

THE DEMONGROUND

Reflections of a Darker Future

FALL 2000
VOL 10

ALIENS
ISSUE!

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GREY, THREE FEET TALL, BIG BLACK EYES, NO NOSTRILS... YEAH, RIGHT!

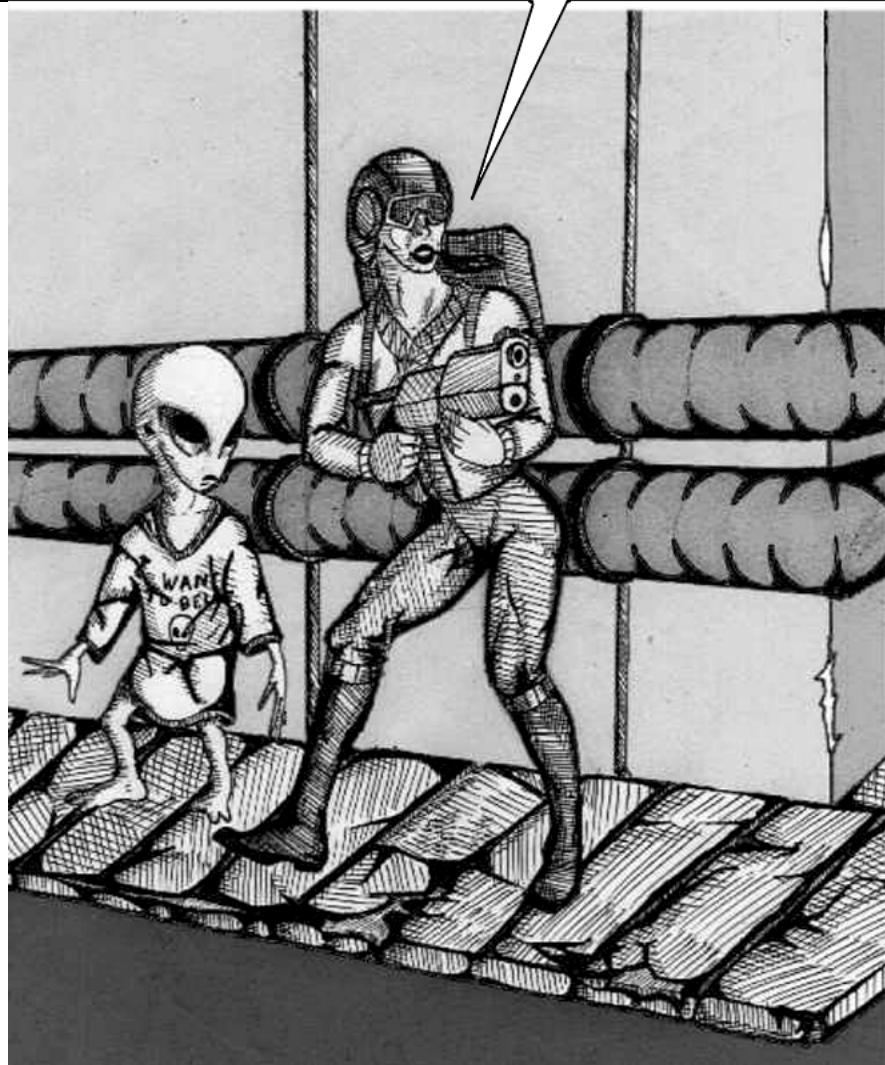
Editorial
by Lee Williams

Aliens...everyone nowadays has an opinion on the subject, but just a few years ago if you expressed any interest at all people would look at you as though you were someone to be either pitied, or avoided in future (and often both). Mass media has had much to do with this upsurge of interest over the last few years, in particular a certain TV series following the extraordinary investigations of two FBI agents. Looks like the aliens have come to stay.

Of course, stories of aliens have been with us for a long time. With this magazine's expansion into horror games other than Dark Conspiracy, I decided to go back and read the works of H.P. Lovecraft for the first time in, well, aeons. I soon realised something I had missed when reading them previously, namely that they are stories of alien beings who are trying to undermine humanity and take the Earth for themselves. When I first read Lovecraft aged about 15, I had taken the mentions of 'Elder Gods' to mean literal deities. This time around I got it...all those intervening years playing Chaosium's games still hadn't really got through to me.

A friend of mine remarked recently, when we were sitting around talking after our Saturday role-play session, that much of the horror in HPL's stories comes from the fact that his aliens are indeed truly alien. Good and evil are human concepts, which HPL's races know little or nothing about. This just makes them even more scary from a human point of view, and this concept can easily be used in other non-Lovecraftian games

On the other hand, there are also stories of aliens helping national governments either willingly or otherwise. This is grist to the mill for those of us who love a good conspiracy game (FNORD), and leads to thoughts of Area 51 and secret underground complexes. Then



there are abductions, crop formations, MIBs, anomalous lights and so forth. There is even a theory that the recent popularisation of alien-related media may just possibly be a ploy by several governments to prepare us all for the day when they finally announce that they have made contact already and ET's walk among us even now.

The real trick with using this in a role-playing game is to be careful not to reveal too much; otherwise the campaign can easily become a one-trick pony. Remember, the truth isn't 'out there' it is in your referee's head, which is a far scarier place...

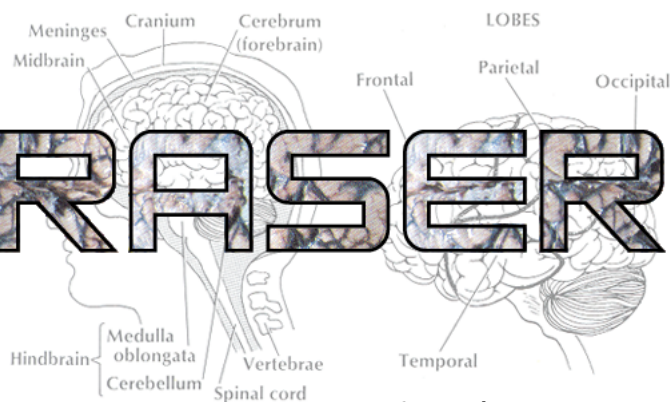
On a somewhat different note, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our esteemed colleagues Mike and Becky Marchi on the arrival of their second daughter, Julia Rose, born on August 22, 2000. Another future gamer, I'm willing to bet.

Finally, many thanks to the original DEMONGROUND team for taking me on board as an Associate Editor. Fools! ... then again they do say that talent will out.

Lee Williams,
Associate Editor

WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT:

THE BRASER



A Dark Conspiracy Weapon by Norm Fenslon

The Braser (BRAIN Amplification and Stimulated Empathic Resonation) is a new weapon, built to prey on vulnerabilities in the human physique. Able to fire in three separate modes, it can be a devastating weapon against the general populace.

Function

The Braser uses human brains as a stimulation medium to amplify empathic energy stored in the brain tissue. Once primed with a small level of energy, the empathic force bounces back and forth within a cavity packed with brain tissue, the *brasing cavity*. The brasing cavity has an anode on one end and a cathode on the end from which the empathic energy exits. As the empathic energy bounces back and forth between the anode and the cathode, it is excited to higher and higher energy states, similar to a conventional laser. Once a critical threshold is reached, the energy passes through the very thin material of the cathode and passes out of the cavity. The highly energized empathic force then passes through a focusing element, which determines the characteristics of the beam.

The focusing elements are large and specially shaped, with three types known to exist, each yielding a different effect. The weapon fires in **laser** mode when the focusing element is made of emerald. A diamond focusing-element provides the **shotgun** mode, while a sapphire provides a **flame-thrower** mode. The anode and cathode are made of lanthanum. The cathode's lanthanum reflector is a layer roughly 1 micron thick attached to the base of the focusing element. The technology that bonds the

cathode material to the focusing element is beyond present human means. The anode is attached to a spring-loaded plunger that maintains a constant pressure on the brains in the brasing cavity. Since the loaded brains tend to shrink when used, the plunger keeps the density of brain tissue relatively constant.

The casing of the braser consists of pure silver or platinum. Purity is a requirement for the casing material as well as the anode and cathode. The lanthanum of the anode and cathode is extremely hard to purify and difficult to come by in sufficient bulk. Although the electronics are alien, the design is esoteric and not well understood even by all of the original designers. Investigators looking in the electronics will find a small biological growth. At first, it appears as a bit of debris or an infestation, but careful inspection will reveal that it is a part of the circuitry. In fact, this growth is the source of the priming empathic charge. Unless well versed in alien technology, attempts to reverse engineer the weapon will fail.

Game Information

The braser's strength and range are dependent on the number and quality of the brains installed into the device. Each braser has a rating equal to the sum of empathy attributes for each brain. The number of shots the weapon is capable of is dependent on the sum of the willpower skills of the once living brains. As shots are taken, the brains begin to blacken and wither giving an indication of being fully discharged. On average, the empathic skill of humans is 2.5 per loaded brain. The average willpower (for this purpose) is 2 per brain. The short range of the weapon is its rating in meters. Brain tissue must be no older than 24 hours after being removed from the host.

Brasers have been seen in various sizes, from bulky pistol-sized devices to cannon-sized psionic blasters. Stats given are representative, since the number and quality of the loaded brains will determine the weapon's actual combat strength. Because of the time it takes to charge up the braser, shooters can discharge it only once per combat round.

The Braser

Ammo: Empathic human brains
Wt: *Pistol:* 2.2kg; *Rifle:* 6.1kg; *Cannon:* 62+kg
Mag: *Pistol:* ½ to 1 brain (average 1-2 shots); *Rifle:* 2 to 4 brains (average 4-8 shots); *Cannon:* 3+ brains (average 6+ shots)
Price: N/A (-/-)

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	Mag	—Recoil—		
						SS	Brst	Rng
Braser Pistol	1	1-3*	Nil	4	*	0	-	1-3*
Braser Rifle	1	5-10*	Nil	6	*	0	-	5-10*
Braser Cannon	1	8+*	Nil	N/A	*	0	-	8+*

*There is no impact from the round, so no knockdown or hydrostatic shock occurs as a result of being hit by this weapon. * See text description*



Recoil from firing the braser is nonexistent. In fact, there is no indication that the weapon has been fired other than the effects it has on its target. The braser's target must be biological to suffer effects, and for non-laser modes, empathic as well. The weapon is fired using the appropriate Small Arms or Heavy Weapons skill. However, due to its alien ergonomics and lack of feedback, the task is one level more difficult.

To reload the braser, the spent brains must be removed, new brains loaded, and the weapon charged. Emptying spent brains takes a combat round and is usually messy. Reloading the braser takes 30 seconds per brain (if one is available) since care must be taken. Charging the braser takes another combat round.

Laser Mode

In laser mode, the focusing element transforms the empathic energy into a bolt that alters the local environment near the creature it strikes. This can take various energy forms, but the most common is a powerful microscopic opening into a pseudo-dimension where the gravity is on the order of a black hole. Energy and chunks of matter are sucked into the micro-hole leaving a gaping opening in the target. The amount of damage the weapon does is equal to its rating. The laser mode has no penetration and any inanimate armor will stop it. Full damage effects extend to the maximum range of the weapon, i.e., extreme range.

Shotgun Mode

Shotgun mode emits a blast of psychic energy that does not do physical damage; but it can cause death. Since it attacks the psyche, it is handled similarly to an empathic attack. The damage value in this mode is actually dependent on an empathic skill level attainment. If a hit is rolled, a Stage of Success is determined using the following formula:

$$\text{Level} = \text{Rating} + \text{\#of Brains} + 1d10 - (\text{Target Int} + \text{Willpower})$$

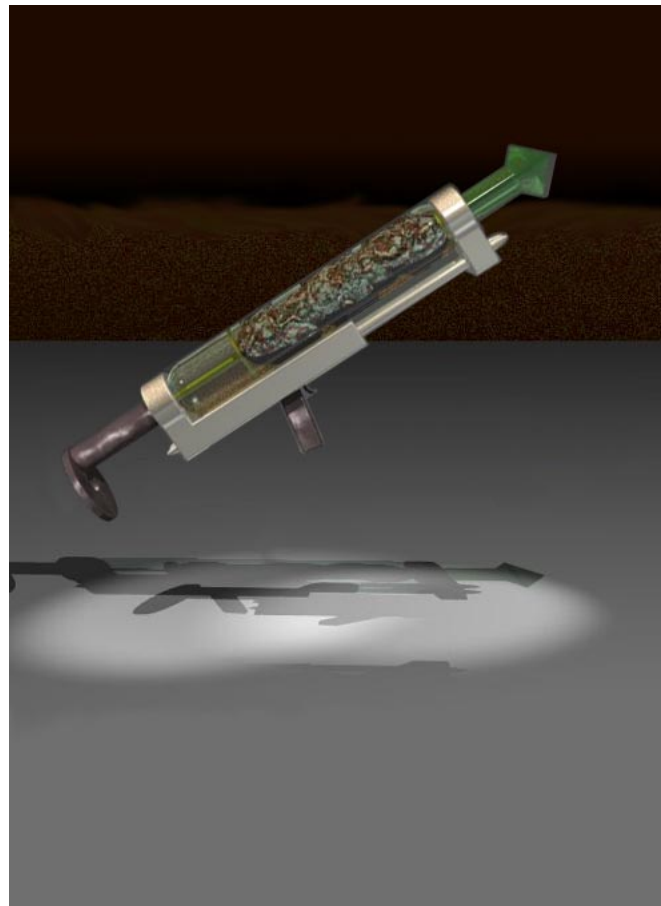
The effects are based on the level attained:

- Basic Success = target stunned for 1d6 rounds
- Stage 2 = target stunned for 1d6 minutes
- Stage 3 = target unconscious for 3d6 minutes
- Stage 4 = target unconscious for 1d6 hours
- Stage 5 = target comatose and must roll for psychosis on Neuropath Failed Push table
- Stage 6 = target dies

The Stage of Success is reduced for each range band beyond Short range. That is, full effect at Short Range, -1 stage at medium range, etc. Less than a Basic Success is no effect. Note: killing the target is only possible at short range. Further, no roll on the psychosis table is needed for non-PC and non-NPC characters.

Flame-thrower Mode

In this mode the weapon has an area of effect. When fired, a circle of some radius is placed at the aim point. If the shot attempt misses, scatter the aim point similarly to a grenade. All empathic and empathic creatures touched by the circle are attacked. Empathic characters and creatures between the shooter and the aim point are also attacked. Each attacked empath in close range has its willpower reduced by the rating of the braser. Each attacked empath in medium range has its willpower reduce by ½ the braser rating. If the target has its willpower reduced below zero, the target goes catatonic and remains conscious, but in a highly suggestible state. There is no effect at ranges greater than medium range. A target whose willpower is reduced below zero drops everything he is holding and if moving quickly, will stumble and fall. If driving, the vehicle becomes uncontrolled, etc. The target can recover willpower points with enough rest at a rate of 1 per 2 days. If under successful psychiatric treatment, this will improve to 2 points each day. The suggestible state can be used to control the target so affected. All negative willpower points should be recorded so that the duration of the willpower dominance can be accounted. Note: the projected circle is a rough estimate of the weapon's edges. The GM makes the final determination of the actual edges and, although only a suggestion, a radius of ½ rating in meters is a good beginning.



Braser Flamethrower Mode Example:

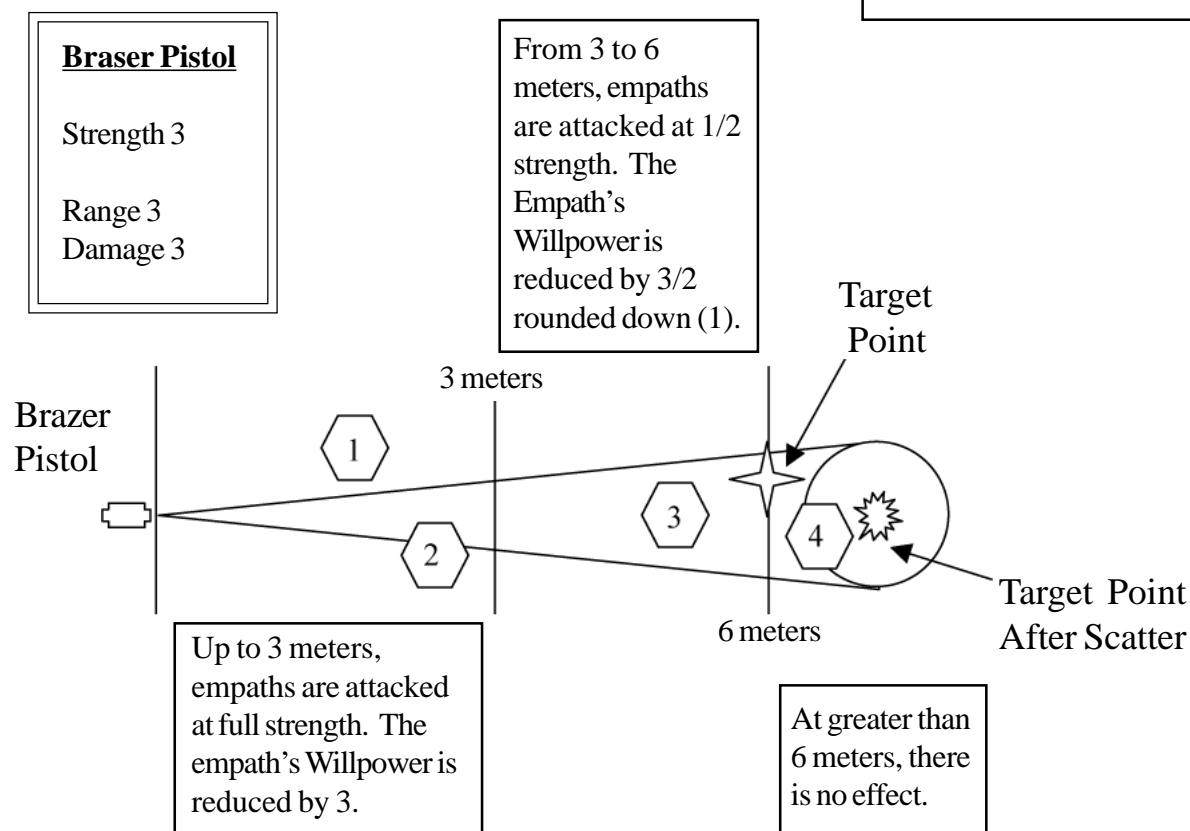
In the following illustration, four Empaths are targetted with a Braser Pistol which is set to Flamethrower Mode. The numbered hexagons in the diagram represent the Empaths, relative to the field of fire of the weapon. Each empath possesses a Willpower rating as indicated in the table to the right.

Empath 1: Willpower = 4

Empath 2: Willpower = 2

Empath 3: Willpower = 2

Empath 4: Willpower = 2



Results:

Empath 1 is missed. No change to Willpower.

Empath 2 is attacked at full strength. Willpower = $2 - 3 = -1$. Empath is catatonic and suggestible and can be controlled for 1 day.

Empath 3 is attacked at 1/2 strength. Willpower = $2 - 1 = 1$. Empath fights on.

Empath 4 is not attacked. Even though the Empath is in the "blast" pattern, the weapon has no effect at ranges greater than medium range (6 m). No change to willpower.



While many Dark Races have been published, it should not be forgotten that some creatures are not Darkling at all...



Corporate Entity

Strength:	N/A
Constitution:	N/A
Agility:	N/A
Intelligence:	6
Education:	2
Charisma:	4
Empathy:	12
Initiative:	N/A
Move:	N/A
Skill/Dam:	N/A
Hits:	N/A
# Appear:	N/A

Corporations are living entities. They eat, or do you think *you're* doing the consuming when you buy consumer goods? They have bodies, as their body rests in the contracts that hold them together. They have a circulatory system in the stock market and bank accounts. There are predators and there are the passive grazers. They even have Empathic essences.

It's unknown what weird forces spawned the Corporate Entities. The first Corporations were mercantile guilds; they eventually blossomed into the Corporate Entities which we know so well today. They can Empathically manipulate their employees and CEO's into a sense of protectiveness, and they can interact with other Corporations. Corporate Entities are territorial creatures; competitors are fought viciously.

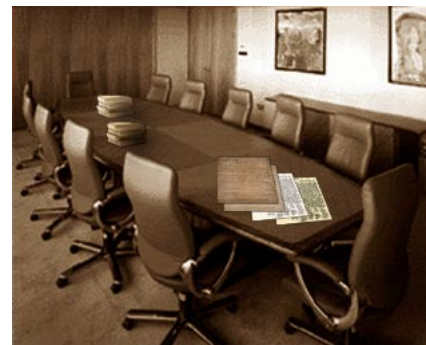
Around the 1900's, Corporate Entities gained a greater understanding of themselves, and learned that the "small, corporeal entities" that ran through their bodies were indeed symbiotic life-forms worth protecting and nurturing. Soon after, they came to the realization that these beings were sapient. There could have been a world in which the Corporation was the boon of all humanity; then the Invasion began.

A new breed of Corporation came into the world; the cannibal-predator Corporation. These Corporate Entities viciously attacked *any* Corporation unable to stand on its own. Rather than protecting or at least leaving young Corporate Entities alone, they viciously attacked and consumed these Entities. They attacked each other, the other, less vicious Entities, and sometimes even themselves. Eventually, these Corporate Entities became the Megacorporate Entities, Dark Minions of insidious nature.

The smaller Corporate Entities have hidden, and contributed to the resistance as best they can, including forming tabloids with journalists who, 30% to 50% of the time, strike gold and find facets of the truth behind the Invasion, and housing cells of the Empathic Underground by raising Empathic shielding. The Corporate Entity, though the source of the problem, is also part of the solution.

Killing Corporations

Any Corporate Entity that goes bankrupt dies. It's death by starvation for them. As well, if they are flooded by counterfeit money, they will become just as dead, this time by poison. Finally, the



contract is their body; by destroying (or otherwise voiding) a significant portion of their contracts in a short time, the Corporate Entity will be destroyed. When they finally die, the business they are composed of will often swiftly fail, and if they don't quite often another Corporation will reproduce by installing a nascent Corporate Entity into the rejuvenating corpse of the former.

* * *

Deathwalker

Strength: * + 1
 Constitution: **
 Agility: * + 1
 Intelligence: **
 Education: *
 Charisma: ** + 1
 Empathy: 2d6 - 2
 Initiative: * + 1
 Move: *
 Skill/Dam: */by weapon
 Hits: *# Appear: 1 or 2d6
 Special: Empathic Healing equal to their Empathy.

* As a Human NPC.

** As a Human NPC, but modified based on its age.

The Mythology

There are some people who seemed to have been stillborn and then picked up with their life and moved on. They grew up seemingly dead, they go through life seemingly dead, and they don't die so much as decay beyond the point of functionality.

The Reality

Self-willed undead, though rare, do exist. In the case of the Deathwalker, they are either stillborn or die very early in life, but refuse to give up. They continue through life as best they can. However, their metabolisms don't handle death-stress very well; in an accelerated age-decay, their artificial vital functions get out of balance and begin to grate upon one another. Meanwhile, a more horrific psychological transformation is occurring within, a transformation which is the psychological ramification of the subconscious (or perhaps conscious) realization that they are dead.

Age and the Deathwalker

At age 17, they have attributes similar to those of a human. However, every four years thereafter, they must roll their Empathic Healing (the skill that holds them together). If the roll fails, they will lose a point of Constitution. The difficulty of this roll is as follows:

Age	Difficulty
21	Easy
25	Easy
29	Average
33	Average
37	Difficult
41	Difficult
45	Very Difficult
49	Very Difficult
53	Next to Impossible
57	Next to Impossible
61+	Impossible

As well, every time the character makes this roll, they must also roll their Willpower to the same difficulty. Failure indicates that they gain a point of Intelligence and lose a point of Charisma. Every time this happens, their intellect twists and becomes more diseased. They gain some neurotic behavior, delusional belief, or personality disorder. With the Dark Invasion, many Deathwalkers slowly succumb to paranoid schizophrenia.

Other Traits of the Deathwalker

Deathwalkers don't feel pain. Actually, that's not quite true; they feel pain, but as a distant alarm rather than an imminent vitriol. As such, the effects of Scratch wounds are irrelevant to them.

As well, Deathwalkers are immune to Empathic Viruses (which die quickly in their systems) as well as most mundane forms of disease. They don't get intoxicated very easily (double their Constitution vs. drugs and half damage from poisons). Any Empath will detect the faint odor of decay about them.

Deathwalkers are very slight (reduce their body-weight by 10 kg), but often are quite attractive as their Empathically-animated bodies develop along psychological lines. Thus, they actually start with an unusually high Charisma.

Deathwalkers as PC's

It is possible to play a Deathwalker PC. Attributes are determined normally, adding one to Strength, Agility, and Charisma. Empathy is determined by rolling 2d6, subtracting 2, and rerolling any die that comes up 1. Above any other modifiers, Deathwalkers get a +1 to their Initiative (being dead tends to inhibit the hesitation-reaction from fear). As well, they automatically begin with level 4 Empathic Healing (in addition to their regular Initial Experience skills). Remember that Deathwalkers do not age using the normal charts. Players wishing to play Deathwalkers should bear in mind that they're actually limiting their character's lifespan, and that they will be condemning their character to a slow death by insanity. Deathwalkers cannot take Military careers; their bizarre and artificial metabolisms and poisonously not-living biochemistries would be rejected by any health examiner.

"I knew a dead man, once. He was absolutely fearless in a fight. Of course, you get that with dead people.

"Embrace your fear. Revel in it. For it is the best proof that you are still alive."

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



Empathic Threshold Viruses

by Norm Fenlason

Have you ever wondered what kind of being it takes to travel the proto-dimensions? We can understand the Dark Elves and other minions. But what about viruses? Can viruses open and maintain gates? Well empathic threshold viruses can.

Empathic Threshold Viruses (ETV) reside within human bodies waging a constant battle with the human immune system. Once the virus starts to win and reaches a certain *threshold*, the virus creates an empathic envelope around itself. This empathic envelope is a bubble of the virus' home protodimension. The additive effect of the bubble completely contains the host body – enough for the ill effects of assimilation and transformation. The virus hovers around this threshold, dragging the unwilling victim through a cycle of transformations. Within the protodimension bubble, the human body suffers all the effects of assimilation. The exact effects are dependent on the virus type, more correctly the virus' home proto-dimension. The virus continues to do battle with the host's immuno-response system. Once the host's immune system reduces the level of viral activity, the envelope is collapsed and the host suffers the effects of reverse assimilation.

Nutshell

Once a victim contracts a threshold virus, they are subject to a trigger event. When the trigger event occurs, the victim undergoes a transformation or other assimilation effect. The transformed victim operates in his present dimension for some duration or until some condition occurs. The victim then reverses the transformation, returning to human form.

Properties of Threshold Viruses

To properly describe threshold viruses, they should be characterized by the following properties or attributes

- Name, Common Name and Scientific classification if known.
- Contagion Vector – How the virus is contracted, necessary conditions for transmission, etc.
- Susceptibility – Some victims have differing susceptibility for contracting the disease.
- Trigger – Most threshold viruses have a triggering condition or circumstance that assists the ETV to dominate the immune response.
- Onset Duration – How long it takes to complete any assimilation effects.
- Average Threshold Length – How long or under what conditions does the virus dominate the immune response.
- Treatment – Any treatments that will suppress or cure the virus.
- Effects – Description of the onset period, the full-blown viral response, the remission period and other special details.

Contagion Vector

Humans contract threshold viruses by a variety of vectors. The exact vector is dependent on the virus type. Unprotected travel through the virus' home protodimension will usually infect a host. Transmission through bites from saliva to blood is common. There should be a definite vector specified.

Susceptibility

Just as hemophilia and sickle cell anemia strike subsets of the general population; ETVs may also only strike a segment of a population. This can be as simple as humans only or as complex as all organisms with earth-based DNA. Users of a specific drug or alcohol can also be more susceptible to a specific ETV.

Generally, body chemistry dictates susceptibility, however, specific conditions like empathic ability or exposure to other alien viruses can change susceptibility.

Trigger

Certain threshold viruses have trigger events. Events like decrease in solar radiation (night), lunar radiation (full moon), sudden infusion of chemistry, like adrenaline, hormonal infusion concurrent with menses, and the sudden introduction of other chemistry are all examples of triggering events. When these events obtain, the victim goes into the onset phase. Similarly, there may be trigger events that cause the immuno-response to dominate and the victim enters short-term remission.

Onset Duration

Onset duration specifies how long it takes the host to undergo full assimilation. It includes what activities the host can perform and to what level.

Average Threshold Length

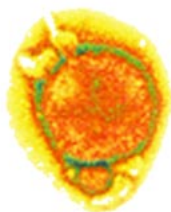
The duration of the depressed immuno-response, how long the ETV dominates, is called the average threshold length. This can be related to the requirement of one or more conditions or limited time duration. For example, duration could be 1d6 hours, or until sunrise, or as long as the moon is present overhead.

Treatment

Threshold viruses may or may not have a cure or a treatment. Treatments tend to suppress the onset of the virus and will have specific protocols, drugs or therapy. However, the effects of the ETV are not usually changed, just the virus' onset. If a cure exists, it removes the threshold virus from the victim's system. Off course, death is the ultimate cure.

Effects

All other special instructions and effects of the assimilation are included in this description. This includes special notes.



Virulent Schizophrenia

Name: Virulent Schizophrenia (Jekyll & Hyde's disease)

Lesser maul species: Human janovirus type 1A

Grand maul species: Human janovirus type 2B

Genus: Janovirus

Family: Picornaviridae

Contagion Vector: Direct contact with an infected individual. Blood contamination via bite, open wound or sex.

Susceptibility: Human. No known cases in aliens. Attacks victims with an Empathy attribute greater than zero (EMP>0).

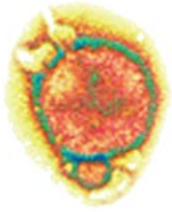
Trigger: After contagion, the stress of making difficult, often moral, decisions triggers onset.

Onset Duration: There are two forms of onset (see Effects below): Lesser Maul: 2-3 minutes – non-noticeable Grand Maul: 45 minutes – no activity allowed since the transformation is very painful.

Average Threshold Length: 1d6 x 4 hours (average) If stressful inner conflict continues, the threshold length is longer.

Treatment: The virus so changes the host DNA that no physical cure is possible. Certain drugs used in the treatment of certain mental disorders (stress-related) can prevent onset.

Effects: There are two forms of this ETV, the lesser maul and the greater maul. Lesser Maul: When the victim is confronted with a difficult decision, often involving inner moral conflict, onset is triggered. The victim then undergoes a significant mental/emotional shift. Morals are loosened or reversed usually to an evil bent. The victim may exhibit signs of possession or split personality. Many victims have been mistakenly treated for bipolar disorder, multiple personality disorder or exorcism, etc. In inner circles, this ETV has been found to be the root cause of mothers ruthlessly and remorselessly killing their own children. Other basic aspects of the victim may change, such as handedness, gestures and affectations, and clothing preferences. Other effects: CHR is raised by 1 for the duration and the victim radiates an *evil aura* as a Project Fear skill at a Basic Success. Grand Maul: The grand maul demonstrates the classic Jekyll/Hyde syndrome. In addition to the personality shift of the Lesser Maul, the Grand Maul includes a physical change as well. In most cases, the visage is changed so dramatically that the victim is often unrecognizable. The change enhances the *evil aura* to a Project Fear success of a Stage Two level. The victim's behavior can best be classified as brutal since the virus feeds off suffering and the benign personality is completely submerged. However, all skills and knowledge are available to the transformed personality, but not vice versa. The victim will often not remember what took place while transformed. Other effects: STR, CON, CHR are raised by 1 for the duration. EDU is lowered by 3 to a minimum of 1. Background: First documented in the west by Robert Louis Stevenson in his pioneering "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" in 1886, Stevenson was documenting the behavior of one of his many physicians. DNA analysis on exhumed bodies of two of the Jack-the-Ripper suspects revealed that they were suffering from the virulent schizophrenia ETV. The wars on the European continent spread the disease mostly among medical care providers to many parts of the globe. Government researchers investigating this ETV have correlated outbreaks to several famous and not so famous atrocities committed throughout history. This syndrome is rare today since violent, malevolent personalities are usually locked up. Occasionally their violence and lack of morals will assist them to positions of power. Several small-country dictators have, in fact, arisen under the effects of virulent schizophrenia. Researchers think the virus originates in the home protodimension of the Dark Elves.



Arkham Syndrome

Name: Arkham Syndrome

Species: Rana Arkhama

Genus: Ranavirus

Family: Iridoviridae

Contagion Vector: Exposure to an infected individual (airborne) or exposure to the virus' home dimension.

Susceptibility: Humans only. Anyone can contage the disease in the presence of an active gate opening to the virus's home proto-dimension. (See Effects.)

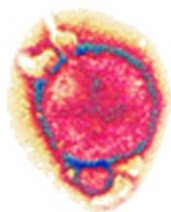
Trigger: An empath that has completed the *change* triggers onset in victims by establishing an empathic contact with them. This is usually disguised as a ritualistic ceremony.

Onset Duration: Onset in 2-3 minutes and barely noticeable.

Average Threshold Length: The length of the effect is as long as the empathic link with a changed being is maintained.

Treatment: 3 months without an empathic contact with a changed being will drive the virus out. However, residual physical effects are permanent. Successful empathic healing will also drive the virus out and cure the victim.

Effects: When infected, the virus lays dormant within the victim. Victims can be infected and not know it. The virus is triggered when an empathic contact between a being that has finished the transformation has been established. Once this contact has been made, the victim will transform into an amphibious humanoid. Webbed hands and feet; changes in eyes, mouth, face, skin; development of gills; sibilance of speech all take place during onset. The victim must resist a willpower drain attack or be immediately sapped of all willpower. Once the willpower is drained, the victim is left in a quiescent but suggestible state. Usually, the changed being, who leads the ritual, will take the victims into the water to another location. After whatever actions take place there are finished, the changed being brings the victims back and breaks empathic contact. The changed being can plant post-hypnotic suggestions into the victims' memory. The victims may not remember what happened and if they do, it will be as the memory of a dream. **Physical Changes:** In full transformation, the victim takes on a full bipedal humanoid form of batrachian appearance. The skin is a mottled leathery consistency. The eyes are lidless and protrude. The eyes themselves are completely black and staring. The nose flattens and the nostrils disappear. The mouth broadens out and flattens, while the chin recedes to near nothing. The hands and feet grow webbing. Body hair recedes and the hair on the scalp thins to a few coarse strands. Folds of skin where the chin once was will conceal a working set of gills on either side of the neck. After transforming back, the victim retains a portion of the batrachian features, permanently. This permanent change is cumulative with each transformation. Once completely changed, the victim is completely under the control of the empathic changed-being who infected him. Each time the victim is transformed there is a 10% chance that the change will become complete. Once the physical change is complete the virus dies off, taking willpower and volition with it.



Loup-garou

Name: Loup-garou (Lycanthropic encephalitus)

Contagion Vector: Blood contamination via bite, open wound, blood transfer, or sex with infected source.

Susceptibility: Empathic humans only.

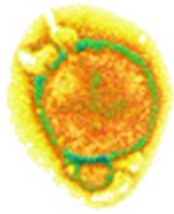
Trigger: Lunar radiation. Once a threshold in lunar radiation has been reached, the trigger occurs. The presence of solar radiation diminishes the effect of lunar radiation. That is, the presence of a moon in a certain stage (usually over $\frac{3}{4}$ full) and at night.

Onset Duration: Instantaneous up to 20 minutes.

Average Threshold Length: Night hours only. The presence of solar radiation reduces viral activity such that the victim is triggered to transform back to *normal*.

Treatment: Lack of empathic feeding on suffering beings will *starve* the virus out. This will take up to 6 months. Note: being locked up in an asylum does not remove one from the presence of suffering. Some forms of gene regression therapy and successful empathic healing will cure the victim.

Effects: The ETV Loup-garou attacks and replaces normal DNA in otherwise healthy cells. Once triggered, the virus causes a severe desire to cause suffering in other beings which it then feeds on. The virus will use the host to cause this suffering if necessary. Transformation: During onset, the victim will transform into a cross between the human and some animal form. The specific animal form is a result of host genetics and is relatively random. History has shown the wolf form is the most common, but other animal forms are possible, including something totally alien. For this reason families and closed communities tend to transform to the same creature type. Specific effects of transformation are dependent on the form taken, but generally, the victim loses coherent intellect, devolving to the basest animal characteristics. An infected individual has a permanent increase in CHR by 1 representing an increase in *animal magnetism*. This increase is lost if cured. Transformed victims are cunning, ruthless and bestial. In the transformed state the victim's EDU is reduced to 1, while INT, STR, CON and AGL are increased by 2 each (min 1). The victim usually does not remember the heinous acts committed while transformed, but may suspect and will usually have plenty of clues. This usually leaves the victim in a state of guilt-driven turmoil, but not always. The victim may or may not fall unconscious during onset, which may come upon them very quickly. While normal bullets will kill an infected, but not transformed, victim, such mundane materials lose their lethality as they penetrate into the protodimensional envelope surrounding the transformed victim. However, gate-dampening materials that pierce the envelope will cause full damage plus an extra 2 dice damage due to the closure of the virus' micro-gates. For example, a silver 9-mm round does 1 die damage plus another 2 for a total of 3 dice damage. Similarly, a silver-handled cane does the full club damage $\frac{1}{2}STR + 1$ dice plus another 2 dice for a total of $\frac{1}{2}STR + 3$ dice damage. Simple contact with a gate-dampening material will cause 2 dice damage to the body part touching the material. Note: dampening materials include sodium, gold, platinum, etc. The virus provides a benefit to its host by increasing the health of the individual. Infected individuals are not susceptible to mundane infections. Victims also heal at a rate $\frac{1}{4}$ that of normal humans in response to treatment. The time taken to heal is the same as if an Outstanding Success has been made in the treatment. This tends to surprise emergency room doctors.



Bricklayer Virus

Name: Bricklayer Virus

Contagion Vector: Contagion is through exposure to the bricklayer ETV home proto-dimension only.

Susceptibility Any complex organism with earth-based DNA is susceptible to this virus if exposed.

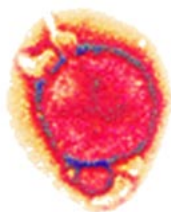
Trigger: Anger, frustration, hate or other strong negative emotion will trigger onset.

Onset Duration: 30 seconds

Average Threshold Length: Until the powerful emotion subsides or diminishes substantially.

Treatment: There is no cure. However, the use of mood control and other psychoanalytical drugs (such as tranquilizers) can prevent onset.

Effects: Strength and constitution are temporarily increased. Size and bulk are also temporarily increased. For humans this is typically an increase to 2 meters tall and a weight of over 150kg. Other creatures will grow as well. For humans STR and CON will be increased to 12 each, while INT, EDU and CHR task checks will be at 2 levels harder difficulty, including normal speech. Whatever the human victim's initiative, it is changed to 2. Skin becomes hardened and may change color (red, green, blue, etc.). The hardened skin gives an armor factor of 2 at all body locations. The victim will remember nothing about the time spent while transformed. The transformed victim will remember nothing about its former personality. Animals can also contract this disease, which will include as triggers, the strong emotions of self-preservation and hunger. This can cause some nasty beasts to appear when they get hungry. Background: This ETV was first discovered after nuclear testing in Nevada and later Utah. Large creatures were discovered near the blast epicenter. As it turns out, the nuclear blasts were ripping temporary holes to the bricklayer ETV home proto-dimension drawing nearby creatures momentarily into the dimension. As the dimension started to close, the creatures rushed back to the primary dimension in an infected state. By staying in the alternate dimension, they were protected from the effects of the nuclear blast. The government quickly discovered the source of these strange creatures and, fearing a permanent opening, moved testing underground to avoid further complications. Note: Early researchers called this ETV the bricklayer virus because of its disabling effect on intellect and improvement to size and constitution – the ETV makes a bricklayer.



Medusa Touch

Name: Medusa Touch

Species: Medusa Syndrome

Genus: Scrapie Agent

Family: Prions

Contagion Vector: This virus can be found in any dimension. Humans using dimensional travel can be infected by traveling through a dimension where the virus exists. This includes accessing protodimensions using sorcery skills.

Susceptibility: Empathic humans

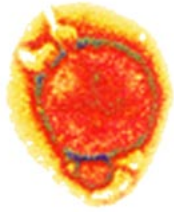
Trigger: Use of empathic abilities

Onset Duration: Immediate

Average Threshold Length: During the use of an empathic ability.

Treatment: Empathic healing is the only method of recovery short of death.

Effects: This virus affects those parts of the brain responsible for empathic abilities. It forms scrapie and other spongiform encephalopathies on those parts and is detectable in that form. The virus also attacks other cell structures in the body undetected, leaving no nucleotides or amino acid telltales. Every time the empath uses his abilities, the referee adds one to his Empathy attribute. This addition should remain unknown to the player. Once the Empathy attribute reaches 10, the virus also doubles the final number of empathic task points. Also once the attribute level reaches 10, the virus starts to drag parts of the empath's body back to the virus' home protodimension. This has the effect of causing a number of six-sided dice damage equal to the final task Success Level attained. The damage is assessed to a random hit location: head, arms, legs, etc. If the number of damage points exceeds the serious level on the body part, the effect is one of explosion. For example, if the base number of points for the head is 8, and the number assessed is 33 or more, the head literally explodes. The PC recovers at twice the normal rate from this damage (assuming the victim survives). The pain from this condition is extreme and can be debilitating. If a Dark Master controls the home dimension of the virus, the effects of the virus' retreat can be stopped (by the Dark Master). Dark Masters have used this technique to control powerful empaths for their dark purposes.



Jigsaw PISTASA

Name: Jigsaw Disease [Inspired by 2000AD comics]

Species: Rhizidiomyces virus Type B3

Genus: Rhizidiovirus

Family: Not yet assigned a family

Contagion Vector: Breathing in spores of fungi infected with Rhizidiomyces virus Type B1. Viral members of this family usually only infect fungi. The Type B3 infects vertebrates.

Susceptibility All terrestrial vertebrates.

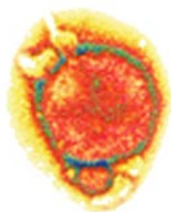
Trigger: Prolonged lack of exposure to sunlight. That is the dark or artificial light.

Onset Duration: 5 to 10 minutes.

Average Threshold Length: 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Treatment: None known. However, a hunter-killer virus has been reported, but unsubstantiated.

Effects: Known: Infected parts of the body literally vanish to no one knows where. Whole sections literally disappear. The victim is not physically pained or otherwise hurt by the loss of these body parts. Mentally, the impact is severe. With each chunk of the body that disappears, the victim undergoes a severe mental/emotional trauma, which could bring on permanent psychosis. The bodily functions do not appear impacted by the body loss. Nerve transmissions from missing parts cease, but are transmitted across the missing parts. The same is true of fluid and respiratory transport. In all cases to date, the head is the last part to disappear. This has proven nearly as traumatic for researchers as for the victims. Truth: The parts of the body are, in fact, transported to a protodimension where they are reassembled. The body aimlessly roams that dimension until the appearance of the head. Historically, some dislocated bodies have made their way back to the prime dimension and are the source of the headless ghost stories carrying their own heads about. Some specialized (and usually darkly aligned) scientists and medical professionals have in fact cured victims before they completely disappeared. There have been reported cases of evil collectors infecting victims, waiting until the bodies are gone, curing and collecting the heads. Underground trafficking in these heads have been reported. The few law enforcement professionals that have uncovered these heads have destroyed them immediately and offering no report. If the victim completely transports to the protodimension, head and all, the victim may be transported back to the prime dimension with no other effect. If the body is brought back before the disease runs its course, and then the head is brought back, the body and head are forever separated.



Flamethrower Virus

Name: Flamethrower Virus

Species: Flamethrower Virus Types A1 and A2

Genus: Unassigned

Family: Not yet assigned a family

Contagion Vector: Unknown but probably exposure to denizens of the Gehenna protodimension

Susceptibility: Humans, but probably all invertebrates as well.

Trigger: Type A1: Extreme fatigue Type A2: Extreme agitation

Onset Duration: 5-10 seconds

Average Threshold Length: Type A1: Until the body is consumed by the fire Type A2: Between 5 and 30 minutes

Treatment: Empathic healing will remove the virus (if Type A1 detected before combustion).

Effects Type A1: The effects are simple; the body erupts into flame burning at about 400 degrees Celsius. All parts of the body burn simultaneously: the chest, legs, arms, and head. Since the body burns from the inside out, there is little that can be done in time. The exterior flame can be extinguished, but burning continues on the inside. Type A2: The victim erupts into fire as in Type A1. However, the victim is not consumed. The fire rages at a temperature between 400 and 1000 degrees C, but the victim's flesh does not burn. Everything the victim touches or is near burns, however, including clothes. The victim cannot communicate in this state, except through gesture as any air passing out of his lungs is superheated. In Type A1 burns, the victim suffers 2d6 damage to all locations each *second*. Attempts to extinguish the flames will fail and may end up causing others attempting help to catch fire as well. Type A2 causes burns to others using 4d6 per *second* due to the hotter flames.





FIGHTBACK

by Michael A Crossman

Emik Drakeson awoke with a start sensing something was wrong, but unable to decide what. It took him a few minutes to realize what it was, and then he understood the cause of his discomfort.

For the first time in the last four years he had slept an entire night without having a nightmare. He lay there in bed with a mixture of relief, and of trepidation.

The war against the Demons was far from finished, but perhaps the tide was finally turning. The latest battle had been a victory with the entrapment of the minion lord Pytec, but the cost had been high, too high. The team had lost four of its members in the last assault that had driven the demon back into the portal from whence it came. Another two were killed while keeping the demon pinned down while the Humanoid ET's used a mixture of Empathy and tech to seal the portal, trapping the Demon inside.

One of the casualties had been Slth Van, one of the Humanoid ETs that had joined Fightback after having been rescued from a prison a team had stumbled upon in Out-Law, just outside of Pittshio. The ETs had been somehow immune to the demonic possession that had claimed all the other aliens, and the Demons wanted to know why. The ETs had been kept prisoner while they were interrogated. The team had found fifty ETs alive, but only twenty had lived long enough to make it back to Fightback. The surviving ETs had joined Fightback, and had quickly proved their usefulness by teaching Fightback members how to use their Empathic abilities, and by providing information on any Darktek the teams were bringing back.

Emik rose from bed and began to shower as he thought of how far they had come in the fight against the Demons.

It had all begun when his roommate Jack Thomas, also known as the "metal man," had disappeared one night while jogging in the park. Emik and his other roommate Carlos Saniga had begun searching for Jack fearing some misfortune had befallen him, and ended up stumbling upon something much worse.

Jack had been abducted by Tentacular ETs, and the ETs had filled him with implants, but Jack had managed to escape. During that adventure they had met a pre-med student, named David Arichec who had removed as many of the implants as he dared, and in the end had decided to join the group as they continued to search for the truth about what was happening to

the world.

As the four of them continued their search for the truth they acquired a reputation of being able to explain the unexplainable, and to handle impossible situations. The reputation had its benefits, but also it's downfalls. By then the group had learned that the source of the problems was a group of demons that called themselves the Demons of Sin. Their reputation had caused the Demons to take notice of the group, and try to eliminate them before they could do too much damage to their plans.

The Demons almost succeeded when it sent a group of zombies, armed with G3s into the teams' apartment. Emik was hospitalized for almost six weeks after the attack, and after that the team went mobile. They remained on the move all the time, fearing another attack if they stopped moving for too long.

While being mobile kept them alive it slowed the progress of their investigation to an almost complete halt. They continued investigating odd occurrences, but the sightings were too random, and most of the teams' contacts had either disappeared or stopped talking to them for fear of disappearing.

Then JW Crowor, the CEO of Crowor Corporations, met them. It seemed the Demons had been trying to take over Crowor's corporation, but Crowor wasn't letting it happen. The Demons had kidnapped his daughter in an attempt to force him to co-operate. JW asked the team to help, and offered them a place to stay if they returned his daughter.

Carlos Saniga was killed in the attempt, but the team managed to rescue the girl, Rita Crowor. JW kept his word and gave the team five floors of his corporation's office building. The security in Crowor Corp was used to handling the Demon's minions, and the team was safe in their new-found home.

Much to JW's dismay however Rita joined the team, stating the things she had seen were too horrible to ignore. Carlos Saniga's younger brother Enrico also joined the team in an attempt to avenge his brother's death. Rita's first hand experience with corporate life helped the team to infiltrate the higher levels of the Demon's organization.

In one investigation Enrico opened fire on a group of MIB's the team had been following killing them all before the team could discover where they were going. Furious with Enrico for killing their only lead on the Demons, Emik demanded why Enrico had killed the MIBs. Enrico answered that these were the men that had killed his brother. It was then that the team

learned that Enrico had empathic powers.

Not satisfied with the answer he had gotten, Emik asked Enrico why he was with the team. Enrico said simply, "To fight back." Emik didn't know if it was the determined look in Enrico's eyes or the steady sound of his voice that convinced him, but the MIB incident was soon forgotten.

Another investigation group attacked Emik's group after being misled by a man working for the Demons. Before too much bloodshed had occurred the groups realized they were fighting for the same cause. They quickly decided to join forces and track down the man that had misled them. The man was found and gave the team another lead to the Demons.

The combined teams had such great success working together that Emik offered the other team a place in their organization. When the other team asked the name of the organization Emik smiled at Enrico and said, "We call it Fightback."

That was three years ago. JW was killed by an assassin Vampire, and Rita was forced to run the corporation, but she took Fightback a step further when she began financially supporting the effort. Fightback was now able to investigate all over the world and because of this had rescued the Humanoid ETs. With the ETs help and the seemingly endless supply of financial support, Fightback's investigation surged ahead by leaps and bounds. It still took three years to gain the knowledge, build the equipment needed to trap Pytec in a portal, and destroy the portal forever, but it was still progress.

The day after defeating Pytec, Emik had received a letter addressed to him. It read:

'You have removed but a pawn from the game I play with you, a mere talon from the claw that holds your world in its grasp. I have allowed your pathetically amusing antics go this far, but no more. I will feast on your souls before the year comes to an end. This I promise you. The next move is mine.'

It was signed Malace.

Emik had disregarded the threat and had the team begin research of ancient folklore in search of any clue on Malace. So far all they had found was a vague reference to South

America.

Emik was just finishing getting dressed when a knock was sounded on the door. Upon opening it, Emik found Jack standing there, his equipment bag slung over one shoulder.

"You about ready to go Emik?" Jack asked.

"Yes, let me grab my bag. Is the rest of the team set to go?" Emik asked over his shoulder as he reached for his bag.

"Yeah, all five of us." "Five?" "Yup. Seems like Miss Rita will be joining us on this one."

Emik paled as he heard the words, there was a big possibility that this was all some elaborate trap, and Emik didn't want to risk Rita like that. She was too important to Fightback.

"And you're not jefe?" Enrico asked with a grin on his face. Emik winced as he did every time Enrico reminded him of his ability to read minds.

"It's different, I was invited." Emik said lamely. "It may be different amigo, but she's going with or without us. Remember that Vamp that killed her papa? She says the last thing it said before she blew its heart out was Malace. You ain't going to stop her man, revenge is one powerful motive...trust me."

Emik looked into Enrico's face and saw the pain that was there, it was on Rita's and Jack's faces too. For all he knew it was in his own face as well. Emik just nodded and the three walked out the door to where Rita and Dave were waiting for them in the car that would take them to the airport, then the plane to South America, and eventually to Malace.

After that first team had joined Fightback, the ranks seemed to fill up overnight, and Fightback's numbers grew into the hundreds. Rita gave Fightback its own building and trained a security team to ensure its safety. The recruits either came in groups or they came alone. Sometimes they were already investigating the Demons, sometimes they were survivors of some Emphatic cell looking for a place to hide and finding a home. Sometimes, like Enrico, they were looking for revenge but no matter what caused them to join they all had one thing in common, they all wanted to Fightback.



"Looking for the subtle signs of dark minion activity is occasionally like some forms of meditation. Both can be incredibly frustrating and at times seem completely pointless.

"But if you stick with it for long enough, the noise seems to fall away and you are left with a clear picture, something both beautiful and frightening at the same time.

"The problem is, few people stick with it long enough..."

- Zena Marley

(Early 21st-century mercenary/philosopher)



With every evil, there is a good. Inevitably the good goes and confronts the evil. But one thing that gets very, very little attention is the person, or group of people that embrace the growing evil.

As is often the case, these people rarely band together. They think that they are alone in welcoming the dark. They fear the wrath of the fighters who are trying to push back the thing in which they see their salvation. So they go about their daily lives hiding, hoping that one day their “savior” will set them free.

But what if these people all banded together? Instead of a group of individuals silently hoping, they became one voice crying out for justice. Instead of fearing the change the dark will bring, they welcome it.

Enter: the Children of the Damned. They are that united voice humanity fears so deeply. They are that vocal group that shows that humanity is not united after all. They stand at the threshold of the dark, pulling it forward onto our planet,

into our homes.

Who are the Children?

Many different types of people make up the Children. Different groups join for different reasons. All different social classes, ethnic backgrounds, everything. Another one of the features that makes this group so dangerous is that anyone walking down the street could be a member.

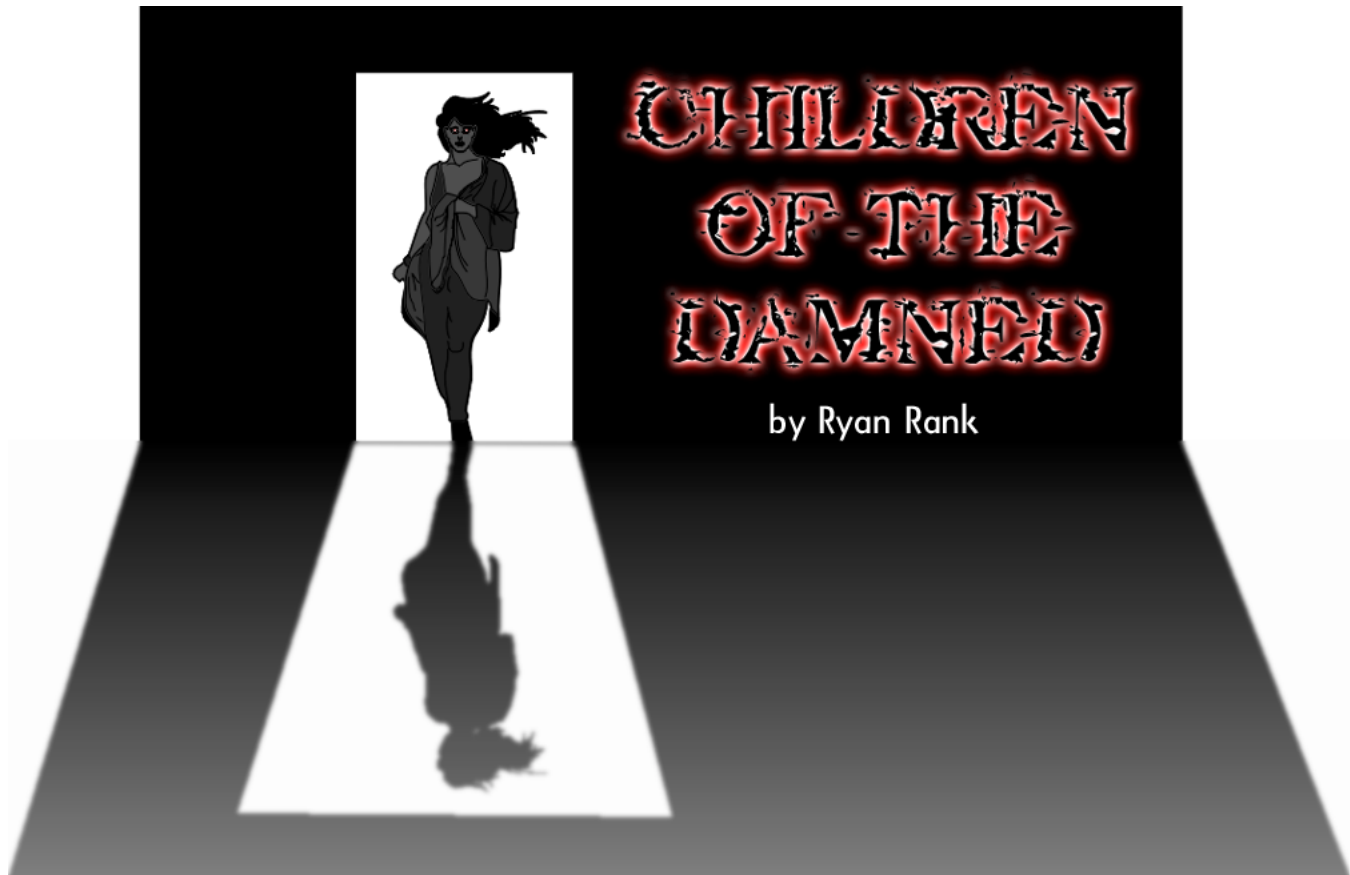
Why do the homeless join? They are probably the easiest ones to find a reason for. The most common reason is because they have nothing else to believe in. They tried the “standard” religions, but no matter how hard they tried to believe and keep up hope, it always seemed that things got worse. So they turned their backs on their former religions. They believe that the darkness will equalize the playing field. Simply, the darkness is a new hope for the hopeless.

The middle class also often joins. They need something to break the mo-

notony of their day to day lives. All they feel that they do is work. They work so hard, but can never seem to make any kind of headway. Mostly, it is people that are sick and tired of working so hard for an unappreciating world. They want justice on the entire world.

With how much the dark seems to be changing the world, one would reason to say that the rich would not join. After all, why would they want to risk change if they were at the top of the food chain? But the truth of the matter is that many rich people join. For they are worried about losing their high standing in society, and will do anything to keep it. Still other rich join because they need a release from the high stress level of their jobs (provided their money is not from inheritance). They are constantly pulling their hair out to keep ahead. Every single one of them wants to be one of a million, not one of the millions, and will do anything to prevent the latter from happening.

And to make matters more difficult,



there is no actual way of telling a Child apart from a normal, everyday person. There is no pendant, no tattoo, nothing. So if something is happening with a Child that could have indicated the Children of the Damned is at fault, there is no positive way to trace it back to the cult.

How do the Children recruit others?

Every group needs people to be in it. And all the groups have different ways of bringing people into their ranks. And in that respect, the Children are no different.

The Children only really have three main ways of bringing in new recruits. The first way is what they call “callers.” Callers are people that go out onto the streets, into the lobbies of hotels, anything, preach their words and hand out fliers promoting their philosophies.

The second way is from word of mouth. A friend will bring a friend, and the guest will theoretically be so enthralled by what they are seeing and hearing that they will join. What do they do if someone goes to a “service” and not like what they hear? We’ll get to that...

The third way is through billboards. Every single one of them is the same. They simply say, “Why fight the inevitable?” And scrawled at the bottom of the billboard, like a signature, is “the Children.”

Nothing drastic, nothing uncommon. It’s almost eerie how large this organization is from such simple recruitment techniques.

Where are the Children?

Everywhere.

What do the Children do?

On the surface, the Children of the Damned is much like any other religion. They just worship the dark, and the change that they feel it will bring with it.

Deep down, they are a very evil group of individuals. The main mass of the cult has no idea what is going on, what their donations are really going towards. They will actually cause the people that fight the dark to “disappear.” They constantly fight law enforcement agencies.

But what they mainly do is to find portals into other dimensions. Because humankind, for the most part, does not know how to construct these portals, they collect them. They protect these portals, and keep them open. Most of these portals cannot be moved, so the Children conquer and secure the buildings that they are located in. They will then put up a front business so to keep up a proper face to the building and hide it’s true contents.

What they do if someone is not interested in joining the cult after they had seen a service is disturbing to say the least. At the end of each service, there is one “greeter” at each exit of the building. Every one of these “greeters” is gifted (empathic, magical, etc). As they are shaking hands with all of the people exiting the service, they do a mind probe and see if the person actually is interested in joining. If they are, nothing will happen.

If the person is not interested in joining, the greeter will indicate that to a small hidden camera in the ceiling with a small, hardly noticeable gesture indicating that person. Security will then start to follow that person. Within 2 days, that person will have an “accident” of one type or

another. Some will be victims of “random” violence. Car crashes are not unheard of. Some people just plain disappear, with no clue given as to what happened to these people. Nothing is below the Children of the Damned. And since there is nothing to distinguish a Child from a normal person, it will not be traced to the Children.

How can I bring the Children into my campaign?

There are many different ideas to bring them into a campaign. I will only list a few of them here. One is a friend brings them to a service. And the PC being a basically good individual (and knowing what the darkness has in store for humanity) will not be interested. On the way home, have them attacked.

Another way is to have them trying to find a portal to a dimension (you supply the motivation for that), only to have it protected by humans when it should be a creature of the dark protecting it.

My final idea is that one of the callers sees the PCs in the street, recognizes their faces from the news (if they’ve been on the news, that is), and outright attacks them because they are trying to push back the Children’s salvation.

In Closing

In closing I wish to pose you with a thought. We all know that our heroes fight the dark with some degree of success. But what if they have to fight the dark and humanity at the same time? “Just who the hell do these damn Aegis people think they are?”



“Igor’s are perhaps the most insidious of all the Dark Minions. The bastards are just human, so they don’t stand out from the crowd like the things from the protodimensions do.”

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



COPS & ROBBERS

New Career Choices for Dark Conspiracy

By Paul T. Riegel-Green

After playing Dark Conspiracy for some time I have found that I am always coming up with alternative career choices for my players and most of them have been widely utilized. In addition, I do the money slightly different from the way the Dark Conspiracy book shows how to do it. Each of the new career choices are set up just like those in the Dark Conspiracy book, with the addition of several new categories.

The first new category is Social Class Allowed, this continues the format originally set forth in the PC Booster Kit for allowing only certain social classes to do those things within the realm of that social class. Next is Entry Skills Required and Entry Background Required this breaks up and further defines the old category Entry.

The next new category is Security clearance. This represents that careers access to secure areas, such as Dreamland and 'Bot city. This category is expressed as a percentage. For each term after leaving the career giving the

security clearance, the percentage is cut in half (cumulative). In other mega-corps dreamlands this percentage would be reduced by 10 to 75 percent. In another mega-corps 'bot or office facilities this percentage would fall 25 to 100 percent, depending on how friendly the atmosphere between the two mega-corps were.

Secondary activities is the next new category, this expresses the number of secondary activities that the player may engage in within a given term. Lastly, there is a new category called Money, which tells how to calculate the monies accumulated during this term.

Corporate Security Careers

You are the mega-corps front line defence against the hostility of the streets and the prying eyes of the other mega-corps. You are much more than mere rent-a-cops, you are well trained and motivated by good pay. The only problem is that you owe your loyalty, not to truth or justice, but to whatever the corporate line is on things.

Troubleshooter

You are the ultimate in the Corporate Security field, doing well enough to be able to freelance your talents to whichever mega-corp has a problem they need you to solve. You have proven that you are capable of handling yourself in all kinds of situations. Yet, due to your cost, the mega-corps only bring you in as a last resort and then, usually, only when things have really gotten out of hand. When your phone rings it could only mean one thing - major trouble.

Social Class Allowed: Mike or Gnome

Entry Skills Required: INT 7+

Entry Background Requirements: Military Officer (Special Forces or Force Recon Only), State/Local Law Enforcement, Government Agent, or Investigative Officer - Corporate Security as a previous term.

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Interrogation	1
Luck	1
Observation	2
Persuasion	1
Streetwise	1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Act/Bluff	Medical
Bargain	Melee Combat
Business	Observation
Computer Operation	Persuasion
Electronics	Psychology
Forgery	Small Arms
Interrogation	Stalking
Language	Stealth
Lockpick	Streetwise
Luck	Tracking

Contacts: 2 per term from any sector. Roll 7+ on 1d10 for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives level 60 clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 2 secondary activities.

Special: None

Money: The character receives \$5000 for each point of Bargain skill possessed.

Investigative Officer - Corporate Security

You are at the top of the heap in the corporate security office. You are brought in to investigate everything from murders to sabotage and from embezzlement to office theft. The hours aren't always the best but the perks help make up for it.

Social Class Allowed: Any

Entry Skills Required: INT 6+

Entry Background Required: Previous term as Enforcement Officer - Corporate Security, Government Agent, or State/Local Law Enforcement.

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Interrogation	1
Observation	2
Persuasion	1
Streetwise	1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 5 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Act/Bluff
Bargain
Business
Computer Operation
Electronics
Forgery
Interrogation
Language
Lockpick
Luck
Medical
Melee Combat
Observation
Persuasion
Psychology
Small Arms
Stalking
Stealth
Streetwise
Tracking

Contacts: 2 per term from the Law Enforcement, Business, Criminal, or Specialist sectors. Roll 8+ on 1d10 for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives level 70 clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 1 secondary activity.

Special: None

Money: The character receives \$1500 for each point of Observation skill possessed.

Enforcement Officer, Corporate Security

You are the backbone of the corporate security force. You have been given full police authority in the mega-corps area of influence, and the mega-corps depend upon you to keep things in order. You patrol corporate facilities and respond to all the emergency calls. There are many long hours, but it beats walking around alone inside an automated factory for twelve hours straight.

Social Class Allowed: Prole or Mike

Entry Skills Required: AGL 5+

Entry Background Required: No Criminal Record: Previous term as Military, Government Agent, Security Officer - Corporate Security, or State/Local Law Enforcement.

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Interrogation	1
Observation	1
Persuasion	1
Small Arms	1
Streetwise	2

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 5 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Act/Bluff
Bargain
Forgery
Interrogation
Language
Lockpick
Medical
Melee Combat
Observation
Persuasion
Psychology
Small Arms
Stalking
Stealth
Streetwise
Tracking

Contacts: 2 per term from the Law Enforcement or Criminal sectors. Roll 9+ on 1d10 for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives level 50 clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 2 secondary activities.

Special: None

Money: The character receives \$1000 for each point of Streetwise skill possessed.

Security Officer, Corporate Security

You are the person hired to stand watch over the corporations vast 'bot cities and to check peoples passes at the entrances of all the mega-corps facilities. In addition, you occasionally get to be used as a bouncer when the bosses really wouldn't like a gate crasher attending. It isn't much but at least you're drawing a paycheck.

Social Class Allowed: Prole or Mike

Entry Skills Required: AGL 4+

Entry Background Required: None

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Melee Combat (Armed)	1
Observation	2
Streetwise	1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 4 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Bargain
Forgery
Interrogation
Language
Lockpick
Melee Combat
Observation
Persuasion
Psychology
Small Arms
Stalking
Stealth
Streetwise
Tracking

Contacts: 1 per term from the Law Enforcement or Criminal sectors. Roll 10 on 1d10 for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives level 20 clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 2 secondary activities.

Special: None

Money: The character receives \$500 for each point of Streetwise skill possessed.



Criminal Career Paths

There are many paths which criminal types take. These are but a few paths that exist in the Dark Conspiracy world.

Independent Computer Hacker

You make your money by hacking your way into other peoples computer systems. You are either independent or are occasionally hired by the mega-corps to raid another mega-corps computer facilities. While hacking through them you have seen many strange things but boy is it getting weird in the computer.

Social Class Allowed: Prole or Mike

Entry Skills Required: Computer Operation 4+

Entry Background Required: None

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Computer Operation	2
Electronics	1
Observation	1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 5 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Computer Operation
Computer Empathy (If EMP 2+)
Luck
Observation
Persuasion
Psychology
Streetwise
Willpower

Contacts: 2 per term from the Specialist sector. Roll 1d10 for a 6+ for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives no clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 2 secondary activities.

Special: None

Money: The character receives \$1000 for each point of Computer Operation possessed.

Corporate Mistress

While far from the normal streetwalker your profession, as old as it might be, is still illegal in most areas. However, you have the ultimate defence, friends in high places. You are paid by the mega-corps to attend to the needs of its executives and visiting VIPs.

Social Class Allowed: Prole or Mike

Entry Skills Required: CHA 7+

Entry Background Required: None

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Act/Bluff	1
Observation	2
Persuasion	1
Psychology	1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 5 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Act/Bluff
Business
Disguise
Forgery
Foreboding (If EMP 4+)
Human Empathy (If EMP 2+)
Language
Observation
Persuasion
Psychology
Streetwise
Willpower

Contacts: 2 per term from the Business or Criminal sectors. Roll 1d10 for a 6+ for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives level 25 clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 2 secondary activities.

Special: None

Money: The character receives \$2500 for each point of Charisma possessed.

Street Walker

Unlike your more expensive cousin the Corporate Mistress, you ply your trade on the streets trying to make a living off of Proles and Mikes. It is not a good profession but you have to do something to keep from selling out to the corporations.

Social Class Allowed: Prole

Entry Skills Required: CHA 4+

Entry Background Required: None

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Act/Bluff	2
Observation	1
Persuasion	1
Streetwise	1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 4 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Act/Bluff
Disguise
Forgery
Foreboding (If EMP 4+)
Human Empathy (If EMP 2+)
Language
Observation
Persuasion
Psychology
Streetwise
Willpower

Contacts: 1 per term from the Business, Law Enforcement, or Criminal sectors. Roll 9+ on 1d10 for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives no clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 2 secondary activities.

Special: Roll 1d10 versus your INT or your have been arrested and must spend the next term as a Prisoner.

Money: The character receives \$1000 for each point of Act/Bluff possessed.

Con Artist

You make your living off of taking other peoples money and when you do it right they don't even understand what went wrong. Yet, there is always the chance that you will take money from the wrong person but it would never happen to you, or would it.

Social Class Allowed: Prole or Mike

Entry Skills Required: CHA 5+

Entry Background Required: None

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Act/Bluff	2
Observation	1
Persuasion	1
Streetwise	1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 5 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Act/Bluff
Disguise
Forgery
Language
Foreboding (If EMP 4+)
Human Empathy (If EMP 3+)
Luck
Observation
Persuasion
Psychology
Stealth
Streetwise

Contacts: 2 per term from the Business, Law Enforcement, or Criminal sectors. Roll 7+ on 1d10 for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives no clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 2 secondary activities.

Special: Roll 1d10 versus your INT or your have been arrested and must spend the next term as a Prisoner.

Money: The character receives \$2000 for each point of Act/Bluff possessed.

Enforcer

You are the hired muscle for some local "Old World Style organized crime family". They come to you rather than hiring out the jobs to the rather unreliable Gangers. You know how much power that the organized crime "families" still have and you can easily discern how deep they have infiltrated the mega-corps. The gangers are nothing more than problems for the general public but have nothing on the "Family".

Social Class Allowed: Prole or Mike

Entry Skills Required: STR 5+

Entry Background Required: None

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Melee Weapons	2
Observation	1
Small Arms (Pistol)	1
Streetwise	1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 4 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Act/Bluff
Disguise
Demolitions
Electronics
Forgery
Interrogation
Language
Luck
Medical
Melee Combat
Observation
Small Arms (Pistol)
Stalking
Stealth
Streetwise

Contacts: 2 per term from the Business, Law Enforcement, or Criminal sectors. Roll 1d10 for a 9+ for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives no clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 2 secondary activities.

Special: Roll 1d10 versus your INT or your have been arrested and must spend the next term as a Prisoner.

Money: The character receives \$1500 for each point of Streetwise possessed.

Hit Man

You are the ultimate enforcer for the "family". When someone really gets out of line then you are called in to whack them and you have proven to be both reliable and good at what you do.

Social Class Allowed: Prole or Mike

Entry Skills Required: STR 7+

Entry Background Required: Previous Term as Enforcer, Corporate Security - Troubleshooter, or Military Special Forces (Incl. Seals, and Force Recon).

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Melee Weapons	1
Observation	1
Small Arms	2
Streetwise	1
Stalking	1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

Act/Bluff
Disguise
Demolitions
Electronics
Foreboding (If EMP 4+)
Forgery
Heavy Weapons
Language
Luck
Medical
Melee Combat
Observation
Persuasion
Small Arms
Stalking
Stealth
Streetwise

Contacts: 2 per term from the Business, Law Enforcement, or Criminal sectors. Roll 1d10 for a 7+ for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives level 25 clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 2 secondary activities.

Special: Roll 1d10-2 verses your INT or your have been arrested and must spend the next term as a Prisoner.

Money: The character receives \$2500 for each point of Stalking possessed.



Corporate Computer Hacker

You make your money by hacking your way into the mega-corps computer systems and getting information out of them. You work for an information broker who buys just about anything you can find out.

Social Class Allowed: Prole or Mike

Entry Skills Required: Computer Operation 5+

Entry Background Required: None

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Business	1
Computer Operation	2
Electronics	1
Observation	1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 4 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

- Business
- Computer Operation
- Computer Empathy (If EMP 2+)
- Electronics
- Mechanic
- Observation
- Persuasion
- Psychology
- Streetwise

Contacts: 1 per term from the Business, Law Enforcement, or Specialist sector. Roll 6+ on 1d10 for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives no clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 2 secondary activities.

Special: Roll 1d10 verses your INT or your have been arrested and must spend the next term as a Prisoner.

Money: The character receives \$1500 for each point of Computer Operation possessed.

Corporate Spy

You are the man that the information exchange market most depends upon to bring in the information. You have the ability and cunning to infiltrate past the corporate security measures in order to get what you are after and you are well rewarded for it.

Social Class Allowed: Prole or Mike

Entry Skills Required: CHA 6+

Entry Background Required: None

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Act/Bluff	1
Forgery	1
Observation	1
Persuasion	1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 5 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

- Act/Bluff
- Business
- Computer Operation
- Disguise
- Computer Empathy (If EMP 2+)
- Electronics
- Forgery
- Lockpick
- Observation
- Persuasion
- Psychology
- Streetwise
- Stealth

Contacts: 2 per term from the Business, Law Enforcement, or Specialist sectors. Roll 1d10 for a 7+ for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives no clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 2 secondary activities.

Special: Roll 1d10 verses your INT or your have been arrested and must spend the next term as a Prisoner.

Money: The character receives \$2500 for each point of Intelligence possessed.

Information Broker

You have obtained the ultimate commodity, not gold or silver, but information and you sell it on a regular basis to whom-ever is willing to pay the highest price. This keeps you in business and keeps your hackers and your spies working hard.

Social Class Allowed: Mike or Gnome

Entry Skills Required: CHA 5+

Entry Background Required: None

First Term Skills: The character receives the following skills in the first term:

Bargain	2
Business	2
Psychology	1

Subsequent Term Skills: A total of 6 levels from any one or a combination of the following:

- Act/Bluff
- Business
- Computer Operation
- Disguise
- Electronics
- Forgery
- Language
- Observation
- Persuasion
- Psychology
- Streetwise
- Willpower

Contacts: 2 per term from the Business, Law Enforcement, or Specialist sectors. Roll 7+ on 1d10 for the contact to be foreign.

Security Clearance: The character receives level 20 clearance.

Secondary Activities: The character may engage in 2 secondary activities.

Special: Roll 1d10-2 verses your INT or your have been arrested and must spend the next term as a Prisoner.

Money: The character receives \$5000 for each point of Intelligence possessed.



Some have suggested that perhaps the reason why the Dark Invaders are so terrifying to us is that they are so different from us. Of course, the answer that nobody expected but many people concluded is this: they're not. Darklings have empathic powers which are seeds of the Dark Ones germinating within their souls... and then, there are the Dark Lords, the lieutenants of the Dark Ones, who bear the powers of the Dark Ones themselves.

Besides the Darkling and Dark Lord Empathic Disciplines, the Empathic Discipline of Theurgy is presented; a ritual form of Empathic power.

Darkling Empathic Discipline

Origin: Darkling Empathy is more than just the contamination of a Dark Lord or Dark One; it is the embrace of such power while one still has free will and the study thereof. Most Darklings don't have the Darkling Discipline... most have no discipline at all. The rare few, the many Pales, scattered ET's, and the goodly number of human tools, are masters of the Empathy of the Dark Ones. Darkling Empathy may not be learned by someone who is aware of the Dark Invasion, except by default if they become a Dark Lord.

Special Traits: Among those traits unique to Darkling Empathy is the taint it causes; Darklings are easily locatable by means of Darkling Empathy, and those using Human Empathy may also be able to spot their inhumanity. As well, the character's Empathy attribute score becomes a Control rating, as if from DarkTek. Darklings, however, find it one level of difficulty easier to use their Empathic powers while on Demonground.

Powers

Besides the standard Empathic powers listed on the Dark Conspiracy character sheet and Plant Empathy (page 25 of the Referee's Guide), Darkling Empaths have a number of unique Empathic Powers.

Darkling Empathy: Evil knows its own; since the Darkling has come to a great understanding of their own evil, they've learned to see it in others. Darkling Empaths can tell the difference between those who have developed a Detection rating and those who are truly Darklings.

Dimension Walk: As the source of their power is extra-dimensional, Darkling Empaths are often able to pierce the barriers

between the dimensions.

Empathic Screen: This is the ability of many Darklings to make themselves appear to be normal, what is wanted, or even what is intimately desired. At one Stage of success, the Darkling appears to be normal in the eyes of those beholding them. At two, they look like the type of person who might be able to help them in some long-term goal. At three Stages, they could appear immediately helpful or duplicate the appearance of somebody trusted. At four Stages, they become quite erotically desirable, and for five they are insanely attractive. With six Stages of success, the character is able to appear totally as they please, even having a consistent appearance from one person to the next... they may also choose to disappear, or, more rather, to be totally ignored.

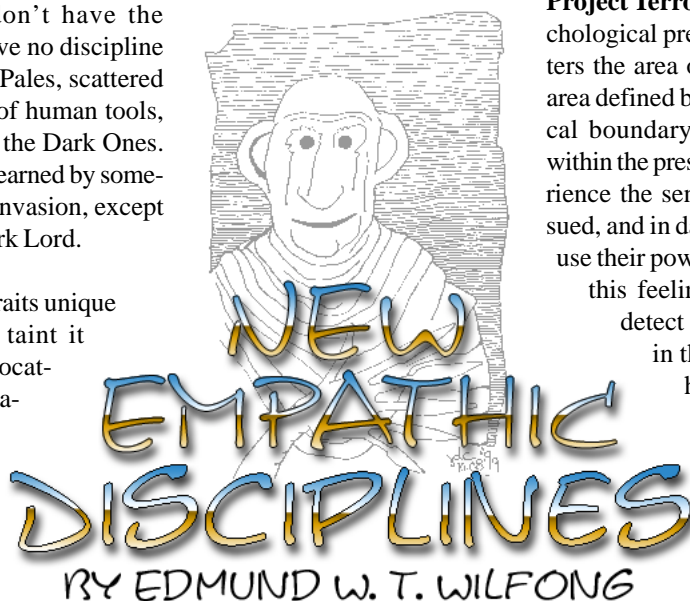
Project Terror: This is actually a feat of psychological prestidigitation. Anyone who enters the area of effect (a referee-determined area defined by some physical or psychological boundary, or alternatively everywhere within the presence of the Darkling) will experience the sensation of being watched, pursued, and in danger. Empaths may attempt to use their powers to determine the veracity of this feeling of dread; indeed, they will detect a powerful Empathic presence in the area (the proto-emotion that has been laced into the psychic ambient) that indeed does seek to cause them anguish. Attempts at Foreboding will ascertain that the character is indeed confronting a threat to humanity (as Darklings do represent a

threat to humanity). Indeed, all this power does is broadcast in an area the realization that something evil is or has been (or will be) present; in other words, the truth.

Dark Lord Empathic Discipline

Origin: Dark Lords come about when an Empath not only discovers what kind of person they are but develops the ability to gather the ambient fear and anguish of the world into a consolidated power. It is unknown what the event trigger is, but it is known that the end result is what we know as a Dark Lord. Dark Lords always gain Darkling Empathic powers.

Special Traits: Dark Lords gain a one-level improvement to Empathic difficulties whenever they are in an area noted for its pain and suffering (a sanatorium, a slaughterhouse, a death-camp, etc.). All Dark Lords have a certain Aspect, which is the





focus for *all* of their Empathic powers (not just the Dark Lord powers). All Dark Lord Empathic powers must fall into this Aspect (the Aspect of Catalyzing would use powers which cause chain-reactions quite easily, and would tend to *cause* rather than to actually *do*, for instance).

When a Dark Lord is “ascended,” their Empathy doubles.

Powers

Besides those gathered from other Disciplines, the following powers are available to Dark Lords.

Biological Psychokinesis: This will twist and distort a living thing. A single application takes a few moments to perform and targets a single hit location, plus one hit location per Stage of success. The location takes enough damage to be taken to Seriously wounded, then undergoes a metamorphosis akin to that caused by an Empathic Viral Mutator. When the metamorphosis ends, the body parts are totally healed (unless the end result was stated as otherwise); the metamorphosis usually takes thirty seconds, or 6 phases. Points of Strength, Constitution, and Agility may be redistributed between each other, but may not be added or removed.

Dispel Body: Dark Lords hardly need their body. They may dispel it at any time and travel in a pseudo-astral form. This requires a standard Empathic skill roll, failure meaning that they were unable to disconnect properly from their body and had to abort. A critical failure permanently slays the Dark Lord. While in this form, they have the Intelligence, Education, Charisma, Empathy, Initiative, and skills they always had, but no Strength, Constitution, or Agility. Any Empathic power which would do psychic damage (referee’s call) does one point of damage per Stage of success; when the psychic damage is equal to the character’s Empathy, they die. All damage is healed while within a body in a number of days equal to the damage taken; notice that the points are not healed at one point per day, but rather are healed all at once at the end of the healing time.

Produce Body: The Dark Lord may also reform their bodies. The new body will have a total number of points of Strength, Constitution, and Agility equal to three times the Stages of success. Special abilities may detract from these scores at the GM’s option. Alternatively, the Dark Lord may produce a body and place another spirit within it, thus creating a new intellect.

Theurgy

Origin: Theurgy is the ritual art of Empathy. Where most modern Empaths use quick powers for quick benefit, Theurgists take the slow path, nurturing their power like an infant. Every use of their power is an education for their soul, and so the soul must be led through every step or it will fail. This is the philosophy of the Theurgist.

Theurgists may not also be Neuropaths. Theurgic training eliminates the potential for Neuropathic eruption, and *vice versa*.

Special Traits: Just like with any other Discipline, training in Theurgy is the controlled re-arranging of the character’s psychological furniture and a major interior redecoration of their belief structure. As such, there is a significant effect on all of the character’s Empathic abilities. Theurgists learn to focus their powers through words, deed, and paraphernalia. As such, they *must* perform some arcane rite to use their Empathic powers. These are detailed in greater length under Related Skills.

Related Skills

There are several extra skills that Theurgists use to utilize their Empathic powers. Note that *only* Theurgists may use these skills.

Alchemy (EDU): Alchemy is not (usually) the mixing of chemicals, though it can be. Rather, it is the realization that the patterns that form our world repeat and interconnect infinitely. As such, by means of the full understanding of the patterns of a single activity, one can perform that activity and, by extension, perform another. Alchemy is linked to another skill, chosen when the skill is taken. When the character successfully performs the linked skill, they may roll their Alchemy. If successful, they may perform an Empathic skill on the next Phase (the referee is free to rule that the action being taken and the Empathic skill usage are too disconnected to apply; for instance, brewing an explosive and performing an Empathic Healing). Common linked skills include Chemistry, Mechanics, Melee Combat (Armed *or* Unarmed), Language (for writing prose or poetry, or for calligraphy), and Willpower (for meditation).

Focus (INT): By extending the usage of a Theurgic skill to the subconscious, one can maintain the “occult state of awareness” and thus continue to use Empathic powers without attempting another usage of a Related Skill. The Focus roll is made as though it were an Empathic skill in that Stages of success are gathered. The Stages indicate how many Phases of Empathic action are available. This may only be done the Phase of or the Phase after an Empathic skill is used, or during the character’s Focus-time.

Incantation (CHA): The character is able to hum, sing, or chant in such a way that they enter an occult state. A successful skill roll made *after* a Phase of incantation means that in the *next* Phase, the character may perform an Empathic skill.

Sacred Geometry (EDU): The character is aware of the patterns implicit in every extant thing. In this, this skill is similar to Alchemy. However, rather than integrating the actions into everyday activities, the Sacred Geometry isolates the actions, making them more distinct. The character must move about in

a semi-dance, draw a pattern onto paper (or a computer-monitor), or somehow manage to perform a geometrical pattern for a single Phase and roll their Sacred Geometry. If successful, then *on that same Phase*, they may perform an Empathic skill.

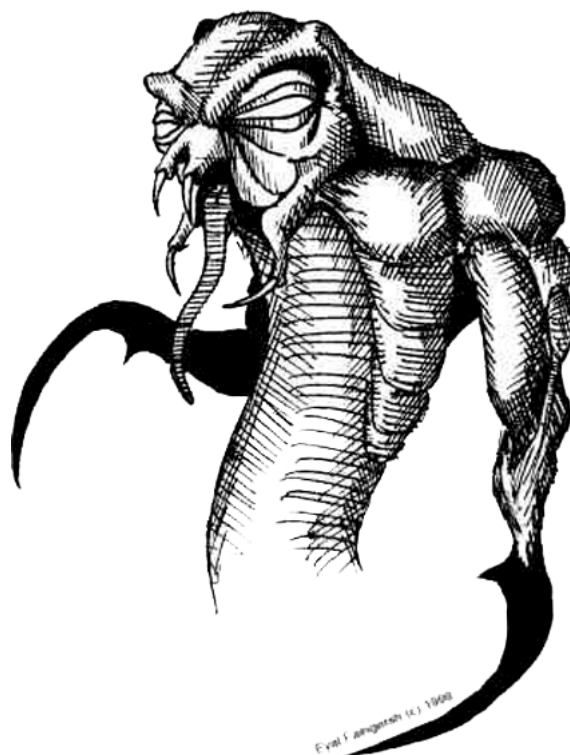
Powers

Theurgists have those powers listed on the standard character sheet, plus Dimension Walk, Plant Empathy, and the following unique powers.

Circle: The Circle is a multi-purpose psychic demarcation. When a Circle is erected, it has a radius of up to the character's Empathy in feet, extending around them. Empathic powers may not be used on anybody who is within the Circle unless the Stage of success is greater than the Circle's, in which case the Stage is reduced by the appropriate amount. Empathic means of detection will *automatically* fail if they attempt to reach into the Circle; as well, purely Empathic beings (spirits) will be rendered utterly unable to cross the boundary or use any Empathic power across the boundary. The Circle is broken if a living being crosses the boundary, or if an Empathic power is used across the boundary (Empathic powers from within extending outward are not inhibited and automatically penetrate the boundary).

Empathic Countermeasures: If the Theurgist is aware of the use of an Empathic power upon them, they may erect an extra line of defense by directly attacking the incoming Empathic power. Every Stage of success diminishes the Stage of success of the Empathic power being used by 1. This may also be used to combat purely Empathic beings (spirits).

Great Rite: The Great Rite is a ritual that gathers Empathic power for a future maneuver. If successful, the character will be able to use Empathic powers to great advantage. For (1d6 x Intelligence) phases, they will be able to make two skill rolls for any Empathic skill whenever they use it, taking the most beneficial roll. ❖



The Dilettante Career

by Edmund W. T. Wilfong

Some people live on couches in other people's homes, living from moment to moment, doing whatever it takes to have a good time for as long as possible. Others, who are deliriously wealthy, don't bother doing much at all except what interests them at the moment. These people call themselves Dilettantes, and are referred to by others as "tramps" and "waifs".

Entry: None

Skills: A total of 4 levels taken in any combination in any of the following skills:

- Act/Bluff
- Bargain
- Computer Operation
- Human Empathy (If EMP 1+)
- Luck
- Persuasion
- Project Emotion (If EMP 1+)

Contacts: One per term of any type chosen by the player. On a roll of 9+ on 1d10, the contact is foreign.

Special: Proles and Xenos may not take this Career option. The character gets two secondary abilities per term as a Dilettante. However, unless they are a Gnome, they do not make money during this career. Indeed, Mikes who are in this career must *spend* savings to remain in this career; they must spend $\$(11 - \text{CHA}) \times 1000$ per term to remain in this career; if they do not have the money, then they cannot be in this career.



ADJUDICATING EXPERIENCE

Introduction

Challenges that regularly appear for Game Masters (GMs) include weaving a good conspiracy, running combat efficiently, and creating unique, memorable Supporting Cast Members (SCMs) and villains. As a result, ideas about how to reward heroes may get less attention from an already-overburdened GM.

However, the benefit of understanding the different methods for character improvement can actually enhance the story and even place subtle pressure on players to roleplay better. It may even take some of the tasks of story direction off the GM's "To-Do list" and onto the players'. Since there are many ways to award heroes, it can be worthwhile to examine the options to best enhance your agents' own game play.

Usage of the following awards will depend heavily on whether or not the GM's campaign utilizes Optional Rule Set 2. Using Optional Rule 2A, whereby characters receive a greater amount of skill points at creation should be fine with the following suggestions. If you are using the Optional Rule 2C, in which players need only pay the list cost, or list cost -1 to improve ranks, then I would suggest not using the skill-based awards - your campaign's characters will improve fast enough without a bonus free broad skill, for example. Lastly, the suggestions below fit very nicely with the standard rules, where higher ranks are costly and rare!

And let's not forget that the best factor in handing out awards is good judgment and game balance. A wise GM wielding these tools will preserve and strengthen a great game.

Now on to the good stuff!

Achievement Points (APs)

According to the Altermity GMG and other published adventures, the standard here is;

a) 1 to 3 achievement points per adventure, with

Advice on Awarding Agents

By Dale Thurber

b) 1 additional point for "in-character" role-playing, and

c) 1 additional point if the player did something spectacular, noble, self-sacrificing, or heroic.

There are a few ways to look at achievement points. First, they represent the "work" that players put into the game, and include their persistence and willingness to play. 1 - 3 APs should probably be related to the length of the adventure, and my home rule is about 1 point for 3-5 hours of game time. This rewards players that consistently show up and participate (after all, "90% of life is just showing up."). Be open with your players about this, and tell them directly that by just being present and participating they are earning 1-3 points. This can eliminate the perception of any favoritism and may alleviate the problem of inconsistent attendance at your gaming sessions if players see an incentive is being offered.

Next is the icing on the cake, which involves exemplary role-playing. This may merit a full point depending on how well a player portrays her Attributes (Motivations and Traits) and character persona. One way to assess this is to make a hash mark on some scrap paper each time a player acts behaviorally consistent with his/her hero's stated personality. An average of one or more hash marks per hour of game time might warrant the AP.

Lastly is an award based on doing something spectacular, self-sacrificing, etc. Here, a GM can award one AP, or optionally, if the player spent a last resort point (LRP) on the spectacular or noble action, the GM can award one LRP instead. This keeps the characters from earning too many APs, and it can also lure heroes into doing the heroic things your players should be attempting as heroes.

For example, Agent Cordova is in-

side a van traveling 65MPH, sees some MIB shoot the tires and reacts by trying to grab the steering wheel to prevent a roll. She decides to use a last resort point to increase the chance that the agents will survive the inevitable crash. Cordova rolls a Vehicle Op - land vehicle check success, and the GM makes a mental (or written) note to award Cordova an LRP at the end of the session for her heroic action.

Consult the Altermity Player's Handbook on all the possibilities for spending APs (pg. 125-127). The number of options presented on those pages rivals the options listed below. Now, with the most common award out of the way, let's take a look at other possible awards.

Awards based on story and role-playing:

If you have exceptional role players, and you want to show that you value this part of their game play, one of the following five options may be the route to go, especially if you wish to keep your player levels relatively close to one another. These awards vary from small to substantial, so use GM discretion.

- Acquiring a new contact - especially useful for Diplomats, this award can be given if you feel the hero interacted with a SCM in a way that built a relationship, forged trust, encouraged reliance or mutual dependency, or handled things in a way which made a strong memorable impression in an SCM's mind. This was perhaps aided by some Good or Amazing successes, but the awarding of a new contact should mostly hinge on the player's excellent role-playing. Utilize the section on contacts in the D*M sourcebook for reference (pg. 245-256.)

- Removing a Flaw – if a character is working hard to overcome a flaw, the GM may be justified to simply remove of the flaw. For example, the hero may still have the flaw Phobia - heights, but has climbed enough times now to obtain mastery of his/her fear. A player with Old Injury can pay heavily to have it surgically repaired. A character with Temper taking expensive anger therapy classes may have the flaw temporarily removed, as long as the hero continues to pay for them. Of course, certain flaws range from hard to impossible to remove.
- Monetary or equipment rewards – Perhaps the Hoffman Institute recognizes an agent's obvious talent with a particular skill or piece of gadgetry. This can lead to an extended lease on an appropriate item, or to outright ownership. Or perhaps the agents were especially thorough in their investigations and discovered the “super-X” ray gun. Agents who abuse this award may find the HI placing them on probation, or the original owners of the ray gun hunting them down. In any case, usage of excess money or cool equipment should be for just a few sessions at most, at which time the award somehow leaves the character's possession. The D*M Arms and Equipment Guide (DMAEG) is a great source of interesting items for this type of award.
- Status, promotions, fame, or authority – Advancement within the HI comes with benefits and responsibilities. Perhaps this is one of the best types of awards because it is a balanced one. Sure, the agent enjoys increased authority, but now they are responsible for their subordinates' actions. Fame may be great for certain professions like Entertainer, or Scholar, but this also has the balanced notion that the player will be easily recognized, thereby making stealth operations difficult. Use the social status tables in the D*M sourcebook as a reference (pg. 247.)

- Award of a last resort point – This is mostly, but not only, suitable for when a hero just used a LRP to save the party, or did something greater than the self-preservation of the agent. And it is a simple message to players to remember – use a LRP, and you may gain it back at the end of the adventure. (see the example above, under Achievement Points)

Awards based on usage of a particular skill

Whenever a character uses a skill successfully, GMs may decide the player warrants a skill improvement. The reasoning here could be that the player had an Amazing or Good success at a critical time in the game. Or, the player has been using the skill repeatedly, with success. There are a couple of options here: a skill rank increase, a rank benefit or the awarding of a completely new broad or specialty skill.

- **Skill Rank Increase** - You can tell your players to keep track of the number of Amazing, or Good successes for a particular skill during an adventure. At the adventure's end, add a 2% chance for each Amazing success, and a 1% chance for each Good success. This percentage chance represents the possibility for a skill rank increase.

For example, Steve “Snake Eyes” Wilson, a Combat Spec Militiaman, accumulates 8 successes with the MRW-rifle skill, two of which were Amazing (4%), and one which was Good (1%). He now rolls percentile dice, and if the score on the dice is 5% or less, he has improved his skill rank by 1!

This can represent the hero discovering a more effective way to utilize the particular skill. A generous GM might wish to only count Amazing successes, but make the percentage chance cumulative.

- **Rank Benefit** – The GM can award a rank benefit before the hero actually has access to it based on their rank

score. The justification here could include the player's risky attempt to accomplish an action that relates to the rank benefit and success at a critical time in the adventure, despite some heavy penalties. However, the GM is cautioned to make this particular award no more than two or three times in the career of the hero.

- **New Broad Skill or Specialty Skill** – The GM can also award a totally new broad or specialty skill. The reasoning here may be that the character attempted a Feat check, and in the spirit of the moment, gained the broad skill which was associated with it. Or, in the case of gaining a specialty skill, the hero utilized his/her broad skill knowledge to “figure out” a specialty skill's intricacies (“Hmm...picking locks is a lot like manipulating your hands to make something disappear – it's all in the wrist...”). This should be a very rare award, and should be based on character concept development. The GM should never give this award more than once in a hero's career.

Award of a New Perk/Flaw

There can be many role-playing developments that can be reflected in the award of a perk, or the saddling of a player with an appropriate flaw. Perhaps the hero fell from a tall building during the course of an adventure – a suitable consequence may be that the character develops the flaw Phobia – heights. Or, the character has spent a great deal of game time talking with acquaintances and developing contacts – this character may receive the perk Networked. The GM should never award a perk or flaw more than once in a hero's career.

Awards based on a successful Feat Check

- **Resistance Modifier Increase** - The GM may award a +1 bonus to the resistance modifier of one ability upon a Feat check with an Amazing suc-



cess, or for success during a critical time in the story. Other possible circumstances that would make this appropriate are similar to those listed for skill awards. This also, should rarely be awarded more than once in a career.

- **Ability Score Increase** – A very rare bonus for an incredible job role-playing would be the increase of one of the primary ability scores. Out of consideration for game balance, this award should also be in concert with some story-related development. For example, the character has dedicated a few hours a day for months to studying western philosophers and has fasted and soloed in the wilderness, thereby gaining a point of Wisdom. Or, the player commits to three months of rigorous Strength training. Since this is the equivalent of a 10-AP expenditure, the GM should never award an ability-score increase more than once in a hero's career.

Summary of Possible Options for Awarding Player Achievement

Achievement Points (APs)

Awards based on story and role-playing:

- Acquiring a new contact
- Removing a Flaw
- Monetary or equipment rewards
- Status, promotions, fame, or authority
- Award of a last resort point

Awards based on usage of a particular skill:

- Skill Rank Increase
- Rank Benefit
- New Broad Skill, or Specialty Skill

Award of a New Perk / Flaw

Awards based on a successful Feat Check:

- Resistance Modifier Increase
- Ability Score Increase

Final thoughts on Achievement:

One final recommendation is to not give any of the non-AP awards until the 4th level. That way, the players have actually earned their first few levels (and spent some APs already) - they now know the value of APs and that the above rewards are special.

Please note that any of these benefits can be paid for normally with earned achievement points when a hero goes up a level. A GM awarding these benefits without making the character pay normal cost for them is a generous act indeed, and should be seen in that light by players. Hold them as precious gifts, not to be awarded lightly, and you'll have players competing to role-play with each other!!



ART GALLERY

This is another piece in our continuing series, letting us share with you some of the great artwork that has been sent to us that we might not be able to match up with a specific article.

This issue, we present another picture from Eyal Feingersch, one of our most dedicated contributors. Eyal has been with us since Issue 1, and is perhaps the only person who has actually had something in every single issue of DEMONGROUND to date. Eyal is responsible for creating the excellent banner art that we use across the top of each page of the magazine.

So, thanks Eyal!



SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT...

by Geoff Skellams

Major Karen Westerby groaned as she slowly began to regain consciousness. Unable to move her body because of the restraints on the gurney she was strapped to, she just tossed her head weakly from side to side.

Gavin straightened his army uniform and looked across at her. Showtime, he thought. He went over to her and made sure the oxygen mask was firmly settled over her face. "Major Westerby?" he said, his voice much deeper than it would normally be. "Major Westerby, can you hear me?"

The woman groaned again and her eyes fluttered open. They focused slowly and unsteadily on Gavin's face.

"Colonel Hestrim?" she muttered groggily. "What happened? Where am I?"

"Calm yourself, Major. You were in an accident coming down from the research facility. You're in an ambulance on the way to the base hospital."

The woman's eyes flew wide. "Where's Daniel?"

Gavin shook his head solemnly. "I'm sorry, Major," he said. "Lieutenant Paulson was killed instantly."

She closed her eyes and laid her head back on the bed. "We've failed then. There's no way we can complete the mission."

"That's why I'm here. General Erichia dispatched me personally to ensure your mission is not a failure." Gavin held up a locked but badly dented aluminium briefcase. "I have the prototype right here. The case is intact and we believe it to be safe."

The woman breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank God for that," she whispered. "It's taken us over a year to develop that machine and organize this meet."

Gavin looked her solemnly in the eye. "General Erichia has authorized me to assume responsibility for the transfer of the prototype. He doesn't want the project to be ruined now. But when you left the base, the access codes were purged from the mainframe. I need you tell it to me so that I can complete the mission."

The woman nodded. "Echo Hotel Zulu Niner Fiver Uniform Tango Zero Zero Whiskey."

Gavin nodded solemnly. "Thank you, Major," he said. "Leave it to me now. I give you my guarantee that I will not fail you. Get some rest. You'll be out of here before you know it."

Gavin turned a knob on the oxygen supply, opening the

valve on the knockout gas. Within seconds, the Major's eyes fluttered and closed again. Gavin waited for several minutes to ensure she was fully sedated, then stepped from the ambulance.

He carried the battered briefcase across the darkened warehouse and entered a brightly lit office on the other side. Tossing the briefcase on the table, he reached up and grabbed the side of his face. With a quick tug, he peeled the latex face of Colonel Hestrim off and threw it on the table next to the briefcase.

"God, I hate wearing those things," he muttered.

Kate Henshaw poked her head through a doorway on the other side of the office. In the room beyond, Gavin could see his partner, Vanessa, now wearing the face of the unconscious Major Westerby. "Did you get the code?"

"Yep," muttered Gavin, lighting a cigarette. "Vanessa will be right to make the drop of the fake prototype and we're done. By the time that the Book figures out we've duped them, we'll be long gone."

Sometimes, Gavin thought, I love this game.

There are times when Aegis agents are sent to accomplish missions that they may not be equipped to handle. They might not have the security clearance they need to get onto the military base, or a frontal assault would be plain suicide. It's at times like this they have to start thinking smarter; the agents need to find a way to make their opposition hand over exactly what it is they want to keep hidden.

In his 1940 book, *The Big Con*, David W Maurer described the way a confidence man could extract whatever he needed from his target. Maurer wrote:

A confidence man prospers only because of the fundamental dishonesty of his victim. He allows the victim to make large sums of money by means of dealings which are explained to him to be dishonest and hence a "sure thing."... The mark puts all his scruples behind him. He closes out his bank account, embezzles from his employer or his clients. In the mad frenzy of cheating someone else, he is unaware of the fact that he is the real victim, carefully selected and fattened for the kill.



This very concept became the core concept of the successful “Mission: Impossible” television series in the late 60s and early 70s. The IMF team would trick their opposition into doing whatever it was that the team needed doing. By playing against the target’s weak points, the Impossible Missions Force team was able to live up to their name.

An Aegis cell could learn a lot from the example of the IMF teams. In many situations an Aegis cell is asked with acquiring knowledge, artifacts or individuals that, by rights, they should not even be able to get access to. However, by outthinking the opposition, they stand to become far more successful than they should otherwise by.

Hiding in the Shadows

It’s extremely important to remember that Aegis is just as much a part of the government conspiracy as the Black Book. As such, it is imperative that Aegis agents maintain a low profile at all times. If they were to make too many overt moves, there remains a very real possibility that Aegis’ involvement in a great many things could come to light, the cell structure not withstanding.

The question then becomes how does a cell achieve its missions without overt action and without compromising security? While at first this may seem difficult to understand, the answer is relatively simple, at least in theory.

People believe what they want to believe. A clever cell can use that to their advantage.

Imagine a man in a police uniform pulls you over in your car. He steps out of a police car and approaches you in a confident manner. You’d assume that he was a policeman. But is he really? Very few people would actually bother to question the man’s authority.

It’s facts like this that makes the job of a covert Aegis cell much easier. If an agent looks, sounds and acts like the person he or she is supposed to be, then the target is probably not going to question the authority that the agent is supposed to have. If the individual is paranoid enough, they may later check up on the agent’s supposed identity, but by that stage, the agent has already received the information they needed and have vanished back into obscurity. However, for the vast majority of the population, this is something they wouldn’t even know how to do.

While dressing up as a policeman or a government agent might fool some people, there are certain times when a cell may well have to go a lot further in order to accomplish their mission.

Setting the Stage

Regardless of the actual mission, using these sorts of psychological warfare tactics successfully relies on one very simple fact: the target must truly *believe* what ever it is the cell is trying to convince them of. Once the target is hooked, their reaction to various situations can be manipulated by the cell to achieve whatever the mission objective is.

The trick is, how can you make someone believe exactly what you want them to believe? That depends on what the object of the mission is.

Traditionally, deception of this nature has involved the planting or removal of evidence - either physical evidence or computer records manipulated by hacking - in a place that will have the most effect on the target. The actual effect will depend on what the evidence is and who actually finds it. If the target finds it, they can be either blackmailed into doing the teams bidding, or if the team has been more careful with the choice of evidence, the target will do whatever the team wants them to do of their own volition. Alternatively, the evidence could be delivered into the hands of the authorities who could then use it to make life extremely difficult for the target.

While these are both extremely valid techniques, there are other tricks that can be brought to bear against a target that go a lot further. This usually requires a much higher degree of proaction and courage on the part of the cell. However, much of this effort has to be done in the background to set things up so that the target is completely convinced of what it is the team wants them to believe.

Smoke and Mirrors

In order for the target to be manipulated into believing what the cell want him or her to believe the cell must first have all their dominoes lined up before the target is involved - in other words, the cell needs to be in control of the environment the target will be in.

Every phone that the target uses needs to be end up connected to one of the cell members. Every important person the target meets or speaks with should be a cell member. Everything they see, read or hear should be orchestrated by the team to point the target in the direction the cell wants them to go.

Psychological warfare of this nature is an excellent way to use the pulling strings that the cell has at their disposal.

Phone lines

Capturing the target’s phone lines goes a lot further than simple bugging. Instead, ever number the target calls (or depending on the mission, perhaps only selected numbers) need to be routed to a phone that the cell controls. This could be done at the target’s residence by team members posing as members of the phone company coming to check on a reported fault (that they themselves may have created in order to have the target phone the telephone company). Alternatively, it could be done at the exchange, either be a physical penetration of the exchange, or by hacking in.

Cell phones pose a completely different challenge. In this case, the cell needs to be able to hack into the computers controlling the network and reroute any calls that way. They may also be able to use some high tech equipment to jam the signals coming from the target’s phone.

The people you meet

If the cell is controlling the environment the target is in, then everyone important will either be a cell member, or working under instructions from one. However, with a limited cell size, making sure that the target does not become suspicious can be a complicated procedure.

The easiest solution is to get people to work for you. This could be done either by positive means (lies appealing to people's charitable sides through to outright bribery) or by negative means (blackmail, extortion or threats).

However, a more creative and confident cell could well perform these roles themselves. As mentioned before, people believe what they want to believe. The cell members, with the right outfits and equipment could easily get themselves close enough to target to feed them the information the cells wants the target to have. More ambitious cells can take this to the highest level - by clever use of makeup, cell members can go so far as impersonating someone the target knows intimately in order to achieve the mission goal. Naturally, this requires a lot of skill on the part of the team (both in the makeup and in the acting departments), but it can easily yield the best results.

Places you go

With the team controlling the environment, anywhere the target goes could well be under the cell's control. This can be done either by providing the target's transportation for them, by manipulating things (perhaps using the phone line tricks mentioned above) so that the target ends up at a place where the cell can call the shots, or by the cell learning in advance where the target is going to be and beating them there.

The makeup trick can be used on places as well. A clever cell can create locations that look exactly like somewhere else, so that the target thinks they know where they are, when in fact they are somewhere else completely.

When the hell am I?

Perhaps one of the most ambitious tricks a cell can use is the "time warp." Of all the deceptions, this one is perhaps the

hardest one to pull off successfully as it relies on the cell being able to get to the target while they are asleep or otherwise incapacitated.

By changing the times on the clocks, as well as employing other props like false newspapers, the target can be lead to believe that some (possibly lengthy) period of time has passed. If the new time is after some time critical for the target (for example, the deadline for a mission), the cell can "debrief" the target and learn the vital details of what the target was doing.

Armed with this information, the team can achieve (or prevent) the target's mission.



Other tricks

There are a multitude of other tricks a cell can use to convince a target of something. Most of these rely on the use of a special effects team to achieve the right degree of believability.

These can include:

Faked murders: By using special effects such as staged explosions, pyrotechnic squibs, fake blood and blank bullets, a cell can make it appear as though someone has been murdered when in fact no one has died. This could be used to convince a target that the cell means business, or perhaps even faking things so that the target *thinks* they have killed someone when it was all stages.

Falsified images: with the rapid advances in computer graphics technology over the past few years, it is now possible to have photorealistic images generated entirely by computer. A cell with access to this sort of technology can fake either photographic or videotape footage in order to convince a target of something.

Faked artifacts: A cell with access to clever model manufacturing facilities (such as those at movie studio props departments) can create physical props that they can use to their advantage to convince the target they have seen something that does not really exist. This can be used as a form of reverse psychology - if the target saw a real gray saucer, then presenting the target with a fake one could well convince them that the real one was also just a fake.



The Movie Industry - A New Host for Conspiracy X

Since the invention of the motion picture, movie studios have spent an immense amount of time, energy and money in devising ways to make the unreal real, at least to the movie going public. In the past ten years, the rapid advances in computer technology have enabled the creation of special effects that were quite simply impossible only a decade ago.

Although its influence in the industry is quite minor, Aegis does target certain individuals for the skills they can bring to a cell. Movie stars and directors have much too high a profile for the secretive work of the agency. Instead, Aegis tends to recruit members of the teams who bring the magic to the screens: the makeup artists, the prop and set designers, the computer animation experts and the special effects wizards and the stuntmen and women.

By using these skills to their advantage, Aegis cells can create a huge advantage in the deception stakes. When combined with meticulous planning, these agents can prove vital to the success of a mission.

Movie Industry Professions

Special Effects

Influence Provided: Media

Professional trainings: Communication, Savoir Faire

Professional skills: Computer Use, Demolitions, Diplomacy, Disguise, Engineering, Forgery, Photography, Research, Repair/Build, Science, Video.

Stunts

Influence Provided: Media

Professional trainings: Awareness, Parachutist, Rapellings, SCUBA Diving

Professional Skills: Athletics, Blind Maneuvers, Brawling, Boating, Drive, Gun Fu, Martial Arts, Melee Weapons, Pilot, Small Arms: Pistol, Small Arms: Rifle.

Movie Industry Pulling Strings

Restricted Equipment: Many movies make extensive use of firearms and explosives. As a result, a show biz agent can get access to any gear on the Pistols, Rifles, Thrown Weapons and Explosives Resource Lists.

Props Departments: Make the unreal real is what the movie industry does best. Agents within the show business industry can have all manner of strange things built to aid them in their missions. Items meant to only have a passing resemblance to something else require a Df1 Influence test. Items required to pass casual inspection require a Df2 test. Items that need to pass a rigorous visual inspection require a Df3 test. These tests assume a relatively small item with few moving parts. If the item is large and/or complex, the Game Master should feel free to impose a further Df penalty.

Cast of Thousands: There are times when it is useful for a cell to create a diversion in order to cover up their own activities or to disrupt the activities of another group. A show biz agent can organize a group of “extras” under the guise of making a movie. A small group (< 10 people) requires a Df1 Influence test. A medium group (< 100 people) requires a Df2 test. Large groups of up to 1000 people require a Df3 test. Organizing groups in remote areas increases the difficulty by +1Df. Trying to organize a group in a foreign country imposes a (cumulative) +1Df.

Production Money: The movie industry regularly spends hundreds of millions of dollars each year making what they hope will be the next blockbuster. Agents within the show business industry can skim money with relative ease. No funding check needs to be made for amounts under \$10,000. For amounts under \$50,000, a regular luck roll needs to be made. If the agent wants up to \$250,000, a successful luck roll with a +2 penalty is required. On Bad Luck, a movie studio accountant discovers the agent’s actions. The Game Master should feel free to prosecute the agent to full extent of the law.



“Just who the hell do these damn Aegis people think they are?”

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

Dancing With the Maidens

The Vorceki Saga – Conclusion

by Lee Williams

THE republic of britain 

The race to stop Major Reed was almost over in New Zealand, but still she managed to escape by air across the Pacific with the gate components. Now comes the player-characters' last chance to stop this awakening danger from becoming a horrifying reality.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

As the party makes their way out of Hobson airfield, New Zealand Air Force security personnel begin to round up the remaining Nukids. As they return to Auckland to gather up their equipment and resume the hunt for Reed, Carissa Grooms' cell phone rings. She listens for a moment, makes confirmatory noises and hangs up. Turning to those party members who are in the same vehicle, she explains that Reed's cargo plane was last seen on radar losing height rapidly, though it could well be that she did this intentionally to avoid radar detection. If the flight across the Pacific is uneventful, Reed should cross the West Coast of the United States or Mexico in about 12 hours.

Back To The Chase

The party will most likely be unsure of exactly what to do next, other than assume Reed has indeed flown back to the USA and probably holed up somewhere to regroup what remains of her network before embarking on the search for the last gate component. They

will make arrangements for a flight to Los Angeles, leaving the next day before lunch. Carissa Grooms will help to expedite the procedure, but this will be the earliest flight available.

Early the next morning, the party will be awoken by Eagon Spengler battering on their hotel room doors. He is obviously distressed, and will be babbling something about Reed. After a few moments, Eagon takes a deep breath and composes himself somewhat. He then explains that Carissa just phoned him and said that the U.S. Department of Defense radar grid has not picked up any air traffic that corresponds to the profile of Major Reed's aircraft. However, the French forces on exercise in the Polynesian area picked up a garbled S.O.S. transmission, but when they investigated found no trace of any plane or wreckage of any sort.

After tracing some satellite imagery from CIA headquarters in the United States, Carissa will point out that there was a sudden increase of activity among British forces currently on U.N. peacekeeping duties in the area. Reed's course took her directly toward the island nations of Polynesia, which are being torn apart by tribal warfare. There is a small U.N. force in this area, mostly comprised of British Marines and Indian soldiers. The French, pursuing their own agenda as usual have a battalion of Foreign Legion in the area as well. (Note: The PCs

may not be previously aware of these events, particularly if they are not citizens of the nations involved in the conflict. In the world of Dark Conspiracy people don't tend to care what happens thousands of mile away).

REFEREE

Reed's aircraft was violating a U.N. no-fly zone over one of the disputed Polynesian islands. Republic of Britain Navy Harrier jets intercepted and attempted to make contact. After refusing to alter course or even answer radio communications, Reed's plane was forced to ditch in the sea. The entire plane, along with its contents and crew, was recovered and moved aboard an RN cargo ship that immediately set sail for home. These actions were carried out by British Intelligence, which upon realising that the aircraft belonged to the United States Air Force, assumed that some sort of American plot was being hatched. The mysterious objects found in the plane only enforced that misconception.

It is of course up to the individual referee how quickly this information is gathered by the party, but bear in mind that British Intelligence have taken extra care in covering their tracks, making it very difficult to work out exactly what happened. Carissa Grooms could be the one to put the elements together, but she will be able to offer no further assistance, other than arranging a 'diplomatic pouch'



A Long Time Ago...

Three and a half million years ago, an ancient alien race known as the Vorceki (the people), achieved space flight and discovered an even more ancient, even more alien, teleportation network. Using this network of gateways, the Vorceki combed the galaxy in search of other intelligent races. Failing that, they settled upon helping primitive, evolving races on the road to more advanced development.

Around this time, one of the Vorceki exploration teams discovered the biggest gateway yet - a super gateway capable of sending travelers not only to other parts of the galaxy, but to other dimensions as well. A team of highly qualified explorers was selected.

They entered the gateway, and returned a short time later. But they were changed by the experience. A dark influence gripped their souls, turning these explorers against their own people. They became known as the Terceki (ghosts) and set about trying to control the teleportation network to use toward their own twisted purpose.

Too late, the Vorceki realized what the Terceki were up to. The only course of action available was to destroy the gate network, in order to prevent the spread of the Terceki's evil influence. For the most part, they were successful, but their actions left many members of both races scattered and stranded forever on distant worlds.

In the process of its destruction, the gateway on earth blew apart into six segments, which were scattered across the face of the planet. On earth, a few of the Vorceki and Terceki survived the destruction of the gate.

Realizing that they would not be able to survive on the earth as the food supplies ran out and their equipment fell apart, both sides sought desperately for a way to survive and defeat the other. The Terceki tampered with the genes of some of the proto-humans and embedded their DNA into the genetic code of these creatures.

When these beings eventually evolved into intelligent life forms, the genetic codes would become active, triggering genetic "memories" and "programming". The surviving Vorceki learned of this plan when they finally defeated the last of the Terceki on earth. The Vorceki, weak and dying, could not find and destroy all the infected proto-humans, so they decided to counter by creating hybrids of their own. These proto-humans would bear in their genes the "memories" they would need to continue the fight.

The Recent Past ...

Millions of years after the tampering of the Terceki and Vorceki, their horrific labors have finally borne fruit. Some humans, infected with now active Terceki and Vorceki DNA, have set out to find the parts of the ancient gate and reactivate it. This yearning is part of their subconscious, but is growing stronger.

The players were first contacted several months earlier by Dr. Karl West, a physician from the Northeast United States who had noticed a disturbing increase in the recent incidence of birth defects. His research had led to the disturbing conclusion that the defects were not the result of a random mutation, but some sort of genetic marker built into the DNA of the child's parents, and passed on to the child.

Victims of this genetic tampering showed any number of disturbing physical deformities - oddly discolored skin, thick tentacles radiating out from the torso, and in extreme cases, a gaping razor-toothed mouth visible in the center of the abdomen.

Through the course of the adventure, the players have had opportunity to meet a number of Vorceki/human and Terceki/human hybrids. One thing has certainly been gained from these meetings: The Vorceki and Terceki hate each other with a passion so strong, that carriers of race's genetic markers will instinctively dislike and/or distrust someone bearing the other race's genetic markers.

ready for when the party leaves Auckland.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Under no circumstances, will the party be allowed to enter the UN controlled area should they wish to follow Reed's exact trail. When they realize that British forces are at work they should travel to London instead. After all, what harm could possibly befall them in sleepy little England?

The only available flight will take about 30 hours in total, including a couple of hours stopover in Singapore. The journey will be relatively uneventful, and provides a good opportunity for Dr. West to do some more theorising on the nature of things Vorceki. It also affords the player-characters some much-needed rest. Eventually, the airliner will begin its descent into London Heathrow. Spengler and West eagerly press their faces to the windows, anxious for a first glimpse of the capital of the Republic of Britain.

Welcome to the Republic of Britain

As the plane comes into final approach, those with window seats can see the western suburbs of London stretching away below. Another passenger, who has visited Britain before will comment to their neighbor on the urban growth, saying 'There's a lot more of London than there used to be, at least out here. Of course it's because of the way the corps ruined the farmers' lands...'

As the party members disembark the aircraft, they notice that the level of security at Heathrow airport is even higher than at Auckland. Body armor-clad Metro Police armed with HK submachine guns patrol the walkways and lobbies of International Terminal 3 in groups of 2 or 3, and airport security are everywhere.

At the baggage security checkpoint (between the carousel and the exit) there will be a minor delay as Eagon Spengler's passport is checked. A man dressed in a dark blue suit and trenchcoat will appear from a door marked 'Airport Staff only'. The man looks to be about forty years of

age and has an air of command about him. After showing his identity card to the security guard, he glances at Eagon's papers. If one of the player-characters is close enough to see him flash his ID card (Formidable: Observation), they might be able to make out the name 'Myers'.

Myers will approach the party and beckons to them. "Please follow me," he says in a measured British accent that betrays his background as a educated man. He offers nothing else by way of introduction, but merely opens the door and steps to one side allowing the party to enter before him. The door leads into a corridor designed to give airport staff more direct access to almost any point of the terminal. He closes the door behind him and points ahead down the corridor, saying 'This way please'. He will not say anything further to the party no matter what they may ask him.

The group proceeds along the corridor until they reach an intersection. Suddenly, several heavily armed figures in dark blue coveralls and respirators surround them. Resistance is not an option. None of the armed group bears any kind of insignia, and they take any and all weapons that the party may have retrieved from their 'diplomatic pouch'.

The man in the trenchcoat begs their pardon, and then says to one of the armed figures 'take them out through Emergency Exit 7 and proceed to Alpha'.

The party members are handcuffed and blindfolded and led through a maze of access ways, until they are taken aboard what seems to be a van. Empathic characters, as well as anyone attempting to struggle or make a noise will be rendered unconscious by means of a tranquilliser injection. After boarding the waiting vehicle, it then makes its way at high speed to...well, somewhere.

Incarceration

After what the party estimate to be about an hour, the van pulls to a halt and they are all ushered out. Anyone who has been sedated by the guards is carried out and placed into a waiting golf cart-style vehicle. Still blindfolded, the party is taken along a straight corridor. They

are each placed into separate rooms, after having their cuffs released. The doors are then locked and they are left there.

After removing their blindfolds, they will see they are each in a small grey-painted room, with a bed and a toilet. Concealed lighting in the ceiling gives a slight yellow tint to the interior. Any banging on the doors or yelling will have no effect and will not be heard by the other player-characters.

After a couple of hours, one of the cell doors will open (referee's choice) and three of the figures in dark blue will take the occupant to another room at the end of the corridor. This room is decorated like a Victorian office, with a large rectangular desk in the center. In front of this is a large high-backed leather armchair flanked by two less ornate leather chairs. Sitting in the center seat is Myers, the man from the airport. To his right is another man dressed in civilian garb. Two guards remain in the room, taking position next to the door behind the player-character. The man to Myers' right will state the character's full name, date and place of birth and ask them if this is correct (it will be, no matter what).

Myers and this other man will then ask a long series of questions. They will be relatively polite, but there is always an unspoken sense of menace underlining their words. (This gives a really good chance for the referee to embarrass his players, bringing up all those little mistakes and foiled plans from previous sessions.) It will be very plain that these guys know everything about the character. References will also be made to belief in UFOs, alien life forms and so on, and later in the questioning, the threat of weapon smuggling charges will be made. More pointed questions will be asked about the alien tracking device which was found in the luggage of whoever was carrying it.

The questions will jump from one subject to another, seemingly at random, until the character is totally confused. The idea here is to rattle the players, giving them the impression that they are being swept away beneath the carpet behind the cabinet where all the red-tape is kept.

The character will not be allowed to initiate any questions. Any attempt to do anything beyond truthful responses should be met by a kidney punch from one of the guards behind them. Also, any empathic character attempting to use their abilities will find that they are unable to focus, which should make them nervous.

After a random amount of time the interview will be abruptly terminated and the character taken back to their room. The same thing will happen to each party member in turn.

Eventually, after everyone has been questioned, the last person is returned to his or her room and hidden loudspeakers announce a sleep period, commencing in ten minutes. At this time, everyone will feel sleepy and will drop off into a deep sleep, regardless of whether they want to or not...

Rise and Shine

Some time later, the player-character that occupies the room closest to the interrogation office will be awakened. As they groggily come to their senses they will recognize the man as Myers' assistant. He will motion for them to stay silent, and hand them a small oxygen cylinder, whispering 'Take a couple of deep breaths. Negates the gas, you see'. The oxygen clears the character's head in seconds. Gesturing to follow him, the man then goes to each room in turn, waking those within and passing the cylinder just as before. When all are awake, he leads them quietly into a larger room near the opposite end of the corridor to Myers' office.

"Now, we don't have a lot of time," he begins. The man opens a locker in the corner of the room, and returns any weapons and small items of equipment belonging to the characters that were confiscated by the guards. He explains quickly that his name is Trewarren, and the party are being held by British Intelligence Section Seven, which deals exclusively with alien technologies. He also tells them that Myers has already left the building with several guards and another prisoner, a woman who was



brought in shortly before the party. Although Trewarren was not told who this person was, she wore the uniform and rank badges of a major in the US Air Force. She also aroused inexplicable feelings of revulsion and hatred in Trewarren, who managed to stay clear of her. She was brought in after being forced down by the Republic of Britain forces in the South Pacific (see Referee's section following 'Back To The Chase').

The plane she was piloting was full of strange dark objects, which seemed to bear a remarkable similarity in style to the strange device taken from the characters. When the tracking device was taken to the woman prisoner, she activated it and it gave a sense of direction towards something a long way north from London, probably in Scotland.

He also explains that the player-characters had been gassed to make them sleep, as it was clear that Myers wanted them to be kept out of the way during his unscheduled departure from the Section Seven building where they now are. It also seemed that Myers was not in fact treating the USAF woman as a prisoner but more as a friend, even though they had not met previously. Suspicious of the whole thing, Trewarren has now broken into Myers's secure files for more information. He has one more bit of information to give the party after reading some of Myers' records, namely that he himself is suspected of having some kind of taint in his genetic makeup which may possibly be of alien origin.

As a young boy he underwent surgery to remove strange tentacle-like growths from his abdomen, and lately he has begun to suffer with skin discolouration and hardened patches on his stomach. He has also been experiencing vivid and strange dreams, and is almost afraid to try to sleep anymore.

It should be obvious that Trewarren is a Terceki hybrid. Furthermore he knows that something big is going on with Myers and the woman, who is, of course Janice Reed. Something inside him has made him determined to stop whatever it is Reed and Myers are doing, and his

newfound instincts coupled with a lifelong nose for investigation has made him throw his lot in with the party.

"So now," he says. "Time we weren't here, I think. Follow me, please."

Quietly he leads them down the corridor, pausing only to place his eye over the retinal scanner on the outside door before leading everyone out into a courtyard where a van awaits. The party is asked to hunker down in the back and remain quiet for a few moments as Trewarren slowly drives toward the gate, winding down his window and casually offering his identity card to the guard. As the guard nods and raises the gate, Trewarren guns the engine and darts off at speed into the London traffic.

Streets of London

As the van winds its way through the city traffic, the characters can take a short rest and try to come up with some kind of a plan. As West and Spengler discuss details, the others can take a peek through the bullet-proof one-way mirrored windows at the reality of London, capital of the Republic of Britain. The van emerges into daylight somewhere near the western end of Lambeth Bridge, and speeds north along Millbank and past the bullet-scarred but still imposing edifice of the Houses of Parliament. After rounding Parliament Square and continuing along Whitehall, the traffic comes to a halt as the tanks guarding the end of the newly reconstructed Downing Street are manoeuvred back into position. This is due to the recent return home of the Prime Minister after Question Time.

Trewarren guides the van smoothly past Trafalgar Square, now bereft of pigeons since psittacosis mutated from pet birds into the general bird population. Along Pall Mall and St James's and west onto Piccadilly, past the shell of the Ritz (bombed out by Welsh terrorists a few months before). As they pass Green Park to the left side, Trewarren tells them not to be alarmed in case anything hits the van, as it will only be garbage thrown by the homeless who live in shanties in the parks. "They like to try and freak people

out by throwing animal guts at them," he says, matter-of-factly. "Besides, this thing is armored". Many dispossessed and homeless people stare with suspicion or hatred at the vehicle as they pass through the parks.

Eventually the van leaves the city and joins the M1 motorway, heading north at speed in the outermost fourth and fifth lanes. Trewarren explains that this lane is reserved for government vehicles and those few who can afford to pay the tolls. Everyone else has to make do with the decrepit and gridlocked three lanes that were originally built in the 1960's.

Over the Border

After several hours, having joined the M6 motorway in the Midlands and following it all the way as far as Collinsisle, Trewarren pulls the van over at a service station not far from the Scottish border. He explains to the party that if they use their passports as they enter Scotland (now a separate nation) they will trip an alert program that was covertly inserted into the customs computer in Edinburgh by Section Seven. This will immediately let Myers and Reed know that they are on the trail. Therefore, Trewarren says 'it's time to use a little low-tech know-how'. Stepping out of the van with his cellphone, he dials a number and begins to talk animatedly into it. After a couple of minutes he returns, smiling. 'Our tickets are arranged' he says, and with that he takes the van back out onto the northbound motorway.

Turning off at the last junction before the border, the van winds its way along smaller and smaller roads and eventually through a gap in a fence marked with a Ministry of Defense 'Keep Out' sign, until Trewarren stops outside a small pub in a tiny village. The only sign of life is the light flickering from the pub windows, which upon closer inspection, appear to be the only remaining windows in on the entire street. Trewarren steps out and gestures to the others to follow, then calmly enters the pub. As they follow through the door, they find the interior to be warm and

welcoming and full of men with guns... none of which are pointed at them. As firearms are still mostly illegal in Britain this should unnerve the party to some extent.

"Welcome to the Breakers Arms" says one of them, stepping forward to greet Trewarren with a college handshake.

The Breakers Arms

The man who greets Trewarren is of average height, but somewhat muscular. He has close-cropped, dark hair and is wearing a Second World War style British pilot's jacket. He carries a pump-action shotgun and a large bowie knife in a leg sheath. He is introduced as Collins by Trewarren, and is described as a 'breaker' (officially sanctioned bounty hunter). The other 5 men with him are also breakers, three of whom are Scots and the rest English. "These guys are our ticket over the border," says Trewarren, and goes on to explain that he has worked with Collins before whilst on 'official duties'.

Collins and his men have reliable information that a convoy of large trucks bearing government registration plates was driven straight through the official diplomatic lane at the border without stopping. The Land Rover at the rear of the convoy stopped and the occupants

handed a stack of paperwork to the bemused Customs guard and then left. The trucks were last seen heading towards the ferry terminal which serves the islands off the western coast.

"Thing is," says Collins, "Several islands in that region are still owned by the Ministry of Defense in London. They could be doing anything, it might not even be the people you are looking for."

"No, it's them all right," states Trewarren. "I know it is, and somehow I think I can track them. Something is letting me know where they are, at least in a rough sense, but I don't know how or why. I fully intend to find out though, with your help – and yours of course," he adds to the player-characters.

Collins suggests they get some food and then he will show them the route through the border that the breakers use when they need to move secretly.

Road To The Isles

Shortly after midnight on this moonless night, Trewarren loads up the van with the party and their equipment, plus a couple of Collins' friends. As they prepare to hit the road, one of the player-characters notices blood on Trewarren's arm, soaking through his shirt sleeve. If examined, it will be obvious that the cellular breakdown of his body is accelerating. The skin on his arm is beginning to 'leak' from within. His skin is taking on a translucent blue tint and his eyes seem to shimmer green in the darkness. He will tell the others quite abruptly that he will be fine, at least for a while yet and he has no intention of missing the 'fun' as he calls it.

Collins takes the lead in his car, a Jaguar V-12 XJS painted army green, with a bulky object strapped to its roof. The Jag must be at least 25 years old, yet is in perfect order. The van

follows on as the Jaguar winds along dirt tracks and across pastureland until they eventually arrive at a high multiple-layered fence with a deep ditch on each side. This is the border between the Republic and Scotland, not really designed to stop a serious effort to breach national boundaries but it is fitted with alarm systems, which in this area are often triggered by wildlife.

Collins gets out of his car and takes the object off the roof rack, revealing it to be a set of folding ramps which are easily long enough to cross the ditches one at a time. As he sets them across the gap on this side, one of his men scrambles up to the fence and rolls back a large section, which has been previously cut.

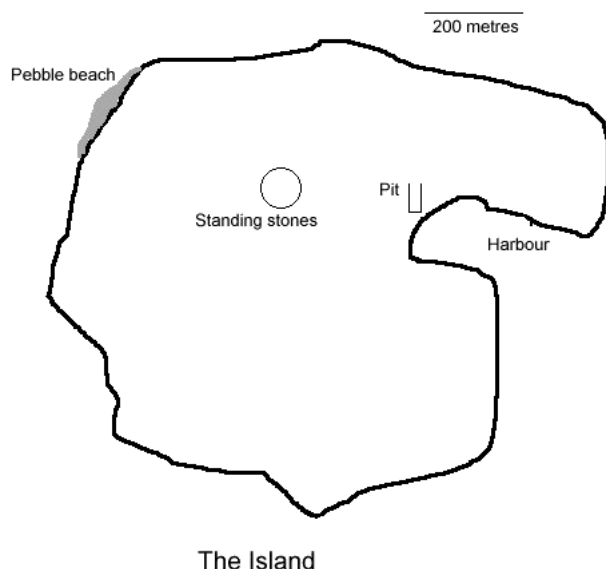
Within 10 minutes all are safely across in the vehicles, apart from the two men from Collins' group who remain on the English side to roll the fence back.

They continue along back roads for a while, then turn onto a main road and proceed until they come to a major junction. Collins takes the turn that is signposted for the ferry terminal and after about another couple of hours they reach the dockside. Trewarren pulls the van over and almost leaps through the window to get out, and he runs to the edge of the quay shaking with what seems to be excitement. "There!," he cries, pointing across the dark waters at the lights of a far-off ship, "That's them, I just know it."

As the party wonders what to do next, Collins comes over and points out a small fishing boat, long past it's best. "Your transport awaits," he says with a smile, "better get your stuff aboard."

The boat has but one crewman, a tall Scot with a scar across his chin. He starts up the motor as everyone climbs aboard but says little save for one-word answers to anything he is asked. The boat bears the name Aileen III on its bow.

When all are on board they cast off and sail due west, towards the collection of islands in the distance. Trewarren finally succumbs to sleep, possibly the first time since leaving London some 36 hours before. As he sleeps he dreams, mumbling strange words and twisting





and turning in his seat. The skipper who Collins says is called Lochran seems to know just where Myers and his crew are going, even though the Aileen III is nowhere near as fast as the ferry Myers has commandeered. The engine of the Aileen III is well muffled, and everything seems still as they traverse the waters of the firth. Drifting silently through the night toward their inescapable confrontation with Reed and Myers. The last chance humanity has to halt their evil plan.

Almost Time...

Eventually the Aileen III slows as Lochran brings her about and points to a dark shape on the water. "That's your place," he says, "Yon ferry's aroond the ither side. They can't see us from there, we can get right up on yon beach this side."

If anyone asks how large the isle is, Collins replies, "About two clicks across, so it's silent running for us from now on."

All go ashore except Lochran, including Doctor West and Eagon Spengler as their expertise may be useful. The now obviously ailing Trewarren also comes along, even though his skin is now almost entirely blue-grey and he only blinks about once per minute. Something else is driving him now, something primal, and he will not stop until whatever happens is over.

The island is small and shaped rather like a boxing glove, with a small harbour in the gap between the 'thumb' and the 'hand' (see map). The water is deep enough there for the ferry to pull right alongside the old quayside, built for military use during World War One. It is approximately one and a half kilometers from the old harbor to the pebble beach where Lochran pulled in, and there is little in between but grassy land and the remains of stone walls. The highest point of the island is only 20 meters above sea level, and as the party sneaks across the beach and up the short slope onto the island proper they can easily see the lights of the ferry.

Right on the highest point of the island is its only notable feature, a circle

of standing stones several thousand years old. Collins says he once heard Lochran refer to them as 'The Devil's Maidens', after a local legend which states the monoliths were once a coven of witches who were turned to stone after displeasing the Devil. This is a common myth connected with Neolithic circles in the British Isles.

As the party gets gradually closer to the harbor, the following becomes apparent. On the quayside there is much activity. A portable control cabin has been set up, as well as power generators and other paraphernalia. There are also about 12 to 15 armed guards about the area (although they have not set up a defense perimeter, since they firmly believe that nobody knows they are here).

Eagon looks through his binoculars at the open loading doors of the ferry, then points out something to the player-characters. Being brought out of the hold are several large shimmering black shapes, easily recognisable as the gate components.

About 50 meters from the control cabin, a large bulldozer is working away at an already large hole, and as it digs further the people around it become excited. Close study with binoculars will reveal something black and shimmering in the back of the hole. Apparently the final component has been located, and it looks as if Reed intends to open the portal right here and now.

A few moments after the object is

revealed, two figures step out of the office and walk over to the pit. One is Myers, still dressed in a suit and trenchcoat. The other is Major Janice Reed, now wearing jeans and a sweatshirt and a parka to keep out the cold wind. At the sight of Reed, Trewarren almost growls with hatred. He is now almost unrecognisable as the neatly groomed man the party first encountered. As he forces himself to calm down, Reed turns suddenly and looks in the direction of the party, with a puzzled expression on her face. Shaking her head as though to clear it she turns back to Myers, talks briefly to him and then returns to the cabin.

Loudspeakers come to life, and a voice announces '*Commencing Stage Three. All hands to begin unloading the cargo.*' A flurry of activity begins on the ferry, as teams of technicians guide the floating columns of the Gate gently from the hold of the ship onto the dockside. At the dig site, the final part is also brought out from its millennia-old resting-place, and is carried towards the stone circle with the others.

The Last Chance Plan

Collins, West and Eagon are deep in whispered conversation with Trewarren for several minutes during the events described above, with Trewarren drawing odd shapes all over West's notebook. Eventually they turn to the rest of the group, and Eagon announces "We think we might have a plan that will stop





the gate opening...maybe.”

The plan requires that West and Spengler gain access to the column that forms the lower right side of the gateway. There are controls there that might possibly be scrambled and made useless, which will prevent the gate from ever being used again. “Its just a matter of knowing which symbols to connect” says West confidently, “and with Mr. Trewarren’s help we think we know which ones they are.” If anyone asks how Trewarren knows which symbols are which, he will reply is a croaking voice “I just know for certain somehow, that particular combination will stop the gate from working ever again...”

Not having any other course available at this late time, some kind of plan to get the two scientists to the column must be devised. The easiest way seems to be some sort of diversion to draw the armed guards away from the gate-assembly area. At the mention of this Trewarren says “It should be me. Myers and the woman will certainly be shocked to see me here”. Collins suggests that at the same moment Trewarren breaks cover, he and whichever of the PCs are best able to fight will escort Spengler and West to the foot of the column.

Scanning the area yet again with his binoculars, Collins says “We’d better get a move-on, then,” and points out Janice Reed exiting the cabin carrying what looks to be the tracking device, as well as some kind of laptop computer sized object.

The Final Act

The gate components are gently floated on their internal gravity fields across the scrubby grass of the island, and placed roughly into what will be their assembled shape in the central area of the stone circle. The armed guards are still alert but they should not yet have spotted the party (Formidable: Observation).

Reed walks across to the right-hand column, and places the mystery object onto a slight recess in the base of the column. Immediately after she does this, any empathic characters will begin to feel

an extremely strong empathic ‘pulse’ begin to emanate from within the components. The pulses are strong enough to be almost felt physically by empathes at this close range. The separate parts of the gate begin to lazily drift up into the air, forming slowly into the shape of a huge black archway.

Now is the time to act. If the party waits any longer than this, it will be too late, and Reed will be able to summon the true Vorceki to our Earth.

Collins and whichever characters are aiding him, as well as West and Spengler creep around toward the column base. Trewarren breaks cover and staggers out into the centre of the circle, behind Reed but in full view of Myers who is watching with awe as the huge black slabs that make up the gate float effortlessly through the night air. At Trewarren’s sudden appearance, Myers’ attention is drawn away from the portal. He stares at the semi-human form of Trewarren before him, and opens his mouth to shout for some guards. However the area is suddenly filled with a deep resonant humming sound, drowning out his cry of alarm.

Trewarren grabs Myers and makes an attempt to run out of the circle. However, Reed suddenly spins around and leaps onto the fleeing figure - a standing jump of over 10 meters! Myers falls from Trewarren’s shoulders and smashes into the nearest standing stone, as Janice Reed begins to attack Trewarren furiously with her bare hands. He responds with a flurry of blows and Reed tumbles and rolls out of sight into the long grass. With an inhuman howl Trewarren chases after Reed. By now several guards are responding with snap shots, but none of them come near to the intended target.

The diversion works sufficiently to allow the party to reach the base of the portal without being seen by the guards. For the moment, the party members find themselves alone in the circle for a few moments. The technical staff, having no desire to catch any stray bullets, is fleeing for the safety of the ferry. West and Spengler set to work with the controls,

referring to their hastily scribbled notes taken from Trewarren’s verbal instructions earlier. After just a couple of minutes, the humming sound changes slightly in tone and the other components stop their seemingly weightless dance through the air and drift to earth, landing gently in a pile within the stone circle. Slowly the humming sound decreases in volume until it stops completely. Everything is silent once again.

The sudden onset of deafening silence spells the end of the PC’s reprieve, and all eyes turn toward the settling pile of portal components. Myers sees the party, produces a pistol, and shouts for the guards to arrest them. He appears to have injured his left leg falling against the stones. There is no sign of Reed and Trewarren, and only two of Myers’ men are nearby. On seeing the figures at the side of the column, and the amount of weapons they have, the guards are unsure of how to proceed. (50% chance of then starting a firefight).

Then, unexpectedly, the humming noise begins anew. Different in tone and MUCH louder than before, it sounds like nothing the characters have ever heard before. Another strong empathic pulse can be felt by those with the ability, and anyone with the Foreboding skill will need to make an Impossible level check against it, otherwise they will just leap up and run as fast as they can back to the Aileen III in a total state of panic. The components shift slightly and arrange themselves into a stack, with the largest parts at the bottom and the smallest at the top. There is a sudden flash of blue light and a blast of extremely hot air, as if an oven door had been opened. The ground begins to tremble slightly, in a rhythmical pattern. The remainder of Myers’ men give up and run back toward the ferry, leaving him behind. Myers himself holsters his weapon and begins to crawl away as well as he can.

“Oh dear,” says Spengler in a small voice, as he reads his notes again. “I think I may have just made a small error in calculation.”

“How small?” asks Collins.

“Well, let’s just say that now would



be a good time to leave.”

West sees the look on Spengler’s face, and continues for him, “He means NOW! Come on people, back to the boat!”

If pressed to explain, Spengler admits that he hit one control key twice instead of once and something ‘unusual’ is happening to the internal anti-gravity generators within the gate components. A last glance towards the components shows them to be fusing together, and the bottom-most column is beginning to flatten and sink into the ground. There is no time to seek out Trewarren, the ground itself is starting to split assunder and even the ancient standing stones of the Devil’s Maidens are toppling and cracking apart. One of them falls onto Myers with a sickening crunching sound, and he moves no further.

This is literally a last, desperate sprint for the party now, and the terrain is not suitable for running at high speed. Each remaining character should make at least one (Formidable: Agility) test to check for mishaps.

As they reach the beach where the Aileen III is waiting there is a huge explosion and another searing blast of heat. Turning to look, they see the center of the island sinking down into the depths of the earth, and small fountains of molten lava can now be seen spewing forth into the night sky. The grass covering the island is ablaze, and none of the standing stones remain visible. Lochran gives the engine full revolutions as the last passengers clamber aboard, and the Aileen III sails away as fast as possible.

As Lochran makes his way back towards the mainland, the Aileen III clears the north-eastern part of the island and it is possible to see into the small bay where the ferry was anchored.

The scene that greets the party is something from a nightmare dreamt by Dante. The ferry is listing heavily to port and looks to have been pulled against the dockside by some immense force. To further complicate matters there is a torrent of what looks like lava pouring out of the excavation pit and down the

short slope into the water, and also over the side of the ship. There are screams and small explosions coming from inside the ferry, and several dozen corpses floating in the dark water. None of the figures visible are alive. There is nothing more to be done, and Lochran continues his course back to the mainland.

The Return...

As the party is carried safely across the water, a dark mood descends. The struggle against the ancient force that hid itself inside human DNA for thousands upon thousands of years is over, yet the sights they have just witnessed have taken the edge off the victory. The entire island has ripped itself to pieces and swallowed the gate components, and also took many lives with it.

As the dawn light begins to brighten the sky, a slight bump is heard against the hull of the Aileen III. Lochran leaves the wheelhouse and peers over the bow. A blue-grey shape darts through the water about a meter in front of the prow. ‘Ach, it’s a dolphin or porpoise’ says Lochran. ‘A bit late in the year for one, we must be on top of the gulf stream now’. The shape nudges the bow again, harder this time. Lochran returns to the wheel and throttles back a little to save running the creature over.

Then, a wheezy ghost-like voice emanates from the empty night air. The party’s hair stands on end as they hear the voice call their names. Collins leans forward over the bow, then sits back heavily with an ashen face.

“Guys, take a look at our ‘porpoise’ friend,” he says in a startled tone of voice.

Lochran brings the boat to a dead stop, and everyone crowds onto the side rail as the shape swims around to greet them.

The players are confronted with a strange sight, a blue-grey creature with a disk shaped body, looking up at them with eyes located on a stalk protruding from the upper surface. The ‘thing’ has several tentacles around the circumference of its body, some of which are longer and thicker than others. One

of these is grasping the rail to keep the creature in place. One smaller tentacle is trailing a ragged end and is about 15 centimetres shorter than the others, and there are several gashes on the body.

The stalk on top also contains a remarkably human-seeming mouth, which is trying to speak to them. Although the voice is punctuated by clicks and wheezing sounds, if they listen carefully they will hear the following;

“...don’t be alarmed. I used to be Trewarren. The last energy pulse from the gate hit Reed and I full-on while we fought and we both changed....she is dead, the sea began to boil and she was scorched by molten lava...I will not be able to stay here in the sea for long, I must go to find freshwater...I wanted you to know that I was safe...” and he trails off into what must be laughter.

“The power pulses changed other things...all traces of my ‘ancestors’ genetic manipulation of humans are being erased...nothing left but me...”

“I will be safe now...I must stay away from people...please tell nobody else...our secret...” With this he lets go of the rail and swims away towards the mainland at quite a fast rate.

“Okay...that was interesting” says Eagon. The others begin to smile at the huge understatement, and soon everyone feels at least a little better, especially when the mainland harbor comes into view.

“Back to normality then,” says Collins.

“So far as one can call it normality, yes.” replies West with a grin. “I just wonder what Fate has in store for us next.”

* * * * *

Postscript

Some months later, Doctor West sends one of the player-characters an e-mail with the URL of the World Health Organization's online newsletter. The document details the sudden rise and equally sudden fall of a strange new ailment, having symptoms similar to severe influenza. However, no virus or bacteria could be isolated, and even more puzzling was that the infection seemed to spread along family bloodlines rather than by physical contact. After 4 days or so, the disease trailed away leaving the sufferer in generally good health.

West then admits that after analysis of samples taken from several sufferers who had previously possessed the Vorceki/Terceki DNA markers, he has found no trace at all of those genetic codes. However, he has decided not to let the WHO and the CDC know about this, so they are still looking for a new virus or bacteria. Anyway, they would never believe him...

* * * * *

Jaguar XJS V-12 5.3



Price : N/A Combat Statistics
 Fuel Type : Gasoline
 Configuration : Standard
 Load : 300kg Suspension : W (3)
 Vehicle Weight : 1.2 tonnes
 Crew : 1 plus 1 passenger (no back seats)
Armor Values
 Night Vision : Headlights, active IR HF 2
 Cruise Speed : 110/17 HS 2
 Combat Move : 60/12 HR 2
 Fuel Capacity : 420
 Fuel Consumption : 6

Appendix - New NPCs

Bernard Myers, Republic Intelligence Section Seven

STR 5 INT 6
 CON5 EDU 7
 AGL4 EMP 0
 Initiative 4

Myers has been in charge of Section Seven for five years, having risen from the position of junior information analyst some 20 years ago.

He is a Veteran level NPC with the following skills all at level 5; Act/Bluff, Computer Operations, Interrogation, Leadership, Armed Melee Combat, Observation, Persuasion, Small Arms Pistol.

Myers carries a FN FiveSeven pistol and wears a kevlar vest (AV 1).

Alex Trewarren, Section Seven

(Human stats)
 STR 4 INT 5
 CON5 EDU 5
 AGL5 EMP 1
 Initiative 3

Trewarren has been head of the 'Found Technologies' department of Section Seven for 18 months, gaining his promotion after a highly successful field operation to retrieve certain artefacts from a nest of 'Greys' concealed in the Wolverhampton ant-hill districts.

He is an Experienced level NPC, and possesses the following skills: Computer Operations 4, Electronics 5, Foreboding 4, Instruction 4, Interrogation 3, Observation 3, Physics 4, Small Arms Pistol 3, Wheeled Vehicle 4.

Alex Trewarren

(Tercecki stats)
 STR 7 INT 5
 CON7 EDU 5
 AGL7 EMP 3

His new-found skills are designed for his new body and are instinctive. The new abilities include; Animal Empathy, Stealth, Swimming, Tracking and Willpower Drain. All these are to aid the Tercecki form in hunting for food, as well as hiding from any human enemies.

John Collins, Breaker

STR 6 INT 5
 CON6 EDU 4
 AGL6 EMP 0
 Initiative 5

Collins is a Breaker, the government-sanctioned bounty hunters who originally scoured the Republic searching for those former high-ranking members of the SPP who had escaped from justice. Now he follows his own nose, getting into trouble to get others out of it. "Comparisons to Robin Hood are not applicable," he says.

He is a former soldier and therefore a Veteran NPC. He has the following skills: Act/Bluff 4, Bargain 3, Climbing 4, Disguise 4, Interrogation 2, Lockpick 4, Luck 3, Mechanic 6, Armed Melee Combat 4, Observation 4, Small Arms Rifle 8, Stalking 4, Stealth 3, Streetwise 5, Wheeled Vehicle 6.

Collins habitually carries a pump-action shotgun (use stats for Mossberg M500) as well as a Bowie style knife with a 10-inch blade. Handcuffs, a tactical radio and other goodies are concealed in his pride and joy, his dark green Jaguar XJS V-12.



THE OPENING GAMBIT



by Paul T. Riegel-Green

Maria's eyes opened slowly as the bright light stung her eyes. She looked up at the ceiling with her head still throbbing and spinning. Slowly she realized that what she was seeing was not the ceiling of her little efficiency apartment in the precincts. As she stirred, she noticed a sharp pain in her left shoulder and reached for it with her right hand with much effort through the fog that was her brain. Her fingers felt a small scratch and something wet and gooey there. When she brought her hand back up above her face she realised that it was blood!

She now found herself wide awake and totally terrified and jumped out of the large bed that was not her own. Looking back she let out such a scream as she viewed the naked headless corpse of a man there.

Scampering around the bedroom, which by itself was larger than her apartment, she realized that she didn't have on her paper clothes that she usually wore, in fact she was naked. She found some modest but somewhat expensive female clothes forming a trail out into an adjoining room that were in her size. Not having any time to think she gathered them and quickly dressed out in the largest living room she had ever seen.

Looking for the door she looked over the room seeing the huge Hologscreen and the large leather sofa with a bottle of what she could only guess was champagne and two glasses on the glass table in front of the couch.

Having no idea of where she was she decided to make her way out of this place as well as she could considering her dishevelled appearance and shocked manner. She felt the door slam behind her with a lock as she stepped into the short hallway. She realized she was in far over her head and she had no pass card to call the elevator at the end of the hall.

Maria's instinct for survival took over and she hoped that someone would come along to let her get on the elevator before corporate security picked her up.

Introduction

This is an adventure, which I have run as an introductory adventure for many groups. As this is an adventure it is not intended to be read by players.

This scenario is set in the Cincinnati metroplex and features a look inside of the Riverfront dreamland of Proctor, Gamble & Hyatt. It starts in a place called the Wanna Play? Pleasure Dome, which is a fifty story playland for the rich and elite. The Pleasure Dome consists of sports facilities, stores, bars, restaurants, night-clubs and exercise bars below the 25th level. In addition, it holds a great amount of apartments and hotel rooms for the rich or the elite.

Meeting up with Maria

Should one of the player characters be an affluent Gnome, they will meet Maria in the hallway outside of their room. She looks dishevelled and nervous, and waits for the PC to board the elevator. She then slips on before the doors close.

If confronted by the character or questioned, she will break down and plead for the PC's help to get out of the building. If the player offers to help, she will quickly tell her story. Once Maria is outside the building however, she will run away, only to be caught shortly thereafter. If the PC does not help, corporate security will be waiting for her at the bottom of the elevator ride.

Should none of the PC's be of the Gnome status needed, one PC will see Maria being led away by armed PG&H Security guards. Should they enquire the PC will be informed that Maria is a suspect in the murder of a high PG&H executive.

All others will see Maria's picture on the news as the prole prostitute who killed a PG&H executive. She is scheduled for trial in corporate court next week.

Involving the Players

How the characters are introduced to the adventure depends on their relative experience at dealing with various aspects of the Dark Conspiracy.

Experienced Group:

The PCs have been called together by Mr. Jackson, for whom they have worked before. To the PC, Mr Jackson is a voice on the phone and a messenger of money, as none of them has actually met Mr. Jackson before. All the other PC's have some limited knowledge of the dark races but they have never worked together before. They will be allowed to talk together for a few minutes while they wait in an abandoned warehouse for Mr. Jackson's arrival.

A limousine pulls into the warehouse and out steps a large, very well dressed, black man. A moment later out steps Maria Archer, whom the PCs recognize from seeing her on holoscreen or in person. He will introduce himself (the PCs will recognize his voice from their numerous phone calls) as Mr. Jackson and Maria. Mr. Jackson will then say that this is someone he thinks the group can help.

Inexperienced Group:

One by one the PCs will lose their jobs, if they have one, and be threatened with future arrest over some trumped up charges. Their bank accounts will be seized to repay the "losses" caused, leaving the PCs with little or no money.

Once this happens a very tall thin well-dressed white man will approach them. His white hair is well kept and his face is long and angular. He speaks to the PC's as if he was their long lost friend.

He will tell them that he knows about their problem and he could help them if they could do a little something for him. Once the PC's agree he will hand them a cell phone with Mr. Jackson on the other end. Mr. Jackson will instruct them to meet him at a warehouse in the Sharonville miketown.

After the PCs agree they turn around and the tall thin man is gone.

The Newspaper Article

Mr. Jackson pulls a slightly tattered piece of newsprint out of his inside jacket pocket and unfolds it. The PC with the highest observation skill will observe that

it is from a local street corner rag dated 28 days prior to today's date. He will then read *"The Blood Moon Killer Strikes Again. A third victim has been claimed by the killer who only comes out when the moon over Cincinnati turns blood red. ... A spokesman for Proctor & Gamble & Hyatt Security was quoted as vowing to catch this killer no matter what it takes. ... Scientist have stated that the red color of the moon is due to suspended particulate matter in the atmosphere. ... According to an unnamed informant in the coroner's office, the victims have all been decapitated but there is some dispute over if the head was recovered."*

Mr. Jackson then pauses for a moment, folding and putting away the article, then states, *"Apparently this woman was the survivor of the fourth blood red moon killer attack and Mr. James Jefferson was its victim. I want an answer to this riddle found and you will all be rewarded properly."*

He will then turn the floor over to Maria who will quietly relay the story at the beginning of the adventure adding the following;

Maria's Story

Maria is a female Prole and she will tell the following tale; *"I woke up this morning in an apartment which wasn't mine, with a headless guy next to me. I don't know how I got there. Mr. Jackson later told me that I was on the 48th floor of the Wanna Play? Pleasure Dome inside of Riverfront."*

I was unclothed, covered with blood splatterings and have a small cut on my shoulder. I didn't see the head. My clothes, along with clothes of the guy were scattered all around the living room.

The last thing I remember before last Thursday was eating at the Procter, Gamble & Hyatt precinct 121 soup kitchen."

If the PCs elect to use human empathy on Maria they will be able to unlock further memories as follows;

Basic Success: *"Upon returning to my one room apartment, after the lunch*

hour at the precinct's soup kitchen last Thursday, I stopped by and looked in my normally empty mailbox. Inside I found a large white envelope with your name and address on it and bearing a large red stamp saying "You are a WINNER".

Upon opening the letter I found that some company, i'm not sure of the name, was giving away money and a weekend pass to Riverfront Dreamland's Wanna Play? Pleasure Dome. It said that I had won \$2500, to be spent at the Pleasure Dome, and that a room would be provided for me for the weekend, at their expense. My hand quivered as I dialed the number only to find that it was all true.

Stage 2 or better Success: *A car came by, picked me up and took me to the Pleasure Dome. There I was shuttled into an office, given a bank card with a \$2500 limit, a key to room 1501, a level 15 pass, which allowed me to access up to level 15 and a Monday expiration*

After a quick shopping spree for some real clothes and a good meal(the best i've had in years) I don't remember anything after that, until I woke up the next morning, or at least I thought it was the next morning." She then shudders and screams out as she remembers another woman, a bat, a flash and red.

Mr. Jackson will hand the PCs a copy of the room key for James Jefferson's Pleasure Dome apartment, which was reportedly found on Maria when she was arrested. Mr. Jackson then answers any questions he can from the PC's, leaving many things for them to find out in their own way. Before leaving he reminded the PCs *"to trust in no one but themselves"*. With that, Mr. Jackson gets into his Limo leaving Maria in the PC's care.

The Plot

The plot is a simple and yet twisted one. Mediterranean Gargoyles, under the direction of Sandman, a young Dark Lord, are making an effort to open a permanent doorway to their proto-dimension. In order to do so they have to contact Karen Jameyson, of Proctor,



Gamble & Hyatt.

They, through their chameleon shielded cousins, the Lesser Gargoyle, have promised her a new and virtually instantaneous transportation system which would make all other forms of transportation obsolete. She, being ruthless, and totally unaware of what the Gargoyles true form is or what they really want, decided to go along with whatever they said.

The Gargoyles knew that in order to open and maintain the doorway they were going to need a biocomputer, so they set forth to make the legend of the *Blood Red Moon Killer*. They selected four individual executives from the other mega-corps in Cincinnati and looked for a weakness. They found it in their proclivity for “slumming”, i.e. going to the precincts and picking up proles for a night of fun.

So the Gargoyles hatched a plan to provide proles to the four selected individuals. They set up the Miller Public Relations Agency whose sole job was to find a prole to match the wants of the selected individual and provide them with a way to meet. Since they have their last victim the Miller Public Relations Agency has abruptly gone out of business.

The Miller Public Relations Agency would then contact the prole telling her/him that they won some contest and they would get a weekend in the pleasure dome. Once the prole accepted they would contact the prospective victim and tell him about the prole. They explained it was a new service to longstanding renters in the pleasure dome.

At midnight a Lesser Gargoyle would open a small portal, causing a flash, and appear in the bedroom of the victim. They would project sleep and with one mighty slash of a sword they decapitate the victim. The Lesser Gargoyle then leaves the same way it came leaving the prole to put up with corporate security questions in the morning.

The proles would then be questioned by the authorities and arraigned. Jameyson would then pull

some strings to have proles released and then have them kidnapped by the gargoyles to throw further suspicion on them as killers. The proles are all being held and abused by Lesser Gargoyles in a warehouse at the anthill of Mt. Airy.

Those killed by the gargoyles include Mr. James Jefferson, Mr. Frank Cheswick, Mr. Alvin Keller, and Ms. Allison Boyd.

Mr. Jefferson was a senior project director for Ford-Revlon motor transport division. Mr. Cheswick was senior engine designer for General Electric - Rockwell's aerospace engine division. Mr. Keller was a top designer with Apple - Milicron in their robotic transportation division. Ms. Boyd was a senior designer for Chevrolet. All were brilliant and all were killed in the same way.

The “test” of the new transportation system is to take place the night of the projects discovery by the PC's at the Proctor, Gamble, & Hyatt research facilities at Blue Ash bot city. This will be the actual opening of a new demonground, although none of the humans involved knows this or anything else about the invasion.

The Objective

The PC's, through whatever means must find out what is going on and destroy the test project before it is tested.

Obstacle #1: The prole the PC's have with them is wanted by corporate security, as her image was captured by the security cameras on the 48th floor.

Obstacle #2: Should things get to slow or the prole be left in one area to long, the Lesser Gargoyles will appear to kidnap her.

Obstacle #3: Proctor, Gamble & Hyatt Corporate Security, tired of being made fools of by these killers have brought in a troubleshooter to get to the bottom of things, (see Peter Williamson below). He has a tendency to show up at the wrong time for the PCs with some heavy firepower, but he can be reasoned with as he is somewhat aware of the invasion and he is just a mercenary.

Obstacle #4: The normal problem of trying to implicate an executive of a mega-

corps in a plot, which is tied around a corporation secret project.

Visiting the Scene of the Crime

The 48th floor consists of 10 identical suites. All but two of which are rented on a permanent basis. The suite themselves consist of a living room, a kitchenette, a bedroom, a media room, a large bathroom, a walk in closet, and a balcony. They are all tastefully furnished with rather expensive furniture and many of the permanent residents have made slight adaptations to that, depending upon their purpose for renting the suite.

This floor is only accessible by a single elevator that runs from level 15 to the more exclusive floors above. Calling the elevator to go up requires a coded key, which must be inserted to call the elevator and then shown to the operator of the elevator.

Security is provided for the upper levels from level 15. There is a permanent security guard on duty next to the elevator with an array of monitors, one on each floor and one in the elevator. Each of the keys is electronically coded for only one door and any tampering with the lock will show up on the security officers' desk. All of the outside windows are electronically locked and any tampering would again show up on the security officers' desk.

Should the party find a way to get up to level 48 they will find that the body has been discovered and corporate security is on site. They will be belligerent with civilian onlookers and will be non-cooperative with any law enforcement types who try to horn in on the investigation.

If the party waits until security leaves with the body, and then attempts to enter the apartment they can find the following;

A crumpled up letter from the Miller Public Relations Agency giving a picture, physical description, date and time to expect Maria to be in the pleasure dome and the rest was “up to him”.

They will find documents marked confidential from the Ford-Revlon

Company detailing some R&D he was working on, ruling out industrial espionage as the motive.

They will find a love note in the trash, dated 2 weeks ago, from Jill and postmarked from the Newport precincts, showing that this in not his first prole visitor and about how often he uses the place.

The party will find a total absence of female clothing in the closet and only a very small collection of male clothing. Meaning the victims wife did not visit and he only rarely visited.

They will find a receipt from the Wanna Play? Pleasure Dome for \$60,000 for the next years rent, meaning that he had no idea that he was in any way going to die.

If the party tarries to long Corporate Security will come up and arrest them. If they leave quickly they will only gain part of the above list. If they push the envelope of time and then leave, Peter Williamson will follow them. Peter Williamson will delay the corporate security response a while in order to find out what the party members are up to in the apartment. If the party is outside of the apartment at the time the response team arrives, they have orders not to detain or even question anyone.

Visiting the Precinct Home of Maria

If the characters elect to visit the home of Maria to gain more clues to why she was in a dreamland, they can find the following information.

They find that the small one room apartment, while possessing no lock and maintained in little order, has been searched already. In fact if careful they will find an electronic eavesdropping device and an entry detector.

They will find the discarded envelope with a large red "YOU'RE A WINNER" stamped on the front. The envelope is empty but it does bear the return address of Miller Public Relations Company, Suite 1001 Wanna Play Pleasure Dome Riverfront Dreamland.

Maria's neighbors will shun and in fact move away from her if she or any of

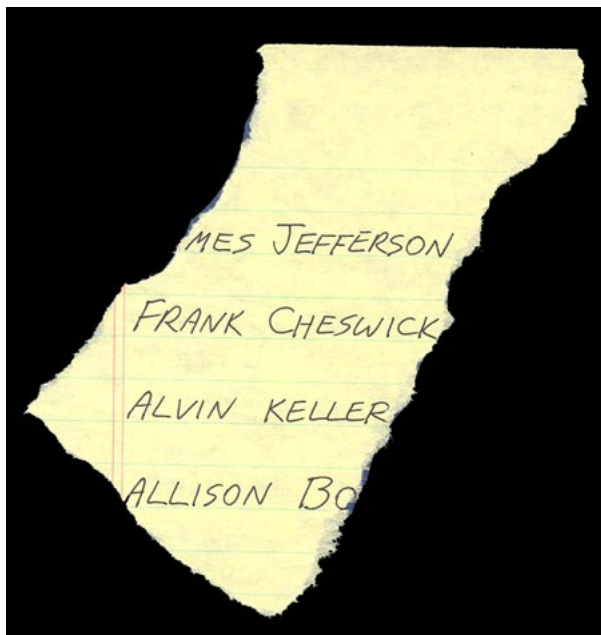
the group approach them. They know the *word on the street* is that *people* are looking for her and they know they do not want to be around if they find her.

Miller Public Relations Company

This is a small office right off the parking lot of the Wanna Play Pleasure Dome. It has a large sign in the window that says CLOSED even if its during normal hours of operation listed.

If the characters break into the office they will find it a simple task with a simple lock and a glass front window. Inside the office there is a small single room with a desk, an office chair, two folding chairs, and filing cabinet.

The filing cabinet and desk appear to be totally empty. If they are searched closely the PCs will find a small piece of yellow legal pad which had fallen behind the drawers in the filing cabinet.



If they look through the mail that's on the floor inside the door they will find a letter from Adkins Land Management Service. Inside it contains an invoice for a month's rent on a warehouse in Mt. Airy anthill.

A computer search for public records on Miller Public Relations Agency will find that it's a small division of Mandrake Enterprises out of The Gold

Coast, Florida. It's listed as having Karen Jameyson as the C.E.O..

A look at the computerized financial records on file with PG&H dreamland comptrollers, not an easy task to get, will reveal only small assets with four large influxes of cash, about the times of the murders. The only outgoing transfers were to PG&H Dreamland Management for their office space and payments to Adkins Land Management Service for a warehouse on Hawaiian Terrace in Mt. Airy.

Common Denominators

If the PCs look into the victims jobs as a common denominator they will quickly run into corporate security walls. All the PCs will be able to discern is that all were involved in new transportation technology research.

Using Police/Security Contacts

The PCs will tell you that each of the victims of the Blood Red Moon Killer has been found with a prole. In each case, they were arraigned and given a high bail. Each was anonymously bailed out and disappeared within 24 hours.

Using Street Contacts

The PCs will quickly learn that there are multiple groups looking for Maria. They will easily discern that one of the groups is PG&H Corporate Security. The other two are darker and more sinister according the contacts. One is the Gargoyles and the other is Williamson.

Mt. Airy Anthill

This is a rough area of town, uncontrolled and overgrown from the Mount airy Forest. The PCs have one route to the Hawaiian Terrace address and that is up Colerain Avenue.



If the players have been seen recently with Maria they will be ambushed by a well-armed gang. The gang will consist of 1 ganger for every 2 players going and will be led by an undercover corporate security man. The gangers will use M-3 grease guns and Uzis while the leader will attempt to immobilize the party's vehicles with a Stormgun. The gangers have been told they will make \$5000 each for the capture, alive, of Maria, and anyone else is expendable. The leader will immobilize the vehicles and provide fire support until things begin to look bad and then he will withdraw. He is under direct orders from Karen Jameyson to recover the prole.

If the PC's did not meet the requirements above then they will simply be ambushed by gangers, 1:2 ratio, armed with pistols and a few automatic weapons (depending upon how heavily armed the party is).

If Williamson (who the party could have picked up at the public relations agency or at Maria's apartment) is following the players then he will intervene on the players' behalf and attempt to befriend the players.

The Warehouse

Once they get past the first hurdle the PCs will arrive at the warehouse. The upstairs maintains the look of an abandoned warehouse but upon close observation one can see an electric eye, silent alarms and the occasional splattering of red on the floor or wall.

The main warehouse floor contains scattered crates, each of which contains a silenced, automatically controlled shotgun which are set off by the electronic eye passive thermal alarms.

In one corner of the warehouse is a stairwell going down to the basement. Downstairs is a large open room with 2 awake and 2 asleep Lesser Gargoyles and the three prole prisoners. (All four Gargoyles will be awake if the traps are tripped upstairs). The prisoners are shaken, barely clothed, and chained together through rings on the floor. The Lesser Gargoyles, having no real retreat route will fight to the death against any

invaders. The Lesser Gargoyles in this area don't bother with their chameleon screen.

Once rescued the proles will tell their story, which will jive with Maria's story. They will also say that the head gargoyle left about an hour ago for some "door opening" at the P,G&H Blue Ash facility. The lead gargoyle told the others that they would not be alone for long.

The Raid on the Blue Ash Research Facility

Eventually, the players, through various means, will discover the project going on at Blue Ash and they will want to put a stop to it. The first thing that they will have to do is attempt to penetrate security.

A 10' high chain link fence topped with concertina wire surrounds the facility. There is one entrance and it is controlled by a guardhouse manned by two armed corporate security guards. There are several armed patrols, with dogs which roam the grounds. In addition to the human guards, there are various electronic eyes, motion sensors, trip wires and pressure plates spread around the perimeter of the facility.

The facility consists of a tall office administrative building and four concrete buildings that look like huge Quonset huts. There is a large parking lot outside the office administrating building and service roads that lead up to all but one of the Quonset huts.

It is set on a large slightly wooded lot with a main road running up one side of the facility. There is a branch road that leads up to the gatehouse into the facility. The gatehouse controls an electronic sliding chain link gate. There are two pistol armed guards at the gate.

There are four dog and guard teams that patrol the interior of the facility. These guards are armed with pistols and nightsticks. Each building's main entrance has two pistol armed guards at it to control access. In addition, there is an emergency response security team of ten men who are armed with automatic weapons and have access to everything up to Stormguns. This team has access

to four Hummers for transportation.

Each individual on the facility must wear a picture ID with a magnetic strip on the back. This magnetic strip deactivates door locks and can be tracked by the security stations in that manner. All doors in the facility have electronic locks on them.

The Administration building is ten stories of cookie cutter offices. None of them are made aware of what is going on in "Building 5". Ms. Jameyson's office is on the tenth floor should the characters pursue that angle.

Computer Entry

Should the PCs attempt to enter the facilities mainframe via modem they will get a "Hello" back. Should the PCs pursue this they will find that they are talking to Frank Cheswick. He believes he is still alive but is confused because he can not move see or hear anymore. The PCs have tied into the bio-computer of the Gargoyles. There is very little that the bio-computer can do other than tell the PCs that he is in Building 5 and there seems to be something big ready to happen.

Ms. Jameyson's Office

This is a large well-apportioned office dominated by a large mahogany desk in front of a large bank of windows. There is a black leather covered couch against one wall and a couple of leather covered chairs in front of the desk. The floor is covered in rich, thick carpeting. Off to the left of the entrance is a small closet and a rest room.

Ms. Jameyson is not in her office as she is intimately involved in the experiment in Building 5. Unless the characters are very convincing or break in there will be no access to the office past the secretary's desk.

Should they gain access to the office they will find little of use until they examine below the hanging files in the desks lower left drawer. There they will find an inch thick file marked "Sandman Project". It features detailed plans for some kind of huge electric device. It also features detailed instructions for the construction of Building 5 and a test

schedule with the final entry being “Full Scale Test” and today’s date.

Building 5

The actual building in which the test is being made is a windowless, concrete building in the center of the facility. It will be guarded by two armed security guards on the only outside door. The door has a triple security lock on it, requiring three successful, time consuming, difficult lockpick, electronics or computer operation task checks to bypass. In addition, one of the MPs has a key.

Once inside the building the PC’s will enter the changing room filled with lockers and white lab suits. Exiting towards the interior they will see doors to various offices and a double door at the end.

The end door opens up into the control room. It’s a room filled with computer equipment, and controls. Off to the right and left are doors, the one to the right is marked “Off Limits Main Computer”. Straight ahead is a glass wall looking down into a pit.

In the center of the pit, on a concrete platform, is a black metal globe about 4 meters in diameter. Into the black metal globe is connected a series of wires and the globe appears to be humming low and pulsating with a low level of red light.

In front of the door to the left you will see a woman, known as Karen Jameyson speaking to a couple of technicians, a civilian woman (actually a Lesser Gargoyle using its chameleon power so do your checks), and a man in a military uniform.

Upon the party’s entrance onto the scene there will be a bright flash in the pit and the hum will become loud. Then one of the technicians will be heard to say, “But it’s not supposed to do that”. Then a scream can be heard from the pit as one of the technicians in the pit has just has his arm ripped off by a stone like, clawed hand reaching out of what was a solid object. Upon seeing that panic will beset the control room.

Stopping the Dimensional Gate

The easiest way is to shut down the power. This is easier said than done as both Jameyson and the Lesser Gargoyle in the room will try to stop the PC’s. Even with them out of the way the controls are locked and it will take a successful very difficult task check of either electronics or computer operation to shut it down. Blasting the control panel will either have the effect of shutting it down or it can also lock the controls in the current position and make it impossible to change. Yet, even shutting down the power will only have a temporary effect as the biocomputer will soon bypass the controls and turn on the power again.

The only way to permanently shut the dimensional gate is to destroy the biocomputer in the Main Computer Room off the control room.

Failure to shut down the dimensional gate quickly will allow Mediterranean Gargoyles and Lesser Gargoyles to spill out into the pit and up into the control room making your task even more difficult.

The Results

Should the players eventually succeed they will be summarily thrown off of company property. The news will report an experimental transportation project exploded with injuries, and no mention of the players’ involvement, Jameyson’s involvement, or anything out of the ordinary.

Any charges against the players, including against Maria will be dropped. Mr. Jackson will be pleased with the results and reward the players with cash, equipment and a new assignment.

Biographies of Significant Individuals from Computer Files:

Peter Williamson:

STR:	9	CON:	7
AGL:	6	INT:	10
EDU:	9	CHA:	8
EMP:	3	Luck:	6
Observation:	9		
Vehicle Use:	5		

Small Arms (Pistol), Melee Combat (Unarmed), Stealth, Interrogation, Streetwise, Stalking



He is a former Army Intelligence Officer and operative for the Defense Intelligence Agency who has gone out on his own. He makes his living now as a troubleshooter, recovering the unrecoverable and solving the unsolvable. He is highly intelligent, reasonable, attractive and highly skilled. He is deadly both with a weapon and without. He is 35 years old and unmarried. He has a very healthy bank account and an AAA VIP rating in most metro-plexes, except Chiwaukee where he seemed to get into some sort of trouble with a CEO’s daughter.



Karen Jameyson:

STR: 5 CON: 5
 AGL: 8 INT: 9
 EDU: 10 CHA: 9
 EMP: 0
 Persuasion: 9
 Psychology: 6
 Disguise: 5
 Bargain, Business, Engineer, Instruction,
 Streetwise



She is a highly intelligent executive in the Proctor, Gamble & Hyatt research and development staff. She also is highly ruthless and considered extremely cunning. She has a PhD from Stanford in Engineering and immediately came to work for PG&H. There she set about getting to the top any way she could, first having her boss fired for sexual harassment then taking his job then sleeping with several of the board of directors to get her current position. She knows that she needs to come up with a big project to make the jump to executive vice-president and so she jumped at the chance to take on this project. She didn't care then that it would cost lives, nor does she now.



Mediterranean Gargoyles

Full statistics are available in Dark Races but here are the important statistics for those who do not have that manual.

Strength : 15 Education : 1 Move : 5/10/30 (flying)
 Constitution : 20 Charisma : 3 Skill/Damage : 7/3D10
 Agility : 5 Empathy : 3 Hits : 50/100
 Intelligence : 3 Initiative : 3 # Appear : 1D6
(Armor Value 2 for head and chest, Armor value 1 for all other areas)

Lesser Gargoyles

Full statistics are available in Dark Races but here is the important statistics for those who do not have that manual.

Strength : 12 Education : 4 Move : 10/20/45 (flying)
 Constitution : 6 Charisma : 4 Skill/Damage : 8/2D6
 Agility : 5 Empathy : 14 Hits : 12/25
 Intelligence : 7 Initiative : 4 # Appear : 1D6 +3
(Armor Value 1 for head and chest)

Empathic Screen:

People pass them all the time not knowing what they are without taking the time and effort to make a willpower check to see through their empathic screen. The results of the willpower check are as follows:

Level	Result
Basic Success	The gargoyle appears as a human, but with a lightly projected upper and lower jaw, and with slightly pointed ears
Stage One	As basic success, but more pronounced muzzle and obvious fangs
Stage Two	As stage one, but with a greenish cast to the skin.
Stage Three	As stage two, but with red eyes.
Stage Four	As stage three, but with pointed batlike ears
Stage Five	Looks like a human with large batlike wings, fangs, claws, glowing red eyes and a pale green tint to its leathery skin.
Stage Six	The creature appears as it really is.

These creatures can also project sleep over an opponent and those within 10 meters as follows:

Level	Results
Basic Success	The victims limbs feel heavy. -1 to initiative.
Stage One	The victim feels drowsy. -2 to initiative.
Stage Two	The victim feels sleepy. -2 to initiative. Tasks are one level more difficult.
Stage Three	The victim is nodding off. -2 to initiative. Tasks are two levels more difficult.
Stage Four	The victim falls asleep but can be shaken awake, in which case the effects of stage three apply.
Stage Five	The victim falls asleep and can only be kept awake if someone is constantly attempting to keep them awake.
Stage Six	The victim falls asleep and can not be awoken for eight hours, even with physical pain.



TRIBAL DANCE



AN ADVENTURE FOR CALL OF CTHULHU

by Linden Dunham

Tribal Dance is a modern day Call of Cthulhu scenario for 3-6 experienced investigators. The scenario is set in the imaginary Gloucestershire town of Brichester which provides the location for much of Ramsey Campbell's mythos fiction.

A New Investigation

The investigators are contacted on Monday by Nick Harlow, the owner of a small recording studio in Brichester. Last Saturday night his studio was broken into and Rob Grover, his sound engineer and business partner, was murdered. Both the break in and the attack on Grover appear completely motiveless. Nothing was taken from Grover or the studio.

A veteran of the 70's rock scene with numerous drug busts to his credit, Harlow doesn't trust the police to find his partner's killer. He wants the investigators to look into the matter and bring Grover's murderer to book.

Harlow can supply some information about the circumstances of Grover's death: Grover spent most of Saturday working on a 12" single by Doctor Psychotrop, a local DJ. The record was supposed to have been finished on Friday but had been delayed due to Psychotrop's perfectionist approach and insistence on adding some extra samples halfway through the recording process. Grover agreed to work Saturday as a favor to Psychotrop, whose music he liked, thus ensuring the single would be ready for the DJ's spot

at a local club the following Friday. Psychotrop left the studio with 50 pressings of the single at 10.30pm. Grover stayed behind to tidy up and was killed around thirty minutes later. Having been called upon to identify Grover's body Harlow can testify as to the grievous nature of the wounds inflicted on his former partner: "It looked like someone had carved Rob up with a butcher knife. The bloke who did it must be a real psycho."

Keeper's Notes

Grover was killed by a Byakhee which was summoned to Earth by a sampled Tcho-Tcho tribal chant in the record he was producing. Dr Psychotrop (real name Paul Sanderson) had obtained a tape recording of Tcho-Tcho tribesmen worshipping Hastur the Unspeakable made in 1978 by a Brichester University anthropology expedition. Sanderson listened to only a part of the tape but quickly decided that its eerie chanting and manic drumming were just what he needed to add authenticity to his latest vinyl opus, a dance single entitled "Tribal Rhythm". He and Grover sampled a couple of sections of the tape at random without bothering to listen to it all the way through. Unfortunately the "cleaned up" sampled segments contain the operative incantations from the Call Hastur spell. Playing the finished record in the studio was sufficient to attract the attention of one of Hastur's Byakhee servitors. By the time the creature arrived

at the studio Sanderson had already left, taking his newly pressed records with him. The Byakhee quickly ascertained that Grover was not a cultist, killed him, and destroyed the master tape of "Tribal Rhythm" to prevent any more unwarranted summonings before returning to Aldebaran.

Sanderson, meanwhile, intends to premiere "Tribal Rhythm" at the climax of his DJ slot at The Glasshouse night club on Friday night. Playing the record in the presence of a large crowd, many of whom are in a trance like state due to constant dancing and/or ecstasy consumption, will be sufficient to attract Hastur to Earth. The Great Old One will manifest itself inside the Glasshouse causing widespread death and insanity amongst the assembled clubbers.

The investigators have until Friday night to find out how Grover died and to prevent the summoning of He Who Cannot be Named.

Crime Scene

Harlow's studio is situated on the edge of Lower Brichester in an former industrial area. It occupies most of the basement of an old factory. Various unsavoury characters can be seen hanging around outside drinking from cider bottles and cans of strong lager. One or more of them will try and cadge some change off the investigators.

The police have finished their examination of the studio and the investigators are free to inspect the area



where Grover died. Initial findings are as follows:

- 1.) The door to the studio has been torn off its hinges suggesting that the killer possessed abnormal strength.
- 2.) The studio carpet is spotted with dried blood although not excessively so. An investigator who makes an Idea roll will find this strange given Harlow's description of the wounds inflicted on Grover by his killer. Grover should have bled a lot more.
- 3.) Investigators who succeed in a Spot Hidden roll will find a small clump of fur in the middle of one of the bloodstains. Subsequent analysis of the fur either by a laboratory or by a suitably equipped investigator making a Zoology roll will reveal that the fur comes from no known animal.
- 4.) Most of the recording equipment is undamaged although one tape deck has been smashed. Harlow explains that this deck would hold the master tape of the recording on which Grover had been working prior to his death. Harlow believes that the police have taken the tape as evidence.

As the investigators are leaving the studio they are approached by one of the neighbourhood winos. He has deduced that the investigators have come about "the murder." He claims to be a witness and for a couple of quid he will tell them what he saw on the night of the killing. Anyone handing over money will be treated to a rambling monologue describing how a dragon flew down from the night sky and forced its way into the studio: "It was there for a about five minutes. I could hear it roaring and...and... that poor lad screaming. When it came out it...it...had blood all over its claws and teeth. Then it just flew away into the sky." The wino's tale is largely true although over embellished. At one point he will claim the creature was breathing fire and had bright red glowing eyes.

The Police

The enquiry into Grover's death is being led by Detective Inspector Stone of Brichester police. He will initially be resistant to the idea of amateurs horning in on his investigation. However, there are several aspects of the case which bother him and he will agree to share information with the investigators if they can convince him that they have something worthwhile to contribute. The inspector is susceptible to Oratory, Fast Talk and possibly Law rolls but not bribes.

Stone informs the investigators that Grover was killed by trauma and massive blood loss after apparently being attacked by a wild animal. His body exhibits several wounds which were made by large claws. The neck region also contains two puncture wounds from which blood was drained. The pathologist has been unable to identify what sort of animal could inflict such wounds.

Stone has worked in Brichester long enough to accept the existence of the supernatural. He believes that he is dealing with some kind of vampire because of the puncture wounds and the great strength needed to tear the studio door off its hinges. He has not shared this suspicion with any of his colleagues but will confide in any investigator who seems receptive to the idea that there may be an occult aspect to Grover's killing. Stone's vampire theory is of course a red herring but the inspector's open mindedness towards the supernatural makes him a potentially valuable ally. He can use his police powers to obtain evidence that the investigators may have trouble acquiring on their own.

Stone has the DAT cassette taken from the master tape deck. He does not believe that it has any value as evidence and will hand it over to the investigators if they ask for it. The cassette casing is cracked and fistfuls of tape ribbon have been pulled free. Attempting to repair the tape requires a Mechanical Repair roll at half the usual chance (one per hour allowed). A roll of 80% or higher results in the destruction of the tape and its contents. A successful repair enables

the investigators to listen to Dr Psychotrop's "Tribal Rhythm," with attendant after effects (see Tribal Rhythms below).

Sanderson

Harlow tells the investigators that Sanderson is "a nutcase. Thinks he's Aleister Crowley or something. He used to be in some industrial outfit back in the eighties, Flesh Wound they were called. He's into dance music now. Nick used to like that stuff. Can't stand it myself."

Harlow can give the investigators Sanderson's address from his business records.

Sanderson lives in the Mercy Hill area of Brichester in a detached red brick Victorian house set well back from the road. A sign in the overgrown front garden welcomes visitors to the Church of Higher Consciousness. Suspicious investigators may wonder if they are dealing with a cult...

The amount of information the investigators obtain from Sanderson will depend on how he is approached: If they turn up at his door accusing him of killing Grover and being in league with Cthulhu he will flat out refuse to talk to them. Reasonable investigators will be admitted into the house and taken into to the library to conduct their interview. The interior of the house is dark and gloomy with the scent of joss sticks not quite masking the smell of marijuana. The investigators catch sight of several people in a room off the hall lounging on bean bags staring vacantly into space or holding desultory conversations with one another.

The library is a former dining room lined with shelves full of books on esoteric subjects such as the occult, ufology, new age, drugs, anthropology and ancient history. Just as Sanderson is about to start talking to the investigators the phone rings and he excuses himself. The investigators now have five minutes to look around the library.

A close inspection of the bookshelves reveals the presence of some minor Cthulhoid texts; Frazer's "The

Golden Bough” and the “Witch Cult in Western Europe” as well as an ultra rare copy of Roland Franklyn’s “We Pass From View.”

On one bookshelf there is a pile of tapes of the type used in reel to reel recorders. The top tape has two labels stuck to it. One is printed and reads “Property of Brichester University Library,” the other is hand written in faded biro and reads “tchau-tchau ritual. Anthrop dept exped, Malaysia 1978.” Investigators with Cthulhu mythos skill should make an Idea roll to realise that tchau-tchau is a corruption of tcho-tcho, a notorious tribe of Old One worshipping savages. The remaining tapes also have library stickers and handwritten descriptions but seem fairly innocuous being recordings of rites, ceremonies and chants of tribal cultures unconnected with Cthulhoid activity.

There is also a box of records in one corner of the room. The records are all in identical black sleeves and bear a label reading “Dr Psychotrop’s Tribal Rhythm.”

Investigators who try and eavesdrop in on Sanderson’s telephone conversation must make a Listen roll. Even then they only catch a few words: “Yeah, the record’s all finished...Think there’ll be plenty of stuff for me? Great...Should be a good night then...Yeah, see you Friday Steve.”

When Sanderson returns to the room he makes it clear that he has nothing to tell the investigators beyond what he told the police. He left the studio at 10.30pm, well before Grover was supposed to have been killed.

If questioned about the Church of Higher Consciousness Sanderson will tell the investigators that it is a loose collective of like minded individuals, all of whom are interested in exploring altered or heightened states of perception in an effort to reach a state of enlightenment. Sanderson will become vague at this point resorting to pseudo-mystical mumbo jumbo. However, he freely admits that the church’s activities involve the use of drugs, as well as meditation techniques and anything else

a church member might feel like trying. Sanderson’s particular interest is the creation and exploration of trance states via a combination of drugs and rhythmic, percussive music. He claims that this is a common practice in many native cultures. Sanderson wants to create a modern, urban version of the same technique and believes that with his latest record he has achieved this. He claims to have successfully married modern dance beats with authentic sampled tribal chants and claims that the resulting fusion is a new type of music which he terms Tribaltronic. If quizzed about the source of the tribal chants



Sanderson tells the investigators that one of his church members works at Brichester University library and has access to various recordings made by the anthropology department.

If requested to play his new record Sanderson will refuse saying that the investigators will have to wait until the premiere at the Glasshouse on Friday night. If the investigators push the matter he will rapidly lose his temper and accuse them of having come to spy on him and plagiarise his musical ideas. He demands that the investigators leave his house and begins pushing them towards the door. Sensible investigators will beat a retreat at this point. If they stay to fight a number of church members equal to the number of investigators will join in on Sanderson’s side. The investigators will probably win the ensuing brawl but they risk being arrested as a neighbour will

call the police who will arrive in 1D4+2 minutes. Sanderson may also persuade his old Flesh Wound colleague Steven Adams (see Research - Flesh Wound below) to pay the investigators a visit and administer a revenge beating. If the investigators take any of Sanderson’s property (e.g. his mythos books or copies of Tribal Rhythm) then they can definitely count on Adams and/or his thuggish minions being sent to recover the stolen items.

Research

Flesh Wound: Brichester Library contains back issues of the local and national music press both of which contain references to Sanderson and his old band. Investigators who succeed in a Library roll (one per two hours allowed) obtain the following information: Flesh Wound were a four piece Brichester band consisting of Paul Sanderson (vocals/tapes/keyboards), Laura Kelly (guitar), Michael Watson (bass/tapes) and Steven Adams (drums and percussion) who gained some notoriety for their extreme live shows which involved, amongst other things, throwing offal over the audience, screening footage of war atrocities, and provoking at least one small scale riot. Flesh Wound recorded on the local Dum-Dum label from 1982 to 1988 and made three records in that period described variously as “a painful sub-Throbbing Gristle drone”, “an unpalatable combination of pipe-clanging music and childish obscene lyrics”, and even less charitably “crap.” Their fourth, and last, recording was “The Franklyn Tapes” a cassette only album based on the life of the 1960’s Brichester mystic and his book “We Pass From View.” Released in 1989 it was derided as “A ridiculous would be occult concept album unworthy of even the most hare brained death metal band.” Flesh Wound split up soon afterwards. Sanderson continued his musical career, jumping onto the dance music bandwagon and releasing several singles on his own Higher Consciousness label. These solo efforts were generally written off as being derivative of other more popular acts.



Of the remaining members of Flesh Wound, Laura Kelly and Michael Watson are married with children and living in a new built suburb on the edge of Brichester. They can be located with a Library roll and a fifteen minute search of the telephone directory. Having settled into comfortable domesticity they now consider the antics they used to get up to in Flesh Wound as just a bit of youthful fun. They regard Sanderson as a harmless acid casualty despite his obsession with the paranormal. They are more wary of Adams whom they recall as being “a thug with a drum kit. Most of the trouble at Flesh Wound gigs was down to him.” The last the Watsons heard Adams was involved in the drug trade.

Steven Adams is harder to track down. Streetwise investigators i.e. those with previous experience as a police officer, crime reporter, criminal lawyer or similar profession will have heard of him if they make a Know roll. Investigators who specifically research the Glasshouse night-club (Library roll required, one per two hours allowed) will also come across his name in some recent local newspaper articles. Adams is the owner of the Glasshouse which is located in central Brichester. The club is a well known trouble spot and has a reputation as a drug den. Adams claims to be doing all he can to reduce the drug problem at the club but comments by the police make it clear they are unconvinced. Any investigator who listened in to Sanderson’s telephone conversation shouldn’t need to make an Idea roll to realise that Adams is the “Steve” Sanderson was talking to. In the event that the investigators decide to pay Adams a visit refer to The Glasshouse below.

Brichester University Library: The investigators will have been led here by the tapes in Sanderson’s house. There is a 30% chance of Sanderson’s contact, Mark Howard, being on duty when they visit. Howard isn’t particularly tough and can be strong-armed into giving details of his relationship with Sanderson. Howard isn’t a true church member. He latched on to Sanderson as a good

source of ecstasy and acid. He procures books and other library materials in which the guru is interested in return for free drugs. His last “assignment” was obtaining a range of tapes from the library’s anthropology archive. The tapes were of “natives singing, that kind of thing.” Howard specifically recalls taking a reel to reel tape from the back of the cabinet where all the other tapes. “It looked like it had just been chucked in the back and forgotten about. I reckoned it would be up Paul’s street so I took it.”

Howard has no information about the origin of the tape and suggests that the investigators talk to someone in the anthropology department.

If Howard isn’t at work the investigators will have to speak to the senior librarian. He is unaware of the arrangement between Sanderson and Howard and will be mystified at the amount of material missing from the anthropology archive. The librarian remembers the university expedition to Malaysia in 1978. “A dreadful business. One man dead and another left stark raving mad.” He suggests that the investigators talk to Professor Douglas in the anthropology department if they require further details.

Brichester University Anthropology Department: The investigators are seen by Professor Douglas in his office. He will be curious as to why they are interested in the ill fated 1978 expedition. He will give short shrift to anyone claiming the expedition has somehow unleashed a hideous supernatural force. “You people are even crazier than Lewis was,” he shouts as he shuts his office door in the investigators’ faces.

Clever investigators will employ a more subtle approach, pretending to be fellow academics interested in the expedition’s findings or employing some other subterfuge to persuade the professor to tell what he knows:

In 1978 Douglas was a student at Brichester University. He and five other students accompanied Professor Richard Hill, the University’s then chair of anthropology, to Malaysia to observe the customs of a tribe living in the

country’s interior. The expedition found the tribesmen hospitable and welcoming although it soon became apparent that they were not on friendly terms with everyone. The tribesmen had an intense dislike and fear of their neighbours, the tchau-tchaws, who lived further up in the mountains. The tchau-tchaws it was claimed were evil and worshipped a demon whose name could not be spoken aloud (Cthulhu mythos roll required to recognise this as a reference to Hastur the Unspeakable). One student, Colin Lewis, suggested that the tchau-tchaws might be more interesting subjects than the local tribe and proposed mounting sending a party to contact them. This was vetoed by Professor Hill on the grounds that it was too dangerous and might antagonise the expedition’s hosts.

The expedition proceeded satisfactorily for three weeks until one evening when Lewis and his friend, Matthew Stewart, were found to be missing along with a tape recorder. A search of their tent uncovered a note saying that a villager had told them that night was a major ceremonial occasion for the tchau-tchaws. Lewis and Stewart had gone into the mountains to watch the tchau-tchaws worship and hopefully obtain a recording for posterity. Nine hours later Lewis returned to camp cut and bruised and gibbering incoherently about the “tentacled mass that floats in the air.” In his hands Lewis clutched the smashed remains of the tape recorder. When examined the tape inside the recorder was found to be intact. Upon playing the tape it became apparent that Lewis and Stewart had observed and recorded a native ceremony of some sort, had been discovered and forced to flee for their lives. Only Lewis made it back. Stewart’s body was found the next day on a trail leading into the mountains. It had been extensively mutilated as if by some wild creature although there was surprisingly little blood around (Stewart was killed by a Byakhee which drank most of his blood before tearing him to pieces). Lewis never recovered from his ordeal and on returning to Britain was confined to the mental health unit at

Mercy Hill hospital.

Professor Douglas recalls that the tape made by Lewis and Stewart was quite disturbing. “Lots of chanting and drumming going on. If you listen to Lewis’s comments on the tape it’s clear that he believed that he was witnessing the summoning of some unworldly creature. Poor devil, he was completely deluded. Stewart as well, of course.” Douglas doesn’t know what happened to the tape but he will be unsurprised to learn that it fetched up in the university library. The expedition came home in some disarray and most of its research data was dumped wherever convenient without ever being collated or published.

Mercy Hill Hospital: The hospital won’t be keen on releasing Colin Lewis’s details to investigators without good reason. Again subterfuge may be necessary along with Fast Talk or Oratory rolls. Alternatively, the investigators could call upon Inspector Stone to assist them in getting the information they require.

Eventually, the investigators are told that Colin Lewis was discharged in 1992 following the closure of the mental health unit. His last known address is Flat 1, 10 Park Road, Lower Brichester.

Lewis’s Story: 10 Park Road is a formerly impressive Victorian house knocked into smaller units. Flat 1 is the basement flat. A haggard middle aged man opens answers the door in response to the investigators’ knock. Speaking in a quiet monotone he admits to being Colin Lewis. He will make no move to invite the investigators into his home although he will allow them once they suggest going inside. The interior of the flat is filthy. The floor is covered with a layer of rotting food and rubbish. A thick film of dirt coats every surface. The smell is unbelievable. It will be obvious to the investigators that Lewis is incapable of looking after himself.

Despite his evidently precarious mental state Lewis agrees to answer any questions that the investigators might have about what he saw in Malaysia. His version of events is similar to Professor

Douglas’s but he maintains that he saw the tchau-tchous summon their god “down from of space.” The god was massive with long tentacles that writhed in time to the natives chanting. Stewart screamed when he saw the creature and the natives heard him. “That’s when we ran,” says Lewis. “The natives sent some kind of flying creature after us. It caught Matt, but I got away.”

If Lewis is told that the tape he made has been sampled and incorporated into a record his lucid period abruptly ends as he begins to scream at the investigators: “Don’t you see? It’ll bring the god down from space again! You must stop it! Stop it coming down from space...” He tails off muttering, “Down from space,” over and over again. Compassionate investigators will try and obtain some medical assistance for Lewis at this point. Callous ones will just leave him to his demons. In any event there’s nothing else to be learned here.



The Glasshouse

The Club: The Glasshouse is an old factory building that has been converted into a night-club with a flat above the main premises. The club gets its name from the large panels of frosted glass set into the building’s flat roof. Steven Adams bought the building three years ago using capital raised from drug dealing and his old band mate Sanderson who is a silent partner in the business. Sanderson’s name appears on the club’s business records but he takes no part in its day to

day running. Adams originally intended to “go legit” and get out of the narcotics trade altogether. However, the burgeoning dance scene with its accompanying demand for drugs offered the opportunity to make far more money than just running a club by itself would. Adams adopted on the practice of allowing only a select number of approved drug dealers into his club. In return for a percentage of their takings and drugs (with all of the latter being passed on to Sanderson) Adams offers the dealers a secure base from which to sell together with a ready made market. Rogue dealers are kept out by Lenny and Terence, the bouncers.

Day Time: If the investigators visit the Glasshouse during the day they find the club locked up. Knocking on the door for about five minutes will eventually produce a response from Adams. He pokes his head out of a window in the flat above the club. Once he has ascertained that they are not the police Adams tells the investigators to “get lost.” An Oratory or Fast Talk roll is required to persuade him to come down and talk to the investigators. When he finally appears Adams will insist on talking to the investigators on the doorstep of the club. Investigators who succeed in a Spot Hidden roll will notice the bulge of a handgun in the front of Adams’s jacket. This may dissuade investigators from insisting that they go inside to talk. Adams will not use the gun unless physically attacked. His response to any lesser threat is just to slam the door in the investigators’ faces.

Adams will be extremely defensive when questioned. He will admit to a business arrangement with Sanderson but not much else. He will strenuously deny any allegations of criminal activity at the club. Investigators who argue for the necessity of cancelling Sanderson’s DJ spot to prevent the release of an evil supernatural force will be dismissed as lunatics.

Night Time: Investigators visiting the club in the evening will find easy enough to gain entry although Lenny and Terence are adept at spotting



concealed weapons which may cause some investigators problems. The club is relatively quiet in the early part of the week with Adams putting on themed nights to drum up trade. These are student night (Monday), rock night (Tuesday) and over-thirties night (Wednesday - also known locally as “grab a granny night”). There is little illegal activity at the club during these evenings. The local dealers tend to wait until the more popular Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights when a horde of young clubbers descends on the Glasshouse.

Adams can usually be seen in the club during the evening. He emerges from his back office after the main doors have shut to see how business is going. Investigators have the option of approaching him then if they wish. It should be noted that any sudden move towards their boss runs the risk of provoking a response from Lenny and/or Terence. If the investigators do talk to Adams his responses will be the same as described previously although he will be more sure of himself as he has his hired muscle to back him up.

The Summoning

At nine o'clock on Friday evening Sanderson takes up his usual position behind the club's sound system. He plays a selection of current dance hits until half-eleven when the club begins to fill up as the pubs shut. Towards twelve the tempo begins to pick up as Sanderson plays records with much harder and faster beats than the preceding chart fodder. At midnight Sanderson suddenly announces “and now here it is: The latest Tribaltronic sounds from your very own Dr Psychotrop.” The opening beats of Tribal Rhythm fill the dance floor.

Any investigators present should realise that it is imperative that Sanderson is stopped from playing the record. If the investigators fail to act then He Who Cannot be Named will be summoned: The activity on the dance floor takes on a frenzied quality with many of the dancers seeming to be in a state of rapture. Some mouth the words of the chant along with

the record while others throw their hands ecstatically in the air. As the record ends around a dozen of the of the dancers collapse to the ground seemingly exhausted. Hastur has leached away their life energy (in game terms all of their magic points) to enable it to travel from Aldebaran. Due to the lack of several key components in the summoning spell (see Tribal Rhythms below) Hastur is unable to fully manifest itself. Instead it possesses Sanderson. The DJ's body swells and expands becoming bloated and monstrous. The transformation takes place with an obscene slurping noise. All those witnessing the transformation lose 1D10 SAN (1 pt if SAN roll made).



The creature's first act is to smash the sound system's record deck with a single blow of one massive fist. It then jumps down onto the dance floor where it throws people aside like rag dolls as it makes for the nearest exit. 1D10+2 people are killed in the ensuing panic stricken stampede. If allowed to escape the creature disappears into the night, never to be seen again?

The authorities will try to suppress any accounts of Sanderson's transformation blaming them on the drug addled imaginations of the club's patrons. The deaths at the club will be blamed on inadequate safety precautions. The Glasshouse will be closed down and Steven Adams prosecuted.

Ending the Adventure

Ideally the investigators should figure out that Grover was killed by a mythos creature summoned by the record he was working on. They should then realise that the record itself presents a further danger and must be destroyed to prevent further summonings. How the investigators accomplish this is up to them. A last minute intervention in the Glasshouse battling Adams and his cohorts will appeal to action minded investigators although it should be noted that Sanderson still has 49 copies of Tribal Rhythm back at his house. More prudent types may like to take action before then, perhaps by trying to reason with Sanderson. Sly investigators may decide to steal the existing copies of the record either when visiting the Temple of Higher Consciousness or by returning later to burgle the premises.

Even if Hastur is brought to Earth the scenario can continue with the investigators trying to discover how he was summoned and then attempting to hunt down the avatar which has been released onto the streets of Brichester. The avatar will have its own plans: It may attempt to found a Hastur cult in modern Britain. Alternatively, it may want to locate the remaining pressings of Sanderson's record either to destroy them or utilise them for its own purposes. The record could be of use in assisting Hastur to tap into the “youth market” and recruit young people into its cult.

SAN Rewards

Discovering the cause of Grover's death.....1D6

Destroying all copies of Tribal Rhythm..... 1D8

Preventing the summoning of He Who Cannot be Named.....1D20

OR

Destroying the avatar of He Who Cannot Be Named.....1D10

Tribal Rhythms

There are two audio recordings that may come into the investigators' possession during the course of this scenario. Listening to them can help the investigators solve the mystery of Grover's murder but there are hazards associated with each.

Lewis and Stewart's tape: This recording is very much as described by Professor Douglas. The quality is not particularly good, much of it sounds distant with only the occasional interjection by Lewis and Stewart sounding close to the mike. Nonetheless eerie chanting, whistles and drumming are audible at many points and Lewis and Stewart's commentary is disturbing enough in itself. At one point Lewis exclaims "A human sacrifice!" followed by "What are those things and what in the name of God are they doing to him!"

Toward the end of the tape Lewis says, "There's something forming over the altar, some kind of cloud. My God! it's alive! Tentacles..." This is followed by a piercing scream of terror and Lewis saying, "Shut up, they'll hear you! Too late, Here they come! Run for it Matt!" The tape abruptly ends at this point.

Anyone listening to the tape all the way through must make a SAN roll or lose 1D3 SAN. A listener who makes a Cthulhu Mythos roll will realise that the tape is a recording of a summoning of a Great Old One compete with attendant servitors. The tape's quality makes it impossible to be more specific but investigators should eventually be in a position to make an educated guess as to which entity is involved. The tape's poor quality also means that it is relatively harmless. A small SAN loss is the only danger to the listener.

Dr Psychotrop's Tribal Rhythm: A fairly undistinguished dance record with a middle section composed of tribal chanting sampled from Lewis and Stewart's tape. The chanting is clearer than on the source tape having been "cleaned up" in the studio during recording. Investigators who make a Cthulhu Mythos roll will recognise the chant as belonging to a Great Old One

summoning ritual (the name of the Great Old One should be given if the investigator rolls a critical success). Investigators who make a subsequent Idea roll will realise that the chant is audible enough to be effective in summoning a mythos entity.

If the record is played all the way through there is a 75% chance of a Byakhee being summoned. The creature will arrive within 2D10 minutes. Irritated by the summoning, the Byakhee will try to smash the record and any equipment used to play it. As noted previously, playing Tribal Rhythm in a suitably charged atmosphere may attract the attention of He Who Cannot be Named (50% chance or Keeper's discretion). The Great Old One will materialise within 1d6 minutes. The likely lack of ritual paraphernalia such as standing stones and Byakhee attendants will mean that Hastur will be unable fully manifest itself at the summoning site. Instead it will possess the person nearest to the record when it was played, or else appear in non-corporeal form.

Important NPCs

Name: Paul Sanderson

Sex: Male

Age: 35

STR:	9	DEX:	15
INT:	13	Idea:	65
Dam Bonus:	Nil	CON:	10
APP:	15	POW:	14
Luck:	70	Hit Points:	12
SIZ:	14	SAN:	60
EDU:	14	Know:	70

Skills: Archaeology 36%, Astronomy 13%, Bargain 36%, Chemistry 35%, Cthulhu Mythos 03%, Drive Auto 45%, Fast Talk 43%, Library Use 35%, Occult 46%, Oratory 41%, Pharmacy 23%, Play: Keyboard 54%, Sing 43%

Notes: Sanderson is the only child of doting, and wealthy, parents who conceived him late in life. When his parents died Sanderson inherited all of their property and money. This legacy has funded his largely unsuccessful music career and the Church of Higher

Consciousness. If Adams hadn't approached him with idea of investing in The Glasshouse he would certainly have squandered all of his money on various crackpot projects by now. The club provides him with a decent income, plentiful drugs and a platform from which to inflict his music on the world at large.

Sanderson likes to portray the Church as a serious organisation, which is genuinely seeking cosmic enlightenment. He will become vague if questioned about the exact nature of enlightenment or the practicalities of achieving it. In truth, Sanderson just adopts whatever ideas appeal to him at a particular time and then discards them once something else catches his interest. All of these enthusiasms have some paranormal element. Thus Sanderson has taken a past interest in ufology, ESP and satanism amongst others. At the moment his main fixation is tribal mysticism. The rest of the church are a rag bag mixture of drug users, hangers on and the occasional true believer. The church is far too loosely structured to be considered a cult.

Sanderson is a fool but he is not evil. If the investigators can prove to him that his new record has the power to summon monsters he will be genuinely appalled and will agree to the destruction of all copies of "Tribal Rhythm". Sanderson is aware of the Cthulhu Mythos but his knowledge derives from skimming Roland Franklyn's "We Pass From View" which he regards as a normal occult text. Thus he is familiar with the name Eihort and Franklyn's theories of reincarnation but is ignorant of the wider mythos. He will be surprised and fascinated to learn that there are other Great Old Ones with their own cults. This discovery may lead him to become a student of the mythos if he survives the scenario.

Sanderson is tall and thin with unruly fair hair. He wears wire-rimmed glasses, which give him a studious look. He speaks with an affected languid drawl which many people find irritating. His lowered SAN is due to his Cthulhu Mythos knowledge and prodigious consumption of psychedelic drugs.



Name: Steven Adams

Sex: Male
Age: 35

STR:	13	DEX:	13
INT:	15	Idea:	85
Dam Bonus:	1D4	CON:	16
APP:	11	POW:	14
Luck:	70	Hit Points:	15
SIZ:	14	SAN:	70
EDU:	11	Know:	55

Skills: Accounting 50%, Bargain 45%, Chemistry 32%, Debate 45%, Dodge 33%, Drive Auto 54%, Fast Talk 56%, Fist/Punch 54%, Jump 41%, Listen 53%, Pharmacy 31%, Pistol 46%, Play: Drums 60%, Sneak 63%, Spot Hidden 52%, Throw 45%

Notes: Adams has matured since his Flesh Wound days. He no longer indulges in acts of mindless aggression preferring to channel his energies into making money, firstly as a drug dealer and more recently as a night club owner. He is still capable of violence though and investigators should be wary of provoking him. He owns a 9mm automatic pistol, which he will not hesitate to use if he feels threatened. Adams has no time for Sanderson's pseudo-mystical beliefs but feels some residual loyalty to him for helping to finance his business. He shares the club's profits equally with his partner and doesn't try to cheat him. He is also not averse to doing Sanderson a favour if asked e.g. intervening on his behalf if the investigators are muscling him.

Adams is of stocky build with short black hair.



Name: Lenny/Terence

Sex: Male
Age: 29

STR:	16	DEX:	16
INT:	10	Idea:	50
Dam Bonus:	1D4	CON:	14
APP:	9	POW:	11
Luck:	55	Hit Points:	15
SIZ:	16	SAN:	50
EDU:	10	Know:	50

Skills: Club (Baseball Bat) 60%, Dodge 40%, Fist/Punch 65%, Head Butt 30%, Kick 40%, Spot Hidden 60%

Notes: These two steroid cases are Adams's enforcers. They do pretty much what he tells them to. They are somewhat violence prone and The Glasshouse's bad press is mostly due to their heavy handed door policy. Both men have bulky physiques and shaved heads. They almost look like twins.

Avatar of He Who Cannot be Named

STR:	64	SIZ:	19
POW:	35	CON:	27
INT:	15	DEX:	10
Hit Points:	23	Move:	8
Armour:	3 points baggy flesh		
SAN Loss:	1/1D10		
Attacks:	1 x Crushing Blow		
To Hit:	50%		
Damage:	5D6		
Spells:	All spells known by Hastur		



Sources and Afterword

"The Rough Guide to Rock" particularly the entries relating to Christian Death, Coil, Psychic TV, The Shamen and Throbbing Gristle.

"Black Man with a Horn" by Ted Klein. Excellent Lovecraft inspired story which contains a similar corruption of Tcho-Tcho to the one used in this scenario and also places the tribe's home (or one of them at least) in the Malaysian peninsula.

"The Franklyn Paragraphs" by Ramsey Campbell. Intriguing but ultimately anti-climatic story centring on the search for occultist Roland Franklyn and his notorious book "We Pass From View".

"Valkyrie Magazine" issues 15 and 16 contain a detailed guide to Ramsey Campbell's Severn Valley by Shannen Appel.

Various Newspaper articles about the Essex dance and drugs scene.

Lenny and Terence is a song from the album Post-Historic Monsters by Carter U.S.M.

I'd also like to thank to my brother Cameron Dunham for providing me with information about music recording.

This is an attempt to marry the Cthulhu Mythos with modern dance music concentrating on the new age - tribalistic pretensions of some of its practitioners. I like some of the music but not the drugs and quasi-mystical bullshit that often go with it. From a fictional point of view the whole culture seems ripe for infiltration by Cthulhoid elements particularly those with tribal connections.





by Robert Sullivan

From the Blackjack Times:

An unidentified gunman opened fire at a science fiction convention, injuring eight people. The panic of the crowd resulted in the injury of 21 more people, and the gunman escaped the scene. Two Black Jack natives were critically injured.

The Texas Comics and Games Convention (TCGC), held in the Dallas Regents Hotel, had drawn several hundred fans of comics' books, science fiction and fantasy from far away as Louisiana and Oklahoma. Venders had set up booths in the hotels Rose Room, selling books, games, movies and other memorabilia. Fans milled around the room, waiting for the evening's festivities to begin, when popular artists and authors would be speaking. The song "Don't Fear the Reaper" was playing over the room's speakers.

At approximately 3:15 p.m. an unidentified gunman entered the dealer's room and immediately opened fire on the crowd of venders and fans gathered in the room. The mass of frenzied people rushed to the single emergency exit. The alarm sounded when the emergency door was opened, ringing out over screams from the crowd, its shrill call punctuated by the raptort of gunfire.

According to eyewitnesses, the gunman first shot Black Jack natives Stephen Martyr, 21 and Peter Saint, 22, with a shotgun. He then used a black .38 pistol to fire 12 shots into the panicked crowd. The gunman then fled the scene.

Before it was over 14 shots had been fired. Nearly 30 people were injured in the panicked stampede as the crowd attempted to rush away from the firing guns. The gunfire injured six people, one person — a professional artist — lost both eyes to shotgun pellets.

The gunman himself escaped in the confusion before the police arrived. According to eyewitnesses, he had been wearing a long black coat and a large latex mask.

Police discovered the coat and mask behind a hall door. No one has claimed to have seen the gunman disrobing.

The injured people, including Martyr and Saint, were rushed by helicopter to the Dallas Presbyterian Hospital.

A police spokesman said the Dallas PD is turning all their available resources to this investigation, although no motive is currently known.

* * *

Stephen and Peter — or as they call themselves in-character, Dracon and Sir Gorul — were dying.

Old people often complain that the young think they are immortal, that they are bullet proof. That is not true. It simply never occurs to the young — unless they have been hurt — that they can die. They never really realize that bullets can hit them. It is not until they start aging — when they have more reason to think about Death as something other than an abstract concept or cinematic entertainment — that the young realize that bullets can hit them and can tear their flesh. Of course, this



is about the same time these people stop being young, start being old and begin complaining about how the young think that they are immortal.

Lying on the dirty floor in a mixing pool of each other's blood probably drove home this point for Stephen and Peter. The broken bones, screams and the scent of blood, gun smoke and urine, drove this idea home for the rest of the throng as it tried to heave its way out of the room.

The three of us, Stephen, Peter and I had driven to the convention from Black Jack. I had the weekend off from the paper and wanted to enjoy myself. If I had known going to Dallas meant I was going to have to write up the story for the paper about watching my friends get shot, among other things, I would have stayed in Black Jack.

For a brief instant, I saw the gunman's mask face reflected in someone's blood.

Then one of the bullets from the .38 had grazed my skull from behind as I turned to run away. The force of the shot snapped my head forwards and knocked me onto a display table covered with cards. Tarot cards from a new deck featuring many monsters with tentacles and cards from several collectible card games fluttered through the air and swirled around the table as I went down. A white light went off in my head as the colorful images on the cards tumbled past my eyes.

I blinked.

Smashed under my face was the Death card from one of the new-style tarot decks. It featured a silvered face to reflect the face of the person seeking their fortune. In the right corners are little pictures of whippoorwills. The problem with the design is that when used in a typical reading the card lies face up on a table so the seeker sees the face of the prophet distorted in the mirroring, not their own face.

After blinking I looked into mirror the with my left eye — lying the way I was my right eye was mashed shut — so closely I could not really focus on the image.

The room was silent. I guessed I must have blacked out for a moment. I slowly sat up, the card stuck to my face by the blood. My head swam and I saw a dark figure moving behind me reflected in the card. I was not thinking clearly — I did not realize the figure could have been the gunman.

I turned and pulled the mirrored card away from my face because it was blocking my vision. Then I saw him.

The Angel of Death.

He looked just like me.

I mean Death looked just like me... the unmitigated bastard. He was wearing a black silk shirt, (just like mine), tight blue jeans (like mine), and army boots (just like mine — I had not realized that they needed to be polished). It was worse than looking into a mirror. I did not even try to make eye contact. He turned and looked at me and for the first time, I realized he was standing over the prone and still bodies of Peter and Stephen.

Behind him, I could see the three whippoorwills perched on a light fixture. I had noticed them when I first entered the dealers' room; they had somehow been trapped inside.

I am not certain how much time passed while we, Death and I, looked at each other.

I also have no idea what happened to the panicked crowd as all this happened.

"Don't you touch them!" I finally said, and it sounded petulant, like something a child might say.

He blinked and then said, "I've got to do my job."

For a moment I felt better when the first words out his mouth sounded as stupid as my first words had been. Then I had the idea that his response was more from mirroring me than any intrinsic human weakness on his part and I did not feel so good any more.

"I have to take this pair with me," he said making a waving motion back to where Stephen and Peter lay bleeding among cards scattered on the floor.

"O.K. how about this we gamble for them," I said, desperately. I was remembering an old European movie I saw with my girl friend, at a film festival to which she dragged me. In this movie, a guy plays Death in a game of chess to win the lives of his friends.

"I saw that movie," Death remarked. "A card game would seem to be the most appropriate given the circumstances."

The two of us were surrounded by cards. The tables that were still standing displayed some, each with itty-bitty price stickers. Most lay scattered on the floor where the crowd knocked them. A seemingly endless tumble of collectible card games for Star Wars, Star Trek, Highlander, Lord of the Rings, Babylon Five, Batman, Superman, Spiderman, Wolfman, and Vampires. There were many cards from the game, Magic: the Gathering — which is more or less the original collectible card game and paved the way for all the others. There were also a dozen different styles of Tarot cards in the mix. There were even, I saw to my surprise, some traditional playing cards and baseball cards.

He picked up the mirrored "Death" card and looked into it. I wondered, and still do, what he saw.

"Cute," he said and then dropped the card. "You know card games all come from the tarot, people looking at each other over a table and cards. People shuffle the cards, play games with fate, see what they can do." Being too talkative and pompous is a bad habit of which I have been trying to break myself. "They played games with each other with cards of fate."

"It's up to you," he said, smiling coyly. "You choose the type of card game."

I looked over the mess. I saw a small pile of like cards and picked it up. I looked at Death and said, "Call me a traditionalist."

"You're a traditionalist," he intoned in that perfect echo of my own voice. "The wager is, of course, your life as well as those of your friends if you loose."

I suddenly wished I had paid more attention to that movie so I could remember what the bet actually was, and how the flick ended.

There was then a table between us, with folding chairs on opposite sides. We sat down together and scooted our chairs

forwards at the same time.

Out of reflex I reached across the table and held out the deck of cards. He reached out and took the deck from me. Our fingertips did not quite touch.

Death took the deck of cards and shuffled simply, without any Las Vegas style showmanship. I have never been able to do any of those tricks without scattering the cards all over the places. He set the deck on the table. I reached over and cut the cards. He took them, reshuffled and then started dealing each of us our respective hands. I watched him closely. Death's deal appeared to be legitimate, with no cards coming off the bottom of the deck.

We took our cards and looked at our hands, and then looked across the table and cards at each other.

He looked right at me, head cocked to one side, his eyes slightly hooded, his hands folded over his cards. Something about it just made the back of my head hurt and I hoped to God that I did not look like that when I am playing cards.

"I've got a gambling problem," I...damn it all to hell...Death said. Then he gives me my snake-smile, "Actually it's not normally a problem because normally I win. It's only a problem when I lose."

"Well it's going to be a problem for you today," I said. He gives me a blank stare — the kind of stare my girl friend always bawls me out for giving when she has said something that goes over my head. "You're going to lose, that's why it's going to be a problem for you today."

He simply grunted, glanced at the cards in his hand and gave me more of the snake-smile I have when I feel like a predator.

I hate his face.

Despite my attempts at self-control, my mind started to wander and I glanced around the room. For the first time I noticed that the whippoorwills were still but looking intently — almost hungrily — down towards my friends. I glanced down towards them and noticed two moths circling their bodies. Then Death said something and brought my attention back to the table and the game at hand.

"I don't destroy souls," he said, my Texas twang in his voice. "I just take them."

"Where?" I asked. "Were do you take them?" My silk shirt felt uncomfortable sticking to my clammy skin.

"It varies," he said absently, looking at his cards and rearranging them in his hand. "Some go to some places, other go to...another."

"Then why have me in the pot, so to speak?" I asked.

It's a pretty standard bet, but mostly to save me trouble later."

In silence, he lays a card out.

I followed suit.

Then Death killed the hush of the room.

"People are not afraid of me, and they aren't afraid of being dead *per-se*," he says looking me right in the eye. I do not want to break eye contact but it is like staring hard into a mirror. Which will blink first, the person or the reflection? Which

is the reflection? "The known scares people more than the unknown."

"What do you mean?" I asked, still staring him in the eye. Only after I say it do I feel like I have walked into some verbal trap, something to distract me from the game.

"People are not afraid of the state of being dead, or me for that matter, because they don't know what will happen. Men and women have always gone poking around the proverbial 'unknown.'" They fly to the moon and sail to new continents and crawl around in dank caves and engage in all sort of perilous activity just to *explore* the unknown. They have forever. Yet no-one jumps off a cliff to explore what is beyond life."

We looked at each other.

I put a card on the table, it made a crisp snapping noise.

Death followed suit.

"People are not afraid of me. They are terrified of me taking them to where they have to pay their dues," he said. "Deep down the soul knows exactly what it is in for. That's why only the deeply delusional and the saints don't mind it when I show up." That last sentence was particularly smug.

Still staring me in the eyes — is this something I do when I play card games? — he laid out the cards in his hand. I had to break eye contact to look down at them. My tongue felt fat and dry in my mouth.

"People fight, scream, kill, blaspheme, soil themselves and are generally rude to avoid me 'cause when I show up they know it is time to pay the piper. Each soul, shivering down inside everybody, knows just how much it is going to have to pay."

I look up from the cards.

"Fuck you."

I laid out my own hand. My face, eyes, head and body that was sitting on the other side of the table leaned forward. Those nostrils flared slightly as Death slowly inhaled and looked at the cards.

"Fuck you and the pale horse you rode in on," I said, and it felt better the second time.

I closed my eyes and heard the beating of wings. I opened my eyes and watch as the whippoorwills darted out the emergency exit above the heads of the shrieking crowd that was again surging out the door. It crossed my mind that perhaps everything that had happened took place between the beats of the birds' heart.

Death is gone — for now at any rate.

Blood streaming from my own head wound I got up rather gingerly and walked unsteadily to Stephen and Peter. I tended my friends as best I could until the paramedics arrived. The crowd was well away from them so there was no danger from trampling. It was a long time before the nightmare ended.

Eventually I had to write up the story for the newspaper. Of course, I had to leave out certain parts of what happened to maintain my journalistic credibility. Sometimes I think what is omitted from a story is more telling than what is related. You always have to leave out bits.

The End





CALL TO DARKNESS

Part Three
by Mike Marchi

Nick swallowed hard and took a step closer. "I..." He had to fight off a sudden urge to stop there, and forced himself to lean closer. He stopped with his face only a foot away from hers. Then, very quietly, he spoke so that only she could hear. "What are you?"

Secrets

Doctor Nicholas Mercer regarded his patient with an odd combination of curiosity and gut-wrenching fear. The results of her blood workup were still clenched in his sweat-slick left hand. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

Enise Westfield could feel a ball of dread settle in her belly. She had lived in fear of this moment for too long. Now, she faced it from a state of complete vulnerability. The straightjacket straps bit into her arms as she tested them once again. Ever since Rachel and Smitty had secured the jacket after her last outburst, Enise had been lying on her bed, in what appeared to be complete resignation to her fate. To all outside observation, she was lying perfectly still. But inside, her mind was a whirling dervish of activity. *What could she say now that the inevitable question had come? Did she dare tell the truth? Was Mercer ready to hear that yet?* She flexed her muscles again, exerting steady pressure against the canvas material of the straightjacket. Each time she pressed, she heard another tiny seam pop, and then relaxed. If she had the time, her patience would be rewarded. All she had to do was take it one seam at a time.

But now, it appeared that time had run out. Mercer stood before her, with her greatest fear clenched in his shaking fist. She knew perfectly well, what that piece of paper said. She'd performed the tests on herself a hundred times, trying to come up with an explanation for the telltale indicators that proved she didn't have any business being on this world. But an explanation never came. There was no way she could explain any of it away.

She saw the look of terror in Mercer's eyes. He didn't know enough of her story to understand what had happened to her. She couldn't run the risk that he would give up on her, now. Yesterday, the worst he could have done to her, was declare her sane, so she had to face a trial for murdering Wil. Today, he had the power to send her to a worse fate. Which would make the fate Wil had suffered seem mild by comparison. She squeezed her eyes shut, and a tear slid down her cheek. The memories flooded back...

* * *

The sounds of the operating theater echoed in her ears: the rhythmic beeps and tones of the monitoring equipment, the hum of the pumps, the hiss of the breathing mask. Her nostrils

remembered the scent of disinfectant combined with the steamy scent of iron coming from his blood. She had set the temperature controls in the room to near freezing, to slow his metabolism down. Then, beginning with the left eye, began to cut. At first it was easy. "I'm saving him," she kept telling herself, over and over. A litany singing in her head, that occasionally found itself voiced aloud, riding the steamy exhalation of her measured breaths...

* * *

"Are you going to answer me?"

Enise was shocked out of her reverie by Nick's question. How long had she been sitting there, lost in thought? How much time had passed between when he first asked question, and when he repeated it?

"What would you have me say?" she spat back.

Nick recoiled back, stunned. He actually didn't know *what* he expected to hear. The evidence in his hand pointed to something that was so far beyond his realm of experience, that it threatened to perforate his entire belief system. What did he want? He wanted her to explain how the readings were possible. He wanted a rational explanation that made it go away. But the look on her face as much as told him that he wasn't going to get what he wanted.

"You're not going to like the answer," she said at last. "Better you should just attribute it to a chemical imbalance."

"This is not any chemical imbalance! *These tests do not show human DNA!*"

"Of course it's human DNA – or will be, at any rate."

Nick did a double take. "What?"

Enise nodded toward the paper in his hand. "You're looking at a glimpse of your future, Nick."

"I know you won't believe me. But it's the truth. Those tests came out the way they did because I'm a more advanced species of human than you are."

Nick burst out laughing. "You expect me to buy this explanation?"

"No. I don't," she replied in a measured tone. "I expect you to declare me insane, and leave me alone."

"Well, I got news for you, lady. There's a big difference between insane, and crazy. Being a traveler from the future only makes you crazy."

"Is that your clinical opinion?"

"I think you're being very inventive. I have to admit, I didn't expect this."

"You should dig a little deeper then. If I'm making this up, then there must be a bottom to this pit of lies. If you find it, you win."

"Is that a challenge, Doctor Westfield?"

"Why not? I'll come clean on one condition. If you believe

my story, you have to destroy that report.”

Nick looked at the crumpled printout. “What if I just turn this over to a higher authority?”

“Then they’ll take me away from you. If you’re lucky, they won’t make you disappear too. Either way, you’ll never know how close you are.”

Nick glanced over his shoulder at the closed cell door. Rachel was looking in at the two of them. Probably with her stunner at the ready, in case Enise got loose again. Nick gave her, what he hoped was a reassuring gesture. Rachel nodded and stepped away, out of sight. Nick turned back.

“All right, Doctor Westfield. You have my attention. Tell me what you need to say.”

* * *

In October, 2010, I came to your world with five companions. It was an accident. We were drawn along with a creature of great power, summoned into the past by something dark and terrible. At first, we thought our ship had misjumped...”

“Mis-jumped?”

“The device we use to propel our ships between the stars, is called a jump-drive.”

“Got it.”

“The ship had materialized in a cave of some kind. We wound up finding our way out of the cave. And passed through a series of places...other dimensions, if you will. Until we found our way here.”

“Here, to Earth?”

“Yes. Your world is one seriously messed-up place, you know that?”

“Aren’t they all?”

“Actually, no. But there’s a reason why yours is so screwed up. It has to do with the force that took us to that cave. A being of unimaginable power – it’s pure evil.”

“I thought you were going to tell me a space story.”

“Don’t be as ass,” she glowered. “All of this is important for you to understand.”

“Right. So there’s a big, powerful ‘something’ out there, summoning evil minions and spacemen to do his bidding to make our world into its own personal hell-hole.”

“Essentially.”

“Riiiiiiight. Go on.”

“We spent a couple months wandering across the southern United States. We still thought we had misjumped, and were searching for a starport. We didn’t realize we had traveled in time as well as space. In the end, we found a way home. Or rather, one was provided for us.”

“By whom?”

“The thing that had been summoned along with us. He sent us back in return for ... well, suffice to say it’s a long story, and not the space story you’re looking for.”

“We were sent back, but the time we returned to wasn’t really our own. As near as we could tell, over eighty years had passed. And in that time, the Imperium had changed dramatically.”

“This ‘Imperium’ was your star-spanning empire?”

“Something like that.”

“Civilization as we knew it, had collapsed. We were found by a smaller Coalition that was working to rebuild it.”

“Sounds like a noble cause,” said Nick, being drawn in, despite himself.

Enise smiled, “It was the only cause in town.

“We wound up getting assigned as crew on a Far Trader ... that’s a long range cargo vessel...”

“I’ve seen the movie.”

“What?”

“Never mind.” He shook his head. “Go on.”

Enise sighed heavily, being drawn deeper into the telling. “Everything seemed to be going okay. Wil had some problems fitting in to a structured command hierarchy again. He wound up butting heads with the Commander of our ship – and had even more problems with the Captain of the task force in our area.”

“If you don’t mind my asking, how did you fit in?”

“Oh. I did okay. Like I said, it was rewarding work – for the most part. But the altercations between Wil and Cal were getting worse. I found myself making excuses for Wil, more and more.”

“Finally, Wil came to me one day and announced that he wanted to go back.”

“Just like that? How did he propose to accomplish it?”

“I think he just figured he’d retrace our steps,” her brow furrowed. “I honestly don’t think he doubted for a second that it would be possible.”

“So let me get this straight. You two were in the future, in some space-opera universe of adventure, and you came back – here?”

“I’ve come to this place twice now. The first time, was an accident. The second was...by choice.”

“You don’t sound very convinced of that.”

“No. It was a choice. It wasn’t mine, so much as Wil’s. But I still had to choose whether to go with him or not.”

“Why do you think he chose to come back?”

“Like I told you. Coming here the first time, awakened something in him. He had powers and abilities that were beyond reason. But he couldn’t control them. He said he could. He tried very hard to convince me that he was coping.”

“But he wasn’t.”

“No. He wasn’t coping at all. Every day, a little piece of him ... just slipped away. I think he came back looking for help.”

“Why did you come with him?”

“I owed him that much. He was my responsibility. The entire crew was my responsibility. And by that time, he was the only other member of the original crew left.”

“Your loyalty is commendable.”

“We gathered up some supplies, took a small utility robot with us to carry everything, and we left...”

Enise’s eyes lost their focus, as she continued. “The place we came to was plunged in darkness. A rocky, desert landscape...”



* * *

The sky overhead was overcast, with a ceiling of clouds a hundred feet above the ground. A portion of the cloudscape suddenly grew dark, and issued forth with a series of electrical bolts. The lightning struck the ground again and again; each strike accompanied by a blast of thunder; each strike fusing silica into blackened glass. The lightning seemed to tear at the air itself, until the very fabric of reality ripped open to reveal an inky slash. A man stepped through the slash first, behind him, holding his hand was a woman, and just behind her, a small robot. As the trio stepped down (or rolled down in the latter case) onto the glassy surface, the lightning abruptly stopped, and the hole in the air behind them snapped closed. A moment later, the last distant echo of thunderclaps died out across the dune-covered landscape.

The man and woman were similarly dressed, wearing one-piece black jumpsuits with yellow piping. The waist-high robot resembled an upright bug rolling on tractor treads. It immediately began turning its head from side-to-side scanning the area. The man took a look around and grinned. "You see, doc? I told you it would work."

The woman shook her head, "This isn't the cave, Wil."

Unperturbed, Wil Ohmsford rummaged through the backpack on the robot and pulled out a pair of binoculars. Raising them to his face, he turned in a slow circle and surveyed the horizon. "There's a mountain range, bearing two-three-zero point five. I'll bet that's it."

Doctor Enise Westfield squinted her eyes as she looked in the direction her companion indicated. "How far is it?"

The robot began emitting whirring sounds, "*Specified target is located point zero zero seven five mega-meters.*"

Enise and Wil both look at the small robot. Enise's look of mild surprise slowly dissolved into one of anger. "Seventy-five kilometers!?" Her hand lashed out, slapping Wil across the side of the head with her open palm, "You moron."

* * *

The dawn came after an hour of walking; a weak orange sun climbed into the sky over the southern horizon. By mid-

day, the temperature had reached 25 degrees C. By nightfall, they have covered one half the distance. During that time, the only signs of life they saw, were a variety of small insects skittering across the stony landscape. The mountain, now clearly visible in the distance slowly faded into the inky blackness of night as the sun set. Enise set up a small thermal heater and Wil began clearing the ground of large stones to make camp for the night.

As they slept, the robot circled the camp, vigilant for any sign of movement. Wil was just drifting off to sleep when the robot sounded an alarm. He and the doctor jumped up and shone their cold-light lanterns in the direction indicated by the small mechanical sentry.

At the edge of the illumination, a hairy spider, approximately six inches across advanced slowly across the ground. Visibly annoyed, Wil reset the perimeter alarm and the two humans once again tried to go to sleep. Within fifteen minutes the robot identified yet another threat. This time, a lizard approximately two feet long. The third time their sleep was disturbed, Wil was beside himself with fatigue-induced frustration.

"What is it this time? Perhaps a moth has ventured too close to the camp?"

"Reset perimeter alarm and discontinue monitoring."

The little robot continued to make little clicking sounds as it 'stared' off to the north.

A moment later, it whirled around and began equally intense scrutiny to the west. The doctor heard a sound of stone clattering against stone to the south.

"Wil, there is something out there!" She shone her light off to the south, and gasped in surprise. The figure was humanoid, crouched low approximately seven meters from camp. The gray skin stretched tightly over the bones of a face framed in knotted waves of hair. The eyes

returned the light of the lantern as a pale white illumination. It's lips parted and a long black tongue slithered out. A telltale sound of stone against stone came from the north, and Wil's lantern revealed another creature already beginning a charge



ASZK



on the campsite.

There were five altogether. Three of them, mercifully focused their attentions on the robot who warded them off with electrical shocks. Wil barely managed to un-holster his snub pistol, *Excalibur* when one of the ghouls closed the distance and embraced him. The creature's grip was far stronger than the wiry frame of the attacker indicated. It parted its gray, cracked lips and a long black tongue lashed out like a stinger. It bounced ineffectively off of the cloth armor of Wil's shipsuit.

Wil managed to turn the muzzle of *Excalibur* into the stomach of the ghoul, and pulled the trigger. The sharp report of the handgun, distracted the adversary for a moment. Its grip faltered just long enough for Wil to reorient his aim between the glowing eyes. The call of *Excalibur* once more thundered in the night, carrying the life-force of a vanquished foe with it.

Enise drew a short rod, about eight inches long from her belt and activated a small stud on the surface. The rod telescoped outward into a six-foot long staff, which she wielded with a deftness drawn from many hours of practice. The staff was a whirling blur of motion, keeping her attacker at bay, although her blows appeared to cause no lasting harm to the gray-skinned thing. Wil turned his weapon on her assailant and it quickly followed the first into oblivion.

The poor robot, locked in a triple embrace by the Desert Ghouls could no more break their grip, than they could puncture his metal skin with their sharpened tongues. Judicious placement of *Excalibur* quickly ended the encounter.

* * *

At dawn, the three continued the trek toward the distant mountain. By the end of the day, they had come to its base.

Close inspection revealed a number of entrances into the cavern complex. Selecting one at random, they entered the dark caves. It took a while for them to determine if these were the right tunnels. Wandering through the caves, being careful not to make any noise they eventually found the first sign that they were on the right track; a single gargoyle footprint pressed into the dusty cave floor.

Before long, they began to hear rhythmic pounding, as from a drum. They followed this sound until they came to a very long and straight tunnel with numerous alcoves lining it on either side. The tunnel was lit along its length by torches, and a brighter light was coming from the the far end. By hugging the walls, they worked their way forward, moving from alcove to alcove along the tunnel's length. Each alcove held a black obsidian statue. The statue in the first alcove was a carving of a Gargoyle, about two feet high, and resting on a pedestal. A twin to it sat in an identical alcove across the hall. As they continued along the hall, they began to hear a low guttural chant accompany the pounding of the drum. The next alcoves held another pair of gargoyle statues, but the subjects of these carvings were much larger and muscular. Surprisingly, the third alcove contained twin statues of a man, dressed in long robes, bald headed with a goatee. The chanting and singing was coming from the lit area at the end of the hall, now only another alcove or two away. Continuing down, they came to another

pair of statues. The figure engraved in the obsidian couldn't be described as a single creature, but more like a roiling mass of gnashing fangs, multi-faceted eyes and wings. At the last alcove before the lit area, Wil motioned for the Doctor and the robot to hang back. Then, as stealthily as possible, he works his way forward to look into the lit room.

The chamber resembled a cathedral carved from the native rock, 15 meters wide and 50 meters long. The 10 meter tall ceiling arched overhead in spectacular formations of stalactites and rock flows. A hundred guttering torches lined its walls, and a thousand gargoyles lined the floor, facing the front of the cathedral with their backs to Wil. The gargoyles chanted and swayed in adulation to a larger full-color statue of the flaming heads thing.

A low growl to his left alerted Wil that he had pushed it too far. One of the large honor-guard gargoyles lashed out and caught him by the scruff of the neck. The thunderous bellow of *Excalibur* detached the creature from its hand. It also alerted the occupants in the stone cathedral.

The oppressive silence that followed the chanting and drumming was suddenly shattered as the entire Gargoyle Nation issued a war-cry and charged en-masse toward them! Gargoyles were approaching from every direction but the alcove they were currently in. This alcove led back and to the left on an incline, paralleling the cathedral. With the sound of pursuing gargoyles pressing them on, they frantically followed the passage to its end. There, they found themselves on a balcony, overlooking the center of the cathedral. Hoards of pale yellow eyes turned up toward them from the cathedral floor. Harsh raspy breathing and the skittering of leathery feet on the stone floor came from the only exit behind them. They were trapped!

* * *

Wil immediately started rummaging through the robot's backpack. His search produced a grapple hook and a coil of rope. The doctor grabbed one of Wil's larger rifles and started laying down covering fire, hoping to ward off the advancing gargoyle column. Body after body of gargoyle fell in the doorway.

"What do we do now?!", she shrieked at him.

"I think we have a big problem."

"What was your first clue?"

Wil stood on the rail of the balcony and swung the hook around and around. He aimed the hook at a particularly ornate outcropping of rock in the ceiling, and let it fly. It arced up toward the formation, but sailed passed it without gaining purchase. The grapple landed in the balcony opposite theirs across the cathedral. Enise felt a rush of air as something whizzed past her face. She felt tiny impacts along her chest and arm. The gargoyles were firing blowguns at them, but the tiny darts couldn't penetrate their armor.

Wil drew the line taut and called out to Enise. She stood up, grabbed hold of her companion and prepared for him to launch them into the air across the cathedral.

A small group of gargoyles suddenly appeared in the balcony across the room. Seeing this, Wil recoiled back, aborting



his attempted leap.

"This isn't where we want to be, anyway," he called out.

One of the gargoyles across the room grabbed the grappling hook, and gave the line a tremendous tug, causing Wil's balance to shift dangerously forward over the lip of the railing. In a panic, Wil concentrated on the first place he could think of: the basement of the Talamasca motherhouse in Phoenix, Arizona. A black tear opened in the air before them. Then, aided by the pull from the gargoyle across the room, Wil and Enise plunged off the balcony into the newly-formed dimensional gateway...

* * *

...and emerged in utter darkness. The air around them was dusty and stale. Wil tried to take a step and his foot immediately caught on something, sending him sprawling to the floor. Although it was utterly dark, he could still sense the portal pulsing behind him. A moment later, there as a high pitched squeal as the robot came plunging out of the rift. Even as the little robot clattered to the ground, it activated a small worklight and shone it back at the portal. The light played across the course gray skin of a gargoyle, touching off a glow in the pale yellow eyes. The creature's wings beat furiously in the confined space. Its cry of surprise changed to one of terror as the portal began to close. The gargoyle flung itself at the doctor, throwing its entire body weight into the lunge. Its course was interrupted almost before it began by the deafening blast of *Excalibur*. The first explosive bullet caught the creature square in the face, the second in the chest. It was dead before it even hit the ground.

Enise's ears rang furiously in the stillness that followed. "Damn it, Wil. Didn't anyone ever tell you not to fire a gun in an enclosed space?" She pulled out her medical scanner and passed back and forth in front of her face. She looked at the readout and then redirected it at Wil. Satisfied, she replaced it in the pouch on her belt. "You're damn lucky our eardrums are still intact." she growled.

Wil was suddenly indignant. "Well, you're very welcome for the miraculous save, Doc. How was I supposed to know we were in an enclosed space?" His voice trailed off as he began looking at the room around him.

The walls were constructed of cinder block, and formed a room with a seven-foot ceiling. Many of the blocks had shifted out of their interlocking pattern, and lay broken on the floor. From each of the gaps formed by the missing blocks, a cascade of sand had flowed into the chamber. There were no visible windows or doors in the walls. One wall was composed entirely of collapsed sand, implying the room had at one time been larger than the eight by eight foot square that remained.

The ceiling above appeared to be made of riveted panels of black metal. Based on the interface where the walls met the ceiling, it was obvious that the ceiling was not part of the original structure; possibly something that had fallen atop it long ago.

Wil began rummaging through the robot's backpack again. He produced a compact cutting torch. Then, balancing

himself on the edge of a small pile of rubble, he began cutting into the metal ceiling. Red-hot globs of melted material dropped to the ground, whistling through the air as they fell. Each drop left a distinct tracer of smoke which marched slowly across the room, one after another on unseen currents of air. After a few minutes, a two-foot diameter rough-cut circle of metal dropped to the dust-strewn floor with a deep resinous clang. The ceiling was formed from a ½ in. thick alloy. Above that was a three-foot airspace crisscrossed with a metallic framework which joined it to another layer of flat-black material. Swearing under his breath, Wil grabbed the edge of the hole with a gloved hand, and pulled himself up into the superstructure. As he climbed up with his lantern, he noticed movement out of the corner of his eye. Dozens of small crab-like insects ran for cover, out of the light. Ignoring the bugs, he pulled the trigger on the cutting torch again, and turned it on the upper ceiling. After a moment, he shut down the torch in disgust. The upper ceiling was composed of a black ceramic material, and not metal. He dropped back into the dusty cellar just long enough to locate a length of iron pipe about three feet long. He climbed back up and began swinging the pipe with all his might at the ceramic ceiling.

After a few hits, small hairline cracks began to appear in the surface. The cracks grew wider, until at last the material shattered. The air that wafted down from the opening was decidedly fresher and cooler than that in the cellar. Wil poked his head up through the opening, and gasped in surprise at what he found. The stars shone across a clear night sky. The crescent of a large pale moon hung on the horizon, casting a glow over the desert landscape around him. The structure through which he had climbed stretched out in all directions, a vast thing which buckled and flowed over a surrounding uneven landscape. In places there were breaks in the surface where portions of it remained aloft on support towers a hundred feet tall.

As impressive as that sight was, what shocked him more were the five distinctive structures that rose above the collapsed array of solar panels. The five corporate towers of Phoenix, Arizona still vaulted into the sky above the ruin of Frozen Shade. Except that now, the towers sagged and leaned like drunken behemoths. One tower, in fact had snapped in two and lay atop the solar panel array a mile to his left.

The doctor heard his gasp and immediately began to climb up to get a look for herself. "What is it, Wil? Where are we?"

Wil Ohmsford felt a chill spread through his chest as the sinking feeling of realization set in. "We're in Phoenix."

"That's good, right?" Enise asked as she pushed up into the night air. "Oh my..."

Wil turned to look at her, a vision of despair in the desert night. "I'm sorry Enise. We're right where I wanted us to be. But the time is wrong. We're in some future incarnation of Phoenix." He pointed at the crumpled tower. "A time when some horrible fate has befallen the city."

Enise looked at the black tiled surface which surrounded them. "The Solar Panel array has collapsed!"

Her companion shook his head and locked eyes with her.

"I don't know how to travel through time!"

* * *

"One, two, three, HEAVE!" Wil and Enise pushed with all their might and the robot slowly rose out through the shattered upper layer of Frozen Shade. The treads on his undercarriage spun wildly as they gained purchase on the rim. A moment later, the little robot was perched safely on the upper layer. His sensors came to life. "*Scanning... No life forms detected to limit of sensor radius. Background radiation at acceptable levels.*"

Enise had dropped to the ground in the bottom of the cellar; what they had come to realize was at one time the basement of the Talamasca motherhouse in Phoenix. She was breathing heavily with the strain of having lifted the robot's heavy chassis out of the hole. Wil was similarly winded, but walked around the room collecting the rest of their gear.

"Are you about ready to go topside, Doc?"

Enise smiled weakly and closed her eyes in mock exhaustion. "I need a good night's rest, is all."

Wil grinned at her and offered his upturned hand to her. "I'd feel better out in the open."

As Enise reached toward him, she felt the hairs on the back of her hand begin to tingle and stand on end. Apparently, Wil noticed something too, because he whirled around to face the pile of rubble that led to the rest of the basement, and the inky black rend which had suddenly formed in the wall.

The creature which unfolded itself from the rubble was covered from head to toe in colorful scales. The head was easily four feet across. The massive claw on the end of a long chitinous limb lashed out and struck Wil in the arm, sending him tumbling into the crumbling cinder block wall. Enise heard the hollow crack of Wil's skull striking the wall, and watched in horror as the Dimensional Hunter grabbed Wil by the leg and began dragging him toward the portal through which it had appeared. Enise didn't have time to draw a weapon. She only knew that if the portal closed with her on this side of it, she would be trapped here forever. That wasn't a risk she was willing to take. She hoisted herself to her feet and lunged at the already shrinking portal...

* * *

They emerged in a room Enise recognized. They were back at Volaris, in the throne room where the final confrontation with Sebastian had taken place. The room where they had left Jay Novachek to die*. The vaulted ceiling of the room carried forth the echoes of the time river which flowed beneath the chamber. A group of elite gargoyles surged forward and grabbed Enise and the unconscious Wil Ohmsford. Enise was vaguely aware of a popping sound as the Dimensional Hunter teleported out of the throne room. The gargoyle gripped her shoulder like a vise. It forced her to her knees, facing the throne

at the head of the room. Wil was propped up in a kneeling position by his captor; a thin line of drool ran from the corner of his mouth. A low chant began in the room, and all the gargoyles bowed before the throne, including the two that had been holding them in place. Enise's attention was suddenly drawn to the throne.

It began as a subtle shimmer over the throne. The shimmer grew to a small roiling cloud of black smoke. The smoke suddenly issued forth with a gout of flame. The cloud of fire grew until the flames formed faces. The sound of a hundred mad voices accompanied the vision. Teeth formed of flame gnashed at the air. Tentacles of fire writhed. Wings formed of brimstone and smoke flapped in the air. And still the presence grew larger and more horrible with each passing moment.

Enise couldn't draw her gaze away from the thing. She felt a mind-rending horror grip her consciousness. She opened her mouth to scream, and realized that she was already moaning in terror. The roiling cloud of evil consumed her will. And then she heard its voices shrieking in unison with her own.

"You will be my pawn to return the wayward one to me. Your abilities will serve me. Your powers will enhance my own."

In a moment, Enise realized that the thing was not addressing her, but Wil! He was bathed in an orange flaming glow. His eyes were rolled back in his head and he made vague choking sounds. In that moment, all the terror in her mind suddenly snapped free, and she was filled with a single-minded clarity.

She focused on Wil. He was the last of her charges. The last member of the TJ crew to which she was sworn. The being in the room was trying to harm Wil. That couldn't be allowed. She screamed at the top of her lungs, a feral cry which surely ripped her throat into bloody tatters. She snatched Wil's unconscious form in a grip born of madness, and carried him toward the railing. The gargoyles in the room never raised their heads to watch her. They never even moved as the Dark One's voice rose in a shocked bellow of rage. With a small leap, she cleared the railing. Rock plummeted past the two Travellers and suddenly they were doused in the raging river. Carried through the dark underground riverbed, bodies smashing against unseen rocks and outcroppings. No air pockets. No reprieve. She felt Wil stiffen and jerk as though he suddenly was shocked back to awareness. Her lungs strained to release the last breath of air. Darkness engulfed her to the point that she barely felt Wil's hand clutch her own. She barely felt the dimensional rift pass over her, as Wil instinctively opened a doorway. And the two of them were sucked out of the river and deposited in a sea of chaos...

To Be Continued...





The Loose Ends

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Next Issue

Wow! 70 pages of content! But oddly enough, the writing theme idea seems to have fallen a little flat. That doesn’t mean we’re not trying again...we’re a stubborn lot.

So Volume 11 will be our **Winter 2001** issue, and will be available in February. The theme for the writing contest will be MYSTIC PLACES. The deadline for DG11 submissions will be January 1, 2001



DEMONGROUND: Reflections of a Darker Future

The Magazine of Modern Conspiracy/Horror

proudly announces

THE DEMONGROUND THEME-WRITING CONTEST

In Issue 11, DEMONGROUND will be bringing you a new quarterly feature. We thought it would be interesting to see how each of the different game systems would address specific themes in the conspiracy/horror genre. For instance, in this issue, we presented several different articles dealing primarily with Zombies.

As with this issue, each quarterly installment will not just contain contest-themed material. Only a specific portion of the magazine will be devoted to presenting the BEST articles on the theme. The rest of the magazine will continue to be devoted to a variety of conspiracy/horror material of any theme.

The themed articles presented in the magazine will be considered the 'finalists' in the contest.

The rest is up to you, the DEMONGROUND reader. Shortly after the release of Issue 11, we will present a ballot on the DEMONGROUND web site. Only registered subscribers of Demonground will be allowed to vote for contest winners, and each registered subscriber will be able to cast one vote. At the end of the tabulation period, the winner will be declared, and will receive a PRIZE!

Keep a close watch on the DEMONGROUND web site for more details and specifics of this contest.

We know you're all anxious to get started, so here is our second theme topic:

DEMONGROUND Issue 11 Theme

MYSTIC PLACES

If it involves a strange place, it's fair game for Issue 11

Please indicate at the start of each contest entry that it is intended for the Theme Contest. Remember, it may not be possible for all contest entries to appear in the magazine. Finalists will be chosen by DG staff members. Final choice of the winner will be carried out by popular vote from among registered Demonground subscribers ONLY. See the DEMONGROUND Web Page for further details and full presentation of the terms and conditions of the contest, as well as specifications of the Prize.



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