

"The Knife" ©1992,1996,1998 Call of Cthulhu

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Sure we've had some killings here. Every US city and town has them these days. They're also getting weirder. This latest guy, the one the media calls "the Knife", has been cutting people's hearts out and draining their blood. I'm looking forward to retiring, you bet.

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Introduction/Keeper's Background

This 1990s adventure can be set in any city or town that has or is near an established university, such as Boston . Of course, setting it near Miskatonic

University would be a nice touch.

Prior to the beginning of the adventure, US troops discovered a new site of Aztec ruins while they were conducting exercises with local troops. An archeological expedition soon arrived at the site with Professor John Wenton among them. In the course of the exploration, Professor Wenton stumbled across an enchanted mythos knife. Contact with the knife caused him to become ill and he was forced to return to his home. During the trip back and when he was back, the mythos being connected with the knife gradually drove him insane. His first victim was a colleague, who was soon discovered. His next was his wife, whom he hid in the basement freezer of his house. He has been killing one person a day ever since. It is up to the investigators to stop him and get rid of the knife.



Getting the Investigators Involved

The bizarre nature of the killings might intrigue the investigators to enter into the situation, especially if they reside in the area. They may also be brought in by a professor, who knows of them, who suspects that occult activity may be afoot. This adventure is also suitable for running "in the background." The investigators could hear of the killings while the investigators are involved in another adventure and they could be gradually drawn into this adventure, perhaps because they believe the incidents are connected with the original adventure.

Players' Information

The following information may become available to the players. There are numerous newspaper articles that the investigators might find. Most of them are difficult to find and the players would have to think to check for them. Finding them requires Library Skills rolls, which may be modified at the Keeper's discretion to reflect the difficulty in coming across some of the articles. A fairly easy to find piece of information is that a new site of Aztec ruins was discovered recently and that an expedition visited them. A more difficult article to find is a piece in the local paper about Professor Wenton joining the expedition. A later article is about the fact that he became ill and was forced to return. There are numerous news items about the killings. These are front page news and there is extensive TV coverage. The killings are sometimes mentioned on the national news. Researching the killing will reveal that the first victim was Professor Ivan Tarksi, an expert in ancient languages. He was found in his office by a student. The next victims were of various professions (ranging from hookers to accountants) and they were killed in various places (at home, in an alley, etc.). The only thing all the killings have in common is that the hearts have been precisely removed and all the blood has been drained

from the bodies.

If the investigators wish to learn more about the killings, they may want to speak with the police or the coroner. The police on the case will talk about the killings if the investigators have some of official standing (press, PIs, etc.) or if the investigators can earn their trust (or trick them). The police have no idea who the killer is, except that he is very good with the knife and is insane. They suspect that it is probably a surgeon, due to the precision of the cuts. In all cases, the police will say, the heart was removed from the body and the blood was drained. If the investigators speak with the coroner, who will talk if persuaded (expressing an interest in his work will help) or if the investigators have an official status. He will say that the hearts were removed with surgical precision with a scalpel sharp implement. The rib cage of each victim has been ripped out and the markings indicate it was done by a gloved human hand (the police haven't revealed this fact). The coroner will also say that the blood was removed completely from the bodies, but there is no indication of how this was done.

Investigators with occult skill will, if they make their skill roll, recognize that the way that the victims have been killed is very much like the way the Aztecs sacrificed their victims. According to the Aztecs' metaphysics, the universe had been made from the blood of the gods and human blood was needed to keep the universe's energy in the proper balance. The blood draining part of the killings is not part of the standard Aztec ceremony, but a second occult roll will indicate that the investigator is aware of a small cult that existed in the Aztec culture which removed the hearts of their victims and drained their blood. This cult worshiped a god named "Azatcl" who was served by a dark god named "Thotaxtl." According to this cult's mythology, the chief god lived at the center of the universe and fed upon blood. This blood was brought to it in a variety of means, but blood from sacrifices was brought to it by a toad like being. Many scholars doubt that the cult existed and believe the information on it was fabricated by the Spanish to justify their wiping out the city this cult supposedly resided in, as no evidence has ever been found supporting the documents written by a Spanish priest detailing the cult and its practices. Ecofeminist scholars contend that the city was a peaceful, matriarchal society which worshiped an earth goddess and this is why the city was destroyed by the patriarchal Spaniards. Once the Aztec link is made, finding the articles about the professor will be easier, since the investigators will be focusing on Aztec related information.

If the investigators learn about the Aztec cult, a successful Cthulhu Mythos skill check will reveal that the cult did exist and apparently worshiped Azathoth and Nyarlathotep by sacrificing people to them. There is also reference to an enchanted knife used in the sacrifices as well as some mention of a toad being that drank human blood. The knife is supposed to be inhabited by or linked to the toad thing and it is written that it can take control of anyone who possesses the knife.

The fact of the matter is that the inhabitants of the city did indirectly worship Azathoth and sacrificed humans to it. The heart and blood of the sacrifices was consumed by the nameless toad creature. The Spaniard came across this city and

learned quickly of its practices. In response, they wiped the city out and had all record of it destroyed so that no one would return to the cursed site. This city is, of course, the one that was found by US troops.

If the investigators check out the first murder, that of the professor, they will find out that he was killed in his office and that no one saw or heard anything. This is surprising, since the main office is next to the dead professor's old office and the walls are quite thin. If an investigator makes a luck role, one of the people will say "It's just terrible. First Professor Wenton took sick on the expedition and had to come early, and now Professor Tarksi is dead." If the person is asked about Wenton, they will say that he was on an expedition to an Aztec city and was forced to return due to an illness from which he hasn't recovered yet. If the investigators ask (or look in the phone book) they can find his address. The book also indicates that he is married, since it lists a Mr. and Mrs. John Wenton.

Action

The professor, insane and dominated by the toad thing, will kill a person a day unless he is stopped. He hunts each night for a suitable victim, using his own keen intelligence and the abilities bestowed upon him by the toad thing to select the best victim and circumstances in which to kill him/her. If the investigators go out at random, they will have little chance of finding him, if any. If they search for him, they will also have little chance of finding him. Their best bet is to put the pieces together in order to find out who the killer is. If the investigators call him, he will say that he is sick and doesn't feel up to visitors. If they stop by (with or without calling) during the day, he will answer the door and explain that he is ill and wishes to be left alone. A successful spot hidden role will reveal that his sneakers by the door are in small puddles, indicating he was out in the rain last night (an odd thing for a sick man to do). If the investigators ask about or to see his wife, he will say that she is out of town (and odd thing for the wife of a very sick person to do). If he becomes suspicious of the investigators (they give no good reason for visiting him, they mention the killings, or ask too many questions) he will track them down and attempt to kill them.

If the investigators talk to his neighbors and can persuade them to talk (not too difficult) they will reveal that they never see the professor leave during the day and haven't seen his wife in some time (they will give a date around the time he killed her).

If the investigators try to break in during the day, he will try to kill them. If he succeeds, he will stash their bodies in the freezer after slicing them up into easy to store pieces. If the investigators go to the house at night, they will see him go out the back door around 1:00 am. If they search the house they will find that kitchen refrigerator contains spoiled food (he lives off blood now) and if they go into the basement they will find his wife's body in the freezer. If the police are called, they will put out an APB on him and will try to arrest him. If the toad thing is convinced that the professor will not be able to escape, it will make him turn the knife over to another person who will take up the trade. The professor will then be found

wandering in the streets, totally insane.

The professor's killings will also inspire a copy cat killer. This killer will murder people and hack them open to remove their heart. Due to the difference in the killing styles, the police will know that they are now dealing with two killers. This killer will cause the investigators problems and they may run into him, since he is not as smart or cautious as Wenton and lacks the toad's help. He will attack them on sight. Of course, if the investigators take to running around at night they may be picked up by the police for questioning (and they better not be toting around any illegal fire power).

Resolution

The killings will continue at the rate of one per night (or more if the copycat stays active) until the investigators deal with Wenton. If the investigators defeat him directly, each involved investigator receives 1D4 Sanity points. If the investigators indirectly defeat him (they find the body and call the police, for example) they get 1 point of sanity (or none, if they didn't do enough to merit a reward). If the knife is captured by the investigators and taken care of (by encasing in concrete, for example) and they are aware of its nature they each receive 1D4 Sanity points. If the knife is not recovered or is lost, then the investigators each lose 1D4 Sanity points if they are aware of the nature of the knife. If the investigators give up, somebody will eventually take care of Wenton, but the knife may end up in somebody's possession and if so the killings will start again.

The Knife

The knife is composed of an extremely hard metallic alloy that is not found on earth. It has very odd markings on it that seem vaguely Egyptian in character. Used in combat, the knife inflicts 1D6+3 damage due to its enchanted nature.

The knife is linked to a horrid being. This creature manifests itself as a bloated toad whose warty hard drips blood. The thing's mouth is full of bloody, writhing tentacles. The toad thing has no material body, except the knife, and has only intelligence and power stats. Its Intelligence is 16 and its Power is 21. The toad can manifest itself at the cost of one magic point per minute it appears. Seeing a manifestation of the toad costs the viewer 1D6 Sanity points on a failed roll, 1 on a successful roll. The toad cannot physically attack people and cannot be physically attacked, but may attack and be attacked mentally. Such an attack costs it one magic point. The toad and its victim match Power and each attempts a resistance roll against the other. If the victim fails his/her roll, the victim loses 1D6 magic points. If the toad fails its roll, it loses 1D6 magic points. A being (the toad or victim) who reaches 0 magic points in this battle loses consciousness and can no longer resist attacks. If the beings magic points go below 0, the being perishes. The toad will break off attacks against more powerful beings very quickly. It can also be harmed by attacks that affect the target's Power. Reducing its power to 0 will destroy it.

If a person touches the knife when it is not linked to another, the toad thing will attempt to link to the person. The process begins with a mental attack on the person

touching the knife (must be with bare skin). This attack is resolved by using the resistance table using the Powers of those involved. If the victim resists, he/she will be aware of the nature of the knife and will probably avoid it. The person is thereafter immune to contact with the knife. If the toad thing wins, it has made a link to the victim. The victim will immediately lose 2D6 CON and STR, which will be regained at the rate of one point a day each. If the loss reduces one or both stats below 0, the victim dies. If the victim survives, the toad thing will send him/her horrible visions and appear to him/her. This torment will cost the victim 1D10 Sanity points each day. The victim cannot willingly get rid of the knife once the link is made (but it could be taken from him/her). The victim is likely to go insane before reaching 0 SAN, and while insane the person will be completely under the toad thing's control. The toad thing will direct the victim to kill and the victim cannot resist. These killings are likely to cost the victim further Sanity points, especially since the toad thing makes them kill their friends and loved ones first. Once the victim's sanity reaches 0, they are permanently lost.

When the person is under the toad thing's control, he/she will be directed to kill one person a day for the toad to feed upon. The toad will manifest and feed upon the blood, heart and POW of the individual. The blood and heart are not actually eaten by the toad (it lacks the requisite body), but it does consume them. The person will be forced to drink the blood and eat some of the heart (and the person will stop eating normal food). The toad gains a number of magic points equal to the victim's POW after the kill and has 24 hours to use them.

The toad thing can aid its host in the following manner. First, for each magic point it expends it can heal one point of damage the host has sustained. Second, for each magic point expended, the toad thing can increase the host's STR by one point for five minutes (hence the ability to rip open rib cages). This can increase the host's damage bonus. Third, for each magic point expended, the toad thing can increase the host's CON by one point for five minutes. This will increase the host's hit points. When the time runs out, the added points are removed. For example, a host with 13 hit points is given 6 points of CON, increasing his hit point total to 16. He takes 14 points of damage. He will die when the magic CON runs out unless he is healed. In both the STR and CON additions, the toad can use its magic points to increase the points or the duration. Each point expended to increase duration increases it 5 minutes. For example, 6 magic points could increase the host's STR by 6 for 5 minutes, or by 1 for 30 minutes. The toad thing also confers a +20% to the knife skill of the host.

The knife is very hard to destroy. It is immune to most acids and would require an incredible amount of heat to melt. It has 30 hit points. Destroying the knife does not destroy the toad thing, but does cut off its connection to this world. Doing so will free any host it might have. If the host still has some sanity left, they can be treated and returned to some degree of normalcy. The host will also be freed if the toad thing is defeated in the mental combat earlier. The knife will turn to powder if the toad thing is killed this way. Of course, the host will be forced to prevent the knife and toad thing from coming to harm.

NPCS

Professor John Wenton

STR: 14 CON: 13 SIZ: 14 INT: 16 POW: 12
DEX: 15 APP: 12 EDU: 19 SAN: 0 HP: 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Anthropology 15%, Archeology 85%, Computer Use 15%, Drive Auto 55%, Library Use 75%, Martial Arts 25%, Natural History 15%, English 95%, German 25%, Latin 25%, Photography 25%, Handgun 35%, Knife 65% (includes bonus).

Weapons: The knife, 9mm Parabellum

Description: Prior to his encounter with the knife, Wenton was a kind and loving person, happily married to his wife and pleased with his job as an associate professor of archeology. Now he is an insane puppet of malign forces. Though his mind has been shattered, his intelligence remains, though it has been twisted to the toad thing's evil purposes. Wenton will make full use of his abilities when stalking victims and dealing with any threats to him. Unfortunately for the investigators, Wenton is in good physical condition, has received martial arts training (karate), and is good with a handgun. He is incapable of surrendering and will fight to the death as long as he has the knife.

Copy Cat Killer

STR: 16 CON: 14 SIZ: 15 INT: 10 POW: 9
DEX: 12 APP: 11 EDU: 11 SAN: 38 HP: 15

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Skills: Dodge 45%, Hide 55%, Sneak 25%, Fist 65%, Grapple 55%, Knife 65%

Weapons: Combat Knife (1D6)

Description: This is a disturbed individual who hopes to gain fame for being a killer. He was inspired partially by the psychic emissions of the toad thing, but mostly by his own evil character. He will stalk and kill people and will attack anyone who tries to stop him. He will not attack media crews or reporters if he recognizes them, since he is doing the killings for the notoriety.