

Meridian

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Introduction

Joplin, Missouri. The crossroads of America. A pair of investigators drive into town, sent from Washington, D.C. on a case that looks like a waste of time and resources: investigating the finances of a rural shelter for homeless youth. It looks like poison to careers that are already on life support. Unless there's more to it. Unless the ghostly lights of tall tales really do rise over the black woods. Unless the leaves whisper with memories beyond life and death.

Delta Green has to find new Agents somewhere.

“Meridian” introduces two such recruits, beleaguered federal agents from a career-killing task force. They seek a church too poor to follow the law. They find something else entirely: a Preacher who inspired the church and years of quiet horrors.

She came out of New York in the early 2000s, a 60-year-old homeless woman, deeply disturbed, tormented, on a delusional, impossible quest. She wasn't the Preacher, then, just a homeless schizophrenic nicknamed Carpark Kattie. She'd had purpose in New York. She obsessively tracked the sounds of car doors closing and reported her findings at a steel door in an uptown alley. In return, a voice spoke in her mind, spoke to her with meaning. It spoke for unspeaking and unspeakable wonders. Then the voice stopped and it never came back. Some of her peers withered and died without that drive to act. Some killed themselves. Kattie went walking.

She wandered west and south, drawn to open spaces with sparse populations, drawn by something she could not name. She came to deep Oklahoma and Missouri woods where the Cherokee Nation ends and the Ozarks begin: the lands where she was born. The woods where she had vanished as nine-year-old Catherine Catlins in 1953, taken up by strange lights that she thought were angels but that left her changed, broken, years later, far away: a gift from the fungi from Yuggoth to the young Fate of New York, a homeless adept. She performed bizarre tasks for sorcerers from the 1970s until the cult's dissolution in the 2000s.

Returning to the woods, she heard echoes of that lost voice. Not *his* voice precisely, not *the Man's* voice. Just echoes that reminded her, like *deja vu*, like disconnected memories. It rose like spores from the moist earth where something like ancient fungus slowly spread, forgotten, that in its faint luminescence could never die. Kattie could identify.

She'd been given a gift back in New York, back in the day. One of the sorcerers of the Fate found it amusing or useful to make Kattie immortal. "You can't die, Kattie," she said, smiling through teeth slick with blood and a viscous blackness that curdled and spasmed. "You can count your cars forever. You're gonna say thanks, aren't you, Kattie?"

In that Oklahoma fungal bed, growing and glowing, cast off and abandoned, Kattie found a place to rest. She breathed deep and ate well. She explored the depths of it. She made a bed for herself in faintly glowing mycelia. She dreamed and whispered as it slowly enveloped and crushed her. She and the fungus-like expanse grow together, never dying, never remembered, sharing wonders that still demand a messenger.

Alien fungi merged with a woman once claimed by the very entities that fruited it and then made immortal by spiteful sorcery. As some new hybrid thing they reach for reunions that will never come with godheads they can never understand: a race of motile and crablike fungal things from beyond the curves and planes that we call reality, dedicated to exploration; and the smiling master of a cult of sorcerers and thieves, dedicated to awakening humanity to its full and appalling potential.

The Task Force

A handful of federal agents have been assigned for different reasons to what amounts to a punishment detail: the tiny Religious Crimes Task Force, created in late 2017 at the request of Attorney General Jeff Sessions and running on bureaucratic inertia ever since. It is ostensibly dedicated to investigating and prosecuting fraud and abuse in tax-exempt religious institutions, coordinating all such cases under one roof. The task force manager, Joshua Fredericks of Gary, Indiana, is a Sessions-appointed Evangelical who despises the federal government and its "persecution" of the faithful, by which he means white Evangelical Christians. Its work has been used more often to help suspects in troubled institutions take necessary steps to prevent charges from being filed. The task force allows easier disposal and quieting of the cases. It's a smokescreen. Its work is used to cover up crimes and protect suspects.

Two task-force agents—two players' Agents, one from the IRS, the other from the FBI— are given a case in Joplin, Missouri, where the Kansas–Missouri–Oklahoma borders meet. Holy Light Ministries files taxes as a church and shelter for troubled youth, but it owns no property and has a single officer, using his mailing address, also the address of the church leader's mother. The church leader, Daniel Boone Keeler, had a long history of arrests for drug dealing, theft, check kiting, and assault before he founded Holy Light Ministries in 2011. His criminal record ends at that point. He has never filed personal income taxes. The church's tax returns show far too little income, all from anonymous cash donations, to support even one person. Much of its income is offset by purchases in Seneca, Missouri: gasoline at a Phillips 66 station and the Gas Shack and food from Dollar General and the Stateline Food Pantry.

Holy Light Ministries has no website or social media. But it has been mentioned in social media posts in association with “Ghostlight Bridge,” apparently a rural site popular for underage drinking and drugs, where Holy Light members are said to recruit youths.

The Agents’ have the following instructions:

- ▲ Find and meet Daniel Keeler.
- ▲ Review the activities of Holy Light Ministries.
- ▲ Determine the location of “Ghostlight Bridge” and investigate the activities of Holy Light Ministries members there.
- ▲ Determine whether there are grounds for criminal prosecution or civil action.
- ▲ Send daily updates to task force member Rick Corcoran, an IRS analyst who is reviewing the case.

The IRS analyst, Corcoran, has sent the Agents on two similar cases in the last six months: useless investigations of fringe and vaguely cultish but ultimately harmless organizations. There’s no reason to think this will be any different. Another eyeroller, digging around in things that might be bad but are not actionable. Another waste of time and talent.

The state of Missouri has assigned a Joplin social worker who works with children and teens and who can help them conclude the work quickly.

Religious Crimes Task Force, Tax & Fraud Section

Joshua Fredericks, Special Counsel

Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Religious Rights Section
Director, Religious Crimes Task Force

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William Berry, Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General for Criminal Matters

Department of Justice, Tax Division

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The Agents—Rick Corcoran, IRS Analyst

Joplin

Up at 5:30 a.m., Eastern time. At the airport at 5:00 for a 7:00 departure. A two-hour flight from DC to Chicago. A 70-minute layover. A two-hour flight from Chicago to Springfield, arriving about 10:10 a.m. Central time. Picking up a rental car. A 70-minute drive to Joplin, Missouri, arriving just before noon.

Joplin, population 51,762 in 2020, is shared by Jasper and Newton counties in southwest Missouri. The Agents pass through the edge of the Ozarks before they reach town. Deep woods give way to broad green fields and an empty horizon. Streams and rivers have carved limestone bedrock into steep hills and bluffs, valleys, caves and sinkholes. A quick Internet search says Missouri has over 7,300 recorded caves, mostly in Ozark counties. Only Tennessee has more. And a great many abandoned mines, many of which have leaked heavy metals into topsoil and groundwater for decades.

The Agents see big-box stores and vast truckstops. Homeless kids and job-seeking laborers. Fast-food joints that sprung up where the 2011 tornado destroyed homes. Apartments for displaced homeowners who can no longer afford the market.

At noon the Agents check in at La Quinta Inn & Suites, just off Interstate 44.

“Our pet-friendly hotel puts you close to The Precious Moments Chapel and Grand Falls, as well as Missouri Southern State University and Ozark Christian College. If you're here on business, we also give you easy access to companies like Contract Freighters, Inc. (CFI) and General Mills. Make the most of your stay with free daily breakfast, high-speed WiFi, and our business center.”

At 2 p.m. they shake hands at one of Joplin's two FBI resident agencies, five minutes north and just off the famous Route 66. It shares one leased floor in an eight-floor office building with an IRS office. Four FBI agents and two support staff are led by a senior special agent, who answers to a supervisory special agent in the main Joplin office, twice as large. The supervisory special agent answers to the Kansas City office special agent-in-charge. None of them have the slightest interest in the Agents' case.

At 3 p.m., in a conference room at the FBI office, they meet the social worker assigned to help them.

xxx BEGIN TEXT BOX xxx

The Weather

Southwest Missouri is subject to intense and sudden changes in the weather in early fall. Every few hours the Agents spend outdoors, they must make a group **Luck** roll. If it fails, the weather is either miserably hot (rolling an odd number) or miserably cold (even), incurring –10% penalties to CON×5 tests.

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Social Work

The Agents' local contact is Jennifer Johnson of the Missouri Department of Social Services, Jasper County office. Johnson has spent 13 years as a frontline Children's

Division social worker, a job where lasting a year or two is typical. See **JENNIFER JOHNSON** on page XX for her history and details.

What Jennifer Johnson knows:

- ▲ She has heard of Holy Light Ministries and Daniel Keeler but never met him.
- ▲ Keeler’s Holy Light Ministries has a reputation for a soft touch, nonjudgmental and nonproselytizing.
- ▲ Holy Light Ministries is not in Joplin.
- ▲ A lot of kids on the Joplin streets know friends who know friends who got help from Holy Light Ministries.
- ▲ Very few of the young people who supposedly got help at Holy Light are still around. Some aged out of the system. Others lost contact with it. The system has no idea what becomes of them.
- ▲ People in this area go missing in extraordinary numbers, especially young people. It’s on the interstate. It’s at a corner where four states meet, each with its own social services, none connected. It’s cave country and wilderness. It’s adjacent to tribal lands, which often attract predators.
- ▲ She knows of one known former Holy Light client, a homeless 16-year-old named Gay Gottlieb. As is all too common, Gottlieb feeds addictions with prostitution. Her caseworker can recommend where and how to find and question her.

Holy Light Ministries is not registered with the state as a youth home or shelter and does not receive state money. That stands out as very strange and potentially a red flag for bad actions. But if the church does indeed offer shelter to kids unofficially, any local judge would eviscerate an agency that attempted to crack down on it.

Johnson wraps up her meeting with the Agents at 5 p.m. She recommends they join her and her husband at Ray’s Tonky-Honk for steaks and beer at 8:00 p.m. A live band will be there, Bluegrass Blue, old friends of the Johnsons.

Either way, she calls the Agents about 7:00 p.m. Gay Gottlieb and her caseworker have agreed to meet them the next morning at 10 a.m. at the McDonald’s on State Highway 43, in the giant truck stop south of town. Johnson will meet them there.

The First Night

If the Agents take Johnson up on drinks at Ray’s Tonky-Honk, she introduces her husband (“my worse half”) as Lonnie Johnson, a veterinarian who dotes on her. He seems bemused and curious about the Agents’ coming to town from afar. He doesn’t know anything more than his wife about Holy Light Ministries. (“Ain’t that old Devil Dan’s new place?”)

They drink beer and dance. Bluegrass Blue's guitarist sees Jennifer and calls her on stage to sing some Loretta Lynn, "Fist City" and "You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)." She's a good singer, certainly no pro but enthusiastic enough to win over any crowd.

In between, both Johnsons offer to buy the Agents enough drinks to get them drunk. A good-looking woman in a tight T-shirt takes an interest in one of the Agents, flirting shamelessly and pulling them to the dance floor: Jennifer recognizes her, Bobbi Cameron, the kind that most men think of as good trouble until it goes bad, and encourages the Agent to have fun. Then Cameron's belligerent ex-boyfriend shows up and it likely turns into a fight.

The Johnsons want to see what the Agents are like when they let their guards down and when they deal with strangers and new situations. Do the Agents seem confident and friendly? Reserved? Standoffish? Cold? She never comments on it but it affects how far she goes to help them in this case.

Agents who indulge in a good time with plenty of food and drink must make **CONx5** rolls. Failure puts them at -10% to all tests the next day as their guts churn with uncomfortable warmth. Locals are not affected.

The Witness

The McDonald's on State Highway 43 stands in the middle of a vast network of truck stops and trucking service centers, shops, dealerships, terminals, and a three-story motel. Jennifer Johnson's colleague Patricia Atkinson meets Johnson and the Agents there. Atkinson is Gay Gottlieb's caseworker.

Gottlieb is tall and thin, a pale white girl with the lines and scars of a rough life and knowing, suspicious eyes. She keeps mousy brown hair bottle-dyed deep red. Gottlieb seems much older than her 16 years. She wears third-hand clothes, not clean, and eyeliner that was fresh three days ago.

She sizes up the Agents warily and constantly. She has been a prostitute since she was 13 and an addict since she was 11, and was abused long before that. She expects the worst from strangers. Particularly strange men. Especially police.

An Agent who watches her carefully and succeeds at a **HUMINT** roll at -20%, or a **Medicine** or **Pharmacy** roll, sees signs of regular methamphetamine use. Bad teeth, bad skin, broken nails, painful thinness: regular use but not severe, perhaps less severe than the Agents might expect. The Agent has seen or read about much worse. (If the Agents pursue that line, Gottlieb realizes she has been using drugs less since her visit to Holy Light Ministries. Not that she's given them up. More like it takes less to get her where she wants to be.)

With Atkinson's encouragement, Gottlieb agrees to answer questions in exchange for a hearty breakfast, a second meal to go, and two twenty-dollar bills.

Two Nights at Holy Light

Gottlieb says she visited Holy Light Ministries for a couple of days, three months ago. It's an old church off to the southwest somewhere. A drive of an hour or so. It's way out in the woods, quiet and dark. Hard to find.

Holy Light has a few kids who are regulars. They're in better shape than most people who live rough. They hardly ever invite someone over. At least not that Gottlieb has heard. They watch for kids who maybe want to stick around. If someone seems ready to sit still, they might invite them to the shelter. They don't demand a commitment but they don't think of it as an overnight thing. It's a place to lay low, calm down, and clean up.

Gottlieb was at Holy Light for a couple of days. Maybe a dozen kids were there, some teenagers and some a year or two older. It wasn't what she expected. No forced-happy singalongs, no prayer meetings. No earnestly manipulative chats about what's missing in your life. All of that might have been better. It was too quiet for her.

She went walking and found a couple of girls out in the woods on old trails, laughing and staring, sometimes jumping up and dancing or running. She thought they were high as hell. She was already in withdrawal, so she asked if they were holding. They said no. Said they didn't need that stuff anymore. They got their joy straight from God. Gottlieb said if they didn't want to share, just say so. They stuck to their story. They said if she stayed long enough, she'd get clean too and get her own joy from God, even better than getting high.

That wasn't going to happen. Gottlieb was jonesing and going stir-crazy. With the clarity of hopelessness she says it's never just about the drug, anyway. You get too calm and your brain starts crashing in on itself. It's like the floor falls out from under you and panic takes over your whole brain. Nothing to lean on, nothing to even pretend you can control. Nothing to distract you. She wasn't ready to handle that. So she asked to go back to Joplin. They drove her back. No arguments. No trouble.

Brother Dan—Daniel Keeler, if that's what the Agents call him—ran the place. He was friendly but a little distant. He still has that gravelly meth voice from the old days. Gottlieb says he kind of looked her over like he was figuring her out. Not in a horny way, just figuring out what she was after. He never made a move on anyone that Gottlieb heard about. She didn't talk to him much. She thinks he could tell she wasn't going to stick around.

How She Got There

Gottlieb had met a couple of Holy Light kids, Packy and "Jessyca with a 'Y'," out on Ghostlight Bridge. That's not the bridge's official name. It got that nickname as a

favorite spot to watch for the Ghostlight. The Ghostlight is this light that comes up over the woods. Nobody knows what it is. UFO, spirits, who knows.

Gottlieb saw the Ghostlight herself, that night. She had taken some mushrooms. They grow well around some of the local waterways and cow pastures and some are really powerful. When the Ghostlight showed up, everybody started oohing and aahing. To Gottlieb, that plus the light and the light's movement, with the mushrooms already hopping, it was all amazing. The Ghostlight made trails, patterns in the air that only she could see. That she could almost understand. Beautiful. It was the best night she'd had for a long time.

The next morning, she was coming out of it and couldn't stop crying. All the bad stuff was all hitting her at once. All of *this*, she says, motioning at the world all around her. She could tell she was going to die on the streets. She was just low. That's when Packy and Jessyca With a Y came over. They gave her some water and offered to take her over to the church to eat and sleep. They said they would drive her to town whenever she wanted. They seemed safe—or at least they didn't seem *bad*, and she was too down to care about anything else—so she went.

Anyway, Gottlieb says, if the Agents want to find those Holy Light kids, try the bridge. But maybe spend a year or so getting scuzzy, first. Everybody's going to assume they're cops or somebody's parents, either way, but at least put in the work.

Caroline Keeler

Daniel Keeler's address of record is the home of his mother, Caroline Keeler of 429 North Joplin Avenue. She lives in a one-floor, two-bedroom house with three small dogs that smell of indifferent house-training. At age 60 she suffers from the beginnings of early dementia. She invites visitors inside whether she knows them or not. It's easier to assume they're known friends than to question them and possibly admit her mind is slipping.

Keeler says that her husband Leroy bought the house in the late 1960s. They raised Daniel, their only child, there. The husband died of a stroke in 1999, right after hearing about teenage Daniel's third arrest. Those were hard years. But Daniel has turned everything around now. He is right with Jesus. That's what matters. If pressed for details, she can give none. She artfully talks around the holes in her memory.

Neighbors help keep up the yard from time to time. They uniformly bad-mouth Caroline's son Daniel for not doing enough. He comes around about once a month to fetch mail and that's it. Maybe he found Jesus, they say, but he must not have let Jesus find him.

The kitchen has mail, some open and some piled up, that neighbors occasionally bring in for her. Three pieces are for Holy Light Ministries, the oldest from 17 days ago: two

are promotional junk and one extends an invitation to Seneca Gospel Church in Seneca, Missouri, about a half-hour's drive south.

Daniel's bedroom clearly has not been lived in for years. The only things that belong to him are left over from his 1990s childhood: Pogs, long-dead Tamagotchis, Pokemon cards, a GameBoy Color. He comes around once a month to check for mail. His mother always says she saw him "just the other day."

An Agent who stays in the Keeler house more than a few minutes must make an **Alertness** roll. One who succeeds hears Mrs. Keeler whispering to herself.

- ▲ "Say thanks, Kattie."
- ▲ "Out to the void. Out of the curves and angles. Out to the dark stars."
- ▲ "You can't ever die, Kattie."
- ▲ "Went to the light and out where every light is strange."

If roused and asked, Mrs. Keeler has no idea what she said or why. Nobody has ever called her "Kattie." She doesn't even know a "Kattie."

Deputy Potts

If the Agents want a police perspective, Jennifer Johnson introduces them to 50-year-old Jasper County Sheriff's Deputy Horace Potts, bald and burly. Beforehand, she tells them that like most cops, Potts is loyal to fellow police first and foremost—which does not include federal agents—but "he's all right, as they go." Potts has enough years on the job that he could retire with a full pension any time, so he's not worried about getting on any boss's bad side.

Brother Dan and Holy Light

Potts doesn't know anyone who knows anything about Holy Light Ministries. It's not in Joplin and it's not in either of the two counties that Joplin overlaps. If it's a problem, it's somebody else's problem.

Potts does know Daniel Boone Keeler, aka Brother Dan, though nobody has seen him in years. Keeler would be 35 years old in 2018. Until seven or eight years ago he was Dealer Dan, Dirty Dan, or Devil Dan, notorious source of meth, heroin, and ill-advised mayhem. He had a bad temper and was in and out of jail since puberty.

Nobody knows for sure what happened, but word got around that Devil Dan found religion. He stopped showing up in bars and small-time drug busts. If he's a problem, he's somebody else's problem. Just like his church, wherever it is.

Potts can give them a name and phone number for Keeler's old parole officer, Jakayla Wright. Wright in turn says she has not seen or heard about Keeler since his last parole ended in 2012. He changed at the end. That last year, he seemed to give up drugs,

drinking, and fighting. He avoided trouble. He had the demeanor of someone who found religion. In fact, he claimed that's exactly what happened. He told her that he was out hunting in the woods somewhere south of Joplin and met a woman who turned him around. "She woke me up to the Glory," he said, emphasizing "Glory" unmistakably. Wright thought he meant a girlfriend but he said no, the woman was more like a preacher. But that's all he said.

Illicit Drugs

Missouri drug laws are harsh, but that doesn't stop people from indulging any more than it stops them anywhere. (Recreational marijuana is still outlawed in 2018. It becomes legal in December 2022. Most police dislike legalization because it takes away an easy justification for arrests and searches that allow pursuit of other crimes.)

Illegal use and sale of crystal meth and prescription opiates are common. According to health and crime statistics, though, use of both has fallen by about 10% over the last five years. Most of that drop is among locals. Truckers passing through get just as high as ever. The sheriffs of both Joplin counties take credit for the local drop, but no one has presented a convincing explanation.

Potts has flat-out asked users why they're using less. Two said the stuff they get now is better than before so they need it less. That didn't make much sense; users use as much as they can get. Lab work shows no such change in any drugs of abuse.

Psilocybe semilanceata—the "magic mushroom"—is widespread in lowlands, wet grasslands, old forests, and cow pastures. Possession is a felony. Its use is not widespread and hasn't seemed to change lately.

Indian Country

If the Agents ask where the most serious trouble is likely to occur, Potts says that's on the tribal areas. The 50-km stretch of border that Missouri shares with Oklahoma is home to the Quapaw Nation, the Peoria Tribe, the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, the Wyandotte Nation, the Seneca-Cayuga Nation, and a small part of the much larger Cherokee Nation. Some eighty percent of Native women report being victims of violence, and ninety-six percent of those say the attackers were non-Native. Most of the violent crime on tribal areas is perpetrated by outsiders who rarely face any risk of law enforcement. State police have no authority on tribal lands. Tribal police and Bureau of Indian Affairs officers have no authority over anyone not part of the tribe. They can arrest a non-Native if they see a crime in progress, but even then, prosecution is up to the FBI and federal courts. And they have other priorities. Some tribal areas have county sheriffs provide law enforcement, but deputies are often spread too thin to respond quickly to trouble.

Local Legends

The Ozarks have no shortage of legends. People invent tall tales for fun. You hear about ghosts in this school or that. A farm run by murderous albinos. A limestone basin so deep and broad that the Devil lives there. A hundred years ago there was the Blue Man, a Sasquatch-like wild man haunting the woods of Douglas County. If the Agents seem credulous, Deputy Potts may tell one of those stories with utter conviction, spinning more and more details to see how he can reel them in. At least until Jennifer Johnson sets them straight.

The Ghostlight is a local story of a different character only in that it keeps coming up. The Ghostlight is said to be a red-orange ball of light that sometimes appears at night over the woods on the Oklahoma-Missouri border. It supposedly appears in the low night sky, floats around for a minute or two, then flies out of sight. Some say it hypnotizes people and whispers secrets into their heads. Stories say it's a UFO, an angel, the Devil, a ghost, or an optical illusion caused by distant headlights seen at just the right angle. It was first reported in the late 1940s. Sightings became more common about 10 years ago. Potts blames the rise of social media for that. But there are no confirmed photos of it.

Neither Johnson nor Potts has seen the Ghostlight. Both know people who claim to have seen it, but they shrug those off as tall tales. If the Agents press to be introduced to Ghostlight witnesses, Johnson and Potts say they'll set something up. But never do. That's outside their remit for helping the Agents look for Holy Light Ministries.

Seeking the Church

With a great deal of driving and many interviews, the Agents can narrow down the unlisted location of Holy Light Ministries.

Jessyca With a 'Y'

From Gottlieb's story. Jessyca Polowski: the only Jessyca the right age and background. Info on (zealous, abusive) parents. SSN. Cell phone accounts and use. Most recent time they saw her she said a church had taken her in, and a preacher, and then she started saying crazy things until it turned into a screaming match and she ran off again.

South of Seneca

According to Gay Gottlieb, Holy Light is a short drive south of Ghostlight Bridge. That places it on the Missouri-Oklahoma border somewhere between Seneca and a long stretch of tiny towns to the south.

SUPPLIES AND FUEL

Holy Light is said to be a nontraditional Protestant church that houses a handful of impoverished young people and a founder with no income. And according to Gay Gottlieb, they keep cheap, prepackaged food that requires no refrigeration. That means shopping at the cheapest stores.

The only likely places are both in Seneca, the Dollar General store and a thrift shop called the Stateline Food Pantry. The likeliest places to get fuel for Keeler's Jeep are in Seneca, too: a Phillips 66 station and a Gas Shack, on either side of Little Lost Creek.

The Agents need at least two of these pieces of information to have a chance to learn anything:

- ▲ A photo of Daniel Keeler
- ▲ Knowing that Keeler and his followers drive a battered old Jeep Wrangler
- ▲ A photo of Jessyca Polowski
- ▲ A photo of Packy Barrows
- ▲ A photo of Julie Cornsilk

The Agents then must make a **Luck** roll, gaining a +10% bonus for each piece of information beyond the first. If it succeeds, the employee does not remember them but lets them review footage from an ancient security system. After 1D4 hours grainy tapes they find footage of Packy and Jessyca driving up in the Jeep to buy gasoline and ramen. They pay in cash with small bills. With a critical success, the employee remembers them personally and says they drove in from south of town.

The employee says the kids are “kinda moody,” often intensely happy and friendly but sometimes wary and suspicious, never in between. When they're happy, it seems to be that pure inner joy of Jesus. You can't help but feel happier yourself just from talking to them. It kind of bubbles up from inside.

Even so, they are always evasive about exactly where they came from and how to find Holy Light Ministries. That stands out. What kind of church doesn't want strangers to visit?

If the **Luck** roll fumbles, the clerk grows angry and indignant, demands to write down or photograph the Agents' identity details, and castigates them for persecuting a church and a young man just trying to do right. Word gets around swiftly. Brother Dan and the kids have forewarning of the Agents coming.

CHURCHES AND OFFICIAL RECORDS

No church is listed in state or county records as Holy Light Ministries, or in any records of organizations like the Southern Baptist Convention, the United Methodist Church, or the Catholic Church.

A great many old, abandoned churches dot the woods and hills of southwest Missouri and northeast Oklahoma. Many appear on lists kept online by amateur historians, in photos and videos posted by explorers. Some look like possibilities. None are named Holy Light Ministries.

Some defunct churches show up in county land records, utility records, and state registrations. Searching takes 4D6 hours with many phone calls and visits to county archives in Neosho, Missouri (Newton County), tiny Pineville, Missouri (McDonald County), and Miami, Oklahoma (Ottawa County). An Agent with **Bureaucracy** at 50% or better or who succeeds at a roll, or who restricts their search to McDonald County, Missouri, and Ottawa County, Oklahoma, reduces their share of the work by 1D4 hours.

The research identifies a dozen possible sites: churches defunct for decades, in wooded areas, in the southern part of the Oklahoma-Missouri border. None were named Holy Light Ministries.

If the Agents take that list of candidates to extant churches in the area, they find ancient pastors and little old ladies who know every church that has come and gone for decades and that their parents and grandparents knew. Saying they are looking for a site that is NOT one of those on the list, but is in deep woods and hard to find from the roads, gets a spark of recognition after two attempts taking 1D6 hours each. A pair of Baptist octogenarians, pastor and wife, think of Spring River Baptist Church. Nobody has mentioned it in years and years. It was an African-American church in southeast Ottawa County, Missouri.

The Agents can look up Spring River Baptist Church in nondigitized newspaper archives in Wyandotte, Missouri, scanning through microfiche sheets on old readers for 2D6 hours, halved with a **History** skill of 50% or better or a successful roll.

It shut down in 1953 after nine-year-old Catherine Catlins vanished in the forest, a few miles away, on a Sunday School excursion. Public interest and official investigations were short-lived and tinged with racist disdain for rural Black culture. Neighbors speculate about Catlins disappearing in the countless unmapped caves of the region or being seized by degenerate “outsiders” passing through. The most salacious story interviews a former Spring River churchgoer who remains anonymous. The source says Spring River congregants often went into the deep woods to worship. In the deep woods prayers rise up to the heavens and the light of God sinks into you, lifting you up in joy so everything but the light and the joy fade away. But maybe it wasn’t the light of God, after all, the source says. Maybe it was the Devil taking hold in the Ghostlight. See Matthew 7:20, the source says: “By their fruits you will know them.”

The most recent Ottawa County platte map to show a site for Spring River Baptist Church as “Abandoned Church” is from 1991. The most recent to name it is from 1983. Its location is a corner of land that sits between multiple big plots and has no clear owner. Its small plot of land is not worth enough for any of the neighboring owners to spend the money to confirm it and claim it. It has sat undisturbed, unimproved,

uninvestigated for all these years. Such a platte map allows that Agents to easily find Holy Light Ministries in person.

HART, MO

The nearest community is Hart, Missouri: a church, a cemetery, a volunteer fire station, a few farms. It's at the northeast corner of McDonald County, population 23,083 in farms and tiny towns. The county sheriff's office has fewer than a dozen deputies, all of them loath to interfere with any house of worship, even a disreputable one. Weird Christianity is better than no Christianity at all.

To neighbors, Daniel Keeler came from a wild youth to let the Lord into his heart. Now he's a good Christian boy: one of *us*, that freighted phrase implies without saying, to be protected from consequences wished upon him by the likes of *you*. Brother Dan is a man of God offering the light of salvation to young people who need it most. In this world, in this America, where "everybody knows" Christians are under constant threat, he deserves protecting. He gives homeless kids shelter from the wild. Nobody has accused him of harming anyone. And he gets them off meth! Only an incontrovertible horror would stir neighbors or police against him.

Ghostlight Bridge

"Ghostlight Bridge" crosses Sycamore Creek about 5 km west of the Oklahoma border. Take Highway 43 south from Joplin. Turn west on Highway 60 just past Seneca. Turn south on South 690 Road. When it merges with East 160 Road, turn southeast. After about five more minutes, if you keep to the speed limit, look for an unmarked dirt road to the north with a "BRIDGE OUT" sign. It's a drive of about 40 minutes from Joplin.

Oak, hickory, and juniper trees grow thick all around. The bridge is ancient, built over a hundred years ago for wagons and early automobiles and no longer safe even for foot traffic. A thick, rusty chain with a heavy padlock blocks both ends. Visitors park in the grass nearby and often camp among the trees.

By day the bridge is likely to have one or two small groups of visitors, most between 15 and 25 years old. They splash in the creek, drink beer out of truck-bed coolers, and get high. More come as night approaches, with often a couple dozen visitors making a party out of it as they wait for the light. Strangely for the region, no one brings dogs to play and enjoy the creek. Dogs howl too much when the Ghostlight comes out.

The Agents almost certainly stand out. Everyone assumes they're police. The youngest stay out of sight. The oldest watch the Agents, a little amused and a little hostile. If the Agents start nosing around, one of them honks a car horn a couple of times to warn the rest. If the Agents bully people and demand to search for drugs, they find them on one or two older kids while the rest drive off in a hurry.

A few approachable locals include:

- ▲ Hannah Williams, white female, age 20, part-time convenience-store clerk
- ▲ Jacob Schimmel, white male, age 25, unemployed mechanic
- ▲ Henry DuBuque, white male, age 19, unemployed but with aspirations to be an Uber driver if Jake here ever finishes fixing his car

Getting anyone to talk to the Agents takes a **Persuasion** roll, assuming the players can come up with an approach that the Handler finds remotely plausible. If all the Agents openly take illegal drugs, they gain a +20% bonus. An offer of \$20 or more to one lifts the need for a roll. Once they're talking, others come to join in.

No one is there from Holy Light Ministries at first. Two members arrive in a battered old Jeep Wrangler just after the Ghostlight appears. Unless the Agents are extraordinarily diligent, the arrival goes unnoticed at first. See **PACKY AND JULIE** on page XX for their details.

About the Ghostlight

Once locals begin speaking to the Agents, they quickly start one-upping each other with increasingly outrageous tales.

- ▲ The Ghostlight is the Devil dancing.
- ▲ The Ghostlight never comes out if strangers are around.
- ▲ "I saw the Ghostlight come out once when a stranger was around, but that was my cousin's girlfriend and she was a Satanist. She was no stranger to the Devil."
- ▲ The Ghostlight's not the Devil, it's an angel sent by heaven.
- ▲ It's not an angel, it's the spirit of a dead Indian that haunted the Cherokee all the way along the Trail of Tears.
- ▲ It's not a spirit of any kind, it's a UFO searching for signs that humanity is ready to meet the aliens.
- ▲ Sometimes the Ghostlight talks to you, but most folk can't hear it.
- ▲ "The only people that hear the Ghostlight talking are so high they can't walk."
- ▲ "My cousin heard the Ghostlight talk and she wasn't high, but she killed herself a week later."
- ▲ "I heard the Ghostlight talking one time and I was only a little high. It whispered crazy stuff. 'He showed us how to see what's real.' 'He called down the thoughts of stars.' Crazy. And it always said *he* and *him* like that. Reverently. That's how you know it's from the Devil."
- ▲ The Ghostlight rises over a crossroad in the woods, where the Devil waits for unwary walkers. If you see it at that crossroad, nobody ever hears from you again.

The Agents can also find such tales online, in old newspaper accounts and in books of local folklore by making **Occult** rolls.

The Kids from Holy Light

One or two locals—assuming the Agents get them talking—say they saw a couple of kids who live at Holy Light around that afternoon. The Holy Light kids eventually stand out to the Agents for watching them from a distance, not with curiosity like most but with a kind of flat, disinterested attention. The kids are Packy and Julie, each around 20 years old. They look no different from anyone else at the bridge.

If the Agents have been asking about Holy Light, Packy and Julie eventually approach and ask why. They don't express any indignation or anger. They only want to be able to tell Brother Dan. They do not reveal the location of the church. They do not invite anyone at the bridge to come to the church.

The Light Appears

A couple of hours after sundown, the Ghostlight appears to the south. There are a few false alarms, first, sightings that turn out to be headlights. Then the real thing appears low among the distant, black trees of the night. There is a great deal of excited, hushed talk among the witnesses. It doesn't always come out.

Its color is hard to identify. It seems a pale orange sometimes, or a pale violet, or a pale green, or does it change color? It's hard to say. The light bobs erratically and rises. An Agent watching closely with binoculars and compass could guess its rough location by making a **Navigation** roll: it seems to dance above the deep woods about six kilometers south. But there's no hope of following it and finding it. Cars reach only the edge of those woods and it doesn't last very long.

Seeing the Ghostlight feels like *almost* understanding something profound. As if its erratic movements and shifting colors might be full of meaning just beyond comprehension. Still, there's no **SAN** loss. The brain can easily make it harmless by contextualizing the light as something banal, the hints of meaning as mere pareidolia.

Agents not from the area realize that locals all stare as if hypnotized, wonderstruck, including the social worker accompanying them.

After a few minutes, the Agents hear a young local whisper something strange. After another minute or two, another whispers something else. Another few minutes, another whisper. Only a handful of locals whisper but their voices, or rather their intonations, their speech patterns and accents, sound eerily similar. The strange whispers coming from different enraptured viewers, entirely uncharacteristic for all of them, cost the Agents 0/1 **SAN** from the unnatural.

- ▲ “For a while, the streets made sense.”
- ▲ “You stare. Pity me. Hate me. But only *he* ever saw me.”
- ▲ “Don't fear the stillness.”
- ▲ “Aluminum and concrete and steel burned like souls.”

- ▲ “*He* spoke and the outer dark awakened.”
- ▲ “The light put me down and *he* found me in the streets.”
- ▲ “We are dying and dying, always dying in the light and the earth.”

The whispers eventually fade but the watchers sway, dance in place, nod excitedly, suffused with disjointed joy. It’s like the appearance of the light makes everyone who is local to the area ecstatically high and filled with energy, even those who took no drugs at all.

After less than an hour, the light descends out of sight and vanishes. The locals calm down. They do not remember speaking or hearing anyone speak. They remember only the wonder of the light. Jennifer Johnson or another local loses 0/1 **SAN** if they realize they lost themselves for a time.

Agents who photograph the Ghostlight or record it find that it appears on no recording or sensing device whatsoever.

Packy and Julie

The Holy Light Ministries kids, Packy and Julie, eventually drive off in a battered old Jeep Wrangler. It’s registered to Daniel Keeler at his mother’s address.

If the Agents follow and try to stay unnoticed, compare a **Driving** or **Stealth** roll, whichever is worse, by the driving Agent with the kids’ **Alertness** roll as listed in **THE SHELTERED** on page XX. If Packy and Julie notice the tail, they pull off into the woods on a dirt road looking for a campsite. If the Agents keep watching them, the kids offer quiet hospitality. “You want to camp with us?” If they Agents stay close, the kids just stare at them. They do not answer questions. At no point do they offer violence or hostility of any kind. Neither possesses or does anything illegal. They just watch until they get tired and go to sleep.

If followed and they do not spot the tail, or if the Agents plant a phone to trace, Packy and Julie lead the Agents to Dan Keeler and his church, Holy Light Ministries.

Scientific Investigations

Agents might find themselves curious about the neurological condition of local youth and drug users. Research by an Agent with **Medicine** or an appropriate **Science** skill at 40% or higher, or one who succeeds at a roll at +10%, turns up online discussion three years ago of a research project into the brains and gut flora of Joplin-area addicts.

The discussion trailed off after a few months and little other information about the project is online. The investigator was Teresa Glass, Ph.D., a 33-year-old associate professor of biology and environmental health at Missouri Southern State University in central Joplin. Agents can easily reach her. She is still very interested in the topic. But

she says funding ran out while she was still collecting data and she had to work on other projects.

Glass examined and took blood samples from 59 interview subjects. In a substantial proportion of subjects, she found signs of euphoria and dopamine exhaustion characteristic of frequent and high-level methamphetamine use but with very low levels of methamphetamine in their systems and without telltale symptoms of inhaled or intravenous use. That was a surprising development but it was not the purpose of the research. She had set out to study gut flora in heavy drug users. Many participants in the study showed extraordinarily high levels of gut fungi, including several samples of apparent fungus in very high levels that could not be positively identified. The levels were high enough to exclude the subjects from the study as probable examination errors. That did not help her attempts to gain funding.

Fungus is present in every gastrointestinal tract, yeasts being the most common. For the most part, they cause damage and disease only in immunosuppressed individuals. But there is very little consistency in the levels of fungi from person to person, and each individual mycobiome changes greatly over time. Unusually high levels of gut fungus cause pronounced gastrointestinal distress. That did not appear in Glass's subjects.

All the outlier subjects came from Joplin and the surrounding area: Neosho, Seneca, one from as far south as Pineville. None came from north of Joplin. She examined only Missouri residents before funding ran out.

Glass still finds the results fascinating. It was almost as if something in the elevated human mycobiome triggered some unknown neuroactivation in the gut-brain axis, causing powerful euphoric effects. She only wishes she had the time and resources to develop more data and either confirm or rule out her strange findings.

If the Agents ask, Glass says none of her interview subjects whispered crazy things or talked about the Ghostlight.

Reactions

Telling colleagues, friends, or family about the strangeness at Ghostlight Bridge wins Agents a range of responses. Some are annoyed at taking a practical joke too far. Others worry that the Agent is either seeing things or has proven disturbingly suggestible. Either way, it calls for a **CHA×5** roll.

With a bond, failing the roll costs a point from the bond, or 1D4 with a critical failure, but it goes no further.

Without a bond, failure alienates a social contact or causes a professional contact to call the Agent's other colleagues to quietly ask if they ought to be concerned. People press the Agent gently for details about their work. Does the Agent say things that

indicate emotional or psychiatric distress? How far the repercussions go is up to the Handler.

Telling those details to anyone in contact with or involved with the Religious Crimes Task Force brings a call from a rarely-encountered task force supervisor: 45-year-old William Berry, Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General for Criminal Matters in the Tax Division of the Department of Justice.

Berry wants all the details, unvarnished. He emphasizes the importance of full truthfulness for the sake of comparing data with other cases. If it seems like the Agent balks at revealing something strange, Berry says not to worry about it and that he'll check in again tomorrow.

Shockingly, Berry shows up the next day in person in Joplin. He calls the Agents to a private meeting in a secure conference room in the main Joplin FBI office, no electronic or communications devices allowed. Berry is gaunt and looks worn out. See **WILLIAM BERRY** on page XX for his details.

Berry presses for whatever weird details the Agents might have held back. Then he asks the Agents to continue their investigation of Holy Light Ministries, wherever it leads. It may still prove to reveal nothing special. But they should be alert to further signs of strangeness. Strangeness that affected them may affect others who are less stable in less predictable ways.

If the Agents suggest that this sounds like psychic mumbo-jumbo, or that it sounds like an important discovery that demands scientific investigation, Berry agrees conciliatingly. But he asks that they keep everything quiet for now. He wants to see what's really going on before taking further steps.

The Agents might have questions or complaints about the IRS analyst whose work sent them here. Berry says the strangeness they found here is exactly what the analyst and Berry are watching for. That doesn't mean he can explain the strangeness. Only that it seems to be consistent with a certain kind of strangeness that has come up before. That demands attention.

Berry is, of course, with Delta Green. He does not tell the Agents, of course. Nor does he join their investigation. But if they call him with a catastrophe, he responds with crime and cover-up in Delta Green style.

At the Church

Holy Light Ministries has adopted an ancient decrepit ruin of Brush Creek First Baptist Church, abandoned for decades. It stands on a corner of land between multiple big plots and has no clear owner. Its small plot of land is not worth enough for any of the neighboring owners to spend the money to confirm it and claim it. Brother Dan and his ministry keep a low profile. Nobody has interfered with them. Even if he knows the

Agents are coming, Brother Dan is not too concerned. His soul is fixed on greater things than they.

Arrival

A few kids in the shaggy field that surrounds the church watch the Agents arrive, expressions mild and inscrutable. Two are teen girls, certainly younger than 18. They walk into the woods to avoid contact.

The church has a ground floor with a shallow entry vestibule, a broad worship chamber, and an office, dressing room with a toilet and a shower, and a closet in small rear chambers. In the entry, stairs lead up into a little steeple and down to the basement. Another staircase connects the basement and the ground-floor offices.

The church has no running water. Kids bring buckets from the creek. Toilets flush, if there's water, into a septic tank. There is no power or heat. A generator powers the refrigerator and microwave in the kitchen, light bulbs strung up on extension cords at night, and space heaters in winter.

Brother Dan lives in the office on a pull-out sofa bed. Short-term guests sleep on pallets wherever they like. There are no short-term guests at the moment.

Two young adults greet the Agents in the vestibule, 20-year-old Packy Barrows and 18-year-old Jessyca Polowski. They seem happy and friendly but wary. Packy goes to tell Brother Dan about the visitors. Jessyca excitedly keeps them talking about their business here, where they're from, and how wonderful it must be.

An Agent who makes a **HUMINT** roll at -20%, a **Medicine** roll, or a **Pharmacy** roll at +20% when speaking to the greeters sees signs of intoxication: a certain subtle, shaky euphoria; wide pupils; quickness to startle; enthusiastic talkativeness; hyperactivity that builds the longer they stand still. They show none of the deterioration of teeth, skin, and voice of frequent meth abuse. Asked if they're high, they say "No, sir." (Or "ma'am.") "Just high on life." Laughter. Some kind of inside joke. But it's true. They are not on any drugs at all.

In the worship chamber, a 15-year-old boy is playing a game on someone else's phone. When he hears adults coming, he heads into the back rooms and then outside and to the woods.

If the strangers stay more than half an hour, the kids who fled to the woods take the long hike to their secret grove. (See **GHOSTLIGHT GROVE** on page XX.)

About half the Sheltered are adults, 21 at the oldest. The other half are teens.

A few of the Sheltered:

- ▲ Patrick “Packy” Barrows, white male, age 20, lanky, scruffy, recovering meth addict
- ▲ Julie Cornsilk, white female, age 19, ex-cheerleader, recovering heroin addict
- ▲ Jessyca Polowski, white female, age 18, singer, recovering meth addict
- ▲ Michael Weimann, age 21, ex-football player, recovering alcoholic

Brother Dan

Daniel Keeler is in his mid-thirties, clean-cut and clean-dressed in thrift-store casual but still rough of face and gravelly of voice from his meth-heavy past. He never looks or acts high. Whatever affects the Sheltered runs deeper than that in Brother Dan.

Keeler’s office and makeshift bedroom in the back of the church is littered not with a churchman’s writings but with sketches and watercolors, amateurish but inspired, and supplies for making them. The recurring theme is a deep forest at all hours, day and night.

Brother Dan welcomes strangers in the church with the wary warmth of a true believer. Friendly and generous, he is barely holding back wondrous news of astonishing, life-changing importance. He would love to share the incredible truth. But the dangers of being misunderstood make him wary.

FOUNDING THE MINISTRY

The Agents might wonder why Keeler went to the trouble of establishing Holy Light Ministries as a nonprofit and filing yearly tax returns for it. Only taking those steps brought him to the government’s attention.

He says he set it up at first in case he had to show people he was working, the way he always had to do while on parole. He filed tax returns because he figured that would keep him from attracting attention like that of the Agents. He never thought it through very deeply. He shrugs it off. Legal and money matters do not interest him.

FINDING JESUS

He says he found Jesus years ago when he was in the deep woods not far away, literally lost in the wilderness. He had been a terrible man, violent and selfish. That led him near to destruction at the hands of men more violent still, cousins of a customer he had abused. He fled into the woods and wandered for days. He thought he was going to die, but he was only being prepared. The light of glory found him, burned the evil away, and showed him he had a purpose in the hands of God.

One by one, he gathered about him those who had eyes to see. Brother Dan and his congregation found the old, abandoned church. It was not far from the grove where the Lord had saved him, a walk of only an hour, yet another sign of providence. They found others homeless and despairing in the country and on highways, in towns and truckstops. Young people came to him who had fled horrors, who would rather live and

die broken and forgotten than live like anyone's property. He offered them acceptance, healing, and a better way to live.

An Agent who succeeds at a **HUMINT** roll or at a **Psychotherapy** roll at +40% can tell he's carefully, stubbornly holding back details that he knows he should keep to himself. The urge to share almost glows in his eyes. Pressing him aggressively gets him only to dig in. Asking him to share the holy light that changed him opens him up: see **ABOUT THE PREACHER** on page XX.

THE MONEY

If the Agents came to look at his finances, he laughs and says that's easy. He hardly has any. He and the Sheltered scrounge and scavenge, occasionally do odd jobs, and sometimes get donations from people who admire their efforts. Twenty dollars here, forty there, all cash. He can try to add it up if the Agents want.

An Agent who succeeds at an **Accounting** roll can tell he's probably truthful. One who succeeds at **Criminology** or **Law** can tell that if he's truthful, this would be a waste of time and energy as a federal prosecution, the kind of waste to ruin a career, win nothing but disapprobation from the public, and become a *cause célèbre* for conservative politicians and talking heads.

PERSECUTION

If the Agents press him, they find that Brother Dan has it adopted a version of the all-too-common white Southern Evangelical persecution complex. He doesn't feel as personally threatened by the changing world as so many white Americans. His heart and mind are set on matters beyond earthly or even spiritual fears. But embracing a shared sense of religious aggrievement helped him win sympathy and a blind eye from neighbors. If he learns the Agents are government investigators, the paranoia snaps on like flipping a switch, like reciting someone else's creed.

- ▲ *“All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”* That's Timothy chapter two, verses twelve and thirteen.”
- ▲ *“If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world and therefore the world hates you.”* That's the Son of God talking in the book of John.”
- ▲ *“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”* That's the Revelation, chapter two, my friends. Look it up. Are you the devil come to throw us into prison? That don't matter. I already wear the crown of life. I met a Preacher in the woods who wore it. She showed me the light and placed it upon my brow.”

See **ABOUT THE PREACHER** on page XX for more about her.

THE SKETCHES

Oaks and hickories crowd around leafy earth that is uneven with lumps of varying sizes and shapes, the largest about two meters long and half a meter high but most much smaller. Old fallen trunks lie broken and choked with fungus and lichens drawn in unskilled but loving detail.

Studying the sketches more extensively than Brother Dan wishes, or studying them briefly and succeeding at an **Art** roll, recognizes the same forest grove from many different perspectives. By day sunrays filter weakly through the leaves. By night—the drawings are strange. He's drawn the forest pitch-dark at night beyond the grove but no night touches the grove itself. Its colors are not that of sunlight but the soft glow of countless impressionistic patches of color that seem to come and go from work to work.

An Agent who studies Brother Dan's art extensively, succeeded at the **Art** roll, or succeeds at a **Search** roll after a quick sifting, finds a couple of strange portraits of an elderly black woman seen up close in the woods. In one she seems to be speaking, eyes wide with enthusiasm. In another she seems to be sleeping among the fallen trees and fungi.

If asked about the woman in the sketches, Brother Dan frowns like the Agents are intruding on something private. He says she's a Preacher he met in the woods back when he was lost. See **ABOUT THE PREACHER** on page XX for more about her.

ABOUT THE PREACHER

Brother Dan says the Preacher helped him see the light: a good woman that society cast out because she knew truth of God. It was in the Spring River woods to the west, several years ago, not long before before he founded Holy Light Ministries. He slips between talking about her in the past tense and the present. He tries to use the past tense but he thinks about her in the present.

He says he met her in the woods at his lowest point. If not for her, he would never have seen the light of God. He found her foraging to survive and praying, always praying. When she saw him, she turned upon him eyes that saw into his soul and found it ready for change. She prayed with him. She preached to him. He returned again and again until one day she was gone. He says he never saw her again. But she had done her work well. He set out on his mission.

If a player says their Agent suspects there's more to it than that, confirm they are correct. The Agent can tell without a roll. If nobody raises the issue, any who succeeds at a **HUMINT** roll, or **Psychotherapy** at +40%, realizes it.

Getting Brother Dan to reveal more requires convincing him of a genuine spiritual interest in the wonderful truths that he found. A player who makes that case convincingly achieves it without a roll. If in doubt, a **CHAx5** or **Persuasion** roll does it. **Psychotherapy** in this case is no good. It takes sincerity or deceit.

If the Agents get Brother Dan talking, the details begin to pile onto each other like an avalanche until he realizes he has said something truly damning. Then he walks it back and weakly says that sometimes he gets carried away.

THE TRUTH OF THE PREACHER

Dan Keeler didn't know he was looking for the kind of purpose and meaning that only the ramblings of an immortal, ensorcelled schizophrenic could provide. But he found out fast. Phrase Dan's revelations of the truth of the Preacher how you like. Learning a great deal of it told convincingly costs 0/1 **SAN** from the unnatural.

- ▲ Her name was Kattie. She had recently come out of New York City. She had been homeless for decades. She was digging in a bed of softly glowing fungus that was not quite fungus in a cluster of fallen and diseased trees, whispering. She said that was where the light had found her. It took her up to the heavens. As she whispered, the spores found Keeler's lungs and central nervous system and he for the first time knew God. He experienced a more profound high than any drug could match. He knew he could do some good in the world.
- ▲ Kattie talked about God and the Son of God. Brother Dan doesn't remember much of what she actually said. He fills in those kindly lacunae with fragments of biblical scripture. She had known the Son of God in New York. That's where the light put her down again. She knew the Son of God for years and years. But she stopped hearing *his* voice. Then she came wandering west. She thought she heard it again in the woods where the light first found her. She shared it with Daniel Keeler.
- ▲ Keeler set about his good works with patience. He thought one of his friends could see the wonders that Dan had seen. That was Sadie. Sadie Hawkins, just like the school dance. (Sadie Eileen Hawkins of Neosho, Missouri, would now be 30 years old. She has been in the Missouri missing-persons database for 12 years.) He brought her to the grove. She did not see the wonders. She saw only Kattie crushed and half-consumed in the glowing fungal earth where she had made herself a bed and home, not dead, never dead, but staring and whispering. Sadie fled screaming and tripped on a rock and knocked her head open. She was still dying and he still wept as he covered her with earth. He found others.
- ▲ It became easier, year by year. The Breath of God—meaning the spores launched by the Preacher's fruitful joining with the remnants of fungi that were never exactly fungi—found its way into human food chains. Families that relied on hunting, foraging, and gardening were especially susceptible. Occasionally it builds up in someone's system and they become primed for a fantastic awakening.
- ▲ The Ghostlight is a memory of angels or gods that departed long ago. People who have felt the influence of the Breath of God are most likely to genuinely see

the Ghostlight rising above the grove, Ghostlight Grove, where Preacher Kattie rests. She still whispers there. Brother Dan and the Sheltered go to see and to hear.

Neither Brother Dan nor any of the Sheltered want the Agents to visit the grove. They never willingly lead them to it. But they are so distracted by the the Preacher's whispered wonders that the Agents could easily follow them there.

The Basement

The basement has two bathrooms, a community and dining room, and a small kitchen. A dozen thrift-store bunk beds in the community and dining room are home to the Sheltered.

Packs and coats are piled up in a corner, left behind by past guests. Residents asked about the belongings shrug and say people often leave things behind in favor of better coats and clothes that the Sheltered give them. An Agent who searches them carefully, or searches them hurriedly but succeeds at a **Search** roll, finds three phones with dead batteries, a stack of printed-out photos, and two drivers' licenses: enough to identify three missing teenagers from southwest Missouri and two from the Cherokee Nation, all girls.

Jars of foraged nuts, seeds, berries, and mushrooms share counter space in the kitchen with paper plates, plastic spoons, and canned soups.

Three of the Sheltered are in the basement, a 14-year-old boy lying very still in a bunk and two young women, 17 and 18, sitting near each other, watching each other, breathing deeply, whispering softly back and forth, oblivious to all else.

EDDISA AND JANEY

An Agent who lingers—it does not disturb the girls—or who makes an **Alertness** roll can make out some of their whispers.

- ▲ “The light is not the stars. The stars are not the light.”
- ▲ “*He's* gone but the voices still speak.”
- ▲ “Came down in the city. Lost. Only the counting made sense.”
- ▲ “Carpark Kattie, always counting the cars.”
- ▲ “Only echoes of a song that died but never lived.”
- ▲ “Up into the light. Up where no body can live. Up with the angels.”
- ▲ “*He* said I would set the world and humanity aright.”

JULIO WEEPS

The young man in the bunk is wide awake, wide-eyed, staring at nothing. He doesn't seem high. A persistent Agent could get his attention. He focuses on the stranger with the strangest expression. An Agent who makes a **HUMINT** roll, or a **Psychotherapy**

roll at +40%, recognizes yearning, an unfulfilled longing so deep no words could touch it. He says, “Are they finally here? Is it time to go?”

The expression changes after an instant as he recognizes that he is speaking to strangers. He has no interest in going anywhere with them. He says the church is home. For now. He looks for a second out a ground-level window, through dust and weeds to the distant sky. Tears swim in his eyes and he says, “When will they come for us?” His demeanor is heartbreakingly forlorn.

If pressed for details, he says, “We can see them sometimes in the grove. But it’s not really them.” He cannot explain what he means or whom.

xxx TEXT BOX xxx

Lights Beyond the Grove

If the Agents refuse to go to Ghostlight Grove (see page XX), its weirdness may manifest elsewhere: at the church after sundown, or at the church if the Agents harm anyone or place Brother Dan under arrest, or in appallingly specific dreams recalled as completely as physical memories.

xxx END BOX xxx

Ghostlight Grove

The trail meanders a few km west through woods, across fields, and into high, deep forest from the church to Ghostlight Grove. A few farms and isolated houses dot the land in between. Anyone walking the trail loses track of time in the quiet of the woods and the leaf-dappled light. An Agent who succeeds at an **Alertness** roll realizes it and can spend 1D6 **WP** to come to their senses. One who fails or who refuses to spend the WP walks all the way to the grove.

The grove opens itself to the Agents suddenly, carnivorously, as they find their way through brush and thorns. Trees lean, sprouting unidentifiable growths almost like fungus.

The shadowed light is dim as deep dusk even at midday. Dead trees rot and glow with growths deeper still, bioluminescent, pulsing with colors that subtly shift and change as if conveying some meaning that no human could ever understand and remain sane.

Whispers rise from all around, from the earth and trees, perhaps from the mind itself like shivering eruptions of frisson at the meridian of sensation.

- ▲ “Count the car doors closing. Give the count to the girl in the door.”
- ▲ “Teese Plaza alley. Things rumble down below. One time he’s there, smiling.”

- ▲ “Wild shapes spinning, shining like black stars, dancing in the center of everything, creating everything.”
- ▲ “They offered the universe. Light and thunder in every atom, every galaxy. But they’re gone.”
- ▲ “Can’t die now, Kattie. Count your cars forever. You’re welcome, Kattie.”

If the Agents followed Brother Dan and the Sheltered here, they sit at random places near the pulsing fungal light. They breathe deep of dust barely seen, smiling, roused to ecstasies of joy, purpose, and understanding by a manipulation of the human brain that inhuman beings invented and long ago forgot.

The experience costs 0/1D4 **SAN** from the unnatural.

In the Light

By night the glow is more pronounced and pulses everywhere fungus grows thick in every human body, from every orifice and across the skin in incomprehensible mycelial patterns. The realization costs 0/1 **SAN** from the unnatural. The glow merges and coalesces and rises overhead, the Ghostlight, pulsing with near-patterns of inhuman meaning.

To anyone who has lived nearby for more than a couple of years, the pulsations of light feel more like a sound, or perhaps the sound feels more like pulsations of light, almost a buzzing or gleam in the brainstem itself. They feel the pulsations like mild warmth in the depth of their guts. That costs them 1/1D6 **SAN** from the unnatural.

There are more mounds, at least a dozen, likely half again that many, and the proportions of most look very much like graves. Some hold those to whom the Sheltered revealed all and who balked. Others hold a few whose brains wore out in the exhaustion of constant startlement and overstimulation, the hint of eternity becoming a threat when all capacity for joy was burned away. There are five boys and a dozen girls in all, half of them indigenous from nearby tribes, only two of them ever reported missing. Fungal filaments grow and pulse throughout the buried remains, linking them with a vast growth beneath the grove. Three mounds are smaller, the graves of infants born to the Sheltered and offered with love and wonder to grow like the Preacher in the timeless glories of the universe. Understanding all this costs 0/1D4 **SAN** from violence. The whispers continue all along.

- ▲ “You’re gonna say thanks, aren’t you, Kattie?”
- ▲ “*He* spoke for the soul of the cosmos. *He* helped humanity see itself.”
- ▲ “Clarity was the one that changed me. She laughed and laughed. Blood and black slime like cold thorns and lightning. Can’t ever die now.”
- ▲ “Not *him*. Just worked for *him*. Ate the wonders and passed them around.”
- ▲ “Why’d you bring me here, Dan? What is that thing, Dan? Who is she? Oh God, Dan, no.”

The Adept and the Excision

The Preacher can be seen if an Agent searches or flees away from the path. Her deformed face extrudes from a fungal mass in the earth that has crushed and absorbed the rest of her in grasping filaments. She cannot die. Finding her costs 0/1D6 **SAN** from the unnatural. Temporary insanity here is never fighting or fleeing, only freezing in place and absorbing it all.

The wonders continue to whisper, these half-thinking remnants.

- ▲ “He’s gone. Nowhere to go.”
- ▲ “He danced the ashes and flames down from heaven to hell.”
- ▲ “Say thanks, Kattie. Live forever, now.”
- ▲ “Came from Outside but now they’re gone. Took the best of us away.”
- ▲ “Say thanks, Kattie.”

Agents who linger or suffer temporary insanity find the whispers turn to visions more detailed. Offer the truths of the **INTRODUCTION** as fragments, out of order, broken. The more **SAN** an Agent loses, the higher their **POW**, and the greater their skills in **Art**, **Occult**, and **Unnatural**—reflecting the pursuit of outside inspiration and deep interest in strange histories—the more the Agent apprehends. Impose losses of 0/1 **SAN** every so often, as seems appropriate.

Knowing or Nescient

The Sheltered awaken to shivering delight as if they had been half-asleep all this time. Kattie succeeded at one thing that would have made the Man smile: she revealed in a handful of people what humanity truly is. She reveals it still.

The joyful laughter of the Sheltered rises and grows more intense, more directed, directed at the Agents. The Sheltered stare at the Agents with something like hunger.

Each Agent loses 0/1D6 **SAN** from the unnatural. Those who fail become the Knowing, experiencing horrifying violence that may only be in their heads. Those who succeed experience a split-second of vertigo and become the Nescient, seeing what is around them for what it is.

Locals, incoulated by long exposure to alien microbes in the air and water, get a –20% penalty to the **SAN** roll but find themselves riding high on the purest, blinding euphoria that seems to spread from the gut and the base of the spine. That costs 0/1D4 **SAN** from helplessness and imposes a –10% penalty to everything else.

THE NESCIENT

The Nescient, Agents who succeed at the **SAN** roll, see the Sheltered as they are: deranged youths who laugh and sing and cling, gently guiding the Agents to the

Preacher where they can hear her words, where they can continue to learn truths and lose **SAN** until they become like the Sheltered themselves. They seem to see glimpses of the Sheltered becoming the Awakened, mad and savage, as if in flickering memories.

Making any attack roll risks changing the Agent's perceptions. Use the attack roll also as a **SAN** roll. If it fails, the Agent becomes one of the Knowing.

To the Nescient, the reactions of the Knowing are bizarre: inexplicable terror, sudden violence or flight into the woods, shrieks of agony and recoiling away from teeth that no one else can see. Gunshots by the Knowing are lethal all the same.

THE KNOWING

The Knowing, those who fail at the **SAN** roll, see the Sheltered as the Sheltered see themselves: shouting and reveling in heedless joy and strange, weeping euphoria. The Sheltered rush to bring the Agents among them, to make the Agents part of them, to dig for the Agents hungry graves of their own. They leap and climb with heedless clumsiness but terrifying strength. They laugh and clutch and bite and savage, ravening for delight. See **THE AWAKENED** on page XX for their modified stats and attacks. Temporary insanity here freezes the Knowing in place, suffering attacks turn by turn until they die.

The Knowing easily see that standing in self-defense means being overwhelmed by half a dozen mad Awakened, heedless of all risk or fear, exulting in blood, with ecstatic speed and strength.

To the Knowing, the reactions of the Nescient are bizarre: tamely allowing themselves to be overrun by joyful predators, calmly talking through torn mouths choked with blood, trying to stop the Knowing from defending them against the murderous youths.

The Knowing cannot make the Nescient see the truth. They cannot persuade them. At best they might knock them out and carry them away or grant a mercifully quick death.

For one of the Nescient to make one of the Knowing see reason requires pinning the Knowing down with an Unarmed Combat roll. If the Knowing has a Bond with the Nescient, the Knowing becomes Nescient. Otherwise the Knowing sees the Nescient as viciously, murderously transformed as the Awakened.

Flight From the Grove

The Nescient can withdraw from the grove, refusing the call of the Preacher and the Sheltered by spending 1D6 **WP**. If they cannot or decline to spend the WP, the allure and mystery of the grove and its strange beauties prove too strong, too enticing. The Agent meets the Preacher as described in **THE ADEPT AND THE EXCISION**, perhaps suffering further SAN loss, perhaps even freezing in place. An Agent still in self-control

can now withdraw only by spending 2D6 **WP**. Failure, or being reduced to zero **WP**, has the same effects as temporary insanity in the Preacher's presence.

One of the Knowing who flees must stay free for three turns can escape. They run, duck, and dodge as the Awakened slow and find their thoughts muddled once more.

PURSUIT AND THREATS

At the beginning of each turn, a fleeing Agent faces a threat from the **FOREST THREATS** table. Choose it or roll 1D20. The Knowing must then succeed at a roll of either **STR×5**, **CON×5**, **DEX×5**, or **Athletics**, whichever is best for the Agent. Failure subjects the Agent to a single attack by one of the Awakened. If that pins the Agent, another Awakened arrives and joins the assault next turn. Then others, one a turn, until 1D4+1 of them beset the Agent or the Agent breaks free.

After the first failure, the Agent must roll the second-best of **STR×5**, **CON×5**, **DEX×5**, or **Athletics** each turn. After another failure, and from then on, the Agent must roll the worst of them.

FOREST THREATS

1D20	Forest Threat	Unexpected Complication
1	Fallen trees	-10% to the next test
2	Eruption of spores	Roll HP×5 or take -20% to the next test
3	Brambles and thorns	Take 1D4-1 damage or take -20% to the next test; body armor reduces only an odd damage roll
4	Slick mud	Roll the next test twice and use the worse result
5	Stony bluff	Take -20% to the next test; or leap, roll Athletics , and take 1D6 damage if it fails; body armor does not reduce the damage
6	Baffling thicket	Roll Navigation or take -20% to the next test
7	Animal trails	Roll Survival or take -20% to the next test
8	Bloody remnant	Roll SAN or lose 1 SAN and take -10% to the next test
9	Tree-carved patterns	Roll Occult and take -20% to the next test; failure incurs no penalty
10	Inhuman memory	Roll Unnatural at +20% to witness a revelation
11-20	Trees and thorns, shadows and rocks	None

1. Fallen Trees: A tumble of slick and rotting tree-trunks blocks the way unless the Agent can clamber over quickly.

2. Eruption of Spores: The Agent stumbles over an unseen patch of unearthly fungi, triggering an updraft of strange, disorienting spores.

3. Brambles and Thorns: The Agent must either pull back and go around or suffer the undergrowth stabbing and tearing them.

4. Slick Mud: The Agent slips in a rocky stream.

5. Stony Bluff: A sudden drop requires a choice: running around and losing time or taking a dangerous leap.

6. A Baffling Thicket: The Agent loses all light and landmarks in the suddenly dense trees.

7. Animal Trails: The Agent comes to a crossing of old animal trails which might lead to a hiding place—or a dead end.

8. A Bloody Remnant: A half-covered red and bony ruin calls for a **SAN** roll. Success leaves only that brief impression. Failure lingers too long on the horrid sight and stench, costing 1 **SAN** from violence and incurring –10% to the Agent's next stat test to flee: the half-eaten face and torn-open torso of a young Native American girl, carefully tied in place before the riot of hungry violence and dismemberment began. Alien fungus glows and pulses deep in her exposed intestines. A rusty machete lies in the leaves. She must have been rotting here for days. Searching later finds no trace.

9. Tree-Carved Patterns: Elaborate designs carved into a stand of trees draw the eye, hypnotic, fascinating. Succeeding at an **Occult** roll leaves the Agent mesmerized.

10. An Inhuman Memory: The ambient glow of the woods suddenly coheres in an inexplicable experience. The Agent sees, or rather senses, from the glow as if it is a thing that can touch and be touched, sense and be sensed, though this utterly alien sense is beyond human naming. The Agent must attempt an **Unnatural** roll at +20%. Failure snaps the Agent out of it with loss of 0/1 **SAN** from the unnatural and a sense of incredible memories lost. Success costs the Agent 1/1D10 **SAN** from the unnatural as a kaleidoscopic jumble of impossible, incomprehensible experiences collect in their brain. Supply one or two of these impressions to the player.

- ▲ The word “Yuggoth,” that being the closest possible approximation to human senses of an utterance of inhuman organs, nonsense except to the **Unnatural** skill.
- ▲ A pyramid shape whose visual angles taste of extinction.
- ▲ The life-principle that is the essence of all living things and of the slow dissolution of the universe, felt like the grasping touch of a radiant star.
- ▲ A concept of cosmic importance seen in two dimensions like a flickering shadow, impossible for the human brain to comprehend or interpret. The Agent

can pursue studying the unnatural at home, between operations, in an attempt to unravel its true import: the Elder Sign ritual.

- ▲ A black world with seven suns, alive not with color or life but with currents of binding power and unfathomable comprehension, home to something as fearsome and strangely joyous to gods as gods are to mortals.
- ▲ Awareness of the nature of humanity as a captive species, disposable at a whim.

The experience is over in an instant unless the Agent suffers temporary insanity, which means freezing in place and contemplating it at agonizing length.

SAFETY

The Sheltered did not in fact attack the Knowing. They sought to grasp them, to guide them without force. When the Knowing flee, the Sheltered pursue, smiling, happy in the possibility of sharing their awakening if only the Knowing return. The Sheltered die smiling. Finding that they have killed harmless youths costs the Knowing 0/1D6 **SAN** each, to a maximum loss of 6.

The Knowing die not of the savaging that they think they experience but of heart failure or stroke from a breakdown of inconceivable severity. The Knowing who survive with injuries find their injuries are not the ravages of mad cannibals but the accidents of heedless flight through the woods: impaling sticks, bruises and cuts from rocks, head trauma from sudden falls.

Attacking the Incursion

Destroying the Preacher does nothing to end the threat of Ghostlight Grove.

BURNING THE GROVE

Burning the grove kills the surface layer of fungal growth without touching its vast bulk or inflicting any particular harm. The smoke chokes every survivor with a deep draught of alien spores unless they took precautions equivalent to a firefighter's mask. Each loses 1D6/1D20 **SAN** as their brains awaken spasmodically to devastating revelations. They come to know the source of this infestation: alien fungi fruited this version of themselves in order to influence the behavior and evolution of certain mammals that appeared within the last one percent of their history on Earth. The fungi had already struggled for epochs with other powers in this outpost. Control of rapidly evolving "human" species of primates, which would eventually grow to perhaps three percent of animal life by weight, occasionally proved useful. With time the great rivals of the fungi subsided, departed, or dissipated. The structure of Ghostlight Grove served less and less use until it became isolated from the larger fungal clade and as forgotten as if it had never been. But the spores could do nothing but remain.

POISONING THE GROVE

Drowning the grove in barrel after barrel of sulfurous fungicide or potent acid—a spectacularly illegal abuse of the environment that costs each Agent 0/1 **SAN** from

helplessness—does not kill the remnants but disperses them in the tormented earth for a while. Perhaps long enough for the rest of humanity to awaken to its nature and potential, freed from all fear of the revelations of Ghostlight Grove.

LEAVING THE GROVE ALONE

Leaving the grove alone leaves others to follow Brother Dan and the Sheltered in new ways, with new goals and priorities, new forms of joy and truth. Making that choice costs each Agent 0/1D4 **SAN** from helplessness but it might be safest. Even if it means a group like Delta Green must come back to the grim task of cleaning up every few years.

Aftermath

Delta Green has of course infected and come to control the ill-advised Religious Crimes Task Force, using it not only to send agents on weird missions but to recruit potential agents. After the horrors of Ghostlight Grove, the head of the task force considers the Agents who went there, if any survive. Is their instinct to go public with they discovered, spread the word of it, warn the world, take it to universities as new research avenues or to publishers for profit? If so, they find themselves unaccountably reassigned from the Religious Crimes Task Force to posts even more poisonous to their careers. Lunatic social-media posts in their names damage their credibility. Falsified crimes and betrayals break their relationships. All to smother their incredible discoveries in ruinous disrepute.

If they do not try to go public, task force head William Berry walks them slowly through reporting the events in ways that both protect their reputations and minimize anyone else's exposure to Ghostlight Grove. He and certain other, less visible colleagues watch them over the next few months. When some new event hints at horrors, the Agents get the call. And then they may find themselves in Delta Green.

If any of the Agents pursue research into the effects of the Ghostlight Grove fungus with enough stealth and subtlety that it escapes Delta Green's attention, they and certain biologists make interesting discoveries. The fungus, for lack of a better word, affects about 16% of mammal test subjects noticeably and about 3% profoundly. It takes root in human gut flora among hundreds of species of bacteria, archaea, protists, viruses, and other fungi. It interacts with the gut-brain axis to stimulate the central nervous system, activating a protein that stimulates dopamine production and causes euphoria, hyperlocomotion, heightened startle response, and sensory sensitivity. The symptoms are similar to methamphetamine abuse. But their duration varies widely from subject to subject and from episode to episode. And they have additional, unexpected effects that appear to reduce the euphoric and neurological effects, sharply reducing many side effects of long-term methamphetamine use. Some studies indicate a role for psilocybin in mediating the behavioral effects of methamphetamines. It's almost like this infestation offers the highs of meth that mediation built right in.

Naturally, the findings are fascinating. Compelling. Researchers cultivate the fungal samples in laboratory conditions. That leads to wider exposure. Scientists and secretaries and janitors take varying levels of infection home, across the country, out of the country. Some are harmless. Some seek greater and greater exposure at all costs, triggering hallucinations, delusions, PTSD, contagious psychosis. Until Delta Green figures out what is going on and sends agents to ruthlessly put a stop to the spread.

Characters

Holy Light Ministries

Brother Dan and the Sheltered—Packy Barrows, Julie Cornsilk, Jessyca Polowski, Michael Weimann and the rest—change not physically but in every other way to the Awakened in the presence of strangers in Ghostlight Grove.

BROTHER DAN

Hardened criminal reformed to something worse

STR 13 **CON** 12 **DEX** 10 **INT** 11 **POW** 15 **CHA** 12
HP 13 **WP** 15 **SAN** 0

SKILLS: Alertness 47%, Art (Sketching) 33%, Athletics 43%, Criminology 25%, First Aid 27%, Melee Weapons 50%, Navigate 45%, Occult 39%, Pharmacy 21%, Search 38%, Stealth 32%, Survival 40%, Unarmed Combat 50%.

ATTACKS: *Unarmed* 50%, damage 1D4 or pin.

THE SHELTERED

Freed of addiction and conscience

STR 9 **CON** 10 **DEX** 10 **INT** 10 **POW** 8 **CHA** 8
HP 10 **WP** 15 **SAN** 0

SKILLS: Alertness 40%, Athletics 40%, Navigate 30%, Occult 30%, Stealth 30%, Survival 30%.

ATTACKS: *Unarmed* 40%, damage 1D4–1 or pin.

THE AWAKENED

The Sheltered, freed of humanity, their outrages mere hallucinations

STR 14 **CON** 15 **DEX** 15 **INT** 5 **POW** 8 **CHA** 4
HP 15 **WP** 8 **SAN** 0

SKILLS: Alertness 40%, Athletics 40%, Navigate 30%, Occult 30%, Stealth 30%, Survival 30%.

ATTACKS: *Grasp and clutch* 40%, pins target.

Ecstatic ravening 60%, only on a pinned target, damage 1D6 from clawing and feeding; also inflicts 1 damage on the heedlessly, rapturously savage attacker.

EUPHORIC SPEED: Add a +40% bonus to **Alertness** and to **Athletics** tests that require speed or power. Apply a –40% penalty to **DEX** tests and **Athletics** tests that require balance or coordination.

Jennifer Johnson

Johnson, available as a player character, is described in more detail than most NPCs.

Veteran social worker Jennifer Johnson has been married for 16 years and has two kids, age 13 and 7. She and the family are regulars at Grace Lutheran Church. They spend weekends hunting, fishing, rafting, and camping.

Johnson comes from a large family in the Ozarks. She is all too well acquainted with fringe religious beliefs and conspiracy theories, and has spent a lifetime coping with the fallout of loved ones' drug addictions and self-destructive habits. The same attitudes and habits that kept her sane growing up have kept her stable in a harrowing career: generosity, a ferocious urge to protect children, and blunt honesty.

Johnson is deeply pragmatic, not idealistic. She sees family, community, and her relationships with “clients,” as the system calls kids in her files, not as fixed parts of life but as ongoing acts of trust and kindness. She learned early to accept that she can't save all of her kids. Sometimes what a troubled kid wants most is the stability and familiarity of the very thing that's going to kill them. All she can do is offer alternatives they rarely want and a little help from time to time.

She constantly does favors for peers in the system and only occasionally calls for favors in return. She fills out reports promptly and with shocking brevity, and superiors love her for it. In between, she does what she can to keep “her” kids alive.

JENNIFER JOHNSON

Doesn't let it get to her

STR 9 **CON** 12 **DEX** 11 **INT** 13 **POW** 14 **CHA** 13
HP 11 **WP** 14 **SAN** 70

BONDS: Husband (Lonnie) and two kids (Elijah, age 13, and Olivia, 7), 13. Grace Lutheran Church in Joplin, 13. Parents, sister, and three brothers, 13.

MOTIVATIONS: Protecting kids.

Building community and family each day in acts of outreach and trust.

Sharing the wonders of the great outdoors.

Blunt honesty.

Real change happens outside rules and paperwork.

SKILLS: Alertness 38%, Art (Singing) 50%, Athletics 42%, Bureaucracy 65%, Criminology 30%, Driving 42%, Firearms 35%, First Aid 40%, HUMINT 59%, Law 31%, Navigation 50%, Occult 27%, Persuade 53%, Psychotherapy 51%, Stealth 39%, Survival 48%.

ATTACKS: *Unarmed* 40%, damage 1D4–1 or pin.

William Berry

Berry is a veteran prosecutor with extensive experience working with the FBI, state and local police, and intelligence agencies. He privately chafes under the authority of Joshua Fredericks, a political hack whose use of the Civil Rights Division to protect violators of civil rights Berry finds disgraceful. But he puts up with the assignment for the sake of his more important, more secret work as an operations officer for Delta Green. The Religious Crimes Task Force gives Berry opportunities to keep DG-affiliated analysts on the lookout for potential incursions. And it lets him send potential recruits to look at cases that have that whiff of weirdness but are not clearly unnatural or dangerous. Berry is a dead-eyed 53-year-old with exhaustion and burnout so deep that no rest can cure them save death. He exercises and runs daily as if that might forestall the horrors to come.

BILL BERRY

DOJ prosecutor and Delta Green operations officer, testing potential Agents and covering their tracks, age 53.

STR 13 **CON** 10 **DEX** 13 **INT** 13 **POW** 8 **CHA** 8
HP 12 **WP** 8 **SAN** 42

DISORDERS: Adapted to violence and helplessness; PTSD.

SKILLS: Accounting 61%, Alertness 40%, Athletics 50%, Bureaucracy 63%, Computer Science 48%, Criminology 60%, Dodging 47%, Driving 40%, Firearms 41%, Foreign Language (Spanish) 50%, HUMINT 62%, Law 71%, Melee Weapons 40%, Occult 40%, Persuade 64%, Stealth 44%, Unarmed Combat 49%, Unnatural 11%.

ATTACKS: *Unarmed* 49%, damage 1D4–1 or pin.

Handgun-configured AR-15 with 7" barrel (technically a pistol in most states) 41%, damage 1D12, Armor Piercing 3, base range 30 m; –10% to hit if fired with only one hand.

Pregenerated Agents

Terry Wall and Avery Shepard are federal agents stuck in a thankless and useless job, detailed to a task force that investigates cases that interest no one in power. Neither has ever heard of Delta Green. But Delta Green has heard of them. It uses the Religious Crimes Task Force to check cases that might involve the unnatural and test the resolve and discretion of potential recruits. If it turns up an unnatural threat, operations officer Berry guides them around it or through it. Sometimes that means diverting these coal-mine canaries and sending vetted agents in. Sometimes Delta Green can only hope the canaries survive long enough to be recruited. See the *Handler's Guide* for more details on recruitment. Players who take on Shepard or Wall as Agents can fill in details on gender and appearance. Other players can play Jennifer Johnson or already-established Agents of Delta Green.

Special Agent Avery Shepard

Athletic, confident, and competent, Avery Shepard should be ascending to the heights of a distinguished career in the FBI. College basketball scholarships led to medical school and a hospital practice. When medicine proved not physically exciting enough, a family friend in the FBI made some recommendations. Shepard passed the tests and interviews quickly. The FBI Academy was a breeze. But the vicious rivalries of the FBI bureaucracy came as a surprise. Each of Shepard's successes seemed to come with unwelcome recognition of interest in cases that a few supervisors deemed a bit to outré to suit joining the supervisors' ranks. It's all led here: a task force no ambitious agent would ever want to join.

AGENT SHEPARD

FBI Criminal Investigative Division, National Crimes Branch, Financial Crimes; Religious Crimes Task Force; age 35.

STR 13 **CON** 12 **DEX** 12 **INT** 13 **POW** 12 **CHA** 10
HP 13 **WP** 12 **SAN** 60 **BREAKING POINT** 48

BONDS: Mom (10); dad (10); sister (10).

MOTIVATIONS AND DISORDERS: Showing off competence.
 Not quite an adrenaline junky but definitely adrenaline-forward.
 Making the world a better place.
 A little too interested in cults and conspiracies.
 Being part of a like-minded team.

SKILLS: Alertness 50%, Athletics 55%, Bureaucracy 50%, Criminology 50%, Dodge 40%, Drive 50%, Firearms 50%, First Aid 50%, Forensics 30%, HUMINT 50%, Law 30%, Medicine 50%, Occult 30%, Persuade 50%, Pharmacy 50%, Science (Biology) 20%, Search 50%, Unarmed Combat 55%.

ATTACKS: *Glock 17M pistol* 50%, damage 1D10, base range 15 m.
Unarmed 55%, damage 1D4.

EQUIPMENT: Business attire, spare shirts, khakis and hiking boots, FBI badge and identification card, tactical flashlight, windbreaker jacket printed with “FBI,” encrypted smartphone, police-band radio with earpiece and throat microphone, encrypted laptop with access to FBI networks, small evidence-collection kit, belt holster, two spare magazines in a belt pouch, handcuffs in a belt pouch. Other gear is available at local FBI offices for requisition, such as surveillance kits, body armor, and rifles and shotguns.

Special Agent Terry Wall

Terry Wall got an MBA expecting to turn large salaries into larger earnings in investments and entrepreneurship. But a knack for foreign languages and learning the ins and outs of money laundering along the way led to a job that seemed bizarre to friends but was a perfect fit for Wall: working as a criminal investigator for the IRS. IRS CI has 2,100 special agents in tiny bureaus across the country to enforce tax, money laundering, and Bank Secrecy Act laws. Gifted and intuitive, steady, friendly, and confident, Wall spent the last ten years on progressively bigger cases in money laundering, organized crime, and political corruption. Maybe one of those cases was too big, or came too close to someone with clout. Getting put on this task force was the last thing Wall expected. With any luck it will prove very temporary.

AGENT WALL

IRS Criminal Investigation, Office of Operations, Policy, and Support; Religious Crimes Task Force; age 37.

STR 10 **CON** 11 **DEX** 11 **INT** 14 **POW** 13 **CHA** 13
HP 11 **WP** 13 **SAN** 65 **BREAKING POINT** 52

BONDS: Two brothers (12); therapist (12); mom (12).

MOTIVATIONS AND DISORDERS: Type “A” overachiever.

Finding the missing pieces that untangle mysteries, puzzles and misdirection.

Family history of public service.

Ten more years to a lucrative retirement.

Stopping users, abusers, cheats, and thieves from harming others.

SKILLS: Accounting 60%, Alertness 50%, Athletics 40%, Bureaucracy 60%, Computer Science 60%, Criminology 50%, Drive 50%, Firearms 50%, Foreign Language (Chinese) 40%, Foreign Language (Russian) 40%, Forensics 30%, HUMINT 60%, Law 50%, Persuade 50%, Search 50%, Unarmed Combat 50%.

ATTACKS: *Glock 19M pistol* 50%, damage 1D10, base range 10 m.
Unarmed 50%, damage 1D4–1.

EQUIPMENT: Business attire, spare shirts, khakis and polo shirts, IRS CI badge and identification card, tactical flashlight, handcuffs in a belt pouch, belt holster, two spare pistol magazines in a belt pouch, navy windbreaker jacket with “POLICE” printed on the back, small evidence-collection kit, encrypted smartphone, police-band radio with earpiece and throat microphone, encrypted laptop with access to IRS networks.

Playtesters

Mike Daisey, Allan Goodall, Kevin Ham, Jeremy Kush, Ross Payton, Caleb Stokes, Thaddeus Stoklasa.