

Jason Webber's story is a tragedy. Victim of the bizarre Gendack case. Orphaned by the mysterious murder of his parents. Lost his home to fire. Now he's in state care, surrounded by kids whose futures likely lie in running the streets. His caseworker tries desperately not to let him slip away, but he won't talk to her, or to anyone. Yet the boys in the home gather around him, protecting him as he obsessively draws scene after scene of violence and sadness. Each of his drawings has a space left noticeably blank.

What do they mean?

What won't he draw?

COLLECTION

OF

HORRORS

EMPTY SPACE

A Storytelling Adventure System anthology for Hunter: The Vigil

WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING, INC.
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Special thanks to our voice actors for giving up a Saturday to help us out:
Anna Albano, Nathan Binder, David Bounds, Natasha Bryant-Raible, Priscilla Kim, Vincent Lombardo, Orrin Loria, Weston Reid, Rich Thomas, Michelle Webb

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Empty Space

MENTAL ... PHYSICAL ... SOCIAL ...

Overview

Jason Webber is haunted by tragedy. He is a survivor of the bizarre child abduction case known as the Sendack Case or "Row Home Nightmare" (as detailed in the **Horror Recognition Guide**, pp. 49-72), only to lose his parents a few months later in an unsolved homicide and arson case. The house that marked the scene of both crimes is condemned and demolished now, and Jason is in state care. His case worker, Rebecca Mitchell, has been getting nowhere with the boy and fears he is falling in with the wrong crowd.

To make matters stranger, the cliques and proto-gangs of the state home haven't subjected him to the hazing or initiations typical of such groups. Instead he seems to be having a positive effect on the yard, despite his withdrawn nature. Significantly fewer fights and outbursts rule the days and nights within the cramped and usually volatile environment. How Jason is responsible is one of many unknowns surrounding the boy.

Jason draws constantly on every surface he has access to, and the boys gather protectively around him like he's some sort of schoolyard messiah. Pictures of his dead parents, his time spent in the basement dungeon, a gray mare drawing a black carriage and other macabre images cover every available surface. One element features in every one: a blank area in the picture as if he's leaving something out; something too terrible to draw.

Rebecca is at the end of her rope and willing to try anything to make some sort of inroad with the boy. Familiar with his case history and the daughter of a hunter herself, she reaches out to the cell. She can't shake the feeling that something deeper and more sinister is at hand. Why won't the boy talk to her? What won't he draw?

Sample drawings are provided and may be handed over to the players by Rebecca first thing or revealed as the scene progresses, culminating in a picture of the rec room with a man with a candle and a woman lying on the floor – both presumably dead.

Pursuing answers, the cell must win the boy's confidence that they can keep him safe from the horror that haunts his every moment and killed his parents: Old Tom. Old Tom attached himself to Jason after the rest of his anchors in this world have been destroyed. Able to communicate with children and youths, he takes on the forms of nightmares to coerce and control his growing flock at the State home. If the cell can get Jason to confide in them, Old Tom will be revealed, hovering nearby in the chilling form of Rebecca Mitchell's mangled and crushed body. No wonder the boy won't talk to her: every minute a twisted mirror of her broken body reminds him of the consequences.

Description

Rebecca

Rebecca greets you at the door with a pleasant if sad smile. "Thank you so much for coming, I... I couldn't think of what else to do. I think Jason - the boy I told you about - I think he's afraid of something. At first I thought it was me, but, these pictures he's drawing..." She trails off with a faraway look in her eye, a handful of pictures in question in her hand. Her attention snaps back to the here and now. "Take a look for yourself. When you're ready, he's right through here in the rec room with the rest of the boys."

Jason

The common room of the group home is crowded despite the relatively small number of boys. At once everyone in the room stops their card games and conversations to look you over. The change in atmosphere makes it clear that strangers aren't common or welcome. It doesn't take a minute to guess which one is Jason. He scratches out a drawing in chalk on a brick column while a thuggish-looking boy stands guard nearby.

(introduction) Jason is obviously reluctant to speak to you with Rebecca in the room. He barely acknowledges you, seemingly enthralled with his drawings. But you can tell from his body language that he does hear you. It's like he's afraid to acknowledge your presence at all, let alone answer your questions. Rebecca gives you a look of quiet apology.

(gaining ground) "Can't say." Jason responds simply, concisely. Your first instinct might be that he's blowing you off but he looks up at you for the first time and repeats himself earnestly. "Can't say." His eyes flick over to a collection of boys by a recreation table before looking back down at his drawing. Following his furtive line of sight reveals nothing exceptional about the boys, other than their intense interest in you and the cell.

(success) Jason looks up at you again this time his face is a resolute mask. He beckons you closer to him and whispers "You look over there to those boys. You look real hard. Not at them, but above them. He's hiding from you, but you can see him if you try." A tear tracks down his cheek before he starts a new drawing on the floor.

(losing ground/failure) Jason picks up his shoebox of chalk, pencils and markers and stalks across the room to where a group of boys leers at you and the cell. If you try and approach, the group of boys shoulder up protectively around the boy. Something is definitely not right here.

Old Tom

(first glance) Your gaze settles on the group of boys sitting on and around the table on the far side of the room, but nothing about them seems out of place. Looking back down to Jason reveals no new clues to what you're supposed to see here. Only by letting your eyes unfocus a bit do you start to sense a blur hovering slightly above the boys like a smudge on a photograph. The more you try to blink and focus on it, the more agitated your vision becomes, and you feel the onset of a sudden and piercing pain.

(Old Tom revealed) Finally your vision pierces the gauzy veil obscuring the horror. You see Rebecca - or something that has deigned to look like her - with her neck bent at a harsh right angle, staring from unblinkingly eyes, hovering over the boys. She is crumpled, bent and crushed like a tissue stuffed into an invisible box. Seeing your reaction Jason points to the empty square in his drawing and reveals with a harsh whisper, "Old Tom."

Storyteller Goals

Confront your players with an inexplicable horror from a position that they can't do anything about immediately. If they force the issue now, they put everyone present in danger, but if they wait, they may be allowing a direct threat against Rebecca and Jason to stand unanswered.

Character Goals

By request of Rebecca (or following up on leads from the **Horror Recognition Guide**), the cell comes to Jason. As they delve deeper into Jason's situation, the horror dawns on them that they are not alone, and a presence within the common room holds sway over the children present. Who or what is Old Tom, and how do they deal with him?

Actions

Interviewing Jason

Jason is a withdrawn preadolescent, almost autistic in his lack of response. Getting answers from him will be difficult, doubly so if Rebecca is close by. Despite all appearances, though, he wants to tell the cell that a couple yards off hovers the thing of nightmares that killed his parents and holds sway over the other children. He wants this to be over. The onus is on the cell to prove that they can keep him safe when no one else can.

If the interviewer is successful, Jason will give clues indicating that he can't speak to Rebecca. He's afraid and under constant watch. If the interviewer fails, Jason regresses, convinced the cell can't help or believing this is a test by Old Tom.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy + equipment vs. Jason's Resolve (dice pool 2)

Action: Extended and contested

Hindrances: Rebecca is present (-3), interviewer appears old (-1 to -3, depending on apparent age).

Help: Familiar face (+2), interviewer appears to be in their teens to mid-20s (+1), direct offer of protection for him or Rebecca (+1).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The interviewer makes a tragic misstep, reinforcing Jason's image of adults as untrustworthy, and incurs a -3 penalty to any subsequent attempt by visibly present members of the cell.

Failure: The interviewer makes no progress with Jason. For every two consecutive failures, any attempt to interview Jason by any visibly present member of the cell takes on a cumulative -1 penalty to interact with Jason (to a maximum of -3).

Success: The interviewer makes some headway with the boy, getting deeper into what he's seen and what he knows. At 10 successes, Jason will reveal that they are not alone and the spirit (identified as Old Tom) is nearby, which is why he can't speak freely.

Exceptional Success: Jason wholeheartedly believes that the cell can protect him. He will be specific that his parents were killed by a spirit calling itself Old Tom, that the creature is with him at all times and has threatened to kill Rebecca if he talks. He will point a straight line to Old Tom, granting an additional +2 bonus to the Seeing the Unseen roll.

Seeing the Unseen

Some hunters have a way to look through the veil between the tangible world and the supernatural worlds that exist alongside it. Everyone else must rely on their wits or the will of monsters to reveal themselves. In the case of Old Tom, he – it – hovers somewhere between seen and unseen near the boys at all times. With enough clues as to where to look, anyone can see him without aid.

Dice Pool: Resolve + Composure + equipment

Action: Instant

Hindrances: Openly skeptical (-2), dramatic failure on previous observation rolls (-2)

Help: Jason points to Old Tom (+2), deciphering the pictures (+1)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The boy is severely delusional or putting the cell on. Whichever it is, the attempted observer is likely to lose her patience and agitate to leave this lost cause before they embarrass themselves further. Only a direct confrontation with Old Tom by other members of the cell or the boys will allow her to reroll with a one-time -2 penalty.

Failure: The courtyard appears normal and occupied only by the boys, the cell and Rebecca. Another attempt to detect Old Tom may be made upon further evidence at a -1 cumulative penalty per successive attempt (maximum -3).

Success: Success is marked with a chill as the observer is confronted with the twisted figure of Old Tom, in the form of Rebecca broken and contorted as if stuffed into an invisible box. Her head bent at an unnatural angle she regards the cell with glassy eyes.

Exceptional Success: As success above and the observer gains a one time +1 bonus on any initiative rolls made this scene.

Consequences

Old Tom is revealed, but what can the cell do about it? Rebecca is under a standing threat from the spirit and the potential blowback for Jason could prove deadly. The cell may attempt to negotiate with the spirit, but all he wants is to be left alone with the children or an equitable substitute. Can Old Tom offer anything the cell wants more than to free these kids from his grasp: a clue to an ongoing mystery, closure with a deceased colleague or a significant boost in funding for their Vigil?

Attacking Old Tom is no easy prospect. Battling a spirit is a tricky proposition under the best of conditions, and some of the boys are willing to defend him. Perhaps it's worth biding their time and coming back with the proper arsenal, but are Rebecca or Jason safe in the meantime?

Old Tom, Pied Piper

Quotes: (*stares unblinking from Rebecca's dead eyes*)

(*speaking through the boys*)
"Old Tom doesn't want to talk to you. Leave us in peace."

(*ghost sign*) A shadow casts over Rebecca's face making her eyes look like hollow sockets, and a ragged line appears across her throat.

Virtue: Charity. Old Tom relishes taking care of his charges, if briefly.

Vice: Lust. Old Tom covets power in the physical world, the ability to touch it and impact it.

Background: Was Old Tom ever alive, or is he some other form of spirit? Even Old Tom would be hard pressed to answer the question. His oldest memories involve luring Lenapé children to a cave off the Delaware River and dashing them against rocks. Estranging the parents and causing sorrow among the tribes of the Delaware seemed to be his only purpose. As European settlers moved into the area, Old Tom glommed



Dread Powers: Strange Form 4.

OLD TOM'S GANG

The boys around the rec room have been lulled into Old Tom's employ through Jason and through the spirit's direct persuasion. If the cell causes problems, they will move to defend him. Abbreviated sample stats are provided.

COMMUNITY CENTER BOYS

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2,
Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Presence 2,
Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Weaponry 1

Health: 6

Willpower: 5

Morality: 6

Size: 4

Speed: 9

Defense: 2

Initiative: 4



DRAWING 1
- GHOST CARRIAGE

Props



DRAWING 3
- BEDROOM



DRAWING 2
- REC ROOM