



MODERN

THE PETERSEN

COUNTERSTRIKE



By Stan!

A Short Urban Arcana Adventure for Four 9th-Level Characters

The world is an unsafe place. We all know it. With the rise of modern terrorist tactics, it seems like no place is safe—anything can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time. We all feel more secure and comfortable in our own homes than elsewhere, but in reality, home offers little more protection than the office, the mall, or any other public place. In fact, for those involved in high-security work, home is sometimes the weakest link in the chain of personal protection.

In *The Petersen Counterstrike*, a terrorist organization strikes at Department-7 by targeting the home of one of its employees.

LEVELS

You, the Game Master (GM), need a copy of the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game* to run this adventure. To get started, print out the adventure (including the map) and read it through. Familiarize yourself with the various GM characters and their individual motives and abilities. Then make sure you are familiar with the rules for combat, movement, and cover from Chapter 5 of the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game*.

The Petersen Counterstrike is a short scenario for four 9th-level heroes. With slight modifications, you can make it suitable for heroes at other levels (or groups as large or small as you're comfortable adjudicating). See the Scaling the Adventure sidebar for guidelines on adapting it for other groups.

The text that appears in shaded boxes should be read aloud or paraphrased for the players. Opponents' statistics are provided in abbreviated form.

This adventure can be set in any large city. A map showing the major encounter areas is provided. With a little work, the locations presented in the adventure could be adapted for any locale.

Scaling the Adventure

The situations described in this adventure are suitable for heroes of any level. All you need do to make it suitable for your game is modify the levels of the hostage takers so that the Encounter Levels are appropriate for your heroes. Alternatively, you can gain the same effect by increasing or decreasing the number of antagonists.

Just the Beginning

The Petersen Counterstrike can be used as a stand-alone adventure. You can place it in your campaign anywhere you see fit—particularly if you used the information in the Scaling the Adventure sidebar to modify the opponents for your campaign. The scenario requires neither previous knowledge on the part of the heroes, nor any understanding of a larger plot on your part.

However, *The Petersen Counterstrike* is also the first in a series of five adventures that, when strung together, constitute a more complex and detailed tale of deception, murder, and lust for power that is entitled *Heartless*.

While *The Petersen Counterstrike* is completely mundane, featuring no magical components, the series will become more fantastic as it continues. If your campaign precludes the existence of monsters, spellcasting, and other occult elements, you can use this opening chapter with little or no modification, but you may have to make adjustments to later chapters of *Heartless*. Indeed, you may wish to wait until all five chapters have been released before deciding whether to use the storyline as it is presented or adapt it into something that better suits your campaign.

BACKGROUND

No matter how you choose to depict Department-7 in your campaign, it is an organization with vast resources. Among its holdings are many items that could be described as works of art, collector pieces, and even museum-quality artifacts. To keep track of these items and insure their proper care, Department-7 employs an entire department of archivists and antiquarians. The head of this department is Professor Grant Petersen.

Professor Petersen

Grant Petersen is an expert in the identification, reclamation, and preservation of relics and curios. He has earned nearly a dozen advanced degrees from the most prestigious universities in the Western Hemisphere, and he is considered among the most knowledgeable people on the planet in areas ranging from antiquarian books to xenobiological models. At present, he is the curator of Department-7's property archives.

Although Professor Petersen has an office, extensive storage facilities, and a state-of-the-art laboratory at one of Department-7's high-security facilities, his work generally does not require such precautions. In fact, he performs the lion's share of his research via the Internet from an office in his penthouse home.

In recognition of his many contributions, Department-7 has allowed the professor to decorate his home and office with various items from the archives. He is quite circumspect in the use of this privilege, taking care to select pieces that, while interesting and aesthetically pleasing, have no particular monetary, occult, or historical value.

Due to an error in archiving, however, two of his most recent acquisitions do have considerable value—albeit to a rather limited audience. The professor's home office currently contains a matched pair of 4th-century occult totems that were mislabeled as a set of 19th-century replicas. The only person who knows about the error is the professor's wife, Audrey—and she has her own reasons for not revealing the truth.

Audrey Petersen

Audrey Petersen is more than what she seems. On the surface, she is a well-educated, urbane woman—the perfect life mate for the professor. She and Grant did their undergraduate and masters studies together, then got married the summer before they planned to begin work on their Ph.D. degrees. Throughout their college days, Audrey had always been Grant's intellectual equal and academic peer. That's why it came as such a surprise to everyone when Audrey withdrew from the Ph.D. program shortly after the wedding.

She told friends and colleagues that supporting her husband was more important to her than “pushing on to get one more sheepskin.” Some people considered her action a loving gesture; others saw it as horribly old-fashioned. Everyone, however, was convinced that it was a choice Audrey had made happily. To this day, no one—not even Grant Petersen—knows how wrong that supposition is.

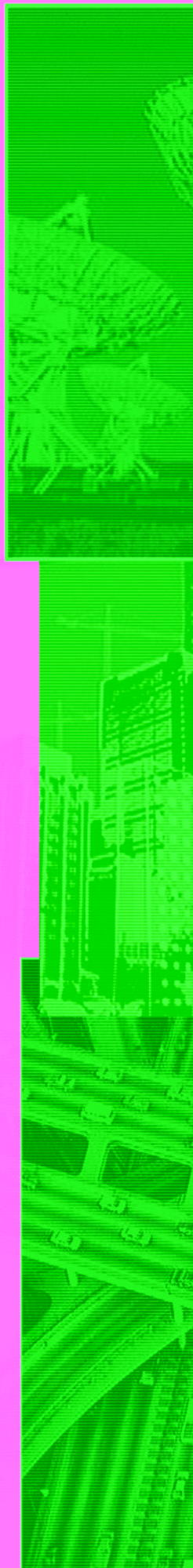
In fact, Audrey had always seen Grant as competition—someone to be beaten in the cutthroat world of academia. But beating him was difficult, since he was her equal in every way—indeed, he was better at the political maneuvering that is so important in academic circles than she was. Clearly, he would always come out on top, and that thought gnawed at Audrey. In the end, she decided she would rather give up her work altogether than forever play second-fiddle to her rival.

The ironic aspect of the situation is that over the years, Audrey has become better at playing politics than Grant ever was. She has been a supporter of every academic department he has ever belonged to, and she has been serving as his primary research assistant for many years, though she has yet to receive any credit for her work. This lack of recognition has preyed on her mind, gradually twisting her into a bitter, spiteful woman. Though she has never showed any outward sign of dissatisfaction, she has been longing to find a way to upstage Grant and take her rightful place in the spotlight.

None of Audrey's friends or relatives has ever guessed the extent of the jealousy that she has been hiding all these years. No one has ever known the secret dreams she harbored—no one, that is, except Nicholas St. Andrew.

Nicholas St. Andrew

Nicholas St. Andrew considers himself one of the world's leading experts on the occult and pagan folklore. Most recognized authorities, however, consider him a charismatic



confidence artist and an accomplished thief. A few also know that he is the leader of a cult known as the Children of Chaos.

For years, Nicholas has passed himself off as a legitimate scholar engaged in research on various ancient mysteries. Most of his rich, gullible patrons believe that he is working on recovering Noah's ark, locating Solomon's mines, or chasing some other archeological pipe dream. In truth, he has been using their generous donations to bankroll the theft of various occult artifacts. Nicholas now possesses an extensive collection of sacrificial daggers, several stone and ivory altars, and a library full of scrolls and tomes.

In the course of his research, he stumbled onto what he believes is a method of gaining godlike powers. Unfortunately, two of the items necessary to perform this ritual are in the private archive of Department-7.

The Plot

Nicholas met Audrey Petersen while he was investigating her husband's work. He immediately recognized her as a kindred spirit—a fellow expert in the arts of subterfuge and subtle manipulation.

Nicholas first approached Audrey as a fellow scholar, asking her for help with one of his projects. Over a period of months, he played to her ego, praising her talents while slowly acquainting her with his true ambitions. Eventually, he revealed that only the acquisition of a particular pair of artifacts currently in Department-7's custody stood between the two of them and incredible power. As a woman of science, Audrey didn't really believe that anyone could receive mystic powers from the rituals that Nicholas described. But she did realize that losing these items would make her husband look foolish in the eyes of his employer and the world—particularly if the loss could be made painfully public.

Using Audrey's desire to discredit her husband, Nicholas drew her inexorably into his scheme. Eventually, she was completely committed to his plan, even though she remained utterly unconvinced of the mystic power that Nicholas knew they would eventually wield.

It was Audrey who completed Phase One of the plan. She purposely mislabeled the two artifacts, knowing that her husband would never think to question her judgment, or even look closely at the totems. She then convinced Grant that the two objects would be marvelous additions to their home collection.

Nicholas and Audrey didn't initially agree about how Phase Two of the plan would proceed. Nicholas wanted Audrey to simply remove the items from her home and claim they had been stolen when the loss was noticed. But Audrey knew that too much could go wrong with such a plan when Department-7 was involved. Besides, she wanted a method that would discredit Grant as well as acquire the desired items. So the two developed a complex scheme involving a smokescreen of hostages and ransom demands.

As the adventure opens, Phase Two of the plan is about to commence. A group of commandos loyal to the Children of Chaos will break into the Petersen home, take hostages (including Audrey and Grant), and demand money and an entirely different artifact (a German occult book) as ransom from Department-7. Nicholas will alert the media to the situation to ensure that the incident receives maximum media

coverage—thus ensuring that Professor Petersen's reputation is impugned.

In the confusion, Audrey will slip the 4th-century totems into her pockets. She and Nicholas presume that whatever operatives Department-7 sends to handle the situation can defeat the commandos and “rescue” Audrey, enabling her to bring the totems out and hand them over to Nicholas when the time is right. The commandos know that their number-one objective is to ensure that whoever opposes them manages to rescue Audrey alive. Their secondary goal is to wreck the place enough so that it will be difficult to tell whether anything is missing.

If all goes according to plan, it should be days or even weeks before anyone notices that the totems are gone. At that point, thanks to Audrey's judicious mislabeling, no one will be particularly anxious to retrieve two worthless reproductions. Department-7 already knows about Nicholas's involvement with the Children of Chaos, and that he has a reputation as a deranged villain as well as an egomaniac. If, as he hopes, Department-7's investigators focus their inquiries on him, they are much less likely to look for deeper motivations or unknown accomplices. And even should the Department-7 operatives manage to figure out that Audrey was working with the hostage-takers, they will still think that the book was the goal. With so many red herrings to confuse the issue, Nicholas hopes that Department-7 will never be able to figure out what the Children of Chaos are really up to—until ultimate power is his.

SYNOPSIS

The adventure begins when a videocassette arrives at the local Department-7 offices. The tape contains a message from one of the commandos claiming that the Children of Chaos have broken into the home of Professor Grant Petersen during a rather large dinner party and taken everyone hostage. The commando claims that he and his associates will kill one person every 2 hours if Department-7 does not give them \$10 million, a particular occult artifact, and a means of escape.

It's clear from the tape that the intruders are organized, well equipped, and highly trained. They patrol the penthouse regularly but keep themselves and the hostages well away from the exterior walls.

Before plans can be made for any rescue attempt, however, television and radio broadcasts are interrupted with news of the situation. St. Andrew has alerted the media in an effort to ensure that Professor Petersen's dilemma is made as public as possible.

Department-7 immediately seizes control of the situation, sending in its own forces (the heroes) to rescue the hostages and ensure the safety of the artifacts in the house. Since Department-7 does not want mundane law enforcement agents to know its business, officials within the organization pull strings to have the heroes put in charge of the situation. When play begins, the heroes have 90 minutes before the scheduled death of the first hostage—Grant Petersen himself.

Character Hooks

As GM, you know best how to involve your players and their characters in an adventure. This scenario is constructed

specifically for heroes employed by Department-7. Since there are no magical or other fantastic elements, it should fit well with whatever incarnation Department-7 takes in your campaign.

If the heroes are not employees of Department-7, a similar organization, or an appropriate peacekeeping agency, you can use the following adventure hooks to spur your imagination, modifying them as necessary to make them appropriate for the characters' interests.

- The heroes are well acquainted with Professor Petersen, having met him in previous adventures. When they hear the news about the hostage situation, they can attempt to become personally involved in any convenient manner.
- A friend or relative of one of the heroes was in attendance at the Petersen's dinner and is now a hostage.
- In Grant Petersen's collection is an item that the heroes desperately need for some other mission or adventure. Perhaps they were planning to break in and steal it themselves, but Nicholas St. Andrew and his thugs struck first.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

The Petersen Counterstrike is a freeform adventure that takes place in a single site—the Petersens' penthouse. The site is described in encounter A below, but the locations are not keyed to the map. After the heroes' initial briefing, you can run the encounters in any order you wish, depending upon the actions of the heroes.

The adventure begins when the heroes are called into a briefing room at Department-7 early one evening. At the head of the room, a senior officer of the department stands stiffly next to a cart bearing a large television and a VCR. As soon as all the heroes are in the room and the door is closed, he tells them that a very serious situation has just come to his attention. Using a remote control, he turns off the lights and starts a tape playing in the VCR.

Read aloud or paraphrase the following.

The image on the screen shows the head and shoulders of a heavysset young man in green fatigues, a black ski mask, and gloves. It is unclear where the video was shot, but it was clearly done indoors under fluorescent lighting.

"Gentleman and ladies," the man begins. "At approximately 7:00 this evening, armed associates of mine forcibly entered the residence of Professor Grant Petersen, taking him, his wife, and a house full of dinner guests hostage.

"If you have not met all of our demands by 9:00, my associates will shoot Professor Petersen. At the stroke of every hour thereafter that our demands go unmet, they will shoot another hostage. I hope I make myself clear.

"Our demands are that you deliver the following to the Petersen residence. First, a black nylon backpack containing \$10 million in unmarked, nonsequential one-hundred-dollar bills. Second, an identical black nylon backpack containing the original manuscript of *Die Handgeheimnisse*. Please do not think to substitute a forgery or reproduction. My associates and I know how

to identify the genuine article. Third, and finally, a fully fueled Bell model 212 helicopter. Instruct the pilot to land on the roof, leave the engine idling, disembark, and take the stairs down to the ground floor. We will not be needing his services for departure.

"I urge you to treat this matter with the utmost gravity. Our terms are quite non-negotiable, and my associates understand their assignment perfectly.

"Good evening."

The screen flickers momentarily, then the image cuts to two men in a large, marble-floored room that looks like an opulent foyer. One of them, a middle-aged gentleman dressed in a jacket and tie, is being held in a headlock by another man dressed like the one who delivered the demands.

"Help," the grappled man says. His voice is hoarse and strained, as though he's having trouble breathing through the other's grip. "They're serious. They haven't. . ."

The tape ends abruptly.

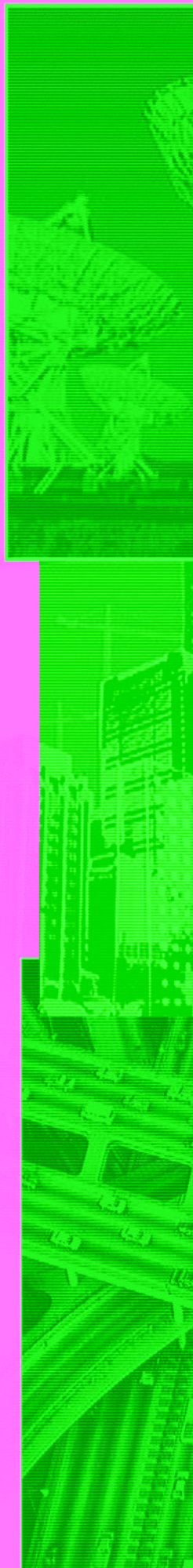
Each hero may attempt a Spot check (DC 10) after the video ends. Success means the hero noticed that the two portions of the tape had clearly been shot in different locations.

Each hero may also attempt a Knowledge (arcane lore) check (DC 20) to realize that *Die Handgeheimnisse* is an infamous 14th-century book on conjuration and diablerie. (Anyone who is fluent in German knows that the title means "Secrets of the Hand.") By all accounts, its only value is as a curiosity—the information it contains has no basis in reality. (In fact, the book is worthless. The request for it is merely Nicholas's way of ensuring that Department-7 does not deduce his real reason for this assault.)

The senior officer can confirm that the man being grappled is actually Professor Petersen. In fact, he is confident that that portion of the video was shot in the professor's foyer. If the heroes do not know who Grant Petersen is, the officer explains that the professor is the curator of Department-7's archives and a specialist in antiquities tied to purported occult practices.

The senior officer also tells the heroes that Department-7 has identified the man making the threats as Peter Jayson, a member of an occult group known as the Children of Chaos. Its leader is Nicholas St. Andrew, a known con artist with a talent for skirting the law. St. Andrew has been charged with more than a dozen counts of fraud, petty theft, and forgery, but he has been convicted in only about half the cases. In the past, he has taken money and property primarily from wealthy individuals who have shown an inclination to work around the borders of the law—the sort who use questionable tax practices, run sweatshops, and have other reasons for not maintaining strong ties to law enforcement agencies. This time, however, it seems that St. Andrew and his cult have purposely targeted a member of Department-7.

The time is approximately 7:30, which gives the heroes 90 minutes until the hostage takers carry out their threat to kill Grant Petersen. The senior official says that Department-7 will not acquiesce to the cult's demands, and that he will personally see to it that the heroes are given all possible support. It is up to you as GM to determine exactly what support is



available and how long it will take to arrange. If reminded that the book demanded is worthless, the official relents on that point but remains adamant that the \$10 million and the helicopter are not to be used as negotiating tools.

We Interrupt This Crisis . . .

Shortly after the heroes begin to assess the situation and make plans, read aloud or paraphrase the following.

One of the office support staff bursts into the meeting room. "Put on the TV," he says breathlessly.

The senior official presses a button on his remote control. "What channel?" he asks.

"It doesn't matter," replies the staffer. "It's everywhere."

When the picture comes on, the image is that of the commando from the video just played in this room. Commentary from a somber newscaster follows the end of the message.

"This tape was delivered to our studios mere moments ago. Allegedly, it is a duplicate of one sent to a local investigative agency. Professor Grant Petersen resides in the penthouse of the Howard Arms apartment building. We take you now to the News 5 helicopter, which is circling the structure. Local police are on the scene assessing the situation."

Every local channel is carrying a similar report. Since Audrey wanted the incident made as public as possible, Nicholas St. Andrew has alerted all the media to the situation. Every news agency in the city is now watching the unfolding crisis, and the heroes' every move will be scrutinized. Whether they succeed or fail, their exploits will be carried live on every station in the city.

Department-7's press secretary can keep the reporters away from the heroes while they try to resolve the situation, and its officials can get them authority to take charge of the situation in lieu of the police. However, they cannot clear the area completely. Throughout the rest of the adventure, helicopters will circle the sky around the penthouse, and reporters will gather in the street surrounding the building. Some may even sit in apartments or rooftops facing the Howard Arms. Police will try to keep the area clear of innocents and gawkers, but the officers at the site are not authorized to provide any other aid.

A. INVESTIGATION

If the heroes want information about the opponents or the site before departing, they can obtain the following through Department-7.

Nicholas and the Cult

The information revealed in the briefing is all that is known about the Children of Chaos. A picture of Nicholas St. Andrew is available through the Department-7 computers. He is a thin man who appears to be in his mid- to late-forties, with thinning black hair and a beard trimmed so as to appear squared off at the chin. He has large ears, squinty eyes, and a crooked, smirking grin.

The Howard Arms

Through Department-7 and the local police, the characters can get the blueprints for the penthouse, photos of the interior, and live reports on activities there.

The Petersen Penthouse

Grant Petersen's penthouse occupies the entire top floor of the Howard Arms apartment building. From the outside, the only visible difference between this floor and the others is that the penthouse has a small balcony running along parts of the south and east walls, while the lower floors have only fire escapes.

By the time observers tried to look at the apartment, the captors had already pulled the blinds and curtains on every window. No one has been seen coming out onto the balcony.

If the heroes ask for (and you wish to allow) thermal imaging equipment, Department-7 can provide it. Using such a device, the heroes can get images through the walls of the apartment building. Unfortunately, the building is so large that they can get reliable data only on areas that are within 20 feet of an exterior wall, and there is no sign of the hostages in any such location. Scans can confirm only that there are at least three people in the penthouse, and all of them appear to be attired and equipped like the men in the video. Once every 15 minutes, one of these figures walks from room to room in the penthouse carrying a longarm of some kind (actually an AK-47).

Elevator and Stairs

Although the Howard Arms has three elevators, only the center one goes up to the penthouse. It opens onto a building-wide hallway directly across from the main entrance to the Petersen residence—a large set of oak double doors, each equipped with a peephole and an ornate, wrought-iron knocker.

At either end of the hallway, a staircase leads down to the ground floor. Each stairwell also features a locked door that safeguards stairs leading up to the roof.

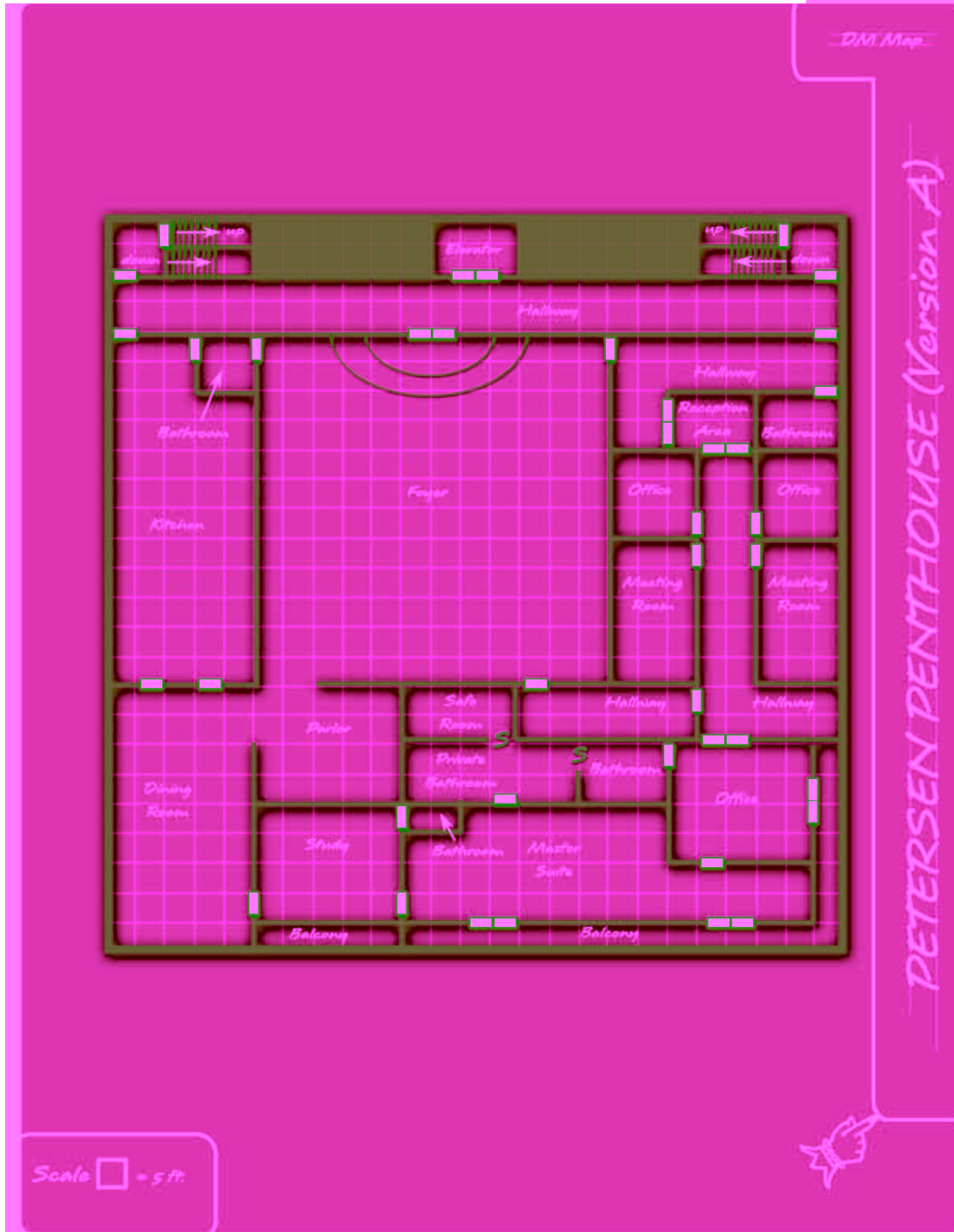
Across from each stairwell is another locked oak door. The eastern one bears a placard reading "Petersen Consulting." This door has no peephole, but there is a doorbell to its right. Beyond this door lies Grant Petersen's home office. The western door has a peephole and doorbell, but no markings. (Each of the two doorbells rings a different set of chimes so that those inside know to which door a visitor has come.)

Oak Door: Hardness 5, 20 hp, Break DC 23.

Petersen Consulting

The Petersen Consulting section of the penthouse is a comfortable space in which the professor can do low-security research and make presentations to visiting officials. It consists of a reception area, two small offices (one belonging to Audrey Petersen and one for use by visitors or temporary help), two meeting rooms—one with no windows and one with a view of the skyline—and Grant's large office, which provides access to the balcony.

All of these rooms are decorated with art, relics, and mementos from Department-7's archives. When describing them to the players, feel free to add any details that fit your interpretation of Department-7.



- Doors:** Hardness 5, 10 hp, Break DC 13.
- Walls:** Hardness 2, 10 hp, Break DC 20.
- Windows:** Hardness 1, 3 hp, Break DC 12.

Residence

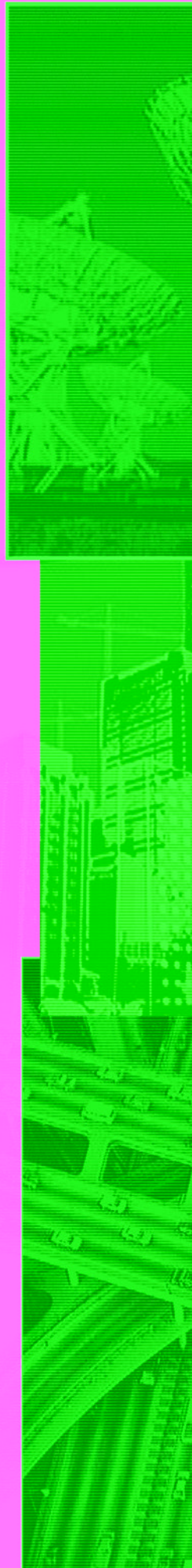
Grant and Audrey spared no expense in decorating their home, so the living space in the penthouse is quite opulent. Most of the art and decorations belong to the Petersens, but some of the more avant-garde pieces are actually items borrowed from the Department-7 archives.

The marble-floored foyer is occasionally used to host cocktail parties, and the kitchen rivals those of most

three-star restaurants. A dining room with a banquet table that seats thirty gives mute testimony to the Petersens' love of dinner parties. A parlor furnished with plush chairs and a handsome sideboard allows for entertaining smaller groups of visitors. Rare and unusual books fill the bookcases lining the study, and the master suite is a vision of opulent comfort. A small balcony runs along the outer wall past the study, the master suite, and Grant's office.

- Doors:** Hardness 5, 10 hp, Break DC 13.
- Walls*:** Hardness 2, 10 hp, Break DC 20.
- Windows:** Hardness 1, 3 hp, Break DC 12.

*Except the walls surrounding the safe room; see below.



Safe Room

The residence also has a safe room—a space designed to provide protection from any prowlers that might invade the premises. (Nicholas's thugs struck too quickly for this feature to do any good.)

The first set of blueprints the heroes receive does not show the safe room. Any hero who examines them, however, may attempt a Spot check (DC 20) to notice that they are marked as "Version B." A hero with 5 or more ranks in Craft (structural) gets a +5 insight bonus on this check.

Department-7 can supply the heroes with "Version A" if they request it. This set of blueprints is identical to Version B except that it also shows the details of the safe room. This chamber is completely self-contained, with running water and its own dedicated phone line. If the heroes or police try calling the phone in the safe room, there is no answer.

Door: Hardness 10, 120 hp, Break DC 35.

Walls: Hardness 10, 120 hp, Break DC 35.

B. NEGOTIATION

Any attempts the heroes make to negotiate with the intruders do them no good. Although the lead commando answers any phone except the one in the safe room, he refuses to negotiate in any way. The only other person he allows to speak on the phone is Audrey Petersen, who does her best to play the part of a frightened hostage.

Any hero who makes a Sense Motive check while talking to the lead commando can learn the following information, depending on the check result.

SENSE MOTIVE CHECK

| CHECK RESULT | INFORMATION GAINED |
|--------------|--|
| 10 | He is probably taking orders and does not feel empowered to negotiate terms. |
| 15 | He considers this a suicide mission and does not think he will survive. |
| 20 | He has such fanatical devotion to whoever issued his orders that he probably volunteered for this suicide mission. |

Any hero who makes a Sense Motive check while talking to Audrey Petersen can learn the following information, depending on the check result.

SENSE MOTIVE

| CHECK RESULT | INFORMATION GAINED |
|--------------|--|
| 15 | She is terrified. |
| 20 | She is a brave woman. Despite her panic, she is lucid and relatively calm. |
| 25 | She isn't as scared as she's pretending to be. |
| 35 | She isn't scared at all. She knows something that makes her feel safe. |

C. COUNTERSTRIKE

It should become clear to the heroes in short order that they must either make a counterstrike against the hostage takers or allow one captive to be shot each hour.

Six commandos currently have control of the penthouse. One stays in the foyer guarding Audrey (who is tied to a chair), one is in the safe room disguised as one of the hostages, and the other four are in the master suite's bathroom waiting to ambush the heroes.

The heroes and commandos can encounter one another in a number of ways, but the four most likely situations and locations are described below. You are free to alter the commandos' tactics if a different situation arises, as long as they remain focused on their primary goal of getting Audrey Petersen out alive.

Cl. Sentry (CL 10)

Once every 15 minutes, one of the soldiers in the bathroom walks from room to room in the penthouse, making sure that no one has managed to sneak in. This process takes 5 minutes.

GM Character: The only GM character directly involved in this encounter is one of the commandos. His gun does not have a suppressor, so if the heroes get into a firefight with him, everyone in the penthouse will know about it. The sentry's comrades will not come to his aid, but it will be nearly impossible to take them by surprise.

Commando (Strong Hero 5/Soldier 5): CR 10; Medium-size human; HD 5d8+10 plus 5d10+10; hp 69; Mas 14; Init +2; Spd 25 ft.; Defense 24, touch 18, flat-footed 22; BAB +8; Gap +11; Atk +11 melee (1d4+5/19–20, unarmed attack) or +11 ranged (2d8+2/19–20, AKM/AK-47) or +10 ranged (2d6, Beretta 92F); Full Atk +11/+6 melee (1d4+5/19–20, unarmed attack) or +11/+6 ranged (2d8+2/19–20, AKM/AK-47) or +10/+5 ranged (2d6, Beretta 92F); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL Children of Chaos; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +2; AP 11; Rep +2; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 8.

Occupation: Military (class skills: Hide, Move Silently).

Skills: Climb +8, Hide +10, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (tactics) +14, Listen +7, Move Silently +10, Spot +7.

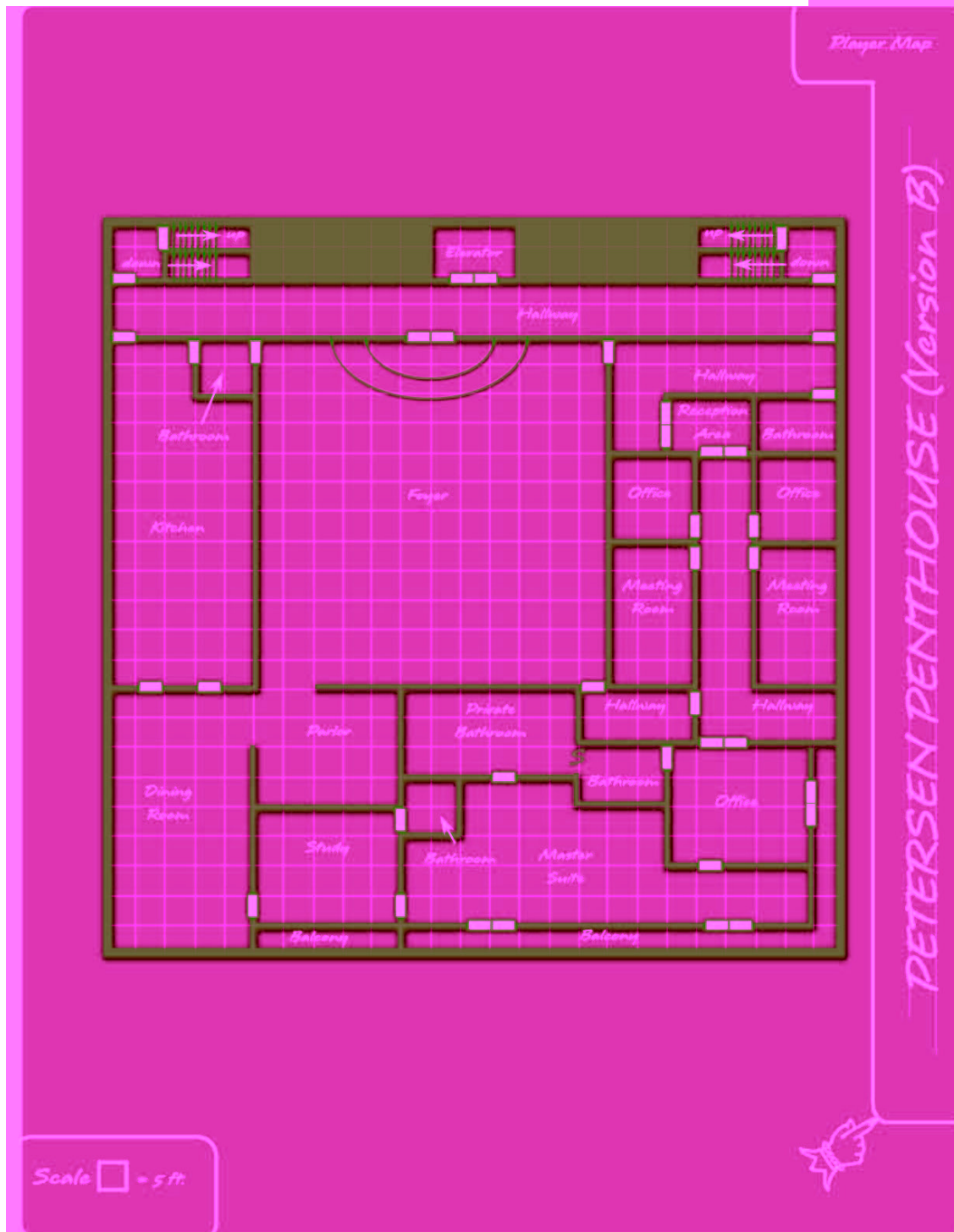
Feats: Armor Proficiency (light), Armor Proficiency (medium), Combat Martial Arts, Dead Aim, Far Shot, Improved Combat Martial Arts, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

Talents: Extreme Effort, Improved Critical (AKM/AK-47), Improved Melee Smash, Melee Smash, Tactical Aid, Weapon Focus (AKM/AK-47), Weapon Specialization (AKM/AK-47).

Equipment: AKM/AK-47, Beretta 92F, tactical vest.

Tactics: If the heroes enter the penthouse at the wrong time, or take too long bringing a plan to fruition, this sentry might interrupt them. On the other hand, thermal imaging devices can detect the sentry throughout most of his route, so heroes equipped with such devices could arrange to take him unawares when he passes near one of the doors.

If the commando on sentry duty hears a firefight begin in any other part of the penthouse, he rushes back to the private bathroom and either joins his partners there or takes a flanking position and engages any heroes who are fighting them. He does not go to the aid of the commando in the foyer because doing so might result in crossfire occurring in the room where Audrey Petersen is tied to a chair.



C2. Foyer (EL 10)

One commando waits in the foyer guarding Audrey Petersen, who is tied to a chair and gagged. If he sees or hears anyone other than his partners moving about on this floor, he stands directly behind Audrey (thus gaining up to one-half cover, depending on where his opponents are) and places the muzzle of his revolver against her temple. Then he shouts, “Come out and put down your weapons or I’ll blow her brains out!”

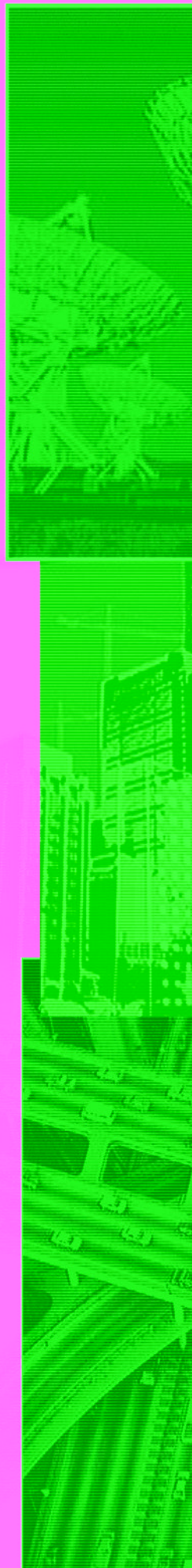
This tactic, of course, is a complete bluff. The commando’s job is to ensure that the heroes rescue Audrey, and he knows that he will have to be shot at least once to make that rescue convincing. In fact, he fully intends to die in the course

of this encounter, and he is proud to do so to advance the agenda of the Children of Chaos. Of course, he also hopes to take a few of the heroes out with him.

GM Characters: This situation involves one commando and one hostage (Audrey Petersen).

Audrey Petersen: If you need statistics for Audrey, use the High-Level Dilettante (Fast Ordinary 5/Charismatic Ordinary 5) from Chapter 8: Friends and Foes in the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game*.

Commando (Strong Hero 5/Soldier 5): CR 10; Medium-size human; HD 5d8+10 plus 5d10+10; hp 69; Mas 14; Init +2; Spd 25 ft.; Defense 24, touch 18, flat-footed 22; BAB +8;



Grp +11; Atk +11 melee (1d4+5/19–20, unarmed attack) or +11 ranged (2d8+2/19–20, AKM/AK-47) or +10 ranged (2d6, Beretta 92F); Full Atk +11/+6 melee (1d4+5/19–20, unarmed attack) or +11/+6 ranged (2d8+2/19–20, AKM/AK-47) or +10/+5 ranged (2d6, Beretta 92F); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL Children of Chaos; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +2; AP 11; Rep +2; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 8.

Occupation: Military (class skills: Hide, Move Silently).

Skills: Climb +8, Hide +10, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (tactics) +14, Listen +7, Move Silently +10, Spot +7.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (light), Armor Proficiency (medium), Combat Martial Arts, Dead Aim, Far Shot, Improved Combat Martial Arts, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

Talents: Extreme Effort, Improved Critical (AKM/AK-47), Improved Melee Smash, Melee Smash, Tactical Aid, Weapon Focus (AKM/AK-47), Weapon Specialization (AKM/AK-47).

Equipment: AKM/AK-47, Beretta 92F, tactical vest.

Tactics: As soon as the commando sees anyone he can identify as an opponent, he yells out information loudly enough that his partners near the safe room can hear. He concentrates on imparting such details as the number of heroes, their apparent armament, where they are, and what their tactics seem to be.

The hidden commandos do not come to their partner's aid because the last thing they want is a big firefight in the room where Audrey is tied helplessly to a chair. But they listen intently and shout back remarks such as, "We're coming, Charlie. Just hold on!"

Development: If the heroes beat the commando who is "guarding" Audrey, they can free her. She thanks them profusely and tells them what an awful ordeal she has been through. She freely answers questions about the number of commandos and the number and names of the hostages. For information beyond that, however, she claims that she can only guess. If asked about the location of the other hostages, she guesses that they must be in the safe room.

While questioning Audrey, any hero who attempts a Sense Motive check regarding her state of mind gets results as described in encounter B.

After a while, Audrey says she is feeling lightheaded and asks whether it is safe for her to leave. The heroes may want to escort her to one of the stairwells and turn her over to the team of paramedics that Department-7 has stationed a few floors below.

C3. Private Bathroom (EL 12)

The safe room is accessible through a secret door in the master suite's bathroom. If the heroes have already encountered a commando on patrol, there are three more in the bathroom; if not, there are four here.

These commandos have been assigned to ambush the heroes as soon as they come into range. Their position gives them up to nine-tenths cover, depending on how they take advantage of it.

GM Characters: There are three or four commandos in this room.

Commandos (3 or 4) (Strong Hero 5/Soldier 5): CR 10; Medium-size human; HD 5d8+10 plus 5d10+10; hp 69; Mas 14;

Init +2; Spd 25 ft.; Defense 24, touch 18, flat-footed 22; BAB +8; Grp +11; Atk +11 melee (1d4+5/19–20, unarmed attack) or +11 ranged (2d8+2/19–20, AKM/AK-47) or +10 ranged (2d6, Beretta 92F); Full Atk +11/+6 melee (1d4+5/19–20, unarmed attack) or +11/+6 ranged (2d8+2/19–20, AKM/AK-47) or +10/+5 ranged (2d6, Beretta 92F); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL Children of Chaos; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +2; AP 11; Rep +2; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 8.

Occupation: Military (class skills: Hide, Move Silently).

Skills: Climb +8, Hide +10, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (tactics) +14, Listen +7, Move Silently +10, Spot +7.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (light), Armor Proficiency (medium), Combat Martial Arts, Dead Aim, Far Shot, Improved Combat Martial Arts, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

Talents: Extreme Effort, Improved Critical (AKM/AK-47), Improved Melee Smash, Melee Smash, Tactical Aid, Weapon Focus (AKM/AK-47), Weapon Specialization (AKM/AK-47).

Equipment: AKM/AK-47, Beretta 92F, tactical vest.

Tactics: Chances are that the heroes have already rescued Audrey by the time they reach this area. If this is the case, the commandos will do their level best to kill the heroes, employing any tactics that seem appropriate. If they can still hear their partner in the foyer, though, they know that the primary mission has not yet been accomplished. In that case, they spend a lot of time and ammunition keeping the heroes at bay, hoping to drive them back to the foyer and force them to deal with that situation first.

If these commandos ever get close to running out of ammunition, they use the last of their ordinance to make a mad dash for the balcony, then leap off, intending to use their short-fall parachutes to escape. These commandos are more than committed enough to die in the name of the Children of Chaos but, unlike their partner in the foyer, they are not resigned to that fate.

C4. Safe Room (EL 10)

When the heroes get to the safe room, read aloud or paraphrase the following.

The door to the safe room was obviously built to blend into the wall and look like an ordinary part of the decor. However, the intruders' efforts to get the door open have destroyed this illusion completely.

Yellow spray paint now marks the doorframe, and a section of the particleboard has been pulled away to reveal an electronic lock. Wires have been disconnected from the lock and patched into a shunt of the sort that skilled burglars might use to force such a door open.

Any hero with the appropriate skill may attempt a DC 10 Knowledge (technology) or Craft (electronic) check. Success reveals that opening this door should have been a relatively easy task. (Although the heroes wouldn't know this specifically, opening this lock requires a DC 15 Disable Device check, but the shunt provides a +5 equipment bonus.) In point of fact, the commandos seem to have bungled the job so badly that the door can no longer be opened from the inside at all. The heroes must disable the mechanism from the outside.

This realization does not automatically provide the heroes with any insights, but it does not require a particularly great leap of logic to conclude that the commandos were not really trying to get into the safe room. The question is why.

When the heroes manage to open the door to the safe room, read aloud or paraphrase the following.

With a loud hiss, the lock disengages and the door pops open. From inside the room, ten pairs of eyes gape in anticipated horror at the open door. Even upon realizing that they have been rescued, the hostages still seem uncertain and nervous.

As the hostages leave the safe room, the heroes can attempt several checks.

First, anyone who succeeds at a DC 15 Sense Motive check notices that the hostages do not seem relieved at their rescue. In fact, they appear to be certain that their lives are in immediate danger. If asked about their attitude, they deny any such assertion and simply ask to be taken out of the building.

Next, any hero who succeeds on a DC 20 Spot check notices that one of the male hostages is acting differently than the rest. While everyone else is milling around in a state of confusion, he remains calm and composed and stays very carefully in the middle of the group. This individual is actually a commando disguised as a hostage. While locked in the safe room, he warned the hostages that he would instantly kill anyone who revealed his secret to their rescuers. To emphasize his point, he showed them the Beretta 92F that he has hidden on his person.

Anyone who succeeded at the Spot check may now attempt two more checks. A successful Sense Motive check (opposed by the commando's Bluff check result) reveals that the man does not seem traumatized at all. In fact, he is trying to maneuver the whole group closer to the exit. Another successful Spot check (opposed by the commando's Sleight of Hand check result) reveals that he is carrying a gun.

GM Characters: This room contains nine hostages and one commando disguised as a hostage.

Commando (Strong Hero 5/Soldier 5): CR 10; Medium-size human; HD 5d8+10 plus 5d10+10; hp 69; Mas 14; Init +2; Spd 25 ft.; Defense 21, touch 18, flat-footed 19; BAB +8; Grap +11; Atk +11 melee (1d4+5/19–20, unarmed attack) or +10 ranged (2d6, Beretta 92F); Full Atk +11/+6 melee (1d4+5/19–20, unarmed attack) or +10/+5 ranged (2d6, Beretta 92F); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL Children of Chaos; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +2; AP 11; Rep +2; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 8.

Occupation: Military (class skills: Hide, Move Silently).

Skills: Climb +11, Hide +13, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (tactics) +14, Listen +7, Move Silently +13, Spot +7.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (light), Armor Proficiency (medium), Combat Martial Arts, Dead Aim, Far Shot, Improved Combat Martial Arts, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

Talents: Extreme Effort, Improved Critical (AKM/AK-47), Improved Melee Smash, Melee Smash, Tactical Aid, Weapon Focus (AKM/AK-47), Weapon Specialization (AKM/AK-47).

Equipment: Beretta 92F, undercover vest.

Hostages (9): If you need statistics for the hostages, use the Low-Level Dilettante (Fast Ordinary 1/Charismatic Ordinary 1) from Chapter 8: Friends and Foes in the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game*.

Tactics: If their suspicions are aroused, the heroes must decide whether to confront the commando here or try to maneuver him into a more contained (and less volatile) position. If the commando thinks his identity has been compromised, he shoots one of the hostages and grabs another as a human shield, then tries to make his escape. Otherwise, if the group makes it to the ground floor, the man immediately bolts, attempting to hide in the crowd of emergency service personnel, reporters, and onlookers.

D. RESOLUTION

If all goes well, the heroes can free all the hostages and take some or all of the commandos into custody. If the rescue went sour and hostages were injured or killed, the heroes have much to answer for at Department-7.

Interrogation

Upon interrogation, the commandos say that they are soldiers for the Children of Chaos, that a new era is coming in which all nonbelievers will suffer horribly, and that Nicholas St. Andrew has shown them the truth. Beyond that, it is difficult to get anything useful from them. If your campaign includes psionics, the heroes may be able to have the commandos' minds read, but the truth is that these guys don't know very much. They can reveal their orders, which were as described above, and that Audrey Petersen is a "believer" who must not be harmed. They also know that the whole hostage situation was really a front that allowed Audrey to perform some other mission for Nicholas.

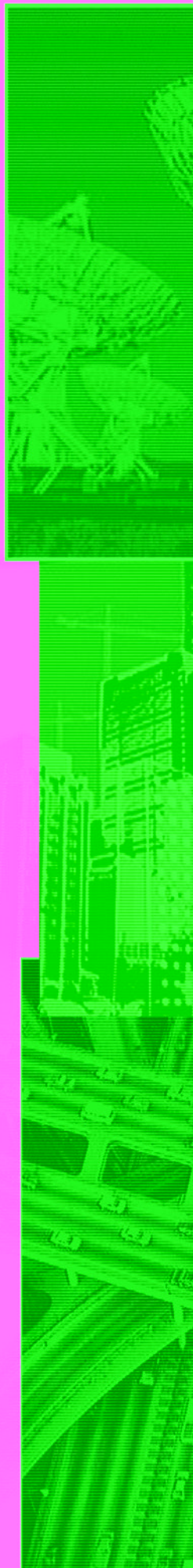
The Ones Who Got Away

Any of the commandos who managed to escape head back to their headquarters (a private warehouse somewhere near the city docks) to await further word from Nicholas St. Andrew. But this word never comes—St. Andrew has decided to sever his ties with the commandos now that they've been involved in such a high-profile caper. If the heroes follow them, set up the warehouse as you wish and allow the heroes the opportunity to make up for their earlier failure.

Audrey Petersen

Audrey Petersen is a different problem. The heroes may reach this point without knowing anything of her involvement with the commandos and Nicholas St. Andrew. What's more, they may have been unwitting accomplices in her theft of two priceless artifacts.

If you're not planning to play the entire *Heartless* campaign, you should decide whether this information is actually important to your campaign. If it is, you can design a follow-up adventure around it (see *Continuing the Adventure*, below). If rescuing the hostages was all you wanted the heroes to accomplish in *The Petersen Counterstrike*, you can choose to ignore the connection between Audrey and Nicholas.



Whatever occurs with Audrey, the heroes have succeeded in this adventure if they managed to defeat the commandos and rescue all of the hostages.

Heartless Resolution

If you plan to continue with the next installment of the *Heartless* campaign, you must ensure that the two artifacts somehow land in Nicholas St. Andrew's hands. If the heroes' intervention has resulted in Audrey Petersen being "rescued" and sent down to the emergency services personnel, it should be easy for her to complete her mission.

If the heroes are still trying to overcome the rest of the commandos when they part with Audrey, she simply disappears. If the medics are questioned later, one of them claims to have treated her for superficial wounds, but reports that as soon as he turned around, she simply left. No one has seen her since. (In this case, Audrey will return in a later chapter of *Heartless*.)

If, on the other hand, the heroes insist on taking her down to the medics personally, she complains of chest pains upon reaching the emergency station, and the medic on duty insists that she be sent to the hospital immediately. Once there, she disappears without a trace as soon as the heroes' backs are turned.

If Audrey is somehow killed in the crossfire, her remains and possessions are treated as criminal evidence. The artifacts in her pockets, however, mysteriously disappear from the police lockup after they have been catalogued and put in storage.

REWARDS

Aside from the standard experience and wealth awards, the heroes gain a significant amount of publicity from their exploits. The Petersen hostage situation was covered live by every major news service, and the reporters identified the heroes as the officials in charge.

This publicity could result in one or more characters becoming media celebrities, an increase in the amount of work (or rate of pay) that they receive, or—if things went badly—in public vilification.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

Regardless of how this adventure is resolved, Nicholas St. Andrew is still on the loose. Although he was the mastermind behind the hostage situation, he played no physical part in the execution of the mission. He truly believes that the artifacts Audrey is stealing have mystical powers, and if you decide to play through the *Heartless* campaign, he turns out to be correct.

If you are not playing the rest of *Heartless*, then it is up to you to decide whether or not the artifacts have true mystical powers. If you wish to continue using Nicholas St. Andrew as a villain, he can offer many interesting possibilities. He

believes in arcane powers and other fantastic phenomena, and so do all his followers. Nicholas's plans always involve gaining more money or power for himself, and he is more than willing to sacrifice the lives of his followers to reach his goals.

Continuing *Heartless*

The *Heartless* campaign will continue next month with the free online adventure *Blood Sugar*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stan! has been publishing fiction, cartoons, and games professionally since 1982. He has served as a graphic designer and line editor for West End Games, an editor and designer for TSR, Inc., and an author, senior designer, and creative director for Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Stan! is currently the Creative Vice President for The Game Mechanics, Inc. <<http://www.thegamemechanics.com>>. His recent projects include the *URBAN ARCANA Campaign Setting* for Wizards of the Coast and the *Modern Player's Companion* for Green Ronin. In what he laughingly refers to as his spare time, Stan! writes and illustrates the *Bolt & Quiver* and *Table Talk* comic strips.

Stan! lives in Renton, WA, where he eats nothing but meat and cheese. Visit him online at <<http://www.stannex.com>>.

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| Graphic Design: | Cynthia Fliege, Sean Glenn |

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