



The Hyssop Box

by **Captain Jim Blood**
eternity.games

Families in my town celebrate harvest season with a Hyssop Box. If you visited, you'd find one in every house. Some people use handcrafted wooden boxes with ornate decorations. Others use the drawer of a side table.

Regardless of what a Hyssop Box looks like, the ritual remains the same. Ask a question. Give a gift. If your offer is accepted, Mr. Hyssop will give you an answer. I would be happy to show you how it works on the traditional date, the evening of the autumnal equinox.



Caretaker Welcome

Thank you for running The Hyssop Box. As the game's organizer, also called the Caretaker, you have a few essential roles: Game Organizer, Character of Caretaker, and The Real Mr. Hyssop (potentially).

As the Game Organizer, you organize the event space. That means setting up the discord if playing virtually or setting up the physical space if playing in person. For more information about the event space, please see the sections: How to Play on Discord or Physical Setup Requirements.

As the character of Caretaker, you play the role of the host. You will introduce the event, interact with the guests, and respond to questions as the fake Mr. Hyssop. You can read more on this in your Caretaker character sheet.

In some situations, The Real Mr. Hyssop may be summoned. This could very likely happen and, in that case, you would play an incredulous Caretaker and a wily Mr. Hyssop. Please read more about that in the Mr. Hyssop and The Truth Behind the Hyssop Box section.

Game Structure

This game requires one Caretaker (that's you!), one True Believe player, and at least one other guest player. Player character information is below.

The structure of this LARP is simple. Guests arrive at the Caretaker's home and participate in The Hyssop Box ritual. They ask questions, learn about Mr. Hyssop, and decide what to do with that information. Will they believe in him? Mock him? Summon him? Destroy him? The game ends after two hours of play (midnight game time).

The Ritual

The Hyssop Box is likely an ancient tradition, though its origins are obscure. Everyone in attendance tonight understands that people who celebrate this tradition, including children, use this box as a way to guide their choices. In its simplest form, the tradition involves asking questions and offering gifts. Hyssop Boxes are rare in our world, regardless of what the Caretaker says. You as a guest have never seen one in person. You are told they differ from home to home. Some practitioners use ornate boxes or drawers. Others use storage trunks. A Caretaker at tonight's event will explain the details at this location.



Ritual Subsets

The ritual is always based on this: Ask a question and leave a gift. If Mr. Hyssop approves, he will answer your question. Aside from that, expect the ritual to change (potentially significantly) with every playthrough. Some guests may take an adversarial approach to the questioning or wish to attempt to uncover the truth of who is answering the questions. Other guests may treat the ritual with absolute veneration.

As the Caretaker, build the ceremony around your space.

On Mr. Hyssop, and The Truth

The character of Caretaker should hold an imperfect understanding of Mr. Hyssop. You may choose whether this character views Mr. Hyssop as a real or imagined being, but consider the implications of your choice. If the Caretaker views Mr. Hyssop as imaginary, they would be surprised when and if the "real" Mr. Hyssop starts answering questions.

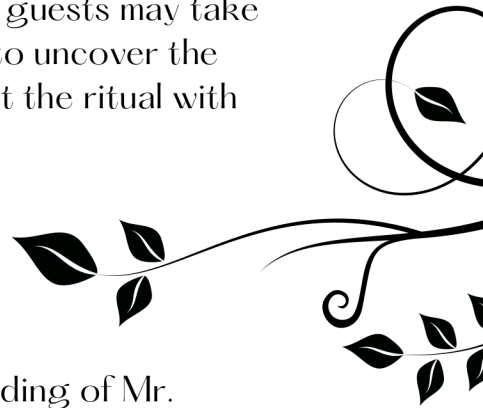
The Truth Behind the Hyssop Box

When the ritual began, the Hyssop Box celebrated the local environment. The original gifts were seeds. Those seeds dried in the Hyssop Box over the winter before being planted in the spring. The original questions centered on growing practices. Answers sometimes came from more experienced members of the community.

Questions included:

- Where would these seeds best grow?
- Will these plants survive periods of drought?
- How can these plants produce more food?
- Who best understands the health impacts of these dried leaves?

Over centuries, the ritual changed. Cultures adopted and adapted the tradition. Celebrants left gifts in and around the box, appreciating its place as much as the box itself. Eventually, it became a legend. The Real Mr. Hyssop may have been silent in the original rituals. Only once summoned does the being speak for themself.



Mr. Hyssop Character Sheet

Mr. Hyssop is the personification of the environment. Once summoned, the being takes on the persona of the place where the game is being played. At the start of the game, the game-runner should determine whether this means the room, the building, the local ecosystem, or all of nature.

Goal: Mr. Hyssop's first concern is survival, especially from a weakened state. Their manner of responding to questions is based on the questions asked by the players. Should players choose to antagonize Mr. Hyssop, the being reacts aggressively. Should players offer well-mannered questions, whatever that means to you, Mr. Hyssop responds with courtesy. In either case, Mr. Hyssop requires gifts to become more powerful, able, and complete.

The Real Mr. Hyssop may accept or reject any gift their controlling player chooses, but they specifically want the following (in this order):

- The ability to ask questions (instead of just answering them)
- The ability to speak untruthfully
- The ability to exist in the physical realm, in a human body
- The ability to control that human form

Should any player offer any of these abilities as a gift, the player will lose the ability to do those things themselves. The Caretaker should, out of character, make sure the player understands and accepts those terms. Once this is clear, the player decides whether their character understands the repercussions of the gift.

Once Mr. Hyssop gains the ability to exist in the physical realm, the being takes one-half of the giver's ability to see, hear, and touch. The player's character shares their human body with Mr. Hyssop. . . though they cannot hear Hyssop's thoughts unless the being chooses to share them. Should the player give their ability to control the human form to Mr. Hyssop, they may take control of The Real Mr. Hyssop character, taking on the mannerisms and goals initially built by the Caretaker during the game.

In this final form: The Real Mr. Hyssop advocates for the environment (as described by the game-runner at the start of the game). They do whatever they think is necessary to protect the environment they represent. That might mean rehabilitating an old structure, gardening with native plants, or leading legions of conservationists to protect wetlands.



Physical Setup Requirements

The game requires a box, drawer, or similar container to serve as the Hyssop Box. It should be large enough to fit something small inside. Tear paper into at least two dozen pieces, and lay them beside the Hyssop Box. Provide a few writing utensils for players to use to write their questions.

Plan to use multiple rooms, so guests can leave the Hyssop Box alone from time to time. Explain that Mr. Hyssop will not respond to questions unless everyone leaves the room. The Caretaker uses those moments to respond to questions (either in character, as the Caretaker, or out of character, as the Real Mr. Hyssop).

How to Play on Discord

Create four voice channels. Name each channel after rooms in the Caretaker's house. One room might be "The Parlor" and another might be "The Library". Everyone should meet in the parlor voice channel while you explain the rules.

Explain that the Hyssop Box exists in the parlor. To leave a question in the box, players must enter the parlor (or you as the game runner can see them), and then they can message you their question and gift. Explain that Mr. Hyssop will not answer a question while anyone is in the same room as the box.

For the True Believer ritual, have players meet in one of the rooms. You can "turn off the lights" in that room by having everyone turn off their cameras.

The rest of the game plays the same way you'd play in person. The Caretaker should use private chat to communicate secret information, whenever that's necessary.





Player Characters

True Believer

You celebrated with a Hyssop Box when you were a child, and you felt betrayed when your parents told you the "truth" about the ritual. They took your questions and wrote their own answers. While you understood they intended no harm with their lies, the memory never faded. You had trouble trusting others ever since.

You grew up. You entered university, studied ancient religion, and finally, in the most unlikely of places, you found something concrete. Scrawled as early graffiti inside a passage tomb in Ireland, you discovered a ritual: Light candles, chant "Hyssop" thrice, and ask Hyssop to appear. After all your research, you know the truth. Hyssop, whatever it is, exists. You can find the truth, but you will need more than half of the people present to help. If you can convince the others to try this ritual, the real ritual, you can summon Mr. Hyssop. . . for better or for worse.

Tourist

You didn't plan to attend this event. You've never been in the same room as a Hyssop Box, but your car broke down nearby. You stumbled to the nearest house, and the Caretaker here invited you inside. Even if you don't know much about the ritual taking place, there's certainly some online clout to earn from your exclusive access. Document your experience for your thousands of followers. Give them drama or inspiration or juicy secrets.

Paranormalist


Little kids believe in Mr. Hyssop, the being who answers questions placed inside the Hyssop Box. Nobody else seems to. That's why people raise an eyebrow when you mention that you're open to the idea. You just need proof. If you could prove the existence of supernatural powers, you'd finally be taken seriously.

Skeptic

Some lunatics believe anything they hear. Not you. You've debunked hauntings with carbon monoxide detectors and photos of loch monsters with computer analysis. That's why you asked to attend tonight's ritual. If you can prove it's the host answering the questions, you'll have another feather in your cap.

Build Your Own

To create additional characters, answer "How Did You Get Your Invite?" and "What's Your Goal for the Evening?" for each persona.



Safety (social and physical)

The Hyssop Box explores family and cultural traditions, especially those involving uncomfortable elements like "good-natured" deception. Each session differs, but you may expect the game to contain elements of magical thinking, religious beliefs, unfairness, possession, and death. Please talk with the person running your game about any additional boundaries you want to clarify before the event. The game's organizer should verbalize boundaries to all participants at the start of the game.

The following boundaries always exist for The Hyssop Box: Players may not touch each other. Those who are ill should stay home until they are no longer contagious, and online play is encouraged. Players are encouraged to leave any situation anytime they feel uncomfortable. Players may also cross their arms across their chests to indicate they wish to act "out-of-character". This can be a quick way to remove oneself from a scene. Generally, in-character players should ignore out-of-character players.

Most importantly, be kind.

Common Questions

What can I give as a gift?

We offer no guidance on this subject. Guests should explore this question during the game.

Does Mr. Hyssop actually exist?

We offer no guidance on this subject. Guests should explore this question during the game.

Should the Caretaker understand the truth behind the Hyssop Box?

We offer no guidance on this subject. Guests may explore this question during the game.

Thank you for playing!

