

TRANSCRIPTS FOR MAY 2019

GAMES FROM FOLKTALES

An experiment in podcasting for the
Ars Magica roleplaying game

PU: JUSTICE FOR REBELS
PU: DUTCH CARPET
MANNAN MACLIR
THE ENCHANTED ISLAND
CORNWALL: NEGOTIUM PERAMBULANS
JUNE 2019 MONSTER UPDATE

PATREONS

BEN MCFARLAND

DAN CASAR

DANIEL JENSEN

JARKMAN DEVRIES

JASON ITALIANO

JASON NEWQUIST

JASON TONDRO

THOMAS STEWART

THE RAVING

SAVANT

AND

ANONYMOUS

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Pu: Justice for Rebels

This week another recording from “Strange Stories From A Chinese Studio” by Songling Pu. Thanks to the readers from LibriVox who have read this book into the public domain.

During the reign of Shun Chih, of the people of T'êng-i, seven in ten were opposed to the Manchu dynasty. The officials dared not touch them; and subsequently, when the country became more settled, the magistrates used to distinguish them from the others by always deciding any cases in their favour: for they feared lest these men should revert to their old opposition. And thus it came about that one litigant would begin by declaring himself to have been a “rebel,” while his adversary would follow up by shewing such statement to be false; so that before any case could be heard on its actual merits, it was necessary to determine the status both of plaintiff and defendant, whereby infinite labour was entailed upon the Registrars.

Now it chanced that the yamên of one of the officials was haunted by a fox, and the official's daughter was bewitched by it. Her father, therefore, engaged the services of a magician, who succeeded in capturing the animal and putting it into a bottle; but just as he was going to commit it to the flames, the fox cried out from inside the bottle, “I'm a rebel!” at which the bystanders were unable to suppress their laughter.

The fox in this story is a fairy and it shows that fairies can warp stories around human secrets and conspiracies. This may explain why Hermetic Magi now use little tablets (that they can hand around) for poking holes in the Aegis of the Hearth. A faerie could give away a password, the secret phrase to a local society or criminal gang, or the method of entering an area protected by the spell The Shrouded Glen, or the verbal trigger for a magical item.



Pu: The Dutch Carpet

A quick story from Songling Pu:

Formerly, when the Dutch were permitted to trade with China, the officer in command of the coast defences would not allow them, on account of their great numbers, to come ashore. The Dutch begged very hard for the grant of a piece of land such as a carpet would cover; and the officer above-mentioned, thinking that this could not be very large, acceded to their request. A carpet was accordingly laid down, big enough for about two people to stand on; but by dint of stretching, it was soon enough for four or five; and so they went on, stretching and stretching, until at last it covered about an acre, and by-and-by, with the help of their knives, they had filched a piece of ground several miles in extent.

I believe I first heard this story about a woman who bargained for a oxhide of space to build her nunnery, but I've seen variants in other places. I recall a king who bargained this much land with the vikings, as another example.

It makes a fine covenant origin story: your ancestors bargained for space to unfold a picnic blanket and, as it happens, it reached from from the top of the hill all the way to the river. Your covenant has many fine spinners in it, and has a festival each year to celebrate the blanket. You carry it about during the Aegis of the Hearth ritual and sometimes check its memories for point s of covenant history. The design on the blanket is like a battle tartan for your grogs.

In *Ars Magica*, we have supernatural realms which bargain with mortals, either wanting land or giving it away. A demon who asks enough land to bury one of his servants: just enough for his shroud and no more. A faerie who seeks enough land for the hooves of his horse, and no extra. Magi who seeks enough of a church's lands to raise a beacon fire. Magi who deal with a faerie court, for as much land as rests in the shadow of a coin.

I used to try and pull these stories back in university, but one of my players was studying law and pointed out that lacking a meeting of the minds, there is no contract. I'm not sure if this is true of medieval laws, in various places, but it certainly seems effective with faeries and, surprisingly, demons.

Why demons allows themselves to be tricked has been discussed in various other locations, such as *Sanctuary of Ice*, but, in short, it tempts others to wager with demons if there is a monument to a demon losing. Also, some of the "losses" were just greater evils in the making: a lot of the Devil's Bridges have been in the right place to allow conquering armies to cross rivers.

Man – Mannanan MacLir

This is a bonus episode.

In following months we'll be moving on from "The Stories of a Chinese Studio" by Pu to "Manx Fairy Tales" by Sophia Morrison. Morrison is kind of like the Brothers Grimm for Manx fairy tales: if you've heard manx fairy tales, you have heard her work. She also acted as the editor for a magazine that and was a leading light in the Manx cultural revival movement, which led to the rescuing of the Manx language. I will be going through her journal, now that it's available electronically, to look for the sort of material that hasn't quite filtered into the role-playing sphere yet.

There have been several attempts to stat up the Isle of Man for Ars Magica because, from a very early edition, it was decided that there had been several attempts to put a covenant on Man and that each of them had failed. Whichever covenant could claim Man could decide which tribunal it would go into. I know I wrote up a very early version, using paper tourist sources which were available to me in the early 90s. There was a far more comprehensive version done by someone else in one of the other fanzines.

As it has already been done a couple of times I didn't want this foundational myth to be your only episode this week: hence the bonus episode.

The recording used was released into the public domain through the LibriVox Project by a reader called Sonia. Sonia has been reading for LibriVox forever. She's got about 3,000 entries in the LibriVox catalogue and that's not exaggerating for emphasis. Thank you so much to Sonia and all of the team at LibriVox.

For those of you who've heard this story before I do apologise, but I think it's an important foundation before we go on with the rest of the folklore of the Isle of Man. Your saga of course may vary

Manannan Mac y Leirr, the Son of the Sea, was the first Ruler of Mann. He was a great Wizard, and he was so powerful that afterwards he was looked on as a god. He had a great stone fort on Peel Island, and he could make one man, standing on its battlements, seem to be a hundred. When he saw his enemies' ships sailing, he would cover the island round with a silver mist so that it could not be seen; and if, in spite of the mist, his enemies came near, he would throw chips into the water and change them into ships.

He was out walking one day on Barrule, when he saw the warships of the Northmen were in the bay of Peel. And with that he made himself into the shape of three legs and rolled like a wheel down from the mountain top as fast as the wind. It jwas about low tide in the harbour, and there ran a stream of sparkling water out to sea. Now the banks of the stream were marshy, and by the river-side grew a quantity of sedge with broad, green leaves. So Manannan made little boats of the sedge, a good number of them, and sailed his boats in the stream. And when the little fleet floated out of the harbour, he caused them to look like great ships of war, well manned with fighting men. Then terror seized on the Northmen when they saw the Manx fleet, and they cut their cables, hoisted sails, and cleared away as fast as they could, and Manannan and his island were left in peace. Thus did he keep Mann, and not with his sword, or his bow and arrows.

In his fort he had a great banqueting-hall, where handsome boys made sweet music, and others played games and did great feats of strength. He had a horse called Enbarr of the Flowing Mane, who could travel like the wind over sea as well as land, swift hounds that could catch any wild beast, and a sword called The Answerer,[173]whose wound was always fatal, besides his Magic Branch and his wonderful boat, Wave Sweeper.

He governed Mann well for long, long years. Manx people had the best of good treatment from him, and all the rent he wanted was that each one was to bring a bundle of green rushes to him on the Mountain of South Barrule on Midsummer Eve. The island was a happy place, full of sunshine and all pleasant things, and no person there was old or tired or sad.

Manx men have never forgotten Manannan, and this thousand years our fishermen have prayed to him the following prayer, as they have put out to sea. Even up to the days of our fathers it has been used:

Manannan Beg Mac y Leirr—
Little Manannan Son of the Sea,
Who blessed our island,
Bless us and our boat, going out well.
Coming in better, with living and dead in our boat.

Man – The Enchanted Isle

I've been talking with Ben from Sub Rosa about whether it would be useful to create some background information for an adventure, and record it as an audio episode, so that players on their way to a convention could absorb the background information while they're driving.

That reminded me of this little story, which I think player-characters should hear from a redcap or from an old fisherman, to start them on the quest for Mannan's Island. It's clearly a fairy regio and, if I make the calculations correctly, May Day falls on a Sunday in 1222, 1229 and add seven to extrapolate the pattern.

The recording used in the podcast was released into the public domain through LibriVox by John. Thanks to John and all of his support team over at LibriVox. It's from Manx Fairy Tales'' by Sophia Morrison.

Out under the Irish Sea, fifteen or sixteen miles south-west of the Calf, there is an enchanted isle. Long, long ago it was on the surface of the water—that was in the days when Manannan ruled in Mann—but when Saint Patrick drove Manannan and his men from the island in the form of three-legged creatures, they came upon this isle. Manannan dropped it to the bottom of the sea, and they were seen no more.

Now it is the home of Manannan Mac y Leirr, Son of the Sea, and he rules it as he used to rule Mann. But once in seven years, when Old May Day is on a Sunday, the isle may be seen. It rises up from the sea just before sunrise, like a beautiful vision, and Manannan looks once more at Ellan Vannin.

The hills of the enchanted isle are green, white foam rings it round, and if you are near enough you may see the tossing arms and golden hair of the Mermaids by the water's edge washing their glittering jewels, and hear the singing of birds, and smell the fragrant scent of flowers. But as the first rays of the sun rest upon its highest hills, it sinks into the deep, deep sea.

Cornwall: Negotium Perambulans

This is the 200th episode of Games From Folktales, so you're going to have to indulge me, dear reader. I'm sharing a fiction piece. It's set in Cornwall and has a creature which is presumably, in Ars Magica terms, an Accuser: that is, a demon who hunts sinners and claims to be sent from God.

The recording that follows was released into the public domain through LibriVox. Thanks again to all of the gang from LibriVox, particularly Rafe Ball, this week's reader. The story was written by E.F. Benson and came into the public domain this year.

The casual tourist in West Cornwall may just possibly have noticed, as he bowled along over the bare high plateau between Penzance and the Land's End, a dilapidated signpost pointing down a steep lane and bearing on its battered finger the faded inscription "Polearn 2 miles," but probably very few have had the curiosity to traverse those two miles in order to see a place to which their guide-books award so cursory a notice. It is described there, in a couple of unattractive lines, as a small fishing village with a church of no particular interest except for certain carved and painted wooden panels (originally belonging to an earlier edifice) which form an altar-rail. But the church at St. Creed (the tourist is reminded) has a similar decoration far superior in point of preservation and interest, and thus even the ecclesiastically disposed are not lured to Polearn. So meagre a bait is scarce worth swallowing, and a glance at the very steep lane which in dry weather presents a carpet of sharp-pointed stones, and after rain a muddy watercourse, will almost certainly decide him not to expose his motor or his bicycle to risks like these in so sparsely populated a district. Hardly a house has met his eye since he left Penzance, and the possible trundling of a punctured bicycle for half a dozen weary miles seems a high price to pay for the sight of a few painted panels.

Polearn, therefore, even in the high noon of the tourist season, is little liable to invasion, and for the rest of the year I do not suppose that a couple of folk a day traverse those two miles (long ones at that) of steep and stony gradient. I am not forgetting the postman in this exiguous estimate, for the days are few when, leaving his pony and cart at the top of the hill, he goes as far as the village, since but a few hundred yards down the lane there stands a large white box, like a sea-trunk, by the side of the road, with a slit for letters and a locked door.

Should he have in his wallet a registered letter or be the bearer of a parcel too large for insertion in the square lips of the sea-trunk, he must needs trudge down the hill and deliver the troublesome missive, leaving it in person on the owner, and receiving some small reward of coin or refreshment for his kindness.

But such occasions are rare, and his general routine is to take out of the box such letters as may have been deposited there, and insert in their place such letters as he has brought. These will be called for, perhaps that day or perhaps the next, by an emissary from the Polearn post-office.

As for the fishermen of the place, who, in their export trade, constitute the chief link of movement between Polearn and the outside world, they would not dream of taking their catch up the steep lane and so, with six miles farther of travel, to the market at Penzance. The sea route is shorter and easier, and they deliver their wares to the pier-head. Thus, though the sole industry of Polearn is sea-fishing, you will get no fish there unless you have bespoken your requirements to one of the fishermen. Back come the trawlers as empty as a haunted house, while their spoils are in the fish-train that is speeding to London.

Such isolation of a little community, continued, as it has been, for centuries, produces isolation in the individual as well, and nowhere will you find greater independence of character than among the people of Polearn. But they are linked together, so it has always seemed to me, by some mysterious comprehension: it is as if they had all been initiated into some ancient rite, inspired and framed by forces visible and invisible. The winter storms that batter the coast, the vernal spell of the spring, the hot, still summers, the season of rains and autumnal decay, have made a spell which, line by line, has been communicated to them, concerning the powers, evil and good, that rule the world, and manifest themselves in ways benignant or terrible . . .

I came to Polearn first at the age of ten, a small boy, weak and sickly, and threatened with pulmonary trouble. My father's business kept him in London, while for me abundance of fresh air and a mild climate were considered essential conditions if I was to grow to manhood. His sister had married the vicar of Polearn, Richard Bolitho, himself native to the place, and so it

came about that I spent three years, as a paying guest, with my relations. Richard Bolitho owned a fine house in the place, which he inhabited in preference to the vicarage, which he let to a young artist, John Evans, on whom the spell of Polearn had fallen for from year's beginning to year's end he never left it. There was a solid roofed shelter, open on one side to the air, built for me in the garden, and here I lived and slept, passing scarcely one hour out of the twenty-four behind walls and windows. I was out on the bay with the fisher-folk, or wandering along the gorse-clad cliffs that climbed steeply to right and left of the deep combe where the village lay, or pottering about on the pier-head, or bird's-nesting in the bushes with the boys of the village. Except on Sunday and for the few daily hours of my lessons, I might do what I pleased so long as I remained in the open air. About the lessons there was nothing formidable; my uncle conducted me through flowering bypaths among the thickets of arithmetic, and made pleasant excursions into the elements of Latin grammar, and above all, he made me daily give him an account, in clear and grammatical sentences, of what had been occupying my mind or my movements. Should I select to tell him about a walk along the cliffs, my speech must be orderly, not vague, slip-shod notes of what I had observed. In this way, too, he trained my observation, for he would bid me tell him what flowers were in bloom, and what birds hovered fishing over the sea or were building in the bushes. For that I owe him a perennial gratitude, for to observe and to express my thoughts in the clear spoken word became my life's profession.

But far more formidable than my weekday tasks was the prescribed routine for Sunday.

Some dark embers compounded of Calvinism and mysticism smouldered in my uncle's soul, and made it a day of terror. His sermon in the morning scorched us with a foretaste of the eternal fires reserved for unrepentant sinners, and he was hardly less terrifying at the children's service in the afternoon. Well do I remember his exposition of the doctrine of guardian angels. A child, he said, might think himself secure in such angelic care, but let him beware of committing any of those numerous offences which would cause his guardian to turn his face from him, for as sure as there were angels to protect us, there were also evil and awful presences which were ready to pounce; and on them he dwelt with peculiar gusto. Well, too, do I remember in the morning sermon his commentary on the carved panels of the altar-rails to which I have already alluded.

There was the angel of the Annunciation there, and the angel of the Resurrection, but not less was there the witch of Endor, and, on the fourth panel, a scene that concerned me most of all.

This fourth panel (he came down from his pulpit to trace its time-worn features) represented the lych-gate of the church-yard at Polearn itself, and indeed the resemblance when thus pointed out was remarkable. In the entry stood the figure of a robed priest holding up a Cross, with which he faced a terrible creature like a gigantic slug, that reared itself up in front of him. That, so ran my uncle's interpretation, was some evil agency, such as he had spoken about to us children, of almost infinite malignity and power, which could alone be combated by firm faith and a pure heart. Below ran the legend "Negotium perambulans in tenebris" from the ninety-first Psalm. We should find it translated there, "the pestilence that walketh in darkness," which but feebly rendered the Latin. It was more deadly to the soul than any pestilence that can only kill the body: it was the Thing, the Creature, the Business that trafficked in the outer Darkness, a minister of God's wrath on the unrighteous . . . I could see, as he spoke, the looks which the congregation exchanged with each other, and knew that his words were evoking a surmise, a remembrance. Nods and whispers passed between them, they understood to what he alluded, and with the inquisitiveness of boyhood I could not rest till I had wormed the story out of my friends among the fisher-boys, as, next morning, we sat basking and naked in the sun after our bathe. One knew one bit of it, one another, but it pieced together into a truly alarming legend. In bald outline it was as follows:

A church far more ancient than that in which my uncle terrified us every Sunday had once stood not three hundred yards away, on the shelf of level ground below the quarry from which its stones were hewn. The owner of the land had pulled this down, and erected for himself a house on the same site out of these materials, keeping, in a very ecstasy of wickedness, the altar, and on this he dined and played dice afterwards. But as he grew old some black melancholy seized him, and he would have lights burning there all night, for he had deadly fear of the darkness. On one winter evening there sprang up such a gale as was never before known, which broke in the windows of the room where he had supped, and extinguished the lamps. Yells of terror brought in his servants, who found him lying on the floor with the blood streaming from his throat. As they entered some huge black shadow seemed to move away from him, crawled across the floor and up the wall and out of the broken window.

"There he lay a-dying," said the last of my informants, "and him that had been a great burly man was withered to a bag o' skin, for the critter had drained all the blood from him. His last breath was a scream, and he hollered out the same words as passon read off the screen."

“Negotium perambulans in tenebris,” I suggested eagerly.

“Thereabouts. Latin anyhow.”

“And after that?” I asked.

“Nobody would go near the place, and the old house rotted and fell in ruins till three years ago, when along comes Mr. Dooliss from Penzance, and built the half of it up again. But he don’t care much about such critters, nor about Latin neither. He takes his bottle of whisky a day and gets drunk’s a lord in the evening. Eh, I’m gwine home to my dinner.”

Whatever the authenticity of the legend, I had certainly heard the truth about Mr. Dooliss from Penzance, who from that day became an object of keen curiosity on my part, the more so because the quarry-house adjoined my uncle’s garden. The Thing that walked in the dark failed to stir my imagination, and already I was so used to sleeping alone in my shelter that the night had no terrors for me. But it would be intensely exciting to wake at some timeless hour and hear Mr. Dooliss yelling, and conjecture that the Thing had got him.

But by degrees the whole story faded from my mind, overscored by the more vivid interests of the day, and, for the last two years of my out-door life in the vicarage garden, I seldom thought about Mr. Dooliss and the possible fate that might await him for his temerity in living in the place where that Thing of darkness had done business. Occasionally I saw him over the garden fence, a great yellow lump of a man, with slow and staggering gait, but never did I set eyes on him outside his gate, either in the village street or down on the beach. He interfered with none, and no one interfered with him. If he wanted to run the risk of being the prey of the legendary nocturnal monster, or quietly drink himself to death, it was his affair. My uncle, so I gathered, had made several attempts to see him when first he came to live at Polearn, but Mr. Dooliss appeared to have no use for parsons, but said he was not at home and never returned the call.

After three years of sun, wind, and rain, I had completely outgrown my early symptoms and had become a tough, strapping youngster of thirteen. I was sent to Eton and Cambridge, and in due course ate my dinners and became a barrister. In twenty years from that time I was earning a yearly income of five figures, and had already laid by in sound securities a sum that brought me dividends which would, for one of my simple tastes and frugal habits, supply me with all the material comforts I needed on this side of the grave. The great prizes of my profession were already within my reach, but I had no ambition beckoning me on, nor did I want a wife and

children, being, I must suppose, a natural celibate. In fact there was only one ambition which through these busy years had held the lure of blue and far-off hills to me, and that was to get back to Polearn, and live once more isolated from the world with the sea and the gorse-clad hills for play-fellows, and the secrets that lurked there for exploration. The spell of it had been woven about my heart, and I can truly say that there had hardly passed a day in all those years in which the thought of it and the desire for it had been wholly absent from my mind. Though I had been in frequent communication with my uncle there during his lifetime, and, after his death, with his widow who still lived there, I had never been back to it since I embarked on my profession, for I knew that if I went there, it would be a wrench beyond my power to tear myself away again. But I had made up my mind that when once I had provided for my own independence, I would go back there not to leave it again. And yet I did leave it again, and now nothing in the world would induce me to turn down the lane from the road that leads from Penzance to the Land’s End, and see the sides of the combe rise steep above the roofs of the village and hear the gulls chiding as they fish in the bay. One of the things invisible, of the dark powers, leaped into light, and I saw it with my eyes.

The house where I had spent those three years of boyhood had been left for life to my aunt, and when I made known to her my intention of coming back to Polearn, she suggested that, till I found a suitable house or found her proposal unsuitable, I should come to live with her.

“The house is too big for a lone old woman,” she wrote, “and I have often thought of quitting and taking a little cottage sufficient for me and my requirements. But come and share it, my dear, and if you find me troublesome, you or I can go. You may want solitude — most people in Polearn do — and will leave me. Or else I will leave you: one of the main reasons of my stopping here all these years was a feeling that I must not let the old house starve. Houses starve, you know, if they are not lived in. They die a lingering death; the spirit in them grows weaker and weaker, and at last fades out of them. Isn’t this nonsense to your London notions? . . . ”

Naturally I accepted with warmth this tentative arrangement, and on an evening in June found myself at the head of the lane leading down to Polearn, and once more I descended into the steep valley between the hills. Time had stood still apparently for the combe, the dilapidated signpost (or its successor) pointed a rickety finger down the lane, and a few hundred yards farther on was the white box for the exchange of letters. Point after remembered point met my eye, and what I saw was not shrunk, as is often the case with the revisited scenes of childhood, into a smaller scale. There stood the

post-office, and there the church and close beside it the vicarage, and beyond, the tall shrubberies which separated the house for which I was bound from the road, and beyond that again the grey roofs of the quarry-house damp and shining with the moist evening wind from the sea. All was exactly as I remembered it, and, above all, that sense of seclusion and isolation. Somewhere above the tree-tops climbed the lane which joined the main road to Penzance, but all that had become immeasurably distant. The years that had passed since last I turned in at the well-known gate faded like a frosty breath, and vanished in this warm, soft air. There were law-courts somewhere in memory's dull book which, if I cared to turn the pages, would tell me that I had made a name and a great income there. But the dull book was closed now, for I was back in Polearn, and the spell was woven around me again.

And if Polearn was unchanged, so too was Aunt Hester, who met me at the door. Dainty and china-white she had always been, and the years had not aged but only refined her. As we sat and talked after dinner she spoke of all that had happened in Polearn in that score of years, and yet somehow the changes of which she spoke seemed but to confirm the immutability of it all. As the recollection of names came back to me, I asked her about the quarry-house and Mr. Dooliss, and her face gloomed a little as with the shadow of a cloud on a spring day.

"Yes, Mr. Dooliss," she said, "poor Mr. Dooliss, how well I remember him, though it must be ten years and more since he died. I never wrote to you about it, for it was all very dreadful, my dear, and I did not want to darken your memories of Polearn. Your uncle always thought that something of the sort might happen if he went on in his wicked, drunken ways, and worse than that, and though nobody knew exactly what took place, it was the sort of thing that might have been anticipated."

"But what more or less happened, Aunt Hester?" I asked.

"Well, of course I can't tell you everything, for no one knew it. But he was a very sinful man, and the scandal about him at Newlyn was shocking. And then he lived, too, in the quarry-house . . .

"I wonder if by any chance you remember a sermon of your uncle's when he got out of the pulpit and explained that panel in the altar-rails, the one, I mean, with the horrible creature rearing itself up outside the lych-gate?"

"Yes, I remember perfectly," said I.

"Ah. It made an impression on you, I suppose, and so it did on all who heard him, and that impression got stamped and branded on us all when the catastrophe occurred. Somehow Mr. Dooliss got to hear about your uncle's sermon, and in some drunken fit he broke into the church and smashed the panel to atoms. He seems to have thought that there was some magic in it, and that if he destroyed that he would get rid of the terrible fate that was threatening him. For I must tell you that before he committed that dreadful sacrilege he had been a haunted man: he hated and feared darkness, for he thought that the creature on the panel was on his track, but that as long as he kept lights burning it could not touch him. But the panel, to his disordered mind, was the root of his terror, and so, as I said, he broke into the church and attempted — you will see why I said 'attempted' — to destroy it. It certainly was found in splinters next morning, when your uncle went into church for matins, and knowing Mr. Dooliss's fear of the panel, he went across to the quarry-house afterwards and taxed him with its destruction. The man never denied it; he boasted of what he had done. There he sat, though it was early morning, drinking his whisky.

"'I've settled your Thing for you,' he said, 'and your sermon too. A fig for such superstitions.'"

"Your uncle left him without answering his blasphemy, meaning to go straight into Penzance and give information to the police about this outrage to the church, but on his way back from the quarry-house he went into the church again, in order to be able to give details about the damage, and there in the screen was the panel, untouched and uninjured. And yet he had himself seen it smashed, and Mr. Dooliss had confessed that the destruction of it was his work. But there it was, and whether the power of God had mended it or some other power, who knows?"

This was Polearn indeed, and it was the spirit of Polearn that made me accept all Aunt Hester was telling me as attested fact. It had happened like that. She went on in her quiet voice.

"Your uncle recognised that some power beyond police was at work, and he did not go to Penzance or give informations about the outrage, for the evidence of it had vanished."

A sudden spate of scepticism swept over me. "There must have been some mistake," I said. "It hadn't been broken . . ."

She smiled. "Yes, my dear, but you have been in London so long," she said. "Let me, anyhow, tell you the rest of my story. That night, for some reason, I

could not sleep. It was very hot and airless; I dare say you will think that the sultry conditions accounted for my wakefulness. Once and again, as I went to the window to see if I could not admit more air, I could see from it the quarry-house, and I noticed the first time that I left my bed that it was blazing with lights. But the second time I saw that it was all in darkness, and as I wondered at that, I heard a terrible scream, and the moment afterwards the steps of someone coming at full speed down the road outside the gate. He yelled as he ran; 'Light, light!' he called out. 'Give me light, or it will catch me!' It was very terrible to hear that, and I went to rouse my husband, who was sleeping in the dressing-room across the passage. He wasted no time, but by now the whole village was aroused by the screams, and when he got down to the pier he found that all was over. The tide was low, and on the rocks at its foot was lying the body of Mr. Dooliss. He must have cut some artery when he fell on those sharp edges of stone, for he had bled to death, they thought, and though he was a big burly man, his corpse was but skin and bones. Yet there was no pool of blood round him, such as you would have expected. Just skin and bones as if every drop of blood in his body had been sucked out of him!"

She leaned forward.

"You and I, my dear, know what happened," she said, "or at least can guess. God has His instruments of vengeance on those who bring wickedness into places that have been holy. Dark and mysterious are His ways."

Now what I should have thought of such a story if it had been told me in London I can easily imagine. There was such an obvious explanation: the man in question had been a drunkard, what wonder if the demons of delirium pursued him? But here in Polearn it was different:

"And who is in the quarry-house now?" I asked. "Years ago the fisher-boys told me the story of the man who first built it and of his horrible end. And now again it has happened. Surely no one has ventured to inhabit it once more?"

I saw in her face, even before I asked that question, that somebody had done so.

"Yes, it is lived in again," said she, "for there is no end to the blindness . . . I don't know if you remember him. He was tenant of the vicarage many years ago."

"John Evans," said I.

"Yes. Such a nice fellow he was too. Your uncle was pleased to get so good a tenant. And now —" She rose.

"Aunt Hester, you shouldn't leave your sentences unfinished," I said.

She shook her head. "My dear, that sentence will finish itself," she said. "But what a time of night! I must go to bed, and you too, or they will think we have to keep lights burning here through the dark hours."

Before getting into bed I drew my curtains wide and opened all the windows to the warm tide of the sea air that flowed softly in. Looking out into the garden I could see in the moonlight the roof of the shelter, in which for three years I had lived, gleaming with dew. That, as much as anything, brought back the old days to which I had now returned, and they seemed of one piece with the present, as if no gap of more than twenty years sundered them. The two flowed into one, like globules of mercury uniting into a softly shining globe, of mysterious lights and reflections. Then, raising my eyes a little, I saw against the black hill-side the windows of the quarry-house still alight.

Morning, as is so often the case, brought no shattering of my illusion. As I began to regain consciousness, I fancied that I was a boy again waking up in the shelter in the garden, and though, as I grew more widely awake, I smiled at the impression, that on which it was based I found to be indeed true. It was sufficient now as then to be here, to wander again on the cliffs, and hear the popping of the ripened seed-pods on the gorse-bushes; to stray along the shore to the bathing-cove, to float and drift and swim in the warm tide, and bask on the sand, and watch the gulls fishing, to lounge on the pier-head with the fisher-folk, to see in their eyes and hear in their quiet speech the evidence of secret things not so much known to them as part of their instincts and their very being. There were powers and presences about me; the white poplars that stood by the stream that babbled down the valley knew of them, and showed a glimpse of their knowledge sometimes, like the gleam of their white underleaves; the very cobbles that paved the street were soaked in it. All that I wanted was to lie there and grow soaked in it too; unconsciously, as a boy, I had done that, but now the process must be conscious. I must know what stir of forces, fruitful and mysterious, seethed along the hill-side at noon, and sparkled at night on the sea. They could be known, they could even be controlled by those who were masters of the spell, but never could they be spoken of, for they were dwellers in the innermost, grafted into the eternal life of the world. There were dark secrets as well as these clear, kindly powers, and to these no doubt belonged the negotium perambulans in tenebris

which, though of deadly malignity, might be regarded not only as evil, but as the avenger of sacrilegious and impious deeds . . . All this was part of the spell of Polearn, of which the seeds had long lain dormant in me. But now they were sprouting, and who knew what strange flower would unfold on their stems?

It was not long before I came across John Evans. One morning, as I lay on the beach, there came shambling across the sand a man stout and middle-aged with the face of Silenus. He paused as he drew near and regarded me from narrow eyes.

"Why, you're the little chap that used to live in the parson's garden," he said. "Don't you recognise me?" I saw who it was when he spoke: his voice, I think, instructed me, and recognising it, I could see the features of the strong, alert young man in this gross caricature.

"Yes, you're John Evans," I said. "You used to be very kind to me: you used to draw pictures for me."

"So I did, and I'll draw you some more. Been bathing? That's a risky performance. You never know what lives in the sea, nor what lives on the land for that matter. Not that I heed them.

"I stick to work and whisky. God! I've learned to paint since I saw you, and drink too for that matter. I live in the quarry-house, you know, and it's a powerful thirsty place. Come and have a look at my things if you're passing. Staying with your aunt, are you? I could do a wonderful portrait of her. Interesting face; she knows a lot. People who live at Polearn get to know a lot, though I don't take much stock in that sort of knowledge myself."

I do not know when I have been at once so repelled and interested. Behind the mere grossness of his face there lurked something which, while it appalled, yet fascinated me. His thick lisping speech had the same quality. And his paintings, what would they be like?

... "I was just going home," I said. "I'll gladly come in, if you'll allow me."

He took me through the untended and overgrown garden into the house which I had never yet entered. A great grey cat was sunning itself in the window, and an old woman was laying lunch in a corner of the cool hall into which the door opened. It was built of stone, and the carved mouldings let into the walls, the fragments of gargoyles and sculptured images, bore testimony to the truth of its having been built out of the demolished church. In one corner was an oblong and carved

wooden table littered with a painter's apparatus and stacks of canvases leaned against the walls.

He jerked his thumb towards a head of an angel that was built into the mantelpiece and giggled.

"Quite a sanctified air," he said, "so we tone it down for the purposes of ordinary life by a different sort of art. Have a drink? No? Well, turn over some of my pictures while I put myself to rights."

He was justified in his own estimate of his skill: he could paint (and apparently he could paint anything), but never have I seen pictures so inexplicably hellish. There were exquisite studies of trees, and you knew that something lurked in the flickering shadows. There was a drawing of his cat sunning itself in the window, even as I had just now seen it, and yet it was no cat but some beast of awful malignity. There was a boy stretched naked on the sands, not human, but some evil thing which had come out of the sea. Above all there were pictures of his garden overgrown and jungle-like, and you knew that in the bushes were presences ready to spring out on you . . .

"Well, do you like my style?" he said as he came up, glass in hand. (The tumbler of spirits that he held had not been diluted.) "I try to paint the essence of what I see, not the mere husk and skin of it, but its nature, where it comes from and what gave it birth. There's much in common between a cat and a fuchsia-bush if you look at them closely enough. Everything came out of the slime of the pit, and it's all going back there. I should like to do a picture of you some day. I'd hold the mirror up to Nature, as that old lunatic said."

After this first meeting I saw him occasionally throughout the months of that wonderful summer. Often he kept to his house and to his painting for days together, and then perhaps some evening I would find him lounging on the pier, always alone, and every time we met thus the repulsion and interest grew, for every time he seemed to have gone farther along a path of secret knowledge towards some evil shrine where complete initiation awaited him . . .

And then suddenly the end came.

I had met him thus one evening on the cliffs while the October sunset still burned in the sky, but over it with amazing rapidity there spread from the west a great blackness of cloud such as I have never seen for denseness. The light was sucked from the sky, the dusk fell in ever thicker layers. He suddenly became conscious of this.

"I must get back as quick as I can," he said. "It will be dark in a few minutes, and my servant is out. The lamps will not be lit."

He stepped out with extraordinary briskness for one who shambled and could scarcely lift his feet, and soon broke out into a stumbling run. In the gathering darkness I could see that his face was moist with the dew of some unspoken terror. "You must come with me," he panted, "for so we shall get the lights burning the sooner. I cannot do without light."

I had to exert myself to the full to keep up with him, for terror winged him, and even so I fell behind, so that when I came to the garden gate, he was already half-way up the path to the house. I saw him enter, leaving the door wide, and found him fumbling with matches. But his hand so trembled that he could not transfer the light to the wick of the lamp ... "But what's the hurry about?" I asked.

Suddenly his eyes focused themselves on the open door behind me, and he jumped from his seat beside the table which had once been the altar of God, with a gasp and a scream.

"No, no!" he cried. "Keep it off! ... "

I turned and saw what he had seen. The Thing had entered and now was swiftly sliding across the floor towards him, like some gigantic caterpillar. A stale phosphorescent light came from it, for though the dusk had grown to blackness outside, I could see it quite distinctly in the awful light of its own presence. From it too there came an odour of corruption and decay, as from slime that has long lain below water. It seemed to have no head, but on the front of it was an orifice of puckered skin which opened and shut and slavered at the edges. It was hairless, and slug-like in shape and in texture. As it advanced its fore-part reared itself from the ground, like a snake about to strike, and it fastened on him ...

At that sight, and with the yells of his agony in my ears, the panic which had struck me relaxed into a hopeless courage, and with palsied, impotent hands I tried to lay hold of the Thing.

But I could not: though something material was there, it was impossible to grasp it; my hands sunk in it as in thick mud. It was like wrestling with a nightmare.

I think that but a few seconds elapsed before all was over. The screams of the wretched man sank to moans and mutterings as the Thing fell on him: he panted once or twice and was still. For a moment longer there came gurglings and sucking noises, and then it slid out even as it had entered. I lit the lamp which he had fumbled with, and there on the floor he lay, no more than a rind of skin in loose folds over projecting bones.

Negotium perambulans in tenebris

Order: Accuser

Infernal Might: 20 (Terram)

Characteristics: Int +1, Per +1, Pre -3, Com -5, Str +3, Sta +5, Dex -2, Qik -2

Size: +1: A vast, dark slug.

Virtues and Flaws: Many.

Confidence Score: 5 (5)

Personality Traits: Cruel +6

Reputations: The reason to leave the lights on 5 (locals)

Combat:

Grapple: Initiative -2, Attack +8*, Defense +8*, Damage +0**

* includes specialisation (defiler of its church)

** does not include exsanguination damage.

Soak: +13. Only partially material. In another story by Benson, an identical creature was defeated when broken apart with shotguns, but it can't be grasped effectively.

Wound Penalties: -1 (1-6), -3 (7-12), -5 (13-18), Incapacitated (19-24), Dead (25+)

Abilities: All suitable for story. Area Lore 9 (region). Grapple 9 (defilers of its church).

Powers:

Beyond the Heart: 2 points, Init 0, Vim: Each use of this power allows the demon to know one secret which the target would never admit.

Coagulation, 0 points, Init 0, Terram: The creature takes the form of a vast, luminous slug.

Envisioning, 1 point, Init 0, Mentem: For 1 point, allows the demon to enter and twist dreams. If used to terrify, the victim can ignore it with a Brave Personality trait roll against an Ease factor of 9 or more. Failure to resist leads to a profound physical reaction, like a seizure.

Exsanguination: 0 points, Init 0, Animal : After a successful grapple, the creature can automatically drain blood from its victim. This costs 1 Fatigue level per round until the character is unconscious, then one wound level until death.

Obsession: 1-3 points, Init -5, Mentem: May force characters to make Personality Trait rolls to resist a temporary trait, Cruel, which has a score equal to the Might points spent.. If the roll is successful, the trait vanishes. If it fails, they gain the trait permanently at +1, although they can remove it by the usual means of reducing traits.

Whispers Behind the Back : 2 points, Init. 0 Mentem: Like Pains of Perpetual Worry, this gives the character the sensation his secrets are known, and discussed, behind their back, for the next month.

Weakness: Shuns light. Seems particularly resistant to the Dominion.

Vis: 4 pawns, ashes (may be sordida)

Appearance: Luminous slug.

June 2019 Monster Update

The Coachman of Major Weir

This creature takes the form of a wizened man in elegant clothes. It claims to be Satan himself, but that's simply a lie.

Order: Lord of the False Gods

Infernal Might: 25 (Ignem)

Characteristics: Int +1, Per +1, Pre +1, Com +5, Str +0, Sta +5, Dex +5, Qik +2

Size: -1: Usually takes the form of a debauched, dwarfish nobleman.

Virtues and Flaws: Many.

Confidence Score: 5 (5)

Personality Traits: Proud +6

Reputations: Lord of skeletal revels 3 (Infernal)

Combat:

Whip: Initiative +1, Attack +10, Defense +10, Damage +6*

* does not include fire damage from powers

Soak: +6, Clothed in rich velvet, but has a tough, leathery body.

Wound Penalties: -1 (1-4), -3 (5-8), -5 (9-12), Incapacitated (13-17), Dead (18+)

Abilities: All suitable for story, but this demon has a broad range of social skills. Area Lore 9 (region). Carouse 9 (host), Etiquette 9 (victims), Single weapon (whip) 4.

Powers:

Coagulation, 0 points, Init 0, Corpus: The creature prefers to take the form of a little nobleman, but can also take the shape of one of its skeletal minions, to allow itself to escape in a crowd. The creature's whip is an extension of its body. It appears and vanishes at will, and at no cost.

Change Shape, 0 points, Init 0: The creature can change between its shapes.

Envisioning, 1 point, Init 0, Mentem: For 1 point, allows the demon to enter and twist dreams. If used to terrify, the victim can ignore it with a Brave Personality trait roll against an Ease factor of 9 or more. Failure to resist leads to a profound physical reaction, like a seizure.

Master of Revels: 1 point per skeleton, Init 0, Vim: The Coachman can summon far more demons than most other False Gods, but this power is limited to a single type: his skeletal dancers. Unlike most False Gods, the Coachman is able to command his summonees.

Obsession: 1-3 points, Init -5, Mentem: May force characters to make Personality Trait rolls to resist a temporary trait, Pride, which has a score equal to the Might points spent.. If the roll is successful, the trait vanishes. If it fails, they gain the trait permanently at +1, although they can remove it by the usual means of reducing traits.

The Serpent Oracle: 2 points, Init. +2, Mentem: May cast any Intelligo spell for 2 Might, and automatically knows the context and likely outcome of actions made in response to the information gained.

Sparks of sin: 3 point, Init +0, Ignem : Causes a object to catch fire until dawn. This does not damage the engulfed object, but does damage anything the object touches that is not similarly engulfed, save the demon himself. The power does +5 Damage on contact, and is used to make the demon's whip and carriage wheels burn.

The Wealth of Nations: 1-3 points, Init 0, Terram: Allows the creature to summon wealth, equal to one pound of gold (10 Mythic pounds) per Might point spent, from anywhere in the world, at the creature's discretion. The wealth summoned must never gain its value from its usefulness, only from the human agreement that some things are treasure. The creature cannot, for example, make bread appear to starving people, although it can make luxurious feasts appear before corpulent nobles. The demon summons carriages and horses with this power.

Weakness: May not harm teetotalers, which he, and his minions, call "Rechabites"

Vis: 5 pawns, skull (may be sordida)

Appearance: As story.

Saltatores Mortuorum – Dancing Skeletons

Infernal Might 5 (Corpus)

Characteristics: Int -2, Per -2, Pre 0, Com -2, Str 0, Sta +3, Dex +2, Qik +1

Size: -2 Skeletons have a low Size score compared to living humans because they lack the mass provided by organs and fluids.

Personality Traits: Enjoys causing shock +3

Combat: Shortsword*: Init +2, Attack +9, Defense +6, Damage +5

* Change to other weapons for cosmetic effect.

Soak: +2 if dressed in finery, Add a +10 Soak bonus if struck with piercing weapons.

Wound Penalties: -1 (1-3), -3 (4-6), -5 (7-9), Incapacitated (10-12), Dead (13+)

Abilities: Carouse 6 (parody), Single weapon 4 (shortsword)

Equipment: Fine clothes, improvised weapons, inexplicably present shortswords.

Powers:

Coagulation, 0 points, Init 0, Corpus: Takes the form of a skeleton, with accoutrements suited to the mortal behaviour it mocks.

Obsession: 1-3 points, Init -5, Mentem: May force characters to make Personality Trait rolls to resist a temporary trait, Thanatophobia, which has a score equal to the Might points spent.. If the roll is successful, the trait vanishes. If it fails, they gain the trait permanently at +1, although they can remove it by the usual means of reducing traits.

Weakness: Cannot harm those who have succeeded in a Brave check against 6+. Storyguides may raise this factor if the characters are surrounded by a group.

Vis: 1 Corpus (sordida).

Appearance: Skeletons with burning blue eye sockets, that follow the commands of their master..

The Temptress With Painted Skin

A variant on the Ribboned Revenier – see

<https://timothyferguson.wordpress.com/2018/11/27/the-ribbon-wearing-revenier/>

Order: Tempter

Infernal Might: 10

Characteristics:

Human form: Int +1, Per 0, Pre +3*, Com +3, Str 0, Sta Tireless, Dex -1, Qik 0.

* Prefers beautiful skins, but will make do with ugly ones.

Demonic form: Int +1, Per 0, Pre +0, Com +3, Str +3, Sta Tireless, Dex +1, Qik +1.

* Prefers beautiful skins, but will make do with ugly ones.

Size: -1 or +1 Prefers diminutive female forms. Demonic form is apparently too large to fit inside the human skins.

Virtues and Flaws: Many

Confidence Score: 1 (3)

Personality Traits: Hedonistic +5, Demure +3.

Reputations: Seductress +1 (Infernal)

Combat: Claws in demonic form: Initiative +1, Attack +10, Defense +9, Damage +8

Soak: 0 (human) / +3 (demon – thick fur)

Wound Penalties:

Human -1 (1-4), -3 (5-8), -5 (9-12), Incapacitated (13-16), Dead (17+)

Monstrous -1 (1-6), -3 (7-12), -5 (13-18), Incapacitated (19-25), Dead (26+)

Abilities: All suitable for story: well-versed in Carousing, Craft: Leatherwork and Folk Ken. Brawl 5 (claws)

Powers:

Coagulation: 1 point, Init 0, Animal/Corpus: The creature's natural shape is a cloud of foetid gas. It can take up residence in the flayed skin of a human, or take the shape of a dreadful beast. If it changes from human to demon without becoming a gas, it rips apart the skin it is wearing. This is terrifying (Brave check against 3 if characters were aware she is a monster in disguise, 6 if surprised).

Envisioning, 1 point, Init 0, Mentem: For 1 point, allows the demon to enter and twist dreams. If used to terrify, the victim can ignore it with a Brave Personality trait roll against an Ease factor of 9 or more. Failure to resist leads to a profound physical reaction, like a seizure.

Obsession: 1 to 3 points, Init. -5, Mentem: May force characters to make Personality Trait rolls to resist a temporary trait, Hedonistic, which has a score equal to the Might points spent.. If the roll is successful, the trait vanishes. If it fails, they gain the trait permanently at +1, although they can remove it by the usual means of reducing traits.

Weakness: Must be invited into houses. Cannot cross a boundary protected by a holy symbol. Strongly prefers to kill those who it has had "tea" with.

Vis: 2 pawns, skin.

Appearance: A beautiful woman in distressed circumstances.