

The
Dark Times
Horror & conspiracy gaming

Issue 02
January 2018



The DARK TIMES FANZINE issue 02

Table of Contents

Cover - Callanish Moon by John Bird

Page 3 - Credits and acknowledgements

Page 4 - Elements by Davide Quatrini

Page 5 - Dark Times Interviews author I.E. Lester

Page 9 - Using Qi by Yicheng Liu

Page 12 - The Voshkod Incident by Davide Quatrini

Page 14 - Libram Memoriam by T. Mike McCurley

Page 18 - The Vanishing Varigotti. An adventure for Trail Of Cthulhu, set in the weird world of stage magic. By Joe Klemann

Page 30 - A Short Guide to Australia Part 2 by Kevin O'Neill

Page 36 - From the Editor's Attic by Lee Williams

Page 37 - Errata & Omissions for Issue 01

Page 38 - Free Advertisements

CREDITS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Dark Times fanzine wishes to thank the following people and publishers who have allowed us to cover their intellectual properties and games:

Atlas Games
Atramentis Games
Cakebread & Walton
Chaosium Inc.
Clockwork Publishing (Uhrwerk Verlag)
Delta Green Partnership
Eden Studios
Jason L. Blair
Just Crunch
Lester W. Smith
Modiphius Publishing
Pelgrane Press
Popcorn Press
Purple Duck Games
Sine Nomine Publishing

Cover image adapted from a photo by John Bird, used with permission

All trademarks and copyrights used in this publication remain the property of their owners and are used according to the respective publishers' policies

Dark Times Influences 01

"There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears, and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call ... The Twilight Zone."

Rod Serling

December 25, 1924 – June 28, 1975



Dark Times Fanzine covers material for the following game systems. If you would like to submit something for our consideration please contact us at the following email address: darktimesfanzine@gmail.com

Atlas Games - Feng Shui 1&2, Over The Edge, Unknown Armies all editions
Atramentis Games - Zas Irkalla
Cakebread & Walton - Dark Streets, Clockwork & Cthulhu
Chaosium - Call of Cthulhu all editions
Cthulhu Dark
Dark Conspiracy - all editions
Delta Green all editions
Eden Studios - All Flesh Must Be Eaten, Army of Darkness, Conspiracy X, C.J.Carella's Witchcraft
Just Crunch - The Cthulhu Hack
Little Fears & Little Fears Nightmare Edition
Modiphius - Achtung:Cthulhu
Pelgrane Press - GUMSHOE system (Esoterrorists, Fear Itself, Night's Black Agents, Trail of Cthulhu)
Popcorn Press - D6xD6 RPG
Purple Duck Games - 4Saken
Sine Nomine Publishing - Silent Legions

We also accept short fiction, artwork, poetry and anything else that fits our chosen sphere.

Additional Philological Elements on 'Cthulhu' Name

By Jerry O'Herlihy, curator, Kingsport Historical Society

Editor's note:

I found the present paper only after Jerry's disappearance during his exploration in Bolivia in 1999. I don't know if it was intended for publication by its author. Anyway, Jerry wrote it approximately during the winter months of year 1998, so I strongly believe, after such a long time that it is far better sharing this document with the scientific community in order to allow a more complete understanding of Jerry's work. Maybe, in this way, his reputation as a scholar deserving approval and attention will be finally recognized.

Daide Quatrini
September 2017

Dr Sadowski's 1989 paper "On the Ubiquity of Cthulhu" [A] is considered to be the final word on philological research about the name 'Cthulhu'. Although I find it a very complete and deep study, nevertheless at the same time I have to admit that it is too much focused on Eurasian elements. Recent discoveries, in fact, show that 'Cthulhu' is a widespread word also in the American continent since, at least, the first Inca records of the 13th century.

Let's examine, for example, the 1996 book "The Secret of the Incas" [B]. In it, the author traces the origin and meaning of the word 'Lluthu', a term used by the ancient Andean civilizations to alternatively indicate the following:

<<the one who devours>>

<<the evil bird>>

<<the dark constellation>>

First of all, applying the same philological rules used by Dr Sadowski in [A], we can surely affirm that 'Lluthu' is a term strongly correlated to 'Cthulhu', especially when the Quechua pronunciation rules are taken into account. Moreover, the three elements listed above are traditionally connected to Cthulhu

descriptions in the occult texts. In fact, it is usually described as a winged (<<the evil bird>>), merciless creature eager to destroy mankind (<<the one who devours>>), coming from space (<<the dark constellation>>). Those features are especially clear in the old manuscript registered here in the KHS library as the "Ponape Scripture".

It is worth noting that the term survives nowadays as a toponym. It indicates, in fact, a Bolivian plateau named Lluthu Pampa, in Cochabamba Department (17°45'S, 64°59'W; elevation 2,700 meters). The place is particularly valued by zoologists for its isolation, a feature that makes it possible to encounter there peculiar species of rodents and small birds not to be found elsewhere.

Anyway, on the basis of what I learned, I'm sure the site is important also from an archaeological point of view. For this reason I decided, as the curator of the Kingsport Historical Society Museum, to use most of the 1999 budget to fund my expedition to Bolivia.

In the meantime, I will try to involve other philologists in the search of 'Cthulhu'-related terms also in the lexicon of Northern American ancient civilizations.

[A], Sadowsky, Phileus P, "On the Ubiquity of Cthulhu", edited by William Hamblin, 1989, Chaosium

[B] Sullivan, William, "The Secret of the Incas", 1996, Random House



DARK TIMES INTERVIEW

Editor Lee recently caught up with one of his old gaming friends Steve, who fixed up an interview with up-and-coming author Edmund Lester who was good enough to answer a few questions.

What originally interested you in the horror genre, first as a fan and then as a writer?

The first time I can say I found spooky stuff interesting was when I was nine and I heard a ghost story told by a tour guide when I was on a school trip to a Jacobean Mansion. He told a story of a woman who had been imprisoned in the house, died and now roams the house a ghost. The idea just intrigued me. Not long after my mother made a mistake which probably sealed my fate. I was reading a Roald Dahl book (I think it was James and the Giant Peach) which I'd borrowed from the school library. She decided to encourage my interest in reading so bought me a set of Roald Dahl short story books. The problem (not for me) was she didn't know he wrote adult horror as well as kids' books and bought some of the Tales of the Unexpected books; which of course I loved – what nine-year-old wouldn't? The idea of writing horror came later – much later – and it's all down to horror films; most especially bad horror films. I like watching terrible films. I admit it. I find them incredibly funny. And I like talking about how they could have been made better; what I would have done with the idea. One day after watching a particularly awful movie that featured witchcraft (I think) my wife said why don't you write your version then. It wasn't the first time she had said something like that but it was the first time I listened.

I started to think the story as I would have imagined it and slowly, bit by bit, I removed every single element of the original story, the characters, the plot, the setting, the...everything, and replaced them with my own ideas. And of course, the result was terrible; as bad as the original, just in a different way. But it proved to me I could stick with it until I typed those two final words – "The End". So, I did it again...and again, and slowly I got better at it. I think the Stairs Lead Down, the first I have had accepted for

publication, was the eighth novel I wrote. There are eleven altogether, although no one will ever see the first three – not unless I completely rewrite them.

Where or from whom do you take writing advice?

I read a few of those books authors write where they talk about the writing process; not originally out of wanting to figure out how to do it, just that they were authors I read (Stephen King's On Writing being one). When I wanted to try writing seriously I bought a couple of "How To" books and read them. The only one that suited me was Howard Mittelmark and Sandra Newman's How Not to Write a Novel. It entertained me which helped. The other couple (I won't mention) just seemed to contradict each other and even themselves from time to time. They certainly didn't contain much that I wanted to try doing.

I did speak to a few people about writing. I have the good fortune to still know a couple of authors from when I used to run a science fiction, fantasy and horror fan site called the Eternal Night. (It's been a decade since it died when social media took over the internet.) I asked them a little about it and got an almost universal "Don't do it" response. But when they saw I was serious they gave one key piece of advice – write the book you want to read yourself. Don't force writing a story that doesn't interest you just because you think it is the kind of book that sells. For instance, there is no way I could write a Dan Brown style book even though I see them on the bestseller lists because I don't enjoy that kind of story. I like the quirky, the dark and the dangerous in fiction. So I write that kind of story.

The last piece of advice is to find someone you trust (or preferable several someones) and ask them to read what you write. Ensure you let them know you want a TOTALLY HONEST reply. Then listen and take the feedback on board and make your story better. It's painful at times but it does help.

What's the best piece of advice that you could give to other writers?

Write, and keep writing until the story is done. You can't sell a story unless you finish it. And

there's a lot you can learn from going through the process even if you don't ever want anyone to see what you wrote. But before that it's simple – read. I think most of the lessons on how to write can be found in reading how other people did it. Answer these three questions. What's your favourite book? What did you like about it? What did the author do to make you like it? If you can figure all that out you're on your way.

What are you working on at the moment?

I'm writing the sequel to the Stairs Lead Down. It's called Breath of Imagined Dead and is set a few months after the events in the first novel. The characters are trying to deal with what happened in Stairs and cope with a new emergency. All good fun.

After that I have three or four on the stocks waiting to see which appeals most when this is done

- a comedic take on religion – yes, I know this is hardly new ground but I think my story has some merit
- a big science fiction epic thing again with religion being a key element – serious this time though
- a dark fantasy set in a monastic setting in a roughly Victorian era world tech wise – I'm spotting a trend here. Religion just interests me.
- a dark fantasy set in 15th century Venice, involving politics and corruption

One of them may well demand to be written when I've finished with Breath of Imagined Dead. But then maybe an entirely new story will have overtaken them all by then. You never know.

Who are your favourite writers?

Starting with horror (it seems right) my favourite authors are Stephen King (how could I leave this man out), Clive Barker (ditto), and Adam Nevill. In years gone by I read all of James Herbert and Richard Laymon, both of whom I miss and Graham Masterton who seems to have left horror behind. I used to be an addict of the Leisure

Books line of horror that ran until 2010. Every month I would get two new horror paperbacks arrive in the post – it was fantastic. Such a shame it ended.

Science fiction-wise I am a big fan of Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Kevin J. Anderson, Mike Resnick and Robert Charles Wilson. And my favourite book of all time is Frank Herbert's Dune – simply stunning world building.

I have two favourites among current writers – Magnus Mills and Zoran Živković. They both write absurdist, surreal fiction often with a serious social commentary point hidden underneath. In that style I also like Max Barry. Away from genre fiction I enjoy Robert Harris, having recently finished Munich – great book – and Bernard Cornwell.

What other authors would you recommend to people, without hesitation?

Apart from those listed in the previous question and some of the old guard of science fiction (Edmund Cooper, Clifford D. Simak, and Eric Frank Russell to name three) I recommend everyone go read Emily St. John Mandel's dystopia tale Station Eleven. I considered adding her to my favourite writers list but it's the only book of hers I've read so I held back. I have bought the other three she's written but they are as yet unread. In the months and years to come she may well be elevated to my top table of authors. I'd also recommend Emmi Itäranta's Memory of Water (as long as you don't want your fiction to be action packed). Like Station Eleven, it's a dystopian future story – maybe it's a type I'm attracted to. It must be as I've realised two of the other two novels I picked to recommend are also set in futures that have gone more than a little wrong. They are Adrian Barnes' Nod and Margaret Atwood's the Handmaid's Tale. I'm not sure what this says about me. To round of my list of recommendations can I add M.R. Carey's wonderful the Girl with all the Gifts? Other authors in general would include Sarah Pinborough, Tim Lebbon and John Ajvinde Lindqvist – go read Let the Right One In.

Where do you get your inspiration from?

Everywhere and anywhere. It's a simplistic answer but the truth is they come from

watching TV and films (as mentioned above), from reading non-fiction books (I love reading history books), from watching the news (always good mileage to be made out of twisting current events), from visiting old historic sites and other countries, and from my surroundings. I live in a wonderful town in the middle of England with a fascinating and long history (Ashby de la Zouch). Just walk around and you see the past thousand years in front of you – all you have to do is know where to look.

How important is it to you for your characters to be believable?

It's probably the most important thing. You can have the greatest story ever told but no one will care if you have characters no reader can identify and sympathise with.

What do you think of the recent trend in movie horror towards sadism? How does this affect your work?

I think it was a great original idea when it first appeared but like every trend it's become overdone. I've seen it all too often and it's losing its impact for me. That said I still want to watch the Saw reboot movie – there's just something about that franchise I like. I think film makers need to go back to telling a good story with proper scares instead of just relying on how good effects have got.

Back when I started watching horror there were one or two pretty good Body Horror films – I'm mainly thinking of David Cronenberg – and then there were dozens. After a while they stopped being watchable. Not to say it's not possible to bring out a Torture Porn that I'll enjoy. Give me a good idea and I'll go with it no matter the sub-genre.

What do you think of the romantic horror genre in print and the likes of Twilight - romance novels in a classical horror setting and all that brings to the table?

I try not to if I'm honest. I'm not saying I think the idea's terrible. It's just that vampires to me are the bad guys in horror. I'm not saying you can't make them rounded out characters just not teen heart throb types –

not if you want me to watch anyway. I want my vampires and werewolves to be trying to eat your face not asking you out on a date. I like horror that tries to scare you, or disturb you, or gross you out, not horror that snuggles up on a cold winter's night to watch a rom-com.

Do you find that music, lyrics, or poetry affect your work? If so, does any one in particular inspire you?

I cannot write without music playing. I use it for inspiration. I write better when my foot is tapping. As for what type of music there's little rhyme or reason to the choice other than it being music I like. I certainly don't have to match the music to the type of story I'm writing. I'm listening to an American alternative jazz-rock band called Morphine as I complete this interview but it could as easily be heavy metal, jazz, sixties jangly pop, eighties jangly pop (not much pop from the seventies passes muster), classical, blues or soul, progressive rock, folk or Tom Waits (not sure I can place him in any category). It won't be modern pop music, rap, country and western or musical theatre stuff – I cannot stand listening to any of those. Sorry if your favourite type of music is on this list. (Not sorry enough to start listening to them.)

What about creepy locations? Do you visit darker parts of the countryside to get the ambience? (Obviously avoiding the areas of personal safety risk!)

I enjoy visiting ruined castles, monasteries, prehistoric sites like stone circles, roman ruins and pretty much any kind of historic place. It doesn't have to be world renowned or anything like that – just interesting. The idea for the setting of the Stairs Lead Down came from walking around my hometown and seeing all the buildings along the high street from Tudor times to the 1970s. It made me think what would have happened here in years gone by. So I started reading about it and then fed all that into the novel – although not much of the detail made it through the final edit. I didn't want it to read like a history textbook with a plot. Does help ground it though.

Finally, how do you keep the idea mill stoked and organized when it is running three shifts?

I keep notebooks. Everywhere I go there is a miscellany notebook into which I will scribble down ideas. When some of these congeal into a story concept I deflower a new book and then dedicate this to a single novel or series idea, writing new notes whenever they occur to me.

After a while, entirely dependent upon how many pages of nonsense I've added to a given notebook, I review the contents to decide if I have enough to flesh out a story then try to create a plot and write up character sketches. If this all passes muster I'll block the story out into chapters and start writing. I like to have all the bits of a story at least sketched out before I start the actual writing. I'm not one of the writers who can just come up with an opening and go for it. I like to know where I'm going; roughly anyway, I do allow the characters space to breathe.

Edmund's YA novel "The Stairs Lead Down" can be yours, merely by following one of these here links!

[Amazon UK](#)

[Amazon USA](#)

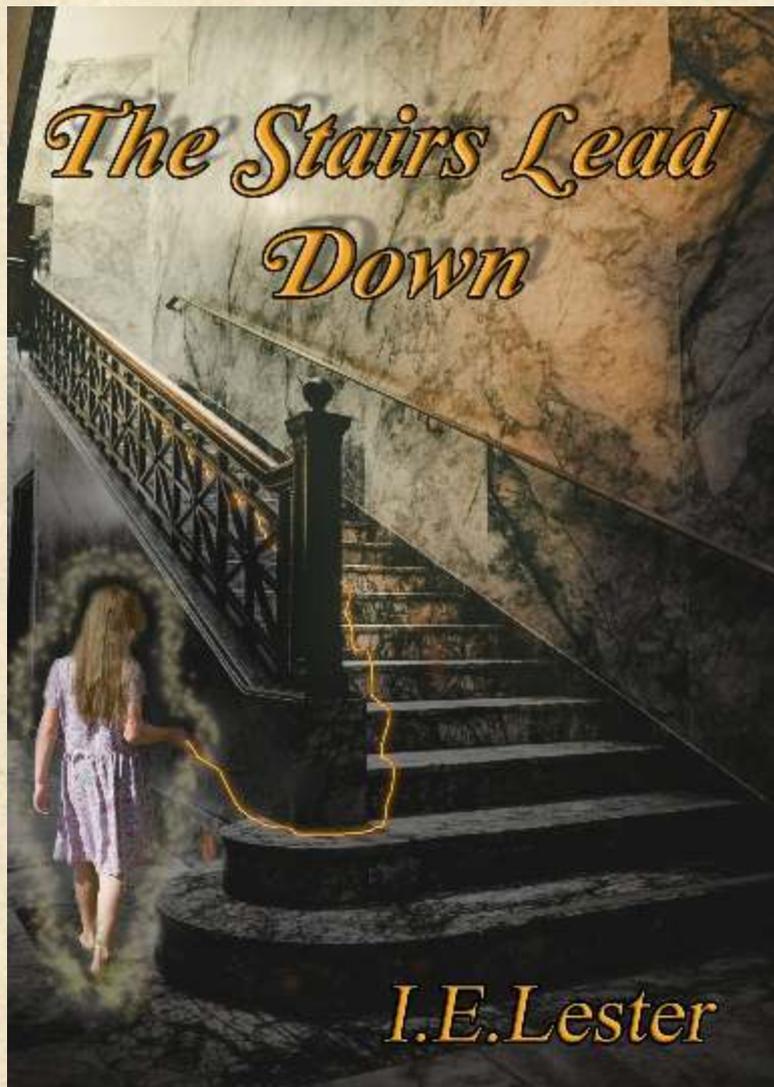
[Writer's Sanctum](#) (Edmund's publisher)

Follow Edmund on [Ye Booke of Faces](#)

Alternatively, he's on the [Tweets](#)

Also available in [Blogspot](#) form

Finally, a big thanks to my old mate Steve for arranging this interview. Catch you sometime soon I hope, and I'll never forget the games and other nonsense we got up to way back in Fox Hollies days!



Call of Cthulhu Optional Rules for the Asian Culture By Yicheng Liu

I'm sure I can't possibly be the only one who was a little disappointed with Chaosium's 'Secrets of Japan' setting and the unfortunate lack of a China Sourcebook. Maybe you are, or maybe you aren't. Whatever the case, I believe there's a better way to merge ancient Eastern Cultural beliefs together with Lovecraftian themes without it completely ruining the point of the game. So, here's my humble attempt to try and make things better...

Qi

According to the most commonly accepted interpretation of the concept of Qi, it is commonly understood as a universal force flowing through all existence. It was generally considered to be the cosmic underpinnings of all existence that mortal men are destined to never understand or to even sense the mere presence of Qi. Between different Asian countries, there were surprisingly little difference between their respective understanding of what Qi is.

Many Eastern Esoteric practitioners' saw Qi being divided into two types: Inner Qi and Outer Qi.

Inner Qi are 'cultivated' through many, many, many years of practicing 'Qi Gong' and guiding it to flow through the meridians into the Dantian on a routine cycle. However, before it could cause any visible changes to a person's constitution or abilities, a consistent flow of Qi must be achieved. That is why Tai Chi and other Eastern Martial Arts generally involved exercising joints (because the traditional belief is that meridians overlap with many places where there's major arteries and the spinal structure was often considered to be an important part of the human body. This was once the traditionally accepted model of human anatomy between many Eastern countries) and weird breathing exercises (to

help Qi quickly circulate through their body, a commonly held belief was that breathing rates affected the Qi. To certain degree, this is true; scientific studies have long since shown that breathing rates affects mood, brain chemistry, and ancient Eastern practices such as meditation reduces stress and reduces the chances of developing suicidal tendencies). The animal with the most power inner Qi is the Long, better known as the Eastern equivalent of a dragon.

Outer Qi, however, is portrayed as '氣'. This Chinese character shows some sort of gas covering rice, thus portraying the idea of an invisible force capable of moving, covering or surrounding a heavy object. Hence Outer Qi is first and foremost thought of as the driving force behind all movement and all change within the three realms (the heaven, the human realm, the hell). If a country is not being governed properly, the Qi of the land might be the root source of all failures and flaws, or maybe the Qi of the Emperor was flowing incorrectly. Conversely, a country with 'a powerful amount of Qi' is credited as prosperous.

Of course, there's plenty of different, distinct diffraction of Qi as well. From an early point in Chinese history, some Chinese thinkers/philosophers began to believe that there were different types of Qi. The coarsest and heaviest of those formed the solids; whilst lighter ones formed the liquids. The origins of Qi were often debated as well, but it is also widely accepted within Esoteric Chinese ideologies that it stemmed from Pangu, a God who was said to have created the world. Many religions from Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, even Hinduism. I am not an expert on the exact relationships between these major schools of thoughts and religions, and I cannot tell you with precise certainty how each came about and the precise nature of every individual model of Qi there ever was, simply because the exact history is too complicated to explain simply and also requires a degree in Eastern theology before the key values could be dissected with any confidence.

But many centuries before Western Science developed the concept of positive and negative spin for electrons and made ground-breaking understandings of quantum duality, the Asian community of thinkers and philosophers and religious activists had already developed the idea of the Yin-Yang duality. The Yin is the negative flow of the cosmic Outer Qi; the Yang, on the other hand embodies the positive flow of the cosmic Outer Qi.

Accordingly, there are places where these types of Qi flow more strongly than in others. These places are generally also considered the foundations of the prosperity of a country. These Earthen ley-lines style Veins were called the Long Mai, the Dragon Veins. Yin Qi represented Women, death, and unpleasant stuff such as ghosts and demons (remember, China was, and still kind-of is, a patriarchal society). The Yang Qi represented men, life, and goodness in general. A Yang Mai meant good luck and friendly Qi and a Yin Mai, on the contrary, meant bad luck and are found in places where massacres happened (the study of identifying Yang Mai and Yin Mai are called Feng-Shui, which is too complicated to discuss within 1,000~ words).

Here's a few suggestions on how to implement Qi-based Rules and making your game more Chinese Wuxia-like without losing the point of a good CoC game. Rules listed below:

- All Kung-Fu and Martial Arts skills require the usage of Qi. Thus, the Qi Cultivation skills is required to even rudimentarily understand Eastern Martial Arts and Human Anatomy, and Qi Manipulation skill is required to 'use' any Kung-Fu skills such as 'Mantis Reflexes' or 'Lightning Thunder Palms' or What-have-you. Archaic Eastern Martial Art Practices were pretty silly to begin, so it's actually pretty easy to come up with silly names for them.
- Introducing a Qi points system that is completely independent from MP and HP. The main reason for this is because Qi is not

the Eastern equivalent of magic, and there's key differences between Qi and Magic. Another reason to make the Qi points system independent would be to prevent Investigators from attempting to use Qi points to power magic spells when they run out of MP. While unlikely, it is something to watch out for as that could be potentially game-breaking and ruin immersion.

- Qi will be spent for each usage of the Kung-Fu skills. To either deflect damage or to successfully activate a skill.
- Once the Qi Cultivation skill is acquired, investigators will passively cultivate Qi over time. With a 20% Qi Cultivation skill: they gain 1 Qi point every two months, 50% is 1d3 Qi points per two months, 80% is 1d6 per two months, and 90% or above is 1d10 per every two months. However, mentality and a healthy state-of-mind are often a require to cultivating inner Qi as ethics and morality are a surprisingly consistent theme within Eastern Cultures
- Qi affects the PCs whether they want to or not. 50 Qi points means they get to increase one of their character stats by 1 point (of course, subsidiary stats will not be affected). For every 20 points beyond 50 is a chance for increasing one of the character stats by one.
- For obvious reasons, Qi points cannot be used to increase any of the character stats above human limits.
- Qi points can be used to recover either HP or MP, as acupuncture and Reiki healing are both Eastern practices based off of fundamental ideas of Qi manipulation; but the PCs shouldn't be able to use it to increase HP or MP beyond their initial maximum limits using Qi points.
- Qi points cannot be used to recover SAN points or to increase maximum SAN beyond the 99-Mythos Knowledge-Miscellaneous. Again, for obvious reasons.

Further Readings (in no particular order):

<http://asiasociety.org/education/confucianism>

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qi>

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_martial_arts

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism>

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taoism>

氣

The Voshkod Incident – an alternative future terror By Davide Quatrini

Union of Soviet Socialist Systems

USSSS Voshkod (CCCCN-2712)

Commanding officer: Boris Komarov, Podpolkovnik

Personal logbook

3223.X.31,75: our exploration of the *Sagittarius Dwarf Spheroidal Galaxy* continues. I'm very proud and honored to be the first comrade to command a mission aimed at discovering what lies in another galaxy, and I hope new resources for all workers can be found in these uncharted places.

3223.X.31,77: new planet detected by sensors. It seems to be very interesting, despite a high concentration of lead. It revolves around a green star, and seems to be the only one... a really strange scenario. Anyway, I ordered a complete scanning of it, this will require several hours to complete.

3223.X.31,80: amusing. Mrs. Rinde, the medical officer, organized a party meant to start in a few hours. She discovered, on the *People's Akashic Encyclopedia*, that primitive, superstitious men of a couple of millennia ago used to celebrate something on this day, something called *All Hallows' Eve*. I'm supposed to dress as a monster and join them. Uh.

3223.XI.01,02: I drank too much at the party. Anyway, the new planet is strangely impervious to the sensors... maybe the lead is the problem. I told the engineers to redirect some energy from the propulsion to sensors... but it will take yet more hours to give results. Time to sleep!

3223.XI.01,18: what a horrible nightmare. Better not to think about it. Still no news about the planet scanning, the additional energy seems ineffective... I'll wait another couple of hours and then try something else.

3223.XI.01,19: incredible. The *Korolev AI* on-board computer found something about this planet in pre-War literature. It seems that a reactionary writer called Lovekravt described it in one of his tales... including the lead content and its parent green star! But it is surely a coincidence... the astronomic instruments of 20th century were not able to resolve extragalactic planets, and pre-War information is unreliable. Anyway, Mr. Lovekravt (or Lovekraft, the sources are discordant) gave *Hchab* as a name for the planet... horrible. But at the moment I have nothing better, so I'll use it!

3223.XI.01,26: two wasted hours. For the first time the Glorious Soviet Sensors are not able to do their work. I'll send disposable peop... ehm... androids.

3223.XI.01,34: finally, the first photograph from Hchab! Not so much to see, in reality... a hilly desert covered by strange lead plates, lit by a dark green sun and with a suffocating sky full of slimy fog and brown clouds. The ideal place for capitalists' vacation!

I'm joking, but the truth is that I'm a little bit disturbed. The landscape is incredibly similar to the one described by that old writer, and also incredibly similar to the scenery of my nightmare.

The fault it is surely of that damn party full of masked idiots and their vodka-filled pastries!

3223.XI.01,35: the fates are playing with me. The second photograph sent by Hchab surface shows an elongated shadow extending on the androids' sensors, and then... connection lost. The last time something similar happened to Soviet space missions was with Mars 3 more than 1,000 years ago!

3223.XI.01,39: madness, pure madness. Four crew members, including Mrs. Rinde, departed for Hchab using capsules, without my permission. I used the on-board AI to force their personal logs, and all of them wrote something about being 'attracted' by the planet after a 'terrible nightmare'. For the first time in my career, I really don't know what's happening.

3223.XI.01,83: nothing for the entire day from the mutineers and then, all of a sudden, a recorded audio transmission! They seem to be ecstatic, yelling of something 'large' and 'beautiful' and 'horrific'. It's like something sucked out rationality from their brains.

3223.XI.01,88: I can't wait any longer. I'll lead a rescue mission to retrieve Mrs. Rinde and the others from that damned planet. Strangely, a lot of crew members offered as volunteers for this risky task.

This log was found in the year 3227 by the crew of the Proton USSS intergalactic ship. It was stored on the Voshkod ship's systems and never transmitted to the Fleet Central Committee before today. The Proton mission has not been able to locate any trace of the Voshkod crew members, Podpolkovnik Komarov or the Hchab planet.



The Libram Memoriam

By T. Mike McCurley

A tome for all systems

Existing through the ages, stolen from one magician after another, handed from master to apprentice, the Libram Memoriam is the kind of grimoire imagined only in tales: the accumulated knowledge of generations of magical practitioners. If you can get your hands on it, there's no telling what you'll find inside. You can add your own secrets as well -- in fact you soon will.

The Libram is a System-agnostic item of power. It can be hinted at or dropped straight into an existing campaign. No statistics are added here so you can customize it to your own needs.

The door was surprisingly easy to open, given the security that Danker was known for. I glanced over at the Professor, signaling him with a hand and holding up five fingers. He pointed to his watch and I nodded. I slipped into the house and looked around for a bit, taking slow, creeping steps that made me look as silly as you'd think. Silly looks beat making noise sometimes, though. It was enough to get me within blackjack range of the goon on the porch, after all. Danker was in his study, hunched over a table. There was a huge book open in front of him, big as a spread coat. The lights gleamed off his nearly bald head as his hand worked like a sewing needle. Up and down, back and forth, pausing only long enough to jam the nib into a bottle of thick black ink. He was muttering something under his breath that I couldn't make out. "Should have sprung for a real pen," I said. He scarcely looked up, but when he did the face I saw wasn't the one I had known back before all this. He was drawn and haggard, with black under both eyes and a three-day stubble. "Morgan," he said. His voice was a ragged croak of sound. He no sooner spoke than he went back to scribbling. I'm used to being ignored by a lot of folk, but this was more than usual. I strolled into the room as if I belonged there.

"What's the deal, Danker? You dropped off the world. Lotta folk think something bad might have happened."

"I'm busy here. Come back later."

"You're writing in a book. You can't say hello to an old friend?"

"Is that what we are?" he asked, setting aside his pen and looking up at me. He leaned back in the chair and the smell of him hit me. I took a step back.

"Always thought we were."

"What do you want?"

"What's the book about?" I asked. He had turned in his seat now and I didn't like looking at what I saw. His clothes were rumpled and stained. There were bits of something in his lap that looked like eggs. The half-eaten tray on the little table past his desk had some on it, but I would guess them to be from the morning.

"You already know or you wouldn't be here."

"Come on, Danker. You know I don't read nothin' but the sports page."

His face screwed down on itself as he made to stand. He looked like a boiled ham in a rumpled brown suit.

"Stop with the --"

His voice cut out and I knew we weren't alone any more. He was looking past me where the Professor stood in the doorway.

"I should have known," he said.

"You found it," the professor said, his voice low and soft like he was in a church.

"You bring a thief into my home?" Danker asked me. He started to reach toward a drawer but the light gleaming off my .38 caught his eye. I jerked my head to the side and he stepped away from the desk.

"This is what all the fuss is about, then?" I asked, flicking a finger toward the big book.

"The Libram," the Professor said, the words little more than a breath. He started for the book and before I could stop him he was between me and Danker. I moved to the side to get a clean line just in time for Danker to sink a brass letter opener into the Professor, just under the ribs on the right side. From where I stood, I could even hear the hiss of steel on silk shirt before it went in. Danker pulled the letter opener free in a rush of scarlet and his eyes dilated as they

fixed on me. His lips peeled back and he took a step.
"All over a damned book," I thought, as the revolver spat flame.

DESCRIPTION & KNOWN HISTORY

No one knows the true history of the Book, but it is said that some of the greatest minds in magic have possessed it at one point or another, and left their secrets emblazoned on its pages. Whispered legends have put it on every known continent at some point. Due to the Book's tendency to ensnare the reader and draw them into states of hypergraphia and marginal insanity, the Libram Memoriam has been dubbed the "Tome of the Crazy" by some, and the "Frenzy Book" by others, as either is equally descriptive. Use of a nickname while referencing the Book in academic circles will frequently, however, reduce the standing of a PC in the eyes of the occultist. Despite the risks, the Libram is widely sought due to the aggregate of knowledge contained within. Most anyone with more than a passing interest in the occult may have heard of the Book, and the vast repository of magical information it is rumored to be. Its effects are well-known in the same circles, but most believe that simply to be an effect of wanting to add one's own knowledge to a grimoire of such renown.

The Libram Memoriam in its current form is roughly five hands-widths wide and seven tall, and nearly four widths thick. It is heavy, weighed down with paper. The exterior plates are leather-wrapped oak, the covering stained and darkened by ages of handling. They are held in place by black, cold iron hinges that, with some planning, can be removed to facilitate inserting new pages within the covers. It is wrapped in a thick strap of leather, and a series of holes in the strap allow it to be tied and secure the book closed.

The pages within were originally a thick parchment of a pale gray tone, but over time, more and more pages have been added - pages of convenience at times. The materials range from vellum to pressed pulp of a muddy brown color, modern paper and even the thin material from newsprinters. In a more modern campaign,

one might expect to find lined notebook paper or possibly something more random - a ripped magazine page with scribbled notes in the margin, a cocktail napkin with scrawled information stapled to a page from a legal pad that bears entirely different writing, etc.

The inks present are as varied as the pages - even more so at times, due to the use of different inks by the same author. Colors and blends show to be essentially whatever the author had on hand at the time. The handwriting ranges from barely legible to extravagantly beautiful, and the languages here are representative of those freely understood today to those classified as 'dead languages' and even codes and ciphers. Allegories and parables are present in great quantity, and one must be certain of what they are reading before experimentation. Pages, having been removed and replaced over the years, may no longer be sequential.

Notes have been added to some of the oldest pages, scribbled at times in the margins and at others by means of papers inserted between pages with said notes written on them. This further adds to the confusing nature of the Libram, as one must determine if the notes themselves are accurate.

Pages and passages are found in many different languages, and this is exacerbated by the fact that allowing someone to read from the Book in an attempt to translate it frequently leads to that person stealing the Book and adding their own pages after they have become Entranced. For this reason, it rarely stays in one place -- or even geographical region -- for long.

RUMORS

Obviously, most rumors will be campaign-specific, but here are a few easy ones to manipulate:

- 1: The Book was last known to be in the library of the Vatican (or equivalent).
- 2: Everyone who reads the Book is cursed (which is, in its own way, partially correct).
- 3: An evil source (insert your favorite) created and ensorcelled the book in an effort to create its own weapon against whatever good remained in the world.

4: A ritual buried somewhere within allows for the summoning and control of (insert Ancient Evil of your choice here). This rumor will prompt further study of the Libram, should it be obtained.

GAME EFFECTS

If the ability to detect magic exists in your game, the Book will radiate magic of fluctuating levels due to the presence of certain inks used inside it as well as the Book itself. It will radiate neither good nor evil, as the Libram is merely a repository of information.

Those who know of the Book and have heard of its contents will stop at almost nothing to obtain it if it is determined that a PC has it in their possession. Likewise, a PC obsessed with the Book will seek it out based on rumor and innuendo alone.

The main effect PCs will note (if they are the reader) is a slowly building desire to add their own magical knowledge to the Libram. They will begin to experience bouts of hypergraphia in which they feel a compulsion to scribe their own spells and/or rituals on paper and add them to the book. This is the entrancement "ability" of the Book, and it is the bane of its many authors. The entrancement will manifest as insomnia and hours of frenzied writing (the usual penalties for lack of sleep will accumulate) as normal life will pale in comparison to the driving need to document what they can for addition to the book. PCs caught in the trance will pay next to no attention to daily existence. Eating and drinking will be frequently less than subsistence level and their hygiene will suffer. Many a page has an ink line and smear on it where the author has passed out during writing.

The more of the Libram that they read, the more the PC will be convinced that the information they want is just a little deeper in the pages. It might be in a language they don't understand, or presented as metaphors and parables within the writing of another, and the PC may come to believe that they just need to work harder at interpreting the information as presented. This has the added effect of causing the PC to spend even more time examining the

tome, during which they are more susceptible to its entrancing power. Occult knowledge will increase by study of the Book. It would be easy to add (for example) 1-3% for every week of dedicated study, at least as long as the pages studied were in a form and language the PC can understand. The more that knowledge increases, though, the further down the road to Entrancement the PC has staggered. When it comes to knowledge gained, that again will be campaign specific, but it is recommended that the majority of spells and rituals found and interpreted be "low level" types. Nothing too earth-shattering. Nobody who gets their hands on the Book begins by inscribing their greatest rituals. Greater power is hinted at and alluded to on many pages, and continues to impress upon the reader that what they want is waiting to be discovered.

As to the included spells, there is no reason why the PCs should not see some benefit. Considering how many spells may be inscribed in the Book, some of them must be useful. That being said, some spells come with their own price tags. Possible spell types included would be:

1: Aegis - Basic shielding (a slight hindrance to incoming damage - magical or physical at GM discretion). Requires concentration, preventing the user from conducting other actions without penalty.

2: Magic Bullet - A minor incantation allowing a small stone or random object no bigger than a shot glass to be thrown with the accuracy and force of a sling stone or small caliber pistol round. Takes the same time as using said sling/small pistol.

3: Demon Ward - A quick spell providing momentary protection from supernatural creatures. Used in a combat situation, Demon Ward provides a few seconds of time to prepare your next options. Not long lasting, and the stronger the opponent, the shorter the spell duration.

4: Beacon of Return - Creates an arrow that points unerringly toward home, visible only to the caster, that hovers in their vision and prevents them from losing their way. Unfortunately, the spell was transcribed long ago and is very specific in its wording. The arrow will direct the caster to the home of

the original author (which may now be underwater, or overrun by monsters, or in another town, country, dimension etc.). Alternately, the arrow directs the caster to their own home but partially blocks their vision with a glowing arrow icon that won't go away even while they try to sleep. Appropriate penalties apply.

5: A series of cantrips from an apprentice that can be surprisingly useful. Not everything in the Book has to have a penalty associated with it.

6: Infatuation - "Will cause another to love you" claims the scrawled note. A love spell that will make you more attractive to others. ALL others. The postman, local gangs, your best friends' spouses... Seemingly useful, but how many of the people suddenly attracted to you are willing to act on that attraction, and are definitely not willing to share you?

7: Restoration of the Lessers - A spell designed to heal animals, but which leads to strange behavior on their part after. Will actually heal minor ailments, but also opens the animal's vision to infrared and ultraviolet spectrum viewing, as well as campaign-appropriate dimensional sight (astral, ethereal, the dimensions seen by use of the Tillinghast Resonator, etc.).

I carried the thing in a suitcase, it was so big. Walking down the street with it would have marked me as a sap at best, and a killer at worst. Champlain's butler let me into the house and walked me through the long hallways without a word.

The old man was in his bed when we got there, barely able to sit up on his own. It didn't matter. The butler sat him up neat as you please, with his nightclothes and that stupid sleeping cap still on.

"You have it?" he croaked. I dropped the suitcase onto the floor with a thud.

"It's in there," I told him. "I wrapped it in a couple of shirts. You can add them to the expense reports."

His eyes opened wider than I thought possible, looking like two green plates sunk in a spotted mass of wrinkles. He leaned forward, his fanatic gaze never leaving the suitcase. He raised a frail finger and the butler stepped forward.

"Mister Morgan needs a check, Ballantine," he said. "Five thousand dollars, I believe, was the agreed-upon amount?"

"People died for that book," I said. He flapped a hand.

"They always have."

"I was nearly one of them."

Champlain made a quiet snorting sound.

"Ballantine, add an extra thousand for Mister Morgan's troubles."

Always good to know what you're worth.

I followed Ballantine from the room to get the check. He still walked ramrod-stiff, like he hadn't just seen Champlain dismiss a couple dead bodies. I watched as he scribbled the details onto a fresh check from a big ledger.

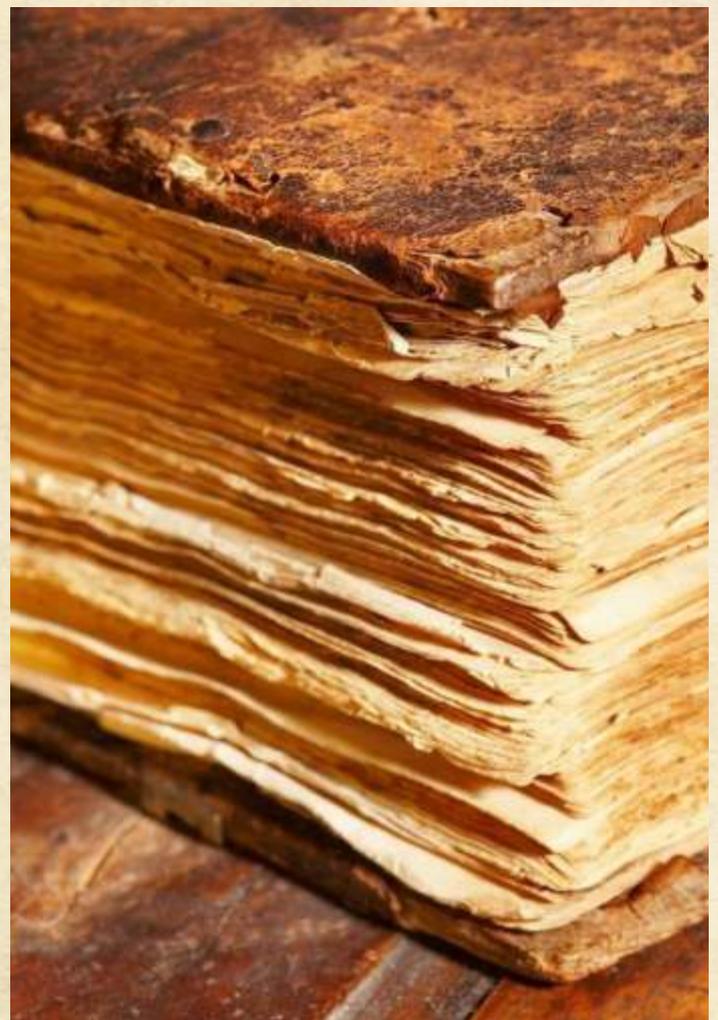
"Say, does that pen work pretty well?" I asked. He looked at me, then down at the pen, and then repeated the motion.

"It does," he said. "Why do you ask?"

I grinned at him and pocketed the check.

"Got a feeling your boss is gonna need it soon."

<END>



THE VANISHING VARIGOTTI



The Vanishing Varigotti For Trail of Cthulhu By Joe "Citizen X" Klemann

Setting: The Setting presumes that the Investigators have all received invitation or purchased tickets to see a Magic Show either in Arkham or similar locale on the East Coast during the 1920s or 1930s (the details of the era change very little for the scenario). This scenario works best for 4-5 Investigators and is meant as an introductory investigation for new players to Trail of Cthulhu.

Overview: The Investigators watch a Magic Show gone wrong and become enthralled in the shadowy world of the Mafia and Magical Society. Discovering that one Magician had stolen knowledge of an unusual machine from its inventor, they learn about the dark secrets of Misery Island. There they discover a mind-rending portal to another dimension and a deadly giant beast that stalks our world. I have presented a list of core clues, which are described in more detail throughout the scenario simply to give a Keeper an idea of what should show up for the Investigators, no matter which direction they investigate.

Core Clues:

Varigotti's Machine

The Crystal Shard

Mallore's Laboratory

The Crystal Caves of Misery Island

Opening Scene: The Vanishing Act

Description: The characters arrive at a rented theater in Arkham (or other starting city). They have come to see the magical act of the Magician known as "Vanishing Varigotti." The theater attendees are mostly high society types looking for an intriguing night at the local theater, the characters can decide where they are sitting based on their Creditability score or the Keeper can simply decide they all have front-row seats. If the Keeper wishes to run a longer game in Arkham, introducing NPCs from the town or Miskatonic University, can be done in social scenes while the Investigators wait for the curtain to draw back and the show to

begin. Likely to be unknown to the Investigators during the play, there are members of the Arkham Magician's Society (of whom Varigotti is not a member) and the local Mafia observing the performance as well.

The Show: As the curtain draws back, Varigotti, a thin man with formal attire and an exaggerated mustache, explains that he has traveled the world and learned secrets thought forgotten by the "civilized" nations of mankind. He performs some showy tricks with his two lovely assistants, causing explosions of smoke and tricks of sleight of hand with the audience. As his show begins, the audience may notice that there are mirrors reflecting a veiled device beyond the curtains. Varigotti reaches the performance's climax by drawing back all the curtains and the veiled machine, he explains he will perform a trick that will allow him to literally vanish before the eyes of the audience and reappear somewhere else. His assistants Linda and Lisa, beautiful twins, step and pull off his coat. Varigotti rolls up the sleeves of his undershirt as he steps into a glass cage made of magnets and mirrored lenses, the assistants plug in power cables to the machine. Suddenly the lights go dead in the theater and yet the machine glows with unnatural light. Daring Escape [Sense Trouble Difficulty 4]: If an Investigator succeeds the skill check, they notice a man in a top hat and fine suit exiting the theater during the commotion. This man is "The Amazing E" or Everett Evreux Esquire, a rival stage magician who seems to understand something has gone drastically wrong with the act. The Investigators may not know his identity at this point of the scenario, but he will be revealed to be a key figure in the Arkham Magician's Society. Attempting to Shadow him from the theater or chase after him, leads in a surprise turn of an alleyway and a dead-end, it appears "The Amazing E" has also vanished suddenly. [Forensics or Evidence Collection 1 point] The Investigator discovers a Top Hat and Cloak thrown clumsily in a nearby waste bin and evidence that "E" may have climbed an iron fence and torn his cloak while escaping into a

nearby yard. His appearance would have changed even if they were to locate him, the Magician likely disguised himself and fled the scene.

End of the Show: Suddenly in a burst of white hot flame and bright light, Varigotti's body becomes a skeletal outline and he vanishes, leaving nothing but ashen hand-prints on the glass of the chamber and smoke in the glass cage. It appears the trick worked, but at the expense of power to the whole city, which takes another hour to return the lights to Arkham. Witnessing the show's vanishing act is unsettling to observers [Stability Test Difficulty 5]. The Investigators are now in a darkened theater full of panicking citizens and even the Magician's assistants seem shocked by this last act. Some of the men in the crowded theater recover flashlights or lanterns to provide light for the patrons to depart safely. Linda and Lisa, the assistants of Varigotti, will approach one of the Investigators who seems most competent or has a background in Law Enforcement, asking for their help discreetly in the matter of figuring out where Mr. Varigotti has gotten off to. During the beginnings of their investigation, another figure from the crowd will emerge to interfere and loudly dismiss Varigotti's vanishing act as the trick of a charlatan, this man reveals himself to be the Magnificent Medlov, he is an arrogant stage magician who is performing at this venue himself next week.

Magnificent Medlov

Medlov is essentially a jealous performer who feels that he's been outdone by his rival, whom he will frequently mention to those who entertain his arrogance [Flattery], is not even a member of the Arkham Magician's Society but rather an Italian of Jewish faith from the Island of Cyprus. Medlov offers his services to help "debunk" Varigotti's tricks, but his real intentions are to steal any documents or learn information that might help him perform a similar trick [Bullshit Detector 1 point spend]. If the Investigator's discover Varigotti's blueprints for the machine in his magical trunk while Medlov is present, he will attempt to filch the plans from their pockets before leaving [Sense Trouble against Medlov's Filch roll]

Medlov will generally spend 3 pool points to ensure the success of his theft. If confronted, Medlov will likely make an intimidating flourish with his saber, but is unlikely to fight anyone directly and more likely to run away if faced with a firearm wielding investigator. Assume that chasing or pursuing Medlov leads to a similar outcome as chasing "The Amazing E" since, after-all, he is a magician. Three Things: Fashionable suit with white gloves, wears a fencing saber at his side, piercing blue eyes and dark features
General Abilities: Athletics 4, Health 7, Scuffling 6, Weapons 8, Stealth 6, Filch 10
Alertness/Stealth Mod: +1/+1
Weapon: Unarmed (-2 damage), Fencing Saber (+1 damage)

Linda & Lisa

Varigotti's assistants are two beautiful twins, blonde haired women wearing clothing that would not be out of place at a cabaret show. They have worked with Varigotti's travelling show for a year, before that they were primarily dancers and performers for various vaudeville acts. The assistants seem to be straight forward and honest, Varigotti worked on most of his tricks behind the scenes and the assistants were only given one rehearsal before a show to learn how he would work on stage. This last trick however, with the glass chamber, Varigotti did not want to use the machine or plug it in until the act itself. This act was a bit out of character for the Magician but he had seemed nervous lately. The women are worried about their boss and want to find him safe and sound. If the investigators don't ask, the ladies will mention they took Varigotti's jacket before he entered the machine and point at it on a nearby stool back stage.

[Reassurance 1 point spend]: By calming the assistants down and reassuring them that Varigotti will be found, the women can impart some information about how his last machine had been made by working with an eccentric Italian inventor named Marcini Mallore. Varigotti had been spending a lot of time at Mallore's laboratory lately. The ladies impart a Core Clue, the location of Mallore's Laboratory.

[Shadowing]: Following the assistants after they leave the theater later or on subsequent nights, learns that they also work late nights as lounge singers performing a duet at a local club in the basement of Garrison Street. Their intentions seem more innocent than sinister, although the club has ties to the Mafia and the liquor business. (This provides the optional scene with the Garrison Street Club)

Varigotti's Jacket:

The magician gave his assistants his jacket before he entered the machine. [Evidence Collection] discovers a few tricks up his sleeves, cards, handcuff keys and lock-picks, but only one item is of importance inside his interior pocket. There is a numbers slip from a local gambling hall and speakeasy on Garrison Street, the slip is a loser. [Streetwise 1 point spend] to a character who has connections, they learn that Varigotti owed gambling debts to the "Outfit" in Arkham and Boston, so he was likely to be in big trouble before his show tonight, (this clue can also lead investigators to the optional scene with the Garrison Street Club.)

Searching the Theater:

Characters may assume that Varigotti has simply pulled a mundane trick and is still hiding somewhere in the theater itself. The following avenues reveal various facts about the theater and the Magician's act. Those with Drives related to Sceptic, may be obliged into this search for Varigotti, assuming the whole act to be a charade. Hidden Spaces [Architecture 1 point spend]: By searching the theater, characters can find stairs under a trap door backstage that leads to the basement, this is also where the wiring from the machine runs too and can be discovered through other means at a Keeper's discretion. Searching the cellar, there is no other way in or out (there are some normal pipes that power the boiler, but these are not big enough for a man to crawl through). No hidden door lies below where the machine was sitting. As far as a character can tell, there is simply no place that Varigotti could have disappeared to in

the building. This revelation is a Difficulty 4 Stability Test.

The Machine Wiring [Electronics Difficulty 4]: The wires that powered the machine were attached from below the stage to the machine.

Asking Witnesses [Oral History 1 point spend]: Asking those who were in the theater during the incident and those who may have been outside the theater during the act is time consuming and many of those people were confused by the bright glow of the machine. No one can recall seeing anyone looking like Varigotti fleeing the theater.

Finding Varigotti's Magical Trunk [Evidence Collection 1 point spend]: Investigator's searching the theater, may instead come across Varigotti's magical trunk hidden backstage, see below for details.

Examining Varigotti's Machine:

Varigotti's Machine is an odd marvel of science, a glass and steel chamber surrounded by rings of high powered magnets and lenses, snaking with power cables and coils of copper wire. The machine seems to be still smoldering from the last charge which killed the power to the entire city and seems to have burned out some of its wiring. [Electrical Repair Difficulty 6] will return the machine to working order, though the Investigators will learn this is a bad idea. They still must wait for Arkham's power grid to be restored in the area, which takes roughly an hour. [Evidence Collection] discovers a secret panel on the machine with a shard of glowing blue crystal of unknown purpose, removing the crystal will prevent the machine from activating properly as well, but this crystal is a Core Clue. Any scientifically minded characters who examine Varigotti's machine will scoff at its ability to do anything besides reflect light in spectacular ways using the many mirrored lenses [Physics, Chemistry or Photography]. It all appears to be an elaborate trick, although, Varigotti is missing and there are some physical clues left behind inside the machine. [Evidence Collection or Forensics 1 point spend] there is melted rubber on the floor of the machine from Varigotti's shoes and there are ashes of burned human skin from Varigotti's hands

pressed against the glass, it seems that his entire body may have been incinerated, though that seems unlikely, this revelation is unsettling [Stability Test Difficulty 3].

Activating the Machine: [Electrical Repair or Physics] If the investigators decide to activate the machine, precisely one investigator can enter the machine at a time and the effect is much the same to witnesses as to what happened with Varigotti. Invariably the machine drains power from the city once again. The investigator who volunteers for such a task will be sorely disappointed. As Varigotti's machine is flawed, they will feel the flesh burned from their bones and they arrive suddenly with a still screaming brain teleported into the crystal caverns of Misery Island. A monstrous four-armed creature bears down on them to feast. It is the last thing they experience before a quick and painful death. Witnesses suffer a [Stability Test Difficulty 5] as their friend essentially vanishes in a bright light, they will find out their fate later if they arrive on Misery Island, their body will be found next to Varigotti's.

Activating the Machine without the Crystal Shard [Electrical Repair or Physics]:

Activating the machine without using the tiny crystal shard in the housing, instead creates an electrical fire and does not teleport as intended. The investigator remains trapped in the machine, taking Fire damage as if from a burning room (+1 damage, as listed on pg. 68 of the ToC book) each round until another investigator can save them or they find a way to open the door to the chamber [Mechanical Repair Difficulty 5]. The machine is destroyed as a result.

Examining the Crystal Shard: [Geology 1 point spend] The crystal shard appears to be a sliver of blue-gray crystal that glows from within. It could be a sliver of Kyanite crystal, but it appears to display rare magnetic properties. There had recently been mention of a Arkham Gazette newspaper article of deposits of similar magnetic crystals being brought back from Misery Island Massachusetts to the Miskatonic University for study. The location of Misery Island is a Core Clue.

(Characters may decide to go to Miskatonic University and examine their deposits, learning that the crystal did come from the island. I did not do a full writeup for this scene, but Keepers are welcome to utilize some of the NPCs from the theater at the university. It will be discovered Misery Island is indeed where the crystal came from. If the crystals display truly strange electromagnetic properties it could prepare the investigators for their inevitable visit to the island.)

Varigotti's Magical Trunk:

Hidden behind the scarlet curtains backstage, Varigotti's magical storage is a large decorative trunk with an elaborate false lock mechanism. It appears unlocked, but if someone attempts to open it, it instead gives them a shock of 1 damage [Electrical Repair Difficulty 6 avoids the shock a second time]. The inside of the trunk lid is lined with wiring connected to a battery. The trunk requires a locksmith [Locksmith 1 point spend] to open or someone handy with a crowbar [Scuffling Difficulty 4]. Inside the trunk are various magician's tools, smoke projectors, mirrors and spare parts for the machine. There is also blueprints to Varigotti's machine, written in Latin [Languages]. If the blueprints are deciphered, they describe a teleportation device that literally manipulates the magnetic sphere through high intensity light, this technology completely contradicts the laws of physics and should not be possible [Physics]. The device is believed to have a destination somewhere on a nearby island, though there are handwritten notes by Varigotti himself, that he hasn't discovered which island but knows Marcini Mallore has gone there many times to get the strange blue crystals from the caves. The address of Mallore's laboratory is written on the bottom of the paper, this is a Core Clue.

Scene 2: Mallore's Laboratory

Marcini Mallore is an Italian inventor and mechanic who runs a workshop. Located on a quiet alley in an immigrant neighborhood of Arkham near Fish street. This brick building has a large loading dock and its chain padlock has been broken. [Sense Trouble Difficulty 4] someone has broken into the lab and is watching the building, characters see unseemly silhouettes at the end of the alley, these men are from the Outfit looking for Varigotti to get their money. If investigators don't notice the thugs, they wait until the investigators come out of the laboratory before they attack, otherwise the conflict happens immediately. There should be 1 hired goon for each investigator. There is a single back exit to the workshop, though it's likely the mafia is watching it as well. Marcini Mallore is not actually at the shop when the investigators arrive.

Investigating the Workshop:

Inside the workshop is full of strange machines and tools for building them. [Evidence Collection] A large map of the Massachusetts coastline and islands takes up one wall of the workshop. There is a geological survey and articles about each of the islands, only one island is circled: Misery Island. The location of the island is a Core Clue. Additionally, the ceiling of the workshop has been plastered with Astronomical star charts, [Astronomy or Occult 1 point spend] the charts depict a specific part of this summer season when the stars align with the Taurus Constellation. This alignment will end in 7 days. Marcini maintains a desk in his workshop against the wall which is covered with papers and a radio that looks like it was deliberately smashed, investigators discover scraps of his loose notes and collections of scientific papers [Evidence Collection] much of these notes have been burned in the alleyway in a metal barrel, what can be learned indicates Mallore found a type of crystal capable of holding a high energy charge and he designed a device capable of transporting people or objects from his laboratory to a nearby unnamed island. [Evidence Collection 1 point spend] A combination of Mallore's scraps and burned

notes can be reassembled to reveal Mallore had been visited by a young Magician after he demonstrated the use of his device to transport an apple at a scientific convention in Italy last year, one of his blueprints had gone missing after his last visit to the laboratory. Mallore says that if the stars are not right, the machine will not function properly and someone may be transported elsewhere in the universe instead, he is angry that the magician is getting too curious about the device.

Mallore's Machine:

The main sight dominating Mallore's laboratory is his version of the machine that Varigotti attempted to copy, wires snake from it to a nearby portable generator. [Evidence Collection] There is a crystal shard in a port similar to the one that was found in Varigotti's machine, although this crystal is not glowing and appears as if it were scored with fire. If investigators replace this crystal shard with the one from Varigotti's machine, then it will activate with the generator and work normally.

Activating Mallore's Machine:

If an Investigator activates Mallore's machine [Electrical Repair or Physics], unlike Varigotti's the investigators will be transported directly into the Crystal Caves of Misery Island unharmed, though they will quickly realize they are in more danger. Traveling via the strange machine is a mind rattling [Stability Test Difficulty 4].

Hired Goons

These thugs are either hired by the Arkham Magical Society or more likely the local Mafia to find Varigotti. Keepers may allow smart Investigators to avoid confrontations with the thugs by using investigative skills like Intimidation or Streetwise. The thugs aren't likely to be very helpful though.
Three Things: Foreign Accents, Flashy Jewelry, Bad Attitudes
General Abilities: Athletics 6, Firearms 3, Scuffling 4, Weapons 3, Health 4
Hit Threshold: 3
Alertness/Stealth Modifier: +1/+1
Attacks: Club (+0 damage) or Pistol (+1 damage)

Floating Scene: Reaction by the Magicians

If the Investigators are still snooping around Arkham or survive the goons at Mallore's Laboratory, they may be confronted by one of the rival magicians from the Arkham Magical Society. They are likely to encounter the Magnificent Medlov first, who may attempt to get the notes from Mallore or anything the investigators discovered at the laboratory. Otherwise, if the Investigators need a real challenge, they come face to face with the Amazing E' who performs a feat of real Magick. The nature of the challenge is up to individual Keepers.

Everett Ev'reux Esquire "The Amazing E'"

Three Things: Top Hat, White Hair, Speaks like an Announcer

General Abilities: Athletics 7, Scuffling 4, Weapons 2, Firearms 4, Stealth 8, Conceal 8, Filch 8, Cthulhu Mythos 3, Magick* 5, Health 8

*Magick is an optional ability if you use the Rough Magick guidebook.

Hit Threshold: 3/5* (*5 when the Amazing E' uses flash powder or other Magician's tricks)

Alertness/Stealth Modifier: +2/+2

Attacks: Unarmed (-2) or Pistol (+1 damage)

Optional Scene: The Garrison Street Club

This business is the speakeasy, gambling hall and club where Varigotti's assistants, Linda and Lisa sing their duets and where Varigotti has been losing on his bets to the local mafia. The speakeasy is accessed via a set of stairs that lead down from Garrison Street to a basement door beneath a local business, rowdy types and those who look like law enforcement are equally turned away by the door man, who asks a quarter just to get inside. Asking around too much about Varigotti in the club is likely to draw notice, although if the investigators are with Linda and Lisa, they will likely be able to eavesdrop when Mr. Sills or other tough guys come around with their entourage of thugs to ask about the disappearance of Varigotti [Oral History]. Use the statistics presented for "Hired Goons" from the Mallore's Laboratory scene if the investigators get into a bar fight or similar. If the Investigators were not aware already, they learn that Varigotti owed

considerable debts to the mafia and that he was hanging around an Italian man named Marcini Mallore at his workshop near fish street, this is a Core Clue, if the players did not already know the laboratory's address. *(This scene does not present much as far as new information, it primarily exists to give Investigators the ability to get into some trouble, maybe punch a thug or two.)*

Mr. Sills

Three Things: Expensive Suit, Slick Haircut, Eyes like a Weasel

General Abilities: Athletics 8, Firearms 8, Scuffling 8, Weapons 6, Health 11

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness/Stealth Modifier: +0/+0

Attacks: Brass Knuckles (+0 damage) or Pistol (+1 damage)

Optional Scene: The Arkham Magical Society

Investigators may decide to find the location of the Arkham Magical Society and talk to the Magicians there or see if they can learn more about their motivations. [Library Use 1 point spend] The address listed in local records for the Arkham Magical Society is a moldering old building on Main Street, near the old warehouses. Gaining access to this building is difficult, many of the doorways have been bricked over or windows boarded up. The Magicians themselves use secret entrances and each carries a special key [Shadowing 1 point spend] if the investigators are sneaky, they can observe the building and watch one of the Magicians from a previous scene enter discretely via one of the hidden entrances. [Architecture] There is a fire escape that goes up to the roof where there is a locked door [Locksmith 1 point spend or use of a Magician's key]. Also, there are stairs to the cellar which are revealed hidden beneath some bushes if the investigators were staking the place out, this reveals another locked basement door. The basement door also happens to be trapped with an electronic silent alarm system [Locksmith or Electronics Repair as an investigative ability 2 point spend]. The alarm alerts the Magicians but not the police. Once the Investigators have made their way inside the building, they find

all manners of carnival performer's props: whips, water tanks, stuffed clowns, fake trunks, trick manacles and similar devices accumulating dust and rust. The main floor contains a single conference room and small stage, where the magicians reveal their secrets to each other when they meet here on set nights (tonight the conference room is empty).

The Hall of Atlantis:

The basement level contains the Magical Society's real treasures in the "Hall of Atlantis" where artifacts from all over the globe are accumulated. Everything from Egyptian Mummies still in their sarcophagi to statues from the Parthenon sit on dusty shelves, there is practically a secret and most likely illegal, museum here. *(The Investigators may discover a second shard of the glowing crystal here in the hall or any other items or evidence that may have been stolen by the Magician's themselves. Keepers may also introduce Mythos artifacts or books in the Hall of Atlantis if they wish).* The investigators are likely to encounter the Magnificent Medlov or the Amazing E' here during their visit [Sense Trouble Difficulty 6], the magicians want as much information on Varigotti's trick as they can get, they'll be willing to pay the investigators for it or hurt them (Keeper's discretion). Clever Investigators may join forces with the Magicians [Reassurance or Flattery 1 point spend] and get their assistance throughout the rest of the scenario. The Keeper can also have the Magicians present any information or Core Clues that the Investigators may be lacking at this point in the scenario.

Ending Scene: Misery Island

(Real History of Misery Island, in the early 1900s, the island was home to resorts and cabins for the people of Massachusetts, but it these buildings were mostly burned to ruin in a large mysterious fire.)

Located off the coast of Massachusetts, this small island is officially abandoned. If the investigators arrive here by boat, they can dock at the remaining pier and forgotten clubhouse on the island. [Sense Trouble Difficulty 6] An alert investigator notices there is a rowboat that has been pulled up

from the beach and hidden behind some rocks and bushes, it likely means someone else is here. If the investigators surveyed Mallore's laboratory, the geological discovery revealed that the cliffs of the island contain curious caves and they can easily find the entrance [Geology]. The weather of the island is typically shrouded in fog and thunderstorms are frequent (Hit Thresholds for ranged attacks on any foes and for the Investigators is improved by +2, Investigators gain a free refresh on their Stealth pool if they run away from any opponent).

The Ruined Buildings: Simply wandering around the island is likely only to discover the burned remains of cabins from the fire and the ruins of a once larger resort here [Architecture] reveals that someone or something deliberately burned the buildings down, they are not close enough to simply spread a wildfire. (The ruins are not connected directly to the current story, but show that the strange caves have been here for some time causing strife and the island was deliberately depopulated to prevent their discovery. Optionally, the Keeper may have the Investigators discover some of the hired goons from an earlier scene killed among the ruins, highlighting the danger of the Beast of the island or Mallore's dedication to keeping the island a secret.)

Arrival by Mallore's Machine: If the investigators arrive via Mallore's machine, they are teleported instantly into the Crystal Caves on the island. Investigators risk attracting unwanted attention if they do not move quietly inside the cave [Stealth Difficulty 4].

The Crystal Caves: At the entrance to one of the many cave mouths on the rocky cliffs that face the edge of the island, investigators can feel a strange static charge which causes their hairs to raise on end [Stability Test Difficulty 2]. These pulses of energy occur every few minutes or so and cause the veins of minerals and crystals along the cave walls to glow and illuminate the tunnels. [Physics or Electrical Repair 1 point as an Investigative ability] when these pulses occur, if they were properly harnessed or a conductive wire embedded

into the rock, they could be used to power a device or even as a weapon to cause electrical shock (*If used as an improvised weapon, the shock from the cave pulses causes +8 damage*). The caves themselves run deep underground and eventually the floor of the tunnels turns into crushed skeletal remains of animals and some humans.

[Biology or Forensics 1 point spend] whatever killed these prey animals was very large and predatory, the animals appear to be common from the New England area but as you get deeper in the caverns, they appear more alien and bizarre [Stability Test Difficulty 4].

Remains of Mallore's Expedition: In a specific section of the deep caves, there are wires embedded into the stone walls and clamps attached to raw veins of pulsing crystal. These wires run to a central chamber filled with strange electronics equipment, [Physics or Electrical Repair] these devices are built to track the source of the energy pulses.

The Observatory: If Investigators follow Mallore's electrometer readings, they come to a spherical chamber made of slowly rotating stone and pinpointed with glowing crystals that reveal themselves like stars in the night sky, this bizarre room is spanned by a stone bridge. The construction is so seamless and monolithic that it is unsettling.

[Architecture 1 point spend] the construction seems impossible and built to be for something far larger than human beings, it could possibly be older than the island itself, older than the Natives [Stability Test Difficulty 3]. The constellation map of the domed ceiling is actually the same as the alignment with Taurus which was on Mallore's laboratory ceiling [Astronomy].

The Fate of Varigotti: Located halfway within the wall of the stone dome of the Observatory room, Varigotti's blackened bones are still in his charred suit and white gloves. It seems his malfunctioning machine killed him upon arrival [Stability Test Difficulty 5].

The Portal of Mists: The bridge continues down a tunnel into the deep earth where a mist seems to cling to the air and the pulses seem to originate from, the tunnel ends a magical gateway, covered in runes of

crystal veins which emit light and rolling fog that fills the cavern.

Entering the Portal: [Stability Test Difficulty 7]

Entering the gateway transports the Investigator to a strange subterranean cavern filled with a gigantic cyclopean alien temple, where thousands of bones of human and alien litter its steps. Various hideous Gugs climb about the temple and surrounding cavern, they crunch on bones and shuffle about, getting their attention is a very bad idea [Stealth Difficulty 6]. If the investigators are charged by a horde of Gug, their only option is to flee the island as fast as they can, for their doom is certain.

[Cthulhu Mythos 1 point spend] The gateway between worlds only opens during the alignment of the stars with the Taurus constellation, which Mallore discovered ends in 7 days.

NPC Reaction Scene: Threats in the Mist

As the Investigators are likely to realize, they are not alone on Misery Island. Marcini Mallore is here hiding in the mist and his mind has finally snapped after finding Varigotti dead, a greater threat in the form of an escaped Gug also exists.

Encountering Mallore:

Marcini Mallore wishes to keep anyone from discovering the secrets of the island and has set out with a plan. Mallore may ambush characters by electrocuting them with wires using the cave pulses [Sense Trouble Difficulty 3] or he may use more straightforward means by firing his double barrel shotgun at them (+1 damage). The attack by "Mad Mallore" can occur in the mists of the island, the caves, ruined buildings or whenever the Keeper feels appropriate. He may attempt to reason with the investigators at gunpoint, convincing them this place means only death and destruction, a successful use of [Psychoanalysis Difficulty 6] reveals that Mallore is paranoid and believes the threats to be a real danger, he is also suffering from severe depression after watching the young apprentice Magician die from the faulty machine based on his own designs. Three Things: Italian Accent, Wild Hair, Leather Electricians Overalls & Gloves

General Abilities: Athletics 5, Scuffling 5,
Firearms 4, Stealth 6, Health 7
Hit Threshold: 3 (5 in the Fog)
Alertness/Stealth Modifier: +1 (Paranoia) / +1
Weapons: Unarmed (-2 damage) or
Shotgun (+1 damage)
Armor: 3 vs. cutting weapons and electrical
attacks (leather protection)

The Beast of Misery Island:

A massive predatory Gug stalks through the mists and darkness. The Gug does not like bright lights and if it is daylight, he'll be in the tight confines of the tunnels rather than outdoors. If there is a storm or it is dark out, the Gug will be hunting for prey on the surface. Standing over 12 feet tall and covered in matted fur with four arms, at a distance it may be mistaken for a gorilla or a grizzly bear, certainly the human mind hopes that is all it perceives. The vertical mouth of the Gug is covered in dry blood and gore, it stinks like rotting meat that can be smelled before the thundering footsteps of the Gug are heard closing in [Sense Trouble Difficulty 3].

Three Things: Vertical Mouth, Four Arms,
Terrifying Stench

General Abilities: Athletics 14, Scuffling 16,
Health 14

Hit Threshold: 3 (Huge) / 5 (Fog)

Alertness/Stealth Modified: +2 (Scent)/-1
(Stench)

Weapons: +2 (Claw), +5 (Crush/Rend with
Four Arms), +4 (Bite)

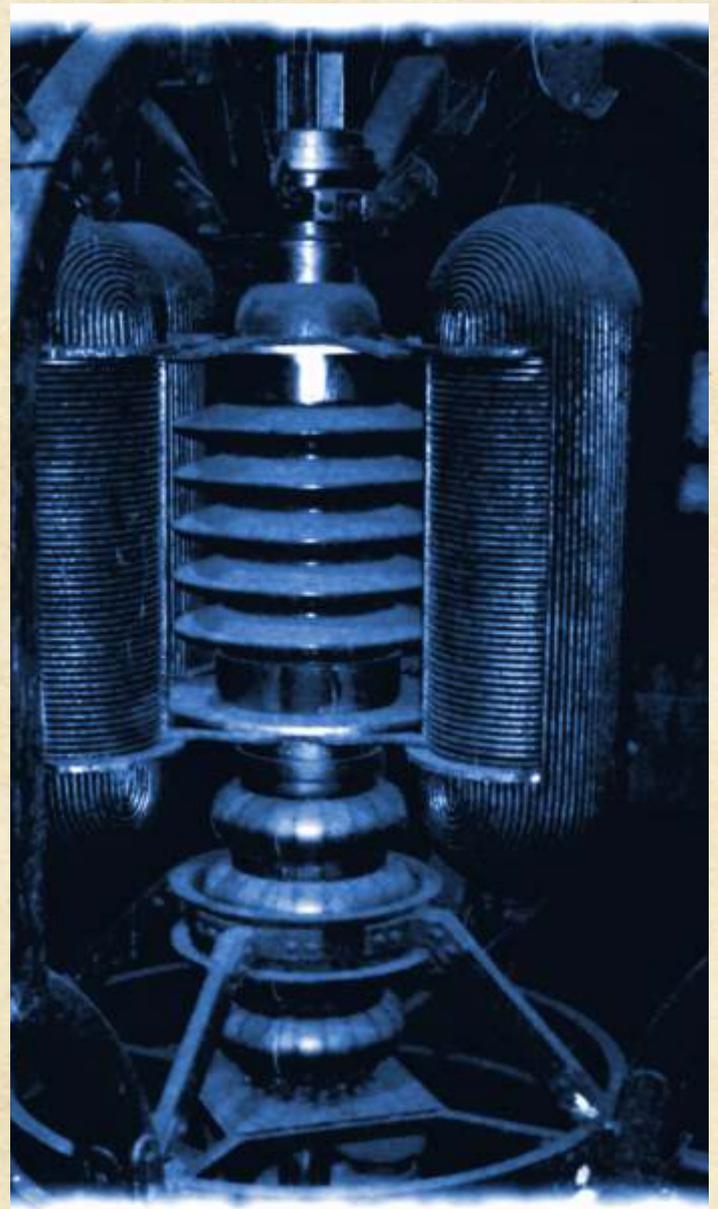
Armor: -4 vs. any (Thick Hide)

Stability Loss: +1

Special: The Gug can attack up to four
Investigators without penalty.

Ending the Scenario

The Investigators most likely discover the true fate of Varigotti and the nature of Misery Island, likely they'll want to escape the deadly situation once and for all. Those who survive may now be mad, the Keeper could have them picked up by a passing boat and taken to Arkham Asylum or they may simply go to the authorities and convince them to restrict access to the island. If Mallore is still alive, he may end up in the asylum and is unlikely to be of much help. There are numerous hooks that have been seeded through this scenario that can lead to larger scenarios and adventure. The Investigators may also use Mallore's knowledge to try and find a way to shut the gateway once and for all. This is up to the Keeper's discretion, however if the crystal circuits can be disrupted (such as with a few crates of dynamite) that should do it.



MARCINI MALLORE'S MACHINE





BEFORE THE SHOW



MALLORE'S ISLAND

MURDERPLOT

**By Phil Ward
For Dark Conspiracy**

+ + + ADVERTISEMENT + + +

MURDERPLOT - By MurderPlot Industries

An invaluable tool for law enforcement personnel, the MurderPlot is an extension of the FBI's VICAP program, allowing the user to plot murders and violent crimes geographically, historically and by criminal signature. The patented software then analyses common elements of the crimes, and ties them in with historical crimes taken from a variety of data sources [1] to spot trends and make predictions of future crimes.

"I used Murder Plot to predict two murders before they even occurred, those conspirators can do their planning IN COUNTY GAOL!"

- Sherrif Jane Arpaio III

[1] Extra data sources are on a subscription basis, MurderPlot LLC provides no guarantee as to accuracy.

Payment only accepted in non-governmental digital currency, Doge Of Venice Coins preferred.

Disclaimer: Murder Plot is provided for educational purposes only, and should not be used by non-law enforcement personnel to track down serial killers or other violent offenders.

+ + + END + + +

THE DARK TRUTH:

Murder plot does exactly what it says on the tin, replacing the giant map covered in red string, push pins and maniacal sharpie scrawlings.

Have the player make a Computer Operations skill test, and then give them some hints. Particularly useful if they're completely lost as to what to do next in your adventure. Of course, you can make it worse for them by having them turn up at a murder scene just BEFORE the police arrive, or perhaps just BEFORE the murderer selects a target...

The skill check becomes easier, the more subscriptions that the Hunter has, e.g. news, police, crime stats, GPS, Google maps data, etc, etc. There is at least one Gnomen serial killer who uses murder plot to ensure that there is nothing to tie his murders together.



A SHORT GUIDE TO AUSTRALIA Pt. 2 - What to do with all that unoccupied space?

**By Kevin O'Neill
For Dark Conspiracy**

In my first article, I attempted to give readers a feel for the vast distances that can be encountered in Australia, a situation that is often referred to here as "the tyranny of distance". That phrase, commonly attributed to Geoffrey Blainey after the publication of his book *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History* in 1966 (although the term probably originated at least five years before Blainey's book and possibly earlier) covers not just the distance of Australia from Europe, but also the distance between settlements within Australia.

The term is metaphorically speaking of how the vast distances between settlements in Australia from the motherland of Great Britain and also between each other, imposed certain needs upon the people and shaped the national psyche. Australia developed into a much more egalitarian society than societies found in Europe and also developed a culture of "make do with what you've got" (as illustrated by my reference to bush welding in the first article) that developed into a particular determination and creativity when faced with adversity. That distance has obviously caused various problems for transport between towns and was found that rail was not the best option for transport to small communities. As such, road transport is well established to the point where it's very common to see semi-trucks (the truck itself is commonly known as a prime mover in Australia) hauling two trailers and for some remote locations, the truck may haul as many as five trailers (giving rise to the term "road train" to describe such vehicles).

Of interest to anyone running Dark Conspiracy (or other alien or conspiracy games) is that those long distances between towns give you plenty of

opportunity to succumb to driver fatigue and/or sleep-induced hallucinations. A number of long-distance truck drivers have had the experience of "seeing" something on a lonely stretch of road late at night. Now whether they have actually seen UFOs and other inexplicable lights/vehicles or have just been suffering fatigue induced hallucinations, is something that the Referee could have a little fun with.

So why stress the distance factor so much? To better illustrate how much land is uninhabited or at best, very sparsely populated. Why stress *this* idea so much? Because all that open space makes it very easy for a group to establish their own settlement without coming into conflict with other settlements. In the Dark Conspiracy setting, this means corporations can (as some mining companies have in Australia in the real world) establish company towns but in the game world, as opposed to the real world, the corporations can have total control over those towns. It also means that special interest groups who wish to remain covert have many places to hide themselves. It also means that the Dark Lords and their Minions can do the same. A Demonground could flourish in one of these sparsely populated regions and never even be noticed until it is far too late.

And this is not even taking into account the reduction in government abilities to monitor & control the country that are a feature of the Greater Depression in the game world. In an example from the real world, the Japanese doomsday cult Aum Shinrikyo purchased the Banjawarn Station in April 1993. Aum Shinrikyo is the group responsible for releasing sarin gas on the Tokyo subway on 20th March 1995 killing 13 commuters. Banjawarn Station is located 550km (220 miles) north of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, the nearest large regional centre and the Station is classified as a "remote" farm due to its distance from nearby rural towns. The Aum cult was discovered to have tested their sarin on sheep at the Station and it is thought that the sarin was developed at the Station before full scale manufacture occurred in preparation for the Tokyo

attacks. It's worth pointing out, that like a number of remote Stations, Banjawarn had its own airstrip making it very easy to clandestinely transport people and equipment to the site, much as Aum Shinrikyo did when they owned the Station.

For the benefit of those readers who use Imperial measurements, 100 kilometres is roughly 62 miles and 500 kilometres is approximately 311 miles.

Note that on this map, Banjawarn Station is located east and slightly higher than the town of Leinster but in line with the town of Kalgoorlie-Boulder almost directly south of the Station. Leinster was established as a company town for workers of Agnew Mining in the mid-1970s. In 2006, it had a recorded population of just 732 people. In a straight line, Banjawarn Station is approximately 96km (60 miles) from Leinster although by road that distance is approximately 120km (75 miles) by gravel track and 180km (112 miles) using paved and unpaved roads.



The driving time for these distances is given as 5 hours 8 minutes for the gravel track and 5 hours 32 minutes by mostly paved roads. Hopefully that should give some idea of the potential level of difficulty presented when traversing unpaved roads in the rural areas. It also needs to be stated that while maps of the region show a number of lakes, these lakes are universally dry and only have water after significant rainfall. They are referred to as dry lakes for obvious reasons.

Note also that the population for the state of Western Australia was approximately 2.6 million in 2016 with most of that number (around 1.9 million in 2016), residing in the Perth-Fremantle metropolis meaning that the rest of the State is home to around 700,000 people.

(Fremantle is the port town serving the city of Perth and is a significant population centre in its own right. The two, originally separate, towns spread out over time to eventually form a north-south corridor along the coast such that Fremantle has been generally considered a location within Perth for many, many decades).

Any mission the PCs undertake in rural Australia will need a higher level of self sufficiency than they usually require in many parts of North America or Europe. The nearest town for fuel, food or ammo might be 100 to 200km away (62 or 124 miles away) or more and there's no certainty that fuel stations and shops will carry anything but the most common items. In terms of Availability Codes, anything listed as Scarce should be considered as Rare and Rare items should be available at the Referee's discretion.

For the PCs however, this means that carrying a large amount of survival gear in their vehicles won't actually draw a lot of attention (and oh yes you will need vehicles, you are not going to survive if you try to travel the outback solely on foot, you just cannot carry enough water and food let alone anything else). If anything, the PCs will likely draw attention if they are underequipped for travel in the outback. In this regard, a long range radio transceiver is not just some "rich kid's" luxury item, it's an

everyday survival tool. As with anything, common sense and proper preparedness are normal, practical considerations but having more than you think you will actually need is not a bad idea if you intend spending a lot of time in the bushland of Australia.

Roads (I use the term loosely) in outback Australia are most often unpaved, it's simply too expensive to surface a track that gets minor amounts of traffic and even more so when that track is located hundreds of kilometres from the nearest town large enough to even have the equipment necessary to pave the track. In your travels, the roads you use could easily look like this:



If you're lucky, you can travel on one of our magnificent outback highways such as the one shown below. One lane each side for miles on end, except for an overtaking lane every so often.



Some roads in the outback have travel restrictions placed upon them at certain times of the year for safety reasons. The top half of Australia lies within the Tropics and has a two-season climate, wet and dry. Some roads can become impassable during the wet season where dirt tracks become mud tracks. Even light vehicles will easily get bogged, stranding the occupants hundreds of kilometers from anywhere. The wet season can see some towns cut off from the rest of the world for days or weeks simply because there is so much water on the ground that tracks are not usable and even roads are under too much water for safe travel.

In regards to the wet season, I'll quote from the Australian Government website page *Australian weather and seasons – a variety of climates*.

"Australia is a continent that experiences a variety of climates due to its size. The temperature can range from below zero in the Snowy Mountains in southern Australia to extreme heat in the Kimberley region in the north-west of the continent.

Due to the size of the continent, there is not one single seasonal calendar for the entire continent. Instead there are six climatic zones and this translates as two main seasonal patterns.

There is a Summer / Autumn / Winter / Spring pattern in the Temperate zone, also affecting the Desert and the Grassland climatic zones and, a Wet / Dry pattern in the tropical north which includes the Equatorial, Tropical and sub-tropical zones.

Depending upon where you are each Month, the season will vary on whether the weather is defined by the Temperate zone seasons or the tropical seasons."

[This link](#) is the page quoted from, it features a useful, although small, map of the climate zones but also gives a more detailed explanation of the climate range in this country.

And in case you were getting the impression that we have nothing but treeless plains, stones and red dust, you might also travel along the following roads.



Sometimes your road meets a river.



Sometimes your road IS a river.



The outback can also hide things that the city-dweller will never see in the city - star gazing on the Gibb River Road, Kimberley region of Western Australia.



Some might even be helpful to the PCs, like this immobile double-decker bus, once used as a stockman's camp, in the far north of South Australia



Some will be dangerous, potentially lethal, hazards.



Other discoveries could be extremely useful. These could be anything from a long forgotten water well to abandoned vehicles from various eras that can be put back into working order. I personally know of one such case were the manager of a sheep station near Coolgardie, Western Australia (who was the Quartermaster Sergeant of the Army Reserve unit I was in at the time), discovered a small, 1960s-1970s era bulldozer while clearing brush for a track sometime in the late 1980s. The bulldozer had apparently been abandoned many years earlier by someone unknown because despite still sporting a (faded) yellow paintjob, it was almost impossible to see due to the thick growth of plants around it. The original owner/s of the bulldozer were never found but after some minor maintenance and a few new parts, it was put back into service and was used by the manager of the station for many years afterwards.

I also knew someone who had worked for a security company in a rural town that had been tasked at times, to do security checks on shipping containers located in various out of the way places far from town. The shipping containers were owned by mining exploration companies who prepositioned various supplies in places where they thought they might be working at a later date. In some cases, the shipping containers were owned by mining companies who had shut down a no-longer profitable mine site and stored smaller equipment rather than transport it back to town where they would either have to pay for it to be stored or would have to arrange for it to be further transported to the mining company's own store yard. The use of shipping containers hidden in the bushland meant they didn't have to leave the equipment at the mine site, a location that would be very well known by anyone living in the area and easily enough found by someone consulting a detailed map.

These shipping containers would sometimes be discovered and broken into because they could have anything from 44 gallon drums of fuel to generators, to long lengths of electrical cable or flexible water pipe,

water pumps, tools, safety equipment, vehicle tyres and batteries and even at times mining explosives (these are usually tertiary explosives, i.e. explosives that require a substantial amount of energy to detonate, they typically require electrical detonators to ignite so Referees should be aware that if they make such explosives available, the PCs can't just set them off by setting fire to them, shooting them or dropping them from a great height and so on).

Looking at a map of the population distribution for Australia shows the majority of people living on or very near the coast and while there are some major regional centres inland, they typically have population levels of 40,000 or less. A vast amount of country is given over to agriculture so in some regions, you will find many farms, orchards or livestock stations. Some of our cattle stations are larger in area than some small European nations. But there are still many areas of the countryside that have little to no human presence. In these areas you could set up a commune and be undiscovered for years (aircraft perhaps being the only vehicle likely to spot your camp, assuming you haven't disguised it from aerial observation). You could even build a small settlement before the government found out and tried to regulate your new town. Or you could find some remote area, open a gate to another dimension and start bringing in terrifying creatures to form your army of conquest.

The Dark Conspiracy world (and indeed, any cyberpunk style game) could also see certain corporations buying huge parcels of land to establish their own outposts. Whether for covert research & development, medical purposes unacceptable to the public (e.g. clone farming), domination of a natural resource, corporate leisure/holiday location, setting up their own corporate ruled city or simply for settling their own corporate personnel who've reached retirement age, the landscape provides

many suitable areas for such use. For example, Kevin Flynn placed the 2nd Edition DC location of New Centennial City (from the Sin City adventure trilogy) in the north of Western Australia (approximately halfway between the coastal towns of Onslow and Dampier, see the map provided above for the location of Karratha, Dampier is a small coastal township 21km/13miles NW of Karratha).

There is so much land available that even placing an entire city and its hinterlands is easily accomplished without interfering with other settlements.

[Kevin Flynn's DC website](#)

The link for his map showing the location of New Centennial can be found there in the attachments listed as dcmmap.jpg

To sum up, Australian is one of the smaller continents but a continent none-the-less, there's a lot of land but a small population and most of that is located on the coast. It would be very easy in the Dark Conspiracy world, for a special interest group to establish themselves in a remote part of the country and remain free from interference for some time. This special interest group could be anything from a group of people looking to establish their own free settlement, a corporate town, a hidden laboratory complex engaging in forbidden research, a secret military base or even an ET enclave. It also means that Demogrounds could come into existence and lie undiscovered for months or even years.

As a Referee placing a campaign in Australia, it is well worth looking at any of the online map providers (such as Google Maps) to get an overview of the country and exploring all the remote locations where you might want to place such a settlement.

**"A FELLER - A QUICK FELLER - MIGHT
HAVE A WEAPON UNDER THERE. I'D HAVE TO
PIN HIS HEAD TO THE PANEL!"**

- THE GYRO CAPTAIN.



We're back! Issue 02 is here, a little later than I would have liked but finally ready.

This time around I am going to duck into the world of podcasts and point you to some of the shows that are relevant to the Dark Times' chosen niche. If you're a podcast fan then I hope you find these picks useful.

[THE GOOD FRIENDS OF JACKSON ELIAS](#) - A triumvirate of UK Cthuloid creatives go in depth on "Call of Cthulhu, horror films, and horror gaming in general."

[KEN AND ROBIN TALK ABOUT STUFF](#) - Ken Hite and Robin D. Laws do exactly that, covering any number of things from gaming to food.

[MISKATONIC UNIVERSITY PODCAST](#) - The MUP crew are all about the Lovecraft Mythos and all manner of related things. They have also threatened to interview me at some point - fame at last?

[MONSTER TALK](#) - The podcast of the US magazine "The Skeptic", investigating UFOs, cryptids and many related topics.

[BLURRY PHOTOS](#) - Broadly similar to Monster Talk at first glance, but wider-ranging and much sillier with some truly epic puns plus the hosts are gamers themselves.

[LOVECRAFT E-ZINE PODCAST](#) - Discussion of all things Lovecraftian with a slant towards the authors and artists involved in Mythos literature as well as gaming.

[THE SMART PARTY](#) - Two British gamers chat about various aspects of RPGs, cover conventions and other events and interview professional and amateur publishers.

[IMPROVISED RADIO THEATRE WITH DICE](#) - Two other British gamers talk about RPGs, often with emphasis on how to take a game or campaign in a different direction or style.

[GAMING & BS RPG PODCAST](#) - Covers all aspects of gaming, from inspirations and ideas to interviews and how-to guides.

Okay, that's me done for now. There is a bunch of material that I left out in order to stop this issue being even later, so I am going to format that up and release it as a special supplement - it's just too good to wait until Issue 03 for! Cheers all.

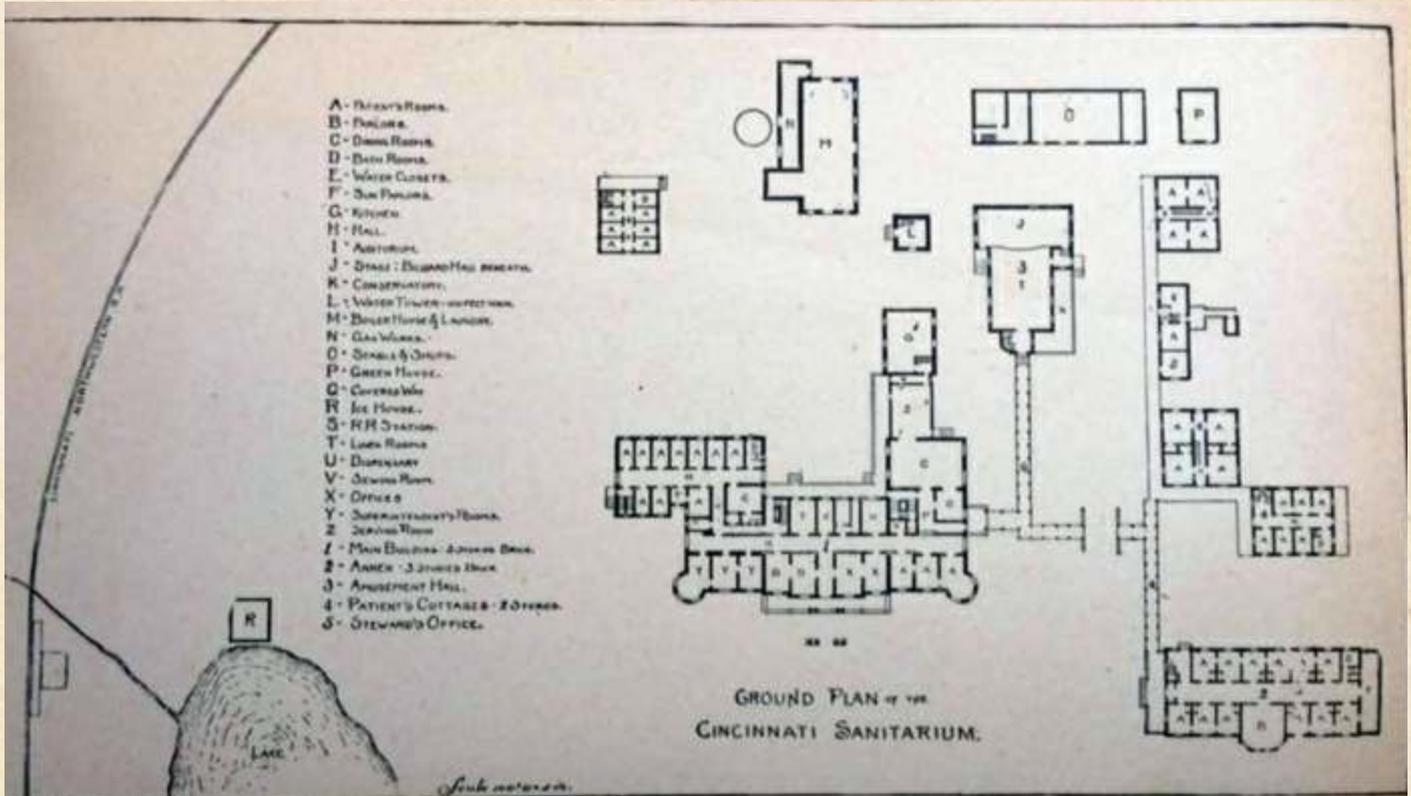
Lee Williams

Issue 01 Errata & Omissions

It appears that we neglected to include any maps or plans in Issue 01's featured adventure "The Open Veil", by Paul Riegel-Green.

Please accept these images as a basis or inspiration should you require a map when you play through the scenario. Entirely my fault - sorry!

Editor Lee.





GEAR UP!



The Shop, that's what everyone who talks about it calls it, is located just outside of Dreamland. It's located there so that those who live and work in Dreamland can sneak out and grab some item that might not be available without being traced. The nondescript entrance is on a quiet side street in a brick warehouse that looks like any other. If you didn't know it was there you would drive right by...

GEAR UP is a comprehensive equipment guide for Dark Conspiracy first edition by Paul Riegel-Green. Paul is a published RPG author, and has previously contributed to Challenge Magazine, DEMONGROUND and Protodimension.

You can find GEAR UP on DriveThru RPG by following this link:

<http://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/180327/DC-GearUp>

