

WRATH OF THE PUMPKIN KING

A mystery written by Mikhail Aristov for play with the *Monster of the Week* (Revised Edition) rules by Michael Sands and Evil Hat Productions.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

PREFACE

The mystery takes place in Northern England before and around Halloween, and its overarching theme is nightmares. It consequently plays up the horror aspect of the game, while downplaying the action – in fact, no monsters in it have harm tracks. Nonetheless, the additional mechanics for diving into the victims' nightmares (see below) may offer ample opportunities to kick some ass.

The Divine, the Expert, the Monstrous, the Mundane, the Spell-slinger, and the Spooky playbooks are all viable choices for this mystery. When selecting gear and vehicles, keep in mind the United Kingdom's restrictive gun laws and left-hand traffic rules.

MYSTERY CONCEPT

Forty years ago, a young author from the small English town of Hardwick had managed to publish his debut horror novel *In the Eyes of the Jack-o-Lantern* through a vanity press. The novel, featuring a Halloween-themed monster named “the Pumpkin King”, was critically panned, and most of its 10,000 printed copies were returned to the author, Finley Russell. Discouraged by this experience, Finley never wrote again and spent the rest of his life working small jobs to gradually pay off the loans he took to get his book published.

Last October, Finley moved to the local retirement home, having no known living relatives. Most of his belongings, including stacks of *In the Eyes of...*, ended up in the garbage dump outside of town, where the books were discovered by three schoolboys skipping classes. Despite its lack of literary merit, the text of the novel had a grave effect on the trio, who became plagued with nightmares in the following week. On the All Hallows' Eve, Owen and Shawn died of heart failure in their sleep, while Max managed to convince his parents to move to Wales after burning his copy of the book.

Unbeknown to the boys, their fear was what allowed the monstrous entity described in the book, the Pumpkin King, to attain a sort of malicious self-awareness and intelligence, if not a corporeal form. After consuming two of the boys, the Pumpkin King went into hibernation, slowly gathering strength by feeding off the small fears of the townsfolk. Now, with the next Halloween fast approaching, the Pumpkin King is once again ready to terrify and to kill.

HOOK

A hunter's distant relative living in Hardwick may be hospitalized after failing to wake up from a nightmare. Alternatively, one of the hunters may be plagued by nightmares themselves, perhaps having read *In the Eyes of the Jack-o-Lantern* years ago, and identify the town in them as Hardwick. Lastly, the hunters may see a news report on a mysterious outbreak of nightmare-ridden comas in an otherwise insignificant English town, where two teenagers died a year prior.

COUNTDOWN

- Day** Three schoolboys from Hardwick read a copy of *In the Eyes of...*, allowing the Pumpkin King to manifest himself before killing two of them.
- Shadows** The Pumpkin King awakens from hibernation and sends his fearlings to invade the dreams of the townspeople.
- Dusk** Townspeople being falling prey to the Pumpkin King *en masse*. The St. Lucy's Hospital is over capacity.
- Sunset** The Pumpkin King's influence reaches into the material world. Fearlings are unleashed onto Hardwick.
- Nightfall** The Pumpkin King walks the waking world in the flesh.
- Midnight** Hardwick is removed from this reality entirely, becoming the otherworldly domain of a new Dark Lord of Terror.

CUSTOM MOVES

- **A Note of Panic:** At the start of the mystery, each player must write down one to three of their hunter's deepest fears or darkest secrets on separate slips of paper. The slips are then to be folded, clearly tagged with the hunter's name, and passed over to the Keeper.
- **Scent of Dread:** Whenever a player misses a **+Sharp** or **+Weird** roll (even if it's negated with Luck), the Keeper may unfold one of their slips, representing the Pumpkin King's growing awareness of their hunters' weaknesses, and use anything they find in it against the hunters. Acting against anything the player had listed as their hunter's fear requires an **Act Under Pressure** roll, with the pressure being succumbing to that fear.
- **Nightmare Dive:** During this mystery, the hunters may pick "Enter a nearby person's nightmare" as the effect of the **Use Magic** move. While inside a nightmare (their own or another person's), the hunters may use any skills and gear they had in the waking world. Dying in a nightmare inflicts 1-harm (internal ignore-armor) on their body in the waking world.

THREATS

THE PUMPKIN KING, LORD OF NIGHTMARES

Monster: Parasite (motivation: to infest, control and devour)

The Pumpkin King is a creature of pure malice and terror that feeds on people's fears, regardless of whether this fear is of him and his minions or of anything else. Although lacking a physical manifestation (yet) and able to change his form at whim, the Pumpkin King's "default" appearance is that of a very tall humanoid figure clad in tattered rags with a disproportionately large jack-o-lantern for a head. His eyes glow with eerily flickering red, and his head bears a small iron crown with many sharp edges.

Originating as a bogeyman in Finley Russell's unsuccessful horror novel *In the Eyes of the Jack-o-Lantern*, the Pumpkin King did not exist as a self-aware entity until last year, when three teenagers found a copy of the book at the Hardwick garbage dump and were so terrified by the text that their fear allowed the creature to manifest. Feasting on the boys' nightmares, the Pumpkin King directly caused the deaths of two of them, before the third one fled the town, to which the monster appears to be bound for some reason.

After gathering strength for almost a year, the Pumpkin King is ready to take on Hardwick with his army of fearlings. As his *modus operandi* is to feed on fear, he chooses his victims with precision and deliberation, targeting a few to maximize the terror and confusion of everyone around them.

Powers

- **A Name That Crawls:** The true name of the Pumpkin King is contagious: anyone who reads it from the pages of the original novel, or hears it from someone who did, and so on, becomes "infected", giving him access to their dreams, fears, and, ultimately, to their minds and souls.
- **Visage of Fear:** The Pumpkin King can appear as anything or anyone he wants, though he prefers to take on the form that would terrify the onlooker the most.
- **Nightmare Cage:** The Pumpkin King can trap sleeping people inside their nightmares, so they are unable to wake up unless they confront and overcome their fears. With enough power, the Pumpkin King can transform an entire town like Hardwick into a giant Nightmare Cage. If successful in escaping their Cage, the victim may recover a piece of it – a "nightmare shard", – which materializes into a small physical object resembling some aspect of their dream.

Weakness The Pumpkin King cannot be destroyed as long as there is a living being that knows his true name. However, if enough "nightmare shards" are collected, perhaps a Big Magic ritual can be conducted to seal the evil entity away until some future time when he can be better dealt with.

FEARLINGS, THE DREAM INVADERS

Minion: Brute (motivation: to intimidate and attack)

Fearlings are lesser spirits of terror serving the Pumpkin King. They do not have a fixed appearance or a physical form and instead invade the minds and dreams of the townsfolk, turning them into nightmares with extreme efficiency.

Powers

- **Visage of Fear:** Like their master, the fearlings take on the shape most terrifying to the onlooker. Unlike him, however, they cannot change shape voluntarily.
- **Whisper in the Dark:** Although the fearlings cannot communicate intelligibly (their individual intelligence is comparable to that of a shepherd dog), they somehow manage to impart their master's true name upon the minds they occupy.

FINLEY RUSSELL, THE HORROR UNDERSTUDY

Minion: Renfield (motivation: to push victims towards the monster)

Forty years ago, Finley Russell was a hopeful young author striving to make a name for himself in the horror genre. When his debut novel, *In the Eyes of the Jack-o-Lantern* bombed with the critics and the readers alike, he abandoned his writing career and spent the next decades of his life slowly repaying the debts he incurred to publish his book.

Now in his sixties, Finley is a bitter old man spending his lonely days at the Hardwick retirement home for the elderly. After the Pumpkin King manifested himself a year ago, Finley somehow became aware of his existence and seeks to serve him in a desperate attempt to validate his life.

Fear: Debt collectors.

MAX BURTON, THE SHELL-SHOCKED SCHOOLBOY

Bystander: Witness (motivation: to reveal information)

A year ago, Max and his two best friends, Owen Parker and Shawn Wilson, became the unwitting progenitors and first victims of the Pumpkin King. Max was the only survivor of his rampage. Believing to have destroyed him by burning the copies of *In the Eyes of...* he and his late friends brought home, Max convinced his parents to move to their relatives in Wales. Even a year later, Max is tormented by (ordinary) nightmares and by his inability to share his experience with anyone, for the fear of being locked up in an asylum.

Fear: Needles.

DR. ELEANOR CLARKE, THE HEAD PHYSICIAN

Bystander: Skeptic (motivation: to deny supernatural explanations)

Head physician of the St. Lucy's Hospital in Hardwick, Dr. Clarke is a single mother, following an unfulfilling marriage and a messy divorce procedure. Although she strives to be there for her darling son Samuel as much as she can, her professional duties keep her away from home on long night shifts far too often, causing her considerable anguish. As a result of constant stress, Eleanor is a heavy smoker.

Fear: That her ex-husband kidnaps their son while she is away at work.

SAMUEL CLARKE, THE MODEL STUDENT

Bystander: Innocent (motivation: to do the right thing)

A scrawny young man, Sam grew up in an unhappy household, between a workaholic mother and an alcoholic father prone to domestic violence. Following their divorce, Sam stayed with his mother, whom he loves dearly and always strives to make proud, despite her being seemingly too busy to notice. Samuel was a classmate of Max, Owen, and Shawn, but since they had a reputation of trouble-makers, he didn't associate with them much. He certainly didn't take Owen and Shawn's sudden deaths as hard as Max.

Fear: Failure and ridicule at school.

ROBERT GREEN, THE FIDGETY HOMEROOM TEACHER

Bystander: Gossip (motivation: to pass on rumors)

Robert Green is the homeroom and mathematics teacher of Samuel and, until recently, of Max, Owen, and Shawn. An obese and fidgety man in his forties, Green sweats constantly and is deathly afraid of small spaces, for instance, insisting on opening the classroom window even in the middle of winter. Although he didn't approve of Owen and Shawn's delinquent tendencies, he cared for the boys, and their deaths affected him as if they were his own sons.

Fear: Claustrophobia.

KIERAN BRADLEY, THE HYPERACTIVE EDITOR

Bystander: Busybody (motivation: to interfere in other people's plans)

Kieran Bradley is the founder, editor-in-chief, and sole on-staff employee of the *Hardwick Herald*, Hardwick's premier (and only) local newspaper. A hyperactive man in late forties, he maintains an extensive card-file on the important events and milestones of the town, some going as far as the Elizabethan era.

Fear: Open fire (pyrophobia).

OTHER VICTIMS

Aside from the bystanders listed above, the Keeper is encouraged to introduce additional victims of the monster and their respective fears and nightmares for the hunters to save and to resolve, respectively. A sample selection of possible victims is listed below – you can pick whichever character seems to fit the current situation best or just roll a d12 to introduce one randomly.

#	Name	Occupation	Fear
1	Dominic Bennett	Trucker	Dismemberment by closing doors
2	Kyle Patton	Veteran	Balloons popping
3	Ethan Young	Secretary	Being stuck in an elevator
4	Vanessa Hart	Student	Being exposed while watching porn
5	Luke Morris	Nurse	Being followed at night
6	Sarah Kaur	Housewife	Heights
7	Grant Dixon	Park ranger	Social interactions
8	Tegan Wallace	Bank manager	Leaving home with no pants
9	Blake Mooney	Hairdresser	Insects and spiders
10	Joshua Ball	Shop assistant	Toothy things hiding in toilet sinks
11	Norah Meyer	Antique dealer	Darkness
12	Charles Day	Writer	Mold on food

HOLLIE CAINE, THE HOMELESS WEIRDO

Bystander: Helper (motivation: to join the hunt)

A quiet, malnourished girl in her early twenties, Hollie is homeless, mostly found loitering in the vicinity of St. Lucy's Hospital – which is just as well, given her propensity to getting hurt and abused. The nurses and hospital staff have long suspected some kind of mental disorder in her, manifesting in a dangerous deficiency of the self-preservation instinct and, indeed, of capacity for fear itself. A fortunate side effect of this, however, is that Hollie is the only person in the town whose mind is impervious to the Pumpkin King's powers.

In the unlikely event that none of the hunters is capable of even rudimentary magic, Hollie helps them to access others' nightmares with her own clumsy mystical powers.

HARDWICK, A SLEEPY COUNTRYSIDE TOWN

Location: Den (motivation: to harbor monsters)

Hardwick is a small countryside town somewhere in Northern England. Nothing of note happened here since the founding of the town during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, so the sudden and unexplainable death of two teenagers last year was a major shock to the community. Heavy fog blankets the town streets and surrounding areas in October.

ST. LUCY'S HOSPITAL

Location: Lab (motivation: to create weirdness)

The central clinic of Hardwick, St. Lucy's Hospital is located in better-off part of town. Founded under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church a century ago, many nuns still serve here to care for the sick. Despite chief physician Dr. Eleanor Clarke's efforts, the hospital has trouble obtaining and installing modern medical machinery.

If the Pumpkin King can be said to have a birthplace, it would be the hospital ICU where Shawn and Owen died in their sleep a year ago.

THE GOLDEN ROOSTER, A TRADITIONAL PUB

Location: Crossroads (motivation: to bring people, and things, together)

The Golden Rooster is a popular meeting spot for the townsfolk to unwind after a stressful day. The proprietor, Zachary Chapman, is known for his photographic memory and for treating all new patrons to a free drink.