



# COLD DARK EARTH

**A murder that seems not quite normal. Dirty handprints marking the body and the surrounding area. Is this an isolated incident, or the beginning of a trail of bodies? Who contacted SAVE about this mysterious killing? Can the envoys discover what pulled itself out of the cold, dark earth?**

**Important Traits:** I run this game at conventions, using John Post, Miranda Chase, Thomas Simpson, Jennifer Joyce, Miakoda Lawrence, and Rory Calhoun. All of the information skills (Interview, Investigation, and Research) are useful, and it's handy to have someone with a Tracking Specialization. Someone who's good at Unarmed Combat is also a plus.

**Major Menace:** John Dreyfus Millar, a zombie.

## SETUP

In June 2014, John Dreyfus Millar, a petty criminal, shot two people while robbing a convenience store in Johnson City, TN. One of those people was Jacob

Rice, an off-duty police officer. Millar was caught a few days later, pled guilty to two counts of murder, and was sentenced to life in prison.

Some months after that, Millar escaped the prison while on work detail, and fled north along the highways. He wound up in Richmond, Kentucky, where, sick with the flu, he collapsed in the back yard of a woman named Melissa Byrne. Byrne took him in and nursed him back to health, and they fell in love. Millar hid out in her house for a short time, but a pair of US Marshals tracked him to the area and came to Byrne's house looking for him.

Millar, not wanting to endanger Byrne, fled. The Marshals caught him the next day. They took him back to Tennessee, and Millar, assuming he was going to be returned to prison, spent the time writing a letter to Byrne. He hid this letter from his captors, intending to send it through an intermediary, so as to avoid outing Byrne, since she'd be guilty of harboring a fugitive.

The Marshals didn't notice the letter, however, and never reported his capture. One of the Marshals,



named Matthias “Mattie” Tomlin, was the brother-in-law of the man that Millar had murdered. Tomlin and his partner, Tonya Brinks, took Millar to an isolated, wooded area in the tiny town of New Deal, Tennessee, dug him a grave, shot him, and buried him. They left New Deal without being noticed, and officially, are still looking for Millar.

Millar didn’t rest easy, though. Overcome with fear as he bled out in the hole, as Tomlin and Brinks shoveled earth onto him, he wished to see Melissa again before dying.

The next night, he pulled himself out of his make-shift grave. The first thing he did was pull the shackles off his wrists and smash them to pieces with a rock. He then started walking northeast. He happened upon the campsite of a young man named Benjamin Crist. He strangled the unfortunate camper, stole some of his clothes, and tried to wash the grave dirt off his hands with Crist’s camping shower, but he couldn’t get his hands clean. Giving up, he continued north to the highway, and then walked until he reached a truck stop.

Here, a sex worker named Robin Hart saw him and took a picture with her cell phone (she recognized his face from a wanted poster). Millar, noticing this, strangled her and left her body in a ditch. He felt guilty and covered her body, though; she reminded him of Melissa.

Millar is working his way north, killing those who cross his path. He is motivated by his love for Melissa and his longing to be able to rest someplace he felt loved and safe, but he is also terrified and infuriated by police and other law enforcement personnel (though not to the point that he’ll seek them out). Millar’s body is slowly decaying as he walks, but his disciplines of the Evil Way more than compensate. If not stopped, he reaches Melissa in a few days, strangles her, and lays down with her, at peace.

## SAVE

A hiker discovered Ben Crist’s body and contacted the local police department. Millar’s prints were discovered at the scene, which, in turn, meant that Tomlin and Brinks were notified. They managed to keep their involvement and Millar’s name out of the paper; they knew that this wasn’t possible, since they’d killed Millar. Tonya Brinks, having had some experience with the Unknown herself, sent an anonymous email to SAVE’s Nashville HQ, which assigned a team to investigate.

SAVE has arranged for a rental car, rooms at the small hotel in New Deal, and directions to the crime scene. They do not know Millar’s name or have any

indication of his involvement (Brinks didn’t mention him in the email and his name hasn’t been made public). SAVE isn’t sure what the envoys are likely to find, so the initial goal of the case is to investigate and determine how Ben Crist died and whether the Unknown was involved.

## TIMELINE

**June 20, 2014:** John Dreyfuss Millar enters a bodega in Johnson City, TN, with a gun. He robs the place, but an off-duty police officer (Jacob Rice) in the store draws his weapon and engages him. Millar shoots the cop; the bullet travels through the cop and kills a bystander (Greg Chordrey).

**June 22, 2014:** Millar is arrested at his home.

**July 18, 2014:** Millar takes a plea to avoid the death penalty; life in prison.

**July 21, 2014:** Millar is remanded to Riverbend Maximum Security Institution in Nashville, TN.

**February 13, 2015:** Millar escapes while on a work detail outside the prison. He opens the lock on his shackles with a homemade lockpick and flees. Manhunt initiated.

**February 14, 2015:** Millar meets up with Quentin Bride, a friend of his living in White House, TN. Bride gives him clothes, money, and a gun. Millar continues moving north.

**February 15, 2015:** US Marshals Tonya Brinks and Matthias “Mattie” Tomlin begin to track Millar. Tomlin is Jacob Rice’s brother-in-law.

**February 16, 2015:** Millar arrives in Bowling Green, KY. He hides out in a Wal-Mart for a few days, but becomes ill (flu).

**February 20, 2015:** A customer recognizes Millar and calls the police. He manages to slip into the back of a truck heading east before the Marshals arrive.

**February 28, 2015:** Millar, half-dead from flu and hunger, leaves the truck at a weigh station outside of Berea, KY. He stumbles through the woods, delirious, until he arrives at the home of Melissa Byrne. Byrne takes him in, recognizes his prison tattoos, and decides not to call the police. She nurses him back to health.

**March 20, 2015:** Marshals Tomlin and Brinks find the trucker and locate the weigh station where Millar got out. They start questioning everyone who lives nearby.

**March 25, 2015:** Marshal Brinks visits Byrne at her home. Byrne lies, saying she's never seen Millar, and although Brinks suspects her, she sees no evidence of Millar's presence and leaves. Millar, now fully recovered and in love with Byrne, realizes that she won't be safe with him there.

**March 26, 2015:** Millar leaves Byrne's home in the early morning. He is apprehended while attempting to hitchhike to Richmond less than four hours later. Tomlin and Brinks do not report this.

**March 27, 2015:** Tomlin and Brinks drive Millar back to Tennessee. En route, Millar writes Byrne a letter, which he intends to send to her once he is re-incarcerated. The Marshals stop south of the small town of New Deal, TN just after midnight. Tomlin shoots Millar three times in the chest, killing him. Millar's last thoughts are of Melissa Byrne, and a wish that he had never left her home. They dump him in a shallow grave in the woods. The letter is tucked into his waistband.

**March 28, 2015:** Tomlin and Brinks report that the trail in Kentucky has gone cold. Their plan is to wait a few months, then "track" Millar to New Deal and "discover" his body, thus closing the case.

**March 29, 2015:** Benjamin Crist stops at Grisham's Hunting and Camping Supply in New Deal, TN, and speaks briefly with George Grisham. He then leaves town and sets up camp a few miles from the grave site.

**March 30, 2015:** Millar's soul, tormented by rage and regret, comes howling back from the Unknown and animates his body. He pulls himself out of the grave and starts walking north. **First Victim:** Benjamin Crist, camper, found strangled, smeared with black, loamy earth. Millar steals clothes from him and tries to clean off with his camping shower, but the dirt won't wash clean.

**March 31, 2015:** Local police find Crist's body and process crime scene. Prints at the scene read as Millar's; Brinks and Tomlin are notified.

**April 1, 2015:** Millar makes his way to a weigh station north of New Deal on I 65. **Second Victim:** Robin Hart, sex worker ("lot lizard"), spots Millar in

the shadows, recognizes his face, and takes a picture on her phone. Millar strangles her and leaves her body in a ditch; it remains undiscovered.

**April 2, 2015:** SAVE office in Nashville receives an anonymous email (from Brinks). It simply says "Murder of Benjamin Crist wasn't normal. Please help." SAVE asks John Post to request information; information looks strange enough to send a team to follow up. Robin Hart's sister, Francesca, reports her missing. This information is communicated to Brinks and Tomlin; they do not immediately investigate.

**April 3, 2015:** SAVE team arrives in Nashville.

### START OF SCENARIO FOR PLAYERS

**April 4, 2015: Third victim:** Fred Wren, former prison guard, roadside honey salesman and apiarist, dead on his porch (just over the border into Kentucky). His bees are dead, frozen out by Millar's Evil Way. Neck broken. Millar steals fresh clothes from his house. Marshals Tomlin and Brinks arrive when PCs are there.

**April 5, 2015: Fourth Victim:** Fourth victim: Emilio Marquez, ex-con, hitchhiking. Millar steals his knife and cuts his throat with it, leaves body by the side of the road. It is discovered several hours later (south of Bowling Green, KY).

**April 6, 2015: Fifth and sixth victim:** Amber and Rae O'Toole. Sisters on a road trip, sleeping in their car near Greensburg, KY. Millar stabs Amber (18) and then uses Blunder on Rae (20) as she runs, chases her down and slits her throat. He steals their car, but drives it into a ditch less than a mile away (his body is becoming too decayed to drive).

**April 7, 2015: Seventh victim:** Victor Fox, highway patrolman. Sees Millar walking near I75 outside Berea, KY and tries to apprehend him, then sees his zombie-like face and drives away. Millar uses Gnarl to yank the car off the road and Wound to kill him, takes his gun. Fox makes a panicked radio call for help.

**April 8, 2015: Eighth Victim:** Melissa Byrne. Millar arrives at her house just after midnight, smothers her in her sleep, and lays down next to her, truly dead. The envoys have failed.



## THE CASE

**Millar's Burial Site — Investigation:** *Vital:* Disturbed earth, consistent with a person pulling his way out of a grave. Letter to Melissa found in the dirt, mostly impossible to read except the words “Mel, They're taking me back” at the top. Shackles are on a nearby rock, smashed with another rock. *Interest:* Dirt here matches dirt at other crime scenes. Millar stopped to smash the shackles beyond recognition, taking much more time than he needed to. Use of Schematic on shackles reveals hatred and rage. *Esoteric:* Handprints on trees indicate Millar is heading northeast.

**Benjamin Crist Autopsy — Research or Interview:** *Vital:* Crist died of strangulation. Assailant was male and very strong. Assailant left black, dirty handprints on the body. Handprints have not washed or rubbed off as they should; assailant's hands remain filthy even after touching multiple surfaces. *Interest:* Crist was attacked from behind (bruises on back of neck), thrown down (bruises on back) and strangled. Assailant took clothes from his pack, leaving handprints on tent, pack, and other belongings. *Esoteric:* Earth from handprints does not match dirt from campsite. Some creatures of the Unknown leave uncontrollable prints or marks like this.

**Benjamin Crist Campsite — Investigation:** *Vital:* Black dirty handprints on trees, tent, camp shower. Handprints have not washed off like they should. Police have not processed scene properly, but this is probably due to lack of experience with murder scenes. *Interest:* Assailant apparently used Crist's camping shower, but handprints after washing are still just as dirty. *Esoteric:* Envoys can trace handprints back to Millar's grave.

**Analysis of earthy handprints — Investigation or Interview:** *Vital:* Fingerprints belong to John Dreyfus Millar, convict currently at large, serving life for double murder. Earth is dark and rich, unlike the more sandy ground at Crist's campsite; probably transfer from assailant. *Interest:* Earthy handprints found on trees and underbrush indicate assailant's hands still dirty after using camp shower; also shows assailant moving northeast. *Esoteric:* “Hands that don't wash clean” is a fairly common telltale for creatures of the Unknown, particularly those who die “unclean” in some way.

**Tracking — Investigation (General Check):** Tracking from Crist's campsite leads back to Millar's grave.

**Robin Hart Crime Scene — Investigation:** *Vital:* Hart was strangled by a strong, male assailant with dirt on his hands matching that found at the Crist campsite. She was thrown in a ditch after death, and has been there for X days (depending on when the envoys find her). She still has her phone and cash in her pockets. *Interest:* Her phone contains a picture of Millar. His flesh is pale and sallow. *Esoteric:* Hart's body was positioned on her back with her hands folded on her chest, and covered with brush, as though the killer felt some empathy for her and wanted to cover her up. Millar is clearly dead in the photograph.

**Fred Wren's Body — Investigation:** *Vital:* Fred's neck was broken from behind while he stood on his porch. His Department of Corrections cap lies near his body. *Interest:* Assailant grabbed the railing, pulled himself over, grabbed Fred's head and twisted. Earthy handprints on railing, body, and doorknob. *Esoteric:* Fred's body was thrown across the porch post mortem, as though the assailant was angry. There are no handprints on the cap, but based on the positioning of the handprints on the victim's head, the hat was on when he was grabbed. This indicates that the dirty didn't transfer to the cap.

**Fred Wren's Grounds — Investigation:** *Vital:* All bees dead. *Interest:* Other insects in the fields are dead as well, apparently from frost. *Esoteric:* Some creatures of the Unknown, especially ghosts and the undead, can lower the temperature enough to create frost.

**Fred Wren's House/life — Investigation/Research:** *Vital:* Fred lived alone; he was a widower. His wife died of natural causes three years ago. He was an apiarist and sold honey by the roadside during the summer months. Fred was a retired corrections officer. *Interest:* Fred did work at Riverbend, but not during the time that Millar was incarcerated there. *Esoteric:* Fred's death was more violent than the other two individuals. The killer must have reacted to something about Fred — notable differences are his age and his authority (he was wearing a DOC ball cap when he died).

**Talking with Tomlin — Interview:** *Vital:* They are pursuing Millar and have been since his escape in February. Both are nervous and agitated. *Interest:* Tomlin shows signs of sleep deprivation. Tomlin reveals that they questioned people in Berea, KY and

caught Millar near Richmond. *Esoteric:* Tomlin reveals that the cop that Millar shot was his brother-in-law.

**Talking with Brinks — Interview:** *Vital:* They are pursuing Millar and have been since his escape in February. Both are nervous and agitated. Brinks noted a missing person report: Robin Hart. Tomlin disregarded it because Hart is a prostitute and “lot lizards go missing all the time.” *Interest:* Brinks reveals (if alone) that she put in the email to SAVE; she ran across SAVE during her time with the Nashville Police Department. *Vital:* Brinks reveals that she and Tomlin murdered Millar and buried him in the woods in Kentucky, about 10 miles from where Ben Crist died.

**Emilio Marques Crime Scene — Investigation:** *Vital:* Marquez’ body was thrown into a ditch and left there. It is discovered by a motorist who stopped to change a tire and called the police (unless the envoys get there first). Marquez died of a single stab wound to the throat. He is wearing an empty knife sheath on this belt, and there is a dirty handprint on his clothes near where the knife would have been resting. *Interest:* Marquez has skin under his fingernails, but analysis shows the skin has no blood (i.e., it is from a corpse). Marquez’ knuckles show bruising, indicating he fought his assailant. Marquez was not robbed. *Esoteric:* Marquez’ arms were exposed. He has prison tattoos indicating membership in a Mexican prison gang.

**Emilio Marquez Background Check — Research:** *Vital:* Marquez served time in Tennessee for assault, burglary, and weapons charges. *Interest:* Marquez belonged to a gang in prison, but has no record of further crimes after his release. He has no record of employment or residence, either, however. *Esoteric:* Marquez’ gang is active at Riverbend, where Millar was incarcerated, though they were not there at the same time.

**O’Toole Crime Scene (Amber) — Investigation:** *Vital:* Amber is on the ground, face down, dead of a single stab wound in the throat. Earthy handprint on face where Millar grabbed her. *Interest:* She has no defensive wounds. Blood spatter indicates she was stabbed while seated, probably in her car. *Esoteric:* Same knife killed Emilio Marquez. Body left unceremoniously on ground, unlike Robin Hart’s. Amber is considerably younger than Hart was.

**O’Toole Crime Scene (Rae) — Investigation:** *Vital:* Died of a knife wound to the throat. Throat was slit from behind. Earthy handprint on head (Millar

grabbed her from behind). Footprint indicate she was running away from her sister’s location. *Interest:* Footprints are random and haphazard, as though she couldn’t find her footing. Ground is even. *Esoteric:* Some creatures of the Unknown can make people clumsy through the Evil Way. Body left unceremoniously on ground, unlike Robin Hart’s. Rae is considerably younger than Hart was.

**O’Toole Car — Investigation:** *Vital:* Blood spatter indicates that Amber was sitting in car when she died. Earth handprints on steering wheel and interior of car. Car is in ditch less than a mile from crime scene. *Interest:* Bits of rotted flesh under seat and on dashboard. *Esoteric:* Millar’s body is decaying; he might not remain active much longer. This indicates he is working toward a distinct goal.

**Victor Fox Crime Scene — Investigation:** *Vital:* Fox is found dead behind the wheel of his patrol cruiser. Cause of death is apparently a heart attack, but he shows signs of being beaten as well — fresh bruises over his torso, head, neck, and arms. The steering wheel of his car is bent beyond recognition. *Interest:* Based on Fox’s positioning in the car, his wounds are impossible — his body was not exposed in such a way that someone could have beaten him to cause his wounds. *Esoteric:* Some creatures of the Evil Way are capable of causing wounds with a look or gesture. If Millar did so, this is the first time he’s killed using purely the Evil Way. This might indicate he is growing more powerful, or it might indicate that he is losing the ability to control his body as it decays and therefore *has* to rely on magic.

**Fox’s Last Communication — Interview:** *Vital:* Fox made two radio calls before his death. The first indicated that he was stopping to question a man walking by the side of I75. The second was a panicked, breathless request for help: “Get someone out here. He’s dead! It’s him, but he’s dead and walking—” followed by a cry of terror and a crash. *Interest:* Fox had been following the Millar case with interest; all patrolmen were briefed on Millar when Tomlin and Brinks were conducting investigations nearby. *Esoteric:* A grinding metal sound is audible during the second call (this was the steering wheel contorting from Millar’s use of Gnarl).

**Talking with Byrne — Interview:** *Vital:* Byrne claims she has never seen Millar, but is not a good liar. *Interest:* Byrne reveals (but not to a police officer) that Millar collapsed in her yard, dying of flu. She nursed him back to health, but didn’t call the police because



she doesn't trust them. *Esoteric*: Byrne recognized his prison tats, but didn't realize who he was or know what he'd done, and never asked. She reveals that he left the day after Brinks questioned her.

### JOHN DREYFUS MILLAR

**EWS:** 110 (Deadly)      **REF:** 45      **STA:** 100

**Injury:** Superficial, Minor -10, Serious -20, Major -30, Critical -50, Lethal

**Disciplines:** Blunder, Change Weather (frost), Gnarl, Touch of Death, Wound

**Aspects:** Bloodless, Deadly Attack (Minor), Regeneration, Resilient, Special Weakness (chains, grave earth), Telltale (black handprints), Unfeeling, Unliving

**Special Weakness:** If chained or handcuffed with police or DOC issue restraints, Millar becomes inert. A handful of dirt from his grave put on his skin renders him vulnerable to normal damage and prevents him from using his disciplines. Destroying the letter within his sight enrages him and he attacks the character responsible to the exclusion of everything else, but destroying it while he isn't present has no effect.

### MARSHAL TONYA BRINKS

**STA:** 60      **WPR:** 55      **REF:** 50

**Specializations:** Tracking (E85) Handgun (B65) Criminology (E85)

**Drive:** Bring Millar to justice, even if she has to face the consequences

### MARSHAL MATTHIAS "MATTIE" TOMLIN

**STA:** 50      **WPR:** 45      **REF:** 60

**Specializations:** Unarmed Combat (B65) Handgun (B75) Forensics (E75)

**Drive:** Kill Millar for good

## RUNNING COLD DARK EARTH

Obviously the trick is going to be catching up with Millar before he gets to Byrne. The timeline, as always, is just "what happens if the PCs don't get there first." Some things to know:

- Questioning Brinks and Tomlin should carry a negative modifier; they're Marshals, so they're in a position of authority, and they've committed murder, so they're not going to be in a hurry to confess. Brinks knows that the Unknown exists (if the PCs ask her about her experiences in Nashville, make something up; it's not important for this case), so she's more receptive, and she's ultimately willing to take the fall for the crime because of the guilt she feels. Tomlin would rather not, but he also knows that since Millar is now a walking, murderous corpse, tracing Millar's death to him will be difficult anyway, so he just avoids incriminating himself.
- Getting the Marshals to work with the PCs is important, but it's equally important not to let them steal the spotlight. Their role in this is to get the PCs access to crime scenes and data they wouldn't otherwise have, not to solve the case for them. As always, let the players make the investigative rolls, and let the NPCs be tools.
- Tracking Millar from any crime scene requires an Investigation check. Characters like BB or Miakoda use their Tracking specializations. Make it an S/O check between the PC and Millar (use Millar's STA score). If Millar wins, he stays ahead of the PCs and the trail goes cold. If they tie, Millar stays ahead of the PCs, but they find his next victim before Millar does (meaning the PCs save someone's life). If the PCs win, they catch Millar before he gets to the victim.
- Millar will fight the PCs and attempt to kill them. Remember that Millar isn't Unkillable, so he takes damage and Injury from normal attacks, but he also gets a Resistance check on *every* attack against him, and he regenerates Injury quickly. If it becomes clear that he'll lose a fight, he attempts to get away.
- Remember too that Millar will kill PCs easily. Wound by itself can cause a Major Injury, and Blunder renders most of the PCs' fighting ability useless. A combatant like BB or Post can get cuffs on Millar, but they need to be "official" police or DOC cuffs.
- If the letter is brought to Brinks' attention, she remembers Melissa Byrne. Going to Byrne's house to wait for Millar works insofar as he *will* show up there, but he kills people in the meanwhile. Try to get them thinking about how to intercept him. If they move Byrne, Millar changes course to home in on her (turn a token light for that).
- Remember that you can turn tokens light to mess with NPCs, so if you need Millar to grab Tomlin's gun or something, that's a good way to do it.



More...

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## ENVOY ACTIVATION NOTICE

tags: InboxSAVE

### S SAVE Nashville

(April 02, 2015)

Early this morning, the Nashville SAVE office received an anonymous email that simply read: "Murder of Benjamin Crist wasn't normal. Please help." Quick investigation revealed that a man named Benjamin Crist, 25, was found strangled in his campsite just south of the small town of New Deal, TN. SAVE asked John Post, a SAVE envoy and lawyer, to use his connections in the legal system to learn what he could about the murder. His findings provided enough evidence to assemble a team of envoys to look into the matter further, and are summarized below:

*Benjamin Crist was strangled by a male assailant, based on the size of the bruising on his neck. The assailant was very strong; Crist was a fit young man and probably could have fought off an attacker. His throat was crushed, the hyoid bone was broken, and death occurred almost immediately.*

*The autopsy report is still pending, but no evidence that Crist was drinking or using other drugs was found at the scene.*

*The attacker rifled through Crist's pack and tent, and apparently stole clothes and used a camp shower but left Crist's money and phone.*

*Crist had no family in the area. He lived in Nashville and went to the woods to camp every few months from March to November.*

It is possible that Crist died from a human assailant, however, the lack of motive, suspects, and robbery, and the damage to his body make a creature of the Unknown a more likely culprit, particularly coupled with the fact that someone who knows about SAVE alerted us to the case.

Please exercise caution. This case has an unknown entity in play. While it's likely that whoever sent the email is concerned citizen, perhaps a SAVE contact, it is also possible that someone or something is attempting to lure SAVE into a trap.

Please report any updates to SAVE's Nashville branch.



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