

Towerfolk

As it is said, the highways, railroads and skylanes of the world form Earth's modern ley lines as they thrum to the heartbeats of the millions of people in transit at any given moment. What is less known is that there are people there who aren't there. The missed connections, the roads not taken, the ships that sailed. Their absence is felt and if it's felt strongly enough, Towerfolk manifest.

Towerfolk appear when people fail to take journeys of life-changing importance on a heavily traveled route, usually using some form of mass transit, whether local or long distance. They exist as a sort of ghost of the untaken journey and appear as a physical duplicate of the person on the day they missed their trip, haunting the transport route they would have used. They are indistinguishable from a regular human, with the original's memories and personality on the day of the journey, complete with traveling clothes and possessions. Mostly they pass unnoticed because, like most people on transport, they just want to sit down and get where they're going. What usually clues people in is their outdated possessions, such as newspapers from the day of their journey or being the only person on the bus still using a walkman. Also they show up every day at around the same time so long as the route is running.

Some example Towerfolk

-Becky Saunders of Roswell, GA was supposed to go MIT on a scholarship back in 1999, but she deferred for a year after a leukemia scare and deferred again after her brother died in an industrial mishap. Delayed for another fortnight by a broken leg, her flight was grounded by the 9/11 attacks. As she hobbled out of the airport she decided to take the hint and went to a local community college instead. Now her doppelganger haunts the Atlanta-Boston flight path, reading *American Gods* and listening to Britney Spears on her CD player.

-Back in December 1940, David Breed was planning to slip into Great Ormond Street Hospital in London and surprise his significant other with an engagement ring during her nursing rounds. Unfortunately the night before he was set to pop the question the Germans bombed his house from the air as he shivered in the Anderson Shelter in his back garden. Sifting through the rubble in the cold light of day rather took the wind out of his sails and in the end he married someone else in 1946. He haunted the Piccadilly line from Cockfosters to Russell Square until people started remarking on the happy-yet-nervous looking man who took the tube every day and always wore the same vintage overcoat even in the sweaty pits of summer. The Sleepers caught on and successfully cacked him back in 1982.

Supernatural Qualities

Towerfolk appear at their initial station emerging from out of sight amongst crowds of people and around corners, disappearing in the same way once they've reached their destination. Their outdated tickets and passports pass by human and mechanical observation without comment.

Similarly, Towerfolk are oblivious to their changing surroundings and modern inconveniences to travel, unless some thoughtful human being points them out.

Under aura sight, Towerfolk show up as rippling empty spaces, like the outline of an invisible person standing in a river, leaving a reverse “wake” pointing into the direction they’re traveling.

The Sleepers who eliminated David Breed’s copy discovered that Towerfolk blood (which is thick, gray and viscous) serves as an alarmingly efficient and versatile engine fuel. A pint of the stuff tipped into the combustion chamber of any single fossil fuel powered vehicle gives it a full year of operation before exhausting, whether it’s a moped or a battleship. It doesn’t combust for things that aren’t vehicles such as stationary generators or witch-burning pyres.

Dealing with Towerfolk

Mostly Towerfolk are benign, but sometimes nosy people talk to them, and when that happens sometimes something pierces the veil of obliviousness and makes the Towerfolk realize their unnatural situation. Realizing they’re out of time or not fully real invariably causes them to freak out, badly, trying to escape the vehicle by any means necessary. Then they show up again the next day acting as though this didn’t happen. That makes some people talk, so it may be useful to get rid of them.

Towerfolk manifestations show up roughly within three hours of the time they originally traveled, so if you can persuade the person in charge of scheduling to change their 3PM flight to a 7PM flight then the Towerfolk is unlikely to manifest until the next head of scheduling changes it right back and the haunting resumes. For more regular services such as buses and trains, arranging a big gap in service is usually impractical.

The presence of the original person on the route suppresses the manifestation for the whole day, which is a good thing because running into your past self would involve a Rank-8 Unnatural Stress Check if it did happen. Because the world is complicated and full of exceptions to its own rules, this sometimes does happen and it rarely goes well.

Killing Towerfolk is relatively simple since they have the same strengths and vulnerabilities as the original human and their bodies disappear once they’re out of sight for a few seconds. What complicates matters is their blood tends to terribly stain clothes and seat upholstery and it’s somewhat difficult to quietly murder someone in a crowded vehicle.

The most thorough way to get rid of a Towerfolk is to win their trust and accompany them from when they exit the vehicle to their intended destination without ever letting them out of your sight. If they make it to their ultimate goal without vanishing around a corner, the Towerfolk blinks out of existence in a pulse of warm air, leaving behind a Golden Ticket, which is magical.

The Golden Ticket (Significant Artefact)

“As Bokonon says: ‘peculiar travel suggestions are dancing lessons from god.’”

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat’s Cradle*

Appearance: It’s not actually gold or gold coloured. It’s a beige cardboard ticket about the size of a credit card. Details of the Towerfolk’s original journey is printed on the ticket, complete with date and time. On the back is printed a black and white map of the world in the familiar Winkel Tripel projection with an unfamiliar additional continent off the west coast of South America, which is vaguely shaped like a boxing glove.

Effect: What makes the ticket golden is that it’s fated to provide a good journey.

At some point in the future, the bearer of the ticket may notice that the ticket has changed into a valid ticket for a journey from somewhere near them to somewhere else within the next three days. This may involve it changing shape and manifesting additional papers such as a boarding pass.

If the bearer takes the journey they are guaranteed a positive outcome of some sort. They may meet a new friend on the train or uncover the answer to a mystery that has plagued them in the city they are sent to. Or sometimes they just get a nice week on a Hawaiian beach.

Whether used or ignored, the ticket just becomes mundane cardboard afterwards. Also you have to deal with the return journey yourself.

A Note On Etymology

Many people in the occult underground assume Towerfolk are intrinsically linked to the days after the 9/11 attacks when almost all flights were grounded as a precaution. While it is true that one event produced a great number of Towerfolk, they have been around since the development of reliably scheduled mass transit and first noted during the 19th Century, haunting steam locomotive routes.

The name “Towerfolk” derives from the common Tarot deck’s Tower card, which commonly represents catastrophe or overturning of the present order and an interruption of The Fool’s Journey from naivete to wisdom.

Using Towerfolk

-Gabby The Cabbie has been losing money on her once lucrative route from the airport to the convention center because she seems to have an uncanny tendency to attract Towerfolk passengers, whose cash seems fine upon payment but turns to dust minutes later. She’ll owe the PCs a favor if they can fix this.

-The PCs were supposed to have a meeting with their contact today but someone got to them first and took them out of the picture. If they can work out a way to coax a Towerfolk copy into existence on the bus route they were supposed to take to the meeting the PCs can hopefully get the information they were after.