

“A Little Thing” ©2005

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Call of Cthulhu

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Introduction

This adventure is intended to be the second in the “Convenience Store Cthulhu” series and takes place after “Clean Up, Aisle 4.” However, it can be run as a standalone adventure.

The adventure sends the investigators on a mission for the enigmatic Mi-Go: they want the investigators to recover one of their brain cylinders. Unfortunately, the item is in the possession of an undead being that is not inclined to hand over his prized canned brain.

Keeper’s Background

The 12th century Scholastic philosopher John Belton, developed the theory that the life energy of a creature, which he called the spark, could move a shell of metal or wood as easily as it moved the body. He further theorized that the spark could be somehow utilized as a source of energy-although he argues that using the “spark like a mere piece of wood for fuel” would be an affront to God. Other thinkers followed Belton and some investigated the matter unhindered by Belton’s moral sense.

In the early 1900s an Englishman named Harold Greshem was working on a theory about the life energy of living creatures when he came across Belton’s works. Delving deeper, he came across works that went into greater detail and encountered some works that had links to the Mythos and its alien sciences.

Utilizing his findings, he designed several devices intended to capture and store said life energy in the way a battery stores electrical energy. Greshem decided to conduct his experiments in a big way-he constructed several apartment houses in London in 1910 and equipped them with various versions of his “batteries.” He then arranged for people to die in the houses and examined the results. Unfortunately for Greshem, the authorities were somehow able to connect him with some of the deaths and him and his fellows were arrested in London. His houses were troubled places for years; at least until the Nazi bombings in WWII destroyed all but one of them.

Unfortunately for the rest of the world, Greshem had corresponded extensively with like minded people in Europe and America. Many of these people, such as the American Brunholt (see the adventure “The Brunholt Head”) came to bad ends.

One of the people Greshem corresponded with was a rather untalented self-proclaimed inventor named Joseph Range. Range was convinced that his soul would perish when he

died and was terribly afraid of this occurring. As such, he became obsessed with finding ways to extend his life.

While Range was singularly unskilled at invention, he was rather good at investigating old texts and myths-so much so that he eventually, after many years, managed to acquire a Mi-Go brain cylinder containing the brain of a true inventor-a being the Mi-Go had acquired on one of their many forays to other worlds.

Through the use of threats and punishments, Range got the brain to design various devices which he patented and sold. Ironically, the best inventions were regarded as preposterous impossibilities and rejected. Using the money from selling the patents he helped fund a group dedicated to developing a way to preserve the spark of life after death.

In his final years Range became morbidly obsessed with surviving death and remaining in the physical world. Using Greshem's diagrams, the aid of his fellows and the intellect of his prisoner, he managed to design a fairly crude device for holding his spark after he died. In his last few months, he spent his fortune preparing the means of his survival. He purchased a plot of land and had a large house constructed on the site with a secret underground complex in which he would remain. He was sealed in the secret complex by a loyal colleague and, upon his death, his spark was drawn into the device.

He had planned that his fellows would continue to refine their devices until his spark could be placed in a suitable shell and he would not need to siphon the energy of others to remain in existence. However, his group's rather nefarious activities attracted the attention of a group of investigators and most of them were slain. Since then Range has remained trapped in his secret chamber feeding on the life of others and unable to die.

Getting the Investigators Involved

Recently the Mi-Go learned the location of one of their lost brain cylinders-specifically the one acquired by Range. The Mi-Go prefer to operate in a subtle manner and like to use agents to do their dangerous work for them. As such, the investigators will be contacted by a Mr. Earl Grey, a Mi-Go agent.

Mr. Grey seems to be a nondescript man. He has light brown hair, an average face, is of average height and average build. He speaks American English with no discernible accent. He wears an average gray suit and drives a mid sized average priced car. The only slightly odd things about him are that he rarely blinks and he wears a gray hat of the sort that was in style during the 1920s. Oh, and he has a Mi-Go thinking organ in his skull instead of a human brain.

Mr. Grey will approach the investigators and offer them something in return for doing "a little thing" for him. He will say that he is a historian of science and needs a specific item recovered-a cylinder containing some experimental and highly dangerous chemicals developed in the 1920s. If the investigators agree, he will carefully describe the cylinder and warn the investigators of the terrible danger posed by opening it. He will also add that he will give them an additional reward should they recover any other items of historical and scientific interest.

He will then tell the investigators that his research has revealed that the cylinder was last in the possession of a man named Joseph Range. Mr. Grey believes that although Range died in the 1930s the cylinder is still concealed in his house which is located in Orono, Maine.

If the investigators agree, Mr. Grey will provide them with a suitable means of travel, such as plane tickets to Bangor, Maine (a few minutes drive from Orono) and wish them luck. He will again stress how important it is that the container not be opened.

The Keeper can decide what Mr. Grey will offer the investigators. If they investigators have played the previous adventure, he will visit them and say “It has come to my attention that you have a bit of a problem with unwelcomed guests. I see that you have a solution...but a temporary one. Perhaps you would like a more permanent solution.” This is most entertaining if they are actually in the convenience store at night and relying on the microwave generators to keep the phantoms at bay. In this case, when Mr. Grey finishes, the microwave generators will “fail” for a few seconds-long enough for a phantom or two to become visible. Mr. Grey will offer to solve this problem permanently if they assist him. If the investigators succeed Mr. Grey will have another Mi-Go device placed in the area, thus preventing the interface from taking place in the area around the convenience store.

If the investigators did not go through “Clean Up, Aisle Four”, or if they do not want a new solution to the problem, then Mr. Grey will offer them something else beginning with cash and working his way up to even more cash. Mr. Grey is willing to pay up to \$5,000 for the cylinder. He would be willing to pay more, but knows that offering too much for it would probably incline humans to try to sell it on their own for more money.

Investigation

The following details the information that can become available to the investigators in the course of the adventure.

Mr. Grey: Mr. Grey will be willing to answer some questions, although he will state that he is “a busy...man.” He knows that the house is owned by a fund established by Range and that the taxes and so forth are paid for from this fund. He will say that he believes that the cylinder is most likely in a hidden area, based on his experience with the recovery of other artifacts. He will add that the house is being rented and that the investigators are not to do anything to attract undue attention to their activities, such as shooting people. If asked about Range, he will say that Range was an eccentric but apparently brilliant inventor who held numerous patents.

Joseph Range: Checking on the patents will reveal that Range did hold several patents. The patents are for a variety of items, mostly electronics. If an investigator with Physics or Electronics skills examines some of the patents and makes a successful skill roll, they will notice that the devices are not the invention of a mere workshop tinkerer but clearly the work of someone well educated in physics and electronics. A check on Range’s academic records will reveal that he had a high school education.

If the investigators check into Range’s finances (this can be done by using their own Credit Ratings to get access to such information, by hacking into the bank computers, etc.) they will learn that he invested the proceeds from his patents quite well and established a fund. There was a large expenditure in the 1930s (which was used to pay for the house). The money spent significantly exceeds what would be required for a house in that time-thus supporting Mr. Grey’s conjecture that the cylinder is in a hidden workshop. Since then the fund has been used to pay property taxes on the house and to keep it

maintained. The financial aspects are taken care of by a reputable financial company-no one there has any idea of the truth about the house.

If the investigators try to find out more about his personal life, they will find little beyond his birth records (he was born in Portland, Maine) and his school records. There is not even an obituary for him in the papers.

The House: If the investigators check on the house, they will find that it is handled by a rental agency. Range set it up legally so that the house would be rented out at a very low rate. The house has been rented for years. The contract specifies that no major alterations are to be made to the house-only normal repairs. It also specifies that there is to be no digging on the grounds of the house.

If the investigators check on the rental records, they will find that the house has a fairly rapid turnover. If the investigators are able to fast talk the rental agents, they will reveal that the renters complain of feeling weak and sick after staying in the house (this is the effect of their energy being siphoned away). The rental agent thinks it is probably because the house is full of toxic mold and needs to be remodeled (but the contract forbids such alterations). If the investigators are able to talk the rental agents into divulging the names of the past renters and they speak with these people, the investigators will learn that they all say that the house seemed to drain them. Many will laugh a bit nervously and some will hint that they think the house is haunted. If asked, most will go with the toxic mold hypothesis.

The Students: The house is currently being rented to five college students who attend school at the University of Maine at Orono. They are Eric Rollins, Tabitha Hunt, Samantha Jones, Fred Williams and John Hunt.

If the investigators observe the house, they will find that the students are usually gone during the day and (of course) Friday and Saturday night. If the investigators talk to the students in a friendly manner and ask about the house, they will say they started renting it a few weeks ago. If asked if they have noticed anything odd about the house or ask about any illness or weakness, they will say that the rental agency warned them their might be some mold or mustiness but that they cannot remodel the house. They will say that they agreed to the conditions of the rental (that they had to assume any health risk) because the house was so awesome and so cheap. The students will say that they have felt a bit run down, but they attribute this to their tough schedule and partying.

Maps

The following details the maps for the adventure. The adventure takes place within Range's house and his secret complex.

The house is large, well constructed and in good shape. Unfortunately, the house's structure contains a network of hidden wires and rather unusual devices which serve to siphon off the life energy of those that remain within its walls. This energy goes to maintain Range's existence. The house drains one magic point every six hours from those within its walls. This drain makes people feel tired and a bit ill. The effect grows over time as the drain wears on the victims. Most people decide they have had enough after about two months.

House Map

The following details the house. Aside from the odd devices in the structure of the house, the rest of the house is normal and looks like the dwelling of typical college students.

First Floor

Dining Room: This is the dining room of the house. It contains the usual items for such a room.

Kitchen: This is the kitchen. The stove is rather old, but it is otherwise equipped with the trappings of a modern kitchen.

Bath: A bathroom with a full sized tub and an old (high capacity, one flush does it) toilet.

Closet: A closet.

Study: The former study-now used as a bedroom.

Living Room: The living room.

Stairs Up: Stairs going up to the second floor.

Stairs Down: Stairs going down into the basement.

Second Floor

Stairs: Stairs going down to the first floor.

Bedroom: A bedroom.

Bedroom #2: Another bedroom.

Closets: Closets.

Basement

Stairs Up: These stairs go up to the first floor. They are a bit squeaky. The side of the stairs is boarded over, which is a bit unusual. If the investigators remove the boards, they will see the hollow under the stairs and the basement wall. If they check the wall carefully, perhaps by tapping on it or looking for differences in the surfaces, they will find that there is a hollow space behind it. It has been plastered over with cement but can be broken through, thus revealing a space and the door to the work shop.

Basement Entrance: The entrance to the basement. The area is a bit damp.

Main Basement: The main area of the basement. It is a bit damp and has a musty smell.

Furnace Room: This room contains the furnace for the house.

Generator: This room contains the old generator. It still works, although the tank is only about a quarter full.

Storage: This area contains a lot of old junk that has been left by the tenants over the years.

Work Shop

Entrance: The entrance is located behind the stairs leading to the basement. It has been plastered over with cement to hide it, but the plaster is fairly thin and over a plywood board. The door is locked.

Pit: There is a three inch by three inch hole on the floor in the northeast corner of the room (use Spot Hidden to find). Placing a suitable object (about 3X3 and three feet long)

will prevent the pit from operating by extending a rod under the panels if the pit. The top of the pit consists of four balanced floor sections that will collapse under 100 pounds of weight or more. The pit itself is ten feet deep and the bottom is filled with blades and various jagged items. The fall inflicts 2D6 in damage.

Spike Trap: The door to this room is rather odd-it is a panel that must be pushed down into the floor. There is small hole in the wall to the east of the door to this room's door (use Spot Hidden to find). Pushing a suitable object (the same dimensions as the one used to disable the pit, above) will lock the spike trap in place. If the trap is not locked, a sprung steel arm with metal spikes welded to it will be released and swing into the doorway. To avoid being hit the investigator opening the door will need to make a dodge roll. A hit by the trap inflicts 1D8+1D6 points of damage.

Chainsaw Trap: Beside the door are three metal knobs. The knobs can be pulled out or pushed in. Pulling out all three knobs disables the trap. If the door is opened without the knobs being pulled out, the sound of engines starting up will be heard. If an investigator enters the room the balanced floor will tip a bit and this will cause three large chain saws (attached to a central pole) to drop into the room and spin around. The saws are two feet apart with the first one being two feet off the ground. They are also spread out (like the hands of a clock) to provide maximum coverage). The investigator who entered the rooms can make a dodge roll to jump back out of the room to avoid being hit. Trying to run past the chain saws requires three dodge rolls to reach the other door. Each chainsaw blade inflicts 2D6 points of damage. The mechanism can be damaged-each saw will take 10 points of damage before it stops working and the central pole will take 15 points before it stops rotating.

Workshop: The door to this chamber is locked. The lock can be picked (rather hard to do if the chainsaws are still active) or the door can be broken down (use a STR of 15 on the resistance table). The workshop contains a wide range of dusty equipment from the 1920s but nothing that is particularly unusual.

Soul Battery Chamber: The door to this chamber is also locked. The door can be broken down (STR 15) or the lock can be picked. Within the chamber is a workbench, a safe, a couch and an odd machine.

The main feature of the room is a highly complex machine of metal parts, wires and glass components. Its components move and rotate, making it seem almost like a living thing. A strange pale blue glow is emitted from the structure. It is connected to wires that run off towards the house and to various complex looking battery like structures including one large (3 feet tall) battery. The wires also connect to a skeleton on the couch and what looks like a telegraph machine on the work bench.

The machine has two main functions. The first is that when suitably attached to a living creature it will drain the being's "spark" into a suitable soul battery if the being dies or is killed, maintaining the being's mental attributes and transforming it into a being capable of existing without its original physical body (see the information about Range, below). Second, the machine is connected to the devices in the house which drain off life energy and uses it to power the equipment and sustain Range.

The machine is fairly fragile and can be rendered inoperative by 6 points of damage. If the machine is destroyed it will emit a burst of energy that will inflict 1D6 points to everyone within 20 feet. Range's battery is fairly solidly constructed and will sustain 15 points of damage before it fails.

Range's battery is linked to the telegraph machine-this allows him to communicate from within his battery with people who know Morse code. The telegraph device is a standard surplus model and does have a Morse code key on it.

The workbench holds the cylinder the investigators are looking for. The device is a Mi-Go brain cylinder containing the alien brain. The device is hooked up to a speaker, microphone, stylus and camera system. This system, incredibly advanced for the 1930s, enables the brain to see, hear, speak and write. The cylinder is also attached to a power system (which is in turn attached to the soul battery system) which sustains it. If the investigators talk to the cylinder, it will plead with them for help. It mainly wants to escape its situation and be brought home. It went along with the Mi-Go willingly and wants to go back to them. If the cylinder is removed there will be a strange discharge of energy from the powering device (the battery has several days of power capacity of its own) which will arc to what seems to be a radio device. This is a signal that will lead to the next adventure in the series.

The safe, which is locked, holds a variety of diagrams of electronic devices. These diagrams could be used as the basis for patents and would be worth a significant amount of money. The safe also contains papers and notes describing the soul battery device (but not enough detail on how to make one) and a notebook in which Range writes about his experiences with his group. The gist of it is that in the 1920s a group existed that was dedicated to creating a way for people to achieve immortality by the use of what they called "soul battery" technology. The notebook suggests that other members were involved in various experiments and projects, some of which might still exist.

Action

The following provides some guides for handling the action in the adventure.

In the House

Unless the investigators decide to try to harm the college students or Range pursues them into the house, there will be little action in the house.

In the Workshop

The initial action in the workshop will involve dealing with the traps that have been set to protect Range. The traps are detailed, above.

The final action will take place in the soul battery chamber. Range will sense the investigators approaching and will use the telegraph to send a signal. If there is no reply or if he does not get the reply he wants (that the group has returned to help him) he will emerge from his battery to attack. He will attack savagely and attempt to drive the investigators away. If they flee, he will pursue a ways but will be forced to return to his battery to avoid perishing.

Range can be dealt with by destroying the machine or his battery, or both. If the machine is destroyed, Range's powerless battery will no longer sustain him and he will perish. If the battery is destroyed Range will have no place to reside and will slowly lose

his energy. If either happens, Range will become enraged and attack savagely in a desperate attempt to steal energy to sustain himself.

Conclusion

The adventure ends when the investigators recover the cylinder and deal with Range. Given the brutal nature of his traps and the fact that he has been feeding on the life forces of various innocent people over the years it is likely that the investigators will simply decide to destroy him. Destroying him or otherwise defeating him should yield a 1D4 Sanity point award. The investigators should, as usual, be penalized if they willingly harm or endanger innocent people.

If the investigators return the cylinder to Mr. Grey he will reward them as promised and might have additional jobs for them in the future. If the investigators decide to keep the brain cylinder, Mr. Grey will probably hire some people to deal with them-the nature of his reaction is at the Keeper's discretion.

If the investigators are able to recover Range's equipment, the Keeper will need to decide what should become of this. Perhaps the best option is to ensure that the equipment is destroyed during the course of the action. Another option is to have Mr. Grey offer to purchase the items as artifacts of the history of science. He will be willing to offer up to \$10,000 for the equipment. Obviously, it would change the world significantly if a soul gathering device became a production item-so the Keeper should find a plausible way to keep that from happening. Unless, of course, the Keeper wants the campaign to take an unusual turn.

Finally, there is the matter of the strange effect produced when the cylinder is removed by the investigators. That effect leads to the next adventure in the series.

Monsters

Joseph Range

Range has had his life energy (POW) transferred within a special sort of soul battery. He can leave the battery, but doing so causes his energy to dissipate. Each minute he spends outside the battery consumes one magic point. If he runs out of magic points, he then starts losing one point of POW per minute. If he runs out of POW, his cohesion will be lost and he will vanish in a faint burst of light. This limits his mobility considerably.

Although he seems to be a ghost or wraith, he has a partially physical existence as a type of energy. As such he has INT, POW and DEX scores and moves by "flying." He can pass through virtually any solid surface, but he is blocked by an inch or more of dense materials, such as lead or gold.

He attacks by attempting to rip away at the life energy of other creatures. To attack, he must be in contact with the intended target. When he attacks, match his POW against the target's POW. If he wins, the victim loses 1D3 magic points and must make a sanity check to avoid losing 1 sanity point. If he fails, he loses 1D3 points of POW. If he is reduced to 0 POW, his cohesion is lost and he vanishes in a faint burst of light.

Because of his nature, he is unaffected by most material weapons-bullets, knives and such just pass through them harmlessly. He can also be dispersed by a suitably strong electric field or by an electromagnetic pulse-the Keeper will need to decide the details of such cases.

Range barely remembers being human and is mainly driven by a basic desire to survive. When he is in his battery he can sense the general presence of beings with a 3 or higher power within the house. Within his workshop he can sense their general proximity to him. Outside of the battery he can sense the presence of such beings as easily as a human being would see in a well lit room. His ability to sense is blocked by dense materials such as lead. Anything that can suitably block radiation-such as a hazard suit would prevent him sensing the life energy.

If people enter his soul battery chamber he will attempt to communicate. He can use 1 magic point to activate his Morse code beeper for a minute and can sense the reply. He will initially assume that anyone arriving is someone from his group and will ask if they have come to provide him with a better "home." He will only risk leaving the battery if he believes that he is in danger or if someone attempts to remove the brain cylinder from the room-he can sense its life energy as well. In these situations he will emerge and attack savagely.

Joseph Range, Disembodied Spark

Char. Stats

STR n/a

CON n/a

SIZ n/a

INT 13

POW 14

DEX 15

Move 12

Av. Damage Bonus: n/a

Weapons: See above.

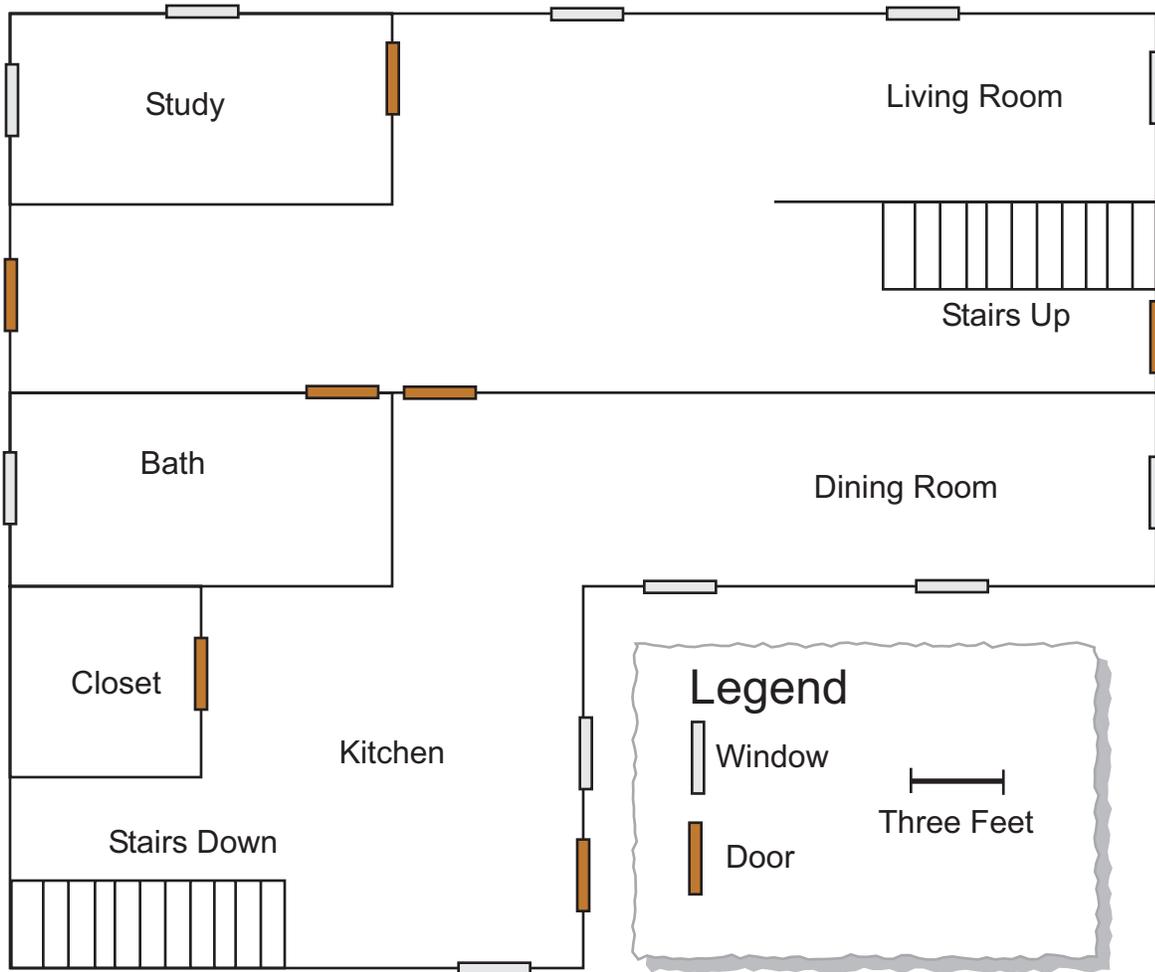
Armor: None

Spells: None

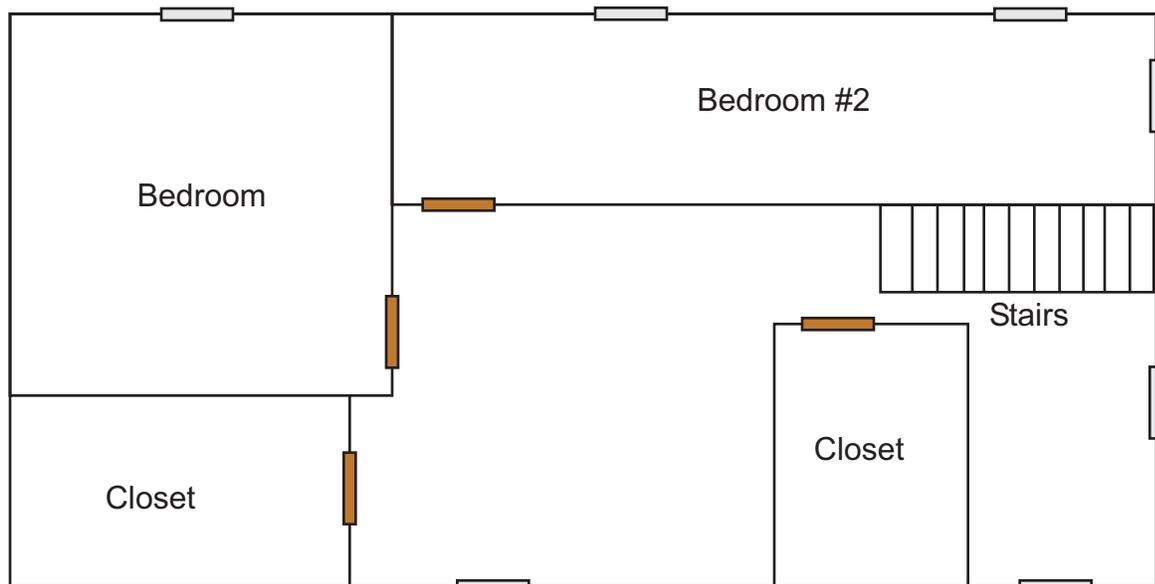
Sanity Loss: Seeing a disembodied spark costs 0/1D3 sanity points.

A Little Thing House Map

First Floor

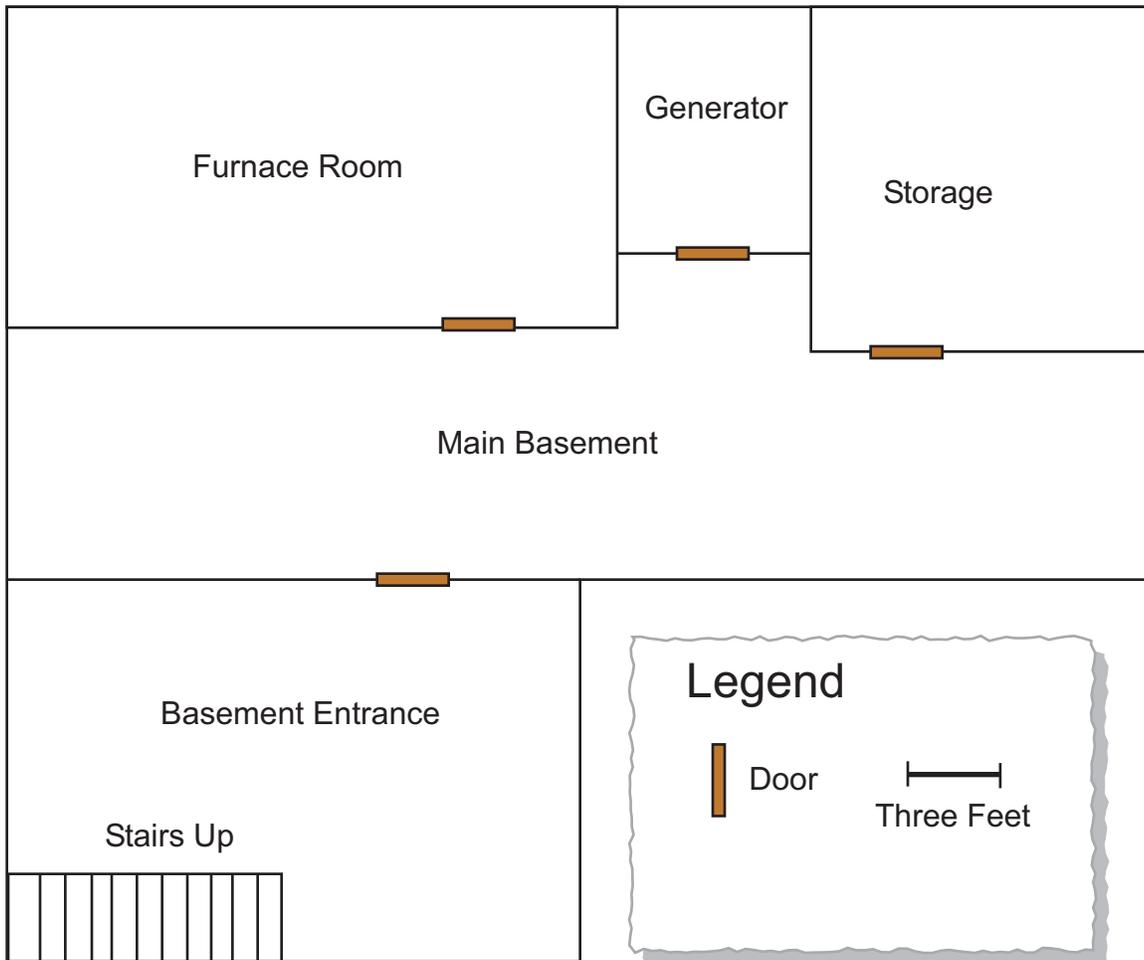


Second Floor



A Little Thing House Map

Basement



A Little Thing Workshop Map

