



STANDING ORDER

Crossing case — The Custodians: STANDING ORDER

A thousand people are waiting under Sheldon Moor for the all-clear from a war that never happened. They have not aged the way the calendar says. Every ninety days somebody writes to tell them to keep waiting — and it is not the government.

STATUS — READ THIS BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

Version	v2.1 , 23 September 2026 — same story as v2.0, cut to the bone
Can it be run?	Yes, from this document alone , with the compendium for sheets and the two cast actors.
Is it convention-ready?	No — it needs desk passes. Earlier passes tested older plots; their timings are not evidence for this one.
Players	4–6 from the duty roster, declared in Casting.
Runtime	45 / 75 / 50, plus a ten-minute break — 3h00 in a 3h15 slot.

The things that are not obvious

1. In 1974 **Mr Smith** talked a government bunker underground with a forged order. He has kept it there with letters ever since.
2. Underground, **people age at half speed**. The survivors look fifty-odd and are eighty-odd. Nobody below has noticed.
3. The agents go in as a **1974 Board of Inspection — unarmed** — to open the place and bring everybody out.
4. The people will not come. **Their own instruments say the war happened**, and their Standing Order says an outsider's word is not evidence. **Act Two is that argument.**
5. **Winning it springs the trap.** The Order says the Seat must broadcast a recorded Address when it surfaces. The Address is Mr Smith's song, and anyone who hears it whole is his.
6. **The children already know the song by heart.** That is the choice the case ends on.

Mr Smith is never met. No sheet, no portrait, no scene. He gets away.

GM ESSENTIALS

- **System:** d100 roll-under. **Special** under a fifth, **critical** under a twentieth; 96–99 always fail, 00 fumbles.
 - **Coherence runs 10 → 0.** The song and the release cost it. Nothing here gives any back.
 - **Panic is live** in the detention and the broadcast.
 - **Standing Order 9:** nothing modern goes through. It is also the reason for the 1974 dress.
 - **A warrant card is inside scope here** — Borrowed Authority, 1 Trust, no roll. The Seat's own Order names it, which is the only reason the Council listens.
 - **The song:** eleven minutes. Hear it whole and roll **POW×5**; *failure* costs **1 Coherence** and you are his — calm, obedient, waiting for Centre — until a debrief brings you back. **Stopping it before the end is always a complete answer.**
 - **Content warnings:** confinement underground; a detention that can turn violent; children under an occult influence who are not growing up, and a decision about taking them from their parents; an old woman's shame.
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THE STORY (GM TRUTH)

1974. Bellhouse is a government bunker in a worked-out coal mine under Sheldon Moor, running a drill. A pleasant man in a grey coat — **Mr Smith, "for Centre"** — brings a letter saying the war is real. Deputy Controller **Edith Marlow** knows it is the drill. She signs anyway and has never been able to say why. **412 people go down and the door shuts.** The adit is filled in, the Seat leaves every map, and the only way in now is a crossing at a warm vent on the moor.

Now. A thousand people live below: 412 who went down and 588 born there. They run the place like a 1970s council — rotas, ration books, a housing list, vegetables under lamps in the old coal roads. Every ninety days a letter comes down the postal pipe from Centre saying it is still not safe. **Centre is Mr Smith.**

Why they believe it. Their own Geiger counter at the blast lock reads hot and has since 1974. The periscope was sealed against flash blindness and only Centre may unseal it. The fallout return arrives quarterly on the right form. **They are not fools; they are a careful office being lied to by its own paperwork.**

The slow. Time below runs at half. Fifty-two years have passed and the intake has aged twenty-six. Nobody below thinks it strange — they have no one to compare themselves with. It has begun to leak: at **Wetherlaw Farm** above, the milk does not turn, the hay is green four summers on, and Joan's dog is thirty-one. *Ages in this document are what people look. The calendar age is in brackets where it matters.*

What Mr Smith is doing. He is a **Cthulhu Mythos messenger** — not a god, a go-between for the powers that sleep Outside — and he is raising a congregation out of the most obedient people in England. Three quiet signs: the **chant** at the end of every bulletin (*We hold. We count. We answer.*), the **dream** everyone born below shares (a corridor, a counter, a pleasant man who asks your name and writes it down), and the **drawings** in the crèche, where the sun is a circle with a stroke through the top. That is the mark on his letters. **No altars. Nothing louder than this.**

The trap. The Standing Order says the Seat must broadcast its recorded Address when it surfaces. Centre sent a new tape in 2019: **it is his song.** Region 12 holds a million people. Since 2019 the tape's opening has played on the crèche speaker at three every morning "to settle the young", so **the 168 children know the whole song and hum it.**

The cure. The song only works whole. Play the children the tape with the last bars cut off and it breaks in them: they stop humming and cannot remember it by morning. That needs the tape, so the tape cannot be burned first.

Revelations, in order

1. A thousand living people believe the war happened, and their instruments agree. (*Act One*)
 2. There was no war. Mr Smith's letters kept them down. (*Act Two*)
 3. Surfacing triggers the Address, and the Address is his song. (**Act Three — never earlier**)
 4. The children already know it. (*Act Three*)
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TIMING

	Act	Budget	Checkpoint
1	Getting In — briefing, moor, crossing, Enquiries	45 min	Inside by 0:25
—	<i>Break</i>	10 min	
2	The Argument — three exhibits, pressure, the vote	75 min	Vote by 2:10
3	The Song — the Address, the children, the choice	50 min	Tape in hand by 2:35

Surfacing is at first light — the session's 2:55. That is when the Address plays unless the table has dealt with it. **If you are late,** cut the Bureau to two lines and Hatcher entirely. Never cut the Enquiries desk, the vote, or the choice.

HANDOUTS

The section map is **SO-Ho4**, a plate in the compendium. A print pack of Ho1 and Ho2 is in [STANDING_ORDER_HANDOUTS.html](#).

SO-H01 — Case brief SO-012

Typed, from Registry. Give it in the briefing with SO-Ho2 and let them keep it.

DEPARTMENTAL CUSTODY SERVICE CASE: SO-012 / BELLHOUSE **CLASSIFICATION:** ACROSS — SEALED SITE **FAR SIDE:** Regional Seat of Government 12, under Sheldon Moor, Derbyshire. The present day. **REGISTRY OFFICER:** Mr Bewley

Bellhouse is a government bunker built into a worked-out coal mine under Sheldon Moor and commissioned in 1962. On 4 November 1974 its staff and their families, 412 people, went below for a civil defence exercise. The door was shut. Nobody came up. In 1975 the adit was filled in. After that the Seat is on no map, no index and no budget. Nobody asked why.

In May this year a Seat return dated Week 1, 1974, arrived in the Registry in-tray. It was not posted. It is enclosed (SO-H02). It is stamped with a small circle cut by a stroke. The same mark is on the letter of instruction recovered in case TT-004, Mercy Draw, 1881, from a Mr Smith whom the company never employed.

Coal smoke has been settling on Wetherlaw Farm for fifty years and there is no chimney on the moor. Milk does not turn in that farmhouse. The dog is thirty-one.

The Department's reading is that the Seat is still occupied, and that something under it is running slow and running over.

ORDERS

1. The Seat is to be opened and its people brought home. None is expendable.
2. Establish what is holding the ground slow, and bring back the evidence.
3. Establish who instructed the Seat in 1974 and who has instructed it since. Bring me his letters.
4. The Seat is released under clause 4 of its Standing Order. **Read the whole Order before you cancel anything.**

CONDUCT You go in as a Board of Inspection of 1974. Dress, speak and carry paper accordingly: these people have had no outside voice for fifty-two years and the Department will not open with a shock. Carry your warrant card where it can be seen — a warrant of the Department is named in the Seat's own Order. Do not argue with anyone about the war until you can prove it. Standing Order 9 applies. Nothing modern goes through.

ISSUED BY STORES Hand lamp · Geiger counter, 1974 pattern · greatcoat · document case · warrant card. **No firearms are issued for this case. No telephones.**

Registry: bring me his letters.

SO-H02 — The 1974 letter

Buff, typed, stamped with a small circle cut by a stroke.

REGION 12 — SEAT RETURN — WEEK 1 ESTABLISHMENT: 412. CASUALTIES THIS PERIOD: NIL.
QUERY TO CENTRE: CONFIRM THE GENTLEMAN WHO BROUGHT THE ORDER IS KNOWN TO YOU.
SIGNED: E. MARLOW, DEPUTY CONTROLLER.

Casualties nil — no war. The stamp is Mr Smith's mark.

SO-H03 — Standing Order 12

Foolscap. Pennyfeather hands it to anyone who asks and makes them read all of it.

4. This Seat shall not surface until this Order is cancelled by an officer holding a warrant of the Department in person at the Seat.

5. No cancellation shall be made upon the word of a visitor alone. The Seat shall first be satisfied by: (a) a reading taken by an instrument of the Seat, by an officer of the Seat; (b) the deposition of an officer of the 1974 intake; (c) a document under the Seat's own seal. **Matter brought in from outside is not evidence.**

6. On cancellation the Seat shall surface and proceed under Annex D.

ANNEX D. On surfacing the Seat shall broadcast the recorded Address held at the Seat, to the region, entire.

Clause 5 is Act Two. Clause 6 is Act Three. Give this out early and let them read it late.

SO-H05 — Centre's letter

A flimsy, stamped with the mark. Arrives by pipe in Act Two.

CENTRE TO SEAT 12. NO BOARD HAS BEEN SENT. THE PERSONS AT THE SEAT ARE NOT KNOWN TO US. HOLD THEM PENDING INSTRUCTION. THE SEAT WILL SPEAK AS ORDERED WHEN IT SPEAKS. THE YOUNG ARE TO BE SETTLED NIGHTLY AS BEFORE. J. SMITH, FOR CENTRE.

It sends the wardens, names Mr Smith, and its last two lines are the ones that matter later.

ACT ONE — GETTING IN (~45 MIN)

Read aloud or paraphrase: Mr Bewley lays a buff envelope on the Registry table. "This came out of my in-tray in May. It was posted in 1974, from a bunker filled in in 1975. There are a thousand people down there who think the war happened. You are going to tell them it didn't, and they are not going to believe you."

The briefing. Bewley gives SO-Ho1 and SO-Ho2 and three facts: the Seat's own rules name the Department, which is the only reason a stranger can open the door; they go in **dressed as 1974** so a thousand people are not shocked out of their wits; and something above the Seat is running slow. **Mr Prosser issues 1974 kit and no firearms** — clause 4 needs an officer in front of a council, not a gunfight in a corridor. Let them argue. Do not give in.

The moor. Joan Wetherlaw meets them at the gate with a yard brush and a dog that should not be able to walk. She will say it is thirty-one, flatly, as a fact about a good dog. [CUS: Insight — the farm is wrong in a way that has nothing to do with soot] : the paint, the milk, hay green four summers on. **The slow, seen from above.** The vent is warm and smells of a coal fire: somebody is alive down there.

The crossing. No roll. At dusk the air over the vent creases like a folded page and they come out inside the blast lock. **The Seat's counter by the door reads hot. The 1974 counter in their hands reads nothing.** That contradiction is the whole case in one image.

Enquiries. A warm lobby smelling of floor polish and soup.

"Name and section, please."

Mr Ogden has no form for visitors, which distresses him more than the impossibility does; he finds one — INSPECTION, BOARD OF, 1971 revision — and is happier. **Warrant cards work, no roll.** *"But Centre didn't tell us you were coming."* Saying *there was no war* in the lobby costs them the first hour and makes **Warden Teague** arrive expecting liars.

Controller Sowerby receives them in front of a wall map fifty-two years out of date: courteous, tired, immovable. [CUS: Persuade — give him something he can file]. *Success:* the run of the Seat with an escort. *Failure:* the same thing, said colder.

△ **No fight in Act One.** Teague and one guard would lose anyway: against the four-player cut that pair detains everyone in **4%** of fights.

ACT TWO – THE ARGUMENT (~75 MIN)

What it is for: beat a committee on the committee's own terms.

Read aloud or paraphrase: Shift change. Cardigans and overalls, a child on somebody's shoulders, a housing list on a noticeboard. Everybody looks at you and then, because they were brought up properly, everybody looks away. Nobody here is the age they should be.

How to run the Seat. A council, not a bunker: queues, minutes, tea. Say *Centre will tell us when* three times in three mouths. Every refusal cites clause 5 — a 2026 newspaper, a photograph, a wristwatch and an agent's word are all **matter brought in from outside**. Let the players lose that argument once, properly. Show two of the three quiet signs (chant, dream, drawings) and explain none of them.

The three exhibits

Clause 5 wants	Where	How
(a) A reading by a Seat instrument, in a Seat officer's hands	The vent shaft or the sealed periscope	The agents cannot take it themselves. [CUS: Persuade – Teague or Larkhall will go if asked straight], or open the periscope: [CUS: Repair (Mechanical) – 1962 seals nobody has touched]. Outside reads clean.
(b) A deposition by an officer of the 1974 intake	Sick bay — Edith Marlow	[CUS: Insight – asked kindly: "It was the drill. He said, then it had better be. I signed."] Pressure closes her. Her box holds the real drill order and a note reading <i>I knew</i> .
(c) A document under the Seat's own seal	Registry — Pennyfeather	No roll to see the birth register. [CUS: Research – the register against the faces]: the dates are fifty-two years long and the people are twenty-six years old.

Failure costs a scene, never the exhibit. The periscope opens an hour later; Marlow's box is still on the shelf; Pennyfeather does the sum herself overnight and brings it, white-faced, to the hall.

Pressure — three things, in this order

1. **+10 min — the bulletin.** The tannoy; the site stops; everyone says *We hold. We count. We answer.* **Panic trigger.**
2. **+25 min — Centre's letter** (SO-HO5) comes down the pipe: hold them.
3. **+55 min — the detention**, if the Council acts on it.

Gil Hatcher, fitter, and a dozen others have been **forging Centre's letters for two years** to force the door open. They corner one agent in the mushroom gallery to ask who really sent them. [CUS: Persuade – Hatcher is frightened, not cruel] ends it talking. **They are not Mr Smith's and know nothing about the song** — but their forged letter beside SO-HO2 shows the stroke leaning the wrong way, which is how the table learns to tell his hand from anyone's. **Cut this scene first if you are behind.**

The detention

Teague comes with wardens and a truncheon, and leaves the armoury locked.

"The Controller asks you to come with me. I'll ask you twice."

Four players: Teague and three. Six: Teague and five. Measured over 2,000 runs against this cast; deaths are a **ceiling**, because wardens stop hitting anyone who is down.

Detail	Against	Agents down	Party detained	Deaths (<i>ceiling</i>)
Teague and three	the four-player cut	2.89	60.3%	1.31
Teague and three	the declared six	1.16	0.3%	0.59
Teague and five	the declared six	3.51	15.7%	2.07

A small party loses; a big party wins and loses the vote. Ways through: **go quietly** (one scene in a dry clean cell, and Kit brings the key), **talk** [CUS: Persuade – a warrant card and an honest account are a reason] , or **name Nell kindly** and Teague stands his men down. **Do not mention the song – nobody knows about it yet.**

The vote

The Council sits in the Vigil hall with the whole Seat standing at the back: **Sowerby, Pennyfeather, Teague**. Give every player a moment to speak, then settle it:

- **Three exhibits:** it passes, no roll.
- **Two:** [CUS: Persuade – argue around the missing exhibit] , one supporter at –20. *Failure:* the Council adjourns to first light, costing Act Three ten minutes.
- **One or none:** the Council refuses – and **Hatcher's people force the blast lock in the night**. The door opens anyway, in uproar instead of in order.

The Seat is coming up either way. The act ends with Sowerby signing the surfacing order, his hand shaking, and the tannoy telling a thousand people to be ready at first light.

ACT THREE — THE SONG (~50 MIN)

Read aloud or paraphrase: Half past two in the morning. The Seat is packing — suitcases from 1974, a woman teaching her grown son what a bus is. In the Control Room, Pennyfeather is reading Annex D aloud to Sowerby for the third time, because he keeps asking her to.

The reveal. Annex D: on surfacing, the Seat broadcasts its recorded Address, entire. Nobody below thinks anything of it. The tape is in the studio safe and **Sowerby hands over the key without a fight** — the argument is over and they are his Board now.

- [CUS: Research — the studio log: NEW TAPE FROM CENTRE, 2019. PLAYED NIGHTLY TO CRÈCHE, OPENING ONLY] The tape came from Centre, and Centre is the hand on every letter.
- **Play thirty seconds and stop.** It is not a message, it is a tune — and it is the tune the crèche hums. **Anyone who lets it run to the end rolls POW×5 and is his.**
- [CUS: Listen — in the crèche the little ones are all humming the same slow tune, and it does not end; they start again]. If nobody goes, **Kit Marlow brings Nell to the Control Room at three in the morning** to show them.

Kit's cure. Give her a scene teaching geography off a 1971 atlas first. Then she says it herself: the speaker plays at three every morning, the under-twelves all know it, and *"if Nell stops halfway she just looks confused and goes back to her crayons — it has to finish."* So: play them the tape with the ending cut off.

The choice

Put all three on the table plainly. Do not hint at a right answer. They have just spent an evening persuading a thousand people that the sun is waiting.

A. Surface, burn the tape, take the children into care. The region is safe today. 168 children still carry the song, so they go into departmental care away from their parents for as long as it takes, and nobody knows how long. **Teague will not let them take Nell.**

B. Keep them below. Go back to the hall and argue the opposite of everything you proved, to people who have packed. [CUS: Persuade — asking a thousand people to un-believe you] at -20. *Failure:* they surface anyway and the Address plays. **Either way the agents have become Centre**, and Mr Smith's next letter thanks them by name.

C. Cure the children first, then surface. The best ending and the hardest. Before first light: cut the tape [CUS: Repair (Electronics) — splice the last minute out of eleven], then somebody **runs the machine in the crèche and hears ten minutes of it** — POW×5, *failure* costs **2 Coherence** and the dream for life. Then burn the tape and open the door.

Opening the door

An agent cancels the Order with their warrant card — no roll, **2 Coherence**. **Better: Sowerby cancels it himself**, and it costs nothing. △ **The Address is wired to the surfacing:** if the door opens before the tape is dealt with, it plays. Say so plainly — they have had clause 6 since Act Two.

If it goes out: eleven minutes, on the tannoy and the mast. Every agent in earshot rolls POW×5 at the end; **panic trigger** at the first note. It can still be stopped — pull the valves on the plant floor [CUS: Repair (Electronics)] or pull the tape out by hand — and **stopped before the end, nobody outside is taken.**

If it finishes, say this and stop: *In farmhouses and flats and school buses across the Peak District, people stop what they are doing and say, quietly, "We hold. We count. We answer."*

Endings

Ending	What happens
C — cured, burned, surfaced	A thousand people come up into the rain with their children. Within a year they start ageing properly, which is its own grief. The agent who ran the machine dreams of a counter and a pleasant man for the rest of their life.
A — surfaced, children taken	Everyone comes up. The children go into care. Some parents never forgive the Department; Teague is arrested at the crèche door.
B — kept below	The door stays shut on a thousand people who had packed. They are safe. The agents wrote the letter that keeps them there.
Broadcast finished	Region 12 belongs to Mr Smith.

However it ends:

Three days later a buff envelope arrives in Bewley's in-tray, stamped with a circle and a stroke, addressed to the agents by name. Inside is one line: "With thanks for the count. — J. Smith, for Centre."

THE PEOPLE

Ages are what they look; the calendar is in brackets.

Controller Edwin Sowerby, 56 (82) — obeyed Centre for fifty-two years and has begun to fear it. Immovable until clause 5 is satisfied, then wholly theirs. **Registrar Alice Pennyfeather, 52 (78)** — keeps the Order and the birth register. Will do the arithmetic herself if nobody else does. **Warden Michael Teague, 38 (64)** — head of the wardens, Nell's dad, a widower. Not a villain. Fights anyone who tries to take his daughter. **Edith Marlow, 96 (96)** — signed for a stranger in 1974 and has been ashamed since. **The slow never took her and nobody can say why.** Kind questions work; pressure does not. **Dr Ivy Larkhall, 48 (74)** — 588 people share one dream and she has no one to tell. Will carry a counter up a vent shaft if asked straight. **Kit Marlow, 17 (34)** — teaches the little ones and noticed what the song does. The cure. **Nell Teague, 9 (18)** — hums the song at tea. She has been nine for a long time. **Gil Hatcher, 41 (62)** — forges Centre's letters because nobody would listen. Right about the war, wrong about the agents, and no part of Mr Smith's business. **Mr Ogden, Enquiries, 59 (85)** — had no form for visitors and has now found one. **Joan Wetherlaw, 67**, above — soot, green hay, and a thirty-one-year-old dog. **Mr Bewley** wants the letters; **Mr Prosser** refuses the firearms. **Mr Smith** — a Cthulhu Mythos messenger: a grey coat, a pleasant manner, a face nobody can picture. **No sheet, no portrait, no scene.**

Cast actors in the compendium: *Warden Michael Teague*, and *Bellhouse warden* for everyone else who takes hold of an arm.

CASTING — SIX FROM THE DUTY ROSTER

△ The cast marker above is read by the build. check-rollable holds every roll here to 25% or better on somebody listed, and detention-tables measures the fight against these six.

Agent	What they do here
Kate Renshaw — interviews	Persuade 63 (Joan, Sowerby, Teague, the vote), Insight 63 (the farm, Marlow), Listen 63 (the humming)
Arun Bhattacharya — Registry	Research 63 (the register against the faces, the studio log)
Marek Kowalczyk — engineer	Repair (Mechanical) 58 (the periscope), Repair (Electronics) 58 (the tape cut, the mast)
Marta Holloway — lead	Tradecraft 63, Stealth 63 — the Enquiries desk, and getting out of the mushroom gallery
Dr Chidi Nkemdirim — medic	Backs Insight at 58; goes up the vent with Larkhall
Ben Okonkwo — containment	The detention. His best move is to stand still and not hit anyone

At four players, cut Okonkwo and Nkemdirim. Nothing essential needs them, and the detention gets much harder — the table above says how much.

THE MAP

Thirteen blueprint scenes are in the Adventure, one sheet each, 2800×2000 at five feet to the square, **north to the left** like the section drawing (SO-Ho4). Level 1 runs lobby → sick bay (sheets 1–4); Level 2 runs crèche → canteen (5, 6, 9, 10); an incline drops to the pit galleries — coal roads, Sump, Vigil hall, the Estate (7, 8, 11–13).

Which sheet when: **Sheet 1** the arrival and the interview · **Sheet 3** the register · **Sheet 4** Marlow · **Sheet 7** Hatcher and the cells · **Sheet 8** the vote · **Sheet 2** the tape · **Sheet 5** the crèche and the cure · **Sheet 6** the mast. Sheets 9–13 are how people live: the dormitories, the canteen, and 213 homes on three coal roads.

The Estate is the best place to run and the worst place to fight — narrow roads, doors on every side, children behind all of them.

OPEN QUESTIONS FOR TIM

- **Is the vote enough of a set piece on its own**, or does it want Hatcher at the blast lock running under it as standard rather than as a failure branch?
- **Ending B** — arguing your own case backwards. A real option, or a punishment?
- **Runtime.** Unmeasured for this version. Act Two carries the exhibits, the pressure and the vote; time it hard on the first desk pass and cut Hatcher first if it overruns.