

A Is For Awful, B Is For Blood, C Is For Creature, A Thing That Goes Thud All stories begin small, with a twist of fate. The teddy bear was a little dirty, a little frayed, and its black, button eyes were a little loose. Someone had lovingly stitched and patched its fuzzy, brown sides, however, and it was well stuffed with straw. It lay on the floor in a slick of blood, its long muzzle pointing straight up at the ceiling. The sitting room of the Grey family was low and cramped. A wood-burning stove stood in the corner, beside some brightly colored number blocks, a toy cutlass, and a wooden train. A table, chairs, and various ornaments lay broken or flung on their sides, and the yellow curtains were torn. The room was even more cramped with all the men in it, talking in tight, low voices above the muffled sobs from the back room. Guild badges hung from chests, beneath grim, vengeful expressions. The air was charged, like at a hanging. There was blood all over, but those present wanted more. A tall man entered, as rangy and grizzled as an old mountain lion, and the voices hushed. Riding spurs clinked as he walked, and guns hung from his belt. He did not take his hat off. He spoke to a hefty man with a sergeant's badge, in a wilderness drawl that was soft and gentlemanly, with just a hint of menace. "Your man in back. He got a name?" "Grey, sir. Phineas Grey." "Has he talked?" The sergeant glanced towards the back room. "Some of the men had a go at him. Didn't say nothin' worth repeatin', sir." "The neighbors, they hear anythin'?" "If they did--""--they ain't talkin'." Even behind his bushy, grey moustache, the man's expression told what he thought of the neighbors. "They're scared, sir," the sergeant said. This was his neighborhood, and he felt an odd compulsion to rise to its defense. "Proper scared. Been a lot of sightings. Odd things. Then this." The man looked at the sergeant for a while, his eyes hidden under his hat. "Y'all know this part of town. Seen many street kids hereabouts? The Wee Malkies? The Little Sisters? Crooligans?" "Not now you mention it, sir, no. Is that important?" The man considered this for a long moment, then gestured to the back room. "Fetch our Mr. Phineas Grey to the cells. Mind he doesn't fall down any stairs on the way there." He looked around. "The victim?" "Well, just..." The sergeant pointed over by the teddy bear, and then at various other red, wet splashes around the room. The man with the spurs took a last look and left. "Bleedin' Neverborn Hunters, thinkin' they're better'n us," Sergeant Kliegemann muttered, as he headed for the murderer in the back room. "This ain't got nothin' to do with him, anyway." Not long after, the sun came up, and the men all departed, leaving a bruised, brooding emptiness in the house. Shadows came and went and came again as day passed and night fell. Flies clustered around the darkening blood in the silent rooms and crawled on the teddy bear's fur, but the house stayed still and dead. And so things might have remained. If fate had not lent a hand, the house would have been cleaned and stripped and the teddy bear thrown away along with everything else. Things might have turned out very differently indeed had the rat not come along. Drawn by the blood-soaked straw, the rat gnawed a hungry hole in the toy's side before picking it up in her jaws and

running back down into the sewers with her treat. These sewers of Malifaux are home to things much worse than rats, and the sight of something raw and bloated eating an unwilling supper frightened the rat into dropping the bear into the foul water. It floated for a long time, passing through unlit halls and old buried streets until a woman's hand closed over it and lifted it clear. "Ah," the Widow whispered in a voice like twigs on a windowpane, "you're perfect. You've seen things." Fingers more like knives gently stroked its button eyes. "These remember, they do." Crooning softly over the sodden bear, the Widow skittered up a long flight of steps, through a trapdoor, and into the back of a long-closed shop. An old

spinning wheel and a stool sat surrounded by a carpet of white bones. She cleared a space for the bear on the rotted floorboards by the wheel, sliced a seam open with one of her sharp fingers, and lowered her black bulk onto the stool, folding her many legs underneath. She opened her mouth, which was round and full of needles, and exhaled an inky, dark cloud that she captured on the wheel and began to spin into a glistening black thread. She placed the end of the thread into the seam she had opened and continued to spin. She was happy in her work. It had taken her a long time to gather all the precious material she needed for the black thread; many nights of clinging around eaves and windows, sniffing for the scent of a human child having a nightmare. There were quite a lot of those in Malifaux. Her whispers in their ears would make the nightmares worse, and then she could open her round mouth filled with needles, open it wide, lean close and breathe deeply of their fear. It was sweetness to her. The black thread began to fill the bear, and her sharp fingers worked fast, loosening the stitches and letting the sodden fabric stretch. It grew larger and larger, impossibly so. Still the Widow exhaled the stolen terrors, and the black thread ran on and on. Eventually the Widow sighed and sat back, aching and weary, but pleased with her night's effort. The floorboards creaked, and dust fell from the cracked ceiling as the teddy bear sat up, its massive bulk filling the back room. The fur was torn here and there, but instead of straw, what poked out looked more like bones and gristle. The button eyes had sunk into the fabric and vanished, leaving stark, black holes like abandoned wells where something ancient and hungry waited at the bottom. The soft, round hands split as black shards of bone pushed out to form wicked claws, and the stitched mouth opened to reveal a nightmare's smile of swords. The Widow clapped in delight. Teddy was in a toy room, bright and full of joy. He saw the woman clapping, and he smiled and clapped too. She must be a mummy. They were always kind and smiling. She was pleased with him, and he liked that. He played with the toys, while the mummy watched. After a while, his tummy got sore and rumbled. He cried, and tried to eat the toys, but they were dry and crumbled to dust. The mummy opened a door. At first he was a bit worried, but the mummy told him that outside was a magic kingdom, and he was going to have a great adventure. Teddy liked adventures, and waved goodbye to the mummy. The Widow watched as the great creature lumbered off, wrecking a path through the deserted woollen shop and out into the empty lane beyond. She wiped a tear away from one of her many bulbous, white eyes. It was so hard to let them go. MMMD is for Doomed, Sentenced To Die, E is for Endless, Death To Defy. Each minute in the cells lasted forever, but the days and weeks were stolen away as the appointed date drew nearer. The condemned man's shouts and yells were louder and fiercer than any of the others, but the jailers were deaf to cries of injustice. Even so, they were glad when Phineas Grey left. He had arrived pale and shrinking, but the darkness of the jail had brewed something black in his soul. Some said it was his crime, eating him up. Others were not

so sure. In his last days, those who met his hollow gaze under the lanky, brown curls chose to sleep that night with a candle burning. The murderer was hanged for the crowd on a Friday. With his last words, Phineas Grey promised them all justice, in this life or the next. On Saturday and Sunday, a cold rain fell as his body creaked on the Hanging Tree in a breeze that few could feel, and those who could chose not to speak of it. On Monday, the body was gone. MMMF is for Fun, Toy Trains In a Station, G is for Grisly, A Nightmare Creation. Not all mummies were kind. Teddy had learned this first hand, several weeks into his Great Adventure. To his delight he had found a toy train set just like one he remembered--the night

porters of Creepwood Station had run screaming as the giant Neverborn creature appeared out of the mist on the gas-lit platform--and had played with the brightly coloured trains for awhile, rolling them up and down the track, while their happy faces puffed steam and smoke--the accountant dragged his elderly mother from the mangled wreckage of the sleeper car, amid the screams of the dying, while the abomination hurled another carriage at them along the tracks--and then he played hide and seek with the people inside--Rebecca knew she had to stop her brother's teeth from chattering, or the thing would find them both hidden away in the luggage compartment. So she wrung his neck. It still found her--until they all fell asleep. But then a mummy turned up, with hair as black as coal under a cowboy hat. Teddy had run to play with her, but this mummy did not want to play. This was an angry mummy, with angry friends. Pistols cracked, and made Teddy hurt. The black thread inside him tried to stitch his blood-soaked fur, but the onslaught of lead was more than even it could keep up with. Frightened and confused, Teddy turned and ran. He blundered through dark alleyways and down twist-back streets and hidden closes, until all sounds of the angry mummy and her bullies had gone. By the time he reached an expanse of waste ground, where the moonlit mist lay low like a patchwork quilt, he had quite forgotten about her, and was keen to continue his Great Adventure. He set off, the mist billowing around him like a ship's wake. He passed a brightly painted wooden wagon, decorated with puppets, pirates and clowns, with colored bunting strung up on old washing lines, but no one was home. He sniffed the air, and could smell no one to play with, so he carried on sailing through the Magic Mist to the Kingdom of Adventure, while far above Master Moon and Mistress Luna smiled down and whispered secrets only brave Teddies should know. All was still and silent in the waste ground, until, that was, something the size and shape of a small boy appeared, following Teddy through the mist, its limbs clicking as it walked. MMMH is for Hired, A Gun That Is Peerless I is for Injured, But Nonetheless Fearless. The woman sank slowly to her knees, pain etched on her face, as blood ran from the wound in her side. Her broken swords lay on the corpses in front of her, her empty pistol on the corpses behind.

"Give it up, bitch," Scissors O'Doull sneered, stepping back and wiping her blood off his knife. Louden and Smalls, his two remaining companions gave a nervous laugh. "Lord knows, ah don't mind hittin' wimmin, but ah try an' avoid killin' 'em. 'Specially the pretty ones." The woman said nothing, her head bowed, her face hidden behind long, red hair. "It's Oriental Joe we want," O'Doull said. He was pointing with his knife at the man from the Three Kingdoms standing behind her, but O'Doull didn't move any closer. He had seen what the woman could do -- the evidence lay cooling around her. "Step aside, an' we'll match wit he's payin' ye." With gritted teeth, the woman slowly drew a long, stiletto blade hidden in her belt and dug the point into the cobble to steady herself. She paused to draw breath, and O'Doull seized the moment. Springing forward he kicked the blade away, and then jumped back, a more bullish sneer on his face. "That's wit ye call a last warnin'." The woman looked over her shoulder at her employer, Bai Jian. Her dark eyes pinned him to the iron gate he stood against. His meaty jowls trembled, and sweat stained his collar. He held up a hand, spreading all five fingers. The woman shook her head. Bai Jian glanced at O'Doull and his men, let out a whimper of fear and held up both hands. Ten fingers. The woman looked away. Her hand reached into her boot, and came out holding a nail file. She dug the point into the cobbles to steady herself. O'Doull started to laugh, but then she looked up at him, and his laughter faded away into the night. His face hardened, and the knife came up. Louden and

Small shifted their brickbats, and charged, yelling. Bai Jian hid his face in his hands and curled up into a small ball until the sounds of violence were over and the only scream was the night wind in the chimney tops. A rough hand grabbed his collar and pulled him to his feet. He looked not into the leering face of Scissors O'Doull, but the warlike face of the woman he had retained to protect him, a woman he knew only as Zephyr. Eyes like gunmetal, and a countenance just as cold and hard, she wiped the nail file on the sleeve of her shirt and tucked it away. She held out a hand. "The deal was for ten hundred." Stunned, Bai Jian handed over a neatly folded bundle of high-value Guild Scrip. He could not take his eyes off O'Doull. The man was still standing, his body shaking violently. How could he still be standing? "Ten extra." He paid, transfixed by O'Doull's "Expenses," Zephyr said, swaying on her feet, her voice cramped from the pain. "Broke my swords. That'll be another two." Zian paid. "And I'm out of ammunition. Another two. Call it two fifty." To Zian's enormous relief, O'Doull's body finally toppled, crumpling next to his own head. The blood spurting from the stump slowed to a steady ooze. Zian paid again, without complaint. As she stepped away over the pile of bodies, he called out after her. "That small fortune you have. You can do anything you want with it." "No, sir," Zephyr said, stopping to pick up her pistols. "It's not nearly enough." And she walked away, O'Doull's blood tattooed on her cheeks. MMMJ is for Joke, A Trick That Is Cruel, K is for Kids, Who Should Be In School The lane behind the rows of terraced, brick houses was dark, cluttered with rubbish and shadows. Old bed frames leaned against piles of moss-covered slates, and ash bins

overflowed beside reeking night pails. The cobbles were dangerously uneven, and in places, sinkholes stank of the sewers below. The lane was home to rats, cats, and other two-legged vermin. "Hey, missus!" Callooh shouted, flinging another cracked tile to shatter a window of the house he and his brother had targeted for that night's fun. "What'll ye do when the Wee Malkies come? Hey, missus! What'll ye do?" Lights flicked on, and Callooh snorted, ducking down behind the wall, crouching on a moldy mound of broken boxes. He was almost invisible in his filthy rags, and his skin was dark with dirt and ash. He turned to elbow his younger brother into action – the plan was to draw the housekeeper's attention out the back, and then his brother would nip round the front and nick the brass off their door, leaving the traditional Wee Malkie calling-card steaming on their front step – but Kallay wasn't there. All of sudden, Callooh felt a shiver run down his back, and he remembered what the older Malkies had said about going into this part of town. Boys and girls going missing. They didn't sound so stupid, now. Then a pathetic, mewling noise made him peer down the lane, and there was Kallay, his tiny frame almost buried under a sack. A sack that was moving. "Whit ye got there?" Callooh hissed, leaping down, all thought of warnings and Number 78B's brass door ornaments flown at the sight of the bag. "Show us!" Kallay's face mirrored his brother's – a mischievous smile in a dirt-smeared face surrounded by long, filthy hair that might have been any color once upon a time. Both of them wore the black rag of the Wee Malkies around their necks. "Ah've only gone and found a sack of kittens, didn't ah?" he whispered, eager to impress. "Ah reckon a few are dead, you know, but ah figure we can fling the rest at whatever poor eejit they lock up in the stocks in the mornin'!" Then a sound that did not belong in the lane made them both freeze. It sounded like someone dropping canes onto the cobbles, over and over, and it was getting closer. "Whit's that, Callooh?" His younger brother backed off, the whites of his eyes bright in the darkness. "Whit's that?" "Ditch it!" Callooh hissed. "Hide!" As his brother heaved the sack into a garden, Callooh ducked behind some

rusted old pipes. Kallay joined him in a flash, wedging in tight against his older brother. "Ah don't like it--""Put a sock in it!" Callooh put his hand over his brother's mouth as the sound grew louder. Trembling, he put his eye up to a rust hole. It was hard to make anything out in the dark, but what he could see was small, like him, and fast, but moving all wrong. And there were a lot of them. He caught glimpses of colored cloth and enameled eyes. There was no sound but the soft clatter of wood on the cobbled lane, and he knew that if they spotted him or Kallay, it was all over. Whatever they were, they were hunting. Callooh kept his hand where it was long after they had gone, until Kallay's tears had dried in the cold night air. Even when he and his brother crawled out, sprinted down the lane, and ran breathless back to Wee Malkies' territory, he was convinced he could hear the tap-tap-tapping behind him all the way. M M M L is for Lady, Gets Quite A Fright, M is for Master, Won't Outlive The Night. Teddy liked the house. The yellow curtains reminded of him of somewhere he once knew, and it had bright marble columns at the front, like teeth. It smiled at him, so he went in. The LaGrange family, grain merchants with solid Guild connections, returned later that night from the opera. None of the servants were around. Everard LaGrange called angrily at the back stair and rang the bell, but no one appeared. Alarmed, he took his children to the drawing room to get his gun. Teddy had found several people in the smiling house, but none of them wanted to play, so he had put most of them in the naughty box to teach them manners.

Lady Isabelle LaGrange entered the kitchen, and her look of fury turned to one of horror as she saw the blood slick on the tiled floor. A thick pool of it led back to the cast iron oven in the range. The door had been forced shut, and the parts of the servants' bodies that had not fitted fully inside were crushed around the edges. Hands, feet, and pieces she could not identify. There was always a low fire burning through the night, and the stench of cooked flesh turned her stomach. Then she heard her children screaming--but he had kept a few of them with him to help him make number blocks. Teddy had always enjoyed number blocks, but it had been hard to get these ones square. They were a bit mushy--The maids had fainted on the drawing room floor when the nightmare creature had plucked the butler's head clean off and started hammering it against the walls, forming it into a crude cube of mashed bone and brain. It had carved what looked like numbers into the sides with one jagged claw, before reaching for the maids--but red was a good color, and he hoped the family who lived here would like them. They did not. Disappointed, Teddy showed them how to make more number blocks, but when he had finished, there was no one left to play with. Outside the drawing-room window, something small watched him play. M M M N is for Nightwatch, To Guard Against Danger, O is for Outlook, To Watch For The Stranger. "One of the clock, and all's well," Sergeant Kliegemann called, feeling the rain trickle down the back of his neck. Its sodding well was not all well, but every time he called out, as his deep voice echoed back to him in the narrow streets, he felt as if he had company on his patrol. A welcome feeling on a night like this. It had not been a good spell for the Guild Guard, he reflected as he paced down Ambergris Street, the light from his lamp sweeping to and fro between the closed shops on either side of him. The cut glass of the windows flashed white as his lamp played over them. His cap was pulled low and his collar raised against the incessant drizzle. There had been that unfortunate incident of the murderer going missing off the Hanging Tree two months ago. They never had found the victim's body, of course, but the blood in the Grey house had been enough for a conviction. Fortunately, that had been pushed off the front pages by the massacre at Creepwood Station. It had been released to the Malifaux Daily Record as a

points failure on the track. No survivors meant no one to contradict the official version. A few more runaway kids than usual had been reported, but then the LaGrange killings, right in the heart of up-market Feverstone quadrant only a couple of weeks ago, had forced the Guild to put more feet on the beat in the areas around there. Specifically, his feet, for the use of which he was unlikely to get overtime pay. Being a sergeant was supposed to spare him this nonsense, but there he was. The only saving grace was that the gangs of street kids had been unusually quiet recently, but all that meant was that the Guild would have a hard time pinning trouble on their frequent fights. And then, although Sergeant Kliegemann was not keen on thinking about this alone at night, there had been the deaths of more than a few Guild Guard officers. No one was calling them murders, because the morgue had said 'heart attack' in every case. Still, Sergeant Kliegemann could not remember the last time a heart attack had caused a man to rip his own ears off as he died. He shone the lamp beam over a patch of red brick wall next to Ormiston's butcher shop, where hand-printed bills curled in the rain. Missing children were buried under rugs for sale, and snake-oil sleep remedies were partially obscured by brightly colored posters for the puppet show out on the waste ground. He walked on, swinging his lamp from side to side, the light flashing in the leaded shop windows. And then he caught a glimpse of his own reflection in one of the

windows, and his thoughts fled, leaving only one remaining – there is someone standing behind me. Sergeant Kliegemann whirled, his pistol raised. The street was empty. He stood for a long moment, watching and listening – he had been Guard long enough to know that some shadows should be jumped at. But the street held only him and the rain. The night air felt much colder now – he let out his breath and it fogged around him. A whiff of decay made his stomach rise. He glanced back at the window and his heart shrivelled in his chest – there it was again, closer this time. A dark figure, the rain glistening on its bowed head. There was something wrong with its neck. He spun back, crying out, but the emptiness of the street seemed to mock his fright. The rain grew heavier, hissing on the cobbled street, summoning a knee-high spray. He looked back at the window, his pistol hand shaking. The figure was still there, only a few feet away from him. He could almost reach out and touch it. Then all sense left Sergeant Kliegemann as he realised its feet did not touch the ground. He screamed, dropped the lamp and ran. He ran as if in a nightmare, the shops on either side hemming him in, the hiss of the rain drowning out the slap of his boots on the stones and the rasp of his breathing. In momentary pictures, each shop window he raced past contained only him and the thing at his heels, both blurred by the rain. In every reflected instant, it drifted closer and closer no matter how fast he ran. A voice spoke, or it may have been just the hissing of the rain. "Jusss-tissss." Sergeant Kliegemann stumbled, cried out and fell hard, skidding on the cobbles. His gun skipped away like a stone on a pond, lost in the dark. The street behind him was empty, but in the tall, rain-streaked window of a tailor's shop, the dark figure floated slowly closer. The rain hissed louder still, and it was all he could hear. Not even the drumming of his heart rose above it, and in the sound of the rain came the voice again. "Jusss-tissss." The word was everywhere, carried on every drop of rain, in every bouquet of spray, repeated over and over by a countless choir. Kliegemann cried out, gripping his head, but nothing could keep the voices out. In the tailor's window, the figure stooped over him. A rope hung from its broken neck, and long, curly hair hung heavy in the rain. Eyes burned with the fires of damnation. "I know you," Kliegemann gasped, but he could not even hear his own voice any longer. "It – it can't be!" "Jusss-tissss," the rain hissed, and

Phineas Grey bent low over Kliegemann and whispered secrets to him with his dead, white lips and black, swollen tongue. The morgue reported it as just another heart attack, although the Guard surgeon choose not to comment on why the late sergeant might have torn off his own ears. MMMP is for Plunder, Winnings Ill-Gotten, Q is for Quarrel, Needless Brought On "Just give me my share, and I'll be on my way," the woman said, indicating the paired leather saddle bags stuffed with the stolen Guild Scrip. Denver noticed that she protected her right side and wondered if she had an old injury there. It certainly hadn't slowed her up on the job, however, and the way she had dispatched those Union enforcers had been cool, clinical and impressive. Now, she looked pale and exhausted, just like the other four survivors of the raid on the Galestone Mine salary wagon, gathered in the abandoned trappers' hut. Josiah Denver had a mean, narrow face, with a tight mouth and a head that seemed to come to a point under the slicked, black hair. Everyone but his mother thought he maybe had some bayou blood in him, and even some days she wasn't sure. No matter his expression, there was a sly hint of gremlin in those sideways eyes. He looked around at his hired hands, and wondered if he really wanted to share the proceeds with them at all.

He held up a hand to the woman he knew only as Zephyr. "In good time." He looked over at Roake, who had taken a mess of pellets to the face and was in a bad way. "Roake, it ain't right what done happen to ya, but don't cha think y'all should've been watchin' that third wagon?" Roake didn't look up. His voice was pained and slurred. "That was Jann's job." Denver nodded, glancing very briefly at Jann as the thick-necked Swede bridled at the tarnishing of his name. "Maybe it was, maybe it weren't," Denver said, "but he told me he had to go help Ferris with the locks." Now it was Ferris' turn to stir, and he fixed Jann with a cold stare. "Didn't need no help, didn't ask fer none." The woman buttoned up her docker's coat, and said in a low voice that only Denver could hear, "It doesn't have to go down this way." Denver just grinned. Sharing was for deadbeats and children. "Easy Ferris. Sounds like you're calling Jann a liar." Had there been anyone outside the trappers' hut a moment or so later, they would have heard gunshots, maybe a half-dozen or so, the flashes creeping through the cracks in the shuttered windows. They would have seen a man with shiny, black hair come out the door, saddle bag slung over his shoulder and a pistol in his hand. They would have seen him take a few paces, drop the pistol, and then fall, dead. And they would have seen a woman walk from the hut, pick up the saddle bags and head off down the trail towards the horses. It was a lot of money, Zephyr knew, but it wasn't yet enough. MMR is for Run, A Thing You Should Do, S is for Scared, Of Things You Bump Into. It was too late to get away. The lawman towered over Callooh and his brother. He had a face like the mountain lions outside the Malifaux Museum and riding spurs that clinked as he walked. Gun hung from his belt, catching the light of the gas lamps behind him. "Bout time I ran into yeh," he said in a prairie drawl. "You and yours've bin keepin' mighty quiet these past months. I reckon you're gonna tell me what I wanna know." Callooh puffed his chest out but made sure his little brother was standing between him and the lawman. "Ah'm no tellin' you nuthin, bandy legs. Wee Malkiesdinnae clipe. In't that so, Kallay?" The man looked at the older child for a while, his eyes dark under his hat. "Ain't half the words comin' out yer mouth mean a dang thing to me, boy. Speak English, or I'll tan yer hide. There's things in the streets at night, got y'all runnin' scared. I thought I had 'em, too, not a few moments ago. Posse of 'em, but they up and gave me the slip." He smiled, but it was full of menace, and grabbed the knotted rag around Callooh's neck, twisting it tight in his big, gloved fist. "Then I got lucky and found

myself a pair of jokers."Tap-tap.Callooh froze, but the big lawman mistook the fear in hisface, and carried on talking.Tap-tap-tap.Callooh couldn't see anything of the street past the man'senormous frame. "Mister-" he began, and then thelawman stopped mid-sentence, his mouth open.Callooh tried to pull away, but the lawman was holdinghim tight. "Mister?"The man started to shake. A stick, with a sharpened tip,appeared inside his open mouth and slowly pushed outbetween his teeth. Blood poured down the man's chin,and his eyes rolled back into his head. His body jerkedviolently.Callooh's little brother screamed and tried to run, butCallooh was still holding him and the lawman holdingCallooh. Then the stick vanished with a sickening slurp, andthe lawman dropped like a stone.

There was not one, but a dozen of the things crowding thenarrow street. They were clad in garish colors, stripes andchecks, some in jester's motley and one in the tricornd hatand black garb of a privateer. All had limbs and faces ofwood, and they leapt on the body and hacked at it withtheir sharp fingers.Callooh drew a broken-glass shiv and stabbed at the glovedhand that still held him tight, and then froze as themarionette with the pirate costume raised its carved,painted face towards him and his brother.Its fixed smile and blood-covered hands were the lastthings Callooh saw.MMMT is for Torment, Secrets To Tell,U is for Undying, Dry Whispers From HellPhineas Grey was dead. He had died on the Hanging Tree,three months ago or more. All that was left was his fly-blown body, warmed only by the fires of vengeance.He could barely remember anything of his life, and evenhis existence now passed by in splinters of awareness,drifting through an endless night, dark fragments of theman he had been, held together by pain and anger.His was the pain of the noose around his neck, the painthat a man feels when all hope is truly gone. A pain thatnot even death had eased.The noose tugged at him, and he went. To officers of theGuild Guard who had been in the Grey house that night itpulled him, one by one. The whispers he had heardhanging on the Tree blew through his dry, cracked lips,caressing them with corpse-breath. He did not know whothey were or why he spoke to them, only that he must.The noose tugged, the fires burned, and he must.He spoke to the men who had walked him to the Tree. Hespoke to the men who had locked doors and turned keysuntil none were left who had wronged him, but still, ittugged.He came to an alehouse, tumbledown and rank with deaddreams, and he spoke to the men. None of them had beenthere that night, but his vengeance still burned all ittouched, and he moved on.The fragments of Phineas Grey wept in their cold, deadprison.Time passed, or none at all. It mattered not. He came to a ward, where the sick lay. The soft, dry whispers beyondthe grave touched them all, taking everything they had butleaving him only anger and pain.He came to a house. All within heard his tales, from youngto old, but it mattered not. The noose tugged, and hemust.One cold night, he passed a caravan on some wasteground. It was brightly colored, and beautiful to look at,but there was nothing alive within to whisper his secretsto, and he carried on past. His shrivelled, putrid eyes sawa small figure hastening away as the clouds hid the moon.The noose tugged in a different direction, but whateverwas left of Phineas Grey recognized something in thatsmall, running figure, and he drifted after it.MMMV is for Valuable, Things We Hold Dear,W is for Wish, Heart's Desire SincereAlderman Abster Sinth awoke to see a pistol, and a face heknew. His mouth was dry from sleep, and his teeth werein a glass jar beside his bed, so it took a few attempts toget the name out. "Sheffir?" It was a question, and a curse."Alderman Sinth," Zephyr replied, with a small nod. Herred hair was tied back under a black scarf. She had a freshscar on her right cheek, but she was as beautiful as ever.She put the candlestick



down by Abster Sinth's bedside and gestured with the pistol at the glass jar.  
"Good evening." Carefully, Abster Sinth plucked his teeth out of the jar and put them in his mouth, working his jaws a few times until

they clicked into place. The movement let him shift the bedcovers enough that he managed to slip his right arm back under them. The mercenary he had hired at great expense two weeks ago did not seem to notice. "The Lorimer brothers?" Her eyes never left his, and the gun did not waver. "Dead." For a moment he felt a surge of vicious pleasure, and then swallowed. "I am surprised. I assumed they had offered you double to kill me." "They did." "I see. But you killed them anyway." "I never walk away from a paying job. And I always take payment up front. You knew my terms when you hired me." "I suppose that, once in your life, you might consider making an exception?" Abster Sinth's right hand moved very carefully, and very slowly, closing over the grip of the custom, snub-nosed Peacekeeper he kept in a hollow in his mattress. "Double it again. I know you're desperate for the money. Let me live. The Lorimers are dead, no one will ever know. Just walk away and let me live." Zephyr lowered her gun to her side, and for a moment his heart leapt, but then she spoke. "I can't do that." "Money's no object, dammit!" He covered the sound of the hammer clicking back with his raised voice. "Ten times what they paid you!" "No, I mean, you're already dead." Zephyr said, at the same time as Abster's finger tightened on the hair-trigger, and a hollow click sounded, muffled by the bedclothes. Zephyr tapped the glass jar with the tip of her pistol, and it rang softly. "Powdered bayou rose, applied to your false teeth. It's painless, and quick. And I took the firing pin out of your gun." Abster tried to pull the trigger again, but his hands seemed numb and distant. "Curse you, woman!" he rasped. He fell back onto sheets that were suddenly damp with sweat. "I hope you choke on the damn money!" His breath was becoming heavier, and the candle seemed to be dimming. But he still had riches, and enemies he did not want gloating at his funeral. "There's a list," he said. "In the drawer by the window, on the left. A list. And there's a safe in the room. I can pay you now. Get the list." Zephyr shook her head. "You're a spiteful old man, when all's said and done, but with the scrip from the Lorimers I finally have all I need. Your sons will have to continue your petty feuds for you." "All you need?" Abster gasped. "I'm offering you a fortune! Who ever has all they need?" Zephyr's face grew terrible, and Abster shrank further into the bed. "I did, once. Then a man murdered my son, Dylan. Dylan Grey. Maybe you've heard of him?" He could barely see her anymore, and no matter how deep his breaths, his lungs barely filled. "That was last year. They hanged him. On the Tree. Phineas Grey. I remember. He was – your husband?" Her voice reached him across a vast and sluggish ocean. "Zephyr Grey, lady-at-arms, at your service. Oh, they hanged dear Phineas, but they didn't hang the man who killed my son. Although, in truth, I hear he is no man at all. Puppetmaster, I have heard him called. I really don't care what manner of creature he is, down in that caravan, putting on his sick shows. What I do know is that he came into my home and took my beautiful Dylan – tore his body apart and imprisoned his soul in a monster's plaything of wood and string and left my husband to hang for it. I came back from a job Earthside and found my husband dead and my son gone, and I want them back. I want to hold them again, more than anything in this world!" Abster felt a rough hand on his face, closing the eyes whose lids he could no longer move. "Now go to sleep, Alderman Sinth. Your money, the Lorimers' money – all of it is for my family. I was told it would take a king's ransom, and that's exactly what I have. I am going to get them both back." "MMM"

X is for X-Ray, To See What Is Hidden, Y is for Yell, But Escape Is Forbidden Teddy was disappointed. He had been looking for the House of Teddies and had run into one distraction after another. It was fun to stop and play, but he really wanted to find the House of Teddies that the little boy with the big knife had mentioned. There was something about being in a house that made Teddy's stitches tingle, and if it had yellow curtains that would be even better. Yellow curtains and a family would be best of all. A couple of times he had seen – or thought he had seen – a small figure following him, but every time he turned it was gone. He was left with an impression of wooden limbs and strings, and a pirate hat. It seemed familiar, for a moment, but then he would find something new and wonderful and get all excited and his head was fuzzy at the best of times. There had been the little girl in the blue dress. She and Teddy had played for a while – the little girl had found a daddy wandering all alone in the streets – Resolved Jones had spent an evening drowning his sorrows, and was full as a tick, staggering from pillar to post trying to find a street he recognized. A girl child came out of nowhere, took his hand and spoke to him. She looked normal in all respects but one. The wisps of smoke coming from her empty eye sockets sobered him up but quick, but by then it was too late – and asked him if he wanted to play hide and seek. Teddy liked that game, and it quickly got underway – Resolved Jones screamed as the girl plucked his eyes out. In disbelief, he found he could still see through them, and watched himself clutching his own maimed face as the girl popped his eyes into her own vacant sockets. "You should hide," she said, and started counting back from twenty. Jones ran, and watched himself stagger away around a corner – with Teddy carrying the little girl in the blue dress and her telling him where to go. The daddy wasn't very good at hiding, but every time they found him crouched under a cart or in a doorway he would leap up – he had no idea where he was, and had tripped and fallen so many times his clothes were torn and wet with blood, but then he would see himself and know they had found him again – that girl and the monster she was riding on – and run off again. This game was fun! Outside a ruined posthouse, Resolved Jones turned his ankle on a loose cobble and fell heavily, breaking through rotten wooden slats over a buried coal pit. His left leg and collarbone shattered when he hit the bottom. He tried to be quiet, but the pain came out in whimpers he could not stop. Then he saw a loose cobble, and the broken slats of a pit, and knew they had found him again. The girl-thing jumped down the pit, and he watched as she ate what was left of his face. The little girl in the blue dress skipped away into the night, and Teddy waved goodbye, another chapter in his Great Adventure complete. In the ruins of the posthouse, a pair of painted eyes watched him go. MMMZ is for Zephyr, Bold, Quick and Brave, Summoning Monsters, Her Family To Save The inventors-for-hire who had built the device for Zephyr, Dr Oldish and his shrewish assistant Mr Lemon, had told her it would work best some place high, so she carried it, piece by piece, to the top of the north towers on Hurrycross Bridge. She was sweating freely on the third trip up the narrow, winding steps. It had cost her every cent of Guild scrip she had earned in the four months since her family had gone, and all their savings from before then. Dr Oldish had raised the cost at the last minute, but she'd been expecting that and had negotiated a six-chambered discount that the good doctor had been wise enough to accept. She finished assembling the device at midnight, as the damp on the wind finally turned into rain and lightning

flashed far off across the city. The device was about the size of four large traveling trunks stacked together. Most of its innards were concealed behind polished wooden panels, but

here and there copper coils or brass buttons broke the surface. On top, complicated arrangements of glowing glass tubes reflected in gleaming black ceramic insulators. The raindrops hitting them sizzled into vapor. It looked expensive, and impressive, but the real cost lay in the customized soulstones hidden within. Zephyr opened a wooden hatch on the front. "Resonances," Dr Oldish had said. "Something aetherically attuned to both you and the subjects." That meant personal belongings, and Zephyr placed her wedding ring— the one thing she'd refused to pawn — in one hatch and a lock of her boy's hair in the other. Times had been hard when Dylan was born, and she remembered repairing his favourite teddy bear's stitches with some of his own hair to save on thread. The memory hardened inside her, like all the others. She flipped the switches in the sequence Mr Lemon had written down for her, and waited in the rain.—the noose tugged, but this was stronger by far. Phineas Grey turned and floated across the river. The rope around his neck dangled down, drawing a wake in the black water below his feet.—She did not have long to wait. The air grew cold, and puddles iced over as her dead husband's lolling head rose over the tower parapet. He drifted up and over, towards the device, the wet rope around his neck trailing on the stones. Fear froze her, but only for a moment. It was working, just as they had said it would. "Phineas," she called. "Phineas, it is me." He turned towards her, and for a moment she thought she saw something alive in his dead, white eyes, but then the whispering began, and he drifted over the rooftop towards her, ice crackling into being beneath him. Before the whispers grew too loud, she flipped the first master switch and the device hummed anew. A blue light from a coiled tube pierced her husband through the breast, and he floated in silence.—all strings led to the Puppetmaster, but this string was new. New and taut like iron on a cold day. The other strings snapped, one by one, and Dylan Grey ran over the cobbles on wooden pegs, heading for the bridge.—She had only just flipped the switch when Zephyr's instincts told her to duck. As she did so, a small bundle of black cloth and sticks hurtled over her head to land, skittering and struggling to stand on the spreading ice. Painted eyes glared at her with a malevolence that chilled her soul, even as carved fingers, black with dried blood, reached out for her. "Dylan!" she cried, one hand on the second master switch. Her mind rebelled at the thought that this murderous marionette could be her only son. It found its footing and advanced on her, but still she did not flip the switch. "Dylan?" she begged, looking for anything that might remind her of her child. "It's mama!" The grasping hands were only inches from her face when she flipped the master switch. The puppet stopped, held up by a single thread of blue light from Dr Oldish's device. "Dylan," she whispered, raising a hand to the marionette's painted face. It twitched, once, then nothing. She gathered her resolve and began the final sequence of the device.—his stitches tingled as they had never done before. Something powerful was tugging at them, and not even the black, nightmare thread the Widow had placed within him could resist. Teddy reached the tower and started to climb.—The device was rumbling and hissing like an old boiler, and shafts of blue light lanced out into the rain-lashed night to rival the approaching lightning. Zephyr stood back, her heart in her throat, willing the device to work, looking from it to her husband and son and back again. She shouted at the machine, cajoling and begging it to complete its task, but she knew it was out of her hands now. Thunder rumbled as sparks flew, and she looked in astonishment as the noose around her husband's neck glowed blue, loosened and slid to the stones. The puppet's wooden limbs split, and layers of wood began to peel back. She had not dared to hope, not once, not since she had found her home cold and empty and her family

gone all those long months ago, but now she did. She did not notice the monstrous creature heave itself over the tower parapet behind her.

Teddy had once had button eyes, and those eyes had seen things. Images flashed before him; a house with yellow curtains and toys on the floor; a man, a woman and a child. A family. Not just any family – his family. Something bad had happened to them, but here they were, gathered on top of this tower to greet him! They were all together again. Teddy was overjoyed! And – he noticed the hissing, chugging device beyond the mummy – they had brought a toy to play with. He knew what he had to do. He had to take his family back to the house with the yellow curtains. Everything would be fine then. Teddy smiled – he would show them what a good Teddy he was. He would carry the toy for them. Zephyr was sent sprawling across the rooftop as the monster barged past her. Her anguished cry was lost in a peal of thunder. It all happened so slowly. The creature reached out two enormous claws, each ragged talon black as night, and plunged them deep into the device. Woods splintered. A pressurised container burst, and scraps of brass flew through the air. Sparks leapt from raindrop to raindrop as the blue light spluttered and died. The hulking creature, its filthy fur matted in the rain, turned toward her, the innards of the machine cradled in its claws. Eyes like stab wounds looked at her, and it bared row after row of vicious fangs. Zephyr screamed in disbelief, and drew her sword and pistol. Something had gone wrong, Teddy knew. The mummy was angry, angrier than he had ever seen her. Zephyr emptied her pistol into the huge head, each shot tripping tears in the sodden, patchy fur. Something black boiled beneath, dark and fearful. She leapt forward, slashing with her sword, but the nightmare thing raised its claws and blocked her blade. Then the thunder and her own cries faded away, and she could hear only the hiss of the rain on the stones. There was a voice carried on the rain, a voice she knew well, and it spoke only one word. "Jusss-tissss." She turned, aghast. The thing that had been her husband was at her side, the stench of death overwhelming her, and knives of ice drove into her mind. She tried to push him back, and then the marionette was on her, clinging to her back and stabbing at her eyes with its sharp, little fingers. Teddy could not understand what he had done wrong, but now his whole family was angry. He had to do something. Protecting her face with her pistol hand, Zephyr grabbed the puppet and hurled it into the undead body of her husband, knocking them both back. She staggered back a step, reeling from the wounds to her head and back and the unrelenting whispers that poisoned her mind. She fell to her knees. Teddy reached out to help the mummy stand. He lifted her to her feet, and then realized he had made an awful, clumsy mistake. Zephyr gaped wordlessly, gripping the black talons where they pierced her belly. The razor edges of the claws sliced her hands open to the bone, and her body shook as one talon grated against her spine. The creature stared at her, smiling as blood welled in her mouth. She looked over at her son and husband as her vision darkened. The riven wood of the puppet's limbs was smoothing over once again as the effects of the device faded. Her husband bent awkwardly and picked up the fallen noose. He tightened it around his broken neck with cold, dead fingers. Then the black talons slid out of her stomach, sawing against her bones, and she collapsed to her knees. With a herculean effort she rose to her feet, and took a step towards her family, but she had finally pushed her body to its limits, and she fell one last time. She could not move, but the rain felt cool on her face. The last thing she saw was three abominations gathering around her under a storm-bruised sky. The mummy was sleeping on a red, red rug, and the daddy and the boy stood over her. Teddy looked at the daddy's white, lifeless eyes and grey, sagging

skin. He looked at the boy's cruel, painted face and blood-stained hands. This was not what he remembered. Not at all.--the noose tugged, and the thing that would never again be Phineas Grey felt the fires of vengeance kindle once more. A corpse, a nightmare, and a wooden doll that no longer sparked any memories in his rotten skull. There was nothing here to listen to the truths he must tell. The Hanged Man drifted away----the strings returned, one by one, and the puppet that only looked like Dylan Grey felt them pulling him back to the

gaily painted caravan on the waste ground. The lumbering creature took a step towards him. The puppet had been following it for a long time, whenever the strings had allowed him. It had reminded him of a toy he had once loved, but this blood-stained monster was nothing like the teddy bear whose memory was fading fast. The Marionette skittered off over the cobbles, returning to his true master--Teddy ran after him, but he was too slow, and a moment later he was alone on the top of the tower. He stood, trembling, his claws clenched. His stitches ached, as if they were being pulled out one by one. It had all been a lie! The house, the yellow curtains, the family. All of it was a lie! He swung both great arms at the wreckage of the device, sending fresh splinters of wood and brass out into the storm. He would never play with toys ever again! No one would! With a sky-splitting roar he brought fist-like hammers down on the gutted remains, again and again, smashing it to pieces. He would never be friends with anyone ever again! He ripped stones and tiles from the roof and hurled them into the night, great inky streaks of black ooze running from his bullet-hole eyes. He hated them all, everyone! Then he heaved the buckled frame over the parapet. Lightning flashed overhead. A fissure of light touched the soaring frame and Teddy gaped in wonder. A thousand sparks burst into life in brilliant hues, crackling and fizzing in a kaleidoscope of stars. Fireworks! Beautiful fireworks! It was the most magical thing he had ever seen. He spread his arms as the incandescent motes drifted down around him, twirling and swirling like fairies in the night. It seemed to go on forever, as if the stars above had come down to dance, just for him, and he danced along with them, turning and whirling across the rooftop. Where the stars touched him they tickled, and he laughed, spinning and swaying all the more. When it was over, and the last of the twinkling fairies had gone, he walked to the parapet and looked out over the city. The rain eased and stopped. The storm passed and faded from memory. Teddy smiled as he thought of all the excitement and wonder that awaited him in his Magic Kingdom. This truly was the greatest of adventures.