

## Strands of Black Magic

**Theme:** Ambition

### Presenting the Threat:

*According to The London Truth, a tabloid of the lowest sort, something sinister is brewing on The Strand, West End home of booksellers, theatres, and elite clubs. In a series of lurid articles, reporter Danforth Locke has detailed the following. First, the grisly murder of Percy Highgarden, a wealthy collector of rare books and aficionado of the arcane, found stabbed to death in his ransacked West End flat. Second, rumours of a powerful grimoire recently smuggled into the country and sold for a small fortune to persons unknown. Third, a series of mysterious deaths in and around the Strand. A chorus girl, plucked from obscurity and given a lead role, dies on stage soon after, vomiting blood. A ragged street preacher, whose fiery sermons suddenly drew huge crowds, is torn apart by an angry mob. A penniless actor, the unexpected recipient of a huge inheritance, is found beaten to death in his newly purchased theater. Scotland Yard has had no comment on the deaths.*

*Mr. Locke has previously reported at length on the arcane in London and in a series of editorials and is floating the notion that there is a war in the shadows and alleys of the Strand as various groups vie for control of the grimoire, including a group he calls the Darkling Sun. A number of other recent murders and the presence locally of certain agents of Special Branch has led him to conclude that these events are somehow connected to London society and perhaps even the security of the realm.*

*London society is in a tizzy about the murders, and several acquaintances of Hargrave House have asked the Hunters to step in and deal with the situation.*

**Pose the following question to the hunter with the highest Sensitivity (your choice in the case of a tie) Based on the evidence, what kind of magic does this grimoire contain?**

### Questions and Opportunities

**Threshold Question:** *Who currently has the grimoire in their possession?* (complexity 2) Unlock the remaining questions. Use this information to throw one of the opposing factions off the scent. This will grant the hunters one night free of interference from a single danger.

**Question:** *Can you find the bearer of the grimoire before the Darkling Sun does and prevent them seizing the grimoire for themselves?* (complexity 6) Resolve the threat by wresting the grimoire from the current owner, either destroying it or archiving it at Hargrave House.

On a result of 6- the Darkling Sun will seize the grimoire themselves and attempt to spirit it away. Unlock the final question.

**Question:** *How will the Darkling Sun try to get the grimoire out of London under cover of night?*  
(complexity 6) Resolve the threat by confronting the cultists and preventing the disappearance of the grimoire.

### **The Mask of Ambition**

Each hunter narrates a time when they achieved something they dearly desired, but with a steep and unexpected cost.

### **The Grimoire**

Narrated to the mad monk Gerhard Kemmler by the Black God, Czernobog, in 1293. The cover of the grimoire is deep black leather, chased with gold. Around the periphery of the cover are arcane symbols of unknown provenance. On the front cover, in gold, is the title: *Kotel na Ludostta* (Cauldron of Madness) in gothic script, and a stylized depiction of a cauldron. The pages of the book are of the creamiest vellum, and densely covered with arcane script. The signs of the Czernobog are shadowy ravens, insects of the grave, and a bloody sledgehammer. Both Malvolio and Papillion are certainly aware of this, as perhaps are other side characters.

Any Hunter attempt to use the grimoire will result in PC retirement.

### **If Hargrave House ignores the grimoire...**

The spate of murders will snowball as the holder of Grimoire begins to truly master its contents, and as the various arcane factions involved slaughter each other to possess the book.

### **Moments**

- A raven has been following you all day, you think it tried to speak to you...
- You open a cupboard or drawer and insects spill out of it onto the ground, then disappear into the shadows
- A vision of a tall black-robed man stirring a massive cauldron with a long-handled hammer
- Whispers only you can hear, asking you to do foul things
- Your head swims and your temples throb, take a condition: **Confused**
- The shadows here seem especially dark and conceal ... something

### **Dangers**

Charles Dexter - a wealthy adept of the black arts

Impeccably tailored. Narrow foxy face. A surfeit of arrogance and sarcasm. The third son of a prominent family, he is suave and completely without morals. He is a member of the Darkling Sun, a cult steeped in the black magic. They are hell bent on acquiring the grimoire as means to enormous power and influence. Dexter has connections across high society, essentially anywhere it might be inconvenient for Hargrave House.

Quote: *I'm quite sure you didn't mean to actually threaten me did you? That would be amusing.*

Bartleby Nosegay - agent of Special Branch

Hulking. Huge scarred hands. An improbably small derby perched on an enormous bald head. Bartleby is an enforcer for Special Branch, and has orders to limit exposure and embarrassment to certain prominent people.. He doesn't care about the arcane, grimoires, or right and wrong, only about protecting the reputation of certain individuals.

Quote: *Beggin' yer pardon, but I'm gonna break yer face if you don't scarper quickish, so piss off.*

The Veil of Confusion - the grimoire exudes an aura that confuses and befuddles investigators

Any action a hunter takes **directly** against the bearer of the grimoire will be rolled at disadvantage. This also includes investigative actions taken at the scene of a manifestation of the grimoire's power. When this rule applies is entirely at the discretion of the Keeper. This would also apply (narratively) to other people searching for the grimoire. Charles Dexter will likely find this enormously vexing.

## **Locations**

### Malvolio and Sons - Purveyors of the Finest Books and Antiquities

Redolent with the smell of herbs and incense. Towering shelves packed with books and curios. A locked iron-bound door at the rear of the shop.

**Paint the Scene:** *This is not your average seller of fake grimoires and bric-a-brac, what details about the shop tell you that Mavolio's might deal in actual magic?*

### The Crossed Keys Gentleman's Club

Steep stone stairs up to a third story. Oak panelling and discrete seating. The smell of fine cigar smoke.

**Paint the Scene:** *What details here suggest that the patrons might have a shared interest in things arcane?*

### The Candle and Orb - A Psychic Salon

Soft couches and velvet curtains in the waiting room. Hushed conversation. Shadows and the smell of beeswax candles.

**Paint the Scene:** *This is a destination for monied women, what details make that obvious?*

### Offices of *The London Truth*, a tabloid of the lowest sort

A sense of energy, possibly even mania. Desks overflowing with paper and dirty crockery. Uneven narrow stairs down to a creaky basement front door.

**Paint the Scene:** *What do you see here that suggests that this paper deals in the most wild and lurid sorts of stories?*

## Side Characters

### Danforth Locke, reporter for the London Truth

Rumpled and somewhat shabby suit. An engaging grin. Talks a blue streak. Danforth is an up and coming star in the London tabloid scene. He has a nose for scandal and a penchant for pithy prose. His endless blather conceals a keen investigative mind. He is familiar with all the locations above, as well as all the characters below.

Quote: *Of course you can comment without attribution. I'm just keen to find out what actually happened on the night of the 15th. No, no, naturally I would never mention that you were present at the brothel and dressed in a fashionable frock. Let's just talk about the facts Mr. Griswald.*

### Giuseppe Malvolio, owner of Malvolio and Sons

Tall and gaunt with a whispery voice. Ancient but still hale. Sumptuous, but sadly out of date suits. He transformed a previously obscure book shop into a destination. The best sort of people know to come to him for ... certain kinds of items. He always seems to know more than he should, and talking to him almost always leaves people feeling unsettled, which doesn't hurt his business.

Quote: *Of course I can acquire a copy of that for you sir. It will take some time and a not insignificant amount of investment on your part, and there may also be ... persuasions necessary. You understand, of course.*

### Madame Papillon, professional psychic and proprietor of The Candle and Orb

Satin robes embroidered with arcane symbols. A probably put-on east european accent. Rather a lot of bracelets, necklaces, and rings. Mdm. Papillon is a psychic to the monied and gullible of London's high society. Can read palms and the like, but mostly relies on flim-flamery. She also knows most everyone involved in the arcane side of London society.

Quote: *Hush, I can see you've come to me today with a great weight on your mind. Someone close to you has betrayed your trust, yes? A friend, no, wait, a servant. A woman. She has ... stolen something from you. Something valuable? Yes, valuable. A ring, or perhaps a bracelet?*

### Dahlia Gosford, society darling and patron of the Candle and Orb

The latest shocking fashions. Dripping in diamonds. A penchant for drama. Dahlia is the current leading light of London society. She attends the best parties, with the best people. Magic is a current society fad, so Dahlia ensures she is seen at the Candle and Orb in the right company. She jests about the whole thing, but deep down believes it far more than would be considered fashionable.

Quote: *Darling! It's just marvelous to see you. Is that a new necklace? It's divine, really. Oh, did you hear? The spirits told Jessica Heatherby that her fiance was cheating on her and now she's on the warpath! Isn't that just too much? What a scandal!*

Hugh Puddleford, Porter at the Crossed Keys

Softly spoken and unfailingly polite. Impeccably dressed (for a servant). A surprisingly engaging storyteller. Hugh has been the Keeper of Rolls and Keys at the club for 30 years, and is the first and only barrier to entry for non-members. He would never talk about a current member but might be persuaded to regale a willing listener with stories of the club's history.

Quote: *I'm very sorry sir, I couldn't possibly allow you in. We are a members only club, and our members value their privacy. Perhaps you'd like to leave a note? Should the gentleman in question arrive you can be sure I will convey it to him at his earliest convenience.*

Sir Edmund Pike, member of the Crossed Keys

Tall and imposing. Saville Row wardrobe. Sonorous baritone. Sir Edmund is well connected, rich, and urbane, a gentleman's gentleman. He is a Master Mason, and has a keen interest in magic and magical scholarship. He is very well read, and is the High Ordinate of the Emerald Lions, the preeminent mystical order at the Crossed Keys. He also keeps a careful watch over some of the less decorous members in order to protect the Club's reputation, a reputation he will go to some lengths to protect.

Quote: *Mmm, yes, that was a dreadful business with those devil worshipping blaggards, wasn't it? A word in the right ears got it sorted of course, never a worry. Of course we had to revoke their memberships.*

Sir Gregory Whipplethwaite, eccentric scholar into the arcane

Fashionably dressed but poorly put together. Wild grey hair that never looks anything but crazed. Ink-stained fingers. Sir Gregory is a member of the Royal Society (in bad odour) who's only real drive is research into the history and practice of English magic. He has a vast collection of books, artifacts, and anecdotes about magical practices and societies. He is an inveterate gossip about the magical scene in London, and a member of the Crossed Keys.

Quote: *Oh? Oh! Yes, yes, there was indeed an incident in Kent in the 16th century much like the one you just described. I have an account here .. somewhere. Did you say you'd brought that book with you?*

Peeper, a canny street urchin and entrepreneur

An enormous toothy grin. A too-large hat cocked back on his head. High-level patter. Peeper runs a small crew of urchins that work the area around the Crossed Keys. They deal mostly in watching horses and carriages, with a touch of pick-pocketing and snitching when the opportunity presents itself.

*Quote: Wotcha, guv? You don't wanna leave that horse there, someone might half-inch it before you've had even a little butchers upstairs. I'll see you right, you cross my palm and I swear on me mother's minces it'll be here when you sally back out.*

## Clues

- A crude chalk drawing in a alley, depicting a cauldron being stirred by a hooded figure
- A wave of Grave Beetles erupt from a sewer grate causing panic
- Sibilant whispers from a shadowed corner
- A scrap of paper with the address of the Crossed Keys, and a time, 10pm
- The cloying smell of blood and offal
- A gold signet ring set with rubies and the likeness of two ravens with crossed wings
- An overheard story about a wealthy Mercer who dug up a trove of golden coins in his garden
- A flock of strangely silent ravens completely cover the roof of a building
- A handwritten receipt for an unnamed book, very expensive
- The ravings of a drunken madman who shouts about beetles under his skin
- Bricks fall from a construction site and land in a perfect circle
- A bloody massacre in a brothel perpetrated by a scion of the nobility
- A scruffy preacher shouts from a street corner about the perils of greed while no one listens
- A torn robe of purple velvet that reeks of incense
- Strange spectacles with a variety of coloured lenses
- A battered sledgehammer, covered in blood
- A Side Character claims to have seen a midnight procession of street children, their faces slack and their eyes blank
- A silver cufflink with three small sapphires and the letter M embossed on it
- A torn vellum page covered in arcane symbols written in purple ink
- A rain of black feathers falls from nowhere obvious

## Rewards

- Madam Papillon becomes a recurring side character; you get one extra Clue on the Information Move when you consult her about the doings of high society.
- Danforth Locke becomes a recurring Side Character; you get one extra Clue on the Information Move when you consult him about scandals.
- A memento from the investigation; ask another hunter what it is and then add it to your Personal Quarters.
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