PRESENTING THE MYSTERY

It was all over the news recently: a block party ended in tragedy when Marguerite Lennis, age 71, murdered her husband with a pair of garden shears in front of the whole neighborhood. When asked by her neighbors and the responding police officers why she did it, all she said was: "The house told me what he did. None of us are innocent." Marguerite was later found dead in the station's lockup. She had hanged herself.

The block party in question happened on Mahogany Place, the only completed section of the abandoned Playa Morado housing development outside of Deep Lake. It is a single street of sixteen houses, surrounded by empty lots and desert.

Pose the following to a Latchkey of your choice: *You've heard many conspiracy theories about Playa Morado and why it was never finished. Which is the most absurd, and which one unnerves you to think might actually be true?*

That's not the only thing that grabbed your attention. Ed Regelski, a conspiracy nut and resident of Mahogany Place, has been posting extensively on messaging boards and local chat rooms about the strange goings-on and paranoia in his neighborhood. Between the murder of Mr. Lennis and Ed's ramblings, all of this eerily aligns with a well-known urban legend in Degoya County: the Whisper. Depending on who you ask, the Whisper is either a demon or aliens or the Illuminati, or something similarly hard to believe, but the details are usually the same. A voice in your walls that tells you the deepest, darkest secrets of your friends and family, and what they really think of you.

Pose the following to a different Latchkey: *Your family was nearly torn apart by the so-called Whisper when you lived in Deep Lake, so you know that, whatever it is precisely, the Whisper is a real phenomenon. What happened to your family?*

Maybe the Whisper is a supernatural entity. Or maybe some shadowy group just wants you to think it's a supernatural entity. Either way, Playa Morado is only a twenty minute drive from the house on Rodenbecker Street. What harm could it do to check the place out?

QUESTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

Question: Is the Whisper a supernatural infestation, or a man-made experiment? (Complexity: 4)

Opportunity: Unlock the next appropriate Question.

- **Question:** If it's an infestation, how can it be cleansed from the street? (Complexity: 4)
  Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by locating the first house it infected, and then exorcize it from the neighborhood entirely.
- **Question:** If it's an experiment, where is it operating from and why? (Complexity: 4)
  Opportunity: Resolve the mystery either by confronting those responsible and threatening exposure, or ruin the integrity of the data being gathered, thereby shutting it down.

THE KEY OF THE UNSPOKEN

☐ Each of you finds something another Latchkey does to be quite annoying. Who is it, and what is their annoying habit?

MOMENTS

> A child trips while playing, scraping their knee on the asphalt. They accuse their friend of pushing them.

> Bent blinds snap back into place as a hand retreats into darkness. Movement in your peripheral, but too quick to notice in detail. Someone is watching you.

> A Side Character is kneeling on their front lawn, digging behind the blades of a mower to free an obstruction. Their neighbor stares longingly at the pull cord.

> The pervasive smell of cigarette smoke wafts through the air. It lingers and seeps into everything; a near constant reminder of menthol and cancer.

> A sleepless night of tossing and turning, unable to quiet your mind of intrusive thoughts.

> Tinnitus and a sensation of vertigo, caused by a faint disturbance in auditory processing.

THE WHISPER

According to the kids of Degoya County, if you stay up late and keep your ear to the wall, you can hear a whispering voice that tells you the secret thoughts of others. While that is not the case for most places, it is certainly true for Mahogany Place. At random times in the middle of the night the Whisper will emerge—its voice neither male nor female—and tell its residents the dark secrets of their neighborhood. If the Whisper is a psycho-social experiment by a shady group, its abilities are all technology antd subtle hallucinogens; the secrets it tells are the result of surveillance. But if the Whisper is a supernatural infestation, it infects a neighborhood one house at a time; any secret is visible to it so long as someone is suitably exposed.

If the Latchkeys ignore the Whisper...

The paranoia on Mahogany Place worsens. Residents start to barricade themselves in their homes at night, some even taking up arms against the slightest perceived trespass. Families will eventually turn on each other, fueled by the Whisper that can no longer be ignored. Chaos and violence will spill out onto the street as the whole community devolves into a witch hunt against one another. Before any authorities can arrive, almost every resident of Mahogany Place will be dead. In time, the Whisper will move on to another street...

DANGERS

- **Paranoia**
  Things on Mahogany Place were already tense before the Latchkeys arrived, and they may find themselves suddenly in dangerous spats between its inhabitants. If any Latchkey has **The Sandstone Arch** marked, the Whisper will speak of them to the residents as having dangerous goals, and that they know their darkest secrets. This may lead to the good people of Mahogany Place spying on, harassing, or outright assaulting the Latchkeys.
- **Special Rule:** As long as the Latchkeys are investigating this mystery, the Keeper has a new reaction: **Reveal a Secret**. These secrets count as Clues for the purpose of resolving the mystery, but the Latchkey that finds them must take the following Condition: **Marked by the Whisper**. This Condition can only be cleared by resolving the mystery.

LOCATIONS

Mahogany Place

A serpentine road, ending at a cul-de-sac. Single-story, modern houses with gravel front yards. Surrounded by empty lots and desert.
Paint the Scene: *It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood, but an eerily quiet one. What do you see that suggests this is a place of subtle hostility and not a friendly community?*

The cul-de-sac

A wide circle of cracking asphalt, baking under the sun. Discarded bikes. Scorch marks left from a bonfire in the middle.
Paint the Scene: *This is where Marguerite Lennis murdered her husband. What remnants of that traumatic evening are still lying around?*

The other houses of Mahogany Place

Sun-beams spilling out from half-shuttered blinds. An underlying vibe of shallow materialism and conformity. That new house smell.
Paint the Scene (ask for each house)**:** *While almost identical to the other houses of Mahogany Place, what personal touches are scattered throughout by its current residents?*

9 Mahogany Place, the Lennis household

Cordoned off with police tape. Old cardboard boxes that were never unpacked. The sweet, musty smell of the elderly.
Paint the Scene: *Mr. and Mrs. Lennis were the picture of a loving, elderly couple whose marriage stood the test of time. What around their home suggests this union was actually deeply flawed?*

× 1 Mahogany Place, a model home

Immaculately tidy and well-organized. Plastic plants and fake fruit on display. A very faint coating of dust on everything. A VCR, projector, and screen are set up to show promotional videos about Playa Morado.
Paint the Scene: *This place is intended to represent the "ideal" state of a home in Playa Morado, but this is undermined by cheap furniture and lifeless decorations. What items are on display that appear to be part of a normal home, and what about them feels shallow or meaningless?*

Special Rule: The first time the Latchkeys use the VCR and projector found here to watch an Odyssey tape, the Keeper narrates a final scene on the tape whereby a representative of Playa Morado is giving a tour of 1 Mahogany Place. During the tour, things mostly look as they do now, but the representative shows a crawl space, the entrance to which is hidden behind a pantry shelf that acts as a secret door. If the Latchkeys look for the crawl space, they will find it and discover the following inside: a Clue (for any active mystery, Keeper's choice); a set of lockpicking tools, which a Latchkey can add to Their Corner of the House; and a map of "Old Deep Lake," which a Latchkey can add to Their Corner of the House.

Playa Morado

Empty squares of dirt and sand, marked by sun-faded construction flags. Peeling signs advertising the finished development: "Coming Soon!" A rusting cement pourer, discarded next to unfilled foundations.
Paint the Scene: *Beyond the rows of suburban decay, the desert stretches out far into the shimmering horizon. What mirage do you see out there in the vastness, and how does it make you feel?*

SIDE CHARACTERS

Maynard Keene, a community leader

A crew cut jarhead. Khaki shorts and a salmon-colored polo shirt. Silver Rolex watch. Maynard is the head of the neighborhood watch, a position he mostly forced his way into by cowing his neighbors. He puts on the face of someone confidently in control, but in reality is a weak man whose facade is already cracking under pressure, fearing being exposed for his dishonorable discharge.
Quote: *"Hey, it's nothing an old Marine can't handle. Maybe you kids should worry more about getting your own lives in order, and not poking around in business that has nothing to do with you, yeah? Unless there's something you're not telling me."*

Peggy Keene, a trophy wife

Bottle-blonde. Leopard print top and hoop earrings. Freshly painted nails. Peggy is Maynard's trophy wife, twenty years his junior, and already chafing under the boring mundanity of suburban living. Despite this she constantly feels the need to supervise others and bend the neighborhood to her own standards, a task almost everyone opposes, and now the Whisper has laid their mockery of her bare.
Quote: *"If you ask me, I'm surprised that the hoarder cat lady across the street hasn't been evicted yet. I'm allergic, you know. It's so disgusting."*

Bonifacia "Bunny" Suarez, a recluse

Blue floral mumu dress. Fuzzy cat slippers. A tangled nest of curly hair. Bunny moved to Mahogany Place after she lost her wife to cancer, adopting several cats to help fill the hole in her heart. She had not been leaving her house much even before the Whisper arrived, but she's convinced that the voice is evidence of her deteriorating mental state. Some cat names, if you need them: Caramela, Bigotes, Amada, Cazador, Rico, Sombra, Bombon, Fiesta
Quote: *"¡Me caigo al mar y no me mojo! Bah, please forgive the mess. These things just keep piling up. Estoy molesta... Um, I have some cookies in the kitchen if you'll give me a minute to find them. Please, please sit. Don't mind Caramela, she's grumpy around strangers. Bigotes and Amada love having their bellies rubbed, though! So, what was it you said you wanted?"*

Garrett Downes, an avid gardener

Tan bucket hat and green-rimmed sunglasses. Hawaiian shirt and brown cargo shorts. Assorted gardening tools on a belt. Garrett paid a fortune and raised a fuss to swap his gravel front yard for grass and dirt, which he tends to diligently with a dystopian display of water waste. He wants to be a successful florist, but burns his money on "perfecting" his yard to impress neighbors that resent him.
Quote: *"Woah! Watch where you're walking, I just planted those azalea seeds last week. And careful of the grass buds, your shoes can throw off the moisture distribution of the whole yard, and then what'll I have? Yellow spots. Unsightly, dry, pathetic little yellow spots."*

The Man in the Gray Suit, an observer

Immaculate old suit with a mauve necktie. Dark hair, parted and slicked. Always smoking a cigarette. He is always just out of reach, either watching the Latchkeys from behind a window or atop one of the nearby ridgelines; if approached, he turns a corner and vanishes. None of the other residents of Mahogany Place acknowledge his existence. **Special Rule:** The Man can still perceive Latchkeys who have marked **The Chromatic Desert**.
Quote: *[A passive, half-bored stare. A slow draw from a cigarette. An exhale.] "..."*

David Truong, a marketing executive

Light blue button-up and black slacks. Argyle socks. A mustard-stained necktie. David works in Deep Lake at a failing marketing firm that's in the process of being absorbed by another company in Santa Fe. Typically a level-headed guy, David has been on edge after the Whisper started telling him about how his late wife really felt about him, and how some of his neighbors want to hurt his daughter.
Quote: *"The Keenes kind of run the show around here. Not that I voted for them to lead the committee, but what can you do? I don't care much about their business, so I'd love for them to stop obsessing over mine. Did you know Peggy called the cops on my kid once? Just because she likes to explore and play with that stray."*

Syd Truong, a vigilant tween

Long black hair in need of brushing. Albuquerque Isotopes baseball cap. A tomboyish youth. Syd gets around on a 2000 Litespeed Ultimate titanium bicycle that her dad bought for her tenth birthday. She knows something weird is happening on her street, and tries her best to ignore the Whisper when she hears it.
Quote: *"Everyone here says they don't believe me, even my dad! They all know something's wrong, but they don't want to talk about it! Well, except the guy that lives at the end of the lane. But he's weird."*

Bentley, a stray dog

Border Collie. A little on the mangy side. Bentley is an intuitive dog that has taken to Syd, and regularly accompanies the kid on her sleuthing.

Ed Regelski, a conspiracy theorist

Long brown hair, tied back in a ponytail. Stick-thin and lanky. Denim vest with a pin: I Want to Believe. By day Ed works as an electrician for the power company, but by night he stalks online conspiracy boards and documents his favorite findings. Whatever the Whisper is he'll fully believe it, and so will help the Latchkeys in any way he can.
Quote: *"Why do you think people in this town have so many secrets? It's 'cause we're conditioned not to trust anyone anymore, man! The government's been poisoning our heads since Gorbachev. They don't want us to see what's really going on, so they turn us against ourselves."*

REWARDS

- ☐ Ed Regelski becomes a recurring Side Character; you get 1 extra Clue on the Meddling Move when you consult him about matters related to conspiracies in Deep Lake.
- ☐ Syd Truong becomes a recurring Side Character; you get 1 extra Clue on the Meddling Move when you ask for her help in snooping around places a kid could better fit in.
- ☐ A pack of Ashford Menthol Cigarettes; add it to Your Corner of the House.
- ☐ An adopted kitten from Bonifacia; name it and 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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CLUES

- ☐ Mockups for the intended layout of Playa Morado, in an unusual shape (pick one: Fibonacci spiral/Mandelbrot set/Eye of Providence/ something else).
- ☐ A camera, hidden in an unusual place.
- ☐ Strange lights coming from an unusual place.
- ☐ An odd device with a blinking red light, half buried.
- ☐ Cigarette butts in an unusual place.
- ☐ Evidence that the Playa Morado development was mysteriously halted by a federal organization.
- ☐ The song "Twilight Time" by The Platters, playing on a distorted loop.
- ☐ A pulsing vibration from inside the walls.
- ☐ Rumors of an illicit affair between two Side Characters.
- ☐ A manilla folder containing something interesting (pick one: intercepted audio transcripts/heavily redacted documents/odd spectrogram readings/something else).
- ☐ A sudden and unpleasant sensation (pick one: cottonmouth/taste of metal/vertigo/something else).
- ☐ If a Latchkey has **The Fathomless Well** marked, all the TVs in the neighborhood show staticy images of unblinking eyes.
- ☐ Evidence of a resident that left town shortly before the strange events began.
- ☐ Partially burnt remains of a hastily-destroyed journal, some words still legible: "*They can never find out who I really am. What I've really done.*"
- ☐ A wire-tap, found amongst a Side Character's discarded clothes.
- ☐ A newspaper article reporting on the Playa Morado project breaking first ground, and how it replaced a decommissioned military SIGINT site.
- ☐ Sketches of geometric shapes; particularly ninety-degree angles and corners.
- ☐ The tap water pours out with a vaguely yellow tint.
- ☐ A radio picks up flickers of static with something interesting underneath (pick one: inaudible conversation/counting/a list of names/something else).
- ☐ Rumors of a Side Character leaving their house in the middle of the night, walking out into the dark desert away from town.

NOTES