

parallel paths

VOLUME 01
ISSUE 00

**THE FALL OF
WAINSCOTT MANSION**
WHAT HORRORS WAIT WITHIN?

parallel paths

With the turn of the page, the course of this story will be in your hands.

Simply read this like you would anything else. All we ask is that you make important decisions along the way. Sometimes you will shape the narrative. Other times your choices will have consequences later. Most of all, the ending is uniquely based on how you navigate this adventure.

Some people like to commit to their choice and only read that passage. Others read both and make a decision after seeing how the options play out. This is your story to enjoy and I welcome you to approach it in whatever way brings you the most enjoyment.

Below is a handy chart to help keep track of your decisions.

Best of luck making your way through Wainscott Mansion. We'll see you on the other side.

Part 01: Arrival	<input type="checkbox"/> A. Flashlight	<input type="checkbox"/> B. Boxcutter
Part 02: The Mansion	<input type="checkbox"/> A. Upstairs	<input type="checkbox"/> B. Downstairs
Part 03: Retrograde	<input type="checkbox"/> A. Flight	<input type="checkbox"/> B. Fight
Part 04: From Dark to Darker	<input type="checkbox"/> A. Wine Cellar	<input type="checkbox"/> B. Mechanicals
Part 05: The Only Thing Guaranteed	<input type="checkbox"/> A. Closure <input type="checkbox"/> C. And Yet it Grows	<input type="checkbox"/> B. Gone & Away <input type="checkbox"/> D. The Cruelty of It All

01. arrival



Kyle.

Of course it was Kyle.

And of course he was the one to do something so knuckleheaded. Anything for a quick buck, even if it meant you would, once again, have to bail him out.

Despite it being broad daylight, the road you're driving down has a sense of foreboding. The leaves still clinging to the skeletal branches lining the isolated street are only shades of brown. The ones that may have had color fell long ago.

If there's one thing you appreciate, it's that Kyle at least let you know where he was going before he left, not that you're thrilled to be heading there. Tucked away in the woods deep outside of town is Wainscott Mansion. Few people, if any, sought it out. Except, of course, your friend.

Pursuing yet another half baked idea, this time Kyle thought scrounging for antiques was an easy way to help pad his bank account. The only problem is, Kyle didn't have the patience to buy, repair and resell items of potential value. Stealing things he could immediately sell was easier.

Abandoned for over half a century, the mansion promised to be flush with all kinds of antiquities, at least that's what Kyle believed. But in the six hours that have passed since he told you he was going there, he hasn't replied to a single text or call. Regrettably, concern happened to get the best of you.

Your car makes one last turn and you head down the long, rocky driveway towards the mansion. Once owned by a family thought to have earned their fortune through less than savory means, tragedy befell every single member living there. Fearing some kind of curse had fallen upon the place, the once magnificent property fell into disrepair as no buyers could be found.

The giant house looms above as you slow to a stop in front of it. Kyle's car is parked nearby, seemingly a good sign. You climb out and look over the estate. Through the overgrown plants, peeling paint and crumbling walls you have a fair idea of how stunning the mansion once was. You don't like to give Kyle credit, but it's impossible to disagree that it's the perfect place to pilfer some expensive items.

You open the car door and get out. The grey sky overhead lets very little sunlight through. As night starts to approach you can see reds and oranges creeping into the clouds.

Kyle owes you for this one. Before you head inside, you turn to your passenger seat. It was a good thing that before you left you grabbed:

- A. A Flashlight
- B. A Boxcutter

Option A: Guided by the Light

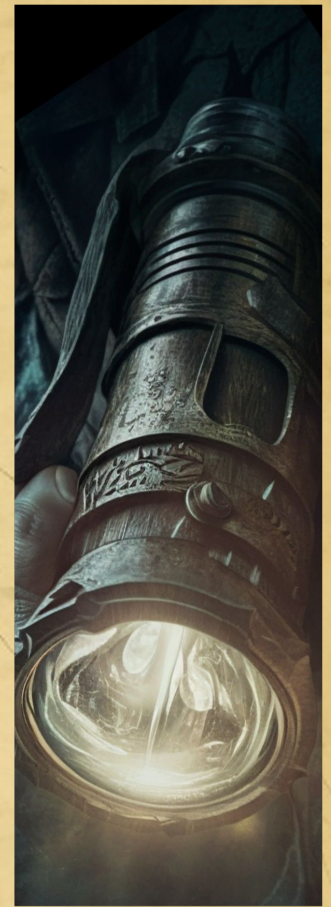
You approach the door with the flashlight in hand. It's not dark enough to need it yet, but there seems to be an almost nonexistent chance any of the lights will work inside. It's not to say you're afraid of the dark, but even the toughest person wouldn't want to walk through the supposedly haunted corridors in darkness.

When you reach the imposing front door you find it locked. Great. How the hell did Kyle get in?

You back away as a soft wind blows, managing to cut through your jacket. You scan the house to see if there's an easy way to get in. Nearby you spot a broken window. Walking over, you size everything up and while it's not as simple as walking through the front, you can make it work.

With a grunt you hoist yourself up and roll through the window. Is it graceful? No. But you're inside regardless. You look down and see there's a rip in your pants. Kyle had better find something of value, because if there's one thing for certain, he will be buying you a new pair.

You turn on your flashlight and look around. The room is empty and dust floats through the beam of light as you get your bearings. You spot footprints on the grimy floor and follow them into the foyer.



Option B: Cutting Right to It

The boxcutter fits in your hand nicely. Almost subconsciously you flick the blade up and down a few times. The zipping sound competes with the wind picking up around you. Playing with the blade feels just as natural (and essential) as clicking tongs when you pick them up.

As you approach the house, you wonder for a moment why you grabbed the box cutter. The building is abandoned, so there's no real chance of danger. Perhaps it was nerves. Perhaps it provides a sense of safety. Regardless, you hope the choice isn't somehow prophetic.

You reach the porch and try the front door. Of course it's locked.

You take a quick glance around to see how the hell Kyle found his way in. However he did it, you don't see how. You shake the door again and find the lock is much looser than you realized. The wood around the bolt is rotten. Using your boxcutter, you carve around the handle. The door is quickly whittled down and with a forceful yank, the lock gives, sending splinters scattering across your feet.

You step into the foyer as the cool air within the mansion welcomes you.





02.

The mansion

Despite the disrepair that surrounds you, the beauty of the mansion is easy to see through all the dust and decay. On any other day, the large windows would have flooded the foyer with soft, seemingly angelic sunlight. The floor, beneath the decades of dirt and runoff, is made of marble and accented with ornate inlays. In the center of the room among shattered crystals sits a chandelier that is tarnished to almost completely black.

While the existence of the mansion is no secret, you've never even seen it before, let alone went inside. The stories you'd heard served as an effective deterrent over the years. Ghosts or not, any place that was visited by so much tragedy was bound to be off putting. Like some kind of ethereal mold, you'd never felt compelled to risk having that bad energy rub off onto you. That is until Kyle put you into a situation that didn't leave you with much choice but to make the pilgrimage there yourself.

You pull out your phone and try him one more time, hoping proximity, or simply the passage of time, are enough to make this call different than all the others. You listen carefully, but don't hear his phone ringing anywhere in the mansion. A few seconds later you find yourself greeted by the now very familiar voicemail that promises you will be called back shortly.

"KYLE!" you shout, hearing your voice fade into the mansion. There's no echo. There's no reply. You are simply greeted by silence, possibly the worst outcome in the given situation.

The ornate foyer has a simplistic quality to it as you search for any signs of your soon-to-be former friend. It dawns on you Kyle was certainly not the first person to have the idea to loot the property, meaning if there was anything of value left it would be hidden much deeper in the house.

The idea of delving further into the mansion doesn't sit well with you, but the alternative of leaving your friend, possibly quite injured, to find his own way out is even less palatable.

You hear a squeak from further within. All the rational reasons for such a sound cross your mind - the building settling, Kyle walking around, the wind disrupting things - but you can't keep out the irrational ones either. You try to remind yourself that ghosts don't exist, but even if they did, there was no foul play suspected for all the people that met a bad fate there. Just simply the worst string of luck anyone could possibly imagine.

With no clear direction where to head next, you decide to look for Kyle:

- A. By starting at the top and working your way down
- B. On the first floor, since you're already there

Option A: Up and Away

You're actually quite impressed with how sturdy the staircase is considering the beating both the weather and Father Time have given it. You reach the upstairs hall and walk down the corridor. The remnants of old rugs squish as the water worn fabric protests under your steps.

You reach the end of the hall and glance inside the main bedroom. The furniture inside is beyond any salvaging, covered in moss and barely standing. Still, this is perhaps the closest you've been to riches and fortunes, despite the dreadful state of everything around you.

You step further in and glance into the attached bathroom. Out of sheer curiosity, you peak inside. Of the many bizarre deaths and suicides that afflicted the family, you imagine at least one was in there.

When you glance at the porcelain tub, it looks like there's some water in it. Stepping closer, you're surprised to see it's opaque... and quickly becoming redder each moment. The level rises as the tub begins to fill with blood. As you hurry away, you catch a glance in the mirror and see an old man with sorrowful eyes standing in the sanguine liquid, his slashed wrists filling the tub!



Option B: Just Down the Hall

You move from the foyer into the nearby hall. Still no signs of Kyle as you look around. You've yet to see anything worth salvaging. How deep into the creepy old house did Kyle have to go to find something to sell?

As you pass the old, peeling wallpaper you wonder what kind of corrupt deals were made in the ancient halls. Politicians with corrupt hearts, business leaders with rotten secrets and cold-blooded murderers all could have stayed there. It suddenly dawns on you, the family that lived there were probably not the only ones who met a gruesome fate.

You step into the kitchen and the soggy floorboards creak under your weight. You notice any silverware made of actual silver is long gone and the china that remains is in roughly a thousand different pieces.

There's a groan and you turn towards the source. With a BANG the door to the oven falls open. Green ooze flows out and pools on the floor. The puddle continues to grow in size, but that's not the most alarming part. From underneath, the bones of a skeleton rise and the sludge congeals as gangrenous flesh on it. The head turns to look at you and only a second after locking eyes with the decaying sockets you run from the room before you can see any more.

03.

retrograde



You reach the foyer and take a moment to collect yourself. There was no way what you saw was real. Your heart hammers rapidly from a miserable mixture of fright and exertion.

Whatever it was you encountered, it couldn't have been Kyle. While idiosyncratic, he wasn't one to pull pranks, let alone go to such great lengths to orchestrate something with such complexity. But if he didn't play a role in it, who could it have been?

Spooked, you keep reminding yourself that ghosts aren't real. Even more so, since arriving back in the foyer the phantom hasn't followed. Your mind fabricated an awfully grisly vision, so much so it alarms you. The stories of the all the suicides coupled with the urban legends about the place seem to be the perfect culprit for conjuring up such frightful sights.

At this point, all you want is to find Kyle and get the hell out. Even then, just leaving on your own may be enough of a win. There are people much better equipped to find him and leaning on them to see everything through has risen to the top of your list of ways to resolve an increasingly terrible day.

You turn to the door. It's time to leave and call the police. If Kyle gets dinged for trespassing, so be it. In fact, that very well could be the best end to the whole series of shenanigans. You push the other less desirable outcomes out of your mind.

You come to a stop, however, as a figure stands between you and the door.

You almost mutter Kyle's name, but something seems off. The figure has clearly spotted you, but calling its attention feels like a poor idea. You stand still, hoping that if it isn't your friend it's some kind of caretaker or police officer.

The figure steps forward and you are able to finally see it clearly. Stepping into the light, the Flayed Man reveals his peeled skin which exposes his stringy muscles and network of veins underneath. Globules of scabby blood cling to tendons as he takes another step forward.

The apparition you saw earlier was terrifying, but the ghost in front of you is downright grisly and sanity-shattering. The Flayed Man takes another damp step forward. There's no doubt you've been seen. Even though not a single word has left his mouth, you know his intentions are anything but noble.

When you entered the mansion, did you bring:

- A. The Flashlight
- B. A Boxcutter

Option A: My Kingdom for a Weapon

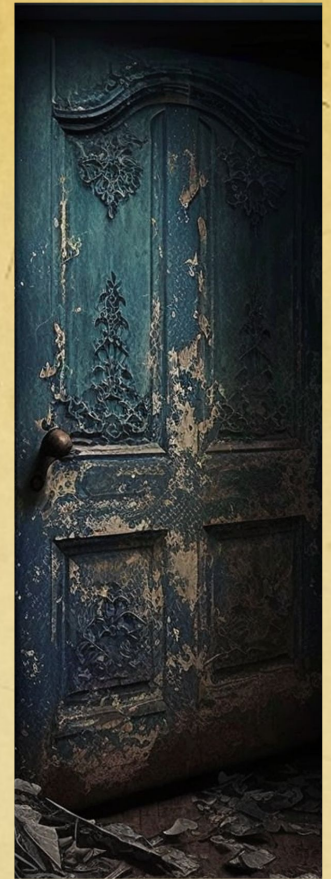
What shocks you the most is how quiet the Flayed Man is as he approaches. But even without his unnerving silence, there is still a long list of other reasons to run like hell.

You turn and sprint further into the mansion. There are fewer and fewer windows as you make it deeper inside, inviting darkness to take a stronger hold with each turn you make. You realize you don't know quite where you are, but worse, you have very little idea where the Flayed Man is either.

You find a room and sneak inside, pushing your back against the wall. While your pounding temples seem to drown out everything else, you once again hear the moist footsteps of the Flayed Man approaching. While you wish you could close your eyes and will him away, they remain vigilantly open as you listen to him get nearer.

The footsteps reach the door and stop. Out of the corner of your eye you can see the crimson sneer of your stalker. He soon moves on, but even then you don't let out a sigh of relief for fear of attracting the Flayed Man.

Once the ghoul has made it far enough away, you cross the hall and slip through a door before he can return. You find yourself in the basement stairwell and flip on your flashlight, bracing yourself for the worst.



Option B: Right Tool, Wrong Job

Seeing the gory, gristly shade moving towards you leaves you with two options: fight or flight. However, indecision over which one to embrace will get you killed.

You grip the box cutter tightly and slide the blade out. You scream as you rush towards the Flayed Man. A moment later the box cutter is plunged into his chest and you gag as you feel the cold muscles and detritus slip all the way up to your wrist.

The Flayed Man snarls. It's immediately obvious that physical means are not the best way to deal with supernatural threats. With no other option, you release the box cutter and stumble backwards. The attack has done nothing to give you an edge, but it has brought you much closer to the Flayed Man than you ever wanted.

Your other survival instinct kicks in and the interior of the mansion becomes a blur as you run away from the threat. After what seems like a full minute of running it dawns on you that you have no idea where you are, but the sounds of the Flayed Man's squishy footsteps still follow.

You open the nearest door and slip inside. There's no light so you take out your phone to guide you. It reveals a set of stairs leading into the basement. You take them slowly to the bottom. Still feeling vulnerable, you grab a nearby metal pipe despite having the overwhelming feeling it can do little to protect you.





04. From dark to darker

Interesting, the first of your senses to take offense to the state of things is smell. Stagnant water, rust and decades of gradual decay have created an overwhelming stench of musty rot. However, smell is just as important to survival as all the other senses and your nose is telling you that you're in danger.

Unfortunately, the only way to safety is to delve deeper into the basement. As your eyes adjust you see that everything is in a state of disrepair that makes it seem like a miracle the rest of the building is standing. On top of surviving all the horrors you've encountered, you now can add not being crushed to death as part of your growing list of concerns.

You listen carefully as you look around the room you're in. While relatively silent, you know you can at least rest comfortably knowing the creaking stairs will give away the Flayed Man if he makes it down there. At the moment it seems that you are safe, but until you finally set foot outside you won't let your guard down.

You scan the room and for the moment there doesn't seem to be any other way back up aside from the staircase behind you. However, since it is such a large building you suspect there's at least one other way upstairs, if not more.

One passageway to your left leads to what appears to be a wine cellar, though from what you can smell anything that was once there is, at best, vinegar.

The other direction leads to the mechanical room where you're able to faintly spot the outline of water heaters and furnaces. No part of you wants to delve further into the basement, but with no other choice in the matter you have to make a decision.

- A. Do you venture into the Wine Cellar?
- B. Is the Maintenance Room the best way out?



option a: upon high they fall

You move into the next room and your guesses were correct. A quick look suggests not a single bottle remains intact. Piles of mold and moss cover the floor, flourishing where the wine spilled.

But that's the problem. Instead of being neatly on display, the broken shards of glass are scattered across the floor in a glistening mosaic. Stepping on even one piece could make the sound that grabs the attention of the Flayed Man.

Sounds from overhead propel you into action to keep moving. Carefully, you walk into the room and avoid the remnants of glass that are strewn across the floor. The first couple steps, while stressful, go just fine and you advance without any trouble.

A door ahead of you leads to another room further into the basement. Looking for a few moments you realize it's a miniature ballroom of sorts. Any other day it would have piqued your interest, but at this moment all you can see is more distance between you and your exit.

You continue to make it through the wine cellar, one cautious step at a time. Fortunately there are no signs of danger, so you continue to go at your careful pace.

Just as you reach the next room a grating sound fills the air. Below your foot and beneath some moss, a hidden piece of glass grinds into the floor. Objectively it probably wasn't that terribly loud, but in the current circumstances it feels like you may as well have just lit off a firework.

And to your horror, you see something in the ballroom react. A shape moves towards you, forcing you to choose between facing the specter or running back in hopes the Flayed Man has moved on.

As the ghost nears, you realize it's a woman with a sorrowful gaze. The sadness in her eyes settles on you. The sense of danger seems to ebb. As she nears, you see a startling detail about the ghost's condition... a bloody hole penetrates her chest where her heart should be.

"It couldn't drive me mad, but by then it could harm the living," she says, her voice raspy and ethereal.

She retreats back through the room and you realize, she is no threat. She is on your side.

You move through the large ballroom, unable to take in any of the details that exceptional craftsmanship that went into building it. Your focus is on the warped, wooden floor to make sure you don't trip.

You make a turn, and the woman is no longer there. But just ahead it seems there's a way out.



option b: the darkest corners hide the darkest secrets

As you step into the room, the machines used to keep the mansion running almost astound you. Industrial in their design and decades old, they are a testament to the the mechanical scale of what it took to manage a mansion the size of the one you are trapped in.

The downside to your choice to venture through the room are the plenty of places for creatures and ghouls to hide. As you slowly move forward, your eyes dart all around you. There are almost too many pockets of evil-concealing darkness to keep track of. Relief washes over you when you reach the end.

Before you can push on to the next room, you hear a soft whisper saying your name. It can't possibly be! You spin around to where it may have come from, but nothing is there. A part of you hopes that the voice, along with everything else, is somehow just not actually real.

But as you go to move on you hear it again. There's motion in the corner of your eye and you turn to face it. Hiding behind some machinery by the wall is... Kyle!

You rush to meet him, but his frightful face reminds you of everything that's still at stake. Kyle is holed up in a small hidden room that is concealed by one of the large machines.

"In here," he whispers and helps you make it behind the large furnace.

You find yourself standing next to the friend you've been looking for in a long forgotten, concrete alcove. Before you can ask what he was thinking sneaking into the mansion, you notice a horrific scene in front of you.

On the floor, a desiccated corpse is nailed to the ground. The skin has withered to almost nothing and the muscles have dried into taut sinew. It hits you what you're looking at... the tortured body of the Flayed Man. As your eyes adjust, you see strange arcane symbols painted around it in a rusted red color, almost certainly blood. You turn to Kyle, but neither of you say anything. It's quite the discovery, but you have no idea what to do with the knowledge.

There's a sound from elsewhere in the house and before you can even react, Kyle bolts out of the room and runs further into the basement. Not wanting to be left behind, you run after him. In the darkness and frenzy of it all, you lose sight of your friend and are left behind.

Ahead of you a corridor leads to what looks like a flight of stairs. Alone again, you have at least discovered your way out.



05. The only thing guaranteed

When everything escalates, it will inevitably reach an end. With your situation worsening by the moment, you fear the only outcomes possible are not in your favor. Not too keen to meet your end this evening, you know you don't have the luxury of time to make your escape.

The staircase ahead of you seemingly leads to your only way out. You've been lucky enough to make it this far. Embracing what little momentum you have, you carefully take the first step, doing everything in your power to prevent any of the boards from creaking.

The bannister helps in this endeavor, allowing you to quietly and silently make it up one step at a time. Your heart races each time you put your weight down, not knowing if the wood is going to give in and announce your presence to the Flayed Man.

You near the top of the steps when there's a loud CRACK! The rotted wall gives away and the bannister rips free, clattering on the stairs. Getting out the quiet way is no longer an option and you bound up the remaining steps to the door. Throwing it open, you spill into an unfamiliar hallway.

As you run, each step thunders through the house. The boards groan underneath and you fear what might happen if they were to collapse, sending you sprawling back into the basement.

You slide to a stop upon seeing another apparition in front of you. A woman wearing a formal gown blocks your way, nothing but a gaping wound where her heart should be. She lifts a skeletal finger and points behind you. You spin around, but nothing is there. When you return your gaze the woman is gone. There's something odd about the exchange and your gut tells you to head the way she pointed.

The deteriorating wallpaper passes in a blur as you take off running once again. As you pass by a door you see a man, but it's impossible to recognize him since the top of his head has been blown off. Blood pours out from a wound under his chin like a faucet turned on full blast. His presence keeps you running in the direction you've been going.

Just as you turn a corner you almost come face to face with a man. His mouth froths as his lips part and contort in silent screams. You turn and make your way through the opposite door.

You spill into the foyer and see the front door just ahead of you.

And that's when the Flayed Man steps in your path.

- A. Do you have your Flashlight and did you explore the Mechanical Room?
- B. Do you have your Flashlight, but entered the Wine Cellar instead?
- C. Are you armed with a Pipe and chose to pass through the Mechanical Room?
- D. Are you armed with a Pipe, but made it through the Wine Cellar?.



Conclusion at closure

You stop and hold your hands up. You've seen what the Flayed Man can do and without a weapon there's very little chance you can push your way through. Violence is not the answer since you are outmatched in that category in every single way.

Using the flashlight, you try to illuminate yourself and the rest of the room as best you can in an effort to show how unthreatening you really are. It almost feels like you're trying to keep a wild animal from pouncing and you can only do that with a level head.

Oddly, the Flayed Man seems to respond positively to the gestures. From the moment you set foot inside the mansion, this seems to be the first time you have some control over the situation. But you're not out of the woods yet. You still have to get the Flayed Man to step aside.

As you look at the tortured body, you know it isn't just optics. Someone, some poor soul, was gruesomely murdered in secret, leaving the death an unresolved mystery for all these decades.

"You deserved better than what was done to you," you say as soothingly as possible, still keeping your hands up.

It seems to resonate with the Flayed Man. Sorrow in his eyes. Remorse. Sadness. You're unsure of how much thought the creature is capable of, but it looks like he hates the heinous acts he committed and couldn't control.

"Someone did you wrong. You suffered while you were alive, but even now in death you suffer too. All that rage and anger, it isn't your fault," you continue. This line of thinking seems to be working.

"Whoever that person was, they wanted to hurt this family and they used you to make that happen. But they're gone. And the person who did this to you is gone too. If you can release the pain, maybe you can be free too," you say, hoping you've said the right words.

The Flayed Man stares at you and his eyes shift to understanding. Trapped in an existence of toxic emotions, he has finally felt sympathy for the first time in his tortured afterlife.

And just a moment later, the being is gone. Tentatively, you open the door and step into the cold night. Your car is still parked out front next to Kyle's. He sits behind the wheel, but avoids making eye contact. You're not sure if it's shame from leaving you behind in the basement or that he regrets that his awful judgment dragged you there in the first place.

Regardless, just as you are ready to move past your harrowing experiences in the mansion, you're also ready to put a dangerous friendship behind you too. You've seen what toxic emotions can do to a person and perhaps a new beginning is what you need to fully move on.



CONCLUSION IN GONE AND AWAY

All you have on you is a flashlight and you know that means one thing... you're screwed. Perhaps you should have brought the box cutter instead. But they have a saying about hindsight and it is much too apt in this moment.

The Flayed Man continues to block your path. You have a feeling if you turn and run like last time your luck won't be as fortuitous. You shuffle backwards, completely out of ideas.

Each footstep the Flayed Man takes squishes on the marble floor. You shine your flashlight at him, but it proves ineffective in deterring him. You've seen the horrific damage he did to the others and all you can think about is the gaping hole in the woman's chest... and not wanting one in your own.

The Flayed Man stops suddenly and you're not quite sure what to make of it. You look at the gruesome body, unsure what he is going to do next.

You then see something unexpected in the Flayed Man's eyes... fear. The bravado and confidence he once had fades. You turn and see the other ghosts you ran into heading into the foyer. They quietly circle the Flayed Man, passing by and barely acknowledging your presence.

The suicides and specters with their hearts ripped out continue to close in as the Flayed Man backs away, slowly being guided into the corner where there is no escape. It's then you hear the beast make a sound for the first time. The otherworldly scream he lets loose chills you in a way that will undoubtedly haunt you the rest of your life.

As the ghosts attack the Flayed Man, you see this as your chance to escape. You bolt out the door while they continue their ectoplasmic execution behind you.

That's when a new threat rears its ugly head. Police cars pull up and their blue and red flashing lights rake across the house and surrounding woods. The flashlight tumbles from your hand and lands on the ground with a thud. The officers get out, already on edge.

It dawns on you what is unfolding. Kyle's car is still in the driveway and your it does not look good that you are there. In fact, it looks downright guilty. You had no luck finding your friend inside, but after seeing all the carnage firsthand, you have a feeling his body will never be discovered.

The officers approach you with a no-nonsense demeanor. Before you can even share your side of the story, you find yourself being read your Miranda rights. You try to explain that the mansion is full of evil creatures, but hearing it outloud you realize it sounds nothing short of insanity.

You eventually taper off and stop talking, knowing that everything you've blurted out in your defence will only make the case against you stronger. You may have survived the mansion, but knowing you'll spend the rest of your days rotting in a cell, it still has claimed another victim.



Conclusion is and yet it grows

You grip the pipe tightly. The boxcutter didn't do much when you used it before, but things feel different this time. You're ready for a fight. Emboldened by the weapon in your hands, you confidently walk forward. The Flayed Man is the only thing standing between you and making it to safety. What once seemed as an impossible obstacle is now surmountable. All you need to do is clear a path.

The Flayed Man starts moving in, intensity burning in the undead creature's eyes. Everything that has happened in the mansion has come to this. It's time to finally get out.

Holding the pipe like a baseball bat, you wind up to strike. You plant your foot on the floor and swing with all your might. The pipe whips through the air at lightning speed.

When it hits the Flayed Man it bounces off as if you'd slammed the pipe into a tree. It doesn't even leave a mark and the ghost remains standing. You swing the pipe again, this time hitting the Flayed Man in the head. It simply rebounds, the metal buzzing in your hands from the impact.

It hits you that escaping will be much more difficult than it seemed just moments before. You shuffle backwards, but the Flayed Man continues his pursuit, not taking his eyes off you.

The front door opens and Kyle tumbles in, out of breath. He looks at you and a mixture of emotions cross his face. He's happy you're alive, but seeing the skinned, bloody spirit still drives fear into his heart.

Kyle dashes forward, winding up to punch the Flayed Man. Before the blow can connect, the ghost reaches out and grips your friend by the throat, stopping him immediately. You step in to strike the Flayed Man with your pipe when you feel a burning sensation in your chest. You look down to see the creature's hand buried in your ribcage. The pipe falls to the floor as shock settles in.

Pain shoots through your entire body as your heart suddenly stops. You look up and see the Flayed Man has disappeared, but the agony continues to radiate through you. Kyle picks himself up from the floor and backs away in terror before running back outside. You collapse as the torment reaches its zenith.

It all stops and you stand, glad that the Flayed Man has been driven away. You hurry after Kyle, but when you try to step out from the mansion, you find you cannot pass through the door. Some kind of invisible barrier won't let you through.

You glance at your chest and see a gaping hole where your heart should be, a wound other ghosts in the house have been afflicted with. Sorrow floods you as you realize the only purpose your agonizing afterlife serves is to hopefully scare off other interlopers before they too fall prey to the Flayed Man.

A skeletal figure, possibly a zombie or a creature, is shown in a dark, gothic-style room. The figure is wearing a dark, tattered garment and has a menacing expression. The background features ornate architectural details and a red glow, suggesting a dramatic or horror setting.

Conclusion of: The Cruelty of it all

After everything you've been through, there's something about seeing the Flayed Man trying to prevent your escape that makes you furious. You hold the pipe tightly as rage wells up from within. This whole time you've been made to feel like a victim and that is finally going to end.

You approach the Flayed Man with determination, not willing to accept any other outcome than escape. As you close in you find yourself almost certain there's something quite interesting in your opponent's eyes... fear.

You prepare to strike when the Flayed Man dashes towards you. He grips your wrist to prevent you from swinging. You struggle to wrest your hand free, but it is held tighter than you can imagine. Realizing the Flayed Man is reacting so fiercely gives you hope.

With a quick yank you pull your arm out from his grip and push the Flayed Man away from you. You swing the pipe and this time it connects just as you intended. A satisfying vibration ripples through the weapon as the blow hits him.

You look up and see the Flayed Man's jaw hanging from his face. You'd never thought yourself capable of such brutality.

You try to swing again, but the Flayed Man lunges forward, scratching at you in a last ditch effort to save himself. You back away, trying to avoid the nails looking to rip your flesh. There's a desperation in the attempt to deter you that almost gives you pause.

But another window to swing the pipe opens up and you crack it across the Flayed Man's head. The ghost goes spinning to the ground with a sickening thud. The creature's skull is partially split open, a fitting injury considering all the pain and suffering he's caused.

The Flayed Man weakly reaches his hand up to try and thwart any following blows. But you can't rest until you know the threat is gone. You slam the pipe down several more times before you're finally confident the job is finished. You step over the body and head to the door.

After a few steps you hear a whimper, the first sound the Flayed Man has made this entire time. You turn and instead of seeing the creature, Kyle's battered body lays on the floor in its place. Panic washes over you as you realize what happened.

The pipe you hold has both your friend's blood all over it along with your fingerprints. There's no denying what transpired, regardless of what you think you saw. The mansion was able to claim two new victims today. You don't know how it came to this, but whatever the evil residing within the mansion was scheming, it succeeded in getting exactly what it wanted.

parallel paths



Look at that. You made it to the end.

Do you like how everything turned out? Would you make any changes if you were to do it again?

This issue is just a taste of what waits in the full release. The narratives will be roughly four times larger, meaning more choices, more endings and more ways to customize your journey.

If you'd like to continue the adventure, pledging to *Parallel Paths* on Kickstarter nets you four more issues (with other goodies available as well).

We know time is a scarce resource these days, so we appreciate that you spent some of yours giving this a read.

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