

EPISTOLARY

*A game of Letters
and Monsters*

EXTRA DOCUMENTS AND
GAME MASTER'S INFORMATION

From Thought Check Games
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Created for the 2012 Game Chef

Thank you for taking a look at *Epistolary!* This document contains a few news reports which the GM may want to use to set the scene, and which she may wish to convey to the players in advance, along with some loose advice regarding the running of the game and, of course, the Archetype cards to be printed out or copied before play.

This information is intended for the GM only. Part of the game is paranoia... you don't know the nature of the Monster, and you hardly know the other Hunters, and you can't trust anyone at all, for the beast can look like a man. In order to enjoy the game as a player, please do not look any further. Thank you.

-Ed

Some Useful Articles:

Front page of the Whitcheater Lantern, September the 21st, 1912.

TRAGEDY AT SEA!

Dateline: Inlet Beach—Beachgoers were shocked this morning as a Ruritanian merchant vessel, arriving seemingly out of nowhere on a calm, windless sea, abruptly ran aground, burying itself fifty feet ashore on a popular stretch of Inlet Beach at 9:35 this morning. Witnesses described the event as “shocking, unprecedented,” and claimed that “the d---ed thing showed up out of nowhere.”

Officials reported to the scene within minutes. Officer Thomas Quincy had this to say: “It was pandemonium, pure pandemonium. People were running, screaming, the boat had caught fire where a lamp had hit the deck... the only thing what was calm was the water, which didn’t even have a wake behind it. Took us an hour to see that nobody was hurt, calm down the men and comfort the women, before we could even see to the vessel itself.”

No Whitcheater residents were injured in the crash, though eight have been admitted to the hospital, citing “shock” and “distress.”

The ship, the *Var Brasto*, had been reported missing after departing Kolayoh two months earlier, and had been assumed sunk or stolen. No crew or corpses were found aboard, and the log made no indication of what cause the crew to abandon, bar a cryptic final entry: “September 2: IT WAS ZEMINOV, ZEMINOV THE ENTIRE TIME. IT LOOKS LIKE A MAN, BUT IT’S A BEAST. IT IS AT MY DOOR. MY THOUGHTS FOREVER WITH YOU, KATRINA.”

Officials have declined to comment on the potential causes of this incident.

Front Page of the Whitchester Lantern, October the fifth, 2012:

ANOTHER MURDER: WHEN WILL IT END?

Dateline: City Hall—For the eighth time in two weeks, a Whitchester resident has been found dead, body mutilated nearly beyond recognition. Harold Webster, 67, a Whitchester native since birth and shoemaker, was discovered in the yard behind his house, by a concerned neighbor who had not seen him in several days.

“He’s getting on in years,” said the neighbor, who asked not to be identified, “and with his wife gone and no children around, I like to stop by every so often to make sure he’s getting on. I mean, I knew that at some point he’d be... but I didn’t expect it would be like this.”

Medical officials were unable to determine the precise cause of death, due to the state of the body, but speculate severe blood loss, owing to lacerations about the chest and neck. When asked whether the attack was caused by a human or animal, officials stated that there was no way to be sure.

Officer Thomas Quincy made this announcement this morning: “Ladies and gentlemen, please stay calm. Our condolences go out to the friends and family of Mr. Webster, and the other victims of these attacks, and we would like to remind everyone that we do not intend to stop investigating until the cause has been discovered and Whitchester is safe again. Until that point, please do everything in your power to remain safe: all of the attacks have occurred in the evening or at night, all of them outside, and most of them near the outskirts of town. The victims were almost all alone, and those that weren’t were an older couple. Stay inside when it is dark, avoid the woods at all costs, and if you must travel at night, do so in groups of three or more, paying careful attention to your surroundings. Thank you.”

Mayor Ronald Twain has announced a city hall meeting tomorrow night to discuss the situation at length; at the time of printing, he could not be reached for comment.

Confidential to the GM.

What is the Monster?

In due time, I would like to create multiple choices for monster, each with different powers and purposes, each unique and intriguing. At the moment, however, I've got one monster.

It's a werewolf... one that feels the need to kill and consume humans, and the desire to spread its curse and form a mighty pack. It arrived on the boat, and, during the panic, snuck away, into the forests, to resume its killing. Every few days, it will attack a local, either one travelling alone or, if they look weak or slow, in pairs. As a wolf, the beast is not so intelligent as a human, but it IS cunning, and knows enough to find the easy prey, usually at night, usually near the trees. Whitchester is far enough from civilization that travelling to and from it is not simple, and it sees no reason to leave easy prey just yet.

That said, when it learned a hunting party was to be formed, it decided to join them, by killing someone and taking their place. He can't change his human form, but he did select someone that the people wouldn't easily recognize, who happened to resemble him reasonably well. He's aware of the Monster Hunters, and he realizes that, as they are the best of the residents, they would make an admirable pack which he might be the head of. It's a delicious thought, and now his goal is to spread his curse without being discovered.

Controlling the Players.

Get things started with some casual chat. Have everyone share their names, have them decide what they look like, have them talk about their motivations a bit. They won't have met formally prior to the game, but they may have seen one another around town at a distance, or been briefly introduced years ago... that said, don't let them forge complex relationships with one another. They're meant to be strangers.

One of the biggest tools at your disposal is Prop cards... you can make them at will and offer them up, and a clever player will grab them quickly. Don't abuse this power; if you make more than two or so per player the economy becomes bloated and drawing fresh cards becomes cumbersome.

Do, also, make and pass notes to the players; interrupt them with *Lantern* articles and diary entries when necessary, but that should be sparing. By passing them a note which reads something like "you're going to find a broken locket, photo missing," you get what you need out there, and allow the player to still wield control over the narrative by determining the specifics of the find and the item.

Avoid taking control away from players... specifically, don't have the *Lantern* report on actions they haven't already declared an intent to do; their investment in the narrative relies on their sense of control over their own character.

Playing the monster.

Two basic options. First, you may pick one of the players, give him the Archetype card that allows him to arrive on the scene, and the unique Prop card, and replace the remaining Archetype cards with the Monster cards. In this case, you will primarily be acting his role when he is in monster form. Make a habit of handing cards to all players, even when there is no cause to, because your communication with the monster will otherwise seem quite suspicious.

Alternately, you may elect to have all the players be humans. This makes the job of communication slightly easier, as you need not keep the grand secret, and the players, not aware that this is an option, should still feel some paranoia. That said, if the game is run in this method, you are on your honor to play the beast more conservatively, and not run all over the Hunters with ease.

Clues and investigation.

As the Monster narrates and passes you notes, consider the clues which could point him or his plans out to the Hunters. The should not be able to spot him instantly, but nor should things grow interminable. Consider the following aspects of the monster:

His motive.

His residence (as a human).

His appearance (as a human).

His appearance as a monster.

His powers.

His hunting strategies.

His allies, if any.

His potential victims.

His weaknesses

If two or three letters pass without a hint toward one of these, players will grow restless! Clues need not be major... a stray hair, an unreliable witness, even a howling from afar (albeit one which occurs in an NPC letter, so as not to suggest that one of the players cannot be the one doing the howling), anything which can be discussed among the players and used to form a plan... that is to say, anything that can keep the story moving.

The archetype and monster cards follow, as well as a few common happenings which you may need to convey to your players, and should serve as a guide for further communication.

<p>Aristocrat: "Suddenly, I heard the tap, tap, tap of a mahogany walking-stick on the pavement." <i>Present to the Narrator to arrive in the current scene.</i></p>	<p>Doctor: "I smelt the reek of chemicals, unguents, and burned air on the breeze." <i>Present to the Narrator to arrive on the current scene.</i></p>
<p>Aristocrat: "But fortunately, I've an estate more than large enough to carry influence." <i>Acts as a clubs Skill card when you are present in the scene.</i></p>	<p>Doctor: "I had seen something like this before, though never quite so severe..." <i>Acts as a spades Skill card when you are present in the scene.</i></p>
<p>Aristocrat: "'We can always send Baxter,' I suggested. 'Baxter, will you be a dear?'" <i>You gain the Prop card: The Aristocrat's valet.</i></p>	<p>Doctor: "'I believe only one thing,' I declared, 'that truth may be found only in investigation.' <i>You gain the Prop card: The Doctor's microscope.</i></p>
<p>Aristocrat: "I removed from my hand a ring of gold, in which a multifaceted ruby was set." <i>While Narrating: if an item might be had for any price, you have the means to purchase it.</i></p>	<p>Doctor: "I was on the scene, thank goodness, to inject him with an energetic compound of my own devising." <i>While Narrating: prevent another player (or yourself) from being injured.</i></p>
<p>Aristocrat: "'I say,' I screamed, 'when you tangle with my companions, you tangle with me! Is that your intent, sir?'" <i>While you are present in the scene: Burn any card to allow all players to immediately draw three Skill cards.</i></p>	<p>Doctor: "'The answer is blood,' I whispered. 'Yours is poisoned, but mine has life left. I must prepare a transfusion.' <i>While you are present in the scene: Burn any card to allow one other player to un-Burn up to two cards.</i></p>

<p>Constable:</p> <p>"A figure appeared in the fog, striding with the slow assurance of an oncoming barge."</p> <p>Present to the Narrator to arrive on the current scene.</p>	<p>Servant:</p> <p>"I nearly shouted when I heard the polite cough just behind my ear."</p> <p>Present to the Narrator to arrive on the current scene.</p>
<p>Constable:</p> <p>"I felt the wind go out of me, but that only made me rally harder!"</p> <p><i>Acts as a diamonds Skill card when you are present in the scene.</i></p>	<p>Servant:</p> <p>"I presented myself with deference, and bowed. That seemed to satisfy the blighter."</p> <p><i>Acts as a clubs Skill card when you are present in the scene.</i></p>
<p>Constable:</p> <p>"Keep struggling,' I said, 'and all you'll break are your wrists. Not that I wouldn't want to see that."</p> <p><i>You gain the Prop card: the Constable's handcuffs.</i></p>	<p>Servant:</p> <p>"I return every night,' I admitted. 'It may be cinders, but it's the only home I've known."</p> <p><i>You gain the Prop card: the remains of the Servant's home.</i></p>
<p>Constable:</p> <p>"I yelled something about warrants and jurisdictions and rights of search and seizure. They seemed to buy it."</p> <p><i>While Narrating: you cannot be denied entry into any building.</i></p>	<p>Servant:</p> <p>"Wordlessly I stepped back, melding into the background. A veritable ghost."</p> <p><i>While Narrating: move without being seen.</i></p>
<p>Constable:</p> <p>"Men, stop for a second,' I said. Something in my gut, I can't say what, told me there was trouble."</p> <p><i>While you are present in the scene: Burn any card, and the GM will suggest where a clue may be found.</i></p>	<p>Servant:</p> <p>"If someone asks,' I pleaded, 'tell them the door was ajar when we arrived."</p> <p><i>While you are present in the scene: Burn any card to instantly pick the most complex of locks.</i></p>

<p>Scholar:</p> <p>"I'd never seen a figure so still. Had he not been turning pages I'd have thought him a statue."</p> <p><i>Present to the Narrator to arrive on the current scene.</i></p>	<p>Soldier:</p> <p>"I saw the uniform before I saw the man. I suppose most did, if gleamed even in the dim light."</p> <p><i>Present to the Narrator to arrive on the current scene.</i></p>
<p>Scholar:</p> <p>"I recalled one of my professors, who'd rambled at length on this very subject more than once."</p> <p><i>Acts as a Spades Skill card when you are present in the scene.</i></p>	<p>Soldier:</p> <p>"I'd never been trained for quite this situation, but some experience is quite universal."</p> <p><i>Acts as a hearts Skill card when you are present in the scene.</i></p>
<p>Scholar:</p> <p>"If only I'd been home, they'd be... I hesitated, unable, unwilling to complete the thought."</p> <p><i>You gain the Prop card: the graveyard where the Scholar's parent's lie.</i></p>	<p>Soldier:</p> <p>"Easy now, Justice,' I said soothingly. 'Save your strength for the final furlong."</p> <p><i>You gain the Prop card: the Soldier's horse.</i></p>
<p>Scholar:</p> <p>"I hadn't been studying my companions, but they were, in their way, predictable."</p> <p><i>While Narrating: you may deduce where any one of your companions is.</i></p>	<p>Soldier:</p> <p>"The modern soldier must cross any border in an instant, even the one between sleep and wakefulness."</p> <p><i>While Narrating: you are aware and prepared for any approaching danger.</i></p>
<p>Scholar:</p> <p>"No,' I protested. 'You think me mad, mad as a hatter, but I've seen it studied, confirmed, tested!"</p> <p><i>While you are present in the scene: Burn a card to declare an improbably scientific fact to be true.</i></p> <p>(Note, the GM may exercise discretion with this ability.)</p>	<p>Soldier:</p> <p>"D-- you," I said, my finger on the trigger. "I'll not miss you this time."</p> <p><i>While you are present in the scene: Burn a card to shoot with unerring accuracy.</i></p>

<p>Monster: werewolf</p> <p>You were once a man, but now the blood of the beast flows within you, driving you with its insatiable hunger. You seek a victim every few days... sometimes more often.</p> <p><i>When you are NOT present in the scene, this card causes a wolf (you) to appear and attack the Narrator viciously.</i></p>	<p>Monster: werewolf</p> <p>Even when human, you are not human. The Beast lends you strength and perception beyond mortal understanding.</p> <p><i>When you are present in a scene, this card provides a Benefaction for any challenge you are involved in.</i></p>
<p>Monster: werewolf</p> <p>You desire a pack. It is the nature of wolves to want to congregate, and you wish to spread your curse to those who might lend the pack strength.</p> <p><i>Burn a card when you physically attack a Hunter (in wolf or human form) to spread the curse to them. They will know they are infected but transform involuntarily at the full moon.</i></p>	<p>Monster: werewolf</p> <p>Your condition is a curse, it is a strength as well, for the flesh that calls to you also sustains you.</p> <p><i>Play immediately after you kill somebody (NPC or hunter) to consume their corpse; you may un-Burn or un-Lock a card.</i></p>
<p>EVENT:</p> <p>A wolf appears from the underbrush, growling. It is about to attack you.</p>	<p>EVENT:</p> <p>The smell of death is unmistakable. There is a body somewhere near.</p>
<p>EVENT:</p> <p>You have been writing for some time, and feel your hand is beginning to cramp.</p> <p>Please begin concluding the letter.</p>	<p>MONSTER EVENT:</p> <p>I feel you wish to attack a player, but am not sure which. Please hand this card back to me, and somehow indicate your target subtly.</p>
<p>EVENT:</p> <p>As night comes in, you feel strange, then sick. You don't recall going to bed, and when you wake up you feel exhausted and sicker than ever.</p>	<p>EVENT:</p> <p>A messenger runs up to you, out of breath, and announces that the mayor wishes to see you.</p>