

The Horse of Shallaholm

A Call of Cthulhu Scenario by A J Bradbury

INTRODUCTION

This scenario is freely adapted from William Hope Hodgson's short story of the same name. Despite the deliberately misleading initial plot the climax of the action will bring the investigators in contact with a particularly dangerous creature bent on wholesale destruction. Keepers should reserve this scenario for a time when player characters are comparatively fit and healthy.

KEEPER'S INTRODUCTION

The players must be encouraged to take this case – apparently a simple, if somewhat fearsome, case of haunting – on the grounds of compassion. The sanity, and just possibly the life, of a young woman (Mary Hisgins) is threatened by the manifestation of an ancient family curse – the White Horse of Shallaholm. Miss Hisgins is a most attractive young woman who has recently become engaged to Sub-lieutenant Charles Beaumont. The hauntings began almost as soon as the engagement was announced. One of the investigators will know of the case either through social connections, a childhood friendship

with Miss Hisgins or, for added tension, because one of the male investigators was himself nearly engaged to Miss Hisgins at some earlier date. (In the latter case the break-up of the romance will have been by mutual agreement, allowing a continued friendship.)

The Curse of Shallaholm

The curse of the White Horse of Shallaholm (the ancestral home of the Hisgins family for over six centuries) dates back nearly four hundred years. The curse arose out of a romance between the son of the village blacksmith and the only daughter of Vere d'Veire Hisgoine in the 1530's. Not surprisingly, Hisgoine had no intention of seeing his daughter besmirch the family escutcheon by such a degrading liaison. Instead of simply sending her off to stay with relatives in London, however, he took the law into his own hands (he was, after all, the local magistrate), went into the village and beat the young swain within an inch of his life. The young man did, in fact, survive the beating, but at the price of irreparable physical damage. Ironically the exertion triggered a heart condition the Squire had been developing for some time past. Within a month of the beating Squire Hisgoine was dead and buried.

In these circumstances the blacksmith expected that Miss Hisgoine would prove her devotion to his son by marrying him. Yet Miss Hisgoine chose, instead, to marry a distant cousin. What the enraged artisan did not know was that the dead squire had entirely squandered the family's wealth and that the marriage was one of convenience rather than love. In his anger the blacksmith, with the help of a local occultist, caught and slaughtered the late squire's favourite horse – a white stallion – swearing that, whenever a female member of the Hisgoines became engaged, the spirit of the stallion would return to destroy the match, and if possible, the girl herself.

In the first two hundred years following the raising of the curse five female members of the Hisgoine family were affected by the curse. Two committed suicide, one 'fell' from an upper window, one died of a 'broken heart' (heart failure?), and the last died one evening in the manor grounds, apparently kicked by a horse (though no horse was known to be in the area except the two docile family horses safely stabled on the far side of the house).

Since that time some seven generations of Hisgins (the name was Anglicised at the time of the Napoleonic Wars) have passed without a single female child surviving beyond the age of ten. Thus the curse is now regarded as a quaint myth rather than a genuine danger. The investigators will need to make a successful Library roll, with only half normal chance of success, in order to find a record of the events described above in the Hisgin's library plus three hours of research. If they don't find this record the Keeper should not give any other confirmation of the truth of the curse.

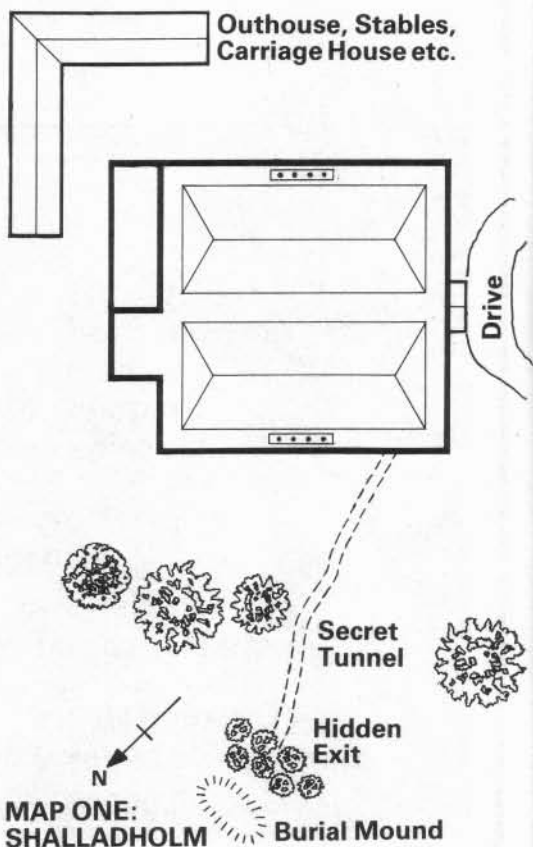
The investigator who is already acquainted with the Hisgins will naturally wish to take the case, and it is assumed that the other players will agree to accom-

pany him/her. In this case they will all be invited to spend a long week-end as guests at Shallaholm.

Once the investigators take up residence at the manor house a series of hauntings will occur. These must be organised in the order given below, though the exact speed at which events reach their climax is very much a matter left to the Keeper's discretion. Above all the Keeper must ensure that the investigators have every possible chance to interpret the hauntings as purely man-made phenomena, or at worst as the work of a poltergeist, whilst not deliberately obscuring the occasional hints that a far more terrible evil is involved.

INVESTIGATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Hisgins family – Captain Saul Hisgins (Army, retired), his wife Emily, and their daughter Mary – live at Shallaholm, the manor house of the remote village of Lower Shallah in Norfolk (Map One). The family, and servants, are all aware of a family legend that no daughter of the family may ever survive long enough to get married. No-one knows where the legend comes from or whether it has any truth to it. Indeed, since there have been no female Hisgins who survived beyond the age of seven or eight (for entirely natural reasons – poor medical facilities, genuine accidents, etc) the legend has never been put to the test for over seven generations (about 180-200 years). It might not have been mentioned now but for some strange events which have occurred over the three week period since Mary Hisgins became engaged to Charles Beaumont who has been staying with the family for some time. (The explanation for Beaumont's extended presence will depend on the period in which the game is set. He may be convalescing, from a wound or an illness



contracted in distant parts, between postings, etc.)

As soon as the investigators arrive at Shalladholm they will be told of the three 'hauntings' which have occurred so far:

1. On the day of the engagement, before it had been officially announced, Mary and Beaumont were in the great corridor about dusk – before the lamps had been lighted. Without any warning they heard a grotesque sound like a horse neighing. The next moment Beaumont received a tremendous blow or kick which broke his right forearm. When servants responded to Miss Hisingins' screams, with lamps of course, they could find nothing to explain the event either in the corridor itself or anywhere else in the house.

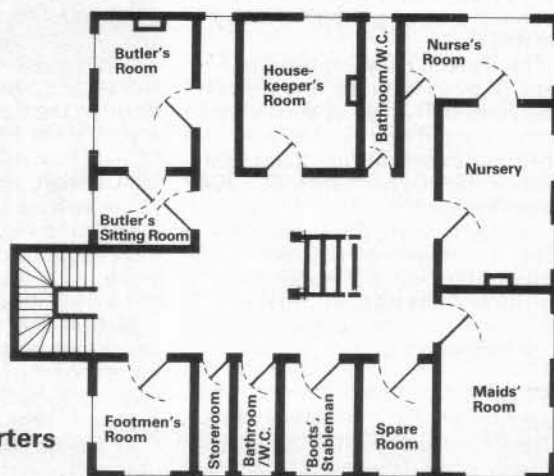
2. Three days after the engagement Beaumont and Captain Hisingins were woken by the sound of terrified screams from Mary's bedroom. They both lit lamps and arrived at Mary's bedside almost simultaneously. The young woman claimed to have been woken by the sound of a horse neighing close beside her. Almost as soon as she awoke the sound stopped and there were no further phenomena. Beaumont then went and woke the butler and the three men made a thorough search of Mary's bedroom and the adjoining corridor. With no success.

Over the next couple of weeks both Beaumont and Mary, separately and together, heard the sound of hoofbeats and/or neighing on almost a daily basis – but always at a distance. The third 'threatening' event has occurred only two days before the investigators' arrival.

3. Again at dusk, whilst seated in a room off the main hall, both Beaumont and Mary heard the sound of hoofbeats approaching the front door. (If the period is suitable this will be the aunt's boudoir and the aunt will be chaperoning the couple.) Disregarding the notion that 'discretion is the better part of valour' Beaumont went out into the darkened hall, opened the front door and stepped outside. For a moment Beaumont felt relief as the hoofbeats had ceased and there was nothing to be seen in any direction. The next instant his apprehension was renewed and intensified as the front door crashed shut behind him and for several minutes resisted all his attempts to re-open it. And when it did open, as suddenly as it had closed, the situation got worse rather than better.

As Beaumont stepped back into the hall he naturally turned to close the front door. It was then that he heard a sound which he interpreted as that caused by his sweetheart blowing him a kiss from the far side of the hall. Turning back Beaumont began to raise his hand to return the kiss – and at the same time realised that there was, in fact, no-one in the hall but himself – at least there was no other human being present! He immediately shouted to Mary to stay where she was, no matter what might happen, and started across the hall. By the light of a torch made of a bunch of matches Beaumont crossed the tiled floor, despite hearing a second kissing sound only a few feet away. Finally, as he reached the room where Mary

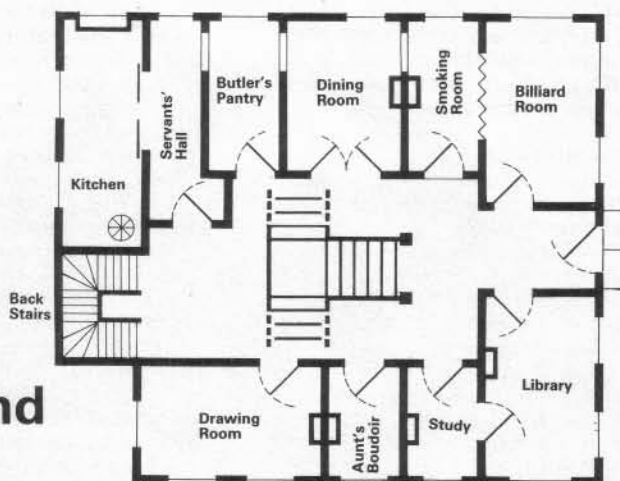
Top Floor Servants' Quarters



First Floor

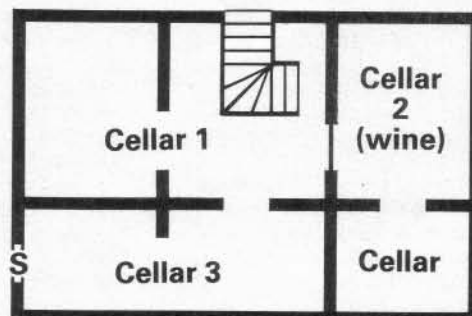


Ground Floor



FLOOR PLANS OF SHALLADHOLM

Cellars



waited, they both heard the sound as of a great hooved animal galloping away down the drive.

Note: The Keeper may legitimately encourage, or even initiate, any discussion of the possibility that at least some of the events described may have an entirely rational explanation—a draught blew the door shut, Beaumont may have been unable to open the door simply because he was turning the handle the wrong way, etc. However, neither Beaumont or Mary will accept such explanations and the Keeper must not force them on the investigators against their better judgement.

THE FIRST DAY

On the assumption that the investigators will spend a reasonable part of the first day of the adventure in preparation and travel their arrival at Shalladholm should be timed for the late afternoon or early evening. What time remains to them should be taken up with meeting the family and servants, hearing the tales outlined above, dinner and, if they take the opportunity, there is sufficient time to explore the library and discover the material on the Curse of Shalladholm.

There will be no untoward events during that day or the first night.

THE SECOND DAY

During the second day the investigators may do whatever they wish with one exception: they must not be allowed to make a thorough search of the cellars of the house. If necessary the Keeper may invent another appearance of 'the horse' (preferably well away from the house), a visit by a local police officer or any other suitable means of heading the players off as subtly as possible. Floor plans should be made available to the players as and when they move into the relevant areas. No unnatural events occur until after dinner on the second day.

Enter the Horse

If the Keeper has been forced to introduce the horse already, as a diversion, he must ensure that the phenomenon ceases before any of the investigators have a chance to witness the alleged manifestation. Their first chance for a first-hand experience of the haunting will come at approximately 9.30-10.00pm on the second day.

At this time dinner will be over and the players will be either in the lounge (taking coffee with Mary and Mrs Higsins), or in the billiard room (with Beaumont and Captain Higsins). After enough time has passed for a couple of games Mary will come into the billiard room to invite anyone present to come for coffee. All will agree. (If anyone has an alternative idea the Keeper may insist that they have a duty to guard the young couple whenever they are together.)

Once everyone is clear of the billiard room (and the door is closed) the sound of hoofbeats will be heard loudly from within. All investigators present must make their SAN roll or lose 1 point of SAN. At this point Mary will flee towards the stairs where she will be protected by her father who seizes a cavalry sabre from a display in the hall. Beaumont will go to his room to fetch his gun and any investigators who possess fire-arms

should be encouraged to fetch them.

When everyone involved is assembled in the corridor ready for the assault on the billiard room the hoofbeats will suddenly speed up and come straight through the door, along the corridor and up the stairs towards the Captain and Mary. They will then stop just short of the Captain, and the event will be over. There will be no further occurrences on the second night until just before dawn, then the sound of heavy hoofbeats will be heard in the grounds for between three and five minutes.

Notes. The 'trigger' for the charging hoofbeats will be the moment that the handle of the billiards room door is turned. If any investigator should decide to try and enter the billiards room before everyone else is ready this will still cause the hoofbeats to gallop out of the room to the stairs. Anyone standing in the corridor during the charge automatically loses 1 point of SAN.

Any investigator who initiates an overnight guard on Mary and Beaumont may be rewarded with 1 point of SAN or POW per person (ie one point for guarding Mary, one point for guarding Beaumont). The Keeper may suggest, through Beaumont or Higsins, that the guards work in shifts. If any of the guards leave their posts when the hoofbeats are heard in the early morning they will see nothing but may be penalised as the Keeper sees fit.

THE THIRD DAY

Due to the upsets of the previous night most of the main characters, especially investigators who have been on guard duty, will probably sleep late (11.00am-12.00pm). Little will happen during the afternoon, with one exception.

Any investigator(s) who engage Miss Higsins in conversation will learn that she is expecting the arrival of her cousin, Harry Parsket, sometime during the day. Outwardly Miss Higsins will express the utmost confidence in Parsket, but if the player(s) involved can make a successful Psychology roll they will realise that Mary has certain unconscious reservations about her cousin.

Alternatively, any investigators in the bedroom area in the early afternoon may attempt a Spot Hidden roll. If successful they will note a house maid preparing one of the empty bedrooms for occupation. If the maid is questioned she will only say that Mr Parsket, Mary's cousin, is expected to arrive before dinner. If a player can make their fast talk roll and offers a reasonable bribe the maid will explain that there was talk in the servants' hall of a possible romance between Mary and Harry Parsket about 18 months ago, but nothing ever came of it.

Danger in the Park

Harry Parsket will arrive in Shalladholm not more than an hour before dinner (when members of the party are due to dress for dinner). If any investigator is close to the front hall within ten minutes of Parsket's arrival they may attempt a Spot Hidden roll and an Idea roll. If rolls are successful the player will notice that Parsket looks remarkably fresh for someone who is supposed to have travelled down from London by steam

train, and it will occur to them that Parsket may actually have been in the area for at least 24 hours before his alleged arrival.

About ten minutes after he arrives Parsket will take his bags up to his room (he hasn't brought a valet with him) to prepare for dinner. Captain Higsins will invite the investigators to take drinks with him before dinner. Only then will they discover that Mary and Beaumont are not present (in fact they have gone for a walk in the grounds!). Even if the investigators start after the lovers immediately, they will still be too late to prevent the events which follow.

Not less than ten minutes after Parsket's exit screams will be heard from the manor grounds. Captain Higsins will immediately get his sabre and rush outside. The butler will, quite independently, take up a shotgun and a lamp and also run out into the park, possibly accompanied by one or two footmen (the footmen, if any, will carry clubs of some kind rather than fire-arms). The investigators may take whatever measures they choose.

Once outside the players will find that the grounds are obscured by a fairly heavy mist which reduces the effectiveness of lamps and torches as well as distorting sounds. At first the situation will be one of total confusion, then the players will hear three sounds quite nearby, firstly a bloodcurdling, gobbling neighing sound, then a shout from Harry Parsket, and then a pistol shot. The sounds will come at intervals of no more than one or two minutes each. Shortly after the shot is heard the players will find Beaumont standing over the prostrate body of Mary Higsins. Beaumont holds a smoking pistol (obviously he fired the shot) and has a deep cut across his forehead. Miss Higsins has fainted.

If questioned by one of the investigators Beaumont will explain that they felt a presence whilst walking in the park and began to walk briskly back to the house. After having gone only a few paces they heard what sounded like hoofbeats behind them. They began to run, but Mary tripped over a tree root—and began to scream. Beaumont turned to face the sound and saw a huge horse's head rearing up out of the mist. He only had time to loose off one shot before being struck across the forehead. He had only just regained his feet when the 'rescue party' arrived.

Any player making a Spot Hidden roll as soon as the couple are found (ie before any questions/discussions begins) will notice that Parsket seems to be sweating rather heavily, despite the chill mist.

HARRY PARSKET

It will be clear by now that Harry Parsket, cousin and friend (but from his point of view, rejected suitor), is out to break the romance between Beaumont and Mary Higsins by resurrecting the legend of the White Horse of Shalladholm. As time passes, however, he is moving towards the idea that it might save a lot of time and trouble if he were to simply kill Beaumont.

Parsket is, of course, quite mad, though still able to conceal this fact unless a skilled psychologist/psychiatrist makes a deliberate study of his behaviour over



several days. According to W H Hodgson, Parsket's activities merely serve to conceal the reality of The Horse. Keepers may feel, however, that Parsket has already found the Sigsand Manuscript and is using the *bind squarch* spell to control the creature. In this case Parsket's control over the squarch will become more and more erratic as his manic behaviour increases so that the climax of the case will be the same in either case. If the investigators, should by any chance, attempt to apprehend Parsket prematurely this will merely hasten his final loss of control over the squarch, which will then attack as soon as darkness falls.

Harry Parsket

Age: 28.

STR: 11; CON: 11; SIZ: 13; INT: 14;

POW: 15; DEX: 9; APP: 12; EDU: 13;

SAN: 0; Hit Points: 12.

Skills: Debate 70%, Fast Talk 60%, Psychology 50%

Weapons: Apart from his attacks on Beaumont, Parsket will only become violent if cornered. In this case Parsket will use any weapon that comes to hand. Even with his bare hands, and fingernails, he will do 1d3+1d6 damage.

Profile: Well-educated, physically healthy although used to easy living.

IN THE CELLARS

Events in the cellars of Shalladholm will depend entirely on who enters them, and when. On any occasion there is a 20% base chance that the squarch will be loose either in the cellar or in the adjoining tunnel. Add 20% if a lone male investigator enters the third cellar (30% for a female) or 10% in the case of two or

more people plus a further 20% anytime during the hours of darkness. The one exception to these figures is if Mary Hising enters Cellar 3, in which case the

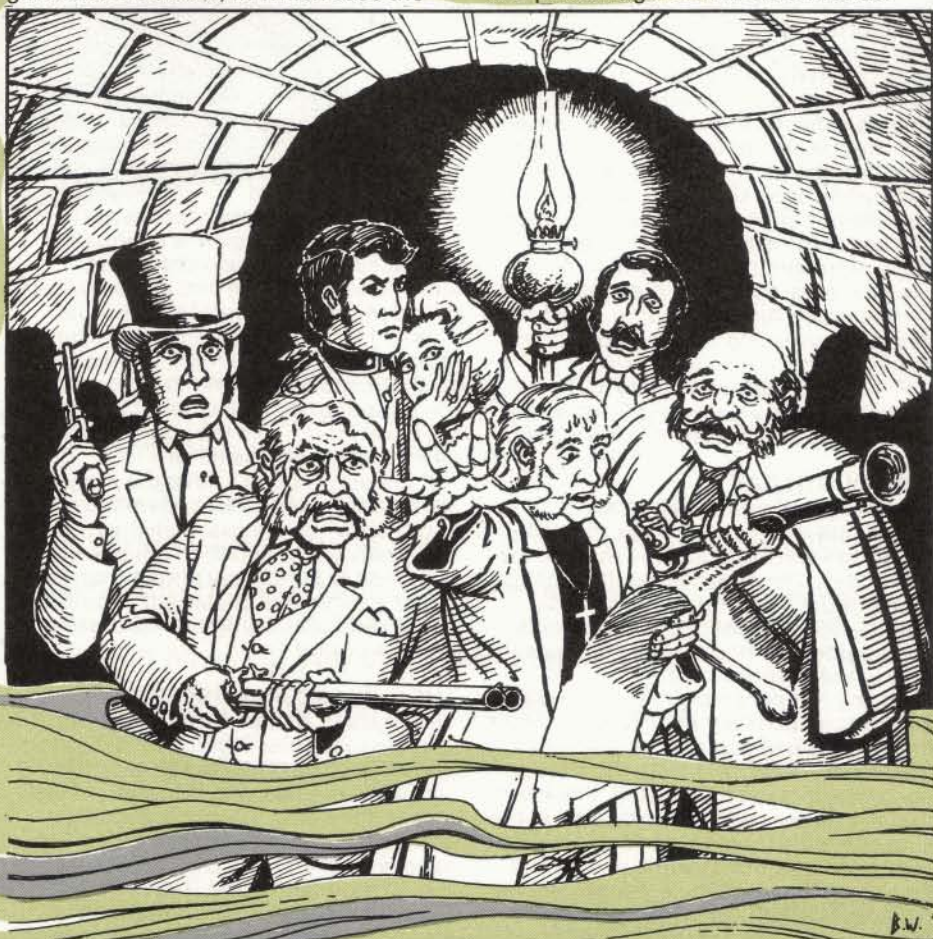
chance rises to 100%, regardless of who else is present.

Sooner or later the investigators will surely wish to search the cellars. There are, in fact, three adjoining cellars, though only the second and third have any special significance.

Cellar 1 – is used for the storage of wine. The players may search high and low but they won't find anything here.

Cellar 2 – is used for storing odds and ends (mainly junk) which fills most of the area except a central aisle leading through to the third cellar. Any investigator making a Spot Hidden roll will find a pile of wood in one corner including several long poles, smallish blocks, and some odds and ends of string. A successful Idea roll (if needed) will bring out the fact that a fair imitation of hoofbeats on the ground floor and part way up the stairs could be achieved by anyone hitting the cellar ceiling with wooden blocks tied to two of the poles. (Even if Parsket is using *bind squarch* these clues should still be available – as a red herring!)

Cellar 3 – is the danger area, as outlined above. There is more junk scattered around this cellar, though none of it is significant. There is, however, a hidden entrance to a tunnel leading into the manor grounds. Since the squarch can pass through solid objects, and Parsket doesn't know about the tunnel, the entrance has not been opened for over a hundred years (when it was used by the eldest son when he wished to slip down to the village undetected by his somewhat puritanical parents). Normally, then, a player would need to make a Spot Hidden roll of one-fifth of their normal percentage to find the entrance.



However, if a lone investigator enters the cellars and encounters the squarch it will kill him/her and force the entrance open in order to drag the body through the tunnel. In this case small traces of brick dust, broken cobwebs, etc, will make the entrance clear on a straightforward Spot Hidden roll.

If Mary Higsins enters this cellar alone (extremely unlikely!) the squarch will kill her. Otherwise it will merely make its presence known by the gobbling, neighing sound, and retreat into the tunnel. Anyone entering *Cellar 3* must make their SAN roll or lose 1 point of SAN due to the miasma of evil that pervades it. Anyone hearing the squarch whilst in here loses 1d3 points of SAN (without the option). If the party splits up whilst searching the cellars only those players in *Cellar 3* will be able to hear the squarch if it does turn up.

Notes: If a search of the cellars is arranged then, unless the players absolutely refuse it, the Keeper should ensure that Mary, Beaumont and Parsket are all included in the party. These three will automatically follow any investigator into the third cellar.

The hidden entrance can *only* be sealed using the Saaamaaa Ritual sign to be found in the Sigsand Manuscript, the Elder Sign is *not* sufficiently powerful to stop the squarch since it can project itself round the sign rather than having to pass through it.

The Tunnel

The tunnel from the third cellar is a fairly stable construction, despite having been built as far back as the time of the English Civil War. The fact that its exit into the manor grounds lies close to the grave of the dead stallion is actually pure coincidence. Since it has been used quite regularly by the squarch, it too has an atmosphere of evil about it so that players entering the tunnel from either end must make their SAN rolls or lose 1d4 SAN points. If, however, an investigator has been killed and dragged into the tunnel then the body – with the head and upper torso removed by a single, huge, semi-circular bite – will be found lying a few yards in from the mound end of the tunnel. Anyone finding a body in this state loses 1d6 SAN points with no chance of making a saving roll.

Finding the outer entrance to the tunnel will demand a successful Spot Hidden roll whilst in the area of the burial mound.

THE FOURTH DAY

Assuming that nothing has happened to precipitate events the climax of this adventure will occur around dusk on the fourth day. This means that the daylight hours of the day, during which all is quiet, will be the last opportunity for the investigators to find the special materials in the library.

As any Keepers worth their salt will have impressed on their players by now, the only time of real danger (excluding trips to the cellar) is during the hours of darkness. It is to be expected, therefore, that the players will have adopted some kind of regular protection for Miss Higsins and Beaumont from sun-down to sun-up each night. They should also be ready to bring this case to a successful conclusion (especially if they've found

the Sigsand Manuscript and studied it).

The final confrontation, as described by Hodgson, takes place at a specific location and at a specific time. In practice, however, it would be fairly difficult to stage the events exactly as Hodgson describes them so keepers may run the scene to suit themselves within the following guidelines:

1: The scene *must* be set after dark and will be preceded by sounds of hoofbeats in the grounds.

2: Parsket must be given a reasonable excuse for going off by himself shortly before the first event.

3: Within a few minutes of Parsket's exit the sound of neighing and hoofbeats will be heard close to the investigators and the lights will go out (except for any candles the investigators may have lit).

4: The sounds described above are being made by Parsket, who is now wearing a model of a horse's head and carrying a weighted pole with an iron horseshoe at the end. His insanity has now taken over and his only interest is to reach Beaumont and kill him.

5: The Keeper may make the ensuing battle as violent or brief as he likes, but Parsket must *not* be killed. Once he is brought under control the investigators may question him for a few moments and the Keeper should encourage them to believe that the mystery is over.

6: After an appropriate interval the neighing sounds and hoofbeats will be heard again somewhere within the house, and getting closer. The Keeper may encourage the idea that Parsket is managing to produce sounds somehow, though Parsket himself will be absolutely terrified as he knows that this is the real horse approaching.

7: What happens next will be decided by previous events (and the Keeper).

If the investigators have the Sigsand Manuscript they will be able to *bind* and then eliminate the squarch once and for all – for which they should receive an appropriate reward.

If the Sigsand Manuscript has not been found, but Miss Higsins is adequately protected, then Parsket should be allowed to break free and place himself between the horse and Miss Higsins. This will result in his death (from a heart attack brought on by fear), but won't solve the main problem – it will be up to the Keeper to decide whether to close the case here or give the players another chance to search the library.

If the players don't have the manuscript, and haven't taken adequate steps to protect Miss Higsins, then the squarch will destroy her, and then anyone else still close at hand. Any players managing to survive this onslaught should be penalised for bringing their profession into disrepute!

THE SIGSAND MANUSCRIPT

The Sigsand Manuscript will be more familiar to regular Cthulhu investigators under its other title – the Sussex Manuscript. As readers will, I'm sure, be well aware, the name Sussex is actually a corruption of South Saxon, whilst Sigsand is derived from the German words Sig (or sigu) and Sand. Taken literally Sigsand means 'victory sand', but is more correctly translated as 'victory of

the sand'. This rather cryptic title will not be found in any list of proper German names and is clearly an adopted name rather than a given name. The noted antiquarian Prof Wolf von Archensbak has noted that the earliest known copies of the Sigsand Manuscript can be dated to the time when Arab invaders ruled most of Southern Europe. On this basis he suggests that the author (or authors) of the manuscript had close contact with Arab mystics and that the 'sand' part of the name is a thinly-veiled reference to the true origin of much of the arcane knowledge contained within the document.

For the purposes of this investigation the manuscript will be found to contain two spells – *bind squarch* (cost 1 POW point), and *dispel squarch* (total cost 4 POW points from one or more players). Although the contents of the Sigsand Manuscript are 'positive' – as distinct from the decidedly negative or evil tone of, say, the Necronomicon – much of its subject matter is quite horrific and Keepers should apply the statistics given for the Sussex Manuscript to any player who reads this document.

The Squarch – and Saiitii Manifestations

The 'monster' in this investigation is a member of one of the Lesser Servitor Races believed to be vaguely related to the shantaks. It is not, however, truly autonomous in the way that most creatures of the Mythos are since it can only enter our part of the time/space continuum at the express command of a human agent.

The squarch which manifests itself as the White Horse of Shalladholm is, in fact, a saiitii being summoned by the occultist during the ceremony conducted over the dead stallion and bound by him to the Manor House and its occupants. It acquired a rather tenuous physical form as a direct consequence of the blacksmith's hatred, and the fibrous substance of this form was succoured by the terror of the various girls whose deaths it caused. The subsequent dearth of female victims has drained the squarch of some of its power otherwise the *dispel squarch* spell could only be affected at greater (possibly fatal) cost to the person or persons casting the spell.

Because saiitii manifestations do not conform to any standard Cthulhoid pattern no regular statistics can be supplied for them other than those given in the body of the text.

Signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual

The First and Eighth signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual (see below), when connected by a triple line, will effectively seal any opening in much the same way as the Elder Sign.

In the case of the squarch, this creature can render itself immune to the effects of certain sigils, runes, etc, by assuming a ring-shaped appearance so as to pass by the sign in all directions at once. It cannot pass *any* sign on one side only, nor can it divide in two, and therefore it cannot cross any opening totally bisected like the Saaamaaa symbol. □

