

# STARLIGHT KINGDOM

## PRESENTING THE MYSTERY

Built upon a mountain mining settlement just outside of town, Starlight Kingdom was supposed to be the destination that put Deep Lake on the map—at least that was the hope of Paul Greco, the eccentric philanthropist who founded the bizarre amusement park. Both a religious man and paranormal enthusiast, he believed that alien encounters were all divine visitations. He hoped, with the creation of this dazzling amusement park, to “inspire visitors with the glory of heaven on earth.” The scope of the park was ambitious, with millions supposedly poured into early construction from anonymous donors—but the park never opened. After reports of “internal disputes,” Starlight Kingdom was abruptly shut down and fenced off, just months before its planned opening. Rumors persisted about continued work on the park, but none proved fruitful, and Mr. Greco was never seen again. The promised Starlight Kingdom slowly crumbled over the years.

In recent weeks, strange lights have begun to appear within the park at night. Visible just past the highway, they pulse and swarm in odd colors and patterns. Residents of Deep Lake who have seen the lights all seem to recall visiting Starlight Kingdom years ago, even though the park never opened. “Maybe they finally fixed it up again,” they say. But you know this simply isn’t true. As children growing up in a small town, you were over the moon at the prospect of having your own amusement park just down the road, and devastated when it failed to open.

**Pose the following to a Latchkey of your choice:** You saw these strange lights back when you were a kid in Deep Lake. Something about your experience then convinces you these lights are not of this world, and that Paul Greco might have been influenced by some kind of unknowable force. What is it?

## QUESTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

**Question:** Was the founder of the park influenced by an alien intelligence or a psychic anomaly? (Complexity: 4)

**Opportunity:** Unlock the next appropriate Question.

**Question:** If it is an alien intelligence, what does it want? (Complexity: 4)

**Opportunity:** Resolve the mystery by making contact and convincing it to leave the area.

**Question:** If it is an anomaly, how can it be contained? (Complexity: 4)

**Opportunity:** Resolve the mystery by preventing the spread of further manifestations beyond the park.

## THE KEY OF THE NEON LIGHTS

- Each Latchkey must recall an exciting destination they dreamed of visiting as a child, but never got to go to.

## MOMENTS

- > A mirage appears on a distant stretch of highway, an array of dancing lights that disperse upward.
- > Light bulbs and neon tubing flicker to life within broken structures, blinking out a complex pattern.
- > A pulsation emanates through the sand, a vast irregular heartbeat.
- > A meteor shower shifts direction in fluid, synchronized movement like a flock of birds.
- > A dust devil spirals in place, causing three plastic bags to float in the air, like jellyfish of the desert.
- > Dusty flyers for Starlight Kingdom drift down from nowhere: “The Wonders of Heaven Await,” “Witness True Miracles,” and “An Out-of-This-World Experience.”

## THE PRESENCE

A concentration of self-directed, intelligent energy, curious and eager to shape the world around it. The Presence is nothing human, but in its attempts to take root in this world it will make use of whatever raw materials it finds, replicating patterns as best as it can. Drawing upon the memories of a place and its inhabitants, consuming their hopes and fears, it reflects back those desires projected upon it. Like an anglerfish, the Presence has learned to present an enticing glow to draw its prey close, before absorbing their essence and once more projecting it in a form it perceives as more enticing. The results are never quite right, to human eyes—but perception is a fickle thing, and you see what you want to see.

## If the Latchkeys ignore the Presence...

Its manifestations around the park will intensify. More residents of Deep Lake will be drawn to the ruins of the park and absorbed by the force dwelling there. As their memories and dreams are leached away and replaced with distorted perceptions, the whole town will eventually fall under the influence of the Presence—wandering, oblivious, into the desert to waste away.

## DANGERS

### Degoya County Highway Patrol

Parked off the highway, lights off, watchful for any suspicious activities—which is anything you’re doing, really, if you’ve come all the way out here. The more you try to explain, the worse it gets. They live for times like these, catching weirdos like you in the act of... well, who knows what you might have done, had they not been there to stop you!

### Unstable structures

The park is full of cobbled-together building materials, unfinished foundations and scaffolding, often connected in ways that should not be possible. Not only are elements of the park physically unstable, but their location and arrangement have a way of shifting without notice.

## Anomaly manifestations

Visual mirages occur as the brain seeks patterns in almost-familiar sights. Electronics may act strangely in certain locations. Inexplicable sounds, vibrations, and other stimuli manifest at a frequency that is uncomfortable to human senses. Overexposure may cause Conditions such as: Frazzled, Ringing Ears, Dizziness, Racing Heartbeat, Dissociating, Tunnel Vision, and Trance.

## LOCATIONS

### Fifth Dimension Holistic Beverages & Supplies

A repurposed roadside diner in the middle of nowhere, its rainbow mural depicts glowing starships, crystals, and a circle of people holding hands. Inside, a dizzying chalkboard menu lists dozens of juice bar concoctions alongside other New Age services available, including Star Chart Oracles, Psychic Vampire Defense Classes, and Desert Moon Vision Walks. Aggressively cheerful affirmation signs, crystal ornaments, and alien-themed decorations clutter every available surface.

**Paint the Scene:** What pretentious beverage name catches your attention, and what dubious health claims are associated with it?

### The Ark

Towering over the park with curved arches like the exposed ribs of a giant. Unfinished domed roof glittering with stained glass fragments, rusty patches under peeling chrome. A rickety gangplank leads to an open door two stories up. Decaying fiberglass molds of animal sculptures are stacked nearby. Graffiti includes several obscene alien cartoons, along with “Land Back,” “E.T. Was Here,” “The Alignment Is Nigh,” “Juan + Leo Forever: Love You To The Moon” and “R.I.P. Grannie Z.”

**Paint the Scene:** What unconventional detail of this structure makes you question its purpose?

### The “crop circle” maze

A gently-sloped crater lined with twisting rows of cactus skeletons and dry corn stalks, circling footprints, litter. A sign at the entrance reads, “Follow the Prophet’s footsteps to find true peace within.” At the center, a massive pit gapes wide and unfinished, surrounded by ragged tarps and loose construction materials.

**Paint the Scene:** What surprising pattern do you see in the maze as you look down? How does it make you feel?

### Paul Greco’s trailer

Half-observed by weeds and fallen debris: a vintage Airstream bristling with extra antennae, solar panels, and satellite dishes; its windows barred and tires long gone flat.

**Paint the Scene:** What signs show that the person once living here had completely lost touch with reality?

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## LOCATIONS (continued)

### × The Heavenly Descent

The only fully-constructed ride in Starlight Kingdom. A train of flying saucer-shaped cars, passing a series of panoramic displays which illustrate the story of how the Son of the Stars came down to earth. The rails are rusted and missing several sections, but the full route is walkable. The ride culminates in a darkened passage through the mountain, emerging from a round door that resembles both the door of a tomb and a flying saucer. A series of television monitors mounted overhead at various points in the line to get on the ride are connected to a VCR near the operator's station.

**Paint the Scene:** *What is the most far-fetched parable or ridiculous scene you see displayed on the ride?*

**Special Rule:** When the Latchkeys watch an Odyssey tape on the numerous monitors in the ride's line, the tape will show an extra scene at the end: a character depicted in the tape shows how one of the Latchkey's Clues from another active mystery is extraterrestrial in nature; the Clue is re-written to account for this new information.

### A familiar place

An abandoned building—and the location of an Anomaly. It takes multiple forms, depending on the viewer. To each of the Latchkeys, it appears as a place from their childhood in Deep Lake. Details are drawn entirely from the Latchkeys' memories. Ask each player one of the following **Paint the Scene** questions, then pose the final question to the group.

Exterior: *What exciting place were you always demanding to visit as a child?*

Interior: *What luxuries could your family never afford?*

Inhabitant: *What person in the community did you look up to?*

Closed door: *What place was always off-limits to you as a child?*

Visitation: *What movie gave you nightmares as a child?*

A final question: *What small, incongruent detail makes you question your own memories?*

## SIDE CHARACTERS

### Crystal Starseed, the juice bar owner

Unicorn fringe haircut, tie-dye overalls, copper and gemstone jewelry. Projects an aura of manic cheerfulness, holds eye contact too long, repeats statements back to you affirmingly.

**Quote:** *"Your aura looks a little dim. Don't worry! You just need a boost. I'd recommend the Dune Glow, or Cosmic Sunrise. They're all-organic and prebiotic, full of adaptogens, made with locally-sourced ingredients—and we purify each batch with our unique energy crystal filtration process!"*

### Psychic Narwhal Messiah, a post-industrial, glitch-punk noise performance collective

Psychedelic-patterned robes and spiked leather straps, snake-like hair extensions, retro hacker gloves and other DIY "cyberpunk" accessories. On location to shoot a music video, they are busy rigging a portable generator to stacks of TV monitors, dramatically repositioning alien mannequins from the park, and taking turns donning what appears to be a smoke-filled vaporizer helmet. Names: Ash, Orion, Y2K, Splice, Lord Prawn, The Ambassador, Sparkle Raptor.

**Quote:** *"Whoa. Hear that distortion? I'm telling you, there's some kind of different signal out here... keep the loop going, that feedback pattern is unreal..."*

### Ray Nakai, a highway maintenance worker

Safety vest and baggy uniform, tattoos of desert wildlife. Seemingly impervious to the scorching heat. Pauses working to record goofy dances on his phone when the right song comes on the radio.

**Quote:** *"Yeah, I've seen the signs. Hard to miss when there's another one every mile. We had to remove most of 'em, though—they were kinda directing folks out to the middle of the desert. There used to be a theme park or something out there, but I never went!"*

### Javier Perez, a wayward thrillseeker

Designer tank-top, gold chain and chrome watch, slick hair he frequently checks in the mirror of his rented Hummer. Dependent on his GPS, which has stopped working completely, he's about to find out he's in the wrong town.

**Quote:** *"So what are, like, the best clubs around here? I know those desert parties are lit! Y'all ever been to Burning Man?"*

### Angel Lewis, a very high sculptor

Stupefied grin and starry pupils, a confounding array of power tools and art supplies dragged on a sled, overalls caked in dried paint and dust. Apparently on a journey to complete a specific sculpture in the park, but someone else has been here already and made copies of the same sculpture, also incomplete. It's all very confusing.

**Quote:** *"Yooo... I was just thinking we needed a group of you, standing right about there, and you were already there. You're like... on the same wavelength. Bending spacetime, you know? Wait, wait... no, that's no good. Change the angle, QUICK! The way you're standing, it sounds all prickly!"*

### Sam Hollingsworth, a wildlife researcher

Tactical vest and sun hat, blonde ponytail, cheerful wave. Conducting fieldwork through Degoya County College, seemingly unfazed by the unusual locale they find themselves exploring.

**Quote:** *"So you know how scorpions glow under UV light? Well, it turns out they might not be the only creatures that do! At least, around here..."*

## REWARDS

- A Star Child figurine molded from glow-in-the-dark plastic; add it to Your Corner of the House.
- A chunk of iridescent ore which changes color in response to nearby emotions; add it to Your Corner of the House.
- A Star Messenger virtual pet, appearing at random on the pixel display within its sparkling blue egg, gesturing mysteriously, then vanishing. The battery never runs out. Add it to Your Corner of the House.
- A pair of 3D goggles which reveal spectral afterimages when used at night; add it to Your Corner of the House.
- A Starlight Kingdom-branded Magic 7 Ball; add it to Your Corner of the House. You can pose a question to it, which triggers the Meddling Move with Sensitivity, taken with advantage. The following special rules apply to the roll:

— If the highest die is a 1-5, the side that floats into view is a variation of "watch for a sign," "wait for the signal," or "ask the stars." If the roll was also a hit, you then look up to find a Clue.

— If the highest die is a 6, "don't ask again" appears, and the window grows dark. You still look up to find a Clue if the roll was a hit, but the item may not be used in this way again.

## CLUES

- A passage of time that can't be accounted for—was it a few minutes, or a few hours?
- Rippling geometric patterns formed in the sand; a noticeable lack of nearby footprints.
- The *Gospel of the Star King*, a religious pamphlet by Paul Greco that argues all extraterrestrial encounters are visitations by Jesus and his angels.
- A persistent hum from nowhere, the same sequence of notes repeating over and over.
- A partially buried circle of mirrors, face up in the sand.
- The remnants of an antique Ford F150, disassembled and rearranged in a bizarre configuration, with added control panels and lights.
- Bioluminescent flora and fauna, amassed in a strange place.
- Precarious stacks of random building materials, meticulously arranged in geometric patterns with no apparent purpose.
- A children's planetary map, printed with alternate names for each planet and the subjects they are supposed to herald.
- A suitcase full of bibles, each one a different translation or edition, and newspaper clippings of alleged UFO sightings.
- Tattered folder of blueprints for Starlight Village, a gated residential compound arranged in concentric circles.
- A cluster of tarantulas, huddled placidly around a softly flickering TV screen.
- A skeleton, stooped in a contemplative posture over an array of exposed motherboards and random electronic components.
- A life-sized nativity scene, incomplete, depicting a trio of alien "wise men" bearing a large wrapped bundle.
- A small underground bunker, containing only a chair which faces a smooth wall, layered in black paint and polished to a dull gleam.
- A twelve-foot-tall sculpture of a saint-like alien, one hand raised in blessing, peeling green paint and empty light sockets for eyes.
- Gangly cacti growing in all directions, as if unhindered by gravity. An intricate device of unknown metal, lined with strange symbols. Its mass shifts unpredictably, feeling at times dense, then hollow.
- A whirlwind of litter around an old campfire: empty liquor bottles and spray cans, sci-fi paperbacks and drug paraphernalia, along with discarded clothing and shoes.
- Satchel of heavily annotated books and periodicals from the Aetherius Society, Church of the SubGenius, The International Raëlian Movement, Scientology, and the One World Family Commune. Each outlines various beliefs on the spiritual involvement of extraterrestrial intelligences with humanity.
- An uncanny approximation of a known Side Character, seen from a distance. Almost every detail about them seems right, but one is horrifically wrong.