

MARTIN ANNANDER

Death and

TAPE POLICE TAPE PO

Freeform Horror One-Shot

Playtank



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Writing & Design

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Original Cast

Johan Barouta, as Corey Danton and Jim Forrester

Roger Mattsson, as Tim Duke and Diana Fowl

Steven Payne, as LaGeorge Dolmes and Van Dutresku

Patrik Skog, as Maurice Lavalley and Maria Bonavera

Inspiration

The *Sorcerer* role-playing game.

Darkly Through the Labyrinth role-playing game.

Hellblazer comics.

Detective stories.

True crime and crime fiction.

INTRODUCTION

A condemned three-story office building with a subterranean parking house.

A year-old human trafficking case with occult overtones.

A group of police officers investigating a connection...

The following is a chamber play in role-playing form. It focuses on a basement where grisly murders and terrible crimes have taken place. It lets players be cops, profilers, occultists, and bitter rivals.

It starts in medias res and then kills the characters brutally, before cutting to the same stage again with the players switching alter egos to play investigators trying to explain what happened. The idea is for them to be able to work with the meta-knowledge of the absurd events while still maintaining their new characters' ignorance and skepticism.

The scenario shouldn't take more than three to five hours to play.

- » **INTRO.** How to play; you're reading it already.
- » **DEATH.** The first part of the scenario, including characters. These characters will all die or become witnesses.
- » **POLICE TAPE.** The second part of the scenario, also including characters. An investigation into what happened to the first characters.

BODY HORROR

This works best if you have a group that's comfortable with body horror. The more grisly the murders can be made, the better. But it should be possible to tone this down and bypass descriptions of mutilated corpses and other gruesome effects.

When it was originally played, the blood and gore was used to draw how terrible the scene is—it was never used as comedy.

- » **BUILDUP.** Haagen's abattoir and the buildup before it is intended to be truly gruesome.
- » **MEETING.** Once the characters find Haagen, her unresponsiveness and obvious distress is intended to make it highly uncomfortable. She won't resist, she won't say anything, and she won't quite seem to be in the room mentally.
- » **CONFRONTATION.** Hell breaks loose. This segment is hard to do without visceral descriptions of violence. Cracking skulls, pooling blood, choking, pain, and death with a clearly supernatural horror tone.

RULES

Each character has a **STRENGTH** they can use that will let them solve a specific type of situation.

Using a strength is as simple as the player saying that they use it and letting them describe what happens. There are no rolls or other considerations. There are no failure states.

Beyond this, there are no rules or traits or similar used by this scenario.

DOING THINGS

If players want their characters to do other things—more or less anything—they should be able to do so. The idea is that the group itself will generate the drama and play off each other more than the game master.

Players that take this to mean taking a cab elsewhere, go rob a bank, or any other variation of something completely different than the scenario's premise, should never be allowed near a role-playing game again.

Freeform play works best where everyone is interested in the premise and equally invested.

As a game master, this means following along with the players' ideas and trying to promote creativity rather than saying no.

As a player, this means considering what consequences your actions will have for the other participants. If you "go solo" and essentially play the scenario as a single-player game, you may end up causing unnecessary friction and cause everyone around the table to have less fun.

X AND Y

After playing this one-shot, the concept of **X AND Y** (Death and Police Tape) has been styled in other ways too.

KILL AND CLEANUP, where there's a brutal action scene and then people having to clean it up.

HIT AND CHASE, where a heist or other thing happens, and the next thing is the culprits being chased.

HELL AND HISTORY, where a large-scale catastrophe takes place (like the eruption of Mount Vesuvius and the events of the Roman city of Pompeii), followed by the archeologists or other researches that unearth it.

Basically, **X AND Y** is cause and effect in scenario form, with two scenarios comingling into one.

Maybe you can have some cool ideas thinking about it and using this scenario as inspiration.

COREY DANTON FBI SPECIAL AGENT

You're a career field agent, with several raids and arrests to your name. Your professional record is almost impeccable. Well-mannered, well-tempered, and professional from toes to fingertips.

The reputation you've earned makes you a sought-after expert in trafficking fieldwork. You know how the perps operate, where they hide the trafficked victims, and how communication is handled. Colleagues say you can "sniff 'em out."

But it's hard to see the faces of all the people caught up in illegal trafficking and not get caught up in the misery of it all. It's turned you into a chain-smoking nervous wreck on your days off and ruined both of your marriages. It's hard to talk to your own children and hard to let anyone get close to you. The things you've seen are things that shouldn't be shared.

Sometimes, you contemplate suicide. Sometimes, you feel that special elation of solving a hard case. Sometimes, you thrive on lecturing the new generation of Special Agents at Quantico.

But most of the time, you're an empty shell, with a professional veneer.

STRENGTH: MULTILINGUAL You know many languages fluently.

FAMILY Two ex-wives you don't talk to. Five children you never see.

TIM DUKE
L.A.P.D. SWAT

Assaults you can do. Even hostage rescues. But it creeps you out every time you're put on bodyguard detail. It's not your job—way too personal. Even if the perps are the same, and the result the same, even the risks the same.

But sometimes precinct just fucks up and you're forced to take these jobs anyway. You'll do it, as long as people don't give you too much shit, or insist on sticking their chins out.

Your job is to get them in, then get them out. Worst case, you'll bite a bullet. But no one will ever say you didn't do your duty.

So please Mr., just shut up and let Duke go in first.

STRENGTH: DUTY FIRST You just don't give up. It's not your style.

FAMILY Your wife, Melissa, and daughter, Tiffany, 9.

LAGEORGE DOLMES
L.A.P.D. SWAT

You've had a rocket-powered career. Top of your class every step of the way. Every tough assault, every hard job, you're right there. People know they can rely on you, and you know they trust you.

But you don't want to get a promotion. No pencil-pushing for you. You want to be right there at the front, gun in hand.

STRENGTH: HUMAN TOUCH You can disarm almost any situation.

FAMILY Your wife, Baby, and five kids, Darryll, 6, Logan, 8, Sofia, 11, Patrick, 13, and Monique, 16. They're your life and your passion, each and every one of them.

MAURICE LAVALLE
L.A.P.D. HOMICIDE

There's nothing new under the sun. People kill each other all the time. For passion, for money; you've seen it all. Even the occasional serial killer that made headlines while ordinary decent people were still dying from the same domestic violence cases and other shit humanity just can't get over.

It's made you cynical, yes. You'd lie if you said otherwise. But retirement is coming up, and you'll start travelling or doing something else that helps erase the images of 20 years of human evil from your mind.

STRENGTH: HOMICIDE INTUITION You don't really miss anything crucial.

FAMILY You have three children; Billy, 13, Lauren, 15, and Adam, 19, and you still live with your wife, Carrie, even if you've mostly grown apart.

ANN HARRISON RAMIREZ
L.A.P.D.

You grew up in this district with all its schizophrenia. Homelessness next to empty condemned housing. Poverty next to million-dollar properties. Unemployment next to illegally immigrated wage slaves.

Molina down the street sells the best burgers. Tammy Lee can tell you who's hiding and where, for a few Benjamins. The fixers, the dealers, the gangbangers; they're all in your pocket, as much as you're in theirs. The laws of the street makes everything work, and your job is to fine-tune those laws to run beside the laws of the United States and the State of California. To let people profit some, beat up some snitches now and then, and to make the proper number of arrests.

What's more, you're very good at it. You've walked this beat for years by now; you grew up here, and you'll most likely die here. It's hell, but it's also home.

STRENGTH: STREETWISE You blend in with regular folk.

FAMILY Boyfriend and his two children, no children of your own; you've never wanted any.

DEATH

Intelligence suggests someone fitting Isabella Haagen's description is holed up in an abandoned office building.

We'll go in with a small group to apprehend her quietly, with SWAT surrounding the building and a raid team on standby.

She has escaped before... Don't let her escape again. Keep a low profile, turn off the blue lights.

Get in, get her, get out.

Hand out the characters presented on the previous pages. If you have fewer players than characters, use the unplayed ones as non-player characters portrayed by the game master. This isn't super-important, but it serves a purpose.

More players than five would be unwieldy to begin with and is not recommended. There's not enough characters anyway.

Give the players some time to read their character descriptions and ask some questions, then...

CUT TO:

INT. CONDEMNED OFFICES

Zoom in. The characters are stepping into a condemned three-story office building. Maglites are on, flashlight cones the only source of illumination. The rest is a gloomy murk.

You've been looking for ISABELLA HAAGEN for over a year. She's wanted on charges of human trafficking, kidnapping, and suspected of committing several murders. It's a grisly case with weird occult overtones that has the press frothing at the mouth.

She's not Isabella Haagen anymore. She's "The L.A. Blood Witch," or some nonsense like that.

The trail has gone colder and colder, and if this lead doesn't pan out there will be no justice. She will have eluded the law.

Somewhere, water drips; somewhere else it pours. Everything is wet, rusty, or rotting. Windows are cracked and boarded over. Grimy puddles collect in the corners. Rain and wind whip through in gusts of wet and cold. Broken glass crunches underfoot and half-torn cabling hangs from the ceiling.

Everything is decaying.

As game master, you can use any or all of the following scenes depending on how much time you want to spend here.

Three to six scenes should do, just making sure that at least one points the group towards the basement.

1. Mildewed blankets and the random detritus of a homeless person's belongings are strewn under a series of old desks. It smells of urine and infection. If any character touches it, an angry limping person emerges from a hiding place, toothlessly protecting their worldly possessions without getting physical. *If it's clear that no one will disturb the homeless person's stuff, and the characters ask, the person will point to the emergency stairs.*

2. A small fire burns and a group of worn and tired drug addicts are holding their hands over the flames. A pile of metal parts is acting as a barrier for the fire. They're sharing a plastic milk gallon bottle that reeks of strong alcohol; the kind of alcohol that's not intended for drinking. They may offer a friendly officer a swig. *This is a group of three hollow-eyed addicts. If asked about Isabella Haagen, they'll talk a bit about the "crazy bitch," mentioning how she seems active at all hours and brings people down into the basement but never brings anyone up.*
3. The sweet smell of a rotting carcass; human or dog or cat or otherwise. But the door it's coming from won't budge, the carcass seemingly leaned up against it. With some work, officers will find out it's just plastic sacks full of bits and bobs; decaying food, dead pets, and trapped rats. *Nothing here points to Isabella Haagen.*
4. Rotting cubicle partitions toppled like dominoes across the remains of some dotcom office floor. Rats scurry away as the maglites shine across them. A human foot can be seen underneath the rubble. It may be a dead body. If roused, the foot complains loudly in a drunken incomprehensible slur. *If asked about Isabella Haagen, the foot's owner has nothing comprehensible to say. Not even threats of arrest or violence will rouse the foot.*
5. A filthy plastic bucket full of used syringes, and "Good 'Uns" written on its side with a red marker. If the characters try to interact with it, a young heroin addict tells them "wouldn't do that if I were you," as their pale blue-lipped syringe-pricked self emerges from the blankets beside it like a sick beast breaking the surface of water. "Wouldn't be safe." *If asked about Isabella Haagen, the drug addict looks afraid and pauses. Then they simply point to the basement stairs.*
6. The patter of quick feet on the floor. On pursuit, movement at the edge of vision. On further pursuit, a desperate and frightened child emerges, fighting for their life. They're an undernourished mute that looks at the characters in abject terror, as if anticipating abuse. *The mute child stares towards the emergency stairs if asked about Isabella Haagen, but takes the first opportunity to bolt. If held or tied down, the child goes completely limp, as if resigning.*

Eventually, the only way the characters can go is down to the basement.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT

Down the concrete stairwell, the basement is much drier. The air is almost stifling from the months or years of lacking air conditioning. A miasma assaults the senses.

Human waste. Organic decay. Rot. But also a strange hint of exotic spices carried by a slight breeze. Incense; it must be incense.

The following clues should be revealed in the order they are listed, but any potential time pressure is entirely artificial. Players that want to call for backup or wait for a SWAT team or similar should know that this is the culmination of a whole year of almost entirely fruitless investigation.

Ultimately, it's of course up to the players. But playing it too safe may kill the atmosphere.

Offer them to draw a map of this area as it's investigated. This will come in very handy soon enough.

- » Drag marks in the dust; traces of blood. Hard to discern if the drag marks are from bodies, crates, or something else, but it's clear that this basement has been busy for some time.
- » The smell of spicy incense gets stronger.
- » Containers filled with a thick crimson fluid. Human blood.
- » Farther in, a freezer plugged into an improvised power outlet leeching power from a ground cable. The freezer is padlocked. Breaking open the lock reveals human body parts and organs; fingers, hands, hearts, tongues, eyeballs. Clearly packaged in ziplock bags, labelled in a neat script, and catalogued.
- » A deep pungent stench starts eating into the subconscious. The sweet gag-inducing stench of decaying human flesh.
- » A small area with drainage gates in the concrete basement floor. They're all clogged with human bone, guts, and viscera. This area is an abattoir, filled with the discarded butchered remains of human carcasses. It's hard to say how many bodies, and impossible to identify anyone except from dentures or the odd piece of skin.

After exploring, investigating, and feeling like police officers in over their heads for a while, it's time to meet Isabella Haagen.

FADE TO:

INT. RITUAL CHAMBER

The characters won't be stopped along the way. There are no combat encounters or other things to keep them occupied. Eventually, they'll reach the ritual chamber, but ideally this happens as a crescendo after the previous horror has been sampled, called in, or handled in a similarly policed fashion.

If the players spread out or call for reinforcements, that may be fine, but make sure that most of the group remains fairly isolated and are kept investigating the basement.

The ritual chamber is the last room, converted from what must have been an underground parking garage.

A base covering of tarps is used to protect a second room within the room, made almost entirely out of thick black velvety cloth. Entered through a set of heavy crimson string curtains, the room is a small personal space centered on an altar made from human bones. On closer inspection, officers will find that the string curtains are also bones—human finger bones—and much too small to be adult finger bones.

Illumination and some warmth comes from black ritual wax candles placed seemingly at random all over the ritual chamber. Two heavy censers burning incense with a vaguely opiate smell hang from the cloth ceiling.

A naked malnourished woman in her 30s is kneeling by the altar, her back turned against the entrance. She's somehow hard to focus on, appearing blurry and indistinct even as the maglites illuminate the chamber.

She's in extremely bad shape, caked with dirt in cracked layers, and she's breathing, almost choking, in throaty croaks. Her skin is tattooed here, scarred there.

If anyone touches her, she won't resist. Her eyes are completely white, rolled over. She's whispering incomprehensibly. Anyone from the group who gets a good look at her sees that it's a badly starved Isabella Haagen.

But she's somehow hard to focus on, even up close. She's still blurred. Like when you need to clean your glasses or your computer screen.

Then something happens.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. RITUAL CHAMBER HELL

Secretly give one player a choice between the following options and ask them to pick one:

SAVAGELY BEAT ONE OF YOUR COLLEAGUES TO DEATH WITH AN OBJECT FROM THE ALTAR.

GET EATEN BY A HELLHOUND THAT CLAWS ITS WAY OUT OF ISABELLA'S CHEST.

SMASH YOUR HEAD REPEATEDLY AGAINST THE FLOOR UNTIL YOU DIE, CRACKING YOUR OWN SKULL WITHOUT EVER LOSING CONSCIOUSNESS.

GET TORN ASUNDER BY CLAWED MULTILIMBED ARMS REACHING OUT FROM ISABELLA'S FACE.

FORCE ONE OF YOUR COLLEAGUES ONTO THE ALTAR AND STAB THEM REPEATEDLY WITH A CURVED RITUAL KNIFE YOU SUDDENLY HAVE IN YOUR HAND.

The player may describe their character's end if they want, or give that responsibility to the game master.

After playing out the choice, give the same list to the next player, except now you remove the option that has already been taken.

Note what happens to each character carefully, since who does what matters at this stage.

Go through all players, until each character has met a gruesome fate. If one character kills another character, let the player of the killed character still make their choice instead of letting the same player make multiple choices.

When everyone is gruesomely murdered, you cut. Abruptly stop describing the scene from one word to the next.

FADE TO BLACK.

POLICE TAPE

“Special Agent Forrester, sir! Molly. CNN. Is it true that fifty-one – or more – people have been ritually murdered by the Blood Witch?”

Palpable silence. Camera flashes. Unmoving, unblinking agent, his eyes hidden behind black sunglasses.

But there’s just one answer he can give.

“No comment.”

Immediately hand out the following new characters. Note that they don’t have any **STRENGTHS** but instead have **GOALS**.

A goal is intended to provide a bit of secret motivation to each character, beyond the stated goal of the group.

Goals should not be shared openly between players unless they are players that prefer to play with all cards on the table to avoid surprises.

It’s recommended to keep everything secret however, and play the following part of the scenario as the political minefield that it is.

POLICE TAPE

This section of the scenario has two specific stages:

- » The first stage is a crime scene investigation, where the characters get to check out where the previous characters perished brutally.
- » The second stage is a press conference where the characters have to tell a cohesive story of what happened.

After these two scenes have played out, the scenario is over. The press conference is the formal and practical end of the show.

SPECIAL AGENT MARIA BONAVERA FBI PROFILER

Profiling is the magical art of the FBI, and you’re one of the foremost experts in the field. Initially you had no idea why you were pulled into this case. But now that you’ve seen it you understand perfectly, and all you can think of is how to get out of it.

The whole thing makes your skin crawl.

GOAL Isabella seems to have been a much worse lunatic than first anticipated. It’s hard to even imagine what the fuck happened and what could drive someone into such acts of desperate violence.

FAMILY Loving husband and your highly successful career.

SPECIAL AGENT VAN DUTRESKU
FBI FORENSIC EXAMINER

In all your years as a forensic examiner you've never seen anything even close to whatever the fuck this is. You know you've been pulled out of the lab to observe something truly and remarkably unusual. You're not even sure you want to know what.

GOAL What in the actual fuck happened here? You need to get to the bottom of this while keeping your own sanity.

FAMILY Your husband, William, and your adopted daughter, Aryana, 12.

SPECIAL AGENT JIM FORRESTER
FBI HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE

You're the only sane person in this shitshow. The only one who isn't all over the newspaper rumours about satanism and other bullshit. It's your job to make sure people keep separating their assholes from their elbows.

GOAL Make sure that this case doesn't blow up too much. Contain it. Find reasonable explanations—make them up if you have to—and keep the whole thing under wraps.

FAMILY Your two pet ferrets, Dog and Cat.

SPECIAL AGENT DIANA FOWL
FBI HUMAN TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE

You're the good looking "girl," and you play that card to blend in. Let other people do the talking and find out what you want instead. Act harmless and people will think you are. Pull your weight and stay out of the line of fire.

GOAL You're part of the occult, and you've been infiltrating the FBI for many years trying to figure out where Isabella Haagen went. Here she is. But what did she learn about the other side and what is there that you can bring with you? Steal grimoires, take photos of occult symbols with your private camera, and make sure to gain as much as you can from this terrific opportunity.

FAMILY Your parents, back in Utah, that you haven't talked to since you joined the cult. Off-and-on boyfriends, when you find the time. The cult is your real family, but you can't see them or talk about them. Not yet.

DETECTIVE EMILY PARKER

L.A.P.D.

Career police work isn't exactly romantic. You've become more politician than police officer. When you're called in, it's because things are already in panic mode. You know that your colleagues whisper behind your back. "Foul weather Em" they call you, as if bad luck followed in your footsteps. But you know that you're good. You know that you can make any PR problem go away. Question is if this particular shitshow is simply too shitty?

GOAL Make sure that the L.A.P.D. doesn't get any of the blame for this shit. If anything, this was the FBI's fuckup, and they better take full responsibility.

FAMILY Your husband, Phil Parker, and your two children, Emma, 9, and Adam, 6.

INT. BASEMENT CRIME SCENE

The ritual chamber is now clearly lit from portable floodlights powered by a diesel generator. The latter can be heard chugging in the background and the smell of burning diesel hides some of the more noxious smells.

Overall, this is the same scene, same gruesome horrible scenario as before. Same details, new characters.

A team of forensic specialists are here to understand what the hell happened and cook up an explanation for the media.

How the players go about this investigation is entirely up to them. Play on investigation tropes, but remember that they have their own agendas as well.

When it was first played, evidence lockers, examinations of the building, trying to figure out if Isabella Haagen had help, and numerous other leads were pursued.

Introduce a hard deadline if you want. We used 48 hours.

INT. LA POLICE STATION

Pick one character—we picked Jim Forrester—and have that character's player role-play the press conference. Make it as formal-sounding as possible. If the players want to play this out as an argument, where the media gets wind of some of the supernatural or occult features of the crimes, have fun with it.

After all, once the press conference is over, this scenario is over too, and you'll know for certain that there's no Isabella Haagen out there anyway.

It was all just a game.

END

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