"Satan loves it when you pretend to be an elf. Oh, how he laughs when you roll your little dice!" -Father Lopez, Degoya County, 1985

PRESENTING THE MYSTERY

The house on Rodenbecker Street was visited by Leona Calvillo and a sheriff's deputy; they said they were looking for Mrs. Calvillo's daughter, Amelia. The Rodenbecker Street house used to be the Calvillo home, before they were priced out of the neighborhood, and they thought she might be there.

Amelia Calvillo snuck out the night before and is now missing; the only clue of her whereabouts is a photocopied flier found on her bed: line art of an elf on a mushroom and the text, "Greetings, Travelers," alongside a local phone number. On the back, a handwritten note: today's date and "TURN UNDEAD." The police don't think it's relevant, but the flier reminds you of something...

Back in the '80s, at the height of the Satanic Panic, some teenagers were obsessed with a roleplaying game called Serpents & Sepulchers*. They would set up underground* S&S *games, using fliers similar to the one found on Amelia's bed to advertise: call the number and you'd get a location and a date. You'd meet in a drafty warehouse, or a vacant storefront, or a half-constructed house and play all night.* Serpents & Sepulchers *felt secret, sexy, and rebellious. These teens called themselves the Black Leaf Circle, and the rumor then was that they knew how to perform real magic.*

The secret S&S *games came to a halt when Bastian Dare went missing. Police waved "Greetings, Travelers" fliers on the nightly news asking for help, curfews were put in place, and the subculture died out. Bastian was never found.*

Pose the following to a Latchkey of your choice: *You had an older sibling who was Bastian's classmate. What do you remember about how the disappearance affected them and their circle of friends?*

QUESTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

Question: Where are these new fliers luring kids? (Complexity: 6)
Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by locating the current location of the underground game of *Serpents & Sepulchers*, and then convincing the would-be gamers to give it up. The Black Leaf Circle will be an ongoing Danger in the campaign.

Question: Where is the Black Leaf Circle's "lair?" (Complexity: 8)
Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by confronting the Black Leaf Circle and convincing (or forcing) them to leave Degoya County. They will not be an ongoing Danger in the campaign.

THE KEY OF DUNGEONEERING

- ☐ Each Latchkey narrates a flashback to their childhood showing a dangerous activity they engaged in and hoped their parents would never hear about.

MOMENTS

> While looking at a reflective surface, you catch a glimpse of a figure behind you. They're wearing a dark cloak, like they're about to go on an adventure, watching you from a distance. By the time you turn around, they're gone.

> A teenager on a smoke break draws lazy circles with their finger in the air and a small dust devil stirs up, tossing around litter and dirt.

> A car playing extremely loud music goes abruptly silent when it gets close, rolling quietly by, before starting up again once they're some distance away.

> Among some litter on the ground, a scuffed-up Betamax copy of Mazes & Monsters, starring a young Tom Hanks. If slipped out of the sleeve, the plastic falls apart, tape unraveling and rolling away.

> An entire cowhide being walked down the street, draped over someone's head, their legs visible underneath.

> A nearby clattering of a polyhedral die that just misses hitting you. Then another. Then another. Then a hail of them.

THE BLACK LEAF CIRCLE

These occultists take their name from a group of secretive wizards in the *Serpents & Sepulchers* setting. They have figured out how to do real magic, and believe that great sacrifices are required to get results. Back in the '80s, the Circle organized the underground *S&S* sessions so they could identify young people with an affinity for the occult... and who were gullible and able to keep a secret. They lured Bastian Dare out into the desert and bound him to the abandoned silo to serve as a living battery for their magic. Decades later, that energy is nearly depleted. It's time for the Circle to cast another Great Work together. They just need the perfect victim.

The Black Leaf Circle can cast the following spells: Fireball, Web, Dimension Door, Invisibility, Hold, and Sasha's Hideous Hunger.

Some Black Leaf Circle members, if you need them: Roshanakh Godpanther, Saphronina Ravensdottir, Ringak Stonejammer, Brandy Mousemother, Korgoth Serpentfeast.

If the Latchkeys ignore the Black Leaf Circle...

The Circle will select a young person from among the would-be gamers to "turn undead" (i.e. suspend them in a magical "unlife" to serve as a power source).

DANGERS

Concerned Parents & Patriots

Good Christian parents, concerned about how the youth are going to bear up under the War on Terror, meet weekly to share insights (and horror stories they found online). They're very concerned about "outside influences" moving into their community and will be quick to poke their noses into the business of anyone asking suspicious questions about their children. And they will call the cops. Some names, if you need them: Mateo, Kendra, Ellison, Barb, Lupe, Big Pete.

The ghost of Bastian Dare

Drained of energy for decades, all that Bastian's ghost wants is to be replaced so they can move on. Anyone interfering with the Black Leaf Circle's quest for a replacement will be subject to hauntings such as: jerking the wheel of a car, making unexpected loud noises, shoving someone down stairs, and so forth.

Special Rule: If the Latchkeys locate Bastian's desiccated corpse in the binding site, they will immediately be confronted by the ghost and unlock a new Question.
Question: How can we set the ghost free so it can pass onto the next world? (Complexity: 2).
Opportunity: Perform a quieting ritual on the ghost of Bastian Dare; it no longer ceases to be a Danger.

LOCATIONS

Smoker's corner

Just at the edge of the La Fresca High grounds, behind the handball courts. Long-haired teens smoke and jeer at classmates driving by. One is hiding a flask, poorly. A sickly sweet smell of flavored tobacco. Some worried speculation about whether or not there will be a draft for Iraq.
Paint the Scene: *Pick a Latchkey in the scene. What cutting nickname are they given when they approach?*

Deep Lake Trading

A combination pawn shop and "local gifts" trading post. Actual Native jewelry gathers dust next to bear paw keychains (Made in China). Behind the counter: fixed blade knives and poorly-maintained hand guns.
Paint the Scene: *What childhood treasure did you pawn here years ago and what did you waste the money on?*

TobaccoPLUS Outlet

All the supplies a tobacco hobbyist might want for pipe smoking or rolling their own. Novelty water pipes make great gifts. They card everyone, so don't take it personally. A crowd of teenagers tend to loiter in the back lot, occasionally hacky sacking.
Paint the Scene: *What about the decor in the shop reveals the owner's long-standing fondness for fantastic fiction and film?*

COPIES COPIES COPIES

Two self-serve photocopiers up front (one out of order). An ink-stained counter with paper samples in three-ring binders. In the back, the *ka-chunk-whirrr, ka-chunk-whirr* of copy machines in motion, a single employee reloading paper, clearing jams, etc.
Paint the Scene: *What makes it evident that the "Greetings, Travelers" fliers were made in this shop?*

× The binding site

Inside a decommissioned underground nuclear missile silo, a small room. Tied to a chair with padlocked chains, the slumped body of a young man, desiccated and shrunken; it has been here for some time. A complex pattern of salt surrounds the chair, poured into strange and compelling shapes. An observation booth has utilitarian furniture and dated equipment, including a VCR and monitor.
Paint the Scene: *What signs indicate that this site has been visited recently?*
Special Rule: If the Latchkeys watch an Odyssey tape in this Location, the nature of the tape changes: whatever scene is taking place is in the middle of a post-apocalyptic hellscape, and players must narrate their prompt in a way that reflects that.

SIDE CHARACTERS

Jesse "The Beast" Herrera, an iconoclast
Wears custom-made clothing recycled from second-hand stores, with leather accents. Intricate eyeliner. Terrible stick-and-poke tattoo of an inverted cross. Ex-Mormon with a tattered collection of mass-market occult paperbacks.
Quote: *"Every place they put up the Ten Commandments there should be a statue of Baphomet. Did you know the Church of Satan has never lost a court case?"*

Dan Skeen, a reporter at the La Fresca Tribune
Balding, with close-cropped hair, suspenders over a button-up shirt, no jacket. Gives out their pager number readily. Used to play *Serpents & Sepulchers* with their cousin, Bastian Dare; Dan's character was a dwarf named Yorun Shalebreaker.
Quote: *"You might think the news slows down when it's not election season, but it never really stops! Year round, we've got accidents, craft fairs… the weather. Crime. And then there's all the weird Degoya County shit. I get run ragged!"*

Carlos Rey, pushcart food/drink vendor
Wears a rotating set of ironic ballcaps, many featuring fishing lodges. Droopy mustache. The heel of his right sneaker hangs loose. After school lets out, Carlos's food cart ("Hungry's") is surrounded by starving teens, serving water, Gatorade, roasted Piñón nuts, and giant bags of chicharrones de harina doused with hot sauce. He knows the kids, and also notices which of them drive, who gets picked up, etc.
Quote: *"Dang, don't they feed you in there? Feel like I'm gonna get my fingers bit. What can I get for you, boss? Hungry?"*

Missy "Donut" van Doorn (aka "Missy von Donut"), a head shop owner
Big '80s hair and a denim jacket with a Psychic Narwhal Messiah patch on the front. Silver rings on most of her fingers. Fidgets with a metal Zippo lighter, doesn't smoke. Back in the '80s, her *S&S* character was a healer called Witch Elm.
Quote: *"To be honest? I let anyone who asks leave fliers up front by the windows, or hang up their little band posters. Doesn't hurt anything. Helps with foot traffic, you know?"*

Lem "Frog" Cutler, a photocopier tech
Slump-shouldered, dark bags under his eyes. Long, limp blonde hair. Name tag has "Frog" written in marker on masking tape, covering the original name. Works third shift and takes money to run "off the books" photocopy jobs. They were a classmate of Bastian Dare's and if asked about him, they bat at their ear as if hearing something loud and distracting. He's possibly haunted by the ghost of Bastian Dare.
Quote: *"Uh. Okay, so like… yeah. Sorry, could you ask that question again? I was… yeah. Wait. Yeah."*

The People's Champ, a legend
Skinny male youth wearing a red and purple lucha mask with coyote ears. In possession of a broad golden championship belt and a plastic bag full of energy drinks. A living folk hero with no apparent responsibilities save for those he adopted: keeping the youth of Deep Lake safe.
Quote: *"The forces of evil are gathering, my friend. Will you answer the call and give a couple dollars to the People's Champ? I have a long night ahead of me. I will need my strength."*

Amelia Calvillo, no longer missing
Amelia might turn up again, wandering the streets, dazed and clutching a *Serpents & Sepulchers* character sheet. She's bilingual but speaks English with a slight lisp. Scrunchies on both wrists. Her *S&S* alter ego, Whisper, shares a name with her pet python. Amelia doesn't remember exactly what happened to her, though she can be pressed for Clues like any other Side Character.
Quote: *"There's no easy way to tell if a snake likes you."*

The would-be gamers
These are all kids from La Fresca Senior High, the school that most teenagers in Degoya County go to. They have each attended one or more sessions of the secret *Serpents & Sepulchers* game, which is always held somewhere new. Some names, if you need them: Brittany Sutherland, Joshua Inchareon, Elizabeth Costa, Tiffany Hong, Judd Baker.

REWARDS

- ☐ A magic wand with a crystal handle, an artifact from the Black Leaf Circle; add it to Your Corner of the House.
- ☐ The key to a decommissioned underground missile silo; add it to Your Corner of the House.
- ☐ A memento from the investigation; ask another Latchkey what it is and then add it to Your Corner of the House.
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Additionally, each Latchkey gets the following:

> A character sheet for a level 3 hero; give the hero a name and class, and then add it to Your Corner of the House.

CLUES

- ☐ A metal twenty-sided die, red numbers stamped on black. The 20-face is a nuclear cloud.
- ☐ A small comic book tract from Jack Chick: "Crazy Wolf."
- ☐ A burner phone connected to a number on a "Greetings, Travelers" flier.
- ☐ A hand-drawn map on blue graph paper.
- ☐ A van with an airbrushed door panel: a bare-chested warrior riding an armored roadrunner. It's found in an unusual or suspicious place.
- ☐ The original "Greetings, Travelers" postcard, image glue-sticked into place.
- ☐ An extensive collection of (pick one: RPG modules/Dragonlance novels/friendship bracelets/something else).
- ☐ The phrase "Bastian LIVES" is written in an unusual place.
- ☐ Colored contact lenses, a long wig, and latex ears (pointed) in a locked location.
- ☐ A lost teenager (possibly Amelia) holding a character sheet.
- ☐ Bastian said he didn't just play a wizard… he *was* a wizard.
- ☐ The code for a lock.
- ☐ A Christian comic book about the dangers of magic, found in an unusual place.
- ☐ An overheard conversation about "magic batteries."
- ☐ A guy with a mullet and nunchucks brags about buying beer for teenagers.
- ☐ A note reading: "You're too old for these sorts of games."
- ☐ Someone flicks a cigarette at someone else and snarls, "Magic missile, bitch!"
- ☐ The scent of flavored tobacco in an unexpected place.
- ☐ An AIM away message points to someone's location.
- ☐ A hand-written history of a fictional land: Silo Deeps.

NOTES