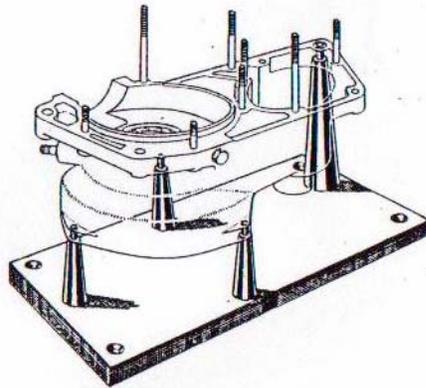


THE SIGNAL

AN *EPOCH* SCENARIO BY MARCUS D. BONE

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ACTIVATION AND DISASSEMBLY OF THE *KPG1A20 SIGNALBOX*



RESTRICTED. DISSEMINATION OF RESTRICTED MATTER.

EPOCH is a game of character-driven survival horror. The goal is to deliver a tense and scary experience in a single game session. *EPOCH* players are active participants in the creation of the game atmosphere and have complete control over the creation and ultimate fate of their characters.

THE BASICS

INTRODUCTION.

1. Nature of the Emergency.

The town of Wilcott is about to have a visitor. Not your typical visitor from your typical horror story; not a demon, alien, or vampire, but rather the sort of visitor who is simply one its own returning home after years abroad. Unfortunately, this simple man - let us, for convenience sake, call him Mr Hadrian - is not well... positively ill if one is to be honest. You see years of service in his country's finest military establishment, as both an uncaring killer and an unquestioning assassin, has unhinged poor old Mr Hadrian.

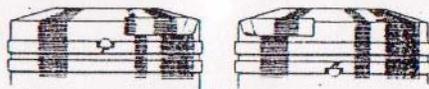
Returning home was meant to be a calming and restorative experience, but some horrors can never be left behind, can they? So it is then, and as no surprise to the reader, that our visitor has brought with him a device which, once unleashed, will bring havoc, death and insanity to the innocents of Wilcott.

And we all know just how easy it will be for someone to tip Mr Hadrian over the edge, now don't we...

2. About *THE SIGNAL*.

THE SIGNAL is an adventure written for the EPOCH game-system, and has been submitted to the Kapcon 23 (2014) edition of the Scenario Design Contest (SDC). As such, it best suits a 3-hour time slot accommodates 4 to 6 players.

Unlike other EPOCH scenarios, this adventure is specifically designed to be run with little preparation and at short notice (i.e. as a 'pick-up' or 'overflow' game). As written it requires only the material provided in either the EPOCH rulebook or the rules from one of the Quick-Start scenarios. To help facilitate this (and minimise the need for preparation), it is intentionally presented in a style that allows the Game Master (GM) to define the specifics of the setting and how the various events will unfold, as they see fit.



RS10 - ROCKERS (FITTED)
Fig 1.

3. Locked Boxes.

THE SIGNAL is a locked box scenario utilises the *FAMILY* Relationship cards from the EPOCH rulebook. The adventure will also work well with other relationship alternatives, including the *FRIENDS* or *COLLEAGUES* cards.

4. GM Flashbacks (Optional Rule).

One addition to this scenario that is not otherwise normally used in EPOCH is the introduction of GM FLASHBACKS. The first three Tension Phases each note one of these flashbacks, which can be initiated as and when required by the GM. GM Flashbacks not only

provide some context to the story as it unfolds, but more importantly provide the GM an opportunity to place the gaming spot-light on a character (or characters) who may not have had as much 'screen time' during the Tension Phase as their fellow players. This tool should help 'level the playing field' for players unfamiliar with the EPOCH mechanics or who are not as naturally 'outgoing' as others

5. The Horror Track.

In regular EPOCH scenarios, the Horror Track is utilised to determine how successful the players are in solving the horror that threatens them. In *THE SIGNAL*, no horror track is provided, as this not only removes the need for additional cards to be brought to the table and reinforces the focus on player/character interaction as opposed to the need for specific investigation. As an alternative, the GM and players should determine their level of success in the scenario based on their characters' actions and final results of the story.

PLOT OVERVIEW

1. The Tension Phases.

THE SIGNAL is divided into six Tension Phases. The first, *STRANGE BEGINNINGS*, introduces the initial setting of the scenario, Devil's View, and facilitates the players in developing their group dynamic. This phase ends with an unexpected attack by seemingly rabid animals.

Tension Phase Two, *CRACKLIN' ROSIE*, covers the group's flight for safety after the unprovoked attacks, and concludes with the discovery that the characters might not be the only victims of some strange event.

Tension Phase Three, *IT MUST BE A DREAM*, introduces the source of the horror, the Signal Box, and ends when the characters are confronted with the madness the signal brings.

Tension Phase Four, *WELCOME TO WILCOTT*, details the survivors' trip into the town of Wilcott, and leads them to the home of the perpetrator of the evil.

Tension Phase Five, *THE SIGNAL BOX*, brings the story to an initial conclusion with the destruction of the Signal Box, and a battle to the death between the crazed townsfolk, the madman responsible for unleashing the terror, and few surviving characters.

Tension Phase Six, *CLEAN-UP*, acts as both an alternate scene in the event the characters attempt to flee town rather than confront the source of the horror, as well as being available if the GM wishes reveal one of those 'there are no winners' scenes that often play after the credits in apocalyptic horror moves.

2. Setting the Scene.

It is late summer of this every year and the characters find themselves at Devil's View Nature Reserve; a national park so named for the most dominant natural feature in the region - a razor sharp mountain known as the Devil's Back.

Devil's View could be located anywhere in the world, and by default is generic hill country somewhere at the foot of a mighty mountain range. Snuggly hidden within a boxed in valley, the only road leading to Devil's View is a long and winding dirt track that begins in the small town of Wilcott some 25 miles to the east.

How the characters arrived at the camping ground in Devil's View's (a serene glade of flat land, hemming in by steep cliffs on two-sides and a fast flowing river on a third), is left to the group to decide as they begin the adventure proper (see Tension Phase One - Strange Beginnings below). What is important is that group find themselves in a nice relaxing location, isolated from the rest of the world (i.e. with no cell phone reception) and free from the worries of day-to-day life...

3. Acts of Malice.

Dylan Hadrian was a loyal soldier for his country. For years he undertook his assigned missions with cold efficiency, and without question, seemingly unaffected by the horrors he was ordered to perform on his fellow human beings. But despite outward appearances, Hadrian burnt within; each act of destruction he perpetrated and every cold murder he committed, destroyed, bit by small bit, his humanity.

By the time his superiors, and more importantly the doctors, realised how little of the real Dylan Hadrian was left inside him, it was too late; he was now nothing more than a self-destructive sociopath. In becoming such a monster, Hadrian became more a liability than an asset, and so it was decided that he would receive his discharge and be sent home, no longer anyone's problem but his aging parents.

And there it might have ended. The shell of Dylan Hadrian might well have lived out the rest of his, likely short, life in the care of friends and family in his home town of Wilcott.

But it wasn't destined to be. Hadrian, has brought with him a prototype of a very special weapon, one designed by the military to allow them to seize enemy territory with a minimal of fuss. A device named the Signal Box.

A weapon of ultimate clandestine terror, the Signal Box emits waves of energy that disturbs the thoughts of every living thing - from human through animal - driving them slowly insane. Without sound, light or heat, the Signal Box was designed to render the target population 'inoperative' within a few short hours.

It should come as no surprise that Hadrian need very little to finally drive him insane, and in this case it was the arrival of party of Military Police investigating the disappearance of the Top Secret prototype that set him off. In an act of violent paranoia, he attacked and killed the soldiers (along with his parents), and decided that the whole of Wilcott must pay for their imagined crimes against him.

Taking the Signal Box to the local power substation he unleashed the Signal that will bring brought doom to all that hear it. Unfortunately, not being an expert in the workings of the device, Hadrian has failed to set it up correctly, and as such it is not as 'silent' a killer as it might have been!

4. The Effects of the Signal.

GMs are free to determine how each individual is affected by the 'signal'. Madness, uncontrolled anger, and hallucinations are all typical. The physical breaking-down of the body's cells is also a side effect, most readily indicated by the bursting of the blood vessels in the eyes and collapse of the small capillaries in sensitive tissue, such as the ears and nose. Those exposed to the signal long enough will soon to bleed from every orifice.

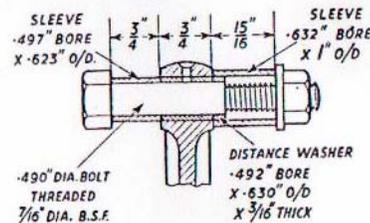
As this is a horror scenario, the Signal Box also disrupts all technology, radio and cellphone reception, effectively isolating Wilcott and those near it. If, during the adventure, the players are determined to get some sort

of communication working, the GM should feel free to blow powered-up devices, as a backlash from the signal.

PREPARATION

1. Facing the Horror.

As with all EPOCH scenarios, *THE SIGNAL* is more a study of the individuals challenged by the horrors unleashed by the threat (in this case Hadrian and the Signal Box), than it is a story of investigation or resolution. As the adventure unfolds the characters will discover reveal more about themselves they would have ever guessed, and will likely become more a danger to each other than the signal could ever be!



RE-ADJUSTING THE PEKING BOLT
Fig 2.

2. Creating the Characters.

The first step in creating the characters for this scenario is to distribute the Relationship cards. Each player should spend a little time thinking about their character and how they might be connected to the others in their group.

Next, each player is dealt one Trait card and one Strength/Weakness card. These cards should remain hidden from the other players and act as prompts and inspiration if the player ever faces a hard decision on how they should act in at any point of the story.

Once the players have an idea of the characters and the relationships they will be playing, each is given a set of *OUTCOME* cards (3 physical/mental outcomes and 1 Hero/Zero Card). These are used resolve each *CHALLENGE ROUND* and indicate the effects of the horrors the characters are about to face.

Finally, each player should also receive one ballot slip. This is where they will vote after each *CHALLENGE ROUND* for the player they believed was most interesting character at the table during the previous *Tension Phase*.

3. Ready, Steady, Go...

Once the GM is ready, the characters and the mechanics are all in order, it is time to unleash *THE SIGNAL*.

STRANGE BEGINNINGS

(TENSION PHASE ONE)

SETUP

1. A Fortnight at Devil's View.

The group is nearing the end of its second and final week at Devil's View. The weather has been wondrous throughout the past fortnight and it has allowed the group undertake a range of activities; from biking along the high mountain trails, tackling the white water rapids further up the nearby river, and even climbing the formidable Devil's Back itself! For those more interested in rest and relaxation, time away from the 'rat race' has been well spent by catching-up on their reading, doing a spot of fishing, or simply getting a tan by soaking up the late summer sun.

2. Introductions All Round!

It is dawn on the group's penultimate day at Devil's View. As individuals awake, the GM can ask each player to introduce their character and their relationships to the others. They should be prompted also to talk about what they do 'back in the real world', and what they might have done in the break so far.

Between each of these descriptions, the GM may wish to embellish the setting and add more to backdrop that has become 'home away from home' for the group; focusing on the beauty, splendour and more-over the tranquillity of the Devil's View Camping Ground. Highlight its isolation from the pressures of the outside world and the mention that no matter what the tensions that have previously passed between the members of the group, here bygones are bygones.

After introductions, the GM should question how the group came to Devil's View (perhaps they came in a camper van, maybe in couple of family cars loaded to the gunnels, or they could have even have travelled on a handful of motor bikes bringing only pop-up tents and the urge to 'rough it'), what they have been eating (maybe it's fresh fish caught daily from the river, or store brought meat that is now running low), and what the sleeping arrangements have been.

These details might seem minor and insignificant at first, but as they are filled, the GM and, more importantly, the players will be define the dynamics and attitudes of the group, all of which will become factors as the rest of the story plays out.

LAST DAY IN PARADISE

1. Making Plans.

As this is the last full day at the camp, there is one final opportunity to challenge nature, and the question on everyone's lips is 'how they plan on spending their last full day of freedom'? It is up to the party as what they want to do, and the GM should prompt them to decide as a collective. The group needn't do something together, but if individuals want to head off by themselves the GM should remind them that despite its serenity Devil's View can be a dangerous place for the lone straggler.

2. Conflicts Emerge.

With the day's activity decided, the GM should describe the action, asking for input from the group as they

go about their fun. In particular, for each activity taking place, the Game Master should highlight a point of conflict or disagreement between those present. This could be simply be a heated discussion about another person in their group (i.e. the GM can ask a player to define their view about the party dynamics) or by forcing them to face a challenge that takes place during their activity (i.e. during a mountain biking race one of the riders falls badly, or rafting down the rapids, the raft capsizes and one person fails to bob to the surface, etc).

None of the characters should be physically hurt, or too emotionally scarred by these events (i.e. this is not a Challenge Phase and no Outcome cards need be played), but by asking how those present react to these events will help define the group dynamic in future scenes.

GM FLASHBACK

1. Trigger.

This flashback is run after the day's activities, and works well for any character (maybe one that has stayed behind at the camp or who falls behind as the characters return in the late afternoon). As this character passes by or is on the river, they see something red floating nearby. Investigating further they see it is a distinctive red backpack, one they recall as being carried by another hiker much earlier in their stay at Devil's View.

2. The Event.

The Flashback itself is a simple conversation between the character and this other hiker (who was travelling with friends). This could have occurred at the camping ground, back in Wilcott or even as a chance encounter on the road trip to Devil's View. The details of the chat are unimportant, except that the other hiker was someone the character found attractive, and who seemed interested in them in return. The thing that does stand out is their red hiking bag, most definitely the same one the character now holds in their hand.

3. The Significance.

How or why the stranger's bag found its way here is impossible to tell, did it float down the river, or was it dropped here? It doesn't seem damaged, and everything within (typical kit for a day pack only) is untouched. The importance of this flashback is to foreshadow the upcoming Challenge Phase, and subtly indicate that not everyone is getting out of this adventure alive.

FACING THE CHALLENGE

1. The Climax of the Tension Phase.

Darkness descends rapidly in the valley and the bright, clear stars soon dominate the heavens. As the group gathers for the evening meal, they hear the sounds of a creature close to their camp. (Note that someone wanting to head directly to Wilcott in reaction to finding the hiker's pack can do so at any time but will not get far - see below.)

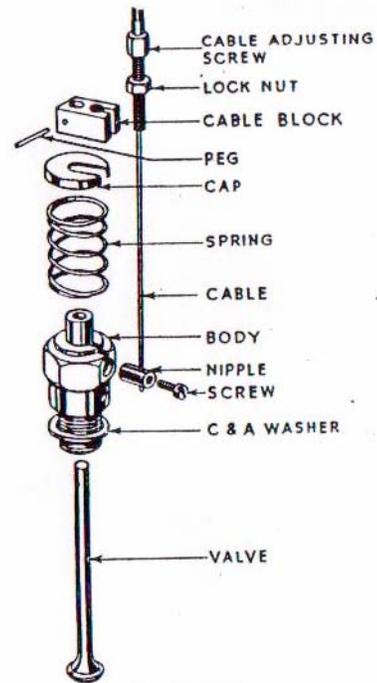
Investigating, they see that it is a wild animal (such as a bear or wolf) and it seems to be acting uncharacteristically aggressively. Nearby other creatures are also moving closer.

As the character's flashlights splay across the animals in the gathering darkness, it is immediately obvious that something is very wrong. Their coats seem covered in blood, and their eyes are unnaturally red. This is the effect of the signal, whose power has affected the animals from high in the mountains long before it reaches the characters in the protected valley.

2. The Challenge.

The characters are free to play a challenge card of their choice in this encounter. The animals might attack the group (physical), or simply circle as individuals attempt to hide (mental). There are as many affected creatures as needed by the GM to make this encounter threatening, and they can either be killed, driven off, or simply expire from the damage done by the signal.

For characters attempting to leave the area (including those who might be taking the backpack to Wilcott), they are soon stopped in their tracks. An 'infected' animal stumbles out onto the narrow road in front of them, causing the vehicle to crash into a ditch. For these unfortunates a physical Outcome from the challenge is much more likely.



EXPLODED VIEW OF THE DECOMPRESSOR
Fig 3.

CRACKLIN' ROSIE

(TENSION PHASE TWO)

PHASE GOALS

1. Of Roads and Bridges.

The focus of this Tension Phase is to see the group head towards the only source of safety they know of – the town of Wilcott. This trip is in itself long and chilling one, given the release of the signal, and shock of the attacks that have just occurred. The phase ends with the group encountering a car accident and being forced to cross a dangerously damaged bridge.

1. Sharing Secrets.

Hopefully by the end of the first phase Tension Phase all of the players should have an idea of what their character's personal secret is. The GM should ensure that everyone has recorded a Secret and that they have been placed unread in a common location.

The GM should also remind players that **COMPILCATION** cards can be drawn if they require a little more motivation or conflict for their character.

LOOKING FOR SAFETY

1. Getting it Together.

With the crazed animals dead or driven off, the characters have a moment to collect themselves, treat the wounded and regroup (especially those who might have already tried to escape in a vehicle). There seems no reason for these animals to turn violent, since as most people know, wild beasts rarely attack people unless threatened.

If any of the characters are brave enough to look closer, it is immediately obvious that all of animals killed in the last Challenge display identical the wounds (beyond those caused in the fight); bleeding from the eyes, nose and mouth. Even dead these creatures look distressed and exhibit signs of illness (foaming at the mouth, etc.)

2. Travelling a Winding Road.

With the attack and serious injuries amongst the group, it is likely that the characters will want to get medical assistance and alert the authorities, as soon as possible. Gathering together whatever supplies they wish (and collecting anyone that might have previously attempted to get to Wilcott) they are free to travel in whatever vehicles they wish.

The road to Wilcott is, for the first 10 miles or so, little more than a narrow and winding one-lane track. Leading from the valley, it heads up and over a small range of hills before angling down onto the plains and the town.

While on this road the GM is free to throw whatever strange encounters they may think appropriate, from the staring eyes of more crazed animals (including those such as rabbits or deer) watch the car go past, through to strange lights in the sky, and maybe even an abandoned car on the side on the narrow road.

The purpose of these odd scenes is to build the tension and paranoia amongst the group, and provide a background upon which they will reveal their own personal stories and flashbacks.

GM FLASHBACK

1. The Trigger.

This flashback is initiated during the Climax section of this Tension Phase (see below). When the group realises that there is someone trapped in the crashed pick-up, one of the characters recognises the driver as a young man who acted very threateningly to them earlier in the fortnight.

Such an encounter might have occurred on the trip to Devil's View or during one of the few excursions one or more of the characters took into Wilcott.

2. The Event.

As the character is driving, just outside of Wilcott, he or she is cut off by a young man driving a red, panel damaged, pick-up. The man seems to take exception to the characters actions (even if they do nothing exasperate the situation), and follows them aggressively for a fair distance (perhaps a good way down the road to Devil's View, tailgating them the whole way, etc.)

If directly confronted the young man, draws a rifle and points it at the character, swearing at them and threatening to shoot. He will drive off, however, before the situation escalates. Nothing came of the incident, even if the characters approached the Wilcott authorities.

3. The Significance.

This flashback serves two purposes. The first is to create doubt amongst the characters as given confrontation that occurred, what are the chances that the 'effects' are more widespread than they know. The second is to cause conflict amongst the group, some of whom may be unwilling to help a man who previously threatened them.

FACING THE CHALLENGE

1. The Climax of the Tension Phase.

As the lead vehicle of the party rounds a corner they suddenly see a major accident laid out ahead of them. A red pick-up has obviously failed to safely cross a small 'one lane' (as the nearby sign says) suspension bridge, and now lies on its side, headlights still ablaze. The accident has seriously damaged the bridge (not the most secure in the first place) which now sways dangerously while creaking and groaning ominously.

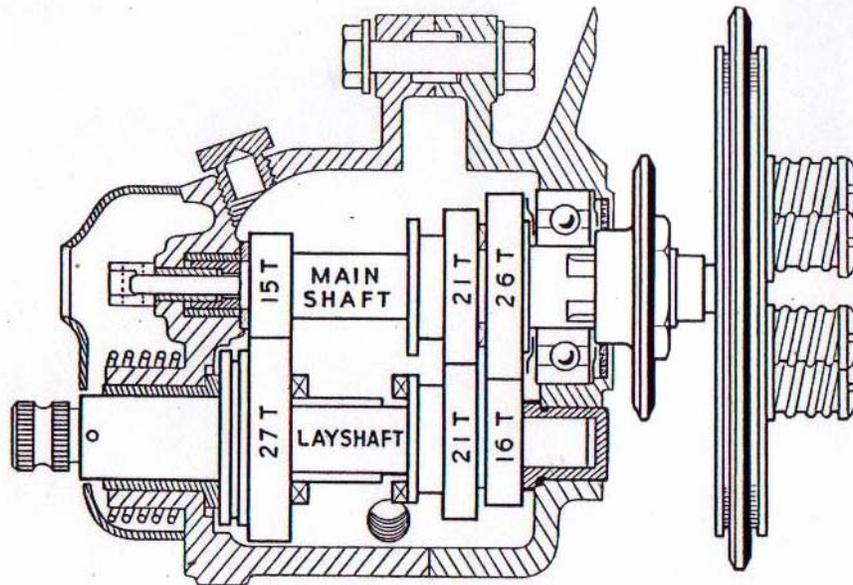
As the group disembarks from their vehicles, they hear loud music emanating from the pick-up; the chorus of Neil Diamond's 'Cracklin' Rosie'. This section of song repeats over and over again until it is stopped.

In the car is a young man, dressed in jeans, chequered shirt and a baseball cap. Frightening, it doesn't seem that the crash was the cause of all his injuries, and as like the animals they have encountered, has blood-shot eyes and substantial bleeding from every orifice.

Despite belief to the contrary, the man is still alive. However, at the most inopportune moment, the bridge begins to finally fail. As it does so, the young man, stares directly at the closest characters and yells '*Can you hear it!*'

2. The Challenge.

The Outcome cards played in the face of this challenge depends greatly on the characters' actions. Physical outcomes are most applicable for those on the bridge (which thankfully stands only a few metres above a small creek), when it collapses, while Mental outcomes are more appropriate for those witnessing the scene from a distance (or having interacted with the driver of the pick-up).



CROSS-SECTION OF THE AGS IGNITOR

Fig 4.

IT MUST BE A DREAM (TENSION PHASE THREE)

PHASE GOALS

1. Lightshows and Neighbours.

The focus of this Tension Phase is to reveal more about what has happened in Wilcott, and to offer the characters a way of stopping the events in the town. During this sequence, the group should also start doubting each other and begin to wonder whether they can even trust themselves.

GOING ON FOOT

1. Over the Bridge.

Having survived the collapsed bridge and encounter with the young driver, the group has no real option but to abandon their vehicles and proceed on foot. This might be a concern to the players, given the madness they have already witnessed and the threat of other creatures in the woods around them, but with the bridge gone, they have little in the way of alternatives.

Traversing the small creek is easy enough, and while the scramble up the far bank might seem daunting to the injured, it is no real challenge. For characters refusing to carry on or leave their cars, a GM can use the rabid animals to prompt them onwards.

2. View from the Top.

Not more than a mile away from the bridge, the road leads upwards to a rise. From here the party knows that they have left the Devil's View behind them, and ahead is the panoramic view of the farmlands upon which the town of Wilcott lies.

Standing on this vantage point, the characters will likely be surprised to see only darkness all around them. Although Wilcott is still a few miles away, they immediately know that they should be able to see the lights from its houses and streetlights. And yet there are none.

As they watch in dismay and confusion, the scene suddenly changes and the town becomes visible in a bright flashing light show (created by every light in the community blinking in unison). These flashes form a pattern that is somewhat like Morse Code with a two short flashes, followed immediately by two longer ones. Those characters who know Morse, however, realise that this pattern is too short to be any coded digit or letter, let alone being part of a longer message).

The strange light show, which repeats after about 10 minutes, is the result of Hadrian's incorrect wiring of the Signal Box. Unable to draw enough power to fully activate, it is causing a backlash across the local power network in Wilcott, which in turn makes the lights surge in such a pattern. Those watching long enough soon realise that the period between the flashes is getting, ever so slightly shorter and shorter every iteration.

GM FLASHBACK

1. The Trigger.

This flashback can be run when the flashes from the Signal Box are seen and can should involve any character

that might have found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, some time in their past.

2. The Event

With the exact circumstance to be determined by the GM, the character finds with a strange electronic device in their hands. Maybe they were handed it by that dying soldier, or it was taken to school by the son of a General? It could have even been found left in that old gas station rest room?

Whatever the circumstance, the device is most definitely military in nature, and when turned on, crackles (much as like cell phone does over a radio) in the same short, short, long, long pattern that they have just witnessed. Of course, the device didn't remain in their possession for long, as soon some official looking gentlemen arrived to reclaim it.

3. The Significance.

This flashback reinforces the conspiratorial nature of what is unfolding in Wilcott, and will help the characters understand a bit about the threat they face. It may also motivate them to perhaps stop whatever might be happening in the town.

FACING THE CHALLENGE

1. The Climax of the Tension Phase.

Continuing down the road, the first building the characters come across is a farm house. This is the residence of Norman family, whose only son, Ben, was in town when Hadrian activated the Signal Box. Witnessing the first signs of madness caused by the device the 20 year old fled home. Unfortunately, Ben has already been affected by the Signal, and each additional 'dose' he receives makes his madness worse.

John and Claire Norman have put Ben to bed, and will greet the characters cautiously. Once reassured that the group poses no threat, they will do everything in their power to assist the weary and injured; from first aid to hot soup cooked over a camp stove (the power being subject to the signal even this far from town).

They will explain that the electricity went out around noon, and the flashes started just before dusk. Their son Ben came home ranting about Hadrian (the name of an old couple in town), but could get nothing else coherent from him. They will also say that they have tried to call for help, but the phone lines are down and their cell phones only picks up the strange pattern that is seen with the power surges.

As the group starts to get comfortable with their new surroundings (i.e. they might want to hunker down, or perhaps prepare for the obvious 'zombie apocalypse'), the Signal Box flashes again. For Ben, this latest wave of madness is enough to finally send him over the top, and he appears, the family shotgun in hand.

2. The Challenge.

As with other Challenge phases, both Physical and Mental Outcomes may be used. For those playing Physical cards are shot or otherwise injured in the struggle, while Mental effects are likely the result of seeing Claire and John Norman shot down in cold blood by their son.

WELCOME TO WILCOTT (TENSION PHASE FOUR)

PHASE GOALS

1. Source of Terror.

The focus of this Tension Phase is to finally reveal the root of the horror to the survivors, as well as provide them with enough information to decide whether or not they wish to heroically take on the threat.

MOVING ON

1. All Roads lead to Wilcott.

The characters are now well aware that something horrible is occurring in Wilcott, and that they might be the only people able to make a difference to the situation. On the other hand they may simply wish to flee for their lives.

In any either case, they will find that to get to safety, they must first past through the town. The Norman household is full of useful supplies (including food, weapons and ammunition) as well as having a couple of cars parked nearby, so if nothing else they should be well equipped for whatever horrors await them.

2. The Signal.

Even to the most unobservant, the frequency of the flashing signal is increasing, with the cycle down to about 5 minutes between pulses by the time they begin to move on. With each of these bursts come the various side-effects noted earlier (see The Effects of the Signal). The GM should play up these random effects and use them to both motive and scare the characters into action.

INTO THE TOWN

1. Traveling to Wilcott.

The road into Wilcott is straight and narrow, and while it passes by a few homes, no signs of life can be seen in any of them. It is not until the group is within the last mile to the town that they see the scope of the damage caused by the signal. At first these are only dead animals, each of which seems to have expired from massive haemorrhaging of the major organs (the GM might like the first encounter with such being a cow partially blocking the road), but soon the bodies of people can be seen lying where they died on the street, in their cars or in their homes.

Each of these victims has obviously suffered a violent death, although the causes differ; ranging from self-inflicted wounds through to vicious assaults from attackers unknown. The entire situation is bloody and surreal and it is only the darkness that protects the characters from fully realising the extent of the destruction around them.

2. The Town Rally.

Nearing the centre of Wilcott, the characters notice that not everyone has been killed by the Signal. In an eerie scene reminiscent of a bad horror movie, a group of crazed survivors stagger about, slowly congregating on the source of their madness, the Signal Box. While easily avoided, the presence of these crazies herds the group towards the home of the Hadrians.

3. The Better Part of Valour.

Some characters may not be as motivated as others to stop the Signal. If this is the case, the GM is encouraged change the order of the Tension Phases, forcing the characters to encounter the military (as noted in Tension Phase Six) if they attempt to flee. This encounter will likely force the group to disable the Signal Box, as the other option is likely death.

FACING THE CHALLENGE

1. The Climax of the Tension Phase.

Whether or not the group intends to locate the Hadrians (as mentioned by the Normans) as the characters explore their options for escaping they see a military Humvee parked outside a seemingly normal residence - the letterbox of which denotes the home of Louise and Daniel Hadrian.

Upon inspection, the Humvee is fully equipped with weapons and ammunition, and also contains four storage crates marked 'Tanis Suits'. All of these crates are empty, although the markings on each seem to indicate that the suits are designed for responses to Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) threats.

Entering the house, the group witness a scene of a massacre; both of the elderly Hadrians have been shot by a high powered gun at close range, and the bodies of four Military Police Officers (MPs), two male and two female, are discovered in various rooms, all having suffered similar wounds. The MPs all wear the bulky Tanis Suits, although most seem damaged from what was obviously a brutal close quarters gun fight (despite this they are all still fully sealed and operable).

In a surprising turn, one of the MPs, Sergeant Sarah Godhard, is still alive, barely, and has not gone insane from the effects of the Signal (due, of course to the suit she wears). She will, between painful breaths, tell the group that Dylan Hadrian is responsible for the Signal, and that he ambushed the officers as they came to retrieve the device. She is also able to explain that the Tanis Suit are they only thing keeping her from going insane, and that they will be needed to stop the Signal.

She seems to be on the verge of saying more - something about a protocol or military response when the world suddenly goes bright white and all of the survivors' senses are immediately shut down in pain - the Signal has gone off again in a display that is much larger and more violently than before - and very, very close.

2. The Challenge.

This challenge can be Mental (as they are assailed by hallucinations and false memories that are from beyond their wildest nightmares) or Physical (as the result of the effects of the Signal on their already crippled bodies). Another option is for a Physical outcome to be played if one or more of the characters finally goes insane and attacks their friends or family members.

THE SIGNAL BOX

(TENSION PHASE FIVE)

PHASE GOALS

1. Death or Die Trying.

This Tension Phase acts as a climax to the adventure and details the survivors' attempts to stop Hadrian and disable the Signal Box.

THE SUBSTATION

1. Descent into Hell.

Building quickly to discharge again, the Signal Box is in the last few cycle before it becomes permanently activated. In this state it begins to glow and shimmer in an unearthly manner. Even the most dazed of characters are drawn to this impressive light show emanating from the nearby substation.

Situated only a few dozen yards away from Hadrian's home (as the crow flies), the substation can be reached by jumping a few fences and crossing a few gardens, or by following the road around the block.

2. The Locals.

The characters aren't the only ones attracted by the changes in the Signal Box. What few townsfolk still alive (all most definitely insane and little more than shambling corpses) are also drawn to the Signal Box, although why this is will never be known. These 'zombies' are only dangerous if disturbed, but act as both as guides (leading the way towards the substation) and as tools for the GM to use to add more colour to the final scenes.

3. What Confronts Them.

Having killed his parents and the Military Police in a paranoid rage, Hadrian drove his four-wheel drive around to the sub-station, breaking through the chain link fence. Here he set up the Signal Box and despite his lack of understanding of the finer details, was able to activate it.

Hadrian's truck has been left open, and clearly visible in the back is another empty Tanis Suit crate. Leading from the vehicle into the substation building is a trail of wood

chips and drag marks; it is obviously that some large box was dragged there.

FACING THE CHALLENGE

1. The Climax of the Tension Phase.

It is easily enough to locate the Signal Box in the building; its bright multicoloured light drawing even the most unwilling closer. At this distance the box hums with the sound of deadly electricity, and the characters can see that it has been haphazardly wired into the substation's main power board ((the GM is free to immediately force a challenge on any character who is silly enough to approach it not wearing a Tanis Suit).

Close up the Signal Box is a disappointingly small device of metal and cables, and it is hard to imagine that such a thing could have caused so much death and destruction. Nearby the crate in which it was shipped lies on its side, and scattered across the floor are pages of the KPG1A20 SIGNALBOX manual. These documents clearly detail, in a series of easy to follow instructions, how the Signal Box device is to be armed and activated.

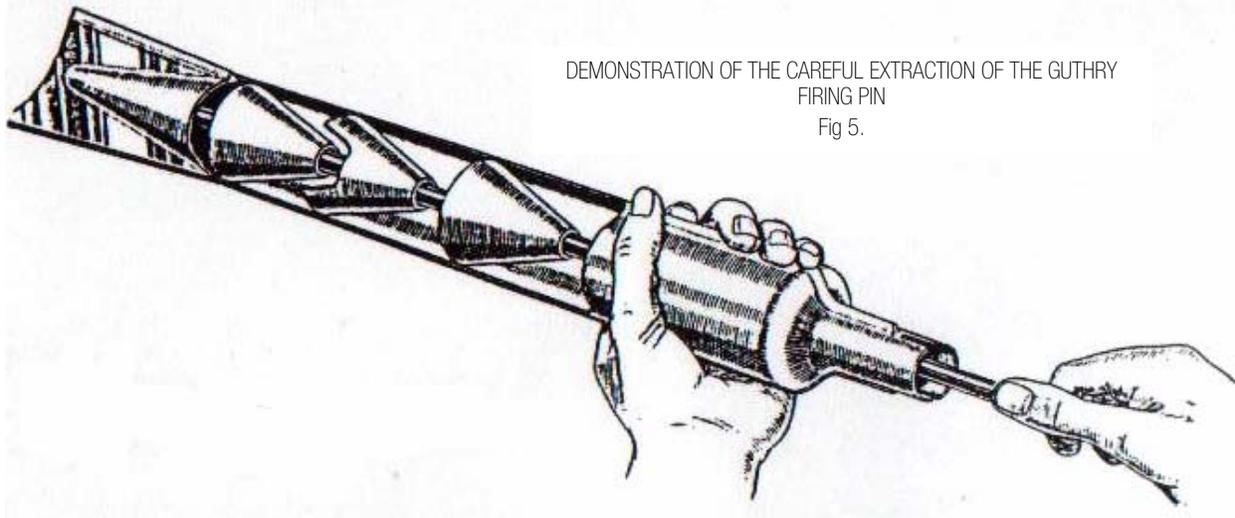
There is no sign of Dylan Hadrian, and with the building of energy in the Signal Box there is little time to search for him.

Deactivating the Signal Box, however, is even easier than starting it, and following the steps given in the manual it can be turned off in seconds. Of course, a single round of a large calibre projectile (such as a military assault rifle) is just as effective. GMs, of course, should make this a dramatic and even climatic event...

It is with a disappointing whine that the Signal Box powers down, and immediately plunges the survivors into darkness. Their relief however quickly turns to fright as not only an enraged Dylan Hadrian (who having watched from a safe distance has seen is ultimate act of revenge thwarted) attacks them, but the last surviving townsfolk, not longer entranced by the signal assault them as well.

2. The Challenge Round.

This challenge is likely to be Physical, with a three-way battle ensuing between Hadrian, the enraged Signal victims

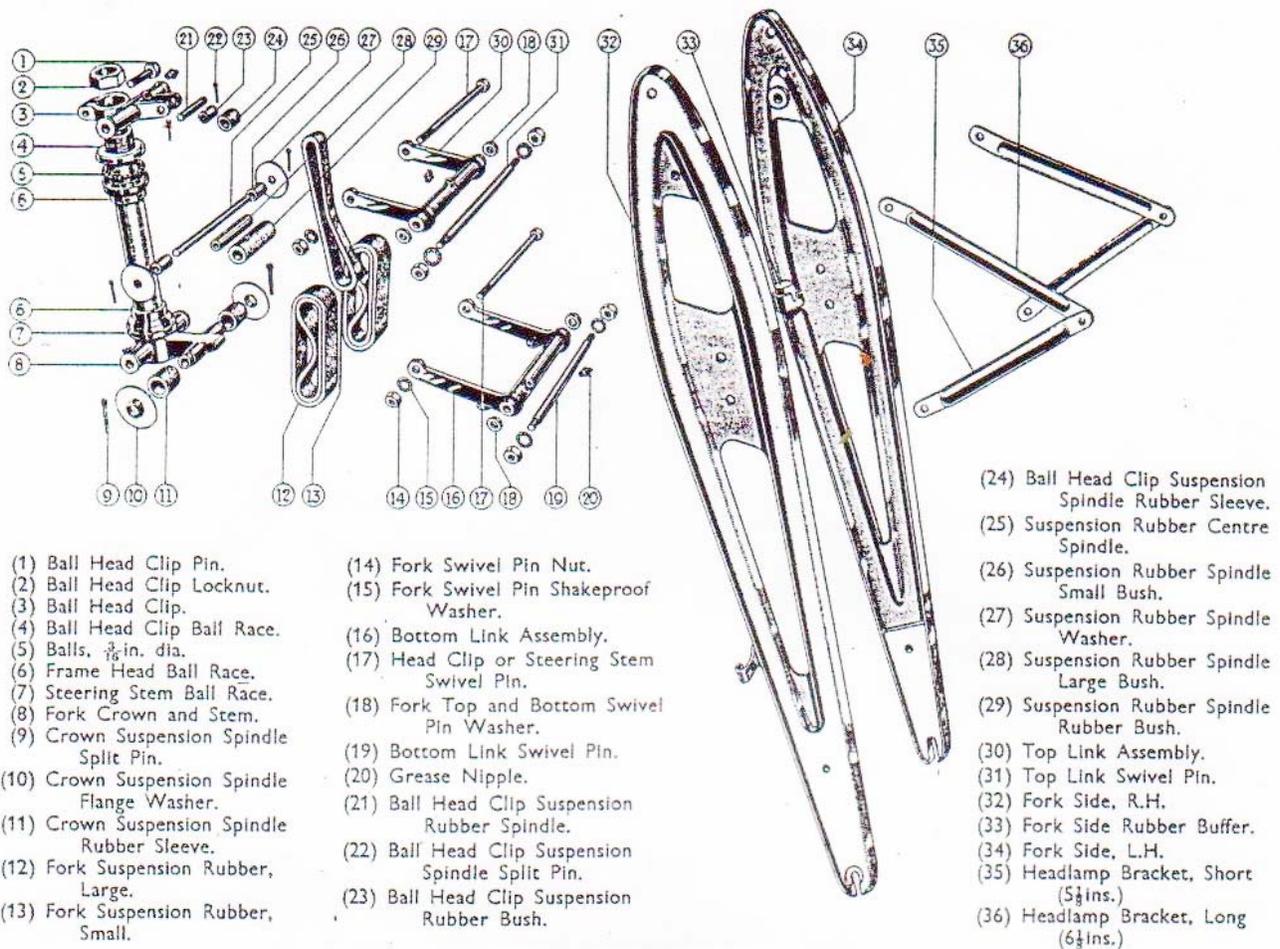


DEMONSTRATION OF THE CAREFUL EXTRACTION OF THE GUTHRY
FIRING PIN
Fig 5.

and the few surviving characters. What specific outcomes arise from this conflict are left for the GM and players to determine, although there is plenty of scope for heroics or underhanded feats of self preservation.

3. Ending It There?

Although this is only the fifth Tension Phase, this is an appropriate ending for those who have survived the terrors presented by *THE SIGNAL*. In the unlikely event of more than two heroes having survived this far, the author recommends running Tension Phase Six, otherwise feel free to wrap up the story here and proceed to the Final Notes section below.



EXPLODED VIEW OF THE YG-NORTH DISASSEMBLING TOOL

Fig 6.

THE CLEAN-UP

(TENSION PHASE SIX)

PHASE GOALS

1. Military Responses.

This Tension Phase acts both as an alternate scene for characters attempting to flee Wilcott without disabling the Signal Box, or as dark ending to the scenario (as often seen in horror movies).

PROTOCOL ALPHA

1. Running the Tension Phase.

As noted earlier this Phase acts as a 'catch-all' for the scenario. GMs should alter and adapt this phase to best meet the circumstances of the adventure as they have occurred.

2. Check Points.

It didn't take long for the military to realise someone had stolen the Signal Box, and to determine exactly who that might be. Having sent in the four Military Police Officers to apprehend Hadrian, the rest of the task force has remained at a safe distance away hoping for the situation to be resolved as quickly as possible; the light show over Wilcott and the sudden change coming over the local wildlife soon told them that this wasn't the case.

To quarantine the area, a number of units have set up check points along roads, patrol the open farmland and sweep the area in well armed helicopters. It is impossible for those fleeing Wilcott to avoid meeting one of these teams if they try and escape before the Signal Box is disabled.

Not really knowing what to expect from the use of the Signal, these soldiers are taking no chances and will shoot to kill if their targets do not return to town. Such a fire-fight should be run as a Challenge.

3. Operation Sweep and Clean.

This scene is run after the 'credits have rolled' and the few exhausted survivors weary make their way to... well, somewhere they might recover from the horrors they have just witnessed. The disabling of the Signal Box, however, is the sign the military have been waiting for, and they quickly 'assault' the town with one task in mind - destroy anyone infected with the Signal.

As often happens in such events, the young brash soldiers don't really stop to check if each and every person they find is really a legitimate target or not in their sweep, and so mistakes are bound to happen. The GM could build this challenge with the military arriving as saviours, but quickly becoming one final threat, as they gun down every living thing in sight.

The outcome of this encounter should be run as a Challenge.

FACING THE CHALLENGE

1. The Climax of the Tension Phase.

The climax of this Phase depends greatly on the actions and situation of the characters.

2. The Challenge.

It is most likely that the outcomes from a confrontation with the military will be Physical, although if this scene is run as a dark conclusion to *THE SIGNAL*, the effects could well be Mental (i.e. a jubilant survivor watching in terror as their 'rescuers' gun them down). As always, the GM and players should together determine the appropriate outcome to this challenge.

FINAL NOTES

1. Describing Victory.

Congratulations to any character that outlasted *THE SIGNAL*. Each surviving player should be given the spotlight to describe how, or even if, their character recovers from the events of this horrible night. No running of this scenario will ever been the same, with each survivor having their own story to tell, based not only on what occurred in Wilcott, but also in relation to their back-story and the flashbacks the came up with throughout the adventure.

2. Revealing Secrets.

It is often fun to complete the session up with each of the players revealing their characters' secrets (whether or not they survived). Each player should take this opportunity to describe any 'fallout' or connotations they thought might arise from these revelations. While on occasion a secret doesn't exactly pan out as a player expected it to, there is rarely a dull moment when they are brought into play. If everyone is happy to do so, you may want to discuss why each player chose their secret, and what they thought might arise from it when they did.

3. Wrap Up

All that is left to do now is for the GM to thank the players for their time, collect the various cards, and pack up the mess on the table. If your players are anything like those who have previously completed EPOCH scenarios, they may wish to talk further about what has transpired in the adventure, their actions and why they agreed or disagreed with each decision made as the story unfolded. In the author's mind this is the most important part of any shared experience, and he fully supports the GM in encouraging this sort banter!