

The Circus of the Night Part 1
Call of Cthulhu
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“Unseen among them, watches Fate-
His lips move, counting-his deep eyes stare
Upward at Marie, Queen of the Air.”
Vine McCasland, 1920

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Introduction

This scenario is written for a modern setting but could be easily modified for another era. Although the locations have not been specified, I had envisioned several small towns in the American Midwest. The investigators will be involved with a case which will lead to progressively more gruesome/violent cases. A running thread throughout these should be that the circus had just been through the town and one of the involved NPC's attended. The mythos involvement in these should be minor or indirect. These might involve poltergeist activity, a medium, the dreamlands, or a psychotic murderer. Ultimately, the investigators will catch up with William Miller's Circus of the Night. Miller is a 440 year old sorcerer who started as a performer/juggler/storyteller. He made a deal with Nyarlathotep (in the form of The Black Man) to become the greatest performer in the world. William was given enhanced charisma and prolongation of life in exchange for the corruption of others and the spread of chaos. He has corrupted his performers, many of whom needed very little encouragement. He corrupts his audience through the viewing of his circus. A performance is at the least disturbing leading to ill feelings and nightmares. At its worst, a viewing can destroy a person's sanity and release powers from beneath the surface of consciousness.

Poltergeist

Keeper's Info

The initial scenario for this campaign is a poltergeist event aka recurrent spontaneous psycho-kinesis (RSPK). I suggest a poltergeist event as the first encounter as there will be no true danger to the investigators allowing escalation of the violence in the ensuing episodes (See The Parapsychologist's Handbook by Chris Jerome Chaosium Monograph #0085).

After a visit to The Circus, a young wife and mother by the name of Alicia Salter has developed a problem. Alicia was abused by her father as a child. She has repressed these memories in order to be able to continue to love her father and function as a person. Since the birth of her daughter, she has been depressed and afraid because of the subconscious fear that her husband will mistreat their child as her father did. The sanity blasting effect of The Circus has threatened to bring her repressed memories to the surface at one time which would likely push off the deep end but has also given her the power to displace her anger and conflict in the form of psychokinetic energy. In order to assist this family in crisis, the investigators will need to isolate and identify Alicia as the problem. More experienced investigators may be quick to blame invisible mythos entities and this can be encouraged if the Keeper chooses. If the investigators are taking overly long to figure out the situation, poltergeist activity should follow Alicia Salter to her new lodgings and occur with increasing frequency. This should clue the investigators in to the fact that the problem is one of the people rather than the place. Time, at this point, should be short before Alicia loses her mind and the psychokinetic activity stops. To prevent the investigators from chasing after The Circus too quickly, the Keeper can make the successful pursuit hinge upon a clue which will only be provided by the insanity or cure of the character, Alicia Salter.

Getting the Investigators Involved

I would suggest that one of the investigators is an old friend/schoolmate/co-worker of one of the poltergeist victims. For Delta Green, the connection could be a co-worker aware of the investigator's interest in the paranormal who is seeking help but hoping to avoid attracting the attention of his superiors. Once the investigators become involved in the poltergeist activity, it should be fairly easy to get them to follow the circus' trail from scenario to scenario. Eventually the investigators should be allowed to catch up with The Circus for a campaign ending finale.

Harry Salter

One of the investigator's will be contacted by Harry Salter with a request for assistance. He will explain that he, his wife Alicia, and daughter Sandra recently moved to a farmhouse in the country and recent strange events have put his sanity and his marriage in jeopardy. Harry and his wife moved from the city to the country approximately five months ago. At first, there were some unusual events such as strange noises at night and an occasional odd draft but he attributed these to his being unaccustomed to old, large houses and country life. Small objects would disappear only to show up later elsewhere. (The sounds are simply those of an old country house and the misplaced objects are the result a curious four year old) However, one night after going out to the circus as a couple everything changed. He dropped the babysitter off and returned home to find Alicia sitting in the living room and objects flying around the room. The moment he entered the room, the objects fell to the ground as if suddenly dropped by invisible hands. It happened again two and half weeks later. This time it was a clock knocked off the mantle while we were eating dinner. He can't afford a new home so he has temporarily moved his family in with his folks who live approximately an hour away until he can figure out what to do.

Harry will do his best to answer any reasonable questions that the investigators

have. A successful Psychology roll will reveal that he is anxious and confused but not unstable. He is unaware of any special history to the house and will allow the investigators to study or search it in any manner they choose. Further inquiry regarding the events of that evening reveal that he does not recall anything unusual happening at the circus. He can recall the acts of the side show and trying a few games of skill. He remembers little of the bigtop show other than there was a creepy ringmaster who played a flute. They spoke very little on the way home. He could not have been gone more than twenty minutes driving the babysitter home.

If specifically questioned about the details of the poltergeist incidents, it can be learned that the objects found floating during the first episode were a wedding photo, one of their daughter's dolls, and a candy dish which broke upon hitting the ground. The second episode occurred during a silly argument over who should drop their daughter off for preschool. The clock was an anniversary present from her parents. Alicia has been putting on a good face but he is worried about the effect these strange happenings will have on her.

If asked about Alicia, he will tell the investigators that he was worried about her even before all this. She seemed to be under a lot of stress living in the city, sleeping poorly, unable to fully enjoy life. Ironically, he thought a move to the country would settle things down. If specifically asked about mental illness, he will admit that Alicia did have post-partum depression after their daughter was born. He will state that this is a common biologic disturbance for which she has been treated and cured. He will be reluctant to admit that there is a possibility that she has depression or has any other mental disorder. He is unaware of the abuse that she suffered as a child.

The House

Examination of the house by any means will be unrevealing. The investigators, however, will not know this and should be given the benefit of a complete room by room search with many details. Without Alicia, no unusual activity will be observed no matter how diligent the surveillance. Please see the section on Alicia regarding events that can occur with Alicia present. A successful Geology roll will reveal no evidence to suggest underground water, mines, caverns, or geological faults are to blame. Research into the history of the house will reveal that it was built approximately 60 years ago and that no suspicious events have been reported at this residence. At the Town Hall/Hall of Records, a successful Library Use roll will reveal the following. Prior to the current structure, a general store was existed at this location. It was destroyed by a fire which killed the owner, his wife, and his daughter. There is no indication that foul play was suspected. To make things interesting, the keeper can add the local legend of his/her choice such as vengeful Indian spirits or a witch. This information can be provided by a neighbor, further library research, and/or a local historian/crackpot.

General Research

Research into the paranormal reveals that this type of activity would be ascribed to a "poltergeist". The word is derived from two medieval German words meaning "noisy spirit". In the 1950's, parapsychologists replaced the term with recurrent spontaneous psycho-kinesis (RSPK). Cases have most commonly involved moving objects. Other types of manifestation have included apports (small object displacement), noises, writing, voices, pools of water or blood, stone throwing, and rarely biting (similar

to stigmata). Poltergeists rarely cause serious injury or death. Cases frequently center around a prepubescent girl. Famous poltergeist cases include the “Worksop” poltergeist (1883), the “Karin” poltergeist (1905), and the cases of Eleanore Zugun (1926) and of Borley Rectory (1930). This information and more can be found in *The Parapsychologist’s Handbook*.

Alicia’s Parents

Alicia’s parents, Gloria and Carl Lansing, live in the area. If the investigators wish, they can visit them. Gloria is a homemaker and will defer to her husband unless directly addressed. Carl is a large ex-military officer. He will admit that he was a strict authoritarian and that his daughter is all the better for it. He will deny any accusations of abuse and call on his wife to back him up. Successful psychology rolls will reveal that he is telling the truth but that she is afraid and lying. He believes that he is telling the truth because he has convinced himself that he was only strict and not physically abusive. If the investigators can engage Gloria in conversation, she will offer to show them her prized photographs. Gloria can produce many photographs of her daughter winning many awards from spelling bees to track meets. All but the earliest photos reveal Alicia’s expression as grim determination rather than jubilation. A successful spot hidden will allow the investigator to notice the scattered bruises. If asked about Alicia’s medical history, they will admit that she was an active girl and had many broken bones. They will deny a history of psychiatric disease in Alicia or in the family.

Alicia

Eventually, the investigators will focus their attention on Alicia. If they do not, another episode of poltergeist activity should occur during a visit from Harry, perhaps an object flying towards his head but only missing by inches. She will neither admit any responsibility nor be able to guess any reason for the strange events. She does not recall any details from their visit to the circus. She will say that it must not have been all that impressive if it left no impression on her. She can give an unimpassioned the details of the poltergeist activity as described above. A successful psychology roll will reveal that she is displaying a total lack of emotional depth regarding these events. If this is pointed out to her she will retort analytically stating that no one has been hurt, a logical explanation must exist, and that being frightened would not help the situation. However, Alicia will become disturbed with any discussion of her childhood, her daughter’s welfare, or the possibility of her husband becoming angry/violent.

The key to solving this mystery is convincing Alicia Salter that she is the root of this problem and that she needs professional help. Although risky to her sanity, this can be most easily accomplished by provoking her into an episode. Including her husband in the process would definitely improve the chances of success but would require convincing him to cooperate (oratory skills). Even so, there is a strong chance he will fall apart when he sees her start to break down. If this occurs and he is not sent away, he could become an obstacle rather than an asset. Alicia will become agitated should there be any prolonged discussion of the subjects mentioned above. If the investigators persist, Alicia will scream and breakable objects will float about the room and then smash into walls. Though near misses may occur, no one will be struck. Alicia will then become calm and quiet. Once provoked, the investigators will be able to convince Alicia that she

needs to seek professional help (no roll required).

Alternatively, the investigators could try to assist Alicia without provoking her. Psychoanalysis on an unwilling subject is unlikely to be fruitful. However, clever investigators could possibly convince her to get help without admitting she has a problem through deception. A potential ploy could involve convincing her that her husband or daughter has a problem but he refuses to accept help. She could be convinced (oratory skills) that family therapy is the only way to help her husband or daughter thereby getting Alicia the help that she needs.

Conclusion

Regardless of the ultimate results of her psychotherapy, the investigators should receive 1d4 sanity bonus if successful in determining that she is the root of the problem and getting her help. If the investigators fail to solve the mystery in time, Alicia will become permanently insane and the investigators will lose 1d4 sanity points. Either way, the investigators will get a call from Alicia's doctor asking them if they are aware of a particular place (Keeper's choice for next part of the campaign). Alicia seems to be making progress but dreams of this place. Alicia's husband and family claim that she has never been to this place and has no connection to it of which they are aware. The investigators will not be familiar with this location. If the investigators ask about the dream, he will state that he believes a recent trip to the circus has brought back repressed memories from her childhood. She may have heard or read about this place and simply inserted it into her dreams/memories. The doctor will not be pursuing it further. Alicia's dreams will lead the investigators to the site of the next scenario.