

# **Dark History**

**A TTRPG collection of  
the odd and the alarming**

**by Moe Lane**



This material is not intended for either sale or resale. Permission is granted to use the written material found in this document for non-commercial use only.

– © Moe Lane, 2024

– <http://www.moelane.com>

– <https://www.patreon.com/MoeLane?ty=h>

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Austen’s Fang.....	4
Bad Seeds.....	6
The Bee King.....	8
The Book of Cooper Duly.....	10
Gelumaqa.....	12
Humanbane.....	16
Ijekeland.....	18
Kingdoms of the Harvested Meat Map.....	21
Nega-Ohio.....	23
The Scablands Map.....	26
Soil of the Tarnished Bounty.....	28
That Which Harvests.....	30
The Twelve Inscrutable Masks of the Dark Zodiac.....	33
Zombie Cicadas.....	36

## Introduction

This is a selection of some of the tabletop RPG material that can be found on my [website](http://MoeLane.com) (MoeLane.com). They're all rules-generic material, and absolutely picked to be on the creepy and scary side. Have fun using them, and be sure to check out my website and [Patreon](https://www.patreon.com/moelane) for more gaming material!

...That's it. I'm not inclined to belabor the point. Either you'll like this stuff, or you won't. I'm hoping you will.

– Moe Lane

## Austen's Fang

**Physical Description:** Austen's Fang is a pretty little thing, while at the same time being a repellent little thing. Strictly speaking, it's more of a misericorde than a stiletto. The green blade is thinner and longer than you'd expect it to be and still be functional, the black hilt is very short, and the tarnished silver cross-guard is almost non-existent. Austen's Fang does register as magical in scans, but not on sight.

Yes, 'Austen' as in Jane Austen. This was reputedly her favorite enchanted stiletto. There's not really any sort of evidence that she ever personally murdered anybody with it, mind. Austen's Fang *has* killed at least three hundred people in the last two hundred years, which does make one wonder. Especially since it really is an enchanted weapon.

Don't be so surprised. Look, what do people actually *know* about Jane Austen? She wrote a bunch of books, yes. She never married, she died relatively young, the primary source for her life is a Victorian biography written fifty years after her death; there's not much to go on, and what there was has been openly sanitized. But there's still Austen's Fang. And, trust me, the occult community is well-aware of it, and its history. After all, the Fang has killed enough of them.

Austen's Fang is very specifically a weapon for assassinating mages. Aside from the usual enchantments that keep it from rusting or losing its edge, anyone stabbed with the Fang immediately loses the ability to speak, communicate, and read. The effect only lasts for five seconds, but that is typically enough time for the attacker to pull out the Fang and stab her victim again, which resets the process. Austen's Fang can be deflected by the right spells, but being stabbed by the Fang is still enough to immediately disrupt any ongoing spell that requires chanting, gestures, or even concentration. Plus, once the stabbing begins the mage will mostly likely not be able to cast any new spells.

The magical community keeps muttering about how they're going to destroy this artifact, but somehow they never do.

## Bad Seeds

**Physical Description:** a twisted and gnarled hard organic mass, about the size of a peach. Bad Seeds are hard, fibrous, and vaguely itchy to the touch. They smell of rusted iron, and mildewed hay. Consuming one is contraindicated. There is a mild enchantment on Bad Seeds that allow them to be ignored under normal circumstances, up to and including baggage checks at airports.

These are monster seeds. Plant one in the right (read: evil, cursed, corrupted, hexed, desanctified, whatever description fits) ground, then wait until a monster to sprout. Sure, it will take about forty years or so for the process to complete, which is one reason why there aren't more monsters around. That just means that all it takes is for one deranged lunatic to have successfully gotten away with seeding an area with Bad Seeds a couple of generations ago for the whole situation to blow up in somebody's face *today*.

The *really* weird, and dangerous, thing about Bad Seeds is that they're idiosyncratic. Each one grows a *unique* monster, based in equal parts on the exact nature of the evil ground that it's planted in and the local, inchoate folklore of the area. For example, a Bad Seed planted in a cult-degraded chapel in a decaying mining town will produce a different monster than would a Bad Seed planted in a murder house basement on the edges of a crumbling coastal city.

It's pretty clear that the entities that create Bad Seeds don't really care *what* horrible thing that they get, as long as they get one. Which is extra-distressing, if you don't like nihilism for its own sake. Even victims prefer to think that they're getting preyed on for a *reason*, right?

## The Bee King

Bees rather famously do not have kings. So when bees encounter a Bee King, they react about as horrified as a bee can manage. To them the Bee King is this horrible, enslaving entity which smells wrong and moves wrong. It also makes regular bees grow weak and passively obedient, and there's nothing that can stop him. The queens are helpless, the drones are helpless, and the hive itself is helpless. When a Bee King comes to one, it inevitably becomes corrupted, and eventually dies.

It doesn't die easily, either. There is maximum suffering and misery involved, and the worst part is that there's no discernible rhyme or reason to the destruction. All of which means that, to a bee, the Bee King is precisely the same sort of entity as Nyarlathotep would be to humanity.

That's to bees. To *humans*, a Bee King is just this strange, sickly-looking mutant bee (you get those a lot) that's a little larger than a queen bee, can barely crawl around, and seems to have some sort of fungal disease which can wreck a hive if left unchecked. Fortunately, the nasty things have no stinger, so if you find one you can just pluck them out of the hive. It's livelier than it looks, so it might try to get away. Fortunately, the other bees don't seem to care much if you do.



What happens next is up to the beekeeper. *Regular* beekeepers, uninitiated in the esoteric ways of the hive, simply just get rid of the Bee King and go on to the next beehive. *Enlightened, initiated* beekeepers, on the other hand, take care to ritually burn alive the Bee King somewhere that the hive can see it. You can tell which beekeepers are which, because the second kind are the ones who can somehow unconcernedly go among the hives without wearing protective clothing.

Which makes sense: after all, would *you* attack Nodens, after He has banished Hastur from your city?

## The Book of Cooper Duly

**Physical Appearance:** Originally, this book was a 18th Century treatise on the proper and safe use of copper dust (copper sulfate). It was a slim volume of about 30 pages, indifferently bound from loose sheets, and cheaply covered. However, at some point in the last sixty years it seems to have had, well, *evil* dripped on it – and now the book is horribly distorted. The cover currently says “The Book of Cooper Duly,” and where the leak has spread the pages have become thicker, better quality, and show alterations in the text. The effect is like seeing a paperback swell up after it’s gotten wet, only a bit more organized.

The Book also glows in the dark and unmistakably registers as magical to a naked-eye observer, so there’s that, too.

The horror of this Dark Tome is not in what it says; it is in what it’s apparently turning into. The rate of 'decay' has been slow, but from what text has been transformed already “Cooper Duly” comes across as having been a fairly wicked warlock, even by the rather strict standards of Regency-era England. This Book shows every sign of being Duly’s grimoire. There are no usable spells, yet, but, judging from the visible and unfortunately legible text, they’re not going to be wholesome in their intent, ritual practice, or ingredient list.

Interestingly, nobody's ever heard of a 'Cooper Duly.' This doesn't reassure the research library that's been keeping his Book under literal lock and key for the last sixty years. Clearly the grimoire is magical, because it's transforming itself; possibly when the book is complete, it can will this warlock into existence? Does that even make any sense? Nobody knows, which is why the book is kept well hidden.

Up until the recent Interlibrary Loan incident, that is. Now the team has been called in. They handle this sort of thing, right? – JUST DON'T HANDLE THE *BOOK*! Use tongs. Trust them on that.

## Gelumaqa

**Description:** minor prehistoric water deity, Caspian region

**Area of Influence:** water, fishing, waterfowl, outdoor survival

Gelumaqa is a very old, and formerly very forgotten, Indo-European deity who apotheosized, thrived, and dwindled about six thousand or so years ago around the Black Sea. What was she like, in her first Divine incarnation? It's unclear. Gelumaqa herself finds her memories of that period extremely hazy. Mud was everywhere, it was cold all the time, far too many of the most vivid memories involve bright sprays of blood; the goddess suspect mortals probably weren't too happy when she manifested.

But that was then! Which is to say, that was before Gelumaqa drifted away from the minds of humanity, falling into a very peaceful oblivion which lasted until modern mortals started [inking her sacred symbols onto their skins.](#) Which was enough *like* worship and sacrifice to 'wake her up;' and those mortals should thank, well, Gelumaqa that the goddess was the kind that *could* wake up in a friendly and accommodating mood. There are any number of deities from that really old-time religion that might have come out the gate demanding blood for the blood god.

Gelumaqa's 'cult' is made up mostly of an increasing number of North American women from 25 to 40 who are interested in camping, fishing, and the outdoors. There aren't that many of them, but then there weren't that many worshipers in the old days, either. The population of the planet has skyrocketed since then, making it much easier for a rediscovered deity to thrive. The arrangement is simple: Gelumaqa gives good fishing and protection from the elements, and her worshipers get the tattoo and, well, *believe*. Many of them don't think that they're *really* believing in a goddess in a worship-like manner, instead rationalizing her commands and presence as manifestations of their own subconscious thoughts<sup>1</sup>.

All of this is quaint, and possibly even comforting, since Gelumaqa isn't evil, and nobody's getting hurt – but there's still complications. First off, Gelumaqa has a long-term plan in mind where her followers all go have a bunch of kids and raise them up in worship of the goddess. This is not a particularly morally **awful** plan, but it does mean that the goddess is constantly doing her best to meddle in her worshippers' love lives by making sure they notice 'appropriate' potential suitors, complete with helpful suggestions on how to approach them.

---

<sup>1</sup> The goddess doesn't argue the point. The worship energy comes through anyway, and that's what matters.

If the worshiper in question is inclined anyway towards large, fit men who like the outdoors and roast meat (Gelumaqa, like many deities, has a 'type') this is not particularly onerous; if the worshiper does not, well. Gelumaqa can't actually make her worshipers do anything against their will, but she doesn't so much want babies as she's still a Bronze Age deity who doesn't really get why 'not wanting more babies' would even be a thing. Having her engaged in your love life is like having your grandchild-wanting mom in your head, only your mom can adjust the weather around you so that the wind is flowing through your hair romantically just as the park ranger approaches the campsite in the last orange rays of the sunset.

Second: what if the other shoe drops? Gelumaqa herself recognizes that her personality and habits now are very different than when she first manifested, and she has no idea as to what exactly caused the change (the tattoos only explain why she's around again, sort of). What if she changes back? It could be awkward, especially since even too-explicit animal sacrifice is frowned upon in the modern era. Things are pretty sweet for the goddess currently. She has plenty of worshipers and no onerous duties, so she's not really keen on any sudden changes. Not that Bronze Age types ever really were keen for that, whether mortal, or godly.

Which leads to the last, most interesting question: where *are* the other Bronze Age deities, anyway? Gelumaqa of course considers herself to be uniquely deserving of resurrection, but she will more or less concede that perhaps others from her pantheon might be almost as worthy of re-apotheosis. So why haven't they come back, too? There are other deity-associated tattoo designs out there, after all.

Or perhaps they did, and then the deities went away? That would be worth finding out, honestly. And quickly, too.

## Humanbane

**Physical Description:** it's a carp's tongue broadsword, with a wide blade that tapers down to a lengthened point. It's suitable for slicing, stabbing, and/or thrusting. Humanbane's provenance is dated as being somewhere around the 12th century BC. Which is awkward, because the blade is made of something roughly equivalent to wootz steel.

Normally, something this anachronistic would be dismissed as a clumsy joke or forgery, but they pulled this sword out of a previously-undisturbed burial mound in northern France during an extremely well-documented expedition. There's no way that Humanbane could have been inserted into the dig somehow: the cameras were operating 24/7 throughout the entire operation. In some ways, it was a relief when the nice people from the – well, they're from a pan-European agency, and had the right officials vouching for them, and that was enough – came to collect Humanbane. They also replaced it with something that looked like it at first, but then looked like something else entirely when cleaned.



Note that 'Humanbane' is a joke name given to the sword by various staffers. People claimed this is because the blade is decorated with primitive doodles showing human figures being cut in two by a shorter, thinner human figure with prominent ears. In reality, the name is based on the fact that, every time somebody's picked up Humanbane, it ended up *almost* cutting somebody else. Everyone who tried to wield it swears that the damned thing actively twisted in their hand during the barely-averted accidents; there's a general consensus that the artifact just feels hostile. Which is ridiculous, but here we are.

One other weird thing: Humanbane is still *sharp*. And apparently immune to rust. And some people think that it has a weird... hum? Not everybody agrees with that last part, but a couple of researchers further swear that the sword hums, variably. But those particular researchers are widely considered to be a bit off-puttingly strange in the head themselves, so it's probably nothing.

## Ijekeland (59° N, 12° W)

**Physical Description:** a rocky island of indeterminate size, shape, and existence on this plane of existence. Presumed to be inhabitable, although whether *humans* can survive there has never been definitively established. Individuals who have come close to Ijekeland without being drawn in report that the island glows faintly yellow in darkness, releases mists of an unpleasant shape, and smells like 'spoiled ozone.' The individual who used that description could not explain what she meant by that. Still, when asked, every other survivor of a near-miss with Ijekeland has agreed with her.

Ijekeland does not show up on maps or digital recording equipment, and all psychic attempts to interact with it have ended with the psychic in catatonic shock for several weeks. The Five Eyes intelligence network, or FVEY, has found it extremely difficult to track the place more accurately than the above coordinates. It definitely moves around.

Ijekeland eats a ship roughly once every four years. That's pretty much everything that's known about the place – even the name has been assigned to it, by somebody with a particularly dark sense of humor (geographically, it's somewhere in the North Atlantic, halfway between Iceland and Ireland). There are no medieval or Viking legends of the place, and even unreliable reports of ships consistently being lost in that one area didn't start cropping up until the 1990s. There's a strong belief among researchers that previous ship disappearances were blamed on pirates or privateers, all the way back to the First Anglo-Dutch War in the Seventeenth Century – but it's just a belief. Nobody can actually ask.

The working theory, among the special division of FVEY assigned to this one specific national security issue, is that *something* is poking its head through our reality every so often, and taking a snack. Similar incursions have happened in the past (the details are need-to-know), if never this large. The methods used to shut down those incursions haven't been working in the case of Ijekeland, but technology marches on. Particularly psionic technology, which has been steadily (if clandestinely) improving since 1998. The big brains in the labs think they've got a lead on what may actually be going on out there. More importantly, they think they know how to stop it.

FVEY has managed to keep ships out of Ijekeland's hunting grounds for the last thirteen years, and not coincidentally reports of near-misses involving Ijekeland have increased in the last two. There's a ship prepared, full of the closest approximations to human thought-patterns our psionics can manage – and the most devastating psi-bombs we have, too. When Ijekeland comes for the ship... Boom.

What? Good God: of *course* you won't be on the ship! No, you and your team will be inserted onto Ijekeland itself once it's been confirmed it was immobilized by the psi-bomb. We're not sure what you'll find there, but things manifesting in this reality are bound by this reality's rules. That means that bullets can kill it. Bullets, bombs, mortars, explosives – and, once you find or make a big enough crack in whatever that thing is using for armor, we've got a couple of nuclear devices that are almost at their use-by date anyway. That should encourage it to go somewhere else to hunt, assuming it doesn't just kill Ijekeland. Either outcome is acceptable.

Look, I won't claim that nothing will go wrong, but this is still a on-book operation. FVEY won't abandon you if things go pear-shaped. But the nukes *are* getting dropped, so don't put yourself in a position where you can't get away in time.

Unless you decide you have to.

# Kingdoms of the Harvested Meat Map

**Physical Description:** a wrinkled, somewhat used page with an outline map of the United States of America printed on it.

The Kingdoms of the Harvested Meat Map is annotated, in a highly bizarre fashion. What appears to be crude boundary outlines are scrawled on the map in blue, a variety of outlandish and unsavory names are written in red, and a large number of green dots are scattered throughout the map.



This last detail is significant, because the dots on the part of the map labeled “BLOOD - HEAT - HOWL - PREY - LAND” correspond fairly closely to particularly brutal crime scenes from a serial killer investigation in Texas, including one murder that hadn't been discovered yet when the map first surfaced. Discreet calls to other jurisdictions with green dots have revealed an alarming number of mysterious and open violent criminal cases in the general vicinity.

It's vague enough to be perhaps nothing, but – well, to the law enforcement personnel who have handled the map (including at least one state attorney general, at this point) it doesn't *feel* like nothing. They can't explain why and they're not sure that they really want to, but something about all of this is off, and answers would be welcome. Or at least answers would clarify things.

They just need somebody to look into it. Somebody nice and deniable. That would probably be best.

## Nega-Ohio

Strictly speaking, the name is *N'Gh O'Yiehrh*, and that's as close as humanity can get to the correct pronunciation, thank God<sup>2</sup>. 'Nega-Ohio' works well enough as a use-name; inhabitants of it are typically referred to as 'Interlopers,' or 'the Unwelcome' if somebody's feeling vaguely pompous.

The epithets are well deserved, too. Interlopers would like to invade, conquer, and enslave Earth, only the dimension they hail from is just a little too different from our own to let them make a proper go at it. They've still tried several times, only to discover each time that our native reality interferes with too many of their regular biological processes. A less malevolent species would have given up long since, but the Interlopers seem particularly determined to succeed.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Literally*. Species that can pronounce it properly tend to develop nasty personality disorders.

Interlopers have a 'range' covering most of the Mississippi river valley and Appalachian mountains, although they definitely prefer the latter to the former. In the flatlands, they manifest as various cryptids, usually at night (ultraviolet light levels during the day are intolerable to them). It is unknown why they try to manifest in the open, as they are barely tangible, and can barely move. Possibly it's just bloody-mindedness, or the Interlopers are acting as scouts, or they're doing something less comprehensible.

In the mountains, Interlopers can maintain their presence in our dimension for longer periods, and typically use that time to try to acquire human servants. They pay for services via the application of 'sorcery,' for lack of a better word. Interlopers can't or won't do very many beneficial spells, but they know any number of processes that can cause serious harm. Unfortunately, humans who spend too much time in the presence of sorcery quickly become physically and mentally warped, in increasingly unsubtle ways. Which is why Interlopers are always looking for more servants<sup>3</sup>.

---

3 A lightly fictionalized account of this can be found in the short story "One Other," written by Manly Wade Wellman, a writer and folklorist who was definitely familiar with mythological creatures of the Midwest and Appalachian mountains. This story suggests that it was either a *personal* familiarity, or he had access to reliable eyewitness accounts. Either way: Wellman should be considered authoritative but not inerrant on the topics of modern cryptozoology and apotropaic rituals.

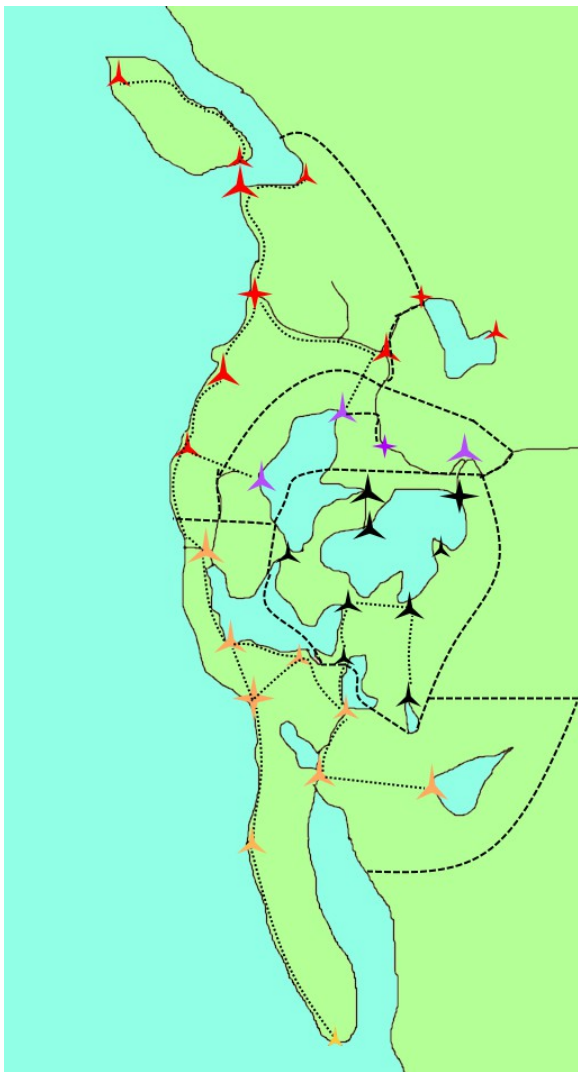


As noted before, while Interlopers are malignant they are not powerful – at least, not on Earth. Presumably they are more dangerous in Nega-Ohio itself, which would presumably have the same effect on humans as Earth has on Interlopers. More than one occultist has wondered if that applies to sorcery, as well. Could human Interlopers in Nega-Ohio be able to create powerful curses and entropy bombs? It's an interesting question.

Well, it's interesting to a certain kind of mind. One that is perhaps more likely than some to want to come to an *arrangement* with the Interlopers. Oh, they might not last long before their inevitable implosion, but that's hardly any kind of comfort to their victims...

# The Scablands Map

**Physical Description:** there are three versions of the Scablands Map. The first is a thin slab of slate with numerous scratches and markings on it. Unfortunately, about thirty percent of that Map is missing, and the rest was carefully broken into numerous pieces.



The second Map is vellum, tentatively dated early 17th Century AD, probably by Spanish monks. That Map is intact, and is stored in a wooden case with extensive scorch damage.

The third Map is dated 1937 AD, and is a product of the WPA's Federal Art Project (artist: Hannah Anderson). Anderson went on to have a mildly successful career as a draftsman and local artist who died in 1978 of natural causes. She left behind no explanation as to why she was assigned to the Scablands Map project – or, in

fact, what the project was at all.

As to the maps themselves, they show the West Coast of the United States, only with considerably more wetlands (roughly consistent with existing research of prehistoric conditions in North America), and markings for towns and roads. ...Which is nonsense. If there were ever civilizations on the West Coast that were on the level of the Toltecs or Sumerians, there would also be evidence of that.

Then again, maybe the evidence is not being dug up for a reason. A thorough search of the history of archaeological digs in the Western United States will quickly confirm that the areas marked on the Scablands Map have a much higher than average tendency to be abruptly canceled, never formally completed, or just be suspiciously bland. The archaeologists on those projects also have a tendency to end up taking jobs with the state or federal government, whereupon they more or less professionally disappear.

Note that they don't *disappear* disappear. They can easily be found. They're just not publishing papers, writing books, or teaching classes. And none of them seem particularly upset about it, either.

## Soil of the Tarnished Bounty

**Physical Description:** A pound of reddish-black soil, stored in a bag made from a dubious leather. It is perpetually damp to the touch, with an unpleasant smell. Prolonged contact will result in a stain that cannot be removed by any kind of cleanser. On bare flesh, the stain will eventually fade away as new layers of skin form, but long-term users of Soil of the Tarnished Bounty will bear a mark that goes all the way down to the bone marrow.

**Use:** Scattering the Soil on the ground – a pound can ‘prime’ about a quarter of an acre’s worth of land – makes it much easier for *bad* things to grow there over the next growing season (it usually takes a decade for the land to recover fully). Some of the possible (and spontaneous) results:

- Plants with malice in their taproots, or a taste for blood;
- Trees that move against the wind and snatch up small creatures for chill offerings to the winter moon;
- Things that use their thorny tendrils walk and stalk and seek out throats.

Scattering the Soil in a cemetery is also a quick way to raise the restless and hungry shambling undead, but that’s considered an inefficient use of resources by those with an interest and delight in such dark deeds.

The Soil of the Tarnished Bounty cannot be made, although certain foolish mortal dark mages have tried (inevitably to their doom). It is instead a gift, as well as a task. When those that provide the Soil give it out as a boon, it is understood that the soil must be used, and soon. Some dark mages have tried to hoard the Soil, instead. Their doom is also inevitable, comes rather sooner, and will often prove very instructive to the interested observer. Evil may be patient, but those that provide the Soil are never slothful.

It is by the way *very rare* for more than a pound of the Soil to be handed out at any given time. The Soil of the Tarnished Bounty is an *artisanal* horror, meant for smallish *tableaux* of horror and suffering. Too much use of it attracts the attention of Those entities who smite corruption with the cleansing flames, after all. Better to save it for horrors that are well-crafted, elegant, and personal. And it must be used carefully, not squandered.

If not? Well, one should expect malicious punishments from those steeped in malice.

## That Which Harvests

Description: a sickle with a discolored, serrated metal harvester's blade, and a leather-covered wooden handle. The handle will always (slightly) scratch the hand that holds it, no matter how much protection is worn. *That Which Harvests* (full name: *That Which Harvests the Blasted Fields*) absolutely registers as Evil, scans as being generically demonic in origin, but uses spells not known to human magicians.

Most of the time, the forces of Hell tolerate well enough humans who use magic for awful ends. The idea is to spread suffering around in the most efficient way possible, after all. If one of the talking monkeys decides to help fill the local monthly quota on his or her own, then why get in the way?

But sometimes a human mage grows far too arrogant and cocksure in his powers, and threatens to overstep his place. When that happens, *That Which Harvests* is sent for and given to a suitable human wielder (whether he wants it or not). The wielder is then commanded to go forth and slay the offending mage – and right quickly, before *That Which Harvests* consumes the life energy of he who wields it.

The artifact can fortunately apparently only be 'gifted' to genuinely Evil magicians, although the Evil magicians wouldn't agree with the 'fortunately' bit. *That Which Harvests* has been the whispered subject of fearful rumors among necromancers, sorcerers, diabolists, and other avowedly Evil magicians for centuries, since it's a punishment weapon, not a combat one. If the wielder does not slay his target, he himself will eventually wither and die if he does not slay his target.

The good news is, should the wielder use *That Which Harvests* to sacrifice said target (and the weapon is rather good at cutting through defensive magics, mystic shields, and titanium), the wielder will permanently receive a part of his target's power, which is nice. At any rate, once the target's dead the wielder must then leave *That Which Harvests* stuck in the corpse; he's now free to go about his day. Of course, he's also just ritually sacrificed a human being in the service of Hell, but the wielder was probably already damned anyway. So, how are things *worse*?

Assuming that a player isn't evil enough to justify getting given *That Which Harvests* as a demented extra-credit assignment, the party will probably encounter the item in the hands of somebody else, who is currently trying to reach a target that the party probably wants dead anyway. Unfortunately, the wielder will likely carve through a bunch of less vile people in the process, which can be a thorny ethical problem.

Assuming that the party can contact the forces of Heaven, the usual advice there is to find out the wielder's target, kill the wielder, then kill the target. Once that happens, deliver give *That Which Harvests* to an angel, who will soon deliver the fragments of the unholy artifact back to Hell with a demon corpse wrapped around it.

Hell will just make another version of the artifact, though. They always do.



## The Twelve Inscrutable Masks of the Dark Zodiac

By definition, we know very little about what happened prior to the invention of writing and the keeping of records. Have you ever considered that this may have been deliberate? That writing itself might have been a desperate weapon, wielded by people who needed to learn a new way of thinking before they were eaten by the all too seen, and the dangerously definable?

There aren't many relics from that time, but the Twelve Inscrutable Masks of the Dark Zodiac (and *bless* Victorian occultists for that particularly hideous, power-sapping description) would be unique, even if every other item from that horribly different time before writing still survived. Each mask appears to be crudely made from limestone, and each one has a suitably lurid imaginary god, fabricated constellation, and quite real power associated with it:

- **Kritchatter the Rat-God** (Rat, Contagion): The wearer of this mask commands all rodents, and they bring him wealth without bidding.
- **The Jester in the Smoke** (Jester, Delirium): This mask gives its wearer the power to make any man laugh until the Jester wills that he stop, or the man dies.
- **Barbed Matriarch** (Childless Mother, Murder): only a woman may wear this mask, and while she wears it all she can either ensure a safe birth – or prevent it.
- **Maureznok the Liar** (Liar, Lies): When wearing this mask, every word that the wearer utters is a lie – and every lie is believed.
- **The Anticipatory Reaper** (Death, Dying): Those who don this mask know the easiest and safest way to kill anyone that they see.
- **The Seducing Gibbon** (Seducer, Lust): Wearing this mask gives its owner the ability to engender irresistible lust in anyone – but only towards someone that the victim truly hates or loathes.
- **Click-click-click!** (Skeleton, Gluttony): The one who wears this mask will know which strange hungers lurk under the surface of any person the wearer sees.
- **Rotun the Imbecilic** (Fool, Stupidity): Those who put on this mask discover they can will that a crowd of people become each as smart as the crowd's stupidest member.
- **Tongue-Ripped Wraith** (Mute, Silence): Wearers of this mask can make a man forget how to talk. Forever.
- **Still-born Angel** (Child, Secrets): This mask can be only worn by a child: its wearer can look at a person and know what secrets they would rather die than reveal.
- **Consumer of Life** (King, Order): Only a man may don this mask. He may order women to engage in bitter strife with agents of the Consumer of Death.
- **Consumer of Death** (Queen, Chaos): Only a woman may don this mask. She may order women to engage in bitter strife with agents of the Consumer of Life.

Yes, none of this really makes any sense. Neither do the associated ‘theology,’ constellations, or even (absolutely made-up) folk traditions surrounding the Masks. That is entirely the point. By coming up with this collection of bizarre, yet frighteningly powerful, set of powers the aforementioned British occultists sought to keep the *true* powers of the Twelve Inscrutable Masks from activating.

Because if those true powers ever do activate? Well, it’s entirely possible that a respectable percentage of the population would survive the transformation of the entire perceived universe into *something else*. But whoever did would be permanently inhuman, in a very real sense that transcends mere genetics and physiology. Mere mad arcane duels in the occult underworld seemed like the less dangerous option.

And it worked. We know this, because the world has not ended. However, there’s another group out there who is now trying the insanely risky stratagem of trying to define the Twelve Inscrutable Masks in terms of our existing scientific-materialist paradigm. It may work, too – and more permanently. But if it doesn’t, things could get bad. Very, very bad. Bad enough that the reward may not justify the risk.

## Zombie Cicadas

*Magicicada septendecim mumia*

(Blame [this](#))

**Physical Description:** imagine a seventeen year locust. Now give it a half-eaten Undead appearance, apparent mummy wrappings (actually, flaking chitin), and eyes that glow red in the dark. They can fly, too! ...Of course they can. That's all the situation needed, really.

Strictly speaking, these should be called 'Mummy' Cicadas, given that the undead fungus infecting them causes the stricken cicada to appear swathed in wrappings. But that's the popular media for you. Have the first examples of the 'breed' show up shambling all over the Eastern Seaboard during a time period where zombies are 'hot,' and you're going to get misidentification. That's just how it goes.

As to the fungus? Well, if the fungus turned people into shambling flying Undead it'd be more of a problem. But it doesn't. Heck, a pulped Zombie Cicada can cure gout, although the CDC only discovered that by accident. They're not keen on further experimentation, or indeed any other kind of experimentation into the pharmaceutical qualities of Zombie Cicadas...

What? People in the health community *do* watch horror movies. They know how zombie plagues get started – more importantly, they know how the zombie plagues would *actually* get started, and so they’re doing the six or so things smart people do to keep that from happening.

Which would include keeping not-smart people from eating the damned things, but somebody inevitably decided that Zombie Cicada powder was an aphrodisiac. There's also a persistent rumor (with admittedly *much* better anecdotal evidence) that Zombie Cicada powder will get you high. Then there’s the minor detail that Zombie Cicada powder *can* cure the gout. Not treat, but *cure*. Four percent of the population still gets that disease, you know. They’re willing to pay serious money for a dose of Zombie Cicada.

Naturally, these would-be consumers are being aided in this matter by any number of forward-thinking entrepreneurs and other self-made individuals determined to not let the dead hands of either fearful authority or the uncaring law prevent them from servicing the needs of the common man. Which eventually means that somebody’s got to raid the illegal ‘breeding’ pits; and while it’s not exactly dangerous (except for all those hostile people with guns), it also isn’t really for the more timid members of law enforcement.

In fact, the experience can be downright spooky. It's the chittering moans, you understand. Something in the reptile brain hears a Zombie Cicada moan, and it tells you *Either get the hell out of there, or go get an ax and start lopping off heads*. Even if the heads in question are quite small.

PS: They taste awful. Good GOD! Why would you even ASK such a question?



# FROZEN DREAMS

PULP DETECTIVE MEETS HIGH FANTASY!

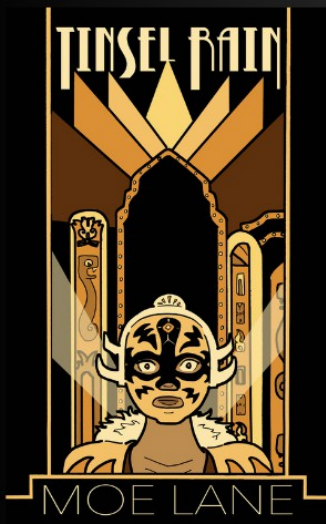
NOT THE  
START OF  
AN EPIC  
TRILOGY!

POST-APOC-DELICIOUS!

DO YOU LIKE SHAMELESS JOKES  
ABOUT MOVIES?  
THEN THIS SERIES IS FOR YOU!

TWO-FISTED  
FANTASY ADVENTURE!

AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK, KINDLE, AND KINDLE UNLIMITED



# TINSEL RAIN

MURDERS! SO MANY MURDERS!

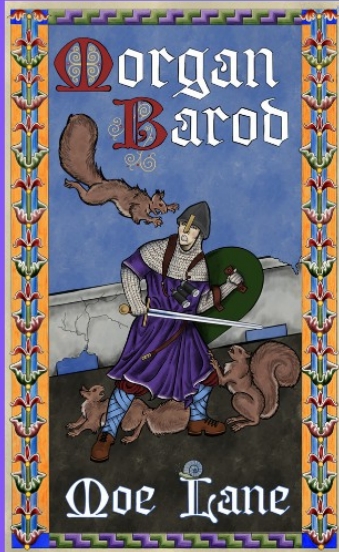
SEQUEL  
TO  
FROZEN  
DREAMS!

FANTASY AND MYSTERY!

YET MORE SHAMELESS JOKES  
ABOUT MOVIES!  
WE CANNOT SAY THIS ENOUGH!

THERE IS AN ACTUAL  
WORKING CAR IN THIS ONE!

AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK, KINDLE, AND KINDLE UNLIMITED



YES, THERE ARE GIANT CARNIVOROUS SQUIRRELS IN THE BOOK! THIS HAPPENED!

# MORGAN BAROD

SWORD AND SORCERY!

BIRTH OF  
A SENSIBLE  
BARBARIAN  
HERO!

MAGIC!

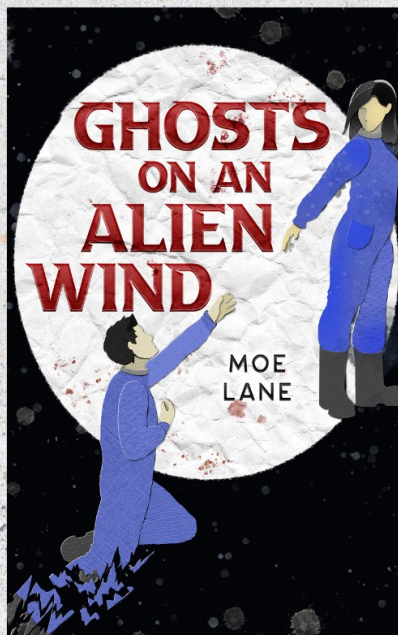
TWO SEPARATE  
BATTLE SCENES!!

YOU WILL FIND  
A SEXY VAMPIRE  
IN THIS BOOK!

GIANT MONSTERS!

FANTASY ADVENTURING IN  
THE WILDS OF NEW JERSEY!

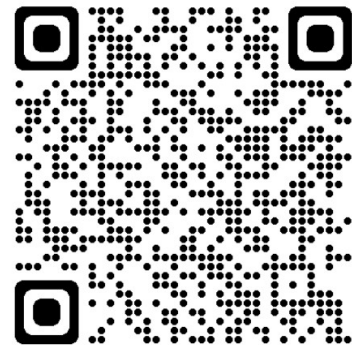
AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK, KINDLE, AND KINDLE UNLIMITED



## GHOSTS ON AN ALIEN WIND

Science Fiction Cosmic Horror!

Adventures  
in the  
Tomb Worlds!



<https://www.amazon.com/Ghosts-Alien-Wind-Moe-Lane-ebook/dp/B0CJX61K5D/>