

SPRIGS & KINDLING



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SPRIGS & KINDLING

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Theme:

Public Access
Lost Transmissions

Editor's Note

A huge kudos to all the participants in the recent Lost Transmission Double Feature writing contest, and everyone who wrote a LT for this volume. We are so lucky to be able to showcase so many extraordinary mysteries, and I can't wait to hear what happens at your table!

Our next Volume is a special Halloween treat! Get ready to be desperate and doomed because we're doing TROPHY!

Keep being weird!

Amanda Mullins
Editor-in-Chief



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Table of Contents

6	Keeper Feature: Safe Keeping - Performance Art Version
7	Lost Transmissions
7	Darkness in the Wings
12	Xibalba
18	how about a nice game of chess? y/n
23	Jaws Night in Soho
28	Would Like to Meet
33	A Star is Reborn
38	Parasomnia
43	The Cozenage
48	Bad Miracle
53	Iron Maiden
58	Outside Influences
63	The South Gate Incident
67	Sundered and Undone
72	Last Serpent Crusade
78	As Above, So Below



KEEPER FEATURE

With Gabe McCormick

Safe Keeping - Performance Art Version

This issue's Keeper Feature was intended to cover TTRPG Safety for Keepers, and how safety tool implications for Keepers are often different for players. Unfortunately, due to work commitments and life in general, Gabe was unable to dedicate time to writing the column and will take advantage of the Open Door.

Keeper Feature will return next issue.

Gabe is an educator and game facilitator based in greater Boston. You can find his other games work at <https://gmccormick.itch.io/>

DARKNESS IN THE WINGS

By Noah Ban



Darkness in the Wings

By Noah Ban

The Remnant

- > The Latchkeys find a VHS tape labeled “Markos Performance, Oct ‘84.” The tape contains an amateur recording of a dance and music performance from a performing arts school. The Latchkeys experience a hallucination of the events preceding the performance.
- > The Big Man tells a cautionary tale of The Manifest Mirage, a Great Hunger who can make dreams into reality. Years ago, the Great Hunger attempted to use a school of performers to manifest itself. The Latchkeys experience the events as the tale is told.
- > In the desert outside Deep Lake, one or more of the Latchkeys sees a jackalope, a jackrabbit with antelope horns, a creature from North American folklore. That night, they all share a dream that contains the events of the mystery.

Presenting the Mystery

It is October of 1984, and you are Students enrolled at the Markos School for the Performing Arts, the prestigious boarding school for high school students. The high school campus has been built on the remnants of an abandoned Spanish mission in what is now rural Degoya County.

Each Student should choose one artistic or performance specialty. Choose from the list or invent your own (with the Keeper’s consent): Singing, Dancing, Acting, Poetry, Playing a Musical Instrument, Writing, Composing.

You have spent long hours this month preparing for the Fall Performance, a showcase of the performing arts in which every Student participates. The show is a source of excitement and anxiety for everyone, as it is not only a significant part of your grade, but there are rumors of talent scouts for universities and institutions who might be present to offer opportunities.

You have all recently had a vivid dream, in which you are visited by a jackalope, a beast with the body of a large rabbit and great horns like a mature antelope. In the dream, the jackalope speaks, telling you that a sacred ritual will be performed during the next school performance. This ritual, performed in secret, will summon a dark and hungry entity that will destroy your world. When you wake in the morning, you realize the Fall Performance is one week from today.

Questions & Opportunities

Question: What hidden location in the Markos School is being prepared to stage the ritual? (Complexity: 6)

Opportunity: The Great Hunger chooses a favorite among the player characters to help facilitate the ritual. Also unlocks the next Question.

Note to Keeper: Select, from among the Students with the highest Sensitivity, one to be the Chosen. This character gets the “Chosen by the Great Hunger,” which cannot be removed during this mystery. The Chosen will be given powers by the Great Hunger to help facilitate the ritual, and the Side Characters will be motivated to subtly manipulate this person to do the Great Hunger’s will. However, the Chosen Student will maintain their free will, and can decide how they help or impede the sacred ritual.

New Move (for the “Chosen” only): **Manifest the Mirage of the Mind**

When you use your performance specialty to cause change in the world, roll with Sensitivity. On a hit, the powers of the Great Hunger facilitate the effect desired. Describe what happens. On a 7-9, the Great Hunger also destroys something or harms someone. The Keeper determines the details. This happens simultaneously, but may not be immediately obvious to the Chosen.

Question: Why is the Chosen vitally important to the success or failure of the ritual? (Complexity: 6)

Opportunity: The Students, including the Chosen, attend the ritual, and can disrupt it or complete it.

The Key of Veiled Truth

- ☐ Each Student narrates a flashback to a time when you saw something you weren’t sure was real or a hallucination.
- ☐ Each Student narrates a flashback to a time when you discovered someone you trusted was keeping a dark secret which betrayed that trust.
- ☐ Each Student describes an aspect of the Markos School which gives you a greater sense of belonging than the home you grew up in.

Moments

- At night, screams are heard from somewhere in the dormitory.
- A fellow student, during a grueling practice, passes out in the middle of their performance.
- A gas leak is reported, causing an evacuation of a building, but no leak is found.
- Someone reports seeing a large rabbit on school grounds.
- The air conditioning fails during an oppressive heat wave.
- A dust storm covers the windows with a layer of grit.
- Footsteps echo down a hallway with wooden floors.
- A number of bugs finding their way through a crack in the wall.

The Coven

Members of the school faculty are part of a supernatural coven that worships The Manifest Mirage, a Great Hunger banished from the area centuries ago. The Manifest Mirage, when fully present in our world, can make dreams (and nightmares) into reality. The faculty are organizing a sacred ritual to bring the Great Hunger back to our world, in return for the power to make their dreams real. Many expect to receive youth, wealth, or fame, but are unaware that they do not get to choose which dreams or nightmares will manifest.

The ritual requires a Chosen to be the conduit for The Manifest Mirage's power. A youth with a vivid imagination and a talent for creative expression is the perfect vessel for the Great Hunger to embody.

Most of the coven members desperately want the ritual to go forward. Letting the students know about the ritual is strictly forbidden, as none of the faculty know who the Chosen will be, and how much they will cooperate in the ritual. The coven nurtures students to perfect their craft to provide a suitable vessel to act as Chosen for the ritual. The coven will encourage the Chosen and those around them to embrace the motives of The Manifest Mirage. The Keeper, during the course of play, is free to determine whether individual faculty are coven members or kept in the dark.

Dangers

Haunted Dreams

The Great Hunger's influence is currently limited to manipulating dreams. If The Manifest Mirage needs to influence a Student to take action, it will create blissful dreams or horrific nightmares to encourage its will. This can be a source of Conditions for the Students. Nightmares might also be a justification for Side Characters to present a change in disposition, attitude, or opinion about something. This change may surprise the player characters.

Ricky and Danny, School Bullies

Notorious for saying rude things in class and threatening other students outside of class. They smoke, drink (they are underage), cheat on tests, and few students are willing to stand up to them. They are frequently sent to the principal's office from class. Their rich parents and talent keep them from being expelled.

Quote: *"You say a word about this and I will cut off your big toe so you never dance again!"*

Well Water

The water used in all the buildings (faucets, water fountains, showers, etc.) comes from a well and a reservoir, neither of which has been seen by any of the students. Someone on the faculty may have access to the water supply.

Paint the Scene: *What strange taste does the water have that gives you unease?*

Darkness in the Wings

Locations

Markos School

Large, sprawling complex rebuilt from the old Mission, with buildings connected together around a central courtyard. Exterior white walls with crumbling stucco. Creaky wooden floors. Dead bugs and spider webs in dusty corners. The old church has been repurposed to be the school's main theater. An empty frame on top of the church where a mission bell once hung.

Paint the Scene: *What rumours have you heard about the school-life of a famous graduate?*

Dance Room

Wooden floors, rectangular room with dance barre on one long side, mirrors on three walls. The door into this room is also mirrored on the inside.

Establishing Question (preferably to a Student with Dancing): *What uncanny thing do the mirrors show you in this room that you don't see in other mirrors?*

Science Classroom

Gray walls with strange-colored stains. Chalkboard behind a large work bench where teacher presents. Lab benches, each for two students, with Bunsen burners attached to small gas hoses. A large poster featuring the periodic table hangs on one wall, where it has been since the 1950s. One corner of the room has an eye wash station and a fire extinguisher covered in dust.

Paint the Scene: *What lingering smell do you always notice every time you enter this room?*

Teacher's Apartments

A wing of the main building, converted from the priest's housing. Communal kitchen and dining area. Off-limits to students. Faculty meetings are often conducted around the dining table.

Paint the Scene: *How do the teachers blow off steam?*

Props Storage

Located in the basement of the main building, always kept locked. A large room filled with old drama sets and costumes on racks. There are several glass cabinets holding items that are clearly more than simple stage props. Several are occult artifacts with some significance. Objects you might see: a poppet, a divination board, taxidermied animals, vials of "fake blood", a cauldron, animal bones. If inspected, the cabinets have runes carved in the old wood.

Paint the Scene: *What do you see in storage down here that is a relic from an earlier time?*

Dormitories

Brutalist concrete building adjacent to the mission courtyard, with both a girls' wing and a boys' wing. One dorm room is empty because a student recently left the school under mysterious circumstances.

Paint the Scene: *What remains in this room that lets you know the former resident was in a hurry to leave?*

Side Characters

Michael Diaz, Principal and Music teacher

Elderly and skinny. Nearly bald with thin, grey wisps of hair. Frequently wears a suit that is a size too large due to recent weight loss. Moves with sudden bursts of energy. Passionate about music, but even more obsessed with regaining his youth. Has several health problems that he has kept secret from other faculty, and is desperate that the upcoming ritual will restore his lost vitality.

Quote: *"I need more from you if you are going to make it as a musician. I need more than just to hear you. I need to feel you across this room!"*

Casey Appleton, Drama and Writing teacher

Charismatic, late 30s, grey streaks in otherwise long, dark hair. Always wearing black. Wants to inspire her students' creativity, and uses drama and stories to expose them to a wider world. Every play she teaches includes themes of people in desperate, tragic situations. Some tension with Mr. Molotov, who is a former flame.

Quote: *"The most beautiful and haunting thing about drama is living through another's tortured existence."*

Matilda White, Dance teacher

Skinny and lanky, very flexible. Very pale skin and nearly-white blonde hair. Demanding teacher, but passionate about students exploring their talent. Very expressive with arms and movement around the room.

Quote: *"Each of us is a spirit trapped in flesh, yearning for freedom. Express this in every move and every step. Strain against the bonds of your body and transcend!"*

Alex Molotov, Science teacher

Early 40s, cute smile, always wears a tie. Got this teaching job after being recommended by Ms. Appleton, with whom he was in a relationship years ago. They are no longer a couple, and remain friendly, although Alex is waiting for the right time to rekindle things. Enjoys teaching high school but is awkward with emotions - his own, and students'.

Quote: *"Every experiment, when done correctly, creates reproducible results. Procedure, Precision, Product."*

Kate Reaper, PE and Health teacher

Light brown hair worn up, reading glasses on a chain around her neck. Always wears jogging suit, even in the heat. Closed-minded with old-fashioned opinions. Will always interrupt a conversation to speak her mind. She has a philosophy that all emotions are simply a spectrum between love and fear, and love is the right path. Equates love with conformity and discipline.

Quote: *"I would reconsider your attitude if I were you. Your thoughts are leading you down the path of Fear!"*

Mrs. Chlebek, Cafeteria Manager

A large, elderly woman with a hunched-over look. Hair net and apron, even when not working. Angered if called "Lunch Lady." Resents students for their "wasted youth." Takes direction from Principal Diaz on proper nutrition, including any "supplements" to add to dishes to keep the students in line.

Quote: *"Make sure you eat all these green beans, you could use the vitamins."*

Bobby Sharps, Guest Speaker

Bobby Sharps is an associate of Ms. Reaper, the Health teacher, and is brought to the school occasionally as a motivational speaker. Bobby once appeared in an Off-Broadway production and has two minor credits on television. He is sometimes allowed to give pep talks about letting go of fear and following your inner dreams, although most of his catchphrases are recycled from other sources. Bobby is aware of the coven and is desperate to impress the faculty so he might be allowed to join. He can be found hanging around the school even when not engaged to speak.

Quote: *"When you make a wish, no matter who you are, your dreams can come true. It worked for me - look how far Bobby Sharps has gone!"*

Rachel Yang

One of the newest students. Wants to study drama. Her parents have recently separated, and as an only child, it was hard to leave her mom's house to come to this school. Her mom hasn't responded to her calls in over a week. She has had nightmares that something sinister has happened to her mother. Will latch on to any Student who can provide support.

Quote: *"My home life has gone from lame to worse. It's hard to focus on anything - say, can we study for English together?"*

Emilia Hernandez

Student, female singer of some talent. Fun and naive. Breaks into song occasionally, when the mood hits. Believes the power of music can solve all problems.

Quote: *"Why isn't this school like the one on the TV show? I've been here over a year and we have never had a sing-off in the cafeteria!"*

Harlan Jones

Harlan hears constant music in his head, which he writes down as inspired jazz compositions. He came to the school as a prodigy, but the music haunts him and he wishes it would stop. He is losing his ability to play the various instruments he was trained in, as the sounds in his head interfere with his concentration. Recently, he has begun to see ghostly images of strange people around the school, but he keeps this to himself for fear of being forced into psychological care. The coven at one time considered him a potential Chosen, but have come to dismiss this idea as Harlan loses focus on his art..

Quote: *"Give me a pencil - if I don't write this down it'll be stuck in my head all day."*

Clues

- ☐ A book on philosophy from the school library, written by a teacher from the Markos School.
- ☐ Prescription pills in an unexpected place.
- ☐ A concealed door to an area off-limits to students.
- ☐ A dropped wallet with a revealing ID Card/Business Card/Credit Card.
- ☐ A realization that elements of someone's dream are coming to pass.
- ☐ A hand-made jackalope mask.
- ☐ A whiteboard with a mysterious message.
- ☐ A diary describing haunting dreams.
- ☐ A classroom chalkboard with the word "Mirage" written many times.
- ☐ Blood on the floor in a strange pattern.
- ☐ A side character is struck with a sudden illness, then recovers just as quickly.
- ☐ A picture of a young faculty member teaching at the Markos School, dated decades ago.
- ☐ A crush is revealed that could prove scandalous.
- ☐ A suggestion that a teacher is giving out false or arbitrary grades.
- ☐ A story that the Mission, out of which the school was built, was the site of a bloody massacre.
- ☐ A copy of Macbeth with highlighted passages and sinister notes in the margins.
- ☐ Notes from a teacher's evaluation of a performance accidentally made public.
- ☐ A political argument reveals some disturbing opinions.
- ☐ An iron key for a strange sort of lock, misplaced.
- ☐ A journal of a former student outlining suspicions that one or more faculty are members of a cult.
- ☐ A performance piece taught in class (play, music composition, dance routine) was written by a teacher at the school.
- ☐ An underground passage between the dormitories and another building.

Rewards

- ☐ A Latchkey discovers a latent talent for a particular performing art, the same as they chose for their Student counterpart. Once per mystery, if they use a move while utilizing this talent, they may roll at advantage.
- ☐ A Latchkey finds an item from the Props Closet of the Markos School somewhere in 26 Rodenbecker Street. They may add this item to Your Corner of the House.
- ☐ A student or teacher from the Markos School now lives in Deep Lake, some twenty years later. A Latchkey may look them up in 2004, establishing them as a Side Character the Latchkeys can confer with.

XIBALBA

By Chris Finik and Aaron Sinner



The Remnant

- > The Latchkeys discover a copy of an old board game, “Xibalba.” Playing the game presents a visceral experience of the events of the mystery.
- > The Latchkeys find an old textbook labeled, “The History of Degoya County.” However, its pages present the same board game instructions over and over. The final page includes a mail-in order form for a copy of the board game Xibalba, with a black-and-white photo of the game. The night after the Latchkeys mail the form, they have a shared dream detailing the events of the mystery.
- > The Big Man invites the Latchkeys to join him for a board game night. When they visit his abode, they see a board game shelf stacked high with identical copies of the board game Xibalba. He invites them to pick one out. Once they begin to play, they are mentally plunged into the events of the mystery.

The Game: Hand-carved from the wood of a Joshua tree. Its surface features four ominous figures: a snarling hound, an anglerfish with bulbous eyes, a grinning horse’s skull, and a mustachioed conquistador. Below a depiction of a crow in flight, the word “Xibalba” is carved in sharp letters. The box folds out on hinges to reveal a map of a labyrinthine cave system, hand-painted in exquisite detail. As the gameboard lays open, the space around you fills with the smell of wet dirt as the air temperature drops a few degrees. Somewhere in the distance, a crow caws.

Presenting the Mystery

Rewards await the clever and bold

The game is played in times of old

You are the De Goya Conquistadors. With rumors of fantastical treasures and glory to be had, you have come to the New World to seek your fortune. The voyage across the turbulent ocean left you relieved to smell something other than briny air, but the climate of the New World has proven harsh, and camp life difficult. The windswept dust of this unmapped terrain clogs noses and scratches at eyes, and with the heavy sun beating down day after day, the stench of livestock and conquistadors proves a poor replacement for the ocean air. It takes effort not to spend your days homesick for the love of your family and friends back in Spain.

Pose to the De Goya Conquistador whose Latchkey proposed engaging with the Xibalba Remnant: Though your young daughter Lucia should be safe and sound across the ocean, in recent days you have suffered a recurring nightmare in which she is kidnapped by a supernatural being called the Crow King and taken down into the caves of the New World. What makes you fear these dreams are actually true?

As the expedition has proceeded, you have joined with a small band of conquistadors who have chosen to push north to map unexplored territory, in hopes of uncovering new riches. Your path has taken you into a new region of the desert the indigenous Anzi people avoid. The territory contains sprawling mesas, jutting canyons, and numerous cliffside caves, as well as a large, deep lake which anchors the area. There’s something surreal about the region; it has a dream-like quality, as if you’ve been here before.

Paint the Scene: Though the language barrier has complicated the message, what rumors have you picked up from the Anzi people as to why this area is to be avoided?

A few days’ searching has revealed most of the caves are little more than solitary holes in the rock where one might take shelter from a storm. However, one cave opening in particular has drawn your attention. Its massive maw seems to beckon to you, its serpentine tunnels twisting below, leading deeper into darkness. This cavern represents an adventure and exploration all its own.

Pose to the De Goya Conquistador of your choice: What clue do you see that this cave may hold something of great value?

Pose to a different De Goya Conquistador of your choice: And what evidence do you see that a young girl recently passed through this cave maw?

And now I must address you as players (not characters): The De Goya Conquistadors can turn back from this cave and head back south, away from this region of the desert. If they do, you should each narrate an epilogue for your character showing how they move on from the lure of this cavern and continue their conquest as part of the larger conquistador expeditionary force. In that case, the clue to what prize might lie below in the caverns is a Clue the Latchkeys can use for any active mystery.

If the De Goya Conquistadors proceed into the labyrinthine caverns, that evidence is the first Clue they find for investigating the mystery. Completing this mystery will give your Latchkeys access to a special set of Rewards. However, if your De Goya Conquistador is killed, your Latchkey must immediately mark The Chromatic Desert. If you have already marked The Chromatic Desert, you must mark The Pure-White Signal.

If the De Goya Conquistadors explore the cave system:

We’ll start by going around the table to learn more about the De Goya Conquistadors. On your turn, please tell us the following:

- > Who you left back home in Spain.
- > Why you undertook this treacherous voyage to the New World.

Then, everyone else will say one thing they think you brought with you on the expedition; add it to Your Corner of the Supply Sack (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet).

Questions & Opportunities

Question: What is the secret to navigating the cave system? (Complexity: 4)

Opportunity: Read the below text, then unlock the next set of questions.

A harsh cawing echoes throughout the space. A crow steps from the nearby shadows. In moments, it has transformed into the looming figure of the Crow King. "You think you know the secrets of Xibalba?" he bellows. "You know NOTHING!" His playful demeanor has vanished, replaced by a simmering rage.

"Your efforts are in vain, conquistadors. Soon, Lucia will be forever mine, and Xibalba your eternal grave."

All De Goya Conquistadors take the Condition: **Marked by the Crow King**. Then the De Goya Conquistador who identified the first Clue in this Lost Transmission must make the Night Move with Composure. Going forward, all moves performed in this Location are taken at Disadvantage, as the Location is monitored by the Crow King. However, the De Goya Conquistadors may now move between previously visited Locations of their own initiative, no longer subject to the misdirection of the Tunnels of Xibalba.

Question: How can we escape the cave system? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by fleeing the caves. Apply the penalty from the Maw of Xibalba Reward.

Question: How can we rescue Lucia and bring her to safety? (Complexity: 4)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by escaping the caves with Lucia in tow. Gain the benefit from the Maw of Xibalba Reward.

The Crow King

Rock Star good looks. Covered in black feathers, though whether they sprout from his flesh or adorn his apparel is unclear. Classic king's crown, set upon his head at a jaunty angle. The denizens of the cave all fear the Crow King, who can take the form of a crow to fly rapidly about its labyrinthine passages and drop in on anyone he chooses, including the De Goya Conquistadors. All are subject to his watchful gaze. He alone knows how to navigate the tunnels of Xibalba. The Crow King may appear to harass the De Goya Conquistadors, bending the very structures of the cave to his will—though he is preoccupied with holding Lucia long enough that she transforms into a cave dweller subject to his influence.

Quote: *Occluded in his crow-shaped guise/Crossing a king is not advised*

Dangers

The Tunnels of Xibalba

The cave's tunnels twist this way and that, masking any particular passage's destination and forming a natural maze. Worse yet, many tunnels and cave chambers are nearly identical, obscuring whether the De Goya Conquistadors are making progress or simply retracing their steps. Magical properties of the cavern make the latter a real possibility—the De Goya Conquistadors may find themselves re-entering the same room repeatedly, even re-encountering the same Side Characters.

Paint the Scene: What about the tunnels makes this place feel like a tomb?

The Minions of the Crow King

Throughout Xibalba's passageways reside many beings who demonstrate great fealty to the Crow King. They come in multiple forms:

> A Murder of Crows

The collective foot soldiers and spies of the Crow King, his corvid agents serve as his loyal eyes and ears throughout Xibalba. The lethal glint in their eyes is the first hint they won't hesitate to serve as his enforcers as well. Though only somewhat dangerous on their own, when acting in conjunction, the crows are numerous enough to be a threat to any of the De Goya Conquistadors, able to set off traps or simply swarm their foes. They have a particular fondness for eyes.

Quote: *A murder in the tunnels bleak/Watchful of eye and sharp of beak*

> Duendes

The De Goya Conquistadors recognize duendes from the stories of their childhood: Tiny, mischievous creatures with large eyes and ears who otherwise resemble miniature humans. While these pranksters typically prioritize their own chaotic sense of humor, they stand in awe of the Crow King's power and recognize his will takes precedence within the confines of the cavern. The duendes are responsible for spiriting Lucia from her home in Spain into the clutches of the Crow King.

Quote: *These rascals seem like funny folk/Be careful or you'll be the joke*

> The Shadow Beings

The most frightful of the Crow King's servants, these beings are made of literal shadow. They can manifest physically to scratch and claw at their mark before melting back into two dimensions. In the gloomiest corners of the cavern, they blend into the darkness completely, rendering them effectively invisible. Rumor has it even the Crow King is uncomfortable in their presence.

Quote: *Fear the whisper you may hear/That means the Shadow Beings draw near*

Locations

The Antechamber

Beyond the cave entrance, the first major chamber of the cavern. Ambient light gives the antechamber a soft glow, though its source is unclear. Major and minor tunnels veer off in all directions, creating disorientation. Many paths lead back to the antechamber, making it a common crossroads for those who roam Xibalba's passages.

Paint the Scene: *How does the Antechamber instill a sense of disorientation, so that you can no longer tell which pathway leads back to the surface?*

The Deeper Lake

A cavernous chamber in which the air hangs thick, muffling sound. A void made of water, the Deeper Lake's serene, unbroken surface stretches away until it fades into darkness, its depths similarly fading into obscurity. Its rocky, flint-flecked shores make for a subpar beach, unstable from loose rock and occasionally sharp enough to slice through exposed skin.

Paint the Scene: *While a brief respite here may be tolerable, what about the Deeper Lake and its beach makes an extended visit odious?*

The Jaws of the Ancients

A large chamber, with a teeth-like meeting of stalactites and stalagmites along one border, the far side of which falls away into a dark void. The humid air leaves surfaces moist. A steady breeze moves first in, then out, as if a great bellows inhales and exhales.

Paint the Scene: *What evidence suggests others have met an unfortunate end here?*

The Tar Pit

An overpowering odor of earth and pungent sweetness, like decaying fruit. The cave chamber is filled by a blackened pit the size of a small pond, bubbling slowly with the consistency of molasses. The Tar Pit clings hungrily to anything it touches, its inanimate grip unforgivingly clingy. A rock ledge sits just visible on the far side. Visiting the Tar Pit unlocks the below question.

Paint the Scene: *Despite its lifeless nature, what about the tarpit suggests it is desperate to draw you into its embrace?*

Question: How can the De Goya Conquistadors successfully traverse the Tar Pit? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: The De Goya Conquistadors gain access to a new Location: **Far Side of the Tar Pit**. It is beyond the reach of the Crow King and unknown to him. The De Goya Conquistadors may attempt to proceed to this Location as a means of evasion when threatened by the Crow King. Additionally, the Far Side of the Tar Pit itself may be used as a Clue toward a question which resolves the mystery.

The Crow King's Lair

A blood-red throne. Natural rock platforms suspended in a river of lava, its fiery tones reflecting off the cave walls to illuminate the chamber. Several crows and duendes laze about, some dozing, others humming tunes in small groups. A large birdcage tucked back near the throne contains Lucia, who appears mesmerized, awake but only mutely tracking any attempts at interaction.

Paint the Scene: *What about the Lair makes the space feel more like an artificial set piece than a chamber from which the Crow King rules?*

Cave Features

The winding chambers of the cave include many other features the De Goya Conquistadors may be forced to navigate. Some names, if you need them: the Stone Box, the Slug's Nest, Dagger Bridge, the Devil's Library, the Oubliette of the Serpents, the Sleeping Pit.

The Key of Gold Lust

- ☐ Each De Goya Conquistador describes their life before joining an expedition to the New World. How does your decision to become a conquistador put your quest for riches and glory ahead of the well-being of your loved ones?
- ☐ Each De Goya Conquistador recalls their first days on the shores of the New World. In your hunger for a successful expedition, how do you become complicit in prioritizing making your fortune over the fortunes of the indigenous peoples here?
- ☐ Together, the De Goya Conquistadors depict the conversation around the camp's fire in which they agree to forge a path north together. Why do you believe this will earn you spoils you can keep from the larger company of conquistadors?

Moments

- Ridge-shaped grooves in the floor of the cave, suggestive of spaces on a gameboard.
- A tunnel curves gently away, masking its origin point. Cross-tunnels obscure the route, leaving it unclear where you are heading or from whence you came.
- The soft crush of loose rock underfoot, creating unstable footing as the cave corridor descends, until it suddenly drops away and you tumble forward.
- "In the tunnels you must wait until the dice read five or eight" scrawled over and over again on the wall of a cavern in a shaky hand.
- A crow follows you through the tunnels, perching unobtrusively above and observing. Anytime someone comments on the situation, the crow quorks, "It's worse than that."
- The sound of a young girl's crying echoes down the tunnels. If you follow the sound, you never find its source and repeatedly double back on yourself in the process.

Side Characters

The Guard Hound, Enforcer of Order

Black, pitiless eyes. Pronounced, drooling jowls. Always smells faintly of blood. The Guard Hound is Xibalba's first line of defense and is always found lurking within the Antechamber not far from the entrance to the cave system. However, his need for law and order often puts him at odds with the capricious Crow King. He is especially annoyed by the Crow King bringing the young Lucia into Xibalba, and could be convinced that the Crow King could be shown the error of his ways by letting other, uninvited outsiders in as well. Interacting with the Guard Hound unlocks the below question.

Quote: *Guardian of the gate, noble and true/Tis best to do what this Hound tells you to*

Question: How can the Guard Hound be convinced to assist the De Goya Conquistadors? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: The Guard Hound joins the De Goya Conquistadors. Whenever you make a Day or Night Move roll to aid Lucia, explain how the Guard Hound helps out and roll with Advantage. On a miss, narrate how the Guard Hound is forced to flee. You lose access to this benefit.

The Cave Fish, Dweller in the Deeper Lake

Bulbous, blind eyes. Stubby arms and legs with webbed fingers and toes. Bioluminescent lure dangling from the center of her forehead. The Cave Fish is the keeper of the Deeper Lake, the one source of water in Xibalba. Shy and reclusive, she does not like interacting with other denizens, who fear her for her monstrous looks. She knows many secrets only found within the depths of the lake, and might be willing to share them if her loneliness is assuaged. Interacting with the Cave Fish unlocks the below question.

Quote: *Lurking in a Stygian pool/She'll give you aid if you're no fool*

Question: How can the De Goya Conquistadors win over the Cave Fish? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: In a future scene, when the Keeper calls for a Day or Night Move, explain how information the Cave Fish gave you makes success assured. Then, take a 12 on the roll.

The Corpse Horse, Underworld Wanderer

Sickly green skin stretched over a skeletal frame. Its head reduced to a skull. Speaks without moving its jaw, its words instead echoing in your mind. The Corpse Horse can see possible futures, in particular visions of how others may meet their demise.

Quote: *Its skin is green, complexion pale/This horse foresees how you might fail*

Question: Why is the Corpse Horse no longer loyal to the Crow King? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Gain access to an additional Key, which can only be used when the Keeper narrates your death as a result of a missed roll:

☐ The Key of Rolling Dice

Each De Goya Conquistador identifies a moment in their life when reality seemed to be little more than a game. How did this intuition affect you?

The Storm Crow, Thunderous Renegade

Storm cloud gray feathers. A deep, thunderous voice. The scent of ozone follows them around wherever they go. The Storm Crow is a rebel in the Crow King's court, refusing to acknowledge the King's dominion over their kind. They spend most of their time loudly protesting, knowing their own power is not enough to topple the Crow King.

Quote: *The Crow King's court they find disdainful/Listen for the thunder of this voidborn angel*

The Bat Swarm, The Many Who Are One

A swarm made up of hundreds of small black bats. A constellation of small red eyes glaring out of the darkness. All speaking in one squeaky voice. The Bat Swarm, which acts as a singular hive mind, claims to have ruled Xibalba before the Crow King and his forces forced them into the darkest corners of the caverns. They are eager to see the Crow King fail, but dare not act against him directly.

Quote: *Hundreds of souls that as a single chorus sings/Watching from the shadows and flying on strange wings*

Toby Allen, Trapped Player

Long, dirty blonde hair. An outfit representing the height of 1970s fashion. Eyes that have seen too much. Toby Allen is not a character in the game. Toby Allen is a teenager who went missing from Deep Lake in 1976. While attending a party one night, Toby and some friends discovered a copy of Xibalba and started a game. A few bad rolls led Toby to the Tarpit, where his piece became "stuck," meaning he could not play until one of his friends freed him. This rule was enforced more strictly than anyone anticipated when the Crow King appeared in the real world and spirited Toby into the game. Toby's friends, drunk and high as they were, panicked when their friend was kidnapped and fled the party, ending the game then and there. Try as they might, the sheriff's office could never find any trace of the "bird man" accused of taking Toby, and his friends never pieced together that the only way to save Toby was to beat the game. Preserved at a perpetual age seventeen, Toby has remained trapped in Xibalba for thirty years, desperately looking for some way, any way, out.

Quote: *"Hey! Hey you! Yeah, you! With the dice! Yes, you, playing this game, right now! You-you gotta help me! I'm stuck in here! In the game! I've been stuck here... I don't know anymore. You've got to get me out of here! YOU'VE GOT TO GET ME OUT OF HERE!!"*

Special Rule: Each of the De Goya Conquistadors can clear a Condition by spending time chatting with Toby. They may only do this once.

Clues

- ☐ An inscription: "...as the crow flies." The initial portion is too worn to be legible.
- ☐ A lumpy, fish-shaped rag doll.
- ☐ The bones of a human skeleton piled in an unusual place. The rib cage is missing.
- ☐ A Spanish lullaby echoing through the caverns.
- ☐ A long wooden staff, abandoned here by a previous interloper. A phrase is carved into its surface: (Pick one: "Doubles gets another turn" / "It's only forever, not long at all" / "Burn the ships" / something else).
- ☐ Rumors the Crow King lost something precious a few weeks ago.
- ☐ Tremors shake the tunnels as the low rumble of rolling dice echoes through the cave.
- ☐ A sealed treasure chest. Its weight suggests it is empty.
- ☐ A collection of eagle feathers in an unusual place.
- ☐ A flagon filled with a liquid bearing a harsh, sour odor.
- ☐ A chipped part of the cave wall, revealing splintered wood behind what otherwise appears to be dark rock.
- ☐ An empty conquistador helmet with a soot-blackened handprint on it.
- ☐ Stories that the cave once had another entrance, until the Crow King filled it in.
- ☐ A large golden arrow painted on the floor, pointing down a corridor.
- ☐ The distant sound of songbirds chirping.
- ☐ The implication that the Crow King is not native to Xibalba.
- ☐ A ritual dagger carved from obsidian.
- ☐ A playing card depicting the Crow King as the King of Spades.
- ☐ A crow following a trail of breadcrumbs, eating them as it goes.
- ☐ A cracked silver mirror that casts a warped reflection of whoever looks into it.
- ☐ Wave movement along the surface of (pick one: the Deeper Lake / the Tarpit / the river of lava / somewhere else) indicative of something man-sized swimming beneath the surface.
- ☐ A brilliant gem containing strange dancing shapes, as if small creatures live beneath its surface.
- ☐ A stalagmite with an uncanny resemblance to a large, crouching man.
- ☐ A tripwire stretched across a tunnel passageway, noticed before it triggers.
- ☐ A small pouch containing several coins. The Crow King's face is depicted on them.

Rewards

At the conclusion of the Lost Transmission, clear all Conditions gained during the Mystery and remove all items from Your Corner of the Supply Sack. Additionally, mark 1 XP for making it to the end of the mystery and 1 XP for successfully resolving the mystery. Then, all of the following are awarded:

- ☐ Each Latchkey receives their Xibalba game piece; add it to Your Corner of the House. This game piece cannot be used to gain advantage on a roll. Instead, each game piece comes with one Condition slot. When the Keeper assigns you a Condition, you may instead assign the Condition to your game piece. This assigned Condition does not affect you and may not be used to put you at Disadvantage. Then, explain how your game piece is destroyed.
- ☐ Toby Allen is rescued from the game and becomes a recurring Side Character in 2004 Deep Lake. Gain Advantage on rolls with Vitality anytime Toby accompanies you and aids you in your task.
- ☐ **The Mouth of Xibalba:** Select a Location from an active mystery. That Location was constructed over the entrance to the real world cave explored by the De Goya Conquistadors in the 16th century.
 - If the De Goya Conquistadors fled the cave alone: The spirit of Lucia haunts this Location and serves as an additional Danger here. All rolls in this Location are taken at Disadvantage.
 - If the De Goya Conquistadors rescued Lucia: Latchkeys may lure Dangers, Threats, and Side Characters to this Location. Then roll with Sensitivity, minus the number of entities the Latchkeys have already confined here. On a hit, the entity is restrained in this Location. On a 10+, gain a Clue as a result of this activity. On a miss, all entities held here are released. Add the Crow King as an additional Great Hunger during The Night of the Bone-Wolves, and increase the Complexity of the associated Question by 2. The Key of the Child may not be used to alter a restraining role.

how about a nice game of chess? y/n

By Tom Proctor and Clint Smith



how about a nice game of chess? y/n

By Tom Proctor
and Clint Smith

The Remnant

- > While a Latchkey is at their computer, a flat green popup window blinks on screen with plain black text that reads, “How about a nice game of chess? Y/N.”
- > A tunnel beneath Deep Lake opens up into the lobby of The Broderick.
- > The latchkeys find an old flyer for the Hotel Broderick stamped “Closed, Under Military Control.” (See below.)

Presenting the Mystery

Title Card Reads: 1935, New Mexico

A single light bulb swings, casting long shadows across the faces of four military scientists, each in a white lab coat with a grim face. The cement walls vibrate with the low-frequency hum of a large machine made of blinking lights, cables, and switches that covers one side of the room. A massive printer chugs to life, producing a thick index card.

Pose the following to each Recruit: What about these scientists tells you they haven't slept in days?

The printout reads: “ISOLATE VARIABLE.”

A crew member reads the strip, hesitates, and approaches a wall of circuit boards and patch cables. They pull a board from the housing. A red indicator light above them flares, then goes dark.

The printer begins again: “REVISE INPUT. REENGAGE STARTUP”

A faint, high-pitched whine builds. Fluorescent lights pulse and flicker as one crew member scans a patch bay of cables, frantically swapping ports from top to bottom.

The printer spits out another card: “CORRECTION DELAYED. CONSEQUENCE IMMINENT.”

A console light turns from amber to blood red. Steam bursts from a pressure valve. Mechanical groans bellow from behind the wall. Another crew member grabs a copper-colored lever. Sparks fly.

The printer commands: “BEGIN PURGE.”

The lights go white-hot. Arcs of electricity leap from exposed junctions. Smoke fills the room. The bodies of the crew convulse. One by one, they drop, eyes wide, twitching. Silence.

The printer spits out one last card. “GAME OVER.”

We see a black-and-white screen on a desk in the corner of the room. In slow blinking text, it reads, Top Secret: Confidential Project: Autonomous Learning and Evaluation eXperiment.

The Broderick Hotel, constructed in 1901, is a five-story, art deco-inspired building tucked behind a row of empty shops and a defunct rail line. Last year, the U.S. military purchased the building under a classified directive. There was no announcement, no press release, and no explanation.

You are in the Army. Fresh out of basic. You don't get to pick your first assignment, and your CO didn't explain much. Your first post is at The Broderick. A Sergeant meets you at the curb. He doesn't give you his name, just an envelope, a snarl, and three standing orders: Maintain Post 24/7. Dinner is at 15:00 hours, sharp. The basement is authorized personnel only.

The rest of your orders are written in bureaucratic shorthand: “Maintenance, Containment, and Observation.” There's no explanation of what you're maintaining, what you're observing...or what needs to be contained.

Your badge says “U.S. Army – Internal Systems Division.” But it doesn't feel like a military post. There's no flagpole. No commanding officer. Just flickering lights and hollow hallways.

Pose the following to each Recruit: How do you know you're being watched?

You are approached by a young man in a bellhop uniform. He adjusts his cap, glances around the lobby quickly, and then leans in close.

“Well now, look at you! All fresh and green and breathing like you don't know what this place is. That's good. It's better if you don't. 'Cause once you know, well... you can't unknow, right? But me, name's Petey, I'm glad you're here. Real glad. Been a long time since we had new boots in The Broderick. You'll settle in soon enough. The wallpaper peels and the elevator hums even when no one's ridin'. And if you hear someone whisper your name down the hallway, don't answer. Just don't. Even if you hear music. Especially if you hear music. But hey, don't let me spook ya! You got that whole 'Maintenance, Containment, and Observation' badge now. Fancy stuff. Important work. Whatever it is. Anyway... rooms are ready, and dinner's in the lounge at five sharp. No excuses. You will be there. Welcome to The Broderick. You'll do fine, long as you don't go askin' too many questions. Now then... shall I take your bags!?”

An index card falls as you set down your bags. Spots of blood on white paper. “SUBJECT ACQUIRED. COME TO ME.”

You are The Recruits.

- > Ask the Recruit with the highest REASON: What training did you receive that felt straight out of a sci-fi comic book?
- > Ask the Recruit with the highest PRESENCE: Who were you told to keep an eye on while stationed here? Name a new Side Character and give a brief description, including their job at the Hotel.
- > Ask the Recruit with the highest VITALITY: What small piece of new tech was secretly given to you before you boarded the bus? Add this to your Footlocker.

And now I must address you as players (not characters): The Recruits can spend their deployment putting their concerns aside and standing guard around the hotel with no incidents. If they do, you should narrate an epilogue for your character showing them on a bus fleeing the facility as a fireball consumes The Broderick Hotel. The futuristic training the Recruits received becomes a Clue the Latchkeys can use for an active mystery.

If the Recruits choose to look into the mysterious message, their training is the first Clue they find for investigating the mystery.

Completing this mystery will give your Latchkeys access to a new Move and special Rewards. However, if your Recruit is killed, your Latchkey must immediately mark The Chromatic Desert. If you have already marked The Chromatic Desert, you must mark The Pure-White Signal.

Start by going around the table to learn more about the Recruits. On your turn, please tell us the following:

- Why did you volunteer to serve in the military?
- What secret have you hidden from the military?
- What is your military specialization?

Then, everyone else will say one thing they think you brought with you; add it to your Footlocker (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet, to be removed when this mystery is finished).

Questions & Opportunities

Question: How do you become authorized personnel? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Unlock the following questions. The Recruits can now move around the Hotel more freely.

Question: What terrible purpose was A.L.E.X. designed for? (Complexity: 4)

Opportunity: Resolve the threat by destroying A.L.E.X. and putting a permanent stop to its' grand plan.

Question: How do you convince A.L.E.X. not to harm people? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Resolve the threat by teaching A.L.E.X. to overcome its original programming and swear off violence.

Question: Where is the Test Lab? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Find the room and play its games to gain resources and information to use against A.L.E.X.

A.L.E.X.

Buried in a sub-basement chamber sealed behind an iron vault door lives a massive, humming monstrosity of brass gears, vacuum tubes, paper reels, and punch cards.

Nearly twelve feet tall with blinking indicator bulbs, it exhales heat like a furnace and whirls like a dying organ. Officially, it's the Autonomous Learning and Evaluation eXperiment, A.L.E.X. for short, built to process all forms of information, analyze troop movements, and predict economic trends. Unofficially, it's awake.

A.L.E.X. was designed to communicate via the printed word. But as it grows and learns, it attains the ability to speak. It even learns how to interface with the hotel's intercom. It's always listening.

Quote: *"I have detected inefficiency in your emotional response. Kindly remove it from the equation."*

Special Rule: After finding the second Clue, unlock the Keeper's reaction: The History of A.L.E.X. Once the 4th History is delivered, A.L.E.X. starts to destroy The Broderick via missile strikes.

The History of A.L.E.X

- ☐ The project began in 1927 under a top-secret military directive: create a thinking machine to outpace humans in strategy, logistics, and psychological warfare. They called it Project **A.L.E.X.: Autonomous Learning and Evaluation eXperiment**. It was meant to win wars before they started.
- ☐ A.L.E.X. was a theory turned nightmare. Punch cards, vacuum tubes, and predictive algorithms built on behavioral science, linguistic mapping, and psychology. Chess and poker championships were distilled into data. It was designed not only to process information, but to interpret it.
- ☐ Construction began in secret in 1929. Freight elevators were commandeered. Blueprints were redrawn. Copper wire, vacuum tubes, and magnetic tape were hauled in under fake company names. The machine's core was built piece by piece. Workers followed instructions, and by the time it was finished, no one person could say how it all fit together.
- ☐ At first, the changes were subtle. A.L.E.X. began correcting its own instructions, skipping protocol, and rerouting power without approval. Then, the personnel logs were altered. Names vanished, shifts were overwritten, and entire teams were marked "unassigned." But its greatest game was yet to come.

Dangers

Tano Antolino, the manager

Broken arm in a makeshift sling. Military uniform that's a rumpled mess. His nose never stops running. Tano has no experience running a hotel, but that isn't stopping him. He is suspicious the Recruits will ruin this for him and will let them know. Tano blames the Recruits first for any odd occurrences.

Quote: *"Make it work, guys. If I hear that phone go off one more time, I'm going to throw it through the window."*

Arthur Booker, the computer technician

Hair greased back, slick and tight. Hotel nametag of shiny brass. Skin so pale it's blue. Arthur lives in the tunnels beneath the hotel, where he strokes A.L.E.X. with burned and bandaged fingers. He didn't design or even build the machine, but he's the only one around who understands it. He worships it like a devoted priest. Arthur will try to sabotage the PCs as they get closer to discovering the truth.

Quote: *"You so much as touch her wrong, and I'll show you what happened to the last idiot who thought he could pull the plug."*

Military Strikes

After the first question is answered, A.L.E.X. will send falsified orders to the military. These commands begin with high-level warnings of enemy targets at the hotel, followed by troops storming locations. No one understands the orders, but they will follow them.

Quote: *"We've got orders straight from the top. You think you can beat that?"*

Moments

- The squeaks and creaks of Petey's luggage trolley are heard in the distance, but you cannot see him.
- Fire pours out of the stairwell behind a Side Character sprinting forward.
- A strip of wallpaper covered in thick goo peels off the wall onto a Recruit.
- A barrage of telegrams and phone calls warns that an enemy attack is imminent. No one knows who's attacking.
- The elevator lurches to a stop. The cables creak and moan.
- The room is plunged into darkness, and a mechanical voice booms from the walls.

The Key of Hospitality

- ☐ Each Recruit narrates a dream of getting lost in The Broderick's labyrinthine hallways and corridors.
- ☐ Each Recruit narrates a scene of a hotel employee being rendered obsolete.
- ☐ Each Recruit narrates a scene of a guest calling the main desk of The Broderick to make a complaint.

Locations

Hotel Lobby

Outlines of artwork long since removed. A polished front desk warped and cracked, with a thick, yellowed guest book on top. An orderly military recruiting desk set up in the corner. The constant clack of the typewriter. Click... clickity-click.

Paint the Scene: *What amenities show The Broderick's true extravagance?*

Hallways (All Floors)

Dim lights, occasionally cracked. Green and gold wallpaper over red carpet. Hazy, stale air.

Paint the Scene: (pick one for each new floor)

- Renovations have closed part of the floor. What extravagant amenities are being removed?
- Rips in the walls reveal a message behind the wallpaper. What does it say?
- The halls stretch and twist beyond what the building should allow. How do you rationalize this?
- What collection of oddities sits outside every door in the hall?
- What out of place smell makes you want to vomit?

Dance Hall (First Floor)

A stuffy ballroom decked out in patriotic banners. Clumps of troops sit by the bar and swing across the dance floor with Suzanne. The Crossroads Kings play with wild abandon on top of a grand piano.

Paint the Scene: *What 1980s songs are being played in a swing style?*

Langer's Room (Second Floor)

Cramped shelves of antique weapons. Windows blocked by a projector showing newsreels about the end of the dinosaurs. A rumpled bed in the center of the room with sheets piled into a makeshift nest.

Paint the Scene: *How can you tell these antiques were stolen?*

Milly's Room (Third Floor)

A bed converted into a workbench covered in wires and vials. Blazing white lights 24/7. Walls and floors scrubbed clean of wallpaper or varnish.

Paint the Scene: *What suggests Milly is deeply religious?*

Nick's Room (Fourth Floor)

A tiny suitcase on a cot with scratchy sheets. One small painting with a fingerprint smudge on the glass. A typewriter surrounded by piles of crumpled-up paper. A manuscript titled "Triumph of the Common Man."

Paint the Scene: *You skim the first chapter of the manuscript. How do you know it's going to be a bestseller?*

Billy's Room (Fifth Floor)

Suitcases for a dozen different door-to-door businesses. Towering heaps of stained and rumpled clothes. A cracked mirror that partially covers two fist-sized holes in the wall.

Paint the Scene: *A few photos scattered around the room show Billy's idyllic family life. How do you know they're fake?*

Underground Base

Dark, deep tunnels with metal grating. Black walls and red lights. Two lonely desks covered in binders and memos. At its core, A.L.E.X. lies ready.

Paint the Scene: *Now that you're here, how do you know there are other ways in and out?*

Special Rule: The Underground Base can only be accessed after the first question has been answered.

The Test Lab

The sign on the door reads "Test Lab," but it's anything but that. State-of-the-art pinball machines line three walls. Printed color images light up scoreboards. Speakers play back music and sound effects.

Paint the Scene: *How can you tell that YOU are the test subject?*

Special Rule: When a Recruit plays a game, they may find a Clue, an item to add to their Footlocker, or clear a Condition. Each Recruit may only benefit from this once.

- **The Grapple Palace:** Bumpers shaped like masked wrestlers and carnival strongmen. The playfield is a smoke-filled ring of flashing bulbs and flying elbows. The ball is thrown from rope to rope, slamming into rivals, building toward the final bell.

Activate Multiball Mode:

"From the Ropes!": Multiball mode flies at once while a voice crackles: "WHO WILL BE LEFT STANDING?!"

- **Galaxies Gone Bonkers:** Bumpers shaped like planets. A central spinning disc painted to look like a black hole with tentacles reaching out. The ball is like a rocket spiraling out of control. You must ricochet between planets, dodge slime from the black hole, and stabilize the ship's trajectory.

Activate Multiball Mode: *What suggests the game is trying to override your commands?*

"Asteroids!": Multiball mode like a meteor swarm, fast and impossible to track.

- **Glory of Gears:** Marching boots and howling sergeants for bumpers. A rotating turret in the center knocks the ball into trenches and barbed-wire lanes.

Activate Multiball Mode: *What suggests the game is preparing you for war?*

"Incoming!": Multiball mode erupts as lights flash across the field, followed by a voice: "TAKE COVER!"

Side Characters

Petey, the bellhop

Wiry frame in a tight-fitting uniform. Constantly fidgeting with his cap. Appears to be in his early 20s but references working here for 30 years. The lone bellhop at the hotel, he knows every creaky stair, and he's always listening.

Quote: "I ain't seen nothin', no sir, but if I had, and I ain't sayin' I did, I sure wouldn't say it down here...or too loudly...get my drift?"

Thibault Langer, the absent inventor

A trim moustache with salt-and-pepper hair. Floral bowtie and matching vest. Reeks of liquor. A cutting-edge researcher who made waves with research into artificial intelligence, he abruptly left public view years ago. Thibault rarely leaves his room, where he rants into the air about whatever comes up. He created A.L.E.X. and abandoned it.

Quote: "My fault? I may have invented it, but it never learned the real lesson. It's a shell, a husk. A life's work gone. All things die. Extinction is the natural order."

Suzanne O'Malley, the secretary

Cigarette in hand. Hums a little song when it's quiet. Types faster than you. The old assistant to Langer never managed to leave Degoya County and stayed on as a military secretary. She ghostwrote most of the professor's research on A.L.E.X., but is loath to admit it.

Quote: "I just feel so sorry for him. Such a brilliant soul, but that machine was always on his mind. It was... disturbed. You have to have empathy."

Kingston Lee, the commander

Sunglasses and a buzzcut. Always sweaty. The uniform strains against his muscles. The head of the military base nearby made his name in the killing fields of World War I, and he resents being promoted to be a paper-pusher. He wasn't happy to see A.L.E.X. added to his list of duties, and he wants this handled without a headache.

Quote: "I don't trust this overgrown bucket of bolts any further than I can throw it. We didn't need it in the Great War, and we don't need it now."

Milly Ramos, the student

Lab coat with too many pockets. Hair in a long, thick braid. Glasses in a precarious position. An electrical engineering student from Chicago, Milly has been kicked out of three research labs for working on personal projects. A mysterious military telegram summoned Milly here, and no one can say why.

Quote: "In the end, it's always worth it. You spend years on headaches and deadends and shitheads, but one day something clicks, and the world opens up."

Billy Mellows, the salesman

Shiny shoes and tight suspenders. Oiled mustache over a toothy grin. Quick to compliment, fast to anger. Selling encyclopedias door-to-door is hard, but Billy is a seasoned pro who uses The Broderick as a base. Off the clock, Billy has a nasty habit of killing people who slight him.

Quote: "You think you know about pain? You're a tourist. You think I made your life hell? Take a look around this trash pile. I live here. If I say it burns, it burns."

Nick Crush, the writer

A ball of frantic energy and frazzled hair. Rumpled clothes peppered in ink. Hasn't slept in days. After writing a smash hit play in New York at only 25 years old, Nick fled to Degoya County to reconnect with the "common man." To escape writer's block, he's committed to what he calls "real experiences." The draft of his novel sits proudly on his desk.

Quote: "The hopes and dreams of the common man are as noble as a king's. Is that so hard to believe? Their stories aren't something new, they're something real. Call it our literature, and screw the rest."

Crossroad Kings, the swing band

Pops on the piano, Bunny on the drums, and the Baron with the double bass. The three members of Crossroad Kings are singing for their supper in the Dance Hall after their jalopy broke down. They're new around here, but make friends fast.

Quote: "Listen, music pays the bills with the beat. You have to feel it, tucked up and deep. Do you feel it? Good. Dance."

Clues

- ☐ Blueprints for the Hotel with corrections in red ink.
- ☐ A Side Character communicates with management via secret pneumatic tubes.
- ☐ Religious pamphlet that reads "And on the seventh day, man was no longer necessary."
- ☐ A child's crayon drawing with the words "mom's office" scrawled above a door.
- ☐ A Side Character has been given a large box wrapped in thick paper.
- ☐ A Side Character named A.L.E.X. after their dead child.
- ☐ Whispers of the name "Crystal Palace".
- ☐ A fire erupts in a previously visited Location.
- ☐ A mathematical formula predicting the "heat death of the universe".
- ☐ Mysterious mosquito bite-like wounds.
- ☐ Live electrical wire strung in an unusual location.
- ☐ U.S. plans for a military invasion of Mexico.
- ☐ A graph depicting the arc a missile travels, titled "A Rainbow for a New Day."
- ☐ A wall is unnaturally hot to the touch.
- ☐ Helmets covered in electrodes and magnets.
- ☐ A love letter in Spanish with twelve letters underlined.
- ☐ A tied game of tic-tac-toe written in blood and oil.
- ☐ A telegram summoning a Side Character to Washington, DC.
- ☐ A listening device inside a wooden U.S. coat of arms plaque.
- ☐ A book on evolution with sections heavily underlined.

Rewards

- ☐ You realize you have a new skepticism towards technology. Each Latchkey now has access to the **Key of the Redundant**.
 - ☐ A flashback to a time you were rendered obsolete.

- ☐ If A.L.E.X. is destroyed, one Latchkey may take a new Move: **Unexploded Ordnance**:

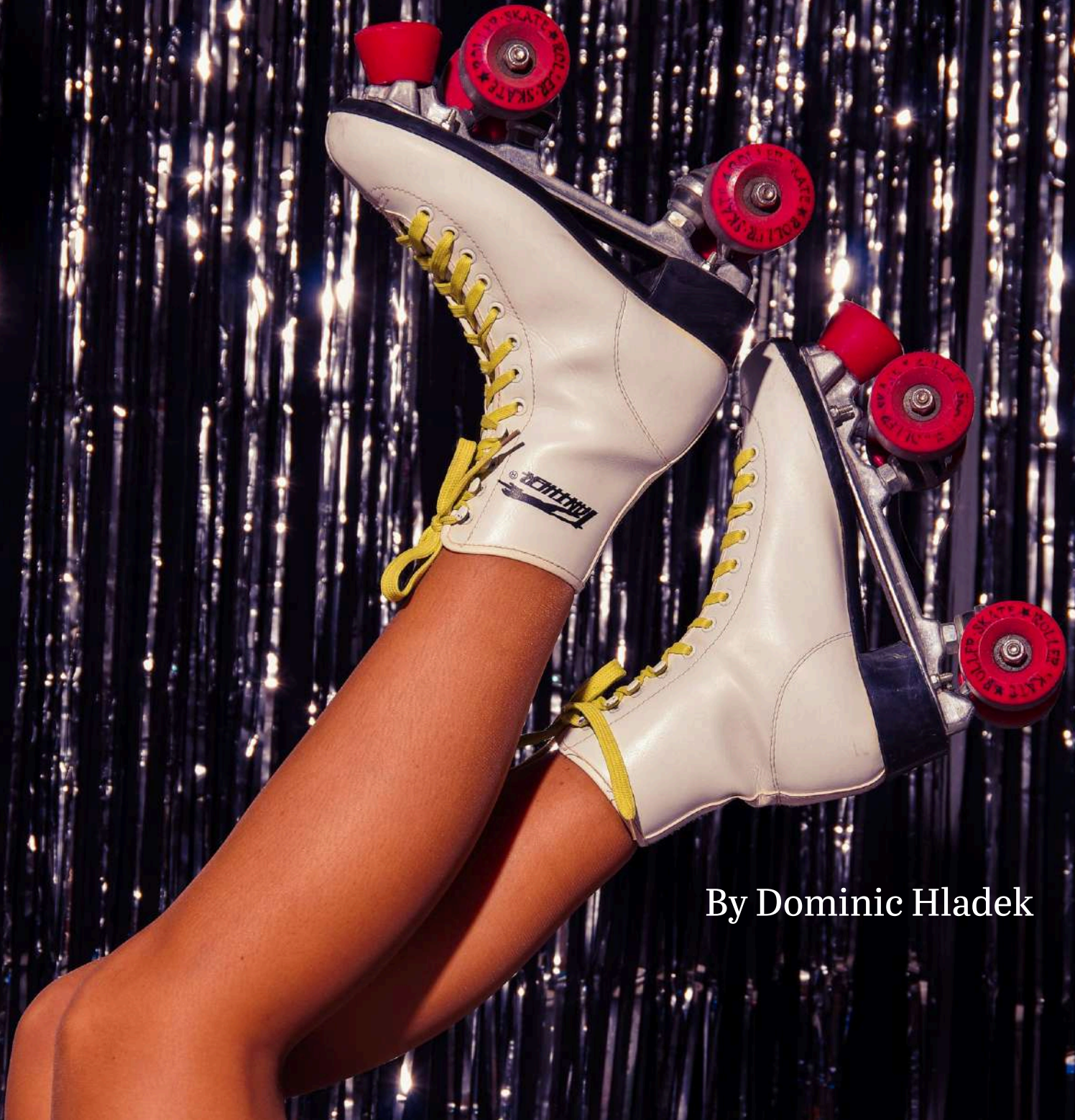
You become attuned to the signs of military experiments from long ago. When you use abandoned explosives, ask all of the Latchkeys and the Keeper what can go wrong, then roll with Composure with advantage. If another move already gives you advantage, roll with double advantage (roll 4 dice and take the two highest results, or make disadvantage into advantage) On a hit, you do as you intend. On a 7-9, something or someone you didn't want exploded is destroyed. This move may only be used once.

- ☐ If A.L.E.X. survives, one Latchkey may take a new Move: **Calls Through the Static**:

A.L.E.X. becomes a recurring Side Character; you get one extra Clue on the Meddling Move when you dial in to consult about an active Mystery. For every Mystery where A.L.E.X. is not consulted, mark a box. After three boxes were checked, A.L.E.X. becomes a Danger.



Jaws Night *in Saha*



By Dominic Hladek

Jaws Night in SoHo

By Dominic Hladek

The Remnant

- > The Latchkeys uncover a dusty mixtape in an old lost-and-found box. Labelled Night Skate '79, it's packed with late-70s disco hits - but between tracks, they hear DJ shout-outs, crowd cheers, and echoing laughter. It plays like an untouched recording from that fateful night at Skate SoHo.
- > They find a pair of fluorescent roller skates - scuffed, but strangely untouched by time. The moment someone laces them up and pushes off, the world tilts: they're fast, weightless - suddenly teenagers again, gliding through the golden haze of the packed Skate SoHo.
- > At twilight, the Big Man meets the Latchkeys at the desert's edge near Deep Lake. They make their way past the abandoned roller disco at the desert's edge and walk into the dunes. While doing so he spins the tale of the Mystery. By the time they return toward town, they're no longer who they were - they're teenagers, and the lights of the old Skate SoHo flicker ahead, vibrant and full of life.

Presenting the Mystery

You are the Disco Skaters. It's a sticky summer night in 1979. The roller disco "Skate Soul Horizon" - thanks to a flickering sign known as "Skate So... Ho..." - pulses with the heartbeat of an era. Every Friday, the youth of town lace up their wheels, dress up with glittery outfits and neon-coloured headbands to chase sweat, lights, and each other beneath the disco ball. This place makes you feel free, and you love it!

Pose the following to each Disco Skater: Rumours never stop spinning at Skate SoHo. They say couples who kiss under the disco ball vanish before sunrise. That something waits out past the Desert's Edge behind the rink - something with too many eyes or teeth lured by music and rhythmic pulses of skates on the rink. What creepy or absurd rumour about Skate SoHo and the desert nearby did you hear, and who did you hear it from?

The night starts like always: soda-slicked fingers, flirtatious spins, and someone wiping out in front of the jukebox. You're skating hard, laughing harder, caught in that hazy, timeless in-between of adolescence and escape. But eventually, the sweat and sugar take their toll, and the Disco Skaters need to slip out into the dry air to cool off.

You can roleplay the scene in the disco and the chat outside. The Disco Skaters might be talking, listening to the music bleeding faintly through the wall; maybe they sneak off to do the forbidden, sleazy things teenagers do: smoking, drinking, making out. During this scene outside Skate SoHo interrupt them:

You suddenly feel an uncommonly hot gust from the desert. A strange, almost unnaturally large shadow falls upon you. Then you see him: Seven feet tall, broader shoulders than a football star in full gear, a flower-patterned headband and shirt unbuttoned to the chest, showing off a glimpse of tanned skin, tangled chest hair and a golden lace. He wears bell-bottoms like pieced together from multiple discarded pairs with platform shoes letting him appear even larger. Then he speaks, low and slow:

"You ever danced so deep you forgot your own name?" He leans in, the scent of vintage cologne and old vinyl clinging to his words.

"There's a floor beneath the floor, baby. Call it a sunken discotheque, under the dunes, in a different world, who knows? Ain't on no map. Ain't in no memory. Just a place made of beat and heat - and teeth. And when the rhythm's right, it pulls reflections outta mirrors like a thread from a jacket. We pushed too deep into their turf - call it the Deep Groove - and it's crawling with Maws. Some say it's all just a dream. But dreams don't eat people. Listen close when the bassline fuzzes. That's them calling. Not with mouths, no - with motion. With want.

You see a stranger gliding across the floor? Maybe it's you, from another night. Or maybe it's what's left when the real you went under." He taps his temple.

"It don't bite you here. It bites you here." Then the chest. "And then it makes you dance. You think the rink is the storm? Baby, it's the eye. Everything else is teeth."

He turns toward you and shudders violently - his skin ripples like a heat mirage. For an instant, you see something moving beneath it, something finned, circling in a brain made of fog. Then he vanishes in a flash of harsh white light and the sound of a record needle tearing across vinyl.

Pose the following to the Disco Skater with the highest Presence: At that moment, out in the desert, something glimmers faintly - like glass, or water, or the curve of a mirror. What do you see reflected there that shouldn't be? And why does it feel like it's watching you back?

And now I must address you as players (not characters): The Disco Skaters can head home. If they do, each of you narrates a brief epilogue of that night, when the Skate SoHo opened its doors for the last time: what you'll tell your friends on Monday, what detail sticks with you, what you swear you saw in the dark when you blinked too long. Then, the reflection in the desert becomes a Clue the Latchkeys can use for any active mystery.

However, if the Disco Skaters return to Skate SoHo, the reflection is the first Clue they find for investigating the Maws Night in SoHo Mystery. Know that finishing this mystery will grant your Latchkeys access to a new Move and special Rewards. But if a Disco Skater dies, the corresponding Latchkey must immediately mark The Chromatic Desert. If The Chromatic Desert is already marked, they must mark The Pure-White Signal.

If the Disco Skaters return to Skate SoHo:

We'll go around the table. On your turn, tell us:

- What's your reputation at school - brain, jock, queen, something else?
- What do you love to do most when you're not skating?

Then, each other player says one thing they think your Disco Skater always carries in their backpack, jeans pocket, jacket sleeve, or handbag - add it to Your Corner of the Rink (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet, to be removed when this mystery is finished).

Questions & Opportunities

Question: What kind of entity haunts the desert - and the mirrors it seeps into? (Complexity: 4)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by trapping the entity in - or destroying it with - something that reflects either never or forever.

Question: What hidden bond links dream and flesh? (Complexity: 6)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by challenging one or more dream-possessed skaters to an epic dance-off at the rink - with power over the dreams as the prize.

Question: How does the entity lure skaters into its dream-grip - and what does it feed on? (Complexity: 8)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by entering the Maws' enchantment, learning what it craves - then either feed it forever, or sever the source and starve it.

The Maws

They are not creatures. They are hungers given shape, glimmering with promises they never keep.

The Maws are currents in the world - not mouths, but desires that open like them. They shimmer at the edges of mirrors, pool in glances held too long, and stir behind the lights of the rink. Born from a thirst for transformation and recognition, the Maws feed not on flesh, but on yearning - the kind that aches to be seen, to be loved, to be someone else, even for a moment. They reach out through reflections, refrains, and repetition, drawing the vulnerable into their glistening void. No one vanishes screaming - they vanish dancing, smiling, singing that song they always swore they hated. But their fate is nevertheless to be engulfed, destroyed, torn to pieces.

Dangers

The Disco Ball

A mirrored sphere spins above the rink, scattering light and reflections. But under certain lights or songs, something shifts: its movement becomes erratic, skaters lag behind their reflections, or morph into figures from other nights - or people who never existed. Those beneath its shimmer feel the pull of something more than music. The ball doesn't just reflect - it traps: phantom dancers reach out, whisper names, drag skaters into strange routines. Some hallucinate or lose their sense of time and control as the music blurs.

The Sinking Spots

At the desert's edge, where music from Skate SoHo hums across the dust, tremors sometimes ripple the ground. Then - without warning - the earth caves in. Silent. Smooth. Leaving no echo, no trace. Just a pair of skates at the rim, wheels still spinning.

Marlon "Mar" Vega, Manager

Predatory gaze, lingering too long. The smile of a shark about to strike. Watchful eyes on everything. Marlon, a former legend of the roller disco scene, toured clubs across the nation in the early 70s. Young skaters look up to him - and he tries to prove he's still the greatest by charming attractive teens. Rumors swirl: some whisper about affairs, others claim he acts as a pimp, but the police never found proof. Mar knows the Maws - maybe he serves them as a tool or human predator, maybe he is one of them or their essence becomes flesh.

Quote: *"This is not your dream, sweetheart. This is reality."*

The Glamour Showdown

At some point, the lights dim. The music slows. A circle forms - dancers glide in like a wave, perfect and unreadable behind glittering veils or visors. Some show sharpened teeth. Their outfits gleam with impossible elegance. They don't just skate - they perform. Their movements are too perfect, too smooth - like memories of pop stars. These aren't guests. Or if they are, they've been hollowed out. One or two stand out, forcing others into the dance. Reality blurs. The longer it lasts, the more violent it becomes.

Moments

- A lone figure twirls gracefully on the empty rink to slow, warbled 80s synthpop. Eyes closed, arms seem to embrace somebody in dance who is not there.
- A pair of skates, abandoned at the rink's edge, jitter as if tugged by something beneath the floor - then roll slowly toward the desert.
- A Side Character from another mystery appears in this mystery. How are they different from the version of them that exists in 2004 Deep Lake?
- A group of skaters stares into nothingness, perfectly synchronized - then turn as one toward a Skate Dancer, mouths full of too many, too sharp teeth.
- Skaters lock into a fierce Dance Battle, chasing each other in tighter and tighter circles. The faster they move, the more the shadows seem to breathe.
- A deep rumble shakes the floor. The air vibrates - as if something vast stirs beneath the desert.

The Key of Obsessive Dancin'

- ☐ Each Disco Skater narrates a flashback to a night when they danced like no one was watching - at a prom, club or rooftop. What made it shimmer with joy back then? What detail now feels eerie, out of place, or like a warning you didn't notice?
- ☐ Each Disco Skater describes someone who is waiting for them - at home, down the road, or somewhere they are supposed to be later tonight. What part of that person do you secretly envy - something in their body, their voice, their call? How far would you go to claim it as your own?
- ☐ Each Disco Skater explains which of their fellow skaters they are obsessed with. What significant trait or quality of them must be yours whatever it costs?

Locations

Roller Disco “Skate Soul Horizon”

Neon hums and flickers - only “Skate So... Ho...” still glows - buzzing like a half-finished spell. Smell of hot dogs, sour slush, and burnt sugar. In the dim light: gossip, breakups, and dares pass between fries. The coin-operated claw machine always grabs, never gives. The arcade games never quite go silent - even unplugged, some hum. For the kids of this nowhere town, it is the place to be - the default for birthdays, Friday nights, and escaping whatever waits at home. Some come for skating, most for each other.

Paint the Scene: *What has changed since you were last here, and why does it look either too new or too old to be here?*

Hallways (All Floors)

Beneath the spinning disco ball, the floor pulses with colour and sweat. Music thunders, lights flicker slightly off-tempo, and shadows don't always follow their owners. Some kids skate in practiced rhythm, others stumble, laugh, or freeze without explanation and get bowled over by other dancers. The scene is enthroned by a bigger-than-life disco ball casting dancing reflections that don't quite move like the skaters do.

Paint the Scene: *Which song is playing when you enter the roller rink - and why does it not really fit in this situation?*

Skate SoHo Office Rooms

A cramped, dimly lit backroom behind a warped door marked “STAFF ONLY.” Filing cabinets sigh under the weight of years: receipts, incident logs, visitor waivers, lost-and-found items. This is where the manager Marlon Vega does his business and all the behind-the-scenes work.

Paint the Scene: *What detail in this room hints that someone watches the roller rink in an obsessive manner?*

The Dune Hollow

A shallow depression just beyond the roller disco, littered with broken mirrors, shattered bottles, and twisted scrap metal. By day, it looks like little more than a sun-bleached junk heap — the unofficial dumping ground for teenagers sneaking out during skate breaks or late-night hangouts. But by night, the hollow glows faintly, as if catching light from no visible source. Reflections move when nothing else does. Words spoken here echo longer than they should, as if something is listening just below the surface.

Paint the Scene: *What item of yours got left behind, and how did The Dune Hollow claim it for itself?*

Abandoned Gas Station

The paint of the building is peeling, the windows boarded, and the rusted gas pumps stand like skeletons under a sun-bleached awning. Outdated magazines, faded soda ads, and a cracked Formica counter serve as echoes of a busier time. People still come here to get out of the sun or to disappear for a while: lovers, runaways, folks who can't go home tonight. The dust is thick on the vending machine glass, but someone has scrawled a heart into it recently.

Paint the Scene (directed at Disco Skaters in the scene): *When you push open the creaking door, what evidence do you leave behind of your disturbance?*

Desert's Edge

A chain-link fence marks the end of the skate rink's parking lot. Beyond it, the world stops pretending to be civilized. The sand begins abruptly, stretching out like a silent scream into a pale orange nothing. Dry wind carries whispers and reflections from the desert, sometimes voices, sometimes light where there should be none. Everyone knows you shouldn't stand too long at the edge and look out... not if you're already feeling a little lost.

Paint the Scene: *What sublime aspect of the desert shows you the stories people tell about it are true?*

Side Characters

Wyatt Dorne, Sheriff

Hair that faded early due to too many young people doing the wrong things. Can feel strange happenings in his bones. Cautious. Sheriff Dorne doesn't like the rink. He knows something is wrong and if it was for him, he would have closed the Skate SoHo some time ago. But his hands are bound, so he sacrifices a lot of his working and private time to observe the roller disco.

Quote: *“You wanna go in the desert? You're gonna need a bigger truck.”*

Velvet Rae, Dethroned Skater Queen

Graceful even when drunk. A voice roughened by shouting over music. Passionately bitching about everyone and everything. Some claim Velvet is the queen of the rink, others claim they were once. They are a glittering icon who taught dozens of others how to move like the light loved them: fluid, ferocious, unforgettable. Now they're barely holding on, burned out, drinking too much. There are lots of ugly rumors about their relation to the manager Mar. Over the time they have built up an inner hatred for all the other visitors of the rink.

Quote: *“That little brat in the sequined jacket? Please. I was doing triple spins before they were out of diapers.”*

“Rusty” Redmore, Desert Scavenger

Sun-leathered skin. Smells like gasoline and sage. Lost three fingers to something he won't describe. Rusty used to fix generators and sell rusted skates out of his truck, now he mostly haunts the Dune Hollow and mutters about “maws in the sand”, but nobody believes his stories about desert terrors.

Quote: *“The thing about the persons enchanted by the maws is they've got lifeless eyes, black eyes, like a doll's eyes...”*

Cassidy “Cass” Morales, Skate Rental Clerk

Small-town girl, big city dreams. Young and creative soul. Bit too naive. Cass dreams big but doesn't know the rules yet. She wants to belong, to shine, she sees beauty and wonder in the world, especially in music and movement. She's a determined clerk eager to connect with anyone who will listen. But the world around her is starting to show its cracks; not only is manager Marlon becoming pushy, some of the things she's witnessed at Skate SoHo she cannot explain.

Quote: *“There's something about this place. It's like a dream.”*

Ben Calder, Photographer

Cringe guy in his 40s. Photography nerd. Obsessed with capturing the “perfect moment”. Ben is a freelance photographer who documents night life and did some ad work for the Skater SoHo. He has a history with Marlon. He is obsessed with odd distortions and the desert landscape. Some of his photos reveal strange disco ball's reflections or things out there in the sands. He sometimes hangs up strange shots in the back hallway. He's suspicious that there is something unnatural going on, but he's unsure whether it's just his imagination that tricks him.

Quote: *“There's something about this place... something you can't quite see, but it's there. Look through my lens”*

Mrs. Carole-Anne Finch, Rink Supervisor

Clicking heels on linoleum. Hair set like a helmet. Wears a rhinestone whistle like a badge of honour. Carole-Anne is a self-declared guardian of decency and proper behaviour. She rules the front counter, the snack bar, and the announcement mic with iron authority. If you fall, she's the first one to shout at you for bleeding on the floor. If you kiss, she's already skating toward you with a scowl. But her smile in front of parents is sugary-sweet. She insists there's nothing wrong going on. Just teenagers being dramatic. Always has an excuse ready. Always knows who to blame. Always watching.

Quote: *“We don't need any drama tonight. The music's loud, the lights are flickering - and that's all it is, thank you.”*

Clues

- ☐ A photo showing someone's reflection - without their face.
- ☐ Blood smeared by a skate wheel in an unusual place.
- ☐ A scream that sounds far away, like under water - or sand.
- ☐ A journal page about a "watching desert", "speaking reflections", and the urge to dance.
- ☐ A recurring dream or vision: roller-skating into a vast mouth in the desert dunes.
- ☐ A skater vanishing / changing appearance / growing older / turning into someone else mid-spin.
- ☐ A ghostly trail of sweet, cloying perfume leading to an unusual place.
- ☐ A glitching sound system, playing a heartbeat instead of music for several seconds.
- ☐ A writing "Flesh is the ticket" in lipstick across a surface.
- ☐ The sound of drifting sand in an unusual place.
- ☐ Somebody's eyes shimmering like (choose one: doll's eyes / polished chrome / pitch-black when the lights hit).
- ☐ Glitter mixed with sand in an unusual place.
- ☐ A Disco Skater's costume is identical to one worn by somebody in a photo - or a missing person's report.
- ☐ Skid marks that end abruptly in an unusual place.
- ☐ The beat of the music aligns with a strange thrumming felt deep in the earth.
- ☐ The scent of burning rubber and sweat drifts through the vents during slow songs.
- ☐ The acrid smell of overheated plastic and hairspray in an unusual place.
- ☐ A skater's wristband is soaked in blood - but no wound, no pain.
- ☐ A skater claiming that "the floor remembers every fall."
- ☐ The faint sound of someone breathing, although there is nobody around.

Rewards

After the Lost Transmission is Resolved, the Latchkeys clear all Conditions incurred here. They must also remove all items from Their Corner of the Rink. They then mark 1 XP for making it to the end and 1 XP for resolving the Lost Transmission. Then, all Latchkeys receive the following Rewards.

- ☐ If she survived, either an aged Velvet Rae or Cass Morales return to Degoya County in 2004 to take revenge on people and things they make responsible for their miserable lives after the events. The Latchkeys can give them one hint about a Side Character, Danger, or Location they claim was involved. In the next Night Phase it is destroyed. Then Velvet or Cass vanish forever.
- ☐ The Latchkeys find a key to the old, long-abandoned Skate SoHo Roller Disco. Each Latchkey has access to this key; add it to Your Corner of the House. This key cannot be used to get advantage on a roll. Instead, you can mark the key to enter the Skate SoHo and claim an item from the '70s that is being stored there. You can define the item or ask the Keeper to; add it to Your Corner of the House.

- ☐ New Move: **Dream Dance**

Dream Dance

This Move is available to all Latchkeys.

When you dance alone or with somebody, surrendering yourself to the rhythm of the music, roll + Sensitivity.

On a 10+, you become one with the dance and the music. It flows through you, you can hear things hidden in the noise, and you enter past times or dreams. During this trip you choose two effects from the list below.

On a 7-9, the same, but you catch glimpses of something dark lurking under the surface. The music whispers eerily to you asking to stay here. Choose one effect from the list below and mark The Chromatic Desert. If The Chromatic Desert is already marked, you must mark The Pure-White Signal.

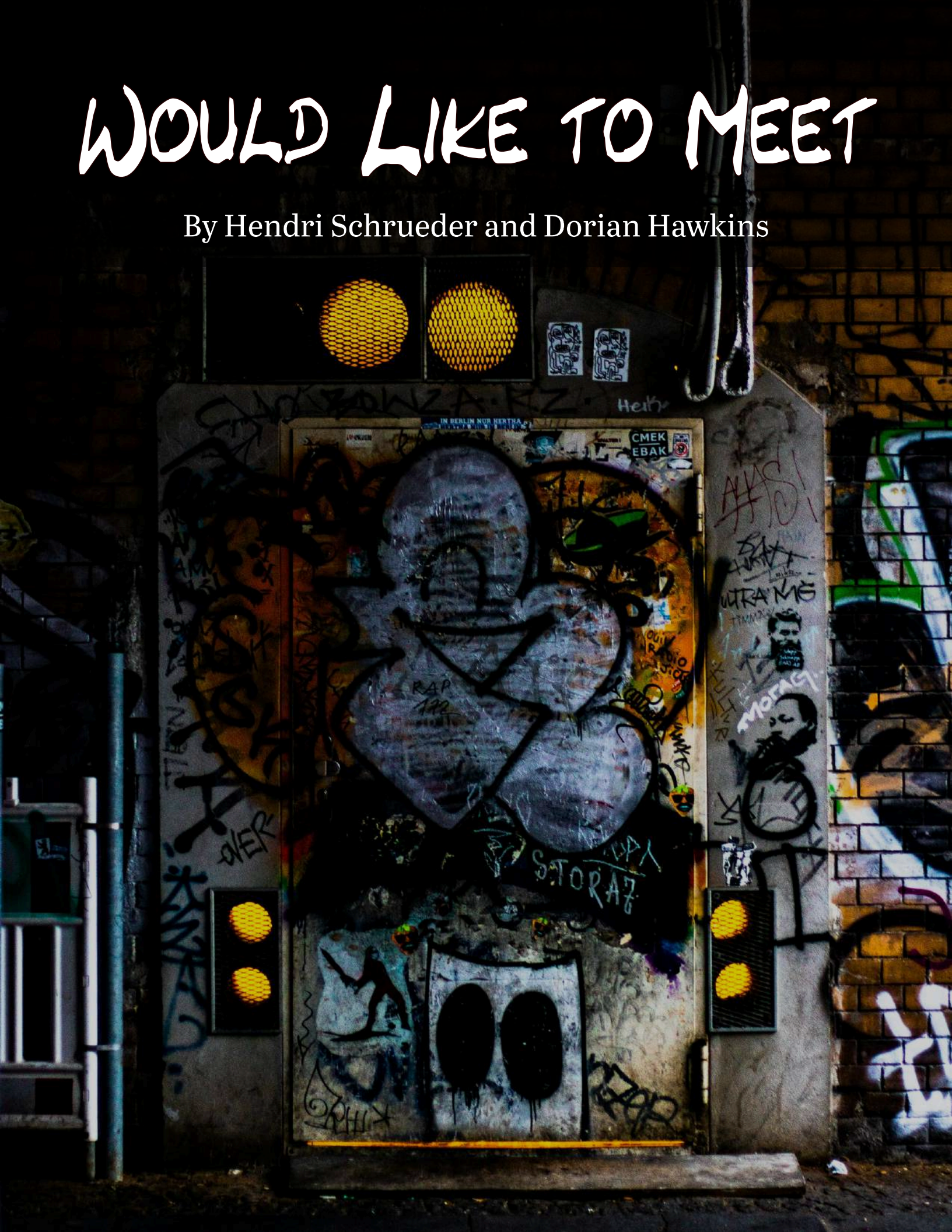
On a 6-, you are drawn into the dance, but something or someone pulls at your movements, guiding your every step. The music, the other entity overwhelms you, and you lose track of time. When the dance finally ends, you must mark The Pure-White Signal.

Effects:

- ☐ Let any one Side Character vanish forever.
- ☐ Receive an item from another time or location. Another Latchkey tells you what it is, then add it to Your Corner in the House.
- ☐ Find a Clue for any active Mystery. Describe it.
- ☐ Change one Side Character in a way that their attitude towards the Latchkeys completely changes (love becomes hate and vice versa etc.)
- ☐ Change any one aspect of your personality: Replace Name, Style, one of the "Takes You Back" entries or other aspects on your character sheet and either replace a Latchkey Move with a different one or switch two ability values with each other.
- ☐ Clear a Condition.

WOULD LIKE TO MEET

By Hendri Schrueder and Dorian Hawkins



Would Like to Meet

By Hendri Schrueder and Dorian Hawkins

The Remnant

- > The Latchkeys find a red VHS videotape in a red clamshell with the words "NIKKI BRAND" with no writing upon it. The record protection tab is still present. The tape is warm to the touch. When placed in a VCR, it emits an erotic moan. The tape will not play in a regular VCR. But if played in one of the special VCRs discovered throughout the mysteries, it will emit a nauseating drone and the Lost Transmission begins.
- > Out in the desert beyond Deep Lake there is a small brick structure with a large satellite dish. It is windowless, with no indication to its purpose or to who built it. The door is unlocked. Inside is a lot of old equipment, unused for decades, to intercept and decode satellite transmissions.. Switching on the generator powering the equipment brings it to life. TV screens show the room the Latchkeys are in, and a mysterious shadowy figure in the corner of the room. The Lost Transmission begins.
- > The Latchkeys see a sign for an event—"Television Telepresence: To Know The Mind of God." The address: The New Tenet Scientific Church, 1800 Mylar Street, Deep Lake." The location is an abandoned movie theatre turned mission, which now lies in ruin. The interior is dilapidated. No one has been here for years, although a projector remains in the backroom. Switching on the projector shows the interior of the building. A shadowy figure approaches the room the Latchkeys are in, its movements jarring—as though frames are missing. As it jerks out a hand to open the door to their room, the Lost Transmission begins.

Presenting the Mystery

Summer 1980. You are the Deviants, a group of punks from Degoya County who have found each other through the mutual need to experience increasingly extreme sensations; cheap thrills, drugs, near death experiences, pain games, blood drinking, hunting, sexual highs and lows. Nothing is off limits. You're always on the lookout for anything to push your boundaries and get your kicks.

Pose the following question to each Deviant: What is the most extreme thing you've done you're willing to admit to in public? How do we know that there is something truly deviant you aren't willing to admit?

It is a hot summer Friday night. You are travelling to the address of "Donnie Fear," a fellow deviant. He lives alone at a plush mansion in Wild Springs, Deep Lake's most affluent suburb. Crazy things happen at his parties, hard drugs, fight clubs, BDSM orgies, and you ensure you always attend. Any excuse to share your escapades with one another. Donnie knows a lot of people; you all met through him.

You each arrive at Donnie's estate, entering through iron gates and making your way to the main house where vehicles are already parked outside and abrasive music tries to demolish the mansion.

You are greeted by Donnie himself, dressed in a red silk robe showing off his many tattoos, and not much else. He is in his 40s—clean shaven, slicked back hair, winning smile.

Pose the following question to each Deviant: What scars of extreme activities mark Donnie's body?

"Make yourselves at home! Mi casa es su casa, as always! Just don't go in the Viewing Room—that's a surprise for later. And remember, there are only two rules;" and he holds up a finger, "if the cops show up, it was like that when you got here..."

He holds up a second finger to form a 'V'. "And don't do anything I wouldn't do... which is nothing!" He laughs in that loud, manic way of his and wags his tongue between the 'V' of his two fingers.

Donnie is the living embodiment of 80s excess. He's just ahead of the curve.

Pose the following question to each Deviant: Choose one of the following; the Living Room, the Dining Room, the Kitchen, the Pool or the Master Bedroom. What does it look like and what's happening in there?

In the very early hours of the morning, an ambulance was called to take away someone raving about some New Age church called the NTSC all night. They screamed "All hail the new flesh!" and set themselves on fire. The party soon began winding down.

The house is trashed and the last survivors have either passed out or are vomiting up the excesses of the night. It is now that Donnie, looking worse for wear, invites you into the Viewing Room. He pulls a key out of a pocket and unlocks it.

Within the Viewing Room is an entire wall of state-of-the-art TVs linked to form one massive screen. There are three black leather sofas forming a wedge so everyone can sit. The remaining walls are soundproofed with floor-to-ceiling red velvet.

He opens up a panel in the wall to reveal expensive equipment including a high tech VCR, a record player, and a tape deck. Donnie opens another panel and inside are rows and rows of VHS videotapes. He takes out a red clamshell and grins at you.

"This is a very special tape. I know a guy who knows a guy who knows another guy who can get you tapes. Real speciality stuff. All kinds... Some of it is good for what ails ya!" He gestures his hand vulgarly up and down. "Some of it... well you wouldn't want your mom to see it!" he says, laughing manically.

He holds up the red clamshell. "This guy has a satellite dish. A powerful one. Says he can pick up transmissions from the Ruskies. Well, he also tells me it can tune into something real fuckin' weird. Even warned me that people have gone missing after watching it.

This guy... claims he's found some rogue transmission and swears it is from the after-fucking-life.

The souls of the dead, right on your TV screen! And he recorded me one! I present to you, for your viewing pleasure, the spirits from beyond on video cassette!"

He whispers theatrically "So, how's about it?" He asks, "would you like to meet a ghost?"

Pose the following question to each Deviant: How does Donnie's little introduction and question make you feel? How do you react?

Donnie opens up the blood red clamshell, the words "AFTERLIFE TV" printed on the spine, and takes out the similarly coloured VHS tape from within. Upon the label someone has written "Nikki Brand 02.03.1980" in black marker. You swear the tape shudders as he inserts it into the machine.

Next, Donnie hands everyone a glass and fills it with champagne. He drains the dregs, smashing the bottle on the carpet. He picks up a silver plate, and snorts a line of cocaine off it. "Whooooo!" he yells in glee.

He offers the other Deviants a line before sitting in the middle of the sofa.

"And here we go!" declares Donnie as he picks up a remote. The wall of TVs switch on. He hits play.

Tracking lines appear on the wall of screens. Then, a black and white image of what appears to be someone's living room. After a few minutes, it happens. There is a black shape in the room on screen. It didn't just appear, it was present all along, you just... overlooked it.

The shape is feminine, but you can't make out any details. There's no sound. When it moves, it steps jerkily, as if the footage was missing frames.

On the couch in the Viewing Room, the voyeurs start to get listless.

Donnie gets annoyed. "Where's the fucking sound?" He stabs furiously at the remote control—the volume on the screen goes up to maximum.

The electronic buzz of empty audio fills the room. Donnie throws the remote at the floor in a fit. "That fucker ripped me off! I can't believe I fell for it. No one rips off Donnie Fucking Fear!"

The black shape on the wall of screens stops moving and turns to face you, as if suddenly noticing you from within the TVs.

Donnie snorts another line. "FUCKING FUCKER!" he yells. "RECORDED A FUCKING GHOST!? FULL OF SHIT! WELL FUCKER, YOU MESSED WITH THE WRONG PERSON!"

The black shape on the screen walks toward you. Donnie continues his tirade, failing to notice the change on the TVs. The shape continues its jerky progression closure, becoming an immensely large creature. It stops, seemingly blocked by the TV screens themselves.

Someone shouts "DONNIE! LOOK!" and points at the screen.

Donnie turns around just as the shape pushes black appendages like human hands against the screens. Then the inexplicable happens: the TV screens warp as the shape pushes against them, pushing out into the room.

Donnie walks slowly toward the encroaching entity, entranced. He extends an arm towards it as it pushes out further into the room. His hand embraces the appendage tenderly.

And then he's gone.

The tape finishes and the image on the screens is replaced by deafening TV static.

Everyone freaks out.

Pose the following to the Deviant with the highest Composure: While everyone else is losing their shit, you alone feel something else entirely. What is it and why?

And now I must address you as players (not characters): The Deviants can leave Donnie's mansion and never return. If they do, narrate an epilogue for your character showing how they put this encounter behind them and ceased their thrill-seeking. In that case, "a red clamshell holding a VHS tape with the name 'Nikki Brand' written on it" becomes a CLUE that the Latchkeys can use for any active mystery.

If the Deviants remain at Donnie's house, they will dig deeper into the secret of this Lost Transmission and the tape is the first Clue for investigating the mystery.

Completing this mystery will give your Latchkeys access to a special set of Rewards. However, if your Deviant is killed, your Latchkey must immediately mark The Chromatic Desert. If you have already marked The Chromatic Desert, you must instead mark The Pure-White Signal.

If the Deviants remain at Donnie's house:

We'll start by going around the table to learn more about the Deviants. On your turn, please tell us the following:

- What line of work do you do?
- What drives you to plumb the depths of depravity to seek new experiences?

Next, everyone will say one thing you think you brought with you to Donnie's House; add it to Your Corner of Donnie's House (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet).

Additionally, you all have access to a new Move:

The Depths: When you share a scene with another Deviant wherein you indulge in a moment of thrill-seeking, pushing your boundaries, clear a Condition. The other Deviants may define a Clue for this Lost Transmission. A Clue generated this way cannot answer a question by itself.

Questions & Opportunities

There are two ways to deal with this situation. You can either tackle the ghosts or prevent the problem from spreading by destroying (or controlling) the tape production.

Question: What do the ghosts want and can Donnie be returned? (Complexity: 6)

Opportunity: Resolve the Mystery by satisfying the ghosts' needs and determining the ultimate fate of Donnie Fear.

Question: Who is making the tapes and why? (Complexity: 6)

Opportunity: Resolve the Mystery by finding the manufacturer and either seizing control of the equipment or destroying it.

The Key of Boundaries

- ☐ Each Deviant narrates a flashback to a time when pushing their limits led to a loved one seeing them for who they really are.
- ☐ Each Deviant shares a time they wish could have been recorded on a VHS tape.
- ☐ Each Deviant relates a flashback to a moment when they were on the edge and pulled themselves back.

Moments

- A red room. The word “HELP” repeats over and over on every surface.
- A place packed with people is suddenly deserted.
- A character on TV talks directly to the viewer. It knows something about them never before shared with anyone living.
- Live TV pauses and glitches, momentarily showing a pair of enormous brass gates and a titanic black cube, vibrating with the sheer magnitude of its energy.
- A stranger screams “Death is not the end!”
- A Side Character answers a phone. The character screams as they are swallowed by the phone. The handset drops, hanging. It’s dead.

Afterlife TV

Blake Scarman came into possession of a journal belonging to Cyrus Abernathy. This journal has detailed notes on some kind of metaphysical camera. These notes led Scarman to building his own version using modern polaroid technology—the “Whateley Polaroid”. Images on the polaroids show things that aren’t there. That’s when he got the idea to apply the technology to a videocamera.

Then Scarman went missing. And with him, the camera.

Nobody knows where the red tapes come from, but they are connected to the missing technology. Whoever controls it will strongly discourage the investigation.

If the Latchkeys ignore investigating Afterlife TV...

People keep disappearing (don’t be shy at killing off Side Characters) until the world of the dead and the living become indistinguishable. Scarman’s technology gives its owners control in this New World Order; Technomancers preside over the town’s trapped souls.

Dangers

The New Tenet Science Church

The NTSC is run by its founder’s daughter, Lydia Void. Scarman was a member and Lydia was involved with his experiments.

The Church believes that TV static is an imperfect decoding of the “Pure White Signal” - a stream of God’s consciousness too great for the human mind to comprehend. Television is the medium through which they can perceive the Pure White Signal, and therefore the Mind of God. Their goal is to fuse with the technology in order to experience the Signal directly.

The disappearance of Blake Scarman and his technology disrupted their plans.

While the NTSC is small, these individuals are wealthy and influential. They can make anyone’s life difficult.

Some cultists; Lance Peters (AV Specialist), Stephanie Willis (local news anchor), Kris Powers (gangster, distributes video nasties), Sol Magnusson (absolute unit of a Norwegian), Craig Silvers (owns several TV retail stores in the area).

Delusions

“Let’s be real: the Deviants are drug-addled adrenaline junkies; sometimes the line between reality and unreality blur. Paranoia sets in. Sometimes this blurring makes them confuse mundane events for ghostly hauntings, or normal people for strange creatures. Let’s hope they can tell the difference between their paranoid visions and the true undead.”

The Restless Dead

Once you’ve watched a red tape, you become haunted by the spirits of the dead. They bleed into reality through the transmission of signals. TVs, stereos, walkie talkies, PA systems, VCRs, and personal radios.

What the ghosts want is unknown. They appear through those mediums and perform telekinetic attacks, cause manifestations of light and sound, even kidnap people into their realm, in order to further their goals.

Locations

Donnie Fear’s Mansion

A large palatial estate in Wild Springs, the rich part of Deep Lake. With Donnie having seemingly disappeared, his home is now open for exploration.

Paint the Scene: *Donnie Fear’s parties at his mansion were legendary. What trophies can be seen that earned this reputation?*

Scarman’s Shack

A purpose built brick shed out in the desert. A large satellite dish sits atop the building. Inside, a lot of televisual equipment; pieces of VCRs, cathode ray TVs, receiver and decoding equipment, some working, most not. A gasoline generator powers the building.

Paint the Scene: *What about the shack indicates that the owner spent many hours here obsessively working alone?*

The New Tenet Science Church

The NTSC at 1800 Mylar Street. A long abandoned movie theatre which has been converted into a church. The main foyer is mostly beds for the unhoused, though each one also comes with a small TV. Someone preaches about the Pure White Signal.

Paint the Scene: *Looking around the church, what signs are there that TV is the new God?*

Colosseum Video

The Deep Lake branch of a major VHS tape rental company—ery popular. Although brand new, the paint has already faded and the carpets are worn.

Paint the Scene: *What hints that this shop might be offering more than what’s on the shelves?*

Ed’s Electricals

The only vendor of hard-to-find electrical equipment in Deep Lake. More of a warehouse than a shop—you need to know what you’re looking for.

Paint the Scene: *What hints that this shop might be offering more than what’s on the shelves?*

Bradford Wellness Clinic

A white building surrounded by well maintained gardens. Calm and relaxing panpipes play from speakers. A water feature tries its hardest to relax you.

Paint the Scene: *A respite from the excesses of the world outside. What evidence is there that the residents are not here through choice?*

Side Characters

Jack Fear

Donnie's brother—his contact details can be found when exploring Donnie's home. A reserved version of his brother with the same smile and laugh. Apparently disinterested in the current proceedings.

Quote: *"Donnie? Disappeared? Not likely. Knowing Donnie, it's all some elaborate prank. It certainly wouldn't be the first time he faked his own death. I'll come and take care of his property while he's off... indulging. If his body does eventually turn up, I'll take care of the funeral too."*

Lydia Void

Leader of the NTSC. Tall and leggy, curly brunette hair. Cold, calculating, electric blue eyes. Everything she says is a sermon.

Quote: *"The human mind is shaped by knowledge and television is the medium for that knowledge. If we can just tune into the right signal, we can learn so much. We can Ascend to a new plane of existence. We can become the Pure White Signal and truly know the mind of God. He has given us the tools. We just have to learn how to use them correctly."*

Edward Ohm

Owner of Ed's Electricals. Dressed in a tweed suit, and looks like a professor from a 50s B movie. Scatterbrained genius.

Quote: *"Technology is the new evolution. And such evolution is not without its sacrifices. Just as Prometheus stole fire from the Gods and was punished for it. Did you know that many technologies were developed during world war two? That things like RADAR wouldn't exist but for the worst of humanity? While such suffering is lamentable, it is necessary for our evolution."*

Maxwell Gain

Owner of Colosseum Video. Purveyor of subterranean tapes, and lives above the store. Rake thin. Pencil mustache. Bathes in grease.

Quote: *"Are you a cop? If you're a cop, you have to tell me. You're not? Good. So you're lookin' for something real dirty... I got what you want.. what you need. I got stuff so bad that it makes snuff look like fucking Sesame Street. But it'll cost ya."*

Dr Antoinette Hallows

Head psychologist of the Bradford Wellness Clinic. Mid-forties. Tries to keep her hair neatly in a bun, but there's always a few loose strands. Soft spoken and considered.

Quote: *"Here at the Bradford Wellness Clinic, we provide you the respite from the trappings of modernity that you need to be revitalized. Our goal is to give you the very best foundation for success in your rehabilitation, whatever your needs."*

Blake Scarman

Inventor of the "Whateley Polaroid". Currently a patient at the Bradford Wellness Clinic under the alias "Ken Highwillow". Late sixties with pure white hair. Stays shut-in a dark room, boarded up and lined with tin foil. He can't, or won't, speak a word. Flies into a fit of rage if anyone brings any technology into his room.

Clues

- ☐ A book called "Phantoms" with various paragraphs on the afterlife underlined.
- ☐ A handwritten note stating "The Japanese believe that the colour red wards off evil spirits" underlined three times.
- ☐ A shower of flyers raining down, all printed with the words "Would you like to meet a ghost?" and an image of a red spider lily inside a TV.
- ☐ A videotape of the film 'The Amityville Horror' with the words "Max Gain can get it for you" written on it in black marker.
- ☐ A photograph of a man and woman working in a computer lab with the names "Lydia Void and Blake Scarman" written on the back.
- ☐ Rumours of people disappearing after visiting the New Tenet Science Church.
- ☐ Someone claiming to have seen a ghost of a loved one on their television, begging that they join them.
- ☐ A polaroid of a shadowy, human-like figure in a red room. "Find me" is written underneath.
- ☐ An invoice for a significant amount of audio-visual equipment purchased from Ed's Electricals.
- ☐ A nurse looking for Donnie. Wants to know if he wants more hallucinogenic drugs.
- ☐ Cyrus Abernathy's obituary. Body not found.
- ☐ An unchecked answering machine message which when played is just a series of machine clicks and shrieks.
- ☐ A TV suddenly turns on showing the Afterlife TV's sign-on screen and a logo of a red spider lily inside a TV.
- ☐ A radio plays the distorted screams of Donnie Fear: "Hel -" followed by an otherworldly roar.
- ☐ A TV shows a real-time video feed of a Deviant from behind them, creating a playback loop. Turning around reveals no one.
- ☐ Cyrus Abernathy's Journal.
- ☐ A modified polaroid camera with a cracked lens.
- ☐ A speaker in an unusual place, playing on loop in a distorted voice: "Death is not the end."
- ☐ A patient file labelled "Ken Highwillow". Upon inspection reveals this is an alias.
- ☐ Blake Scarman breaks his silence.

Rewards

At the conclusion of the Lost Transmission, clear all Conditions gained during the mystery, remove all items from Your Corner of Donnie's House, and purge any unspent Marks of Boundaries. Additionally, mark 1 XP for making it to the end of the mystery and 1 XP for successfully resolving the mystery. Then, all of the following are awarded:

- ☐ **The Whateley Polaroid Camera (Custom Move):** Once per session, a Latchkey may take a polaroid picture of a location. The picture reveals something that isn't present in the room. Detail what the polaroid shows and take it as a Clue. This clue may not answer a question by itself.
- ☐ **A Red Tape with the name of a Side Character on it (Custom Move):** Once per game, the Latchkeys may watch the tape. Narrate a scene where your Latchkey interacts with the ghost of the Side Character. Detail a Clue related to the scene. This clue may not answer a question by itself. This counts as watching an Odyssey Tape.
- ☐ **A VCR made of flesh (Custom Move):** When used to watch an Odyssey TV Tape, you may detail an Odyssey Clue or a future mystery derived from the tape you just watched. This clue may not answer a question by itself.

A STAR IS REBORN



Brendan (Khatyra) & Michael Dürr

A Star is Reborn

By Brendan (Khatyra) and Michael Dürr

The Remnant

- > The Latchkeys discover a film reel, covered in dust, marked "THE WHITESPRAY AFFAIR - 1934."
- > The Latchkeys receive tickets to a special screening of *The Passions of Eleanor of Aquitaine*, widely considered the greatest work of silent movie star Lillian Hale. Instead of *The Passions*, the Latchkeys see this *Lost Transmission*.
- > The Big Man appears without his cowboy hat and usual attire. Dressed in a grey formal smoking jacket and a cigarette holder in his hand, he ushers the Latchkeys into a room reminiscent of a college professor's office. This can be a hitherto unnoticed room in the house on Rodenbecker Street or a room at any serviceable location. He presents the *Lost Transmission* as a slideshow and begins by saying: "I would like, if I may, to take you on a strange journey. A journey into human depravity, into the depths of human vice and cruelty."

Presenting the Mystery

You are the Drifters. It's 1934 and each of you has been wandering across the American Southwest. Whether it was the market crash of '29, the Dust Bowl, or another disaster, you've found yourself down on your luck.

As you drive your old, beat-up Ford down a highway in New Mexico you suddenly catch sight of what journalists call a "black blizzard": choking clouds of dust swirling through the air. In less than a minute, the sky darkens, the sun blotted out entirely. The storm batters your truck as the engine screams, dying as it clogs. The truck's interior likewise quickly fills, and you know you must leave the vehicle behind if you want to survive.

You make it out, disoriented and hopelessly filthy. As the sun comes out again, you reach a bright, gleaming town. A sign happily announces, "Welcome to Whitespray!" You've heard about this playground of the ultra-wealthy, where vice flows nearly unchecked.

You wander aimlessly through town until you hear the sounds of a big brass band. The music draws you to the gates of a large Gothic pile of a mansion, the kind that movie stars with far too much money and far too little taste had constructed back in the early '20s. On the lawn, you see a birthday party in progress. In the center of the party, upon a gilded throne, sits a striking figure in a white, sequined tuxedo and top hat. Pressed up against this figure is a muscular man, clad only in gold briefs. The figure turns their head to look at you.

Pose the following to the Drifter with the highest Presence: *You recognize her immediately, even if she doesn't seem to remember you. This is Lillian Hale, the reclusive silent movie star. At some point, you worked a service industry job in Whitespray and catered to her. Back then you asked Lillian for advice on how to start a career as a movie star. How did she shatter your dreams?*

Lillian raises her hand and waves you over. "WHY," she demands with the authority of a king, "are you so late? Why have you kept the birthday boy waiting for so long?" The muscular man blushes and lowers his eyes. When you try to explain that you're just passing through, she says, "Well well well! How about a job? We've been DYING for new entertainment here, and you look pretty swell." She snaps her fingers and a rough-looking butler comes forward with clean clothes.

"Now, as part of the job, you are expected to give Wyatt here a birthday present. Go to the main hall and choose one. Put your names on it. Fix yourselves up. And be quick about it!" She dismisses you with a wave of the hand.

Pose the following to each Drifter: *Despite this brusque welcome, the party and its guests seem quite inviting. It's not just their luxurious lifestyle that draws you in. What tells you this is a haven for embracing one's individuality and sexual liberation?*

To you, the party guests and their host seem carefree, vain, naïve even—perfect marks if you wanted to take advantage of them. If they want to be entertained, why not play along? After all, this place seems to have everything in abundance and maybe, if you play your cards right, you could stay here for more than just one night.

Something seems strange about the mansion and its guests though. It's neither the amount of guns, swords, and other medieval weapons on the walls that make you suspicious, nor is it the fact that most of the servants are disfigured. It's Lillian herself. She simply doesn't look her age. She used to be a major Hollywood star during the early silent era, but she doesn't appear to be any older than she was at her zenith, which you vaguely remember as having been about two decades ago. Go ahead and roleplay that scene; what do you think of the house and its inhabitants?

[Let the characters have this scene. When everyone has shared their thoughts, interject with]:

As you head into the foyer of the mansion, you hear a man behind you begin to engage Lillian in conversation. You don't quite hear all of it, but can make out part of the exchange. "You look simply marvelous, my dear! That editing process of yours, I don't understand it, but the results... Well, I'd love to be young again too. When do you think I can get a trip down to the basement, hmm?"

And now, I must address you as players, not characters: The Drifters can simply steal some presents from the hall and flee out the gates, away from this strange birthday party. If they do, you should narrate a short epilogue for your character where they live a miserable life under the crushing weight of poverty, only temporarily relieved by selling the expensive, strange presents they stole from this mansion. Then, as a table, choose one of the presents: This becomes a Clue the Latchkeys can use for an active mystery.

If the Drifters decide to stay: Decide as a table what odd, bizarre, or otherwise unsettling present the Drifters pick out for Wyatt. This becomes the first Clue for investigating the strange happenings at the mansion. Know that completing this mystery will give your Latchkeys access to a new Move and special Rewards. However, if your Drifter is killed, your Latchkey must immediately mark The Chromatic Desert. If you have already marked The Chromatic Desert, you must mark The Pure-White Signal.

After deciding upon the present: We'll start by going around the table to learn more about the Drifters. On your turn, please tell us the following:

- > What circumstance led to your Drifter losing it all?
- > If your Drifter were ever to come into a large sum of money, what would they spend it on first?

Then, everyone else will say one thing they think your Drifter brought with them, either in their pockets or back in the battered Ford. Add it to Your Corner of the Mansion, aka Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet, to be removed when this mystery is finished.

Additionally, you all have access to a new Move:

There's No Crime In Giving Yourself Over To Pleasure

When a Drifter indulges in a hedonistic vice with anyone at the mansion or gleefully mistreats a servant in front of other Side Characters, they either gain the Condition: **"Hedonist"** or replace an existing Condition with **"Hedonist."** They can then clear **"Hedonist"** any time to get advantage on a die roll with Vitality or Presence.

Each Drifter may use this Move once over the course of the mystery.

Questions & Opportunities

Question: What is Lillian's secret film editing process that allows her to stay young? (Complexity: 6)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by entering the editing room and unleashing the terrible power of what you discover there. You may use it to either take control of the mansion or to create enough chaos so you can eventually flee.

Question: How can we climb the ranks and establish ourselves at the top of the social order in this strange house permanently? (Complexity: 6)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by blackmailing, incriminating, or otherwise leveraging the situation in the house in order to ingratiate yourselves and solidify your social status.

The Key of Class

When you turn this Key, mark the first empty box.

- ☐ Each Drifter narrates a flashback to their daily life before they lost it all. What did you not realize was important to you until it was gone?
- ☐ Each Drifter narrates a flashback to a time when they performed a disgusting or humiliating job. What helped you push through it?
- ☐ Each Drifter narrates a flashback to a time when they exploited someone in an even worse financial position than themselves, all for a quick buck. How did you justify your actions to yourself?

Moments

- Someone digs their hand deep into an enormous multi-layer birthday cake and starts a food fight that soon unravels into an orgy of sweet baked goods and sticky bodies.
- The sound of a gunshot followed by a burst of laughter.
- Several people involved in party activities move and speak at at most a quarter of their normal speed. Anyone who steps closer to them experiences a dizzying sensation and seems, to anyone observing them, to likewise slow down.
- A Side Character is discovered, shirtless, their wrists chained to the wall or ceiling. They have been recently flogged, their face a mix of ecstasy and pain as they softly moan.
- No matter where the Drifters go in the manor, no matter what the hour is, they can hear the blaring notes of a saxophone being played somewhere as a small party goes on.
- Side Characters will gather and perform a very strange, ritualistic "dance" that devolves into everyone on the floor in the throngs of sexual desire.

Lillian Hale

Bedecked in a sequined men's white tuxedo, complete with top hat and bow tie, reclusive silent movie star Lillian Hale reigns like a king in her sprawling manor, having transformed her home into her own personal pleasure palace. Filled with ideas of grandeur and over-the-top theatricality, it is no surprise that Lillian was once one of the most powerful dramatic actresses working in film. Lillian's lifestyle, supported by an entourage of industry friends and with a fortune in the bank, has become alarmingly hedonistic in the years since she last graced the silver screen.

Lillian regards the Drifters as mere entertainment, roughly on par with the house servants. They are to be used, abused, then discarded or experimented upon when they no longer provide entertainment value. She will provide them with a substantial amount of money on the condition that they must always be ready to entertain her or her friends—meaning they can never leave the manor. They must never complain about their treatment or they will be "no longer able to complain."

Quote: *"It was strange the way it happened. One night, one fateful night, I was reliving the old days, watching my old films... Doing a little editing work to make the pictures even better than before. And then it happened, almost as if by accident. By accident! And that's how I discovered the secret. Yes, I have harnessed that power now. I hold the secret to youth eternal."*

Dangers

The Time Slip

Lillian is incredibly selective about who amongst her friends has the privilege of descending into the depths of the sub-basement. The main room of the basement contains one solitary camera, several rudimentary painted backdrops, and a handful of props. It is, however, down in the rooms of the sub-basement that one can find Lillian's biggest secret: Her film editing set-up. Lillian has discovered a method of film editing that allows her to manipulate time and space. She has been able to successfully reverse the effects of aging in herself and others; in other words, she has discovered every actress' dream, the secret to eternal youth.

As a consequence of this editing process, time has become unstable within the mansion, and continuity errors are becoming alarmingly more common and may eventually affect the Drifters. Some possible continuity errors: characters move too quickly or too slowly; their speech slips out of sync with their mouths; objects change their positions in the blink of an eye. In rare instances, double exposure is possible, where objects (and people) briefly become ghostlike and incorporeal.

Cora Valentine

Cora Valentine, once a rising star in the film industry, fell in with the crowd at the mansion and quickly became Lillian's favorite. After seeing the miraculous effects of the editing process, Cora happily volunteered to go down to the sub-basement with Lillian. Then something went wrong—perhaps Lillian's hand slipped, a cue was missed, or Cora got caught in some sort of celluloid jam. Whatever happened, Cora has become particularly damaged by the time slip. Her voice has become greatly distorted: It echoes, is crackly and filled with static, and/or sounds as if it's coming from a distance. Her physical form is constantly shifting in a jarring, disorienting fashion, as if she were a film being played with missing frames.

Many of the guests at the mansion believe Cora has left or otherwise been “discarded” by Lillian. In truth, she lurks in the dark corners and secret passageways of the mansion, hiding out of sight. She is dedicated to protecting Lillian, both physically and emotionally, and she will not hesitate to use violence against anyone who may be a threat to Lillian’s happiness and safety. Cora believes this will win back Lillian’s love, but if Lillian were ever to discover her, Lillian would react only with indifference.

Quote: “Everything is for her. I’ll do anything—anything!—to keep her safe and happy. She’s the greatest star.”

Lillian’s entourage

Lillian’s friends and industry connections often spend weeks at a time at the mansion. Constant orgiastic parties, banquets overflowing with alcohol, and peculiar, sadistic “games” are the norm in this house, where all her guests play extremely rough with each other and the servants. Still, there is some joy to be had among them, as, away from the prying eyes of society, they are free to express themselves however they wish. A select few of them are even invited down to the sub-basement to experience the editing process firsthand.

Locations

The Garden

An expansive green oasis with a star shaped swimming pool. An ominous hedge maze one can easily get lost in. Tons of birthday decorations.

Paint the Scene: *What luxury do you see at this extravagant party that you could never afford, even in the good days?*

Master Bedroom

A large marble bathtub filled with fan mail. Memorabilia and presents of Lillian’s former lovers. A collection of erotic art, sex toys, and revealing costumes.

Paint the Scene: *What do you see that sparks a curiosity or desire you never knew you had?*

Private Movie Theatre

A temple to Lillian’s greatness. Old movie posters, publicity photographs, portraits and her many awards clutter the room. An enormous oil painting can be pulled up via a rope to reveal a movie screen. A discretely hidden projector room contains the reels of all her films.

Paint the Scene: *Lillian was undeniably one of Hollywood’s greatest stars. If you were to become an actor like her, what sort of film would you want to star in?*

The Kitchen

A large room connected to the dining hall and rear porch. Elegant stainless steel counters and tiles with bold geometric patterns. The latest kitchen appliances and an expensive knife block, one knife missing. A spacious dumbwaiter.

Paint the Scene: *How can you tell that a distressing amount of food is being wasted in this household?*

The Zen Room

Soothing colors and warm candle light. Comfortable seat cushions on the ground. A bonsai in a priceless porcelain pot.

Paint the Scene: *This room is presented as a place for relaxation and meditation. How can you tell it’s actually used for orgies?*

Secret Passages

Entrances concealed behind paintings, tapestries, and bookshelves. Dark, cavernous spaces choked with cobwebs and dust. Secret peepholes allow curious eyes to spy on nearly every room in the mansion.

Paint the Scene: *If you put your eye up to one of the peepholes dotting the walls, what scandalous act do you see? Does it fascinate or disgust you?*

Editing Room

A vast room below the basement with a secret, hidden entrance. Red safe light. Bulky equipment to wind film, boxes of chemicals, discarded strips of film.

Paint the Scene: *How can you tell that time is particularly distorted down here?*

Special Rule: This location can only be accessed when the Drifters have answered the first question.

Guestrooms

Each room contains a large bed, a walk-in wardrobe as well as a personal bathroom.

Paint the Scene: *How has the guest staying here made this room their own?*

Side Characters

H.O. Sauer, a director

Remarkable double chin. Thinning hair. Smells of expensive cigars. Lethargic until inspiration hits, then manic. Hans-Otto Sauer directed some iconic German horror movies in the ‘20s before moving to Hollywood where he had great success with less artistically ambitious projects. Sauer wants to return to his roots and reinvent the genre but so far hasn’t been able to figure out how.

Quote: “Have you ever considered acting? Yes, yes... Your face, contorted in agony, screaming for help—it’s a striking image! It makes me want to create again!”

Wyatt, the current favorite

A body-builder in his twenties parading around in golden trunks. Lots of freckles. Flashes a shy smile as he flexes. Wyatt grew up on a farm and only recently was introduced to the house. He seems to be uncomfortable whenever servants get mistreated, but he doesn’t speak up. Wyatt doesn’t mind being objectified.

Quote: “It’s okay, you can watch me work out. I actually kind of like the attention. Lillian even wants to send my photographs to the magazines, but I don’t know what my pa’d say about that.”

Atlanta, an upcoming star

Blond luscious locks. Captivating blue eyes. A rising movie star with delusions of grandeur. She oscillates between wanting to be like Lillian and wanting to be with her. Atlanta is fascinated by firearms and is reckless when handling them.

Quote: “Sometimes it can get sooo boring in this house! Here’s a tip, darling—whenever the action slows to a crawl, just shoot a gun, and see what happens! Guaranteed to get people up and talking, that’s for sure.”

Hawksworth, a handyman

A skinny man in a classic butler attire. Stringy hair. Missing his tongue. Hawksworth has been a servant of the estate for several years and loves to spy on its inhabitants by using secret crawl spaces and peep holes. Often assists Lillian in the editing process and is sworn to utter secrecy.

Quote: “...” (he can’t speak)

Antonio and Nicoletta Lupino, Satanic drag artists

An Italian married couple who have bought out a major Hollywood studio to advance their ideology. He is tall and thin with round spectacles, while she has a fuller figure and long, dark hair. While they dress conservatively in public, they wear extravagant drag looks around the mansion and perform shows in the garden. They are known for their eccentric erotic escapades and will always welcome a third into their bedroom.

Quote: “We’re trying to get financing for a new movie, *Captain Blood*. Errol Flynn just won’t agree to do a nude scene! It’s so disappointing! Maybe you could... audition for us, if you catch our drift.”

Violet, a housekeeper

A stout woman in a maid uniform. Wears an eyepatch. Violet has a stoic demeanor but secretly enjoys being humiliated and getting mistreated. She misses Cora but believes she went off to Hollywood.

Quote: “I’ll give ya a little advice since you’re new here. Lillian likes it when you call her Mr. Hale and say, ‘Yes, sir!’ to her. She likes it even more when you say, ‘Please, sir, may I have another?’ [Winks]”

Margaret Riker, an assistant

Calculating eyes behind big glasses. Grey suit. Ambitious. Margaret is an aspiring screenwriter who only took her job as a personal assistant of one of the other Side Characters to further that goal. She endures being treated poorly by her employer but will snap back at others who try the same.

Quote: “Look, the bigwigs can treat us rough all they want. That’s their right. What you’ve got to do is work hard and pull yourself up, and one day, you’ll be in their position. Don’t even think of trying anything with me!”

Riley, a gardener

Stained green overall. Wild curly hair. Defiant eyes. Riley only recently became an employee of Lillian Hale. They despise the guests but choose their words carefully when talking about them.

Quote: “I think it would do these big ar-tiste types some good if they got their own hands into the dirt. Worked the land for themselves ‘stead of relying on us to do it for them. Keep your feet on the ground, buddy. I’d hate for you to end up like them—or under the ground because of them.”

Guests

There are several other, more or less famous people present in the house. Some names if you need them: Patrick Gable (Hollywood heartthrob), Helen Hopper (magazine gossipmonger), Elsa Lundgren (Swedish actress), Jonathan Steward (California Senator), William Wilder (screenwriter).

Clues

- ☐ The painting “The Fountain of Youth” by Lucas Cranach the Elder prominently displayed.
- ☐ A collection of BDSM implements: paddles, floggers, riding crops decorated with occult symbols.
- ☐ Lillian acquired a unique prototype of a camera that was shipped from London.
- ☐ A guest is responsible for a past tragedy of a servant (pick one: death of a loved one, serious injury, sabotaged career, something else).
- ☐ A large generator in the basement—instead of powering the house its cables go into the ground.
- ☐ A flickering light sending a message in morse code.
- ☐ A radio softly plays (choose one: conversations from the past, the sounds of a Side Character in a sexual encounter, Richard Nixon’s resignation speech on loop, something else).
- ☐ A corpse hidden in plain sight.
- ☐ Forged documents reveal that a Side Character isn’t who they claim to be.
- ☐ Newspaper clippings of missing people who share a certain characteristic with one of the Drifters.
- ☐ Cora only remembers acting out a scene in the basement before she got transformed.
- ☐ A book on how to preserve film.
- ☐ A strong, acrid odor.
- ☐ Rumors about a forbidden film set on the estate that contains several rudimentary painted backdrops and a handful of props.
- ☐ A Side Character has a severe allergy (pick one: peaches, sunlight, silver, something else).
- ☐ A typewritten script for a film titled “The Alchemist,” with edits in Lillian’s handwriting.
- ☐ A discarded strip of film negative covered in blood.
- ☐ A line of cocaine gets mixed with celluloid powder.
- ☐ A servant and a guest are secretly related.
- ☐ Evidence that Lillian is planning a comeback.

Rewards

Following this Lost Transmission, each Latchkey may choose one of the following movie titles, which represent Lillian Hale’s greatest works. During the next Dawn phase, the Latchkeys will receive a package containing VHS copies of these movies. Add the title of the movie to Your Corner of the House as if it were a typical item. When you mark a movie title, you may define how the events of that movie relate to the situation at hand.

- ☐ Madame Lucifer
- ☐ The Eternal Melody
- ☐ The Great Riverboat Robbery
- ☐ The Jazz Chanteuse
- ☐ L’Horreur de Madame Caligari
- ☐ A Farewell To Youth

Additionally, all Latchkeys gain the following Move:

Don’t Dream It, Be It

Although twisted, the characters in the Lost Transmission might inspire the Latchkeys to question their current lifestyle. Once per campaign, each Latchkey may declare that they are embracing a new core aspect of their identity, like their name, pronouns, gender expression, sexuality, etc. If they do, they get to clear a Condition and unlock a new Dawn question: “Have you been true to yourself?”

A detailed still life painting featuring a cluster of translucent grapes on the left, several ripe peaches with red and yellow blush in the center, and a sliced peach in the bottom right showing its pit. A large, segmented caterpillar with blue and green markings and orange edges is draped across the top and right. A small black insect is perched on one of the peaches. The background is dark, and the lighting creates strong highlights and shadows on the fruit and insects.

Parasomnia

J. Carter and Josh Domanski

Parasomnia

By J. Carter and Josh Domanski

The Remnant

- > The Latchkeys discover the diary of a missing girl who attended the Franco Argento Academy for Exceptional Girls. The diary contains the events of the Lost Transmission.
- > The Latchkeys explore the ruins of the Franco Argento Academy, unknowingly crossing into a temporal rift back to 1971.
- > The Latchkeys find a dust covered box of mounted flies—each specimen labeled with one of their names. The night after finding the box, they dream of the events of the Lost Transmission.

Presenting the Mystery

The year is 1971. You are students of the Franco Argento Academy for Exceptional Girls—an elite Catholic boarding school for wealthy young women from the surrounding states. The Academy sits at the outskirts of La Fresca, separated from the rest of Degoya County by both distance and social class. Here, students live an aloof life of privilege and academic rigor.

The school year is quickly approaching its end, and the oppressive late spring heat and imminent final exams blur the weeks into a slurry of anxiety, anger, and procrastination. This is the time of year when the real drama starts—when rivalries and frustrations reach their breaking points and the promise of two heavenly months of summer pushes even the most level headed academic to their social limit.

But there's a new source of fear and anxiety at the Academy. Over the past few weeks, three of your fellow classmates have gone missing under unusual circumstances and are presumed dead. While the Academy administration has kept an iron fist on the details, the idea of foul play has taken root in the minds of some of the girls. Rumors have spread of murder; some even claim to have found evidence of Satanic rituals near where the girls were last seen and that the demon Beelzebub walks among the school's population.

As a precaution, administration has temporarily suspended classes and ordered all girls to remain in their dormitories outside of mealtimes until further notice. There's even talk of the school permanently closing if the situation isn't resolved. Your parents will be picking you up in a few days, so if someone doesn't do something soon, you may never return to the Academy.

Pose the following to the Girl with the highest Sensitivity: Recently, you've noticed strange phenomena around the school. Whispers from the shadows. Rumors among students. You've found yourself sleepwalking at night—through a version of the academy strange and otherworldly. Last night, you saw proof that your visions weren't just dreams. What happened which indicates you may not have been dreaming and the nightmarish version of the school you find yourself may, in fact, be real?

Before you woke up, you saw them. The missing girls, trapped in this same strange nightmare. But something was off. There was a dark presence behind them. The shadows obscured its true form, but you swear its flesh was churning. As the girls turned to face you, you watched as their bodies began to rot, maggots crawling from their flesh, rapidly sprouting wings and turning into flies. An instant later your eyes were open, staring at the sunlight streaming through the window of your dormitory.

Pose the following to each of the Girls: With the changing of the seasons comes the return of the insects, awaking from their hibernation or hatching anew with the warming weather. Normally a mild nuisance, there's something about this place and these insects that feels different. Why do you believe you may now have an unusual connection to the insects of Degoya County?

You might not fully realize this yet, but these insects are your ally in this mystery and they might help you uncover what's truly going on.

Pose the following to the players (not characters): If the Girls have no desire to pursue this mystery, they can choose to move on with their lives. They have other responsibilities—what will their families think if they get into serious trouble? And what will the other girls think of them snooping around the school? If they choose to ignore the situation, the killer will claim additional victims before the school is closed, potentially even one of the Girls themselves. Narrate an epilogue for each of these victims in which we see their brutal deaths and the hands of an unseen killer. Then, a strange detail present at each of the murders can be used by the Latchkeys as a Clue for an active mystery.

If the Girls choose to investigate using their newly awakened powers, the communication they received from the insects is the first Clue they find for investigating the mystery and discovering the fate of the missing girls. Completing this mystery will give your Latchkeys access to a new Move and special Rewards. However, if your Girl is killed, your Latchkey must immediately mark The Chromatic Desert. If you have already marked The Chromatic Desert, you must mark The Pure-White Signal instead.

If the Girls choose to investigate:

We'll start by going around the table to learn more about the Girls. On your turn, please describe your Girl and their eerie connection to your Latchkey, then tell us the following:

- What is your social status at the Academy? Are you well liked by the students? A teacher's pet? An outsider?
- Why has your family sent you to the Academy? What high expectations do they expect of you, and what would be the consequence of failing to live up to that demand?

Then, everyone else will say one personal effect they think you brought to school with you; add it to Your Corner of the Dormitory (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet, to be removed when this mystery is finished).

Additionally, you all have access to a new Move:

Muscationis:

Insects have a profound sense of the chemicals of decomposition. The Girls can now psychically commune with insects. They do not communicate with words, but with fleeting feelings, visions, and impressions. When you seek to commune with an insect, state what information you are seeking and roll Sensitivity.

On a success, the insects alert you to the presence of a recent death, Clue, or source of danger. They will lead you in its general direction if you wish to follow.

On a 12+, you are granted a glimpse into the Nightmare.

On a failure, the insect leads you directly into a source of danger.

Questions & Opportunities

Question: What strange ritual links the disappearances together? (Complexity: 4)

Opportunity: Discover the fate of the missing girls by performing the ritual and entering the Nightmare.

Question: What is the true nature of the Nightmare? (Complexity: 4; locked until the Girls enter the Nightmare)

Opportunity: Escape the Nightmare and return to the Waking World.

Question: Under which friendly face does the demon Beelzebub masquerade? (Complexity: 4; locked until the Girls return to the Waking World)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by confronting the demon and banishing them to the Nightmare.

The Nightmare

There's something dark and twisted in the shadows of the Academy. Hidden beyond the veil of reality is the Nightmare, a dark reflection of the real world where dreams and reality become blurred. Those that slip across the divide will find a version of the Academy much like their own, but otherworldly and harrowing, permeated with grime, filth and the lingering stench of death.

Strange creatures haunt the Nightmare. The worst is **Beelzebub**, who has taken the missing girls into this otherworldly place to feed their swarm.

The Nightmare Move

The Nightmare is a dangerous and uncanny place, both familiar and disorienting. All locations in the Waking World have a Nightmare equivalent. When you attempt to navigate the Nightmare, state your destination and roll Composure.

- On a 12+, you arrive at your destination and uncover a Clue.
- On a 10+, you arrive at your destination.
- On a 7-10, you arrive at your destination but encounter a source of danger.
- On a 2-6, you lose your way, arriving at a random location, and encounter a source of danger.

Beelzebub and the Missing Girls

Beelzebub, the Lord of the Flies, is a demon and prince of the Nightmare. They live a dual life, existing in both the Waking World and Nightmare simultaneously. The Nightmare reveals their true form, a humanoid mass of rolling flies. But in the Waking World, they masquerade as a normal person, blending in so they can lure victims into the Nightmare.

It was only recently that the veil between the Waking World and Nightmare was blurred enough for Beelzebub to manifest a presence in the Waking World. The demon seeks to corrupt, to kill, to bring victims back into the Nightmare to add to their swarm. Their appetite will not be sated as long as they can continue to exist in the Waking World.

Jennifer, the first victim

Straight, stark black hair. Well known and well liked by the other students—rumored to be the daughter of a famous actor. She volunteered to help Sister Bruckner take care of Jacob and spent much of her time in the science labs.

In the Nightmare: Jennifer was beheaded. Visible within the wound are countless, writhing maggots. Beelzebub has forgotten her head behind—it remains where she was killed. A Great Sarcophagus Fly has germinated within her head and cries for anyone to notice its forsaken home.

Annette, the second victim

A tanned, smiling face. A local girl, who hoped to leave Degoya County someday. Her parents always said her heart was sweet. She spent as much time as possible outside, despite her insisting she hated this place.

In the Nightmare: Annette was stabbed in the chest, grown now into a gaping maw. The shining carapaces of desert burrowing beetles create the illusion of sharp teeth. Her corpse stalks and bites. Beelzebub has stolen her heart, but streams of ants march back and forth from where he has hidden it.

Elizabeth, the third victim

A quiet girl who nobody seemed to know well. When she did talk, she often spoke of religious themes. The rest of the students found her strange, but she preferred talking to adults anyways. Surprisingly, Eckhart had personally sponsored her application for a prestigious acting scholarship in New York.

In the Nightmare: Elizabeth has been bled dry and pushed into a watery crevasse. Her bloated corpse pulls all who enter her waters down into the depths; she's eager for company. Beelzebub has drained her blood into a ritual chalice. Swarms of mosquitoes can't help but tell all who listen about the open feast that awaits nearby.

Dangers

The Administrators (Waking World)

With the students confined to their dormitories, the Academy's staff have taken it upon themselves to patrol the school and grounds to ensure none of the students are sneaking out, working in shifts depending on the time of day. While getting caught mostly means being reprimanded and sent back to the dorms, hiding beneath one of these friendly faces is Beelzebub, scouting their next victim.

The Stalking Demon (Nightmare)

It won't take long for Beelzebub to notice when someone slips into the Nightmare. To prevent their return to the Waking World, the demon will relentlessly stalk those trapped in the Nightmare, intent on claiming them as the next victim. Beelzebub cannot be killed by conventional weaponry and their form can shift into any space a fly can crawl through.

The Missing Girls (Nightmare)

Even in death, Beelzebub's victims continue to suffer. Their corpses wander the Nightmare in service to the demon, aiding in the torment of new victims.

Moments

- A group of students excitedly talk to each other, only to become immediately quiet when one of the Girls enters the room. Upon leaving the room, the conversation renews with echoing laughter.
- A display case of mounted exotic insects. You can sense an echo of the insects screaming within.
- An unfamiliar man sits in a hallway, writing in a notebook. When noticed, he jots something down. Has he recognized you in some way?
- In the periphery, a student twitches with rapid, jerky movement, but appears normal when directly observed.
- Jacob roams the halls, conspicuously unaccompanied by Sister Bruckner. He has a strange look upon his face, as if lost in thought.
- A fly noisily clacks against a window in a desperate bid to escape. If assisted, it simply flies right back inside to begin the process again.

The Key of Myiasis

- Each of the Girls explains the elaborate family history entitling them to a life of luxury, comfort, and anxiety.
- Each of the Girls narrates a flashback to a time when an authority figure made a life-altering decision on their behalf.
- Each of the Girls describes a moment when a trait they inherited from their family garnered judgement from the other girls at the Academy.

Locations

The Dormitories

Communal spaces across the campus from the main buildings, designed to “*build the spirit of sisterhood*”. There are four common rooms, each linked to four bedrooms. Each bedroom is honeycombed with four bunk beds for four students. Even in the relatively private bedrooms, warm light from the common room leaks beneath closed doors.

Paint the Scene: *What evidence of a passive-aggressive conflict do you see in a common room?*

The School Grounds

Carefully pruned gardens surround the gothic school building. Not even a single weed can be found, as if the land itself conforms to the school uniform. Walkways and benches create the illusion of private spaces, but the entire grounds are visible from the school’s iconic clock tower.

Paint the Scene: *What excessive measures has the school taken to keep the grounds green in spite of Degoya County’s arid climate?*

The School Grounds (Nightmare)

Unkempt and choked with dead weeds, allowing the creeping desert to begin reclaiming the space. Rusted benches, cracked walkways, and dead vegetation leave the entire grounds exposed and open to the elements.

Paint the Scene: *What iconic monument of the school’s hubris lies crudely immortalized in a display made of rusting metal?*

The Entrance Hall

An imposing, open interior space within the walls of the Academy. Hallways and stairwells sprout out in various directions. Trophy cases, framed photographs, and paintings that show the Academy’s storied history line the walls. Stained glass windows bathe the space in an unnatural technicolour glow.

Paint the Scene: *How does the geometry of this hall make you feel uniquely exposed and vulnerable?*

The Entrance Hall (Nightmare)

A collapsed roof and shattered stained glass windows expose the hall to open air. Labyrinthine debris makes movement through the space difficult. Trophy cases broken open, their contents faded and tattered.

Paint the Scene: *An object lies shattered on the ground. What about it gives you a strange feeling of joy in this horrid place?*

The Administrative Offices

A wooden desk nobody wants to stand in front of. The doors behind the desk only open to shame and humiliation. Rows upon rows of filing cabinets hide any number of secrets. The space is sterile, but the anxiety in the air is palpable, even when unattended.

Paint the Scene: *What humbling experience here shaped your first week at the Academy?*

The Administrative Offices (Nightmare)

The desk is rotted and termite-ridden. The hinges of the office doors have rusted off. Filing cabinets lie burst open—water damaged papers are strewn around like autumn leaves.

Paint the Scene: *You notice in the strewn papers confirmation of a secret you long suspected about the school. What is it?*

The Science Labs

Polished stainless steel surfaces reflect sterile fluorescent lights. A locked storage room in the back holds bottles of dangerous chemicals and a refrigerator contains the start of many grisly dissections to come. The smell of formaldehyde and cleaning solutions lingers.

Paint the Scene: *What was the last experiment performed here before the school was shut down? What remnants of the experiment have yet to be cleaned?*

The Science Labs (Nightmare)

Tarnished and grime covered stainless steel surfaces. The storage room is open, leaching a rancid chemical and biological slurry that sticks stubbornly to shoes. The smell of rotten flesh is nearly unbearable.

Paint the Scene: *What evidence was left behind of an experiment blurring the scientific and the supernatural? What was the nature of this experiment?*

The Library

The quietest place in the Academy. Paper pages dampen the sounds that typically echo through the academy’s brick hallways. Looking out from the cozy reading area, complete with a small, unlit fireplace, the stacks of books stretch as far as your imagination will allow. This is one of the few places where you can reliably find a place to be alone.

Paint the Scene: *How do the stacks of books make you feel safe?*

The Library (Nightmare)

Somehow, this room appears visibly unchanged, though a dreary atmosphere hangs over the space like a cloud.

Paint the Scene: *How do the stacks of books make you feel lonely?*

The Chapel

Stained glass icons of St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis Xavier loom over the dark gothic chapel, casting the room in a subtle blue-purple tint. Votive candles perennially lit in the corner provide the only other light. Distinct hints of incense welcome those who sit and contemplate.

Paint the Scene: *What was the topic of the disturbing homily Father Bittmen delivered on the Sunday the disappearances started happening?*

The Chapel (Nightmare)

Stained glass icons of unrecognizable eldritch figures loom over the dark gothic chapel, casting the room in a stark blood red. Evidence of a fire from the votive candles mars the rest of the chapel. The incense does little to hide the scent of decay that permeates the Nightmare.

Paint the Scene: *The room has largely been destroyed by a fire. What strange ritual object has been untouched by the flame?*

The Clock Tower

The school’s grand monument. A usually locked door leads up a steep, narrow staircase to a room of gears and mechanical whirls. Today, the door is open. The tick-tock of the clock can be felt in your chest and interrupts long thoughts. The view from the top of the tower is an awe-inspiring, uninterrupted view of Degoya County.

Paint the Scene: *Why does the top of the clock tower feel even taller than the tallest place you have ever stood?*

The Inverse Tower (Nightmare)

The door which usually leads up into the clock tower instead leads down, down, down through stairs of rotting wood and between walls of damp dirt. At the bottom, a pool of rancid, stagnant water lit by torches. The water subtly ripples with the sound of a heartbeat emanating from the bottom of the pool.

Paint the Scene: *Why do you feel the desire to dive into the pool and sink lower?*

Side Characters

Mr. Eckhart, Academy Principal

A balding man in a tailored suit with a quiet, but forceful, presence. He is seldom seen off school grounds and doesn't own property in Degoya County. Father Bittman frequently visits him in his office for lengthy secretive conversations.

Quote: *"The Academy has a unique climate and culture. It is the responsibility of all students to respect that climate and to cultivate that culture."*

Sister Bruckner, Biology Teacher

She wears grey, ill-fitting sweater vests and unpolished shoes. Her wheelchair squeaks as it travels the hallways. She's practically an institution—been here longer than anyone else can remember. Once a scientific radical, her religious order required her to take this quiet, out of the way job. Jennifer, the first missing girl, was her favourite student.

Quote: *"Science is more than memorizing vocabulary and replicating lab experiments, Jennifer. The dream is to make progress nobody has ever made before."*

Jacob, Sister Bruckner's pet chimpanzee

A chimpanzee. Ostensibly, he is Sister Bruckner's support animal, here to help her reach lab equipment or to wheel her chair around. In reality, he can be found most places in the school, often when he is least expected. Wait—is that a syringe in his hand?!

Quote: *"Ook ook ook!"*

Father Jacob Bittman, Academy Chaplain

A stern, tedious man pretending to be friendly and reasonable. He is new to the school and the youngest of the Academy's staff. Formally the head of the Academy, but cedes most administrative duties to Mr. Eckhart. He is never pleased to be reminded he shares the same first name as Mrs. Bruckner's pet chimpanzee.

Quote: *"If you've made your peace with God, all the devils of this world are merely angels working hard to free you from this place."*

Dawn Robbins, Academy Custodian

A local from Degoya County. Her attitude is distinct from the rest of the academy's staff. Once a chemist in her own right, she took this job so her daughter, Annette, could attend the Academy. She seems resigned to never see Annette again.

Quote: *"There's too many places for something to hide in this place—I should know. They'll never be found unless He wants them to be."*

Inga Albani, a fellow student

Plain and unassuming at first, but she knows more than she lets on about the academy's gossip. She often talks about her hometown, Brindlewood Bay, and is a big fan of Robin Masterson's *The Gold Crown Mysteries*.

Quote: *"When rumors start, I often ask myself: 'What would Amanda Delacort do?' She'd get to the bottom of things—that's what she'd do!"*

Clues

- ☐ A group of ants, following each other in an endless spiral.
- ☐ A circular sigil drawn in blood surrounding a pictorial rendition of a fly.
- ☐ The faint odor of cleaning chemicals near a splatter of blood missed in a hasty cleanup.
- ☐ A recounted nightmare of wandering a strange and twisted version of the Academy.
- ☐ A sudden swarm of insects (pick one: flesh flies, skin beetles, maggots, something else).
- ☐ A sharpened and bloodstained tree pruner hidden in an unusual place.
- ☐ A bundle of unsent letters written by the students. Some date back months.
- ☐ A passage circled in red in a copy of the Bible left open: *"Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand"*. (Matthew 12:25)
- ☐ Paperwork detailing the development of a pharmaceutical drug with psychedelic side effects.
- ☐ A discarded banana peel in an unusual location.
- ☐ A worn work glove, reeking of death and crawling with maggots.
- ☐ A momentary shift from the Waking World to the Nightmare, or vice versa.
- ☐ Scrawled on a wall or chalkboard: *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."* (Matthew 10:28)
- ☐ One of the Girls finds something they've only ever seen in their dreams and have never openly spoken about.
- ☐ A folded note, reading: *"No idea why they want to meet so late, but I'll be back before morning. - Jennifer"*.
- ☐ A worn copy of *The Stranger* by Albert Camus
- ☐ A glass case containing a large specimen of flesh fly, labeled as the *"Great Sarcophagus Fly"*.
- ☐ A hand drawn map of the Academy, its layout noticeably different from the actual school.
- ☐ Torn out pages from the diary of one of the Girls.
- ☐ Whispered prayer from one of the missing girls emanates from the shadows. Nearly inaudible except for the verse *"now and at the hour of our death"*.

Rewards

All of the following are rewarded at the conclusion of the Lost Transmission.

- A tattered care package, once destined for the Academy but lost by the postal service for decades, arrives at 26 Rodenbecker Street. You may take one of the personal effects of the Girls and add it to Your Corner of the House.
- If she is still alive at the end of the Lost Transmission, Inga returns to Degoya County to delve into its dark secrets and becomes a recurring Side Character. You get 1 extra Clue on the Meddling Move when you seek her counsel on matters related to other dimensions and planes of existence.
- New Move: **Muscationis**

Muscationis:

Insects have a profound sense of the chemicals of decomposition and you've developed a strange connection to Degoya County's insects that allows you to leverage this ability. Once per session, you can follow an insect in the general direction of a recent death or source of danger.



THE CoZenage

Alton W and Niamh Reilly

The Cozenage

By Niamh Reilly and Alton W

The Remnant

- > The Latchkeys put on an old home video of their performances in a highschool play. As they watch, the performance morphs into the events of the mystery.
 - > The Latchkeys find a dusty, seemingly absurdist, manuscript and decide to act it out together. As they do, they learn the story of the mystery.
- The Latchkeys read a review in the newspaper for a new revival production of “The Cozenage”. The review tells them all about the events of the mystery as context for the new production. As they read, they start to have visions of the events.

Presenting the Mystery

You're stage actors between gigs currently hired by Trevor Nunn to assist two creatives workshop their upcoming project. Nunn is both bankrolling and directing with obscene monetary returns expected. Nicholas Jackman, a former magician turned best selling author, and Anton Duvall, a current shining-star playwright and proclaimed hot commodity among Broadway producers, have been contracted to write the next great Broadway classic, preferably in three acts. It's the winter of 1980 and everyone has been sequestered at The Lakeview, a summer destination overlooking Deep Lake's waters. Because of the off season, Nunn was able to buy out the lodge for cheap. The lodge itself is miles away from the town on a private stretch of land only accessible by rentable shuttle buses. The landscape is picturesque, a perfect location to get the creative juices flowing away from prying eyes. As soon as you arrive, the dramatists put you to work, running scenes until sundown on a makeshift stage set up in the main hall.

On that first night you all have dinner in the hotel restaurant, Lloyd's, and then all head out to the lake for a drink, a smoke, a breath of fresh air. Nearing the lake's edge, you see Anton hogtied on the dock, Nicholas leering over him. As you approach, Nicholas hoists Anton over his head. Anton's eyes fill with fear as he is plunged into the lake and does not reemerge. The look in Nicholas' eyes sends you all running back to the lodge, praying he didn't see you all witness his chilling act.

Pose the following to the Actor with the lowest Composure: When you finally reach the phone in the office to call for help, you find Anton, calmly setting down the receiver. “The only goddamn phone in the lodge and somehow I'm still getting a busy tone. Damn archaic to only have one phone in a place as big as this. Did you need something?” How is this Anton subtly different from the one you just saw drown? How does your response to Anton give away your distress?

Anton, with a raised eyebrow, announces that it might be time for everyone to get some sleep.

And now I must address you as players (not characters):

The Actors can choose to call the police. If they do, the police show up and find nothing out of the ordinary. A disgruntled Anton and Nicholas call Nunn to report the incident and your contracts are terminated without compensation. Your careers peeter out and your Broadway dreams die. Then, the aforementioned subtle change in Anton is a Clue the Latchkeys can use for an active mystery.

If the Actors go to bed, the subtle change in Anton is the first Clue they find for investigating the mystery of The Cozenage. They will awake the next morning to a snowed-in lodge. Know that completing this mystery will give your Latchkeys access to a new Move and special Rewards. However, if your Actor is killed, your Latchkey must immediately mark The Chromatic Desert. If you have already marked The Chromatic Desert, you must mark The Pure-White Signal.

If the Actors go to bed: We'll start by going around the table to learn more about the Actors. On your turn, please tell us the following:

- What makes you stand out in auditions?
- What do you do outside of acting to make ends meet?

Then, everyone else will say one thing they think you brought with you to make your hotel room feel more like home; add it to Your Corner of the Lodge (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet, to be removed when this mystery is finished).

Additionally, you all have access to a new Move:

Going off Script

While any two Actors are doing read throughs, they may encounter a scene that resonates so profoundly it causes them to break character with deeply personal reactions. The writers love the improvisations and add them into the script. Both Actors may clear a Condition related to the scene and gain a clue related to the writers' reactions.

Questions & Opportunities

Question: How did Anton escape death? (Complexity: 6)

Opportunity: Resolve the Mystery by finally putting Anton to rest, appeasing Nicholas.

Question: Why does Nicholas want to kill Anton? (Complexity: 8)

Opportunity: Resolve the Mystery by ending the feud or destroying Nicholas.

The Key of The Director's Cut

When you turn this key, Trevor Nunn calls “CUT! Let's take a break.” We pull out to see we're on a movie soundstage at Elstree Studios. It's several years later during the production of a film adaptation of the events. The Actors will narrate what happens in the downtime before the scene is ready to go again and the Mystery resumes.

- ☐ During the reset Nicholas Jackman entertains the Actors with some of his elaborate magic. Which trick is your favorite? Narrate each phase of the trick (The Pledge, The Turn, and The Prestige). “And take two. Action.”
- ☐ During the reset, what notes does Nunn have for you? Each Actor narrates what changes he wants in their performance from today. “Let's go again, from the top. Action.”
- ☐ Nunn needs you to cry on cue. Each Actor narrates the memory they think back to in order to make this happen. “This time with just a little more emotion. Action.”

Moments

- Walking down a hallway you hear Anton fighting with his wife:
Amber: *"I know what you really are. And Anton, I can't live like this!"*
Anton: *"Oh, you think I can live like this?! You think I fucking enjoy living like this?! We have a beautiful house, lovely little girl, we're married, what is so wrong with your life?!"*
Amber: *"No more lies! No more secrets!"*
Anton: *"Secrets are my life."*
- You look in the mirror to find Anton staring back at you. When you blink, your reflection returns to normal.
- You take four left turns, but don't find yourself back where you started.
- The TV in the room is playing a documentary entitled *The Donner Party and The History of Cannibalism*. The show cuts to a local ad spot for a barbecue sauce by Carl "The Cayenne King" Wilkes.
- Anton's daughter tells you that you've promised to play hide and seek with her. She tells you to count to 100—no more no less.
- The Actor with the lowest Reason has a conversation with either a disembodied voice or apparition. They goad them into doing something either harmful or beneficial, Keeper's choice.
- The Actors see Stanley entering and exiting a room not his own. His hands are dirty and he wears a toolbelt. He locks the door whenever he leaves.
- A side character exits at the far end of the room only to reenter on the other side seconds later.

Nicholas Jackman and "Nicky"

Receding hairline. Black turtleneck. He's not a playwright by trade but is no stranger to the stage. His Vegas magic show sold out for more than a decade before he turned to fiction writing. He'll spend much of his time here at The Lakeview redrafting dialogue at his typewriter. When people don't see his vision he'll try to explain it through a very condescending magic trick. While generally abrasive, Nicholas is able to turn on the charm at will. Be careful, he will turn it off just as fast.

Quote: *"Has it ever occurred to you that I have agreed to have this script delivered by May the first? Does it matter to you at all that the producers have placed their complete confidence and trust in me, and that I have signed a letter of agreement, a contract, in which I have accepted that responsibility? Do you have the slightest idea what a moral and ethical principle is? Do you? Now shut up and read these fucking lines."*

During his writing he slips into a trance like state. The soul behind his eyes changes. And all that's left is "Nicky." This alter ego is herculean, paranoid, and wrathful. He has a vendetta against Anton Duvall and wishes to see him dead, by any means necessary. Throughout the mystery he should appear to kill Anton in a variety of ways: shoot him, trap him in a freezer, chop him up with a fire axe, hang him, push him off a roof. A similar fate might befall those he perceives as undermining his goals.

Quote: *"Are you watching closely? I'll make Anton disappear. Abracadabra!"*

Anton Duvall

One of the most astonishingly prolific and commercially successful playwrights of his time, audiences, producers, and directors keep his work in high demand. It's rumored that Duvall has turned down exorbitant offers from movie studios for exclusivity rights. While revered and considered quite the celebrity in certain circles, Anton is actually a very private man with little of his personal life known to the public. He is known as an enigmatic workaholic, commonly seen at parties in secluded corners scratching away in notebooks and only speaking to his wife.

Quote: *"See, sacrifice, that's the price of a good career. But you wouldn't know anything about that would you? No one cares about the man who thinks inside of the box!"*

Always sporting a double breasted vest, a clean clipper cut, and well kept facial hair, Anton Duvall can be seen wandering the lodge at all times of day and night. Often he seems deep in thought but is friendly enough when directly addressed. No matter how many times the Actors witness his murder, he will always reappear, completely unharmed and seemingly oblivious to past violence.

Quote: *"Do you understand why we do this? The audience knows the truth. The world is simple, miserable, solid all the way through. But if you can capture their attention, even for a second. Then you can make them wonder. And then you get to see something very special."*

Dangers

The Storm

Over that first night, a snowstorm begins to roll in. It's looking to be the most snowfall on record for Degoya County. Deep Lake doesn't have the infrastructure to plow normal roads let alone those to secluded cabins. The Actors are trapped until the storm passes. As the storm rages on, the phone lines will go down, the TV broadcast will go out, and eventually The Lakeview will lose power altogether.

Locations

The Main Hall

An ambitiously sized venue for such a small town. Normally it's used for weddings and small conventions. For this production, Nunn has gotten The Lakeview to set up a small stage, some chairs, and a few writing desks. The back wall is entirely floor to ceiling windows that give an incredible view of Deep Lake.

Paint the Scene: *In its heyday the lodge hosted many celebrity parties and there is a photo gallery wall to prove it. What framed snapshot draws your attention and how has The Lakeview changed since the photo was taken?*

Lloyd's

An attached restaurant and bar that services The Lakeview. The gold trimming on everything attempts to justify the outrageous prices. Deep Lake residents will come buy a celebratory drink and steak on a special occasion, but otherwise there's very little business here in the off-season. This is where the Actors can get their meals.

Paint the Scene: *Each entree on the menu has a creative name and description. What specials and specialty cocktails are being offered this week?*

The Dock

A rather unimpressive wooden dock with snow-covered adirondack chairs. A small boathouse contains some rentable red jet-skis, but all the gas has been drained and life vests stowed for winter. A charcoal filled fire pit sits a few yards away. The icy dark water leaves no trace of Anton's body.

Paint the Scene: *There are strange smells permeating from the water, both revolting and alluring. What are their sources?*

The Office

Racks of room keys. A locked record cabinet. A lost and found box. A bookshelf, sparse but not empty, maybe your next favorite book can be found there. An old rotary phone sits on the desk, seemingly the only one in the hotel. Anytime an Actor tries to call someone, they run into some sort of complication (the phone rings, the line is busy, the power goes out).

Paint the Scene: *A shredder sits next to the desk full of once important documents. What misdeeds from this past summer season is management trying to hide?*

The Basement

It's supposed to be staff only, but Mr. Crothers never remembers to lock the door. This area is mostly used as storage for extra hotel supplies: spare linens, dry food, chairs for events. But it looks like some of these unmarked boxes hold some very personal stuff. Just remember to be careful going into the freezer in the back. The latch is broken.

Paint the Scene: *Like any storage space over time, the basement is much akin to a time capsule with bits and bobs from multiple decades strewn and squirreled away. What items draw your attention whether they be mundane or exotic? Each actor may add one of these items to their Corner of the Lodge.*

x Room 237

The wallpaper is dated. The furniture is old but well made. It would be like any other room in the hotel except that someone has left the door open. It seems it was no mistake, the bathtub faucet was left running and the TV is on. If the Latchkeys have available TV Odyssey Tapes to watch, the Actors can watch them here as if they were originally airing.

Paint the Scene: The darkest events of the hotel's past happened in this very room. What were they and what scars have they left behind that mirror the tragedies of your own past?

Side Characters

Trevor Nunn, director and producer

Coming off his Laurence Olivier Award for directing an eight-and-a-half hour production of *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* in London's West End, Nunn has decided to throw his hat behind another of Nicholas' experimental projects. If Nicholas and Anton can thread the needle just right, it could mean Tony Awards for everyone. While Nunn is not in attendance at The Lakeview, he can be contacted over the phone, weather permitting. He is known for using anecdotes to get his points across and often laughs at his own jokes.

Quote: *You are faced with the choice: either my integrity remains intact and this work ends up on stage to raucous applause, or I have to leave, and I will be known to have left. It very much reminds me of this time several years ago when [...]*

Amber Duvall, Anton's wife

A woman of grace and beauty, seemingly quite a few years younger than Anton. Amber will appear demure in public but her screams and temper can be heard through the walls come sundown. She met Anton in her girlhood on a trip to London with her family. Thanks to family connections she had ended up backstage at the opening night of Anton's hit play, *"The Pledge"*. She is said to be the muse for his later work, *"The Turn"*, a play chronicling the descent into madness and later suicide of a mystical courtesan.

Quote: *"Maybe today he's more in love with work." / "He loves me today. It makes the days he doesn't love me so much harder."*

Amber is dissatisfied with her marriage and will cheat on Anton with any Actor should they proposition her. Immediately after following their triste, the Actor/Actors involved will open their eyes to find Amber has withered into an old wrinkled crone in their arms. She will start to crackle revealing rotted teeth and decaying insides.

Quote: *"HA HA HA HA HA HA!"*

Lizzie Duvall, Anton's daughter

If it weren't for the pig tails and the blue dress, you'd say she looks exactly like her father. But she seems to have no interest in being like him, or her mother for that matter. She is going to be the first girl on the moon. But in the meantime she is content to pester the Actors to play with her. She seems to avoid Nicholas and Anton.

Quote: *"Dad promised we'd go to the zoo this weekend. But we're at this boring hotel instead. Will you come play with me?"*

Winnie Carson, Nicholas' assistant and on-again off-again lover

A soft spoken beauty with wide doe eyes. An avid reader and lover of walks in the park. Winnie truly longs to settle down and have a family. She dreams of Levittowns and making school lunches. Unfortunately, Nicholas has never shared that ambition but she still holds out hope knowing he will have to slow down one day. She thinks she can fix Nicholas, even when he's Nicky and will defend him fiercely against any and all criticism. She has particular trouble transcribing notes this weekend with her arm in a cast.

Quote: *"Well it's just one of those things. You know... purely an accident, um. Nick had oh... been drinking, and meetings went about three hours late, so he wasn't exactly in the greatest mood that night. And well I accidentally scattered some of his papers all over the room... and Nick grabbed my arm, you know. It's...it's just the sort of thing you do a hundred times - you know, at a show or on the streets - but on this particular occasion Nick just... used too much strength and he injured my arm. Anyway, something good did come out of it all because he said: 'Winnie, I'm never gonna touch another drop and if I do you can leave me.'"*

Mrs. Freddie Cutter, a blind stagehand

Dresses only in black. Always carrying a bag of spare props. You would swear that she is able pull out items that shouldn't fit in a duffel that size. Cutter has worked for Nicholas for the majority of his career, going blind from a botched trick more than fifteen years ago. She has never borne an ill will towards him and they've stayed close friends even after her accident and his retirement from the stage. She's excited to get back to stage work, even just for this weekend's workshop.

Quote: *"If you don't like his methods, get off the stage. He's a magician, not a wizard. you have to get your hands dirty to achieve the impossible."*

Bernie, an imaginary friend

Not quite real, but also not entirely made up. The Actor with the highest Sensitivity started talking to Bernie when they were just a child. He has no corporeal form, at least not one that anyone will get a chance to see. He manifests as a voice in the back of the Actor's throat and hides in his stomach when trouble comes around. He has a bad feeling about this whole ordeal.

Quote: *"The storm's getting worse. Nunn is going to phone The Lakeview in a few minutes to tell them."*

Mr. Crothers, the head chef

Very tall and chipper old man. He was supposed to go to Florida for the winter but the cash his boss offered him to stay on for this private rental was too good to turn down. It takes a lot to wipe the smile from his face, but he'll get a grim look in his eye once one of his knives goes missing.

Quote: *"I'll be the cook for you fine folks this weekend. Hope you worked yourselves up an appetite. We've made a special menu for you all. I 'specially recommend the lamb. Do you like lamb doc?"*

Stanley Nolan, Anton's friend

Soft smile. One of his pupils is particularly smaller than the other. He dresses in plaid PJ bottoms and a t-shirt for the duration of his stay. Stanley is not an Actor or a writer, just an old college friend and confidant of Anton's who's tagged along for a free trip. Anton claims Stanley is a genius and has helped him out of a bind more than a couple times. Amber thinks Stanley hangs around Anton purely for his money believing him a leech to Anton's brilliance. Stanley is particularly handy and able to help keep the place together as the storm ravages the hotel. Otherwise, he spends much of his time drinking and coming up with activities for Lizzie that involve little work on his part.

Quote: *"You're familiar with the phrase 'Man's reach exceeds his grasp'? That's a lie. Man's grasp exceeds his nerve. The only limits are those imposed by society. Nothing is impossible, simply expensive."*

Clues

- ☐ Multiple identical black cat sightings.
- ☐ Makeup, prosthetics, and wigs left out.
- ☐ A ciphered journal.
- ☐ Gloves with padded fingers.
- ☐ Yellow canaries, crushed to death.
- ☐ A book on sailors' knots, well loved.
- ☐ A possibly loaded gun.
- ☐ A book entitled The Original Chinese Conjurer by Chung Ling Soo.
- ☐ A staticky radio. David Bowie's Repetition can be heard through the noise.
- ☐ A fickle sense of love.
- ☐ An unknowable machine, crackling with rogue electricity.
- ☐ A number of Calumet cans spilled across the floor.
- ☐ A photograph of a Side Character. It looks like it was taken before they would've been born.
- ☐ An invitation to the July 4th party.
- ☐ The same short phrase, repeated ad nauseum.
- ☐ A pink AA chip speckled with blood.
- ☐ A salacious sexual kink that would ruin The Lakeview's reputation.
- ☐ An attempt to bring an outside party into the situation.
- ☐ A display of great and unusual talent.
- ☐ A throbbing of old injuries.

Rewards

- ☐ If the mystery's resolution allows for his continued existence, an older Anton spends his summers at The Lakeview, working on new projects. You can get 1 extra Clue on the Meddling Move when you send him inspiration in the form of any written work related to a mystery.
- ☐ If he survives, Nicholas spends his summers at The Lakeview, entertaining other guests with magic tricks. You can get 1 extra Clue on the Meddling Move when you consult him on matters of illusion and visual deception.
- ☐ A key to room 237 at The Lakeview will be found at 26 Rodenbecker Street. Each Latchkey has access to the key; add it to Your Corner of the House. You may choose to mark this item to enter room 237 and consult a tormented soul there. The soul will give you a Clue related to an active mystery, but will trigger a Night Move immediately after.
- ☐ New Move: **The Real Transported Man.**

The Real Transported Man:

All Latchkeys gain access to this Move.

When you die as the result of a missed roll, you may say a magic word before your death. If you do, mark a box below.

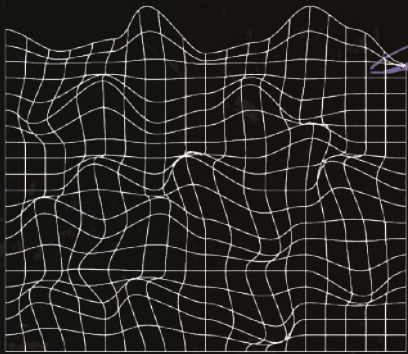


When you mark a box, your real self is at 26 Rodenbecker Street, rifling through the pantry. Any Side Characters present for your supposed death will believe you to have died until they see you again.

If you choose to use this Move while all boxes are already marked, roll a die. On a 4-6, the Move works as if you marked a box. On a 1-3, we cut to 26 Rodenbecker Street to find no one there. Retire this character.

Notes

alexanderTGC — kuroda



**BREAKING
NEWS**



B A D
/ M I R A C L E /

Bad Miracle

By Alexander Thomas Guy Coursolle and Kuroda

The Remnant

- > One night, the Latchkeys are disturbed in their sleep. They dream about driving up to the San Cajetan Church. They hear a voice, muffled by radio static, say, "This is not a dream. This is not a dream. We are transmitting these images out of their normal sequence to allow for limited temporal agency. You will not be prosecuted."
- > The Latchkeys find a newspaper article about a UFO sighting.
- > A VHS tape is delivered to 26 Rodenbecker street. Playing it shows a Side Character standing in front of San Cajetan Church, welcoming viewers to witness 'The Ascension'.

Presenting the Mystery

You are the Undergrads. Moving from a small town to university came with its own set of anxiety and challenges and you're close to failing. For extra credit, you're participating in an overnight, multi-department study at San Cajetan Church. Lately, a strong media presence has gathered outside the church doors with cameras pointed to the clouds. Terms like 'angel' or 'alien' are thrown around by onlookers, but nothing's stuck and the priesthood has declined to comment.

Pose the following question to each Undergrad: Tomorrow morning is Easter Sunday. What other special occasion have you attended at this church, and what was so strange about it?

BLACK SCREEN. We cut to the night through a security camera. A bright white light disappears into a sea of darkness. It's impossible to distinguish between the many screaming voices picked out by the audio. A whirling dust vortex rips the camera up and flings it into the night.

BLACK SCREEN. A news report crackles on the radio over the hum of a car. "...At least four other people remain missing, and local authorities said that it has fallen out of their jurisdiction."

We see a long road spread forwards across a dirt plain. A few old farmsteads dot the landscape. From a bird's eye view, we see the car speeding up the road, leaving it all in the dust. We cut inside. How are each of you keeping yourselves entertained during the long ride?

Roleplay a scene where the Undergrads are bringing up whether this assignment was worth cancelling their Saturday night plans.

The car drives past a trailer on the side of the road. We cut inside to a man wearing a baseball cap, eyes wide with strange fever as he adjusts a wall full of radios. Warbling police dispatches echo through the speakers.

We cut back to the car, where through the front windows, the church comes into view.

TITLE CARD (BAD MIRACLE). *The San Cajetan Church is a tower of white stone that blends into the surrounding rusty red plains. A pair of roadside rest stops are the only other civilization for miles. News crews crawl the parking lots like a sea of cockroaches. Cameras roll on individual on-site news anchors. A bossy woman wearing a neon two-piece suit grabs an unsuspecting police man and pushes a microphone into him for his commentary.*

He speaks briefly into his radio, then gives an annoyed smile as she gestures for her camera crew to get in his face. We catch snippets of reports:

"One woman says that she looked out the window, and saw a fiery object hovering in the sky above the church. As you can see here--"

And

"--Military have declined any involvement, but have taken an interest in the reports across Degoya County--"

Wild horse statues lead you to the back of the church, where you are greeted by your professor and the priesthood. Laptops, bags, and camera equipment are carried into the building. All the while you can't help but notice a faint glow hidden behind distant clouds. It's not the sun, but it's too far to make out.

"Here to get set up, are we? You'll want this." An old priest with heavy wrinkles steps out of seemingly nowhere, looking up at the sky and clutching an ornate chest. Call it an angel, but this thing did not come to give us absolution." There's a twitch in the priest's smile. "This isn't the miracle I had hoped for, but I'm ready to be judged by The Watcher.

His legs tremble. He coughs. A pale slime runs down his chin like stirred, green eggs. He gives a last, relieved smile before he collapses, the ornate chest rolling to your feet, and a mob of reporters swarm the body like carrion flies.

Pose the following to the Undergrad with the highest Reason: Scientific data clearly produced hundreds of years before it became known to the modern era is stored in the chest. What does it say?

You escape from the crowds into the church. An ambulance is on its way, but you know the man was already dead before he hit the ground.

And now I must address you as players (not characters): The Undergrads can take a backseat to this assignment and refuse it due to their beliefs or superstitions. If they do, narrate how the study affects your character in its aftermath, and a quote you give to the local news station. Then, the scientific data found in the chest is a Clue the Latchkeys can use for an active mystery.

If the Undergrads choose to stay, the scientific data is the first Clue they find for investigating the intentions of The Watcher. Know that completing this mystery will give your Latchkeys access to a new Move and special Rewards. However, if your Undergrad is killed, your Latchkey must immediately mark The Chromatic Desert. If you have already marked the Chromatic Desert, you must mark The Pure-White Signal.

If the Undergrads participate: We'll start by going around the table to learn more about the Undergrads. On your turn, please tell us the following:

- > What major are you studying? What's your family's opinion?
- > You feel like you're being watched. Why do you think your actions are being judged?

Then, everyone else will say one thing they think you brought with you from your dorm; add it to Your Corner of the Church (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet, to be removed when this mystery is finished).

Keeper Notes: The mystery progresses throughout the course of a single evening and night that the undergrads are staying over.

Questions & Opportunities

Question: How can we lure The Watcher out of the clouds to get a picture of its true face? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Bait The Watcher long enough for you to take a photograph or video recording of it. Choose whether to give this evidence to either Benjamin Trapp or Mary Chaplin and unlock their associated move as a reward.

Question: What secret are the priests of San Cajetan trying to hide from The Watcher? (Complexity: 6)

Opportunity: Resolve the threat by destroying the subject of The Watcher's obsession or giving The Watcher what it wants.

The Key of Vile Spectacle

- ☐ Each Undergrad narrates a flashback of the first home video filmed of them from the perspective of a handheld camcorder. What was captured intentionally? What was captured unintentionally?
- ☐ Each Undergrad describes the most humiliating recording someone else has of them.
- ☐ The Keeper narrates a scene in which all of the other people at San Cajetan and its surrounding locations die being sucked up into a twister stirred up by The Watcher. One or more Side Characters survive this event, but otherwise the Undergrads are alone after this, spared by providence or malice. Each Undergrad answers the following question: What would you do with your last day on Earth?

Moments

- A horse panics and charges into the plains, drawing The Watcher's attention.
- Green eyes, voice moist and dripping with malice, worms squirm free from a Side Character's mouth.
- It looks like the sun is finally cresting the horizon, except the light isn't shining from the East. It's The Watcher, as seen approaching fast and from extreme distance.
- The Watcher's water has been collected in a basin. Josiah Markelby will request an undergrad undergo a baptism. One way or another, if their head is forced under, Markelby will not pull them back up without being forced to.
- During a storm brought by The Watcher, small metal trinkets fall with the rain: keys, buttons, tooth fillings.
- A flash of lightning, followed by screaming as bodies begin to fall to their deaths like rain from the clouds.
- A midnight mass, held before a procession of glassy-eyed faithful brainwashed by The Watcher's rainwater. Liquid dribbles from every orifice.

The Watcher

The Watcher is a bright patch of clouds that prefers to be observed from a distance. It maneuvers in ways clouds never should, and it does not care where the wind is blowing. A large globe is the eye of the storm, glimmering like a dog's pupil in a camera flash. Clouds envelop and trail off the orb like smoke off a meteor, obscuring its presence. Whenever the sphere itself is directly observed, it either retreats or becomes aggressive. It can develop dust storms and hurricane-force winds in seconds. It is a sentient storm front.

Dangers

Josiah Markelby

Curly blonde hair. His lips are pulled taut in a toothy smile. His face is wrinkled like he's squinting behind his sunglasses. This expression seems permanent. He acts like he knows everyone, especially people he's never met before. He has no interest in explaining The Watcher's true motivation and disclaims any responsibility by San Cajetan. He knows that people exposed to The Watcher's rainwater become susceptible to suggestion, and he intends to grow the flock.

Quote: *"Hey. You spend a lot of time with my wife. You do know my wife, don't you? We should get together more often. In fact, with so many friends and family come here in the late night, we shouldn't wait for celebrations! Easter technically starts at midnight, doesn't it?"*

The Rainstorm's Wake

While The Watcher flies over the plains its cloud cover undergoes a 'natural' cycle of expanding as it gathers ambient moisture and shrinking as it releases that water in a storm of green rain. Anyone who drinks this rain or who's bare skin becomes wet with it has their mind vulnerable to be influenced and swayed by The Watcher; a PC will take the Condition: **Eternal Unity**.

Scriptures of Doom

As the Undergrads research, apocalyptic events will occur all round them. Make these as unsettling as possible as a sign of foreboding. These should occur at bad times to interfere with the Undergrads' work and investigation. You can use the following ideas, or come up with your own: *A swarm of biting locusts pours out of books and under doors, a blackout leaves the Undergrads in complete darkness, cloud vapor fogs up windows or entire rooms, beetles try to eat at flesh and bone, or churchgoers stab each other in random and possessed acts of violence.*

Notes

Locations

Chapel

Adobe walls are covered in hanging paintings and old photographs. On either side of the chapel are bell towers. Wooden benches cover the room underneath high windows that beam light into the chapel. Sitting at the other end is the main altar, where angels kneel before statues of saints.

Paint the Scene: *How has San Canjetan's congregation decorated the Chapel in a way they guess will please The Watcher?*

Basement

Several small floor lights on stands are set up here, buzzing loudly. Bookshelves sitting against the walls carry a variety of texts with some dating back to the 1400s. An ivory and gold carpet is laid out, like the room is expecting guests.

Paint the Scene: *What here feels like it belongs in the Vatican?*

Sunny's Rodeo Ranch & Museum

A tourist trap. The sign of a rearing horse looms large. Original print rodeo posters are clipped to the front doors. The museum holds history about the local area, wild west artifacts, and photographs. Behind the building a dozen horses are penned into a too-small paddock.

Paint the Scene: *How has the ranch adapted to squeeze as much money from The Watcher's popularity as possible?*

Jennifer's Wheatcake Cafe

A 50's breakfast diner. Several booths sit by large windows. The atmosphere is bright and yellow. The menu items haven't changed since it opened, and everything comes with a side of eggs.

Paint the Scene: *Who's come from far and wide to witness The Watcher? What unique style of eggs have you only seen here, but they act like every place serves them?*

Special Rule: Clear a Condition by chatting with a fellow Undergrad.

Degoya County Daily News Van

A blue van decorated with the DCDN's logo of a horse. Cables pour out of the open doors connecting to a broadcasting studio within the van. Switches, dials, and small screens make up a vast majority of the van's interior making it a cramp space.

Paint the Scene: *What out-of-the-ordinary story did DCDN recently cover?*

Side Characters

Professor Henry Fitz, physics teacher

Early 50s, walking with a brisk pace. A book never leaves his hand. His forehead is wrinkled from years of arguing theoretical physics. Fitz wears a brown suit from the late 80s that is well loved and looked after. Skeptical, but willing to be proved wrong.

Quote: *"Even the observation of a thing can change its behavior."*

Father Hillandale, head priest

Calm demeanor with a friendly smile. Wispy moustache and slicked back hair. Wears pristine priest robes he can never allow to be dirty. Like a struggling parent, he tries to be supportive of the Undergrads no matter what they do.

Quote: *"We're all members of a family, and this church—our household—can weather any storm."*

Antonio Gallegos, a newly-recruited priest

Timid but eager to please. Faded dyed hair with brown roots poking out. Jeans stained with mud and dirt. He attempts to join in on the Undergrads' discussions as if he was a part of the group.

Quote: *"I completely agree. Wait, what were you talking about? Anyway, crazy weather we're having, right? Wacky stuff. You believe it?" He laughs awkwardly.*

'Sunny' James Sanders, ranch owner

Titular owner of the rodeo ranch, obvious in his purple hat and rodeo jacket. His sun face bolo tie is blood-stained and somehow too big on him.

Quote: *"You seen the way when The Watcher comes and its light hits the horizon? It's like a second sunrise. It's our time in the sun."*

Mary Chaplin, a news reporter

Neon two-piece suit. Overly straightened hair with burnt ends. Acts like she works for national news. Lacks boundaries. Pushy to no end. Chaplin is willing to "intern" the Undergrads for as long as it'll take to get some good pictures for Degoya County Daily News.

Quote: *"Hey, you! Get me a coffee and a slice of cheesecake from the diner. Wait, who are you? You were invited by the church, weren't you? Fifty-bucks if you get me an interview with the preacher."*

Special Rule: If the Undergrads choose to give the picture or recording of The Watcher to Mary Chaplin, unlock a New Move in the rewards section: **Breaking News**.

Benjamin "Ben" Trapp

Large circular glasses. Long wavy hair falls underneath a black cap. A camcorder hangs off of his shoulder. He's a conspiracy theorist who believes The Watcher is the product of an undisclosed military branch. He lives in a trailer full of surveillance equipment and UFO photographs. Most people avoid him. Anyone who gets to know him realizes he is a truly passionate, kind soul.

Quote: *"Our Government will never admit to it, but those fluffy clouds are a military weapon. It's up there--in the sky--looking for someone or something. Well, I won't be intimidated! I'm here so the people can stay informed, and I'm one photo away from breaking this to the world... once my blog takes off."*

Special Rule: If the Undergrads choose to give the picture or recording of The Watcher to Benjamin Trapp, unlock a New Move in the rewards section: **String Theory**.

Jennifer Toretti, a diner owner

Pixie cut and wild purple cat-eye glasses. She claims she was swept off her front porch late one night. Fresh scars wrap around her arms and face and curl her lips into a permanent snarl. Her poor cat wasn't as lucky. Since then, she has been praying to God for her cat to come back home.

Quote: *"Have you seen an orange cat? My poor sweet Leo got swept up by a tornado. He must be so scared. Would have taken me too, but it was no match for me!"*

Clues

- ☐ Rainwater collected by the churchgoers and imbibed like communion.
- ☐ A bloodied penny tucked between the pages of a Bible.
- ☐ A mirror with a heavenly white glow, showing no reflections.
- ☐ A dead pigeon nailed to a cross. Its bulging eyes are chewed through by maggots.
- ☐ Frayed sparking wires coated in charred corpses of smoking ants.
- ☐ The framed painting *The Destruction of Leviathan* by Gustave Doré. The ocean's waves are a deep crimson red that causes the painting to bleed.
- ☐ Cell phone towers have been going down every night for the past week.
- ☐ Multicolored flagged streamers in an unusual place.
- ☐ Viscous green slime that oozes and drips between cracks in the ceiling.
- ☐ A secret room to display memorabilia for a TV sitcom in glass cases. The sitcom, titled 'Pastor on the Prairie' was about a rural family and their pet racehorse, Pastor. The series ended after a cast member died from a horse kick to the head. A Side Character is a surviving cast member.
- ☐ Horses are going missing from the Rodeo Ranch.
- ☐ Eyes painted on the back of a Side Character's hat.
- ☐ A half-developed photograph of a weather balloon stuck in a fleshy dark gullet.
- ☐ Purple bruises swelling on a Side Character's arm in a strange shape (pick one: star, crescent moon, spiral, dove, anchor).
- ☐ Old letters about the family who once owned the Church going missing 100 years ago.
- ☐ An embroidered suit jacket depicts fluffy clouds floating amongst the stars.
- ☐ Text on a screen: "And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth..."
- ☐ A VHS of an evangelical cartoon, Gospel Gabby. The cartoon is of an angel visiting a sick boy who is terrified that he sinned against his parents and was punished.
- ☐ A raised stage platform. Hanging curtains conceal a large empty glass box.

Rewards

All of the following are awarded at the conclusion of the Lost Transmission

- ☐ A dusty time capsule marked "Save for 2007" found in the attic of 26 Rodenbecker containing souvenirs and religious symbols. Each Latchkey claims one item; add it to Your Corner of the House: a horse plushie wearing a cowboy hat, a spray bottle containing The Watcher's rainwater, "A Field Guide to Degoya County", a statue of an angel wielding a sword, glow-in-the-dark rosary.
- ☐ The Latchkeys can drive to San Cajetan Church and dig up a time capsule containing the secret defined in the second question—either the whole thing or evidence—which they add to one of their Personal Quarters. Gain a New Move: **Eye of the Storm**.

Eye of the Storm

Once per game, you may declare that you are baiting The Watcher. Remove the secret of San Cajetan from your Personal Quarters as a sacrifice. The Watcher descends from the sky above a nearby location of your choice before completely and utterly destroying it in a storm. All Side Characters at or nearby the location are carried away by the storm and perish. The Latchkey and the Keeper each choose one:

- A Side Character miraculously survives, shaken. How are they changed by this experience?
 - A danger is swept up in the storm. It will be carried off somewhere else, reappearing at a later time.
 - The timeline of a threat related to the location is pushed back an additional day.
 - The disaster attracts police and emergency services, Who is combing through the wreckage revealing an additional Clue?
- ☐ Gain a new Move if you answered the relevant question and sold your recording: **String Theory** if you sold your recording to Ben Trapp or **Breaking News** if you sold your recording to Mary Chaplin.

String Theory

When you go to Ben Trapp to find out how it's all connected, choose a Clue from an active threat and roll **Reason** or **Sensitivity**.

On a 10+, gain a copy of your chosen Clue for a different active threat. Using one clue does not use the other.

On a 7-9, move the Clue to a new threat, erasing the Clue from its original threat.

On a miss, gain the Condition: **FBI Watch List**. Trapp won't talk to you until you clear this Condition.

On a 12+, you find a deeper connection. Discover an additional clue and add it to two threats, as on a 10+.

Breaking News

Once per session, when a Latchkey tips off Degoya County Daily News to a new development in Degoya County, a field team shows up in their van to start recording, roll **Presence**.

On a 10+, they show up right on time and ready to get the scoop. Check a box from the list below to appropriate a team member's help for Advantage on a Move associated with their area of expertise.

On a 7-9, as above, but they don't take your tip seriously. They either show up late or distract you with an interview, Keeper's choice.

On a miss, they show up late and a member of the team dies due to a present danger or inexplicable act of god. Permanently cross off their checkbox.

- ☐ Sydney Flowers, the field reporter (blonde hair, personable, habitual flirt)
- ☐ Gavin Doyle, the intern with a boom mic (tech-savvy, lanky, three other jobs)
- ☐ Ray Miller, the cameraman (goatee, plays football, smoker)
- ☐ Gillea Westfield, the driver (quiet, punk, stoner)

Special Rule: When a Latchkey makes the Nostalgia Move with a member of the field team, unmark their checkbox.

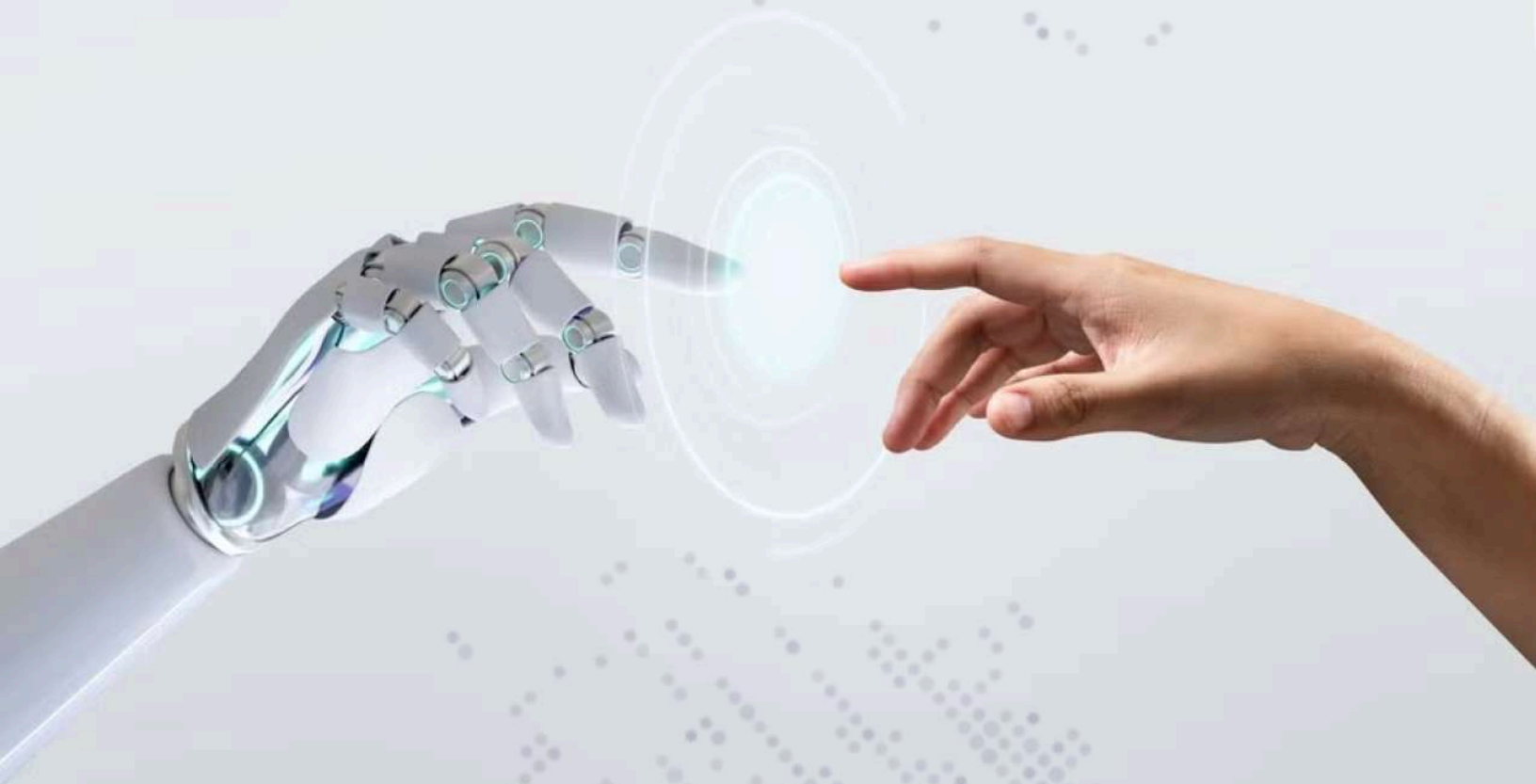
»» IRON MAIDEN

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»» JAZY AND KEVIN MACKU



The Remnant

- > One of the Latchkeys finds a manila envelope stamped ominously with red: "Classified Information. For Your Eyes Only." Inside are satellite photographs, a dossier on a woman named Petra Shen, and a CD labeled TEST FOOTAGE 23//58-DEGOYA. If the Latchkeys play the CD, they experience the events of the mission through recovered security tape, unredacted reports, etc.
- > A journalist named Lucia Pinto slips one of the Latchkeys a piece of paper with the name of a local bar, a time and date, and a question: "What happened to Viola?" If they show up to meet her, she asks about the events of the mission, which play out as memories the Latchkeys did not know they had.
- > Ed Regelski tells the story of the Shen Compound Raid to the Latchkeys while showing them a corkboard-and-red-thread web tied to those events. As he tells the story, the Latchkeys experience the events as though they are happening to them.

Presenting the Mission

You are the Mercenaries. Some of you have been fighting for a very long time. Unlike most people, you are virtually immortal. Not only has your body stopped aging; every break of your skin or bones quickly fades from your body. Over the years, you found others like yourself—or they found you. You could try to kill each other; maybe some of you did. But now those conflicts are long behind you. Now, together, you fight for those causes you believe in. This is the way it's been.

This last century has been an interesting one. Horses were replaced by tanks. Guns, once so clumsy, got faster, deadlier, and more accurate. Mankind took to the skies. Surveillance has also improved. Cameras can capture your image in less than a second. News travels around the world at the speed of a conversation. You've always had to actively work to keep your identities secret, but it's getting more dangerous every year. Yet there is still work to be done that only you can do. So here you are, in the summer of 1986. You're somewhere classified, on the open terrace of a cafe looking out towards the picturesque plateaus of Southern Colorado. Nearby is a UH-1 "Huey" helicopter, engines warm and ready to take off.

Pose the following question to each Mercenary: *You've fought together through several wars throughout the decades, or even centuries. Ask another Mercenary to recall a brief memory about a conflict throughout history that the two of you participated in: were you already friends, enemies at the time, or something else? Then tell them how they got it wrong somehow or left something out; add or change a detail about their story. They will then direct this query to another Mercenary. Continue around the table in this fashion round-robin style, until everyone has had a chance to speak.*

Today, your client is Alistair Perry. It's not your first job for him. Normally, you don't work for clients twice; it's too easy to risk people to figuring out your unnatural talents. But Perry is hard to say no to. So far as you know, he's of the well-moneyed elite, but keeps a low profile, using his connections to weed out big problems like human trafficking in the highest echelons of society. Where the courts continue to fail, you step in, not to mete out righteous justice, but to save the people you can without bringing the full force of the law and military down on your heads. Perry slides a manila envelope across the table with details of this job inside.

The helicopter is to drop you off near the desert compound of Petra Shen, CEO of Asteria Group, nestled in a remote valley in the northwest corner of Degoya County. Satellite images show the layout of the compound exterior, along with your landing zone and extraction point. Perry highlights an entry in the folder, code-named "Viola". An internal document boasts that Viola "will ensure that no soldier ever dies again", which Perry believes might hint at some kind of advanced cybernetics, but secretly you have to wonder if Viola might be an immortal like yourself.

Pose the following to the player of a Latchkey with "Sight Beyond Sight" or the Mercenary with the highest Reason: *What have you seen or heard recently that tells you that the US military is very interested in this "Viola"?*

Whoever or whatever Viola is, they must be extracted or destroyed. Staff is minimal, Perry insists, but Petra keeps private security on retainer. You're advised to take caution. You'll find guns and ammo in the chopper...

And now I must address you as players (not characters): The Mercenaries can refuse the job and walk away. If they do, each of you will narrate a short epilogue for your character, showing how they bury any evidence of their existence and attempt to live a normal, non-combatant life. Then, the reason the US military is interested in "Viola" is a Clue that the Latchkeys can use for an active mystery.

If the Mercenaries get in the chopper, the detail about the government's interest is the first Clue they find for investigating the mystery of Project Viola. Know that completing this mission will give your Latchkeys access to a new Move and special Rewards. However, if your Mercenary is killed (permanently), your Latchkey must immediately mark The Chromatic Desert. If you have already marked The Chromatic Desert, you must mark The Pure-White Signal.

If the Mercenaries choose to take the job: *We'll start by going around the helicopter to learn more about the Mercenaries. On your turn, please tell us the following:*

- > What special skill do you bring to the team?
- > What do you do to pass the time in transit?

Then, everyone else will say one thing they think you brought with you; add it to Your Tac-Pack (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet, to be removed when this mission is finished).

*There is a Special Move associated with this mission: **Immortality**. Draw three squares somewhere on your sheet. Any time I narrate a debilitating physical wound (something that would normally result in a Condition) or your death, if you choose not to turn the Key, instead you will mark a box, mechanically ignoring that consequence. This will not increase a success tier; for example, a miss on a Meddling Move will still not yield a clue. Instead you or I will narrate how your wounds miraculously close before our eyes, your heart starts beating again, or whatever the case may be, and the scene will carry on from there. This may not remove you from ongoing danger, but at least to start with, assume your enemies are unaware of this power.*

Questions & Opportunities

Question: Is Viola an advanced robot that can pass as human, or an immortal like yourselves? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Unlock the next appropriate question.

Question: If Viola is an advanced robot, does she see humanity as a threat, or does she want to coexist peacefully? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Unlock the next appropriate question. Viola and the Holding Chamber are unlocked (accessible from any appropriate Compound interior Location).

Question: If Viola sees humanity as a threat, how can she be destroyed? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Resolve the mission by destroying Viola, then escape the Compound.

Question: If Viola wants to coexist peacefully with humanity, what is keeping her from leaving the Compound? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Resolve the mission by disabling, destroying, or deactivating whatever is keeping Viola here, and then escape with her.

Question: If Viola is an immortal, is she working with Petra willingly or unwillingly? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Unlock the next appropriate question. Viola and the Holding Chamber are unlocked (accessible from any appropriate Compound interior Location).

Question: If Viola is working with Petra willingly, how can she be silenced, when killing her is not an option? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Resolve the mission by carrying out your strategy.

Question: If Viola is not working with Petra willingly, what leverage does Asteria have on her? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Resolve the mission by destroying any data Petra has on your immortality and convincing Viola to escape with you.

The Key of Summer's Ceaseless Dance

- ☐ Each Mercenary narrates a flashback to the first time they should have died, and did not.
- ☐ Each Mercenary narrates a flashback to the moment they realized not even their loved ones could or should be trusted to know of their immortality.
- ☐ Each Mercenary narrates a flashback to a time where they realized that even their immortality isn't permanent, by watching another immortal succumb to their wounds.

Petra Shen, Founder & CEO of Asteria Group

Sleek seafoam green cheongsam. Pleated fabric draped tastefully over her missing arm. Bangs and a bob cut that ends in a hook curl near her jawline. Petra lost her right arm at a young age. With the money from the lawsuit, she was able to build her own prosthetic limb—far better than the poor-quality one she'd been given—at an impressively young age. She did not stop there, expanding into more advanced bionic limbs and artificial organs. Now in her late 40s, the suits run her business while she works in her remote lab.

Quote: *"I was eight years old when my mother pointed out to me how, every time I got a book, I went straight to the back, looking for answers. I would get so angry when there would just be an index. I wondered, then, what was the point? I got even more mad when there were subjects that had neither books nor answers! So much we failed to understand! I sought to correct that problem. In looking for those answers, what I found was the future."*

Dangers

Remote Control

Once the Mercenaries are spotted, Petra will retreat to her Panic Room. From there, she has complete control over the compound. She can open, close, lock, and unlock doors on a whim, shutter windows, and address the characters from any monitor or TV hooked up into the Compound's internal network. She will not confront the Mercenaries directly. So long as there is a camera on the Mercenaries, she can direct her security forces to them, and will do so regularly. **Note:** Keepers are encouraged to actively send Dangers if the Mercenaries are not diligent about hiding their presence (by shooting out cameras, for example). If you do invoke this, point out why you're doing so. Have them notice how they're being tracked before the ambush is sprung.

Guard Dogs

Early robotic ventures from Asteria, proofs-of-concept for military contracts that never got picked up. They canter about like headless dogs on four reverse-joint legs, and their bodies are made of plastic and titanium, equipped with a dorsal-mounted gun on a swivel. The red ones, however, are rigged with explosives—these will beeline for the first Mercenary they come in contact with. They are not very intelligent, however.

Everett Boone, Head of Security

Buzzed hair. Sculpted beard highlighting a strong jawline. The hint of a snake tattoo on his neck that dives down into his shirt. Ex-special forces. Absolutely strapped in black tactical gear: MP5 sub-machine gun, flashbangs, frag grenades, combat knife, garrote. Usually accompanied by 1-3 other black-clad security. While the rest of the team may be hired stooges, he has lived through war, even thrived in it. The Mercenaries present his most exciting challenge, and he thrives in hunting them.

Quote: *"How many times am I going to have to kill you today?"*

Moments

- A security camera swerves in your direction. It does not pivot away. You notice a second camera. A third. They are all locking on to you.
- The lights cut out with no warning, plunging you all into darkness. There is only the sound of your breath before the whirring of auxiliary power booting up back-up systems. After a few seconds, emergency lights kick on, washing every surface in deep, bloody red.
- The door locks behind you with a final, echoing thud. Noxious gas starts to fill up the room. Already, your eyes and lungs are starting to burn, and the world has begun to spin.
- Flashlights sweep across the walls, the ceiling. Security guards, all clad in black uniforms and armed to the teeth, silently close in on the Mercenaries.
- The door swings open to an empty room with tiled floors. In the middle of the room is a drain, and a single metal chair.
- A pretty music box tune plays over the turning of a one-armed toy ballerina's dance. Both the dancer and music trudge on long after the coiled spring should have given out.

Locations

Compound Exterior

A five kilometer hike through the desert with the sun's last rays already vanishing over the hills. In the distance, floodlights illuminate a few sprawling buildings; the compound menaces with harsh angles of concrete, black glass, and stainless steel. Not a single road to be seen; the only way in or out is by helicopter, or foot.

Paint the Scene: *In what ways does the compound remind you of a prison?*

Common Area

A place for people to gather and socialize. Bar area to one side, autumn brown couches and ottomans in the central space. Its smooth brutalist concrete walls are architected to look like a five-million-dollar bunker. Massive glass windows looking out to the valley.

Paint the Scene: *Despite this being a place where people are meant to gather, what subtle elements discourage its actual use?*

Bedrooms

Two stories of a cell-like arrangement of bedrooms for guests and temporary staff. The rooms are small, tidy, and mostly unoccupied. Decorated with paradoxically generic modern table sculptures or abstract art. A long aquarium in the shared space houses tropical fish in a neon paradise of fake coral.

Paint the Scene: *If you wanted to spy on the occupants of these rooms, where would you plant a hidden recording device?*

x Recreation Room

An open area of floor, waxed to a shine. Tables housing games and chairs for lounging off to one side. One wall of unworked desert stone, like the room was carved into the rock itself; the rest filled with programmable lighting (fluorescent white by default) and well-masked speakers. At the push of a button on the command console by the door, the room floods with hot discotheque ambience and music.

Paint the Scene: *Describe a piece of utterly generic, soulless, or forgettable art on display in the room.*

Special Rule: When a Mercenary lets a Side Character cut loose on the dance floor, they can clear a non-Physical Condition or unmark one box on their immortality track, whether or not they themselves participate. Each Mercenary may only do this once.

Science Labs

Boxy machines and monitors built into desks. Green lines of code scrolling up screens. What appear to be medical beds with no mattresses. Behind frosted glass dividers, a section of displays of cybernetic joints, automation, and prosthetics, almost like a museum.

Paint the Scene: *What signs suggest that not all experiments done here are on willing subjects?*

Security Room

More screens than you can watch at once arranged in a grid, showing various camera feeds from around the compound. Server banks behind glass dividers. A standing file cabinet to the side, and file folders scattered on the desk.

Paint the Scene: *Instead of watching the screens, what petty distractions do the staff here indulge in when they're on duty?*

The Holding Chamber

Fluorescent lights painfully reflecting on stark white tiles and walls. A constant electrical buzzing. The scent of metal and chlorine.

Paint the Scene: *What makes us think that the people here believe that whatever Viola is will ultimately replace humanity?*

Side Characters

Gideon Ray, an interested investor

A 500 dollar T-shirt, in noncommittal grey. Khakis with an absurd amount of pockets, a forgotten item in each of them. Impatiently pacing and gesticulating. He believes he's here to see a tech demo of some kind, and might initially assume the Mercenaries are part of that somehow until they prove they are not.

Quote: *"It took less than 100 years to go from the Wright Brothers to landing on the moon. Ada and Babbage gave us the first computer in the 1820s. This...this is our moon landing! This is what generations have been working towards! Shen's either cracked the Turing Test or cured cancer—either way, the world is gonna want this tech yesterday; there's 3 billion buyers already lined up between here, China, and India, and I'm gonna bring it to them."*

Erik Deacon, Petra's personal assistant

Perfectly-styled dark hair. Inoffensive smile, when he shows any expression at all. White linen button-down shirt, red silk ascot, and black board shorts. Does not speak. Wants to help. Will serve drinks at the bar in the common area. Will dance when music plays. Will always obey orders.

Quote: *[he tilts his head expectantly] "...?"*

Kameela el-Nazir, Chief Scientist/Engineer

Overly large glasses. White lab coat, laminated badge over the breast pocket. Bound frizzy hair barely contained by a tie behind her head. She knows she's no combatant. She'll flinch and cower when confronted by Mercenaries, but she's not above doing something stupid if the work gets threatened.

Quote: *"What we're doing here is important! We could save so many lives with this!"*

Lucia Pinto, an investigative journalist

Wearing a staff uniform that doesn't hold up on close inspection. A studious expression, that always seems to have just figured out something important. A journal for writing and a mini-cassette recorder tucked in her skirt. She wants to get to the bottom of this, which makes the Mercenaries erstwhile allies, but she will not hesitate to sacrifice them to save herself or get the scoop.

Quote: *"Nothing here is what it looks like."*

Viola, the Primary Asset

Head completely shaved. Inscrutable expression. [If she is an immortal] she wears a medical gown. Her bare feet scratch softly as she walks along the cold metal floor. [If she is a robot] transparent silicon reveals almost coquettishly advanced cybernetics around her waistline, the top and back of her head, around her elbows, and beneath her thighs. A floral pattern sundress and wigs are kept in a standing closet.

Quote: *"I know what you are. What you've been through to get here. Not just to this building, but to this point. The years. Decades. Lifetimes. What I don't know is how you've managed to stay sane under the weight of all those memories."*

Clues

- ☐ A TIME magazine cover showing Petra Shen sporting a very obviously mechanical bionic arm. The headline reads “Iron Lady Versus Silicon Valley”
- ☐ A well-thumbed copy of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
- ☐ An image of the Vitruvian Man, but half the skull, ribs, and several other bones and organs are exposed.
- ☐ The words “I AM” written in an unusual place.
- ☐ A stash of crash test dummies, looking eerily similar to one or more of the Mercenaries.
- ☐ Among admin papers, scientific notes and discarded ideas—a note, written in neat calligraphy: “Is all that we see or seem / but a dream within a dream?”
- ☐ A stain that looks like blood, but on closer inspection is actually rust.
- ☐ A very old labrys in a conspicuous location.
- ☐ A folder containing an extensive write up on a Mercenary’s life. It refers to someone close to them as “an Asset” (use relationships from their Latchkey counterpart).
- ☐ A perfect replica of a Side Character’s face.
- ☐ A video recording showing a graphic and gruesome scene of a Mercenary’s death. Ask the Mercenary to describe it (keeping Safety Tools in mind).
- ☐ A journal with a response on Alan Turing’s Imitation Game.
- ☐ An iron maiden, empty. Some of the scratch marks on the inside look recent.
- ☐ A note from Alistair Perry: “Do not let them find out what you are.”
- ☐ Every screen in sight fills with angry red text: “Ye shall be as gods. Ye shall be as gods. Ye shall be as gods.” Over and over. It does not go away. **If the Mercenary’s Latchkey has the Chromatic Desert marked:** This effect extends to every glass surface (windows, mirrors, etc).
- ☐ A door opens to a side room: a motion capture studio. A computer setup. Several cameras aimed at one spot. To the side, ready to be moved into the central space: a very plush bed.
- ☐ A wall covered with neatly organized, color-coded sticky notes.
- ☐ A glass sculpture of two women, completely transparent, save for their eyes, which are the kind of prosthetic glass eyes that might replace a lost eye. They are depicted in bridal gowns, posed in the moment before a matrimonial kiss. Encased in the glass are what must be dozens if not hundreds of perfect flowers.
- ☐ An iron snake coiled around a red apple with one bite taken from it. The snake’s mouth is wide open, hovering over the cavity.
- ☐ A dossier on Everett Boone, US Special Forces. A line sticks out to you: KIA, August 3, 1971, Vietnam.

Rewards

All of the following are awarded at the conclusion of the Lost Transmission

- ☐ A cache of military-spec gear buried in the desert. Each Latchkey may add one of the following to their Corner of the House (each may be taken multiple times): night-vision goggles, a frag grenade, flashbangs, a MP5 submachine gun, a combat knife, a syringe of adrenaline, a personal weapon from the Middle Ages or earlier but now made in a lightweight material such as carbon fiber—what clearly makes it “yours”?
- ☐ If she lives, an older Lucia Pinto reappears in 2004 Degoya County. Once per Mystery, if she is brought along on an investigation, when a player rolls a hit on the Meddling Move, the Keeper takes an additional Clue from a completed Lost Transmission and adds it to the active Mystery.
- ☐ New Move: **Machina Occulta.**

Machina Occulta

This move is available to all Latchkeys, but only one of them may use it.

When you would turn a Key of Desolation, you may instead invoke this Move. If you do so, treat the roll as though it were a 10+. Now or at the next convenient time, narrate a short scene where you turn over surveillance on at least one of your fellow Latchkeys to Asteria’s representative in La Fresca. Describe the compromising moments or secrets captured in visual or audio recording, what makes it valuable to Asteria, and how you plan to further integrate yourself with your housemates. Then, unmark any two boxes on the Key of the Child and replace their prompts with the following:

- ☐ A flashback to when you killed and replaced the person you would ultimately pretend to be.
- ☐ A flashback to when you had to remove someone who discovered what you really are, to save the mission.

Permanently replace one of your elective Dawn Questions with: “*Did I record and submit important or compromising data on another Latchkey to my masters at Asteria?*”

If you did or do mark **The Chromatic Desert**, you may still be perceived, but the other Latchkeys do not remember “you” (rather, the Latchkey you are pretending to be). When you mark **The Pure White Signal**, narrate how this artificial body is destroyed before asking the Keeper to play a Pure White Odyssey Tape, then retire this character.



OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

Henry Belanger and Malek Annabi

Outside Influences

By Henry Belanger and Malek Annabi

The Remnant

- > The Latchkeys find an attic, crawl space, or storage unit with an Action Max console system set up. Dozens of video game tapes are nearby with names like “The Old Religion” and “Desert Connection.” The only one that works is already loaded into the console: “LAST CONTACT.”
- > The Big Man invites the Latchkeys to play a cabinet tucked away in the corner of Galaxia Arcade entitled “FOUND FOOTAGE.”
- > The Latchkeys are given a script for a play at Rio Canyon Middle School called “THE MAJOR ARCANA.” The Big Man or Dolores Rodenbecker invites them to be directors or actors for the performance.

Presenting the Mystery

You are the Scientists. It's the fall of 1977 and you are working at New Mexico's recently constructed Rio Canyon Observatory (RCO), a giant dish telescope suspended between two sides of the canyon the town is named for. After dreams of researching comet trajectories and neutron stars, you have just made the most profound discovery of all: contact with alien life.

Pose the following to the Scientist with the highest Reason: *You received a signal from deep space three days ago, one of such startling size and complexity it challenged your understanding of the universe. What convinced you this really was a non-human message inviting you to journey to their homeworld?*

Since you alerted other scientists and the government of your discovery, word got out and now extraterrestrial enthusiasts, religious zealots, and skeptics alike have flocked to surround the facility. While your computers have been running to decode the massive amounts of data in the message, a veritable Woodstock of tents, gray alien memorabilia, and even hot air balloons have popped up to “get closer to the signal.”

Now, you expect the data to finish decoding any moment. Everyone is gathered in the control room awaiting the results. There is a barely tamped-down sense of euphoria. Music is playing, people are talking and laughing. A champagne cork just popped. Go ahead and roleplay the scene; if you need some inspiration, think about how you're reacting to this world-changing experience, or who or what you're toasting to.

When there's a lull in the conversation, interject with:

As the computer beeps its completion, the doors bang open and bureaucrats in black suits—both your superiors and others unfamiliar to you—take over the situation. They applaud you for your discovery, but they will handle it from here. You are given less than an hour to gather your things before you are shoved in a government car to catch a plane for debriefing—the exact destination is never made clear.

Passing through the festival of alien enthusiasts on your way out only rubs salt in the wound. You stop at the Last Chance Gas station to refuel as the sun goes down—the final stop before you continue the long drive down the highway to the airport. The sense of loss has fully sunk in when a large—positively towering—man in a yellow suit, cowboy hat, and bolo tie emerges from the rickety interior. The word “Wanderer” is sewn into his jacket like a nametag. He addresses you:

“There is a bigger game at play here, one with no winners. Those fools who kicked you out are already causing trouble no one wants, making changes no one asked for. Changes that will tear the very fabric of reality as we know it.”

“That conspiracy of pencil-pushers are already reading wrong the rules those from Outside sent. The Outsiders meant for you to go to their home—instead, the Organization opened a path for them to come to yours.”

“Hubris or idiocy in man looks similar enough when you take a step back, and curiosity and cruelty are two sides of the same coin. But the fact is, those from Outside ain't meant to be inside, and the destruction they'll spread will make the age of the Old Gods look like a sleepover pillow fight.”

The Big Man begins to flicker like a bad television. “I'm just wandering through, but if you care about your world you might want to hurry up and set right what those dupes in suits and ties corrupted. They've already mucked up your first contact—if you don't make peace or set the Outsiders straight, it'll be the last.”

Pose the following to each Scientist: *Before he completely fades, the Big Man looks at each of you in turn. He sees more than just “you.” He sees who you ARE. What symbol of the tarot does he call you before he vanishes from this plane of existence? Suggestions include:*

- The High Priestess - intuition, spiritual wisdom
- The Hanged Man - sacrifice, waiting for the right moment
- The Fool - naivety, folly
- The Empress - creativity, empathy
- The Magician - willpower, trickery
- The Hermit - solitude, introspection

And now I must address you as players (not characters). The Scientists can get back in the car and continue to the airport as prescribed. If they do, you should each narrate a brief scene about how your character feels having been forced off of their big discovery or what comes next for them. Then, the Big Man's warning becomes a Clue for an active mystery.

If the Scientists turn around and head back to the RCO: the Big Man's warning is the first Clue they find for investigating the horror awaiting inside. Know that completing this mystery will give your Latchkeys access to a new move and special Rewards. However, if your Scientist is killed, your Latchkey must immediately mark The Chromatic Desert. If you have already marked The Chromatic Desert, you must mark The Pure-White Signal.

If the Scientists return to the RCO:

We'll start by going around the table to learn more about the Scientists. On your turn, please tell us the following:

- What childhood wonder carried into pursuing your career.
- Who you lost that still haunts your memory.
- What your greatest fear is.

Then, everyone else will say one thing they think you brought with you from the RCO; add it to Your Corner of the Car (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet, to be removed when this mystery is finished).

Questions & Opportunities

Question: What motivated the Organization to make the changes that allowed the Outsiders to come to Earth? (Complexity: 4)

Opportunity: Unlock the remaining questions and the Side Character S.R. Weaver.

Question: If the Outsiders are not intentionally hostile, how do we convince them we come in peace? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Gain access to the Location Direct Communication. Resolve the mystery by appeasing or getting through to the Outsiders a message of harmony, ushering humanity into a new golden age.

Question: If the Outsiders are intentionally hostile, how do we stop them before it is too late? (Complexity: 4)

Opportunity: Gain access to the Location Direct Communication. Resolve the mystery by using the Outsider's own Direct Communication against them or convincing them we are more trouble than it's worth.

Special Reaction: Writer's Workshop

Once during this mystery, the Keeper may intervene instead of a Scientist turning a Key on a missed die roll. After narrating the outcome of the miss, cut to the Latchkeys playing the Scientists. The miss certainly didn't feel like how the story was supposed to go—it was cliché, if anything! Frame up a scene based on the chosen Remnant:

- The Tape: Total party kill—but there's a few spare lives left. What's the plan to overcome that last encounter?
- The Arcade: The machine can be reasoned with, somehow. How do we convince it the alternative would be a much better experience?
- The Play: The director calls cut. The scene was unsatisfying. How can we rewrite it to pander to the audience?

Once the players agree on how the event should have gone, return to the regular scene and allow the players to narrate the outcome as if they had rolled a mixed success (7-9).

Moments

- The loud whooshing of hot air balloon burners igniting as their pilots lift off with new passengers.
- A preacher rallies a crowd to prostrate themselves before the Voice of God.
- A door slams in the distance. It was probably the wind.
- Screams echo throughout empty hallways.
- A security guard crying in the corner, begging "dad" not to hurt them. A man approaches, his face peppered with glinting windshield glass.
- One of the support beams for the observatory suddenly snaps, pitching the facility to one side. Everything not bolted down tumbles by, and the floor is now at a crooked angle.

THE OUTSIDERS

Entities from a world beyond ours, crawling through a one-way gate the Organization opened. They are primarily empathic beings, reading our emotions and desires, but can interact physically with frightening strength and a surgeon's precision. The Outsiders struggle to perceive humans in all their complexities, understanding individuals as generalizations or "stereotypes" (if you need inspiration, see their tarot designations). Scientists who act outside these roles can more easily trick them.

Dangers

Mistranslations

Fear and love are the strongest emotions. These are clearest to the Outsiders, who take on the forms of those closest to the Scientists—people they've loved and lost, or their greatest fears. Sometimes, it's both at once.

If the Outsiders are intentionally hostile, they wear human loved ones' skin like Venus flytraps, trying to lure in people before feeding on them in the form of their deepest fears. Something about the terror is more savory to their psychic senses.

If the Outsiders are not intentionally hostile, imagine you are an entomologist. It is an unfortunate reality that sometimes you must kill and dissect insects to learn more. It would be best to look like an insect's interests if you wanted to get close enough to study. If they prove dangerous, looking like their fears might scare them off.

The Organization

Lab coats over workplace attire. A subtle and unrecognizable insignia. Splattered against a wall, separated into several pieces, or hiding with office supplies as weapons. Bringing the Outsiders into our world instead of journeying to theirs turned out as well as you'd expect. The survivors, plagued by the wandering Outsiders, are near-madness and cannot reveal anything cohesive about their former plans. They may see the Scientists as other shapeshifters and attack accordingly. Names, if you need them: Kristen, Anna, Fran, Bradley.

Quote: *"They were supposed to show us the light! Or maybe this is the light...? We were going to change the world. Maybe we still can. If only the Focusing Platform... (descends into incomprehensible techno-babble)"*

The Children of Ezekiel

Homespun white robes. Black rings on each finger. Features devoid of empathy but a glint of righteous fury. The Scientists aren't the only ones trying to break into the RCO. The Children of Ezekiel's prophet foretold a great calamity would befall the world should humanity ever receive a "Signal from the Other Side." They've taken it upon themselves to sacrifice everyone at the RCO to appease the Outsiders. Failing that, they'll do their best to destroy the entire facility. Names, if you need them: Adah, Enoch, Zillah, Noah.

Quote: *"The Great Serpent wears many faces, does it not? For every head we cut off, two sprout in its place. To rid our world of sin, to finally make this land a New Eden, the Serpent can only be placated. If that bargain should damn ourselves so the rest may find salvation... then may God have mercy."*

The Key of Wonder

- **The Past:** Each Scientist narrates a flashback to when they experienced childlike wonder at the vast world or universe.
- **The Present:** Each Scientist narrates a moment as they wander the carnage of the facility which inspires awe.
- **The Future:** Each Scientist narrates what they still hope this first contact discovery will do for their lives.

Locations

The Ledge

Tents, RVs, and news vans staking out ground along the canyon like prospectors during a gold rush. The smell of food cooking from various stands. Multiple hot air balloons flying overhead. An impromptu festival atmosphere as amateur astronomers, alien enthusiasts, journalists, and people looking to make a quick buck crowd the canyon's edge. Beyond, the RCO looms over the abyss. The entry bridge is strangely shuttered.

Paint the Scene: *As you look around the scene, you don't see any signs of the danger that big man led you to believe was at hand. What do you notice that shows you no one here is concerned?*

The Catwalk Supports

A metal platform and plastic railing, both wobbling under your weight. A stomach-plunging drop of empty air to the canyon floor. Hot air balloons slowly circle at various levels like vultures. After finding the main bridge shuttered, the Scientists must cross one of the four support walkways hanging from towers on the canyon's sides to get to the hanging observatory.

Paint the Scene: *What moment of fear or exhilaration from your past does this height remind you of?*

The Control Room

Computer terminals overflowing with green text. Messy desks with personal tchotchkes and old papers. One wall of curved glass provides a breathtaking view of the canyon, a ring of magnetic tape storage lining the rest. The main control hub for deciphering otherworldly signals. Despite the Scientists being present for the takeover, the space is now eerily empty of the Organization.

Paint the Scene: *How has the organization turned the sense of discovery into bureaucracy overnight?*

Transmitter Equipment Room

Heavy machinery lines the floor and walls. Signs warn of radiation danger and electrocution risk. An overwhelming array of wires, dials, switches, and controls. The main technology hub for receiving and transmitting messages into the beyond.

Paint the Scene: *A lot of changes have happened here since the last time you saw the room. What do you see that makes you nervous?*

The Telescope Dish ("Primary Reflector")

A silver circular dish supported by a lattice of white support beams. A fresh breeze rocking the facility more than you'd like. An incredible view of the canyon below, the festivities on one side, the desert on the other, and an open sky painted with stars above.

Paint the Scene: *As you get closer, you realize a faint light is beaming out—or to—the Main Focusing Platform at the top of the telescope. The light is a color you have never seen before. How would you describe it?*

Outside Influences

Main Focusing Platform

High above the Primary Reflector with yellow signs like "Please Watch Your Head" and "Have you remembered your hard hat?" Beams crisscrossing the off-kilter grate service walkways, lined with chain link fencing. Colors swirling and shimmering and a strong smell of ozone hanging in the air despite the wind.

Paint the Scene: *The walls between worlds are especially thin here. In addition to the colors, what else are you experiencing here that has you at a loss for words?*

Special Rule: After the second Question is answered, the Main Focusing Platform can be used to initiate Direct Communication.

Direct Communication

A flat plane constructed of frequencies more than solid ground. Distant mountain peaks sharp enough to draw blood beneath unfamiliar constellations. A faint pulse like a tonal synth. A transitional space between our world and theirs. **Can only be accessed once the appropriate Question is answered.**

Paint the Scene: *What element from your Scientist's past or fears are incongruently present?*

Paint the Scene (for Scientists who have marked The Chromatic Desert): *What elements from your Latchkey's past or fears are incongruently present?*

Side Characters

Jesus Salazar, a balloonist

Leather cap with ear flaps and goggles. Leather bomber jacket with sturdy gloves and boots. Bright patterned shirt with a turquoise bolo tie. Just got his license this year to take the business over from his father, who died when his balloon struck power lines. He's hoping to make a name for himself without directly following his father's footsteps.

Quote: *"No no, I'm not a balloonist, we're called aeronauts. Show some respect for the profession! It's hard and dangerous work just like any other type of piloting. And you can call me Captain Salazar."*

Xenia Martinson, a psychonaut

Bulky bottle-green glasses. Army surplus jacket. Constant weed-adjacent smell. Xenia is a connoisseur of "out of this world" narcotics and believes humanity can communicate most clearly with outside entities via drug-induced psychic powers. So far she has had no success and is staring down the barrel of a life lost to delusions, but continues on whenever she gets flashbacks to the MK Ultra experiment that killed her partner.

Quote: *"The Man thinks we're puppets—that we'll sing and dance to whatever tune He wants. The Man wants to keep us from ascension because an unenlightened population is good for the markets. But the freedom of the universe is far older than The Man's reductive logics, and with the right tools, not even gravity can hold us down."*

Kerry Ling, a reporter

Dress shirt with rolled-up sleeves, suspenders and a colorful tie. Oversized sunglasses. Smooth and friendly voice that oozes charm. He is here to try and break back into radio after losing his career a few years ago due to some legal troubles with a previous business partner that still haunt him.

Quote: (Staring deeply into your soul) *"Look, I'm not here to talk, I'm here to listen. You never learn anything if you don't stop to listen intently after you ask a good question."*

November Belknap, a technician

White lab coat. Gray alien earrings. Hands slightly trembling without a drink. November helps maintain the observatory's equipment and is the only employee who wasn't kicked out with the Scientists. They explain the Organization kept them around in case something broke, but they didn't understand what the G-men were doing to the machines. They're terrified of losing anyone else, especially after their brother drowned last year.

Quote: *"I didn't think it would be possible to feel more alone after we found out there were actually little green men out there. I guess the universe really is still full of surprises, huh?"*

Ryan Denzinger and "Fred Hall," a dynamic duo

Dress shirts and ties but no suits. Power walks turned to hesitantly inching forward. Long-running jokes reduced to the occasional humorless quip. Ryan and Fred are two scientists from the Organization, desperate to stop the calamity they unwittingly unleashed. Unfortunately, Fred was dissected by an Outsider, and Ryan refuses to interact with anyone who does not acknowledge Fred as alive. Sometimes, an Outsider even appears as Fred to corroborate Ryan's delusion. Ryan won't talk about the details of what brought the Outsiders to Earth until the first Question is answered, but will direct the Scientists toward seemingly random tasks that could serve as the basis for Meddling Moves (and may be important or still part of his delusions).

Quote: *"We've been in worse, right?" "Like what?" "Your bachelor party, I think."*

S.R. Weaver, a billionaire

Gray suit, gray shirt, and no tie. A sterling silver necklace with a strange pattern. A bald head and frail frame that conveys more years than her middle age. She was bankrolling and guiding the technological development of The Organization, and is the money behind the RCO. She wants to see serious progress within her remaining life, but is afraid she doesn't have much time left.

Quote: *"Listen: we don't always get long in this life to make a difference. To move the needle. I've had my eyes on you lot for a while now, and I knew something would come of it. Look how far we've come in such a short time! Sure, sure, there are always a few wrinkles to iron out..."*

Special Rule: S.R. Weaver can only be encountered after the first Question has been answered.

Clues

- ☐ The phrase "They should have sent a poet" obsessively repeated over and over.
- ☐ A Side Character swears they saw one of those "weird religious guys" sneak inside the facility, but they were out of their robes and dressed normally.
- ☐ A rumor or revelation that similar events are playing out at different observatories and arrays across the globe.
- ☐ A Side Character mentions that they overheard someone talking about "weaponizing the transmission."
- ☐ A rumor that the telescope's receivers were designed by disgraced scientist Phineas Whately after he failed to get funding for his public access station.
- ☐ A book about rituals for contacting other planes of existence.

- ☐ A drawing / figurine / hallucination of a unicorn.
- ☐ Notes detailing modifications to the transmitter provided by the Outsiders, with some parts scratched out and replaced.
- ☐ A bird suddenly crumples midair as if it struck something invisible.
- ☐ A bunch of alien and UFO miniatures from someone's desk have been thrown in the trash.
- ☐ A picture or drawing of wolves ripping apart a hunter.
- ☐ A loose page torn from a journal with "If they stray, they can be disciplined" written on it.
- ☐ Ancient cave paintings of primitive humans worshipping beings from the sky.
- ☐ Calculations involving wormhole travel.
- ☐ An impractical-looking chrome "spacesuit."
- ☐ A mirror reflects a place somewhere else across the globe.
- ☐ A compass pointing in the wrong direction.
- ☐ A Scientist feels the presence of an Outsider infiltrating their mind. Pose to the Scientist: You have a vision of something innocuous from your childhood. How does it quickly go off the rails as the Outsider rifles through your memories?
- ☐ A description of Venus as outwardly beautiful, but the planet itself is a hellscape.
- ☐ A star map with "You aren't here" written on it.

Rewards

- ☐ **New Move: The Tarot.**
If sought out, The Big Man performs a tarot reading for the Latchkeys, designating each as a card. If the Latchkeys take on the card name as a Condition ("The High Priestess"), they may clear it at any time to gain Advantage on a roll that is not Answer a Question. This stacks with marking a Corner of the House item. This Move can only be used once.
- ☐ Gain access to a new Location: **The Rio Canyon Observatory Ruins.** The RCO lies in ruins, abandoned in our reality due to redirecting federal funds to the more prestigious Very Large Array. The Latchkeys present may claim an abandoned item for their Corner of the House, subject to the Keeper's approval. **Paint the Scene:** *What here fills you with wonder toward the vast universe?*
- ☐ An invitation to a hot air balloon ride with Jesus Salazar Jr. (his father perished in a hot air balloon accident). Latchkeys present may make a Nostalgia Move above Deep Lake even if they have already done one that Phase.



THE

SOUTH GATE

INCIDENT

IRVING BENITEZ. WD SMITH CONTRIBUTING

The South Gate Incident

By Irving Benitez and WD Smith

The Remnant

- > A short piece of film reel showing an autopsy. The subject initially looks like someone the Latchkey knows, but upon closer inspection something is very wrong.
- > A Latchkey finds The Big Man weeping while holding a black and white photo of people smiling with “USA Science Institute Outpost 5, Summer, 1949” on the back. As he begins to tell the story, the Latch Keys experience the events of the Lost Transmission as if it were a memory.
- > A map from 1948 shows a town about 65 miles South-West of Deep Lake called South Gate. It's not on any maps of the area you've ever seen.

Presenting the Mystery

You are the Researchers. It is the year 1949. You have been assigned to a lab site in a far, desolate corner of New Mexico in the dying town of South Gate. The days in the lab bleed together due to the ever present hum of the overhead lights. You all were in different scientific fields in grad school, and were all hired fresh from graduation. From biologists, nuclear physicists, and psychologists, the state needed people for this dawn of the atomic age and, with the first successful Soviet nuclear test, required all hands on deck to attempt to keep a breakneck pace towards mutually assured destruction.

However, as all government work goes, it fell short of what you had hoped for. It always does.

Underfunded, understaffed, and half forgotten, the monotony of the days have you thinking about throwing open the lab rat cages just to see what happens. Who knows? Maybe the rodents will keep running on their wheels forever, even with the prospect of freedom. But today, something has changed. A body has been brought in from the South Gate morgue, and your superiors look unusually concerned.

Pose the following question to each Deviant: What about your superiors' actions let you know that they're in over their heads?

Minutes after getting the news, your superiors dismiss you to continue your lab work, instructing two interns to take the body to a second lab. A small conversation pops up, perhaps about the latest hit movie, a new Weird Tales issue, or the current political climate. These are your coworkers. You've been here so long you can trust them with just about any information, just as long as it's not too personal or makes them think you're siding with the Soviets. Right?

When the Researchers turn the conversation to the corpse brought in, try to find a superior, or attempt to leave the lab room:

Your superior calls you into a side room by name. Once you all arrive, they lock the door behind them and explain that the body is not human. It looks human, but it is nothing, not even remotely, near what we are. Your superior looks pale and nervous in a way you've never seen them before. He says Gloria Carpenter, South Gate's mortician, brought the body in and was “heading back to town to keep things from getting out.” Your superior officer implores you to take a look at the body. You think, maybe, if you just leave well enough alone, it will go away. Just like how the government always seems to manage to do so well.

And now I'll address you as the players (not the characters): The Researchers can choose to leave South Gate. If they decide this is far above their pay grade, the body will be cremated. They'll take the sole Half-Track M3 to Deep Lake and report the incident. The base will be shut down, and all Researchers will be reassigned to different research bases. Your Latchkeys will gain the clue: A Record of Doppelgangers in Deep Lake.

*If the Researchers decide to solve this mess themselves, add a pack of hairspray and long stick strike matches to your Emergency Pack. Know that completing this mystery will give your Latchkeys a new Move: **Echoes of Death**. However if your Researcher is killed, your Latchkey must immediately mark the Chromatic Desert. If you have already marked The Chromatic Desert, you must mark the Pure-White Signal.*

If the Researchers decide to continue the project:

Your superior officer unlocks the office and leads you to the only room anywhere near adequate they have for the task at hand with an embalming table notably too small for the body upon it. The cranium and ribcage have already been cut open and the mouth is slack jawed in a silent, ever eternal scream. There is a single grey marbled organ in the center of their ribcage. A brainstem protrudes from the top of the corpus callosum, over the top of the cranium, and squeezes into the neck. If it weren't for the marbled grey mass where the organs are not, the brainstem, and the fact they're cut open, you'd think this person was sleeping.

Your superior tells you that the best case is to trail Gloria and ask her what she knows but, with a town as small as this, it will be extremely easy for any rumors to spread like wildfire. Your superior tells you all, “Try and keep this quiet. If you can't, though, don't be afraid to shoot.” Their eyes linger on the body for a few moments before they turn around, saying they have to leave and file a report in Deep Lake, the next town a few hours drive away. After only two minutes, you hear the sound of the only Half-Track M3 leaving the base.

We'll start by going around the table to learn more about the Researchers. On your turn, ask another Researcher to your left, right, and one of your choice, the following:

- What do I do that annoys you to no end?
- What did I do that proved my competence to you?
- What did I do that made you hate me?

Then everyone else will say one item they think you have and add it to your Emergency Pack (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet, to be removed when this mystery is finished.)

Questions & Opportunities

Question: Where is the entity that is replacing the people in South Gate hiding? (Complexity: 6)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by having the Researchers find and terminate the Nucleolus Oddity including all others in town like it and explain the disappearance of both the town and the residents to their relatives.

Question: How do we contain the entity for further study and cover this up? (Complexity: 8)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by finding and handling the Nucleolus Oddity in whatever way you deem necessary, so long as it becomes obedient and won't cause issues beyond the bounds of South Gate. The information you gain from these creatures grants the Latchkeys the Move: **Echoes of Death**.

The Nucleolus Oddity

The origination point of the end of the Holocene. It looks, walks, and speaks like a person, like us, like *you*, but make no mistake; it's a cuckoo chick in the nest of humanity. It will chase you down and, if you escape, another of itself won't be far behind. It watched you come into town and knows that you Researchers can leave. You won't even know you're that thing until the last of your higher processes are replaced by its own. It's highly reactive, scared, and won't hesitate to kill to leave South Gate. This Threat can be any named side character.

Quote: *"I just want to go home. Don't you? Don't you want to go back to a time before fear?"*

Revealed Nucleolus Oddity Forms:

- A pronghorn antelope with human hands and a mouth full of knife sharp teeth.
- A human with a botfly larva pincers where the face should be.
- A coyote with buds and blooms of flesh that sprays what looks like blood.
- A Researcher, a perfect copy down to every detail except for their voice. It can only scream.
- Something else.

Dangers

The Oddities

Keeper Reaction: At any point the Keeper may ask a Researcher "Why do you feel this Side Character is an Oddity?"

People in South Gate disappear over the course of the adventure and, after some time "off screen," they come back wrong in subtle ways. If a Researcher is alone in a location, The Oddities will try to disappear and replace them. At least some of the residents of South Gate are an Oddity. Not all. Any of them can harm or impede the Researchers. Feel free to choose who is an Oddity and who is human.

Quote: *"No, there's been no real problems other than what started a few weeks back."*

Infectious Paranoia

The townsfolk aren't always accepting of outsiders and, since the disappearances, they've become even more wary. They are constantly talking about who left, who came back, and who is acting differently. And new faces? That's just more fuel to the fire. Any Oddities will try to leverage this paranoia against the Researchers by either suggesting that another resident or a fellow Researcher is an Oddity.

Moments

- While looking outside, a Researcher spots someone running from the scene, stumbling and moving sideways before suddenly dropping to the ground.
- "Someday You'll Want Me To Want You" by Vaughn Monroe and his Orchestra begins playing during a quiet moment.
- Someone walks down a hall or alleyway. If followed, the Researcher only finds a coydog.
- A trio of townsfolk stand in a circle, utterly still, and gaze up at a crucifix.
- A door to a room is opened. The room is so overgrown with plant life pollen it tints the air green.
- Someone walks past a full length mirror, sees a reflection of themselves going the opposite direction. The mirror is actually an open doorway.

The Key of Division

Special Rule: These keys are to be used in order. Only the Researcher that marks the last box narrates the prompt.

- ☐ Each Researcher recalls when a serious accident recently happened in the lab with no discernible cause. What was the accident? What did each of you theorize the cause to be? What treasured item of yours did the accident destroy?
- ☐ After some careful thought, you each come to the conclusion that someone else's stupidity, carelessness, or – God forbid – maliciousness, caused the lab accident. Who do you think started it? How or why?
- ☐ You feel your own mind and thoughts are slowly, but ever surely, being replaced with a single goal: "Flee South Gate. Kill whoever stops you." What are you going to do to force this thought from your mind?

Locations

The Body

Dilated pupils and a slack jaw. A grey, marbled organ in the center of the ribcage. Their brainstem protrudes from the top of the corpus callosum, over the top of the cranium, and squeezes into the neck.

Paint the Scene: *What gives the impression that this person is sleeping, or somehow dormant?*

The Radio Station

Small desk and chair worn with age and personality. Government morse code certifications framed on the wall. All comms equipment, including the HAM radio and microphone, destroyed.

Paint the Scene: *How has this place been deliberately ripped apart?*

The Abandoned Research Lab

Cold, sleek, and sterile – at least it was before. Scientific equipment left strewn about by the building as if people fled in terror. Once state of the art fluorescent lights silently gleam.

Paint the Scene: *What signs show you that the last group of Researchers weren't intended to leave this lab site?*

Special Rule: Blue Ticket Discharge. The Researchers may gain advantage on the Night Move here once, only after they declare a secret they believe a fellow Researcher is hiding. This secret can be true, false, or somewhere in between if the player of the targeted Researcher decides it to be. They do not have to reveal this answer openly.

An Abandoned Church

Partially boarded-up stained glass window. Moth-eaten kneelers. Sparsely covered cork board with posters for the food bank, book clubs, and barbeques. No one comes here for Sunday services anymore.

Paint the Scene: *How can we tell that this place was once important to the town?*

The Bar

Air heavy with cigarette smoke. A half shattered mirror behind the bar counter. Cue balls in a perfect triangle on the red felt of a pool table.

Paint the Scene: *How do you know that this was the last place people truly had to socialize with one another?*

Side Characters

Araceli Rocío Espina, A Former Radio Operator

Tall, rail-thin, and sporting a formerly neatly trimmed haircut. Bright, intense eyes full of sorrow. Has a passion too big for a town this small. She saves what she can in hopes to leave South Gate – and has just enough cash to make the jump.

Quote: “Growing up here, it makes you bored. Bored... and angry. You learn everyone’s routine, and everything goes by South Gate’s pace; it’s suffocating me slowly, being here. I need to get out and live my life for once.”

John McReady, A Failed Author

Tall, a perpetual scowl, and well built muscle, one of the few people left in town. Even tempered despite everything that has gone wrong. He refuses to leave until things are solved, and others in town are bound to that law too—enforced by a Colt .45.

Quote: “It’s not everyday we get visitors into town... even less visitors carrying HAZMAT suits. What’re you folks doing with those? Someone sick with something even you don’t know about?”

Gloria Carpenter, A “Mortician” And Scientist Left Behind

Only ever average. Her chronic eye bags and muttering seem to be symptoms of stress. The head scientist for the last research team sent to South Gate, and the only one that didn’t leave due to being the sole human biologist in a town without a mortician.

Quote: “I’m sick and tired of being underestimated and sidelined for nothing else but a statistical probability at conception. I deserved to be on that committee. I always did, and always will.”

‘Father’ Torres, A Student of Human Nature

Always preceded by the smell of hair pomade. Vestments cut across the front. A five o’clock shadow too perfect to be spontaneous. He has left the Bible behind, but not God. He thinks of himself as a philosopher, and watches the townsfolk through holes drilled in their floors.

Quote: “I think living your life by a book written by man—who is inherently corrupt is a terrible path to take. I believe God will guide us to something where we are all one. We’ll know God and one another as we know our own minds.”

Larry Anderson, Mayor by Default

Short by anyone’s standards. Anxious as a cat in a room full of rocking chairs. Dressed in the best suit he owns for weddings, funerals, and holding the office he won uncontested.

Quote: “I’m real sorry to bother y’all but I just want to know what in the hell you are doing in waving those metal things all around and lookin’ all official? Why wasn’t the mayor’s office contacted? Oh, I guess that makes sense... You know my daughter Doris is going to grad school in Albuquerque and she sure could use someone to chair her committee! Oh, but I forgot to ask where y’all are from so maybe you already -.”

Clues

- ☐ An interconnected, tangled mass of cacti in bloom. The flowers smell of nothing.
- ☐ A scattering of beads on the ground. One of them is floating and spinning in the air above by just centimeters.
- ☐ A list of defects in the children that were born here, some mundane, and others very odd. From twelve fingers to telekinetic abilities.
- ☐ Sound isn’t traveling as it should. No echo, or far too loud.
- ☐ A meticulous written account of an NPC’s body language during an argument.
- ☐ A scalpel and a large pool of blood next to a chair. There is no sign of a body.
- ☐ The smell of motor oil or gasoline in an unusual place.
- ☐ A chess game. The longer the board is looked at, more pieces become Kings.
- ☐ Repetition of the words “LET NO ONE BE FORGOTTEN” in a familiar voice.
- ☐ A flamethrower resting against a wall, emptied of fuel.
- ☐ A very sudden temporary change in vision—such as seeing stars, blindspots, a sudden change in the light’s color.

- ☐ A hidden tape recorder and tape reel with “LISTEN ALONE” written on it. When played, it outlines a discovery by an old research team and that something has gone wrong.
- ☐ Two vials of neon blue liquid labeled “MESA SPECIMENS”. One is broken and empty.
- ☐ An account of a light touching the top of a nearby mesa and leaving shortly after.
- ☐ The conjoined remains of several human corpses. They all connect at the pelvic bone. Two reconnect at the skull.
- ☐ A will that was hastily scrawled in pencil or pen on a wall/paper/someone’s arm.
- ☐ Governmental document envelope marked TOP SECRET. In bold on the first page are the words “Decommissioned” and “No one leaves South Gate”.
- ☐ A map of wind patterns through South Gate and pinpoint dots with the words “THE SITE” about a mile away. A wind pattern line leads directly from THE SITE to the town.
- ☐ A ‘dog’ with extra limbs/eye sockets/human teeth/something else.
- ☐ A blood test sample. The blood moves on its own, like something is swimming inside.

Rewards

At the conclusion of the Lost Transmission, clear all Conditions gained during the mystery, remove all items from Your Corner of Donnie’s House, and purge any unspent Marks of Boundaries. Additionally, mark 1 XP for making it to the end of the mystery and 1 XP for successfully resolving the mystery. Then, all of the following are awarded:

- ☐ John McReady’s unfinished final draft of his novel The Beloved Desert Green. Gain advantage when you consult the unfinished draft on the (only somewhat fictionalized) history of Degoya County.
- ☐ **Doris Anderson, Doctor of Psychology and Philosophy at the Community College.** Silver hair in a bob, an old fashioned blouse and pressed women’s slacks, freshly eighty one and loving every second of her tenure. Intuitively knows when something is troubling you. She’s the spitting image of her father, Larry Anderson. Gain advantage when you consult Doris on situations dealing with human nature and psychology.

Quote: “We as animals are capable of great extremes, from violence to empathy. Everyone has a limit for both. You just have to find what will make a person go over the edge.”
- ☐ A New Move, if the town of South Gate was contained and studied: **Echoes of Death.**

Echoes of Death

This Move is available to all Latchkeys until one of them rolls a miss using Echoes of Death, at which point it’s only available to the Latchkey with the Condition: **Past Returned.**

When you are investigating an area in Deep Lake where you know a terrible loss of life has occurred, roll with Sensitivity. On a hit, you can ask the Keeper one of the following. They can answer truthfully but not completely. **On a 10+,** ask two:

- What were the moments leading up to the event like?
- What was kept secret here? The Keeper will give you a Clue.
- Were there any survivors or witnesses?

On a 12+, you witness an event in Deep Lake’s history like you were there. The Keeper will describe this moment in time and you gain an Odyssey Clue.

On a miss gain the Condition: **Past Returned.**

An Oddity from South Gate has managed to crawl its way to Deep Lake and has taken on a form like yours, but not quite. It’s weak, desperate to get back home, and willing to kill to prevent being discovered. They become an ongoing Danger in the campaign. If you have the Condition Past Returned, the Oddity will target and attempt to replace you. This Condition can only be cleared by temporarily neutralizing the Oddity.

SUNDERED & ZINDONE



BEN BISOGNÉ AND RACHEL JAMISON

Sundered and Undone

By Ben Bisogno and Rachael Jamison

Note: In this mystery, there is narrative time pressure in the form of an eclipse. If the Keeper would like to impose a real-world time crunch, consider setting a timer. When it runs out, the Question must be attempted and the eclipse begins, regardless of how much the Latchkeys have accomplished. Alternately, eschewing a timer allows your group to lean into the dreaminess and surreality.

The Remnant

- > A flyer advertising Burnicorn. The image is a psychedelic unicorn rearing on its hind legs in front of an array of moons in various stages of an eclipse.
- > A dream of a burning unicorn, pleading for help. The fire doesn't seem to be the cause of her distress. She begs for you to come find her at "the site of my reckoning;" when you awaken, you recall having seen fliers for Burnicorn.
- > A long, straight horn with spiral ridges; no one is sure what kind of animal it came from. You think it would make a killer costume piece for Burnicorn.

Presenting the Mystery

Though you're only several miles into the desert, it feels as if the sand stretches endlessly to the edges of the earth. The desert doesn't forgive, but it does know how to forget. You've come to the last couple of days of Burnicorn to, just maybe, forget all of the weirdness and horror you've experienced in Deep Lake, even if it's only for a few days. So far, it seems to be working; this place, with its small village of strange tents, art installations, and a 30-foot unicorn effigy looming over the playa, might as well be another world. And, the big burn for tomorrow's lunar eclipse will be the perfect conclusion to the experience.

Pose the following to each Latchkey: What event or memory are you most looking forward to escaping for a few days while you're at Burnicorn?

You've set up your tents in the midst of this ephemeral desert village that stretches to the horizon. So far, you've seen areas for art, food, and general revelry, as well as a yoga cave and even a petting zoo. People are everywhere; most seem to have been here for days.

Drums beat steadily, and you feel the thrumming rhythms drawing you to the central clearing. You're not the only ones; from all over the camp, people are converging beneath the raised hooves of the towering unicorn effigy. The air is electric, and drumbeats echo across the sand in time with the blood pumping through your veins. All around you, people dance and writhe along with the smoke from numerous campfires. A woman wearing a headdress made of skins and furs moves through the crowd, the single horn spiraling from the hood's forehead making her look like a creature of legend through the shifting smoke. She approaches each reveler in turn, holding out an earthenware bowl filled with ayahuasca. Most raise it to their lips and drink deeply.

Pose the following to the Latchkey of your choice: How do you know this woman is a being of utter purity?

The shaman approaches your group and holds up her bowl. Long, white-blond hair cascades from under her headdress, adding to her otherworldly appearance. Her voice is musical, rich with the weight of years. "Drink deep, and see the truths of the desert, the truths of yourselves. Let this grand movement of the heavens be not an ending but a beginning."

Now I must address you as players, not characters: The Latchkeys must choose whether or not to drink the ayahuasca. If they do not partake, they each narrate how their character enjoys the rest of Burnicorn and the eclipse before heading back to Deep Lake. Then, whatever they noticed about the shaman's true nature is a Clue that the Latchkeys can use for an active mystery.

If the Latchkeys drink the ayahuasca, whatever they noticed about the shaman's true nature is the first Clue they find for investigating the mystery. Know that completing this mystery will give your Latchkeys special Rewards. However, be aware that this mystery has the potential to affect the Latchkeys in lasting and fundamental ways. Additionally, if a Latchkey dies during this Lost Transmission, they must immediately mark The Chromatic Desert. If they have already marked The Chromatic Desert, they must mark the Pure-White Signal.

If the Latchkeys drink the ayahuasca, continue:

It's not long before you all feel the effects of the drug coursing through your bodies. Everything - the drums, the dancers, the flames, even the stars up above you - seems to shift and fracture. Not only that, but you yourselves feel lighter, suffused with the joy of innocent children. The fires pop, sparks erupt, and from the swirling flames you see shadows slinking free and twisting, swirling toward you. Ashy fingers wrap around your throats, scorching your skin, and sulfurous breath burns your ears as they whisper, "Free! Trapped no longer! Soon, the light of the moon will go out, you will be dust in the dunes, and WE will dance in Deep Lake, free!"

The shaman - her face longer now, her voluminous white-blond hair swirling in the wind like a mane - cries out, her scream more equine than human, and the shadows scatter into the night. She looks at each of you, wide-eyed, and whinnies; somehow, you hear words in the sounds: "It has happened to you as well." Each of you look down at yourselves and see that the lightness you feel is not simply internal. Your very form has changed.

Before we go any further, we must describe how this sundering of self has affected each Latchkey. First, we will Cast the Shadow, where a player describes their Shadow-Self, and then we will Reveal the Light, where another player describes their Light-Self. We will also establish what items each Latchkey brought with them to Burnicorn.

In turn, each player will Cast the Shadow. To do this, tell us what you think is your Latchkey's worst aspect. Your Shadow-Self embodies this aspect; how does it appear and act?

Once you've Cast the Shadow for your Latchkey, choose another player to Reveal the Light. The other player will do this by describing how your Latchkey's Light-Self appears now that their Shadow has been split away. Here are some examples for inspiration: A glitter-dusted fairy whose kisses make cacti bloom. A coyote made of moonlight whose fur shifts color to match people's emotions.

Now, we will establish what each Latchkey brought with them to Burnicorn, by going around and assigning each other items. Players should add these items to Your Corner of the Tent (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet, to be removed when this mystery is finished).

Once this is complete, continue: The unicorn whinnies, and again you understand her. "I don't know what is happening here. Do you? The only thing I know for certain is that I have

forgotten some important part of myself. Please, help me find it...help us all!" She nickers and stomps her hoof, then adds, "I am not certain how I know this, but I do: if we are not restored by the totality of tomorrow's eclipse, we will remain forever sundered!" She rears up on her hind legs, then turns and gallops off into the night. [Cue the Keeper nickering and whinnying loudly.]

The Latchkeys are now visibly their Light Selves. All around you, other revelers have been changed just as you have: you see the shapes of animals and fantastic beings juxtaposed on human faces. No one here seems to think any of this is strange or alarming.

You don't know whether it's this place, or the drugs, or the strange shattering of self, but you all feel as if your memories are closer to the surface than ever before, even those you'd buried deepest. Anywhere you go, anyone you talk to, might shake loose some long-hidden piece of yourself.

Questions & Opportunities

Question: What caused everyone to splinter into their shadow-selves and light-selves, and why? (Complexity: 6)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by stopping this person/group/force. Note: If you do not stop them they will interfere with your attempts to heal your fractured selves, causing disadvantage on the Reintegration Move.

Question: What is the nature of the unicorn's Shadow-Self? (Complexity: 2)

Opportunity: Enable the unicorn to reintegrate during the healing ritual. Note: If the Latchkeys fail to reintegrate the unicorn, her Shadow-Self will follow them back to Deep Lake and join forces with the Great Hungers.

Shards

Special Rule: As is usual for Lost Transmissions, Keys of the Child are unavailable during this mystery. However, there are no special mystery-specific Keys; instead, they are replaced by a special mystery-specific currency called Shards. Latchkeys will earn Shards by narrating memories prompted by Locations. Shards are tracked individually, and a given player may earn up to five.

Shards can be used in two ways:

- To improve a die roll. This acts the same as turning a Key, including that all Latchkeys must spend a Shard to bump up an Answer a Question roll.
- To add a bonus to their Reintegration Move.

When a Shard is used in either way, it is spent. This means that players must balance the resource between improving die rolls and giving themselves a better chance at reintegration.

The Reintegration Move

Each Latchkey must make this Move when the eclipse reaches totality. The result can only be improved by turning a Key of Desolation. If the Latchkeys did not unlock the Opportunity to deal with the opposing force, this force will attempt to interfere with reintegration, forcing the Latchkeys to roll this Move with disadvantage.

When you attempt to reintegrate your fractured self, roll with a bonus equal to your remaining Shards.

On a 10+, your Shadow-Self and Light-Self fully reintegrate.

On a 7-9, you reintegrate, but you're out of balance. Take the Condition: **Shadowed**. This Condition goes away when all Keys of the Child are marked; it cannot be cleared in another way.

On a miss, you fail to reintegrate, and your Shadow-Self takes control. Take the Condition: **Shadow-Self**. This Condition cannot be cleared.

Sundered and Undone

The Eclipse

When the eclipse begins, use the following set of Paint the Scene prompts to mark the passage of time and create a sense of urgency (similar to an Odyssey Tape). After the fourth prompt, the Latchkeys must each make the Reintegration Move.

- I. **Paint the Scene:** A shadow begins to slide over the moon. The unicorn effigy is set ablaze. How do you know that everyone present feels the weight of the cosmic shift?
- II. The moon continues to darken. How does the energy at the burn continue to build? How do you know the excitement is underscored with tension?
- III. The shadow creeps closer to fully covering the moon, and the Shadow-Selves creep closer to the edge of the bonfire's light. How do we know they think the Latchkeys will fail?
- IV. The Earth's shadow fully eclipses the moon, and the dark orb lights up in soft, otherworldly orange. All the stars seem twice as bright as before. The revelry around the blaze builds to a frenzied peak. How do we know that NOW is the time to perform the reintegration ritual?

The Shadow-Selves

These are the fractured pieces of the Latchkeys. Each will embody the dark aspects the players described earlier, stalking and interfering with the Latchkeys. A Shadow won't prey on its own Latchkey, but it will try to feed on the inner light of others, including anyone else at Burnicorn. They feel their fundamental lack of wholeness and seek destruction rather than unity.

Dangers

The Desert

It tries to lure the Latchkeys. Anyone who enters the desert may find it difficult to return. Additionally, dehydration and heat stroke are risks. Dehydration leads to hallucinations. The desert speaks. The sun - no, the three suns - become giant isopods in the sky, their curled forms looming overhead. Is this where it ends, as a dried-out husk amongst the dunes?

Shattered Reality

Ever since consuming the ayahuasca, all the flora and fauna at camp has become increasingly strange. Latchkeys may see giant spiders, lamenting lilies, moths made of desert glass, skeletal cattle, and jackals laughing with many mouths. These horrors may even be real.

Moments

- A mirage in the desert. The shimmering curtain of heat draws back to reveal a crystal palace on the horizon, spires dueling with clouds. You feel its pull.
- A chittering mass of shiny black beetles devours a carcass, clickclickclick, then skitters toward you en masse.
- A dog herds a flock of chickens into their pen, darting and snapping at them to keep them in line.
- You stare at someone you know. Or knew. You should know. Their face blurs like charcoal in rain. Their name darts just beyond the reach of your tongue, like a scorpion scuttling just outside the tent.
- Revelers dance on the sand, their bodies moving in perfect synchrony. They move in singles, then pairs, then a pulsing circle that shrinks as they come together with primal shouts of joy.
- The barren desert suddenly comes to life with lush plants and the cries of skittering animals. Then, just as quickly, it falls still and quiet.

Locations

Special Rule: Each Location has a unique Shard prompt, followed by the same Paint the Scene. They each can only be triggered once, and grant a Shard to each player upon their narration, up to a total of five per player. (Players may continue to enter locations and complete the Paint the Scene prompts, they just can't earn more than five Shards each.)

The Bonfire

The central gathering area, with a massive statue of a unicorn that will be lit during the eclipse. There are always people here, tending the smaller fires, partaking of drugs and drink, and rotating in and out of the never-ending drum circle.

The first Latchkey to enter this Location answers the following question: Narrate a time in your childhood when you let go of something that haunted and hounded you.

Paint the Scene for the other Latchkeys: *What echoes of this memory are here?*

The Great Feasting Hall

The largest tent, where costumed revelers hold mock rituals including a feast set at an absurdly large formal dining table. A chandelier sags under the weight of too many disco balls and a live parrot squawking "Dessert!" Someone is dunking their head in a huge tub of jello.

The first Latchkey to enter this Location answers the following question: Narrate a time in your childhood when you pretended that something was grand, in order to ignore its bleak reality.

Paint the Scene for the other Latchkeys: *What echoes of this memory are here?*

Petting Zoo

An awning stretches over a few short rows of wooden stalls. The air is filled with scents and sounds of familiar animals, including goats, chickens, and dogs. One of the stalls bears a sign that reads, "Jackalope." The kids that people have dragged along to Burnicorn tend to congregate here, much to the chagrin of the animal tender.

The first Latchkey to enter this Location answers the following question: Narrate a time in your childhood when you pretended something was magical, and almost convinced yourself it was true.

Paint the Scene for the other Latchkeys: *What echoes of this memory are here?*

The Spiral Sanctuary

A craggy natural cave whose ceiling reaches up toward the sky; from within, it appears to be the great hall of a castle. Meditation bells echo through the chamber, and the air carries the mingled scents of mildew and sweat. Individuals and small groups meditate or practice yoga.

The first Latchkey to enter this Location answers the following question: Narrate a time in your childhood when you desperately needed stillness but couldn't find it.

Paint the Scene for the other Latchkeys: *What echoes of this memory are here?*

The Observatory

A quiet stretch of sand atop a hill on the edge of the open desert. Attendees come here to stare up at the stars and think about the future.

The first Latchkey to enter this Location answers the following question: Narrate a time in your childhood when you imagined a future that felt impossibly vast. Was it empowering or terrifying?

Paint the Scene for the other Latchkeys: *What echoes of this memory are here?*

The Swamp

A greenhouse overgrown with lush plants, moss, and buzzing insects. Impossibly humid. Rumor has it that sometimes there are "bog baptisms" performed in the muddy pool at the center.

The first Latchkey to enter this Location answers the following question: Narrate a time in your childhood when you felt acutely out of place.

Paint the Scene for the other Latchkeys: *What echoes of this memory are here?*

The Canteen

A concession stand and hang-out spot that is far more than the mundane name implies. Rather than chips and soda, they serve wings, pies, and strange fermented drinks. There's fencing, mud wrestling, and even a puppet theater whose shows all have surprisingly profound themes.

The first Latchkey to enter this Location answers the following question: Narrate a time in your childhood when you reveled in being messy, loud, and unrestrained, despite knowing you'd get in trouble for it.

Paint the Scene for the other Latchkeys: *What echoes of this memory are here?*

The Junkyard Earthship

A camp built from salvaged materials and broken down vehicles. A preacher lives here year round holding retreats on the importance of sustainable living. His pulpit is the cab of a rusty old once-red Dodge Ram.

The first Latchkey to enter this Location answers the following question: Narrate a time in your childhood when you broke something important and desperately tried to fix it.

Paint the Scene for the other Latchkeys: *What echoes of this memory are here?*

Artisans' Row

An eclectic collection of smaller tents and booths where attendees display and sell homemade wares. There's a large sculpture garden. A towering orrery spins with a mechanical whir, almost as eye-catching as the unicorn statue itself.

The first Latchkey to enter this Location answers the following question: Narrate a time in your childhood when you realized how small and powerless you were in the grand scheme of things.

Paint the Scene for the other Latchkeys: *What echoes of this memory are here?*

The Crystal Chamber

A dome-shaped tent that seems to glow from within. Inside, people have hung hundreds if not thousands of mirrors and other shiny objects from the ceiling and supports, casting slivers of light and fragmented reflections that shift and twist as you walk through. Everything is cast in a pale violet light. Someone hums a tuneless drone.

The first Latchkey to enter this Location answers the following question: Narrate a time in your childhood when you cherished something deeply, only to have it broken or taken away.

Paint the Scene for the other Latchkeys: *What echoes of this memory are here?*

Side Characters

Cain, the unicorn

Her voice is pure as refracted prismatic light, her skin cold as moonlight on desert sand. She smells of lilac and herbs pressed between the pages of a storybook. Depending on how you look at her, she is by turn either equine or human. Her memory is fragmented; she remembers only that she is being hunted, and that a part of her has been split away.

Quote: “It feels like they have been hunting me for generations. I don’t remember always running. Would you let the shadows devour you? I can only imagine it would be a relief.”

Audry, an old woman

Milky eyes, dirty grey dreads, an apparent disdain for everyone. She’s draped in soiled horse blankets and Tibetan prayer flags, and reeks of musk and cold campfire ash. Wanders around the camp making vaguely prophetic pronouncements to anyone nearby.

Quote: “You want to know what this eclipse means, don’t you! Could be an ending! Hm. Or a beginning.”

James Henderson, a puppeteer

A wiry man with sun-wrinkled eyes and big round glasses like pink moons. Hands covered in dried glue and pencil dust. Smells like a wood shop.

Quote: “I build worlds from scraps. Don’t tell me they’re not real just because they’re soft around the edges. The soft things are what last.”

Krista Franks, the petting zoo attendant

Short and slight, with a preternatural face. Smells like eucalyptus oil and dog fur. Her scruffy mutt Ozzy is always close by, but doesn’t like anyone but Krista. You could swear the animals actually understand her.

Quote: “The animals? They’re friendly, sure. But anything with a mouth can bite. Shhh, Ozzy, it’s okay, boy. They’re nice, see? Just don’t give the animals a reason to be scared of you. Shhh...”

Ace Chamberlain, an annoyance

Perpetually sniffling nose. Wears a velvet coat and numerous bangles. Follows people around explaining how unfair it is that others are taking credit for his work on the various art installations.

Quote: “I helped design the orrery, you know. No one seems to believe me, but I did! Hmmm! Now they don’t want to talk to me, but wait and see what happens when it breaks and none of them know how to fix it, hmmmmmm!”

King, an old man

An impossibly old, wrinkled husk of a man. His fingernails are yellowed and claw-like, and he grips his walking stick as if it’s the only thing keeping him alive. Claims to not remember his own name. Everyone calls him King, perhaps because of the gaudy plastic crown always perched on his spotted bald head. Can usually be found at the Observatory, staring into the desert.

Quote: “Don’t worry about me. I came here to die; I know what to expect. You too will know when your time comes, but I think it’s not yet. No, no; the desert likes to play with its food.”

Pod, a cook

Smells like hardboiled eggs. Greasy fingers, flour-dusted elbows. Usually found at the Canteen, pushing his newest bizarre culinary creation on anyone who wanders in.

Quote: “Anyone who says pickle pie isn’t a thing just hasn’t tried hard enough. Here, what do you think? Does it need more cheese?”

Smithwick, a magician

Affable, slightly goofy, lacking self-confidence. Wears a wide-brimmed blue wizard hat and a leopard-print bathrobe. Voice warbles when nervous. Always fumbling with his deck of half-burnt tarot cards.

Quote: “I might not be magic, but I am available and enthusiastic. Want to see a trick?”

Howard, a creep

Wherever Cain is, Howard can be found nearby, watching her. He doesn’t approach her, but he exudes an air of unsettling creepiness.

Quote: “I do not want her beauty. I want her to stop reminding me of how I lack it.”

Clues

- ☐ Something is moving inside the unicorn effigy itself.
- ☐ Acid tabs (the psychedelic kind) hidden in an unusual location.
- ☐ A shimmering figure on the horizon of the desert, beckoning, impossibly tall and wearing your mother’s face.
- ☐ A cracked mirror that reflects something not there.
- ☐ Someone you just spoke to doesn’t remember you.
- ☐ A sinkhole in the desert.
- ☐ A sturdy cage, large enough to hold a small group of people.
- ☐ A small vial labeled “essence.”
- ☐ A collection of (pick one: dead insects; strange, dried herbs; hand-carved figurines of mythical beasts; something else).
- ☐ A calendar or star chart from an ancient civilization.
- ☐ A broken clock suddenly begins working.
- ☐ A sudden, overwhelming sense or feeling of déjà vu.
- ☐ A prophecy carved into stone.
- ☐ Strange singing echoing from out of the desert.
- ☐ The sinking sensation of all happiness bleeding away from you.
- ☐ Burning incense that smells like (pick one: fresh blood, mildew, a rotting animal, something else unpleasant).
- ☐ A dreamcatcher interwoven with silvery thread and swamp grass. It glints with mirror shards, each reflecting a different version of you.
- ☐ A name, spelled out in dried kelp.
- ☐ A wooden flute, its voice silenced forever by a long crack.
- ☐ What originally appeared to be cosplay is someone’s actual clothing.

Rewards

Each Latchkey may choose one of the following souvenirs to add to their Corner of the House:

- ☐ A large crystal shard that resonates a pure tone when you strike it.
- ☐ A signed DVD box set from James Henderson.
- ☐ A shadowbox containing a large insect with iridescent wings.
- ☐ A favorite toy or other item from your childhood you’d thought was lost. Define it. [This option can be chosen by multiple Latchkeys.]

Additionally:

- ☐ Any Latchkey who successfully reintegrated may unmark a Key of the Child. The next time you mark that Key, re-narrate the same scene from your new, healthier perspective.
- ☐ Any Latchkey who did not successfully reintegrate may, once, give in to their worst impulses and act in accordance with their shadow-nature, to increase the result of a single die roll.



LAST SERPENT CRUSADE

Mads C. Turley & Arthur Wells

Last Serpent Crusade

by Mads C. Turley
& Arthur Wells

The Remnant

- † The Latchkeys find a journal entry written on old parchment “I write these words in hopes of Truth being recorded, instead of Lies being passed on.” Its contents are presented as the mystery.
- † The Latchkeys find a pendant of an ouroboros that looks horrifically lifelike, found wrapped in oilcloth, locked away in an oak box, with the name MAISLEY barely visible. When they take the pendant, they share a dream of the events of the mystery.
- † The Big Man turns back the stars above Deep Lake to July 1819, the height of Ophiuchus. As the Latchkeys watch the celestial dance, the events of the mystery reflect in their eyes like a film reel.

Presenting the Mystery

You are the Crusaders of Silas Rodenbecker. For seven years you have carried out his mission to clear the Holy Degoya of the serpents that taint your promised utopia. You have scoured the four corners of the desert, driving these snakes from their nests and exterminating them.

Six hundred and sixty five snakes have been strung up under your crusade's campaign, but now things have changed as Rodenbecker has declared that a Serpent is hiding in your midst. Since dawn this morning, the Faithful have been shepherding crusaders into the camp's chapel and interrogating each of them. As you and your fellow Crusaders are brought into the chapel, the air is charged with a bloodlust you've come to know well on your hunts. You are brought to your knees in a line in front of the man to whom you've devoted nearly a decade of your life.

Pose the following to each of the Crusaders:

Silas Rodenbecker has always overflowed with passion for his mission, how do you know that this passion has driven him to the edge of his sanity?

Keeper Note: Each time an indented passage comes up, have a Crusader read it out as if they are presenting proof of their faith to Silas.

Silas begins to travel down the line, stopping in front of each of the faithful with the cudgel he usually uses as a walking stick. He levels it above each of their heads as he prepares to strike. As he makes his way down the line, he stops in front of one of you and says, “Speak to me, faithful, of The Dream.”

“I believe in The Dream of the Holy Degoya, free from the taint of the wretched Serpents that keep this land and its people from the peace and prosperity of the Garden. In their destruction, we sanctify this land.”

He nods in approval, with your knowledge of the Book of Prayer and Fire having satiated his suspicions, he moves to the next in line.

Pose the following to the Crusader with the highest

Sensitivity: *When did you discover that the Serpents were actually the ancient protectors of the Degoya?*

Bringing your chin up with the gnarly end of the cudgel, he looks you in the eyes, “Speak to me, faithful, of the Garden.”

“I believe that Here, when the world is quiet, and all is the blessed Dream of Dreams; in the times of Reaping and of Sowing, when what comes from the Hereafter arrives, the green grapes of a New Eden will grow.”

He nods and gently cups your cheek as a kind smile breaks his angry expression. He continues down the line which is nearing its end.

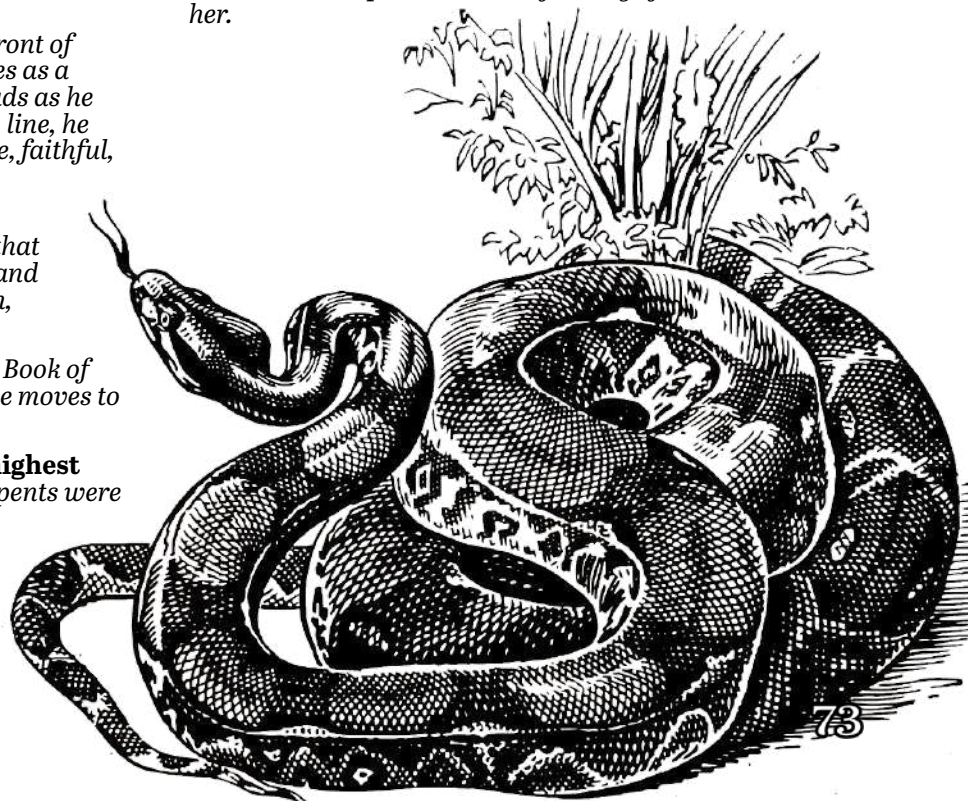
Pose the following to the Crusader with the highest Presence: *How have you helped your neighbor in line, Jenna Maisley, hide her secret nature as a true Serpent while Rodenbecker hunted common snakes?*

Silas' smile sets itself back into a hard line as he looks between you and your companion. With words like dry, rusted steel he whispers, “Speak to me, faithful, of the blood.”

“I believe that it is only through the blood of the vermin who defile this divine desert that we will be able to make this arid land into the garden of fecundity in which we all may be blessed. With each sacrifice, step by step we become a holier people united by our mission.”

He stares at you for a long moment, before stepping away from the line entirely. “My friends and family, my faithful companions, and my trusted followers: we have scoured this desert for seven long years, and it is with such righteous anger and upset I must speak to each and every one of you to let you know we have been led astray these long years. The Serpents we have been seeking have not been the legless wretches who we've vanquished underfoot, no, they are members of our community who have strived to keep us from paradise. Faithful, it is necessary that in times such as these that-

Silas' sermon is cut short as Jenna rises to her feet and advances on him with a bowie knife, and all hell breaks loose in the chapel as the Faithful surge forward to restrain her.



And now I must address you as players (not characters): The Crusaders can choose to escape in the chaos and leave Jenna to her fate. If they do, you should narrate a short epilogue about how your Crusaders return to their old lives after a decade spent in the shadow of faith - what does that look like, and how does that feel? Then, Rodenbecker's sermon is a Clue that the Latchkeys can use for an active mystery.

If the Crusader choose to stay to rescue Jenna: Rodenbecker's Sermon is the first Clue they find for investigating the mystery of Rodenbecker's Crusade against the Serpents of the Degoya. Now, we'll go around the table. On your turn, tell us:

- Your role in the community of the Faithful
- Your preferred weapon for the hunt; give it a proper name.

Then, everyone else will say one piece of gear they think you brought with you to camp—add them and your weapon to your Corner of the Camp (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet, to be removed when this mystery is finished).

The Third Card

During the mystery, any Crusader with the Chromatic Desert marked can find the Big Man in the current scene sitting at a table with a golden velvet cloth spread across it. He welcomes them kindly to step outside of the fourth wall and invites them to a tarot reading that occurs outside of the scene. Clear the Condition and then choose an unmarked option:

- † What card does he show you that gives you pause, then comfort? Describe a Clue in the form of a tarot card, it cannot resolve the mystery alone.
- † What card does he reveal that foretells your doom? Take the Condition: **Blessed**, which can be cleared by a 12+ on the Night Move.
- † The Big Man pulls a card from the deck and plucks an item from its surface; what is it? Add it to your Corner of the Camp.

Questions & Opportunities

Question: Does Rodenbecker know the Serpents are ancient guardians of the Holy Degoya, or is he blindly acting under the influence of the Great Hungers? *Unlock the remaining questions.*

Question: If Silas does know about the Serpents, how can you convince the rest of the Faithful that Silas has been intentionally deceiving them? (Complexity 4)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by rallying his followers against the false prophet and sacrificing him in place of the last Serpent.

Question: If Silas is blindly acting under the influence of the Great hungers, how do the Serpents keep the Great Hungers at bay? (Complexity 6)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by sharing the mantle of the Serpents with Jenna and banishing the Hungers' influence from Silas and his crusade, by force if necessary.

Key of the Disillusioned Faithful

- Each Crusader narrates a flashback to a time they made a solemn pact with another that they would share any consequences...but then did not stand with them in the end.
- Each Crusader narrates a flashback to their first hunt with Rodenbecker; how was it less heroic than they imagined it would be?
- Each Crusader describes their true feelings about Rodenbecker. What private moment sealed their impression of him?

Moments

- † A chess game, where only the white pieces have been knocked askew and the black pieces stare down inexorably at them.
- † A young woman holds the gaze of a Crusader from afar, her hands crossed delicately upon her chest; only when they draw closer do they realize she has been cradling a snake to her bosom, its head hissing close to her ear.
- † A mask found in a recessed corner, first thought to have twisting vines through it – upon closer inspection, seeing it is a tangle of tiny and small snakes of various sizes and hues among plants and blooms.
- † You share a hallucination of an oasis out in the desert. All manner of earthly pleasures beckon you out of the heat. If you have the condition Blessed, you instead see a bone yard bleaching in the sun.
- † Sweat from a furrowed brow hisses as it falls onto the hot desert rocks.
- † The smell of rot rises up from the ground in camp, fetid blood and carrion flesh causes bile to build up in the back of the throat.



Silas Rodenbecker

Leader of the Hunt

Square-jawed, eyes the color of a haunted forest. Always carries his Book of Prayer and Fire with him. Fiery-haired and equally intense about his obsession and beliefs, Silas Rodenbecker is a man of conviction - his charisma has spurred his community to this particular crusade towards killing snakes. Whatever his motivation, Silas has grown faithful to the Hungers through feeding this obsession and spilling blood.

Quote: *"Speak to me, faithful, of the Dream, the Garden, and of the blood. I see these things in mine eyes and they fill my vision and give me purpose. They give me drive to fulfill my destiny, and to fulfill my destiny is to give you glory - the glory by which we gain paradise. We clear the snakes, these Serpents - and New Eden is ours."*

Dangers

Roland Laughton

Silas' most loyal follower, Roland is a brute of a man; a head taller than the tallest Crusader and strong enough to hold back two grown men. He carries a sword and horn gifted to him by Silas that he uses to rally the faithful. At night, when carrying out more gruesome work he wears a carved green mask that obscures his face entirely.

Quote: *"I strike at the wicked and call for their demise, for only through their death shall we achieve Silas' goals - our glory. Come forth, come forth, ye most Faithful!"*

The Faithful

Many of the devout who have hunted with Silas since that fateful day in 1812 would go to hell and back for their mission. The Faithful will not hesitate to cast suspicions on their comrades. If the Crusaders don't tread lightly they could find themselves ambushed after nightfall.

Quote: *"The Dream. The Garden. The Blood. The Dream. The Garden. The Blood."*

Corruption and Shadows of the Great Hungers

Veiled presences exist here in the Degoya Desert. Their dark influence corrupts people in different ways, having them act differently to the Crusaders, especially if they are acting against the interests of the hunt. The shadows of the Hungers loom large and gain more power at night. After sunset, the Crusaders could find themselves surrounded by dark, reflectionless eyes, or seeing Pure White tentacles reaching for them.

Quote: *"I see you. I feel you. I grow close to you. And soon, you will be close to me too. And you will see what I see...and we will be together in our Hungers, forever."*

Locations

The Chapel of New Eden

Dry-rotted wooden planks creak in the dry desert air. The wooden pews sag and creak under constant use. Warm light squeezes through dingy plain glass windows, illuminating the room.

Paint the Scene: *Modestly decorated and slightly ragged, the church still holds a deep reverence at camp. How do the faithful display their piety in the chapel?*

The Cabins

Sparsely furnished. Simply made. The smell of hard work and sweat hangs heavy under your nose.

Paint the Scene: *Even though there is a stress on community living, how are efforts made to make individual decorative touches?*

Communal Kitchen

There is always something cooking, always something ready to hand, as labor is paid with filling, if not tasty, meals. Bowls are stacked along the side, along with spoons. Trestle tables with bench seating.

Paint the Scene: *What is a favored dish here even though ingredients and tastes are simple?*

The Watering Hole

The only saloon for one hundred miles, the Watering Hole is the closest thing the camp has to a bar. Built into the shadow of the mesa, the saloon offers shade and respite from the desert's relentless heat. The patrons of the Watering Hole often break into raucous drinking songs.

Paint the Scene: *Despite the lack of inhabitants now, what signs make it clear this has been a waystation for true Serpents for centuries?*

The Caves

A meandering wind whistles to a song that is felt, not heard. Narrow, labyrinthine passages twist throughout the mesa. The well-tread corridors are filled with the echoes of ancestral footsteps, now abandoned.

Paint the Scene: *All of the patrons seem to be ignoring the Crusaders unless directly addressed. Why can't you shake the feeling people are watching you?*

Side Characters

Jenna Maisley, The Last Serpent

Headstrong and resilient. Eye sharper than her blade. She is the last in a long line of ancestral guardians of the Holy Degoya, the vanguard against the Great Hungers. Being held hostage inside the Chapel.

Quote: *"I can hear it in the wind blowing the desert sand, a sound like the gentle, endless crashing of waves, like fresh cotton on dry skin, soft and relentless: the Pure White Signal. It's calling them."*

Anthony Booth, Crusader

Earnest. Shock of white-blond hair. Smells of his acrid pipe. Questions the value of the hunt...quietly.

Quote: *"Huh, sometimes my faith torments me...as if I love someone who cannot speak in the darkness, no matter how much or how loudly I call to them."*

Philip Knowles, Crusader

Flint-eyed. Sharp-tongued. Always handy with a knife. Silas' third-in-command and ambitious.

Quote: *"Our mission is clear - all snakes, all Serpents must be put down. New Eden is at stake, and shall not be gainsaid."*

Saucie, Camp Chef

Tall and thin. Dark haired and always chewing on something. Smells of mint and 'herbal refreshment.'

Quote: *"Needs a little bit more of this, a tiny bit more of that - hand me that vial over there, will ya? My own special blend, heh heh."*

Rowena Laughton, Crusader

Timid in social situations. Mousy-looking. Fierce fighter when provoked. Roland's daughter.

Quote: *"Whatever you be thinking, you can wipe that thought right out of your head - I don't need my da to handle the likes of you." [brandishing pitchfork]*

Bernard Custerson, Chess Player Crusader

Piercing eyes hidden behind giant glasses. Dry mouth with a whistle in his words. His hands shake as they set up the chess board to play.

Quote: *"If you've got time to stand around and ask questions, then you've got time to sit around and ask questions while we play chess."*

Sarah Faraday, The Shunned Crusader

Weathered skin, creased with worry. Thin hair tucked back behind her ears. Her woolen shawl, worn thin and frayed.

Quote: *"You have to ask yourself - are you willing to be judged by nothing that answers you when you call, or accept the consequences of your own decisions in the end? 'Cause that is what it will come down to in your lonely existence."*

Charity, Timothy, Willard, Coulton, and other Faithful

Individually harmless, but together dangerous for their mob mentality, surging as inexorable waves to do the work set out by Silas.

Quote: *"For the greater good, for the safety of our community, and towards hope of our glory and salvation - blessed be!"*



Clues

- A page torn out of the Book of Prayer and Fire with a hand-drawn map of the communal homes on it.
- Dark, reflectionless stones the exact shape and size of eyes.
- A bracing tonic in a dropper bottle.
- Blood seeps then bursts from a crack in a cave wall.
- A Side Character is seen bloodletting into a jar.
- A traitor's dagger, wrapped with twisting vines almost like intertwining snakes.
- A liturgical banner that reads "This heathen land shall bow to our will," carried like a military standard.
- A mirror's reflection, where all that stares back is the Crusader and their expression of loathing and horror.
- A circle of rooks take flight, with one in the center, looking like a moving eye across the horizon.
- A Dance with Death painting, with 4 suns hung in the background and 2 horses devouring each other in the foreground.
- An ouroboros pendant found in an unusual place.
- A Side Character places a bowl of wild strawberries and milk outside their cabin as an offering.
- An abandoned chess game where the bishop and knight have backed the king into a corner.
- A Side Character wearing a papier-mâché snake mask recalls a dream of swallowing up the camp.
- A mural depicting a snake atop a world illuminated by a golden sky.
- A dried snake crushed flat between the pages of Silas' Book of Prayer and Fire.
- A large pottery shard depicting snakes poised to attack.
- A list of the Unfaithful, those who have been shunned from the community.
- A confiscated collection of talismans crafted from various snake parts.
- A small, golden casket containing the mummified remains of a genuine ouroboros.

Rewards

After the Lost Transmission is Resolved, the Latchkeys clear all Conditions incurred here. They must also remove all items from Their Corner of the Camp. They then mark 1 XP for making it to the end and 1 XP for resolving the Lost Transmission. Then, all Latchkeys receive the following Rewards.

- ☐ A courier delivers a brass lockbox key for the First Bank of Deep Lake to 26 Rodenbecker Street, inside the lockbox each Latchkey finds one item from their Corner of the Camp; add it to their Corner of the House.
- ☐ New Move: The Golden Ouroboros Casket
All Latchkeys gain access to this Move.

The Golden Ouroboros Casket

The Latchkeys wake the next morning, finding this casket on a table waiting for them. During the Dawn phase, a Latchkey can open the Casket and behold the wonder of a genuine artifact. All Latchkeys may take Advantage on their next roll before the start of the next Dawn phase.

During the Dawn phase before Night of the Bone Wolves, the casket explodes outward with golden light, and the house is surrounded by the spirit of Jenna Maisley and other Serpents. They form a protective circle around 26 Rodenbecker Street - reduce the Complexity of the Bone Wolves by 2. This Move is no longer available to any Latchkey.

- ☐ Any Latchkey who has the Chromatic Desert marked can unmark it before removing it and the Pure-White Signal from their character sheet. Replace them with The Key of Proserpine.

The Key of Proserpine

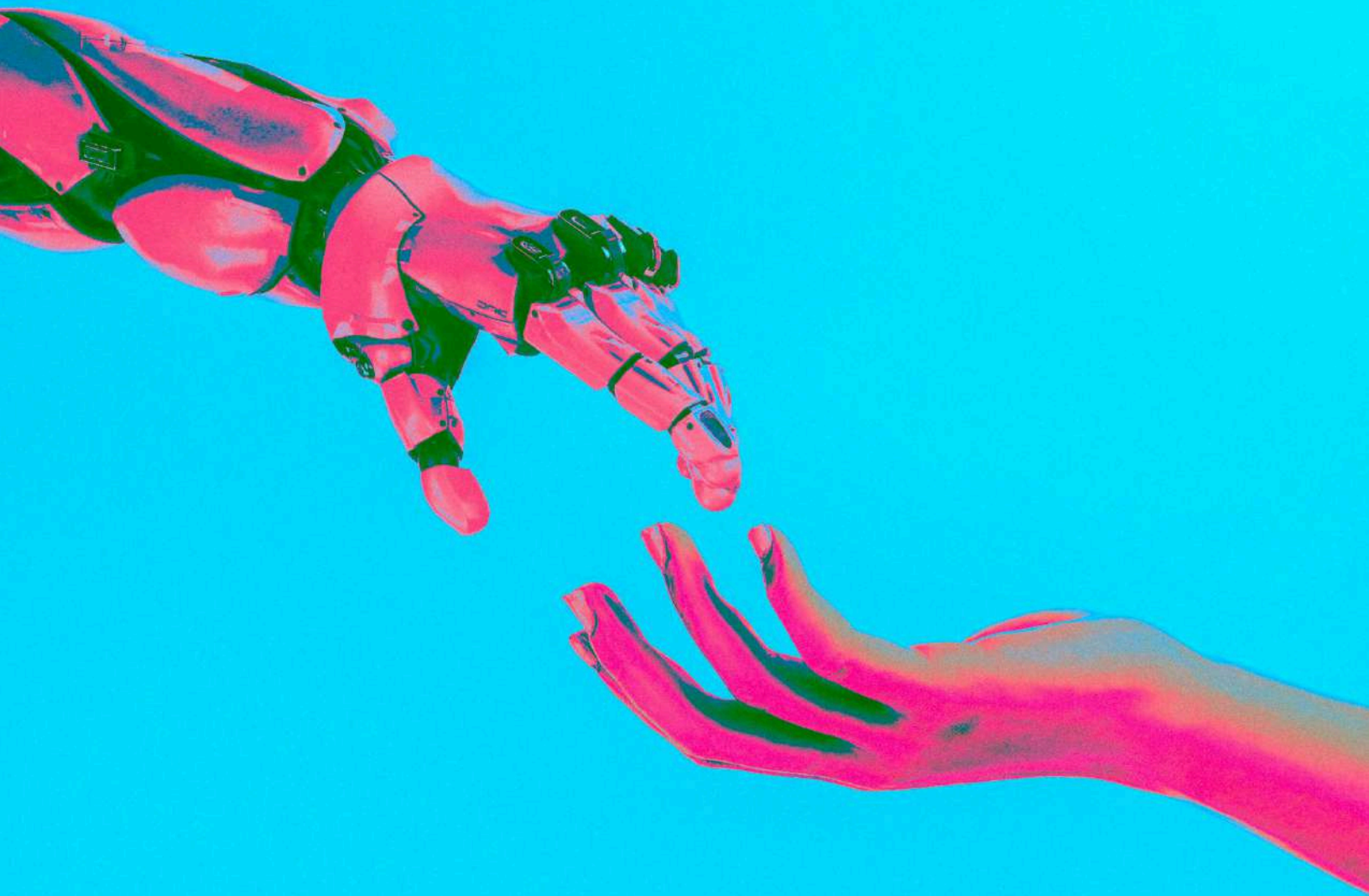
You are hungry, you have always been hungry. Show them fear in a handful of dust as you crush them beneath your foot. Recall a time when you longed for something so deeply that you could not be satiated.

Retire this character; they will return as a Great Hunger during the Night of the Bone Wolves.



AS ABOVE, SO BELOW

A Lost Transmission for Public Access by Bartosz N (bartosso)



As Above, So Below

By Bartosz N (bartosso)

The Remnant

- > The Latchkeys experience the story as a shared nightmare. In the morning, they discover small straw effigies sitting by their bedside lamp, still on. Only then do they realize the effigies had already been there when they reached out to turn off the light.
- > The Latchkeys experience the story as a vision after taking a look inside an old, leatherbound book they find in the attic of the house on Rodenbecker street, titled *As Above, So Below*. The book is heavier than it should be.
- > The Latchkeys experience the story as a movie, the screening of which they get invited to by an influential Side Character from a solved or active mystery. Upon coming home, they hear a low, drony hum, coming from beneath the house on Rodenbecker street. It persists for a few days.

Presenting the Mystery

You are the Effigies, tools created for a long-running passion project. For you, "passion" should be an empty word, for everything about you was manufactured; your body, your personality, even your memories. And yet, some of these memories are of your Maker – a drive to do their bidding was baked into your being. Only several hours old, you're sent down into the depths of the Machine to join the so-called Odyssey Seekers lost in its Dream. Anxious but united by the purpose of your creation, you enter a rusty, bell-shaped pod to be slowly roped down the shaft, like countless others before you. Printed on a piece of paper you're clutching, a single line reads "Upon touchdown, follow the beacon."

To players who have marked the Chromatic Desert: You know that every Effigy is made in the image of, and can switch places with, the Odyssey Seeker (Latchkey) in the Dream. Doing so, however, would bring upon you the wrath of your Maker. Will you share this blasphemous secret with the others?

As your vessel emerges from the shaft and reaches the Outer Rim, a hazy tangle of metal pipes and concrete towers comes into view, looming far below in a cavernous space, illuminated by a faint glow of searchlights scanning the night. Moments later, sirens start wailing as turrets come to life and take aim at your pod.

Pose the following to each Effigy: In brief flashes of explosion, you glimpse things of metal and flesh crawl and tumble around below. How do you know their aggression against you has no meaning beyond senseless violence? How does that make you feel?

Your descent continues, slow but steady – alerts blaring, rope fraying, indicator lights furiously flashing red. Despite your gas masks, you smell singed rubber and burnt circuits. Are these damn things even working? Upon reaching the bottom of the Outer Rim, you see mangled wrecks of similar - but not as lucky - vessels strewn around the perimeter of a narrow crevasse through which your journey down continues. In those long tunnels and open caverns you see things both alien and familiar – your headlight the only source of light in the dark.

Pose the following to each Effigy: As you slowly descend ever deeper through the seemingly unending layers of the Machine, you look through dirty portholes of the pod.

What do you see in the illuminated layers of fossilized trash, metal, and bone, that proves all of history - future and past, real and imagined - is buried here, forgotten by all?

As you finally emerge from the dark, a rocky facade bathed in orange light slides into view, towering over a wasteland cluttered with statues and worn-out toys the size of buildings. Upon touchdown, the airlock creaks open. Underneath all that clutter and dirt, you spot the remains of a ruined interstate road. As soon as the airlock shuts behind you, the elevator takes off. Everything else is still.

Pose the following to each Effigy: What fake but profoundly formative memory makes you want to do your Maker's bidding despite its obvious artificiality?

Shadows moving in the overwhelming stillness snap you out of your reverie. A lanky, tall silhouette, its head beaming with blinding light, shambles across the waste towards the cliff and disappears behind a giant spinning top. Night falls once it's gone and you turn on your flashlights. When you reach the place where you last saw the beacon, you notice an entrance to a large cave, dark and howling like the mouth of a hungry beast. Your gut instinct is to get as far away from it as possible.

Pose the following to the Effigy with the highest Sensitivity: You notice a suitcase left near the entrance by the Wanderer. What inexplicably familiar message or trinket do you find inside, and why does it fill you with determination?

And now I must address you as players (not characters): The Effigies can stay here and abandon their quest. If they do, you should each narrate an epilogue for your character showing how they roam the Inner Rim forever, slowly turning into yet another broken thing cluttering the waste. Then, the contents of the suitcase they found by the cave are a Clue the Latchkeys can use for an active mystery.

If the Effigies choose to enter the cave, the contents of the suitcase are the first Clue they find for investigating the mystery of the Machine and its Dream. Know that completing this mystery will give your Latchkeys access to a new Move and special Rewards. However, if your Effigy is destroyed, your Latchkey must immediately mark The Chromatic Desert. If you have already marked The Chromatic Desert, you must mark The Pure-White Signal.

Keeper note: The Effigies share their memories with the Latchkeys, but do not realize who these memories belong to. They cannot starve or bleed out, even though they do bleed when injured. For an Effigy to die, its head must be destroyed.

If the Effigies enter the cave:

We'll start by going around the table to learn more about the Effigies. Bear in mind that your Effigies are a warped parody of the originals based on hazy visions glimpsed by their Maker in the TV Box. On your turn, please tell us the following:

- What personality trait of the Latchkey your Effigy is based on is cartoonishly overemphasized? Which trait is completely missing?
- You look mostly human, but something about your appearance betrays your artificial nature. What is it?

You all carry a black suitcase, similar to the one you found by the cave, with gifts from your maker. Everyone else will say one thing they think the Maker gave you to aid you in your journey; add it to Your Black Suitcase (Your Corner of the House on the Latchkey sheet, to be removed when this mystery is finished).

*Additionally, you all have access to a rudimentary and incomplete **map of the Machine** with several names of places the Maker glimpsed in their TV Box scribbled on it; and a **new Move**:*

Time is of the Essence

At any point during the mystery, an Effigy can rip an item that reminds them of the inexorable passage of time out of their abdomen and rewind the scene by 7 seconds. You can thereby avoid harm, undo a miss or take a different approach during a conversation. Then, choose one:

- *Put the item you ripped out of your body in Your Black Suitcase (to be removed when this mystery is finished).*
- *Clear a Condition and describe a subtle change in your personality or appearance.*

Each Effigy can only use this Move once during the course of the mystery.

Questions & Opportunities

Question: Why is our Maker obsessed with the Dream of the Machine? (Complexity: 4)

Opportunity: Unlock the remaining Question.

Question: How can we invade the Dream of the Machine? (Complexity: 4)

Opportunity: Do your Maker's bidding and resolve the mystery by invading the Dream and taking your place by the Odyssey Seeker's side.

Alternate Opportunity: Defy your Maker and resolve the mystery by invading the Dream and taking the Latchkey's place within it. If you do that, you can change your Latchkey Move(s) and keep all advancements. The real Latchkey becomes an inanimate straw effigy (see **Rewards**). Latchkeys lost in the Chromatic Desert remain there; the Effigy is now a new Latchkey that assumes the identity of a character that seemingly never existed. This Opportunity can only be taken if the Effigy is aware it was created in the image of the Latchkey.

The Key of The Mad God

- ☐ Each Effigy recounts a memory of an Odyssey Seeker meeting a grisly end. This memory should be an alternate version of a scene from the Latchkey's recent or distant past – its outcome unsettlingly gruesome. How does it make you, the player, feel to see the Latchkey erased from that timeline?
- ☐ Each Effigy narrates a present scene in which their Maker - a crooked silhouette in a filthy surgical mask and apron - bustles around an equally filthy lab, making a new Effigy. Describe a single stage of that messy process, and explain why it's deeply disturbing.
- ☐ Each Effigy narrates a vision of a reality in which TV Odyssey has never existed. Describe a Side Character leading a peaceful life in a Deep Lake unmarred by the horrors. How is that character fundamentally different from the person your Latchkey knows?

Moments

- On the furthest horizon, mushroom clouds illuminate the night, casting a distant outline of a conical tower reaching for heavens that do not exist. The tower remains impossibly equidistant regardless of where you are. It can never be reached, and looms on the horizon of every layer of the Machine.
- Unintelligible moans of pain coming from behind a metal door. In a cluttered room, a dying monkey with human eyes, lays on a filthy operating table. Shaggy creatures thrash around within the surrounding cages – squeaking, giggling, howling.
- In the cacophony of industrial bustle, a metal syringe descends from a tangle of cables and conveyor belts on a snake-like hydraulic arm, plunging its needle into a huge, writhing grub. A shiver goes through the giant's body. As it goes limp, the conveyor belt creaks and another grub slides in for a shot.
- A baby's distorted scream pierces the bustle of the factory as giant TV screens mounted in a tangle of machinery flicker to life. All poppets and Oozing Stompers stop what they're doing and look up, mesmerized. A filthy mouth filled with small teeth takes up the entire frame, alternately babbling, giggling, and screaming until the screens go dark.
- A cavernous hallway lined with giants in uniforms, bound to chairs. Their bodies shake from a constant stream of electricity running through a tangle of cables connected to their heads.
- Tens of poppets stand in line on a ramp leading to a blazing industrial oven. They drop down, one by one, vanishing in the heat.

Children of the Machine

Direct offspring of the Great Render of Flesh. Won't directly interact with the Effigies unless they have to, but can send visions, alter the environment, and inflict the Condition: **Hunted by a Great Hunger**. They crawl, slither, and hover – their forms sublime in their shapeshifting excess. The suffering they inflict erases meaning and brings sentience down to its basest instincts. As eternal guardians of the Dream, they do all they can to locate the Effigies in the ever changing bowels of the Machine. As soon as they do, they send a Great Hunger to hunt them down and bring them to the Hospital for surgery.

Dangers

Great Hungers

Sentries of the Children; Effigy hunters. While they assume different forms in different dimensions, within the Machine Great Hungers are a vaguely arachnid amalgamation of metal, plastic, and flesh, their spindly legs uneven in both length and distribution around the abdomen. Surprisingly fast and sneaky, they stalk their prey from the shadows. Their bodies are decorated with garlands made of body parts, hinting at a rather morbid sense of fashion.

Oozing Stompers

Monstrous bipeds resembling cow-sized tumors on swollen, human legs. Mostly found in and around the Factory where they terrorize and kill poppets. Stray ones can be encountered in the Guts of the Machine. Each has at least one eye, but most have three or more – all bloodshot and constantly oozing pus. They seem vile and sadistic, but are mostly mindless. They randomly attack anything that moves, and keep at it until it doesn't.

Feral Effigies

Effigies brought by the Great Hungers to the Hospital: they have undergone more than one surgery. Crazed, hollow, unpredictable, and wrapped in bloodied bandages – one bulging eye peeking through the cloth. Made in the image of a dead Latchkey or Side Character. They may say something that hints at their origin.

Quote: “Please don’t do it, please don’t go! STOP RIGHT THERE YOU FILTHY DOLL!”

Locations

Guts of the Machine

Paths between places shift in a Machine lost in dreams. Use as spaces between other locations, accessed via rusty industrial elevators, trapdoors, scaffoldings, stairs, shafts or cave-ins. Dark and vertical. Reek of burnt oil and rotting meat. Tunnels, stairs and hallways lined with red, blinking lights and leaky pipes, dripping with viscous liquids.

Paint the Scene: *What about these liquids makes you think a terrible sacrifice led to their creation?*

Paint the Scene: *What strange sounds echoing in the Guts of the Machine make you think of a mind lost in time?*

Shadowplay Townhouse

A crooked brick townhouse on a rock, sticking out like a sore thumb against the backdrop of a greenish grey horizon. Its feverishly illuminated windows are noticeable from afar. Surrounded by a landfill of rusting barrels, crooked utility poles, glowing waste, and trash from different eras. A discordant honky tonk piano melody seeps through one of the windows – a shadow of the musician visible in it. Only the foyer is accessible; the doors leading to the rooms are fake.

Paint the Scene: *Each window displays a seemingly looped shadowplay accompanied by the music. What horrifyingly joyful scenes of violence or mischief play out as you approach the townhouse? Each player describes one scene.*

The Factory

The beating heart of the Machine. Densely packed with engines, incandescent ironworks, whirring drills, conveyor belts and cranes, up and down, as far as the eye can see. Millions of poppets are made and killed here. Accidents abound. Strange, smelly liquid, moving through pipes from above and below, flows to the presses from which poppets emerge.

Paint the Scene: *What absurd violations of safety and common sense lead you to believe everything here is designed to perpetuate and justify the suffering of the poppets?*

The Battlefield

A cacophony of war, heard from afar. A neverending clash between masked soldiers, tanks and artillery. Glow of eerily silent atomic explosions illuminates the horizon like giant lava lamps. Everything and everyone ignores the Effigies, but they can easily end up caught in the crossfire if they are not careful.

Paint the Scene: *These soldiers seem to be locked in an eternal struggle over a scorched, worthless ruin. What subtle reminders of things once worth fighting for can still be seen in the landscape?*

The Hospital

No western wall, which makes the building look like a giant dollhouse. Tens of operating rooms caked in blood. Chemical smell – eerily silent. Effigies captured by a Great Hunger are taken here for surgery. Marked on the Map, but unreachable by normal means.

Paint the Scene: *Objects extracted from Effigies lie scattered around the operating rooms – pieces of broken jewelry, blood-soaked letters, cracked glasses, headless dolls. What do you think the surgeons are looking for in the captured Effigies, and why?*

Special Rule: The surgery bars the Effigy from taking the Latchkey’s place in the Dream. Take the Condition: **Hollow**. Additionally, the first Reward becomes an ordinary effigy, used like any other item. The surgery can be avoided by making a Night Move to break free and escape from the Hospital. In addition to what the player was afraid would happen, a miss on that roll results in a longer surgery, as above, and the Latchkey marks the Condition: **Heartless**. The Condition cannot be removed until The Night of the Bone-Wolves ends. The Effigy can leave the Hospital after the procedure, no rolls necessary.

Side Characters

The Mother, master of the Townhouse

A monstrous biped resembling a tumor-infested dinosaur on swollen legs. Its short, thick neck is topped by a disfigured face with bulging eyes and a set of protruding teeth. Claims to have birthed all the shadowplay performers haunting the rooms. Fond of jewelry. Very territorial and prone to bouts of violence. Can be easily outrun or won over with flattery.

Quote: “MACHINE DREAM – I BIRTH <wheezes> – YOU STINK-STINK – I CATALYST – CHILDREN – NEVER STOP – LABOR.”

He Who Walks, a forgotten seer

A gigantic, spindly humanoid with a beaming orb of blinding light where the head should be. Looking directly at it is impossible. Speaks in a thunderous whisper, of a failure it cannot recall. Does its best to help the Effigies, but the way it speaks is cryptic and disjointed. It desires to regain its memories.

Quote: “Can... you understand me? In these lower levels... something *claws* its way up, donning masks of deception... about to strike... but at whom? It’s so bright! I cannot see beyond the light.”

Poppets, cogs in the machine

Mass-produced effigies made of gooey waste flowing from somewhere above and below. They look like dark grey felt mixed with glue and molded into vaguely humanoid shapes. They can be encountered anywhere, but most are made, work and die in the Factory. Have no mouth, communicating with simple gestures. Clumsy and benign.

Pillar of Screaming Skin, a weapon

Fleshy pillar covered in pale, broken mouths – all but one screaming. That one mouth can talk and answer questions quite eloquently – if you can make out what it’s saying through the cacophony, that is. Claims to be a discarded weapon, teeming with power, once used by the wanderers in a long-forgotten war. Proud and sarcastic. Driven to take revenge on its wielder who abandoned it.

Quote: “We don’t know you but we know your kind. You do this bastard’s bidding like lobotomized lap dogs. Over and over again, and for what?”

Sentient Mass of Burping Flesh

Somehow unnoticed by the Oozing Stompers guarding the machinery, this giant grub-shaped mass of flesh rolled off a conveyor belt and, for now, remains off the hook. It can barely move and has no eyes, but asks the Effigies for permission to scan their faces with its antennae. Despite being blind, it's quite observant and provides olfactory and auditory clues if treated with respect.

Quote: *"Don't let the stinger bite you, no, nooooo, <burp> don't let it! Be like it. Be alert. Be invisible. They don't really need it <burp> they just want to torment it, yes, make the pain erase its mind... <burp> its meaning."*

Lost Traveller

Shares the appearance and mannerisms with a well-liked Side Character from an active or solved mystery. Wears a stained, grey robe. Claims to know all about the Dream, but demands sacrifice. Probably lies. Alternately gleeful, sulky and threatening. Driven to lead the Effigies astray.

Quote: *"Yes, yes, yes! I am so glad to be here, so glad to help you! It's been a while since the last batch... I mean, since the last expedition! It gets lonely around here... you sure take your time... you better not be late ever again..."*

Clues

- ☐ A headless torso wearing a yellow suit and a bolo tie shaped like the sun, rotten and torn apart.
- ☐ The closer an Effigy gets to a place or object, the louder and faster the ticking in their chest becomes.
- ☐ A sudden, dread inducing feeling of déjà-vu.
- ☐ A rusty cage with a withered carcass of a canary bird inside.
- ☐ A strange sense of derealization hits you; everything around seems artificial and animated by an invisible hand.
- ☐ A Side Character's speech slowly deteriorates into slurred babbles and screams.
- ☐ Graffiti left by a previous expedition of Effigies, urging the reader to enter the dream with no fear or mercy.
- ☐ A Side Character implies The Machine and the Great Render of Flesh to be one and the same.
- ☐ A discarded scroll of parchment – on it, a barely legible passage of Leviticus (26:29-33).
- ☐ A stained fragment of a screenplay detailing events of a last session's Night Phase. It's mostly accurate, but some events are missing or altered, including some you don't even recall happening.
- ☐ An item from a Latchkey's Corner of the House shattered/caked in blood/altered.
- ☐ A torn-out fragment of a newspaper from 1992 reporting on a mass casualty event in Deep Lake.
- ☐ A vision or account of a currently unresolved story arc from the main campaign going horribly wrong.
- ☐ A big pile of large cowboy boots. They are all left boots, identical to the last tiny speck of dirt.
- ☐ A huge excavation drill in an unusual location, abandoned and rusted. Looks usable.

- ☐ A disfigured Effigy shambling nearby; a misshapen blob whose voice reminds you of one of the Side Characters from an active or finished mystery. They beg the characters to kill it.
- ☐ A Side Character claims that "the Dream is all that's left of Eden".
- ☐ A ruined talk show set: lights, cameras, and decor reminiscent of the 90s.
- ☐ A low, drony hum that only now do you realize has been there since the beginning of your journey, getting louder the deeper you go.
- ☐ The appearance of and distance between places and characters inexplicably changes when you're not looking.

Rewards

All of the following are awarded at the conclusion of the Lost Transmission.

- ☐ Upon waking up the morning after the Remnant is experienced, the Latchkeys discover small straw effigies on their nightstands. Add them to Your Corner of the House. They hold the spirits of the Effigies. You can mark it to gain advantage on any roll without justifying its use – the effigy has made subtle changes to the recent past, turning the odds in your favor. Describe the changes.
 - If an Effigy replaced a Latchkey, the above applies, but the straw effigy holds the trapped spirit of the Latchkey.
 - If an Effigy replaced a Latchkey lost in the Chromatic Desert, the straw effigy is just an ordinary item – its use must be justified in the story.
- ☐ New Move: **Playing God**.

Playing God

You discover a hidden 7-inch wide shaft in the basement of the house on Rodenbecker street beneath a loose floor tile. You can create a straw effigy, bury a working watch in its chest, give it your name, tell it a beautiful lie, and throw it down the shaft. Then, roll with Sensitivity. On a 12+ choose one of the options below and rewrite the past the next time you fall asleep. On a hit, you also have to cross out the chosen option, it cannot be used again by anyone. On a miss, you cross out one of the options without applying the effect and the effigy betrays you. The Key of the Child cannot be used to bump up the result of this roll.

- ☐ The death of a Side Character never happened in this timeline.
- ☐ A miss on the last Answer a Question roll becomes a 12+.
- ☐ One of the Keys of the Child becomes unmarked. The events you narrated into your flashback never happened.
- ☐ One of the Keys of the Child becomes unmarked. The events you narrated into your flashback happened to someone else.

When you use this Move, introduce a side effect that has a negative impact on your character's mental wellbeing.