



MODERN

Roleplaying Game

Le Chien de

L'ONYX



By Steve Winter



The emergence onto Earth of strange creatures from the shadows is nothing new. It has been going on throughout history, but at a much slower pace—a bare trickle, compared to the present rush.

One such trickle occurred in the year 1780...

LEVELS

You, the Game Master (GM), need a copy of the *D20 MODERN Roleplaying Game* to run this adventure. *Le Chien de l'Onyx* is a short introductory scenario for low-level characters. It can be tailored for any number of player characters (PCs) from 1st to 3rd level (1st-level characters obviously might have a harder time of it than 3rd-level ones, but instructions in each encounter allow you to balance them pretty easily to match the party's strength). Any number of characters can be involved. Three to five is best, but more or fewer will work.

BACKGROUND

In 1780, a young elf mage named Nieulor suddenly found himself in the strange, new world of 18th century France. Unaccustomed to Earth's deep-seated superstitions and xenophobia, he made no effort to conceal himself or his race. Nieulor was promptly arrested, stripped of his possessions, and tossed into the Bastille as a dangerous radical.

There he remained, visited only occasionally by priests and curious scholars, until July 14, 1789, when the revolutionary mob opened the gates of the Bastille. Nieulor, much wiser now, quickly blended into the escaping crowd. Over the next century, he traveled across Europe, Africa, and Asia under many names, never staying more than a decade in one place lest his unaging face arouse suspicion.

His travels, however, always brought Nieulor back to Paris in search of a particular item that the French authorities stole from him: an onyx dog figurine of wondrous power (similar to the jade crocodile on page 379 of the *D20 MODERN Roleplaying Game*).

Through meticulous research, Nieulor learned that the onyx dog came quickly into the possession of the Duc de Rouen, who devoted much of his life to studying it. The duke learned enough about the object to write a short manuscript, *Le Chien de l'Onyx—Sa Fonction et Son Origine Mystérieuses*. Very few copies were printed, and barely a handful survives.

Nieulor's most recent research showed that one man, Vincent Lastrode of Manhattan (or whatever city your PCs use as their home base) purchased both the onyx dog and a copy of the manual at separate auctions. With solid information at last, Nieulor has placed himself in a position to reclaim his possession.

SYNOPSIS

The PCs are drawn into this adventure by being in the right place at the wrong time.

Lastrode isn't the only person interested in the onyx dog. The manual was hijacked en route to him by one of Lastrode's rivals. The PCs happen to be on the scene when Lastrode's goons try to recapture the book. This should place the book in their hands and bring them to Nieulor's attention.

In the second half of the adventure, the PCs confront Lastrode over the object, battle his minions, meet Nieulor, and ultimately can help return the magical dog to the elf.

CHARACTER HOOKS

The characters can become involved several ways:

- They may coincidentally all be having lunch at the *Blanché Escargot* when Lastrode's goons burst in;
- They may be working for Customs, law-enforcement, or some other investigative agency that has reason to connect the *Blanché Escargot* to a smuggling ring;
- They could spot the suspicious-looking goons and follow them into the diner on a hunch;
- They could be making a delivery to the diner at that time.

Feel free to mix together two or more of these ideas; not everyone needs to be on the scene for the same reason.

SCENE 1: THE BLANCHED ESCARGOT

For whatever reasons the GM chooses, the characters all happen to be in the *Blanché Escargot*, a once fashionable but now run-down diner. The regular lunch crowd is mostly gone—the only people here appear to be the PCs, the apathetic waiter behind the counter, the chef in the kitchen, and two or three other solitary customers.

A group of three tall, burly thugs in long coats and cowboy hats enters the diner. (They're bugbears attempting to pass as large humans. With a Spot check opposed by the bugbears' Charisma check, the PCs can realize these guys are not your usual leg breakers.) Ignoring the waiter, they head straight toward a door in the back marked "Staff Only." The goons disappear through the door, the chef pokes his head out from the kitchen, the waiter shrugs, and everything returns to normal.

A few moments later, a gunshot is heard, followed by an eruption of pistol and machine pistol fire lasting three or four seconds. There are crashes, screams, thumps, and one

of the goons bursts—literally—through the door. Blood streams down the front of its coat from several bullet holes. Its hat is gone, revealing a brutish, furry face and large, pointed ears, one of which has been mostly shot away. If PCs do nothing, this creature flees out the front door and escapes. If someone tries to grab or attack it, the bugbear collapses, dead from its wounds.

A scene of chaos is apparent through the splintered staff door. The other two intruders are sprawled on the floor, riddled with bullets. Thick blood is spreading into one large puddle, slowly concealing the dirty linoleum. A third figure, a human in a blood-soaked shirt, slumps against the far wall. His hand clutches an MAC Ingram M10 machine pistol. Dozens of empty bullet casings litter the floor.

The waiter and other customers bolt from the restaurant as fast as they can. The chef can be heard in the kitchen, swearing lustily in French, but he doesn't come out. As the PCs approach the back room, they hear sounds of movement. The first person to poke his head through the shattered doorway sees a foot slipping through a crack in the wall to the right, then the concealed doorway seals shut with a solid clack.

The two bugbears and the human are all dead of gunshots. The M10 is empty, but there's a spare 30-round magazine in the human's hip pocket. All three bugbears were armed with Colt Python revolvers (now empty) with the trigger guards sawed away so they could get their thick fingers on the triggers and enlarged handles attached with duct tape. A pocket search of the bugbears turns up 36 more rounds of Colt ammo, spare change, a flask of bourbon, and a dozen packs of cheap spice cigarettes from Algeria.

About the time the PCs are wrapping up their quick search of the room, the chef emerges from the kitchen to tell them that he's phoned the police and that the characters probably don't want to be here when the heat arrives.

SCENE 2: THE LABYRINTH

Depending on the hook used to involve the characters in this adventure, the PCs may or may not be aware that the *Blanché Escargot* has ties to a smuggling ring in the city. The smugglers hide out in a virtual labyrinth of tunnels below the diner.

The secret door at the side of the room can be found pretty easily (Search check, DC 14), because at least one of the characters got a good look at its location. The latch is concealed inside a false electrical outlet. If PCs seem reluctant to open the door or pass through it, gently point out to them that under even the best of circumstances, the police are going to detain them for hours of questioning once they see what's dead on the floor. Make some police siren sounds, gradually growing louder, to urge them along. If they meet the police they can always come back later to investigate the hidden passage, but it's best to keep things moving and avoid entanglements with the law.

The door opens into a narrow, dark passage between this false wall and the actual outer wall of the building. Only a few yards along, the floor opens up and narrow steps lead steeply down. (See the map on the next page.)

The steps wind down a long way, passing through several landings, switching directions to avoid other underground structures. Sometimes a ladder replaces the steps. Dim,

motion-detecting lights are spaced along the passage. These activate as characters get near and go out again as they pass. The electrical line is crudely tacked to the wall and can be easily cut, but that will plunge the tunnel into complete blackness.

There are eight flights of steps/ladders in all. Roll a d6 for each flight. On a roll of 1, the light in that section doesn't work, leaving it in treacherous darkness. If the PCs must traverse a flight in complete darkness (either because the light is broken or someone cut the power and they have no other light source), have each character make a Balance check (DC 5). Anyone who fails the check misses a step and tumbles down to the next landing, suffering 1d3 points of damage. Anyone below that character is knocked down and suffers the same injury.

Eventually, at least 100 feet down, the steps end at an iron door.

1. Iron Door

The door is rusted, grimy, and droplets of condensation glisten on the dark metal. It isn't locked, but the hinges are stiff and noisy.

2. The Tunnels

Beyond the door lies a very old, decrepit access tunnel—brick-lined, with an arched ceiling about 7 feet high. A motion-sensing light comes on when the door opens. Additional lights are spaced irregularly throughout the labyrinth. Illumination is dim but adequate. The power here is separate from that in the stairs and can't be cut except from the generator room. Pounding, incoherent music can be heard from somewhere ahead.

Every time the PCs round a corner in these tunnels, roll a d10. On a roll of 1, they encounter a smuggler. Roll initiative between the smuggler and the lead character. If the smuggler wins, he was standing still in the darkness; if the PC wins, the smuggler was moving and illuminated. Regardless, a smuggler always fires one shot from a Sites M9 pistol at the lead character, then runs to the nearest junction and turns away out of sight. (See Area 4 for smuggler characteristics.)

3. Steel Grate

A heavy steel grate blocks the passage here. The tunnel continues in darkness, but there's no way to go forward without an industrial cutting torch.

4. 'Living' Quarters

This squalid room at the end of a doorless tunnel contains a few mildewed bunks, a compact refrigerator, hot plate, stacks of canned food and water, a wobbly table with six mismatched chairs, a land-line fax machine and telephone, and a blaring boom box with a stack of scratched, pirated hip-hop and industrial CDs. The music is loud enough to drown out gunshots from anywhere but the corridor leading into this room and the cross-corridor it connects to. Enough smugglers are gathered here to equal one-third of the PCs' total levels, rounded down (for example, if the player characters have 13 levels all together, then four smugglers currently lounge in Area 4). From the main corridor they can be plainly seen moving around. If no PC

marches down the entry corridor, the smugglers remain oblivious to their presence. If a character advances more than 20 feet down the entry hallway (past the midpoint) or if someone fires a shot in the entry corridor or cross-corridor, then these smugglers are alerted and they attack.

Smuggler (Strong Ordinary 1/Tough Ordinary 1): CR 1; Medium-size human; HD 1d8+2 plus 1d10+2; hp 14; Mas 15; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 13, touch 13, flat-footed 12 (+1 Dex, +2 class); BAB +1; Grap +3; Atk +4 melee (1d6+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike), or +3 melee (1d4+2/19–20, knife), or +2 ranged (2d6, Sites M9 pistol); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL Any; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +0; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills: Craft (mechanical) +5, Drive +5, Intimidate +3, Knowledge (popular culture) +2, Knowledge (streetwise) +2, Profession +4, Read/Write English, Repair +2, Speak English, Swim +3.

Feats: Brawl, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

Possessions: Sites M9 pistol and ammunition.

5. Generator

A gas-powered generator here produces electricity for the complex, to operate lights, ventilators, and appliances. Shutting it down plunges all the rooms and corridors into complete blackness (and kills the dreadful music). Within a minute, two smugglers with flashlights show up to investigate. A half-full, 55-gallon drum of gasoline powers the generator. Broken chairs, shredded mattresses, and other bits of useless and mangled detritus litter the area, along with a large toolbox (containing a heavy bolt cutter and a relatively complete set of general tools) and extra supplies—canned food and water. The place smells bad, and the smell seems to come from Area 6.

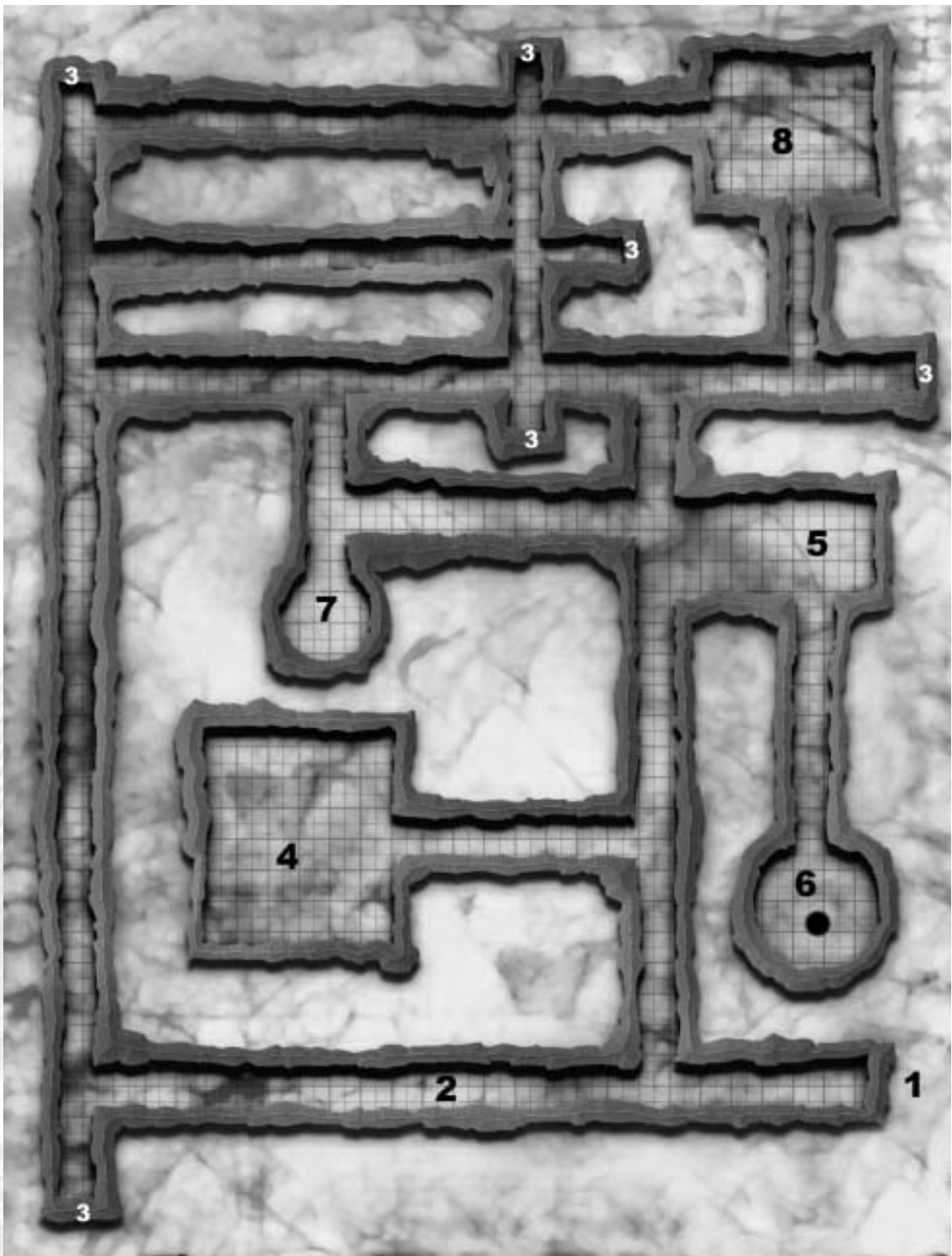
6. Toilet

This is what passes for the smugglers' toilet—a black, grimy, smeared hole in the floor that leads to who-knows-where. The smell is unbearable, and the floor is slick. Anyone who stays here a moment longer than necessary is just sick.

7. Captive

A man of indeterminate age, dressed in a soiled business suit and with long blond hair, sits tied to a chair and gagged. He's not injured beyond minor cuts and bad bruises, but he's in terrible condition—dehydrated, weak, and disoriented. He can walk only with aid. The man speaks English well but with a French accent, although he doesn't say much. A company ID card (in his coat pocket) identifies him as Delacey Otagé, an employee of Messagerie Exprès Français, a French courier company. He was kidnapped when he boarded a taxi at the airport and brought here, where he's been tied up and neglected for six days. In fact, this is Nieulor, though no one knows that, including his captors. Nieulor bribed the courier who was to deliver the manuscript to Lastrode into letting him take his place. Nieulor needs at least a half-hour to regain his equilibrium and strength, if someone gives him water and food.





8. Contraband Storage

Anything of value the smugglers keep in this room, locked inside a chain-link cage. The key is in the pocket of one of the smugglers in Area 4, but the padlock can also be picked (Disable Device, DC 21), broken (Strength check, DC 25), shot to pieces (automatic), or cut with the bolt cutters from Area 5 (automatic). Inside the cage is a stack of stolen goods, most still in the original packaging: stereo equipment, computers and components, cell phones, leather jackets, and so forth. Atop the heap is a shiny metal briefcase. If shown the briefcase, Delacey/Nieulor indicates that it's his. He prom-

ises the PCs that his company will reward them handsomely for rescuing him and recovering the briefcase.

Leaving the Labyrinth

The PCs can leave the tunnels the same way they got in. As long as they don't disturb the smugglers in Area 4, they won't be bothered by anyone but random encounters on the way out. At the top, they'll need to wait until at least four hours have passed from the time of the shooting before the police investigators leave. (The detectives' voices are clearly audible through the secret door.)

SCENE 3: NIEULOR AND LE CHIEN DE L'ONYX

Outside the labyrinth, Delacey's recovery seems startlingly rapid. He asks the PCs to take him somewhere safe and private where he can clean up, contact his employer, and explain the situation. Any of the PCs' homes would do.

Once secure, Delacey opens the case and shows its contents. Only two things are inside the briefcase's extensive foam padding: a sealed letter and an old, slim book titled *Le Chien de l'Onyx—Sa Fonction et Son Origine Mystérieuses*.

The letter is addressed to a Monsieur Lastrode. It is no more than a thank-you for his business and a wish that he will be pleased with his purchase.

The book is far more interesting. It was written by the Duc de Rouen (one of the rare members of French aristocracy to survive the revolution) and printed in 1802 in Paris. It is entirely in French; if none of the PCs can read French, Nieulor translates for them. Its title means *The Onyx Dog: Its Mysterious Origin and Function*. It describes the onyx dog (along with illustrations) as a stone fetish seized from a highly unusual man-creature who called himself Nieulor. Much of the text is a boring description of various tests that were applied to the object. A few chapters concern interviews the author held with Nieulor before his disappearance from the Bastille in 1789. The final chapters, however, discuss the object's magical properties, and in particular the fact that the statue can become animated, turning into a real dog, for up to six hours per week. There is no mention of what became of the item. PCs with Arcane Lore may have heard of this book (DC 16 to have heard of it, DC 21 to know enough of the dog's history to appreciate the value of the manuscript, which is considerable).

Only after showing them the book does Delacey reveal that he is, in fact, Nieulor. If the PCs know very little about Shadow, this may be quite a revelation. Nieulor will perform a spell or two, if necessary, to help persuade everyone he's no average human. He explains that he is here to recover the onyx dog and offers to pay them well for their aid (over the centuries, he's amassed a small fortune). This amounts to a +1 Wealth bonus for each PC, upon recovery of the dog.

Nieulor intends to contact Lastrode, set up a meeting to deliver the manuscript, and reclaim the dog. Based on his research, the elf knows that Lastrode already has cracked the item's secret and learned to activate it. He's also certain that Lastrode will be accompanied by the dog, because it's reported that the man never appears in public now without "his faithful dog" at his side. Once the dog sees him, Nieulor believes it will recognize him as its rightful owner.

SCENE 4: LASTRODE

The meeting is set for the following day, in an open, downtown park. The PCs must arrive early and get into position, because Delacey/Nieulor is expected to come alone.

Lastrode arrives 15 minutes early, accompanied by a large, powerful, intelligent-looking black dog. Several bugbear thugs dressed like those killed in the Blanche Escargot are easy to spot lurking nearby.

Nieulor arrives precisely on time, with the briefcase handcuffed to his wrist. As he approaches Lastrode, the dog

perks up its head. Clearly, it is reacting to a familiar presence. Lastrode's glance shifts rapidly between the dog and the approaching courier. No fool, he comes to an immediate, intuitive realization. He snaps an order at the dog to attack and signals his bodyguards into action.

The dog attacks Nieulor, but half-heartedly, unsure where its loyalty should lie. The bodyguards have no such compunction and will open up on him without reserve, until the PCs get involved.

Lastrode's main concern is getting back to his bulletproof limo as quickly as possible and making his getaway. He needs only 2 rounds to reach the car.

The onyx dog has a -4 penalty, on top of all other modifiers, when it attacks Nieulor. If its unadjusted attack roll is ever 1 to 5, the dog fully recognizes Nieulor as its true owner (having been stolen from him in the 18th century) and comes completely under the elf's control.

Bugbears: CR 2; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d8+3; hp 16; Mas 13; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 14, touch 11, flat-footed 13 (+1 Dex, +3 natural); BAB +2; Grap +4; Atk +4 melee (1d3+2 slam), or +3 ranged (2d6, Colt Python +18 spare rounds); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., scent; AL Chaos, evil; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 15, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 9.

Skills: Climb +2, Hide +3, Listen +3, Move Silently +6, Read/Write Goblin, Speak Goblin, Spot +3.

Feats: Alertness, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

Possessions: Long coat, cowboy hat, Colt Python, and ammunition as noted above.

Assuming the heroes are 2nd level, they should be outnumbered about three to two by the bugbears (the PCs have two advantages—Nieulor is on their side, and the bugbears don't know they're here to help the elf). If the heroes are mostly 3rd level, the bugbears should outnumber them two to one; if they're mostly 1st level, the numbers should be even. Feel free to adjust the scales as you see best.

Vincent Lastrode (Tough Ordinary 3/Charismatic Ordinary 3): CR 5; Medium-size human; HD 3d10+6 plus 3d6+6; hp 39; Mas 15; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 15, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+1 Dex, +3 class, +1 light undercover shirt, nonproficient); BAB +3; Grap +4; Atk +4 melee (1d3+1 nonlethal, unarmed strike), or +4 melee (1d4+1/19-20, knife); Full Atk +4 melee (1d3+1 nonlethal, unarmed strike), or +4 melee (1d4+1/19-20, knife), or +4 ranged (2d6, Glock 17); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL any; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +1; AP 0; Rep +3; Str 12, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 15.

Skills: Bluff +7, Disguise +4, Gather Information +7, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (popular culture) +5, Knowledge (streetwise) +7, Read/Write English, Read/Write French, Sleight of Hand +6, Speak English, Speak French.

Feats: Dodge, Double Tap, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Simple Weapons Proficiency. While Lastrode won't fight unless cornered, he is armed and armored.

Possessions: An expensive suit, diamond satellite watch, Glock 17 in an Italian leather shoulder holster, and enough cash to raise one character's Wealth by 1. Other than that, he lets minions do most of his carrying.



Onyx Dog: CR 1; Medium-size magical beast; HD 2d10+4; hp 15; Mas 15; Init +2; Spd 40 ft.; Defense 13, touch 12, flat-footed 11 (+2 Dex, +1 natural); BAB +2; Grap +4; Atk +4 melee (1d6+3, bite); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft., scent, trip; AL owner; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +1; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 15, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Skills: Jump +4, Listen +6, Speak French, Spot +6, Survival +1 (+5 when tracking by scent), Swim +5.

Feats: Track.

Notes: When the *onyx dog* hits with a bite attack, it can attempt to trip the opponent as a free action (see the *D20 MODERN Roleplaying Game*, page 152) without making a touch attack or provoking an attack of opportunity. If the attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the dog.

Most of the time the *onyx dog* is a tiny (1 inch high) figurine of a dog, beautifully carved from onyx. When it is tossed to the ground and a command word spoken (the word is spelled out in *Le Chien de l'Onyx*), the statue transforms into a living dog that obeys only its owner. It can be used once per week for up to six hours. If reduced to 0 hit points, the dog reverts to a statue and can be transformed again for the next week's use. If the statue breaks, however, the magic and the dog are destroyed. In figurine form, the *onyx dog* has a hardness of 5, 6 hp, and a break DC of 22.

Nieulor (Male Elf Smart 3/Mage 5): CR 8; Medium-size humanoid (elf); HD 8d6; hp 33; Mas 14; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 14 (+4 class), touch 14, flat-footed 14; BAB +3; Grap +3; Atk +3 melee (1d3+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike); Full Atk +3 melee (1d3+2 nonlethal, unarmed strike); SQ Arcane spells, brew potion, scribe scroll, scribe tattoo, spell mastery (*change self*, *protection from arrows/bullets*, *sleep*); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL good; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +7; AP 4; Rep +0; Str 10, Dex 11, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Occupation: Entrepreneur.

Skills: Bluff +10, Computer Use +12, Concentration +13, Craft (chemical) +14, Decipher Script +16, Disguise +5, Investigate +9, Knowledge (arcane lore) +16, Knowledge (business) +10, Listen +3, Profession (entrepreneur) +5, Read/Write English +1, Read/Write French +1, Read/Write Russian +1, Research +16, Sense Motive +3, Speak Cantonese, Speak English, Speak French, Speak Russian, Spot +6.

Feats: Armor Proficiency (light), Attentive, Deceptive, Educated (Knowledge [arcane lore] and Knowledge [business]), Low Profile, Simple Weapon Proficiency, Studious.

Talents: Linguist, Trick; Wealth +18.

Elf Traits: Low-light vision; +2 racial bonus on Listen, Search, and Spot checks.

Spells Prepared (4/4/3/2; save DC 13 + spell level): 0—*daze*, *detect magical aura*, *message*, *resistance*; 1st—*cause fear*, *change self*, *magic missile*, *sleep*; 2nd—*enhance ability*, *locate object*, *protection from arrows/bullets*; 3rd—*haste*, *slow*.

Note: The GM should randomly select half of these spells to be absent. Nieulor has not had adequate time to memorize everything from his PDA spellbook.

Possessions: Nieulor typically wears a nice suit and a Rolex and carries a PDA spellbook. His suit was pretty well ruined during his captivity, and the smugglers stole his watch, but they had no use for another PDA.

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REWARDS

The Encounter Level for the tunnel complex should be just EL 1, because the smugglers present little danger to a careful group of adventurers. The Encounter Level for the final battle equals EL 1 plus one-half the number of bugbears, to a maximum of EL 4.

Assuming Nieulor survives and Lastrade escapes, the PCs will have gained both a powerful ally and a dangerous enemy, plus some key insight into the changing nature of the world.

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