



The
BOOK
of
HUNTS



The Book of Hunts



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A decision was made to release what we had in order to get the material to fans of *The Whispering Vault* who had missed the print version of the book. While a second edition of the *Vault* main book is in the planning stages there are no plans to release the material in this PDF in any way other than you see here.

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– Philip Reed and Christopher Shy

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**THE
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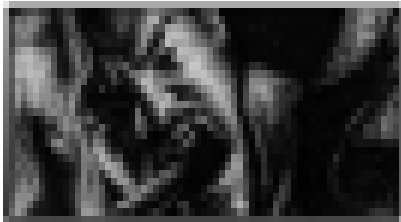
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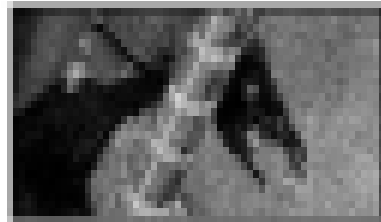
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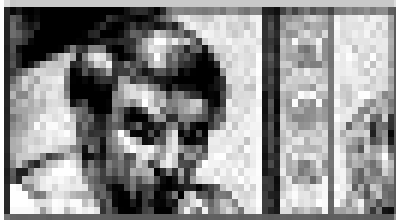
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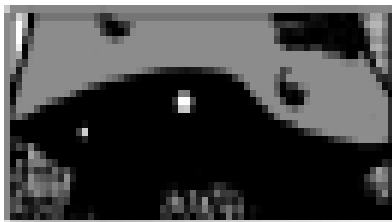
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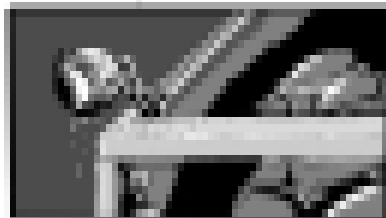
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Dedication:

To our parents. And to Jack Fountain, a good friend, a good husband, and a good father who though sorely missed will always be remembered.



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Book of Hunts, Ronin Publishing's first support product for the Whispering Vault RPG. It's been a hectic time since we at Ronin acquired Vault from Pariah Press, but we're quite happy to culminate a year of struggle with this product. Our idea was to put together an adventure anthology that showcased the strength and flexibility of the Hunt concept. Each Hunt in this book somehow stretches the bounds of the traditional Vault adventure. Some purists might not like everything we've done, but these ideas are meant as a resource. Take what you like and discard the rest. If you find even a few inspirational ideas, we've done our job.

The book kicks off with a new addition for your Vault campaign: the Crossroads. This is an example of the direction we'll be taking the Realm of Essence and is easy to incorporate into your games. It plays a key role in the first of our Hunts, Lester Smith's *Life Abundant*. It's probably best if you run a couple of Hunts with the Crossroads before starting *Life Abundant*. Let the players get used to their new sacred ground and then pull the rug out from under them and watch their bewilderment. Lester's Hunt is the most experimental of the lot, and is meant to be played in acts between other adventures. Players who've gotten used to the standard format will be in for a surprise as *Life Abundant* unfolds.

Next up is *Let's All Be Frank* by Julie Hoverson. This Hunt is an excellent example of taking a theme and weaving a whole tapestry around it. The Unbidden here is completely obsessed with FDR, and his obsession colors every episode of the Hunt. By the end of the adventure, everyone is sure to be a little more like Frank...

Bumpy Toad, our third entertainment, is as devilishly clever as its twisted creator, the aptly named Crazy Todd Miller. Players find themselves in the bizarre Land of Quay, a Shadow Realm ruled by the forlorn Unbidden Bumpy Toad. Half children's fable and half horror story, *Bumpy Toad* is an innovative adventure that casts a unique Shadow as the main villain and the unhappy

Bumpy Toad as the sympathetic has-been. Players are sure not to forget the cunning Mr. Fox, especially since he has the nasty habit of coming back to life.

Following the light-hearted romp of *Bumpy Toad* isn't an easy job, but Brian E. Kirby, author of the aptly titled *A Thousand Pounds of Flesh*, is just the man for the job. There is nothing subtle about this Hunt, showcasing as it does a Beast who really earns his name. The twist of this adventure is that the Beast has unknowingly created a Life Link to the Focus of the Enigma, which has caused havoc to come to visit the quiet town of Dry Gulch in 1870. Saddle up them horses, pardner.

The Sword of Allah, my humble contribution to this tome, is notable for two reasons. First, it takes the Vault into the future, literally. Many GM's seem to forget that the Dream is a unified whole that spans all of human history. This allows great freedom in designing futuristic adventures, since it liberates you up from the constraints of history. Second, the Enigma in this Hunt is not caused by an Unbidden, but rather an experimental piece of technology. Players locked into the "find the beastie" mentality are in for a rude surprise.

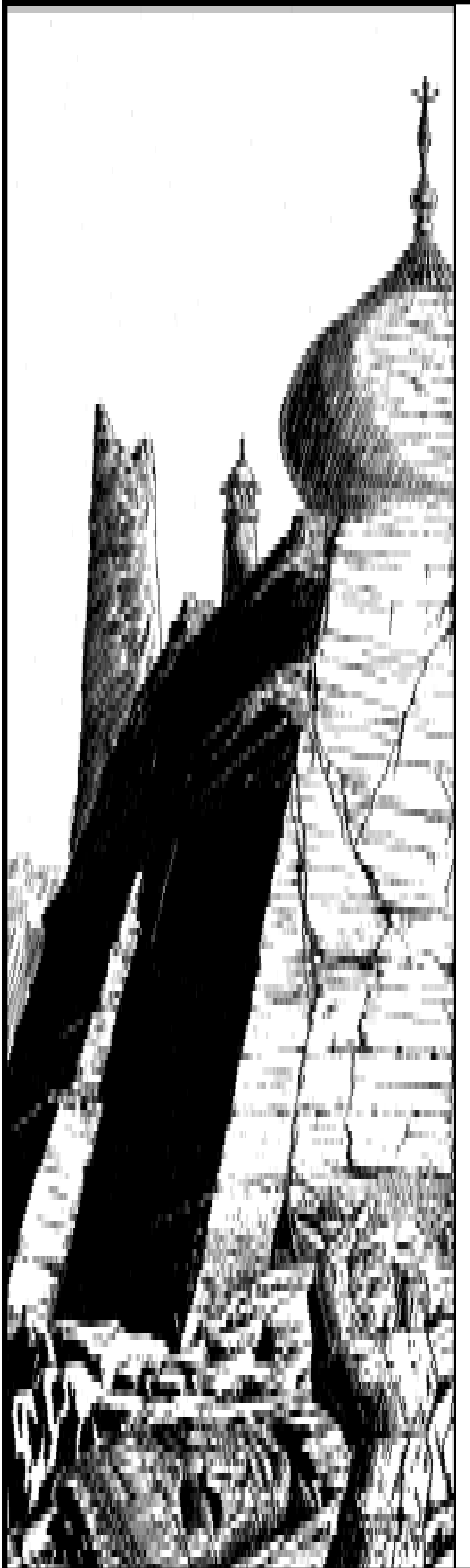
Rounding out the Book of Hunts is *Playground of the Damned*, by our own Neal Darcy. Neal brings splatterpunk sensibilities to the world of Whispering Vault, so you'd best not eat lunch before reading this one. Set entirely within a Corrupted area, *Playground of the Damned* gives "a day at the circus" a whole new meaning. Despite its graphic nature, this Hunt is not meant to be a shoot 'em up. Just stay away from the lollipops and you'll be fine.

So there you have it, six different visions of Whispering Vault under one glorious cover. We sincerely hope you enjoy the book and please, let us know how you liked it. We want every book we put out to be better than the last, so voicing your opinion does make a difference. Good luck and good gaming.

Chris Pramas
February 22, 1997



CROSSROADS



I sat alone in my Domain, surrounded by the shifting sands of my unconscious, when I heard the whisper. It was the Widow's Son, calling me forth again in my battle against the unrighteous. Leaving my well-spring of inspiration behind, I moved quickly over the trackless waste to the edge of my Domain. With a leap of faith, I plunged into the formless mist and suddenly the path became clear before me. It lead to the Crossroads of my Circle and there, amidst the twisted wreckage of a civilization that never was, I found my brethren.

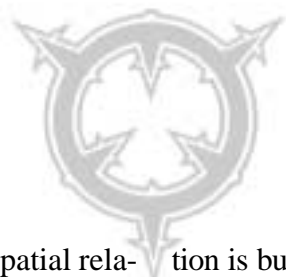
I saw the Widow's Son first, wrapped in his cloak of darkness, and, not for the first time, I wondered about my brother. Alone of the Circle, he refused to invite others to his Domain—and Stalkers, strange beings that we are, will never go to another's Domain without an invitation. This is why we meet at the Crossroads, and this is why the Widow's Son is always the first to arrive. Only the Powers know for certain what secrets lie at the heart of his Domain, but I fear that none know the darkness of his soul.

-from the Confessions of the Prophet

The Stalker's Domain is a very personal expression of their past life in the Flesh. Like their resistance in sharing the meaning of their keys, many Stalkers are just as hesitant to share the secrets of their Domains. Stalkers know well that to violate the sanctity of another's Domain could lead to a confrontation of deadly intensity. For this reason, the Stalkers' Domains are brought together during the creation of the Circle and linked at one focal point. This point is known as the Crossroads.

Crossroads are a new concept to add to your Whispering Vault game. They are somewhat similar to Domains but belong to a Circle rather than an individual Stalker. Basically, Crossroads are the place that the Domains of a Circle meet. Like Domains, they have an infinite variety of appearances but only one function. They serve as a meeting place for the Circle, and are most often used when a Stalker has received the Call. It is at the Crossroads that the Circle comes together to summon a Navigator and depart for the Realm of Flesh.

Crossroads are also important for another reason that has to do with the peculiarities of the Realm of Essence. Some regions in the Essence are dependent on other, more significant regions. These regions are considered to be *tethered* and this has two important effects. First and foremost, if a region is destroyed, any region tethered to it is also destroyed. Since the Domains of a Circle are all tethered to a Crossroads, this means that destroying the Crossroads also wipes out all the associated Domains. Needless to say, Stalkers are very protective of their Crossroads.



Tethering also affects perception of spatial relationships. When you near the boundary of a region, you can see a path to any region tethered to it and any region it is tethered to. Moving towards any of these paths will allow you to see these regions in the distance. For example, if you move to the edge of a Crossroads, you will see several paths leading off into the formless mist. As you near each path, the destination becomes clear, allowing you to find your way to any of the associate Domains that you like.

Only the Primal Powers understand how tethering works and why, but it has something to do with indivisible association. Many Stalkers believe that any region that would be meaningless were it not for its relationship to another region is automatically tethered. A rational theory, but only part of the truth.

Creating a Crossroads for your Circle is a simple matter. The players need only get together and decide what they would like their Crossroads to look like. Alternately, the GM can make the decision. In either case, the Crossroads can appear as literally anything. Bombed out ruins, lakes of fire, deserts of glass, it's up to you and your imagination. But, as the Stalkers may find out, even things in the Realm of Essence are subject to change.

Crossroads, tethering, and other aspects of the Realm of Essence, including what kind of regions Crossroads themselves are tethered to, will be covered in more detail in future products.

SOME EXAMPLE CROSSROADS

The Junction

This Crossroads looks like an abandoned railroad yard. Countless tracks lead off into nothingness and the rusted wrecks of trains dot the landscape. A few of the tracks, however, are shiny and new and these lead to the Stalkers' Domains. When a Stalker appears at the edge of the Crossroads, an old-fashioned pump car appears from the mist. Once the Stalker is aboard, the car glides down the track to the Junction proper, it's pump rising and falling of its own accord. The Junc-

tion is built around an enormous elevated track. This track is only used by the Navigator, who appears as a cross between a giant slug and an iron horse.

The Crystal Sphere

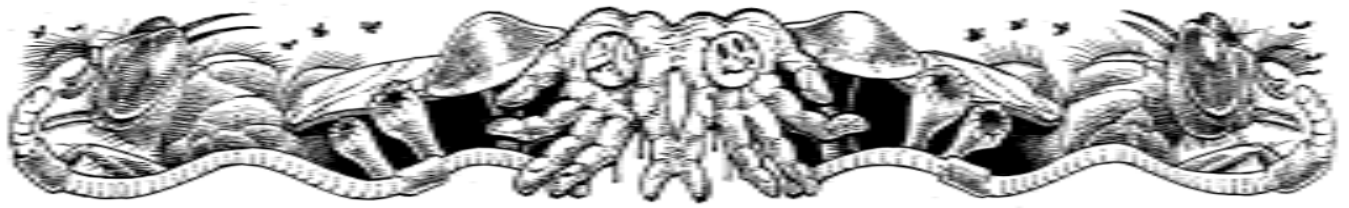
A rather unusual Crossroads, the Crystal Sphere sits suspended in the starry blackness of an endless night. Ornate bridges arc out from the Sphere, leading to the Stalkers' Domains and points beyond. The Sphere itself is perfectly clear but hard as steel. Some Stalkers say that the Crystal Sphere was not always a Crossroads, that it is a relic of forgotten powers of the Essence. Sometimes a bitter wind does blow, carrying with it howling voices. But if these are the voices of the Sphere's makers, they speak nothing but gibberish and their secrets remain unknown.

The Clockwork Maze

The roads to the Clockwork Maze always begin with a simple door. Beyond the door, however, nothing is simple. A bewildering array of spinning gears, clacking pipes, and steaming pistons stretches as far as the eye can see. Glittering walkways and speeding conveyer belts criss-cross the Maze, but like everything else these paths are always on the move. The Stalkers of the Clockwork Maze have learned to appreciate its hisses and whistles. They learned long ago that the Maze will always tell you how to get to where you want to go, but only if you know how to listen.

Fire and Ice

A union of opposites, this Crossroads consists of a central island of ice surrounded by a sea of blistering lava. Chunks of ice, both large and small, bob up and down in the bubbling magma and it is on these ice flows that the Stalkers travel to the island. When a Navigator is summoned here, it invariably bursts out of the lava and flops violently to rest on the ice, steam erupting as its superheated body hits the frozen island. Stalkers with too many ties to the Realm of Flesh often find this place uncomfortable, even though they know they have nothing to fear.



LIFE ABUNDANT

By Lester Smith

STORY OVERVIEW

This hunt is intended to be run in several separate parts, unfolding slowly between the others within this book. Life Abundant details the efforts of a very well-prepared Unbidden Architect to prevent Stalkers from ever coming to call upon itself. Being a very proactive type of being, this Architect does not wait for the Stalkers to come looking for it. Rather, it sets out to thwart the Stalkers before they even learn of its existence.

Within the Realm of Flesh, in the late 1960s, the Architect has assembled itself a cult of human followers - people who believe that they are serving a new messiah. The Architect is known as Father Abrams and the Profit of Rebirth. (See Act IV: “*The Church of Life Abundant*” page 12, for a detailed description of the creature.) As the PCs will discover by Hunt’s end, confronting Father Abrams within the heart of his commune and bringing him to justice can be a truly dangerous task.

But this supposed “prophet of life” is not content to merely wait for Stalkers to come seeking him. Prompting some of his followers to explore beyond the Realm of Flesh in a drug-induced dream state (*an extension of his Dreamwalk ability, page 17*), he sends them to the very borders of the Stalkers’ Domains, where they use his power to manipulate the Essence in an attempt to divert the Stalkers from ever reaching the Realm of Flesh again. Ironically, this manipulation is likely to make the Stalkers only more determined to discover the source of their unexpected trouble.

From the point of view of the Stalkers, the Hunt begins with a few hints that something has been prowling around their Domains while they have been off on another mission. The story then continues with the change of the Stalkers’ Crossroads into some-

thing very different from before. And it culminates with the confrontation of the supernatural cult leader during America’s “tune in, turn on, drop out” decade.

ACT I. THE INFILTRATOR

In this act, the PCs come home from other Hunts, to discover that their Domains have been spied upon by some unknown being. The purpose of the invasion is unclear, and there is really no way of them tracking the spy back to its source. The purpose of this part of the Hunt is purely to set the stage for later acts and to make the players edgy. After all, to this point in their supernatural existence, the Stalkers have thought of their Domains as sacrosanct—a secure place to rest between their deadly investigations. If those Domains are no longer safe...

The Gamemaster should set the first of these invasions between the other Hunts he/she is running. In practical terms, the scene should be set at the very end of an evening’s Hunt. That way, the Stalkers can arrive home to discover the intrusion, and the players can be left to wonder about its significance until the next time they get together to play.

Running this act is at once both the simplest part of this Hunt and the one requiring the most creativity on the Gamemaster’s part.

The simple part is the event itself: Returning to his or her Domain, a Stalker discovers evidence that someone has been prowling around, but investigation of the intrusion yields no further clues. *Fini*.

The main labor required for the Gamemaster is in adapting that event to each Stalker’s Domain and making it appropriately horrific (or at least spooky). Because the Whispering Vault deals strongly with archetypes, it is a good idea to have this event seem somehow legendary as well.

A few examples follow:

Supposing that one of the Stalker’s Domains consists primarily of a tall, dark castle surrounded by a wall of spiky thorns, the Stalker might find that wall disturbed in one



spot, with blood sprinkled about as if something tried to get through and then gave up, barely managing to escape. Looking closer, the Stalker discovers an eyeball snagged on one of the thorns; apparently the spy paid dearly for his/her glimpse of the castle.

If one of the Stalkers has a Domain populated by wild beasts of some sort, that Stalker might arrive home to find that an invader has been caught by those beasts and torn to bits.

Perhaps a Domain consists primarily of a tall, craggy mountain. The Stalker who owns it might find marks in the ground below, suggesting that someone tried to climb the steep face, fell, and limped away, dragging a broken leg.

A Stalker whose Domain is a frozen wasteland might discover a line of discarded clothing, leading toward the edge of the realm, and ending at the frozen body of a naked madman. And to add to the confusion, any Stalker attempting to use Delve on the victim experiences an acid trip courtesy of the corpse's drug-addled brain.

The Gamemaster may decide to run several such events, perhaps one for each Stalker, spreading them out one at a time between various other Hunts, or placing them all between a single pair of Hunts. It all depends upon how long the GM desires to string the players along. When the tension has been drawn out to an appropriate point, it is time to start Act II.

ACT II. THE ALTERED CROSSROADS

Having scouted the Stalkers' Domains, through the agency of his human followers, Father Abrams is able to pinpoint the location of the Crossroads linking those Domains. That accomplished, he sets about "Dreaming" changes to those Crossroads, with the intent of preventing the Stalkers from finding their way back to the Realm of Flesh. The Stalkers discover these changes when next they receive a Call. (*That Call is the praying*

of the young lady described in Act IV, pg. 12.)

The very fact that their Crossroads has changed should cause the Stalkers at least some concern. Also, their new Guardian is a very tough customer, suspicious of their claims of authority to travel between the Realms of Essence and Flesh, and extremely resistant to letting them pass without complete assurance that they are who they say they are. Even after the Stalkers manage to pass the Barrier, the Spinners fail to manifest as usual, and the Stalkers are shunted to a different time and place than where they have been Called. Worse, they arrive there without Vessels of Flesh, and are forced to use children as surrogates in a battle versus Awakened Shadows. (*See Act III: Stillbirth, page 10, for details.*)

THE NEW CROSSROADS

Receiving the Call for a new mission, the Stalkers assemble at the Crossroads of their Domains. But this time as they enter it, they discover it has changed to a wasteland of sandstone, with treacherous slopes and deep gorges where wind and water would seem to have cut through the land in ages past. There would seem to be no hint of life anywhere, neither plant nor animal. As the Stalkers advance toward the very center of the Crossroads, the terrain slowly tilts downward, eventually leading them into a deep hollow. At the bottom of that depression, there lies a stagnant pool of water, with a brown scum across its surface.

Nothing further occurs until the Stalkers summon their Navigator. The summoning having been made, nothing seems to happen for a moment or two. Then the surface of the pond trembles, and the Stalkers begin to hear a faint sucking sound, growing ever louder. Soon, they notice that the water level in the pond is dropping. Finally, a whirlpool appears in the pond's center, tearing the scum apart and draining the last of the water. At the bottom of the pond, the Stalkers can now view a gaping hole like a fleshy sphincter, roughly



the height of a tall man, opening into a cavernous tunnel.

When the Stalkers enter the tunnel, they discover that the experience is something like being consumed by the typical vermiform Navigator, but with a bit more suggestion of the interior of an intestine. The walls ripple with peristaltic motion back toward the sphincter the Stalkers have just entered. If they stand still, that motion propels them back the way they came, eventually ejecting them onto the slimy bed of the pond once again. Proceeding forward through the tunnel, however, the Stalkers discover that it grows progressively wider, until the roof is fully twenty yards above their head.

Eventually, the Stalkers reach a fleshy wall closing off the tunnel, in appearance much like a valve in a heart or stomach. A dim light radiates through the translucent flesh from the other side, and the valve trembles slightly, as if a breeze were blowing against it.

After a moment, the Stalkers can begin to recognize in the drooping folds of this enormous valve the elements of a face. The lips of the valve serve as a huge mouth, and two drooping eyelids can be discerned. As they are soon to learn, this valve is both Barrier and Guardian.

Calling upon the Guardian, the Stalkers again spend a moment with nothing seeming to happen. They notice that the valve's eyes open sleepily, and a warm, dank wind begins to buzz between the lips of the mouth. Slowly, that buzzing takes on the elements of a voice. It states quite emphatically that they cannot pass, and the eyes begin to close again.

To convince the Guardian to let them pass, the Stalkers must all

present their Keys and demand to be let through. If any of them show the slightest hesitation, the Guardian seizes upon that as evidence that they are not who they claim to be, or at least that they are not prepared to acquit themselves well in the Realm of Flesh. By this point in their careers, the Stalkers may be used to having Guardians bow and scrape before them, but the Gamemaster should play this one as unimpressed by their posturing, extremely suspicious of their claims, and colossally lethargic. Violence against this Guardian does little good either: It can bleed, but it then purses its gigantic lips and blows the Stalkers back down the tunnel, while the peristalsis of the walls increases to a





frantic pace, helping to propel them away as well. Fortunately, once the Stalkers have been ejected back onto the bed of the pond, the tunnel reverts to its normal condition, and they can re-enter it and try their encounter all over again.

Assuming that the Stalkers do eventually convince the Guardian to let them by, it stretches its mouth wide, until the corners actually begin to tear and bleed, then remains that way, quivering with tension, until all have passed. Once the last Stalker has stepped (flown, or crawled) through, the lips crash together behind them all, creating a shock wave that propels the group forward, causing them to lose their footing. The tunnel diameter increases rapidly, ceiling, walls, and floor receding to a distant grayness, while the light grows steadily brighter around the group, until a world begins to take shape around them, and they eventually find themselves standing on a path in a pine forest.

The Stalkers may not at first register the fact that no Spinners ever arrived to give them Flesh. But that fact will become obvious before too long, as detailed in the next act.

ACT III. STILLBIRTH

In this section, the Stalkers are forced to conduct a mission without any shell of flesh to clothe them. Not only have the Stalkers been diverted from their intended mission (*see Act IV, pg. 12*), because the Spinners never arrived, they have reached Earth “unclothed.” In effect, they exist only as Shadow-like creatures devoid of their Vessels. No one in the Realm of Flesh can see them—*except for one child*—nor can they directly affect creatures from the Realm of Flesh. When they discover this, the Stalkers have a choice between one of two courses of action: they can abandon this Hunt, returning to the Realm of Essence, or they can try to finish the mission through the agency of the only person who can see and hear them, an adolescent boy who can perceive

Shadows.

Because this section is only a sideline to the pri-

mary Hunt, and because the Stalkers are unable to directly affect things, the plot is intentionally sketchy and no game statistics are provided for the people and creatures involved. The Gamemaster should not dwell unnecessarily for long on this portion of the Hunt. Still, it is a great opportunity for storytelling and roleplaying with no dice rolling at all.

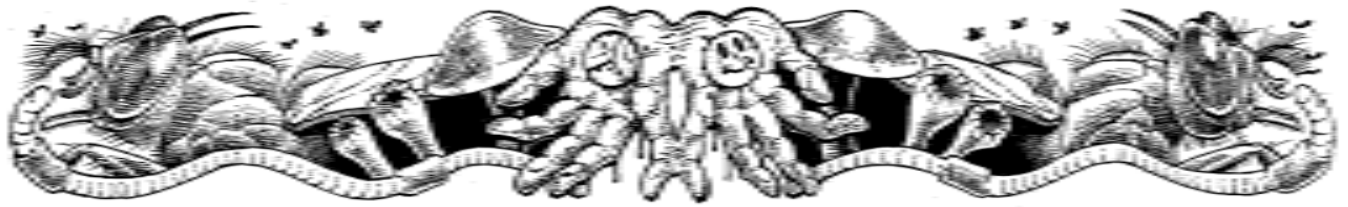
Ojibwa Lodges

The setting for this part of the adventure is Ojibwa Lodges, a summer camp in modern Wisconsin. The camp is set on the shore of Grindstone Lake, near Lake Chippewa in the northwestern part of the state. Recently, a development company has begun constructing an exclusive resort hotel on the lake, opposite Ojibwa Lodges. The spot for the hotel is undergoing extensive landscaping, and the lake itself is being polluted by the construction process. The development company has promised the locals that the disturbance is only temporary, and that after a few short years, the lake will recover its former pristine glory.

Unfortunately, a tribe of amphibious Shadows dwells within the lake, and the disturbance has Awakened them. Viewing this as their chance to firmly establish themselves in the Realm of Flesh, the beings set about conquering the “land creatures” dwelling near the lake. But their plans for conquest are sinister, involving the implantation of larvae within the creatures they capture, which then grow to control their hosts permanently. At first, the amphibians implant local animals such as deer, beavers, bears, and the occasional stray cat or dog. But soon they set their sights on human hosts as well, starting with the attendees of the summer camp.

Enter the Stalkers

When the Stalkers first arrive on the scene, they are likely to be bemused at their lack of Vessels. As they stand about trying to figure out what has gone wrong, a trio of children comes running down the path toward them, their faces stricken by terror. Two of the boys run right through the Stalkers, not even noticing their pres-



ence. The third skids to a halt before colliding with them, and stares at them in horror. It doesn't take much to figure out that he sees the Stalkers in their normal forms. Only terror keeps him from fleeing.

If the Stalkers gain his confidence, they learn that the boy's name is Jason Murray. Jason fills them in as to their current location, and lets them know that he and his friends have just seen a "fish-man" attack their camp counselor. If the Stalkers go to investigate (something Jason doesn't want to do), they find signs of a scuffle, but the counselor is nowhere to be found. Unbeknownst to the Stalkers, the amphibians have carried the fellow away for the few hours necessary for their larva to take over his body.

The Amphibian Plot

When Jason goes back to camp, the other boys have already made their report, and the rest of the camp staff is out looking for the missing counselor. Eventually, they call off the search for the night, phoning a missing person report to the police of the nearby town of Hayward, who tell them that they will check things out in the morning. When the police arrive the next morning, however, the missing counselor turns up in camp, apparently none the worse for wear, and claiming that he just got lost in the dark. As to the boys' claim that he was attacked by a "fish-man," he frowns at the trio and says that they are lying and deserved to be punished for it. As a result, the three are grounded to their cabin for the day.

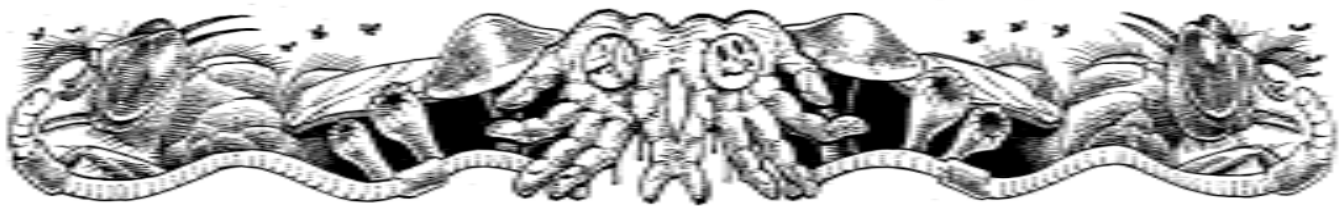
That day, the possessed counselor lures another staff member to the lake's edge, where he helps to have that person implanted as well. Over the course of the next

several days, while the camp seems to go about its daily activities normally, a progressively larger number of adults and children are lured away and possessed. Eventually, once everyone else in camp has been converted, they all converge upon Jason's cabin in the middle of the night, along with the animals that have been implanted in the region, and carry off him and his cabin mates (a dozen boys in all) to be converted. That accomplished, the creatures are ready to spread their influence beyond the camp, into the world at large, but there is nothing that the Stalkers can do about it at that point.

Flies in the Ointment

Of course, the amphibians' plot does not take into account the presence of the Stalkers (immaterial though that presence may be). There are any number of possible courses of action the Stalkers might attempt through the agency of their friend Jason. The Gamemaster should give them free reign and see what they come up with, but keep in mind that Jason is an adolescent boy and cannot meet the threat with head-on force. One possible solution is for the boy to somehow contact his parents and convince them that something sinister is going on at camp. If he tells





them too much, they are likely to drag him out of camp and straight into a mental health treatment center. But if he is instead careful with what he tells them, he can bring enough attention on the camp that the amphibians relinquish their plans for the world and sink back into the Shadows, including their larvae, at which point the implanted creatures return to their earlier state.

The Gamemaster should not make things too easy for the players, however. If necessary, the Stalkers should be allowed to fail, and even Jason should be possessed. This may frustrate the players for the moment, but it will certainly motivate them in the next section of the Hunt.

ACT IV: THE CHURCH OF LIFE ABUNDANT

This section forms the primary part of the overall Hunt. It is to this end that the Stalkers, all unknowing, have been laboring.

Immediately upon returning to their Domains after the previous act of this Hunt, the Stalkers hear the Call again. It is, in fact, the same one as they received before (the young lady described below). Once again they set out for the Crossroads to summon their Navigator. Perhaps to their dismay, the Crossroads remain the wasteland of sandstone that they discovered last time, with the same stagnant pool in its center, and the same sphincter that they entered last, leading into the same intestinal tunnel.

The Barrier/Guardian also remains the same, though he recognizes them and is less hesitant to allow them passage. If asked why the Spinners did not greet the Stalkers on the other side last time, the Guardian is at a loss to explain. On the one hand, he says that his job is merely to guard the path from Essence to Flesh. On the other, he is clearly dismayed that such a thing could go wrong. (This Guardian has a pretty “black and white” attitude toward the workings of the universe, and the Stalkers’ news greatly upsets his sense of how things

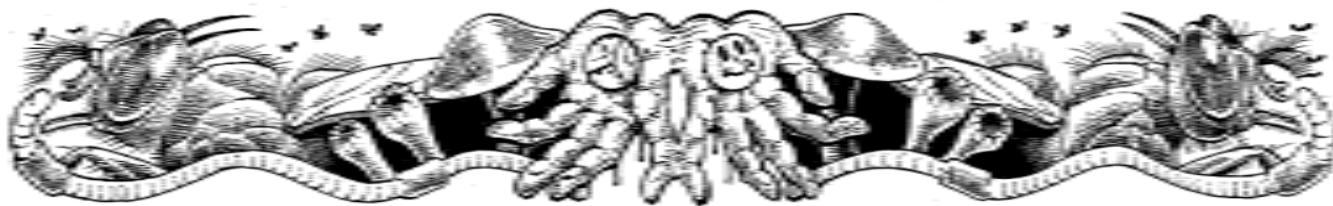
“ought to be.”)

Once past the Guardian, assuming that the Stalkers resist the pull of the Realm of Flesh, they can avoid entering that Realm “unclothed” again. But in order to receive their Vessels of Flesh, they must call out for the Spinners, demanding their attention. That done, the Spinners arrive, exceedingly apologetic for not having come earlier, but explaining that an unusual dream had seized their attention, and that it was only just now that they were awakened by the voices of the Stalkers. Quickly, the Spinners set about doing their job, abuzz with repeated apologies for the delay. Now, as the Stalkers feel the weight of Flesh settle over them, the pull to that world draws them onward.

Answering the Call

When they arrive in the Realm of Flesh at last, the Stalkers find themselves standing in a dim, dusty room empty of anything but a teenage girl kneeling in prayer in front of a single candle and an ashtray of incense, with an enormous family Bible open before her on the floor. Her eyes are firmly shut and she is dressed in a tie-dyed T-shirt and bell-bottomed, hip-hugger jeans. (If the Gamemaster is used to dressing their Vessels appropriately to the mission time and place, the Stalkers find that they are similarly dressed in late sixties-style, with all the paisley, tie dye, bell-bottoms, and love beads that suggests.) She is surprised to be surrounded suddenly by so many figures, and her first thought is that maybe she is having an acid flashback. Once the Stalkers convince her that they are not part of a flashback and that are, in fact, there to help, the girl will relax.

Questioning the girl, the Stalkers can learn that her name is Becky Anders, and the locale is Taylor’s Point, Massachusetts, a small town on Buzzard’s Bay. Becky has been holed up in this abandoned farm house a few miles outside of town, praying for divine assistance because her only living relative, a twin brother, has joined a strange religious cult—the *Church of Life Abundant*—currently settled on an island a few miles out in the bay,



and she doesn't know what to do about it. The two of them have been hitchhiking around the country ever since their parents died in an auto wreck (their VW bug was crushed under an overturned semitrailer carrying a load of black-light posters, lava lamps, and portable eight-track stereos), going from commune to commune where possible, sleeping in abandoned buildings when necessary, begging or taking odd jobs for spending money, and moving on whenever they came to the attention of the local school authorities. Without her brother, she is uncertain what to do next, and in desperation she decided to pray for help, turning to what she remembers of her early Catholic upbringing.

Becky also reveals that the town is currently overrun by all sorts of religious groups, who have come to view a recent "miracle"—a red stain spreading across the waters of the bay. Many claim that it is a sign of the end times, and it is popularly called the "Blood Tide."

If the Stalkers volunteer to help Becky regain her brother, she responds with excitement. If they do not, she demands to know why they have appeared to her, if they are just going to wander off now and leave her alone. As far as the adventure is concerned, of course, it doesn't really matter whether the Stalkers agree to help her or not, or whether they take her along with them, as long as they go to investigate the "Blood Tide." In any case, the Gamemaster can have some fun playing the role of this rebellious yet frightened young girl.

Taylor s Point, Massachusetts

Proceeding toward town, the Stalkers must walk about three miles along a blacktop road through wooded hills. The time is late afternoon, and their first view of the town comes as they crest a final hill and find its white houses scattered across the slope below them, to the very edge of the bay. The sun is just setting as they arrive, an orange ball of flame settling into the strangely crimson waters of the bay.

As they enter the town itself, the Stalkers meet all sorts of religious groups, from snake handlers to

Moonies to Hare Krishnas to Doomsday prophets. The place is a virtual circus of conflicting faiths, sometimes just loudly competing for attention, but occasionally breaking into a scuffle. (The Gamemaster is encouraged to play up this chaos, confronting the Stalkers with all sorts of aggressively evangelical individuals, interspersed with calmer sorts just looking for donations to their cause.) What few locals the Stalkers encounter are resistant to talking to strangers, and most are just holing up in their homes, waiting for the hoopla to all blow over. The one exception to this rule is the local shopkeepers, who are taking advantage of the surge in business. But even they are growing weary of the chaos. The Stalkers will receive only strained professional politeness from them, unless they somehow manage to break through that reserve. In the long run, however, there really isn't much for the Stalkers to learn in town. They must travel to the island where the Church of Life Abundant can be found.

The Blood Tide

Reaching water's edge, the Stalkers can investigate the Blood Tide more closely. Here near the shore, it gives the water a pink tint, but farther out it is as red as clotted blood. Signs posted recently along the shore warn against swimming in the contaminated water or walking on the decaying pier. Its posts are severely eroded from high-tide line downward, and coated with a brown-red stain. All wooden boats along the pier are holed and filled with water as well, though ones with fiberglass or aluminum hulls are just fine.

If the Stalkers are somehow capable of discerning the fact themselves, they can discover that the culprit is a red microorganism in the bay. (They can learn the same thing from the local paper, which contains a synopsis of the results of a recent scientific study.) A bit of experimentation (or a read of the article) reveals that the organisms feed on dead organic material—even the outer layer of an animal's skin. (Skinless fish floating in the water add credence to this, a few of them still



flopping weakly.) Scientists are baffled as to the microorganisms origins, although many of the religious groups in the area have come up with their own explanations (a plague sent by the God to punish the wicked, the blood of Jesus returned to Earth, etc.).

This stain is the Enigma the Stalkers seek. To heal it, they will have to reach its center, which pretty much necessitates their commandeering a boat. Even if they just want to cross to the island without their Vessels being consumed in the process, they will need a boat to make the travel. Of course, taking a boat that does not belong to them in such a crowded town may present some difficulties, at the Gamemaster's discretion.

Busted!

While the Stalkers have been investigating the water, they in turn have been subject to the scrutiny of a pair of ravens, a fact the group may or may not have noticed. (The creatures are in fact Zsa Ralas, or "Spritelings"—see page 77 of the *Dangerous Prey* book for details—bound into the carcasses of ravens, and serving as spies for Father Abrams.) If any of the Stalkers use any supernatural power within the ravens' view, the two birds launch themselves into the air with a squawk, one circling high overhead while the other makes a beeline for the island. It should be pretty obvious to the Stalkers that they have been identified and are being reported. If they somehow battle these ravens, one will try to escape to report while the other occupies the Stalkers' attention.

Even if the Stalkers never notice the ravens, there is another supernatural denizen of the bay that they must face. Jammed into the husk of a sperm whale is a Hydraesc, or "Strangler" (see page 69 of the *Dangerous Prey* book for details). Once the Stalkers are well out on the water, far enough from the eyes of town that its tentacles will not be noticed, the thing attacks. The ensuing battle is certain to feel epic, from the point of view of the Stalkers, with a behemoth attacking the boat,

and the deadly waters of the bay waiting to receive their Vessels. The Gamemaster is encouraged to play this battle for all it is worth, overemphasizing the size of the creature and the deadliness of the water, without actually destroying the Stalkers in the process. Give them a good show, but give them whatever breaks are necessary for their survival, as well.

The Showdown

When the Stalkers finally reach the island, whether still in the boat or washed ashore, it should be fully night. They find themselves on a beach, where they are greeted by a squad of four cultists dressed in military fatigues and carrying torches and M16 rifles. The cultists demand their immediate surrender, and the Forbiddance warns the Stalkers against simply obliterating these people. Assuming that the Stalkers surrender, the cultists take them to see Father Abrams for his judgment.

Not far from the beach, a space has been cleared in the woods that cover most of the rest of the island. Within this clearing, there stands a tent city, lit by torches and bonfires, with one wooden building at its center, Father Abrams' church. The Stalkers are led to the steps of this building, where the Architect waits for them, surrounded by his faithful flock. With all of these mortals about, the Stalkers quickly discover that they are in something of a "Mexican stand-off"—they cannot safely use their powers in front of all these human witnesses without invoking the Forbiddance. Of course, neither can Father Abrams.

Couching his words in religious language, the Architect appeals to the Stalkers to abandon their mission and to join him in leading all of humanity into a future of peace under his leadership. He works hard to sound as sane and reasonable as possible, trying to convince the Stalkers to join him voluntarily. He speaks of the Dreaming as something that should be molded for the



benefit of humans, not for the entertainment of distant powers that do not truly care about these individuals. As he presents things, the only reasonable line of action for an Aesthetic is to invest itself into the Dream, protecting it from within. The Architect presents himself as a selfless being who only wants to love and safeguard the human race.

It may be that the Stalkers sympathize with Father Abrams, and do not want to haul him away to the Vault. Of course, that brings their whole purpose for existence into question. On the other hand, they may be just itching to lay the law down on him, but uncertain as to how to do so with all of these witness about.

The Gamemaster should be careful to give the players plenty of time to consider their options, but not so much that they grow overly frustrated. Eventually, if they cannot come up with any other solution, Father Abrams denounces them as weaklings and “minions of Satan,” unfit to join him in his mission. In the growing tension, one of the armed cult members then fires upon the Stalkers, and the unarmed cultists begin fleeing for cover. In the chaos that ensues, the Stalkers can use their supernatural powers more freely, and as even more of the Architect’s followers flee, they can finally confront the creature itself. The ensuing battle should be a hellish mix of modern firearms fire and supernatural powers, all glimpsed dimly in the flickering light of torches.

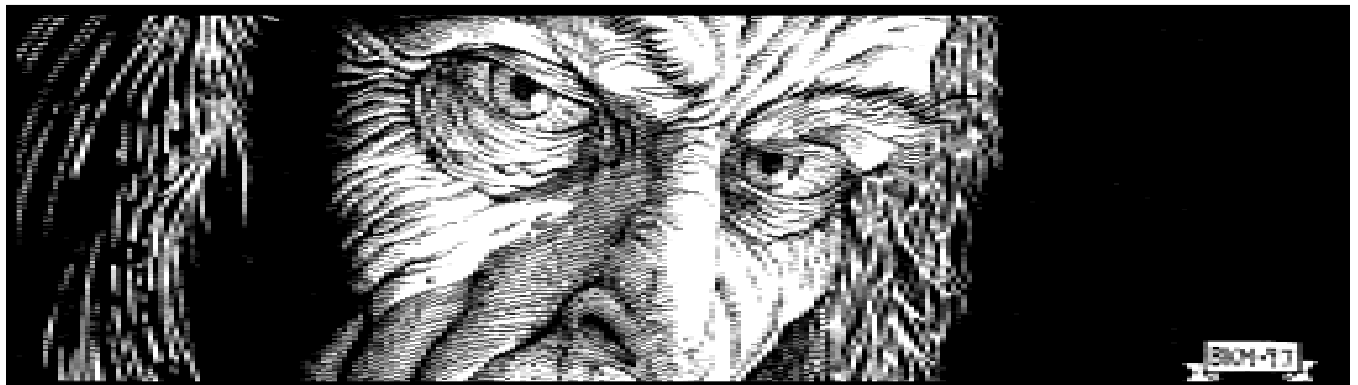
From this point forward, only the Stalkers can determine exactly how the adventure will end. After Father Abrams has been dealt with, the Enigma can be taken care of.

Mending the Enigma

The Enigma in this case is an otherworldly micro-organism that infests Buzzard’s Bay, staining the water red, spreading wider as the Corruption grows, and quickly dissolving any nonliving organic material, from wooden boat hulls to an animal’s outer layer of skin. Locals have taken to calling the stain the “Blood Tide,” and many people believe it to be a sign of the end times. The Architect preaches that to his disciples, as well.

The Focus of the Enigma lies in the waters of the bay itself, roughly halfway between the town’s waterfront and the cult’s island (which means that the Stalkers will sail right through it if they make a beeline from town to island). It is recognizable as a bloody red scum upon the water, in an area roughly ten yards across, where the water bubbles vigorously, as if boiling. This is where the adult microorganism gathers to spawn more progeny. Mending the Enigma requires a Challenge roll of 12 or better.

It should be noted that while the Corruption has spread throughout much of the bay, the cultists’ island has not been surrounded and thus remains free of the effects of the Corruption. This means the Stalkers will not be able to cut loose with their powers in front of the mortals, due to the Forbiddance.





FATHER ABRAMS , THE PROPHET OF LIFE

		As an Aesthetic, the being currently
Fortitude	4 / 6	known as Father Abrams originated the
Vitality	15 / 18	concept of things that spring to life from
Initiative	12 / 12	the decaying carcasses of the dead. As an
Defend	13 / 15	Architect, then, he is especially intrigued
Perceive	20 / 18	with infection and the means of decay:
Resolve	20 / 18	maggots spawning from a corpse, fun-

guses spreading across wet flesh, pus-filled boils, inflamed appendices, and so on, especially diseases of the brain. This morbid fascination also includes interest in the grave, and the faith of humans that their spirits can continue beyond it.

As a religious leader, Father Abrams preaches that a perfect world can be reborn from the decaying corpse of the old, if his disciples are willing to adapt themselves to that new world. Of course, none of them realize just how much adaptation he really expects of them. If their leader had his way, the new world would be rife with parasites, its every surface carpeted with molds and funguses, and swarming with worms and beetles.

In the flesh, Father Abrams appears to be a trim man of medium height in his early seventies, with oily gray hair and a florid face. His eyes glisten feverishly, and he is nearly always perspiring slightly. The Architect's personal hygiene habits leave something to be desired. Father Abrams smells constantly of old sweat with an undertone of mildew, and his teeth have an unwholesome brownish tint near the gum line.

If shed of its Vessel, the Architect appears as a humanoid mass of putrid matter, swarming with worms, beetles, maggots, and flies, and striped with molds and slimes. The whole assemblage glows with an eerie green light that accelerates a hundred fold the life cycle of disease organisms and creatures of decay within its presence—germs, funguses, insects, worms, and the like. Humans and other higher animals coming in contact with the Avatar suffer an immediate, agonizing death as their systems are overrun by disease, their flesh erupts with pustules, and fungi swarm over their skin, consuming them even as they die. Stalkers are more resistant to this effect, but they are still vulnerable due to their fleshy origin.

Father Abrams is extremely self-aware, and supremely confident of himself. He knows exactly what he is - a fallen Aesthetic. He also believes that he understands humanity very well, and that the power of the Dream lies waiting untapped for those who would seize it. If given half a chance, he will try to talk the Stalkers into joining him as his apostles, offering them

the chance to not only protect the humanity that they hold so dear, but to elevate that race by leading it to universal peace under his rule. In a normal human, this would be considered megalomania. It is up to the Stalkers to decide if the same applies to this renegade Aesthetic. The Gamemaster should do everything possible to make that decision a difficult one, presenting the Father's plan as a glorious step forward for the human race.

COMBAT (Vessel)

Unarmed (Attack 11, Damage 17)

COMBAT (Avatar)

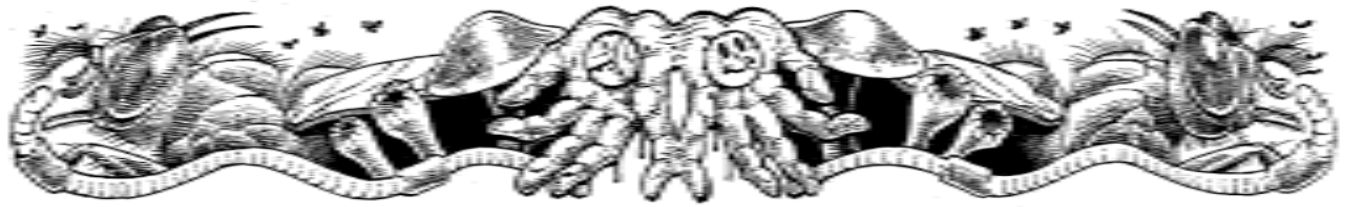
Attacks from Father Abrams' Avatar are especially virulent, killing mortals instantly and inflicting substantial damage on Stalkers (Attack 17, Damage 7d). Describe in detail how each attack twists and decays the Stalkers' Vessels.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Healer, Dreamwalk, Infect, Parasite, Weaver.

AVERSIONS

As self-possessed as he is, Father Abrams still suffers from an Aversion, as is common among the Unbidden. In this Architect's case, the Aversion is to antiseptics and preservatives, and to pest-control poisons. A simple bar of antiseptic soap will cause him to recoil in disgust; he forbids any packaged foods within his commune; and bug sprays cause him to retch violently.



FETISHES AND IDIOSYNCRASIES

As evidenced by his Lair, the good Father has a fascination for creatures that feed on decay. But not only does he surround himself with such things, they are also his primary source of food. Fortunately for him, the world is somewhat used to religious figures with odd dietary habits. Unfortunately, however, his fascination with such things is far beyond what might be perceived as normal even for a cult leader. Whenever the Architect encounters a particularly large fly, maggot, beetle, or even patch of mold, it immediately draws his attention; he stops whatever he is doing, even in the middle of a sentence, to snatch the thing up, lick it lovingly, then wolf it down.

ALLIES

The problem that is likely to cause the Stalkers the most trouble in confronting Father Abrams is that he is constantly surrounded by so many devoted followers. Although these mortals believe the Architect to be human like themselves, they also believe him to be a divine messiah. In the face of their faith, the Stalkers will have a hard time separating the Father from his flock, and with so many witnesses (Becky's twin brother among them), the Stalkers cannot really cut loose with their own supernatural abilities.

LAIR

The Father doesn't let many people in his private office. Those he does allow find a nightmare of trash and filth, filled with mildewed stacks of papers, dotted with cups containing an inch of old coffee with mold ringing it, and with spoiled scraps of food lying about. The sour smell of decay hangs in the air, and clouds of gnats arise when any part of the mess is disturbed, while flies dot the ceiling and cluster on lamp shades and other warm surfaces. On the floor, roaches, beetles, spiders, and millipedes rustle through the trash underfoot. The Architect is very protective of the various bugs and micro-organisms infesting his lair, cautioning visitors to watch where they step and where they sit. GM's who

wish to expand on this adventure may consider fleshing out Father Abrams' lair.

SPECIAL ABILITIES (descriptions)

Dreamwalk

See the Dangerous Prey book for details of this ability. The Father possesses this at three levels. First, he can use the skill at its basic level as described in that sourcebook, allowing him to visit the dreams of beings currently within the Realm of Flesh. Second, in an unusual twist on the power, he can Dream minor changes to the Realm of Essence (such as those he perpetrated upon the Stalkers' Crossroads). Third, sporadically, he can Dream visions of the future, which is how he came to realize that these Stalkers in particular would be coming to visit him. Both of these last abilities have come to him as a result of his fascination with the religious nature of rebirth. It is common for religious leaders to have prophetic dreams, so Father Abrams began to do so. That power of dreaming led him to the normal use of Dreamwalk, but also reminded him of his original ability, as an Aesthetic, to dream reality into existence. Given a few more centuries, the Father will likely gain the ability to Dream (recreate) the Realm of Flesh in his vicinity.

The Father has also learned how to send his thralls to the Realm of Essence. Through a complex method requiring among other things the ingestion of dangerous narcotics, his thralls are able to part the Essence from their bodies and travel through Father's Dreamwalk ability to the Stalkers' Domains where they have been able to spy and play havoc.

Infect

See the Dangerous Prey book, pg. 24 for specific details of this ability; Father Abrams possesses it at Master level, and beyond. To explain, the good Father is specially attuned to the life cycles of microorganisms, especially disease germs, and he can accelerate or decelerate their growth phenomenally within any

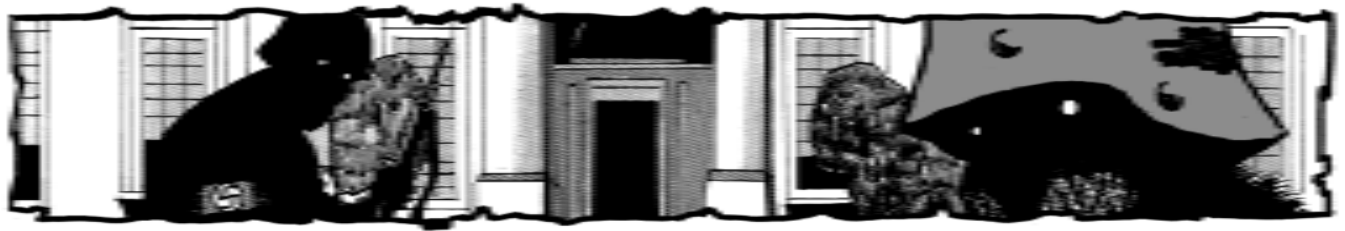


flesh in his line of sight. Father Abrams can use this ability to cause the immediate onset of nearly any disease known to Humanity. (By spending 1 Vitality, he can use this ability as a Master-level attack by touch, causing 4D damage and lowering the Fortitude of mortal victims by 1, or for 2 Vitality, he can use it against any target within his sight, without touching that target.) On the other hand he can reverse the ability, to suppress diseases that he encounters (at the same cost in Vitality—one point for touch, two for line of sight).

This latter use, together with his “Healer” ability, has established for him a reputation as a religious miracle worker. And the faithful interpret his attack ability as the wrath of God, called down upon Father Abrams’ enemies. (The GM may even wish to allow the Father to “infect” the Stalkers in their own Domains, either before or after they meet him, which certainly ought to cause them worry.)



Notes



LET S ALL BE FRANK

by Julie Hoverson

The makeup goes on thick. The latex stings her eyes. She muses aimlessly, in time with the base and the setting powder. Tonight's the big night, the end of months of work - and who knows how many years Mr. Feeder has been working toward this goal.

...Another sponge crumbles. Good thing this is the last night of the show, nothing's left. A note on the mirror: remember moisturizer. She's seen wrinkles coming on - no surprise with the constant application of makeup for the last week. No matter, a full peel and hot oil treatment tomorrow.

...Wave and smile. Answer questions. No one has a sense of history any more. Pass out "My Day" flyers, stand next to the big man's chair.

...Change for dinner. Freshen makeup. What's up, it won't come off? This is silly - very tired, must have grabbed wrong bottle of remover. Show has been more stressful than you thought.

...Panic! Face has altered! Stuck like this forever? Flee!

BACKSTORY

Feeder first entered our world in 1945, drawn into the Dream by the shock of a momentous event - the death of his favorite creation, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Feeder was so stunned by the president's expiration, despite FDR's long illness, that he was virtually propelled into the Dream. The shock of such a precipitate entry drove Feeder insane with fear and rage, a combination which kept him in the Beast stage for longer than normal. By the time he began to come to some semblance of his senses, every trace of FDR's influence in the Dream was gone, and Feeder was de-

spondent.

Feeder believed that FDR was the only one who truly knew how the world should be, and that he himself is the only one who really understood the president's true goal for the world - World Peace.

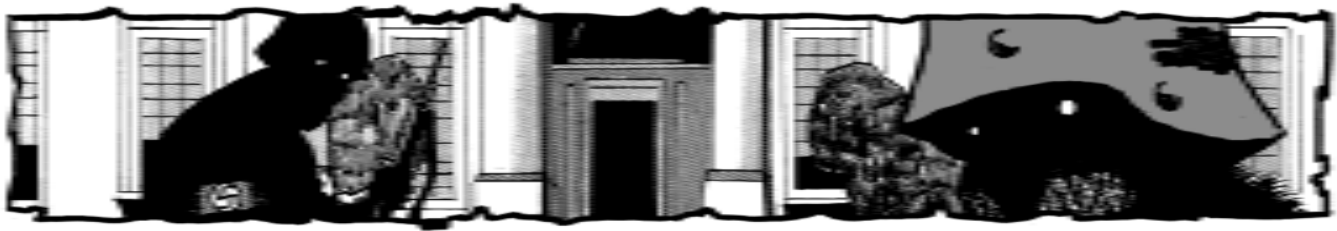
Feeder's goal is to make everyone in the entire world a little more like Frank, since such a change could not but improve the way things are. To do this, he has created a creature he calls "The Machine". The Machine's only function is as a generator of a new strain of poliomyelitis - the very viral disease which crippled FDR and which Feeder believes ultimately gave him his force of personality and strength of character, both qualities which the people of the world now sorely lack. Once the new strain is spread, the people who survive will certainly gain the same benefits that FDR did, or so Feeder thinks anyway.

Feeder spent years planning for this event, both working to get the funding by manipulating the mundane world, and cultivating The Machine. As he grew it, he spent some time testing the new strain of polio it embodied, by infecting various virologists and waiting to see if they could find a vaccine or mitigating factor before they died. None did, so he is quite certain his plan will work.

Much of this last information will not be apparent within the scope of this Hunt as it stands, but can be used to develop further "clean-up" activity for the PCs to carry out, and is included to indicate Feeder's obsessive personality.

OVERVIEW

It is April 11, 1995. The place is Warm Springs, Georgia (the place where FDR died on April 12, 1945), where a W.W.II re-creation event is taking place. The event was organized by Feeder to commemorate the 50th anniversary of FDR's death. He plans to release the virus at midnight. For the moment, he has made sure to surround himself with Uncorrupted humans as protection against misguided Stalker interference.



Time and Place

Though the date is April 11, 1995, the place is the site of a re-creation commemorating an event from 1945, so nearly everything is made to look like its equivalent from that time. The actors on and around the battlefield are dressed as American soldiers, and the actors in the White House are dressed in evening wear from the era. The guests at the house are dressed in varying degrees of authenticity, since they're uninvolved civilians who paid to attend the party.

Though this is a re-creation, it should not be immediately apparent that it is anything other than a real W.W.II battlefield where the PCs arrive. Throughout the scenario, they should continue to believe the year

is 1945, making any anachronisms particularly surprising.

There are a few glaring anachronisms - many of the attendees ignored the "no beepers" rule listed on the tickets, and almost none have left behind their digital watches. A couple of the corpses on the battlefield even have some sort of modern accessories.

Apart from the anachronisms, there are other oddities: the American's guns have no bullets, the White House is both smaller than the real White House and not internally laid out like the original. In addition, it sits in the middle of a park, next to a parking lot, rather than behind a fountain, fence and a street - as we always see it in the pictures.

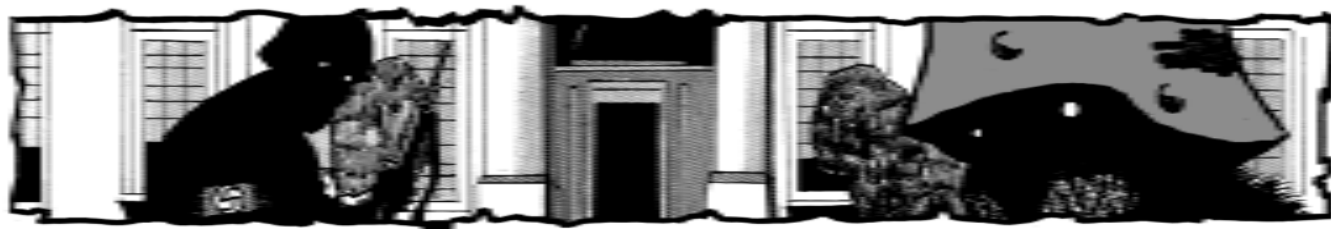
Earlier, a battlefield event was staged, but by the time the Stalkers arrive, a press conference and reception are about to commence at a scaled-down model of the White House. Since the moment is nigh for the final step in his plan, Feeder no longer needs to maintain the external facade and has given his Minions (attired in Nazi German uniforms - they just didn't look right as "our boys") free license to roam the battlegrounds and kill any people remaining there as a reward for their restraint to date.

The Call comes in the form of the words "Someone, get it off me!" When the Circle arrives, they find themselves on a battlefield at dusk standing over the prone body of the Supplicant, a woman, dressed in a beige wool suit (circa 1945). She is dying from bullet wounds and expires before anything can be done. She is Marcia Perkins, the actress hired to play Eleanor Roosevelt for the event.

Gunshots ring out nearby. To the north, where a hillside approaches the woods, a bar-

ricade has been erected on the hillside and is manned by men in W.W.II American uniforms. They are not returning fire. All six living soldiers are wounded, and only one is still conscious. He is panicked and incoherent. If the PCs get within earshot, they will hear him screaming that the enemy has real bullets - he doesn't.





At the White House, Feeder has taken the shape of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, complete with cigarette holder, martinis and wheelchair. The latter is an anachronism, since FDR never appeared in public in the wheelchair. The PCs reach the building as the “press conference” begins, giving them a chance to observe, but not affect, the Unbidden.

Eventually, after getting the PCs into the back room, along with some of the human guests, FDR will reveal his plan to them - which is to release a mutation of the polio virus to bring about World Peace. The release is scheduled for midnight - the beginning of the anniversary of FDR’s death. The Stalkers must find a way to clear the humans from the room, so they cannot do anything which may invoke the Forbiddance, while at the same time they cannot send them entirely out of the building and into the hands of the Minions roaming the grounds.

ANSWERING THE CALL

The Call is “Somebody, please get it off me!” The Circle summons the Navigator and walks the Winding Path as usual.

They arrive in the middle of a battlefield sometime after dark. Combat is not currently going on in this area, though the remains of combat are everywhere. Bodies lie strewn about, and gunshots ring out in the distance. At the PCs’ feet lies a woman in a beige suit, clawing weakly at her face, moaning with her last breath that “it has to come off,” though she doesn’t say what “it” is. The PCs cannot prevent her from dying.

The supplicant is the woman playing the role of Eleanor Roosevelt, an actress named Marcia Perkins. She is the only individual Feeder deliberately Corrupted - giving her the right facial features. When she realized that her face had changed, she panicked and ran out onto the battlefield, where she was shot by the roaming minions. She has been lying here for some time.

Even Stalkers whose personal history included the

era of the Roosevelts will have a hard time recognizing who she is supposed to resemble, since she has raked her face bloody with her nails. A Master of Delve can find out the following from the deceased Ms. Perkins (these thoughts are foremost in her mind): The person in charge is Feeder. He is at the house. The house is white. The house is on the other side of the hill. Something was on her face, and it wouldn’t come off. She is an actress. Midnight is when “IT” will happen, but she does not know what IT is. If the Delver tries to get more, she will experience Marcia’s death - fleeing in panic for an unknown reason, then being shot.

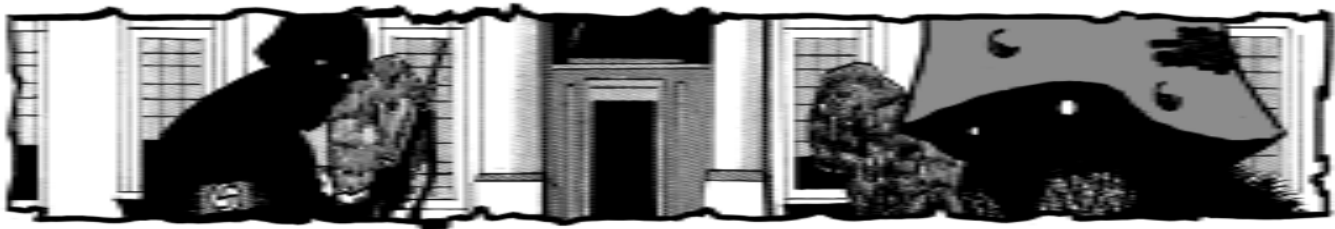
If Trackers are Evoked, they lead the Stalkers to the Minions roaming the woods.

WHERE IS HERE?

The open field where they arrived forms a rough triangle with a hill and a patch of woods. From where they stand, the PCs can hear gunshots being exchanged between the woods and a barricade which has been erected on the hillside. Though this is a re-enactment (or at least started out as one), the PCs should not suspect that it is anything other than a real battle.

Any PCs with a knowledge of the twentieth century will recognize the minions’ garb - black uniforms with parallel lightning bolts (“SS”) marked on the sleeves - as being that of Nazis. Stalkers have a lesser chance of recognizing the American uniforms, since they are less distinguishable. The battlefield appears real, with corpses strewn about. A few of them are dummies left over from the re-enactment, more are the remains of the actors portraying American soldiers, brought down by the Minions.

A very important point to play up is the contrast between the apparent strangeness of the site (no bullets in the American guns, the White House just over the hill from a battlefield) and the lack of Essence in the area. There is nowhere near the Essence lying around that there should be to cause a Corruption this severe - this point should baffle the PCs.

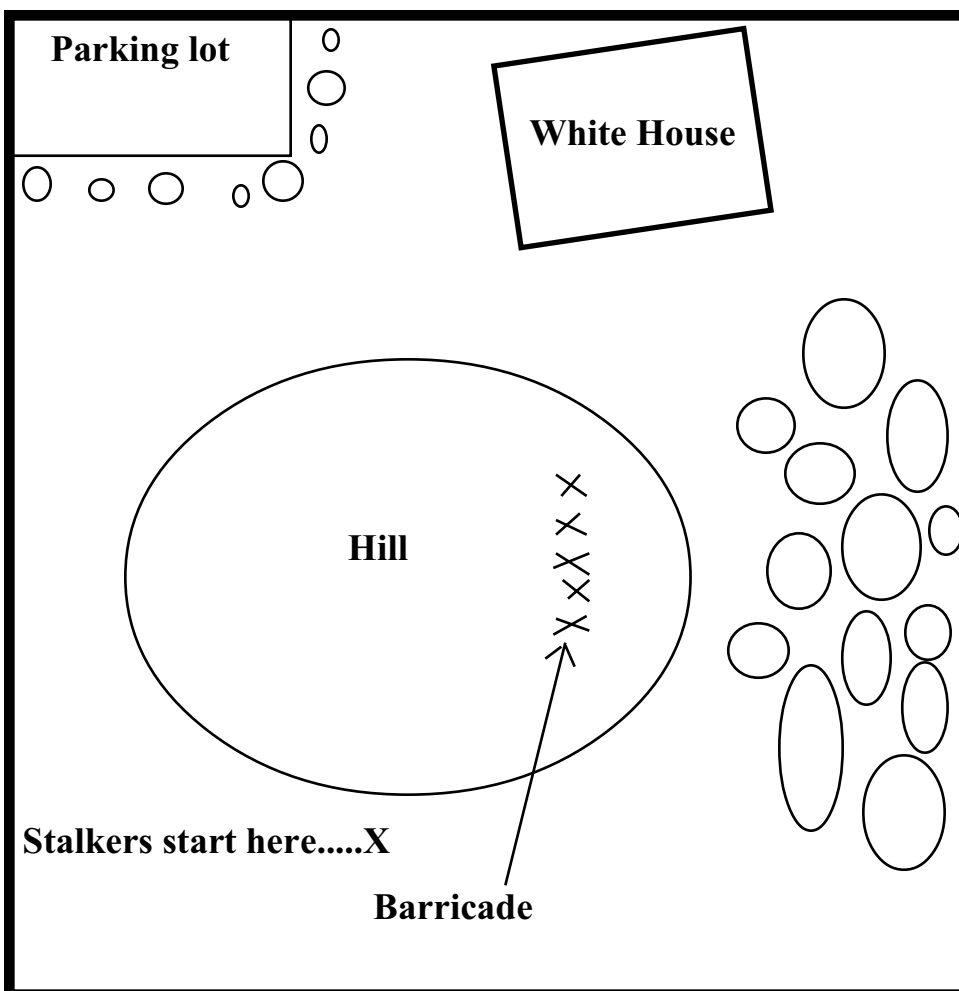


The Woods

The number of Shadows in the woods is left up to the GM, and should depend on the number, strength, and experience level of your Circle. Challenge, but don't overwhelm them. If it looks like they're going to spend too much time running about the woods, have them meet a party of Minions they can't defeat, which should send them running to the White House. None of the Shadows will come within sight of the house - they have been warned off. After they run out of prey elsewhere, however, any Shadows that remain will begin to mass at the edges of the White House area, hoping for more victims.

Suitable Minions for these encounters include: Ogyrs (*pg. 111, WV*), Sycophants (*pg. 68, DP*), and a

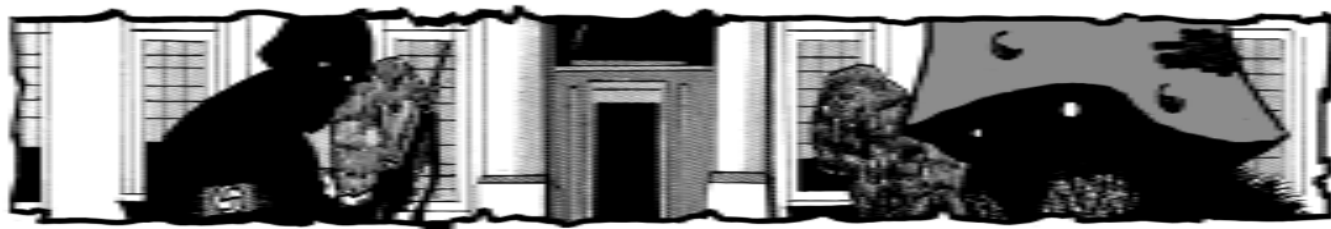
couple of Hate Merchants (*pg. 63, DP*). If your group is more powerful, you may include a Fiend (*pg. 53, DP*) or a Dreadwolf (*pg. 57, DP*). Not all of these are armed with guns, and most will revert to their natural weaponry when faced with Stalkers. There are also a few Mocks (*pg. 58, DP*) running around who may be intimidated into giving the Stalkers information. They know very little, though, since they are not even Minions, just hangers-on. They know of the house, and that the one with power is there and is called Feeder. No matter how many Minions the Circle kills, there should still be a few left to menace anyone leaving the House later. It is also important to note that when the Stalkers finally leave the woods they have the impression that there are many Shadows still lurking about.



The Barricade

Halfway up the hill is a barricade built of sandbags and wood, which has been reinforced with a couple of corpses (both fake and real). Behind the barricade, only six of the American soldiers are still alive, though all but one are unconscious. The last one is Daniel Hurd, and he is hysterical.

If calmed down (for example, by Dominate), Hurd can give the PCs a quick run-down of the evening, though only from his point of view. He worked through the day in the battle re-creation, then, at dusk when they were supposed to go home (since the focus shifted to the indoors at night) there was suddenly



shooting, and he and his friends took cover behind the barricade. They've been there ever since, though several died, and a couple went nuts and ran off, only to be shot down in their tracks.

As long as the Minions continue to see movement behind the barricade, they will continue to fire on it from a distance. This is not because they are afraid of the unarmed humans, but because they are having fun playing with them this way - for the moment.

THE WHITE HOUSE

On the far side of the hill from the battlefield, out of sight from the field where the PCs arrived, sits the White House.

This White House is not quite the same as the original. For one thing it is significantly smaller, only about half the size of a city block, and only the front is actually detailed to look like the White House. Windows have been built into the front wall and are lit from behind to make them look like the real thing, though they don't open onto rooms. The other three walls are featureless, but for a door in the wall directly around to the right of the front. The first floor exterior has been made slightly larger, so the door is a normal size, but from a distance the whole place looks fairly realistic.

Inside, the back half of the building is a single huge room which houses the Machine and its Cradle. The front is divided into two rooms - the conference room and the banquet room - separated by the entrance hallway. At the back of the entrance hallway is the door to the room of The Machine.

Unless the PCs have wasted a lot of time fighting Minions in the woods, people will still be arriving when they reach the house. As the PCs go to enter the building, they should catch a glimpse of Shadows lurking just out of mortal sight, warning them of the danger of driving the humans out of the building.

Outside

Behind the house, out of sight in the trees, is a parking lot. Cars can be heard, but not seen, from the front of the house. If the PCs go to take a look, they will see people getting out of 1990s cars dressed in 1940s evening wear.

The Entrance Hall

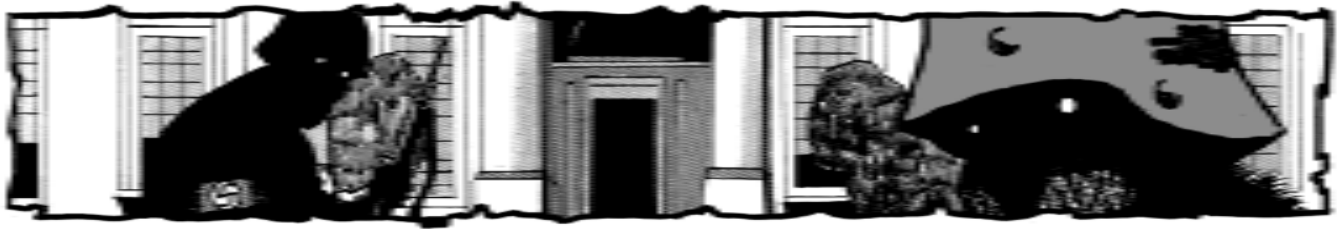
Coming into the building through the front door, everyone is directed to the left, into the conference room. Behind velvet ropes to the right is an open door into a ballroom-sized chamber. The rear wall of the room (to the left as you enter) is lined with tables which are being filled with food.

Straight ahead as you enter the hall is a door guarded by two secret service look-a-likes (another anachronism) in black suits and dark glasses standing on either side of another red velvet rope. They will not let anyone into the back room until after the press conference.

THE PRESS CONFERENCE

The conference room is a fairly large room which will hold upwards of fifty people. Everyone is directed into it as they enter the building. The room is filled with rows of chairs, all facing a stage at the back of the room. On the stage is a podium with the bald eagle blazoned on it. Behind it on the wall is the presidential seal flanked by American flags. By the time the conference begins, the room is full, not even standing room is left.

A door at the back of the stage opens and in rolls Franklin Delano Roosevelt. (A successful Perception Challenge of 12+ shows that he is not pumping the wheels quite in time to the movement of the chair - this is a sign of Corruption on the Focus). He moves up to the podium, then stands with no apparent difficulty.



He begins to speak, and has the audience enthralled, possibly enthralling the Stalkers who are present as well. (He is using Majesty, though he is not trying to get them to do anything more than listen to, and appreciate, him.) His speech is cobbled together from all the “best parts” of FDR’s own speeches. Possible quotes (and misquotes) include: *“I pledge you - I pledge myself - to a new deal for the American people. I see one-third of a na-*

tion ill-housed, ill-clad, ill nourished, while we must be the great arsenal of democracy.”

“When peace has been broken anywhere, the peace of all countries everywhere is in danger, and I dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor, in the field of world policy.”

“Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself - nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”

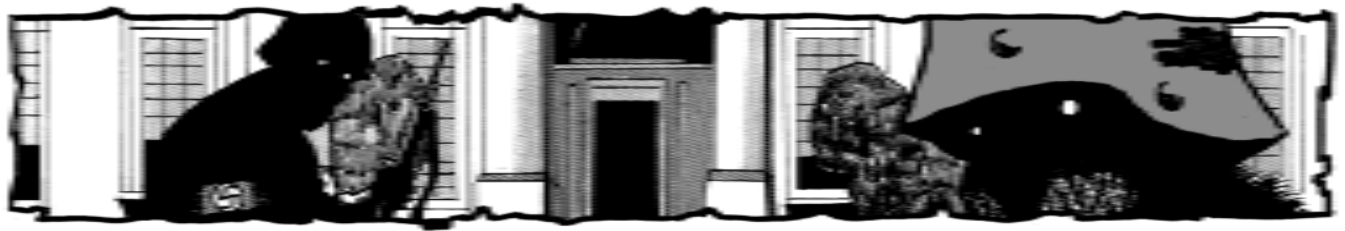
After the speech, the various actors dressed as servants guide the group into the banquet room.

The Return Of Eleanor

Feeder’s speech begins at 11:00 and he speaks for about a half an hour. At 11:35, approximately, Eleanor enters the room through the door at the back of the stage, and is introduced by Feeder as “the Missus”. She appears exactly as the PCs first saw her: scratches, bullet wounds and all, but none of the humans notice. When (and if) the PCs see her from behind, they will see some sort of network of tentacles which extend all over her back and the backs of her arms and legs. This is a Minion of Feeder known as a “Puppeteer”.

If the Stalkers kill the Eleanor host, the Puppeteer will try and get near enough to one of the humans to ride it. It takes the creature three round to get attached enough to be able to attack, and its attacks on the host will be automatic successes once it first gets a grip. During this time, the Defend of Puppeteer and host drops to 10, but the host will still take 75% of all damage inflicted on the whole.

THE LOUTONE		DARØ	(PUPPETEER)
Fortitude	*3		A Puppeteer is a Shadow which Awakens when a dead body is moved or posed as if to pretend it is alive. Puppeteers normally appear as a tangle of rope-like tentacles which have no motivating power of their own. Only when they latch onto a human body can they move at all. A Puppeteer can hitch-hike on a living body, but can only assume control of a dead one. Of course, once on a live body, it is easy to make a corpse simply by strangling the Host.
Vitality	**6		
Initiative	12		
Defend	15		
Perceive	8		
Resolve	10		
<p>Puppeteers prefer fairly intact Hosts, since the more extensive the damage, the more difficult it is to conceal. A Puppeteer’s presence does not prevent any sort of decay on the part of the body, so it must exchange bodies fairly often. Even though the Veil will cover appearance, smell and any detritus of decay will still be apparent. Puppeteers which survive for long become adept at ways to kill without doing obvious damage, preserving every iota of appearance. Throughout history, Puppeteers with extensively decayed corpses have given rise to the myths of zombies and other walking dead.</p> <p>A Puppeteer’s attack takes one of two forms: Host attacks (Attack 10, 2d Damage), or tentacle attacks (Attack 15, 4d Damage). Its tentacle can either strike like a whip or attempt to entangle. If the Shadow attaches itself to a living Host, it can still attack, though it cannot attack using the Host.</p> <p>The Puppeteer’s weakness lies in its Host. If the Host is destroyed, the Puppeteer is rendered essentially helpless until it finds another. Damage that gets past the Puppeteer’s Fortitude of 3 is then divided between the Host and the Shadow itself. As noted above, the host take 75% of all incoming damage. A Puppeteer cannot attach itself to a being of Essence, though it could ride on a Minion’s husk.</p> <p>*(host takes 75% of all damage that gets through)</p> <p>** (host 10)</p>			



The Banquet Room

Along the back wall of this room (to the left when entering the room from the hall) are tables covered with food. Behind them is a door through which the catering staff bring food to keep the tables stocked. The outside two walls have false windows hung with thick draperies. The “windows” have big screen TVs behind them displaying various views of Washington D.C. in the 1940s.

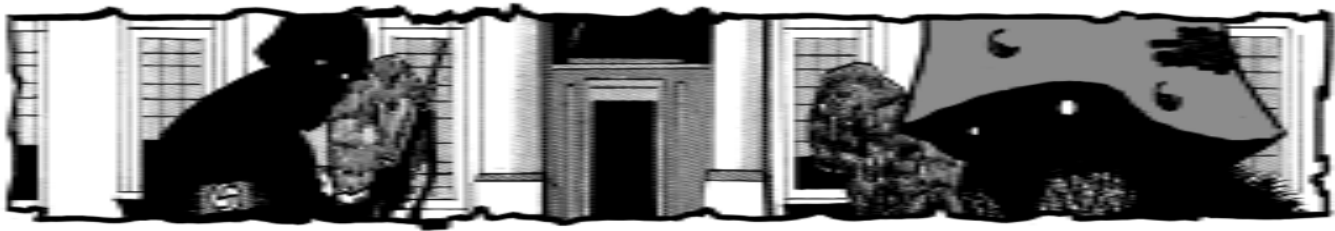
Most of the humans will remain here for the rest of the evening, eating and socializing. If something is done to clear the building, such as pulling a fire alarm, everyone will mob out through the front hall and door, and will be cut down outside by the Minions lurking in the darkness.

The Room Of The Machine

The entire rear of the building is a single huge room which houses The Machine. Until the press conference ends at 11:00 p.m., there are Uncorrupted humans working in the back room, specifically to prevent Stalkers from Dissipating through the walls and interfering with The Machine. The back room is the staging area for the banquet. Once the banquet begins, the room will be empty of humans for a short while.

The room is dark, with a dark curtain screening off over half the room. In the single patch of light in the room stands a huge conference table with chairs surrounding it. By the time the PCs get into the room, one





side of the table should be filled with Feeder and his human dupes. On the interior wall, behind the door which leads onto the stage, is a ramp which comes down from the door to floor level (for the wheelchair). Immediately after the speech, Feeder will be coming down the ramp into the room.

The Machine

Fortitude	8
Vitality	8
Initiative	8
Defend	12
Perceive	7
Resolve	15

The machinery is actually nothing at all. When Feeder refers to “The Machine” he is actually talking about the contents of the tank, which he calls its Cradle.

Inside the Cradle is the creature Feeder specifically bred to complete his plot. It was raised within the Cradle, and has no way out. However the first thing most Stalkers who are able to will do is try and destroy the machinery by summoning Devourers. These servitors will devour the inanimate bits of the machinery, letting loose The Machine itself. If the tank is left intact, the PCs won’t have to deal with attacks from The Machine until Feeder sets it off.

This artificial creature resembles a huge, sickly-pink, bloated sausage with no head, but rather a pair of bulging eyes flanking a trumpet-shaped snout which together seem to move about its surface like a toy boat floating on a pond. It has no appreciable intelligence, and simply fails to notice most attacks perpetrated against it. It is essentially harmless until it is attacked. Once it is angered, it will attack any movement within its field of vision, and any time it takes damage it will snort heavily, sending the virus out through the top of the tank and any holes which have been made in the sides.

The Machine’s attack form is a snort of warm steam. Each time it takes damage, it snorts in a random direction. The snort itself does no damage, but the aftereffects can be devastating. The blast carries the special

strain of the polio virus which Feeder has worked so hard to develop - a strain which will effect creatures of Essence as well as mortals. It cannot permanently cripple a Stalker, but it can make him very uncomfortable until he is able to return to his Domain. The disease affects the Stalker’s Vessel only, and since the Vessel is re-created each time the Dream is entered, no ill effects will carry over to any further Hunts.

The blast takes affect on the second round after the Stalker is hit. Each round thereafter, he loses a point of attack bonus due to weakness. Once his attack bonus is gone, the Stalker will begin to lose points of Dexterity. This damage to the Stalker’s Dexterity can never lower it below one point. Once the Stalker’s Dexterity is reduced to one, points begin to come off the Stalker’s Fortitude.

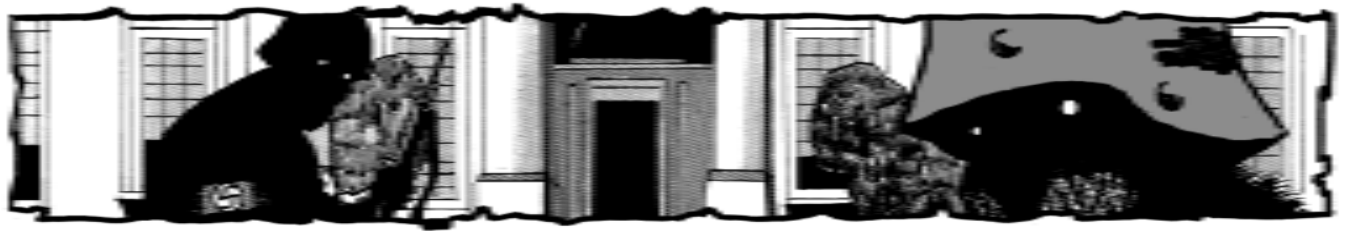
If The Machine is annoyed enough while still contained within its Cradle, it will start blowing steam out the top, affecting people within the room of The Machine. If the side of the Cradle is pierced, by a Rend attack, for instance, steam will come out through that hole as well. Holes in the bottom are beneath The Machine and are blocked by its own body.

Feeder’s plan was to abruptly seriously injure The Machine, causing it to let off all its steam at once, spreading the virus far into the upper atmosphere, seeding the clouds, the ocean, and eventually the entire world’s water supply with the virus. Since the belief in the past was that polio was passed through water, he designed his strain specifically to be passed that way.

F I N A L E

The most opportune moment for the Stalkers to get into the back room is during the transition between the conference and the banquet. Feeder has already set up the final scene - the conference at Yalta.

Positioned at the bottom of the ramp, just inside the door from the entrance hall, is a huge conference table. The room feels big, though most of it is in utter darkness. The only light comes from a powerful overhead lamp. Outside the bright oval of light is impenetrable blackness. Though Stalkers normally have no trouble seeing in the dark, the drastic contrast between



the light and the darkness makes all vision a bit edgy in this room.

Seated on the opposite side of the table is Feeder at the center, flanked on one side by three humans (randomly chosen from among the crowd at the party), and on the other by Winston Churchill and two more humans. Eleanor is standing next to the only window which has its drapes closed.

Winston Churchill is actually a Sycophant (*pg. 68, DP*) who turned up at the last moment and Feeder threw into an improvised shell - just good enough that the Veil will cover it. Its face was made with a shaved bulldog's head, and the rest of the creature is shoved into a zipped-up one-piece jumpsuit and gloves to give it shape. It holds and chews on a cigar which is not actually lit, and when it speaks, it sounds vaguely like Churchill. Any time Feeder says anything, it will simply agree. It is not a Minion but rather just delighted to be part of the party, and will not fight unless it itself is attacked.

Unless they come in through a back wall, in which case they will run into a jumble of machinery, the PCs will have to get in through one of the doors - the one at the back of the stage or the one in the entrance hall. Dissipating in through the front wall will not work since there are humans in sight of it within the big room. The door at the back of the stage is locked and the door in the entrance hall is guarded by two secret service men. The PCs need only knock on the stage door and it will be opened in a couple of minutes by a young man (human) who introduces himself as Harry Hopkins and asks if they are there for the meeting. Approaching the guards, PCs need only say they are here for the meeting (or otherwise convince the guards), to be let in. A couple of humans will get into the back room by this method, and the PCs may see this and try to follow their lead.

Harry will show the PCs to the table and seat them opposite Feeder. Feeder is sorting through papers, and will continue to do so until one of the PCs speaks. Whichever PC speaks first will be designated the leader and Feeder will look up at him or her and say: "Well, Joe, it's been a long time since Tehran, hasn't it?" Then

he will wait expectantly for a reply. A Hard History roll will tell the PC that Tehran was a meeting place for the allies during World War II, and that Joe is probably Joseph Stalin. If the PC can make any kind of a coherent reply, Feeder will continue (if they make some specific reference or speak with a Russian accent, he will be extremely pleased and well-disposed toward the PCs).

Whichever one of the PCs who first annoys Feeder for any reason will be the subject of the comment (aimed toward "Joe") "Who brought De Gaulle? He wasn't invited!" and will continue to be the butt of disparaging comments for the rest of the talk.

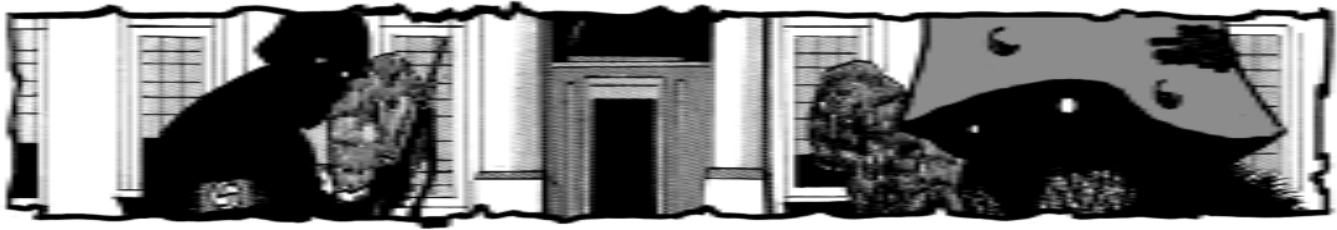
Feeder will continue: "Well, you certainly brought along plenty of your bullyboys, didn't he Winnie?" Winston agrees. "Joe, I have to tell you up front that I don't think I can let you have Poland."

Whatever the PCs say in reply to this statement, Harry Hopkins approaches leaning down over Feeder's shoulder and murmurs (loud enough to be heard by PCs who make a Perception roll) "It's 11:45, Mr. President - nearly time to begin." Harry then walks away around the table to a spot next to Eleanor, near the door to the entrance hall, on the opposite side from the ramp.

If the PCs can keep up any sort of relevant discourse, Feeder will be delighted to continue with a debate as long as it can be drawn out, regardless of the time it takes - after all, he's getting to fulfill his wildest dream of being FDR and debating with a potential enemy. As soon as the PCs begin to get restless, cease to make sense, or get boring, he will cut into whatever is being said with:

"Look, let me be Frank (heh, heh) with you, Joe. I have an alternate proposal which I have brought for just such an occasion, and I'll warn you it is something I plan to implement regardless of what you have to say.

What is lacking in the world today is strength of character, wouldn't you agree? A severe lack of character brought about by easy living - since we all know that character is built through hardship. After all, that which does not kill us makes us stronger, except for you of course, De Gaulle.



Unfortunately, suffering does not guarantee strength of character, and strength of character does not guarantee the proper outlook. After all Joe here is very strong and very wrong.

We must ask ourselves, what is it we truly want? And I think I can speak for us all when I say 'we are seeking peace - peace on earth - world peace.' I have devised a way to bring this about. Let me present to you The Machine."

He gestures grandly, pointing up and behind him with a sweep of his arm. At the cue, Eleanor pulls on a cord she has positioned herself by and the black gauze window drapes rise slowly to the ceiling.

What is revealed in the semi-darkness behind the curtain first seems to be thousands of tiny eyes glowing in the dark, but resolves rapidly into the tiny lights all over a series of complicated consoles and control panels. As the curtain continues to rise, more machinery is revealed, pipes and cogs and wheels and cords which stretch around three sides of the room, reaching all the way to the ceiling. Nestled among the pipes which hang above head level at the back of the room is a huge tank the size of a train boxcar. On a closer inspection

(Hard Perception roll), the bottom of the tank seems to be full of holes with various pointy bits which appear to be placed so as to pass through the holes into the interior of the tank. Nothing is leaking from the bottom of the tank, though the entire room has a weird, musky and damp smell. The tank is the Cradle of The Machine.

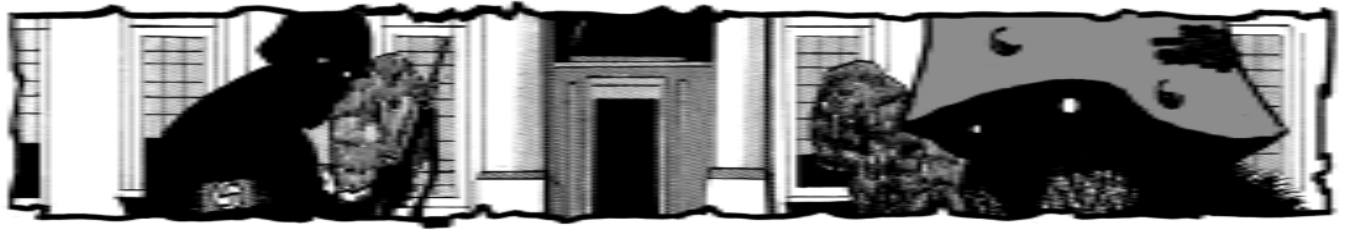
"Now, for my plan." Feeder wheels away from the table, gesturing for everyone else to follow him. "To give the world some strength of character and bring about world peace at the same time is a tricky task - but I have the answer. This will spray it into the atmosphere, where it will get into the water and reach all parts of the world. Everyone will be effected and those who make it through will be enriched." He grins happily at the PCs. If asked what "it" is, he replies "it took me ages to get it just right, but it can't be prevented by current vaccines. An entirely new strain of poliomyelitis."

Once this bombshell is dropped, he will move toward the machine. The humans are baffled, but since this is a performance, as far as they are concerned, they will not be frightened by anything said by Feeder. Of course, he deliberately kept them here to prevent active interference from any Stalkers.

At this point, the PCs will most likely try to stop him somehow from activating The Machine. Various things can be done, though they are hampered by the presence of the humans. For instance, Servitors may be Evoked, but only out of sight of the humans. There are various places, under the table, in a patch of darkness, or behind the ramp, where a Stalker could conceal himself while Evoking.

Servitors which may be called include:





Gremlins will not affect The Machine, since the mechanical element is not the vital part (Gremlins will stop the points from entering the tank, but all Feeder needs to do then is hit the panic button, which activates a simple catapult mechanism, sending the points in);

Devourers can consume the Cradle but will not affect The Machine, since it is living;

Glimmergaunts can make the cradle translucent enough to see The Machine, though it is abnormal enough that such a look will probably only establish that there is something alive within;

Negators will do slight (1 point) damage to The Machine, as it was created by Essence and is not a normal Shadow - this will enrage it enough to start it snorting;

Slashers will do twice as much damage to The Machine once it is exposed since it is so huge;

Voidoids will have no effect on The Machine, since it does not work off an energy source; Spinners will slow the action of the machinery for quite some time - giving the PCs time to act even after the device is activated. Feeder, Churchill and the Puppeteer are affected normally by Servitors.

At the moment, the hole in the ceiling through which the steam will exit is not open. If the machinery is not interfered with, it will open several moments before The Machine is skewered. It is possible to block the funnel-shaped opening on top with something, if a PC climbs or Translocates to the top (Hard roll for Translocate since vision is difficult and there is no specific place to land). A PC could even conceivably get in through the hole and try to Banish The Machine after it has taken some damage.

The Corruption

Feeder has tried very hard to keep his presence hidden, and has kept the Enigma somewhat under control. Feeder's "Domain" is not a lair, per se, since it was constructed primarily through normal human means, and exists almost entirely in the "real world". There is very little Corruption in the area, since the Focus has only recently been moved to this site. Until recently, it was housed at the FDR museum, where there is a significant trace of Corruption. Feeder stole it a month ago.

The Focus

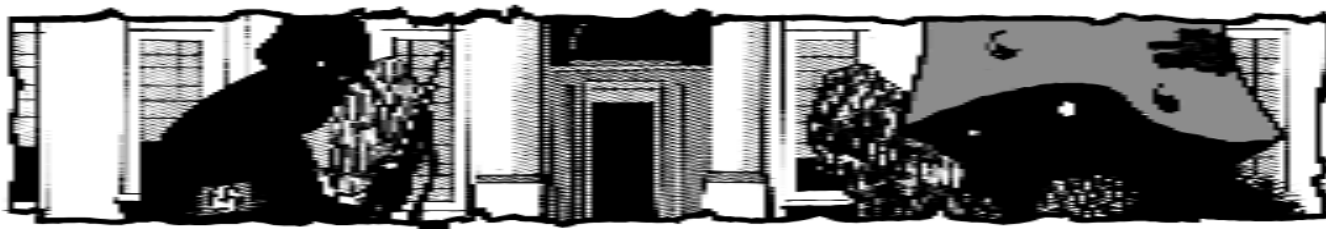
The focus is the wheelchair itself, which actually belonged to FDR just before he died. The wheelchair is a old-fashioned wicker-backed model, with the large wheels in front and smaller ones in back, and has no armrests. It maneuvers surprisingly well, partly due to the taint of Corruption upon it.

Unlike the usual Focus, it is not immediately apparent that the wheelchair is the center of the Corruption. It looks perfectly normal. However, whenever Feeder takes damage, the chair moans in pain. If this isn't a big enough clue, have the chair start to bleed as well. Once they figure it out, the Stalkers can then Mend the Enigma.

It is important to note that even though Feeder has stolen FDR's wheelchair, he is not aware of it being the Focus and therefore has not attained a Life Link to it.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

The Circle may elect to seek the museum formerly housing FDR's wheelchair to remove lingering traces of Essence. They may also elect to hunt down the remaining Shadows throughout the area.



FEEDER

Fortitude	5 / 7
Vitality	15 / 17
Initiative	11 / 16
Defend	10 / 16
Perceive	17 / 17
Resolve	20 / 14

Feeder has enough knowledge of the world by now to get along, and has made enough contacts to organize the setting he wants for his big event. His main problem with social situations now lies in his obsession, rather than his lack of knowledge. He behaves the way he

thinks FDR would at all times, but has several major flaws in his knowledge. The most obvious one is that he rides about in a wheelchair, while FDR was never seen in public in it. He has an explanation, however, which is that an organization of handicapped people requested he appear this way.

He has molded his Husk to appear as FDR in his later years and is so attached to it that his Resolve goes down drastically once he has lost the semblance of his idol. Feeder's Avatar has an appearance akin to a Gibbering Horde. A single massive fang-riddled mouth supported by a formless mass of flesh makes up its body, while its eyes and the ends of its four appendages are smaller versions of the deadly mouth.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Majesty (Mastered)

Rather than a show of force, Feeder gains control through its use of quotes, emulating the strength of FDR (Feeder's confidence is directly tied into its portrayal of the president, so this ability is unusable once its Husk is destroyed).

Tentacles (Mastered)

Once Unmasked, Feeder has four attacks per round to start with. It can have as many additional attacks as it wants, but each further attack lowers all attacks by 1 point/additional attack (i.e., a fifth attack lowers each attack score by 1, a sixth attack lowers each by 2, etc.).

Alter Form

Feeder also has a special ability which allows it to manipulate Flesh with Essence and create specific creatures, such as The Machine, and alter the physical characteristics of humans (which allowed him to change "Eleanor" and create his FDR Husk). Creating something new takes enormous amounts of time to accomplish, not to mention careful tending of the nascent creature, and changing a mortal takes long exposure on the part of the individual. This ability is not likely to come into play in this Hunt.

COMBAT (Vessel)

Unarmed (attack 11, 4d damage). One strike per round with its cigarette - which is actually an extrusion of the Unbidden's natural form through its shell. The flammability factor (see below) applies.

COMBAT (Avatar)

Unarmed (attack 14, 4d damage, 4 attacks per round - in any direction). Any time Feeder misses with an attack, there is a chance it strikes something flammable and sets the entire building on fire. Neither Feeder nor The Machine will be harmed by normal fire, though it may inconvenience them.

AVERSIONS

Any information which contradicts Feeder's firmly held beliefs about FDR (many of which are either exaggerated or untrue). Anyone who will not stop spouting any information he does not want to hear (such as that FDR may have known about Pearl Harbor in advance and allowed it to happen) will eventually anger him, in which case he will kill the offender as quickly as possible, even if he is in front of an audience.

FETISHES

Anything having to do with FDR, especially any items which might have actually belonged to its idol, such as cigarette holders, letters, glasses, etc. It can be distracted by being offered an item claimed to be a relic of FDR.

IDIOSYNCRASIES

Feeder must always behave the way it believes FDR would, especially in front of people. Even while revealing its master plan, much like a traditional super-villain, it remains in character. Feeder truly wants everyone to know just how it intends to fulfill FDR's fondest dream.



BUMPY TOAD

by Todd Miller

It was a cold October evening, and Sarah clutched the stolen bag of warm chestnuts under her coat. She'd had a good day at the Camden Market, stealing two loaves of pumpernickel, four radishes and a butterscotch lolly. Sarah also pinched a brand new wool scarf for her baby brother Ryan. He'd caught a cold sleeping on the damp cobblestones. As she walked home, Sarah remembered the day her mother passed away from consumption. Poor mother's fragile hand, clutching Sarah by her coat sleeve and whispering weakly "Be a good girl and take care of your brother for me, won't you dearie?" Then she closed her eyes forever.

A shiver ran down her spine and Sarah thought it best not to think about Mother anymore. The fog was getting damper, and it shrouded the streets. To keep her spirits up, she sang a little nonsense song out loud. The alley where she and Ryan slept was just around the corner, when she heard a terrible commotion. Children where screaming against a background of strange, metallic noises. A young boy came running down the street, his face twisted with fear. He turned around to look for pursuers, and crashed into Sarah, knocking them both to the pavement. She grabbed the boy by the arm. "What's going on?" she cried. The boy's eyes were wide with terror and he quivered. "It's Umpugs! They're back!"

Sarah ran down in the alley, praying they didn't find her little brother. Boys and girls were trying to escape,

fleeing into the dark streets of London. Sarah stopped short and peeked around the corner. That's when she saw them.

Strange metal men grabbed the orphans with their clawed hands and shoved them into large, burlap sacks. The red light bulbs atop their heads pulsated menacingly as they threw aside the crates and barrels the children were hiding behind. Sarah was paralyzed with horror. She could only watch as one of the Umpugs found her brother Ryan, and tossed him into the squirming sack with the others.

The Umpugs searched around for stragglers, and when they were satisfied there were none, they proceeded to march towards a very small wooden door. One of the Umpugs unlocked the door with an elaborate key, and the rest marched through. They had to stoop so as not to bump their metal heads, and when all but the last one was through, he turned and pulled a large barrel over to block the door from sight. The door shut, and an eerie quiet settled into the deserted street.

Sarah stumbled through the filth and rubbish, her mind overwhelmed. Her baby brother had been kidnapped. The Umpugs had taken him to make into meat-pies! Sarah realized the grown-ups would never believe her if she told them what happened. Suddenly, the words to an old nonsense rhyme came to her lips, and she found herself repeating them over and over again ...

BACKSTORY

There was once an Aesthetic who loved children, and he called himself Bumpy Toad. He adored their playful games and fantastic imaginations. But it hurt Bumpy Toad to see children suffer and be exploited. Poverty, starvation, and forced labor were crushing the very spirit out of little boys and girls everywhere. So

Bumpy Toad decided he wanted to help them, and crossed over into the Realm of Flesh.

It was unfortunate that after he crossed over, he had to eat a few of his new young friends. But, after he overcame the hunger, and went through several mortal vessels, Bumpy Toad figured out what he wanted to do. He wanted to create a wonderful, secret place, where children could go and have marvelous adventures. A



place safe from the dangerous and corrupt world of the grown-ups. As Bumpy Toad's power grew, he was able to track down the Focus of the enigma and use it to shape his new world. And he called it the Land of Quay.

Being a creature unable to completely grasp the workings of the human psyche, Bumpy Toad did the best he could create a fabulous kingdom that would appeal to a child's sense of wonder, romance and mystery. There were the whimsical, but regrettably carnivorous gigantic Venus flytraps that would snap and bite the children's heads off. And then there was that strange, dark pond where all those boys and girls drowned. Or maybe they were eaten by Old Lantern Jaw, who lurked under the lily-pads, just out of sight. He was but one of the many cuddly, but lethal creatures of Quay who delighted in terrorizing, dismembering, and eating the poor children who visited there.

Bumpy Toad knew that something wasn't working out right. Instead of raucous laughter, he heard only blood curdling screams. The children ran away from him whenever they saw him approach, shrieking out of the clouds on his gargantuan dragonfly steed. And, Bumpy Toad noticed, there was way too much blood everywhere. But, before he could set things straight, a Circle of Stalkers moved in to capture him.

Feeling pity for Bumpy Toad, because he never meant to truly harm anyone, the Stalkers eventually decided that the punishment would be to banish him and the Land of Quay to a Shadowland. Once there, Bumpy Toad would never be allowed to interact with mortal children ever again. Bumpy Toad agreed to the punishment. However, he secretly sent one of his mortal thralls, an orphan boy, out of the Shadowland with a Touchstone, shaped like a church key. With the Touchstone, the orphan boy would be able to return to the Land of Quay, where he and Bumpy Toad could play together for ever and ever.

Or that was the plan. Once the orphan boy returned to the Realm of Flesh, he was accidentally struck and killed by a horse-drawn wagon during a particularly brutal snow storm, before he ever got a chance to use

the Touchstone. The key passed through several grubby pairs of hands in the London underworld before it came into the possession of the cunning Mr. Fox. A unique shadow, Mr. Fox was awakened a very long time ago, the circumstances around which are uncertain. Mr. Fox's sole pleasure in life is to lead young, gullible children to their doom. Usually they are baked into pies; however, a few are working in salt mines around the world.

Realizing at once what he possessed, Mr. Fox wasted no time in using the touchstone to cross from the Flesh to the Shadowland of Quay. He discovered that the Unbidden who ruled over the Shadowland was in a deep state of melancholia. Because he could no longer play with children, Bumpy Toad was in a terrible state of despair. When he withdrew forever into his castle, cursing the day he ever crossed over, it rained for a thousand days and a thousand nights. No one has been able to find Bumpy Toad or his castle ever since.

Mr. Fox saw this as an excellent opportunity to usurp the throne and take over the Shadowland for himself. He conspired with two of the lands inhabitants, the nefarious giants Gristle and Grazzle, to raise an army and capture the king. Using orphan children from the Realm of Flesh as raw materials, they have created the Umpugs. The Umpugs are strange, scrap metal soldiers who do the bidding of Mr. Fox. He sends them about the shadow land, searching for Bumpy Toad. Mr. Fox knows that one day they'll find the king, and when they do, Bumpy Toad will be executed. And because he's such a terrible scoundrel, Mr. Fox will often sends the Umpugs into the Realm of Flesh to gather more children. They are, after all, the main ingredient of Gristle's delectable meat - pies.

ANSWERING THE CALL

The Supplicant is Sarah Mayall, an orphan who makes her home in the filthy, fog-shrouded streets of London. She cannot remember her father, for he abandoned her before she was born. Her mother fell in with gentlemen of questionable character, the consequences of which was the birth of Sarah's baby brother Ryan. A



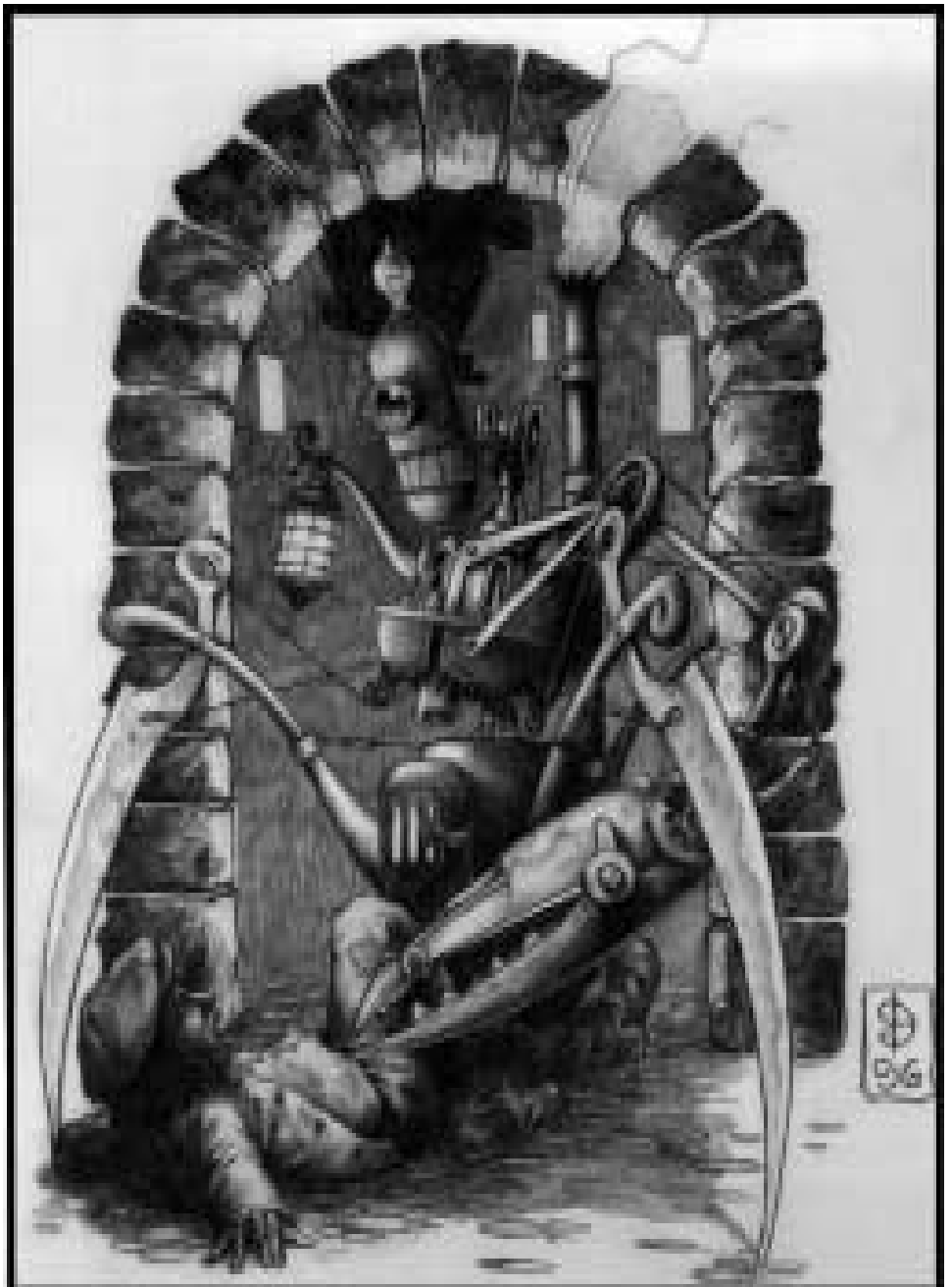
short year later, Sarah's mother died of Consumption. With no other relatives to take care of them, Sarah and her brother joined the already large, rag-tag community of orphans who survive as best they can in a harsh and unforgiving city.

Sarah's an intelligent girl who also possesses a great deal of street-smarts. She takes care of herself and her brother mainly by stealing the food and clothing they need to survive. She is tremendously suspicious of adults, believing them to be cruel, selfish and corrupt. As far as Sarah is concerned, most grown-ups either want to hurt or exploit children, and will go at great lengths to do so. This includes all Authority figures, whose foul clutches she hopes to never fall into. Sarah has been known, however, to accept charity when times were desperate.

The Umpugs have been kidnapping children for several weeks. Most of the orphans have already encountered the Umpugs a number of times. Many of them know someone who was snatched away, never to be heard from again. The children have not turned to the adult community for help because they know that their plight will fall on deaf ears. After all, how could a grown-up understand such things? The orphans do their best to look after each other, but their society is loosely organized at best, and posi-

tively cut throat at worst. This is why none of them have bothered to call for help before. They figure, why should they stick their neck out when no one cares?

Sarah finally decided to call for help after the Umpugs snatched her brother Ryan. An old verse of nonsense came to her tongue, which she repeated over





and over. She cannot remember where she learned the rhyme, but she felt compelled to speak it. The Rhyme is actually a primeval Formal Petition, used by children throughout the Chronosphere when a Stalker's help was needed. Even though Sarah is not an Enlightened Supplicant, she, like all children, had the knowledge of the Rhyme buried deep in her subconscious. The Formal Petition does not summon a particular Stalker, but instead a Stalker deemed most appreciative to the needs of children.

The Circle hears the Call, summons the Navigator, and walks the Winding path as usual. They appear in a dark, deserted alley. There are heaps of rubbish and filth everywhere, and large rats scamper about searching for food. Putrid black smoke pours out of the nearby chimneys. Although it is night, the lights of the city reflect off the clouds, creating a eerie orange glow that hovers above the roof tops. They find Sarah there in the alley, curled into a ball and crying.

Questions and Answers

Sarah won't notice the Stalkers until they try to talk to her. At first, she'll dry her tears and go for the stiff upper lip approach. Initially suspicious of the Circle, she'll tell them she's all right now, and won't they please just let her go. If the Stalker who heard the Formal Petition asks Sarah if she needs help, or mentions the Rhyme, Sarah will burst into tears again, and tell them her brother is missing. After the Circle assures her they want to help, Sarah will confide in the Stalkers. She cannot see through the Veil, but she does sense that these "adults" are different from the others. However, should the Circle take a more aggressive approach, Sarah will be as uncooperative as possible. Eventually, she'll try to run away from the Circle.

Sarah tells the Circle that the Umpugs have been stalking the streets of London, searching for little boys and girls for several weeks. Umpugs all look exactly the same, as if they were produced on an assembly line. A cross between a suit of armor and a stack of cans,

they have short bodies made out of pieces of scrap metal, with joints that bend at the elbows and knees. Their hands are large pincers, and their feet are heavy, cast-iron boots. They have a regular face, consisting of two eyes, a nose and mouth. The eyes are functioning, but the nose and mouth are, of course, strictly for decoration. On top of their head is installed a single red light bulb, that can glow and pulsate menacingly.

The Umpugs toss the children into large potato sacks, and then carry them away through the small, secret doors that are hidden all over the city. Sarah doesn't know what the Umpugs intend to do with the children, but she suspects they are being baked into pies. She has also seen a strange, hooded figure lurking about whenever the Umpugs are conducting one of their raids. She believes this individual to be Mr. Fox, but she cannot be sure. When asked who Mr. Fox is, she replies that Mr. Fox is, quite simply, Mr. Fox. Only the most wickedest animal there ever was.

Afraid of what will happen to her brother Ryan, Sarah asks the Stalker who heard the Formal Petition to solemnly swear to rescue him from the clutches of the nefarious Mr. Fox. Whether she has to cry, beg, throw a tantrum, or even be reasonable, Sarah won't be satisfied until the Stalker promises to return her baby brother, safe and sound. She describes Ryan as a fussy, blue-eyed two year old, who wears a blue coat with large blue buttons, black boots, and a bright red cap. Also, he's very fond of sweets.

Through the Door

At some point, the Circle will probably ask Sarah to see one of the small doors she claims the Umpugs use. She'll lead them to a stack of pungent smelling barrels that have been placed flush against a brick wall. Leaking from the barrels is a foul, red ooze, that looks vaguely like rotting raspberries. Behind the barrels is a very small wooden door. It's about two feet high, hinged, with a tiny knob and keyhole. Anyone peeking through the keyhole will see a glimpse of the Land of



Quay. Strange, grotesque trees with shiny black leaves, and gnarled roots, are peppered around a dingy green meadow.

The door will not open by force. If asked, Sarah will confess that she doesn't know how the Umpugs open the door, but suspects that Mr. Fox may have the key. Any Stalker who tries to open the door with one of their own keys will be successful. The door slowly swings open with a creak, and a gust of wind hits the Circle. Looking up, the Stalkers see a cloudy, and threatening sky. Sarah asks them to remember the oath they've sworn to her, but she will not go with them. It's not safe for children there, she tells them. After the Circle has gone through the door, they see that the other side of the door comes out of a large, gray boulder. The boulder stands at the center of a meadow. The door can be re-opened once again with a Stalker's key, and it leads to the exact same alley the Circle departed from.

THE LAND OF QUAY

The countryside has a distinctly storybook feeling to it. But it is a storybook gone horribly, horribly wrong. Along with the strange trees and meadows, there are other features to the Land of Quay. Dark, murky ponds with decadently colored lily pads. Broken cobble stone walls that jut out of the earth at odd places. Small, creepy looking cottages with fresh blackbird pies cooling on the windowsills. For more atmosphere, the GM could add topiaries cut into fearsome, bizarre animals. Or an old, cracked water fountain, long since out of use, and covered with ivy. Any setting that could have been a innocent place for laughter and merriment, only now twisted and corrupt, would be appropriate.

The inhabitants of the land of Quay are anthropomorphic animals, of varying degrees of temperament. Most of them are belligerent, all of them are crazy, and a select few love to torture and kill things. However, they are not Shadows, or Minions of Bumpy Toad. They

were created by Bumpy Toad to be the citizens of the Land of Quay, and were once human beings. Most of them stand as tall as humans, but some are shorter. There is no trace of their former human identities left in the creatures minds. They all think, and act like people, but they are really talking rabbits, frogs and grasshoppers. Perhaps their insanities are the side-effect from such a traumatic twisting of their persons, but one can never be sure. Also, all of the inhabitants have retained an element of their animal nature. A civilized mouse still craves cheese, a talking bloodhound can still track a scent through a muddy marsh, etc.

These beings can be hurt and killed. Any Stalker who successfully banishes one of these creatures will be surprised to see it disintegrate into a puddle of green goo.

Using the discipline Delve on any of these creatures may not have the effect the Stalker intended. The Stalker must make a Very Hard Willpower challenge to avoid being caught up in the insanity of the warped creatures mind. If they fail the challenge, they will lose a point of Vitality, and also temporarily lose a point of Willpower for d6 hours.

Most Servitors evoked in the Land of Quay will perform their duties appropriately. However, Ferreters, Glamours, Gremlins, Nightwings, and Trackers, will suddenly appear as physical entities. Their forms can be determined by the GM, but these Servitors will not perform their tasks. Instead, they may choose to attack the Stalkers, or have them over for tea, or play a wicked game of cricket, or run away and vanish into a sinister forest.

The Circle has many courses of investigation open to them as they explore the Land of Quay. They can search for Mr. Fox and the Umpugs, or for Bumpy Toad and the Focus that holds the Shadowland together. After the first encounter, the GM has the option of running the rest of the encounters in whatever order she desires.



GREEN THUMBS FOR LUNCH

As the Stalkers wander through the forest, they hear the sounds of a struggle. An Easy Perception roll leads them to the source. The Circle comes to a small cottage, with a stove pipe chimney, and a little hedge that grows around it. The mailbox reads Mr. and Mrs. Mouse. The commotion comes from the backyard, where Mr. Mouse is currently being eaten by one of the enormous Venus flytraps that grows in his garden. There are three flytraps all together, and the Stalkers will see someone struggling in the mouth of the largest. Poor Mr. Mouse has dropped his garden spade, which lies on the grass next to a watering can. The other two flytraps giggle hysterically and nip at each other.

Mrs. Mouse is inside the cottage, in the kitchen. She is baking raspberry tarts, and is lifting a very fresh, fragrant tray of them out of the oven. She seems to be oblivious to her husband's plight. If the Stalkers approach the flytraps, they will be attacked. The flytrap eating Mr. Mouse will not give up its lunch until someone strangles or kills it. If Mrs. Mouse is alerted that her husband is being eaten, she will rush out of the kitchen with a meat cleaver and join the fray. She alone will not be able to defeat the carnivorous brutes.

G I G A N T I C V E N U S F L Y T R A P S

Fortitude	4
Vitality	14
Initiative	12
Defend	13
Perceive	8
Resolve	12

Combat: One nasty bite (Attack 13, 3D Damage) If bite attack is successful, anyone trapped in the mouth suffers an additional 3D chewing damage per turn.

After the treacherous plants have been dealt with, Mr. Mouse will be so grateful he'll invite the Circle in to meet the missus. Mr. and

Mrs. Mouse insist the Stalkers to stay and have a cup of tea. When everyone is settled, Mr. and Mrs. Mouse will chit-chat idly about the weather ("Awful, it was raining clocks the other day, and one of them, a big grandfather clock, beamed Uncle Albert on the head and squashed the poor fellow dead"). The Stalkers will not receive any useful information until they interrupt the Mice and take charge of the conversation.

Mr. and Mrs. Mouse have heard of Mr. Fox, but they recommend avoiding him at all costs. He does eat mice, you know. They also know that Mr. Fox has built an army of metal Umpugs to find King Bumpy Toad and execute him. Both of them will be shocked to learn that the Umpugs have been carrying off little children. According to them, there haven't been any children in the Land of Quay for a very long time.

They inform the Stalkers that no one has seen Bumpy Toad or his castle for a very long time. They know he's suffering from a severe case of melancholia, and they hope that someone may be able to cheer him up. Maybe then they'd have some sunshine, grumbles Mr. Mouse. The only individual they could guess may know the location of the castle is the King's royal physician, Doctor Koko Pembleghast. But, Mr. Fox has recently strung up Dr. Koko Pembleghast and left him to rot in the melon patch. The good Doctor is being punished for "crimes against the state." Mr. and Mrs. Mouse are not sure what exactly he's guilty of, but he must be guilty of something, mustn't he?

At some point during the conversation, Mrs. Mouse will be unable to keep herself from commenting on the Stalker's atrocious table manners. Mr. Mouse will try to apologize for his wife, saying she's a real stickler for etiquette. Eventually, after several small lectures, Mrs. Mouse will attempt to enforce proper behavior by brandishing a meat cleaver and attempting to hack off the Stalker's hands. She'll be subdued by Mr. Mouse, who will suggest the Circle be on their way, and best of luck. If the Circle asks, he'll point them in the direction of the melon patch.



THE THIMBLE AND THE CARP

The spies of Mr. Fox are everywhere in the kingdom, and the GM can assume that they have seen the Circle and already warned Mr. Fox of their appearance. Mr. Fox is well aware of a Circle's power, and has devised a cunning trick to meet them, and hopefully destroy them as well.

While journeying through the woods, the Circle meets an old woman by a strange, dark pond. She calls herself Grandmother Rabbit. She wears eyeglasses and a shawl, and seems very frail. She has a basket of yarn at her side, with two large steel knitting needles jutting out. In fact, she's not Grandmother Rabbit, but Mr. Fox in a clever disguise!

Grandmother Rabbit will tell the Stalkers that she's been knitting by the side of the pond, when she accidentally dropped her thimble in. When they look, the Stalkers see that the pond is very murky and deep, but that they can make out the distinct glint of a metal thimble down below. Grandmother Rabbit will ask very sweetly if one of the Circle could go down there and fetch it for her. Should they balk at her request, she'll chastise them for their rudeness to an old lady, and storm off into the woods. But if they accept, she will shower them with praise and pinched cheeks.

What the Stalkers don't know is that lurking at the bottom of the pond is Old Lantern Jaw, a monstrously large Carp that could have once been a train car. He's extremely hungry, and will attack whoever enters the lake. Whichever Stalker jumps into the pond will have to swim twenty feet to the bottom to rescue the thimble. The water will be green and murky, with tall weeds growing out of the muddy bottom. Once the Stalker picks up the thimble, they must make a Dexterity Challenge versus Old Lantern Jaw's Initiative to avoid being swallowed completely and whole. Those watching from the surface will be able to see their fellow Stalker being devoured, and can jump into the lake to attack.

OLD LANTERN JAW

Fortitude	9
Vitality	18
Initiative	15
Defend	12
Perceive	8
Resolve	12

Combat : Attack 15 .
Old Lantern Jaw swallows his opponents whole. They may accidentally be crushed in his mouth, causing 4D Damage. Those inside Old Lantern Jaw suffer 2D damage per day as they are digested.

In the belly of Old Lantern Jaw there is a little mortal boy named James. He's pale and shivering, and has been inside the gigantic fish for days. There are fierce blisters on his skin, and holes in his trousers from being slowly digested. James will be catatonic until he's been freed from the stomach of Old Lantern Jaw. However, if none of the Stalkers have been swallowed, they will be able to hear faint cries of "help!" coming from inside the creature's body after it is dead.

Mr. Fox will pick an opportune moment, when attention is focused elsewhere, to slip out of the Grandmother Rabbit disguise and sneak away. If the Circle does not let him out of their sight, he'll keep his Grandmother Rabbit disguise on, and feign concern. Grandmother Rabbit will claim she didn't know Old Lantern Jaw was down in the pond. If she's asked about the location of Bumpy Toad, the Castle, Mr. Fox, or Dr. Koko Pembleghast, she will say she doesn't remember exactly, and then point the Circle in the direction of the Well of Sorrows. She will then thank the Circle for retrieving her thimble and head off for home, to enjoy her afternoon cup of tea.

GM Note : If necessary, Mr. Fox will keep up the Grandmother Rabbit ruse for as long as he has too. He doesn't want to expose himself yet, but will look for a moment when he can escape.



Oh James, Poor James

It will take some effort to get James to speak. At first, he asks for something to eat or drink, and then he tells his story. He smells like rotting fish, and is faint throughout his entire exchange with the Stalkers.

James is a ten year old orphan who used to live in the streets of London before he was kidnapped by the Umpugs. They took him, and several other boys and girls, to the house of Gristle and Grazzle. James describes Gristle and Grazzle as two giants, with awful noses and screechy voices. At their house, the boys and girls were given all sorts of sweets and candies and pies and tarts. They all ate until they were sick. After they had their fill, Gristle and Grazzle suddenly locked them in a cold, dark pantry. Over the next few days, they would take out one boy or girl at a time, and leave the rest in confinement.

Frightful and wide-eyed, James recalls hearing the screams of his fellow children, and a hideous grinding sound, like bones being ground into paste. He also recalls smelling the wonderful scent of meat-pies cooking in the stove, but he doesn't care to think of what's in them. Finally, he and the children who were left made a plan to escape, and the next time Gristle came to the door, they all charged her and ran. As far as James knows, he is the only one who wasn't recaptured by the giants. He was wandering around the Land of Quay, thirsty and starving, when he came to the pond for a drink. And that's when he was eaten by Old Lantern Jaw.

James has never seen Mr. Fox, but he does remember hearing a very sinister and crafty voice that would order Gristle and Grazzle around. The voice would usually tell them to add more spices to the meat-pies. Sometimes the voice would insult them, calling them "pernicious gabble bounders" and the like. He has not seen Sarah's brother Ryan, but has heard a baby crying at their cottage. He doesn't remember where their cottage is exactly located, but when he was fleeing for his life, he does remember

passing a lonely stone well.

After a few questions, James will weakly express his desire to go back home. The Circle will probably notice his ill health, and it shouldn't be too difficult to find the door and return him to the Realm of Flesh. Or, if the GM wishes, James can then dramatically expire right there on the spot.

UMPUG PATROL!

The Circle is bound to run into several of these patrols as they explore the Land of Quay. Seven Umpugs are marching through the woods, overturning rocks, poking around in briar patches, and knocking down trees. As they come across bugs, newts and other creatures, they grab them and examine the animals. The red light bulb on top of their head blinks a few times, and then the animal is crushed, stomped on or eaten. (And always to the pathetic little cries of "no! oh, please! no!")

The Umpug Patrol is out searching for Bumpy Toad. They know what he looks like, but they aren't very intelligent, so they have no clue where he might be hiding. Anyone they encounter is either Bumpy Toad or they're not. Those who are not are killed. Should they see the Stalkers, they will immediately attack. They will do their best to grab the Stalker, squeeze them to death in their mechanical pinchers, or bash them against a rock.

Fortitude	7
Vitality	12
Initiative	9
Defend	13
Perceive	10
Resolve	12

UMPUGS

Combat: Two clawed pincers for hands (Attack 13, 3D Damage each). Target must make a Dexterity Challenge against the

Umpug's attack score or be held fast in its grip. The next turn, the Umpug will automatically smash the target against something hard, causing an additional 3D damage.



When an Umpug reaches zero vitality, the light bulb blinks out, and they fall apart into bits and pieces of scrap metal. If a Stalker manages to smash one of their light bulbs in combat, the Umpug wanders around as though blind. It can still be a menace, however, as it madly crashes into things. Examining the remains of an Umpug will reveal that they are made of hundreds of gears and sprockets. They're central power source is a small, human heart, that is kept in a glass jar with various colored wires running out of it. When the Umpug is destroyed, the heart stops beating. All efforts to communicate with an Umpug will prove futile.

THE MELON PATCH

The good Doctor Koko Pembleghast is the Royal Physician for King Bumpy Toad in name only. In fact, Pembleghast's real job is that of Court Spy. He was on assignment from Bumpy Toad to investigate the appearance of a strange new Shadow in the Land of Quay, the nefarious Mr. Fox. Pembleghast took it upon him self to suggest the mission to Bumpy Toad, and was distressed by his gloomy Lord's initial lack of concern. While on his mission, the agents of Mr. Fox apprehended him first and took him to the cottage of Gristle and Grazzle. Once there, Mr. Fox interrogated and tortured the Doctor, demanding to know the location of Bumpy Toad's hidden castle.

But Pembleghast wouldn't break. Eventually, Mr. Fox decided to have the Doctor strung up like a scarecrow in the Melon Patch, as an example to others. The Doctor himself never knows where the Castle may be located from one day to the next, but has a special, secret way of finding out. In his possession he has a flute, and when the proper tune is played upon it, a Will-O-The-Wisp would appear and guide him to the Castle. Pembleghast swallowed the flute so it wouldn't fall into the paws of Mr. Fox. However, the flute cannot pass through his stomach and is causing him an immense amount of pain.

The Melon Patch is a hideous, overgrown place. Black vines, covered with sharp thorns, pour out of the earth. Along the vines grow dark, purple melons, of various shapes and sizes. Cutting open a melon releases an awful stench, and the fruit appears pulpy and inedible. The melon seeds explode if bitten, causing no significant damage but making a loud noise that will certainly shock the offending herbivore.

Doctor Koko Pembleghast is located in the center of the patch, still hung up like a scarecrow. He's been dressed in gaudy clothes, and wears a large top hat. The Doctor appears to be a very dead monkey. Guarding Pembleghast are two inky black Magpies. They are regular bird size, and are perched on his shoulder. The Magpies are trying to eat the Doctor's ears. When the Circle approaches, the Magpies will demand to know who goes there. Whoever it is, they aren't authorized to be in the Melon Patch.

The Magpies will tell the Stalkers not to take another step, or if they do, they'll be in big trouble. The two sneaky birds are bluffing, trying to figure out a way to save their skins. They'll come up with all sorts of outrageous lies to keep the Circle from coming any closer. Eventually, they'll flee, and report back to Mr. Fox what they've seen.

Pembleghast has not passed away yet, but he's close. At death's door, he will try to enlist the Stalkers to his cause, to save Bumpy Toad and the Land of Quay from the evil Mr. Fox. When he sees the Stalkers, he swears that they have already been to Quay once before. It seems that a group very similar to the Circle once had an audience with King Bumpy Toad a long time ago. Whatever transpired at that meeting was the cause of the King's descent into melancholia, but Pembleghast doesn't know what it was. He has no idea that Bumpy Toad is an Unbidden, or that he lives in a Shadowland.

He can explain to them that recently, a usurper to the throne has appeared, and is organizing an army to take over. He tells the Circle about how he was captured by Mr. Fox, tortured, and left in the Melon Patch



to die. He fears that the King is so distracted, he cannot recognize that his kingdom is being threatened. He begs the Stalkers to meet with Bumpy Toad and lead a counterattack against Mr. Fox. The Doctor tells them about the flute he's swallowed, and how to use it to find the king. In order to find the castle, the Stalkers will have to cut open Dr. Pembleghast, and pull the flute from his stomach. Then, they must play exactly, note by note, a song that he hums for them. However uncertain the Circle feels about doing this, Pembleghast is ready to die for his beloved homeland.

Following the Will-O-The-Wisp

The Stalker who elects to use the flute must make an Average Awareness Challenge to correctly play the song. After the song's been played, a Rekir Noch (*Dangerous Prey*, pg. 55) appears, glowing with a scarlet red luminescence. This Shadow has been bound by Bumpy Toad, but not husked, and serves as a guide to the King's castle.

The Circle follows the Will-O-The-Wisp for what seems like forever. They pass through many strange places, full of bizarre landmarks. At the GM's discretion, they may even pass by the Well of Sorrows. The Rekir Noch darts madly, stopping for nothing. Eventually it leads the Circle up the side of a small mountain, to the entrance of a dark cave.

THE PALACE OF KING BUMPY TOAD

The entrance into the mountain cave is a narrow gash in the jagged rocks. Once through, the cave wall slopes steeply downward. The cave is an enormous cavern that holds an underground lake. Here, scores of Will-O-The-Wisps flutter about. When the Circle appears, the Rekir Nochs all light up in unison. The Stalkers are able to see that at the center of the lake

there is a magnificent Palace, with many turrets and spires that reach up to the stalactites. The Palace looks very regal, but also whimsical and strange. It's painted in a variety of garish and clashing colors. Oranges, purples, and greens assault the eyes.

The lake is unfathomably deep, and full of lily-pads. After their encounter with Old Lantern Jaw, the Circle should probably be hesitant about jumping into any lakes. The water is the darkest shade of black, and casts no reflections. Should anyone attempt to swim to the Palace, they will instead find themselves sinking rapidly into nothingness. That unfortunate person will continue sinking until they are driven insane. They will suffer the loss of one point of vitality per turn until they make a Hard Willpower Challenge, which is required to swim back up to the surface and to tread water.

A ferryman, Mr. Frog, approaches the party on a gondola. Mr. Frog is King Bumpy Toad's personal valet, cook, and handyman. (*Use secondary character template WV rules pg. 118*) He will politely instruct the Circle to board the gondola, so that he may take them to meet the King. Once they are safely aboard and sailing towards the castle, Mr. Frog very smugly delivers a long lecture to them on the proper ways to speak to his Royal Majesty. Invent whatever bizarre greeting rituals you wish, as long as they are steeped in mock formality. As they get closer to the Palace, Stalkers passing a Routine Awareness Challenge notice that there is no activity going on inside, as if the Palace was deserted.

Before they reach the Royal shores, Mr. Frog asks the Circle what gifts they have brought for his Majesty. If they do not produce appropriate presents quickly, Mr. Frog indignantly turns the gondola around and heads back. Bumpy Toad prefers his subjects to give him strange and outlandish toys. Anything too practical will be frowned upon, and Mr. Frog will throw the offending gifts into the lake. If the Circle's presents pass inspection, they will be lead to the entrance of the castle.



King Bumpy Toad

From the outside, the castle seems to be overcrowded with rooms. However, once the Stalkers are inside, there seems to be only one - the King's audience chamber. The chamber is a round room, with a fantastic mural painted on the ceiling of stars, planets and comets. The floor is covered with red and black squares in a checkerboard pattern. Hundreds of shelves full of thousands of toys and books run from one end of the room to the other. This is the Lair of the Unbidden, his royal majesty King Bumpy Toad.

Mr. Frog produces a trumpet and announces Bumpy Toad. The Architect appears, looking distracted and depressed. For Bumpy Toad, life has become unbearable. Long ago, after the sentencing, he decided to turn his back on everything he once held dear. He won't lift a finger to defend himself, preferring to either waste away or be destroyed. Anything to break the terrible monotony of his miserable existence. No matter how wonderful the gifts the Circle has brought, the King will be annoyed with them. He'll explain that's he's already been sentenced once, and sees no reason why he should be sentenced again. Bumpy Toad feels he's done nothing to deserve further punishment, but has resigned himself to probably being cast into the Vault. He'll inquire hopefully if the Stalkers are going to allow children to come back to the Land of Quay.

Being forlorn for so long, Bumpy Toad hasn't even noticed that his trusted court spy, Dr. Pembleghast, has never returned. After the Circle has explained to Bumpy Toad the fate of his Court Spy, and the strange goings on in the Land of Quay, the melancholy King will

only shrug. Without the presence of children, the Land of Quay has become a dreadful prison for him, and he cares not what happens to it. He's known for some time that Mr. Fox has crashed his domain, and has been build-





ing an army to destroy him. Bumpy Toad will hint that he also knows where Mr. Fox is hiding, and how he moves from the Shadowland to the Realm of Flesh. But, being totally uncooperative, he will not volunteer that information to the Stalkers.

Bumpy Toad will eventually get bored with the conversation and refuse to speak in anything but blunt and belligerent quips. There is only one subject that will get his attention. Should the Stalkers tell Bumpy Toad that Mr. Fox is hurting children, the King will at first be skeptical. But if the Stalkers have physical evidence, or make a particularly stirring speech about the evils of Mr. Fox, Bumpy Toad will fly off in a rage. He honestly did not know that Mr. Fox was kidnapping mortal children and eating them. He'll demand the Stalkers do something to stop the evil Shadow.

He suspects that Mr. Fox is in possession of the Touchstone he created long ago and gave to an orphan thrall. He also suspects that Mr. Fox has teamed up with two of the Lands monstrous citizens, the giants Gristle and Grazzle. The King will offer to point the Circle in the direction of the giant's house. Bumpy Toad will not go with the Circle, preferring to remain in the safety of the palace walls. Although he doesn't mention it, he is also afraid that someone may try to steal the Focus or Mend the Enigma while he was away. Bumpy Toad will do his best to convince the Circle that Mr. Fox is the culprit they want, and not himself. He'll urge the Stalkers to Banish him, as well as Gristle and Grazzle. Graciously, he'll also offer to look after any children that may have been abducted by Mr. Fox.

There are several ways the Circle can choose to deal with Bumpy Toad. If they take him on in a fight, he'll put up no physical resistance. He'll protest, but will eventually let himself be bound. They may then wander about the palace until they locate the Focus of the Enigma. The Focus is kept in a small room, not more than four feet high, and full of miniature furniture. On a small table, there is a spread for afternoon tea. Several one-eyed dolls, and battered teddy bears

are seated around the table. Small portraits hang on the walls depicting Bumpy Toad. The Enigma is a miniature teapot, that when turned, will pour out a liquid composed of tiny, shimmering stars.

After the Enigma is mended, the Touchstone belonging to Mr. Fox will be destroyed. The Circle can summon the Navigator and return to the Realm of Essence. The Land of Quay will continue to exist as a Shadowland, and Mr. Fox and the mortal children he kidnapped will be trapped there forever.

Or, if the Circle agrees to spare Bumpy Toad, he will tell them how to reach the headquarters of Mr. Fox. He tells them to look for a secret door that's hidden in the Well of Sorrows. The door is so secret, not even Mr. Fox knows of it's existence. Bumpy Toad tells them the door will lead them into the cottage of Gristle and Grazzle.

Bumpy Toad will take the Circle to a small door, located somewhere in the castle. The door opens out into a dark forest. In the distance, the Well of Sorrows can be seen. The Stalkers pass through the door, and find themselves outdoors, and far away from the palace.

THE WELL OF SORROWS

The Well of Sorrows is actually an oubliette. Bumpy Toad created the well as a prison for any wayward Shadows that stumbled into the Land of Quay. Currently, Gristle and Grazzle use the well to dump the inedible parts of the orphan children (usually the tongue and the feet). Dwelling at the bottom of the Well are two Lirik Wyches. Their job is to eat anyone or anything that's been thrown into the oubliette. The infrequency of their meals as driven them insane. The Gluttons names are Rawhead and Bloodybones.

Stalkers passing an Average Awareness check will notice wheelbarrow tracks around the Well, as well as dried up gore. Slime, gore and ooze line the inside walls of the Well, and anyone looking directly into the well will be assaulted by a powerful stench. Rawhead and Bloodybones have a very keen sense of smell, and will



pick up the Stalker's scents almost immediately.

These two Gluttons are capable of the Shadow power Mimicry. They use the power to call out to whoever is standing above the Well to "come down and play with us". The other phrase they know is "we won't hurt you, we love you." Rawhead and Bloodybones will repeat these phrases over and over, believing themselves to be very crafty.

The Well shaft goes straight down for twenty feet. The bottom of the well is a square-shaped dungeon, made of heavy stone blocks. The stench down here is almost unbearable, and the floor is stained with blood and ichor. Rawhead and Bloodybones haven't eaten for over a day, and will attempt to eat the first thing that comes down the shaft. (*Use the basic statistics on pg. 67 of Dangerous Prey*). Because of their weakened condition, however, they have Fortitude scores of 7 and Resolve scores of 10.

After the Shadows have been dealt with, the Stalkers will have more time to look around the oubliette. Climbing back up the shaft to escape requires a Very Hard Strength challenge. Those who fail lose their grip in the slime and fall back to the bottom. On the ground there is a wooden board, and several feet away a brass doorknob. If the wooden board is placed up against one of the walls, and the doorknob attached to it, it will open up into the house of Gristle. Placed on another wall it will open up into the workshop of Grazzle. The GM can choose where the two remaining "doors" will lead to, but it should be someplace ominous and remote, like the Arctic tundra.

FUN HOUSE

Gristle's house is a large, two-story cottage in the woods. Everything in the cottage is giant-sized, from the cozy beds to the porridge bowls. The only rooms of importance on the first floor are the kitchen and the pantry. On the second floor, Mr. Fox keeps a tidy office, full of globes and telescopes. The cottage is warm and pleasant, full of knick-knacks and picture framed

inspirational quotes, like "don't eat your mommy tomorrow when you can eat her today". The Stalkers can even make out the smell of fresh baked meat-pies.

The children are kept in a closet that is directly underneath the staircase. It is a small, cramped space, and there are twelve little boys or girls crunched up like sardines inside. They are pale and shivering, and most of them are in shock. They are waiting for Gristle to come and eat them. Sarah's brother Ryan is not among them. One of the children will tell the Circle that they saw Ryan with Mr. Fox.

Gristle is in the kitchen, grinding up a very bad boy in a gigantic meat grinder. She pushes the screaming boy into the grinder with one hand, while the other turns the large crank around and around. Bloody pink ground

Fortitude	7
Vitality	20
Initiative	12
Defend	12
Perceive	14
Resolve	15

up little boy meat comes out of the bottom of the grinder. Gristle is a very large woman with an enormous, hooked nose, arched brows, and a severely pointed chin. She wears an apron to keep the all blood off her nice dress. She'll tell the orphan to stop squirming and hold still, he's only making it hard for himself.

GRISTLE

Combat : With fists (Attack 14, 4D Damage) or with gigantic improvised weapon (Attack 15, 6D Damage with -1 die cap penalty)

Fresh baked little boy and girl pies are out cooling on the windowsill. Lots of kitchen equipment is scattered about, including many large and nasty utensils. There is a large bowl set aside that holds only the children's' plump little hearts. When Gristle sees the Stalkers, she'll scream, and then reach for the nearest meat cleaver. Her scream will be heard by both Grazzle and Mr. Fox. In his workshop, Grazzle will stop tinker-



ing with the Umpugs, and go see what the hell his wife wants. Upstairs in his office, Mr. Fox will have a nice cup of tea while he composes his Last Will and Testament.

During the battle, Gristle will try not only to hack the Stalkers in two, but she'll also try to shove them into the oven. Grazzle will eventually show up holding what looks like an elephant gun. He'll scream at Gristle to get out of the way so he can get a clear shot. Gristle and Grazzle laugh and giggle during the fight, thinking it's the best fun they've had in years. Even when they are dealt the killing blow, they linger around long enough to find their deaths hilarious.

Ankle Bone Connected to the Foot Bone

Grazzle's workshop is a large barn, with double doors on one end that open out onto the yard. The workshop is full of all sorts of junk. Scrap metal, broken bicycles, merry-go-round horses, and other trophies are scattered about. A large flat table stands in the middle of the workshop, where Grazzle builds his monstrosities. There's a large furnace in the shop, along with all the necessary tools for working in metal. Deactivated Umpugs are everywhere, some in bits and pieces. Umpug parts fall out of barrels labeled "arm," "head," and "other". A few active Umpugs walk into walls, or stand around punching each other.

Fortitude	7
Vitality	20
Initiative	13
Defend	12
Perceive	12
Resolve	14

work putting a saw blade on the end of an Umpug's arm. This process involves using a very large hammer, and banging on the Umpug repeatedly. Also on the table, there is a glass jar full of fresh, juicy children's hearts.

Grazzle is a very large man, who looks remarkably similar to his wife. They share the exact same nose, brow, and chin. Grazzle wears a pair of greasy overalls, and a strange, crescent shaped hat. He's hard at

Grazzle

Combat : With fists (Attack 14, 4D Damage) With gigantic improvised weapon (Attack 15, 6D damage with -1 die cap penalty) or with monstrous elephant gun (Attack 14, 5D damage with -1 die cap penalty)

When the Stalkers appear, Grazzle will order his Umpugs to attack. Then ,during the fight, he'll try to throw the Stalkers into the furnace, or grab a part of their body with gigantic pliers and twist it off. The commotion in the workshop will draw the attention of Gristle and Mr. Fox. Upstairs in the office, Mr. Fox will pull out a crisp sheet of paper and start the will. Gristle will grab an immense rolling pin, and rush to help her husband.

All My Worldly Goods

When the Circle arrives, Mr. Fox is up in his office, relaxing. He wears his slippers, smoking jacket, and fez, and smokes his favorite pipe. He was just catching up on the latest edition of "The Shadow's Gazette" when the Stalkers start attacking his minions. Ryan is also in the office. He gleefully rocks back and forth on a wooden rocking horse, wearing the exact same clothes that Sarah described. However, sweet little Ryan has a pair of foxes whiskers growing out from under his nose.

It seems Mr. Fox has always wanted a son to mold and corrupt in his image. Since he cannot reproduce naturally, he decided to kidnap a mortal child and take him someplace where he could twist the boy into a miniature likeness of himself. The warped reality of the Land of Quay was the perfect place to try, and so far, Mr. Fox has had some success. In addition to the fox whiskers, Ryan is also starting to grow a tail. It is probable that he'll soon turn from a human child into a fox child. If that happens, all trace of the old Ryan will be gone.

During the battle with Gristle and Grazzle, Mr. Fox



sets quill to parchment and composes his Last Will and Testament. The Will reads “I, Mr. Fox, being of sound mind and body, do hereby decree that in the event that I am rendered non-corporeal, I do hereby leave all my worldly goods to myself. Said goods will be returned to Mr. Fox when he again Awakens. However, should Mr. Fox be destroyed, or unable to return to the Flesh for a period of time exceeding a millennia, his entire estate will be passed over to his son, the adorable Ryan Fox. Signed, the most honorable Horatio Poombah Fox. Boo hoo hoo, I am dead!”

Being unable to tolerate the loud noises below, Mr. Fox will open the door to his office and shout at the combatants to be quiet. The Stalkers will no doubt hurl themselves upstairs to capture Mr. Fox. Allow them to dramatically burst through the door. Mr. Fox has planned one last game for them and it is about to begin.

London Calling

Mr. Fox cackles when the Circle arrives. Over his shoulder, he’s slung a large burlap sack. Inside the sack squirms Ryan the boy-fox child. Mr. Fox has unlocked a secret door to the Flesh, using the Touchstone key. Before he runs through the door, he draws his saber and challenges the Stalkers to an old-fashioned game of *Catch-Me-If-You-Can*. Then, with a spew of insults and nonsense, he flees into the Realm of Flesh, slamming the door behind him.

Stalkers looking around the office will see Ryan’s little red cap, sitting on the desk next to Mr. Fox’s will. One of the remaining children will creep into the office and ask the Stalkers to take her home. The other children can be heard helping themselves to cookies in the kitchen. The Stalkers can open the door using any their own keys. The door opens up onto the rooftops and chimneys of London. Mr. Fox gleefully leaps from smokestack to smokestack, getting farther and farther away.

The real obstacle for the Stalkers to overcome during the chase is the Forbiddance. Mr. Fox will do whatever he can to force the Circle to reveal themselves.

He’ll leap into crowded markets, and knock over carts and people. Or he’ll scurry down chimney pipes into respectable homes, wreaking havoc in his wake. At some point, he could jump onto the back of a moving carriage, and scare the horses into running themselves ragged. The poor passengers scream for help as the carriage spins wildly out of control through the city streets. Mr. Fox knows he’s in danger, but can’t help himself from having a marvelous time.

Stalkers getting too close could get a taste of his cold saber. Those opponents who aren’t able to spar verbally as well as physically will be dismissed as unworthy. Mr. Fox will also fight dirty, and will use whatever is at hand to slow the Circle down.

Eventually, the Circle will have Mr. Fox surrounded. The crafty Fox will be forced to use the last trick up his sleeve. He’ll retreat to an alley full of children, and use his Shapeshifting ability to blend in with them. Then, he dumps Ryan out of the sack and allows the boy to wander around. Other children in the alley witness these events, but are uncertain of what to do about them.

The Circle arrives at the alley and notices several nervous children. Depending on the Stalker’s attitude, the children may flee from them, believing they are police. If they search among the children for Mr. Fox, they must pass a Hard Insight challenge to spot him. He could be given away by a number of things, including his eyes, or shadow, or teeth. Ryan is found sitting on a crate and sucking his thumb. However, his tail has become fully grown, and in addition to his whiskers, his ears have turned large and fox-like. The boy won’t talk to the Stalkers, and only pouts. Any Stalker who makes a Hard Insight challenge will realize that Ryan is not a fox, but a little boy. And he still wears his blue coat and black boots.

Meanwhile, Mr. Fox will attempt to sneak out of the alley. At this point, the Stalkers could make an Awareness challenge to spot him. Or, at the GM’s discretion, the other children in the alley could notify them. Mr. Fox will throw himself at their mercy, inventing all sorts of sob stories to deter them from destroying him.



He'll confess that he kidnapped Ryan because he wanted to make the boy his son. If the Stalkers insist, he'll also turn over the Touchstone key, begging for leniency.

The Circle can attempt to Banish Mr. Fox. (who suffers a - 3 penalty to his Resolve.) Should they fail, Mr. Fox will valiantly draw his saber and fight them recklessly. When he becomes Formless, he won't stick around any longer, and will flee.

Figuring out what to do with the Touchstone is another problem. It cannot be destroyed by conventional attacks, and Devourers won't eat it. One of the Stalkers, or the entire Circle, could choose to become the guardians of the Touchstone, safely securing it away in their Sanctum or Domain. They could also pass it along to the Guide while returning home in the Navigator. If they have a relationship with the creature, it would be more than happy to hold it for them. Any creative solution is acceptable.

Any children brought back from the Land of Quay will thank the Stalkers with a good handshake, and then scamper off to pick-pocket well-dressed English gentlemen.

Ryan will eventually return to normal, despite Mr. Fox's tinkering. The boy can be tearfully reunited with his sister Sarah, who will tend to him until he's better. Sarah will be eternally grateful to the Stalker that saved her brother. A likeness of that Stalker will later appear in a popular children's book, written by Sarah when she's older, called "The Adventures of Bumpy Toad".



Strange Folks

If the GM desires, the Stalkers can have many more encounters while they are in the Land of Quay. Below are a few suggestions for some of the inhabitants they could meet.

GENERAL BAILEY HOUND AND CORPORAL RANDOLPH MUTT

These two bloodhounds have taken it upon themselves to form their own militia to hunt down Mr. Fox. They both wear elaborately decorated military uniforms, and Corporal Hound carries a large, intimidating blunderbuss. The Corporal suffers from terrible eyesight, however, that doesn't seem to keep the blunderbuss from going off frequently, often blowing up innocent civilians. They'll speak only in military terms, demanding "unconditional surrender" before they "terminate with extreme prejudice".

MAX MONKEY AND THE ALL-MONKEY SUPER-STAR BAND

Max Monkey and his band are a troupe of wandering musicians who play strange songs for impromptu crowds. Their music often lures in all sorts of folks, and when the set is over, Max and his Monkey Band use their instruments to club the spectators to death. Those unfortunate music-lovers are then thrown into a stew pot and cooked with a variety of tangy spices.

MR. PIG AND MR. HOG

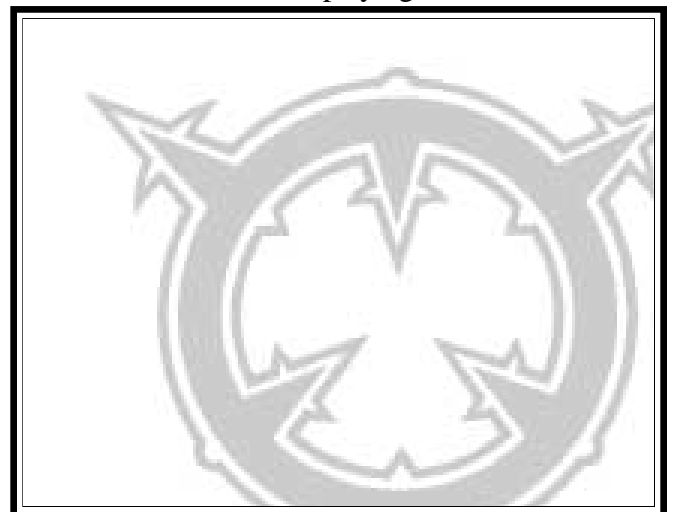
These two porcine gentlemen love to get drunk and then take their motorcar out for a spin. The Circle encounters them after they've accidentally crashed into Mr. Gigantic Dung Beetle. The poor Mr. Dung Beetle is all twisted up under the tires and in the grill on the car, but he is still alive. While Mr. Dung Beetle screams horribly, Mr. Pig and Mr. Hog are trying to remove him, piece by piece, from their car using a large mallet and a hack saw. Mr. Dung Beetle will shout for the Stalkers to help him from being dismembered.

THE CAROUSEL RIDERS

This elite squad of Umpug soldiers works for Mr. Fox spreading fear and dread through the Land of Quay. They are encountered riding on bizarre, mechanical Carousel horses, who spout flame from their noses and have sharpened steel hooves. They are meaner and tougher than your average Umpug.

THE OLD BLACK GOAT

This NPC can be used in case the plot of the adventure has become seriously derailed, or if the Stalkers just have no clue on where to go or what to do. The Old Black Goat wanders the Land of Quay, challenging its citizens to games of Cards. Anything can be wagered during these games, whether it's information or otherwise. The Old Black Goat is actually another unique Shadow, who was inadvertently trapped in Quay when it became a Shadowland. If the Stalkers challenge him to a game and lose, he will ask to be escorted out of the Land of Quay. He knows where there is a door, and wants the Stalkers to open it so he can leave. Should the Stalkers challenge him to a game and win, the Old Black Goat will live up to the wager as best he can. (He won't take the Stalkers to Bumpy Toad, but will tell them where to find Pembleghast, etc.) The GM should use their discretion when playing this NPC.





BUMPY TOAD

Fortitude	5 / 6
Vitality	15 / 18
Initiative	12 / 14
Defend	15 / 15
Perceive	13 / 13
Resolve	17 / 15

Bumpy Toad has a very unusual imagination for an Unbidden. He doesn't wish to harm anyone, and takes pleasure in playing harmless games with Mortal children. Bumpy Toad managed to become an Architect by keeping a low profile. While he was in the Flesh,

many of his thralls were children. Upon establishing a Life Link with the Focus, Bumpy Toad was able to use it to shape and create a new world, the Land of Quay.

COMBAT (Vessel)
Unarmed (Attack 13, 3D Damage)

COMBAT (Avatar)
An enormous tongue used to quickly slam opponents (Attack 16, 4D Damage)

SPECIAL ABILTIES
Majesty (master), Parasite, Summoner, Sculptor

Sculptor
An Unbidden only learns this Power after they have established a Life Link with the Focus. This power allows the renegade to somewhat control the way the Enigma corrupts the Dream. Anything existing in the corrupted area can be twisted to whatever the Unbidden desires. Houses can become monsters, people can become cars, etc.

AVERSIONS
Responsibility, exploitation, plain old reality

FETISHES
Collects a vast amount of toys and children's books. Lampoons "proper" Royal behavior.

IDIOSYNCRASIES
Everyone is to be spoken to as if they were a ten year old child. Also, he sometimes talks only in Nonsense, expecting people to understand him

MR. HORATIO POOMBAH FOX

Fortitude	6
Vitality	24
Initiative	14
Defend	14
Perceive	18
Resolve	18

For as long as there have been children, there has been Mr. Fox. This crafty Shadow was Awakened so long ago, the exact details of the incident remain clouded in mystery. Mr. Fox delights in leading children astray, to make them perform actions they

would never do in their right minds, to cause trouble, to hurt people, and ultimately to hurt themselves. Foolish children from all over the Chronosphere have fallen victim to Mr. Fox's machinations. Even though they seem to know better, and even when it's against their parents wishes, Mr. Fox is able to convince children to break the rules. Many a disaster follows suit. Mr. Fox has also been known to eat children as well.

Mr. Fox behaves like a perfect gentlemen, and pretends to have respect for polite society and all it's rules. In fact, he's a shiftless, amoral rascal who will cheat and kill whenever he desires. Contracts, bargains and vows mean nothing to him, and he'll break them as quickly as he can. Mr. Fox has a strange and macabre sense of humor, and finds the

elaborate traps he sets for children to be hilarious. There's nothing funnier than a orphan being worked to death in the salt mines.

After a few thousand years, Mr. Fox decided he wanted to have a child of his own, not to torture, but to pass on all his wonderful tricks and cunning plans. However, none of the mortal children he choose lasted very long, either falling prey to Mr. Fox's dangerous whims, or dying horribly during a training accident. Until he stumbled onto the Land of Quay, Mr. Fox was sure that he would never be able to have a son that was truly his own.

COMBAT
Mr. Fox prefers to avoid combat, but when he's forced to fight, he uses his saber with amazing skill. Mr. Fox has imbued the saber with some of his Essence. (Attack 15, 4D damage)

SPECIAL ABILITIES
Mr. Fox posses the Unbidden ability Shapeshifter. He usually uses this ability when he wants to pass among children unnoticed by adults.

VULNERABILITIES
Mr. Fox has a aversion towards water and will actually suffer 3D damage if submersed or struck with a substantial quantity of it.



A THOUSAND POUNDS OF FLESH

by Brian E. Kirby

Dry Gulch
July 9, 1870

Dear Isabelle,

I know its been a long spell since I last wrote. You know I'm not one for words, but what with all the queer things happening around here I figured I needed your help. You know from your visit after Jude's death that the railroad men have decided not to bring the rails near Dry Gulch. The mines seem to be drying up too.

Since people heard the news, many of them have up and left, moving on to some of the new towns promising fame and fortune. The five o'clock stage had been empty on coming and full on leaving almost every day up until a few months ago. Now people are just plain disappearing.

Being sheriff and all, I expect a certain amount of lawlessness. It seems to arrive with people heading west. They spend most of their life buttoned up and proper. Sometimes they want to cut loose a bit. Nothing wrong with that. But sometimes things go a little too far. Someone gets liquored up, says something they shouldn't, soon you got trouble. Most times people can work it out. Other times, someone gets hurt. Or dead. It happens. Doesn't take a genius to put the pieces together afterwards. After all, you see a corpse, you can be pretty sure you're gonna find somebody holding a smoking six-iron. Lately, Isabelle, it ain't been like that at all.

It ain't always easy to keep track of everybody in a town like Dry Gulch, what with people always getting on and off the stage. Some of them stay in town a spell, others head on out the next day. I always check up on those I think are gonna be a problem, and put them out of my mind after they traveled on. So when I started hearing word that some of the passers through were disappearing I had trouble checking on the stories. It

was only when some of the folks I knew started going missing that I knew for sure that there was a problem. Then I started finding bodies.

Isabelle, I thought I saw the worst things a man could do when I was fighting in the war. But I ain't never seen the likes of this. These bodies were stripped of their skin, lying in positions that no man could make without breaking every bone in his body. The damndest thing was, these bodies had no bones. It was like something had reached right into their bodies and taken them all out, then thrown away the rest in a heap. Worse still, their skin was gone. Even the Doc here can't figure out what happened. People are starting to say that the devil walks at night here in Dry Gulch. Not in my town he don't.

Folks outside have found out about the vanishings and even the stage has stopped coming here. If I weren't sheriff, I might leave with all the goings on. But things don't seem to bother the folks who have stayed behind. In fact it is like nothing is happening at all.

I know what I am about to tell you may sound damn crazy, but I swear to you its all true. Three weeks ago I was attacked by a lion. Now I ain't seen all the territory but I know for damn sure that there ain't no lions here. I captured another animal last week. Didn't know what it was until I found a drawing of it in a book. They call it a hyena. Book says they live in Africa. Fact is that now I got cages out back of the jail filled with the most peculiar beasts you ever seen. None of the folks even bat an eye about any of this either. That got me worried too.

Isabelle, this is why I need your help. You know that man from the Pinkerton Agency. I was thinking you could ask him to send some men out here to check things out. I here told they are the best there is. This letter may come to you too late, but I got to try.

*Love, your brother,
Roy*



BACKSTORY

The disappearances in town marked the arrival of the Unbidden Tchgronothan into the Realm of Flesh. Before he left the Realm of Essence, Tchgronothan had been in charge of augmenting human reflexes during moments of extreme stress, which was eventually rationalized by science as a surge in adrenaline. He had initially become obsessed with human behavior during the American Civil War. He watched with fascination as flesh was punctured by speeding lead, cut off by doctors seeking to preserve the rest of the body, and shrunk to fit the emaciated frames of the starving masses at Andersonville. The more it observed the ever-renewing substance, the more its desire grew. Finally, Tchgronothan left his post with lust in his heart and crossed over the Rift into the Arizona Territory of 1870.

Overcome by hunger, he initially paid no mind to the screams of the Fleshy creatures he slaughtered. As his hunger became less pronounced and his feedings less frequent, Tchgronothan became intrigued by the pained screams and pleadings his victims bombarded him with during the last few moments of their lives. Able to exercise more restraint, he would draw the process out in order to observe it more closely. While he believes that the information he is gathering will be of use at some point, he is too befuddled by hunger to understand how. For now he is primarily interested in the flesh.

Tchgronothan's *modus operandi* is to immobilize his victim, and then break most of their bones to facilitate removal. He does this by creating several precise incisions in the victim's feet, hands, and chest. He devours the bones immediately, and then carefully skins his prey. If possible, he tries to keep the unfortunate alive during the entire process, but not many survive past the first stage due to internal hemorrhaging. The rest of the flesh is taken back to his lair, located several miles outside of town in the surrounding foothills. The Enigma was initially only focused there, but has gradu-

ally spread to Corrupt all of Dry Gulch and the surrounding region.

Tchgronothan is an unusual Beast for a couple of reasons. First, he has mastered his hunger enough to approach his feeding with a certain animal cunning. He has not been foolish enough to simply walk into Dry Gulch and start feeding but has stuck to the hills and attacked small parties. More importantly, Tchgronothan has an intuitive understanding of the Enigma he created, although he isn't consciously aware of it. Unlike most Unbidden in the Beast stage, Tchgronothan stayed near the Enigma and even formed a lair at the center of the Corruption. This early attunement to the Enigma allowed him to create a Life Link (*see WV, page 99*) to the Focus. Although not able to manipulate the Enigma in the way an Architect could, Tchgronothan has been able to influence it via his subconscious will. The effects on the residents of Dry Gulch have been startling.

For starters the Enigma sapped all desire for the residents to leave town. It also infused them with an obsession for flesh that has become more and more twisted as the Enigma has gained strength. This obsession almost always manifests as tactile by nature, causing the obsessed to try to be in contact with flesh other than their own as much as possible. The means to obtain this are several, from the common outlets of sex and violence, to more socially unacceptable options as torture and cannibalism. As time wore on, however, the lines between acceptable and unacceptable became blurred. Now, violent deaths during sex are commonplace, and brawls don't stop unless one combatant or the other collapses from lack of blood. Due to the effects of the Life Link, the people of Dry Gulch have in many ways been acting out the desires of Tchgronothan. Although they cannot stop themselves from pursuing these fleshy passions, there is a strange awareness amongst the townsfolk that



their actions somehow serve a being with an even greater hunger. Due to the Enigma, this seems perfectly normal to them, but Stalkers confronted with mobs chanting “Feed the beast” may become more than a little concerned.

If the minds of the people of Dry Gulch have been affected, so too have their bodies. The Enigma has been gradually transforming the populace in a most unpleasant way. The townsfolk are literally turning into animals, albeit slowly. While victims of this transmogrification initially hid themselves away and operated only under cover of darkness, they now move about openly. Thus, it is not unusual to see a man with fangs and the arm of a bear, or a woman with lizard skin and a forked tongue. Everyone in the town is affected either with the obsession for flesh or the beginning signs of transformation, and usually both.

Unbeknownst to the denizens of Dry Gulch (and the Stalkers), on the other side of the foothills reside a tribe of Apache. While they have been relatively untouched by the Enigma, several members of the tribe have fallen prey to the beast in recent months, and they are now forming a war party.

THE GRAVEYARD: ANSWERING THE CALL

When Sheriff Roy McCallister left for the Arizona territory, he thought he had a pretty good shot at the good life. A veteran of the Civil War, Roy had little trouble finding work as a Sheriff and his precious wife Jude was a great comfort to him. Things went sour for him a year ago when Jude died. Since then he’s been going through the motions of life, but the truth is that he lost a lot of himself when Jude passed on.

He used to visit Jude’s grave once and awhile usually to give her flowers, sometimes just to let her know how much he missed her. He sat down in the dirt and talked, sometimes just for a minute or so, but other times, when he was feeling low, for the better part of the day. Lately, he’s been at the grave almost every day, but he’s pretty sure today will be the last time.

“Jude,” he says to her gravestone, “*I don’t know what’s goin’ on down here, but if I don’t get me some help, we may together again real soon. I used to think that would scare me, but it don’t no more. I just want this all to end.*”

Sheriff McCallister intended his last monologue to be for his departed wife, but it is the Stalkers who hear him. They call the Navigator and walk the Winding Path as usual. Arriving in early afternoon, the Stalkers find themselves in a dusty old graveyard. Roy sits a dozen feet away, staring intently at a gravestone. Since no one else is about, it should be readily apparent that he is the Supplicant.

The graveyard is located on a hill about half a mile out of Dry Gulch. From the look of the place, not many people have been up here lately. Most of the graves are somewhat overgrown, and a few of the dozen or so grave markers that are contained in the fenced-in area have





fallen over. The one exception is Jude McCallister's site, which Roy has kept quite well-tended. Any Stalker who checks will note that Jude was born in 1835 and died in 1869.

Roy will be lost in his thoughts until the Circle calls attention to itself. He will dust his legs off with his hat, take a long look at them, and proclaim, "*You must be them boys from back east. Didn't 'spect ya to git here so soon. Welcum to Dry Gulch.*"

A TRIP TO THE ZOO

Roy begins walking down the path that leads back to town and at first he is silent. When questioned, he says, "*Well, I'm tryin' to figure out how to tell you about what's been goin' on without you thinkin' I been standin' out here in the sun too long.*"

However, it takes but little prodding to get Roy talking, and soon he starts to talk about recent events in his drawling, no-bones-about-it way.

Roy believes that the Circle are Pinkerton men sent by his sister. He is more than willing to tell the Stalkers anything he knows. He explains about the sudden disappearances, going into gruesome detail about the state of the retrieved bodies. He is at a loss as to who or what could have done this, since there were no bullet holes or claw marks on any of the victims. He lost count of the number of people killed at about "two score."

The path the Circle is being led down leads to the back of Roy's office. As they get closer to it, the Stalkers notice about a

dozen wooden cages of various sizes scattered along the path ahead of them. The cages are full of animals, which become agitated as the Stalkers approach. There are two hyenas, a Kodiak bear, an African lion, several wolves, and an Awakened Orratt (*see Dangerous Prey, page 70*). Roy informs the Stalkers about the sudden infusion of wildlife around the town, and explains that this seemed to be the only logical solution. The animals are fed leftovers from the Saloon in town. Roy is planning on contacting the circus to donate the animals, if he can manage to get through his present trouble. It is evident to the Stalkers that some of the animals are not native to the United States. The Orratt was Awakened because of the sheer number of animals that were showing up in the region, and had been trying to protect them until it was captured. The Shadow recognizes the

ROY MCCALLISTER

Fortitude	5
Vitality	12
Initiative	13
Defend	14
Perceive	15
Resolve	9
Attack	13
Strength	2

Standing around 5'7", in his mid-40's, Roy is a man who seems shaped by his environment. He saw only limited action in the Civil War due to his age, but he saw enough to make him want to emigrate to the west after it was finished. His combat experience was more than enough to get him the job of Sheriff in the then-booming town of Dry Gulch. Five years exposure to the western sun and wind have left wrinkles in his face, making his penetrating stare even more imposing.

Despite his age, Roy's tenure as Sheriff has kept him in very good shape. He is quite resilient (for a human), and has reflexes of a man half his age. And although he claims to be a simple man with limited knowledge, he is quite intelligent. Until the Enigma began spreading over Dry Gulch, he was just as good as talking a man down as shooting him.

Had events not taken a turn toward the macabre, it is quite possible that he would have eventually picked up the pieces of his life that were shattered by his wife's death. He would have immersed himself in his work, and eventually the pain would have gone away. As it is, he feels that he has lost all control over his town, and his hope has gone with it. This is the reason the Enigma has not twisted his emotions like the rest of the denizens of Dry Gulch—he is no longer in touch with them because he no longer has any desire to live.



Stalkers as creatures of Essence, but can provide little help. Its knowledge is pretty much limited to the animals and it does not realize that these animals are in fact humans transformed by the Enigma.

Before Roy and the Stalkers enter the Sheriff's office, they begin to hear loud shrieks of pain coming from inside. If the Circle has stopped to interrogate the Orratt, this should happen at a point when the dialogue seems to be slowing down (which shouldn't take long). If not, then it should occur when they are about 50 yards away. Roy will immediately draw his gun and sprint into the office. Presumably, the Stalkers will follow. If not, they will hear Roy yell, "*Oh godammit, no! No, no!*" This should get them moving.

THE SHERIFF S OFFICE

The office is a very modest affair, with only two rooms. The main room consists of the jail cell and the Sheriff's desk. A side door leads to the Sheriff's personal quarters, which are sparsely furnished with a bed, night stand, and dresser.

Although the two prisoners were both entirely human when Roy left to visit the graveyard this morning, one of them has begun to transform into an alligator. The visible parts of his body are covered in green/gray scales, the beginnings of a full-fledged tail have ripped through the back of his pants, and his mouth has become a long snout filled with teeth. At the moment he is using those teeth to tear into the flesh of his unfortunate cell-mate's shoulder, shaking him back and forth in order to rip it off. When Roy yells, the alligator-man turns toward him, some flesh still hanging in his mouth. He then quickly turns and clamps down on his victim's neck, piercing the jugular and sending blood gushing over the cell. The other man's screams turn into gurgles. Roy unloads his gun into the alligator-man, killing him.

The Sheriff unlocks the cell and checks on the prisoners, but they are both already dead. Roy sits down on the cot dejectedly. "*What would cause a man to do that? Dammit, I was gonna let them both out tonight.*

All they had to do was wait a few more hours. It's gettin' so I can't even keep the peace in my own jail." He doesn't comment on the fact that one of his prisoners was turning into a reptile, nor does he even seem to notice it, even if the Stalkers point it out to him. After a moment, he gets off the cot and starts arranging the bodies for the undertaker.

"*Well, looks like I'm gonna have to see if Brent can make time for another two,*" Roy says. He then tells the Stalkers that they should see about getting themselves set up at Madame Belmont's hotel. Taking another glance at the Circle, he adds, "*But it looks like you fellas travel pretty light.*" If the players do not want to leave, he will insist, since there is not much they can do here right now.

Before the Circle leaves Roy's office, he shares one last bit of information. He mentions that most of the bodies have been found in the foothills east of town, and that he is planning on getting together a posse "*a few hours before dusk to see if we can stir something up,*" and that the Stalkers can join him if they wish. In the meantime, he encourages them to settle in and do some snooping around the town. "*You boys are the experts,*" drawls Roy, "*maybe ya'll notice somethin' 'round here that I missed. Way my lucks been goin', the posse probably won't find anythin' anyway.*"

DRY GULCH

If you've ever watch a typical western film, then you probably already know Dry Gulch. Consisting entirely of one street, it is indistinguishable from any other of the hundreds of towns of that era that sprung up around coach stops. There are horse hitchers (but few horses) in front of every building, as well as wooden elevated sidewalks. The ambient noise is limited to a weak but persistent wind, occasional gunshots, animal noises, and distant screams. Feel free to throw in some tumbleweeds where appropriate.

The only buildings of the town where there are people with whom the players can interact besides the



Sheriff's office are the hotel, the saloon, the undertaker's, and the general store. There are several private homes on the street, but most of them are abandoned (it's difficult to interact with flesh if you're alone), or their inhabitants do not want visitors. If the Stalkers decide to investigate these homes, they will probably find some half-mad person slowly transforming into some unsavory animal (badger, zebra, etc.). These encounters should be played up for the maximum gross-out factor. The person may be living in their own feces, subsisting off their own flesh, or any other repulsive idea that pops into your head. Some may try to kill the Stalkers, others worship them like gods.

The Stalkers are pretty much at liberty to do as they like during their stay. Keep in mind, however, that since the Sheriff doesn't think tonight's posse will turn up anything useful, he will leave town without the Circle. It is okay for this to happen. Upon reading what happens to the posse without the Stalkers assistance, you may not even give the Circle the option, making sure the posse is gone no matter what time the Stalkers check back in.

All of the people that the Stalkers interact with should be assumed to have Minor Character Statistics (*WV*, page 118). If you feel the circumstances warrant it—the character is insane with rage or transformed into a particularly nasty animal for instance—you may use the Secondary Character Template. But no human, transmogrified or not, should ever be a match for a Stalker.

Madame Belmont's Hotel

As with all the major encounter areas in Dry Gulch, there is a large sign over the entryway. Two swinging doors lead into a rather dusty lobby. There are a couple of tables with accompanying chairs, but the only person in the room is a woman behind the front desk, Madame Belmont herself.

Madame Marie Belmont is an attractive woman in her early 30's. As the Stalkers enter, she is sitting on a high stool fanning herself. She wears only a negligee, which is half undone. Her long brown hair is falling out of the bun that looks like it was only made half-heartedly to begin with. She is also entering the first stage of transformation into a cat. The only sign of this so far has been the growth of six additional nipples that have formed along her torso that are slowly being surrounded by fur. While her establishment was once simply a hotel, it now doubles as a brothel, with the Madame satisfying most of the sexual urges of her patrons herself. The mere arrival of the Circle has



aroused her (they are fresh meat, in her mind), and she will be unable to stop herself from gently tweaking one of her new nipples during the course of conversation. Any player who makes more than a casual glance will notice the aroused nipple. This will most likely win them a lascivious grin from Marie.

"My, my, my," she says as the Circle walks to the desk, *"ya'll have to be the best lookin' things that have come through these parts since I don't know when. Will ya'll be needin' rooms or did you want... somethin' else?"* Marie does not have much to offer the Stalkers other than her insatiable lust. She is quite aware of her transformation, and has seen a number of the residents of the town pass through similar changes over the last few weeks. She is not disturbed by her change. On the contrary, she finds it extremely exciting.

Madame Belmont can provide some scattered information on some of the residents of Dry Gulch [*"I understand that some of the people Brent's been takin' care of have been goin' into the ground with a lot less parts than when they died," or, "If you're looking for a good fight, you might want to try the saloon."*]. If possible, she will try to get one of the Stalkers alone, in order to *"tell 'em somethin' in private,"* and then attempt to seduce them.

If the Circle does decide to get rooms, Madame Belmont takes the appropriate number of keys and leads the Stalkers up the stairs to the second floor, which consists entirely of a dozen rooms for guests. As they walk down the hall, the Stalkers hear quite clearly hear the sounds of pain mixed with pleasure coming from one of the guest rooms. The moans and grunts grow steadily louder and then stop suddenly. If the Stalkers attempt to get in the room, they find the door locked. If they then break the door down, the Stalkers find two men in the room. One man is lying face down on the bed with a sheet over the lower half of his body. There is a large patch of blood soaking through the sheet, and it is growing larger as they watch. His partner is sitting on the floor in a corner of the room, wearing only a pair of underwear. There is a large patch of blood on them as

well. Should the Stalkers attempt to question him, the man will behave as if he is coming out of a trance, and will be practically incapable of coherent speech. The one word that the Stalkers should hear loud enough is "Tchgronothan," which is spoken in a tone of awed reverence.

By the time the Stalkers get to their room, Madame Belmont is practically beside herself with arousal. Once she is certain that they are satisfied with their room(s), she will linger a moment longer, as if trying to think of a pretense to stay. She then gets a far-off look in her eyes and asks, *"Did he send you?"* Like all the Dry Gulch folk, she doesn't know who "he" is, but hopes that the Stalkers do. She's sure "he" could provide her with the experience she craves.

If the Stalkers are not forthcoming with information about "him," she assumes that they've been sent by the Beast for her amusement. This arouses her to no end. She will then go from one Stalker to another, seeing if any of them have any interest in her. At any sign of interest (real or imagined) that a Stalker displays, she will proudly show them her "special modifications." The lucky character will notice that she has pinched herself so much that she has started to bleed. She does not seem to notice. She will not leave the Stalkers alone until they forcibly remove her. This will convince her that they are simply teasing her, and she will attempt different tactics of seduction (waiting in their rooms, trying to kiss them, etc.) whenever they are in the hotel.

The Saloon

The sign above the swinging doors on the outside simply states "Saloon." As with many similar establishments, there is a good deal of noise emanating from within. Inside, nothing seems out of the ordinary. There are at least 30 people scattered about at the bar and various tables. Most of them are engaged in conversation with their fellow patrons, others are playing poker or gathered around the piano player in the back. There are four doors in the back of the saloon. Two of them



are lavatories, one is the saloon owner's private quarters, and the other opens to a set of stairs leading down into the basement.

Attending to the patrons behind the bar is Jed Ellis. Jed is a very amiable type who is being transformed into an ant. He has a third, insect-like arm coming out of his side that he casually uses to ring up a sale while he is serving. If he speaks to the Stalkers, at some point during his monologue he gets a pained expression on his face, he scratches at his forehead, and a single antennae forces its way through his skull with an audible ripping sound. Most of the other patrons sitting at the bar are being transformed into anteaters, who are constantly scrunched over so that their proboscises rests in their drink. No one seems to mind the Stalkers, and everyone appears quite friendly. You may want this to be the first place the Circle visits because, on the surface, it seems normal. As normal as Dry Gulch gets anyway.

Jed and most of the other patrons are quite aware of their slow transformation, and while most people would prefer to pretend that it wasn't happening, Jed is eager to talk about it. You see, he's got this theory, which he will explain with greater and greater intensity until he is overcome with emotion. *"The lord isn't exactly happy with the way humans turned out. We're not the fastest animals, or the strongest, or the largest. We're just sort of right in the middle. So, he's decided to send a messenger, right? And this guy, he's seein' how he can make us better. Maybe replacin' a leg here, addin' some teeth, makin' us better than we ever were. And at some point, he's gonna come across the perfect combination. Y'see, it's like this, we're just all sort of a grand experiment for the lord. The flesh is weak, y'know? It needs...it needs to be removed. But...but...it has to be preserved. Can't throw it away. Keep it. Oh, but it's hard. It...it tastes so good. And the way it rips...oh, oh, it's soft, but it tears away real nice. And the blood. It pools into your mouth as you take a bite...so sweet...so sweet...so sweet."* At this point, Jed is over-

come with emotion and can not continue, and he turns away from the Stalkers, throwing his arms around his face. After a minute, however, he turns back to his patrons as though nothing has happened. He will not remember anything he has said. Other than his little monologue, Jed doesn't have much to offer the Stalkers, other than rumors. If anyone mentions the Sheriff, he remarks, *"That man is dead already."* The rest of the people at the bar, because of the state of their transformation, will be unable to speak at all. Instead they will be capable only of letting out a high-pitched whine that may be words, but is totally indecipherable.

At some point during the Stalker's visit to the saloon, two men playing poker will get into an argument over some petty affair which quickly escalates until the two stand up from the table and start yelling into each other's faces. One of the men will say, *"That's it. I'm callin' you out."* and a cheer will come up from the crowd. Everyone in the saloon will then quickly rush down the stairs into the basement, with the exception of Jed and the people sitting at the bar.

Halfway down, the wood steps change to rough stone. The stairs appear to lead outside, passing underneath an arch framed by two large trees that have somehow started to grow into each other like a pair of Siamese twins. The trees are on top of what seems to be a hill looking down into a small valley. The townsfolk walk calmly down the hill into the valley and gather around a glowing green circle. Any Stalker making a Hard Perception challenge will notice a cave set into the rocks of a hill opposite where they entered. Should the Circle try to climb up to the cave, they will run into an unseen wall. The entire setting is an illusion, as they really are still in the basement of the saloon.

From somewhere a faint pounding begins. The two men both draw two knives and launch themselves at each other. At first they are subtle, moving in quickly, cutting, then attempting to dance out of the way of the return blow. With every cut there is a cheer from the crowd, and the green glow shines brighter as the blood



strikes the ground. After several exchanges, both men are bleeding from multiple cuts, and the pounding has grown louder. The men are starting to get slower as their wounds accumulate, and the blows become more fierce. One man takes a blow in the shoulder, the other a deep cut in the back. And then, one of them feints with one knife, and cuts out his opponent's eye with the other. A roar goes up from the crowd, a deep, feral, guttural roar. Everyone stares as the battle reaches its climax. The man who lost his eye is reeling in pain, and his opponent moves in, cutting almost at will. He slashes at one-eye's legs until he falls to his knees, then he begins working on the torso, then the face. As the pounding becomes thunderingly loud, melding with the noise of the crowd, he raises both knives over his head, and drives them one each into his opponent's ears, killing him. The crowd falls absolutely silent as the loser wavers a moment, and then falls onto his side. Then there is a cry of victory, and they surge in, quickly obscuring the corpse. The Stalkers, however, should be quite able to hear them tearing the body to pieces. In a few moments they are done, but instead of blood, all of the patrons are bathed with the green glow.

Slowly, as if in a trance, they walk out of the valley and



back up the stairs into the saloon. No trace of the body remains.

If the Circle attempts to intervene, there will be a cry from the crowd that they should “stop interfering.” If they get one of the combatants out of the ring, the crowd will expect one of the Stalkers to take his place. The crowd will turn on the Stalkers if they interfere further, but they will go into the same trance state and leave if anyone is killed. If the Stalkers try to prevent death altogether, someone will yell, “*We must feed the beast.*” The crowd will chant various things like “Feed the Beast” or “Feed him” until they are driven into a frenzy, and they will start attacking each other. Once someone is killed, the hunger will be sated, and they will leave. None of them can remember any of the details of the basement thereafter.

The Undertaker

The lone undertaker of Dry Gulch is Brent Nowell, who has lately developed a taste for the flesh of the people he is supposed to be burying. He has been able to make most people (including Sheriff McCallister) believe that he is so backed up that he can’t build coffins fast enough for all the dead people he’s getting. The truth of the matter is that, while he tries to make sure that everyone is given a proper burial, it’s becoming harder and harder not to take a few bites. It all tastes so good that he can’t make himself put it in the ground. Only when the flesh is so rancid that it is completely inedible will he force himself to bury them. As it is, he’s developed quite a backlog. He has also developed whiskers, and two small paws for hands. Brent Nowell is turning into a rat.

There are only two rooms in the building, the front reception area, and the rear work area. The Stalkers will notice a subtle rotting smell as soon as they enter. There is no one in the front room, but the door to the back is slightly ajar. The back room is totally dark, the way Brent prefers it. The stench in the back is almost

overpowering. Brent will not appear unless the Stalkers go into the back room and call for him repeatedly. He is in the midst of dining on someone’s arm at the moment and would much rather eat than talk. If the Stalkers do manage to get him to respond, he will not have anything to tell them, and will try to get them out of the building if possible. If the Stalkers mention the dead men in Sheriff McCallister’s cell, he comments, “*How unfortunate.*” However, if the Stalkers can see him, they notice that he is beginning to drool. If the Circle questions him for more than a few minutes, Brent will grow more and more agitated, and his attempts to get them out will become increasingly obvious. Finally, he will yell, “*Leave me alone!*” and dive under a loose floorboard. Should the Stalker investigate it, they will find an intricate series of tunnels underneath that are impossible to navigate through. If any character were to physically restrain him, Brent will squeal and shake violently, completely taken over by his animal nature.

Should the Stalkers check any of the coffins in the work area, they will find them all to be stuffed with body parts in no discernible order. Most of the parts have been mutilated, and some have obvious human-sized bite marks.

The General Store

The proprietor of the general store is Max Desiss. When the Stalkers enter, Max is in the back room. He appears shortly, summoned by the bell attached to the door. He looks like a typical shopkeeper, except that he is sweating profusely. Friendly and gregarious, Max tries to interest the Stalkers in his goods. He gladly goes through the items that he has for sale, but his primary selling point for any item is how it can be used to injure people. For instance, lanterns can be used to set people on fire, you can smash someone over the head with an iron pan, etc. What Max is most interested in selling, however, are specimens from his large collection of blades. He takes great pains to go over the different



types he has. Some are better for filleting, some for stabbing, others for hacking. His personal favorite is a large machete, which he presents as his piece de resistance. He fondles it lovingly as he talks, and as he goes onto other subjects, he unconsciously uses it to slice off pieces of his skin. Any Stalker who notices this (an Easy Perception task) also notices that he is showing the physical signs of sexual arousal. Other than his rather singular interest in his goods, Max knows little of the recent events in town, claiming that he has pretty much been occupied with the upkeep of the store. The rather dusty conditions of the room belies his claim.

The back room of the store is Max's own private torture center. He has set up a rack, an iron maiden, and various whips and pokers. Close examination of any of the devices will reveal that they have been modified so that they can be operated by the person being tortured. Most of them are blood-stained.

Also in the room is an Unawakened Thritch Kalvarr. The Pain Mother has been driving Max to further and further deviant acts, feeding on his mixture of agony and ecstasy. She is aware of Tchgronothan, but she has stayed well away from him, afraid that he will keep her away from her observations. She knows the general direction of beast's lair (the foothills east of the town), but she is unsure how far away he is exactly. She will practically beg the Stalkers to let her continue her observations, and will only tell them the location of Tchgronothan's lair if they agree to let her stay.

THE POSSE

At a few hours before sunset (around 7 p.m.), Sheriff McCallister has gathered up his posse of fifteen men and is set to leave town. Most of the people he has gathered have come from the Saloon. If that is the third or fourth place the Stalkers visit, they will notice several people leaving at about 6:45. There are also a few people who have come out of their homes, but not many. Most

of the posse is only going because they believe there will be killing done, and they are all carrying numerous weapons. Somebody has brought horses for the entire group. Roy will wait a few minutes to see if the Stalkers are going to show up, but he won't send anyone to get them. At about ten minutes after the hour, the posse sets out.

An hour later, the posse is deep into the foothills to the east of town when they find themselves surrounded by the Apache war party. Both sides suspect the other of being the cause of all the recent troubles, and if the Circle is not there to set things straight, Roy will be unable to keep them from attacking each other. The result is a slaughter. Only Roy and one other man make it back into town, while the Apache, lacking the firepower of the posse, are all killed or severely injured.

The Stalkers can catch up to the posse and avert disaster if they have the foresight to ask someone in the saloon where Roy went, otherwise they will have to wait for his return. The Circle finds him the following morning in his office, bandaging himself. He recounts last night's events in detail, and insists on traveling with the Stalkers should they decide to visit the scene. At the massacre site, they will find that Tchgronothan has paid a visit to the battlefield in their absence, removing the skin and bones of the bodies in his usual way. The only living survivor is Proud Hawk, an Apache warrior who was leading the war party. Proud Hawk has been driven to the brink of insanity by what he witnessed during the night and will die of shock and blood loss if not cared for.

If the Stalkers do accompany the posse, and avert disaster with the Apaches, they will have quite a formidable force. In either case, the Circle should recognize the two intertwined trees on a hill in the distance. The hill overlooks the valley the Stalkers saw during the saloon fight. If they climb up the other side of the valley, they should have no difficulty finding the cave.



TCHGRONOTHAN S LAIR

There are two Bakracai (*Dangerous Prey*, page 59) hidden inside the entrance to the cave. Awakened by the massive bloodletting of Tchgronothan, these two Shadows have taken it upon themselves to aid the renegade Beast. The longer Tchgronothan survives, the longer the Bakracai can feed. With this in mind, they wait until half of the party is inside and then attack. If the posse and the war party are with them, the Stalkers will have to make an effort to keep the majority of them from being killed outright. At some point, Roy should get a “lucky shot,” and hit one of the Bakracai, perhaps even providing the killing blow. You may want to point out to the Stalkers how difficult a task this is for a mortal.

Once the Shadows have been dealt with, the party is free to walk deeper into the lair. It continues back for quite a while, and then begins to head down. A green glow (exactly like the one seen in the basement under the Saloon) assures that there is enough light for everyone to see the horrors within.

After they have traveled a few minutes, the Circle should begin to hear what sounds like running water. Soon after, they will find its source. The rock walls of the passage have been completely covered with flesh of Tchgronothan’s victims. The sound they hear is not water, but blood that Tchgronothan is pumping through the cave in order to keep the flesh from drying. Unfortunately, the skin coverings are much more porous than previously, and blood is dripping out in little rivulets from the walls and the ceiling. A channel has been cut in the floor so that the blood can run back to be used again. If the humans are present, some of them will begin vomiting, others will refuse to continue, and others will flee outright. Most of the Apache will carry on, wanting the abomination against nature to be destroyed.

A hundred yards further in, the passage widens and enters a large room. There are two items immediately

of note. One is a very complex machine made of human bones that Tchgronothan has built to re-circulate the blood throughout the cave. The other is Tchgronothan itself.

Tchgronothan’s Vessel is repulsive to behold. Once the body of a traveling salesman, it has been bloated almost beyond recognition. Tchgronothan now appears as an enormous man with a bald head and a burning stare. The body, engorged by his constant feeding, bulges inhumanly and has been restrained by chains and leather straps. Undigested fragments of bone protrude from his distended stomach and fresh human meat hangs from hooks on his restraints. When the Stalker’s enter, Tchgronothan is enjoying a snack, most likely a member of the posse or the Apache war party. He does

T CHGRONOTHAN

Fortitude	3 / 7	COMBAT (Vessel)
Vitality	30 / 18	Unarmed (Attack 9, 3D Damage)
Initiative	8 / 15	COMBAT (Avatar)
Defend	8 / 14	Unarmed (Attack 17, 7D Damage, 2 attacks)
Perceive	9 / 17	
Resolve	14 / 20	

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Once Tchgronothan has taken enough damage that his Vessel is about to be destroyed, his remaining flesh explodes in a ten yard radius. This should be treated as the Shred discipline. He has also mastered the Animate ability, and will use it to attack with the bone apparatus that recycles the blood.

As noted earlier, he is Life Linked to the Focus. This has already been included in his stats.

AVERSIONS

Flame.

FETISHES

Tchgronothan is completely obsessed with acquiring and absorbing flesh.

IDIOSYNCRASIES

Will attack anyone who is damaging the flesh he has placed on the walls without personal regard.



not like to be disturbed while feeding.

Tchgronothan, of course, is a Beast. More philosophical Stalkers may want to talk with him and try to get him to surrender. This course of action is futile. Tchgronothan can talk, but only talks of his obsession. He responds to questions by relating everything to flesh. To him, of course, everything does relate to flesh, so this is hardly surprising. The Stalkers should quickly get the idea that they're going to have to bind him. His Vessel at least is slow, although it can take a great deal of damage before exploding.

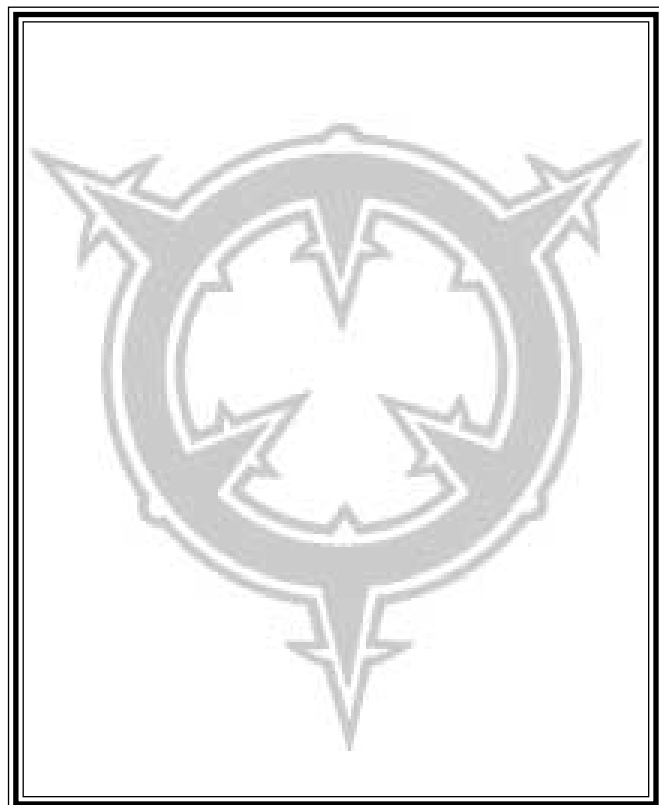
Tchgronothan's Avatar is a round sphere with no face and four arms that end in sharp claws. When it is revealed, the sphere will start to spin, and he will try to hit with two claws at once. If he succeeds, the target suffers an additional 2D damage. He has grown quite fond of his lair, and will not allow the Stalkers to destroy it without being Bound first. Any of the mortals not killed in the first round must make a Hard Resolve check or they will flee. Roy will automatically make his check, and will try to assist as best he can. After the Avatar is revealed, however, he will be unable to help.

Mending the Enigma

Once Tchgronothan has been dealt with, the Stalkers can take a better look around the room. The bone pumping system is truly a warped marvel and it's a wonder that Tchgronothan remained lucid long enough to construct it. More importantly, the Stalkers now notice a pedestal in the back of the cave. This lovingly crafted centerpiece is constructed entirely of the severed fingers of Tchgronothan victims. On top of the pedestal, supported by five upright and stiff fingers, is Roy's wedding ring, the Focus of the Enigma. If the Stalkers do not realize its true nature right away, they should be able to guess when Roy runs over to retrieve it. With many thanks to God, Roy tries to slip it on his finger, but drops it when it sears his flesh. The ring then starts to bleed. Close examination of it will reveal that it seems to be engraved with the contorted figures of the people Tchgronothan has slain.

The Stalkers should now try to Mend the Enigma. If Roy believes the Stalkers are going to destroy his ring, he will have to be physically restrained before they can do their work. Once the Enigma has been Mended, he will ask for the ring back. He then looks at the Circle closely and asks, "You boys ain't from back east, are ya?" Roy, whose had enough of the town of Dry Gulch, asks that the Stalkers take him with them, wherever they are going. He knows nothing of where they're from or what they do, but that doesn't concern him. "There's nothin' left for me in these parts anymore," he says. "I reckon the town needs to get itself a Sheriff who's a tad younger. It's time for me to move along." If the Stalkers desire, they can recruit Roy into their Circle.

Whether or not Roy joins the Circle, the Stalkers can now call the Navigator and take Tchgronothan to the Whispering Vault. His time in the Flesh has ended. Dry Gulch eventually recovers from the effects of the Enigma but is then done in by the Trans-Continental Railroad. No one said the Dream was fair.





THE SWORD OF ALLAH

by Chris Pramas

Jalal lay in the medical bay, his unblinking eyes staring at the ceiling. He had been unable to sleep since he came back from the Other Side. Visions of his journey danced through his mind, and he shuddered. How could he tell the his superiors on Earth what he had seen? Who would believe him? Likely they would lock him away with the criminal and the insane. It could be worse, he reflected. He might never have made it back to normal space at all.

As he lay there, Jalal began to hear voices coming from down the hall. It was the two doctors of the station and they seemed to be discussing his case. Jalal listened intently, trying to learn of his fate. He could not catch most conversation, but when they stopped in front of the door, it opened soundlessly and he could hear them all too well. "He most certainly will have to go back," said Doctor Rima. She and her assistant walked

into the room, briefly checked on Jalal, and then left through another door.

Jalal bolted upright. The words of Dr. Rima echoed in his skull, smashing down the last vestiges of his sanity. "He most certainly will have to go back." Go back, were they crazed? Did they have any idea what he had seen on the Other Side. "He most certainly will have to go back." He only barely made it to the station the first time. He had done his duty and this was his repayment? "He most certainly will have to go back." This must be punishment, punishment for not finding what They thought he should find. "He most certainly will have to go back." No, he would never go back. Never. He had paid in blood. Now it was their turn.

Jalal got up and walked over to the operating table. He picked up a scalpel and stalked out of the medical bay...Now they would pay.

The Sword of Allah is a rather atypical adventure for the Whispering Vault. There is no Unbidden and very little combat. The Enigma was caused by an experimental spaceship and not the insane lusts of an otherworldly creature. The adventure is suitable for any Circle, as long as your players understand that not all Enigmas are caused by the Unbidden. The challenge here is not to find and kill the beastie, but rather to piece together what caused the Enigma and figure out how to mend it. Here's hoping the Stalkers bring their brains along.

BACKSTORY

The Five Pillars is a deep space station far from Earth. It was constructed some 45 years ago to study its closest neighbor, a black hole called the Eye of God. After gathering a great deal of data, the scientists of the

Five Pillars decided to embark on a daring enterprise. They would construct a manned probe to travel through a black hole and return with data on the other side. This ambitious project consumed the station for nearly twenty years, but finally the probe was ready. A brave young astronaut named Jalal volunteered for the historic mission. Finally, the probe, dubbed the Sword of Allah, was catapulted through the Eye of God.

Jalal and the Sword of Allah were gone for over a week. Just when the scientists were giving up hope, the ship reappeared and auto docked at the station. They found Jalal inside, still alive but obviously traumatized by his experience. He babbled about a strange reality dominated by an titanic being and swarming with hundreds of creatures that defied description. Dr. Rima sedated him and brought him to the medical bay, where she treated some strange wounds of unknown origin. When Jalal was awake,



TIME AND PLACE: DEEP SPACE, THE FAR
FUTURE.

The Sword of Allah takes place in the far reaches of space on a station near a black hole. The time is left deliberately vague because it is not our desire to map out a codified future for the Whispering Vault universe. That we leave to the individual GM, so they can create interesting futuristic scenarios of their own. All the players need to know is that technology is highly advanced and that mankind has conquered the stars. If your players insist on pressing you for details, have fun deciding why everyone on the station is a Muslim.

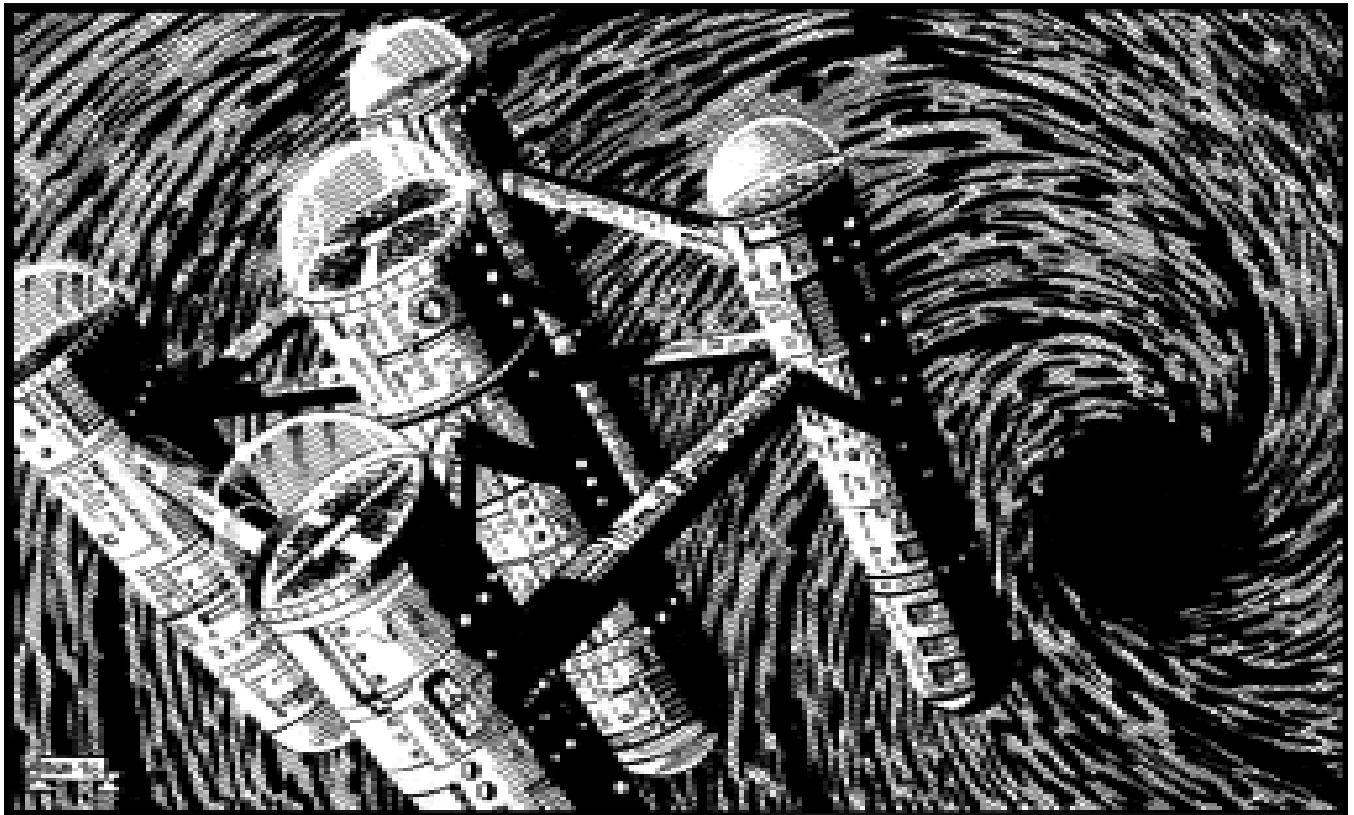
Dr. Rima and her assistant tried to talk him through the experience but he would always break down and then lapse into silence. Eventually, they decided that he needed treatment by psychological specialists and determined to send him back to Earth.

Unfortunately, Jalal overheard one of the conversa-

tions between Dr. Rima and her assistant. The only sentence he heard clearly, however, was Dr. Rima saying, "He most certainly will have to go back." She, of course, was referring to sending Jalal back to Earth, but Jalal became convinced that they meant to send him back through the black hole. His mind, already teetering on the edge, snapped and he decided that the staff of the Five Pillars had it out for him and he must kill them all to protect himself.

Jalal took a large scalpel and went to command and control. He killed the officers on duty and then shut down the Artificial Intelligence that ran the station. The station, now operating only on emergency power, was plunged into near darkness. Jalal prowled the ship, guided by the running lights in the corridor, and began to murder the crew one by one. Unbeknownst to him, he was aided by a Sloth that had recently awakened in the computer lab.

What Jalal and the scientists couldn't know is that





his journey through the Eye of God had created an Enigma. Black holes in general were still only dimly understood. As it turned out, this particular one was a sort of back door into the Realm of Essence. It lead to a rather strange domain, which acted as a prison for a extremely powerful being of the Essence. The Sword of Allah, by making its journey, had opened the back door, allowing this being to begin to creep into the Realm of Flesh. This created the Enigma which is currently corrupting the area.

Meanwhile, Jalal continues his deadly work.

ANSWERING THE CALL

The call comes from Khadija, one of the station's technicians. She was eating when Ali, the Artificial Intelligence, was shut down and the station went to emergency power. She tried to make her way to the Power Center to turn on the reactor manually. When she reached Operations, she found the bridge crew had been horribly slain. She looked in other parts of the station and did not find anyone left alive. In a panic, Khadija tried to return to her quarters to lock herself in. As she hurries through the station, she whispers a prayer to Allah. This is the call:

"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds: The Beneficent, the Merciful: Owner of the Day of Judgment. Thee alone we worship; Thee alone we ask for help. Show us the straight path: The path of those whom Thou hast favored; Not of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.

"Allah, I ask you now for help. I feel a great evil is loose on the station. The commander and Dr. Rima are both dead, Jalal is missing, and Ali has been shut down. Allah, Beneficent and Merciful, I ask you to show me the path. Help me defeat this evil and I will not go astray."

Although Khadija's prayer was certainly heartfelt, it could not save her. Jalal caught her in the crew's common area (Level 2A; *see map*) as she was nearing her

quarters and hacked her to pieces with a cleaver. When the Stalkers appear in the Realm of Flesh, they find themselves in the common area. The room is only dimly illuminated, but the Stalkers can see Khadija's body on the floor in a widening pool of blood. Her arm lies a few feet away. Half-eaten trays of food, spattered with Khadija's blood, lie on some of the tables.

Khadija is quite dead. Stalkers who have Mastered Delve can read her mind. Unfortunately, she doesn't know much. She knows that the power went out without warning and then the killing began. She was attacked suddenly by a savage figure she could not identify. In her mind, she was murdered by some kind of wild beast. If this convinces the Stalkers that their prey is an Unbidden, so much the better.

Stalkers who use Trackers are lead directly to the Sloth in the Computer Center. Interestingly, if the Stalkers use Trackers after the Sloth has been dealt with, the Trackers fly out to the Black Hole where the being is coming through. *This is a Big Clue.*

On the Prowl

The Stalkers at this point will have very little idea what's going on. They probably believe that they are hunting an Unbidden in the Beast stage. They have little choice but to explore the station, looking for their prey and hopefully for clues as well. Although they might not realize that they are on a space station at first, it should become clear the first time they see a view port. Be sure to describe the swirling mass of the black hole to them, emphasizing its size and nearness.

The next section provides details of the Five Pillars and is keyed to the map.

THE FIVE PILLARS

The Five Pillars has a literal and figurative meaning. Literally, it is constructed of five round pillars connected by passageways. There is one central pillar surrounded by four tertiary pillars. Figuratively, the station is named for



the Islamic Five Pillars of Observance (*Repetition of the Creed, Prayer, Charity, Fasting, and Pilgrimage*). Each pillar of the station is named for one of the Islamic Pillars. The space dock, for instance, is known as Pilgrimage.

The station is sturdily constructed and has artificial gravity. For safety purposes, all of the station doors are usually kept closed. A proximity detector opens them when someone approaches and then closes them when they are through. The doors are heavy enough to seal off each section of the station should a loss of atmosphere occur. Single person elevators can be found in all of the pillars and provide transport between levels. The main pillar has a diameter of 60 feet, while each of the tertiary pillars has a diameter of 35 feet. The corridors between the pillars are tubular and have a diameter of 10 feet.

Due to the shutdown of the AI, the power at the station is running at emergency levels. This means that most of the station is very dark indeed. The only light is provided by running lights built into the floors. All of the rooms and corridors have them, but they only provide dim illumination. Try to play up the atmosphere of the deserted and dark space station, full of dead bodies and few answers.

Pillar One: The Creed

This is the central pillar of the space station. It has three levels and operates as the command and control center. Four short passages lead from the tertiary pillars to the middle level (Operations) of the Creed. Above each entrance to Pillar One are inscribed the words (in Arabic, of course): “No god but Allah; Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.” This is the creed.

LEVEL 1A: OFFICERS’ QUARTERS

The top level of Pillar One is dedicated to quarters for the officers, Commander Abu Malik and Chief Science Officer Shabaz. These quarters contain the personal effects

of each officer and are decorated in individual styles (Abu Malik’s with very traditional Islamic art, Shabaz’s with African tribal masks). Each also has their own computer and they both kept logs. Patient Stalkers with computer knowledge could find out the general purpose of the station and some specifics of the Sword of Allah by spending some time here, but only after the power has been turned back on. Otherwise, there is little of interest up here.

LEVEL 1B: OPERATIONS

This is the heart of the station and where the commander is to be found most of the time. Passages lead from here to the four other pillars, making it a heavily trafficked area. Advanced navigational and communications systems occupy most of the room, along with a number of computers. A large view port clearly shows the black hole.

Commander Abu Malik and his Communications Officer are both here. Both have been killed and are covered with repeated stab wounds. The Commander still sits in his chair and seems to have been surprised by the attack. The Communications Officer has a knife in her hand and must have put up some kind of fight. Masters of Delve can find out that Jalal came in and attacked them unexpectedly. He produced a scalpel and killed the Commander in his chair, and then fought with and killed the Communications Officer.

LEVEL 1C: POWER CENTER

This entire level houses the reactor that powers the station. It’s not all that large (hey, it’s the future) and is currently running at emergency levels only. A trained technician could juice the power back up manually, but the Stalkers are probably best advised to let it be.

The body of one of the technicians can be found here. He was grabbed from behind and had his head smashed repeatedly into the reactor. He doesn’t know who killed him.



Pillar Two: Prayer

Pillar Two provides quarters for most of the crew, as well as common areas for prayer, eating, and relaxation.

LEVEL 2A: COMMON AREA

The Hunt begins here, where Khadija was murdered. This room has a compact kitchen on one wall and a number of tables and chairs for meals. There is also a lounge area on the other side of the room, with comfortable chairs, a video screen, and stereo. Rolled up mats are piled up on a shelf, as the room is also used for praying.

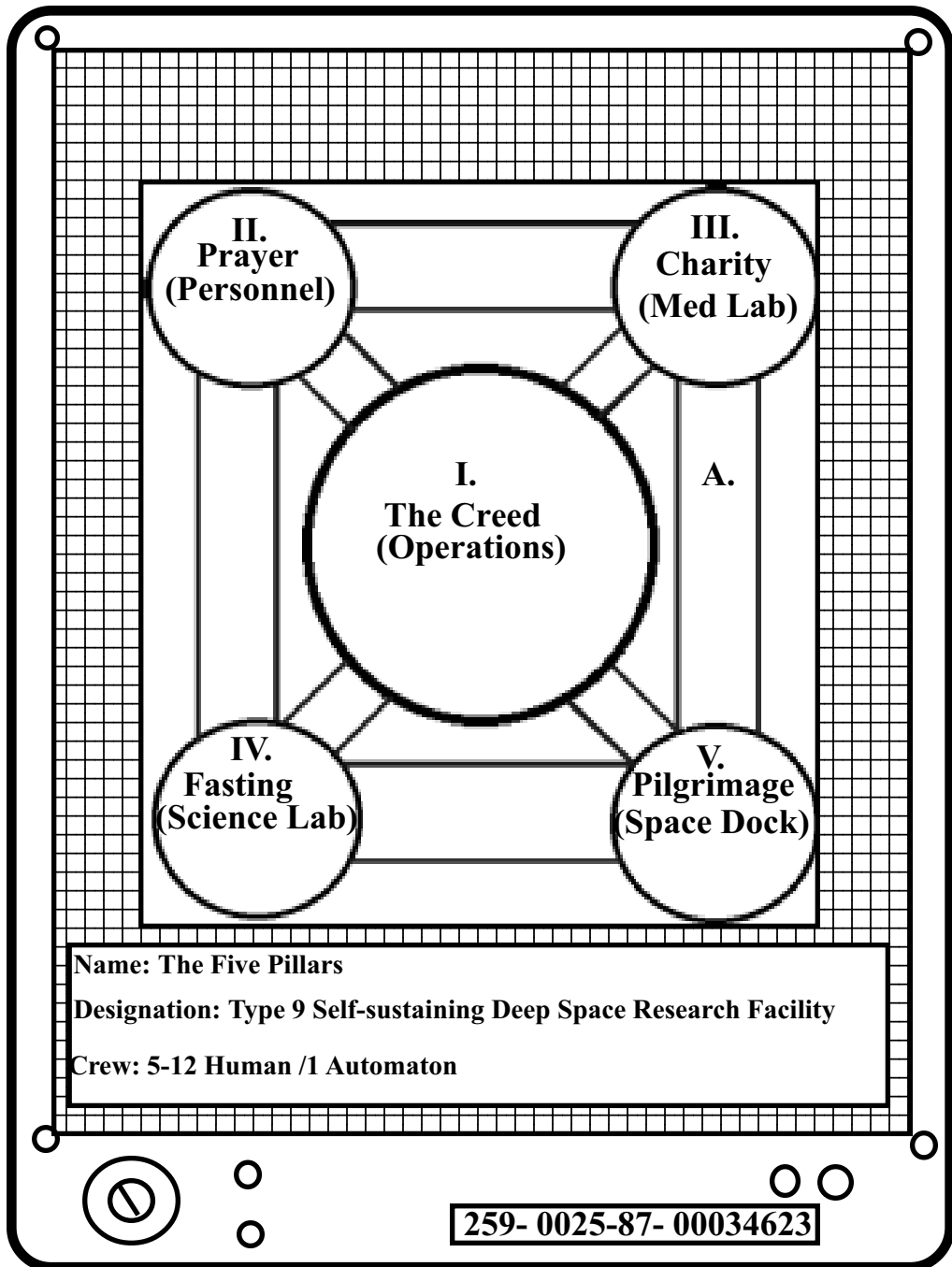
As mentioned earlier, Khadija's body is here.

LEVEL 2B: LIVING QUARTERS

There are two rooms on this level, plus a bathroom. Both rooms are nearly identical. They contain two bunk beds, four lockers and little else. The lockers are full of clothes and personal effects.

Each room also contains a body. Both of them were members of the tech team who were killed by Jalal in their sleep. Their throats were slit with a scalpel as they

slept. Consequently, Delve won't be of much help, since they have no idea what happened to them. You may want to insert memories that give a little history to the station, especially if the Stalkers are having trouble.





Pillar Three: Charity

Pillar Three is the station's medical facility and is the exclusive domain of Dr. Rima.

LEVEL 3A: MED LAB

This is Dr. Rima's clinic. The main room contains an operating table, an examination table, a medical computer, and two cases full of instruments and drugs. A secondary room has two beds for resting patients. The wall that divides the two rooms has a large window so Dr. Rima can watch her patients.

LEVEL 3B: MED STAFF QUARTERS

Dr. Rima and her assistant have quarters under the Med Lab.

Pillar Four: Fasting

Pillar Four is the station's science center. Since most of the research is done here, the place is packed with computers and other high-tech equipment.

LEVEL 4A: OBSERVATORY

It is here that most of the data about the black hole was collected. The room is dominated by a large telescope pointed at the Eye of God. Slumped over a computer counsel is one of Science Officer Shabaz's assistants. He had hooked up this computer to a battery pack and was apparently trying to get the AI back on-line. Unfortunately, Jalal then came to visit and left the scalpel in the back of his neck. If Delved, his mind offers up a memory of trying to get the AI back on-line in the darkness. Jalal then came in and feigned concern just long enough to get behind him. Then pain, shock, surprise, and nothingness.

The telescope is still trained on the black hole. Anyone who looks through it sees a most disturbing sight. Something appears to be coming through the black hole. At first glance it looks like a small planet. A closer inspection shows that the "planet" seems to be gripped

by monstrous fingers. While moving slowly, the planet, and whatever is attached to those fingers, are definitely coming through the black hole and towards the Five Pillars. *Uh, oh...*

LEVEL 4B: COMPUTER CENTER

This room is chock full o' computers, printers, back-up systems, and all kinds of technical goodies. Over forty years of data are stored here in various drives and formats. There are three desks here, each loaded down with equipment. Shabaz and one of his assistants are both sitting unmoving at their desks. They do not react when the Stalkers enter, nor when talked to, yelled at, etc. On closer inspection, the Stalkers can see that they are both completely covered with a dark resin which is as hard as stone. This resin prevents the contact necessary for the use of Delve, so the Stalkers should have no idea what the resin is or where it came from.

In fact, the resin came from a Sloth (*Dangerous Prey*, page 56), which just recently awakened in the computer center. This particular Sloth had been drawn to the space station by the exciting experiments being performed here. When the AI went off-line, the Sloth decided it could help and so Awakened. Once in the Realm of Flesh, it found itself a slow-moving mass of goo, which raised its ire. The Shadow took out its frustration on Shabaz and his assistant. As noted in the description of the Sloth, any attempt to remove the resin results in the death of the victim.

The Sloth is currently under the vacant desk, oozing quietly to itself. Stalkers who make a Perception Challenge of 12 or better spot the Sloth. If it is not Perceived, the Sloth will remain inactive. Should combat ensue, use the stats found in *Dangerous Prey*.

Pillar Five: Pilgrimage

Pillar Five is the station's space dock. The only ship here right now is the Sword of Allah.



LEVEL 5A: STORAGE ROOM

This room is used for storage. It is full of big space crates (you know the kind) that have foodstuffs and technical equipment. There is also a computer console that controls the docking mechanisms below. Passages lead from here to Pillars One, Three, and Four.

LEVEL 5B: AIRLOCK AND DOCK

This room is the airlock. It contains two docking mechanisms, one of which is currently hooked up to the Sword of Allah. Until the AI is put back on-line, the door to the Sword of Allah will not open. Stalkers might try to use Devourers to destroy the door to the ship or Dissipate to go through it, but neither of these tactics

will work due to the bio-organic nature of the Sword of Allah (*see page 70*).

This room is a nice place for an ambush, and Jalal may well try to blow the PC's out the airlock if they tarry here too long.

CORRIDOR LOCATION A

Jalal caught Dr. Rima and her assistant in the corridor between Pillars Three and Five. Their bodies are still there, at least what's left of them. Jalal blamed them, and especially Dr. Rima, for the supposed decision to send him back through the black hole. He knocked them both unconscious with a pipe and then went to work on them with the scalpel. The results are rather grisly. The pipe is next to the bodies, although the scalpel is not. Masters of Delve find the death memory recent and vivid. The leering face of Jalal figures prominently, as does the impact of the pipe. Dr. Rima also has a memory of pulling Jalal's unconscious body out of the Sword of Allah.

THE PLAYERS

There are two important personalities at the station whose positions are not fixed: Jalal and Angel.

Jalal

Jalal is still stalking around the station, trying to figure out what to do now that everyone is dead (or as good as, in the case of the scientists in the Computer Center). The Stalkers should eventually confront him, but make sure not to make their meeting too soon. Let the Stalkers explore the station a bit, pick up some clues, and then spring Jalal on them. Jalal, when he becomes aware that someone is on the station, will assume that the Stalkers are security troops from a





JALAL

Fortitude	3
Vitality	6
Initiative	9
Defend	11
Perceive	12
Resolve	14
Attack	12
Strength	3

Once Jalal was a brilliant and daring astronaut. He volunteered for this dangerous mission because he longed to achieve what no man had ever done before. He returned from his journey with only a tenuous grasp on reality, and that was quickly lost due to his fatal misunderstanding. Now the once articulate astronaut has been reduced to a stalking animal only interested in his own survival.

Jalal is dressed in hospital scrubs that have been slashed and torn. His clothes, hands, and face are all covered with blood, and his eyes are wild and crazed. He still carries the cleaver that he killed Khadija with.

patrol ship and treat them with the utmost of hostility. He's lucid enough to know that no one is going to let him go back to Earth and retire after brutally slaying the crew of the Five Pillars.

At a suitably dramatic moment, have Jalal make his move. He'll try to get the Stalkers to split up so he can deal with them separately. One of his favorite tricks is to wait in front of the elevators, which only hold one person each, and try to ambush someone as they emerge. It's also possible that the Stalkers may be able to flush him out.

When the confrontation comes, it is probable that the Stalkers will believe that Jalal is an Unbidden. Jalal's actions do little to contradict this. When cornered, he screams about how he'll never go back, no matter what the Stalkers do. Then he'll brandish a bloody cleaver and attack the nearest Stalker. Needless to say, he's Driven and will fight until he's killed.

Once dead, Jalal's body provides few clues. No doubt many Stalkers will be surprised to find that Jalal was only a human. Hopefully, they'll realize that something else is going on here. Masters of Delve (who are certainly getting a workout in this Hunt) can read Jalal's mind. His experience in the black hole so traumatized

him that this is the only memory that the Stalker can read. The Stalker sees a titanic being in a strange domain that can only be the Realm of Essence. An enormous hand reaches for Jalal's ship, which only barely escapes back through the black hole. Over this memory a woman's voice endlessly repeats, "*He most certainly will have to go back.*" Stalkers who encounter this memory must make a Willpower Challenge of 15 or better or lose two points of Vitality.

Angel

Angel is the only remaining member of the original crew. He's also a robot. Originally programmed as a general purpose robot, Angel was reprogrammed by Shabaz during the creation of the Sword of Allah. It's Angel's job to reset the controls of the Sword of Allah so it can go back through the black hole. He was almost finished when the power was shut off. Only a few minor adjustments need to be made to make the ship flight capable.

Angel was heading towards the Computer Center to get some parts when the power went out. He has since been wandering around the station trying to find someone to give him orders. So far he's found only dead bodies and Jalal, who has studiously ignored the robot. When he finally does encounter the Stalkers, Angel perceives them as a Security Team as well. Hopefully, the Stalkers can use this to their advantage.

Angel's role in the Hunt is up to the individual GM. If the Stalkers are wildly off course, he can be introduced to get them going in the right direction. If Jalal is dead and Stalkers still haven't realized they should try to get Ali the AI back on-line, Angel can suggest it. He's fully capable of turning Ali back on, if there are no techno savvy Stalkers with appropriate Focus skills. He also has basic knowledge of the Sword of Allah and its mis-



sion, should anyone think to ask him. Angel is perhaps best used as a GM tool to control the pace of the Hunt.

Physically, Angel is an elegant looking robot. He was designed to be both aesthetically pleasing and functional. His fingers are very long and adroit at manipulating machinery, and each contains a different tool. His limbs are a spider web of wire and steel, and his body is etched with devotional passages from the Koran. All together, Angel is an unusual robot.

WHAT NOW?

Once Jalal is dead and the whole station has been explored, the Stalkers need to figure out what is going on and how to stop it. What they need is information, and the best place to get it is from Ali, the Artificial Intelligence. A number of clues point to this, and Angel can be used as a last resort if the Stalkers are being thick. Alternately, the Stalkers can make a Deduction Challenge with a difficulty of 12 to figure it out.

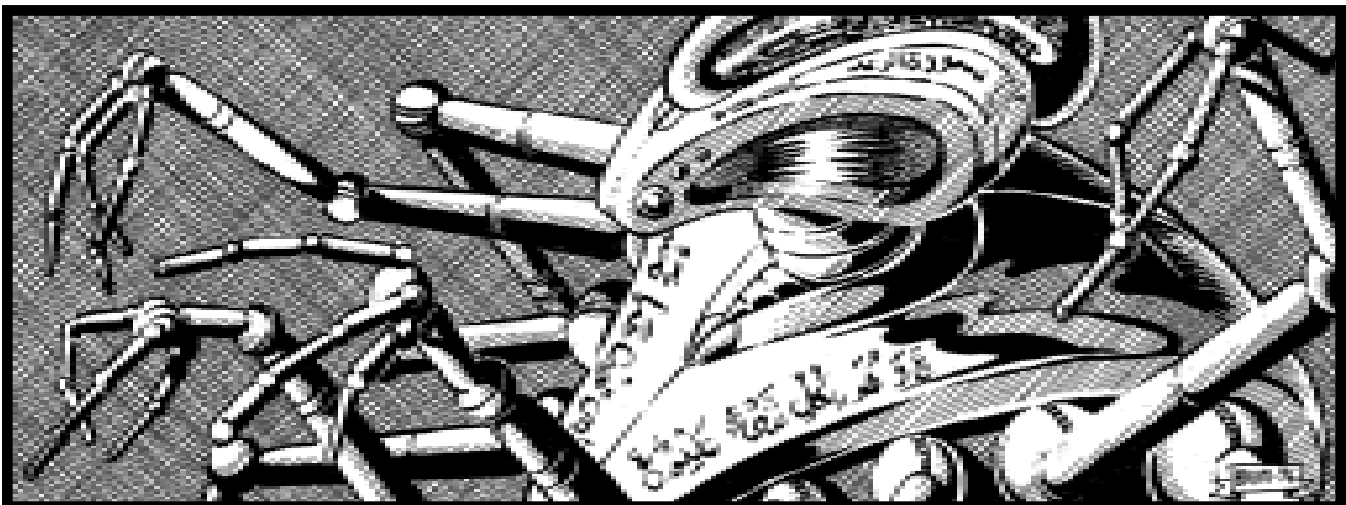
Turning On Ali

Ali can only be turned back on from Level 1B: Operations. There are basically three ways to do it, although its possible the Stalkers may think of others. First, the

information can be Delved out of Commanders Abu Malik's dead brain with a Difficulty 10 Insight Challenge. Second, a Stalker with an appropriate Focus skill and background can make a Challenge with a Difficulty of 12. Third, Angel could do the honors.

Once Ali is turned back on, the lights and computers come up. The full extent of Jalal's butchery can now be seen, and it is not pleasant. Ali itself uses sensors to assess the situation and then sends a distress signal. It then asks the Stalkers to identify themselves. The Veil should protect the Stalkers, as long as they don't give a tremendously stupid reply. If they do, have them make a Mask Challenge with a Difficulty of 12. [If the Stalkers are Unmasked, Ali will activate his First Contact protocol, and deal with them as if they are aliens. He will answer questions, but not give out any classified information (like the mission of the Sword of Allah, for instance). The Stalkers job has just become that much harder.] While Ali is dealing with the Stalkers, Angel goes back to the Sword of Allah to finish his work, no one having told him to stop.

The Stalkers meanwhile can talk to Ali. They can find out basic information about the history of the station, its mission, the construction of the Sword of Allah, and its maiden flight. Ali doesn't know a great deal about what happened to Jalal but Stalkers who





check the medical computers can find out that Jalal was suffering from severe shock, disorientation, and delusion, and that he babbled in his sleep about a gigantic being on the other side of the black hole. He was scheduled to be shipped back to Earth for advanced treatment in a week.

THE SWORD OF ALLAH

After talking with Ali or looking through the telescope and probably both, the Stalkers should have a pretty good idea of what's going on. The question is, how to stop whatever that thing is from coming through the Eye of God. Hopefully, the Stalkers should realize that they need to take a look at the one part of the station they haven't been able to get to: the Sword of Allah.

Once Ali is back on-line, the airlock to the ship can be opened. As the airlock hisses open, a blast of hot and humid air rushes out of the ship. Inside, the ship is steamy and reminiscent of a jungle. The interior is not very large, containing a crew compartment for the pilot and a few access panels for repairs. Angel may well be in one of the panels already, making the last few adjustments to make the ship operable again.

Even a cursory look shows that the ship has been changed by its flight through to the Other Side. Although Angel doesn't notice anything different due to the Corruption, the ship has become bio-organic. The walls, floors, and even instruments pulse with life and are squishy and yielding to the touch. Strangely, this transformation has not affected the ability of the ship to function. The engines, scanners, and computers all still work, only their appearances have changed. Words appear on the computer screen as if they were slashed in with a knife, exposing the red muscles of the ship. Scanners belch rather than beep, and the engines truly do roar. In case the Stalkers had any doubts, a Sensitivity check reveals massive levels of Essence that indicate that this is indeed the Focus.

MENDING THE ENIGMA

Although the Stalkers have now found the Focus of the Enigma, mending it is not as easy as they might think. What they need to do is seal up the gate between the Realm of Flesh and the Realm of Essence that was created when the Sword of Allah passed through the Eye of God. To do this, one or more of the Stalkers must take the ship and fly it back into the black hole. Then they can mend the Enigma and reverse its effects.

This course of action probably won't be immediately obvious to the Stalkers. Let them try to mend the Enigma at the station, but tell them that they fail no matter what they roll. This should get them thinking. If they still haven't figured it out, tell them that all the Essence pouring through the black hole is making the mending difficult. If this doesn't do it, Angle at this moment finishes his adjustments. The ship's computer suddenly announces in a deep and demonically possessed sort of voice, "Ship ready for launch."

Launching the ship is actually quite easy, as much of it is automated. Once the airlock is sealed, the Stalkers need only tell the ship's computer to begin the launch sequence and it takes care of the rest. Since the ship is designed for one crewman, the Circle are in for a tight fit. In the interest of the story, the Circle can cram in no matter how large it is. No one will want to miss the opportunity to fly into a black hole, after all.

Once the computer receives its orders, it gives a ten second countdown as the engines power up. As the engines howl and screech, the ship begins to shake violently. When the countdown ends, the engines give out a long scream and launch the Sword of Allah towards the black hole. The engines are extremely powerful and the ship rockets outward at an amazing pace. The Stalkers onboard are slammed back by the tremendous g-force, but they soon approach the Eye of God. As they fly into the black hole, two things happen. First, pressure starts to build that



threatens to crush them out of existence. Second, they can clearly see the being that is coming through.

The Stalkers have no idea what this thing is. It looks like some kind of Old Testament God, a towering being holding a planet sized orb of gold in its hand. Although human shaped, it is impossible to tell if it truly looks human because of layer upon layer of tattered robes that it wears. The hood over its head casts a perpetual darkness over its face, which is probably for the best as far the Stalkers are concerned. What is obvious is that this creature is a staggeringly powerful being of the Essence the likes of which they've never seen before. They should leave the adventure with more questions than answers, although you can assure them these questions will be answered in time.

Once the Stalkers reach the black hole and see the thing that is trying to force its way into the Realm of Flesh, they are in a position to mend the Enigma. Needless, to say, it's a difficult job and requires a Challenge Roll with a Difficulty of 15. If successful, the tear in reality begins to mend, and the titanic being is forced backwards through the black hole. As the Dream reasserts itself, a psychic scream of frustration crashes into the consciousness of all the Stalkers, nearly knocking them over with its intensity. The scream is followed by one tantalizing sentence.

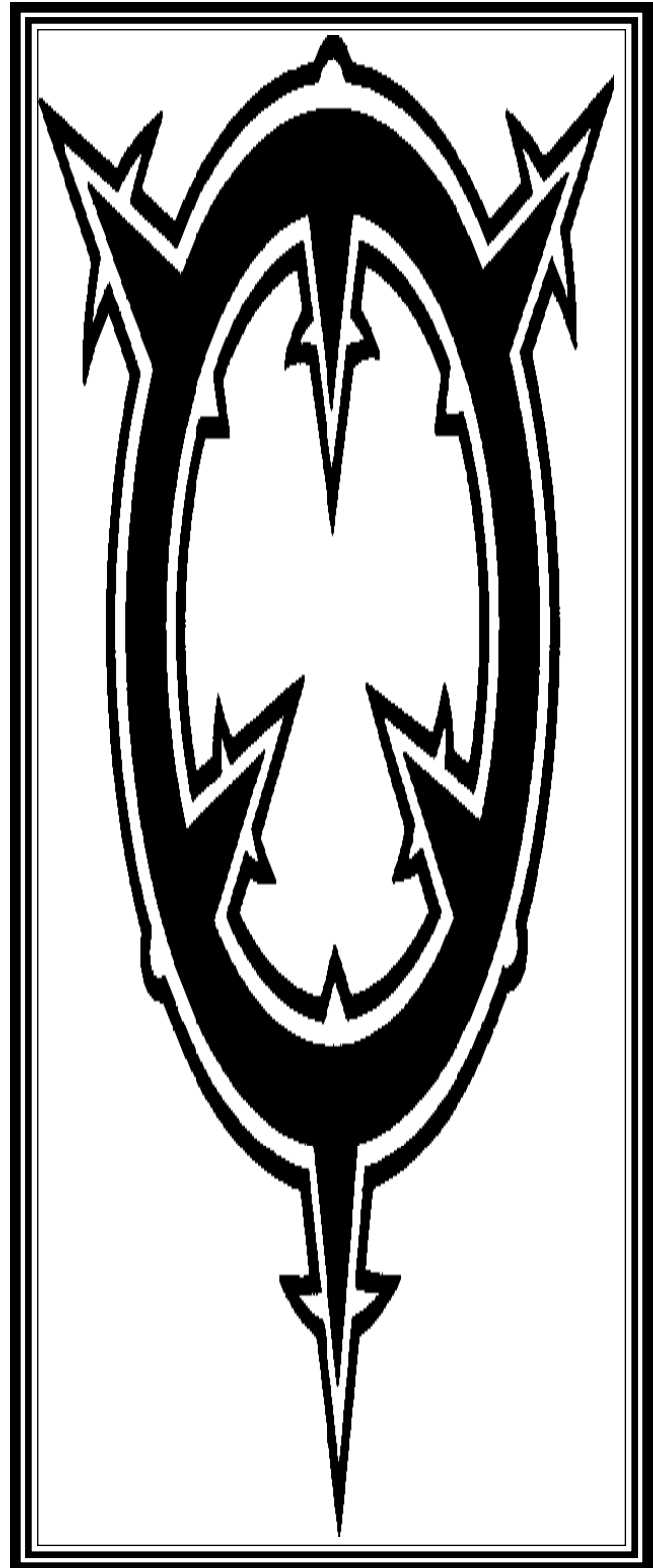
"Upstarts! You dare to betray me yet again!"

Then the voice is gone.

Getting Out

The Stalkers on the Sword of Allah need to summon a Navigator very quickly indeed, unless they want to start the whole process again. Describe how they are plucked off the ship just as it plunges through the black hole a second time, this time never to return. The Stalkers can then return to their Domains. They've succeeded in protecting the Dream again, but at the cost of making a powerful and unknown enemy.

Naturally, details about this *being* will follow in future products. Until then, let the Stalkers live in fear.





PLAYGROUND OF THE DAMNED

by Neal Darcy

For a brief moment Theodore Zardova's thoughts became clear once again. Torturous odors of fecal coated straw, mixed with sweat, vomit, and urine, had acted like a smelling salt. Tears caused the grease paint of Theo's clown face to swirl together into a grotesque dance of chaos.

Numb, and confused about his whereabouts, the clown's gaze darted frantically around for some clue that his recent memories were nothing more than a dream. Reality was not so kind.

Three days had passed since Theo had ventured out of the wagon. A smothering blanket of dread now engulfed him, slowly, mercilessly, devouring his body and his mind. He no longer found the innocence of a child's laughter to possess the same magic it once held. Life was without meaning and death held no sway over the pathetic wretch he had become.

A knock came on the wagon door. Slowly the door opened and the painted face of another clown peered into the darkness. "Theo?" It was Rickii, Theo's best

friend. A worried expression flashed across Rickii's face as he spotted Theo huddled in a corner and he quickly climbed up to meet his troubled friend.

The clown immediately tried to cheer Theo, as he would a sick child, by showing him a new trick. Explaining that he had learned to juggle while performing a hand-stand. With a vacant stare, Theo watched as his friend proceeded to perform the hand-stand. Theo's eyes grew wide with horror as a third arm slowly snaked out from underneath the clown's shirt and began tossing two red balls in the air. The grotesque arm had been sewn into his chest. Rickii chuckled innocently: "Theo I can teach you this trick, too, if you want."

Theo tried to cry out, but earlier screams had nearly destroyed his vocal chords. His face contorted and purple veins ballooned in his neck from the strain as he managed to croak a single word; while his eyes rolled back into his head to meet with oblivion, "Noooooooooooo!"

BACKSTORY

In the year of 1752, the Renegade who arrogantly called itself Momus, after the patron god of clowns, first crossed the Rift. He began his existence in the Flesh by taking a host and slithering to the bottom of a stagnant pond of unknown depths, situated next to an old tannery. There, as he bloated and putrefied, the beast gorged himself on rotting pieces of discarded animal flesh scraped from hides and dumped into the pond daily. Periodically Momus would supplement its diet on a careless worker.

For years he routed through the fetid slime of the brown froth-covered pool, growing and evolving. Then, at last he developed a clearer focus on the curiosities that brought him to the Realm of Flesh.

Momus found the abnormalities and mutations occurring in some mortals to be a unique phenomenon unequaled among the mundane trappings that the Dream had to offer. They were more complex; requiring many more than the usual number of Aesthetics to maintain them. They added a refreshing expansion to the dimension of the Dream itself. Momus decided he would make the Realm of Flesh into his own splendid garden. But first he must study the special mortals.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, a circus set up and performed in a field not far from the tannery. While on an evening stroll, the circus owner, a man by the name of Colonel Beaumont, unwittingly stumbled upon the Focus of the Corruption caused by Momus. Located in the very spot that the Unbidden had first materialized, the Focus had been shaped into



the form of a bat skeleton the size of a man. Thrilled with this rare find, Beaumont took the Focus and added it to one of his exhibits.

When the circus left, the Unbidden was drawn by an uncontrollable urge to be near the Focus. Momus sought to leave the festering bosom from which he had suckled over the decades. To achieve this, the Unbidden was forced to discard his desiccated Host, and take the body of a young boy working part-time in the tannery. As he devoured the innocence of the child's thoughts he learned of the small circus which had just performed in the area. The child's memories of the circus contained beautiful images of the creatures which tempted Momus across the Rift. They were massed together in what was called a "side show".

The concept of the circus fascinated him. He did not realize that others, especially mortals, shared his affinity for the uniqueness of these individuals. Momus had never assumed the mortal possessed enough understanding of the Dream to appreciate the minute intricacies and the unconventional patterns of thought that were required to create just one of these beauties. In fact, it seemed to be exactly the opposite.

As a cat is attracted to a fish wagon, so the Focus attracted Momus to the brightly painted caravan of circus wagons. Mistaking a performer to be one of the oddities, he discarded the child's body in favor of that of a rotund clown with wonderfully oversized eyes.

To his delight, Momus discovered "the side show" he had seen through the child's mind. Momus cherished the precious freaks he found there and studied them as one may study great works of art. He would spend hours and sometimes days, staring, unblinking, at a single subject. Like controlled brush-strokes, he observed their patterns and curves; the extra lumps of flesh. These were individual works which he felt only the most inspired and gifted of the Aesthetics were able to maintain.

Soon the Corruption emanating from the Focus had completely overtaken the circus. Within this area,

Momus was able to freely work on the wonderful band of freaks. The Unbidden's desire to learn of the inner workings of these malformed mortals and perhaps unlock the wondrous secrets that they held, often led to impromptu dissections. It was not long before the freak population had dwindled down to nothing.

Frustrated by the loss of his art collection, Momus tried and failed to fashion his own freakish masterpieces out of unsuspecting circus-goers. Later other circus performers were used in his experiments, but his knowledge of the human anatomy was still incompetent at best and the mortals' bodies were too frail. Momus was frustrated at having miserably botched his attempts to construct his own aberration.

Eventually, with the exception of Colonel Beaumont, only the tattered remains of a half-dozen tents, a few shattered wagons, and lots of bones bleached white by the prairie sun, were all that remained of the circus. Momus admired Beaumont for his ability to locate freaks and was smart enough to realize the future potential of their relationship. Thus Beaumont's life was spared.

Recently, Colonel Beaumont has found employment with another circus, where he has relocated his remaining collection of odd artifacts, including the Focus. Although he has agreed with its owners to run the circus in its entirety, he still manages to perform as a barker for the sideshow, his first love. Unfortunately for the rest of this circus, Momus has followed the colonel, and appeared one day as a clown with oversized eyes.

With a new palate to work from Momus has begun to experiment again. This time he has met with limited success. As the corruption spreads through the circus, spectators as well as performers are falling victim to the artistic whims of the Unbidden. Circus shows are becoming more and more bizarre as the newly designed freaks put their talents to work. The only person that seems to be aware of the nightmarish changes is Theo the Dancing Clown. Poor Theo.



About this Hunt

This Hunt has been designed to take place totally inside the Corruption. Many stops have been pulled, resulting in the contents of this Hunt being quite graphic and it should be approached in a mature fashion. It serves as an example of how Stalkers still need to show restraint from the all too easy choice of violence over intellect despite the relaxing of the Forbiddance. The GM should make it abundantly clear that there are too many Minions and Shadows running about for the Stalkers to try to destroy things with impunity. This should actually make the Stalkers a little more cautious, since the Forbiddance has no allegiance and will not prevent the Minions from doing what they want. If they chose to hack and slash their way through this hunt, there is an excellent chance they will not be returning to their Domains. Mending the Enigma is as always their most important duty followed by dealing with the Unbidden. They should therefore carefully chose where and when to fight. Of course, if you and your group enjoy the no-mind-hack-and-slash aspects of role-playing, your bloodiest dreams have just come true.

This Hunt has also been designed to be somewhat non-linear. The GM needs to know the material well in order to get the most out of it. It is therefore suggested that after the GM reads this Hunt he go back and read it again.

The Unbidden is a very young Architect and it has recently achieved a Life Link to the Focus.

SERVITOR EFFECTS

During this Hunt the Stalkers will undoubtedly try to invoke Servitors. The following Servitors will not have the usual effect:

Cloudlings function normally but their rain will have no effect on any of the circus activities, or its spectators.

Devourers will do their job, but they will also probably bring angry Shadows out of hiding.

Trackers are virtually useless in this Hunt. They will be drawn to the nearest creature of Essence which will usually be a few yards away. Locating the Unbidden this way will be impossible.

The Enigma

The Corruption created by the Enigma is influencing the entire circus. Levels of sound fluctuate constantly. The whistle of the calliope organ ranges from barely audible to extremely loud. Occasionally a deafening scream or the earth shattering laughter of a group of people will break the relative silence. Patches of thick fog are interspersed with a lighter mist. The barely visible sky above is crimson red which reflects off the fog - giving the appearance of everything being awash with blood. Torches have been lit to allow the mortals to see more clearly. Physical proportions of the tents and the buildings have become very distorted with exaggerated dimensions, corners, and curves.

ANSWERING THE CALL

The Circle receives the Call in the form of Theo the Dancing Clown's last vestiges of sanity, fashioned into a scream of a single word - "NO!" which slowly trails off back into the Realm of Flesh. The Stalkers summon the Navigator, and walk the Winding Path as usual, appearing just outside the entrance to a circus.

Steam clouds jet from a calliope as it plays a whimsical tune. At the gate, standing high upon a pair of stilts sewn into the stumps of his legs, is a two-headed dwarf. A sign reading "Ticket Collector" hangs around his neck. People dressed in their Sunday best wait excitedly in a line to enter the roped off circus grounds. The dwarf hands a sign to each person as they pass through the entrance.

Silhouetted on a small but steep hill several dozen yards beyond the gate, a cage hangs from a massive tree limb. Inside the cage is the Supplicant, Theo the Dancing Clown.



When the Circle decides to enter the circus they will be confronted by the dwarf who will ask them if they are performers or spectators. They will each then be given a sign to wear around their necks reading "Partz". Should the Circle asks why the ticket collector has his title and they do not, he informs them that he is a "titled work of art" and they are not.

Theo the Pathetic Clown

Wearing a filthy, shredded clown suit and make-up streaked with the tracks of tears, Theo lays locked in a square cage, formerly occupied by "The Australian Wild Dog." It is much too small to stand in. A sign hangs above the cage reading: "Do Not Feed the Animal." A sign around his neck reads: "Theo the Dancing Clown." Theo's vocal chords have been all but destroyed by the strain of continuous screaming.

Despite the fact that Theo has been Sensitive since he was a child, he has never come to terms with his powers. Pointing out strange Unseen creatures in the shadows had caused him to be labeled a child with an over-active imagination.

The clown now sits rocking himself in the shadow of the tree outside of the flicker of torchlight. His arms wrap around his knees, which are drawn up to his chin. Theo has recently become a victim of one of the Unbidden's latest inspirations. Momus has given an extra arm and an extra set of legs to the clown. The sutures around the third arm jutting from his chest have been partially torn. Badly infected, they drip pus.

W H E N T H E M I N D D I E S

Theo looks up as the Circle approaches. His lips quiver and a tear rolls down his cheek. He mumbles in a hoarse voice, "He said I would dance better..." Looking down at his four legs, he starts laughing and says, "But I can't even walk now."





Keep in mind that Theo is quite insane. An untrained Sensitive mortal mind cannot be expected to last long within a Corrupted area. He tries to answer any questions, but for the most part he does not make any sense and the Stalkers gather no real information from him.

He mumbles things like: "That's strange...when did all the flowers die? I used to dance until all the little insects laughed...Now they just crawl on me, eating my flesh." Etcetera.

If a Stalker tries to use Delve on Theo he will see and hear the following: Images of people flash through the clown's head...an immensely fat man and his belt-girdle...a clown doing a headstand and juggling with his third arm...a gray-haired man talking in a southern accent...a man with serpent tattoos taking bites out of circus animals...men with dragon-fly wings...a horned bearded lady thrusting rotting flesh into Theo's face...

Should the Circle decide to try to free Theo from his cage, the clown will become hysterical. He thinks he is being taken away again for another operation. Theo will chose to remain in his prison, unable to walk. If the Circle tries to remove him, he will quite literally die of fright.

THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF FUN

There is nothing like a day at the circus. The red and white candy-striped tents. The smell of exotic foods. The sounds of a thousand different people laughing, talking, screaming, and having fun.

Stalkers who are familiar with circuses will know instantly that this is like no other. The corruption is hard at work here. This is evidenced by the fact that crowds of mortals walk casually to and fro despite wearing primitive masks - made of circles of leather and painted with a smile - *pinned* to each of their faces. (Momus does not like the look of pain that most faces show after he borrows their flesh). Each of these people

also wear signs reading "*Partz*". In fact, some of the mortals have obviously had pieces of their bodies taken from them.

The GM should emphasize the fact that the spectators look like walking donor centers. For instance, an impeccably dressed gentleman, bloody rags tied where his arms used to be, escorts a woman in her Sunday dress hopping on her remaining leg. Another man, his body ending at the waist, has fallen off of his bicycle and tries to untangle his intestines from the spokes of the wheel. It should also be noted that interspersed among the mortals are obvious Shadows that have acquired Husks.

Mingled in with the "*Partz*" people are the "*Art*" people. They have been the other unfortunate victims of Momus. These mortals appear very bizarre, having been given grotesque deformities through being melded with other human or animal parts. None of these pathetic souls wear a mask. Many of them are lying in the dirt dead from the shock of their operation. (Go crazy when describing these people. The more twisted and horrific, the better. e.g.. On the ground lays a human body. Its head has been replaced with that of a large cat. Attached to its arm, the torso of a large rat gnaws on the flesh which it has been sewn. Etcetera.)

What would normally be the staples of the circus, such as french fries, cotton candy, foot-long hot dogs and peanuts are not available at this event. Rather, people walk around nibbling on fried fingers, balls of hair, foot long intestines in a bun, roasted fingernails and teeth, and other ghastly items.

SUGAR AND SPICE

As soon as the Circle makes their trek into the circus, a little girl with curly blonde hair, wearing a matching white hat and party dress, both accented with big red bows, appears from around the corner of a tent. She does not wear a mask. Nor does she wear a sign. Cocking her little head she smiles cutely at the Circle and asks them in a sweet little voice for help. Her name



is Temperance and she says she's lost her mommy. The girl then starts to cry. If the Stalkers ask her any questions she gladly tells them about all of the wonderful things she has seen at the circus today. Temperance believes she is at a normal circus. "Last time I saw my mommy was shortly after she gave me this wonderful rainbow lollipop!" From behind her back she produces instead of a lollipop, a woman's rather ripe forearm beset with rigor mortis. "Want a lick?" The girl then proceeds to lick the palm of her

"lollipop". Temperance giggles and skips away singing a sweet little tune. "Come on sillies, we have to find mommy." She leads them to the circus' Midway should they choose to follow.

Temperance

She is one of the lucky mortal children under the influence of the Corruption. Momus cannot sculpt the flesh of a child because it is not controllable due to its tendency to grow. He must wait until the young mortals finish growing. This saddened him until he realized he is virtually ensured a continuous supply of Flesh. Temperance's mother has fallen prey to an Awakened Lurker which has taken up residence inside the Fun House, located on the Midway.

GOOD TIMES ON THE MIDWAY

The Midway is where most of the games, amusement rides, and activities for spectators are located. It is full of vendors selling all kinds of items from "miracle cures" to saddle wax. Most of the items are of cheap quality or do not live up to their claim.

When the Circle arrives with Temperance at the Midway, she leads them to the dark entrance of the Fun House. Pointing she exclaims, "That is where I lost her." And she skips through the entrance.

The Fun House is the only encounter that needs to take place in the Midway, but the Stalkers may roam the area at their will. Feel free to use the following Midway encounters at your discretion.





The Ferris Wheel

The giant wheel towers over one hundred feet in the air. As it rotates it is plain to see dozens of bodies which have been crucified on the backs of the Ferris wheel seats. Many of the mortals are still alive and smiling as if they are enjoying the ride. Below, people line up as the operator and his assistant each drive nails through the outstretched arms of each enthused ride-goer. If the Stalkers are close enough they may hear one of the people ask, "Is it safe?"

The Carousel

The plaster and wooden statues of the carousel lay broken in a heap. Dead horses and cows have been impaled in their place. Millions of flies swarm the ride, feasting on the rotten flesh.

Dr. Paradox

"THE cure-all to end all." That is how the elixir is described and it comes with a money back guarantee. A sign around this wretch's neck reads, "Dr. Paradox". This top-hatted, fast talking, eight armed, arachnid-hybrid quack, is doing a brisk business selling his poisonous venom in the guise of medicine. He believes in truth in advertising. Every hour or so he gathers up any available bodies of those who have imbibed his secretions and ended it all. He then cocoons them in the back of his wagon for dinner. (*Use secondary character template WV pg. 118*).

The Maze of Mirrors

On occasion, the Stalkers may hear loud cracks of thunder echo throughout the circus. If they chose to investigate, they find that the thunder claps come from within a mirrored labyrinth attraction. The Corruption and the activities of this particular Unbidden have acted much like a magnet for attracting various types of Shad-

THE VISIONARY

The Visionary is a parasitic Shadow resembling a cyclopean lump of flesh with tendrils. It watches the Dream unfold but does not have the capacity to understand what it sees. It Awakens when a mortal is struck by sudden loss of sight through a violent injury. Immediately burrowing into the Flesh and attaching its tendrils to the destroyed optical nerve endings, the Shadow enables the victim to see without ever realizing it had lost its sight.

The Visionary enjoys a symbiotic relationship with the Host providing the sight while the Host's brain is able to interpret what the shadow sees and thus it finally understands. It is protected by the Veil without having to Husk, since it is an unobtrusive Shadow molding to the host's facial contours. But, all too often this relationship ends in disaster.

Over time the Shadow's perception and lack of understanding of the Dream can Corrupt its Host into performing casual acts of extreme violence. The Veil protects the mortal from knowing what is truly taking place. However, Sensitives sometimes understand what has happened only after committing some bloody act, which often leads the Host to suicide.

The Visionary has a Fortitude of 2 and a Vitality of 3 but cannot actively defend or attack. Naturally, the Host will defend against any attacks that appear to be directed against it.

ows. In this case, Miragi have been Awakened by mortals venturing into the maze of mirrors. There the Miragi observe from the other side of the mortal reflection. Two Miragi can be found in the maze. The first one just stares at itself in a mirror. The other one is still in a



slime-like state and in the process of constructing its Husk from its victim. (pg. 75, DP)

The Great Crescendo

No circus is complete without a magic show. Ralph Stanky, *a.k.a.* “*The Great Crescendo-art*,” as the sign around his neck reads, has practiced tricks and slight-of-hand for the past fifty years. He is an old man now with bad eyes and his illusions were becoming far from convincing but Beaumont did not have the heart to let him go. Momus has tried to help by giving the aging magician a new lease on life. He replaced his failing eyes with a pair of merchant marine binoculars. This left the magician blind. Momus then tried something more drastic. He has bound a Lesser Shadow, known as a Visionary (*see pg. 79*), and attached it to the eye sockets of the old man. This has given “sight” back to the magician, but he has been Corrupted by the Shadow as evidenced by his actions during his performance.

The act is under a large canopy and a modest sized crowd of “Partz” have gathered. The magician runs through his first few acts with the help of his assistant (*Pain Mother*, WV pg. 109.) She has been husked with the skinned corpse of Crescendo’s former elderly assistant. Her stiff, mannequin-like, prosthesis-arm dangles awkwardly throughout the act.

For his Grand finale Crescendo walks over and chooses a young man from the audience as a volunteer. He directs the man to lie down in a long box set upon a table. The magician closes the box and produces a large tree saw. He then proceeds to cut through the box joking and laughing with the volunteer and the audience. All the while, the volunteer, Crescendo, and his assistant are being showered in blood. He then separates the box, the victim still twitching. He puts the box together, passing a wand over the top saying “*alacazam!*” The volunteer is quite dead. The magician and assistant takes bows to an absolutely delighted audience.

For Crescendo, use the Minor Character template,

WV pg. 118.

THE FUN HOUSE

Note: This is one of the key encounters of the adventure. It is important that the Stalkers go to the Fun House before the Big Show. Let them wander around the Circus as much as they like, but if they visit the Big Top before they go to the Fun House they’ll find nothing going on there.

The Fun House is where Momus has been conducting his experiments. Though the outside of the building seems small, the inside is disproportionately huge. This is a direct result of the Corruption.

The Fun House is a foreboding place and Stalkers should be made to feel very uneasy about what lies beyond its entrance. A successful Perception check allows the Stalker to notice two things: 1. Though there are people entering the fun house, none are exiting it. 2. The ends of a couple of writhing tentacles protruding from the darkness of the entrance.

If the Stalkers try to prevent Temperance from entering, they hear a gravelly voice call out, “*Temperance...mommy needs you!*” The little girl screams for the Stalkers to help her mommy. If the Stalkers allow Temperance to enter the fun house, they hear the same gravelly voice performing a bad imitation of the little girl. It calls out to the Stalkers, “*Go away now, I have found my mommy.*”

A Lurker (WV, pg. 110) has been lured up from the depths of a nearby well and has set up shop just inside the fun house. It is quite content with remaining where it is due to the fact that a seemingly inexhaustible supply of food has been walking right into its gaping maw. Should the Stalkers decide to venture in, describe the interior as very twisted. (e.g. infinitely high ceilings, bottomless pits, maniacal laughter, moans of pain, etc.) Let your imagination run free. *One note:* when the Stalkers enter a room there is only one exit available. The Stalkers find that the entrance way seals up behind them. This forces them to go on. Even if they try



to separate the Circle by having some of the Stalkers remain in the other room, they find the surroundings change about them, causing them to be located in the same room all together. There is no explanation for this other than that is just the way Momus has planned it. For this reason a map is not needed. The Stalkers experience each room one at a time, unable to reverse their direction, until they finally meet Momus.

Upon entering, the Stalkers find a torn red ribbon on the floor. It is Temperance's. The floor is also wet from water swiftly trickling away. (This is the Lurker trying to escape from the Circle. A successful Perception Challenge with a Difficulty 12 will indicate that the water is traveling up a slope toward a door. If allowed, it escapes by sliding down through a crack in the walkway just before the door). On the door ahead hangs a sign reading, "Enter and Be Forever Changed." (The Stalkers may recognize this from the *Oddities of the Old World* exhibit.)

Behind the first door is a smaller second door, which opens up to an even smaller third door, and then a fourth and so on until there is just enough room for a Stalker to squeeze through on its belly.

The Recovery Room

Inside the first room, many leather faced "Partz" people lay bandaged and bleeding. They have obviously had pieces recently borrowed. The walls, floor, and ceiling have been painted red to hide the blood. A single hanging lamp casts red light throughout the room. Momus is not aware, nor does he care about, pain-killers, so the sounds of suffering are intense. On the opposite wall is a door that lays on its side. It is the only exit.

The door opens like a giant mail slot into another hallway. A strong odor of fish wafts toward the Stalkers.

THE ROTATING SLIME BARREL

The hallway resembles a giant wooden barrel rotating on its side. Coating the barrel is a black, fishy

smelling, oily, slime that constantly drops in gooey masses. Once the Stalkers walk through here they will be in a second room with a black and white checkered floor, walls, and ceiling.

The Room of Forgotten Children

In the center of the checkered room is a roped-off area containing a tall child's slide. Next to the slide is a sign that says "Free Toyz" and points up the slide-ladder. There is no other way out of the room. (If the Stalkers take the slide they will end up in the Room of Forgotten Children) To anyone watching, it seems that the Stalkers just disappear as they near the bottom of the slide.

The Stalkers will land on a pile of pillows. They will be in a huge room, the size of an aircraft hanger. The scene is very dreamlike. Scores of children laugh and run and play on plastic turf among gum drop flowers. In the distance, an artificial Christmas tree-style pine forest can be seen. They drink lemonade from a stream and eat sweets and treats heaped upon plum pudding hills. A hypnotic musical blend of harps and flutes gently flow through the air. High above, giant bales of fluffy cotton have been attached to the ceiling, resembling soft white clouds. Below these clouds circle cherubs as they watch over the children with their oversized eyes. (These are bound Spritelings, *WV pg. 77*. They do not attack the Circle, but Momus, seeing through their eyes, now knows that they are here.)

SNIPS AND SNAILS

Momus does not create anything out of the children. He has too much trouble with their growing parts. So he is content to raise the proverbial "fatted calf" ensuring a continuous supply of "partz" for a long time to come.

The children surround the Stalkers and ask for them to tell a story. After which, the children shall show them the way out. The children act dramatically to whatever story is told. They laugh or cry and imitate characters in the story.



After the story, the children take the Stalkers to a modern day sewer cover. Carved into it are the words: “Boogie Men - Drop In For A Bite”. They warn the Stalkers that no one ever comes back from there. Running inside the sewer there are handle-styled grips, leading down very deep into the ground. The bottom cannot be seen. This is the only exit. The children wave good-bye as the Stalkers descend.

(If the Stalkers have not yet faced the Lurker it will be at the bottom of the sewer, *WV pg. 110*.) Once the Stalkers have dispatched the Lurker they will find that there is a door in the wall. It made of steel, resembling a ships hatch. The door opens by turning a wheel.

Spare Partz Room

Inside, a thick layer of ice covers hundreds of frozen appendages taken from many different species. Boxes marked “eyes” and “tongues” are stacked high. Everything seems to be neatly stacked. A large freezer door is framed on the other wall. On it, yet another sign reads: “Knock and We Will Open.”

If the Stalkers knock, a balding middle-aged man in a blood smeared surgeon’s apron opens the door, wipes his hands on a bloodied rag, and welcomes them to the studio. Alternatively they can break the door down and the same man greets them but he scolds them for breaking the door. In either case he tells the Circle that “they” have been expecting the Stalkers and asks them for their signs. If they do not have them, it does not matter.

The Studio

Several people dressed in suits of pure white cotton stand in different parts of the studio. Large bright light bulbs protrude from sockets placed in their mouths. Momus has sewn their eyes shut to protect them from the glare. Two giant batteries have been strapped to their backs with wires running from them into their skull. They illuminate the pure-white marble

covering the whole room. Blood trickles from the mouths of twisted, marble, wide-eyed, and fang-toothed clown gargoyles hanging in each corner of the room. The blood runs along the base of the walls in a carved trough that empties into a small drain.

Set into one of the walls is a small stainless steel refuse door marked “Extras”. It is wide enough for the Stalkers to squeeze through. Set into another wall is a window that has a painting of the rooftops of Renaissance Florence set behind it. On a third wall hangs a man. He is Momus’ living tribute to the Aesthetics responsible for Leonardo DaVinci. The mortal’s two sets of arms, and two sets of legs have been positioned in the same fashion of DaVinci’s famous sketch titled “Vitruvian Man.”

Centered in the room is a large blood-stained, bronze, dental-style chair. A myriad of bizarre gadgets extend away from it like a metallic octopus. The man that had greeted them stands next to the chair smiling and motioning toward the seat. Bloodied white towels and a few scattered teeth litter the floor around him.

The people with the bulbs cannot speak. They are alive and move to shine their light in requested directions. The man’s name is “Assistant” (*Secondary Character Template WV pg. 118*). He is Momus’ helper. While the Stalkers talk with him he continues to smile vacantly. If asked where Momus is, he tells them that he was having a mental block and needed to relax. If pressed again where the Unbidden is, Assistant points to a suddenly swinging refuse door.

In order to leave the studio, the Stalkers need to slide down the refuse chute which is coated in the gore of a thousand operations. The chute delivers the Stalkers into an Olympic-sized, pure-white marble-trimmed pool of blood and gore.

Pool Party!

The Stalkers splash into a pool which has been set in a cavernous room with walls of granite block and pillars of the white marble. Far across the pool, an



enormous clown relaxes in an inner-tube, sipping on a large drink sprouting a bushy mint sprig. When the clown sees the Stalkers, his bulbous eyes narrow and he smirks. Putting a finger up to the side of his nose, he disappears before any Stalker has a chance to react. A miniature inner-tube supporting a tray floats up to the Stalkers. On it are fresh mint juleps, one for each Stalker, and an envelope marked "*Un-Named Circle.*"

Inside the envelope is a ticket for each of the Stalkers to the Big Top Show. Written on an enclosed card are the words "*Enjoy the drinks. See the show. And then leave.*"

The door in this room leads back outside. When exiting the Stalkers will also notice they have just walked out of a small toilet shack. The Stalkers now stand at the entrance to the Freak Show.

What Now?

The Stalkers will not be able to catch Momus at this point. He was made aware of the Circle's presence through the Spritelings in the Room of Forgotten Children. He was using his unique ability of *Shimmersifting*, normally a Shadow Power. The Stalkers cannot re-enter Momus' pool room through the toilet shack. Inside they will only find the trappings of an outhouse.

If the Stalkers have not found the Focus yet they should be "lured" into the Freak Show. One way to do this is to say that the time on the tickets is over an hour away. Another way is to have a random encounter with one of the many different Shadows available. Lastly, the Circle could bump into Olnick doing his show (this should be a last resort).

THE FREAK SHOW

In this section of the Hunt, the Stalkers only need to visit the "Oddities of the Old World" exhibit. The other encounters listed below are for the GM's conve-

THE BIG BAT

Stacked against the far wall from floor to ceiling are hundreds of polished human skulls. Hanging ominously in front of the wall of skulls is a large humanoid skeleton. The bony vestiges of outstretched wings extend demonically from either shoulder. The skull is human except for notably long fangs, which drip blood at a steady rate into a tar-like coagulated puddle. A small sign hangs from it stating that it is a Vampyre Man-bat. This is the Focus of the Enigma.

Though most definitely a hoax, the skeleton has been designed very realistically with painstaking attention paid to its anatomically correct detail and held together with pins and wire. Colonel Beaumont himself stumbled upon the Focus years ago and has displayed it as a curiosity ever since.

When the Stalkers have their final confrontation with Momus, the Focus will have been moved by Beaumont to the interior of his wagon. When the Stalkers try to Mend the Enigma it becomes evident that the Corruption was too much for the Dream to handle. It will break free of the Dream and form a Shadowland with no Touchstone to the Realm of Flesh. There it will float in Neitherspace until the end of the Cycle.

nience.

There are three arrow signs at the entrance to the freak show, each pointing in a different direction. They read: 1. *Gross*, 2. *Grosser*, and 3. *Bad Choice*. Which ever path the Stalkers take they will all lead past several booths containing curious personalities and ending at the "Oddities of the Old World" exhibit.

Being closest to the Focus, the freak show has become a catch-all for the harsher elements of the Corruption. The entire area looks more like a shantytown than part of the circus. There is a constant annoying buzzing sound as armies of insects battle over the corpses of the dead strewn through-



out the area. Many Shadows, both Bound and Unbound, roam the dark aisles between booths. This is where the Stalkers will most likely end up having a random brawl or two.

Below are some of the Freaks in their booths the Stalkers are likely to see. (*Minor Character templates WV pg. 118*).

Spineless Norman: Momus removed all of the bones of this man so he would be able to contort into a compact ball.

Countess Teresa and Her Dog: This woman, who was a paid customer of the circus, once slapped Colonel Beaumont for what she called blatant thievery. Momus punished her by joining her and her pet beagle. Now they are the only Siamese master and dog known to be in existence.

BlockHead: What he was supposed to be even Momus cannot remember. This was an experiment gone bad. The pathetic wretch has expired some time ago but no one seems to have taken notice.

Goathead Jones: In addition to having a goat's head, he eats tin cans.

Crockman: This is one of Momus' few rudimentary DNA experiments. It was originally inspired by a handbag Momus observed one the spectators carrying.

Psychic Annie/Andy: This is an Awakened Nightmare (*DP, pg. 83*) that has been using its limited understanding of the Dream to predict the future for paying customers. They usually find the price too high. Annie/Andy slays and skins its customers right after a reading. The fact of whether

Annie/Andy is male or female in appearance depends upon what tailored suit of Flesh it is wearing at that moment.

The Living Totem Pole: This creature was put together from the heads of a favorite local politician and his trustworthy staff. The Living Totem Pole stands over six feet tall and is interconnected in the back of each skull via an umbilical chord which leads to some sort of colostemic sack drooling onto the stage.

ODDITIES OF THE OLD WORLD EXHIBIT

Here the Stalkers find Colonel Beaumont, circus manager. He stand on a podium painted in bright yellow paint with the words, "Oddities of The Old World Exhibit." Beaumont is making a pitch for the exhibit. He tries to get the Stalkers to enter.

The Oddities are housed within a dilapidated wood building. The walls are constructed of various pieces of old discarded signs. The sagging roof is nothing more than a tar-coated sheet of canvass. Above the exhibit entrance hangs a giant pair of multi-pointed antlers. The wax of a dozen melted candles hangs from the antlers like a mass of stalactites. Below that is positioned a sign reading "Enter and Be Forever Changed." If the Stalkers have been to the *Fun House*, they should easily recognize the quote.

Inside, the eclectic exhibit is set up like a cross between a museum and a witch doctor's hut. Hundreds of various sized burning white candles cast the room in a myriad of deep gold and bright white contrasts. So much wax drips from candles hanging from the walls, that it gives the illusion the walls themselves are melting away. The floors are covered with expensive Persian carpets. On tables there can be found: sparkling glass jars stuffed with a multitude of different curiosities, various skeletal remains, and all sorts of



strange items. Each of the treasures have a place-card set in front of it. (This entire experience should be as surreal as possible for the Stalkers so the more you play up this fact the better. e.g.. The walls seem to wobble. A skull may hiss or laugh at a Stalker, etc.)

SAMPLE ODDITIES :

The Mummified Hand of St. William, The Floating Stone of The South Pacific, The Demon Skull of Rio Verde, The Key of Vesperous, Scepter of The Rat King, Ring of a Thousand Curses, Sling of David, Dehydrated Zombie Flesh, The Bloody Jar, Eye of the Damned Ruby, The Head of Franz Mesmer, The Mermaid-fish, Jackalope, World's Largest Rattlesnake Skeleton, Black Dog of Ulster, Orang Pendek - The Sumatran Ape Man, Skeleton of The Vampyre Man-bat, and dozens of other unique items on display.

GMs may want to utilize an item or two that could lead to future scenarios for the Stalkers. It should be very obvious that most of the oddities are complete fakes. But, there are actually several authentic pieces that radiate Essence other than the Focus.

Colonel Montgomery Beaumont

He is a middle aged, gray haired, very charismatic and entertaining man, always willing to share a wildly inventive story or two with anyone who will lend an ear. The Colonel always begins a story by speaking in his southern drawl the words, "*Now may the good lord strike me dead with the lightning bolts of the righteous if I'm not telling the truth. I had once...*" It should be noted that he is by trade an exploiter of people. He has little integrity and his lust for money is second only to his uncanny ability to make a dollar.

Should the Circle try to interrogate Beaumont, he very cordially tells them that he is the manager of the circus. He has a passion for freaks and his first love is working as a showman, thus he spends much of his time in the freak show. He does not know of the

Unbidden in any capacity or fashion. If asked about the Focus dripping blood, he will explain matter-of-factly that sometimes Vampyre Men-bat skeletons will continue to drip blood years after their death, just as a stuffed tortoise may drip oils from its long dead body.

If a Stalker tries to use Delve, he learns that Beaumont has joined the circus within what he recalls as the last couple of months. Beaumont was one of three people to have joined the circus at that time. The other two people are *Gentle Jim - the fattest man in the universe* and *Olnick - a professional geek*. Beaumont also has an unusual memory, concerning being attacked on a tropical island by three armed bug-eyed cannibals. (This is a memory implanted by Momus to overlay the first circus disaster.)

Beaumont happily tells the Stalkers that they should check the performers' cooking pavilion, located in the performers' quarters, for Gentle Jim. He is always hungry. Olnick, however, was punished for eating some of the petting zoo and has been in his cage.

For Colonel Beaumont, use the Primary Character Template ,WV pg. 118.

Note: (If the Stalkers return to this exhibit they will not find Beaumont. Their next meeting with him will be at the finale.)

THE PERFORMERS QUARTERS

The Performers' Quarters are full of tents and wagons of all sizes. Laundry, tattered from the length of time it has been hanging, flaps in the wind. Smoke from a dozen or so camp fires masks the foul scents plaguing the rest of the circus. On one side is set a large striped canopy, with tables set underneath. This is obviously the dining pavilion.



Gentle Jim, the Fattest Man in the Universe

A man of enormous bulk sits under a pavilion, at a table, eating from a giant platter of meat, oblivious to the fact that the meat is rotting and strewn with maggots. Smiling as maggots wriggle from his lips, he politely asks the Stalkers if they would like some “Yummies.” Jim’s intellect is severely lacking. He is not aware of anything being abnormal except there seems to be much more food than normal and the cook is rather pleasant about serving seconds. He finishes the platter and stands up to get another helping. It becomes noticeable that Jim is wearing an odd belt-like contraption that seems to be constricting his bulk, enabling him to walk.

Jim answers questions between mouthfuls of decaying meat. He works in the Freak Show and does not know of any Unbidden. If asked, he tells the Stalkers that Colonel Beaumont heads the circus. He points out Olnick’s cage if asked. But, he does not get up again from the table because he goes back on stage in a half hour and must first eat.

Use the Secondary Character Template, WV pg. 118.

The Cook

The cook is at the end of the pavilion. He is stirring a huge noxious vat of gray meat with three of his hands and chops chunks of rotting flesh with his other two hands. The origin of the meat is truly questionable. Flies buzz in thick clouds, desecrating the flesh with a fury. The cook is quite human.

If questioned about his extra arms he tells the Stalkers that he is one of the earlier masterpieces of functional art. He is not able to explain what that means (he does not know). But that is what he was called by the “artist” that created him. He has no clue where the studio is nor does he seem to have any interest. If asked

about the meat, the cook tells the Stalkers it is delivered by the keepers just about every hour. If the Stalkers decide to wait they will meet the Keepers.

Use the Minor Character Template, WV pg. 118.

The Keepers: Nog and Tog

Should the Stalkers wait for the next delivery of flesh, they see two odd shaped (and very ugly) dwarfs. Their signs read: Nog and Tog. They are dragging a large wood barrel containing meat by rope and harness. The word “Yummies” has been painted on the side. When Nog and Tog notice the Stalkers, they look at each other and run in the direction from where they came. Pursuing Stalkers easily catch up to them. The dwarves are quite fidgety and break into an argument. They curse each other saying that the boss will now make them the next “Radarmen”. A simple Perceive Roll will enable the Stalker to see that the dwarfs’ flesh seems to be translucent and it appears that there is a dark thing twitching within each of the dwarfs. They are really Husked Goblins (*DP pg. 66*). If the Stalkers try to communicate with them, the Goblins will try to scare the Stalkers by making sounds to intimidate or perhaps terrify them (naturally to no effect.) The attempts are obviously pathetic, ranging from really bad cackling witch’s laughter, to a simple “boo.” When they finish their little display, they will look at each other once again and shrug. Their Husks will tear as claws rip through flesh. The Goblins are prepared to die rather than talk or be punished by the boss.

GM Note: If the Stalkers try to follow the drag marks left from the barrel they will be led to the Big Top entrance, where the marks dissipate.

Olnick-The Lobster-Clawed Amphibian Geek

Olnick is found in a large cage, sitting in a rocking chair, next to a large pile of books, and smoking a clay pipe while reading his favorite novel, “Great Expecta-



tions” by Charles Dickens. The sign above the cage reads “Olnick - The Lobster-Clawed Amphibian Geek.” Across the center of Olnick’s head a large spiny dorsal fin can be seen. A lateral fin can be found behind each of his ears. And a giant lobster claw has taken the place of where his right hand should be. The geek offers the Stalkers a casual glance up from the book he is absorbed in while puffing away.

Though it appears that Olnick has been the subject of some sort of experiment, that could not be further from the truth. Upon joining the circus, Olnick took to occasionally sampling some of the animals from the petting zoo to sate his voracious appetite. (That is what got him thrown out of the last circus.) When Olnick stumbled upon a curious creature hiding in the animal pen he declared it a delicacy and letting his hunger get the best of him, he ate it. That creature was a Mock. Eating an Awakened Shadow is no small feat and even Olnick’s nearly indestructible stomach ached for days. But the whole affair awakened within him his dormant gift of Sensitivity.

Secondary Character Template, WV pg. 118

Geek Speak

Olnick is a true Sensitive, having the power to see things as they truly are. The truth is no more bizarre than the reality he had known, as far as the geek is concerned. He knows what is going on and has chosen the path of self-preservation. He has sewn the fins into his flesh and has cleverly rigged the giant lobster claw to his hand. Momus assumes that Olnick is a “natural” freak and has allowed him to continue with his performances. Olnick chooses to spend his time in an unlocked cage when not performing. He is free to roam where he chooses but that would be too risky. So he has taken to hunkering down to some of the classics.

He has never seen the Unbidden to his knowledge but things were weird from the first day he joined the circus. He asks the Stalkers why they are together in a group and not roaming around by themselves like all of the other strange creatures? He also asks if the Circle plans on eating him. *“That would be irony,”* he chuckles.

Olnick, having eaten a creature of the Essence, has become extremely Sensitive and actually radiates some Essence himself, so it is possible that the Stalkers could mistake him for another Minion. The geek has a good idea what the Unbidden is and does not try to escape in fear of being caught.

If the players are totally lost at this point, you can use Olnick to



get them back on track. Olnick can help them out by telling them what he knows, but he only speaks in riddles. *“The god of clowns walks the earth. People are pawns in a greater reality. In this circus we have freaks and then we have freaks of nature. Which are you?”* He will then go back to his reading. *“Don’t miss THE big show. It starts just after my act.”*



OLNICK'S ACT :

He performs on a stage next to the entrance to the Freak Show. The back of the stage has promotional posters of Olnick without his “fins” or the “claw”. No one has caught on to his clever deception yet. Being a geek, his act consists of eating lots of strange and grotesque items and in the grand finale, he bites the head off of a squirrel and then devours it. Next to Olnick’s stage is a large poster reading: “The Big Show” which gives the times. The next show starts in just a few minutes.

THE BIG (TOP) SHOW

Big colorful posters at the entrance preview the best circus acts worthy enough to be given Big Top status. The Stalkers will see promotions for the Flying Salucci Brothers, Captain Bob - the High Diver, Jasmine - the Lion Tamer, and Theo - the Dancing Clown (with a big red X painted over it) among others.

A clown with two additional faces sewn to his skull and wearing an “*Baphomet - art*” sign, excitedly greets the Stalkers at the entrance. Even the thick white makeup cannot hide the look of horror with which both his additional faces have been preserved. He informs the Circle that he has been waiting for their arrival and that they are to be the guests of honor at the next show, which begins in 10 minutes. The clown escorts them to reserved front row seats. (Momus is using the Puppet Master power to control and speak through the three faced clown.) Baphomet - the three faced clown says: “*It is an excellent opportunity for you to view our work in progress.*” If the Stalkers ask him what he means, he has no clue what they are talking about.

The Stalkers find the grandstand at full capacity and the excited chatter of the spectators echoes throughout the tent. A band can be heard tuning up. And the sounds of the circus animals echo through the enormous tent. The Stalkers notice that the audience has

the leather smiley masks pinned to their faces all the signs read “*partz.*” They sit perfectly still in anticipation of the show about to begin.

The Corruption has given the Big Top perverse dimensions. Though oval in shape, the tent has become very narrow, barely allowing room for the grandstand and the twin performing rings. Set in the rings are colorful boxes of various sizes, hoops, and barrels. The peak of the tent is some 150 feet in height. Just below the canopy are two platforms, a tightrope, and a set of trapeze. Even the Corruption is not strong enough to Mask the heavy odor of kerosene used for weather-proofing the canvass tents.

GM Note: The Stalkers should be made to feel that they should stay through the show. However, if once seated, the Stalkers try to leave or react before the show is over, a spot light shines upon them and the ring master insists that due to the risk of spectators being seriously injured, they must stay seated until the end of the show. If they do not like the performance then they will be offered a complete refund. Upon the ring master’s comments two larger than life pasty-faced clowns dressed in circa 1880s police uniforms with huge clubs, positions themselves on either side of the Stalkers. An Easy Perception Roll will tell them that the clowns are in fact two Ogres (*WV pg. 111*) and that fighting them would be a bad idea for the Circle.

A Minor Fiasco

It suddenly becomes dark and remains that way for a moment. A brass band starts to play “Three Blind Mice” as a voice booms through the dark. “*Ladies and gentlemen you are about to witness the most amazing show on earth. Sit back and relax, while you witness the most perfect of creations in action. Now, fix your eyes on the spotlight high above your heads while the Flying Salucci Brothers perform for your entertainment.*” The crowd wildly cheers and then abruptly stops. (A successful Perception Roll indicates that the Stalker notices something peculiar about the cheering.)



A spotlight zooms in on four strange looking figures standing on the platforms near the top of the canopy. They appear to be in some sort of bulky costumes. As they begin to swing across the space between the platforms while conducting well-orchestrated acrobatics, one thing becomes evident. The Flying Salucci Brothers are not using the trapeze at all. They are quite literally flying, using translucent wings much like a giant dragonfly. After their act ends, the Salucci Brothers can still be seen in the darkness - a strange glow from their abdomens flicker in the blackness.

Below, another spotlight shines on a young woman, standing with a large hoop, in the ring on the right. The crowd cheers again. (This time it becomes more apparent to the Stalkers that the cheers seem to start and stop at exactly the same time.)

The ring master barks, "*See Little Suzie Sunshine and her trained...<pause>...uh <pause> goat...uh...people <pause> ...uh...things.*" Sitting in a row are six goats with French poodle hair styles, bare human buttocks, and bald human heads. They each have long beards and a single horn protrudes from the forehead of each beast. The goat-people all seem to be extremely nervous - not quite knowing what to do. Little Suzie Sunshine produces a whip and begins to crack it above the beasts' heads. They pause and then drop off of the box and jump through the waiting hoop. Sweet Little Suzie Sunshine starts to giggle, flailing the whip wildly as she "coaxes" the beasts to jump through the hoop at a faster pace. This keeps up until the girl is hysterical with laughter and the beasts are crying in human voices. Then the spotlight cuts off, allowing darkness to once again take over.

The silent crowd erupts into crazed cheering until a spotlight shines on Little Suzie Sunshine once again. This time she was not prepared for the spotlight as evidenced by her look of surprise while she struggles to swallow the last leg of one of the beasts. It can still be seen trying to fight in vain within the grossly contorted neck of the young woman. Flesh stretched beyond its capacity starts to tear. A voice screams, "*Kill*

the lights!" The light fading, Little Suzie Sunshine tries to bow to the crowd. She lets out a muffled "*uh...oh...*" while watching her body continue to expand. A loud tearing sound is heard in the darkness, followed by an ear-shattering squeal, the shuffling of numerous feet, and many dull whacking noises.

The Show Must Go On

After a brief delay, the light shines once again high above at one of the platforms. Standing on the platform is a heavy set man with the face of a bat. He waves to the crowd below and motions as if diving. The ring master explains that the figure on the platform is Radarman the Sixteenth, part of a long, proud line of Radarmen. On the ground below a wooden barrel is illuminated. Radarman the Sixteenth performs a beautiful swan-dive off of the platform. Using his bat sonar, he hones in on the barrel, finding his mark with expert precision and landing with a sickening crunch. Two dwarfs quickly attach ropes to the barrel and drag it away.

Several more acts follow: from the human pyramid (nine bodies joined at hip and shoulder), to the human cannonball (very messy), each act receives more cheers from the crowd than the other.

When the show ends the lights come on and none of the performers or the clown policemen, are to be seen. The audience is still seated cheering wildly...but not moving at all. Then they become deathly silent.

At the end of the show, Stalkers who have paid any attention to any members of the audience notices that no one has moved at all through the entire show. Not one head has moved. Not one hand has clapped. They just stare forward with the leather smiley faces. Close inspection proves that the audience is comprised of stuffed dummies and rotting corpses and the "cheering" came from primitive talking machines placed behind the grandstand.



The Curtain Falls

Baphomet - the three faced clown, approaches the Stalkers again, asking if they enjoyed the performance. Momus uses Puppetmaster on the clown to speak through him. He feels he has probably convinced the Stalkers that they should leave. *"You're not going to make us shut down the circus right? I mean, we have convinced you that the work we are doing is making a big difference, right? You understand. I mean, after all, you are just as beautiful to look at with all your lovely personal touches, as some of the best pieces of art I have seen. So I guess we won't be seeing you around these parts anymore, huh? It was nice of you to visit. I'll say good-bye now. That way is the exit."*

Assuming the Circle does not decide to return to the Realm of Essence at that point, then the clown matter-of-factly informs the Stalkers of the following:

"I regret to inform you that my master is much too busy too speak with you any further and will have to meet with you at another time. It has become painfully clear to him that do to your lack of appreciation, the circus has just performed its final show for the good people of this county. And now, we must all be leaving you. Perhaps you will visit us again if we return next year. I am afraid you have lost all past privileges as guests of Colonel Beaumont and the circus. I would kindly ask you to leave the premises."

The clown offer no fight. Instead, he hisses at them and runs away toward the performers' quarters. Should the Stalkers interrogate Baphomet they find that he only knows his master was in the Big Top but has left and is now preparing to depart.





BUGGING OUT

When the Stalkers exit the tent, they see that everyone is moving about in a seemingly rushed purpose. Smaller tents are being dismantled. Signs are being taken down. Food stands are closing. The circus is packing up! All of the leather masked people wearing “partz” signs are moving in the direction of the performers’ quarters.

The Stalkers will eventually be led to the performers’ quarters, whether it was from chasing the three faced clown, investigating the migration of the “partz” people, performers pointing the way to Colonel Beaumont, or by drawing a conclusion that Momus may be in that direction. There they will witness a well rehearsed routine of breaking down the circus.

Horses are being led to the circus wagons. The cooking pavilion is being dismantled. Gentle Jim is arguing with the cook over a new barrel of “yummies” that has just been thrown away in the rush to pack.

If the Stalkers try to locate Momus or his wagon, people will shrug but suggest that they speak with Colonel Beaumont. Pointing the way to Beaumont’s wagon, the performers will also tell the Stalkers, “better pack now and talk with him later”, because they have never seen the man more angry. Eventually the Stalkers will make their way to a large and wildly colored wagon. The bill-sign painted on the side reads “Oddities of the Old World”. There hustling in and out of the wagon with arms loads of bizarre goods, is Colonel Beaumont. He is just as busy cursing and shouting as he is packing. When the colonel sees the Stalkers he will fly into a rage, screaming; “*Its all your fault!*”

Send In the Clown

Momus has warped Beaumont’s mind into believing the Stalkers are a group of religious people who are driving the circus away due to its immorality. The Colonel berates the Stalkers for being close-minded hypocrite do-gooders with no sense of wonder. The Circle decide, based on this tirade, that Beaumont is, in fact, the Unbidden. This outcome is likely if the Stalkers misconstrue Beaumont’s issues with people chasing away the circus for the obsessed insanity of an Unbidden.

Beaumont ends the confrontation with violence drawing a knife and charging at the Circle, forcing the Stalkers to subdue or kill him.

Immediately after confronting Beaumont, the back of his wagon explodes outward in a shower of millions of splinters. Standing at the edge of the wagon is an enormous clown. His bulging blood red eyes radiate fury. His massive chest heaves. And from the corners of his mouth drip goo. It is Momus, and he is not happy about the Stalkers killing his favorite pet. He speaks to the Stalkers in a venomous voice.

“What’s this? Stalkers, attacking mortals? Only that which creates, has they right to destroy. Your incessant buzzing has now earned my wrath. Your own idiocy brings your doom.

“I have tried to impress you with my work. I have created masterpieces that the most imaginative Aesthetic could not have thought of. By being here, I have made the Dream a better, more beautiful place.

“How could I expect you bastards of the Flesh to understand me? The greatest irony is that you are the purest freaks of all. Far from art though, each of you are nothing more than an abomination.

“You are the flotsam and the jetsam of the Dream, no longer worthy of even a single Aesthetic’s thought. I know. I was there when you were stripped of your Flesh and made into the perversions that you are. I watched it all.



I tasted the bile of your creation as thousands of my kind vomited forth that which made you.

“What right do you have to tell your makers that your ways are correct and they are wrong? What right have you to pass judgment on things you cannot possibly understand? WHO gives you that right?”

“If you knew the answers, you would not be doing this of free will. Heh, heh. Free will. It gives me no pleasure to destroy those pets who would rise up against me.”

Momus does not wish to be taken to the Vault and does anything he can to prevent it.

Inside the wagon the Stalkers will find hanging, the Focus, which Beaumont has recently packed up. Once the Enigma has been dealt with, the Hunt is over and the Stalkers can return to their Domains.

Momus

Momus' Vessel is that of a huge rotund clown with bulging eyes. Momus is an exceptionally intelligent Unbidden and has reached the early stages of an Architect. It has reached this stage in a relatively short time. Recently the Unbidden has achieved a Life Link to the

Fortitude	5 / 6	Focus, and it's ability to bind Shadows is extraordinary. It has quite a number more Minions at its disposal than an Unbidden at its level of evolution would normally have. Momus also has an intricate understanding of the anatomies of not only humans but most other species. It is currently experimenting with creating “freaks” by combining the anatomical parts of multiple species forming perverse twists of nature. The end result, he considers a work of art.
Vitality	16 / 19	
Initiative	15 / 12	
Defend	14 / 14	
Perceive	16 / 17	
Resolve	20 / 20	

Momus will not confront the Stalkers unless he is cornered. He stays away from the Circle by communicating with the Stalkers through use of the Puppet Master power. The Unbidden truly believes that what he does truly enhances the Dream. He does not relinquish his convictions and tries to destroy the Circle if confronted rather than be taken to the Whispering Vault.

Momus' Avatar is truly the ultimate freak, its head being microcephalic is in great contrast to the huge head of his Vessel. The rest of his body is a slimy tangle of arms, legs, horns, tongues, hair, and tails from a myriad of different beasts.

COMBAT (Vessel)

Unarmed (Attack 18, 4D Damage)

COMBAT (Avatar)

Four attacks per round Melee (Attack 20, 4D Damage) or two ranged attacks (spitting powerful acid) for 2D with -1 Die cap vs beings of Essence.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Puppetmaster, Extraction, Quicken-ing, Shimmersifting

AVERSIONS

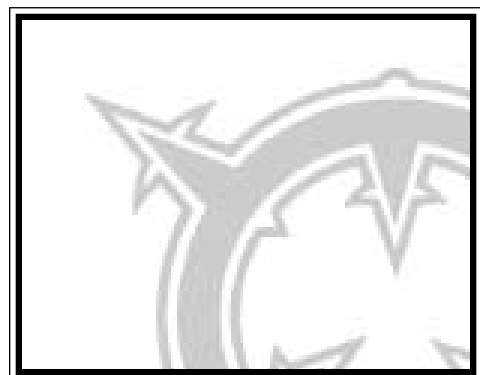
Critics (inspire to a rage)

FETISHES

Physical deformities

IDIOSYNCRASIES

Momus is prone to tantrums because of its “artistic temperament”. Being an Unbidden prodigy is quite demanding. The Unbidden enjoys Mint Juleps and relaxing in a pool of gore while gathering its thoughts.



Writers

Lester Smith

Lester Smith is a freelancer who likes to refer to himself as “self-unemployed.” He used to work on staff at TSR, where he designed such things as the Origins-award-winning Dragon Dice game and the Bughunters sci-fi horror RPG. Before that, he worked at GDW, where he created the Dark Conspiracy RPG and edited Dangerous Journeys, just to name two hats of many. Les got his start a decade ago, when the first game he ever designed was purchased by Space Gamer magazine. But SJG sold the magazine to DTI that very issue, and it died shortly thereafter. Then Les moved on to GDW, which closed up shop soon after he left. Shortly after his leaving TSR, the company ran into financial difficulty and was purchased by WotC. This Typhoid Mary of gaming now works at home, pouring his horror into products for Ronin, Pinnacle, Destination, Authority, and anyone else who will have him.

Julie Hoverson

Julie Hoverson has been running and writing horror games for nearly half her life, but only recently began being published. She has written for Mayfair's CHILL, and publishes the zine Serendipity's Circle. She is proud of her use of history in her games, though always with a twist, and enjoys creating bad guys who are fun to role-play. Although she lives in Seattle, she does not work at WOTC or drink Espresso. She does, however, love to get feedback on her work and can be reached at SercCircle@aol.com.

Todd Miller

Crazy Todd Miller's remains were fished out of the East River three days ago. He was well-known in the New York theater scene, and was also a writer for television and film. He was last heard to be saying that he was very excited to be working for Ronin Publishing. There are no suspects in custody but the authorities seek several of his evil clones for questioning.

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Brian E. Kirby

Brian E. Kirby is certainly glad that there are games like the Whispering Vault that allow him to express the twisted ideas he gets while working at his straight job. He currently resides in Hoboken, New Jersey with his wife Jennifer, two computers, and the world's dumbest cat. The doctors say that he probably won't get better any time in the near future. Editor's note: (Horried by his psychological profile results the postal service refused to hire him.)

Chris Pramas

Chris Pramas is one of the conspirators behind the great Ronin Experiment. He hopes to prove that teetering on the edge of poverty can be a positive life experience, and figured that starting a gaming company was the quickest way to achieve his goal. When not working for Ronin, he maintains an active freelance career and has written for such games as Feng Shui, Over the Edge, Warhammer FRP, and Ars Magica. Current projects include work on In Nomine and a series of short stories for Games Workshop's forthcoming fiction anthology. Loves include coffee, punk, toast, and sushi.

Neal Darcy

Working for several multi-national corporate propaganda mills provided Neal with the proper focus he needed to become a productive member of a prominent multi-level marketing cult. Mistakenly, he thought that advancement was achieved through assassination and he was quickly ejected after an unfortunate incident. When the prospect of forming Ronin Publishing came up he jumped at his first chance for a steady, non-paying job. Aside from having a penchant for millenial cults and comet watching, Neal enjoys writing, drawing, sushi by the truck load, and sweet irony.