

DEMONGROUND

The Electronic Fanzine of Dark Conspiracy

AUGUST 1999
VOL 6

SPECIAL
GENCON
ISSUE!

In this Issue:

Trespasser

Cover Art by Eyal Faingersh

Sins of the Fallen

Adventure by Mike Marchi

The Ashes of Phoenix

Adventure by Rob Beck

London - An update for the Republic of Britain

Milieu by Lee Williams

GenCon 1999 Highlights

Review by the DEMONGROUND Staff

Plus:

The Mercenary Philosopher, Tabloid Articles, plus a lot more...

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Faingersh
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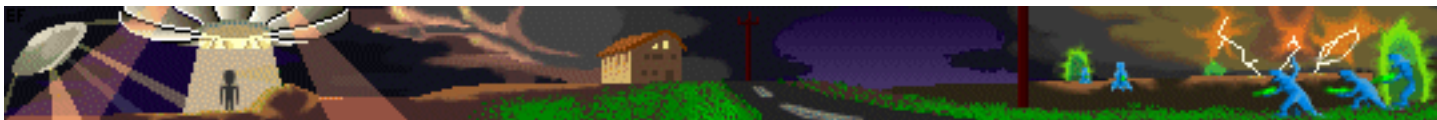


DEMONGROUND

Issue 6 - August 1999

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The End of the First Year

Geoff Skellams
welcomes you
to the giant
post-Gencon
issue.

With this issue, DEMONGROUND concludes its first year of publication. It's hard to believe that we have been doing this for a whole year already. I can remember when DEMONGROUND was just a bit of wishful thinking on our part, something we hoped people would read and enjoy.

As the guy who actually sits down every couple of months and puts everything together into the product you actually download, it never ceases to amaze me just how far we have come since DG1. When I completed that first issue, I was very proud of my achievement. I thought I had done pretty well with it. Since then, I have kept trying to improve with each new issue. A lot of work goes into putting each issue together; I tend to spend every night for a week working on it to get it to look the way it does. If I wasn't such a perfectionist, I think I could probably get it done a lot quicker, but it might not be the same.

By the time you're reading this, you should have noticed that the DEMONGROUND website has had a complete facelift. Mike Marchi has done an outstanding job of renovating the look of the site. He's also installed a guestbook page, where you can leave comments about the magazine. We're hoping to soon have feedback forms for each individual issue of DEMONGROUND. Once we get the pro-

gram written to receive the results, you will be able to give ratings on each individual article in each issue of the magazine.

This issue is the special post-Gencon '99 issue. Dark Conspiracy had a much bigger presence at Gencon than it had in previous years. Five different DC events were run over the course of the four days and all went down very well. From what I saw, several people who had never played Dark Conspiracy tried the game, with a couple of them later visiting the Dynasty Presentations booth in the dealer's hall to buy the new books.

Gencon also saw the release of two new Sin City adventures. Both "*Of Gates and Gods*" (Sin City 2) and "*Masks of Darkness*" (Sin City 3) were released at Gencon. These books are now available for order from the DPI website, so for all of you who have been waiting to see what happened after the end of "*The Shadow Falls*", the wait is over.

In this issue, we have two of the Dark Conspiracy adventures that were run at this year's Gencon. This is the first time that DEMONGROUND has featured two full length adventures, which accounts for the length of this issue. We also have Marcus Bone's and Mike Marchi's takes on the events at Gencon this year, complete with a few photos. I had done my version, but at 5,000 words, it ended up being too big to put into the mag. So instead, I'll publish it on the web for those who are interested in that sort of thing, and we'll link to it from the DEMONGROUND website.

The one thing I will say about this issue is that it is a bit short on artwork. I still have a few pictures that people have submitted for previous issues that I am saving until I can find appropriate articles to put them with; I tend not to put art in just for the sake of having art. If you've submitted works in the past that you haven't seen used yet, don't worry. I still have them all and I

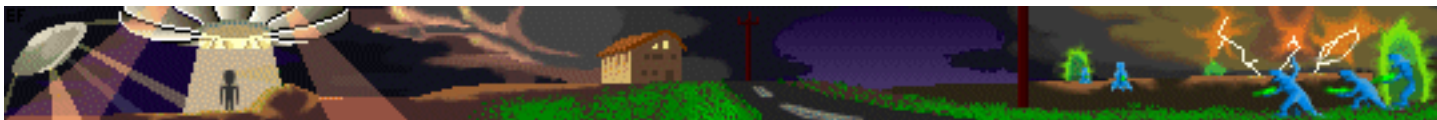
will continue to look for the most effective way to use them. Having said that, I am always looking for new DC related art to help make DEMONGROUND look better. If you can draw something, *please* submit it and help make the magazine better for everyone.

The next year of DEMONGROUND will hopefully be better than the first. We have our eye on a couple of goals for the coming year and there is a part that all of you can play in that. As the appropriate times get nearer, we will let you know the part you can play to help others sit up and take notice.

Until then, enjoy this issue.



Geoff, being his usual, idiotic self at Gencon '99



Three Go Mad At Gencon

Marcus Bone describes the adventures of the DEMONGROUND editorial team at Gencon '99.

Going to GENCON had always been a dream of mine, to travel across the oceans to the place where roleplayers flock in the thousands. When I was a kid, I used to read Dragon magazine and stare at those pictures; the TSR Castle, the abundance of large bearded men, and the few scanty clad women (or is this memories of a different magazine?).

However, this year I was lucky enough to have my book published by DPI and I thought that if that wasn't a good enough reason, then nothing was. So planning ahead I saved my little heart out until I knew that a trip to GENCON would become a reality.

Mike will detail the stupid antics we got up to, the incessant calls for "Vowel Checks" (although these sounded like calls for "Val Checks" to me... who was this girl Val?), the long trip across the unchanging country side of Illinois, and the overconsumption at the "Safe House". So I would like to add to these in a different way.

During my journey to America I carried with me a diary of sorts (a book of loose pages actually), and at each available moment I wrote ideas and reactions I had to certain events. Sure there aren't as many entries as I would have like, but then it was a pretty hectic trip for me.

America and size

Everything in America is large, the cars, the freeways, and yes, the people. Not to say that every one is fat or over weight, although a large number were at GENCON (one of the more interesting traits at GENCON - that and scruffy beards).

Rather that Americans in general are a very vibrant and outgoing people, loud and full of life. I had always heard that New Zealanders were reserved compared to the rest of the world, and I call myself "loud" compared to the typical New Zealander, but I was overawed by the range of personalities I met.

And the cars, how big do you need them to be? Again I was really taken aback by the size of the cars and trucks.

But one thing that really is great about America and its size is the fact that something like GENCON can take place. In New Zealand, the National Wargaming Tourny gets 5 to 6 thousand players and spectators tops. At GENCON, the number of roleplayers was at least four times that. It really made me feel as if I was part of something special, real special... and man I loved it!

The DG Editors

Until the day I left for America I didn't even know what Mike sounded like let alone really know what he looked like. Geoff, on the other hand, I had met before and had immediately clicked with (as they say like minds). But to meet both of them together and to journey to GENCON was one of the greatest events of my life.

It is hard to explain the feeling one gets when you final get to talk face to face with a guy you've "known" for a year. It was sort of like meeting a brother that had gone away to war or something. I mean you know this guy but you really didn't "know" him.

But as a testament to our friendship it only took a couple of margaritas before I was fully in the swing and getting attacked by accent jokes and the 'what the hell' when the Marchi's couldn't understand me. Don't worry, if they ever visit New Zealand I'll get them back!

Actually one of the best things about meeting Mike was to finally meet Becky, Mike's better half. Like when I met Geoff's wife, Sue, I was really amazed. I mean for a year I had talked to my fellow editors and only knew of their wives in passing, yet to finally meet them was to have something click in my mind.

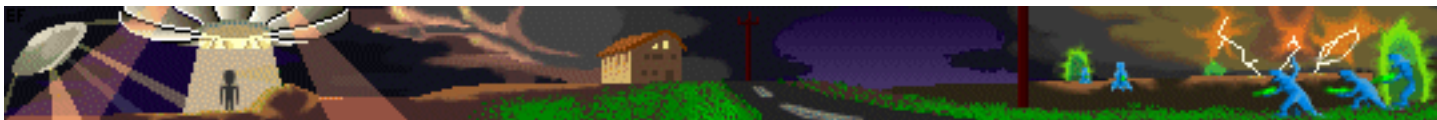
Some one famous once said that "Behind every great man there is an even greater woman." Well, Sue and Becky are these great women. They put up with the magazine and the episodes with the books and yet they still support each one of us and make us do the best we can, even if we feel like giving up. My hats off to you both!

Journey to the Centre of the Earth – GENCON

I really never knew that America was so much of nothing. To travel 6 hours and see what looks like the same fields on both sides constantly is an almost scary thought. I suppose because I live in New Zealand, I'm so spoilt for environments. I mean it takes just three hours to travel from our biggest city to the snowfields, and during that time pass through a desert, a dairy farming province and past one of the greatest trout fishing lakes in the world.

To travel for hours with nothing but fields and highway to keep you company would drive me mad.

However one very interesting thing did happen during this trip (apart from meeting Mike's mum) and that was listening to "Loveline" with Adam and Dr. Drew. This had to one of the funniest shows ever on the



Geoff and Marcus travel across the flat, boring expanse of Illinois

radio, where the host and doctor seemed constantly to make fun of callers, even to the point of having a celebrity join in the “fun”. I laughed so much and thought that it is things like “Loveline” that epitomize America from a New Zealander’s point of view.

The Coffee Run

To some New Zealanders, coffee is an important morning ritual, but to Americans, coffee in the morning seemed more important than life itself. Fair enough, I thought, but although the mighty hand of Starbucks has reached New Zealand’s shores, percolated coffee is still a rarity for most house holds. Instead, we rely on the instant stuff.

I can hear it now the indignation from all those that **must** have their early morning cup or become a monster for the entire day, but in New Zealand we are happy sticking to our tea.

I was during one of these morning (okay so it was lunch time really) runs to Starbucks that I got the most perfect picture from my entire trip. Sidelined by a call to visit “Dunkin Donuts”, we stopped to pick a dozen of their finest. So had a local law enforcement officer parking his parking his patrol car under the shop sign. Now this was an opportunity to good to miss... A policeman getting donuts is the vision that enters every man’s mind when you think of cops. Although Mike was a little worried about

the repercussions, I got my snap shot, which now sits pride of place on my memo board at work.

The People of GENCON

Talk about great; every person I talked to at GENCON was interesting and informative. Every one seemed to know something else new in the roleplaying world and were willing to share.

I suppose it is because events like GENCON are a “group therapy” session for roleplayers, a place where they are the focus (street signs stating that Milwaukee welcomed GENCON were everywhere). Just for a few days people could wear what they wanted, speak in funny accents (New Zea-

landers and Australians included) and act in ever role took there fancy.

I met some really cool people at the Dark Conspiracy tables, and also had a chance to chat with others I had spoken to through ICQ or E-mail. In particular Josh, Rob, Charles, Glenn (Glenn’s buddy, sorry forgot his name) and Heather from the roleplaying. Also Dave and Mike from the Target stand and all the others who stopped and talked to the funny New Zealander...

Most important I must mention John and his brother-in-law, because without them I would have been sleeping on the streets and becoming another of the unwashed masses.

To me anyway it was the people who made GENCON, without them it would have been rather boring.

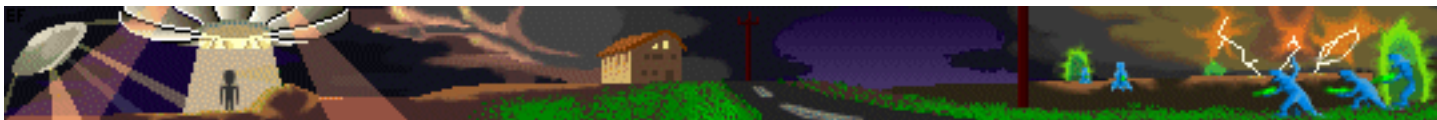
Rumours about the Safe House and running a DC game

When I got to Mike’s place I had been told that I would have to run Lester Smith’s game for him. I was a little taken aback by this... I had nothing prepared, what if people expect Lester and get ... me?

So I tried my best. Finally, Saturday rolled around, as did my session time. Now, I wasn’t the best referee and being ill-prepared, I felt the game was a little flat. This was especially the case when I messed up the end and was trying to get the characters



Mike Marchi runs the final session of “Dark Nemesis” on Sunday



Mike Marchi, Ken Whitman and Marcus Bone next to the Dynasty Presentations booth in the dealers' hall.

back on track. Thankfully, some of the roleplayers were really excellent, the guy who played the bus driver (sorry lost his name) was outstanding!

So, feeling sorry for myself, I decided to get drunk that night, and with Geoff, Becky and some of the rest of the crew headed to the "Safe House". I won't go into details but really loved the atmosphere the club had. I'd recommend it to anyone visiting Milwaukee.

By the next morning, I was a little worse of wear, and was in no fit shape to run the second (and last session) of my adventure. Thankfully Mike stepped in, having missed his 8 a.m. game and ran "Dark Nemesis" instead. I just lay on the floor and

slept a little.

Actually one of the guys that played in this game had also missed the 8 a.m. session so was happy to find that it was being played then instead. I think that Sunday is on that should be used to visit the exhibitors' hall one last time and little else. Everyone I spoke to on that last day was pretty jaded.

Going Home

The saddest thing is that "all good things must come an end". And I am not ashamed to say that as I said my good byes to Mike and Becky, there was a tear in my eye. In just a week, I had made friends into really good friends and wished that they never had to leave. But the real world beck-

oned.

I was fortunate enough to spend that last Sunday night on the floor of Geoff's room and next morning was forced to say goodbye to him too. To be honest, saying my farewells to Geoff were even harder, not only because his leaving meant that the Con was well and truly over but because I look up to Geoff more like a father figure (me being the youngest of the DG crew). Therefore it was much harder to express my emotions in front of him.

All in all, the four days at GENCON had gone really slowly in parts and yet by the end has seemed to have just raced by. There was so much I didn't do, so many people I hadn't talked to and new stuff I hadn't brought. Next time it will be different ... Next time...

Getting Published

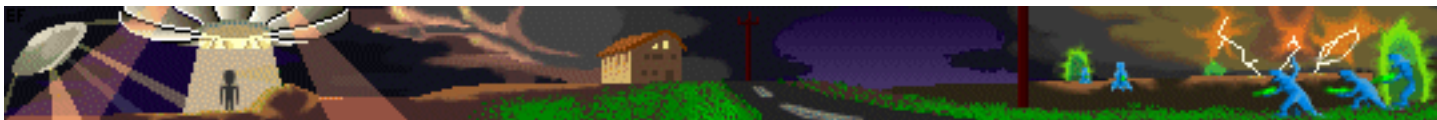
If you don't already know I got my first Roleplaying book released at GENCON this year - 'Of Gates and Gods'. I have to say that I was wrapped to have something of my own to trade and show. Yes, I also was a little egotistical when people asked me to sign it, I was sure that I couldn't fit my head through the double doors in the dealers' hall after that.

In total though it wasn't really that which drove me to attend GENCON, by far the opportunity to meet Mike and Geoff, and to visit my Mecca by far outweighed my book getting released.

There will be other books, but never another first GENCON.

"Look after your friends. They're the ones who'll save your ass when the chips are down."

**- Zena Marley
(Early 21st-century mercenary-philosopher)**



GENCON '99 Memories

Mike Marchi gives us his version of the Gencon '99 story

Introductions

Meeting my fellow editors – I’ll start with the moment the three of us finally got together. We ordered Chinese food, mixed up some Margaritas, then sat around the kitchen table and talked long into the evening. We got along like old friends who had known each other for years, falling easily (too easily, perhaps?) into a pattern of good-natured mockery and insult. Marcus, begin the most jetlagged suffered the brunt of the initial barbs – being too tired to respond. Don’t worry, he made up for lost time later in the week.

Transportation Barrier

The fellows down under, like their British counterparts, drive on the left side of the road - not the ‘right’ side as we do in the States. This was a considerable source of mirth and merriment for our globe-crossed trio. Geoff arrived in our care after spending several days out in L.A., so he was already acclimated to our backward driving. Marcus on the other hand, arrived fresh off the plane from New Zealand, thoroughly jetlagged. From his vantage point in the front passenger seat (the driver’s seat back home), he tended to grip the door handle and press his foot down onto an imaginary

brake pedal every time we made a turn. Every corner was a grim reminder to him that he was someplace different – every turn we made, there was traffic approaching head-on from the lane he *wanted* to turn into. Eventually, he started to calm down. A couple times I actually found myself making a turn that Marcus seemed to be completely comfortable with. So to keep things interesting, every time I saw that happening, I’d let out a cry of horror and point straight ahead. I swear, I’ve never seen anyone jump so high in my life. ☺

The Technology Barrier

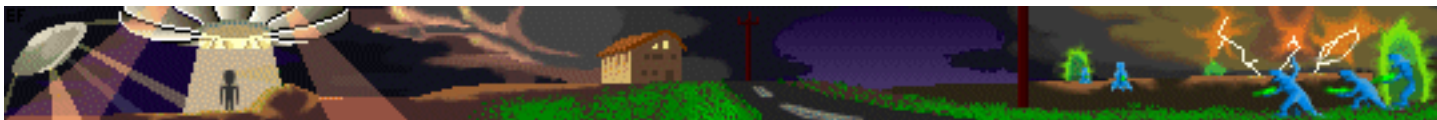
In some ways, I’m the absolute worst example of the stereotypical U.S-Centric middle class American male. There are many aspects of my life that I take completely for granted. For example, Marcus was very taken by the ice/water dispenser in the refrigerator door. It never occurred to me that everyone didn’t just *have* one of these. In his defense, I should point out that he had

been awake for about 36 hours by the time he showed up. He kept watching Becky, Geoff (who had been there two days already) and myself putting glasses against the dispenser, and having ice cubes drop in. His brow would furrow, and he would seem on the verge of asking a question, but then stop himself. After a time, he apparently lost his inward battle to remain silent, blurting out, “How do you get the ice back in there?”

I think I’d make a terrible diplomat. The sarcastic person at the center of my brain is just a little too close to the surface. A litany of nonsensical replies echoed through my brain: “Penguins”, “A baby harp seal with a bucket and a pair of tongs...”, but nothing that seemed to have sufficient *bite*. I instead opted for the rather lame “There’s a water line that feeds up into the back of the fridge from the basement.” In other words ... the truth. The Sarcastic Monster within was so utterly dissatisfied with that reply that he took control of my mouth and followed with a quick “I’ve heard it said that any sufficient level of technology is indistin-



The night it all got started. The DEMONGROUND editors in the one place for the first time.



guishable from magic.”

The Language Barrier

You would think that three men from English-speaking nations (albeit all subsets and/or castoffs from the original British), would have no trouble communicating with each other. Obviously, we’ve managed on ICQ and via e-mail for well over a year.

But I’m here to tell you, that spelling English and speaking it are two entirely different things. There are just some words and phrases...especially phrases that don’t survive translation intact.

One of the more amusing mis-speakings came in the pronunciation of some names. Geoff’s name ended up sounding like “Jif”, Becky came out “Bikky”. Even Marcus’ fiancée’s name, Emma (which I have been pronouncing “Eh-ma” in true, American fashion), came out as Ih-ma. My quick advice for translating New Zealand: tell them to talk slower, and change all ‘ih’ sounds (like sit), into ‘eh’ sounds (like bet).

Vowel Check!

That first evening of Margaritas and conversation resulted in the first of the running gags for the coming week. Vowel Check (or in the Australian, Vaahl Chick). If one of your fellow editors says something you don’t understand, you just call out “Vowel Check!” - which according to the unanimously agreed-upon but never spoken rules, had to be echoed by the third group member. Then the offending speaker had to attempt to render the word in a more appropriate dialect and accent (or “ehksint” if you’re from New Zealand).

Tuesday Afternoon Fever

Do you have any idea what it’s like to be standing outside in the sun, on a humid, 83-degree afternoon – and be shivering? I had been fighting off a cold prior to our departure. The late night of drinking had sent me toppling over the edge.

Taking a quick temperature check, I had a fever of around 102, and felt like someone was rubbing the back of my throat with red-hot steel wool. Where-a-Flu(?) for Sore



The Dark Conspiracy pre-GENCON dinner at The King & I

Throats (apple flavor) saved the day. Four hours of relief that throat lozenges and even sprays were unable to deliver. I was seriously worried that the sore throat would degenerate into laryngitis by the time the Con began. It’s hard enough to make yourself heard in the gaming rooms without a frog in your throat.

Fortunately, my voice held, and despite the abuse, the sore throat abated by Saturday.

Passing Sin City

Between St. Louis and Chicago, just south of Joliet in fact, there is a large oil refinery. By day, it is a collection of scaffolding and vertical pipes leading from tank to tank and tower to tower. At the back of the lot is a pair of exhaust towers, capped by flame.

By night, it is the hellish inspiration for Sin City. The work lights on the smokestacks and scaffolds make the whole complex appear to be a distant city. A central tower surrounded by a ring of slightly shorter structures, and these in turn encircled by even lower structures spread out across a vast area. If the weather conditions are right, a cloud of steam and foul-smelling gases will hang behind it, with the twin towers of flame poking out from the fog bank.

I had hoped that we would be able to pull over to the side near this place, and snap a picture with the refinery as the backdrop. As luck would have it, the exit was under construction, and closed. Besides, the atmospheric conditions were *not* right, and the cloudbank was conspicuously absent. I’m not sure the other guys saw it in quite the same way that I did. *sigh*

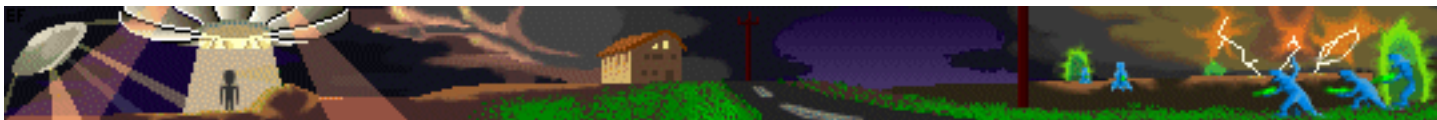
The T-Shirts

DEMONGROUND was about to turn a year old and the editorial staff was going to be together for the first time. It was an auspicious event that demanded a special tribute.

So Marcus came up with this idea to produce promotional t-shirts for DEMONGROUND. He contacted me one day, and asked if I thought Neal would grant permission to use the cover from DG5 on the shirt.

I did some checking, and Neal agreed. Ken Whitman suggested a t-shirt print shop that he had used in the past. It was a rush order, and we didn’t get to see them until the day before we hit Milwaukee. The reproduction of the painting wasn’t the best representation, but it had a certain charm to it.

For those of you interested, DPI is sell-



ing the shirts on their web site for \$10.00 each. Since these are promotional shirts, they're pretty much being sold at cost. If you'd like to show your support for DG at home, why not pick up a shirt?

Long Live the King & I

We arrived in Milwaukee on Wednesday afternoon, and everyone got settled in their respective hotels. Our plan was to meet at *The King & I* for Thai food at 8pm. For my part, the fever and sore throat were still hanging on, so I decided to apply one of those old adages. "Starve a Cold. Feed a Fever". I elected to go with "Feed a Cold. Nuke the Fever"!

The King & I has four levels of *heat* associated with their food. The lowest level is 'Careful', the highest is 'Native Thai'. I opted to make my body the least hospitable vessel I could for whatever germs I had. Native Thai hurts...but damn, it's good ☺

Lester Smith joined us for the evening of revelry. So did Rob Beck. Sadly, Ms. Georgie took ill just before the convention, and her doctor refused to let her travel.

The Convention Begins

There is such a surreal feeling to GenCon. It is such a stark contrast to day-



Ken awards Mike at the DC party for being the DPI Volunteer of the Year



Mike and Marcus at one of the Dark Conspiracy games at GENCON

to-day business that you feel like you've walked into some sort of alternate reality. The really strange thing about going to GenCon year after year is that you start wondering if you recognize some of the people walking past you, or if they just look like everyone else. Every once in a while you spot someone familiar – usually someone who played in one of your games in years past, and you wonder if they remember you, or if they had fun. That's the toughest part for me running these games; the constant fear that the adventure will suck, and you'll be branded as a bad GM.

But I digress. I always like running the 8am game on the opening morning of GenCon. The people who show up for that game are fresh, and ready to play. That eagerness goes a long way toward saving even a mediocre story.

DC Party

Friday night was the MARI Telecom/Dark Conspiracy party. Ken broadened the scope of the party we originally conceived by opening it up for the Archmage people too. I'm pretty sure that the vast majority of the attendees were there for DC, which was a great sight. The pizza was okay, but the conversations were fun. I got a chance

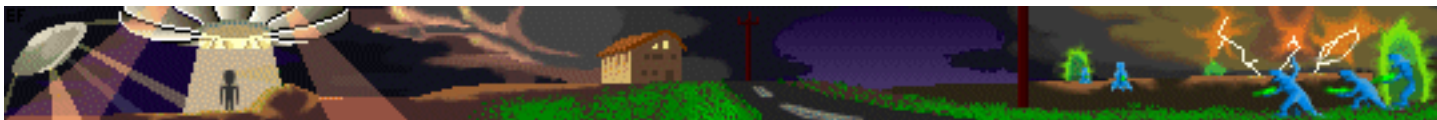
to meet some people I hadn't seen in a while. Sadly, Lester was ill Friday night, and couldn't join us.

The big surprise of the evening (at least for me) was the presentation of the DPI Volunteer of the Year award. Ken Whitman and Tony Lee stood up and called everyone's attention. Actually Ken called for everyone's attention and Tony looked surprised that Ken was doing it. I guess it was a surprise for Tony too ☺

Anyway, Ken awarded yours truly with an acrylic paperweight with the award printed on parchment and slipped into the frame. It was really a nice gesture, and I thank Ken for thinking I deserve it. I wish I'd had some warning that this was coming though. I was put on the spot, and had to do some sort of acceptance speech. I wound up saying something like "Well, Ken said it would be interesting ... and it certainly has been. Thanks a lot." As I sat down, I immediately regretted not having more time to think about it. I think I would have taken a completely different tone.

And so, better late than never, here is my actual retrospective afterthought speech:

"Thanks Ken. This award represents a lot of time and effort that has gone into promoting DC over the last year. As such, I



don't deserve to be recognized alone. A lot of people were involved in things as well, and I never would have appeared as involved as I did without them backing me up. First of all, I'd like to recognize Geoff Skellams and Marcus Bone, my co-editors on the DEMONGROUND Fanzine. Geoff is the person responsible for giving DG the professional look. It is his dedication and eye for layout that makes all of us look good. Marcus is the glue that holds everything together. He came up with the idea, and was kind enough to share the glory with the rest of us. These two have done as much for bringing DC back from the dead as anyone. I'd also like to thank our regular contributors to the magazine, Rob Beck, Ms. Georgie, Eyal Faingersh, Chris Carpenter and Lee Williams (– especially Lee! My god can that boy kick out the content!!). Also for the artists who have become regular parts of the magazine – Sullee, Eyal, Collin. And a special thanks to Neal Dickinson for letting us use his painting on the cover of DG5 and the DG T-Shirts! There are many more people who have appeared in the pages of DEMONGROUND and many more to come. I thank you all, and hope you will keep sending us your contributions. We couldn't do this without you!"

Gaming

The two scenarios I ran at the convention went remarkably well. And incredibly badly all at the same time. I don't want to name names (do I Geoff?), but I'm amazed I managed to pull *Sins of the Fallen* off in the first session after Eden took it upon himself to shoot the object of the game within the first hour.

It was a valuable lesson for me. Make sure the key players *understand* what you need them to know. There is a lot of information thrown at players in a short amount of time. And the key points don't always sink in.

On the other hand, the Friday and Saturday sessions of the games (*Sins* and *Nemesis*) went so well that I couldn't have asked for a better set of players. I had a blast. I hope all of you did too.

This was the first year I actually got to play in some DC games as well. It's definitely a different experience on the other side of the screen. There was always this GM in the back of my head telling me things like "Don't fall for it...you know what you'd do to the person who walked through that door." And then I'd force myself to do it, knowing that if somebody didn't trip the trap, then the game would probably suffer. *sigh*

Safe House

I wish I could have been there. I can only attest to the aftermath. Geoff, Marcus and Becky came back from the Safe House completely bombed out of their collective minds. What a sight! Marcus could hardly stand up. Geoff was probably the most sober of the bunch. He certainly was acting as the protector for the group. Thanks man, for bringing her home safe. ☺

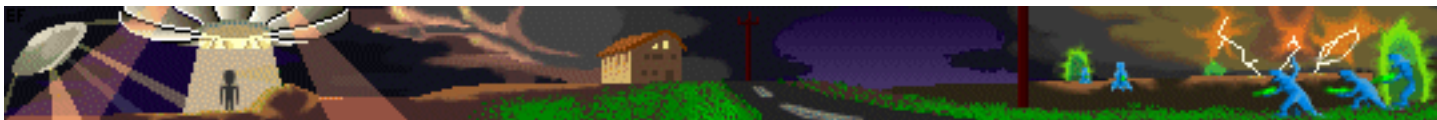
Farewell

Finally the convention was over, and we all had to go our separate ways. For my part, the week went much too quickly. I would have loved to spend another week just talking with Geoff and Marcus and trying to fit a lifetime of not knowing each other into that small space. I really think I've found some friends for life in these guys, and can't wait for the next opportunity to see them again. All of you who have had the opportunity to chat with them online, know what I'm talking about. They are a first-rate bunch of guys, and I am privileged to know them both.

"Fear is the greatest weapon of the Dark Minions. They will do anything to foster that to prevent humanity from acting. Some of them even thrive on fear itself. It seems to give them more power.

"Control your fear and you begin to get control over them. Most of them are surprised when you go on the offensive."

- Zena Marley
(Early 21st-centurry mercenary-philosopher)



The Ashes of Phoenix

Rob Beckll gives us his Gencon 99 adventure, based on a concept from the DC Chat Group

Author's Note

This adventure is set in the city of Phoenix, as portrayed in Michael Stackpole's Dark Conspiracy novels in the year 2019. As with any adventure, it is adaptable to other locations and campaign settings.

With the exception of Eclipse, I've tried to make it as generic, setting wise, as possible. However, some of the original flavor may be lost without at least some understanding of the general aspects that make up Phoenix in the Dark Conspiracy setting. The addition of the scientist abductions and what those might entail are additional pieces a GM can use as part of a greater plot connected to this (what I'm doing), as a completely unrelated issue, or a red herring. Enjoy.

News Article

CONGO GOVERNMENT UPS THE ANTY IN RECENT CONFLICT

"Leaders risk battling guerillas with bugs instead of guns."

Sources in the nation of Zaire reported today that there are strong indications that the government there has released a biochemical warfare agent in areas of suspected rebel strongholds.

Reports coming in from the affected provinces are sketchy, but it appears that the government, tired of the rebel's hit and run tactics and growing support for them in the more rural provinces, has decided to take drastic action.

The rebel's have issued a press release stating that the government has unleashed a tailored plague that will rid them of not only the guerillas, but also the citizenry who might have been tainted with the rebel's ideas. The press release stated that the rebels were attempting to contain the bioplague, but they did not give any details on the disease or the delivery system.

Efforts by this reporter to find out further information on the plague have been blocked as the area in question has recently been cordoned off by the Zaire military. Zaire government officials deny the existence of this alleged contagion and are calling this yet another attempt by the rebels to gain popular support and international recognition.

In response to why the area has been sealed, the Minister for Internal Affairs, Nigel Mamboso, offered that "the provinces in question have been sealed due to high amounts of terrorist activity on the part of the rebels in that area. We are doing our best to contain this unrest from spilling out of the already overrun areas and threatening any more of our population. For those unfortunate citizens trapped in there with the terrorists, I can only say that we are doing our best to minimize the loss of property and freedom and hope to have their lives back to normal soon."

Rebel leaders were unavailable for comment via radio, and all attempts to raise them recently have failed.

Tabloid article

Just the Facts

FROM BUGS TO A BIG BOLT FROM THE SKY!

"Government big wigs plan secret escape from Armageddon."

65 million years ago, an asteroid smashed into what is now the Yucatan peninsula and brought an end to the reign of the dinosaurs. Rumors that a new and deadly biological warfare agent has been released in the Congo could herald a new apocalypse.

Freak snowstorms in south Texas portend a coming Ice Age, while at the same time, flowery meadows near the Arctic Circle warn of global warming! Top officials in Washington seem worried that any of these disasters could spread to or adversely affect our homeland, and there is evidence that they are taking steps to protect themselves and the cream of corporate America should such a catastrophe occur again.

The disaster in Zaire appears to have finally spurred our leadership into action. From across the nation, reports and rumors have filtered into the *Just the Facts* office that some of the leading experts in the fields of biology, chemistry, and construction engineering, have been disappearing to a fate unknown. Speculations as to where they have gone have ranged from being abducted by the Greys for their insidious purposes, to some kind of secret conference, or possibly that they have been recruited into some secret government project.

One source in the State Department, who refused to be identified for fear of retribution, was quoted as saying "What people don't know, and what the government doesn't want them to know, is that they're putting together a top team to design and build a biodome of sorts, but on a grander scale than anything we've done before."

He further stated that these people have been brought together at great expense, to



design a shelter to protect the cream of American society from any potential major disasters that might befall the United States.

There has been no official comment from the U.S. government on the matter, and our attempts to inquire further have been blocked. Rest assured we at *Just the Facts* will continue in our crusade to get the truth to you, our loyal readers.

Foreword

Professor Martin Horstead wearily turned the key to the door lock of his LeBeuof. The cold autumn night did little to sharpen his senses, as he reflected back on a day of grading exams and fielding questions from students regarding their future in his class.

Teaching microbiology seemed a lot more romantic when he'd decided he'd go into pure research instead of taking that job at Eli Lilly. He could've been making six figures designing new drugs for new diseases, but instead, he had been relegated to the dry, dusty academic establishment.

A crisp wind threatened to free the pile of papers under his arm as he struggled to slide into the seat and finally drop the burden he'd hauled all the way from his office.

One moment later, he was safely on his way home to a much-deserved nap. Two moments later, he was subjected to a brilliant flash of light, and then the world fell dark.

Somewhere, in a small alien ship hovering near the scene, long, slender arms worked foreign controls to remove the occupant from the car and transfer him aboard. With cold precision, the strange, bug-eyed humanoid touched a computer screen next to a series of symbols. Another specimen had been logged. Their cargo hold was full. Time to make another delivery.

Dry, warm winds descended upon the dark sea of solar panels that hid most of the city of Phoenix. Amid this black ocean, stood several brilliantly lit spires of glass and steel, like miniature towers of Babel.

Near City Center stood one of the new giants in the race to be gods. The MedStar tower had just finished completion, and was open for business.

Looking out the penthouse window, a well-tanned white-haired bear of a man stood surveying the inky sky and ground that lay before him. His piercing steel blue eyes seemed to see into the very heart of the city, as if searching for something. Behind him, past a large mahogany desk, a small young man, adorned in a business suit, and carrying a personal data pad, appeared out of the shadows.

"It's time for your 8:30 meeting Mr. Gannon," he said, as he waited dutifully for a reply.

Gannon nodded imperceptibly, then replied, "Tell O'Leary to come in."

A tall, thin, balding man with pale, almost grayish skin, and wearing a black turtle neck sweater and trousers stepped in after the attendant. The attendant bowed out quietly and closed the door behind him.

Once he was certain they were alone, he turned slightly to O'Leary and stared right into him. "How are preparations going?"

"On schedule and undetected so far. We should be able to execute phase one in 22 hours, right on time for evening rush hour." O'Leary's tone was icy and precise.

Gannon nodded more vigorously this time. "Good, proceed as planned. Make sure the emails and phone calls to the CDC and FBI go out exactly on time. We don't want any screw ups."

O'Leary clasped his hands behind his back, the slight bulge of a black pistol pushing out from the shoulder holster on his left side. "Shouldn't be any problem, Mr. Gannon. It'll be over before it starts. Our only concern is containment, and our people can easily handle it until the Feds arrive." Almost as an afterthought, he mentioned "The inoculations for our people will be complete by 10 tomorrow morning. Even if this does get loose, it shouldn't affect us. We can control the information on this long enough that no one will be the wiser."

Gannon, with almost a hint of eagerness in his voice, said, "I want you to personally oversee this. Any screw ups, and I'll make sure your head rolls first." With that he turned back to the window, and resumed his search for, something.

O'Leary released a venomous "Yes sir,"

and headed out to his duties.

Unaware or uncaring of his subordinate's tone, Gannon continued his search for, something...

Synopsis

A rising new megacorp, MedStar, formerly an insurance giant that diversified into pharmaceuticals, has raised a brand new tower near the heart of Phoenix, right in the middle of the BloodCrips territory.

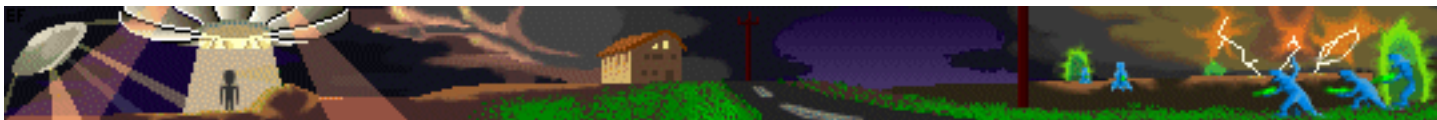
The initial "urban renewal" and construction were not without difficulties. The BloodCrips resisted and several bloody assaults were conducted against MedStar and Scorpion Security before the Tower's completion. MedStar did not forget.

MedStar is actually a minion-owned company, controlled primarily by the Humanoid ET's, that has specialized in hybridizing ET medical science with recovered viral strains from the Plaguelands. Several new and deadly strains of virus have been developed, but none so bizarre or lethal as the modified empathic virus known as Strain 14.

The virus provides debilitated victims who pump out negative emotions such as fear; emotions Darklings thrive on. Areas infected by this disease would act as "Darkling Night Lights", drawing in all manner of creatures. They would even serve as fertile anchor points for Dark Lords, or the whims of the Dark Ones themselves, and all at the expense of humanity.

It is to this end that MedStar, at the secret behest of their ET masters, offered this bioweapon to the government of Zaire to test on its more rebellious populace. It was described as a debilitating nerve agent, with hallucinatory side effects. MedStar warned, though, that the area should be quarantined, as the "agent" could spread very easily given a transport mechanism like people. Zaire, desperate to solve its rebel problems, jumped at the offer, and agreed to allow MedStar personnel to seed the area.

Once it was done, the infection rate was rapid, and within 96 hours, most of the population of the affected area had either died or killed each other. The few who were left crawled into the woods to die, mad and alone, or were shot when the MedStar clean



up crews came in and burned the whole section of jungle down.

The initial trials were successful enough the MedStar began phase two, domestic urban testing. The target chosen was the old thorn in their side, the BloodCrips. Their territory surrounded the MedStar tower, and it was felt that a small neighborhood close to the tower could be controlled and sealed enough to determine its viability in an urban environment. Sadly for the players, their residence(s) lies in that zone.

To cover up any potential problems with the government, MedStar already has a plan set in motion that absolves them of blame. The “attack” on the neighborhood will be blamed on a terrorist cell (particularly evil GM’s will pick the players) and MedStar hopes to score a big political relations victory by giving prior warning to the FBI and CDC that a terrorist attack will likely occur in Phoenix sometime on or about their target date.

Their tip-off will be described as a “disaffected” member of the group—a former employee of MedStar, who had planned on turning the others in, but who has since disappeared. MedStar will augment their containment resources with those of the federal government, following the Zaire model, and will set up “aid stations” and “crisis centers” around the 1 square mile perimeter to help control the virus’ development. The plan is, to let the virus burn itself out in the zone, then go in and collect data on its proficiency.

No plan is perfect, however. First, there are the PC’s to consider, and they’ll not likely roll over and die.

Then, there are Darklings not in on the plan. The outpouring of fear, paranoia, and violence will draw them like moths to a flame. They will endanger the quarantine, as well as provide additional havoc to an already chaotic scene.

Once these variables have played themselves out, the end results are as different as life and death. Either the players will recover the cure and save themselves, as well as those still trapped within the zone, or they’ll die trying. Even worse, Darklings could pop in and decide that this test needs a broader base, or that they just need food, which could

spread the virus through wanton or chaotic destruction of the quarantine.

It’s a happy little bug...

Strain 14 began its life as a host-jumping virus, capable of modifying its delivery systems to accommodate a wide variety of hosts. Its speed, longevity, and instant compatibility with humans are ET-provided traits. Its preferred habitat is the warm-blooded pulmonary system, where it multiplies and can be spread either as a blood-borne, or airborne virus, depending on which vector has proven most evolutionarily promising for that species. It takes about a week to adapt to a new host species in its native form, but ET modification has already set it as a strain capable of infecting humans immediately.

Infection of the bloodstream produces the quickest growth rate, and causes death faster. The disease manifests itself starting with flu-like symptoms, which begin less than an hour after introduction. A few hours later, a high fever, a raspy wet cough (the virus offspring being expelled) and hallucinations follow this.

The hallucinations are the virus empathically feeding off the host by stimulating the brain. The hallucinations are usually horrible and frightening, designed to illicit maximum response from the host, in the form of negative emotions, mostly fear, paranoia, and anger. These hallucinations produce more empathic energy than the virus can absorb. The excess is usually sucked up by other empathic vampire organisms that act as symbiotic organisms and benign hosts for these critters in their natural environment.

Strain 14 works only on sentient organisms. The most it can do in a non-sentient warm-blooded animal is to go dormant and occasionally send out spores to try and take root in a host with suitable brain mass.

To resist the virus, an Impossible: Constitution roll is necessary if it is bloodborne, and Formidable if airborne. Once the virus settles in the lungs, begins to feed by secreting a chemical that stimulates the sections of the brain that have to do with fear, paranoia, and image processing.

After the first few hours, the victim

must pass an Average: Willpower test to stave off the hallucinations. As the disease runs its course, every six hours after the first test, the check becomes more difficult. Difficult at six hours, Formidable at 12, Impossible at 18. After that, it remains at impossible, until the victim finally succumbs (an ET trait, long life).

The hallucinations are quite real and are manifestations of the virus stimulating the brain to produce the emotions it needs. In the case of empaths with certain powers, these may be activated accidentally. (Dimension walk, psychokinetics, etc.) Side effects from this are left to the GM’s discretion.

A variety of consequences befall the victims of this virus. A Difficult: Constitution check is required of people that fail the very first Average: Willpower roll. If they fail, they are so frightened by the intensity and reality of the illusions, they go into cardiac arrest. (This is to simulate the weakest being hit the hardest) It takes a Difficult: Medical roll to revive them. Victims who recover from the heart attack lose a point of Constitution permanently.

If this is survived, the hallucinations are still severe and terrifying. For those the disease does not kill outright and who have failed their willpower check, initiative is halved, and all skill rolls requiring mental concentration or exertion are one level more difficult.

Assuming the victim survives the maddening effects of the virus, the debilitating effects continue, along with a difficulty of breathing. By one week, labored breathing is standard. By two weeks, a Difficult: Constitution check is required, becoming one level more difficult every week to stay alive. At that point, the lungs fill so full of the virus and its liquid media that the victim suffocates. Draining the lungs and use of respirators stave off death, but the virus is persistent. Eventually, the host will die.

Hook

Simpler than most, there won’t need to be much urging the players to get involved, since they’re in it up to their necks at the very start. You will have to get their attention, though. A friend getting sick can



do this, or if one or more players has a medical background, they may be called in to the local clinic to consult on one of the first reported cases.

Half a dozen people are infected in the initial round, sticking their fingers on sharp pins in phone booth coin slots. Five will either find their way to hospitals or be brought to them before the first 24 hours. Players should be brought in not long after the first delusions start.

Players being among the first victims should be avoided, as the first victims are meant to die rather quickly and horribly, to show everyone what's in store. Remember, transferred as a blood disease, this virus is much more fatal.

The last method of bringing them on board is having them hired or asked by the BloodCrips to find an alleged victim who hasn't showed up in the clinic after 24 hours. Alternatively, one of the PC's knows him and is supposed to meet him for some reason, when he fails to show. He will be a well-known local who keeps to himself mostly and lives in one of the tenements near the edge of the neighborhood. The players will find a not so pleasant surprise upon arriving to investigate.

These should be sufficient to involve the group, but if they are too apathetic for even this, let them wait 'til the local Darklings come around to have a little fun.

If that doesn't win them over, they're dead already.

The Investigation

The first thing the PC's might want to do is investigate what has happened. One way or another, they'll have their reasons.

If they have a friend who is infected, or they get called in to the clinic to have a look at the victims, they can witness the progress of the virus. It will take a Difficult: Medical roll to diagnose some of its general physical characteristics (where it sits in the body, how it is transmitted, etc.), but it will be next to impossible to medically discern the virus' true nature.

Only empaths with Darkling Empathy will sense the virus' empathic properties on an Average roll. This won't necessarily tell

them what it does, exactly. It will tell the PC's that this is an empathic virus, and that it's likely not a natural manifestation, but something that was introduced.

PC's can glean from the doctors that one patient, Terry Eichenauer, was lucid enough when he came in to tell them he was stuck in the finger with a needle while trying to retrieve his change from a phone. He was worried he might catch something from it, so he went in to the clinic. It was while he was being tested that his flu symptoms changed over to the disease production stage. The doctor decided to keep him for observation and thus has a full record of the disease's progression over the last 24 hours.

If these options aren't played out, there is always the tenement building where Willard Tuttle lives. Tenements in Phoenix, like in most major U.S. cities, are large concrete, brick, and steel structures that act as fortresses for communities in present day America. Each tenement building has steel outer doors, and the lowest windows bigger than a porthole that haven't been boarded up or bricked over start at the third floor. The Phoenix tenement buildings range in size from 6 to 8 stories, to keep below Frozen Shade.

Willard stuck his finger on a needle in a coin slot and went home cursing the vandals that would pull that kind of a prank. He was an old man, and couldn't understand why anyone would do something like that. He went home to his tenement, ate dinner with one of the other families in the building, then went to bed. He died in a screaming fit seeing a nightmare beyond anything he'd experienced in his long life.

The children who had eaten dinner with him spread the virus among other children and the overseeing adults as they played out in the playground. The air circulation, being as poor as it was in the tenement, finished spreading it to the few uninfected souls.

Building of Death

By the time anyone investigates, everyone in the building is dead. Some have died in their beds. Some are huddled in closets or have tried to hide behind furniture. Many have wounds inflicted by a small group of

individuals that turned homicidal and went on a killing spree, armed mostly with kitchen utensils. These individuals quickly turned on each other, and soon, the whole building was a tomb. This serves to allow the PC's to see what is in their future, if they don't find a cure.

After returning from the tenement, which they should visit at some time, the doctors at the clinic, headed by Dr. Jenna Sandoval, will inform them they have contacted the CDC and MedStar in the hopes of getting some help.

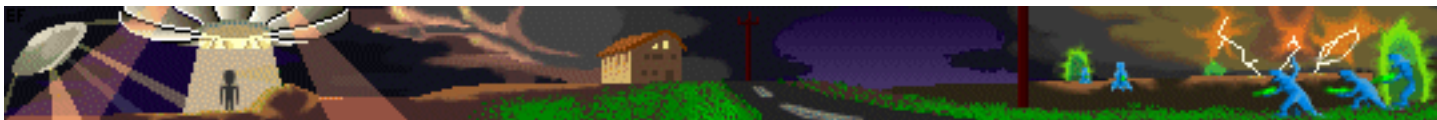
By this point, if the PC's have not determined it, Sandoval will have determined that the virus has gone airborne. They have guessed contagion rate, and the CDC has agreed, is very high, but fairly localized. The virus likely doesn't survive out of a body long, but it survives long enough to be spread in close contact, like the clinic.

Blockade

Right after this, word will arrive at the clinic that Scorpion Security vehicles can be seen taking up positions and blocking the roads and sewer tunnels that still lead into the neighborhood. (They are forming a 1 square mile perimeter around the initial infected zone.) Frozen Shade completely opens every panel in the square mile area, and helicopters descend with Scorpion and MedStar logos and rather obvious door gunners. These gunners seem to be operating large flame-throwers.

There are six total burn units, plus two gunships to suppress any ground fire. The flame units' job is to remove the hanging communities from Frozen Shade so that none of them, all potential infectees, try to escape through the panels. They issue a verbal warning, and after five minutes, descend and start burning the web houses attached to the framework of Frozen Shade. Not everyone will vacate the area, and many will be burned alive.

Anyone resisting will have to face up against two RAH Comanches. For reference, 3 hours after Scorpion initiates the road and sewer blockade, MedStar's security forces join them. 6 hours after that, a strong National Guard contingent and a 6-



man team from the CDC join them.

Two squad cars and four men followed quickly by two riot vehicles and two 8-man squads will initially block each of the streets. These are all Scorpion vehicles. The MedStar forces add 2 vans to each blockade and 10 security officers. The National Guard contingent will include heavy armor and mechanized infantry. Scorpion will begin the process of building barricades and stringing barbed wire.

MedStar will set up a “crisis center” at the end closest to the clinic, and “aid stations” at three other locales around the perimeter. Medical and communications personnel who will give the appearance of trying to track the disease’s progress and solve the crisis will man these. They’re covering for their real activity of monitoring its spread and making sure it stays contained. The crisis center will establish contact with the clinic and start a dialogue. This is their main attempt to chronicle and track the disease’s progress, but of course they will act as if they are sincerely trying to find a cure. They’ll ask for disease cultures and biopsies from sick individuals. They might even ask for some of the corpses that are bound to begin to accumulate.

Starting with the blockade, panic will begin. Some people will stay in their homes. Some will wander the streets. Some will try to flee. (These people will mostly be killed by the blockade troops, but some will be turned back.) And some will head for the clinic, hoping to find a cure for their affliction. This will be confused by the debilitating effects of the virus, which will slow people down, and the hallucinatory effects of the virus, which will cause mass chaos and confusion.

There will be 3000 to 4000 people trapped in the zone, all with their own problems and perceived solutions. Their purpose in this scenario is to get in the players’ way, certainly. But they are also here to give the PC’s a reason to push on, and eventually come back, beyond the simple goal of self-preservation.

As the story unfolds around them, the focus is shifting to the PC’s to do something, rather than wait to die. There is a possibility

that they have discovered that MedStar is the culprit, just by logical deduction. Some players will need some kind of evidence to make a solid enough connection to decide on a course of action.

The Burned Out Van

If they need the proverbial clubbing over the head, the evidence will come in the form of burned out MedStar van some kids found in an alley about the time the blockade started. They decided not to touch it and to alert the BloodCrips, who, in turn, have alerted the clinic and the PC’s.

MedStar, if questioned about it, will claim the van was stolen and used by the terrorist group that apparently initially spread the disease. (One of MedStar’s ex-employees was supposedly a member, after all.)

Exploring the van, the PC’s on an Average: Observation roll will uncover traces of a pink sludge on the ground. Later examination of the pink sludge will require a medical or biology lab, like at the clinic.

The sludge, with an Average: Medical roll will show several organic compounds found in the human body. A Difficult: Medical task will offer that these could be partially digested human remains. What was digesting them, though, will be a mystery.

Searching the inside of the vehicle will provide few useful clues. Most of what was in the van was badly burned. There is broken glass, melted plastic, and burnt paper, but a Difficult: Observation roll will turn up an intact, stoppered tube with some liquid residue still inside, encased in some of the melted plastic. Analysis back at the clinic will confirm this is the virus in the state that was seen in the first patients.

This, in and of itself, is not enough to crucify MedStar, but it does cast lingering doubt on their good intentions. If a Formidable: Observation roll was made, allow the PC’s a more damning clue, like a tainted syringe needle among the refuse or an inoculation reminder for the driver in the overhead visor. You don’t have to come out and say “Yes, here’s a document detailing the development and dispersal to date of Strain 14”, but give them enough, if they’re inquisi-

tive or lucky enough, to connect things to MedStar.

For GM reference, the placement crew (the team that was installing the needles) fell afoul of some Plaguelings, ironically enough. They were dissolved, eaten, and their clothes stolen. The Plaguelings burned the van to cover the crime. These critters will figure into the later attempt by the players to cross the barricades.

Finding the Culprit

Discussion with the BloodCrips and/or the Clinic staff will offer up the general conclusion that MedStar is behind this affair, or at least knows more than they’re telling.

MedStar, if questioned by radio/phone/what have you will deny this vehemently, and will pass this off as the beginnings of hallucinations and delusions among the victims. Given who the victims are (gang members, proles, charity docs, PC’s), all outside parties will side with MedStar on this. It’s thought, the best chance to find a cure likely lies with MedStar.

The easiest way to find out would be to break into their tower and look for their medical testing labs. Find those, it is reasoned, and one might find the virus.

Military and/or Medical characters, perhaps even parapsychists may have heard rumors, as well, that MedStar came into possession of some virophage samples by unknown means in the recent past. If these rumors are even to be believed, and even if MedStar isn’t completely guilty, it is thought, perhaps they have something that can be synthesized and produced as a cure. If they are guilty, Dr. Sandoval and the BloodCrips both agree any evidence found should be brought back so that the CDC and military can be shown MedStar’s culpability in this outbreak.

Luckily for the PC’s, the BloodCrips know some ways in at the base of the tower, given their earlier conflicts with MedStar. They’ll provide the PC’s with a garbage dock that they know the passcode to and frequently use to raid for mundane and medical supplies.

The problem lies in breaking out of the



quarantine zone. The BloodCrips can be persuaded, with a little eloquence and common sense from the PC's, to produce a diversion. They're stubborn and untrusting, but they realize the dangerous situation they are in. It's possible for them to stage a riot near one of the "crisis centers", using a mix of their people and neighborhood people.

They'll make enough of a disturbance that most of the quarantine force's attention will be on them. The important thing will be to make sure they withdraw just before the quarantine troops decide to disperse them by force. This should give the characters a window of a few minutes to break through one of the smaller checkpoints before the full weight of the quarantine can be brought to seal the breach.

The diversion goes as planned, and the PC's have a chance at one of the less protected spots on the perimeter. It's a small alleyway checkpoint consisting of two HMMWV's, one VW Kartofflen, and a 12-man detachment of Scorpion Security. They are outfitted with M16A2's, 2 concussion and 2 HC smoke grenades each, and appropriate biohazard suits.

The poor souls that made up that detachment though are recently deceased. The Plaguelings caught inside the quarantine zone have already broken this part of the quarantine and are using it to collect some more food (they appear to be immune to the infection) before they have to leave the area.

They appear as normal soldiers and actually allow the PC's to approach if they do so without malice. They then will descend on the PC's in a flourish of murder. If the PC's are an untrusting sort (and if they've been playing Dark Conspiracy long, they are) or if they just decide for the full frontal assault, none of that will matter. The Plaguelings will try to defend themselves with the stolen weapons, but will splatter

like the amoebic life forms they are when hit with weapons fire. The Plaguelings will fight to the death.

Assuming the PC's manage to survive this encounter, the Quarantine Command Center will not realize its lost contact with that checkpoint for several minutes. There will be no more immediate trouble for the

to seal Eclipse off from the outside world.

Dreamland

From the broken checkpoint, it's only a couple of miles to MedStar's dreamland. This can be as eventful or uneventful as the GM wants, since it doesn't really have much bearing on the adventure.

Once they arrive, they'll have to approach the south side of the building.

There is a small access road from the main road that leads to a series of truck docks. These docks are used by MedStar's sanitation service. The area is temporarily locked down for the duration of the crisis.

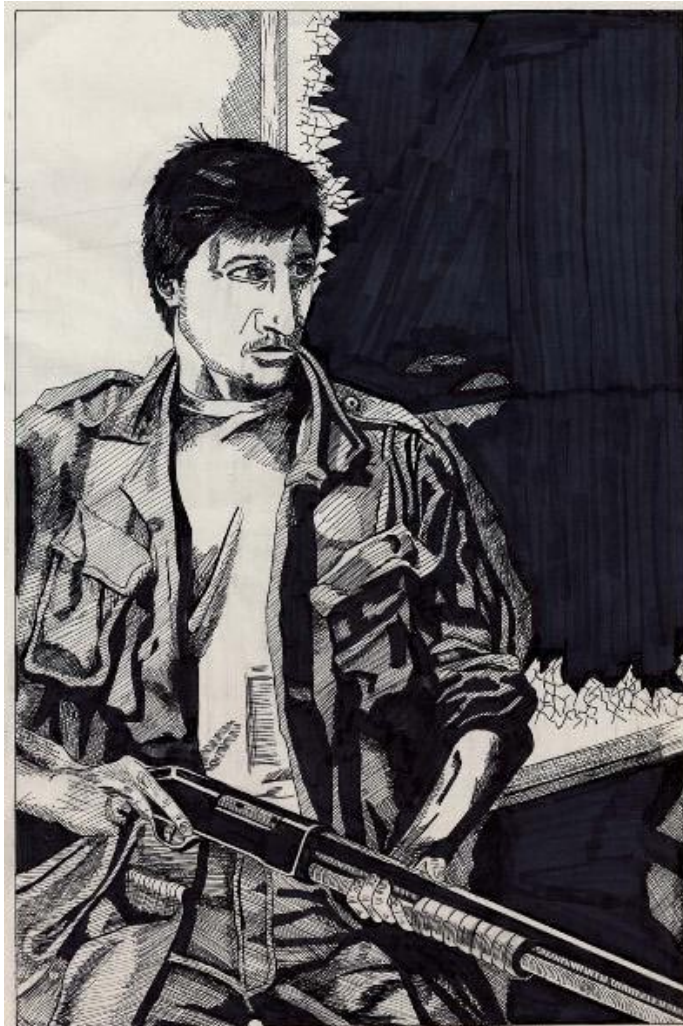
Dock 8's personnel access door stands a few feet off the ground (wheeled staircases are normally used) and has a keypad access. There are two video cameras that sweep the docks and are monitored by the central security office on level five and the truck dock security office.

Once the PC's deal with the cameras, and armed with the code, they can access a rather smelly, nasty series of dock storage areas filled with trash (it's starting to pile up).

At the security office on the dock, the two guards are bored senseless. Use the normal security guard templates, but due to their boredom, they are a task level worse at noticing any goings on.

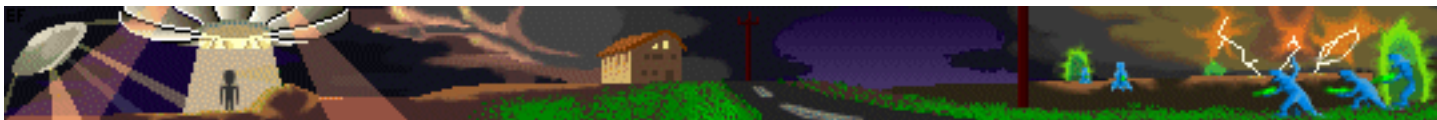
There is a computer workstation in the guard office that can be used (Difficult: Computer Operation) to access a floor plan of the building and find the probable location of the testing labs that might contain the virus. Failure means that the security is proving too difficult to crack. Catastrophic failure means the central security office has been alerted to an attempt to hack into the system. The labs are on level 20.

Players being what they are, they will likely develop other methods of entry and



PC's, but the CDC and MedStar will recommend the city be sealed, since there will exist the strong possibility that whoever killed the guards at the checkpoints has fled into the city.

The upper highways in Phoenix have already been shut down, but all major roads out of the city will fall under a blockade until the crisis is resolved. The National Guard will mobilize at a greater rate and take pains



finding the labs.

The basics of the building are that there are about 100 roving security officers in total, with 20 in fixed positions (like the dock entrances, front lobby, central office, etc.) and 10 supervisors. They patrol in twos, checking each level every hour (the building is 115 stories tall) by 50's (Levels 1-50 one hour, 51-100 the next, then an hour break while 15 rotating groups check the last 15). There are cameras spread conservatively over the various levels in well-traveled areas and monitored in the central office. Use GM discretion on placement to provide a challenge to the team.

Finding the proper testing lab will also require a computer hack (Difficult: Computer once the initial security is breached). A standard keypad lock, which can be defeated by an electronic lockpicking kit and a Difficult: Electronics roll, guards the lab.

The PC's can then search the lab (Difficult: Medical) and its computers (Difficult: Computer Operation - the necessary info is on the computer's hard drive) to recover the notes and samples of the virus as well as the virophage antidote. Sufficient samples to cure the populace of the quarantine area are not present, but among the notes is MedStar's method of mass-producing the virophage (from when they inoculated their own employees), which, given some raw materials available in this lab, can be used to mass produce it.

Surprise!

As the PC's are loading up on notes and the boxes of medical supplies they will need, Mr. O'Leary, the head of special operations for MedStar and a small contingent of 6 security officers show up. O'Leary had set up a small monitoring device (spybot) in the labs for just such an emergency, and was alerted to the intrusion just in time to make this assault.

The secret to O'Leary is that he is the Humanoid ET that helps run the corporation, acting as the control for the unwitting, but equally despicable Samuel Gannon, the CEO of MedStar. O'Leary has been secretly manipulating the development and testing of Strain 14 for months for his dark mas-

ters, and is determined to not let anyone stand in the way of its success.

To this extent, he will be armed with a death ray. If his own security happens to get in the way of his fire, well, they're only human. He will fight only until he feels his life is in danger and his side has lost. Then he will retreat to his office to await retrieval by a UFO.

The craft will show up near his window and spirit him out of his office, hopefully to plague the players again another day. Should the players get lucky and kill him, well, there are always more ET's. Combat will alert the security of the rest of the building.

If they survive their encounter with O'Leary and his guards, they will have to find a way to avoid the building security, and escape back to the quarantine zone. This again, is where the PC's can get creative.

There is Mr. Gannon's personal Peregrine on the roof, which a computer search might turn up. There are fresh, but possibly damaged guard uniforms, if PC's defeated any of them. Give them a tough time, but don't make it impossible. They can't think this is easy, but they aren't going to just walk out of the building either. Well, very experienced players might find a way to do just that.

Capture really isn't an option, except in cases of gross stupidity. It would only result in the group being quarantined, and quietly done away with. Getting out of that would be a next to impossible situation that GM's can deal with if it comes to pass. To reiterate, it shouldn't, though.

Getting Out Again

Escaping back to the quarantine zone shouldn't be too difficult. Again, throw in roving patrols, Darklings drawn by the strong outbreak of emotional distress, or whatever other problems you think might make the short drive back interesting.

The important thing to consider in all of this, is that the PC's are all infected. Anyone they come into contact with, outside the Dreamland, will also become infected. They should take care and consider this potential problem before just stopping off at the local

convenient store for a soda.

They will also be suffering the effects of the disease after their first exposure, be that at the clinic, or the tenement, or wherever. Don't hesitate to use that, their empathic powers, and their own imaginations against them. "Is that really a pair of Ravagers preparing to tear Clyde apart, or am I imagining things? Were those really Plaguelings at the roadblock, or did we kill a bunch of innocent security forces? Why did my pyrokinesis kick on and immolate that trashcan? Why did a portal open up in front of us, even though I didn't try to open one?" This virus is the ultimate expression of the Dark Conspiracy. Nothing is as it seems, any longer. The PC's can't even trust their own minds.

Breaking back into the zone may not be as easy as getting out. Security has been tightened and the soldiers present are on a much higher state of alert. The bright spot in this is that the troops are trying to keep people in, and are only half-watching keeping people out. They don't expect anyone to actually want to break IN to the zone. See what the PC's can do.

Back In The Zone

Assuming they've survived this far and returned to the zone, they find the situation has deteriorated extensively. All five of the initial exposures died very early on.

There have been deaths here and there in the rest of the zone. Heart attacks, murders, and suicides have been the chief reason. The virus, itself, hasn't killed anyone yet. Most people are operating at very reduced levels, and everyone is not quite himself or herself.

Getting the surviving clinic personnel to synthesize the virophage will take the PC's actively getting involved in its production. Everyone will have to pitch in to see that it is done, and effort and supplies are not wasted in delusional fantasies or fits of fear or rage. Dr. Sandoval will then ask the surviving BloodCrips to pass the word to come to the clinic and get the antidote. Again, the PC's will be needed to help keep order. A riot is a very real possibility if order isn't strictly maintained.



Most will agree, given MedStar's part in all this that they should not be made aware of the cure until after it has been administered. The virophage works as the standard serum in the GM's book, and all infected persons will revert to normal in short order, with minor coughing fits for a few days, as they cough the liquid out of their lungs the virus was living in.

The Big Finish

The last thing to remain is for the PC's to expose MedStar's part in all this to the CDC and any other government bodies present, such as the FBI. Simply contacting the CDC over satellite or internet lines and uploading the captured data will do the trick.

However they alert the government, the MedStar forces on hand won't take it well, and will immediately begin fighting the National Guard at the perimeter of the zone. They will also try, using the still unwitting Scorpion Security, to hose down the zone with napalm from the Commanches and burn all evidence of this plot. The hope will be that the notes can be shown to be fakes if the people and original materials recovered can be destroyed.

This is the PC's shining moment. Along with the BloodCrips, they need to take out the MedStar control center on the perimeter, rescue as many CDC people as they can, and help defeat their security forces. The Commanches will be driven off or de-

stroyed by the BloodCrips, who bring out the Stingers.

This is a lot for a group of PC's to survive, and is designed to be an epic finish to their stay in the Phoenix area. Making enemies with the primary security force, Scorpion, and a discredited megacorp, MedStar, as well as the Humanoid ET's of whatever Dark Lord set this up, will make living in the Phoenix area very hazardous to the PC's health. A relocation might be in order. The publicity alone might get them new contacts, patrons, or enemies eager to make their acquaintance.

The results are left for the GM's to tailor their individual campaigns. They will have the eternal gratitude of the BloodCrips, and the survivors of the neighborhood they fought for, though. This, and the knowledge that they foiled a major Darkling plot, should help with the incentive to continue the fight.

As an aside, and as part of the Foreword regarding good old Doctor Horstead, at the GM's discretion, while rifling through the testing lab's computer, or if they chase O'Leary to his office and search it, they could find evidence of a mass kidnapping of scientists and construction specialists. The kidnapers aren't readily apparent, but may be guessed at if the PC's saw the UFO spirit O'Leary away.

Again, this can be a connected plot piece, completely unrelated, a red herring, or maybe ignored altogether.

Notes on the Virus

Some things that came up during playtesting and when I actually ran the game were the virus' effects on PC's. Sure, a few horrific moments may work well in adding to the flavor of the game, but what fun is a character who is completely out of his mind to the average player? Some may find it stimulating and a challenge, but others will be bored watching their character get frightened into catatonia.

I worked around that problem with Empathic Healing. I set it up so that Empathic Healing, although not a panacea, could alter the virus' effects, producing only benign, but comical hallucinations. This allowed the players who had failed their Willpower rolls to still have fun in the game, after I'd given them a good scare or two. I'm sure creative GM's can come up with other alternatives.

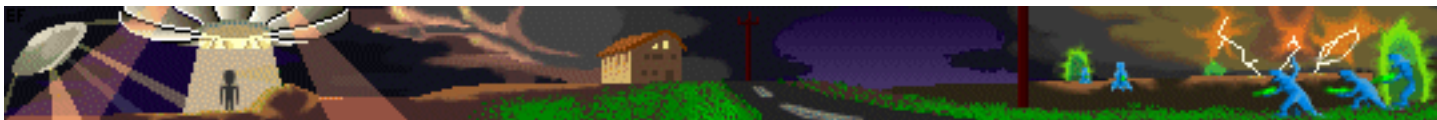
There was also a matter of implementing the virus and its effects. I found it best that the players should start to feel the first, physical symptoms at the clinic. I had them rolling their second Willpower checks while they were in the tower. It's easy to lose track of these, though, and I did once. As a piece of advice to other GM's, keep careful track of the disease's progress. It doesn't have to go on six-hour intervals. It can go faster or slower to suit how the adventure is running for your campaign.

"With the massive overcrowding in modern cities, it's easy to see how Dark Minion activity goes unnoticed.

"When you have this many people crammed into an area this small, they're bound to do things that no decent human being would do.

"Sometimes all the minions have to do is encourage that, which is why they are so hard to find."

- Zena Marley
(Early 21st-century mercenary philosopher)



Sins of the Fallen

Mike Marchi presents a Gencon adventure complete with characters, set in Sin City.

“A Sin City Adventure. The soft beat of wings, the snick of a blade through chill night air, a sickening thud. An investigation into a series of murders draws the players into a centuries-old conflict.”

Introduction

This adventure has been a long time forming. It started as a crossover between *Dark Conspiracy* and *In Nomine*, but in the end, bore little resemblance to that other system, save the names and some of the terminology used for the supporting antagonists. The background became unique, as did the specific adaptation of the concepts of Demons and Angels to *Dark Conspiracy*.

A straight adaptation of the material would have been impractical. The vast numbers of heavenly host in *In Nomine* wouldn't have translated well to the concept of *Dark Conspiracy* – there are too many of them, and their presence too widespread. I needed to have their involvement be a more limited event. Besides which, the concept that Angels were inherently good, and Demons inherently evil bothered me. It wasn't going to be much fun if the Players looked at the Angels and said, “Ah...those are the good guys. We should side with them,” or the other side of the coin: “Demon! Bad guy! I draw my shotgun...” The motives of these

two new groups should be indeterminate.

Oh sure, the players would probably assume the Angels are on their side for a while. There is nothing wrong with that. But it should become clear after a while that the lines aren't so clear cut.

To be honest, I owe a debt of gratitude to *Babylon 5* for giving me the answer to the dilemma. The *Shadow War* story arc was an inspiration. Vorlons vs. Shadows - presumably good vs. evil, but as it turned out a completely different set of divergent motivations drove these groups: Order vs. Chaos.

Seraphim and Succubae: Angel vs. Demon

The Seraphim and the Succubae are natural enemies. They hate each other with a passion that can only come from familiarity.

Long ago, they were actually the same race, beautiful winged creatures, existing together in harmony in a beautiful land. The Sun and Moon danced across the starless sky, always opposite each other, bringing with them the cycles of day and night. With the Sun came the daylight, and a warm golden light shone down on the world. With the moon came darkness, bathing the world in a dim, silvery light – or so it was recorded in the ancient texts of the Celestials.

Nobody is quite sure what happened to alter their world. It was as if powerful forces pulled at the land, dragging it in two directions at once. The forces were so strong, and held on with such tenacity that the world of the Celestials was literally ripped in two. The result was a pair of dimensions, joined together in the multiverse by a thin tendril of connecting dimensional fabric. The survivors of the catastrophe were now separated into two groups, as yet unaware that the tenuous connection remained. Time passed, and the two groups, separated

geographically, began to diverge mentally and physically as well.

One half of the splintered land became known as Elysium, and became a shining beacon of light, due to the fact that this half of the land contained the Sun. From the moment of the split, Elysium was bathed in constant golden light. Never again, did the Moon reappear with its silvery darkness. The Celestials who remained there adopted a new name: Seraphim – which means children of the light. Their interpretation of their world was formed as a result of the catastrophe that had torn their world in two. They felt the event could have been avoided if only they had been more vigilant, and worked harder to understand the laws that controlled the motion of their world. From that point forward, the Seraphim, as a people sought to exert control over all aspects of their lives and environment. They embraced Order.

The other half of the splintered land was known as Arcadia. The catastrophe plunged their half of the world into permanent night. The Sun never returned to this land, instead the silvery glow of the Moon became the only source of natural light. The Celestials of Arcadia, adopted the name, Succubae – children of shadow. Their view of the world was also colored by the catastrophic event that had shaped their world. They saw the event as a random act of chaos, and saw it as an inevitable force that could not be denied. The Succubae, therefore embraced Chaos.

After thousands of years, the discovery was made that Elysium and Arcadia were in fact still attached to one another, and contact between the now-divergent cultures was renewed. The Seraphim and the Succubae soon realized that they no longer shared a common ideology. To make matters worse, thousands of years of constant sunlight had altered the Seraphim every bit as much as thousands of years of darkness had reshaped



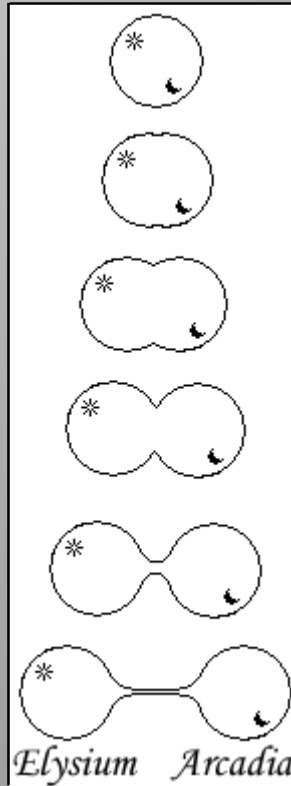
A Note On Dimensional Physics

Dimensions in *Dark Conspiracy* are described as bubbles of reality floating through an empty place called the Interstices. All of these bubbles collectively form the multiverse. The dimension in which Earth resides is just one of countless bubbles adrift in an endless sea of night.

When two or more of these bubbles move into close proximity with each other, they deform and press together (like two soap bubbles colliding in the air). Sometimes the bubbles will cling to one another, separate but connected. When such couplings occur, it is possible for travel between the dimensions to happen with very little expenditure of effort. It is one of the few times that people without the Dimension Walk skill can actually pass through a dimensional barrier unaided. In fact, this sometimes occurs without the person even realizing it.

The opposite can also be true. A single dimension, seemingly stable and complete in its own right can begin to become deformed or misshapen – whether that be through outside forces or direct intervention. To continue with the soap bubble illustration, imagine the motion of an extremely large soap bubble. A small bubble is a perfect sphere, but a large bubble is often oblong and undulates through the air currents much more radically than its smaller brethren.

In terms of the dimensional physics of *Dark Conspiracy*, the bubble of reality that the Celestials call home was stretched until the center collapsed, producing a pair of bubbles connected by a long, thin corridor that refused to give way. The resultant pair resembled a giant barbell, spinning through the multiverse.



the Succubae. The Seraphim's wings had developed a thick coating of light-reflecting white feathers. By spreading their thick wings, the Seraphim could produce an artificial shade around themselves. The Succubae wings had changed as well, becoming thinner and covered in a translucent membrane which did little to block out the already dim moonlight.

Aware of their common heritage and

sickened by their separate fates, the two races immediately declared war on each other. For millennia, the two sides would meet in the eternal twilight of the connecting corridor between Arcadia and Elysium, and there waged the ultimate battle.

Bear in mind that until this time, the Seraphim and Succubae had not had contact with Earth or humanity. They remained ignorant of other dimensions or realms. Their

only motivation became the annihilation of the other side. The twin lands of Elysium and Arcadia, linked together by that narrow corridor, spun through the multiverse like a giant barbell – waiting for the day when something would happen to change the balance of power and allow one side or the other to achieve ultimate victory.

The Fallen

Quite suddenly and unexpectedly, the tunnel between Arcadia and Elysium passed through Earth's dimension. For a moment, the entire battlefield translated into our plane of existence, and the combatants, suddenly free of the limitations of the dimensional corridor ranged far and wide. Before they realized it, the corridor snapped, destroying the link between the two realms. Arcadia and Elysium were separated from our dimension, and presumably each other forever, stranding the two sets of warriors on Earth.

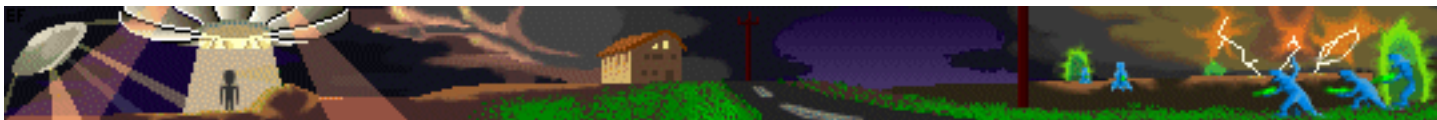
The Seraphim and Succubae who found themselves trapped in our dimension have adopted a new name to describe their collective fate: The Fallen. These Celestials have not fallen in the classic Biblical sense, so much as the geographic! They have fallen to earth, and remain here, unable to return and incapable of giving up their fight.

It did not take long for humans to become aware of the fallen Celestials. The Seraphim made first contact to try to get the natives of the world to join their fight against the Succubae.

The Seraphim were perceived as Angels, and indeed became the source for most stories of these beautiful creatures. The Succubae on the other hand, became branded as Demons - evil creatures with dark purpose and destruction of all life as their ultimate goal (although to be perfectly fair, their actual motivations are nothing of the sort).

For three-thousand years, they have lived among humans. In the more enlightened times of recent human history, they have learned to remain discreet in their dealings. They have also sought to avoid direct combat, preferring instead to manipulate humans into fighting the battle for them.

Remember that the Seraphim are not



‘Dark Lords’ in the normal DC sense. They seek to impose order on their world, for a world that is orderly, is one where random happenstance is kept to a minimum. The Seraphim seek to experience (and impose) calm, peaceful emotions. For a creature that is at peace is less likely to act rashly. The Succubus on the other hand, craves dissonance and disorder. The Succubus seeks volatile emotions such as anger, jealousy, greed and lust. Someone who is driven by these volatile desires is unpredictable – chaotic.

The Fallen are scattered across the globe. There are two Fallen officially located in Sin City right now: Michael and Lilith. It should be pointed out that while these creatures are winged, they do not always appear to be so. They are extremely adept at using their “Project Human Form” empathic skill. This ability allows them to ‘hide’ the wings from all human observers. They are so adept at this skill, that it is an Easy Task for them to alter their appearance, unless they are engaged in combat (in which case it jumps to a Difficult Task).

Servants of Michael

The servants of Michael seek to undo the work of the Succubus. Michael is the epitome of the Seraphim. He seeks to impose order on the world around him – specifically by destroying the Succubae, and with them, their love of chaos. Michael is far from good. He will just as soon sacrifice a single person, or a room full of them in the name of his cause. Michael has an army of ninja warriors at his command, trained in battle by the ultimate Seraphim warrior. Eden Shroudslip is one of them (see Pre-Generated characters below)...

Servants of Lilith

Are you beautiful? Do you want to be? Will you serve me? Lilith is a temptress. A seductress. Her servants are given the beauty they crave in return for nine favors, which they are compelled to fulfill. The Lilim (as these servants are called), will gain the physical attributes of their Succubus mistress.

Regardless of what they were before,

The Fallen Races

Seraphim (Archangels)

Blandine	- Dreams
David	- Stone
Dominic	- Judgement
Eli	- Creation
Gabriel	- Fire
Janus	- Wind
Jean	- Lightning
Jordi	- Animals
Laurence	- Sword
Marc	- Trade
Michael	- War
Novalis	- Flowers
Yves	- Destiny

STR	14
CON	9
AGL	12
INT	7
EDU	3
CHR	10
EMP	3
INIT	6
Move	2/10/15/30 (*60)
Skill/Dam	6/2d6
Hits	40/80

Skills: Melee (unarmed) 4, Melee (armed) 8, Stealth 3, Acrobatics 4, Human Empathy 3, Project Thought 2, Project Human Form 4 (other skills can be assigned as the referee sees fit)

Succubae (Demons)

Andrealphus	- Lust
Asmodeaus	- Game
Baal	- War
Beleth	- Nightmares
Belial	- Fire
Haagenti	- Gluttony
Kobal	- Dark Humor
Lilith	- Freedom
Malphas	- Factions
Nybbsas	- Media
Kronos	- Fate
Saminga	- Death
Valefor	- Theft
Vapula	- Technology

STR	9
CON	6
AGL	7
INT	7
EDU	3
CHR	14
EMP	2
INIT	3
Move	2/10/15/30 (*45)
Skill/Dam	6/2d6
Hits	25/50

Skills: Melee (unarmed) 8, Melee (armed) 2, Stealth 3, Acrobatics 4, Human Empathy 4, Project Thought 3, Project Human Form 4 (other skills can be assigned as the referee sees fit)

Strength, Constitution and Agility are modified to 9, 6, and 7 respectively. There is also a +1 given to Initiative. But Charisma is the attribute that receives the greatest modification. The Lilim gain a Charisma of 12 (not quite the 14 of Lilith herself – she is too vain to allow that). The change takes time, and Lilith keeps the numbers of acolytes down to around six at a time. These girls get to know each other very well as the

change takes place, living together and learning to use and control their new attributes.

Michael has his army of ninja warriors. Lilith has her sororities. Lilith seeks to defeat the Seraphim through subterfuge. Defeat a Seraphim and weaken order. Amanda Edwards is another of Lilith’s creations (see Pre-Generated characters below)...



Abomination

Lilith sought to subvert a Seraphim. One of her Lilim, Daphne achieved that goal. She was charged with seducing a Seraphim and did so quite effectively: Novalis - Angel of Flowers.

Daphne was born human, as all Lilim are. Ugly, overweight, lacking social grace, she pledged her loyalty to Lilith. In return, she was transformed into a seductress of such overwhelming beauty and grace that none could refuse her. She seduced Novalis and the two disappeared for a time. What Lilith did not count on, was the fact that Daphne was unable to separate the job from her feelings.

Novalis and Daphne fell in love and tried to escape together. They succeeded for a time. When they were found, it was discovered that Daphne had become pregnant.

The two races who had been at each others throats for so long were at least able to reach agreement on something. The concept that two of their kind should conjoin in this way was offensive to them. The Seraphim are powerful beings who are constrained by their philosophy of Order. The Succubae are powerful as well, and constrained by the need to create chaos. A child that combined the abilities of both, may well have the strengths of both parents, yet none of the restrictions.

The child was condemned to death before it was even born, for neither side dared imagine what a creature born of pure Chaos and Order would be capable of. Seraphim and Succubae joined forces for the first time in centuries to hunt down the two doomed lovers.

Involving the Players

There are four main characters that absolutely have to be involved in this story. Eden Shroudslip (servant of Michael), Amanda Edwards (servant of Lilith), Spike (orphaned street urchin), and Dr. Enise Westfield (a medical doctor).

The adventure has been designed to present the players with a difficult decision at the end. The character of Eden will represent the Seraphim viewpoint, Amanda will

represent the Succubus viewpoint. Spike is essentially a neutral advocate who would have no predisposition to either side, but rather would represent the rights of the child. The Doctor is present as an advocate of life in general. Fader represents human law, more or less to keep the players from straying too far afield from normal behavior. Evan serves as counterpoint to Fader – more or less an ‘ends justify the means’ mentality.

When the adventure begins, all of the characters are together except Amanda and Eden...

Oratello's

The adventure begins with the characters located in Oratello's Pizzeria. Located deep in The Square, the old section of town, Oratello's is a family-owned and operated business, and has been for over thirty years. The pizzeria occupies the ground floor of a four-story building. The upper three levels are apartments, rented out by Joe and Marta Oratello.

Joe Oratello is friendly enough, although as an immigrant, speaks only broken English. He is the head chef at the restaurant, and spends most of his time in the kitchen, appearing only to help out up front if things get really busy. His wife, Marta is a matronly woman, who treats her customers like members of her family, worrying over them like a mother hen.

It is this personal attention that is the charm of Oratello's, and the secret of its long-term success despite the recent financial collapse that befell the rest of the world. Marta is a devout Catholic, and attends regular services at St. Luke's Cathedral, located around the corner a half block away.

[Note: If you are using the pre-generated characters, the apartment on the third floor is rented out by Amanda Edwards.]

The group is gathered for dinner at Oratello's. Spike is in the process of telling Dr. Enise Westfield and Detective Richard Fader details of his new job. [Note: Enise and Richard are not a couple, but collectively serve as the closest thing Spike has to parental figures at the moment.] Having just turned sixteen and obtained his driver's license, Spike is now able to legally drive. As

a result, he has been given a part-time job at Evan's Garage, working as an apprentice mechanic, and porter for customers of the garage.

Spike is animatedly jumping from subject to subject, covering such diverse topics as learning how to do a brake job, seeing Mrs. Reese (the administrator of the orphanage that allowed Spike to stay with the group) again, how some more of those creepy CMS workers brought in another six City Services vehicles that Evan somehow needs to get fixed up by the day before yesterday, and so on.

The Young Couple

It is a little past the normal dinner hour in this neighborhood, so apart from the group, there are no other customers in the restaurant. That's probably why the couple that enters the restaurant winds up drawing so much attention. They are a young man and woman, who look to be in their early twenties.

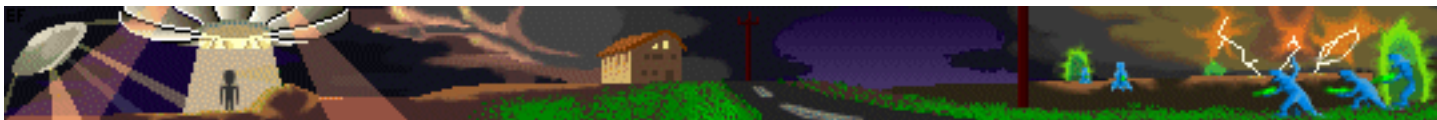
The man is well over six-feet tall and exceedingly handsome, with sandy blond hair and a clean cut goatee. He is well-dressed, but something about the way he carries himself tells you that he isn't accustomed to wearing that suit and tie.

The raven-haired woman who enters with him is as strikingly beautiful as he is handsome – more so, in fact. She is dressed in a plain simple sun-dress, but somehow the plain garment is transformed to stunning elegance on her. It is hard to pin down what combination of factors creates this effect. It could be the way she has woven the purple streaked white flower into her long black hair, or perhaps it is the simple fact that the woman appears to be nine months pregnant!

The man hovers over the young pregnant woman, treating her like a delicate glass sculpture. He holds the door for her on entry, then leads her by the hand to a seat near the front of the restaurant. Lines of worry crease her forehead. The man takes her by the hand as they sit, and tries to reassure her.

Fragments of their low conversation can still be heard:

“Don't worry darling, I won't be gone



Debbie Lincoln

Debbie is an extraordinarily beautiful woman. She is probably the only woman who could turn the attentions of Spike away from Amanda... despite the fact that she is pregnant. The flower that is woven into her hair is a vital clue for the party, it is very important that it at least gets mentioned along the way. Debbie Lincoln is Daphne, the Lilim who was sent to corrupt the Seraphim, Novalis. She has gone back to using her original name, rather than the more distinctive name of Daphne.

Stats as per "Succubus" (see above), but her Charisma is only 12 (instead of 14).

Nolan Aviz

Nolan is a disarmingly handsome man. He is also extremely dangerous. Nolan is Novalis – Archangel of Flowers, but don't let that fool you. The title of 'Flower Bearer' comes with a unique ability. Novalis can affect the growth and movement of plants in his vicinity. The more plant matter that is available, the more dangerous he can be. Forest preserves and greenhouses are two examples of places where Novalis could turn the environment against his opponents. Novalis' symbol is a now-extinct breed of Lily. The flower is white with purple streaks running through it, and a pale orange interior. The truth is, this breed of flower is not completely extinct. Novalis maintains a small number of these plants in his lair.

Stats as per "Seraphim" (see above), but add Plant Empathy.

long. I'll return as soon as the meeting is over."

"But..." she says

"There's no other way. This won't take long. I promise."

Marta approaches the table as soon as the couple appears to be settled, to take their order. She smiles broadly at the young pregnant woman, and asks her a question that you cannot make out. The reply from the young woman sounds like, "Any day now."

The man thanks Marta for her attention. Then he stands, and with one last reassuring glance, leaves the pretty young woman at the table and steps out through the jingling door onto the street beyond.

Amanda's Arrival

Amanda Edwards enters Oratello's Pizzeria shortly after the young man leaves. Her obvious intent is to join the group at their table, but she stops short at the sight of the

woman in the booth. Her jaw drops open as she recognizes the girl, and she squeals in surprise, "Daphne!" Then her gaze drops and focuses on the swollen belly of the other woman.

[Note: It is important to impress upon Amanda's player two things. First, that this girl is Daphne, a member of Lilith's sorority who is known to Amanda, and second, the fact that she is pregnant is a completely unusual and highly suspect state for a Lilim to be in. It is recommended that this information be conveyed in secret, rather than revealed to the entire table.]

Amanda and Debbie will talk for only a few moments before Debbie is upset enough by the encounter to stop talking with Amanda at all. Amanda will rejoin the party, and if asked can say that she and the other girl were undergraduates together, and she had no idea that Daphne was even dating anyone, let alone pregnant!

St. Luke's Cathedral

The Cathedral of St. Luke is a grand old stone church that has existed in Centennial for almost a hundred years. The front arched stained glass foyer rises to a peaked roofline that extends back for the entire length of the church. Flanking the entrance are twin bell towers which rise up well above the roofline. To the rear of the structure, flanking the back side in much the same way as the bell towers in front, the rectory and convent of St. Luke's are found.

The cathedral is located across the street from an apartment building where Dr. Enise Westfield happens to live. St. Luke's is as much a member of the neighborhood community as any of the people. Regardless of their faith, people in this neighborhood time their lives by the tolling of the church bells. Few people in the neighborhood even bother to set alarm clocks. They are so accustomed to the sounds of the quarter-hourly chimes, that they subconsciously awaken themselves at the appropriate time.

Church Staff

Father Patrick O'Brian is Pastor of the church. He, along with Father Alexander Gondek lead the Catholic flock in this neighborhood of the Square.

Father O'Brian is a middle-aged man with naturally curly black hair and gold-tone wire-rimmed glasses.

Father Gondek is considerably older, balding gray hair and tiny rimless spectacles that make him look like a librarian.

Sister Katherine Morris is Mother Superior of the small convent, assisted by Sister Mary Sheldon and Sister Mary Francis.

The three nuns, quite unlike so many of their sisters, still wear the full black and white habits of their order. They are three women entering their declining years, secure in their faith, and the role they play in the world. Even outside the cathedral walls, these three walk together, heads bowed, and whispering conspiratorially among themselves like the three fates of Greek mythology.

[Note: when I ran the three sisters, I



tended to fall into a Monty Python Pepperpot routine.

“So you want to look around the church then, do ye?”

“Yes, I’ll bet ‘e does then, doesn’t ‘e?”

“Why do you want to go mucking about that dusty old tower anyway?”

“Perhaps ‘e thinks we’re ‘iding something.”

“Of course we’re not hiding anything!”

“Well don’t go yelling at me. I’m not the one suggesting it.”

“I didn’t SAY you were suggesting it!”

“Well there’s a fine how’s your mother, then, eh?”

“Don’t get me started.”

“Well, that’s easy for YOU to say, you’re not the one that has to keep walking up and down the stairs...”

Needless to say, the conversation will very quickly shift to completely unrelated topics, and if possible, the actual answer will never be revealed.]

The Secret

The reason for the subterfuge and the conspiratorial whispers resides in the upper chambers of the south bell tower of St. Luke’s; an honest to goodness angel lives there. And not just any angel, but the Archangel Michael.

Michael has two rooms in the tower all to himself. The uppermost floor is the location of his sleeping chamber. The room below it is used as an office/receiving area. At all times, two of Michael’s ninja warriors are on hand to guard his angelic presence.

At the moment, the two followers of Michael who are assigned to guard their master are Eden Shroudslip and Collin Montenegro. The official robes of the followers of Michael resemble a Zorro costume, complete with wide-brimmed hat, mask and cape. The one departure from the standard Zorro getup is a white priest’s collar. When dressed in these garbs, the followers of Michael gain physical prowess and stamina – all the better to carry out Michael’s wishes.

The Meeting

[This section should be related to Eden’s player outside of the earshot of the other players.]

Eden Shroudslip and Collin Montenegro stood guard outside the receiving chamber of their Lord and Master, Michael. The two ninja stood at attention, staring impassively forward, appearing to focus on nothing in particular, but actually seeing it all.

The approach was silent. The only clue to the arrival of the other was the golden aura of power that shone from around the form of the approaching archangel. Upon recognizing the creature who approached as one of Michael’s brethren, the two bow their heads in respect.

“Is he in there?” the angel says quickly, apparently quite upset.

“Who shall I say is calling?” Collin replied in an impassive voice.

Eden, for his part was impressed with his counterpart’s outward calm. He mere concept of another of Michael’s kind in the same city, did not bode well.

“Tell him,” the other angel replied in menacing tones, “that Novalis is here to answer the summons.”

Collin nodded. “Wait here.” With a graceful sidestep, Collin stepped through the door into Michael’s receiving room. He dropped to one knee and faced the large wooden desk across the room. Behind it sat Michael, wings outspread, bathed in a golden light, shoulder-length black hair waving in an unfelt breeze.

“My Lord,” Collin began, “Novalis has answered your summons.”

“Send him in, Collin. And remain outside, please.”

Eden and Collin resume their position on either side of the door, as Novalis sweeps through into the chamber. Despite the heavy wooden door, the following conversation can be overheard:

“Michael, I don’t appreciate...”

“You forget yourself flower-bearer. You are in my domain here.”

“Very well. I beg your forgiveness, Michael”

“Dominic has already passed judgement on your actions.”

“Michael, we’ve done nothing wrong!”

“What the two of you have done is immaterial, all that remains now is to carry out the judgement.”

Suddenly the sound of a cellular phone ringing breaks the silence. Michael answers, listens for a moment then hangs up.

“The Lilim is no longer our concern. Will you yield your sword to me, that you may be forgiven and rejoin your brothers?”

“What do you mean, no longer our concern?”

“The Succubae have reclaimed her, as we have you...”

“You bastard, Michael!”

“How dare you draw your sword...”

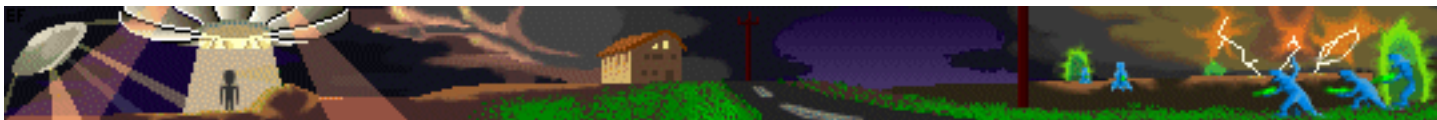
The conversation is interrupted by the sound of clashing blades. Collin and Eden draw weapons and pass through the door to find Michael and Novalis engaged in a mighty duel around the small chamber. The combatants move with such speed, that individual movements are impossible to follow with the eye. Wings spread and auras aglow, the two archangels engage in a deadly duel, that suddenly takes them with a resounding crash, through the stained glass window behind Michael’s desk, and out onto the rooftop of the cathedral...

Labor Day

Following the brief encounter with Amanda, Debbie Lincoln will appear quite distraught. She will force herself to stand and push away from the table toward the front door. She won’t get very far before she will be doubled over by a contraction. This is an obvious place for the party to get involved (especially if using the Pre-generated characters).

The girl will only give her name as Debbie Lincoln. Only Amanda is aware of her other name, Daphne. Two things will become readily apparent upon medical examination. She has entered full labor, and the baby is coming, *now*. The first priority should be to get Debbie to the hospital.

Despite the great pain, Debbie insists that she would feel better outside in the fresh air. She also begs the group to try to find



her boyfriend, Nolan. He is at a meeting on the next block. She doesn't know where he was going, but it is a Average: Observation task for anyone to remember that when he exited the restaurant, Nolan headed West, toward St. Luke's.

The group will have to split up for the moment. One group trying to find Nolan, the other trying to deal with the pregnant woman.

How the group gets Debbie to the hospital is up to them. If they seem to be hesitating too much (and they usually do), have a cab conveniently drive around the corner. The driver is very talkative but less than enthusiastic about a pregnant woman being in his cab ("Babies is messy business, and I should know! I've got three of 'em at home, so don't be messing up my cab, make me spend the rest of the night hosing the back out...")

Despite his vocal protests, he is a professional, and a fare is a fare. The fact that she could have the baby at any moment is only more incentive for him to get her there (and out of his car) that much quicker.

Clash of the Titans

The search for Nolan won't get very far before the searchers are distracted by events transpiring atop the roof of St. Luke's Cathedral. It is now full on dark outside, with a low overcast sky serving as backdrop for the two figures, bathed in golden light and engaged in battle with glowing swords atop the roof. It is a Average: Observation task to notice that the two figures have some sort of apparatus on their backs resembling wings (it is Difficult: Observation to see that they really are wings!)

The two combatants range back and forth across the peak of the roofline. Suddenly, a slate tile gives way, causing one of the figures to lose his footing. The momentary distraction is all the other one needs to drive his sword deep into his opponent's belly, extinguishing the golden glow of the fallen figure. Then, sheathing the sword, the victor leaps skyward, wings outstretched and disappears into the cloud bank.

In the Tower

[This section should be related to Eden's player outside of the earshot of the other players.]

Eden Shroudslip and Collin Montenegro watch in horror as Michael is brought down by Novalis. They clamber out onto the rooftop and bring their master back into the receiving room. Michael's aura is all but gone, and blood flows from the wound in his abdomen.

"Collin. Hurry down to the convent. Bring the three sisters."

"At once, my lord."

"Eden, I have need of you. This is perhaps the most important mission I have ever sent you on." He winces in pain and continues. **"There is a woman. She is with child. She won't be far. Find her. You must bring that child to me."**

Only if pressed for information, will Michael add the following. **"The child is the product of demon and angel. It is an abomination and must be brought to me, so I can determine if it represents a threat. Do not fail me, Eden. Do not underestimate the mother. My wound is grave. Only the child..."**

Then he will lose consciousness. A moment later, Collin and the nuns arrive in the tower and help carry Michael to the upper chamber.

Eden must now go to fulfill his mission...

Finding Nolan Aviz

Shortly after the end of the rooftop battle, the sky will be clear. Since they are facing the cathedral from the north, the party members will not be able to see the two figures climb out onto the rooftop from the south tower, and retrieve the fallen figure. Don't allow the players too much time to think about what is going on. There are a lot of events happening at once, and it is important to keep them off guard.

One way or another, whether they approach the church to investigate what is going on, or if they continue to stand there on that corner, they will meet up with Eden Shroudslip. [Note: Eden is familiar to the group. They know that he claims to be a

warrior for the Archangel Michael. Nobody actually believes this is the case. They think of Eden as a mostly harmless eccentric who has stood at their side in fights before. They respect his ability if nothing else.]

Eden will appear to be quite distraught, having only now realized that he has been sent on an impossible task. Then, using the only information he has at his disposal, "Have you seen a pregnant woman in the area?"

If they give any indication that they have seen her, and where, he will immediately head for Oratello's (unless they tell him that the Doctor is already transporting her to the hospital). Either way, Eden will not stay with the group right now. He must track down the mother and child. If he goes to Oratello's, Marta will tell him that the woman is en route to the hospital.

No sooner does Eden dash off, than they will see Nolan Avis returning at a brisk walk from the south. Recognizing him as the man they were sent to retrieve, the party will inform him that Debbie has gone into labor. He will be very anxious to tag along with the group as they follow the Doctor and Debbie to the hospital.

(At this point, the Doctor and her patient are either in the cab, or have found another form of transportation. The urgency of the situation would have prevented the Doctor from allowing them to wait until Nolan was found).

Amanda's Call

Sooner or later, Amanda will get the idea to contact Lilith about the events that are transpiring around them. Such a call (probably made in secret) should produce the following conversation:

"Lilith, this is Amanda Edwards. I've just run into Daphne. She's pregnant, and looks about ready to give birth!"

"Amanda, I want you to listen to me very carefully. That child is the product of a Lilim and a Seraphim. It is more dangerous than you can possibly imagine. The powers it could possess... I want you to consider this one of your Favors to me, Amanda. Bring me that child. I want it alive!"



If Amanda fails to think of this on her own prior to the appearance of Novalis (see ‘Father of the Child, below), then have Lilith call Amanda out of the blue, and issue the same order.

The Birth

As the car speeds toward the hospital, Debbie will begin giving birth. The Doctor will order that the car pull over. They now have no choice but to allow the baby to be born outside the hospital.

Debbie is in full-on labor, and not paying attention to much of anything around her except the birth process itself. The Doctor is pretty much occupied as well. As the baby’s head crowns, have someone make an Average: Observation check. Success will show that Debbie’s fingers have lengthened into claws, and she is digging them into whatever she can get a hold of as the pain grips her (if that happens to be on of the PC’s arms, then the Observation Task becomes Automatic).

Just as it comes time for the final push, Eden Shroudslip will arrive on the scene. He is a man with a mission, and can see the object of that mission entering the world before him. Eden would most likely make some sort of flamboyant announcement at this point (he’s just that kind of guy), “Step away from the woman. She is not what she appears to be!”

The Doctor would not heed this warning. “Stay focused Debbie. We need one more big push...”

Debbie will become visibly agitated at Eden’s approach. “No! Keep him away from me!”

The Doctor will be in the process of trying to regain control over the situation when the rest of the party (with Nolan in tow) will arrive. Nolan will immediately rush forward and try reassuring Debbie. “This is the moment we’ve waited for, Darling. Stay focused.”

His presence will be enough to rekindle her focus on the job at hand. She cries out once more in pain as another contraction begins. The Doctor takes control, “That’s right, Debbie. Don’t focus on the pain. We just need one more push. This is

for your baby...”

With a cry of agony and a final push, Debbie will lose complete control over her Project Human Form ability. The party will then see her in her full natural(?) state, wings and all. She has become Daphne once more. Nolan will push back away from her, horrified by the sight, “Oh my God!”

The child will come into the world in the normal manner, despite apparently having a Demoness for a mother. A cursory examination will note several things of interest.

First, the child appears perfect in every way. There is nothing to indicate that this is anything but a healthy, baby boy. The second note is that the child’s eyes are already open, and he does not cry. He stares at the Doctor with a look of calm understanding – as if a newborn could understand anything.

If the events up until this point have not been enough to get the party to open fire on Daphne, they will shortly. Daphne recognizes Eden as a threat to her child, and without hesitation will throw herself at him, using claws as her weapon. Anyone who tries to restrain her, will be attacked as well.

[Note: The idea is to trick the party into killing Daphne. Whether it is in self-defense or not is immaterial.]

Father of the Child

This is probably going to be a very confusing series of events, and how you as Referee handle them is key to the subsequent adventure. Allow me to just tell you what the end result is supposed to be. How you get there depends entirely on what your players do, and so cannot be mapped out...

The party will kill Daphne. This is an important plot point for the rest of the adventure, because it identifies whom among the party Novalis will target for vengeance.

Nolan Avis will begin bombarding the Doctor with questions about the health of the child, basically keeping her occupied with making sure the child is all right, cutting the umbilical chord and whatever else needs to be done.

When Daphne wigs out and is killed, Nolan will stand up with rage burning in his eyes! A golden glow will radiate out from

his body, and he will suddenly appear to have a pair of beautiful, outstretched white wings. “Noooooooooo!”

Suddenly, the figure from the rooftop battle is standing before the group. Eden will recognize him immediately as Novalis. Novalis will take the child from the Doctor (by force if necessary – he has incredible strength), and leap skyward with the baby.

If anyone wants to take a potshot at the fleeing angel (as ill-advise as that may seem, especially considering he’s holding a newborn child in his arms), remember to impose the full penalties for range and moving target. The Seraphim can fly 60 meters per phase, and so will be out of range of most guns (and safely hidden in the clouds) within a single combat turn.

Where Do We Go From Here?

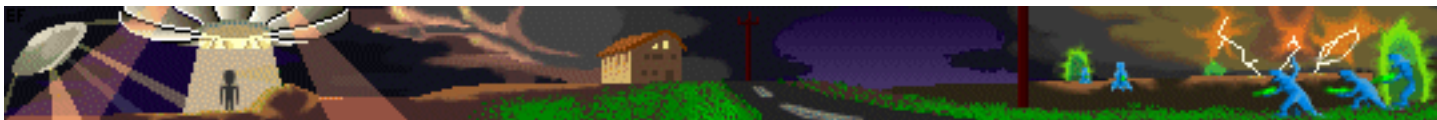
There are several possible directions that the group could go from this point. Eden and Amanda have been ordered by their respective bosses to retrieve the child at all costs. If nobody else feels compelled to investigate the situation, they can be used as catalysts.

It is possible for the subsequent events to happen immediately, or after a short time (several weeks). A lot depends on how willing your players are to ‘wait and let events transpire’. The impatient types will probably try to seek an immediate resolution. The adventure has been designed to accommodate either style.

The Body

The first thing that needs to be addressed is the body of Debbie Lincoln (Daphne). Not only do they have a full-sized body complete with two six-foot wings coming out of her back, but they probably have a cab driver who has gotten far more out of this fare than he ever wanted.

Debbie’s body is a wealth of information if the group wants to search it. The flower that is woven into her hair is an unusual breed of Lily. It is in fact, supposed to be extinct. At this point, making sure that the flower is described to them (white pet-



als with purple streaks on the outside, but a distinctive orange tint on the inside), is probably sufficient.

Her identification lists the name Debbie Lincoln, and gives her address in a small apartment complex out in the Burbs. If anyone questions Amanda about her, it is unlikely that Amanda will willingly reveal her nature as a Lilim to the party, and so will have to downplay her knowledge of this subject. Amanda can remember that Debbie's parents are originally from Centennial, and her father has a fairly unusual name – Norvill.

Debbie's Parents

Norvill and Emma Lincoln will be upset to hear of their daughter's death. But they will admit that Debbie hadn't really been a part of their lives over the last few years.

After joining that sorority in college, she seemed to lose interest in her family, preferring to spend her time with her friends. One thing that should become abundantly clear as the interview progresses (especially if they go to the Lincoln home), is that the photos that the Lincolns have of their daughter do not resemble the creature who they saw giving birth to the baby. Any physical resemblance is cursory at best. Debbie Lincoln was a short, dumpy girl with deep acne scars and a weight problem. Her kinky black hair was far too brittle to have ever grown to the lustrous lengths seen on Daphne.

The only thing that the dead Lilim appears to have in common with the Lincoln's child, is a clover-shaped birthmark on her left hip. For Mrs. Lincoln, this is enough for her to believe that Daphne is indeed her daughter, although she is at a loss to explain how.

Debbie's Funeral

Assuming the players have even pursued the family angle (or for that matter, turned the body over to the family), the following information can be gained.

Considering the obvious lack of family resemblance, the Lincolns will opt for a closed casket ceremony. There will not be many people at the ceremony, save a few relatives. Anyone making a Difficult: Ob-

servations roll will be able to pick out one specific bouquet of flowers from among the many arrangements surrounding Debbie's casket. There are a dozen flowers identical to the one that was woven into her hair. That same extinct breed of lily!

Seeing Michael

Returning the body of the Lilim to Michael will serve little purpose. Michael is not interested in the mother at all, and will merely order them to dispose of it.

One thing that will happen if Eden returns to consult with Michael: Michael will start chuckling softly until he is wracked by another coughing fit. **"I do not envy you, the Flower Bearer's wrath. Novalis will avenge the death of his lover. Anyone involved in her death will be a target. Do not underestimate him, Eden. He is a warrior, just as I am. But beware. The Succubae are aware of the child too. They will also be after the him."**

Seeing Lilith

This is not likely to be the course of action the group takes. It is more something that Amanda would try on her own (unless she reveals her true nature to the party).

But if Lilith should be consulted, she will only agree to see Amanda if Eden is there too, and only then if he agrees to enter her presence unarmed. Lilith is not stupid, but realizes that Eden may be privy to knowledge she does not possess.

"A creature of Order and a creature of Chaos foster a child. What is the result? A creature with the power of either parent, but bound by the philosophy of neither! That is Michael's fear. The child would be unpredictable. It is this unpredictability that I find so intriguing. I must see for myself."

If asked if she knows where Novalis is, she will reply only with, **"If I knew where to find him, I would have already had the child in my hands. I fear you will find him soon enough – or he, you. The Seraphim never did understand when to quit."**

Debbie's Apartment

Visiting Debbie Lincoln's apartment will reveal the most secrets. It is here that Debbie and Nolan planned to live, and raise their child. There are many pictures of the couple together, situated around the apartment. All of the photos appear completely normal, as if they were manufacturing a normal environment for the child to live in. One room of the apartment appears to have been fitted out as a nursery, with all the attendant accoutrements.

A search of the apartment will find the front door unlocked (and slightly ajar). Inside, it appears as if the nursery has been ransacked and some obvious items that should be there are not. It appears that Novalis has already been there, and taken everything he would need for the short term to care for the baby.

The living room has some older family pictures of Debbie growing up with her family. These match pictures that could be found at Norvill and Emma Lincoln's home. There is also a small appointment book tucked in the back of the desk in Debbie's bedroom. Listed on the calendar are the names of various religious terms. "Holy Name", "Ascension", "Mother of Sorrows". There is no indication what the terms refer to.

[Note: The listed names are all of the orphanages in the city that are run by religious orders. Nolan and Debbie were checking out each of the orphanages as a backup plan in case something went wrong. It will take a great deal of investigation to reach this accurate conclusion. They are also the names of some of the cemeteries in the city, and the names of some churches.]

The kitchen has another bouquet of the distinctive flower that the party saw woven into Debbie's hair. This particular bouquet contains only eleven flowers. If someone checks the garbage, the stem of the twelfth flower will be found there – the twelfth flower being the one that Debbie wore.

[Note: If the party is getting especially frustrated, you could reveal the following: Digging deeper into the trash will find a torn piece of business card that could have come from a florist. The card reads "Plantmann Enterprises" and gives a par-



tial address deep in the suburbs. Toss them this bone *ONLY* if they appear to be up against a blank wall.]

Longer Term Events

The following events will happen over time following the evening of the child's birth. There is no fixed order for the events to be presented. It is up to the Referee's discretion to decide how involved the players will be in them.

Increased Church Attendance

The following characters will notice an increase in activity surrounding St. Luke's over the course of the next few weeks.

The Doctor will notice an increase in traffic in and out of the church. Also, there appear to be more late night services than normal.

Spike and Evan Shatterstone would both notice that Mrs. Sartori, their landlady is spending far more time at church. When she isn't attending church, or sleeping, she is sitting in her rocking chair praying her rosary.

The same could be noticed by anyone with contacts in the Oratello's apartment. Marta is spending far less time in the restaurant more time attending church.

Michael Needs Medical Attention

The reason for the increased number of vigils in the cathedral revolve around the fallen Archangel. Michael has been mortally wounded. He clings to life in his chamber in the south tower of the cathedral by the barest thread. It is almost as if he is hanging on, awaiting a resolution to the issue of Novalis' child before deciding if he can die or not. Either that, or the prayers of the congregation are actually doing some good.

It is possible that Eden would turn to the Doctor to treat Michael. Michael would never request this contact himself, so it is totally up to Eden.

Spike Has Touched the Child

If Spike were to accompany anyone to see Michael (or for that matter, sneak up there on his own – his curiosity has gotten

him in worse scrapes before), Michael will stare at Spike for a long moment, and then ask to be left alone with him.

“I sense something in you. You and the child are linked somehow. I can feel its presence on you.”

This is a clearly ridiculous statement. Of course, Spike was present at the birth of the child. It would make sense that he has had contact with it.

[What Spike and Michael do not realize (and are not meant to realize), is that there is a far more direct connection.

When Mrs. Reese dropped off the Ascension Orphanage bus at Evan's Garage for repairs, it was Spike who drove it back to the orphanage. He was invited inside by Mrs. Reese, and had occasion to see some of the children who had recently been brought to the orphanage. He does not realize it, but the child is among those new orphans].

Calling Cards – The Flowers of Novalis

Once Novalis has managed to find a safe place for the child (he and Debbie had checked out several orphanages around the city as a backup if something should have gone wrong – this situation qualifies), he will be ready to get his revenge for Daphne's death. Who is attacked depends on who was primarily involved in the death of the Lilim. Here are some suggested ways that the attacks could begin.

One of the Players is leaving his or her place of business, accompanied by a trusted NPC. As they step outside, something swoops down out of the sky swinging a flaming sword (with Novalis' armed melee skill and strength, head hits are especially deadly). Novalis will probably start by toying with the players, purposely picking off people around them rather than killing them outright. He wants them to suffer before they die at his hand.

Another possibility would be for Novalis to send a flower to as a warning to each person he intends to attack. Sooner or later somebody needs to figure out that the flowers are the key to finding Novalis.

Researching the Flower

There are several botany books and even the Internet that could be used to identify the flower. All references will claim that the species is long extinct.

A number of cross references will point to the fact that the flower had some special religious significance. Eventually that significance will be revealed. The flower is supposed to be the symbol of the Archangel Novalis.

The Final Clue

So far, there has been a lot of reference to the flower, but no indication of where

Bob DeVine

Skills and attributes as per Novice NPC.

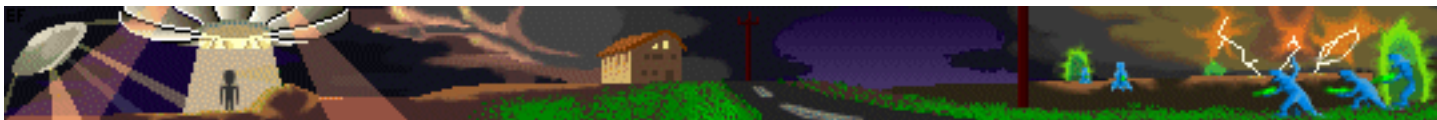
As an acolyte of Novalis, he too has gained some proficiency with the Plant Empathy skill. Although his application of the skill usually results in little more than the plants growing extremely well.

Bob is an tall, wiry man with a ring of dark hair around an otherwise bald head. He wears thick, horn-rimmed glasses and can often be encountered in office buildings.

He is the proprietor of Plantmann Enterprises, a company which specializes in renting out potted plants to office buildings. Bob will be encountered tending to the plants he has distributed.

One of the characters should spot an actual live plant producing the extinct lily. Bob inadvertently took one of Novalis' prize plants and delivered it to one of his customers with his regular shipment.

The plant is tagged (as all are) with the business card of the company that supplied the plant. Plantmann Enterprises, with the address and phone number of the business office.



it can be found. Searching every florist in the city would take weeks. It is either a lucky break (or the partial business card in Debbie's garbage) that will lead the group to Plantmann Enterprises. If this is by lucky break, the answer will come to any character that could find themselves in an office building.

Plantmann Enterprises

The offices of Plantmann Enterprises are also the same location as the greenhouse where all of their plants are grown.

The greenhouse is a three-story tall building about one-hundred meters long and thirty meters wide. The entire building is 12 meters tall. The first four meters of height is composed of cinder-block walls. The top eight meters are walls of glass panels. The entire ceiling is composed of glass panels as well, arranged in three peaked segments that extend the entire length of the building.

Hanging beneath these peaks are three catwalks that hold special species of plants (suspended 10 meters off the ground). There is only one apparent way to reach the catwalks from the inside, and that is a motorized portable lift that is parked at the back of the greenhouse. The lift is designed to carry no more than 400 lbs of cargo straight up or down in complete safety. It is possible to lift up to 1000 lbs on the unit, as long as there isn't any lateral motion (it could easily tip over once fully extended).

There is a single reinforced loading dock door at the back of the structure, and a steel fire-door that allows entrance to the greenhouse from the storefront. The storefront of Plantmann Enterprises is a single story building with a florist shop and the business office of Bob DeVine.

Searching the files in the office for any customer by the name of Nolan Aviz will draw a blank. Nolan isn't listed as a customer. He is listed as a part-owner of the business. He is the chief botanist for the greenhouse, using his skills to produce many rare hybrid species of plants – including the lily.

Trapped!

There are two entrances into the greenhouse (three if you count the glass panels on the roof). No matter which ones the players take, the others will be locked. Also, the door they enter through will shortly be locked behind them.

Novalis intends to destroy his pursuers and enemies in one final blow inside the greenhouse. Once locked inside, the plants in the greenhouse will seem to come to life, growing at tremendous rates, and moving toward the party. The descriptions should be like something out of Day of the Triffids, with plants writhing along the ground and trying to wrap themselves around the players. Most of the attacks will be strangling attacks, meant to subdue the PC's. There is a particularly nasty group of climbing rosebushes by the rear entrance that can do damage with the thorns as well. The thorny branches will wrap around and around the target, then start constricting. Thorns will inflict 1d6 of damage per hit location per phase until removed. Thorns cannot penetrate armor.

[Note: One group of players actually tried to use explosives in the greenhouse. Keep in mind what the concussion from an explosion would probably do to a glass ceiling!]

The easiest way out is through the roof. To get up to the roof, the group must fight their way through the plants, and reach the motorized lift. This can then be used to raise them up to the scaffolds above. From there, it is a simple matter to smash a window and climb out onto the roof of the building. That's when Novalis' attack will begin...

Angel's Flight

Novalis is not a stupid opponent. He will not just stand there and let the party take potshots at him. His methods are more hit and run tactics.

Flying in under cover from an unexpected direction and taking swings at party members with his sword as he goes. The first person who pops their head up through the roof of that greenhouse is in for a rude shock! Novalis will take high-speed swoop-

ing attacks, trying to cause as much damage as possible. After each pass, he will tuck wings back, and maneuver into a long banking turn back for another pass. He will make good use of the low cloud cover to escape out of view.

Once all of the party members escape the greenhouse, they will probably expect an all-out attack. This isn't Novalis' style. He will wait until they get in their car(s) and start driving away. One very effective attack is to dive, foot-first at the rooftop of one of the fleeing cars, then rebounding back into the sky. The roof suddenly caves in, the safety glass cracks and the car bottoms out on its springs.

After a couple of these attacks, the players will probably stop and try covering the skies with their weapons. From the roof of an adjacent building, a molotov cocktail will come arcing down and shatter on the roof of the car. The gasoline will pool up in the indentation on the top of the car and burn with intense heat, driving the party away from the vehicle.

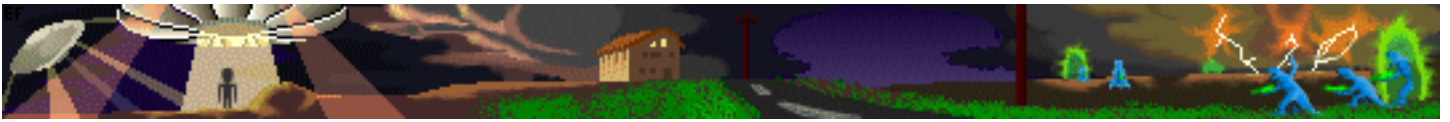
Downfall

Novalis will remain on the rooftop from which he lobbed the firebomb, waiting for the party to approach. The only way up the building is the fire-escape at the back. Seeing Novalis on the rooftop from the ground will not be an option. Also, this is the tallest building in the area, so trying to find a higher vantage point will be impossible.

Novalis is growing tired of the game. The mere sight of the party members who actually killed Daphne will unleash absolute rage in him.

To defeat him, the party will have to catch him off guard. One possible way to achieve this would be for Amanda to reveal herself as a Lilim at a key moment. Novalis, transfixed for a moment with another woman who so closely resembles his lover will be distracted enough to leave himself vulnerable for a moment.

Another possible distraction can come from Spike. Although growing up, Spike is still a child in Novalis' eyes, and will not under any circumstances ever become a target. In fact, if placed in harms way, Novalis



would actually abandon an attack to pick up Spike and physically move him out of the battle zone. No matter how the battle winds up, Novalis will die, firmly believing that the child is safe from the Seraphim and Succubae.

By the end of the battle, it should be clear that neither Eden nor Amanda are acting in the best interest of the child. This should be painfully apparent to Spike, who can sympathize with the plight of the child, and also to the Doctor, for whom all life is held sacred.

Resolution

Spike holds the final key to knowing where the child is hidden. Remember that Spike was an orphan, and has a soft spot for children in that situation. Hopefully, he will approach her alone, but he will eventually realize that Mrs. Reese's orphanage is the source of Spike's contact with the child.

Mrs. Reese is a kindly old woman who cares deeply for all orphans. When ap-

proached, she will address most of her comments to Spike.

"The child you speak of has lost his mother. If the father still lives, then he is not an orphan, and has no place here. If the father has met with ill fate, then the child is an orphan, and will be in need of guidance and love – just as you, Spike needed help when you were brought to us.

The child you speak of is a result of a father who could impose only order, and a mother who could instill only chaos. The two combined sound more like the abilities of any normal child. I can't imagine a child more in need of care and support. I hope he has found that wherever he has gone to."

A Final Word

Both times I ran this adventure, Spike or the Doctor wound up making sure that the Child's location remained a secret from the party. Neither side wound up finding him.

While this is exactly the ending I had hoped for, I was amazed to see that it actu-

ally played out that way. The point of the adventure was to show that good and evil are not absolutes, and fear is never an excuse for doing evil.

Pre-generated Characters

This adventure has been designed to be run as a standalone adventure in a gaming convention environment, with pre-generated characters.

There are six characters provided here. It is suggested that if you do not have six players, that you assign the characters in the order presented, as they are listed in decreasing order of importance to the story.

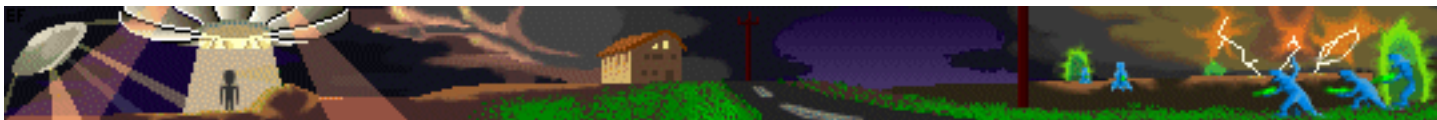
In order to effectively adapt this adventure to another campaign setting, some of the characters presented will have to be used as NPC's, or you will have to substitute some of your own characters in the key roles. Remember, the interactions of these characters are as much a part of the adventure, as the background story is.

"I have heard some people complain that minion hunters are no better than the minions that they seek to destroy. All they see is the hunters killing people or destroying property, without ever bothering to find out why. To these people, minion hunters are just as evil as the minions.

"The fact of the matter is that these people wouldn't know evil if it came up and smacked them in the face. They bitch and complain about the lawless elements in society creating havoc in the name of some holy cause, without ever believing that what these hunters are fighting for really does matter.

"It's these same people who fall prey to the Dark Minions the fastest. When the real evil comes knocking, they don't know how to see it and just hand themselves over. They change their tune pretty fast once they realize what's really going on."

- Zena Marley
(Early 21st-century mercenary-philosopher)



Eden Shroudslip – Ninja Priest

Male

Age 33

Height 5' 10"

Weight 176 lbs

Attributes:

STR 9 **EDU** 6

CON 8 **CHR** 7

AGL 9 **EMP** 5

INT 5 **INIT** 4

Skills:

Archery 2, Heavy Weapons 1, Melee(unarmed) 9, Melee(armed) 7, Small Arms (Pistol) 3, Thrown Weapon 3, Climbing 2, Stealth 6, Navigation 1, Observation 2, Psychology 2, Vehicle (Motorcycle) 1, Willpower 2, English 10, Japanese 6, Latin 3, Leadership 2, Persuasion 2, Foreboding 3

Possessions:

Waterproof backpack, Basic Tool set, Small Arms tools, Small Radio Receiver, Radio Shack Eavesdropper, Handcuffs, Laser sights on both lasers (making even quick shots “aimed”), Flashlight, Waterproof boots, 2 Shoulder holsters, 2 Laser Pistols fashioned to look like old wood Black-Powdered pistols, Modified Colt Python 44 Magnum, 2 Hunting Knives, Sword, Motorcycle.

Background:

Eden is a Hero. He wears garb that resembles a Zorro costume, but with a priest’s collar at the neck. On his back, he wears twin holstered laser guns fashioned to look like flintlock pistols. At his belt, he wears a sheathed sword.

Eden believes that he works directly for the Archangel, Michael. He can often be found sitting a rooftop ‘keeping watch’ over the neighborhood around The Cathedral of St. Luke. The other party members all believe that Eden is an eccentric, and none of them believe that Michael is real. Eden does what he can to foster this misconception, thus protecting Michael’s presence in the Cathedral’s south tower.

His original training was as a Clergyman, who later took up combat training to the point where he attained the title of Ninja. As a result of his training, Eden suffers from “Hero Syndrome”. Unless he is wearing his “hero” costume, all physical stats (Str, Agl, Con) are reduced to 5 (average). He is also able to shoot with both hands when in “Hero” mode. Eden can be extremely formidable in combat, his firepower tempered slightly by the fact that the lasers take three combat phases to recharge.

Opinions:

Amanda Edwards

Amanda joined the group recently, working with Professor Kaitlyn Jones. When Dr. Kate was sent away on an archeological dig, Amanda stayed behind to handle teaching her classes. Amanda is very beautiful, and Eden fears she may have been sent to tempt his vow of celibacy.

Spike

Spike is a rash youth, but his heart is good, and so he is tolerated.

Dr. Enise Westfield

The Doctor is a talented surgeon, and has often been called upon to help patch up other members of the party.

Detective Richard Fader

Fader is a man of honor, and Eden is proud to fight alongside the policeman.

Evan Shatterstone

Evan is a non-believer. He seems to do as he pleases.



Amanda Edwards – Graduate Student

Female

Age 21

Height 5' 8"

Weight 125 lbs

Attributes:

STR 7 **EDU** 7
CON 6 **CHR** 12
AGL 9 **EMP** 2
INT 5 **INIT** 2

Skills:

Melee(unarmed) 6, Melee(armed) 2, Thrown Weapon 1, Biology 1, Computer Operation 1, Acrobatics 1, Stealth 2, Instruction 5, English 10, Spanish 6, Mayan 4, Egyptian 2, Persuasion 1, Human Empathy 2, Project Human Form 4

Possessions:

Palmtop computer, Cellular phone, Ray-ban sunglasses, Security Pass for Ford-Revlon corporate tower in the Citadel, Backpack/Bookbag, Micro-Transponder - Tojicorp Discreet

Background:

Amanda is the teaching assistant for Professor Kaitlyn Jones. She has worked for the professor for the last six months. In that time, the two of them have become good friends. Amanda has encouraged Dr. Kate to start working out. Amanda is incredibly beautiful, and can usually talk her way out of any situation.

Amanda has a secret that nobody else in the party knows about. She was not always the beautiful girl they know. She is actually what is known as a Lilim. Several years ago, she was a short, frumpy and awkward girl with no social grace. She was singled out by a woman named Lilith who offered to transform the awkward girl into an image of beauty. Amanda accepted the offer. She was shocked to learn that what Lilith offered was nothing short of a miracle. She, along with five other girls were placed together in a sorority house, and over the course of the next year, slowly changed. Amanda and her sisters received more than good looks and a killer figure. They also grew a pair of wings, identical to the ones that Lilith herself (as it turns out) possessed. The wings are not the problem that one would imagine them to be. Amanda, and all the Lilim, possess an empathic ability called Project Human Form, which allows them to hide the fact they have wings from others. Their skill with the ability is such that it is normally an Easy task. During times of great stress or combat, this task changes to Difficult. Note that Lilim can fly, but only when they have ceased to use the Project Human Form skill. It is thought that when the skill is in use, that the wings are more than just disguised, but may not even exist in this dimension. Now she works for Lilith, owing nine favors to her mistress as payment for the transformation. Nine favors that Amanda knows she will be compelled to acquiesce to, for the penalty for resisting the will of Lilith is death.

The first favor that Lilith asked of her was to get close to Professor Kaitlyn Jones, an archeologist who had recently gotten involved in some pretty strange stuff. Dr. Kate had never been considered terribly attractive, and Lilith saw in her some of the potential she usually seeks out in new acolytes. So Amanda has been assigned to lay the groundwork for Lilith making her proposition to Dr. Kate.

Opinions:

Eden Shroudslip

Eden is a follower of Lilith's arch enemy in the city, Michael. Michael is a Seraphim (although he calls himself an Archangel). The Seraphim and Succubae (the race to which Lilith belongs) have been at war for millennia, using people like herself and Eden at pawns in their great war. She is wary of letting him get too close to her. She is quite certain that he has no idea what secrets she hides.

Spike

Spike is a young kid who can't help the fact that he is the victim of raging hormones. Considering she missed out on such attentions in high school, she actually gets quite a thrill out of Spike's dogged interest in her.

Dr. Enise Westfield

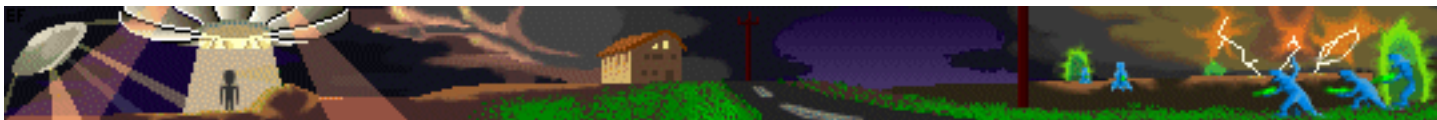
The Doctor is a very talented surgeon, and prior to Amanda's arrival was by far the most beautiful woman in the group. Amanda's arrival has changed that, and she fears that the Doctor resents her for it.

Detective Richard Fader

A good contact to have. Doesn't know him very well.

Evan Shatterstone

He seems trustworthy and honest, plus Spike looks up to him.



Spike – Street Urchin

Male

Age 16

Height 5' 1"

Weight 123 lbs

Attributes:

STR 3 **EDU** 2

CON 6 **CHR** 8

AGL 9 **EMP** 0

INT 8 **INIT** 2

Skills:

Mechanic 1, Melee(unarmed) 0, Thrown Weapon 2, Acrobatics 3, Lockpick 3, Pickpocket 1, Stealth 4, Observation 2, Streetwise 4, Vehicle (wheeled) 3, Willpower 2, English 9, Street Slang 10, Luck 2

Possessions:

Backpack, Driver's License, Portable TV/VCP (6" B&W screen, 8mm tapes), A half dozen Action Movie/Martial Arts films on video tape, Lockpick Tools: Slim Jim, Nail File, Screw Driver Set, Hammer & Nails, Hunting Knife (with leg sheath), Key Ring with Ford/Revlon logo, Keys to Ford/Revlon Elite (unknown car), Keys to the original owner's house (unknown location), 300 ft of Twine, 1/2 Carton of Cigarettes (unfiltered), Zippo Lighter, Sling, 12 smooth stones, MiB ID Card, MiB Sunglasses, Blank Magnetic Strip card (parking garage), Browning HP-35, Subway Restaurant Punchcard 12/12

Background:

Spike grew up on the streets for much of his early life, until he found himself picked up by the authorities and placed in Ascension orphanage. Despite the quality of care, he found the environment too confining, and longed to be back on the streets – free to do as he wished.

A chance meeting placed him in the path of Detective Richard Fader. Fader has more-or-less assumed responsibility for Spike, and Spike looks up to him as a father-figure. Despite appearances to the contrary, Spike's actions are usually meant to try to gain Fader's approval.

Spike is a packrat, a pickpocket and a shoplifter. He has a special affinity for car keys and flashlights. Spike is also extremely impulsive, usually acting on the first thing that pops into his head (he lacks the experience to judge good vs bad ideas well). He recently obtained his driver's license.

Opinions:

Eden Shroudslip

Eden is a superhero in Spike's eyes. He dresses like Zorro, and carries himself like a Hollywood hero.

Amanda Edwards

Amanda is a hotty! Spike can't even talk straight when she enters the room. He has many fantasies about being alone with Amanda in the backseat of his car. He is always trying to prove to her that he is really mature for his age.

Dr. Enise Westfield

The Doctor used to be the object of Spike's attentions. But she kept treating him like she was his mother or something. When Amada showed up, he was more than happy to let the Doctor play mother.

Detective Richard Fader

Fader is a lot like Spike. He was the first person outside the orphanage who treated Spike like anything but a misplaced piece of property. Fader introduced Spike to this group of people, who have become a pseudo family for him. Spike would like to earn the respect of Fader, thinking that would be a good way to repay the detective for the chances he has given him. Fader is trying to quit smoking, and Spike has had to quit smoking in front of him, or the detective got cranky.

Evan Shatterstone

Evan is cool! He lets Spike smoke with him, even though Fader and the Doctor keep trying to take the cigarettes away. Evan also has given Spike a job at his garage, working as porter and apprentice mechanic. Spike currently lives in the house that Evan rents from a sweet old lady named Mrs. Sartori. Mrs. S, as Evan calls her is like a grandmother to them both. She cooks and cleans for them, but stares disapprovingly when they come in late at night. She is also always trying to get Spike to go to church with her.



Dr. Enise Westfield – Surgeon

Female

Age 40

Height 6' 2"

Weight 152 lbs

Attributes:

STR 9 **EDU** 10

CON 9 **CHR** 9

AGL 8 **EMP** 1

INT 9 **INIT** 3

Skills:

Melee(unarmed) 1, Melee(armed) 6, Small Arms (Pistol) 6, Environment Suit 1, Zero G. Combat 1, Stealth 1, Psychology 2, Willpower 3, Biology 2, Business 1, Computer Operation 3, Medical 10, Ship's Engineer 1, Ship's Energy Weapon 1, Act/Bluff 2, Instruction 2, Villani 10, French 6, English 6, Acrobatics 1, Stealth 2, Instruction 5, English 10, Spanish 6, Mayan 4, Egyptian 2, Persuasion 1, Human Empathy 2, Project Human Form 4

Possessions:

Medical Bag, Medical Scanner, Medical Slow Drug (10 vials), Medical Fast Drug (12 vials), Broad Spectrum Antibiotics (15 vials), Other Drugs (20 vials), Telescoping Quarterstaff (six inches long when collapsed - always carried), Dessert Eagle .44 Mag (2 clips), PRIS Binoculars, XM26APW (1 clip)

Background:

Enise is a Traveller from another time and place, who found herself quite unexpectedly in an alternate reality of a dark Earth. She takes the well-being of her patients very seriously. She arrived here with a group of people who have all managed to die (or worse) since arriving on this world. Enise is from a more evolved species of humaniti, so her stats seem pretty spectacular. Her medical knowledge is probably the most advanced of anyone on the planet. As such, she has managed to purchase some forged accreditation documents, and has become a quite famous surgeon.

She wears a form-fitting environment suit under her normal clothing. This garment is comprised of a ballistic cloth that gives her an armor value of 1 to every hit location except her head.

English is not the Doctor's primary language. The language she speaks naturally is probably closest to French. She is learning more English every day, but still speaks with a funky accent.

Doctor Westfield holds life – all life – in the highest regard. As such, she prefers not to use firearms. Her favorite weapon is a quarterstaff. She has a really cool telescoping staff, that collapses down to around six inches in length. She carries the staff with her at all times.

She has become a pseudo-mother figure for Spike.

Opinions:

Eden Shroudslip

Eden is crazy. She can't understand why everybody tolerates him.

Amanda Edwards

Amanda is a stuck-up party chick, full of herself and flaunting her looks. She doesn't like the way that Amanda encourages Spike to fawn after her.

Spike

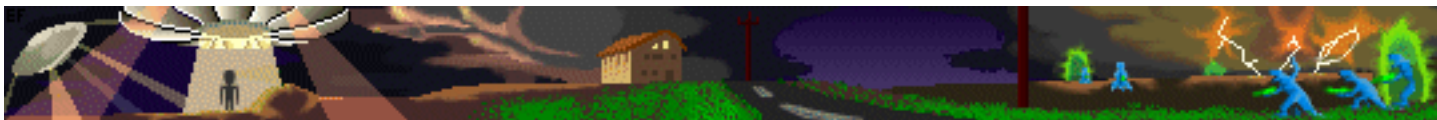
Spike is a lost child, who needs someone to watch out for him. Enise can relate to this, as she is a visitor to this world. She finds comfort and feels as if she has a place in this world by providing care for Spike.

Detective Richard Fader

Fader is an honorable man who lets his personal code drive his actions. Early on, there was some friction between Enise and Fader, mainly because one of Enise's shipmates wound up on the wrong end of one of Fader's murder investigations. Since then, Enise has had to grudgingly admit that Fader was only trying to do what was right. She thinks that Fader is a good influence on Spike.

Evan Shatterstone

Evan is a recent addition to the group. He hasn't seen as much weirdness as some of the rest of them have, and keeps trying to view everything from a rational point of view. His major saving grace is he doesn't let that analytical mind get in the way of pulling a trigger when it is warranted.



Detective Richard Fader – Homicide Detective

Male

Age 34

Height 5' 10"

Weight 194 lbs

Attributes:

STR 7 **EDU** 8

CON 6 **CHR** 6

AGL 5 **EMP** 1

INT 8 **INIT** 3

Skills:

Melee(unarmed) 3, Small Arms (Pistol) 5, Small Arms (Rifle) 2, Business 1, Computer Operation 1, Lockpick 2, Stealth 2, Swimming 2, Observation 4, Psychology 1, Steetwise 2, Vehicle (wheeled) 2, Willpower 2, Interrogation 4, English 10, Spanish 4, Leadership 2, Persuasion 2, Foreboding 3

Possessions:

Chrysler LeBoeuf (unmarked police car), S&W Model 29/16.5 (.44 Magnum) Revolver, Browning Autoriot, 4-Knives, Kevlar Jacket (AV:1), Kevlar Helmet (AV:1 1-4), Binoculars, Handcuffs, Road Flares, Bianchi Shoulder Holster, Watch, Serengeti Sunglasses

Background:

Fader is one of the few truly honest cops left in this city. He doesn't care much for his new partner (Michael Rollins), but cares deeply for people and seeing that the cause of justice is served. Fader recently lost his right leg in a tragic freak accident. Dr. Enise Westfield helped him obtain a prosthetic leg, but Fader walks with a limp, complaining constantly of the pain in his leg.

Fader got caught up with this group when investigating a series of murders. Weirdness seems to follow these people around like a bad smell. And now that he has helped them out several times, they seem to call him every time they run into something odd.

Fader treats Spike like a little brother. He has a lot in common with the background of the young Street Urchin. He was given a chance when he was younger, that allowed him the chance to become a cop. He is hoping to repay that favor by giving the same help to Spike.

Opinions:

Eden Shroudslip

Eden has a lot of secrets. Fader has secretly run several checks on Eden's background, but has found no information on anyone by the name Eden Shroudslip. He suspects it is a pseudonym. Fader isn't sure if Eden is crazy or not, but he definitely knows what side of right and wrong he is operating on. Fader is willing to forgive a lot of crazy shit as long as the person doing it is good.

Amanda Edwards

Amanda is probably the most gorgeous creature he's ever seen. But she's a little young for him, and so he puts any thoughts of romance out of his mind. He is a little uncomfortable with the way Spike follows her around, but it's hardly her fault that she's so attractive.

Spike

Watching Spike is like looking into a mirror to Fader's own past. A child with a troubled past, and no opportunities to improve his life. Fader is determined to see that Spike gets those opportunities. This can be a tiring experience at times. Spike is a handful. If he isn't stealing something that he could just as easily ask for, he's doing something foolhardy and dangerous, trying to impress the adults in his life.

Dr. Enise Westfield

The Doctor is a caring person, and Fader respects her for her ability and dedication. she is the key to one of his unsolved murder investigations, and so she was the primary reason he stuck with the group. One of Enise's companions was a man named Wil Ohmsford. Wil killed at least two people and became a suspect in a serial killer investigation. In the tapestry of Fader's career, Wil is 'the one that got away'. He knows that sooner or later, he'll try to make contact with the Doctor again...and he waits for that day to come.

Evan Shatterstone

Evan is a lot like Fader used to be when he first met up with this group. The mechanic is a realist, and can't quite wrap his brain around some of the weird things that are happening in the world today. But the important thing is he will accept things far enough to act when action is needed, and worry about the rationale later.



Evan Shatterstone – Mechanic

Male
Age 29
Height 6' 0"
Weight 158 lbs

Attributes:

STR 5 **EDU** 5
CON 6 **CHR** 6
AGL 7 **EMP** 5
INT 9 **INIT** 4

Skills:

Mechanic 8, Melee(unarmed) 3, Small Arms (Pistol) 1, Small Arms (Rifle) 2, Thrown Weapon 1, Computer Operation 3, Engineer 1, Electronics 4, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Vehicle (Wheeled) 3, Willpower 2, Interrogation 1, English 10, Human Empathy 3

Possessions:

Arc Welder, Basic Tool Kit, Shoulder Holster, Flashlight, Chrysler Conestoga 4x4 Tow Truck (\$10000 conversion package), Gas Mask with bio-filter, 1 phosphorous grenade, 1 concussion grenade, 1 fragmentation grenade, Mossberg, M1911A1-Colt, M3A1 .45 ACP

Background:

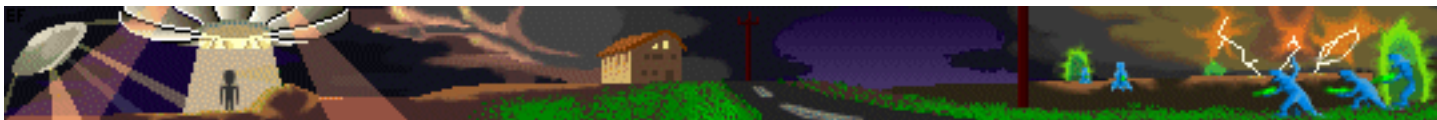
Sole-proprietor of Evan's Garage. Formerly a small one-bay shop which specialized in local neighborhood repairs. Evan has recently secured a lucrative contract with the CMS and City Services, and has expanded to an adjacent building, with four new garage bays. He still wonders if the world was going to hell before he ran into these people, or has it started going that way because of them. Either way, he refuses to get emotional about strange things going on, trusting that a rational explanation will present itself, if only he looks hard enough.

Evan rents a room from an old woman named Marjorie Sartori. Mrs. S is like a mother to him, and treats him like the son she never had – or maybe used to have, he's never been quite sure which. She is just supposed to be his landlady, but she wakes up every morning and cooks him huge cholesterol-rich breakfasts before he goes to work. Then when he returns, there is a sumptuous (if bland) meal waiting for him. He would never do anything to hurt Mrs. S, but he sometimes gets annoyed that she expects him to adhere to the schedule she sets.

In an attempt to deflect some of her attention, Evan volunteered to house Spike (the street urchin who hangs out with the group). He hopes that having a younger person in the house, Mrs. S will treat him like the Grandson she never had, and ease up on Evan. This has worked to a certain extent, but has also backfired. Now Mrs. S gives disapproving stares when Evan appears to be encouraging the boy to do things like stay out late.

Opinions:

- Eden Shroudslip** Eden is an odd person, but comes to Evan whenever he manages to damage his motorcycle. Eden fancies himself some kind of priest – or maybe a superhero. Evan isn't sure which, he only knows that Eden isn't firing on all cylinders. But it's a harmless kind of crazy.
- Amanda Edwards** Amanda is one of those women that most men do something stupid over. Evan would probably be willing to do something stupid for her, if she even glanced in his direction. He thinks he must be beneath her notice. There is a side of him that feels he's probably lucky for that.
- Spike** He has tried to be a buddy for Spike. He is a frequent confidant for the young lad, the two of them often taking off to sneak some cigarettes (which Fader hates, as he's trying to quit). Spike showed no interest in going to school, so Evan offered to let him work at the garage.
- Dr. Enise Westfield** The Doctor is a scientist of sorts. Evan likes that. It means that when something strange happens, and he starts getting that tense feeling between his eyes (that happens whenever he doesn't quite want to understand something), he can usually turn to her for reassurance. Spike seems to look up to her like a mother, which is good. That way Evan doesn't have to feel like he needs to be solely responsible for Spike.
- Detective Richard Fader** Fader is a cop. And it's never a good idea to piss off cops. In fact, quite the opposite, it's usually a GOOD idea to befriend a cop. You never know when one will come in handy. And as cops go, Fader's not such a bad guy. He's certainly doing what he can to make sure Spike gets his chances in life.



Masdon Global's Robots

Lee Williams provides some new robots from a British corporation

MASDON GLOBAL PLC. a British based megacorporation

Masdon Global is one of the few success stories of the Republic of Britain era. One of only a handful of heavy manufacturing companies still operating in Britain, Masdon Global design and manufacture cybernetics and construction robotics systems.

Their main area of expertise is in the building of factory robots, especially completely automated assembly lines used in the vehicle and aerospace industries. Masdon's biggest achievement to date is the fully automated plant they installed in Europe's biggest car works. This system requires almost no human input other than basic instructions and manual safety checks.

Masdon also manufacture self-contained mobile robots, mainly for security and law enforcement work. These range from sniffers about the size of a rat which are used by repairmen to check for gas leaks, up to the car-sized armed security robots which are meant to be available for military use only.

The main feature of these robots is that they tend to be less expensive than those from rival makers, such as RamTech or Krauss-Maffei-Deere, whilst still maintaining an equivalent level of specification.

Masdon was founded by Hari Massud

and Graham Donaldson in the early 1980s, and survived the upheavals of the SPP years and the Recovery. This was mainly due to the company being a major machinery supplier to the arms companies that the SPP bought its weapons from. Though apparently not supporters of the SPP, the directors still made a reasonable profit during this period.

Massud and Donaldson retired three years ago, and the current CEO of Masdon is Graham Kent. Kent is a very competent businessman, but some news commentators have made much of his "New Age" spiritual and religious beliefs. Kent has made little comment on this, except to say that "the way Masdon is run is governed purely by financial necessity and not by ethereal fantasy as certain tabloid writers have said".

ISM Mk.5 Internal Security Model 5 (non-vehicular robot)

This is a small (80cm high) robot designed for security patrols inside buildings. It is shaped like an American mailbox on four soft-tyred wheels, with a swivel-

mounted sensor package on top.

This package contains a smoke detector, passive infra-red sensor, siren alarm and spotlight. A CS gas dispenser, a "smart water" spray to tag suspects for later identification, a video camera and a loudspeaker which can be activated remotely from a control room are also included.

The ISM 5 is usually preprogrammed to follow a set route around buildings, checking locks and so on. If it encounters any unauthorised personnel it will attempt to block their exit, spraying them with smart water which will show up under UV light. If they resist then the robot will use its gas dispensers to incapacitate, whilst sounding the alarm in the control room. The robot can then be remotely controlled if necessary by human staff. It can also use its two lightweight arms to restrain prisoners until reinforcements arrive. Some versions can be programmed to use weapons, using their arms to hold and aim them.

The software and processing power of the ISM 5 enables it to distinguish between human and non-human, and it can read security passes with a small scanner. The

ISM Mark 5

Combat Move:	18/6	Initiative:	2
Fuel Capacity:	24 hour charge	Agility:	3
Armor Values		Strength:	4
Head	2	Constitution:	4
Chest	2	Weight:	80kg
Arms	1	Price:	\$1,300,000 US
Legs	2	Fuel Type:	Electricity
Skills:	Observation 8, Unarmed Melee 2, Small Arms 4 (optional)		
Armament:	Gas dispenser, smart water spray		
Sensors:	IR motion detector, pattern recognition software (visual)		



power source is a rechargeable electric battery cell, which can run for 24 hours on a full charge. A recharge takes 6 hours.

The Biped column of the Hit Location table is used in combat.

ADRR2

Armed Defence Response Robot mark 2 (non-vehicular robot)

ADRR is designed to combat the threat from armed groups such as terrorists who may attempt to gain entry to corporate facilities. It is a tracked robot, which makes it

more agile and better suited for external security operations than the ISM would be.

The standard armament configuration is one 5.56mm light machine gun (usually the M249 SAW) and a semiautomatic 12 gauge shotgun. The shotgun can be loaded with a variety of special rounds, which the ADRR can select whilst in combat to maximise its effectiveness. The robot's body is capable of 360 degrees rotation, and can elevate and depress its weapons to point vertically up or down.

The sensors equipped on this robot include all those seen on the ISM 5 with the

addition of audio pattern recognition (including voiceprint) and detectors for ultrasonic and subsonic vibrations. An IR spotlight for night operation is also fitted. It is somewhat bigger than the ISM, mainly due to its more heavily armoured and rugged construction. ADRR also has a heavy duty manipulator arm, which it can use to remove barricades or restrain suspects.

The Biped column of the Hit Location chart is used to resolve hits in combat, with Arm hits considered to hit the weapon pods and Leg hits going to the tracks.

AHR Mk.1

Armed Heavy Robot mark 1 (non-vehicular robot)

This is the biggest self-contained robot built by Masdon Global. It is intended for military use and extreme law enforcement situations.

The AHR is a walking robot with two independently targeting weapons pods as its arms. A wide variety of armaments can be installed in these pods, but usually one will carry a direct-fire weapon such as a HMG while the other will carry a heavier weapon such as a grenade launcher. Each pod can carry two weapons of Bulk 4 or less, or one weapon up to Bulk 9.

Sensors equipped on this model include everything seen on the ADRR 2, as well as full UV capabilities. AHR is able to perform a wide range of tasks independently, within the parameters of its basic programming. In a combat situation it can easily seem that the robot is operating of its own free will, which is enough to scare a lot of people. This is especially true when the AHR is operating in stealth mode, using a clever series of baffles to minimise any engine noise.

The AHR also has one advantage over other combat models - it is capable of self-repair. Inside the body cavity is a foldaway lightweight arm with several tools attached. The AHR can use this to repair damage when the combat situation eases. It has a full schematic of its own systems on file, as well as a weapons repair capability. This may give it an edge during sustained combats.

The AHR uses the Biped column on the Hit Location table.

ADRR Mark 2

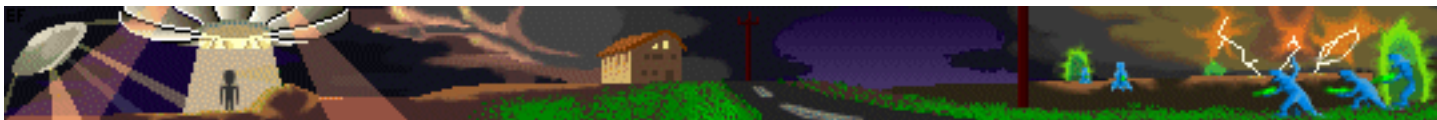
Combat Move:	20/10	Initiative:	4
Fuel Capacity:	24 hour charge	Agility:	4
Armor Values:		Strength:	6
Head	3	Constitution:	6
Chest	3	Weight:	120kg
Arms	3	Price:	\$4,300,000 US
Legs	2	Fuel Type:	Electricity

Skills: Observation 8, Small Arms 8, Stealth 4, Melee Cbt(Unarmed) 2.
Armament: M249 SAW with 200 rounds, 12 gauge semi automatic shotgun with 50 rounds, gas dispensers..
Sensors: Infra red motion sensor, pattern recognition software (audio & visual), subsonic and ultrasonic detectors, IR spotlight.

AHR Mark 1

Combat Move:	30/18	Initiative:	6
Fuel Capacity:	120	Agility:	4
Fuel Consumption:	5	Strength:	14
Armor Values		Constitution:	10
Head	5	Weight:	450kg
Chest	5	Price:	\$54,000,000 US
Arms/Legs	4	Fuel Type:	Gasoline

Skills: Observation 10, Small Arms 8, Stealth 4, Heavy Weapons 8, *Mechanic 4, *Electronics 4 (*repair abilities).
Armament: usually one M2HB mg with 315 rounds, one 40mm grenade launcher with 40 rounds, one 9mm smg with 150 rounds(treat as Uzi).
Sensors: IR & UV motion sensors, pattern recognition software (audio & visual), subsonic and ultrasonic detectors, IR/UV spotlights, white light spotlight.



London

Lee Williams provides another expansion to the Republic of Britain setting

This is a somewhat more detailed look at the capital city of the Republic of Britain. I have written this mainly in response to those on the regular chat forum who have been asking me questions, I suppose due to my being a British citizen. Here is my take on what to expect in the London of Dark Conspiracy. For more ideas, check out the list of reference material at the foot of this article.

"London never sleeps, it just sucks the life out of me.."
- *Londinium* by Catatonia

London's Public Face

The Greater London area does not look much different in the Dark Times than it does today. There are some differences, but by and large London is still a major destination for those who can still afford to travel as tourists. The most obvious change is the blackened ruin of St. Paul's Cathedral, burnt to the ground by arsonists who were rumoured to be in the employ of the SPP. This took place before the SPP revealed their true colours as an extremist political force.

Recently the New Tory government has

started to rebuild St. Paul's, training unemployed people as a work force and using their skills to reconstruct Wren's masterpiece. Though these workers are only paid a few extra Euros more than the welfare payment, they are developing a certain pride in the work. Curiously the cathedral's interior is far more badly damaged than expected, given where the fire was started. It has even been rumoured that bullet holes have been found there, but no workers have admitted seeing them.

Elsewhere, the building of New Downing Street continues apace. Using the original architect's plans taken from the vaults of the British Library, an exact reconstruction is taking shape. New Downing Street will actually contain several more houses than the old Downing Street, as well as a new national emergency control bunker. A small garrison is being built on the site of the Old Treasury, which was also destroyed by the mystery explosion which obliterated the old Downing Street buildings.

Other London landmarks are still as they always were, at least on the outside. Buckingham Palace is no longer a Royal Residence, the King and his family having moved permanently to Windsor Castle after the end of SPP rule. It is said that His Majesty felt the old place carried too many bad memories, after the family's arrest by Superintendent Bishop under SPP orders and also the signing of the so-called New Magna Carta. This is the document that the King signed, giving up the last vestiges of any power to the Recovery government whilst retaining some properties including Windsor Castle. Buckingham Palace is now used as official accommodation for visiting dignitaries, and is open to the public at certain times.

As part of the old Britain's Millennium celebrations, a huge Ferris wheel was built on the banks of the River Thames, close to the Houses of Parliament. This was closed

by the SPP as a waste of time and money, and later re-opened after their demise. A few months after the grand re-opening the wheel collapsed, killing 24 people and injuring many more. No explanation for this incident has yet been forthcoming.

The famous Millennium Dome at Greenwich was remodelled by the SPP as a nationalistic history museum. They had it filled with all manner of xenophobic and extremist propaganda, and then made it compulsory for schoolchildren to attend. After the end of SPP rule the Dome was closed down and is currently awaiting another refurbishment, this time as a huge concert venue. This was suggested as a cheaper alternative to forcing the Hyde Park refugees to move. The Dome has largely been ignored by the homeless, and is now ringed with security fencing to prevent entry before the rebuilding commences.

Other more visible signs of change include the A40 Westway, London's main access roadway from most of the rest of Britain. In the 1990s it was a gridlocked urban highway, with three lanes in each direction and several bad junctions and gyratory systems. Shortly before the SPP were elected, work was completed on a substantial improvement scheme approved by the New Labour government. This was an unpopular project with the people who lived near the Westway, as a great many of them were forcibly moved by local government officials and corporate security guards. The new roadway had four wider lanes in each direction, and a commuter monorail system was also constructed. This monorail runs along the central divider strip of the new road, and links to the outlying Tube train stations and bus terminals.

The Westway, and indeed most of Britain's road network, was ignored by the SPP during their brief period of power. Many roads fell into disrepair and are still awaiting improvement. This was due mainly to



the SPP policy of dissuading private transportation, but the Greater Depression also played a part in reducing the number of cars on British roads. Doubling the price of fuel didn't help, but at least the SPP did put a few ideas into action which have survived into the new government.

One of these is charging vehicles to use the outermost "fast" lane of the Westway. Anyone in a hurry and who can afford to pay is charged electronically by a scanner that can read the number of their car and bills the charge to their credit card. This lane is also used by police and emergency services for rapid response. Vehicles are also charged to enter the City of London, the so-called "Square Mile". This is the area where many international banks and financial institutions are based.

Old Father Thames

The Thames is the single biggest reason that London exists. The Romans founded the original settlement over 1500 years ago, which they named Londinium. Ever since then, the Thames has taken more than its fair share of abuse from mankind. From medieval times when the bodies of plague victims were originally dumped in the river to cholera, malaria and who knows what else later on, the Thames has had a lot thrown into it. The Industrial Revolution just made things worse, with iron slag, coal slurry and various chemicals just drained directly into the water. In the 1960s, the local authorities decided to clean up the river. By the 1970s trout were spotted in the Thames at London Docks, proving that the clean up had worked. By 1998 there were no fish anymore.

New industrial processes using chemicals that were not banned in the 1960s had leached into the river, as had the heavy air pollutants from the ever-increasing number of vehicles in the capital. Then the SPP arrived and ignored the environment altogether, instead spending all their efforts trying to further their twisted vision of a New Socialist Britain.

The Thames in the London of Dark Conspiracy is as it was a hundred years ago, filthy and polluted. Nobody ever goes too

close to it, except the River Police, water taxis and river buses and the gangs of Mudlarks (see below). All water taxis and river buses have high rails around them to prevent passengers from falling into the Thames. A water taxi can be hired for about 20 Euro per person and carries up to six passengers. They run the river from Kew Gardens all the way down to the Thames Flood Barrier. River buses are a cheaper way to travel in the central areas, but there are only six docking points for them and they run a very infrequent service.

The water is black and oily, and in bright sunlight it gives off a foul festering chemical stench. Every time there is a flood, the environmental health departments are put onto 24 hour alert. The water is tested daily, as there is so much chemical crud in there it changes into other toxic forms on a regular basis. Due to the continual rise in sea levels, this black water is what floods into the Underground rail network. On a good day, the Tube trains are only stopped about two or three times. On a bad day the entire system can be disrupted, with trains stuck and stations closed (sometimes to prevent people actually drowning in particularly deep flooding).

London has developed its own particular variety of Nukids too. As in Victorian times, these abandoned kids roam the banks and mudflats of the Thames, picking through the mud and garbage for anything which they can sell or barter for food. The old name for these unfortunate children is Mudlarks, which has become the local slang for these London Nukids. Some gangs of Mudlarks are said to actually rob and even kill unwary visitors, but this is the exception to the rule so far.

Remember, stay out of the river.

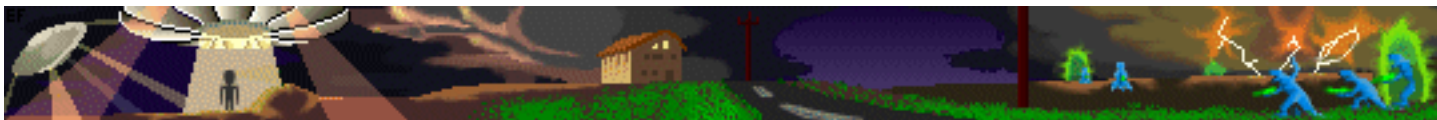
Street Life

Life on the streets of London can be complex, interesting and sometimes not even deadly. The main place for street dealing is the shantytown in Hyde Park. This was originally an emergency refuge for people who had been left homeless by the flooding on the East coast, but over time it has become a semi-permanent street market for "doggy

gear" as the locals have it. If the people here don't have what you want they can probably find it for you – at a price of course. A word of caution, do not go looking without a local contact or you may be mistaken for police informants. These people still remember the treatment they got from the SPP and its "Rehabilitation Constables", and they find it difficult to trust any strangers.

Street gangs are a problem in London, as they are in any big metroplex. There is a twist to this however, as the Metropolitan Police have found out. Whilst searching an area called the Heaps for a suspected kidnap victim, a joint police and army search team discovered a group of elderly people living in a subterranean complex. The senior citizens had built a warren of tunnels and rooms, using old car panels to line the walls. They survived by searching through the Heaps (actually a huge scrapyards full of abandoned cars) and bartering anything useful with the traders in Hyde Park. The police nicknamed this self-sufficient colony of oldsters the "Soft Gang", a name which stuck. There are several soft gangs nowadays, old people banded together for mutual support and protection against the violence of the youth gangs. Several of them are military veterans.

There is another shantytown in London, under the overpasses of the Westway. Originally an official site for gypsies, it has grown over the years and is second only to Hyde Park in the range of "services" that are available there. This site has a different reputation though, as fresh food is usually available here. Grown by the few remaining independent farmers, or sometimes stolen from agricorn store complexes, the chance of real fresh fruit and vegetables brings even respectable Mike types out of their suburbs. There is even a diner of sorts, using only organically grown produce. The owner was one of the first to settle permanently here, and he uses his meagre profits to buy water purification equipment to ensure the general good health of his friends and neighbours. The water supply is guarded at all times by several locals, armed with baseball bats and at least one double-barrelled shotgun.



The Old Bill (Metropolitan Police)

The police in Republican London are by and large similar to the force at the end of the 20th century. The major difference is that all officers are now trained in the use of firearms. It is left to the individual officer to decide whether they wish to carry one though. Currently around 40% of Metropolitan Regional Police Command officers choose to carry guns at all times. These are usually Glock pistols, though the detective branch is thinking of re-equipping with more up-to-date weapons in the near future.

Standard equipment for all uniformed beat officers includes the familiar helmet, which is now lined with an impact resistant material. This protects the head from thrown objects such as stones or bottles. All officers carry a 65cm long flexible baton and a CS spray for personal defence, as well as wearing a concealed kevlar vest (AV 1). The latest design handcuffs are carried, along with a headset radio that can be used with or without headgear. Armed officers carry their pistol in a secure hip holster and are issued with three magazines, one in the weapon and two spare.

Special armed response vehicles (ARV) are used more frequently nowadays also. These are specially tuned cars, with armoured glass windows, manned by marksman grade officers. Each officer in an ARV carries a Glock Model 20 pistol, and the car has a lock box which contains two H&K MP 7 submachine guns fitted with night vision equipment. If there is a serious incident involving firearms then the elite SO 19 are called in. They are trained by the SAS in siege breaking tactics, as well as being the best of the trained police marksmen (and women) in Britain. SO 19 includes snipers and “entry teams”, who use special techniques to enter buildings and release hostages.

In a riot situation, officers will be issued with flameproof coveralls and military style kevlar helmets with full-face visors. The standard baton is replaced with a 90 centimetre side-handle version. Full body armour is worn, with extra trauma plates in the front

and back (AV 2 to chest and abdomen). Respirators are carried, but are worn only if gas is used to disperse the rioters.

Some areas in London have become so bad that the police authority have begun to hire more ex-military personnel and even some mercenaries to patrol them. These are the Contract Police or “Pay Cops”. They use military style tactics and are much feared by those who inhabit their jurisdictions, including the few ordinary citizens who still eke out a living in those areas. They have a few APCs that they use for their patrols, and are often better armed than the regular police. There are many more official complaints lodged against the Contract Police than against the regular force, but the complainers do not often pursue the claims all the way to court for some reason. The regular Met officers have doubts about the new policy of hired help, but these are usually voiced in private.

The more professional “Breakers” are still used, usually to recapture runaways from the containment zones. The regular police have a great deal of respect for Breakers, and often like to hang out with them when off duty. Breakers are the only non-government employees who are normally allowed to openly carry firearms in the Republic. Of course, after all the civil unrest and upheaval of the SPP period there are many more guns available in Britain, but gun

crime as a whole has not increased as much as expected. When there is an incident involving firearms the ARVs race to the scene, and the police put as much effort into solving gun crimes as they used to in the late 20th century.

Law and Order

It should be remembered that the Republic of Britain has re-instated the death penalty for extreme crimes, such as mass murder. This makes it harder for the already over-stretched police force. Their investigations have to be almost clinical, with no mistakes or doubt whatsoever. Given the state of law enforcement, this means that actually getting a death sentence is very remote.

When the law, originally passed by the SPP, was NOT repealed by the Recovery administration there was a huge riot in Wormwood Scrubs prison. This jail had been having problems for years, but nothing was ever this bad. After three weeks of rioting, looting, beatings and arson the entire prison was destroyed. If you happen to be a passenger on the unbelievably overcrowded Western commuter monorail you can see the remains to the north of the East Acton stop.

Seventeen prisoners and twelve staff were killed, and at least two death row occupants escaped. One of them was serial killer Ryan Lovell. Lovell had claimed his

Weapons of the Old Bill

Glock Model 20

Ammo	ROF	Dam	Pen	Bulk	Mag	- Recoil -		
						SS	Burst	Range
10mm	SA	2	1-Nil	1	15	3	no	12

H & K MP-7

Ammo	ROF	Dam	Pen	Bulk	Mag	- Recoil -		
						SS	Burst	Range
10mm	5	2	1-Nil	4	30	2	6	30

Side Handle Baton

Melee Range	Hit Modifier	Damage
Short	+ 1	1D6+1



killings were done at the bidding of a small man who would appear in his home at night and tell him he needed the life essences of young people in order to live, and was willing to kill Lovell if he did not comply. His lawyer's plea of insanity was rejected, not least because Lovell himself stood up in court and asked the judge to reject the plea. His whereabouts are still not known.

The Media

London was always thought to be the home of mass media. It was the home of the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) for many years, and was the first city in the world with a regular TV service, which started long before WW2.

However, this all changed during the SPP administration. Being an overtly nationalistic political party, the SPP rushed through laws which stated that at least 90% of TV programming must have UK content. Then they introduced a list of subjects which were no longer deemed suitable for viewing. Finally they had a paranoid fit, claiming that TV satellites were being used by foreign powers to beam subliminal messages into the minds of UK viewers. Satellite TV originating from abroad was banned, and the average Brit was forced to watch only approved programmes.

In Britain, all five national networks were nationalised and merged into one channel, called BTV (British Television). As the list of banned shows grew and grew, BTV

shrank until basically the whole of the nation's TV was made in and broadcast from the old BBC headquarters in Wood Lane, west London. As public unrest grew, the SPP decided that BTV shows should be sold to other nations to fund the cost of "public re-education". This meant that the best of the BTV shows were broadcast at 3am GMT, because in the USA it was peak time and therefore worth more money. In the newly formed Democratic Socialist Russian Federation this equated to breakfast time, so the masses were sent out to the new factories laughing at the poor quality of decadent Western TV.

After the fall of the SPP, the Recovery government turned to the corps for help in many areas. One of their first popular moves was to re-instate satellite TV. By this time, several of the media groups had ceased making British-centred programmes so they hastily dubbed European shows into English. Astonishingly these became very popular, becoming the new wave of alternative entertainment. Scandinavian TV personalities became household names, and were quickly invited to social events in the highest strata of Republic society. Catchphrases such as "Vere is my herring buried darlink?" have wormed their way into the British consciousness.

In Conclusion

I hope that this article has helped to get across more of the ideas and feel of the

Republic of Britain milieu. At least it should provide a few seeds for future adventures, as well as some added colour should you decide to send your party to Britain.

Notes

The following books and films were my source material for the both the original Republic article and this follow up.

Clone by Richard Cowper

Quatermass (1979 UK TV series)

Fairyland

The Invisible Country by Paul J. MacAuley

Mindstar Rising

A Quantum Murder

The Nanoflower by Peter F. Hamilton

Road Lines by Chris Ould

Split Second starring Rutger Hauer

Zodiac by Neal Stephenson

The Uninvited (1996 UK TV series)

A Philosophical Investigation by Philip Kerr

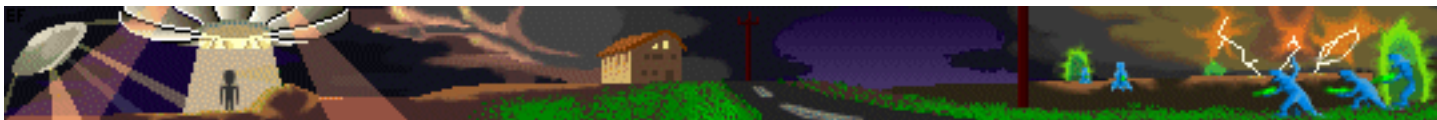
Department of the Environment (for the Thames flood map)

"It's no good wishing you were in another country because you think it would be better than where you are now.

"I've been there. It's just as messed up as this place is."

- Zena Marley

(Early 21st-century mercenary-philosopher)



Getting-The Drop On-The Bad Guys

Marcus D. Bone gives us an alternative to the standard Dark Conspiracy initiative system.

After long discussions with people at GENCON 1999, I came away with distinct feeling that while DC is a great game with excellent potential, but there are rules that people feel are too complicated, unwieldy or plain unfair to some of the players.

One such problem area is the Initiative rules. Seeing that DC is most defiantly a combat orientated game, initiative can be a major factor in any session. Unfortunately, because of the structure on these rules, some characters can be left standing around, while other party member and Darklings carve each other up in battle. Not only is this pretty unrealistic, it can also be downright boring for the players stuck in such a situation.

The other problem that is encountered is that, over time, the characters get progressively faster, making it much harder for the referee to find a creature able to outperform the PCs.

When second edition came out in 1998, Lester Smith recognized these problems and tried to fix them, while remaining inside the boundaries that he had set down in the original rules. These changes were a definite improvement; the characters' initiatives were much more compressed with only the quickest and deadliest creatures have 5 or 6.

But something about the system still didn't sit right in my own mind. The lack of

any random elements was disappointing, as was the inability for any character to really act out of turn. To me, it seemed as if the characters would end up relying on just one character to do the damage in combat, with the rest of the party getting pot shots where they could.

So my aim in this article is to present an Initiative system that is more flexible and random, while remaining in the frame work presented by Dark Conspiracy 2nd edition. I also tried to copy Lester's original aims with Initiative by having the Dark Minions different from any mortal humans.

The System

The basic goal of this initiative system is to add some sort randomness to the combat. Just like real life, some characters will act quickly in one situation, but slowly in another.

There are some small alternations to the combat mechanics that must be made for this system to work. These are all minor and will become second nature with practice.

Combat Turns

Each 'combat turn' in Dark Conspiracy is 30 seconds long. In this alternate system, these 'Combat Turns' remain as normal.

However these rules require that they be divided in half for reasons described below. Therefore, a 'half turn' is just that – half a Combat Turn or 15 seconds of time.

Seconds

Each phase in DC represents five seconds. Actions have been created so that what the character can achieve in this five seconds is realistic i.e. reload a magazine, or shoot up to five time with a semiautomatic pistol.

In this alternate system, the characters still use a 5 second phase to complete an

action. However, they now start this action at a random second during the 15 second 'round'.

During combat, the referee counts down the seconds as they pass, with the PCs and NPCs interrupting when it is their second to act. Because counting down is easier than counting up, second 15 is the first second to pass in a round. The referee then continues to count down until reaching zero. No actions can be preformed on a zero.

Rolling for Initiative

Like many other roleplaying games that have random based initiative roles, this alternate system also requires a short time at the beginning of each 'round' for a each character to roll single d10 and add this to their initiative stat. The combined total of stat plus roll gives the starting second in the 'round' that the character with begin their actions.

Example – Brem has initiative 3 and has just entered combat with an initiative 4 dog. The referee asks for Brem to role initiative and declare what she is going to do for the 'round'. Rolling 1d10 Brem rolls a 6 and adding it to her base initiative of 3 gives her a total of 9 for this 'round'. Unfortunately for Brem, the referee rolls a 7 for the dog, and added to its initiative. of 4 gets a total of 11, meaning it will act quicker in the coming 'round'.

Phases

As explained above, each action that a character takes requires 5 seconds.

Every five seconds that passes during the count down allows the character another action during the current combat round.

Example – As Brem's starting second is 9, she is entitled to another action during that round at 4, or 5 seconds after her first.

The Dog that is attacking Brem will get three actions during the present round: one on 11, one on 6 and one at 1.



The Count Down

Now that the characters all know when in the round they are going to start, and know how many actions that they will have during the round the referee can now begin the Count Down.

Example of a Combat round (half turn) -

Brem has an Initiative stat of 3, the Dog that she will be facing has an Init of 4. The referee begins the first round of combat (remembering that a round is 15 seconds long) by asking Brem what she is going to do. Brem replies that she is going to pick up a nearby stick and close with the dog, attacking it if necessary. Satisfied that this is an adequate action for the character to make the referee then asks for Initiative rolls.

Brem rolls a 6 on the 1d10 and adds this to her initiative stat for a total initiative score for this round of 9. Quickly subtracting 5 from this she states to the referee that she will be acting on second 9 and then 4.

The referee has meanwhile rolled for the dog and has got a 7 adding this to the dog's initiative of 4 gives a total of 11. Therefore, the dog will act on 11, then 6, and then 1.

The referee begins the count down starting at 15... 14... 13... 12...

11... The Dog acts closing in on Brem snarling, obviously not in the best of moods. The referee calculates that the combatants are now within striking distance of each other...

10...9... Brem attacks the Dog with her club (a Difficult: Armed Combat task). She hits doing 8 points of damage, knocking the dog to the ground.

However, since it isn't seriously wounded yet, the dog does not need to roll to remain conscious, but is at -1 initiative next round...

8...7...6... The dog gets to attack again now. It hits Brem full on with its dive attack, but misses with its bite. The referee allows Brem a chance to dodge if she wishes. Brem has an option to weigh up; if she does dodge then regardless of the result she loses her next action (on the 4). Otherwise she

will the full brunt of the dog's attack. Deciding to try and dodge the flying dog, she needs a Formidable: Unarmed ... and succeeds... the dog crashes to the ground behind her...

5...4... Brem would have gone but used this slot in dodging the Dog...

3...2...1... The Dog gets up looking dazed and confused as to what just happened...

So the combat continues. Being the end of the round (or half-turn), the referee calls for new initiative roll from Brem. This time she rolls a 9, for a total of 12. While the referee rolls only a 3 for the Dog and with only 3 now for its initiative stat will start acting on a 6. This turn it looks as if Brem has the drop on the dazed dog getting two actions, on 12 and 7, before the animal will even react.

Special Rules

These have been added to make combat in the DC world more like it should be.

Action 16

Characters with an initiative of 6 who get a 10 on their initiative roll get a total of 16. With only 15 seconds in a combat round, this may seem like a problem. However, the action 16 rule is an extension of what can and sometimes does happen in real life.

Sometimes people react without even thinking; normally this is a subconscious reaction to some event. e.g. grabbing something as it falls, yanking the steering wheel of the car to one side to avoid an oncoming car, etc. Normally these only happen in extraordinary circumstances, but then combatting Dark Minions could be called that.

If a character or NPC rolls a 16 for Initiative, then they immediately get one action before any one else i.e. as if there was a 16. After it is completed they will act on an 11, 6 and then finally one.

Remember the referee is the final arbiter on this rule. Therefore, if the circumstances do not warrant it, feel free to make any 16 initiative rolls a 15 instead.

Darkling Phase Speed

In DC and these alternate rules it is taken that all mortals have a phase speed of 5. In other words, it takes 5 seconds for a character to complete an action. However, some beings the PCs will encounter are not from this earth, and possess skills and abilities that man hardly comprehends.

One such ability is summed up as Darkling Phase Speed. Imagine that a Darkling can complete a task in less time than a human. For example, it may take only 3 or 4 seconds for five shots from a semi-automat rather than five.

This rule was created to mimic Lester's wish for quick acting Dark Minions that out strike the PCs, or the big lumbering Darkling that may only be able to strike once in combat, but be able to knock down entire buildings with its fists.

By simply altering the number of 'seconds' between a minion's actions, we can achieve this effect. A minion with only 4 seconds between actions would realistically get more actions per round than any PC regardless of what second they started in.

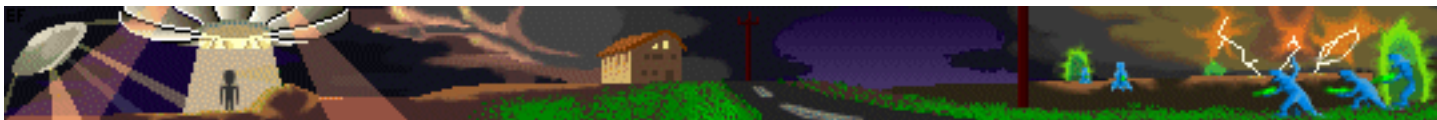
Example - A Darkling with a Phase Speed of 3, an initiative of 6 and a 9 on their 1d10 would act in seconds 15, 12, 9, 6, and 3. A minion with a Phase Speed of 7, an initiative 3 and a rolls of 4 would only get to act in second 7.

In Conclusion

From reading through this again I realize how complicated these alternate rules must seem, although in reality they are every simple and easy to use in your game. I know that no set of rules is ever perfect and that there must unfortunately always be a compromise between complicated and usable.

I have been using them regularly for 5 years now and they do work. From my own experience, I can say that they bring a little more tension and enjoyment to the initiative phase of any combat, especially when at last the character with initiative 1 gets to go before the initiative 6 combat bunny.

I can only ask that one session you try them out, just as experiment and tell me what you think; I'd love to hear your opinion.



The Ezeuth

Lee Williams
presents a
new Dark
Race

The Ezeuth are a lizard-like race who evolved on a world that is almost entirely covered by oceans. They are a liquid breathing species, who have evolved natural empathic abilities.

Their technology has been created by the genetic engineering of other sea creatures native to their planet. Early in their history, they used a slightly empathic creature similar in appearance to an Earth clam as a kind of alarm to protect their egg chambers from predators. Over many centuries they modified these naturally empathic molluscs, as well as many other lesser creatures, to perform all kinds of minor tasks, enabling the Ezeuth to ponder other things such as the shape of the universe.

Eventually, they came into the technological age. Using a type of coral, they grew the hull of their first space vehicle. Into this they placed life support devices, living machines that would keep the pilot alive as she headed out of the ocean into the deadly dry

atmosphere, and further into the empty seas of space. The lower part of the vessel they focussed by carefully shaped vents, spouted forth. The tiny craft soared up and through the air, into space. The flight was a success.

From then on, all the Ezeuth's efforts went into space exploration. The spaceships they now use are still grown from gene tailored corals, although they are now much more sophisticated than that first humble ship. Indeed, they are one of the very few species who have a faster than light capability. This makes their ships sought after by all the Darkness controlled ET races, who still do not have this technology.

Physically, an adult Ezeuth stands about four feet tall. On land they are bipedal and roughly humanoid in shape. They have three webbed fingers and a thumb on their upper

limbs, and three widely splayed webbed toes on the "feet". Their eyes are large, with a third transparent eyelid. They breathe through gills which are located in the neck, but the water enters through slits in the face about where a human nose would be.

Their spoken language consists of clicks and sonic pulses, somewhat similar to that of dolphins. They have a crest on the head which is used to sense vibrations and speech in water. Their swimming ability is breathtaking.

As far as is known, they bear no ill will to humankind. However the FTL technology that the Ezeuth possess make their ships prime targets for the minions of the Dark. Earth is of great interest to the Ezeuth, mainly due to its large oceans. The Ezeuth would like to have made contact first, but circumstances dictated otherwise. If the Darkness could be eradicated then friendly contact could still be made with them. Obviously though, the Ezeuth must be cautious when they visit Earth's system, lest they be captured or influenced by the Dark Lords.

THE EZEUTH

Strength:	3	Education:	10	Move:	2/7/12/20
Constitution:	4	Charisma:	4	Skill/Damage:	7/2
Agility:	6	Empathy:	6	Hits:	12/25
Intelligence:	9	Initiative:	6	# Appear:	1D6

Special: Swimming (movement of 50 when swimming), Psychic Invisibility and Project Emotion all at level 10. All weapons and equipment are fully functional in and out of water.

"You people think I'm joking, don't you?"

-Zena Marley
(Early 21st-century mercenary-philosopher)



Tabloid Articles

Lee Williams
provides
another short
adventure seed

UFO CRASHES INTO SEA?

From our Eastern Europe correspondent

Brbinj, Croatia: After a number of sightings of strange lights in the sky on the night of July 12, a spacecraft was reported to have crashed into the Adriatic sea.

At first, two local fishermen said that the pilot had also fallen into the sea a short distance from the craft. After trying to rescue him, the fishermen returned to shore and brought back with them professor Jozе Kukovic who was on a diving holiday in the local port of Brbinj. Using his scuba equipment, the professor sought in vain for any sign of the craft or its occupant.

Now however, the townsfolk appear to have changed their minds and claim to have mistaken an annual meteor shower for a UFO crash.

Rumours persist in the local area that an “unclean beast” *was* taken up from the sea by the men of Brbinj, but later died and was burned by the local priest as an abomination. This is denied by both Doctor Kukovic and fisherman Pribislav Polascek, one of the two who first raised the alarm after the alleged crash. Polascek claims that he now realises what was seen was a meteor shower, common in the area at that time of year.

“I must say that the shooting stars were

particularly bright this year, so this means they were bigger than usual. What we saw must have been some rocks hitting the sea” he added.

Doctor Kukovic said “I am a man of science, and though there is still a great deal of superstition among the locals they are generally down to earth types. If they say it was a mistake and what they saw were in fact meteors then I would have to agree. I saw no evidence of anything unusual.”

The local Orthodox priest Father Perc refuses to comment on the matter altogether, even though it is said to be he who burned the alien remains. One local citizen who wishes to remain anonymous has claimed that there was also a book of strange writings, which was among the items burned by the priest.

There seems to be no clear evidence of any otherworldly visitation in this quiet part of Croatia, but the people of neighbouring villages now make the sign of the cross when they enter Brbinj on market day.

THE TRUTH

A small alien scoutship did in fact crash into the Adriatic, after entering the Earth’s atmosphere too fast and suffering a system overheat. The pilot did survive and was rescued by Kukovic and the two fishermen, but sadly died from anaphylactic shock caused by a bandage that was impregnated with an antibiotic substance, which ironically was designed to prevent infection.

The craft was on a reconnaissance mission to Earth. The race who sent it, the Ezeuth, have become aware of the opening of the portal on Io, and despatched the ship to covertly observe the extent of Dark influence on humanity. It remains to be seen whether they intend to help those opposing the Dark or are trying to infiltrate humanity like the other Darkness controlled beings.

The Ezeuth have not previously been seen on Earth, and have managed to remain relatively free of Dark incursions themselves thus far. There is a distinct possibility that when the scoutship does not report back they may send another ship to Earth to investigate.

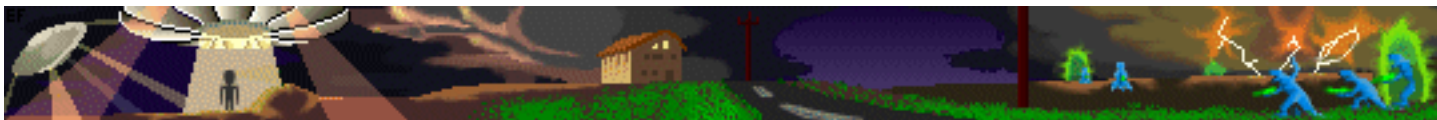
As for the witnesses in Brbinj, they found all the wreckage they could from the ET ship and buried it in a cavern several miles from the town. As Kukovic said, the people of the area are very superstitious and when the priest declared the unfortunate pilot to be unclean and wrong in the eyes of God they all came together to cover up the incident and forget it forever more.

Kukovic himself actually tried hard to persuade the locals that this was an intelligent being from another world, but after the being’s unfortunate death he was so saddened that he agreed to the deception. As a respected nuclear scientist, he could not tell his tale without any evidence, or he would be ridiculed by the scientific community.

Another thing is the “book” that the Ezeuth scout had, which was allegedly burned by Father Perc. It was in fact rescued by Petar, a local man who had assisted in the attempt to treat the visitor’s injuries. He still has it, secreted away in some place known only to himself.

Anyone who could prove themselves trustworthy to Petar might be let in on his secret. If another scoutship arrives the Ezeuth might come looking for the book, which is a record of the first ship’s voyage (a kind of flight recorder). This book could become a sort of Rosetta Stone for human/Ezeuth communications, if it could be found and decoded.

Tabloid article and adventure seed inspired by the short story “Rescue Operation” by Harry Harrison.



The Loose Ends

Credits

Demonground Editor-In-Chief
Marcus Bone
(MARCUS.BONE@xtra.co.nz)

Demonground Associate Editor/Chief
Minster for Propaganda
Michael Marchi
(mjm@42north.org)

Demonground Associate Editor/Chief
Minister for Layout
Geoff Skellams
(geoff.skellams@towersoft.com.au)

Article Authors
Rob Beck
Marcus Bone
Michael Marchi
Geoff Skellams
Lee Williams

Cover Art
Eyal Faingersh

Banner Art
"Invasion" by Eyal Faingersh

Interior Art
Andy Simmons

Interior Graphics
Geoff Skellams

Gencon '99 photographs by Becky Marchi
and Geoff Skellams

New Zena Marley quotes written by Geoff
Skellams.

Submissions

Like all fanzines, we need articles by you, the fans of *Dark Conspiracy*, to keep this magazine alive.

We're looking for articles solely related to the *Dark Conspiracy* universe. Any material that would help a new referee or player would be ideal.

Use the departments from this issue as a rough guide to the areas of material we are looking for. In particular, we need more:

Dark Races
Dark Conspiracy Related Fiction
Tabloid Articles
House Rules
NPCs
Milieu

If you think you can help, then please send your submission to Marcus Bone (MARCUS.BONE@xtra.co.nz).

We would prefer all submissions to be in a format readable by Microsoft Word 97. Our main preference is a Word 97 file.

If you are sending in a number of articles, please send each one in a separate file. This saves us a lot of time and effort.

If you are sending in tables, please send them as a word processor table or a tab-delimited text file. Do not send HTML files.

Please keep the formatting in your submissions simple. We will format your submission when the magazine is being laid out.

We reserve the right to edit your submission and to correct spelling and grammar if necessary. If you have a problem with us doing this, please contact us and we will see if we can come to some sort of arrangement.

We look forward to seeing your submissions. Your involvement is important, not only to the success of this fanzine, but also to the continued survival of *Dark Conspiracy*.

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MASKS OF DARKNESS

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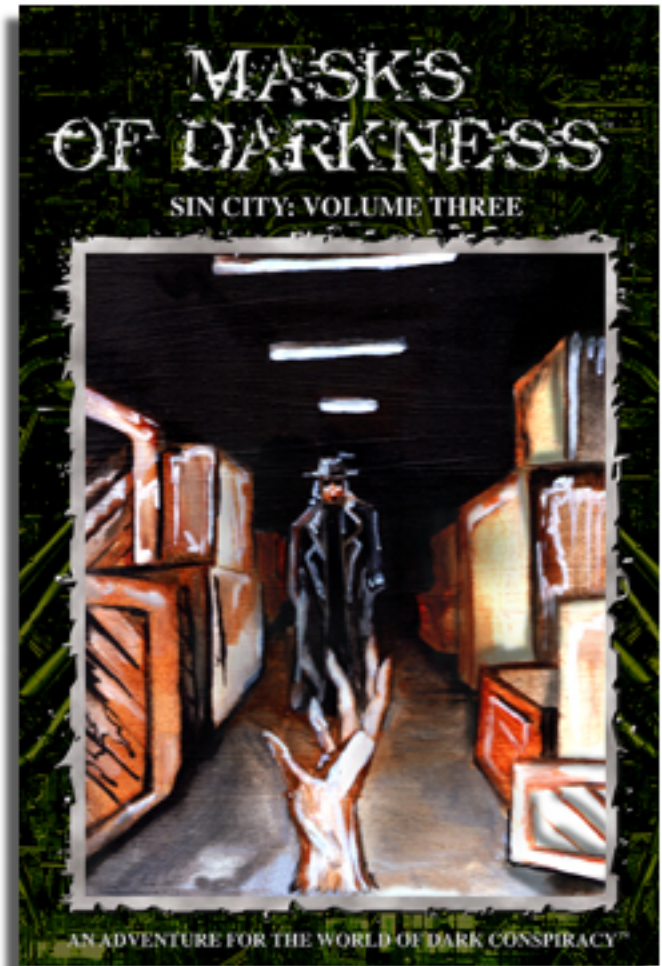
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Dynasty Presentations, Inc.

P.O. Box 221

Lake Geneva, WI USA 53147

Phone: (414) 245-3710

Fax: (414) 249-9456

<http://www.dynastypresentations.com/>