

"The Terrible Childe"



A Casus Belli scenario for
Call of Cthulhu

This adventure was created to be played in the Nineteen Twenties, but can easily be adapted to another timeline. However, it is important that the **Keeper of the Arcane** knows the **Dreamlands** well. Warning: this scenario is slightly unusual. Keep it for experienced or 'blasé' **Investigators**. It can serve as a good introduction to the Dreamlands.

The Waking World

Introduction to the Investigators

New York city, on a nice Monday morning in May. The Investigators are getting ready for a usual day of work. Their morning will be shattered upon reading the newspaper. The headline reads, in big letters: "Tragic Gathering!" The article is short but clear: Saturday night, Miss Violetta Harden, rich widow of the Harden fortune, organized a soiree in the private hotel of her parents (who are in Europe and have not yet been reached). No one knows what happened; to the guests, twenty are dead, ten have been driven mad, the others have ended up in prison. However, the most unusual aspect is the gathering's guest list. We find several individuals whose presence at a high-society reception can not be easily explained: two mediocre gangsters, a call-girl, several artists of dubious reputation, many individuals of no distinguishing background, an insurance clerk, a shopkeeper, even a homeless man "still unidentified at this time". In

conclusion, the reporter complains that the police have refused to divulge any information about the condition of the bodies found. In the list of victims is a 'Morton Smith', a friend of the Investigators'. He was a painter who was making a meager living from the paintings he sold. Note: This "Smith" character is just a name. Try to give him more depth by having him present in an adventure or two before killing him off. Or take a NPC from a previously played game or even a retired investigator (but not without the consent of his player).

Normally, the party and its consequences should suffice to pique the players' interest. If that is not enough, have the grieving Dolores, Smith's beautiful widow, call the Investigators to motivate them into action. She is in need of comfort (and of valiant knights to help her clarify the events that have transpired).

The Facts

The roots of this affair rest in the Dreamlands, more precisely in the town of Sorrowstone on the horizon of Sona-Nyl, the Country of Imagination. No need to look it up on a map, it's not there. It must be said that it is such an abominably

dreary place that no dreamer has ever even thought of talking about it. Even the stones of the town cry from the pain of boredom! For the children, it's like living in some sort of hell. Until recently that is. In fact, some time ago, the town received a visit from a peddler who was a bit of a magician, a little crazy and quite the tinker. He took notice of the children's distress and, on his following trip, brought them toys of his own making. Kaleidoscopes, lenses, picture books, puzzles...all sorts of objects that, when gazed upon for a long enough period of time, revealed marvelous landscapes and images. The most recurrent scene was one of a marvelous city of gigantic towers, overpopulated and incredibly animated: New York. The toys were more powerful than the peddler suspected. Keeping focused on the images of the city, the children started dreaming of it... The veil between the Waking World and the Dream Countries is thin and permeable in both directions. At first the children had the impression of seeing the city through somebody else's eyes. Bit by bit, night after night, they started influencing their unwilling host's actions. After but a few weeks of practice they achieved total domination over them. That's when one of the rascals, a little

brighter than the others, had the idea of having all the hosts meet. The reception took place at Miss Harden's residence. The soiree started rather well but took a turn for the worse rather quickly. The volatile mixture of childish disputes, unsupervised alcohol use, available drugs and the well-known tendency children have to break their toys 'just to see what's inside' turned the party into carnage. The surviving host's bodies were left on their own at the end of the night. Of course the involuntary hosts have suffered a lot of psychological damage. And their troubles are not yet over. This mess has not gone unnoticed by the powers who rule over Dreamland who have sent an emissary to investigate. Actually he is content to simply eliminate the survivors.



The Trail

The Police

The detectives are hesitant to reveal the details of what could be the biggest scandal of the year. Maybe the Investigators could get some information if they show themselves to be persuasive or have friends in high places. The causes of death were varied, original and generally unpleasant. There were several cases of overdoses and ethylic comas, a handful of murders (three with blades, six with firearms), a drowning in the bathroom, etc. Don't hesitate to give out details. The more realist and morbid you are in the first part of the scenario, the more intense the fall into the unreal will be felt later on. Among the things that should attract the Investigators' attention are the clothes. Almost everybody was strangely dressed. One would expect that the guests show up in smoking and dresses, but someone wore a

suit and a straw hat! Some of the guests must have put on whatever was the most colorful pieces of clothing available in their wardrobe. (The children picked what pleased them most in their hosts' wardrobes.)

The Survivors

The survivors are detained for a couple of days in an insane asylum. They are then released (due to "lack of proof") or sent to a prison to await judgment. With some imagination the Investigators can bypass the medical staff and interrogate the victims. Most of them don't remember anything, some just a vague sensation of a cold and gray featureless landscape. Many of them are developing what the psychiatrist is calling "small neurosis" that are, in fact, childish personality traits that remain after their 'possessors' left. One survivor fears the dark, another has taken to a security blanket, etc. The most interesting case is that of 'Big' Bob Jackson, a gangster. He is the most affected. The psychiatrists doubt that he will ever revert to a normal state. He stays cradled in his bed, immobile; but he talks and tells stories. According to your needs, he could limit himself to fragments of memory from his possessor (big gray houses, gray streets, deadly boredom) or include in his stories some more or less obvious clues (the name of a renowned Dreamland place or person, for example).

Morton Smith's Studio

Through Dolores, the players could obtain the keys to Morton Smith's attic studio. There is not much of interest there, except for a canvas on a trestle. The background and the sketch lines are by Smith's hand. However, the details and the colors are by another hand, quite unskilled and that favors much brighter colors. A successful Psychology roll indicates that it is a child's drawing.

Otherwise, remain vague in describing it.

Friends and Family

With lots of patience and tact, it should be possible to ask questions to family members of the gathering's participants. Many have noticed that their relatives had periodic memory blanks for a couple of weeks. They will tell examples of 'embarrassing behavior', like the time when a dignified businessman suddenly jumped on his secretary...or when a young trade clerk started crying right in the middle of the stock exchange and so on. The more the Investigators search, the more of these incidents they will find. Be fair and make it obvious that they are dealing with children. In any case, there is a strong chance that they will believe that it is a case of possession by evil supernatural entities not from this earth.

A Nightly Call

Not all of the children had a firm enough grasp on their host to participate in the gathering. Dolores is host to one of these children who is only just now taking control of her actions. During her first encounter with the Investigators, they will notice a strange light in her eyes – something akin to jubilation. As soon as the investigation's rhythm slows down, have one of the Investigators called by a hysterical Dolores who begs for him to come over. He will find her alone in her apartment, staring at a huge doll's house. Her living room is filled with costly toys: teddies, dolls, miniature kitchen tools, toy makeup. When questioned, her landlady will explain that everything had been delivered that afternoon and that Dolores was there to receive them. The day after, a visit to the toy store will confirm that she bought about a \$1000 worth of toys. The amount is practically

all of her savings...of course, she remembers nothing of it.



The Murders

Several times during their investigation, the players will have the impression that they are being watched. One morning they will learn of a fire at the asylum where the last survivors were kept, or that Dolores fell through a window, or the mysterious death of one of the guests' family.

The perpetrator of these murders is a small man in a gray suit with no particular traits. He is an ordinary dreamer who has had the bad luck of offending the powers-that-be of the Dreamlands. In his dreams they offered him a full pardon in exchange for making a couple of people disappear. He's doing his best, but he's not a very good assassin. However he has some spells that work well in the Waking World. Sooner or later, the players will catch him. For a dramatic atmosphere the players could set a trap at Dolores' place with a small combat (followed by a pursuit on the roofs perhaps?) Our assassin's name is Simon Tottle. He belongs to the 'pitiful crying cowards' category of criminals and confesses his crimes at the first hint of violence. If the Investigators are unaware of the existence of the Dreamlands his story will seem completely insane. He knows one detail of interest:

during his conversation, the Being who spoke to him mentioned that the source of the problem resided in a place named "Sorrowstone" of which Simon knows nothing.

He is more than ready to help the Investigators take their first step to the other side of the mirror, if they are novices. He could even have access to a drug that could help the players with too low SAN or POW scores to go through. Once in the Dreamlands, he will prove himself an extremely nervous, unreliable, cowardly ally. He is convinced he has brought the wrath of the Gods upon himself. He's right actually. If it suits you, the Investigators could find him burnt to a crisp on their second or third night there...



Sleep Tight!

Looking for Sorrowstone

You are free to decide where the Investigators start their journey. According to your whims they could end up in Ulthar, Celephais, Dylath-Lee or much farther away. The only thing they can do is ask direction to Sorrowstone from the inhabitants. Nobody seems to know where it is. You have to remember that every hour of sleep is equal to one week in the dream world. In other words, the Investigators have around two months to find the village. You can include various incidents during this time, even whole scenarios. Among

the steps they could take; visiting the Great Library (which exists in a fold between Time, accessible from Ulthar and a half-dozen other cities), getting an audience with King Kuranee (who is about to leave for Serranie), consulting the mute Oracle of Dylath-Leen (quite an unpleasant man who will certainly ask something in exchange from the players), or meeting the Cats of Ulthar who know-all-that-is (they know Sorrowstone well, but do not care to live there). Whatever they attempt, the Investigators will eventually learn that the town is on the border of Sona-Nyl, in the only arid region for thousands of leagues. The way there can lead to a whole expedition, unless the players find themselves there without transition.

Sorrowstone

The Waking World is not a very nice place. Sorrowstone is worse. A bunch of gray stone houses sits in the middle of a gray plain where only a few stunted trees grow. The sky is always covered in low, dark clouds but it never rains. There is not a spot of color in the region. It is the realm of uniformity, mediocrity, and of boredom. It's one of those places where time does not flow at the same rate as everywhere else: each second feels like an hour. All the houses are identical; the streets are all at right angles. For your descriptions you can get your inspiration from 19th century mining towns and modern-day suburbs. Put heavy emphasis on the atmosphere. Remember that this is a bad dream! The pavement stones look solid, but have a quicksilver feel to them when walked upon. Some Investigators may notice similar stones of similar size and shape in the houses' walls. If someone spends some time looking at them they can see the stones slowly oozing water... the rocks are literally crying from boredom. By the way, the main activity of the citizens of Sorrowstone is to remove these stones; if they did not, they would

eventually flood the town. The city is right in the middle of a roadway complex that leads nowhere...

There are two thousand adult citizens in Sorrowstone. And they all have the same mournful look, the same dull clothing, and they all look aimlessly busy. The arrival of the Investigators does not even faze them. They are willing to talk (have them speak in hushed voices and yawn from time to time). The Investigators are welcomed to stay as long as they wish but they will be thrown out of town at the first sign of trouble.

Depending on what the Investigators learned in the first part of their investigation, they will take more or less time to show interest in the children. Do not hurry it up. Sorrowstone has another interesting secret; the Conformer, who might attract their attention first. The children are the only touch of life in this dreary landscape. They wear multi-colored clothing, play, laugh, and shout like normal children. The adults ignore them completely unless they do something really messy. The children feel a mix of fascination (they're so different) and fear (they're adults) towards the characters. It will probably take some time to approach them and gain their trust. They are not willing to talk about their nocturnal visits to New York in the Waking World. Present them like as you see fit. They can be like "The Little Rascals", nice and polite, or instead ready to do anything to protect their secret. In that case, take time to remind the players that murdering children is not an option.

Among the group of about fifty children there are several different individuals. Here are some to inspire you. Create others, do not hesitate to have them lie, confabulate, deny the obvious, and display other typical childish behavior.



Janna, 9 years old. Blonde, melancholic. She

misses her 'doll' that she 'broke'. (Louisa Moore, 27. Ethylic coma). She is particularly defensive.



Pol, 13 years old. Brown-haired, brawny and strong-headed. He's the one who instigated the party. He is in the process of finding a new host.



Norma, 10, red-aired with a bad temper but a good heart.



Hovra, 12, puny and near-sighted. He's the one who had the most fun at the party and he would like to return to continue with his "experiences". For now he is content pulling the wings off flies.

Once revealed, the children's story is quite simple. One day "a strange black man" came through town (curiously the adults do not remember him; in fact they will not remember much from the Investigators' visit because it would distract them from their boredom).

He sympathized with them and came back later with a bunch of wonderful toys. For the rest see "The Facts" above.

The children will agree to show the gifts to the Investigators. Whatever their shape, they all have something to do with sight: lenses, glasses, kaleidoscopes, etc. If the Investigators look at them for a while they will end up with a migraine. After about an hour of observation ask for a POW roll x1. If they succeed the character will briefly see the skyline of New York City's skyscrapers at sunset. Apparently it works better with the children: they manage to do it in a couple of minutes. It will be impossible for the Investigators to take on a host body over a fortnight. The possession, from

this side of the mirror, takes many nights (while weeks can go by in the Waking World). If there is such obstacles with the objects' design it is mainly to avoid them being misused in future scenarios, besides they are attuned to the reality of the Dreamlands. From which the Investigators are not native to.

You have the opportunity to create touching scenes with the players pleading with the young ones to not do this sort of thing any more and to try and get the toys back. Some children will obey, some will hide them. Trying to help from their parents would be the worse thing to do; the children would disobey *en masse*. When this no longer amuses you, go to the next step.



The Return of the Black Man

Note: If you have experienced players you can be certain they will equate "Black man = Nyarlathotep". Take no measure to dissuade them of that.

One morning another stranger comes into town. A middle-age black man, thin, he is all smiles and colorfully dressed. His name is Peter. He's a dreamer, like the players. In the Waking World he's a postman in Atlanta. Here, he's a peddler, a jester, a magician from time to time. The children probably will be the first people informed of his presence. They will explain the presence of the Investigators to him in their own fashion (their feelings depend on how the players handled the story thus far). According to the situation, Peter will be convinced that the Investigators are either "there to steal their toys" or wish to help solve their problems. In any case he will not attempt anything against the Investigators before they have a chance to explain themselves. He'll be more or less agreeable on the first encounter. He's sorry about the trouble he's unwittingly caused and will offer help to the players. Asked about the origin of the toys, he will give the players an odd look and tell them "I dreamt them of course!" With his help, the gathering up of the toys will go fast. The sad thing is that it will leave the children without anything interesting in their lives. They are quite aware of it and are very disheartened about that. There might be something that can be done about that.

Sorrowstone's Dark Secret

The town took shape from the dreams of a New England colonial village founded by Puritans a long time ago. They established themselves on the brim of the Realm of Imagination out of pure defiance. To them, the Dreamlands seemed to be an acceptable incarnation of hell they could stand out against. The original dreamers are all dead of course, but their creation continues to exist. Misanthropic and neurotic persons in the Waking World have come upon the place and liked it. In time they dreamt some

ameliorations and modifications to the dream town, the most important being the Conformer. It is located in the lower basement of the city hall building. The citizens of Sorrowstone do not hide it. On the contrary: they proudly explain that because of it "everyone is able to become a useful member of society, free of all antisocial tendencies" (etc, *ad nauseam*). Everyone is required to see him on their fifteenth birthday. The true purpose of the device is simple: devour all the hopes, dreams and gifts of the victim, producing a new adult who will start to show a predilection for grayness and boredom.

The Conformer is kept in a dark room under lock and key, overseen by the burgomaster. Note that Sorrowstone is very democratic. The burgomaster is elected every two years...unanimously. Then again, he has been the only candidate since forever it seems. Gaining access to the room may prove difficult. You can decide of the exact looks of the device. In the past it looked like the inside of a church with a minister doing a sermon. Nowadays it rather looks like a huge baroque machine, with pistons, valves and levers. The patient is strapped on a table, the burgomaster pushes a button, then...

Revolution?

The children know perfectly what awaits them. The most upset among them leave before reaching the fateful age. Those who survive the journey through the gray desert disappear into Sona-Nyl. But now, with Peter and the Investigator present, they might consider storming the *Bastille*. Let the Investigators establish a plan but you must add a *caveat*: Peter wants no violence. If need be, draw them a plan of city hall. Let them take care of keys, diversions and the like. This part is for them to manage. Of course they are going to have some nasty surprises when they attempt to implement their plan.

- The adults are quite willing to defend the Conformer, even if it costs them their life.

- The reality of Sorrowstone will defend itself. Walls and doors around the machine suddenly become unnaturally solid, nearby houses fall down (when you take away something it must come from somewhere else).

- The Conformer has no intention of letting itself be destroyed. Upon the arrival of the Investigators it will have ripped itself off of the ground. This is the time to make a big scene with special effects descriptions. The Conformer grows wood and brass tentacles and tries to attach the players to the operating table and drain them of their hopes and dreams. Scale the power of the Conformer according to your group's strength. With some luck they should be able to destroy it. If the situation gets bad for the machine, it will flee, destroying half of city hall in the process. It will naturally aim for Xura, the Realm of Lost Dreams, which is close by. A great career as a predator awaits it there.



Conclusion

Sorrowstone's evolution could be interesting to see in the future. The adults are definitively lost, but the children can take care of things. The land will become greener with time and the stones will stop weeping.

The Investigators will awake with the comforting feeling of having accomplished something good ... plus having found a new friend in Atlanta. Regaining 1D6 points of SAN is a reasonable reward.

NPC Characteristics

➤ **Tottle, amateur assassin & natural born victim**

STR 12 CON 14 SIZ 14 INT 13 POW 16
DEX 14 APP 11 SAN 30 EDU 14 HP 14

Damage bonus: +1d4

Weapons: .38 Revolver, 45%, damage 1d10

Skills: Dream 30%, Oneiric Lore 40%, Cthulhu Mythos 20%, Hide 40%, Track 35%, Sneak 50%, Whine 40%

Spells: Shriveling, Dread Curse of Azathoth, Fist of Yog-Sothoth, Malenkanon's Bolt* , Passing Unseen* (*Dreamlands spells)

➤ **Typical child**

STR 08 CON 12 SIZ 08 INT 10 POW 13
DEX 12 APP 14 SAN 65 EDU 06 HP 10

Damage bonus: -

Weapons: None (at best a slingshot)

Skills: Sorrowstone Lore 50%

➤ **Peter**

STR 14 CON 15 SIZ 13 INT 14 POW 17
DEX 13 APP 14 SAN 75 EDU 08 HP 14

Damage bonus: +1d4

Weapons: Fists, 60%, 1d3+1d4

Skills: Dream 60%, Oneiric Lore 45%, Deliver Letters Unerringly 80%, Whistle 55%

Spells: Flame of Lambent, Woeful Itching, (Pick other non-lethal offensive and defensive spells from Dreamlands source.)

➤ **The Conformer**

These stats are just an indication. Adjust them according to the party's power if he seems too powerful or not enough.

STR 20 CON 20 SIZ 40 INT na POW na DEX 10 HP 30

Armor: 10 points

Damage bonus: +3d6

Weapons: Grab 50%, (2 / round) no dam. Two rounds to break free, and then target ends up on the table and gets drained. Drain, 100% Halve POW, loss of imagination, sense of humor etc...don't be cruel

San loss: 1 / 1d6

Note: The conformer is cowardly, and will flee if down by 5 HP or if seriously threatened.



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