

my dearest friend,

I have made a remarkable discovery! Who would have thought that Dartmoor held the key to my research. An extant group who actively worship an ancient god, right here in England. You must come to the Thistle Lodge in Postbridge at once! Your advice and insight into this matter would be most helpful.

Your friend,
Prof. M. Blackwood

UNSEEN HANDS STRIKE AGAIN

A road outside the village of Postbridge, Devon, sees third accident in as many months.

Margaret Blackwood, Professor of Folklore at UCL and winner of the Cootes Lake Medal, was driven from the road to her death in mysterious circumstances last night.

Two similar accidents include the death of a doctor and a motor coach crash, the driver of which claimed it was as if two "large, strong, hairy hands" grabbed the wheel, forcing him to swerve.

A local psychic suggests the presence of a malign spirit, possibly a murder? Authorities are dismissive of such fancies, claiming the deaths result from drivers on unfamiliar roads.



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- The newspaper clipping was produced using Cthulhu Reborn's Mutable Deceptions Volume 1.
- For additional background to the setting and Dartmoor's folklore, I recommend searching Wikipedia.

THE KEEPERS OF THE WOODS - a scenario for TRAIL OF CTHULHU by Frederick Foulds

Submitted as part of the RPG Geek One Sheet Contest 2015

THE HOOK

January 1934 - The investigators receive a letter from their friend, Margaret Blackwood, a professor of British folklore and traditions. It invites them to meet in the quaint Devonshire village of Postbridge, where Blackwood has made a discovery regarding active worship of an ancient god. Before they set off, however, the morning's paper announces her death in a mysterious car accident, attributed to a local ghost legend, known as the 'hairy hands'.

THE SPINE

The investigators travel to Blackwood's accommodation at the Thistle Lodge in Postbridge. From there they can discover that her death was caused by no accident or ghost. Investigating further, they slowly uncover that all is not right in the village. An ancient sect, known as the Church of the Green Man, hides in the village's shadows. Everyone is involved to some extent and they don't like interference. And every 25 years, they make sacrifice to something sinister that lurks in nearby Wistman's Wood.

THE HORRIBLE TRUTH

The Church of the Green Man is in fact benevolent, despite their actions and distrust of outsiders. Established in the Dark Ages, they are tasked with keeping a lesser avatar of Nyarlathotep, known in local legends as 'The Horned Man' and 'Old Crocker', bound to surrounding Dartmoor, lest it roam free across the world. The investigators' actions could disrupt over a thousand years of careful effort and personal sacrifice. Or, should the cult persuade them otherwise, it may present them with the ultimate moral choice - the sacrifice of one, for the lives of many more.

KEEPER'S NOTE

The investigators have less than 48 hours from arriving in Postbridge to collect the evidence they need. On the evening of the second day, James Carter will be sacrificed, completing the current ritual cycle. Some of the events on the reverse have times associated to them - these can only be accessed in these windows. Don't forget the antagonist reactions to ramp up tension!

PERSONS OF NOTE

- ☠ **Prof. Margaret Blackwood** - friend of the investigators. Deceased.
 - ☠ **Martha Carter** - (37) Landlady of the Thistle Lodge. 3 things: speaks softly; looks over speaker's shoulder as if checking no-one is there; wrings hands.
 - ☠ **James Carter** - (41) Originally from outside Postbridge alongside his wife. Suspicious of villagers. Currently to be sacrificed.
 - ☠ **William McArthur** - (58) Village drunk. Haunted by acts committed for the Church. 3 things: slurs his speech; leans in close when talking; smells of old booze.
 - ☠ **Detective Lawrence Donnelly** - (33) Police officer at Princetown. 3 things: smart and orderly; direct when speaking; runs tongue over teeth when thinking.
 - ☠ **Father Anthony Blakely** - (57) Leader of the Church. 3 things: cheerful; uses biblical passages to emphasise points; uncomfortable stare.
 - ☠ **Peter Bulgrew** - The local thug, used by the Church to deter investigation. 3 things: inarticulate speech; bulging eyes; cracks knuckles.
- Unless noted, characters have the following statistics:**
Fleeing 5; Health 5; Scuffling 5; Hit Threshold 3; Weapon -3 (Fists).

ANTAGONISTS

- ☠ **The Horned Man** - Avatar of Nyarlathotep. It manifests as a being some 7 feet tall, robed in black smoke. Its head is white and featureless, with a crown of malformed antlers. Cannot be fought. **Stability loss 4 when seen.**
- ☠ **Wish hounds** - treat as a Hound of Tindalos (ToC Core Rules - p. 137-8).
If the investigators unleash the avatar, have them chased by it and a pack of ravening hounds. **Stability loss 7, Sanity 2.**

+++READ THIS FIRST+++

- Stability losses with a slash (e.g. 6/3) indicate a maximum and minimum loss. On a successful check, the minimum loss is still taken.
- Don't worry if the investigators don't figure out the Church of the Green Man at first. Give them with hints, but let them follow the clues and draw their own conclusions. This will lead to more satisfactory endings.
- The skills mentioned are the most obvious choices - allow players to be creative and don't hold clues back if they use alternative skills than those asked for.
- The scenario starts at the **Thistle Lodge**. After that, the players have free reign.

WISTMAN'S WOOD (THE SECOND NIGHT)

On the evening of the second night, at around 11 pm, one of the investigators will notice a procession of lanterns heading north east. If they follow, it leads to Wistman's Woods, some 2 miles away. Here, **James Carter** will be sacrificed, if the investigators don't do something. Unless they intervene beforehand, they will catch **Father Blakely** (armed with a sacrificial blade [0, Weapons 3]) and six other villagers within the woods. They will not initiate combat and will negotiate their point of view if allowed to.

MULTIPLE ENDINGS: The scenario can end in several ways (feel free to concoct your own as needs be!):

- The investigators kill the villagers and free James. The Horned Man is unbound. They are chased (**Fleeing** contest) from the woods suffering appropriate **Sanity** and **Stability** losses (see **Antagonists** on reverse).
- They are too late, or let the villagers sacrifice James. **6 pt Stability** loss, minimum 2 pts if passed. **1 pt Sanity** loss.
- James is freed or escapes. The villagers ask one of the investigators to sacrifice themselves for the greater good. Other investigators suffer a **6/2 pt Stability** loss, or **8/3** if they choose to commit the sacrifice. **1 pt Sanity** loss.

If running this as a **Purist** game, use **Anagnorisis** at the finish, as the investigators learn that this chain of sacrifice is unstoppable, if the Mythos is to be kept at bay.

For added tension, have **The Horned Man** and **Wisht Hounds** appear fleetingly, attempting to stop the binding.

ST GABRIEL'S CHURCH (AVAILABLE: ANYTIME)

- Following the lead about the gravestones shows there are trios of graves dated to within days of each other. These repeat every 25 years, and occur in January.
- **Architecture** shows the church is old. In fact, some stonework may be over a thousand years in age.
- **Occult** or **Art History** will notice the motif of the Green Man. A **1 pt spend** in **Occult**, **Anthropology**, or **History** will reveal this is generally considered benevolent.
- **Father Blakely** may be encountered here. If Blackwood is mentioned, he expresses his sympathies. **Assess Honesty** shows this to be not entirely sincere. **1 pt spent** notices him look towards the vestry. Searching the church will uncover the following:
 - The vestry (**Locksmith** to access) contains Blackwood's diary, which details her talks with **James Carter** and sighting of the first murder. It ends "They are coming for me..."
 - There is a tome. **Occult** shows it discusses binding of some form of spiritual entity. It is not clear if this is binding to service, or imprisoning.

THE BOAR'S HEAD (AVAILABLE: 12 PM - 11 PM)

Postbridge's pub. Here, **William McArthur** can be found at most hours, drinking. Spends in **Oral History** or other interpersonal skills will reveal the following, intertwined with garbled stories:

- The **church** has "curious" trios of gravestones
- The villagers don't like outsiders, no sir!
- **Father Blakely** runs this village.

Occult and a mention of folklore will have him ramble incoherently about the 'Horned Man o' the Woods' and the Wisht Hounds, as well as mentioning that he has done things no man should, but "only for the greater good". This will also draw the attention of the barman, who warns investigators away from troubling the old fool. Clever investigators may get around this by taking William elsewhere, or sitting away from the bar. Other locals will eye the investigators with suspicion. There is a chance, after 5 pm, that **Peter Bulgrew** is here. **Sense trouble** spots him paying the investigators particular attention.

TO PRINCETOWN (AVAILABLE: 9 AM - 5 PM):

Princetown is half an hour away by car, or 40 minutes by a very irregular bus service. There investigators can try and obtain the police report on Blackwood's accident by visiting the police station in Princetown (**Cop Talk**, **Bureaucracy**). **Medicine** or **Biology** will show her wounds were caused prior to the accident. May also use **Cop Talk** to contact **Detective Donnelly**, who will suggest that Blackwood's death was suspicious, but the department has no resources to investigate further.

Interviewing Princetown residents about Postbridge will elicit comments on how the residents are of "a strange character" and rarely welcome outsiders.

ANTAGONIST REACTIONS

- **The Note:** Once the Church gets wind of the investigators, a note appears under their room door telling them they aren't wanted and should leave.
- **The 'Hairy Hands':** If the investigators head to Princetown, have the driver (or bus driver) make a **Driving** check. On a fail, they are driven from the road with a **2 pt Stability** check for the experience. A point of **Driving** or **Forensics** will reveal it is the cambre of the road, not something unnatural.
- **The Howling:** On the first night, the Wisht Hounds howl for a **3 pt Stability** check. Those who go looking will see a hound in the distance before it vanishes, resulting in the same stability check.
- **Taken Unawares:** If the note doesn't work, **Peter Bulgrew** attempts to single out a lone investigator and encourages them with his fists. His stats are:
Health 10; Fleeing 10; Athletics 10; Scuffling 5; Hit Threshold 4; Weapon -2 (Fists), -1 (Improvised). If captured, he won't give much info, just that he is doing the good work of the Church. If pressed about murders, suggests they talk to the **Father**.

THE THISTLE LODGE (AVAILABLE: ANYTIME)

Martha Carter runs the lodge. She is welcoming, but investigators can tell she is disturbed (**Psychoanalysis**, **Assess Honesty**). If asked about the villagers, she will admit they are strange, but have welcomed her to their community. Any mention of folklore will end in directions to **The Boar's Head** and **William McArthur**. She will also let investigators know that the police in **Princetown** dealt with Blackwood's death.

Interpersonal skills get her to open up, but only alongside other evidence (Blackwood's Diary, the police report etc.) - tailor to the players choices. She will breakdown and inform them about her missing husband, **James**. He has been taken by the Church of the Green Man for speaking to Blackwood about their activities. They captured her and then she turned up dead. Now James is gone and she doesn't know where they're keeping him. She does know about the sacrifices and that the third is due to happen tonight. She also knows that they are supposed to happen for protection, but from what, she is unsure. She just wants her husband back.