

On the eighth day of the eighth month of 1888, something crashed in the simple, cheerful town of Rineshoul. Founded on the sixth day of the sixth month in 1666, Rineshoul was built among the country's first coal mine. The coal mine has been a power source to Rineshoul and the surrounding communities ever since — until that day in 1888. Nobody knows what went down. All that was known was that something happened at the coal mine beneath Rineshoul, and it caused a town-wide apocalypse. Toxicity filled the air, fire arose from underneath the roads, swallowing cars, gardens decorating the exterior of homes, signs marking the location of office buildings and small stores. Since 1888, the town has been near abandoned, with Rineshoul's population sitting at just eight — or, at least, the *living* population.

On the twelfth day of the twelfth month of 2012, a black van sped towards the town, flying past the green 'Welcome to Rineshoul' sign. The van pulled in next to one of the decayed office buildings in town square, residents walking over to see the mysterious visitors.

Three men wearing large black vests and hats with a weird ghost emblem jumped out of the van, smiling uncontrollably.

"Hello! Is this the ghost town of Rineshoul?" one of the men said unusually eccentrically.

"Yes, this is Rineshoul Township," a man in a white shirt said. The man looked very pale, almost as if he was about to pass out.

"Great! My name is Tom Cover, here with my team of 'ghost hunters', John Devor and Shawn Addison. We're 'ghost hunters' for our television show Spirit Searchers, here to search for the spirits that scamper around this stupendous sphere!" He pulled out his phone, clicked a button, and a strange song started to play.

*Spirit Searchers
We're hunting every ghost
All around the globe
We hunt the most
Spirit Searchers
Findin' the ghoul
Zapping them up
Suck up their souls,
Yeah that's us,
We're the Spirit Searchers!*

"What was that abomination of music?" another resident asked.

"*Abomination?*" Tom replied, utterly baffled. "It's our incredible Spirit Searchers theme song! In fact, we won an Emmy in 2017 for best theme song. So yeah, not an abomination."

"Anyways," the resident said. "Why have you invaded our town?"

“Because we film our show in a different location every episode,” Tom replied. He coughed for a moment, then continued, “We got a mysterious tip to come here as they said this was the perfect town for ghost hunting! Mind if we film here for a day?”

“You won’t be able to record anything.”

“Why not?”

“The ghosts that dwell here in Rineshoul Township are imperceptible,” the resident answered. “They can’t be seen through a camera – only through your eyes.”

“Well, don’t worry about that. We don’t actually catch ghosts. We’re actors, not actual ghost hunters.”

“Well, good luck,” the resident started. “Because the ghosts will interfere with your *show*, and you will never be able to escape Rineshoul.”

“Trust me. We’ll be fine.”

“Well, this is your last chance. If you step any farther into Rineshoul, you will never be able to escape.”

“Great, thanks. Well, nice meeting you all. And don’t worry, we won’t be in your way. We’ll be gone before you know it.”

“If you see someone with a dark-green mask with a red stripe down the middle, those are the ghouls. Beware.”

As the bright sun dipped below the horizon and the moon arose into the night sky, the Spirit Searchers cast and crew headed out in the moonlight, across town to an abandoned convenience store.

“This place is perfect,” Tom said, and the crew set up their filming equipment. When they were ready, Tom stood in front of the doors, his ghost-hunting device on his back, his crew in front of him holding oversized cameras, lights, and fog machines pointed at him. A crew member came out of their van, stood ready next to one of the large cameras holding a clapperboard.

He yelled action and the cameras began recording. Tom began to speak when suddenly, a large owl soared from behind the building and onto his shoulder.

“Cut!” the man with the clapperboard yelled, and the crew members began to whoosh it away. However, the owl stayed put like a statue. The bird’s black and gray feathers seemed to glow as the moon in the background completed its ascent into the sky, and sunshine had completely subsided. It was now pitch black.

Then, a popping sound came out of the van. It sounded like kernels crackling into popcorn, though louder and the cracking sounded rougher.

“Don’t worry about the shot, Tom,” a crew member said. “We couldn’t even see you anyway. We have to make it brighter.”

“Alright,” Tom replied disappointingly, and the crew and cast member attended to the van. Slowly, the two cameramen opened the doors. A wave of burning spewed out of the van, like opening an oven to an overcooked casserole. The van looked rusted with the vintage carpet peeling open and the walls scratched as if a tiger was locked inside. The crackling sound distinguished when the doors opened, but black smoke started to drift out and along the black streets.

“What happened here?” Tom said.

Suddenly, something snapped behind them, and when they turned around, someone was standing there. It was a large woman wearing a white gown with flower designs lining the end of the dress. The woman looked older, like in her seventies, and she was shivering chronically as she stared at them. The most notable thing about her was something she was wearing — a dark green mask covering her face with a red stripe down the middle. She stared into the eyes of the crew members, and in a voice so deep it was like hell was using her mouth to speak, she asked, “What are you doing in Rineshoul?”

Droplets of sweat slid down Tom’s scalp as he remembered what the man at the start of town said. They had found a ghost. Its weird look with the mask covering its face was unlike anything he’d ever seen of one of these dead spirits.

“Well? What are you doing?” the woman continued. “Get out!”

“Get in the van!” Tom screamed, running backwards and to the door of the passenger seat. A man was already in the driver’s seat, the van purring as it was about to drive. “Go go go!”

The man stomped on the gas pedal and the van propelled forward as the crew members in the back of the van quickly pulled the doors shut. The van skidded off, down the road.

As it passed, the man they met when they first entered town watched and said to the other residents, “They must have found one of the residents. Hope they didn’t take her mask off. We don’t have enough living residents in this town for another one to die.”

“What happens to those idiotic people in the hideous van?” another resident said.

“They will make it back to where they wanted to go before they realize that no one will be able to see them, no one will be able to hear them, and will only feel their cold presence.”

“You think that’s what happened?”

“I know it,” the spirit said. “No human can last more than minutes in this town without a mask. The smoke piling from that mine is growing day by day.”

“You think the smoke will ever leave Rineshoul to the rest of the world?”

Suddenly, the owl with black and gray feathers flew towards them, its stomach glowing like a lava lamp spilled all over the bird.

“You know what to do,” the man said to the owl.

The bird flew over to the end of town where the TV people egressed. The glow on its stomach detached from the bird and into the air. A large glowing dome flickered into view, but went invisible just as quickly.

The man faced the other resident. “The smoke will never leave Rineshoul. That’s what the souls are for.” He looked at the owl. “Well done. Now go into the world and find our next victim. The strength of this dome depends on it.”

THE END