

Hades Hunter

GAME NOTES 10-26-2000

THE GAME

Our setting is Miskatonic University in Arkham, Massachusetts in late April 1928.

The game opens with Albert Lancaster, Rhea Brandenburg, and Chester Colebrook having a late Friday lunch with their advisor Professor John Crane. The party is discussing the affairs of the day as Lilly Matson, Professor Crane's housekeeper, answers a knock at the front door. The postman delivers a parcel from Crane's colleague Woodrow Fitch who is in Ireland with eight graduate students conducting an archaeological expedition.

The parcel contains a letter from Fitch describing his groups' work (excavating Celtic burial dolmens in county Cork), a large conch-shell horn, and a number of slates inscribed with Celtic runes. The letter asks Crane to take the shell around to the staff at MU to see if they can identify the type of conch and place its origin. Crane, Albert, and Rhea all try to blow the horn. It seems to be in good shape, but no one can get it to make any sound at all.

As lunch is breaking up Crane asks Chester to take the conch to the "zoologists" for identification, and asks Albert to lug the slates over to Seamus Finnigan (another historian) whose offices are in the MU library building.

Chester dutifully makes the rounds. He finds two zoology grads who gleefully take up the task of identifying the conch. After extensive checking of the conch's morphology with book references they place the conch as a member of a species of giant Philippine conch. Despite Chester's dubious looks, the two grads assure him that the conch is definitely of Philippine origin. Chester takes the conch on to the an archaeology professor to try to unravel the mystery of its provenance. He has limited success, learning only that the conchs were traded all over the South Pacific in prehistoric times, but not finding any apparent explanation as to how the shell came to be in pre-modern Ireland.

Albert and Rhea arrive at Seamus Finnigan's office in time to witness him scourging a hapless undergrad who flunked an exam. Albert and Rhea approach as the young man is sent off with a ten page paper freshly assigned and due Monday. Finnigan accepts the slates and begins sorting out their meaning. He is soon lost in the task and sends Rhea and Albert on their way. Albert propositions Rhea for dinner that night, but the winsome Miss. Brandenburg ignores him.

Saturday passes uneventfully, with Albert, Rhea, and Chester doing whatever it is that college students in 1928 do -- it probably involves taking in a game of rugby or soccer.

Sunday morning begins normally for the trio. Chester and Rhea are preparing for church in their rooms, and Albert is catching up on his sleep in East Dorm. Rhea is the first to receive the awful news -- Lilly Matson telephones her on the verge of breaking down. Professor Crane has been

murdered. She has instructions from the professor to contact his colleague Hiram Ben Jakob before doing anything else should something happen to him. Ms. Matson cannot locate Ben Jakob, so she calls Rhea, then Chester as the next best things. On Ms. Matson's urging Rhea calls Albert's dormitory. Albert comes to the phone expecting to hear his mother's voice, and is pleasantly surprised to be greeted by Rhea's. His pleasure is suffers instantaneous extinction, as he hears the news. In minutes the three converge on the Professor's house.

Albert, who borrowed a dorm-mate's bicycle, arrives first. Lilly sees him in and points him up the stairs. Her parting words of instruction are "...don't touch anything!" Albert goes up, and upon entering Professor Crane's bedroom is greeted by a ghastly sight. Rhea arrives and Albert calls down, urging her to stay down stairs. Chester arrives and hurries up. Chester is struck hard by the sight of Crane's torn throat and battered body. The volume of blood all over the room cracks his calm, and Chester flees, heaving his breakfast and crying out about the blood. He will be forever marked by terror at the sight of spilled blood.

Squaring himself Albert moves into the room and makes a survey. He finds that Professor Crane's throat has been slashed open, and his chest has been savaged. Crane evidently had time to get a revolver out of his night stand. The drawer is on the floor. It contains a tin of lip balm, a box of .38 caliber hollow-point ammunition, some folded handkerchiefs, and a leather holster. Albert finds two bullet holes in the door casing. His examination of the gun shows that Crane got off four shots.

Meanwhile, Rhea is looking in the kitchen for something to clam Chester. She finds a bottle of a opiate-based tonic and gets some in to Mr. Colebrook. Chester calms, but is still badly shaken. In the kitchen, Rhea sees how the assailant entered the house. The back door has been knocked off of its hinges (held on only by the twisted bottom hinge). The outside of the door is badly gouged suggesting a creature like a large bear. Oddly, Rhea discovers that the door wasn't locked -- it was merely latched.

By now the police are arriving. A murder in Arkham is an unusual and terrific crime. The house is soon swarming with police; the chief of the Arkham PD comes to the scene. Everyone is interviewed by the police.

The police send Rhea, Albert, and Chester out after about an hour and continue going over the house with Ms. Matson's assistance. The party sees Professor Hiram Ben Jakob practically running up the street toward the house (he had returned home from his errand and his housekeeper gave him the word), and meet him on the sidewalk. After describing the scene to Hiram, and answering some questions from him (which to their curiosity seem to rapidly center on the parcel from Ireland) Ben Jakob announces that he is going to talk to the Police and that Chester, Rhea, and Albert should go directly to the library. He will arrange for Dr. Armitage to meet them at the North entrance. Ben Jakob's instructions are to search the stacks looking for stories involving shells and Irish priests -- non Christian! With that Ben Jakob hurries on to Crane's house.

The party meets Dr. Henry Armitage at the library. Armitage has been briefed by Ben Jakob and sets the trio to work at once. Ben Jakob arrives after about two hours. By now Rhea, Albert, and

Chester have found several references to a Celtic god -- Cernunos, a.k.a. Cern, and later Herne -- and a story of a Celtic priest who stole Cernunos' horn -- a large conch shell -- from him at the cost of sacrificing his own daughter. The party is duly shaken by this discovery; even more so by the seriousness with which Armitage and Ben Jakob seem to be taking these tales. Chester theorizes that someone, a madman, may be loose looking for the conch. He leaves the library to send a cable to Fitch in Ireland. Chester wants to know if Fitch and his party are still there. Albert is drawn into the restricted section with Armitage and Ben Jakob while Rhea researches cases of mass delusions.

After another hour or so Chester returns. Rhea has found a welter of cases of what appear to be mass delusions, and Albert has found a book of invocations to various gods. He drops the book into his brief bag and sneaks it out of the restricted section. Between Rhea and himself they decode the Latin ritual and German text. Albert quickly copies the drawings in the book. They have found what purports to be a ritual for summoning Cernunos to them.

In conference with Armitage and Ben Jakob it is theorized that Cernunos and/or his hounds are pursuing those who blew upon the horn. Albert and Rhea take in the news that they may be in grave danger, and yet the party is still skeptical that any of this could possibly be real.

After an exhausting day where weirdness has been piled on top of shock, the party leaves the library to find dinner. Chester takes them to a speakeasy in the Italian North end of Arkham. There they have a fine dinner and indulge liberally in illicit spirits. A bit after ten PM they stagger out to catch the trolley South back to Miskatonic.

As they are making their way down the street they pass an old Gypsy woman. She turns as they pass her. Claspng her hand over her mouth she gasps, points at Albert and Rhea and exclaims "you, are marked for death!" The party is in no shape to take this seriously, and after a brief exchange (in which Chester offers the woman a dollar for his fortune) she turns away. The old woman spits on Albert's shadow. As she is rounding the corner she looks back says "beware the hunter's hounds, for they will follow you to the ends of the Earth!" and is gone.

Thus we find the trio riding the trolley back across the Miskatonic river. At a junction where the trolley is briefly darkened (as it coasts from one section of overhead power to another) Rhea thinks she sees a large dog or wolf pacing the trolley car out in the night.

Albert asks Rhea to stay with him and Chester in Chester's rooms. She declines protesting about her reputation. Albert takes up the couch in Chester's parlor and Rhea returns home.

At about two AM Chester wakens to hear scratching at his front door. As he gets up and dons a jacket the scratching becomes a loud banging. He makes it into the hall in time to see a large hound break his front door down and charge up the stairs at him. Chester flees into the parlor slamming the door behind him. Albert is up and moving -- back toward the dining room at the rear of the parlor. Chester is making for his skeet-shooting gun -- a side-by-side 12 ga. shotgun. The parlor door bursts open and the hound runs in. The hound looks at Chester, then fixes on Albert. Chester fires at the great beast and scores a tremendous hit. The hound wheels and charges Chester. Albert scoots for the kitchen and feverishly locates a bottle of high-proof

whisky and a table napkin. The hound sets upon Chester and fells him in one bite. Chester, unconscious and barely alive slumps to the floor. The hound again comes after Albert, his true target.

At this point Albert has opened the kitchen window and is balanced in it. In one hand he has his lighter, in the other his incendiary bomb. The hound runs into the kitchen, Albert makes his throw, and the beast is engulfed in alcohol fire. Albert heaves himself out the window, lands badly on the pavement below, and struggles to his feet. The kitchen is now ablaze as Albert runs up the alley making for the front of the house.

At the front the other tenants of the house are pouring out. Someone has called the fire department. A burly man helps Albert find Chester in the smoke and drag him out to safety. Chester and Albert are taken to the MU hospital and Albert endures another round of questioning by the police. He implores the officers to find Rhea and bring her to the hospital, telling them that she is in great danger.

Two officers do go to Ms. Brandenburg's rooms. And, after ascertaining that she is not in immediate physical danger, offer her a ride to the hospital.

Thus is it that Albert and Rhea arrive at the MU history department early Monday morning. The news only gets worse. Hiram Ben Jakob is holding the reply to Chester's cable. Fitch and six of his students are dead. Killed by a "pack of wolves"; there are only two survivors and they are in hospital in Killarney. Finnigan reports the results of his translation: the dolman where the slates and conch were found was the burial site of the priest who took Cernunos' horn, and the conch is almost surely the stolen item. At this time Albert and Rhea come to grips with the depth of their situation.

There is a period of debate between the students and Ben Jakob and Armitage about the best course of action. They consider attempting to summon Cernunos and asking him to call off his hounds. But, they know that they do not want to surrender the conch to him, and cannot be sure what price he might ask for this "favor". At last they decide to make a stand that night: they will try to slay the hound that is coming for Rhea. At Ben Jakob's suggestion they pick the MU bell tower as their stronghold. They enlist the help of an electrical engineering student to wire a trap at the foot of the tower's stairs.

Preparations are made: they buy shotguns and pistols, obtain ropes, a hatchet and make ready four "Molotov cocktails." At nightfall they enter the tower and bar the door. Rhea stations herself in the belfry looking out over the campus. Albert takes up a position on the stairs half-way up from the bottom. They wait.

Rhea misses the approach of the hounds. But, neither can mistake the pounding on the door. She sees that there are three hounds below. Perhaps this spooks her aim, for she misses them with her first Molotov. The hounds break through the door as the bomb bursts. Now the hounds are in, with a pool of fire at their backs. They charge the stairs.

There is a huge *CRACK* and the stink of Ozone. Lights go out across the campus as the engineer's trap electrocutes the first hound. The second and third, undeterred, come up. Albert and Rhea both lob a Molotov at the beasts and both miss. The floor of the brownstone tower is now awash in gasoline flames. At least now they can see adequately. Both take up their shotguns and fell the second hound yards from Albert's position. It slumps to the stairs and blood pools beneath it. Albert flies for his life as the third hound continues charging. Rhea keeps up her fire until her pump shotgun is empty, then changes to a revolver. The hound is injured but still comes on. It and Albert reach the belfry and a standoff ensues. The hound wavers for a moment between Albert and Rhea. Albert gives the bell a mighty shove at the hound and cuts its rope. The bell swings out then plummets down the tower shaft into the fire. It misses the hound. The hound leaps the void and tears into Rhea. Rhea survives the first attack and Albert dives for his gun. He grabs up his shotgun and turns to step into the hound, but trips - falling forward. The gun goes off as Albert hits the floor. Luck intervenes at the last and the blast hits the hound not Rhea.

The hound rears for another bite and misses. Albert grabs a rope and swings out over the open shaft. He hits the hound and knocks it into open air. The hound falls but fetches up on a landing sixty feet down. In a moment it is moving. Rhea is firing and hound falls just as it reaches the belfry again.

For a moment there is silence. The hounds are dead, the fires have burnt themselves out. Then there are firemen and police, and Armitage and Ben Jakob. The hounds' bodies are gone. All that remains is a pool of blood on the stairs and Rhea's wounds. They are taken to the hospital and Rhea is treated. For Albert the night closes as the day had begun: in the MU hospital sucking coffee and being questioned by the cops.

ÉPILOGUE

On Tuesday Rhea and Chester are visited in the hospital by two monks -- Brothers Paul and Christopher. They identify themselves as Brothers in the Dominican order from a monastery near Boston. The Brothers are full of questions about the events of the preceding days. They say that they have been searching in the area since Saturday morning, and are pleased to find Rhea and Chester alive. There is something about these two that is comforting, yet Albert finds their presence disconcerting and does not participate when they ask to interview him.

By Friday Hiram Ben Jakob has been visited twice by a Special Agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Agent Thomas Parker is keenly interested in the conch and slates. He is friendly to Ben Jakob on his first visit. But on his second visit, when it becomes clear that Ben Jakob will not let him view the artifacts, Parker turns nasty and makes veiled threats about action against the University and insinuates that he might have Ben Jakob investigated as a Communist. Hiram throws Parker out of his office. Parker approaches Henry Armitage as well, but Ben Jakob has warned him, and Armitage tells him off: no warrant, no visit. Parker does not fail to notice that the MU rugby team is "studying" outside Dr. Armitage's office. Nor does he fail to recognize that several university wrestlers are loitering by his car...