

Marsden Falls

I - INTRODUCTION

Captain Hershel Marsden, the captain of the whaling ship HMS Charybdis, also called the Dark Leaf, settled down and founded the town along the New Hampshire coast of Marsden Falls, with his children, after the death of his wife from tuberculosis in 1826. Under his leadership, the Marsden family built an impressive shipyard and drew workers from afar to settle in the area with the promise of a good-paying job and a better life. Once the businesses were flourishing, the town was prosperous, and the children were grown, the old sea captain went back to the sea for one last trip.

Years would pass before Marsden would set foot back in the town he founded. And with him, he brought riches of unimaginable worth. Travelling to strange lands and discovering even stranger

customs, the sea captain lived in his house at the top of the hill overlooking the town with his servants whom he acquired during his trip. No one ever saw him again; the only sign of life was the lights in the windows that could be seen across town. It is said that as long as the light burns in the house, and a Marsden is in residence, the town will be prosperous.

All these years later, generation after generation, a Marsden lived in that house. Now the house is dark, with the passing of Maximillian Marsden, in the year of 2022. The town is starting to decline in the absence of leadership. Now with the distant heir contacted, the town waits to see if the lights in the old mansion will burn once again.

Background Information

The Keeper should familiarise themselves with the adventure content before attempting to run it. This allows the Keeper to determine which characters should make their appearance and when, and how their interactions will guide or illuminate the Investigators. Not everything that hides in the darkness should be given a voice, though.

There are key locations where the Keeper can introduce certain NPCs. Those that the Keeper does not wish to appear can be removed or could ignore the investigators during play. This is true for any part of the story: it is important to adjust the game to your table. A full list of NPCs is found in Appendix A.

Additional information can be gathered from ancient or recent documents that the players can

find and translate. Remember: some translations take longer than others, and you can space out the information based on how long they keep investigating the materials. For example, one might find one piece of information, but upon continuing to translate the rest of the book, they find that the first piece was only the tip of the iceberg.

There are other things for the players to investigate in Marsden Falls, and some may be hinted at in the sections below. However, never let the players feel overwhelmed or chase too many dead leads, as there is a ticking clock once the players arrive in town. If they start investigating a part of the mystery, start from there and the other parts will appear as they go. One of the main goals of the Heir will rapidly become finding the reason of **the Silver Key**.

II - WHAT'S TRULY GOING ON

Hershel Cycle

Hershel Marsden found treasure beyond human knowledge, and most importantly **the Silver Key**. **The Silver Key** is the main instrument of a ritual that enables Hershel to transfer his spirit into the body of one of its descendants. Generation after generation, he took possession of the body of a member of the main family. With him in command, in the Mansion, the town was prosperous.

A Cult formed in the town to preserve the cycle and serve **Marsden**. But as Maximillian Marsden, the last vessel, he couldn't have children, and this body started showing signs of the limits of flesh. The solution was simple: find a descendant of Hershel Marsden in another part of his wide lineage and start a new main family branch.

In this plan, the chosen PC was selected because they are a distant relative of the Marsden family. Faking the death of Maximilian Marsden, all the entire town is now waiting for the new vessel to perpetuate the cycle.

"As long as the light burns in the house, and a Marsden is in residence, the town will be prosperous."

To help Marsden, the cult will do everything possible to keep the PCs in town for the three days and three nights required for the ritual.

To save themselves, the PCs will have to put an end to this by destroying **the Silver Key**, which can only be done with extreme heat, such as the blast furnace of an old shipyard.

The Ritual

The ritual of the soul transfer is the vital point of Hershel Marsden's spirit longevity.

For three nights unbroken in a row, the chosen future vessel must sleep in the bed of the master. During the third night, they should open the body of the master in the ritual room with **the Silver Key**, and then the previous body must be disposed of.

Once the body is destroyed, the soul will take place in the vessel.

Some parts of this ritual are flexible, but the Heir should be in the Marsden Mansion at least once overnight for all three nights and present in the ritual room during the third night. **The Silver Key** must have been in contact with both the new and old vessels, and then the old body must be destroyed.

The soul transfer itself will take place once the ritual is done, and Marsden destroys the body he is currently inhabiting. Then, he is free to move on to the next body. The players need to stop the body from being destroyed.

If the PCs destroy the body after the ritual is done but do not destroy **the Silver Key** beforehand, the soul will move to the new body on their way back home. The Heir can try to resist the possession, but they will have to do so every hour until it the end. If it takes more than two attempts, the Heir will know something is wrong.

If the possession happens, it's possible that the others are unaware. The character will just seem a little off.

To aid this ritual, Marsden has his power in the Mansion and **the Silver Key**, which is a link of influence from him to the Heir, growing with time. **The Silver Key** will be "found" by the PCs in the Mansion during the initial investigations of the place. **The Silver Key** is a heavy old bulky key.

The chosen one will want to keep it on them at all times. As soon as they see it, they need to know what it is for and will fight anyone trying to take it from them. As long as they have it on them, Marsden knows where they are.

The Cult

The Cult acts under the authority of Hershel Marsden for the greater good and prosperity of Marsden Hill. They are simply protecting and preserving the town. But they do not set limits to their methods. People's lives can be rearranged; some disturbing individuals can be intimidated or

'removed' from the town. They are not immortal like Marsden but serve and help to perpetuate the cycle. The Cult is led by **Sheriff Ethan Sullivan**. He is the one to whom everyone reports. The members of the Cult know of and use the Underground if needed.

Most of the townsfolk are part of the Cult as soon as they are old enough. The police, the administration, and the elderly are constantly looking after the PCs. Nevertheless, not everyone in town is a member; some people know of it and prefer to avoid conflicts with the Cult, while others are just newcomers unaware of it.

If pressed with questions when the GM doesn't want to provide answers right away, NPCs can shut down, feign not speaking English, make an excuse to leave, or simply walk away. It will be obvious but effective.

The Cult will be the most direct and tangible adversary of the PCs.

Secretly, a PC can be a Cult member or replaced by one in a cruel twist, but be careful, as it can be a tricky aspect to handle.

The Call

One of the Heirs is chosen, (how it is done is up to the GM), to receive a package from a courier. Inside is a small scrimshaw piece of ivory depicting a ship and a letter. The letter is very formal; it informs the recipient of the recent death of Maximilian Marsden, explains that the PC is the only relative still alive, and asks them to come to Marsden Falls to clear some administrative details specifically concerning the Marsden Mansion they will inherit. The Heir will bring some friends or professionals with them to manage the task during a few day trips.

III - MARSDEN FALLS

Overview

The time of year is not important; however, fall seems to be a perfect time to draw the PCs to this New Hampshire coastal town. The dark skies of winter are coming, and the colours of nature are at their peak. However, you may choose to set it in the hot, muggy days of summer or the frozen, frigid winter of the coastal New England states.

Several locations exist in the town, such as the train station, police department, post office, grocery store, etc. All these places can and will be the scene of some intriguing events witnessed or at least encountered by the PCs. In most respects, it is a normal, mundane town. The wharfs, docks, warehouses, and its shipping trade are important to the whole region.

In a town this small, everybody knows everybody's business. Rumours spread fast, and most of the inhabitants will spot that the PCs are not from around and will know who they are and what they are here for. As soon as one of the townsfolk knows something, so do the others.

The origins of the town, as described in the introduction, are common knowledge. Most of the townsfolk can tell a version of the official story.

The Bus Station

The buses are rare. Normally, only twice a day. If the PCs try to escape by bus, they will have missed it, or no more buses will stop due to a tree falling on the road at the edge of the town or a strike.

Similarly, if the players try to escape by car, the car will break down, and the mechanic will have to wait five days for spare parts.

Marsden Mansion

The Marsden Mansion is a grand manor from the mid-19th century at the top of a hill visible from everywhere in town. The building is a large rectangle of red bricks, partially covered by ivy, with two square pillars in front of the main entrance supporting a small balcony on the top

floor. It has two floors and an attic beneath the roof. The land and the small wood behind the house are part of the property, as well as an old mill not far away. As soon as the PCs arrive, they are welcomed by the two servants of the house, who are fully dedicated.

Inside the house, the style is not at all modern, resembling a vintage picture from long ago. It still has common modern utilities like a phone and electricity, but no internet. Everything can be easily shut down. The first floor consists of a small entry hall, a large living room, an old office, and the kitchen and dining room. The second floor consists of two bathrooms and eight bedrooms, including the servants' room. The attic is full of old, forgotten relics of the past. Unfortunately, the servants lost the key to access it some time ago.

The servants, **Patricia and Richard O'Brien**, are an elderly and traditional couple. They are totally devoted to Marsden and will be to the PCs in a limited way. They are obviously members of the cult. They will help the PCs acclimate to the house. They will place the Heir precisely in the master bedroom, an important part of the ritual.

Hershel Marsden is still wandering around and cannot leave his home until the third night of the ritual, when he will take his new body. When they arrive, the PCs may have a chance to feel a presence observing them. The decomposing body of Maximilian Marsden, whom Hershel is occupying, stalks the halls at night, leaving behind a distinctive odour of decay and, upon closer inspection, bits of skin and rotting materials in its wake. The servants make cryptic statements like, "Sorry, we haven't had the opportunity to clean up yet this morning," when asked about the stench or debris.

In the house, Marsden is all-powerful. He can move freely, an uncatchable ghost, as if secret passages were everywhere in the house (It is up to the GM to decide if those secret passages exist and can be used by the PCs or are just for Marsden). He can provoke hallucinations and horrifying manifestations. The PCs can see things out of the corner of their eyes that aren't there. For example,

when they look at the Heir, they think they see a bag when there isn't one, or a dog with them that isn't there. Items appear normal – a book is just a book, a clock is just a clock – until the PCs see them move. The book begins to bite their hand, only returning to normal when they drop it.

Every night, the atmosphere will grow more and more disturbing, culminating in the ultimate third night. The first night should only involve a disturbing feeling of being watched and a few odd things. The second night can start to feel spooky and, to some extent, threatening. The third night is a nightmare, with no logical explanation for what is happening, pushing the PCs to flee to Hershel's pit.

During the first day or at the end of the first night, the PCs will find a small, engraved box left to be found by Marsden himself. The box can fit in one hand and requires the scrimshaw piece of ivory depicting a ship to open it. Inside is **the Silver Key**. As soon as the Heir sees or touches the key, a link that will grow over the days of the ritual is established between them and Marsden. They will become obsessed with it, keeping it and not letting anyone take it from them. The need to know what it opens will consume them.

If the PCs search the mansion, they will not find much valuable or suspicious information, with the servants assuring them of that. They can find articles about the prosperity of the Marsden family and Marsden Falls through time. In a place forgotten by the servants, at the GM's discretion, they can find an old letter from a Lady Marsden. (*APPENDIX B – HANDOUTS-1. Lady Marsden letter*)

The Old Mill

This is an old, abandoned mill lost at the end of a track that is part of the property. It is completely unusable and does not even turn on windy days. The wooden floor is cracked and unstable. Hidden under the worm-eaten floor lies a wooden chest the size of a shoebox. Inside, there is a small bottle of unidentified alcohol, two gold bracelets, ten ten-dollar banknotes from the 19th century, and a small journal. (*APPENDIX B – HANDOUTS – 2 Marsden's second's journal*). It was buried by Marsden's second back in the 19th century.

It is one of the few places in town not permanently monitored by the Cult. If the PCs head there, soon after their arrival, the sheriff, along with one of his deputies, will drive there to warn them. They will warn them that it is a dangerous place and that they should probably stay in town or at the mansion. They will arrive before the PCs can begin reading the journal.

The Underground

Underground tunnels run beneath all of Marsden Falls, connecting the Marsden Mansion and many other places. They are linked: the Mansion, the Old Mill (an entrance hidden in the bushes near the mill), the town hall, the police department, the town square (an entrance hidden between the post office and the flower shop), and the shipyard. The most important one is Hershel's Pit, the ritual room, directly connected to the old, disused shipyard.

In addition, rooms can be found directly in the underground, some whose purpose has been lost to the ages, others containing strange objects or symbols, and even a secret cemetery for inconvenient people.

Torn pages from Marsden's second captain's journal can be found scattered in those tunnels. (*APPENDIX B – HANDOUTS – Marsden's second's journal lost Pages*). They can also be found elsewhere if time runs out, to help the PCs figure out what is happening.

Hershel's Pit and the Abandoned Shipyard

Hershel's Pit is the place where the soul transfer should take place. It's a medium-sized cave, roughly circular, open to the sky through a large crack in the roof, with moss on the walls, except for a small section. This clean section is perfectly smooth and vertical, with a rectangular surface measuring approximately 80 by 80 inches. A trickle falls from the crack and runs along the floor to an opening in the cave, leading to the abandoned shipyard. This is the mundane aspect of Hershel's Pit, except during the ritual. If the PCs visit before the ritual, it's mostly disturbing, but perfectly harmless. During the ritual, the moon is visible, large and menacing.

The water is red, like blood, drawing incomprehensible symbols on the floor, and the smooth part of the walls glows and bubbles, delimiting a humanoid shape. This is in addition to what Hershel Marsden can do with magic and the cult members surrounding the PCs.

Hershel's Pit is accessible from the underground, hidden deep in the maze of tunnels. It is also connected to the old, abandoned shipyard furnace room by a 10-foot-long tunnel.

The abandoned shipyard is hidden from view by dense vegetation. It was abandoned fifty years ago when the new one was built. It's a large hangar for building small ships, with two rooms for engineers and one containing three massive old furnaces that were once used to melt iron.

The second captain mentions 'the shipyard' in his journal, referring to this shipyard, but the PCs will most likely go to the new one.

Oliver Olson used to explore the abandoned shipyard, but the adults have forbidden it now.

The Town Hall

The Town Hall is a historic building built at the beginning of the twentieth century and recently repainted. It's a proud building situated behind a small park of freshly cut grass, with soaring white columns topped with a decorative pediment and bright red brick walls. Near the entrance, the national flag and the New Hampshire State flag float.

As expected for a town of this size, the place is nearly empty. Half of it is a communal hall rarely used, and the rest consists of offices, archives, and the reception area, where a middle-aged woman, **Samantha Olson** (a member of the Cult), is reading. Not particularly pleased to be disturbed, **Samantha Olson** will still deliver her memorized presentation of the town. She will present the main places as if they were for tourists. Pedal boats can be rented, but only one day a week, in four days. Feel free to add other tourist locations that will be either restricted or watched by the Cult.

Hearing people speaking, **Nicolas White** (not a member of the Cult), the Mayor of Marsden Falls,

looks outside his office. Seeing the PCs, he will introduce himself and invite them to talk, happy that a new soul will inhabit the Marsden Mansion. White is a tall, bald man in a perfect blue suit. He is a straw man for the Cult; he is easily manipulated, superstitious, gullible, and a joyful guy, unaware of the reality of the town.

He talks freely about the town and what he knows of the Marsden history, which is only superficial. He explains how he was elected thanks to **Maximilian Marsden's** support. As far as he remembers, even when he was young, **Maximilian** took control of the shipyards, as competent as his father before him, as if he always knew how to do it. The mayor worked there for him at the shipyard for a year before being elected. He admired Marsden, but most importantly, he really believes the town legend:

"As long as the light burns in the house, and a Marsden is in residence, the town will be prosperous."

The players should be inclined to go to the Town Hall to fix the last administrative details for the inheritance. However, **Albert Hughs**, the notary in charge of it, has taken some vacation and will only be back in three days, just in time for **the Ritual**. **Samantha Olson** can provide some details about what comes with the inheritance, including the Marsden Mansion, some shares of the Shipyard, and a large sum of money.

If the Cult feels that White will be a problem, they will teach him what to say or not, only 'removing' him as a last resort. The Underground is connected to the Town Hall.

There is a small museum about the history of the town and the Marsden family in the Town Hall. Here, the players can learn basic knowledge about the town, but nothing more. There is, however, the Marsden Family tree, with pictures or portraits of the main members. It has already been edited to include the heir's link. The PCs can read the name of Elphie Marsden, married to Andrew Marsden, some distant ancestors. They could also learn that "the Dark Leaf" is the nickname of the HMS Charybdis.

The Police Department

The Police Department is a one-level modern square white building with grey lines. It consists of a main central open space, surrounded by a few offices and cells. An underground level is occupied by a storage room, small archives, and an access to the Underground, locked behind an iron gate.

The Police Department is part of the Cult, which is spread throughout the town. They will act as though they are doing their job but will not push matters. They will not be open about their allegiances but will work against the PCs when they can. If the PCs call the authorities using their phones, the call will be redirected to this police department, making the call useless. They will also cause the disappearance of any NPCs who seem to provide too much information. If a PC, other than the Heir, becomes too uncontrollable, they may be thrown behind bars until the end of the ritual.

The department is led by Sheriff **Ethan Sullivan**, a cold and authoritarian man, who is the real master of the town and the Cult, working under Marsden's orders. He is assisted by his two deputies: his son, **Liam Sullivan**, a bully who abuses his powers, and **Grant Curtis**, a smiling, calm, tall man.

They will always keep an eye on the PCs. If the PCs want to access the archives, they will find that everything about the Marsden family and the Mansion is missing, as it supposedly burned in a fire thirty years ago.

The Post Office

Marc Guzman works as the mailman of the town, stationed in the two-room red building that serves as the post office. He is a smiling guy, not particularly clever, with a crude sense of humor. Sadly for him, he can't keep a secret. This trait can be the trigger for a secret being revealed to the PCs if they encounter him at the post office, at the Old Pepper, or during his rounds.

The post office can be used by the Cult to send the PCs a fake letter from a close relative, claiming they will be near the town soon,

encouraging the PCs to stay longer. The Underground is connected to an entry near the post office.

The Grocery Store

The Grocery Store is a traditional, small grocery shop with an off-licence, featuring a smiling apple as its logo. Inside, it's a joyful mess, but everything can be found on the tall rustic shelves. Located in the downtown area, it serves as a place to meet people and buy essentials. It is owned and managed by **Granny Emma Olson**, who is helped by her ten-year-old grandson, who is visiting for the holidays.

Granny Emma Olson (a member of the Cult) is your typical sweet, old, reassuring, and caring granny. She is affectionately called "**Granny Olson**" by everyone.

Oliver Olson, her grandson, helps as much as he can, but he often looks as if he doesn't know what to do to occupy himself. During his previous visits, he used to go adventuring in the abandoned shipyard, which he refers to as "the ruins," but the grown-ups have forbidden him from doing so now.

Granny Olson may seem defenceless, but she will not hesitate to take action to preserve the Ritual. For example, she might offer a poisoned apple pie, sickening the PCs and forcing them to stay.

Emily's Flowers

Emily's Flowers is a colorful florist shop that sells freshly cut flowers and ornamental plants. The scent inside is powerful and pervasive. It's not a big shop, but it's honest work. **Emily Newman** is a talkative, friendly neighbor who arrived in town four years ago to open her florist shop.

She is happy to talk about what she's seen or heard around town—there's no doubt about that! However, her conversations will not go unnoticed by the Cult. If she shares something she shouldn't, she will be "removed" in a theatrical and mysterious way, possibly even during a conversation with the PCs.

Nobody in town really wants to talk to newcomers or answer any real questions, so the

PCs will likely end up here if they are searching for someone willing to talk.

The Underground is connected to an entry near the florist shop.

The (New) Shipyard

The Shipyard consists mainly of two large hangars made of grey corrugated sheets, open to the sea, with cranes. The area is enclosed by a toasting fence all around. Two medium-sized fishing ships are under construction, one nearly finished and the other in the middle of the process. There are supposed to be offices, but the workers rarely use them. Instead, they prefer to gather in the open spaces of the hangars, setting up desks and tables in various spots.

If the PCs try to enter, they will be stopped by two workers, who are also members of the Cult. **Bill Sullivan**, an electrical engineer, and **Bob Wade**, a mechanic, will quickly take care of them, sending them away with grumpy, sullen expressions. They will not be kind.

The furnace room the PCs are looking for is located in the back of the east hangar. While they may try to sneak in and investigate, they will not find anything suspicious. The walls of the furnace room separate the interior from the exterior, and there is nothing that connects it to a secret ritual room. However, while sneaking around, **Sullivan** and **Wade** might be heard talking to each other, revealing some details about the Cult's activities or the upcoming ritual.

The Old Pepper, Bar and Restaurant

The Old Pepper is a bar and restaurant with a traditional shack-like exterior but a modern, sleek restaurant aesthetic on the inside. The decor is understated, yet every picture, sculpture, plush, and small trinket is themed around childish bears and teddy bears, an eccentricity of the owners. The spacious room features a central bar with tables spread out around it.

It serves as a central hub for town life, run by **Rick and Sandy Davis**, along with their seventeen-

year-old gothic twins, **Daphne** and **Simon** (all of whom are members of the Cult).

The atmosphere inside is disorienting. The owners attend to the PCs with commercial smiles, treating them like any other customer, while the other patrons deliberately avoid them. Depending on the time of day and the GM's direction, many NPCs can be found at **The Old Pepper**, each contributing to the unsettling ambiance of the town.

The Beach

The Beach can be accessed by a narrow road between **Granny Olson's** Grocery Store and the edge of the Shipyard. It's a small, pebbled stretch of shoreline, measuring about 60 feet by 20 feet. The entrance is on one side, and at the other end of the beach lies a beached, rusty fishing boat wreck.

The Duke keeps some of his properties hidden here. Behind the beach, a dune of wild herbs grows, offering a good hiding place for anyone who wishes to remain unseen.

If the players venture to the beach, **Granny Olson** will send her grandson, **Oliver Olson**, to keep an eye on them and report back to her.

The Duke

The Duke, whose real name is **Grim Woods**, is a homeless middle-aged man. He can often be found in the restaurant if he's lucky enough to get some money, or lying around the downtown area, surviving however he can. He's seen things, disturbing things, and they've left a mark on him.

If **The Duke** sees the PCs outside, he will attempt to lure them into a shadowy part of town, where he will urgently shout at them to leave immediately. His explanations will be confusing and frantic, often as if he's trying to warn them, but the words won't make sense.

If he encounters them at **The Old Pepper**, he will act suspiciously, leaving early and trying to avoid the Cult's notice, perhaps having been "bought off" or threatened into silence.

APPENDIX A – NPCS

“(C)” precise that the NPC is a cult member.

Hershel Marsden (C) is the master in the shadows, the monster behind the plan, the antagonist. His goal is to transfer his consciousness to one of the younger members of the family, the Heir. He has been the master of the town since its creation, and people obey him because he is the sign and the promise of the town's prosperity. He occupies the body of the last descendant of the main Marsden branch, Maximilian Marsden, a tall, large man in his sixties when his body began to decay. Marsden can't leave the house during the ritual before the third night. But he is powerful, smart, and resourceless with his powers in the house and with his Cult in the town. In the house, Hershel Marsden is powerful, moves freely, and can attack. He manipulates and monitors the Heir thanks to **the Silver Key**. It is possible that he, or a member of the police department, has taken something precious from one of the PCs to force them to stay.

For references, here is the main line of Marsden patriarchs:

- Hershel Marsden (1782–1856)
- Lewis Marsden (1811-1873)
- Mathew Marsden (1852–1902)
- Andrew Marsden (1880-1952)
- Albert Marsden (1915-1958)
- Maximilian Marsden (1940–2022(present))

Nicolas White has been the Mayor of Marsden Falls for more than 20 years now, after the sudden disappearance of the former mayor. He was selected by the Cult because he can be easily manipulated, and his life is easy. White is a tall, bald, 56-year-old man in a perfect blue suit. He is a straw man for the Cult, easily manipulated, superstitious, gullible, and joyful, unaware of the reality of the town. He talks freely about the town and what he knows of the Marsden history, but his knowledge is only superficial. He used to work in the shipyard, but only for a short period, like his

father before him, who worked at the abandoned one. He admired Marsden, but most importantly, he really believes the town legend: “As long as the light burns in the house, and a Marsden is in residence, the town will be prosperous.” If the Cult feels like White will be a problem, they will teach him what to say or not, only ‘removing’ him as a last resort

Ethan Sullivan (C) is the 47-year-old sheriff and the true leader of the town's Cult, serving under the orders of Hershel Marsden. He is cold and authoritarian, wearing a distinctive pair of glasses. He is the man in charge during the Ritual, as Marsden cannot leave the Mansion. He is the one to whom every member of the Cult will send intel about the PCs and the town's situation. He will never be far from the PCs, in person or through one of his subordinates.

Liam Sullivan (C) is the 20-year-old son of Ethan Sullivan and a sheriff's deputy. He is the chief's son and knows it. He is a bully who abuses his powers. He is small in stature but large in presence, often wearing a red jacket over his uniform.

Grant Curtis (C) is one of the sheriff's deputies. He is a smiling, calm, and tall man. He is strong and appreciated by the townsfolk as a responsive and helpful deputy. Nothing is more dangerous than an apparently trustworthy man of the law who is, in reality, a Cult member.

Patricia and Richard O'Brien (C) are the Marsden Mansion servants. They come from another era and are traditional in their respective roles. They have strange looks and mannerisms, subtly not human. They are both over eighty, scrawny, and always seem occupied or preoccupied with a task to be done. They are totally devoted to Marsden and will be so to the PCs in a limited way. They are obviously members of the Cult. They will help the PCs acclimate to the house. They will carefully place the Heir in the master bedroom, an important part of the Ritual. They will clean flesh and traces of Marsden's passage, always having a good explanation for

strange things happening in the mansion. They often appear unexpectedly, unseen and unheard.

Granny Emma Olson (C) is your typical sweet old reassuring caring granny. She is called Granny Olson by everybody. She always wears a knitted jacket and sometimes cooks pies to sell at the Old Pepper. Granny Olson can propose a poisoned apple pie, sickening the PCs, who will have no other choice than staying.

Samantha Olson (C) is the mayor's secretary and the daughter-in-law of Granny Olson. She is in her 40s and doesn't have much to do, so she reads many adventure and romance books. She wears round glasses and has short curly hair that she dyes red regularly. She will report everything she sees to the Cult and has the task of looking after White, but she doesn't like to act directly.

Oliver Olson is an ordinary but energetic 10-year-old boy, spending a few days with his grandmother, Granny (Emma) Olson. The rest of the time, he lives with his parents in Brown Hill, a medium-sized city two hours away from Marsden Falls. He helps as he can in the grocery shop but likes to play outside. During his previous visits, he used to go adventuring in the abandoned shipyard that he calls the ruins, but the grown-ups have forbidden it now.

Marc Guzman (C) is the town's mailman. He is 27, not thin or athletic, and lives alone in a flat just next to the post office. He is a smiling guy, not very clever, with a crude sense of humour and can't keep a secret.

The Duke, whose real name is **Grim Woods**, is a homeless middle-aged man with an unkempt beard and worn clothes. He has seen things and was disturbed by them. Now, he roams around town.

Rick and Sandy Davis (C) are the cook and the manager of the Old Pepper, the restaurant of Marsden Falls. Rick is a tough guy with a biker moustache, and Sandy is a beautiful lady with short hair and crazy eyes. They are in their early fifties. They are busy and will do what needs to be done quickly. They know everyone's little secrets, even within the Cult. They employ their seventeen-year-old gothic twins. Every year, during the dead season, they do a two-week bike trip and come back with a new teddy bear-looking object for the restaurant.

Daphne and Simon Davis (C) are the 17-year-old adopted twins of Rick and Sandy Davis. They have long black hair and leather jackets. They are in a gothic phase that their parents disapprove of and are not happy to have to serve in the family restaurant. They are grumpy but have artistic passions: writing for Simon and composing for Daphne. They were recently made official members of the Cult and are still learning.

Emily Newman is warm, round, talkative, and friendly, a neighbour who arrived in town four years ago to open her florist shop, Emily's Flowers. Like her, it's a colourful shop. She finds the town a little odd but has settled into it. She will talk about what she has seen or heard around town, for sure. But it will not go unnoticed by the Cult. They will 'remove' her as soon as she talks to the PCs about something she shouldn't. Nobody in town really wants to talk to newcomers or answer the real questions, so the characters will probably come here if they seek someone to talk to.

Albert Hughs (C) is the notary of Marsden Falls. He is 42, has short blond hair, and wears perfect suits. He works mainly with the administration of the town from his office on the first floor of his house. He will return from his holiday only for the night of the Ritual.

APPENDIX B – HANDOUTS

1. Lady Marsden letter

My dear sisters,

I don't believe I'm writing those words but trust me I only wrote them to clear my mind from the horror I saw. I was unable to sleep two days ago and can't do as well since. I saw him. I saw my grandfather-in-law in the plain light of the moon.

My dear Andrew told me it should have been a nightmare, but I know I saw his grandfather walking around the house as if he wasn't dead and burry three days ago. I can't tell it wasn't liberation when the poor soul passed away. Do not put cruel thoughts in my mind, I only think it was a liberation for the sick and old man. But God is not as merciful as you would certainly be to me. Maybe those visions were his vengeance to my thoughts. I just hope I will be able to forget this dark silhouette lost in the night.

I hope you will find time to visit us next month as you promised.

Your dear sister Elphie Marsden

Addressed to Anne Grimm, New York

2. Marsden's second's journal

The journal pages are rotten, only a few entries are readable, but the last two pages were clearly ripped off.

October 1806

The Dark Leaf has a new captain in charge today, a young one but a great one I'm sure of it. A true comrade, a brother, a few years older than me. I couldn't see anybody else than Hershel to lead the ship, and it's with great respect and proud that I accepted to be his second in command. I ... *the page is unreadable from here.*

April 1828

It's been years since our last trip and the sea call me. But my obligations here keep me on the ground. ... *few lines are covered by small spots* ... I will maybe just end my days as a humble merchant here, at least it will be with friends.

April 18XX

Hershel asked me this morning to accompany him for a new trip. I can't refuse the proposition. The sea calls me even after all those years. I can see that he knows what he wants and where he wants to go. He has the assurance of a messiah that received a vision. The ...

... Multiple pages are in a too-deteriorated state to be read...

... weeks of research, we found the island. It was worth it. ...*few confuse words*... We will not need to work anymore, nor will need our children or theirs. Gold and gems everywhere. And men, obedient and ... *the ink is unclear from here.*

September 18XX

God pardons him for what he did and me for what I will do. Hershel found something not for humans in our ultimate trips. I didn't mind it at first, but what he did was not something I can't ... *The next two pages are ripped.*

3. Marsden's second's journal lost Pages

In a shaking handwriting,

He showed me the underground below Marsden Falls and some of the secrets it kept for ages. I didn't mind it at first, if it helped us become rich how bad could it be. I was a fool!!! They are the devil's work. So many rooms and he wants to add more. Last week he showed me the last one he dig with the help of his strange servants. It's a room hidden behind the shipyard furnaces, ...unreadable... Fool I was to think this key

...unreadable... led me and his youngest to this room. He was in his last days I thought of seeing him so old and exhausted. The room was totally unrecognisable, a door to hell. Before I realised, his son had used the key on him. I couldn't believe it when he talked with the tense and the knowledge of his father. I drank as much as I could, but the vision stayed even after his funerals.

This ritual room and everything connected to it need to be destroyed. But first, as the last soul he dared to accept in his home, as the last person that can be called his friends, I need to stop him, at all costs.