NightShift:

The Casefiles of Anomalous Crimes Division

A **Brave New World of Secrets and Lies.**
By Captain Thark

The first thing I noticed when I walked in the door was the Mouse with its guts flayed open on the desk. It's little heart was still beating, it's lungs still inhaling and exhaling. All kinds of wires were attached to it, plugged into some kind of mechanical apparatus arcing with electrical energy, and covered with little spinning parts I couldn't identify a use for.

Sitting at the desk was a tall gaunt man, somehow towering and diminutive at the same time. He was watching an the waves on an oscilloscope coalesce and mutate into various cryptic patterns. He kept rubbing his temple, and scrawling various observations in a battered spiral-bound notebook.

I cleared my thought, hoping to get his attention. Without turning his head, he said in a low voice "I don't recognize you, what do you want?". "Well, I was just recruited for the job here". I replied.

The man paused his writing, slowly set his pen down, and stood up. His yellow left eye pierced into me "Ah" he said "then you are my new partner!"

NightShift takes place in The City. The city is the only city in the world, as far as it knows. Two years ago, it was one of the various urban centers in the USA, people buzzing about living their little lives in relative peace. Today, it has been relocated to a completely alien island chain in the middle of a totally uncharted ocean, threatened by creatures that defy any sort of explanation at all.

The Shift

Three years ago, a whole city up and vanished. You were in it at the time. The strange phenomena now known as the lights filled the city for a day, and then you all were gone. The city filled with Lights and fog, strange creatures lurked everywhere, and no one knew what was going on. You don't know how long it lasted, some people say it was seconds, some say it was a year, but no one disagrees that after a while, everything went totally black. A while after that, the sun rose over The City for the first time in its new home.

Another world entirely.

The City

The City used to have another name, back when it was one of many cities in the world named Earth. Now, it is the only city in a new world without any name.

People in The City

Those who live in The City are regular folk, honest workers, criminals, businessmen, merchants, all the sorts that make up any city on earth are represented here. They work, they play, they live their lives as best they can with the threat of The Lights constantly over their heads. All of them have a story about

how things were before The Shift came. They all have their theories about what *really* caused The Shift. They also all know they don't remember everything they should. They don't talk about it much, but they all know that something is *missing* from their heads. They might remember the presidency of Ronald Reagan, but they could not say who the president was before the shift. They could tell you the name of the town where they grew up in, but not the name The City used to have. This is true for all, but no one talks about any of these things, the implications are too worrying.

Life in The City

The City is on an island chain in the middle of a sea that no one has yet named. While some parts of The City sunk on arrival after the shift, the vast majority materialized on the land. Most people here don't drive cars, as there is no where to get gas. The easiest way to get around is a series of street cars erected in the last three years. The street cars are powered by electricity primarily generated from tidal and wind power, with some geo thermal energy extracted from the southern volcanic islands. Most buildings are as they were before The Shift, with the exception of being covered in wires and cables to keep The Lights from getting inside.

The City Government

The City is ruled by a city council of businessmen, politicians, engineers, and scientists who control the power grid. Because electricity is necessary to repel The Lights, they are nearly impossible to oppose. Fortunately, most are too afraid of rebellion to anger the populace. The most senior of the group is Mayor Fletcher, a gray haired hardass who does not tolerate incompetence from anyone, and largely keeps the many factions in City politics from killing each other through force of will alone. All law enforcement, including Anomalous Crimes Division, answers directly to him when he wants them too.

The Islands

The island chain is relatively large, and most are not covered by The City. The islands cover an area roughly the size of Japan. The southernmost island has a volcano on it, and all of the southern islands have many features caused by the large amount of geothermal activity. The fertile soil from the volcano mean most of the islands are excellent for growing crops, and thus provide most of the food for The City. There are also many varieties of alien aquatic life that have been found to be quite edible. Throughout the island are various ruins of indeterminate origin. The vary sight of these crypts give people a disquieting feeling, and their origin remains totally unknown as no archeological expeditions have been launched to investigate them until recently.

The Lights

The Lights are the bane of every human who lives in The City. They come every night, and when they concentrate, they spawn horrible creatures. Lizards that walk like man, entities composed of a mask and a silken sash, a perfect sphere. That is, the platonic *idea* of a sphere that's perfect in every way. The creature spawned by the lights only wish to unmake reality, turning people to stone, or eating all the red haired people they see. Whatever they exist to do, it is baneful to life in the city. The Lights can mutate humans into monsters, and can create places where reality is…broken. They can make things fall up, turn brick buildings to flesh, and turn water into acid. The lights can even change people, giving them strange physical deformities, such as red eyes, or gills. And on top of all of this, The Shift was the first things the lights did.

Because of this, all buildings have a web of electrical equipment covering them called a barrier. The cables draping the buildings are charged with electricity pulsing at a certain frequency that has been found to repel the lights. This means anyone inside is safe at night.

However none who walk the streets are safe.

Anomalous Crimes Division

In this strange city, this powder keg, this nightmare, there are crimes beyond all sanity. There are mysteries that should not have answers. There are people who disappear, and the turn up with their heads fused with a brick wall a week later. There are people who have learned to control The Lights with their thoughts. There are people who have been changed by The Lights. And there are criminals who fall into either category. There are things no one can possibly expected to cope with.

And Anomalous Crimes calls that Monday.

When it became clear in the aftermath of The Shift that some crimes were occurring that involved forces beyond any previously dealt with by a conventional police force, the Mayor issued City Order Thirteen, which called for the formation of a task force in every precinct that was unusually suited to dealing with the paranormal elements that menace The City. These individuals were found from all blocks of life, cops, scientists, crazies, cultists, anyone or anything that had a knack for dealing with That Man Was Not Meant To Know. Many were a burnt synapse away from becoming the very forces that they were hired to combat. Of course, Anomalous Crimes gave them an outlet for their eccentricities, and has made them the best defense The City has.

The Game

In Night Shift, you take on the role of an Investigator in the Anomalous Crimes Division of The City's police department. You take the cases no one else can handle, cases that would drive any normal person mad.

Fortunately, you're not a normal person. You may have powers that seem totally rational to you, but others would call magic. You might create machine that run on air, you might turn into a hideous monster at will, or you could just be a guy with the brains of Sherlock Holmes, the Charm of James Bond, and the physical skill of a ninja. Or like Columbo if Columbo took a lot of acid and fought monsters.

Any way you slice it, you're not exactly normal, and you and your colleagues are the only one who can crack the case.

This game assumes you know how to play an Roleplaying Game, that you know PC means Player Character and GM means Game Master and what that means in a RPG context. It also assumes you have an imagination.

Character creation:

Traits

First, choose three personal traits you gained in the time before the Shift. Choose one of them as the most important, and write an asterisk by it. Now, choose three traits you gained after the Shift, also pencil in an asterisk by the most important. Now, choose three new traits you gained from an event involving another PC, these can be from before or after the event, mark one of these as the most

influential to you with an asterisk as well. These are the building blocks of your character, and the most important things about him. They are who you are, and what you can do. Choose clever things, things that make you laugh, things that sound badass, and always pick things that sound fun.

Assets

Now, select six points of assets. Assets can be mundane abilities, or anomalous powers. Mudane abilities tend to help the investigation, and powers tend to help in conflicts. Write a brief description of the asset (Such as what it looks like when you use the power, or that it represents a bartender you know), and then write the actual asset in parentheses. These are things that

Asset List

*Defense: Reduce the ATK value by four minus the number of Links this asset has, min zero.
*Attack: You attacks reduce the threat's HP by four minus the number of Links this asset has.
*Special Trait: This is an extra trait, it's totally just like a regular trait. Since it's an asset, it should probably be something extra cool and/or weird.
*Caution: When the GM spends a threat token, make a roll as if this was a trait. If successful, you avoid the problems headed your way and the DM loses one threat token. In addition, the GM may not introduce a threat this turn or the next.
*Growth: Roll this as a trait, if successful; add two beads to your map.
*Aide: Roll this as a trait. If you succeed, two allies may add one bead to their map, or one ally may add two.
*Evade: Roll this as a trait. If successful, end the scene, and start a new one as normal. The GM may not use any threats used in this scene in the new scene, but may do so in the next.

Link up Traits and Assets

Now you must link up your Traits and assets. You may have any number of links, but you must be able to trace a route from any trait or asset to any other trait or asset. (IE: No loose ends). More links means you're more flexible, and you have more control over how you can advance or be set back, but less links means you're more powerful and competent.

Congratulations! You've just made a star Investigator in the Anomalous Crimes Division! Now, fight the good fight!

Rules Concepts

Character Map: This is a network of Nodes (Traits, Stats, and Assets) and lines connecting them called Links. This represents your character, what skills and abilities they have, and how those things connect together in your head. Unlike most games, you can't use all your abilities at once when you start an Investigation; you have to activate them one at a time.

Activating Nodes: A node is considered active when you mark it with a bead. A bead can be anything you want, as long as you can place or remove it easily. You can't use a node unless it's activated. Certain actions in the game allow you to activate abilities. You can only activate a node that has a Link with a node that is already activated, or is one of your key traits. These guidelines apply whenever you add a bead, whether through an action or asset.

Trait Rolls: Sometimes the rules will call for a trait roll. This means rolling a number of six sided dice equal to the links the trait has. The roll fails if any of your dice come up a one, any other result is successful. You may only make a trait roll when a Trait is active, if for some reason no trait are active, all rolls are considered failures.

The Investigation Map: This is a map made by the GM to describe the mystery the Investigators have set out to solve. This is almost exactly like a character map, except it's not used to determine any roles.

Investigations, Scenes, and Turns: Scenes are things framed by the players about their investigation. Some things only last a Scene. Turns are segments of a scene where a player takes an action, and then the GM may or may not react. An investigation represents one case the Investigators unravel.

Threat Tokens:

Procedure of Play
Before play begins, the GM needs to prepare a Map of the mystery the players are going to investigate. I'll go into this in the GM's section, skip ahead to find out how, or just read how the Map interacts with the PCs actions in play.

Play goes in a series of phases, one where the GM explains the problem the players must solve, one where the players investigate and solve the problem, and a phase to explain any lose ends and work out some last bookkeeping.

Phase One: Introduction

1) Setting the Scene: Every day for the Anomalous Crimes Division begins with a problem. A kidnapping, a murder, rumors of drug dealers somewhere in the city. The only the thing all the crimes have in common is that all of them involve the things that could be considered…*unusual*.
The introduction involves the GM setting the scene of their briefing on the case, this could be back at the office, the crime scene, an anonomous telephone call in the middle of the night to one of the PCs, whatever. The Investigators should get a good idea of the main questions that need answering, and anything that's immediately weird about the situation.

2) Prep Work: Now the PCs place three beads on their Character Map, and the GM draws one Threat Token for each PC. These follow all the regular rules, including only being able to place a bead on a Key Trait or one that links with an already active trait.

3) Decide the First Scene: Now that the stage has been set, the players decide what tact they're going to take in this investigation. This entails where the next scene will take place, and why they're going there. If the PCs have no idea what to do, then it's not a bad idea to add a few more details to the situation.

Phase Two: Investigation

1) Set the Scene: Now, the GM should describe the details of the scene chosen by the PCs. This includes basic details of what's going on, and what the place looks like; maybe have some dialogue with any subjects that might be there. Note, PCs don't have to be in the same location in a scene, and can split up. Any threats in a scene can only affect the Investigators near it. Threats can move locations between scenes, however. The GM also draws one Threat Token per PC.

2) Decide the order of action: The players must determine what order they will take their actions in. This order cannot be changed for the rest of the Scene.

3) Investigator Turn: The Investigators now takes their actions. Each turn you may make two actions from the following list:
Investigate: Explain what tact you are taking to further the investigation, and make a Trait Roll. If successful, you manage to make progress in the case, and reveal a new link or a new node. The GM should narrate the exact circumstances based on your explanation, and decide which node or linkyou uncover.
Bolster: Activate a node on your Character Map adjacent to another activated node.
Assist: Make a trait roll to help a specific action of another PC in a later turn. IF you succeed the roll, the chosen player may reroll a failed check later in this scene.
Fight: The Investigator may make a trait roll attack a Threat. Choose whether it's mental or physical, and narrate your attack. If you succeed, reduce the Threat's HP by one.
Take Precautions: Remove a threat token form the GM's pool.
Use an Asset: Choose an asset and use it.

4) GM's Turn: After an investigator has taken both their actions, the GM may take theirs. The GM MAY choose one of the following
Call for a roll: The GM narrates some mishap that befalls a character, and chooses an active Trait of that player. That player must make a successful Trait Roll, if the roll is failed, remove it's bead. The GM may do this once for every two people Investigators per scene. The GM may spend a threat token to do this as well.
Introduce a Threat: The GM may spend several threat tokens to create a threat. The rules for this are in the GM's section.
Attack: Describe an action a Threat takes to set back a PC. The PC may make a Trait roll, if that roll fails, they must remove one bead from their map for each point of ATK the threat has. The beads must be linked, and start with the Trait used to defend against the attack.
Reintroduce a Threat: Any threat that still has HP from a previous scene may be reintroduced. This is like creating a threat, except no tokens need be spent.
Thicken the Plot: Draw a threat token.

5) Next investigator: Go back to step three, except go to the next investigator in order. If all the investigators have taken their actions, and the GM has had a chance to respond to each, go to the next step.

6) End of Scene: If any PCs have no nodes active now, they are out for the Investigation at least. How should be obvious from how the GM described the attacks from his threats.
If all the links and nodes on the Investigation Map have been discovered, or the PCs have worked out the mystery on their own, go to Phase Three, otherwise, the PCs decide the next scene; play returns to the first step of Phase Two.

Phase Three: Resolution

1) Determine Final Scene: Now the PCs have figured out what's going on, and they know what they have to do to stop it. Each adds two beads to their Map. In addition, in preparation for the final fight, each PC may explain things they're doing to make the next fight easier, and each may make a trait roll. Reduce the GM's threat token pool by one for each successful roll. Now, it's time for a showdown!

2) The Boss: The GM may now spend any threat tokens they want to create the final obstacles in the PC's way. These are created as normal threats. The GM may also introduce any threats from a previous scene.

3) FIGHT!: The battle is on! The rest of the scene plays out as a normal scene would, with the exception that it's pointless to Investigate the mystery any further. The GM and PCs take swipes at each other until only one side has anything in play. Then it's over.

4) It's Over: After the PCs have wiped up any threats, it's time to narrate what happens because of the PCs, good or bad. Now it's finished, and time to go home. There should be a lot of back and forth narration between the PCs and the GM, but nothing bad happens.

…to the Players at least. If you have an idea for next week, you should totally describe a preview of the next session's crime.

GMing procedures

Making the Investigation Map

Before play starts, the GM must create a mystery for the players to solve. This is accomplished by making a Map similar to a Character Map. It's composed of nodes and links like the Character Map. Each node is a fact in the case, a person, or any other subject crucial to understanding the Mystery. Each link is how the evidence connects together. All of the nodes should link together, without any loose ends (unless those loose ends start adding up over the course of the campaign).

Mysteries can and should be very surreal. Even if it just boils down to something a murder used to cover his tracks, finding the floor covered with *exactly one inch* of skin is going to freak people out. DO stuff like that. It's also cool to link stuff together over multiple mysteries. Why *was* there blue paint at the crime scene every Investigation? And why do all the Perps claim they painted things *yellow*?

Making threats

Threats are people, places, or things that set the character back. You make them by spending threat tokens. When you spend a Threat Token to create a threat, it has HP1/ATK1. You may spend more tokens, however. Each token you spend increases either the HP or ATK by one.

HP means Hit Points; this is how much it takes to remove a threat. ATK means Attack; this is the number of beads removed from a character map by the threat.

Note that if a threat isn't dealt with in a scene, it can return until it losses all it's HP.

Threats can literally be anything. They could be goons from the mafia, stone-skinned blood sucking horror, a blob of slime, even excess paperwork! The important thing is that it fits in the logic of the story, and it can logically hinder the PCs. A PC losing all their links doesn't mean that they're dead, it just mean they're out of the picture. Go nuts!