



THE
ESOTERRORISTS

PROFANE MIRACLES

BY LEONARD BALSERA

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Introduction

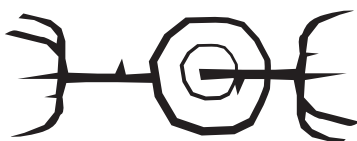
Profane Miracles is an *Esoterrorists* adventure for 3-5 investigators. It's fairly demanding in the arena of General abilities, so more physical, ops-oriented teams will have an easier time completing it than others. Given that, GMs with smaller groups may want to wait until their investigators have a few more build points from previous adventures before running this. In general, Interpersonal and Technical abilities will be more helpful in the investigative process than Academic ones, and players should focus character builds appropriately in that direction if you're running this as a one-shot. Players of strongly specialized Academic characters may want to consider creating a temporary PC for this adventure whose abilities are more spread out.

A Word on Action

This adventure might be slightly more action-oriented than is common for other *Esoterrorists* scenarios, and prospective GMs will have to be careful that they don't overwhelm the player characters. Consider fine-tuning some of the violent encounters depending on the group's point distributions - if they all have low scores in Scuffling and Shooting, reduce all the antagonists' pools by one or two points to right-size things. It is very likely that one or more investigators could be killed by this scenario, so keep that and the tone of your campaign in mind when you're looking over the encounters.

You might also need to adjust the pacing of the adventure a bit - I tried to include reaction mass at every point, but you might not have the kind of time it'll take to go through it all. You might choose to gloss past some of the optional material, such as the chase with police (see p. 12) and encounter with Marlow (see p.14), or even reducing the sanctum exploration (p. 14) to just a general picking up of core clues instead of a room-by-room exploration. Also, the end is supposed to be highly fluid and contingent on how the investigators decide to use the information they have - not all the scenes that are presented necessarily have to take place. For example, if they shoot Jonathan in the head at the sanctum and take the antidote to Eve's baby, that scene will be comparatively shorter. Your group may find the interpersonal scenes to be the really important part of the ending, and hence you might want to gloss past the Westside Studios scene (p. 18), combining the separate obstacles into something more general.

Keep the needs of your group in mind as you're preparing the adventure, and good luck.



Backstory

Investigation Trigger

Famous financier **Jonathan Bentley** was resurrected from the dead at a charity ball held in Los Angeles by his widow, **Grace Summerville**, nearly a year after his well publicized death due to heart complications. The feat was performed by Grace's recently acquired spiritual advisor, a self-appointed "psychic to the stars" named **Cassandra Madrigal**, and it has garnered significant media attention since.

The player characters are posing as investigative reporters for a major media research unit, trying to collect information for a future documentary on Ms. Madrigal and her abilities. Their real mission is to determine whether or not this miracle is genuine or a hoax, and if genuine, to determine if Madrigal is an Esoterrorist agent. If so, they are to determine what her plans are and thwart them.

Sinister Conspiracy

Jonathan has secretly hated his wife for years now. She has always been the key to his financial success, choosing the best investments at the best times, seeming to have almost a prescient knowledge of changes in major world markets and stocks. Though they appear to be a team as far as the public is concerned, Grace has always called all the shots behind closed doors. He had always carried resent in his heart, and this has created a blind need to take total control of their immense financial power for himself.

He made plans within plans for the takeover, but every time, he found himself frustrated by Grace's cleverness and ambition, and could not divine how to achieve his goals without alerting her to his motives. Finally, a man named **Thomas Dellinger**, one of the major stockholders in Bentley Financials (Jonathan's holding company), approached him with knowledge of his ambitions, seemed to understand all his frustrations and insecurities, and agreed to help him take the position of prominence he'd always wanted.

Dellinger helped Bentley fake his death by providing a drug that he called Fatalix, which he said would mimic all the necessary symptoms. Bentley took the drug, and everything went without a hitch – but then, Dellinger explained that Bentley was now beholden to him. The drug he'd taken was a potion conceived by Esoterrorist arts, a lethally addictive substance that, once taken, begins to slowly transform the consumer into a mindless, undead thing. The only way to stave off the process is to ingest more of the drug. If Bentley didn't now do as Dellinger commanded, then Dellinger would cut off his supply of the potion.

Naturally, the financier balked at this, and went into hiding long enough to realize that Dellinger was speaking the truth. He reluctantly agreed to Dellinger's terms, but spent the next year secretly researching the occult to find a way to counteract the potion's effects. He also became mildly obsessed with convincing himself he was still human, attempting to exorcise his insecurities through a few months' worth of prostitutes, chemicals, and violent situations. During this span, he unknowingly impregnated one of the prostitutes he was more regular with, a woman named **Eve Granier**.

Eventually, a year later, the time came to enact the takeover. Dellinger had since hired Cassandra, an excellent con artist, to masquerade as a spiritual advisor wanting to help the

mourning Grace Summerville through her grief. With Cassandra fully in Grace's confidence, it was a small matter to arrange the party where Jonathan Bentley would supposedly be brought back to life. Armed with a second chance at life with her husband, and taken in by Cassandra's supposed power, Grace has decided to retire from the business completely, giving it all over to her husband and concentrating on their home life. With Jonathan in place as his pawn, Dellinger has unlimited access to the resources of Bentley Financials. Jonathan has little choice but to comply with Dellinger completely, or else his supply of the drug will be cut off, and he'll be doomed to existence as a mindless, half-living thing.

But even this is not enough for Dellinger's twisted ambition. He plans to use Bentley's money to fund another miracle for the wondrous Cassandra, a séance on national television to contact the beyond for cosmic advice for the world. It will work far better than she planned, summoning a horrible creature from beyond to consume her and anyone else in its way, and millions of viewers will be able to see it...

Trail of Clues

The first thing the investigators discover is the trace of a foreign substance they don't recognize in the main banquet hall of the party. Security camera footage shows that the substance was found right where Cassandra was sitting during the ritual.

This leads them to Cassandra, who will give an interview herself and explain that the substance is part of her occult toolbox, and a necessary part of the ritual. She'll verify that she receives it from occult contacts in downtown, where all the genuine practitioners of magic in Los Angeles are.

This leads them to the shop of a local "street witch" and Esoterrorist named **Vincent Marlow**, though he is nowhere to be found. Breaking in and examining his effects produces both more samples of the substance and financial records showing a large recent order of the substance by Bentley Financials.

This leads them to the Bentley estate, where they find Grace Summerville. Presented with the evidence, she confides her worries about Jonathan potentially having a drug addiction, and explains how he's been acting strangely since his return. Determined to rebuild a life together with her husband, she implores the investigators to intervene, giving them access to the GPS tracker on the family cars.

This leads them to Dellinger's sanctuary, a small structure erected deep within the tree cover of the Hollywood Hills. This area contains several clues - damning proof of Dellinger's involvement with the Esoterrorists, a full set of notes on the potion and its effects, Bentley's journals detailing his escapades over the course of the missing year, and the completed ritual that is set to be triggered by Cassandra during the television special.

There are several possibilities for concluding scenes from here.

Antagonist Reactions

If the investigators are caught breaking into Marlow's store, the police will come looking for them, which will degenerate into a pursuit and possible violence in the streets of downtown.

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After the investigators talk to Grace, Marlow will make a desperate attempt to silence them before they reach Dellinger's sanctum, aided by a dementia larva under his control.

Dellinger will begin to take the direct approach at the end of the adventure, bringing hired guns to take out the investigators when they begin to act on the final clues.



Scenes

Scene I Briefing Scene Type Intro

The player characters are instructed to prepare for a voyage of indefinite length to Los Angeles, California. As per usual Ordo arrangements, electronic tickets are waiting for pickup at whichever airport they're departing from. They arrive at Los Angeles International Airport in short order, and all have instructions to proceed to a specific point in the central terminal area and await the arrival of Taxi #556 from ScurryCab, Inc.

The taxi arrives precisely as scheduled, a seemingly impossible feat given the enormous cue from the 96th Street Bridge all the way to the central terminal – it is a large van capable of accommodating all the player characters in the rear seats. Once everyone is appropriately seated, a voice pipes out from what appears to be a hidden loudspeaker:

“Greetings, operatives. I am Mr. Verity, though due to an unusually large case load, I am unfortunately not available to brief you in person. You will find your identity packets in the manila folders below your seat. Please review those now before continuing.”

The cab driver seems oblivious to the proceedings. The folders are under the seats as indicated. If you wish to add a touch of the eerie, make a note that each character's folder is under his or her seat, almost as though the seating arrangements had been predetermined.

The packets show the investigators to be journalists for a major television media outlet (pick your favorite, CNN, BCC, etc.), complete with press passes, credentials, and so on. Curiously enough, the package also includes one semi-auto pistol per investigator – a mix of Springfield XD's and Taurus PT 24/7's in 9mm (+1 damage), as well as a forged permit for concealed carry. Give the players a chance to talk about the names of their cover identities, as well as other salient details about who they're pretending to be and why, what “role” each person is playing on the investigative team, etc.

The voice continues speaking after a few minutes:

"The nature of this case is rather unusual, as it is not a crime you're investigating, but a miracle. Jonathan Bentley, the late CEO of Bentley Financials, was apparently raised from the dead at a gala ball held ten days ago by his widow, Grace Anne Summerville. Donations collected at the ball went to the support of Aspire Children's Charities, which they both helped create. The ritual that brought him back to life was the keynote event of the ball, and has garnered a great deal of media attention and suspicion.

"Your main goal is to determine whether or not this ritual was real or fake, and if it was real, to determine if those responsible are Esoterrorist agents attempting to levy control over Jonathan and Grace for their own ends. If you discover definitive proof that Esoterrorist activity is taking place, you are ordered to pursue whatever means are necessary to stop it. This may mean direct confrontation with an Esoterrorist and his or her forces - you should consider this mission to carry an extremely high probability of lethal danger, and prepare yourselves accordingly for any unpleasant developments. An automatic pistol has been included for each member of your team, but they are not technically street legal, so be careful. The permits are forged, and had to be acquired quickly - if you have to show them for any reason, the ruse is likely to work only once. You'll have to acquire any additional protection implements on your own.

"Your major difficulty here lies in the legal restrictions inherent to your cover. The Ordo has embedded you as journalists, not as FBI or any other kind of police forces. You have no civic authority to wield when interviewing suspects, and you should expect to face charges if you are caught bending or breaking the law in the course of your investigation. While it is standard policy for the Ordo to help in legal matters, it becomes considerably more difficult with this particular cover.

"Let me repeat, if you encounter a threat, you will have to determine how to deal with it on your own - the Ordo will provide no sweeper teams, due to the inherent security risks involved. Do not allow carelessness to leave you vulnerable. You are now being conveyed to the Millennium Biltmore hotel, where you can begin your investigation. You also have lodging there which has been paid for by the Ordo, and can claim your reservations at the front desk. Good luck."

The taxi comes to a stop at the front entrance of the hotel.

Scene 2 Ballroom

Scene Type Core

Grace Summerville's gala ball was held in the renovated Biltmore Bowl, a 16,000-square foot reception facility encased in turn of the century opulence - gold leaf ceilings, dark wood columns, and rich decorations of maroon and beige. This enormous chamber is divided into three main sections: the main convention hall, its foyer, and a balcony area above.

Points of Interest:

- **(Forensic Accounting, Trivia)** An investigator may ask what he or she would reasonably know about Jonathan Bentley or Grace Summerville. A spend will reveal that they have both been prominent figures among the financial leaders and philanthropists of the United States since the 1970s, after their first private investment

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company showed massive profits from skillful currency speculation. Since then, they've delved into nearly all major world markets, eventually forming Bentley Financials to manage the bulk of their holdings. Their success is characterized by an unusual prescience in anticipating trends – it's been routine over the past thirty years to see large investments from Bentley in weaker markets just before a large boom. They are very active in charity and generally considered to be generous givers. Bentley's death took place a year ago, and was decently publicized, being blamed on a sudden heart attack and other organ failure.

- **(Core Clue, Evidence Collection)** On the north end of the main hall, the stage is still set up as it was during the gala – two long, rectangular tables laid end to end with places set for the guests of honor, and a space for the podium. On the floor underneath the tables, nearly in the center where the two tables meet, a small dark stain mars the stage floor, where an unnatural, liquid substance has caused a chemical reaction of some sort with the wood. Some of the wood fragments can be chipped away to obtain a sample for lab analysis.
- **(Core Clue, Negotiation)** One of the night employees, a middle-aged man of uncertain descent who simply identifies himself as **Charlie**, has been lingering around the convention hall since the miracle. He has been holding onto a security camera tape from the incident, waiting for an opportunity to hand it to the press or any other interested parties, in exchange for money or other boons. The security tape has a record of the incident, and clearly shows Cassandra Madrigal applying the substance to the corpse of Jonathan Bentley, using sleight of hand to keep it out of sight of the audience, and remaining seated for the rest of the ball right at the location where the stain is found.
- **(1-pt. Spend, Flattery, Flirting if the investigator is female, Reassurance)** Charlie fully believes that Cassandra really did raise Jonathan from the dead, but he's reluctant to admit it to anyone unless they're able to overcome his natural guardedness. On a spend, he'll confess that Jonathan had a funny stink about him when they brought him in, describing it as "a faint, but sour rot kind of smell, like old meat and dirt".
- **(Chemistry)** Lab analysis of the mysterious substance shows it to have strange effects on organic tissue beginning some time after initial contact, inducing or accelerating the process of decay. The substance has a large quantity of tetrodotoxin in it, which is the same poison used by the Japanese pufferfish. No other major ingredients can be identified.
- **(Research)** A buried news story in one of the local papers talks about a child that was recently born with strange defects and is currently being studied at Children's Hospital. Specifically, the story mentions strange substances found in the baby's bloodstream at birth which may be contributing to both internal and external tissue damage, including a fair quantity of tetrodotoxin. The mother exhibits none of the same peculiarities and doctors are baffled.



Scene 3 Cassandra Scene Type Core

Lead-In: Security tape from the ballroom.

Cassandra Madrigal can be intercepted at her apartment, a surprisingly modest one-bedroom flat in Venice Beach overlooking the famous Ocean Front Walk. She makes no effort to stay hidden from the investigators, and will go so far as to schedule or suggest an interview herself if the investigators intimate that there may be some kind of television program involved.

Cassandra is a dark-haired woman of mixed Mediterranean descent, likely in her early thirties, with a runner's build and flawless complexion.

Points of Interest:

- **(Research)** Cassandra has had a fairly storied career in the entertainment industry, working as a psychic consultant and private therapist for a very exclusive clientele made up of movie stars, fashion icons, recording artists, the idle rich, and other celebrities. She's never entered real prominence herself, having made only a few forgettable appearances on radio and TV talk shows. As with most people in her profession, the media regards her with some suspicion, occasionally referring to her as a destructive influence on celebrity culture, as bad as the decadent party scene and fad religions.

- **(Core Clue; Flattery, Flirting, or Reassurance)** Cassandra's outfit from the night of the miracle, a gaudy but surprisingly modest gypsy-ish looking affair, is hanging by the door of the flat on a coat hanger. It can be searched, but someone is going to have to distract Cassandra in conversation by using one of the abovementioned skills. Without that distraction, even a Filch attempt would be highly noticeable in the small space. The empty bottle that once held the mystery substance is inside, with a clearly marked label showing its origin: the apothecary of one Vincent Marlow, with a corresponding address in the dead center of downtown LA.
- Cassandra is such an accomplished con artist that she's able to completely subsume herself in her roles, therefore, the use of **Bullshit Detector** to parse out true statements from false ones is completely useless when dealing with her. However, you should tell the player with the highest pool that she's obviously trained in avoiding the telltale ticks which normally reveal deception - her body language and responses are almost *too* perfect.
- Cassandra is all too happy to blather about the miracle she performed and her current association with Grace.
 - She originally came into contact with Grace via her own sense of intuition, shortly after reading about Jonathan's death in the newspaper. She admits that it took Grace some time to open up to her particular methods of counseling, but since then, Grace has made incredible progress in coping with loss and dealing with the stresses of continuing the business alone.
 - While she normally doesn't consider it right in the natural order to bring people back from the dead, she firmly believes that it was not yet Jonathan's time to die, and that he had more to do in this world. The fact that her ritual succeeded is testament enough to that. In addition, she claims to have become enchanted by Grace's personal strength, intelligence, and compassion, and interceded with "the spirits" for a year on her behalf before the ritual. She did not reveal her plans for the ritual to Grace beforehand, instead choosing to surprise her on the night of the ball.
 - She does not claim to practice any one system of magic, but instead believes that all truths of the spirit must be studied to achieve true understanding. This multidiscipline approach has led her to secrets she could not have mastered through one path alone.
 - Regarding the substance they found, she will say only that it is a mystical concoction, part of the necessary supplies for performing the resurrection ritual. She claims no understanding of its scientific properties, claiming only that it's not unusual for mystically created substances to display strange side effects. As an ethical matter, she will not reveal the exact origin of the substance, but advises the curious to investigate matters themselves. However, she will not give them any information, because she believes all practitioners must find their own paths of guidance. If one of the PCs presents the bottle during this conversation, she will seem nonplussed, only replying, "See what I mean? You found something. The fates have spoken."



- She's preparing for a second ritual that may be filmed on national television.

- **(Occult Studies)** Cassandra's apartment is bedecked with ornate collections of jewelry, which she claims to make herself, and the accoutrements of several mystical and religious traditions – a mélange of Asian, Gaelic, African, and Christian artifacts, but each kept to their own section of the room. Therefore, nothing in the arrangement necessarily suggests an affinity for, or an affiliation with, known forms of Esoteric.

Scene 4 Hospital

Scene Type Alternate

Lead-In: News story about the deformed baby from the ballroom scene.

Children's Hospital Los Angeles is located in East Hollywood on Sunset Boulevard, dominating the east side of the intersection between Sunset and Vermont Avenue. It is a massive, highly trafficked facility, treating tens of thousands of children a year in its emergency department alone. The parking garage is almost always filled by 9 AM, so the characters will have to arrive by taxi or other public transportation.

Points of Interest:

- **(1-pt. Spend)** Getting to see the child is a fairly elaborate obstacle, as it is under very heavy scrutiny and sequestered in a secure wing of the hospital. The characters will have to convince the staff that they have some sort of relevant business or authorization, which their media covers will absolutely not provide. Creative uses (and spends) of **Bureaucracy** or **Impersonate** can provide a convincing, if temporary, ruse. If the investigators can use **Infiltration** to make their way to one of the computers (Difficulty 3), **Research** will reveal the name of the mother, Eve Granier, and they can drop her name to be given access to the child as well.
- The child is a horrible sight to behold – a withered, desiccated husk of lumpy, graying flesh kept sedated and stable by a tangle of tubes and machines, constantly being fed fresh blood and other nutrients via IV drip. Seeing this freakish child requires a Stability check with a potential loss of 2 points on failure.
- The hospital room looks more like a forensics laboratory at this point, with equipment on hand to take and analyze tissue samples, test chemicals, and so on. While the investigators cannot do an in-depth analysis, due to close staff escort and copious security cameras, the following information is immediately obvious:
 - **(Chemistry)** The necrotic effect on the child's skin roughly matches expectations of what the substance found at the ballroom might do to living tissue.
 - **(Occult Studies)** The child's appearance is reminiscent of what a blood corpse might look like midway through transformation.
 - **(Forensic Anthropology)** According to the instruments, the nutrients and blood drip are having minimal effect on the deteriorating condition of the child, and it will likely die within a matter of days.



- **(Streetwise)** The mother, Eve Granier, is also present and most likely encountered in the hallway leading to the child's room. Under optimal circumstances, she'd be a slim, yet curvy knockout with golden-brown hair, a wicked blue gaze, and an innocent smile that screams "come hither" subtext. Right now, she's haggard and tired - dark bags dominating her eyes, hastily caked makeup, mussed greasy hair, dumpy figure - it's obvious that she's been sleeping on a hospital bench since the child's birth. She will only speak deeply with someone who possesses **Streetwise**, who she feels will not levy any kind of judgment on her.
 - She has no qualms about admitting she's a prostitute, even using the phrase "another bleached-out Sunset whore" to describe herself. Hers is a fairly common story - she came to Los Angeles as a young woman hoping to become an actress or other entertainment personality, her funds dried up, she entered prostitution out of desperation, and complacency kept her in it.
 - She's been living destitute for months since the baby started to show more, and the pregnancy was a difficult, painful one - she's been to walk-in clinics several times with severe pains, and constant weakness and dizziness have kept her from working for any extensive length of time. Various unsavory contacts have been helping her get by, but she's facing a mound of favors and debt to be paid back once she returns to the streets.
 - There is no doubt as to the father - about a month before the baby was conceived, one of her more unusual johns made an arrangement for her services to be exclusive, and she was only sleeping with him at the time. Unfortunately, she has no idea how to identify him, because he insisted on wearing a mask at all times when he was with her. She only knows that he was a slim, older white man, and that he probably had psoriasis or some kind of skin problem - he commonly had discolored splotches on his chest and arms.
- **(1-pt. Spend, Forensic Psychology)** Eve is hiding a great deal of self-loathing regarding this child. She wonders if its defects might somehow be her fault, due to the health risks inherent to her lifestyle. She isn't sure she wants it to live, either, which is a massive source of internal guilt. And even if it doesn't survive, or she gives it over to the state, she wonders if all her children are doomed to come out like this one has. If someone points this out to her, she'll come apart and start bawling. An investigator can calm her down with **Reassurance**, by convincing her that she's not at fault, or with a Difficulty 4 **Shrink** test. She will be grateful for the emotional release.

Scene 5 Occult Workshop

Scene type Core

Lead-In: Cassandra's tip to seek occult practitioners downtown.

Points of Interest:

- The Historic Core and Skid Row, located in the center of Los Angeles' sprawling downtown area, is a very unfriendly place. The Core has been dominated by illegal drug dealing and prostitution since the 1960's, and Skid Row boasts one of the largest



populations of transient people in the United States. If you want a little dose of verisimilitude, you can introduce a little local trouble for the investigators if they go into the area without taking precautions to avoid attracting attention from locals keying into their visible wealth and obvious outsider mannerisms. These muggers shouldn't necessarily take up too much time – give them a couple points in **Athletics**, **Scuffling**, and **Shooting**, enough to worry them. Considering the warning at the beginning of the briefing, this might also be a good place for the investigators to acquire firearms if they're not enamored of normal legal channels.

- The investigators will require **Streetwise**, **Interrogation**, or **Intimidation** in order to successfully garner any information about Vincent Marlow from the locals. He is regarded by the transient population as a real, honest-to-God street witch, and few speak of him in a positive light. He tends to spend most of his time closed up in his shop by day and roams the streets at night on mysterious errands. For a 1-point spend, one of the bums will give them foreknowledge of the security system, reducing the difficulties to deal with it by 1.
- Marlow's shop is locked up tight, with boarded windows and supplementary padlocks on each door and gate. In addition, he has an unusually high amount of hidden security cameras for someone living in the poorer quarters, which can only be spotted by someone with **Electronic Surveillance**. The security system as a whole is

extremely elaborate, with additional countermeasures inside. It will require a Difficulty 6 **Infiltration** test to get in without being detected; failure trips a silent alarm that will result in a call to the police. If the player fails the test, do not give any indication that something is amiss. If the investigators wish to disable the security system, they can do so on a Difficulty 6 **Infiltration** or **Mechanics** test; likewise, a failure here will silently alert the police.

- **(Core Clue, Evidence Collection)** Fortunately, the evidence is pretty much in plain sight regardless of how the investigators have fared with the security system – bottles of the substance Cassandra used in the ritual are stored in a pallet along the wall in the central room of the shop, labeled under the name “Fatalix”. A logbook on the front desk shows that a large continuous order has been placed for Fatalix by Bentley Financials, and that Jonathan has signed off on it. A two-week supply is to be regularly delivered to an address somewhere in Beachwood Canyon, a subdivision of LA’s ritzy Hollywood Hills area.
- **(Core Clue, Occult Studies)** The mix of elements from different occult traditions (especially hermetic magic, voodoo, and Mesoamerican sorcery) in the wall hangings, artifacts on the shelves, and inscriptions on furniture are classic signs of Esoterrorist affiliation.
- **(Core Clue, Research)** The address turns out to be the manse of Grace Summerville and Jonathan Bentley, which they’ve owned for 15 years.

Scene 6 Pursuit

Scene Type Alternate

Lead-In: The silent alarm in Marlow’s shop.

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If the investigators didn’t perform well against the security system, three police cruisers will arrive just as they are leaving the shop, a chorus of sirens and screeching brakes. Two uniformed officers will emerge from each car to try and apprehend the investigators if they’re on foot, or will pursue in the cruisers if the investigators try and flee that way.

The police officers all have **Health**, **Shooting**, **Scuffling**, and **Driving** at 6. They do not have any reservations about using firearms or keeping up a determined pursuit. There are several types of conflicts that could come out of this scene – the investigators might try to lose them with **Athletics**, winding through the alleys of the Core. They may escalate into a full hand-to-hand or gun battle, using **Infiltration** to gain surprise and then **Shooting** or **Scuffling**. A car chase could ensue through the streets of downtown, relying on **Driving** and perhaps **Preparedness** (for a map or other navigational aid).

One a 1-pt. spend of **Streetwise**, an investigator could garner the sympathy of the locals, making them interfere with the cops in some way to help the investigators get away.

If the investigators escape police pursuit, they will find their images plastered all over the local news, both from the shop cameras and the police car cameras. This will make it considerably more difficult to go about in public, requiring discretion and perhaps the use of **Infiltration** and **Streetwise**.

If they are subdued or captured, they can use **Bureaucracy** or **Cop Talk** to convince the police that they're on the verge of screwing up a major undercover operation by another precinct and obtain their release. This will only buy them a day or two of time however, given that their stories will be checked out and proven false – this will simply add impersonating a police officer to their list of charges, and they will still have their images posted on the news.

Scene 7 Grace

Scene type Core

Lead-In: Delivery receipt from the occult workshop.

The Bentley-Summerville mansion is a grandiose affair combining key elements from Mediterranean and French architecture, a cascade of baroque details on wide patios and pale colonnades, nestled in the Beachwood Canyon area of the Hollywood Hills. The canyon is located just below the famous Hollywood sign and just north of Hollywood proper. Despite its convenience to the city, the area abounds with nature – wooded glens, preserves, and ranch land surrounding a commercial center of small shops and boutiques, retaining much of the aesthetic from its roots in the 1920s.

Points of Interest:

- Getting to the area is easy enough, but things change when the investigators ascend the drive leading to the mansion – the Bentley's have private security surrounding the manse at all times, who are quick to intercept and interrogate anyone who seems suspicious. This could create real problems if the investigators have been tagged by the media as per Scene 6. Consider a variety of approaches for getting the investigators onto the scene – ranging from using **Bureaucracy** to obtain an appointment, **Impersonation** to help with the media schtick and get an interview, or more of Scene 5's **Infiltration** and **Mechanics** to bypass the security systems and break in.
- **(Reassurance, Negotiation)** Jonathan is nowhere to be found in the mansion, but Grace is there. Grace is a regal blonde with penetrating jade eyes who carries an air of classic elegance around her, touches of fading beauty remaining in her mid-sixties. The methods used to get her to talk are largely dependent on the methods the investigators chose to access the mansion – if they broke in, they'll have to convince her of their good intentions, and that'll take **Reassurance** or **Negotiation** on top of the mention of her husband. Grace has an iron will, and cannot be coerced with **Intimidation** or **Flattery**. Assuming those conditions are met, she will provide the following information:
 - She knows full well that something is up with her husband by now. He's been acting very strangely since his return, staying distant for reasons she doesn't understand, leaving the house for great lengths each day. She suspects drug addiction to be the primary cause of this, and has been preparing to do an investigation of her own into the details – who's supplying him, why, etc.
 - She's not really sure what to believe about his resurrection. She sincerely believes in Cassandra's gifts as a seer, but the cynic in her cannot help but feel

that there must be an easier, more terrestrial explanation. She admits that her relationship with Jonathan is characterized by no small amount of jealousy and barred communication, and she explains how she's the real key to the continued success of Bentley Financials. She wouldn't put it past him to fake his own death instead of confronting her with this jealousy – he is both eccentric and rich, after all. Part of the reason she even agreed to have him disinterred was to gather data regarding that suspicion. She's quite accustomed to all the maneuvering between them, and held on to those suspicions more as a coping tool than anything else.

- Though she expects the company to falter in Jonathan's care, she wants to retire so she can concentrate on what's important to her – rebuilding her life with her husband. In the end, the company is less important, and if it would help remove some of the bitterness from their lives, she's happy to do so. It is like conceding victory in a way, but she no longer cares. Ultimately, her time with Cassandra convinced her that the company was a spiritual burden she could do without.
- Assuming he did fake his death and leave her for a year, why put up with him? Because by now, anyone else would mainly care about her money – Jonathan's the only person on earth who really knows her as a human being, and she's not willing to give that up to look for other suitors at her age.
- She was actually notified when the group began their investigations into the miracle and has had surveillance on them, though she is unaware of the Ordo or the investigators' real affiliations. She will ask them what they think about Cassandra, the events at the hospital, etc., give them a chance to sound out their thoughts about the case – it's clear that if she had the inclination, she could probably have done the investigation herself.
- **(Core Clue)** Confronted with evidence that Jonathan did indeed make some kind of large drug order from Marlow's shop, she will request that the investigators help her in the initial stages of an intervention. She just got her husband back and is determined to fix their lives together at any cost. While she knows he'll stubbornly protest against a direct confrontation, she thinks he'll relent if presented with the evidence the investigators have, and tells them that they can drop her name in the face of any resistance. She'll give them access to the GPS tracker that she and Jonathan have installed on each of the family cars for security purposes, so that the investigators can go find him and bring him back to her.

Scene 8 Sanctum
Scene type Core

Lead-In: Receiving the GPS tracker from Grace.

At this point, the investigators have enough information to be dangerous. They haven't quite gotten all the pieces of the puzzle, but they're close enough to worry Dellinger. The



GPS tracker will lead them into a more heavily wooded area in the Hollywood Hills, away from any major or even minor roads. Eventually, if they have some kind of vehicular transportation, they're going to have to abandon it in order to make their way further into the woods. Their eventual destination is a small, two-story edifice deep under the tree cover, where Dellinger and Jonathan make their plans in relative safety.

However, a potentially lethal obstacle awaits them first. Vincent Marlow is on the prowl, charged with keeping watch over Dellinger's sanctum, and he is aided by a servant that he created through foul magic - a dementia larva that remains under his control (see the Appendix on p. 22 for a more detailed explanation of the dementia larva). Give one of the investigators a chance to see the ambush coming - a Difficulty 4 test with **Infiltration** or **Surveillance** will allow them to react normally to the initial attack, coming out of nowhere from the dense foliage. Otherwise, they're stuck at the default hit threshold for one round.

Vincent Marlow

Athletics 3, Health 7, Infiltration 4, Scuffling 4, Shooting 7

Damage Modifier: +1 (small submachinegun)
Armor: +2 vs. firearms, +1 vs. melee weapons (light body armor)

Dementia Larva

Athletics 4, Health 10, Scuffling 10, Shooting 3 (spat heads only)
Hit Threshold: 3
Alertness Modifier: +1
Weapon: +1 (Sinuous limbs), +2 (bite) or +1 (spat-out head)
Armor: +1 vs. Shooting, +1 vs. Scuffling
Abilities: Burning Envy, Constrict, Decapitate, Gelatinous Body, Regeneration

The larva and Marlow will not fight to the last - Marlow will flee as soon as he's reduced below 0 Health, and he will command the larva to cover his escape. The investigators can then continue unhindered to Dellinger's sanctum.

The sanctum itself is a two-story, white prefab building with a hastily attached garage space. No cars are visible outside. There is only a single entry on the first floor, as well as a manually-opening garage door, though obviously, **Infiltration**-minded investigators will be able to make it into a window, and someone might consider climbing the side of the building with **Athletics**.

Sanctum Key

First Floor:

- **Garage** - The garage door will open noisily with the efforts of at least two investigators, revealing a dank area that smells very faintly of rot, partitioned into two sections. Jonathan's car is here, a sleek black sedan that fits almost too perfectly into one of the spaces. The second space is obviously set aside for rituals - unhealthy amounts of old blood staining the floor and walls, etched circles and markings everywhere, candles and other detritus lazily strewn about. The smell is coming from small bits of unidentifiable animal flesh that are still sitting in the center of the casting circle.





- **(Core Clue, Occult Studies)** The casting circle is currently configured for some kind of summoning ritual, and looks like it has been set up to delay the actual triggering of the spell for some undetermined time in the near future. Among the ruined supplies used in the ritual are several fragmentary pieces of jewelry that are easily recognizable as being made by Cassandra Madrigal, matching the pieces decorating her apartment. The ritual space is clearly reflective of the Esoterrorists' hodgepodge magical craft, making it doubtful that Cassandra herself is the actual caster.
- **Kitchen** - The small kitchen is kept very sparse and barely seems to see any use - spotless grey, laminate counters in a small "L" shape that barely accommodate a small stove, convection oven, and refrigerator.
- **(Evidence Collection, Chemistry, Occult Studies)** The minimal pantry space contains a strange collection of beakers, jars, burners, and other equipment - essentially, a combination between an alchemist's workspace and a miniature chemistry lab. Several chemical samples are present, but they are all mostly dangerous poisons and neurotoxins - tetrodotoxin, jimson weed, atropine, and so on. There are also dried tissue samples from certain kinds of marine toads and tree frogs, as well as human remains. Some of these ingredients are believed to be components in Haitian zombie powder.

- The only thing present in the refrigerator is meat, ground or cut from various animals – there's chicken, beef, pork, lamb, rabbit, and even a collection of butchered, frozen human thighs in the freezer. Call for a Stability test, with a potential damage of 2.
- **Living Room** – The living room continues the theme of Spartan decoration, containing nothing but two black leather couches, a small coffee table with a laptop sitting on it, and an end table with a television and a radio. There are no wall hangings of any sort, or plants, or personal touches.
 - **(Core Clue, Data Retrieval)** The laptop clearly belongs to Thomas Dellinger, one of the leading stockholders on Bentley Financials' board of directors, and has an immense amount of company data on it – budgets, net sheets, profit reports, and stock analyses. Several e-mails and copies of letters detail covert deals, agreements made by a Thomas Dellinger to redistribute Bentley's investments across a different set of companies and projects, to be executed following a takeover of the board. There is also a private ledger detailing payroll checks sent to Cassandra Madrigal for services rendered, making it clear that she's in Dellinger's pocket. Additional notes detail the rest of the plans for the takeover of Bentley Financials – faking Jonathan's death, making certain maneuvers within the company, and using Cassandra to convince Grace to retire. An interesting note is that only one version of the plan involves installing Jonathan as a puppet CEO – it seems that Dellinger would have been just as happy having an undead servitor.
 - **(Core Clue, Data Retrieval)** The laptop also contains a series of formulae and information pertaining to the creation of Fatalix. In fact, the mystical potion is a lethally addictive substance made possible by Esoterrorist magic – the first ingestion creates a strong coma that reduces metabolic function so much that it resembles death. Afterward, the victim must continue ingesting regular quantities of the substance to avoid gradually transforming into a zombie-like creature – skin and organs begin to rot regularly, cravings for raw meat develop, and mental faculties begin to vanish. Tissues will even regenerate over time if the potion is taken. As an emergency measure, there is also another substance that will purge the effects of the potion from the body after a single dose. This "antidote" is extremely difficult to make, however, and can only successfully be produced a dose at a time.
 - **Storage Closet** – A small closet set just underneath the stairs to the second floor, lined with shelves.
 - Many sample bottles can be found here, apparently attempts at creating the antidote for Fatalix. Most of them are labeled "FAILED SAMPLE" with various dates stretching across the past six months. There is, however, one unlabeled bottle present among the others, a single successful dose. If, for whatever reason, the investigators find this room before investigating the living room, simply note the uniqueness of the unlabeled bottle among its brethren.

PROFANE MIRACLES

Second Floor:

- **Bathroom** – About what you’d expect in a building like this – white linoleum and grey laminate counters, small shower, toilet. There are no clues in here.
- **Thomas’ Bedroom** – The first of two bedrooms in the hall leading from the stairs, this space only has room for a twin bed, a nightstand, a computer cart, and a three-drawer dresser. Opaque black curtains hang from the single window above the bed.
 - A discarded robe is draped carelessly on the bed, filling the room with some of the scents from the garage. It is smeared with blood, and very obviously was used in the recent ritual.
 - **(Core Clue)** A memo from Myopic Productions is sitting on the nightstand next to a reading lamp, detailing the production and shooting schedule for Cassandra Madrigal’s television special to summon wisdom for the world from beyond – they are preparing for filming right now, and will begin shooting in a matter of three or four hours from now. Dellinger has written notes at the bottom of the memo, indicating that he plans to speak the final key words to trigger his own ritual just as Cassandra finishes her show on the national broadcast, showing “our truth” to the world.
 - **(Forensic Anthropology)** The computer cart has a pair of results from two different DNA tests on it. One of them is for Jonathan Bentley, from a profile taken to match him for organ donors if he should need one. The other is from a profile taken of Nathan Granier, the infant son of Eve Granier, from the staff at Children’s Hospital. The samples clearly show that Jonathan Bentley is the father of the child, which would explain the child’s condition – it was born needing the potion for continued survival.
- **Jonathan’s Bedroom** – The second bedroom is slightly larger than the first, allowing for a double bed and an actual desk rather than a computer cart, but otherwise looks similar.
 - The major feature in the room is Jonathan himself – unconscious, restrained to the bed with heavy straps similar to those used on psychiatric patients, clearly in advanced withdrawal from the zombie potion. His flesh is starting to sag off his face, and faint traces of decay show through in several places. He is squirming against his bonds but is not entirely conscious, muttering unintelligible statements under his breath. The room reeks of rotting skin, and a pair of flies can be faintly heard buzzing about, awaiting a meal. The effects look very similar to those on Nathan Granier, if the investigators went to the hospital. Dealing with Jonathan is the first step in leading to the conclusion of the adventure, and therefore will be covered in more detail under “Endgame”, below.
 - **(Core Clue)** Jonathan’s personal journal is on the desk. It reveals the final details of the backstory – how he faked his death as part of a plot to take over

the company, how he was deceived and placed under Dellinger's control, his efforts to learn about the potion and cure himself, his affair with Eve, the hiring of Cassandra as a con artist, and Dellinger's plans to turn his holdings into an Esoterrorist funding source. At this point, he is fully aware of the Esoterrorists, but he hasn't been able to gather any information on other people in Dellinger's cell. The journal also contains a small photo of Dellinger confiscated from company records – a nondescript man in his mid-thirties with brown, closely-cropped hair and matching eyes. The tone of the journal is apologetic, yearning for a chance to take his rash actions back and set things right.



Endgame Scenes

At this point, the investigators have enough information to pursue several options for resolving the scenario. They also have to take responsibility for the veil-out, which may end up being impossible depending on certain choices that they make. This section will cover the various loose ends waiting to be tied up, and what options are available to the investigators. Keep in mind that despite the preponderance of evidence, the Ordo will not risk a sweeper team on a case where they can't disguise their efforts as those of legitimate legal authorities. Also note that depending on how some of the endgame scenes go, the investigators might not get to tie up all the loose ends – anything that goes unresolved can always pave the way for future scenarios.

Dealing with Jonathan

The most immediate problem facing the characters is what to do with Jonathan Bentley. They have a dose of the antidote in hand now, and they might have had the foresight to take a whole dose of the potion from Vincent Marlow's shop. While either will work to rouse Jonathan from his sleep and help him to recover, there are other factors to consider. First, the investigators only have one dose of the antidote, and hence can permanently save either Jonathan or the Granier baby, but not both. Using a stolen sample of the original potion is not a viable solution, because it just ensures a permanent dependence on the potion, which cannot be replicated except by Esoterrorists – whoever receives the potion instead of the antidote is ultimately doomed.

If the investigators choose to revive Jonathan, he will awaken and overflow with gratitude, asking to be released. As it so happens, he came to the sanctum to break off his relationship with Dellinger once and for all, inspired by the realization of how much Grace really did care for him. He was not able to make it past Vincent Marlow, however, and was captured and held until Dellinger could finish the nefarious ritual. He has little other information to give the investigators that they don't already know, but he offers his assistance in bringing Dellinger to justice by whatever means are necessary, and avows to abandon his schemes against his wife permanently.

If Jonathan is told about his illegitimate child and its condition, he will be horrified beyond measure and beg for the investigators to find a way to save its life, and to accompany him to confront Eve and determine what they can do for her and the child.

If the investigators decide to use the potion on Jonathan instead of the antidote, they will be able to deceive him about it if they wish – it will take days for him to realize he has not been permanently cured. If they are honest with Jonathan about using the potion instead of the antidote, he will fly into a murderous rage and attack the nearest investigator to him, unless they also mention that it was a choice between saving him and saving the Granier child. Similarly, if they use the antidote on him and then admit that they cannot save the child because they saved him, he will fly into the same rage. Jonathan only has a **Health** of 4 and, because of his current condition, has no points in general abilities to spend – destroying or subduing him will be fairly easy.

Jonathan’s knowledge of the Esoterrorists is also an issue of concern for the investigators. He cannot be allowed to simply continue on with his life having that knowledge, as it represents a major security breach for the Ordo. In order to attempt to recruit him, the investigators have to break their cover and explain the Ordo to him, and he is going to staunchly refuse to become an investigator, because he’s too old and has too much to do to repair his life. He also refuses to keep any secrets from his wife, because she’s too clever and it would just raise her suspicions.

Ultimately, the investigators will have to decide if he knows too much and needs to be silenced, or if they are willing to accept the risks to their local cell. If allowed to live, he could serve as a helpful contact in the future for investigators with **Forensic Accounting**, as well as the seed of an adventure where he takes actions against the Esoterrorists on his own, and the investigators have to rein him in.

The investigators might consider going back to Marlow’s shop to take the rest of the shipment in hand. They will find that the shipment is no longer there.

Dealing with the Esoterrorists at Westside Studios

The next most immediate concern facing the characters is thwarting Thomas Dellinger’s plot to unleash a summoning during Cassandra’s television special. This scene is staged as a series of obstacles which the investigators have to pass. Make sure to remind them at the end of each obstacle scene that they are running out of time regardless of the outcome.

The special is being filmed at Westside Studios, an old production house from the 20s in Hollywood proper that has been remodeled and restored specifically for this event.

Obstacle I: Traffic

Los Angeles is well known for its intimidating level of automobile traffic, and the investigators are going to encounter it on the way to the filming. Many of the streets in Hollywood have come to a near standstill, promising hours of delays both on wheels and on foot. The investigators will have to decide how far they are willing to go to try and mitigate

this. Some immediate suggestions involve forcing their way through traffic on a Difficulty 5 **Driving** test, spending **Intimidation** or **Streetwise** to hijack different cars in order to accelerate their progress, attempting to get a hold of an ambulance or police car to force drivers to the side of the road, spending **Impersonation** or **Bureaucracy** to requisition a news helicopter, and other such tactics.

If they don't succeed at this obstacle, it takes them a very long time to get to the studio, and the ritual is almost complete.

Obstacle 2: External Security

Once the investigators arrive at the Westside Studios site, they are going to find that it is crawling with security guards, barricades, and reporters trying to get inside to the actual set. If the investigators are traveling with Jonathan, they will have to make a Difficulty 6 **Infiltration** test to sneak him past the crush of reporters. Once they arrive, however, security will let them in without any further ado.

If they are not traveling with Jonathan, they have a little bit of a different problem – convincing security to let them past the barricades, or avoiding the barricades altogether. Spends from **Bureaucracy**, **Cop Talk**, **Flirting**, or **Negotiation** would all be appropriate here, as would a Difficulty 5 **Infiltration** (sneak past) or **Surveillance** (find an opening) test.

Obstacle 3: Live Telecast

Cassandra's ritual is being recorded and broadcast live with minimal delays, a demand of the production company to prove that her insights are genuine and not the result of television trickery. A central control room in the studio building monitors the camera feeds from the set and sends it out to the various networks. In order to prevent the results of the ritual from being broadcast to the outside world, the investigators must either sabotage the computers in the main control room, or disable the television cameras themselves.

Finding their way around the set might require spending from various interpersonal abilities, **Research**, **Trivia**, **Photography**, or **Electronic Surveillance**. Then, there is the matter of dealing with any attendant staff. As with the outside, the inside of the building is regularly patrolled by security, so if the investigators choose to become violent, they will find themselves swarmed quickly and escorted outside at the very least.

Jonathan's presence here makes things easier, but not necessarily a cakewalk – he can at least make sure no one questions the *presence* of the investigators, but that doesn't necessarily mean he can cover for all their *actions* (like overtly shutting down the broadcast).

Obstacle 4: The Hitmen Cometh

Thomas Dellinger has made the ultimate preparations to stand in the way of the investigators' menace – a group of trained assassins ordered to eliminate them by any means necessary. There are three assassins in total, and the GM is encouraged to be very flexible in how to introduce them during this sequence. One may try to stop them in traffic, for example, while another might masquerade as a reporter. Or, if the group is doing fairly well in their physical pools, perhaps they attack in teams. The assassins are all **Athletics 6**, **Shooting** and **Scuffling** at 8, **Driving**, **Infiltration**, and **Surveillance** at 4. They will be armed only as well as their disguises allow, and investigators should get opposed **Surveillance** tests to see through any ambushes.

Keep in mind that direct confrontation with the hitmen might not be necessary to win. If the investigators can force the hitmen to make their actions obvious to studio security or the reporters outside, the attention will force them to flee for fear of having their identities revealed. The only loyalty they owe Dellinger is one of money, and life trumps money any day.

Keeping Jonathan alive through these attacks is of paramount importance. As stated before, he has no general abilities and a very low **Health** score, so the investigators should make his safety an utmost priority.

Obstacle 5: The Summoning

At this point, there are several factors that might influence what the state of the ritual is by the time the investigators actually reach the main set. If the group is running seriously low on points in their general ability pools and they performed well in at least two of the obstacles above, it's probably safe to say that they arrive in time to interfere with the ritual and keep Dellinger from interrupting things.

On the other hand, if the group has plenty of resources to spare, or played it safe with any of the previous obstacles (like simply maneuvering past them to get to the set), feel free to decide that they arrive just in time to hear Dellinger chant his final, powerful words from off-stage.

In either case, Cassandra is positioned up on a sound stage build for live audience filming, wearing an ornate, but skimpy outfit, seated in the center of a large pentagram inscribed on the stage floor. Candles and braziers of incense gaudily decorate the scene, and she is chanting in a nonsense tongue and swaying rhythmically to music that has a traditional Arabic backbeat. The studio audience is held in rapt silence at the proceedings, leaning forward to await the result of her efforts.

If the investigators have arrived in time to stop the ritual, allow them to make as large a disturbance as they can – shouting, shooting in the air, whatever. All eyes will turn to them, and Dellinger will come out from behind the sound stage screaming maniacally, thwarted just before his moment of triumph. He will immediately pull a pistol from his jacket and shoot Cassandra in the head, unless one of the investigators is able to out-draw him (Difficulty 6 **Shooting** test). Whatever the case, security will rush in and subdue him at that point, taking him away.

If the investigators have not arrived in time, Dellinger speaks his words of power immediately, and a low rumble resounds through the chamber. This being Los Angeles, a place prone to small earthquakes, such an event does not create immediate panic. But, suddenly, the support beams holding up the stage lights begin to quiver and come apart, and electrical wires suddenly fly up and stab into Cassandra's midsection, tearing her asunder before the audience in a shower of gore. Her entrails and connective tissues become enmeshed in the wiring, and they wrap around the remnants of support beams to form a vaguely humanoid mass of twisted scrap, held together by strings made of Cassandra's flesh.

This thing turns its attention to the nearest stagehand, and wires fly from it to eviscerate him too, and it adds his tissues to the framework. Dellinger is next to feed its appetite, holding



his arms open to the thing and cackling as he is ripped apart.

This event calls for a **Stability** test that costs 8 points for failure.

If the investigators choose to battle this monster directly, here are its statistics:

Health 15, Scuffling 12

Hit Threshold: 4

Damage Modifier: +2 (live electrical wires and metal limbs)

Armor: +3 vs. all damage

If the creature takes an investigator below 0 **Health**, have that investigator make a Difficulty 3 **Athletics** test if they remain conscious. If they fail, the creature has gotten wires into them and can rip them apart from the inside for an additional, free damage test. If this second test kills the investigator, the creature absorbs the investigator into its flesh layer, immediately healing it for 2 points of **Health**.

If the investigators decide to run, the creature will continue to eat its way through the studio building until it is stopped outside by heavy fire from Los Angeles Police Department SWAT units, in full view of the gathered press.

Dealing with Eve

Whether they're coming to visit for the first or the second time, the investigators will have similar troubles getting access to the child as are detailed in Scene 4. If the investigators made a considerable disruption the first time through, feel free to make their second trip more difficult, with actual police security hanging about to keep out the press, or whatever other measures you deem appropriate. Traveling with Jonathan makes things harder rather than easier - he's very high-profile, so people are going to be wondering exactly why he's so interested in seeing the child. The investigators may have to split their efforts between getting to the child and keeping Jonathan from being noticed.

Actually saving the child will require actions bordering on the criminal - they will have to get rid of the camera surveillance, get all staff witnesses away from the area, and otherwise make sure that no one can see them feeding the antidote to the child. If they are caught, they're going to get flooded by hospital personnel, security, reporters, and others trying to figure out how the investigators were able to bring about the child's recovery. You're encouraged to be extremely flexible in allowing spends and general ability tests to tackle this problem - **Preparedness** will probably come in very handy here in any case.

The confrontation between Eve and Jonathan will be very awkward - she'll have a very hard time believing that her old regular john was actually a highly regarded financier. At first, she'll react with hostility and suspicion, deciding that this must be some kind of stunt having to do with her child, but investigator intervention (especially by anyone with **Streetwise**) will eventually bring her around. Her reactions after that will be less than ideal. She'll remain cold to Jonathan, realizing that she'll never be able to become a publicly recognized part of his life, deriding offers of money as poor excuses to justify writing her and the child off, demanding to know what his wife would think if she found out, and threatening to tell her. (If you want, you can go ahead and give her this line: "So, you're going to sweep me and Nathan under the rug with your pocket change and run home to your loving wife? Fuck you. I don't need you.")

She'll also demand to know why her child came out the way it did, and under that pressure, Jonathan will crack and tell her about his condition, pointing to the investigators for verification. This could represent another security breach for the Ordo, as Eve is currently got some media attention on her, so the investigators will have to decide if they're going to back up Jonathan's story or not. If they do, and present some of their evidence to her, she will beg them to save the child. If they don't, she's not going to believe any of it, and demand that Jonathan leaves before she has security brought in. He will, and he will also abandon the investigators at that point, deriding them for their betrayal.

Eve will obviously be overjoyed to find out her child has been saved, and this will make her amenable to any suggestions the investigators have about taking support from Jonathan or settling her affairs.

Dealing with Grace

The only reason why the investigators might have to deal with Grace at all in the endgame is if they decided not to give Jonathan the antidote or killed him to protect the Ordo. Getting to her the second time will be much easier than the first, especially if Jonathan is with them. She will invite them in and extend all the hospitality of the manor to them.

If Jonathan is not with them, the investigators would be beyond foolish to tell her the entire truth of the matter. You should allow them to consider what they are going to say to her, and she will accept it at face value at first. However, given her suspicious nature, she will eventually launch her own investigation into the circumstances surrounding her husband's death. This could initiate another scenario where the investigators have to thwart her attempts to seek vengeance for her husband's death, or a simple news report in another session that she was assassinated, leaving the investigators to wonder if the Ordo took decisive action in their stead.

If Jonathan is with them, he will calmly explain everything to Grace, and descend into choking sobs as he finishes his tale. She will join him in those upon realizing that he is doomed to an unavoidable, continued descent into his undead state. They embrace each other and fall into a torrent of profuse apologies, finally reconciling the long buried tensions of their relationship. Grace admits that she'd treated Jonathan more like an opponent than a partner in their recent years with the company, and Jonathan admits his jealousy for her abilities as a financier. Finally, Jonathan tells her that he does not want to finish the transition into the terrible creature that he is becoming, and says that he needs her blessing to end his life.

She gives it, and reluctantly turns to the investigators to ask them if they'll do the deed, because she cannot bear to pull the trigger on her own husband. If they agree, she will produce a silenced pistol from their collection and ask them to go out onto the back courtyard, which provides them a stunning view of the Los Angeles Basin. Jonathan will join them after a few minutes, and will kneel before whichever investigator wishes to do the deed. Grace agrees to do the cleanup on the body, and thanks the investigators for saving her husband from his terrible fate.



The Veil-Out

The investigators will have separate opportunities to deal with the various individuals who are security threats in the scenario, and should have fairly little contact with any other high-risk events until the very end. The scenario is only considered a complete Failure to Veil if the national broadcast of Cassandra's television special was not sabotaged somehow.

Jonathan Bentley's resurrection from the dead is ultimately denounced as a hoax by the media. Grace is more than happy to do whatever she can to conceal the nature of the incident, agreeing to claim it was a publicity stunt to raise some money for charity. If Jonathan has died again, it is reported as a sudden tragedy due to natural causes, and many newspapers push the cosmic irony of returning from a faked death only to suffer it for real.

If Cassandra survives her ordeal, she comes clean about being a con artist. No charges are

pressed against her from current or past clients, however, and she promptly disappears from the public eye after the incident.

If Dellinger survived his final scene, he is arrested on charges of fraud and drug trafficking, and is found dead in his prison cell some months later, apparently having hanged himself.

If the creature made it outside, local news catches faint glimpses of it on distant cameras before police take it down, but because it was mostly covered in flesh by that time, its supernatural nature is mostly hidden from the public. The story gets reported as the senseless rampage of a studio staff member addicted to drugs, and all evidence from the medical examination and autopsy is quickly covered up by the police. Some tabloids carry the story, and while the Ordo sternly reprimands the characters for letting the situation get out of hand, it acknowledges that minimal damage was done.

Eve Granier goes public with her story about the affair with Jonathan but does not mention anything about the supernatural nature of the child. The scandal stays in the media for some weeks thereafter, and quietly vanishes to make way for other sensational entertainment news.



Appendix: The Dementia Larva

Athletics 4, Health 10, Scuffling 10, Shooting 3 (spat heads only)

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +1

Weapon: +1 (Sinuous limbs), +2 (bite) or +1 (spat-out head)

Armor: +1 vs. Shooting, +1 vs. Scuffling

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 after some form of spiritual or occult revelation, such as through drugs, meditation or obscure rituals. The human mind and spirit practically never survive; when a person is exposed to these monstrous visions or soul-rending vistas of nightmare, he 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 have been wrenched from their mortal lives and reborn as grotesque hybrids. The remnants of the people they used to be are steadily digested by the horror to which they have been exposed. They are completely devoid of humanity and they will attack their former brethren on sight.

It takes some weeks for the final vestiges of mortal life to be broken down. Once the terrible transformation has taken place, 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.

The dementia larvae attack humans with incredible ferocity. Perhaps some fragment of their former selves recalls what it has now lost and it can only react violently to what now confronts it. The extraplanar masters who govern the larvae relish this misery.

Burning Envy: 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 with no attempt at stealth. In this state, which lasts 5 rounds, its weapon bonuses increase by +1, but its Hit Threshold is reduced to 2.

A larva that wishes to remain hidden may be unable to do so if it is tempted to go into frenzy. If it is facing humans that it did not know in life, it may be able to contain its rage, but if it is facing former acquaintances it is almost impossible for it to resist frenzy. The GM should judge the larva's likely reaction, being alert for any actions or fragments of conversation that might tip the larva over the edge.

Constrict: Larvae twine their thick tentacles around their despised human victims and crush them to death. If the larva has successfully hit with a tentacle, it may make a **Scuffling** contest (opposed by the victim's **Athletics** or **Scuffling**, victim's choice) to twine a tentacle around the victim. If the larva wins the contest, it automatically hits and deals damage on its next action, continuing to do so for as long as its grip lasts.

The ensnared victim may use his action to attempt to free himself from the tentacle by beating the larva in an **Athletics** or **Scuffling** contest (victim's choice).

Decapitate: Larvae have horrendous knife-like teeth that can shear off a victim's head with one snap. If the larva scores a 6 on its damage roll, then the target *may* have been decapitated. The target must make an immediate **Health** test against a target difficulty of 9. The target may spend **Health** points to attempt this test, and under ordinary circumstances will *have* to, as the difficulty number is higher than 6. This represents the trade-off between a wound that is merely horrendous and one which is instantly fatal. A target who fails the test is decapitated outright.

Depending on how much threat the larva faces, it will then do one of two things. If there are multiple opponents facing it, it will spit the head at one of them. This is resolved as a **Shooting** attack, which the larva may make immediately (it need not wait until the next round).

Alternatively, if there is not much perceived 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 1d6 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: A dementia larva is mostly composed of tough, jelly-like matter that

exudes awful slime. It can squeeze itself into places that would apparently be too small for it, though this takes it considerable time. As a guideline, a larva can squeeze under a door in 15 minutes, through a letterbox in 30 and between floorboards in an hour.

A larva's gelatinous body and slimy coating make it impossible to restrain with handcuffs, rope or similar devices.

- **Regeneration:** The larva's body is hard to damage permanently. It recovers one **Health** level every minute, unless the damage was dealt by fire, acid, chemical or electrical sources. In addition, it does not die when reduced below zero Health unless the damage dealt to it is of one of the aforementioned types, though once reduced to -10 Health or lower, it appears very dead indeed.

It is easy to mistake a mangled heap of slimy mush for a dead larva and fail to notice the residual life therein. If it is necessary to the plot for the players to detect that a larva is still alive, then use of **Natural History** establishes that the protoplasm is still regenerating. If this information is not necessary to the plot, then a two-point **Natural History** spend uncovers it.

