



***STUNNING  
ELDritch TALES***

BY ROBIN D LAWS

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## Credits



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# The Devourers In The Mist

This adventure is a tribute to the rugged adventure genre, a pulp staple which earns less love among today's fans than fantasy, science fiction, horror and proto-superhero stories. Don't worry, though; this being *Trail Of Cthulhu*, the players face something far more outré than a simple battle of man versus nature.

*The Devourers In the Mist* can be played at any point in a pulp-oriented series. (For example, it could occur on a trip to or from Shanghai, the site of the next scenario in this book.) It is also designed to serve as a simple introductory adventure highlighting the GUMSHOE rules. With its brief length, it also makes for a good convention game, where you can more freely indulge in the high PC mortality rate encouraged by the survival story sub-genre.

**Important note:** As in any man vs. nature tale, the **Outdoorsman** ability proves crucial to the protagonists' survival. Check character sheets before commencing play. If none of the characters have Outdoorsman (or the player whose character does have it is a sporadic attendee) invite the players to adjust their abilities so that they do.

Some pieces of advice apply only to a one-shot, campaign intro, or mid-campaign scenario. These passages appear next to the following icons:

<1S> One-Shot

<I> Introductory scenario

<M> Mid-campaign scenario

## The Hook

The scenario opens with the characters waking up on an uncharted island in the Pacific, the survivors of a shipwreck.

## The Horrible Truth

The shipwreck that strands the characters was no accident. Buried on the island is *The Firenze Tome*, an object which is at the same time a volume of unspeakable Mythos lore, and a Mythos entity called Abholos. Hungry for souls to devour, it exerts a malign influence over the region, causing shipwrecks and plane crashes. Unless the tome is found and destroyed, any potential rescuers will also be drawn in and devoured. To have any chance

of solving this mystery, the characters must work together to gain food and shelter—and evade the invisible beings who come to collect Abholos' nourishment.

## The Spine

To complete the scenario, the characters must:

- Learn that there's a dread tome on the island
- Discover that the tome is also an entity
- Destroy the tome, probably by doing battle with the entity

## Timing For Convention Play

<1S> Convention play requires a Keeper to take a firm hand on the pacing tiller, ensuring that a satisfying story unfolds within the allotted time. This scenario helps you to achieve that by being fairly open ended. Assuming a four-hour session, you ideally want the following events to occur no later than the following points:

- 45 minutes: First indications of devourer threat
- 1 hour: Ruth Copeland's plane discovered
- 2 hour: packet of letters discovered
- 3 hour: Group learns that *The Firenze Tome* is Abholos

To compress the scenario into an even shorter demo experience, play out only a few of the scenes, flashing forward between sequences with quick descriptions of what might have happened in between. Play out the landing on the beach, including Stability tests for the group's memory of the squid attacks during the sinking, and the use of several investigative abilities. If this goes quickly, play out a survival scene or two, as the players decide what to do. Then flash forward to the discovery of the plane, but put the packet of letters, discovered separately in a full run of the scenario, inside the ruined fuselage. Then flash forward again to the final attempt to destroy *The Firenze Tome*.

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### Antagonist Reactions

“Devourers In the Mist” is both a Mythos tale and a man vs. nature story. In addition to solving the mystery, the characters must in the meantime ensure their day-to-day survival by securing food, drinkable water, and shelter. In other words, nature itself can be seen as an additional antagonist, against which the group must also succeed.

After devouring their souls, Abholos turns the discarded husks of his victims into quasi-substantial hunters, who bring his prey to him. As the PCs fight to survive, progressively more alarming appearances of these unearthly beings ratchet up the tension.

### SCENES

This scenario has a very simple spine, and an extensive set of choices for antagonist reactions and moments of general unease. As such, it allows you plenty of room for improvisation based on the character actions and the mood of the room.

#### The Beach Scene Type: Introduction

The PCs awaken on the sandy shore of a tiny Pacific atoll. All players make **Health** tests against a Difficulty of 4. Those who succeed awaken on their own, at about the same time. Failed characters either must be awakened by another characters (on a Difficulty 2 First Aid test) or come to on their

own. In the latter case, they wake up on their own in fifteen minute intervals, in the order of their Health ratings, from highest to to lowest.

Upon awakening, each character makes an **Athletics** or **Fleeing** roll (player’s choice) against a Difficulty of 4. Failed characters take a die of damage+2. This is retroactive damage, measuring how badly they were hurt during the shipwreck. See which failed character loses the fewest Health points; successful characters lose this number, minus 1.

The characters are splayed across the beach, some with the cold, briny water hungrily lapping at their legs and torsos. Their clothing is drenched.

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## The Beach

They're wearing whatever a person of their Credit Rating would have had on during the early evening on a luxury liner. As soon as a player inquires into the state of repair of his or her garments, all of them make Difficulty 4 **Preparedness** tests. Winners' clothing is relatively intact. The garments of failed characters are tattered and will afford less than perfect protection against the elements until repaired. However, in true pulp fashion, the tattered clothing of physically attractive characters is strategically ripped for maximum sex appeal.

<1S>In a one-shot game, only the

player characters are present on the island. When PCs die, they are not replaced. Players up for a convention run of a Cthulhu game know they're signing on for a high body count.

<I>or<M>In a campaign game, new castaways are found to replace dead PCs. They can be located on other beaches, or have made their way into the jungle interior. Place them as required to ease them smoothly into the narrative. Present flashbacks to characterize these replacement investigators.

The stretch of beach goes on for about half a mile; they are at its center point.

Jungle plants thickly forest the middle of the island. The tree line begins about a quarter of a mile from their position on the beach.

**Geology** reveals that this is an uncharted island, marked on no map.

There are no obvious sources of shelter, food, or potable water on the stretch of beach the group currently occupies.

The players will doubtless have questions about the sinking of their ship, the *Empress Of Caledonia*:

It sank due to a hurricane-force wind,

### <I>Flashbacks

By using "The Devourers In the Mist" as an introductory scenario, you get to use an extreme and vivid example of the technique in which an investigative group forms spontaneously after being thrown together into mutual peril.

Prepare for this by creating a campaign frame in which each player is instructed to prepare an interesting reason for their characters to be headed to the Orient on a luxury liner.

Rather than introduce the characters in static, motiveless scenes aboard the ship, start the action as given in the main text, with the post-wreck awakening on the nameless isle. Let them establish themselves according to what they do.

However, whenever a player asserts something unusual, interesting or telling about his character, use this as a cue for a directed flashback scene, in which the character is introduced to the other players. (See **Fear Itself** for more on directed scenes and flashbacks.) Work with the player to frame the scene to highlight the character's drive, a secret element of his backstory, or as an explanation for a seemingly incongruous ability, as that ability is used.

Possible examples might include:

A character with the drive In the Blood might gaze into the trackless jungle and feel a shudder of cosmic malignity, which simultaneously attracts and repulses her. This cues a flashback to the first time she felt the pull of weird forces on her.

When a character who is posing as a scientist but is really a criminal supplies an obscure and useful fact, he flashes back to an incident when he saved an older fellow prison inmate, who in turn tutored him in the basics of science.

A character's backstory refers to a traumatic year spent as the prisoner of a degenerate Amazonian tribe; a flashback of his capture occurs when he first ventures into the jungle.

Unless a player specifically indicates that he's verbally recounting the flashback to others, its contents must be treated as player knowledge only, unavailable to the players. (That said, if another player takes a flashback of his own in an irresistibly clever direction, he might be able to show why he ought to know another's secrets...)

As no one scene is likely to convey all interesting information about a character, add further flashbacks as trigger points come up in play. Try to balance the flashbacks so that everyone gets an equal share. Some characters are full of hooks for this sort of thing and tempt you to overemphasize them.

It might also be fun to include some flashbacks of the ship's capsizing and the efforts to get to the lifeboats, or to swim to a lifeboat after the sinking.

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which sent waves crashing up over onto the deck, causing it to take on water and eventually capsize the boat.

The storm came up suddenly, in a matter of minutes. Any characters described as being part of the crew can attest that there was no warning from the ship's weather station. Characters with **Physics** consider the storm anomalous both for its speed of attack, and for its apparently highly localized effect.

Passengers and crew behaved irrationally, even savagely, when they realized their lives were in danger, leading to many deaths.

The character with the lowest Stability rating thinks he felt the ship shudder just before it went down, as if it was hit by some moving object below the waterline.

The character with the second-lowest Stability rating thinks he saw a dark form moving through the water, dragging drowning passengers down into the depths. If the character voices this, other characters with **Biology** can theorize (correctly) that the passengers were attacked by one or more giant squids. If the players dwell on this, more of them recall the squid attack, reliving it in all of his horrible detail. Players who take no part in the discussion are portraying their characters as successfully denying or repressing the ghastly memories. Everyone else faces a possible 5-point Stability loss.

### Surviving the Island Scene Type: Trap / Challenge

Though savvy players will of course suspect it, the characters won't at first know that there's a mystery to solve on the island. Instead they'll need to focus on survival. This forces them to explore the island, which in turn

gets the mystery started. However, if they neglect their physical survival, nature will kill them long before any Cthulhoid menaces rear their distorted heads.

**Water:** After a day without water, characters suffer impairment as if **hurt**, regardless of their Health pools. After 48 hours without water, they are treated as seriously wounded (including the need for a Consciousness roll) regardless of their Health pools. These conditions can't be cured with First Aid, only with the gradual ingestion of clean drinking water. After 72 hours without water, characters must make Difficulty 6 Health tests every two hours, or die.

Going without water induces panic; after a day without water, characters face a 3-point Stability loss. After two days, a second test, for 5 points, is required.

Characters with **Outdoorsman** know that it is possible to retain water by avoiding exertion, keeping cool, and eating as little as possible. Even talking uses up water. Those faithfully following these techniques increase the intervals between dehydration repercussions by 25%. Of course, this will effectively incapacitate them, not to mention leaving them as sitting ducks for the devourers.

There is no drinking water in the beach area. Finding it means going into the jungle. There are no safe, obvious sources of water within a day's walk of the beach. The group finds one pool of water a few hours into their first jaunt into the vegetation. However, **Outdoorsman** reveals that the lack of green vegetation around the pool, plus an assortment of animal bones, indicates that it is toxic. (Anyone drinking the water takes Damage+1, and suffers impairment as if hurt, regardless of Health pool, for 1-6 hours.)

**Outdoorsman** tells exploring characters that their three best bets are as follows:

To seek out patches of green vegetation and dig for water there. This will be laborious and yield at best moderate amounts of water, but will require only a short jaunt into the jungle.

To go further inland, looking for concentrations of lush vegetation in its face. These indicate the presence of a spring. This is the least likely to succeed, and requires the longest trip into the jungle, but if successful would yield the most water, and on an ongoing basis.

To strip the bark off of nearby trees, creating a catchment for dew and rain. This requires the least amount of effort and jungle exploration, but yields less water than the other methods.

Method 1 is successful on a 1-point **Outdoorsman** spend by one character, and a total spend of 4 Athletics points by any number of characters. It takes all involved characters the better part of a day, and places them in the Jungle Exploration sequence #1, if it hasn't already occurred.

Method 2 is successful on a 3-point **Outdoorsman** spend, which may be made jointly by a number of characters. It takes a half day's jaunt out to the rock face, and places all involved characters in two Jungle Exploration sequences that have not yet occurred to them. To get water back to camp requires storage vessels of some kind, which may be found during the exploration.

Method 3 is successful with one 1-point **Outdoorsman** spend per day. The lack of a spend indicates that insufficient rain and dew are gathered. It does not trigger a jungle exploration scene.

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## Surviving The Island

### GEAR

For the most part, characters begin the adventure with only the possessions they can credibly justify as having been in their pockets, if any, on an evening spent on an ocean liner. Anything else they may have been holding—like the shovel referred to in Charlie Allred’s backstory (see “Pre-Generated Characters,” p. XX) was lost or washed away in the frantic scramble for the lifeboats.

Any player with a **Preparedness** rating may designate a single item that was in the PC’s possession at the time of the sinking. As with any ordinary use of Preparedness, items which fail the test of narrative credibility are completely unavailable. Once you approve the items, players may blindly bid a number of Preparedness points against each other to see how quickly they find their chosen items. Rank the characters by the number of points they want to pay, from most to least, resolving ties in favor of characters seeking more mundane or everyday items.

The first character finds his item in the current scene. Then, whenever a new scene occurs in which it feels dramatically correct to allow another item to appear, the next player on the list finds his chosen piece of gear. This continues until the scenario concludes, or all items are recovered.

Clever players will note that certain items may put them in danger of robbery by hostile fellow PCs. Being the only one on the island with a gun makes you powerful—and a target.

Clever players will have specified at least one water vessel as salvaged gear; see “Gear” sidebar. Few trees on the island have large enough trunks to carve a watertight vessel; finding and chopping a suitable tree requires a 1-point **Outdoorsman** spend, a 1-point **Athletics** spend, and enough travel to trigger one jungle exploration scene. Making enough vessels to carry the group’s water from a distant source requires a 1-point **Craft (Woodworking)** spend.

Otherwise the castaways will have to scour the jungle or coastline for suitable vessels, which may lead them to *The Electra* or the *The Bishamon*, respectively. Without vessels, they can only glean water from rain and dew catchment.

**Food:** Although the human body can survive for about three weeks without food, characters will lose concentration and stamina without at least minimal nourishment. After

two days without food, the cost of all investigative spends increases by 1, and clues which would normally be available automatically now require 1-point spends. All general ability Difficulties increase by 1; this is cumulative with any increases for injury or dehydration. After a week without food, the cost of all investigative spends increases another point, as do all Difficulties. After two weeks without food, this cumulative increase occurs again. After three weeks without food, characters must make a Difficulty 7 Health test every six hours, or lapse into unconsciousness and die. If a player’s description of a character describes him or her as obese, you may decide to let him live a few days longer than his slimmer companions. (Note though that the scenario is unlikely to take up enough game time for death from starvation to become an issue.)

The ocean is full of edible fish—at least for a while. A character with

**Outdoorsman** can teach any number of castaways to spear fish, using sharpened bits of bamboo taken from the nearby tree line. (One of the players *did* think to specify a knife as salvaged gear or a credibly explained pocket appurtenance, right?) Spearfishing is a Difficulty 4 Athletics test, which takes several hours of sustained effort in cold ocean water and may therefore be attempted only once per character per day. Successful characters get enough fish to feed one person, plus another person for each point of difference between result and difficulty. (So, for example, a result of 6 feeds three people for a day.) Characters with **Outdoorsman** can render the fish edible by cleaning and scaling—assuming they have a knife. Otherwise a 1-point **Outdoorsman** spend is required to scavenge up sufficiently sharp rocks to do the job.

By traveling into the jungle, the characters can search for game or edible plants.

As soon as exploration begins, **Biology** shows that the island is strangely deficient in both animal species and edible plant life.

**Outdoorsman** reveals the principles of wild plant eating: avoid red plants, milky or sappy leaves, anything that smells like peaches or almonds. If it’s wilted, don’t put it in your mouth. When testing a plant for edibility, allow only one person to test it. Stop eating anything that burns when you touch it to your tongue. Safe plants can only be harvested by characters with **Outdoorsman** or **Biology**. If the group also has fish or game to eat, enough supplemental vegetation to keep everyone healthy can be gathered with three hours of foraging—this can be one qualified forager working for three hours, three exploring for one hour, or any other workable combination. If the group subsists

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entirely on vegetation, 4 foraging hours are required for each hungry mouth.

Gulls and shorebirds comprise the only avian life on the island. Catching one with bare hands requires a Difficulty 4 **Athletics** test, and can be attempted only once per hour, as the rest of the flock tends to fly away when one of their number is caught by a predator. One bird provides a day's protein for one person.

A 2-point **Outdoorsman** spend, plus a net, can create a bird trap, which yields 1-6 birds per day.

Deep in the jungle, wild pigs lurk. **Outdoorsman** plus a 1-point **Shadowing** spend allows the character to track a wild pig. Success at a Difficulty 4 Firearms or Difficulty 5 Weapons test (assuming someone has made a suitably stout spear) downs a pig. Each pig yields enough protein to feed six people for 1-3 days. (Roll a die, subtracting 3 from all results above 3.) Like fish, pigs must be properly cleaned before being eaten, requiring the use of **Outdoorsman** (with a knife) or a 1-point **Outdoorsman** spend to find rocks that can be sharpened to a blade's sharpness. One set of sharp rocks can be used on both fish and pigs.

This account of foraging on the island is not meant to be exclusive. If the players suggest a food-gathering method that sounds believable, allow it, assigning an appropriate point cost or Difficulty number, as seems warranted.

**Fire:** Any **Outdoorsman** can build, start, and maintain a fire—with adequate fuel. Dry logs and foliage are hard to come by in the jungle, requiring three hours of exploration per day. This can be accomplished by one **Outdoorsman** working for three hours, three working for one hour

### New Rule: General Spends

Occasionally you'll want to create a task at which there is no reasonable chance of failure, but which should cost the characters a degree of effort. To do this, simply charge the character(s) a number of points from relevant general ability pools. Where tasks can be performed by cooperative effort, multiple characters may contribute points to them. The expenditures should usually be on the low side, at least if more than one character pitches in.

The task of digging for water at patches of lush green vegetation serves as an example of this technique.

This rule can be applied to any iteration of GUMSHOE.

### Food Fear

Something is wrong with much of the island's flora and fauna.

A character with **Biology** who chooses to carefully examine trees or other relatively old-growth plants notices that their trunks and branches are oddly soft and weak. Some can be pulled apart with one's bare hands. On a close examination (1 point **Biology** spend) their cells prove to be enlarged and full of empty space, as if the trees grew extremely quickly, and without necessary nutrition. This last fact is impressively gleaned: the character is doing with the naked eye a task that would normally require a microscope.)

A character with **Biology** or **Outdoorsman** butchering a pig notices that its bone structure is subtly wrong. Although the creature outwardly *resembles* a pig, dozens of skeletal details differ from any known member of the swine family. In fact, they do not appear to have evolved from any known mammal.

**Cthulhu Mythos** use posits the horrible truth: it's as if this island sprung up from nowhere, and some immensely powerful being chose to instantly populate it with living creatures. The result is an organism which is a rough approximation of a wild pig! Any character hearing this theory faces Mythos shock, with 4 Stability and 1 Sanity at stake.

each, or any combination thereof. Multiple outdoorsmen gathering fuel at the same time must split up, searching separate sections of the jungle.

**Shelter:** **Outdoorsman** reveals the key points of tropical shelter-building, and the vexing choice that faces the group in choosing its base camp.

Camping on the beach will expose the group to rainstorms and insects. Building a shelter in the jungle lessens those threats—but who knows what's in the jungle? (As the players debate this, describe the queer, swirling mists

that billow through the jungle. Then, as they lean toward the beach, describe the hungry roiling of the implacable ocean waters.)

<1S>In a convention run, be prepared to briskly moderate debates between players, especially during the early part of the scenario focusing on the castaway experience. Let everybody have their say, then call for a decision. Extended arguments on how to proceed will otherwise eat up all the time you need for scares and a climactic conclusion.

Stands of bamboo are everywhere in

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the jungle. These can be used to build a lean-to. If the group camps in the forest, they'll also want to create a bed of bisected bamboo logs, to protect themselves from the wet and damp of the jungle floor.

Without a knife or machete, chopping down and preparing bamboo is very difficult; only the outdoorsmen can take part, and several days elapse before the shelter is fully built. Pocket knives are too small for the job.

### Dread In Camp

As the castaways struggle to assemble the basics of survival, harass them with incidents of escalating dread and horror. Major incidents involve the Devourers, detailed below. These can occur either in the base camp (which is either on the beach or in the jungle, depending on what the players decide) or during exploratory jaunts across the island.

Although these minor incidents of dread are arranged in rough ascending order, feel free to deploy them in any sequence, based on what the characters are doing and what seems to most unnerve the players. At the end of each description is a suggested Stability/Sanity loss, should you decide that the incident warrants a Stability test. Use only as many of them as you need; don't slow down the narrative just to shoehorn them all in

**Mist:** A thick, churning mist emerges from the jungle depths to roll through camp. Characters test Stability against a Difficulty of 4. Those who fail lose no Stability, but become convinced that they saw tormented faces in the fog.

**The flash:** In the middle of the night, the character on watch (there is someone on watch, right?) perceives a sudden flash of green-blue light out on the ocean horizon. This leaves the observer with the sense that the world

is more fragile and mysterious than he or she had ever contemplated. (1/0)

**Squids return:** *This incident works best after the characters have grown used to depending on fish as a food supply.*

A gibbous moon hangs low over the still midnight ocean when a sudden thrashing erupts beneath the waves. Great sprays of foam explode. Tentacles blast up through the waves. Fish fly up into the air. Occasionally a vast bulk raises itself above the waterline, to survey the castaways with an alien eye. Glimpses of the creatures' great gnashing beaks are seen.

If a player concludes that these are Cthulhoid entities, and the characters know what this means, call for Stability 4/Sanity 1 tests. Do not specify what happens to characters whose Stability or Sanity ratings drop below 0.

**Biology** reveals this as a mundane, if distressing event. It was an enormous school of giant squids, having come to feed on the shoals of fish gathered here. This as behavior is heretofore unseen in the wild; a Professor or Scientist character may resolve to write a scientific paper about it.

Once the event is shown to be mundane, all Stability/Sanity losses reverse themselves.

The day after this incident, fish become scarce—the Difficulty of spearfishing attempts increases to 8.

### Into The Jungle

Investigation of the island arouses disquiet in characters with **Geography**. After several hours of exploration, they realize that the atoll's apparently natural features are subtly wrong. If the player(s) asks for examples, provide the following: chasms lack apparent means of erosion. Streams run up slight inclines. Rocks show no evidence of aging.

The island's igneous formations display superficial characteristics of sedimentary formations, which is impossible. The character discovering the details faces a 2/1 Stability test.

The following incidents can occur while the group explores the jungle. Some are psychologically destabilizing, while others pose physical challenges.

**Disorientation:** A character with **Outdoorsman** finds that the island interferes with his natural sense of direction. The spatial relationship between the group and its destination (whatever that happens to be at the moment) appears to change at a rate inconsistent with the distance they've actually traveled. (2/0)

**Constrictor:** An enormous python slithers slowly from the branches of an overhanging tree and drops onto character taking up the rear. A Difficulty 4 Athletics test allows the character to avoid being knocked down by it. On a failure, the victim is stunned long enough for the snake to begin wrapping its coils around him. Another character armed with a knife can then kill the snake by making a Difficulty 4 Weapons test, or wrestle it off the victim with a Difficulty 6 Scuffling test. For each failed rescue test, the victim takes a die of damage. The snake yields enough protein to feed half of the group for a day. As with the pigs, if the character doing the butchering has **Biology**, he notes deep structural anomalies in the snake's skeletal structure.

**Chasm:** A long, deep rock trench blocks the group from an area they badly want to enter, such as the one containing the Electra (see below.) Without climbing gear, a single moss-slicked log provides the only route over, unless the group wants to take a long detour that may get them lost, or put them in the middle of a coming storm. Getting across the log requires

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a Difficulty 3 Athletics test. On a failure, the character falls into the chasm, taking Damage +3, and leaving the group to figure out how to effect a rescue. The trench walls are twenty feet deep. Free-climbing up or down imposes a Difficulty 7 Athletics test.

Of course, the worst threat in the jungle are the Devourers.

### The Devourers Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction

After Abholos destroys a victim it transforms the remains into a nearly-invisible servitor creature called a Devourer. These creatures can likewise turn their victims into Devourers.

Abholos is a sadistic, unambitious entity. Its sole goal is to torment, madden, and then destroy as many intelligent beings as it can. It can manifest itself only when *The Firenze Tome* is endangered, but can dimly perceive all events transpiring on its new island. With victims few and far between on the atoll, it wants to prolong the misery of the castaways as long as it can before finally giving in to its destructive impulses and turning them into more devourers.

Accordingly, it calibrates devourer attacks so that they escalate from vague menace to deadly threat. Devourer incidents might be timed as follows:

**Sensation of surveillance.** A castaway making a Difficulty 2 Sense Trouble check gets the feeling of being watched from the jungle—but can see nothing. (1/0)

**Growling in the bamboo.** Several devourers position themselves around the party during a jungle exploration and commence a weird, guttural



growling. Then they disperse, unseen. (1/0)

#### Chanting from the jungle.

While the castaways are in camp, the devourers chant with broken lips and shattered teeth: *"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn."*

#### Fomenting intra-party conflict.

Abholos seizes on any opportunities to inflame distrust between castaways. For example, if there's one gun on the island, PCs may argue over who ought to control it. Abholos then sends a devourer in to invisibly

steal the gun and move it to another disputant's sleeping area. Depending on the situation, the character possessing the coveted piece of gear may get a Sense Trouble (Difficulty 5 or higher) test to see it being tugged from its place by an invisible hand. (4/0; applies only to movement of objects by unseen hands.)

**Glimpsed in camp.** A devourer wanders into camp just as a fire is being built, or another new light source (such as a lightning storm) is about to come into being. For an instant, a castaway sees the devourer,

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## The Devourers

### NEW CREATURE: DEVOURER

A devourer is what remains of a human being after its psychic energy and physical form are torn asunder and reassembled by a powerful Mythos entity, such as Abholos.

It can be perceived only for a fraction of a second at a time, and only when a new light source is shined on it. The devourer appears as a mutilated and badly reassembled version of its previous self. No two are put back together in exactly the same way, although all gaze dully ahead with enlarged, staring eyes. One devourer's head might have been torn inside out; another's chopped horizontally in two and replaced with forehead on the bottom and jaw on top. Devourers exude an aura of killing energy; they need merely get close to a victim with an ill-swung fist to cause flesh to necrotize and fall from the bone. (They can deliberately dampen this field should they need to touch a living thing without harming it.)

Sentient beings damaged by devourers may turn into devourers if they subsequently die. They remain in danger of this until their Health pools refresh to the totals they had immediately before suffering devourer damage. (So if your Health pool is 8 out of a possible 12 and you then lose 6 points in a devourer attack, you must refresh Health back up to 8 before the threat of devourer resurrection ceases.)

A devourer victim turns into a devourer in a matter of moments. The corpse is torn apart as if from within, becomes a cyclone of whirling body parts, and then coalesces into a new form, which then becomes invisible. Witnessing this constitutes a Mythos shock carrying a potential Stability/Sanity loss of 4/2.

### Game Statistics

**Abilities :** Athletics 8, Health 5, Scuffling 8

**Hit Threshold:** 7 (drops to 4 if attacker has glimpsed it during current round, or 5 if an element of the environment, like wet sand or snow drifts, reveal its location)

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** +1

**Weapon:** necrotizing aura +0

**Armor:** 0

**Stability Loss:** +0

in all of its mutilated splendor, standing just a few inches away. Then it apparently vanishes. Abholos chooses the most evidently unstable castaway, or one who has otherwise aroused its attention. (5/0)

**Dragged off.** Devourers wait until a castaway has isolated himself from the

others, in camp or elsewhere, and set upon him. If they incapacitate him, they drag him off into the jungle and finish the kill. Only scraps of clothing and bloodless flesh are found, a discovery which may occasion a 4-point Stability loss.

**Glimpse reprise.** After a castaway is

claimed by the devourers, "Glimpsed in camp" repeats—but this time, the devourer is recognizably the lost comrade. (6/0)

**More killing.** Eventually the devourers run out of interesting ways to toy with their victim's minds, and resort to picking them off, one by one.

There is one more devourer than there are PCs—plus an extra devourer for every castaway slain by the creatures. Astute players may choose to take the fight to the enemy. This may enable them to defeat the devourers and then recuperate before tackling Abholos.

Although invisible, the devourers are substantial enough to leave trails through sand or jungle, and can be tracked. This requires a **Shadowing** test of Difficulty 4 on a trail known to have recently been occupied by devourers, performed by a character who also has **Outdoorsman**. Higher difficulties pertain for older trails. The spoor they leave behind consists of blood and bits of dripping human gristle, so the tracker and anyone else taking close note of this detail faces a 2/0 Stability test.

When not in use, they tend to congregate together. Abholos allows them to be targeted because it does not believe that the humans are capable of winning a straight-up battle against his minions. Give the PCs statistical advantages to reward any clever plans or tactics they may execute in their attempt to tilt the odds in their favor.



The Devourers In The Mist

**The Electra**

Scene Type: Core (Physical Evidence)

During an early jaunt through the jungle—probably the group’s second or third major journey, depending on how much rapt suspense you’re wringing from the story’s struggle for survival and escalating horror threads—the group stumbles across a small downed plane, buried nose-first in the jungle floor, its wings snapped.

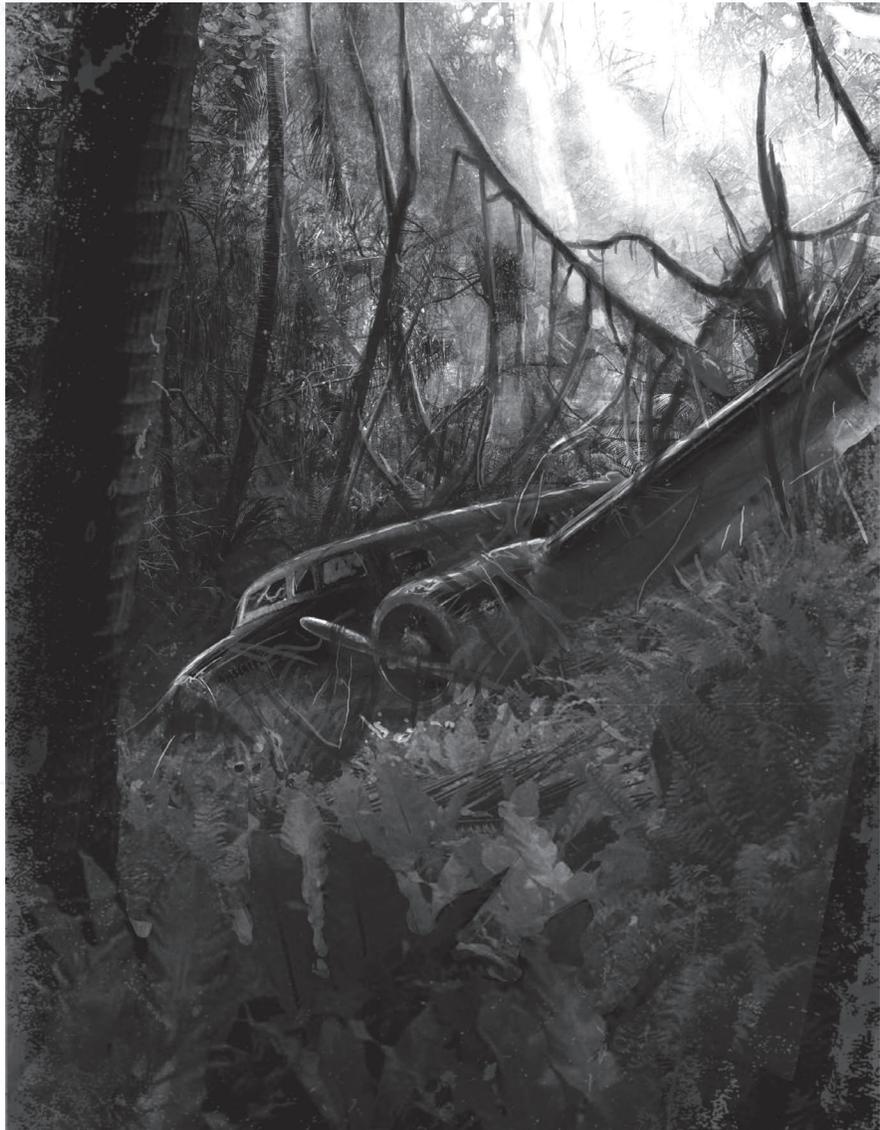
**Piloting** (doing double duty as an investigative ability) identifies the twin-prop plane as a Lockheed E-10 Electra. When operational, seats four, including the pilot.

Everyone who sees it immediately comes to the same conclusion: this must be the plane in which famed aviatrix Ruth Copeland disappeared, during an attempted worldwide flight, just a few months ago. Any school kid knows that Copeland departed from New Guinea with her navigator, Kenner Housman, and then vanished into the Pacific.

**Mechanical Repair** reveals that the plane is very badly damaged and would take months to render airworthy again—with proper parts and tools, which the island obviously lacks.

Items of gear salvageable from the crash include four parachutes, a bucket, a canteen, a machete, a world map (on which this island does not appear) and a 6-shot .32 revolver. Characters with Preparedness may each make a test to find a single item apiece amid the wreckage. Choose Difficulties according to the likelihood that the item would be among the limited equipment taken on an exploratory flight.

Also present is a newfangled radio, which, with a Difficulty 3 **Electrical Repair** success, can be detached



in working order from the plane, complete with an ingeniously light and small battery pack. The battery, a prototype product from Tesla Technologies of Santa Clara, CA, weighs *only thirty pounds* and is not much bigger than a breadbasket! The radio doesn’t do anything to get the group rescued until they deal with Abholos, but does serve as a potential alternate source of clues and eeriness.

Kenner Housman’s bloodied, shredded clothing can be found nearby, along with desiccated gobbets of flesh.

**Forensics** fails to identify any known weapon or attack, including an animal

attack, that would have caused this evidence pattern. (If it was an animal, it would have eaten the bits of flesh, rather than allowing them to dry, and scattered bones would be present.)

**Evidence Collection (core)** finds, taped to the underside of the pilot’s seat, a small blank book, half filled with terse diary entries. These start with the preparatory phase of the journey, in early 1937. Scanning the entries for relevant information takes several hours. The relevant passages, interspersed with lots of aeronautical data, are as follows:

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## The *Bishamon*

**March 12.** Approached with curious request from Clive Lewiston. Wishes me to drop a package into uncharted ocean. Says very urgent, that I'd not believe him if he explained, but begs my indulgence.

**March 14.** Lewiston swings by with package; forgotten about his request in all the bustle of preparation. It is a leather case containing an ancient book, bound in some weird metal. Am curious about alloy; he warns me not to touch. I laugh this off but the old boy is serious. Wild look in his eye. Calls the thing *The Firenze Tome*. Says it is unwholesome and that mankind must be protected from it. Unusual for you to be destroying an antiquarian object, I say. It must be buried in the sea, he demands. Very queer, but he is so insistent, so wild-eyed that I shrug and agree, and accept the package.

**March 15.** Bad dreams. Must be pre-flight butterflies, tho I've never been rattled like this before.

**March 16.** Another call from Lewiston. Reminds me to take book, says make sure to drop it far from any landfall. I ask him why he can't just tear up pages or burn it. Question seems to throw him. He says he knows too much about something called the *Cthulhu* cult; if he touched the book again, he would be tempted to use it. Repeats that I mustn't let it take hold of me, and should leave it in its case. Then Ken calls me away, so rest of conversation unresolved.

**July 1.** Dreams ever stranger. Feature that fool book of Lewiston's, which I had nearly forgotten about. Resolve to throw it overboard on next leg. Taking off tomorrow.

The last entries in the journal are mundane and do not explain the crash. The final entry is dated July 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**Occult** reveals that: Lewiston is

probably Professor Clive Lewiston, a researcher of classical and medieval texts on ritual magic on sabbatical from Miskatonic University.

*The Firenze Tome* is a famous lost book, referred to in many medieval works but not seen since the Hundred Years War. It reputedly had a metal cover and was said to be cursed.

(1-point spend) Lewiston collapsed and died, perhaps of a heart attack, on the campus of the University Of California at Berkeley.

**Piloting** confirms that Copeland took off on March 17<sup>th</sup> from Oakland, very near to Berkeley.

### The *Bishamon* Scene Type: Alternate (Physical Evidence)

If they follow the shoreline until it terminates in a rocky cliff, the explorers find the wrecked remains of a small Japanese fishing vessel.

**Languages (Japanese)** reads the name on the hull, written in Japanese characters, as the *Bishamon*.

**Anthropology** or **Theology** then indicate that the boat was named after the Japanese god of happiness and war.

**Piloting** or a backstory indicating sailing experience allows a guess at a crew size for the vessel between eight and fifteen.

Only half of the boat is present; **Piloting** surmises that the rest of the vessel is submerged nearby.

**Evidence Collection** notes the presence of blood in the ship, in patterns suggesting that at least a couple of the crewmen were killed on impact—as if some madman had deliberately rammed it into the island!

### Hacked From the History Books

Obviously, Ruth Copeland is modeled on Amelia Earhart. If you're willing to set your game in the fall of 1937, and to involve an admirable real-world figure in a horrific fictional story, use the real name instead. Be sure to conduct enough the additional research to make this story point ring true.

**Outdoorsman** allows the group to follow a trail from the shore to an abandoned base camp in the nearby jungle.

Found at the camp are two metal pails, a shovel, a harpoon, a pair of six-inch fish gutting knives, a spyglass, and four sodden and deteriorating blankets. Also, as at the plane crash site, each character with **Preparedness** can now make an additional pitch for a single other object they might find there, with the Difficulties determined by likelihood.

Also present are a quartet of shallow graves. **Evidence Collection** suggests that they were dug about a month ago. If dug up, the bodies show all the vomit-inducing signs of tropical putrefaction. Nearby characters must make **Difficulty 4 Health** rolls or unceremoniously lose their hard-won lunches. **Forensics** shows that they all died of injuries consistent with a shipwreck.

**Evidence Collection** also turns up a set of drag marks, indicating that a still-struggling man was pulled from the camp by his arms. The footprints of the two figures doing the dragging are distorted, as if their feet were mangled beyond recognition.

## The Devourers In The Mist

### The Firenze Tome

Scene Type: Core

In order to successfully combat Abholos, the group must know that it is also *The Firenze Tome*. There are two ways to learn this: from the Electra's radio or from awful dreams.

**The radio:** Abholos' presence distorts the behavior of radio waves around the atoll, causing it to periodically carry distressing audio from the past. Each separate time a character scans the radio band, one of the audio messages listed below is heard. The core clue floats; introduce it early if the group is struggling or the end of the session looms. If the horrors of the island remain unplumbed, withhold it for a while.

**Electrical Repair** posits that the messages are not being transmitted in any conventional manner. Their contents include:

Screams of horror in a foreign tongue, followed by the wet, cracking sounds of torn flesh and bone. This is the sound of *Bishamon* crewmen being taken by devourers. **Languages (Japanese)** identifies the tongue in which these appalled exclamations are made, although they remain largely unintelligible groans and pleadings.

If the group has already heard devourer growling from the jungle, they hear more of it from the radio.

Ditto for devourer chanting.

The trembling, distant voice of an elderly-sounding, professorial type, nearly obscured by howling winds:  
"Ruth, Ruth, do not be alarmed. It is me, Lewiston. I am attempting to reach you from beyond the veil of sleep. It is very hard to maintain contact, as the flight of the moongaunts interferes with

the discs... I have put you in grave peril, and must warn you..."

The message then cuts out. The character with the lowest Sanity pool comes to the instinctive realization that this message is absolutely what it purports to be: a voice somehow communicating from beyond the grave. This character risks a 2-point Stability loss, as do any other characters who accept this as true, or whose players speak as if they accept it as true.

**(core)** The voice is heard again. (If the need for a fast pace outweighs the creepy satisfactions of a slow build, combine this message with the last one.) "Ruth, Ruth, it is Lewiston again. You haven't time for disbelief. I have been a fool. I thought that the book summoned a dread entity called Abholos, but I was wrong. Abholos is the book!"

### Dreams Of the Dread Island

Scene Type: Alternate Core

If the group doesn't find or take the radio, the above core clue can be conveyed through fever dreams suffered by one or more castaways. The dreams also convey additional flavor information, which might prove entertaining even if they have the radio.

The dreams occur to the first character wounded by a devourer attack. (If no one gets hurt by a devourer and pacing demands that the clues appear anyway, it is the character with the lowest Sanity pool.) To speed up the transmission of information, allow dreams to come to multiple qualifying characters, and/or combine separate dreams.

To observers, characters having these dreams are visibly agitated: they toss about, groan, sweat, and mumble in their sleep.

Although it's usually better to paraphrase scenario text, reading these descriptions verbatim simulates the weird passivity of the dream experience:

#### Dream #1

Your heart thudding in your chest, you dash through a dank, fetid corridor in what appears to be a tenement building. The structure is antiquated and foreign, and reeks of urine. You come to a door and kick it down. A pistol springs into your hand. Rushing through the opened door, you find yourself in a large, loft-like chamber. Inhabiting the room are a half dozen vile-looking men, clad in an outdated, rustic manner. They're gathered in a circle, chanting. One of them holds a knife. At his feet is a naked newborn baby. Six times your pistol barks! The men fall to the floorboards, stone dead. You doff your coat and wrap it around the squalling child. Then you reach forward for a strange book, positioned in the center of the circle. Steel covers incised with unrecognizable sigils house two inches of moldering manuscript paper. You reach for it, but are afraid to touch it.

*The character experiencing this dream risks a 1-point Stability loss.*

#### Dream #2

You're moving through a trackless catacomb, sweating and terrified. Something that should have been safe and hidden has been violated. All around you are stacks of bones and skeletons. You're in a musty crypt, in Italy you think, a flashlight in your hand. Finally you arrive at your destination: the door to a vault. Panicking, you pull it open. Lying on the floor inside is an old man in a priest's cassock. A knife juts up from his chest. You rush to his side.

"Lewiston," he groans. He's speaking Italian, but in the dream you know the language. "They got the book. You

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Abholos

must stop them, before they summon Abholos. Then, the book... you must destroy it.”

### Dream #3

You are in Italy, sometime during the medieval period. The burning remnants of a small village lie all around you. Dozens of corpses are strewn across its muddy lane ways. You survey these with your thousand eyes. Some are freshly dead. Others are mutilated nearly beyond recognition, and then reassembled in a bizarre, higgledy-piggledy fashion. But now they're coming apart. Without people to torment and toy with, you are losing energy. This strange realm, with its limited geometry, wearies you, unless you can inflict pain and instill fear. Yet you do not wish to leave this place forever, as the weak, fearful minds of its resident ape-creatures are delicious beyond measure. There must be a way to go dormant, so that more of them will come to you. Yes, you will do it, even if it renders you somewhat vulnerable.

You enfold your tendrils, flatten your brain-sails, convert your claw-spears. You become a thing the ape-creatures cannot resist. The new form settles in as you drift to fervid torpor.

You, Abholos, have become a book.

*Having this dream, in which the character relives an event through the eyes of a Mythos entity, is a Mythos shock, and risks a 6-point Stability loss. It also confers 1 point of the Cthulhu Mythos ability for free.*

### Abholos Climactic Sequence

The island, a projection of Abholos' will into physical space, shifts its dimensions like a place in a dream. When it becomes aware that the



castaways are in turn aware of it, Abholos makes its location known to them, in anticipation of a delicious final confrontation. If they've figured out the scenario's central mystery, they may be able to surprise it, dispatching the dread entity once and for all.

The next morning after acquiring the final radio transmission and/or third dream, the castaway with the lowest Sanity rating awakens to see the island's landscape bizarrely changed. (If the lowest Sanity is shared by more

than one character, all of them see it.) Now looming from the atoll's rough geographical center is a pylon of black volcanic rock, thrusting hundreds of feet into the Pacific sky. The observer sees the vague outlines of a face leering from it.

At first, other characters do not perceive the structure. The realization that others can't see it costs the initial observer(s) 3 Stability, unless they succeed at Stability tests.

## The Devourers In The Mist

As those who do see it describe it, the rest of the party makes Difficulty 6 Sense Trouble tests. Those who succeed can now perceive it too—and must make Stability tests, or lose 4 Stability.

Characters who still can't sense the pylon get retries on their Sense Trouble tests when they're halfway into the jungle. When they finally do perceive it, the potential Stability loss is 5.

When they finally reach the base of the tower, they see it no matter what—and face a possible Stability drop of 6 points.

In between these tests, make the journey through the jungle seem additional arduous and terrifying. Do this quickly, through description, if you're running out of time. Otherwise, throw in additional physical obstacles, to build the sense of rising action.

During its jaunt to the tower, the party is waylaid by all remaining devourers, if they have not been proactive enough to wipe them out already.

Assuming the group reaches the tower, it finds a gaping, disturbingly vaginal cave mouth in the side of the cliff face. Venturing inside, they find the steel-shod *Firenze Tome* lying in plain view. Also nearby are Ruth Copeland's shredded, bloodied clothes. (**Forensics** or **Anthropology** show that, given their style, age, and manufacture, that they must surely be hers.)

If the book is approached, Abholos manifests. It is an amorphous, quasi-substantial mass of steel-tipped tendrils, flapping sails of wrinkled brain tissue, and pulsing, insectoid eyes. It can simultaneously attack up to two targets at close range and any number of point-blank targets.

### Abholos AND THE MYTHOS

If players voice curiosity about Abholos and its place in the Mythos, tell them during the denouement (assuming they survive) that their post-island occult researches turn up a few references to the entity. As is so often the case, these turn out to be contradictory.

One source refers to it as one of a number of minor entities created as a side effect from the catastrophic mating of Ghisguth and Zstylzhemghi, which led to the birth of Tsathoggua. It is less a brother or cousin to the dread toad god than a self-willed placental form. This gestational quality may explain its inherent lack of world-destroying ambition.

A different source instead describes Abholos as being formed from the tears and bile of Cthulhu, whatever that means.

References to devourer-like entities also appear. Formed initially by Nyarlathotep (or perhaps the Great Race) these improbable hybrids of ghouls and star vampires began as artificial constructs. Then certain sorcerers learned how to make them from the bodies of dead humans, spreading the knowledge via ethereal osmosis to stray entities such as Abholos.

### Game Statistics

**Abilities:** Athletics 10, Health N/A, Scuffling 23

**Hit Threshold:** 3 (large)

**Alertness Modifier:** +2

**Stealth Modifier:** -1

**Weapon:** +5 (speared tendril)

**Armor:** Abholos completely shrugs off damage to its monstrous form (although you should mark it down as if it matters). However, if the book is destroyed, Abholos loses his hold on this plane and disappears into a warp in space, leaving behind only a stench of vinegar and methane. If its pages are burned, the book is destroyed in one round. To rip up enough of the pages to

**Stability Loss:** +3

### Rescue and Wrap-Up Scene Type: Denouement

With Abholos gone, the radio from the Electra is no longer hobbled by interference. After several more weeks of tough island survival, which you probably want to elide over in a quick sentence, just like that, a passing freighter picks up their distress call, and sends boats out to pick

up the surviving castaways. (A few groups might enjoy playing out the intervening weeks in detail, especially if one or more PCs have spiraled into madness, but most will prefer a short and sweet denouement.)

During the wait for rescue, the island, a creation of Abholos' eldritch energies, has been gradually eroding and sinking into the sea. As the rescue boats move into the open ocean toward the freighter, it implodes completely, and vanishes beneath the waves.

For situations, like a convention run, where a grim ending is appropriate, apocalyptic disaster strikes at the moment of rescue. Abholos' island turns out to have been parked on top of R'lyeh, which now rises conclusively from the waves. The dread god himself sinks the freighter and devours the castaways, as a prelude to mankind's inevitable downfall.

### PRE-GENERATED CHARACTERS

These six pre-generated characters are presented for use in convention or demo games. For ongoing games, you'll naturally want to allow players to create their own characters. However, you can draw on these characters as quick replacement castaways when original player characters meet horrible demises. (With the omission of the line explaining the reason for their ocean voyage, you could use them as instant alternates in any *Trail Of Cthulhu* game.) Investigative abilities are assigned assuming a six-player group.

#### Charlie Allred

**Occupation:** Hobo  
**Drive:** Bad Luck

You were aboard the *Empress Of Caledonia* as a crewman. Yeah, the hard work of life in the engine room is a violation of the hobo code against honest labor, no doubt about that. If you signed on voluntarily for this job, you sure don't remember it. Last thing you remember, you were drinking it up in a San Francisco dive, and then you came to in the crew quarters of a churning steamship. And yeah, getting Shanghaied on a luxury liner sounds unlikely, but here you are. Maybe it was something you said to those drunk sailors who were stinking up the joint. Could be you got tight and agreed to something stupid. Wouldn't be the first time in your unpredictable and checkered life.

It's your typical lousy luck to get shipwrecked, but in a cockeyed way, it's a blessing, since it got you away from that tyrannical madman of a crew boss, Bornedal. And maybe, when the ship was going down, he accidentally slipped and hit his face on a shovel you happened to be swinging at it. Funny things sometimes happen in the heat of

the moment, huh?

That's all behind you now. Now all you have to worry about is getting off this damned island.

#### **Investigative Abilities:**

Anthropology 1, Assess Honesty 1, Bargain 2, Credit Rating 0, Craft (Carpentry) 1, Flattery 1, Law 1, Library Use 1, Locksmith 1, Medicine, Occult 1, Oral History 1, Outdoorsman 4, Pharmacy 1, Physics 1, Streetwise 4.

#### **General Abilities:**

Athletics 8, Conceal 4, Filch 8, Firearms 4, Health 8, Mechanical Repair 2, Sanity 8, Scuffling 12, Sense Trouble 8, Shadowing 3, Stability 4, Stealth 8, Weapons 4.

#### Professor Ezekiel Brush

**Occupation:** Scientist  
**Drive:** Thirst For Knowledge

This shipwreck interrupts your trip to Tokyo, where you were due to deliver a paper on improvements in gunpowder manufacturing. Several of your colleagues warned you not to speak on a matter of military application before a potentially hostile foreign power, but politics mean nothing to you. Knowledge is all! Ever since you were a child, your only concern was to unlock the manifold secrets of nature. A young genius and polymath, you found no scientific subject beneath your notice. Now that you are old and whiskered, you find yourself ever closer to the ultimate breakthrough which will unite the material disciplines, exposing the intrinsic logic underlying all of existence.

Although to be marooned on an uncharted island would perhaps be distressing to others, you see it as another opportunity to learn. Perhaps even this is part of an unseen plan, executed by the impersonal yet surely

benevolent mechanism of the universe.

**Investigative Abilities:** Astronomy 1, Biology 1, Chemistry 2, Credit Rating 4, Cryptography 1, Evidence Collection 2, Forensics 1, Languages 4 (Latin, French, Italian, German), Library Use 2, Medicine 1, Occult 1, Photography 2, Physics 2, Theology 1.

**General Abilities:** Driving 2, Electrical Repair 8, First Aid 4, Fleeing 22, Health 6, Hypnosis 4, Mechanical Repair 4, Piloting 4, Psychoanalysis 4, Riding 4, Sanity 6, Stability 5.

#### Leroy Currie

**Occupation:** Archaeologist  
**Drive:** Arrogance

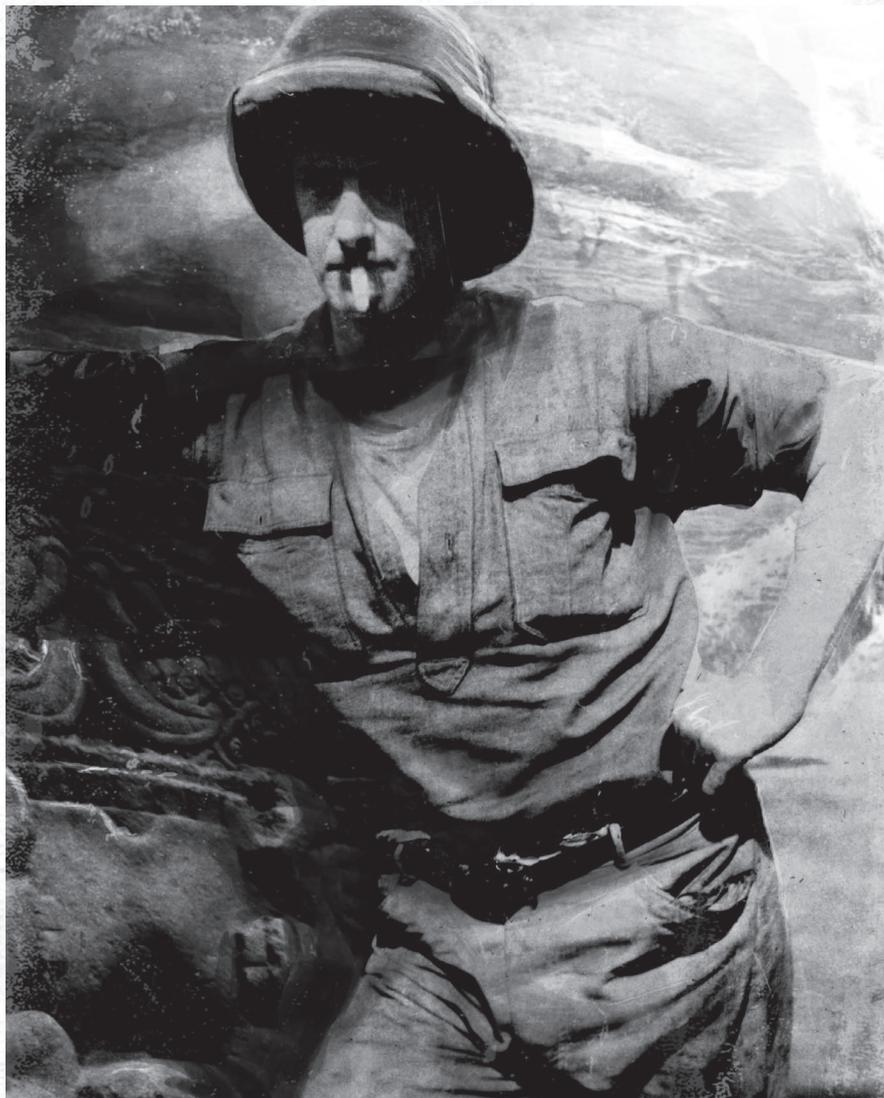
The ultimate destination of your Pacific voyage was the Gobi Desert, where you fully intended to discover entirely new species of dinosaurs buried beneath its shifting sands.

You are, in your own not-so-humble estimation, the world's foremost paleontologist. No obstacle, whether natural or man-made, may obstruct your path to glory. The world of dinosaur hunting is not for shrinking violets. You've stared down bandit leaders, drawn on warlords, and wrestled hyenas. Being stranded on an island is a damnable nuisance, but you're confident that you'll survive. Only in an empty and utterly indifferent universe would a stalwart such as yourself be permitted to die a meaningless death on some useless speck of land.

#### **Investigative Abilities:**

Archaeology 4, Bargain 2, Biology 1, Bureaucracy 1, Credit Rating 5, Evidence Collection 2, Geology 4, History 4, Intimidation 2, Languages 2 (Chinese, Spanish), Library Use 2, Outdoorsman 4.

## Pre-Generated Characters



buildings and history you accumulated then still rattles about your brain. Still a handsome woman, you find yourself the occasional object of flirtation from love-smitten men, whose attentions you find annoying—yet secretly flattering.

### Investigative Abilities:

Accounting 1, Architecture 1, Art 1, Art History 1, Assess Honesty 2, Biology 2, Bureaucracy 2, Credit Rating 2, History 1, Intimidation 1, Languages 1 (Chinese), Medicine 2, Pharmacy 2, Reassurance 2, Theology 2.

**General Abilities:** Athletics 4, First Aid 12, Fleeing 8, Health 6, Hypnosis, Preparedness 6, Psychoanalysis 8, Riding, Sanity 10, Scuffling 2, Sense Trouble 4, Shadowing, Stability 10.

### Irina Krilov

**Occupation:** Charlatan

**Drive:** In the Blood

Known throughout Europe as a seer and mystical philosopher, authoress of *Towards A Hermetic Dawn*, and founder of the Trimergestic movement, you decided to take a jaunt to the far east after a series of unfortunate misunderstandings. A couple of years ago you had to leave England after Scotland Yard took a nosy interest into changes to a wealthy follower's will. Although strictly speaking these changes occurred after the subject's death, there is no question that they were in accordance with her wishes. Then there was the incident that led to your hasty booking of a ticket on the *Empress Of Caledonia*... well, the less said about that, the better. You were having a merry and potentially profitable time aboard the ship, meeting several well-connected individuals with a keen interest in spiritualism and the occult, when this horrible shipwreck happened.

Ever since you were born, as plain

**General Abilities:** Athletics 12, Driving 3, Electrical Repair 2, Explosives 4, Filch 3, Firearms 4, First Aid 4, Health 10, Mechanical Repair 4, Preparedness 3, Riding 6, Sanity 8, Scuffling 8, Sense Trouble 4, Stability 6.

### Sister Flora Godden

**Occupation:** Nurse

**Drive:** Duty

You were headed to Shanghai to serve at the St. Panteleon Mission Hospital, a Catholic charity.

Always a devout young woman, you

trained as a nurse in your native Scotland before converting to Catholicism and becoming a nun. However, the doctory work ethic instilled in you by your no-nonsense parents would not tolerate the cloistered life, so you applied for a transfer to a part of the world which is both in need of your talents, and could badly need a cleaning up. As much as you've strived to achieve humility before God, your tongue sometimes betrays you with its sharpness. Likewise, your ability to suffer fools gladly could use further work. At least you've stifled the frivolous interest in the arts that plagued you in your youth, although all the useless information about artists,

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## New Occupation: Charlatan

Ever since the dawn of time, people have sought solace in the supernatural. And as soon as the first sucker was born, along came somebody like you, ready to capitalize on their yearnings. Whether they're hoping for good luck, knowledge of the future, romantic success, or to contact dead relatives, you have a zippy routine ready to convince them of your powers over the great beyond. Along with an inexhaustible well of chutzpah, the job requires a thorough familiarity with the lingo of the occult, plus the ability to bore deep into people's souls at a glance. Because that, as you've well learned over the years, is the surest route to their pocketbooks.

**Occupational Abilities:** Assess Honesty, Conceal, Filch, Flattery, History, Hypnosis, Occult, Reassurance, Theology.

**Credit Rating:** 1-6, depending on character concept. Are you a world-renowned occultist, or a street corner palm reader?

**Special:** With a 1-point Assess Honesty spend, you can always tell the difference between a genuine occult believer and a fellow charlatan. With a 1-point Reassurance spend, you can send a subtle look to a newly encountered charlatan that says, "Don't worry. We're in the same business, and I'm not going to bust up the sweet racket you've got going here." Except where this would completely short-circuit the scenario, this establishes a bond of trust between the two of you, which remains in force unless you screw it up.

 In a pulpy game, it is often ironically appropriate for a Charlatan to make the dismayed discovery that he possesses a genuine psychic ability. Designate a number of general ability points for a mystery ability, which counts as an occupational ability. The Keeper then, at a dramatically suitable moment, decrees that you've spontaneously manifested one of the psychic abilities described in **Fear Itself**.

ordinary Emma Jones, near Newcastle, England, you've felt a curious affinity for the occult. At night, you have strange dreams, in which you meet the parents who disappeared from your life when you were a small child. They are trapped in a nightmarish realm, but promise you a birthright of stunning power. Naturally, you have turned this vocation into a means of making a buck. Great destiny or no, surely you have to survive in the meantime...

### **Investigative Abilities:**

Accounting 1, Anthropology 1, Archaeology 1, Art History 1, Assess Honesty 2, Astronomy 1, Bargain 1, Credit Rating 4, Cryptography 1, Flattery 4, History 1, Languages (Russian), Law 1, Locksmith 1, Occult 4, Reassurance 2, Theology 2.

**General Abilities:** Athletics 3, Conceal 12, Disguise 3, Filch 12, Firearms 3, Fleeing 8, Health 8, Hypnosis 14, Sanity 6, Scuffling 3, Sense Trouble 4, Shadowing, Stability 7, Stealth, Weapons 3.

## Felix Strode

**Occupation:** Police Detective

**Drive:** Duty

You're on extended leave from your job as a Los Angeles police detective after having solved a grisly and emotionally destabilizing case. The killer of a half dozen college students turned out to be one of their own, an art student who dismembered them and left them in various drainage ditches throughout the city. You still can't forget the animalistic look on his face as he confessed to the crimes. The boy was completely insane, claiming that the corpses were tribute to a race subterranean of cannibals. If he didn't keep them fed, evil gods would come to get him in his dreams.

You've seen some pretty terrible sights in your fifteen years on the force, and you're no wilting violet, goodness knows, but somehow you've been unable to shake this case. The fragility of the human mind, the depths of depravity to which people are capable of sinking... frankly, you're not sure you can continue any more. Grateful relatives of the victims booked you a ticket aboard the *Empress Of Caledonia*. You were hoping that some mindless

sightseeing would help you regain the perspective needed to report back to work. Now this shipwreck comes along. Maybe it will prove to you that people are fundamentally good and capable of working together for the good of all... or maybe, God forbid, it will show that your darkest thoughts about humankind are absolutely on the nose.

### **Investigative Abilities:** Assess

Honesty 2, Bureaucracy 1, Chemistry, Cop Talk 2, Credit Rating 3, Evidence Collection 2, Flattery 1, Forensics 1, Interrogation 2, Intimidation 1, Law 2, Library Use, Outdoorsman 2, Pharmacy 1, Photography 1, Reassurance 1, Streetwise 2.

**General Abilities:** Athletics 12, Driving 8, Firearms 14, First Aid 2, Health 10, Sanity 6, Scuffling 10, Sense Trouble 10, Shadowing 8, Stability 5, Weapons 6.

# Shanghai Bullets

This scenario pays homage to the pulp-inspired tradition of international intrigue, as epitomized by novelist Eric Ambler and such films as *The General Died At Dawn* and *The Shanghai Gesture*.

History buffs take note: our portrait of Shanghai includes the occasional historical simplification.

## The Spine

Catholic missionary, amateur archaeologist, and possible spy Emil de Briac has gone missing in Shanghai. His disappearance came shortly after he sent word of a dangerous discovery with occult implications. The investigators quickly what's left of de Briac, only to realize that there's a more urgent mystery to resolve: who's got the artifact, and why are other corpses, connected to Shanghai's gangland, turning up in the same awful condition as de Briac?

## The Horrible Truth

On an archaeological mission to Yellow Mountains, de Briac found a secret cave containing a number of Mythos-related artifacts. Knowing the import of what he had discovered, de Briac destroyed everything—except for an object he was unable to damage. He took this star mirror, as he dubbed it, with him back to Shanghai. Before his arrival, however, he was waylaid by a bandit. Before he knew it, he'd gripped the star mirror in his hand, visualized the demise of his robber—and thereby summoned a star vampire, which then devoured his unconsciously chosen victim. Terrified by what he had seen and done, de Briac wrote a letter seeking the counsel of either

an investigator, or the NPC who introduces the group to the case.

The star mirror is especially dangerous because it grants any user, no matter how unschooled, the power to summon a dangerous Mythos entity, and to reliably direct it against a desired target.

Driven by remorse to suicidal thoughts, de Briac summoned the creature to devour him. The star mirror then fell into other hands. As word of the mirror spreads, representatives of the city's many conspiracies and factions decide to capture it for themselves.

## Trail Of Clues

Tracing de Briac's moments takes the group both to the St. Panteleon Mission Hospital, where he worked, and the appalling Pension Montigny, where he removed himself when he feared for the safety of his fellow missionaries. The discovery of another desiccated body leads them into the Shanghai underworld, eventually revealing one of his neighbors at the Motigny, Darvesh Singh, as a hitman who has taken the mirror. This leads the group to an ambitious but sidelined gangster who has thrown his lot in with the Japanese. They seek to undermine Big Ears Tu, the reigning kingpin of Shanghai, because of the support he lends to their future adversaries, the Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-Shek.

## Antagonist Reactions

By the time the star mirror winds up in Japanese hands, the investigators have the opportunity to snatch it for themselves. They must act

quickly though, or representatives of another violent factions operating in Shanghai—from which there is a near-endless supply to choose—will step in to take it yet again.

## Victory Conditions

Regaining the artifact is only a first step toward victory. To truly win, they must get it, and themselves, safely out of Shanghai—and then figure out what to do with a surpassingly dangerous Mythos object which cannot be destroyed.

## SCENES

### Getting On Board

Scene Type: Intro

Investigators may be drawn into the de Briac disappearance in any of the following ways:

**Personal connection:** One of the investigators is already engaged in correspondence with de Briac, and is the recipient of his letter. He may have been following his expedition to the Yellow Mountains. An academic character may have provided some of the information that led de Briac to undertake his journey.

**Ongoing assignment:** The investigators work for an organization, like Project Covenant or the Armitage Inquiry, whose leaders are in possession of de Briac's final letter. The team is dispatched to Shanghai as one mission among many.

**Special assignment:** An investigator

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Getting On Board

### Paris Of the East

1930s Shanghai is a wealthy, decadent city over which hangs a cloud of violence and doom. It serves as the hub of western trade in China, housing 70,000 foreigners in a polyglot section of the city known as the International Settlement. It acts as a break of bulk point for incoming opium, and as an export center for outgoing Chinese products, including tea and porcelain. The International Settlement, with its many examples of ambitious art deco architecture, leads to frequent comparisons to New York or Paris. What history will eventually show is a deeper parallel to Weimar Berlin: a glamorous elite lives life to its dissolute utmost, against a backdrop of crushing poverty. The boozy swirl of parties and nightclubs occurs to the beat of an ominously ticking clock. In August of 1937, a brutal modern battle for control of the city concludes with the Japanese in control of the city's Chinese sectors. (The International Settlement falls four years later, in 1941.)

At the time of this scenario, the city is a bubbling hot pot of international intrigue. A large refugee population of White Russians and Russian Jews fled here after the Soviet revolution. In brothels and opium dens, they dreamily plot Stalin's overthrow. The NKVD officers of the Soviet embassy monitor and penetrate émigré groups. British, French, and German intelligence agents rehearse the coming war in Europe, as America's relative neophytes look on, wondering when they'll be forced to enter the dance.

For the moment, Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalists rule the Chinese sector. Their agents vie with Communists, operatives of recalcitrant warlords, and Japanese spies for dominance of the city's covert scene.

Shanghai has no shortage, then, of people who might make good and frequent use of a killing artifact like the star mirror.

This adventure is best set during the mid-30s. It assumes that the Chinese Nationalists are still in charge of the Chinese part of the city. If you set it after August 1937, you'll need to alter details in accordance with the Japanese takeover. To end the scenario with a bang, time it so that the Battle of Shanghai marking the change of control between the two sides kicks off during its final scenes. The battle began on August 13<sup>th</sup>, escalated into an amphibious assault and house-to-house warfare on August 23, and concluded with a Nationalist withdrawal at the end of November. Naturally, you'll need to research this epic event thoroughly if you want to fold it into your game.

*Further Research:* The 1930s chapter of Stella Dong's *Shanghai: Portrait Of a Decadent City* veritably drips with evocative period detail, from the fetid to the swellegant. At the time of this writing, the text of a 1934 guidebook to Shanghai was available in its entirety at <http://www.talesofoldchina.com/library/all.cfm>. A wiki at <http://streetsofshanghai.pbwiki.com/gathers> information on Shanghai of the 1920s, much of which remains applicable to this period.

is approached by a contact from an organization, such as the US State Department, with an interest in Shanghai politics but no expertise in the paranormal.

**Chance:** The investigators are already in Shanghai (or somewhere nearby) when they hear reports of bloodless corpses showing up in the city, and decide that the case must be up their alley.

**Introductory scenario:** The investigative team coalesces around this case. Each player explains why his character is present in Shanghai. The group collaborates to establish

connections between their characters, which will naturally lead them to team up, and, in conjunction with their drives, to keep them together as a team for future scenarios. They may be brought into the case directly by Detective Basserman (below) or through other local connections created collaboratively between you and the characters. Note that the scenario is written assuming that the PCs are visitors to Shanghai. To alter it for residents, assume that any basic information about the place is already known to them, regardless of their ability lists. You can also allow each player to specify a prior acquaintance with a single NPC in the storyline,

which they can specify as they go along.

If stumped, collaborate with your players and have them suggest their motivations for looking into the fate of a French priest mysteriously killed in Shanghai.

Whoever introduces the team to the case provides the following letter as their initial core clue. If addressed to a player character with **Languages (French)**, it is written in French. Otherwise, it's in English.

[[[BEGIN HANDOUT FORMAT]]]

## Shanghai Bullets

Old friend,

I scarcely know where to begin. My thoughts spin, and I feel as if I will be at any moment devoured by shame. My faith in a benevolent god and orderly universe, already sorely shaken by the things I have witnessed, lies in tatters. These malignancies I will not allude to directly, for you know them perhaps better than I, and since the incident at Ningbo last year, I have learned a certain wariness in regard to the security of personal correspondence.

I found something at that cave in the Yellow Mountains. Many things, actually, of an obscene aspect that led me to destroy them, lest they fall into hands intent on promulgating madness and disorder. You may think of this as absurd precaution, perhaps even a blow to your scholarly efforts. (Though if you beheld the writhing, intertwined figures on the frieze near the cave mouth, you perhaps would raise no such objections.) As much as you may wish to disbelieve it, there are mundane forces at work, at least in Shanghai, exponents of earthly power, who would happily wield the weapons of the ancient ones for their own momentary advantage—ignorantly laughing off the cost to be paid for their arrogance, by them and by all mankind.

Pardon my rambling. A thousand thoughts at once beset me. Here is the nub of it: there is one item, which I have called the star mirror, which has resisted all of my efforts of destruction. The frieze I broke with my climbing pick. The ceramic idols were easily shattered. The multi-limbed, conical mummies yielded readily to the flames. But this mirror—I have tried to shatter it, to scratch it, to warp its frame with heat, all to no avail.

I would send it to you, but don't dare surrender it to intermediaries, who I would neither trust nor endanger. You must come here, to the St. Panteleon Mission Hospital, Rue Hennequin, in the French Concession, Shanghai. Together we can find a means to effect its removal from this beleaguered plane.

I realize that it is no small matter to come halfway across the world, to inspect an item whose dire function I dare not put into words, and all on the basis of a florid, hasty missive. But by all that is holy, old friend, please get here with all dispatch.

In hope and prayer,

Emil

If the recipient of this letter was not a player character, you'll need to explain why he didn't come to Shanghai himself. He may be ill, infirm, occupied with another case, committed to a mental hospital, or otherwise out of commission. If it's Detective Basserman (see below) or another official contact in Shanghai, the letter was found unaddressed, in de Briac's room, along with this body.

### Arrival In Shanghai Scene Type: Transition / Antagonist Reaction

Assuming they're not already Shanghai residents, the investigators arrive via ocean liner or steamer, traveling through the part of the Pacific Ocean known as the East China Sea. As they draw nearer to the port of Shanghai, situated on the mouth of the Whangpoo River, they pass increasing numbers of people on small flat-

### Connections

"Devourers In the Mist", with its cast suffering a Pacific shipwreck, combines naturally with this scenario as part of a globe-hopping campaign. The characters might be heading to Shanghai to follow up on de Briac's letter when the shipwreck occurs. However, it is probably better to have "Devourers" happen second, as an interruption to their journey back from Shanghai. Otherwise it will seem confusing to introduce one premise, then insert an entire additional adventure, and then expect the group to jump back into the story of de Briac and his letter.

Be careful of the timing if, in "Devourers" you're substituting Amelia Earhart for Ruth Copeland. Earhart takes off for the final leg of her Pacific flight on July 2<sup>nd</sup>; the Battle of Shanghai begins six weeks later.

bottomed boats called sampans. The harbor itself is ringed by warships, each from a different nation. Navies represented include the American, British, German, Japanese and Italian. **History** explains why they're here: they represent the Treaty Powers, nations who lay joint claim to a section of the city in a quasi-colonial arrangement dating back to the middle of the last century.

The ship disembarks at one of the many docks of the International settlement, a large section of the city that hugs the coastline. Its buildings mix Asian and western styles; many are impressively new art deco structures that could as easily be seen in New York or Toronto.

Investigative abilities provide the

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Arrival in Shanghai



following facts about Shanghai:

**Accounting:** The prevailing currency of the International Settlement and French Concession is, of all things, the Mexican dollar. You can trade US or other currencies for Mexican silver dollars at a variety of kiosks at your disembarkation point, or from itinerant money-changers throughout the International Settlement. (*Warning:* Although reported as fact in some sources, the Mexican dollar business is sadly less a one hundred percent true historical detail than an oversimplification that's too much fun to discard.)

**Geology:** Shanghai is about a hundred miles away from the Yellow Mountains

(where de Briac says he found the star mirror.) *Omit this if the group doesn't have the letter yet.*

**History:** Shanghai became a haven for foreigners after the Opium War, the 1840-1843 conflict in which the British forced the Chinese to open up a number of their ports to trade. The United States and France quickly signed treaties permitting them similar rights. An area of Shanghai became the International Settlement; another contiguous chunk became the French Concession. These have grown in size and population over the last ninety years.

**Law:** The French Concession is a de facto colony of France and operates

under French law, as overseen by the French Consul General. Executive decisions are made by a Municipal Council, which he possesses full authority to override.

The International Settlement operates under the legal doctrine of extra-territoriality, meaning that there is no true law code. The basic rules of the settlement are laid down in a document called the Land Regulations, established in 1845. Administration is by a Municipal Council of fourteen members, usually dominated by Brits and including Americans, Japanese, and, as of a few years ago, five Chinese representatives.

Within the International Settlement,

## Shanghai Bullets

foreigners accused of crimes are tried at their own embassies, under the laws of their respective homelands. Chinese criminals are turned over to the rough justice of a local court.

**Cop Talk:** Policing in Shanghai is notoriously complicated and corrupt. A British-run police force, the Shanghai Municipal Police, employs detectives of many nationalities, supported by local patrolmen. The Chinese and French sectors of the city field their own police forces.

(1-point spend) None of the three police forces cooperate with one another. All of the police forces are notoriously penetrated by triads, to the extent where it is impossible to tell where the cops end and the crooks begin. Many of the gangs have political patrons among the various struggling powers of Shanghai, and can be seen as extensions of various governments—or vice versa.

Triads run rampant in Shanghai. The best-connected of them are collectively known as the Green Gang. (There are other triads, most notably the Red Gang, who hold power outside the city, and the opium-smuggling Swatow Combine, but they don't feature in this scenario.) Like many organized criminals, the triads espouse an ideology of honor, respect and discipline, which masks a dog-eat-dog struggle for power.

As the investigators mill about on the pier after going through customs (see sidebar), waiting for porters to offload their luggage, they get their first taste of Shanghai as a city of rampant intrigue. Every PC with a Sense Trouble rating makes a test of that ability against a Difficulty of 4. Every successful character takes note of a separate individual watching them from one of the many vantage points offered by the

### MONEY ISSUES

The costs of bribes and other transactions are provided mostly as a matter of flavor, not as a central obstacle to the investigators. Some PCs may object to the expenses entailed by Shanghai's endemic and casual corruption providing opportunities for entertaining character interaction.

If the group includes a character of Credit Rating 6 or 7, they can rely on the time-honored "let the rich guy pay for it" method of hand-waving away all minor financial considerations. Encourage amusing by-play as he is repeatedly called on to reach for his wallet.

Otherwise, assume that characters can arrange to arrive with cash on hand equal to about 1% of their annual incomes. They can carry these in the currency and format of their choice: traveler's checks, cash, or gold. By making slow arrangements at a Shanghai bank, characters of Credit Rating 4 or more can draw on up to 10% of their annual incomes. New infusions of cash take three days to process.

Although the currency of our Shanghai is in Mexican dollars, assume a one-to-one correlation between the US and local dollar for simplicity's sake.

### Travel Times

At best, investigators who are not already in the Shanghai area at the time of de Briac's death arrive two and a half weeks after the discovery of his body. This assumes swift airmail travel for the letter to an investigator recipient, and that the group is already on the west coast of the United States. (An ocean voyage from San Francisco to Shanghai takes from ten to eleven days.) A more likely chronology, with the letter being delivered to an intermediary, contact with the PCs being made, and then a four-day train trip from the east coast to the west, puts the interval at closer to a month.

### Languages

Shanghai, especially its International Settlement, is a polyglot city. Within the settlement, founded and still largely run by the British, the investigators will never find themselves far from an English speaker. However, many truths of the city will remain opaque to those incapable of eavesdropping in multiple languages. Accordingly, game statistics for all NPCs include the languages they speak. The first listed is always the character's native tongue. Those they comprehend but speak poorly are indicated in *italics*.

Unless otherwise indicated, Chinese speakers are fluent in the local dialect, Shanghaiese. Strict realism would require PCs to specify the Chinese dialects, which are to various degrees mutually unintelligible but share the same written language, they are familiar with. We urge you to instead show mercy and employ pulp realism, in which Chinese is one big happy language.

Chinese proper names in this scenario are listed in the western manner, with surname last. Exceptions are made for historical figures, like Chiang Kai-Shek, popularly known in the eastern order, with surname first.

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Arrival in Shanghai

bustling docklands area. Have each character who spots a watcher then make a Difficulty 4 Stealth test. On a successful test, the stranger conducting the surveillance remains unaware that he's been spotted, and remains in place. For each failure, a watcher realizes he's been made and fades away into the crowd. All watchers are positioned at least a hundred yards away, on the other side of an intersection full of people, vehicles, and stacked cargo. To catch up with a watcher requires a Difficulty 5 Shadowing test. If the group successfully pursues one of them, try to work them back into the story later on. Watchers include:

### Vasily Altshul

A down-on-his-luck poet, Vasily pays for his opium addiction by acting as a freelance information broker. He monitors comings and goings at the docks in hopes of selling his observations to one of the many cops and intelligence officers who uses him as an occasional informant. If confronted, Vasily nervously claims to have been watching the people down at the pier because he's writing a series of poems about the city. If followed to his destination, he parks himself in a musty tea room frequented by his fellow Russian Jews. Open to offers of employment, Vasily will not inform on anyone he's afraid of, but will freely sell out the PCs to any of his long-term patrons. He wears shabby, moth-eaten clothes; his features comprise the ruins of a once-handsome face.

Athletics 4, Health 3, Scuffling 3.  
Languages: Russian, Yiddish, *English*,  
*Chinese*  
Alertness: +1  
Stealth: +1

### Eiji Takagawa

Eiji Takagawa is a low-level agent of the Black Dragon Society assigned to routine intelligence-gathering duties

### Customs Inspection

All visitors to Shanghai must submit to customs inspection before entering the International Settlement. Officials are mostly concerned with the amounts of dutiable tobacco products the investigators are attempting to bring into the country. They take a dim view of would-be breakers of the Chinese government's monopoly on salt importation. Finally, they insist on impounding all firearms until such time as the characters leave the city, at which point they'll be safely returned. If the characters enjoy a credible governmental connection (such as diplomatic status), a 1-point **Bureaucracy** spend *per gun* allows the team to keep its weapons of choice. Alternately, a 1-point **Bargain** spend and \$10 bribe (also *per gun*) slips the firearms through. The PCs can't use **Bureaucracy** for some of the guns and **Bargain** for the others; the customs officers won't risk engaging in corruption with apparent authority figures who could easily turn them in.

### Gun Shopping

Characters deprived of their weapons may wish to acquire replacements for use within the city, or simply to stock up while visiting a gun-running hub of worldwide repute. Finding an illicit gun dealer requires a 1-point **Streetwise** spend. Prices paid depend on the number of **Bargain** points the customer spends *per gun*. 0 points doubles the standard prices given on p. XX of *Trail Of Cthulhu*. A 1-point spend gets the standard price; a 2-point spend earns a 50% discount from that.

A gun shopping tour may serve as a vehicle to naturally communicate information about the city's triad scene to the players.

on the streets of the International Settlement. On such missions he dresses as a lowly Chinese laborer and indulges his habit of chain-smoking cheap cigarettes. A character with **Anthropology** who observes him while incognito identifies him as not Chinese but Japanese. Takagawa takes pride in the cool, impersonal dedication he brings to his organization. If confronted in a language other than Chinese, he pretends not to understand. If forced to respond in Chinese, he denies everything and attempts to bull his way past his accusers. If followed to a destination, he parks himself on the patio of a French-style bistro, takes out a notepad, and is seen to take notes on its clientele and passersby. No interpersonal ability induces him to reveal his true allegiances, except where the revelation furthers a *Kokuryū-kai* agenda.

Athletics 7, Firearms 4, Health 8,  
Scuffling 6, Weapons 8  
Languages: Japanese, Chinese  
Alertness: +1  
Stealth: +1  
Weapon: -1 (tantō), +0 (Tokarev)

### Siu-Kwan Liu

Siu-Kwan Liu is a patrolman of the Shanghai Municipal Police assigned to plainclothes duty. He sees it as his responsibility to spot troublemakers as soon as they arrive, and to keep a watchful eye on them. Shanghai being what it is, he finds lots of people to write down in his little leatherbound book. Siu-Kwan's superiors and fellow officers see him as an officious zealot, but have to admit that his information comes in handy sometimes. If confronted, Siu-Kwan whips out his badge and orders the investigators to back off. **Cop Talk** mollifies him enough to justify his snooping as

## Shanghai Bullets

necessary, given all the riff-raff who show up on those docks every day. If shadowed, he winds up at an SMP station. Though brusque and unlikable, Siu-Kwan is a rarity here: a dedicated and incorruptible patrolman. He will never believe in the occult but may be convinced to help the party in other ways.

Athletics 7, Firearms 4, Health 8,  
Scuffling 6, Weapons 4  
Languages: Chinese, English, *Russian*  
Alertness: +1  
Weapon: -1 (billy-club, only when in uniform), +0 (light pistol)

### Marcel Malet

Petty criminal Marcel Malet informs for the French gendarmerie, but is watching the investigators to size up their potential as victims of pickpocketing. If the characters try Shadowing him and fail (note his Alertness modifier), he flees willy-nilly into the crowd. If tackled, he apologizes profusely for his rudeness, and admits to being an honest pickpocket. The tackling character must make a Difficulty 5 Sense Trouble test. On a failure, his wallet is absent the next time he looks for it.

Marcel will do anything for a buck, including selling out the last person who gave him a buck. He loves jazz, knows all the best clubs (none of which allow him inside) and is an excellent source of gossip about triad power struggles.

Athletics 7, Firearms 4, Fleeing 12,  
Health 8, Scuffling 6, Weapons 4  
Languages: French, English, Chinese  
Alertness: +2  
Stealth: +2

### Basserman and the Body Scene Type: Core

*This scene provides two core clues, allowing*

*the group to decide which fork in the clue trail to follow first. If Basserman is the group's initial contact, this may be the first scene. Otherwise they'll probably come to it later, after starting at the mission hospital.*

The investigation of Father de Briac's curious demise has fallen to Detective Clyde Basserman of the Shanghai Municipal Police. Basserman is an English Catholic from Manchester. Policing is in the blood; his father served as a working class police constable. Stationed in China during a stint in the British Army, Clyde stayed on after mustering out and soon gravitated to the family business here in Shanghai.

He instinctively recognizes that this case is far beyond his ken and, if convinced that the investigators are better equipped to handle it (1-point **Cop Talk** spend), will step back and let them have at it. Although he has a soft spot for priests and wants to see de Briac's killer apprehended, this dedication does not extend to sticking out his neck for the PCs. On the other hand, he'll be happy to take whatever credit redounds to him if they solve the case for him. Regarding the supernatural, Basserman's position is, "I was a skeptic until I came to China." Now he's willing to believe all manner of rummy things—so long as he doesn't have to write them up in his report to the Commissioner.

### Detective Clyde Basserman

Athletics 4, Firearms 8, Fleeing 8,  
Health 6, Scuffling 6, Weapons 4  
**Weapon:** -1 (billy club); +0 (light pistol)

If not invited into the case by Basserman, **Cop Talk** or an introduction from a locally powerful patron is required to gain a briefing and access to the body. Here's what Basserman can tell them:

de Briac was found in a rented room

at the Pension Montigny. Despite its French name, it is unfortunately located in the International Settlement, not the French Concession, putting this damnably strange case squarely under poor Basserman's jurisdiction.

The pension's manager, one Jenny Simon, discovered the body, in what she said was a locked room. She claims she unlocked the door to check on him, because she had a strange feeling that he might be in danger.

Under ordinary circumstances, de Briac lived at the St. Panteleon Mission Hospital, on Rue Hennequin, in the French Concession. Basserman has been unable to determine why de Briac moved to the Pension Montigny.

**(core)** Basserman believes that the head of the hospital, Father Duvivier, knows something, but can't say, perhaps because of the confessional seal.

**(core)** Basserman then shows them de Briac's body. He still has it in storage in the station's rudimentary morgue even if it's been many weeks since his death. This is possible because the body is a desiccated shell, completely drained of all liquids. The priest is now a shriveled, shrunken husk, an expression of screaming terror frozen onto his mummified face.

**Forensics** reveals a series of strange lacerations on the shoulders, arms and upper torso, and an equally peculiar group of punctures around the carotid artery. (They're hard to spot on the dried and shrunken corpse, which is why Basserman didn't spot them.)

**Cthulhu Mythos** recalls a description of corpses found in this condition, from a set of anonymous marginal notes scrawled in Henry Armitage's article "Folk Legendry of the 'De Vermis Mysteriis'" in the

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## The Grave By The Waterfall

### Accommodations

The French Concession and International Settlement offer accommodations to suit all Credit Ratings. For the utmost in luxury, head to the Cathay Hotel, an art nouveau concrete palace topped by a green pyramid, built by high-living tycoon Sir Victor Sassoon. It is located on the Bund, a bending riverfront avenue fabled throughout the world for its splendor. The Cathay features such modern amenities as air conditioning and an amazing new innovation in which it is possible for guests to call for the assistance of hotel staff from telephones installed in their rooms! More modest hotels cater to the tourist trade, which remains vibrant despite the Depression. Countless squalid pensions and rooming houses cater to the down and out.

*Journal Of Epigraphic Studies*, Volume 4, 1929. It says that these are the victim of star vampires, a.k.a. shamblers from the dark. (Characters whose Mythos knowledge derives from something other than book-learning instead simply get a hunch that something called a star vampire did this.)

Looking at the corpse without knowing about star vampires imposes a possible 2-point Stability loss. A character resorting to the Mythos loses 3 Stability and 1 Sanity.

### The St. Panteleon Mission Hospital

Scene Type: Core

De Briac was the office administrator at the St. Panteleon Mission Hospital, a Catholic charity clinic located in the French Concession. Its modest examining room overflows with desperate patients, day and night. Its chief medical officer is the physician-priest Father Henri Duvivier (Languages: French, English, *Chinese*.) Duvivier makes the investigators wait while he attends to ill and injured patients, then apologizes for his unforgivable rudeness.

The padre's gaunt frame accentuates his sharp Roman nose and high cheekbones. **Medicine** indicates that he's a good ten years younger than he looks and is working himself into

an early grave. He sincerely means to assist the investigators in sorting out what happened to his dear friend Emil, but is so harried by his overwhelming duties that he has little time to offer them.

Although only too happy to answer questions, he's too distracted to supply information characters don't explicitly ask for.

Père Henri knows that Emil was involved in a battle against occult evil, which came increasingly to occupy his time during his final months. "We all serve the Lord in different ways," he shrugs. Emil rarely told him exactly what this entailed. "He protected me, he said, from the details. My spirit had to remain here, with the patients, he would always say."

Emil told Henri most of what was in his final letter, though in much more reassuring terms.

(core) He also said that he had done, or the star mirror had made him do, or allowed him to do, something horrible on the road outside a village called Woo Sing, or Yu-t sien, or something like that. It was several hour's drive from the city. There was a waterfall, and the ruins of an old gate nearby. Evidently, he'd been accosted, and somehow reacted out of reflex and... Henri tried to get him to say more, but he turned pale and would speak no more.

(core) He said something else that may have connected to this, but it was under the seal of the confessional, so Père Henri is, alas, forbidden to elaborate. **Reassurance** gets him to spill the priestly beans, if the investigator argues either that there is an ongoing threat, or that Père Emil would have wanted them to know: *whatever he had done at Woo Sing had prompted Emil to thoughts of suicide.*

One night, Henri was awakened by a scratching noise on the hospital roof. It seemed to emanate from Emil's quarters. The next morning, Emil left for the Pension Montigny and never came back. Henri had one of the workmen trim the branches of a tree near the building, and that was the last he heard of the noise.

When the scene loses steam, a bleeding young woman stumbles into the clinic, clutching at her spilling innards. Henri rushes to help the nurses save her life. **Streetwise** indicates that she's a prostitute, probably cut open by her pimp, or possibly by a client. A medical character who wishes to pitch in can try to save her with **First Aid**; her Health pool is at -10, from a rating of 4. (This is an instance where drama calls for the use of the standard injury rules for an NPC.)

### The Grave By the Waterfall

Scene Type: Core

A quick glance at a map shows the most likely road Emil would have taken from the Yellow Mountains back to Shanghai. On their journey, presumably undertaken in a rented vehicle of some kind, the investigators experience bumpy roads and experience an atmosphere of deprivation and menace.

## Shanghai Bullets

They're stopped at a military checkpoint by Nationalist soldiers, who subject their vehicles to a sullen, resentful search. If they have guns, they must make a 1-point **Bargain** spend and pay a \$1 per weapon bribe to hold onto them.

They have to stop their vehicle for a ragged platoon of Nationalist soldiers to march by.

They see a bomber fly overhead. Is it a Japanese plane, and is this the beginning of the inevitable war? No, **Piloting** (or the Military occupation) identifies this as a Nationalist plane.

Driving by roadside hovels, or merely observing the obvious hunger written on the bones and faces of passing peasants, the group notes a degree of poverty at least as striking as in the city—without the contrasting displays of great wealth.

Although peasants are more than willing to accept compensation for minor services like providing directions, only **Language (Chinese)** is really needed to be pointed to the village of Yushing. Outside of this collection of shabby buildings is a greasy waterfall running off a high cliff.

(core) Nearby is a ruined gate.

**Evidence Collection** or **Archaeology** finds a shallow grave not far from the gate. A 1-point spend identifies it as X weeks old, where X is one week before de Briac's death. If they dig up the grave, the group finds the dry and withered husk of a human body, clad in ragged peasant garb. Also present in the grave is a rusty machete. If the group has already seen de Briac's body, **Forensics** confirms that the two men died the same way—whatever that was. If not, refer to the description of de Briac's corpse and apply the details to this one.

### New Rule: The Drop

Under dramatically appropriate circumstances, the Keeper may allow one set of characters to get “the drop” on the other. This means that the group with the upper hand can automatically kill at least one member of the disadvantaged side if any of its members make a false move or attempt to break free. (It is also possible for an individual to get the drop on another, or a group to get the drop on an individual. It may be possible, depending on circumstances, for one person to get the drop on a small group.)

PCs always get a chance for at least one of them to make a Sense Trouble (or similar general ability) test to avoid being subjected to the drop. To place NPCs under the drop, they must succeed at a Stealth test (when sneaking up on unsuspecting targets) or an Athletics vs. Athletics contest (to see which side draws first.) A lost Athletics vs. Athletics contest means the other side gets the drop on you.

“The drop” may not be used as a shortcut to a quick kill and can only be used by characters who intend to keep their enemies at bay (perhaps to search, rob or render them captives) rather than killing them on the spot. If player characters get the drop on enemies and then attempt an instant kill, a convenient plot contrivance causes them to fail, allowing a normal fight to then proceed.

This rule is appropriate for any GUMSHOE game.

The grave location is in an isolated bend in the roadway. If the group posted one or more watchers while the others dig it up, the watchers get to make Difficulty 4 Sense Trouble tests. Otherwise, only the character who seems least engaged in the digging gets a Sense Trouble test, against a Difficulty of 6.

On a failure, a group of bandits swarms up around the group, getting the drop on at least one investigator. This takes the form of a machete held at the character's throat.

### Rural Bandits

Athletics 4, Health 4, Scuffling 4,  
Weapons 8

**Weapons:** +0 (machete)

The bandits only speak Chinese. **Anthropology** reveals that they are just ordinary peasants forced by conditions into opportunistic robbery. Their objective is to strip the group of anything with immediate value: cash and guns. They can't fence expensive goods, and know that taking a vehicle

would just make them easier to find.

A 2-point **Intimidation** spend convinces the group that, despite the apparent advantage they now hold, that the group can either overwhelm them, or send KMT troops howling down on them and their families.

A successful Sense Trouble test (Difficulty 5) spots the bandits as they approach. The characters making these successful tests can then make Stealth tests (Difficulty 4) to appear unaware, luring the bandits into coming closer. If carrying pistols, they can then get the drop on the bandits.

Regardless of who gets the drop on who, the bandits can provide the following information if shown the dug-up corpse:

They blanch visibly at the sight of it, clearly responding with the same appalled revulsion the investigators felt when they first saw de Briac's body.

The body is of their friend Ka Feng.

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## The Pension Montigny

He, like them, had been driven to occasional banditry.

They wouldn't be surprised to hear he'd accosted a priest. He had no respect for any religion.

This gives the players the evidence they need to surmise the truth: Ka Feng ambushed de Briac on the road. De Briac used the star mirror; this is what it does to its victims.

### The Pension Montigny Scene Type: Core

*The core clue leading to this scene occurs in "Basserman and the Body", p. XX.*

The Pension Montigny is a small, rundown hotel. As the investigators approach it, a character with **Streetwise** identifies the building across the street as an opium den, and spots a brothel kitty-corner from it. The pension's lobby smells like stale tobacco and abandoned dreams.

#### Going To the Village First

If the group talks to the locals before finding Ka Feng's grave, the villagers remain close-mouthed about both their missing friend and their own excursions into banditry. They disguise their ill intent behind an air of hysterical supplication. Wherever possible they emphasize their desperation and poverty. They don't beg for money but will gratefully take it if given. Unless a PC makes a point of scaring them into good behavior (2-point Intimidation spend) they'll still do their best to sneak up on, then waylay, them as they explore the grave site. In this case the Difficulty of the Sense Trouble test is only 3.

Its proprietress, Jenny Simon, (Languages: French, English, *Chinese*) is a blowsy woman, her hair dyed bright orange and her eyes rimmed red. **Medicine** pegs her as a chronic alcoholic with not many more years left to live.

Simon's clientele runs toward the seedy, and she doesn't like having cops around. Unexplained people who act like cops are even worse. She is, however, amenable to the **Flattery** of at least moderately handsome men, or a simple gift of Mexican silver dollars (**Bargain** plus \$10.)

She repeats the story she gave Basserman: that she suddenly got a bad feeling about the father, banged on his door, unlocked it when he didn't answer, and discovered his corpse inside. If asked for more details on the "bad feeling" part of the story, she sticks to it, but in a way that triggers **Assess Honesty**. Simon needs **Reassurance** that the investigators aren't cops, and won't take what she tells them to Basserman, or any other cops. She then reveals the truth:

"I was sleeping off, what you call, a *toot*, when another of my guests, he comes and tells me that he 'eard terrible screams from the room down ze hall. He is, you say, making himself scarce from Municipal Police, so I do not involve him."

This shy other guest is still staying at the Montigny; his name is Darvesh Singh (Languages: Punjabi, Bengali, English, *Chinese, Japanese*.) Singh is a former SMP patrolman turned hitman. He is hiding out after shooting a triad leader outside a bathhouse, and doesn't want any official attention. Darvesh's primary driving impulse is to avoid thinking about who he's become.

When the investigators knock on his door, he is initially furious at Simon for alerting anyone to his

presence here. **Reassurance** that they aren't interested in his misdeeds, or **Intimidation**, suggesting that they might turn him in, earn them admission to his room, and a grudging version of the events of de Briac's death. Singh wears a worn but well-kept Western suit and a turban; **Anthropology** identifies him as a Sikh. He never volunteers information, answering only in response to specific questions, and then as sparingly as possible. **Assess Honesty** shows that Singh has something to hide. **Streetwise** adds that everyone who stays in a place like the Pension de Motigny has something to hide.

Even though Singh was laying low, de Briac managed to strike up an acquaintance with him in the days before his death.

De Briac said nothing to explain why he was no longer staying at the mission, or why he had chosen such a seedy establishment. (The investigators might deduce that he came here because, if he was to put the people around him in possible danger, he wanted a place where no one qualified as an innocent bystander.)

(core clue) The night of his death, de Briac came to Singh's door, clearly troubled. If asked, Singh feebly claims not to remember what the priest was upset about. If pressed, Singh admits that de Briac asked Singh a peculiar question: what he would do if he discovered he had the means to kill anyone, at the merest thought—and that, once possessed, the power demanded to be used?

Singh will not consent to an examination of his quarters. If conducted while he is present (which entails restraining him in some way), a search yields a Mauser pistol hidden underneath his bug-ridden mattress. **Evidence Collection** shows that the weapon, though well cleaned, was

## Shanghai Bullets

fired recently. A 1-point spend narrows the timeframe; it wasn't used in the last day or so, but certainly within a couple of weeks.

### Unrevealed Information

The following is *not* revealed to the investigators during their initial encounter with Singh:

de Briac hinted that the power to kill lay in an object.

Singh, as first to discover the body, saw the star mirror in his hand and promptly hid it in another unoccupied room of the pension.

He used the mirror in a murder, his second hit undertaken at the behest of gangster Chi-mo "Wrong Eye" Ling.

Since then, he's had it safely stashed, probably elsewhere in the hotel.

### Checking On Singh Scene Type: Core

If given Singh's name, Basserman confirms that he until recently was a patrolman for the SMP. He can direct the group to Singh's former desk sergeant, a bluff Irishman named Shane McLaglen (Languages: English, *Chinese*.) McLaglen can be **Bargained** (\$5) or **Cop Talked** into providing the following information on him:

Singh was a good patrolman, by local standards. Quiet, kept his head down, neither friendly nor unfriendly.

He left the force abruptly a few months ago.

McLaglen isn't sure why he resigned. It wasn't the smoke that did him in, and probably not women. Gambling, perhaps?

The above information can also be gleaned from any informant with

### Cultivating Informants

The investigators' exploration of the Shanghai underworld goes more smoothly if they seek out informants. These can be acquired through **Streetwise** expenditures, made in sleazy clubs, back room casinos, low-rent brothels or smoky opium dens. Ask how many points the character wishes to expend per recruitment attempt.

1 point gets you a forthcoming informant, but in a way that attracts the attention of other gangland figures. For 2 points, depending on how the players describe their actions, the recruitment occurs unobtrusively or the informant remains discreet about their inquiries. On a 3-part spend, both are true.

Informants might include Vasily Altshul or Marcel Malet; they can be turned after being spotted watching the group at customs, or can be met for the first time during the above-described trawl for pigeons. Quick profiles of other possible informants follow:

**Jin-Rong Mak** (Languages: Chinese, *English*) is a stooped, elderly opium addict who used to be a Green Gang enforcer back in the teens. He adopts the mien of a doddering smokehead, prompting others to ignore him and speak indiscreetly in his presence.

The handsomely dissolute **Shou-Hua Li** (Languages: Chinese, English, French) was disowned by his wealthy family for Communist leanings. He subsequently renounced his political views in favor of a life of dissipation, but, too proud to reconcile with his father, scrapes by as a freelance journalist, club tout, and paid gossip.

Brothel keeper **Rose Ma** (Languages: Chinese, *English, French*) is a grasping, miserly woman who hates the various gangsters to whom she is forced to pay protection money. Taking care to cover her tracks, she'll provide the inside scoop to outsiders—steering them, if possible, into confrontation with the bosses she despises.

All informants are devotedly self-preserving, but might be induced to take safe-seeming actions for the investigators through the offer of large cash sums. Genre convention dictates that they should turn up horribly murdered shortly thereafter.

street-level SMP contacts.

(**core**) Basserman or any Shanghai underworld contact (see sidebar) knows that a man matching Singh's description recently assassinated a gangster named Four Fingers Cheng in the Black Lotus, a swank supper club owned and frequented by factions of the Green Gang. (Up to the PC's questioning, Basserman has not considered Singh as a possible suspect.)

### The Black Lotus Scene Type: Core

Players unable to suppress their knowledge of the Lovecraft canon may blanch at the name "Black Lotus", associating it with the hallucinogenic drug *liao* and the tcho-tcho infested Plateau Of Sung. In this context, it's simply the name of an upscale supper club where the rich and daring rub shoulders with the cream of Shanghai's underworld.

A 1-point **Streetwise** spend allows

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## The Black Lotus

the investigators to show up at the Black Lotus and ask unwelcome questions without coming to the attention of management. The club is run by Li-hung Tseng (Languages: Chinese, *English*) a slim, cultured lieutenant to Shanghai's reigning mobster, Yueh-sheng "Big Ears" Tu. Overly inquisitive foreigners without obvious influence will be shown the door—the door to the back alley, where they will then be subjected to a vicious beating. This is administered by a number of triad soldiers equal to the number of investigators present, plus two. They continue until all of them are reduced to 0 Health or lower, or until all of the investigators relent and each of their Health pools have been reduced to 25% of their ratings or less. (To allow a non-lethal resolution, use the Purist Health loss rules for this encounter, even though it occurs in a Pulp game.) Pistols come out only if the investigators threaten to overwhelm the triads, or draw guns of their own.

### Triad Muscle

Athletics 6, Health 10, Scuffling 7,  
Weapons 4  
Weapons: -2 (fist), -1 (kick), +0  
(light pistols)

The Black Lotus is a shining art deco cathedral dedicated to wine, women, and song. Chrome window frames encase vaulting pieces of stained glass. Tiers of tables surround a kidney-shaped dance floor, permitting unobstructed views of a large stage-slash-bandstand. During performances, a motorized mechanism sends a thrust mini-stage, big enough for a single vocalist, out into the dance floor. The highlight of every evening is a performance by sultry chanteuse Lily Tsao.

Regarding Lily, **Streetwise** suggests that she is undoubtedly the paramour



of a prominent gangster. Any NPC remotely aware of Shanghai's underworld can confirm that she is Yueh-sheng Tu's woman.

Patrons will tell the exciting tale of Four Finger Cheng's execution if plied with drinks (**Bargain**) or flirted with (**Flattery**): It happened thirteen days ago<sup>1</sup>. Cheng was sitting at his favorite table, near the door, when a turbaned, brown-skinned man calmly walked in,

shot him with a Mauser, blew a hole in one of his bodyguards, and ducked back out through the lobby. House bodyguards gave chase but evidently didn't catch up with him.

**Streetwise** permits an inquiry into the gangland politics behind the shooting:

Cheng was a loyal lieutenant to Yueh-sheng Tu. Someone is making a move against Tu.

<sup>1</sup> If time has passed since the group first learned of the Fatty Tang murder, adjust as necessary to keep the timeline in order.

## Shanghai Bullets

### Falling For Lily

Keepers wishing to add a touch of classic gangster melodrama to their Cthulhoid horror can introduce a subplot in which one of the PCs embarks on an ill-starred love affair with Lily Tsao. Lily can't help it if her mere presence makes men fall hopelessly in love with her!

First, float the hint by describing Lily's intoxicating stage presence. Wait to see if one or more players will pick up the cue from there and initiate a romance, let the storyline progress from there. Should the process require a bit of nudging, require all characters who are sexually attracted to women to make Difficulty 4 Stability rolls. The professions Artist, Author, Criminal, Dilettante, Military, Pilot, Police Detective and Private Investigator impose a +1 Difficulty modifier, as do the drives Artistic Sensitivity, Bad Luck, and Ennui. The Adventure drive brings a +2 Difficulty modifier. Failing the test occasions no Stability loss, but causes the character to become uncontrollably smitten with Lily.

Bored and fickle, Lily puts up token resistance but in short order falls genuinely in love with at least one of her PC suitors. This should ultimately result in beautifully-lit tears streaming down her perfect cheeks—either as she dies in her lover's arms, or her lover dies in hers. In the latter instance, she returns to Tu, her songs forever after burnished by mournful nostalgia.

That said, if the player works hard enough, maybe he can avoid the tragic outcome dictated by genre norms, and spirit Lily out of China to live happily ever in a new country as a newfound Source of Stability.

But seriously, what fun would that be?

(**core**) Three days ago, another of Tu's men, Fatty Tang, was found murdered in the French Concession.

### Fatty Tang

Scene Type: Core

**Cop Talk** indicates that an approach to the French police will be better attempted without introductions from an SMP officer like Basserman. The two forces view one another as rivals, and an affiliation with the SMP would only prove an impediment.

A trip to a police station in the French Concession, plus **Cop Talk**, puts the group in touch with a counterpart of Basserman's, Inspector Raymond Delmont. Red-faced and blustery, Delmont resembles an unhappy Father Christmas who has been closely

shaved, shoehorned into ill-fitting clothes and forced to perform police duties. He treats the group brusquely until spoken to by an investigator who a) is French b) is a beautiful woman using **Flattery** on him or c) who speaks dismissively of Basserman and the SMP. Then he becomes witty, erudite, and forthcoming. He believes that there is no point in investigating a gangland murder, even one as annoyingly unusual as this one.

Condescendingly or not, Delmont reveals the following:

Fatty Tang, a well known associate of Yueh-sheng Tu, was found lying in an alleyway off the Route Herve de Sieyes.

(**core**) Despite his well-deserved sobriquet, Fatty, when found, was a skeletal figure, drained of blood and

other bodily fluids. His dried skin stuck to his bones like a mummy.

Naturally, the gruesomely disfigured body was turned over to the family, who held a grand triad funeral for him. However, Delmont did, despite the impossibility of ever resolving the case, take a few photographs of the remains, for curiosity's sake. **Forensics** shows that the corpse bore the same marks as de Briac's.

Once the investigators make the connection between Fatty Tang's death and that of a French priest, Delmont becomes more sympathetic—but still shrugs fatalistically at the suggestion that anything can be done about it. "My friends, this is Shanghai."

### Yueh-sheng "Big Ears" Tu

Scene Type: Core

The following information on Triad kingpin Yueh-sheng Tu (or Yuesheng Du, depending on which transliteration system you prefer) can be gained via **History**, or from Basserman, Delmont, or any suitable underworld contact:

Known as the "Al Capone of the East", Tu has been a top triad figure in Shanghai for over a decade.

Tu bought himself a bank with his illicit millions, becoming one of the city's leading tycoons.

He is somewhat of a beloved figure among the rich foreigners of Shanghai, who see him as a swaggering symbol of their swashbuckling lifestyle and as a protector of western mercantile interests. He's even listed in the city's "Who's Who," which supplies his many legitimate business interests along with a winking indication of his true profession.

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Corps Parade

(core) A long-time ally of Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-Shek, Tu has often lent his triad muscle to the Kuomintang cause. A notable example of this occurred in 1927, when Tu's men infiltrated Communist labor groups, culminating in a notorious massacre of party members and other leftists.

In the early 30s, Chiang put him in charge of the KMT's anti-opium efforts, a job for which, as Shanghai's top smuggler, he was uniquely qualified.

(Tu is an actual historical figure; other gangland characters are fictional.)

Wary and well-protected, Tu has little reason to speak personally to investigators and no information that can't be garnered through lower-ranking members of his gang. Gaining an audience with him requires a 3-point **Streetwise** spend. Tall and thin, he presents himself as a rakish, flamboyant figure. If he does meet with the PCs, he'll be flanked by multiple brawny bodyguards, fawning underlings, and an assortment of dolled-up chorus girls. The girls are all disposable, except for Lily Tsao—anyone making time with her is flirting with a torture killing.

### Corpse Parade

#### Scene Type: Core (Event)

When the investigators come to a pause in their inquiries into the Shanghai underworld—either because they're stumped or because they've gathered all available core clues—an event occurs, propelling them onward. Make sure they've met Darvesh Singh before this scene occurs.

They are contacted by either Basserman or Delmont, depending on which of these police officials

they've forged the most entertaining relationship with. A new corpse has been found, in the same bizarre condition as Father de Briac.

The body was found in a beggar-ridden stretch of either the French Concession (if the contact is Delmont) or International Settlement. It was being carried by a beggar woman, Old Yi.

**Anthropology** reveals that it is a common practice for beggars in Shanghai to, in a plea for sympathy, grab a stray corpse and lug it around on their shoulders.

Although Basserman/Delmont has not identified the victim, the identity is immediately obvious to the investigators: it's Darvesh Singh.

OldYi is in custody as a witness in the case. She speaks only Chinese and pretends to be senile. Basserman/Delmont has been unable to get anything out of her. **Reassurance** gets her to tell what she knows: she was sleeping in an alleyway, when she awoke from a terrible dream to find the dried-up body, and a man running away. She then demands compensation for the body, which she views as her property.

If asked about the dream, she says she dreamt that a ghost was attacking the Indian man. The ghost couldn't be seen at first, but as more of the man's guts and blood splashed out onto it, it became partly visible. She shudders, clearly troubled by the dream. **Assess Honesty** suggests that her mind is protecting her by failing to fully correlate its contents: this was a real memory.

(core) If asked about the man, she says he wore a long coat with a fur-trimmed collar, carried a Mauser pistol with white paint on its barrel, and had a wandering eye. Other than that, she

didn't get a good look at him. Oh yes, and he carried a strange mirror in his hand. Can she have her corpse back now, please?

She'll shut up about getting the body back in exchange for \$2, though more will, it goes without saying, be gratefully accepted.

With Singh dead, his landlady, Jenny Simon of the Pension Montigny, no longer has any reason to protect him. In exchange for "a modest administrative fee" (**Bargain** plus \$10 or more) she reveals her suspicions that Singh was performing hits for a triad gang. She saw him go to his room on a couple of occasions accompanied by a man with a wandering eye, who wore a fur-trimmed long coat. Soon afterwards, Singh would be briefly flush with cash and able to pay his back rent. This happened on two occasions. By checking her account books, she can date his payments as occurring on the days after the murders of Four Fingers Cheng and Fatty Tang.

The players now have enough evidence to piece together the following: Singh was a hitman for a triad figure. He killed his first victim, Four Fingers Cheng, the old-fashioned way. Then he was next door when de Briac was killed by the effect of the star mirror (which the group may or may not have identified as easily summoning a star vampire). Singh took the star mirror and later used it on his second hit, on Fatty Tang. Then his triad contact double-crossed him, getting the star mirror away from him and killing him with it. The mirror is now in the possession of this unidentified triad figure.

The remainder of the scenario is a MacGuffin hunt, in which the investigators work to intercept the star mirror as it travels up the food chain of crime and power in Shanghai. The group may gain the mirror at any point

## Shanghai Bullets

from now on—but when they do, they still have to get it away from everyone else in the city who might want it for their own nefarious purposes.

### Mr. Fur-Trimmed Coat

#### Scene Type: Core

From the description given by Old Yi and/or Jenny Simon, any underworld contact can identify Darvesh Singh's triad employer as Chi-mo "Wrong Eye" Ling. The contact can also supply the following facts:

Chi came to Shanghai from the north a few years ago.

He belongs to a minor Green Gang faction that has never gone very far. Whenever they expand, Big Ears Tu steps in and squeezes them out.

Recently he has begun to extort the Russian businesses in the Little Moscow neighborhood, on Avenue Joffre in the French Concession.

He is often seen at the Volga Tea Room, one of the aforementioned targets of his extortion racket.

A trip to the Volga Tea Room and the use of **Anthropology** shows that it is frequented mostly by Russian émigrés. To sit at one of its dark tables and wait unobtrusively for Wrong Eye to show up requires a Difficulty 4 Stealth test. Otherwise, a member of the wait staff notes their presence as suspicious; see below.

**Anthropology** also finds one solitary tea drinker out of place: he's Japanese. (1-point spend) Although dressed in western business wear, his stiff posture identifies him as a military officer. This is Yusuke Ashida (Languages: Japanese, Chinese), an intelligence officer assigned to undermine the criminal empire of Big Ears Tu. Tu

is aligned with the Nationalists, so the Japanese want him neutralized before their inevitable takeover of the city. The sooner they can put a pro-Japanese faction of the Green Gang in his place, the better. Wrong Eye Ling is auditioning for that role, and has arranged for the assassinations of several of Tu's men as proof of his competence. Now he hopes to seal the deal by turning over the star mirror to his handler, Ashida. Yusuke Ashida is distinguished by his long face and wide, flat nose.

A Difficulty 5 **Disguise** test allows a group member to approach Ashida in the role of an oblivious tourist without arousing his suspicions. However, he's uninterested in talking to fools, particularly foreign ones, and rebuffs them gruffly. At the closer glance afforded by such an approach, **Streetwise** reveals him to be packing: he has a pistol, and a long knife, hidden in his coat.

If the group has aroused the attention of a server, they see Wrong Eye pop his head into the café, then just as quickly exit. **Streetwise** notes the server giving a discreet hand signal. Following Wrong Eye in the busy, unfamiliar Shanghai streets is challenging, requiring a Difficulty 6 Shadowing test. Meanwhile, the group must make a Difficulty 5 Sense Trouble test to realize that they're being shadowed in turn by Yusuke Ashida. They can then decide whether to try to lose him (requires Stealth test, Difficulty 5) or continue on to catch up with Wrong Eye. If they try to lose him and fail (or give up their attempt to shadow Wrong Eye), he learns where they're staying and plans an ambush against them; see sidebar. If they continue their successful Shadowing of Wrong Eye, Ashida catches up with them and prepares to make a fight of it.

### Ashida's Ambush

Ashida's natural reaction when faced with foreigners nosing into his business is to arrange for their swift and quiet murders. To this end, he dispatches a team of chillingly competent Japanese agents to kill the investigators—if they let him find out where they're staying.

Athletics 10, Firearms 8, Health 10, Scuffling 8, Weapons 8

Languages: Japanese, Chinese  
Alertness: +1

Stealth: +1

**Weapons:** +1 (.357 revolver),  
-1 (tantō)

### Wrong Eye Ling

Athletics 4, Firearms 8, Health 4,  
Scuffling 4, Weapons 4

Languages: Chinese  
Alertness: +1

**Weapons:** +0 (Tokarev), -1 (knife)

### Yusuke Ashida

Athletics 10, Firearms 12, Health 15,  
Scuffling 12, Weapons 12

Languages: Japanese, Chinese  
Alertness: +2

Stealth: +1

**Weapons:** +1 (.357 revolver), -1  
(tantō)

*Note:* As pulpy as this scenario is, Yusuke Ashida is a killing machine, not a mook. Use the PC injury rules for him.

Wrong Eye carries the star mirror, so it is possible that the investigators can gain it here by physically overpowering the two men. Oh wait... the two men *and* a star vampire, which Wrong Eye will summon with the mirror, as soon as it becomes apparent that the fight is going against them. The creature arrives immediately to attack the PC with the highest pool in the attack ability he's currently using,

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Mr Fur-Trimmed Coat

whether that be Firearms, Scuffling, or Weapons. Forced by the mirror to effectuate Wrong Eye's wishes, the star vampire holds off on feeding until the investigators are defeated or flee. It thus remains a more effective opponent than it would be if it was stopping to splash gore all over itself.

### Star Vampire

**Abilities:** Athletics 9, Health 11, Scuffling 26

**Hit Threshold:** 6

(invisible but tittering); 3 (when feeding, and for 3 rounds thereafter)

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Weapon:** +2 (talons), -1 (bite); victim Health lost to bite attacks is added to the star vampire's Health or Athletics pool; can either feed or attack with two talons

**Armor:** -3 vs any (integument); bullets do half damage

**Stability Loss:** +1

A group avoiding detection in the Volga Tea Room is instead able to witness the hand-off of the star mirror, wrapped in a bolt of red silk, from Ling to Ashida. They can then wait until the two men get up and go their separate ways before deciding which of them to shadow (if they choose to attempt it at all.) Tailing Ashida requires a Difficulty 7 Shadowing test; Ling's test remains Difficulty 6.



Ling remains in Little Moscow, heading to his offices above a tailor's shop called Abramoff's. If confronted, he denies everything. Subjected to credible **Intimidation**, he puts up a brief front and then folds. He admits to having hired Singh to knock off some of Big Ears' best earners. If asked about the star mirror, he says he sold

it to a collector. The one thing he's too afraid to admit is that he's making war on Tu for the Japanese. (When questioned on this point, a 1-point **Intimidation** spend suggests that he fears someone else much more than he does the investigators.)

If turned over to Delmont, Ling is

## Shanghai Bullets

shortly thereafter stabbed to death by a fellow prisoner, a triad foot soldier loyal to Tu. Delmont lacks the facilities to place him in protective or solitary custody.

Should the group consider handing him over to Basserman, *and* they know that Ashida represents Japanese intelligence, **History** reminds the group that the SMP includes a Japanese auxiliary, answerable to their embassy. If they do hand him over, Japanese officers spirit him out of custody and into a safe house in Hongkew, the sector of the Chinese city where the Japanese of Shanghai live and work.

Groups willing to swim the morally questionable currents of the city may give Wrong Eye to Big Ears Tu, who will grant them a significant reward. If the investigators have already crossed him, the reward may simply be their removal from his death list.

A successful Shadowing of Ashida takes the group to gates of the Japanese embassy, in the International Settlement. Failed Shadowing allows him to make them, at which point he attempts to turn the tables on them and learn where they live. To avoid this requires a Difficulty 6 Stealth test. If failed, he, as above, sends a hit team to bring about their eradication.

Investigators can establish that Ashida is a Japanese military attaché without following him, by finding a contact within a friendly intelligence agency; see sidebar.

### Getting the Mirror From Ashida

Scene Type: Action

If the investigators don't get the artifact from Ashida, someone else will. (If they already have the mirror,

#### Mythos Artifact: The Star Mirror

The star mirror is a slightly irregular oval of a scratch-proof reflective material, about four inches across, encased in an ornately carved frame, apparently of jade. The carvings consist of swirling, serpentine characters in an unidentified alphabet, some of which bear a resemblance to invertebrate sea creatures. Neither frame nor mirror can be broken by any earthly means.

**Geology** shows that neither the reflective substance or the frame are of known materials. A 1-point spend shows that neither are made up of elements appearing on the periodic table, a revelation constituting a minor Mythos shock and occasioning a 2-point Stability test.

**Languages (Chinese)** identifies the characters on the frame as undocumented precursors to the oracle bone script, the earliest known ancestor of the hanzi script used in China and other Southeast Asian nations.

Anyone touching a star mirror can summon a single star vampire by a simple act of will. The creature arrives immediately, and attacks the human being within visual range whom the device's possessor most wants to see harmed. If only the possessor is present, the star vampire attacks him or her. All the creature wants to do is feed, but the holder of the mirror may compel it to efficiently attack other enemies who are also within easy attack range. Once it has vanquished the holder's immediate foes, the star vampire finishes feeding and dematerializes.

The device summons a different star vampire each time, so killing the summoned creature does not render it useless. It can't summon more than one at a time.

Although there is no limit *per se* on how frequently one can use the mirror, its use exacts an onerous mental toll. In addition to the Stability costs associated with seeing star vampires, and seeing them feeding on victims, the user of the star mirror must make an entirely separate 6-point Stability test for each summoning. These are always treated as Mythos shocks.

skip to "Keeping the Mirror From Everyone Else.")

Barring a plan of such exceptional cleverness that you can't help but allow it, storming the Japanese embassy is suicidally stupid. Any intelligence contact will tell the PCs that this is so. It is heavily fortified and well guarded by a large number of heavily armed soldiers.

#### Japanese Embassy Guards

Athletics 4, Firearms 8, Health 4,  
Scuffling 6, Weapons 8  
Languages: Japanese,

Alertness: +1

**Weapons:** +1 (Schmeisser MP28 submachine gun), -1 (tantō)

The unsociable Japanese do not host swank international soirées, making Bond-style infiltrations impossible.

However, Ashida will be unable to resist using the mirror, now that he has it. By staking out the embassy, the investigators can tail him (keeping in mind his +2 Alertness) as he hunts Kenong "Five Arms" Chow.

Chow is another of Tu's lieutenants,

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Intelligence Contacts

Characters can establish intelligence agency contacts with a **Bureaucracy** spend and a credible-sounding explanation of how they ought to be able to travel in such murky circles. Certain occupations, like Military or Scientist, will find this easier than, say, Criminals and Hobos. American characters' connections are to the State Department, Brits and commonwealth citizens to British Naval Intelligence, and French citizens to the Deuxième Bureau. In the unlikely event that your campaign frame casts investigators as citizens of the fascist powers, Italian characters can seek out the Servizio Informazioni Militare, and Germans the Abwehr's Foreign Branch. Investigators whose citizenship lies outside the major western powers are out of luck.

Investigators' cases will be assigned to mid-level officials reporting to Shanghai station chiefs:

**Clive Chesney** (British Naval Intelligence; Languages: English) is a white-haired but sprightly gentleman in the best tweedy, pipe-smoking Men's Club manner. His jolly comportment conceals the mechanical heart of a calculating machine. His main concern is the protection of British colonial interests in Asia in the face of the coming troubles. He will assist the investigators to remove the star mirror from the grasp of England's enemies, and will then try to seize it himself. If played properly, Chesney will seem so kindly and benevolent that the investigators give it over to him willingly, for safekeeping.

**Harry Furthman** (US State Department, Languages: English) is a dashing young Minnesotan who fixes interlocutors with a dreamy, brown-eyed gaze. Naïve and a little out of his depth, he knows what's going on in Shanghai but is less interested in Machiavellian statecraft than in attractive female investigators. Harry is the character in this sidebar most likely to be devoured by a star vampire.

Slight and somewhat stoop-shouldered, **Saturnin Bergeron** (French Deuxième Bureau, Languages: French, English, *Chinese*) resembles a well-dressed satyr, thanks to his tousled black locks, dark brows, florid goatee, and twinklingly intelligent eyes. Between puffs of cigar smoke, he speaks in cynical epigrams. Like Clive Chesney, he is utterly ruthless and will stop at nothing to get the star mirror into French hands.

Round of facial feature and generous of belly, **Antonio Nazzari** (Italian Servizio Informazioni Militari, Languages: Italian, German, English, *Chinese*) appears to be a friendly, bumbling public servant, up to his elbows in paperwork. In reality, he's only half as foolish as he looks. His objectives are to protect his own position, and, whenever possible, to make his German counterpart, Georg Rehkopf, look bad.

This wouldn't be a proper pulp scenario if **Georg Rehkopf** (German Abwehr, Languages: German, English) were anything other than a full-blown Teutonic stereotype, complete with riding crop, leather gloves, sibilant accent, and sneering, humorless demeanor. He naturally wishes to get the star mirror to his superiors—meaning that he sees the local Ahnenerbe asset, Theodor Meixner (p. XX) as a bigger rival than any agent of a non-German power.

Criminal characters may gravitate to Big Ears Tu as an information resource—assuming they haven't already alienated him, for example by making love to Lily Tsao. He knows what's going on in the International Settlement better than any of the above intelligence officials. For example, he controls the post office worker's union, and can intercept any mail going in or out of the city, diplomatic pouches excepted. He can tell them about Ashida—but of course will want the star mirror for himself, if he finds out about it.



## Shanghai Bullets

responsible for maintaining confidential communications between Big Ears and Chiang Kai-Shek. His nickname derives from his grabby ways with women.

Athletics 4, Firearms 4, Health 6,  
Scuffling 4, Weapons 4  
Languages: Chinese  
**Weapons:** +0 (Mauser pistol)

Ashida has had Chow under surveillance for a while now, and know that he stops each night for congee (a rice porridge) at a particular food stall near the Black Lotus. He intends to wait in a dark alley for Chow to pass by and summon a star vampire to devour him.

The next move is up to the players. They can jump him right away, wait until he makes his assassination attempt, or attempt to relieve him of the artifact by other means of their own devising. Waiting for the hit on Chow allows them to struggle with Ashida while the summoned star vampire is occupied with his chosen target. Taking advantage of this requires some shrewd guessing on the players' part.

Should they fail to tail Ashida, Chow's drained corpse is found the next day and brought to their attention by Basserman, Delmont, or an underground contact. Any of the same characters can tell the PCs who Chow was and what he did for Tu and Chiang. If the players don't deduce the connection themselves, **History** suggests that the Japanese have an interest in undermining the Nationalists, by undercutting one of their most effective assets—Tu's dominant Green Gang faction.

Within a day, Ashida is found dead, from an old-fashioned bullet hole. Someone else has the star mirror, and starts using it to wipe out his faction's enemies.

### Chain Of Custody Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction

As we're far down the chain of possible plot branches now, further instances in which the star mirror changes hands, and the clue trails that eventually lead the investigators to a current owner, are left to you to devise and/or improvise. The following entries tell you who might take it, who they serve, who they might use it on, and why. Most of these people have no qualms about killing anyone to get the device. Others, as indicated, will not harm members of their own side. Where a target is not mentioned, they use the mirror on someone who's trying to get it away from them, not knowing exactly what it does.

#### Shi-Kai Yu

This boyish, implacable Nationalist intelligence operative targets underground Communist organizer Li-Fu Teng, an elderly scholar with a taste for fiery rhetoric. Despite the apparent greater threat posed by the Japanese, Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-Shek remains fixated on his old enemies, the Communists. Yu will not kill other Nationalists, including Tu's men, to get the mirror. (Languages: Chinese.)

#### Po-siung "Big Ox" Lu

The physically imposing ex-peasant heads a Communist hit squad, or Red Brigade, which targets both Nationalist counter-insurgents and Communist turncoats. Included in the latter category is his priority target for a star vampire attack, former comrade Ying-chieh Cheng. Lu is most likely to take the mirror from Shi-Kai Yu. (Languages: Chinese.)

Athletics 12, Firearms 6, Health 6,  
Scuffling 8, Weapons 4  
Alertness: +1  
**Weapons:** +0 (light pistol)

#### Eiji Takagawa

Black Dragon operative Takagawa (p. XX) will imperturbably execute anyone to get a powerful Mythos artifact for his organization, including his fellow Japanese.

#### Vasily Altschul

The down and out Russian émigré (p. XX) sees the artifact as something he can sell to the highest bidder, providing his ticket to Easy Street.

#### Theodor Meixner

Former stage magician, covert homosexual, and rising Ahnenerbe agent Theodor Meixner (picture a young, fit Peter Lorre) will kill anyone, including fellow German officers, for the star mirror. (Languages: German, English.)

Also, any of the characters' potential intelligence contacts (sidebar, p. XX) will kill any perceived enemies to gain possession of the device.

Where not otherwise specified, these characters have the following game statistics:

Athletics 6, Firearms 6, Health 6,  
Scuffling 4, Weapons 4  
Alertness: +1  
**Weapons:** +0 (light pistol)

### Keeping the Mirror From Everyone Else Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction

When the investigators do get the star mirror, they should have to fend off at least one attempt from one of the above-named individuals (perhaps aided by operatives or hired muscle) to relieve them of the star mirror.

Depending on who knows of their activities and how far those groups' reach extends, leaving Shanghai may not be enough to get them out of

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Keeping the Mirror From Everyone Else

trouble. If they lose the star mirror to a rival, they'll have to do something to get it back, otherwise the chain of murders and ownership changes continues. However, if they take so much care to keep their discovery a secret that it makes no sense for any attacks to occur, they get to move onto their final challenge unimpeded.

To solve it, they must devise and execute a plan to keep the star mirror away from anyone who might want to use it. How do you do this with an indestructible object? Build a concrete tomb? Return it to its cave in the Yellow Mountains? Give it to the US government, for storage in their giant facility, next to the ark of

the covenant?

If they drop it into the sea, they should later be reminded that in a Lovecraftian universe, the ocean is not their friend. Have it come back to haunt them in a later installment, perhaps clutched menacingly between the claw-like fingers of a Deep One/human hybrid.

If the final disposition of the device leaves the scenario on a disappointingly anti-climactic note, you can always have enemy agents show up at the last moment to try to wrest it from the investigators.

Reliably ensuring that the star mirror

will never be used again earns a 3-point Sanity refresh.

This segment of the scenario might be dropped entirely if the scenario has already stretched to a satisfying length by the time they fight Ashida and the star vampire. You might find this to be the case if the Lily Tsao subplot lays claim to a big chunk of your narrative, as it did during in-house playtest.

# Death Laughs Last

This scenario puts a Cthulhoid spin on the classic hero pulps, envisioning a world of masked vigilantes and colorfully nicknamed villains co-existing, and then intersecting with, the antiquarian Lovecraftian milieu.

## The Hook

When millionaire philanthropist Addison Bright is found murdered in his New York City manor, the investigators are called in to perform a discreet inquiry into the mysteries surrounding his death.

The executor of Addison Bright's estate engages the investigators to inquire into his mysterious and grisly murder. The Brights' great influence has allowed them to make an unconventional arrangement, in which the NYPD has agreed to step aside in favor of the family's favored team of investigators.

## The Horrible Truth

Addison Bright led a double life. By day, he was the debonair heir to an old money fortune. By night, he became the fearsome masked vigilante The Penitent, striking the hearts into the city's evildoers.

According to respectable newspapers and official police sources, the Penitent is nothing more than a rumor spread among supernatural criminals. If you believe the yellow tabloids, you know him as a slouch-hatted, trench-coated warrior of vengeance, who sends criminals to their knees with his ability to summon up their own darkest nightmares.

The Penitent is real. Four years ago, Addison Bright was the embodiment of the classic rich, irresponsible wastrel. One night, a drunken jaunt in his Duesenberg led to tragedy on a dark country road. Bright crashed the car into a tree, instantly killing his passenger, Murray Sullivan. Sullivan, the son of his chauffeur, had signed up for the police academy at the time of his death. Torn by remorse, Bright swore to redeem himself by taking on Sullivan's vocation. However, he would not be an ordinary crimefighter—he would use his resources, athleticism and untapped scientific talent to become the ultimate justice-making machine. After initial missions proved more difficult than expected—and pitted him against foes with seemingly supernatural powers—Bright went on a pilgrimage to the mysterious east, seeking the power to cloud the minds of the cowardly and superstitious.

After a year of largely fruitless sojourning, he found these in the trackless jungles of Burma, aided by a local guide, Nyunt Ohnmar. Unbeknownst to Bright, Ohnmar was a member of the dread Tcho-Tcho people, and an initiate of the gods Lloigor and Zhar. He led Bright to the Plateau of Sung, where he arranged for his fellow cultists to pose as Buddhist monks. They gave Bright a sham education in the mystic arts, as Nyunt Ohnmar prepared his secret weapon: the powdered petals of the hallucinogenic black lotus. This "sacrament of justice", as he called it, could be used to overcome the mental defenses of The Penitent's criminal enemies. Ohnmar knew it as a variant of liao, the hallucinogenic drug used to commune with the dark gods.

Nyunt Ohnmar returned to America with Bright, adopting the guise of his faithful manservant, Mr. Han. Bright proceeded to formulate special dispersers, pieces of equipment concealed in the Penitent's voluminous trench coat. These allowed him to release into the atmosphere microscopic, pulverized fragments of black lotus flower. He altered his mask to contain filters, protecting his own lungs from the substance, which induced madness when consumed over an extended period. Criminals briefly exposed to it underwent paralyzingly horrifying visions confronting them with their cosmic insignificance.

Mr. Han remained Bright's most indispensable confidant as the crimefighter proceeded to assemble a team of assistants and sidekicks. As the Penitent cut a swathe through New York's underworld, Han pursued a secret agenda. As the vigilante busted up the city's gangs, Mr. Han proceeded to take over their roles in the underworld economy, staffing his new criminal empire with dedicated cultists, led by individuals of Tcho-Tcho blood. When the stars align, he will be ready to claim Manhattan in the name of Zhar and Lloigor.

Han is as dismayed by anyone by the death of Addison Bright. The Penitent's gas mask is well-crafted, but unfortunately not quite impervious to the tiny particles of black lotus powder emitted by his dispersers. Over the years, he has been exposed to enough of it to go slowly insane. His mental deterioration intensified sharply a few months ago. During this time, he became convinced that he was being stalked by a new arch-foe

## An Executor and An Execution

called the Other, whose supernatural powers outstripped his own. In fact, his identity was splitting in two. The Other, a projection of his still-overwhelming sense of guilt, became a full-fledged persona, capable of controlling Bright's actions. Becoming convinced that it was preparing to usher in a supernatural cataclysm, Bright refurbished an old trap confiscated from one of his enemies, using it to kill the Other—and, hence, himself.

### Victory Condition

Victory occurs when the investigators solve the murder, discovering that Bright laid a fatal trap for himself. As the investigate, they may uncover Mr. Han's covert perfidy, and smash his occultic-criminal network. If the investigators fail to discover the true significance of the black lotus powder, it is possible that one of them will court eventual madness and destruction, by donning Bright's hat and trench coat and becoming the new Penitent.

### The Spine

The case begins at the crime scene (**An Executor and an Execution**) which leads, directly or otherwise, to the discovery that Bright was **The Penitent**. In **Enter Mr. Han**, the investigators encounter the main villain, in his role as Bright's right hand man. Before or after an encounter with Brights inamorata and partner in vigilantism, **Myrna Thornton**, they gain access to The Penitent's **Sanctuary**. This scene gets them hunting down the Penitent's **Network** of aides, who can shed a degree of light on his mad final days.

### Antagonist Reactions

The team may be able to conduct its case without making Mr. Han fearful of discovery. Most likely, though, he'll send his gangland minions after them

in an ultimately self-defeating attempt to obscure his part in the Penitent's career, and in Bright's suicidal madness. His antagonist reactions may lead them to the discovery of the location where he grows the black lotus plant, and his mind-shattering methods of cultivation.

## SCENES

### An Executor and An Execution

#### Scene Type: Intro

When the players show up for the first session of "Death Laughs Last", ask each of them to supply a possible reason explaining why they might be contacted for an urgent and extremely sensitive task on behalf of a very well-known and exceptionally reclusive old money New York family, the Brights. The task requires not only unimpeachable trustworthiness but a practical familiarity with life's dark and unseemly side.

Certain investigators' character concepts will render such a possibility completely absurd. The Bright family wouldn't seek out a hobo or criminal for a job like this. Excuse these players from the exercise entirely.

Obvious suggestions players might make include:

(Alienist) "I once treated their niece for hysteria, only to discover that her fiancée was gaslighting her. In removing the fellow from her life, I showed myself to employ tactics than many of my sedentary colleagues might consider unorthodox."

(Clergyman) "An old mentor of mine, who knows the dark pathways I've been walking recently, administers one of their charities."

(Dilettante) "I went to prep school with a Bright. Although I've done my best to downplay my present activities among

the old social set, I suppose word has gotten around that I can be trusted in a sticky situation."

(Private investigator) "I handled a blackmail case for them once. Showed them I'm the kind of guy who keeps his mouth shut."

The Bright family itself takes only a peripheral role in the mystery to follow, so you can safely grant the players considerable leeway in inventing details about them. If a contradiction appears, don't reject it; amend the scenario background to fit it in.

Then the player suggestion that best suits the theme of the scenario, or seems the freshest and most entertaining. Use that as the basis for the opening scene, in which this character is contacted by Addison's executor, after which he or she can bring in the rest of the team.

Addison Bright's executor is Landers Jennings, partner in the law firm of Wellman, Landers and Welbourne. **Law** or **Library Use** reveal that this is one of the city's most prestigious firms, catering to an old money clientèle. **Law** additionally reveals that Jennings enjoys an impeccable reputation for integrity, frugality, and common sense. A player with a **Credit Rating** of 6 or 7 may make a 1-point spend of that ability to specify a previous personal acquaintance with Jennings, either socially or as a client. A player with Credit Rating 5 and whose background establishes him as a member of the bar may make a 1-point **Law** spend to specify a previous collegial relationship with him. Without such an acquaintance, his demeanor is formal and reserved; **Assess Honesty** suggests that he is dealing with the investigators against his own better judgment. With an acquaintance, he is formal but relaxed, and less obviously uncomfortable when members of the group make unorthodox comments or suggestions.

**Death Laughs Last**

With no time to waste, Jennings arranges for the investigators to meet him at Pitcairn House, the imposing Fifth Avenue manor inhabited by Addison Bright. (Red herring: players may associate this name with the remote Pacific island of Pitcairn, famed as the settlement founded by mutineers from *The Bounty*, and from there free-associate a connection between the Brights and the R'lyeh. **Library Use** reveals that the manor was named after the island by its original builder, who was descended from one of its discoverers. The manor has been in the Bright family only since 1890.)

Inside, he ushers the investigators to the crime scene—Bright's study. The scene has been left undisturbed for them. Present are three uniformed officers, plus homicide detective Bart Kroeger and police commissioner Lawrence Ballentine. Jennings makes the introductions and lets the investigators get to work.

**Physical Evidence**

Addison Bright's body hangs limply from a decorative mahogany column, impaled on a metal javelin approximately a yard long. The sharp end of the javelin protrudes through the column.

*The core clue in this scene is granted through a series of ability usages, and is thus labeled as Core Clue i, Core Clue ii, and so on. Note that parts i and ii are redundant—the group needs only one of them to get to the Indian statue.*

**Forensics:** Bright was pierced through the heart. He would have died instantly.

**Forensics:** If taken down from the column and examined (here or elsewhere), Bright's body shows no other recent injuries. Although in extraordinarily good physical health, with a surprisingly developed musculature for a man of his supposed



indolence, he shows a long history of repeated injuries, many of them severe. His body is a map of old scar tissue. An X-ray examination reveals that almost every bone in his body has been broken at one point or another, sometimes on multiple occasions. These wounds and contusions were incurred in a long series of separate incidents. They represent a track record of physical harm eclipsing any boxer or soldier the character may ever have examined or (if the character also has **Medicine**)

treated. A 1-point **Forensics** spend establishes that all of the injuries occurred within the last four years.

**Chemistry:** The javelin is made of a lead-iron alloy. The head of the javelin is lighter in color than the rest of it. (Give the players a moment to deduce what this means—that whoever sharpened to its present deadly point did so very recently. If they don't make the connection, tell them.)

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## An Executor And An Execution

**Chemistry (core clue i):** The only other item in the room that is clearly made of lead is a large painted statuette of a North American Indian, positioned across the room.

**Evidence Collection (core clue ii):** A flattish rectangular object, about four by five inches, is visible under the Persian area rug that covers the study floor. It appears at the rug's edge, right at the point where you'd enter the room. When the rug is rolled up, the device is revealed as a pedal. A wire connects it to the Indian statuette.

**Mechanical Repair (core clue iii):** The statue's arm is articulated and can be ratcheted up into a throwing position. When the pedal is stepped on, the arm releases, throwing the javelin. The statue is hollow.

**Locksmith (core clue iv):** A series of gears and pulleys hold the arm at high tension. Stepping on the pedal sends an electrical signal, which activates a small blade. It cuts the interior wires, creating enough force to propel the javelin through the room at high speed. (Because of this, the device cannot be reactivated without hours of repair work, and a new length of wire.) The work inside the device is very new, though many of the parts are at least several years old.

**Evidence Collection (core clue v):** A crown symbol appears etched on the base of the statue, next to a series of scratches and dots. The symbol was made during casting; it was not recently etched.

**Library Use (core clue vi, must occur off-site):** The crown symbol marks it as the work of Royal Castworks, a foundry in nearby Bayonne, New Jersey.

If a player with **Locksmith** thinks to ask if he recognizes the workmanship inside the device, he can make a

2-point spend to know that the original design and work (but not the recent refurbishment that made the device active again) have to be the work of one Nedrick Farnum. This allows the group to leapfrog the brief investigation scene at the Royal Castworks and go directly to the Nedrick Farnum scene, p. XX.

### Interviewing Jennings

Landers Jennings requires no inducements to be forthcoming. He wants the group to succeed, and as quickly as possible, so he can get to work hushing everything up. Jennings has no idea that his client was a costumed vigilante and has little useful information to contribute, beyond simple background queries.

He makes it clear to the group that they are to make all inquiries to the Brights through him. They are to avoid upsetting any member of the family, and can expect no contact whatsoever with retired patriarch Overton Mitchell Bright (see sidebar), who is unable to receive visitors for health reasons. Jennings has spoken to all of them, and assures the group that they are horrified and baffled by Addison's bizarre demise, and have no useful facts to contribute to their investigation. **Assess Honesty** reveals that Jennings is absolutely certain that this is true. (When playing this part of the scene, take care that you don't steer the players away from this fruitless avenue so zealously that they conclude that the family *has* to be central to the case.)

Jennings provides, if asked the appropriate questions, the following information on Addison Bright:

Bright was independently wealthy, living off the income from several large trust funds. He has been luckily spared the ravages of the Depression.\*

An incorrigible bachelor, he lived alone. Unless you count his manservant, Mr. Han.

Mr. Han does not seem to be here. He hasn't answered the phone; nor is he in the servant's quarters.

Bright was uninvolved in the affairs of the Bright business empire.\*

He financed a number of small electrical, manufacturing and pharmaceutical firms. These investments have been canny, but pale in significance compared to his inherited assets.

A world traveler, Bright took a year-long jaunt to the Orient about four years ago.

His philanthropic activities include support for education, the arts, public hygiene, and criminal rehabilitation. He also supports various eugenics movements.\*

Until recently, Addison was largely apolitical. Over the past couple of years he has supported anti-corruption candidates of various political stripes.\*

[If your game is set in the early 1930s] In foreign policy matters, Addison is a staunch anti-interventionist.\*

[If your game is set in the late 1930s] Addison recently renounced his past anti-interventionist stance, recognizing Germany's Nazi movement as a threat to world peace.\*

(Items marked with an asterisk can also be discovered through **Library Use** or with a **Credit Rating** of 6 or more.)

Throughout the rest of the case, Jennings periodically makes contact to ask for updates, urge quicker action, and to stuffily upbraid them if they breach the absolute discretion expected by the Bright family.

Whenever the party gets stuck in speculation and needs a sounding board, use one of his inquiries as a device to

Death Laughs Last

**The Brights**

The Bright family came to prominence in the middle of the last century, with the rise of Addison's grandfather, Joseph Henry Bright, from working class origins to status as one of the nation's wealthiest industrialists. He parlayed timber and steel interests into a banking empire, which was taken over by his son, Overton Mitchell Bright, at about the turn of the century. Overton married socialite Dorothy Addison shortly thereafter. Addison was their third child, after sons Joseph and Henry. Overton withdrew from public life after the 1929 stock market crash and is rumored to be in ill health. Joseph now runs the empire, having cut his brothers out of active participation in its business affairs. He is one of the mayor's major campaign contributors. Henry Bright leads a circumspect life as an art collector and amateur painter. The Bright name is plastered on institutions throughout the city. Joseph Bright the elder began a long tradition of arts patronage.

The above information is available through **Library Use**, to anyone with a **Credit Rating** of 5 or more, or from conversation with Landers Jennings. Jennings will frame all details on the family in the most flattering possible terms.

help them organize their thoughts. Under no circumstances does he believe any theory of the case couched in supernatural terms. If the investigators need him to accept their account, they must describe all of its elements scientifically.

**Interviewing Ballentine**

Police Commissioner Lawrence Ballentine is a rough-hewn, hard-boiled man who brooks no nonsense. He believes in bare-knuckled police work and likes to see his jails full of mused-up prisoners. A stickler for discipline, he may interrupt his talk with the investigators to bark at a uniformed officer with dirty fingernails. In a thirties movie, he'd be played by Donald Crisp.

Ballentine is on hand to make sure the investigators get all the cooperation they need. He's here on direct orders from the mayor. The commissioner is untroubled by the idea that there's a different law for pillars of the community such as the Brights. If they want to bring in fancy weirdos to handle this matter quietly, that's none of his beeswax.

He makes it clear that no reasonable request of police resources will be refused. To effect such help, they're to go through Kroeger. If there's a problem, they should contact Jennings, who will coordinate with his office.

Ballentine has no information relevant to the case. He's a leader, not a detective.

If re-approached later in the case about The Penitent, he will say for the record that no such individual exists. Off the record, he confirms that The Penitent is responsible for busting up many of the city's worst gangs, and that many of the force's key arrests were gifts the masked vigilante left on their doorstep. "That's a damn tough break," he says, if told that The Penitent is dead.

(This character is based on Lewis J. Valentine, who started out as a beat cop and was New York's police commissioner from 1934 to 1945. If your game is set during that timeframe, you might as well use the real name.

Find a picture of him with an online image search.)

**Interviewing Kroeger**

For a New York homicide detective, Bart Kroeger cuts a surprisingly dapper figure. Slim, nattily dressed, and impeccably manicured, he's comfortable among the moneyed and powerful—which is why Ballentine tapped him for this delicate assignment. Kroeger is not rich himself, but comes from a long line of butlers and servants. Imagine William Powell in his 1930s prime.

Kroeger is aloof but professional until one of the investigators impresses him as an all right guy—either through deed or the use of **Cop Talk**. Then he becomes fully frank with them, letting his suavely cynical side show. Once this shift occurs, he's willing to share the following information:

He by no means resents the investigators for horning in on his case. If they catch the mug who did this, he gets credit. If they fail, they take the blame. Meanwhile, he gets to catch up on a bunch of murders nobody but him cares about, because they happened to poor people.

Because he'll be out working these other cases, he won't necessarily be waiting at the station house to quickly complete any errands they have for him. However he'll try to have the desk sergeant take care of their routine needs. For anything unusual, leave a message and he'll get back to them.

His sense is that the Brights are protecting their reputation, not covering up any complicity. If he thought something smelled funny about it, he'd go after them, no matter what. But that's not what his nose tells him.

**Bart Kroeger**

Athletics 8, Firearms 8, Health 10, Scuffling 12, Weapons 6.

## Nedrick Farnum

**Special:** Although his Credit Rating is 4, his experience with the ultra-rich also allows him to function as if he has Credit Ratings of 6 and 7.

*If an investigator dies during this scenario, give the player the option of taking Bart Kroeger as a replacement character, promoting him from NPC to PC status. The player should reconfigure Kroeger's game statistics according to the standard rules for character creation, but gets to keep the special Credit Rating. The death of the previous investigator presumably draws Kroeger more deeply into the case.*

### Royal Castworks

Scene Type: Alternate

*(This scene can be skipped with a spend in "An Executor and an Execution.")*

Royal Castworks, like the rest of the economy, has fallen on hard times. It's now a quietly decaying industrial building with only one full time employee, Abe Hackett. Abe is a sad-looking man, his face indelibly gin-blossomed. Though not resistant to providing the information the investigators seek, he is lonely and will try to prolong the encounter with trivial small talk before getting down to brass tacks. He putters about his dusty office, preparing coffee and inviting the group to sit a spell and talk about the Mets, the weather, and Rudy Vallee. A 1-point **Flattery** or **Reassurance** spend gets him to stick to the subject.

If shown a rubbing, sketch or photographic image of the marking on the base, he confirms it as the work of his company. Shown an image or sketch of the statue itself, he says it's a Chief Howdee, a figure made mostly for cigar stores. Only a few dozen of them sold. The markings are unique to each piece and serve as a sort of serial

number. By checking his old record books, he can tell who bought the figure. Hackett blows about a quarter of an inch of dust off a ledger, and provides the name: Nedrick Farnum. Abe seems to remember that Nedrick was a locksmith.

### Nedrick Farnum

Scene Type: Core

**Library Use** shows that Nedrick Farnum operates a locksmith's shop in Astoria, Queens. Farnum is a diminutive, easily-spooked man who becomes extremely agitated when the investigators confront him with his dark past. When he realizes that this is about the trapped Indian figure, he begins to tremble and sweat.

"Oh my God!" he cries. "You work for him, don't you? I've gone straight, I swear, straight! I never want to see those things again! Never! I kept all my promises to him! Don't take my mind! Don't take my mind!"

Anxious to cooperate but terrified, he remains incoherent unless they scare him into lucidity with **Intimidation** or calm him down with **Reassurance**. Then he supplies the following answers to relevant questions.

Yes, he purchased the statue, and modified it into a deadly trap.

He did this two years ago and hasn't seen the thing since.

He doesn't make traps anymore, nosirree.

He made the trap when he worked for a crime boss he knew only as the Blue Mist. Back then Farnum was a morphine addict and a petty criminal.

The Blue Mist ordered him to make the trap to kill a masked vigilante, called The Penitent, who was trying to bust up his crime syndicate.

### The Whereabouts Of Mr. Han

The absence of Addison's trusty servant is certainly noteworthy. The group may suspect that he was responsible for the murder, or has met a bad end. Although Han conceals a dreadful secret, neither is true.

Han is traveling, having been sent by Bright to attend a lecture in Philadelphia. At this point in the story, he has no idea that his protégé is dead. A delusional Bright sent him away so that he wouldn't interfere with his attempt to kill his otherworldly nemesis. Han appears in the narrative once the characters have found the connection between the Indian figure and the Penitent; see p. XX.

The Penitent survived the trap and came after Farnum. Farnum tried to shoot him, but his horrifying gaze froze Farnum in his tracks and showed him things—*terrible things*—he doesn't want to contemplate.

The Penitent was nearly seven feet tall, with a visage of metal and fire. He existed in four places at once, which is why ordinary people don't stand a chance of hitting him in a fight. *(As the investigators will later learn, this account of The Penitent is a gross misperception. Farnum's memories of the encounter remain warped by the hallucinogenic effects of the black lotus powder.)*

Confronted with all of his pettiness, sin, and insignificance, Farnum swore he'd go straight, and gave The Penitent receipts and other evidence of his interactions with the Blue Mist.

The Penitent used these to identify the Blue Mist as real estate tycoon Creighton Moorhead. They fought atop

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the Moorhead Building in downtown Manhattan, and the Blue Mist fell to his death. (*Though accurate, this is based on second-hand information from newspaper accounts and former confederates.*)

(**core**) As part of his agreed penance, Farnum delivered the Indian statue to a location specified by the Penitent. It is, so as far as Nedrick knows, still in the masked vigilante's possession.

Farnum begs them to tell The Penitent that he's done nothing wrong and hasn't committed a crime or injected any morphine since that terrible day when the vigilante turned his mind inside out. If they used **Intimidation** to get him to talk, Farnum suffers a heart episode after supplying the above information—or, if the investigators don't ask for all of it, when they start to leave. A 2-point **Reassurance** spend calms him again. Otherwise, he suffers a full-fledged heart attack. A Difficulty 4 **First Aid** test stabilizes his condition long enough to get him to hospital, ensuring his survival. The character who saves his life (either through the Reassurance spend or First Aid test) gets a free +2 bonus on his or her next Stability test.

In a movie, Farnum would be played by character actor John Qualen.

### The Penitent

Scene Type: Core (Background, Common Knowledge and Legwork)

Anybody who has seen a New York tabloid headline in the past three years has heard of The Penitent. Characters with Credit Ratings above 4 probably disbelieved these as sensationalist nonsense, at least before their inquiries into the supernatural showed them how many bizarre truths underlie the veneer of quotidian reality. Respectable papers maintain that the Penitent is an urban legend.

Characters with **Streetwise** or **Cop Talk** and any familiarity with crime and punishment in New York City have heard of The Penitent. From their criminal and/or police contacts, they already know the following:

He began his career about four years ago.

He wears a mask, a trench coat, and a slouch hat.

Although perfectly willing to shoot, stab, or defenestrate criminals, his most potent weapon is his ability to confront them with their own worst nightmares. (Not all contacts take this at face value; cops and crooks who are skeptical in general assume that this is some kind of trick or mental hocus pocus, perhaps an advanced form of hypnotism.)

Rumor has it that he learned this power in the mysterious East.

If asked, Kroeger confirms that The Penitent exists, but that for political reasons the brass don't want to admit it. They want to take credit for the many gangs he has smashed, and don't want to be shown up by him. (No one in power is particularly concerned with the vigilante's flagrant and violent abuse of civil rights. In this era, such concerns are the exclusive province of eggheads and pinkos.)

If the investigators canvass their underworld contacts, they find a few more people who have been terrified into going straight, or at least lowering their profiles, after nightmarish confrontations with the vigilante. They find many more who have heard of him. All of them describe him as monstrous and inhuman, but in different ways. (In other words, perceptions of him are all filtered through the lens of a Mythos-tinged hallucination.) Accounts of the nightmare experience include:

"I saw that nothing really existed, least

of all me. My identity came apart. I was like a bug, or a bacteria. I promised to do anything, just to make it stop."

"It was like there were these eyes on me. Ancient, judging eyes. Inhuman eyes. I can't drink anymore, because when I do, I feel them, watching me still."

"These things flew at my face, terrible things, like squids or bats—I can't even describe them. They came from the corners. All the straight angles in the room turned, not blurry or wiggly, but something else. For weeks afterwards I thought of shooting myself."

These accounts are all from former henchmen of gang leaders the Penitent has destroyed. The group will probably want to know who the masked man's current enemies might be. By using **Streetwise** to find underworld contacts or crime beat reporters, they learn that:

(**core**) The mob boss most recently taking the heat from The Penitent is Thomas "Two Tone" Brophy. He runs a primarily Irish outfit concentrating on hijacking, extortion, and gambling. Brophy is comparatively small potatoes, but with so many big syndicates having fallen over the past few years, he's moving in to fill the gap. Brophy can most often be found holding court in a back room at McGonagle's Pub in Hell's Kitchen.

### Thomas "Two Tone" Brophy

Scene Type: Core (Interview)

Thomas Brophy is a rash, brash, and not especially clever man. But with the Penitent cleaning up New York City's streets, he's about the best the Irish gangs of Manhattan have to offer right now. He's a heavy-set torpedo who looks rumpled and uncomfortable in his well-tailored suit. He's best known

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## Thomas “Two Tone” Brophy

for his off-puttingly intense gaze: one of his eyes is brown, the other a vivid green. Brophy hates snoops, dicks, coppers, and reporters. To get him to talk all-friendly like, use **Streetwise** to find and underworld contact to vouch for the group and set up a meeting. This must be followed up with something sweet for Brophy—an illicit deal (**Bargain**), or perhaps a worshipful request for patronage (**Flattery**.) He may provide the information below through other interpersonal abilities but will bear a grudge and will definitely cause trouble for the group at a later point in the scenario.

In response to relevant questions, he reveals the following:

Yeah, that masked loon was breathing down his neck a while back. He braced himself for things to get worse, but they never did.

What he ever did to attract the loon’s attention, he doesn’t know.

Kill a guy with a trapped statue? That’s not Brophy’s style. A shiv in an alley, sure. A statue? That’s for the funny papers.

Besides, if the loon ain’t bothering Brophy no more, Brophy’s not going do nothing to provoke him.

(**core**) Brophy has enough trouble to worry about, what with the Mott Street Gang muscling his territory.

The Mott Street Gang is an odd one. It’s made up of your Asiatic types, but has all these strange connections to other groups, even the swells. As far as Brophy’s concerned, an honest gangster sticks to his own kind.

A first-class paranoid, Brophy probably concludes that the investigators are stalking horses for The Penitent, or freelance vigilantes. If it’s too soon for Mr. Han to be alarmed by them,



but pacing demands that you send a guy through a door with a gun, Brophy’s gang can provide the requisite gratuitous action. He sends thugs to rough them up and find out what’s really going on. Or maybe he just orders them snuffed.

### Brophy

Athletics 4, Conceal 4, Driving 2, Explosives 3, Filch 4, Firearms 8, First Aid 2, Fleeing 8, Health 8, Mechanical Repair 2, Sanity 10, Scuffling 10, Sense Trouble 6, Stability 3, Weapons 8

*Weapons:* Smith & Wesson .38 (+1), knife (-1), brass knuckles (-1)

### Typical Brophy Goon

Athletics 8, Driving 4, Filch 2, Firearms 8, First Aid 2, Fleeing 8, Health 10, Sanity 10, Scuffling 8, Sense Trouble 2, Stability 5, Weapons 8

*Weapons:* Smith & Wesson .38 (+1), knife (-1), brass knuckles (-1)

## Death Laughs Last

### The Mott Street Gang

Type: Core (Background / Legwork)

The Mott Street Gang is Mr. Han's criminal enterprise. Upon his arrival in New York, he took over an existing Chinese triad and staffed its upper echelon with fellow Tcho-Tchos. Some of these were already in New York; others emigrated from Burma to join him. Since then Han has expanded his underworld workforce by drawing in low-level street soldiers of the gangs the Penitent smashes. Breaking with gangland tradition, he recruits from all ethnicities, although he segregates his people into small teams so they get along. Knowing the right signs to look for, his trusted Tcho-Tchos surveyed the local occult scene until they found servants of the Outer Gods, some of them quite prominent, adding them to his network as well.

Mr. Han can afford to build his criminal empire carefully. Unlike any other gangster, he's less concerned with current profits than in positioning himself for power after the Old Gods rise. He's so circumspect that neither his rivals nor the authorities fully grasp the reach of his organization.

### Typical Mott Street Enforcer

Athletics 8, Health 6, Scuffling 12, Weapons 8

Weapons: Mauser pistol (+0), knife (-1), machete (+0)

### Tcho-Tcho Lieutenant

**Abilities:** Athletics 8, Health 6, Missiles 6, Scuffling 7, Weapons 5

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** +1

**Weapon:** -2 (blowgun dart), -1 (kris), -1 (arrow); all Tcho-Tcho weapons are poisoned, the vile side-effects being up to the Keeper

From Bart Kroeger or contacts earned through **Cop Talk** or **Streetwise**, the following can be learned about the

Mott Street Gang, if the characters ask the right questions:

They're a Chinese triad. Not much is known about them; the Orientals keep to themselves, and prey mostly on their own kind. (*That last bit is untrue conventional wisdom, but sincerely believed by whoever says it.*)

They had a change of leadership a few years back. Since then they've kept a low profile.

Given that there are always going to be triads in Chinatown, the city could do a lot worse than whoever's running things there now. They never leave bodies on the sidewalk, or cause embarrassing headlines.

### Enter Mr. Han Scene Type: Core

Mr. Han enters the story once the investigators have determined that there's a connection between Addison Bright and the Penitent. The next time they return to the Bright manor, they find him calmly unlocking the front door, travel valise in hand.

Han is a neatly attired, diminutive man who favors pinstriped suits and bowler hats. He speaks in the heavily accented manner of a stock Chinese servant in a Hollywood movie of the era. His manner is soft-spoken and unfailingly polite—even if, later on, he's regretfully forced to drop one of the investigators into a death trap.

After speaking to him for a while, a character with **Anthropology** notes that his accent is not mainland Chinese, but Burmese. If asked, Mr. Han claims to have spent a few years of his childhood in Burma. On a 2-point **Anthropology** spend, the character notes that his physiognomy is unusual for a Chinese or Burmese man, suggesting some other element in his ancestry.

When informed of Addison Bright's death, Mr. Han pales and fights back tears. **Assess Honesty** confirms that he is genuinely shocked and grief-stricken by the news. Although he anticipates the apocalyptic return of Zhar and Lloigor with a quiet fanaticism, Nyunt Ohnmar is in his everyday activities a sympathetic, even gentle soul. He came to feel a strong affection for Bright, even as he used him to advance his devious schemes.

He is not so affected, however, as to casually blurt out Bright's secret to a group of possibly dangerous strangers. Han phrases his answers cagily, hoping to avoid outright falsehoods, which an empathetic listener might be able to detect.

(In a race-conscious campaign, it is possible that Western PCs are unable to spot Han's falsehoods with **Assess Honesty**, on the grounds that he is an inscrutable Asian. In other words, they preconceive of him as impassive and opaque and therefore miss the subtle behavioral cues the ability relies on.)

When forced to address a difficult topic, he answers vaguely. When all else fails, he pretends that his English is poor, either acting as if he doesn't understand the question, or answering in incomprehensible pidgin. Han reveals only what he wishes, no matter what Interpersonal abilities the investigators deploy against him.

He is perfectly willing to admit to the following:

He has been working for Addison Bright for nearly four years.

He met Mr. Bright during his travels through the Orient. (If pressed to be more specific, he keeps repeating "Orient", focusing on where Addison's trip was, rather than where exactly they met. He doesn't want to say "Burma.")

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## Margaret Sanger



He was in Philadelphia attending a lecture by a lady Mr. Bright gives money to, and to give her a check for her charity. (Han rifles through his valise to find a program for the event. It turns out to be a lecture by birth control advocate Margaret Sanger. The program gives special thanks to a number of funders, foremost among them the Bright Foundation For Social Progress.) Han professes not to have understood very much of the lecture, which was about “sex and babies.”

**(core)** It was unusual for Mr. Bright to send him to these events. Han does not know why he was sent this time. Usually, if he could not go himself, Mr. Bright would send his lady friend,

Myrna Thornton.

In response to relevant questions, he tries to convey the following, while doing as little flat-out lying as possible:

He has never heard of the Penitent.

It is ridiculous to say that Mr. Bright was a masked vigilante.

He doesn't know where the Indian statue came from.

It is hard to believe that anyone wanted to kill Mr. Bright.

Maybe someone decided to hurt him because they didn't like his politics.

Some of his causes, like his support for birth control or the rehabilitation of criminals, resulted in hate mail. (This is actually true, if misleading in context. If asked to supply the hate mail, Han truthfully replies that he always burned it, as per Mr. Bright's instructions.)

It is possible to get Han to admit that Bright was the Penitent, and to gain access to his sanctuary, costume, and dispersers. The investigators can:

Win Myrna Thornton's trust, so that she vouches for them to Mr. Han. See “Myrna Thornton”, below.

Shadow him to the sanctuary entrance; see “Shadowing Mr. Han.”

### Mr. Han

**Abilities:** Athletics 8, Fleeing 10, Health 12, Missiles 6, Scuffling 3, Weapons 5

**Hit Threshold:** 4

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** +1

**Weapon:** typically none, but if forewarned of trouble arms himself with standard tcho-tcho poisoned arsenal: -2 (blowgun dart), -1 (kris), -1 (arrow)

### Margaret Sanger

#### Scene Type: Red Herring

Family planning crusader and eugenics advocate Margaret Sanger (1879-1966) is one of many recipients of Addison Bright's philanthropic largess. As of the 1930s, Sanger's advocacy of family planning remains a matter of burning controversy. Contraceptive devices are still illegal in many states. In the teens, Sanger had to flee to Europe to escape prosecution simply for providing women with information on the subject. Over her career, Sanger founded a number of different organizations dedicated to her cause. During most of the thirties her organization is called the Birth Control

## Death Laughs Last

International Information Center. If your game is set from 1937 onwards, she acts under the auspices of the Birth Control Council Of America.

Sanger's involvement in the case is peripheral. Bright needed an excuse to get Han out of the house so he could proceed with his plan to kill his imaginary nemesis, The Other. So he sent him to Philadelphia.

A peripatetic speaker, Sanger is currently engaged on a tour of the eastern seaboard. To talk to her, investigators will have to squeeze a phone call from her busy schedule or travel to another city to buttonhole her after a lecture. Her next engagements are in Wilmington, Delaware and then Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. She gives the investigators short shrift until they **Bargain** their way into her schedule with a generous donation to her organization. Her answers to probable queries are as follows:

She remembers Bright as a serious, committed young man.

Unlike other wealthy supporters she's not allowed to name, he was courageous enough to publicly attach himself to the cause.

Although it's possible he was singled out for that support, Sanger considers this unlikely. If anyone wanted to kill over family planning, she'd be the obvious victim, not Bright.

She can think of no earthly reason why Bright had to send Mr. Han in person. In fact, she prefers to have checks mailed to her offices, so she doesn't have to worry about misplacing them.

Her meeting with Han was brief and unmemorable. She refers to him as a "funny little man."

As per the standard *Trail Of Cthulhu* M.O. when dealing with easily-

researched historical figures, Keepers seeking additional background material on Margaret Sanger are urged to conduct a quick online search.

### Myrna Thornton Scene Type: Core (Interview)

*This scene provides two core clues.*

The Penitent was assisted in his activities by a network of operatives. The most trusted of these was plucky newspaperwoman Myrna Thornton. She and Bright were occasional romantic partners, in a tortured on-again, off-again way. Apart from Mr. Han, she's the only other living person who knows that Bright and the Penitent were one and the same.

Myrna can be contacted through her newspaper, *The New York Morning Mail*, for which she writes the hardboiled Crime Beat column. The *Morning Mail* is a mid-market paper; **Library Use** shows that her column routinely debunks stories of The Penitent.

Myrna is a bright, fast-talking, leggy dame. She's currently looking into the disappearance of Whitey Mullane and Pat Toomey, two runners for Thomas Brophy. The Bright family never cared for her and her brassy ways and did not think to inform her of their son's demise. If the investigators first meet her within a day or two of Bright's death, they're the ones who break the news to her.

Should this be the case, Myrna is quietly stricken but stoic. **Assess Honesty** gauges her reaction as unfeigned.

If the investigators share their suspicion that Bright was The Penitent, Myrna confirms it. (She's used to making snap judgments about people, and decides that the PCs are on the up-and-up.) Myrna does not, however, volunteer this bombshell.

She deals with her grief by falling into her professional routine, pumping the group for information. They have to get a word in edgewise to get answers out of her. These might include:

She and Bright have been on the outs for months, after he definitively broke it off with her.

The Penitent was working on bringing down the Brophy gang, but seems to have gone off to fight another enemy. He did not involve Myrna in this case.

Myrna knows a few of The Penitent's other operatives, but by no means all of them. Bright kept their identities secret from one another to limit damage to his network if one of them was captured, tortured and forced to spill.

Bright never talked much about his power to "show criminals their nightmares." He downplayed it as a parlor trick.

Myrna never saw it in action; for some reason, only The Penitent and his targets could be present when he unleashed this power.

A hard-bitten rationalist, Myrna believes that the supernatural is nothing but a bunch of hokey.

Mr. Han is a faithful servant, who helped Addison make his difficult journey to Thibet. (Not entirely true, but Myrna believes it.)

**(core; may not be required)** Han was right not to reveal Bright's secret, even in death. But if she contacts him, he'll change his tune, and arrange for them to search his secret sanctuary, beneath his manor.

**(core)** Whether asked about it or not, Myrna concludes the interview by revealing that she received a package from Bright a few weeks ago, which she was to open only in the event of his

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Myrna Thornton

death. This contains a cryptic message:

Dearest Myrna -

*I send you this case file in should I fail against my worst enemy yet. Should I fall, there may still be time to rally, and prevent the destruction of this world.*

Case File #124-E

*If I succeed you shall not hear from me again. The difference between success and failure may not be apparent at first, yet if the sun continues to rise and the sky is not covered in black smoke and the singing writhing shagnatl do not scour the earth than you will know ~~that~~ ~~apparent disaster~~*

*~~There is not really any~~ I regret that I cannot explain more fully but its presence is now fully upon me. I have recovered my bearings, yet*

*Preparations are completed. I know the enemy as I know my own skin and ~~have fabricated the means to~~*

*Be careful, Myrna, as you clean up any loose ends. It may still have earthly minions abroad in the city. There is a certain one who I have trusted, and now do not trust, but no longer trust my judgment, either. So he may be innocent in this regard, or the original cause of all my suffering.*

*No, that is wrong. I brought all suffering on myself, on a lonely country road.*

*I am sorry that I was unable to love you in the way that you wanted.*

*With sincerest regrets and fondest hopes,*

Your Addison

### Myrna Thornton

Athletics 6, Firearms 4, Fleeing 8, Health 8, Scuffling 4, Weapons 4.

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Stealth Modifier:** +1

**Weapon:** Derringer (+0)

Like Bart Kroeger, Myrna can be adopted as a PC to replace an investigator who dies during this case.

### Shadowing Mr. Han

Bright's secret sanctuary is located beneath Pitcairn House, in a chamber originally excavated for an aborted private subway line. (A 1-point **Library Use** spend confirms the existence of this project, undertaken in 1919.) Wanting to keep his home as a venue for large social gatherings, Bright thought it unsafe to build an entrance from the house, however secret, into the sanctuary below. (It does however have a one-way entrance back up from the sanctuary into the house.) Instead he installed an entrance in a carriage house on the manor grounds, separate from the main building.

Investigators placing the manor under surveillance may be able to spot Mr. Han entering the carriage house. To do this, they must successfully contest **Disguise** or **Stealth** (depending on their chosen tactic) against his **Sense Trouble**. If they spy on him undetected, they note not only that he goes into the carriage house, but that it appears to have a strangely elaborate locking mechanism for what ought to be nothing more than an antique garage. They also hear a clanking, whirring sound; **Architecture** reveals this as the muffled sounds of a sophisticated elevator mechanism.

If group members probably can't get to Han before he goes inside and activates the elevator, but if they do, he takes this badly and draws his pistol on them, demanding that they leave the property. This is not treated as an instance of the drop (see p. XX), and the resulting

standoff may resolve in the PCs' favor. If so, they can then require Han to take him down into the sanctuary.

By going through channels and contacting Landers Jennings, the investigators can remove Han as an obstacle—perhaps too successfully. The Bright's lawyer instructs Han to turn in the keys to the property, including the combination to the carriage house, and orders him to vacate the premises. By making a 1-point **Reassurance** spend, a PC can intervene on Han's behalf, persuading Jennings to let him to remain on the property at least while the case remains active.

Investigators may decide to attempt an entry into the carriage house when Han is not present—either while he's in the sanctuary, or later. Inspection of the carriage house with **Locksmith** shows that the apparent lock is actually a dummy. The real locking mechanism is a safe-style combination dial hidden under a false shingle. It is also apparent that the dial is wired to an electrical mechanism of some kind.

If a player with **Mechanical Repair** specifies an attempt to search the carriage house exterior for hidden hazards, a Difficulty 5 test reveals the presence of small nozzles secreted under its eaves.

As soon as the dial is touched, characters with **Locksmith** hear a ticking noise. The lock is on a timer; if the correct combination is not entered within sixty seconds, the nozzles release a potent knock-out gas. If the nozzles have already been stuffed with handkerchiefs or some similar item, the gas is not released.

Characters resist the effects of the gas by making Difficulty 6 Health tests. Those who fail drop into a sound and immediate slumber. Sleeping characters with **Cthulhu Mythos** ratings of 4 or higher experience strange dreams. If

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they've seen an image of The Penitent's outfit, they dream that they're being menaced by him and confronted with their worst nightmares. If not, they experience disquieting images of a dissolving world, where ordinary reality has been destabilized by the incursion of a new, unwholesome geometry. Dreaming characters make Difficulty 3 Stability tests; if they fail, they vividly remember their nightmares on waking, and suffer a penalty of 1 to any other Stability tests undertaken for the next twenty-four hours.

If all of the PCs succumb to the gas, they wake up in The Penitent's sanctuary under Mr. Han's watchful gaze. Allow the players to freak out at having been captured, as players are wont to do. Then gradually allow them to perceive that they're not restrained in any way. By getting gassed, they've found their way into Bright's hideaway. The cat is out of the bag, and Han now feels he has no choice but to allow them on his dead employer's secret life.

### The Sanctuary

The Sanctuary is a chilly chamber, about forty feet long by twenty feet wide, whose naked rock walls are obscured by hanging maps, most of them of New York City and its outer boroughs. A metal grate separates it from the rest of the old subway tunnel, which is filled top to bottom with crushed rock. The center of the room is taken up by rows of metal filing cabinets. Bookshelves contain an array of reference books, from tomes on criminology to the kinds of directories that the investigators use on a routine basis in their own cases. (In fact, Bright's collection of materials is so good any further Library Use in this scenario can take place here in the Sanctuary.)

Strange trophies dangle from the ceilings on wires and decorate the tops of bookshelves. These include a stuffed cobra, a paste replica of the Hope

Diamond, a fortune telling machine featuring an articulated dummy of a swami, and an entire arsenal of confiscated exotic weaponry.

Characters who scour the room with **Cthulhu Mythos** in mind find nothing of interest here. There are a few conventionally published books on standard occultism, but no references in either print or trophy form to any of the dread mysteries. Because it establishes a negative, this use of Cthulhu Mythos does not degrade Sanity or Stability.

The file cabinets are blackened and warped; the bookshelves and trophies are smoke-damaged. Han opens the cabinets; their contents have been incinerated.

**Evidence Collection** turns up a sealed, unaddressed manila envelope, placed on one of the bookshelves between two books: C. G. Jung's *Analytical Psychology* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The rest of the shelf is dusty, but these two books have been moved recently—indicating that the envelope was placed there within the past few days. It contains the following document:

#### Case File #124-F

*Soon I will know if I have succeeded or lost but then again I will know. It is a paradox, not unlike the looping swirl I now see in front of my eyes at all times. It is geometric, yet not, simultaneously. I can feel the wind now, but it is the wind on the other side of the earth, and it is black and seorching scorching.*

*If I could have foreseen in advance how my quest for personal redemption might lead to universal destruction, would I have walked this road? Certainly I would not have gone to Burma, not have sought the plains of Sung. My weapon against evil would*

*be sought from another source. But it is too late for regrets now.*

*I have burned all of my case files, as a precaution. Sent a final farewell to Myrna. Worry that I have endangered Homans and others by exposing them to my babblings. Accursed condition, that I can no longer distinguish between the thoughts I utter aloud, and those that silently stalk the fervid corridors of my mind! Perhaps I should have warned the family, but cannot bear to disappoint them again. Jennings will see that this is investigated, and then that the secrets of this case are kept as such forever. He is a good man, with solid contacts.*

*The Other's return is imminent. I cannot post this, as I had intended, but must hide it instead. Perhaps this will not be the final culmination, in which case I will*

**Cthulhu Mythos** allows the character knowledge of the Mythos material in the Burma section of *Trail Of Cthulhu* (p. XX) at a cost of 2 Stability points.

If asked about Burma and the plains of Sung, Mr. Han professes complete ignorance, claiming that this must have happened during Bright's journey, but before the two of them met. **Assess Honesty** shows that Han is dissembling wildly. Even if you're pursuing the idea that the racist PCs can't see through his Asian inscrutability, a 1-point spend makes it clear that Han is hiding something.

If any of the PCs refers to the "plateau of Sung" rather than the "plains of Sung", as the document has it, a character other than the speaker with **Assess Honesty** sees Han start visibly, then take pains to disguise the reaction. The investigator has revealed himself as familiar with the Mythos, which makes him doubly threatening in Han's eyes.

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Myrna Thornton

A character with **Art History** knows that the head of the Egyptology department of the Metropolitan Museum is one Ernest P. Homans.

If the investigators allow Han to see this document or ask him about Burma or Sung, he panics, deciding that they may uncover his secret. He then makes plans to go after them, using members of his Mott Street gang, before they can piece together the rest of the puzzle.

A freestanding wardrobe is secured with a combination lock. **Architecture, Art, or Craft (Cabinetry)** identify it as the work of noted Art Nouveau designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh. If asked, Han tells them that it contains the Penitent's costume. **Locksmith** opens the lock, or Han may do it for them—after warning that it must be handled with care, as it contains the gas emitters Bright used to instill terror into the hearts of men. If they do decide to mess with the outfit, Han excuses himself, leaving them alone in the Sanctuary. He attempts to appear superstitiously afraid of its effects. What he's really trying to conceal is the fact that the black lotus powder will have no effect on him, having long since surrendered his sanity to Lloigor and Zhar.

The costume consists of a trench coat, slouch hat, dark slacks, a chain mail tunic, a glowering metal mask, and a pair of boots with three-inch lifts, to make the wearer seem more imposing. Studying the mask with **Mechanical Repair** shows that it contains a sophisticated gas mask.

Hidden in the lining of the trench coat are a pair of tubular devices four inches long and half an inch in diameter. One end terminates in a fine mesh, covered by a grill. The other ends have buttons on them. A character examining them with **Mechanical Repair** will conclude that they can't possibly emit a gas. They seem more like automated

pepper grinders. The devices screw open, revealing how they work, but exposing anyone present to the black lotus powder; see sidebar. Inside is a cavity containing a black, flaky substance. **Biology** identifies it as dried plant matter.

## The Network

The rest of the story reveals itself as the group finds members of the Penitent's network of aides.

Each member of the network is aware of only one of the other aides. For each aide, we provide a suggestion of the two others they are most likely to know. However, you can adjust these as necessary, so that if there are undiscovered aides, the one the group is currently talking to can always point them toward one of them.

The various network members all have a tale to tell about a recent strange encounter with Bright/The Penitent. They occurred according to the following timeline:

- Clemson — two weeks before Bright's death
- Belasco — two nights after Clemson
- Roach — three nights after Belasco
- Wilkes — two nights after Roach
- Homans — four days before Bright's death

## Brooks Belasco

Broadway impresario Brooks Belasco aided The Penitent by providing him with costumes, disguises, and magician's equipment. He's a quick-talking gent with a fine line of patter. In return for his assistance, Bright always anonymously backed his latest show. He's desperate to mount his new revue and will give the investigators

the time of day if they propose a similar **Bargain**.

Belasco last saw Bright when he showed up unexpectedly one night a few weeks back. Belasco was burning the midnight oil trying to fix the book for his latest show, as hacked together by his drunk idiot of a playwright. Why he ever hired that has-been, he'll never know!

At first Belasco thought Bright just wanted help with a disguise or the like, as usual, but this time he seemed different. Like cracked in the head different. Belasco was preoccupied with his second act problem and only managed to pay half attention to him as the two of them drank the night away. Although come to think of it, Bright seemed smashed out of his gourd, even though he barely touched the twelve-year-old single malt Belasco laid out for him. He talked about the ghost in Hamlet, and about some kid named Sully, and asked if Belasco thought people could come back from the dead to wreak revenge.

The rest of the story comes only in response to specific questioning, as Belasco, prompted to concentrate, remembers more of what Bright was talking about:

He said something about looking into a mirror and seeing Sully's face superimposed over his. And something about taking his destiny.

When Belasco said that ghosts were all dreams and hoey, Bright said he'd been having bad dreams.

He also called his ghost "Murray."

(core) He's most likely to name Pugger Clemson or Gertrude Wilkes as a fellow aide of the Penitent.

Followup research after the Belasco interview reveals the following:

## Death Laughs Last

**Library Use** turns up a four-year old newspaper account of the death of Murray Sullivan. He perished in a one-car collision on a country road near New Haven, Connecticut. The brief article says that he was scheduled to begin training at the NYPD police academy in a few weeks. It describes him as the son of Murray Sullivan, Sr., chauffeur to the Bright family of New York. It asserts that he was the only person in the vehicle, a Duesenberg belonging to the Brights. (The elder Mr. Sullivan passed away last year, as a further newspaper morgue **Library Use** attests. The cause of death is not specified, but the tiny obituary mentions that he died after a long illness and is survived by a daughter, Margaret Reardon, of Boca Raton, Florida. Attempts to contact Margaret fail, as she's on vacation with her family.)

New Haven Police initially confirm the above story, but in a way that sets off the listener's *Assess Honesty*. *Cop Talk* or *Bargain* plus a small bribe gets a patrol officer to tell the true story, off the record—the car was driven by a very drunk Addison Bright.

Landers Jennings, if pressed, reluctantly confirms that Bright was behind the wheel, had been drinking, and was slightly injured in the incident.

**Library Use** confirms that reports of the Penitent begin to surface a few months later.

### Pugger Clemson

Pugger Clemson is an ex-boxer The Penitent cleared of a murder frame. He helped The Penitent with simple muscle jobs, like guarding witnesses or discouraging extortion racketeers. A little punch drunk, he distrusts new people until they butter him up with **Oral History**, asking him to recount his most famous fights.

The last time he saw The Penitent,

### Black Lotus Exposure

Unprotected exposure to airborne particles of the black lotus triggers a stressful and philosophically disturbing hallucination. The subject can resist the effect by succeeding at both a Difficulty 6 Health test and a Difficulty 6 Stability test.

Even resistant subjects suffer distorted vision, an elevated heart rate, and dizziness. Combined, these symptoms impose a penalty of 2 to all general ability tests, and entirely prevent the use of investigative abilities, for about ten minutes.

Characters who fail both tests are unable to act at all for a ten minute period, as they undergo a horrific hallucination which takes (at the Keeper's discretion), one or more of the following forms:

the subject relives all of the worst things he ever did, but from his victims' point of view

the subject's realizes that all of his beliefs are meaningless in the face of a cosmic indifference that borders on the malign. If any of his pillars of sanity consist of abstract beliefs or creeds, including religious faith, one of these pillars is destroyed.

the subject experiences an unraveling of reality, including the ability to perceive additional dimensions in all their awful splendor

At the end of the hallucination, the victim loses 6 Stability. If he experienced its second and/or third forms, the experience counts as a Mythos Shock.

Unreflective people with a significant record of harming others tend to suffer the first style of black lotus hallucination. This includes nearly everyone The Penitent ever used his powder on. Introspective villains suffer that form, plus one or both of the others. Virtuous souls suffer the second and/or third.

Numerous distillation methods convert the black lotus' raw petals into a mystical narcotic. Other distillations may create different effects.

The Penitent's mask is the best possible against airborne lotus flakes, but does not offer complete protection. At the end of any session in which the character was exposed while wearing the mask, make a Stability test, with the Difficulty equal to the number of exposures  $\times 3$ . On a failure, his Sanity *rating* drops by 1. If his Sanity drops to 0 in this manner, he suffers anagnorisis, and becomes an NPC. He may at this point decide that he is being pursued by his demonic, extra-dimensional alter ego, and kill himself in order to destroy it.

he was doing legwork for him on the Brophy gang, like he was getting ready to take them down. Then all of a sudden he got a call telling him to lay off, like there was something much worse he'd stumbled into.

Pugger's foggy memory only further resolves in response to specific

questions:

The Penitent said that Brophy would remain occupied by the Mott Street gang while he dealt with this other threat.

If asked about Han, Pugger says that the Penitent did mention him—he said

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Myrna Thornton

Han's research seemed to exaggerating the danger posed by Brophy, like he was more than a run-of-the-mill local thug.

The queerest thing he said was about how the three dimensions of the everyday world were just a ... well, it wasn't the word he used, but some kind of trick. That unimaginable horrors lurk beneath. Puggler sure didn't know what to make of that one.

(core) He probably knows Brooks Belasco or Phil Roach.

## Ernest P. Homans

Antiquities curator Ernest P. Homans assisted The Penitent with information on artifacts and ancient cultures. He opens up to an investigator who proves himself to be a colleague, by talking the language of **Anthropology**, **Archaeology**, or **Art History**. He doesn't like mumbo-jumbo and may require further mollification if a character attempts to win his trust with **Occult** or **Cthulhu Mythos** knowledge.

His information concerns a curious phone conversation, in which the Penitent called him to ask a series of unclear questions, yet at times seemed unaware that he was on the phone at all, and seemed to be interrogating himself. Homans feared that he was suffering from a tropical fever, similar to a potentially hallucinatory malady he himself came down with during a recent expedition to the Sudan. Yet the Penitent would hear nothing of his medical advice. Homans does his best, in response to specific questions, to piece together his febrile utterances:

He said Pitcairn House was permeated with some other force, which Homans took to be a damned tropical bug.

He asked Homans for his opinion on the works of a Swiss alienist called C.G. Jung, who Homans was not familiar

with. He then said something about a living manifestation of the Shadow, encased in human flesh.

Being flesh was what it needed to sneak into this world through "Euclidean loopholes" but was also its weakness.

Somehow to defeat this Shadow, he had to get outside of its sphere of influence, which included Pitcairn House.

(core) He would make the weapon to defeat it, then, at a place he called the "water shed."

(core) Homans most likely names Brooks Belasco or Phil Roach as fellow aides to the Penitent.

## Phil Roach

Phil Roach, owner of a tiny airline in which Addison Bright was a silent partner, flew many a mission for him. Phil's a down-to-earth guy who requires **Reassurance** that the investigators are really working in poor Mr. Bright's best interests. He's working on a recalcitrant plane engine when the group comes to his hangar; pitching in with **Mechanical Repair** (treat as an Interpersonal ability) also gets him to open up.

The Penitent came to him about a week and a half ago and asked for a Manhattan fly-over. For most of the flight Phil thought he was looking for something specific he could only see from above. Then he slowly realized that the Penitent had asked for the flight to clear his head: "Like he wanted to escape something that was dogging him down on the ground." Throughout the flight the Penitent muttered stuff, but it was hard to make out through his mask, not to mention the roaring of the two-seater's engines. Phil didn't catch much of it. He puzzles out some answers to specific questions, based on the masked man's muffled ramblings:

Whatever was attacking him was doing it more frequently now. Like, once a day.

He thought it was a person's ghost at first, but now he was figuring it wasn't. The ghost had a name, like it was someone he knew, but Roach didn't catch the name.

There was something about the Penitent thinking it was a ghost because that was his mind coming to terms with something something, blah, blah... Did Phil mention that the engines were very loud?

Then he started calling it the Other. Oh yeah, right, that was it. His deadly enemy was the Other. And it could follow him anywhere. Even, apparently, up into the sky, because the Penitent abruptly told him to land, and then stalked off into the night without so much as an explanation.

(core) Phil has met Ernest Homans and Gertrude Wilkes.

## Gertrude Wilkes

Bright helped former madam Gertrude Wilkes go straight and establish a charity for fallen women. In return, she keeps her ear to the street, providing him with information from the city's ever-evolving vice scene. Investigators can win her trust by mentioning suitably upstanding contacts they know through **Cop Talk** or **Streetwise**.

He came by about a week ago to tell her that he'd started a trust fund to support her shelter, and gave her contact information for Landers Jennings, who would be its executor. She got worried, like Bright thought something terrible was about to happen to him and was setting his affairs in order. However, he wouldn't tell her anything.

What he did do, strangely, was to pace around in the alleyway next to the

## Death Laughs Last

shelter, muttering to himself. Normally Gertrude would not eavesdrop on a friend like that, but she was worried, so she heard a few snatches here and there. Unfortunately, it didn't make much sense. In response to relevant questions, she reveals the following:

Bright mentioned a *caprimulgus vociferus*, which seemed like an important code-word, so she wrote it down. He said he could hear it wherever he went, even in places he shouldn't. (**Biology** identifies the *caprimulgus vociferus* as the whip-poor-will, which belongs to a family of nocturnal birds known as the nightjar.)

He muttered bitterly about somebody named Han, how his "Asiatic smile" was "cruel with the blood of a million dead." At the same time he seemed afraid of him.

Bright said something wanted to use him as a killing instrument. Then he talked all this end of the world craziness: smoke, screaming, "the squeals of the gutted."

(core) Strangest of all, he kept repeating: "I am the gate. Only the gate can kill the other."

**Cthulhu Mythos** diagnoses these as classic outpourings of a mind unhinged by contact with appalling cosmic revelations, right down to the whip-poor-will reference. This insight is a basic one as Mythos truths are concerned, and costs a mere 1 Point of Stability.

(core) Gertrude can, if need be, point the group to Phil Roach or Brooks Belasco.

### The Water Shed Core Clue: Physical Evidence

This scene follows up on a clue provided by Ernest P. Homans. It allows the group to reach its minimal victory condition, by proving the identity of

Bright's killer to his family's satisfaction.

By reading between the lines, the players must intuit the location of Bright's secondary sanctuary, a "water shed" where he must take extra care to appear to be no one other than Addison Bright. This refers to the boathouse of the family's palatial summer house in the Thousand Islands. (This chain of small islands is located in the St. Lawrence River, bordering New York state and the Canadian province of Ontario, and is an outdoorsy refuge for the wealthy.)

Taking this information to Jennings (perhaps requiring a **Reassurance** spend if they've embarrassed themselves with him or otherwise caused him to doubt the trust he initially placed in them) wins them permission to travel to the Bright summer house and possibly even to interact directly with family members.

There are two boathouses on the Bright's private island. The larger of the two is in constant current use. A smaller, older one is unused. The Bright's main Thousand Islands housekeeper, Elsa Bailey, informs them that Mr. Addison, as she calls him, was up at the summer house just last weekend. It was his first time there in many months. He went into the old boathouse, stayed there the whole weekend, and left. He brought some cases with him, which he took into the boathouse; he left with the cases at the end of the weekend. She heard the sounds of machine work of some kind from the boathouse, like he was working on a project or some such. Elsa further reports that Mr. Addison seemed odd—like he was upset and distracted, but making an effort to seem cheerful. When he left, he warned her that he'd put a special lock on the boathouse, and that she wasn't to let anyone try to enter it.

The lock is a simple combination

padlock. **Locksmith** spots a tiny wire leading from it. The lock is electrified. An **Electrical Repair** test (Difficulty 4) disarms the trap without harm. Without it, anyone cutting through the lock or attempting to dislodge the lock plate from the door takes a damage die +1. The investigators can also safely enter by breaking a window and crawling in, but that's undignified, and may upset the Brights.

Inside the boathouse, the investigators find the following pieces of evidence establishing that Bright himself created the trap that ended his life:

lead shavings which match the javelin, showing that it was sharpened here

spare gears and dials matching those used to reconstruct the trap's inner workings

a set of jeweler's pliers; marks on the gears inside the workings can be matched to it

plans of the works, in pencil, with notations matching Bright's increasingly wobbly handwriting

Elsa confirms that no one other than Mr. Addison has been in the boathouse in ages.

### Han Strikes Antagonist Reaction

If Mr. Han knows that the team is seeking members of the Penitent's network, he takes measures to stop them. These lead to scenes of jeopardy interspersed between interview scenes. Han sends his Mott Street gangsters and then his trusted tcho-tcho lieutenants to accomplish these missions of disruption.

Mr. Han may instead be happy with the group's behavior, thinking one of them an ideal replacement for Bright as the Penitent. In this case, nervous tcho-tcho

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Lotus Factory

lieutenants, less devoted to the idea of a tame masked vigilante, override his wishes and attack the group anyway.

The exact number of incidents and the physical danger they place the group in is left for you to calibrate, depending on pacing and the need to “soak” the PCs. Before any scenes of actual danger, you may wish to foreshadow, allowing the team to note that they’re being followed by distant, unknown figures. Scenes of jeopardy and disruption might include:

The grisly murder of a network member. The group learns of the murder mere hours after interviewing him or her.

Another network member goes missing after talking to them. He or she will be found as plant food at the lotus factory, if the group continues the case to that point.

Mott Street thugs attempt a drive-by shooting.

A tcho-tcho waits until one of the investigators is alone in a room, and then attacks. Ideally, the investigator is taken alive, to be sacrificed at the lotus factory (see below).

As immediately above, but without the subtlety. Tcho-tchos attack, to kill.

A tcho-tcho allows himself to be spotted, then leads the investigators into an abandoned warehouse owned by Mr. Han. He has installed there one or more death-traps The Penitent liberated from one of his vanquished foes. (For example, the floor might give way, dropping one or more investigators down a chute onto a series of rusty spikes. Depending on the efforts the team makes to move cautiously into the building, the Sense Trouble test to avoid stepping into the trap faces a Difficulty ranging from 4 to 6. The first investigator to fall on the spikes takes Damage +3; any others subsequently

landing on top of him take only an unmodified Damage die, but cause the first faller to suffer an additional Damage +3.)

Characters who encounter other tcho-tchos and using **Anthropology** to examine them note that they share, in addition to the obvious diminutive physical stature, the same unplaceable facial traits as Mr. Han (provided that these were previously noted.) This is peculiar, as their accents place them as coming from completely different corners of the world.

**Cthulhu Mythos** can build on this observation, identifying them as tcho-tchos, and giving the characters the information on p. XX of *Trail Of Cthulhu*. Provide them also with the relevant entry from Dan Harms’ *Encyclopedia Cthulhiana*, if you are lucky enough to have that on hand. This costs 3 Stability and 1 Sanity.

Han vanishes from Pitcairn House, retreating to the lotus factory, if he suspects that the investigators are onto him—or if he decides that they know too much about the Mythos and are thus likely to suspect him soon.

### Lotus Factory Scene Type: Action / Resolution / Horror

Even as they learn that Bright went mad and arranged his own murder, convinced he was possessed by an otherworldly entity, the group may continue to investigate. They might want to know who’s trying to stop them from getting the documents, or may want to follow up on burgeoning suspicions of Mr. Han. They may consider the case still open until they figure out why the Penitent went mad. They may have exposed themselves to the powder and rightly concluded that it slowly ruined Bright’s mind—but where did it come from?

Any reasonable-sounding way of finding Han’s secret headquarters works. Examples might include:

Capturing and **Interrogating** one of his minions

**Shadowing** him or a minion to the factory

Using **Bureaucracy** to checking the title on a known property of the Mott Street gang (perhaps one with a death trap installed), then finding other properties owned by same innocuous-sounding legal entity, and doing the legwork until they arrive at the lotus factory.

Using **Library Use** or interviewing one of the Penitent’s assistants to find places Bright raided during his crimebusting career, then using shoe leather to check them all. (Han acquired the warehouse, like most of his criminal empire, as table scraps from his boss’ vigilante activities.)

The warehouse is guarded by as many Mott Street gangsters and tcho-tcho lieutenants as you think will make a tough but not insurmountable challenge for the PCs in their current condition.

You’ll gain more narrative closure if Mr. Han is present when they break into the warehouse; he can then be apprehended and **Interrogated** into revealing whatever loose ends still bedevil the players. Then again, the players may undertake steps preventing this from happening, for example by entering the warehouse only after occupying him elsewhere.

Addison Bright went to his grave believing that his supply of black lotus powder came imported from Burma. As far as he knew, it was cultivated, prepared, and shipped to New York by the Buddhist monks he met on the plains of Sung. Although a few vials of the powder were exported

## Death Laughs Last

from the Orient, Han grew anxious when a shipment went missing. To ensure an uninterrupted supply remained, he made secret and laborious arrangements for specimens of the live plants to be shipped to the city. By gruesome trial and error, he learned how to cultivate the lotus indoors—by nourishing it on the live blood of tormented victims. His new hybrid strain of the plant requires no sunlight, only blood.

The plants are grown in the center of the warehouse in a squarish sandbox-like construction, roughly twenty feet on each side. **Biology** reveals that these plants are unknown to science, and that they appear, against all logic, to mix qualities of fungi and flowering plants. The lotuses seen here are woody, spavined versions of the wild plants, their engorged stems leading to twisted, meager blossoms. Still, the tiny petals gleam with an oily malignancy that, even if sighted alone, would instinctively unnerve the strongest mind. However, this is the least of the horrors the group will experience here, so why even bother listing a Stability cost?

An oilcloth tarpaulin, suspended on a series of freestanding wooden stanchions, overhangs the plants. Holes have been punched in it, over each blossom.

Hanging above the tarpaulin are the bleeding, naked forms of two to three tortured captives. Their blood drips onto the oil-cloth, which pools down through the holes, dropping onto the blossoms.

The captives dangle upside down, their ankles bound to a heavy chain which hangs horizontally over the oilcloth. It functions as a clothes-line device and can be drawn with pulleys to position the victims precisely over the holes in the cloth. There are three to four captives:

### The Unfolding Petal Of Gulaa Cyar

If the story seems to require an immediate infusion of gruesome horror, a tcho-tcho attacker is armed with a dried flower called the unfolding petal of Gulaa Cyar. When tossed down, like a grenade, into enemy ranks, it opens itself up, exhaling a hallucinogenic gas. This takes an action for the tcho-tcho but (at least for the purposes of this scenario) automatically succeeds. PCs within thirty feet of the unfolding petal make Difficulty 8 Stability tests. The character with the lowest result (*even if successful*) hallucinates that the flesh of his or her face is coming off in ropy gobbets. The victim is unable to stop pulling the flesh out, like so much taffy (or so it seems.) Other PCs failing the Stability test share in the hallucination, seeing the victim pull his face off. The victim and fellow hallucinators then undergo a second round of standard Stability tests, with a possible Stability loss of 6. This Stability returns at the conclusion of the incident, when the effect is shown to be hallucinatory, provided that they did not drop the sufferer's Stability pool below 0. Victims dropped below -6 Stability may continue to believe in it as a real event, rejecting all evidence to the contra

If the petal doesn't come into play before the climactic warehouse confrontation, use it there.

One random man taken from the streets of New York. Driven completely mad by the experience, he is never able to identify himself.

One or two NPCs from this adventure, already known to the PCs. One may be Thomas Brophy or another of his gang. The second is one of the former aides, perhaps even Myrna Thornton. This will be more powerful if you already established the character's disappearance.

Ideally, one of the PCs, if Han's minions have managed a live capture.

It is not enough for the black lotus to have fresh blood. It must be shed in a state of unbearable torment. Their flesh writhes and bubbles as if something long and wormlike is swimming around in it. Every fifteen seconds or so, the skin of their torsos is pierced from the inside out, and a small, grotesque creature pops out. It skitters across the victim's gore-slicked body, pulling itself fully out of the wound, which spurts blood down onto the oil cloth. Then the wound heals up, and the creature

dives into the victim's trembling body at some other point. The cycle then repeats itself.

Witnessing this scene risks the loss of 6 Stability if no PCs are included among its victims, 7 if they are. A PC victim risks a Stability loss of 8. This requires a Stability test when the process begins, and again for every six hours of continued torment. If you decide to reveal the PC's fate only when his or her comrades show up at the factory, these tests may be taken retroactively. Stability refreshes are impossible while the torment continues. Should the victim turn out to already be irretrievably insane after rescue, the maximum Stability loss for all other PCs becomes 8. This is a Mythos shock.

The instruments of this agony are the parasites of Shuug-Athyar.

### The Parasites Of Shuug-Athyar

Just as many earth parasites live off a variety of hosts through their complex life cycles, the parasites of Shuug-Athyar feed off beings in three different dimensions. They devour the brain

## Other Conclusions

### Summon Parasites Of Shuug-Athyar

May only be cast in the presence of a helpless, suffering sentient being. The caster must open a superficial wound on the chosen victim with an iron knife and then lick the blood from the blade. The accompanying chant is a series of barks and clicks.

The parasites can not be bound, per se, but will happily infest the caster's chosen victim if he or she has been rendered properly helpless.

**Stability Test Difficulty:** 3

**Cost:** 3 Stability or 8 Fleeing (halved if Aldebaran is above the horizon)

**Time:** Two minutes

wave energy emitted by creatures in profound physical torment. The parasites can be summoned to this dimension by a spell (see below.) Upon arrival, they gravitate to a frightened, helpless and intelligent being. With their razor-sharp mandibles, they drill into the victim's flesh, then tear through it. What their mandibles rip apart, their worm-like abdomens cauterize and heal. The parasites exude an invigorating substance preventing their victims from losing consciousness.

Parasites are hard to fully discern while covered in their victims' blood and viscera, and vanish to another dimension when threatened. If somehow captured and then cleaned off or dissected (an act imposing a possible 5-point Stability loss, and which constitutes a Mythos shock), they turn out to have walnut-sized heads which resemble exposed brains. Sprouting from them are large, metallic mandibles, six sets of insect-like forelegs, and a soft, wormy abdomen.

The parasites consider themselves threatened when within one or two inches of an open flame, or when their victims are injected with drugs or toxins. They then immediately disappear to another dimension, to seek their next victims, a species of sentient, land-based sponges from the planet Shanyak.

During the mop-up phase, the group finds Mr. Han's systematically elaborate plan for the conquest of New York by its consolidated crime gangs. This would coincide with a coming conjunction of the stars and worldwide eruption of Mythos phenomena. The scheme, which calls for the ritualistic execution of tens of thousands, is so chillingly plausible that to read it in all of its coldly cruel detail is to face a possible 4-point Stability loss (counts as a Mythos shock.)

### Other Conclusions

Armed with the evidence in the warehouse, an investigator with **Bureaucracy** can call the right people in Washington to arrange for a full-scale FBI scouring of the Mott Street Gang, on a par with their operation to clean up Innsmouth.

However, the scenario doesn't have to lead to the lotus factory; it can end earlier or later than that. The group is certainly free to decide that they've closed the case as soon as they can prove to the Brights that his death was an elaborate suicide. Roleplayers being roleplayers, it is not impossible that one of the PCs will decide to continue on as the new Penitent, perhaps even with Mr. Han as trusty assistant. Of course, such a choice should gradually lead to a sequel, as the black powder

slowly drives the PC into a similar state of madness. This could finally lead to the unmasking of Mr. Han and the discovery of the black lotus factory. Use this only on groups willing to sustain an anti-climactic ending for a future payoff.

In the meantime, it may turn out that the Other was not a delusion, but a real entity who, if allowed to fully possess the character, will trigger an occult apocalypse. Does the PC do what Bright did, and stop the Other by killing himself? Or is there another way to keep it at bay?

If the investigators let Han escape, he can take on a recurring villain role in your campaign, until such time as they finally catch him.

### Sanity Refreshes

Solving Bright's killing gains a 1-point Sanity refresh.

Busting up Han's tcho-tcho gang and destroying all of the black lotus flowers allows a 2-point Sanity refresh.

# Dimension Y

In this tribute to the science fiction pulps, an inventor's presentation of a new machine to peer into a non-Euclidean reality appears to fizzle—until the PCs, who stood by as witnesses, begin to feel reality slipping from beneath their gumshoed feet.

## The Hook

Maverick physicist Polton Williams invites the PCs to attend the inaugural demonstration of his Y-Scope, a device intended to illuminate the so-called half-reality he calls Dimension Y. After a brief instant in which it seems that something extraordinary will indeed occur, the machine belches smoke and sputters to a halt.

Soon afterwards, William's assistant on the project, David Fearn, goes violently mad, killing the wife of a friend. Disturbing waking visions, coupled with suspicious details of the Fearn murder, prompt the group to investigate further.

## The Horrible Truth

David Fearn, an initiate into the Cthulhoid mysteries, surreptitiously hijacked the Y-Scope project, using it as part of a ritual to open a gate between this reality, and that of the court of ultimate chaos, where Azazoth reigns. With his fusion of science and occult secrets, Fearn hopes to achieve the dream of every slaving cultist—to usher in the final apocalypse, in which the Old Ones ravage the earth.

## The Spine

A gnawing sense of unease, prompted by increasingly bizarre waking visions,

motivates the group to research Fearn's activities prior to the failure of the Y-Scope, and the overly convenient fact that the husband of his victim, Dr. Otto Vock, also happens to be the head of the asylum where he is now detained.

## Antagonist Reactions

Complicating the investigation are the mental breakdowns suffered by other observers of the Y-Scope experiment—which threaten to claim the investigators as well, if they don't uncover its true purpose.

## Victory Condition

The investigators achieve victory when they find the secret lab beneath Otto Vock's private sanitarium, and destroy the energy field-slash-entity whose existence in this plane is slowly opening the portal to Primal Chaos.

## SCENES Invitation To A Demonstration Scene Type: Prelude

Begin the scenario by inviting the players to explain why their characters might be invited to attend a small scientific demonstration. They might have personal, professional, or business associations with Polton Williams, or might come along to accompany a PC with such an association. Should players become stumped and require inspiration, here is a list of suggestions, broken down by Occupation:

**Alienist:** the invitation came from

Williams' assistant, David Fearn, who is on friendly terms with a colleague of yours, Otto Vock of the Springhaven Sanatorium.

### **Antiquarian, Archaeologist:**

Williams has invited the PCs to act as experts in case the Y-Scope allows one to see, as he suspects, memories of the past.

**Artist:** Williams wants someone to draw what they see through the Y-Scope.

**Author, Journalist:** A noted author or newspaper scribe should be present to render his prose impressions of this momentous occasion.

**Clergy:** Fearing the opprobrium of faith groups Williams wants a man of the cloth to attest that his Y-Scope in no way represents a dabbling with dark powers.

**Criminal:** Williams has taken on some ill-advised illicit loans to pay for his equipment. The character is present to keep an eye on the boss' investment.

**Dilettante:** The professor is a friend of the family, possibly borrowing money from them, too.

**Doctor, Nurse:** Williams doesn't say so, but there's always the chance that someone will be hurt when new machinery is used for the first time, and has invited the character to perform first aid duties if needed.

**Hobo:** The character has taken on momentary hire as an odd job man for Williams.

## Half Reality

### Setting

“Dimension Y” takes place in your campaign’s home base, whatever that may be. It could take place in Arkham, particularly if you’re running the Armitage Inquiry campaign frame, or in Washington if you’re doing Project Covenant. All it assumes is an urban setting with a high concentration of scientists, so it could equally well take place in New York, Boston, London, Paris, or Toronto.

**Military:** Williams wants to establish peaceful, defensive military applications for the Y-Scope, and seeks the player’s expertise on what these might be.

**Parapsychologist:** The professor believes that ghost manifestations are intrusions of Y-energy into our reality, and hopes that the PC can confirm this theory.

**Pilot:** Even we’re stumped on this one. This PC will have to come as a friend of Williams, or a plus one.

**Police Detective, Private Investigator:** These PCs earn their invites due to Williams’ theory that the Y-Scope can be used to recreate crime scenes.

**Professor:** Though an exponent of the humble humanitarian disciplines, the PC knows Williams from their mutual service on various faculty committees.

**Scientist:** Self-explanatory.

You’ll only need a few of the above suggestions if the PCs have already formed a well-established investigation team. The less likely characters can tag along with the obvious choices. That said, this scenario does work as a first scenario in a campaign, allowing the team to coalesce after being thrown together at the Y-Scope demonstration.

### Half Reality

#### Scene Type: Intro

The group of invitees arrives at Polton Williams’ private laboratory at dusk. The lab is situated on the outskirts of the city. Depending on your chosen setting, it may be in an industrial zone, or perhaps high on a hill, accessible by only by a winding, lonely gravel lane. The lab has been converted to its present use, having originally been a warehouse, mill, observatory, or lighthouse. Warm lights blaze from a new addition, built in a homey, Tudor-revival style. **Architecture** indicates that this section of the building comprises William’s living quarters.

Williams himself greets the visitors as they arrive at the door. He is a tall, thin man, who favors owlsh glasses, a red bow tie, and a tweed jacket. Characters who know him personally have not seen him in a while—invitations arrived by mail—and are surprised to see that he has aged considerably since their last meeting. His hair, once salt and pepper gray, is now snowy white, and dark circles frame his tired eyes. Still, he seems chipper, and greets each arrival with evident excitement. If he knows a PC, he makes small talk, re-establishing old connections:

“When did we see each other last? It wasn’t last year’s cotillion at the Wentworth’s, was it?”

“How is your mother?”

“Still enjoying the bachelor life, I take it?”

To PCs who’ve been invited on a professional basis, he offers his profound thanks and slips in an indication of his familiarity with their work. He might cite an academic paper they’ve written, a case they’ve solved, or one of their past heroic feats.

**Physics** reveals the following about Polton Williams:

His reputation as a brilliant, unconventional thinker is well-deserved.

Williams recently left a tenured position at [fill in a prestigious local university] after trustees pressured him to restrict his research to fields with more obvious practical utility. He then set up his own private lab.

He has yet to secure reliable funding for it.

Everyone in the physics community is dying to know what he’s been working on since he struck out on his own.

(1-point spend) His new wife, formerly Ellen Selwyn, is a crackerjack gal. The two seem very smitten with one another.

In addition to the PCs, four other people are present: three men, whose clothing and demeanor marks them as academics, and a matronly woman attired in an understated yet expensive manner.

Unless prompted, Williams forgets to perform introductions. Characters with the following abilities recognize them by sight. If they make the specified 1-point spend, they know something extra about the person, having met them briefly before. On a 2-point spend, the NPC remembers the encounter and thinks kindly of the PC.

**Biology** identifies pioneering

## Dimension Y

neurological researcher Dr. Harold Binder. He's a rotund, balding man who tugs nervously at the cuffs of his jacket. (1-point spend) Binder despises medical quackery in all of its forms and crusades for the banning of non-Western traditional medicines.

**Chemistry** allows the PC to recognize Dr. Alfred Sykes, touted as a possible Nobel recipient for his work in the synthesis of radioactive materials. Sykes speaks slowly and leaves a damp residue after shaking your hand. (1-point spend) Sykes collaborates with his pretty young wife Mildred on a series of science books for children, featuring the cheery mascot character Adam the Atom.

**Physics** spots Dr. Robert Steber, discoverer of cosmic radiation. He wears small circular spectacles, combs his thinning hair backwards, and speaks with a slight Austrian accent. (1-point spend) Steber credits his best thoughts to the time he spends fishing for marlin off the Florida coast.

**Credit Rating 5+** identifies Eulalie Finch, of the New York Finches. A philanthropist and society figure, she known as a generous donor to the arts, sciences, and educational foundations. (1-point spend) Her grandson Stephen was recently involved in a scandal involving his orchestra conductor.

Williams young wife Ellen arrives to serve canapés and direct the group to a makeshift cocktail bar. After half an hour of pleasantries, Williams ushers the group down a set of circular stairs into a sub-basement, which **Architecture** identifies as having been recently expanded, at considerable cost. However, it lacks amenities; the walls are unadorned concrete, and the temperature is distinctly chilly. The basement lab area is about fifty feet deep by twenty feet wide. At one end stands a battery of electronic equipment,

the central component of which is a large device resembling a bulky, heavily industrialized film projector. **Mechanical Repair** shows that this is clearly a custom-made prototype device, with many parts from other machines modified and pressed into new service.

An assistant toils on the machine, calibrating gears and oiling pistons. Describe him only if the players ask for details: this is David Fearn. He's a sandy-haired man in his mid-thirties, memorable for his freckles, cleft chin, and prominent ears. In contrast to Williams' tweed jacket and pressed slacks, he wears oil-stained overalls and a flat cap.

(If this is an introductory scenario and a hobo PC is present as a hireling of Williams, he's standing by with broom in hand. Fearn commands him to perform various menial cleaning tasks as he finishes his last-minute fussing over the Y-Scope. The PC was hired only in the last few days and has no inside information on the device or Fearn's secret scheme. However, he may dislike Fearn, who issues instructions curtly, and know Williams only as a distant, if avuncular, figure.)

Ellen has not accompanied the group downstairs, a fact you should point out only to a player with a female character. Male characters are presumed, in accordance with the unquestioned chauvinism of the era, not to notice that the supportive wife has not ventured into the work area. Tell the players if they ask about her, though.

As the assembled group peers curiously at the Y-Scope, Williams clears his throat, and apologetically announces that he has prepared a few opening remarks.

Although we usually recommend paraphrasing adventure text, here

you should read, in character, from William's notes. Williams begins haltingly but picks up steam as enthusiasm overcomes his nervousness. The notes are presented as if typed on index cards; prepare these as a handout for players in case one of them decides to surreptitiously lift them after Williams is done with them and absently sets them on a lab table (requires Filch, Difficulty 4.)

*Friends, colleagues, benefactors--*

*I thank you wholeheartedly for the support you extend to me with your presence here tonight. I trust that what I am about to demonstrate rewards your decision to venture from the comfort of your homes to my distant laboratory.*

*Ever since the dawn of Mankind, we have wondered what lies on the other side. Even before there was the written word to record the thought, man has believed in the existence of additional worlds beyond our own. Our names for these have been many: the imagination of man has mapped uncountable heavens and hell, limbos, purgatories, and dreamlands.*

*Tonight, you are about to peer into another world. Except this will be no mere folly of the imagination. I am about to show you—Dimension Y.*

*By building on the fine work of doctors Sykes, Binder and Steber, I have measured the radiation output of the human brain, which I have called the Y-Ray. Moreover, I have discovered that the Y-Rays we emit persist around us, forming an energy field—a Y-Field, if you will. Like the ripples that result when a pebble is dropped into a pond, our thoughts, our dreams, our hopes and memories, live on within the heretofore invisible substance of the Y-Field. Together these things comprise, after the three spatial dimensions, and time, the*

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Half Reality

fourth dimension, a fifth dimension:  
Dimension Y.

*I call Dimension Y a half-reality, because, although it concretely exists, and, with the aid of this device, be measured and observed, it is a mere reflection of what occurs in this, our world, and in our minds. It is the ripples; we are the stone and the water.*

*This device, the Y-Scope, holds incalculable promise. With it, alienists can behold their patient's dreams. Police forces can see the memories of crime victims. A scientist can go to bed at night, conceptualizing the solution to a physics problem, and wake up the next morning and see his thoughts coalesced, through the Y-Scope. Historians can locate the memories of the long-dead, peering into a reflection of the world as seen by Napoleon, Joan of Arc, or the disciples of Christ himself.*

*Of course, these practical applications will all require considerable refinement of the Y-Scope's mechanisms, a task requiring many years of effort, with the concomitant funding implied thereby. [Look meaningfully at Mrs. Finch]*

*Until then, we cannot predict what we will see when we peer into this half-reality tonight. Only that we behold—Dimension Y!*

At the end of his speech, Williams signals to Fearn, who pulls a lever to activate the machine. It is not possible to talk Williams out of testing the machine. None of the NPC scientists feel any trepidation regarding the demonstration: unlike the players, they don't know they're in a horror scenario. There is no time to prevent Fearn from pulling the lever.

Fearful characters may turn and run away, avoiding exposure to the

Y-Scope's effects. However, only two at most can get onto the narrow spiral stairs in time. Should more than two PCs attempt this, they all make Difficulty 4 Fleeing tests. The two with the highest successful results make it far enough up the stairs to avoid effects.

Before players choose to have their characters flee, warn them that doing so constitutes a violation of the following drives:

**Adventure:** What could be more adventurous than a chance to peer into another dimension?

**Antiquarian:** The opportunity to see the past is too precious to squander.

**Arrogance:** You have too great a destiny to be harmed by some scientific experiment.

**Artistic Sensitivity:** If you turn away, some other artist will be the first to paint/portray Dimension Y.

**Bad Luck:** If you try to get to the stairs, you trip and fall, and are exposed to the experiment despite your best efforts.

**Curiosity:** Self-explanatory.

**Duty:** The fact that this may be dangerous is precisely why you have to experience it first hand—to protect others when everything goes inevitably wrong.

**Ennui:** Not seeing things is boring. Seeing things, that might be exciting.

**Follower:** You can't seem cowardly in front of your role model.

**In the Blood:** An ancient impulse stirs within you, drawing you to the experiment like a moth to a flame...

**Revenge:** Congratulations! You've

chosen a drive to which this situation does not apply. For once, you're the one who gets to run away. Not that you *have* to scuttle off like a scalded rat, mind you...

**Scholarship:** Self-explanatory.

**Sudden Shock:** You can't run away now—maybe Dimension Y holds the secret to whatever it is that first reoriented your fragile consciousness!

**Thirst For Knowledge:** Self-explanatory.

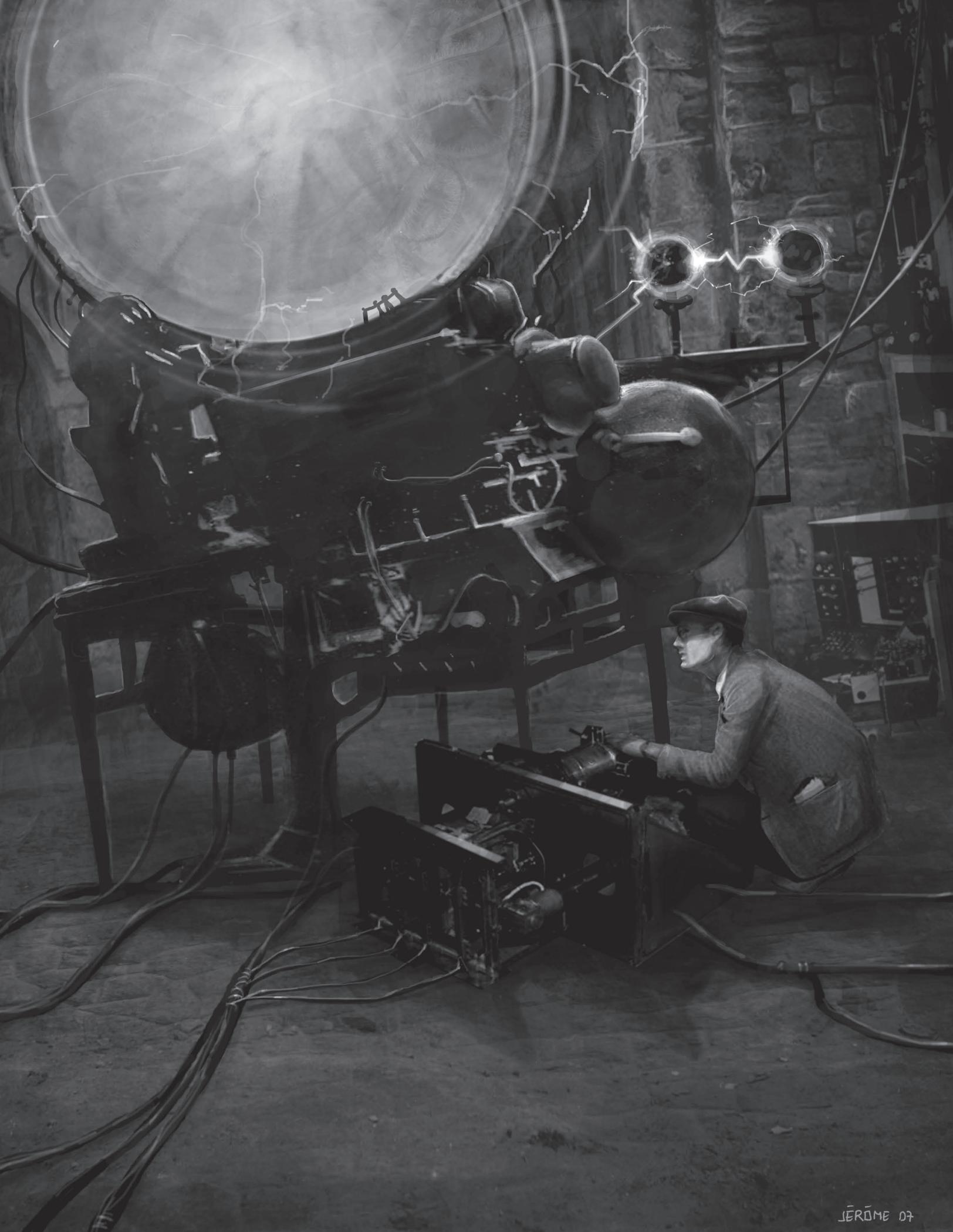
The actual manifestation of the Y-Scope should seem, especially if characters flee or you have to invoke their drives, like a build-up to a letdown. With a metallic shudder, the device groans to life. Gears spin and pistons chug. Arcs of electricity inchworm their way between exposed antennae. Then a spectral light shoots forth from its cyclopean central lens. Blinding light strobes through the damp basement. Then the onlookers see something coalesce in the air before them. It's like a movie projection, but appears to have depth, if not substance. First they see strange biological forms, like bacteria wriggling on a microscope slide, but in three-dimensional space. Then a shape forms: a glowing, beautiful cube.

Then everyone realizes that something is wrong with the cube.

*It has five sides.*

Its impossible geometry is on a deep and intrinsic level destabilizing to one's sense of orientation. The sight of it incurs a possible 4-point Stability loss, which counts as a Mythos shock.

A few moments later, the machine overloads, belching forth black smoke. The stench of burning rubber fills the room. The mechanism dies, shutting off the spectral light, and bringing the



# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Five-Sided Nightmares

demonstration to a premature end.

Williams appears distraught. He shouts at his assistant, who works furiously for a while, then pronounces the machine irreparably damaged: “This will take weeks to repair. Months, even.”

The four NPC guests react with varying degrees of disappointment and dismissal. **Assess Honesty** suggests that all of them are trying to forget the five-sided cube. Williams tries to placate them.

Fearn tries to stand in the PCs’ way if they try to examine the Y-Scope. He gets no support from a distracted Williams, though, and backs off in the face of **Intimidation** or **Reassurance**.

**Mechanical Repair** shows that many of the device’s moving parts have been badly damaged in the device’s few seconds of operation. As a piece of engineering, the Y-Scope is an amateurish effort; its self-destruction should have been predictable.

**Electrical Repair** reveals a similar lack of basic workmanship, and a set of completely shorted wires. It’s a miracle that it didn’t start a fire.

Neither ability, even with **Physics** thrown in, yields much about the principles behind the device; they’re simply too bizarre.

**Cthulhu Mythos** use shows otherwise inexplicable patterns of gears and wires that recall the petroglyphs of a certain dread cavern in the Appalachian mountains. This costs 2 Stability.

As his would-be patrons and colleagues shuffle out, Williams despondently tries to shoo out the investigators in their wake. Encouragement in the form of **Flattery** (perhaps reminding

him that all of the scientific greats had days like this) prompts him to give a few curt answers to no more than three specific questions.

This was the first full-fledged test of the Y-Scope.

He and Fearn produced slightly longer manifestations with a smaller prototype device. It was cannibalized to make the full device and cannot now be used.

He did the design work; Fearn performed the mechanical and electrical engineering.

The brainwave measurement device that provided the Y-Scope’s inspiration still works. Maybe he’ll demonstrate—some other day.

He is reluctant to say much about the device’s components, as he intends to patent the device.

Fearn is likewise standoffish, though for more sinister reasons. During this scene, he acts as if severely introverted. His replies are even briefer than Williams’; if he can answer with only a shrug or other gesture, he does that. When in character as Fearn, avoid eye contact with the players, staring at your shoes or off into a corner.

He is no physicist, but a self-taught mechanic and electrician.

Williams hired him after firing a number of so-called professionals who couldn’t follow his instructions.

He met Williams at a machine shop, where he used to come for custom tool and die work.

After the investigators leave Williams’ lab, ask the players if there’s anything else they wish to do before heading home to their ordinary lives. As

there isn’t yet a mystery to uncover, whatever they attempt proves inconclusive. Dispense with it in a few sentences.

## Five-Sided Nightmares

### Scene Type: Antagonist Action

In this sequence, creeping horror presages the mystery to come. It can be seen as an antagonist reaction, where the antagonist is the inherent malignity of the universe, to which the Y-Scope has left the characters exposed.

Ask each player to describe his characters’ home life, in a way that references at least one source of stability. Then create very brief scenes in which the characters undergo a mild conflict involving that NPC, which can then be resolved—or not, depending on the player’s response. Award yourself bonus points if you can tie scenes into images of cubes or eyes, or the theme of dissolving or competing realities. Examples:

A PC’s elderly mother requires the character to intervene with her unresponsive nursing staff.

The PC is urged not to forget a kid’s upcoming birthday.

The PC helps his child with his geometry homework.

A debate ensues in the faculty lounge about the nature of reality—is it objective, or subjective?

An artist friend unveils a new work: a painting of the sun, in which can be seen the iris of a staring eye. When asked for his inspiration, the source of stability replies, “I dreamt it.”

After quickly running through these scenes, each character makes

## Dimension Y

a Difficulty 4 Stability test. Tell the players that no Stability is at risk; instead, the results influence an upcoming scene. Make a list of the characters, in ascending order, from lowest result to highest. Resolve ties within the list by 1) Stability rating 2) Sanity rating and 3) how unnerved the player allowed the character to seem during the Y-Scope sequence. We'll refer to this as the Nightmare List.

That night, all characters endure restless, dream-plagued nights. Those who succeed at their Stability tests recall nothing of their dreams. Failed characters remember vague flashes: of seeing the five-sided cube again, or the bacteria-like shapes. They also remember their real-life encounters with their sources of stability replayed to horrific result. For example:

The PC realizes that the nursing staff has been poisoning his mother, but can't get her out of the hospital.

The PC forgets a kid's birthday, causing the authorities to schedule the child for execution.

The PC realizes that the child is trying to drive him mad, by forcing him to draw a five-sided cube.

The other faculty members are inhuman lizard kings, trying to loosen the PC's grip on reality by whispering keywords in an ancient language the human tongue was not meant to speak.

The artist's sun painting not only looks like an eye: every so often, it blinks.

On the Nightmare List, put a tick mark next to every character who experiences a nightmare. Players may intuit, especially if all of them pass their Stability tests, that vital information is locked in their memories of the dreams. A character performing a Difficulty 4 **Hypnosis** test permits another to remember his

dreams. The hypnotist can perform any number of these tests, and may engage in self-hypnosis. Dreams recalled through hypnosis are more distressing than ordinary nightmares; in every case the subject becomes agitated when the dream swerves into upsetting territory. The hypnotist can spend 1 **Hypnosis** or **Reassurance** point to calm the subject; if not, he faces a possible 2-point Stability loss. Each character reliving a dream through hypnosis gets a tick mark on the Nightmare List.

### The Sudden Death Of Lucy Vock

#### Scene Type: Core

The next morning, the investigators become aware of that Williams' assistant, David Fearn, concluded his evening by murdering the wife of a friend, alienist Dr. Otto Vock. Choose the most likely of the following segues into the scene:

A distraught Williams calls with the news. He wants them to look into the case, to make sure there's no chance that the look into the Y-Scope caused Fearn's breakdown.

One of Williams' backers, perhaps Mrs. Finch, calls with the same instructions as above.

The PCs read about it in the newspaper and are pushed by their Drives to confirm or disprove a connection to the Y-Scope.

### Police Blotter

#### Scene Type: Core

**Cop Talk** provides access to the arresting officer about three hours after the investigators make their initial inquiry. A 2-point spend gets them a meeting within an hour. Detective Alan Fix is a jaded, unflappable copper. (Or

### Dinner Party Murder; LAB ASSISTANT Arrested Wife Is Victim Of Prominent Alienist

Tragedy struck the prestigious Brent Town neighborhood last night when Lucille ("Lucy") Vock, heir to the Alper textile fortune, was slain at dinner table. Police shortly thereafter arrested David Quinton Fearn, 36, who remained on the scene after bludgeoning Mrs. Vock with a silver candelabra. Fearn was described by witnesses as having undergone a sudden breakdown, shifting in moments from the quiet calm of a sophisticated dinner party to a raging mania.

The murder took place at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Vock. Dr. Otto Vock is a renowned alienist, administrator of the Springhaven Sanatorium and author of the popular book *Limits Of the Human Mind*. Police described Fearn as cooperative. Witnesses suggested that Fearn became immediately remorseful after the brutal slaying, calmed in large part by the efforts of a courageously forbearing Dr. Vock. Fearn will be arraigned later today. Sources familiar with the thinking of the district attorney's office deemed as premature speculation that Fearn would be spared a criminal trial in exchange for his swift acquiescence to lifelong psychiatric incarceration.

substitute a recurring police detective from your ongoing campaign—such as Bart Kroeger from "Death Laughs Last.") He's grateful to have an open and shut case for once and is happy to talk about it, unless the investigators seem like they're going to complicate his nice, simple collar. He can expand as follows on the newspaper report:

Fearn definitely did it. He had the bent, bloody candlestick in his hand

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Singer, Sing

### Ticking Clock

In a typical GUMSHOE investigation, the Keeper moves the plot along by largely ignoring the picayune logistical hassles of getting in touch with witnesses, making appointments with them, traveling through the city, and so on. By doing so, you edit out the boring parts and cut straight to what matters, just as an author or screenwriter would do.

This is a ticking clock scenario—the investigators are in a race to solve the case before they suffer mental breakdowns from the escalating effects of Y-Scope exposure. Here you should absolutely pay attention to the passage of time. The more the group can get done each day, the fewer nights of madness-inducing dreams they'll face before it's all over. Here simple logistical challenges generate suspense—if you can't get the car started to get to the interview at the Vock asylum, you're wasting valuable time, and bringing the next night of dreaming ever closer.

Accordingly, each interview scene lists how long the investigators have to wait before requesting a meeting and actually getting to talk to the witness. In many cases, the time windows can be shortened with spends in the investigative abilities necessary to secure the meeting in the first place. For example, Detective Fix is available after three hours normally, but within one hour with a Cop Talk spend. Few witnesses make themselves available after the early evening. If a time window runs past that, the interview takes place the following morning. (For example, if the group contacts June Kenyon at 6 pm, the four hour window between initial approach and meeting takes you to 10 pm—too late for a young single woman to be meeting a group of strange men. She instead offers to meet at 10 am the next day.) At your discretion, a doubled spend may permit a meeting in the evening, but will not at night or early morning.

Time windows can't be circumvented simply by showing up and knocking on doors. However, if players cleverly overcome other obstacles to shorten a time window—for example, by wangling an invitation to a benefit they know June Kenyon will be attending—reward them by allowing the interview to proceed sooner than planned.

Dr. Vock (see below) expects anyone exposed to the Y-Scope to be slowly sliding into madness, and will read the symptoms on the PCs' faces when he first meets them. Should they give him reason to fear that the investigators are onto his conspiracy with Fearn, he'll cook up wild goose chases to send them on—trying to kill them with delays.

Ticking clock scenarios require deft handling of the balance between frustration and progress. See to it that any delays, whether created by Dr. Vock or of the everyday variety, build suspense. As they face them, mention minor symptoms of encroaching madness to remind them of the urgency of their mission. Avoid slipping into the syndrome of the merely annoying obstacle.

when Fix arrived on the scene. Cradling it, rocking back and forth, gibbering. Plus the other guests at the party all saw him do it and can testify in court.

Apparently no one noticed except in retrospect that Fearn was agitated throughout the dinner.

The murder happened during the dessert course.

What did Mrs. Vock do to set him off? She spilled the sugar. Knocked over the silver sugar bowl, sending cubes skittering into Fearn's lap. That's what he was screaming when he stood up on the mahogany dining table, grabbed a candelabra, and clocked her with it:

“The cube! The cube!”

(core) Along with Dr. and Mrs. Vock—and Fearn, natch—the guests at the soirée were all society muckety-mucks: Mr. and Mrs. Conrad Augé, and Miss June Kenyon. They all seemed badly shaken up, just like you'd expect.

(core) Normally Fix would be upset that a guy like Fearn would get off as not guilty by reason of insanity. But the D.A.'s gonna pull strings so that he has to go to Vock's sanatorium. Sending a nutjob to an asylum run by the husband of his victim. He'll get his what's coming to him, all right.

### Singer, Sing

Scene Type: Core

**Credit Rating 5+** or **Flattery** will get the group in the door to see June Kenyon, a pretty young heiress with pretensions to a career as an opera singer. A 2-point spend of either ability gets the investigators an immediate appointment; otherwise she's available after four hours. Clearly distraught by the murder, she says she has nothing to say beyond what she told the police. She's too upset—and perhaps a little too dim—to volunteer information. To elicit the following, the characters must ask specific questions.

She was there as a friend of Lucy's. They've known each other since they were six.

## Dimension Y

Otto invited David Fearn; the Augés were Lucy's guests.

June confirms the account of the killing given by Detective Fix, though in disjointed, traumatized fashion.

Otto Vock's sanatorium was built on his wife's inherited wealth. He was penniless when he came to this country.

Fearn was always an odd duck. A friend of Otto's, and not the sort of person she or Lucy would normally associate with.

Lucy married Otto after he briefly treated her for "a bad case of the mopes." Many of her friends disapproved, and distanced themselves from her.

Lucy and Otto weren't a good match. Otto was serious and controlling. Lucy wanted to have more fun.

(core) Lately she seemed in a better mood, though Otto remained as big a stick in the mud as ever. If June didn't know better, she'd swear that Lucy was getting romanced on the side.

### A Whiff Of Scandal

Scene Type: Core

The Augés are reluctant to talk to the investigators. Alicia Augé worries about damage to the family fragrance and cosmetics fortune if their names are linked too closely with a scandalous murder. Conrad Augé pretends to care about that but actually has another secret to conceal—he and Lucy were having an affair. To get them to talk requires **Reassurance** or **Credit Rating 5+**. A meeting within four hours requires a 3-point spend of either ability; otherwise they schedule a meeting for early evening the next day. Conrad, a suave, balding man, radiates Continental sophistication. Alicia is a

plain, bespectacled woman whose eyes glitter with keen intelligence.

A character with **Accounting** has read about them in the business pages. Augé Cosmetics suffered terribly after the crash of '29, but became profitable after Alicia slashed production and reoriented the company to the luxury perfume market, abandoning the low income customers who could no longer afford fripperies. Conrad is the outward face of the company, but it's Alicia who runs the numbers.

The two meet the group in tandem. Conrad seems more shaken than the cold-seeming Alicia. They reveal the following, as queries demand:

Alicia has known Lucy for many years. They are frequent guests at the Vocks, and vice versa.

They also confirm the detective's account of the murder.

Neither of them liked David Fearn. The only person less congenial in polite company than a tradesman is an arrogant auto-didact of a tradesman.

Nor were they extremely fond of Otto, come to think of it.

They suspect that Otto kept inviting Fearn specifically to annoy them.

**Assess Honesty** shows that Conrad is extremely uneasy, and possibly hiding something.

If they can arrange to speak to Conrad outside of Alicia's presence, they can then use **Intimidation** to wring a confession out of him: he and Lucy were engaged in a clandestine affair. "It was purely physical. Meaningless. We both knew that." Conrad sweats bullets throughout the discussion; his primary motivation is to ensure that Alicia never learns about it.

### My Poor David

Scene Type: Core

David Fearn lists his permanent residence as a rooming house owned and operated by his mother, Ida. Ida is suspicious that the investigators are gathering information to use against him. **Reassurance** or **Credit Rating 2** gains immediate access to her. A heavy-set, jowly woman, Ida wears a cheap, ill-fitting floral print dress, an obvious wig, and bulky orthopedic shoes. Mouthy, defiant, and proudly ill-educated, she takes a blatant dislike to anyone not of her Credit Rating. Anyone poorer than her is a bum and a no-account. Investigators with higher ratings are either putting on airs or looking down on her, depending on how far up the social ladder they are.

Her thoughts on the murder are those of a confused and protective mother. On one hand, she thinks Vock will vengefully try to prove that David is sane, in order to have him put on trial and executed. At the same time, she doesn't believe that David is crazy. Someone must have drugged him, to make him hurt someone like that. Or maybe all of those rich hoity-toits conspired together, and they all killed the girl in some occult orgy ritual.

Ida herself has no useful information to provide, but can confirm the following:

Dr. Vock used to live here, when he was down on his luck.

He and David became fast friends.

She used to like Dr. Vock, because he kept up his friendship with David after he married rich. But now she sees it was all some kind of trap.

David is a good boy. He's innocent, no matter what they say.

He found it hard to get and keep good

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Throw Away The Key

jobs, because he was always smarter than his bosses.

David seemed happier when working for Professor Williams, though it was never easy to tell, because he always kept his feelings to himself.

David continued to work as handyman around the rooming house no matter what other job he was doing.

David's room displays the immaculate cleanliness of an obsessively neat person who's rarely at home. His accommodations are Spartan: a bed, a few basic possessions kept in a military footlocker, a closet full of interchangeable work clothes. The walls are unadorned. **Evidence Collection** notes a spot in the shape of a cross where the drab wallpaper shows less fading than the area around it. If asked about it, Ida says that David took it down after he came back after from his military service. This upset her, but he didn't want to talk about it. He came back from the army toughened up, but distant. If asked where he served, she says he was stationed in all sorts of horrible countries, like the Philippines.

Knowing that David had the full run of the place, the investigators may want to check out the rooming house's common areas.

(core) Down in the boiler room, **Evidence Collection** finds a spot on the walls and floors where dust patterns suggest that a number of boxes have recently been taken away. Ida doesn't know what was in them, but remembers that David took a bunch of boxes out to a cab a few days ago. (These boxes contained David's collection of notes and mythos texts, which he sent out to Vock's asylum in anticipation of his relocation there. This indicates his premeditation of the murder, and, when found at the asylum, Vock's complicity.)

A 1-point **Evidence Collection** spend finds a crumpled piece of paper shoved up under one of the boiler's feet, filling a crumbled bit of the concrete flooring. Unraveled, it is a page of handwritten notes in faded ink. The notes include a Latin quotation apparently transcribed from an unnamed book. If translated, it reads:

"The flautists blindly piping at the court of Azazthoth both reinforce and penetrate its boundaries. Ultimate Chaos is falsely claimed by many necromancers, Mülder included, to occupy a specific place in physical space, at the Center Of the Universe, but logic dictates that this cannot be true, for Chaos abhors locational specificity. Rather, Ultimate Chaos is never more than an eye-blink or dream away. It fills the space between space, the emptiness at the heart of our bodily components (cells?) and by magicks dire can be made visible, though at enormous threat to the seer. The red text of M\_\_\_\_m, which cannot be owned for more than seven years, lest apoplexy seize the heart of its possessor, is said to contain a ritual of permanent fixing."

(This is an optional clue, not a spend, because, although it provides a clearer context to what's going on, it isn't essential to uncovering the conspiracy.)

### Throw Away the Key

#### Scene Type: Red Herring

For the first day after the murder, David Fearn remains in state custody. During this period it takes a 2-point **Bureaucracy** spend to gain access to him. After that, they can petition Otto Vock for permission to speak with him. Vock puts up a show of reluctance, then allows the meeting to take place. **Assess Honesty** shows Fearn to be in an agitated state, but trying to appear calm and sane. This

is true, though perhaps not for the obvious reasons. A canny villain, he does his best to steer the team in the wrong direction. He makes the following claims, as appropriately prompted by investigator queries:

The thing they all saw in the Y-Scope had been haunting him all day.

Still, he has no idea why he snapped, and no memory of having done it. He remembers Mrs. Vock passing the sugar, and then the next thing he remembers is being covered in blood, crouching in a corner, with Dr. Vock leaning over him.

Mrs. Vock was a cheerful, lovely woman, and he had no reason at all to want to hurt her.

He's been a friend of Otto Vock's since the doctor's arrival in this country. He rented a room in the city from David's mother. The two of them had common interests like engineering, history, and the life of the mind. Vock often invited him to dinner parties when he was afraid the conversation would get boring.

He believes he should absolutely be put away for the rest of his life for what he's done. What if they pronounced him cured and let him out, and then he snapped again?

Already a bull-goose lunatic, Fearn was by no means driven crazy by the Y-Scope. He predicts a wave of madness in those exposed to it, however, and has chosen to use this as his cover for a grim *quid pro quo* between himself and Vock. Fearn promised to murder Lucy, who Vock wanted dead after discovering her affair with Conrade Augé. In exchange, Vock would take custody of him and give him a secret headquarters in the basement of his sanatorium. Vock knows that Fearn intends to perform scientific occult experiments

## Dimension Y

down there, but has no idea that his old friend intends to bring down the curtain on humanity.

Fearn wants the investigators to waste their last days of civilization as we know it poking into Williams' business or spiraling into madness. He does his best to steer them toward Williams, hinting about Polton's occult connections as if he himself is entirely ignorant of the subject. If the group asks about dreams or strange visions, he amps up their sense of dread by confirming that he had any symptom they mention. Should they talk to Fearn about their weird experiences for any length of time, the Difficulties of any Stability tests they take in regard to them increase by 1 for the remainder of the scenario.

### Murder By Proxy

#### Scene Type: Core

With his wildly tousled hair, deep-set eyes, and bushy, single eyebrow, no one would call Dr. Otto Vock conventionally handsome. Yet he exhibits an intense personal magnetism, as if possessed by a stormy genius. Despite his tragedy, he remains curtly composed. Understandably occupied after the death of his wife, he agrees to a meeting the next day, then keeps rescheduling. A 3-point spend of **Credit Rating 5+** or **Intimidation** secures a meeting in four hours.

**Medicine** reveals that Vock is a former disciple of Sigmund Freud and colleague of C. G. Jung, who broke from their theories by seeking pharmaceutical remedies to mental illness, deeming the talking cure of psychoanalysis to be insufficiently rigorous. On a 1-point spend, the character may claim a prior acquaintance with Vock, having met him at a conference, at which he spoke brilliantly. He also fended off the obvious advances of several attractive



female psychoanalysis enthusiasts, brandishing his wedding ring.

He gives the investigators only a few minutes of his precious time, although he will work to appear more congenial if one of them is a fellow alienist. In response to questions, he makes the following true statements:

He is unacquainted with Polton Williams, although he is aware of him as the current employer of his former friend and current patient, David Fearn.

His friendship with Fearn dates back to his arrival in this country. Fearn was his landlady's son, and possessed an interesting, though unschooled, mind.

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Y, Have You Deserted Me ?

He is a welcome breath of fresh air compared to the hidebound academics with whom Vock must so often deal.

By no means will he mistreat David now that he is his legal guardian, despite what police and prosecutors might believe.

He can confirm the description of the murder as given by others.

June Kenyon is an amiable enough girl, though frivolous. Sadly, she insists on singing soprano when her voice is better suited to the mezzo range.

The following assertions are untrue or misleading, and register as such to a character **Assessing Honesty**.

Vock is of course beside himself with grief. He is grateful that his Teutonic upbringing allows him to stifle unseemly emotional outbursts.

Although presumably he stands to inherit the bulk of his wife's considerable fortune (true), the thought had not occurred to him until the investigators mentioned it (very untrue.)

David Fearn is suffering from a psychosis of unknown origin.

He is as fond of the Augés as his wife was and hopes they recover from the shock of this terrible event.

If asked whether Fearn's illness could have been brought on by exposure to the Y-Scope, Vock nods as if considering the possibility for the first time. "It seems strange but could be true. Please keep me abreast of your investigation, as it could yield data invaluable to David's treatment."

Did he make the authorities think that he would turn David's treatment into punishment, and thus secure Fearn's release to him? Heavens! He would

never do something so shockingly Machiavellian.

### Y, Have You Deserted Me ?

#### Scene Type: Core

Polton Williams is an innocent dupe in this entire affair. Although he blames himself for Fearn's condition, and the death of that poor Vock woman, he is unprepared to believe that he colossally misjudged his assistant's character unless provided concrete proof. If he can be convinced that there's something fishy in the Fearn-Vock relationship, he will then make his project's records available to the group. These in turn will point to the existence of a second laboratory, which now maintains the connection to Dimension Y.

Williams is willing to speak with the investigators right away. **Medicine** or **Streetwise** reveal the presence of alcohol on Williams' breath when the investigators first interview him after the Lucy Vock slaying. He is morose, self-pitying, and wracked with guilt—but still determined to rebuild the Y-Scope, as if this will somehow vindicate him. In addition to any of the information given for Williams on in "Half Reality", p. XX), he can provide the following answers:

He found Fearn at a tool and die shop. When Fearn saw the parts he wanted, he intuited that they were for some extraordinary viewing device. Williams took this as an omen; he'd hired and fired three assistants before him, whose technical training only prevented them from thinking unconventionally.

Fearn had an intuitive sense for the work, sometimes finding solutions Williams had not dreamed of.

Williams knows nothing of the

occult. He dismisses as it primitive superstition, unsuited to the dawning era of pure reason that the 20<sup>th</sup> century will doubtless prove itself to be. References to Cthulhu or other elements of the mythos are brushed off as patently absurd.

(core) If asked to match the remains of machines to his specifications, Williams notices for the first time that the actual machine diverges in significant ways from his plans. His reaction is not to suspect Fearn of wrongdoing, but to lament the difficulty of reconstructing the machine now that the poor fellow is permanently incarcerated. "If only I had known the extent to which this project depended on the poor boy's rude, untutored genius!"

He will grant access to his financial records, which Fearn kept charge of, if Williams asked. **Accounting** finds cleverly disguised financial subterfuge. For every part that can be accounted for at Williams' lab, Fearn ordered another four to eight identical items. Scrutiny of the list of ordered parts with one of the **Repair** abilities indicates that Fearn may have been building copies of the Y-Scope elsewhere. A 1-point spend of either suggests that the machines he was making with the embezzled parts were larger and more sophisticated than the Y-Scope he made for Williams. Calls to suppliers confirm that he did place much larger orders than Williams knew about. However, he always picked the components up himself, so there's no way of knowing where they wound up.

No matter how badly the situation deteriorates, Williams maintains his belief that the reality he contacted with the Y-Scope is a benign repository of humanity's hopes and memories. If the group keeps in touch with him throughout their investigation, they see his mental state worsen, as the strain of reconciling his desired reality

## Dimension Y

### Avoiding Sleep

Characters may try to evade their nightmarish destinies by staying awake. This is difficult and imposes penalties of its own.

After 18 hours without sleep, characters become sluggish, irritable, and dull-witted. The cost of all investigative spends goes up by 1. Clues that would ordinarily be available free now become 1-point spends.

After 24 hours without sleep, characters risk falling asleep unwillingly. Every half hour the character must make a Health test, with a Difficulty starting at 4 and increasing by 1 for each past consecutive successful test. On a failure, the character drifts into unconsciousness and immediately suffers a nightmare.

After 28 consecutive hours without sleep, the Difficulties of all general ability test increase by 1. After 32 hours without sleep, the Difficulties increase by 2. For each additional 4 hours without sleep, they again increase by 1.

Stimulants such as amphetamine or cocaine stave off sleep but do not reduce the penalties associated with the lack of it. Usage reduces the Difficulty of a Health test against sleep by 2. However, the mixture of Y-scope effects and mind altering substances is dangerous on its own. The drugs increase the Difficulties of all Stability tests by the number of doses taken during the previous 24 hours. To be effective, a new dose must be taken prior to each sleep test. Each use costs you Health points: 1 for the first, 3 for the second, 5 for the third, and so on.

Characters who drop below 4 Health points with either drug in their system experience their next nightmare in the sequence *while still awake*. This hallucinatory event risks a 4-point Stability loss every time it happens. If the dream includes Mythos elements—including impossible geometry—it also counts as a Mythos shock. Further waking dreams occur at every subsequent loss of 4 or more Health points.

Once drugged, investigators must always make Health tests to see if they fall asleep at each half-hour increment. Characters with unpolluted bloodstreams can always willingly forgo the test and drift off automatically.

with the truth becomes increasingly untenable.

Alternately, the characters can, with Williams' help, construct a device to track the presence of Y-rays. This requires at least a day of effort, plus a pair of Difficulty 5 **Mechanical** and **Electrical Repair** tests, which may be taken by different PCs. A 1-point Physics spend allows a failed test of either ability to be retaken the next day. The device, resembling a geiger counter, picks up a new source of Y-Ray energy in the direction of the asylum. Readings grow stronger the closer the machine gets to Springhaven.

### Spiral Into Madness

#### Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction

As the investigators look into the mystery of the Y-Scope, danger is never further away than their next

nap. Whenever a character falls asleep, his connection to Ultimate Chaos deepens.

A sleeping character who has not yet failed a Stability test for the nightmares brought on by Y-Scope exposure must make a Stability test for each new episode of sleep. The Difficulty equals 4 plus 1 for each previous nightmare test the character has passed. (So if Martin Harvesson has had three dreams without failing, his Difficulty for the next sleep period is 7.)

Once a character fails a Stability test against the dreams, each new sleep episode is guaranteed to produce a disturbing vision, no further tests permitted. The dreams escalate in horror, and soon lead to waking visions.

The dreams themselves exact no Stability or Sanity tolls, but when events in the waking world begin to

mirror them, the tests start coming hard and fast.

Create the content of the dreams by continuing the ideas given under "Five-Sided Nightmares", p. XX. They're personalized to each investigator, and involve one or more of the character's sources of stability. The dreams may also weave in details from the day's investigation, twisted to become distressing, demoralizing, or outright gruesome. Work in impossible geometric shapes, bacterial forms, and imagery making an eye out of the sun or moon. Dreamers may also sense a crawling chaos at the heart of the universe, or in their own hearts. They might hear the tuneless piping of unearthly heralds. Each dream progresses its narrative a little further toward horror. The ultimate storyline of each dream is the same—the character winds up butchering the source of stability.

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## Spiral Into Madness

Each time a character dreams, add a tick to his name on the Nightmare List.

Ticks on the Nightmare List lead to waking visions. Waking visions occur either between scenes, or as a device to conclude a scene that threatens to drag after all likely plot advancement has been wrung from it. The character with the most ticks on the Nightmare List suffers the next waking vision in the sequence below. If two or more characters are tied for first place, the character whose player has had the least spotlight time of late suffers the vision. Once a character has suffered a vision, erase a tick from beside his name. Some visions have lasting or continuing effects: once you realize that the moon is also an eye, the effects of this new horrible insight are visible whenever you check.

The first waking vision occurs on the second morning after the Y-Scope experiment. No more than three waking visions occur per day. If the group achieves their victory condition before four days, no one has to see the irrevocably mind-blasting visions.

The number at the end of each vision description is the possible Stability loss suffered by the dreamer, followed by the Stability loss suffered by any fellow investigator who hears a first-hand account of the vision's contents. An M indicates that the vision, experienced directly or indirectly, constitutes a Mythos shock.

### Vision #1: Tuneless Fluting

The character hears a nagging, tuneless sound, as if made by some unearthly flute. At first, the tootling seems merely random, but after that a chaotic, atonal pattern becomes apparent. (2/0; every time the player asks if the fluting can still be heard, the answer is “yes”—occasioning *another* possible 2-point Stability loss.)

### Vision #2: Impossible Geometry

An ordinary object with an everyday geometric shape can now be seen to possess an additional dimension. (2/0; M, every subsequent object the player tests for possible ultra-dimensionality also registers as having non-Euclidean qualities—calling for another possible 2-point Stability loss.)

### Vision #3: The Moon's Eye

The character becomes convinced that the moon is a watching eye and can't stop checking its progress through the sky. Finally, the moon's eye becomes briefly visible, fixing the character in its pitiless gaze before blinking shut again. (2/0)

### Vision #4: The Sun's Eye

As above, but on a failed Stability test the character also loses a die of Health, reflecting damage to the retinas caused by looking at the sun for too long. (2/1; second hand Stability exposure is 2 for the character who suffered Vision #3.)

### Vision #5: Puppetry

During a travel sequence or other situation in which one sees many anonymous passersby, the character can suddenly see formless bacterial creatures all around them. Worse, these half-real beings are controlling the movements, thoughts and impulses of the people. The creatures manipulate people's arms and legs. They whisper thoughts into their ears.

The creatures seem to notice that they are observed. They swarm to one particular bystander, who is then made to dance a mad, capering jig. The rasping, papery sound the creatures make is horribly like... *laughter! We are just puppets, controlled by unseen strings!* (5/2; M)

### Vision #6: The Moon Is Always Watching

Whenever you look, the moon is always in the sky. At night, it glares

balefully down at you, burning through what is otherwise a thick layer of cloud cover. In the daytime, it hovers invisibly, next to the sun. It can see you, even though your eye is closed. (3/0)

### Vision #7: Murder Is the Only Solution

Suddenly, in a sickening epiphany, you realize who's responsible for the entire Y-Scope conspiracy. It's [[insert name of Source of Stability]]. He or she is an agent of a blind idiot god called Azazoth, and has been for as long as you've known them. He or she sneaked into William's lab at night and reoriented the wiring of the Y-Scope. You've been used to confuse the case while the end times commence. There's only one thing to do—go and kill him or her, immediately, to save the world. (6/0; M, if the Stability test fails, the character stops what he's doing and goes off to murder his Source of Stability. Upon seeing his intended victim, or being confronted by fellow investigators with obvious craziness of what he's doing, the character realizes that he's been deluded by unseen forces.)

### Vision #8: The Gate

The moon is the key to all of this. Yes, it is an eye. Soon, it will open, you realize, along with the sun's eye. At that time, it will become a gate, and all manner of horrors will pour through it, to lay waste to this world. (6/2; M)

### Vision #9: More Murder

Realizing that the world is about to end in an appalling supernatural apocalypse, during which innocent people will be tortured and defiled, you decide that you must kill [[insert name of Source of Stability]] to save them from this unspeakable fate. You swing into action, meaning to do this immediately—but then see a formless bacterial creature surrounding you, whispering into your ear, urging you to murder. Further, you think back

## Dimension Y



to a few hours ago, when one of your friends decided he had to kill [[[his Source of Stability]]] and realize there was a creature whispering into his ear, then! (7/2; M)

### Vision #10: Azazoth

You gaze into the heart of Ultimate Chaos, a writhing amorphous force that at once demands and repels your understanding. To comprehend it, you cannot help but personify it, calling it, as so many have before you, the blind idiot god Azazoth. But by granting it qualities of intention, emotion and identity, you have invited him into your soul, given it power over you. Around him demonic flautists

play a shrieking, atonal melody of destruction and disorder. His left eye is the moon; his right, the sun. He is coming, coming to earth. (9/4; M)

### Vision #11: Apocalypse

The moon and sun stand together in the sky. Both of them open at once, revealing themselves as grim and pitiless eyes. They blast the landscape. Skyscrapers topple. The sky turns black. In the distance, you hear the oceans boil and turn to steam. People collapse, screaming, flesh falling from their bones. Crawling from the eyes of sun and moon come the shapeless bacterial creatures. They fall upon the survivors, playing with them, ravishing

them, devouring them. The world is ending! (8/3; M)

### Vision #12: Half-Reality

The marrow of your bones turns to ice as you see that [Insert name of PC who had previous vision] was right—in a manner of speaking. The world has ended—the land blasted, the lakes and seas evaporated, the sky a roiling slick of blackened oil... Nearly everyone is dead, defiled, skeletonized. Your home is gone, your friends, your family, your fellow investigators—all dead.

You are dead. The other pale consciousnesses around you can fool themselves, can continue to

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## More Murders

believe that life goes on, that they are real, and that their comings and goings are imbued with meaning and consequence. If only you could believe the same! You have seen through the veil.

What remains of you is only an echo of your true consciousness. You are a memory, a shadow, an emanation in Dimension Y. What seems to be the ordinary, undamaged world around you—that too is a memory of how things used to be, given apparent dimensionality by the half-reality of the Y-field. It has entombed, like a wasp in amber, the collective mind of the shattered human race. (The character suffering this vision undergoes anagnorisis (*Trail Of Cthulhu*, p. XX) and is removed from play. Others hearing him or her recount this terrible epiphany face a Mythos shock and possible 4-point Stability loss.)

### Further Visions

If the PCs run out of visions before they run out of plot, recycle the above hallucinations, with variations, until they achieve victory or all go crazy. Avoid giving the same character identical visions. The best ones to repeat are the later ones: 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12.

## More Murders

### Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction

To further complicate the investigation—thus increasing the chances that it will last until the really brain-blasting visions kick in—the other guests at the Y-Scope demonstration begin to go insane and commit their own gruesome murders. Although there is little to be gained by investigating these slayings, the PCs will probably think it necessary.

Fortunately for their progress in this

ticking clock scenario, the murders all occur at night, when witnesses in the main case are least likely to make themselves available for questioning. They take place once per day. Their exact timing depends on your pacing needs as you work to keep the players engaged and unnerved. The order as follows:

Dr. Binder kills a Chinese shop owner.

Dr. Sykes strangles his wife, Mildred.

Dr. Steber kills his neighbor.

Eulalie Finch poisons an orchestra conductor.

The investigators may try to prevent further murders by staking out the various other NPCs present at the demonstration. None will willingly cooperate with such a venture, which will also take up valuable time that should be spent finding Fearn's lab beneath the asylum. All will point out that the investigators were present at the demonstration, too, and are just as safe or unsafe as any other participant. Denied access to their subject's homes, they probably won't be able to do anything more than arrive quickly after a murder is committed. However, if they do take special and clever countermeasures, perhaps they can prevent a slaying or two. During dialogue scenes with the prospective future murderers, try to foreshadow the slaughter to come by off-handedly underlining Steber's fishing hobby or Eulalie's concern for her grandson (see below.)

Otto Vock is more than happy to accept any of these characters as additional patients. He is too cautious to make the offer himself, though; the investigators will have to suggest it.

### Killing Of a Chinese Herbalist

At the time given above, Dr. Harold Binder strides into the shop of Chinese herbalist Johnny Wing and, without uttering a word, shoots him in the throat with a small caliber pistol. Wing dies immediately. Binder uses Wing's own phone to calmly call Detective Fix and inform him that he's solved the case of Lucy Vock's murder. If the investigators have already met with him since the Vock slaying, he may call them instead.

Wing is an elderly man. His terrified wife and two adult sons do not venture downstairs until Fix or the investigators arrive. The youngest son, Albert, speaks for them. He attests that his father was a quiet man who never made trouble for anyone. The Wings recognize Binder. On several past occasions, he came into the store to remonstrate with Wing for what he said were false scientific claims on his in-store literature. Johnny Wing always listened politely but did not change his signs or pamphlets.

Binder, in a blithe and earnest tone, explains that Wing caused the dreadful emanations of the Y-Scope with "his infernal yellow medicine." If not stopped, everyone else who had seen the demonstration would go on to murder friends or loved ones. Now the world is safe again, he claims. If asked to prove his theory, Binder grows confused. He was sure he had concrete evidence, but now, for the life of him, he can't recall what it was... Nonetheless, Binder remains convinced that he did the right thing.

A character with **Psychoanalysis** can perform a spot diagnosis, judging him to be in an acute dissociative state, wherein his judgment and perceptions have become completely disconnected from one another.

**Library Use** turns up several articles written by Binder debunking non-Western medicines.

## Dimension Y

### Mercy Killing

The death of Mildred Sykes, pretty young wife of Dr. Alfred Sykes, is reported to police by their housemaid, who finds the poor woman strangled with the silk belt of her own negligee. The maid, a trim middle-aged black woman with a nurse's demeanor, is called Minnie Green. She says she found Sykes calmly typing in his office in the next room.

When confronted by police or investigators, Sykes appears startled, as if he killed his wife and then promptly forgot about it. Shown the body, he undergoes a wailing, breast-beating breakdown, sinking to his knees and tearing out his hair. A 2-point **Reassurance** spend restores him immediately to lucidity, though he remains guilt-ridden. Otherwise, it takes until the next morning before he is able to speak coherently.

Even when he talks, his actions make little sense: he says that his look into Dimension Y convinced him that the world is about to end, destroyed by the creatures from the other side. "The eyes of sun and moon will open, and then they will subject us all, every man woman and child, to fates worse than death. I had to spare dear Mildred that appalling fate."

### Cleaned and Gutted

Dr. Robert Steber is found in the garage of his home, having killed his neighbor, an ophthalmologist named Victor Starzl, with a blow to the back of the head from a boat hook. He then treated him as he would the marlin he fishes for off the Florida coast—by suspending him from his heels, then bleeding and gutting him. Only then did Steber realize he'd done anything untoward, at which point he called either police or the investigators.

Seeing Starzl's corpse while still posed like a gutted marlin risks a 3-point Stability loss.

During questioning, Steber remains confused, switching back and forth from thinking he killed someone to believing he innocently cleaned a fish. The pressure of **Interrogation** prompts him to exclaim that "One of those creatures must have whispered into his ear, and moved his hand." What creatures? Why, the bacteria-like things from the Y-Scope demonstration, of course.

### Tea and Strychnine

Society grand dame Eulalie Finch poisons orchestra conductor Janos Horvath, serving up the lethal concoction in a pot of tea. She lures Horvath to her estate with the promise of a good word to the board of the local orchestra, which is looking for a new leader.

**Credit Rating 5+** provides the gossip behind the story: her grandson Steven recently fell into Horvath's orbit. The louche Hungarian music master has a reputation for corrupting handsome youths.

When ambulance workers at the scene challenge her account of Horvath's death by sudden heart attack, Finch quickly crumbles. She admits to poisoning him to prevent him from doing to any more impressionable boys what he did to Stephen.

The only odd thing about her confession is that she invariably refers to Horvath as "Azazoth."

### The Second Cube

#### Scene Type: Resolution

The investigators achieve their victory conditions by finding and destroying the basement lab beneath Springhaven Sanatorium. They may be led to check into the asylum by Vock's dishonest responses, or the signs in Fearn's rooming house that he already moved

some secret boxes, as if in anticipation of his sudden lapse into madness.

Also allow any other credible inquiries the players think up to point to the asylum.

Once they know to go there, they can bluff their way in, bring the cops along, or come in shooting, pulp-style.

They've probably been at the facility at least once before, to interview Dr. Vock. If they contact him using **Reassurance** to seem stupidly unaware of his complicity, he invites them in for a new interview. Then they can get the drop on him, otherwise overpower him, and execute a search.

Or they can gain entrance by brandishing their firearms. Vock has a quartet of burly orderlies on staff, but they're ordinary joes with no link to his conspiracy. They'll engage in Scuffling contests if necessary, but fold at the first sight of a gun.

### Orderlies

Athletics 6, Health 6, Scuffling 8

To gain a police escort into the asylum, requires a 1-point **CopTalk** plus 2-point **Law** spend. The first gets Fix to agree to take the investigators along on the raid. The second earns a search warrant, by making whatever evidence the group has gathered so far resemble probable cause to a rough and tumble prosecutor of the pre-Miranda era.

(If the investigators seem ready to let the cops to go in by themselves, use their drives to force them in.)

**Locksmith**, used on the elevator, reveals the existence of a secret button taking the user to an unmarked sub-basement.

The basement opens directly into Fearn's laboratory-slash-temple, where he, hopped up on amphetamines,

# TRAIL OF CTHULHU

## The Second Cube

conducts a nearly continuous ritual to open the portals between this world and the realm of Ultimate Chaos. Arrayed around the room are six projector devices, like the Y-Scope, but bigger and more overtly sinister in appearance. Where their beams intersect, a five-sided cube hangs permanently in the air. About the size of an automobile, this cube writhes from within and intermittently displays a seventh, even eighth side.

Dancing about the chamber, wailing on bloodied, razor-tipped flutes, are man-sized versions of the bacterial entities previously witnessed through the Y-Scope. Anyone who has heard the awful tootling of Azazoth's realm recognizes the atonal cauterwauling.

Held in low, bench-shaped cages beneath the cube are the tormented figures of Vock's more expendable patients. **Medicine** identifies the multiple puncture wounds on their naked forms as having been made by the sharpened flutes.

Fearn participates in the dance, wielding a flute of his own.

If any police are present, the servitors of Azazoth leap on them, impaling them with their flutes. The police collapse after a single round—but this gives the investigators a round to try to strike the servitors without being hit in return. There are three to

six servitors present; pick a number that will challenge the group without leading to a total party kill. Fearn himself is a wild but fragile combatant.

### Flautists Of Azazoth

Athletics 12, Health 14, Scuffling 12, Weapons 28

**Hit Threshold:** 4 (large but only partially visible)

**Weapon:** +1 (flute)

**Armor:** all physical weapons do damage as if their modifier were -1; enchanted weapons, fire, and electricity do normal damage

**Stability Loss:** +2

#### David Fearn

Athletics 6, Health 4, Scuffling 7, Weapons 4

**Weapons:** +1 (flute)

Team members can attack the flautists directly or banish them by damaging the projection devices. Damaging a device substitutes for a combat action and requires either a Difficulty 6 Athletics test (for hitting it or knocking it from its moorings) or Difficulty 5 Firearms test (for shooting a vulnerable spot.) A success at either knocks out a machine. If there are more operational machines than flautists when the hit is sustained, roll a die: on an odd result, a flautist wavers, swirls and vanishes back to the non-Euclidean space from whence it came. If there are as many flautists as projectors, a creature vanishes automatically.

As soon as he realizes that the jig is up and gets an opportunity to do so, Vock attempts to flee for the sanatorium garage, hoping to drive away in his roadster. If he does escape, **Cop Talk** allows the group to have an APB issued for him, resulting in his arrest at either the Canadian or Mexican border (depending on where you set the scenario) a few days later.

The entire scene—cube, flautists, victims, and all—imposes a possible 9-point Stability loss, which is also a Mythos shock.

The character who has lost the most total Stability and Sanity during the scenario who is struck by a sudden, horrible italicized, climactic revelation:

*It was then, staring at those awful things, that I realized the truth. It was not the beings of the so-called DimensionY that were half-real. It was us. We were the absurd dreams of malign and indifferent beings. And although we had kept them at bay this time, one day they would come to reclaim their playthings for good.*

Assuming the character is not already below -12 Sanity, he then makes another Stability test, against a further 6-point loss.

