

The Loss Specialist

An Adventure for **JAGS Wonderland**



The Loss Specialist

This is a scenario for JAGS Wonderland for 2-4 players and a GM.

It contains player and GM information. If you intend to play in The Loss Specialist do not read the material presented in the GM's section. The player's section provides character creation details and a description of the player's shared background. GMs should read both sections and be familiar with the history in the Player's section.

Player's Section

The characters are 50 Base Points, 4 Archetype Point people living in modern times (2006) who share a common background and tragedy (described below). They are all in their mid / early 20s; at the start of the game they have no specific knowledge of Wonderland or the supernatural and are not infected.

Key Character Guidelines

There are three key character guidelines that should be considered at character design time

- The game begins with a scene that takes place in 1992 when the characters are approximately 12 years old. During this segment the PCs and NPCs agree to meet again in 10-years time for a reunion and to support each other. Players should design characters who are amenable to this
- As young adults the characters are still affected by the tragedy they suffered as children. This is not a crippling depression but the characters' lives should be in some way shaped by a sense of loss. It may have positive aspects but they are not, entirely, 'over it.' We encourage each character to identify something important that is unresolved in their lives as a result of this loss. The meat of the game will have more meaning if they still feel and deal with the aftershocks of the significant events of their young lives
- The PCs will be part of a group (the "Orphans") who will be offered an enigmatic deal in 2006 (not during the flashback) that may or may not be a wise course of action. While it is not necessary that the PCs accept the deal, it is important that they stay in contact with the NPCs (some of whom, very likely, will accept it) – perhaps out of curiosity or to 'protect' their friends in case the situation turns dangerous

Characters who will not attend the reunion or who will completely disengage from the group afterward (rejecting participation in the arrangement) may not work so well in the game.

What is JAGS Wonderland?

JAGS Wonderland is a source book for the JAGS roleplaying game system. JAGS and the JAGS Wonderland source book are free and available at <http://www.jagsrpg.org>

Note that it is not required that the characters be enthusiastic or particularly cooperative. These guidelines are meant to prevent the characters from disengaging from the scenario.

Character Shared Background

The '60's were an era of pharmaceutical revolution that swept the campuses and progressive outposts of American culture (the revolution came to the streets two decades later with the rise of the crack epidemic). Before the war on drugs, emergent psychoactive chemicals like lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and dimethoxy-4-methylamphetamine (DOM) were considered a possible road to self-knowledge or even enlightenment.

The objective of a family of piracetam-like nootropics test-marketed by Kefauver-Harris LTD (a joint venture between two large, multinational pharma-corps who's name you can find in any modern newspaper) was somewhat less ambitious than cosmic illumination.

Ascendanx (trade name) was supposed to make you smart.

It may have worked; clinical studies are inconclusive on that score, but what is a matter of indisputable public record is that, taken consistently over a period of several years, it killed you. Glioblastoma multiforme—most common type of brain tumor to occur in adults—occurred in close to 90% of the population taking Ascendanx. By the time the Age of Aquarius was dimming and the Age of Mergers and Acquisitions (the Regan 80's) was dawning it became clear that a certain group of explorers in the outer realms of psychopharmological medication were not going to live to see the new millennium.

These were your parents.

Your Parents

Ascendanx appealed to men and women who were adventurous, ambitious, and had little respect for tradition, while eagerly (and all too credibly) embracing the promise of science.

Ascendanx was hugely popular with intellectuals, academics, members of the press (the ones who had stopped the War and brought down a presidency). It was taken, largely, by those who were already considered intelligent and saw Ascendanx as a way to widen the gap; to enhance their natural advantage.

In retrospect their decision to gamble with their brains can be seen as a fatal hubris but this is not entirely fair: most of the heavy users were professionals in their early thirties (the average user was 30 and already in the upper 85th percentile of wage earners in 1978), beginning to see their careers come to fruition in an era sliding from a euphoria of hope toward cynicism, moral stagnation, and economic collapse. They came of age in an era that seemed pivotal

in history and it was all too easy to imagine that by taking (measured) risks, they would be the ushers of an inevitable utopia.

Perhaps Ascendanx seemed to offer hope in the face of hopelessness – a miracle cure for a culture that seemed unglued, impotent, and cursed by demagoguery in the face of a great vacuum of leadership.

The first cases of terminal cancer appeared in Ascendanx users in 1983; by 1987 it was clear that total casualties would be in the low triple digits (lawyers eventually cut the knot at 103 fatalities and some 226 cases of treatable, non-lethal tort).

Children of the 80's

All of you share canonical memories – the first signs of trouble, the hospital visits for tests, and the fearful unveiling of their awful conclusions... the horrible night or morning or late afternoon when the news broke and your world crumbled into nightmare.

Many children lost one parent, but due to the insular world of the Ascendanx users (they were of a type and a time, and a place often characterized as Brookline, Berkeley, and Beltway), there was even more tragedy for some – the Ascendanx Orphans, as they were called – children who would lose both parents to mistakes made decades earlier.

You are first class of Ascendanx Orphans. The average Ascendanx Orphan was born in 1980 and was seven years old when legal proceedings against the parent company of Kefauver-Harris began in earnest. There are some 12 to 15 orphans in your “class” of plaintiffs and another group even younger – children conceived during the trial (1987 to 1992) by plaintiffs who knew they were dying.

The Crystal City Settlement

In 1992 the lawyers (Pierce and Pierce out of New York) and Kefauver-Harris reached an agreement; the counsel for the plaintiffs would retire rich. The surviving spouses and children would be richly compensated for their loss, and the Orphans would be provided massive trusts (\$40 million USD apiece) to be managed by trustees until the completion of their education.

This agreement was reached in a conference room of the Crystal City Marriot in Washington DC where more than forty people (your parents, their lawyers, the corporate lawyers, and the children) met to hash out the details and close that chapter.

Your shared memory of each other covers three days in the summer – grave, somber meetings, flashes of anger and rage, and finally resolution. Your future and fortune was assured. Your parents could get on with the task of dying.

On the last night of the meeting – the night when everything was finally settled, you and the other Orphans met in private – one of the only times you were away from your parents during that horrible weekend – and you reached an agreement that night to stay friends, to support each other, and to meet in ten years time no matter what happened.

Character Design

Your characters should be 50-point “normal” people -- who’s lives are defined by the Crystal City Settlement in both positive and negative ways:

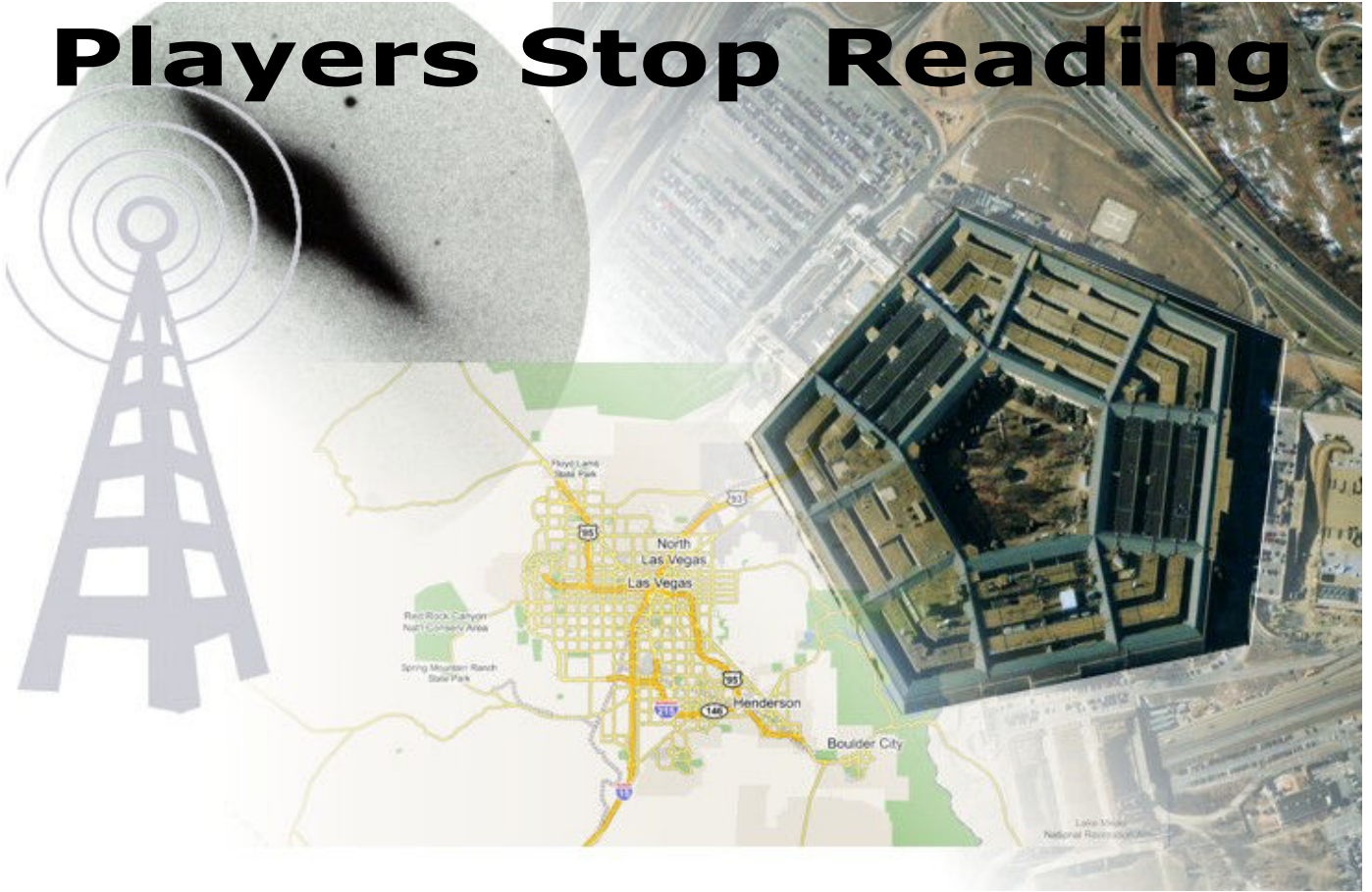
All characters are may purchase “*rich*” (with 30 to 50 million dollars in assets) for no points due to the Crystal City Settlement. Characters that do not wish to be rich may use the additional 8 points for other things (this represents poor financial management over the last 10 years).

Each player should choose an important element in their life that remains unresolved as a result of their experience and the lingering sense of loss.

The early loss of their parents may have made them spiritual or reflective but there is no supernatural aspect to their lives; they are not “infected”

GM's Section

Players Stop Reading



Game Overview

This section describes the back story (“What’s going on”) the NPC groups (“The Antagonists”) and then provides some ideas about how this is likely to play out (“Acts and Scenes”) with GM’s notes and so-on.

The approach we’ve taken is to provide an overview of the situation and antagonists whose plans are in-motion along with descriptions of several likely events or scenes (such as the characters agreeing to work with the Loss Specialist) that are described in some detail.

Ultimately, however, the PC’s should drive the plot of the story through their character’s actions and decisions. Characters may well drive the action away from what we expect – our aim is to provide enough structure and background so that the GM can interpret events on the fly even when they’re outside of what we’ve predicted.

Game Structure

The game is structured in five phases and a coda; the action in the first two phases is fairly scripted and the players have agreed to participate (see Key Character Guidelines in the Player’s Section). The action in the middle three phases may vary widely depending on the player’s decisions and the character’s actions.

- 1 **Flashback:** The game begins during the summer of 1992 when the characters are 10-15 years old. During this scene the characters meet each other and the other Orphans (including some key NPCs) and are pressured to convince the rest of the group to participate in a (bad) financial deal concerning their trust fund. They should also make the agreement to be part of the re-union; it’s important that the players make characters who would agree to this
- 2 **Reunion:** The game resumes in 2005 when the characters meet and discover that there is yet another “opportunity” – the chance to work with a Loss Specialist who may be able to provide some degree of healing and closure
- 3 **Midnight at the Radio Tower:** The Loss Specialist and his (mysterious) backers have arranged for an “experiment” at a radio station. The “experiment” goes... badly... and results in a terrifying Descent and a change to the character’s nature (a change similar to being Twisted described in the appendix)
- 4 **Scrum:** The limited success of the radio tower experiment has put the characters into a state of jeopardy with a “clock” counting down – they must act quickly to understand what is happening to them and what’s at stake. Fortunately three sets of antagonists (who know some of the story) are trying to capture / use / kill them and may be available for questioning
- 5 **Climax and Resolution:** With sufficient understanding of the situation, the characters have the opportunity to take control of it and drive the action toward a desired outcome (they have several choices) – their opposition, however, is nearly hysterical at this point, and they’re being chased by corporate assassins, warlocks, fantasy monsters, and flying saucers
- 6 **Coda:** The end of the scenario, wrap up, and any seeds for further stories with these characters

They have a shared history and a personal agenda for attending the reunion (for fellowship, closure, to honor their agreement, etc.) but there are forces they are unaware of that have been tracking them with great interest.

**Lamenoumen -- pronounced
Lamen-ou-men as in, "to
lament"**

What's going on?

The character's unique psychological experience (the loss of their parents in a certain way, the loss of their childhood, their relative fame and subsequent fortune) connects them to deep elements of the universe – the physical manifestation of loss and sorrow on Chessboard Four.

They are, in a sense, the physical components of a ritual or spell that can open a channel to a deep realm called The Palace – a vast subterranean chamber on the fourth chessboard that is a howling vortex of loneliness, emptiness and deficiency.

It is full of what is called Negative Space.

This is a terrible place; its architecture reflects its cruel, all-too-human nature. The things that live there are not evil; it's not the pain of loss that they revel in, it's the event itself and the absence which follows from it. To the **Lamenoumen** the loss of anything is music to them, the more extreme, the more convoluted, the more beautiful. And although it's common, the finality of death is like a beautiful symphony. To them, the Universe, full of abandonment, forsakenness, and mortality, is full of beauty.

During their ordeal – and with each anniversary – the character's Shadows are invited to a great feast in the magnificent, terrifying halls of The Palace. While they meet with each other and relive the past and discuss their future, their deeper selves feast on strange wines and delicate meats that have a sweetness mixed with an intolerable misery; the "hole" in their lives left by the premature death of their parents is a hunger that can be addressed but not sated.

It is during this period that a ritual performed with them can reach out to the beings of The Palace; contact can be made. And under the right circumstances (a remote location, a powerful transmitter to act as a beacon, etc.) The Palace can be called up.

Why would anyone do such a thing? There are two main reasons, one human and one inhuman.

The First Agenda – The Commission

The first reason is that life – even a "perfect" life – can be unbearable. Everyone knows this is true and everyone knows that to admit it is unacceptable. Society must function, and to function, we must pretend that we are fine. Some people have to pretend a little. Others have to pretend a lot, but society doesn't care how hard it is, or how much pain there is beneath the surface: society must function.

For those who pretend so much that they begin to believe their own façade, loss – real, devastating, undeniable, unbearable loss – glows like truth. It speaks the language of the human soul, with a voice that cannot be ignored or pretended over.

To those who have smothered their humanity with the pretence necessary to function in Society, loss feels like life itself.

There are a people whose surface hides an agony they may not, themselves, recognize except through reflections in others. They might see a glimpse of themselves in certain pictures, certain movies, certain books. They may not even understand (fully) why they are drawn to these things (these works and people that are shot through with darkness) but they are. To works of

sadness, terror, and to others like themselves, who share the terrible secret that their public selves are pretense and they live their lives pretending.

They seek works of exquisite misery and even depravity, sharing them in secret, studying them, enjoying passions they cannot express to others, and some of them – the most visionary – seek an escape; they want to travel to a place that must exist. A place they cannot bare to be fictional. There are exotic secrets that must be learned. Techniques that must be used.

This is the agenda of the Lottery Commission: to use the characters as a means to go to a place that will accept and understand them.

The Second Agenda – Global Alienation

Death is the ultimate loss for mortal beings – the end of everything they are and everything they might be, but The Palace cannot (and would not if it could) sponsor the extinction of humanity. There would, at that point, be nothing left to lose.

But there are widespread losses that could be engineered; the loss of emotion. The loss of empathy. The loss of humanity. The Rational Actors have limitations; they are not entirely aware of the lower chessboards; they are incapable of fully understanding the Palace and the universe they live in.

They do, however, understand that The Palace could be used as an engine of a widespread epidemic of Alienation – an “alienation singularity” with a 17 kilometer “horizon” from which no humanity would escape.

The Rational Actors have always worked with humans to shore up their own weaknesses (they would never admit this – to suggest that they even have weaknesses is apostasy; to suggest humans might have advantages over them, heresy). They are watching with a cold, baleful eye, as one of their flesh and blood allies develops the alienation singularity.

Their ally does not need the characters – she has her own “key” to the Palace – but the Lottery Commission and the character’s involvement represents a threat to her plans that cannot be allowed to proceed. She does not see the characters as her enemies, personally, but she will take whatever steps are necessary to stop them.

Deeper Agendas

And there may be forces behind these forces as well. The Lottery Commission had the vision, but it took the arrival of a Loss Specialist show them how it might be realized. The Rational Actors represent a perversion of humanity, but what’s behind them?

The Antagonists

There are three agencies – groups – whose agendas and designs intersect with the characters. They are all interested in the characters for certain reasons and they all are willing to force their outcome.

- **The Lottery Commission:** A lodge of Students of the Invisible (magicians) who share an eponymous obsession and have recently joined with a guide – a Loss Specialist – who has informed them that the characters are the key to a lock that may hold the solution to realizing their dreams. With their sponsorship, the Loss Specialist can secure what he needs – the character’s cooperation and a defunct radio station powerful enough for one final broadcast.

- **Dr. Stephanie Law's Radio Show:** A radio personality on the verge of becoming a national sensation, Dr. Law is popular because she has an uncompromising message. But she's known from the beginning that telling people isn't enough. To make them change, you need to motivate them. Her discovery of the Rational Actors – fellow travelers in the reforming of humanity – energized her and gave her the missing pieces. Her plans are proceeding apace but the Commission's work threatens to interfere and that cannot be allowed. No one stands up to Dr. Law – not on the phone, not in the press, and definitely – definitely – not on the radio.
- **Big Pharma:** Mistakes were made; Killing a hundred people inadvertently when you're trying to kill billions isn't progress – it's exposure. Ascendanx has been out of the press for awhile but there are still loose ends and they're all getting together for a big reunion. What better time to tie them up?

The Lottery Commission (and the Loss Specialist)

On June 28th, 1948 Shirley Jackson published *The Lottery* (<http://www.classicshorts.com/stories/lotry.html>) in the New Yorker. It was immediately controversial, gripping the public imagination with a force that's still sharp even after decades. None of the men who would grow up to form the Lottery Commission read it then, of course, but all of them came across it as they grew toward maturity.

Mr. Graves confessed upon reading it, that he could not imagine such a vivid tale to be a work of fiction – he was fifteen, and believed it to be real. Mr. Martin (who read it much later in his life) was under no such illusions, but he (like the others) felt it could be real and that, perhaps, such a thing could be made to come-to-pass.

This is not as strange as it might sound; the story is evocative, becoming a notorious classic upon publication. It has an impact on people and some respond more strongly than others. It is more powerful, still because it is a difficult story to parse – it doesn't explain itself – and the author has never neutered it through clarification.

Many readers see it as an attack on traditional values – a metaphor for the brutality of tradition, patriarchy, and maybe even capitalism. Those readers often find it offensive (it was banned in South Africa; the author's comment was to suggest that they understood it), but there are other possible reactions.

The men (and vanishingly few, highly sought after women) who form the Lottery Commission share a love for the story that goes beyond literary appreciation and into obsession. It speaks to them – to a private, damaged place deep inside them that they long ago decided to turn away from and in rejection, it became a compulsion. This is not something that they understand themselves (when they discuss the story, they often find some intellectual approach or else they pontificate on its illustration of tradition, or fidelity, or some other beside-the-point aspect), but here is the truth:

The story depicts a society – our society, not an alien one – that embraces nihilism and loss in a way that is so real it feels almost tangible. To the damaged, private members of the Commission, it suggests a tantalizing potential: in such a society, they would feel fulfilled. The horror that they carry inside them would be reflected in Society; echoed back. Not just accepted, but enforced and acted out. The village in *The Lottery* shows them what their emotional hurt and long-ago-loss might look like inscribed in flesh.

Most of the fellow travelers in the underground community of Shirley Jackson fetishists have accepted that the words in print are the closest they will ever get to visiting the Village; to see and even, perhaps, participate in a Lottery themselves, but the Commission represents the most ambitious and accomplished (and, yes, perverse) of the school.

They know that the village exists with the unsubstantiated faith of a zealot, and they have turned to the invisible schools, seeking answers. They have uncovered truths in pursuit of their goal that have spurred them to even greater heights, and now their dedication has been answered:

The Loss Specialist has approached them, has shown he understands them, and has offered them passage.

The Loss Specialist

Note: The Loss Specialist is described in more detail in the first scene; this section covers his relationship with the Lottery Commission, how they met him and what they know about him.

Men who practice their perversions in secret and have done so for decades do not expect to be discovered and when they are, they do not appreciate it. The Specialist approached Mr. Summers first (as was appropriate; Mr. Summers was the most senior of the Commission leaders).

He put Mr. Summers at ease – yes, he knew their secrets. No – he did not share them – but they do have something in common: the Commission members know in their hearts that the story must be real. That there has to be some way to travel to such a traditional land; to live there. The Loss Specialist knows the same thing – he knows that it is real; that it can be traveled to. And he knows how to get there.

And the Specialist? He studies Loss in all of its forms. His interest is clinical – actuarial, even – but he lacks the means to perform the experiment. With their (financial) support and his expertise, he can arrange for everyone to get what they need.

In truth, they do not trust him, but they are sure of themselves (and sure that they can afford the loss if his plans – this ‘experiment’ fails. And they are obsessed, so the idea that they might win is attractive enough to make them take risks that others might find, frankly, insane.

The Experiment

The Loss Specialist’s experiment has been described to the Commission as a study of subjects with a deep, unique and intimate connection to loss; not just an extreme loss, but an on-going relationship with incompleteness; the Orphan’s history makes them perfect and ‘nearly but not-quite singular’ candidates.

The experiment, he has explained to the Commission, will transform the subjects into agents of emptiness – incarnations of the nameless passion that haunts the Commission’s dark fantasies. When it is done, they will be changed in ways that they will not understand, but they will be able to send the Commission members down to the world that they trust exists.

The Loss Specialist is not the first person to perform this experiment. It is an attempt to replicate the results of a Soviet test performed in the mid-

seventies codenamed CDL1DT or, known by the name given by US intelligence analysts: Cold Light.

The details of the experiment are provided in section 4, but it requires the Orphans to participate in a human sacrifice. The Loss Specialist has told the Commission that the Orphans will be in a fugue state that will make them compliant, but in practice that will not actually be the case (the Loss Specialist has betrayed the Commission members).

Dr. Stephanie Law's Radio Show

Dr. Stephanie Law is a nationally syndicated talk radio host whose morals, ethics, and advice format show plays in more than 200 stations, mostly at late-night and early morning hours (broadcast live at 2:00 AM PST). Despite the late time-slot and a rather controversial point of view on many topics, she is widely considered to be the “next” national phenomena with a built in and dedicated fan base.

She has a common-sense, down-to-business, high-standards reputation but critics claim to have detected a much deeper level of misanthropy in philosophical position.

The critics are right. In four years on the air, Dr. Law (doctorate in physical therapy) has gone from crusading to reform her listeners to despising them. She has gradually developed the idea that humans are inherently weak and flawed – that only a vanishingly few are strong and perceptive enough to truly understand and behave morally. Eighteen months ago she was gratified (and frankly, surprised) to discover that she was not alone.

The Rational Actors made contact with her indirectly first (two “callers” who got her attention and then a personal phone call to discuss matters in more depth). Over the last year-and-a-half she has begun to see the extent of their operation, the cold beauty of their vision for humanity and the potential for making it happen.

To develop the alienation matrix, one needs uniquely damaged people; people with a connection to The Palace. She recognized the Orphans – the “Category Two” ones (conceived after 1987, now in their late teens) as the key to making contact with the Palace and arranging to unleash its power upon mankind.

Unlike the Commission, she is not a magician – she is not infected with Wonderland (although she has come close) and does not fully understand the forces she is playing with. She understands them instinctually. She believes her approach is soundly and completely scientific. The Rational Actors are simply evolved humans. The Palace is a sort of shared Jungian archetype – a human-made manifestation and consensual illusion. Her lack of a formal scientific degree aides her in believing this in the face of strong evidence something far weirder is actually happening.

She has a group of dedicated fans who follow her and act on her advice. Her great strength and weakness is her utter conviction that she is right. She believes her perspective is infinitely rational and no more or less than common sense. Irrational or immoral enemies must be destroyed, but the merely weak or confused should be led.

Class Two Trustees and Her Experiment

Contacting The Palace requires the cooperation of people who have experienced a highly specialized, somewhat Byzantine loss that is interesting, beautiful, and delicious to the Palace denizens.

The Commission plans to use the Reunion Club. Dr. Law has already been working with the second generation – the younger, more traumatized orphans who were conceived during the trial (these are called Class Two Trustees and are generally in their mid-teens now, orphans for just about a decade).

The Class Two trustees are more vulnerable, more angry, and more hurt than the characters are. They have not been difficult to recruit – they feel abandoned and betrayed by their society and believe it to be beyond repair by normal means. Like Dr. Law, they see themselves as radical healers, not destroyers. They believe their twisted vision will bring a measure of peace by silencing pain and passion, alike.

She has six “students” who are nearly fanatic followers of her direction and philosophy. They are all well on their way to becoming either alienated or full-fledged Hunger Disciples in their own right.

Big Pharma

Big Pharma is a Wonderland conspiracy described in the Book of Knots; if you haven't read the Book of Knots, all you need to know is that many (all?) of the top executives of the large multinational pharmaceutical companies are (and have been for many years) involved in a conspiracy to remake mankind into a Wonderland-mutated image. Their mechanism would be a drug (not yet developed) that would be widely administered and cause fearful transformations.

The result would be mass insanity / thousands of mega-deaths.

In this scenario Big Pharma is not an especially supernatural entity compared to the other antagonists; very few members of the Big Pharma conspiracy know about Wonderland. Even those who do have only the most-vague understanding of its nature (the Chessboards, the reality of CPD, etc.) Most of the members of the Big Pharma conspiracy believe they are involved in a much less ambitious, much more mundane effort to develop a drug that will give them control over a large segment of the population. They may be thoroughly immoral, but they are not insane. Still, there are enough members of the conspiracy who are aware of its more paranormal aspects to take action when action is required.

Global Logistics Incorporated

Big Pharma has been tracking the Orphans from afar for the last several years; they are aware that there could be problems – that they might someday re-enter the news and that there are certain... metaphysical characteristics to them that need to be contained.

They work through a variety of private security / detective agencies. The one they're using for this job is called Global Logistics Incorporated that performs surveillance and when necessary handles dirty work (GLI does not work for anyone but the conspiracy).

GLI has assigned a case officer and a surveillance team to monitor the reunion. Huey Longfellow and his team are camped out in the Marriott and

Huey Longfellow

Huey's a bad ass. A partial set of skills for him follows

PHY 12 (15 DP)
REF 12
INT 11

Several military skills include
Firearms skill 14- L3
Unarmed combat 14- L2
First Aid 13- L2
Police Procedure L3 14-
Surveillance L3 14-

Investigative skills
Journalism L2 12-
Electronic Underground L2 12-

Of course he hires specialists to do computer searches and research -- people with considerably higher skills

will be aware of the Orphan's comings and goings. They do not expect trouble (or anything interesting) and are not engaging in close surveillance (eavesdropping, following Orphans, tapping phone lines, etc.) although they have the equipment nearby.

Frankly, they are on the lookout for what they consider to be the biggest potential threat to their client: lawyers. The Loss Specialist looks enough like a lawyer to alert them, and they'll start paying much closer attention. Their likely behavior and reactions are described in the scene descriptions.

Ultimately the characters will probably meet Longfellow; he sees them as victims and pawns of the Lottery Committee. This doesn't mean he'll spare them if his employers want them dead, but it does mean that if things become incredibly weird he might be convinced they have value to him in doing his job. It also means that, given a real choice of enemies, he'd rather see the Orphans win than Dr. Law

Ascendanx History and Background

Ascendanx and its trials were part of the Big Pharma program; its lethality was not intentional – in fact, it was a terrible mistake (it drew attention to the nature of the research and increased scrutiny and oversight).

The drug was developed as a highly pure, highly concentrated hit of superiority – it doesn't make you smarter; it just makes you feel smarter (it also fries your brain). The confidence boost resulted in somewhat higher test scores in clinical trials and some statistical evidence of an IQ increase.

Kefauver-Harris's work wasn't trying to make people feel better; it was trying to find a psychologically addictive additive that could be used to make the cure for humanity more attractive when it was ultimately produced. Superiority can be found natively on Chessboard Four, and when refined and transported to Chessboard One, could be made available in the real world (like all Caretaker operations the Ascendanx development and trials required significant coordination across many levels of reality).

Superiority was supposed to be attractive (and psychologically addictive) to almost everyone (who doesn't secretly think they're smarter, more "right," etc. than everyone else – except me and you, of course), but it was found to be not-so-effective with most test subjects and extremely effective with certain segments of the population.

Kefauver-Harris LTD doesn't exist anymore (it was swallowed long ago in a spasm of leveraged buy-outs). The doctor who led the project committed suicide (a minor media event). Most of the other people involved have moved on to other projects or other initiatives within the conspiracy.

Global Logistics Incorporated's Role In The Game

How GLI features in the game should be determined before the game starts when the GM has seen the characters. There are two basic roles for the GLI team and they are opposite each other:

- 1 GLI as an ally
- 2 GLI as an opponent

GLI as an Ally

In this configuration, Huey—the head of the GLI team—has started to have doubts. He knows he works for a big, amoral, corporate master ... but things have started getting weird. The first thing that went bad was his look into

Adam Faraday. Huey has been at this a long time and he's very good. When he couldn't get much information through his ordinary channels (insurance company records, compromised Federal databases, and contacts in Homeland Security) he went around the problem.

He contacted other Loss Specialists and set up a sophisticated con to get them to work with him and find out what they were all about. He had an iron-clad corporate front, accomplished actors (his team), and all the backing he could ask for. They saw right through him. This really worried him.

He used his influence and manner to get some of their former contacts to open up: he got nothing (well, he got a lot of data—but he still couldn't figure out where, exactly, these guys were coming from). So he looked into Bessler.

And he's pretty sure that Bessler is dead. The man he paid in Mexico disposed of a body beaten and stabbed with its chest cavity open to the heart. The man was credible and Huey knows when people are lying to him.

Scenes With GLI as an Ally

When GLI breaks from Big Pharma, it will be because Huey has tendered his resignation and is told to “sit on the situation” until a new team arrives. He has informed his masters that the characters, themselves, do not seem to be a threat and are not initiating legal action. They're fine with that—and he has nothing to do but just wait and watch. So he decides that after tracking these people (and he'd have put a bullet in their heads if he'd been told to) he owes them a little more than nothing.

1. First Kiss in DC

Huey can show up as a shadowy figure and give the PCs some idea that Bessler (or someone like Bessler) died in Mexico. He'll say he was part of a team hired to “watch the situation” and he doesn't know what's going on but he “thinks they ought to know.”

2. Honeymoon in Vegas

Huey is off the team—but he hasn't quit the job. Right now the characters are off Big Pharma's radar. The new team is on the task, reviewing documents and stuff—but the surveillance has been ratcheted down. Huey has come out there himself, using his old skills and contacts to get to the bottom of this.

He may link up with the characters again and tell them a few things:

People have vanished: People have gone to Dr. Law's compound for therapy and to sign up for her team and disappeared. She says they left. The authorities found nothing. Their loved ones claim they've received horrified, garbled, nonsense phone calls asking for help.

He Knows About Cold Light: He knows that the Russians did it and were scared of what they got. He says that it involved half-heard voices on black boxes of airplanes that crashed and ventriloquist dummies and that the file on it is super-highly classified. However: he also believes that, despite it all, Adam Faraday is on the level. He knows enough about the man's background to know that he has done good work for some very high profile clients.

His advice: “If you have loss issues, while I'd be on my guard, I think he's the man to sort them.”

3. Part of the Team

Why make GLI an ally?

GLI as a friendly force is good if the PCs have very little innate combat ability (Huey can shore them up with tactical advice)—however, the GM should not have him running things. GLI also acts as an information vector that can produce dramatic moments like you would see in a spy drama.

Finally, having them be friendly is just plain simpler.

Why make GLI an Adversary?

This is good if the PCs are competent and *armed*. It gives them a human opponent to fight early on. It makes it clear there are other forces out there and stirs the pot.

When the PCs show up after the experiment, Huey will know they vanished and believe they are dead. After they return, he's fascinated. He has killed enough people that he believes that if there is a return he might get clean with himself. He will be a valuable member of the team and can help break into Dr. Law's compound. Huey may, in the final showdown, redeem himself at risk or loss of his own life.

GLI as an Adversary

In this case Huey is Big Pharma's man and his information leads Big Pharma to want them eliminated (if they make contact with the Palace that could jeopardize Pharma's deep Wonderland contacts). Here are some ways he can show up.

Scenes with GLI as an adversary**1. Fire Fight**

Huey is given the go-signal when they are in the radio station. He moves in. Unfortunately, for him, Adam is aware that he is being tailed and while the experiment is underway there is a fight at the radio station. It's pretty defensible and the team has only hand-guns to use when they go in.

The GLI team is ex-military but not ex-elite military. They are normal people in good physical shape with 13- or 14- gun skills. Huey, as the commander, is prevented by SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) from leading the assault.

When the vehicles approach, the dummy in the room will warn people that "Death is coming with dark headlights and chromed wheels." If people stage a lookout, they will see cars coming with the lights off (the night is very bright).

The GLI hit team is probably 3-4 people.

2. Aftermath

Assuming the GLI team fails (and they likely will, even if PCs are killed—unless they kill all the characters and Faraday (unlikely) the experiment will resurrect the PCs) in the aftermath, Huey quits.

Before he does, though, he could still drop by one last time to give the PCs some information about Dr. Law and Cold Light. He might also fill them in on Bessler.

Scenes / Phases

This section describes key scenes and provides details about characters, their plans, and so-on; it provides a potential plot – not one set in stone.

Flashback

Key to this scene are

- 1) An agreement between the characters (PCs and NPCs) to meet again in about 10 years time
- 2) Meet and talk with William Bessler – one of their number – who is charismatic but with incredibly poor judgment and an overly refined sense of self interest
- 3) Introduce (at a distance) the Class Two (younger) trustees

Less importantly, the characters will have an opportunity to describe and predict the people they will become and get a sense of the characters they'll be playing with during the rest of the game.

Scene Background

The opening scenes are set in 1992 at the Washington DC summit between the plaintiffs (the character's family's attorneys) and the legal counsel for Kefauver-Harris LTD. KHL is there to surrender after a battle that's lasted almost eight years (The first suits were filed in 1988).

This is not a meeting between everyone who was affected by Ascendanx – it's to cover the special cases: the astronomical payouts made to the children of families where both parents will be dead within years.

There are 12 or so families with something like 15 children, nearly 30 parents (the extra parents are the result of divorces and re-marriages) and another 15 lawyers counting the teams from both sides.

Given the non-inconsiderable size of the group, the lawyers have chosen the Crystal City Marriot as a neutral ground to discuss and ultimately resolve the case. At this point the lawyers from both sides have reached what they feel is a reasonable agreement and are going to convince their clients (the character's parents) that they should accept it.

The Party and the Reunion Club

It's rare that the children are unsupervised by at least one parent, but it does happen; it happened exactly once, on the last Friday of the discussion, when the Orphans-to-be found themselves together on an elevator heading up to their respective rooms. The parents are arguing – there are some “hold outs” who could ruin the agreement for everyone. Tempers were flaring and no one (not the mothers, not the fathers) was willing to leave the room. They sent the kids away.

By this point they know each other's names and have some idea who's who (he's the kid of that journalist; she's the daughter of the professor). Because their parents travel in similar circles, they may know each other from other places.

One of the girls (NPC) who's father is more interested in fighting that coming to an agreement is crying inconsolably and William Bessler (16 years old, by far the eldest in the group) offers her a marijuana joint. He announces that he has more up in “his” room and invites the group to come and partake. For those not interested in pot, he also has the key to the minibar.

Bessler is older, very confident. Very smooth. He seems to have it together, but in a lackadaisical way (where others are frantically trying to appear collected). In short, he's very cool and persuasive. Almost all of the NPCs go; the characters may go as well.

Note: The characters who are at the party agree to form the Reunion Club (they cannot bare to call themselves orphans) and they will discuss the agreement with any characters (PC or NPC) who aren't there.

At the party, smoking dope and feeling a good deal better, the characters talk about their dreams – where they expect to be in 10 years time (they'll be in college or just graduating mostly. They'll also be – very likely – filthy rich). Most of the characters want to follow in their parents footsteps or say they want to do charity work or medicine.

The GM should prepare NPC descriptions for some (small) number of Orphans who will be important during the rest of the game and use this

Tone and Atmosphere

The characters have a limited understanding of what's going on – there are meetings in a medium-sized “conference room” during the day and discussions amongst factions of parents and lawyers at night – efforts to understand, negotiate, and amend the agreement.

The mood ranges from somber to hysterical to angry – quite a few of the parents want vengeance as much as they want justice; everyone agrees that the children's needs come first, but their lives have been stolen by a corporate force most of them loathe viscerally.

Conversely, amid the rage and depression, this also feels a lot like being on vacation – nice hotel rooms (the Crystal City Marriot's not a resort hotel, but it is a very passable business hotel). They eat at restaurants or in the dining room. There's HBO on TV, and even an opportunity to go sightseeing (The Mall, the Smithsonian Museums, etc.) for people who aren't local.

The players should decide how their parents were reacting to the nightmare and the emotional state of their characters as input for the events.

opportunity to introduce them and their personalities (e.g. who's angry, who's calm, who's realistic, who's fanciful).

This discussion leads into an agreement to actually meet – here, in this hotel – and see how things turned out. Also an agreement to stay in touch; to support each other.

Bessler has a slightly different take on things. He participates, but mostly watches. He's looking for someone (or someones) to relate an offer to (he'll choose a PC). His point (when asked about his predictions) is that the world's so random and chaotic and inexplicable that they could be anywhere. And... rich? He's not sure about that.

SUGGESTION: After the party scene concludes players should discuss their relationship with the other Reunion Club members--do they stay in touch? Produce a news-letter? Try to distance themselves (but keep the promise?).

Do the PCs stay in contact with each other? With any NPCs? What sense of belonging do they feel to the club?

When they reunite there may be some interesting discussion amongst the more distant members of the group when they discover what has become of each of them. It may also be interesting to see how they used (or used up) their Money.

Shooting Pool and Breaking the Trust

After the party and the discussion and the reunion agreement (the next day), William Bessler invites the PC or PC's he felt were natural leaders (like himself) to play pool in the basement bar of the hotel. Kids aren't allowed in there, but he's just old enough to pass and he hustles the other characters in as well. He's smoking (regular) cigarettes, and talking as he shoots.

Bessler's Pitch

"Everyone knows the lawyers – both sets of lawyers – all the lawyers – are going to screw us. Well, not everyone. They (the kids from last night) believe that we're gonna be set for life... our parents are buying it too. They can't afford to face the truth.

So we have to.

The truth is that \$40 million in... what? Ten years? Fifteen years? Whatever it is – it might not be worth anything. And there's no guarantee we'll get it. Between taxes and attorneys fees and everything else? They'll make sure that they get the money. They'll give us enough to live on. Maybe. Maybe not."

Bessler looks into their eyes, studying them.

"We have to take care of ourselves. We have to take matters into our own hands. It's the only way. We've gotta face it – we're orphans and no one's going to look after us."

He explains that he's been approached by men representing yet another firm. Men who are offering a deal: \$3 million now instead of \$40 million upon graduation in exchange for signing over all rights to whatever's left in the trust. He explains that properly invested \$3 million is enough. And it's "in our hands" instead of being left to the vultures.

He makes a passionate, convincing case (he's doing it), and then he explains the rest: the men making this deal have offered a bounty (he doesn't use that word) on each member of the "Reunion Club" he (they, now) can convince to take it. An extra million for each taker.

If, between them, they can convince 13 kids to give up their trust they can split thirteen million tomorrow.

This is clearly a horrible deal playing on fear, immaturity, and greed. These shadowy men are playing on the vulnerability of children about to lose their parents.

It's also questionably legal (being under the age of maturity, it's very unclear that the children can sign away anything – there is a tortured legal rationale for it, but Bessler doesn't understand it, and it's not likely to actually work, anyway).

The point of the scene is to build a history with the characters and Bessler and reveal what kind of person he is. Clearly anyone who takes the deal is going to wind up with a lot less money, but for purposes of the game this is less important.

Second Class Citizens

Not all the Ascendax orphans were born before anyone knew the drug was dangerous. As early as 1983, there were clear signs and by 1987 there was conclusive proof that most of the heavy users were going to die.

Children conceived in the mid-to-late 80's by parents who knew they were dying were rare, but not non-existent. Some of them were terrible mistakes – the result of young, desperate adults running into each other's arms in search of comfort and not taking all the necessary precautions. Others might have been a romantic, poorly thought-out expression of hope in a hopeless time.

But some may have been an act of revenge. Once the lawsuits started in earnest (1985 or so) it was clear that children, especially orphaned children, would be huge beneficiaries. The charge (never copped to, never proven) is that some childless plaintiffs chose to have children to deal the defendants an even greater blow.

If true, this would be reprehensible, but people have done reprehensible things. And if they were meant as weapons of revenge, it worked: the legal agreement calls them "Class Two" trustees and they are also massive beneficiaries of the settlement.

In 1992 the Class Two trustees are seven years old or younger (the cut off is 1985, the filing date of the class action suit). They are not included in the Crystal City Settlement. Their settlement will come later, its provisions based on this one. Like the characters the Class Two's will be rich. They will also be far worse off psychologically: younger when their parents die, and born into an almost unimaginable turmoil as pawns in a greater game.

There are some of them in the hotel (not invited to the meetings, not officially sponsored). The characters have seen them – parents smoldering. Angry. Young children with haunted eyes.

Behind the Pitch

The characters are minors and do not have authority to sign away their fortunes; the group is *not* paying money "tomorrow" -- Bessler is (somewhat) misrepresenting the deal.

The group pushing this has a (highly questionable) plan that involves the emancipation of the Orphans (legally separating themselves from their parents) and placing their (financial) well being in a privately managed "hedge fund" that is still "protected" by trust rules.

Should any characters (PC or NPC) actually accept the deal, there's a very good chance nothing comes of it and a small chance that the settlement money is transferred into a private hedge fund, where it's all lost during the 2001 stock-market crash when the hedge fund collapses.

Reunion; The Loss Specialist

In 2005, thirteen years after the settlement, the Reunion Club gets its act together and holds the first reunion.

The Crystal City Marriot is much as they remember it. In a weird, morose way, it feels like coming home.

During this scene the characters may

- 1) Make introductions and become a cohesive group (PCs and NPCs)
- 2) Realize that things are, perhaps more complex than they appear (the Class Two's have contacted some of the Reunion Club members and told them not to attend. Some members have been having strange dreams... and then there's Bessler and his story)
- 3) Be introduced to the Loss Specialist by Bessler in a scene that closely parallels the meeting thirteen years ago (Bessler has this guy who has a proposition; it sounds shaky... but this time maybe there's something to it)
- 4) Listen to the Loss Specialist's explanation for their condition and his suggestion about how to proceed
- 5) Have more direct contact with the Class Two's and receive a more clear warning and maybe a threat

This scene provides background and information (as well as leads for more investigatively inclined characters) and sets the stage for the next scene – the Loss Specialist's experiment at the radio tower.

A key decision in this phase is how much investigation the characters will do (which, in turn, will determine how much they know going into the experiment) and how much they will participate in the experiment.

Invisible Wheels – the actions of the antagonists

The members of the Reunion Club (PCs and NPCs) with the exception of Bessler (who knows the Loss Specialist) know the least about what they are walking into. To them, this is little more than keeping a promise, honoring the dead and supporting the living. Perhaps a chance to share with the small community of people who actually understand what they've been going through.

To The Commission, Dr. Law, and Big Pharma, the meeting is either a threat or an opportunity, and they are in-position to mitigate or exploit.

Big Pharma has just been watching – not yet interfering. Their agents are remote and professional. It is unlikely that even careful characters would notice them at this point (they aren't really doing anything except keeping a record of who shows up and when)

The Lottery Commission and the Loss Specialist are taking this opportunity to make their move. The Specialist has made contact with Bessler (who's had his own troubles, detailed below) and has convinced him to make introductions: he is offering a sense of understanding and closure that no one else (legal, psychological, medical, or spiritual) can offer.

Dr. Law and her followers (her "students") have been tracking the Commission's plans since the Specialist contacted them and proposed his experiment. Their background research into the Specialists has uncovered enough to make them very suspicious and uncomfortable. They know that he tried (earlier, without the support of the Commission) to contact The Palace,

and they're eager to stop him. They have been warned by their benefactors (the Rational Actors) that he's far from what he appears and may be very difficult to kill.

Their plan is to stop the meeting – or, if that proves impractical, convince the Reunion Club not to be involved with his plan.

Bad Dreams and Omens

As the date of the meeting approaches the Reunion Club's shadows are invited (and descend) deep into Wonderland to The Palace. They are Honored Guests here, and they have been here before.

On Chessboard Zero, the characters feel this as a stronger experience of their loss than they would normally have (not surprising – it is, after all, something of an anniversary), but they also sense that there's something beyond that going on. To one degree or another all of them have a sense of incompleteness – a sense of having (metaphorically) a hole in themselves that acts as a window into some place strange.

There aren't really words for having a "hole" in yourself; it's hard to explain (even internally).

- To some it's like there's an open window somewhere in the house letting cold air seep in
- To others, it's like hearing a maddeningly familiar but unidentifiable tune coming from somewhere nearby...
- Characters may have dreams of finding a literal hole in their flesh near their hearts, and seeing a vast, deep pit that goes somewhere distant and bright

Characters undergoing counseling or therapy will have been generally unable to express this odd sensation in a way that helps the therapist understand that it is unusual.

More sensitive characters (those with dreams or empathy, or other such traits) have even more extreme experiences: the sense of there being an audience to their suffering.

It is an appreciative and deeply empathetic audience to be sure: The Palace sees beauty in loss and understands the full cycle of loss and gain. Characters who sense the presence of The Palace in their lives will find it alien, frightening and yet deeply insightful: the Palace's perspective reveals the positive outcomes of loss as well as the negative ones.

The character's trauma may have made them emotionally stronger, more empathetic, more caring, or otherwise had benefits (beyond the financial ones) that their perspective might miss.

The odd thing about these insights are that they very much feel like they are coming from an external source – and usually occur at the nadir of emotional depression; at one's darkest hour.

Finally, especially perceptive characters may even have dreams of The Palace – a great Masquerade (attended by the Reunion Club and magnificent creatures in fancy gowns and truly disturbing masks decorated with feathers of spun gold and sequins made of crystalline starlight). There are visions (or sensations) of a great table laden with unrecognizable food and drink that has a dark character to it – enticing and frightening at the same time. Dining at this table would mean partaking of the pure truth of their

Still Grieving

As the Reunion Club members arrive the characters will immediately recognize them and begin interacting.

An NPC who has been active and instrumental in keeping the Reunion Club going over the past decade arrives at a nadir of her emotional health. She has been feeling the loss *hard* and had “thought she was over it.” She’s afraid she’ll never get over it: “I didn’t think it would hit me so hard--this reunion,” she says.

Therapy hasn’t helped, encounter groups haven’t ended it. She’s spent time in a monastery in Asia--and she came back feeling fulfilled and more whole than she had before ... and now it’s back again.

She is sensitive, sincere, and (presently) hurting. She’ll meet the characters at the bar, asking if any of them have a solution to their problems.

--this is a hook to getting the characters interested in the Loss Specialist.

loss, the good and the bad. It would mean facing things that after thirteen years, many of the characters may still not be ready to face.

First Contact (The Pre-Game Show)

One of the PC’s may have been contacted by members of the Class Two trustees. This would have been a phone call (or at the most, a visit in a neutral place) from a vaguely familiar member of the group – a teenager who sounds oddly mature and (possibly) coached.

Dr. Law will choose a character that seems likely to listen, might be influential with the others, and has a respectable reputation (they won’t threaten a dangerous or belligerent character)

The student will make no reference to Dr. Law or any of Dr. Law’s plans. He or she will claim to be from the Class Twos.

The message is ominous but cryptic: Don’t attend – the Reunion Club is not healthy. Visiting the past is not healthy. You – all of you – need to move on rather than looking back. I know what you’ve been experiencing (a vague sense of dread, disturbing dreams, etc.) These will get worse if you go.

Stay away, and tell others to stay away.

The student will provide only the vaguest answers and explanations – I know what you’re going through because we’re all going through it, etc. The tone is primarily helpful (“I’m warning you because it’s for your own good,” but will become more overtly threatening if the character doesn’t sound convinced (“There are things going on here you don’t know about – and don’t want to know about. It would be best if you don’t get involved.”))

Friday Night – Bessler emerges

The Reunion has been scheduled to run from Friday night through Sunday afternoon (after which everyone will return to their regular lives). As Reunion Club members arrive, they meet and recognize each other immediately in the hotel lobby and bar. It is strangely easier than they would expect and everyone feels a sense of connection and familiarity that is stronger than they had expected...

As though they had been close friends all these years, somehow. Almost everyone has made it. Notably absent, Bessler has disappeared (no forwarding address). Some of the members know that he took the buy-out and lost everything during the 2000-2001 bubble-crash.

The scene opens with the characters at the hotel bar off of the room with the pool table. They are far from the only one’s there (although at this time there are probably no other Reunion Club members – there should be no more than three or four characters present -- the PCs and maybe an NPC at most).

Bessler is staying in the hotel under an assumed name. He’s been watching and approaches the character or characters he talked to before (in the same place, dressed much the same as he was when he first propositioned them). Still smoking, he invites them to a game of pool.

He’s friendly. Abashed. He knows they are likely to remember him as someone who tried to get them to betray their group. He’s quick to acknowledge his mistakes and let them know he’s paid for it. The rumors are true – he’s broke, his fortune gone into bad investments. He’s been in

Mexico, he says (his tone suggests there might be a story there, but he declines to elaborate at this point).

He smiles easily. He's still cool. Still laid back – but it's clear that hardship has scarred him. It's also clear that he's still a hustler and he has a hustle. He doesn't deny it. He knows a lot about the characters; what they've been doing. What their plans are (where they go to school, etc. The Loss Specialist has made inquiries through a private detective firm to get basic biographical information about the Orphans)

He also knows that “all of us have moved on,” but “none of us have really ever left here.”

How does he know all this? What's his angle?

He explains about the Loss Specialist

The Loss Specialist

There are men who study loss mathematically. They're kind of like insurance adjusters... and kind of like psychologists. Really, their approach is what you'd call 'multi-disciplinary' – economic, statistical, empirical, psychological, medical, and so-on. They seek to understand loss holistically. To model it (they “use computers and shit,”)

They have a “professional association” but they earn their living through freelance work for insurance, security, and financial services companies. Their work is very technical, but also artistic in its way: what they call a “formal model” is really a perspective – a point of view – for looking at the world. “Like, you know, how the best art really makes you think? Their ‘models’ do that.”

Because their work is non-theoretical, they don't work out of universities or corporate headquarters. They go where the loss is. They tour flood zones, disaster areas. Famine-blighted countries. Cemeteries. They seek understanding. Evidence.

The Specialist who contacted Bessler traveled a long way to meet him (they finally met in Mexico). He was interested, he explained, because Bessler and the rest of the Reunion Club are in many ways (subtle ways – there's no lack of basic orphans in the world) nearly unique.

Because their loss – their relationship to death and absence – is so special, they could prove very useful in furthering the understanding of Loss as an entity. As a science. The Loss Specialist has been working with Bessler for several months and they've “learned a lot” but they need more. More people. More test subjects.

They need the cooperation of the Reunion Club.

The Experiment; the Deal

William Bessler explains the experiment to the characters at a high level – the Specialist himself will explain it in more detail to the group tomorrow if they'll allow him to speak (Bessler doubts, with good reason, that the Specialist would be invited in on his say-so, alone).

The experiment involves being hypnotized while connected to a “monitor” – a lie-detector type apparatus run off of a laptop computer. The monitor will, in turn, be hooked into a radio station which will be broadcasting its findings on

Adam Faraday – Loss Specialist

Adam is blandly handsome and respectably dressed without being ostentatious (Brooks Brother's suit, Bruno Magli shoes, and a Tag Heuer watch). He appears to be in his late-thirties, although he could easily be five years older (his eyes suggest an older man, his body, a younger one).

He has a crisp, professional manner – neither cold nor warm, but certainly not deeply sympathetic: he relates to the Reunion Club as clients rather than patients.

He's also very polished in any of his meetings. Loss Studies are field that's been around for a long time, but is emerging as a combined discipline (he describes it as the ‘sister discipline to risk management’). Yes, it's obscure in its specifics but should be easy to grasp in its broad outline: he studies loss and its impact (financial, emotional, sociological, etc.) He offers a variety of high-level corporate executives from banks, re-insurers, and retail industries he's worked with personally as references (none of them are immediately available, but they do check out; none of them, however, will discuss the nature of his work with them). Anyone who meets him can easily imagine him giving a PowerPoint presentation to the Board of Directors.

His confidence and credibility are almost able to make the strange experiment he's proposing sound believable.

He also understands. He talks with the characters (and later, with the whole group) about the “hole” they experience. It's emotional, he says, but also very real and objective. In fact, his model measures the dimensions of this psychological hole. He explains that financial and economic losses often leave small

Adam Faraday – Loss Specialist (continued)

holes that close as the assets are recovered and the loss reversed. The same with the loss of a job. The loss of a limb or the death of someone close leaves a hole that can get smaller over time, but usually never closes.

In this case, the hole has shrunk (the characters can get out of bed in the morning without being overwhelmingly depressed), but there are forces within them keeping it open. All these years later, he believes it's huge.

The hypnotism and broadcast (with an audience, even a remote one) will allow him and the characters to address some of those forces – to understand them – and ultimately to redirect them so that the hole can close and the wound can heal. The experiment will last approximately four hours with a thirty-minute “interview” under hypnosis for each participating member. They will broadcast from 8:00 PM until midnight, local time.

He explains he has worked with Bessler as well as others (refugees in Central Europe, he mentions, without specifying), but he really needs more highly-similar test subjects to develop a repeatable and effective process.

He will mention that this technique (including the radio) has been done before by the Russians during the late '70's. It was a notable success, but the details have never been published (they were state secrets at the time, of course. Now it seems most of the records have been lost). It's one of the reasons he's using the radio – he wants to replicate the experiment as closely as possible.

Adam has secured a defunct radio tower in Nevada. It meets the rather rigorous specifications (distant from population centers, powerful, available for purchase) and has equipped it with the necessary equipment.

He is willing to share the more technical details of the experiment with anyone who asks but they are nearly incomprehensible (computer models, actuarial tables, cold-war era soviet documents, etc.)

shortwave frequencies to a variety of “listeners” – other Loss Specialists who will be participating remotely (“they don't use the internet... not sure why...”)

In exchange for this, the Loss Specialists offers a possible closure. The experiment has been done before (“In Russia, I think.”) with healing results. It may not help, but it's unlikely to hurt.

Bessler seems unconcerned with the strange nature of the Specialist or his plan. He hand-waves any questions about whether it makes scientific sense (“Ask him tomorrow – I'm not the guy to be answering scientific questions.”)

He presents himself as a guy who's benefited from it (“I know about the hole guys. We all have it. The Specialist – he showed it to me... It's still there, but it's smaller now. If we do this right, we can close it completely and get on with our lives.”)

Presenting the Specialist

Whether the PCs agree to support the Specialist talking with the group, Bessler will convince some of them. His knowledge of the “hole” and his assertion that this might fix it is compelling. They know Bessler's a worm, but they're willing to listen.

The next day everyone meets the Specialist

The Specialist's Secrets

Bessler has been introduced to the Lottery Commission by Faraday (he knows very little about them, except that they're wealthy and eccentric and they're backing the experiment): they demanded to speak with him before fully backing the experiment. They realize that their direct involvement would scare away or anger the rest of Reunion Club so they're behind the scenes for now. Adam will make calls to them (from a secure cellular phone) every night to inform them of their progress in securing the involvement of the club.

GLI (Big Pharma's local security group) is monitoring him. At first they're afraid he's a lawyer (he looks, talks, and acts an awful lot like a lawyer), but once they discover that records on him are hard to come by they get even more suspicious. Being unable to eavesdrop on his nightly phone conversations make them even more uneasy.

The Specialist (and all Loss Specialists) has secrets neither the Commission nor Bessler knows – he is a Hunger Disciple for beings even deeper and more twisted than The Palace and his agenda is far more sweeping and subtle than even Dr. Law's dream of changing humanity. He wants to make contact with The Palace, not to change reality, but to cause an earthquake in Wonderland—to try to trigger an apocalypse in realms even deeper.

Bessler died in Mexico in 2002 after losing everything he could conceivably lose. His extreme loss was noticed by The Palace and by Faraday. The Palace was with him when he died (on lower chessboards), and welcomed his Shadow into their realm to feast on it unendingly (by infusing it with Negative Space, they can maintain the shadow even in the event of the death of the caster).

Bessler, then, is a ghost. He has been “rescued” from The Palace by Faraday who understands the mechanics of Wonderland very well. Bessler's manifestation on Chessboard Zero has been made possible by the re-animation of Bessler's body. This technique for raising the dead is very

limited (it only works with shadows immersed in Negative Space, and so-on), but it's working for Bessler.

Bessler strongly suspects he's dead. Moreover, he's pretty sure that he's here on Faraday's dime – that when the experiments are over, he'll be released...or worse. His memory of The Palace is fragmented and horrific but not exactly hellish: he was surrounded by awesomely strange beings that fed on his epic misfortune and kept his painful memories alive and fresh even as his body decayed.

The Loss Specialist's Presentation

Bessler convinces someone (PC or NPC) to at least give the Loss Specialist a hearing. Everyone's still mad at Bessler (they don't trust him) and him 'paying' for his sins doesn't really change that. No one believes he's changed a bit since he was 16, but they do find the Loss Specialist interesting.

And if not convincing, at least worth playing along with.

At least five of the 12 Reunion club members will agree to participate in the experiment in the hopes of learning about their strange affliction. They'll ask the others (including the PC's) to at least be nearby... to monitor and help if possible.

The scene should end with the end of the Reunion and the agreement to meet in Las Vegas next week to pursue the Specialist's offer.

Next Steps and Loose Ends

GLI is concerned – something strange is afoot. They aren't able to get much of a background on the Specialist and they're very uncomfortable with the idea that the Orphans are going to be collaborating. Their superiors (who have a better idea of what Faraday might actually be) are even more alarmed and order GLI to begin a more intrusive and aggressive investigation.

Dr. Law's Students are equally upset. They've failed to stop the Reunion Club meeting. They've also failed to prevent the Class One's from agreeing to participate in the experiment. If they are successful in establishing contact with The Palace first, that could scuttle their entire plan.

They are still willing to try persuasion (instead of more violent means) and over the next week they'll ask for a direct meeting. This is what they'll say:

Dr. Law (well known therapist and radio personality) has been working on exactly this issue with the Class Twos. She's aware of the 'Loss Specialists' and their 'models' and she believes it's the worst kind of quackery.

She points out that the supposed 'Cold Light' Soviet project was, in reality, a psychological warfare program designed to cause the disintegration of the personality. She also says it was a complete failure except that it convinced the US government to spend millions trying to replicate the Russian's supposed 'success.'

Dr. Law, on the other hand, does know how to work with the Ascendax Orphans. She's been very successful with the Class Two's and is willing to provide counseling and therapy to the Class One's on her ranch in Oregon if they're willing to cooperate (follow her rules) and abandon any "irresponsible" plans to work with Faraday or his "sponsors."

Bessler's Story

One of the clues Bessler will give to his experiences and background comes in the form of a partial story about his death in Mexico. He'll tell a PC he trusts (one who's been the most receptive and forgiving). He presents it as a "funny" story from his travels something amusing and dirty (he makes it clear it's a bit of a pornographic adventure) that "really did" happen to him.

He was working as a gardener in a town you've never heard of for the local dentist ("When you're in Mexico and you see the big house at the top of the hill, it's always the dentist's house," he explains). See? Funny – an American working as a gardener for a rich Mexican! (He's too good a story teller to make this point overtly; it should come through in the telling).

Anyway, he's doing gardening in exchange for a place to sleep and the dentist's young, pretty, commanding wife ("She ran that house, man—let me tell you!") started to have eyes for him. She was left there all alone with the servants and here was this exotic American guy getting sweaty and dirty in her rose bushes...

So, they start sleeping together. Right? He's trying to be entertaining so he'll provide some details if the audience seems receptive. But she's always very careful and so is he. After all, he doesn't want to lose his sweet living arrangement (see – living arrangement – you think he's talking about a place to sleep but... well... the story goes on).

One day, about a month in, he's doing some heavier landscaping out by the cliffs, and he makes a discovery – the bodies of three men. Shallow grave. Blunt trauma, it looks like. Very nasty stuff. Seem to have been there awhile but not that long.

He confronts the Senora and she confesses: her husband is a jealous man. He has killed three of her lovers in the past when he discovered her infidelities. Worse, he may be getting

Bessler's Story (continued)

suspicious. She was going to tell him – to warn him – but she is afraid, too: afraid that after three strikes, she be about to join her lovers.

His discovery has brought this pot to a boil and now they must take action.

"What'd I do? What'd you do, bro? We got the hell out of town is what we did! Me and that sweet, sweet Mexican Princess... woo hoo!"

He ends the story there, with them in a hotel a few towns away, hiding with a stolen motorcycle, ready to make their next move. If pushed, he'll say "She went her way... I went mine."

In truth, of course (and he suspects this, but doesn't remember it too well), she killed him and the others as well.

She also points out that he seems successful, but buying a radio tower and refurbishing it is well beyond his means – who do they think is paying for this? And why? Questions they should be asking themselves.

Her students are (like her) officious, superior, and caustically judgmental. Failure to agree with them is a sign of moral laxity or stupidity (best case: ignorance, but once it's been explained to you, that's no longer an excuse).

Failure to make progress through browbeating results in an out-and-out threat delivered (over the phone) by Dr. Law herself:

"If you were only imperiling yourselves that would be one thing. But you're not. Your irresponsible behavior is endangering my clients and anyone who parasites like Faraday work with after that. I'm afraid I can't allow it. If you insist on this wasteful and dangerous game, I'll be forced to contact the adults who supervise radio broadcasts and have his little station shut down. I'm loathe to do that, but you give me no other choice. Oh, and if you continue to be involved with him after that – out of defiance – you ought to think twice about who you're making enemies with."

Midnight at the Radio Tower

The characters conduct whatever investigations they feel are appropriate and as Faraday tries to carry out the experiment despite interference from Dr. Law and GLI. There are many possible outcomes at this point, including the possibility for the game to end.

This section describes

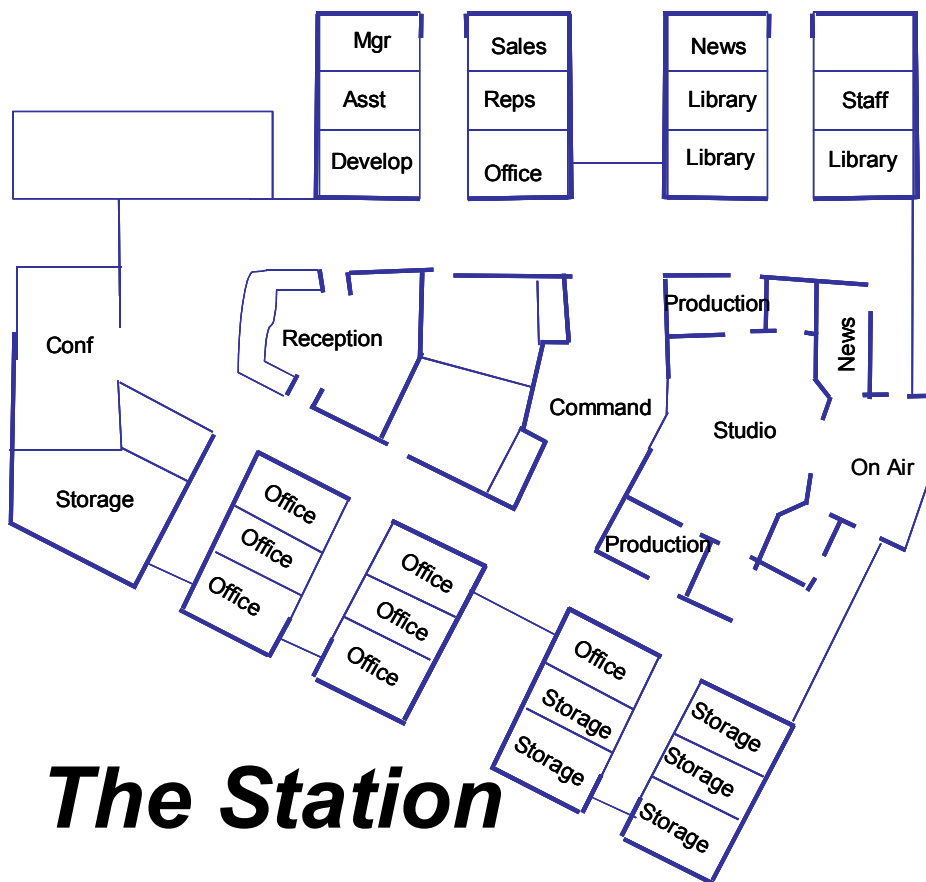
- 0) What happens when the characters arrive in Vegas
- 1) The experiment itself, including a partial script
- 2) What happens if the experiment is successfully conducted
- 3) What happens if it isn't
- 4) Potential conflicts between the parties that might involve the PC's
- 5) Information about what can be learned by research

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas

The PCs fly out to Vegas to stay; The Loss Specialist will book them in the MGM Grand hotel, but he will not insist that they stay there if they have other plans.

As they arrive, they can marvel at the wonders of the Vegas Strip, the hotel itself (see links in the last section), and the somewhat off-kilter guests staying with them -- there seems to be a small

(quiet) literary convention of some kind going on. The characters are soon approached by overly friendly members talking enthusiastically about the author Shirley Jackson and her works. They're setting up for the weekend when the larger crowd will arrive and the characters may see them bringing in ordinary materials for presentation and sale including (inexplicably) disturbing ventriloquist dummies.



The Station

During this encounter, the convention and its members should not be portrayed as overly important, but the characters should see the dummies, as they may make an important connection later.

If the character do respond to the conventioneer's friendly overtures, they will discover that it's a moderately-to-very disturbing group of people (they're fans of all Shirley Jackson stories, but this convention is dedicated to one: The Lottery) and deeper probes may reveal that their presence here is *not* an accident.

Characters who actually attend the convention events (readings, screenings, and most disturbingly, an amateur-theater presentation that is presented as a 're-enactment') they will feel a strange, almost supernatural sense of loss pervading the room (an emotional warmth, the way tears are warm, a breathtaking sense of distance -- the "free fall" feeling they had when their parents were finally pronounced dead).

They'll sense what the enthusiast do -- that mannered, orderly, ritualistic killing portrayed in the story has an element to it that goes beyond social commentary or satire.

Depending on how alert and inquisitive the characters are, they could discover and expose the Commission before the experiment.

What if the Experiment is Conducted?

If the experiment is conducted, The Palace will manifest in the Radio Station. This is what the Loss Specialist was hoping for; this is what Dr. Law is afraid of.

The Palace manifests itself as an arriving party of terrifying, masked entities that seem a bit like angles of death and a bit like Mardi Gras grotesques. They come as floating ghost-lights (will-o-wisps) and they are delighted to be real, even if only for an hour at midnight.

They know the characters well, and will interact with them in ways that are satisfying and fatal; the characters will be sucked into their own holes -- drawn down (full, physical descent) into The Palace and consumed by it.

This will not, however, kill them -- it will Twist them, turning them into things very much like Hunger Disciples (but without the obsessive insanity or, in fact, the "hunger").

They will awaken some days later, after their descent wears off with no full memory of what happened.

Everyone else will know what happened though:

- 1) Dr. Laws' plan is ruined unless she can control the PCs in time to satisfy her alienated benefactor's needs
- 2) Big Pharma will recognize the potential metaphysical disaster once the characters understand the nature of their plot
- 3) The Loss Specialist is gone -- having succeeded with his plan to transport himself into the Palace (the characters were his ticket to the Ball)
- 4) The Lottery Commission is dismayed by the disappearance of the Loss Specialists, and will need to contact the PCs themselves to close the deal; they will also have to convince the PCs to help conduct what will probably be a repellent ritual

This results in a variety of forces closing in on the characters as they struggle to learn what happened to them and survive.

What if it isn't?

Dr. Law is trying to stop the experiment. GLI is very nervous at this point. The PC's have good reason to pull the plug – what if someone prevents the experiment from being carried out?

That depends, but very likely the Loss Specialist would (if he's alive) “come clean” and explain that despite their reservations, they have very good, personal reasons to conduct the experiment – they are ‘connected’ to something that calls itself The Palace. It is... very deep. Very... dangerous. Psychologically dangerous. It will not consume them-- it doesn't do that – but it will continue to dominate their lives both through continued mental anguish and because as conduits to The Palace they are useful to people like him.

The truth is, given their experiences, they cannot break with it. The Palace's hold on them is too strong, their hold on it, too strong. To quit now would be to betray everything they've lived for.

So the Loss Specialist offers them a more honest and more clear choice: embrace it. Instead of trying halfheartedly to turn away from The Palace, face it. Face what they're terrified of, and see what's there. It's in them, anyway... they might as well understand it.

In this case, they'll emerge twisted with a considerably stronger understanding of what's going on and a much better idea of who their antagonists are and what's chasing them.

If they still refuse (or if Dr. Law manages to kill Faraday – unlikely but possible), they may be contacted by GLI who is nervous about both parties and interested in seeing that everyone returns to their ‘normal lives’ – and that includes stopping Dr. Law. In this case, GLI would launch an attack on Dr. Law's compound in the later phase of the game.

UFO Interference

When the characters arrive in town Dr. Law will already know her bid to legally stop the broadcast isn't going to work (it won't be a legal broadcast, but the government will not repossess the radio station on her say-so).

She has concluded that it is necessary to neutralize Faraday either by killing him, killing the Reunion Club, or scaring them off in a sufficiently permanent fashion.

- Fortunately her ‘students’ are not trained killers; they are vicious but inexperienced and largely ineffective.
- Unfortunately she has help from the UFO's. There is a Pagan hit team nearby that is reluctant to show themselves unless things go really badly (they've been far-less-than-honest with Dr. Law about who they are and what they represent; a well-trained, psychotic assassin team would lead to questions whose answers would damage the relationship. If the experiment goes off, they will be deployed unilaterally (by Pagan) without Dr. Law's knowledge or consent.

The Commission Can't Stay out of Trouble

The Loss Specialist is very professional; he's told the Commission members that they may listen and monitor from a distance -- preferably a very discrete distance. But they're clients. They won't let him call all the shots.

They've set up shop in the MGM Grand Hotel (the big emerald one right on the Strip) and they're holding a convention for "Lottery Enthusiasts" -- this is one-part a celebration of their impending success and one part an attempt to monitor and control the situation. They will make a "clever" attempt to contact the characters prior to the Experiment; they believe they're being quite slick -- the Loss Specialists is highly annoyed, but doesn't show it.

Exactly how they approach the characters will depend on how the characters arrive in town. The Commission members will send trusted junior members of their group to meet at the airport or in a hotel bar, or (at worst) on the streets of Las Vegas. They're eager to know if the characters have a special relationship with the story -- if they've ever read it. If they like it. If they... Believe it might be true?

They're friendly if a bit unsettling (both in personal manner and in subject matter). Characters who follow up with them (accept the invitation, or just hang out with the weirdoes) won't find anything too disturbing, but they may see something that will have significance later: the Lottery Commission members have brought along several Ventriloquist Dummies for the post-experiment ritual.

The Experiment

Faraday and The Lottery Commission have secured access to a 90 Watt station in the middle of the desert about 45 minutes away from Cathedral City (Palm Springs' poorer cousin). It was foreclosed on and sold at auction in 2003 and has been empty ever since.

Over the last month Faraday has renovated it and has moved in a variety of pieces of specialized equipment including computer systems and two very disturbing "ventriloquist dolls" with cherubic porcelain faces, fat, white-cloth bodies, and mechanical eyes that open and close almost randomly.

The Studio is set up as a war-room with computer terminals and recording devices, while the experiments will take place in the "On Air" broadcast room. The door to the On Air room is painted dark red; a warning to be aware before opening it.

The Experiment runs as follows:

- 1) The subject reclines in a chair near the Loss Specialist and is hooked up to the monitoring equipment (electrodes on the temples and cheeks, blood pressure cuff and sensors on the fingertips for skin-galvanic response). Recording devices (cameras, computers, etc.) are set up to film the experiment from several angles
- 2) The Loss Specialist performs a standard guided relaxation ("As I count backward from 10, relax your muscles in sequence,")
- 3) When the equipment shows that the subject is relaxed and calm, the Specialist begins to broadcast the session on live radio
- 4) He guides the subject through his memories of his parents including the day they learned the test results, the settlement day, and their funerals. He manages to keep the subject calm, even when remembering very painful experiences, but the memories still carry

Kicking off the Experiment

The experiment can start with a PC or NPC depending on what works best for the game -- in general, the players should call the shots

The Experiment (Step Seven Example Dialog)

Loss Specialist: How big is it?

Subject: Huge...

The 'Hole' seems larger than the person; it's as though the subject is reclining over a great pit.

Loss Specialist: How deep is it?

Subject: It goes down forever.

The Hole seems to be infinitely deep. But it isn't; it does have a bottom. It goes to The Palace.

Loss Specialist: I know you can't close the hole. I want you to move it. I want you to move it to the dummy. Just imagine it flowing, like water, into the dummy. Imagine the dummy drinking it.

Dummy's mouth opens; the Dummy rolls its eyes in exaggerated, "isn't this corny" amusement

The Experiment (Step Nine Example Dialog)

The Loss Specialist to the Dummy: Can you hear me?

The Dummy (Voice raspy, high-pitched, squeaky – like a very bad radio transmission): Heeereee Youuuu—giggles.

Loss Specialist: Welcome to our Chessboard.

The Dummy: (Looking around, its head turning mechanically, its huge, laughing eyes scanning the room) I see a red door.

Loss Specialist: Am I talking to the Palace?

The Dummy: We're commmming, Faraday; we're commming to seeeee you. I see a Red Door, Farradaaaaay – Weeee know what that means, donnn't weee? Faraday? Don't weeeeee.

a lot of power. Some of this power seems to be being recorded and broadcast.

- 5) He asks the subject to locate the "hole" and the subject will find it. There are a series of questions about how big it is and how deep it is. The holes are huge and deep
- 6) The Specialist instructs the subject to 'transfer' the hole to the dummy – to let it 'personify' the hole and speak for the hole.
- 7) The Subject answers questions as the dummy ('throwing his voice'); the questions are about what is keeping the hole open and what it would take to close it
- 8) The dummy's eyes open. The Dummy is now channeling The Palace through the character. The Loss Specialist instructs the character to speak of his loss through the dummy (the dummy is used because coming that close to the hole without an intermediary would be too painful).
- 9) The Dummy, speaking for the Palace talks nonsensically and cryptically about The Ball. It knows the character intimately (They are all Old Friends) and it chants the lyrics to the Rolling Stone's Paint it Black as the Lamenuomen manifest
 - They come in luminous pairs (2 by 2), floating up the from the darkness outside, looking (at a distance) like headlights of a line of cars too dark to be visible
 - During this time, all the doors (including interior doors) lock automatically, and must be broken to be opened. Outside, the cars won't start. Firearms won't fire (the caps in the rounds will not ignite)
 - As the Lamenuomen approach, the characters feel the temperature drop, and the Cold Lights will began to swirl around the tower, dancing in estatic, crazy motions
- 10) The Lamenuomen enter the building. They appear as luminous creatures decorated with pale, glowing feathers and wearing sequined masks and gaudy dresses and fancy waist coats. They smell like tears, and behind their masks, are empty spaces filled with unimaginable sorrow. Their voices are mocking, terrible, and beautiful, all at once.
 - They are there to hold their Ball, and they know the characters well; they greet each character as an old friend, speaking their name and talking of the horrible loss of their parents with a lilting tone that suggests they find the trauma delicious
 - Their touch paralyzes, their kiss kills. The Lamenuomen will hold their Ball with the Dead, massacring the characters (they are virtually impossible to hurt and while only a dozen or so will enter the station there are hundreds available if the characters (somehow) mount a credible resistance
- 11) The characters are not dead (except for Bessler). They will not remember The Ball, but they will be changed by it; their bodies are warped, merged with the Lamenuomen's world. They are resurrected – changed, but not infected in the normal sense: they do not know it now, but they are directly connected, and able to visit The Palace

Scrum

The characters, probably amped up by their mind and body-twisting experiences in The Palace face Dr. Law's Pagan hit team, GLI's clean-up

squad, and the Lottery Commission which still wants its new reality from them

Any of these are reasonably lethal, but they're expecting mortal humans, not Hunger Disciples.

The next attempt on their lives won't be so naive, however, and the characters need to learn as much as possible about their adversaries and take the battle to them.

In general, the characters should have the easiest time taking care of the Lottery Commission and getting GLI off their backs. In fact, GLI and Big Pharma may even be allies in the fight against the most dangerous enemy: Dr. Law.

Awakening

When the characters awaken from their sleep, disoriented and disturbed, they'll discover

- 1) Bessler is dead – long dead. His body is in an advanced state of decay
- 2) Faraday is gone – vanished without a trace
- 3) The station is trashed in strange but not supernatural ways
- 4) They feel strange – their memories are terrible and fragmented. They remember impossible things, but appear unharmed. They also feel lighter, as though the weight of their history has somehow been – not lifted – but made sweet

For the moment, they are on their own in the middle of the desert, free to do anything they like.

They are not, however, “off the radar” – everyone looking for them has a good idea of where they are and is eager to engage them for their own ends.

Big Pharma and Global Logistics

Big Pharma has plans for the dissolution of humankind, but right now what they want is stability. A world-wide revelation and massive re-formatting of hundreds or thousands of people (Dr. Law's plan) would be a disaster to them – the right objective, the wrong way to go about it.

GLI has no knowledge of its master's long-term plans, but Longfellow is aware that things are stranger than they seem and when it becomes clear that the PC's aren't a threat to stability, he'll stop hunting them.

In fact, with a common enemy, they might well become allies.

Shutting Down the Lottery Commission

When the characters recover (awaken) from the Experiment, the first contact they have will be with the Lottery Commission. The Commission members, of course, know everything the Loss Specialist knew (who the characters are, probably how to contact them, where they're staying, etc.)

They were monitoring the experiment (listening on the radio) and are aware that things have gone wrong, but they feel their plan is still salvageable; here's their backup

1. Invite the characters to a convention of “Lottery Enthusiasts” – this is their ‘cover’ for being in town. This is a small convention of

What happens next?

When the PCs wake up, it's not necessarily clear what will happen next. How the next stage is introduced will depend on how the Players like their games.

Any number of forces (first and foremost, the Lottery Commission) are looking for them -- if the characters do nothing but wait, they'll be contacted, but there are other possibilities as well:

- The PCs may remember the dummies and realize there is a connection with those Lottery people
- For a more immediate contact, the Commission might move quickly so that, as the PCs are picking through the ruins of the station, a beat up four-door sedan will show up with some young men and women from the Convention that want to talk to them and think their superiors can explain what happened
- GLI knows that Faraday was in contact with someone from the Lottery Convention--something that makes no sense to them. They might approach the PCs with questions or leads.

It's also entirely possible that PCs will already know about the Lottery Commission by this point and already be in contact with them.

A lot here is left open depending on the dynamics of your group.

The Character's New Forms

The characters are Twisted (for statistics and a full explanation of their new abilities see the back of this book). On Chessboard One they now appear as Lamenoumen versions of themselves. On Chessboard Zero they feel a sense of calm *potential*--a sense of *metamorphosis*. They can now feel the hole as an actual thing--they can't see it--but they *feel it* there, around their heart.

When they are threatened, under real conditions of extreme emotion (rage, sorrow, or fear) they can "reach into that hole" and turn themselves "inside out." This is the transformation that brings their form to the surface.

It has a Presence of 23, meaning that it rolls a 23- with a -1 for each non-infected person in the room. If this is failed they don't transform. If it is failed by 5 or more, their form on Chessboard Zero will be destroyed and they will shift to a Chessboard One reality for a while--and then come back (ascend) reappearing somewhere private.

Even without this transformation, though, they have the physical defences and statistics described in the write-up.

It is dramatic if their first actual transformation happens by surprise in the Convention. It is not necessary.

NOTE: although the convention goers are not Infected with a common strain of Wonderland, they are all warped enough that they do NOT count for purposes of Presence rolls--and will not be infected with CPD on seeing the characters manifest (although they, having an innate understanding of what the characters can do, may be horrified and afraid for their lives).

people who love the Shirley Jackson story (although not in the obsessive, sexual way that the Commission does)

2. Determine that the characters are, in fact, capable of transporting them to the nameless village of the story
3. Convince them to go through with it (with force, if necessary)

The Invitation

Ideally, the characters will go to the convention out of curiosity -- the Commission does not want to expose itself if there's a problem. They've arranged for the characters to receive invitations to the Convention (it is invitation only -- even "ordinary" Lottery enthusiasts are strange enough that they don't feel comfortable discussing their interests in public) held at the MGM Grand.

The invitations are delivered personally by young (college-aged) Commission members who are coy about their reasons. They'll approach the characters (on the street or as they return to their hotels) pretending not to know exactly what's going on -- saying only that they get a feeling that they might be interested in this.

And the characters will get a feeling as well: on Chessboard 1, the Invitations explain that they'll be told what's happened to them. The PC's won't get this information consciously, but they will feel a strong sense that this weird, disturbing convention is somehow meant for them.

If they beg off, the Commission will try a more direct approach, escalating to an above-board offer ("We knew Faraday; we know what's happened to you.") and if all else fails, force (young, fanatic members will go to the PC's hotel with hand guns and try to force them to visit the MGM Grand)

Getting to Know You

The Enthusiasts Convention is small -- a number of conference rooms with a few activities: readings, discussion panels, a documentary showing a stoning in an African country, and midnight viewings of The Lottery movie and the (much better) Wicker Man.

The people there are kind of like English Majors crossed with adult Dr. Who fans. Strange, a little socially bizarre. Not threatening, but somewhat presumptuous and obnoxious in a subtle, superior way. They are mostly young (early 20's) and overwhelmingly male (the girls there are very quiet, very traditional and almost withdrawn to the point of being autistic).

The characters clearly don't quite belong in and are something of a curiosity to the other Enthusiasts; but they do fit in strangely: they give off a sense of strangeness and an aura of sadness and loss (they don't feel it themselves, but highly sensitive people will comment on it) that's both attractive and unsettling.

They are being monitored by the senior members (and assessed on Chessboard One, where it's clear that they are very different from ordinary humans). Once it becomes clear that they are capable of performing the ritual, but not in a confused / compliant state of mind, the Commission members will approach them.

Going to the Village – The Ritual

“You’ve been cured. Your trauma... your sadness... your loss has been lifted. You feel it don’t you? You’re different now – you surely sense that? Yes?”

You owe us for that. Faraday should have explained that to you, but he didn’t. So now I have to. Yeah, it sucks. But you owe us, so remember that: You get to sleep at night and the price is, you send me – and the other two – to the Village.

How do you do that? Simple: it’s where your hole goes.”
- Mr. Summers

Note: The characters do *not* feel “cured” that’s a mistake Mr. Summers is making. they do feel “different” though, he’s right about that.

“Tessie” (her real name is Gretchen) joined the Lottery Club five years ago; in person she is pretty, fragile, and quiet – more like withdrawn to the point of invisibility. If the men of the Lottery Commission are perverse the women are indecipherable. Tessie is an enigma.

And if the Summers and Graves and the senior members are dedicated, Tessie is a fanatic. She will never reach The Village; that won’t be necessary – she’ll achieve her goal when they kill her to open the gate.

“The Ritual” is nameless and unique. It is a kind of mass infection and descent with an extremely rare strain of Wonderland; those infected will catastrophically and irrevocably vanish to the 3rd Chessboard, where the rustic peoples who scratch out a living above the Palace sacrifice their own, each season, to the Lamenuomen.

To perform the ritual, the members will sit around the characters and Tessie will stand in the middle. She will read the story by candle light (she can, like all of them, recite it from memory) and as she reaches the end, the characters will sense her emptiness drawing their new natures out of them.

Since the Experiment, they are Lamenuomen themselves (in part), and they cannot help but react to the utter wasteland of her soul, laid bare in her tremulous voice and eyes. Long ago, she passed through a “gate” – a phase in her life, when even suicide would have been some expression of the self. Her choice to go on living with nothing inside has turned her into a shell, and that loss, that small, personal, human tragedy is like a perfect jewel to the character’s darker natures.

They will transform around her, becoming Lamenuomen, ecstatic maelstroms of devouring nothingness behind gleeful and festive masks, bedight with motley ornaments – they are no longer merely guests at the Lamenuomen’s nihilistic celebration; they are now fit to be ceremonial masters.

In this “form” they are augmented the way Hunger Disciples are. They are not out of control, but they fully recognize “Tessie’s” tragedy and there is a part of them that revels in it.

The Lottery Commission is counting on this – for their full and complete infection will come from watching the Lamenuomen feast upon Tessie. The characters’ “maws” are their howling vortexes of tears. They leave no wounds – just dessicated, withered flesh that crumbles into powder.

The Choice: Feeding on Tessie

When the characters are brought into the room, Tessie will be there, sitting perfectly still, and waiting. They will feel an “artistic affection” for her—a sense of depth (a deep, perfect loss). She will seem delicate, beautiful, and cold. These are senses from their nascent existences as Lamenuomen.

The Lottery Commission is taking no chances: they are aware that consuming, effectively killing, a young woman is something the characters might find distasteful. They are hoping the character’s new nature takes over and compels them. It won’t—but it will give them The Choice.

As they explain—or rapidly if things start to deteriorate—Tessie will begin a song—a song of great sadness, loss, and despair. This will begin the ritual as she walks amongst the characters. They may feel it hurts so badly they wish to silence her. They may feel it sounds so beautiful, they wish to claim her so they can hear it forever.

When she begins to sing, they will transform.

The room will become a vortex of emptiness and sadness—the air will be filled with a fine mist of tears. Sounds of lament come up from the depths of the shadows and, softly, from behind the masks of the character’s new forms.

The characters will feel a sense of hunger and know this:

If they feed on Tessie, consuming her with their tornadoes of grief, they will become more powerful (permanently). They will gain +10 STR, +20 DP, and +50 years of life on this plane. They will also, irrevocably lose any chance at resolving whatever their unresolved issue was.

There will be no roll to force anyone to feed. Indeed, even if they would rather have the power over the

unresolved issue, they will still be taking the life of a distraught young woman.

If the PCs balk at this, the Lottery Commission will call for armed members of their group to compel them to feed. The martial Commission aren't professional security have only 12- L1 firearms skills, and 9mm handguns. They do, however, have murderous intent.

However, they will not be much of a match for the characters. This may be a chance for the PCs to see, how their new forms stand up to damage!

Pagan Terror Tactics

As things start to heat up, Pagan will attack with more vicious and advanced weaponry.

Their operatives are usually trained, heavily brainwashed, amphetamine addicted killers most with some degree of (concealable) self-mutilation.

Pagan Operative
PHY 12 (18 Damage Points)
REF 12
INT 10

Firearms Skill 14-
Unarmed Combat 14-
Grapple 8/6

9pt .45 Caliber ACP .45

If Pagan (or Dr. Law) thinks that the characters are likely to try to interfere directly (or make contact with the Laménoumen and convince them to stop passively supporting her activities), they'll panic and send out the flying saucers.

They flying saucers carry "psychic searchlights" which can scan an area for a specific mind; they'll hover in Stealth Mode over the character's Last Known Location and they have an 18-chance of making contact (PWR v. Will, a standard success indicates the characters are in the area; a major success gives a specific location, and a critical or catastrophic success causes Dazed or unconscious results)

If the characters participate and if they feed upon Tessie (who, as is befitting of a Shirley Jackson heroine, finds her will to live and humanity in the final, screaming instants of her life and dies, drowning in terror and regret) they will vanish from the hotel, leaving not-even-their-shadows behind.

If the characters transform, but do not devour Tessie, the Commission members will be infected in the rather ordinary way – and very, very unhappy.

Life in War Time

Dr. Law is days (or, at worst, weeks) away from developing her singularity. It requires a perfectly spherical critical mass of pure Loss, available only from The Palace on Chessboard our. She has been working with her Class Twos through advanced hypnosis and regression therapy (using drugs, sensory deprivation, and technology from the Rational Actors) to collect enough Loss to construct the device.

The PCs are vortexes now; transformed, they make transport of Loss much more difficult (they absorb and consume it); they are also allies (although they don't know it) of the Laménoumen. Like the Commission, Dr. Law needs to convert the characters or kill them.

Since the success of the Experiment, Pagan and Dr. Law's Class-Two Orphans have been on the move. The Class-Twos want to capture the characters and bring them back to Dr. Law's compound for re-education (and if the re-education doesn't take, execution).

The Pagan Hit team just wants them dead.

They'd all prefer to be discrete, but as the characters start to learn about what they are and what they're capable of (including conscious contact with the Laménoumen) they become a huge threat to her plan.

The Class Twos will try reason, and then threats – they will make it clear that they'll be attacked, killed, if they don't cooperate. They'll also say that Dr. Law is on the verge of a great development: she is going to "explain" to "everyone" what they've gone through. Her "revelation" will make the rest of the world understand.

At some point, if / when negotiations have broken down, the Pagan hit team will arrive and do everything they can to kill the Class One Orphans; they're professional, but not prepared.

When this is done, the characters should be aware of two things

1. Dr. Law must be stopped. Soon. The clock is ticking.
2. They're the only ones who'll believe that; the only ones who can stop her

Turncoat (optional scene)

Not all of Dr. Law's "patients" are as... dedicated to the cause as she would like. They're in tremendous psychological pain (feeling their loss at a crippling level every day) and looking to Dr. Law for guidance and healing, but her program is part of what's causing their pain.

When the PC's are successful in the experiment some of her more clear-minded Class Two orphans recognize that Dr. Law hasn't been completely

Pagan Tactics (continued)

The saucers are also carry neural stunners (see the Book of Knots for statistics) which can be used on exposed ground targets.

Flying Saucer activity, however, will bring out the USAF and NORAD, and will make the game a *lot* more complex (the characters will be in the middle of a shooting war between the Aliens and the US Military)

What would a Big Time Radio Personality Like me have to say to a bunch of PC's like you?

"Religion teaches us that humans were once perfect and they 'fell' – I don't know how any intelligent person can believe that. We're broken. We're designed to feel pain, to feel sorrow. To be miserable unless we're in nearly perfect conditions available to maybe the top 10% of the people on the planet.

Nature's failed us – you're living proof of that. You've grown up devastated. Why? Because we're connected to people who are going to die – to leave us – inevitably. You're born, biologically attached to an anchor.

It doesn't have to be that way.

We can be perfect – the 'Aliens' don't mourn. They don't cry. They don't feel so heavy and depressed they spend millions on Prozac and alcohol. They don't stay indoors listening to sad music, feeling sorry for themselves. They've left humanity behind, and they're trying to help us, but they can't quite reach out the way can.

You see those people out there? They're wretched. They're fat, or they've lost someone they love, or – in most cases – they've never really been loved by anyone at all. They're designed so that they're programmed to be disgusting,

honest with them (she led them to believe that the experiment would accelerate and complete their collapse.

Maybe one of the Class Twos defects – leaves the compound in the dead of night, and tries to make contact with the characters (this would assume that the person has a reasonable understanding of where the characters are).

If this were to happen, Dr. Law would explode (she does not allow patients to act on their own) and devote considerable forces to hunting and killing the turncoat.

From a dramatic standpoint, this would involve a character with a lot of information about what Dr. Law's plans are, her physical security, the capabilities of the Flying Saucers and all kinds of other tasty secrets trying to rendezvous with the characters before the forces hunting him (or her) arrive to capture or kill.

Ideally, there would be a dramatic battle between Pagan forces and the characters in a photogenic, desolate desert location.

Earth versus the Flying Saucers

This is the "final act" -- the characters are both hunters and quarry; they are also aware (to some degree) of the plans Dr. Law has and their potential role in stopping them.

We see the climax ending in Dr. Law's compound, with the characters actions determining the impact Dr. Law has on humankind.

With the disaster (from her perspective) in Vegas, Dr. Law wants to complete the Singularity and detonate it before the characters can cause any more damage. The Rational Actors agree and are on the move (visible, even – there are flying saucer reports across the American West and an increase in sightings and abductions).

She is also in contact with them via the radio, explaining to her listeners (and them) that the "apocalypse" is coming; that the flying saucers are her doing and humanity is going to be awakened. She is encouraging listeners to come to her compound to be present for the "greatest event in human history."

Although this sounds to many like the ravings of a nut, she's popular and charismatic. If tens of thousands listen, hundreds come – within days, there's a swam of tents around her compound. A kind of New-Age, Old-School, Jones Town Party vibe. Add the mainstream media, and protestors (who think she's an insult to their various causes) and the whole place is a circus – a nightmare for her private security.

She welcomes the PC's to talk to her, and will even promise them safety if they'll come to her compound unarmed. Her message is that they've changed in a terrible and dangerous way, and she's offering assistance.

She is not aware that their proximity to her Loss Core will make them even stronger than normal

- Regenerating all damage instantly each round, unless killed,
- +4 PHY (including STR and CON but not BLD)
- Fast Level 4

- Base damage from their bite attacks is quadrupled before any doubling

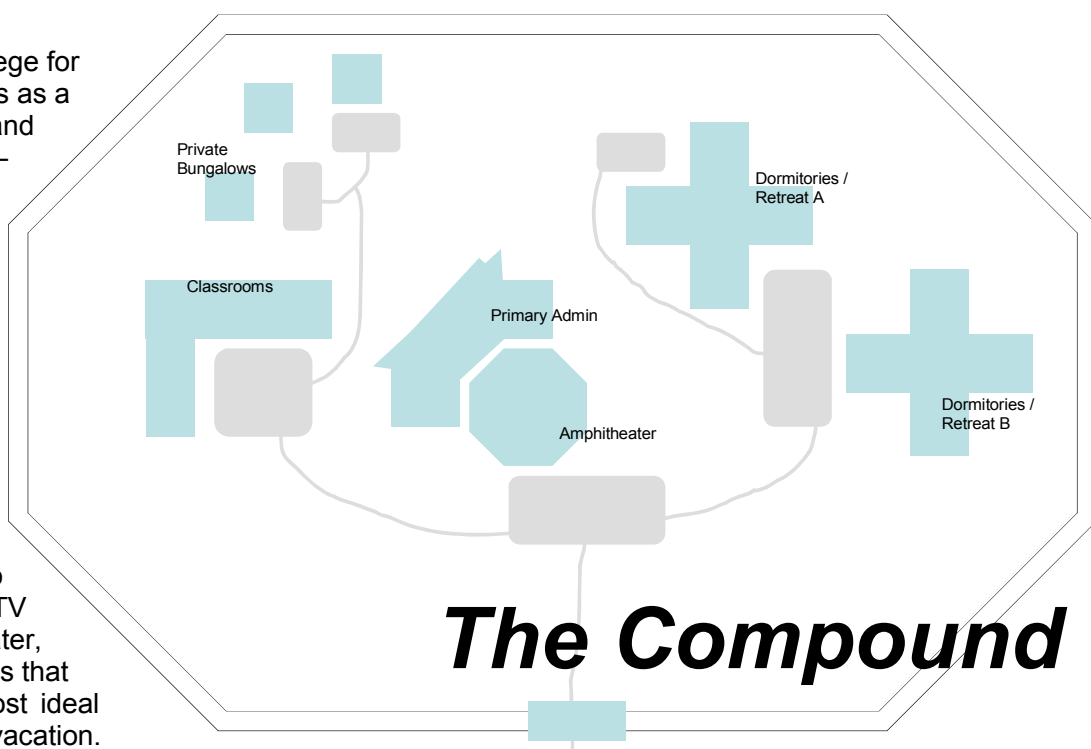
This makes them utterly overwhelming to even the best-equipped members of Dr. Law's staff and the Aliens.

The final act will (probably) take place on her Compound, surrounded by Class Twos with submachine guns (skills at L1, 10-) and private security (L2, 13- Firearms skill), where she tries to convince them to join her and support her vision of an alienated humanity

The Compound

Dr. Law has created a "college for living" that ostensibly serves as a base for retreats, classes, and "breakthrough counseling" – things she talks about and even pushes on her radio show. She's also set up a television filming show for the planned cable-network "Dr. Law Show."

There are dormitories, classrooms, a cafeteria, private bungalows for executive guests and VIP's, Dr. Law's personal offices, her recording studio for the radio show and the TV show, a covered amphitheater, and numerous other luxuries that makes her retreat an almost ideal place to go for a get-away vacation.



Over the last year, since her contact with the Aliens, things have turned darker. She's erected fences and guard posts, canceled her yearly retreat, and quietly closed the Compound off from the rest of the world. As she prepares to usher in the "Revelatory Event" (the term her and her acolytes use to denote the activation of the Alienation Singularity), she's prepared for Branch-Davidian cataclysm.

At the time the characters conduct the experiment, there are half a dozen Class Two Orphans living full-time on the compound (they are her assistants, helping her with the show, running errands, and overseeing the rest of the crew). She also has a security staff and a group of (alienated) "Security Consultants" who oversee the guards – the people she has hired are hard men; many of them have histories. All have been selected for ruthlessness and controllability.

The radio technicians, her agent, her publisher, and many of her peripheral associates have become very disturbed at her transformation – they've had their access greatly restricted, and they suspect she's lost it in a very bad way... but she's still getting great numbers and she sounds sane and normal.

After the Experiment, she snaps – her broadcast is an hour-long rant against the characters that's nearly incomprehensible to most of her audience (she accuses them of trying to disrupt the "important work" she's doing there and

The Dr. Law Monologs (continued)

sloppy, teary wretches. And that's what they are... but they can see that there's another way. They're here to leave that behind...

Are you going to deny them that?" -- Dr. Law's last, best attempt to convince the characters before she gives the command to open fire.

Dr. Law's Right Hand Girl: Christie McCall

Every executive needs their assistant and Christie McCall is the perfect disciple. She might meet the characters when they arrive—she might be introduced in passing. She won't be in a lot of conversations with them and Dr. Law because she's the *back up* in case things go *wrong*. She has orders to throw the switch on the Singularity Engine and give a try at Alienating the world Dr. Law is incapacitated.

She is arrogant, dismissive, and makes sure that people who meet her know how she feels about them. She's such an evolved personality that most people (especially scum like the PCs) should be *in awe* of her. She, herself, is in awe of Dr. Law and is a true believer.

If she shows them around the compound she won't really restrain herself from performing on-the-spot psychological diagnoses of the characters (denial, usually—but she also tells anyone who asks for anything they have an “overabundant sense of entitlement”). Her subordinates are rightly terrified of her.

Since she may be the human face at the end of the game, the PCs should probably hate her on contact (as she may not appear as a direct antagonist very often). She also does some prepping for callers who dial in—so if the PCs talk to Dr. Law on the radio they might speak with her first—and she'll be sure to introduce herself by name.

snarls/sneers that they're just another group that's “unwilling to take responsibility.”

It's the first time on the air that she speaks about her “Program” – her tone is cool and messianic and oblique. She makes it clear that she is going to do something that will usher in a new “understanding” – that people who aren't “clear, right thinkers” won't be able to “handle it.”

But you, loyal listeners, will. She explains that she's been preparing them for this coming enlightenment. She tells them to stand by for more information.

This, of course, causes all sorts of chaos and her associates either abandon ship (her publicist quits) or go into damage control. During this time, she will bring the Compound up to a “full security posture” – only people of unquestioned loyalty (or of use to her) will be admitted. She institutes 24 hour armed guard including patrols and an alienated response team.

In her next broadcast, she invites her listeners to come – physically – to the site so that they can be part of the “class” she is going to teach. She instructs them to bring camping supplies and their own water / toilet facilities – she is not going to be able to host them; instead, they will stay in the woods and township outside the compound and await further word.

Within two weeks after the Experiment, the Compound is the eye in a storm of barely-controlled chaos and expectation. UFO sightings, other strange phenomena, and her status as a national C-list celebrity have also ensured a vulture-circle of entertainment press.

Breaking Into The Compound

She'll issue an invitation to the PCs on her radio program a few nights after the Experiment—an invitation to call her and “talk” about their problems. An invitation to visit her.

If they take the invitation, they'll be closely watched and heavily guarded, of course. If they want a more... private appointment with her, they'll need to break in.

Breaking in and finding her without a gun-battle requires overcoming the following obstacles without being detected

- Getting up to the fence / gate
- Getting through the fence / gate
- Maneuvering across the campus to her offices
- Getting inside the building and finding her

If they're detected

If the PCs activate an alarm (14- security system on the fences and grounds, 16- security system to enter the building), cameras will be focused on the area (12- perception roll on the fence and campus, 14- at the doors to the building and 13- inside the building) and a human team will be dispatched to check it out (guards arrive after 1d6-1 minutes outdoors, and after about 30 seconds in the building)

Hordes of fans and visitors are creating nearly constant security triggers at the fence and gates, so the teams are relatively less aggressive if they catch people trying to climb over.

Inside the campus they'll be scary – guns drawn, affect-less, cold, and murderous in manner.

Inside the building they'll give warning, and open fire if demands to surrender aren't followed immediately (Dr. Law wants intruders captured alive, but they're very paranoid).

Better Ways In

If the characters have expert security system skills, they might be able to break in. Practically, on the site grounds, they're probably able to fight their way through everything she can throw at them, but they may not realize that. If they have full command of their alternative forms, they can use passage to open the doors and gates and their aura to shut down cameras (but not the central systems). The guards will know something terrible is coming, but be effectively blind. Some alternatives include

- Pretending to be someone else – there are still people coming and going (although under much closer guard than before). They could impersonate delivery personnel or (potentially) important members of the press
- Blackmail – Her acolytes (the Class Twos, her personal assistant, and some other, fanatic followers) mostly stay close to her, but they go into town to conduct business and for other reasons. They have the authority to authorize access; they could be forced to (they're not that fanatic)
- Special Volunteers – She is letting some people – listeners, fans, in for experimentation purposes (exposing them to the Loss Core to see what happens). She is taking candidates on her daily show, looking for people who are weak and won't be missed. If the PCs listen to her radio show they'll know this, and might be able to fake the right mix of pathetic desperation to be chosen. Volunteers are watched, of course, but not heavily guarded

End Game

In the secret chamber of the compound is the Singularity Engine. The characters can see it and find it. When things start to go wrong, either Dr. Law or her second in command, who is stationed there and will probably know if things go wrong, will activate it. Their thinking is that even if the PCs do *not* agree to go along with it, its siren song may overcome them ... or, it might work to some degree *anyway*.

They are partially right: if it is activated and not shut down or destroyed a 60 mile radius will undergo partial or total *alienation*—extreme mental trauma producing sociopaths, autistics, and extreme deviant behaviors or just the loss of all human empathy.

The Chamber

The Singularity Engine looks like a great green glowing tube some 5 yards high and two yards around amidst banks of machines, terminals and pumps. It is filled with a luminous fluid that bubbles and boils and has forms coalesce and dissipate as one watches.

Plugged into the machine are two naked human beings, both immobilized with probes running into their bodies and thick tubes running into and down their mouths. One look in their eyes (when the machine is started) will tell you they are screaming.

These two people are Class Two Orphans who had second thoughts about Dr. Law's Initiative. The machines use their brainwaves to guide the 'Expansion Event' (the detonation of the Alienation Singularity).

The Siren Song

When the detonation begins the characters will *know*. They will feel the aperture of alienation opening and will understand that if it goes off they must either guide it or be destroyed by it. When they get down to the chamber they will see either Dr. Law (who will be running the show if she knew things were going badly before she gets dealt with) or Christy McCall, her second in command—who will be throwing the switch if Dr. Law has been killed or detained.

When the PCs enter the room they will, if they have not already, assume Lamenuomen form. They will feel the seductive pull of the machine.

When they feel it they can do the following:

- **Draw Power From It:** Any character may, one a Round, make a WIL roll at a chosen negative. For each negative they choose, if they make the roll, they get +10 STR, +10 DP, and +100 years of life. If they miss the roll, the machine gets that many "points" towards detonation.
- **Destroy It:** It has 300 DP, a 15- STC, and 8 Armor.
- **Kill the Humans:** If they wish to kill the humans (who can still be rescued) they are easier to kill and will shut it down—the characters will know this, feeling their guidance. Unplugging the humans takes too long and, if done haphazardly, will kill them anyway (this should be made clear to the Players). The humans have 12 DP and 10 CON's. Any result other than Dead or Dying will allow the machine to continue to function.
- **Let it Detonate:** If it goes off, which it will, 10 Rounds after they arrive (since they are close) or within 30 minutes (if they simply stay away) then it will Alienate them and everyone else within the radius (the results will not be immediately obvious to officials but the PCs will become NPCs, effectively ending the game). Again, the Players should be told this.
- **Guide It:** If they wish to see Dr. Law's view of alienation happen OR it gains NUMBER of PCs x 3 pts from failed WIL rolls, it will detonate and effectively Alienate the world. This ends the game, although the PCs enjoy some existence further down on the Palace and very powerful (but the Palace is upset since the Rational Actors are far less into Loss than humankind).
- If the characters fed on Tessie, tell them that they are unsure if abandoning their forms will lead to the loss of their issue. It will be a gamble (but not a random roll). If they choose to give up their forms anyway, the hole, still, will not close: they will be without their power and without closure.

The PCs will NOT know what the value is that will set it off (9 for 3 PCs) but will know some value will do that.

Explosion

Assuming the PCs try to stop it, as it is damaged, it will begin to “go critical.” Faces contorted in anguish appear in the fluid chamber, wailings and gnashing of teeth are heard. Mothers crying for lost children, men crying for lost childhoods, and a pandemonium of loss and sadness comes welling out of the hole along with a lurid green glow of *alienation*.

When they break it, it *explodes*. This is a flash of green light that reaches from Chessboard Zero down to The Palace itself. They will see the magnificent gothic architecture and the beautiful, terrible Lamenuomen.

And they will have choices:

1. Leave their forms in The Palace. If they choose, in the split-seconds of destruction of the machine to disassociate from The Palace, they will, and can *close the hole*. They will lose their forms (a lot of power) but whatever unresolved issue was in their lives will now be attainable—easily. They can fix it, solve it, or mend it.
2. Keep Their Forms. The issue in their life will be forever lost to them—but they can, if they choose, *let it go*. They will be part Lamenuomen and will be facing a new world of existence both beautiful and horrifying. They will have to move on. But they can choose to do so. If they do, they will retain their powerful forms and their new perspective.

Whatever happens, in the aftermath, when they awaken, the compound will be in chaos and the machine will be falling apart with pieces of it evaporating as they watch.

Things in the Compound

The most important things in the compound are (of course) the Loss Core located in the fortified basement of the main building (it is behind a bank-vault door, but the PC’s abilities can open it). There are some other things of potential interest as well:

- Alienated Test Subjects: There are several dormitories converted into cells where psychotic, alienated test subjects are being kept after being exposed to the Loss Core; they are mindless, ferocious, and horribly mutated (black eyes, hairless, and with toothless parasite mouths)
- The Flying Saucer Garage: She is constructing a flying saucer in the covered amphitheater; currently there is a half-finished airframe with a variety of strange Rational-Actor technology devices
- Contact Station: She uses an old-fashioned-looking Rational-Actor technology radio to contact her allies. The radio makes constant, disturbing noises and is capable of communicating with similar radios on Chessboard 1; the character’s shadows will be able to contact them in this room
- Alienation Theater: A surgical theater where volunteers are subjected to the psychological rape of alienation

Coda

How it ends and where it goes next is unwritten. The PC’s could retire. They still feel their loss. They still mourn their parents. Every year, on their anniversary, they have strange dreams and travel to a place that used to seem horrible, but now feels like home.

Their association with the Lamenuomen has other benefits as well – the strange creatures fully understand what their loss has cost them, but also

what it has given them (strength of character, perhaps, empathy with others? A chance to do good in life with their fortune and their sense of justice).

But they've had their horizons expanded exponentially. If they want to pursue the mysteries of their world, they're deep and varied.

They are not infected and cannot be infected, but with practice they can learn to descend at will.

Character Suggestions

The Reunion Club (Class One Orphans)

The GM should identify a manageable number of Class One Orphans and introduce them during the first scene (Flashback) and re-introduce them ten years later to communicate continuity (these are recognizably the same people you met before) and change.

Sorrow: After a decade of loss and grieving, the Reunion Club members are marked; they have a slightly haunted look to them (a sort of light veil of sadness – most of them will not be perpetually gloomy or depressed, but a sense of melancholy seems to pervade them)

Seclusion: They have not known physical hardship, but their wealth and freak show life story has isolated them in other ways. They are (mostly) not in romantic relationships (alternative: they might be hedonists, living the extreme-party life, surrounding themselves with sycophants, music, and booze to drown out the pain). The Reunion Club is a blessing – here, and only here, they're normal.

Inner Strength: They have not (most of them) fallen. They are not alcoholics. They are not heavily medicated (most of them will be on mild medication; it doesn't help). They are also empathetic and supportive toward others, as a rule.

Anger: Some of them will carry anger that (almost) masks their sorrow; but it's usually not inchoate rage – more like the righteousness their parents would have recognized: anger as a force for change. The angry ones are likely to have causes; political connections, and power in their community and their nation.

Some will be doing better than others – all of them are aware on some level, that their sorrow isn't healing the way it's supposed to. They have the best pharmacists and therapists money can buy and every year, it's almost like it's starting again.

Here are some examples:

Darren Wong – Asian American (Korean); parents were influential journalists in California. He started (and remains the Chairman of the Board) a mildly successful web-based magazine with strong liberal / progressive leanings. He's a passionate defender of the powerless and an enemy of corporate influence. He's also handsome, charming, and can "turn down" the revolutionary aspects. He's also happy in many ways which makes the hole in him all the stranger.

Adrian Tesher – PhD. candidate in economics at Princeton, where his parents taught. He's smart, all the more-so because his some of his dedication comes from using work (school work) as a narcotic. Some of his

papers have already been published. He tends to think before speaking and he's self-reflective. Also remarkably good in a tough (or violent) situation – he's in good shape and has a hyper competitive side that comes out when it's needed.

Rebecca Gurney – Looks very young, and fragile – you see her and you want to protect her. Her long red hair and pale skin make her look almost ghost-like. She speaks quietly, but with a conviction that tends to catch the attention of the room. She has grown into a very good judge of people and will know that Bessler knows more than he's telling, and also that the Reunion Club – all of them – need to try something; she senses that this isn't right.

Barbra Weisberg – Practical, efficient. Her parents were beltway politicians and she's never wanted for support and always for friendship. She's a problem solver, these days, and has a little patience for people who are part of the problem. She's used to being in charge, but she doesn't demand it – she knows and respects good ideas when she hears them.

Brian Rolman – He's spent the last decade staying away from dark places and when that's not possible, staying away from sleep. He's up from the Bahamas, where he has a bar and a permanent residence (his own, private Margaritaville). He's got the Hawaiian shirt, Jesus-sandal beach-guru thing down. He's a joker and a bit of a lech, but he's got a good heart. He's got a breathtaking young woman with him (Amy) who seems to be part girlfriend, part personal assistant; she keeps track of his schedule, his commitments, and she has the awesome power to order him around when necessary.

The Lottery Commission

The young men of the Lottery Commission live with a perversion so inexplicable and disturbing that their lives are almost entirely facades. Like the Reunion Club, they only feel truly at home amongst each other.

Their connection to the story is sexual; its coy mannered build up is a tease. The horror of the realizing, the climax. That it ends... clearly, but without closure leaves a deep frustration in them that they adore.

Many of them are very bright, very articulate people (often, English majors). They are also amoral in their literary tastes and in other ways as well. They find themselves smarter than everyone else but also more cunning. They are envious of "normals" and find it comforting to use them as tools.

They're not psychopaths, though; they are very confused, very damaged people who have turned a weakness into an obsession. The most obsessed and successful have discovered magic.

At the top of the Commission hierarchy they have studied spells that give them dreamlike insights into other realms – they don't know if these are real other realms or internal ones, but they don't care. Their journeys have found a dust-bowl plain where simple, agricultural people live with the reality of strict tradition and ritual sacrifice. They have tasted their fantasy in a way they never thought possible and now they see consummation within their grasp.

Edwin Williams – A promising young man from a good family. There are high expectations and there always have been. Even if he had not found the story, he would have warped under the pressure in some other way. He's engaging, highly educated (the best money could buy), and friendly, but after

a time with him, one begins to sense that he's bent slightly... bent and disturbing. Edwin wouldn't disagree.

Thomas Brolling – Thomas is aggressive. If he had a head for numbers he'd have been an investment banker. Instead, he gained tenure at a prestigious institution. He has a closet full of skeletons (the metaphoric kind) that he keeps adding to as a collection game. He's the smartest guy in the room, and he'll tell you so himself.

Robert Chellum – "Chelly" is quiet and a bit withdrawn, but you catch him looking at you, and when you catch him, he introduces himself. He's awkward, but sincere; and he seems like a good person if you didn't get a vibe of neediness that screams 'get away! Get away now!' Chelly doesn't know why he doesn't have any friends. He just thinks he needs to try harder.

Links

Crystal City, Washington DC
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crystal_City%2C_Virginia

Crystal City Marriot
<http://marriott.com/property/propertypage/WASCC>

The Lottery
<http://www.classicshorts.com/stories/lotry.html>

Vegas, in general
<http://www.vegas.com/>

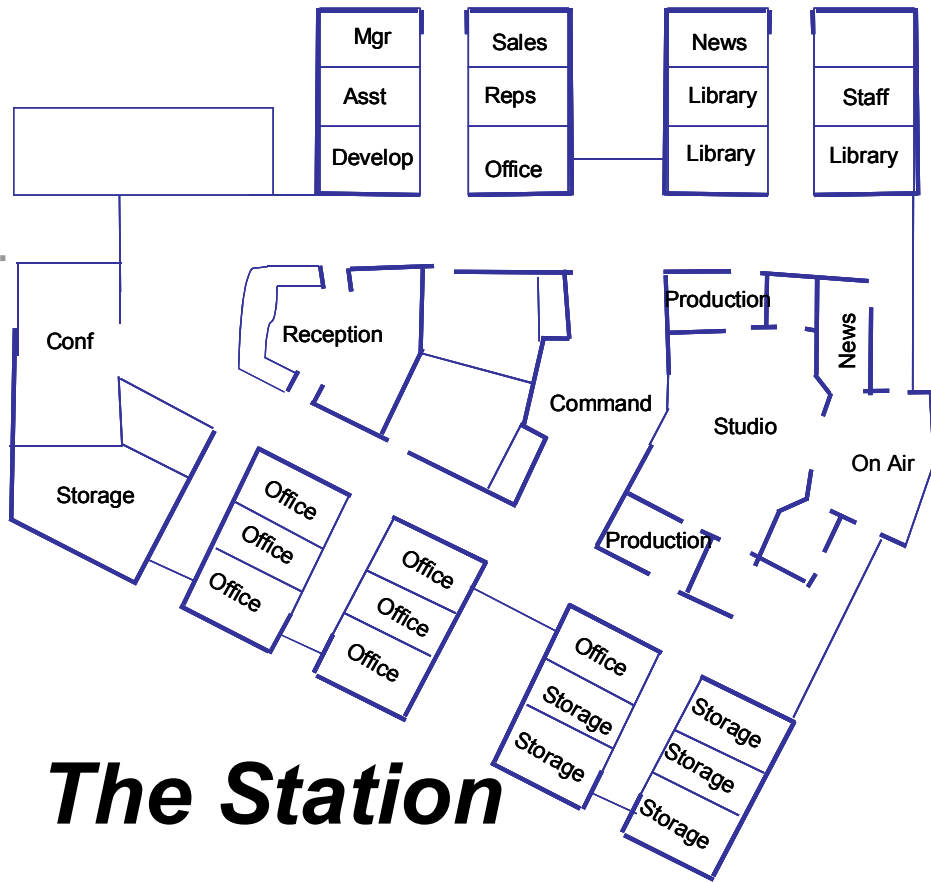
MGM Grand Hotel
<http://www.mgmgrand.com/pages/promotions.asp>

Afterword

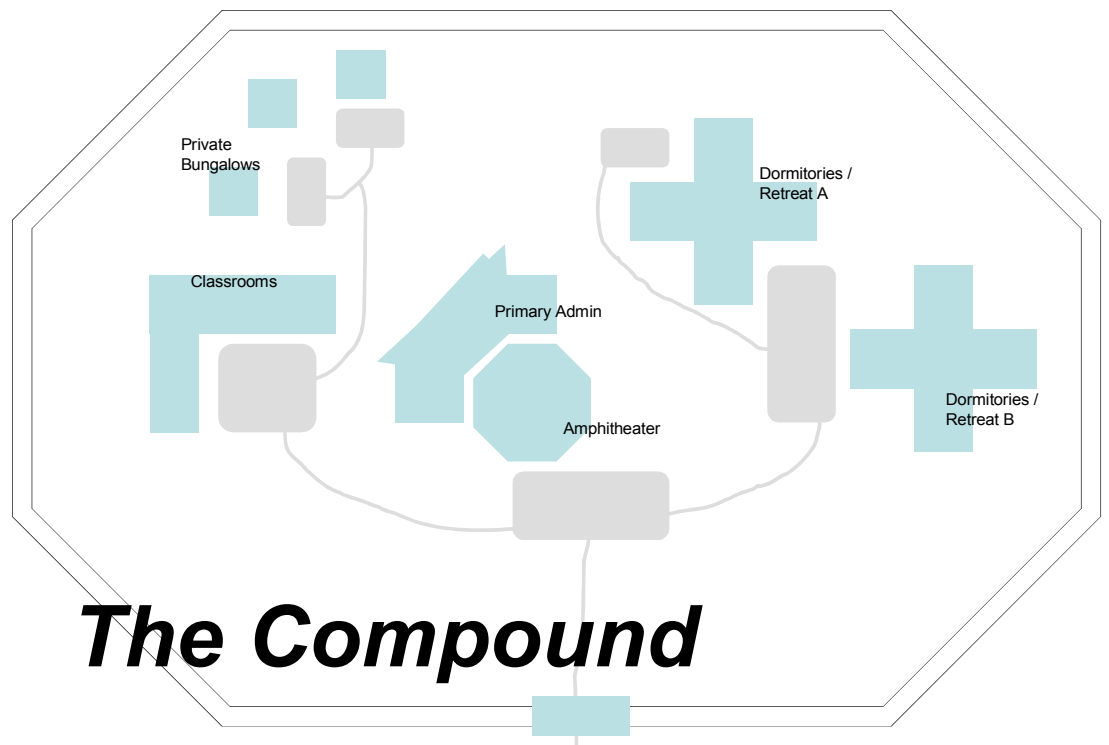
This scenario represents an atypical Wonderland game -- it doesn't deal directly with the themes of insanity or the mental health system. The characters don't actually visit the lower chessboards (at least not consciously).

We wrote it up because it was fun, unusual, and we felt it demonstrates the creative potential of the Wonderland universe.

Hope you enjoy!
 -- The JAGS Crew



The Station



The Compound

Statistics of the Lamenuomen

Lamenuomen encountered during the Experiment will have these statistics (base scores of 12); after the experiment, the characters will be transformed as described here. Even during their human form they will have the STR, CON, and Damage Point enhancements, although they will not consciously realize it at first.

Statistic Enhancements

STR Character Base + 15

CON Character Base + 1

Damage Points Character Base + 60

Supernatural Abilities

Aura of Power With a 5 REA action will allow the character to *reach out* and shut down WIL - 8 machines within line of sight. This will:

- freeze door locks
- freeze firearms
- turn off the motors of cars

This effect does not require a roll to hit

Consume The character can expand their vortex of sorrow so that it emerges from their body (or face, eyes, etc.) like a tornado of black Negative Space and tears (and looking a bit like an elephant's trunk). This deals 12 + WIL damage (IMP) and has a range of STR yards. It cannot be conventionally blocked but may be dodged. It can grapple with the same STR as a tentacle.
If a target is killed by this, it acts as the Consume power of a Hunger Disciple (Book Of Knots pg 136).

Protection against the Weapons of Man They have 12/24 Armor against mundane weapons. They have 4/16 armor against non-mundane (Wonderland) attacks.

Passage Doors will automatically unlock or open for them. This will, however, set off security and they will be *aware* of the security *before* they activate it.

See the hole When looking at a person they know what that person has been most hurt by losing. By talking intimately (8 REA Long action to whisper in their ear, the target must be Held with a Grappling action) they can shatter most people with significant losses. Make a Resisted Attack of POWER WIL +4 vs. the target's WIL.

Minor Effect	Sorrow. The target feels sorrow but no other significant effect.
Standard Effect	Great Sorrow. the target feels broken up. Make WIL rolls each turn at -3 or suffer a -3 to all rolls.
Major Effect	Despair. The character suffers -5 to all positive action--may simply fall to the ground in a fetal position.
Critical Effect	Suicidal. As above--but the target may commit suicide later.
Catastrophic Effect	Shattered. The target is catatonic for some (extensive) period of time.