

CITY of MIST



PUPPET SHOW

A CALCULATING SMALL-TIME VILLAIN DRIVEN TO KILL BY FATHERLY LOVE

CITY of MIST

Hidden behind the mundane persona of a used car salesman and concerned father, Walter Stephenson (Geppetto) is the last person anyone would expect to be a serial killer. Butchering and dismembering his victims, he truly believes one day he'll be able to make his handicapped son, Freddy, into "a real boy".

HOW TO USE WALTER IN YOUR CITY OF MIST GAME

This PDF describes a small-scale criminal operation for the **City of Mist RPG**, run by the Rift of Geppetto, **Walter Stephenson**, a maniacal serial killer. You can use Walter and his son Freddy in your City of Mist series in the following ways:

- **As a component in a case or story arc you are creating**, where Walter is used or manipulated by a different villain to dispose of competition or specific individuals that hinder that villain's operation.
- **As a side case**, in which the crew is assigned or hired to investigate the vicious murders of Ryan White or any of Walter's other victims. Alternatively, the crew might stumble into Walter and Freddy's storyline while at the hospital, or when at the used car lot buying a vehicle.
- **As a ready-to-play random encounter**, if one of the crew members or a supporting character encounter Freddy and make a comment about him in Walter's presence, or have Walter misinterpret their words as degrading, thus marking them as his next victim.

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WALTER'S BACKGROUND

Walter Stephenson grew up in the Blue-Collar Residential neighborhood, the only child of a working-class couple. He lived an average life in every sense of the word, graduating from high school and marrying his sweetheart three months later. Walter's family could never afford to send him to college, but thanks to his strong communication skills, he was able to secure a decent living as a used car salesman at a dealership called "Cash for Cars".

Two years after his marriage, Walter's wife gave birth to their son, **Freddy Stephenson**. Freddy was born missing his right arm and leg, with severe birth defects in his heart and lungs, and an underdeveloped brain. Just minutes after the birth of their child, Walter's wife bled to death, leaving Walter alone to care for their son.

Freddy's childhood was difficult. Between his missing leg and underdeveloped cognitive capacity, he was never able to learn how to walk, even with a prosthetic, so he had to rely on a wheelchair for mobility. For the first several years, Walter would find himself bringing Freddy to the hospital on an almost weekly basis. As Freddy grew older, he suffered terribly from his endless health issues and constant bullying from his peers. No kid his age wanted to hang out with someone who was only "half a person", as they often put it.

Walter encouraged his son to try and find a hobby to fill his time. After trying an assortment of different activities and games, Freddy finally found a deep interest in puppet making. Walter believed his son developed this interest due to his lack of real friends, but regardless of the reason, he was just glad to see his son take interest in anything.

Freddy's puppets started as simple designs, mostly sock puppets and paper bags. As he grew older, his de-

signs grew more complex, eventually moving to wood. While Freddy struggled in most tasks, he seemed to have a real aptitude for woodworking and puppet making. His father, ecstatic at his son's developing hobby, began helping him create more and more complex and interesting puppets. Once built, Walter would perform for Freddy with the puppets, making them appear almost as though they were alive.

Freddy Stephenson is now thirty years old, living with his father Walter. He spends most of his time in his workshop working on his next puppet. He also enjoys watching television shows and listening to whatever might be on the radio. Freddy has come to enjoy his daily routines, but his father was never content with them, always desiring more for his son.

While Freddy never seemed to take notice of the bullying and the looks sent his way, Walter noticed all of them. Whether at school, at the hospital, or on the streets, it always seemed to him that someone was making fun of Freddy or giving him a judgmental look. This enraged Walter and led him to get into more than a few fights over the years. Eventually, this anger took Walter to a much darker place, leading him to kill.

WALTER'S OPERATION

Walter's life as a serial killer began with the murder of **Ryan White**, who has recently moved in to a neighbouring house. After hearing Ryan make some rude jokes about Freddy, Walter attacked him near his home that night, striking him on the back of the head and killing him instantly. While the motive for the killing was based on Walter's furious anger, the murder itself was done with meticulous planning. Walter did not strike as a lunatic thirsty for blood, but as a careful, intelligent man who always has a plan before making his next move.

Walter was taking Ryan's body to a nearby bridge for disposal when he suddenly had a terrible idea: This dead man had limbs that Freddy could use. It was an insane thought, but Walter, meticulous as he was, didn't just dismiss it. Using a saw from his woodworking toolbox, he removed Ryan's right limbs, throwing the remainder of the corpse into the river. He stored the limbs in a deep freezer until, months later, they would be used in the first of many horrific experiments.

Over the course of the next couple of months, Walter Stephenson took the lives of two more people who showed scorn towards his son. The mutilated bodies - one limb was taken from each - were carried down the river and out of the jurisdiction of the local police.

Walter's love for his son seemed to grow deeper and stronger to the point of obsession. He spent even more time with his son and his puppets, performing puppet shows and making the mannequins seem alive. It was during one of these very puppet shows, right after the murder of his third victim, that Walter discovered he could make the puppets come to life. With simple verbal commands, Walter was able to make the puppets do whatever he asked of them. He no longer needed to do the killing himself, the puppets could do it for him.

Since then his MO changed drastically. Using camera-carrying puppets as scouts, he began devising plans of entry well ahead in advance of the murder itself. On the night of the murder, he would send especially-equipped puppets into his victim's bedroom, where they would silently restrain and kill, leaving even the person sleeping next to the victim unaware of what happened. During each murder, Walter has his puppets cut off one or more body parts and return them to him. The puppets do this by placing the limbs in safe places near the crime scene where Walter can then go and pick them up. The only part Walter has never taken is the head, having no use of another person's mind.

Because of Walter's careful planning and abilities, the authorities are operating at a great disadvantage: Walter's puppets can enter through small cracks and leave no biological evidence behind, making it nearly impossible to investigate the crime scenes using mundane methods. Worse still, because of Walter's change of MO, the police have only been able to connect between the last five murders, as of yet unaware they are chasing the person who is also behind the first three murders.

Walter targets only people who insult his son in some way. This does not have to be a direct insult, and any slight, real or imagined, can put a person in Walter's sights. Walter has begun to specifically target victims who share a similar body size and build with Freddy, hoping to find a suitable set of replacement limbs for his son (See *A Construct of Flesh* sidebar). Walter does have a soft spot for children, however, and while he will not harm a child, he is not above targeting parents for the sins of their children, believing them responsible for their child's behavior.

Walter spends his free time at home, helping his son to craft new puppets that he later uses as untraceable assassins, the rest of his time being spent at Cash for Cars or taking Freddy to his doctor's appointments. To the outside world, Walter comes off as a concerned

father exhausted from the labors of caring for his son, but his dark, violent persona lurks just below the surface, easily triggered by a whispered insult or a wrong look in his son's direction.

A CONSTRUCT OF FLESH

The police (and probably also the crew) are especially puzzled by the goriest aspect of the murders: why does the killer take body parts from his victims? The answer lies in the latest power Walter Stephenson gained from the Mythos of Geppetto. Beyond his ability to command puppets to do his bidding, Walter is also able to animate puppets made of flesh.

Walter doesn't intend on using his new ability for murder – to him, this power has a very different purpose. Walter does not just kill because he wants to protect his son from those that would do him harm; his ultimate goal is to give Freddy the arm and leg that he should have had from birth, and at last make his son into “a real boy”!

As of yet, Walter hasn't tried to attach a new arm and a leg to Freddy. So far, he has been unable to find a way to grant another person control over the limbs, nor has he found a better way to attach the limbs than using simple needle and thread. In his experiments, Walter has created several Flesh Puppets, horrible constructs of severed limbs that serve him just as his other puppets do. While they are vastly more dangerous than his other minions, Walter will not use them unless absolutely necessary. As the crew closes in on him, this option will probably begin to look like the best chance he has.

KEY LOCATIONS

CASH FOR CARS

A classic example of a used car lot. Stationed on the corner of two busy streets on the edge of the Blue-Collar Residential neighborhood, the lot is filled with cars of many shapes, sizes, and conditions. The lot is owned by a slightly overweight and balding middle-aged man named **Kumar Nadar**, his features made far more distinct due to his fashion sense (or lack thereof). He often wears a worn-out stetson hat and an old plaid blazer, at least one size too small. Walter has been working here ever since finishing college and has a good working relation-

ship with Kumar. The pay comes on time, and the holiday bonus is usually good enough to provide Walter with extra funds to buy new materials for Freddy's puppets.

The lot employs a few salesmen other than Walter, but most of them come and go every year or so. Cash for Cars' roster has one more constant - **Lisa Nadar** - Kumar's wife, who acts as the accountant, office manager, and, as all employees know, the real authority around the used car lot. With a sharp sense for both business and numbers, Lisa makes sure that Cash and Cars stays afloat in the ever changing market, while making sure that her husband is kept busy (and smiling) on the floor, attending to the customers. Having strong maternal instincts but no children of her own, Lisa helped Walter a lot during the first few years of Freddy's life. She's very fond of Freddy and enjoys feeding him her delicious home-cooked meals while talking with him about his newest projects whenever he comes around.

INVESTIGATING CASH FOR CARS

Lisa Nadar knows how to keep her books in order and the Nadars are known throughout the neighborhood as law-abiding citizens, repulsed by any kind of criminal activity. Needless to say, this makes the establishment devoid of any suspicion by law enforcement, which works to the benefit of Walter's sinister activities. Conforming with the dichotomous nature of his personality, none of Walter's actions are performed in or around the premises of Cash for Cars. He knows better than to mess with Lisa's observant eye. Though nothing has been discussed between the two, Lisa seems to know that Walter is hiding some secret; something has changed about him, these past six months or so.

The Nadars are a private couple and would not be quick to reveal information about their employees to snoopier strangers coming in with questions. In fact, they would probably report such suspicious activity to the police. However, if they ever become suspicious of any illicit activity that's taking place in their own establishment, they'll probably be more lenient to provide information.

THE STEPHENSON'S RESIDENCE

Walter and Freddy's place is a small, one-story home squeezed in between two almost identical houses on a quiet cul-de-sac, located in one of the older parts of the Blue-Collar Residential. The street is home to hard-working, middle-income families, mostly getting by from paycheck to paycheck.

The Stephenson home is distinguishable by the handicap ramp that has been set up to make the front porch accessible for when Freddy uses his wheelchair. Inside, the small kitchen and living room are fairly plain, but the garage has been transformed into a workshop for Freddy's woodworking. This workspace is filled with tools, flat tables, and even a lathe, though Freddy is not allowed to operate the lathe by himself. Working materials of many different kinds are placed all around the floor - blocks of wood, fabrics, buttons, and zippers - alongside puppets of many shapes and in varying degrees of assembly.

The two upstairs bedrooms are as plain as the rest of the house. Walter's bedroom is a boxy but awfully tidy room with a narrow closet, containing Walter's "extensive" wardrobe of three suits - everyday, Sunday, and holiday. Despite being in his 30s, Freddy's bedroom appears to fit a boy a third his age - vivid-colored furniture and a racing-car bed. A multitude of puppets occupy every open space of Freddy's bedroom floor, from finger puppets to stick figurines, through sock puppets and marionettes, all are lying silently, "waiting their turn" to play with Freddy.

INVESTIGATING THE CUL-DE-SAC

Among the nearly identical-looking houses around the cul-de-sac, one can also find the home of Ryan White's family. **The Whites** have remained in the house even after Ryan's disappearance. In fact, with just one provider for the family, **Lynda White**, they feel lucky to even have a home. The two siblings, **Sarah and Oliver** (ages 16 and 14) have been trying to help their mom the best they can, taking odd jobs in and around the neighborhood.

Most families in the neighborhood don't pay much attention to what goes on in other people's homes, but ever since Ryan's disappearance, the people of the cul-de-sac have started to act as more of a community, with Friday potlucks and many a Sunday spent in the nearby park. The Stephensons have not shied away from this and are considered quite the life of the party, with Freddy showing off new designs for puppets and Walter entertaining the younger kids. Not everybody is happily accepting of the quirky Stephensons; Oliver White in particular is suspicious of Freddy, and if asked will comment that: *'I know he's not alright in the head, but that just makes me think he's capable of hurting someone without showing remorse.'*

WALTER IN PERSON

There are two sides to Walter Stephenson's personality. When meeting someone for the first time, Walter comes off as a tired father who has been stretched to his limit. He is always polite, but his patience is a bit short. Above all else, Walter's concern for his son, Freddy, is very apparent. He enjoys boasting about his son's creations, and will take great offense to anything rude said about him.

On the flipside, Walter's second persona is a cold, calculating killer. When Walter is in the moment of killing and dismembering his victims, all pretense of emotion seems to leave him, and even surrounded by puppets, it almost seems as if he is the one made of wood. He shows no remorse for those he kills, and is very difficult to throw into a rage, unless Freddy is threatened in some way.

WALTER'S ABILITIES

Walter possesses the power to bring puppets to life and have them obey his every command. When awoken, the puppet seems to hang in the air, as though an invisible puppet master was controlling it. The puppets are not capable of cognitive thought and are simply following the commands of their master.

Walter's growing connection with the wooden puppets has made him lose touch with his emotions. Whenever Walter uses his abilities, he seems to become drained of all feelings, almost as though he was a puppet himself. This prevents him from becoming enraged or being sympathetic towards his victim in any way.

WALTER STEPHENSON (GEPPETTO) ★★★

While Walter bears few means of physically hurting others, he makes up for this lack of strength with cunning and the incredible power to bring puppets to life. Walter tries his best to stay out of the fight, letting his mindless servants do the dirty work, but he would also prefer to go down swinging than to risk leaving his son alone without a father.

HURT OR SUBDUE 3 / APPEAL TO THE FATHER IN HIM 5

- **A Loving Father:** When Walter enters the scene, give him *overprotective*. Whenever anyone insults or threatens his son, give him *furious-2*.
- **Wooden Heart:** When Walter's psychopathic persona is revealed, remove all his emotional statuses and give him *cold-and-calculated-3*. This status can be renewed as a hard move.

The puppets come in many forms and with varying complexities. Ranging from simple sock puppets to intricate wooden marionettes, and operated by hand or by strings, these puppets serve as both cheap entertainment for Freddy and the neighborhood kids, and as Walter's silent couriers of violence.

USING FREDDY AS A DECOY

The crew might first suspect Freddy of being the culprit behind the murders, seeing as he is the one who creates the dolls. This could also lead them to think that he is in fact the Rift of Geppetto, or the Rift of Pinocchio. As the MC you might want to steer your players toward such a conclusion, by either stressing his doll-making capabilities or by utilizing Freddy's tendency to lie and his *Itchy Nose* move.

Note that even a simple conversation with Freddy might reveal that he is in fact innocent, and moreover, does not in the least suspect his father of being a murderer. In fact, suggesting as much will make Freddy uncooperative, due to his protective nature and infantile mannerisms.

The fact that Freddy wants to protect his father could (and should!) be used to present a moral dilemma of how to engage Walter without hurting his innocent son.

- **Make a Puppet Out of You:** When you attack Walter, if he can see you, he first takes control over one of your limbs, imposing *hitting-myself-2* (If not resisted, this status may prevent the attack).
- **Clever Planning:** Twice per scene, when the crew is at the Stephenson Residence or a place Walter has previously surveyed, the MC can use a soft move to remove up to two tiers of beneficial statuses or place a *simple but deadly trap*.
- **Bodyguards:** When Walter or Freddy take a status from which his puppets can protect them, the puppets take the status instead. As a hard move, Walter can call additional puppets and command them to act (create a new Puppet Danger).
- **Strike with a hammer** (*blunt-trauma-3*)
- **Call forth his puppets and orchestrate their actions**
- **Lunge at his victim, showing no emotion or remorse**

FREDDY STEPHENSON (SLEEPER) ★

Freddy is missing both his right arm and leg. The missing limbs have been replaced by wooden prosthetics, but Freddy still depends on his wheelchair for mobility. He spends most of what time he has outside of hospitals working on elaborate puppet designs, using special tools designed by Walter that connect to the end of his wooden arm. These attachments include a hammer, a screwdriver, a hook, and a small paint brush.

Freddy is unaware of the devious purpose his father has given the puppets, choosing to make puppets because they are “just like him” and are “the only real friends” he has ever had.

HURT OR SUBDUE 1 / THREATEN 3

- **A Loving Son:** When you try to use Freddy against his father, he first gets *loyal-3*.
- **Itchy Nose:** If you spend a Clue to ask Freddy a yes/no question and you know his tell (he scratches his nose, turning it red and itchy), you always get a straight answer. On a 7-9, the MC cannot choose to give you fuzzy clues.
- **Guilt Trip:** When you hurt or threaten Freddy, it breaks your heart and you take *remorseful-3*.
- Move into the line of attack to protect his father, or to protect a friend from murderous puppets (**Make Something Horrible Happen**)
- Beg you to leave his dad alone (*hesitant-2* or *sad-2*)
- In a fit of rage, stab you with one of his prosthetic attachments (*stab-1*)
- Fearfully hold on to his puppets and watch events unfold
- Angrily cry and chastise someone for being bad

SOCK PUPPETS ★

The first puppets Freddy created were simple sock puppets, with glued-on googly eyes and a smile drawn with a red marker.

BURN OR TEAR 2 / DISENCHANT 1 / COMMUNICATE -

- **Collective:** This collective has several members and a size factor of 2.
- **Open the Drawers:** Once per session, as a hard move, if the Sock Puppets are at the Stephenson Residence, they can open the drawers and increase their collective's size factor by 1.
- Wrap itself tightly around someone's neck (*constrict-ed-throat-2*) or tie itself over someone's eyes (*blind-2*)
- (As a collective) Surround someone, bouncing silently towards them

WOODEN PUPPETS ★★

This classic wooden puppet comes in many forms. Most resemble people, but a few of Freddy's creations may also resemble animals. Regardless of their given form, Walter has since modified these puppets to wield tools and knives, making them dangerous additions to his mindless army.

BREAK OR BURN 3 / DISENCHANT 2 / COMMUNICATE -

- **Collective:** This collective has a few members and a size factor of 1.
- **Wooden:** When Wooden Puppet enters the scene, give it *hard as wood*.
- Attack with an attached tool (*gashing-wound-3*, *cracked-bones-3*, or *deep-cut-3*)
- Creep towards their victim, creaking and squeaking

FLESH PUPPET ★★★

A hideous creation of Walter's design, these puppets are made from the stolen body parts of the serial killer's victims. These constructs are a grotesque combination of sewn together arms and legs, bound together by a single torso at the center.

The Flesh Puppets can't be ordinarily disenchant-ed because Walter placed tiny bits of himself (hair, fingernail clips) in them.

DISEMBEDED 6 / COMMUNICATE -

- **Nightmarish:** The first time in a scene the Flesh Puppet moves, everyone who sees it takes *harrowed-3*. In the next downtime, if you still have this status, you cannot take a recovery action that requires rest.
- **Bloody Mess:** Whenever the Flesh Puppet takes a status on the *dismembered* spectrum, it inflicts *gory-mess-2* on anyone close to it.
- **Blood Everywhere:** When the *dismembered* spectrum is maxed out, add *dismembered limbs* and *pools of blood* to the scene.
- Leap atop its victim, pinning them below its weight and unnatural strength (*held-down-3*) or flail its arms and legs wildly at its prey (*battered-4*)
- Stand still, in all its horrifying glory
- Rush towards a victim, limbs flailing