of psychic activity in the machine's surrounding region. Areas that are rich in psychic vibrations, such as the sites of murders, cause the needle to rise. This indicator will also fluctuate up or down according to whether there are supernatural creatures present in the vicinity. Creatures of the undead, outsider or fey type that come within 80 feet will cause the machine's dial to twitch upwards. The higher the reading, the closer the creature is.

Once it has settled in to its surroundings and processed the regional vibrations, a task that requires at least 30 minutes of undisturbed operation, the apparatus can produce a psychic disruption graph. This is a spool of paper marked in increments of ten years, going back up to eight hundred years; Moxon's later designs would have allowed for even longer time periods, but he never had the chance to build them.

The psychic disruption graph is a series of peaks and troughs showing which years have been the most psychically active for the region. If, for example, the region is a muddy field and there was a battle there in 1829, then that year will show an abrupt spike on the chart, with almost completely flat lines on each side. By contrast, a stretch of motorway that was a 'black spot' for car crashes would show a consistently high level of psychic activity in recent years (from the accumulated pain, grief and fear) with next to nothing in the years before the motorway was built.

The machine can also be made to record residual psychic vibrations as sound, tapping into the memory of the region. It can effectively record and play back segments of the past, as they happened. A skilled user can correlate this function with the psychic disruption graph (see above) in order to build up a picture of what may have happened in previous centuries.

When this function is activated, the apparatus automatically 'homes in' on the strongest source of psychic vibrations in the region's history. It then records sixty seconds of sound from the events that caused those vibrations. Only the sounds can be heard, and these come without any kind of explanation or context. For example, if the event in question was the torture and eventual murder of a young man, one could hear the last sixty seconds of screams and sobs – even the grunts of the person carrying out the deeds – but not necessarily learn anything at all useful.

The machine does not in any sense probe the past; it is actually picking up on the psychic echoes of terrible

moments in the past that are still vibrating in the present. The sound is recorded on to a scratchy wax cylinder, which must then be played back through a gramophone in order to be heard.

The machine's function in assisting manifestation is somewhat more bizarre. Moxon noted the ability of genuine mediums to produce ectoplasm from the mouth and nose. Spirits could then use this ectoplasm to give themselves physical bodies, molding forms for themselves as if the ectoplasm were temporary flesh. A discharge valve at the rear of the apparatus produces a spurt of ectoplasm from the brass trumpet beneath the brain. This fills a 10-foot cube with faintly glowing, clammy mist that smells of sour milk. Any outsider or undead creature standing within this mist is fortified, gaining the ability to regenerate 2 hit points per round. Ghosts within the ectoplasm can remain manifested indefinitely.

§§§§§

## THE CRYING STONES

These loose stones seem unremarkable; a collection of rounded pieces of semi-precious minerals such as obsidian and rose quartz, such as one might buy in any new age store. They are typically found tied up in a simple black bag. This bag is held shut by a few stitches, which while they are easily cut or snapped, are evidently there for a purpose. Their appearance completely belies their power. Each stone is a matrix of occult force, concealed beneath a humble exterior. To create a full set, the stones have to be individually blessed by "men of high degree" from several different Aboriginal tribes according to rituals given to them by entities called the 'guardians of man'.

As it takes several tribes working together to create a complete bag of eight stones, co-operation between the tribes is essential and peace is thereby assured if all the tribes are to benefit. A new set of stones is created every twenty years. It is traditional for each shaman to receive a complete bag, made up of contributions from all the others. The old sets are sent out into the world, slightly weakened in their power but still usable, so that they can assist others.

It may be that other secret organizations also know how to prepare a set of the crying stones, but so far no source for them has been found. Talismans in mediaeval grimoires could also serve a similar purpose. Certainly, talismans against sleep hags are well known .

## Function

The purpose of the crying stones is to protect a sleeping person from attack by malignant entities. (They fulfil a purpose similar to the ostensible 'dream catcher' seen in so many occult shops.) The bag of stones must be placed beneath the sleeper's head and be kept there until morning. Should any creature with malignant intent approach within 30 feet of the sleeper, the stones will wake him. They do this by sending a telepathic cry into his mind, which is where they get their name from; they are called crying stones (in English) because they cry out a warning, not because they weep.

After every successful warning, one of the stones has a 5% chance of burning out. A burned-out stone becomes black and dull. When all the stones are burned out, the set is useless. If the stones are ever exposed to daylight, they are useless for 24 hours. They depend upon immersion in shadow in order to work.

§§§§§

## THE BOOK OF JABASSALLAB

All cults have their prescribed rituals. Some must be transcribed laboriously by the new initiate, while others are privately printed and issued. *The Book of Jabassallab* is the ritual guide for those who want to earn the favor of certain dark entities, those who will, if duly petitioned and faithfully served, grant permission to perform the Blossomer Ritual.

Like other ritual texts, it is cloaked in secrecy. However, it is not kept secret by being locked away. It can be downloaded from the Internet easily and in fact often is by those who do not understand what they have. The Book looks like a block of sheer gibberish. Alphanumeric characters fill the page in a solid mass of nonsensical text. It is usually taken to be a corrupted document of some kind, or a file that is being read by the wrong kind of program. It is in fact supposed to look like this. Printed-out copies of the Book of Jabassallab are just as incomprehensible to the untrained eye as the electronic version.

To decipher the text of the book, the reader's mind must be in a specific trance state. Ritual syllables must be chanted and a meditative state achieved, which requires ten minutes of solitary contemplation and a Concentration check (DC 10). Once the mental state has been attained, the Book of Jabassallab is as comprehensible as if it had been written in reader's own language; however, no other written text makes any sense and the reader until this state ends. This

state lasts for 1d6x10 minutes. The reader cannot transcribe the book into a standard written language.

Of course, the cult itself teaches the appropriate chants and meditative techniques. A person cannot use them unless a fellow cult member has instructed him. This simple measure ensures that the entirety of the Book of Jabassallab can be distributed over the Internet to the faithful but will never be read by anyone who is not trained in the proper deciphering meditations.

For additional security, it is customary for only one person – the cult leader – to carry out the preliminary meditations before a given ritual begins. They will do this in complete privacy, to minimize the risk of eavesdroppers learning the secret of the Book. That person will then lead the ritual and perform any necessary recitals from the Book. Cult copies are not usually bound, as it is much easier (if less reverent) to keep them in loose-leaf printout form. The cult has little to fear if the Book itself is stolen or seized, as it is anyone who looks at it will mistake it for mere scrap paper, unless a reader makes an occult knowledge roll at DC35.

### ***Function***

The Book of Jabassallab contains all the rituals appropriate to the blossomer cult, including the proper way to prepare a blossomer host and what to expect when the resultant demon is allowed to carry out its work of impregnation. Any person who was able to comprehend the seeming gibberish of the Book would become aware of exactly what the cult's intentions were.

§§§§§

## **DEMON FETUS IN A JAR**

This jar of cloudy liquid contains something that seems at first to be a wax model. Surely nothing like this could actually have been born from a human being? The jar's occupant is superficially similar to a human infant, with a body and limbs no different to those of an unborn child of about eight months' development, complete with a frayed tassel of umbilical cord. The infant is extraordinarily thin, with the ribs clearly discernible and the elbows and knees bony, but is otherwise human below the neck. Only two incongruous bulges where the shoulder blades are strike the observer as unusual. These are hard swellings, like tumors.

When the face and head float into view, most observers gasp in shock. The ears are disproportionately large, with

an obvious point. The face is slit-eyed and piggish, not human at all, with a squashed-up snout like the face of a boxer dog or a vampire bat. The thing is clearly dead but has an expression of sleeping malice that is disturbing even to the most objective medical specialist. An embryologist would doubtless account for the child's deformities by attributing them to a congenital disorder.

The thing is in fact the product of a blossomer cult that arose in the 1920s. It is the result of a typical blossomer impregnation that did not carry to term, because the mother and the rest of the cultists were gunned down in a raid. The child was removed from the mother's corpse during the autopsy procedure and was kept as a medical curiosity, pickled in formaldehyde.

The child was to be one of those favored ones, who represents the interests of the dark gods on Earth. Now it is nothing but a fairground attraction. It might be found in any of the following locations:

- The fetus is owned by an artist resident in New Orleans, who keeps a collection of macabre and grisly items. She is less than entirely sane and believes the fetus speaks to her in dreams, giving her inspiration. She does not like to receive visitors and spends the whole day indoors with the curtains drawn. Popular local belief is that she is either a vampire, or has convinced herself that she is.
- The jar is kept in the biology lab of a public school in France. It is not supposed to be part of the laboratory's inventory and sits among the other jars on a high shelf. Only the assistant knows that it is there. He likes to take it down when he is alone in the laboratory, examine it and make sketches of it.
- The fetus is buried along with the other loot stolen from a country house. It had previously been the property of a well-to-do eccentric. (The doctor who removed it became addicted to drugs and sold the preserved infant for ready money.) A burglar who was robbing the house was so troubled by its sinister expression that he bundled it into his sack along with the silverware, thinking that he would rather have it there than sitting on the shelves in the dark, watching him. Besides, someone might be willing to pay for it. The burglar died before he could go back to the buried stash, but someone else might come across it.
- The fetus is still among the medical detritus of the hospital, which was closed in 1935 and became derelict. The hospital had to be abandoned after it was found to be structurally unsafe; it was built on the cheap and began to crumble away. Whole

levels have never been opened up since they were barricaded and the building declared unsafe. The jar with its unwholesome occupant sits on a shelf in a dusty storeroom, among other pickled organs.

**Function**

The demonic fetus does not have any particular powers or uses but it is an example of what the blossomer cult can do. As such, it is a potential lead to their activities. The relic was preserved, so there is still a small amount of demonic essence still bound up in the flesh and fluid in the jar. The cult will be concerned to recover it. They will do this by the disgusting means of tearing the remains apart and devouring the fragments, and gulping down the fluid.

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**THE SCALPEL OF MYNARTHITEP**

This apparently unremarkable bronze knife, pitted with age and yet razor-sharp, is a relic of great significance to the Practice. It was supposedly wielded by one of their most senior members, who was an embalmer and priest of Anubis in the days of the Old Kingdom of Egypt. Unwilling to be subject to the judgment of mighty Osiris in the afterlife, Mynarthitep sought instead an immortality in which the body was preserved while living and the soul was able to indwell it forever. Judgement would therefore be escaped.

It was with this knife that Mynarthitep opened his own cranium and made certain surgical modifications, ensuring that his own life would be extended far beyond its natural limit. He stitched his scalp back together afterwards, knowing that the operation had been a success. Had it not been for the supernatural properties of the knife, which Mynarthitep was careful to prepare in accordance with appropriate rites, the operation would have been both messy and fatal.

The scalpel is thus the founding instrument of the organization, and has both symbolic and practical value to them. If they ever learn of its location, they will be eager to reclaim it.

The current whereabouts of the scalpel are unknown. Any of the following might prove to be true:

- The scalpel is in use by a cannibal cult in Mexico. The cult is ostensibly Satanic, but does not have a particularly coherent doctrine. Victims are taken to remote locations, slaughtered and eaten in ritual feasts. The leaders of the cult venerate the scalpel as a sacred

item but do not know anything of its history. They instinctively sense its importance and always use the scalpel to make the first incision in the victim. Were the Practice to manifest before the cult, they would be greeted with awe as ambassadors of the satanic powers, although this is an inaccurate perception of them.

- The scalpel is currently exhibited in the Chicago Museum as part of a display on embalming techniques in Ancient Egypt. Since it arrived, there have been numerous strange events after closing time. Other exhibits have mysteriously moved around, the contents of locked cases have been disturbed without any sign of forced entry and old Egyptian ritual equipment has been found laid out in formal arrangements, as if someone had been using it for its original purpose. None of the security cameras register these events. They simply show a grayish blank screen during the time when the rearrangements must have been taking place.
- The scalpel is in the possession of an elderly taxidermist in Austria. He does not remember how he came by it, but views it as his most prized tool. Under its malign influence, he has been expanding his repertoire to larger and larger animals. There are now several missing students in his basement, expertly stuffed.

**Function**

The scalpel is usable as a weapon. It inflicts 1d6 slashing damage and has a critical range of 17-20. It bestows a +4 enhancement bonus to any attack roll made and a +4 competence bonus to any Treat Injury skill check. Anyone who uses it is slowly subject to its malign influence, as determined by the GM.

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**GUMMY RUBBER BALL**

The Summer of Love produced many strange and silly toys, which fascinated adolescent hippies and young children alike. It was an age of Silly Putty and Raggedy Ann, of glow-in-the-dark dancing plastic skeletons and X-Ray-Spex, Pong and bubble blowers. These toys, brightly colored and easily broken, provided plenty of amusement for those with short attention spans, whether they were young children or stoned adults.

The kooks, too, had uses for these new playthings. Anything that helped them to attract the attention of lonely children would be useful. As well as the plastic toys of the

sixties, they brought a few gimmicks of their own. From whatever strange place the kooks come from, they took the gummy rubber ball.

This is a fist-sized sphere of transparent rubbery matter that is full of rainbow-colored glitter. It smells strongly chemical and is squishy to the touch. When thrown, the ball bounces back almost as strongly as it was hurled, as if it were made from some miracle substance.

A kook, or a child who has begun to have her essence absorbed by the kooks, can control the ball. A simple mental instruction makes it float in the air as lightly as a bubble. This is endlessly fascinating to children, who see the ball as something miraculous. The colorful twinkles it emits from its center are soothing to watch. Children play with it for hours.

The ball is less appealing to adults. The kooks use it as a way of getting rid of interfering people (or animals, such as loyal dogs). When an adult handles the ball, it is likely to attack them, bouncing into their face and pressing their nostrils and mouth shut with its gluey mass.

The ball moves at a speed of 20 feet per round and attacks with a melee attack bonus of +4. If it hits, it latches on to the target, dealing 1d4 choking damage per round. The ball has an effective Strength of 16; in order to prize the gummy ball off a character's face, an opposed Strength roll must be made. If another creature, such as a kook, throws the ball at a target, then use that attack bonus instead of the ball's own.

If the ball is pulled off before it can choke the target to death, it becomes cloudy and inert and cannot attack again. However, if it manages to cause a death, it is even more bouncy and vital than it previously was – its speed, Strength and attack bonus increase by 25%. The secret of the ball's magic bouncing is not any kind of chemical process, but the extraction of life essence. Like the kooks themselves, it feeds off living human beings.

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## **TINCTURE OF WOE**

This fluid looks exactly like water. It is usually found in small ceramic flasks. Alchemists in the Middle Ages distilled it as part of the process of creating the Philosopher's Stone. The chief ingredient is human tears, which must come from young women.

Production is almost completely nonexistent in the modern era. Most of the flasks of the tincture in the world come from the laboratory of Yamamura Ataru, a Japanese alchemist who combines industrial chemical technology with older techniques in order to produce large quantities of the stuff. It is said that Ataru has a production facility in Osaka, in which he keeps a collection of young women who no longer have arms or legs. This ensures that there will be an ample supply of tears and prevents the source of the tears from escaping.

There is high demand for quality tincture among the cunning men, demonologists and other professionals who work with malignant spirits. The tincture makes it much easier to converse with, negotiate with or even imprison the entities whose worlds border our own.

### ***Function***

When the Tincture of Woe is sprinkled on an area, all spiritual creatures within 300 feet are irresistibly drawn to the spilled fluid. (For the purposes of this item, a spiritual creature is any undead, construct, fey or outsider type entity.) A creature may make a Will saving throw (DC 25) to resist the tremendous impulse to move towards the liquid. All that this substance does is to call the beings to the spot. It does not confer any control upon them, nor are they favorably inclined towards the user. They are compelled to remain within the area for 1d6+4 minutes.

The Tincture has many occult uses. Magicians will use it to draw forth a ghost that has been haunting a house, so that they can converse with the spirit and find out what it wants. Hunters of the undead pour out the Tincture to draw zombies and their ilk out of their lairs. The Tincture has even been used to cause the deaths of other people. There is a case on record of a necromancer who poured the Tincture out over a lake filled with drowners while a rival was boating on it. He then watched while the ghostly creatures all swam up to the surface at once and dragged their screaming victim down into the depths.

§§§§§

## **THE SHANKSKIN**

This ancient, rotten skin has been eaten away by mould in several places. It is designed to be worn; a wooden toggle holds it fastened around the wearer's neck. It is yellow, stained and looks like a piece of odorous rubbish. In fact, it has been handed down from father to son for generations, with as much reverence as the family bible would have had to Victorian Christians.

The smelly object is a ritual cape, which was used in ceremonies involving the First Altar (see above) in which men left sacrifices for the feral drowners. It is made from the hide of one of the feral drowners that washed up, dead, on the shores of the sacred lake. For centuries it was the property of a single family that has followed a secret religion for centuries. Then it went missing.

The family that held the Shankskin, the Beans, are odd-looking. Many generations of interbreeding have made them lumpen and slow-witted, with eyes that sit too close together. The family practises incest to keep the blood line pure for religious reasons and secondly to prevent its members from having to come into contact with outsiders. They prefer to live in isolation and take what they need by stealing it.

The Beans are the most degenerate, filthy, foul-mouthed gang that ever stole a welfare check. They spend their days loitering, fighting and shouting at passers-by. The older males usually drink themselves into a stupor by mid-afternoon, while the females roam the streets and make trouble, and their children bawl in nests of their own filth. Social workers have long since realized that the Beans are a hopeless case and there is nothing they can do.

In more primitive times, the Bean family lived in caves or shacks, but in the present era they colonize housing projects. There are entire residential buildings that only have the Bean family living in them. The family's squalor and aggressiveness scares away all others who might otherwise have kept on living there. It takes a very short time for the Beans to turn a neighborhood into a stinking slum. Those stubborn enough to stay are abused on a daily basis and pelted with rubbish; the truly unlucky ones are 'made part of the family' by being abducted and forcibly impregnated, then kept hidden and prevented from ever leaving.

One member, the infamous Sawney Bean, gained notoriety when his family's habit of capturing and eating travelers became public. The clan was discovered living in a pit, surrounded by the remains of dozens of human beings. That branch was wiped out, but the Bean family had other members elsewhere who could carry on the tradition. Cannibalism is not quite as easy to practice nowadays as it once was, so it tends to be saved for special occasions.

Should the Shankskin ever reappear, the entire Bean clan would be mobilized to get it back. Though they are indolent drunkards, they take their pagan religion very seriously and will happily murder any number of people to secure





their sacred object once again. This has only happened once to date, when a group of police officers broke up a ritual and confiscated everything.

**Function**

The wearer of the Shankskin is immune to the feral drowners' ancient musk ability. He can stand in the presence of one of the noisome beasts and breathe freely. The feral drowner recognizes the wearer of the skin as a priest and will not attack him unless he attacks first. Feral drowners do not have any especial regard for humans except as food or sexual playthings, but they do find the Beans more appealing than most. There are even times when an especially corpulent and perverse Bean female will present herself as a voluntary candidate for the sexual attentions of a feral drowner. It is traditional for such women to wear the Shankskin as a form of bridal train.

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**TORUMBOLO'S ROD**

This is a gnarled, black walking stick, with a hard-wearing white metal knob. The metal knob is hollow and rattles if shaken; there is something loose in there. (If it is shaken vigorously, an angry buzzing comes from inside for a couple of seconds.) The stick is also shod in the same white metal. If anyone removes the shoe, the stick proves to be a wooden tube.

There are pictographic symbols on the head of the cane, which require a Knowledge (anthropology) check (DC 20) to decipher. They identify the rod as sacred to Torumbulo. Sufficient anthropological research identifies this being as an obscure demon of plague, who is depicted as a crawling insect, spider or scorpion. Although the practice of propitiating Torumbulo is long dead, he is still remembered and dreaded in some parts of West Africa.

The Rod is used by certain witch doctors. The populace fears them and fears the rod above all, saying that it brings quick death to those who speak against the wise man. They are, of course, right. Much like the 'pointing bone', the rod of Torumbulo is an instrument of death. The sound of the stick rattling will send people fleeing for safety, each fearing they are the one who has aroused the sorcerer's rage.

**Function**

The rod does not actually have any magical properties in itself. The rattling knob holds a single death tapper, in a dormant state. To use the rod, the shaman shakes it until

the death tapper is woken and becomes angry. He then takes the metal tip from the rod's foot, so that the death tapper can travel down the hollow interior of the cane. An expert flick of the wrist, and the death tapper is flung down the cane towards the person the shaman wishes to destroy.

In game terms, the shaman may make a ranged touch attack against his target to fling the death tapper on to him. If the shaman's ranged attack hits, the tapper may make an immediate attack against the target. Even if the shaman misses his mark, the death tapper will latch on to the nearest available victim. The death tapper does not return to the cane once the shaman has dispatched it. He must summon a new one.

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**BLACK METALLIC LIQUID**

Only a few human beings will ever be exposed to the horrors of the Outer Black, where the torture dogs glide down breezes of pure agony in pursuit of things that used to be men, and the organ grinders roar over battlefields strewn with the remains of machines over a thousand years old. It is not a place where people voluntarily go.

Nonetheless, in their quest for new experience and more and more extreme sensations, some decadent souls who learn of the place make up their minds to find their way to it. These are usually the kind of person who sees everyday life as sterile and dull, who has tried every drug imaginable and gotten bored of depravity and who desperately wants a new thrill to replace the old ones. They imagine that the Outer Black is some kind of sadomasochistic paradise, where a soul that dreams of extremes can experience a hell sweeter than any heaven.

They are, of course, completely wrong.

Accessing the Outer Black physically is not possible, but a mind can be exposed to it by means of a peculiar drug. This is always found in liquid form. It is black and has a curious metallic sheen, as if it were a form of dark mercury. The source of the drug is unknown, but it is always found in glass ampoules that have shredded electrical wires at one end, as if the ampoule had been ripped out of some complicated device. If subjected to chemical analysis, it proves to be a substance unknown to science.

**Function**

Whatever its original purpose may have been, the liquid is

used a narcotic. It is peddled on the black market as ‘the ultimate high’ and is taken in that capacity by the ultra-rich, as well as by criminals with easier access to it, such as high-ranking gangsters and smugglers. Those in the know consider it to be the caviar of illegal substances.

When taken in tiny doses, a deep inertia settles on the drug taker, shot through with strange cybernetic hallucinations. There is never any sense of panic or disorientation. Some users feel that their mental abilities are enhanced massively by use of the drug. They become able to visualize complicated mathematical concepts, such as a rotating hypercube, as easily as they would be able to visualize simple polygons.

If the whole ampoule is drunk, the full effect manifests. The initial effects appear after five minutes. The drinker’s pupils dilate to an alarming degree, so that the iris is almost completely invisible. He begins to suffer hot and cold flushes. Other people’s voices sound metallic and alien. This is an upsetting experience and he must now make a Will saving throw (DC 10) or become shaken.

Fifteen minutes into the experience, the chemical takes over his brain. As he begins to ‘peak’, he becomes intermittently telepathic and can ‘overhear’ the surface thoughts of people within 20 feet. This is completely random and the character has no way to control it. He must now make a Will saving throw (DC 15) or become shaken (and remain so for the duration of the drug’s effect) as the voices in his head begin to shake his sanity. If he was already shaken, he becomes frightened. A frightened character will attempt to flee away from other people, as he believes that this will make the voices stop.

Approximately ten minutes later, the drinker can suddenly see into the Outer Black. His vision is shifted, as if he were now physically standing in that dimension, although he remains on earth. Since he can see only the Outer Black all around him, he may believe that he has somehow been transported there. If he looks down at himself, he sees an insectile, vaguely crustacean body instead of his human shape. This experience is massively jarring to the brain; the character must make a further Will saving throw (DC 20) or become shaken. If he was already shaken, he becomes frightened; if he was already frightened, he becomes panicked. Frightened or panicked characters who would ordinarily flee ‘the source of their fear’ have no one thing to run away from in this instance, so they either flee in a random direction or cower.

The portion of the Outer Black that the character can

see resembles a painting by H. R. Giger. Enormous biomechanical demons, with wings like ragged plastic, tear smaller demons to shreds. Titans made from mangled metal and rancid green flesh fire weapons that spew corrosive acid, or rip away at their armored opponents with claws the size of bulldozers. The experience is utterly terrifying and completely alien. There is no reason or purpose to the destruction. It just seems to go on and on.

After two hours of this, the experience begins to fade. The character returns to normal in 15 minutes. He carries the memory of the experience with him for the rest of his life. Exposure to the bizarre geometries and mind-rewiring energies of the Outer Black subtly alters his brain, granting him a permanent increase of one point of Intelligence and one point of Charisma. However, if he became frightened during the experience, he is left with a permanent nervous condition. He automatically becomes shaken in tense situations, such as combat, and must make a Will saving throw (DC 15) to avoid this condition. If he became panicked, then the nervous condition is worse; he must make a Will saving throw (DC 20) to avoid becoming shaken in tense situations.

This is not the only hazard of the black metallic drug. While the character is exposed to the Outer Black, there is an additional danger: there is a 50% chance that a denizen of the Outer Black will notice the presence of the character’s mind. (This will either be an organ grinder or a torture dog. Future supplements will detail additional creatures from this dismal plane.) It will approach him on the Outer Black, coming closer and closer, but fading steadily from view, becoming transparent. What the creature is actually doing is tracking the character’s mind back to its actual location on Earth. It senses prey and is keen to get to it. The creature arrives on the material plane 1d3 hours after the drug experience ends.

A character who has been seen is marked as prey from that point onwards. The denizen always knows where on Earth he is. It will take its time, allowing the prey to become properly paranoid before finally making its appearance. Sometimes, a creature will come straight for its intended victim but it is more usual for it to spin the hunt out.

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### **SPAULDING’S BELT**

This is a simple brown leather belt, fastened with a buckle. There seems to be nothing remarkable about it at all. There is some damage to part of it, as if strong jaws had bitten

down on the leather. Close examination reveals a row of tooth marks imprinted into it.

This is the genuine belt that gagged Mary Beth Spaulding, who died from choking on her own tongue and became Strap Throat. There are dozens of imitation belts out there in the hands of morbidly minded relic collectors, but only one is real. Those who are so eager to own the genuine article would be much less eager if they knew the truth.

### ***Function***

The belt is a death sentence. Whenever anyone comes into ownership of it, they are absolutely doomed to meet their death at the hands of Strap Throat – literally. The victim has until the next full moon to live. When the moon becomes full, Strap Throat will manifest through the closest available reflective surface and strangle the belt's owner to death.

This fate has been foreshadowed. Those who are marked to die can no longer see their own reflection when they look in the mirror. Other people who look at the reflection see it as normal, but the eventual victim sees Strap Throat herself, staring and staring, where the reflection should be. She never says anything, nor does she react. She only stares. When it is time for her to claim her victim, she simply lunges out of the reflective surface. The only possible solace in these visions is that the victim can see that the very same belt that he now owns is that which is gagging Strap Throat, so he can at least work out the connection.

Ownership of the belt is conferred in two ways. The owner either paid money for it (or traded an item for it) or he was the first person to touch it after the former owner died. It does not matter whether or not the character considers himself the owner. As far as Strap Throat is concerned, he is cursed and she will come for him.

There is only one way to escape the fate that awaits. The owner of the belt must sell it on to someone else. He must do so in legitimate trade, by exchanging it either for money or for an item. Simply slipping the belt into someone else's pocket is not enough. It must be sold. Strap Throat will then claim the person who owns the belt when the full moon comes. A potential victim can always check whether he is still cursed or not by looking at a mirror. If he sees his own reflection once again, he is safe. The belt cannot be destroyed. If the character attempts to throw it away, he finds it among his possessions.

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## **THE VOYNICH TAPE**

This is an old-fashioned spool of recording tape, of the kind that comes in reels rather than cassettes. It cannot be played unless one has access to the proper equipment. From its faded appearance, it probably dates from the late sixties or early seventies. There is no label.

When played, a voice can be heard speaking in Oxford English. The sound quality is extremely sharp. It announces that what is about to be done is being done of the speaker's own free will, and that the speaker takes responsibility for anything that may happen as a result. It states that what follows is 'Experiment Fifteen' in a series of twenty experiments, which altogether form Project Voynich. After this come various ominous incantations in Latin and in apparent gibberish. A successful Knowledge (occult) skill check (DC 20) identifies these as calls from the Goetia, or Lesser Key of Solomon, with additional, seemingly random material worked in.

The tape is from the archives of an occult research organization. The name 'Project Voynich' refers to the enigmatic Voynich Manuscript, a lengthy piece of illustrated text dating from the time of Doctor Dee and Edward Kelley, the Elizabethan magicians. Project Voynich was an attempt to combine the evocation techniques found in grimoires of known efficiency, such as the Key of Solomon, with the names derived from the Voynich Manuscript. The logic behind this was that if the Voynich Manuscript was (as it appeared to be) a manual of alchemical magic, then the logical thing to do was to call up the entities associated with it and ask them to translate it. If successful, this could have opened up secrets of alchemy hidden for over four hundred years.

The person responsible for Project Voynich was Barry Dryburgh, a dilettante magician who had his coven in the swinging Soho of 1967. He vanished amid scandal involving the son of a member of the House of Lords and never resurfaced into public life. The truth of Dryburgh's disappearance has nothing to do with sordid tabloid headlines. It was Project Voynich that removed Dryburgh from the world of the living. Whether he mistranslated the manuscript or made some other fundamental error in the summoning ritual is unknown. What is certain is that he did not succeed in calling up the alchemical angels of the Voynich manuscript. Something altogether more malevolent and less intelligent answered his call. He was visited by a shatterer.

The occult organization, to which Dryburgh belonged, the

Circle of Nine, noticed the massive psychic turbulence in the region and were thus able to reach his flat before the police did. The demon had already departed, taking most of Dryburgh with it. The Circle were forced to clean up as best they could, in the hope that Dryburgh would simply be thought to have gone missing. (If his grisly death became public, it would expose their own activities, and they did not want that.) While they were mopping up, they discovered Dryburgh's tape recorder. It was still running.

The Circle of Nine is now defunct. The order's ritual equipment has been sold off, lost or stolen. Some of the previous members, those who were active in London in the 1960s, will remember the tape, though they will be understandably reluctant to discuss it or Dryburgh.

As for the whereabouts of the tape itself, there are several possibilities:

- A famous American 'shock rocker', who had heard of the Circle of Nine from one of his associates in the music industry, bought the tape for his private collection. He is intending to have a party for Halloween, at which the tape will be played to an audience of hundreds. This person is very high profile and will not be willing to receive visitors, nor to part with the tape. If the players have learned of the tape's significance, they will have to act quickly to prevent a massacre.
- The tape found its way into an archive of BBC radio broadcasts, where it lies to this day. The filing clerk who listened to a short section of it mistakenly believed it to be an episode of a supernatural drama series from the mid-seventies, called the *Armchair Horrors*. It currently sits in a box, gathering dust. This would be the end of the story, if the BBC were not planning to rebroadcast some of the classic 'cult' serials from that time. Should the tape be broadcast on live radio, the results could be carnage on an unprecedented scale. Not all the listeners would be visited by shatterers – there simply are not that many of them – but at least eighty homes in the country would suddenly have a huge invisible presence in them...
- The tape is still in the keeping of an occult society. Unlike the Circle of Nine, it is not a group of decadent sensation-seeking diabolists. It goes by the name of the *Astrum Occidentis*, or the *Star in the West*, and is dedicated to protecting humanity from supernatural threats. Young and upcoming covens with something to prove would very much like to get their hands on the tape, since it is one of the only recordings in history that has a track record of actually having successfully summoned a demon, something that 'wannabe'

magicians would desperately like to do – or so they think.

### **Function**

Dryburgh recorded the whole flawed summoning ritual. If it is played back, it has exactly the same effect as it would have if spoken aloud. A shatterer has a flat 50% chance of arriving in the space where the tape is being played.

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### **THE UGLY SOFA**

There is plenty of hideous furniture in the world. Some of the travesties of the 1970s and 1980s are especially memorable. One hardly needs to mention the orange butterfly chair, the pine faux-settle or the chrome yuppie suite. The ugly sofa is more than just tasteless. It has a sinister look to it.

It seems to be a large, lumpy, green leather sofa that has seen better days. Strange stains besmirch it, the arms are pockmarked with cigarette burns and it has a faint smell of cat urine. When sat upon, it tends to engulf the sitter. This makes it hard to stand up again. The leather upholstery clings unpleasantly to the skin, as if it were coated with some lightly tacky substance.

The sofa is most likely to be found in a run-down slum, squat, crack house or similar place. It is not the kind of furniture that anyone would want if they could afford better. At best, it might be found in a house shared by a group of students. Nobody who has more than a rudimentary standard of hygiene would want to have it in his house.

The sofa has a sinister past. Beneath the cushions, there is an open wooden framework, with a surprisingly large amount of space beneath, which smells appalling. One does not notice the smell unless the cushions are removed. There is a crusty, flyblown layer of some kind of brown matter at the bottom of the open space, in a roughly humanoid shape. Darker stains spread out around one end, where the head would be.

The obvious explanation of this is that a dead body has lain here for several weeks without being discovered. Perhaps one of the sofa's former owners shot a neighbor in the head during an argument and hid the body in the sofa before fleeing. Those who found the corpse evidently just disposed of it, for whatever reason, without notifying the police ...

This is not as far-fetched as it may seem. It is quite common for the spaces below beds or larger items of furniture, such as the sofa, to be used to stash bodies. There are even stories of hotel staff who have discovered corpses hidden in the bed base long after the last person to use the room has left. These corpses are not always found in time, and other guests sleep on mattresses mere feet away from the rotting remains of a stranger.

### **Function**

The ugly sofa is now the resting place of a blood corpse. It returns to it in the same way that a vampire would return to its coffin, pulling the cushions over its head and curling up inside. It is possible that the people who live in the house where the sofa is have no idea at all that this is going on, but it is much more likely that the blood corpse killed them first, then went off to hunt night after night, returning to the sofa to rest.

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### **LYSSA MARTIN'S FACE**

Nobody remembers Lyssa Martin. She was only one minor actress from the early 70s, lost in a vast sea of other similar actresses who all started out with big dreams and ended up nowhere. In the early days of her career, she managed to secure a few minor parts in soap operas and one washing powder commercial. That was as far as it ever went. Without decent work and with bills mounting, she did what many unsuccessful actresses do, when they have the looks for it; she went into porn.

This was supposed to be an emergency move. She would do a couple of movies, make some money and tide herself over until the next job came along. She looked good enough and performed well, and the adult movie producers were interested in her. Unfortunately, when she tried to return to mainstream acting, none of the TV companies were willing to hire a porn star – bad for the station's image, they all said. The emergency option became her only option.

Still, it was not so bad. The money was all right and she had a talent for the job. Now that she was involved, she may as well take it all the way and make a living out of it. There were always ways to earn more money in the porn industry. The more extreme acts you were willing to perform, the more you could earn for it. Lyssa's movies became more degraded, more bizarre. Numbed by a cocaine habit, disillusioned and apathetic, she barely cared any more.

When she was invited to take the starring role in a secret video project, described as 'a number for the true connoisseurs', she was slightly nervous but went along with it anyway. There were some warning signals that she should have paid attention to. She did not know the producers and soon discovered that she did not know any of the film crew, either. The money was good, though. It was the break she needed. One last big job and she would retire, move away from LA and get a waitressing job in some quiet burg where nobody knew her.

The chloroform-soaked rag came out of nowhere. She was dimly aware of a bumpy car journey, of raised voices laughing, the smell of Jack Daniel's and marijuana. When she came to, she was in an empty garage. There was a ball gag in her mouth and her hands and feet were bound. When she saw the cameras, she groggily thought that this must be some kind of BDSM trip. Even then, she did not think herself in too much danger. She had done this kind of thing before. When the man rolled out the fabric with the medical instruments in its pockets, she began to panic. She struggled and tried to scream. The camera was already rolling.

Lyssa was the unwilling star in an especially graphic and horrible snuff movie, one that has come to be known as *Flayboy* on the circuit. She was meticulously flayed, the skin peeled from her body with medical knives. Mercifully, she died from shock shortly into the film. As far as anyone knows, the people responsible for her death have never been brought to justice, nor has her body ever been recovered. The detectives who investigated the case believe that the corpse was probably dumped into a concrete pillar that now holds up a motorway bridge. There is, of course, no way to investigate this.

There are two important facts that the law enforcement agencies do not know. One is that the man who carried out the on-camera flaying, a Greek called Sotiris Vandis, kept a souvenir of his work. He retained the carefully removed pieces of Lyssa's face and stitched them back together, making a mask of the reassembled fragments. Vandis was obsessed with rearranging the features of women and is wanted for practicing plastic surgery in America without any medical qualifications at all, causing horrific injuries and permanent scarring.

This disgusting object is barely recognizable as a human face and looks more like a tanned leather mask. It has no eyes or lips, and the nose is a mere dab of skin without anything to support it. Only close examination reveals it to be an actual face, preserved and reconstructed. There is a

giveaway beauty spot just above the right eyebrow.

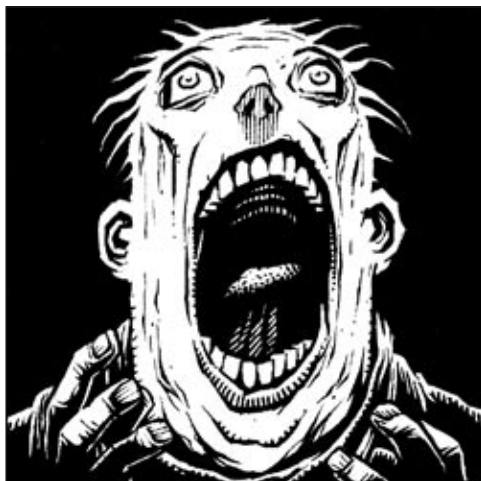
The other unknown fact is the creation of a living nightmare, a walking jumble of blood and electrical equipment, forced into being by the recording of *Flayboy*. This monstrosity, a snuff golem, immediately set about doing what these creatures always do – it began to hunt down and slaughter the men who had made the film. So far, it has disembowelled the cameraman and stuffed him like a piñata with videotape, left the director's head rotating in his microwave oven and run over the financier with a hover mower. Only Vandis is left to find. The *Flayboy* snuff golem is saving him for last.

Lyssa Martin's face is currently in Vandis' possession. He is obsessed with it, seeing it as a souvenir of his most inspired work. He will sometimes wear it himself, when alone in the house. He will also hire call girls and make them wear the thing, which he tells them is just a 'gimp mask'. They are in no position to tell any different.

***Function***

The face is psychically bound to the *Flayboy* snuff golem. It desperately wants to possess it and bind it to its own face. However, when another person wears it, it confuses the creature. It identifies that person as part of itself and will not attack them. As soon as the mask is removed, it will instantly try to rip that person apart and claim the mask for itself.

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# Running Horror Campaigns

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The creatures from *The Book of Unremitting Horror* are ideally suited to a modern horror campaign, although some of the demonic and undead creatures can be transplanted into a fantasy setting. GMs can use d20 Modern unmodified, although the GM might want to create suitable fear rules to reflect the creatures' potential to terrify the life out of their foes. If this is too much of a chore, then there are several horror games that might be worth a look, such as Mongoose Publishing's *OGL Horror*, Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu d20*, or Hogshead's *Fright Night* series..

## CHARACTER TYPES

For this kind of game it is best to avoid characters who are exceptional or excessively heroic in any way. Trained spies, military commanders and ninjas are all out. For the players to be able to identify with their characters, they should have a very limited set of resources. Horror is not truly horror if you can call up an air strike and have the residue daemon bombed with napalm.

This is not to say that characters cannot have military training or combat experience. Do, however, limit the number of characters on a group that have these abilities, and above all, keep it plausible. If a player can justify the presence of a particular career path, then give him the benefit of the doubt. It is fair to say that a 24-year-old character might have had combat training, a course in First Aid or even some martial arts prowess. He could be able to pick locks, having spent some time as a petty criminal, or climb a sheer surface, having gone mountaineering. It is harder to justify the ability to pilot a helicopter or smash a brick with your head.

It's very important that the adventurers have a shared history, and care about each other's survival; in fact a model that works very well is to have a group of friends (or housemates) who are drawn inadvertently into the story. Whatever their initial reason for coming together as a group, they soon find that their shared knowledge and experience means that they have to stick together to survive. Characters in *Unremitting Horror* can have more in common with the protagonists of the slasher movie

genre (or even the zombie movie) than they do with the more dry, academic investigators of Lovecraft's stories.

As a rule of thumb, characters usually fall into one of the following types. Use these outlines to see whether the group is balanced. If a team seems to have too many characters of one type (two is usually the absolute maximum) then the characters should be redesigned.

### *The Veteran*

This character has usually spent time in the army. He knows how to make pipe bombs from household ingredients, has many weapons skills and can take a lot of damage. Gamers who want to give their characters the best chance of survival often play veterans..

### *The Occultist*

Characters of this kind love to study. They find out the historical roots of the horrors they come into contact with. To them, knowledge is power. If a ritual ever needs to be performed in the course of an adventure, then they are the ones to do it. The greatest danger they face is the loss of their sanity, as they must expose themselves to forbidden knowledge in order to prevail.

### *The Street Hustler*

These characters are usually cynical and amoral. They have underworld connections, know the right people to talk to and can generally get you whatever you need, for the right price. Their value lies in their ability to come up with information about the local region and scene, find unorthodox solutions to problems and get out of trouble without a fight. Street hustlers are used to living on the edge.

### *The Techie*

Techies like to take things apart and put them back together. They work with their hands, whether as carpenters, electricians or car mechanics. Usually a character is something else as well as being a techie; tinkering is something he does in his spare time, rather than as a full time job. Examples include a medical student who builds synthesizers, or a dispatch rider with a garage full of disassembled bicycles.

### ***The Bluffer***

These characters get by on their wits and charm. They are often the spokespeople of the group. They tend to be easy going, even coming close to being slackers. Bluffers defuse tension with humor and add a much-needed perspective to a group of characters. In theory, the party bluffer comes up with cunning plans to infiltrate a building, or talks the group out of a dangerous situation.

### ***The Empathizer***

These characters engage with NPCs more than the rest. They are caregivers, usually having some degree of first aid ability, and see themselves as defenders and protectors. When a frightened child or injured adult is encountered, the empathizer will be the first on the scene to comfort them. Empathizers are driven by a strong sense of morality. They genuinely want to make everything all right. Unremitting Horror is more challenging for empathizers than for any other type of character, because their belief in the value of their help is liable to be torn to shreds.

## **MAGIC**

The amount of magic in an *Unremitting Horror* game depends on two things: the rules you are using, and the grittiness of the campaign. Magic in the hands of PCs is an extremely good way of trashing the atmosphere completely. About the only safe kinds of magic to use are the divinatory kind, which gives the characters fresh information, and the ‘summoning ritual’, which is inherently dramatic.

Horror in this game depends on the players experiencing supernatural events. If they have access to magic that always works, then they can produce their own supernatural events, which undermines the uncanny terror of the opponents they face. By all means let them perform rituals of protection and so forth, but never tell them the result. Most especially, take care not to have anything happen as a result of the players’ actions that would seem out of the ordinary in the real world, such as glowing lines of force appearing, or sigils floating in the air.

Divination is especially appropriate in *Unremitting Horror* because it is vague and because it is practiced all the time in the real world. There is thus no need to suspend disbelief. One can easily get a Tarot reading or an I Ching casting. The character has only to decide whether or not to believe it. However, if the characters are flinging magic missiles about, then the game has jumped out of the horror genre and into urban fantasy.

Psychic abilities, by contrast, are very appropriate. As there is no visible proof of their existence, they do not risk breaking the atmosphere. A character could have psychometric, empathic, precognitive or even telepathic powers, any of which would enhance the game, provided that these powers’ effects are not specific enough to derail the adventure. For example, psychometry performed on an artifact should provide clues about its history, rather than spell out the full horror; Precognition should give the character awful visions of what lay ahead, rather than say “don’t go to Milwaukee at midnight, because you will die.” If telepathy connects a character with the inhuman mind of one of the horrors, then the player should have to make an appropriate horror or will roll.

The GM should bear in mind that psychic characters in this genre are often unhinged. They tend to be vague, distracted, or troubled in some way because of the difficulties they experience in living with their abilities.

## **WEAPONS**

Sooner or later, the characters will want to lay their hands on some weapons, just so that they will have a fighting chance of survival. As the GM, you must make sure that the game does not become a gunfest. When in doubt, simply refer to the real world. Whereas guns are generally available, explosives are not. It simply is not possible to pick up a pound of C4 from the shop round the corner. Players usually circumvent this by having their characters make their own bombs. So long as they are inventive enough and do not stretch credulity, there is no reason not to let them do so. The GM should, however, bear the political climate in mind. Someone buying several sacks of the right kind of fertilizer is likely to be investigated by the police as a terrorist suspect.

When higher level characters encounter monstrosities such as an organ grinder, even powerful firearms are going to be relatively useless. If the players are going to have any chance of prevailing, the GM must provide at least one way for them to overcome the horror. Traditionally, there are two ways to dispatch a powerful horrific creature: magic and industrial machinery. A denizen of the Outer Black might, if the players were lucky, be sent back to its home plane if the correct ritual were performed. An organ grinder rammed by a fuel truck carrying gasoline would be burned to a cinder. A snuff golem crushed under a steam hammer would no longer be a threat. Take inspiration from the climactic scenes of films such as *Hellraiser*, *Terminator* and *Alien*.



## GROUP MOTIVATION

The motivation of a group gives it its forward momentum, explaining why the characters cannot simply take the next train to somewhere very far away and hide there for the rest of their lives. Regardless of their classes or careers, there are usually three stages through which a typical group of characters will pass in the course of a horror campaign. The paramount motivation in each stage both keeps the characters together and keeps them focused on the tasks ahead.

The first stage is one of responsibility to others. This begins with the adventure hook from the first scenario. The characters are motivated to help another person, whether this involves locating a missing friend, helping an acquaintance escape whatever vile thing is pursuing him, or carrying out an old man's last wish. As the characters are not especially familiar with the Horrors at this stage, the motivation does not involve them and is rooted entirely in their social obligations. They are more concerned with rescuing a young niece or an old college friend than with saving the world.

The second stage is one of mutual survival. Responsibility to others is still a factor, but by this stage they know that there are dark things in the world, and the things know that they know. The group has knowledge that the rest of the world would not believe. So far as they can tell, they are the only people in the world who can trust one another. Anyone else would call them insane and have them locked up; worse, they might be working for them. The group will already have been through various 'baptisms of fire' together and may even have lost some members along the way. The group is motivated to investigate paranormal events to protect each other from the horrors they already know about and those that they have yet to encounter.

The third stage is one of responsibility to the world in general. A group that has come this far can never return to ordinary life. They know too much about what a grim and haunted place the world truly is. They carry on the work of fighting the darkness simply because nobody else can. A group of this kind is very likely to belong to or found a formal organization for the express purpose of keeping the Horrors at bay. A few such organizations, such as the 'Astrum Occidentis' (see Artifacts, above), already exist in the game world, operating in complete secrecy. They are woefully outnumbered.

## PATRONS

A patron can help to connect several sequential adventures. Put simply, a patron supplies the characters with resources – information, leads, money and physical help – and in return the characters do what he wants. The great advantage of a patron is that the GM can give the characters their mission objectives in plain language. If the players have to work out too much for themselves in the early stages, the game can flounder and the players can feel rudderless.

A patron need not be the 'stranger in the bar who offers you a job.' A remote agency like Watchers' Council (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) or the Powers that Be (*Angel*), works better. A patron who was a member of the Astrum Occidentis would be ideally placed to give the characters new missions, while keeping very quiet about his own involvement.

The most important function of a patron is to provide solid leads and story hooks. So long as he does that, he can be as frustratingly cryptic as the GM wants to make him. The patron will often be a figure of mystery, leading the characters to one discovery after another. Sometimes, the tables will be turned and a patron will need to be rescued. Another useful plot twist is for the patron to turn out to have been working for the Horrors all along, and simply using the players as catspaws to remove potential competition. He might even turn out to be the Mystery Man himself ...

## USING THE HORRORS IN A CAMPAIGN

Fantasy monsters are really just another thing to kill, and d20 tends to grade them so that the GM and players are reasonably confident of success, perhaps with some losses or resource depletion. Horror games are different; atmosphere, particularly fear and tension are more important and are very much what the players expect to experience vicariously through their characters. Hence the Horror and the PCs have a longer, more intimate relationship than is possible with a fistful of level-draining undead. Of course, a good scary story runs to a tight script, and a scary game should do likewise. There should be mystery, a mounting sense of dread, as the GM foreshadows the climactic showdown, when the adventurers fight the thing, with mutilated corpses, creepy messages, mad witnesses and ideally, a tight deadline.

### ***Bait-and-Switch Scenario***

This is an excellent introduction to a horror campaign. It brings the players into what seems to be a wholly mundane mystery, but proves to be far from ordinary. The horror steadily creeps in as the adventure unfolds. The sample scenario in this book, 'The Final Case', is a Bait-and-Switch story, beginning as a missing persons investigation and ending in a confrontation with a nightmarish entity. A disappearance, or a series of disappearances, work well here as a story hook. Without a body or any similar evidence of grisly goings-on, the horror level starts fairly low and there is no reason for any investigator to expect paranormal activity. Only when the clues are followed up does the strangeness begin to emerge.

The most suitable adversaries in Bait-and-Switch are intelligent creatures that clean up after themselves, such as the sisterites, or creatures that are only found at certain times or places, such as the clooties who come ashore on special evenings, the drowners who spend most of their time under the surface of their lakes, or the kooks who always arrive at the start of summer and leave as the season comes to an end. The mood of these stories is one of growing unease. The creature itself should not be met until right at the very end. Until that point, the characters should always be able to account for their discoveries in some way that does not involve unearthly monsters. Only when the entity is seen clearly, a 'demon by daylight', should the skeptics be silenced – and that, of course, is when madness begins.

When writing a Bait-and-Switch story, bear in mind:

- The everyday world, with all its mundane comforts and banal scenery, should play a large part in this kind of story. The characters are being introduced to something horrible and out of the ordinary, and this works much better if they are reminded of the normal world's ignorance of such things.
- Feel free to introduce twists and sudden story redirections. The players know they are in a horror game, so they will be expecting something supernatural to happen sooner or later, but you should be able to keep them guessing. For example, have a NPC who seemed to be an ally turn out to be a maniac who was leading the group into a trap, or have the creature turn out to be in the building where they have been staying all along, under their very noses.
- Madness should be just as much of a threat as painful death, if not more so, for NPCs as well as the PCs. Exposure to something as terrifying as a clootie standing over a disemboweled victim is enough to send ordinary people shrieking into a mental hospital.

### ***Trail of Blood Scenario***

In this kind of story, it is immediately obvious that something deeply sinister is going on. In a Trail of Blood scenario, the players are motivated to investigate deaths that show signs of having a supernatural cause. The aftermath of an oovashi attack or assault by a feral drowner are excellent examples. The deaths will also be under investigation by the police, but the players (being by now at least a little familiar with the Horrors) will be aware of elements that the police do not know about.

Use the more gruesome monsters for this kind of adventure. Snuff golems, residue golems, organ grinders, shatterers and torture dogs are all suitable candidates. While the bait-and-switch adventure is about steady discovery and creeping unease, the trail of blood adventure plunges the characters into the guts of the action from the outset.

When writing a Trail of Blood story, keep the following in mind:

- A good way to start is with the discovery of remains. That way, the characters face an immediate dilemma – do they begin the investigation themselves, using their specialist knowledge, or involve the authorities? If the creature has recently left the scene, do they attempt to pursue it, or do they stay in the area so that they can answer the inevitable questions from the police and the media? Could they even be implicated? This kind of opening scene forces many hasty decisions by the players and so makes for intense drama.
- The murders (and disappearances) will also be under investigation by the police, who will almost certainly disapprove of any PC interference. If they are found to have interfered at murder sites or hindered police work in any way, they are liable to be arrested.
- Having the players present at an autopsy is a very good way to immerse them in the reality of what they are facing. They will automatically connect the damage to the body with damage that might be inflicted on their own bodies. Horror that is built up in the players' imaginations by clues and suggestions is far more effective than a flat description of a drooling thing that is standing in front of them.
- Give the players someone other than themselves to be concerned about, such as a family member, trusted friend or partner. Players can get reckless where their own lives are concerned, but if they have to protect a vulnerable non-PC (especially if they have an emotional connection to him or her) then they are much more likely to tread cautiously and fear what awaits them. They cannot be everywhere at once; if there is a murderous creature on the loose, they will have to

choose whether to protect those who are important to them, or go out to confront the threat. Serial killer stories, such as Red Dragon, make excellent use of this dramatic device.

### ***Conspiracy Scenario***

In a conspiracy scenario, the players are not facing a single 'monster' and the adventure does not conclude when the monster is confronted and defeated. Instead, they are contending with an organization made up of human beings like themselves. The most obvious conspiracy to use is a fraternity of occultists with connections to the Outer Black, intent on bringing chaos and havoc to humanity. You can even create conspiracies within conspiracies, such as a coven of relatively ordinary Satanists that is controlled from within by a hard core of magicians with genuine occult knowledge.

Conspiracy scenarios are best suited to a group that has already been playing for a while. They should have a clear idea of the kind of creature that is out there and be aware that occasionally they work with human sorcerers. The advantage of a conspiracy scenario is that it can stretch over several linked adventures. The creatures that appear are either working in association with the cultists or are connected to them in some other way, such as a shatterer being called up by a botched ritual, or a torture dog homing in on a member who had looked for too long into the Outer Black. The ultimate objective is to expose the cult and break its power for good.

The horrors that are best be used are those that command obedience from their mortal servants, such as the feral drowners, or those that can be made to serve the interests of the cult, such as death tappers, scourgers, and most especially blossomers. Characters will come across these entities at the cult's lairs, or when the cult dispatches them to take care of the troublemakers.

Bear the following in mind for conspiracy scenarios:

- Design your secret society carefully; hooded robes and daggers are certainly traditional, if a little hackneyed, but the other popular examples – creepy corporations, urban voodoo, wealthy professionals, high school students, bored housewives with dark secrets – have become clichés in their own right. Whatever you decide, bear in mind that, if magic works in the GM's world, then an active cult could be wealthy, powerful and well established, expert at covering its tracks (using computer specialists to do so, for example) and feared by all who come into contact with it.

- Cults have other allies than just the supernatural ones. It is very common for superstitious street gangs to be intimidated by magic. The fear of sorcery is enough to make a typical gang member treat a genuine sorcerer with respect, if not outright deference. The relationship is mutually beneficial. Cults can easily persuade gangs to do favors for them; a gang that is backed up by magicians can terrify a neighborhood with ease and frighten off territorial rivals. Players who think that they are going to bust a fusty magical circle of hooded idiots can be rudely shocked when they encounter switchblades and Uzis.
- Play up the paranoia. The players will have no way of knowing how much the cult knows about them, who its agents are, or what kind of powers it has. It is easy (and enjoyable, if you are that kind of GM, as many of us are) to keep them on their toes with little isolated incidents that might be of sinister import. Of course, you should also have definite assaults (both magical and physical) that show the cult has teeth, but fear and paranoia are how genuine cults work, so keep it subtle.

### ***Artifact-based Scenario***

This is the 'maguffin' plot, the story in which the central element is an item, in this case an object with links to one or more of the horrors. It can be linked to any of the above scenario types. Use the artifacts listed in the previous section or create a wholly new one.

The key to an artifact-based scenario is the presence of several interested parties. While the previous adventure types can also involve multiple factions (such as the police, the media, or an institution such as a nightclub) they more usually devolve into the players versus the villains. In an artifact based scenario, you might have the players facing off against the principal villains (who want the artifact for themselves), a powerful horror such as a feral drowner (the artifact's rightful owner), a wealthy and influential corporation that is also hunting the artifact, and a group of neutral magicians (the original holders of the artifact) whose function is to watch from the shadows and keep mankind from becoming exposed to the horrors.

The variety of factions in this kind of scenario means that you can use many different creature types. It is particularly suited to the more intelligent, manipulative kind of creature with an agenda of its own, such as the Practice or the Man in the Bar.

*This adventure is set in London, but can easily*

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# The Final Case

*An adventure for 3-5 characters of 3rd to 5th level*

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*be adapted to other cosmopolitan cities. We recommend it for new PCs who have not encountered anything supernatural or horrific. This is their introduction to unremitting horror.*

*Brandon Miles is a private investigator, who uses unorthodox methods (such as scrying and ritual magic) to find information that others cannot get hold of. His reputation is that of a crank who has a few fluke successes. Nonetheless he is approached when other avenues fail, by people who are desperate enough to try anything. A wealthy patron has hired him to find a missing person. Now Brandon himself has gone missing. The PCs are drawn into the investigation by a frantic email.*

## THE SITUATION

One week ago, Brandon was hired by the wealthy Alexander Pryce-Hamilton to investigate the disappearance of his son, Rupert. The police are also looking into the case but Pryce-Hamilton has his own reasons for wanting an investigator of his own on the job. Brandon has spent the week looking into Rupert's social life and has come up with some disturbing conclusions. The young man was making many contacts in the seedy world of London nightclub life, including a notorious social circle who mixed magical rites in with their drug-fuelled parties. He left his Camden flat to meet friends at the Torture Palace nightclub, where that social group meets, spent several hours there, left at one in the morning and has not been seen since.

## THE TRUTH

What Brandon does not know is that Rupert Pryce-Hamilton was becoming obsessed with someone, even beyond the point of death, and the occult circle was only a means to an end. Rupert had a secret love, a boyfriend named Eric Chalker, who was his 'bit of rough' – an East End skinhead. Eric had a heroin habit, which Rupert's allowance helped to fund.

When Eric died of an overdose, Rupert was utterly distraught. He kept the body in the squalid flat where Eric used to live, unwilling to have the boy taken away from him. The flat was squatted and there was nobody living in the flats on either side, so nobody would notice the smell for many weeks. Perhaps there was someone in London's occult network who could help.

Rupert spoke to his Goth friends at the Devonshire Arms and to Sebastian Bale at the New Era Bookshop. Bale told him about Nicolas Montano, a young ritual magician, pervert and bon vivant who keeps a private room at the Torture Palace. He begged Montano to bring his beloved Eric back from the dead. Montano refused, but in the interests having yet another person owe him a favor, agreed to supply Rupert with the necessary ritual to do it himself. This was a photocopy of a translation of a text called the Kalshinak Ritual. Montano had never dared to use this ritual himself and was curious to see what it would do.

Rupert went back to Eric's flat with the ritual. He performed it over the decomposing body of his former lover. Eric arose as a blood corpse.

The embrace that followed was not a sensual one. Rupert's shrunken remains are now scattered across the floor of the squat. There are a few more desiccated husks there now. Eric has begun to feed, preying on the tramps and homeless people in the area. He is starting to run out of victims and will have to broaden his hunting scope in the next few days. Fortunately, there is a flophouse hotel nearby ...

Shortly after Rupert's disappearance, his father enlisted the help of Brandon Miles to track him down. Miles followed up on the most obvious leads, including a visit to Nicolas Montano, who was intensely displeased by his nosing about. Montano was already aware of Brandon, the self-styled 'psychic investigator' and was expecting to have to deal with

him one day. Concerned that Brandon might find out about Rupert's connection to his circle, Montano conjured a scourger to keep an eye on Brandon and report back. To be on the safe side, Montano also arranged for some magical intimidation to be sent Brandon's way. After his car nearly crashed itself and strange waves of freezing cold struck his little flat, Brandon understood he was in deep trouble. This was confirmed when an anonymous message on his answering machine warned him to stay away.

We thus come to the present day. Brandon sends an email asking for help, which brings the PCs into the picture. He arranges to meet them at the tube station nearest to his house, but Nicolas (forewarned by the scourger) is one step ahead. Nicolas' thugs grab Brandon and bundle him into their black van. If the PCs act quickly, they can save his life when the blood corpse is finally confronted.

### **PLAYERS' INTRODUCTION**

One of the PCs already knows Brandon Miles and has a friendly relationship with him. Depending on how the GM constructs the campaign, he may have helped with previous cases or even gone along on adventures with the group. What is necessary for the 'hook' is that at least one player would be ready to help Brandon out if he ended up in trouble.

Brandon is easy to spot in a crowd. He is a tousle-haired, permanently unshaven man of thirty, though his lifestyle has left him looking older. He habitually dresses in a grubby trenchcoat and smokes constantly, in imitation of his role model, the comic character John Constantine. His demeanor is preoccupied and sharp. He does not often smile, but when he does, he suddenly looks warm and friendly.

The player receives the following email:

It's Brandon Miles here. Sorry to land this on you, but I'm badly in need of help. I would have phoned but there's something listening in. Yes, it's one of those cases. I wish I could explain more but there isn't time. Get yourself to King's Cross tube station at eight tonight and I'll come and meet you. If I miss the meet-up, head straight to my place and let yourselves in. There's a spare key stuck just inside the letterbox – you should be able to reach in and get it. I'll explain everything when I see you.

The character concerned knows Brandon's address. Reaching the flat should be straightforward enough. The GM can decide how much time the characters have to get there, but they should not have more than a few hours at most.

### **LOCATIONS AND ENCOUNTERS**

Apart from the first two listed locations, the following can occur in any order, depending upon how the players decide to go about their investigation.

#### ***1. The Underground Station***

When the players arrive at King's Cross, there is nobody there waiting for them. Hundreds of people are coming and going, but none of them is Brandon Miles. Asking around yields no useful results. The only people who have been here continually are the station staff and they cannot recall seeing anyone matching Brandon's description.

Outside the station, it is raining. A single desultory homeless person is selling the Big Issue (a magazine that the homeless sell in Britain) and will be happy to talk to anyone who helps him out with a few quid for a hot meal. He has not seen Brandon, but he does remember seeing a black van drive past the front of the station at high speed. He thinks this was probably someone engaged in criminal activity of some sort. 'Someone who drives that fast in the City 'as to be on a job of some sort, don't they? Maybe it's got somefink to do with it, maybe not. Just thought I'd mention it.'

Walking to Brandon's flat from the station takes twenty minutes. There are taxicabs available if the characters feel too paranoid to walk.

## 2. *Brandon Miles' Flat*

Brandon lives in a second floor flat in a dingy apartment block. The key is taped inside the letterbox, just as Brandon said it would be. The lights are off, so the players will have to illuminate the rooms one by one as they go.

Once the light goes on the living room, something dodges away from the window, like a cockroach skittering away when the lights go on. It moves too fast for the players to see what it is, but it is approximately the size of a small child. This is, of course, the scourger summoned by Montano. The players may want to rush out and check what was standing out there but it is soon obvious that there is no fire escape, nor ledge, nor anything else that the thing could have been standing on. The scourger, taken by surprise, has scrambled away to find a safer perch.

The flat is untidy, smelly and has clearly not been cleaned in many months. Ashtrays are overflowing on to the floor and other objects, such as cups and plates, have been used as impromptu ashtrays as well. Brandon is living the life of a single man who throws himself into his work. The place is decorated with modern art posters and ethnic knick-knacks. The book collection is a mixture of technical works on forensics and investigation, science fiction and fantasy, and works on magic by the likes of Crowley and Spare.

The 'ritual room' is painted black and is empty but for a small black Japanese table. On this are a set of Thoth tarot cards, a bundle of yarrow sticks (used to cast the I Ching) and a bag of Viking runes, handmade in wood. There is also a case that contains a brass pendulum on a cord. Brandon uses this equipment to perform his divinations.

Brandon's living room doubles as his office. The most important object in the room is clearly the computer. It sits at one end of the room, surrounded by piles of printed-out sheets, half-drunk mugs of coffee and loose 3.5 floppy disks. The computer's screen saver is running, showing a starfield whooshing past.

Accessing the computer is easy. Brandon has not password-protected anything. The salient folders are 'Current Cases' and 'Journal'. There is only one document in the 'Current Cases' folder, entitled 'Hamilton'. 'Journal' similarly contains a single document.

### **Hamilton**

Case Notes – Rupert Pryce-Hamilton. Missing.

Son of Alexander Pryce-Hamilton, currently footing the bill for this job. University educated. Looks a bit of a Hooray Henry. No job as yet. Continues to draw allowance of £3,400 per month from father. Lives on Canal Walk, over the road from the Devonshire Arms, Camden Town. Known to drink in the Devonshire.

Old man hiding something. That's to be expected. Had they quarreled? What about? Probably political differences – sons of rich daddies kick back hard sometimes.

Father does not know of any girlfriend. Rupert was involved with someone at University but nothing came of it.

Missing since 3rd December. Arranged to see friends at Torture Palace in Kensington, left at around 1 PM, not seen since. Torture Palace is heavy BDSM – possibility that Rupert was involved in that scene? Does not seem likely. Will ask for his father's permission to look around the flat.

Have checked flat. Absurdly expensive place. All brushed chrome and Ikea furniture. Very sterile. Many occult books on table, mostly 'simple spells' nonsense, spines not cracked, ergo not read yet. Clearly not bought by someone who knew what he was doing. Found credit card receipt in bin – bought from New Era books. Cannot see Rupert being involved in occult, so who are these for? Or was he getting into something heavier than BDSM? On that point, found no gimp masks, harnesses or anything of that ilk in the flat, so no idea what he was doing at TP. Must check the Torture Palace, but it's not open again until this coming Saturday.

What was Rupert spending his allowance on?

## Journal

Monday: Going to write this down. Not felt this rough in a long time, not since the Liverpool case. There's something in the air. Ever since I started looking into the Pryce-Hamilton case, I've been feeling like I was straying from the path. It's that feeling you get when someone's trying to send you a message. So, somebody's jerking the strings. Who? Who have I offended this time? Bleh. Could just be plain old paranoia. That or the flu.

Tuesday: I should trust my own instincts more. Yesterday's spider-senses were leading me right. Hamilton was definitely in with a bad crowd, some of whom were more than capable of stirring up the bad vibes. Worried about where this is leading. If I'm not careful, I'll piss off some very nasty people.

Wednesday: Not only am I getting poltergeists, I've got someone human on my tail, too. I'm definitely being followed. (Could be that Hamilton senior has a guy watching me? He seems the sort.) I saw the guy briefly when I stopped and looked in a shop window. He was short. Chinese, I think. Long coat.

Thursday: And now they're stepping it up some more. They've put the chills on me. My breath was clouding today. I had all the heating on and it was making no difference. This is how it begins. There's always a temperature drop first. Well, if nothing else, it shows they're feeling threatened. I'm not about to break this off just because a bunch of tuppenny-hapenny sorcerers tries to scare me off. What are they trying to hide?

Friday: Well, we have an open declaration of war at last. I'm telling myself this means they're scared enough to break cover, but in truth it's me who's terrified. I'm on the point of phoning Hamilton and telling him that the deal's off. I don't care how much money he offers. At the same time, I don't want to let young Hamilton down. That's the trouble with cases like this one. You find yourself getting to like the person, even if you never met them. You start to feel like you're the only hope they have, that they're in the dark somewhere crying out for help and if you don't answer, nobody will.

So, no backing out of this now. I'm not confident that I can handle this on my own, though. So, the only thing to do is to call in some backup. I know just the people.

## *Clues In The Flat*

A Search check (DC 20) is needed to find any of the following clues, if the players are making a general search. However, if they specify that they are searching in a given specific location (such as in the waste paper bin) then they find the clue automatically, without needing to make a skill check.

- There is one message on Brandon's answering machine. Listening to this was what prompted him to email his friends (the PCs) for help. The voice speaks in a blank monotone, with slight electrical distortion, as if there was interference on the line:

*We know all about you. We know what you have been doing. There is more happening than you understand. You have been warned twice. Back off now and stay away, and you will be safe. If you continue to interfere, we will remove you.*

- Alexander Pryce-Hamilton gave Brandon a spare set of keys to his son's flat. (He kept a set of keys so that he could check up on his son's lifestyle at any time, without warning.) These are currently sitting on the desk, beneath a layer of papers. If the players find these, they can let themselves into Brandon's flat without attracting untoward attention.
- The drawer of the desk has a jam jar with a wad of money in it, bound up with an elastic band. There is a total of £540 here, in £20 notes. This is Brandon's advance from Pryce-Hamilton.
- Alexander Pryce-Hamilton also gave Brandon a business card, which has his address and contact number on it. The players can use this to contact him directly. Hamilton's estate is in Sussex, a train ride away.

## The Final Case: *Brandon Miles' Flat*

- There are claw marks on the outside of the bathroom window, as if something had been trying to prise it open from the outside. The scourger made these.
- The players might expect to find a photograph of Rupert somewhere, since Brandon was investigating his disappearance. Hamilton did indeed give Brandon a photo, but Brandon has been carrying it around with him and asking people if they have seen Rupert. He still has it in his coat. If the players want to find a photograph, they must either ask Hamilton for one or get one from Rupert's flat.

### *The Neighbors*

The players may want to talk to Brandon's neighbors to find out if they have seen anything. His downstairs neighbor is Mrs. Clegg, an old woman with horn-rimmed glasses and a deep distrust of cold callers. The players will need to fabricate a good reason to ask her questions, or she will simply shut the door in their face. If they persist in harassing her, she will call the police.

To get Mrs. Clegg to talk, a PC must show some proof of authority. She is the product of an older Britain, with no respect for anyone scruffy, disreputable or other than white. In her imagination, all 'darkies' are thieves and layabouts, and young people are all troublemakers. Policemen, on the other hand, are charming and trustworthy.

Mrs. Clegg did not approve of Brandon, who she believed was 'meddling with the hoccult', but she thought him better than 'them two darkies upstairs'. She has not seen Brandon for a day or two, but does remember seeing some young hooligan in a big coat going through the bins for the last two nights. This is the scourger, who took the form of a youth in order to conceal its identity. It has been searching through the refuse from Brandon's flat, looking for useful information.

Brandon's upstairs neighbors are Julius and Martin, a pair of Rastafarians. They will be wary of answering the door to strangers, because there are large amounts of cannabis on the premises. Their reaction to the players will depend greatly on the character concepts that have been chosen. Anyone who could be taken for a police officer – a private detective, for instance – will not be welcomed; if the players persist, Julius will fetch a pool cue and Martin a samurai sword, to encourage them to leave. More anti-establishment characters are more likely to be given a welcome and may even be asked inside for a smoke.

Brandon got on very well with Julius and Martin, who respected him for his interest in spiritual wisdom, even though he did not share their religion. He, in turn, was sometimes able to tap them for grapevine information from their contacts. The Rastas will be concerned to hear of Brandon's disappearance but will not wish to become involved in any search for him. They have troubles enough of their own.

If they are asked about the events of the past week, they will say that they have heard someone moving about on the roof, who they thought was 'the Babylon' (the police) until they went up to look and saw nothing. A fire escape leads from the back of the Rastas' flat to the building's flat roof, so the players can go up and have a look around if they choose to.

### *The Rooftop*

The building has a flat roof. The scourger is often found here, with its ear pressed to the air ducts. A successful Search check (DC 20) finds a tuft of coarse brown hair caught in the sharp corner of one of the ventilation outlets. This is from the scourger, which snagged itself.

### • The Scourger •

This vile little creature is in service to Nicolas Montano. It has standing instructions to keep up surveillance on Brandon's flat and on anyone who seems to be pursuing the same lines of inquiry that he was. Although Brandon is now in Montano's hands, the scourger is still being kept on the job. Montano is intelligent enough to know that Brandon had friends and that someone will come looking for him.

The scourger will hound the players for the duration of the adventure. It will keep relaying information back to Montano, which will put the players at a definite disadvantage. At the early stages of the adventure, Montano does not know how much of a threat the players represent. Later on, he will be able to arrange ambushes (see Montano's



Thugs) and magical harassment (see Psychic Attacks) because he will know exactly where the players are. If the players are smart, they will realize that their adversary had to have some way to know where they would be, in order to mastermind these attacks.

The scourger will stay in constant pursuit of the PCs. If they split up, it will tail the one who it believes to be the greatest threat. It intends to find out where at least one of the players is staying. Once it knows this, it will try to find out where the other PCs live on other nights. This information is especially useful to Montano; if the PCs sleep in separate places, they are that much easier to neutralise.

The players should continually catch glimpses of the scourger. It will be leaping from roof to roof in its natural form, or watching them in a suitable alternate form, using its Disguise Self ability.

Defeating the scourger will be extremely difficult but not impossible. It is not especially strong but it is difficult to pin down, as it is cautious, alert and agile and will stay well clear of anything it believes to be a trap. The PCs will have to come up with some way to lead it into a suitable place where it can be cornered and overcome.

If they do manage to destroy it, remember its Final Image ability. Montano will be furious at the destruction of a creature that he invested valuable time and energy to summon (not to mention the costly material components) and will go after the characters with redoubled energy. He will not be able to summon another scourger for the duration of the adventure.

### **3. *Rupert's Flat***

Rupert lives in the Camden area of London, in a plush and expensive ground floor flat overlooking the Grand Union canal. The flats are opposite a pub called the Devonshire Arms.

Accessing Rupert's flat legally will not be possible without permission from his father, who has a spare set of keys. See the entry on Alexander Pryce-Hamilton below. This does not, of course, prevent the players from investigating the flat anyway. Smart players will take the cue from Brandon's journal and approach Rupert's father first, or use the set of keys that were given to Brandon.

Expensive flats in London tend to be well protected and this one is no exception. The front door is extremely sturdy (Strength check at DC 25 to break) and is kept monitored by a security camera. The camera feeds to an office inside the building, where a single security guard is on duty at all times. If the PCs attempt to break in, they are likely to find themselves surrounded by the police. An ornate steel grille covers the windows on the back of the flat. It should be obvious that a forced entry is a very bad idea indeed, unless the PCs have an exceptionally talented lawyer.

Once the PCs are inside, they can do some exploring. The flat is very clean and smells of detergent and pinewood furniture. The wardrobes are full of smart, tasteful clothing in dark hues. The book collection consists mostly of political science textbooks, with several works of contemporary fiction by authors such as Will Self and Chuck Pahlaniuk. On the table in the living room is the pile of occult books mentioned by Brandon.

The flat holds the following secrets. A Search check (DC 20) is needed to find any of them if the player says that he is searching an area. A player can bypass the check by saying that he is specifically examining a given item or place, such as under the mattress. The trick is in knowing where to look.

- There are numerous cigarette ends scattered by the front door. The natural conclusion from this is that someone was going outside to smoke. Since Rupert could have smoked in his own flat if he had wanted to, this points to the presence of a visitor.
- The receipt for the books that Brandon found has been left on top of them. Players can use this to find out the address of the New Era bookshop, if they do not know it already.
- Stashed under the mattress is a collection of gay pornographic magazines. These are not especially extreme and are the kind that could be bought from the top shelf of any newsagent. There is no fetish or leather element to them.
- Rupert's graduation photograph is on display in the bedroom. This could be useful to the players if they do not already have any idea what Rupert looks like.

## The Final Case: *Alexander Pryce-Hamilton*

- There are several empty, crushed cans of Carlsberg Special Brew lager in the rubbish bin, along with empty wine boxes. A Knowledge (local) skill check (DC 15) reveals that it is highly unusual for a rich highborn boy to drink Special Brew. It is a very strong type of lager that is much more likely to be drunk by ‘lager louts’, football fans and homeless people – in London, anyway. Crushing the cans is also considered a ‘macho’ thing to do. The cans are, of course, Eric’s.
- Stuffed down the back of the toilet cistern are several pieces of stained aluminum foil, with burn marks on them. These are from Eric’s heroin habit. He has been ‘chasing the dragon’, unbeknownst to Rupert. Any character with a background from the streets can recognise this sign of heroin use instantly.

### **4. *Alexander Pryce-Hamilton***

The players may wish to call upon Hamilton senior, whether to question him, keep him apprised of events, or even to ask to take over the case. If they try to contact him by phone, he will insist on a face-to-face meeting. He flatly refuses to discuss his son over the telephone. His manner is carefully neutral until he has decided for himself whether the PCs are worth his time or not.

The estate is in lush Sussex countryside. A long drive leads up to the house, which resembles something out of a BBC historical drama. A youthful butler answers the door, takes the PCs’ coats and shows them through to Hamilton’s study. The study is designed to make the person on the other side of the desk feel small. The desk is huge and made from tropical hardwood. A large portrait, in oils, of Margaret Thatcher hangs on the wall behind it. The walls are lined with books.

Hamilton has gray hair in a widow’s peak and is dressed in tweeds. He greets the PCs cordially, but with reserve.

The following key points occur in the conversation:

- Hamilton insists on proof that the PCs know Brandon Miles and are on friendly terms with him. A printout of the email will suffice, but the more proof the characters can supply, the better. The issues are extremely sensitive and Hamilton is nobody’s fool. He suspects that any caller at this point will either be an undercover journalist or a blackmailer.
- A successful Sense Motive skill check (DC 10) reveals that Hamilton is definitely hiding something, as Brandon intuited. If the check is successful by more than 5, then the PC senses that Hamilton is scared that it will be revealed.
- A successful Spot check (DC 15) or a deliberate examination reveals a gold Masonic ring on Hamilton’s finger. If any of the PCs is a Freemason (or happens to know the Craft secrets) and gives Hamilton the appropriate handshake, then he becomes far more open and trusting, though he will insist on speaking to the Mason in private if the other characters are not also members of the Brotherhood. Hamilton has been drawing upon his Masonic resources to keep the matter of his son’s disappearance quiet and keep the media away.
- Hamilton will pretend to be less than happy if the characters try to take the case over. (A Sense Motive check at DC 15 reveals that he is actually quite relieved to have the PCs’ assistance, now that Brandon has also disappeared.) If he does not think very highly of their abilities, then he will only agree to stay out of the way and consider himself forewarned that the PCs are now on the job. However, if they show definite competence, explain what they intend to do and seem genuinely concerned for Brandon’s welfare, then he will offer to help. He can supply a spare set of keys to Brandon’s flat (if they do not already have one) and pay expenses, as well as providing a recent photo of Brandon.

Hamilton will forward a maximum of £500 to cover the PCs’ immediate needs, with a promise of £10,000 for Rupert’s safe return. He has plenty of money, but like most rich people, he will not spend it unless he absolutely has to. He will ask for regular updates from the players. They will be expected to show progress if they are going to earn anything.

- If he suspects the PCs of being money-grubbing con artists, then he will have them shown out. He expects blackmailers to come out of the woodwork, but will not yield to them.
- Hamilton cannot tell the characters much that they do not already know about Rupert. The boy graduated from University last year and has been living off his father’s money ever since. They have had disagreements over

## The Final Case: *The Devonshire Arms*

politics, but nothing serious. Hamilton will say that Rupert seemed to be embracing the ‘scruffy counterculture’, keeping company with hedonists and hippies, but will not go into any greater detail than this. .

- What Hamilton does know and is not willing to say is that Rupert was obsessed with someone. He knows this because Rupert said so in their last conversation: ‘I’ve found someone, Dad. I’m completely in love for the first time in my life. You’re just going to have to accept it.’ Hamilton refused to listen any more. He did not want to hear what he knew he would hear – that Rupert was in love with a man. He will not volunteer this information unless the players completely run out of leads and come back to him, demanding that he come clean.
- The GM must bear the following in mind: Hamilton is desperate to have his son back under his watchful eye. He is in complete denial about Rupert’s homosexuality and is hoping that he will not have to mention this possibility. In Hamilton’s mind, Rupert is the son and heir, the one who will take over after Hamilton’s death. He needs to be kept under strict supervision. Hamilton is deadly afraid that Rupert is mixed up in some kind of sordid scandal. That is why he hired Brandon in the first place. He is using all the influence he can muster to keep the case out of the papers and hopes fervently that his son will be brought back before the story breaks.

### 5. *The Devonshire Arms*<sup>1</sup>

This pub is just opposite the exclusive flats where Rupert lives. Unless the players are familiar with the Camden district, they are in for a surprise. The ‘Dev’ is a pub for Goths only. There is even a dress code on the door. Unless you are wearing black (or at the very least, alternative clothing) you will not be served. The barman will politely refer people who do not fit the dress code to a different pub down the road, which is more conventional.

If the players are not dressed correctly, they will find the spooky occupants of the pub staring gravely at them as they open the door. Paranoid players may think that they have walked into a nest of vampires, though in truth members of the clientele is extremely polite and friendly when approached

Asking around yields the following information:

- Rupert did indeed drink here. He was not exactly a Goth, but he did have plenty of tasteful black clothing. He was well liked and occasionally brought people back to stay the night at his flat when they were too drunk to travel.
- The only tension that ever broke out was when Rupert brought a friend with him. This person was shaven-headed and did not look comfortable in his black clothing. He and Rupert seemed to be fond of one another. He tried to buy drugs, which did not go down at all well with the pub’s manager and resulted in his being thrown out. Rupert was furious and did not bring him back. This happened about two weeks ago. This was, of course, Eric.
- Rupert had not been himself recently. He looked stressed and preoccupied. The last time he was in, he was enthusiastically discussing black magic with anyone who would talk to him about it. He was particularly emphatic on the subject of the soul and survival of death. He wanted to know where he could find a genuine coven.
- Quite a few of the regulars at the Devonshire Arms also go to the Torture Palace nightclub. They can confirm that Rupert was planning to go there, but will not admit to knowing who he was going to see. Montano is viewed with some awe, not because of his alleged magical abilities but because of the thugs he has on his payroll. If any of the players express an interest in going to the Torture Palace, the Goths at the Devonshire will advise them to get suitable clothing first. They can buy fetish gear from Camden Market just up the road. This is expensive – a character can expect to spend between £70 and £600 on a decent set of clubbing clothes for this scene.

#### *Raven Bane*

There is one Goth girl who drinks in the Dev who is viewed as something of a crank, though she is wholly unaware of this. She calls herself Raven Bane, though her real name is Sally Hayward. She claims to have psychic abilities, a claim that is unfortunately true. The longer the PCs spend in the pub, the more intently she stares at them and the more distressed she seems to be. She is clearly waiting for a chance to get a word in edgeways. As soon as an opportunity presents itself (even if this means dashing out of the pub to catch the characters as they leave) she will blurt out a warning to them.

1. The Devonshire Arms is a real pub. The pub in this adventure, like all locations and persons in the book, is a fictionalized version.

## The Final Case: *The Torture Palace*

Sally will come out with a torrent of words that make little sense, with a few phrases that can be discerned: ‘you are in terrible danger’, ‘it’s watching you with its eye,’ ‘he’s hungrier than ever now,’ ‘he is calling to me,’ and ‘purple and black, purple and black.’ This episode is intended only to distress and intimidate the adventurers, and provide foreshadowing of some of the creatures they are going to encounter in the adventure. Once she has babbled for a while, she will clap her hands to her mouth as if she has said too much and run away. For completeness’ sake, if the PCs manage to follow Sally, (three DC30 tracking rolls, half an hour apart), they will follow her to Brixton, where she walks around aimlessly for hours (Sally is one possible imperiled bystander for this adventure’s climax; so it’s important that the PCs can’t short circuit the story by following her to Eric).

### *The Rowdy Lads*

If the GM finds that the adventure needs some fighting to liven it up at this stage (which will depend more upon the players’ tastes than anything else) then the following encounter can be inserted. A group of three to five football fans in sports gear come swaggering into the bar, clearly already drunk, and demand service. When this is refused, they turn violent. If the PCs help to remove them from the premises, they will be regarded with a kindlier eye than they might have been otherwise.

### **6. *The Torture Palace***

This two floor nightclub is a converted warehouse. It is completely given over to a regular fetish party that happens every Saturday night. The dedicated fetishists of London pack the place out regularly; it is somewhere to be seen. PCs will be flatly refused admission if they are not wearing suitable clothing. There is plenty of variety allowed within the category of ‘fetish’, but one must at least make the effort.

At the door, they are charged the outrageous price of £20 for admission and frisked. If any of the PCs has secreted anything on his person, make a Search check for the bouncers, opposed by the player’s Hide check. (PCs who are wearing very little, as some of them may be if they hope to get into a fetish club, should suffer penalties to the Hide check as determined by the Games Master.) Anyone who is found to have any drugs will have them confiscated and will be denied entrance. Anyone who is carrying weapons will not only have them confiscated, they will be taken around the back and beaten up. The management want to make an example of people who bring trouble to the club. (See Montano’s Thugs.)

Once inside the Palace, the PCs are exposed to the astounding variety of London fetishism. The creativity of some human beings can be as extraordinary as their self-confidence. There are men and women with metal spikes through their flesh, oozing out of PVC and leather. Some patrons wear in straitjackets, others have donned medical outfits made of rubber, there’s a smattering of Nazi uniforms, and a few are naked, but for splatterings of what might be blood, perhaps their own.

In many cases, this exotic exterior is only skin deep. Other than their fetishes, they are just like anyone else and will be perfectly friendly, so long as they believe the characters to be fetishists like themselves. If the characters turn out to be ‘posers’ or tourists, then their reception will be much more frosty. The fetish community does not like people coming in from outside to gawk at their strange ways.

### *Not Quite The Dungeon Crawl We Expected*

The club has two levels. One is for dancing and drinking; the other is a ‘dungeon’ area, which is equipped with furniture for those who want to play. This includes a rack, several poles, a spiderweb-like contrivance suspended between girders and similar objects. PCs who feel inclined to get involved will be treated extremely harshly if they do not know what they are doing. In the fetish scene, it is considered polite to ask first. Moreover, safety is essential, so for someone to simply dive in without having a clue what he is up to is dangerous for everyone.

Nicolas Montano does not own the Torture Palace. A man called Bruno Coldwell is the owner, but he is rarely on the premises. Nicolas has intimidated him into allowing him to keep rooms on the upper floor. These form Nicolas’ own private retreat, where he can meet with his coven members and bring anyone he particularly fancies from the club.

The bouncers here are large men in black suits. They communicate with walkie-talkies and look completely humorless. They have seen it all before and are not especially impressed with the club.

## The Final Case: *The Torture Palace*

### *A Touch Of Unreality*

The scourger, if it is still alive, will have informed Montano that the characters are on their way. The magician sends a message down to the bar staff: make sure that a little something extra is slipped into these people's drinks. If the characters order anything from the bar, a mild dose of hallucinogen is added to what they drink.

Each character needs to make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 17). Success means that he still experiences the effects of the drug but to a lesser degree. The world seems blurred and distant and sounds echo in his mind but he is not seriously debilitated. He is aware that he is under the influence of some sort of chemical. This condition lasts for 1d2 hours.

Failure on the saving throw means that the character is feeling overwhelmed. He suffers a -2 chemical penalty to all saving throws and skill checks. In addition, he begins to perceive some of the people around him as genuine demons. This condition lasts for 1d3+1 hours.

The Games Master must play this carefully. Even if he figures out that he is under the influence of a drug, the player should not be able to tell whether he is seeing something that is real (which the drug has given him the temporary power to see) or something that is hallucinatory.

- One of the characters should suddenly realize that he can see through a wall. Beyond that wall, someone is tied to a frame, evidently fetish equipment set up in a private area. As the character watches, three members of the Practice (see their entry in the Horrors section) drift lazily up through the floor and begin to operate. Try as he might, the character can find no way in to the space beyond the wall – if indeed it even exists. The Practice members take no notice of him unless he tries to attract their attention, in which case they look up as one, nod, then go back to their work.

### *The Man With The Flayed Face*

There is one customer walking around who seems to have the most astounding make-up job imaginable. His face has been peeled back in quarters and pinned to his skull. Odd though it may seem, this person is not at all malevolent. He simply has very good makeup, though a character under the influence of the hallucinogen will be utterly convinced that he has been genuinely flayed. He is quite friendly and approachable, gives his name as Andy and will attempt to assist any character who is having trouble with a drug experience. This will involve taking the character to the toilets and talking him gently down from the bad trip.

Characters who make inquiries in the bar area or dungeon can find out the following:

- Almost nobody except the bar staff remembers Rupert visiting last week.
- One girl remembers Rupert talking to Nicolas, 'the bloke who has the private rooms'. He was only in the club for five minutes before the two of them went off upstairs.

### *Nicolas Montano*

When the characters encounter him, Nicolas is wearing jodhpurs, riding boots and a smart scarlet jacket, and carries a whip as if he were about to ride off on a fox hunt. He has an earnest, open expression and a warm smile. He is holding court in the dungeon area, with several languid ladies and gentlemen lolling nearby and listening to his pronouncements. Most of these are members of Montano's coven. He has two of his thugs with him, as bodyguards.

Montano listens to the PCs with interest. He has only learned of them so far through the scourger and is curious to find out exactly how much they know. He will become very grave on hearing that Rupert has gone missing and will suggest that the characters adjourn to his private rooms. The two bodyguards follow him up.

- Observant PCs (Spot skill check, DC 15) notice that Montano has a bruise on the side of his head, which he has attempted to cover up with makeup. He received this from Brandon the previous night, when he was abducted.
- One of the bodyguards has a very obvious black eye, also from Brandon.

### *The Private Suite*

Nicolas' suite can be reached via a spiral staircase in the corner of the club. The rooms consist of a lounge, a bathroom, a large bedroom and a private ritual room, which Nicolas will obviously not show to the characters. He will sit them down on the sumptuous sofas and armchairs in his lounge and explain the situation to the players:

## The Final Case: *The Torture Palace*

‘Rupert was going slowly out of his mind. He was obsessed, you see. Obsessed with his bit of rough, a skinhead by the name of Eric. Not to my taste, but who are we to judge? Anyway, he came to me and asked for my help. He’d got it into his head that I was the Great Panjandrum of Magic or some such nonsense. He was desperately afraid that Eric was going to leave him, and he wanted a love charm. I mean, can you imagine it? A bloody love charm, in the twenty-first century?’

At this point, there is a loud thump from the temple room. This is either the Scourger moving about, or its dead, deliquescing body falling off the altar on to the floor, depending on whether or not the players have killed it. Either way, Montano glances to one of his bodyguards, who goes to take care of it.

‘As I was saying... yes. Rupert was spending hundreds of pounds on Eric, but he was still convinced that the boy was going to take off. Well, I told him I wasn’t in the love charm business. Tried to talk him down gently, you know. Didn’t do very well. He became awfully distraught. Said something about going and killing himself. I’m very much afraid that that’s what he will have done.’

This story is of course complete fabrication. If a PC studies Montano’s expression and body language, have him make a Sense Motive skill check opposed by Montano’s Bluff check. Depending on which character wins, the player may or may not detect the falsehood.

Once he has said his piece, Montano apologizes that the characters have had a wasted journey, offers them a drink and shows them back down to the club.

The following important points apply to this encounter:

- If the PCs ask Montano if he ever met Brandon Miles, Montano will deny ever having met him.
- Brandon Miles is in the bathroom, lying in the bath with his arms and legs bound and a strip of tape across his mouth. He was beaten up badly last night. He is conscious and can hear the PCs talking. Halfway through the discussion, a bouncer comes in to keep him quiet. The bouncer points a pistol at his head and warns him silently that any further noise will get him killed, then returns to the lounge. Any PC that asks to use the bathroom will be sent downstairs to use the one in the club.
- If the PCs somehow manage to get access to the temple room, they see a ritual circle marked out on the floor and an altar in the center that resembles two black cubes, one on top of the other. Sitting on top of this is a dish full of black fluid. Montano uses this to scry through the scourger’s eyeball.
- If the PCs turn violent and try to get their way by force, Montano’s thugs will not pull any punches. His thugs have stun guns and mace sprays.

Should the fight go against him, Montano will do what he has to save his own skin. This will certainly include telling the players where Brandon is and telling them the truth about the Kalshinak Ritual, which Montano sold to Rupert. Montano knows where Rupert went, because the scourger was sent to follow him.

- If the players are able to free Brandon, he will tell them everything he knows: Rupert came to Montano looking for some kind of magic ritual and was given it, then went off to see this Eric person. Brandon overheard Montano talking about ‘where the boy took the ritual’ and memorized the address – a house on Coldharbour Lane in Brixton.

### *Brandon’s “Escape”*

Should the PCs fail to free Brandon, Montano releases him anyway; the magician wants to see what happens when the private detective investigates Eric’s squat, so sends him off to Brixton. If the adventurers ask Brandon how he got away, he will say that Montano had him beaten up again, and thrown into the street, but didn’t offer an explanation.

Then Brandon, who knows that there is terrible danger loose in the city, sets off for the flat on Coldharbour Lane.

### • Montano’s Thugs •

These are a group of fairly generic, bald-headed bruisers. They work for Montano and beat up whomever he wants beaten up. They do not talk very much and are good at taking orders. Montano has used certain ritual magic methods to make them more resilient than they otherwise would be. Each one has a +1 enhancement bonus to Constitution and a +2 enhancement bonus to Will saving throws.

### **7. New Era Books**

This occult bookshop is small and untidy. It can be found in Soho, among the sex shops and massage parlors. The proprietor, Sebastian Bale, is scruffy and unshaven. He seems to be running the shop in a rather haphazard way. If the players turn up too early in the morning, the shop will not be open yet.

Bale remembers selling the books to Rupert. ‘Intense kind of a bloke. Absolutely obsessed with magic that could bring dead people back to life. Bought a whole pile of stuff off me. Well, I did tell him that there was nothing much that could restore life to the dead short of the Kalshinak Ritual, but that was as rare as rocking horse shit. Probably didn’t even work, anyway. Still, he was insistent, so I told him where I sold the one and only copy I ever got hold of. Sold it to Nicolas Montano. It was only a photocopy, but he still paid a ton for it. Bit of a dodgy one, he is, Montano. Into all that sadomasochism. Not my cup of tea, really.’

### **8. The Squat**

This location is the climax of the adventure. There are several ways that the players can find their way here. They can find the address out from Brandon or from Montano, if they manage to intimidate him into providing it. If they run out of other leads, then they should find out about mysterious deaths among the homeless people in Brixton. (This is Eric, beginning to feed.) Asking the local homeless population if they have seen Rupert will provide an instant positive answer and directions to the squat where he used to come to visit Eric.

The squat on Coldharbour Lane used to be a pleasant enough council house, but it is now a squalid pit. Evidence of Eric’s heroin habit is scattered everywhere, along with old clothes, used condoms and similar trash. The whole place stinks. Cockroaches crawl over the kitchen work surfaces. The electricity does not work. There is half of a drained human body sticking out of the oven. The rest is on the table in the living room, its arms raised up like claws, dry as a dead spider. There is another corpse on the stairs. The players must either move it or step on it to get up to the next floor.

Rupert’s shriveled body is upstairs on the bedroom floor, next to the crusty bed where Eric’s dead body lay for several days before being raised. In Rupert’s dead hand is the copy of the Kalshinak Ritual that he received from Montano. The only other thing in the room is an old closet. If the players have not already rescued Brandon from Montano’s flat, then he is slumped in the closet, which Eric is using as a larder.

Eric beat Brandon unconscious and set him aside to eat later. The detective wakes up when he hears the investigators break into the building and calls for help. If Brandon is with the PCs, then Sally (or Raven Bane, to use her nom de Goth) is the one screaming. Eric himself is lying under the bed. Once several of the PCs are in the room, he will hurl the bed upwards, sending it crashing across the doorway and blocking it. He then turns on the trapped characters and attempts to slay them. He is wearing the ragged remains of an Arsenal football top, but nothing else.

If the players can destroy the blood corpse that used to be Eric, then they have saved the residents of London from a ghastly threat. This is the main objective of the adventure. Hamilton will be distraught on learning of his son’s death, but will be comforted that it seems to have been the work of a maniac rather than some ‘gay suicide pact.’

## **NPC STATISTICS (d20 modern)**

### ***Brandon Miles***

Male human Smart Hero 2 / Dedicated Hero 2; CR 4; medium humanoid; HD 2d6 plus 2d6; hp 16; Mas 10; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; Def 15, touch 15, flat-footed 13; BAB +2; Grp +2; Atk +2 melee (1d3, unarmed strike); Full Atk: +2 melee (1d3, unarmed strike) or +4 ranged (2d6, Beretta 92F); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; AL NG; AP 3; Rep +2; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +8; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 17, Wis 14, Cha 10.

**Starting Occupation:** Investigative (+1 competence bonus when using Investigate skill)

**Skills and Feats:** Computer Use +8, Craft (writing) +8, Decipher Script +8, Forgery +8, Investigate +10, Knowledge (arcane lore) +8, Knowledge (civics) +8, Knowledge (history) +8, Knowledge (streetwise) +8, Listen +6, Profession (investigator) +8, Research +8, Search +8, Sense Motive +8, Spot +6, Treat Injury +6; Attentive, Combat Expertise, Dodge, Iron Will, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

**Spells Known:** Divination (see below)

## The Final Case: *NPC Statistics*

**Possessions:** Scruffy trenchcoat, dictaphone, set of handcuffs for use in emergencies, half-finished packet of cigarettes, half pool-cue (treat as a club)

**Wealth:** +2

**Savant:** Brandon gains a +2 bonus to all Investigate skill checks.

**Empathy:** Brandon gains a +2 bonus to all Bluff, Diplomacy, Handle Animal, Intimidate, Perform, and Sense Motive checks when he is able to observe the target for at least a minute beforehand.

**Divination:** By using the I Ching, the Tarot and similar methods, Brandon may attempt a Wisdom check (DC 15) to gain information about a subject or event. This is never precise and always provides leads rather than solid answers.

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### *Nicolas Montano*

Male human Charismatic Hero 4; CR 4; medium humanoid; HD 4d6; hp 16; Mas 10; Init +1 (+1 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; Def 13, touch 13, flat-footed 11; BAB +2; Grp +3; Atk +3 melee (1d3+1, unarmed strike) or +4 ranged (2d6, Beretta 92F); Full Atk: +3 melee (1d3+1, unarmed strike) or +4 ranged (2d6, Beretta 92F); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA spells; AL LE; AP 6; Rep +4; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +3; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 16.

**Starting Occupation:** Dilettante (Gamble is a class skill)

**Skills and Feats:** Bluff +8, Diplomacy +8, Gather Information +10, Gamble +6, Intimidate +12, Knowledge (arcane lore) +7, Knowledge (business) +7, Knowledge (streetwise) +7, Read/Write Language (latin), Speak Language (latin); Confident, Iron Will, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Windfall

**Spells Known:** Summon Scourger

**Possessions:** Designer sunglasses, Versace wardrobe, Beretta 92F handgun, large silver talisman from the Key of Solomon worn under shirt (not magical, though it looks like it should be)

**Wealth bonus:** +9

**Charm:** Nicolas gains a +4 bonus to all Charisma-based skill checks to influence other men.

**Favour:** Nicolas can spend an action point to make a favour check in which he attempts to get another person to do him a service. See the d20 Modern rulebook.

**Summon Scourger:** Nicolas uses this ritual to summon the scourger. It requires 8 hours of preparation and a successful Knowledge (arcane lore) check (DC 15) to cast successfully. Once a scourger has been destroyed, the dark gods will not grant another for 1d3 days.

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### *Montano's Thugs*

*The same template can be used for all the thugs. They don't want to attract too much attention from the police, so they carry mace sprays, stun guns and brass knuckles, but try not to be seen using them.*

Male human Tough 1; CR 1; medium humanoid; HD 1d10+1; hp 11; Mas 13; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; Def 11, touch 11, flat-footed 11; BAB +0; Grp +1; Atk +1 melee (1d3+2, brass knuckles); Full Atk +1 melee (1d3+2, brass knuckles); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; AL LE; AP 0; Rep +0; SV Fort +5, Ref +0, Will +2; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 11.

**Starting Occupation:** Criminal (Gamble is a class skill)

**Skills and Feats:** Drive +2, Gamble +2, Knowledge (streetwise) +4, Intimidate +4, Spot +4; Brawl, Great Fortitude, Simple Weapons Proficiency

**Wealth:** +1

**Special:** Montano's sorcery has provided the thugs with an enhancement bonus of +1 to Constitution and +2 to Will saving throws.



