

Based on the GUMSHOE One-2-One system by Robin D. Laws

CTHULHU *Confidential*

THE RED MIST

BY

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Pelgrane Press

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A CTHULHU CONFIDENTIAL ADVENTURE

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THE RED MIST

A boxer lost in a psychic labyrinth, a monster that lurks within our own minds, and a mysterious book combine to drag the investigator into a bloody nightmare. This *Cthulhu Confidential* adventure casts an occult book dealer **Phyllis (or Philip) Oakley** as the player character. It can easily be adjusted to work with an original investigator of the player's devising, or any of the 'official' trio of Dex, Viv or Langston).

The place and date of the adventure are not specified, and none of the locations mentioned are real. Assume it's set in New York in 1937 by default.

Phyllis Oakley

Phyllis Oakley is a Bookhound – a dealer in rare books, a somewhat suspect antiquarian who picks through second-hand book marts and the collections of the recently deceased, looking for undervalued books. Find the right old tome or obscure misprinted edition, and she can eat for a month. She also deals in banned books, in censored or foreign books, and in special orders – if a client wants, say, a first edition copy of *Don Quixote*, then Phyllis Oakley knows all the local collectors who might possess a copy, and be willing to sell for the right price (the right price, of course, includes Oakley's cut as go-between.) She runs a small bookstore of her own, although few people ever dare cross the threshold into that musty little back-alley store. She lives in an apartment above the shop.

Despite this hermitic existence, Oakley is fiercely clever and driven; she comes alive when on the trail of a book, and has a magnetic personality that encourages people to trust her.

Some tragedy or personal eccentricity drove Phyllis Oakley to this life on the fringe – ask the

player what happened to her? Was it an accident? Unchecked bibliomania? A lost love? An encounter with the supernatural?

Sources

Phyllis is exceptionally well read, but even she sometimes needs to call on some allies for assistance. Her sources are:

HELENA ROGERS, CITY CLERK

Helena lives in the same building as Phyllis (the same building that houses her basement bookstore), and the two neighbours have become uncertain friends. Helena's attitude towards Phyllis veers between motherly concern and bemused irritation, and she's taken it upon herself to make sure Phyllis stays safe.

Investigative Abilities: Accounting, Bureaucracy, Reassurance

ERIK ZACKAROV, FORGER

'Forger' is such a pejorative term – Erik's usually employed to repair and rebind books. Phyllis knows that Erik had a colourful past – Zackarov was a White Russian nobleman who fled the Communists, and has connections to organised crime – and that he still makes forged identity papers, but Erik insists that he's just an old bookbinder now, and that his wild days are behind him.

Investigative Abilities: Craft, Cryptography, Locksmith, Intimidation, Streetwise

MR. WYILTER, IRREGULAR CUSTOMER

Old Wylter is an eccentric book collector and autodidact. He lives outside the city, in a crumbling old house crammed with rotting books, and refuses



PHYLLIS OAKLEY

Bookhound

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

Anthropology

Art History

Assess Honesty

Bargain

Cop Talk

Evidence Collection

Flattery

History

Inspiration

Law

Languages

Occult

Reassurance

Research

Streetwise

Theology

GENERAL ABILITIES

Athletics 1

Cool 2

Disguise 1

Fighting 1

Filch 1

First Aid 1

Fleeing 2

Preparedness 2

Sense Trouble 2

Shadowing 1

Stability 2

Stealth 1

STORY

Opportunistic Bookhound Phyllis Oakley slinks around the fringes of the city's occult underworld, trading in rare books and manuscripts. Sifting library sales, house clearances, second-hand book-barrows and the occasional daring theft can turn up a mouldy, worm-eaten diamond in the dust – the price of wisdom is above rubies, and Phyllis is hungry for a cut.

to leave his small landholding. (He insists that he has placed 'protections' around its border, and that he alone will survive when they return.) He is one of her best customers, mainly because Phyllis is one of the few booksellers willing to make the long pilgrimage out to Wyilter's farm to hand-deliver purchases. (Wyilter refuses to trust the postal service.)

Investigative Abilities: Archaeology, Astronomy, Geology, Cthulhu Mythos, Outdoorsman

DR. MARIA FORREST, OLD COLLEGE FRIEND

A friend of Oakley's from her university days, Forrest has become a brilliant and wealthy surgeon. Although the two now move in very different social circles, and Forrest is a hardened skeptic

who believes that matters spiritual and supernatural are all flim-flam, they have remained friends.

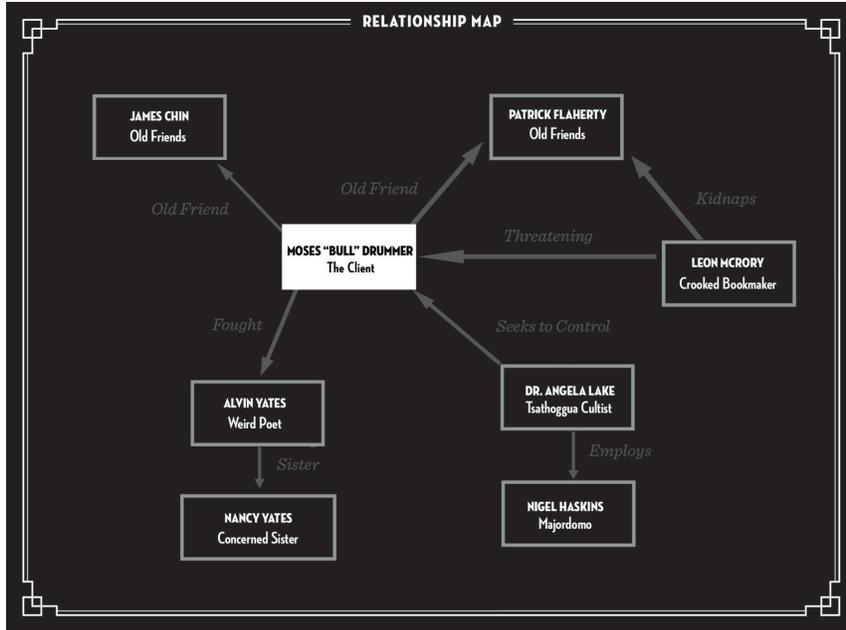
Investigative Abilities: Biology, Chemistry, Medicine, Pharmacy

DAVID SHEA, REPORTER

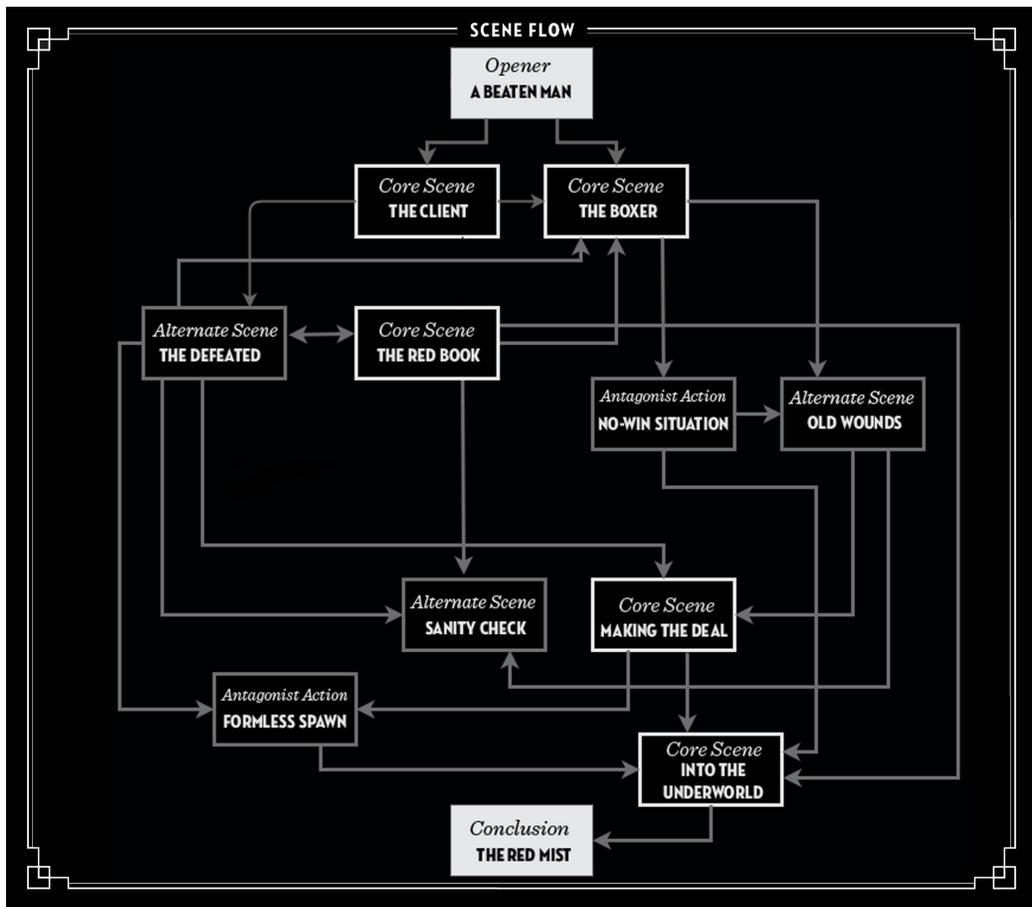
Shea and Phyllis have crossed paths several times; he's a reporter for the local newspaper, and often gets assigned the weird stories that bring him into Oakley's domain. He claims to be convinced that Phyllis is a con artist (although this may be affectionate needling), and helps Phyllis out "so he can catch her red-handed."

Investigative Abilities: Architecture, Library Use, Photography, Oral History

RELATIONSHIP MAP



SCENE FLOW DIAGRAM



Cast

Moses “Bull” Drummer, a former sailor turned bareknuckle boxer. Several years ago, “Bull” came into contact with an avatar of Tsathoggua in a shrine in Europe, and he’s carried a fragment of the deity in his mind ever since. Now, his experiences in the boxing ring have brought the deity closer to consciousness.

Alvin Yates: A writer and poet, obsessed with masculine strength. As part of this obsession, he’s looking for a copy of *Mithraic Mystery Cult Practises in the Western Empire* and believes Phyllis Oakley can procure one. He’s also taking part in the boxing ring to prove his toughness.

Nancy Yates: Alvin’s protective older sister.

Leon McRory: A local bookmaker and criminal, responsible for running the boxing matches. He wanted Drummer to throw the match to Alvin Yates.

James Chin: Another sailor and an old friend of Bull Drummer.

Dr. Angela Lake: A would-be cultist of Tsathoggua, determined to resurrect the old Mithraic elements of the cult and recontact her deity. She possesses a copy of *Mithraic Mystery Cult Practises in the Western Empire*.

Nigel Haskins: Lake’s majordomo/acolyte.

What Happened

All existence on this planet is infected with the unthinkable taint of the Great Old Ones. Just as our human civilisation is like a thin sheen of pond scum on the surface of some vast and noisome pool, so too is human consciousness and sanity; everything we hold good and noble about ourselves is just a surface illusion. Our brains, warped by the eldritch influence of the Old Ones over millions of years of evolution, are susceptible to signals and sensations we cannot perceive or name with our conscious minds.

For hundreds of years, the Roman army concealed a Mythos cult that worshipped Tsathoggua under the guise of Mithras. These Mithraic cults would use physical pain and bloodshed (a state referred to as the ‘red mist’) to crack that shell of human consciousness and allow the deity to rise from the primal sectors of the brain. One member

of the cult would be possessed and transformed by Tsathoggua, and grant them blessings. Over time, with the rise of Christianity in the Empire, this cult was suppressed and worship of Tsathoggua was mostly forgotten.

Some fragments of the cult’s practises survived, notably a maze-like symbol of a labyrinth used to draw Tsathoggua out of the ‘red mist’ and into full manifestation. In the 19th century, a historian named Fr. Gideon Matthews wrote a book entitled *Mithraic Mystery Cult Practises in the Western Empire* and included the most accurate drawing of that symbol that still exists.

Now, two strands of that resurgent cult are about to collide.

First, there’s Dr. Lake. She purchased a copy of *Mithraic Practises* and was drawn into the worship of Mithras. She’s tried to recontact the deity beyond the red mist, but has been mostly unsuccessful so far.

Second, there’s Moses Drummer. Ten years ago, when he was a sailor on a merchant ship, he and several other sailors took refuge from a storm in a cellar that was an old mithraem, a cult temple. There, he became partially possessed by the deity. It was only a brief psychic contact, but Tsathoggua lingers in his mind, close to the surface, lurking behind the red mist.

If Lake has her way, the god will not be kept waiting long.

A Psychic Contagion

Mental contact with Tsathoggua is contagious. The initial infection vector is seeing the labyrinth sigil while in physical distress, but once that combination has roused Tsathoggua from slumber in the amygdala, it can spread to others that have close contact with the afflicted.

Having the Tsathoggua-essence active in one’s mind is maddening. It provokes feelings of anger and fear, and gives the sensation of wandering around in a red mist. The only escape is to correctly use the labyrinth-sigil. Walking the labyrinth one way brings the god to the surface; walking the labyrinth in reverse sends the deity-shard back into primordial slumber.

Scenes

A BEATEN MAN

Scene Type: Opener

Lead-Outs: The Client, The Boxer

The investigation begins late at night, at Oakley's bookshop. After having the player choose a starting problem, ask the player to describe what she's doing at four in the morning – reading? Sleeping? Trying to sleep?

There's a crash from the alleyway outside, followed by the yowl of a started alley cat. It sounds like someone falling heavily against trash cans. A deep voice bellows *"I received the sacrament in a pit! I am girded with four tassels! I – ach!"* There's an anguished scream, and then silence.

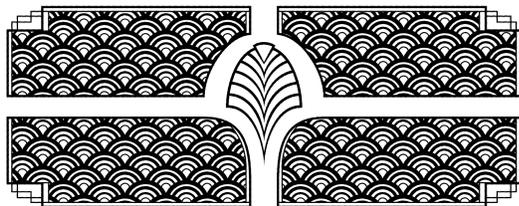
Occult notes that those words are oddly familiar – spend an Academic Push to recall they're from the Mithraic liturgy.

THE BEATEN MAN

Outside, Moses Drummer lies on the pavement. He's a big man, in his mid-40s. His face is a mass of bruises; his knuckles are raw and bloody. His shirt, too, is covered in blood. He's moaning and muttering to himself, in what sounds (**Languages**) like a mix of Latin and English. He thrashes on the ground, smearing blood across the pavement.

With a **Reassurance** Push, Phyllis can calm the big man down enough to get him into the shop. Drummer stumbles inside, and his strength seems to go out of him. The best place for him is a couch in the back room of the shop.

Without the **Reassurance** Push, Drummer tries to break free and run off into the night. Does Phyllis try to stop him?



RESTRAIN THE BOXER

Athletics

Advance 5+: The man tries to run, but you calmly and firmly guide him inside. He's clearly in distress, and you're going to help him. Gain Edge 1, "Good Samaritan."

Hold 3–4: You have to wrestle the man inside; if he wasn't so badly beaten already, you doubt you could manage it. Still, you manage to wrangle him through the door, and he half-collapses into your arms.

Setback 3 or less: He's frightfully strong – he slams a fist into the side of your head, knocking you senseless. By the time you recover, he's gone. Gain Problem 5, "Black Eye."

Spending Edges: Any benefit to General or Physical

Extra Problem: Problem 6, "Punched in the Side."

TALKING TO DRUMMER

Until he gets some sleep, talking to Drummer isn't especially illuminating. Drop phrases into his rants like:

- "The dying bull, the blood, oh god it's not horns. Shapeless, oh no."
- "I lost it; I didn't mean to do that to him. I couldn't see. It was all red."
- "McRory's going to get me, he's going to get me. He said to take a fall, yeah, a fall."
- "It's eating me! It can't find its way out and it's eating me!"
- "He was all red, all red, all red."

Streetwise recognises McRory as likely referring to Leon McRory, a crooked bookmaker.

Questioning Drummer is fruitless – he drops into unconsciousness after a few minutes. (As Helena Rogers lives in the same building as Phyllis, she could be pressed into service to help deal with the unexpected guest.)

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Evidence Collection spots two pieces of evidence (on Drummer, if he's in the bookshop, or abandoned in the street outside, if Drummer fled).

- The shirt Drummer's wearing clearly isn't his – it's several sizes too small, and is much more expensive than the cheap clothes he's wearing. There's a monogram on the wrist: A. Y.
- A piece of paper with Oakley's address written on it, along with the words "*Mithraic Mystery Cult Practises*". (This note was written by Alvin Yates, who intended to hire Phyllis to find a copy of the book. Drummer stole Yates' shirt after their bareknuckle brawl.)

If you're using another protagonist like Dex Raymond, then consider making the piece of paper into one of Dex's business cards.

DRUMMER LEAVES

If Phyllis leaves Drummer alone, then Drummer sneaks out the next morning. He leaves an almost childish thank-you note behind.

"I am very sorry for the trouble I put you to, and for the mess I make. I did not see I don't know why I came to you, but thank you very much for your kindness.

M. Drummer."

Streetwise or another interpersonal ability like **Cop Talk** or **Oral History** can trace Moses Drummer, leading to *The Boxer*, 13.

The handwriting on Drummer's note does not match the handwriting on the piece of paper giving Oakley's address.

Alternatively, if the player keeps an eye on Drummer, then the boxer tries to leave in the early hours of the morning. "*I don't want to impose on you any more – I shouldn't have come here. I don't know why I did. I'm sorry. Thank you, thank you.*" A

Reassurance Push can convince him to stay (and move the events of *The Boxer* and *No-Win Situation* to Oakley's shop instead.)

INCIPENT DREAMS

If Phyllis sleeps after meeting Drummer, she is troubled by strange dreams.

BAD DREAMS

Stability

Advance 9+: You suffer from strange dreams where you blunder around, lost in a red mist. You can dimly sense other figures there, and feel like you'd recognise them if you saw them again. Gain Edge 2, "As A Foulness You Shall Know Them."

Hold 5–8: You fall into a broken, fitful sleep, disturbed by dreams of being lost in red-litten hallways. Still, at least you manage to sleep.

Setback 4 or less: You suffer from horrible nightmares about being chased through a red-lit maze by something you cannot dare look upon. Gain Problem 9, "Wracked by Nightmares."

The next morning, run *The Client*.

THE CLIENT

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: A Beaten Man

Lead-Outs: The Red Book, The Defeated

The next morning, a customer arrives at Oakley's door. She is Nancy Yates, a woman in her early 30s. She clearly has money, judging by her clothes and the way she wrinkles her nose in distaste at the look of the bookshop. She asks for Phyllis by name.

"I'm here on behalf of my brother – he wishes to engage your services."

Assess Honesty: Nancy's not being entirely forthcoming, but isn't lying.

Put the following in your own words:

- Nancy's brother is a writer and poet named Alvin. He's interested in certain books on ancient religion, specifically a book called (and here she checks a handwritten note from her brother to make sure she gets the name right):

Mithraic Mystery Cult Practises in the Western Empire.

- The Yates family are wealthy, but it's clear (Accounting) that she's not letting her brother squander the family fortune on his hobbies. She agrees to any reasonable expenses, and will pay the market value of the book once Phyllis finds it, but a **Bargain** Push gets the player Edge 3, "Money in your Pocket".
- Why isn't her brother here? He's... unwell. If the player insists with a suitable Interpersonal Push, she admits that he was badly beaten in a boxing match, and is at home in bed. She came here to get the book to calm him down; Alvin was getting very agitated that he didn't have a copy of the book, and she worries that he'll make his injuries even worse.
- She asks that the Yates name be kept private; she wants to emply Phyllis as a go-between.
- She doesn't know where her brother goes to box. If Phyllis goes to question Alvin, see *The Defeated*, 17.
- It is clear, though, that she's quietly furious. If pressed on this, she talks about the 'brutal animal' who attacked her brother. There's boxing, and there's the merciless, savage beating that her brother endured last night. From what she's gathered, Alvin's opponent was like a wild beast, cruel and despicable. As soon as she can, she is going to ensure that he is arrested and imprisoned for assault.
 - If Drummer's staying in the bookshop, he hears this and flees through an upstairs window. He'll refuse to speak to Nancy Yates under any circumstances.

Research (Core Clue) turns up details on *Mithraic Mystery Cult Practises in the Western Empire*.

There are two copies in the city – the university library has a partial, severely damaged copy, and the other more intact book was purchased by a collector, Dr. Lake. (See *The Red Book*).

Optionally, ask the player if Phyllis was the person who procured Lake's copy of the book. If the player agrees that it was, run the *Curious Customer* challenge.

CURIOS CUSTOMER

Cool

Advance 9+: You recall the customer who bought the book, a woman named Lake. You got her a good deal, and parted on good terms – maybe you can persuade Lake to part with the book again. Gain Edge 4, "Lake Remembers You."

Hold 5–8: You were the liaison in a deal to procure that book. You never met Lake directly.

Setback 4 or less: You procured the book for Lake, and made sure she paid through the nose for it. She doesn't remember you kindly. Gain Problem 7, "Lake Hates Your Guts."

If Oakley didn't sell Lake the book, it's still trivially easy to use **Research** or **Streetwise** to ask contacts in the occult book scene and track down copies of the book. See *The Red Book*.

THE RED BOOK

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: The Client

Lead-Outs: Into the Underworld

THE LIBRARY COPY

This copy's not on display – it's too badly damaged. **Bureaucracy** or **Research** convinces a bored clerk to fetch it from storage. It looks like someone took a carving knife to the book, with deep cuts gouging into the battered cover and many pages ripped or missing. It's clear that several key sections are missing: notably, there's a reference to a 'labyrinthine symbol' that is supposed to be illustrated, but has been torn out of the book (**Evidence Collection** suggests that this plate was carefully and deliberately removed). Skimming the book, Phyllis learns:

- The cult of Mithras was especially strong in the Roman army.

- Mithras was said to have been ‘born from a rock’.
- There were several grades of initiation.
- One of the key images in the religion was the ritual sacrifice of a bull (the tauroctony). There’s little evidence that the cult ever actually killed bulls, unlike the cult of the Magna Mater (Great Mother). The bull seems to have been a metaphor or the retelling of some foundational myth.
 - **Cthulhu Mythos:** The Great Mother is associated with the worship of Shub-Niggurath.
- The author of this particular book, Fr. Matthews, identifies a “divergent strain” of Mithras-worship that arose in the years just before the cult was suppressed by Emperor Theodosius in the 4th century. This cult used physical pain and gruelling ordeals to attain mystic insights. Other accounts describe the cult “entering into the deep places of the earth, and the red caves therein.”

VISITING DR. LAKE

Dr. Angela Lake is an anthropologist; Anthropology recalls that she left the local university after a scandal involving the murder of one of her students by a classmate, and while Lake wasn’t directly implicated, there were rumours about her teachings encouraging ‘moral degeneracy’. She argued that civilisation and morality were both illusions, and that humans would be happier if they cast away these delusory beliefs and embraced their true primal nature as hunter-gatherers. Now, she lives in a large townhouse and continues her research privately, funded by ‘like-minded philanthropists’.

If the player has Edge 4, “Lake Remembers You”, then it’s trivially easy to get in past Haskins, Lake’s hulking bodyguard. Without this card, Phyllis needs to make a suitable Interpersonal Push or offer a bribe to get an audience with the anthropologist.

If the player has Problem 7, “Lake Hates Your Guts”, then Haskins won’t let Phyllis in, full stop. The only alternative is to sneak into the house.

SNEAKING INTO LAKE'S HOUSE

Stealth

Advance 5+: You circle around and find an unlocked back door. Just as you’re about to slip in, you see a car drive by. Haskins is driving, and there’s Dr. Lake in the back seat. The house is empty. Gain Edge 5, “An Empty House.”

Hold 3-4: You circle around and find an unlocked back door. In you go...

Setback 2 or less: You don’t find any way in, and there are too many suspicious eyes in this neighbourhood to risk housebreaking. Better find another approach.

Spending Edges: Any General/Physical

Extra Problem: Problem 8, “Monkey Bite.”

The House

Inside, the house is crammed with artefacts from Lake’s research. Masks from Africa, clay figurines from Europe, icons and statuettes from Asia – a cross-section of human cultures, emphasising their common roots in basic biology. Images recur: sex and death, violence and secrets locked away in dark, hidden places. The place stinks; Lake has a menagerie of animals, mostly capuchin monkeys, locked in cages. There are also a number of large toads that croak incessantly. There’s little apparent order to her collection.

Biology or **Outdoorsman** notes that the animals are unwell, and have likely been mistreated. Weirdly, several of the monkeys have scratched maze/spiral patterns into their walls near their cages.

Art History or **Occult** spots a curious painting in the middle of the display. Unlike everything else here, it’s quite new – it was painted only a few months ago. It depicts a labyrinthine spiral motif, overlaid onto the image of a human brain. The edges of the canvas are smeared with red, and somehow it makes it hard to look directly at the

painting. The redness seems to bleed out of the image, staining the rest of the world, making Oakley's heart pound with terror or excitement. At the same time, the toads croak in unison, as if somehow aware of the bookhound's reaction.

- If the player has Edge 2, "As A Foulness Shall Ye Know Them", Phyllis senses that Dr. Lake is somehow connected to that vision of red mist.

Evidence Collection: There's a photograph on one bookshelf, showing Lake speaking to a small group of people in the drawing room of her house. It looks like a private lecture, presumably about the same controversial theories that ended her academic career. One of the people in the audience is Alvin Yates.

Filching the Book

Unscrupulous players might consider stealing the book from Lake's house. The copy of *Mithraic Cult Practises* sits in a locked display case. It's a Filch (or Devices) Challenge to grab it.

STEALING THE BOOK

Filch

Advance 5+: You manage to unlock the case without raising the alarm. In a flash, you've got hold of *Mithraic Cult Practises*. Time to go...

Hold 3-4: You manage to open the case, but the lid slips and shatters. You grab the book, but you've got to run. Follow with *Followed by Haskins*, 25.

Setback 2 or less: The case is solidly locked – and before you can smash it, you hear voices. Lake's back.

Spending Edges: Edge 5, "An Empty House"

Stealing the book short-circuits many of the interactions with Lake, but she can pick up the trail of Drummer via Haskins and show up for *Into the Underworld* (20).

SPEAKING TO LAKE

If Phyllis gets to talk to Lake – either by being inviting in, or by confronting her after sneaking in – then the conversation is a minefield.

- Initially, Lake has little interest in talking to Phyllis. It takes an Interpersonal Push to convince her not to throw Phyllis out immediately.
- A suitable Push (**Bargain, Reassurance, Flattery**) gets her talking.
- So does mentioning the strange encounter with Moses Drummer. So far, Lake's failed to make contact with Tsathoggua, and has reached a dead end in her attempts to do so. She tried to awaken the Tsathoggua-essence in the brains of monkeys through various means (exposure to the labyrinth symbol, physical pain, restraint, medication, and combinations of the above), but to no avail. If Phyllis describes Drummer's condition to her, she recognises it as incipient infection by Tsathoggua.

If Lake isn't willing to talk to Phyllis, she has Haskins throw her out. (If Haskins isn't present, then she threatens to call the police if Phyllis stays, but this does give Phyllis a little more time to talk to her or look around).

In conversation, Lake reveals the following:

- She believes that there are 'primal forces' in the human psyche, forces that predate human existence. Forces that have guided and dominated our thoughts throughout existence. Some groups, like the Mithraic cults of the 4th century, had a special connection to these forces that she believes was beneficial.
- The Mithraic cult's central mystery was the sacrifice of the bull; she believes this symbolises the magical union of the strength of the primal beast and the intelligent consciousness of the enlightened human – rising above both savage primitive and frail, mewling civilisation to become a thing akin to a God.
- The labyrinth symbol is an aid to meditation; it encourages a 'primal mindset'. As one contemplates the labyrinth, one discards the trappings and strictures of civilisation at each twist and turn, until one arrives at the primal core as a shapeless, formless thing, a creature of pure potential that can adapt to any circumstance.

- She believes that certain people are especially talented or connected to these primal forces – they are mystics, in thrall to these forces instead of mastering them, but they can provide useful insight.

As she talks, she tries to probe Phyllis for information about her client, and whether or not such a mystic has arisen.

WATCH YOUR MOUTH

Cool

Lake's trying to pump you for information about your client and Moses Drummer. Better watch what you saw, but she's smart like a snake.

Advance 9+: You manage to give her a line of patter that bamboozles her and doesn't reveal your client. Gain Edge 6, "I See Right Though You".

Hold 5-8: You manage to avoid giving her any names, but you suspect she's got a good idea who hired you.

Setback 4 or less: She mentions Yates' name, and you can't suppress a wince. Gain Problem 10, "Lake Knows".

Spending Edges: Any General/Mental

OBTAINING THE BOOK

Lake has little interest in selling the book for money – what she wants is a way to contact Tsathoggua. If Phyllis mentions the red mist or anything related to Drummer, her curiosity is piqued. She might:

- Suggest that she'd be willing to sell the book to Alvin Yates if Phyllis brings Drummer to her. (*"I think young Mr. Yates has discovered someone with a special talent. I would like to meet this prodigy. I am done with the book – Yates can buy it from me, if you introduce me to this... atavism, this survivor from a purer age."*)
- Have her bodyguard Haskins follow Phyllis
- Have Haskins start asking around, so she can work out why there's a sudden, seemingly urgent interest in *Mithraic Cult Practises*.

Run *Making a Deal* if the player tries to convince

Drummer to meet with Lake in exchange for the book.

Alternatively, run *Into the Underworld* if Lake tries to make contact with Drummer at the next boxing match.

THE BOXER

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: A Beaten Man, The Client, The Red Book, The Defeated

Lead-Outs: No-Win Situation, Old Wounds

Tracking Drummer through various means (**Streetwise**) leads Phyllis to the boxer's current abode, a flophouse in a poor part of town (ideally near the docks.) Drummer lives there with two fellow ex-sailors, James Chin and Patrick Flaherty. Only Chin and Drummer are home when Phyllis visits.

(If Phyllis managed to convince Drummer to stay at the bookstore, then Drummer calls James Chin, and McRory follows Chin to trigger the events of *No-Win Situation*.)

TALKING TO DRUMMER

It's clear that Moses Drummer is still suffering the after-effects of his boxing match. He moves awkwardly, wincing in pain with every step. He keeps rubbing his temples and forehead, and complains about headaches. He also appears to have become colour-blind – for example, he might ask Chin to pass over 'that red blanket' so their guest has somewhere comfortable to sit, but the blanket is clearly green.

Moses Drummer is downbeat and confused by the events of the previous night. He apologises over and over; Phyllis can't get any useful information out of him without first Reassuring him that he's forgiven for any misdeeds. After that, words come pouring out of the man.

- To make ends meet, he takes part in an illegal bareknuckle boxing ring.
- Last night, he was up against a young man named Alvie. Drummer was losing, but then this red mist filled up his head, and he heard a voice crying "N'kai! N'kai!"
- Next thing he knew, he had beaten Alvie to a

pulp. He remembers stumbling out of the boxing ring and into the dressing room, and recalls Pat (Patrick Flaherty) calling for him to stop. He doesn't know what happened, or where Flaherty is.

- He's pathetically grateful for any help that Phyllis gave him, or apologetic if he caused trouble
- **Assess Honesty:** Drummer's hiding something about the bout.
 - An Interpersonal Push gets him to admit that the bout was supposed to be fixed; Drummer was the favourite to win, but McRory, the bookie who runs the fights, had ordered Drummer to throw the bout and lose to Alvie. Drummer's loss of control in the red mist ruined that.

Drummer's alarmed by any discussion of the red mist or his strange behaviour last night – especially if Phyllis mentions ancient cults or Lake's theories about psychic connections to primal forces. He just wants to be left alone – although if Phyllis suggests that Lake or Yates might pay Drummer to co-operate (**Bargain**), then the hope of being able to repay his debt to McRory convinces Drummer to play along.

JAMES CHIN

Chin, a fellow sailor, stays quiet in the conversation. If Phyllis asks to speak privately, he describes the events in *Old Wounds* (15). Otherwise, he just treats Drummer's wounds, then excuses himself, saying he's going to check neighbourhood bars for word of Patrick Flaherty, the third flatmate.

NO-WIN SITUATION

Scene Type: Antagonist Action

Lead-Ins: The Boxer

Lead-Outs: Into the Underworld

At a suitable juncture, Leon McRory shows up, either at Drummer's flophouse or the bookstore. The bookie is a small, energetic man, quick to smile, but his smile never touches his eyes. He feigns friendliness, but it's clearly an act. He's ac-

companied by a trio of goons.

On seeing Phyllis, McRory declares that he's "*just here to inquire about the health of his good friend, the Great Bull Drummer. Surely you won't mind if he has a private word with the man?*"

Possible options for Phyllis:

- **Stay Quiet:** It takes a **Streetwise** or **Reassurance** Push to convince McRory to dismiss the bookseller as just another one of Drummer's no-good pals.
- **Speak Up:** Mentioning the possibility of a payoff with **Bargain** gets McRory's attention. The bookie has no understanding of the supernatural, but he's already bilked Alvin Yates out of quite a lot of money; if Phyllis can convince McRory that there's a chance of a payoff from Dr. Lake, he'll let Phyllis stay.
- **Eavesdrop:** A Difficulty 3 **Stealth** Quick Test lets Phyllis leave, and then listen in through the thin walls of another room in the flophouse.

If the test fails, or if Phyllis isn't able to avoid McRory's suspicion, run the challenge *Out On Your Ear*.

OUT ON YOUR EAR

Fighting

Advance 6+: McRory's goons try to kick you out, but you stun one of them out with a sudden elbow to the face. Then Bull Drummer joins the fray, roaring in anger, and before you know it, McRory and his henchmen are fleeing. Gain Edge 7, "Comrades in Arms."

Setback 5 or less: McRory's goons grab you and throw you out, and give you a nasty shove that sends you sprawling against a wall. Gain Problem 11, "McRory knows your name."

Spending Edges: Any General/Physical

Extra Problem: Problem 12, "Rising Mists"

If the player isn't able to hear the conversation, or if by some miracle Phyllis stops McRory from speaking to Drummer, then McRory shouts a threat to Flaherty's life as he flees.

MCRORY'S SPEECH

Paraphrase or play out McRory's speech to Drummer as follows:

- Initially, McRory seems almost conciliatory. He knows that Alvin Yates is a pompous ass, and that it hurts a man's pride to lose to him – but that was the arrangement. Many, many people had bet heavily on Drummer to win, and the arrangement was that Drummer would throw the match.
- Instead, Drummer beat Yates to a pulp. It was a thing to behold, McRory agrees, a beautiful beating, but it's a terribly expensive mistake. Now, instead of getting a payment for throwing the match, Drummer owes McRory.
- Now, McRory knows that Drummer doesn't have any money. So, Drummer's going to fight again – and this time, he'll be up against "Baby" Madison. **Streetwise** – or Drummer's audible intake of breath – suggests that this opponent is far out of Drummer's league. McRory's lining Drummer up to get killed, but Drummer's astounding performance against Yates will draw in bettors.
- As a final threat, McRory points out that Drummer's friend Patrick Flaherty is looking forward to the fight. He's so eager, he's already in his seat." It's a clear implication that McRory's men have Flaherty and will murder him if Drummer backs out.

SCREAMING ON THE INSIDE

After McRory leaves, Drummer slumps down onto his bed. If Oakley's still present, then Drummer provides clarification in monosyllables, explaining what McRory meant if it's unclear to the player. After a few minutes, he falls silent, staring at his scabbed hands. He asks Phyllis to leave, saying that he needs to rest.

When Drummer's left alone, he screams in his mind.

And Tsathoggua answers. From all around the city, there's the croaking of frogs as a red rain

begins to fall. Those who have been exposed to the contagion – including Phyllis – find their vision briefly occluded by a scarlet veil, as if a thick red fog bank passed over them.

If the player has not yet spoken to James Chin, he now contacts Phyllis. "You felt it too," he says, "it's getting worse." Run *Old Wounds* at this point.

OLD WOUNDS

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-Ins: The Boxer, No-Win Situation

Lead-Outs: Making the Deal, Sanity Check

James Chin is half-Chinese, half-Dutch. Like Bull Drummer and Patrick Flaherty, he's worked on various merchant ships for twenty years, finding work where he could. Like the other two, he's down on his luck and needs money, but he was smart enough to stay away from McRory's underground circus of horrors.

For many years, he's kept a secret, and now he wants to tell it.

- Ten years ago, he and Bull Drummer were in Marseilles. They were caught in a thunderstorm, and took shelter in a cellar.
- It was an ancient cellar, deep and dark. From the description, **Archaeology** suggests that it was a Roman cellar, possibly even a *mithraem*, which were traditionally built underground.
- There were other people in the cellar, too – *clochards*, street people, beggars and vagrants, all huddled together against the rain.
- As they tried to sleep, everyone started having nightmares and visions. It was like this red mist was rising from the ground, pouring in from the streets, filling their heads. One of the *clochards* said it was the blessing of St. Toad, whatever that means – like St. Elmo's fire, Chin guesses, the electrical discharge that dances around a ship's masts during a storm.
- He also remembers hearing this hideous liquid sound gurgling in the depths. It was like water running through a sewer, but it seemed to be coming from all around him.
- Drummer seemed especially afflicted. He was

talking to himself, muttering about sacraments and talking in Latin.

- (Chin pauses. He needs **Reassurance** to go on.) He thinks – it can't have been so, but it seemed that Drummer was changing. Like there was something inside him trying to get out.
- This one old *clochard* took charge. He drew a strange symbol on the wall with chalk, and make everyone stare at it, including Drummer. It was a maze. Chin remembers feeling like he was lost in a red mist, but it must have been a dream. He used to think that whole night was a dream.
- The next morning, everything was back to normal, including Drummer. The old man, though, was dead; he'd frozen to death during the night. Everyone left the cellar now that the storm was over. Chin remembers asking one of the other *clochards* about the old man's body, but they told him that it would be attended to by *l'argile*, the clay. He doesn't know what they meant by this.
- He recalls being absolutely exhausted the next morning. His legs ached, as though he'd walked for miles.
- The two returned to their ship, and never spoke of the incident. Chin put the whole night down to the strangeness of the storm, and tried to forget about it.
- Now, he feels the red mist at the edges of his vision again. It's pressing against his eyes from the *inside of his skull*. He thinks that Drummer is the root cause of whatever's going on, but he doesn't know what to do.

Anthropology: If asked to describe the maze sigil, Chin sketches it as best he can. Now that he thinks about it, he can't be sure if the old *clochard* drew it on the wall of the cellar, or if it was there all along.

If the player doesn't think of it, suggest that a visit to Oakley's source Wyilter might be a good idea – he's got **Cthulhu Mythos** and might be able to shed light on Chin's story.

SANITY CHECK

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-Ins: The Red Book, Old Wounds, The Defeated

Lead-Outs: Any

When weirdness crops up, Oakley's contact Wyilter is the man to ask. The old man is clearly mad, but at least he's usually entertaining.

Not this time.

When Phyllis arrives at Wyilter's farmstead outside the city, the way is closed. In the distance, Phyllis can see Wyilter's ramshackle cottage down the laneway, but the gate that opens onto the lane is chained shut and locked. Call for a Difficulty 4 **Sense Trouble** Quick Test. If successful, Phyllis spots Wyilter lurking in a nearby hedgerow with a shotgun, and guesses that she should not cross the threshold.

On a fail, then Wyilter emerges from his hiding place and levels the gun at Phyllis if the Investigator tries climbing over the gate. *"That's far enough. I don't want you crossing my border, see? Be off with you!"* A **Reassurance** or **Inspiration** Push is required to continue speaking with Wyilter; otherwise, he fires a warning blast with the shotgun and demands that Phyllis leave immediately.

WYILTER'S FEARS

Wyilter eyes Phyllis suspiciously throughout their conversation – the old man knows that Phyllis has been exposed to the Mythos in some fashion, although he doesn't know the exact form of the corruption. Until Phyllis cleanses herself of the taint, Wyilter refuses to let her enter the farm (and cross the line of 'magic stones' he's buried around the perimeter of the land).

Use the conversation with Wyilter to review the case so far, and to fill in any gaps in the player's understanding of what's going on. Wyilter can provide the following general clues:

- There are primal forces that predate humanity. They're not abstract concepts, and they're not "just" alien gods. They permeate us, pervade us. They made us! *"Ia! Remember what the Necro-*

nomicon says: *Their hand is at your throats, yet ye see Them not; and Their habitation is even one with your guarded threshold!*"

- Those forces are a contagion – exposure to them is a sickness that can be spread, and Wyilter guesses that Phyllis is infected. It must have been a tangential contact - the signs would be more pronounced otherwise – but he advises Phyllis to take precautions. Find what caused the infection, and *burn it out*. Cauterise the wound. If Phyllis doesn't have a gun, then Wyilter throws her an unloaded pistol and a box of ammunition. *"Most people won't understand. You have to put an end to it."* Gain Edge 8, "Wyilter's Gun".
- If Phyllis describes the tale from *Old Wounds* to Wyilter, then Wyilter suggests that the same methods used to call up the Old Ones can perhaps be used to put them down again. A door that's been opened can also be closed. He cautions against putting too much faith in such methods – *"The enemy's inside us. In our blood and bone, and in our minds. At our throats, see? You think you're fighting 'em, but how can you be sure you're not helping them."*

A Push at this point using **Cthulhu Mythos** gets Edge 9, "Walker in the Labyrinth".

THE DEFEATED

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-Ins: The Client, The Red Book

Lead-Outs: The Red Book, The Boxer, Making The Deal, The Formless Spawn

The Yates family are wealthy; pick a suitable source of wealth common in the city (stocks and banking in New York, politics in Washington, manufacturing in London, entertainment in L.A. perhaps). Nancy's inside tending to her brother's wounds when Phyllis visits their mansion. Nancy has the bookseller shown upstairs immediately.

Alvin's bedroom is crammed with books and papers. Oakley's practised eye spots works on philosophy, on physical health, on anthropology, on poetry, and a great number of occult books of dubi-

ous worth. Alvin lies in bed, wrapped in bandages like a mummy. The family physician brushes past Phyllis on the stairs, and shakes his head glumly. Despite this prognosis, and despite the fact that he's missing a dozen teeth, Alvin gives the Book-hound an excited smile and asks if she's procured that copy of *Mithraic Cult Practises*.

Nancy listens in on any conversations between Phyllis and her brother.

Alvin's eager to talk to Phyllis about the book, but remember that he's been pummelled into a physical wreck by Drummer. Punctuate Alvin's speech with coughing up blood, groans, and other reminders that the young man is severely injured (**Medicine**, in fact, diagnoses considerable internal bleeding and concussion; using **Oral History** or **Bureaucracy** on the family doctor gets the same diagnosis). He's on a considerable amount of morphine to dull the pain.

ALVIN & DR. LAKE

- Alvin was a devotee of Dr. Lake for several years. He believes her theories about how human civilisation was a mistake are nonsense – his real interest is in poetry. He wants to write what he calls 'ur-poems', poems written in the antediluvian common tongue of humanity. Poems that a caveman might understand. He treats Phyllis to an impromptu recitation of one of his works (*"ugh ugh! Rarr! Ugh! Brrr! Ack! Uh! Grr! Grr!"*).
- Most of Lake's meetings involved taking drugs and staring at drawings of mazes. He found the whole thing quite dull, really.
- He also came to distrust Dr. Lake. He believes that she was less interested in teaching her students, and was really using them as test subjects. It damaged his nerves, and distracted him from his poetry. He quarrelled with Dr. Lake, and ended up cutting off ties with her. Nancy, he admits, encouraged him to do so.
- (If asked about this, Nancy mentions that she suspects Lake was scamming her overly-credulous brother.)

Assess Honesty or **Occult** suggests Alvin is relatively clueless about the Mythos and its dangers.

ALVIN & DRUMMER

- Alvin joined the underground boxing circuit to reconnect with his primitive side. He bears no ill-will towards Bull Drummer – “why, I think I was winning until he got a second wind. He’s a tremendously inspiring figure to me. I dream about him, and those dreams are, I think, what Dr. Lake was talking about when she spoke of a primal humanity, a force older and stronger than our concepts of civilisation and morality.”
- Nancy, if present, interjects. “That man hurt you so badly, Alvie! He should be in prison, or shot! He’s a monster. Don’t you dare speak kindly of him – that’s the bloody morphine talking!”
- If Phyllis has yet to track down Drummer, then Alvin can give a rough address (*The Boxer*, p. 13). He also mentions Drummer’s friend Flaherty, who was at the brawl last night.
- Alvin can also point the player in the direction of Leon McRory, the organiser of the underground boxing ring.

ALVIN & THE BOOK

Alvin admits that he was about to contact Phyllis in any event – while he no longer has any contact with Lake, he wants that book to continue his research. He believes that the Mithras cult has its origins “in Persia, in Babylon, and beyond them, in Mesopotamia and Ur and Mu where humanity began.” He had Oakley’s address in a piece of paper in his shirt, which was stolen from the dressing room.

He begs Phyllis to procure Lake’s copy of the book, and promises ‘a handsome reward’ for the tome. He wants to see if there are any new insights to be found in the book, now that he’s been ‘inspired’ by his brawl with Drummer.

If Phyllis manages to get the book for Alvin, run *Formless Spawn*.

FORMLESS SPAWN

Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction

Lead-Ins: The Defeated

Lead-Outs: Into the Underworld

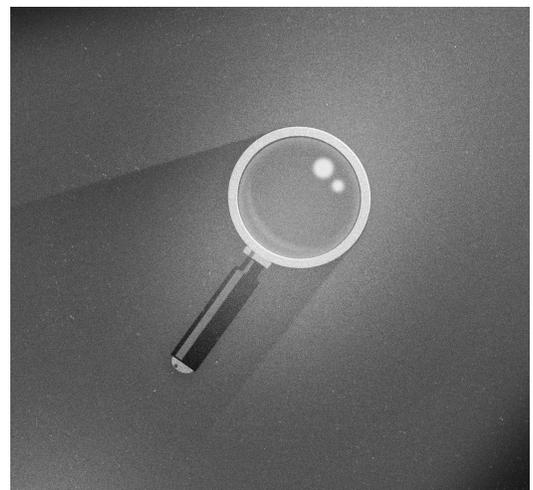
If Phyllis procures an intact copy of *Mithraic Cult Practises* for Alvin Yates, it’s very, very bad.

Alvin begins by studying the labyrinth sigil in the book, and the results are disastrous. The labyrinth is a map, a way for the Tsathoggua-essence to slither to the surface of his mind. The alien god was already half-awake after Alvin’s contact with Bull Drummer; now, it slithers through the labyrinth towards full and awful manifestation.

If Oakley’s present, she’s got a chance to save Alvin before the transformation is complete.

As Alvin stares at the sigil, he starts to change. His eyes fill with blood. “I can’t see,” he moans, “it’s all red. Ia! I walk in red-litten Yoth, and HE approaches from lightless N’Kai! Oh god! He’s in my head! He – I... Ia! Ia!” His skull suddenly distends beneath the bandages wrapping it, the bones cracking and reforming into a shape reminiscent of a conical cap.

Firstly, it’s a Difficulty 4 Stability Quick Test; if this test fails, Phyllis has a -2 penalty on *Grab That Book*.



GRAB THAT BOOK

Athletics

Advance 6+: You rip the book and that awful sigil out of Alvin's hands. For a moment, you're there in the red mist with him, too – it's like you're lost in some underground labyrinth, pursued by a monster. You run – and find that you've hurled the book against the wall, and the spell is broken. Alvin collapses in the bed, unconscious. Gain Edge 9, "Walker in the Labyrinth."

Hold 4-5: You rip the book out of Alvin's hands and throw it against the wall. He roars – this ghastly, inhuman noise – and starts thrashing. Everything goes red as all his wounds open up beneath the bandages. The bed's a sea of blood. Strong hands grab you and throw you out as servants swarm into the room. You catch a glimpse of Nancy's pale, terrified face before the door slams shut.

Setback 3 or less: Too late! The transformation is complete. Run the *Formless Spawn* challenge.

Spending Edges: Any General/Physical

FORMLESS SPAWN

Fighting

Advance 6+: You don't know what Alvin turned into, but you manage to kill the thing before it hurts anyone. After a brief struggle, it falls over the landing banister and smashes against the marble floor of the hallway below. Gain Edge 9, "Walker in the Labyrinth."

Hold 4-5: You fight the thing, but it flows like bloody water. You manage to force it over the balcony and let it splash/smash against the stone floor below, but not before it wounds Nancy.

Setback 3 or less: You black out as its tentacles wrap around your throat. When you wake up, everyone else is gone. Later, you discover that the servants fled, but Nancy Yates is missing. A subsequent search discovers a crack in the cellar, leading down into the bedrock below the city, but nothing human could fit through that narrow gap. Gain Problem 13, "Spared."

Spending Edges: Any General/Physical

Extra Problem: 14, "Formless Claws"

If the transformation is completed, then Alvin degenerates into this hideous ropy mess of inky-black tentacles and flowering organs. He's half-Formless Spawn, half-ruin of a human, as the Tsathoggua-essence that has consumed his brain now rewrites his cells. He stumbles or flows towards the door, slashing at Phyllis, Nancy or whoever's nearby.

Phyllis can flee with a Difficulty 3 Fleeing test; if she fails to flee, or chooses to stay, then she has to fight.

Regardless of what happens, Nancy blames Bull Drummer and Dr. Lake for her brother's condition. She may try to take her revenge in *Into The Underworld*.

MAKING THE DEAL**Scene Type:** Core**Lead-Ins:** The Red Book, The Boxer**Lead-Outs:** Formless Spawn, Into the Underworld

Dr. Lake will trade *Mithraic Cult Practises* in exchange for a meeting with Bull Drummer. (If she doesn't get this meeting, then she has her bodyguard Haskins follow Phyllis and pick up Drummer's trail that way, which leads to *Into the Underworld*.)

To set up such a meeting, Phyllis needs to persuade Drummer to play along. **Inspiration** or **Reassurance** can convince Drummer to accompany Phyllis to Lake's house. Alternatively, **Bargain** and the promise of a payoff works. Drummer's nervous about going along; he has another fight tonight that he can't miss. (If the player hasn't played through *No-Win Situation*, then **Assess Honesty** spots that Drummer's preoccupied with other concerns, and **Reassurance** can draw out an account of what happened – Leon McRory is holding Drummer's friend Patrick, and will punish him if Drummer doesn't fight again tonight.)

AT LAKE'S HOUSE

Drummer gets increasingly nervous as they approach Lake's house, and begs Phyllis to stay with him. "I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I don't know what she wants of me." Either make a **Reassurance** Push, or promise to protect Drummer. The boxer also keeps checking the time – he can't be late for the fight tonight.

Lake receives Drummer and Phyllis in the same drawing room. She carefully guides Drummer to sit in the chair facing the painting of the labyrinth sigil. The boxer avoids looking at the symbol directly; he looks at the floor, at his hands, shoots panicked glances at Phyllis, anything to not fall into that maze. Still, there's a palpable psychic tension in the air, a red sheen covering everything.

Lake murmurs under her breath – it's a binding spell to contain the formless horror that she hopes Drummer will become.

The pressure grows – what does Phyllis do?

Wait? Make an excuse and get Drummer out

of there? Pull out a gun and murder Lake in cold blood? (Optionally, merge this scene with the high-occult elements of *The Red Mist*, 22). If Phyllis doesn't intervene, then... nothing happens. Drummer grows visibly distressed, holding his head and moaning, but he manages to resist manifesting the Tsathoggua-essence.

After a few minutes, Lake starts asking Phyllis about Drummer's background:

- How does Phyllis know Drummer?
- What caused Drummer's injuries?
- Are there any strange events in Drummer's past?

Assess Honesty suggests that she's probing for whatever triggered Drummer's connection to Tsathoggua in the first place. Lake quickly works out that physical pain and terror is the missing ingredient.

She won't keep Drummer waiting. She hands over the book to Phyllis, and suggests that Drummer return to her for another interview at his convenience. She's done enough for today.

Continue on with delivering the book to Yates in *Formless Spawn*, or to the final boxing bout in *Into the Underworld*.

INTO THE UNDERWORLD**Scene Type:** Core**Lead-Ins:** Any**Lead-Outs:** The Red Mist

In twos and threes, they slip into the underworld. McRory's underground boxing club is literally underground, in the basement of a disused pumping station near the river. Thick mists curl around the building like curious ghosts, turned bloody by the garish glow of the red emergency lightning.

Who might be here?

- **Moses "Bull" Drummer** definitely is. He's here to fight "Baby" Madison, and it's a fight he knows he's going to lose, and lose badly. If he doesn't show up, though, McRory will punish his friend Patrick Flaherty.
- Drummer's friends **Flaherty** and **Chin** may also be in attendance; the former's McRory's

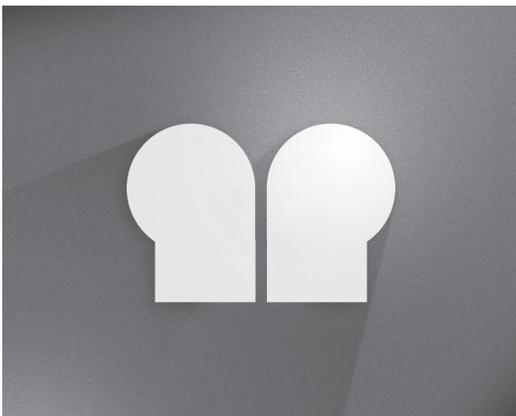
prisoner, the latter as an unwilling witness to his friend's impending beating.

- If, as is likely, **Dr. Lake** knows that Drummer is the well-spring of the Tsathoggua infection, then she's here tonight, aided by her bodyguard Haskins. She carries with her a large square bundle, wrapped in brown paper. **Art History** or **Evidence Collection** guesses that it's the labyrinth painting from her house. Haskins follows along beside her like a protective shadow. Lake's goal in the finale is to use the labyrinth-sigil when Drummer is most vulnerable to possession by Tsathoggua, turning him into an avatar of the god that she can then bind.
- Alternatively, in the unlikely situation where Phyllis has managed to completely sidestep Lake, then **Nancy Yates** is the antagonist. She blames Drummer for her brother's injuries (or death, in the case of *Formless Spawn*), and intends to subject him to the same fate.

GETTING IN

If Phyllis doesn't have Problem 11 - "McRory Knows Your Name", or Problem 7 - "Lake Hates Your Guts", then getting into the underground club is easy with **Streetwise**. If she's got either of those problems, then the goons (the same goons who were with McRory in *No-Win Situation*, 14) will swiftly escort her out if she shows her face.

Inside the dark cellar, the crowd gathers in the main chamber, forming a rough circle around the open space that will be the boxing ring. Drummer's



GETTING PAST THE GOONS

Disguise

Advance 6+: Not only do you make it in, but you immediately spot an ally. Gain Edge 10, "A Friend In Your Corner."

Hold 4-5: Your disguise fools McRory's guards, and you slip down the steps into the underground chamber below. The air's already thick with the smell of blood and sweat.

Setback 3 or less: You manage to get past them, but you're spotted. You find a hiding place to lie low. Gain Problem 15, "Theist in a Foxhole."

Spending Edges: Any General/Social. +2 if Oakley's in the company of Bull Drummer.

Extra Problem: 16, "No Forgiveness."

opponent, "Baby" Madison, is already there. He's a huge man, far bigger and tougher-looking than Drummer, with a face like boiled ham.

McRory's also present, taking bets on the outcome of the fight. Usually, Drummer would be a hopeless underdog in this fight, just as Alvin Yates was when he went up against Drummer, but the sailor's performance in the previous bout has changed the odds considerably, and many more bets than usual are being laid on Drummer to win.

Drummer believes he has to fight – if he doesn't, Flaherty will suffer. Phyllis might try rescuing Flaherty by sneaking around the complex to find where the Irishman is being held.

FINDING FLAHERTY

Stealth

Advance 6+: There, tied up and beaten in that storage closet. You sneak in and free him, but the gathering pressure in the air suggests it may be too late. Gain Edge 11, “Free at Last.”

Hold 4–5: You search around, but can’t find where they’re holding Flaherty. He must be here somewhere, but you’re out of time.

Setback 3 or less: While looking for Flaherty, you’re spotted by some of McRory’s goons. Gain Problem 16, “No Forgiveness.”

Spending Edges: Any General/Social

THE GOD IN THE BLOOD

Stability

Advance 13+: You’re not going to succumb to monsters. Your mind is your own. Through sheer will, you drag yourself out of this nightmare. Gain Edge 9, “Walker in the Labyrinth.”

Hold 6–12: You manage to resist the mind-numbing sensations, but your will is weakening. You’ve got to stop whatever’s happening.

Setback 5 or less: Your mind is cracking under the strain. Gain Problem 17, “Tsathoggua!”

Spending Edges: Any General/Mental

THE FIGHT BEGINS

Drummer steps into the ring, and the fight begins. He’s already hurt, and Madison takes full advantage of this weakness. Blow after bareknuckle blow slams into Drummer’s existing wounds. One of the first hits opens up a cut on Drummer’s forehead, and a torrent of blood rushes out, turning his face into a gory, horrific mask.

The red mist seems to close in. Everyone feels it to some degree. The cheers and laughter of the crowd fades, replaced by a strange mix of nervous fear and reverent chanting. Everyone knows, but cannot articulate, the feeling that God is close at hand. Madison’s beating of Drummer becomes sacramental. Each punch is like the beat of some unseen drum, echoing in the blood of the onlookers.

If Oakley has already been exposed to the Tsathoggua contagion, the effect is especially strong. Run the following Challenge if the player has the Rising Mists problem. Oakley feels the real world melt away, to be replaced by the hallucination that she’s in a red-litten cavern or tunnel, and something huge – snorting, hairy, vile, divine – is chasing her.

And as Drummer’s pushed to the limit of his endurance, Lake unveils the labyrinth image (or Nancy Yates holds up the page of the book showing the same sigil).

Now run *The Red Mist*.

THE RED MIST

Scene Type: Conclusion

Lead-Ins: Into the Underworld

Here’s what happens if Phyllis *doesn’t* intercede.

When Drummer sees the labyrinth sigil through the haze of blood, he enters a trance. He starts savagely beating Madison, knocking the bigger man to his knees. As Drummer pounds away, his flesh starts to dissolve. Madison tries to fight back, delivering a single sharp cross to the side of Drummer’s skull.

The skull cracks, and Drummer’s human form collapses. He becomes a formless horror of flowing bone and muscle, bull-like from certain angles, toad-like from others. Tsathoggua has risen from the lightless N’Kai of the deepest soul and now walks in the light, clothed in the flesh of his serv-

ant. The crowd screams and flees; Madison is torn to shreds.

If present, Lake steps in and casts a binding spell, compelling the thing that was Drummer to obey her. She and Haskins then hustle the monster out into a waiting car. With an avatar of her god in her possession, Lake will become a vastly more powerful and dangerous cultist of Tsathoggua.

There are two obvious ways for Oakley to stop this horror and save Drummer; a clever player will no doubt think of several others.

One option is to physically stop Lake, which means getting past Haskins and McRory's men.

STOPPING LAKE

Fighting

Penalty: -1 if you've got *McRory Knows*

Your Name

Advance 6+: You fight your way through the crowd and tear the sigil out of the woman's hand. You can feel the terrible pressure of the symbol in your mind, like its trying to crack your skull. There! That grating! Water's flowing on the far side. You through the sigil through the grating, to dissolve in the dark river-water. Gain Edge 12, "All Is Washed Away."

Hold 4-5: You wrestle the sigil out of the woman's hands. For a moment, Drummer's himself again. He looks at you across the crowd – and he makes a decision.

Setback 3 or less: You can't get close to her. There are too many of them. You need to find another way

Spending Edges: +2 for "Friend in Your Corner" or "Free At Last".

Extra Problem: 6, "Punched in the Side".

Alternatively, if Phyllis has *Walker in the Labyrinth*, then she can try entering into that psychic mist and drawing Drummer out of the labyrinth, just as the old *clochard* did in Marseilles.

THE THESEUS GAMBIT

Stability

Advance 10+: You plunge into the red maze inside your mind – inside everyone's mind. This is the bloody underworld of the collective unconscious, the monster inside all our souls.

But you keep your nerve, and guide Drummer out of there. You dimly hear the woman screaming at the edge of hearing as you drive Tsathoggua back down where he belongs, to slumber in the darkness of the subconscious. Gain Edge 13, "Karmic Justice."

Hold 6-9: You break the spell long enough to free Drummer from the god's terrible hold. For a moment, Drummer's himself again. He looks at you across the crowd – and he makes a decision.

Setback 5 or less: You save Drummer, but you're trapped yourself. If you've got "Friend in your Corner" or "Free At Last", you can spend it now to shunt this fate onto them; otherwise, gain Problem 18, "Forever Lost".

Spending Edges: Any General/Mental

Extra Problem: 17, "Tsathoggua!"

ON AN ADVANCE

Either Advance (or an Advance in whatever alternate Challenge you create to fit the player's solution) results in Drummer escaping Tsathoggua's influence. Either the dreadful sigil from *Mithraic Cult Practises* or Dr. Lake are destroyed; either puts an end to the growth of Tsathoggua's influence for the moment.

ON A HOLD

A Hold stops Tsathoggua, but at the cost of Drummer's life. Given a brief respite from the god's hold on his mind, Drummer steps back and lets Madison get back up. Furious, the other boxer launches a renewed assault on Drummer. One hit, two, three, four, and Drummer's down, unconscious. He'll never wake up again – but he dies a human, not one of Tsathoggua's minions.

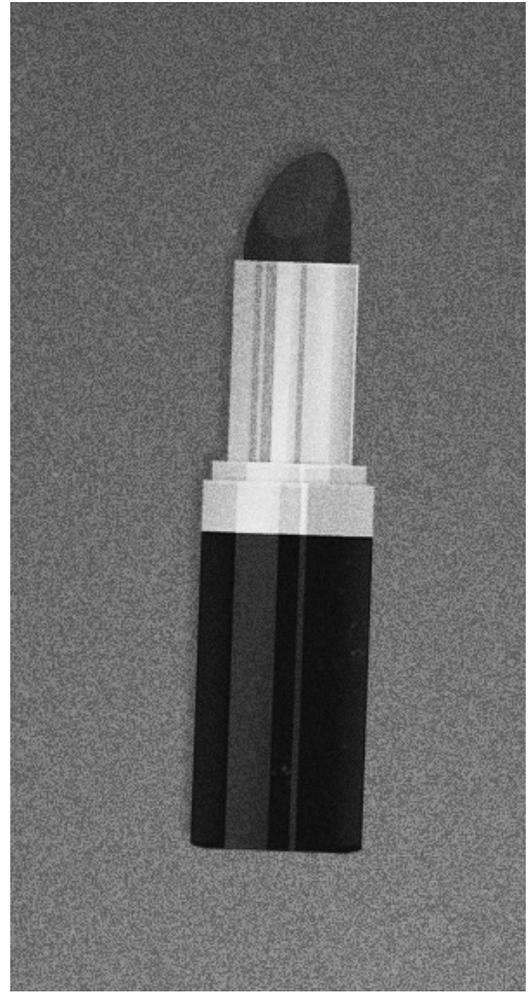
ON A SETBACK

A setback at this stage is disastrous – Oakley might be able to stop Tsathoggua, but only at the cost of her own life, sanity or freedom. The best outcome here is that someone else (A Friend In Your Corner or Free At Last) steps in to save Oakley at the last moment.

AFTERMATH

If Lake survives, then she continues her research into the Tsathoggua cult. She may not be able to reach communion with the god through Drummer, but now she knows she's on the right trail. Leon McRory might also become a recurring antagonist in the mundane arena.

Other survivors may be potential future clients for Oakley (either of the Yates), or allies to be called on in time of need (Drummer, Chin, Flaherty).



ANTAGONIST REACTIONS

| Trigger | Reaction | Setback | Hold | Advance | Extra Problem |
|---|--|---|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Oakley leaves Lake's house | Haskins follows her <i>Stealth</i> | 2 or less: Haskins learns everything his boss needs to know. Gain Problem 10, " <i>Lake Knows</i> " | 3-4: Haskins learns about Drummer. | 5+: Oakley manages to evade her pursuer | None |
| McRory decides Oakley's a threat (player has Problem 11, " <i>McRory Knows Your Name</i> ") | Goons beat Phyllis up <i>Fighting</i> | 2 or less: Oakley's badly beaten. Gain Problem 6, " <i>Punched in the Side</i> " | 3-4 Phyllis escapes her attackers | 5+: Phyllis fights them off. | 16, " <i>No Forgiveness</i> " |
| Phyllis Takes Time after <i>No-Win Situation</i> | It's time for the fight | Drummer heads to the boxing club and <i>Into the Underworld</i> | | | |

The Red Mist Problem Cards

PROBLEM 1

Books Don't Pay the Bills*Continuity*

You're behind on the rent (again) and haven't had so much as a sniff of a good book in weeks. You can't rely on Wyliter going on a book-buying spree, and you can only bluff so many free meals out of Helena Rogers. You need money, and soon.



PROBLEM 2

Strange Fascination*Continuity*

You can apprehend, dimly, the hidden connections between seemingly disassociated events. There are clues in every book that imply the existence of invisible cosmic forces that warp the destiny of humanity the same way the moon affects the tides. You feel driven to investigate strange events, to press on even though you know that only horror awaits you.



PROBLEM 3

Waifs and Strays*Continuity*

You've got a soft spot for the unwanted and the dispossessed. Old books aren't just your livelihood – you collect them the way a spinster collects cats (you've also got lots of cats). There are books on your shelves that no-one will ever want, but you feel a responsibility to shelter them. The same applies to people.



PROBLEM 4

Nightmares*Continuity*

For years now, you've suffered from terrible night terrors. You barely sleep any more, preferring to stay up all night reading. Anything that echoes your nightmares intrigues you.



PROBLEM 5

Black Eye

The boxer gave you a shiner, and you look awful. The next Interpersonal spend of Flattery, Inspiration or Reassurance you make, you've got to spend an extra Push. You may then discard this card. You can also discard it if you Take Time to clean yourself up.



PROBLEM 6

Punched in the Side

Ouch. You don't think he did any permanent damage, but you can feel every one of your ribs now. The man throws quite a punch. -2 on your next General / Physical test, then discard this card.



PROBLEM 7

Lake Hates Your Guts

You can't use Interpersonal pushes when dealing with Lake. Discard this card if you find a way to curry favour with Lake.



PROBLEM 8

Monkey Bite

While breaking into Lake's house, you knocked over a cage and released a small but vicious monkey. It bit a chunk out of your hand. -1 to all General/Manual rolls until you Take Time to get your injury treated. Also, there's a monkey on the loose with a taste for your blood.



PROBLEM 9

Wracked By Nightmares

Mythos Shock : You wake up screaming, convinced that something's burrowing out of your skull. If you still have this card at the end of the adventure, and you've got Problem 4, Nightmares, you go mad.

Counter by Taking Time to sit alone, staring into a mirror and probing your forehead until you've convinced yourself that nothing's trying to hatch from your skull, as if your brain as some loathsome egg.



PROBLEM 10

Lake Knows

You suspect that Dr. Lake knows who hired you. Take a -1 on your next General challenge involving either Alvin or Nancy Yates, then discard this card.



PROBLEM 11

McRory Knows Your Name

Criminal bookmaker Leon McRory knows your name and face. You'll need to be careful in future.



PROBLEM 12

Rising Mists

The red mists are closing in on you. You can feel something terrible inside your mind, inside your skull, like your brain is rotting on the inside. Take a penalty to Stability tests equal to the number of Mythos Shock Problems you have in hand. (Note that this card does not itself count as a Mythos Shock Problem.)



PROBLEM 13

Spared

Mythos Shock : *The creature could have killed you – but it let you live! Why? Did something of Alvin Yates survive in that hideous abomination, or did it have some other reason for letting you live? Is there some awful destiny you are meant to fulfil?*



PROBLEM 14

Formless Claws

Mythos Shock : *You've been savaged by the monster's flailing appendages. You've a -1 to all General/Physical rolls until you Take Time to treat your wounds.*



PROBLEM 15

Theist in a Foxhole

You're stuck in this hiding place. You're safe as long as you stay here, but you've got to discard any one Edge or spend a Push to move on.



PROBLEM 16

No Forgiveness
Continuity

You've earned the enmity of criminal bookmaker and general nasty piece of work, Leon McRory. Counter this by putting McRory in your debt.



PROBLEM 17

Tsathoggua!
Continuity

Mythos Shock : *Something that should be deeply buried has woken up and crawled into the conscious regions of your mind. Now, you're haunted by peripheral visions of something like a hulking toad-like horror. You're a vector for the contagion, just like Moses Drummer.*



PROBLEM 18

Forever Lost
Continuity

Mythos Shock : *Your mind is trapped in the labyrinth of Tsathoggua. If you still hold this Mythos Shock card at the end of the adventure, then you're doomed – your mind will wander forever in the thrall of the alien god.*



The Red Mist Edge Cards

EDGE 1

Good Samaritan

You helped Moses Drummer in his hour of need, and that feels good.

Get an automatic Advance on one Cool test, gaining a Push and discarding this card.



EDGE 2

As A Foulness You Shall Know Them

You've sensed the presence of enemies in your dreams. Spend for a Push of any kind, or an extra die on any test.



EDGE 3

Money in Your Pocket

Nancy Yates gave you money in advance; you've got a roll of cash you can use for expenses in the course of your investigation. If you've still got this card in hand at the end of the game, spend it to counter Problem 3 – Books Don't Pay The Bills.



EDGE 4

Lake Remembers You

Dr. Lake owes you a favour for finding that book for her. Now it's time to call it in. Discard this card to get a free Interpersonal Push when taking to Dr. Lake.



EDGE 5

An Empty House

You know that Lake's house is briefly empty, giving you a window in which to act. +1 bonus to all General/Manual or General/Physical tests in Lake's house.



EDGE 6

I See Right Through You

You've got a handle on how Dr. Lake operates, and are confident you can stay one step ahead of her. While this card is in hand, you get a +1 bonus to any General/Mental tests involving Lake. Spend it for an Interpersonal Push in conversation with Lake.



EDGE 7

Comrades in Arms

You and Moses Drummer now have a friendship forged in the heat of battle.

Gain a +1 bonus to all Fighting tests made in Drummer's presence.



EDGE 8

Wyilter's Gun

Old Man Wyilter thinks this will only be settled when someone's dead. He's crazy, and you're certainly not going to murder anyone, but still... you've got a gun in your pocket. Get an automatic Advance on one Fighting test, gaining a Push and discarding this card.



EDGE 9

Walker in the Labyrinth

You have walked in the psychic labyrinth where some primal horror waits – and you've escaped it. Discard this card to counter any Mythos Shock.



EDGE 10

A Friend in Your Corner

You spot an ally in the crowd. Either pick one of your sources who might be here, or else it's Drummer's friend James Chin. Your pal's assistance gives you a +2 bonus to any General/Physical challenges made in the boxing club.



EDGE 11

Free At Last

You've freed Drummer's friend, Patrick Flaherty.



EDGE 12

All is Washed Away

Dark waters and oblivion don't seem to bad in comparison to the things you've seen. Discard any one Mythos Shock.



EDGE 14

Karmic Justice

Dr. Angela Lake's consciousness got lost within those red mists. She's a hollow shell now. better her than you. Discard any one Mythos Shock.





PHYLLIS OAKLEY

Bookhound

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

- Anrthpology
- Art History
- Assess Honesty
- Bargain
- Cop Talk
- Evidence Collection
- Flattery
- History
- Inspiration
- Law
- Languages
- Occult
- Reassurance
- Research
- Streetwise
- Theology

GENERAL ABILITIES

- Athletics 1
- Cool 2
- Disguise 1
- Fighting 1
- Filch 1
- First Aid 1
- Fleeing 2
- Preparedness 2
- Sense Trouble 2
- Shadowing 1
- Stability 2
- Stealth 1

STORY

Opportunistic Bookhound Phyllis Oakley slinks around the fringes of the city’s occult underworld, trading in rare books and manuscripts. Sifting library sales, house clearances, second-hand book-barrows and the occasional daring theft can turn up a mouldy, worm-eaten diamond in the dust – the price of wisdom is above rubies, and Phyllis is hungry for a cut.

SOURCES



HELENA ROGERS, City Clerk
Accounting, Bureaucracy, Reassurance.

Helena lives in the same building as Phyllis, and they’ve become uncertain friends. Helena’s attitude towards Phyllis veers between motherly concern and bemused irritation, and she’s taken it upon herself to make sure Phyllis stays safe.



ERIK ZACKAROV, Forger
Craft, Cryptography, Locksmith, Intimidation, Streetwise.

Erik’s usually employed to repair and rebind books, but he has a colourful past - a White Russian nobleman who fled the Communists, and has connections to organised crime. Phyllis know he still makes forged identity papers, despite his claims.



MR. WYILTER, Irregular Customer
Archaeology, Astronomy, Geology, Cthulhu Mythos, Outdoorsman.

Old Wyilter is an eccentric book collector and autodidact. He lives outside the city, in a crumbling old house crammed with rotting books, and refuses to leave. He is one of Oakley’s best customers, as she’s the only one who will hand-deliver purchases.



DR. MARIA FORREST, Surgeon
Biology, Chemistry, Medicine, Pharmacy.

A friend of Oakley’s from their university days, Forrest has become a brilliant and wealthy surgeon. Although the two now move in very different social circles, and Forrest is a hardened skeptic, they have remained friends.



DAVID SHEA, Reporter
Architecture, Library Use, Photography, Oral History.

Shea is a reporter for the local newspaper, often assigned the weird stories that bring him into Oakley’s domain. He claims to believe that Phyllis is a con artist (but this may be affectionate needling), and helps her out “so he can catch her red-handed.”