

Topiary

Attributes:

S	F	D	W	A	Sz	Ap	E	K
19	10*	12	5	14	20+	10	4	2

He stopped by the hedge-clipper, but made no move to pick it up. Yes, there was something different. In the topiary. And it was so simple, so easy to see, that he just wasn't picking it up. Come on, he scolded himself, you just trimmed the fucking rabbit, so what's the (that's it)

His breath stopped in his throat.

The rabbit was down on all fours, cropping grass. Its belly was against the ground. But not ten minutes ago it had been up on its hind legs, of course it had been, he had trimmed its ears ... and its belly. His eyes darted to the dog. When he had come down the path it had been sitting up, as if begging for a sweet. Now it was crouched, head tilted, the clipped wedge of mouth seeming to snarl silently. And the lions—(oh no, baby, oh no, uh-uh, no way) the lions were closer to the path. The two on his right had subtly changed positions, had drawn closer together. The tail of the one on the left now almost jutted out over the path. When he had come past them and through the gate, that lion had been on the right and he was quite sure its tail had been curled around it.

They were no longer protecting the path; they were blocking it.

Staring at the hedge animals, he realized something had changed while he had his hand over his eyes. The dog had moved closer. No longer crouching, it seemed to be in a running posture, haunches flexed, one front leg forward, the other back. The hedge mouth yawned wider, the pruned sticks looked sharp and vicious. And now he fancied he could see faint eye indentations in the greenery as well. Looking at him. Why do they have to be trimmed? he thought hysterically. They're perfect. Another soft sound. He involuntarily backed up a step when he looked at the lions. One of the two on the right seemed to have drawn slightly ahead of the other. Its head was lowered. One paw had stolen almost all the way to the low fence. Dear God, what next?

(next it leaps over and gobbles you up like something in an evil nursery fable)

He jerked his head around to look at the dog and it was halfway down the pathway, just behind the lions now, its mouth wide and yawning. Before, it had only been a hedge clipped in the general shape of a dog, something that lost all definition when you got up close to it. But now Jack could see that it had been clipped to look like a German shepherd, and shepherds could be mean. You could train shepherds to kill.

It wasn't the snowmobile he wanted but the gascan held onto the back by a pair of elastic straps. His hands, still clad in Howard Cottrell's blue mittens, seized the top strap and pulled it free as the hedge lion roared behind him — a sound that seemed to be more in his head than outside of it.

Fight Bonus: 1d6

Weapons:

Claw 50%, 1d4 + FB (x2)

Bite 50%, 1d6 + FB

Armor:

none

Skills:

none

Habitat: The Overlook

Move: 12

HP: 15

Sanity Loss: 1/1d4

*Topiaries are flammable

Powers of the Red:

Telepathy

Widow's Tongue

Attributes:

S	F	D	W	A	Sz	Ap	E	K
6	10	8	1	8	9	4	1	1

Ahead of us, the path ended. Or perhaps it had been overgrown. The plants blocking the way were a filthy grayish black, and from their branches flowers sprouted—I think they were flowers—the pinkish-red of infected wounds. They were long, like lilies on the verge of blooming, and they were opening and closing slowly, making those smacking sounds. Only now that we were upon them, it no longer sounded like smacking. It sounded like talking.

There comes a point where the mind either breaks or shuts itself down. I know that now. I was all at once filled with a species of surreal calm I've never felt before. On one level I knew that I was there, looking at those hideous, slow-talking blossoms. But on another, I rejected that completely. I was at home. In my bed. Had to be. I'd overslept the alarm, that was all. I wasn't going to beat Roger to the office as I'd wanted to, but that was okay. More than okay. Because when I finally did wake up, all of this would be gone.

"What in God's name are they?" Roger asked.

Tina Barfield looked at me with her eyebrows raised. It was the expression of a teacher calling on a student who should know the answer. "They're the Tongues," I said. "Remember the letter? She said some of the Tongues had begun to wag."

"Good for you," the woman said. "You're maybe not as stupid as you acted when Carlos first got in touch with you." For a moment no one said anything. The three of us simply looked at those blossoms opening and closing, their scarlet interiors winking. The soft, toothless whispering sound made me feel like clapping my hands over my ears. It was almost words, you see. Almost real talk.

Ah, fuck. Scratch that. It was real talk.

"Tongues?" Roger asked at last.

"They're widow's tongue," Tina Barfield replied. Known in some European countries as witch's tongue or crone bane. Do you know what they're talking about, Mr. Kenton?"

She lead us back quickly and with no hesitation. Once I clearly saw an earth-clotted root come snaking out of the foliage at the left side of THERE Street and slither around her shoe. She gave her foot an impatient jerk, snapping the root without even looking down. And all the time we could hear that low, whispering, smacking sound behind us.

Tongues, wagging.

Fight Bonus: -1d4

Weapons:

Vine (50%), 1d2 + FB

Armor:

none

Skills:

none

Habitat: Any (soil)

Move: 0

HP: 9

Sanity Loss: 1/1d3+1