

The Pontchartrain Inquisition



A Horror One-Shot for **Fate** for 3-4 players.

by Jamie Lindemann

When a group of college friends go missing during Spring Break on the banks of Lake Pontchartrain, the police only have one suspect: the lone survivor of that fateful road trip. As their tale unfolds, ever stranger details are revealed when even the gamemaster doesn't know who the survivor is!

OVERVIEW & PREPARATION

The scenario is broken into scenes with interludes in the interrogation room some time after the adventure itself. The entire playable scenario is a flashback being relayed to the police officers. Stay on the aggressive side with the interrogators and don't give the players much opportunity to react. This is for the best, since we don't actually know which of them (if any!) will survive. Session aspects are introduced during each interlude and can be tagged for the next scene and throughout the rest of the scenario. When a scenario aspect is revealed, place a fate point on it to reflect the free tag any player gets to make on the aspect. (Discard the point from the card during use, don't give it to the player.)

Let the players know that the only major change from vanilla Fate is that conceding a conflict in this scenario has a different outcome: they will not get to decide how the scene plays out for them (and will receive a handout explaining why) but they will receive the additional fate points for conceding, to be used in the remainder of the scenario.

The scenario is written *assuming player characters will perish*. As a result, their stress boxes are limited with few consequences to encourage them to concede early and earn the additional fate points for their new antagonist role. There's a handout associated with the Swamp variants that lets the players know how their character has transitioned to their new life. Once they've read the handout, give them their

new Swamp variant character sheet and the fate points they earned for their concession, if any.

Swampfiends:

- Ignore their previous mortal consequences, as it takes more than that to kill a Swampfiend. It is, however, intentional that Swamp PCs don't have stress boxes. Every hit should cause some hurt, as they pull apart easily and regenerate quickly.
- At the beginning of every scene, Swamp PC consequences downgrade one level, so their minor (-2) consequence is erased. Their moderate (-4) consequence becomes their new minor consequence, with some reflection of its imperfect healing (ex. **Shattered Arm** becomes **Twisted Limb**, **Gaping Facehole** becomes **Ruined Eyes**).
- Swampfiends won't kill a PC outright, as they must be alive to convert them (not that conceding or eliminating a PC necessarily means death). They will not take a course of action too likely to kill a PC, like blowing up a vehicle or pushing them out of a tree.

The players select their character sheet from the four pre-generated options Darius, Nolan, Tim, and Sam. Keep the "Swamp" variants of the character sheet to yourself until later. While the Aspects on the sheet suggest how the characters all know one another, let them discuss it and get to know each other. After all, the characters have been best friends and family for years.

FIRST INTERLUDE

The camera pans across a pair of wrists in handcuffs at a steel table, shooting over the shoulder of an unseen figure, slowly drawing up to a state trooper and his partner. Judging from their uniforms and expressions, they've been at this a while with documents and photographs splayed across the surface of the table. The lead investigator eyes you from across the cold steel of the table in the interrogation room. "You and your friends tear up the bayou and only one of you comes out. So you sign your name to this..." He tosses a report across the desk.

"...and make up a story about being the sole survivor? Walk me through this ghost story one step at a time, kid."

[Reveal the scenario aspect Sole Survivor]

SCENE 1: PAPPY'S & THE DRIFTER

We cut to a brightly lit driving sequence, rock n' roll playing on the radio as four friends make their way south from Missouri. The drive has been uneventful, for the most part. Sam was able to borrow her dad's Camry and Tim provided most of the provisions. With Darius quoting "fun facts" from the travel book he insisted on bringing in between navigating, it's Nolan who's done most of the driving down I-55.

As you drove, more and more billboards advertised a local seafood hut. It was Darius who spotted it first: the name "Pappy's" scrawled across a picture of crawfish with human heads grinning and inviting you to "Come on down!" Kinda surreal at first, but increasingly funny. None of you had heard of the place. Eventually the signs had miles listed and the vote was cast: You had to eat at Pappy's. This place was too weird to pass up.

Give the players a chance to stretch their legs, literally and figuratively during this first sequence in the diner. Pappy's is every small town eatery, with cracked leatherette booths, chrome-edged formica tables, and a counter that separates the kitchen from the dining room stretching down half its length.

The waitress, Doris, is a woman of few words eyeing the newcomers warily (after all, tourists

and children don't tip, and these customers are both). Get a drink order, curtly dismiss anything ridiculous, and toss them a few laminated menus that reflect the offerings at Pappy's: primarily seafood with a few other fried offerings for folks who dislike deliciousness. The players are free to come up with whatever they want, but keep note of which of them orders seafood: They have unwittingly gained the aspect **Call of the Water**. (Feel free not to divulge this until later) The meal otherwise passes uneventfully, as the first sense of dread is waiting for them in the parking lot.

As they return to the car, find out who's driving, if anyone is calling shotgun, etc. Only call for Notice rolls from those who aren't actively doing something else to discover The Drifter before he is on top of them at the car.

A figure appears in your midst and is at the car, eyes yellow and wild, raving and stinking of the bayou. His lips peel back in a mad grin, revealing black nubs of former teeth and rapidly muttering snippets of phrases. "Come down to lake! Rest your soul and feed your brain... Free for you and all your friends, crawfish 'til the bitter end. Wade to where the shallows break... Get to see everything the water can be!"

Feel free to break his rambling up with grasping the PCs or slamming his hands on the car. He is aggressive in his message but isn't a physical threat, unless someone starts something: If that's the case, the Drifter will display surprising strength for a tattered bundle of rags and rage.

Once the Drifter has either been pushed back or dealt with, let the PCs go on their way with the Drifter shouting after their car, cackling.

THE DRIFTER

**Aspects: Strength of Conviction
Powerful of Smell & Spirit
Not of This Place**

**Skills: Will (Good, +3), Provoke (Fair, +2),
Fight (Average, +1)**

Stress/Consequences: ○ ○

SECOND INTERLUDE

As the car makes its way from Pappy's, we cut back to the interrogation room, the trooper reacting slightly to the interlude. "Sounds like you stirred up a mess of trouble back at Pappy's. Nobody there reports dealing with a madman other than some punk kids from out of town. But you go tear-assing out of there and straight into the storm of the century..."

He throws a photo of the Camry, wheel ruts leading off the road and the windshield caved in, surrounded by ribbons of police tape and evidence cones.

"And I tell you what, there was no way you were driving away from that."

[Reveal the scenario aspect *No Driving Away From This*]

SCENE 2: OFF THE BEATEN PATH & THE LAKE CALLS

We cut back to an intact Camry rolling down the road. It's a few hours later and you're getting back into the promise of a week in the Big Easy, flipping among weather reports about a storm brewing, the occasional Clarence Carter song, and snippets of local shows, both of the talk show and religious sermonizing type. Maybe it's nerves, but you could almost swear you hear echoes of the madman's ranting in the theme songs and jingles that come blaring through as the rain comes down heavier and heavier.

Determine who is driving and have them make a Average (+1) Drive test to nail on the brakes as they crest a hill. Brakelights dot the horizon as state troopers are directing traffic away from the Pontchartrain Causeway, forcing you out and around the lake. Add as much detail as you need to make it clear that a straight shot to New Orleans is out of the question (State troopers parked across the interstate, flares up, a car spun out up ahead). Have the driver make a Lore check to keep up with a rapidfire list of directions that may only make sense to locals. This advice will actively

contradict their GPS directions (which is getting spotty signal in the storm) and the maps they brought which won't have the detail to show some of the local roads the trooper suggests.

Once they've had a good solid drive into the rain and bayou, check in with everyone about how they're passing the time. The radio should keep being unsettling, right up until the lightning reveals something out on the lake:

Darius was the first to see it, a figure bobbing in the water, struggling against the rising waves whipped up by the storm. Brief flashes of lightning reveal the figure to each of you, losing them for a moment as the water blocks your view. What do you do?

Each of them must make a Fair (+2) Will test, with compels against their **Call of the Water** aspects (if any were gained back at Pappy's) and perhaps Noland's **Never Leave A Man Behind**. Those who fail the test must try to save the drowning figure.

Allow as many rolls as needed for someone to head into the water. First character to the drowning victim is handed the full page handout at the end of the adventure [**"This message is just for you!"**] as you tell the others that the water swallows both the PC and the drowning victim. Let survivors search for their missing comrade if they want, but hustle them back to the shore and regroup.

THIRD INTERLUDE

The trooper nods. "No body. Convenient. I imagine you don't have an answer for how the rest of you made your way around the lake and trashed the ranger station?"

[Reveal the scenario aspect *Trash The Station*]

SWAMPFIENDS

Once a PC changes, they become a creature neither animal nor human. Each adopts some marine animal traits: Tim a coiled serpent, extending back through the woods like a tongue. Sam a needle-toothed horror with the sinuous grace of an eel. Her brother Darius, a translucent mass of flesh and bone with wide, seemingly blind cavefish eyes. Noland, a rugged beast with the snagged jaws of an alligator with the strength to match.

Their first appearance may warrant a Great (+3) Will check to prevent mental stress and a possible consequence.

In combat, they take damage like a rotten log takes an axe or an errant foot. They are, in truth, the waterlogged corpses of their former selves, animated by the Lake to return with more servants. Emphasize the fragile nature (and unnatural recovery) of these creatures in combat, which may embolden your survivors to strike back against them.

SCENE 3: RANGER STATION & RE-GROUP

If spotting the figure in the lake didn't prompt a Drive check to slide the car off the road, then they can drive to a light in the distance which reveals a ranger station as the storm starts to pick up (and perhaps a Drive check now, if you're feeling vindictive). The station is small, with a light on top to lead the way. The door is locked and a handmade sign announces "Closed for Storm."

The party can discover the following features once inside:

- A weather radio announcing updates about the storm, which keeps repeating Weather Service announcements. A wash of static containing the chant from the car radio/Drifter takes over whenever lightning strikes.
- A corkboard covered with Missing Persons reports takes up a full wall. Layers of pages paper over each other, stretching back years.
- Separately, a shotgun on a rack on the wall and a small number of shells in a drawer. The drawer also contains a pair of heavy duty Maglites.

- Out back, a generator in a shed with enough diesel to run for days. Until it gets started, none of the light switches will do anything nor will the ancient computers boot up.
- The phone lines are down with the storm, as is any internet connection. Cell service is also no good.

Give them an action or few to Investigate their surroundings, attempt to call out, etc. before the first Swamp PC returns. Leave it to them how they go about either attacking the station, luring others out, or just creeping around until someone checks on them. If they are unwilling to confront the PCs directly, you can have lurking minor swampfiends in the treeline just beyond the lights of the station get the PCs spooked and looking to either hole up or go out and do something. As a last resort, compel **Not Driving Away From This** and destroy the car, loud enough that they know it is happening.

Usually these tricks will get a second PC out of the station and overwhelmed, as it is important that they have the odds against them as you head into Scene 4 with equal numbers of survivors and Swamp PCs.

FOURTH INTERLUDE

Back at the state troopers interrogation unit, the trooper sits across from you, doubtful. "So now two of your friends are zombies or devils or something. We may not be the same sort of folk as what you got back home, but we know better than to blame monsters when it all goes to hell. Why'd you feel the need to burn it down?"

[Reveal the scenario aspect **Burn It Down**]

SCENE 4: THE SIEGE OF BIG BRANCH STATION

Little time has passed between the last scene and this one, perhaps just a lull in the fighting if it has become a pitched conflict. By this point, a Challenge should begin, pitting the Swamp PCs with a little help from the nameless lurking extras to force the heroes into a panic. PCs can focus on shoring up their physical defenses, finding weapons to defend themselves, or attacking to drive off the swampfiends, among other things. Meanwhile, Swamp PC goals can

include shattering the doors and windows, destroying the generator (and setting everything on fire), and infiltrating the station.

PCs roll for their first exchange, perhaps penalizing the Swamp PCs in theirs if successful and applicable. Alternate after that until both sides finish the contest. Keep track of which side wins, as it will give that side an Aspect in the next scene for winning the siege.

Regardless of the outcome, the station will have to burn, in accordance with the scenario aspect. Compel the PCs as needed to take that fate point if they need help during the siege, winning the battle to complicate the war.

If both PCs survive, Team Swamp will need to divide and conquer on the last scene.

FIFTH INTERLUDE

“So after your pitched battle with the Creatures from the Black Lagoon, you decide to make a break for it. Just hoof it to the highway and hitch a ride into town, is that it?”

[Reveal the scenario aspect *The Upper Hand* and place fate points on *Sole Survivor* equal to the number of Swamp PCs.]

SCENE 5: FIGHT & FLIGHT TO THE FREEWAY

After the battle at the ranger station, it was clear holding out long-term was impossible. You grabbed what you could and made a break for it, remembering how the roads wound around the station from the map on the wall. You had to put some distance between yourself and the water. Yourself and Them.

In this final flight, the winning side from the last scene gains **The Upper Hand**, a scenario aspect they can tag once for free and keep using throughout the race to the road. The PC will primarily be using Athletics or Stealth to put distance on the contest, while Swamp PCs can either race to keep up and gain tokens or make maneuvers to slow up the PC. Regardless, a number of Swampfiends equal to human survivors should get an action on each pass: three on one is an unwinnable scenario. Swampfiends can decide among themselves

who gets the action on each pass as the beasts dart out at the survivor(s) from the darkness.

Should the Swamp PCs win the race, they have to subdue the survivor and get them back to the water. If two PCs have made it this far, divide and conquer or try to force a noble sacrifice concession from one of them. In this scene only, the PCs have the option of narrating a proper concession, so they aren't necessarily converted into a Swampfiend.

If the last PC is overwhelmed, read the **Swamp Victory** ending, otherwise read the **Sole Survivor** ending.

Swamp Victory Ending

As you finish your account of the final escape, the trooper nods. “So the rest of them are back in the lake, and you alone get picked up on the highway, ranting about swamp creatures eating your friends. Have I got that right?”

The lights flicker and the [First Swamp PC] is shown across from the troopers, their monstrous visage reflected in the one-way mirror as the camera turns to show their human face, smiling impossibly and revealing too many teeth. “That’s my story, officer. Any more questions, just go and ask Lake Pontchartrain.”

Sole Survivor Ending

As you finish your account of the final escape, the trooper nods. “So the rest of them are back in the lake, and you alone get picked up on the highway, ranting about swamp creatures eating your friends. Have I got that right?”

The camera reveals [the Sole Survivor] across from the troopers, looking wrung out and just barely holding on. “That’s my story, officer. Any more questions, just go and ask Lake Pontchartrain.”

Darius

High Concept- Genius Loner

Trouble- The Darkness Within

- Sam's Tag-Along Little Brother
- Wait, I Read About This Once...

GREAT (+4): Lore

GOOD (+3): Burglary, Stealth

FAIR (+2): Craft, Deceive, Investigation

AVERAGE (+1): Fight, Notice, Provoke, Will

Stress & Consequences

OO

Minor (-2):

Major (-4):

Swamp Darius

High Concept- A Killer, Cold and Wrathful

Trouble- The Mark of the Beast

- Ancient Language, Speak Through Fingers*
- Unshakeable Pursuit

GREAT (+4): Lore

GOOD (+3): Investigation, Stealth

FAIR (+2): Burglary, Deceive, Fight

AVERAGE (+1): Athletics, Notice, Provoke, Will

Consequences*

Minor (-2):

Major (-4):

*You may spend a Fate point and use Lore for any skill for a single role.

At the end of every scene, erase your minor consequence and "heal" your major to a minor consequence: **Shattered Arm becomes **Twisted Limb**, **Gaping Facehole** becomes **Ruined Eyes**, etc.

Noland

High Concept- Small Town Soldier

Trouble- War Was Hell

- Sam Could Use a Guy Like Me in Her Life
- Never Leave a Man Behind

GREAT (+4): Fight

GOOD (+3): Athletics, Physique

FAIR (+2): Drive, Shoot*, Stealth

AVERAGE (+1): Craft, Lore, Notice, Rapport

Stress & Consequences

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Minor (-2):

Major (-4):

*Add the scene aspect "A Gun in the Trunk" to any scene featuring the car.

Swamp Noland

High Concept- Reptilian Monster in a Bloody Sea

Trouble- Leave the Weak Ones

- Pack Mentality
- Love Me or Fear Me

GREAT (+4): Fight

GOOD (+3): Athletics, Physique

FAIR (+2): Craft, Notice, Stealth

AVERAGE (+1): Deceive, Provoke, Shoot, Will

Consequences*

Minor (-2):

Major (-4):

*At the end of every scene, erase your minor consequence and "heal" your major to a minor consequence:
Shattered Arm becomes Twisted Limb, Gaping Facehole becomes Ruined Eyes, etc.

Sam

High Concept- Meant for Bigger Things

Trouble- I Can Do This Myself!

- Anything Can Be a Weapon (If You're Holding It Right)
- Unexpectedly Resilient

GREAT (+4): Will

GOOD (+3): Craft, Empathy

FAIR (+2): Athletics, Fight, Rapport

AVERAGE (+1): Drive, Notice, Provoke, Stealth

Stress & Consequences

○ ○ ○

Minor (-2):

Major (-4):

Swamp Sam

High Concept- A Dream Among the Sharks

Trouble- Parasitic, Psycho, Filthy Creature

- Unholy Resilience
- We Can Be Together Down Here

GREAT (+4): Athletics

GOOD (+3): Craft, Deceive

FAIR (+2): Fight, Provoke, Stealth

AVERAGE (+1): Investigate, Notice, Physique, Will

Consequences*

Minor (-2):

Major (-4):

At the end of every scene, erase your minor consequence and "heal" your major to a minor consequence: **Shattered Arm becomes **Twisted Limb**, **Gaping Facehole** becomes **Ruined Eyes**, etc.*

tim

High Concept- The Man with a Plan

Trouble- Everything's a Joke

-Gotta Be the Hero

-Every Saint Has a Past, Every Sinner Has a Future

GREAT (+4): Rapport

GOOD (+3): Provoke, Resources

FAIR (+2): Deceive, Empathy, Will

AVERAGE (+1): Athletics, Drive, Physique, Shoot

Stress & Consequences

OO

Minor (-2):

Major (-4):

Swamp tim

High Concept- The Tongue of the Lake

Trouble- Cackling Madness

-Fortune Favors the Foolhardy

-Strike Like a Snake

GREAT (+4): Deceive

GOOD (+3): Provoke, Will

FAIR (+2): Athletics, Notice, Stealth

AVERAGE (+1): Craft, Investigate, Physique, Shoot

Consequences*

Minor (-2):

Major (-4):

At the end of every scene, erase your minor consequence and "heal" your major to a minor consequence: **Shattered Arm becomes **Twisted Limb**, **Gaping Facehole** becomes **Ruined Eyes**, etc.*

(This message is just for you!)

It starts in the dark.

The water has closed in and the surface is a dark dream above you.

YOU HAVE BEEN CHOSEN

Who, you? Why? And by what?

YOUR QUESTIONS ARE NOTHING

THE LAKE IS EVERYTHING NOW

You look up, your eyes adjusting to the murk, watching the bubbles rise to the surface.

They slow...

They stop.

Water swings in your lungs, but you don't care what that means for you now. There's calm and quiet, floating down here. It barely matters when you feel your bones pop and your skin lurch as the lake welcomes you home.

THE OTHERS MUST KNOW THIS PEACE

COME DOWN TO THE LAKE

WADE TO WHERE THE SHALLOWS BREAK

THAT'S WHERE THEY WILL GET TO SEE

EVERYTHING THE WATER CAN BE

Yes... The others. They have to join you. Together again, forever.

You break the surface of the water, ready to collect them for their new life in the Lake.

COME DOWN TO LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN

(This message is just for you!)

It starts in the dark.

The water has closed in and the surface is a dark dream above you.

YOU HAVE BEEN CHOSEN

Who, you? Why? And by what?

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