

protodimension magazine



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Whitechurch, Vermont



A Beginning Sandbox Setting
By Jeff Moeller
For Classic Era Call of Cthulhu®

Nestled along the shores of Lake Champlain, off a spur road from U.S. Route 7, lies the old (fictitious) town of Whitechurch, Vermont. It is a quiet little town, now only home to about 400 souls, declining and decaying as barge traffic along the Lake declines in favor of rail and road. Once, in the mid-1800s, a couple thousand people lived here, working a mine a few miles away and loading the ore onto barges destined for refineries. Nowadays, people come from Boston by automobile, to picnic along the Lake and admire the old, white clapboard, Federalist era Congregationalist church on the town square that gives the town its name. If it were not a picturesque, lakeside picnic spot, the town likely would have collapsed entirely. As things stand, it supports a mid-sized inn, a couple of tourist oriented general stores, a garage and gas station, and a few other town square businesses, plus some local farms.

The old quarry pond, near where the mine used to be, has been a nasty place ever since the mine closed in the 1880s. It was contaminated to begin with; Massachusetts Mining & Petroleum, the company that ran the place, did whatever it wanted in terms of waste disposal back in the day. They dug 50 feet deep into the Earth right after the

Civil War, and anything that they didn't want from the mine ended up in that pit. The pit filled with 20 feet of water over time after the mine closed, and the water has that funny, green sheen that sometimes comes with mine tailings.

After the mine closed, rumors and ghost stories began to circulate about what might be down in the pit. Some said that the eerie green sheen to the water was from ghosts. Some said that the pit went so deep that Hell was shining up from below.



Rumors aside, though, the pit became a place that attracted troublemakers. People would dump their any and all kinds of refuse in it, figuring that the pit was already so polluted, something new couldn't hurt. Creosote, volatile organics, diseased animal carcasses, the unfortunate remains that came out of the county home for wayward girls back before the State took it over; all these and more were tossed in and forgotten about.

The pit is a few miles out in the hills east of town, yet there is an old trail that leads right to it, back from the days when a spur rail line ran out to the mine. The rail spur has long since fallen into disuse, but people can still hike the easement. This combination of remoteness and ease of access

THIS IMAGE WAS SUBMITTED BY JEFF MOELLER.



made it a popular place for illicit or secret romances. More than once, residual body fluids from these encounters were washed off at the edge of the pond, seeping down to mingle with the rest of the pit's noxious contents.

Twenty years ago, or so the stories go, a bunch of young roughnecks went out drinking one night at the old quarry pond. Whatever happened out there that night, it

scared them straight, and they don't much like to talk about it. One of the preachers in town, Rev. Josiah Bell, knows a bit, though, that he heard in the confessional. Seems there'd been a fight or an argument of some sort, and someone had gone in the lake and not come out. Yet all of the local boys were accounted for.

Right around that time, the strange lights and noises that had sometimes been

seen from the direction of the old quarry pond just stopped. They'd been going on like clockwork, every April 30th, as far back as folks could remember, even before the pond was there. Some said that there was an old woman who lived out that way, a witch, who dealt with old Indian spirits. She would come into town occasionally for supplies, scowling and talking to no one, but whatever happened at the old quarry pond that night twenty years ago, she was never seen again.

People don't go out to the old quarry pond any more. A young couple went out there not long after the argument, but the young girl came back by herself in the middle of the night. She had to be sent to the State mental hospital, babbling something about how the pond was "alive". Her boyfriend turned up at dawn the next day, May 1st. He had hung himself from the steeple of the old white church in town. No one had seen him go up there.

That was when the suicides started, but they've continued. One every four years, they are always found hanging from the steeple of the old white church on the morning of May 1st. Four in all now, and the anniversary date is coming up again soon. No warning was given, not for any of them, and they were all good, sane, stable

people. Last time, four years ago, the town elders tried to stop anyone from going up there by holding a candlelight vigil outside the church. But somehow, a young girl managed to get up there anyway; people must have nodded off for a second. Why anyone would want to keep this madness going is anyone's guess, and why a seven year old girl would even think to hang herself from a church steeple made no sense to anyone.

THE TRUTH

Whitechurch, Vermont is intended as a “sandbox” for players new to **Call of Cthulhu** to dig around in. The town is a “bad place,” with a discrete back story explaining why, and three interrelated plot seeds that can introduce the investigators to one another as well as to some of the basics of **Call of Cthulhu** game play: investigation into hidden secrets, forlorn sites corrupted by the Mythos, dreamscapes, and nasty monsters that creative solutions must be found to address. By the time that they are done digging, they ought to have: an NPC contact who can serve as an entrée to other adventures; a minor Mythos tome to research with; and a crash course into how to use research to mitigate Mythos threats: the basics of an ongoing **Call of Cthulhu** campaign.

The nastiest thing that ever got dumped into the old quarry pond was the witch, and that is saying something. An ancient sorceress sworn to the service of The Black Man, an avatar of Nyarlathotep, her May Eve rituals deep in the woods, in the hills above the old quarry pond, attracted the attention of bunch of drunken youth. Stumbling through the woods and coming upon her coven in the process of summoning The Black Man some twenty years ago, the drunkards reacted violently, beating the witches and seizing the only one they recognized, the old woman who occasionally came into town.

Thinking back to old stories, they thought that it would be fun to dunk the witch, so they drug her down to the old quarry pond, full of strange substances and human DNA. With her dying breath, she cursed them: every four years, at midnight on May Eve, someone would die by their own hand, hung from the steeple of the town church of their false god. The drunks laughed as they drowned her, but they are not laughing any longer.

Even she had no way of knowing how her curse might come true, but come true it has. The foul ooze of the pond, combined with the hyper-dimensionally altered corpse of the witch, have combined to

infuse the pond itself with eerie life. The pond is now a sentient entity that infuses and corrupts the area. Emanations from the pond have seeped into the groundwater, and run off into Lake Champlain itself. It has the memories of the old witch, and her desire for revenge on the town.

The pond has the power to stupefy and sway people, mostly within sight of its shores, but every once in a great while (every four years on May Eve, for certain), it can exert its influence over anyone who has consumed some of its water. The pond uses this control to fulfill the curse, driving anyone convenient to hang themselves from the steeple, and befuddling those who might try to stop it.

DISCOVERING THE TRUTH

The investigators might learn of Whitechurch a few weeks before May 1st in any given year, when a newspaper story about the rash of suicides found in a small town in Vermont every four years, hanging from the church steeple, comes to their attention. Alternatively, Rev. Bell might reluctantly ask occult investigators to become involved in an effort to prevent the upcoming anniversary. This is a way to put a new group together: each of them is there to solve the mystery, as the town will take any help that they can get.



REV. JOSIAH BELL

Nationality: American.

STR 11 DEX 15 INT 13 CON 15 APP 15 POW 12 SIZ 10 EDU 14

SAN 58 Luck 60 Hits: 13 Age: 59.

Damage Penalty: None.

Education: College-level Seminary Education.

Skills: *Accounting* 45%; *Credit Rating* 55%; *Drive Automobile* 35%; *Library Use* 65%; *Listen* 50%; *History* 45%; *Occult* 25%; *Perform (Sing)* 50%; *Persuade* 60%; *Psychology* 60%; *Spot Hidden* 50%; *Sneak* 50%.

Languages: *English* 90%; *French* 25%, *Latin* 25%.

Attacks: None above base.

Notes: Rev. Bell is a dour, unfriendly bachelor of Scottish descent. He is short, thin as a rail, and not terribly popular in town. On the other hand, he is a man of his word, genuinely well-intentioned, and honorable. He is of a scholarly bent and not shy about interceding on behalf of parishioners in trouble.

Occult research on the area of Whitechurch reveals that the area was once known as Hopstone (as in the Devil's Hopstone) and that there is a legend about a stone outcropping a few miles to the east of town (in the same general direction as the old quarry pond). Witches would sometimes gather there to perform black sabbats. No one in town nowadays knows exactly where the Hopstone might be, although a few might know that this was the pre-Revolutionary name for the area.

Cthulhu Mythos research in an appropriate tome (such as *Thaumaturgical Prodigies in the New England Canaan*) might confirm these rumors, and add that this was said to be an old place of power where worshippers of Narlato, The Black Man of witch legend, would initiate new worshippers by having them sign their names in his black book. General directions to the Devil's Hopstone might be given with reference to the shoreline of Lake Champlain in appropriate Mythos sources, which will (not coincidentally) lead to the witch's ruined shack, built on top of a stone outcropping.

The people of Whitechurch really have not put things together; they honestly have no idea what underlies the rash of quadrennial suicides. Talking to the families of the past victims mostly only reveals some very sad people with little in the way of ideas. The exception is the family of the first victim, Paul Spain, from twenty years ago. He was 18 at the time of his death. He had disappeared the night before he was found, and his girlfriend at the time, Sally Clyde, came into town soaking wet, filthy and screaming like a madwoman. She was promptly sent to the mental hospital in Rutland, about a two hour drive away.

Sally was a raving lunatic and died at the state mental hospital a few weeks after admission, falling catatonic and never recovering. Old records at the insane asylum (*Library Use*) suggest that she had a horrible shock, and was afraid of water before slipping into a catatonic state. She insisted that all forms of water were alive, and refused to drink anything, even under mild sedation.

People in town (including Rev. Bell) remember Sally stumbling back into town, distraught, and saying that she had been out by the old quarry pool. Before a search party for Paul could be organized, somebody saw him hanging from the steeple.

Asking around town about the old quarry pond (*Library Use* when reviewing local newspapers, or appropriate roleplaying) can get the basic history (excepting the part about the witch or the altercation shortly before Paul's suicide).

If the investigators start asking pointed questions about murders, tragedies and/or occult things pertaining to the old quarry pond itself (which they might well, especially after they go out there), serious roleplaying and/or *Persuade* rolls will be needed. No one will be easily able to wrap their minds around any connection between the incident twenty years ago and the suicides, and those few who know are being asked to talk about how they murdered a witch or to break the sanctity of the confessional. The roughnecks (three, John Raymond, Peter Levesque, and Ronald Gresham, are still in town) would have to be under extreme duress to share anything that occurred that night.

Rev. Bell would have to be convinced (*Persuade*) that the investigators need to

know that information in order to save a life. He might, however, hint (if he is *Persuaded* that the information is somehow relevant) that there was an old woman rumored to be a witch who lived out in that direction and who stopped coming into town around the same time. Rev. Bell is intended to serve as a recurring NPC in a campaign: a source of advice, someone who might intercede or offer shelter to the investigators when they are under duress, or a confessor.

PLAYING IN THE SANDBOX

Apart from digging around into some of the townsfolk's sordid pasts, there are three basic episodes set up by the back story. These are an exploration of the old quarry pond itself; finding and exploring the Devil's Hopstone; and trying to prevent the inevitable, upcoming quadrennial suicide at midnight of April 30th.

Exploring the pond can take on three basic forms: 1) incidental psychic fallout from the pond; 2) dreams and nightmares from sleeping near the pond; and 3) physical interaction with the pond.

Incidental psychic fallout from the pond is what makes Whitechurch a bad place to live. The influence is subtle: good people tend to move away. Weak minded people

are tempted to do bad things. People err on the side of being lazy. Someone visiting for a day will not notice or be affected, but anyone staying more than a few days can feel that there is just something...wrong. Of course, by this time, they have drunk the water, tainted by the emanations from the old quarry pond.

People who fall asleep near the old quarry pond, or who lose SAN from encounters at the pond, should be treated to nightmares. These can vary, but should strike some basic themes and cost 0/1 SAN. Dreams and nightmares encountered might follow a progression, the last of which amounts to a clue.

- ☠ Drowning in the pond, being unable to escape, while unseen men whoop and yell "dunk the witch!"
- ☠ tying a noose, wrapping the rope around itself 13 times while a church bell rings, and then slowly climbing the stairs in a steeple; the dream ends when your neck breaks at the end of the rope, but you seem to be a very young girl;
- ☠ looking up from the bottom of the pond as a young couple necks on the shore, and then rising slowly, dragging the young man into the water



with foul, rotting hands as the woman screams;

- ✘ a witches' sabbat, around a bonfire at a hut in the woods, with cultists in red robes and hoods, presided over by a tall man with unnaturally ebon skin, burning eyes, and a slightly antiquated manner of dress (including a top hat), asking the dreamer to sign a book in blood. He appears from a shadow in the forest, and glides toward the bonfire (SAN loss 1/1d2);
- ✘ and finally, at the same place as the witches' sabbat dream, this time in the light of day, a hut is being built by an old woman on top of an ancient looking, black stone protruding from the top of a hill. A person who undergoes this dream feels drawn to a specific hill overlooking the old quarry pond to the east.

Physical interaction with the pond amounts to asking to get hurt. It lies within a deep, circular pit, 30' feet down to the surface of the green, oily, slightly luminescent murk. It is sentient and aware of everything that happens within a line of sight of it. It is evil, angry, and wants vengeance against humanity in general and the townsfolk in particular. The pond cannot really be hurt or fought, but with

a POW vs. POW check using its POW of 20, it can hypnotize a person into a fugue state within sight of its shores. Each effort costs it 1 magic point, and it can stupefy numerous people at a time. Allow a victim a second POW vs. POW check to snap out of it whenever damage is done or a shock is received. The pond generally only tries to do this when a victim is alone, however. Victims remember nothing that occurred while in their fugue. Of course, by the time that damage is done or a shock occurs, someone might have taken a lethally deep breath of the foul, soupy water, or be at the end of a noose, or be in the clutches of the corpse of the witch.

Alternatively, the pond can force someone to fall asleep under the same parameters, subjecting them to the thematic nightmares discussed above. In addition, the pond can animate, as a waterlogged, oozing zombie, the skeletal corpse of the witch for its purposes. Her body normally lies on the bottom of the pond, invisible through the green murk. Anyone diving into the pond is at serious risk of first being stunned into a fugue state, and then drowned by the zombie. Such victims add to the pool (pardon the pun) of available zombies for the old quarry pond to use.

POND ZOMBIE

STR 15 CON 15 SIZ 10 INT 15*
POW 01 DEX 09 HP 13 Move: 6"

Attacks: *Maul* 50%, *Damage* 1d6 +1d4 db.
Grapple 50%

Armor: Impaling weapons do 1 point only; other physical weapons do ½ damage. Spells work normally.

Skills: *Rise Silently From The Water Right Behind You*, 80% (gains a round of surprise attack).

SAN Loss: 1/1d18.

Notes: Only thorough and complete destruction of the corpse outside of the pond will prevent it from slowly reforming in the murk of the pond. Anyone who drowns in the pond can likewise be reanimated to do the pond's bidding, with identical statistics, unless their body is retrieved and thoroughly disposed of.

* Acts with the INT of the pond itself.

THE DEVIL'S HOPSTONE

Aerial reconnaissance (Critical *Spot Hidden*, attempted once per hour) or sufficient time searching (Critical *Luck* roll, attempted once per day per investigator) might reveal a collapsed, long overgrown ruined shack about a mile away from the old quarry pond. It is on top of a hill, and no clear trail leads there. People wandering in the area without a clear idea (or an inspiration) as to where they are going tend to wander in circles no matter how hard they try not to. *Cthulhu Mythos* research, as noted above, more reliably leads to this place, as does the last pond-inspired dream.

The shack is built on top of a black colored stone "outcropping" which, on close examination, is actually made of ancient, weathered cut and fitted blocks. An *Archaeology* check suggests that the blocks are extremely old, too old to belong to any known pre-Columbian civilization.

While there is about 20 years of overgrowth to clear away, underneath are the ruins of a small cabin built on top of the stone blocks. What's underneath the blocks? Well, to find out you'd have to dig away blocks for a very long while, a hundred feet into the earth or more, but once you got the first few courses of stone up,

you'd start feeling watched from all sides. SAN loss 0/1. After that, if you kept going, you'd develop a pathological obsession with uncovering whatever lies beneath. SAN loss 1/1d3. Eventually, you'd come to a Cyclopean stairway spiraling deep into the Earth, and feel compelled to descend into the darkness. Anyone who goes down them should simply never return.

The obsessive and paranoid feelings subside when the blocks are replaced. In fact, even though this place is within sight of the old quarry pond, people sleeping nearby are not bothered by its dream sendings as long as the blocks remain in place.

Hidden beneath a loose floorboard in the witches' shack itself, inside a locked metal box, is a musty old copy of Rev. Ward Phillips' *Thaumaturgical Prodigies in the New England Canaan*, a *Mythos* tome which focuses on witches, warlocks and other Colonial era and New England wickedness. SAN loss 1d3/1d6, +4% to *Cthulhu Mythos*, 8 weeks to study, and the following spells recommended in this copy: *Contact Narlato*, *Eibon's Wheel of Mist*. Also in the box is an enchanted sacrificial silver dagger, with curious and suspicious stains at the base of the blade (counts as a magical weapon).

Researching the Devil's Hopstone in *Thaumaturgical Prodigies*, specifically, reveals that it is believed to merely be the top of some unfathomably old structure erected during "the time of those who came before, and will come again." Its stones are said to be enchanted, to "Seal the Great Toad In" and guard the frail human psyche against "the Madness that lies Beneath." This made it a popular place to hold witches' sabbats, because it was easier there to "put down that which they had called up." In game terms, the Devil's Hopstone is a safe zone from dream-based magic, and those in physical contact with it gain +20% to any chances to *Dismiss* or *Bind* a *Mythos* being.

SUICIDE SOLUTIONS

On the night of April 30th, the townspeople of Whitechurch organize a vigil. Everyone is told to lock their doors and stay inside. That night, the church itself is shut up tight, and a group of town elders, including Rev. Bell, start a vigil fire, singing hymns, serving coffee and generally trying to keep everyone awake.

As midnight approaches, however, a thick, low lying fog, slightly green and luminescent, rolls into town from the direction of the old quarry pond. On this night, anyone who has been thoroughly exposed

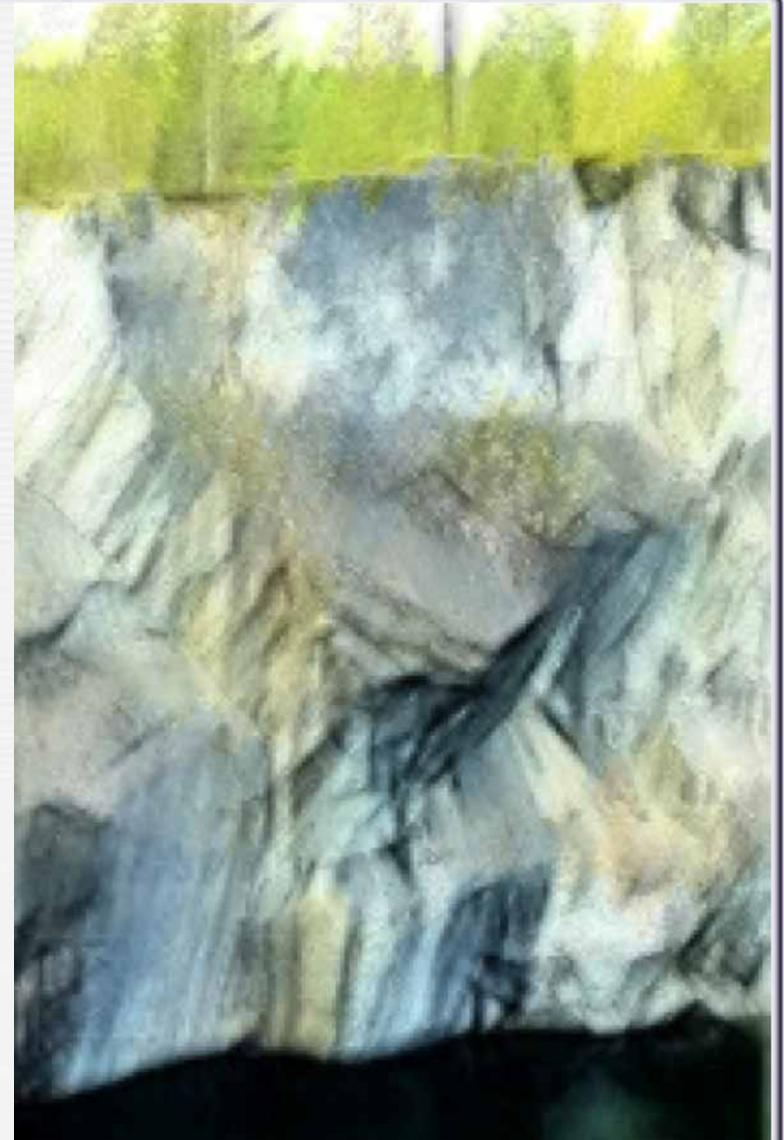
to the local water table must make a POW x1 check or lapse into a fugue state from which they cannot be aroused. This means that most of the town is either asleep or in a fugue state as midnight approaches, whether they want to be or not. The investigators, or other recent arrivals, should be allowed POW vs. POW checks, and are otherwise subject to the pond's normal fugue state rules. One of the handy, ensorcelled townsfolk, ideally one of the rough-necks from twenty years ago or a family member of theirs, promptly marches right up the stairs to the steeple and hangs himself or herself. Interference by any investigators must deal with any pond zombies that the pond can muster, which shamble into town in support.

The pond is capable of using deception and misdirection to accomplish its goal; it might send one townsfolk to the front door with a noose around his neck, wait for a reaction from any investigators, worry them with the pond zombie(s), and then send another victim into the church through the back entrance.

Seeing the vast bulk of the town lapse into a fugue state, even out of sight of the pond itself as eerie green mist seeps in, costs 1/1d3 SAN. Failing to prevent the suicide despite every effort costs 1/1d6 SAN. Preventing the suicide despite the pond's efforts gains a reward of 1d3 SAN.

Solving the problem of the old quarry pond and its baleful influence requires both a great deal of manpower and a couple of steam shovels, or a clever realization. If the Devil's Hopstone protects against baleful psychic influences, what happens if you throw some of its stones into the old quarry pond? Well, initially the pond reacts violently, sends forth any zombies it has on a murderous rampage, and tries to put everyone in sight in a fugue state and have them walk into the pond to drown. But if the zombies can be put down and the pond can be retreated from, it begins to churn and burble and scream (literally). In about a day, the pond settles down. Foul contents separate, float to the surface, and finally begin to decompose. The curse is then lifted. Achieving the same result without the use of magic would be a monumental dredging and draining operation, resulting in several deaths during construction, but would ultimately accomplish the same end.

Of course, weakening the wards of the Devil's Hopstone may have unintended consequences someday....



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What's eatin' you?

FROM HELL TO HOLLOWAY ROAD



A Scenario
By Linden Dunham
For Hot War®

INTRODUCTION

From Hell to Holloway Road is set in February 1963 with most of the action taking place in the North London neighbourhood that was home to Joe Meek, visionary record producer, electronics genius and sometime occultist. It uses some elements of the Cthulhu Mythos and could easily be played as a *Call of Cthulhu*® scenario. A detailed discussion of the Mythos as it exists in the universe of Hot War is beyond the scope of this scenario, but the creatures unleashed by the war could include such entities as Hunting Horrors, Dimensional Shamblers, Star Vampires, and Shoggoths (the Servitor described in the Hot War book bears more than a passing resemblance to the latter). Biotech monstrosities like Creeps, Bayonet Troops and Runners might be the product of contact with the Mi-Go (acting through intermediaries or directly). Post war, the stars may not be right, but the world has become a more accommodating place for the races of the Mythos: There's plenty for Ghouls to eat, Deep Ones are beginning to reassert themselves in coastal areas, and the Fungi From Yoggoth can at last conduct their mining operations without elaborate subterfuge. Meanwhile, isolated pockets of survivors are forced to enter into symbiotic relationships with the likes of Shub-Niggurath,

Glaaki, and Yidhra purely to survive, providing worship in return for the deity's protection. These unfortunates soon discover that the patronage of an Outer God or Great Old One comes at a heavy price, and that perhaps there are worse things than dying. SSG missions into areas where the Mythos holds sway are sure to be highly dangerous and the assigned personnel will, at the very least, end up wishing they had stayed in London. The city of course has its own terrors...

GM'S BACKGROUND

Joe Meek was born in Newent, Gloucestershire in 1929. He showed a talent for electronics at an early age and is believed to have constructed the region's first working television. Called up for national service he was conscripted into the Royal Air Force where he trained as a radar operator. After leaving the RAF he worked in a number of jobs that enabled him to develop his interest in electronics and music recording before setting up his own production company, based at number 304 Holloway Road in North London. Meek converted number 304 into a home studio. From there he produced a steady stream of singles with various bands and session musicians, often using unorthodox recording techniques to get the sound he wanted. He had two



notable hits in the early sixties: “Johnny Remember Me”—co-written by practising psychic Geoff Goddard and sung by actor John Leyton—which was number one in the hit parade for eight weeks in 1961, followed by the unearthly instrumental “Telstar” which occupied the number one spot when the Hot War began in October 1962.

Meek survived the war but the things he saw during the Battle of London left him traumatised and suffering from severe mental illness. With many of his friends dead or displaced, he became a recluse, locking himself away in his flat for days at a time as he worked with his recording equipment and occult books. Meek possessed a strong belief in “the other side” and in the past had attended séances attempting to contact dead musicians, including Buddy Holly. His home experiments were intended to create a machine that could bridge the divide between this world and the next, allowing communication and possibly even travel, between the two. Initially, he was frustrated by the rationing of electricity but after examining the blueprints in one of his esoteric volumes he was able to construct “the translator” a device powered by occult energy and designed to contact those living in other planes of existence.

Meek’s first successful use of the translator resulted in contact with the Denizens of the Gulf of S’glhuo. The Denizens are an unusual race, being composed of, and inhabiting, a realm of pure sound. The translator allowed Meek to perceive them as corporeal but it also allowed the Denizens to see him. Although the Denizens hadn’t been bothered by either side’s gate machines during the war they harboured a strong dislike of humanity: Their last contact with the human race was in 1958 when several of them were killed by a monster unleashed in their home dimension during an amateur experiment by a group of Gloucestershire university students. Unwilling to risk a repeat of that incident the Denizens used their own occult machinery to dispatch several of their number with orders to destroy the human machine and kill its operator.

The Denizens materialised in corporeal form via the translator inside Joe Meek’s flat. Their sudden appearance terrified Meek who grabbed a shotgun and fired wildly at the creatures before fleeing out into the night. As well as killing one of the Denizens, Meek’s shotgun blast also hit the translator machine damaging it sufficiently to render it inoperative, stranding the rest of the Denizens on this side of the dimensional gateway.

The remaining creatures have taken up residence in number 304 from where they sally forth at night, stalking the streets of Holloway scavenging for food and trying to scrounge components to repair the translator so that they can return to the Gulf. To date they have had little success and their numbers have been further reduced after one of them was killed by a “citizen’s patrol.” They are also about to become the target of an SSG investigation...

SCENE I: THE BRIEFING

LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The briefing takes place in a pokey room at SSG headquarters in the former Down Street Tube Station. It is given by Detective Chief Inspector Nick Bradley, a former Metropolitan Police officer, now one of SSG’s liaison officers who manages relations with the amalgamated London force. He starts by telling the PCs that the previous evening a police patrol in the Holloway Road area intervened to stop a mob of local people assaulting a man they had cornered in an alley off the main road. The police officers initially thought that the mob was administering some vigilante justice to a trespassing foreigner, possibly a Soviet infiltrator. Although the attackers were swiftly disarmed and arrested this came too late for their victim who remained mo-



tionless on the ground, evidently seriously injured or dead. An officer attempting to administer first aid received a shock: The victim wasn't human, being abnormally tall with blue scaly skin and possessing long fingers resembling tentacles.

When the creature's assailants were questioned at nearby Hornsey Road police station they claimed to be a citizen patrol formed under the auspices of the Islington Vigilance Committee. The committee's Holloway district representative had received several reports from local people about strange looking men skulking around the streets at night, acting in a suspicious manner and plainly being up to no good. Last night was the first time the citizen patrol had encountered one of the miscreants but the arrested men all seem to be of the view that there is more than one active in the area. The PCs' task is to ascertain whether this is the case, and if so, neutralise any threat the creatures may pose to both the Holloway district and the city at large.

Bradley finishes by saying: "The back room boys would like one of the blue bugers alive if you can manage it, but don't go risking your necks unnecessarily" He suggests that the PCs start by visiting the mortuary at Whittington hospital where

the creature's corpse is currently being stored, followed by Hornsey Road police station to interview the local cops, as well as the citizen patrol members who are still in custody pending charges.

WHAT HAPPENS

Once the PCs have drawn any necessary equipment they are allocated a Jeep as transport, a battered looking GAZ-69 captured from Soviet forces, its red star still visible under a hastily applied layer of khaki paint.

SCENE 2: THE MORTUARY

LOCATION DESCRIPTION

Whittington Hospital – a sprawling hospital complex originally dating from the mid-1800s but extended several times since then. The hospital lies at the north west end of Holloway Road where it runs into Highgate Hill. It is staffed by harassed looking doctors and nurses who seem to spend most of their time running from ward to ward. Groaning patients on trolleys fill the reception area, corridors and landings.

WHAT HAPPENS

It may be some time before the PCs can find anyone willing to stop long enough

to direct them to the mortuary. When they finally get there they are met by the pathologist, Dr Clifford, a grey, bloodless looking man in late middle age. Although emphatically not the excitable type he becomes rather animated when the PCs tell him they are here to look at the non-human cadaver found off Holloway Road. By the time he slides open the draw containing the corpse he is almost enthusiastic. Dr Clifford claims to have seen some of the biological weapons deployed in the war but thinks the blue skinned reptilian creature lying in the drawer is something else again. There's no sign of the artificial components that feature in Soviet mobile biological systems, like the subcutaneous antenna found in Creeps for example. Clifford believes that the corpse is an example of a genuine alien race but one that is very different from homo sapiens. The body contains organs the functions of which he can only guess at. He shows the PCs a cone shaped organ in the creatures neck which he thinks resembles the innards of a stereo speaker but is composed of biological matter. Possibly it's used for communication? Dr Clifford mentions one other detail: The alien was found to be clutching a couple of radio valves in its right hand when it died. Could it perhaps be trying to effect repairs



From Hell to Holloway Road



on a broken radio? If so who or what is it trying to contact?

SCENE 3: LOCAL FACTORY

LOCATION DESCRIPTION

Hornsey Road police station, located on street lying a short distance east of Holloway Road but running parallel with it. The interior is dingy, the décor a drab mixture of institutional green and off white paintwork.

WHAT HAPPENS

The police are shown to the office of Inspector Gerald Harper who was in charge of the patrol that encountered the alien and its assailants. He is also the station commander and thus the senior police officer in the district. Although Harper has been told to expect the team's arrival he expresses some surprise that the SSG are interested in the case. He regards it as a purely local matter which he and his men are quite capable of dealing with. As far as Harper is concerned the job is to mop up the remnants of a low level Soviet biological weapon incursion while preventing the local population from taking the law into their own hands.

Harper will co-operate, grudgingly, with the PCs giving an account of how the crea-

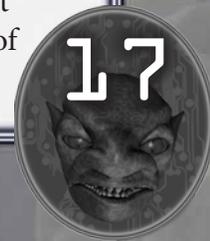
ture's corpse was recovered. On hearing that the PCs are to interview those arrested at the scene he suggests that they concentrate on the ringleader Charlie Foreman: "He's our local Vigilance Committee rep, but he's a Bolshie. Shouldn't be surprised if he's CDA."

The PCs are allocated an interview room in which to speak with Foreman. When brought up from the cells he is initially uncooperative demanding that the PCs "fetch me a brief. I've still got rights you know". He also seems to be suffering from partial deafness and will ask the PCs to repeat their questions several times. The PCs may conclude that his is just being awkward rather than suffering from any real ailment, although Inspector Harper can confirm that the condition is genuine. Two other men arrested with Foreman have the same condition. They have been examined by a doctor who has diagnosed a perforated eardrum.

Foreman appears largely immune from threats of legal retribution. Without making any personal admission, he may even point out that a charge of murder requires the victim to be human, which the creature killed on Holloway Road plainly wasn't. Foreman laughs at the idea of being charged with any lesser offence. e.g. breach

of curfew "I was doing my civic duty, and you know it. Charge me, and you'll have to nick every committee member in London. You going to do that? Didn't think so."

In the event that Foreman is persuaded to talk he starts by assuming the PCs are aware of the borough vigilance committees, formed to protect the interests of the civilian population. Foreman is a former bus driver and TGWU shop steward. He has socialist views and the Islington Vigilance Committee is mostly composed of people with a leftist bent. It is closely allied with the Trade Union movement, in particular the faction opposed to the government. Foreman himself has little time for the police and believes in dealing with law and order issues through direct action carried out by the local citizenry. When he started receiving reports from Holloway residents about prowlers being seen in the area after dark he formed a citizen patrol to deal with the problem. On the second night Foreman and his men got lucky: At just after 5 pm they heard a commotion from the Holloway Road Market. A man in an overcoat and trilby hat had seized several items from a stall selling radio and television components. The citizen's patrol gave chase and cornered the thief in an alleyway. "He turned to face us and let out this God-awful shriek, sounded like one of



those bloody Stokes in the war before the last one. Fair stopped me in its tracks it did. Luckily some of the boys weren't so bothered by it and they waded in and gave him a few slaps until he stopped. Then the old bill arrived."

If the PCs don't get any joy with Foreman they can interview one or other of his associates who may prove more tractable.

SCENE 4: THE STREET

LOCATION DESCRIPTION

Holloway Road – a main thoroughfare running for a mile and half diagonally north west to south east. It forms part of the main A1 road into and out of London. Many of its buildings were shop premises but the majority of these have closed since the war, and are either boarded up or converted to residential use. There are still some pubs open selling home brewed beer and moonshine. Pre-war alcoholic beverages—"the good stuff"—are in short supply and command astronomical prices. Much of Holloway Road's commercial activity takes place in The Market—a collection of open air stalls that line both sides of the street at its south-eastern end near the tube station. Foodstuffs form the bulk of the goods on offer: Home grown vegetables,

hoarded or stolen tinned goods, and meat of dubious provenance (frequently rat). A few stalls offer other items such as tools and clothing as well as odd pieces of bric-a-brac. Market transactions are often barter based.

There is a curfew in effect from 1800 to 0600, which is enforced by the army and the local police. In reality much of the enforcement is done by the latter army patrols are infrequent. The police are less trigger happy than the military, and will usually take steps to establish a person's identity and their reason for being out after dark. Offenders will be cautioned or fined by having their rations docked. More severe sanctions are only meted out to repeat offenders or those found to be abroad for the purposes of committing crime.

WHAT HAPPENS

The PCs look for clues or talk to Holloway residents in the hope of eliciting information that will help them with their case. PCs who take the time to talk with locals, look around the neighbourhood, and/or make creative use of their agendas and relationships should eventually find their way to number 304 Holloway Road and the source of the alien incursion as well as locating Joe Meek. A list of possible encounters with simple NPC types drawn

from pages 134-135 of the rulebook are detailed below:

War Blinded Schoolchild: He lives with his family in an over crowded terraced house on a street connecting Holloway Road and Hornsey Road. Five nights ago while in bed he heard a gunshot in the main road, followed by the sound of a front door slamming and then running in the street. Such sounds aren't uncommon in the neighbourhood e.g. when the police or army shooting at looters and the boy's parents told him to forget about it.

Refugee in Hiding: Will be afraid that the PCs are going to arrest him and send him to a camp. Has been living a hand to mouth existence since arriving in London several months ago: Sleeping rough, surviving on what food he can beg or steal. Life has become noticeably more difficult in the last few days with the appearance of the vigilance committee patrols who prowl the neighbourhood seemingly bent on violence towards strangers. The refugee has seen the Denizens, but not up close. He saw two in a derelict house in Tufnell Park Road picking through the remains of a television set. There was something sinister about them that he couldn't quite put his finger on, but which made him slip quietly away rather than engage them in conver-

sation. He believes the Denizens may be foreign refugees, or possibly Soviet infiltrators looking for spare parts for one of their infernal machines.

Selfish Black Marketer: Usually holds court in one of the pubs on Holloway Road. Before the war he was a local gangster with ambitions to make the big time. He blackmailed Joe Meek over his homosexuality aiming to acquire a share of the producer's business and grab a share of the profits. The war put paid to that scheme. Meek stopped making records and the gangster turned his attention to the black market. Nonetheless he knows where Meek lives and also knows of the producer's interest in the occult and his propensity for visiting Highgate cemetery.

Given his greedy nature the black marketer will want something from the PCs in return for any assistance he gives. If the PCs lose patience with him he has a cadre of toughs he can call on to assist him in any resulting conflict.

Local Gravedigger: Employed at Highgate Cemetery. Has had encounters with Joe Meek, before and after the war. Refers to Meek as "that record producer bloke" who would come down to the cemetery with his strange friends and hold séances. More recently has visited alone but

still seems interested in occult ceremonies. The Gravedigger has to throw him out on a couple of occasions.

Professional Rat Catcher: Was checking his traps down on the main road near the market site. Claims to have seen a man in a raincoat, standing in a doorway and eating a rat. "Was chewing on it raw he was, skin and all. You're supposed to cook 'em first." The rat catcher then noticed that the man's fingers were abnormally long and that had blue scaly skin. The Rat Catcher beat a hasty retreat thinking he'd encountered one of the monsters that the Soviets used during the war. "Still a fair few of them knocking around isn't there?"

Suspicious and Sneaky Citizen's Defence Army Member: The PCs encounter a Vigilance Committee Patrol led by Charlie Foreman's younger brother, Clive. They are hostile to the PCs, seeing them as representatives of remote and uncaring central authority. They are not violent though. Armed as they are with an assortment knives and coshes, they are massively outgunned by the SSG team. However, Clive is a militant CDA member and he along with the rest of his cell may reappear later on. They will be armed with pistols and shotguns taken from nearby secret cache. Determined to strike a blow for the cause,

as well as make a name for themselves, they try to ambush and kill the SSG team.

Bitter and Lonely Old Man: Runs a stall selling electrical bits and bobs, repaired radios, the odd television. Unfortunately with power rationed radio and television has been severely curtailed and what broadcasts there are tend to be propaganda anyway. Business is not good. To make matters worse the old man's one reliable regular customer has disappeared. He used to drop by every couple of days but hasn't been by in over a week. The man, whose name is Joe, would buy various components for his recording studio or so he claimed. With the rationing situation there's no way Joe could be operating a studio without the authorities' coming down on him like a ton of bricks. Perhaps he's got his own power supply?

Joe was the victim of the attempted theft by the Denizen which ultimately led to the PCs assignment. He claims not have got a good look at the thief and can only say that he was tall, thin and all wrapped up in an overcoat, scarf and hat.

Gang of Young Thugs: A group of men in their late teens and early twenties doing their best to keep the pre-war Teddy Boy looking alive despite their patched and worn drape jackets and drain pipe trou-



sers. They won't be inclined to help the PCs and may see them as easy targets for a robbery and a beating. If suitably cowed and asked the right questions they tell the PCs that they used to hang around outside "that poof record producer's house" and have a laugh with the people going in and out (i.e. intimidate them). The gang can direct the PCs to no 304 Holloway Road.

As can be seen some encounters offer a quick resolution to the adventure, others enable the SSG team to piece things together gradually. GM's will doubtless know which encounters best suit their players' style and character agendas.

OPTIONAL EXTRA

The PCs encounter one of the Denizens. It is looking for food, rummaging through some dustbins in the rear yard of a pub on Holloway Road. As the Denizens confine their activities to after dark the encounter takes place at night time. This combined with the fact that the denizen is dressed in stolen human clothing—an overcoat and hat—makes it difficult at first for the PCs to see who or what they are dealing with. It is only when they get up close that the Denizen's true nature becomes apparent. If challenged the Denizen will flee from the yard and try to make its way back to number 304.

SCENE 5: NUMBER 304 HOLLOWAY ROAD

LOCATION DESCRIPTION

A narrow 3 storey building composed of a ground floor shop premises with the upper floors given over to residential accommodation. The shop formerly sold leather goods but is now boarded up. The proprietors of the shop and owners of the building are a Mr and Mrs Shenton. They have been listed as missing since the end of the war.

The upper levels of the building are currently occupied by the remnants of the Denizens' expedition (equal in number to the SSG team). During the hours of daylight the Denizens are resting or trying to effect repairs to Meek's translator device. In the evening one or two of them slip out of the building to scavenge for food and more parts for the translator.

The ground floor is derelict and contains nothing of interest. If the PCs waste time breaking into here the Denizens upstairs will be alerted. Meek's flat has its own separate entrance from the street which opens onto a hall containing a stairs to the upper floors of the building.

The first floor contains a reception area, office and living room and kitchen.

The second floor is the recording studio and control room. The studio contains an organ, a piano and the translator. At first sight the translator resembles a large television with a two foot wide screen. Closer inspection reveals several wires connecting the screen unit to what looks to be a megaphone along with a misshapen blue glass bulb mounted to the rear of unit. Other wires lead to a collection of crystals, induction coils and tubes arranged between the television unit and the wall separating the studio and control room. It is apparent that the device has been badly damaged; a hole has been blasted through the screen causing extensive damage to the unit's interior. The translator is surrounded by an odd assortment of electronic components—evidence the Denizens' failed repair attempts.

Technically minded PCs will notice that the machine has no visible means of power.

The one other item of interest is a leather bound, folio format, book entitled "Revelations of Glaaki - Volume 9" which has been left on top of the organ. It is open at a page containing a series of diagrams that clearly depict the translator in various stages of construction. There are also comprehensive written instructions on how to build the device. The Denizens have been referring to the book but are handicapped





304 HOLLOWAY ROAD...THEN AS NOW...

by their not being able to read the text. The same chapter also contains instructions of for constructing another smaller device resembling a sounding board, and apparently intended for use as a sonic weapon in the event that those contacted via the translator should prove hostile. Meek has not built this though, perhaps expecting friendly contact or else relying on his shotgun in the event of trouble.

The upper floor is Meek's living quarters consisting of a bedroom and a couple of spare rooms. One of the spare rooms is full of tea chests containing tape recordings of various groups. Some of the tea chests have been opened and the tapes ripped out by the Denizens in their search for a means to repair the translator.

OPTIONAL EXTRA

A few of the tapes are recordings of Meek's occult experiments which might be of interest to the PCs and their SSG masters, or could give some indication of how the translator works.

WHAT HAPPENS

The Denizens have little liking for humanity and react violently to any attempt to forcibly remove them from the flat. One of them has commandeered Meek's shotgun

and will use it in any Action based conflict, potentially qualifying for a +2D10 tool bonus.

Although xenophobic towards humans the Denizens are an intelligent species and it might still be possible to reason with them. If so the PCs might be able assist them in the repair of the translator to allow them to return home. If the PCs have located Meek before visiting his home then he can assist with the repair attempt, considerably increasing its chance of success. Of course PC's individual agendas may prevent any accommodation with the aliens, particularly if those agendas involve the recovery of twisted technology and/or biological specimens for parent organisations.

Even if the PCs do manage to build a rapport with the Denizens a downbeat conclusion may still be possible as the violent, and noisy, destruction of the Translator has released a monster into the Gulf of S'glhuo. It waits in ambush until the Denizens return home before pouncing and killing them in gruesome fashion.

SCENE 6: HIGHGATE CEMETERY

LOCATION DESCRIPTION

The cemetery lies on either side of Swains Lane which is to the west of



Whittington Hospital. Neglected for many years, it has been brought back into use since the end of the war. It contains several mass graves and rushed burials take place there every day as many of those who lived through the Hot War succumb to sickness, starvation or otherwise meet an untimely end. The PCs may encounter the Grave Digger from Scene 4 again. He is busy at work but stopped to help them look for Joe Meek if they ask.

WHAT HAPPENS

Joe Meek can be found living with a few other transients in a small makeshift camp in an overgrown section of the older part of cemetery which lies west of Swains Lane. He is suffering from exposure and malnutrition and is barely coherent. Patient PCs can get him to tell the story of his need to contact “the other side”, his construction of the translator from the diagrams in the Revelations of Glaaki and the attack by the Denizens of S’glhuo. If told that that the Denizens are gone he begs to be taken home. The PCs must then decide if they can allow him to remain a large. A highly disturbed man capable of building a home made twisted technology devices is a threat to public safety. If the PCs do take Meek into custody there will much bureaucratic wrangling over his fate. The RAF will be

especially keen to conscript him back into service so they can make use of his talent for electronics and esoteric machinery.

OPTIONAL EXTRA

It is at this point that Clive Foreman and his CDA cell arrive on the scene providing a nasty surprise to the PCs who may have thought that their mission was finally over.

NPCS

These creatures have been given humanoid form by their passage through the translator. They are still manifestly quite alien in appearance and cannot venture abroad in daylight without attracting unwelcome attention. When going out at night they disguise themselves with clothing taken from Joe Meek’s wardrobe.

The Denizens’ leader possesses a metal sphere a little larger than a tennis ball. It has numerous strange buttons and diodes set into the outer casing. This is a timed explosive meant to be left behind once the Denizens have dealt with Joe Meek. Primed with a suitable delay it allows the Denizens to return to the Gulf of S’glhuo via the translator before exploding and destroying the machine to prevent its re-use by humans. Of course if the PCs capture this piece of alien technology and start fiddling

with it there is every chance it will explode in their faces. Suggest an Insight based conflict versus 5D10 for a PC to determine the object’s purpose, and to operate it safely.

SOURCES/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Telstar (Dir: Nick Moran, 2008) Lively biopic of Joe Meek

The Plain of Sound by Ramsey Campbell, short story available in the expanded Cold Print anthology.

Ye Booke of Monstres II by Scott David Aniolowski and others.

The Long Firm by Jake Arnott. 1960s gangster tale featuring Joe Meek in a supporting role.

WEBSITES

Joe Meek – Wikipedia Entry: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Meek

Endorsed as “comprehensive” by the Joe Meek society. Contains a biography of the man plus information on his various recordings and some discussion of his cultural impact.

Danny’s Passion: <http://www.dannypassion.webeden.co.uk/>



Website dedicated to Cornish group that recorded at 304 Holloway Road. Very useful description of the premises, with floor plans.

Highgate Cemetery – A Victorian Valhalla: <http://www.highgatecemetery.org.uk/>

Very informative site about the cemetery, with some highly evocative photos.

Entering “Holloway Road N7” into Google maps (<http://maps.google.co.uk>) provides a general idea of the area’s geography. The street view feature is also useful, but it needs to be borne in mind that the neighbourhood’s present day appearance can be very different to how it was in the early 1960s, even without the devastation wrought by the Hot War; e.g. Shop fronts and facades are a lot more garish, while both Hornsey Road police station and Whittington hospital have been extensively modernised.



JOE MEEK

Visionary Record Producer

Attributes

Action: 2

Influence: 3

Insight: 3

Traits

- (+) Genius with electronics
- (+) Charismatic
- (+) Occult Knowledge
- (-) Mentally Ill
- (-) Homosexual – illegal in 1963



INSPECTOR GERALD HARPER

Local Copper

Attributes

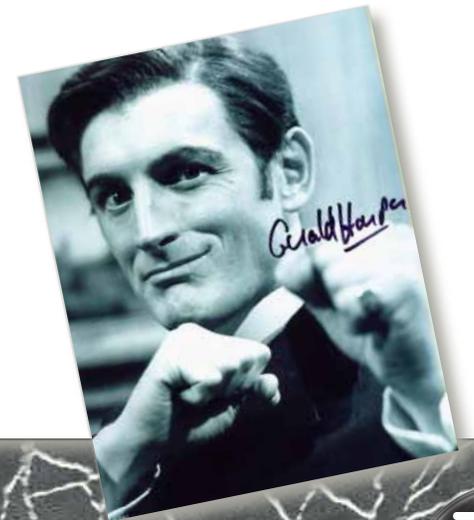
Action: 3

Influence: 3

Insight: 2

Traits

- (+) Intimate knowledge of the local area
- (+) Can spot trouble at a glance
- (-) This is my manor



NPCs

CHARLIE FOREMAN

Vigilance Committee Rep

Attributes

Action: 3

Influence: 3

Insight: 2

Traits

(+) We can handle our own problems

(+) Knows how to motivate people

(-) Impulsive - jumps in with both feet



CLIVE FOREMAN

CDA Firebrand

Attributes

Action: 4

Influence: 3

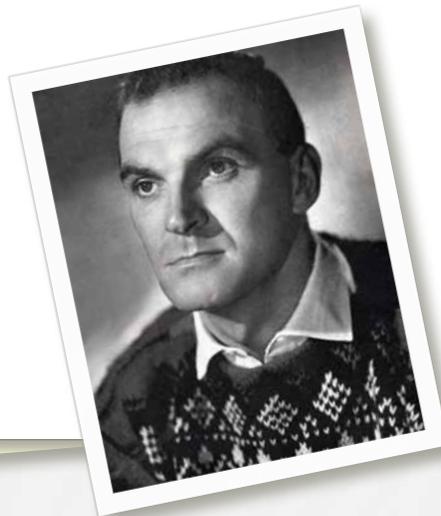
Insight: 1

Traits

(+) Self styled man of action

(+) My CDA cell look up to me

(-) Violent dislike of authority



DENIZEN OF THE GULF OF S'GLHUO

Marooned Alien

Attributes

Action: 4

Influence: 3

Insight: 3

Traits

(+) Sonic attack

(+) Dexterous

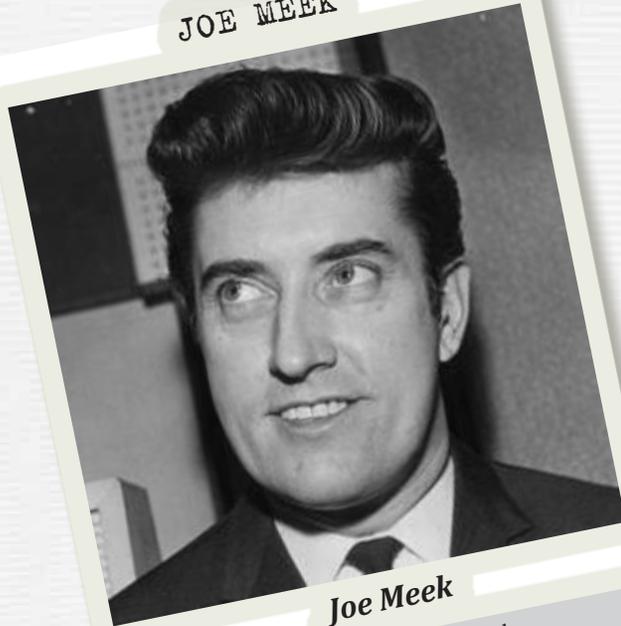
(+) Telepathic

(-) Stranger in a strange land

(-) Hatred of humanity



JOE MEEK



Joe Meek

Birth name	Robert George Meek
Also known as	Robert Duke, Peter Jacobs
Born	5 April 1929 Newent, Gloucestershire
Died	3 February 1967 (aged 37) London, England
Genres	Pop Rock
Occupations	Record producer, Songwriter
Instruments	Recording studio
Years active	1954–1967
Labels	Triumph (co-owner), Pye Nixa, Piccadilly, Decca, Ember, Oriole, Columbia, Top Rank, HMV, Parlophone USA: Tower, London, Coral

Dig that
crazy hair!

[Telstar] ...was an immediate hit after its release, remaining in the UK pop charts for 25 weeks, five of them at number one, and in the American charts for 16 weeks. "Telstar" was the first U.S. number one by a British group. Up to that point, and since World War II, there had only been three British names that topped the U.S. chart: in May 1962 "Stranger on the Shore" by clarinetist Mr. Acker Bilk; the second was "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" by Laurie London (1958), whilst the first was "Auf Wiederseh'n Sweetheart" by Vera Lynn (1952).

Chart (1962)	Peak Position
UK Singles Chart	1
Belgian Singles Chart	1
Dutch Singles Chart	3
German Singles Chart[8]	6
Irish Singles Chart	1
Norwegian Singles Chart	3
South African Singles Chart	1
US Billboard Hot 100	1
US Billboard Black Singles	5

From Wikipedia:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telstar_\(song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telstar_(song))





Zombiall

Zombies, a Shopping Center, Lizard Men and Chainsaws -

What more do you need?

A large multistory mall is the latest refuge for the characters between adventures they have had. Heading into the mall, decrepit and rundown, but still a place to get some more needed supplies like medicinal supplies and spare clothing that does not have stains or bullet holes in them. So the characters should be steered into this multistoried shopping mall. It has seen better decades.

However this mall is a little different. Inside is a small group of lizard based ETs or things, that are about to take it over and convert all the humans inside into mind controlled zombies followed by using them for some unknown purpose transporting them in an impossible fashion out of the mall until it will be emptied and devoid of sentient life. The PCs arrive a few minutes before the lizard types do and they get to be involved in an assault on the mind and body.

For some reason, no answers are given; the PCs will not be targeted for control. If necessary rationalize it as the targeting control happened in the seconds before the PCs entered the mall, meaning they were not noticed and tagged for processing, so they are safe in that respect. Otherwise just shrug the shoulders when questioned by players.

OVERALL SETUP

There are multiple events that go on, with a strict timetable. Refer to the write-up for that.

Once the humans are processed (whatever that means), the Lizards will leave and the doors and windows go back to their natural strength/density and the player characters can leave the mall none the wiser as to what has just occurred. Then it is all done and over.

EVENT I

When it starts the doors all slam shut, the humans inside all stand stock still and frozen for 17 minutes, then they start to move in a single force.

They become like a human wave, always moving towards the lowermost level of the multistoried mall. If they actually touch a

A Dark Adventure
By CW Kelson III (Tad)
For Dark Conspiracy®

player character, or are touched, all become aware of that character and since they are not under control, they are immediately attacked. This attack will consist of all controlled humans within 100 feet. If necessary randomly determine how many are in this radius, a suggestion is 1D6 worth of humans per minute since the control has started. If the characters are following along it could become several hundred attackers all at once in the 'right' circumstances. Make it a whole lot, more than reasonable for the characters to handle to force them to run away. Once they are outside of about 100 feet of the pursuers they will break off and go back to shuffling at half speed towards the food court area.

Once the first 17 minutes of activity is over, all the humans that are controlled just stop moving entirely.

EVENT 2

Then 34 minutes later all the humans start moving once again. This time all towards the food court area. This is where the Lizard Types have now set up a processing station. What they are processing is unknown. All the humans move towards the food court and after 17 minutes of activity the ones in the food court all slump over unconscious. All those humans outside the

food court area drop over dead instead. They will become the animated corpses that make up the follow on waves.

Hand wave about how many make it in alive. There are about 300 humans of various sizes and ages in the mall when the take-over occurs. Figure that about 150 make it into the food court area and the rest all drop dead.

EVENT 3

After 170 minutes of processing the humans in the food court area are all gone. They just disappeared one at a time in a blink of an eye. If a PC is watching from outside the food court they can note as time passes, one by one the humans in the area just disappear. There is no rhyme, no pattern, it just happens. As stated this takes 170 minutes, at the end of which all 150 some humans are gone. The food court area is empty of life at 169 minutes, at 171 minutes after this process starts all the dead humans jerkily rise to their feet and start to move towards the main mall entrance where after 17 minutes of activity, they stop moving. There are about 150 scattered mostly by the food court, but some are trapped in fitting rooms, bathrooms, corners they couldn't make it around. The dead are pretty linear walkers. Then at 17

minute intervals the corpses will animate, move, and then stop. This will continue for 17 days total time. After the 17 days are over the Lizard Folk depart and the corpses all fall down dead for good.

Until then the mall doors are sealed. At this time the glass in the outer portions are all enhanced in some fashion, making them immune to all chemical/physical based attacks. But if the characters have energy weapons or ET weapons (why did they bring them into a mall for goodness sakes!), they can break out of the facility. Damage sufficient to destroy a Main Battle Tank (MBT) done to a single pane of glass or a door will be enough to shatter it. They could then leave if so desired.

The lizards are never seen, there are some weird flickering patterns in the kitchen areas of the various food vendors, but the players should be able to see nothing. If one of them is an empath, allow a difficult test of some appropriate Empathic Skill (Animal or Darkling Empathy are best) to be able to see the hidden Lizards. If so, in theory they could engage in direct combat.

There are 17 Lizards in total and if one is attacked, all will arrive within a few moments to attempt to swamp and overwhelm the player characters. Refer to the end section for notes on the Lizard Types.

STATS

Use normal weak NPC stats per your edition of the game for the Humans

Cut the speed in half for mind controlled ones

Once they are dead, then their speed is one fourth normal speed, with no morale or other similar checks to make. They still take the same amount of damage as if they were alive, once the damage exceeds the body capacity they fall into a heap of blood and gore still twitching like headless chickens do, but not moving. They do not stop twitching until the lizards leave the place after all the processing is complete.

Alternatively, use the Animator Zombies stats in DC rulebook to reflect the dead humans once they are made mobile. Reduce the move to 1/4/7 and Initiative to a 1 though in this case.

LIZARDS

These are a lizard like Darkling or ET race that has come to this mall to get supplies, raw materials, slaves, what ever they need living and dead human bodies for.



LIZARD ETs

Strength:	11	Education:	5	Move:	5 / 10 / 20
Constitution:	11	Charisma:	1	Skill/Dam:	2 / 2D6
Agility:	4	Empathy:	3	Hits:	13 / 25
Intelligence:	10	Initiative:	4	# Appear:	17*

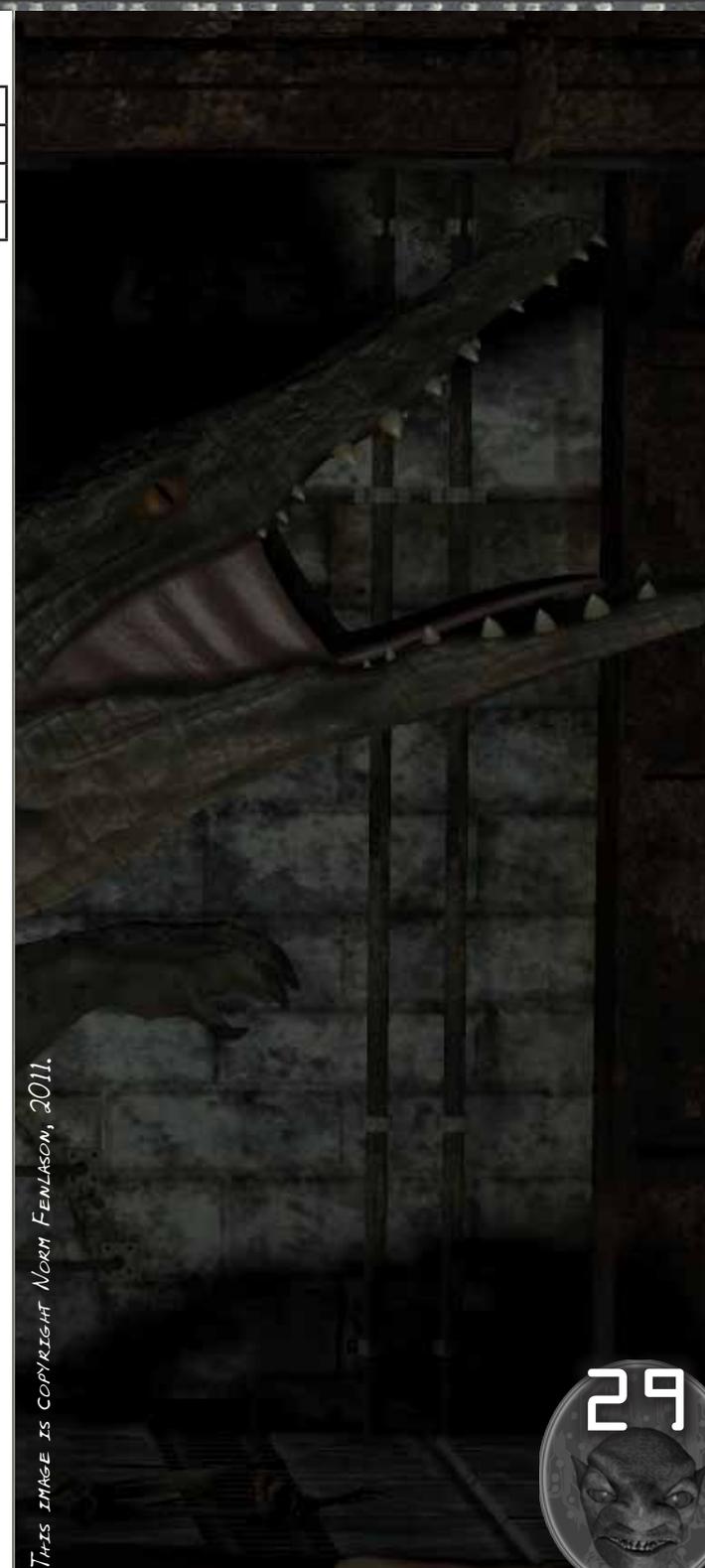
Special: Crystal Machine processing humans, Empathic Camouflage

Difficult Empathic Test to see the Lizard-like ETs.

Description: Standing between 7 foot and 7 and a half foot tall, thick body like a Gila Monster lizard, with an ochre brown mottled hide, wide lidless eyes the color of pewter with no pupils. Heavy 3 clawed hands and feet. They wear no clothing and they seem to have a single device, a large 10 ft by 10 ft crystal cube they are manipulating to their own ends. To destroy it will take damage equal to Hits: 100/200. The Lizard ETs will defend this to their deaths and beyond (the device can animate a dead Lizard ET body and continue to defend its self until damage equal to 15/30 to each reanimated Lizard ET body is done. The initiative drops to a 1 and move is cut in half when animated, but damage done is increased to the maximum on each successful hit (12 points).

DARK CONSPIRACY®

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The Cursed Cabin

A Horror Locale
By Dave Schuey
For All Systems

The old cabin stood deep in the woods, surrounded on all sides by the twisted and ancient growth that defined its existence. It was almost as if nature itself was trying to conceal the building. No animals made their homes there; there was scarcely a sound to be detected; even the soil around the place seemed dead. At night, if one cocked an ear, the souls of all who had departed this world within its walls could be heard...screaming."

UNREAL ESTATE

A long-standing tradition within cinematic horror is the Creepy Cabin in the Woods. From *Evil Dead* to *Ring*, this trope has been used again and again. The haunted house story goes back even further in literature. Its isolation, rugged surroundings, and impending sense of doom that can be found in such a setting make it the perfect horror adventure.

How the PCs arrive at the Cursed Cabin is a matter for each GM's campaign. Perhaps they were hired to investigate the place. Perhaps they are spending the night there on a dare, or to gain an inheritance. Perhaps the unlucky fools are just caught with a flat tire on a long journey. The possibilities are many, but if they regularly travel at all it should be little trouble to get them there.

It is difficult to approach, bounded as it is on two sides by sheer drops and a dangerous mountain climb on the other. The only approach is by crossing the river's rickety bridge.

HAUNTED HISTORY

The Cursed Cabin's history begins long before the cabin was even built. The ground upon which the cabin sits was consecrated to an evil deity by a mad tribesman thousands of years ago. Over the years many who sought the favor of this deity committed blood sacrifices on the site. Virtually every being that died on the spot has deposited their psychic imprint. Other's, trapped in an afterlife of torment, have broken through the veil and now exert their will upon the place.

In addition to the souls of victims, many of those who performed the sacrifices have been bound to the place as well. Rarely does traffic with evil end well. The place has been raided by angry villagers who have stoned, burned and hung what they thought was a madman, sorcerer or serial killer, only to add his malevolent energy to the place. The ground has been salted and priests have tried to bless it, but either their faith was insufficient or the evil too great for the ritual to completely solve the problem.



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In the 19th century a hermit by the name of Oswald Henry Niebling built the first permanent structure. He broke up the

large boulder he found there and used it as foundation material. Little did he know the countless people who had been sacrificed

upon that stone. His cabin was a one-room affair made from trees he had felled and milled by hand.

Oswald lived quietly in the place for twenty years, although he was tormented by horrible nightmares the entire time. He was not familiar with metaphysical ideas, and thus never considered that the place might be responsible. He simply thought he was going mad. Which in the end he did.

Oswald began abducting children from the nearest town, Easely, some thirty miles distant, and bringing them back to his home. There he did unspeakable things to them, before killing them. Towards the end he began to engage in cannibalism. The people of the town eventually decided he was to blame, though they had no evidence, and confronted him at the cabin. He would talk to them only in an unintelligible gibbering, until he barricaded himself inside. The people were not sure what to do, but as they laid siege, their anger and frustration were amplified by the place. Eventually they set the cabin ablaze with Oswald inside.

Afterward, the bones of a dozen children were found in the ashes, as were those of Oswald. The children's bones were collected and given Christian burial, while Oswald was left to nature.

In the early 20th century an inveterate gambler by the name of George

MacDonald won the land upon which the cabin once stood in a poker game. Of note, he was cheating. When he found the foundation of the cabin he decided that it would make the basis of a nice, secluded illegal gambling den. With the proceeds of several other unethical wins, he expanded the foundation and built the current cabin.

This structure has a kitchen, common area, two bedrooms, bathroom and root cellar. There is a small porch and a front and back door. George had electricity run out to the place from Easely, but the service is notoriously unreliable. To that end he eventually purchased a gasoline-powered generator.

Over the 12 years that George owned the cabin he hosted literally hundreds of poker games there. Often, local "women of the night" were brought in to provide entertainment to the invited gamblers. On more than one occasion, the women's lives ended at the hands of a drunken gambler on a losing streak. It goes without saying that George continued to cheat these men his entire life. It was something he was very good at, and he only became better with time.

But the psychic effects of the place took their toll on both host and guests. George became more brazen in his cheating, and

the guests became more suspicious. Where once George would cheat only during the biggest pot of the night, near the end he would win EVERY pot. His guests eventually began to suspect, but could not figure out how he was doing it. In actuality, it was the entity to which the site was dedicated that was showing George his opponent's cards within his mind. George, of course, did not know this, he thought he was psychic, but took advantage anyway.

Then one night a guest, James Henderson, recently returned from WWI, who had been drinking and losing a bit too much, grew furious. He drew his service revolver and shot George in the head. At that precise moment the power went out. The other gamblers rushed for the doors. Henderson fired blindly in the dark, but still managed to kill every other man in the place. Interestingly, he killed two men with one bullet. Of course, the evil power of the place was guiding his hand.

When the bodies were discovered days later, Henderson had slit his own throat and bled out in the bathtub.

The cabin stood vacant until 1955, when MacDonald's great nephew brought some college friends to the "haunted cabin". This was really just an excuse for drinking and sex, but Ian Bright had never believed the

tales his father told of the place anyway. The alcohol flowed freely and soon the young adults were engaged in every manner of debauchery they could imagine, and a few they could not, because they were being influenced by the evil power of the place.

Before the weekend had ended, Ian had murdered his three best friends, their girlfriends, his fiancé, and a local drifter who apparently just happened by. He used a variety of methods, including kitchen knives, a hunting rifle, and his bare hands. While his defense tried to have him merely committed, the severity of the crime caused the prosecution to push for the death penalty, which James received. During the trial he spoke only in a gibberish that would only have been recognizable to one of those who had confronted Oswald Niebling.

In the seventies, a paranormal researcher named Christian Halberd came across the tales of the cabin and received permission to mount an investigation. His team of four set up camp outside a 100-foot perimeter of the cabin and monitored it for several nights. While all experienced horrific dreams and “heard” screaming coming from the building, their cameras and audio recorders captured nothing. The lights in the cabin did flicker on and off, but the

electrical problems of the place had been well reported. They left with little more than they had come.

However, Christian Halberd returned a year later by himself, and unbeknownst to the owners of the property or his wife. He entered the cabin with a cassette tape recorder and a Super 8 camera and attempted to spend the night by himself. He was never heard from again.

This brings us to the present day, unless the GM wishes to add more unsettling events specific to his campaign.

Flora, Fauna and Fear

The Cursed Cabin is located about thirty miles into the local woods. It is approachable from only two directions, being blocked by a significant mountain on one side and a sheer drop off on the other. The flora for one mile in all directions has taken on a distinctively creepy appearance. The trees seem to hunch, are twisted, dark and ugly. The undergrowth is thick and roots jut out at odd angles. The danger of tripping is high.

Of fauna little can be said. Within one mile of the cabin there are no animals of any sort. Outside that, typical small animals for the region can be found, though

they shun the area of the cabin as if they can sense the evil. Attacks by larger predators are possible, but even they will not proceed into the area of the cabin.





LEGEND

- WINDOW
- DOOR
- STEPS

6 FEET

THE CURSED CABIN

A. The Bathroom: The bathroom rests on the original stone foundation laid by Oswald Niebling and is the focal point of much of the cabin's troubles. Here can be found the standard fixtures, sink with mirror, toilet and tub, all dating from George MacDonald's construction. They were the best he could buy at the time, but now are filthy and yellowed. The well serving the cabin is fouled, but if the electricity is operational the pump will provide dingy brown water. The toilet empties into a septic tank that is full to neat overflowing and will thus likely back up if it is used. Ian Bright murdered his fiancé in the tub and it has never been adequately cleaned.

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| <i>Paranormal Events:</i> | 1 The dingy water may turn to blood at any time. |
| | 2 The body of Ian Bright's fiancé may appear in the tub. |
| | 3 The toilet may animate into a toothy, carnivorous demon when it is used. |
| | 4 The mirror may show visions of the observer as they might appear when dead. |
| | 5 The door may jam unexpectedly. |
| | 6 The overhead bathroom bulb may produce red light mysteriously. |

B. Bedroom: This bedroom contains a double bed and nightstand. The sheets have not been changed or cleaned in over fifty years and have begun to dry rot. The peeling floral wallpaper might have once been cheery, but now just seems seedy. If closely examined, the design on the wallpaper has faded to resemble some sort of demonic face. Two ladies of the evening were murdered in this room, as was one of Ian's buddies and his girlfriend. They were strangled. One of the gamblers killed by James Henderson, while shot in the hallway, died in the room as well.

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| <i>Paranormal Events:</i> | 1 An attractive woman may beckon a male into the room for sex. During the act or if the offer is refused before consummation, the woman will instantly transform into a zombie-like corpse. |
| | 2 The body of Ian Bright's buddy and his girlfriend may appear in the bed. |
| | 3 The sheets and blankets may animate and attempt to grapple or strangle anyone lying down on the bed. |
| | 4 The bedside table contains what at first looks like a bible, but will burst into flames if read. |
| | 5 The door may jam unexpectedly. |
| | 6 The overhead bulb may produce red light mysteriously. |

C. Master Bedroom: This larger bedroom contains a double bed, two side tables, a wardrobe, desk and chair. Mounted on the wall above the desk is a mirror. The same wallpaper adorns the walls and has faded in the same way. Splashes of rusty brown dried blood cover the wall at the head of the bed. Another of Ian's buddies and his girlfriend died here, as did another lady of the evening. They were all dismembered.

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| <i>Paranormal Events:</i> | 1 An attractive woman may beckon a male into the room for sex. During the act or if the offer is refused before consummation, the woman will instantly transform into a zombie-like corpse. |
| | 2 The blood on the wall may morph into the zombie forms of Ian's victims, who will chase the observer from the room. |
| | 3 The sheets and blankets may animate and attempt to grapple or strangle anyone lying down on the bed. |
| | 4 The bedside table drawers open only about halfway. Observers will see an unidentifiable item toward the back of the drawer but if they reach in for it, the drawer will attempt to close on their hand with incredible force. |
| | 5 The mirror may display a vision of Ian dismembering his friends, as if recorded from its location. If watched to its conclusion, Ian will arise, turn around, and point at the mirror. He soundlessly mouths the words, "You're next". |
| | 6 The overhead bulb may produce red light mysteriously. |



D. The “Living” Room: This room contains a poker table, six wooden chairs, a sofa, armchair, wooden bench and a wood burning stove. The floor is covered by a blood stained Persian rug, under which is the trap door leading to the root cellar. The walls and ceiling were once painted white, but 12 years of cigar and cigarette smoke have turned them a sickly yellow. Fly spots dot the walls at intervals, as do rust brown spots of dried blood. Ian’s last buddy and his girlfriend were killed here, shot in their heads with a rifle. Strangely, the rifle still hangs on the wall above the wooden bench. Three of the gamblers killed by James Henderson were shot here, as was George MacDonald. Two of the gamblers made it out the front door and died on the porch. On the wall opposite the wood-burning stove, which is shared with the Master Bedroom, hangs a painting. It depicts a scene from Dante’s Inferno and is unsigned.

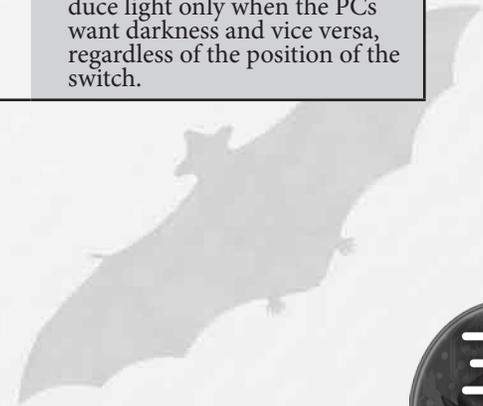
Paranormal Events:

- 2 If observed for over thirty seconds the figures of the damned in the painting will begin to move, and if observed for more than a minute the observer will find himself among them, feeling their torments. This effect will cease if anyone touches him.
- 3 Ian Bright’s buddy and his girlfriend may appear on the sofa, picking bits of brain out of each other’s open skulls and greedily devouring them.
- 4 The gamblers and George may appear at the poker table playing cards. As the betting reaches its peak, George will go “all in”, which will include, in his words, “the lives of these pathetic sheep”, while motioning to anyone who is observing.
- 5 The armchair may animate, attempting to trap anyone sitting in it. It will then run down the hallway to the bathroom where it will attempt to drown its occupant in a mysteriously full tub.
- 6 The doors may open and slam shut repeatedly.
- 7 The overhead bulb may produce red light mysteriously.
- 8 The wooden bench may form a demonic face and hurl insults, curses and epithets at the observers.
- 9 The wood burning stove may begin spewing goutts of flame at observers, whether it has been lit or not.
- 10 It may seem that something is trying to escape from the root cellar.
- 11 The Persian rug may behave like quicksand, as one of the PCs starts to sink. While she can be pulled out by those not trapped, the force exerted upon her is clearly trying to pull her down.
- 12 Anything the PCs place on the poker table (flashlights, guns, cell phones) disappears when not being observed.

E. Kitchen: The kitchen contains a large wood burning oven, a sink and counter, refrigerator, wooden shelf and table. The sink, counter and table are cluttered with dirty dishes, surprisingly free of vermin, yet still rotting. One of the gamblers was shot in the doorway and died here. The head of the drifter was found in a large pot on the stove. The body was never found.

Paranormal Events:

- 1 A pot may be found on the stove containing a severed head which continues to ask for food, but is otherwise unable to communicate.
- 2 The body of the drifter may appear in the fridge.
- 3 The plates, knives, forks, pots and pans may begin hurling themselves at the PCs.
- 4 The wood-burning oven may animate into an armored, flame throwing golem.
- 5 The sink may begin bubbling blood, which will soon be followed by a spraying gout, which will cover the room in red.
- 6 The overhead bulb may produce light only when the PCs want darkness and vice versa, regardless of the position of the switch.



F. Closet: This closet contains only some of George's old suits, spare linens and plumbing access for the tub and toilet. One of the gamblers shot in the hallway crawled in here to die.

Paranormal Events:

- 1 On any opening after the first, the door may instead lead to a cave bathed in an eerie red glow. If the cave passage is entered and followed, it leads to a much larger cavern where a demonic king sits upon a fiery throne. It sees the PCs and immediately dispatches a horde of lesser demons to attack them. However, the passage remains and the closing door ends the apparition.
- 2 The body of the gambler may appear and ask the PCs for help.
- 3 The sheets and blankets may animate and attempt to grapple or strangle anyone trapped in the closet.
- 4 The suits may animate and chase the PCs.
- 5 The door may jam unexpectedly.
- 6 The overhead bulb may produce red light mysteriously.

G. Generator: The generator is gasoline powered and provides electricity during an outage, if it can be started. However, its tank is full of blood. On the up side, this does not keep it from running. On the down side, once it is running the paranormal events intensify. Anything capable of animation hunts the PCs in the house or woods within the one-mile radius. All lights burn red and blood oozes from the walls. Insane and evil laughter echoes through the house. Dead trees reach for the PCs.

The Root Cellar: This 10'x10' chamber was dug out and lined with bricks. It is six feet deep and was used to store food and drink. It is also the exact spot where the old sacrificial stone stood before Oswald broke it up. In this room Christian Halberd took refuge when he returned alone. His desiccated corpse rests against one wall. Only one paranormal event is possible here. If anyone enters the root cellar, the trap door slams shut and becomes Extremely Difficult to open. Meanwhile, the trapped PC must begin fighting for his sanity using whatever system is applicable. The difficulty should be near impossible. Halberd did manage it, however, so all is not lost. Halberd had no one to free him when he won his battle, though, so he starved to

death. Consider this a contest between an evil deity and a mortal.

The End is Near

Escape is perhaps a realistic goal, but the nature and history of the place suggests it cannot be cleansed. Burning it to the ground would only destroy the building, not the evil. Religious cleansing has been tried, and if the GM wishes, a significantly magnificent roll may do the job. Or only appear to.



Deep Blue

Deep Blue (also known as Big Blue or The Deep) is a halfland with a Discontinuity value of 1 and a special Assimilation effect, described in detail below. Its physical shape is a hemisphere, precisely one-half the volume of the Earth, and it consists almost entirely of liquid water. The rounded side has a thin crust that acts as the ocean floor, while the other side is completely flat. However, due to the singular nature of Deep Blue, the “surface” of the water cannot be breached. This makes it appear a very dangerous place for beings that need to breathe in order to live. It could be said that what the proto-dimension known as Airborne is to the sky, such is Deep Blue to the oceans.

The entirety of this protodimension is teeming with life. Although Deep Blue has no life forms native to it, every other dimension that contains waterborne life has representatives here. This is due to the manner in which random dimensional portals are forever opening and closing unseen beneath the lakes and oceans of many worlds, including our own Earth. These random portals usually exist for just a few seconds, but over the aeons they have brought back many unwitting species from elsewhere. These portals can only be formed in bodies of water, so linking to somewhere in a dry location can only be done by artificial

means such as a dimensional gate or by use of Dimension Walk skill (at one additional level of difficulty). Individual empathes with the correct scuba or deep-sea diving kit can dimension walk to here, but will find it very hard to guard against the denizens that swarm through the waters. At some point, every variety of water dweller from across the entire meta-verse have lived and died in these waters.

The unique physics of this proto-dimension enable the co-existence of both fresh and salt water. These regions are held in place and never mix, so encounters can be had with both riverine and oceanic life forms depending where any visitors turn up. Remember that Deep Blue is more-or-less bowl shaped, and the freshwater regions are generally to be found around the “rim”. The saltwater area fills the rest of the bowl, and due to the size of the dimension the water in the center is deeper than any other known ocean. However, even here there may be life. Even though there are no actual volcanic vents here, the strange physical laws of Deep Blue allow for “black smokers” and these have the requisite array of blind crustaceans and half-plant half-worm creatures.

There are no whales or any other mammals here. Air-breathers cannot exist here

A New Proto-Dimension
By CW Kelson III (Tad)
For Dark Conspiracy®

naturally, as there is absolutely no free air for them to breathe. However, every imaginable variety of fish, shark, jellyfish and so forth live here, feeding off plankton and of course each other. There are also a great many unimaginable things living here too. Although there are no dinosaurs here since they are air breathers, there are still all manner of prehistoric fish and creatures. Great shoals of coelacanth flee in fright from things that look like they belong in the very scariest nightmares of Great White sharks.

There is an Assimilation Effect connected with Deep Blue, but due to its nature it is not widely known even among some of the better-traveled empaths who use Dimension Walk regularly. Naturally, those entering this dimension tend to turn up well prepared for underwater survival. Anyone entering here whilst completely protected from the waters outside (for example wearing a full deep sea diver's dry suit or in a minisubmarine) will never suffer any assimilation effects. However, anyone whose bare skin contacts the water must pass a Formidable test of Willpower. If they succeed then nothing further happens, but if they fail the test they are stricken with an overwhelming desire to remove any breathing apparatus they may have and swallow a lungful of water. To resist the urge the afflicted character must now pass a Willpower

test at Impossible level, or they will happily try to drown themselves.

Now for the weird part: any character who does manage to drown themselves will revive within 30 minutes and be able to function as before, but for this to occur their "lifeless" body MUST remain in the waters of Deep Blue the entire time. They will also find themselves now able to breathe underwater, as the Assimilation has made their lungs able to absorb oxygen directly from the water. The only downside to this is that if they remain in Deep Blue for longer than 24 hours, the effects become permanent and irreversible and they will have to spend the rest of their days submerged.



The Gateway of the Monster



Classic Fiction
By William Hope Hodgson



Story by William Hope Hodgson
Illustrations by Florence Briscoe

In response to Carnacki's usual card of invitation to have dinner and listen to a story, I arrived promptly at 427, Cheyne Walk, to find the three others who were always invited to these happy little times, there before me. Five minutes later, Carnacki, Arkright, Jessop, Taylor and I were all engaged in the "pleasant occupation" of dining.

"You've not been long away, this time," I remarked as I finished my soup; forgetting momentarily, Carnacki's dislike of being asked even to skirt the borders of his story until such time as he was ready. Then he would not stint words.

"That's all," he replied with brevity; and I changed the subject, remarking that I had been buying a new gun, to which piece of news he gave an intelligent nod, and a smile which I think showed a genuinely good-humoured appreciation of my intentional changing of the conversation.

Later, when dinner was finished, Carnacki snuggled himself comfortably down in his big chair, along with his pipe, and began his story, with very little circumlocution:

"As Hodgson was remarking just now, I've only been away a short time, and for a very good reason too - I've only been away a short distance. The exact locality I am afraid I must not tell you; but it is less than twenty miles from here; though, except for changing a name, that won't spoil the story.





"LATER, WHEN THE DINNER WAS FINISHED"...

And it is a story too! One of the most extraordinary things I have ever run against.

"I received a letter a fortnight ago from a man I must call Anderson, asking for an appointment. I arranged a time, and when he came, I found that he wished me to investigate, and see whether I could not clear up a long standing and well - too well - authenticated case of what he termed 'haunting.' He gave me very full particulars, and finally, as the thing seemed to present something unique, I decided to take it up.

"Two days later, I drove to the house, late in the afternoon. I found it a very old place, standing quite alone in its own grounds. Anderson had left a letter with the butler, I found, pleading excuses for his absence, and leaving the whole house at my disposal for my investigations. The butler evidently knew the object of my visit, and I questioned him pretty thoroughly during dinner, which I had in rather lonely state. He is an old and privileged servant, and had the history of the Grey Room exact in detail. From him I learned more particulars regarding two things that Anderson had mentioned in but a casual manner. The first was that the door of the Grey Room would be heard in the dead of night to open, and slam heavily, and this even though the butler knew it was locked, and the key on



the bunch in his pantry. The second was that the bedclothes would always be found torn off the bed, and hurled in a heap into a corner.

“But it was the door slamming that chiefly bothered the old butler. Many and many a time, he told me, had he lain awake and just got shivering with fright, listening; for sometimes the door would be slammed time after time - thud! thud! thud! - so that sleep was impossible.

“From Anderson, I knew already that the room had a history extending back over a hundred and fifty years. Three people had been strangled in it - an ancestor of his and his wife and child. This is authentic, as I had taken very great pains to discover, so that you can imagine it was with a feeling that I had a striking case to investigate, that I went upstairs after dinner to have a look at the Grey Room.

“Peter, the old butler, was in rather a state about my going, and assured me with much solemnity that in all the twenty years of his service, no one had ever entered that room after nightfall. He begged me, in quite a fatherly way, to wait till the morning, when there would be no danger, and then he could accompany me himself.

“Of course, I smiled a little at him, and told him not to bother. I explained that I should do no more than look around a bit, and perhaps affix a few seals. He need not fear; I was used to that sort of thing. But he shook his head, when I said that.

“There isn't many ghosts like ours, sir,' he assured me, with mournful pride. And, by Jove! he was right, as you will see.

“I took a couple of candles, and Peter followed, with his bunch of keys. He unlocked the door; but would not come inside with me. He was evidently in a fright, and renewed his request, that I would put off my examination, until daylight. Of course, I laughed at him again, and told him he could stand sentry at the door, and catch anything that came out.

“It never comes outside, sir,' he said, in his funny, old, solemn manner. Somehow he managed to make me feel as if I were going to have the 'creeps' right away. Anyway, it was one to him, you know.

“I left him there, and examined the room. It is a big apartment, and well furnished in the grand style, with a huge four-poster, which stands with its head to the end wall. There were two candles on the mantelpiece and two on each of the three tables that were in the room. I lit the

lot, and after that the room felt a little less inhumanly dreary; though, mind you, it was quite fresh, and well kept in every way.

“After I had taken a good look round I sealed lengths of baby ribbon across the windows, along the walls, over the pictures, and over the fireplace and the wall-closets. All the time, as I worked, the butler stood just without the door, and I could not persuade him to enter; though I jested with him a little, as I stretched the ribbons, and went here and there about my work. Every now and again, he would say: - ‘You'll excuse me, I'm sure, sir; but I do wish you would come out, sir. I'm fair in a quake for you.’

“I told him he need not wait; but he was loyal enough in his way to what he considered his duty. He said he could not go away and leave me all alone there. He apologised; but made it very clear that I did not realise the danger of the room; and I could see, generally, that he was in a pretty frightened state. All the same, I had to make the room so that I should know if anything material entered it; so I asked him not to bother me, unless he really heard something. He was beginning to get on my nerves, and the 'feel' of the room was bad enough, without making it any nastier.



PETER, THE BUTLER

“For a time further, I worked, stretching ribbons across the floor, and sealing them, so that the merest touch would have broken them, were anyone to venture into the room in the dark with the intention of playing the fool. All this had taken me far longer than I had anticipated; and, suddenly, I heard a clock strike eleven. I had taken off my coat soon after commencing work; now, however, as I had practically made an end of all that I intended to do, I walked across to the settee, and picked it up. I was in the act of getting into it when the old butler’s voice (he had not said a word for the last hour) came sharp and frightened: - ‘Come out, sir, quick! There’s something going to happen!’ Jove! but I jumped, and then, in the same moment, one of the candles on the table to the left of the bed went out. Now whether it was the wind, or what, I do not know; but just for a moment, I was enough startled to make a run for the door; though I am glad to say that I pulled, up before I reached it. I simply could not bunk out, with the butler standing there, after having, as it were, read him a sort of lesson on ‘bein’ brave, y’know.’ So I just turned right round, picked up the two candles off the mantelpiece, and walked across to

the table near the bed. Well, I saw nothing. I blew out the candle that was still alight; then I went to those on the two other tables, and blew them out. Then, outside of the door, the old man called again: - ‘Oh! sir, do be told! Do be told!’

“All right, Peter,’ I said, and, by Jove, my voice was not as steady as I should have liked! I made for the door, and had a bit of work, not to start running. I took some thundering long strides, as you can imagine. Near the door, I had a sudden feeling that there was a cold wind in the room. It was almost as if the window had been suddenly opened a little. I got to the door and the old butler gave back a step, in a sort of instinctive way. ‘Collar the candles, Peter!’ I said, pretty sharply, and shoved them into his hands. I turned, and caught the handle, and slammed the door shut, with a crash. Somehow, do you know, as I did so, I thought I felt something pull back on it; but it must have been only fancy. I turned the key in the lock, and then again, double-locking the door. I felt easier then, and set-to and sealed the door. In addition, I put my card over the keyhole, and sealed it there; after which I pocketed the key, and went downstairs - with Peter; who was nervous and silent, leading the way. Poor old beggar! It

had not struck me until that moment that he had been enduring a considerable strain during the last two or three hours.

“About midnight, I went to bed. My room lay at the end of the corridor upon which opens the door of the Grey Room. I counted the doors between it and mine, and found that five rooms lay between. And I am sure you can understand that I was not sorry. Then, just as I was beginning to undress, an idea came to me, and I took my candle and sealing-wax, and sealed the doors of all the five rooms. If any door slammed in the night, I should know just which one.

“I returned to my room, locked the door, and went to bed. I was waked suddenly from a deep sleep by a loud crash somewhere out in the passage. I sat up in bed and listened, but heard nothing. Then I lit my candle. I was in the very act of lighting it when there came the bang of a door being violently slammed, along the corridor. I jumped out of bed, and got my revolver. I unlocked my door, and went out into the passage, holding my candle high, and keeping the pistol ready. Then a queer thing happened. I could not go a step towards the Grey Room. You all know I am not really a cowardly chap. I’ve gone into too many cases connected with ghostly things, to be

accused of that; but I tell you I funked it; simply funked it, just like any blessed kid. There was something precious unholy in the air that night. I backed into my bedroom, and shut and locked the door. Then I sat on the bed all night, and listened to the dismal thudding of a door up the corridor. The sound seemed to echo through all the house.

“Daylight came at last, and I washed and dressed. The door had not slammed for about an hour, and I was getting back my nerve again. I felt ashamed of myself; though in some ways it was silly, for when you’re meddling with that sort of thing, your nerve is bound to go, sometimes. And you just have to sit quiet and call yourself a coward until daylight. Sometimes it is more than just cowardice, I fancy. I believe at times it is something warning you, and fighting for you. But, all the same, I always feel mean and miserable, after a time like that.

“When the day came properly, I opened my door, and, keeping my revolver handy, went quietly along the passage. I had to pass the head of the stairs, on the way, and who should I see coming up, but the old butler, carrying a cup of coffee. He had merely tucked his nightshirt into his

trousers, and he had an old pair of carpet slippers on.

“‘Hello, Peter!’ I said, feeling suddenly cheerful; for I was as glad as any lost child to have a live human being close to me. ‘Where are you off to with the refreshments?’

“The old man gave a start, and sopped some of the coffee. He stared up at me and I could see that he looked white and done-up. He came on up the stairs and held out the little tray to me. ‘I’m very thankful indeed, Sir, to see you safe and well,’ he said. ‘I feared, one time, you might risk going into the Grey Room, Sir. I’ve lain awake all night, with the sound of the Door. And when it came light, I thought I’d make you a cup of coffee. I knew you would want to look at the seals, and somehow it seems safer if there’s two, Sir.’

“‘Peter,’ I said, ‘you’re a brick. This is very thoughtful of you.’ And I drank the coffee. ‘Come along,’ I told him, and handed him back the tray. ‘I’m going to have a look at what the Brutes have been up to. I simply hadn’t the pluck to in the night.’

“‘I’m very thankful, Sir,’ he replied. ‘Flesh and blood can do nothing, Sir, against devils; and that’s what’s in the Grey Room after dark.’



“I examined the seals on all the doors, as I went along, and found them right; but when I got to the Grey Room, the seal was broken; though the card, over the keyhole, was untouched. I ripped it off, and unlocked the door, and went in, rather cautiously, as you can imagine; but the whole room was empty of anything to frighten one, and there was heaps of light. I examined all my seals, and not a single one was disturbed. The old butler had followed me in, and, suddenly, he called out:- ‘The bedclothes, Sir!’

“I ran up to the bed, and looked over; and, surely, they were lying in the corner to the left of the bed. Jove! you can imagine how queer I felt. Something had been in the room. I stared for a while, from the bed, to the clothes on the floor. I had a feeling that I did not want to touch either. Old Peter, though, did not seem to be affected that way. He went over to the bed-coverings, and was going to pick them up, as, doubtless, he had done every day these twenty years back; but I stopped him. I wanted nothing touched, until I had finished my examination. This, I must have spent a full hour over, and then I let Peter straighten up the bed; after which we went out and I locked the door; for the room was getting on my nerves.

“I had a short walk, and then breakfast; after which I felt more my own man, and so returned to the Grey Room, and, with Peter’s help, and one of the maids, I had everything taken out except the bed, even the very pictures. I examined the walls, floor and ceiling then, with probe, hammer and magnifying glass; but found nothing suspicious. And I can assure you, I began to realise, in very truth, that some incredible thing had been loose in the room during the past night. I sealed up everything again, and went out, locking and sealing the door, as before.

“After dinner that night, Peter and I unpacked some of my stuff, and I fixed up my camera and flashlight opposite to the door of the Grey Room, with a string from the trigger of the flashlight to the door. Then, you see, if the door were really opened, the flashlight would blare out, and there would be, possibly, a very queer picture to examine in the morning. The last thing I did, before leaving, was to uncap the lens; and after that I went off to my bedroom, and to bed; for I intended to be up at midnight; and to ensure this, I set my little alarm to call me; also I left my candle burning.

“The clock woke me at twelve, and I got up and into my dressing-gown and slippers. I shoved my revolver into my right

side-pocket, and opened my door. Then, I lit my dark-room lamp, and withdrew the slide, so that it would give a clear light. I carried it up the corridor, about thirty feet, and put it down on the floor, with the open side away from me, so that it would show me anything that might approach along the dark passage. Then I went back, and sat in the doorway of my room, with my revolver handy, staring up the passage towards the place where I knew my camera stood outside the door of the Grey Room.

“I should think I had watched for about an hour and a half, when, suddenly, I heard a faint noise, away up the corridor. I was immediately conscious of a queer prickling sensation about the back of my head, and my hands began to sweat a little. The following instant, the whole end of the passage flicked into sight in the abrupt glare of the flashlight. Then came the succeeding darkness, and I peered nervously up the corridor, listening tensely, and trying to find what lay beyond the faint glow of my dark-lamp, which now seemed ridiculously dim by contrast with the tremendous blaze of the flash-powder.... And then, as I stooped forward, staring and listening, there came the crashing thud of the door of the Grey Room. The sound seemed to fill the whole of the large corridor, and go echoing hollowly through the house. I





... A BIG APARTMENT, WELL FURNISHED IN THE GRAND STYLE.

tell you, I felt horrible - as if my bones were water. Simply beastly. Jove! how I did stare, and how I listened. And then it came again - thud, thud, thud, and then a silence that was almost worse than the noise of the door; for I kept fancying that some brutal thing was stealing upon me along the corridor. And then, suddenly, my lamp was put out, and I could not see a yard before me. I realised all at once that I was doing a very silly thing, sitting there, and I jumped up. Even as I did so, I thought I heard a sound in the passage, and quite near me. I made one backward spring into my room, and slammed and locked the door. I sat on my bed, and stared at the door. I had my revolver in my hand; but it seemed an abominably useless thing. I felt that there was something the other side of that door. For some unknown reason I knew it was pressed up against the door, and it was soft. That was just what I thought. Most

extraordinary thing to think.

“Presently I got hold of myself a bit, and marked out a pentacle hurriedly with chalk



on the polished floor; and there I sat in it almost until dawn. And all the time, away up the corridor, the door of the Grey Room thudded at solemn and horrid intervals. It was a miserable, brutal night.

“When the day began to break, the thudding of the door came gradually to an end, and, at last, I got hold of my courage, and went along the corridor, in the half light, to cap the lens of my camera. I can tell you, it took some doing; but if I had not done so my photograph would have been spoilt, and I was tremendously keen to save it. I got back to my room, and then set-to and rubbed out the five-pointed star in which I had been sitting.

“Half an hour later there was a tap at my door. It was Peter with my coffee. When I had drunk it, we both went along to the Grey Room. As we went, I had a look at the seals on the other doors, but they were untouched. The seal on the door of the Grey Room was broken, as also was the string from the trigger of the flashlight; but the card over the keyhole was still there. I ripped it off and opened the door. Nothing unusual was to be seen until we came to the bed; then I saw that, as on the previous day, the bedclothes had been torn off, and hurled into the left-hand corner, exactly where I had seen them before. I felt very

queer; but I did not forget to look at all the seals, only to find that not one had been broken.

“Then I turned and looked at old Peter, and he looked at me, nodding his head.

“Let’s get out of here!’ I said. ‘It’s no place for any living human to enter, without proper protection.’

“We went out then, and I locked and sealed the door, again.

“After breakfast, I developed the negative; but it showed only the door of the Grey Room, half opened. Then I left the house, as I wanted to get certain matters and implements that might be necessary to life; perhaps to the spirit; for I intended to spend the coming night in the Grey Room.

“I got back in a cab, about half-past-five, with my apparatus, and this, Peter and I carried up to the Grey Room, where I piled it carefully in the centre of the floor. When everything was in the room, including a cat which I had brought, I locked and sealed the door, and went towards my bedroom, telling Peter I should not be down to dinner. He said, ‘Yes, sir, and went downstairs, thinking that I was going to turn in, which was what I wanted him to believe, as I

knew he would have worried both me and himself, if he had known what I intended.

“But I merely got my camera and flashlight from my bedroom, and hurried back to the Grey Room. I locked and sealed myself in, and set to work, for I had a lot to do before it got dark.

“First I cleared away all the ribbons across the floor; then I carried the cat - still fastened in its basket - over towards the far wall, and left it. I returned then to the centre of the room, and measured out a space twenty-one feet in diameter, which I swept with a ‘broom of hyssop.’ About this I drew a circle of chalk, taking care never to step over the circle. Beyond this I smudged, with a bunch of garlic, a broad belt right around the chalked circle, and when this was complete, I took from among my stores in the centre a small jar of a certain water. I broke away the parchment and withdrew the stopper. Then, dipping my left forefinger in the little jar, I went round the circle again, making upon the floor, just within the line of chalk, the Second Sign of the Saaamaaa Ritual, and joining each Sign most carefully with the left-handed crescent. I can tell you, I felt easier when this was done and the ‘water-circle’ complete. Then, I unpacked some more of the stuff that I had brought, and placed a lighted



candle in the “valley” of each Crescent. After that, I drew a Pentacle, so that each of the five points of the defensive star touched the chalk circle. In the five points of the star I placed five portions of bread, each wrapped in linen, and in the five “vales,” five opened jars of the water I had used to make the “water circle.” And now I had my first protective barrier complete.

“Now, anyone, except you who know something of my methods of investigation, might consider all this a piece of useless and foolish superstition; but you all remember the Black Veil case, in which I believe my life was saved by a very similar form of protection, whilst Aster, who sneered at it, and would not come inside, died. I got the idea from the Sigsand MS., written, so far as I can make out, in the 14th century. At first, naturally, I imagined it was just an expression of the superstition of his time; and it was not until a year later that it occurred to me to test his ‘Defense,’ which I did, as I’ve just said, in that horrible Black Veil business. You know how that turned out. Later, I used it several times, and always I came through safe, until that Moving Fur case. It was only a partial “Defense” there and I nearly died in the pentacle. After that I came across Professor Garder’s ‘Experiments with a Medium.’ When they surrounded

the Medium with a current, in vacuum, he lost his power - almost as if it cut him off from the Immaterial. That made me think a lot; and that is how I came to make the Electric Pentacle, which is a most marvelous ‘Defense’ against certain manifestations. I used the shape of the defensive star for this protection, because I have, personally, no doubt at all but that there is some extraordinary virtue in the old magic figure. Curious thing for a Twentieth Century man to admit, is it not? But then, as you all know, I never did, and never will, allow myself to be blinded by a little cheap laughter. I ask questions, and keep my eyes open!

“In this last case I had little doubt that I had run up against a supernatural monster, and I meant to take every possible care; for the danger is abominable.

“I turned-to now to fit the Electric Pentacle, setting it so that each of its ‘points’ and ‘vales’ coincided exactly with the ‘points’ and ‘vales’ of the drawn pentagram upon the floor. Then I connected up the battery, and the next instant the pale blue glare from the intertwining vacuum tubes shone out.

“I glanced about me then, with something of a sigh of relief, and realised suddenly that the dusk was upon me, for the

window was grey and unfriendly. Then round at the big, empty room, over the double barrier of electric and candle light. I had an abrupt, extraordinary sense of weirdness thrust upon me - in the air, you know; as it were, a sense of something inhuman impending. The room was full of the stench of bruised garlic, a smell I hate.

“I turned now to my camera, and saw that it and the flashlight were in order. Then I tested my revolver, carefully; though I had little thought that it would be needed. Yet, to what extent materialisation of an abnormal creature is possible, given favourable conditions, no one can say, and I had no idea what horrible thing I was going to see, or feel the presence of. I might, in the end, have to fight with a materialised monster. I did not know, and could only be prepared. You see, I never forgot that three people had been strangled in the bed close to me, and the fierce slamming of the door I had heard myself. I had no doubt that I was investigating a dangerous and ugly case.

“By this time the night had come; though the room was very light with the burning candles; and I found myself glancing behind me, constantly, and then all round the room. It was nervy work waiting for that thing to come. Then, suddenly, I

was aware of a little, cold wind sweeping over me, coming from behind. I gave one great nerve-thrill, and a prickly feeling went all over the back of my head. Then I hove myself round with a sort of stiff jerk, and stared straight against that queer wind. It seemed to come from the corner of the room to the left of the bed - the place where both times I had found the heap of tossed bedclothes. Yet, I could see nothing unusual; no opening - nothing!...

“Abruptly I was aware that the candles were all a-flicker in that unnatural wind.... I believe I just squatted there and stared in a horribly frightened, wooden way for some minutes. I shall never be able to let you know how disgustingly horrible it was sitting in that vile, cold wind! And then, flick! flick! all the candles round the outer barrier went out; and there was I, locked and sealed in that room, and with no light beyond the weakish blue glare of the Electric Pentacle.

“A time of abominable tenseness passed, and still that wind blew upon me; and then, suddenly, I knew that something stirred in the corner to the left of the bed. I was made conscious of it, rather by some inward, unused sense, than by either sight or sound; for the pale, short-radius glare of the Pentacle gave but a very poor light

for seeing by. Yet, as I stared, something began slowly to grow upon my sight - a moving shadow, a little darker than the surrounding shadows. I lost the thing amid the vagueness, and for a moment or two I glanced swiftly from side to side, with a fresh, new sense of impending danger. Then my attention was directed to the bed. All the coverings were being drawn steadily off, with a hateful, stealthy sort of motion. I heard the slow, dragging slither of the clothes; but I could see nothing of the thing that pulled. I was aware in a funny, subconscious, introspective fashion that the ‘creep’ had come upon me; yet I was cooler mentally than I had been for some minutes; sufficiently so to feel that my hands were sweating coldly, and to shift my revolver, half-consciously, whilst I rubbed my right hand dry upon my knee; though never, for an instant, taking my gaze or my attention from those moving clothes.

“The faint noises from the bed ceased once, and there was a most intense silence, with only the sound of the blood beating in my head. Yet, immediately afterwards, I heard again the slurring of the bedclothes being dragged off the bed. In the midst of my nervous tension I remembered the camera, and reached round for it; but without looking away from the bed. And then, you know, all in a moment, the whole

of the bed-coverings were torn off with extraordinary violence, and I heard the flump they made as they were hurled into the corner.

“There was a time of absolute quietness then for perhaps a couple of minutes; and you can imagine how horrible I felt. The bedclothes had been thrown with such savageness! And then again, the brutal unnaturalness of the thing that had just been done before me!

“Abruptly, over by the door, I heard a faint noise - a sort of crickling sound and then a pitter or two upon the floor. A great nervous thrill swept over me, seeming to run up my spine and over the back of my head; for the seal that secured the door had just been broken. Something was there. I could not see the door; at least, I mean to say that it was impossible to say how much I actually saw, and how much my imagination supplied. I made it out only as a continuation of the grey walls.... And then it seemed to me that something dark and indistinct moved and wavered there among the shadows.

“Abruptly, I was aware that the door was opening, and with an effort I reached again for my camera; but before I could aim it the door was slammed with a terrific crash that filled the whole room with a sort of hollow

thunder. I jumped, like a frightened child. There seemed such a power behind the noise; as though a vast, wanton Force were 'out.' Can you understand?

"The door was not touched again; but, directly afterwards, I heard the basket, in which the cat lay, creak. I tell you, I fairly pringled all along my back. I knew that I was going to learn definitely whether what was abroad was dangerous to Life. From the cat there rose suddenly a hideous caterwaul, that ceased abruptly, and then - too late - I snapped on the flashlight. In the great glare, I saw that the basket had been overturned, and the lid was wrenched open, with the cat lying half in, and half out upon the floor. I saw nothing else, but I was full of the knowledge that I was in the presence of some Being or Thing that had power to destroy.

"During the next two or three minutes, there was an odd, noticeable quietness in the room, and you must remember I was half-blinded, for the time, because of the flashlight; so that the whole place seemed to be pitchy dark just beyond the shine of the Pentacle. I tell you it was most horrible. I just knelt there in the star, and whirled round, trying to see whether anything was coming at me.

"My power of sight came gradually, and I got a little hold of myself; and abruptly I saw the thing I was looking for, close to the 'water-circle.' It was big and indistinct, and wavered curiously, as though the shadow of a vast spider hung suspended in the air, just beyond the barrier. It passed swiftly round the circle, and seemed to probe ever towards me; but only to draw back with extraordinary jerky movements, as might a living person if they touched the hot bar of a grate.

"Round and round it moved, and round and round I turned. Then, just opposite to one of the 'vales' in the pentacles, it seemed to pause, as though preliminary to a tremendous effort. It retired almost beyond the glow of the vacuum light, and then came straight towards me, appearing to gather form and solidity as it came. There seemed a vast, malign determination behind the movement, that must succeed. I was on my knees, and I jerked back, falling on to my left hand and hip, in a wild endeavour to get back from the advancing thing. With my right hand I was grabbing madly for my revolver, which I had let slip. The brutal thing came with one great sweep straight over the garlic and the 'water-circle,' almost to the vale of the pentacle. I believe I yelled. Then, just as suddenly as it

had swept over, it seemed to be hurled back by some mighty, invisible force.

"It must have been some moments before I realised that I was safe; and then I got myself together in the middle of the pentacles, feeling horribly gone and shaken, and glancing round and round the barrier; but the thing had vanished. Yet I had learnt something, for I knew now that the Grey Room was haunted by a monstrous hand.

"Suddenly, as I crouched there, I saw what had so nearly given the monster an opening through the barrier. In my movements within the pentacle I must have touched one of the jars of water; for just where the thing had made its attack the jar that guarded the 'deep' of the 'vale' had been moved to one side, and this had left one of the 'five doorways' unguarded. I put it back, quickly, and felt almost safe again, for I had found the cause and the 'defense' was still good. And I began to hope again that I should see the morning come in. When I saw that thing so nearly succeed, I'd had an awful, weak, overwhelming feeling that the 'barriers' could never bring me safe through the night against such a Force. You can understand?

"For a long time I could not see the hand; but, presently, I thought I saw, once or twice, an odd wavering, over among



the shadows near the door. A little later, as though in a sudden fit of malignant rage, the dead body of the cat was picked up, and beaten with dull, sickening blows against the solid floor. That made me feel rather queer.

“A minute afterwards, the door was opened and slammed twice with tremendous force. The next instant the thing made one swift, vicious dart at me, from out of the shadows. Instinctively I started sideways from it, and so plucked my hand from upon the Electric Pentacle, where - for a wickedly careless moment - I had placed it. The monster was hurled off from the neighbourhood of the pentacles; though - owing to my inconceivable foolishness - it had been enabled for a second time to pass the outer barriers. I can tell you, I shook for a time, with sheer funk. I moved right to the centre of the pentacles again, and knelt there, making myself as small and compact as possible.

“As I knelt, there came to me presently, a vague wonder at the two ‘accidents’ which had so nearly allowed the brute to get at me. Was I being influenced to unconscious voluntary actions that endangered me? The thought took hold of me, and I watched my every movement. Abruptly, I stretched a tired leg, and knocked over one of the

jars of water. Some was spilled; but because of my suspicious watchfulness, I had it upright and back within the vale while yet some of the water remained. Even as I did so, the vast, black, half-materialised hand beat up at me out of the shadows, and seemed to leap almost into my face; so nearly did it approach; but for the third time it was thrown back by some altogether enormous, over-mastering force. Yet, apart from the dazed fright in which it left me, I had for a moment that feeling of spiritual sickness, as if some delicate, beautiful, inward grace had suffered, which is felt only upon the too near approach of the ab-human, and is more dreadful, in a strange way, than any physical pain that can be suffered. I knew by this, more of the extent and closeness of the danger; and for a long time I was simply cowed by the butt-headed brutality of that Force upon my spirit. I can put it no other way.

“I knelt again in the centre of the pentacles, watching myself with more fear, almost, than the monster; for I knew now that, unless I guarded myself from every sudden impulse that came to me, I might simply work my own destruction. Do you see how horrible it all was?

“I spent the rest of the night in a haze of sick fright, and so tense that I could

not make a single movement naturally. I was in such fear that any desire for action that came to me might be prompted by the Influence that I knew was at work on me. And outside of the barrier that ghastly thing went round and round, grabbing and grabbing in the air at me. Twice more was the body of the dead cat molested. The second time, I heard every bone in its body scrunch and crack. And all the time the horrible wind was blowing upon me from the corner of the room to the left of the bed.

“Then, just as the first touch of dawn came into the sky, that unnatural wind ceased, in a single moment; and I could see no sign of the hand. The dawn came slowly, and presently the wan light filled all the room, and made the pale glare of the Electric Pentacle look more unearthly. Yet, it was not until the day had fully come, that I made any attempt to leave the barrier, for I did not know but that there was some method abroad, in the sudden stopping of that wind, to entice me from the pentacles.

“At last, when the dawn was strong and bright, I took one last look round, and ran for the door. I got it unlocked, in a nervous, clumsy fashion; then locked it hurriedly, and went to my bedroom, where I lay on the bed, and tried to steady my nerves.

Peter came, presently, with the coffee, and when I had drunk it, I told him I meant to have a sleep, as I had been up all night. He took the tray, and went out quietly; and after I had locked my door I turned in properly, and at last got to sleep.

“I woke about midday, and after some lunch, went up to the Grey Room. I switched off the current from the Pentacle, which I had left on in my hurry; also, I removed the body of the cat. You can understand I did not want anyone to see the poor brute. After that, I made a very careful search of the corner where the bedclothes had been thrown. I made several holes, and probed, but found nothing. Then it occurred to me to try with my instrument under the skirting. I did so, and heard my wire ring on metal. I turned the hook-end that way, and fished for the thing. At the second go, I got it. It was a small object, and I took it to the window. I found it to be a curious ring, made of some greyish metal. The curious thing about it was that it was made in the form of a pentagon; that is, the same shape as the inside of the magic pentacle, but without the “mounts” which form the points of the defensive star. It was free from all chasing or engraving.

“You will understand that I was excited, when I tell you that I felt sure I held

in my hand the famous Luck Ring of the Anderson family; which, indeed, was of all things the one most intimately connected with the history of the haunting. This ring was handed on from father to son through generations, and always - in obedience to some ancient family tradition - each son had to promise never to wear the ring. The ring, I may say, was brought home by one of the Crusaders, under very peculiar circumstances; but the story is too long to go into here.

“It appears that young Sir Hulbert, an ancestor of Anderson’s, made a bet, in drink, you know, that he would wear the ring that night. He did so, and in the morning his wife and child were found strangled in the bed, in the very room in which I stood. Many people, it would seem, thought young Sir Hulbert was guilty of having done the thing in drunken anger; and he, in an attempt to prove his innocence, slept a second night in the room. He also was strangled. Since, as you may imagine, no one has spent a night in the Grey Room, until I did so. The ring had been lost so long, that it had become almost a myth; and it was most extraordinary to stand there, with the actual thing in my hand, as you can understand.

“It was whilst I stood there, looking at the ring, that I got an idea. Supposing that it were, in a way, a doorway - You see what I mean? A sort of gap in the world-hedge. It was a queer idea, I know, and probably was not my own, but came to me from the Outside. You see, the wind had come from that part of the room where the ring lay. I thought a lot about it. Then the shape - the inside of a pentacle. It had no ‘mounts,’ and without mounts, as the Sigsand MS. has it: - ‘Thee mownts wych are thee Five Hills of safetie. To lack is to gyve pow’r to thee daemon; and surlie to fayvor thee Evill Thyng.’ You see, the very shape of the ring was significant; and I determined to test it.

“I unmade my pentacle, for it must be made afresh and around the one to be protected. Then I went out and locked the door; after which I left the house, to get certain matters, for neither ‘yarbs nor fyre nor water’ must be used a second time. I returned about seven-thirty, and as soon as the things I had brought had been carried up to the Grey Room, I dismissed Peter for the night, just as I had done the evening before. When he had gone downstairs, I let myself into the room and locked and sealed the door. I went to the place in the centre of the room where all the stuff had been packed, and set to work with all my

speed to construct a barrier about me and the ring.

“I do not remember whether I explained to you. But I had reasoned that if the ring were in any way a ‘medium of admission,’ and it were enclosed with me in the Electric Pentacle’ it would be, to express it loosely, insulated. Do you see? The Force, which had visible expression as a Hand, would have to stay beyond the Barrier which separates the Ab from the Normal; for the ‘gateway’ would be removed from accessibility.

“As I was saying, I worked with all my speed to get the barrier completed about me and the ring, for it was already later than I cared to be in that room ‘unprotected.’ Also, I had a feeling that there would be a vast effort made that night to regain the use of the ring. For I had the strongest conviction that the ring was a necessity to materialisation. You will see whether I was right.

“I completed the barriers in about an hour, and you can imagine something of the relief I felt when I saw the pale glare of the Electric Pentacle once more all about me. From then, onwards, for about two hours, I sat quietly, facing the corner from which the wind came. About eleven o’clock a queer knowledge came that something

was near to me; yet nothing happened for a whole hour after that. Then, suddenly, I felt the cold, queer wind begin to blow upon me. To my astonishment, it seemed now to come from behind me, and I whipped round, with a hideous quake of fear. The wind met me in the face. It was blowing up from the floor close to me. I stared down, in a sickening maze of new frights. What on earth had I done now! The ring was there, close beside me, where I had put it. Suddenly, as I stared, bewildered, I was aware that there was something queer about the ring - funny shadowy movements and convolutions. I looked at them, stupidly. And then, abruptly, I knew that the wind was blowing up at me from the ring. A queer indistinct smoke became visible to me, seeming to pour upwards through the ring, and mix with the moving shadows. Suddenly, I realised that I was in more than any mortal danger; for the convoluting shadows about the ring were taking shape, and the death-hand was forming within the Pentacle. My goodness! do you realise it! I had brought the ‘gateway’ into the pentacles, and the brute was coming through - pouring into the material world, as gas might pour out from the mouth of a pipe.

“I should think that I knelt for a moment in a sort of stunned fright. Then, with

a mad, awkward movement, I snatched at the ring, intending to hurl it out of the Pentacle. Yet it eluded me, as though some invisible, living thing jerked it hither and thither. At last, I gripped it; yet, in the same instant, it was torn from my grasp with incredible and brutal force. A great, black shadow covered it, and rose into the air, and came at me. I saw that it was the Hand, vast and nearly perfect in form. I gave one crazy yell, and jumped over the Pentacle and the ring of burning candles, and ran despairingly for the door. I fumbled idiotically and ineffectually with the key, and all the time I stared, with a fear that was like insanity, toward the Barriers. The hand was plunging towards me; yet, even as it had been unable to pass into the pentacle when the ring was without, so, now that the ring was within, it had no power to pass out. The monster was chained, as surely as any beast would be, were chains rivetted upon it.

“Even then, I got a flash of this knowledge; but I was too utterly shaken with fright, to reason; and the instant I managed to get the key turned, I sprang into the passage, and slammed the door with a crash. I locked it, and got to my room, somehow; for I was trembling so that I could hardly stand, as you can imagine. I locked myself in, and managed to get the candle lit; then I

lay down on the bed, and kept quiet for an hour or two, and so I got steadied.

“I got a little sleep, later; but woke when Peter brought my coffee. When I had drunk it I felt altogether better, and took the old man along with me whilst I had a look into the Grey Room. I opened the door, and peeped in. The candles were still burning, wan against the daylight; and behind them was the pale, glowing star of the Electric Pentacle. And there in the middle was the ring... the gateway of the monster, lying demure and ordinary.

“Nothing in the room was touched, and I knew that the brute had never managed to cross the Pentacles. Then I went out, and locked the door.

“After a sleep of some hours, I left the house. I returned in the afternoon in a cab. I had with me an oxy-hydrogen jet, and two cylinders, containing the gases. I carried the things to the Grey Room, and there, in the centre of the Electric Pentacle, I erected the little furnace. Five minutes later the Luck Ring, once the ‘luck,’ but now the ‘bane,’ of the Anderson family, was no more than a little solid splash of hot metal.”

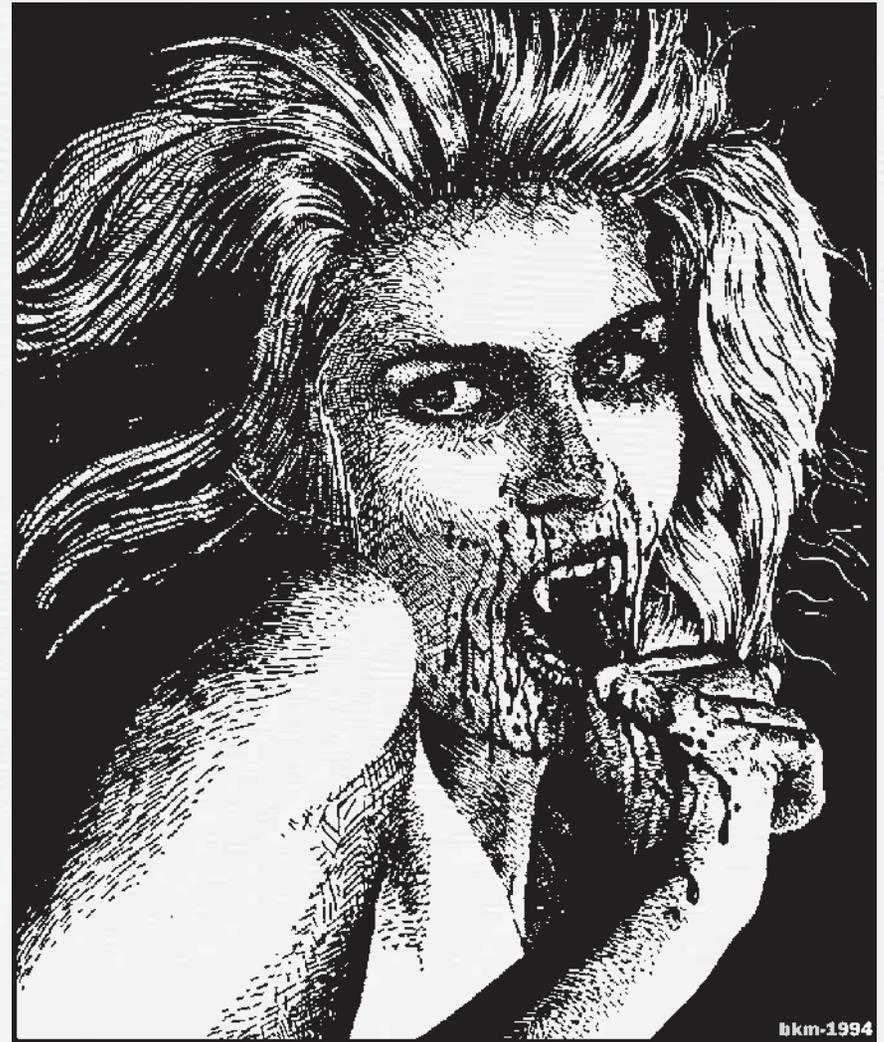
Carnacki felt in his pocket, and pulled out something wrapped in tissue paper. He

passed it to me. I opened it and found a small circle of greyish metal, something like lead, only harder and rather brighter.

“Well?” I asked, at length, after examining it and handing it round to the others. “Did that stop the haunting?”

Carnacki nodded. “Yes,” he said. “I slept three nights in the Grey Room, before I left. Old Peter nearly fainted when he knew that I meant to; but by the third night he seemed to realise that the house was just safe and ordinary. And, you know, I believe, in his heart, he hardly approved.”

Carnacki stood up and began to shake hands. “Out you go!” he said, genially. And, presently, we went, pondering to our various homes.



William Hope Hodgson



Born November 15, 1877
Blackmore End, Essex,
England

Died April 1918
Ypres, Belgium

Occupation author, sailor, soldier

Nationality British

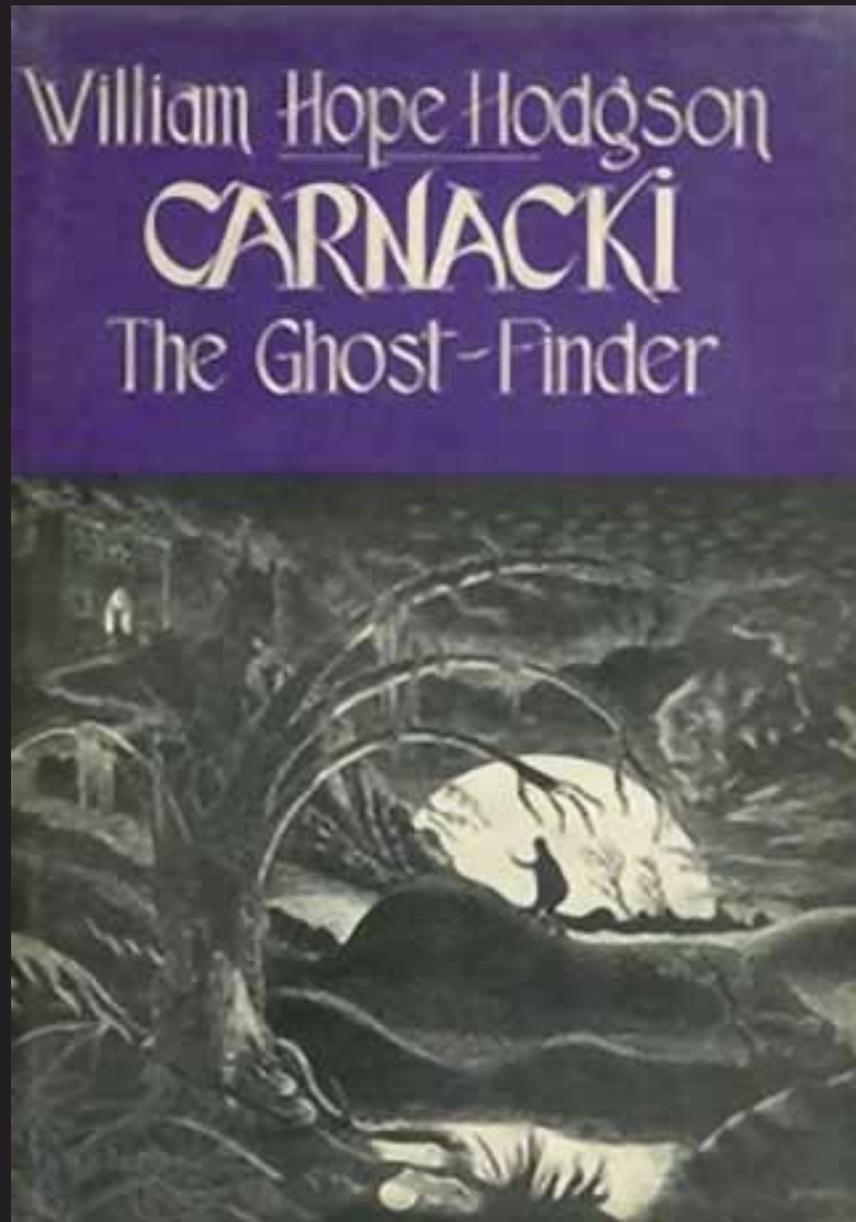
Genres Fantasy, horror, weird
fiction

*Notable
work(s)* The House on the
Borderland, The Night
Land

Spouse Betty Farnworth

Influenced H. P. Lovecraft, Clark
Ashton Smith, Olaf
Stapledon, Dennis
Wheatley, Iain Sinclair,
Gene Wolfe, Greg Bear,
China Miéville

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Hope_Hodgson



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