



THE WILD HUNT

The citizens of West Finley, PA are acting strangely. They're violent, impulsive, and dangerous one night, and then cheerful and whimsical the next. They're blaming it all on the faeries...and heaven help anyone that reminds them that faeries aren't real.

Important Traits: Interview is especially important on this, as many of the clues can be gained by talking to the townsfolk. Skill in Close Quarters Combat is also useful, particularly with an eye toward incapacitating people without seriously injuring them. Finally, Communicative disciplines of the Art can aid the characters in completing their investigation and gaining the information they need.

Suggested Characters: Samar Alaraj, Jeff Mackintosh, Nathaniel Powell, Kayla Justine Proffitt, Thomas Simpson, Amy Veeres

Major Menace: Fairy cap mushrooms, a mind-altering fungus.

Minor Menace: The population of West Finley, PA, who are slowly being converted into servitors. At the beginning of the case, a handful of influential citizens are infected.

SETUP

West Finley, PA is a resilient coal town of almost 1100 people, built around the Enlow Fork Mine. Though the town has declined from its peak in the early 1990s, the mine's excellent safety record and rich deposits of coal have allowed it an advantage when competing for business. Unfortunately, the Unknown has taken root in the mine. In 1929, Enlow Fork's owner murdered a business rival and buried him deep in the mine. This triggered the growth of an Unknown fungus known as "fairy cap mushrooms" (not to be confused with *Coprinellus disseminatus*, the common fairy inkcap). The fairy caps resemble their mundane cousins for the most part and have, up until now, remained fairly benign.

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The sporocarp, the fruiting body of the fungus that sprouts aboveground after every good rain, doesn't produce fertile spores. Instead, they slowly filled the mines with infertile spores. These spores covered the clothes of the miners and burrowed deep into their lungs, but the fungus required a fresh corpse to progress to the next stage of its life cycle.

Three weeks ago, Carl Leonard, 37, the mine's environmental technician, was killed in a bar fight. Attempting to cover up his death, his killers buried him under heavy rocks deep in the mine and reported his death as an accident. The unused branch of the mine they buried Carl had a fine coat of fairy cap spores that had lain dormant for decades. With the fresh body, they germinated rapidly, colonizing the spur with a dense weave of off-white mycelium. After only six hours the body had been consumed enough to produce the fairy cap's fertile variety of sporocarp, something which can only sprout from a fresh corpse. Unlike their mundane cousins, and the infertile form, this sporocarp is bright red with white specks forming the pattern of a skull or a face. They're also capable of releasing infectious spores when a living thing is nearby.

Casual contact with the spores is harmless; the victim might feel slight congestion similar to hay fever for a day or two, but suffer no lingering effects, as long as they aren't repeatedly exposed. People who have high concentrations of the infertile spores in their bodies already, however, become host to a fungal parasite. This parasite forms in the nasal and sinus cavities, forming a thin mycelial film that hooks into plentiful blood vessels and nerve endings before unleashing intense dissociative episodes and delusions upon its host.

A human so infected experiences a psychotic break, becoming violent, sadistic, and cruel. This first episode can be as short as an hour or last as long as twelve, but it eventually fades. At that point, the parasite changes from psychotic mania to hallucinations and delusions. Specifically, it makes its host think their own crimes were harmless pranks committed by tiny, glowing, humanoid creatures, about six inches tall — in other words — fairies. Infected victims often turn violent if anyone challenges these delusions. The fungal parasite induces a shared delusion between all hosts infected from the same batch of mushrooms. That is, all infected hosts remember the "faeries" doing the same things, even things they weren't actually there to see. Following this delusional phase, the victim has a brief period of normalcy, during which they function as they typically would. For the residents of West Finley, this often means going back to work in the mine, at which point the whole cycle starts again.

A body that has been embalmed or otherwise treated for burial, or the body of someone who died of natural causes, does not nourish the fungus. Only a murder victim left to rot does so. As such, in modern times the fungus in West Finley had not had any opportunity to spread. Luckily, infection does not spread easily, as the fertile spores can only take root in a host if they end up in the nasal passage of someone who has had long-term exposure to its unfertilized spores. This means that the envoys, not being from around here, aren't at risk of infection.

This is great for outsiders, but West Finley is in danger of a total outbreak. The fungi have overrun the mine, and the working populace of the town are getting a new dose of spores every day. Come evening, they run wild and wreak havoc on the town, leaving a trail of destruction in their wake, injuring friends and family (or worse), and getting themselves hurt in the process. By nightfall, the miners fall into delusion, shake their heads and laugh at those fairies up to their old tricks, to the horror of anyone not infected. The next day, it's back to work. They can't be kept at home or in hospitals, as their compulsion to return to the red fairy caps is paramount.

The infected immediately cover their lawns with tarps, blankets, and anything else they can find and throw out any particularly fragrant herbs that might be growing. If questioned, they simply shrug or mutter something about protecting their friends. This behavior stems from the fairy cap's sole weakness: green leaf volatiles, the aromatic chemicals in leafy plants that are responsible for the scent of a fresh cut lawn. Most plants native to the area won't trigger this effect, but the common species of grass used in local lawns is poison to it. If the infected are forced to breathe in concentrated GLVs, the parasite in their sinuses and nose dies. Strongly scented herbs like mint, rosemary, and cannabis aren't as effective, but they paralyze the infected if they are forced to smell the herbs close up.

It is important to remember that coal retains and transfers heat extremely well; that is the reason it's used as fuel to begin with. If a coal deposit were to ignite, spontaneous fires above and below ground would burn away brush and fill the air with toxic fumes, making the area uninhabitable for decades, if not centuries. The most famous real-life case of this is the Centralia, Pennsylvania coal fire, which has been burning since 1962 to the date this case takes place, and shows no sign of going out anytime soon. In short, *it is a bad idea to set the mine on fire.*

SAVE

SAVE's point of contact is Rebecca Ford, a 16-year-old occultist and potential future envoy. She suspected that the Unknown was influencing the mine workers around the time her father began setting fires and vivisectioning animals with his pocketknife, then blaming it on invisible pixies. Deducing that something supernatural was at work, she sent her SAVE contact a voice mail describing the situation (how she got SAVE's contact information is up the Chill Master, possibly something to work into a future case). Halfway through the voice mail, the tone becomes increasingly dire; her mother questioned the existence of the supposed fairies, provoking a violent reaction.

The events described and the sudden escalation prompt SAVE to investigate further, and assign a team to the case. Their goal is to ensure the safety of the victims first and foremost, determine the presence of the Unknown, and either eliminate it, or get the proper authorities on the case if the conflict turns out to be mundane.

SAVE provides a flight to nearby Pittsburgh, rental cars, and hotel accommodations in West Finley. The town is about an hour's drive from Pittsburgh.

TIMELINE

Fall, 1929: The fairy caps' infertile spores infect the mine after owner Sebastian King buries a rival's body in the mine's new fork.

October 8, 2016: An argument about politics turns violent at Mike's Cavern, a local dive bar. Carl Leonard, the mine's new environmental technician, is thrown into the side of a pool table head-first, killing him. The killers and their friends get to work hiding the body, while the bar's staff keeps quiet out of fear of reprisals. Leonard's body is buried in the Enlow Fork Mine, in the same fork where King's rival was buried decades ago. The fairy cap mushrooms begin to feed on the body and flower.

October 10, 2016: The walls of the mine are covered with fleshy mycelium, the air is full of fertile spores. Multiple workers examine it in an attempt to figure out what it is, and the first servitors of the fairy cap are created. Anyone who comes to investigate gets a face full of spores without even realizing it. That night, victims commit minor acts of violence, vandalism, and mayhem. Eighteen people are arrested,

but released in the morning to go to work (they seem better by then, after all).

October 11, 2016: More people are infected as the servitors lure other workers into the Enlow Fork. That night, the violence intensifies: fires, assaults, and beatings spread over the town. The police are run ragged trying to keep up. Four people are killed. Rebecca Ford contacts SAVE.

October 12, 2016: The dead are buried in the mine to spread the fungus. The uninfected citizens of means leave town, while the poorer or more stubborn people dig in, knowing that nightfall brings violence.

START OF SCENARIO FOR PLAYERS

October 13, 2016: The envoys arrive in Pittsburgh and head for West Finley. Alan Ford attacks his wife and daughter when they again question the existence of the fairies. Some the citizens of West Finley who don't work at the mine go to investigate it, and are either infected, or killed and buried in the mine to feed the fungus. By nightfall, roughly 4 out of every 10 people of the town are infected.

October 15, 2016: The small police force of West Finley has become infected. If called in to a disturbance they'll side with their fellow infected.

October 19, 2016: 90% of West Finley's population has been infected by the parasite, leaving just 10 people left. Of these ~10 people, self-isolation has kept 80 or so of them out of harm's way but that number will dwindle as supplies run short. Those left have only been kept safe by either dumb luck or having something that protects them from the infection. If the envoys don't stop her, Rebecca Ford becomes infected while investigating the mine.

October 21, 2016: 20% of the town is dead, some left to rot where they fell but many more have been taken down to the mines to feed the fungus. Only 5% of the population remains uninfected. The police set up checkpoints on the only two roads leading into (and out of) town, preventing people from leaving.

October 23, 2016: By now only a handful of people of West Finley haven't succumbed to the parasite and many of the infected are suffering from injuries that will prove fatal over the next few days unless they get help soon.

October 25, 2016: West Finley lays in ruins. The infected bury the dead in shallow, shaded graves rather than the mine.

THE CASE

In better times, West Finley would have an atmosphere of begrudging politeness to welcome outsiders, especially toward city-folk. The xenophobia is tempered just enough that it doesn't get them a bad rap but the locals are, given half the chance, happy to lecture anyone coming through on the virtues of small-town living. These aren't normal times though. The infected, when not in the throes of a psychotic episode, are eerily gregarious and all too ready to buddy up to total strangers. Those who have yet to be claimed by the parasitic spores are scared out of their mind. They can't help but feel as if they're being gaslighted by some unspoken presence. They are scared to speak up or challenge the infecteds' delusions... that always ends poorly if pressed. Many of them feel isolated, unable to trust anyone. They have to tiptoe around their former friends, fearful that they'll come down with whatever malady has stricken the town, or that the wrong word could make them the next target of the "fairies."

FORD RESIDENCE

The characters are, of course, likely to check in on Rebecca Ford first. They arrive at the house shortly after sundown. The Ford house can charitably be described as a mess. A recently shattered window lets the envoys see inside the trashed house. The car is parked at an angle in the driveway, and the lawn has been covered by tarps. Inside, two adult voices, one male and one female, are shouting. The front door is ajar.

If the envoys knock or enter the house, they hear a door slam from upstairs. If they stay outside, Bert Ford comes out to meet them. Ford looks around, confused and wide-eyed. He immediately attacks the envoys. He isn't armed, so he can only do limited damage to them, but incapacitating him without seriously injuring him might be a challenge. Rebecca Ford watches the fight from the staircase, and pleads with the envoys not to kill her father. Ford does not respond to threats or intimidation, and does not stop fighting if someone pulls a gun on him.

Sensing the Unknown (+20 to TN) reveals a supernatural influence on him. Raising a Mental Shield or a Sphere of Protection over him reverts him to normal for as long as the envoy maintains the discipline. Pulling the tarp off the lawn makes him recoil, and a handful of torn grass in the face triggers a violent and disgusting sneeze, after which he passes out. If he takes a Major Injury, he collapses and angrily screams at the "fairies" to leave his family alone. He continues lashing out at the envoys, though, and he bleeds out in a few minutes if the envoys don't find a way to help him. If you're feeling merciful, you could have Rebecca smash some grass into his face to cure him (this is actually a good idea, as it gives the envoys a sense of how to fight the infected).

Once the envoys have dealt with Ford, they can investigate the house and talk with Rebecca and her mother.

BERT FORD – INVESTIGATION

- *Vital Clue:* If Ford was cured, the envoys can analyze the horrific gunk he sneezed out. The stuff that came out of Ford's nose is a black and yellow fungus with roots covered in blood and bits of torn-out septum. Investigating envoys should make a Revulsion check (Distressed).
- *Interest Clue:* Ford has blood on his hands, but it is dried and not from any wound on his body. His hands and clothes are stained black with coal dust.
- *Esoteric Clue:* Taking a sample of Ford's blood or mucus reveals high fungal growth. If the envoys check Rebecca or her mother, they see similar growth in blood, but not mucus. This indicates that all of the family have been exposed, but the fungus somehow became "activated" in Ford.

REBECCA AND/OR MARIE FORD – INTERVIEW

If the envoys killed Ford, his wife Marie will not talk to them. She flees the house, screaming for the police. The envoys might be concerned about that, but the police have more pressing matters at the moment and won't be looking for the envoys until sunup. Rebecca will still talk to the envoys, but is severely traumatized, and requires a successful Communication check (-40 modifier) or use of the Calm discipline to talk with them. If the envoys treated Ford well, Rebecca is much more focused (+20 to the Interview check).

- *Vital Clue:* Rebecca's father came home a few nights ago acting strangely and violent. He caught a mouse in the backyard and sliced it

open with a penknife, and then burned its body in the firepit. The next morning, he blamed this on “faeries,” describing what they did in great detail. He wasn’t the only one acting violent; Rebecca has heard similar stories from classmates and the administrators cancelled school. All of the lawns in this area have been covered, until you get a few blocks north and hit Rainey Street.

- *Interest Clue:* Something about compost and smelly herbs disorients the infected. If they’re already weak, it makes them expel “mushroom goo” and pass out. She’s been using compost from a science project to keep her dad at bay, but ever since she ran out of lawn trimmings, it’s been less effective. Marie confirms that Ford and most of the other people who live in the area work in the mine.
- *Esoteric Clue:* Rebecca’s science project was on green leaf volatiles, the chemical that grass emits when cut.

If the envoys want, they can bring Rebecca on the investigation with them. If they didn’t kill her father, she asks to join them; she knows the town, after all, and she wants to help. The envoys can make this decision; Rebecca will stay at home or leave town if they tell her to, but the CM can bring her back if need be (she’s curious enough to return and do her own investigation).

THE HOTEL

The West Finley Inn is a single-story hotel with an office, then an open-air hallway connecting to each individual room. The manager, Jim Shannon, is friendly and happy to talk about anything, giving directions and points of interest. The hotel is on the outskirts of town, near the entrance to the highway, which has kept Jim safe: he has no reason to get near the mine and the locals usually have no reason to come to the hotel. The one thing he’s hesitant to discuss is the recent “unpleasantness.” The envoys can make an Interview check at this point.

JIM SHANNON - INTERVIEW

- *Vital Clue:* Locals have been going crazy the last few nights. Jim has heard of multiple assaults, fires, and arrests. He hasn’t seen any of the violence himself, but he’s been careful to keep the parking lot lit up at night and he keeps a shotgun under the counter. All of the people he’s heard of who have been committing these crimes have been miners, and warns the envoys to steer clear of the mine; something’s apparently going on. He tells them that if they have to go into town, stick to the area around Rainey Street. That’s where all the rich folks live and there’s been no trouble there.
- *Interest Clue:* Jim heard a rumor that a bar fight at Mike’s Cavern got really out of hand the other night, but he doesn’t know who was involved.
- *Esoteric Clue:* Jim’s staff has told him that the miners are telling stories about “little glowing people” committing the acts of violence. Apparently the miners have no memory of what they’re doing. Jim has also heard that the miners’ stories are eerily coordinated, which to Jim suggests that they’re rehearsed.

THE BAR

Mike’s Cavern is a dive bar halfway between the mine and the three streets that make up West Finley’s neighborhoods. When the envoys enter, the bar is deserted, no matter what time of day they show up. Mike himself is behind the bar, staring down the newcomers. He is gruff and obviously on edge, but willing to talk.

MIKE BOLDAZ - INTERVIEW

- *Vital Clue:* The night before the mine workers started to go berserk, there was a nasty bar fight. Mike refuses to say that anyone died, but does admit that Carl Leonard, the mine’s environmental technician, was badly injured. He assumes that Leonard was taken to the hospital, but doesn’t know for sure.
- *Interest Clue:* The envoys realize that Mike is lying about Leonard; he doesn’t think Leonard survived. He does know that the other men in the fight were miners, and they later came back to the bar without Leonard. The violent behaviors started the next night.
- *Esoteric Clue:* When the miners came back from “taking Leonard to the hospital,” Mike saw fresh mud on their boots, like there is when they come in after work at the mine.

THE MINE

If the envoys come to the mine during the day, they're more or less safe, since the infected are in their lucid phase. Security won't let them in without credentials, of course. The Familiar Face discipline works on the security officers, allowing envoys into the mines. Without the discipline, the envoys might sneak into the mine (Movement check, -10 to TN) or talk their way past security (Communication check, -30 to TN). If the characters are discovered in the mine or their story falls through, they are immediately ejected.

Sensing the Unknown just outside the mine carries a +20 modifier and reveals a concentrated but static Unknown presence below. Sensing the Unknown inside the mine carries a +40 modifier and reveals the fungus on the walls as being tainted; the source of the fungus is deeper in the spur (Carl Leonard's body).

ENLOW FORK MINE – INVESTIGATION

- *Vital Clue:* White, fleshy, fungal matter is covering large patches of dirt outside the mine. If they manage to gain entry to the mine while the servitors are lucid, they'll find that the walls and ceilings, even the constructed parts, are covered in the matted threads of the fungus clinging to the walls. In certain areas, the fungus has flowered into red mushrooms that spew spores into the air.
- *Interest Clue:* The envoys find dead bodies thrown into corners. Mushrooms are already sprouting from their flesh. (Revulsion check, Minor Trauma.)
- *Esoteric Clue:* The miners act normally, for the most part. They aren't currently violent, and they are doing their jobs. Every so often, though, the envoys hear one of them talk about something "the faeries" did, and all of the other miners nod in agreement or contribute their own, similar stories.

If the envoys visit the mine at night, it's swarming with servitor miners armed with makeshift weapons made from mining equipment. Trying to gain entry at this point is impossible, and would likely result in the envoys being killed. The envoys might also see the miners dragging people from town into the mine, some alive, some dead.

RAINEY STREET

The upper-middle-class part of West Finley (that is, a single street) resembles a suburb more than a rural coal town. Rows of well-cared-for houses with late-model cars in the driveways line either end of a cul-de-sac, and most importantly, the dire situation has left unmowed lawns as far as the eye can see, with no tarps covering a single one. Perfect for harvesting green leaf volatiles.

This setting is essential for solving the case, but how it is portrayed should vary based on the tone of the Chill Master's individual game and when in the timeline the envoys try to harvest the grass. The goal is to gather several sacks of lawn trimmings, and thus green leaf volatiles that can be used as a weapon against the servitors and the fairy caps. If the envoys do this during the day and shortly after arriving in town, they don't encounter much resistance. If they try it in the evening or after a few days in town, though, the infected come to stop them.

Holding off a hundred berserk servitors is a hell of a challenge, but the geography of the little neighborhood makes it easier. Rainey Street sits atop a steep hill overlooking the town with the only road in squiggling its way up. Furthermore, it's entirely gated off, though the front gate is left open, as it's been broken down for years. If the envoys can't repair the gate, they can always form a barricade out of sedans and SUVs across it, buying them valuable time to collect the grass they need. Sacks or pillowcases of grass and herbs actually make a decent weapon here if the envoys have to fight; a handful of grass in the face causes an infected person to have a sneezing fit and pass out.

CONFRONTING THE UNKNOWN

The infected are no more coordinated than any other angry mob, except in their hallucinations. They should be an ever-present threat that the envoys have to avoid rather than bad guys to take down. During the first day or two, daylight hours are fairly safe, but nights include encounters with servitors attempting to commit random violence or drag people into the mines. The envoys might be caught in any number of unpleasant situations, and envoys with the Reluctant to Harm Drawback are likely to suffer Trauma just defending themselves. As evidence grows that they can be cured and are even less in control than most of the Unknown's forces, avoiding them becomes paramount.

Once the envoys have obtained the green leaf volatiles from Rainey Street, they can cure the servitors with a whiff of the concentrated stuff. Applying the GLVs to the fungus causes it to dissolve. All the envoys have to do now is finish off the source of the fungus. This requires getting into the mine, which is easier during the day, but not impossible at night, assuming a big enough supply of GLVs. The envoys need to find Leonard's body and treat it with the GLVs in order to destroy the fungus. Finding the body should be a tense scene. The envoys need to search through the mine while avoiding or fighting off the infected. Sensing the Unknown can make this easier, of course, as can Premonition or other Sensing disciplines.

The stench of a dead body hangs in the air over where Leonard's corpse was buried. When unearthed, it turns out the corpse is mummified by thick layers of fungus and covered with flowering mushrooms. Destroying this core mass destroys the psychic link between the remaining servitors and turns the parasites harmless.

INFECTED MINER

EWS: 50
(Common)

REF: 60

STA: 85

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

Disciplines: None

Aspects: Resilient, Special Weakness (Green Leaf Volatiles)

Special Weakness: Green Leaf Volatiles. Inhaling the substance kills the fungus off and reverts the infected to normal. The higher the concentration, the more quickly this works.

REBECCA FORD

STA: 40

WPR: 60

REF: 55

Specializations: Occult (B75)

Drive: Learn more about the Unknown

RUNNING THE WILD HUNT

Paranoia and a darkly surreal atmosphere are key to this case. The servitors are normal people on an Unknown-fueled drug trip, so combat must be approached carefully. The envoys are immune to infection since they haven't been primed by the infertile spores, though they don't know that at first and might wind up taking some precautions to avoid infection. If they think to check their own blood or mucus, they find they don't have nearly the fungal elevation that a local does. Most of the work is investigating the semi-deserted town and finding survivors to interview.

After the case is closed, there could very well be several corpses, and the former servitors will be deeply traumatized. There's no way to wrap this case up neatly with everything going back to normal. If you want to make this case go a little longer (and the envoys have the right kind of expertise), have the envoys hang around to help counsel the survivors.

If the envoys allowed Rebecca to join them and she survives, she'll express her desire to quit school to formally join SAVE. How the envoys respond depends heavily on what kind of HQ they have and whether her parents also survived.



More...

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ENVOY ACTIVATION NOTICE

tags:

Inbox

SAVE

**S SAVE Pittsburgh**

(October 11, 2016, 14:12)

to: <Recipient List Blocked>

Today, SAVE received a voice mail from Rebecca Ford, a high school student in West Finley, PA. The transcript of the voice mail reads:

Hi. Really hope someone checks this inbox.

I know you guys investigate the supernatural. I do too... or at least I want to one day. Anyway, things have gone really wrong where I live, in West Finley, Pennsylvania. It's one of those coal towns, where almost everyone works for a mine. Anyway, yesterday, my dad and a bunch of the other mine workers came home acting weird. My dad, um, killed a mouse and... played with its insides, then set it on fire. Jared's dad down the street was collecting... stuff, just random things. Spark plugs from people's cars, copper from phone wires, fiber-optic cables, and making rings in the ground. Then they just say they're playing with the little glowing people. I don't know what they're seeing, but...

Anyway, the next morning, they're all on edge, like they're on a different drug. They're still talking about faeries. My dad's been talking about them, and... what, mom?

[pause, ten seconds, then a loud crash]

Oh god, oh god, he just hit her! He's throwing stuff and screaming. I don't know what to do!

The police aren't coming. Everyone's scared. My address is 85 Rockland Way. Please—

Attempts to contact Ms. Ford at this number have been unsuccessful. Phone calls to the local police have also not been useful; the police simply say that they are “too busy” to help with a “family squabble.” Social media accounts of residents of West Finley indicate that something is wrong, however; there are multiple references to violence, arson, and people being arrested.

You are to go to West Finley and assess the situation, beginning with ensuring that Rebecca Ford and her family are safe. Though it is possible that all of this has a mundane explanation, if what she said about other people affected is accurate then an infectious Unknown presence might have taken hold of the town. Seeing glowing beings or “faerie lights” could be indicative of various supernatural beings, and without more data it would be dangerous to speculate.

If Rebecca's still alive, find her, get her and any other survivors somewhere safe. Determine the nature of the disaster, and get out. Be aware this mission is *high risk* and carries a danger of infiltration, so arrange some kind of system for identity and cognitive verification.

Please report any updates to SAVE's Pittsburgh branch.



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