

# UNBOUND MAGAZINE

A FANZINE FOR WEIRD TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING GAMES

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## A FANZINE FOR WEIRD TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING GAMES

Thanks for taking the time to download this pilot issue of Unbound Magazine, a repository for some of the weird and wacky ideas I've had over the years, but which have (almost) never seen 'formal' publication. Creating scenarios and thinking up ways to play tabletop roleplaying games is more than just a hobby to me; it's an obsession, and it not only makes me happy but allows me to feel as if I'm contributing to something much more important than my day job.

I'm also something of a 'goldfish' gamer, and want to experience 'all the games, all the time'. As such, I often find it difficult to remain focused on any single setting or system for too long - a detriment to my ambitions to take my writing to the next level. With that in mind, in this premiere, I've scoured my repositories of half-finished material to locate the following:

- An outline for a **Liminal: The Hidden World** scenario, **OF LIZARDS & BEES** (starting on page 3), in which the characters are drawn to a world of Fae bargaining, betrayal, and games of power.
- A review for a neat **Unknown Armies 3rd edition** scenario, **BRING ME THE HEAD OF THE COMTE DE SAINT-GERMAIN** (on page 11,) and
- A short, one-night scenario, **THE SIGNAL** (page 13), written for Dale Elvy's excellent **EPOCH** horror game (and which was first run over a decade ago at a local convention).

I hope you enjoy what you find in this issue - and if you are in any way inclined to want to reward these efforts, I suggest either purchasing one of my scenarios over at DrivethruRPG, or buying me a **Kofi...**

Oh, and before I go off to tinker with some other scenario, game or review (likely destined to never get further than a first draft and joining the hundreds of thousands other unpublished words on my hard drives), if you have some wild or whacky scenario or article you'd like to contribute, please do drop me a line and maybe I can release it in a future issue?

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# OF LIZARDS & BEES

## A LIMINAL: THE HIDDEN WORLD SCENARIO OUTLINE

**Marcus D. Bone**

**Please Note:** This adventure is not a complete scenario, but rather an outline brief providing only the core plot, major NPCs, and some events that may unfold. As such, much of the 'connective tissue' required to turn this idea into a playable adventure is left to the Game Master to create.

### BACKGROUND

The Spring Ceremony – the formal passing of power from the Winter King to the Queen of Hyde Park – is at risk. A rite that has been held for untold years and ensures peace between the Fae courts may now not happen, and all beings, be they mortal or magic, should tremble at that prospect.

With the Spring Ceremony due to be held on the 20th of March, a Liminal courier – **Anna Fulham** – was dispatched to Snowdonia (the seat of the Winter King) to retrieve the *First Light of Spring*. A gem of a unique golden-yellow colour, the First Light is held by the Winter King as a symbol of the promise made between the Fae lords to share the magical domain each year. However, Anna, an agent of **The Lady of Flowers** (a powerful fae in the service of the Queen of Hyde Park), has not returned, and now the Lady needs

those who walk between the mortal and hidden worlds... the Liminals.

What the player characters may not be aware of – but will discover as the scenario unfolds – is that the Summer Court of the Queen of Hyde Park is not a harmonious one and that Lords and Ladies within her entourage vie constantly for the Queen's blessings and attention. Often, these acts can go too far, and as fate would have it, two of the Summer Lords – **The Duke of Bees and Honey** and the **Master of Lizards** – are independently attempting to diminish the Lady of Flowers' growing influence with their Queen.

However, these all-powerful fae seem incapable of comprehending that all fairy domains are symbiotic in nature, and they can never, no matter how much they wish it, be truly independent of one another. Each fae lord needs the power and magic of its brethren to survive, and just as the Winter King is balanced by the Queen of Hyde Park, the lesser lords are also bound together within the Hidden World. Both bound by the waxing and waning of the seasons, and yet, in the same breath, controlling it, the world of the Fae is beyond most mortals' comprehension.

### THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER

Anna's fate is both complex and quite convoluted. Anna Fulham was, for she is now dead, a woman with a complicated past. While well paid for her position as a mortal courier for The Lady of Flowers, she always struggled with her greatest vice – gambling. Finding herself in debt to **Cob Randall**, a

heavy-hitting London bookie (who also happens to be a Werewolf), she soon began to act as broker of secrets and lies among fae lords' games of lies and power. In this capacity, she found herself dealing with The Duke of Bees and Honey, her own employer's greatest rival, and even took one of the Duke's knights, **Sfika**, as a lover.

Being asked to collect the First Light of Spring was the break Anna had long been looking for, seeing it as a way of paying off her debts to Randall. Willing to betray her mistress, The Lady of Flowers, she collected the First Light and attempted to contact the lady's rivals, The Duke, and Master of Lizards.

However, after Sfika learnt of this plan, he approached Anna at the handover point on Hampstead Heath, demanding that she stop playing games with forces beyond her ken. This argument grew heated and emotional, and when Anna threatened the knight with his silver knife, he attempted to disarm her. In the scuffle, Sfika accidentally killed Anna, and not knowing quite what to do, hid her body under the pavilion alongside the Parliament Hill Fields Athletics Track.

However, unbeknownst to all, a third party witnessed the confrontation between the knight and his lover. **Draco**, an agent of the Master of Lizards. Dispatched by his lord to acquire the First Light (at whatever the cost), he followed the knight and later searched Anna's body, being disappointed to find the gem was not on her (although he did take her house keys).



### THE STATE OF PLAY

With Anna's death and the Spring Ceremony needing to take place soon, many in the Fae World are growing restless.

- The Lady of Flowers, tasked by the Queen of Hyde Park to lead the Spring Ceremony, wants Anna (or more importantly, the First Light) found as soon as possible.
- Sfika is trying to right the wrongs of his dead lover and avoid any conflict among the fae courts. Of course, he knows little of the day-to-day world of mortals and has yet to set on any distinct plan.
- The Duke of Bees and Honey wants the First Light, himself, although this is to simply embarrass the Lady of Flowers and gain prestige from the Queen.
- Draco, the Master of Lizards' agent, will do whatever it takes to secure the First Light, including killing any being that gets in his way.
- The Master of Lizards, always on the outer within the Queen's court, wants to shake up the Fae Lords once and for all... no matter the cost. Acquiring the First Light would be the first step in this plan.

### WHERE IS THE FIRST LIGHT

While Anna was foolish enough to think herself smart enough to bargain among powers older and stranger than any mortal could ever know, she did not trust any of her potential clients. As such, using a little magic (and blackmail), she hid the First Light with Huran, a water spirit trapped in

Goddison's Fountain on Hampstead Heath.

### INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

The Lady of Flowers urgently needs to locate her overdue courier. She, of course, cannot risk any of her rival fae lords knowing this, and so needs those who live between the mortal and hidden worlds – the Liminals – to be her agents in this matter.

The morning after Anna's death, the party is approached by **Rose**, one of the Lady of Flowers 'Daughters', who is dressed in red motorcycle leathers and sports bright red hair (accentuating her porcelain-white skin). Rose requests (orders, cajoles, threatens) the party to attend the Lady of Flowers at Palm House in Kew Gardens.

Once there, they are ushered into the presence of a woman dressed in an expensive suit, surrounded by half a dozen androgynous looking men and women all similarly dressed. Each of these 'courtiers' carries a clipboard and urgently takes note of every word and gesture their lady makes. Responsible for the upcoming ceremony, the Lady of Flowers can't let up on the preparations.

Shooing away her followers, she gestures for the party to join her as she strolls around the inside of Palm House, Rose trailing behind with a watchful eye. During this walk, The Lady of Flowers will explain her need to locate Anna Fulham and/or a gem she had acquired for her. She says that all they need to do is locate either and then

summon one of her daughters. They will take care of the rest. It should be an easy task, for which the party will be well rewarded.

Reluctant to give too many details (she refrains from providing either the name or purpose of the gem, nor the fact it came from the Winter King's court), she will ensure they have enough of a story (even if it is lies) that they know their mission is important to the Lady. She has no qualms in invoking the Queen of Hyde Park's name or bribing them with additional rewards.

Once the party agrees to terms, the Lady nods to Rose, who then approaches and gives the group the following:

- A photo of Anna.
- A slip of paper with Anna's address (Circus Apartments in London's Limehouse district) and cell number. Rose will add that she visited earlier, and no one was home.
- A fabulous-smelling Vanilla Orchid, which she says can be used to summon either herself or one of her sisters. To do so, they must pluck one leaf and submerge it in water.

### ABOUT ANNA

Anna Fulham was a 36-year-old freelance app designer who, until a week ago, worked as a contractor for a company called Fuzion. She has a criminal record, but these are all for petty crimes (shoplifting, assault, etc.) done around 20 years earlier (Anna grew up in a rough neighbourhood in Manchester). An independent type, she



## RESEARCHING ANNA

Anna was a complicated individual who fell into the trap of thinking herself smarter than the ancient fae. As the characters attempt to track down Anna, the following can be uncovered (when and where the GM decides best). Of course, given the young woman's nature, the GM is encouraged to embellish Anna's history and experience, as required.

- Anna went to university in Leeds on a scholarship, but after graduating immediately began to travel the world.
- She rarely seemed to hold down a job for longer than a few months, but was a good developer. Her contracts would usually end when she either quit to travel or was fired over some petty argument.
- Most recently, she went on a short jaunt to Wales – Snowdonia, maybe?
- She was rarely short of money but would go through stages of being plum broke (few people knew of her gambling addiction, although some guessed that she had some vice or another).
- She was known to do work with various Fae Lords (not only the Lady of Flowers), and that her special ability made her a good courier.

has few real friends (which is not uncommon for Liminals) but would proudly say that she's 'been everywhere and done everything (adding in a cheeky wink)'.

Born into a family of those touched by the Hidden World, Anna's unique power allowed her to see through illusions, a talent that made her popular with those looking to avoid being tricked by magic. It has provided her plenty of contacts over the years, although few of these could be said to be honest, upright citizens of either the mortal or Hidden worlds.

Attempting to call Anna's cell number has it ring until going to voicemail, where the cheery woman's voice asks the caller to leave a message.

## AT ANNA'S APARTMENT

Reaching Anna's small 5<sup>th</sup>-floor home in the Circus Apartments, situated in London's Limehouse District, the characters will discover the following.

- The door to the apartment is unlocked. Inside, there are signs of someone having searched the property, although the most obvious targets for petty burglary (i.e. cash, clothing, the television, etc.) have not been taken. *Note: This break-in occurred when Draco came to search for the First Light shortly after Anna's death.*
- Three large travel suitcases are packed and sitting just inside the door. Opened and rifled through, these bags contain everything Anna thought was important, including

most of her clothes, four passports each with a different identity but with Anna's picture (all good forgeries), 800 Euros in notes of various sizes and a Eurostar ticket for Paris. The ticket is dated for the day after Anna's death. *Note: Having lost her contract with Fuzion and knowing that she'd have to flee England after betraying the Lady of Flowers, Anna had intended to use what money he had left (after paying off Cobb) to make her way to Eastern Europe.*

- Lying on the floor, by the door, is a note (on a piece of paper ripped from a notebook). This is from **William Grayson** (see below) and reads 'Come see me with the money you owe' along with an address in Shadwell.

The apartment is a large one-bedroom flat. Searching the rooms confirms that someone else has gone through the apartment recently (drawers are open, personal items piled up haphazardly, etc.), although it's difficult to know if anything has been taken.

## SEARCHING THE APARTMENT

The open-plan lounge is split into a kitchen and a living room. The room is nicely appointed with a large television, but is bare of any personal items one might expect from such a residence.

In the living room, on a side table, Anna's answering machine binks with a single unplayed message.

- This is from yesterday and is a younger male voice who says it's 'Carl' and that he's coming around.

He pauses and then mumbles, he's sorry she got fired, but maybe this means we can go for that drink now? This is a message from **Carl Jurgenson**, a young developer who worked with Anna.

- There is also another, already played message on the machine (from just over a week ago). This is from an older sounding woman who simply says, 'It's **Angela Stone** here'. The tone of this message is serious and formal, and Angela states that she has had a visit from a 'Mr Randall' and that he informed her of Anna's actions. Angela then sighs heavily and says that such behaviour is not up to the standard expected of a contractor at Fuzion and that Anna must ring her back immediately on receiving this message if she wishes to keep her contract. There is no date or time recorded for this message.
- Next to the phone is a blank notepad. With a rubbing, the scribbled words 'Cob 9.30' can be gleaned from the impression left behind from the last removed page.

In the kitchen area, the characters find a pile of letters jammed in the gas stove. Among the overdue credit card statements, unpaid utility bills and letters threatening eviction are:

- A receipt (from a week ago) for a meal at **The Vine & Grove**, a fine dining restaurant in the City of London. The cost of this bill is eye-watering and includes two meals, a bottle of expensive wine and dessert (again for two).



- A business card for a 'Master Tse' whose premises are listed as just 'Broadway Stratford'.
- A receipt for a three-day stay at **Mostyn Cottage B&B** in Coed y Brenin Forest in the Snowdonia National Park, Wales. The dates coincide with Anna's visiting Snowdonia to collect the First Light.

### IN THE BEDROOM

A little on the small side, Anna's bedroom is devoid of any personal items, as if it has been thoroughly cleaned out recently. All the drawers and dressings have been emptied of any clothes.

- A modern lift-style desk (complete with two large monitors and a dock) sits in the corner of the room. Below the monitors is a yellow Post-It note upon which a cell phone number is scribbled. A doodle of a bee flies around the number. *Note: This is Sikfa's number.*
- On the floor, under the bed, is an old hardcover book that has seen better days. Missing its slipcover, it has no title and numerous pages (including the end papers) were torn out of it long ago. A book of long-forgotten medieval fairy tales, anyone flicking through the hundred-odd pages that remain in the text will discover a slip of paper marking the start of a story labelled, Huran the Water Spirit (see the sidebar). This marker has a message written in the same hand as the note found at the door. It reads, *'You owe me Anna, this stuff ain't easy to find. G.'*

### THE BATHROOM

A small, clean bathroom, with a shower, basin and combi washing machine/dryer. Again, anything of a personal nature has been removed from the room, although under a glass (used to hold a toothbrush, etc.) is a stained coaster from the **Blue Coat Arms** in Tottenham (Mr Randall's bar).

## CONTACTS & STRANGERS

With the information found at Anna's apartment, the party will need to extend their search for the missing courier. The following outlines some of the leads and individuals they might encounter during this investigation.

### FUZION MARKETING

An upmarket application design house specialising in the creation and maintenance of mobile device apps. Located on New Change Street (in the shadow of St Paul's Cathedral), its offices are bright, modern, and soulless.

It might be difficult to get to meet Angela Stone, the head of Fuzion's People Resources team. If the party can corner her, she will reveal that Fuzion was visited about a week ago by a group of 'obvious gangsters' looking for Anna. The leader of the visitors introduced himself as Randall Cob, and she stated that he needed to talk to Anna urgently. She told Mr Cob that Anna was on leave, and she had no idea where she was. Cob and his men left without further

incident, and it was decided that Anna's contract was to be terminated.

If the party visits Fuzion's office, their inquiries might be overheard by Carl.

### CARL JURGENSON

In his late 20s, Carl is a developer at Fuzion who is smitten with Anna's worldliness and gruff charm. When tracked down, he is keen to know where his ex-colleague might be.

- Carl doesn't really know too much about Anna's past (except for a few mundane facts of her upbringing and education, see the earlier sidebar). He can, however, confirm that she was off on leave recently, doing a task for an old friend in Wales. He is pretty sure it was Snowdonia.
- He can give the party a brief on Anna's personality, and his attraction to the woman is obvious.

### MASTER TSE

The address on the business card leads the party to the 'pedestrian only' Broadway lane in Stratford. Here, 'Master Tse's Eastern Medicinals' is found upstairs from an independent noodle eatery, which does good business most evenings.

Within Master Tse's, the characters discover a small store selling eastern medicines and remedies. Behind the counter is a 20-something South-East Asian man, dressed in traditional Chinese robes. He will welcome the party with an accent that seems just too fake to be real. If confronted about this

## TALE OF HURAN

This Tale of Huran seems to be an allegory about the price of freedom and the treatment of others.

In this tale, Gloria is the daughter of farmers who, after a lean year, are unable to pay their rent to an abbey. Looking to cover this debt and rid themselves of an unwanted child, they offer Simon the priest, Gloria, as a servant. Reluctant to take such on a dependent, Simon eventually agrees and sets the girl to work in the monastery's manor house. Each day, the girl works hard cleaning, cooking, and doing laundry, but is never treated badly or with malice by Simon.

One day, when the priest is away at Westminster Abbey, Gloria steals a few hours in the manor's vast estate and, while near a large pond, cries over her plight. These tears fall in the pond and summon Huran, the Water Spirit. The spirit comforts the girl, and then, as the two play together, it offers her a way out of her bondage. If she brings him a necklace of silver, he says, he will hide her away and the two can play together forever.

Gloria soon builds up the courage to steal a necklace of silver, wrought as a leaf of a vine, from Simon and flees to Huran's pond. When Simon discovers his servant and necklace are missing, he follows the girl, leading him to the pond. Here he finds Gloria drowned in the lake, the stolen jewellery still in hand. As he tries to retrieve both, Huran appears, saying that he had upheld his end of the bargain and that the necklace is its by right. Simon berates the spirit for its betrayal and, in the same speech, finally realises how uncaringly he had treated Gloria.

At the end of the tale, the author expounds on the fairy tale and its parables to the treatment of bonded servants, the price of freedom, and betrayal. It speculates that the story comes from lands once owned by St Peter's Monastery on what is now Hampstead Heath, and how this might be a fictional explanation for a real event.

## FAE KNIGHTS

All of the Fae Lords have knights in their service (although this term varies by Lord, with The Lady of Flowers calling hers 'Daughters', for example). More than a match for any mortal in intelligence, strength and speed, they often appear emotionally detached and bored quickly. Connected to their Lord by an unbreakable bond, they will do everything in their power to defend their master from any threat.

act or if the party says they are looking to ask questions, rather than to buy anything, the man immediately drops the charade. He introduces himself as Jamtsangiin Bagabandi (although everyone calls him James), and he has a Devonshire accent (*"Hey man. I'm just the son of hard-working immigrants – I grew up in Plymouth!"*).

- James is aware of the Hidden World and has a few customers he supplies with reagents and specific chemicals. He is not, however, a Liminal.
- He employed Anna a few months ago to track down a specific chemical for him in Spain. *"Well, it wasn't for me but rather someone I know... who is in the 'know'"*.
- He can tell the group that Anna is well known as a tracker and finder of things, but that she charges a hefty fee for her services!
- Of the other leads found in Anna's apartment, he only knows of William Grayson, a bookseller in Shadwell who dabbles in magic and the occult.

## WILLIAM GRAYSON

William Grayson is one of those individuals who every member of the Hidden World has heard of, even if he believes himself to be apart from 'such nonsense'. Of an indeterminate age (but well past retirement), he is unkempt, smells of stale tobacco and uses enough foul language to make a sailor blush. Grayson runs his second-hand bookstore in one of the spaces beneath the railway viaduct in Shadwell. Packed

high with books of all subjects, it is rarely visited by casual customers, given its dark, gloomy interior and the unwelcoming stares of its proprietor.

When discovered among the stacks, Grayson sneers at the party and says that Anna Fulham owes him money. He refuses to talk further until the £48 bill is paid in full. If the party does this, he will reveal:

- Anna came to him a few weeks back looking for books on spirits on Hampstead Heath, and he located the book of fairy tales for her. He doesn't know who the author was, but the book is at least 150 years old.
- He tried warning her that these spirits aren't to be trifled with and that their bargains often come with catches.
- He is certain that Huran, the spirit in the story Anna bookmarked, won't be in the Heath's Ponds anymore, but wouldn't be surprised if it now resides in one of the main fountains in the park. If asked to explain why he believes this, he states that back before the war, wizards did that sort of thing - trap the free spirits in some device or location to ensure they couldn't be used by the enemy. He, of course, refuses to say which war or what enemy he is referring to.

## MR RANDALL

Cob Randall runs a city-wide syndicate of bookies and odds-makers. He is also a werewolf, which makes collecting his debts considerably easier. Most likely found behind the bar of the Blue Coat Arms in the heart of Tottenham (a

public house he recently purchased and renovated), he is not a man to be trifled with.

- Large, imposing and with a finely styled beard, he has a wicked smile which hides his ruthless desire for power. He offers a bookie service to those who can't utilise the legal avenues for betting, and this, of course, comes with vastly different odds and conditions than your normal betting agency.
- Anna Fulham was a regular 'punter' with Cob, betting on all types of sports and events. She had fallen into a bit of an unlucky streak recently and owes just over £62,000 to Mr Cob.
- Anna had promised that he'd be paid on her return from a little job in Wales, and he was expecting her at the Blue Coat at 9.30 am on the day after her return. As part of this agreement (she repays him; he doesn't break her arms), he took her Apple MacBook as collateral.
- He is willing to sell the Laptop (see below for details) to the party for £1000 (which is what he'd probably get selling it second hand).
- If Cob is convinced that the party is on the 'up & up', he will say that if they confirm Anna's whereabouts, he will owe them a favour. Having someone like Randall Cob on their good side is better than having them as an enemy.

## SFIKA

If the characters call the number on the Post-It Note, the phone will be answered



by a deep voice with a Greek accent. This is Sfika, one of the Duke of Bees and Honey's knights, Anna's lover and her accidental killer. Sfika will do nothing to reveal anything about his identity over the phone but will listen to what the characters have to say with interest.

- He will admit that he knows Anna but refuses to meet or discuss the matter any further, saying that she is away travelling, as far as he is aware.
- If directly confronted either about his relationship with Anna or his involvement with her murder, he will admit to these 'mistakes' as if they were just unfortunate accidents.
- If Sfika is convinced to talk about the night Anna died, he will admit that the courier tried to get him to convince the Duke of Bees and Honey to purchase the First Light of Spring from her. Knowing the trouble that Anna was getting into, he went alone to the rendezvous on Hampstead Heath and tried to convince her to give up her foolish ideas. She got angry at this, and things escalated from there (he might skip the fact that he killed Anna in a scuffle she initiated and hid the body).
- Sfika will not tell the Liminals of Anna's whereabouts unless he is 100% convinced that they might be able to solve his problem of removing the body.
- Sfika took Anna's Silver knife with him after killing her, although he is not sure why he has kept the memento.

**Important Note:** *Sfika is a Fae knight, one of the long-living protectors of a Fae Lord. He doesn't think or act like a normal mortal and is not intimidated or scared by even those with Liminal powers. He is, however, both sad and angry, not only over having to kill Anna, but that she was so willing to betray her mistress for a thing as trivial as money (such treachery is seen as vile among his kind).*

### USING SFIKA

Having got himself into a situation that is beyond his otherwise vast experience, the fae knight is simply attempting to ride out the situation, not quite comprehending how dangerous a position Anna's betrayal has put the entire Fae world into.

Tall, athletic and with golden skin, Sfika looks as if he's in his early thirties and captain of a national beach volleyball team. He rarely talks more than a few words at a time and is immovably loyal to the Duke of Bees and Honey.

### THE VINE & GROVE

A 5-star restaurant in the heart of London, it is usually booked out weeks in advance. Any enquiries at the premises will likely lead to nothing more than a few shrugs; you can't expect the staff to remember every customer, now, can you? If, however, Sfika's description is given, the concierge recognises him as one of **Mr Aristaeus'** entourage (a bodyguard or assistant, is his guess). With this connection made, they then remember that he (Sfika) was also here for dinner

with a young lady (Anna) on the night noted on the receipt.

There is nothing particularly noteworthy about their meal, but it was pretty obvious that the two were intimate (lots of touching, smiles and coy laughs).

### MOSTYN COTTAGE B&B

Contacting the staff at Mostyn Cottage, situated near Snowdonia in Wales, the characters can confirm that Anna Fulham recently stayed for three days in one of the unique stone cottages. They can not provide any further information on Anna or her activities while there.

## EVENTS & CHALLENGES

During the scenario, several events might play out depending on the characters' actions.

### AN INVITATION

During their investigations, the characters will become aware of two figures following them at a discrete distance. These are Sfika (whom they might have already met) and Kentri, knights in the service of The Duke of Bees and Honey. Charged by their lord to uncover more about his suspicions in regard problems with the upcoming Spring Ceremony (see below for details on the Duke's goals).

The two knights, both of whom look more like models than bodyguards (see

## THE FIRST LIGHT

This gem is unlike any other precious stone seen by mortals, made as much by Fae magic as it is by the natural world. The size of a small fist, it glows an unnaturally warm yellow-gold colour, which draws the eye of anyone seeing it. Warm to the touch, it also radiates a comforting heat which has an emotionally positive effect on anyone holding it (it is hard not to touch the First Light without it making one smile or even chuckle with joy).



above for a description of Sfika, noting that Kentri is very similar in appearance), will initially do nothing to interfere with the Liminals' investigations. However, once they are convinced that the party is also interested in Anna or the First Light, they will approach the group and invite them to meet with their boss, the Duke.

*Note: Any meeting with these knights might be slightly awkward, especially if the group has already met Sfika. For his part, the knight attempts to make any interaction as professional as possible - this, after all, is a duty for his lord, not some personal dalliance.*

### THE WATCHER

At some stage of their investigations (hopefully after they have met with the Duke of Bees and Honey), the party will encounter 'Maximillian' Draco, a knight in the service of the Master of Lizards. Draco will pretend to be a family member of Anna's and will say that he is trying to find her (producing Anna's apartment key to prove that his claims are legitimate).

The knight's real goal is to find the First Light and will do all in his power to secure it (knowing the painful punishment that will come if he fails his master). If confronted by the Liminals, he will suggest the party meets with the Master of Lizards at the Barbican Gardens (see below).

### THE LAPTOP

The Mac Air Book is the easiest way of tracking down Anna, as it is connected

via the Find My App to her iPhone (which is still on her body). While locked down, the laptop is not impossible to crack by someone with the right sort of skill.

- When used, the Find My app will show that Anna's cell phone is in the Parliament Hill Fields Athletics Track pavilion on Hampstead Heath.
- The device's internet history and document folders contain records typical for an active woman engaged with the world (i.e. social media, online shopping, etc), it does have a spreadsheet highlighting just how much Anna was in debt to Randall Cob. (This indicates a steady losing streak for the last six months, putting her further and further into debt.)
- In the calendar app, there are several entries for past work deadlines and the date she had with Sfika at the Vine & Grove. A reference to a meeting with 'Flowers' is noted a few weeks ago, and all of the last week is blocked out as 'On Leave'.
- Other details on the Laptop could include links to the Master of Lizards (at the Barbican), the Duke of Bees and Honey, as all the other characters met during the party's investigations (i.e. Tse, Grayson, etc.).

## THE FAE LORDS

This scenario has the Liminals at the mercy of three separate Fae Lords. The following provides the GM with some

insight into these powers and their goals during the adventure.

### THE LADY OF FLOWERS

The Lady of Flowers is focused on the ongoing preparations for the upcoming Spring Ceremony and can little afford to spend any more effort on mere mortals. That said, she is getting very nervous about where the First Light might now be and how to get her hands on it (without alerting the Queen or any of the other lords to the issue). If necessary, she will dispatch Rose or another of her Daughters to hurry along the characters.

### THE DUKE OF BEES & HONEY

The Duke is responsible for all things that pollinate flowers and plants and therefore plays a key role in the Spring Ceremony. He is also a fierce rival of the Lady of Flowers (although, as previously noted, this relationship is symbiotic). Jealous of his rival's position in the Queen's court, he will do anything in his power to undermine her position and promote his own. He, however, is not willing to break the ancient rights and bonds of the Fae to do so (he wants power, sure, but the traditions and practices of the Hidden World must always be followed).

Known to some in the mortal world as Mr Aristaeus, he maintains a public persona as the owner of an international chain of gardens growing specialist plants for unique purposes (everything from rare orchids for rich clients to flora used in medical breakthroughs). Appearing to be in his



late 50s, he has a large barrel-chested build and a bald pate surrounded by well-cropped grey hair. Always immaculately dressed, he laughs with ease and has a distinct Greek accent.

If the characters meet the Duke, they will be brought to the Sky Garden in the Fenchurch Building, where the restaurant is permanently open to him, day or night. Here, overlooking the city, he wants to know why the Lady of Flowers is delaying the preparations for the Spring Ceremony, and what Anna Fulham has to do with the affair. If he learns of the First Light disappearance, he will respect the Liminals' authority to investigate, but says that they should share any information or discoveries with him first, as he will make it worth their while.

The Duke doesn't make threats or cajole the characters, he has untold years of experience knowing that you get more success with honeyed words than acts of violence.

### THE MASTER OF LIZARDS

Always on the outer of the Queen's court, the Master of Lizards is attempting to reclaim his position and authority after an incident many, many years ago. Knowing that holding the First Light for 'ransom' is likely his best chance to regain this power, he was ecstatic when Anna offered the gem to him for measly mortal currency. Dispatching his agent, Draco, to negotiate with Anna over its acquisition, he is surprised that it has not yet been returned to him.

If the party gets to meet with the Master, they will find him a tall, almost skeletal man of an indeterminate age, who is dressed in dark green custodian overalls. Seeming to work as a caretaker at the Barbican Conservatory gardens (on Silk Street), none of the other staff in the complex seem to take any notice of his presence among them. Talking with a slight lisp, he will offer the characters whatever they desire to secure the First Light (of course, whether he upholds this bargain once in possession of the gem is another matter).

The Master of Lizards does not take failure lightly, and either Draco or the party might find themselves with a new enemy if they fail to do as the Fae Lord demands of them.

## ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH

A large, well-used public space north of London, Hampstead Heath is known for its parklands, forests, and open-air swimming ponds. An ancient and mystical place, it is home to many spirits, fae and those who walk between.

### LOCATING ANNA'S BODY


Anna planned on meeting with her contacts just inside the park, south of the public Playground. Met by Sfika and confronted about her plan to sell the First Light of Spring, the Duke of Bee's knight killed her after a brief struggle. Unsure what to do, he broke into the small basement under the Parliament

Hill Fields Athletics Track pavilion and left her body there.

Anna can be found either via her iPhone or by confronting either Sfika or Draco about the truth. The condition of her body will depend on just how long she has been in the long-abandoned basement. After a search, the characters can find her phone, her wallet (which has a few pounds in it and the normal array of credit and loyalty cards) and a silver left pendant. This jewellery will remind the Liminals of the pendant used to bribe the water spirit Huran in the fairy tale found in Anna's apartment.

### HURAN THE WATER SPIRIT

Having been trapped in Goodison's Fountain for many years, Huran is a cheeky, bored water spirit who has been bribed by Anna to hide the First Light within it. Huran can be summoned with the rite noted in the fairy tale, although it will only give up the First Light if it gets the Silver pendant.

Of course, powerful Liminals might have other ways of bringing forth a spirit, as well as forcing it to release its prize. 

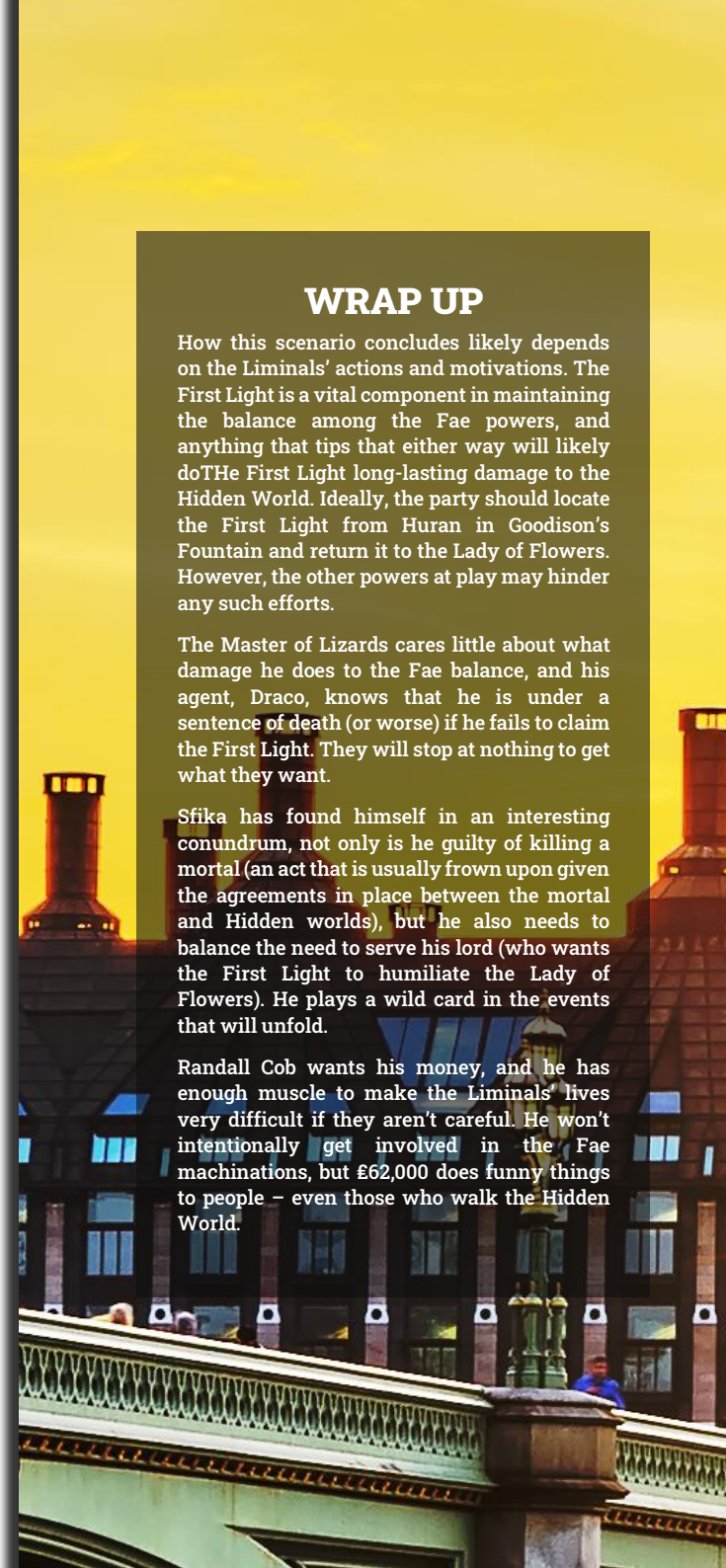
## WRAP UP

How this scenario concludes likely depends on the Liminals' actions and motivations. The First Light is a vital component in maintaining the balance among the Fae powers, and anything that tips that either way will likely do. The First Light long-lasting damage to the Hidden World. Ideally, the party should locate the First Light from Huran in Goodison's Fountain and return it to the Lady of Flowers. However, the other powers at play may hinder any such efforts.

The Master of Lizards cares little about what damage he does to the Fae balance, and his agent, Draco, knows that he is under a sentence of death (or worse) if he fails to claim the First Light. They will stop at nothing to get what they want.

Sfika has found himself in an interesting conundrum, not only is he guilty of killing a mortal (an act that is usually frowned upon given the agreements in place between the mortal and Hidden worlds), but he also needs to balance the need to serve his lord (who wants the First Light to humiliate the Lady of Flowers). He plays a wild card in the events that will unfold.

Randall Cob wants his money, and he has enough muscle to make the Liminals' lives very difficult if they aren't careful. He won't intentionally get involved in the Fae machinations, but £62,000 does funny things to people – even those who walk the Hidden World.



# UNKNOWN ARMIES™

## BRING ME THE HEAD OF THE COMTE DE SAINT-GERMAIN

UNKNOWN  
ARMIES

## Bring Me the Head of the Comte De Saint-Germain

### A REVIEW OF AN UNKNOWN ARMIES SCENARIO

Marcus D. Bone

*Unknown Armies (UA) is a game about broken people trying to fix an equally broken world. Heavily focused on personal challenges and the price one is willing to pay for power, it is part horror, part insanity, and all strange. **Bring Me The Head Of The Comte De Saint-Germain**, is from the mind of UA's creator, Greg Stolze, and is a long-form scenario divided into three parts. A perfect illustration of the game's zeal for weirdness, it also exemplifies Unknown Armies' potential for exploring one's motivations, needs, and desires around a roleplaying table.*

### OVERVIEW

Right off the bat, I'd have to say, it's difficult to classify what sort of scenario **Bring Me The Head Of The Comte De Saint-Germain** (hereafter BMTH) wants to be. Not regarding its overall quality or content, of course, as those are top-notch, but rather in attempting to categorise what sort of story it is trying to present. I highlight this as BMTH is a scenario which focuses unerringly on its utterly wonderful pre-generated characters, an approach that probably means it is of limited benefit for GM running a regular group. Add to this the

fact that BMTH is far too long and undoubtedly too complex to be a good 'pickup' game or a convention scenario, you might be left wondering, what is it good for?

Ultimately (and which I will now say with confidence... after a bit of Google searching), BMTH is one of those rarest of commodities in tabletop roleplaying, a 'tournament-style' game (i.e. where multiple sessions of the scenario are run and the players progress between each part based on their specific decisions, encounters, and in some cases, character deaths). Okay, so that might sound a tad bit pretentious, but rest assured, like all good Unknown Armies scenarios, what BMTH boils down to has little to do with its overall plot (although in this case the story here is quite an intriguing one), but rather how it creates an entertaining playground in which the characters (and hopefully their players) will clash, shout, and laugh over a few hours of fun!

### AN EPIC IN THREE PARTS

Nothing in **Bring Me The Head Of The Comte De Saint-Germain** is what I would call normal, at least in your typical role-playing sense (although, again, this is UA, so I shouldn't be too surprised by that, now should I!). The adventure opens with the players becoming members of a cabal determined to steal the head of the Comte De Saint-Germain... well, the head of his statue, really... from a museum in Quebec, Canada. The Comte was a being who, until recently, acted as the caretaker of our reality, and the fact that his head is now on public display

## UNKNOWN ARMIES>REVIEW

has some worrying connotations. Hoping to return the head to its rightful resting place (in Ohio, USA), this group (called the Headhunters) represents the sort of washed-up, dare I say 'broken', characters that this game is absolutely designed for.

Things are never that easy, of course, as a second group, a loose association of occultists, has also come together to stop the Headhunters. This cabal, referred to as 'the Oppo' (as in 'the opposition') are nothing like a united force but are rather made up of either individuals fearing the return of the head to its origin will result in even more trouble, or those in the service of a group known as the Orthodox Order of Saint-Germain. (Okay, long story, but see that bloke whose head everyone is fighting over? So he's not gone, just changed – a lot – and she (yes, she) now controls the Order so they can secure bits of her/her past... look told you it was weird!)

Erm... yeah, so, all in all, the session or two running Part One will be part museum heist, part intrigue and 100% really, really, strange...

### PART TWO: A FLIP OF A COIN

And just when you think you're getting a handle on everything... well, that's when the twist kicks in... with the players then becoming the characters in the Oppo cabal! That's right, for Part Two, the players get to learn of the opposition's motivations and desires, and most importantly, their sorrows (or, in other words, the worst thing they've done in their lives). I didn't mention it



earlier, but most of the Headhunters also have their own regrets or sorrows, the events that made them the broken person they are today. These memories/incidents drive much of the story from this point on, and believe me, Part Two is absolutely a journey of discovery (both for the characters and their players). Here we get the arrival of further otherworldly threats, the appearance of God-like beings and enough double-crosses and betrayal to teach a lifetime of lessons on the meaning of 'allies & enemies' in UA.

## PART THREE: A FINALE?

How BMTH ends will depend heavily on what has come before, and doesn't have any predetermined conclusions, at least as written. Don't misunderstand me, the story will END, but how and when this happens depends on... well, a lot of factors really.

With plenty of potential for action, debate, and players furrowing their eyebrows, when, why or even how the Head of the Comte De Saint-Germain returns to Ohio doesn't really matter... as surely, all that matters is the journey itself?

## HIGHLIGHTS

There are plenty of things that simply scream UA as you read through this scenario, and while I like to think of myself as somewhat of an experienced connoisseur of the weird, a few of these even had me surprised. Without too many spoilers, in BMTH we have -

- An anaesthetic drug that is also, somehow, the thoughts of a being from a previous universe/reality.
- An encounter with the Human Eternal, the embodiment of the current 'rules keeper' of reality.
- A coming together with the Sorrows and Joy, beings that have much more to do with humanity's happiness and the makeup of future realities than you could ever imagine.
- And a potential encounter with a horde of otherworldly medical practitioners that is just as strange and wonderful as it sounds!

## ADVICE & OPINION

After reading all that you probably think that **Bring Me The Head Of The Comte De Saint-Germain** is a bit of a disjointed mess, and in some regards you'd be correct (the other option here, of course, is that I'm just not a very good review writer, which is also a perfectly legitimate assumption, by the way!).

Some of the most interesting scenes and events in the scenario feel very out of place as written, with more than one important NPC just 'appearing' in the story with little warning. Most GMs I know will want to better plan how these encounters might unfold, and where possible, use this knowledge to generate just the right amount of foreshadowing to make these events meaningful. In retrospect, I think BMTH is probably missing some sort of comprehensive GM overview, as something that prepared me for the overall direction


and encounters in the story might have helped me get a better grip on it all.

I also think it's vital that anyone running BMTH understands their players. I say this because while most of the scenario's focus is on the heist and its aftermath, in play, the game's success is going to come down to how the players play the game. No point throwing in yet another conversation with an immortal entity if the characters just want to focus on their interparty squabbles, now, is there?

But perhaps the area needing the most work is how to swap the players over from their Headhunter characters to those within the Oppo cabal. Some of the late-stage story elements work best with members from both groups coming together, and how, and why, two collectives of paranoid occultists might change sides (or at least agree to work together) really needs some forethought.

## IN SUMMARY

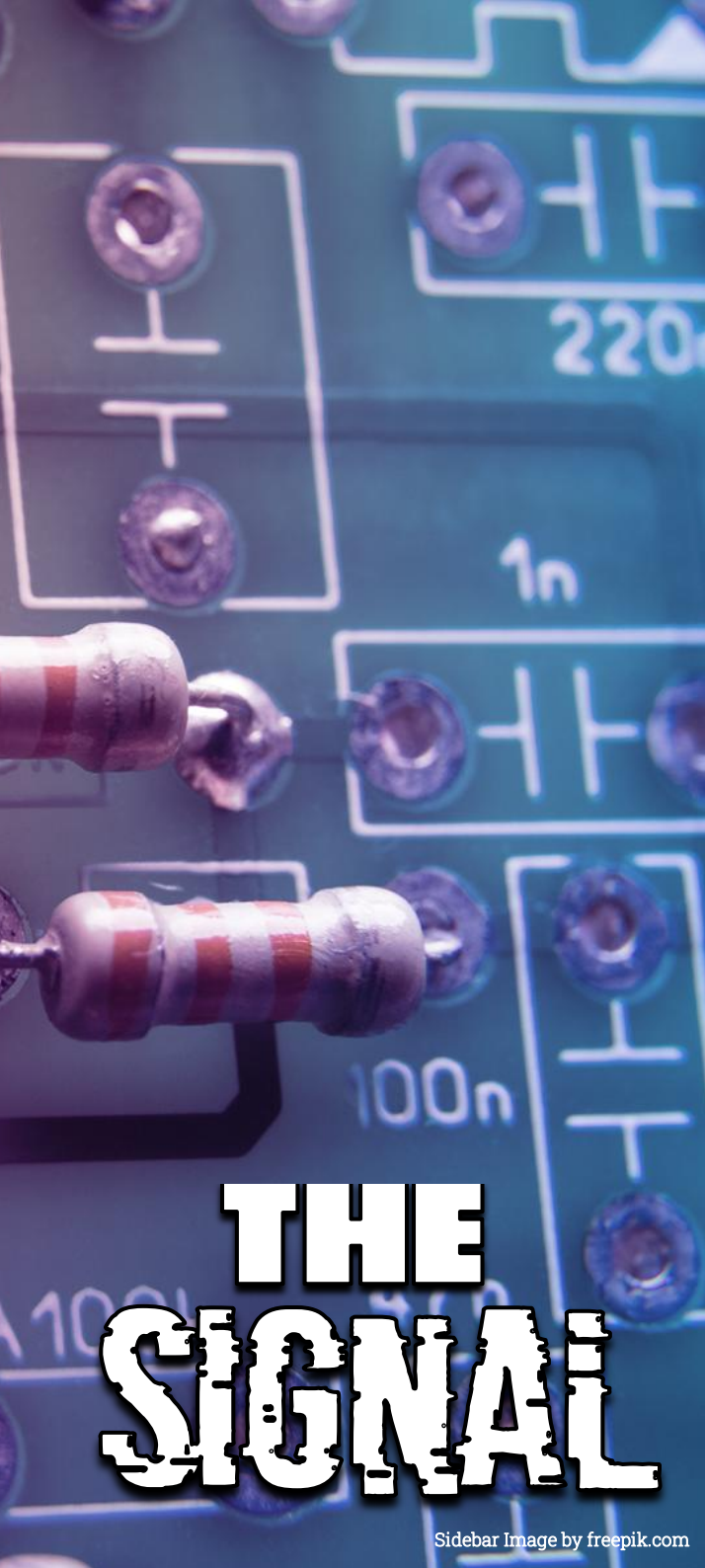
As I hope I've explained, BMTH is anything but your normal RPG experience, and this quality can be its greatest strength... and likely its biggest weakness. Honestly, a scenario like this is either a solid hit or a massive miss based solely on the gamers at the table; If they are fully devoted, then you are onto a winner, if not....

But hey, if we measure **Bring Me The Head Of The Comte De Saint-Germain** on the sheer potential it holds, then in my opinion, this scenario is nothing but a classic! 



## WARNING TIME!

I think it is incredibly important to point out that some of the pre-gen characters in this scenario can be a little extreme in their motivations (and at least one couple is in a very abusive relationship). I personally found these a little queasy at times, and if I were to run BMTH with a group of players I didn't know (say, at a convention), I'd likely change some of these 'dynamics' before play. Your mileage might vary, but I can't see strangers wanting to take on characters quite as broken as some of this lot are, even for a one-off gaming experience.



# THE SIGNAL

Sidebar Image by freepik.com

# THE SIGNAL

## AN EPOCH: EXPERIMENTAL PARADIGM OF CINEMATIC HORROR SCENARIO

**Marcus D. Bone**

**NOTE:** **EPOCH** is a game of character-driven survival horror. The goal is to deliver a tense and scary experience in a single game session. A QuickStart for **EPOCH** can be found for free over at [DrivethruRPG](#).

### BACKGROUND

*The town of Wilcott is about to have a visitor. Not your typical visitor from your typical horror story; not a demon, or an alien, nor is he a vampire or a werewolf, but rather the sort of visitor who is simply one of its own returning home after years abroad. Unfortunately, this simple man - let us, for convenience sake, call him Dylan Hadrian - is not very well... positively ill if one is to be honest.*

*You see, years of service in his country's fine military establishments, both as an uncaring killer and unquestioning assassin, have unhinged poor old Mr Hadrian. Returning home was meant to be a calming and restorative experience, but some horrors can never be left behind, can they? So it is then, and as no surprise to the reader, that our visitor has brought with him a device which, once unleashed, will bring havoc, death and insanity to the innocents of Wilcott.*

*And we all know just how easy it will be for someone to tip Mr Hadrian over the edge, now don't we...*

### LOCKED BOXES

THE SIGNAL is a locked box scenario that utilises the FAMILY Relationship cards from the EPOCH rulebook. The adventure will also work well with other relationship alternatives, including the FRIENDS or COLLEAGUES cards.

### PLOT OVERVIEW

It is late summer and the characters find themselves at **Devil's View** nature reserve; a national park so called for its most dominant natural feature - the tall, razor-sharp mountain known as the Devil's Back.

Devil's View can be located anywhere that provides for a vista of rugged hill country situated at the foot of a mighty mountain range. Situated at the end of a boxed-in valley, the only road leading into and out of Devil's View is a long and winding dirt track that begins in the small town of Wilcott, some 25 miles to the east.

How the characters arrived at Devil's View Camping Ground, a serene glade of flat land, hemmed in by steep cliffs and a fast-flowing river, is left to the party to decide (see **Strange Beginnings**, below). But what is important is that the characters find themselves amid an untouched slice of paradise, isolated from the rest of the world. Here, there is no cell phone reception, no internet access and absolutely no worries!

### ACTS OF MALICE

Dylan Hadrian was once a loyal soldier for his country. For years, he completed

his assigned missions with a cold efficiency, and without question, seemingly unaffected by the horrors he enacted on his fellow humans. But despite his outward composure, Hadrian burned within. Each act of destruction he unleashed, and every cold murder he executed, tore away his humanity.

By the time is superiors, and more importantly, the army's doctors, realised just how little of the real Dylan Hadrian remained, it was too late. Now nothing more than an unfeeling sociopath, Hadrian had become more of a threat than an asset, and so, receiving his discharge papers, he was sent home to become someone else's problem.

That might have been it. The shell of Dylan Hadrian could well have lived out the rest of his, likely short, life in the care of friends and family in the town of Wilcott. But this, unfortunately, wasn't destined to be. Hadrian has stolen a prototype of a very special device, one designed to allow the army to seize enemy territory with little bloodshed - a weapon nicknamed the **Signal Box**.

An ultimate weapon of clandestine terror, the Signal Box emits waves of energy that alter the thoughts of all living things - humans, animals, and even insects - driving them insane. Without sound, light or heat, the Signal Box is designed to render the target population 'inoperative' within a few hours.

It should come as no surprise that Hadrian needed very little prompting to trigger a violent response, and in this



specific case, it was the arrival of Military Police officers investigating the theft of the Signal Box that unleashed his insanity. Attacking and killing the MPs, he took the Signal Box to a local sub-station, determined to use its high-voltage power source to unleash a signal that would finally allow everyone to hear the madness that he had fought to hold with him for so long!

It is into this disaster that the character will find themselves. The party, however, does have one small chance of surviving. Hadrian is by no means an expert electrician and has failed to wire up the Signal Box correctly. While its effects will cause chaos across the countryside, it will be hours before it activates fully (although, at that point, all living souls in the region will likely already be dead, insane or lost forever!).

### THE EFFECTS OF THE SIGNAL

The Gamemaster is free to determine exactly how each individual is affected by the Signal Box's emissions. Madness, uncontrolled anger, and hallucinations are all typical. The breakdown of a body's cells is also a common side effect, usually starting with a bursting of blood vessels in the eyes and the collapse of the small capillaries in sensitive tissue, such as the ears and nose. Those exposed to the Signal long enough will eventually bleed from every orifice.

### PREPARATION

As with all EPOCH scenarios, THE SIGNAL is more a study of the individuals challenged by the horrors unleashed by Hadrian than it is a story

of investigation or any sort of redemption. As such, as the adventure unfolds, each character will likely reveal more about their true selves, goals and urges than even they might have ever guessed possible. Maybe, by the end, they will become more of a threat to each other than the Signal Box ever could!

### CREATING THE CHARACTERS

The first step in creating the characters for this scenario is to distribute the **Relationship** cards. Each player should spend a little time thinking about their character and how they might be connected to the others in their group.

Next, each player is dealt one **Trait** card and one **Strength/Weakness** card. These should remain hidden from the other players and act as prompts and inspiration if the player ever faces a hard decision on how they should act at any point in the story.

Once the players have an idea of the characters they will be playing, each is given a set of **Outcome** cards (3 physical/mental outcomes and 1 Hero/Zero Card). These are used to resolve each **Challenge Round** and indicate the effects of the horrors the characters are about to face.

Finally, each player should also receive one ballot slip. This is where they will vote after each **Challenge Round** for the most interesting character at the table (during that section of play or **Tension Phase**).

## STRANGE BEGINNINGS (TENSION PHASE ONE)

The group is nearing the end of its second and final week at Devil's View. The weather has been glorious throughout the past fortnight, and it has allowed the group to partake in a range of outdoor activities: from biking along the high mountain trails through tackling the white water rapids further up the river and even climbing the formidable Devil's Back itself!

For those less adventurous souls, time away from the 'rat race' of city life has given them the chance to catch up on their reading, dabble in their favourite hobbies or simply relax and soak up the late summer sun.

### INTRODUCTIONS

It is dawn on the group's penultimate day at Devil's View. As each character wakes, the GM can ask their player to introduce themselves and their relationships to the others. They should be prompted to talk about their lives back in the real world, how they've challenged themselves over the break, and what they plan on doing during their last day of 'freedom'.

Between each of these descriptions, the GM may wish to embellish the setting and add more to the scene, focusing on the beauty, splendour and tranquillity of the Devil's View camping ground. Highlight its isolation from the pressures of the outside world and the mention that no matter what the tensions that have previously passed

## THE HORROR TRACK

In regular EPOCH scenarios, the Horror Track is utilised to determine how successful the players are in solving the horror that threatens them. In THE SIGNAL, no horror track is provided, as this not only removes the need for additional cards to be brought to the table but reinforces the focus on the character's interaction as opposed to any specific investigation. Instead, the GM and players should determine the level of success based on their characters' actions and successes as played out during the adventure.

## GM FLASHBACKS (OPTIONAL RULE)

One addition to this scenario that is not otherwise normally used in EPOCH is the introduction of GM FLASHBACKS. The first three Tension phases include one of these Flashbacks that can be initiated at any time by the Game Master. These not only provide for back-story to be introduced to the game, but they also provide the GM an opportunity to place the spotlight on a character or characters who may not have had as 'screen time' as others during a Tension Phase.

between the members of the group, here, bygones are all forgotten.

After these introductions, the GM should ask the group to think about:

- **How they came to Devil's View.** Maybe they drove here in a camper van, in a couple of sedans loaded to the gunwales, or even on motorbikes carrying just enough to 'get by' for the fortnight?
- **What have they been eating while on holiday?** Is it fresh fish caught daily from the river, store-brought supplies that are now running low or perhaps just simple camp-style 'ready to eat' meals?
- **What are the sleeping arrangements?** Does everyone have their own tents, are you all squeezed into a camper, or has the situation been more fluid?
- **Who's the last one to bed each night, and who is the first up in the morning?**

### LAST DAY IN PARADISE

As this is the last day at the camp, there is one final opportunity to challenge themselves against nature. The group needn't do something together, but if individuals want to head off by themselves. The GM should remind them that, despite its serenity, Devil's View can be a dangerous place for the lone straggler.

With the day's activity decided, the GM should describe the action, asking for input from the group as they go about their fun. In particular, for each activity taking place, the Game Master should

highlight a point of conflict or disagreement between those present. This could arise from a heated discussion about another in their group (i.e. they have done something that annoys them or has betrayed their trust) or challenge that takes place during the activity (i.e. a rider has a bad fall along a mountain biking trail, or while rafting down the rapids, the raft capsizes and one of the party fails to immediately surface, etc).

No one should be too badly hurt (either physically or emotionally) by these events (i.e. this is not a challenge phase and no Outcome cards need be played), but asking how those present react to these events will help define the group dynamic in future scenes.

### GM FLASHBACK

This flashback is run after the day's activities, and works well for any character (maybe one that has stayed behind at the camp or who falls behind as the party returns in the late afternoon). As this character passes by or is on the river, they see something red floating nearby. Coming closer, they see it is a distinctive red backpack, a ruck they recall being carried by another hiker much earlier in their stay in Devil's View.

### THE EVENT

The Flashback itself is a simple conversation between the character and another hiker (who was also travelling with friends). This could have occurred at the camping ground, back in Wilcott or even as a chance encounter

along one of Devil's View's many trails. The details of the chat are unimportant, except that the other hiker was someone the character found attractive and who seemed interested in them in return. The thing that does stand out is their red hiking bag, most definitely the same one the stranger had.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE

How or why the stranger's bag found its way here is impossible to tell; did it float down the river, or was it simply dropped here? It doesn't seem damaged, and everything within (typical kit for a day pack only) is untouched.

### FACING THE CHALLENGE

Darkness descends rapidly in the valley, and the bright, clear stars soon dominate the heavens. As the group gathers for the evening meal (note that someone wanting to head directly to Wilcott in reaction to finding the hiker's pack can do so at any time, but will not get far, see below), they hear the sounds of a large creature close to their camp.

Investigating, they see that it is a wild animal (such as a bear or wolf), and it seems to be acting uncharacteristically, almost as if it is injured or under some sort of drug effect. Nearby other creatures, similarly impaired, are also moving about.

As the character's flashlights splay across the animals in the gathering darkness, it is immediately obvious that something is very wrong. Their coats seem covered in blood, and their eyes are unnaturally red. This is the effect of the Signal Box, whose power has



affected the animals from high in the mountains long before it reaches the characters in their protected valley.

### THE CHALLENGE

The characters are free to play an **Outcome** card of their choice in this encounter. The animals might attack the group (physical), or simply circle as individuals attempt to hide (mental). There are as many affected creatures as needed by the GM to make this encounter threatening, and they can either be killed, driven off, or simply expire from the damage done by the Signal.

For characters attempting to leave the area (including those who might be taking the backpack to Wilcott), they do not get far. An 'infected' animal stumbles out onto the narrow road in front of them, causing the vehicle to crash into a ditch. For these unfortunate souls, a physical **Outcome** from the challenge is much more likely.

### ROUNDING OFF THE CHALLENGE

Hopefully, by the end of the first phase, all of the players should have an idea of what their character's secret is. The GM should ensure that everyone has recorded this and that all secrets are kept together nearby.

The GM should also remind players that **Complication** cards can be drawn if they require a little more motivation or conflict for their character.

## CRACKLIN' ROSIE (TENSION PHASE TWO)

The focus of this Tension Phase is to see the group head towards the only source of safety they know of – the town of Wilcott. This trip is in itself long and dangerous, given the Signal's ongoing emissions, and ends with the group having to abandon their vehicles as they attempt to cross a damaged bridge.

### LOOKING FOR SAFETY

With the crazed animals dead or driven off, the characters have a moment to collect themselves, treat the wounded and regroup (especially those who might have already tried to escape in a vehicle). There seems to be no reason for such animals to turn violent, and most people know that few wild beasts attack people unless threatened.

The bodies of any animals killed by the characters display all the same injuries; bleeding from the eyes, nose and mouth. Even dead, these creatures look distressed and exhibit signs of some strange illness (foaming at the mouth, etc.).

### TRAVELLING

With the attack and injuries, the characters will likely want to get to a doctor and alert the authorities as to the events that have just unfolded. Gathering together whatever supplies they feel they need (and collecting anyone who might have previously attempted to get to Wilcott), they can commence their journey.

The 'road' to Wilcott is, for the first 15 miles or so, a narrow and winding one. Leading from the valley, it heads up and over a small range of hills before angling down onto the plains and the town.

### SIGNS OF MADNESS

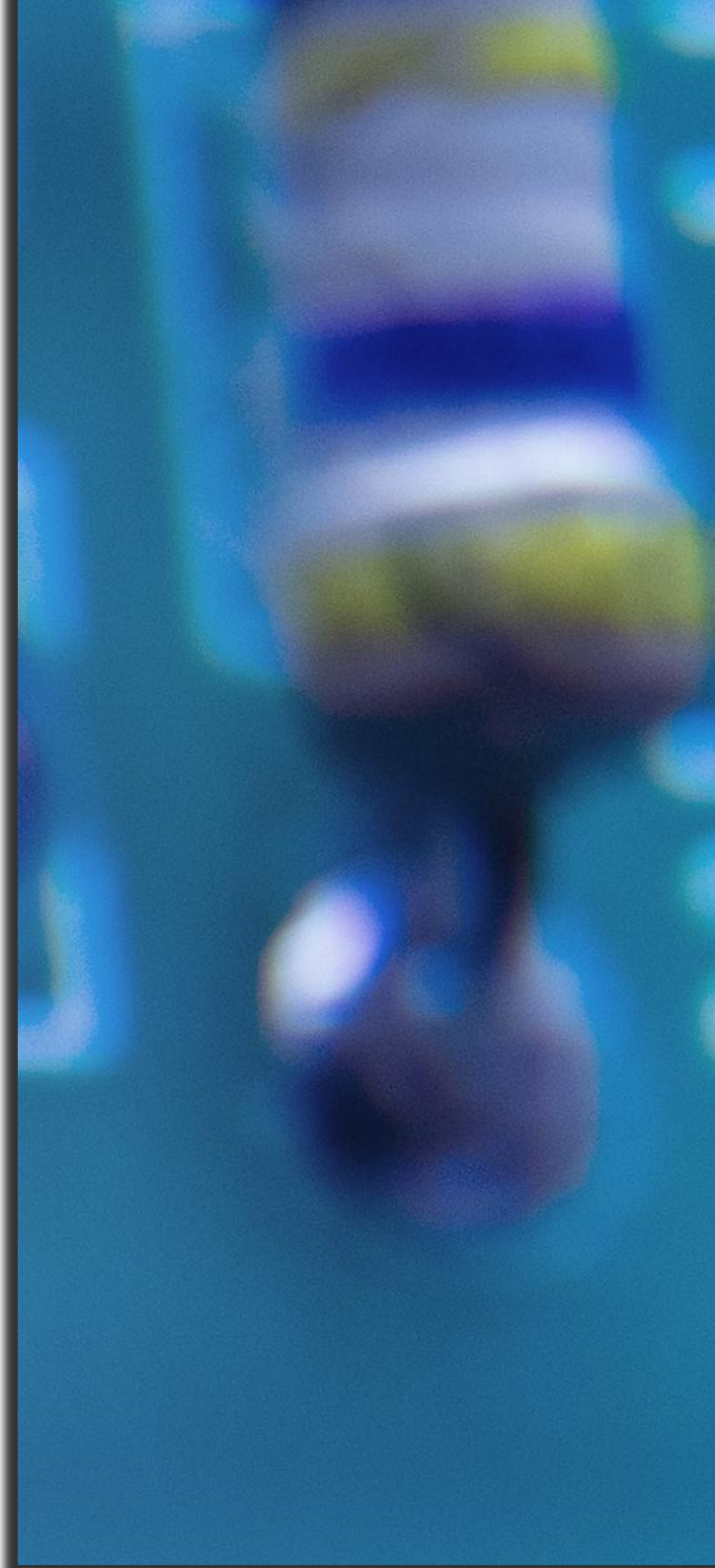
While on the trip to Wilcott the GM is free to throw whatever strange encounters they may think appropriate, from the staring eyes of more crazed animals (including those such as rabbits or deer) watch the car go past, through to strange lights in the sky, and maybe even an abandoned car on the side on the narrow road.

The purpose of these odd scenes is to build the tension and paranoia amongst the group, and provide a background upon which they will reveal their personal stories.

### THE BRIDGE

As the lead vehicle rounds a corner, the characters witness the aftermath of a major accident ahead. A red 1959 Ford pick-up, its headlights still ablaze, has smashed into a baily bridge crossing a narrow creek. Having failed to navigate the narrow bridge, the collision has caused serious damage to the bridge (which was never the most secure in the first place) and which is now swaying dangerously (complete with ominously creaking and groaning), some 25 feet above a creek.

As the group disembarks from their vehicles, they hear loud music coming from the pick-up; the chorus of Neil



Diamond's 'Cracklin' Rosie'. This section of the song repeats over and over again.

Unconscious and trapped in the pickup, is a young man dressed in jeans, a blue chequered shirt, and still wearing his red baseball cap. Upon inspection, it seems that the crash was not the cause of all his injuries, and like the animals they have encountered, he shows signs of bleeding from his mouth, nose, and ears. The truck's tape player is stuck playing 'Crackling Rosie' at an ear-ringing volume, and this does not stop until the bridge collapse, as noted below, occurs.

### **GM FLASHBACK**

This flashback is initiated during the Climax section of this Tension phase (see below) and is designed to facilitate further conflict amongst the group. When the truck is investigated, one of the characters recognises the driver as a young man who angrily threatened them earlier in the fortnight.

Such an encounter might have occurred on the way to Devil's View or during one of the few excursions the characters might have made into Wilcott.

### **THE EVENT**

As the character is driving, they are cut off by a young man in a red, panel-damaged pickup. The local seems to take exception at the character's presence on the road, and harasses them for a few minutes (perhaps following them over the same baily bridge into Devil's View, tail-gating them the whole way, etc.) until he pulls off the road down an unmarked track.

If directly confronted, the young man draws a rifle and points it at the character, swearing at them and threatening to shoot. He will drive off, however, before the situation escalates. Nothing came of the incident, even if the characters approached the Wilcott authorities.

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE**

This young man can be used to create doubt amongst the characters (i.e. was the local population previously 'infected' with the same aggressive bent the animals exhibited, etc.), and show that whatever is occurring is more widespread than just the creatures that inhabit Devil's View.

### **FACING THE CHALLENGE**

At the most inopportune moment, the bridge, severely damaged in the crash and stressed by the added weight of the characters, begins to collapse. As it does, the young man awakens, and stares directly at the closest character screaming, *'Can you hear it!'*

### **THE CHALLENGE**

The **Outcome** card to be played in the face of this challenge depends greatly on the characters' actions. Physical outcomes are most applicable for those on the bridge, resulting from the fall when it collapses, while mental outcomes are more appropriate for those witnessing the scene (or having interacted with the driver of the pickup).

## **IT MUST BE A DREAM (TENSION PHASE THREE)**

The focus of this Tension Phase is to reveal more of what has happened in Wilcott and to indicate a way of stopping the events unfolding in the town. During this sequence, the group should also start doubting each other's motivations and begin to wonder if they can even trust their tight-knit group.

### **GOING ON FOOT**

Having survived the collapsed bridge and encounter with the young driver, the group has no real option but to abandon their vehicles and continue on foot. Anyone either on the Devil's View side of the collapse or now in the creek will discover that, thankfully, the river banks are easy enough to transverse, and the group can soon come together once more. For characters refusing to carry on or leave their cars abandoned, a GM can encourage them to travel onwards with further encounters with rabid animals.

### **VIEW FROM THE TOP**

Not more than a mile away from the bridge, the road leads up onto a rise. From here, the party knows that they have officially left the Devil's View park behind them, and beyond should provide a panoramic view of the flat farmlands and the town of Wilcott. Standing on this vantage point, the characters will likely be surprised to see only darkness all around them. Although Wilcott is still a few miles away, they immediately know that they



should be able to see the lights of its homes and streetlamps. And yet there are none.

Suddenly, from the darkness, every light that should already be on (from the town, outlying houses and street lamps) flashes brightly in an odd pattern. This seems to be some type of code with three short flashes, followed by two long (although anyone who might know Morse realises that this is not that).

This light show, which repeats after about 10 minutes, is one of the results of Hadrian's faulty wiring of the Signal Box. Unable to draw enough power to fully activate, it is causing a backlash across the local power network. Those watching long enough soon realise that the period between the flashes is getting shorter and shorter.

### GM FLASHBACK

This flashback can be run when the flashes from the Signal Box are seen and can be run for any character who might have found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.

### THE EVENT

With the exact circumstance to be determined by the GM, the character has previously encountered the Signal Box. Perhaps they were somewhere when the army tested a 'safe' version of the device, or maybe they had a ex-military friend who drunkenly talked about his encounter with the Signal Box before they suddenly 'disappeared'? Whatever the circumstance, the character recognises the same short-long pattern and instinctively knows

that it is the cause of the horrors they are witnessing.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE

This flashback reinforces the conspiracy and will help the characters understand a bit of the nature of the threat they face. It may also motivate them to perhaps stop whatever might be happening in the town.

### FACING THE CHALLENGE

Continuing down the road, the first building the characters come across is a farmhouse. This is the residence of the Norman family, whose teenage son, Ben, was in town when Hadrian activated the Signal Box. Witnessing the first waves of madness caused by the device, he fled home. Unfortunately, Ben has already been badly affected by the signal, and each new 'dose' drives him closer to the edge.

John and Claire Norman have put Ben to bed and will greet the characters cautiously. Once reassured that the group poses no threat, they will do everything in their power to assist the weary and injured. They will say that the power went out around noon, and the strange power surges started just before dusk. Ben came home ranting about Hadrian (the surname of an old couple living in town), but they couldn't get anything else coherent from him.

As the group starts to get comfortable with their new surroundings (i.e. if they decide to hunker down, or perhaps prepare for the obvious 'zombie apocalypse'), the Signal pulses again. For Ben, this latest emission is enough

to finally drive him insane, and he soon appears, the family shotgun in hand.

### THE CHALLENGE

As with other Challenge phases, both Physical and Mental Outcomes may be used. For those playing Physical cards are shot or otherwise injured in the struggle, while Mental effects are likely the result of seeing Claire and John Norman shot down in cold blood by their son.

Another possibility is reflecting the first effect of the Signal on the party. These are subtle at first – irritable eyes, ringing ears and stomach cramps – but can quickly escalate to major bleeds and immense pain.

## WELCOME TO WILCOTT (TENSION PHASE FOUR)

The focus of this Tension Phase is to finally reveal the cause of the mystery to the characters, giving them enough information to decide whether or not they wish to heroically take on the threat.

### MOVING ON

The characters are now well aware that something horrible is occurring in Wilcott, and that they might be the only people able to make a difference. Or they may simply wish to flee for their lives.

In either case, they will find that to get to safety, they must first pass through Wilcott. The Norman household is full of useful supplies (including food,

## CELL PHONES & OTHER TECHNOLOGY

It should go without saying that the Signal Box's emissions also interfere with all types of electronics, hijacking them to boost its signal and control the environment.

Any character attempting to use their phone to call for help will receive nothing more than the short, long pulses in time with the Signal Box. This effect is replicated in some form on all technology (i.e. laptops and tablets do not start up, but their backlights pulse in rhythm with the signal).

All modern cars and vehicles relying on electronics are also affected by the Signal, although those with no electronics function just fine

weapons and ammunition) as well as an old Chevy truck parked outside.

### THE SIGNAL

Even to the most unobservant, the frequency of the pulsing signal is increasing, with the cycle down to about 5 minutes between bursts. The GM should play up the effects of the Signal and use them to motivate and scare the characters.

### INTO THE TOWN

The road into Wilcott is straight and narrow, and while it passes by a few homes, no signs of life can be seen in any of them. It is not until the group is within the last mile of the town that they begin to see the dead. At first, these are animal corpses, all of which seem to have expired from massive haemorrhaging in their major organs (the GM might like the first encounter with such being a cow partially blocking the road)

Soon, however, deceased people are encountered. Each of these has suffered a violent death, although the causes differ, ranging from self-inflicted wounds through to vicious assaults from unknown attackers. The entire situation is bloody and surreal, and it is only the darkness that protects the characters from seeing the full extent of the destruction around them.

### THE TOWN RALLY

Nearing the centre of Wilcott, the characters notice that not everyone has been killed. In an eerie scene reminiscent of a bad horror movie, a

group of crazed survivors stagger about, slowly congregating on the source of their madness, the Signal Box. While easily avoided, the presence of these crazies herds the group towards the home of the Hadrians.

### THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR

Some characters may not be as motivated as others to stop the Signal. If this is the case, the GM is encouraged to change the order of the Tension Phases, forcing the characters to encounter the military (see Tension Phase Six, below).

### FACING THE CHALLENGE

Whether or not the group intentionally seeks out the Hadrian's house, as the characters explore their options for escape, they will see an army-marked Humvee parked outside one of the town's residences – the letterbox of which denotes it to be the home of Louise and Daniel Hadrian.

Upon inspection, the Humvee is equipped with weapons and ammunition, and also contains four large storage crates marked 'Tanis Suits'. All of these crates are empty, although the markings on each indicate that the suits are designed for NBC (Nuclear, Biological and Chemical) responses.

Entering the Hadrian house, the group bears witness to scenes of a massacre; both of the elderly Hadrians are dead, and the four Military Police Officers (two male, two female) are discovered in various rooms. The MPs all wear the bulky Tanis Suits (which makes them look like strange yellow 'astronauts'),

although all are damaged from the brutal close quarters gunfight.

One of the officers, Sergeant Sarah Godhard, is still barely alive, and not yet insane from the effects of the Signal (protected as she is by the Tanis Suit). She will, between painful breaths, tell the group that Dylan Hadrian is responsible for the chaos unleashed on Wilcott, and that he ambushed the MPs as they came to retrieve the Signal Box. She is also able to explain that the Tanis Suit is the only thing keeping her from going crazy, and that they will be needed if the characters are going to stop the Signal.

She seems to be on the verge of saying more, something about a protocol or military response, when the world suddenly goes bright white with light and all of the survivors' senses shut down in pain. The Signal has gone off again, larger and more violently than ever before.

### THE CHALLENGE

This challenge can either be Mental (as they are assailed by hallucinations and false memories that are beyond their wildest nightmares) or Physical (as the result of the effects of the Signal on their already crippled bodies). Another option is for a Physical outcome to be played if one or more of the characters finally go insane and attack their friends or family.



### THE SIGNAL BOX (TENSION PHASE FIVE)

This Tension Phase acts as a climax to the adventure and details the party's desperate attempts to disable the Signal Box.

### THE SUBSTATION

Building quickly to discharge again, the Signal Box is in its last few cycles before permanently activating. Beginning to glow and shimmer in unearthly colours, even the most dazed of characters will be drawn to the impressive light show now emanating from the nearby substation. Situated only a few hundred yards from Hadrian's home, the substation can be reached by jumping a few fences and crossing back gardens, or by following the road around the block.

### THE LOCALS

The characters aren't the only ones attracted by the changes in the Signal Box. What few folk remain alive in the town (all of whom are now completely insane and little more than shambling corpses) are also drawn to the Signal Box. These 'zombies' are only dangerous if disturbed, but can act both as guides (leading the way towards the substation) and as tools for the GM to use to add more colour to the final scenes.

### WHAT CONFRONTS THEM

Having killed his parents and the Military Police in a paranoid rage, Hadrian drove his Toyota Tundra to the sub-station, breaking through the

chain-link fence. Here, he set up the Signal Box and, despite his lack of understanding of the device's finer details, was able to activate it.

Hadrian's truck's doors have been left open, and another empty Tanis Suit crate is in the back. Leading from the vehicle into the substation is a trail of wood chips and drag marks, a sign that some large, heavy box was dragged into the building.

### FACING THE CHALLENGE

It is easily enough to locate the Signal Box within the substation (the GM is free to immediately force a challenge on any character who approaches the substation not wearing a Tanis Suit – even the badly damaged suits the MPs wore can nullify most of the Signal's emissions); its bright multicoloured light drawing even the most unwilling witness closer. At this distance, the Signal Box hums with the sound of deadly electricity, and the characters can see that it has been haphazardly wired into the substation's main power board. There is no sign of Dylan Hadrian, and with the energy within the Signal Box again, little time to search for him.

Upon closer inspection, the Signal Box is a disappointingly small device of electronic components and cables, and it is hard to imagine that such a thing could be the cause of so much death and destruction. Nearby, its crate lies on its side, and its KPG1A20 SIGNALBOX manual is scattered across the ground. This booklet clearly documents, in good, precise military fashion, a series of easy-to-follow steps the process for the

arming and deactivation of the Signal Box. With these instructions, the Signal Box can, surprisingly, be turned off in just under 30 seconds. (Of course, a round from a large calibre projectile (such as a military assault rifle) is just as effective as turning it off if the characters don't want to risk getting too close to the device.)

So it is with an unstatistactory whine that the Signal Box powers down, and the survivors find themselves plunged into complete darkness. Any relief, however, quickly turns to fright as an enraged Dylan Hadrian, who has watched the party from a safe distance, attacks them, having seen his ultimate act of revenge against the world thwarted.

### THE CHALLENGE ROUND

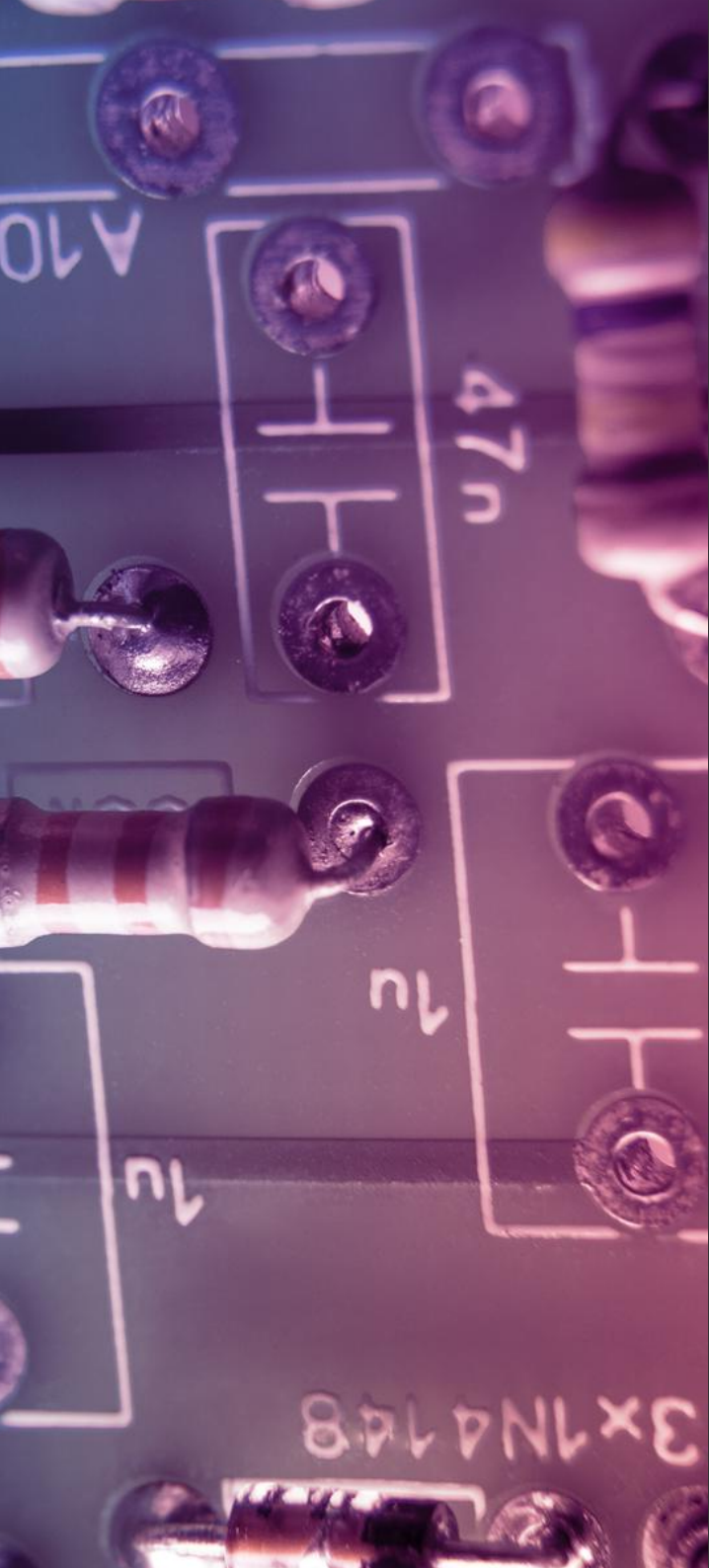
This challenge is likely to be Physical, with a battle ensuing between Hadrian and the few surviving characters (the GM might want to throw in a few townsfolk 'zombies' here as well). What specific outcomes arise from this conflict are left for the GM and players to determine, although there is plenty of scope for heroic action or underhanded feats of self-preservation in this encounter.

### THE CLEAN-UP (TENSION PHASE SIX)

This Tension Phase acts both as an alternate scene for characters attempting to flee Wilcott without disabling the Signal Box, or as a dark, [erhaps depressing, ending to the

### ENDING IT THERE?

Although this is only the fifth Tension Phase, this is an appropriate ending for those who have survived the terrors presented by the Signal. In the unlikely event of more than two heroes having survived this far, the author recommends running Tension Phase Six – Clean-up; otherwise, feel free to wrap up the story and proceed to the Final Notes section below.



scenario (as often seen in horror movies).

*Note: As this Phase acts as a 'catch-all' for the scenario, GMs should alter and adapt these events to best meet their needs as required.*

### OPTION ONE: PROTOCOL ALPHA

As one might expect, it didn't take long for the military to realise someone had stolen the Signal Box, and then identify who exactly that might be. Having sent in the four Military Police Officers to apprehend Hadrian, the rest of the task force has remained at a safe distance away hoping for the situation to be resolved as simply as possible; the light show over Wilcott and the sudden change coming over the local wildlife quickly indicated that this, unfortunately wasn't going to be the case.

To quarantine the area, dozens of armed units have set up checkpoints along routes into Wilcott, patrol the open farmland and sweep the area looking for survivors or the 'infected'. It is impossible to avoid meeting one of these teams if the characters try and escape the town before the Signal Box is disabled.

Not knowing what to expect from the use of the Signal Box, these soldiers have been ordered to take no chances with anyone they encounter and will shoot to kill on sight. Such a fire-fight should be run as a Challenge.

### OPTION TWO: OPERATION SWEEPER

This scene is run after the 'credits have rolled' and the few exhausted survivors weary make their way to... well, somewhere they might recover from the horrors they have just witnessed. The disabling of the Signal Box, however, is the sign the military had been waiting for, and they quickly 'assault' the town with one task in mind – eliminate anyone infected with the Signal.

As often happens in such events, the young, brash soldiers don't think to stop and check if anyone they encounter is really 'infected' or not, and so mistakes will happen. The GM could build is challenge with the military arriving as the party's saviours, but then quickly becoming a threat, as they start to gun down every living person in sight.

### FACING THE CHALLENGE

The climax of this Phase depends on the actions of the characters.

#### THE CHALLENGE

It is most likely that the outcomes from a confrontation with the military will be Physical, although if this scene is run as a dark conclusion, the effects could well be Mental (i.e. a jubilant survivor watching in terror as their 'rescuers' gun them down).

### FINAL NOTES


Congratulations to any character that has outlasted THE SIGNAL. As always, each of the surviving player should be

given the spotlight to describe how, or even if, their character recovers from the events of this horrible night. Each will have their own story to tell, based not only on what occurred here, but in the backstory and flashbacks they endured throughout the scenario.

### REVEALING SECRETS

It is often fun to complete the session with the players revealing their secrets to one another. Each player should also have an opportunity to describe any 'fallout' or connotations arising from these. Of course, secrets don't always pan out in the way the player expects them to, but there is rarely a dull moment when they are brought into play. If everyone is happy to do so, you may want to discuss why they chose their particular secret and what they thought might arise from its choice.

### WRAP UP

All that is left is for the GM to thank the players for their time, collect the various cards, and pack up the mess on the table. If your players are anything like those who have previously completed **EPOCH** scenarios, they may wish to talk about what has transpired in the adventure, their characters' decisions and why they agreed or disagreed with each choice made by the group. In the author's mind, this sharing is the most important part of any gaming experience, and they encourage this post-game banter! 



# UNBOUND MAGAZINE

A FANZINE FOR WEIRD TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING GAMES

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Unbound Magazine is a fanzine supporting weird and wonderful tabletop roleplaying games. Initially thought of as simply a way in which I could publish material that might never see the light of day, I now hope to expand its offerings, with your help, to all games that bring enjoyment and fun to the table.

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