

Beneath the Mask

It was supposed to be a relaxing weekend at your friend's cabin. Then the power went out, and some psycho in a hockey mask attacked. Now two people are dead, and your host is a gibbering wreck. Can you make it through to morning?

Premise

This is a slasher flick, in the form of a *Dread* story. The characters are a group of high school kids taking a weekend at a family cabin in the North Woods, when one of them winds up dead. All of the survivors are suspects, because none of them can reliably account for their whereabouts at the time of the murder. This scenario is supposed to keep ambiguity alive for as long as possible, building suspicion of one another until the last possible moment. And, if you are lucky, one of the players may even turn out to be the killer.

All of the characters suffer from blackouts, anger management issues, or missing time, and could have been the killer—probably without knowing it. Play up that angle, giving them red herrings, plausible explanations, and reasonable doubt, so that they either suspect each other, or a third party. No one should suspect themselves until they have absolutely no other explanation. In this scenario, you will occasionally require players to resist losing control of, or knowledge of, their characters. If you have a really good group of players, you could even let them play out the murderous scenes, relying on them to play their characters appropriately from that point forward: denial, memory loss, or however they might respond. If you do this, it is important that only those players who must know about a scene do so—this scenario relies heavily on deception, and it would ruin much of the fun for the players to know what is really going on, even if they are able to keep that knowledge separate from their characters.

Feel free to use pulls (or their lack) to wrest control of characters away from the players in narratively appropriate ways (i.e., blackouts, hit-first-ask-second, etc.). Doing this retroactively is sometimes appropriate (i.e. “you’re standing over Tom, holding a bloody ax; make a pull if you want to remember why you’re holding the ax, and another pull if you want to remember what happened to Tom”). Those who don’t have memory problems will probably be wishing they did—or lapsing into repression—by the end of the evening.

Since any of the characters could be the killer, the killing methods should be suitably generic, using weapons at hand (more or less), so as not to outright eliminate anybody as a suspect. Implicating a particular person is, of course, always possible. If the story starts going that way, feel free to play it that way. Once the other characters have driven off, incarcerated, or even killed the “obvious” killer, make sure the killings continue.

If the Tower Tumbles

Almost certainly, it means someone has died. It is not impossible for someone to run off into the woods—but it should be made quite clear that that would be tantamount to suicide. In other words, the tower falling might mean someone ran away—and was never heard from again. It’s also conceivable that a fallen tower could indicate someone losing their grip on reality, like Bill has at the beginning of the story—but this should lead to their death in short order.

Setting

An immense cabin in the North Woods, on a lake, is up a long dirt road, several miles (two hours walk in daylight) from the main road. It is at least a mile through untamed woods to the nearest neighbor—which is currently uninhabited. Most of the cabins are empty this time of year, so the nearest person should be too far to go at night on foot, as is the nearest town. There is also a boathouse down a short driveway from the cabin, and obscured from the cabin by the woods. There is no boat in the boathouse. It is too remote for cell phones to work. The story starts after dark.

The Characters

Bill Schnarr: His parents own the cabin. He invited some friends up here to party for the weekend, and he managed to lift his father's key to the bar. As the game begins, he's a wreck – gibbering, catatonic, or hallucinating due to having seen not only the killing, but one of his friends doing it.

Kevin Pearson: The body. He's a friend and teammate of the jock, and is dating Sara. He was last seen grabbing a drink and heading back towards the study.

Seeyean "Sara" Yu: Currently missing. She's a popular girl, though not a cheerleader, and is dating Kevin. She was last seen before she and Kevin disappeared into the study to make out.

Character 1: A jock, and team captain. He is dating character 2. At the time of the murder, he was apparently passed out in the upstairs bathroom. He has suspicious stains on his shoes, and was last seen about half an hour before the screams. He suffers blackouts for reasons to be determined by the player.

Character 2: Head cheerleader. She is dating character 1. At the time of the murder, she had gone out to get something from the SUV. She was last seen about 15 minutes before the screams. She has anger-management issues, and often flies into a rage where she loses control.

Character 3: Nerd. He was the victim of some pranks, as usual, and stormed off alone to sulk about an hour before the screams – nobody had seen him since. Memory loss or alternate personality or something causes him to do stuff that he knows nothing about.

Character 4: Slacker. Party crasher. Has some sort of secret that he is compelled to sneak away for, and was away when the murder happened. Has gotten in trouble in the past for something he doesn't think he did.

Character 5: Rich Kid. Owns the SUV that transported them all up here, and which is now disabled. Has seizures that lead to blurry vision, headaches, and blackouts. He apparently had a blackout during the murder, and woke up next to the body when character 6 screamed. He was apparently making out with character 6, went to the bathroom, and never came back – but doesn't remember any of that.

Character 6: Best Friend of character 2. She doesn't drink because she has a bad reaction to alcohol – she hallucinates and gets very light-headed. She claims she was making out with character 5 when the murder happened, but nobody saw them together, and character 5 doesn't remember it.

Opening Scene

Kevin is a bloody mess on the floor of the den, in the basement near the bar. Character 5 was passed out near him, and character 6 has just found the body – her screams brought everyone else. Bill is also in the room, but he's had a psychological breakdown. Sara is nowhere to be found. If someone examines Kevin, it will be apparent that he was bludgeoned to death, with some opportune heavy object – maybe a trophy in the den? Whatever it was, it will be found in the den without much effort. Pulls are warranted for any forensic efforts, as well as for maintaining composure, and for just not throwing up – they're just high school kids, after all. With a few pulls and a convincing explanation, let the players steer the investigation in any reasonable direction. In short, let them invent how the murder happened, so long as it doesn't spoil the game – just as there's no hard evidence to account for most people's whereabouts, neither should there be any hard evidence at this point to incriminate anyone.

Act I

- Suspicions
- Sabotage
- Noises in the Garage
- The Killer?

Act II

- Searching the Woods
- Finding Sara's Body
- Another Death
- Accusations

Act III

- Power Outage
- Uncovering the Murderer
- The Final Death

Act I

Suspicions: Right from the start, everyone should suspect at least one other character – perhaps Sara or Bill, but ideally another player's character. If they don't, feel free to play it up. Don't just answer questions about where people were and weren't – insist the players ask one another. And demand pulls if people want to determine veracity. Subtly remind the players that they only have the other character's word, when there is no hard evidence. Your goal at this point is to get the characters to split up, however briefly. Ideally, they'll split into three pairs, but it is more likely that either one or two will stay put while the rest go off, or they'll split into two groups. In any case, feel free to drop hints that it is important to search the house and/or area, if they don't think of it on their own.

Sabotage: At some point, they will either check the SUV out of paranoia, or decide to flee, or otherwise discover that it has been disabled. Exactly how is up to the player of Character 3, but whatever the details, it will not be possible to fix it with the tools/knowledge/resources available at the cabin. Similarly, when they try the phone, it will be out. Further investigation will reveal that the phone box, on the outside of the cabin, has been smashed to bits.

Noises in the Garage: During the searches, noises are heard coming from the garage. Or, if you haven't managed to split them up yet, you could use these noises to try and get them separated: have just one or two of the characters hear the noise, perhaps during a bathroom run or the like. In any case, this is just a red herring – it's two raccoons that wandered into the open garage and started rummaging through the stuff in the garage. Be sure and demand appropriate pulls when investigating – the characters don't know this is just a harmless red herring. When they discover the first raccoon, the second will knock over some shovels and rakes and other garden implements as it tries to get away. This is meant as a tension reliever – perhaps it will relax them enough to let their inherent conflicts and flaws to take over, finally splitting the group up.

The Killer?: Now that they're convinced there's no one around, and the strange noises are just the sounds of nature, someone should hear something from the boathouse. Upon investigating, they will find a guy in a hockey mask with a maul. Several of the characters will need to make pulls if they don't want to attack him with potentially-lethal force, ostensibly in self defense. Assuming they don't overreact, and either talk to him or manage to subdue him without killing him, they'll discover his name is Sam, and he goes to school with the others, but none of them really know him except Character 4. Sam will claim that he came up here at Character 4's suggestion, to "scare the crap out of them". He'll admit to smashing the phone box – his sense of "practical joke" is a bit skewed – but will swear that all he did was threaten Character 5, who then passed out, and that he didn't see Kevin or hurt anyone. He claims not to know anything about the SUV. He hiked in from the main road; his car is parked another half mile or so up the road from the turn-off, in the ditch, so nobody would notice it. It is still operational as the game starts, but if they all go for it collectively, the killer will probably do something about that, if she or he doesn't pick them all off in the dark on the way.

Act II

Searching the Woods: At some point, they will have searched everywhere in the cabin, and the immediate surroundings, and will have to acknowledge that the only place Sara could be is in the woods. If you need to coax them, leave signs of her passage – an article of clothing or jewelry, or even just something from the house that she dropped while running. They'll have to, at the very least, fan out to make any kind of useful search of even just the immediate woods. Now is the time to crank up the characters' dark secrets: several of them, as potential murderers, will find themselves in situations where they need to pull to maintain control. In some cases, they may not be able to resist

Extra Events in the Woods

Buck: A character stumbling around in the forest will come across a wounded buck. Its side is slick with blood, black in the dark night. It is entirely likely that the character will not see the animal as a threat, but it most certainly is. If the character gets too close to the buck (and make sure that they do), the deer will charge, attempting to gore or trample the character. Eventually, a reasonable defense will drive the animal off.

Bear trap: Have the players pull to make sure their characters are paying attention to the undergrowth and roots. Have a few of the more klutzy ones trip and require pulls to catch themselves first, to give the others an idea of what might happen (which is to say, not much). If anyone refuses to pull, a bear trap clamps onto their leg. Plenty of pulls should be derived from this: pulls to avoid screaming and possibly alerting a stalking killer, pulls to keep from passing out from the pain, pulls to pry the thing open, pulls to tend to the wound, and so forth. This should be a tense situation, and will require cooperation. It should also lead to accusations. Who put it there? Who was the first to respond to the scream? Didn't they arrive a little too fast, almost as if they expected to hear a scream nearby?

their dark sides, and will instead have to pull just to find out what's going on. Mistaking one another for the killer, in the woods, is perfectly appropriate excuse at this point—start phrasing some of these encounters as “you'll need to pull to not hit him reflexively” rather than “you're not sure who's coming through the woods towards you; you'll need to pull to be sure”.

Whether or not anything sinister actually occurs during this scene, take players aside for the slightest action they wish to accomplish and make sure other players witness them pulling, especially for mundane things like to avoid tripping over a root and sliding down a hill. Just keep the other players in the dark about what the pull is for. In fact, immediately after the pull, take another character aside. This should generate paranoia and suspicion among the players. Are they pulling to visit harm upon each other? Be careful not to overuse this device or the players will assume that every time someone pulls it will be for something mundane.

Finding Sara's Body: Sara is, indeed, in the woods. Dead. However, whoever first finds her will do so alone, and it will take a bit for the others to catch up. More importantly, the finder will be freaked out in some way (as appropriate for the character), and won't be able to recall the exact details of the find. Sara has been killed brutally and messily by something that will be found nearby—a small garden trowel, taken from the garage, and small enough to easily conceal on one's person. The finder will need to make pulls to recall what happened, and might still not be sure of everything. But don't announce this fact to the whole group—let the player decide what to tell them. The players' character might not have been the killer, just traumatized by the sight. Follow the player's lead on this one.

Another Death: Sam turns up dead. Again, killed with a weapon of opportunity. This time, the weapon is a loose chainsaw chain, which he

was strangled with. It was also taken from the garage, and the long-since defunct chainsaw, sans chain, can be easily found in the garage—someone may even recall having already seen it.

Keep in mind how gruesome this tool is for strangulation, and play up the gory details. Unless you are definitely using an external killer (see sidebar), this should definitely be a player's character's handiwork. That player needs to make the right pulls, or their character loses control and does the deed—and it may take further pulls to remember it.

Either pin it on whoever finds the body, or on someone who was off by themselves recently. If you're lucky, they will have left someone to keep an eye on Sam. Insist that that character is feeling ill, or needs the bathroom due to all the excitement, or otherwise needs to leave Sam for just a moment—the exact reason would depend on the character. The next thing they know, Sam is dead. For some characters, they might even come back to reality holding the chain, unsure of whether they are merely finding the body, or have just finished doing the deed. Or, if they definitely couldn't have done it, make sure to get at least one other character alone in the same time frame, so that they could have snuck off to where Sam is and taken advantage of his keeper's absence. There is no need to actually play such a scene out—but the killer could become aware of what they've done with a pull or two. By this point in the story, you *want* at least some of the characters to need to rationalize heavily in order to avoid suspecting themselves.

Accusations: The goal at this point is to goad the players on, escalating the conflicts into violence. This could be open fighting—but it's better if it involves someone losing control. More specifically, by this point they are all quite stressed and paranoid. It is perfectly reasonable to demand pulls just to react rationally. If one of them killed Sam—and espe-

What's Going On?

At its most basic, this story is simply what it appears to be—one or more of the main characters has gone round the bend in one fashion or another and become a killer. However, this may not work out for a number of reasons. First of all, you can't force player-vs.-player conflict if the players don't want it—nor should you try. If they don't get into that element of the story, and want to play it another way, you should go with it—it's their story, too. But that leaves you with the question of who *is* the murderer? You have a couple of options that will fit within the overall framework of the story:

- A psychopath parked his car out of sight on the main road and walked down to the cabin. He could have a connection to the location or one of the characters, but this isn't necessary—it becomes just your standard insane killer story.
- A supernatural being has manifested and is killing the characters much as a wolf kills deer—it is simply its nature.
- Or, a malevolent supernatural force has invaded the cabin, and has the power to possess people. In this case, the players' characters are the killers, but not because of their own flaws.

Finally, if you feel intimidated by the structure of this story, or trying to foment player conflict, another option is to tread the route of many a slasher movie, and start bending reality. You probably don't want to make it "all a dream", but you can certainly explain any inconsistencies with some judicious warped perceptions. This works even without a supernatural presence. In fact, it may help "save" the story if the players aren't providing enough internal conflict.

cially if anybody else knows about it—they should be worrying that that character also killed Kevin and Sara. If you're lucky, the accused won't be able to offer much of a defense.

Act III

Power Outage: Just as things are really coming to a head, or, alternately, just as they manage to all calm down, the power goes out. If there is an external threat, this can happen at any time. Otherwise, it should be while someone is out of the room. The darkness is the perfect opportunity for the killer to attack someone else—requiring some pulls to know what they're doing. Exactly what happened to the power will depend on who did it, and how much opportunity they had. It may or may not be fixable. Regardless of the actual lethality inherent in this scene, take players aside as their characters fumble about in the dark, and demand lots of pulls for even mundane occurrences, much like in *Searching in the Woods* (above). Except that if they assume they are *only* avoiding mundane inconveniences and surprises, they are probably wrong.

Uncovering the Murderer: Someone's dark secret is going to catch up with them. Who it will be will depend on how the questionnaires were filled out, and how things have gone up to this point. It's time for the rest of the characters to figure out who the killer among them is. This may consist of putting together the clues that have been discovered so far, or it may involve essentially deciding who the killer is right then and there. Ideally, the latter: there are enough clues pointing at one person to suspect them, but it will be news to the player of that character. Thus leading into:

The Final Death: By now, the tower is good and rickety. If no one has died yet, it's time. Either the real murderer has been uncovered, and they need to defend themselves and/or eliminate the witnesses; or the wrong person has been accused, and they have nothing to lose. Either way, it's unlikely everyone will get out of this conflict alive. Don't forget to emphasize the various psychological flaws the characters have, demanding extra pulls as appropriate.

If you're having trouble bringing events to a satisfying climax, have the character that is most suspected discover a gun in such a way that others know they have it. That should generate enough paranoia to force their hands.

Your father has pushed you to attain the sort of athletic glories he was not able to in his youth. What sport is your specialty?

You were pretty much a shoe-in to be team captain this season, but you don't let sports define your entire life. What other hobby occupies much of your time?

Why did you originally use sports as an excuse to remain at school rather than going straight home after school?

Everyone but you expected the team captain to date the head cheerleader, but you had resolved not to give in to the cliché. What changed your mind about her?

What's the worst injury you have received while not on the playing field?

What article of clothing do you wear regularly despite it no longer being in fashion?

After waking up several times to find hours missing from your life, you think you've isolated several triggers for your condition. Which one do you hope is just a false alarm?

What did your older brothers constantly tease you about when you were a child?

You were planning on receiving a sports scholarship in order to go to college, but now it looks as if that has fallen through. What is your backup plan?

Like many athletes, you're fairly superstitious. What's your good luck charm?

You had another blackout earlier this evening, and woke up in the upstairs bathroom right before Kevin's body was found. Why are you convinced you had nothing to do with it, despite the suspicious stains you found on your shoes?

Whom do you pity most out of all the students in your school?

What is your name?

As the best-looking and most-coordinated cheerleader on the squad, you fully expected to be named head cheerleader this year. However, what unexpected surprise awaited you on the squad this year?

Despite viewing yourself as the best all-around cheerleader at the school, what aspect of cheering are you lacking in, and must rely on the rest of your squad to help out with?

What were you looking for in the SUV when the killing happened?

How do you combat the stereotype of cheerleaders as airheaded bimbos?

What caused you to lose your temper so badly that before you knew it, you had broken another cheerleader's nose?

Why is dating the team captain such a big deal to you?

What could be considered your “signature” piece of jewelry?

What is the worst injury you’ve ever caused to another person?

What would ruin your reputation if anyone ever found out?

Why did you throw your boyfriend’s good luck charm out into the woods earlier this evening?

Which kids at the school will you not miss at all once you graduate?

You had a loud fight with Sara not long before she disappeared. What was it about?

What is your name?

As a definite member of the “nerd” population of the school, you’re fairly certain you’d normally never be invited to a weekend at the popular kids’ cabin. Why do you think that you got to come along this time?

You’ve received academic awards for excellence in what subject?

What embarrassing habit do you hide from everyone you know?

In what way do you have to admit that the negative stereotype of “nerd” actually applies to you?

Which sport do you follow with as much zeal as your schoolwork?

You’ve been doing the rich kid’s English papers for most of the quarter so far, and in return, he’s promised that he’ll put in a good word for you with the cheerleader. What makes you sure that this weekend is going to be the right time to make your move despite their obvious picking on you?

Several times your friends, teachers, and family have remarked upon events that you’ve participated in that you have absolutely no memory of—events you’d normally never partake of. What common theme unites all of these events?

Why do you intend to convince the others to split up whenever the opportunity arises, despite the recent events?

Which item that you regularly carry has ended up being more useful than one would usually think?

You stormed off after the bucket of water fell off a door onto your head, and the next thing you knew it was an hour later, several of the others were screaming, and the body of the first dead kid had just been found. Where in the house were you?

What subject are you really passionate about, but have an unusual amount of trouble with?

What was the name of your first pet?

How did you disable the SUV so that no one here would be able to repair it tonight?

What is your name?

For what were you given detention (for the 5th time) last week?

What one class do you regularly *not* skip?

What things did you get sent to the principal's office for recently that you don't remember doing?

What one person do you actually care that you have disappointed?

How did you find out about this weekend's get-together?

What were you doing during the murder that you won't admit to, despite the suspicions your evasiveness raises?

How has being considered an outsider improved your high school experience?

How badly were you injured in the last fight you were in?

Why did you spike the best friend's drink when she insisted on no alcohol?

What childhood nickname haunts you to this day?

What is the biggest crime that you've ever gotten away with?

Where have you been sleeping since your father threw you out of his house?

Why did you have to hitchhike to the north woods?

What is your name?

You were asked to come because your SUV has enough room for all of the invited kids. For what purpose did your parents' buy you the vehicle in the first place?

The nerd has been writing your English papers for some time now, and in return you've agreed to set him up with the head cheerleader. How do you intend to do this, when you know she's totally devoted to the team captain?

Recently, why did your wealth cause you problems?

Since you were a little kid, you've been having unexplained seizures, which lead to blurry vision, splitting headaches, and blackouts. When was this most embarrassing to you?

What is your favorite item that, surprisingly enough, didn't cost a lot of money?

What's the worst thing you've ever done to a loved one?

What do you do on the weekends when your parents are at the polo field?

The best friend claims you were making out just before the murder, got up to go to the bathroom, and never came back.
How do you know this isn't true?

When friends describe you to a stranger, what one detail do they always include?

What childhood trauma will return to you in dreams?

What does your locker look like?

You woke up with a splitting headache, lying near Kevin. What were the first words out of your mouth?

What is your name?

You and the head cheerleader have been best friends for many years. How did you first meet?

What was the first thing you did when you got your braces removed?

You received a head injury when you were younger and occasionally lose previous memories when you bump your head. What were you doing when you got hurt?

Despite being best friends with the head of the cheerleading squad, you never understood her fascination with cheering. What hobby do you obsessively practice instead?

What mannerism or speech pattern do you repeat often?

What scared you most as a child?

You were raised in a religious household of what faith? Do you still practice?

When the mail arrives at your house, what do you always hope to receive but never do?

Why do you feel safer when your best friend's boyfriend, the team captain, isn't around?

What personal possession are you never found without?

What advice from your mother will you never forget?

How did you discover that you react very badly to alcohol, getting extremely lightheaded, and even hallucinating?

You had to be convinced to be the rich kid's date for the weekend. What made you reverse your opinion of him and start making out in one of the bedrooms?

What is your name?