

L I M I N A L

BENEATH THE STONES

A Case Note for Liminal

Paul Mitchener

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Introduction

The Mare and Foal standing stones, just outside the town of Haltwhistle, are the only two stones remaining of an ancient stone circle. It is far from the best-known stone circle in Britain, but it marks an ancient place of geomantic power, being a place with a claim to be the exact geographical centre of Britain.

The stones are not impressive, and property developers have their eye on the site. Despite environmental protests, they now have the right to develop it. But before the developers can move in, a team of archaeologists has permission to excavate.

Now the town of Haltwhistle has been swallowed by dense mists. No word has got out. What could have happened?

Hooks

A vanishing town attracts attention, and the player characters can easily pick up information on the archaeological dig. A Liminal crew may well hear and investigate on their own initiative. Alternatively, several Liminal factions have interests there, and can ask the crew to investigate, being reluctant to enter the mist themselves. Specifically:

- Indra Jatt, a werewolf working for the Jaeger family. She was with the protestors, keeping an eye out for magical activity and potential magicians. In fact, unknown to the Jaeger family, she had her own agenda.
- Charles Gardner, a hunted rogue magician formerly part of the Council of Merlin, is part of the team involved in the dig. The Council of Merlin may have discovered clues concerning his presence, perhaps from an observer reporting to them, or perhaps from a divination.
- House Annwn will have interest in one of the Thirteen Treasures of Britain, and the changes to a site so significant to Britain's magical geography.

Initial investigations by the player characters also reveal a story in the Hidden World about one of the Thirteen Treasures of Britain. It is said that Padarn of the Scarlet Cloak, a soldier, vanished here in late Roman times. His cloak, a mantle conferring powers of leadership and nobility on the wearer, vanished with him. Perhaps it is buried here.

Background

There is ample geomantic power at the stones, but it is already channelled into a powerful ancient ward keeping something out. Nothing is left for a modern day geomancer to tap. The archaeologists unearthed the ward, buried beneath the stones. And Charles Gardner, a power-hungry and unprincipled wizard, broke the ward intending to claim the

geomantic power for himself, and caring nothing for the consequences. The crew may have encountered him before.

Now a Fae Realm which was sealed is open. Its Lord is hungry for people to join his subjects. He has extended his power to Haltwhistle, which has completely vanished, leaving nothing but dense mists. Given time, he will extend his power further. Within the realm are a remnant of the Ninth Legion, outside of normal ageing. Padarn of the Scarlet Cloak, known in Latin as Paternus Rufus, joined the Ninth when he too was drawn into the realm.

Indra Jatt, the werewolf with the protestors, is here because she seeks the cloak. She has worked out it is probably within the Faerie realm.

Characters

Charles Gardner

Charles Gardner was named an enemy of Merlin by the Council, after the infamous "Glasgow incident" involving a necromantic ritual and the destruction of the Council's Glasgow clubhouse. He previously appeared in the adventure *The Haunting House*. Here we assume he was thwarted in that adventure but got away. If Charles was captured or killed, replace with another magician with an interest in geomancy, perhaps one belonging to House Annwn or the Mercury Collegium.

He is ruthless and driven. He looks young, but this youth is due to necromantic magic, and Charles Gardner has a wild look in his eyes. He will commit murder to get his own way, and any lingering scruples have been even further corroded by proximity to the thing beneath the stones. However, Charles Gardner can hide his sinister nature behind a veneer of good manners and education. He will withdraw rather than face suicidal odds, but will strike to kill if he is cornered and facing capture, or if the Liminal crew stand in his way.

What Charles wants is the warding spell on the Mare and Foal stones completely ended, even if it releases whatever it contained. Without the ward, he can draw upon the geomantic power of the site.

Drive:	Power at any cost
Physical Skills:	Awareness 1
Mental Skills:	Education 4, Lore 4, Science 2
Social Skills:	Conviction 3, High Society 2, Rhetoric 2
Traits:	Countermagic, Geomancy (Tap Power), Necromancy (Life Stealing, Touch the Darkness), Ward Magic (Personal Wards)
Endurance:	8
Will:	15 (boosted from previously tapped energy)
Damage:	d6 physical

Note that Charles Gardner has a protective spell in place about his person: the first person who attacks him suffers d6+4 damage, and fails to harm Charles. If he attacks, he will use

necromantic magic, particularly the spell Touch the Darkness which drains d6 Will and Endurance from the target, but costs Charles 2 Will to use.

Indra Jatt

Indra Jatt does not look like a typical werewolf – or for that matter a typical environmental protestor. She is young, and smartly dressed in a business suit. She's better than most werewolves at keeping her temper. She is from Sheffield, and just outside the inner circle of the Jaeger family. She is here at the behest of the family. They know enough about the site to know its Hidden World potential; do not want to ruin it or have anyone else exploit it; and have connections with environmental protest movements. She is charged with stopping the developers.

But Indra Jatt has her own reasons to be here. She knows the story of Padarn's scarlet cloak being here. She wants it for herself. With such a kingly garment, the Jaeger family will be sure to respect her as an equal. Or maybe she can set up her own power base.

Drive: I will be the equal of the Jaegers, if not their superior
 Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Melee 3, Survival 2
 Mental Skills: Business 2, Education 3, Lore 3
 Social Skills: Rhetoric 3, Taunt 2
 Traits: Brawny, Rapid Healing (Weakness: Silver),
 Night Sight, Rage, Shapechanger (massive wolf form)
 Limitation: Vulnerability (Silver)
 Endurance: 14 (18 in wolf form)
 Will: 8
 Damage: d6+3 (knife or natural weapons in wolf form)

Professor Ursula Grünwald

Professor Ursula Grünwald is the archaeologist in charge of the dig, and is assisted by two graduate students, Phil and Jim, as well as by Martin Gardner. She's a respected academic based at Newcastle University, but has a scruffy demeanour. In conversation, she's reserved, but opens up when talking about history and archaeology.

She's innocent of the Hidden World, and will be sceptical if confronted with it, but she'll be convinced by the evidence of her senses — and what she's seen has led her to realise something very odd is going on indeed.

Drive: Digging into the past
 Physical Skills: Athletics 1
 Mental Skills: Art 1, Education 4 (Late Roman History),
 Science 2, Technology 3
 Social Skills: Conviction 2, Rhetoric 1
 Endurance: 8
 Will: 10

The Lord of Ruins

The Lord of Ruins, Fae ruler of the Domain of Ruins, is powerful but lazy and set in his ways, even more so than other Fae Lords. His laziness comes from him being cut off from the mortal world completely – now that there is a way to his domain, he is waking up, stretching himself.

Almost out of a sense of play, he has extended his powers into the mortal world. He relishes the thought of gathering more sworn followers from a new era of human history.

Drive:	To increase my numbers of loyal followers
Physical Skills:	Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Melee 4
Mental Skills:	Art 5, Lore 5
Social Skills:	Charm 3, Conviction 5, High Society 5
Endurance:	19
Will:	21
Traits:	Graceful, Presence, The Sight, Glamour (Persistent Illusion, Unholy Terror), Monstrous Toughness, Monstrous Will, Supernatural Bargain, Weathermonger (Fast Working, The Power of the Land)

New Trait: Monstrous Will Grants a monster or powerful NPC an extra 8 points of Will. It is not available to player characters.





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PART ONE: THE MORTAL WORLD

Initial Situation

Outside the mists are a film crew, reporting for the news, and two police cars turning people away. One of the reporters from the news crew, Janet Fleetwood, has gone missing. The police are standing by, and not going into the mist. The crew will have to show credentials or somehow persuade the police to let them in. The officer in charge, Stuart Horton, isn't inclined to stop someone going into the mist who is idiotic enough to be determined to do it. He's also out of his depth and knows it, and is willing to grasp at straws.

Getting through the mists is not an easy matter – it's easy to wander round in circles and not make any progress. A difficulty 12 Awareness test will let a character navigate their way to either the town of Haltwhistle or to the Mare and Foal stones.

An obvious alternative occurs on a failed test – Hadrian's Wall. The Wall is quite intact here, taller than a person, and following it into the mist helps the crew reach a destination. Unfortunately, it's not the most desired destination, but rather a Faerie Domain — the domain of the Lord of Ruins. See part two for details.

First Location

Haltwhistle is an old town of stone-faced houses in the shadow of Hadrian's Wall. Even in ordinary times, there is a sense of isolation about the place, and the only visitors are walkers and ramblers come to explore the countryside and the Wall. It is not a large settlement – in more densely populated parts of the countryside it would be no more than a village – but its isolation and visitors mean there are amenities such as a local market, an antiquarian specialist bookshop, hotels, and several pubs.

Reaching Haltwhistle, the mists thin. But the crew face an eerie sight: the entire town is asleep. A few people have passed out in the streets, though most have made it indoors.

Dogs stalk the streets – huge mastiffs. Unsurprisingly, these dogs are no mundane beasts, but Fae hounds. The dogs have intelligence, but will not communicate. They are not immediately hostile, but a pair will seek to follow a group of waking mortals who wander into Haltwhistle.

The hounds will become hostile should the player characters interfere with any of the sleepers, or try to wake them up. They will growl a warning first, and attack if the one warned does not back off.

The Hounds

Drive:	To prevent interference with the sleepers
Physical Skills:	Athletics 3, Awareness 3 (Tracking 5), Melee 3, Stealth 3
Mental Skills:	Lore 1, Survival 4
Social Skills:	Taunt 2
Traits:	The Sight, Quick Reflexes, Night Sight
Limitation:	Vulnerability (bronze)
Endurance:	11
Will:	8
Damage:	d6+2 (natural weapons)

Leads

It is hard to wake someone sleeping, but if the Hounds are defeated or evaded, someone can be awoken with a little time and a difficulty 8 Medicine test. Any of the sleepers can reveal the following.

- Yesterday evening there was a loud clap of thunder, before the mists came over the town yesterday evening, and then they felt extremely tired: within an hour they were absolutely sound asleep.
- The protestors have a tent camp. There are about a dozen of them staying there. Roll d6; on an odd roll the sleeper agrees with the protestors (protecting the environment) and on an even roll they are angry with them (they are taking away investment from the town). They will also mention a businesswoman with them in her own tent who really didn't fit in. The sleeper will mention the protestors, by raising the theory that they were somehow connected with the mist.
- The professor in charge of the archaeological dig, Professor Grünwald, is staying at the Centre of Britain Hotel.

Some Sleepers

Tony Antoniou, chef at the hotel.

Julie Baker, farmer.

Christopher Greenwood, retired, was in the pub; used to work in the paint factory, since closed.

Joan Bennett, post office manager.

Professor Grünwald is the obvious lead. The door to the hotel is locked, so they will have to break in, but they can find her room by looking in at reception.

Grünwald is asleep, like everyone else, and will need to be awoken. She will need to be convinced to talk with a relevant social test. Her immediate reaction will understandably

be to try to call the authorities (though the telephones are currently down and there is no mobile phone reception) or drive out of town (likely to be disastrous in the mists). But if persuaded to talk, she will reveal the information below.

- Her team was joined by one Martin Gardner, of Oxford University. She didn't know him, nor was she expecting him, but he seemed to know what he was talking about and where to dig. His credentials checked out.
- Under Gardner's directions, they dug, and about twenty feet down found a circular stone with an elaborate knotwork design. When they found it, Gardner grabbed the stone and fled, pursued by her two assistants, Phil and Jim.
- Grünwald couldn't find them, though they were headed in the direction of Hadrian's Wall. After a while she headed back to town. There was a crack of thunder, and she began to feel extremely sleepy, so she headed to her room.
- Gardner was nervous about the protestors, especially the businesswoman with them.

Complications

The protest camp is both another logical avenue for investigation and a potential complicating factor. It consists of a dozen or so tents and a caravan. Most the protestors are a stereotypical mix of eco-activists and new-age travellers, with a tendency towards light drug use and dreadlocks, but not everyone fits into this stereotype.

The camp is in the heart of the mists, and they are just as dense as they were when the characters tried to get in. Unlike in the town itself, people are not asleep here. Several people have gone missing looking for a way out. They are panicked and uncertain. They will be suspicious of the player characters, but any good story and a challenge level 8 social skill test will get them to open up. Most of the protestors are more open to the idea of the supernatural than the good citizens of Haltwhistle.

Some Activists

Tim Knight, officious, thinks himself a leader. And keen on violence if it comes down to it – he's the most likely to openly challenge the player characters. Use the thug description on page 239 of *Liminal* if it proves necessary.

Clare, a pagan, and self-proclaimed witch, but not a full magical practitioner. That said, sometimes her spells have minor effects and she has the potential.

Taz, a nonbinary teenager thrown out by their birth family. The activists are their family now.

Some of these activists will be prisoners of the Fae, described below.

The person in charge is Indra Jatt, but she has retreated to her caravan. She certainly does not fit the eco-activist stereotype. In the caravan, in a locked briefcase, she has a small

arsenal of weapons – half a dozen knives made of bronze, and the same number of pistols. Jatt also has notes, taken from the archives of P Division, on faerie realms. She will not say how she got hold of them.

Jatt is planning an assault on the domain of the Lord of Ruins. She knows where the entrance is – at the nearest point on Hadrian's Wall to the Mare and Foal stones. What she wants out of this is the Red Cloak of Padarn, which must be within the realm. She also believes, correctly, that anyone who has gone missing in the mists will end up there. Perhaps she can persuade the protestors to get involved – a few are comfortable with violence.

If the protestors do become violent, apart from Jatt and Tim Knight, they are a mob.

But the crew of Liminals provides a much better bet. Indra will try to persuade them to help, handing out weapons as needed, with the excuse of a rescue operation. As for warding off the realm again, the answer must lie within the domain – Jatt does not know.

Final Location

If the player characters head out to the Mare and Foal Stones, they will find Charles Gardner. With him are two revenants- the animated corpses of Phil and Jim, and the broken remains of the circular stone. He is conducting a geomantic ritual. If not stopped, he gains an entire 10 points of Will. He is already attuned to the area, gaining a +1 bonus to all his actions through the power of geomancy.

Gardner will fight and is willing to kill, but will not face suicidal odds, preferring to flee into the mist, leaving his sinister servants to delay pursuers. However, he will fight not to be taken alive. If somehow captured and questioned, a social skill test will persuade him to talk.

He will reveal his desire for the geomantic power, that he broke the stone, and that he killed Phil and Jim to give his drawing of the energy an extra boost. He is not at all remorseful. Gardner will mention that the stone was a seal, and breaking it opened the gateways to beyond. He is unsurprised if told about the sleepers — but he will firmly deny it is his problem.

A player character with Ward magic could potentially repair the ward, burying the stone again in the process. A difficulty 8 Lore test will work this out, but the issue is that it will need a ridiculous amount of Will: 20 points. The task is going to be beyond them for the moment. The other solution is the cooperation of the Fae Lord of the realm, wittingly or through trickery.

The Revenants

Drive: Protect Charles Gardner
Physical Skills: Awareness 1, Athletics 1, Melee 3
Mental Skills: None
Social Skills: Taunt 2
Traits: Night Sight, Brawny, Monstrous Toughness
Endurance: 17
Will: 8
Damage: d6+3 (unarmed)





PART TWO: THE DOMAIN OF RUINS

Initial Situation

The domain of the Lord of Ruins consists of crumbling Roman monumental buildings standing in green fields — most notably a version of Hadrian's Wall and some of its fortresses. The commoners of the domain present themselves as Roman era soldiers, albeit ones with sharp features and pointed ears, and a mishmash of different styles from the centuries Rome was in Britain.

Getting into the domain is simply a matter of stepping through a particular gap in Hadrian's Wall. Those lost in the mist will find themselves eventually doing this automatically.

First Location

A visitor to the domain finds themselves in the centre of a crumbling gatehouse, guarded by a dozen Fae soldiers. There are two exits from the gatehouse — a doorway to the rest of the domain, and a doorway back into the mortal world, but the Fae soldiers will not permit passage through either doorway unless a visitor passes the challenge.

If the player characters are with Indra Jatt, and she has her way, the method will be simply fighting one's way in, but this will turn every Fae being in the realm against intruders. It may be better to just deal with the challenge: a very simple game of dice with one of the soldiers. The highest roll on two six-sided dice added together wins.

If the crew win, they can proceed unimpeded. Or, for that matter, leave if they stumbled in here before they were ready. If they lose, they will be captured and held with the other prisoners — or they can fight as above.

Unsurprisingly, the Fae soldier cheats: one of their dice will always show a 6. The crew will still be able to win if they can beat the total (have their nominated player actually roll dice). Alternatively they can cheat (challenge level 11), though being caught at cheating has the same effects as losing.

The Fae soldiers have vulnerability to bronze, and Faerie sight. They are a mob, as described on page 84 of *Liminal*, with a skill level of 1 per 2 soldiers, to a maximum of 3, inflicting d6+1 damage, and with an Endurance score of 3 each.

Leads

The key reasons for coming here are information, and the prisoners. And the soldiers will happily gossip with the player characters, whether they won or lost the game. If they lost,

the gossip will of course be on the way to the prison, a tower with a collapsed roof, but with an intact and securely locked lower floor.

Standing guard outside the locked tower where prisoners are held is a hulking brute of a Fae, again in Roman armour. He calls himself Viribus.

Viribus

Drive:	Bend the prisoners to my will
Physical Skills:	Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Survival 2, Melee 4, Stealth 2
Mental Skills:	Lore 1
Social Skills:	Taunt 3
Traits:	Brawny, Frightening, Monstrous Toughness, The Sight
Limitation:	Vulnerability (bronze)
Endurance:	18
Will:	8
Damage:	d6+4 (natural weapons or huge spear)

Viribus actually has plans, though he is not the quickest thinker. Through a mixture of threats and food, given out when the prisoners swear to support him, he will gain them as an army of his own, with which to challenge the Lord of Ruins. He may well seek to recruit the player characters to his cause.

Some Prisoners

Locals and protestors (use the previous lists).

Elias and Barnaby Johnson, a couple of young visiting hikers.

Janice Fleetwood, a reporter who was looking into the missing town.

Viribus will offer food to any prisoners who agree to support him. Any player character who knows anything about the Fae will know eating the food is a very bad idea; it will seal the support given to Viribus and anchor the one who has eaten in the realm, making it hard or impossible for them to leave in an ordinary timeframe.

A relevant test will be needed to dissuade everyone from eating – the prisoners haven't eaten for a while, and don't fully believe in what is going on. Perhaps one of the crew may have thought to bring their own food.

The prisoners have relevant information to offer.

- The one in charge – not the ogre – also wants a swearing of allegiance. The speaker has a feeling that if they give it, they won't ever leave.
- There's apparently a group of Roman soldiers in an armed camp holding out against the Fae.
- The Lord of this place, according to the Fae, is called the Lord of Ruins. He can control the weather. He caused the mist.



Complications

The matter of the Roman soldiers in the realm, and the Red Cloak of Padarn, are a complication. If she is not put off, Indra Jatt will invade with some of the protestors, to free the prisoners and get hold of the Cloak.

There are sixty soldiers, and they have a permanent fortified camp. They come from the first century CE, and are a remnant of the fabled Ninth Legion, lost in Scotland. They are still mortal, but have been here a very long time indeed; they have lost track. They pass the time through training, games, and exploring the realm. Some explorers have reported hidden pathways to further Fae domains, others have become lost, but most others have looped back to their starting point.

Communicating with the soldiers requires a knowledge of Latin or ancient Brythonic, though Welsh might let one haltingly get by in the latter language.

The soldiers would like to leave, though they will certainly not return to their own time. The crew must decide what to do with them. If they are promised a way out, they will help the player characters.

When the Romans Return

The Romans have eaten Fae food, and are set loose from their own time. They do not age while in the Domain of Ruins. They cannot leave without one of the player characters coming through the gateway out of the Domain with them, even now the way is open.

When they leave, they will come to the modern world. They will start again to age normally, and will be able to resume their lives as well as they can.

Among the soldiers, leading them, is one who came later: Paturnus Rufus, or Padarn the Red, a dashing officer with strawberry blonde hair, still apparently young – at least until one looks into his eyes. He does indeed wear a brilliant red cloak. He is willing to trade the cloak to the crew in exchange for freedom, for himself and his men.

In terms of game mechanics, the soldiers are an armed mob.

The Stalemate

The Ninth Legion refuse to swear allegiance to the Lord of Ruins, despite his entreaties. He is not a pagan god, but a monster, one who will kill and kidnap and destroy. The Lord of Ruins is no fit deity for a Roman soldier, especially one in an alien land who does not want to completely lose himself.

It might be thought that the Lord of Ruins could easily capture or destroy the Ninth Legion over the vast stretches of time they have been here. True, time flows differently in a Fae realm, but every soldier knows they have been here for more than a human lifetime, even if the days sometimes pass so quickly, for all that they seem the same.

Still, the legionaries have held the Fae at bay over many battles, and their numbers are a fraction of what they once were. In an early battle, where the Ninth Legion were victorious though they lost half their number, they forced the Lord of Ruins to promise he would never attack them again. He has sent his forces, but not come himself.

The Lord of Ruins, after the Ninth Legion defeated him, wants them to serve him even more.

Paternus Rufus

Drive:	Lead my men to freedom!
Physical Skills:	Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Melee 3, Shoot 2
Mental Skills:	Lore 2, Survival 1
Social Skills:	Charm 2, Conviction 2, High Society 1, Rhetoric 2, Taunt 2
Traits:	The Red Robe (see below)
Endurance:	11
Will:	10
Damage:	d6+2 Roman arms and armour

The Red Robe is a scarlet cloak made of wool, of exceptional quality. It is bright and conspicuous. It is a magical artefact, and grants a +2 bonus to uses of Rhetoric and Charm. Further, the wearer can spend a point of Will to gain a magical result, persuading someone of something extremely improbable, albeit at +2 difficulty and opposed by the target's Conviction. It is worth 2 points.

If the crew seek to persuade the Lord of Ruins to cut himself off from the mortal world, the Red Robe could be just what they need — though Indra Jatt wants it for herself and is reluctant to try something so risky if her other objectives are accomplished.

Final Location

The Lord of Ruins dwells in a crumbling palatial structure, with only two rooms not open to the elements. He sits on a throne, and wears a purple cloak and wreath of vine leaves like a Roman Emperor. He is a Fae Lord, enormously powerful in his own domain despite the indolent impression he leaves. In the palace with him are two dozen commoners similar to the soldiers, and three hulking bodyguards similar to Viribus. Taking him on in a fight would be dangerous indeed, unless the crew have, for example, most of a Roman century backing them up.

Killing the Lord of Ruins will lift the mists and end the immediate threat, though it will leave the way to the domain open. It does not solve everything.

Talking is likely to be the better option, and the crew can do this if they have not already caused the Fae to become hostile here. The Lord of Ruins wants followers. He is also bored and wants entertainment and variety.

To get the Lord of Ruins to agree to lend magical might to repair the ward, voluntarily cut himself off from the world, or even lift the mist will require an offer he sees of equal worth. He won't respond well to threats. A hundred prisoners could do it, or persuading the Roman legionaries here to swear allegiance to him. Trickery is likely to be involved.

The power of the Red Robe of Padarn might even persuade the Lord of Ruins to help without offering anything in return.



What if the Crew Fails?

The crew are not certain to succeed in restoring the ward against the Lord of Ruins. Working out what is needed is potentially hard, and getting what is needed harder still. But either House Annwn or the Council of Merlin could do it, by having geomancers gather sufficient energy, perhaps at several locations. But it will take them several weeks, during which time over a hundred other people will go missing, taken to the Domain of Ruins never to return.