

JENKIN LIVES!

A Call of Cthulhu d20 Roleplaying Game *web enhancement*
— By Brian “Chainsaw” Campbell

H. P. Lovecraft’s “Dreams in the Witch House” describes a disturbing series of encounters between a theoretical mathematician, a furtive ratlike creature named “Brown Jenkin,” and what very well might be the spirit of a 17th-century sorceress. Jenkin served as the familiar of Keziah Mason, a cunning old woman who escaped Arkham’s witch trials by opening a gate to another dimension. Centuries later, Walter Gilman used mathematical acumen and lucid dreaming to access this forgotten realm. By his reckless investigation, he released an ancient horror into his moldering garret apartment inside the now infamous “Witch House.”

In May of 1931, most of the Witch House was destroyed by a terrible storm, but the fate of Keziah Mason remains a point of some conjecture. Workers sorting through the rubble found the gnawed bodies of several children who had disappeared from Arkham over the years, along with the corpse of a twisted, ratlike *thing*, and the bent and desiccated remains of an elderly woman.

Many occultists and investigators perusing reports on the Witch House have concluded that the withered old body was indeed the remains of Keziah Mason. Yet a few harbor doubts. What if the corpse wasn’t the old witch, but one of her victims? Or even worse, what if the corpse had been preserved in that state for centuries... even after the spirit of Keziah Mason passed into an otherworldly dimension bordering on our own? Was her familiar, Brown Jenkin, a unique anomaly, or is it possible that the beldame has since instructed other hyperintelligent creatures in her dark arts?

For enthusiasts of the macabre, this web enhancement presents an “adventure fragment” based on these possibilities. Like similar fragments for the original *Call of Cthulhu Roleplaying Game*, it contains the outline of a brief story, a handful of encounters, and guidelines for the various “crunchy bits” of the rules. This fragment, however, adapts the game mechanics for the d20 system. With a minimal amount of preparation and a copy of the *Call of Cthulhu d20 Roleplaying Game*, a Gamemaster can use this

fragment to prepare anything from a short introductory adventure playable in one evening to the foundation for a tireless crusade against an ancient and insidious evil. This bonus material is an exclusive feature of the Wizards of the Coast website: <www.wizards.com/callofcthulhu>.

The first half of this story, intended for four or five 1st-level investigators, should be playable in a single evening. It’s a simple, straightforward investigation in which most of the characters (this time, at least) should survive without much difficulty. The body count is minimal, but the implications are horrendous. The second half not only details the consequences of that investigation, but also offers a possible foundation for an ongoing campaign. Some of the particulars concerning rat-things could be used in other adventures as well.

A LOSS OF INNOCENCE

Scholars of the occult may know that in the neighborhoods surrounding Arkham’s “Witch House,” infant mortality was advanced by the depredations and infestations of a horde of skulking rodents. That gruesome series of incidents took place in the early 1930s; this tale can be set in any modern city. The location can be any apartment complex, as long as its rent is cheap, its upkeep has been neglected, and its tenants are desperate enough to endure suffering. The GM should decide how many units the apartment complex contains—the investigators likely will want to question at least some of the tenants, later.

At the start of this adventure, one of the characters’ usual informants (a concerned citizen, a local scholar reading the

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morning paper, a writer's publisher, or perhaps someone at the police department) contacts the investigators. Knowing of their penchant for the fabulous, he asks them to follow up on a hunch he has concerning the disappearance of a young child in a decrepit apartment complex the previous evening: April 30, an auspicious date also known as May Eve (see below). Local news reports have related only minimal details, but the informant believes there's more here than meets the eye.

A typical investigation might start out with the following strategies.

- **The investigators need** a plausible cover story to explain why they're asking questions. Reporters can make a Diplomacy check (DC 20) to gather facts from the reticent inhabitants. Anyone in law enforcement might attempt an Intimidate check (DC 15) to threaten a tenant wanted for an unrelated crime to disclose what he's seen. Anyone else might need to make a Bluff check (DC 15) to fabricate a plausible reason for involvement.
- **A successful Gather Information check** (DC 15) and a suitable application of cash brings out a score of minor stories of the negligence of the missing baby's parents. There's always "suspicious activity" around the old, rumor-ridden apartment complex, but no one recalls sounds of breaking glass or trespassers pounding down doors in the middle of the night. The tenants seem hesitant to reluctant to report suspicious events, however. They endure squalid conditions because they know that, if they are evicted or if the building is condemned, they'll have a hard time finding another place to live.
- **Researching into past newspaper articles** confirms, with a successful Research check (DC 15), that there is nothing remarkable or suspicious about the low-class tenants who reported the missing baby boy. Even with only minimal searching (DC 10), the investigators can find one or two stories in the papers or on TV/radio newscasts the morning after the alleged "incident." The child disappeared around midnight last night from his room. So far, it seems as though the police have had enough time for only a cursory investigation, but it's clear that such a young child could never have left the apartment unaided. Accounts hint that the father is the primary suspect.
- **A successful Sense Motive check** (DC 15) reveals the tenants' apprehension about discussing health or safety issues within the complex, as much out of fear of eviction as the possibility that the building will be condemned.
- **Several tenants seem** to be in various states of illness from an as-yet-unidentified disease that's going around (Spot, DC 15, or Knowledge [medicine], DC 10). Anyone specifically looking for health violations eventually finds out about a large infestation of rats in the basement.
- **Anyone attempting to stake out** the area can try a Listen check (DC 20) or Spot check (DC 15) to notice signs that the building is infested with these vermin.

- **An investigator with** a minimal background in Knowledge (occult) can "take 10" to realize the significance of April 30: the date the child went missing. That date is also known as May Eve, a time of some occult significance. The only blatantly obvious supernatural possibility is abduction for the purpose of sacrifice, and it's just as likely that the case has a mundane origin. If the adventure is set in Arkham, on the other hand, the investigator has heard numerous stories of children disappearing at this time of year.

The parents of the missing child live in Apartment B-13, and they're obviously at their wits' end. The father acts defensive and rude, not only because of his poor treatment by the police, but because he blames himself for his son's disappearance. For purposes of the Diplomacy skill, treat him as Unfriendly (see "Attitude Adjustment" in Chapter 10: The Gamemaster). There's a very real possibility he'll take a baseball bat to anyone who harasses him, accuses him, threatens him, or actually breaks into his home looking for clues. Wise investigators may try to avoid him and speak to the mother, but she is inconsolable, overcome with grief.

Ted Roberts, Grieving Father: Male 1st level Offense option; hp 6; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11; Atk +1 melee (grapple, 1d3) or -3 melee (baseball bat, 1d6) or -2 ranged; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +1; Str 11, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills: Craft (woodwork) +2, Disable Device +1, Drive +4, Gather Information +2, Listen +4, Operate Heavy Machinery (forklift) +4, Repair +0, Search +3, Spot +4, Use Rope +4.

Feats: Endurance, Run.

Possessions: Aluminum baseball bat.

THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

To examine the bedroom where the child disappeared, investigators could fast-talk their way in, diplomatically offer to detail the incident favorably in a newspaper article, or even secure a warrant to check it out as part of an official investigation. Dealing with the apartment manager offers other options. Sometime in the early evening, the parents leave to stay with relatives for a few days; if all else fails, less reputable characters have a chance to break in after they've left. This last option requires a successful Open Lock check (DC 10; the skill is not usable untrained). Anyone breaking and entering should also try to Move Silently (DC 12) within the apartment.

Whether the investigators are invited, break in, or mislead the manager, they can't find out the truth without getting into the apartment. The sight of the child's room is heartbreaking. Everything has been left exactly where it was last night. Searching the area (Search, DC 10) confirms that there are no signs of forced entry, either to the nursery or the apartment (unless, of course, the investigators have created new ones). A casual glance at the wall and floorboards (Spot, DC 10) shows evidence of numerous rat holes. In fact, several of them have been boarded over repeatedly. The vermin gnaw through each new layer of wood laid down. Even the child's room has telltale scratches and rat feces throughout.

The decrepit apartment complex is a relic of a bygone age, complete with faulty wiring, a coal-burning

furnace in the basement, and several laundry chutes. As disturbing as it may seem, signs indicate that the rats have been scampering down the closest chute. Meticulous examination (Search, DC 15) reveals bloody little paw prints from two rats leading through the hallway and into the nursery closet chute. Of course, it would be impossible for ordinary vermin to lift a baby that far off the ground. The police are pursuing more rational—or at least, more stereotypical—avenues of investigation.

The detectives who examined the scene didn't notice the signs of infestation. Because the crime is so recent, they've made only a cursory perusal. Their obvious initial avenue of investigation was to blame the mother, the father, or a relative. Pursuing these leads has wasted valuable time. Having dealt with many seedy apartments in their crusades against domestic violence, they're too jaded to care about outbreaks of disease or signs of infestation. However, anyone in the building can relate that the basement has an unusually active rodent population. The rat tracks, the illnesses possibly borne by vermin, the laundry chute, and the whispered rumors all add up to the same obvious conclusion: Check the basement.

LURKERS BENEATH

The dank, dimly illuminated basement has all the usual accoutrements, including a washer and dryer, a furnace, stacks of newspapers, and piles of coal and cordwood. The whole building is poorly maintained, including the rickety stairs that lead to the nonfunctional washer and dryer. Anyone descending the stairs should make a successful Balance check (DC 15) to avoid taking 1d6 points of damage from a nasty fall. If one investigator falls, the difficulty for the next character's Balance check on the stairs drops to DC 5.

At the base of the stairs, casual perusal reveals behind the stack of newspapers the savaged and rotting body of a dead cat, complete with little teeth marks about its body and a pool of dried blood around its remains. Careful examination confirms that the rats who feasted on it not only left bloody little paw prints when they climbed down the laundry chute, but in a precocious display of agility, left the same tracks when they were climbing *up* it.

The chute's exit point hangs near the wall opposite the pile of newspapers. A successful Spot check (DC 12) uncovers tiny tracks nearby. The Track feat used with a successful Wilderness Lore check (DC 15) reveals that the rats climbed up *and* down the chute. Carefully scrutiny (DC 20 on that Wilderness Lore check) allows an investigator to see that the paw prints are oddly smudged—something about them is not quite right.

Sated with the blood of their most recent kill, the rat creatures down here are unusually aggressive. If anyone disturbs the woodpile, knocks over the stack of newspapers, removes the feline carcass, or takes direct action to flush out vermin, the precocious rodents respond with their teeth and claws. As soon as three of the little beasties appear, it's dead obvious how they got up and down the laundry chute, *for each one of them can latch onto a victim with its tiny little hands* (Sanity check, 0/1d6).

RAT-THING

Tiny Magical Beast (Lesser Servitor Race)

Hit Dice: 1/2d10 (2 hp)

Initiative: +8 (+4 Dex, +4

Improved Initiative)

Speed: 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

Defense: 16 (+2 size, +4 Dex)

Attacks: 1 bite +6 melee

Damage: Bite 1

Face/Reach: 2 1/2 ft. by 2 1/2 ft./0 ft.

Special Attacks: Swarm, jaw lock, spells

Special Qualities: Scent (can detect foes within 30 ft by smell alone), low-light vision, darkvision 60 ft.

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +1

Abilities: Str 2, Dex 19, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 5

Skills: Balance +16, Climb +12, Escape Artist +16, Hide +20, Listen +7, Move Silently +12, Spellcraft +5, Spot +3. (Rat-things receive a +4 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks and a +8 racial bonus to Balance and Escape Artist checks. They use their Dexterity modifier for Climb checks.)

Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse (bite) (Rat-things gain Weapon Finesse (bite) as a bonus feat, even though they do not qualify for it.)

Climate: The ruins of old, long-abandoned mansions; the homes where witches or powerful cultists once lived.

Advancement: up to 1 HD (Small)

CR: 1/2 (two rat-things are CR 1)

Sanity Loss: 0/1d6, 0/1d8 if knew in life

Background: Similar creatures may have lurked in the background of Lovecraft's excellent short story "The Rats in the Walls." After all, the rats of Exham Priory were known for their skillful organization and unnatural cunning. With a bit of extrapolation, one might even imagine them to be the less intelligent relations of Brown Jenkin, Keziah Mason's rodent familiar. The *curse of the rat-thing* spell can transform recently deceased humans into one of these furtive little minions. Closer examination of a rat-thing's body reveals that it has not only tiny hands, *but also a fur-covered face with a disturbing resemblance to one of these human victims.*

Combat: Stage the confrontation with the rat-things as a simple encounter. The creatures attack only to drive away intruders. They'd rather act as a nuisance than try to kill anything as large as an investigator. Instead of swarming, each one swiftly assaults a different investigator. Feel free to scatter various bludgeoning instruments around the room, since incautious use of gunfire can summon the police in about 10 minutes. If you're feeling particularly vicious, the critters can swarm a fallen investigator after she's tumbled down the stairs. (Until the victim takes a move action to stand up, her melee attacks suffer a -4 penalty, while the rats get a +4 circumstance bonus on their melee attacks against her. Throw in a -4 penalty to ranged attacks for anyone who foolishly tries to fire into the fracas without the Precise Shot feat.) After a few rounds of combat or the death of one of the rat-things, the creatures scatter back into the woodpile, the stack of papers, and various holes in the walls.

Once the group has driven away the rat-things, relentless investigators may continue to search for the child. Moving the stack of newspapers reveals an opening large enough for a cat—or something as large as a cat—to crawl inside. A flashlight and a suitable application of courage reveals a tunnel extending into a crawl space

RAT-THING GRIMOIRE

Rat-Thing Grimoire, in English, 2001. Rat-thing familiars learn spells from their masters, but they're also intelligent enough to document the methods by which they were taught. This type of grimoire is a diary detailing magical procedures, the author's triumphs and failures at learning them, and rambling tirades about the master it has served. Rat-things often scatter the pages about

the places where they live. Finding a complete tome may take several Search checks, along with a lengthy period of careful reconstruction.

Examination Period: 1 week (study check, DC 20). Contains two spells. **Sanity Loss:** 1d3 initial and 1d3 upon completion. **Cthulhu Mythos:** +1 rank.

nearby. Listening at the opening (Listen, DC 15), a cautious character can hear the pitter-patter of little feet. Caution is a wise option, since there's only enough room for one investigator to wriggle down into the crawl space.

By the flashlight's dim illumination, anyone looking inside the hole can see where the vermin dragged the baby. The poor child's flesh has been shredded, the face is gone, and the body now resembles an anthropomorphic chunk of meat. The infant is dead (Sanity check 0/1d3). This isn't as gruesome, however, as the bloated rodent perched over its corpse. The greasy, feral creature is about the size of a cat. It hisses through its bloodstained jaws at anyone who disturbs it.

Even after this veritable feast, the beastie's ribs are still visible through its jet-black fur—it is clearly starving. Yet even more disturbing is that this seemingly intelligent hunter, who's clever enough to enlist the aid of the several rat-things to help it hunt, has the *tiny, wizened face of an elderly man*. With a dexterous gesture, it raises a withered hand and mutters an incantation in *fluent Latin, feebly attempting a magical gesture before it scurries into the darkness* (Sanity check 0/1d6).

JENKIN (RAT-THING CULTIST)

"The bones of the tiny paws . . . imply prehensile characteristics more typical of a diminutive monkey than of a rat: While the small skull with its savage yellow fangs is of the utmost anomalousness, appearing from certain angles like a miniature, monstrously degraded parody of a human skull."

—H. P. Lovecraft, "The Dreams in the Witch House"

Tiny Magical Beast

(4th-Level Cultist)

Hit Dice: 1/2d10 + 4d6 (18 hp)

Initiative: +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

Speed: 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

AC: 16 (+2 size, +4 Dex)

Attacks: +9 melee (bite) or +9 ranged

Damage: Bite 1

Face/Reach: 2 1/2 ft. by 2 1/2 ft./0 ft.

Special Attacks: Swarm, jaw lock, spells

Special Qualities: Scent (can detect foes within 30 feet by smell alone), low-light vision, darkvision

Saves: Fortitude +3, Reflex +7, Will +5

Abilities: Str 4, Dex 19, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 8

Skills: Balance +16, Climb +16, Concentration +8, Escape Artist +16, Hide +20, Knowledge (occult) +9, Listen +11, Move Silently +13, Spot +10, Spellcraft +11, Wilderness Lore +9 (Rat-things receive a +4 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks and a +8 racial bonus to Balance and Escape Artist checks. They use their Dexterity modifier for Climb checks.)

Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Weapon Finesse (bite). Rat-things gain Weapon Finesse (bite) as a bonus feat, even though they do not qualify for it.

Climate: Usually near the master or mentor who nurses it and instructs it in occult lore

Organization: Sometimes leads a cult of other, lesser rats and rat-things

Sanity Loss: 0/1d6

Background: This creature exists based on the assumption that Brown Jenkin, Keziah Mason's familiar, was not a unique creature. Because rat-things are intelligent, they are capable of learning and growing, particularly under the tutelage of a powerful witch or sorcerer. This quality makes them ideal, if hungry, little familiars. The creature in this adventure, Black Jenkin, served its master for many years, but was recently abandoned because of its indiscreet feeding habits.

Tactics: This "Jenkin" isn't interested in fighting to the death. On the first round it's seen, it casts a single spell as an attack action and scurries away with its first move action. The poor fool who peered down into the crawl space can make a Reflex save (DC 20) to reduce the spell's damage by half. If the investigators have a plan to lure it out, or just chuck some flaming refuse down after it, they might enrage it enough to attack. For now, its *shriveling* spell (4d4 points of damage) should be debilitating enough. Here's how it works.

Shriveling

Components: V, S

Cost: 3 Str and 1d6 Sanity

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One living creature

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Reflex half

You can channel into a target dark energy that blasts and blackens the flesh. The subject suffers 1d4 points of damage per caster level (maximum 10d4).

If the creature survives at least 1 round of confrontation, it leaves the baby's corpse behind and scurries off into the darkness farther underground. A valiant investigator might fire off a single gunshot—no doubt summoning the police within 10 minutes—but because of the dim illumination of the tunnel, the Jenkin gets a +4 circumstance bonus to its AC as it runs away. It knows it might die from a lucky shot, so discretion is the better part of its valor. If the investigators dispatch the beast swiftly, scholars of comparative anatomy at the local university will find themselves baffled by its remains.

The infant's body can be recovered, but its savaged corpse offers little solace to the grieving parents. If there is consolation here, it is that the investigators have uncovered the culprit behind this foul crime—even though it's unlikely anyone will believe them. If the investigators were careless, they may have attracted police attention. Even if they were model citizens, they are consequences for meddling in the affairs of wizards—even tiny rodent ones.

CONSEQUENCES

The investigation of the missing child is over, but a mystery remains: the true nature of this sinister beast. As the Gamemaster, you can either award experience immediately (using the story goals listed at the end of this article) and wrap up the story here or play out the consequences of the investigation, changing the pace a bit. Instead of tracking events from hour to hour, you can “flash forward” a week or two at a time to show the reactions of the investigators, the police, and Black Jenkin himself.

Alternately, you could easily segue from this story into another unrelated one. Perhaps one of the investigators has terrible dreams about the child, leading to his admission to the Torgerson Sleep Clinic in “Little Slices of Death” (an adventure in the *Call of Cthulhu d20 Roleplaying Game*). Or maybe the characters notice a newspaper article about a mysterious accident at a movie theater, prompting the events of “An End to Paradise” (the second adventure in that book). Both are examples are investigations that take several days to resolve, giving the characters time to get caught on one of the story hooks listed below.

SCRAPS OF KNOWLEDGE

Immediately after the investigators find the child's body, they may decide to search the tunnel or (if they're reckless enough) crawl down farther to try to find Black Jenkin. Shining a flashlight down into the narrow crawl space reveals the glint of several metal objects. Like any ambitious rodent, the rat-thing has dragged a few shiny items into its nest. Anyone bold enough to try to recover the dead body, the rat-thing cultist, or the shiny objects can find additional clues.

Rooting around in the creature's nest (Search, DC 12), reveals various bits of detritus: several small children's toys (gnawed by rodent teeth), a candle, some matches, and the gutted spine of a bound book. The shiny metal objects are actually bits of cutlery stolen from the parents' kitchen. On a failed Dexterity check (DC 15), anyone crawling down here might cut himself on one of the kitchen knives hidden in the rubbish. A cut inflicts 1 point of damage. Inspecting the knives reveals signs that they were used to mutilate or remove pieces of the dead body.

As for the pages of the book, they've been scattered about to line the tunnel and make more bedding for the creature's nest. They're soiled with rat feces, stained in urine, and in some places, spattered in wax. Only someone looking for the macabre or unusual would notice that each page is also mostly intact. Each one is covered with barely legible writing.

If the investigators recklessly set fire to the contents of the tunnel,

they've not only destroyed all this evidence, but cremated the body of the child as well—a rather gruesome scene to leave for the authorities. Since the characters no doubt asked questions of various people around the apartment complex, starting a small fire at a crime scene attracts the interest of the police. (Proceed directly to Detective Callahan's section, “Incautious Investigation.”)

If, on the other hand, they're curious enough to scurry about looking for more pages, they can turn up about 30 of them in 10 minutes. A diligent character can piece them together to form a rather grim narrative. In *Call of Cthulhu* terms, these pages can be treated as a *tome*. Anyone with knowledge of magic (Knowledge [occult], DC 15, or Spellcraft, DC 10) recognizes that the narrative includes the sorts of biographical passages one would find in a Book of Shadows—in this case, a journal of sorts relating to the practice of witchcraft. (See the “Rat-Thing Grimoire” sidebar for more details.)

While the tome is literally a handful of pages, the paper's poor condition makes reconstructing it an elaborate operation. (This is the primary reason for such a high difficulty on the tome's study check; see sidebar) The handwriting is a barely legible scrawl, and the writing itself is meticulously small. Furthermore, the text is written in an archaic form of English, rather like what one would expect in a document from the 17th century. Closer examination (Speak Other Language [English], DC 20) reveals that the dialect seems to have evolved since that time, as though it is actually a parallel form of English. By the end of the week, there should be no doubt that the author is not human—the contents of the journal were scribbled by the paws of a particularly clever rat-thing.

The nonhuman author details various efforts, through trial and error, to reconstruct and replicate spells known by its “Master.” The writing rambles considerably, with numerous references to “spaces out of time” and “banishment from the shining place.” As the writing progresses, the author becomes increasingly frustrated with its “Master.” Long tirades condemn her for abandoning the author and casting him out. The Gamemaster may choose to reveal these facts all at once after a successful study check (see sidebar). If a character studies the journal over time as part of an ongoing campaign, it may be more dramatic to give periodic updates.

The journal is particularly useful to dedicated investigators because it contains two spells. Anyone can learn them by successfully navigating the “Artifact Flowchart” (in Chapter 7: Magic of the *Call of Cthulhu d20 Roleplaying Game*). Each spell requires 1d3 weeks to learn (in addition to the Examination Periods required for deciphering the book). One of the spells is *shriveling* (see above); the other is left to the discretion of the Gamemaster. According to the *Call of Cthulhu d20 Roleplaying Game*, likely choices for rat-thing spells include: *bring pestilence*, *consume likeness*, *curse of the putrid husk*, *flesh ward*, *nightmare*, *power drain*, and *soul singing*. It may be a little early in your campaign to give out a spell like *flesh ward*, so *healing touch* could make for a massively useful (and particularly popular) substitute.

Detective Callahan: Male, 1st-level Offense option; hp 5; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 10; Atk +2 melee or +1 ranged (revolver, 1d10); SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will -1; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 9, Int 13, Wis 8, Cha 11.

Skills: Bluff +4, Gather Information +4, Hide +4, Intimidate +4, Listen +5, Move Silently +4, Search +5, Sense Motive +3, Spot +5.

Feats: Alertness, Weapon Proficiency (pistol).

Possessions: Smith & Wesson Model 29 Revolver.

INCAUTIOUS INVESTIGATION

Some of the most annoying and persistent consequences of a Mythos investigation result from police involvement. In this adventure, if someone fired shots, started a brawl with the grieving father, or set a fire in the laundry room, the police arrive within 10 minutes. Depending on the severity of the crime, between two and eight officers arrive. If they find the investigators, they take names and addresses, ask for identification, and seal off the area. Fast-talking heroes may manage to walk away after giving contact information (Bluff or Diplomacy, DC 15); on a failed roll, someone's taken in for "questioning." If anyone's holding a drawn weapon, the police draw theirs as well, and any chances of walking away from the crime scene unescorted decrease considerably (increase the DC for either check by 10). If anyone's stupid enough to start a shoot-out with the police, play out the fire-fight and give the heroes a chance to make their getaway—the adventure is over.

Hopefully, the characters haven't acted like complete maniacs (at least, not yet). Within a few hours, Detective Callahan of the local police department is assigned to take over this unusual case. His boss has assigned him because Callahan has handled a few "occult" cases during his brief and undistinguished career. The first was a completely bogus case of "ritual satanic abuse," while the second concerned a "coven" of college kids breaking into steam tunnels under the local university. He's expected to turn up a few leads concerning the perpetrator of this foul deed, but not much more. Since his reputation is on the line, his procedure is methodical. He interviews the parents, questions their friends and relatives, and tracks down the people who found the body—the investigators.

If none of the characters entered the tunnel where the body was found and the evidence remained intact, the detective uncovers the clues they missed. As one would expect, he's stymied by the unusual nature of the crime, but he's reluctant to jump to another foolish conclusion involving the occult. Desperate to figure out what he's found, and not sure what to make of the evidence, he brings it in a box to the most reputable investigator detained at the scene of the crime (if any). A clever investigator might successfully recommend someone locally who could decipher the unusual text (Diplomacy, DC 15). Convincing him to leave the papers with the investigators, on the other hand, is a little more difficult (Bluff or Diplomacy, DC 20).

The detective confirms the rather straightforward approach of his colleagues, placing the father as his primary suspect. This buys the investigators some time (if they did anything wrong). If the police stop them at any time in the near future, Callahan hears about it, and the incident raises his suspicions towards the characters yet again. If there's a lull in your *Cthulhu* campaign, it's easy enough to have another child disappear. Just to be thorough, the detective then shows up again, asking what the investigators have been doing over the last few days. They may decide to resume the hunt for Black Jenkin, if only to clear their own names.

STUDYING THE TOME

Because of the high difficulty in deciphering the *Rat-Thing Grimoire*, the reader likely may encounter one or more Strange Events during the course of her studies. While it's entertaining to roll randomly for these occurrences (using the "Strange Events Table" in Chapter 7: Magic), Gamemasters have the option of tailoring the events to that particular tome. Here are two distinctive possibilities.

RATS IN THE WALLS

If an Examination Period passes when the characters aren't actively investigating anything else, the Strange Events surrounding the tome begin subtly. A day or two into a scholar's studies, he may notice that a few small items are missing from his home (Wisdom check, DC 12). He might lose a pen, misplace a letter, or even find a few dollars missing. At the end of the week, the investigator notices his keys are missing. If he's perceptive (Spot, DC 15), he catches a brief glimpse of a rat carrying them away. Should studying take an additional week, the character hears rats scurrying in the walls of his room every time he sleeps (Listen, DC 15).

If studying the tome takes more than two weeks, progressively larger and more important items disappear. Ammunition is an excellent choice, or a trusty combat knife. If the character is clever enough to transcribe the text into a computer file, rats burrow into the machine's casing and chew the wires. Wise investigators may surround the character's home with mousetraps, post a guard, or even buy a dog or cat. If you like, you can stage a quick altercation in the character's home against a few ordinary generic rats (see "Animals" in Chapter 8: Creatures). This does nothing to forestall further Strange Events.

Eventually, the character can automatically succeed at a study check (since the roll has a +1 bonus for each failed check). By that point, however, the rats have stolen several pages of the tome. The character can learn the spells he's studied, but enough of the tome is missing that the pages for one spell are gone.

DREAMS OF THE WITCH HOUSE

If the characters immediately launch into another adventure, they might decide to spend only a few hours each day studying the tome. They may even choose to lock it up before traveling to the scene of their next inves-

TYPICAL STORY GOALS

- Avoid a fall on the stairs.
 - Survive the rat-thing attack.
 - Find the child's body.
 - Find the tome.
 - Avoid or survive Black Jenkin.
-

tigation. As long as they have the book, however, the Jenkin's master takes an interest in the character reading it. Her spirit lives on, if only in dreams.

Deciphering the text is frustrating, but unusual events place the journal's cryptic phrases in a new light. After the first failed study check, the character has a recurring dream that someone whispers in her ear as she sleeps—someone very tiny. Over time, the incomprehensible ramblings begin to resemble the patterns of speech used in the tome. If clever investigators keep watch over the scholar as she sleeps, they see no sign of rat-things or other creatures in her bed. The conversations take place entirely in dreams.

After a week or two of failed study checks, the character bolts upright in bed around one in the morning. Her breathing comes fast and shallow, and she has a subtle sense that something is wrong. A perceptive or educated character (Spot, DC 15, or Knowledge [mathematics], DC 20) realizes that this sensation *must* be part of a dream: The angles where walls, ceilings, and floors meet aren't quite right.

After the character makes a successful study check, she has her most powerful dream yet. When she "bolts awake," the shadowy outline of a large dark man appears at the foot of her bed. He speaks very clearly in the strange dialect of the tome. As he does so, the corners of the room seem to swell at obtuse angles. The following morning, the character can't remember a single word of the message, but she can decipher the tome perfectly. Although a player fluent in Lovecraft's stories may realize what has happened, the character must demonstrate a strong affinity for the occult (Cthulhu Mythos, DC 20) to remember this being as an avatar of Nyarlathotep.

THINGS TO COME

This adventure fragment could easily become the basis for further *Call of Cthulhu* d20 adventures. For a start, if Black Jenkin survives, investigators who were disgusted by its savage abduction of a helpless innocent may want a chance for revenge or justice. Their brief encounter with the beast could serve as foreshadowing for a later confrontation, perhaps after the heroes have advanced a level or two.

As for their tiny nemesis, it's eager to find someone who can instruct it further in the occult arts. The pitiful, starving creature has been cast aside by Keziah Mason, whose remains, it turns out, were not those found in the Witch House back in 1931. When the prodigal beast returns, the witch takes it to her bosom again and nurses it back to

health. A later adventure could involve not only revenge against Black Jenkin, but possibly an encounter with the old crone herself. If you already have sinister schemes in mind for Keziah in your *Call of Cthulhu* d20 campaign, then here's a glimpse of things to come.

Keziah Mason: 8th-Level Human Cultist:

Init +6, AC 12 (+2 Dex); Spd 40 ft.; hp 51; Atk +4/-1 melee (butcher knife, 1d6) or +4/-1 ranged; SV Fort +6, Ref +8, Will +11; SZ M; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 18, Wis 20, Cha 8.

Skill Modifiers: Bluff +9, Concentrate +13, Diplomacy +5, Hide +8, Innuendo +8, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (astronomy) +6, Knowledge (Cthulhu) +14, Knowledge (history [New England]) +6, Knowledge (occult) +12, Listen +6, Move Silently +7, Research +10, Search +10, Sense Motive +16, Speak Language (Latin), Spot +6, Wilderness Lore +6.

Feats: Dodge, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Run.

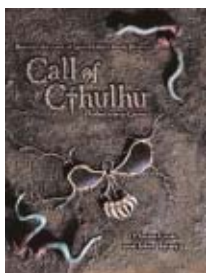
Spells: *contact Nyarlathotep, create gate, chant of Thoth, curse of the rat-thing, deflect harm, shriveling, summon/bind servitor.*

Note: For a deadlier version of this villain, add the ghost template from Chapter 8: Creatures.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Campbell has been involved in the roleplaying game industry for nine years as an editor and freelance writer. You may have seen his work for the *Vampire*, *Werewolf*, *Mage*, and *Changeling* roleplaying games.

Now a Seattle resident, Brian currently serves as an editor with the *Star Wars* and *Call of Cthulhu* d20 Roleplaying R&D group at Wizards of the Coast.



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