

## Lakeside Book Club

**Membership:** 30

**Meeting Place:** the basement of Lakeside Gently Used Books (the owners of the business and the building are both cultists). The bookstore has an **amazing** lawn, by the way.

**Goal:** to efficiently murder people for mild personal gain.

**Damned Book That Started It All:** a twenty page unbound essay that disjointedly argues that it is the duty and responsibility of all self-awakened members of the world community to harvest the 'vital spark of those who cannot grow it within themselves,' and so forth. It must be admitted that the general tone of the essay has a simultaneously self-satisfied and self-accusatory feel to it that is common with the more tedious and intolerant parts of early 21st century social media; which is impressive, since the essay appears to have been typed out on a mechanical typewriter at least a century ago.

The murder cultists who took over the Lakeside Book Club kept the name, at first because they couldn't decide on a new one, and then because all the mundane paperwork and so forth used the old name and couldn't be fixed easily, and then, finally, because that's what the name of the cult *was* and the cultists saw nothing unusual about it.

This happens more often than you might think, particularly when the group being taken over retains some of the people who belonged to it beforehand. Which *also* happens more often than you might think. Sometimes someone's just born to be a cultist, and everybody involved can see that on sight.

Admittedly, all of this doesn't happen very often. And actual **murder** cults are the rarest of the rare. But the Lakeside Book Club is unfortunately rather special; it has worked out how to kill fifty-two people a year for their life energy, and they've managed to keep the process going for over a decade. Usually this takes the resources of an actual government apparatus (on at least the county level) to pull off, which makes the LBC impressive, in a deeply disturbing way (not to mention one of the most successful private murder cults since the days of the *Bǎihuā Qífàng*).

The secret of the LBC's success is due to its limitations: in contrast to the typical collection of death energy-fueled spells available to would-be cultists, the cult possesses only three. One is a mild general health spell, the second is an unspectacular luck ritual, and the third is a powerful (and thus energy-hungry) method of turning a corpse into 'dust and mud.' Generally, this last spell is used by other murder cults to keep the corpses from piling up **too** highly,

as disposing of dead bodies mundanely is actually fairly difficult. But in the LBC's case the other two spells are sufficiently weak that the cult can sustain having thirty people continually warded against colds while having general good luck, in exchange for one human sacrifice per week. The sacrifice is then turned into a pile of carbon and water with no DNA signature, thus making the sacrifices almost trivially easy to hide.

It's important to understand that none of this is done with any sort of mystical or occult symbolism involved. LBC cultists are strict materialists who certainly don't believe in gods, devils, or Great Old Ones. They think that what they're doing is simply an application of bioelectrical transfer from one person to another; it's not very fun for the person being sacrificed, obviously, but the LBC prides itself on being utilitarian in its sacrifices. It only goes after those that they believe would not **really** be missed, like runaways, illegal aliens, the homeless, solitary mentally or physically challenged people, orphans with severe cognitive problems, and anyone with more than two bumper stickers on their cars. The LBC has in fact gotten lucky in that regard; more than one of their victims *did* get missed, but the cult's method of disposing of the bodies has kept the trail cold.

Bounty: the usual shadowy government bureaus, of course. Non-governmental occult regulatory agencies will also pay up, if the cult paraphernalia gets brought in. **But:** more conventional evil cults might also pay a bounty, *particularly* the cults being run by actual demonic entities. The LBC represents a potential threat to their market dominance, after all. And don't worry about bringing in the paraphernalia, either; just make sure it burns. Make sure that it *all* burns.

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