

*Field journal of Nathaniel Turner, Curse-breaker and Master of Mystic Science*

15 Oct. 20-

*I call them "eyesores." This is not their name, you understand, but their real name cannot be written using any alphabet with which I am familiar enough to be confident in my spelling, suffice it to say that it does not work in any of the languages of men (though the demonic languages of the eighth nether are a different story). They first came to my attention when, during preparation for the annual Samhain/Hallowe'en ritual/party, a new client found themselves at my door.*

*The day began like any other, my turbulent voyages through the unconscious worlds of Bisraellyr interrupted by Rel's insistence that I "wake up before a demon devours my soul for good." She cares, though I'd love to see any demon try that while it (allegedly) belongs to such names as: The Devil, Gorath, Haflaetthir, Enma, The Hosts of Qu, and Daken. After yelling at me for the five-hundred and thirty seventh time not to sleep in my clothes, she retired to her basement to prepare my containment draught. At least she fulfills her duties, otherwise I'd have to find another alchemist, and good help is so hard to find these days.*

*I begrudgingly slid off the sofa and threw my overcoat back across my shoulders. Benton or Rel must have thought I looked cold in the night, because I could've sworn I'd left it on the back of the couch. My friends (servants) could be considerate at times. While I awaited the completion of the containment draught, I checked the paper for any suspicious headlines, seeing nothing other than an "end" to the human "democracy." I ended up reading the comics, though weekday comics are much less interesting than weekend ones.*

*"What's the news?" Benton, wrapped in his traditional robes, came into the parlor from his side of the top floor in his usual chipper fashion. His smile grew even bigger when I informed him there was absolutely nothing interesting going on outside, at least not that normal people could see.*

*After a couple minutes of light conversation about the ritual preparations, the spine-tingling sensation that meant someone (or something) was approaching my front door—straight through the protective wards meant to keep it both hidden and secure. This, of course, meant it was someone with clouds over their heart, someone who needed help, yet wasn't sure where to go. Only those with actual need can find the doorbell. Only those who can't afford delay can make it work.*

*A ringing buzz echoed throughout the townhouse, though it lasted less than a full second (indicating, of course, that the client was a rational human being, who didn't believe that the problem would really be something that would require such intervention as mine). Before the next minute I was opening the door, lest the client leave before even getting a consultation, as happens so often. Fortunately, it seemed I was just in time, for at the end of my walk a young man was stopped, hesitating about whether or not to leave or come back.*

*"How may I be of service," I asked with a small bow, having learned from many jobs that it's better to play up the eccentricity at the beginning (it makes people feel more like I'm Sherlock instead of a quack). He hadn't noticed me open the door, so when I spoke he seemed almost to jump out of his skin (which, fortunately, was not his problem. Skin sealant is always so expensive and the application process is uncomfortable for everyone involved). The man backed up slightly, perhaps off put by my sudden appearance. After a few moments, he approached the door and, in a shaking whisper, asked THE QUESTION:*

*"Can you help me?"*

*"Better than anyone else can," I gave my usual response, and waved him into the house. After he'd been seated and Rel had brought up a mug of tea for him, he was able to calm down*

*enough to tell us his story, which I was able to capture using the stylus of Setne (and had edited to remove all the irrelevant details and fits of doubtfulness).*

MY NAME IS ALEXANDER DURHAM, AND, AS YOU CAN PROBABLY TELL FROM MY ACCENT, I'M FROM ACROSS THE POND. I'M NOT QUITE SURE IF YOU'VE HEARD ABOUT IT, BUT A NEW COMPANY IN SUSSEX HAS BEEN REVOLUTIONIZING WEARABLE TECHNOLOGY—ER—I MEAN TO SAY THAT THEY MAKE SMART GLASSES, SPECIFICALLY. WELL, IT SOUNDS LIKE SMART GLASSES... IT'S APPARENTLY A SURGICAL PROCEDURE TO IMPLANT SMART GLASSES INTO EYES, BUT EVERYONE WHO GETS IT NEEDS GLASSES BECAUSE IT INVOLVES REMOVING THE PUPIL. I MYSELF CAN'T THINK ABOUT USING THEM, I HAVE TERRIBLE EPILEPSY, BUT JUST ABOUT EVERYONE ELSE SEEMS TO HAVE IT NOW. YOU MAY BE WONDERING HOW THIS IS A PROBLEM... I MYSELF CAN'T QUITE DESCRIBE IT, REALLY, BUT IT SEEMS LIKE EVERYONE WHO GOES THROUGH WITH IT... CHANGES. NOT LIKE THOSE MOVIES LIKE "INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS," BUT MORE LIKE THEY LOSE FOCUS A LOT MORE. I SUPPOSE IT COULD JUST BE FROM THE DISTRACTION OF TECHNOLOGY. I MYSELF SPEND TOO MUCH TIME ON MY MOBILE, BUT IT FEELS LIKE A DIFFERENT PROBLEM. THE MAIN REASON I'M HERE, I GUESS, IS BECAUSE MY AUNT TOLD ME YOU COULD HELP.

*"Hmmm... you believe this to be truly an issue?" I wondered aloud. He seemed to think I was mocking him, and rose as though to leave. "I didn't say I wouldn't help, I'm just trying to figure out how this may be. You said your aunt?"*

*"Yes, Amanda James. She's a psychic, you see," he answered.*

*"Of course! Ms. James, she was a lovely woman. She had the issue with the three-headed goat demon, right Benton?"*

*"Yes, I think so sir," Benton chimed in, though he seemed to doubt his answer and nearly looked like he would dash to the archives to check the minute we finished. For the record, after we checked up on it following the job, we found she was actually attacked by three two headed goat demons, though that's a far different story.*

*I officially took the case, and asked Mr Durham to stay in the parlor while Rel and I "popped over to Sussex for a quick visit." Though I would normally take Benton on a case, Rel is far*

more useful in figuring out mysteries (an effect of being a thirteen-hundred and seventy nine year-old half faerie). Checking to make sure I had my sacrificial blade, eternal lighter, and flask of soulfire brandy, as well as my spirit mortar, I flicked a drop of Mr Durham's blood onto the fourth floor stained window showing a blue and green Earth, and, stepped through, found myself on a dirty streetcorner.

To make a rather tediously long story short, Rel and I managed to ask around and eventually found our way to a nondescript office-type building with a sign outside that said: Ocular Awesome! Upon further inspection, it turned out to be a rather clever obfuscation/mimicry spell, with a powerful ward against any magic.

"Well, that clears up any doubt about whether there's a problem here," Rel smiled, gesturing to the door.

"Yeah, ok," I said, plunging my blade into the Oblurine seal, easily cutting through the magical barrier and leaving the image of an older-looking house than mine, even, where the office building had stood. A great creaking sound emanated from the door as it swung slowly inward, and a musty, swampy odor issued forth. Exchanging a glance, Rel and I pushed inside through the wide double doors. As usual, the old place had both an attic and a basement. Though it seems rather cliché, those being the two most likely places for any sort of infernal or cursed activity, we needed nothing more than a nod to split up and search the two levels on our own.

As I made my way through the attic, I found little of note. The most evil thing I encountered was an abandoned pigeon nest that reeked with the sulfurous odor of rotten eggs. In the middle of the room was an empty space, the like I am currently setting up on each level of my own house with a twelve-sided ritual circle. Sitting down, I prepared my spirit mortar with a basic sight spell, putting myself in a state that would be familiar to anyone who takes LSD like it was

classic Woodstock. Meanwhile, in the basement, Rel found a similar space complete with a bloodcrystal curse star, which, as she attempted to clean it, lashed out with bloodsight.

As I opened my eyes, I saw the ritual star surrounding me burst with violent crimson light, trying to inflict bloodsight upon me. Suffice it to say the all-eye I received from I gave me the clairvoyance to avoid that particular curse, though it did give me a rather fierce cough for a second. I jabbed the circle with my blade, and when the curse cleared, all that remained was a cracked tragedy mask with a painted smile—the totem of one who has sold themselves.

A loud creak rang out behind me, drawing my attention to a group of people with pure white eyes, shortly before they knocked me unconscious. Coming to in a small operating theater, I noticed the scent indicating that A. we had either not left the house, or B. there were other places with the same musty rot smell (it later turned up to be on the ground floor of the house, where the kitchen should have been). The second thing I realized was that I could only see with my inner eye, which usually indicated darkness, though the room seemed filled with light. After blinking a couple times, I began to realize what had happened, and I may have uttered one or two obscenities against whatever entity held dominion over these poor humans, leading them to transform others into their image. After a while, my eyes burned with greater fire than the sort in my eternal lighter, and I, though I'm ashamed to admit it, began to scream bloody murder. After a while, Rel came in, wearing a DRESS! Suffice it to say that she rarely ever removes her ivy cloak (despite her insistence that I ought to change clothes more than once a month while I clean the other ones), so seeing her that way was enough to send a cold shiver through my system.

"Finally awake, sleepyhead?" Possessed-Rel teased, undoing the straps that had held me down, adding "can you see them?" I had no idea what "them" she meant, but as I looked behind me to look for my coat, I saw something in the corner of my eye. A terrible something.

*"Stephen?" I gasped, "how-? Wha-? Huh-?" The image of my old mentor, wearing the same suit as when he'd left that last time, came into focus. It smiled and nodded at me, gesturing for me to approach.*

*I ran.*

*I ran as hard and as long as I could.*

*I ran away from that room, with my possessed friend, and my dead mentor, and all my cursebreaking gear.*

*I ran away from the building, stumbling because of the tears streaming down my face.*

*Only after I stopped a block away did I notice what was even more ghastly about the vision. I had SEEN it in THE CORNER OF MY EYE. My eye that didn't work to see anything at the moment. As I wiped the tears away, I saw my worst fear again. He was THERE. I pivoted. He was standing by that newsstand. I turned down a side street. He was huddled with that smoking vagabond. I ducked into a pub. He was at the end of the bar. I turned back to my inner eye, and he was gone. I sat down, probably looking quite the fool with my eyes shut tightly. The bartender turned towards me.*

*"Ah, jus' had em done, eh lad?" He asked, "ya really should put the glasses on, they help it focus." I realized what he meant. The surgery. They'd done it to Rel and they'd done it to me, but why was Rel so much more enthusiastic? Why was it showing my worst fear when it was supposed to be a replacement for a VR headset? I mulled these questions over while I sipped the gin the bartender gave me with the advice that "heavy drinks will dull the pain." I fortunately didn't have to come up with an excuse for why I didn't have any money, the old man behind the counter gave me a wink and an "on the house" as I pushed my way out to the street.*

*It was raining (no surprise) and all of a sudden, another searing wave of pain spread across my face, like when I used to have migraines back in highschool. The pain forced my eyes*

open, and there he was. It was amazing how alive he looked, like he was about to crack a sarcastic joke and try to teach me something else he'd discovered he could do while astral projecting. I looked away. I couldn't understand why it bothered me so much. I'd seen ghosts before. Hell, I'd *BEEN* ghosts before... It had to be because I hadn't seen *HIS* before (not for lack of trying, it's hard to commune with the spirit of someone who sacrificed his life sealing away a Dread One within his own heart).

"Hey, silly boy," Rel. "You ran out before I could give you these," she held out a pair of glasses that matched the pair on her face. Had she had those before? I hadn't noticed. There was only one thing I could think about.

"Bryells' kydawr!" I summoned forth my severely limited magical energy to create iron snakes that wrapped around my friend. "I hope you can tell this is for your own good," I whispered in her ear before sending her to my soul pocket with a soft "mushaat." I then nearly collapsed from the fatigue of even those two trifling spells. This is what I get for forgetting my containment draught, I thought. I stumbled down the street, forced to use my eyes since my head buzzed too much to use my inner eye. The image of Stephen tormented me until I somehow found myself behind the *Ocular Awesome!* building. I nearly cried when I spotted my coat on a dumpster, it was almost as nice as if the real Stephen were waiting for me with a nice bottle of that cognac he always had.

Rearmed, I consulted the *Book of the Benevolent Many* for any references to eye curses. The closest to what I could feel was the sight of Horus, where one eye is sacrificed and replaced with a celestial tear, but I found it highly unlikely that there could be so many celestial tears all of a sudden (given that the universe averages about two every three billion years, only one of which has ever been on Earth). Having hit such a snag, I pivoted to looking for demons and otherbeings that might have something to do with eyes. Here, again, I struck out, the closest being the eyeball demon *OCULATION*, who replaces people's eyes with his own, allowing him to see out of all of those

people's heads (he also eats their original eyes). Having found nothing, I turned inwards to a source of the problem.

"Ok, Rel, are you in a mood to cooperate?" I sent directly into my friend's mind in my soul pocket. Hearing no response, I linked myself to my avatar and saw that she was, fortunately, in a limbo state (indicating that there was some form of outside influence on her mind). Approaching her, I gently teased her eyes open to see that my alchemist's usual emerald-in-a-sunbeam green eyes had taken on the shade of homemade toothpaste (this brought to mind the last time I'd been so close to her, staring into those eyes guiding us home after fleeing the faerie kingdom's coronation). As my avatar had no set physical form, I plunged its energy "fingers" into her left eye, giving me an ultrasound-like image of the sphere. After a brief flash, the connection broke and I was back on my bottom in a puddle in the middle of an English town.

Curious...

This was the first time something had been powerful (or tricky) enough to break my connection to my avatar, which made it all the more exciting to find out exactly what was happening. I needed to enter it physically, I decided, and so returned home via the sun-corridor.

"Benton! I need a fifth level vessel protection," I roused my disciple from the pages of the Tome of Fet'har (he'd been drooling on the ritual for deterring demonic bees), and we returned to the only magic circle that wasn't currently in the midst of preparations. Unfortunately, that meant the attic of our enemy's lair. On the bright side, it was once again abandoned, and Benton is more than capable at protecting my physical body whenever my spirit travels between realities.

We set up a basic reality transportation circle, and I prepared the usual potion of margive berry, hell butterfly scale, beetle urine, soulfire brandy, and, of course, my blood. No matter how many times I enter my soul pocket, it never gets easier. It, in essence, flips my soul inside out

(always an unsettling thought). While I was in there, Benton claims he had to fight off the group of people with white eyes for ages, though I suspect he merely locked the door.

Rel was still in the same position as I'd seen through my avatar, so she wasn't the one who broke my connection (I had been worried about such an explanation). As I drifted through the misty remains of my avatar, I saw the image it had sent me before fizzling out: a normal eye structure, but with some dark mass obscuring the pupil and leaking into the capillaries. Her eye was still open, and, figuring it was the most effective measure I could take, I carefully used the tip of my blade to scratch her where the iris should've been (I was, of course, unconcerned about any lasting damage, as she has before demonstrated her ability to regrow entire heads from decapitated corpses so long as they're fresh enough).

A piercing shriek broke forth from my friend's eye, her body contorting in spasmodic ways as a tendril of some thing jabbed out at me from the incision. I could feel the sensations that meant my own body was going through a similar reaction, and hoped Benton would not break his streak of non-interference in demon rejection when I was on a soul journey (16 cases in a row!). Fortunately, my soul itself was unaffected, meaning whatever creature was causing this didn't reach as far as my heart. Having found the problem, I stabbed a couple more times at my friend's eye (being careful not to penetrate more than a millimeter into it), until the shriek became bloodcurdling and I could tell my own eye was bleeding out, as well.

The tendrils lashed wildly, and Rel's other eye burst open. She began uttering a spirit-shackling curse (which would cause her to be free from my soul pocket, trapping me there forever), but I stopped her by stabbing at her other eye. In her haste to dodge, she cut herself on the end of the blade, and its magic-cutting edge sent her into a comatose state while her faerie blood reacted against its effects. The lashing tendrils, however, shot around my arm, injecting some form of nerve agent into it and causing me to drop my blade. In retaliation, I called on my pact

with Lucifer, igniting the pentagram on my palm with the hellfire of the Devil's Dealer, searing the tendrils and forcing them to relinquish their hold on my arm.

I grabbed the now frantic appendages and pulled with all my strength, my fight yielding a rather horrendous little beast that I can only describe as an off-white version of an ocular nerve that one might see in a medical textbook, connected to a lens-shaped body with a rather sharp pair of fangs. Knowing there was yet work to do, but also that this was not where it could be achieved, I kicked off and grabbed my fallen blade before returning to my body. Upon reawakening, I noticed that I was covered in blood, and that a group of tendrils was hanging limply from my left eye. Benton had performed wonderfully, not interfering in any way, though keeping me safe from others' interferences, as well as setting up a purified area in the last rays of the setting sun.

Without wasting a second, I threw the tendriled thing into that space, preserving it for study, and flipped violently through my book until I found the entry I was looking for. Stephen was over my shoulder when I looked back at the door to make sure Benton had things under control, and it almost looked as though he were smiling at me (I could've sworn I saw a nod, though I likely imagined it). Downing my last supply of Ogbori Chimp-Frog slime, I called again on one of my shareholders, this time Kurokek (who I had recently released from my onetime spirit-bind to return to their shadow realm), to swath all the parasites within their darkness. The effort nearly tore my soul in two, even with the aid of the Ogbori slime, but as the last shadows of the receding sun fell over me, a cooling sensation replaced the burning inside my eyes. Everything faded to black.

The eyesore is a parasitic hive-demon, which attaches itself to the pupil and ocular nerve of the hosts, resulting in complete control over what the host can see. To the outside observer, it may result in odd or erratic behavior, alongside a notably calm demeanor. This is because the parasite has effectively brainwashed the host, not by altering their mind or thinking, but by altering the entire way they see the world. The only effective defense against its effects is to close your eyes,

because it can't distort things if it can't see them. Someone who has few wishes or is content with their lives has little to fear from them anyway, as they usually tempt the host with wishes, such as convincing them that they have found large amounts of money, when in reality they are picking up leaves. It may also try to leverage fears or regrets. Its sole purpose in life is, as is the case with many parasites (or indeed creatures in general), to spread throughout as much territory as possible. Their origin is somewhere between the middle realms of Hell and the inner dimensions of madness. While they may be comparatively easy to kill, requiring simply a surgical procedure to cut the lens-shaped body in half, they fiercely resist any attempt by calling all members of the hive to rescue them, as well as put the host's life at risk. They do not serve as a source of nourishment, nor is any part of them useful for any notable potions or spells (though they do possess a nerve agent that exceeds current medical science). It is unknown how (or whether) they breed or multiply, as all known outbreaks have occurred via the use of summoning individuals for each bonded pair individually.

The recent outbreak on Earth was caused by accident, following the death of a psychotic killer who took their life, opening a slight gateway to the space from which they originate. The breach has been dealt with, and the affected population has been cured (all memories of the incident have been captured via twilight moths and replaced with altered versions). A Mr A. Durham has been notified of the situation, as well as the completion of his contract. He has generously donated a sum of £49.67, for dry cleaning of a rather important overcoat, and has extended an open invitation for dinner, should any of those associated with the fulfillment of his request find themselves in Chichester.

Case Closed