

# The Picture in the Lobby

By AlHazred ([original post](#); more [here](#) and [here](#))

In the lobby hangs a painting. It's part of the decor of the hotel - the Management went to a company for their "flair," so it all matches. Well, everything except the painting in the lobby.

For one thing, it's enormous - the lobby is the one room that's big enough to hold it, where it can hang without getting in the way like it would in the convention halls. It's ornately-carved gold-colored frame is strange, anyway. Most guests who take a close look swear they see faces carved in there, screaming or calling out for something. It's all a trick of the eye, though, like finding images in the clouds.

Besides, the subject matter, while odd, isn't outright weird or grotesque. It merely depicts a scene of a murder, with twelve oddly-costumed people standing around a man in a black robe, who clutches his chest as he falls to the floor in a pool of blood. The clerk says its supposed to be some sort of classical scene, but that doesn't explain all the minor oddities in it: through a window in the background is what appears to be a pyramid with a glowing eye atop it; various people have pieces of paper sticking out of their pockets, but they all have strange-looking writing on them - or maybe a code; the knives are all oddly-curved, and some of the look like they are not knives at all but claws that spring from the assailants' hands; and the pool of blood on the floor seems to reflect something just above the painting's point of view, too vague to make out but somehow disturbing in outline or form.

But the most disturbing thing about the painting is the murdered man's face. It glares out at the viewer with an expression of betrayal, anger - and terror. People claim the eyes seem to follow them as they move about the lobby. Even [the All-Seeing Blind Guy](#) (*especially* the All-Seeing Blind Guy) claims to feel some weird chill down his spine when he sits or stands nearby.

Look, look now! I swear, I just saw his eyes swivel in your direction...

## Plot Hooks:

1. *Mystical*: The first PC to examine the painting gets an ill-defined creepy feeling when examining the painting closely (and that PC's Danger Sense will go off as well). (If magic is divined for, the PC can tell that the painting itself is not magical, but seems to have a "mystical residue," as if it were present at the scene of powerful magic.) When the PC sleeps, she will dream that she goes to the Lobby, moves a chair over, and climbs into the painting. Inside, the compulsion vanishes and the PC can interact with the scene, which is of a coven of witches in Salem in 1692. Why they are murdering their leader and what their reaction will be to the PC is left to the GM's imagination. The witch who is being murdered is the only witch present with mastery of dream magic enough to send the PC back. The other players could be drawn into the dream as well, or maybe they need to solve the mystery of how to cure their friend, who remains in a coma until her dream-self can win free of the painting.
2. *Weird Conspiracy*: The painting is a scene from 1775, the murder of one of the minor lights of the American Revolution. A member of a secret society, the painting depicts his murder by Crown loyalists. Hidden in the painting are a large number of clues which point those clever enough to decipher them toward a cache of documents hidden from the British. They might have historical importance - perhaps a title to a piece of currently-foreign soil, or a key to a plot by British Freemasons to take over the fledgling American government. (Perhaps they even

succeeded?) Industrious GMs can turn this into an adventure similar to the movie *National Treasure*.

3. *Fortean*: The painting seems to change subtly when no-one's looking at it. Positions seem to shift, new details (a pocketwatch with Egyptian hieroglyphs instead of numbers, a thirteenth assailant visible only as a shadow among the drapes, a pattern of designs worked into the robe that can be made out briefly from one particular angle but then disappear entirely) emerge and old ones disappear. Do they follow a cycle based on the Zodiac or the Lunar month? Does the elaborate dance lead to a conclusion of mystical significance, or does the scene always retain a particular dramatic tension? Are the characters portrayed actually performing a ritual to summon the thing barely glimpsed in the pool of blood? Or do their apparent motions predict events happening in the world outside the Hotel? Does it signify a countdown when the knives start disappearing from assailants' hands, one per day while the pool shrinks noticeably, and if so what will happen when the last knife goes and the pool is gone?

**Further Ideas:** Actually, a more “mundane” twist on this would be that everyone, no matter who they are, see this painting with their own face as the face of the murdered man. Or, perhaps, the painting always shows the face of a current guest, and the guest who shows up is the one who is the next one to die. Could be later that day, could be years from now; it's just a strange sort of oracle. The face changes as people check in/out (or die).

Or maybe everyone thinks the murdered man looks very much (but not **exactly**) like someone they knew who has died (such as an old friend, a grandparent, etc.). The sort of thing that not everyone would comment on right away to their companions. But if they do start comparing notes, they find that everyone thinks the painting looks like a different deceased person they knew, but those deceased people don't necessarily look anything like **each other**...

Back to [creepy\\_hotel](#)

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