



CANDELA OBSCURA

QUICKSTART GUIDE



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CANDELA OBSCURA

QUICKSTART GUIDE

The full *Candela Obscura Core Rulebook* releases in late 2023.

For character sheets and additional materials to accompany this guide, visit darringtonpress.com/candela.

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*The document within contains depictions of abuse of power, body horror, death, gore, and other sensitive topics.
Reader discretion is advised.*

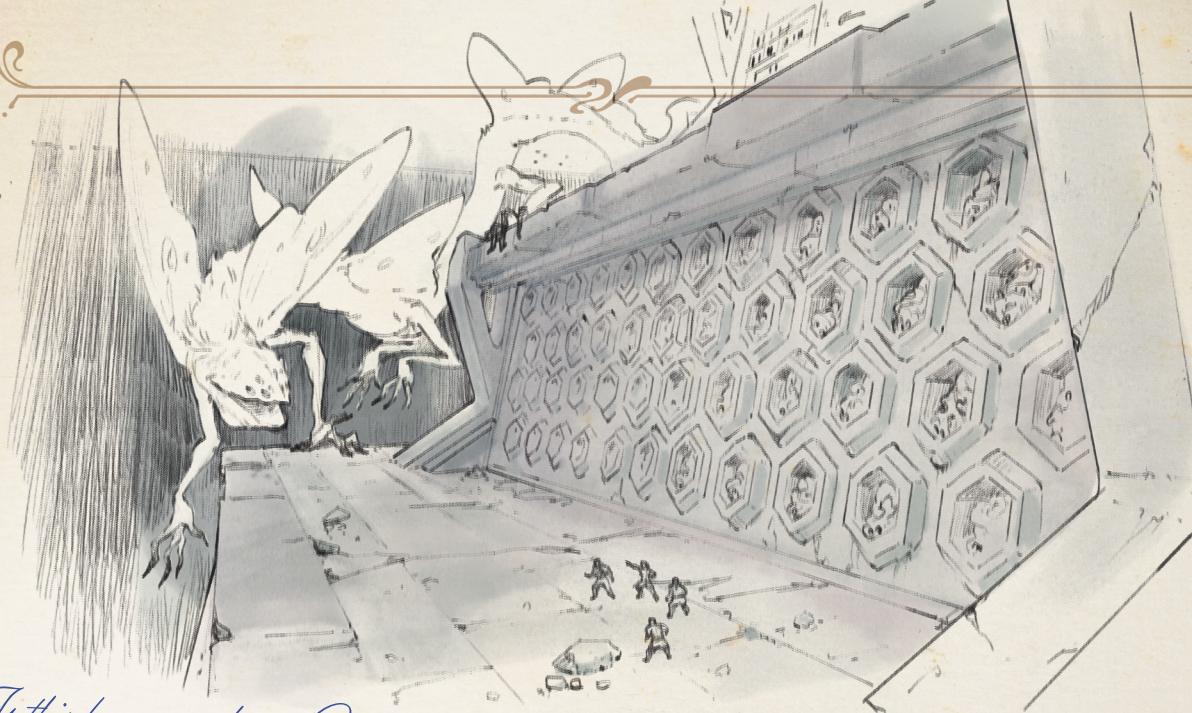
When was the last time you felt real fear?

*I ask now, because I will ask time and time again
during your tenure with us: was your fear real?*

*Or rather, was the cause of your fear based in
reality? It very well may have been—perhaps a fire
roaring through a house, a fist to your gut, a knife
to your throat. But what if it was a fabrication—
the scream of an innocent created by the call of a
bird, a figure formed of the shadow in your room, the
monster you constructed from a movement in the night.*

*I certainly hope you're good at imagining monsters.
We have more than a few, and we need you to teach
us more about them.*

*Your Lightkeeper,
Ezra Ashford*



Is this from our descent?

Yes, stair six.

GETTING STARTED IN CANDELA OBSCURA

Introduction

Candela Obscura is a horror tabletop roleplaying game (TTRPG) about occult investigators who hunt down dangerous supernatural forces making incursions into a world very much like your own.

Candela Obscura is also the name of the paranormal secret society charged with protecting the sprawling, turn-of-the-century city of Newfaire—a place built atop the ruins of an ancient, fallen civilization still teeming with the remnants of powerful magick.

Though we've worked to collect knowledge of this magick over the centuries, our understanding of these phenomena is still limited. We know they come from a realm beyond our own, but what they want and why they're here—that is still a mystery to us.

As part of this organization, you will traverse the wide landscape of the Fairelands—facing off against unfathomable horrors within the crowded downtown streets of the Varnish, investigating strange disappearances in the cornfields of Tottergrass, even delving into the writhing underground ruins of Oldfaire—to help us stop these powerful supernatural beings from tearing the world apart.

Content Warnings & Safety Tools

Though the intensity of the horrors in your adventures is entirely up to you, terror should come as no surprise for any who embark upon an assignment with Candela Obscura. Elements of body horror, human cruelty, violence, death, and the supernatural commonly present themselves to our investigators. Such things come with the territory. In order to help regulate these topics within your group, we strongly recommend that you use safety tools like Lines & Veils, the X-Card, and the Open Door Policy.

More information on safety tools can be found at <https://bit.ly/ttrpgsafetytoolkit>.

How to Use This Guide

The information laid out in this document is designed to guide you through your first game of *Candela Obscura*. The following page covers the important rules to keep in mind when generating lore—as long as your creations fit within the parameters here, you are playing by the rules of the world.

If you are a player, you are encouraged to read through page 16. If you're the gamemaster, or GM, continue on through the example assignment.

THE RULES

Rules of the World

- *Candela Obscura* takes place in a world that resembles your own. The average citizen neither knows about, nor would believe in, magick or its effects.
- There is a barrier, known as the Flare, between this realm and the beyond.
- There are places where the Flare is weakened—referred to as *thinings*. These thinings allow metaphysical energy, known as *magick*, to seep through the Flare.
- The myths, legends, and folktales of the Fairelands are stories created to explain real magikal phenomena.

Rules of Magick

- Magick can become infused in mundane objects, places, or beings, permanently altering them. If a thinning is opened wide enough, creatures from the beyond may also come through. Anything affected by magick or from another realm is known as a *phenomenon*.
- *Bleed* is the corruptive force left behind by powerful magick. This bleed also radiates from the phenomena that have made incursions into the world.
- When a person has “too much bleed,” they may be taken over by these supernatural forces, become corrupted, or die. The manifestation of bleed varies based on the phenomenon.
- People with inherent magick are rare in the mundane world. Many *Candela Obscura* members interact with magick by wielding powerful artifacts. These items may also reduce, contain, or eliminate bleed.

Rules of Candela Obscura

- Members of *Candela Obscura* are investigators of supernatural phenomena attempting to protect the world from these dangers by securing and studying them.
- The organization has a hierarchy that includes a council of Lightkeepers who direct the resources of *Candela Obscura*. A small party sent out by a Lightkeeper to investigate a phenomenon is known as a *circle*. This mission is known as an *assignment*.
- There are *Candela Obscura chapters*, local enclaves of many members, throughout the world. Each has access, via a thinning, to the organization’s transdimensional vault, known as the Fourth Pharos.
- The Fourth Pharos is the fourth iteration of a lighthouse stronghold that sits within the Flare. Inside, there are vaults where the most powerful books, artifacts, and phenomena are kept for safety. The security of these vaults is maintained by centuries-old, constantly turning magickal astrolabes.

The remainder of this document is designed for you to use as a source of inspiration to build your own adventures, with more guidance and tools to come in the *Candela Obscura Core Rulebook*. The Quickstart Guide includes a first look at the world, the secret society itself, additional organizations for *Candela Obscura* to encounter, and a full example assignment you can run (or customize for your own investigation). This guide is a tool for you to utilize, rather than a set of edicts that must be followed.

THE MECHANICS

Preparation

Candela Obscura is played in a series of assignments given out by a circle's Lightkeeper, a character played by the GM. Each assignment is a mystery that should last between one and three sessions, and come to a conclusion before the next assignment begins.

All player characters, or PCs, will need one of the five pregenerated character sheets available alongside this Quickstart Guide, and nine six-sided dice (called d6 for short). Three of these dice should be of a separate and distinct color. These will be referred to as *gilded dice*, and the remaining six will be known, simply, as *standard dice*.

Your group will need a circle sheet for the team as a whole, and we recommend supplying Field Guides for each player to reference during the game. These are also included alongside this Quickstart Guide.

Additionally, you will need a GM to run the session. Their job is to guide the narrative, control all non-player characters, or NPCs, and describe the world.

Dice Mechanics

Candela Obscura uses the *Illuminated Worlds* d6 dice pool system. When there is a question of whether something will happen, and there is a potential consequence if it doesn't, you'll make a roll using this pool of dice and take the highest result.

- ➊ On a 1–3 result, the roll is a failure. You don't accomplish what you wanted, and there are consequences.
- ➋ On a 4–5 result, the roll is a mixed success. You accomplish what you wanted, but it comes at a cost.
- ➌ On a 6 result, the roll is a full success. You get what you want without any major unintended consequences.
- ➍ On multiple 6s, the roll is a critical success. You get what you want, and something extra.

Actions

Actions represent your character's proficiency at a given maneuver under pressure. Each can have a rating between 0–3, denoting the number of dice you roll when performing that action—the higher the value, the more skilled your character is in that area. If you have no points in an action and decide not to spend drive to add dice to the roll (see page 5), you can still attempt the action. In that case, roll two dice and take the lower result. Note that you can't get a critical success on this kind of roll (even if you roll two 6s).

◊ Survey	search, track, spot
● ○ ○	
◊ Focus	inspect, analyze, remember
○ ○ ○	
◊ Sense	attune, channel, reveal
● ● ○	

Dani wants to check the room to see if anyone in the crowd is closely watching her circle. The GM tells her to make a Survey roll. She has an action rating of 1 in Survey, so she rolls one die.



Drives

Drives are a resource you may expend and replenish during a session. They represent your character's ability to push themselves past their standard capacity. You can spend 1 drive point to add an additional die (+1d) to a roll of an action that drive encompasses. You may spend as many drive points per roll as you have available. For example, if you're rolling with Move, you may spend points in Nerve to add additional dice. Your dice pool can never have more than six dice.

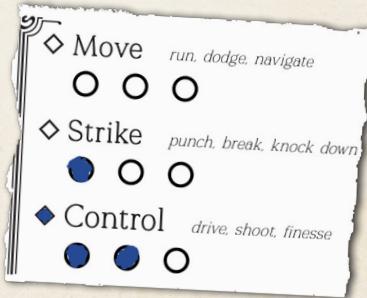
All drives have a maximum, which determines the highest amount of points your character can have in that drive. Your sheet also displays the amount currently available, which is a number that will decrease as you spend the available points.

Another player can assist you by spending one of their own drive points for +1d. Though an assisting player can only spend 1 point of drive per roll, multiple players can help you carry out your action. When another player offers aid, they should describe what they do to assist within the narrative. It is at the GM's discretion whether or not your circle members are able to help.

- ⦿ **Nerve** can add dice to Move, Strike, and Control rolls.
- ⦿ **Cunning** can add dice to Read, Sway, and Hide rolls.
- ⦿ **Intuition** can add dice to Survey, Focus, and Sense rolls.

Gilded Actions

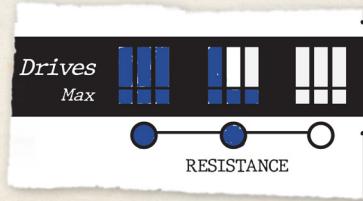
If an action is marked as *gilded* (represented by a filled diamond to the left of the action), you will always replace a standard die with a gilded die when rolling. If you choose the result on that die, you recover 1 point of the drive associated with the action you rolled. This represents a character's ability to recoup themselves after pushing their limits. You may choose the gilded die, with the goal of recovering a drive point, even if the result is lower than one of the standard dice rolled in your dice pool.



Kat rolls with Control to see if their character can successfully pick the lock on a door. They have 2 points in this action, and it is gilded. They choose to spend a Nerve drive to add an additional die to their roll. They now roll three dice, one of which is gilded, and choose a result.

The two standard dice roll a 3 and a 6. The gilded die rolls a 5.

Kat could take the full success, but instead they choose to replenish 1 point of their Nerve and take the mixed success on the gilded die instead.



Resistances

Resistances are a PC's way of pushing back against a consequence. Anytime you don't like the result of your roll, you may choose to spend a resistance from the pertaining drive (Nerve, Cunning, or Intuition). You have 1 resistance per 3 maximum drive. This resistance does not go away if you spend your drive points. For example, if your maximum drive is 4, but you've spent 3 drive (so now you have 1), you still have your 1 resistance.

After spending a resistance, you reroll the number of dice equal to the rating of the action used for the previous roll. You may not include the dice from any spent drive or assistance you initially received. If the action is gilded, you may still roll with a gilded die. If the action you are rerolling has a value of 0, you roll two dice and take the lower result.

You must accept the result of the new resistance roll unless you spend another resistance to roll again.

Carlos has 1 point in Strike and spends 2 points in Nerve to roll three dice. The highest result in the pool is 3, so he decides to spend a Nerve resistance to reroll. Because he has only 1 point in Strike, he rerolls one die. The new result is a 4, a mixed success instead of a miss.

Abilities

Abilities are the unique moves available to each character. For the purposes of the Quickstart Guide, you will only have three abilities available on each pregenerated character sheet.

Rolls & Consequences

The primary engine of the game is built around action rolls. These occur during moments within the narrative when the results of a player's decisions are unclear—action rolls should not be used for every move a character makes. The investigators in Candela Obscura are competent and highly trained, more than your average person within the setting, so you shouldn't roll the dice for unhindered actions such as walking down the street or climbing a ladder. That being said, if you're trying to remain hidden or there's a monster chasing you, it's probably going to require a roll to avoid the danger while you do it.

Ultimately it is up to the GM to decide when dice are rolled and which actions are used; however, as a player you can make suggestions or ask for a roll to achieve a desired result. Remember, this game is a conversation. You are expected to work with the rest of your table to create the best story and game experience together.

The GM sets the stakes of the roll (*low*, *normal*, or *high*) to indicate how dangerous the consequences might be, and tells you which action to roll. You roll a number of dice equal to that action rating, plus any additional dice gained from spent drive points, and the GM determines how the fiction evolves based on your result. By default, the stakes of every roll are normal—there could be important consequences to failing. The GM may lower the stakes if the situation is safe, or raise the stakes if the situation is particularly dangerous. The consequences of a *low-stakes* roll won't put you in immediate peril, whereas the consequences of a *high-stakes* roll will almost always result in taking damage or finding yourself in a very difficult position.

Fighting Enemies

Candela Obscura favors investigation over violent confrontation. That is to say, though you will fight monsters (and we certainly hope you will fight many), combat is not the focus of gameplay. Just like in any other portion of the adventure, when your circle faces off against enemies, your GM will make moves based on the players' rolls. The consequences of a failure (or even a mixed success) might result in an adversary attacking a character and dealing out one or more marks. Your GM may even surprise you with unexpected consequences based on your result.

*Spelling error. Are you sure you're okay
to be back so quickly? I'm worried about you.*

I'm fine. Thank you for the catch.

Building a Character

When making a character, you can choose from any of the five *roles*: Face, Muscle, Scholar, Slink, and Weird.

Each of these roles has two *specialties*:

- ◎ **Face:** Journalist & Magician
- ◎ **Muscle:** Explorer & Soldier
- ◎ **Scholar:** Doctor & Professor
- ◎ **Slink:** Criminal & Detective
- ◎ **Weird:** Medium & Occultist

Any combination of these roles can make up a group of *Candela Obscura* investigators known as a *circle*.

Each role and specialty provides starting values for actions and drives, as well as a list of available abilities.

For the purposes of this Quickstart Guide, you will not go through standard character creation. The five included sheets are pregenerated—they only require a small bit of customization. After choosing your specialty, fill in the bolded circles, then take one of the two abilities from the specialty list. You'll already have one from your role as well. Add a name, pronouns, and a style for this character. Describe their Catalyst—why they joined *Candela Obscura*—and their Question—what grand or personal mystery they're hoping to answer throughout their investigations.

ON CHARACTER CREATION

When crafting your character, it is crucial to avoid the harmful stereotypes often present in the historical and horror genres. For instance: if you are creating an Explorer, they should delve into their own cultural history instead of appropriating another's. Similarly, Mediums should not use other cultures' attire as a costume, and Doctors should not indulge in any historical practices that are rooted in racist and ableist ideologies. Although PCs may be ill-disposed, tactless, or even cruel, you should always strive to construct your protagonists with integrity.

Connections, Gear, & Marks

Connections are the bonds you establish between the characters at the table during character creation. Assign relationships between investigators, ask questions about their shared goals, and interweave characters' backstories to foster more engaging gameplay.

In the full game, there is a defined method for building relationships, but for the purposes of the Quickstart Guide, simply write the name of the character and your connection with them.

For each assignment, choose *gear* from the available list the moment it's needed—you do not need to preselect items before an investigation begins. You may choose three pieces of gear during each assignment.

There is also blank space you can utilize to take something significant (an artifact, weapon, etc.) your circle has previously acquired or has access to.

Damage to a character's health is tracked using *marks*, which are made up of three different categories: Body, Brain, and Bleed.

- **Body** represents physical harm.
- **Brain** represents mental strain or stress.
- **Bleed** represents harm caused by magick.

There are three available marks in each category. If you should ever need to take a mark and can't because that track is full, erase all the marks in that track, become incapacitated in the scene, and immediately take a scar.

Scars represent the permanent changes that affect a character. When you take a scar, you'll write down a narrative change based on the nature of the attack that caused the scar—if it's Body, it might be a limp or a missing eye; if it's Brain, you might become withdrawn or reckless; and if it's Bleed, perhaps you're always dripping with black ichor or your body grows small luminous tendrils where you once had hair.

You must also remove a point from an action of your choice, and add a point into a different action to reflect how your character has changed because of the scar they now carry. You can return to the game once your circle gets you to somewhere safe.

*What ended up happening to her?
Did she go Unabridged?*

Circle Mechanics

At character creation, your group will choose a circle name and ability. After each assignment, the GM asks the three Illumination Questions on the circle sheet, and for each answer in the affirmative, the circle earns 1 Illumination. The GM then asks how many players fulfilled at least one of their Illumination Keys. These are the prompts at the bottom of the character sheet that guide the roleplay of that specialty, and unlock a path towards advancement.

If nobody fulfilled any Keys, no Illumination is earned. If only part of the circle fulfilled theirs, the group earns 2 Illumination. If everybody fulfilled at least one Illumination Key, you earn 4 Illumination. When the Illumination track fills, it is erased, and any extra Illumination is carried over. Players then choose two different character advancements individually and the circle chooses one new circle ability together.

The Illumination track has *milestones* on it, represented by the bolded circles. Achieving these milestones may cause certain circle abilities to activate.

Between assignments, players also have the chance to clear their marks, refresh their drives, and train their characters by spending their available Candela Obscura resources:

- **Stitch** to heal all of one player's marks.
- **Refresh** to fill all of one player's drives and resistances.
- **Train** to gain one bonus die that you can use on any roll in the next session.

Circles start with an amount in each of these resources equal to the number of circle members, plus one. These resources are not refreshed until the Illumination track is completely filled, so use them wisely.



Scars & the Legacy of Harm in Horror

When a PC takes a scar, we encourage the player to look deeply at their character, and consider the way they might change throughout the campaign. You might say:

My character was injured and now walks with a limp, so I'm moving a point from Move and putting it into Survey. My character has new mobility constraints and experiences pain, so they will be slower on their feet. They will also be more observant of their surroundings because they want to avoid danger and protect their fellow circle members from harm.

Equally, you might decide:

My character was injured and now walks with a limp, so I'm moving a point from Survey and putting it into Move. My character is afraid of being injured again, so they know how to get out of the way of attacks and are quick on their feet. Because they're experiencing a new fear as a result of their injury, they're more focused on moving quickly than staying observant of their surroundings.

When you make choices regarding your character's injuries, remember: people are affected by harm in a myriad of ways. Disability and mental illness are facets of the human experience and are not convenient narrative beats behind evil actions, or "evil people." Players should build their characters with care so that they can explore the world of *Candela Obscura* to the fullest.

Due to the legacy of harmful mental health representation in the horror genre, we would like to clarify: Brain marks represent mental and emotional stress. In the same way a week of long work days, a friend receiving an injury, or witnessing a death (violent or otherwise) would weigh on a person in your world, *Candela Obscura* members face stressors and traumatic events that impact them beyond the immediate moment. If a character takes a Brain scar, consider how the traumatic or stressful events they've experienced will affect them long-term.

I've only heard stories about these. Did you see one?

Yes, she nearly took my arm on the western cliffs. I have one of her teeth in my office.



Character changes from scars may manifest in a variety of ways, such as:

My character misused a magickal artifact to devastating effect and is now overwhelmed by high-stakes decisions. Because of this experience, they are even more dedicated to becoming a master of their arcane artifacts, and spend all their free time training. I'm going to move a point from Control to Sense, because they are now focusing their studies on the magickal rather than the mundane.

Or:

My character saw a beast explode out of an innocent civilian. They are now confronted with their own mortality and are hesitant to confront the danger they once eagerly faced. This experience has also made them especially protective of their fellow circle members, so now they create meticulous plans for every situation. I'm going to move a point from Strike to Survey because they are slower to action, and more observant.

Or:

My character failed to save a friend from magickal harm. In their state of grief, they exhibit outbursts when they feel out of control. At the same time, they're incredibly empathetic, and after this experience they're especially good at talking with witnesses. Because my character is too distracted after their loss to behave subtly, I'm going to move a point from Hide to Read, as they can now connect more deeply with others.

In our experience, roleplaying “insanity” is neither ethical nor mechanically viable. Scars—especially Brain scars—should be understood as a change, never a lessening.

While Bleed scars may seem removed from this discussion, you should treat them with similar care. The addition of magick does not make the experience of harm any less human. Furthermore, we often analogize what we don’t know—rituals from other cultures, sacred rites, and practices from traditions that aren’t our own—to be “strange” or “mystical.” When crafting the magick in your game, we ask you to design with empathy. Every table is different, and many may not appreciate having deeply sacred symbols, artifacts, and rituals fictionalized.

My character witnessed something terrible and, in retaliation, a monster cut the pupil of their eye in half. They now see mysterious apparitions overlaid on the mundane world. They are afraid of this change in themselves, but don’t feel safe telling anyone about it, for fear of endangering an innocent person. I am going to move a point from Focus to Sense, because they now have a harder time perceiving details, but can see supernatural phenomena they never noticed before.

See the following chart for examples of scars.

BODY SCAR EXAMPLES	BRAIN SCAR EXAMPLES	BLEED SCAR EXAMPLES
<i>Missing Arm</i>	<i>Anxiety Around Crowds</i>	<i>Eyes That Don’t Blink</i>
<i>Limp</i>	<i>Fear of Deep Water</i>	<i>Vampiric Teeth</i>
<i>Cracked Vertebrae</i>	<i>Consumed by Guilt</i>	<i>Purple Blood</i>
<i>Tremor</i>	<i>Lowered Confidence</i>	<i>Elongated Fingers</i>
<i>Deafness in One Ear</i>	<i>Hero Complex</i>	<i>Elbows That Bend Backwards</i>
<i>Burned Flesh</i>	<i>Jumpy at Loud Sounds</i>	<i>Constantly Exhaling Smoke</i>

Candela Obscura’s fight against the corruption of supernatural forces is an allegory for the fight of good, everyday people against the corruption within the world. The mechanics of marks and scars within *Candela Obscura* are straightforward, but the legacy of mechanizing how people experience harm and disability within the horror genre is not. For each mark, but especially when taking a scar, it is of vital importance that players make choices that serve a nuanced narrative over basic rules.

The idea of “permanent scars” does not align with the modern understanding of healing trauma. But just like you, consider that your character cannot begin the process of tending to deep physical, mental, and even magickal trauma until they are in a safe place for an extended period of time. Over the course of a campaign, your circle should experience only brief moments of respite—this is a challenging game of horror. If you want to see your character heal from scars they’ve taken, you might choose to play a different character for some time and return to this one down the road when they’ve had a chance to recover. Work with your GM to decide which scars they could have healed during this time away.

Above all: make choices that will facilitate the story, while keeping the well-being of your fellow players in mind. To best explore this world of magick and monsters, we urge you to build and play your characters prioritizing specificity, humanity, and compassion.



THE SETTING OF CANDELA OBSCURA

The Fairelands

In the northern country of Hale lies the fertile valley known as the Fairelands. For over a decade, the world has grappled with the effects of a fierce cold snap known as the Shiver. While many countries face shorter growing seasons and food shortages, the relatively temperate valley of the Fairelands provides for Halen citizens. Unfortunately for the people of this region, the land and its resources are highly sought after. When they're not defending their borders from invasion, they're catching their breath before the next attack.

The Last Great War

Over the Glass Sea, across the Vastchasm, lies the country the Newfairens have come to refer to as Otherwhere. Though relations were peaceful for decades, in 1898 this distant power sailed their military forces into Hallowharbor to capture the agricultural resources of the Fairelands.

The war lasted for roughly six years, and the Fairelands and its citizens suffered immensely. Food and other natural resources allowed the people here to sustain themselves throughout the conflict, but it was the discovery and harnessing of electricity, first in Newfaire and then across all of Hale, that allowed them to push back the colonizing forces of Otherwhere.

In the wake of their victory, the city, always a hub of immigration, suddenly flooded with war refugees. Though the population boom was daunting for wartime infrastructure, the cultural adaptations born from this time transformed Newfaire into one of the most vibrant cities in Hale.

In the three years since the war, the country has restored itself, but, like the wastes of Westreck, the collective psyche is permanently changed. While some have adopted an electric, "live while you can" attitude, others desperately seek resolution for the loss of an entire generation to the forces of Otherwhere.

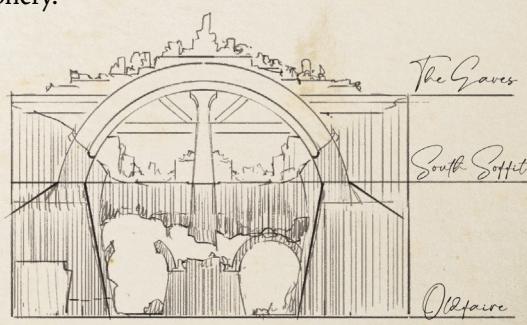
The Language of Hale

Many of the words found within this text are English translations of the Halen language. This is particularly apparent in the names of places. You'll notice that many regions and districts are called exactly what they are—for example, Westreck is the land to the west of Newfaire that was ravaged during the Last Great War. Because the Fairelands were conquered so often and remain so diversely populated, over time, Halen citizens found it easier to speak frankly. Simpler names ease translation in cities filled with speakers of diverse languages. To some, the directness of Halen speech is considered rude, while others find it trustworthy.

GMs are welcome to establish their own Halen words. If you choose to go this route, we recommend that you draw from your own language, and the history and experiences that shaped it. When developing your own vocabulary, remember that respect for real-world languages and their speakers builds a safer playing space and encourages bolder exploration of the topics that your group wishes to explore.

The City of Newfaire

Newfaire is a sprawling and diverse city on the western coast of the continent of Hale. Filled with technology that resembles your own during the turn of the nineteenth century, this civilization stands upon the ruins of its ancient, alchemical predecessor known as Oldfaire. This place embodies the perpetual integration of the ancient and the innovative that occurs within such cities as Edinburgh, Lima, New York, Paris, and Istanbul. In Newfaire, citizens are nestled within historical Brutalist architecture and the recent evolution from Art Nouveau into Art Deco. Here, modern development consumes arcane history, and players grapple with the great forces that rule the mundane world: the Ascendancy, the Primacy, and the Periphery.



Reservation

REVISIONARY FINE DINING & DRINKS

NAME: Ezra Ashford
DATE: Midwinter 5

CONCIERGE: Byron W.
TIME: 9 o' morning

6904 SAPPHIRE STREET | THE VARNISH ON NEWFAIRE

The Triumvirate

The Ascendancy: The official religion of the Fairelands. They are led by the Ascendant, an official appointed from within the faith. They have incredible influence and, like every aspect of the Triumvirate powers, are highly corrupt.

The Primacy: The central government of the Fairelands, led by an elected official: the Premier. Members of the Chamber work beneath them to make decisions for Newfaire and its surrounding districts. Though the Primacy claims to be a distinct entity, they collaborate closely with the other facets of the Triumvirate.

The Periphery: The police force within the Fairelands. In the wake of the Last Great War, the Periphery inherited military technology that is incongruous with the supposed goal of interfacing peacefully with Halen citizens. The Captain of the Periphery is appointed by the Premier, thus they are seen by many Fairens as the violent hand of the government.

Oldfaire

Beneath the city of Newfaire lies the mysterious ruins of Oldfaire—a place that was once a thriving civilization, but suffered a catastrophic collapse around 2,000 years ago. Perfectly positioned within the safety of Hallowharbor and protected by the treacherous Bridleborne Mountains, Oldfaire operated with relative impunity in the ancient world. Led over time by empresses and emperors as well as a council of powerful alchemists, the entire city attempted to utilize magick in the way Newfaire now uses electricity.

The ancient city was built around a central tower-vault, the Ziggurat, where the government of Oldfaire attempted to house and utilize magickal phenomena. But the alchemists were ill-equipped to manage bleed, and the citizens were affected by the horrors that come from prolonged exposure to the corrupting energy.

Halen lore suggests that human minds and bodies transformed and society collapsed. The once powerful city of stone fell when a local thinning was torn asunder. It was this cataclysmic event that tore a rift in the sea, known as the Vastchasm. From this seismic shift, a wall of water swept forth and first drowned, then buried Oldfaire, wiping its technology from the face of the world.

Today, beneath the modern metropolis of Newfaire, within the tombs of its predecessor, magickal monsters, alchemical discoveries, and mutated Oldfairen citizens still lurk.

ON SYSTEMS OF POWER

The systems of power within the Fairelands are designed to provide a scaffolding for the very human aspect of the horror genre. This is especially evident in the Criminal specialty. This character type is the foundation of a person who, for one reason or another, finds themselves on the wrong side of an unjust policing system. When you play within Hale, craft both a hero and world that best supports the monsters you wish to defeat.

Lighthouses

As Candela Obscura evolved through the ages, they attempted to find and secure the effects of bleed. When the investigators discovered thinnings, they built lighthouses containing magickal astrolabes at each site to hold back the deadly forces from beyond this realm.

Both ancient and recently constructed, these bleed-infested lighthouses are found all across the Halen landscape. For Candela Obscura members, they offer an ominous reminder of the ramifications of failure. For Newfaire citizens, they've become a pinnacle of local mythos to warn the vulnerable away from danger.

Vastchasm

This rift in the ocean lies between Newfaire and Otherwhere. Torn into the sea during the fall of Oldfaire, water now pours over all sides in a perpetual, deadly fall. The terrifying currents around the chasm destroy ships, and there is a Candela Obscura lighthouse within its depths.

The Faraway

Newfairens refer to any place that is not within the Fairelands as “Faraway.” It is common to ask (politely, or otherwise) if someone is “from Faire or Far?”

Otherwhere

Newfairens use this name for the country across the sea. When Otherwhere attempted to colonize the Fairelands in the Last Great War three years ago, relations with the people of this nation shattered. Though Hale was able to hold off invading forces with the development of electricity, this scientific development is spreading across the world and has brought a new fear of war down on the people of the Fairelands.

Districts of Newfaire

The city of Newfaire is vibrant and sprawling. It is divided into distinct districts, each with its own personality and purpose within the community. Some of these include:

Briar Green: The most verdant area of the city. Because it surrounds Briarbark College and contains the majority of the city's parks, Briar Green is filled with a large number of flowering trees and affluent homes.

The Eaves: The exclusive, upscale community perched atop the roofs of exposed Oldfairen buildings. This district is exceedingly wealthy and exclusive. The Eaves is also home to the residence of the Premier.

Hallowharbor: The port of Newfaire. A trade hub for the entire continent, Hallowharbor accounts for a major portion of Newfaire's wealth. Both Newfaire and Oldfaire were built around the natural protections afforded to this section of the Halen coast.

Nine Irons: The home base for the Periphery within Newfaire. A relatively small district, Nine Irons contains the Periphery headquarters, prison, and the hanging grounds known as Gallowgate. The Eastreek Landfill has a small shantytown burgeoning around its borders, placing some of the region's most vulnerable citizens within reach of its most violent force.

Red Lamp: The arts district within the city and Newfaire's hub of legalized sex work. Most of the establishments here sell one of three things: sex, scarlet, or the chance to gamble your money away. Red Lamp hosts both artists and scientists eager to buy large workspaces at affordable prices.

The Steel: The industrial portion of the city. Here, the greatest minds and strongest laborers are hard at work modernizing Newfaire. The Steel accounts for a huge portion of Newfaire's recent expansion.

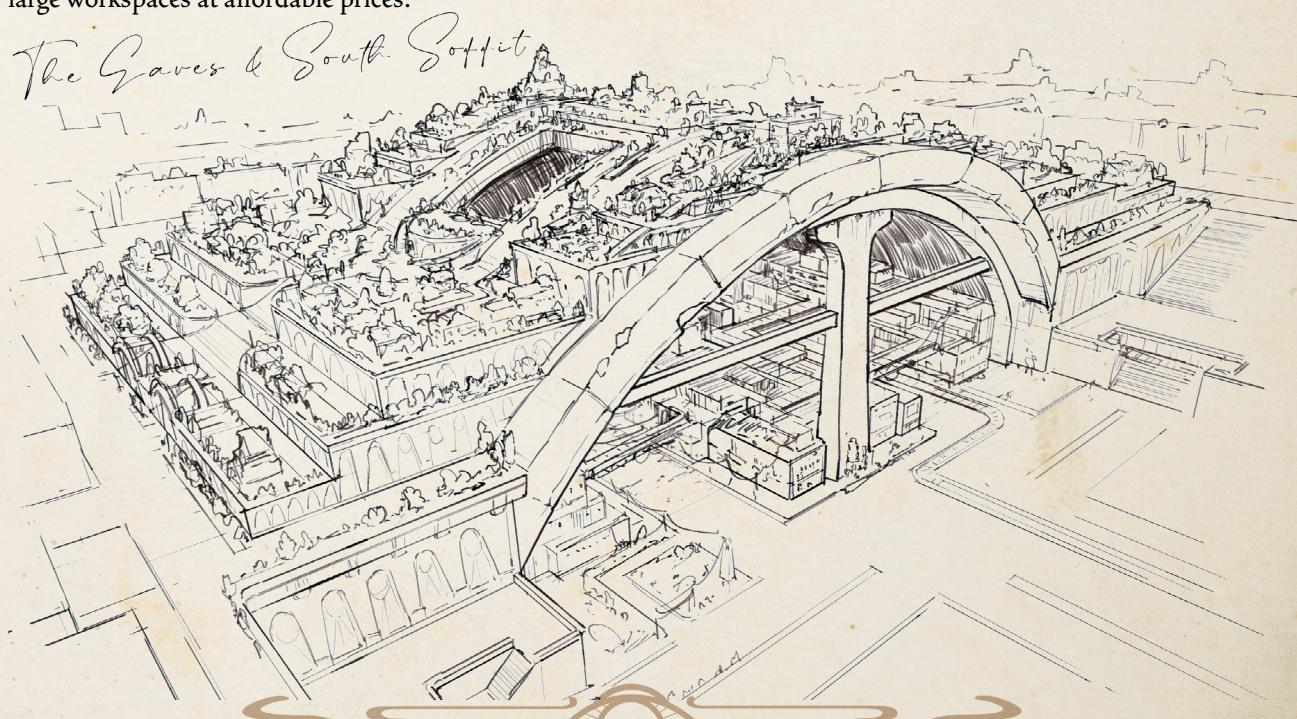
The Shriveline: The home of the Ascendancy within the Fairelands. In this district, religious members and practitioners establish their homes to live alongside the Church. The Shriveline is a popular tourist destination due to its collection of historical buildings.

The Sidle: The middle-class sprawl of Newfaire. Home to up-and-coming residential neighborhoods and family-operated shops. Newly installed electric lights illuminate streets, affording the Sidle a reputation for being incredibly safe at night.

Silverslip: The seat of the Primacy. This large district reflects the opulence the government wishes to convey to its citizens. Those who visit Silverslip will find courthouses, law offices, and some of the wealthiest businesses in the region.

South Soffit: The lower-class district built into the Oldfairen ruins beneath the Eaves. The electric wires that feed the district above run haphazardly through South Soffit, making it a dangerous place to live and work. This place is commonly occupied by blue-collar workers and war refugees.

The Varnish: The downtown portion of urbanized Newfaire. Filled with expensive shops, bars, and restaurants, the Varnish attracts tourists and wealthy locals alike. This district also serves as the central hub for the cable cars that stretch out across all of Newfaire.





Landmarks of the Fairelands

The Fairelands are incredibly diverse in their geographic range, positioning the city of Newfaire within reach of a variety of locales. Some of these places include:

Seaway: The small, coastal village to the east of Newfaire. Here, structures are built to bend in the fierce wind that sweeps in from the ocean. The majority of fishing families that live and work in Seaway have occupied this stretch of coast for generations.

Tottergrass: The rural land south of the city. In Tottergrass, farmers raise livestock and cultivate a variety of crops to great effect, despite the seasonal limits across the world, post-Shiver. The Ascendancy has a strong, decades-long foothold within this region.

The Verge: The high cliffs on the western edge of Hale. On a misty day, it appears as if the Verge marks the end of the world and one might fall off this precipice into the sky. At its highest point, a famous monolith covered in Ancient Fairen writing looms over the sea.

The Bridleborne Mountains: The mountain range to the east of Newfaire. With the Scarlet Wood at its base, this rocky terrain hosts insular communities and is the home of the most powerful bootleggers in Hale. The Periphery struggles to gain a foothold within Bridleborne, and citizens only truly answer to their own enforcers.

The Scarlet Wood: The ancient forest famous for its vibrant red foliage. The trees of the Scarlet Wood produce a hallucinogenic sap, the alcohol and powder from which is prohibited across the Fairelands. Scarlet libations are the foundation of a thriving bootlegging industry.

Westwreck: The war-torn land to the west of Newfaire. This area marks the last stand of the war before Hale drove back Otherwhere with electric advancements. Westwreck is well known for the proliferation of landmines that still pose a threat, and travelers must hire a local guide to lead them through.

CANDELA OBSCURA

Candela Obscura is a secret society of investigators whose primary aim is the survival of mankind against supernatural forces. Your involvement with the organization begins with the mysterious tales set in the Fairelands within Hale; however, their origin predates even the city of Oldfaire.

In ancient times, the ruling class of Oldfaire used and abused the powers of magick, deeming themselves alchemists. As with any development that eases the burdens of daily living, the citizens of Oldfaire embraced the technological advancements born of this power. Out of either irreverence or ignorance, the corrupting force of bleed soon overtook the city. Supernatural forces from this disaster tore a chasm into the sea, and Oldfaire was overtaken by a great flood.

Before its fall, upon the first signs of this civilization's destruction, a covert alliance of altruistic scholars arrived in Oldfaire. With a history of settling their chapter houses around locations of high magickal incursion, this was the beginning of Candela Obscura within the Fairelands. Almost all written records from Oldfaire were buried with the city, but it is clear that in the centuries that followed, this chapter of Candela Obscura slowly expanded in both size and influence.

For centuries, Candela Obscura has utilized lighthouses around the world to hold together large rifts in the Flare, and to warn away innocent civilians from the dangerous magick that passes through. These lighthouses can be found all across the Fairelands—deep in the Scarlet Wood, tucked within the snow of the Bridleborne Mountains, at the bottom of the Vastchasm, and beyond. Their strange locations have resulted in homespun, though inaccurate, folklore about the purpose of these structures and the surrounding geography.

These formidable structures are modeled after Candela Obscura's central lighthouse: a massive, magickal vault known as the Pharos. Over the centuries, the Pharos has risen and fallen to the forces of magick, and today, this citadel is in its fourth iteration. After the fall of the Third Pharos, the organization's council of Lightkeepers found a way to access the Flare, the protective veil between realms, and constructed the Fourth Pharos within its bounds. Now straddling the mundane and magickal worlds, this vault is only accessible from specific thinnings that lead into the Flare. Chapter houses soon began to form around these special thinnings, creating the present-day network of Candela Obscura members all over the world.

Values: Members of Candela Obscura are protectors of the people. With their wealth of supernatural knowledge passed down through generations, they focus their work on collecting and studying magickal phenomena.

Atmosphere: Libraries full of ancient and esoteric literature, working by candlelight, formal attire, strange artifacts in glass cases, secret entrances, hidden passageways.

Key Assets

- *The Fourth Pharos:* A vault located within the Flare that houses phenomena to keep them from corrupting the world with bleed.
- *The Chapter House Archives:* Every chapter house—the secret meeting location for each Candela Obscura circle—contains a highly protected collection of books, artifacts, and records.
- *Lightkeepers:* Veteran members of Candela Obscura who are retired from field work. They oversee circles of investigators, sending them out on assignments.

Notable Figures

- *Shyla Bhaduri (she/they):* A fearless adventurer. This lightkeeper is best known for her work in the ruins of Oldfaire.
- *Naomi Malik (she/her):* The Conservator of the Fourth Pharos, she leads the team that protects and controls this vault. Any requests to access artifacts, information, or other restricted resources cross her desk.
- *Robin Suarez (they/them):* An investigator of Candela Obscura currently in isolation within the Fourth Pharos. They faced intense exposure to bleed on their last mission.
- *Xander Ikari (he/him):* An art dealer now aligned with Candela Obscura. He has intimate knowledge of the underground world of magickal artifact trafficking.

Shyla is on this list and I'm not.

ADDITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

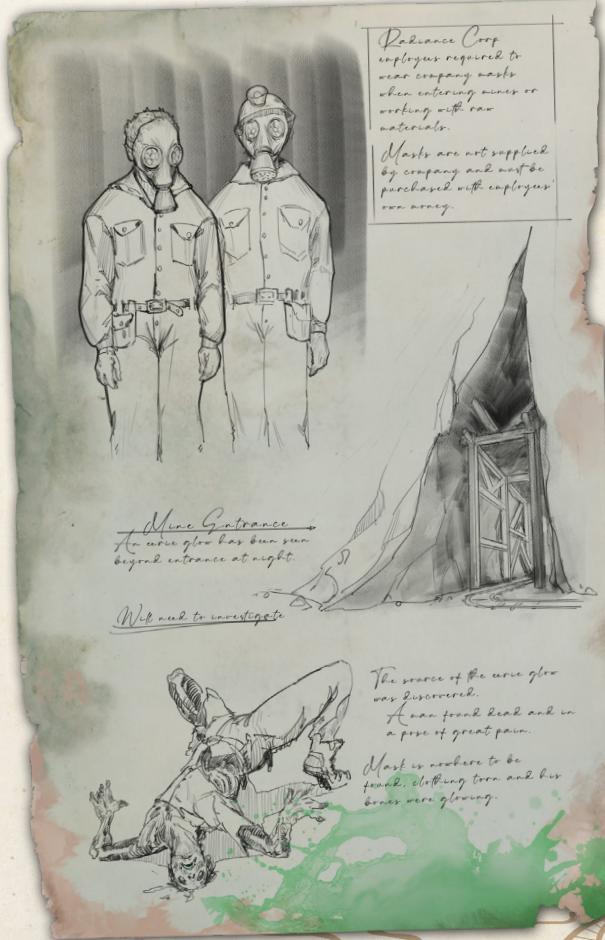
Across the world, other organizations formed to manage magickal phenomena. Some offer protection, others seek profit, and still others seek the total eradication of magick. Each group employs different tactics according to their unique ethos. For the purposes of the Quickstart Guide, here are two of the organizations you might encounter.

Exoteric Order of New Sciences (EONS)

Founded by a small faction of scientists and occultists, this insidious cohort believes in the very public incorporation of science with magick.

Values: The first true occult power of this century, EONS adheres to a daring set of tenets: the old societies have failed mankind, and it's time for bold action. Their opportunistic viewpoints have resulted in a rivalry between EONS and Candela Obscura.

Atmosphere: Laboratories with beakers and brass, industrial spaces, upscale businesses, dense files, hastily scrawled notes, dangerous experimentation, electricity, alchemical symbology.



Key Assets

- *The Devil's Well:* Located under the Glass Sea, this was an attempt by EONS to create a vault styled after the Fourth Pharos.
- *Galvanica Engineering Works:* Located in the Steel, this laboratory is the home to many of EONS's top minds and their experimental works.
- *Adjuvant:* An experimental antidote for bleed, or rather, an attempt to stop the "negative human reaction to the natural phenomena of bleed."

Notable Figures

- *Elvira Dryden (she/her):* The elder and more business-minded of the twins that founded EONS.
- *Edric Dryden (he/they):* Elvira's twin brother, who rarely leaves his laboratory. He is the engine that brings Elvira's dark ideas to life.
- *Violet Boucher (she/her):* A brilliant scientist who recently joined EONS, Violet is eager to prove herself through extreme means.
- *Avery Choi (they/them):* A clever and secretive figure, Avery has been known to provide Candela Obscura with classified information from the EONS labs.

Exoteric Order of New Sciences
Experiment #CV47



What are they working on?

Office of Unexplained Phenomena (OUP)

An underfunded and undervalued division of the Periphery. Omnipresent but invisible to normal society, the Office of Unexplained Phenomena specializes in the discovery, analysis, and suppression of magickal phenomena.

Values: The OUP's primary goal is to keep knowledge of magickal abnormalities from the public, and they will go to great lengths to do so. They may collaborate with Candela Obscura, but their bureaucracy is likely to do more harm than good.

Atmosphere: Government buildings, sterile offices, redacted files, confidentiality, red tape, uniforms, manipulated news.

Key Assets

- ⦿ *The Rediker Room:* Founded in 1883, this location houses a number of magickal phenomena unknown to the public.
- ⦿ *The Sathe Device:* Named for the person that created it, this device can be used to detect bleed on an object, place, or person.
- ⦿ *Grayscale Sanatorium:* The asylum located in the Sidle. It's often used to hide away civilians and agents who were subjected to too much bleed. The OUP frequently uses the slang "they're going gray" in reference to this facility and the effects of bleed.

Notable Figures

- ⦿ *Baxter White (he/him):* The long-time head of the OUP. He has a soft voice, a stern tone, and never suffers fools.
- ⦿ *Marcos Vega (they/them):* The very long-time head secretary of the OUP. There is no secret they don't know and no string they cannot pull.
- ⦿ *Dr. Ida Ashraf (she/her):* A physician at Grayscale Sanitorium. She seems to possess minor magickal ability and has very little loyalty to the OUP.
- ⦿ *Farrah Naftali (she/her):* A close contact of Candela Obscura. She frequently goes against the orders of her superiors to collaborate with circle members "for the greater good."

EZRA ASHFORD

PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY

meet farrah at
318 archer avenue

Briarbank College - Newfaire - They/Them



DRESSED TO KILL

Example Assignment

Content Warning: Body Horror

We recommend that GMs read through the entire assignment before running it for players.

Premise

At the Newfaire World Exhibition, a woman models a stunning dress made of a color the world has never seen. During the presentation, she collapses into a pile of glowing bones and viscera. Candela Obscura comes to investigate what happened to her.

What is actually going on here?

The Radiance Corporation is prepared to take the world by storm with its stunning new export: Undark, a pigment they can incorporate into any material. It is a shade of green not yet encountered and has a glow no one can explain. The secret behind the substance: in the corporation's mines along Bitter River, they've captured a primordial creature and are harvesting its venom. Is EONS involved?

Threats

- ⦿ *Enforcers (Body)*: The patrol of the Radiance Corporation, hired to keep the townsfolk in line.
- ⦿ *Cave Wraiths (Brain)*: The pitch-black creatures that stalk the mines. They feed on the fear of those who venture underground.
- ⦿ *Contamination (Bleed)*: Everything Undark touches is toxic. Every item, place, and person can cause harm.

NPCs

- ⦿ *Cecil Wallace (he/him)*: The managing director of the Radiance Corporation factory in Mordant Springs. Workers fear his attention.
- ⦿ *Olu Adjei (they/them)*: An employee running an underground hospital for others affected by Undark.
- ⦿ *Kiko Nakamura (she/her)*: Mordant Springs shopkeeper and wife of Yael (she/her), an Undark mine worker succumbing to the venom's horrific effects.
- ⦿ *Booker Davis (he/they)*: Booker is a reporter investigating the Radiance Corporation, and keeps his secrets close to his chest.

*Radiance is still in business.
They have a factory in the Steel.*

Themes: Exploitative capitalism, community versus corruption, destruction of nature, danger beneath the facade, industrialism.

Atmosphere: Massive machinery, electric lights, inventors and capitalists, crowds from around the world, innovation, an eerie green glow, incredible poverty, deformed bodies, otherworldly screams.

Adversary: The Radiance Corporation is an exploitative company. They're painfully extracting venom from a primordial creature and hiring workers in the Bridleborne Mountains for criminally low wages. They have ties to EONS and prioritize their bottom line over human life.

History

There is a very real and horrific history behind this assignment. The material known as Undark is based on a real-world paint of the same name, manufactured using radioactive radium. It was produced by the Radium Luminous Material Corporation (later known as the US Radium Corporation) between 1917–1938. Its use resulted in the radiation poisoning of numerous factory workers, some of whom later became known as the “Radium Girls.” These women faced debilitating illness, injuries, and death, all while speaking out and seeking justice for their abuse at the hands of their employers.

The use of Undark within Newfaire also mirrors the real-world history of Scheele's Green, a bright green pigment that contained large amounts of highly toxic copper arsenite. When Carl Wilhelm Scheele invented it in 1775, he was aware of its dangers. But the pigment was beautiful and, more importantly, it was cheap to manufacture. Both workers and consumers of products dyed with this vibrant green faced the horrors of arsenic poisoning until the 1860s.

Worker exploitation during the turn of the century could be particularly graphic—one famous poisoning via Scheele's Green resulted in a widely publicized autopsy that described a young woman whose eyes had turned green. The Radium Girls' bones were known to glow in the dark. These terrible, almost otherworldly tortures are a graphic representation of workplace abuse.

Today, this abuse still occurs in factories, farms, and firms all over the world. Like the books and films of the horror genre, TTRPGs can be a safe place to explore terrifying realities through fiction. When running this assignment, remember that the horror is born of the perpetrator, not the victims.

Hook

Each mystery in *Candela Obscura* begins with the hook—the starting section of the adventure where the characters are not yet a part of the action. It usually works best to frame this introduction like the start of a television show or movie; we are getting a preview of the events that occur before our protagonists get involved. In-world, this intro represents the briefing the players have received from Candela Obscura before they are called onto the scene.

Read this section to the players as the hook for this adventure:

A riot of sound radiates from the Newfaire World Exhibition. Where once these city streets were filled with the screaming of civilians, there is now the laughter of children. The echoing of gunfire has been replaced with the “pop,” “pop,” “pop” of roasting caramel corn. The explosions of enemy bombs are now the crackling of electrified inventions.

Even three years after the war, it feels almost incongruous to hear the wild noise of happiness. You carry with you, as all Halen citizens do, the weight of the Last Great War on this memorial day. In celebration of the military implementation of electricity—the incredible power that forced Otherwhere to withdraw from the region—Newfaire hosts an “Exhibition of Advancement” every year.

Today, the District of Briar Green is a new world. Transformed by colorful flags, each street is lined with the stalls of a pop-up market, and children scurry among the crowds dressed in their finest. On display, there's row after row of inventions, the likes of which you've never seen.

“Come see the Electromagnet Elevator!”

“Use Radar technology to find your missing sheep, madam!”

“Tired of buttoning your shirt for work every day, sir? Try the Amazing Zipper and get your morning back!”

Best of all, the entire district smells of cotton candy and caramel corn.

When we finally make it through the cacophony into Briarbark College and its exhibition hall, the world seems to forget the rules by which it operates. Here the bright sun is dimmed by a dust-filled darkness, and the outside noise is compacted into a weighty hush. The hall is filled with the whispering of industrial giants exchanging vast sums of money. The inventions in these rooms are titanic—the very air smolders with a static buzz.

Electric screams silence the speakers with a regular staccato, sending the bravest eyes looking up to the lightning that dances across the ceiling.

We wander in silence through the gallery, listening to the daring inventors, perched on bespoke stages, evangelizing their work.

“If you'll stand over here, sir... There now, don't be afraid! The X-Ray Machine will only show us your bones, nothing more! But you'll have to hand me the items in your pockets sir... Thank you. I've always wanted a gold watch!”

There are flyers throughout the hall of a bright, almost iridescent green. In the dim light, the pages seem to glow, and in the electric flashes they nearly sparkle. We follow them, like a trail of breadcrumbs, to a massive crowd. High on the stage before us stands a beautiful woman, Vera Montgomery, swirling in a glowing green dress. She is a beam of light incarnate as she parades before a massive sign, a word painted in the same eerie, green hue: Undark.

Over the gasps from the crowd, we cannot hear the voice of the man who stands with her, but it's clear that he's highlighting the features of the pigment. He gestures around the room as if to say: “You need no light but the one we provide. In our Undark, you are the light.”

The crowd erupts in cheers, pulling the attention of the entire hall. In this cacophony, it takes a moment to hear the model's screams. But her cries grow louder and more piercing over the enthusiasm of onlookers and the crash of electricity. All at once, a hush blankets the hall. Gaping red sores open across the woman's skin, crawling from beneath the Undark dress in deep fissures of pain.

The model stops screaming, holding her hand up before the crowd. Within her hand, her bones glow green—the terrible mirroring of the x-rays on display only a few feet away. As we watch, the bones within each finger fall, disconnected, towards her wrist until her flesh hangs like a glove. The cascade of disconnecting bone runs down her arm, then her spine, then her legs, until what once was a beautiful woman is a pooling mass of writhing flesh.

In the end, there is nothing but a pile of red viscera and the most beautiful green dress the world has ever seen. Looming above the body like a promise, a glowing sign reads: Undark.

Arrival

In the Arrival phase, you will introduce your players to the start of the mystery by allowing them to explore the aftermath of the hook. In this phase, the circle's Lightkeeper comes to give them additional information, NPCs can offer players their knowledge or perspective, and the physical scene itself should present strong clues to point the team in the right direction. One piece of critical information, known as the *reveal*, is the most important clue to convey to the players—no matter what approach they take. This information will propel them into the next portion of their investigation.

Read this section to the players:

You're called in by Candela Obscura to investigate the mysterious death of Vera Montgomery, the famous model hired to exhibit clothing dyed with the glowing green pigment known as Undark. This pigment was one of the Newfaire World Exhibition's most anticipated inventions, and your circle's Lightkeeper was shocked to learn that both the dress and her remains radiated an incredible amount of bleed.

You begin in the exhibition hall of Briarbank College surrounded by a crime scene and the remnants of demonstrations not yet fully removed.

There is a lot to explore within the exhibition hall. However, before your players go off on their investigation, use the Lightkeeper as a way to introduce them to the case. This NPC can provide an opportunity for exposition and additional information (an excellent way to speed things up during a short session), or to recap anything that may have occurred in the previous session. Also, feel free to utilize the Lightkeeper as a way to tackle character elements the players at your table might wish to explore. A Lightkeeper is an NPC that should stay with your players throughout a campaign (barring a particularly dramatic turn of events), and they can act as a foil to a PC when you need to highlight their history, specific characteristics, a scar, etc.

ON AGENCY IN HORROR

While there are moments where this game may elicit fear and unease, ultimately it is meant to be enjoyed. Remember that the goal is not to traumatize players, but to provide a safe and controlled environment in which to explore darker themes and narratives. Work to create a sense of anticipation and excitement, while also allowing players to feel a sense of agency in the face of danger.

When your players are ready to explore the exhibition hall, their options are varied. Remember: you only have one piece of information you must convey.

Reveal: The dress was shipped and opened today. The shipping crate is still "backstage in the green room"—a repurposed classroom set up for presenters to prepare. It is not far from the exhibition hall.

There are numerous avenues by which you could convey this information. Some examples include:

Your players might take their time exploring the hall before they speak to any NPCs or investigate the crime scene. They could feel cautious going towards the Undark exhibition and first explore the booths of other exhibitors who are packing up their inventions. When looking through the various commercial and technological developments, allow them to discover the crates NPCs are packing with their inventions. You can seed the next reveal by noting that each wooden box has postage, or a label that says where it came from or where it's going. For this reveal, make it clear to the circle that each package is carried into the green room.

On the other hand, you may have players who are eager to talk to the NPCs that populate the exhibition hall. They could speak to the inventors, citizens who witnessed the woman's death, a student from Briarbank College who assisted in setting up for Exhibition Day, and more. Any person they speak to can have information about the box for the Undark dress that's still sitting backstage. Different NPCs will have different thoughts and feelings about what occurred, as well as a reaction to the circle members asking questions. Emotions such as suspicion, fear, eagerness, resentment, and envy all make exposition more engaging for you and the circle.

Lastly, your players may proceed directly to the crime scene. If they do, they should find the corpse and the dress. This is a good opportunity to raise the stakes by doling out Bleed marks, or even Brain marks, to a player who interacts with Vera's remains. If you want to introduce some elements of outside danger, they could run into the OUP agents who arrived on the scene to destroy the evidence and dispose of the body. Or the corpse, infested with bleed, could reform into a frightening adversary. You should almost certainly put an NPC here who knows enough about the event to point the circle in the direction of "Ms. Montgomery's dressing room." You could use the event coordinator, Ms. Montgomery's personal assistant, or even her lover—whatever feels like the most interesting relationship to explore.

You might want to remind them to use a bleed containment vial!

Exploration I

In the Exploration phase, you'll show the players that they're on the right track with their investigation as they follow the first reveal to somewhere new. Usually, this location will offer more danger and have evidence that points towards the bigger mystery at hand. The Exploration phase opens up the scope of the mystery, but also (like every subsequent phase) provides a strong indication of where the players should go next.

Reveal: On the box that held the dress there is a shipping label for the Radiance Corporation in Mordant Springs, Bridleborne.

Now that you're in the classroom that Briarbark College was using as Ms. Montgomery's green room, the reveal for this scene is fairly simple. Allow your investigators to examine the shipping box for the Undark dress. The inside is permeated with bleed, and there are spatters of the luminous green dye on every wall of the crate. Depending on what tactic the players use to look through the box, they may receive Bleed marks from the virulent pigment. The shipping label from Mordant Springs is easy enough to find, and you should reward your players for their investigation. Try to resist complicating the discovery by withholding too much information, and never force players to roll for something their character could easily accomplish.

If your party doesn't head to the green room, there are other ways to reveal that the Undark dress was delivered from Mordant Springs. The event coordinator has a shipping manifest, players could question the man who hosted the Undark presentation until he reveals that he works for the Radiance Corporation in Mordant Springs, or another inventor knows about the company and its location in the Bridleborne Mountains.

Once the circle discovers the location, you should expedite travel. To accomplish this, you can pick up at the next scene just before the train pulls into the last stop. Your players can walk out of the train car onto a street where a sign reads "Welcome to Mordant Springs." Unless an extended period of travel or preparation helps you and your party explore a personal storyline, you should consider using flashbacks into a character's history to accomplish, more dramatically, what appeals to players about roleplaying during travel.

I know you referred Mordant Springs to the council for lighthouse consideration, did they ever get back to you?

Exploration II

Now that your players are in the second Exploration phase, they should know enough about the actual mystery to pursue it directly. The reveal from the last Exploration phase will have set them off towards an answer, but also towards greater danger. Here, the tension starts to ramp up as they begin to explore the larger mystery at hand—and are reminded of the stakes if they don't succeed.

Read this section to the players:

Deep in the Bridleborne Mountains, as far as the rail will take you, lies the town of Mordant Springs. A massive factory looms along the Bitter River, and the sounds of explosives shake nearby cliffs. This is a company town: a place where the Radiance Corporation pays the workers in a currency that they can only spend at the company store. The settlers who lived on this land sold mineral rights to the corporation and are now working to afford the opportunity to continue living on their own small farms, in their family homes. The people here are hard of head and hand, but soft of heart for members of their community.

Reveal: Undark transforms people who encounter it, most commonly by making all their bones brittle and breakable, and then reshaping them back into uncanny forms within their flesh. The victims of this contamination are known to behave violently and attack anyone who comes near.

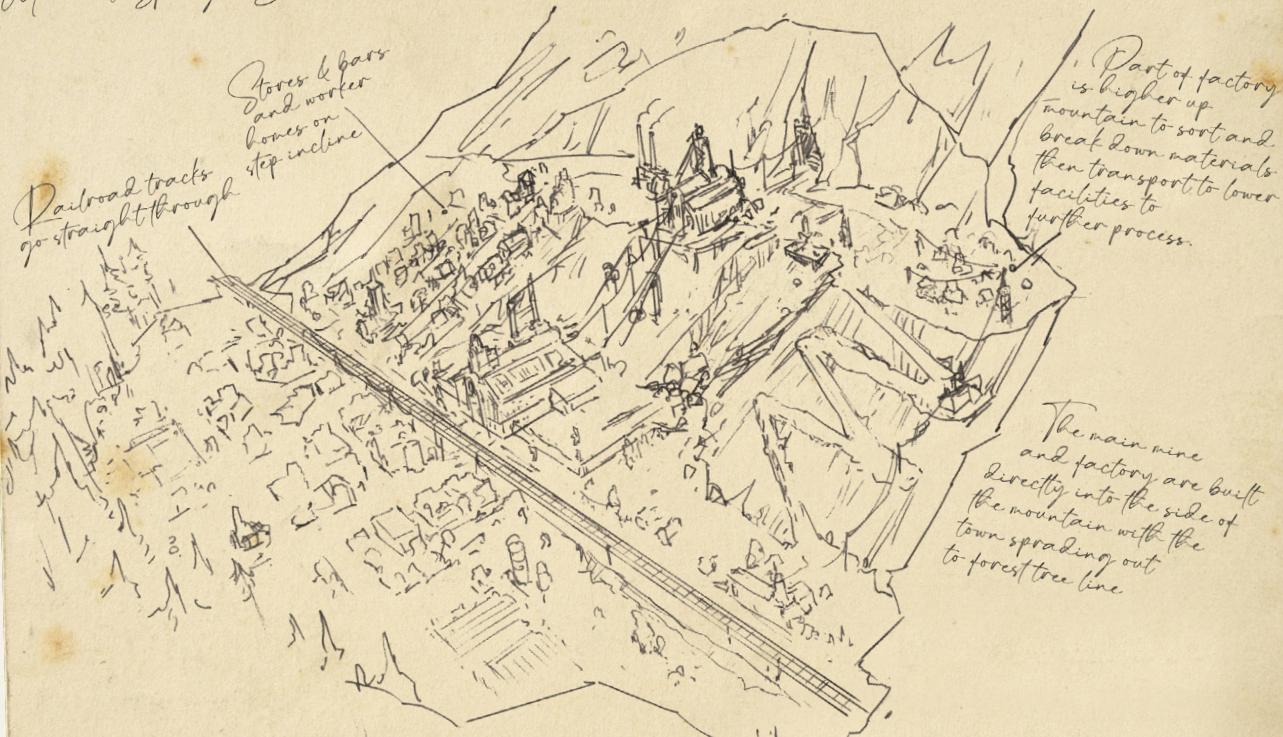
When your players land in Mordant Springs, you have the chance to introduce a number of places for them to explore. Some parties will want to investigate every nook and cranny, while others may head directly for the places that seem to house major plot points. In the latter case, the most likely place to plant your reveal would be in the Radiance Corporation's factory, but that isn't your only option.

If your players are taking their time exploring Mordant Springs and you feel the need to drop the reveal before they reach the factory, you may choose one of these options, or make up your own:

Within the General Store, players will meet shopkeeper Kiko Nakamura. She may open up to discuss her wife, Yael, who works in the Undark mine. At first, her spouse suffered only a mild illness. But as time passed, her body transformed. Kiko is desperate for a cure to stop the Undark from affecting her partner's mind.

Your party can go speak to Yael Nakamura, who is sequestered in the upstairs bedroom. Delirious and transformed by the "Green Fever," she might attack the circle.

Mordant Springs, Bridleborne - 1905



Another option could take your PCs to the hot springs where they meet a local herbalist, "You don't need my name." She's making an effort to heal the sickness of the Radiance Corporation employees. She's seen, first-hand, the way the Green Fever progresses from illness, to green eyes, to glowing bones, to a full-body transformation. The woman explains that the mining and refining occurring at the factory is leaching Undark into the Bitter River and the surrounding land of Mordant Springs. She, and many other townsfolk, can reveal their own bones beginning to glow from Undark poisoning. You can use this NPC to give the circle a ward that can protect characters from taking a Bleed mark, or provide an item that could aid their investigation.

If your players enter the factory grounds, you have the opportunity to introduce them to the foreman, managers, or executives from the Radiance Corporation who are participating in the coverup of Undark's poisonous nature. Cecil Wallace is the smooth-talking Managing Director that will go head to head with a Face character, for example, if the party has one. The stakes in this location are particularly high, and the circle will need the expertise of a variety of player roles to navigate the space without receiving harm.

No matter the location, allowing the investigators to speak to the workers themselves is a particularly good way to express the horror caused by the Radiance Corporation. Though the people of Mordant Springs are transforming into violent monsters, they are victims who deserve the player's compassion. While the horror genre puts protagonists in tough positions—having to harm an attacking townsperson, for example—these are the elements of your story that can lead to the largest impact, both in the game and around the table.

Hidden somewhere in town is a secret hospital where Radiance Corporation workers are trying to care for one another using limited resources, all without losing the jobs they desperately need to survive. Olu Adjei, one such employee, will guide the circle to this location if he believes they can help his community.

Remember: no matter the route your players chose to take, you'll want the stakes to feel one notch higher than the previous Exploration phase. This is a horror game—it should feel deadly. Do not underestimate the unsettling power of little details and small conflicts as your players progress through the story.

Escalation I

In the first Escalation phase, the story should introduce a twist of some kind—something here isn't what it seems. This twist will push the players into further danger and get them headed towards the climax of the adventure. If things are not already scary, now is the time to start ramping up the tension. Put the players in real peril, show them the power of bleed, and remind them of the magickal forces they're up against.

Reveal: The Undark mine isn't a traditional mine. Rather than excavating the mountain for a mineral, the workers are extracting a glowing green liquid that the factory processes to make dye. (You must make sure your players make it to the Undark mine to set up the reveal in Escalation II.)

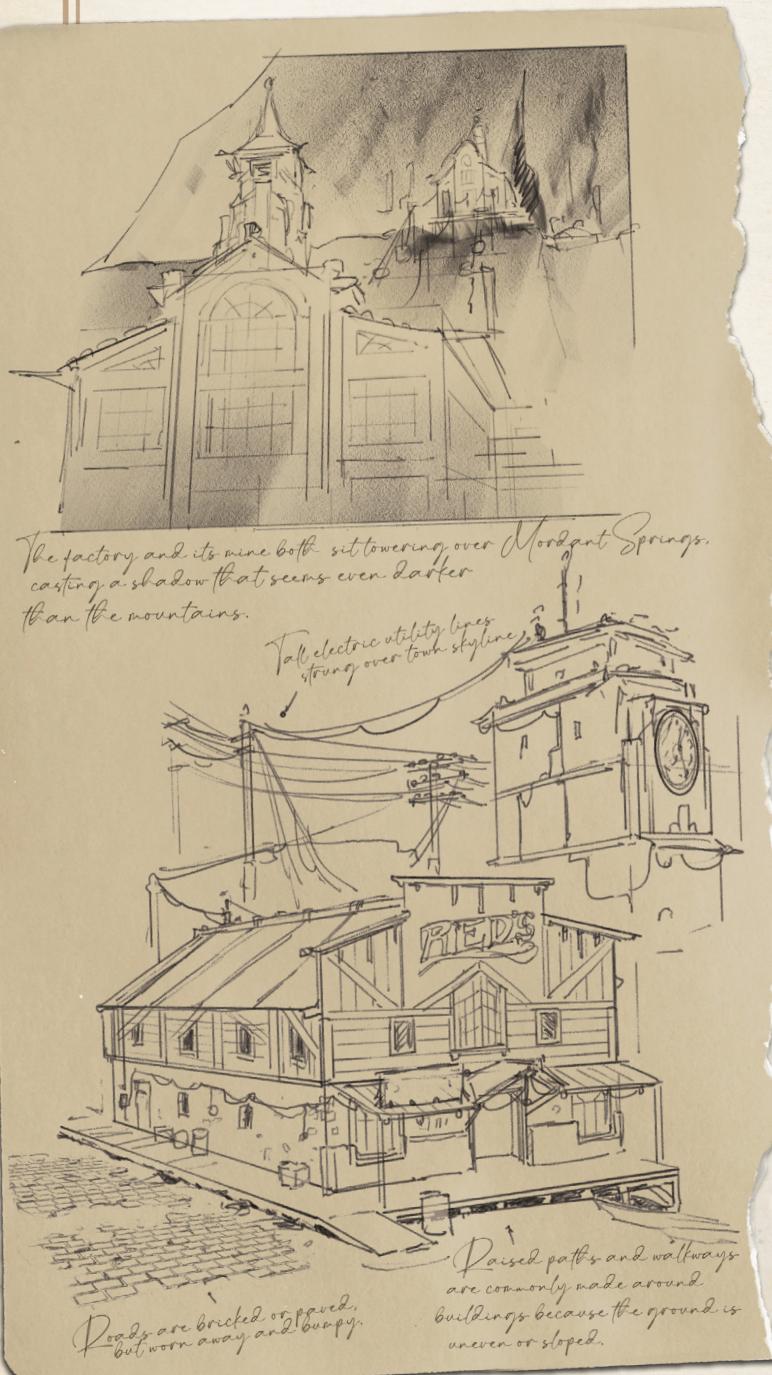
Wherever your players discover the reveal in Exploration II, they should know by now that they must interface with the Radiance Corporation. They can meet their capitalist foes in a variety of locations, but it's time to face danger.

If you introduce the party to the community's underground hospital for Radiance Corporation employees, Olu Adjei or another factory worker can provide information and point the players to an employee who works in the mines. If the circle travels to the miner's house, they discover that he succumbed to Green Fever, and was recently killed in his home. The group comes upon a shadowy figure from the Radiance Corporation attempting to ransack the house. After escaping danger, or sneaking past, the circle finds a letter the miner was writing to his family back in Tottergrass. It reveals that they are "collecting a toxic green liquid from the mine."

Another route might take your circle to the main street of Mordant Springs. The company town is crawling with Radiance Corporation staff—especially guards. As night begins to fall, your investigators find themselves out past curfew and facing the ire of local law enforcement. Though your players can escape this peril alone, offering them an NPC ally or locking them up in the local jail with someone who knows about the mine is a perfect way to drop the next reveal.

You could also provide the reveal using an NPC from out of town. They might encounter Booker Davis, a journalist from Newfaire who plans to blackmail the heads of the Radiance Corporation if he can uncover what they are hiding here. Davis has been in town for a long time, so the circle could join him for a pint at the local bar. Here, the group has the opportunity to peek into his journal and see notes about the mining operation. How does Davis react if he catches them?

If the players are reluctant to head into the dangers of the mine, you have options. You could have an NPC ask the circle for help by telling a personal story about how they've been harmed by the corporation. Alternatively, offer them backup—either in the form of a person or an item—that bolsters their odds. Telling players, outright, exactly where to go allows them to face evil and experience the horror, and catharsis, that comes from major conflict.



Escalation II

In the second Escalation phase, the players can use all of their new knowledge and tools to push directly towards the climax of the mystery. They might not know the truth yet, but this phase should take them exactly where they need to be for the final showdown of the adventure. Throughout the second Escalation phase, continue to raise the tension so that danger always feels imminent.

Read this section to the players:

You make your way towards the mineshaft, a large hole bored crudely into the side of the mountain. The passage within is held up by large wooden beams and illuminated by the flickering of oil lamps. The shadows of miners are projected around the jagged rock, their forms twisted and grotesque in the bending light.

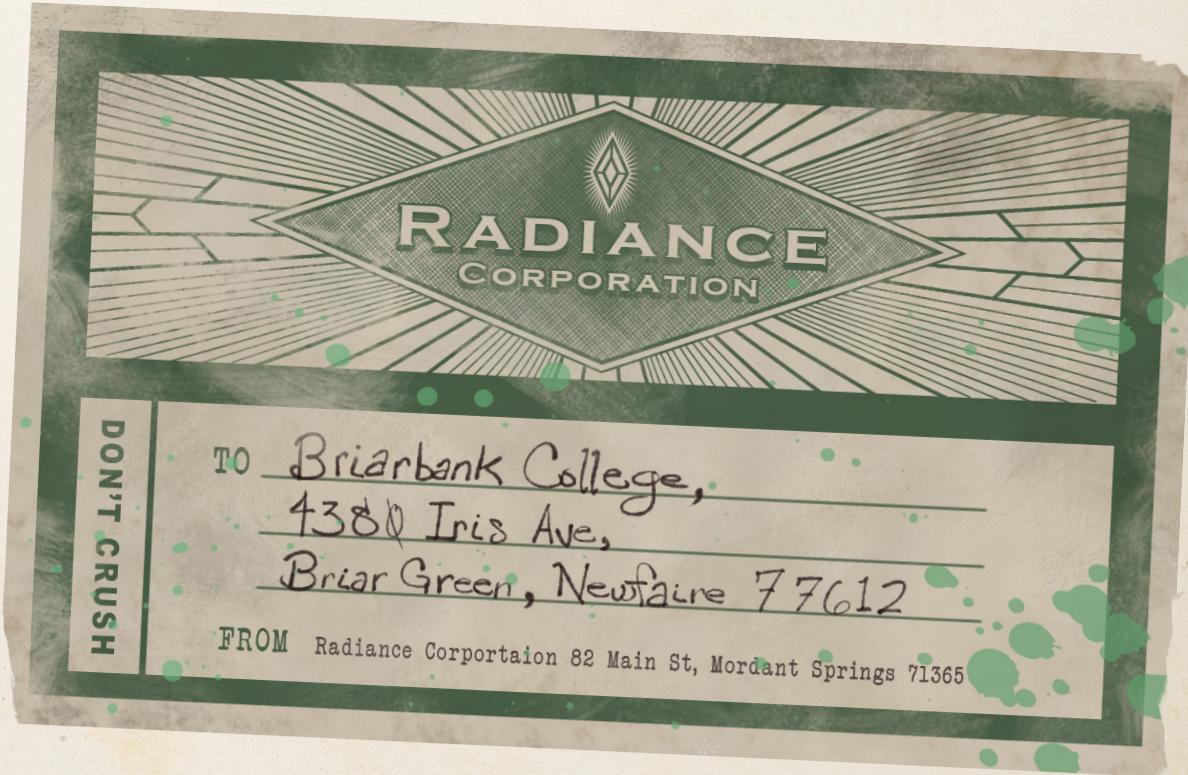
Suddenly, a man in a full-body protective suit breaches the threshold of light within the cave, walking towards all of you. He has a rifle thrown over his shoulder and a breathing apparatus strapped around his head. In a moment, he will spot you, unless you act. What do you want to do?

Reveal: Distressed and otherworldly cries echo through the mine. They are unlike any sound previously known to human ears.

The circle might choose to attack the man and take his suit for protection, hide and wait for him to pass so they can enter the cave unnoticed, or do something completely unexpected—whatever their group decides, they should proceed straight into the heart of the mine. Remember that you can always introduce dangers from behind, should your circle attempt to turn around. Keep them moving through the cave, describing the way in which bleed has corrupted this place. Make it visceral, strange, and gruesome.

As they proceed, you'll want to introduce a few dangers on this path as well. They could encounter regular humans—more suited figures with firearms. They could find Undark miners who have disintegrated beyond recognition and now lay melded into the walls and floors of the cave, hungry to devour anything that passes. Or they could stumble into cave wraiths that are hunting people underground. Decide what type of peril you want your group to face and develop threats that match the story you want to tell. When in doubt, don't be afraid to use emotional flashbacks into characters' backstories. This is a playable way to represent the mental strain and internal turmoil that occurs while moving through an investigation.

At some point in their journey, you'll want to drop the reveal for this section: the inhuman cries of a large creature reverberating throughout the caves. Let them follow those cries to the center of the mining operation, transitioning into the climax of the story.



Climax

In the Climax phase, the drama of the story should reach a crescendo. This is the period of highest tension, where players can experience the most visceral moments of horror. Sometimes, there is a final reveal or twist—something that answers the dramatic question of the mystery in an unexpected or exciting way. Usually, this is the place with the most opportunity for action. During the climax players sprint for cover, fight the monster, take the artifact, etc. Think of this as the big ending sequence of an action movie. Don't be afraid to introduce the dramatic consequences of failure.

Reveal: Within the mines, EONS has imprisoned the “Undark Beast,” but there appears to be a way to release it.

The circle finally finds the truth behind Undark: the pigment is actually venom extracted from the body of a massive creature that is chained up within the mine. If they look closely at the equipment used to extract the poisonous fluid, they will recognize the symbol for EONS. The workers are attaching tubing to the creature and monitoring its vitals, as well as running the manual pumps that are pulling the Undark from the beast's body.

It is up to you to decide what this monster looks like in your adventure: what kinds of sounds, smells, or strange effects it creates, and how it is confined and controlled by the Radiance Corporation. The answers to these questions will shape the climax of your mystery and also help the players decide how they approach the situation. They may try to break the creature out or kill it, fight the corporation's enforcers or bargain with them, blow up the mine, or something else entirely. Whatever they choose, support their narrative goals by responding appropriately within the fiction. Put your players in immediate danger, force them to make hard decisions, and continue to escalate the stakes of the scene right up until the end.

Remember: as the GM, you are not your party's enemy hoping for their failure. You should present opposition so that players can successfully navigate the story they wish to tell. You should always tailor your adventure to the interests of the table. A player who wants to explore the theme of grief may enjoy engaging with tragedy, whereas a group of players that need an escape from stress might simply hope to eviscerate the bad guy. Very often a single dice roll can determine a player's fate, but it's your job as the GM to remember that the luck of the dice can't force an outcome you never offer.

*Great work Ezra. Keep your chin up.
xx,*

A. O'Neill

Epilogue

The purpose of the epilogue is to wrap up any loose ends, but also to set you up for success in future sessions of *Candela Obscura*. Like the hook, this is a peek into the world of the investigation when the player characters are no longer around. This is your opportunity to seed the details of your next adventure, or something that may appear again many sessions from now. Both the hook and the epilogue provide you with the opportunity to reveal a story element that you cannot depict if you only follow the actions of the players.

When crafting your epilogue, keep this in mind: the way that your players choose to interact with the Undark creature and other NPCs will tell you a lot about what they're looking for in the resolution of this story.

Epilogue Questions

- Did they release the beast with the hope that it would escape, or with the goal of destroying the people who caged and harmed it?
- Did they keep the beast in chains and attempt to destroy, manipulate, or negotiate with the Radiance Corporation on their own?
- Did they bond with any NPCs, and if so, where are those characters now?
- Is the Radiance Corporation and capitalist exploitation a theme that resonates with the group? If so, how can you twist the ending into a cliffhanger that allows this organization to appear again?
- If your circle didn't defeat the Radiance Corporation, how does this affect the group, and what becomes of the people of Mordant Springs?

Beyond This Guide

This text represents a small taste of the investigations yet to come for *Candela Obscura*. We encourage you to take anything you read here and make it your own. Adjust and expand on areas of this game in any way that fulfills the needs of your table. This world is now yours as much as it is ours, and we look forward to sharing more of it with you very soon.

TOUCHSTONES

As you set off building your own adventures within *Candela Obscura*, we recommend drawing from the same cultural touchstones that inspired us.



Books: *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern; *Faeries* by Brian Froud and Alan Lee; *Neverwhere* by Neil Gaiman; *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* by Alvin Schwartz; *A Darker Shade of Magic* by V.E. Schwab; *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley; the *Sherlock Holmes* series by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Comics: *Hellboy* created by Mike Mignola; *Bizenghast* by M. Alice LeGrow; *Constantine* created by Alan Moore, Stephen R. Bissette, Rick Veitch, and John Totleben; *Department of Truth* by James Tynion IV; *The Invisibles* by Grant Morrison

Films & TV: *The Prestige* by Jonathan Nolan and Christopher Nolan; *As Above, So Below* by John Erick Dowdle; *Crimson Peak* by Guillermo del Toro; *Penny Dreadful* by John Logan et al.; *Ripper Street* by Richard Warlow et al.; *Arcane* by Christian Linke and Alex Yee et al.

Video Games: *The BioShock series* by Ken Levine et al. from 2K Games; *Bloodborne* and *Elden Ring* by Hidetaka Miyazaki from FromSoftware

We would like to tip our hats to the TTRPG *Blades in the Dark* by John Harper from Evil Hat Productions. John's work is an incredible inspiration both in mechanics and tone, and it is our great joy to count them as a friend. Should your investigators turn to a life of smuggling and thievery, we encourage you to take your circle to play among the scoundrels of Duskvol.

Additionally, *Vaesen* by Nils Hintze et al. from Free League is a game of beautiful Scandinavian lore. Though set within completely different worlds, we hope that the monsters of the Mythic North would find themselves at home among the creatures from beyond the Flare.

