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We Have Been

We Are

We Will Be

***A Campaign Framework for
The Things We Leave Behind***

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We Have Been, We Are, We Will Be, A Campaign Framework For The Things We Leave Behind, by Jeff Moeller

Introduction

We Have Been, We Are, We Will Be is a campaign framework for *The Things We Leave Behind*, in which the “investigators” play not occult detectives, strictly speaking, but money-grubbing, often flawed reporters and paparazzi. They do not seek out, or initially even care about, monsters and their kind, but for some reason, they have a bad habit of running into them. The reason for their misfortune is that their employer of last resort, their last chance in the news business, is the **Global News Service** (“GNS”). And GNS is not what it seems.

GNS seems, on the surface, to be a small, independent wire service that seems to be where the talented but broken journalist often lands. The highly recognizable and popular dimwit who keeps landing in rehab and just got out of jail; the talented writer who punched his boss for killing a salacious story; the blacklisted security risk; the guy who is good at bribing for leaks but has to lay low after a scandal—these are the men and women who find a virtual desk at GNS. It believes in getting the juicy story no matter what, and markets itself to the networks who buy its stories accordingly.

There's one physical office nowadays, in a shoddy walkup in Cleveland. It's been there since the early 1970s, and there used to be a head office in New York before it fell into a sinkhole in 2001. Money is handled and paychecks are processed out of the lightly staffed Cleveland office, but there is an “Editor in Chief”, Mr. Anthony Patel, who only communicates by email or Skype. He's very polite, well-spoken, a Southern Asian gentleman who speaks impeccable English with a British accent. No one knows where he physically sits, or how to get a hold of him other than to send him an e-mail or leave him a Skype message—he gets a hold of you.

GNS freelancers get put together remotely for an assignment by the Cleveland-based editor, Vince Carthon. The base pay is lousy, but the bonuses for a juicy story are handsome. GNS sells pieces to the major news services and networks, so it both better be good and something the networks wouldn't get on their own. Or nobody eats. Bribes, hacking, breaking and entering, and blackmail are all, accordingly, standard GNS operating procedures.

As Vince Carthon likes to say: “If you're not lying, you're not trying. Cause the leak, don't report it! Get the photo of the celebrity in the casket, don't



Bringing Your Story To The World

GNS

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buy it! Read the grand jury transcript, don't take someone's word for what it says! We don't want kidnappings; we want kidnappings of little girls! Preferably sick ones, preferably blonde ones--they churn the most ratings, because people never get tired of looking at her face." Sex sells, celebrity sells, crazy sells, religion sells, tears and tantrums thrown on camera sell, and GNS is the latex glove that the networks use to maintain plausible deniability. This is all about the dollar; it's a dirty business, but money talks and bullshit walks. And GNS stringers have nowhere else to go, other than maybe some community weekly....

In reality, GNS is a gag, a long con being perpetrated by Mr. Patel, a suave and mostly non-violent avatar of Nyarlathotep secretly based in Las Vegas. GNS is a self-funding sleaze machine, designed to chew up and spit out jackass "journalists" in their final descents into madness and ruin. Patel wants to tease and mock society by having its own "champions of the truth" slowly reveal glimpses of the real truth, tenderizing society to accept ever greater truths.

The truth is out there, and Patel is its messenger: he wants it known, but also fully accepted as inevitable, and that requires time, patience, delivery in small doses, and messengers of his own. He wants hints of the supernatural out there: grainy photos, accusations of cover-ups, hints, fuel for the paranoid; a slow but steady composting and buildup to more profound revelations.

Patel gives those who would sell their souls for a story and a buck the means to do so, ultimately laying claim to them when they cannot resist getting that one last scoop: who they actually work for.

Some Commentary on Nosy Reporter Television Memes and Genre Conceits

The inspiration for this campaign framework was a question that I had while watching a particular episode of the classic 1974 U.S. television series, *Kolchak, The Night Stalker*, entitled *We Have Been, We Are, We Will Be*. The protagonist, a classic (perhaps the classic) Intrepid Reporter, gets himself in the middle of a police investigation of an invisible, downright Lovecraftian, alien horror. He sees obvious evidence of the horror, which bizarrely kills several people, tosses gangs of police around invisibly, and even finds its spacecraft (which it has stolen resources from around Chicago to repair). Yet, for all of this, he is only able to report on the slimmest aspects of this (anything too bizarre being killed by his editor). And more strangely still, Kolchak is allowed to walk free (!) by the vast numbers of police and government officials that get involved trying to corral the thing.

I love this show to death, but this particular episode (over and above the series as a whole) forced me to ask some meta-questions. First, how is it that one particular reporter keeps stumbling onto chunk after chunk of the bizarre?



Perhaps there is some agency involved: someone needs a guy to let the steam off on these stories, someone with enough experience in them not to get killed, but who will still ensure that some carefully controlled amount of information gets out. Enough information should not get out to be seriously believed and cause a panic or mass reaction from the populace, but enough should get out to fuel the public's imagination. Who would want such an outcome, and be willing and able to manipulate the situation accordingly? It would have to be someone who wanted to prepare humanity for greater truths, in a controlled way, with a great deal of subtle influence and resources, and with no morals or compunctions about ruining people's lives. In other words, Nyarlathotep was an ideal candidate.

The Intrepid Reporter genre of fiction puts primacy on getting the story. Intrepid reporters are reluctant or accidental heroes at best, and often, they are not heroes at all. They're not involved to fight monsters; monsters are for running away from. They're not police officers; police officers are tools (figuratively and literally) to follow around and cherry-pick for information. If the cops are rushing somewhere, follow them, because there might be a story. Police band radios playing in the background are a must. You don't want to solve the mystery; you want to find out what is going on and then make a buck off of it. Getting the best images, though, requires getting in close; there's no room in this business for complete chickens.

There are very few skill checks and rolls that an Intrepid Reporter should ever make if properly played, and combat checks are not among them. **Fast Talk** to distract a police officer or security guard to slip by them, or to get them angry and blurt out something you can put in your story, is a staple. Intrepid Reporters almost always have very high **Fast Talk** proficiency.

Persuade (with bonuses for bribes) is also a staple. Since reporters have no badges, warrants or legal sanction, they often have sources (sometimes

within law enforcement) who, for compensation, will let them look at a file or give them an "off the record" statement.

Stealth and surreptitious methods of gaining entry to places and databases (**Computer Use**, **Electronics**, **Locksmith**) are likewise staples. Weapon skills are often minimal, as are in depth knowledge of arts and sciences. **Library Use** is often high (as they are used to poring through old archives and have networks of sources).

Unscrupulous people, or people not used to notoriety, will often be more cooperative with Intrepid Reporters than they might with the police; they will seek out reporters for a payday and some television time.

Nosy reporters are often getting themselves into trouble with the police, if they are pushing their noses into police business as hard as they ought to. They often have their cameras seized or destroyed (and are good at instantly backing things up), spend the night in jail, but rarely suffer serious consequences for their nosiness. In other words, they are Lucky as hell and have a certain amount of Teflon coating their behinds.

History of the Global News Service

Up until the "corporate reorganization" in 2001, GNS' history was pretty straightforward. It was an independent wire service founded in New York in 1914 by Naresh Patel, ostensibly the great-great-grandfather of Tony, the current Editor-in-Chief. It operated out of a small office in the Red Hook neighborhood, and specialized in grisly war correspondence. Journalists of the time can comment on its reputation for daring-do and slightly sleazy tricks, but its real reputation was for getting unvarnished reporting from the front lines. Its reporters were often hard-bitten war veterans or talented castoffs from other news organizations who couldn't get along with other people. Naresh was succeeded by Reza (1936), Mohammed (1979)

and finally Tony (2001). Pictures of any of the older Patels are not readily found, but they all look like period-appropriate variations of one another.

In the spring of 2001, the building in which its New York offices were housed collapsed into a sinkhole. Coverage of the incident is surprisingly scarce and hard to find. Contemporary newspaper reports (**Library Use** roll) that can be dug up observe that the building was found to be above a previously unknown tunnel, apparently dating from colonial times, whose structure collapsed. The site was plowed under and turned into a small community garden, the Red Hook Harvest Cooperative.

Feel free to tie the address of the old building and/or stock records of the old New York Global News Service, Inc. into other Mythos-influenced corporations or rumored activities.

Current Operations (On the Surface)

On the surface, GNS is a shady, small, tightly-controlled independent news organization with few permanent employees. At any given time there are about six total freelance stringers—people who, like the investigators, get sent out on assignments. Beyond that, there are a total of only three people associated with it. It has a reputation in news circles as a hack job specialist: a shady group that will dirty its hands and act as a cut-out for more reputable organizations trying to get a messy story. It also has a reputation for being fearless.

It is, however, a legitimate, lawfully operated business. Minimal research reveals that the Global News Service, LLC is a limited liability company (“LLC”) established in the State of Ohio, with John Clancy, a corporate lawyer at a skyscraper firm in Cleveland, as its registered public agent. It is privately held, so information about current ownership is not easily obtained from public sources. In 2001, Mr. Clancy converted the business to an Ohio LLC from a New York corporation. Its New York address no longer exists, as it fell into a sink-

hole. (See “*Looking for Headquarters*” for more details on pursuing such a line of inquiry).

It also pays huge bonuses: a typical salary is only about \$30,000/year plus reimbursement for reasonable bribes and honorariums (a budget is established at the outset of every assignment), but bonuses of \$50,000 or more for a juicy story are commonplace.

The players are contacted via Skype or secure/encrypted email or cell phone when assignments are available. Not every assignment is occult oriented; it may simply be a sensational news story or require some corner cutting to get what the client is after. Getting a picture of the hot new celebrity couple might be intermixed with getting an exclusive on some kind of apparent suicide with sensational overtones. They are sworn to secrecy and to exclusively working for GNS. Moonlighting or breaches of confidentiality result in “termination for cause” (see below for what that entails).

“The Staff”

There are only two staff members at the Cleveland office, Geraldine South and Vince Carthon. Vince plays the role of harried, grumpy, frustrated editor; Geraldine plays the role of incredibly nice secretary, receptionist, payroll clerk and general factotum and little old lady. Vince is what he appears to be; Geraldine is not.

Geraldine South

Geraldine has an elaborately and carefully documented life history for her current guise with only one (deliberate) flaw in it, discussed in “Looking for Headquarters.” Barring extreme efforts to unearth the flaw, she is to every appearance a 79 year old woman, always toying with the idea of retirement but constantly putting it off to “take care of her family”, i.e., the players. She takes care of everything quickly, gets them their reimbursements as soon as humanly possible, pays their parking tickets and makes their travel arrange-

ments, and arranges for their bail. Her interpersonal skills are excellent and she never gives offense; she is grandmotherly to the extreme.

She has a carefully documented job history of secretarial and office manager work stretching back into the 1950s, all of which is real and accurate, along with vital statistics records and a birth certificate (showing birth in Massachusetts in 1936) which are not. Geraldine has never been married and has no children (at least as far as public records show). She appears as a frail, bent over, rail-thin little old blue-haired lady, but this is both a glamour and an act.

Geraldine (they will never learn her true name) was actually born the daughter of a notorious sorcerer in the Severn Valley of England in 1603, and has been a loyal, senior cultist of Nyarlathotep since she hit puberty. A witch with the cult name "Lucretia of the Left Hand" might be mentioned in any appropriate Mythos tome as a particularly debauched, libertine and violent participant in rituals to the Black Man, and is (accurately) reported to have borne the Black Man a child and actually survived the experience. Her current form is that of a little old lady named Estelle Winthrop that she ate in 1951, in preparation for her current deep cover role. She can change back and forth in an instant to her true form, a young, buxom, exotically beautiful, raven-haired English woman. Another form that she can switch into is that of a blocky, severe, middle-aged American psychiatrist.

Her contacts in the Mythos, occult and criminal underworlds are extensive; she can get the players bailed out and charges dropped or greatly reduced in many places, and get people to bend the rules in many ways that few others could. She has been on decades long, deep cover roles for her Master at various points in time, as an actress (several times), lawyer and psychiatrist, and is both extremely cunning and a master manipulator. This time around, though, she's a sweet, highly organized old lady that no one can say no to. Unless it comes to a matter of having to terminate a player from further

employment, or remedy a breach of confidentiality, her instructions are to help the players, let them make their own mistakes and set their own agenda, and keep them on task.

Bad things (ranging from failed **Luck** rolls at inopportune moments (courtesy of her *Evil Eye* spell) to termination from employment) invariably happen to people who mistreat Geraldine.

"Geraldine South", Grandma to the Players

Nationality: American

STR 90 CON 90 SIZ 50 INT 90 POW 100 DEX 80
APP 70 SAN 00 EDU 100 Luck 100 HP 14
Age: 413 (appears 79)

Move: 9.

Build 0.

Damage Bonus: +1d4.

Education: At various stages of her prolonged existence, she has trained as an actress, and another of her guises studied psychiatry in Vienna with Freud.

Weapon: Fighting (Brawling) 90%.
Handgun (Firearms) 99%, Colt M1911A1 .45 ACP, 1d10+2, base range 15, rate of fire 1(2), capacity 7+1, 8 HP, malfunction 99-00. She keeps this vintage firearm in her desk drawer, loaded. It was taken off of an investigator that she ate in 1924.

Skills: Own Language (English) 99%,
Other Language (German) 99%,
Art/Craft (Acting) 95%,
Cthulhu Mythos 55%, Charm 95%,
Credit Rating 95%, Dodge 80%,

Drive Automobile 80%, Law 90%, Library Use 90%, Listen 50%, Lore (Religion) 85%, Occult 95%, Persuade 90%, Psychoanalysis 90%, Psychology 95%, Spot Hidden 50%, Stealth 90%, Swim 0%; others as desired by the Keeper.

Spells:

Many, including: Call Nyarlathotep (as the Black Man), Cloud Memory, Consume Likeness, Contact Nyarlathotep (as the Black Man), Dread Clutch of Nyogtha, Enthrall Victim, Evil Eye, Flesh Ward, Levitate, Mental Suggestion, Shriveling, Summon/Bind Hunting Horror, others that the Keeper may desire and that may be appropriate to a very senior and favorite priestess of the Black Man.

Defenses: None above base, but if

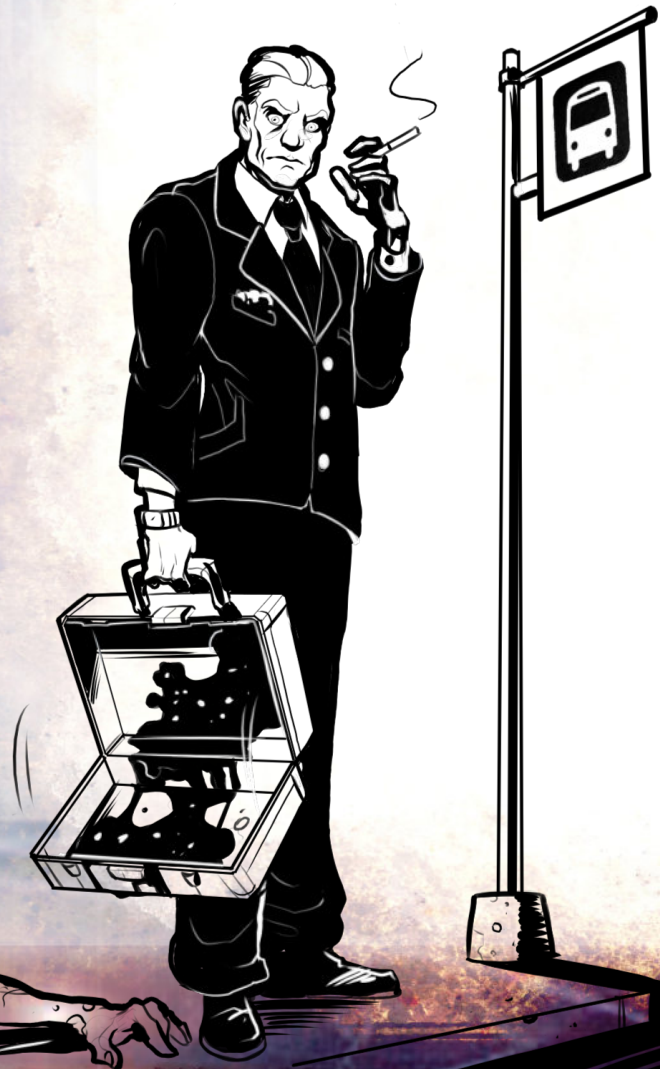
expecting trouble will often be prepared with Flesh Ward, and have a Hunting Horror nearby if possible.

Recruitment and Templates

When establishing a GNS player, try to stick to the same basic recruitment pattern. Each player should have some sort of demon that drives them to stick their nose into other people's business and/or desperately need money. They should also be subject to blackmail, because that is the chief way in which GNS controls them. They need to be at a desperate point in their lives, or GNS wouldn't be interested in them in the first place. They might be substance abusers, gambling addicts, have dark secrets they do not want exposed, or just be driven to uncover weird truths and have enemies that they are just one step ahead of. Suddenly, once they start for the GNS, the enemies are backed off—for now. See the nearby box on "**Recruit No. 38**" for a good example of how to structure a back story.

Recruitment follows a tried and true script. GNS waits until a potential target reaches rock bottom and enters some sort of custody (involuntary commitment, arrest, extraordinary rendition). There is a period of lost time, which corresponds to GNS taking custody of the player. "Geraldine" questions them using both magic and pharmaceuticals, psychoanalyzes them, selectively mind-wipes them with *Cloud Memory*, switches into her psychiatrist guise (she ate the real psychiatrist in 1889), and wakes them up in a pre-paid apartment in a random U.S. location. Any immediate problems (lawsuits, criminal charges) have been solved one way or another, usually legally but occasionally through a convenient disappearance (e.g., a critical witness "disappeared" down the gullet of a Hunting Horror).

"Geraldine" uses not a carrot and stick approach with potential players, but a carrot, stick and sledgehammer approach. Her pitch is simple: "You work for GNS now. It's your last chance. We expect a minimum one year commitment in exchange



for what we have already done for you in terms of straightening out your latest mess. We have really good lawyers, good connections and pay well for good talent. You, in exchange, are expected to work for us, pursue the story, and not be a chicken. We don't want chickens. Just be yourself, and things will be fine. If, after a year, you would prefer to go do something else, we'll be O.K. with that as long as you maintain confidentiality, show up for assignments in the meantime, and don't shirk your job. You get this apartment for a year and a base stipend, and rewards for good stories are high. You won't be asked to do anything violent, or so illegal that we can't get you out of it with some minor inconvenience. If you are pissing off the wrong people, we'll tell you, and give you a chance to change direction. But...if you don't fulfill your contract, you will be terminated for cause. If that happens, we will undo everything it is we did for you and if you ever break confidentiality, even in the slightest, or moonlight, even in the slightest..." She leaves the threat unconcluded.

The unconcluded threat, the sledgehammer, is the updated witchcraft biochips that have been implanted in their left ears. They are a combination of tracking device (GNS knows where they are at all times); spy camera (the Editor-in-Chief sees and hears everything that they are doing); and kill switches (they can induce, if activated, an incredibly rapidly growing brain tumor that kills within a week of activation).

Mr. Patel plays fair

On the off chance that a GNS reporter serves out at least a year and wants to go do something else, as long as he never talks about what he did while working at GNS to a third party, he is left alone. This has only happened once—the sort of people they recruit can't help but blab, and those that bring enough self-preservation instincts to the table to keep what they learn about GNS to themselves often spiral down into the madness that ends with working for Mr. Patel more directly. (See "*Looking for Headquarters*" for more details).

Following are three suggested templates to generate suitable characters for GNS

The 7th Edition rulebook gives us a starting template for the Journalist as follows: **Art/Craft (Photography)**, **History**, **Library Use**, **Own Language**, one interpersonal skill (**Charm**, **Fast Talk**, **Intimidate** or **Persuade**), **Psychology**, any two other skills.

Credit Rating: 9–30.

Occupation Skill Points: EDU x4.

This setting is a bit more cinematic than these guidelines allow, and they do not take into account the status of the players as damaged goods.

All characters in this setting should have 2d10 **SAN** knocked off of their starting totals, to reflect past trauma and their general disheveled state. To make up for this, each of them should receive 3d10 **Luck**, up to a maximum of 99, and **EDU** x6 instead of x4 to reflect prior experience. Nervous wrecks making narrow escapes are a staple of the genre.

Nosy Pest

The classic, cinematic intrepid reporter, your love of the story (and perhaps, some interest in exposing the truth or helping your fellow man) drives you to stick your nose where it doesn't belong. You have good contacts with disgruntled, unappreciated and underpaid elements of law enforcement, and a network of snitches and rats who expect to be paid. You are very good at getting yourself into places where you don't belong; infuriating people into letting things slip; and somehow avoiding lasting consequences. Examples from fiction: Carl Kolchak (from *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* (1974)); Lee Taylor (from *Doctor X* (1932)); Robert Caulfield (from *Capricorn One* (1978)); Lois Lane (especially in the 1950s television version of *The Adventures of Superman*).

Occupation Skills: **Fast Talk** (minimum of 50%),

Art/Craft (Photography) (typically low, drat those grainy photographs),
Computer Use, History, Law (typically low), **Library Use, Persuade, Psychology, Stealth.**

Equipment Package: Obvious, low tech recording device (designed to be seen and confiscated by law enforcement and give witnesses something reassuring to talk into)

Obvious, low tech video camera (again, designed to be seen and confiscated by law enforcement)

Several highly concealable and difficult to detect audiovisual recording devices, which do the actual recording work

Ambiguous looking press credentials

(possible to mistake as law enforcement credentials)

Reliable transportation

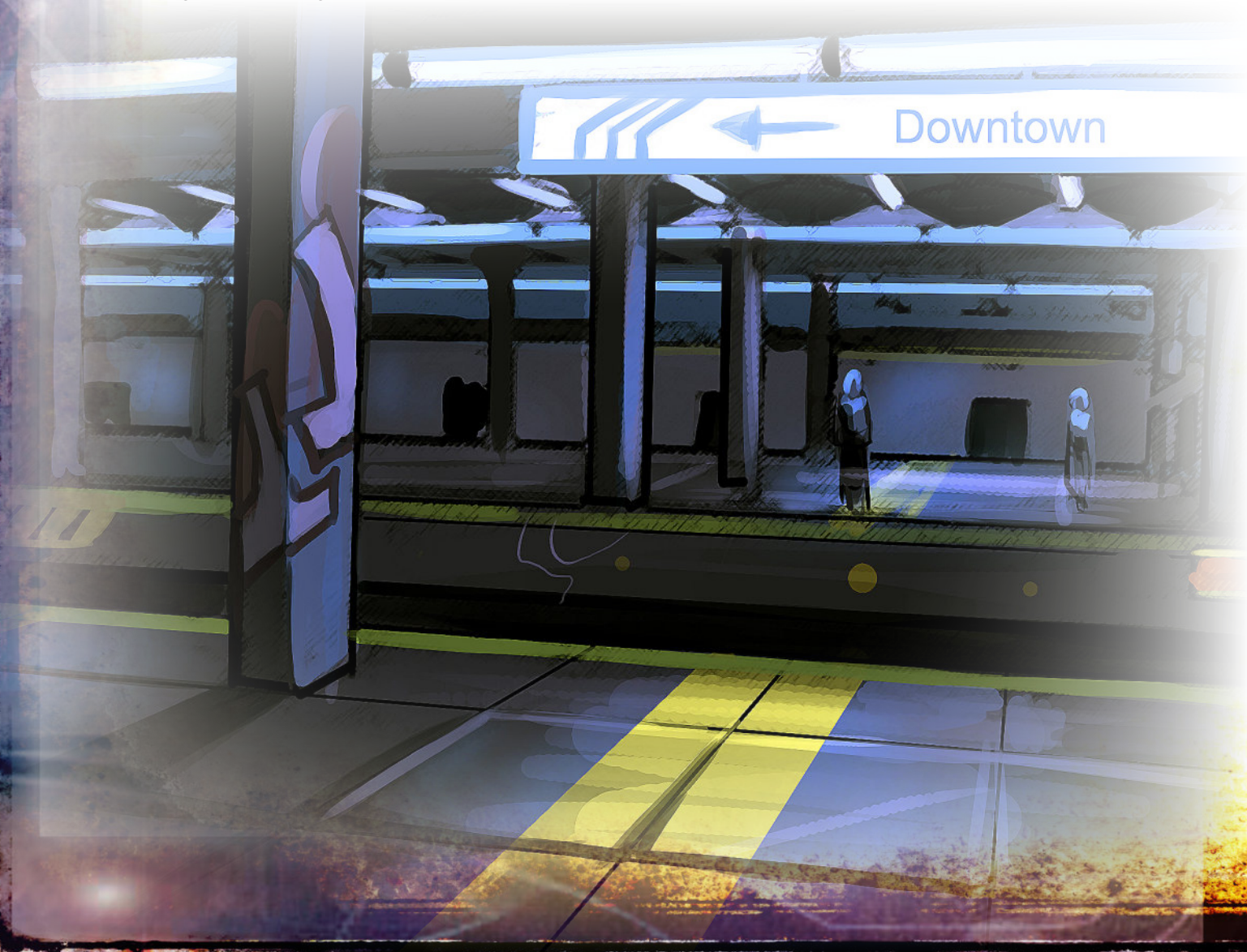
Copy of the U.S. Constitution (to wave in the faces of law enforcement officers)

Bail money, in cash

Bribe money, in cash

High end smart device (encrypted)

Police band scanner in vehicle



Paparazzi

Intrusive, amoral (often downright immoral) photographers or videographers with little respect for the privacy of others, driven by the potential for a big payday. Fictional examples often are tech-savvy. Examples from fiction: Freddy Lounds (from *Red Dragon* (1981)) is the classic example.

Occupational Skills: **Art/Craft (Photography)** (high), **Computer Use** (high), **Dodge**, **Drive Automobile or Motorcycle**, **Electrical Repair**, **Electronics**, **Fast Talk**, **Locksmith**, **Spot Hidden**, **Stealth**.

Equipment Package:

High end video recording equipment

High end smart device (encrypted)

Computer setup with audio and video enhancement and cleanup software and (likely illegal) hacking software

Burglary tools (not regularly carried but kept hidden at home)

Fast transportation capable of getting into tight places (e.g., motorcycle, motor scooter, bicycle)

Parabolic microphone (invaluable, check local laws before using openly)

Surveillance kit (fiber optic cable connected to recording device, binoculars and/or telephoto lens)

Bail money, in cash

Bribe money, in cash

Hot Mess

A possibly famous and quite possibly brilliant journalist, now spiraling into madness or suicide

from stress, the inability to accept setbacks, addiction and/or some dark secret that is being exploited. Still gets ratings, though; even more darkly, the Hot Mess gets better ratings from the public's hope that something weird might just happen on air, be it a wardrobe malfunction or a meltdown. That off chance makes them marginally more interesting to many viewers than the alternative. Examples from fiction: Howard Beale (from *Network* (1976)) is the classic example; he reads the news in his pajamas as he breaks down and is ultimately assassinated on air for ratings. Watch this film if you haven't. Other examples would include Phil Connors from *Groundhog Day* (1993).

Occupation Skills: **Charm** (minimum of 50%), **Credit Rating**, **Fast Talk**, **Own Language**, **Other Language**, **History**, **Library Use**, **Persuade**, **Psychology**.

Equipment Package: Antidepressants

Alcohol in concealable flask

Illicit stimulants

Makeup kit

Porcelain veneers

A good criminal defense attorney

Bail money, in cash

Bribe money, in cash

Sidekick/errand runner/personal assistant, possibly another player-character (invaluable)

The latest in fashion

The latest in smart devices (maybe encrypted, maybe not) (carried by personal assistant)

Vanity plates on leased luxury vehicle

Viagra

“Editorial”

Vince Carthon is the editor. In theory, he's the players' boss; in practice he is ineffectual at actually controlling their actions. Players get terminated from employment when Mr. Patel decides that they are ineffective or security risks, and then they get the bad news from Geraldine. Vince may “fire” them only to relent five minutes later, or the next time that there's a new story. He's an exasperated hothead.

It's his job to apologize to people that get offended by the players' shenanigans, deal with the lawyers and police, and sell stories to the network. He fumes, chases people down the hall, lectures, and kills or sanitizes stories that no one will believe. He is not a cultist; he thinks that GNS is a legitimate operation. Despite being a complete nervous wreck, he does have knacks for both sales and for rewriting reports to make them more believable. He really needs to cut back on the caffeine and doughnuts though, before they cut him down.

Vince was the first recruit for the current GNS, and has been working at the Cleveland office since 2001, when the New York office fell into a sinkhole. The prior staff reportedly “resigned”, except for Geraldine, who wasn't at work that day, and the “Patel family” put Tony in charge. Vince was picked up after a major layoff at a Cleveland newspaper, for which he got no severance. He's an angry, unsettled bachelor whose whole life is the GNS. He lives upstairs from the office, has no wife, few friends other than some poker buddies, and no children.

He knows nothing about ownership beyond “the Patel family, as its will is expressed by Tony”, and doesn't care to. It's not that he has his head in the sand; rather, he just doesn't care. It's all about

(yellow) journalism and balancing “getting out the truth” with “making a buck.”

Vince Carthon

Stressed Out Heart Attack In The Making

Nationality: American

STR 55 CON 55 SIZ 70 INT 65 POW 55 DEX 50
APP 50 SAN 35 EDU 65 Luck 55 HP 12 Age: 53

Move: 7.

Build 1.

Damage Bonus: +1d4.

Education: B.A., Journalism, Kent State University.

Weapon: None above base.

Skills: Own Language (English) 90%,
Art/Craft (Photography) 30%,
Bargain 50%, Computer Use 30%,
Credit Rating 50%, Dodge 33%,
Drive Automobile 30%,
Fast Talk 10%, Intimidate 0%,
Law 25%, Library Use 70%,
Listen 50%, Spot Hidden 50%,
Stealth 50%.

Defenses: None above base.

“The Editor-In-Chief”

Tony Patel is a mysterious and reclusive figure with no social media presence. He is never met in person, but might occasionally Skype into a meeting or participate in a teleconference or chat session (*Charlie's Angels* style). He only gets directly involved when the stakes are high or the assignment is unusual; mostly Vince Carthon directs the players and Geraldine South handles details. When he is encountered, he is a young man of South Asian extraction, in his



Searchers after horror
haunt strange, far places.

~H. P. Lovecraft

mid-30s, always wearing a black suit and black tie (almost like a uniform). He speaks impeccable English with a British accent and is flawlessly polite, often reminding ruder people to mind their manners and avoid conflict with their co-workers. "We're all in this together until the end, after all", he often says. Anyone who hints at Mythos knowledge in his virtual presence is looked at oddly; it is impossible to get a rise out of Tony Patel.

Mr. Patel is, and all his "relatives" before him were, avatars of Nyarlathotep. Remember that he has seen and heard everything that each player has seen or heard since joining GNS, thanks to their bio-implants, so putting one over on him is a tall order. He doesn't mind or react to chicanery, skullduggery, or worried musings about the nature of their jobs or the universe, but breaches of confidentiality (involving a third party in their business) is punished with a fast-growing brain tumor.

Notes on Running an Effective Scenario with Reluctant Heroes

"Run toward the story, don't run away from it."—Vince Carthon.

It's really a pretty simple racket. Vince Carthon encourages the players, again with carrots and sticks, to test the boundaries of the law (and ethics be damned) to get a juicy story that he can sell to the networks. In most cases, the players are acting at the plausibly deniable behest of one or more major news organizations. They want the dirt but don't want their hands dirty, so they hire the players as agents provocateur. Worrying about societal decay and the collapse of private space is not their concern; if they are the sorts of people who worry about such things, they may be involuntarily terminated.

The carrots are large and plentiful for success: money, drugs, high living, wild parties. Or, if the player in question is more altruistic or tortured in outlook, lawsuits get settled, problems clear up, or relatives get helped out of a jam. If the investigator

desperately needs money for his little sister's cancer treatment, she suddenly hits remission thanks to an experimental treatment. The business is profitable and (secretly) run toward a view of breaking even, so money earned gets passed out to those who earned it. It's almost as if Mr. Patel doesn't care about paying himself, and indeed, he doesn't. People who take chances and don't get caught are well rewarded. People who do get caught but don't squeal are likewise treated well. Cowards don't get paid, but cowardice is not judged against "fighting monsters" but "getting something lurid that the networks will pay for." No one wants or expects anyone to fight anything; just call the cops, that's their job. Your job is to get footage of what the cops do in response. Everyone loves watching a good firefight.

The sticks are more threatened than actually swung, but occasionally a light rap across the knuckles is needed. Cowards who don't try to get the story might be slow to be bailed out, or have something bad happen to them in custody. Consistent cowards get involuntarily terminated, mysteriously disappearing and/or dying "after a short illness." Vince Carthon just assumes that they flaked out; he honestly has no idea what happens to his fired employees, and he doesn't care enough about them to try and find out.

It should be obvious, incidentally, that there is a cause and effect relationship between these upturns and downturns of fortune, and how hard the players push to get the seamy underside of a story.

One concern that must be handled carefully is players who get evidence of the supernatural. And this brings directly into play the players' confidentiality agreements. Anything that they learn while on a story belongs to GNS, period. No moonlighting, no leaks, no squealing to the cops or Feds. Everything goes to Vince Carthon, who decides what gets edited and what doesn't. Anyone who tries to do an end run around Vince gets terminated, no second chances, no excuses. Hammer this home to them during their "orientation" session.

The value of the stories they get depends on them being exclusive. With this kind of edgy stuff, the value is only in the first sale. And Vince honestly doesn't believe in the supernatural, no matter how hard you try to convince him. He believes that other people believe in it, though, so he has a way of presenting grainy photographs and spinning the supernatural into plausibly non-supernatural things.

Now, of course, occasionally, if they are poking the bear hard enough to get a good reaction, the bear will swipe at them. Intelligent entities may not want their pictures taken or their business in the news, and they may hunt down the players, lash out at them, or set traps for them. Again, the secret to the players' success is counterintuitive to the way most *Call of Cthulhu* games go; let someone else handle it once you are out of immediate danger. Nudge the cops in the right direction as they throw you out of their offices and confiscate (one) of your cameras (and always, always back things up).

The Rules Of Engagement and Termination from Employment

There are really only four rules when you work for GNS. One, if you get caught somewhere you shouldn't be, don't squeal. Two, if we bail you out, you'd better have something good. Three, don't ever ask who you work for beyond Mr. Patel. And four, don't break your confidentiality agreement. Breaking these rules will result in disciplinary action, up to and including separation for cause.

The names and addresses of people who have worked for GNS since the 2001 reorganization are highly confidential. Neither Vince Carthon nor Geraldine South nor Tony Patel will discuss such information. While it is kept on Geraldine's computer, in a well-encrypted and password protected file (Extreme success on **Computer Use** to hack), this will set off a system alert and notify both Geraldine and Mr. Patel of what has occurred (a second Extreme success on **Computer Use** to

notice and prevent). Any such effort moves that player and his accomplices (remember, Patel is always watching and listening) to the end game (see "**Looking for Headquarters**", below). What they find is that out of 37 correspondents (including themselves) since the 2001 reorganization, 10 were killed, died and/or vanished while on the job; there are the investigators themselves; and most of the rest have addresses and phone numbers that simply do not check out any longer. In about half the post-employment cases (roughly 10), the person mysteriously vanished, leaving their cars, keys, wallets, and homes behind, their romantic partners mystified, their accounts untouched, their pets uncared for. (Some of these were eliminated by Geraldine and/or a Hunting Horror; others have "moved up to management" and now haunt the sidewalks of Las Vegas, as discussed below). When people get "involuntarily terminated" from GNS employment, they get involuntarily separated, limb from limb. Troublemakers might instead get sent on a "story" from which they are unlikely to return. People that they decide need to die slowly simply have their tumor factories activated, and they die raving and mad, with whatever comes out of their mouths being discredited accordingly.

Only one former GNS stringer is behaving himself, and that is Bob Tyler. Bob served out his year, made progress on his addiction to cocaine, and found a job as a videographer at a court reporting service in Trenton, New Jersey. He steadfastly refuses, barring torture or magical coercion, to discuss anything that he ever saw or knew about while working at GNS from 2005 to 2006. If approached or questioned, he reports the matter to Geraldine immediately, and may run, fight, beg, or cower as he sees most fit to get away from the investigators. He realized that all of his former colleagues died or vanished and has had enough force of will, so far, to avoid their fate. A **Psychology** roll might reveal that he is deathly afraid of sweet little Geraldine; he noticed once that her shadow does not match her petite, grandmotherly form, and she noticed that he noticed.

Recruit No. 38

Jules Thomas comes from a wealthy Los Angeles area family. His father is a modestly successful Hollywood director, and his mother is a retired B-movie “scream queen” of the 1980s. While reasonably intelligent, he is unfocused, weak-willed, and defines himself in terms of measuring up to the rest of his successful family—which he has failed to do.

He showed some early promise and aptitude in the technical side of film making (editing, camera wizardry and computer effects). Despite a lengthy juvenile record involving pot, shoplifting and underage consumption of alcohol, he managed to get into film school at U.C.L.A immediately after high school. His less-than-sober ways continued there, but he did well despite himself, until the evening after his last freshman exams. Something

forgot something that he had seen.

With a knack for technical film-making and associated computer systems, and an introduction from his mother, he was able to get a job in London for a new tabloid, *The Weekly Eye*, as a “technical photography specialist”. That was a good job by his standards, which lasted about 3 years.

He developed a knack for devising special equipment that could get “the money shot,” using tricks like fiber optics, strategically placed and highly reflective surfaces, and turning people’s wireless devices into remote “zombie” cameras.

One day, about a year ago, while attempting to hack the cell phone of some Duchess that he’d never heard of, he got a bit more than he bargained for. He doesn’t remember what happened after the man in the commando gear stuck a needle in his



JT-4463-489A



THOMAS, Jules
Incident Photographer

Bringing Your Story To The World

happened at a frat party; Jules honestly does not remember what. However, his father showed up the next morning, bailed him out of jail, and whisked him off to the U.K. The co-ed’s death was ruled an accident, but none of his college buddies would return his calls any longer. He knows that at least one of them was paid off by his father to

neck, and doesn’t remember what he saw on the phone, either. But he still doesn’t sleep well, whatever happened.

He woke up in a nice apartment in Henderson, NV, just outside of Las Vegas. All of his things were there, and he had lost two weeks of time.

The woman who was watching him wouldn't give her name; she was a non-descript, slightly heavy, severe, middle-aged woman in a business suit. But he knew a psychiatrist when he saw one; Daddy had sent him to enough of those over the years.

She laid it out for him: This was his last chance, and Daddy says hi. Jules started to leave at that point, but when she queued up previously unseen cell phone footage from his last night at the frat house, Jules sat down and shut up.

Jules would now be working, exclusively on a freelance basis, for the Global News Service. That wasn't so bad, he thought; he had heard of them and they weren't afraid to take risks. He was to reside in Las Vegas and always be available. Assignments would come in by Skype from Cleveland. There would be a stipend, which he would not be able to live comfortably on. Successful jobs—getting footage that the networks didn't have but would pay top dollar for—would be rewarded well. As long as he did his job when asked, he would be safe from his “past indiscretions”. If not, well, the Duchess has a lot of friends. So did that co-ed.

Last year he pulled down \$250,000. He wouldn't dream of quitting.

Jules Thomas,
Complete Jackass Paparazzo

Nationality: American

STR 55 CON 55 SIZ 60 INT 65 POW 45 DEX 80
APP 70 SAN 35 EDU 65 Luck 85 HP 12 Age: 26

Move: 8.

Build 0.

Damage Bonus: +0.

Education: Went to U.C.L.A. film school (for a year) on Daddy's dime, kicked out for “trashing a

frat house in a drunken frenzy” (real reason not made public).

Weapon: None above base; carries pepper spray.

Skills: Own Language (English) 70%,
Other Language (Spanish) 50%,
Art/Craft (Photography) 50%,
Charm 40%, Computer Use 50%,
Credit Rating 50%, Dodge 33%,
Drive Motorcycle 30%,
Electrical Repair 50%,
Electronics 75%, Fast Talk 50%,
Law 25%, Library Use 50%,
Listen 50%, Locksmith 33%,
Spot Hidden 50%, Stealth 50%.

Defenses: None above base.

Indefinite

Insanity: Substance Abuse Disorder
(mostly alcohol)

The Things We Leave Behind,
as a Linked Campaign:

After each player goes through his or her respective orientation, they are simply left to wait for a few weeks. This is deliberate; GNS wants to see if they can adjust to their new reality. Then they are thrown right into a dangerous story, again, as a kind of trial by fire to weed out those lacking the appropriate outlook on matters.

Ladybug, Ladybug, Fly Away Home is a good starting point. No adjustments are needed; the players simply take on the role of the meddlesome pests shadowing the F.B.I.'s kidnapping investigation (and perhaps moving it along). They should provide tidbits that they uncover to the F.B.I. and film what happens; and constantly pester the F.B.I. for “comments” on camera to see what reaction they get. The investigators are expected to interview the parents (showcasing and doing “sec-

ond-reel” on their religious views and their daughter’s illness) and get into their good graces. They will be expected to build an entertaining story on how the End Times might be coming; to find the girl and get a shouted-through-the-door interview with Lindsay Peale before the F.B.I. arrives; film the standoff; and get themselves invited to a happy homecoming/weird religious ceremony. As they go, if they get a sense that, perhaps, there is something to the Balfours’ Passover Angel, this will put them in a nicely awkward spot.

Depending on how they handle the scenario *Ladybug, Ladybug*, they may be allowed to continue, or they may be involuntarily terminated. People who need psychiatric assistance, who have serious misgivings about what they are doing, who feel genuinely sorry for Regina Balfour, or who want to go drink themselves into a stupor—these people are all, paradoxically, just fine by GNS standards. As long as they abide by the basic rules—maintain confidentiality, get the story—and are willing to get back up on the horse, they are welcome to do so. Quitters are simply never seen again; perhaps they died of a sudden brain tumor (doubtlessly caused by the Plagues of the Passover Angel), or perhaps they just suddenly vanish. It’s difficult to find a body from inside a Hunting Horror’s gullet.

You can follow up with any of the other investigations, in any order, other than *Forget Me Not*, which should be saved for last and will need a couple of minor modifications. A suggested order and suggested modifications to the hooks are below:

Hell in Texas

A lurid suicide, a deliberately provocative haunted house, and allegations of corrupt police officials—smells like a story! The players will be sent into this scenario with instructions to do an expose on the local police, probing into a potential cover-up of any deaths. They will be encouraged to infiltrate the Hell House construction project, and to get footage of the police abusing people to protect the church’s secrets. They should be encouraged to in-

terview friends and family of the deceased, pester the police and church leaders for on-air comments, and shoot some (covert) B-roll of the beliefs of the churchgoers (with a view toward humiliating them). Bonuses are handsome for being live on the scene of a shooting rampage, of course. There is an excellent chance that they will be locked up and/or run out of town, but GNS quickly brings legal resources to their aid to get them back on scene. You might time their re-arrival with the climax of the scenario (the shooting spree).

Intimate Encounters

This is a straight-up investigation into the Lipo Killer, ideally undertaken parallel to the police investigation. The players should, in order to get choice footage, be trying to stay ahead of the police investigation and cutting corners (hacking into websites, breaking and entering the industrial park) that the police would not cut. Bribes to coroners and “friends” in the police department should flow, and the police should again be portrayed as antagonists in the way of the “juicy details.” The players should have little idea of just what the hell it is that they ultimately run into, and you may want to limit the blast radius to give them a chance to escape the industrial park at the end.

Alternatively, this is the sort of scenario in which (because of the blast radius), the players are forced, despite themselves, to do something about the Lipo Killer to save themselves.

Bear in mind two things: if the police get a call from some nosy reporters that they do not like, they may be slow to react. Lying about one’s identity when summoning the police is advisable under such circumstances. Second, even a successful **Fast Talk** that bluffs its way past a police officer leaves a bad taste in their mouths. There will be tons of media trying to buzz around this story, and the police may give preferential treatment to some who treat them with respect. However, dealing with rival muckrakers will inevitably be a part of this scenario.

Roots

One of the concerned adults at the beginning of the scenario is a friend of Vince Carthon from his newspaper days. Vince is called in because the police are ignoring the parents, and perhaps he could shed some light on the situation. Vince is sympathetic, but does not see a story here worth getting the players out of bed for. However, strangely, Mr. Patel himself personally encourages him to have the players look into it. Vince will probably mention this; “the boss has a nose for these things, so go see if you can find her and, more importantly, why she ran off.”

Make special note of the technology outages in the vicinity of Geverlon, and the reluctance of the police to become involved too soon in the disappearance. The players will have a lot of agency; the people of Geverlon are not warm and welcoming to people who profess to be reporters, so a cover story will be needed.

The Night Season

The players get drawn into this one, once again, via parental agitation. Bobby Horn's parents have never accepted that they know the whole story behind Bobby's death, and periodically try to draw attention to their open emotional wound. This time around, they have gotten a hold of the suicide note and circulated it to news organizations, trying to get attention from anyone. Some of the references pique Mr. Patel's interest, particularly given that he cannot get a read on the situation through his own resources. This is troublesome to him, so he uses the players as cat's paws and has them to do a “cold case” documentary story on it.

This scenario gets very weird, very quickly. Poor Vince Carthon probably blows a gasket trying to keep the players on track and telling them that their imaginations are getting the better of them. “Focus on why that kid stabbed himself in the gut, not on a bunch of nerds”! The players' lack of scruples about breaking and entering and filming what

they find should land them in the Dreamlands. If played correctly, they are likely to simply try and escape from Shelly, and she is killed in a chaotic police shootout, along with a lot of bystanders. There may be legal consequences that even Mr. Patel has trouble smoothing over.

Forget Me Not

Having seen things that they will have trouble digesting in *The Night Season*, and likely having drawn attention to themselves from law enforcement that GNS will have trouble sweeping under the rug, the players become expendable. *Forget Me Not* is their “burn notice”; a story that they are sent to cover from which Mr. Patel and Geraldine South do not expect them to return.

“*The Supernatural Files*” is a side project of GNS; Vince tells them that Mr. Patel has been thinking about getting into “hour format reality television” and wants to start with this particular “haunted house.” Lyn Cartwright is a new (innocent, not damaged) veteran of hour-long “reality scare” shows that run on backwater cable channels. If Lyn is going to be used as a romantic interest for one of the players, “*The Supernatural Files*” program should be a subplot—people are being interviewed for positions from more mainstream media outlets at GNS' office; Lyn is around the offices occasionally and pleasant to those who are pleasant to her. When the players' memories start to return, they will remember that they were assigned to the shoot in Clio (not a very lucrative job by their standards) as penance for a failure on another job (e.g., *The Night Season*).

To make matters worse, Vanessa Volker was tipped to expect them, and the tip can be traced back to Geraldine South. This greatly disturbed Volker, since she assumed that no one was “on to her.” Geraldine's cell phone number can be found several times in Vanessa's call history leading up to their infestation, as well as afterwards. (Vince Carthon is utterly innocent, and should they somehow survive *Forget Me Not*, Geraldine disappears, slipping

away in one of her other forms). This may come out if the players somehow force cooperation out of Volker. The stage is now set for “*Looking For Headquarters*”, as the surviving investigators seek answers and/or revenge.

Note that, should they undergo body scans, either in the course of getting medical attention during *Forget Me Not* or after it (having purged themselves of Brood, they really ought to see a doctor), they get an unpleasant surprise. They each have unusual neuroblastomas in their left ears—in the exact same place. **SAN** loss for this realization is 1/1d3 **SAN**. Whether they can be successfully operated on depends on if Geraldine has “pulled the trigger” on them. They can be successfully removed without too much difficulty (**Medicine** check) if not yet activated, or if less than a day has passed since activation. One to two days post-activation requires radical resection of the left ear (cut the whole thing off as well as parts of the skull), costing 1d6 **SAN**

and 1d3 **APP** (and 2d3 damage if done other than in a surgical theater under anesthesia). After two days post-activation, the investigator is a dead man walking, and has roughly five days to live; only magic or a miracle can save them. They will lose 1d4+1 points from **STR**, **DEX** and **CON** each day after the second. When any statistic falls below 3, they are incapacitated and bedridden; when any one statistic hits zero, their agony ends. This is all accompanied by intense head and ear pain starting on Day 2 (when it is almost but not quite too late, if they get their ear removed post-haste with immediate surgical attention), imposing a -20% penalty to any action requiring concentration.

Biopsy results on any removed tumors are identical, and bizarre. There are fingernail clippings and hair from the patient; different (female human) DNA (all belonging to the same woman); what can ultimately be identified as mandrake root; a belladonna berry; and a tiny microchip. An **Occult**



roll might identify everything except the computer chip as an old British witch's formula for a poppet, a sort of voodoo doll. **SAN** loss for learning that the witchcraft involved is a further 0/1.

Looking For Headquarters, a Mini-Scenario

"Looking for Headquarters" is a vignette; a series of clues and events that can be found if the investigators make a sincere effort to track down the true nature of GNS and/or the whereabouts of Mr. Patel. This is a test that Mr. Patel is putting them through; he can be found, but the question is "what cost are the investigators willing to pay for the answers they seek"? In that sense, it is a microcosm of the entire setting, and a fitting end to it. There should be a very nihilistic tone to the affair.



Once they start down this road, then unless they deal with the implants in their ears and cover their activities extremely well, Geraldine South becomes scarce. Vince Carthon can tell them that she "went on vacation to Bermuda", and there may be

a half-hearted paper trail to back that up, but any decent amount of investigation quickly reveals that she never boarded the plane that she had a ticket for.

Vince has no idea, not even under torture, where Mr. Patel might be found, and once they start aggressively looking for him, Mr. Patel doesn't answer their emails or Skype pings. "They always break down, and always assume I know something, and I don't", he might mutter. He will readily admit to having had prior stringers tie him up and torture him before, some complaining about ear infections, with questions about where to find Mr. Patel. Vince will (without the necessity of torture) rattle off several names of former GNS staffers, each of whom decided that they just had to talk to Mr. Patel and "deliver their resignations in person", and it always seems to happen while Geraldine is on vacation. (All of these people are either dead from brain tumors, or have dropped off the grid completely).

There is nothing incriminating in Geraldine's desk or the Cleveland office; that would be too easy. Vince does have Geraldine's residential address.

As long as the players do not breach confidentiality, and approach this problem like any other story, they may have as much time as they need to drive themselves crazy with trying to find the root of GNS. If they breach confidentiality, however, and GNS becomes aware, the cancer bomb is triggered in their ears. In all likelihood, they will seek medical treatment for this once the pain starts, and this will coincide with the need for an immediate, radical surgical resection to save their lives.

Geraldine's most recent address: turns out to be a small loft in downtown Cleveland that has been mostly cleaned out, and has to be broken into in order to access. Geraldine left a silent and well-concealed alarm active when she cleared out, mostly just to mess with the players (**Spot Hidden** at entry to detect; **Electrical Repair** to bypass; failure results in the police arriving in 2d6 minutes). Assuming that they gain entrance, and thoroughly

search the place (at least an hour of searching plus a **Spot Hidden**) they find a box hidden under the floorboards of the master bedroom's closet. Taped on top of the box is a note addressed to the investigator who finds it (regardless of who it is), reading "Good luck, the stairway to madness always needs a first step." Inside of the box are the following:

* A **matchbox**, dating to the 1910s, from the Red Hook Tavern (fictitious) at the "corner of Coffey and Ferris, Red Hook, Brooklyn". This leads to the entrance to the tunnels beneath the Red Hook Harvest Cooperative;

* **12 severed left human ears, in a jar of formaldehyde**. SAN loss 0/1. These all belong to the fluffers in Las Vegas who have ascended to the "Advisory Board." A note on the jar states, "these were the ones who acted quickly enough". This is intended to goad the investigators to hack off their own ears, which conveniently enough is the way that ensures survival if done immediately after the onset of the pain; and

* **An old key**, of the sort that would unlock an old desk. A locksmith can date this to the 1910s as well. This unlocks the desk drawer in the New York office's subterranean remnants.

Attempting to trace ownership of Global News Service, LLC or the cyber-trail of Mr. Patel: While obvious sources of inquiry, these routes literally lead to madness.

Tracking the ownership of Global News Service, LLC initially leads to a Cleveland lawyer, John Clancy, who refuses to cooperate. The public record reflects that he converted the former New York corporation into an Ohio limited liability company in 2001, but beyond that, he has nothing to say. Torture, bribery, or espionage leads to an address of another law firm in another town, which set up another LLC which owns 100% of Global News Service, LLC. That lawyer, in turn, refuses to cooperate, and you can repeat that cycle essentially ad nauseum. The players could literally

spends months torturing lawyers and uncovering the names of new holding companies, without ever finding a real address for ownership. However, each lawyer dealt with Geraldine South and/or Tony Patel in terms of setting up the dummy companies and getting paid for their services. Be sure to inflict minor SAN losses for torturing people to get information.

Trying to trace where Mr. Patel is calling from and/or emailing from is quicker to accomplish, but equally frustrating. He uses Skype and Internet-based phone service, and the players (if they get access to GNS' server) can, with a **Computer Use** roll, locate the originating IP address, seemingly somewhere in New York City. This (**Computer Use** roll) turns out to be a router, which leads to another router, etc., etc. However, with an **Extreme Computer Use** roll, a savvy gearhead can set up an effective bot to track the trail of servers, leading all over the globe through exactly 1,000 iterations—until the trail leads back to GNS' own server. This is an Escher maze and hence, an impossibility. SAN loss is 0/1 for discovering this.

Scouring medical records or enlisting the help of medical personnel

This is a way that the players might actually get a leg up on Mr. Patel, albeit at a price. If they see all the severed ears, or realize that each of them has the same "ear infection", they might go looking for patterns of prior incidents. This requires a massive research effort, scouring quietly through patient files and hacking into numerous databases (require 10 separate **Extreme Computer Use** checks to hack into secure medical databases and effectively search them, with a fumble on any of them resulting in unwanted F.B.I. attention). It is easier to approach a practicing oncologist (such as one who consulted on the players' case(s)) and ask him to reach out to his colleagues for help. This is easily enough accomplished via email, and takes a few days to get answers back.



If the players have managed to get off of surveillance by Mr. Patel, they find 10 similar cases since 2001, all involving ridiculously aggressive neuroblastomas originating in the inner left ear, without Mr. Patel necessarily taking notice. While the cases are widespread across the U.S. and Europe, a cluster of three cases were reported in Las Vegas. In each case, the victim stumbled into the E.R., babbling incoherently about how bad their ear hurt, and they rapidly collapsed and died. This research may send the players to the right city, without Mr. Patel necessarily knowing that they are coming.

If (failed group **Luck** roll, or still under surveillance) Mr. Patel takes notice of this inquiry, however, he gets rather direct with the players and the meddlesome doctor(s) who helped. The next night, a power outage strikes wherever the oncologist is, the next time he is alone, and he is slaughtered by a Hunting Horror. The same Hunting Horror then blacks out wherever the investigator(s) are staying and attacks them as well (killing a small number of bystanders); use average statistics. It relentlessly pursues them, being only deterred by significant damage being inflicted on it, or the investigators getting to a well-lit area where there are plenty of bystanders. **SAN** losses for the butchery and the sight of the thing are likely significant, and the investigators will have recurring Hunting Horror attacks to deal with as well. They would be well-advised to stay in well-lit areas going forward.

Red Hook

The tavern is no longer there; it collapsed when the adjoining office building did. Still at the corner is a Civil War era warehouse on which outdoor movies are sometimes shown. Where the tavern once stood (until 2001) is a corner of the community garden.

The players can easily get copies of old building plans, showing how the tavern and former office building were situated. If they happen to start poking around where the hat check in the tavern would have been, near the front door (and where

the matchbooks would have been kept in the 1910s), they find a utility hatch under a garden bed's mulch. It opens easily enough, but is itself not depicted on any city plans. A modern make of garden ladder leads down six feet into a stinking, earthen, unlit, uneven and rubble-strewn tunnel. The stench of human filth is gagging and will quickly permeate the garden and draw attention from the police, unless the hatch is quickly closed. It is pitch black after this occurs, and the Keeper should emphasize the limited visibility.

The players are in what amounts to a rough tunnel that has been dug out, slowly and poorly, by prior pilgrims such as themselves, through the plowed under rubble of a collapsed office building. It is basically a path half-cleared and half-shored up through collapsed masonry, rebar, and dirt. The tunnel is not stable, but enough people have come this way over the years that it can be crawled through, on hands and knees, single file, taking about an hour. It slopes sharply down at a 10 degree angle. You might require several **Climb** rolls on the way down, which each failure resulting in 1 point of damage. The stench is overwhelming for some reason, and there are rats and other vermin to contend with. **SAN** loss is 1 point for the traverse, 1d6 if appropriate phobias are in play. This should be played out slowly, in a detail oriented fashion, and let the players have an Idea roll to realize how difficult it is going to be to get back out. Hopefully they leave behind a rope to help themselves clamber back out. If so, they need to make five non-fumbled **Climb** rolls to get back out, with each failure resulting in 1d3 damage. If not, or something happens to their rope, they need to make five **Climb** rolls to escape, with each failure resulting in 1d6 damage as they slide down the rubble and muck.

Eventually, after what seems like an eternity, the players emerge into an intact portion of the former sub-basement of the office building. The stench of feces gets worse as they draw near, but there is also a draft and perhaps (depending on whether the Watchman is awake and active at the moment)

sounds of movement, muttering to himself, the clatter of a manual typewriter being hunted and pecked in the dark, and/or singing of children's songs (e.g., "1,253,466 bottles of beer on the wall...").

The Watchman has been here a long time. He (or she) has no toilet facilities, little light, or anything much but a lot of MREs (meals ready to eat), chemical glow sticks and water cans.

The Watchman initially assumes that the players are a periodic resupply, but is elated to learn that they are pursuing "the story." This filthy, parasite infested, disease ridden shell of a human is missing his left ear at the skull and is completely insane (0 SAN) and delusional. Any effort to remove him from his "newsroom" is met with unrelenting, homicidal, fight-to-the-death violence.

Who is the Watchman? From his perspective, he is a current employee of the GNS, assigned to be the editor of the New York office (waves hands at surroundings). He may be a former, vanished employee whose name they have seen before; a missing and/or presumed dead former player; or a similarly vanished NPC. He is completely, irretrievably bonkers and focused only on his own little slice of reality. Someone has to keep the office open, after all; Mr. Patel says so.

He is so nuts that he can't be effectively questioned, but one can have a sort of conversation with him as he putters around his filthy pit/office (obliviously wading through inches deep feces of various stages of decomposition, rats, roaches and other coprophages). SAN loss for encountering the New York office and this wretch is 1/1d6.

Information that can (and cannot) be gotten from the Watchman

This should all be filtered through his delusion that he is still working at a meaningful job for GNS:

* He is aware that he is living under (as he puts

it) "spartan conditions" but "the New York office's budget is kind of shoestring" these days. "But the stories down here are every bit as important as the stories up top, really." If asked to expand on this, the Watchman will answer the question with a question: "Why are any stories important? The sun will still come up and go down, people will still laugh, cry, die, be born, until they aren't any more. There's only one story that really matters...how the stories will end. And they will end, you know. Everything else is equally unimportant, but hey, gotta eat, right"?

* He will know when he was "assigned to the New York office" (years ago) but not exactly how long he has been here.

* He knows that he used to work at the Cleveland office but "went to have a word with Mr. Patel about our working conditions" and was "promoted" for his "initiative" in "chasing that story."

* He warns them not to mess with Geraldine if her name comes up, "she's tougher than she looks."

* If asked about what happened to his left ear, he gets surprisingly lucid for a moment. He explains that Geraldine is really an ancient English witch who went by the nom de plume Lucretia of the Left Hand; that she has created a sort of witch's familiar in each of their left ears; that it lets her see and hear everything they do; and that if they screw up, she can "birth" it and pop their brains like a pimple. He can even wax esoteric about the formula she uses to do it: blood of the recipient; one of her own ova; a blood sacrifice; a gift of power; a modified microchip from a cell phone; a modification of the Sigil of Narlato....

* There's another way out (gestures toward a tunnel proceeding further down, opposite from the one that they came in). But he wouldn't go down there if he were them. (Anyone who does is at the Keeper's discretion; there are many, ancient tunnels lying beneath New York).

* That key? That's to Geraldine's old desk, over there (gestures). She used to work in the New York office, you know. Did Geraldine give you the key? That means you're supposed to be here....

* He will not talk about where Mr. Patel might be; efforts at getting rough with him devolve him into unrelenting, homicidal violence. That would be a breach of his employment agreement and he would be "terminated." But that's the story they're here for, isn't it?

* What stories has he been working on down here? Ones about people like them, who come through here periodically, trying to figure out what the deal with GNS and Mr. Patel is. They ask him the same questions, get the same answers, rifle through Geraldine's old desk, get all creeped out by what they find, and then try to clamber out of here. Please use the key; if you try to damage anything down here, I'll have to stop you or risk "termination."

The Watchman

STR 55 CON 25 SIZ 60 INT 65 POW 55 DEX 60
APP 15 SAN 0 EDU 65 Luck 15 HP 11

Move: 8.

Build 0.

Damage Bonus: +0.

Weapon: Fighting (Brawling) 60%.

Skills: Own Language (English) 90%, Dodge 33%,
Listen 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Stealth 50%.

Defenses: None above base.

Indefinite Insanity: Delusional Psychosis



Geraldine's Old Desk

This is a Victorian era roll-top secretary, which is locked. The key from Geraldine's apartment opens it; if anyone tries to force the lock, they find themselves fighting the Watchman to the death. Inside of it are a number of disturbing and enlightening things:

* **A number of framed pictures.** One is an old silver nitrate picture, and depicts a beautiful, raven-haired young woman in formal dress, posing for a picture with a blocky, middle-aged woman in tweed. The middle-aged woman is easily recognizable to all of the players as the psychiatrist who gave them their orientation. They are sitting in a tavern having a smoke and a drink. On the back is the notation "Lucretia and Dr. Meyer, Red Hook Inn, 1889."

* The next depicts the same scene, with the same pose, only this time, Dr. Meyer (looking exactly the same as in the prior photo) is posing with a different, young, beautiful, raven-haired woman. On the back is the notation "Dr. Meyer and Miss Clarence, Red Hook Inn, 1923". Appropriate research can easily identify the woman as Lucy Clarence, a silent era film star who went missing in 1951 and was declared legally dead in 1953.

* The last picture depicts the same scene, with the same pose, only this time, Miss Clarence (looking exactly the same as in the prior photo) is posing with Geraldine, in her middle age. On the back is the notation "Miss Clarence and Estelle Winthrop, Red Hook Inn, 1951". (Yes, Geraldine should be long dead given the dating of the photo and her apparent age in it).

* A **card index** with phone numbers in it, with dated entries ranging from 1914 until 2001. Feel free to leave any clues you wish in this index, but the important ones are for the Patels. Each Patel dating back to Naresh has had the same, hoary phone number, starting off with switchboard instructions, moving to Klondike 54566 circa 1930, and to a

landline with standard dialing in the 1960s.

* A thin **spell book**, in antiquated English, containing instructions to "*bring forth the Dark Man to a duly consecrated Sabbath.*" It is easy enough to follow (indeed, it appears to have been written for the uninitiated to be able to follow), and takes 2 hours to read and understand (plus a successful **Read English** check). The players are welcome to read it, but not (the Watchman advises) to remove it; they may take notes if they wish. If they attempt to remove it, it will have to be over the Watchman's dead body.

Cell phone service is terrible in the New York office, but assuming that they make it out and dial the number for the Patels, a pre-recorded message states: "This is Tony Patel, I can't answer the phone right now, but if you'd like to make an appointment, please refer to my secretary's instructions."

The Ritual

The point of all of this rigmarole, of course, is to vet the level of societal detachment and craziness of the players. Mr. Patel wants to see to what lengths they will go for a "story"; or, looking at the other side of the coin, to grasp and truly "get in touch" with Mr. Patel, they need to be rather detached and crazy. It consists of a complicated set of navigation instructions (**Navigate** check or using a programmable GPS) that end up taking them to a seemingly unremarkable bit of the less affluent part of Detroit, where any number of rough customers might harass or scrutinize them—right in the middle of a busy street. They must strip themselves naked, perform the ceremony exactly at midnight, and offer up at least 10 **SIZ** points of blood from a living, sentient being or beings (their own freshly spilt blood will do). Persons familiar with the **Contact Nyarlathotep** spell recognize this ritual as a riff on the theme. Each participant is stripped of 1 **POW**, and the result is simple: their cell phone or work email receives a message with an attached file. They must, of course, digitally sign a pop-up waiver "swearing to the highest degree of confi-

dentiality.” Assuming that they do, they can access the email, which consists of a one-way, first class plane ticket to Las Vegas and a hotel reservation at (the high-end, fictitious) Tower of Babel Hotel and Casino. (See *Lost in the Lights*, available from *Sixtystone Press*, for a thorough background on The Tower of Babel).

Fortunately, since the players are likely to be arrested and/or institutionalized for a time for performing the ritual, the ticket is open-dated and the room reservation is guaranteed and pre-paid for a four-person suite for one week.

Las Vegas

Once the players get to Las Vegas, either on a guess from excellent medical research or “the hard way”, they are on their own. They should know, by this point, that they are retreading previously-trod ground. The key, however they get there, is to look around for patterns of people with their left ears hacked off.

Finding such people is no more difficult than asking a hotel concierge, police officer or other person with a good knowledge overview of the Las Vegas strip. “Guys without their left ears? You mean the ones who act like they’re some kind of T.V. reporter? Yeah, those guys. Go walk up and down the Strip long enough, and cut through enough alleys, and you’ll find them; not sure where they hang out or anything like that”, most such people can offer. And indeed, walking up and down the Strip long enough and cutting through enough alleys and garage access roads (group **Luck** roll each hour) results in meeting one.

If the investigators have pictures of missing and/or presumed dead GNS stringers, any of these people that they meet will resemble one of them. They are a strange sight. First, they are immaculately clean and immaculately dressed, indeed, overdressed for what they are doing. Lots of pointless and overdone jewelry, designer clothes, and pomaded hair-

dos are all in evidence. They are exuberantly about their task, which is “fluffing.” For those unfamiliar, “fluffing” is a peculiar Las Vegas tradition whereby workers (often migrants or street people) are paid small amounts of money to stand at the edges of the sidewalks in front of the casinos, in the hot sun, and pass out flyers. The flyers are usually for escort services, strip clubs, porn sites or other forms of adult entertainment. To get your attention as you pass by, they tap the cardstock loudly and focus on getting it into your hand before you can see what it is.

Each missing GNS reporter is doing just that, and not even at a prime location, but in an alleyway, a lightly trafficked sidewalk, or behind a casino where no one ever goes. The entertainment that they are fluffing is random but lurid and probably illegal if accurately depicted: donkey shows, after-hours establishments, that sort of thing. Despite their overdressed status, each is missing his left ear, although in each case, the wound is now as neat as possible.

The reaction of the fluffer after catching sight of the players varies, depending on how it is that the investigators got here in the first place. It is just possible that the players found their own way here (via researching medical records), and are either off Mr. Patel’s radar screen or being pursued by Hunting Horrors. If this is the case, they scream, panic, and run and hide at the first sight of them. Such people are beyond reason, and fight to the death if accosted, like a wild animal. (Use statistics for the Watchman, above, if it comes to this). If the players carefully avoid being spotted and just take up surveillance, they can watch until 8 P.M., at which point, he calls for a limo, which picks up the fluffer at a nearby street corner and takes him to the Neon Boneyard.

If the investigators had their way here paid for by Mr. Patel, the fluffer is friendly, calling each by name and enthusiastically greeting them. He can’t talk about things yet (“confidentiality, you know”), and the fluffers are so insanely focused that they

cannot be Fast Talked. But Mr. Patel is eager to see them, and they should meet him at the Neon Boneyard at nightfall. By the way, congratulations on their potential promotion—the money is really good, and it's guaranteed! In the meantime, enjoy Vegas, but he has to get back to “getting the story out” (referring to the fluffing material he is handing out for some obscure and luridly depicted strip club). It should be obvious that each fluffer is hopelessly mad, almost Stepford Wife-esque robotic in their demeanor.

The Neon Boneyard

The Neon Boneyard is (as of 2016) two separate, large lots full of decommissioned, gaudy, over the top neon billboards and business signs from Las Vegas' past, located near Fremont Street, downtown. Expensive to make and screaming out their message at the top of their figurative lungs, this sign graveyard is now professionally cared for by a non-profit organization which runs tours. (See neonmuseum.org for details and a photo tour). A visitor's center and gift shop is housed in the relocated lobby of the space-age design La Concha hotel. It is the perfect spot for the nihilistic Mr. Patel's news organization to hold court. (Their ability to build fires without being noticed by security and generally hang out there after hours is entirely supernatural; they are invisible and unnoticeable to those who have not been touched by Nyarlathotep. The players, hence, are able to see them; the police and security guards at the Boneyard have a permanent blind spot as to their existence).

As nightfall rolls around, a dozen overly dressed, overly made up, overly coiffed fluffers arrive from around the city, some taking a taxi, some taking a limo, some arriving in expensive sports cars. They interact with one another superficially, cook steaks, pass around liquor, and enjoy caviar. Sex workers of both genders arrive and service them throughout the evening; players there at the invitation of Mr. Patel are welcome to watch or participate as they see fit, as long as they mind their manners. Others who are spotted are attacked, and a Hunting Horror of average statistics might be keeping watch if trouble is expected from the players. (If they have kept a low profile and Mr. Patel

does not know that they are in Vegas, through good stealth and surveillance practices, the Hunting Horror is not on watch). Use the statistics for the Watchman for each fluffer, only increase their APPs to 13; none of them is armed beyond whatever piece of debris or liquor bottle that they can grab.

Assuming that they avoid conflict with the fluffers until midnight, Mr. Patel arrives to preside, simply stepping out of the shadow of an immense “Las Vegas News—All The News You Really Need” sign. If the investigators are anywhere nearby, he calls them out by name and invites them to join the party. If they decline or flee, he summons a Hunting Horror (average statistics) to kill them; it arrives in 6 rounds, so they have that period of time to act and/or run. If they accept, he congratulates them on their promotion opportunity. They may now “be promoted” and join the Board of Directors (he gestures toward the assemblage of one-eared wags). It's a good job: \$1,000,000 per year (plus profit sharing), an apartment in Las Vegas, job security for life, duties as assigned (although most days, they will be delivering the news about the only story that really matters). They are welcome to resign, as well, at any time after one year although no one ever has, and as long as they do not breach confidentiality, they will be safe. He does ask for a one year commitment, however; he has brought contracts for them to sign.

Doubtless they have some questions, which he will be happy to answer as best he can. Mr. Patel is a consummate trickster and cannot be Fast Talked; he is unarmed and special rules apply to getting into combat with him (see *The End*, below).

* Who are you? “I've been a lot of people, but right now, I'm a guide, a messenger, someone who wants to make sure that the truth gets out”.

* Are you the same guy who's been running the GNS since the early 1900s? “That would make me some kind of god or something, wouldn't it?”

* “You’re the devil, Geraldine is a witch, and this is the rest of your coven.” (Smiles). I’m not the devil. I’m quite certain that he doesn’t exist. As to the rest, GNS respects religious diversity.”

* “What do you want? What is GNS trying to accomplish”? “Well, see, it’s like this. I want people to not just know the truth, but really understand it; really grasp it. The news, almost every story that has ever been told, ever been heard--unimportant. They’re meaningless, in the deepest sense of the word. All they are is entertainment, making people feel good until they learn the truth. They delay the inevitable. Worse, they numb people to the truth, they delay realization. Religion is not the opiate of the masses, the news is. It fosters an illusion of control. Humanity would be much better off understanding that, with few exceptions, it does not understand reality at all. Humanity needs to be conditioned, slowly, guided toward the truth. That’s what GNS does: it chews the truth and spits it into humanity’s yawning beak, like a mother bird feeding a chick. It teaches them that there are things beyond mankind’s current understanding, moving it toward true understanding. That’s the only story that really matters. All else is interchangeable entertainment”.

* “What’s the real truth that humanity fails to grasp”? This is an expensive question, but whoever asks it and insists on an answer, gets his answer. First, he asks the player who asked to sign yet another confidentiality agreement. If he balks, he and the assembled throng of cultists openly mock him for cowardice. “I thought you wanted access, wanted the truth, no matter what the cost”? Assuming that the player presses ahead, Mr. Patel casts aside his mask and shows the investigator, all so briefly, his true face, the yawning void, the colossal abyss in which mankind is but a transitory mote. **SAN** loss is 1d10/1d100. Catatonia followed by enslavement to Nyarlathotep is the result of indefinite insanity.

* If nothing matters and mankind is all doomed, why should I work for you instead of, say, shoot

you? “I would have been disappointed had you not asked. Mankind is doomed and insignificant, but that’s no reason to crawl in a hole and wait for death. You can be comfortable while we wait for the Apocalypse. That’s all that you can accomplish. I don’t know when the end will come—could be tomorrow, could be a billion years from now. That’s why I do what I do—have to keep things moving and get those who understand there in comfort. There’s room in the company for people who truly “get it.” Not much room, but some.”

* But aren’t we foiling your own plans? “There’s only one plan that really matters, and that’s imparting knowledge as mankind is prepared to accept it. If some cult gets blown up by a bunch of gun-wielding do-gooders, then they weren’t ready for prime time anyway.”

* What’s this about a “promotion”? “One year commitment. Everyone draws straws when there is a vacancy at the New York office. Everyone else fluffs—at least that’s real entertainment. Nightly Board meetings to go over editorial matters and story selection are mandatory, no days off. No family members in Las Vegas; the hours are long and we expect total commitment. One million dollars per year, in biweekly installments, plus profit sharing—the networks really do pay top dollar for what we put out. (And, if appropriate): And you’ll have to give up that left ear. You don’t want it anyway after what Lucretia put in it, trust me on that.”

The End

The ultimate encounter with Mr. Patel can end in one of several ways:

** Violence before Mr. Patel arrives*

Killing one or more of the wretches on the Board, without also getting Patel, accomplishes nothing, other than putting them out of whatever misery their greedy, besotted minds might be in. It does not derail GNS whatsoever, and may not even prompt Mr. Patel to respond, as long as the players

keep what they did to themselves. **SAN** loss for murdering these wretches in isolation is 1d6+2.

* *Joining the Board*

This is certainly possible, and is what happens to anyone who is driven insane either while questioning Mr. Patel, or who is insane and scooped up by him in Las Vegas. Such people become fluffers unless they draw the short straw. They get all the meaningless material comfort that they could want, spreading stories that mean as much as any other bit of news in the isolation of oneself; but without any meaningful social connection or interaction to give it context. They stay in Vegas (unless they are so lucky as to be assigned to New York), and lose 1d2-1 **SAN** each week for the ongoing despair, nihilism and ennui that they are inevitably exposed to. At the end of the year, they probably have about \$1M in the bank from salary and “profit sharing”, and a quite low **SAN**, but if they then want to go do some low profile job and keep their mouths shut about GNS, they have that option. They can then while away their meaningless lives, or try to make a difference.

* *Attacking the Board, but Mr. Patel escapes*

Unsuccessful aggression against Mr. Patel results in the arrival of a Hunting Horror six rounds after combat begins; activation of any remaining tumors; and the permanent enmity of this particular avatar of Nyarlathotep. The players will find themselves hunted, harried, sued, arrested, harassed and the subject of constant tabloid news attention for anything salacious that they might have done, unless and until they are killed or manage to somehow find him again.

* *Killing Mr. Patel*

The mechanics of this are awkward for the players. He is pretty easy to kill. Although he acts at a **DEX** of 19, and cannot be surprised by anyone still with their “ear infections”, he is not combat-oriented. He will flee at the first sign of violence, disappearing

into a shadow and vanishing in 3 rounds.

He also has a **Dodge** of 99%. But even one point of successfully inflicted damage causes him to pop like a balloon, spraying gore and twitching tentacles over a 10’ radius. At the end of one round (just enough time to look away and start to flee), this pile reforms into a monstrous, black, towering form and kills everything that it can catch (allow players who fled immediately or were already running away before this a Luck roll to survive. Success results in escape and a 1d10 **SAN** loss; failure results in a 1d10/1d100 **SAN** loss and a second **Luck** roll to be overlooked in the mindless slaughter; failure results in death). The police find a previously unnoticed massacre the next time that they do a drive by of the yard.

The death of Mr. Patel puts an end to GNS in its current incarnation. A new Mr. Patel has to rise, and that takes time and occult resources. GNS’ Cleveland office will sadly burn in a mysterious fire. Any outstanding stringers will have their tumors activated immediately, but eliminating Mr. Patel and shutting GNS down, at least for a time, results in a 2d6 **SAN** gain. Again, oddly, as long as the players keep what they did to themselves, there may well be no repercussions beyond the activation of any remaining tumors.

Finding Geraldine, in whatever guise she has most recently adopted, should be a massive challenge; this ancient servant of Nyarlathotep is wily and skilled at reinventing herself.





GNS
GLOBAL • NEWS • SERVICE

NAME _____

ID. NUMBER
JT- _____

COMPANY POSITION _____

Bringing Your Story To The World



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Bringing Your Story To The World

GNS Cards for Player Investigators



Red Hook Matchbook (fold at black dotted lines)

