



SUPPORTING CAST

Mark English and Mrs. English

for *Over the Edge*

by Michael Anguiano

Thomasville, Alabama, appears on road maps mostly by default, simply because mapmakers don't like to have large blank areas. Despite its size, Thomasville is still the largest cluster of population in a rural, underdeveloped part of the state. A stone's throw northward along lightly paved roads is the unincorporated town of Constantinople, where joking questions about changing the name to Istanbul are met with blank stares. Rural postal delivery is handled mostly by the easygoing, friendly Mark English, practically a local landmark in his aged green truck. Life has changed little in Constantinople, despite Mark's rather spectacular achievements as an occult engineer of international merit.

Aside from having a social security number and an indifferent record of service with the U.S. Postal Service, Mark doesn't really have anything else of note in any national databases. He is caucasian, fifty-eight years old, married for forty-three years. He has no college, criminal, or military record. He has a valid driver's license, but has not had any points on it for eighteen years. He has traveled abroad on several occasions but not in the past ten years. Any investigation will find that he is well known and well regarded in Constantinople, with a reputation for being reliable, clever, neighborly, and damn good with his hands.

Of course, Mark English is all of those things, but the locals won't tell outsiders that he's also known as a bit of a nut. Mark has volunteered so many repairs for so many people that it would be unthinkable to speak poorly of him. In recent years, he's fixed the furnace for the local Baptist church, overhauled vehicles for emergency services, rewired the local market's freezer, repaired generators for the hospital down in Thomasville, ran wire to supply electricity to a dozen or so of the county's poorest families, and got the local AM station back on the air after a

storm had knocked out its antenna. Aside from a few drinks of lemonade, sweet iced tea, or beer (depending on the time of day and who's offering), Mark refuses any payment but instead directs people to some worthy local cause that needs support.

Mrs. English has even less on file than her husband. Their marriage license lists the couple as being the same age. This detail constitutes the entire official record for Mrs. English. The license fails to even list her first name or maiden name. Mrs. English was born and raised in Constantinople, and her people have lived here since before the war. A few of the older folk might remember that she was born a Caskinette, but the rest of her family has long since passed on or moved away, so she's been known simply as Mrs. English for the last forty years. Of course, all of the local residents treasure Mrs. English for her friendship, her voluble cheerfulness, her seemingly indomitable good spirits, and her tireless devotion to community and church. Mark may be well regarded, but his wife is beloved.

Outsiders will hear nothing but good about Mark and Mrs. English. Mark may be considered eccentric, but the locals protect their own. Indeed, outsiders will be hard-pressed to even find where the couple lives. Directions will be consistently vague and contradictory, usually identifying landmarks only with "You'll know it when you see it" and "You can't miss it." Meantime, somebody or other will call up to the English place to let them know that someone's wandering around, looking for them.

The English place is a small, two-story pink house on a sizable piece of wooded land, where Mrs. English keeps a few livestock and grows vegetables. Mark has turned the garage into a workshop, since Mrs. English won't let him bring any of it into the house. His library occupies roughly half of the second floor, with the rest taken up by the master bedroom and a water closet. The first floor is a standard arrangement of living room, kitchen, etc. The cellar is mostly used for storage. A rusted length of barbed wire, nailed to half-rotted posts, marks the outlying edge of the property. Fourteen inches below the surface, the same route is followed by a braided cable of assorted metals, which forms a barrier ward against occult and mystical energies.

The front yard is littered with vehicles, a few of which Mark is repairing for neighbors and the rest are slowly being cannibalized for assorted parts. A small tree has grown through the rusted hulk of an ancient, formerly white Chevy Impala, which serves as an anchor for a feline spirit. It was run over the Impala and caught in the engine, a grisly death that tied its spectral essence to the machine. Mrs. English says that Kitty is really a very sweet cat; it's just upset about being run over. If Kitty's former owner were still alive, however, he'd tell you that it was always like that and death hasn't done anything to change it. Kitty

was one of Mark's early projects, found in a salvage yard over in Tuscaloosa. Mark tried to develop it into a powerful guardian spirit, but Kitty proved immune to any training, even when compelled by occult means. It adored Mrs. English, though, so she persuaded Mark to just power Kitty back down instead of destroying it entirely. Now Kitty mostly sleeps in the Impala's glove compartment, emerging occasionally to chase the ghosts of birds and squirrels. It will respond if Mrs. English calls it, but anyone else will be met with indifference or outright hostility.

Mark has mostly given up on guardian spirits, having more luck with barriers and wards which he can anchor with mechanical means. The perimeter barrier is one example. Another is the pentagrammatic array of stainless steel rods, driven into the earth in a seventy-eight foot range encompassing the house and front yard; each 20" rod is inscribed with a mix of Hebraic characters and Aztec hieroglyphs. The wiring of the house itself creates a third barrier, intended to absorb rather than deflect. This barrier is active only in the absence of electricity, draining mystical energies into a modified battery array in the cellar (next to the stack of empty mason jars). Since the house is hooked up to the local power grid, Mark figured that a cut in power would probably be accompanied by an attack of some sort. He later uses the absorbed power to run equipment for his experiments, so that he doesn't have to worry about causing power outages with an unexpected drain.

Thanks to his job with the Postal Service, Mark has managed to accumulate a surprising amount of occult paraphernalia without attracting undue attention. He has established mail drops in five other places, under assumed names, and has their contents forwarded to fictional addresses in and around Constantinople. Each of the fictional addresses is on his delivery route, so Mark simply collects that mail from the rest of his deliveries. He developed this system about 25 years ago, once he'd started work on his system of techno-occult transnotation and decided he needed to acquire significant research materials. He has since accumulated one of the more significant occult libraries on this continent.

The library contains a mix of occult materials and technical manuals. Mark's collection is notable not for its size but rather its focus on efficacy. For example, he sold his copy of the ***Necronomicon*** (Wormius edition) back in the 1970s, deciding that it was unsuitable for his purposes and generally overrated. He also has a filing cabinet with extensive notes on the various books, which he used to compile his manual on techno-occult transnotation. He keeps the manual itself in the back of one of the cabinets, behind a sheaf of letters from the Church of Latter Day Saints.

A small legion of undead spiders protects the library from minor threats like

pests, fire, intruders, or excessive humidity. The spiders also serve to absorb ambient traces of evil, so that certain volumes with a radiant effect will not affect the rest of the library. Once a spider has reached saturation, it lays eggs and is subsequently devoured by the hatchlings. This works much better than Mark's previous system, which involved simply wedging Jack Chick comics between the particular volumes. If the spiders are overtaxed, Mark has left an illegible folio from the Revelations of Glaaki behind the filing cabinet, which serves as hatching grounds and fodder to nourish additional generations of spiders.

Mark has rigged a variety of other defenses for the house and grounds, but he is constantly modifying or replacing those as he fiddles with new projects. Only the more permanent systems have been mentioned here.

Mark is in regular correspondence with various occult organizations, using pseudonyms and his forwarding services to avoid becoming an obvious target. He has, on two occasions, hosted a small convocation for the purpose of demonstrating some of his results and developing useful applications. Only a small number of attendees were present, given Mark's then-lack of reputation, but he deeply impressed all of them. Word about Mark has only nominally filtered out to the occult community, since the attendees are reluctant to share the benefits of Mark's insights.

One of his principal correspondents has been ***The Blue Line***, a Paris-based glossy fringe magazine that serves as a front for an occult research organization. ***The Blue Line*** is particularly interested in his transnotation studies but has worked to discredit him with other occult groups. Once Mark became aware of this, he began feeding them disinformation and has pursued his more serious inquiries elsewhere. ***The Blue Line*** is currently contemplating more direct action to acquire Mark's findings.

Mark is also in regular contact with assorted extraplanar entities, but he knows to distrust most of their assertions. Although encouraged by the success of his various projects, he continues to proceed with extreme caution. Most recently, he has been able to establish a stable portal for direct regular communication with some of his contacts. He has refused to establish a transit point, instead limiting the portal to communication only.

While the depth of his occult studies would drive most men to the brink of sanity and beyond, Mark English has a philosophical view of life and a mechanistic perception of the universe(s). He has no illusions about the unlikely survival of

humanity or the purposelessness of life. Mrs. English, conversely, is a deeply religious woman whose extraordinarily durable faith will see her through any crisis. She's been married to Mark for too long to unquestioningly accept scripture as concrete fact, but nevertheless believes in an Almighty God who has simply created more levels to reality than He let be said in the Bible. She continues to attend church every Sunday, to wear a crucifix next to her heart, and to live her life by the teachings of Christ. Mark, frankly, thinks she's nuts, but he loves her anyway. Mrs. English, of course, feels the same way.

Mark English, Technocultist

Improvisational Engineer/Mechanic -- 4

If it's mechanical or electrical, Mark can fix it or maybe make a new one. He'll use improvised parts as necessary, sometimes sending someone to collect a bizarre list of needed items (sardine tins, a glow-in-the-dark yo-yo, two hardboiled duck eggs, the hubcap from a Ford truck, etc.). Sign: belt with assorted multi-tools and gadgets.

Techno-Occult Transnotation -- 4 (technical, narrow)

Mark has conjoined his occult knowledge with his technical expertise, distilling years of research into a handwritten manual on techno-occult transnotation. Using materials from Radio Shack, Home Depot, assorted electronics catalogs, and eBay, Mark can modify or even replace substantial elements from occult rituals. Just off the top of his head, he can safely substitute a technical simulacrum for a typical single element of any spell, but multiple elements or combinations of elements usually require him to consult his manual and work out the appropriate calculations for a (reasonably) safe reformulation. Sign: ink-stained fingers, library of occult books and technical manuals.

Robust -- 3

Despite smoking a pack a day, drinking regularly, and a lifelong diet of starches and fried food, Mark is hale and healthy. Sign: spring in his step, energetic.

Flaw -- Country. Very, very country. This is not a problem in Constantinople or any other small town in the Deep South, but elsewhere it elicits presumptions of ignorance and credulity. Sign: looks and sounds like extra from "Hee-Haw".

Hit Points -- 21 (health and vigor)

Motivation -- to explore and understand the universe(s), to map the nature of reality

Languages -- English, Latin, Greek; some French, German, Arabic; read-only Aramaic, Kanji

Mrs. English, Wife of Mark English

Country Wife -- 4

She can cook, clean, sew, and handle various parts of a small farm like she was born to it (which she was). Sign: always wears apron, sweet and friendly manner.

.45 Colt Revolver -- 4 (narrow)

She's a crack shot with the .45 Colt Peacemaker that she keeps in one of the front pockets of her apron. Sign: always has a .45 Colt Peacemaker in one of the front pockets of her apron.

Protective Charm -- 6

This is a small engraved steel disc that Mrs. English wears around her neck. This was Mark's gift to her on their 25th wedding anniversary. It took him several years of solid work and a significant outlay of resources, but the charm has proven to be well worth the effort. This charm protects Mrs. English from virtually anything, including the loss of the charm. Sign: the charm, on a thin silver chain.

Flaws -- none. She's an incredibly sweet woman, and anyone who says otherwise is a very bad person.

Hit Points -- 14 (clean living and good health)

Motivation -- to be a good wife and a good Christian

Languages -- English

Using English(es)

Mark and Mrs. English provide a stark contrast to the stereotypical trappings of the occult. The two of them are provided as background characters for

Over The Edge,

adapted to any contemporary game with supernatural elements (modern

Call Of Cthulhu,

GURPS Horror,

etc.). Mark English may be used as a resource by the PCs or as a plot device by the GM. Mrs. English mostly serves as a foil to PCs who are overly aggressive or who might equate folksiness with stupidity.

Aside from his practical repair skills, Mark English can provide PCs with information, analysis, and advice on a wide variety of arcane objects, supernatural entities, mystical phenomena, occult organizations, etc., as well as where to look for further information. His techno-occult transnotation system also gives him a unique ability to analyze and possibly circumvent some of the practical limitations on the use of arcane objects or ritual magic.

A GM can use Mark and Mrs. English as a plot device to introduce the PCs to a particular object or organization. The PCs could be invited to one of Mark's convocations (possibly by accident), Mark might be one of the few known custodians of a particular book, or the PCs could be hired to purchase (or steal) some book or trinket from Mark. Alternately, Mark could hire the PCs to recover a manuscript which was stolen, to find a rare occult element that he can't circumvent with transnotation, or to safeguard a book in transit to (or from) a purchaser.

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