

EUREKA

501 Adventure Plots
To Inspire Game Masters



By the Authors of GnomeStew.com ~ With a Foreword by Monte Cook

EUREKA

*501 Adventure Plots
To Inspire Game Masters*

Eureka—From the Greek *heurēka*, loosely:
“I have found it!”



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(kottke.org/09/06/ghostbusters-iii)

In memory of E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson

DEDICATIONS

John—For my mom, who let me buy the 2nd Ed. AD&D books and read them for hours in my room when I was younger, and for my friends who stand by me and make me stronger.

Patrick—To my wife Karen who inspires me to be a better person every day, my daughter Calen who reminds me to be full of wonder, and my son Liam who keeps my wits sharp.

Walt—For my wonderful (and gamer!) wife Helena, and our beautiful children Leianna and Stephen, who have taught me that no fantasy can beat the magic of being a daddy.

Scott—For Dad, who introduced me to roleplaying when I was ten, and for my wife Jennifer, who I plan to play with until we settle into an old gamers’ home.

Matthew—To my wife, the best GM ever, and my daughter, whose imagination is limitless, and to the rest of the gnomes for being a positive influence on both my games and my projects list.

Martin—To my patient wife, Alysia (who insists that we’ll be retiring to Aruba on *Eureka* money), and my bright-eyed daughter Lark, to my fantastic, imagination-nurturing parents, and to the many friends I’ve made through gaming.

Kurt—For my non-gaming but patient and understanding wife Christine, and our always-amazing daughter Erin, who enjoys everything she does. And to all the *players* characters I’ve killed over the years.

Troy—To Paula, who for years kept insisting that I find a hobby; and to Carolyn, our stargazer, Preston, our storyteller, and Jonathan, king of the sandbox, for whom imagination knows no boundaries.

Phil—To my wife Florence, who always helps me find that next idea, my children Dante and Rose, and to Spenser, Sargon and all my other players, for making me strive to be a better GM.

Last but most certainly not least, we’d like to collectively dedicate this book to the readers of *Gnome Stew*, the best damned community of sexy, brainy, downright inspirational GMs on the web. You rock!

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Foreword

I love role-playing games. I doubt that needs to be stated, but there. I've done it anyway.

The main reason that I love role-playing games is that they're games about ideas. I mean, you put the dice, the rule-books, and the big bags of junk food aside, and at the core, the games are about ideas. The GM's got some cool ideas that he presents (in a very codified fashion) to the rest of the players, and then the players, in turn, develop their own ideas. The GM's ideas are usually about setting and story, and the players' ideas are mostly about character, motivation, and dealing with problems. In a way, the GM develops proactive ideas, and the players reactive ideas.

This is, of course, a great oversimplification, but I have a foreword to write, not a whole book.

When Martin Ralya approached me about writing this foreword, I wasn't sure about doing it. I mean, I already knew that amid the noise of game-related Internet sites, Gnome Stew was practically all signal, but I was pretty busy. But then I found out what the book was about, and I was all over it.

This is a book of ideas.

As someone who's developed a career of selling ideas (because really, isn't that what a writer does?) I think most people think that someone like me never uses published stuff. Or at least, never uses material I didn't write. Really creative people don't need help with ideas, right?

What a load of crap.

In the last twenty years now, I've written I-don't-know-how-many books, countless articles, provided content for multiple websites, and on and on. During this time, I've also run at least two different campaigns at any given time. You think I don't appreciate some cool ideas now and again to help me along? Everyone running an RPG can use a few ideas at any given time.

Everyone.

Let me put it in a different light. Even if you're the world's most creative GM, you've got blind spots that you miss. Things you didn't think of. Worse, you've got familiar territories—ideas you use over and over again, which might be great but they can easily become predictable. These things aren't the end of the world, but taking a look at someone else's ideas now and again can solve them easily. When someone says to me, "I never use published material," I may smile and nod to be polite, but I'm not impressed. On the contrary, I'm probably thinking, "you should be." It's not a sign of weakness.

Actually, you know what? Let me state that again to be clear. *It's not a sign of weakness on the part of a GM to use other people's ideas now and then.* Instead, it's a sign that you care enough about what you're doing that you're going to open yourself up to what someone else might think, in order to keep things fresh.

Lastly, if someone asks me where I get my ideas, the real answer is often by opening myself up to the ideas of others. I'll read what someone else has done and it will make me think of three different other things. Ideas are like that. They spark more ideas. They're contagious.

You hold in your hands a contagion. Of the very best kind. Enjoy.

Monte Cook
February 2010

Introduction

Welcome to *EUREKA: 501 Adventure Plots to Inspire Game Masters*—and thank you for buying this book!

I'm Martin Ralya, the owner of, and one of the contributors to, the game mastering blog Gnome Stew (gnomestew.com). Chances are, you've never heard of me, the Gnome Stew team ("the gnomes," for short), or Engine Publishing before. And that's okay—the web is a big place, and there are thousands of GMs out there who don't spend much time online, don't read blogs, or have just never stumbled across our site.

The nine authors of this book are all veteran GMs with years of practical experience under our belts, and we've been writing about game mastering online since May 2008 (and in some cases, before that). We've written over 650 articles to date, with more coming out every week. We don't think we know everything there is to know about GMing (that's not possible), but we do know adventures, and we wanted to share our love of the craft, science, and art of creating and running fun adventures with you.

When it comes to gaming, we're all passionate about different things, but we also share a common passion: system-neutral material for GMs. System-neutral material is usable with nearly any RPG, rather than being designed for a specific game system. "Likes long walks on the beach and system-neutral gaming products" wouldn't sound good in a personal ad, but it's what drove us to write this book.

Conventional wisdom in the RPG industry is that system-neutral books don't sell, but we emphatically disagree. Gnome Stew, which publishes only system-neutral content, is the most widely read game mastering blog on the planet, and we believe that GMs everywhere have an appetite for material they can use with more than one RPG.

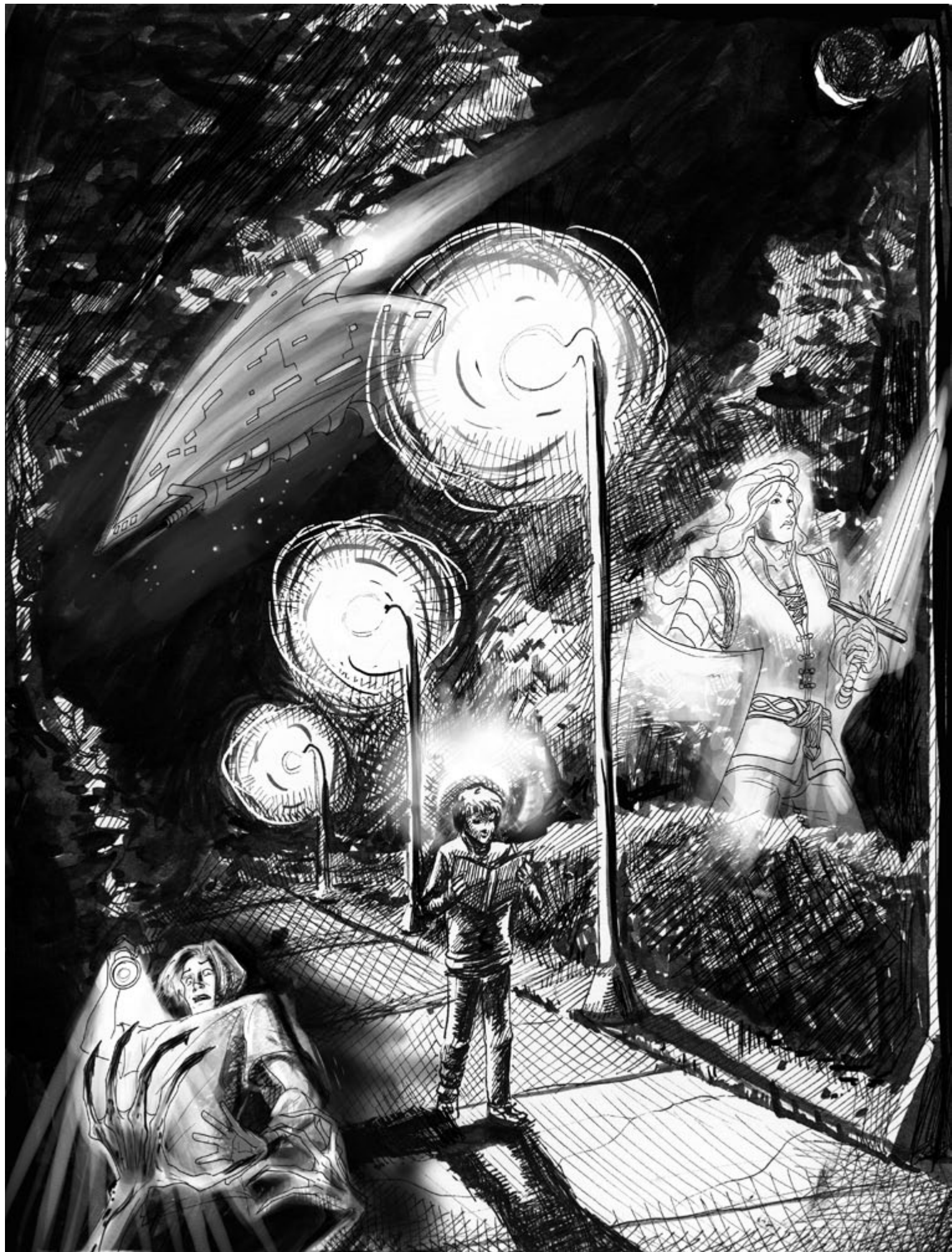
Our goal in producing *Eureka* was to create a book that could find a home on the bookshelves of GMs all over the world—on *every* GM's bookshelf, really. That's why we supported the three largest "umbrella" genres in gaming in a single volume, rather than splitting them up, and why we made it easy to adapt plots from one genre to another. Whether you exclusively run one RPG or system-hop regularly, trying out new games with your players, and whether you homebrew every scenario you run or use published adventures, *Eureka* has something to offer you.

At bottom, this book is about *inspiration*. You can run these plots as written, bend them to your own purposes, mix elements from one plot into another, lift ideas for homebrewed adventures, or anything in between. We want this book to inspire you, to fuel your creative fires and get you past "GM's block," and to give you ready-to-use adventures for those nights when the gang shows up unannounced and wants you to run a game for them. It's intended to illuminate your way, just like the iconic light bulb that represents the sudden arrival of a fantastic idea. There's no wrong way to use this book.

To call *Eureka* a labor of love would be an understatement: From our personal "Eureka!" moment ("Hey, I have this idea...") on June 26, 2009, to the time of publication, it took us twelve months to produce this book. We juggled full-time jobs, kids, writing Gnome Stew, and, of course, gaming, to polish *Eureka* until it gleamed.

We hope you like it, and that it earns a spot on your bookshelf.

Martin Ralya
May 2010



Game Mastering Advice

Eureka is designed to be easy to use: Just pick an adventure plot, flesh out the details to suit your game, and you're off. But 501 plots is a lot of adventures, so we've provided a wealth of simple, practical game mastering advice and information about these plots to help you get the most out of *Eureka*.

This chapter is divided into six sections: Anatomy of a *Eureka* Plot, Turning Plots into Adventures, Adapting Plots to Your Game, Genres, Tags, and Themes. They're all intended to give you a good idea of how best to use this book, and they provide heaps of advice on doing just that.

Eureka is intended to become a part of your games for years to come. It's one hell of a big sandbox, and we hope you enjoy it.

How to Use This Book

You don't need to read this chapter to enjoy the plots contained within *EUREKA: 501 Adventure Plots to Inspire Game Masters* in your game—we designed this book to be easy to pick up and use without any fuss. But if you'd like to know more about the way *Eureka's* plots are structured, how to turn them into full-fledged adventures, and how you can adapt plots to different genres, this chapter offers a wealth of advice and information.

Finding the Perfect Plot

If you're reading *Eureka* for inspiration and don't need a specific kind of plot to use in your ongoing game, just dive in: Start at the beginning or flip to a random page, and enjoy. Chances are you'll find a plot that sparks your imagination in short order.

If you're looking for an adventure that fits specific criteria, we've provided four tools to help you find the perfect plot:

- **Theme:** Every plot has a theme, and there are 36 themes altogether. You can read about themes later in this chapter, and jump to a specific theme using the [table of contents](#).
- **Primary Genre:** Each plot also falls into one of three primary genres: fantasy, sci-fi, or horror. These “umbrella” genres each get their own chapter in *Eureka*, with 167 plots per chapter. There's an [index for genres](#) (p. 295), which covers both primary and sub-genres. Descriptions are provided later in this chapter.
- **Sub-Genres:** Alongside the primary genres are 19 sub-genres like Traditional Fantasy and Space Opera. The [index by genre](#), which starts on p. 295, is a good way to find plots that can be easily adapted to the specific sub-genre you need.
- **Tags:** Tags are short descriptors that call out specific elements within a plot, like *intrigue* for adventures that feature conspiracies and scheming. All 42 tags are described in this chapter, and the [tag index](#) (p. 298) will help you locate plots by tag.

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout this book:

- **GM:** Game master
- **GMing:** Game mastering
- **NPC:** Non-player character
- **PC:** Player character
- **RPG:** Roleplaying game
- **Sci-fi:** Science fiction

The abbreviation AI for “artificial intelligence” is also used in some sci-fi plots.

TERMINOLOGY AND GENDER

You'll notice that *Eureka* uses the term “GM” throughout. This is because GM is the best-known and most universal term available, and isn't intended to exclude the use of this book with games that favor a different term. Even if your RPG of choice calls the GM something different, the meaning is generally the same: This is the person who runs the game, plays the NPCs, and creates the adventures. The same is true of “adventure,” which is the most common term for what happens during a gaming session, and “party,” which is used to describe the PCs as a group.

In writing *Eureka*, we also aimed for roughly 50% usage of “he” and 50% usage of “she” (and related terms, like hers and his). Because layout considerations often dictated plot order, you won't find strict alternation from plot to plot, but the overall distribution should be close to 50/50. The only exception is the themes, which are identical to the original titles listed in *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*; we left those alone because we like the quirky qualities of that book, theme titles included.

CHAPTER 1: GMING ADVICE

The first section in this chapter, [Anatomy of a Eureka Plot](#), explains the common structure underlying the plots in this book and gives you an overview of the tools we've included to make those plots easy to use.

[Turning Plots into Adventures](#) offers up a comprehensive look at how to go from adventure plot to full-fledged adventure. From tweaking the setting to expanding scenes and adding game mechanics, this section will have you making the most of *Eureka* in no time at all.

The third section, [Adapting Plots to Your Game](#), is all about turning a fantasy plot into a sci-fi adventure, altering horror plots to fit into your fantasy game, twisting sci-fi elements to make them work in your horror campaign, and changing up plot details to suit your story, the PCs, or the game world. You might be surprised at how easy this is, and we'll show you how to do it in this section.

The **Genres** section describes the three primary genres (fantasy, sci-fi, horror) and 19 sub-genres used in *Eureka*. Each plot includes a list of which genres it's easily adaptable to, and those genres are intended to cover just about every RPG out there.

The next section, **Tags**, drills down a bit further. Every *Eureka* plot is identified and categorized by a number of tags that describe elements within that plot, like *epic impact* for a plot that can dramatically change the scope of your game. Descriptions of the various tags are provided here.

Lastly, in the **Themes** section we take a look at the 36 themes that tie *Eureka's* plots together, from "Revolt" to "All Sacrificed for a Passion." There are at least four plots for every theme in each primary genre, and themes form the basis for the overall structure of this book—plus, they're a great way to get inspiration for your game.

Anatomy of a *Eureka* Plot

Because we want this book to be as useful to you, the GM, as possible, we wrote *Eureka's* 501 adventure plots in a specific way. We created a template to use as our starting point, and diverged from it only when doing so produced a better plot. Our design goals were to make this book useful to every game master and to make it as easy to use and versatile as possible.

Eureka is a GM's toolkit for adventure-building, and knowing what goes into each plot will help you decide which tool to use, how to use it, and which plots you want to use it on. Here are the common elements of every plot in this book.

THEME

Thirty-six themes are used throughout *Eureka*, with one theme per plot. Sometimes the theme is front and center, while in other plots it stays in the background. You can use themes to find the perfect plot (for example: One of the PCs has just discovered that her brother is now her bitter rival—an excellent time to check out plots based on the theme "Rivalry of Kinsmen"), as inspiration, or as one more tool for evaluating a plot's suitability for your game. For a complete list of themes, see the **Themes** section of this chapter.

TITLE

Each plot has a unique title, and you can find all 501 **plots listed by title** in the index that starts on page 302. Every plot also has a unique number, 1-501, for easy reference.

CHAPTERS 2, 3, AND 4: ADVENTURE PLOTS

The meat of *Eureka* is the massive collection of plots contained with the **Fantasy**, **Sci-fi**, and **Horror** chapters—167 per chapter, for a total of 501 plots. If you ran one plot every week, never missing a week, you'd be running *Eureka* adventures for almost 10 years straight—nine years and 33 weeks, to be exact. (Take Christmas and your birthday weekends off, and you've got the full 10 years covered.) We hope that this book will be useful to you for the rest of your GMing career.

CHAPTER 5: INDEXES

Last but not least are *Eureka's* **four indexes**, which will let you locate plots by **genre**, **tag**, **author**, or **title**. You can use them to look up plots you've read before or to discover new ones; the latter is a special strength of the tag index, as you can pick a tag and quickly check out all of the plots that feature that tag. The same is true for genres: If you want to find plots that are easy to use in a superhero campaign, for example, the Supers entry in the genre index will get you where you need to go.

THE ADVENTURE PLOT

This section contains a brief dissertation on the wave theory of subliminal travel in highly etheric environments. Just kidding—this is the meat of each plot: the actual plot. It's a big topic, so it's covered in depth in its own section below.

EASILY ADAPTED TO

Every plot in *Eureka* falls into one of three intentionally broad genres—fantasy, sci-fi, or horror—and with minimal work, you can adapt any *Eureka* plot to multiple different genres. Those sub-genres appear in this section of every plot entry, and are indexed at the **back of the book** (p. 295). With additional elbow grease, you can adapt nearly any *Eureka* plot to just about any genre you like; the ones listed here are just the genres that require the least tweaking. For more about genres, see the **Genres** section of this chapter.

TAGS

Every significant element of an adventure appears here as a tag—essentially, a flag to tell you what to expect from the plot. Tags cover locations (like *planet-based* for sci-fi), goals (like *bearers*, which denotes that the PCs need to get something from point A to point B), play styles (*intrigue*, for plots that feature schemes and conspiracies), and more. You can use tags as a discovery mechanism: Every **tag is indexed** beginning on page 298, making it easy to find more plots featuring that tag. Tags can also tell you that a particular plot won't be useful to

you right now—for example, the *isolated area* tag means you might have to do a lot of work to adapt that adventure to your campaign if your PCs are currently knee-deep in a city-based plot. Tags are listed and described in the **Tags** section of this chapter.

Those are the basics—here’s a more detailed look at the plots themselves.

WHAT MAKES A *EUREKA* PLOT?

A *Eureka* plot is one that contains a hook, enough background to provide context, ample material for an evening of play (about four hours) and any twists, GMing notes, or other elements that you might need.

It’s impossible for us to know exactly how much adventure material equates to one session of play for your group—there are just too many variables, including your players, your game system of choice, and whether you’re running an ongoing game or a one-shot. Taking this into account, we used a rule of thumb that applies to most gaming groups: *three to five meaty encounters, or extended scenes, equals one adventure*. You also need some “connective tissue,” like PCs bantering with each other, descriptions of travel, and minor side scenes around those encounters, but that tends to arise naturally during play.

We shake this formula up as needed in *Eureka*. For example, in a sandbox-style plot where the PCs are presented with a range of options and their actions determine the entire course of the

adventure, we provide enough material to fill your sandbox, but not necessarily in encounter format. As with every aspect of this book, it’s the results that matter. Our aim for each plot was simple: You should be able to read the plot, flesh things out to suit your campaign (adding stats or other mechanics as needed), and be ready to play in about an hour.

Because we’re providing the main ingredients and leaving the preparation of the dish to you, we tried to make that process as hassle-free as possible. For that reason, you won’t find any proper names in *Eureka* plots, since you’ll be replacing *Eureka*’s generic characters with the NPCs that appear in your own game. You also won’t find any game mechanics or material specific to any one roleplaying game, because we want *Eureka* to be useful to as many GMs, and for as many games, as possible.

Similarly, what we provide in each plot is just one option—one way things could go in the actual adventure. Unlike a simple adventure hook, which leaves all the heavy lifting to you, we’ve done the heavy lifting: Each *Eureka* plot is the skeleton, or outline, of a complete adventure. In order to provide that skeleton, we’ve made assumptions about how things will turn out, written complete encounters, and otherwise included elements that represent one way to turn each particular plot into a full-fledged adventure.

If you see something you don’t like in a plot, you don’t have to abandon the whole thing—just change that element. This can be something simple, like the gender of a key NPC, or it can be something major, like the fact that faster-than-light travel doesn’t exist in your campaign setting. Whatever the case, remember that these aren’t our plots, they’re yours. You can use them however you like, and every element of every plot in this book can be used, abused, bent, changed, tweaked, or otherwise altered to fit your game.

Our principal goal is to provide you with inspiration (“Eureka!”) in the form of a hook, background, major milestones and scenes, and ideas about how to put all that together into a complete adventure. Reading any *Eureka* plot once should give you enough ideas for several encounters, as well as for how to get your players involved in the adventure and how things might shake out.

We can’t read your campaign notes or climb inside your head, so we’ve done the next best thing: provided all of the basic building blocks for a fun adventure, 501 times. We hope you enjoy *Eureka*—these are your plots now.

Artist: Laine Garrett



Turning Plots into Adventures

The 501 adventure plots in this book are like powdered drink mix: All of the essential ingredients have been condensed into a small package, but before you can drink it you need to add water, expanding the powder into a full pitcher of something delicious. In about half a page per plot, we've provided the building blocks for creating an adventure, but *Eureka's* plots need to be fleshed out in order to be used at the gaming table.

When you're done turning a plot into an adventure, that plot will be *your* adventure. *Eureka's* essential ingredients will have been transformed into notes, maps, statistics, and other game elements—and we'll cover how to do all of those things in this section.

Once you've selected a plot (aided by the indexes in the back of the book), remember the golden rule: It's your plot now, and you can do whatever you like to it in order to make it work in your game. Now you're ready to make that plot your own.

CASTING

Eureka plots don't include proper names, with occasional exceptions for organizations and the like. You won't find scheming cultists named Bob, noble elves named Bobolas, or brash space smugglers named Bob Solo. This isn't because we're lazy, but because we wanted to make these plots as easy to use in your game as possible. You get to define the key characters, giving you a chance to work in existing NPCs and making *Eureka* plots feel like part of your campaign, not just side adventures.

As you read a plot, think of NPCs you already have in your campaign that would be a good fit for this adventure. Consider the following three questions:

- Would the NPC be involved in a plot like this one?
- Does this NPC have the abilities/powers/skills to do what's required?
- Am I comfortable with what might happen to this NPC as a result of how this adventure plays out?

If you can answer "Yes" to these questions, then you've identified an NPC that's a good fit for the plot. You can cast all of the major NPC roles in a plot this way, create all of them from scratch, or use a mix of existing and new NPCs. *Eureka* plots are intentionally light when it comes to describing NPCs, so that you'll have the most latitude in creating or assigning NPCs to the roles you need to fill.

The same is true for monsters and other adversaries: We

limited details in order to give you the broadest canvas to work with in choosing the creatures that best fit your game. With a little re-skinning or remaking of plot elements (as described in the **Adapting Plots to Your Game** section of this chapter), you should be able to work in creatures specific to your campaign and game system so that they fit seamlessly.

LOCATION

Location is really just another form of casting, but in this case you're looking for the geographical backdrop for the plot, rather than characters. As with NPCs and adversaries, *Eureka* plots are deliberately vague about locations—you won't find place names, detailed kingdom or star system write-ups, or other intrusive details in these plots. Instead, you'll find general descriptions like "the next kingdom," "a large city," and "a frontier world."

When you read a plot, think about where in your campaign setting it would work best. If some of the geographical elements described don't quite fit, change whatever you need to in order to suit your game. One caveat, though: Some plots include geographical features that are important to the story, and these will be harder to change without reworking the entire plot. There's a whole category of tags devoted to setting, so if a plot works best in a remote area, the *isolated area* tag makes it easy to tell that it will be trickier to use this plot while the PCs are in a major city.

If you do have to change one of these critical setting elements, look at the role it plays within the plot and try to select an element that plays a similar role in your game world. For instance, if the plot calls for the party to cross a treacherous mountain range, but the PCs in your game are currently deep in the jungle, you might use a raging river or a fetid, monster-haunted swamp in place of the mountains. Those are both still obstacles, like the mountains, but they're a much better fit for your game.

CONTINUITY

Much like casting NPC roles, you want to make sure that the assumptions made in an adventure plot match your game. It's almost impossible to write a good plot without making an assumption or two, and in most cases we kept things general enough that you shouldn't need to worry too much about those assumptions. There are times when things just won't match up, though, and in those cases you'll need to make some changes.

For example, you'll find royal titles like king and duke in many fantasy plots. If you're not running a game that's loosely based

on medieval Western Europe, those titles won't work as-is. In a feudal Japanese campaign, for instance, "king" would become emperor and "duke" might become shogun. These are cosmetic changes that don't take much time at all to make. (This is re-skinning, as described in the next section of this chapter.)

Sometimes larger assumptions are present, particularly in sci-fi plots. For example, sci-fi plots with the *interplanetary* tag often assume that the PCs have ready access to a starship, and that faster than light travel is available—common elements in many sci-fi RPGs. If either or both of these things aren't true in your game, you'll need to edit those plots accordingly.

If a sci-fi plot calls for the PCs to fly their ship to a nearby star system, but your PCs don't have their own ship, you have a couple of options. You could introduce a plot element to provide them with one, like an NPC ally who offers to take them there, or you could move their destination to a distant location on the planet that the party is already on. That will allow them to take terrestrial transportation, avoiding the need for a ship entirely. These kinds of changes might require alterations to the storyline, casting, setting, or some combination of all three.

If you need to make adjustments to maintain continuity, consider the purpose of the original plot element. If the starship was present so that the PCs could get into a spectacular space-based battle, you might want to replace that element with one that still allows a similar battle to take place—like an airplane or a dirigible. If the starship was included solely so that the PCs could wind up in a distant system, far from any aid, then isolation is the key ingredient, not the starship. If the point of the journey was to give the PCs time to find out about a traitor in their midst, then however you get the party from point A to point B, it needs to take long enough for them to make the same discovery.

HOOK AND OPENING

Once you have cast all the NPCs, picked out a location, and ensured continuity, the next thing to look at is how the plot opens, including the hook. In writing *Eureka*, the opening was often the most difficult part: Not knowing anything about your campaign, we tried to strike a balance between keeping things general while being specific enough to create a fun, useful plot. Some plots include an opening that acts as a hook, while some present a hook but rely on you to work it into your game; others do a bit of both.

The hook is the thing that makes the PCs want to get involved, and that gets your players engaged in the plot. It's the body in the haunted house, the weird sensor readings coming from the nearby star system, or the mysterious scroll that the PCs find, which describes a vast treasure that could be theirs

for the taking. The way you deliver the hook is through the opening of the adventure.

The goal of the opening is to start the adventure in the way that makes the most sense given the nature of your game and your players, and that delivers the hook effectively. You know your campaign, the world, and where you left off last session (and likely where things are headed, too), and you know your players. You want to guide the PCs to the hook in a way that feels natural; if you force the hook upon them, the plot will feel railroaded or scripted, and you're likely to put off your players. It should make sense for the PCs to be interested in following up on the hook. Once the hook has gotten the PCs involved in the plot, you're on your way to a fun game session.

If the hook focuses on one of the PCs, rather than the whole group, select the character who would be the best recipient. For example, in a horror plot the hook may involve one PC getting a call from the police about a strange murder; if one of the PCs is an ex-cop, she should probably get the call, rather than the biker (or the vampire).

FORESHADOWING

Because *Eureka* is designed to be picked up and used without requiring much prep time, most of the plots in this book don't involve elements that you need to foreshadow or set up in advance. Any exceptions are called out in the plots themselves. There are some plots, however, that will work best if you use foreshadowing to make them a part of your campaign before you run them in your game.

If you choose several *Eureka* plots in advance, you can spend some time coming up with ways to foreshadow them in your campaign. Have the PCs meet a key NPC a few sessions before she turns up dead, hear rumors about werewolf attacks out on the moors before finding themselves stuck there overnight, or fight mutated forest animals before learning of the source of the mutations. Foreshadowing will make the adventures that you've foreshadowed feel like a natural part of your campaign, conveying the impression that the game world is dynamic, with events proceeding apace behind the scenes.

EXPANDING THE ENCOUNTERS

In about half a page, each *Eureka* plot describes the encounters or major scenes that make up a one-session adventure (or provides enough material for you to assemble encounters, as in a sandbox-style plot). This should give you enough detail to spark your imagination, but not so much that you feel constrained by what's already been provided. In order to turn these brief descriptions into full-fledged encounters, you'll need to expand on the scenes we've included. This might involve jotting down notes, fleshing out a location, writing key lines of dialogue, drawing a map, creating props, or any number of other traditional GMing activities.

Depending on your personal game mastering style, you might need three paragraphs of notes or five pages when running an adventure. If you're comfortable improvising, you can even run many *Eureka* plots as-is, with no prep whatsoever. There's no right or wrong way to turn these plots into adventures—just consider your players and their play styles, trust your instincts, and do what feels right to you.

Most of the plots in this book are designed to be played in a single session (about four hours), but many of them can be expanded into story arcs by turning individual scenes into adventures in their own right. Add a complication or two, work in an arduous journey, a nail-biting chase, or a few investigative scenes, and the bare bones of a *Eureka* encounter can become an entire adventure.

GAME MECHANICS

Because *Eureka* is intended for use with nearly any RPG, none of the plots in this book include game mechanics. To use one of these plots in your game, you'll need to add appropriate mechanics: stats for creatures, abilities for NPCs, difficulties for skill checks, and whatever else is needed to suit your game of choice. Most plots give you a starting point for many of these things in the choices that have already been made. For example, if a fantasy plot features orcs (and assuming you stick with orcs, rather than remaking the plot around, say, intelligent dire wolves), then you just need to pull the stats for orcs and you're ready to go.

As you're expanding encounters, think about the mechanical aspects that might be involved. Breaking into a military complex to hack a hardened computer network, for example, is likely to entail sneaking past guards, picking or disabling locks, scaling walls, and ultimately an extended hacking scene. If you don't have time to prep everything in advance, don't worry—just fall back on the systems your RPG provides. When the PCs need to pick a lock, look up the difficulties associated with lock picking and choose one that seems appropriate; the rules in that section should tell you everything else you need to know.

Artist: Philip Miller



WHAT MIGHT GO DIFFERENTLY?

Most *Eureka* plots describe a likely progression for the adventure to follow, but that's only one way that things could go. Your players will surprise you by handling things differently, blazing their own trail, or otherwise throwing you curve balls. If you know your group well, you can probably anticipate some of the points in the adventure where these surprises are liable to pop up.

Take some time to consider what your players will do at different points during the adventure, and jot down a few notes about how you can respond and what elements of the plot will need to change depending on how things shake out. There's no perfect system for this, but there is one key principle to keep in mind: It doesn't matter whether the adventure turns out the way you expect it to, it only matters that everyone around the table has a good time.

THE ENDING

The closing of an adventure can be tough to predict in advance. You can usually make a pretty good guess how things will wrap up, though, and there's one key goal to keep in mind: The ending of the adventure is just as important as the opening. When the adventure is over, you want your players to feel a sense of completion and satisfaction. How you bring it to a close plays a large part in that.

Eureka plots almost always include a possible ending (and sometimes more than one, like success and failure), but no amount of prep can account for the actions of your players. If improvisation under pressure isn't your strongest GMing skill, you may want to write some notes about the more likely outcomes for the adventure, accounting for how the campaign will continue in each case.

For example, an adventure centered on finding a powerful artifact has two likely outcomes: the PCs find the object, or they fail to acquire it. If they succeed, then the campaign progresses, but what if they fail? Can you give them another crack at it, or set them back but provide another means to accomplish the same goal? A few notes about both outcomes will help you decide what to do in the heat of the moment, and will also help you deal with other surprises as they come up.

CONSEQUENCES

After the adventure is over, it's important to consider the longer-term ramifications of the outcome on your game world and the campaign as a whole. Just as foreshadowing helps to breathe life into the game's setting, showing the impact of an adventure's outcome in future sessions will make your players feel like the world is a living, changing place, giving them a deeper connection to the campaign.

After wrapping up a session, make a few notes about the outcome of the adventure while things are still fresh in your mind: NPCs who died, survived, or now have a different attitude towards the PCs, what changed in the world as a result of the PCs' actions, etc. Then as you develop other adventures (whether from *Eureka* or elsewhere), work those elements in as you go: NPCs who turn up again, news stories that mention the PCs, vengeful former allies who now feel maligned, changes to the local economy, and the like. Your players will greatly appreciate the connection to their past, and it will deepen their commitment to the current adventure.

REUSING PLOTS

Even though *Eureka* provides 501 adventure plots, there's no reason you can't reuse a favorite plot with a new group, in a new game, or even in the same game. If you're reusing the plot with a new group (at a convention, for example), you don't need to worry about anyone recognizing it. Think about things that went right or wrong the first time around, make a change here and there to emphasize the former and avoid the latter, and you're good to go.

Using the same plot more than once with the same gaming group, however, can be trickier. To pull it off, you need to file off the serial numbers in such a way that even if your players notice that the underlying structure is the same, everything else is so much fun that they don't feel cheated. Use the techniques described in the next section of this chapter to re-skin, remake, and replace plot elements as needed, and, just as you would with a new group, adjust the plot to focus on what went well the first time around.

Artist: Laine Garrett



Adapting Plots to Your Game

The adventure plots in *Eureka* are specifically designed to be usable with nearly any RPG, no matter what genre your game of choice might be or what system you prefer. Although we've broken plots down into one of three broad genres (fantasy, sci-fi, and horror), every one of these plots can be adapted to multiple other genres, as well as mined for great ideas to include in your game. *Eureka* is all about inspiration and ease-of-use.

You'll be pleasantly surprised at how easy these plots are to adapt to your game. If they don't fit perfectly, all you need to do is "drift" the plot a little bit (or sometimes, drift it a lot). So what is drifting? It's a gaming term that refers to adapting a game element from one game to another, and while it's most often applied to game mechanics, it also applies to genres and plot elements.

There are many reasons why you might want to apply this technique to *Eureka's* adventure plots:

- Adapt a plot to a different genre or sub-genre
- Alter a plot to better fit the story you want to run
- Tweak a plot to utilize elements like NPCs and locations that are already found in your campaign
- Fit a plot to the particulars of your favorite game system
- Change a plot to suit the unique elements of your game world
- Use a plot cross-genre to provide a unique play experience

No matter the reason, the important thing to remember is that every plot has something to offer for your game. The monster rising from the lake in a horror plot might become the alien in your interstellar sci-fi campaign. The planetary governor from a sci-fi intrigue plot could become the chancellor in your next sword and sorcery session. The dark woods surrounding the castle in a fantasy adventure might be the inspiration for the setting of your modern horror game. Every plot in *Eureka* contains something you can use—all you have to do is find it.

THE GOLDEN RULE FOR ADAPTING PLOTS

If you find a plot you want to use as-is, go for it—no drifting or adaptation is required. But if you read a plot you love that doesn't quite fit into your game, it's time to make a few changes. While we can't tell you how to adapt a plot to your

specific game and campaign, we can give you plenty of advice to point you in the right direction, starting with the golden rule of plot adaptation:

These plots are meant to fit into your game, not the other way around. Change anything you need to change to make them work for you.

Never hesitate to change any element of any plot in *Eureka*. You know best what will work well in your game, so trust your instincts, have fun, and make the most of the wealth of plots in this book.

RE-SKINNING, REMAKING, AND REPLACING PLOT ELEMENTS

When you adapt a plot, you're generally doing one of three things: re-skinning it, remaking it, or replacing plot elements. All three are simple techniques—here's how to handle them.

Re-Skinning

Every plot in *Eureka* is written with a core story in mind. Think of that story as the skeleton and the flesh of the plot. The rest of the plot is the skin—the outer shell. Using this analogy, many of the changes that you'll make when tweaking these plots will fall into the category of re-skinning. Re-skinning is changing the outer shell of a plot to fit a different genre or play style, but leaving the core elements unchanged.

Here are a few examples of re-skinning:

- Change the orcs in a fantasy plot into brutish aliens living on a frontier world, making the plot usable in a sci-fi game
- Turn a horror plot's zombies, which were created by a nuclear accident, into zombies that were produced using magic in a fantasy adventure
- Replace the feuding elves and dwarves in a fantasy plot with rival doomsday cults, and use that plot in your horror game

These kinds of changes are easy to make, and often you'll only need to re-skin one or two elements of a plot in order to make it usable in another genre.

Remaking

Sometimes re-skinning isn't enough, or won't produce exactly the kind of plot you need for your game—that's where remaking comes in. If re-skinning is changing only the outer layer, or trappings, of a plot, remaking is changing some aspects of the plot's core: the skeleton and the flesh.

For example, using a horror plot centered on killer bees swarming around cell phone towers in a sci-fi game is simple, and requires only re-skinning: Change the cell towers into some sort of futuristic communications array, and you're all set. But if you want to use this same plot in a fantasy game, a little remaking is in order.

If you turn the cell towers into magical beacons, that won't address the fact that they need regular maintenance in order to advance the plot—so you might also add a magical power source to each tower, one that needs to be replaced or recharged regularly (something only the PCs can do). But what if you're running a low-magic game? Instead of magical beacons, you could use signal mirror towers staffed by villagers. This in turn might mean that instead of the local lord hiring the PCs to deal with the killer bees (analogous to being hired by the cell phone company in the original plot), it's the villagers who recruit the party.

By the time you're done remaking a plot, it might bear little resemblance to the plot you started with—and that's just fine. You still saved time by starting with a solid, inspirational core concept, and the end result is a perfect fit for your game, your campaign world, and your gaming group.

Replacing

When it comes to adapting a plot for use in a different genre, sometimes re-skinning and remaking elements aren't the way to go. You might be better off replacing a plot element with something that already exists in your game, or with a common element from the new genre. Replacing a plot element with something else is simply a matter of determining the purpose it serves in the original plot and replacing it with an element that suits the same purpose in the new genre.

For instance, if the governor NPC in a horror plot is mainly present to quarantine the town where the PCs wind up, and your fantasy campaign includes powerful merchant guilds, replace the governor with the head of one of the guilds. Or if the point of a starship in a sci-fi plot is to get the party from point A to point B, replace it with an airplane for use in a modern horror game or a sailing ship for a fantasy campaign.

Analogs for plot elements are just as easy to come up with in sub-genres, as well: a star cruiser in a steampunk game becomes an airship or a train, nanites become sprites, a keep in the wilderness turns into a remote space station, a genetic

virus becomes magical plague, or a demigod turns into a powerful AI. All you have to do is make sure that the new element matches the purpose of the old one.

Sometimes the difference between re-skinning a plot element and replacing it is subtle, but it usually boils down to this: If the change also alters something significant about the way the plot unfolds (you can't have space pirates attack an airplane, for example), that's replacing. If the alteration just makes the plot element look different, that's re-skinning.

ADAPTING PLOTS TO OTHER GENRES

Sometimes the elements that you need to re-skin, remake, replace, or otherwise change in order to make a plot fit another genre will be clear upon a first read-through. In other cases, it will require a little digging to root them out. We've included two handy tools with every plot to help you with this: the "Easily adapted to" section, which spells out which genres and sub-genres require the least tweaking, and the "Tags" section, which lists the major elements of the plot.

Using Tags

Tags can help you identify the key ingredients of a plot, and they're especially helpful for drifting. They signal elements that may help you draw a connection between one genre and another. For example, the *artificial life form* tag indicates that a plot prominently features mechanical entities, and also signals that this plot might work well in a fantasy game involving magical constructs, a horror campaign featuring re-animated life, or a sci-fi game about blurring the line between AIs and human beings.

Modern Elements

When drifting plots from one genre to another, it's good to remember that because they're written by modern people, all of the genres utilized in roleplaying games include modern elements. Fantasy settings are based on modern thoughts about medieval worlds, and no matter how realistic to a time period we strive to make a setting, it will still incorporate modern ideas. Sci-fi settings are based on modern ideas extrapolated into their future forms, or a core concept recast in the light of different imagined elements. While we can imagine many ways the world will be different in a sci-fi setting, we include many things exactly as they are now. Horror settings are usually modern worlds with some element made more foreign and threatening to the human psyche, or they isolate us from the comfort and safety of our lives.

Every genre and sub-genre contains modern elements. Some modern elements and concepts will exist in the same ways in different genres, and when drifting plots you can use these elements as flags to pinpoint genre similarities.

Sub-Genres

While the three genres we used to categorize *Eureka's* plots were selected to cover the widest range of RPGs and campaign settings possible, many sub-genres feature tropes that are closely tied to their settings. Even so, don't rule out a plot just because it seems like your favorite RPG's sub-genre is too restrictive to accommodate that plot. Every sub-genre is based on or derived from a more expansive genre, and they often include elements of other genres. In fact, some sub-genres actually make it easier to drift plots for use in your game.

Because of its technological elements, a steampunk setting might be a better fit for a sci-fi or horror plot than a traditional fantasy setting would be. A sci-fi setting featuring unexplained powers offers ready connecting points for a plot dealing heavily with magic. An adventure plot featuring zombies can work just as well in a post-apocalyptic sci-fi plot as it does in a horror game.

Similarly, many post-apocalyptic tropes work equally well in a fantasy campaign, like isolated enclaves staving off brutal invaders, tribal characters exploring ruined cities, and PCs safeguarding valuable cargo on a journey through dangerous badlands. If you're running a dark fantasy campaign that involves the PCs protecting townsfolk from creatures of the night, many horror plots can be dropped right into your game with little in the way of modifications.

Cross-Genre Re-Skinning

An interesting option for cross-genre plot usage is to re-skin the plot but retain the core elements, which can create a unique experience for your players. For example, because horror plots are often specifically intended to take the main characters out of their comfort zones, using a horror plot in a fantasy or sci-fi game will give your players a different take on the campaign.

Incorporating this experience into other genres can shake up your players in good ways. While they might have more incredible powers, or be able to deal with greater threats, isolating fantasy and sci-fi characters from help, or utilizing a creature that has the upper hand (and may in fact be unstoppable), will provide a different play experience.

Similarly, employing modern elements and organizational structures from a sci-fi game in a basic fantasy setting can provide a sense of intrigue and complexity. Using a fantasy dungeon crawl in a sci-fi campaign based around space traders will shake things up: When the planetary ruler charges the PCs with defeating the legendary beast that's destroying their mining facilities, the game will take on an epic feel.

Even if you only do this sort of cross-genre re-skinning for a session or two, a quick break from your usual play style can be a lot of fun—and has the potential to improve the play experience in all of the games that follow, too.

Genres

The 501 plots in this book are equally divided into three primary or “umbrella” genres: fantasy, sci-fi, and horror. These are intentionally broad categories, and if you stretch them a bit they can cover just about any roleplaying genre.

We further identified 19 sub-genres: 14 that fit inside the big three, and five that stand alone. Each plot in this book can be easily adapted to at least two other genres or sub-genres. With enough work, any plot can be made to work in any sub-genre, but the ones we've identified in the “Easily adapted to” section of each plot are the genres that are a natural fit.

Listed below are all of the genres used in *Eureka*, along with descriptions of each. Because gaming isn't the same as fiction, we've defined genres according to the way they're typically applied to roleplaying games.

Because it's so easy to adapt plots from one genre to another, don't be surprised to see a wide range of sub-genres listed under “Easily adapted to” for most plots. By the same token,

each primary genre chapter includes numerous plots that can easily be used in one of the other two primary genres, so don't limit your search for fantasy plots to the fantasy chapter, for example.

Lastly, if you want to track down plots that can be easily adapted to a particular primary or sub-genre (all plots flagged as *Swashbuckling* or *Post-Apocalyptic*, for example), you'll find an [index by genre](#) on p. 295.

FANTASY

As a primary genre, fantasy covers a wide range of play styles, core concepts, and settings. Generally speaking, fantasy plots feature supernatural elements in a mythological or idealized medieval setting. They tend to include medieval or archaic weapons and armor, magic and magic items, monsters, and sentient non-human species (dwarves and elves, for example). The four fantasy sub-genres are distinguished mainly by tone.

Grim and Gritty Fantasy: The odds are stacked against the PCs. Death is a very real possibility, magic and wealth are often rare, and cultural elements may be brutal and ugly (slavery, for example).

High Fantasy: The PCs are powerful and heroic, and are generally involved in an epic struggle against evil forces. Magic, wealth, and exotic locations are common features of this sub-genre.

Swashbuckling: Pulp fantasy (including the sword and sorcery genre) featuring over-the-top action, where the focus is usually on the PCs rather than on world-spanning conflicts. Characters often have flexible morals.

Traditional Fantasy: The default genre for many fantasy RPGs, defined by iconic elements of fantasy fiction like elves, dragons, and spellcasting, as well as roleplaying-specific elements such as dungeon crawls. Usually includes elements from the other three fantasy sub-genres, without wholly embracing any one of them.

SCI-FI

Sci-fi is an incredibly broad primary genre. Generally speaking, sci-fi plots feature futuristic settings and situations, often utilizing advanced technologies or theoretical scientific discoveries. They may include such elements as alien races, portable energy weapons, interplanetary or interstellar travel, or even psychic powers.

Cyberpunk: Cybernetically enhanced PCs operate for and/or against powerful mega-corporations in a near-future dystopia. The PCs tend to have loose moral standards, and adventures are often structured as missions. Fantasy elements are sometimes featured as well.

Hard Sci-fi: Hard sci-fi takes place in a futuristic setting in which scientific and technical accuracy is important. Fantastic elements like alien species and faster-than-light travel either don't exist or are dealt with as realistically as possible.

Post-Apocalyptic: Set in the near or far future after an epic cataclysm, either man-made or natural. In play, post-apocalyptic games generally deal with survival in a world of limited resources and knowledge, and can resemble Grim and Gritty Fantasy (or even Traditional Fantasy).

Space Opera: Adventurous or pulp sci-fi with larger-than-life characters, settings, and storylines. Space operas tend to include fantastic elements like anthropomorphic alien races, and they usually take a casual approach to science.

Steampunk: Sci-fi that involves 19th century or Victorian-era technologies, real or imagined, such as steam-powered mechanical computers. Steampunk games often contain

elements of fantasy and feature the theme of rebellion, and may embrace or parody Victorian attitudes.

Supers: The PCs are superheroes, beings with powers and abilities far exceeding those of the common man or woman in their setting. Costumes, strong moral codes, secret identities, and super-villains worth fighting are common features in Supers games.

HORROR

Like fantasy and sci-fi, horror is a broad genre that covers a range of styles and themes. Generally speaking, horror plots evoke a sense of fear or dread through the use of an unknown or overpowering antagonist. Supernatural and disturbing elements are common features of this genre. As written, all horror plots in *Eureka* are set in our world sometime in the last 150 years or so, and the majority of them assume a modern setting.

Action Horror: The antagonists may be big and scary, but in an Action Horror plot, the PCs can fight them. In film, zombie movies and slasher flicks both fit the bill; in RPGs, pulp-inspired Lovecraftian tales can also be Action Horror.

Gothic Horror: A combination of the romance and horror genres, with the goal of creating an emotional atmosphere of dread or foreboding. Terror, a sense of mystery, and hauntings are common features of this sub-genre.

Supernatural: Supernatural horror is characterized by elements of horror, magic, and fantasy placed into a modern setting. Strange and bizarre happenings, psychic powers, the occult, and monsters hidden among us are often featured.

Victim Horror: The antagonists are far more powerful than the PCs, and the fun is in surviving—or at least attempting to survive. Ultimately, struggling against evil or uncaring forces in this type of game is futile, but the characters are driven to try despite the odds.

OTHER

Not a genre itself, “Other” covers those smaller genres that don't quite fit into any of the three primary genres, but also aren't big enough to *be* primary genres.

Anime: Borrows elements from Japanese-style animation and comic books, such as anthropomorphic animals, school-aged children, and giant robots. What counts as anime is highly subjective; anime plots can be fantasy, sci-fi, horror, or “other.”

Comedy: This can be a genre or a style of play applied to other genres (you can run a comedic fantasy campaign, for example). As a genre, it includes everything from parodies of existing genres and tropes to outright slapstick. There are a few pure comedy RPGs, but not all that many.

Pulp: Characterized by over-the-top action and a relaxed approach towards realism and believability, pulp games are generally set in our world from the 1930s onwards. Characters, situations, and settings are larger than life.

Romance: Interpersonal romantic relationships are at the heart of the game, with a focus on roleplaying. These relationships bloom, change, and/or die, and can be played out as the centerpiece of an adventure or featured as recurring elements.

Western: Generally (though not always) set in the American West in the late 19th century, this genre features a frontier mentality, rugged individualism, and oftentimes a sense of rebellion against creeping societal norms—plus gunfights, horse rustling, and panning for gold.

Tags

“Tags” are short descriptors attached to plots in *Eureka*, like *deadline* for an adventure with a time constraint or *madness* for a plot that features insanity or possession. They let you know the key elements of any plot at a glance, and they serve three main purposes: searching, discovery, and inspiration.

If you want to find a specific kind of plot, or plots that contain similar elements, check out the [tag index](#) at the back of this book (p. 298). Chances are we’ve used a tag that will be helpful to you in locating the right sort of adventure plot.

If you like a particular plot but can’t work it into your game at the moment, that’s where discovery comes in. Read over the tags for that plot, and then look up the tags that jump out at you in the index—you’re likely to find another plot you like that matches your needs.

Finally, if you’ve been struck with option paralysis or just don’t know where to turn, you can use tags as a source of inspiration. Find a tag you haven’t used recently, or one that makes you think, “Hmm, I could do something cool with that,” and then peruse the index for plots that share that tag.

Tags are loosely grouped into six main categories: challenges, creatures and enemies, features, NPCs and relationships, play style, and setting. Most plots feature a tag or two from each category, but this isn’t a hard-and-fast rule.

One type of tag doesn’t fit any of the categories: the author tag, which is always the first tag listed and is in the format “(AA)”—where AA is an author’s initials. Because each of *Eureka*’s nine authors has their own GMing style and approach to adventure-writing, you may find that plots by one or more writers match your personal GMing tastes more closely than others. You can look up [plots by author](#) in the index that appears on page 307.

Below is a complete list of the 42 tags used in *Eureka*, broken down by category.

CHALLENGES

These tags describe the types of challenge, test, or signature event that define a plot, as well ways that plot might impact your game.

bearers: The PCs must carry an object (usually a MacGuffin) to a destination

deadline: Includes a deadline or other time constraint that must be met

difficult choice: The PCs must make a hard choice—one with no clear best option

epic impact: The plot is large in scale and will have a dramatic impact on your game

epic challenge: Features powerful adversaries or very difficult trials (“high-level”)

escort mission: The PCs have to guide an NPC to a destination

exploration: This plot includes searching, mapping, or otherwise exploring an area

mass combat: Features one or more large-scale battles

race: Includes a race, chase, tracking, or escape scene

siege: Involves besieging or defending an area

travel: Long distance, extensive, or otherwise significant travel is featured

CREATURES AND ENEMIES

Most plots focus on PC races (humans plus others depending on your campaign setting), but they often involve monsters and other creatures. Whether friend or foe, those creatures are called out as tags.

artificial life form: Robots, AIs, or other techno-critters are featured

monster: Monstrous or alien creatures are involved

spirit: Features insubstantial, ephemeral, or ghostly entities

villain: This tag indicates the presence of a clear master villain for the plot, regardless of what aspect that villain takes

FEATURES

This is the most general category, and covers plot elements that don't really fit anywhere else.

madness: Involves madness, possession, or unnatural behavior

magic: Includes magic as a prominent feature, not just an incidental element; most fantasy plots have "baseline" magic, and so won't include this tag, while nearly any sci-fi or horror plot that features magic will have this tag

mature themes: Contains concepts, imagery, or scenes that may be inappropriate for some gaming groups and for younger gamers

rebellion: Features characters acting against an established order

trade: Centers around trade or other economic matters

twist: Please don't reveal the secret ending to your friends

NPCs AND RELATIONSHIPS

The nature of NPCs who are central to a plot, the relationship the PCs have with other characters, and social elements like religion are all covered by the tags in this category.

alliance: The PCs work closely with one or more NPCs

betrayal: PCs are betrayed, used, or otherwise maligned by someone they trust

innocent: NPCs in danger include children, the helpless, or other non-combatants

politics: Politics, political figures, or the aristocracy are featured

relationship hook: Includes a PC-NPC relationship (family, friend, etc.), most often as part of the plot hook

religion: Religion or religious figures are involved

rivalry: Includes NPC or background-based rivals as a prominent feature

PLAY STYLE

While any plot can be adapted to any play style, some plots are designed to work better with one play style than with others. Plots that prominently feature a particular play style (or more than one) are called out with these tags.

combat-heavy: Features multiple combat scenes or especially intense fights; plots with just one combat scene won't usually have this tag

intrigue: Conspiracies, skullduggery, or other social machinations play a prominent role; all plots with this tag will also have the *social* tag

investigative: This plot is primarily investigative in nature, with lots of detective work

roleplaying-heavy: Features plenty of roleplaying interaction, or heavy or intense roleplaying scenes

sandbox: An open-ended scenario where the PCs are presented with several options and their choices drive the action (as opposed to a more linear adventure)

shady: The PCs must cooperate with unsavory individuals or commit acts of a questionable nature

social: Primarily social in nature, or contains major social scenes

stealth: Subterfuge and stealth are involved

tactical planning: Features a meaty fight or fights that the PCs know about in advance, giving them time to concoct plans

SETTING

The scope or nature of the plot's assumed setting is delineated by these tags. Most plots can be easily shifted from one setting to another, but if you're short on time, a setting tag that matches up with your game will be a timesaver.

city: Takes place in a large city or other significant settlement

dungeon crawl: Features the exploration of a dungeon, ancient ruins, a military complex, or a haunted mansion (any dungeon analog, regardless of genre)

interplanetary: Travel between planets is involved; this tag only applies to sci-fi plots

isolated area: The plot takes place in an isolated or remote location, or a place that's otherwise difficult to reach

planet-based: Used for sci-fi plots only, this tag is applied to plots where the PCs never leave the planet (or space station)



Artist: Andrew McIntosh

Chapter 1: Game Mastering Advice

Themes

Eureka's adventure plots are grouped by theme within each primary genre, and there are 36 themes altogether. Why 36? We have a charmingly nerdy answer for you: because the themes are drawn from a 1917 book entitled *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*. Written by Georges Polti, *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* puts forward an intriguing idea: There are only 36 basic plots, or dramatic situations, for dramatic works—period. In other words, every plot ever written can be distilled down to one of these 36. How can you not dig a concept like that?

We loved this idea for two reasons: first, because it's incredibly ballsy, and second, because it gave us an underlying structure that ensured that we didn't accidentally write more or less the same plot 501 times. As we wrote, we discovered another benefit of using Polti's situations: nearly all of them revolve around people, which is ideal for gaming purposes, since all gaming revolves around the player characters.

The core concept behind *Eureka* emerged more or less fully formed: *Let's write a book that provides complete adventure outlines, not just hooks, and base the plots on the Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*. It grew from there, but the kernel of that idea never changed. Here's how we tweaked that concept to produce a useful, versatile gaming book.

STRUCTURE

Each one of *Eureka's* 501 adventure plots—167 for each of the three primary genres, fantasy, sci-fi, and horror—has a theme, and they're roughly evenly distributed: Within each broad genre, all 36 dramatic situations appear four times, and some appear five or more times. Before we started writing *Eureka*, we created a matrix that broke all 501 plots down by author and situation, and then made sure that each author wrote plots in all three genres and wrote a plot for every dramatic situation (and more than one plot for several of them).

That planning enabled us to ensure that no one author was writing all of the plots related to a specific theme, or even all of the plots built around one theme within a particular genre. We aimed for variety because we believe that variety is one of this book's greatest strengths as a GMing tool: Even with just 36 underlying themes, you won't find two plots among *Eureka's* 501 that look exactly alike.

In fact, you won't even find two plots based on the same theme within the same genre that are identical—but don't take our word for it: Flip to a random page and read all of the plots for one theme, and you'll see how much variety there is. Polti's theory—that there are just 36 plots out there, period—may

be ballsy, but based on what you'll see throughout *Eureka's* adventure plots, there's something to it.

In writing *Eureka*, we took plenty of liberties with the list of dramatic situations. We don't necessarily agree with Polti's premise, but this isn't a guide to playwriting or a drama textbook—it's a gaming book, and it's designed to make your prep simpler and your games more fun. So we used the 36 dramatic situations as a starting point, and called them themes. In some plots, the theme comes through more strongly than it does in others, but it's always discernable.

We also used or discarded the components Polti attached to each dramatic situation, like a "Persecutor, a Suppliant and a Power in authority" for situation number one, Supplication, as we saw fit, all in service of a better gaming experience. Taking these kinds of liberties gave us the creative freedom to write plots that will be fun to GM and play, without worrying too much about how closely we followed Polti's guidelines.

We didn't discard Polti's focus on people, though. Since your game revolves around the PCs, and since their stories, as well as your campaign world, are enriched by and intertwined with those of the many NPCs that populate your campaign, plots that are driven by people are a natural fit. The people you'll find in *Eureka's* adventure plots don't always get along—hell, half the time they're stabbing, betraying, sleeping with, haunting, or stealing from each other (or all of the above)—but they're never dull, and they always make good fodder for adventures.

Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations is in the public domain; you can read it for free online (here's one place to do so: archive.org/details/thirtysixdramati00polti) or buy a print copy for a reasonable price if you prefer the dead-tree version. It's a slim little book, and the bulk of it is taken up by descriptions of the 36 dramatic situations. Drama students, fiction authors, playwrights, and lots of other folks have made good use of Polti's list over the years—and if you poke around, you'll even find other ways that it's been applied to gaming.

THE 36 DRAMATIC SITUATIONS

As you'll see from the list below, there are some quirks to Polti's list of dramatic situations. For example, are "Self-Sacrifice for an Ideal" (no. 20) and "Self-Sacrifice for Kindred" (no. 21) really all that different? Maybe not, but we're fans of Polti's list in all its quirky glory—and after reading *Eureka*, we hope you will be, too.

The 36 Dramatic Situations

1. Supplication
2. Deliverance
3. Crime Pursued by Vengeance
4. Vengeance Taken for Kindred upon Kindred
5. Pursuit
6. Disaster
7. Falling Prey to Cruelty or Misfortune
8. Revolt
9. Daring Enterprise
10. Abduction
11. The Enigma
12. Obtaining
13. Enmity of Kinsmen
14. Rivalry of Kinsmen
15. Murderous Adultery
16. Madness
17. Fatal Imprudence
18. Involuntary Crimes of Love
19. Slaying of a Kinsman Unrecognized
20. Self-Sacrifice for an Ideal
21. Self-Sacrifice for Kindred
22. All Sacrificed for Passion
23. Necessity of Sacrificing Loved Ones
24. Rivalry of Superior and Inferior
25. Adultery
26. Crimes of Love
27. Discovery of the Dishonor of a Loved One
28. Obstacles to Love
29. An Enemy Loved
30. Ambition
31. Conflict with a God
32. Mistaken Jealousy
33. Erroneous Judgment
34. Remorse
35. Recovery of a Lost One
36. Loss of Loved Ones

GO FORTH AND CREATE

Whether you base your next campaign on *Eureka* plots, work them in periodically, or use this book solely as a source of inspiration, you now have all of the tools you need to transform *Eureka's* plots into *your* adventures. We hope that you'll use *Eureka* to create adventures that your players will never forget. So pick a plot, grab your rulebooks and a handful of dice, gather your players around the gaming table, and prepare to have a blast—adventure awaits!



Fantasy

Whether you love the dungeon crawls and treasure hunting that are the hallmarks of Traditional Fantasy, High Fantasy's epic deeds, or the bloody struggles found in Grim and Gritty Fantasy games, *Eureka* has it all. Within this chapter you'll find 167 fantasy plots, all written to be adapted to multiple genres and designed to be easy to drop into your ongoing campaign.

You can run these plots as-is, tweak them a little to fit your campaign world, or pluck out individual ideas and use them as the basis for creating your own adventures. We've sorted them by theme, tagged them to make it easy to find the type of plot you need, and listed the genres where they work best.

Epic quests, mad wizards, romance gone wrong, betrayals most foul, orcish armies sweeping across the land, dark doings in the dead of night—these adventure plots will have your players in the thick of the action in nothing flat.

Supplication

Falsely Accused

1

One of the PCs' friends is arrested and charged with leading a group of bandits who operate out of a nearby forest. He was found unconscious next to the bodies of three slain woodsmen, covered in their blood, with evidence of a recently abandoned bandit camp in the area. He's innocent, but while the local lord is inclined to believe the man there's little he can do: The evidence is compelling enough that the populace expects him to execute the accused man. The accused implores the PCs to go into the dark, dangerous woods and find proof of the real bandit leader's identity—or better yet, bring him to justice. The lord allows them one week to do this.

The real bandit leader lives in the city—he's actually a villainous noble, and makes regular visits to the woods in disguise to lead his band of thugs on vicious raids. He framed the accused man because the bandits had—without permission—stolen from a local baron whose fortune was made in timber; the slain woodsmen were the baron's men. If the plot goes as planned, the noble won't face any retribution from the baron.

The forest itself presents several complications. A centaur tribe is part of what makes it a dangerous place: They attack travelers with little provocation, and are deadly archers with

an intimate knowledge of the land. They dislike the bandits, and if suitably convinced they would aid the PCs in finding the bandit camp. The bandits themselves will also oppose the PCs. As a noble, their leader was in court when the accused man asked for the PCs' help. He has tipped off the bandits, who will arrange an ambush.

If the PCs investigate the woodsmen, the baron will meet with them. He explains that the bandits stole from him, and he wants them dead. He also reveals a clue to the real leader's identity: He saw one of the bandits astride a horse he would have sworn he once spotted in the noble's stable.

Suitable proof can be obtained by coercing the bandits into spilling the beans about their leader, or by gaining entry to the noble's house. With him distracted or incapacitated, the PCs will easily find his stolen goods. He'll be put up for execution as the real bandit leader, and their friend will be released with compensation from the local lord.



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) investigative, politics, stealth, villain

The Grindstone

2

Technology is rare and those who have it, even in its simplest form, have power. The miller in a remote village has gained power over the villagers by charging high amounts for milling their grain into flour. Recently the miller has decided that only customers who bear his mark are allowed to use his services. Some villagers have refused to cooperate and mill their own grain (at a slower rate and in smaller amounts), but the majority of the villagers comply and now bear a scar on the back of their right hand.

The miller is a necromancer who has tampered with the flour. People who eat products made with this tainted flour slowly fall under the miller's spell; the scar on a villager's hand is a sign that the villager is completely under the miller's control. Villagers who refuse to use the miller's services are taken in the middle of the night by his drones and are sacrificed to provide blood with which the miller sanctifies the grindstone.

To kick off the adventure, one of the PCs eats some bread made with the miller's tainted flour and then begins behaving strangely, the PCs are treated as outcasts for not having the mark of the miller, or the PCs rescue someone from being sacrificed by the marked villagers.

This plot is best used as a one-shot adventure while traveling as part of a larger story arc. The PCs encounter a mob of marked villagers (two to three per PC) and, regardless of how that conflict is resolved, it puts the PCs on the miller's radar. Next, the marked villagers try to kidnap the PCs for sacrifice (if the PCs are on the offensive at this point, they interfere with the kidnapping attempt of another villager). The marked villagers are better prepared this time, and the evil magic may have boosted their natural abilities beyond normal levels.

Encounters with the miller outside of the mill should be brief. His mill is heavily guarded by marked villagers. Inside the mill, the miller has a small army of villagers who have become ghouls and zombies. The miller will use necromantic magic in combat. When playing the miller, be arrogant and take foolish risks when fighting the PCs. Actions that threaten the grindstone will cause the miller to act with caution, though, as the grindstone is the secret to his power.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) city, innocent, investigative, magic, tactical planning, trade, villain

The Price of Glory and Fame

3

A bag of bloody clothing is dropped off in town with a ransom note attached, and the garments are recognized as belonging to a famous party of adventurers who disappeared weeks ago. The party was last seen by the townsfolk fending off a vicious pack of monsters who were stealing their goods. People around town can be heard lamenting the fate of these brave souls, and there is much talk about the epic battle that ended when one of the adventurers threw a bomb into the fray. When the smoke cleared, the monsters were gone.

To the townsfolk, the adventurers are heroes. In truth, they're frauds: The adventurers and the monsters worked together to stage the whole scene. First, the monsters harassed the town. Afterward, the party arrived and offered to save the day for a fee that was equal to the task of rescuing the entire populace. The people gave everything they could and the con was almost a complete success. However, even after taking the money and making a clean escape, the swindlers weren't done swindling: The party of adventurers attempted to cut out without giving the monsters their take. Some of the party members escaped with the money, but the monsters were able to capture a few of them and are holding them for ransom in a cave outside of town.

A hooded man approaches the PCs and asks for their help. He is one of the adventurers who escaped the grasp of the monsters. Instead of fleeing with his share of the money, he wants the PCs to help him rescue the adventurers, and promises a reward to sweeten the pot. The hooded man asks that they set out immediately.

A Peaceful Death

4

The PCs, who are well-established and have a heroic reputation, are visited by an ancient creature of considerable power. The creature is dying of natural causes, and its death will come soon. Two of the creature's enemies, a mighty warrior and his arcane companion, have sensed its weakness, and wish to capture it in order to sacrifice it and gain its vast power.

This creature should inspire awe in the PCs both because of its power and its importance in their world, like a kind and noble dragon that has safeguarded a holy site for centuries, and this plot will be more engaging for your players if the PCs have encountered the creature before. It's important to stress to the PCs, through the creature, how bad it would be for the mighty warrior to gain the creature's power.

The creature asks the PCs for protection so that it may die in peace. The party must find a location where the creature can expire that can be easily defended, such as the creature's lair or the PCs' own stronghold. The PCs must fortify the location against possible attackers.

In traveling to the cave, the PCs are ambushed by monsters that seem to have been tracking the hooded man. The hooded man immediately kills any creature that looks like it's about to talk. A torn and bloodstained piece of paper can be found on one of the creatures, written in a pidgin of the creature's language and a common language. The message is hard to read, but says things like "money town attack," a date and time, and "planned run on smoke flash."

The PCs reach the caves, which should be as labyrinthine as the adventure requires. In the deepest section the adventurers are tied up as the monsters' leader gloats over them. If the PCs confront him, he asks for the ransom and warns the PCs not to underestimate his intelligence or betray him like the adventurers did. The hooded man jumps in, trying to prevent the monster's leader from saying too much.

The PCs might fight the monster leader and find out about the adventurers' treachery; the adventurers will attempt to bribe or kill them to keep them quiet. Alternately, the PCs might pay the ransom and be given the adventurers, still tied up, to blackmail or do with as they please. No matter what, the adventurers are full of resentment and will do anything to keep their treachery hidden.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) betrayal, combat-heavy, exploration, investigative, shady, siege, stealth, tactical planning, twist

The warrior sends emissaries to the PCs to bargain for the creature's release, but the emissaries are a feint, and the warrior's minions launch a sneak attack to capture the creature. The PCs foil this attempt.

After the first attack, a stranger approaches the location. The stranger is a long-lost lover of the creature, who has come to be with the creature before it dies. The PCs must figure out who the lover is, and that it isn't a threat, and then escort it to the creature.

The warrior then mounts one final attack, this time with a larger force that includes himself and his arcane companion. At some point after the last attack, the creature dies. Its death should be a peaceful one that denotes not the ending of a mortal life, but the creature's passing to an immortal realm—one where the creature will await the PCs one day, in gratitude.



Easily adapted to: Anime, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) monster, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, siege, tactical planning, villain

Deliverance

Power Vacuum

5

The heroes are in a remote town and have recently vanquished a local threat, such as monsters or bandits. As they depart, they meet a man on the road who's heading in the direction from which they came. They strike up a conversation with the man, and find out that he's a mercenary who is heading to the remote town because he heard that there was trouble in the area. After a bit of conversation, the heroes continue on their travels.

Weeks later, after completing a quest, the PCs come back by way of the remote town. As they near the town, a group confronts them and demands tribute: a highway tax imposed by the new warlord of the area. The PCs will learn from the group that the warlord is the mercenary who they passed on the road, weeks ago.

When the heroes confront the warlord, he explains to them that the threat they vanquished was only an advance guard, and that others followed to avenge the fallen. For protection, the townsfolk turned to the mercenary, who then took over the town. He thanks the PCs for creating the situation that has made him the warlord.

The warlord rules with a heavy hand and is filling his coffers through crippling taxes and highway tariffs. The town is dying under his rule, and the people are suffering. The heroes must decide how to deal with the warlord and deliver the town from the suffering that was caused, indirectly, by their actions.

Before the PCs confront the warlord, another wave of the local threat that they vanquished before mounts an attack—one that might be too much for the PCs to handle. Do the PCs make the warlord an ally and receive his aid, or do they vanquish him and face the threat alone?

This plot works best if you set it up during a previous adventure, and then complete it after running another adventure. The situation creates a sense of cause and effect for your players, as it was their initial actions that caused the town to suffer. It's important that you make the conversation on the road with the mercenary memorable—and it's ideal if the heroes figure out the warlord's identity before you tell them.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (PV) alliance, combat-heavy, difficult choice, innocent, isolated area, villain

Desperation on the River

6

While sheltering in an isolated river town during their travels, the PCs learn that the town is in dire straits. Run by a retired adventurer, the town has long been plagued by a tribe of ogres that lives on the far side of the river. A week ago, the ogres raided the town and kidnapped several children; in retaliation, the townsfolk attacked the ogres and slew several of them—including the chieftain's daughter.

The children were rescued, but the ogres have sworn a blood oath to destroy the town and kill the inhabitants. The mayor has tangled with ogres in the past, and knows some lore about their rituals and tactics; he estimates that the ogres will strike in roughly a week. On behalf of the town, the mayor implores the PCs to aid them—without the PCs' help, the townsfolk will be forced to flee their homes for good.

This is an open-ended scenario: The PCs are presented with a problem and a few logical options for solving it, and how they solve it is up to them. The first option is to prepare the town for a siege—training townsfolk to fight from the walls, shoring up fortifications, digging a moat, etc. The second is to take the fight directly to the ogres by heading up to their caves and wiping them all out. This will be difficult, as there

are more ogres than the PCs can safely face alone. The third is to try diplomacy and attempt to negotiate with the ogres to secure the town's safety; this could involve ritual combat between the ogres' champion and a PC.

The ogres also have two surprises of their own. One bloodline within the tribe tends to produce smarter-than-average ogres, and two of them will spy on the town. If their spying goes undetected, then the ogres will be better-prepared for whatever the PCs choose to do; if caught, they can provide valuable intelligence about the ogre caves and their forces, if suitably convinced. Additionally, as part of their preparations for assaulting the town, the ogre chief will summon and bind a demon, promising the souls of soon-to-be-captured townsfolk in exchange for the demon's aid in battle. The demon will hang back and use its powers to blindside the PCs—who are expecting to fight only ogres.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (MR) deadline, innocent, isolated area, sandbox, siege, social, tactical planning, villain

The Convicted

7

A beggar roams the nearby territories clothed in rags and carrying a scroll containing the teachings of a good deity. The beggar offers to work for food, shelter, and simple goods. The services he provides are those of a highly educated person (calligraphy, book keeping, translations, etc.) and the beggar's fees are not even a tenth of what others would charge for the same work. Still, no one will hire the beggar, and he's driven away by all who encounter him.

The beggar is a former priest of the local good deity who was framed by the current keepers of the nearest temple. The beggar is now an outcast, and no one will help him or hire him out of disgust at his alleged crime. Meanwhile, the current temple keepers are trying to smuggle religious artifacts to a nearby buyer in order to fatten their own pockets.

The PCs may be charged by the good deity to vindicate the beggar, or the beggar may give aid to the PCs out of kindness after they've been wounded. Regardless, once the PCs are associated with the beggar, they become outcasts as well.

The PCs witness a drunken group of mercenaries bullying the beggar; this will help establish the true nature of the beggar, for he will not fight back. The PCs can defend the beggar or watch him be humiliated.

Shortly after that, a group of assassins (disguised as a circus troupe) hired by the temple keepers to kill the beggar and the PCs attack them in broad daylight. They use acrobatics and exotic beasts to assail the PCs, while a knife thrower focuses her attacks on the beggar. The troupe possesses clues as to where the smuggling operation is located.

Finally, the smugglers and temple keepers will meet at the local docks. Here the PCs can vindicate the beggar as they fight their way through evil smugglers and treacherous priests in order to stop a departing ship from setting sail with the artifacts.

The most important aspect of this plot is to make the beggar a likable and sympathetic character. Your players will find the vindication of the beggar to be more rewarding if they genuinely want to help him.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PB) alliance, escort mission, innocent, intrigue, religion, social

Web of Deceit

8

A quick bodyguard mission in a large city has gone well: The PCs safeguarded an exotic young girl who traveled to the city to pick up and sell an item she inherited from rich relatives. The PCs successfully protected both the girl and the artifact during a nighttime attack, and escorted her to the market where she made the sale. She paid them for a job well done.

The next day, the real owner of the object approaches the PCs. A powerful figure in the local government, he shows the PCs undeniable proof that the object in question was stolen from him just days before it was to be sold to pay off a large government debt. The owner tells the PCs to get the object back or be sentenced to life in jail, or worse. It's clear that he has enough power to make this happen.

The true story: The girl was in league with the object's owner, but double-crossed him and sold it to a fence—with the PCs' unwitting help. The thieves' guild also knew about the girl's planned treachery and tried to exploit her vulnerability as the object changed hands by taking the object for themselves (the nighttime attack) and forcing their way into the deal. Multiple factions are at work, and the PCs should feel like they're caught in a large and complex web. Faction members might approach the PCs, believing they have the object; the girl may return to the PCs, pleading for their help, and perhaps lie to or throw herself at one of the PCs; and the fence might be

bribed or otherwise persuaded to give information. Corrupt city guards may also apply pressure to the PCs on the object's owner's behalf.

The PCs learn that the object is being put on a ship out of town at midnight. Many of the involved parties show up at the dock to try to claim the object. The climax could be a combat with various thieves, guards, and other mercenaries, or it might be a tense standoff as the PCs try to negotiate on behalf of whatever party they align themselves with. The PCs might even maneuver the factions against each other and claim the object in the aftermath.

You should plan the movement of the factions beforehand. Place clues and relevant information into the story based on how the PCs search for the object. Your players will feel rewarded when their ideas untangle the complex plot. Write down clues and other information in a visible place so that your players keep everything fresh in their minds and can easily make connections.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) betrayal, city, investigative, shady, stealth, tactical planning, trade, twist, villain

Crime Pursued by Vengeance

Stolen Dishonor

9

Most of the founding members of a famous adventuring party have recently been murdered; the two survivors contact the PCs for help. The PCs arrive to find them murdered as well. “Your children are next” is written on the wall in their blood. On the table next to the last two victims is a large lens, with a folded note: “If we are killed, use this.”

The lens allows one to see scenes from a location’s past. Used at the murder location, it shows a figure suddenly appear in a puff of smoke, slash at the victims, then disappear. The lens also reveals some of the conversation beforehand. Between bouts of nervous small-talk, one victim says, “Do you think it was that business in the pit?” The other snaps “Shut up. We did what we had to. You were there.” It also shows the figure writing his gory message, and his face is visible.

The “pit” is well-known as the site of first adventure the victims embarked upon when their party was originally formed. There, nine years ago (the length of time promises made by demons are good for in some belief systems), they defeated a demonic cult at the bottom of a dried-out well. The clues should lead the PCs there, where a few critters have taken up residence and need to be cleared out.

Justice by Proxy

10

A relative of one of the PCs is a wealthy merchant who has established several highly lucrative and coveted trade routes. One day his rival, the nephew to the king, attacks the relative and seizes his trade routes. Petitions to the king fall on deaf ears, as the king won’t rule against his own nephew.

The relative contacts the PC for help; without his trade routes, he’s ruined. Drawing upon their familial bond, he begs the PC to take action against the king’s nephew. If he doesn’t heed the request, the PC turns his back upon his family—but to heed the request is to bring the wrath of the king upon the PC and his companions.

There is hope, however. The king’s nephew has many enemies, from snubbed nobles to angry members of the thieves’ guild, all of whom would like to see his downfall. The PCs must now navigate palace back rooms and shadowy alleys in order to seek justice by helping those that have been wronged. As the PCs are moving about the city they’ll have at least one run-in with the nephew’s thugs, who will threaten the PCs to stay out of the relative’s business.

One of the nephew’s prominent enemies is the master of the thieves’ guild, who knows of the nephew’s secret affair with the king’s mistress, and whose brother was taken prisoner

At the pit, the lens reveals robed cultists chanting around a demon, who asks, “What do you desire, and what do you offer?” The leader of the famous adventurers throws off the robes disguising him, buries an axe in the lead cultist, and bellows, “Victory! And I offer you these souls!” He and the other party members begin to fight the cultists as the demon shouts, “You shall have it!” Unnoticed in the fray, but visible in the lens, the injured head cultist drags himself off.

The murderer is the head cultist, returned to take vengeance on the adventurers. He is trading their souls for more power. The demon has granted him a sword which allows him to teleport to a victim’s side, acquire their soul with one slash, and then teleport back. His vengeance complete, the sword is now just another sword. The head cultist isn’t difficult to track down, as he has recently formed another cult.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) intrigue, investigative, magic, religion, sandbox, villain

in order to keep him quiet. Another is a noble who knows that the nephew has been taking money from the captain of the guard to overlook certain thefts in his district, who wants the prized horse that the nephew seized from him. The head of the local temple also has an axe to grind: He knows that the nephew has been skimming donations from the temples in his district, but can’t say anything because the nephew’s accountant has falsified the books to make it appear that the head of the temple is embezzling money—the true ledger would prove his innocence.

Can the PCs arrange for the nephew’s enemies to drag him down without the king taking action against them? This plot works best if the relative is either someone from the key PC’s background or an NPC established at least a few sessions before this plot is used. It must be clear that the PCs stand no chance of attacking the nephew outright: A direct attack against the nephew would bring down the king’s wrath, as well as his more powerful followers.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PV) city, difficult choice, intrigue, politics, relationship hook, religion, shady, trade, villain

Deadly Distractions

11

Upon hearing a town crier proclaim the murder of a prominent public official, the PCs begin to notice eyes turning accusingly towards them. At first, townsfolk just whisper about them, but then they notice that a group of mercenaries seems to be watching them closely. The situation rapidly deteriorates for the PCs when they hear another crier loudly declare that witnesses saw people running from the scene of the murder—people who match the description of the PCs. One of the townspeople points to the PCs and screams, “Those are the guys!” The PCs are forced to act quickly and with discretion as the town criers’ descriptions have stirred people up all over town.

It becomes obvious to the PCs that the criers are being overzealous in their duties. If questioned, a crier will reveal that he’s being paid to sensationalize the story. They will find, however, that none were bribed by the same person. The only commonality is the bar where all the criers were approached.

The bar is a known hideout of the real murderer: a member of the assassins’ guild. The guild might have been hired by a long-term enemy of the PCs, or they might just be using the PCs as a scapegoat to draw attention away from their crimes.

More information regarding the murder and frame-up can be obtained in the bar’s basement, where most of the dirty

stuff—like gambling, prostitution, and back room dealing—goes down. Entry to this area can be accomplished in many ways: The group can talk their way in, sneak in, or force their way past the guards, who won’t put up too much of a fight.

Once inside, the PCs see someone (the murderer) bolt through a passage in the back. The rest of the people in the room will attack. After the fight, the path will be clear for the PCs to pursue the culprit, who is running through the sewers to meet up with reinforcements. While chasing him through the sewers, they’ll face many traps that are designed to slow them down. If the PCs don’t catch up to him before he gets to his destination, they’ll face a much larger force. If they do catch up to him and stop him, he will reveal the whole plan.

Between the information discovered about the murder, the confession of one or more of the criers, the evidence gathered from the patrons of the bar’s basement, and the possible confession of the murderer, the PCs can clear their name with the authorities.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) intrigue, investigative, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, social, stealth, villain

The Royal Hunt

12

A member of the royal family has recently been assigned the role of magistrate, and his first order of duty is to have a local brothel burned to the ground, ostensibly for the good of the community. In truth, he patronizes the brothel regularly and wants to permanently quiet the ladies in its employ to keep them from gossiping about him. In “the interest of the public good,” the brothel is torched with the ladies still inside. The fact that other nearby structures will also catch fire and many innocent people will die is an unfortunate consequence of justice being done.

Things get started when the PCs have to fight both the magistrate’s henchmen as well as the blaze itself. At this point, the PCs can become the champions of the common people by opposing the magistrate’s forces and the royal family. For a more personal involvement, a prized possession or a beloved associate of the PCs is within the brothel for them to rescue from the blaze.

The people will demand vengeance, but the royal family only removes the magistrate from his office and places him in another. A traitor will reveal to the PCs that long ago, the magistrate’s ancestors struck a deal with evil spirits. The spirits would grant power and protection in exchange for the possession of a future soul from the royal bloodline, and the magistrate’s soul is the one marked to settle the debt. If the royal

family executes him for his crimes, then the evil spirits collect their payment and return to wreak havoc upon the land.

The magistrate begins to stalk and taunt the PCs. This leads to another encounter where the magistrate attempts to frame the PCs by having them summoned to the local palace. The magistrate then attempts to assassinate the entire royal family and make it look like the PCs are responsible. This results in a three-way fight between the PCs, the magistrate’s thugs, and the royal guards. A member of the royal family will eventually learn the truth and will succeed in killing the magistrate, if the PCs don’t do it first.

When the magistrate is killed the PCs will be plunged into combat with a large demonic creature who is aided by several imps and devils. The royal family is the target of the demon’s wrath. Defeating the demon ensures that the royal family falls from power, but if no action is taken, every member of the royal family will perish.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) city, difficult choice, epic impact, intrigue, magic, mature themes, politics, spirit, twist, villain

Spreading Poison

13

A corrupt city watch captain has been running a protection racket, shaking down merchants and administering savage beatings if they don't pay up. Recently, a merchant rebuffed the captain's cronies, turning down their offer of "protection," and in retaliation they beat the man's wife to death. The merchant is out for vengeance—against the corrupt captain as well as the watch as whole for not bringing the captain to justice. Though not an apothecary himself, he's adept with poisons, and he has begun poisoning watch members.

There have been several poisonings already, and if there are too many more the city will find itself in a crisis, with not nearly enough watch personnel to keep the peace. There's no apparent motive for the crimes, and there are no connections between the watchmen; many are well-respected, and none were involved in killing the merchant's wife. Additional deaths can be used to modulate the pacing of the adventure, giving the PCs breathing room or raising the stakes.

This adventure opens with an investigation of a crime scene. The cause of death is obvious, as is the vector: the watchmen's dinner. The PCs can bring a sample to an apothecary to identify the poison; it turns out to be rare and highly illegal, calling all apothecaries in the city into suspicion.

Visiting a few of their shops will turn up an apothecary who recently disappeared. The merchant bought the poison from him in secret, and as soon as the apothecary saw how it was being used he fled the city. Clues in his shop lead the PCs to the guilty merchant. When the party arrives on his street, they find the captain and his thugs shaking down another shop. If they confront the watchmen, they're warned off; a fight may break out, but fighting the watch should have consequences.

When the PCs meet the merchant, he breaks down and confesses his crimes. He pleads with them to see his side of the story, and to help him bring the captain to justice—even if it means that he himself is executed for his crimes. The nature of the finale will depend on your group, but in general, a good-aligned group will want to see justice served across the board. Exposing the captain will force the watch to punish him for his crimes, but can also reveal corruption further up the chain of command (leading to follow-up adventures).



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) city, difficult choice, intrigue, investigative, politics, villain

Vengeance Taken for Kindred upon Kindred

Caught in the Twins' Crossfire

14

A nearby tribe of orcs (or other savage creatures) was ruled by a powerful chieftain until just recently, when the chieftain was killed by a party of adventurers. The chieftain's twin children, both as ruthless and savage as their father, blame each other for failing to protect him. This has led the tribe to divide into two factions, each led by one of the twins. The factions occupy two nearby camps.

Tensions have risen between the twins and a war is coming. When it comes, a civilized town will be caught in the center of the battle—a battle that will destroy the town and all of its inhabitants. The PCs have arrived at the town (be it by accident, when summoned, or after being dispatched there) on the eve of the war.

The PCs must figure out how to save the town. There are too many orcs for the party to face them alone, but no simple solution exists. If the PCs do nothing, the town will be destroyed, though the PCs may survive. If they support one of the twins over the other, that twin will be victorious; the town will then be in danger from the newly re-formed tribe unless

the heroes can strike a bargain with the winner. If the PCs support a third party, that group will need assistance getting a foothold in the region and dealing with both of the twins.

As the PCs tackle the problem at hand, several events will occur over the course of the adventure: a scouting party of orcs attacks a farm on the outskirts of town, the mayor of the town attempts to make a pact with one of the twins for protection (not knowing that the twin won't honor the pact because the mayor is weak), two small raiding parties sneak into the town and start a fight, and the town's racist barkeep attempts to mobilize the town to fight the orcs—an act that will, if allowed to succeed, get the town wiped out immediately, denying the PCs the time that they need to set things right.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PV) alliance, deadline, innocent, isolated area, mass combat, sandbox, tactical planning, villain

A Family Affair

15

The PCs are attacked by an earth elemental, and upon defeating the creature, they find a large medallion within the mound of dirt that formed its body. It appears to be made of polished black stone etched with the elemental symbol of earth.

This medallion is a cursed item, and it can't be removed by normal means after it is put on, nor can it be easily destroyed. If a PC puts on the amulet, the PC's skin slowly transforms into a mixture of earth and rock. After four weeks of wearing the amulet, the PC's mind is completely destroyed and she becomes an earth elemental.

The earth elemental was protecting the hidden entrance to an elemental's tomb. Upon entering the tomb, the PCs are attacked by an air elemental that uses gusts of wind to slam them into stone columns and walls. Hovering within the creature is another medallion with similar properties; it turns its wearer into an air elemental.

Deeper inside the tomb is a water elemental residing in a room that has small holes in the walls, floor, and ceiling. This elemental attacks by hitting the PCs with a geyser that erupts from the holes, quickly draining down into the floor to attack again from another surface. This elemental also possesses a medallion.

The Devil in the Details

16

Three brothers own a successful shipping company together, and all is well until the middle brother is killed and his shares fall into the eldest's hands. Because youngest believes his eldest brother planned the death—and that he may be next—he asks his wife to hire the PCs to investigate the murder. He has no idea that his wife actually committed the murder in an attempt to win him more control over (and thus, profit from) the company. The PCs may be introduced to the plot because they booked passage on one of the brothers' ships, or they could be hired solely because of their reputation. The PCs are told not to reveal who hired them.

When the wife talks to the PCs, she gives a detailed account of the murder. She knows the place (the tower room with delicate curtains), the murder weapon and how the brother died (a long knife, stabbed in the back), and the approximate time (late in the night). Her demeanor is cool, but she lets clues slip about what really happened while trying to misdirect the PCs; you should provide false leads while also providing real clues. Once the PCs start investigating, she hires others to mislead and attack them.

The PCs will have to talk to many people and do plenty of information-gathering. The middle brother's servants share hard feelings about their shabby treatment at his hands. Local sailors reveal that during their midnight deliveries they noted

The final confrontation is with the fire elemental that protects the elemental's casket. The fire elemental is the most dangerous foe, for during battle it burns with such intense heat that the iron and wood supports of the tomb weaken and the structure begins to collapse. Another cursed medallion is found once the creature is defeated.

A PC that wears a cursed medallion knows that the elementals are a family. The PC also instinctively knows that in order to break the curse, all four medallions must be recovered and laid to rest in the casket. If any PCs are wearing amulets, touching the casket will work just as well for them. If no one is wearing an amulet, the PCs must somehow deduce how to destroy the amulets in order to prevent others from falling under their curse.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Horror, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) artificial life form, combat-heavy, deadline, dungeon crawl, exploration, magic, monster, tactical planning

that he had women over often, and that he propositioned his brothers' wives when drunk. The brothers speak briefly to the PCs, but are generally busy trying to settle a dispute over the company: The older brother is legally entitled to full ownership of the deceased's shares, but the younger brother wants an equal split. They both seem callous and appear largely unaffected by the death. While investigating, the PCs find their lives in danger: They may be attacked by mercenaries (who were hired by way of a letter written in feminine handwriting), discover attempts to poison them, or uncover other covert means of deterring or eliminating them.

Clues should, ultimately, lead to the wife. The watch doesn't know half of the details that she did, despite their investigations; they're willing to follow the PCs' lead in apprehending the wife, who won't put up a physical fight but feigns innocence until all her lies are disproven.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) betrayal, intrigue, investigative, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, shady, social, twist, villain

Orcish Blood Debt

17

The PCs are attacked by orc bandits (they need not be orcs; choose a humanoid type that the PCs have faced before) who fight to the death, hurling vile curses at them during the battle. A few days later, this happens again—and once again the orcs are no match for the PCs, but fight to the last warrior and die screaming curses at the party.

Some time ago, the PCs killed several members of an orcish tribe—and the rest of the tribe has sworn vengeance against the PCs for slaying their kin. Any orc familiar with that tribe can tell them this, and will explain that the tribe will never rest until every last PC is dead—even their chieftain has sworn a blood oath. The orcs have also recently made a treaty with several ogres and giants, and can now mount a force that will crush the PCs utterly. The PCs can try to stave off their assault, or simply flee the region—but the orcs will not stop hunting them. Their orcish informant suggests that they might be able to make peace with the tribe if they surrender and offer up a suitable sacrifice—or best them in a ritual contest.

Finding the orcs is simple enough, as they are looking for the PCs. Whether the PCs surrender or scout out the camp

on their own, they'll have to confront the tribe if they aim to make peace. When they do, their surrender or offer to accept the ritual challenge will be accepted. The challenge has three components; if the PCs can beat each test, the tribe will consider their blood debt paid.

The first test is a race. The PCs will be matched up against the tribe's fastest and strongest members, and both teams will race to find a totem that has been hidden several miles away. Sabotaging the other team is acceptable, as is fighting them outright.

The second test is one of bravery. The PCs must enter the lair of a dangerous monster—with no weapons, armor, or gear—and bring out its corpse. The final test is mortal combat against the tribe's new champion: a truly mighty giant. With dozens of cheering and jeering orcs, ogres, and giants looking on, the PCs must best the giant or die trying.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) combat-heavy, monster, race

Pursuit

Disappearances on the River

18

A fearsome monster has been preying on communities along a stretch of river about a dozen miles long. No one has actually seen it and survived, though many claim to have spotted the creature. It's generally agreed to be some kind of river monster, emerging from the river to claim its prey and then slipping back into the water.

The "river monster" can be one of a number of things, including: an actual river monster, a powerful psychopath (human or otherwise) who haunts the region, a band of humanoids diverting attention from themselves so that they can kidnap locals for their stewpots, slavers picking the region clean before moving on, or an assassins' guild initiation rite. As no one knows the true nature of the threat at the outset of the adventure, you can also suggest several of these options through clues and other signs, and eventually reveal the real threat.

After the PCs are recruited to find and eliminate the river monster, this adventure takes place over four encounters. The first is investigating the threat, and involves interviewing locals, examining at least one place from which someone disappeared, and trying to spot a pattern in the disappearances (time of day, location, who was abducted).

The second involves taking those clues and using them to attempt to catch the monster in the act; how this plays out depends on the clues you seed and the tactics the PCs decide to employ. Part of the fun of this adventure is the planning and guesswork involved for your players. You can build suspense by having another disappearance take place while the PCs stake out their first potential location, but be careful not to drag things out just for the sake of it.

The third encounter involves facing the threat and learning its true identity. If the PCs spotted the threat during the second encounter, this time around they get a good look and know exactly what it is. The fourth encounter is tracking down and eliminating the threat; the nature of this encounter will depend on what kind of threat you selected.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (MR) investigative, monster, sandbox, tactical planning

Kidnapped!

19

Important NPCs with magical abilities are kidnapped and taken aboard a fast ship. Although nearly all of their magical items are confiscated and they're forced to wear collars that suppress much of their magic, the NPCs find that they can still communicate telepathically.

The NPCs are treated roughly, but are not beaten or tortured. The prisoners receive enough food and water to survive; they have multiple guards, none of whom they know. The ship's captain aggressively interrogates them about the PCs.

The PCs should be enticed to follow by whatever means necessary. The kidnapers' ship stays barely within range of spells and weapons. Engagements should take place, but the kidnapers' ship is fast and sturdy. It also has magical defenses against most of the PCs' abilities, and develops additional defenses in response to successful tactics that they deploy. Keep the PCs interested and in pursuit, but don't let them win or lose at this stage.

The kidnapers lead the PCs on a merry chase for a couple of days, eventually running aground on an unknown island. The PCs can easily board the ship, not-so-easily defeat the crew, and rescue the NPCs. The captain surrenders when he realizes that he's outclassed.

The captain is magnanimous and talkative in surrender, and explains that a mysterious stranger offered him a pile of gold to perform this mission. Further, he was promised that his ship would be protected during the chase, and that he would be met here by a larger force and offered additional gold for his cargo. He also points out that the maps he was given of this island are inaccurate, and show a channel where there is none. He'll even offer the PCs a share of the gold if they don't turn him in.

The captain will further explain that he doesn't know how his ship managed to defend itself against the PCs: It's not a magical vessel, and he's no wizard. However, a magical device that allows scrying and long-distance magic can be found atop the mast of his ship; the captain and crew were unaware of its existence.

The island itself isn't unusual (unless that would better suit your campaign), and it provides enough food and water for the PCs to resupply for their journey home—during which they can discuss who exactly was spying on them...



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) exploration, innocent, magic, race, rebellion, rivalry, travel, villain

The Vengeful Horde

20

The Vengeful Horde is a supernatural force, taking the appearance of a host of demonic creatures, which is released from its ethereal prison to bring vengeance upon a person or persons. The Horde pursues its target relentlessly, destroying everything in its path. The Horde can't be killed by conventional weapons or spells; it can only be forced back into its ethereal prison through the use of a holy artifact.

While traveling, the PCs receive word that the last town that they visited has been destroyed. Survivors say that the town was destroyed by the legendary Vengeful Horde. After some investigation, it becomes clear to the PCs that the Horde has been sent after them, and that the day after they visit a location, the Horde will destroy that location.

The PCs know of (or learn of) the holy artifact, and learn that it's being kept in a great temple in a nearby city. They will have to travel there and acquire the holy artifact. The problem is that the city is protected by the presence of the artifact, and if the PCs take it they'll put the city at risk of an attack by its enemies. The city's elders don't want give the artifact to the PCs.

The PCs will have to convince the elders to release the artifact, or steal it, and then travel to the nearby mountain that

houses the Horde's prison. The evil nature of the prison has attracted all manner of fell creatures that live in the area, and they'll attack the PCs as the party tries to gain entry to the prison.

The prison itself contains a number of magical and mundane traps designed to keep people out. The PCs will have to overcome these obstacles, deliver the holy artifact to the prison, and complete the ritual to return the Horde to its confinement. They must do so in less than a day, or the Horde will lay waste to the city that the PCs have just left.

This plot works best using an existing city in your campaign. The prison should be a few hours away on horseback, in rough and difficult terrain. The question of who released the Horde on the PCs can drive future adventures: Was it a foiled nemesis, a rival party, a vengeful dragon, or a spurned lover?



Easily adapted to: Anime, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) bearers, deadline, epic challenge, innocent, magic

Another 45 Miles to Go...

21

The town is abuzz with the news that a dangerous bandit was captured—a bandit with many loyal followers who have vowed to free him. Nervous townspeople want the bandit held in a more secure facility, but can't find anyone willing to escort him to one—not even as far as the neighboring town. The area boasts only two incapable guards and it is understood that the bandit cannot be moved without a more capable force. A sizable reward is offered for help in escorting the prisoner.

The PCs don't even make it out of town before they're harried by sniper attacks originating from rooftops and hidden alleys. They will be assaulted with thrown knives, poisoned arrow bolts, and other ranged attacks. There are three snipers, all trying to draw guards away from the prisoner in preparation for an ambush.

Before the PCs reach the predetermined drop-off point, a bloodied scout stops them. He relays that half of the bandit's men wait along this path, ready to ambush the PCs, and suggests a different path. The PCs should decide whether to push through the ambush, which should be very challenging, or take the other path. If they push through, the final battle will be much easier, but their chances of surviving the journey to that confrontation will be lower. If they take the other route,

they'll be pursued in a mad chase or an on-the-move combat.

If the PCs push through the attacking force at the ambush, then they arrive at the drop-off location earlier. They're still attacked by the rest of the bandit's men just before the drop-off, but they have a much easier fight due to the bandits' thinned ranks. If the PCs take the route suggested by the scout, then the challenge level of this fight should be increased, as more of the bandit's followers are present.

The bandit can be replaced by an evil noble or NPC appropriate to an ongoing story in your game. The bandit will attempt to escape given any opportunity. A scene where the PCs have to rest overnight with the bandit will create an atmosphere of tension, as no one knows if the bandit's allies will attack during the night. Sprinkle in other encounters as needed, using third parties, tolls on roads, or other non-bandit encounters to try to slow the party down for dramatic effect.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (JA) combat-heavy, escort mission, mass combat, sandbox, shady, travel, villain

Big Fish Fear Large Ponds

22

A band of nomads is hunted and tormented by a local warlord. The warlord considers it a game to block their caravan's exit from his territory, driving the nomads back toward his main camp whenever they come close to escape. He forces the nomads to pay him tribute "for their use of his lands." Soon, the nomads will have nothing left with which to pay, and they fear that the warlord will then take his payment in blood.

Their tormentor is a small fish in a big pond. His territory resides between two kingdoms with better-organized and more heavily armed legitimate armies. The territory could easily be overrun by either of these forces, but the warlord has thus far stayed off their radar. The nomads were only passing between these larger kingdoms to sell their goods.

After entering this territory, the PCs are mistaken for nomads by the warlord's scouts and attacked. If the PCs are victorious, the nomad leader offers to hire the PCs as bodyguards to escort the caravan off of the warlord's land. If the PCs retreat from this initial confrontation, a nomad scout finds the PCs and leads them to the caravan so that the nomads may tend to their wounds. The nomad leader offers food and healing if the PCs agree to aid in their escape.

The PCs have to choose between fighting the warlord's troops along well-traveled roads or taking the older roads that the warlord leaves unguarded—but which have been overrun by monsters. Combat with the warlord's troops should involve large numbers of enemies attacking the PCs in relentless waves. Fighting monsters on the old roads can lead to other possible adventures, such as a dungeon crawl or a quest to slay large, sinister opponents like trolls.

Whatever route the PCs choose, the final confrontation should be with the warlord and his elite guard. If the PCs and nomads leave the territory alive, they will surely tell others, and that could result in the warlord being considered a threat to trade.

Foster a sense of urgency by reporting how many of the nomads are still healthy and able after each battle. Force the PCs to choose between moving quickly to stay ahead of the warlord, or moving more slowly in order to ensure that the nomads remain in good shape.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Post-Apocalyptic, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Sci-fi, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PB) alliance, combat-heavy, deadline, difficult choice, escort mission, mass combat, sandbox, stealth, tactical planning, trade, travel, villain

Disaster

Dirty Little Secrets

23

While traveling, the PCs are overtaken by a squad of armored elven soldiers. The sergeant steps forward and begs help from the PCs. She tells of an overwhelming surprise attack by orcs on an elven city, deep within restricted elven lands. No one saw the orcs until they had reached the city walls, and there are simply too many of them to turn aside. Reinforcements keep pouring in from the south; the elves suspect the aid of strong magic. The sergeant asks the PCs to enter elven territory, sneak into the orc camp, and discover or destroy the source of the reinforcements while the elves distract the orcish forces with a counterattack from the north.

In truth, a mage of another race is leading the attack on the elven city. The magic user has created a powerful teleportation apparatus that can quickly transport entire armies to a desired location. The initial attack on the city walls was merely an appetizer to the real battle that will come if the mage breaches the elven fortification—not by force, but by sneaking a portal into the city.

The orc camp is mostly deserted, save for a handful of support troops and a few squads of guards. The camp was hastily made, and serves as a waypoint for the orcs as they travel to the city. A trail, made by the feet of innumerable marching orcs, leads north to the city and farther south. Messages, written both in Orcish and in a more refined language, lay out the attack strategy and hint at the presence of a non-orc leader.

South of the camp is a large tunnel, recently dug from the side

of a stony hill. Handlers outside of the tunnel are tending to a few large burrowing creatures while the rest of the beasts continue digging inside, preparing side passages off the large main tunnel. The PCs can fight their way past the handlers and their beasts, or avoid them through stealth. A portal is found at the end of the main passage, and deep wheel tracks show that a large object was taken out through a side tunnel. Interrogation of any of the orcish beast handlers reveals that the orc general is personally transporting a teleportation gate into the elven city.

The general, accompanied by a squad of his finest, is larger, tougher, and smarter than all the other orcs. When encountered, he stands proudly, the conquering hero, on top of the portal cart. He and his squad will fight to the death to defend the portal. Once defeated, a message can be found on the general's body that reveals the presence of the mage. This can hook into other adventures or larger storylines—or for a self-contained adventure, the mage can simply be involved in the final combat.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (JA) alliance, city, combat-heavy, epic impact, exploration, investigative, magic, mass combat, siege, tactical planning

Artist: Hugo Solis



In the Kingdom of the Blind...

24

One night while the PCs are traveling, a witch offers to pay them a handsome fee should they stay on her lands and protect her from “the evil that rides the night winds.” The phantom creatures tormenting the witch don’t kill their opponents, but instead blind those who fall in combat against them. If the PCs save the old witch, she will bestow upon them a protection spell to make them immune to the blindness. (When the creatures realize they cannot blind the PCs, they will simply try to kill them.)

If the PCs refuse the witch’s offer, they’ll be attacked by the phantoms that very night. If they then return to the witch’s hut, they will discover only her shredded corpse.

What’s really going on: An evil knight, burned at the stake 100 years ago, has returned. He was executed after he nearly overthrew the monarchy. The knight ensnared a demon and replaced his own eyes with the demon’s to gain mastery over the dark arts. When he was caught, he was blinded so that he couldn’t work magic. He vowed to return one day to smite his enemies and their descendants.

Nine out of 10 locals are now blind. The evil knight has risen from his grave as an undead monstrosity who resides in the

former monarch’s castle. Other undead and demonic beings roam the land serving his evil will. Only his destruction will restore normalcy to the land.

The PCs must launch an assault against the undead in order to enter the castle. Once inside, they’ll face an undead royal family that will attack with fangs and claws, and whose eyes have been sewn shut.

The final battle is against the undead knight in the throne room. The knight wears the eyes of the royal family on a necklace made of sinew, and can pluck the eyes from the necklace to cast different spells.

Stress how all of civilization has ground to a halt due to the epidemic of blindness. Fires blaze out of control, food is within reach but hard to find, and people become lost in panic and wander away from safety.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) city, combat-heavy, epic impact, madness, magic, mass combat, siege, villain

No Way Out

25

The PCs are traveling through the mountains in winter when the ground suddenly trembles—it’s an avalanche. The PCs must quickly run or ride ahead of the wave of snow. As they flee the avalanche, they spot a small stone house just off the road.

The house is empty, but has a cellar door. The PCs enter the cellar and close the door just in time as the avalanche sweeps over the house, trapping the PCs in the cellar. They then discover that they’re not alone: In the cellar with them are a young woman, who cowers in one corner, and three wounded men; the men are protecting an object wrapped in hide.

Unbeknownst to the PCs, the object is a white dragon egg. The men fought the dragon atop a nearby mountain and stole the egg; the dragon triggered a series of avalanches to stop them from fleeing the area. The house belongs to the woman, who is the dragon’s companion—a sorcerer who lures adventurers to her home and traps them for the dragon.

In the cellar, the PCs have a chance to talk to the men and the woman. The woman claims to have been part of a caravan traveling through the mountains; the men say little, and won’t reveal what’s under the hides. The woman should seem innocent, but somehow not completely innocent. Exploring

their prison, the PCs discover a hidden passageway that leads into a network of underground caverns.

They encounter a series of traps in the caverns, which the woman avoids. Growing suspicious, the men blame her for setting the traps, and attack her; the PCs may or may not intervene (though most groups probably will).

The group eventually reaches a large, icy cavern. The woman casts a light spell, revealing a wounded white dragon atop its hoard. The men cry out and attempt to flee, but find that the woman has magically sealed the passage, trapping them—and the PCs—with the dragon.

Caught in the crossfire between the dragon, the egg-thieves, and the sorcerer, the PCs have several options. Will they try to talk their way out of this sticky situation? Search for a way to escape, abandoning the men to their fate? Or fight the dragon, the sorcerer, and possibly the men as well?



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) betrayal, dungeon crawl, isolated area, monster, shady, twist

A plague has sprung up in the heart of a forest, and is killing the trees that house a wild elf tribe's village. The plague was released by members of a rival tribe of corrupted wild elves—they want the plague-stricken elves' land, and are willing to sacrifice part of the forest to get it. But the plague is more virulent than their shamans intended, and will quickly spread to the rest of the forest and beyond.

The wild elves ask the PCs for help in saving their village, but they don't know the true nature of the plague; they believe it to be a natural disaster. As the PCs approach the village, they spot shadowy figures in the trees. The figures flee, but leave clues behind: several bags filled with scraped-off tree mold and covered in elven stitch-work. The wild elves suspect a secret benefactor who is trying to find a cure.

Speaking to the village elder, the PCs learn that a rival tribe has approached them on several occasions to barter for their land. They live deeper in the forest, but haven't been seen for months. When the PCs leave the village, they see that the plague has visibly spread just since their arrival.

The rival settlement was abandoned in haste, with precious objects left behind—the corrupted elves fled when they realized

what they'd done. A few of their shamans stayed behind and collected the plague mold that the PCs found, hoping to reverse the spread of the plague and atone for their great sin.

Flushed out of hiding, they'll share the whole story with the PCs and offer to help in any way that they can. Their most powerful shaman, however, fled with the rest of the tribe—and he's the only one who can stop the plague. The PCs must track the corrupted elves through the forest and abduct the shaman.

With the head shaman in tow, they return to the wild elf village only to find that the plague has now mutated and spread to the elves—several have died already, and many more have plague mold sprouting from their skin. The village wants to kill the evil shaman on the spot, and the PCs must first convince them that he's the key to their survival, and then persuade him to reverse the plague.



Easily adapted to: High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) deadline, innocent, isolated area, race, social, travel, villain

Falling Prey to Cruelty or Misfortune

A King's Ransom

Over the past few months, the ruler of a kingdom has been erecting temples to a new deity, and has begun to push out the clerics of other religions. At first these changes were subtle, but they have grown increasingly more overt and hostile. The king recently began converting his people by the sword, using a special group of soldiers who travel throughout the kingdom. The clerics of the other religions have now gone underground, as have their more faithful followers.

The ruler has refused to listen to his council's cries for reason, and reports are circulating about the king's detractors vanishing mysteriously—including his own daughter, a princess who is beloved by the people. The people now live in fear of their ruler's next demand, and it is into this charged atmosphere that the PCs come onto the scene.

The PCs will discover that the ruler has been possessed by an extra-planar creature. Years ago, in desperation to save his kingdom from destruction by a hostile army, the ruler made a pact with the creature: power in exchange for worshippers. The creature has come to collect. It has stolen the king's soul and imprisoned it in a mystical prison in its extra-planar fortress. The PCs must fight this battle on two fronts:

in their world, and on the creature's home plane.

First, the PCs must stop the mass conversion of a town that is faithful to one of the original deities. Most of the townspeople will be killed during the conversion.

They then learn of a dark ritual that is being prepared by the clerics of the king's chosen deity to allow him to draw life energy from the world to the creature's plane. This ritual will cause a blight to spread forth from the ritual site, killing everything in its path.

When the PCs seek to oppose the creature directly, it will send forth extra-planar creatures to attack the party. In order to defeat the creature, the PCs need to obtain a ritual that will open a mystical gate to the creature's extra-planar fortress. The PCs must confront the creature on its home plane and rescue the king's soul, which will restore the kingdom to normal.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, High Fantasy, Horror, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) epic challenge, innocent, magic, monster, politics, religion, villain

Like Rats from a Sinking Ship

28

A shipwreck on an uncharted island is spotted by sailors on a passing vessel. Later, in port, the crew tells of a wrecked ship that seemed to be crawling with strange creatures. The insurer of the lost ship says that a phial of holy water was on board, and that it is the cure for an ever-worsening disease that afflicts a member of the royal family. The insurer will pay a great deal to get the phial before the king finds out about the shipwreck. He will provide passage to the shipwreck if the PCs will get the cure.

En route to the island, the PCs learn from the crew that the area is cursed and is generally avoided, even by pirates. Closing on the location of the shipwreck, the PCs notice dark, menacing figures swimming toward them. They have little time to react before the things crawl up the ship and attack, going after holy or religious characters first. The creatures worship a dark god whose tenets decree the death of the followers of any other god. After defeating the creatures, the shipwreck and island can be seen close by; creatures swarm over the wreck, but flee at the PCs' approach.

Boarding the sloping deck of the wrecked ship, the PCs go below; there they find many waterlogged rooms and the occasional creature picking through the pieces. The majority

withdrew, but some remain on the ship, searching for something. In the area where the PCs should find the phial, they find only an ornate box with holy symbols on it. The box is empty, but there are some valuable items elsewhere in the cargo hold. If the PCs stay aboard the ship for too long, the tide comes in and begins to pull the ship out to sea; the PCs may find themselves trapped in a room quickly filling with water.

Not finding the phial on the ship, the island is the next logical place to search, as many creatures fled there. In the deepest part of the island's half-flooded cave system, the PCs will find the creatures' shaman. He leads the creatures in a ceremony meant to corrupt the vial. All of the creatures will attack if the ritual is disturbed. To ramp up the final battle, have a powerful sea monster or dragon worshipped by the creatures rise up to join the fight.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (JA) combat-heavy, exploration, isolated area, mass combat, monster, religion, siege, tactical planning

Dreams of Water and Fire

29

The PCs have a series of bizarre dreams that recur night after night for more than a week. They're always broadly the same: scenes of landscapes made of fire and worlds which are entirely composed of a single ocean—and just before the PCs wake up, the ocean begins to boil and the fires are extinguished, sucking the life out of both worlds. Somehow, a sense of immense pain is conveyed through these dreams. Then one night, a new scene appears at the end: a brief glimpse of a town that features a magnificent bridge straddling a river—a town the PCs recognize.

The dreams are being sent by several water and fire elementals, all of whom have been enslaved in the waterworks of this town's wondrous bridge—an engineering marvel that powers multiple waterwheels, stays warm even in winter, and provides heat for nearby buildings. The builders will say only that the bridge is “powered by magic,” but in truth a terrible crime is being committed against the elementals: The fire elementals are imprisoned in a magical cage just beneath the water elementals, so that the fire boils the water elementals and the water douses the fire elementals—but not to the point that it kills any of them. In their suffering, they release the magical energy that powers the bridge.

Freeing the elementals isn't as simple as it sounds. They're understandably angry about their imprisonment and torture, and if freed they'll go on a rampage through the town,

killing dozens. The townsfolk are justifiably proud of their marvelous bridge, but most would be opposed to its existence if they knew the true price. Unfortunately, those with a vested interest in seeing the secret preserved are also the people in charge: the town elders, whose resources include the three wizards who bound the elementals in the first place. Additionally, while the elementals didn't send dreams to the locals (for obvious reasons), two other groups of adventurers—a mercenary company and a band of consummate do-gooders—have also received these visions, and they converge on the town at roughly the same time as the PCs.

This is a site-based sandbox adventure, wherein the nature of the specific encounters involved is up to the PCs. Will they free the elementals without heeding the consequences, or will they try to convince the elementals not to attack the town if freed? Will they try to bring the town elders to justice, or sway the townsfolk against them? Will they ally with one or both groups of adventurers, or oppose the mercenaries' pursuit of profit as well as the do-gooders single-minded focus on freeing the elementals?



Easily adapted to: Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) alliance, city, difficult choice, intrigue, magic, rebellion, sandbox, social

Blissful Sleep

30

Eons ago, a fallen angel walked among mortals, stripped of his immortality by the gods; in time, the angel grew old and diseased. He discovered he could postpone death by transferring a part of his essence into a mortal through a kiss. With this magic, the angel was restored to youth and health, and the mortal became physically empowered for a brief period of time.

What the angel didn't know was that all mortals receiving his enchanted kiss lapsed into a coma and died. Furthermore, they spread this magical disease to other mortals through the merest touch. In a matter of days, whole villages were infected and wiped out.

After an entire kingdom fell, the angel, finally realizing that he was the source of the destruction, banished himself from all mortal contact. Still unable to face death, however, the angel cast a spell upon himself and entered a magical slumber in the capital city of the fallen kingdom. Surrounding kingdoms quarantined all roads into the infected lands, and no one dared to set foot into that territory ever again.

Ages passed, the quarantine was forgotten, and now adventurers are entering the infected lands once again. They return with the treasures of the fallen kingdom—and they carry

the disease. They boast of how they have gained power and strength, but after a few days they pass away during their sleep. The epidemic spreads once again.

The PCs may have friends who become infected, or become infected themselves. A PC can contract the disease by entering into combat against another infected adventurer, perhaps one who is drunk with his newfound treasure and power.

Local temples and archives have some information on the legend of the fallen angel, and suggest that the disease cannot be cured unless the angel is either slain or redeemed in some manner. The infected lands are densely populated by monsters that are immune to the disease (non-humanoid creatures should be the norm). The awakening of the fallen angel could be used as a climactic final battle, or could result in a quest to redeem the creature.



Easily adapted to: High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) combat-heavy, deadline, dungeon crawl, epic challenge, epic impact, exploration, innocent, monster, religion, social, travel

Revolt

To Drown in Power

31

The PCs are at sea when a behemoth from the depths attacks their ship. It swipes passengers and crew members from the deck and swallows them whole. Many people land in the water during this attack and will drown if unaided. The PCs don't have to kill the sea creature, and can drive it off by inflicting enough damage—but regardless of the PCs' efforts, the ship starts to sink.

The PCs can use a lifeboat to save crew and passengers from the waters. One of the passengers who they rescue is a pale elf. The elf explains that she has escaped the underwater kingdom, whose tyrannical ruler sent the sea creature out to capture slaves. The pale elf possesses a magic item that will teleport her back home, along with a small group, and she pleads for help in overthrowing the tyrant. Offer treasure and glory as needed to entice the PCs to aid the pale elf.

Following teleportation, the PCs awaken in the underwater kingdom, a dimly lit land with odd vegetation similar to seaweed. The pale elf is there, and she explains that a wizard sealed the land in a magical dome to save the people of a sinking island. If the PCs look to the "sky," they'll see the shadows of large whales, squid, and schools of fish.

The PCs are attacked by merfolk (or other human/sea creature hybrids). These creatures were tracking the pale elf, and they attack using tridents and nets. One of the creatures rides a beast that appears to be part rhino and part great white shark.

Allow the PCs to explore the setting to create empathy with the native people. Eventually, the PCs will need to infiltrate the tyrant's fortress. This will lead to the final encounter with the tyrant and his elite guard. The tyrant has a magical orb that he can use to temporarily allow sea water to fall from the dome and crush his opponents.

The PCs can use the tyrant's orb to raise the former island back to the surface, or you can devise another adventure centered on the PCs returning home.



Easily adapted to: High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) alliance, city, combat-heavy, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, innocent, isolated area, magic, monster, politics, rebellion, villain

The Unexpected Uprising

32

The PCs (who don't have access to flight or teleportation magic) have arrived at a city in search of information, an object, or a person. The city is walled and is heavily patrolled by guards. The PCs are questioned extensively before being let into the city. They can feel the tension in the air; guards have their hands on their weapons, and citizens avoid their gaze.

As the PCs search the city, they're accosted by a patrol of guards. The guards are belligerent, and instigate a fight. When the fight breaks out, the citizens in the area rise up and attack the nearest guards, inciting a full-scale riot.

In the midst of the riot, a man will lead the PCs into a shop and through a secret passage. He pledges his loyalty to the PCs, and tells them that there are others ready to support their rebellion. He asks about the man who sent them—did he return to the city? The PCs have no idea what he's talking about.

The man will quickly realize that these aren't the people he's looking for, and will explain himself. He'll tell the PCs about the city's unjust ruler and the crimes that she and her men have committed against the people. A month ago, a member of the underground left the town with a large amount of money, seeking to hire mercenaries to come and lead an insurgency.

The man assumed the PCs were those mercenaries. From here, the PCs drive the action. There's a citywide insurgency in progress, they've been branded as rebels, and they're trapped in the city—what will they do?

The following events can take place during this adventure: A wizard with the city guard damages a large building with innocents inside, and the PCs are asked to help rescue people from the collapsing building; a group of women and children are being rounded up by guards to use as hostages, and the PCs must liberate them before they're locked in the dungeons; and the ruler's elite guards are dispatched to find and kill the PCs.

Ultimately, the city won't be safe until the PCs have fully joined the rebellion, stormed the evil ruler's keep, and helped to install the next ruler. You can run these events as three meaty encounters, or expand them into adventures in their own right.



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) alliance, city, epic impact, politics, rebellion, sandbox, villain

Extreme Magical Measures

33

All magic, harmful and helpful, has been suppressed in a city that would otherwise use it heavily. The suppression was enacted by the leader of a mages' guild in order to cripple the magical powers of an evil beast that lurks in the catacombs beneath the capital. As evidence of the moratorium, magic-wielding PCs may find that use of magic becomes increasingly difficult as they approach this place. The PCs' magical items cease to work entirely when they reach the area. In town, posted notices advise that magic is currently outlawed by the guild.

The town is full of mages sitting around and complaining. Include humorous elements of mages trying simple spells, only to be frustrated when they remember that they won't work. After some inquiry, the mages will reveal that the source of the magical suppression is an artifact that the guild leader planted to protect the city from an evil creature. They ultimately decide that they'll pay an impressive sum to the PCs if they brave the catacombs and defeat the beast, which will allow the mages to disable the artifact and once again have use of all their abilities.

The catacombs are deep beneath the city. The first few levels are mostly just stairs leading down, but the lower levels are huge and ancient, predating humanity. You should evoke the feeling that the artifact, being buried so far beneath the ground, is nonetheless powerful enough to reach up into

the world above, and that the lower levels are extremely old. In terms of encounters, the catacombs are full of traps and strange creatures; non-magical beasts will also attack the PCs. Whole societies of intelligent beings could be found down here, suffering the effects of lost magic. Some "safe" areas, however, might be immune to the anti-magic effect, presenting either opportunities to rest or new magical dangers.

The PCs should find the device before they find the creature. This leads to two resolution paths: Find a way to shut off the device, thus unleashing the creature, or find and kill the creature first, then take the device back to the mages to be disabled. Defeating the creature requires good strategy and utilization of other strengths—you should choose a creature that is incredibly high in magical power but still formidable without it. This scenario can be used to challenge a party heavily reliant on magic or magical items.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) city, combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, epic challenge, epic impact, exploration, magic, mass combat, monster, sandbox, siege, stealth, tactical planning

Dishonor among Thieves

34

Members of a city's large and powerful thieves' guild are revolting against the guild's leadership, and this is causing numerous problems. Guild rules that normally prohibit certain types of theft or protect specific groups are being abandoned, independent cutthroats and footpads are moving in to contest guild territory, and the city watch is stretched to the limit dealing with thieves' guild issues. Other types of crime, including murder, flourish in the shadows. Because of the secretive nature of the guild, the source of all of these problems isn't obvious to outsiders.

The PCs can become involved as deputized members of the city watch tasked with maintaining order, as good Samaritans who stop one crime only to find others taking place nearby, as rogues with a vested interest in seeing the thieves' guild weakened (or strengthened), as mercenaries hired by the guild to keep the peace, or as victims of a crime perpetrated by a villain who is muscling in on guild territory. This plot assumes that the PCs are broadly on the side of the law.

Use an opening scene to set the stage, revealing that apparently unrelated problems are actually somehow connected to the thieves' guild as a whole. That scene leads into an encounter that makes the big picture clear: two rival guild factions trying to murder each other in broad daylight, with

the PCs caught in the middle. While the city can't officially engage with the thieves' guild, the PCs can. When they share their news with the watch or other officials, they're offered a reward in exchange for quietly negotiating with the leaders of the guild to achieve peace in the city.

At the heart of the guild's troubles is a dispute between the current leader and the woman who wishes to replace him. She challenged him to a duel for leadership rights and won, but was immediately locked up, her victory unrecognized. Her supporters led the revolt, and the two sides are now in opposition.

The PCs must broker a peace between them and decide which leader they would prefer to assist—and how to satisfy the other faction. The current leader encourages more crimes, but forbids violence entirely; the challenger has a vision of a more brutal guild that focuses less on street crime and more on big jobs, which might actually be better for the city as a whole.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) alliance, city, difficult choice, intrigue, politics, sandbox, shady, social

Daring Enterprise

Flame of Passion

35

A supernatural glacier that advances several feet a day has appeared in a nearby land. Shrouded in mist, it is known as the Icy Death, and it's approaching the kingdom's capital city, crushing every field, forest, town, and living thing in its path. The king has put his top sages to work consulting ancient texts in order to find a way to halt its progress.

The sages have found a text that describes how sacrificing "the flame of passion" will dispel the Icy Death, and they've determined that this is a reference to the queen, who is the flame that ignites the king's passion. Without hesitation, she offers herself up as a willing sacrifice in order to protect her kingdom and its people. Leaving the city with a retinue of knights, she heads for the glacier.

Shortly after the queen departs, the PCs arrive in the capital. They've heard news of the Icy Death's return, and consult with the king to see if they can help. Hearing the tale of the sages and the queen, one PC with a background in history is concerned with the sages' interpretation. After reviewing the text in question, she reaches another conclusion: The flame of passion is an alchemical formula, and she can create it with

the proper ingredients. In a panic, the king asks them to create the flame, rescue the queen, and destroy the Icy Death.

En route to the great glacier, the PCs must fight their way through the flood of refugees who are fleeing its approach; they will have an encounter in which they rescue people from peril. Mounting the glacier itself, they'll face ice creatures tasked with preventing anyone from escaping across its surface. When they find the queen, her knights are locked in mortal combat with more ice creatures, and the PCs can turn the tide and rescue the queen. Once they convince her of the sages' error, and of their plan to destroy the glacier, the queen and her knights will begin heading back towards the capital.

In order to use the flame of passion to dispel the Icy Death, the PCs must now fight their way across a vast swath of glacier, eventually reaching the ice demon at its heart.



Easily adapted to: High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) bearers, combat-heavy, epic impact, innocent, magic, monster, politics, villain

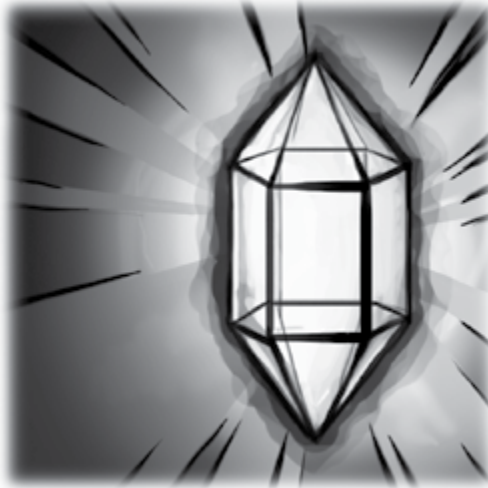
For Glory, Nothing More

36

One morning, a bright light shines on the horizon as if a new dawn were breaking—only a hundred times brighter. A powerful breeze then sweeps across the entire countryside, blasting open doors and lasting more than a minute. The smell of jasmine lingers and then slowly fades away. A new object is now blazing upon the horizon: what appears to be a star, twinkling on the surface of the world. It's bright enough to see during the day, and it provides a pale blue light all night long, illuminating the darkness yet not interfering with sleep.

What is this new “star?” Is it a hundred miles away, or a thousand? Is it a blessing or a harbinger of doom? Is it magical or divine? Most important of all: Who will be the first to reach it?

Hooks include being hired as part of an expedition, a dream of the star landing the night before it actually does, preventing a rival from reaching the star first, or plain old fame and glory. On their journey to the star, the PCs should encounter hazards along their way, as well as competition in the form of NPCs who will try to thwart the PCs' advancement. Whether this is malicious or merely friendly opposition



is up to you; a mix of both may work best.

The PCs should also encounter groups that fear the star and want to prevent anyone from reaching it, as they believe it is an object of evil. Of course, there are groups that worship the star as well, and they try to prevent anyone from reaching it because they believe it to be sacred. The fun of this plot is that no group actually knows what the star is, yet they will fight one another for various reasons related to the mysterious light.

The true nature of the light source is completely up to you. Keep the focus on the race to be first at the scene. You can do this by having multiple teams in play and letting the PCs gain the lead on one team only to lose it to another.

Artist: Laine Garrett



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) investigative, isolated area, magic, race, religion, rivalry, travel

Weird Science

37

A scientist is experimenting on monstrous creatures, creating monster repellents and charms to exert control over them. He needs parts from certain creatures to complete his experiments, but his assistants have run off due to the danger involved. He's currently looking for new, braver assistants. The PCs may meet him because one of the party members is a monstrous creature from whom he tries to take a sample, run into him in a bar bemoaning his lack of good help, or find themselves in an unexpected fight with a captured creature that escapes its bonds. Once met, the scientist will try to hire the party to help him capture creatures or acquire certain parts and byproducts.

The experimenter will send the PCs after many different creatures, tagging along and offering humorous advice: “Fourth spleen on the left,” “The weak point is in his pinkie,” or, “Hmm, this beast's sputum tastes like marmalade.” The experimenter always rewards the party well for hunts, but is upset when vital parts or limbs are destroyed. He should be played as an eccentric mad scientist, unaware of the danger he puts others in. Create hunts for creatures that are exotic, or that the group might not usually face in other adventures—you can even run this adventure straight from a book of monsters as

a side quest, dropping in a hunt whenever players are absent or you need a quick adventure.

After sufficient monster hunts, the final confrontation of this adventure arc is combat with a large, terrifying, and unique creature. As the final piece of his project, the experimenter needs it alive and has a sedative that can knock it out. The scientist doses the creature early in the combat, but the dose is too weak. Success will require controlling the situation and protecting the scientist until he can get in another shot. The creature should be capable of multiple attacks and will target the experimenter every round if the PCs don't control the battle well.

Once the creature is defeated, the experimenter offers an extra non-monetary reward to the party, such as fixing an ailment, boosting stats, or providing a formula that grants a monster-based ability.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) alliance, escort mission, monster, race, tactical planning, travel

Orcs in the Dragon's Den

38

A half-orc stumbles into the PCs' camp in the middle of the night, gravely wounded, and begs for their aid. In exchange for healing, he offers them a golden opportunity to destroy what remains of his tribe—including their chieftain, a vicious killer responsible for numerous recent attacks in the area. He explains that the tribe (which has never accepted him, treating him as the lowest of the low because of his mixed blood) just fought a dragon, evicting it from its lair at the price of many, many orcs' lives. They took over the lair, but the tribe has been decimated—and their chieftain is seriously injured. If the PCs strike while the orcs are licking their wounds, they can kill the chieftain and claim the dragon's hoard. To convince them of his sincerity, the half-orc produces a handful of dragon scales covered in fresh dragon blood.

The half-orc warns the PCs about their first obstacle—scouts on nearby hilltops and around the mouth of the lair—but is unaware of the other two impediments to reaching the orcish chieftain: a rival dragon who wants the lair for himself, but is too young to claim it alone, and the destabilizing effect the battle with the dragon had on the lair's actual structure.

The first encounter is with the scouts, who must be eliminated before they can sound the alarm. They are spread out, with every scout's location in view of at least two others, and are

adept at their craft. The PCs will need to remove them from the picture quickly, quietly, and without alerting any of their fellows.

Entering the lair complex is the second encounter. While there are few defenders, stealth is still important. Observant PCs may notice that the caverns seem unstable (weakened by blasts of dragon breath), and can take advantage of this to cause a cave-in—provided they don't mind missing out on the treasure.

In the third encounter, the PCs face the chieftain. This battle should be challenging, as the tribe's two war shamans are uninjured and ready for trouble, but not insurmountable. Midway through the battle, the cavern complex will begin to crumble, raising two possibilities: Stranding the orcs inside would eliminate them, but striking a bargain with the chieftain might allow the PCs to acquire some of the treasure in exchange for helping the orcs escape.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) alliance, combat-heavy, monster, stealth, tactical planning

The Cloud Fortress

39

While resting in town at the conclusion of an adventure, the PCs hear a commotion in the town square. When they go to investigate, they see a fortress floating in the sky—a fortress which could only have appeared just moments ago.

Upon entering the fortress, they will find that it's not empty. Rather, it's full of all manner of extra-planar and elemental creatures. They all seem focused on the keep in the center, which they're taking turns attacking. The keep looks battered, and is defended by a force of equally battered humans. The humans spot the PCs, motion for them to come inside, and let them into the keep.

The humans explain to the PCs that this structure is a prison, and that it was anchored in the astral plane until one of the creatures unraveled the ritual magic that was holding it there, setting it adrift. The creatures can't exit the prison because the humans have in place a series of wards holding them within the building. The only way for the creatures to escape is to kill the humans and dispel the wards—setting them loose upon the PCs' world.

The humans are badly wounded, and have lost too many people to both hold the keep and complete the ritual for creating a new astral anchor. The PCs can help by taking over the fortifications of the keep and holding off the attacking creatures.

The creatures will attack in waves, beginning with groups of like creatures and then desperately banding together for a final all-out assault.

The meat of this adventure is the siege of the prison's inner keep. The magical ritual can take as long as you need it to take in order to keep things tense for the PCs, and there should be several waves of attackers before the final wave. Use the myriad abilities of the imprisoned creatures to their advantage, mesmerizing defenders, tunneling under the walls of the keep, flying over the walls, and so forth. Providing a stockpile of supplies and varying the number of defenders available to help the PCs will allow you to easily scale this adventure.

If the ritual is completed, the prison will return to the astral plane, and the PCs will be transported to the outskirts of town—their world safe once again.



Easily adapted to: Anime, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) alliance, combat-heavy, magic, mass combat, monster, siege, tactical planning

Abduction

Gone

40

The PCs have returned to their homeland after an extended time away. When they arrive they notice that one of the outlying farms has been abandoned. Farming implements are scattered on the ground, doors have been left open, and furniture is overturned.

Entering town, they find other abandoned houses in a similar state of disarray. As they get closer to the center of town, they find signs of a struggle: blood on the ground and overturned carts. When they reach the town hall, they see that it has been destroyed. Inside, the PCs find a note written by a citizen, telling how creatures wearing the sign of a white fist have come and taken people away each night for the past six nights.

The White Fist is a group of slavers led by a powerful ogre. Shortly after the PCs finish the note, a White Fist slaver party comes to town to round up anyone they might have missed; a fight ensues. The PCs then track the slavers back to an abandoned outpost near a river, where the larger White Fist party is encamped.

There they will discover that the last of the townspeople have been taken downriver by boat. The boat has become stuck downriver, giving the PCs a chance to catch up. They fight the slaver crew and free a small number of townspeople. Stashed aboard the boat is a map that indicates a large camp at the river's end.

The PCs arrive at the slaver fortress, where hundreds of people are imprisoned, awaiting transport across the sea. The PCs must then liberate the camp.

While it's helpful if the PCs have a connection to the town, it's not a necessity. The town needs to be in a remote location, as slavers never strike in an area where a large, organized army could repel them. This also prevents the townspeople or the PCs from going for help, as help wouldn't reach them in time.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PV) innocent, isolated area, relationship hook, siege, tactical planning, travel, villain

Changelings

41

In a backwater fishing and farming town on the edge of a cursed swamp, people are being afflicted with a strange malady. Those affected are clumsy, forgetful, confused, and have a feverish gleam in their eyes.

The culprits are a cluster of will-o'-the-wisps living in the marshes. After luring an unwary person into the swamp and mesmerizing him, they secrete him away in a trance-like state, read his mind, assume his shape, and then take his place. After a few weeks, the wisps have drawn off enough energy from those around them to reproduce, and have shattered into dozens of immature, invisible wisps. This wakes the sleeping victims, who may remember the experience as a hazy dream, having seen it through their connection to the wisp; the victims then head home. However, weakened, confused, and likely lost, they may fall victim to the other dangers of the swamp.

Interviews with the wisps in human form are frustrating. They remember enough to seem like the person who they're imitating, but are forgetful and bewildered, as if they have a fever or have sustained a blow to the head.

Wisps are unintelligent, so even though there are a few of them still in the swamp, if a PC asks a wisp in human form about will-o'-the-wisps, they won't provide any answers. The

changeling routine is part of their reproductive cycle, and humans aren't required, or even preferred, as hosts—but the wisps don't know how to articulate that.

Searching the swamp for answers, the PCs discover people released from their trance state just wandering about. With more careful searches they find the hidden, entranced bodies of victims who they likely thought were in town. They may even notice that there are animals with similar symptoms to the townsfolk. Normal swamp hazards and dangers are still present too, and can be used to break up the investigative elements of this adventure.

Alerting the townsfolk to the nature of the problem should allow them to guard themselves against the wisps' lures. PCs that are more thorough may wish to thin the wisps' numbers or drive them further into the swamp with a series of hunts.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) innocent, investigative, isolated area, magic, monster, roleplaying-heavy, social, spirit, twist

Season of the Beast

42

One of the PCs wakes up to hear a beautiful voice singing outside of her window. Looking outside, she sees no one—just a bird on a nearby branch. The bird is joined by two more birds and the singing voice becomes a chorus. The PC subsequently has many other instances of hearing voices when no one is there, until she finally realizes the truth: She now understands animal speech. Eventually, a rabbit asks the PC for help in freeing another rabbit from a trap. The rabbit will show the PC where a gold necklace is hidden if she helps them.

After that, the PC is approached many more times by animals asking for help. Most are incapable of comprehending the entirety of the situation and say only that “the nature spirit” said she would help. Eventually the PC is able to glean the nature of her newfound ability from what little the animals have said: She has been made an avatar of a nature spirit who is trapped somewhere and is unable to help itself.

The tasks start out small: The PC stops a farmer from building a dam and gets him to build it downstream. Soon, however, they grow in scope: The PC might fight unnatural creatures that are killing everything in a forest, or keep hunters from discovering a secret grove and be rewarded with a drink of magical water. Eventually, the animals reveal that the nature

spirit is trapped by a dark priest who has unearthed an evil shrine buried deep in the woods. The priest is raising an undead army and is using the nature spirit to power the shrine.

The undead are already attacking towns near the shrine, and the PC will fend off an attack as she approaches it. The dark priest is at the shrine, surrounded by a large number of undead, and will fight to the death.

If the priest is defeated and the shrine destroyed, the spirit is freed and offers to either take the power back from the PC or let her keep it as a reward. One good tactic is to give the PC two or three minor druidic powers and allow her to keep one upon completion. Scaling the scope, number, and type of encounters changes the feel of the plot; it can become a simple mission to save a spirit or a quest to save a god. With a few changes, this plot can work just as well for a traditional adventuring party, not just a single PC.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Romance, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) combat-heavy, innocent, isolated area, monster, religion, spirit, travel, villain

Slaves to the Young Drake

43

A juvenile dragon has decided to populate her new lair with slaves. Ticked by the idea that as a young dragon she should be served by young humans, she begins kidnapping local children while in human form. Once they're safely away, she then places them under an enchantment. The first few are set to digging out the cavern she has selected for her lair; the next several are selected as playmates, chosen for their amusement value. The third round will be chosen from among noble families and held hostage as insurance against attack.

The nearby settlement is up in arms, and fear has begun to set in. The PCs are asked to help, and they begin by talking to parents whose children have been abducted. Their stories are different, save for one underlying similarity: A kindly woman—sometimes young, sometimes old, and never the same in appearance—was present shortly before each disappearance, always doing something non-threatening.

Several more children are taken that night—and unlike the first several, who were bigger kids, these are younger children who are known for being pranksters. The woman is still mentioned, but now magic seems to be involved: The parents were on their guard, yet they did nothing to protect their children. Mix in the third round of abductions, the noble children, for pacing if necessary.

Likely suspects include the local thieves' guild, though kidnapping is usually outside their purview, a traveling fair that recently came to town, and the “old woman in the forest,” who is believed to be a witch who eats children. Each can shed some light on the mystery. Fair folk suggest that the kidnapper wants an audience, or playmates, while the thieves point out that no ransom has been requested. The old woman in the forest, who is actually just a hermit, has seen the abductor, though she didn't know what she was witnessing.

When the PCs reach the dragon's lair, they'll find the children there; the dragon is also present, currently in human form. Stage the finale as a three-part scene: breaking the spell, rescuing the children, and fighting the dragon. The children have to be freed of the enchantment, or they won't flee; this can be done using magic possessed by the PCs or through highly successful diplomacy. Once free, they must be taken out of the lair safely—and of course the dragon will assume her true form, complicating matters as she does her best to kill the PCs.



Easily adapted to: Horror, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (MR) deadline, innocent, investigative, magic, monster, social, tactical planning, villain

The Enigma

Surrender

44

Without warning, one of the PCs' most hated foes simply turns up on their doorstep, alone and unarmed, and surrenders to them on the spot—no strings attached. No group of players will take this at face value, and you have three options: her surrender is part of a scheme, she's mind-controlled, or she's sincere.

A good villain is always scheming against the PCs, and this is what your players will think is going on. Perhaps she wants to find out a specific piece of information, and knows her best chance of learning it is if she gets them to let their guard down. Or maybe she's after something of theirs, and needs to see it in person in order to give her wizard allies the best chance of teleporting it away from the PCs. She has a contingency plan for her escape, of course: a mental link to a mage who can teleport her out, or a group of ambushers awaiting her signal.

If she has been mind-controlled, who cast the spell? Was it another villain, or perhaps an underling looking for a particularly cruel way to eliminate her? And can the PCs break the spell? The mind control could also be due to spirit possession (in which case the spirit might leave her body and attack the PCs—joined by the villain, who sees a golden opportunity), or to a malfunctioning magic item. Once they find out, acting

on that information is an adventure in its own right.

Your players will have the hardest time believing that she's sincere, but this option opens up the most interesting roleplaying opportunities. Why did she surrender? Was it out of genuine remorse for her evil deeds, because of a religious experience, or due to some other factor? How does she convince them of her sincerity? Do they turn her over to the authorities, imprison her—or even execute her on the spot? And who else will have a stake in her fate, once word of her surrender gets out?

No matter which option you choose, this plot will surprise your players, and it has the potential to take your campaign in a direction that they didn't expect—particularly if they were predicting a showdown with their nemesis in the near future. Just be careful not to rob them of a showdown that they were eagerly anticipating.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) betrayal, difficult choice, intrigue, madness, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, twist, villain

The Griffon's Claw

45

For years there has been a pact between a dragon that lives atop a mountain and the people living in the town at the foot of that mountain: The people leave the dragon alone, and the dragon allows the people to live in peace. When the dragon landed in the town square and destroyed the blacksmith's house with its fiery breath, it was a sign that something had changed.

The dragon accused the town of cooperating in an attack upon him, and of the theft of a valuable artifact. The mayor denied the town's involvement, but the dragon didn't believe him. It dropped a torn tabard bearing the symbol of a griffon clutching an axe at the mayor's feet, and delivered an ultimatum: Return the artifact in five days time or the pact is null and void, and the town will be razed to the ground.

In the ensuing panic, the PCs are enlisted to find out who attacked the dragon and to recover the artifact. They begin by investigating the symbol, which belongs to a group of adventurers called the Griffon's Claw. Townsfolk can tell them that the Griffon's Claw band stayed in town two nights ago, and that they hail from a nearby town.

After a two-day journey, the Griffon's Claw party can be tracked down on the road to the nearest city, where they plan to sell the artifact. They're a stereotypical adventuring party, and have no intention of returning the artifact, though they will happily sell it for a steep price. If confronted about their attack on the dragon, they're not remorseful—after all, they say, dragons are evil.

The Griffon's Claw should be equal in power to the PCs, and can be flamboyant (for a humorous adventure) or cold and calculating (for a darker tone). The PCs can fight them for the artifact, come up with a ruse to steal it from them, or try other tactics as they desire.

En route back to the dragon's lair (another two-day journey), the PCs will encounter inclement weather, threatening their chances of returning the artifact in time to save the town. If they make it in time, the dragon honors its side of the bargain.



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PV) deadline, innocent, travel

Darkstone City

46

When the world was young, a demon lord discovered a lake of cooled obsidian deep in the mountains and, with his own claws, carved an entire city large enough for giants from this enormous block of volcanic glass. Etched on every surface are sigils and runes. Not only are these in some ancient demon-cursed script, each character of which is blasphemous, but they are encoded as well. Keys can be found in other sections of writing, the positions of buildings, or any number of other forms.

All sorts of demons and spirits haunt the cursed city, but desperate seekers of knowledge still make their way to the forbidding site. It is said of the city that all knowledge is hidden within, waiting for those who can decipher it. The PCs are in the city because they, or an employer, have received a vision of the city that shows them where the answer to an important problem lies. It's up to the PCs to steal into the city, transcribe the cursed script, and get out alive.

Getting to the city is no small feat. It lies deep within the mountains, and its presence has attracted all sorts of foul beasts and warped natural creatures. The PCs will have to contend with both the environment and the twisted fauna.

Letting Sleeping Giants Lie

47

In an isolated hamlet, villagers begin succumbing to a strange disease. At first, it's like a flu or seasonal allergy, but soon warts and other growths appear and become monstrous mutations. The villagers send a representative to seek aid from local governments, only to be turned away because of his hideous appearance. The representative may approach the PCs directly, they may hear tales of the village, or they may encounter the village along their journeys, seemingly stepping into a polite society of monstrous creatures.

Life goes on like normal except for the changed appearances and adaptations of the villagers. Some blame the ancient abandoned castle up the hill. Observant PCs or villagers may notice that fish in the river grow multiple legs or that some animals have human faces. The crops that are nearest to the river grow to enormous sizes, and the river runs near the castle, leading people to believe that it's the source of the troubles. While in the village, the PCs see one of the villagers undergo a rapid transformation, becoming a powerful monster. The mutated villager attacks anyone in sight and doesn't stop until killed. This makes the other villagers fearful for what will happen to them.

Signs of mutation get stronger closer to the castle: Plants sprout up instantly, blocking the PCs' way, many hostile mutated creatures attack the party, and strange voices talk to them from out of thin air. The trip to the castle should feel like being in a fairytale.

Once in the city, finding the spot they're looking for is a task in and of itself. The city is scaled for giants and covers a large area, and it seems to change layout from time to time. In addition, though the city is dead, its alleyways are populated by living seekers obsessed with searching its streets, the dead who call the city their grave, and the demons and other fell creatures attracted to this fell place.

Once the PCs transcribe the writing they need, unless they're able to immediately decode and translate it, they'll carry a bit of the city's taint with them. Animals will be nervous around the scroll they carry, people will be uneasy around them, and all sorts of foul beings will be able to sense the presence of powerful evil. Towns and waysides turn the PCs away, and some townsfolk will even follow them for a nighttime ambush or roadside robbery.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) bearers, city, exploration, investigative, isolated area, magic, monster, shady, spirit, stealth, travel

The castle shows signs of great age and wear, but is intact. From deep inside, what sounds like snoring can be heard. Here, a malevolent, incorporeal shadow creature stands before a sleeping giant. Nearby is an overturned jug, its glowing water flowing endlessly into the river. The shadow creature explains that the giant lost a drinking contest, which the shadow engineered; it appears frustrated, but it won't say more until it knows the PCs' intentions. The shadow creature can't touch the liquid itself, but it wants the liquid and it knows about the village. It plans to use the mutated villagers as its personal army.

The PCs must defeat the shadow, which they can do by waking the giant, dousing the shadow with the liquid, or through other means as you see fit. If the giant is awakened, he'll defeat the shadow and cure the townsfolk, apologizing for the trouble he unwittingly caused. He may reveal a treasure hidden in the castle as a reward.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, innocent, investigative, isolated area, magic, monster, spirit, villain

Obtaining

Delving the Old Base

48

While traveling along a coastal road, the PCs notice a large ship headed towards their destination: a large town up ahead. Seeing no sails or means of mechanical propulsion, they conclude that it's likely powered by strong magic. Sometime after the PCs arrive, they discover that the ship is docked and trading with the townspeople. There are several oddities regarding the transactions that pique the attention of the PCs: The traders are buying very little food, none of the townspeople are allowed to carry their goods onto the ship, and a few friendly crew members carouse in the bars and express relief at being on the mainland and having "real people" to talk to.

Upon interacting with the crew members, the PCs are invited on board and soon discover the reason for the curious behavior: The rest of the crew members are non-organics such as golems, elementals, or constructs. The captain is a powerful wizard who offers the PCs pay and passage anywhere they

like if they raid an old military base to acquire an artifact for him. He explains, somewhat begrudgingly, that the mission requires more creativity and quick thinking than his crew can provide.

The journey to the old base takes some time, and the PCs have plenty of opportunities to interact with the non-organics; they're single-minded in their tasks and literal in their speech. The PCs find that the captain is uncooperative and unfriendly. His aloofness may suggest ill intentions to the PCs, but is, in fact, simply due to his preference for non-organic company.

Once they arrive, the PCs encounter an array of obstacles: odorless flammable gases from alchemical workspaces, flooded corridors, broken magical lifts and stairways, magical traps, and enemy non-organics. Along the way, they find clues suggesting that the artifact is hidden on the lowest level. To reach it, the PCs must overcome a slew of non-organics. The creatures fight as if their lives depend on protecting the artifact—which they do, since it acts as their power source.

The artifact is actually a cage for a living magical being. Tapped for its life force and in constant pain, the being gives off tremendous amounts of energy. It begs the PCs for death, which is its only chance for release. The PCs are thus faced with a moral choice: They must either kill the creature, betraying their mission and losing their pay, or inform the captain of the situation, leaving the creature in agony.

If the PCs choose the latter, they may be surprised to learn that the captain is appalled by the nature of this magic, and wants the PCs to return to release the poor creature. He's still happy to provide payment in full. Use this plot to shake up PCs who are used to being double-crossed by employers or are mistrustful of NPCs.



Easily adapted to: Anime, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) artificial life form, combat-heavy, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, exploration, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, magic, mass combat, shady, siege, stealth, tactical planning, trade, travel, twist

Artist: Hugo Solis

Last Ship to Leave

49

While attempting to leave a city by boat, the PCs are repeatedly turned away. Boats are delayed for inspection, they weigh anchor in the middle of the night, or they cancel plans to travel to the PCs' destination. Even if the party convinces a ship to take them on as passengers, the captain reneges on the agreement later. Everything seems coincidental. If the characters must leave town to attend urgent business or to avoid pursuit, this could be much more than a minor inconvenience.

The PCs discover that they're being tailed and spied upon. When confronted, the observers will put up a fight, but won't use lethal force and will scatter if badly wounded. If the PCs follow, their shadows will try to lose them in back alleys and bolt holes. If captured, they will be reluctant to talk unless put under duress. With pressure or legwork, the men can be identified as thugs who are often employed by a local criminal organization.

When the PCs are finally almost underway, a saboteur is discovered below decks. During questioning, a second group sneaks aboard and begins to slash rigging and otherwise sabotage the ship. While the PCs can drive them off with a running battle, the damage has been done and the captain wants no more trouble. He flatly declines the PCs' business.

Convincing the reluctant sea captains to talk is a trying affair. Most have been bribed or threatened to ensure their silence, so similar leverage or a few barrels of grog will need to be applied to make them cooperate. City officials, who are holding up ships at an unprecedented rate, are just as taciturn. If someone is convinced to talk, the characters can track all the delays back to a single bureaucrat. A scathing older woman, she refuses to explain her actions and insists that she's just doing her job.

She's intentionally tracking the PCs and hampering their travel plans, both through legal and illegal means, because her daughter developed a crush on one of the PCs when she met them in the city. The bureaucrat hopes that keeping the PCs around will give her daughter enough time to work up the courage to introduce herself. If the PCs convince her to share her reasons, they may be able to bargain a date with the woman's daughter for their freedom.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Hard Sci-fi, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MN) city, innocent, intrigue, investigative, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, travel

Asking Nicely

50

A plague befalls the PCs' home town while they're away on an adventure. When they return home, they're met by a man wrapped in rags; he is the last living member of the local church. He tells the PCs not to come into the town, which is ravaged by plague, and explains that in order to save the town they must quest for the Salve of Purity. The Salve is located in a remote temple, far from the town.

The PCs must travel to the temple. They'll have at least one encounter en route with bandits who are planning to raid their home town, knowing that it will be undefended. The temple itself is located atop a mountain, and reaching it is a challenge; tough climbing, rock slides, and bad weather all interfere with the PCs' mission.

Inside the temple, the PCs face several challenges designed to test their resolve. These include a test of faith (walking headlong into an illusion of something dangerous), a test of their knowledge of the gods, and a test of strength (facing a superior foe).

When they have completed the challenges, the PCs enter a holy chamber of incredible beauty. The Salve of Purity sits upon an altar. As the PCs approach it, an avatar of the church's deity appears between them and the salve. It explains to the

PCs that before they can claim the Salve they must convince the avatar that its use is needed and that those who claim it are worthy.

The PCs cannot harm or directly affect the avatar; no spell will be effective, and no attack has a hope of hurting it. They must persuade the avatar with their wits alone. The avatar will question the value of the town and the people in it—which, depending on the nature of the town, could make for a difficult argument. How will the PCs convince the avatar to give them the Salve so that they can save the village?

This scene can be tricky to resolve. You should come up with three to five points that the PCs must make in order to convince the avatar to give up the Salve, and allow them appropriate checks to learn how many points they must make, or the themes of each point. The avatar should be played according to the nature of the deity it represents: compassionate for a god of healing, cruel for a god of war, etc.



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supers, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) innocent, isolated area, religion, roleplaying-heavy, travel

The Impregnable Vault

51

The PCs are offered an unusual opportunity: break into a local castle's impregnable treasure vault and live to tell the tale. The castle guards are known for their vigilance and their brutality, and the noble who owns the castle is a cruel man with a penchant for torturing prisoners—but the woman making the offer is one of the most famous cat burglars alive. She claims to know a surefire way into the vault—one that guarantees that the PCs won't get caught. She can't do it alone, and she's only after one specific item; if they help her, the PCs can take anything else they like from the vault.

For many groups, an offer like this might be a tough sell. You can sweeten it by linking a PC's background to the villainous noble, involving the noble's past deeds as a motivator, giving the party a reason to seek revenge against the noble, or putting something in the vault that the PCs desperately need. The key elements of the burglar's plan are creating a distraction, incapacitating a roomful of guards, navigating a trap-filled passageway, and a performing a complex magical ritual that will allow entry into the vault.

The distraction is a magical explosive, which the PCs must plant near the castle gates while the burglar quietly breaches the wall in another area. The room full of guards is centrally

located, and can't be bypassed; the guards can be fought, misled, or otherwise dealt with. The trap-filled passageway is similarly unavoidable, but the thief will be able to aid the party in surviving the traps. Once they reach the vault, she employs a dangerous magical incantation that temporarily makes one wall of the vault permeable, giving the party a few minutes inside. This ritual nearly kills her, however, forcing the PCs to take charge of getting everyone out of the castle without being caught.

You have several options concerning the thief that can completely transform this adventure. Is she telling the truth, or is she lying to the PCs? Will she double-cross them once the deed is done? Is the object she's after something that no hero could abide being outside of the vault, like a doomsday weapon? Is her plan as foolproof as she says it is? Is she actually working for the noble, testing his security and giving him some new prisoners to torture at the same time?



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Hard Sci-fi, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) alliance, betrayal, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, escort mission, sandbox, shady, stealth, tactical planning, twist

Enmity of Kinsmen

Pulled Back In

52

A member of a powerful organization, such as a family, guild, or secret society, bears a grudge against a PC who belongs to that same group. Because of this member's hatred of her, the PC no longer has close ties to the group.

While the party is resting, an attempt is made on the PC's life from a distance, by way of an arrow or spell. The attacker cannot be found. A few days later, the attacker tries again. A third attempt follows soon thereafter, but this time up close. When the PCs defeat the assassin, clues on his body indicate that he was hired by PC's foe within the organization.

A day or so later, the PC will discover that she is being followed. This time, the pursuer is not an assassin, though the PCs will likely suspect otherwise, but rather is the retainer of a friendly member of the organization. He brings word that the organization's leader is dying and the PC's foe is the most likely candidate for succession.

If the PC does nothing, the foe will become the new leader and bring the full power of the organization down upon the

PC, leaving her no peace. If the PC opposes the rival as the next leader, a power struggle will ensue. In this case, there are several things to consider. Would the PC actually want to lead the organization? How would this affect her adventuring? Is there another candidate for leader that the PC could support instead? If so, how can the PC best lend her support? Or can the foe and the PC make a deal, so that the foe wins leadership but leaves the PC alone?

This plot can be an excellent way to open a campaign, as it allows you to begin using elements of one PC's background—the organization and the hated foe—right out of the gate. Seeing this immediate connection between a PC's background and the campaign world can help all of your players become more invested in the game.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PV) city, difficult choice, intrigue, politics, social, villain

Complicated Kinship

53

A small boy approaches one of the older PCs and claims that the PC is his father. The child says, "I know you! You're my father and you never came back! I hate you!" and runs away. The child runs to a small alleyway behind an inn and ducks inside the back door. He may grab something from the PC before running, if you want to ensure that the PCs give chase.

The boy is the bastard child of a local royal and a barmaid; he seeks to involve the PCs in an attempt to draw out his real father. The mother keeps the identity of the boy's father a secret. If the connection is discovered, rivals might kill the child or use him for political gain.

Inside the inn, the mother shields the child as he shouts about his real father. After quieting the boy and sending him to his room, she apologizes and offers the PCs a free night's stay. She explains that the boy feels abandoned by his father and expresses remorse at not being able to tell him the truth. She asks only that the PCs keep her secret. An agent of a rival noble house overhears the child and the story, and later that night he kidnaps the child from his room.

The agent returns, demanding help from the PCs in blackmailing the royal with the information about the child. The

child will be killed if the PCs don't help. The PCs are to deliver a message to the royal and demand a ransom.

Provide some way for the PCs to get audience with the royal. When told about the situation, he asks the PCs to rescue the child on his behalf, as the royal cares for the child but cannot act publicly. He'll provide details on the nobleman's house, including a secret passage through the wine cellar; he also warns that the kidnapper is devious and employs many layers of protection in his schemes. The royal will punish the nobleman in private and reward the PCs once the child is safe.

Sneaking into the nobleman's house, the PCs find it well-fortified and on high alert. Guards patrol the area, traps are set, and the child is securely hidden. This plot can be played as a covert, stealth-driven scenario, but if the PCs are discovered it will quickly become a vicious fight to escape.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, escort mission, innocent, politics, shady, stealth, villain

The Good, and the Bad and Ugly

54

A friend of the PCs recently obtained his family's ancestral manse after the passing of his mother. He was dismayed to discover that the house was haunted and that there had been several near-fatal accidents. He is convinced the culprit is the unquiet spirit of his mother, and has followed the instructions of numerous experts to lay her to rest, even to the point of wooing and proposing to a young woman his mother had especially liked.

In truth, his brothers were born as disfigured conjoined twins, and have been hidden in the house their entire lives; his family has kept them a closely guarded secret. Rooms and hallways of the manse were converted to hidden chambers for them. With no one to talk to but each other and their mother, and nothing to do but read, the brothers have become very talented wizards. They're also more than a little eccentric. They believe that the house is theirs and they hate their brother, resenting both the normal life he's had and the fact that he's trying to take their home. These secrets are revealed in the mother's diary, which is skillfully hidden behind a locked secret panel in her bedroom.

The brothers are illusionists, and the secret areas of the house are equipped with spy holes, allowing them to create phantasms throughout the house at will. Searching the manse, the PCs will encounter ghostly phenomena, culminating

in a full-body apparition of the mother, while small objects are hurled about, potentially injuring the PCs. This could be treated as a fight or as a skill-based challenge.

The brothers will try to split the PCs up by manifesting phenomena in different locales, thereby starting multiple simultaneous chase scenes. Once isolated, PCs will be led into dead-falls or other traps and attacked by illusory "ghosts."

Once the concealed passages are discovered, the brothers will retreat to hidden rooms within the secret areas of the manse and will become more aggressive. They will again try to separate the PCs with illusions and will complement their traps and illusory attackers with attacks through spy holes.

When the brothers are found, they'll become belligerent and attack if they think the odds are in their favor. They must be knocked out or calmed so that the PC's friend can attempt to negotiate with them. If the brothers are killed, the friend may hold a grudge against the PCs and become a recurring foe.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Comedy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) alliance, investigative, magic, race, stealth, twist

Inheriting Trouble

55

A PC's relative dies, leaving her land and estate to the PC. Before the party can reach the estate, the relative's in-laws—who feel that the estate should have gone to them—simply move in and take over, running off the servants and installing their own staff and guards.

En route to the estate, the PCs hear sounds of fighting in the woods. They come upon a battle in progress: a party of hunters locked in combat with a group of bandits. If the PCs aid them, the hunters don't seem particularly grateful for their help. They glare at the party and disappear into the woods.

At the estate, the PCs find workers making repairs, guards on patrol (including the hunters from the forest), and the in-laws installed as lords of the estate. They ungraciously welcome the PCs, offer perfunctory words of consolation for their loss, and tell the party to get off their land. The PCs won't be able to deter them with diplomacy, and they have bribed local officials to declare them the rightful heirs to the estate.

The structure of the rest of this adventure depends on your group. Some players will want to use magic or force to drive the in-laws away, while others will work the government angle, trying to remove them by lawful means, or by uncovering the corrupt officials who made the takeover

“legal.” Some will try more creative solutions, like convincing the in-laws that the estate is haunted or driving off the servants and seeing how long the in-laws can survive without them.

Later in the adventure, while the PCs are on the estate, the bandits will return in force with the intention of killing every last person they find. The PCs can work with the in-laws to beat back the attack, let the bandits and the in-laws duke it out, or find their own solution to this open-ended encounter. The bandits won't lay siege to the estate; instead, they'll use guerilla tactics to break in at multiple points and try to gain control from within.

If resolved in the PCs' favor, with the in-laws driven out and the bandit attack repulsed, this adventure can change the scope of your campaign. Owning land, keeping the estate well-supplied, and defending it against other threats can become the new focus of your game.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) betrayal, epic impact, relationship hook, rivalry, sandbox, siege, tactical planning

Rivalry of Kinsmen

Wizards' Rivalry

56

Two members of a prominent wizards' guild seek a very rare spell component. The wizard who possesses the component will win prestige and bragging rights. The two mages are aware of only one place where the component can be found: inside a ruined wizards' school. They decide to make things interesting by turning their hunt into a contest. Each hires a group of adventurers to retrieve the component, and promises the use of only minor magic to “make things interesting” for the adventurers.

The PCs are hired by one of the wizards to retrieve this component for a fee. What the wizard doesn't tell the PCs is that there's a second group of adventurers who are on the same quest at nearly the same time.

The next morning, when the PCs are ready to leave for the ruins, they find that their horses are gone; a small trick by the rival wizard. Little things like this keep happening to the PCs until they reach the ruins. After suffering several magical practical jokes, the PCs reach the ruins and begin their exploration. Along the way, they discover that they're not alone. Signs of battle, monster blood, doors that have

been spiked shut, and ropes hung from high ledges indicate that others are present in the ruins.

Following one or more encounters with monsters, the PCs reach the chamber containing the component. The other group of adventurers arrives at the same time. How will the PCs react? Will they try to make a deal with the other adventurers? Who will get the components to their patron first?

Depending on the tone of your campaign and the nature of the other adventuring party, this plot can be serious or funny. It can be light-hearted if the parties try to trick or steal the components from one another, or gritty and dark if the rival adventurers become violent and try to kill the “poachers.” If they survive, you can also use the other party as recurring rivals throughout your campaign.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) dungeon crawl, magic, monster, race, rivalry

Wanted: Dead

57

Entering a city that they've visited before, the PCs see a wanted poster that depicts their party. The listed crimes—all heinous acts, including murder—are entirely untrue, but the poster offers a significant bounty for their heads. Give them a chance to go to ground before anyone spots them, but not before they have a notice that nearly every local is armed. Once in hiding, the party can discuss the posters: Why are they wanted? Who did they piss off recently? Should they present themselves to the magistrate and try to explain the situation?

The posters are part of a plot by a group of corrupt rival adventurers (the party's "kinsmen," after a fashion), who want them out of the way so that they can fill the PCs' shoes, claiming glory and treasure for adventures in this region. The rivals committed the crimes themselves and successfully pinned them on the PCs. They're behind the reward money, and they've bribed a corrupt city magistrate to overlook the holes in their story—and the crimes themselves—in favor of a full-on manhunt for the PCs.

While the PCs are investigating the situation, they hear many locals praising the adventurers who caught them in the act—and who even now are pursuing them tirelessly. The adventurers are believed to have followed the PCs' trail out into the forest, and they're counting on citizens to stay vigilant in their absence. This is largely true: The scoundrels are

hiding out in the forest, but they're really just waiting for the city watch or an angry mob to take out the PCs for them.

Skilled adventurers in their own right, the rivals have formed an alliance with a tribe of kobolds in the forest, who they've hired as scouts. If the kobolds spot the PCs, they'll alert the rivals. Though their guard is relaxed, the adventurers aren't easy prey—and killing them won't solve the PCs' problem: They must also convince the city that they're innocent, and that the crimes of which they are accused were actually committed by the rival adventurers.

En route back to the city, the kobolds strike; they haven't been paid yet, and they'll try to take the party's gold to make up for it. If the PCs took the rivals prisoner, they may be able to resolve the situation through diplomatic means, perhaps by convincing the kobolds that their employers are going to get their just desserts. You can close the adventure with a dramatic courtroom scene, if that would work well with your group.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) betrayal, city, intrigue, rivalry, sandbox, social, stealth, tactical planning, villain

Fraternal Filching

58

Two boisterous brothers are working to outdo each other by robbing caravans and travelers in a contest of thievery. Their style is so grandiose that bookies take bets to see which brother will acquire more stolen goods.

The PCs may discover this by witnessing a robbery, or when a bookie asks if they encountered any thieves on their way into town (in order to calculate an accurate tally). A bookie could also hire the PCs to fix the results by hindering one of the brothers, or they might simply be drawn in by the massive reward offered for the brothers' capture.

The brothers are amiable and refuse to rob the poor. They're not Robin Hood-like, since they keep what they steal, but they've nonetheless become folk heroes. The PCs should be able to track down one of the brothers using information from the bookies. He explains that he steals only from the rich, and that he really does it for the glory—and he asks the PCs help in outdoing his brother on the next heist, offering a bigger reward than the one for his capture. The heist is a caravan of fine goods for the wedding of a duchess. It's common knowledge that the other brother has his eye on the same loot.

As the caravan rolls into town a few days later, each brother is preparing to relieve it of its cargo in a different way.

One brother plans to sweep in with a contingent of mounted bandits and hold up the caravan, while the other intends to trap the caravan on a bridge and load all of the goods onto a waiting boat. Local law enforcement has caught wind of the heist and will show up as well.

For the heist scene, every element of the robbery should come crashing together in a riot of action. In the chaos, one of the brothers will escape with the loot and retreat to a mountain hideout. He and his followers will put up a vigorous fight against anyone who tries to bring them in. If the brothers are stopped or captured, local authorities will reward the PCs. If the PCs help either brother, he'll reward them with stolen loot—and he pays better.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) alliance, deadline, innocent, mass combat, race, rivalry, shady, social, stealth, tactical planning, trade

Race with Two Finish Lines

59

Two heirs are positioned to inherit a small kingdom, but it's uncertain which of them will actually get it. There is, however, a sword symbolizing the royal family that would seriously tip the balance in the favor of its owner, and both heirs have contracted parties of adventurers to procure it from the long-abandoned keep from which their family used to rule.

While the general location of the keep is known, its exact location is not, and the surrounding countryside is difficult terrain; the party will likely have to get directions from locals or hire a guide once they arrive. If they're behind their competitors, it's possible that anyone they get information from is one of their competitors or has been bribed to mislead them.

The keep has been taken over by intelligent humanoid inhabitants, and they've repaired the old drawbridge and portcullis at the main gate. Getting in will require

outwitting them or finding an alternate entrance. The sword itself was being held by the lord of the keep when he fell in battle somewhere inside. It's currently in the hands of the biggest, meanest monster in the keep.

After the sword is retrieved, the opposing group will lay in ambush and even endanger civilian targets, such as those at the inn where the PCs are resting, in order to take the sword from them.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MN) alliance, deadline, dungeon crawl, intrigue, race, rivalry, siege, stealth

Murderous Adultery

Too Much of a Good Thing

60

Years ago, a narcissistic adventurer married a nobleman and used his fortune and standing to further her career. When she was later lost at sea and presumed dead, the noble was devastated. Sparing no expense, he hired artisans to craft a perfect simulacrum of his dead wife. When she unexpectedly returned home alive and well, both she and her replacement were outraged. The distraught husband convinced them to enter into a smoldering truce until a solution could be found. Since then, two servants have disappeared, and the house steward, fearing the worst, has written the PCs asking for help.

When the PCs arrive, their host and his two wives are polite but self-absorbed. They only see the PCs at dinner each night. The noble is happy to listen to any suggestions the PCs have, but each wife rejects any solution that reduces her claim to the fortune or puts her influence at stake. During these meals, the PCs may realize that the animosity between the wives is mostly an act.

The steward is suspicious of the wives' claim that they discovered the missing servants stealing and discharged them; he considered the servants trustworthy. The PCs' search finds no witnesses to the servants' departure, but there are signs of violent struggle outside one of the wives' rooms.

The wives refuse searches of their rooms, and the noble backs them up, so the PCs will have to find a time when they aren't there to snoop around. Dinnertime is a good option, or they

can shadow them and wait for another opportunity. Shadowing them reveals that the wives spend most of their time alone in their rooms, but for several hours a night, one will visit with the other. One of the suites is an unremarkable, if lavishly decorated, guest room. The other is an opulent lady's suite, but a careful search reveals a secret staircase leading to the long-unused dungeons. There, guarded by summoned monsters and the undead remains of the missing servants, are numerous books on poisons and a series of lists divvying up the noble's estate between the two wives—proof that they're trying to kill him.

If the wives discover that the PCs are onto them and believe they can salvage their plot by simply killing the party, they'll try to do so. The wives have similar skill sets but don't have to be identical. If the PCs manage to reveal the wives' plans to the noble first, the wives will first try to convince their husband that the PCs are lying in order to have them imprisoned or banished.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) artificial life form, combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, innocent, intrigue, investigative, politics, shady, stealth, villain

The wife of a local duke has been caught having an affair with another noble, and the duke throws them both in prison to await their execution. The noble's brother uses a magic ritual to try to break the noble out, and instead winds up releasing all of the prisoners into the city's sewer system—an ancient maze of monster-inhabited tunnels. When the duke finds out, he relents in his anger and hires the PCs to track down his wife and as many of the prisoners as they can; he also supplies two units of the city watch to aid them.

The sewers are a nightmarish place, overrun with wererats and other creatures. (Mapping only a few small sections and using skill checks or other mechanics to get the PCs from encounter to encounter will work just fine.) The first encounter is a run-in with a group of prisoners who try to barter with the PCs for their freedom. They'll fight if the PCs and their watch allies try to capture them, and if any are killed the survivors will round up other prisoners and mount an ambush against the PCs later in the adventure.

The second encounter starts with a watch unit going missing—one moment they're right behind the PCs, and the next they're simply gone. Tracking them down in the dark, mucky sewers is a challenge in its own right. Their trail leads

to a wererat nest—an awful place, thick with the stench of rats and sewage—where the watch soldiers are being prepared as the main course in a wererat feast. During the battle, the wererats will split into two groups: One group will fight the PCs, while the others try to spirit off the watch unit so that they can keep their dinner.

When the PCs find the duke's wife and her lover, they implore the party not to bring them back to the duke. They say that the duke will kill them both if they go back, and ask that the party instead help them escape. In exchange, the noble will tell them where most of the prisoners went, enabling the party to succeed at that portion of their mission. The noble is evil, and will scheme against the PCs if they don't accede, looking for a chance to escape—even abandoning or wounding his lover, if doing so will let him get away.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) alliance, city, combat-heavy, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, escort mission, monster, politics

700-Year Itch

The PCs are stopped in the middle of whatever task is at hand by the avatar of a goddess. She makes much ado about the PCs being chosen as worthy to serve her in a most important endeavor. A wicked wench tricked her husband into committing adultery, and she wants the woman to pay. The goddess won't be placated by anything less than the woman's life in payment for this grave insult—and she wants the PCs to help her collect. The goddess will gladly force the PCs into helping if they don't agree, using magical spells, threats, or any means she feels necessary. The avatar tells the PCs where the girl resides and bids them be on their way.

The PCs have little choice but to comply, but they're unaware of the true situation. If, on the way to find the woman, the PCs search for information in any place where the stories of the gods are told, they'll hear another side to the story. In this version, the god forced himself on the woman and forbade his wife from taking revenge. His wife, the goddess, sees the PCs as a loophole.

Upon reaching the town where the woman lives, the PCs are approached by another, lesser god. He wishes to help the PCs and avoid perpetuating this great injustice against the woman, but he doesn't have the power to confront the goddess or her husband directly. He directs them to a sunken city, accessible through a series of caves, where they can find a magical stone that will allow them to travel undetected by the

wife. He suggests that her husband can be reasoned with, and might even intervene if they make their case at his most holy temple, far from the woman's town.

After questing for the stone, the PCs can travel safely to the temple to plead their case. Convincing the husband should be difficult, and may involve pandering to his outsized ego. This can be accomplished through roleplaying or through a tough challenge handled using your game's resolution system. If they succeed in convincing the husband to help them, then he will stop the wife from interfering with the PCs ever again. If they fail, he'll send a great monster to attack them and then forget all about them. Luckily, he will then move onto his next conquest and his wife's wrath will turn towards a new victim.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (JA) difficult choice, dungeon crawl, epic challenge, innocent, isolated area, monster, religion, roleplaying-heavy

One Last Goodbye

63

The queen's body has been stolen. She was laid to rest only a week ago after being murdered in a dark elf raid; the king has vowed revenge for this violation. He is amassing troops in the capital city, and is calling for war.

The PCs receive word from the late queen's handmaiden, who offers what money she has for the PCs to retrieve the queen's body. The handmaiden tells them that her body is in the realm of the dark elves, in the tower of a powerful wizard. If the body is returned, war may be averted.

The PCs venture into the domain of the dark elves, seeking the wizard's tower. Along the way, they face underworld creatures, natural hazards, and dark elf patrols; adjust the number of encounters to the desired length of the adventure.

When they reach the tower, they must overcome arcane defenses and traps in order to gain entrance. After a difficult climb to the tower's top level, they'll face the wizard himself. The wizard will tell the PCs that he was the queen's lover for many years, unbeknownst to the king. He'll show them proof that the queen didn't die in a dark elf raid, but rather was killed by the king when he found out about their affair.

The wizard sent his agents to retrieve the queen's body so that he could see her one last time.

The PCs must decide if they wish to leave the queen's body with the wizard or take her back to her kingdom. The wizard won't fight the PCs if they want to take the body back to the surface; he will only ask for a few moments to say goodbye to his love.

Now that the PCs know the truth, what will they do about it? If they say nothing, the king will wage a war under false pretense, which will result in deaths on both sides. If they confront the king, he'll try to kill the PCs in order to conceal his deception. If the king is exposed, the people will rebel after hearing of the murder of their beloved queen.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) difficult choice, dungeon crawl, epic impact, exploration, intrigue, isolated area, monster, politics, social, twist

Madness

Music for the Masses

64

A new performer has been captivating audiences in the area, and tales of his intoxicating music have spread like wildfire. Each show throws more kindling on the flames as fan fervor over this bard rapidly escalates. After each successive performance there's an outbreak of sudden arguments, violence, and public intimate encounters among those who attend. It seems the bard's music inspires people to uncontrollable heights of passion. The PCs may be drawn in by noticing the ever increasing hysteria, or when one or more of the PCs is in the audience for a show and becomes a devoted fan.

A rival bard, well-versed in magical ways, covertly approaches the PCs. He tells them that the situation reeks of magic, and gives the PCs a charm that will prevent them from being affected. He doesn't know exactly how it's being done, but begs the PCs to stop the influence of the bard's magic before it gets out of control. While this conversation is taking place, rabid fans make an attempt to kill the rival bard, claiming that jealousy is driving him to undermine their hero.

Fans display kindness toward anyone expressing appreciation of the bard's music and disproportionate anger toward anyone who seems ambivalent or disinterested. This results in many

interesting fights or amorous advances for the PCs to become involved in: Fans might attack the PCs (causing a fight against innocents that must be handled carefully), and people may attempt to steal money from the party in order to throw it to the bard. Interactions with fans should make the PCs realize that tonight's performance will have major consequences.

If the PCs attend a performance, the bard himself looks worried. He understands that fans' reactions to his music are unnatural, but can't seem to stop playing. He plays calming songs, but the fans scream for rousing jigs. Perceptive PCs, or those with magical abilities, might notice that the bard's instrument seems to be compelling him to play against his will. If the bard, or his instrument, is attacked, rabid fans will attack the PCs. If the instrument is destroyed, the effect will dissipate immediately and the people will return to normal.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Romance, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (JA) city, deadline, difficult choice, innocent, investigative, madness, roleplaying-heavy, social, twist

The Secret of the Madness

65

The PCs learn of a ruined school of magic that was once the greatest such school in the kingdom, now rumored to be home to great treasures, tomes of lost knowledge, and a powerful artifact. No one knows what befell the school or

the wizards within it, and those who have entered haven't returned. The whole situation is more than any adventuring party can resist.

The expedition into the school begins without any unexpected problems. Monsters have occupied the lower floors, but they're nothing that the PCs haven't dealt with before. It isn't until they reach the third floor that they see signs of real trouble: The walls are scrawled with arcane symbols, broken magic circles are found in some of the rooms, and decayed bodies are scattered about in the hallways.

That's when the madness strikes. Gradually, the PCs fall under the effect of a potent magical spell—one that spiraled out of control years ago. As the madness creeps in it will seed distrust among the PCs, preying upon their rivalries and increasing tensions. While their bonds as a team begin to crumble, the PCs must survive the more powerful creatures that have moved onto this floor.

The best way to simulate the madness is to write notes for each player. As each PC succumbs to the madness, give that PC's player her note. The note describes a prejudice or delusion about one of the other PCs for her character to act upon. Use, adapt, or create a mechanic that allows the PCs to resist the actions forced upon them by the madness. The goal is to simulate a breakdown of party cohesion that adds a sense of urgency to completing the PCs' mission, not to force your players to act against their wishes.

The madness is the result of a powerful artifact that was activated by one of the original wizards who lived in the school. The artifact resides in the personal chambers of the headmaster, where a number of twisted creatures have been drawn to it. As the PCs fight the curse and continue their expedition, they'll uncover a wizard's notebook detailing the source of the delusions—as well as a possible solution that he wasn't able to try before he was lost to the madness himself.

In the finale, the PCs will confront the sentient artifact and its new minions, and must overcome their own distrust of each other in order to defeat the artifact before they find themselves consumed by it.

Artist: Philip Miller



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) artificial life form, combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, madness, magic, monster, villain



Madness by Design

66

With the exception of two nobles, the king's entire court has gone mad. The palace has been quarantined, although the king is unaffected. No one knows what caused the spontaneous madness, or whether it will spread further—except the king, because he's responsible for the "disease." He arranged for a magical malady to afflict the nobles because he wants no interference when he makes several decrees that many in the city, including the PCs, would oppose.

Two nobles proved resistant, but are quarantined, as it's assumed they'll succumb eventually. One of them suspects foul play and reaches out to the PCs. The opening scene for this adventure is a surreptitious rendezvous between the noble and the PCs. They must meet without arousing suspicions, and without anyone knowing of their meeting, or they will be quarantined as well. In their meeting, the noble suggests a magical cause and notes the disappearance of the royal wizard, who is said to be "away on court business."

Investigating the wizard's disappearance comprises the second major scene. During this scene, the noble that the PCs didn't meet with goes mad as well, and the noble they met disappears—thrown into the dungeon on false charges, as he appears to be resisting the madness and poses a threat. The PCs' investigation turns up the court wizard's body. He

appears to have been murdered by street thugs during a robbery, but the key to his palace quarters is still on his belt.

While they're breaking into the palace, the first of the king's unwelcome decrees is announced. Time these announcements as best fits the pacing of the adventure, releasing more of them to give the PCs an incentive to press ahead with their well-intentioned crime. Inside the wizard's quarters, they find proof that he created the madness at the behest of the king.

The climax of this adventure is presenting that proof in a situation where the king cannot simply dispose of the PCs—whether that's a showdown in his court, with witnesses assembled by the PCs, a private confrontation with the king (perhaps accompanied with the threat of force), or taking the proof to the streets and inciting the people. The end result may well be the deposing of the king, which could have far-reaching implications in your campaign.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) betrayal, city, deadline, epic impact, innocent, intrigue, investigative, madness, politics, shady, stealth, villain

Mirror Universe

67

The PCs are hired to retrieve a magic mirror from a dungeon. Their patron has a map of the location in question, complete with notes on dangers, but he admits that it's several years old and the information "may be out of date." As the PCs approach the area, they learn from the local populace that monsters have been leaving the dungeon and destroying or attacking anything and anyone they come across. They claim to have burned those corpses that didn't simply melt away on their own. They're concerned because as the monsters become more aggressive, animals have started acting skittish, plants have begun to grow strangely, and many people are having nightmares with alarming frequency.

As the PCs make the final approach to the dungeon, they're attacked by a native herd animal. It seems to be in great pain, and its neck is twisted so that its face stares skyward. Its fur covers tentacle-like protrusions that grasp weakly at anything that touches its body. If the PCs kill it, it collapses, its skin tears open, and several mutated organs clumsily flee its worm-riddled corpse on insectile legs. Similarly twisted creatures are found inside the dungeon.

The map is roughly accurate, but as the PCs near their goal the walls will become progressively more spongy and moist until chambers seem completely organic, pulsing with life,

and cease to bear any resemblance to the map. In these final chambers, the PCs will have to contend with trap-filled rooms featuring acid-filled pits and tentacles arcing with electricity.

The mirror is found in a chamber that appears to have been gripped by a great hand and pulled like taffy. Made of a green-flecked golden metal and reflecting a misty vortex in which forms drift at the edge of sight, it hangs half-embedded in the wall, as though the wall were growing around it. Its surface feels almost like a liquid. If a PC pushes his hand through, he risks attack by something on the other side. As the PCs try to take it, they're attacked by a mass of squirming tentacles and claws from within the mirror. The PCs can either defeat this monstrosity or try to free the mirror and escape.

If asked, the PCs' patron will indicate that he intends to find a way to destroy the mirror. A good hook for future adventures is to have him be lying about this, or simply fail to destroy it, which will result in the surrounding region being slowly warped by the mirror.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) dungeon crawl, magic, tactical planning, travel, twist

Fatal Imprudence

The Importance of Proper Wording

68

The PCs hear a proclamation that all valiant souls should aid the church in the recovery of a stolen object, and when they inquire about the details of this holy quest they're led to the priest who issued the proclamation. He begs them to be discrete about the true nature of the quest, and explains that a scroll of prophecy has been stolen; it foretells of a great doom that would be caused by a yellow-haired child. The church wants the prophecy returned, but its wording is so vague that church officials fear what might happen if it becomes popular knowledge: riots, people murdering yellow-haired children, and blood running in the streets.

The priest can share two pieces of information to help the PCs start their hunt: Four men were seen near the temple before the theft, and only a handful of fences would be able to move a stolen holy relic. He asks the PCs not to reveal anything about the prophecy during their search.

Three of the four thieves have been spending their time in a local bar, arguing about what to do with the prophecy. They speak in code, so the PCs might encounter them and feel something is suspicious but not put things together. One of the thieves has a yellow-haired son and wants to destroy the prophecy. Two of them want to ransom it back to the church, while the fourth thief, the leader, is pondering the problem on his own but keeps tabs on the other three.

Too Late!

The PCs are approached by a messenger from a nearby town who asks for their help. A band of goblins (or other small humanoids) has been raiding the town regularly and terrorizing its citizens. En route to the town, the PCs face a challenge that significantly delays their arrival: a flooded river or other natural hazard, an ambush set by goblin skirmishers, or a fight with other hostile creatures.

When the PCs arrive in town, they find the townsfolk distraught, and not just because of the goblin raids. Because of their delay in reaching the town, a local would-be hero decided that the goblin problem couldn't wait any longer, and he set out to take them on himself. The residents beg the PCs to deal with the goblins and rescue their foolhardy friend.

Arriving at the goblin lair, the PCs must get past entrance guards in fortified sniper positions. If not defeated quickly, the guards will sound an alarm, alerting all the goblins in the lair and bringing reinforcements.

Within the lair, the PCs will have to fight additional goblins (especially if the alert was raised) as they search for

Visiting a fence who deals in relics, the PCs learn that a shipment was expected and that it hasn't been received. If they play their cards right, the fence will offer to hire them to retrieve the relic. The fence can also tell them more about the thieves, as can other local crooks and ne'er-do-wells.

If the PCs confront the thieves, they will flee. If cornered, a few will fight but the thief with the yellow-haired son will surrender. He'll reveal that he wants the prophecy destroyed to protect his son. Before he can disclose the location of the prophecy, the leader will kill him with a crossbow shot and escape into the area's maze of alleyways.

A map to the thieves' hideout can be found on one of them, leading the PCs to the leader. When the PCs show up, he'll be scooping up the band's loot and getting ready to leave town. The leader can be intimidated or bribed into giving them the prophecy. He'll fight if pressed, but prefers to avoid combat. The PCs should be aware that he still has knowledge of the prophecy and could retell it, and that he's not to be trusted—making him a potential liability.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) city, deadline, difficult choice, innocent, investigative, race, religion, social, villain

69

the would-be hero. Depending on the tone you settle on for this adventure, he could be dead, captured, or alive; if alive, he'll insist on fighting alongside the PCs. With or without the would-be hero, the PCs must ultimately face the goblin warlord. If allowed time to prepare, the warlord and his cronies will barricade themselves in a defensible position with a stockpile of oil that can be turned into bombs and used in traps.

If the PCs return with the would-be hero alive and well, the town will hold a feast in their honor and expect to hear tales of their heroics. If he's dead, the PCs will be asked to attend his funeral and say a few words at the grave site. If the PCs are familiar with the town, this adventure will have more impact—doubly so if the would-be hero is a friend of theirs.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) alliance, combat-heavy, deadline, dungeon crawl, escort mission, relationship hook, social, travel

61

One-Way Trip

70

A few months ago, a party of evil adventurers discovered a long-forgotten tomb complex—one that history books described as being packed from floor to ceiling with priceless treasures. They entered, but never returned. Several other adventuring parties followed them in, never to be seen again. The last to dare the tomb was the dilettante son of a noble family, not a true adventurer. He too failed to return, and his family is offering a substantial reward for his rescue—or the recovery of his body.

Despite the ancient tomb's fearsome reputation, when the evil adventurers discovered it they found it to be free of threats—so they hatched a plan. They snuck back out, spread the word about the tomb's treasures, and laid in wait for others to follow them. One by one, they killed every adventurer who entered the tomb, including the dilettante, claiming their victims' magic weapons and other treasure for their own. However, a tribe of goblins stumbled across the place and decided to take up residence. They reactivated many of the tomb's deadliest traps and boxed in the evil adventurers. The two groups are locked in a stalemate: The goblins control the entrance area, including a series of deadly traps, and the adventurers are trapped in the deepest part of the tomb.

The PCs will first encounter the goblins, who have relaxed their guard somewhat. They can be bargained with: They want the evil adventurers dead so that they can claim the tomb for

themselves, and if they don't have to starve them out, so much the better. They can also be slain, though this will require running their gauntlet of fiendish traps.

The second encounter in this adventure involves traversing the “no man's land” between the goblins and the adventurers. The PCs will discover many bodies of fallen adventurers, as well as the dilettante's corpse. A few traps must be bypassed, as well as undead adventurers who have risen due to the magic of the tomb.

With the goblins dispatched or turned into allies, the PCs must face the evil adventurers. In their desperation to escape the tomb, they delved even deeper, awakening an ancient monster that had been held in place by a powerful enchantment. The adventurers will try to bargain with the PCs to be allowed to escape, though few good-aligned groups will do so once they know why the villains are so eager to flee. If pressed, they will fight—and they're well-armed with the spoils of their looting. For a bigger finale, have the monster break free during the climactic scene.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, exploration, sandbox, social, villain

Angry Waters

71

In the middle of a terrible storm, the heroes come upon a large town and take shelter in the local tavern. The tavern is mostly empty and the barkeep is thankful for the company, but warns the PCs that he can't cook anything for them that requires water. The town's well has become poisonous, making everyone in the area sick and killing several townsfolk.

Three days ago, a foul rain fell from the skies, burning any exposed flesh that it touched and killing the local crops and livestock. When the poisonous rain passed, a heavy deluge of normal rainfall began; it hasn't let up since. The dam upstream of the town is near capacity and there are fears that it will break sometime in the next few days, wiping the town off the map. People would leave, but they're too sick or too afraid to abandon their homes. It should be clear to the PCs that this isn't a natural occurrence. In order to help the town, they'll have to discover what really happened.

The innkeeper gives them their first clue: Seven days ago a traveler came into town, ate at the inn and then left later that night, never to be seen again—and he was a cleric of the god of water. In a fit of drunken rage, the captain of the guard killed him and hid his crime by burning the body—an affront to the stranger's deity. Now the god of water is punishing the town,

and if amends aren't made the deity will destroy the whole town in a great flood.

The PCs will discover the cleric's possessions in the inn, including some divine scrolls that the innkeeper couldn't decipher. Exploring the town, they find signs of violence in the shrine to the water god, including a town guard emblem near the site. Outside of town, they find the cleric's charred remains hidden in a hunting cabin. During their explorations, the PCs will be harassed by the town guard; in a separate encounter, they'll be attacked by thugs hired by the captain of the guard.

The heroes will then need to bring the guard captain to justice and give the cleric a proper burial according to the precepts of his faith. If they do this, the well will return to normal, the rain will let up, and the waters behind the dam will magically recede to their normal levels, making the town safe again.



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PV) deadline, innocent, investigative, religion

Involuntary Crimes of Love

First Date

72

In a busy port city, an ancient wereshark and her adolescent son are posing as a young noblewoman and her younger brother, and they've embarked on a bloody campaign to consolidate her political power in the city. Her plan is to bewitch her innocent son so that he attacks the children of prominent families, and she hopes that these attacks will awaken his innate rage and toughen him up as a man. He knows he's a wereshark, but he rarely acts on his animal instincts.

The PCs are helping the city watch investigate series of mutilations. The crimes all took place in small studios rented by women whose descriptions match the appearance of the victims. Each is well-stocked with expensive wine and art, and each studio is also thoroughly destroyed and drenched in blood. The victims' clothes are in surprisingly good condition, indicating that their bodies were dressed after their deaths. At each victim's house, the PCs will find love letters, art, and an invitation to model from a secret admirer.

During their investigation, the PCs discover that a young woman in the area who fits the profile has just left for a rendezvous. Bursting in on the scene, the PCs find a naked young woman desperately trying to fend off a wereshark in hybrid (bipedal) form. Once the PCs have wounded the wereshark, he reverts to human form and collapses. The party escorts him to prison.

Under questioning, the wereshark is shocked to hear what he has done. He admits to suffering blackouts during recent trysts with a handful of women, but insists that the women solicited him and claims to have letters at home to prove it. The woman says that she arrived at the studio to model and found a note that apologized for her host's tardiness and requested that she be ready to model upon his arrival. When he showed up, he made unwelcome physical advances, and when she rejected him he became angry and transformed into a hideous monster. Both the wereshark and the woman mention that a local courier service delivered the letters that brought them together.

The courier service is staffed by the mother's minions, and when the PCs show up they lure them into a water-filled basement where her fish-man servants are lying in wait. Ransacking the courier office yields papers referring to the son as "the mistress' brat," as well as the mother's address.

At the weresharks' home, more fish-men keep the PCs busy while the mother bars the door, sets fire to the building, and flees.

Exiting the inferno, the PCs follow alarms and watchmen to the city's prison, where the mother is trying to free her son. They flee towards the sea, relying on their natural regeneration to ignore wounds and slowing pursuit with the mother's dark magic. If they aren't brought down before they reach the water, they will likely escape.

The mother can be used as a powerful nemesis in further adventures, while the son will either follow in his mother's evil footsteps or become an ally if the PCs treated him well.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (MN) city, combat-heavy, innocent, investigative, madness, monster, race, villain

Artist: Laine Garrett



Stolen Treasure

73

The PCs come across a group of bandits pulling a wheeled cage with a woman inside. The woman is well-dressed and attractive, and she implores the PCs to intervene and set her free. If they do (running off the bandits with relative ease), she thanks them and explains that she comes from a town about two weeks away on horseback, and that the people there would gladly reward the PCs for her return.

As the PCs trek to her town, she takes a liking to one of them and tries to initiate a relationship with that PC. This is the crux of the adventure: The plot won't play out well unless one of the PCs falls for her. She reveals little about herself, saying only that she's just a simple servant. She insists that she must return in order to fulfill a debt honorably, and will become sad and withdrawn as the party gets closer to her town.

When the PCs enter the town, the locals are elated at the woman's return. They send a runner to the mountain "to inform the dragon of his treasure's safe return," which comes as a surprise to the PCs. The woman then confesses that her town betrothed her to the dragon in return for the dragon's

protection. She has been with the dragon for five years, and her agreement requires her to stay for another 10 years. She was kidnapped by bandits several weeks ago, and in her absence the town was preparing to betroth another villager to the dragon. With the woman's return, she can now return to the dragon's keep.

This should cause great pain for the PC that has fallen for her. The PCs will have to decide what they want to do about this situation, and consider the possible consequences. The dragon will insist on her return, and if he is denied he'll demand another woman as his treasure. The townsfolk, while not fond of ceding anyone to the dragon, receive protection from the dragon and aren't ready to jeopardize the arrangement. The PCs must resolve this sticky situation.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PV) difficult choice, monster, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, social, twist

Preventing a Duel

74

Two young lads of noble birth are trying desperately to back out of a publicly declared duel, but the townsfolk are too excited about the prospect of a fight to let them withdraw. The PCs will find that people are eager to gossip about the origins of the dispute, but that no two stories are alike. The proprietor of a local news publication is anxious to uncover the truth, driven to do so either by a dedication to honest reporting, the desire further a career, the ability use the information as blackmail, or a combination thereof. To that end, the proprietor is covertly hiring people to investigate the situation.

In reality, the dispute is the result of a misunderstanding. In the dead of night, one of the young noblemen spied a masked figure sneaking away from the family's estate. Suspecting a thief, the brave young man embarked on a chase that took them both all the way into town. After a scuffle, the masked figure was revealed to be a young man from a rival house. By this time a crowd had gathered, drawn by the commotion. Affronted, the pursuer slapped the face of perpetrator and challenged him to a duel. With the townsfolk as witnesses, he was obligated to accept.

Both men now regret that encounter, as the perpetrator was sneaking into the pursuer's house not as a thief, but to visit his love—the pursuer's sister. The two nobles are now trying to cover up the details in order to preserve the sister's honor.

Despite attempts at sweeping this mess under the rug, many people know some part of the story. A gardener has witnessed

the masked figure several times. At a coffee house, a dilettante reveals that the sister has been swooning over some secret man, while a horse groomer knows that masked passengers pay double coach prices for covertness and that they always travel between the same two city parks. Tailing the lovers leads the PCs to witness an encounter between them. The lovers flee when city guards show up and try to apprehend them—along with the PCs. Regardless of whether the PCs successfully fight off the guards or are captured and put in jail, one of the lovers finds the PCs and pleads for their help.

This is the crux of the adventure, and from this point events can go in two directions. If the PCs decide to help the young nobles, they must find a way to preserve their honor and the secrecy of the first noble's love. If the PCs opt to out the nobles and reveal their dishonor, agents of the two noble houses will work to sabotage their efforts. Bribery, threats, fast-paced chases, and attacks are some of the methods that might be employed to hinder the PCs. Resolution should occur after a major confrontation, or when the PCs reveal the true story behind the duel.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) city, difficult choice, innocent, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, politics, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, twist

A rainstorm has raged over a small region for several days, and the ceaseless rain is killing crops, flooding homes, and destroying livelihoods. The villagers turn to the PCs for help, and local lore points to an ancient storm giant who is rumored to live atop a nearby mountain. En route to the mountain, the PCs are challenged by the relentless storm, which makes navigation difficult and actual travel doubly so. The storm intensifies the closer they get to the mountain.

Ascending the mountain, the PCs are attacked by orcs. The orcs are outmatched, and seem more intent on keeping the party from getting closer to the top than actually trying to kill them. This is true: They heard that the giant is vulnerable, and hope to kill him and claim his lair. At the top, the PCs find the storm giant, who is indeed the source of the never-ending rain. His mate left him after they had a terrible fight, and in his grief he's lashing out at the surrounding region.

The PCs can simply kill the giant, which will end the storm and allow village life to go back to normal. If they do, the mountain orcs claim his lair and use it as a base from which to launch attacks on the villages. No longer be held in check by the storm giant, they'll devastate the region in short order.

A more interesting option is to go after the giant's mate and try to convince her to return. Though she did leave in part

because of their fight, she was also under the thrall of the orc tribe's shaman, who ensorcelled her with the hope of achieving exactly these results. The spell will wear off around the time the PCs track her down (which isn't difficult, given her size and temperament), and if suitably convinced she'll return to her mate.

Back at the lair, the PCs arrive in time to spot the orcs mounting their attack (or midway through the attack, if that works better for your group). Orc sappers have undermined a portion of the mountain near the lair, evening the odds somewhat, but after a furious battle the PCs and the giants will prevail. The reunited storm giants can even be convinced to pay tribute to the village for the damage they caused.



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) alliance, deadline, escort mission, innocent, mass combat, race, social, twist, villain

Slaying of a Kinsman Unrecognized

Dark Changeling

76

While ridding an area of an evil witch, the PCs discover a number of paintings of a handsome boy growing into a man, all entitled "My Royal Son." The witch's journal reveals that she kidnapped the king's firstborn son decades ago, substituting a changeling: a doll enchanted to seem like an infant, or a sickly baby. She then raised him as her own, using her dark magic to fill him with hatred for the king. It's common knowledge that the king's firstborn son died a few months after being born. Although he does have other children, he was diminished by the death.

The final entry in the journal reveals that the witch knows her end is near. Her beloved son, she writes, will carry on her legacy by killing his siblings and ascending to throne, where he will have ultimate authority to continue the witch's dark work.

The party must get to the capital city at once and prevent the royal son from carrying out his mission by any means

necessary. He's very resourceful, may have the ability to change his appearance, and is unaffected by the magic wards that bar those without royal blood from entering the palace.

The PCs may find themselves sneaking into the palace, fighting the royal guards, trying to convince the guards of the plot, or even demanding a midnight audience with the king himself. This shouldn't be an easy task. If the royal son is caught, the witch's enchantments can be removed, but this is a long and difficult process that will leave many scars on his soul.



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) deadline, epic impact, magic, politics, social, villain

Buyer's Remorse

77

In order to keep the region from plunging into war, the duke has hired a group of mercenaries to assassinate a rival duke. The duke believes that the assassination will trigger a civil war in the rival duchy, perhaps resulting in a more agreeable ruler winding up on the throne. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to either of them, the rival duke is actually the employer's son. The duchess knows the truth, and she has hired the PCs to stop the assassins as well as carry a message from her to her son. However, unaware of his heritage the rival duke has also hatched a plot of his own. He has dispatched mercenaries to assassinate the other duke's wife—his own mother, the duchess—in the hope that her death will drive his rival mad with grief.

To reach the duke's son, the PCs must pass through dangerous territory. Deception and diplomacy may help, but with the two duchies at war they're likely to be viewed as foes by most of the rival duke's soldiers. The first encounter in this adventure should be a tense confrontation between the PCs and some of the son's forces, which may end in a fight. The PCs must then catch up to the duke's mercenaries, who don't want to be found, and stop them from completing their mission.

With the assassins out of the way, the PCs have to infiltrate the son's camp and get close enough to him to pass on the duchess' message. The message lays out the truth of the rival duke's parentage, but he won't readily believe it—or the PCs. The people he considered his parents are long dead, although you might provide a midwife or other intermediary from the time of his birth to add credence to the claim.

Loyalty

78

A stealthy, masked figure trails the PCs for a time, then attacks without warning. If the man is wounded, he attempts to flee. If he gets away, he begins stalking the PCs again as soon as he's healed up. When the PCs finally unmask their stalker, they're shocked to discover that he's a close relative of a party member. If their attacker survives, which is the recommended outcome, he remains single-minded in his determination to slay his kinsman—struggling against any bonds, spitting expletives, and escaping at the earliest opportunity.

Searching the relative reveals that he is tattooed with the symbol of a clan of notoriously persistent assassins. If other members of the clan observed the relative's capture, they may attack the PCs to protect him.

After talking to family members, the PCs discover that their would-be assassin claimed to have been wronged by his PC kinsman months ago. He has since been consumed by the desire for revenge. He disappeared shortly after making dark

Once convinced of the truth of the message, the rival duke will share his plot with the PCs. While he can't leave the front, he begs them to stop the mercenaries he sent into his father's duchy, who must be just a day or two away from killing his mother. Can the PCs catch the mercenaries in time?



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) epic impact, intrigue, politics, roleplaying-heavy, social, stealth, travel



Artist: Laine Garrett

declarations against the PC. In truth, he was brainwashed by the assassin clan—his kinsman never wronged him.

In time, or through magical assistance, the PCs can return the brainwashed relative to a normal state. He joined the clan voluntarily, and over time they conditioned him to hate the PC; ultimately, they ordered him to kill his kinsman as a test of his loyalty. The fact that the relative is free of their control, however, doesn't mean that the assassins will let one of their number escape so easily. The PCs may have to destroy the entire organization in order to prevent the assassins from making regular attempts on their lives.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) betrayal, combat-heavy, difficult choice, investigative, madness, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy

A Second Chance

79

This adventure begins in a cemetery on a stormy day, where the lord (or lady) of the land stands before a grave site and makes a vow. The PCs are the noble's retainers, and the noble is repentant: It was by his hand that the person interred here was slain. Worse still, he later learned that the person was a blood relative. The noble swears to the gods that if given a second chance, the killing blow would not come from his hand. Thereupon the heavens open up, releasing a downpour of ferocious magnitude, and there is a brilliant and searing bolt of lightning.

In the next moment, the PCs and their liege appear in a courtyard. The once-slain kinsman stands before them, making unreasonable demands of the noble. It's clear the PCs' liege lord doesn't recognize his kinsman as such, and sees him only as a rival noble clamoring for war. Nevertheless, the PCs remember the grave site and this person's ultimate destiny.

As the adventure unfolds, the PCs experience a situation that has transpired before. Their liege orders them to infiltrate the kinsman's fortress, elude the guards and the bloodthirsty twin mastiffs that roam the estate, reach his private quarters, capture him, and return so that their liege lord may exact justice on the man.

Knowing that how these events transpire represents a second chance for their liege, the PCs must work at some kind

of reconciliation—even though their liege might interpret anything other than outright obedience as betrayal. Their liege isn't easily convinced of his blood ties to the rival, so the PCs should work to locate proof that they are kinsmen and find a way to present that information before events spiral out of control.

This could involve another raid on the kinsman's fortress to retrieve long-lost birth records, which were inscribed in a holy book now entombed in the patriarch's crypt; the crypt is protected by the ghostly souls of their ancestors. They might instead seek out a priest who knows how the bloodlines connect, but who resides in a wilderness retreat that can only be reached after an arduous and dangerous trek. The PCs could also consult a mountaintop oracle; he will direct the PCs to recover an heirloom inscribed with the lost family history.

Only once the noble decides not to kill his kinsman will the timeline correct itself, returning the PCs and their liege to a slightly changed world.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) alliance, difficult choice, escort mission, intrigue, magic, politics, roleplaying-heavy, social, stealth, twist

Thief of Destiny

80

When one of the PCs was born, the local midwife prophesied great deeds. Before the PC turned one year old, a visiting wizard overheard the tale and decided to steal the blessings of the prophecy for his own. The wizard crept into the sleeping child's room and took a lock of his hair to use to create a duplicate.

Years later, the PCs cross paths with a powerful wizard in red and silver robes and a knight in enchanted plate armor. The knight acts as the wizard's bodyguard, and his (or her, if the prophesied PC was female) visor is down. Having been ordered by the wizard to stay silent, he doesn't speak during the encounter. The wizard offers to auger the future for the PCs, and proves his abilities by divining a minor detail about each of them. His offer of augury is made to all of the PCs, but perceptive characters will notice that he pays particular attention to the duplicated PC.

For a small fee, he promises to tell each PC something useful about their future. (Rolling a die before telling each fortune may help create the illusion that the wizard is actually performing magic.) Assuming the duplicated PC accepts, when the wizard divines that PC's future he proclaims that the PC will die in his or her next battle. He offers to ward off that fate by siphoning that possible future into a

brass amulet that he carries for just such a purpose. If the PC accepts, the wizard will perform a warding ritual—and this time, actual magic is involved: The PC's destiny is transferred into the amulet.

After parting ways with the PCs, the wizard and the duplicate (who is now wearing the amulet, which channels the PC's destiny into him or her) commit a daring theft. When the PCs pass through the same area, town guards attempt to arrest them for the crime. This pattern will recur as often as needed for pacing until the PCs track down the wizard and the fated PC's duplicate. Each encounter can involve mystery, intrigue, diplomacy, or combat as you see fit.

When the party confronts the wizard, he won't give up the amulet without a struggle. If the duplicate dies while wearing it, the duplicated PC's destiny dies at the same time, making a confrontation tricky. What will the duplicated PC do about his or her clone? Can the party afford to leave the wizard and the duplicate alive?



Easily adapted to: Anime, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, tactical planning, twist, villain

Self-Sacrifice for an Ideal

Speaking Truth to Power

81

The local lord's reputation for harsh taxation and political oppression is rivaled only by his reputation as a diehard supporter of both king and country. His zealous support is the only reason that he is tolerated by the king, but things have changed over the past year.

Taxes have increased while roads, bridges, and garrisons are in worse repair than ever. Finally, in the middle of a busy market day, a local farrier climbs atop his stall and loudly protests the latest tax increase. A crowd gathers, egging him on, but the lord's men break it up.

That night, the PCs hear about or witness the farrier being beaten to death by the lord's men. His last words are, "What's in the horses' hooves? And what's in the stables? Only a traitor's got business there!" If his body or the crime scene is investigated, the party will find a number of small pieces of dark flint, some of them bloody, wrapped in a cloth. The flint comes from an area of nearby high hills that stand on the border of a hostile neighboring country.

In the lord's stables are a few horses with bandaged hooves. There's also a newly built section of the stable with locked doors. Peeking through gaps in the boards reveals a number

of new wagons built to carry heavy loads across rough terrain. Bypassing the locked doors reveals two wagons full of road-building supplies and plans for a road from the neighboring country through the flinty hills to this area.

The local lord is committing treason by building a road for an invading army; in return, he will receive a post in the invader's government. The PCs need to get this information to the king or his agents before being caught.

While the PCs are in the stables, a group of foreign soldiers disguised as workers stumble in, laughing and talking with strong foreign accents. If the PCs are caught, the soldiers will draw weapons and attack while one runs to sound the alarm. The PCs must then escape the town while it's in "lockdown" mode. Even if they defeat the soldiers, they must still get word, and preferably evidence, to the king while evading the traitorous lord and his men.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) city, epic impact, innocent, intrigue, investigative, politics, rebellion, social, trade, travel, villain

Tower of the Necromancers

82

From within the infamous Tower of the Necromancers, wizards discharge the magical waste from their vile experiments into a river that serves as a nearby village's water supply. In addition to the effects of pollution (diseases, curses, deformities, and afflictions), necroplasmic goo from the river animates roaming undead like wights, skeletons, and other horrors.

The town's elders have lodged complaints with their lord, but he relies on the tower to reinforce his army with magical support, and resists taking action against the wizards. The PCs can become aware of the town's situation after putting down a roving band of undead horrors that is terrorizing the region, or when a loved one (or one of the PCs) is affected by the tainted water.

When word comes that the lord's own liege plans a visit on another matter, the more outspoken activists in town hatch a plan and present it to the PCs. If the PCs stage a raid on the necromancers' tower during the royal visit and gather proof that the wizards are deliberately causing harm, then the lord will have no choice but to intervene and order the wizards to find another outlet for their arcane runoff. Of course, there is one little problem: The wizards have anticipated this

maneuver. They've hired assassins to eliminate the PCs and have secured any incriminating evidence deep within their tower.

Possible encounters include fighting off a group of undead horrors, battling assassins in the town's narrow streets, or coordinating a first strike and attacking the assassins on the tower grounds. The PCs will also need to neutralize a magical barrier that separates the necromantic workshop from the rest of the tower, overcome the cadre of apprentice necromancers and their magically summoned monsters, and then destroy the workshop itself. Ultimately, they must confront the lord with embarrassing evidence during an audience with the visiting royal.

The PCs face overwhelming odds, and they may need to sacrifice much to bring about this confrontation. What are they willing to give up in order to save the town and its inhabitants?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) epic challenge, investigative, magic, monster, relationship hook, social, tactical planning

Sagacious Writ

83

A young adventurer was granted a small and troubled province to rule, and although he did his best the land fared poorly. His people starved, revolted against him, or both. He wrote letters asking for guidance from other leaders with prosperous lands. While this helped, his people were still restless. When one of his mentors passed away, she willed him a magic parchment that detailed the wisest laws he could enact.

For years, he copied and enacted these suggestions and his lands prospered. Studying the scroll's laws, he has written a book on governance for his descendants. He now wishes to pass the scroll on to another benevolent but hopeless bureaucrat. He has advised a likely candidate for years and has asked the PCs to visit his protégé to make sure he deserves the scroll.

The protégé is paranoid from years of his subjects making threats against him, so even with an introduction from his mentor he's distrustful of the PCs and requires them to prove their intentions. He'll send them to deal with a gang of bandits who have taken possession of a bridge to an isolated part of his kingdom. They've fortified the bridge with cover positions for snipers and are demanding tolls from passersby. Their main camp is just a short distance away, so if they're attacked they can easily summon reinforcements.

The protégé will next send the PCs to mediate a tax dispute. A village is refusing to pay the tax due on their barley, claiming that they harvested only enough to eat and replant. Investigating, talking to villagers, and visiting other towns, the PCs discover that the village's terrain isn't suited to the crop they were assigned. The protégé will drop the tax, ask the PCs how he is to avoid making similar mistakes in the future, and enact any reasonable suggestions.

Now comfortable with the PCs, the protégé will invite them to dinner, during which he'll be happy to discuss whatever they like. Using their abilities or through roleplaying, the PCs must satisfy themselves that the protégé is worthy of the scroll. During dinner, he will offer knighthood to any of the PCs who are not already in the employ of another lord.

As written, this adventure deals with evaluating a single protégé, but it could easily be adapted into a story arc or campaign by giving the PCs multiple candidates to choose between.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) intrigue, politics, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social

The Last Stand

84

While the PCs are staying with a local lord, a group of demons is unleashed against his castle—and the only priest strong enough to dismiss them is half a night's ride away. The lord manages to send a messenger to the priest, but the PCs and the lord's guards need to hold off the demons until he arrives. Everyone else is sent into the dungeons, where a secret passage leads to safety.

The PCs and a handful of defenders must hold off the demons in order to allow people to escape. The PCs should understand that the odds of defeating the enemy are remote; the best they can hope for is to hold the demons off long enough for the priest to arrive or for the people to get to safety. This plot also works well if the PCs have loved ones among the fleeing people: The PCs are, in effect, sacrificing themselves for the ones they love.

Part of the fun of this scenario is the planning. You should have a detailed map of the castle and surrounding environs so that the PCs can accurately plan their defenses. When the demons attack, they should hit hard. The PCs will need to hold them off as long as possible before falling back. Hopefully, they can keep the demons at bay until the priest arrives.

The first major encounter is all planning: How will the PCs defend the castle? The second encounter is the demons' first

wave; these could be scouts, skirmishers, and outriders or a sizeable portion of the main force, depending on what suits your campaign. The third encounter is the main assault: Demons are everywhere, trying multiple approaches to break into the castle and overwhelm the defenders. If the PCs repulse the main assault, the demons can regroup for another attack before the priest arrives. Getting the priest into range to banish the demons is the final, climactic encounter.

You can also run this adventure as a purely military scenario (swapping the demons for conventional forces) or with the foe being a single terrifying monster or a small band of monsters, which is a good option if you don't want to run large numbers of combatants. For an interesting twist, have the escapees cloaked by magic—a magic that could be overcome if the monster can bring all its senses to bear against the fleeing people.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) alliance, combat-heavy, epic challenge, isolated area, mass combat, monster, siege, tactical planning

Blood-Bound

85

Centuries ago, an ancestor of the current king was instrumental in defeating a terrible demon, and it has become the sacred responsibility of his line to keep the demon from threatening the kingdom again. Though the demon can never truly be killed, its soul has been kept beneath the palace, bound in magical chains, ever since its body was destroyed.

The king summons the PCs and delivers terrible news: A theft has occurred that threatens the safety of the entire kingdom. The Blade of Stars, the sword that slew the demon's body centuries ago, is missing. If it isn't returned to the binding circle that holds the demon's soul prisoner, the chains will become weaker every day until the demon can break free.

The PCs must track down the thieves and recover the blade. The king will allow them to commandeer a measure of the crown's resources in pursuit of their quest. The thieves fled by ship and sailed for the northlands. The fleeing ship has quite a lead, and tracking it over the open sea will require ingenuity.

When the PCs catch up to the thieves, their leader—a sorcerer who stole the Blade of Stars to enhance her own magic—whips the waves around the king's warship into a frenzy, allowing her ship to escape. When the PCs pursue her on land, she calls a blizzard down upon them, again driving them back.

After battling the sorcerer and her band, the PCs recover the blade. When they return the blade to its place in the binding circle, the chains strengthen—but not enough. The king's wizards are at a loss. Returning to the king's audience chamber to claim their reward, the PCs are instead greeted by the high priest. He tells them that the king's god appeared in the ruler's dreams, and has demanded a sacrifice of royal blood in order to permanently bind the demon's soul. The king has refused, and is in seclusion. The high priest asks the PCs to convince the king to make this sacrifice for his people.

The deity may be satisfied with royal blood from further down the line, but only a member of the king's direct line (the king or one of his children) is guaranteed to be considered an acceptable sacrifice. There's no easy solution: Sacrificing the king's children will earn the PCs his undying enmity, and convincing him to sacrifice himself will weaken the kingdom—but someone must die to save the realm.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) deadline, difficult choice, politics, race, social, travel, villain

Self-Sacrifice for Kindred

A Concubine's Dilemma

86

A local ruler desires a particular woman and wishes to make her his concubine, so he throws her husband into prison and forces the woman to join him in order to keep her husband alive and well. The concubine wishes for them both to be free, but she has a dilemma: If her husband is freed first then she will likely be killed, but if she's freed first then he will likely be executed.

Unbeknownst to the concubine, one of the servants has learned of her dilemma and wants to help. The servant seeks out the PCs and asks for their aid, noting that the concubine has been gifted with expensive jewelry and would gladly part with it in return for their aid. The PCs' problem is making sure that both husband and wife can be freed without harm coming to either of them.

The first part of this adventure is observation and information-gathering. The PCs must reconnoiter the ruler's palace and the prison, likely using deception to gain entry. The ruler is quite fond of his concubine and not only will he not sell her at any price, he'll also become jealous of anyone else who pays

her too much attention. Thus, an offer to buy her will be met with suspicion and possibly violence.

Once the PCs have managed to map the appropriate areas of the palace and prison, as well as their environs, then they will have to carry out their plan. This will likely involve stealth as well as combat: sneaking into the palace to spirit the concubine away without alerting the ruler's guards, and then breaking into the prison to free her husband, also without getting caught. Getting both the concubine and her husband out of the palace in one piece, and without being fingered for the crime, composes the finale of this adventure.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) alliance, escort mission, innocent, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, politics, social, stealth, tactical planning

No Greater Love

87

A humanoid (orc, hobgoblin, etc.) has taken up residence on the outskirts of a small town, where she and her pre-teen son fit in as best they can and try to help out the locals with their specialized knowledge and unique perspective. They caused quite a stir when they first arrived, but quickly settled into a comfortable routine. Their quiet life is disrupted when the community is stricken by a string of bad luck. People begin to turn the mother into a scapegoat for their woes: Her fences have been torn down, and someone even tried to light her house on fire. Recently, her son was viciously beaten.

Walking into town one day as a thunderstorm is brewing, she recognizes one of the PCs as a friendly face and hands him a sealed letter that says, “Open afterwards.” She then says, “Thank you for everything,” and strides off.

A few moments later, as the storm starts to rage in earnest, the humanoid stands in the middle of the town square and begins to curse the townspeople. She claims responsibility for all of their bad luck, and even claims to have slept with half the married men in town. An angry crowd gathers as the storm breaks, and they stone her to death. The PCs can intervene, but the woman will be killed before they can protect her.

The letter is brief: “I had no choice. They would have come for both of us. Please go to the copse behind my house where my

son is waiting. Take him to this place. Tell him I love him.” This is followed by a crude map showing a route leading out of town to a residence in a major city. The son is sitting in the copse by a large sack, eating lunch. When the PCs approach, he says, “Mother said to wait here for someone. Are you them? Where is she?”

On their way out of town, the PCs must guard the son from the townsfolk, who will pursue them and demand his head. Once they’re clear of the town, they’ll find the city much more accepting of the son and the special talents he possesses. In fact, the city folk are so covetous of the humanoid that some will offer to purchase him for large sums. If the PCs ignore the offers and take him to the destination indicated on the map, they will find a kindly, childless couple who are willing to raise him as their own. If the boy is sold, he will run away to try and live with his own kind and the buyers will demand their money back.



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) alliance, escort mission, innocent, mature themes, roleplaying-heavy, social, stealth, travel

Say It Ain’t So, Pa

88

A mysterious and elusive bandit leader has become a thorn in the local duke’s side, raiding tax collectors and wealthy land owners. The duke wants the leader and his brigands captured and order restored before this little irritation sparks a full-blown rebellion.

Talking with tax collectors and nobles reveals little. The tax collectors know they’re not popular, but the duke’s projects require funding. The noblemen and gentlewomen consider themselves blameless, though even their own servants dislike them—the nobles hold to the oldest privileges and make little effort to be liked.

Capturing and interrogating a bandit reveals a loose network of angry locals, crushed under the heavy burden of the duke’s taxes—which have doubled over the last five years. The bandits are not a group that acts as one, though independent bands do communicate with one another. Many of the groups speak of the inspiring words of the man they call “the First Rebel.”

After the PCs learn of the First Rebel, the duke tells them that he, too, has had a breakthrough: His men tortured a bandit from another area, and he now knows the First Rebel’s identity. He seems to expect the PCs to know the man’s identity as well, and he questions them on the topic, paying particular

attention to one PC. Then he asks the PCs to aid him in their arrest of the First Rebel, who is actually that PC’s father. (You can substitute another relative, instead: A mother or sibling will have the same intensity with a different feel. A more distant relative may be a safer choice, as some players won’t like having a parent or sibling involved in this plot.)

The PCs can pose as rebels and gain entry into a local band. There’s a meeting between bands scheduled in a few days, and when they attend they recognize the PC’s father, and in turn are recognized by him. They may see the justness of the father’s cause and decide to join him, or they might decide to stay loyal to the duke and attempt to take the father prisoner.

Whichever route they take, they will come into conflict with the duke again. If they become rebels, this can substantially alter your campaign, taking things in a new direction. If they stay loyal, the duke may demand that they watch the father’s execution, or perform penance to make amends for his crimes.



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) difficult choice, epic impact, politics, rebellion, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, shady, social, twist

None Shall Pass

89

Deep in the ruins under a large city, a hole leading to some nefarious underworld constantly spawns demonic creatures. Positioned at a choke point between the rift and civilization, an ancient, divine hero holds back the waves of evil. A few elders in the city above know of the hero's existence, and adventurers occasionally bring tales of his fight to protect his descendants to the surface world. Below the hero's position lie even older ruins, overrun with demonic forces and littered with the corpses of would-be heroes. The PCs seek a treasure that lies below the hero's chokepoint, and must venture underground to find it.

Reaching the hero requires navigating the labyrinth above and braving the hazards within. This dungeon is a mix of ancient ruins, natural caves, monster burrows, and sewers all jumbled together. The deepest layers are the natural cave formations where the rift on which the city was inadvertently built is located.

The hero waits within a small natural cavern that forms a choke point between the lower and upper levels of the dungeon. He is beset regularly by the wretched creatures from below. The hand of his god keeps him healed, eliminates the need for sustenance, and slows the advance of years. When not fighting he will be happy to discuss his charge with anyone who asks, and he's grateful for the company, especially if his visitors lend their swords to his cause. He warns against going any deeper into the caverns below: Not only are they

crawling with the vilest beasts, but the tricks employed by some of his foes obligate him to slay any who try to pass from below unless they can prove their nature beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Below the hero lies a wealth of ancient treasures for the taking, including the item the PCs need to recover. In these lower halls, evil creatures are everywhere and the PCs run the risk of not only being slain but also of being corrupted and possessed. To successfully recover the item, they must both survive the lower halls and find some way to prove their true nature to the hero so that he will allow them to pass on their return journey.

A grander goal is to try to close the rift itself and thus permanently end the threat. While this may be possible, doing so requires the PCs to divine and execute a solution while defending themselves at the very heart of the dungeon.



Easily adapted to: High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) combat-heavy, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, exploration, monster

The Shield of Forever

90

A patron of treasure hunters summons the PCs to his villa and asks them to undertake a mission to recover a fabled artifact: a shield known to have healing properties. He says he sought the PCs out because he has lost contact with the previous expedition he sent for the treasure—an expedition led by a relative of one of the PCs.

He doesn't know where along the trek the relative disappeared, only the starting point. It will be necessary, he says, to retrace the first expedition's tracks and find the clues needed to reach each successive destination while encountering the same obstacles as the previous expedition.

As the PCs retrace the previous expedition's steps, they find the bodies of its members at every stage of their journey. They also encounter bodies encased in ice and guarded by a magical creature that ensnares unwary prey in an ice prison, a group of evil dwarves mining a cliff face and gleefully burying travelers amid the rocks below, and finally a large, underground chamber inhabited by fanatics. The fanatics once possessed the key granting entry to the vault containing the legendary shield,

and they'll attack all treasure-seekers because the relative's party stole the vault key from them.

Eventually, the PCs will catch up to the sole survivors of the expedition: the relative and one other person. The wards surrounding the legendary shield require a living soul in exchange for the power of the aegis, so someone must stay behind while the others escape with the shield.

Who will make that sacrifice? Or will they leave the artifact in place for all eternity, as those who devised the trap intended? And what of their patron: How will he react to news of the lost expedition or the artifact itself?



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) difficult choice, investigative, magic, relationship hook, trade, travel

All Sacrificed for a Passion

My Country, 'Tis of Thee

91

A demon in the guise of a man has infiltrated the kingdom, and through his powers of deception he has wooed the queen and placed her under several magical charms. In so doing, he has slowly taken power for himself. Under the demon's influence, the queen has rebuffed those closest to her and welcomed untrustworthy advisors. These newcomers are robbers clothed in silk who owe allegiance only to the usurper.

Those close advisors to the queen who have attempted to warn her against relinquishing too much authority to this man have been banished or punished. An investigation into the situation reveals that the demon's thugs brazenly invaded an exiled advisor's estate, prompting a hasty rescue of his family; later they learn that a meditation chamber exists deep under the castle, guarded by minor demons and traps and filled with unholy relics. The PCs also turn up clues pointing towards a mirror of revealing, an artifact that displays the true nature of anything or anyone caught in its reflection, and they learn

that the queen's handmaiden fled after she spied the demon in his true form. She now hides from a coterie of demon-spawn that was sent to kill her.

This is a sandbox adventure: Once in possession of some or all of the above clues, the PCs can come up with their own way to try and resolve the situation, likely involving several encounters. It will take a daring plan to unmask this scoundrel as the demon he truly is. Whose passion is strongest—the demon's lust for power or the PCs' love of queen and country?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Romance, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) betrayal, epic impact, intrigue, investigative, magic, monster, politics, sandbox, social, spirit, stealth, villain

The Bishop's Rod

92

A bishop (or a similar figure, like a master wizard) summons his subordinate, one of the PCs, early in the morning on a feast day. He tells the PC that a great vision was revealed to him last night: the location of a holy rod that is sacred to their church. Great cunning and sturdy hands will be required to recover it, and he tasks the PC with arranging an escort for the journey to the artifact site several hundred miles away. The PC and the escort (which includes the other PCs) will accompany the bishop.

On the journey, the bishop has nightmares each night. If asked, he explains that his nightmares are of heretics claiming the artifact first. This is a lie. In truth, he's filled with guilt and is steeling himself for the terrible thing he feels he must do: sacrifice the priest PC in order to acquire the rod. The bishop knows that the artifact, which is genuine, can only be claimed by one willing to give her life for god, and he's too much of a coward to do so himself.

After morning prayers one day, the bishop warns the PCs that he foresees that they will be attacked at noon. The attack comes on schedule: Heretics who worship a dark cult dedicated to the bishop's god swarm the party, targeting obvious members of the faith before anyone else. During the battle, the enemy leader raves about the "Rod of Mastery" having returned to earth. After the dust settles, it's clear that without the bishop's warning, the party would likely have been defeated.

The next obstacle is to pinpoint the location of the holy rod. The bishop's vision revealed the rod in a cave above the group's destination. While searching the area, they encounter other priests of their faith who also seek the rod. Some are members of dark cults who may attack the party, set ambushes, or hide and follow the PCs.

When the party finds the rod, they see that it's surrounded by a hazy red energy field. Direct approaches have no effect—the field can't be breached. At this point, the bishop will try to incapacitate the party so that he can sacrifice the priest PC. That sacrifice will dispel the field, allowing the bishop to take the rod. If he fails, a fight will break out.

Presuming the PCs defeat the bishop, the rod is—for the moment—unattainable. But dozens of other groups are converging on the party's location, and it's possible the bishop had other allies, allowing this plot to become the springboard for future adventures.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) alliance, betrayal, difficult choice, escort mission, race, religion, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, siege, tactical planning, travel, twist

Forever Yours

93

The characters discover a magical ring with many defensive and utilitarian properties in a treasure horde. Upon picking it up, the PCs hear occasional snuffles and sighing. The ring is intelligent and can speak, but it's reluctant to communicate unless cajoled. It holds the soul of a young poet who, unable to accompany his love on her adventures, sold everything he owned and paid to have himself imbued within a powerful item—this ring, which was to be delivered to her. Instead, he's spent years in treasure piles or in the possession of a series of increasingly more horrid adventurers. He begs the PCs to help reunite him with his lost love.

Following up on his tale, the PCs will discover that the soul in the ring isn't exactly the man he described himself to be. The crafter of the ring admits that he sold it to an adventurer after he never received payment for its creation. Hunting down the poet's parents reveals that they were outraged to discover that their son financed his cockamamie scheme by selling not only his own possessions and home, but theirs as well. While they stopped the sale of their home in time, many of their possessions were never recovered. Those familiar with the poet's work regard him as a talentless hack, and many who knew him considered him to be a spineless, irritating whiner.

During the PCs' travels, the ring will be stolen by a pixie or other capricious spirit. Though the ring teleports back to its rightful owners, the pixie is determined and harasses the PCs until they convince it to leave them alone.

If the PCs take too long to find the poet's beloved, he will become annoyingly vocal and harass them incessantly. If treated badly, or if he becomes convinced that the PCs are making no attempt to help, he'll do his best to make life as miserable and difficult for them as he can—even going so far as to alert foes to their presence and deliberately attract the attention of thieves.

When the PCs find the poet's lost love, she wants nothing to do with the ring. She launches into a lengthy rant about the poet's ability to annoy her decades after she fled from his constant harassment. After this confrontation, the ring will have a change of heart and will ask the PCs to deliver him to an adventuring bard who could make use of his magic and who might help him improve his poetry.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) bearers, investigative, sandbox, social, spirit, twist

The Price of Love

94

Everyone knows the story of the warrior-priest whose power protects the city. Since he forswore all earthly pleasures and dedicated himself to his deity, he has been undefeated in single combat and mass warfare. His divinely granted power has kept the city safe for the last 20 years, and has inspired many to dedicate their lives to a greater cause. He is a hero in the truest sense of the word.

But now, all of that has changed. The warrior-priest has taken a consort, a stunningly beautiful and enchanting woman, and the deity has withdrawn his favor. The PCs become privy to this sensitive information, and the local ruler asks their help in keeping it secret. If enemies of the city or of the warrior-priest's deity find out, they will use this vulnerability to their advantage.

Initially, a spy tries to get this information to his boss. The PCs may notice someone leaving in a hurry after learning of the affair, or may be sent to catch him. This happens more than once over the course of the adventure.

The warrior-priest's consort is actually an avatar of the goddess of beauty and vanity, though he doesn't know it. She's merely showing off her power and means no ill will towards the city or the warrior-priest, and she isn't evil. In her presence, her appeal is undeniable. Outside of her presence,

it's impossible to understand why the warrior-priest would give up so much for her.

If confronted, she uses her considerable influence to calm those around her so that she may continue her game in peace. If the danger that she has caused to her new lover can be proven to her, she'll break her spell and leave as gracefully as she can. If physically attacked, she'll retaliate, revealing that she's much more than human. Defeated or revealed, she'll release the warrior-priest from her spell, but whoever attacked her will owe the goddess a debt for their offence.

Free of her spell, the warrior-priest will go on a quest for his redemption. In his absence, the PCs are asked to help keep up appearances, preferably with one of them appearing as the warrior-priest. If word gets out that the warrior-priest is absent, the city will need to be defended from raiders, infiltrators, and possibly even infernal beings.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Romance, Sci-fi, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) betrayal, city, combat-heavy, epic challenge, epic impact, intrigue, investigative, magic, mature themes, religion, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy

The high priest of a local temple broke his vows and had relations with a pilgrim, who then departed the city. In retribution, the temple's vengeful deity has begun hammering the city with disasters. The high priest has prayed for penance, but his god has informed him that he must bring the pilgrim back to the city and that both of them must beg for penance in order for the disasters to cease.

This adventure begins shortly after the PCs enter the city, when a disaster strikes; this can be a freak weather condition, pestilence, a swarm of vicious animals, or an earthquake—whatever best fits your campaign. During the disaster, the PCs learn that this isn't an unusual occurrence: The city has been suffering strange and deadly occurrences for the past week. The PCs' actions or their reputation bring them to the attention of the high priest, who asks them for an audience.

The high priest explains his transgression and his god's demand. He can't leave the temple, nor would he know where to go if he could. He's uncertain about pilgrim's identity, but knows which group she was traveling with, what she looks like, and that she has a distinctive birthmark on the back of her neck. The PCs will have to hunt this group down, identify the pilgrim, and convince her to return to the city and seek

forgiveness. En route, they'll encounter at least one threat: bandits, monsters, severe weather, or some other challenge.

Unfortunately, the pilgrim turns out to be a married noblewoman, and public knowledge of her tryst (about which she has no remorse) will likely plunge the region into war. She also has no intention of returning to the city. The PCs will have to find some way to change her mind, or they may end up dooming the city—and possibly surrounding communities as well, if the god's wrath grows.

If they do convince her to return, then they may abate the divine wrath but now have a temporal concern: The noblewoman's husband demands satisfaction for her crime, and will accept a duel between the PCs and his own champions in lieu of his wife's execution.



Easily adapted to: Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) alliance, deadline, difficult choice, epic impact, escort mission, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, politics, religion, roleplaying-heavy, social, spirit, travel

Necessity of Sacrificing Loved Ones

Appeasing the Chimera

96

A chimera rules over the countryside from its roost high on a bluff overlooking the village. To appease the chimera, the villagers hold a lottery once a year to select three sacrifices. These three people trek up the bluff on the night of the first full moon each summer, and the chimera consumes them.

A few villagers have had enough of this barbaric practice and have sent emissaries to hire a group of mercenaries—the PCs—to put a stop to the chimera once and for all. Not everyone, however, agrees with the decision.

The villagers who orchestrate the lottery rig the drawing in order to settle scores within the community or to protect their loved ones from the chimera's teeth. When they learn why the PCs are in town, they don't stand idly by: They hire sellswords of their own and put the PCs' names into the lottery.

During the course of the adventure, the PCs may encounter a sheriff and several deputized citizens tasked with taking the PCs into custody on trumped-up charges, a dark elf scouting party that emerges from the chimera's lair on the

eve of the sacrifice, and an evil wizard who likes things just as they are and tries to prevent any interference. Inside the well-guarded lottery office within the town hall, the PCs can find ledgers, extra chits with certain names on them, a drawer holding chits withheld from the lottery, a magical device that skews the results, and any number of other indicators that the drawing is far from fair.

A little investigation into this arrangement reveals something more sinister than a chimera getting a free meal. The chimera is only the tip of the iceberg—merely a guardian at the mouth of a great underground complex. Deep within the bluff, cultists and dark elves are gathering their strength for a raid to capture villagers and farmers and take them as slaves.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) deadline, innocent, isolated area, monster, sandbox, shady, stealth

My Brother's Keeper

97

In order to stop an enemy invasion, the king acquiesced to his son's demand that he be allowed to lead an elite unit into battle. The king's army won, but the prince's unit was utterly destroyed and the prince is believed to have been killed. The king was devastated and gave up his throne to his other son, who has turned out to be a tyrannical ruler.

The crown prince didn't die. He was captured and nursed back to health, but was kept as a hostage by the leader of the enemy army. This leader believes that the new king, the crown prince's brother, would prefer that his brother were actually dead, and thus has kept the first-born's fate a secret to be used to his advantage.

The second-born son has learned about his brother's existence and is worried that it may harm his claim to the throne. The king hires the PCs to find and execute his brother, who he claims attempted to betray their father and now lives in the enemy kingdom as a reward for his treachery. The king also claims that his brother is using his knowledge of the kingdom to help the enemy plan a successful second attack on his domain.

The PCs will have to travel through enemy lines and assault the castle where the first-born is being held prisoner. They

should encounter an enemy force while crossing their lines and then face a heavily defended castle. Stealth will be their ally for the second encounter, as they sneak into the castle to locate the crown prince. If they don't question their mission once they actually meet him, they'll unwittingly destroy the kingdom's last best hope for a good king. If the PCs learn the truth, then they'll have to help the first-born son escape from prison and return home to stake his claim to the throne.

As an interesting twist, both brothers genuinely like each other and neither is willing to murder the other with his own hands (although they don't have a problem doing it by proxy). This could make the adventure's finale a social encounter that features a debate between the brothers—with the PCs caught in the middle.



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) difficult choice, innocent, intrigue, investigative, politics, social, stealth, tactical planning, travel, twist

All the King's Men

98

For several years while the king was off conquering a distant land, the kingdom's prince has ruled in his father's stead. The prince has governed justly and well, unlike his father, feeding the poor from the royal granaries during a famine and imprisoning cruel lords favored by his father when they treated the people poorly. News arrives that the war is won, and the king is due to return home within a few weeks. This sandbox-style scenario is intended for PCs who are well-established in a particular kingdom (ideally, some will be courtly nobles or advisors), and it can significantly alter the future of that domain.

With the king on his way, many advisors attempt to persuade the prince to retain the crown. A few cynically prepare for a return to the old ways, and hide documents that show them in a less flattering light. The prince is reluctant to betray his father's trust and resists calls to fight. Creative advisors, like the PCs, might convince the prince to propose that the king govern the conquered lands while the prince continues to rule their homeland in his name.

Persuading the people to stand by their prince takes effort: While he's widely loved, few want to risk the civil war that will result if the king reclaims his throne and they have defied him. A few nobles loyal to the prince communicate regularly and are ready for action. They will abide by the prince's decision,

whatever it may be. Sufficient force can bring the king to the negotiating table: He doesn't want to cripple his army in a civil war.

The king's first action when he comes ashore sets events in motion. Having been kept apprised of some of what has transpired in his absence, he commutes the sentences of the cruelest lords who were imprisoned by his son. Then he summons them to a full council session in order to learn exactly what his son has been up to for the past few years. Though shaken, the prince doesn't want to release the imprisoned lords.

Whichever side and whatever course they take, the PCs will drive this adventure through their actions. The consequences of civil war should be clear, as should the consequences of a return to the king's old ways. Faced with terrible choices, what will the PCs do?



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) alliance, difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, intrigue, mass combat, politics, rebellion, sandbox, social, tactical planning

Kill Me a Son

99

A royal advisor meets with the PCs to tell them of the king's worrisome recent visit to the oracle. The oracle's answers are usually riddles, and often point to unexpected solutions to the petitioner's problems, but this time everything is different.

The oracle said, "The king must kill his firstborn in ten days' time, or all is lost." No ambiguity, no riddle, and no hope. The prince is a fine young man, and none of the issues facing the kingdom require such a drastic measure. But the oracle has never been wrong before. The king cannot disobey the oracle, but neither will he kill his own son. The advisor suspects a conspiracy and begs the PCs to uncover the truth.

The oracular procedure begins when the petitioner brings a living sacrifice and a valuable gift to the temple. He then crawls into the oracle's chamber, prostrates himself, and asks one question of the oracle. The petitioner must remain prostrate until the answer is complete and leave immediately afterwards. The king entered as he had many times before, and heard the answer clearly. He even rose and asked, "Are you sure?" The oracle nodded, dreamily.

The king has been infected with an exotic ear parasite which repeats anything spoken into its nest while blocking out all other words. The guilty party is the king's animal handler, who planted the parasite, accompanied the sacrificial lamb, and made the false prophecy. He is a follower of a dark power,

swayed by the promise that the next monarch will elevate his station.

The PCs may consult the oracle, and may speak with the priests and priestesses of the temple, but won't be allowed to inspect or directly question the oracle or the chamber. There is nothing unusual at the temple.

Asked about the event, the king mentions that the oracle's voice seemed to have an unusual quality, and absently tugs at his ear. If the parasite is found, the king will eventually remember tripping over a goat in the stables, and the animal handler who helped him up.

If the animal handler suspects the PCs are on the trail, his cult will send assassins to stop them. The nest can be found on him or in his lodgings. The handler has an uncanny knack with animals, and will use it to defend himself or get away.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) deadline, difficult choice, innocent, intrigue, investigative, magic, mass combat, monster, politics, religion, rivalry, shady, siege, social, villain

The Missing Prodigy

100

A remote village and a nearby temple have an agreement: Each year the temple chooses one of the village's young people to come live and work at the temple, and in exchange the temple provides free services to the village. This year the temple has selected the sheriff's daughter, a promising young healer. However, the girl disappeared during the night on her trip to the temple, leaving her escort baffled.

The sheriff, who has had an oppositional attitude towards the temple since they failed to save his wife's life during childbirth, refuses to help find his daughter only to have her become a slave to the temple. This stance has put him under heavy suspicion. Unbeknownst to everyone, the daughter was approached in the night by a fey elf who overheard the girl's escort discussing her skill as a healer. He asked her to help his village, which is suffering from a plague. The daughter agreed, and she's currently combating the elves' disease, though she is unable to do more than alleviate the suffering of the victims.

If the PCs manage to track the girl back to the well-hidden elven village, the elves are reluctant to let them enter due to the disease, but will agree to send the girl out to meet with them. She tells them that she has no desire to leave, and that

she feels the best service she can provide the temple's god is to stay and help the suffering elves. She won't leave unless the PCs force her to, though she will be happy to write some letters to her father and the temple explaining the situation as long as the PCs promise to keep the location of the village a secret.

If the PCs offer to help investigate or fight the plague, they'll be cautioned of the danger but allowed to provide their aid. However, the disease only affects those of magical blood, so the PCs may be immune (as is the girl). With proper knowledge, the disease is revealed to be a magical curse bestowed by a foul black unicorn that lairs nearby. If the PCs track down and destroy this dangerous beast, the plague will break within a few days.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) difficult choice, exploration, innocent, investigative, isolated area, monster, race, religion

Rivalry of Superior and Inferior

Staking Claims

101

An isolated kingdom has been plagued by a fearsome monster (such as a dragon or the equivalent) for a many years. The king has decided that it's time to stop placating the beast and destroy it once and for all. Unfortunately, the cure may be worse than the disease: Once the monster has been defeated, a number of lesser, but still quite dangerous, contenders will try to claim its hunting grounds.

The PCs are hired by the king to go to the monster's lair and slay it. The lair is located deep within a dangerous region of the kingdom (as few would build settlements so near to the creature), and the PCs will face at least one ambush by the region's monstrous denizens en route to the lair. The lair itself is a high mountain cave that's protected by a crumbling fortress; the fortress is inhabited by lesser creatures that either serve or are ignored by the main monster.

Once the PCs have slain the great beast, they return to the palace as conquering heroes. Unfortunately, the king then

receives news that two new monsters have invaded the kingdom—and a third is on its way to the palace itself. The king asks the PCs to beat back the attack on the palace, and then put down the other two monsters before they leave the kingdom in ruins.

If the PCs are from the kingdom, then one of the new monsters will attack the PCs' home manor or village, making things personal. You can also have an NPC lay the blame for the destruction of her community on the PCs, providing fuel for future adventures.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) epic challenge, epic impact, isolated area, monster, politics, tactical planning, trade, travel, twist

Contested Ground

102

An elven warrior is disturbed by the encroachment of humanity: Her sacred woodlands are being overrun by ignorant heathens. Her unusual hair, which is made of moss and twigs, signals her favor in the eyes of the goddess, and she commands a large and growing group of followers. Opposing her is a young baron, desperate to clear more of the forest to create new farmland. He's haughty but genuinely cares about his people, and the expanding human population needs to eat.

The PCs become involved in this power struggle when they come across a macabre scene while traveling through the barony: a group of woodcutters who have been slaughtered and impaled on stakes of freshly cut lumber. The dead are all human, but elven blood mingles with human blood in the grass, suggesting that there was an attack and elven casualties were removed from the scene. While the PCs are investigating, a group of human knights ride up. Shocked and outraged, they decry the violence.

Once convinced that the PCs weren't involved, the knights ask the party to accompany them into the forest to track down the murderers. Along the way, they fill the PCs in on their side of the conflict between the baron and the elven leader. A few miles into the forest, animal sounds suddenly cease, and a rain of arrows hails down around the explorers. Non-human PCs may receive different treatment, and any PC may be able to convince the elves not to kill them all—but the knights and the elves fight each other without mercy or quarter.

What happens after the attack depends upon your group. If the PCs side with the elves or the humans, their course is clear: The elves will use terror tactics and guerrilla warfare to drive off the humans; the humans will clear-cut the forest and sow fields to grow food for their people, killing any elves that get in their way. Some groups will elect to act as peacemakers, seeing the bloodshed on both sides as a senseless waste of life.

A major scene should bring things to a head. Either the elves strike a human keep, sparking all-out war, or the humans head into the forest and sack an elven temple with the same result. If war sweeps across the region, many innocent lives will be lost on both sides.

The war will continue unless the PCs throw themselves into the battle on one side or the other, or coordinate peace talks between the elves and the humans. Each side is strongly convinced of the justness of their cause, and disdains the other side. Achieving a compromise will not be easy.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) alliance, deadline, difficult choice, innocent, mass combat, politics, religion, sandbox, social, tactical planning

The Wizard Who Lost His Staff

103

Not all wizards are created equal, and that's certainly true of the misfit mage who has sought out the PCs. This wizard wishes to employ the PCs to recover his lost staff—the only thing that gave him any credibility as a mage—and he can pay generously.

If asked how he lost his staff, he shrugs and says it was stolen by a showy rival who's always looking for opportunities to lord it over him. Embarrassed, the misfit wizard won't easily admit that his rival stole the staff while the magically inept wizard was doing the one thing he does do well: seducing his rival's wife. The cuckolded wizard could, philosophically speaking, be justified in stealing the misfit's staff—not that the misfit would ever admit that to the party.

As an additional torment, this rival has sold the staff to a local pasha who fancied it as a prize. The misfit mage suggests that recovering the staff from the pasha should be easier than getting it back from another wizard. The PCs can try to resolve this situation in any number of ways. However, if the superior wizard learns that the PCs are actively trying to recover the staff, he tries to intervene.

The PCs might decide to enter the pasha's compound disguised as servants, in which case they immediately fall under the direction of the chief steward. He sets them to scrubbing pots and cleaning statuary—which, if played smartly, grants them access to the pasha's harem. They could meet a mystic who offers them the use of his flying carpet to aid in a rooftop raid on the heights of the pasha's palace. They'll soon discover that the carpet is intelligent and has other plans in mind, like a joyride over the city. The PCs might also follow a false lead to the pasha's heavily guarded treasure room, which is trapped with all manner of mechanical devices and automated guardians. None of the traps are lethal, but they ensnare the PCs in embarrassing ways by dangling them upside down or splashing them with itching powder.

This adventure is best run as a lighthearted and farcical romp, with the PCs shuffling between all the parties in the palace who want or don't want the misfit mage's staff.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) investigative, isolated area, magic, politics, roleplaying-heavy, shady, social, stealth

Tarnished Reputation

104

During a long-term stay in a city that's also home to some of the PCs' established foes, the PCs have a run-in with a pickpocket that turns out to be far more trouble than it should be. This adventure is best used when the PCs don't have the option to leave the city; inclement weather and crafting time are two good excuses to keep the PCs in one location.

In a tavern or on the street, a pickpocket is caught stealing something inconsequential from a PC, such as loose change or food. This works best if you choose a character that won't react too poorly. Whatever the PC's reaction, the pickpocket goes red in the face and begins throwing ridiculous accusations and excuses at the party. The PCs were "cheating." They're "just trying to embarrass" him. After a few moments, the thief storms off, swearing revenge for this "humiliation."

From then on, the thief makes a nuisance of himself, playing childish pranks on the PCs, such as ruining their baths, exposing them to allergens, or hiring bards to sing embarrassing songs about them. He tends to target PCs who seem to take themselves too seriously.

The thief then starts spreading rumors that the PCs claimed they could take down another group (adventurers, thieves' guild thugs, mercenaries, etc.), and the maligned group decides a street ambush will teach the PCs a lesson. They surround and attack the party as they travel through the city.

The PCs may also discover that a few of their personal effects are missing. Later, they're visited by the city watch and arrested. They're shown their missing items, which were found at the scene of a robbery. If they can't convince the watch to release them, they'll be released in a few days when the watch has proven to their satisfaction that the PCs weren't involved.

Having failed to trip the PCs up too badly, the thief will broker peace between two of the PCs' foes and plan to ambush the party. Leading a mixed force, the pickpocket engages them in an alley, bringing in flankers from behind and ranged attackers from the rooftops. The thief stays in the rear, directing the battle. If the PCs break through the line or damage him with ranged attacks, he attempts to flee. If the PCs don't kill or capture the thief, he'll lie low for a while but will likely return later as a recurring villain.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) city, intrigue, rivalry, social, villain

The Lesser of Two Rivals

105

The PCs are contacted by a retired adventurer who is having visions of one of his old comrades—missing for over a decade—trapped in a small cell. The party is asked to investigate the site of the friend's last adventure: an old wizard's keep deep in the wilderness. They find the keep's mechanical and magical defenses are weakened but still active, as the wizard recently died in his sleep. The adventurer is held in a state of suspended animation, but the wizard's death weakened the spell, and he can now be freed. He is as young as the day he was ensorcelled, and will help the PCs clear out the rest of the wizard's keep if they like.

After a few weeks of freedom, the rescued adventurer contacts the party with a mission: While he was in stasis, his wife was kidnapped, brainwashed, and made to marry another man. The adventurer offers the PCs a reward for their assistance.

Unfortunately for him, after a period of mourning the wife moved on, eventually getting married again. Her new husband is a good man, more reliable but not as wealthy or adventurous. She has even borne him two children, and wishes to stay with him. The adventurer can't believe this. He's convinced that she must be under some kind of spell,

and has already threatened her new husband.

The wife also insists that the PCs help her, as they have brought this terrible situation upon her family. She demands that they do whatever it takes to keep her ex-husband away.

Whether motivated by guilt, love, madness, or just the desire to win, the adventurer will not easily back down. Left alone, he will almost certainly kill the new husband and lose his ex-wife forever. He won't use deadly force against the PCs unless they do so first. What the man really needs is a new reason to live (a cause, another adventuring party, etc.), and his old companions may guide the PCs toward this answer.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) difficult choice, dungeon crawl, exploration, innocent, magic, mature themes, monster, relationship hook, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, social, spirit, stealth, twist

Adultery

Cooties

106

In a small frontier town, a young man spent his idle hours with a local nature spirit, eventually playing along during bonding rites while ignorant of their nuptial nature. The spirit became enraged when he eventually snubbed her for a fling with a local girl, and placed a curse on the town that causes members of the opposite sex to break out in burning, itching hives whenever they come within 30 feet of one another—thus keeping the spirit's husband from his new lover.

The young man is too stubborn to return to the spurned spirit and make amends, and while some of the wiser townspeople recognize the curse as the wrath of a nature spirit, they don't know what is necessary to appease it. The townspeople are becoming desperate and many are trying anything they can think of to appease the spirits—or are simply fleeing town. If the PCs do nothing, the town will soon be abandoned.

On the road to the town, the characters encounter a family leaving town with a wagon loaded down with everything they own in tow, driving their animals before them. Though the men are driving the animals at the front of the procession and the women are following behind, they are all still obviously uncomfortable, and constantly scratch their splotchy, inflamed skin. Beyond rumors of an angry nature spirit, they

don't know the cause of the affliction, but otherwise willingly share everything they know about the town. They encourage the characters to turn back.

It hasn't taken much to push the more volatile members of the town over the edge, and some are willing to try anything to stop the curse on their village, including hauling people out of their beds in the middle of the night and making examples of them. A group of agitated young men have dragged a young woman who often spends time out in the forest out of her house, and they accuse her of somehow offending the spirits. If the PCs do nothing, they may injure or kill her in their zeal.

The nature spirit waits for her lover to return and beg forgiveness at the place where she first met him, a secluded forest clearing by a stream. If others find her there, she will not immediately admit to cursing the village, but is clearly upset for some reason. With clever or sympathetic interaction, she'll disclose the entire sordid story, and the PCs will have a chance to talk her into lifting the curse.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) deadline, innocent, investigative, isolated area, magic, roleplaying-heavy, social, spirit

The Shepherd's Crook(ed)

108

A local rake accused of many affairs with married women turns up dead in an alleyway. It's hardly news, but two similar murders happen the following week. All three victims have reputations as "the other man," and all were beaten to death with a blunt object. Soon after, however, a young man with nothing more than a minor reputation as a flirt turns up dead. And then another, and another.



Townfolk speculate about the presence of a succubus, a vengeful woman, or a jealous man. The sheriff advises young men to stay in groups at night, but takes little further action. Women of "negotiable affection" are suspected, threatened, and even beaten. The streets are empty at night. The sheriff is in no hurry to investigate as crime has gone down since the attacks began. The local priest takes the opportunity to preach about the dangers of immorality.

The priest has been corrupted by a cursed walking stick, and is the one committing the murders. A demon disguised as an angel gave him the stick, convincing him to carry it by claiming that the implement drives out immoral behavior. The demon then cursed the stick such that it encourages the priest to see immorality where ever he looks and to act violently against it. It also aids him in remaining unseen, though not necessarily invisible, and is a powerful weapon when wielded like a club. The priest has developed a bit of a limp, which he thinks is just an injury incurred during one of the murders, but is actually one of his feet slowly turning into a cloven hoof. The more the priest uses the walking stick, the greater his corruption. The demon is hungry for his soul.

The PCs may be asked to investigate by the family of one of the victims, or by a madam whose business is faltering. They may also have known one of the victims.

Opportunists will thwart the PCs' investigations. Some gangs of thieves have taken to scaring off guards by moaning and thumping the ground and walls with a cudgel. More than a few scores are being settled by hired thugs with clubs, and one enterprising theater troupe has made a costume of a huge cloaked man with a stout staff that they use to frighten victims into giving up their coin.

But the true victims are not mugged, just savagely beaten to death. The crime scenes show the uneven footprints of the cloven hoof, and witnesses may come forward once they realize the PCs are truly interested in catching the killer. They've seen the attacker limping during fights, which could lead the party to the priest. If confronted, the priest will put up a fight, and the demon may shed its disguise and come to his aid.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (KS) city, deadline, difficult choice, innocent, investigative, madness, magic, mature themes, monster, relationship hook, religion, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, shady, social, spirit, stealth, twist, villain

Artist: Philip Miller

Infatuation and Jealousy

108

While the PCs are in the court of a local noble, the noble becomes infatuated with one of them. It doesn't matter if the PC returns the affection—in fact, this scenario works better if the PC doesn't want the attention. Even if rebuffed, the would-be suitor attempts to court the PC with messages, gifts, and invitations. The complication, of course, is that the noble is already married and has a jealous spouse—and the PCs need to accomplish something in court (or may even have been hired by the noble's wife), and can't simply flee the situation.

This is a comic plot that works well when overlaid with another adventure, but it can also stand alone. The noble's wife believes that an affair will blossom, no matter how unlikely that actually appears, and takes steps to ensure that it does not. The first encounter involves the wife politely trying to convince the PCs to leave her husband alone. If they agree, which they likely will, this is followed by the noble redoubling his efforts to win the key PC's affection.

If you really want to drive home the insanity of the situation, then the noble won't take no for an answer. He simply believes

that the PC is playing hard to get and counters every refusal with even more attention. This naturally increases the ire of his spouse, who will step up her own attempts to dissuade the affair.

While the PCs are trying to wrap up their court business, the noble conspires to trap the key PC: He makes getting whatever it is that they need contingent on their attendance at a celebratory dance. Depending on how this social scene goes, the PCs may find themselves in a duel for their honor, fleeing the grounds pursued by guards, or able to finish out the dance without any problems.

In the finale, the noble's wife—who simply cannot be convinced that the PC has no interest in her husband—tries to have the PCs assassinated. Can the PCs escape the assassins' blades and still salvage their original mission in court?



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) intrigue, mature themes, politics, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, social

The Laughing Princess

109

Just days before the royal wedding, the princess-in-waiting was unfaithful to her groom-to-be. There is no denying that she betrayed her betrothed, the prince of the kingdom. The high priest has taken the princess-in-waiting into custody, locking her in a high tower and employing hardened crusaders as guards (though she is allowed visitors).

The king's close advisor, however, thinks that all is not as it seems. For one thing, the young man with whom the princess had her tryst is missing. Moreover, the king's son never ceased his own dalliances, and no one demanded fidelity on his part. Even now, with his fiancée locked in the tower, he continues to entertain young ladies of high and low birth.

Should anyone ask a question of the princess-in-waiting about the prince, she attempts to speak but then bursts into uncontrollable laughter. She can talk plainly about any other subject, but she gives over to a fit of laughter the moment she tries to speak the prince's name.

The advisor implores the PCs to do their utmost to uncover the truth of the matter, but he warns them to be wary as well, for the princess' condition hints at allies who employ powerful magic on behalf of the prince.

The advisor is right to be suspicious, for the prince is plotting to overthrow his "fuddy-duddy father," the king, and run things the way he sees fit. Unfortunately, the princess-in-waiting stumbled onto the coup while the prince was plotting with his co-conspirators, a powerful spellcaster and the

high priest. Startled and overwhelmed by the situation, the future princess fled to her chambers. Before she decided to warn the king and raise an alarm, the prince had the spellcaster weave a spell that would disguise him to look like the princess-in-waiting's former lover. The disguised prince went to the lady and seduced the troubled princess-in-waiting. According to the prince's plan, witnesses "discovered" the princess in the throes of passion with her former lover. The high priest took her into custody, where the mage placed a spell upon her that caused uncontrollable fits of laughter at any mention or thought of the prince.

The first encounter that will set the PCs on the road to learning the truth involves investigating the spellcaster and his quarters, where they will discover the spell that disguised the prince. They must then challenge the high priest's loyalty, gather information implicating him in the plot against the king, or develop allies within the church who place the king above the high priest. From there, the PCs can defeat or outmaneuver the prince's guards on the ramparts of the castle, surprise the prince, and then either get him to confess his crimes before witnesses or somehow trick him into admitting his scheme.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) epic impact, innocent, intrigue, investigative, magic, politics, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social

While the PCs are staying at an inn, the innkeeper's son becomes infatuated with one of them. Unhappily betrothed, he impulsively decides to leave town with his new love and become an adventurer. That night, he bursts into the PC's room, claiming to be in terrible danger.

He says that a rival innkeeper wants to take over his parents' business, and has hired thugs to kill him in order to drive them mad with grief and make them vulnerable. Even if the PCs can escort him out of town, he believes the thugs will pick up their trail and try to kill him on the road. He pleads with the PCs to ambush the thugs and kill them, saving his family from ruin. He claims that the town guard has been bribed to overlook his murder, so the thugs can't be confronted within the town.

In truth, there are no thugs and there is no murder plot. If the PCs agree to help him, they must sneak out of town with the innkeeper's son in tow while avoiding non-existent thugs, bribed guards, and other false threats. The PCs can disguise the son, slip out of town under cover of darkness, or use any other approach they like.

Once they're on the road, the son is much more obvious about his infatuation. He tries to make himself useful to the whole group, but it's obvious where his real interest lies. After a naïve seduction attempt, he reveals his true intentions (but not the betrothal) and asks to be allowed to join the party.

His parents think that he has been kidnapped and, noting the coincidence of their departure, they blame the PCs. The parents of his betrothed think he's skipping out on marrying their daughter. A reward has been posted, and well-meaning relatives, townsfolk, and a handful of ne'er-do-wells head out to track down the PCs. Many of those on the PCs' trail will not give the group a chance to negotiate if they catch them—and murdering townsfolk won't improve the PCs' prospects for a peaceful resolution.

Even if the PCs can convince the son's parents and the town authorities that they were duped, there's still the matter of the son's infatuation with one of them, and of his unhappy betrothal. Will they simply flee the scene, or will they try to resolve things between the betrothed? This scene can form the basis for a denouement, and offer the PCs a chance to gain friends (or make enemies) in town.



Easily adapted to: Anime, High Fantasy, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) betrayal, escort mission, innocent, race, roleplaying-heavy, social, stealth

Crimes of Love

This Land Is My Land

111

Debts force a local lord to take an extraordinary step to save his beloved ancestral lands from his creditors: He looses a pack of dire wolves onto the property. That and a few well-placed rumors of spectral wolves are enough to keep away the unwary and to make the property undesirable to any potential buyers. Things come to a head, however, when a courier making a delivery to the manor finds the mangled body of a villager slain by the wolves.

The lord's adult daughter, who is unaware of the scheme, seeks out the PCs and implores them to investigate. She fears that supernatural forces will bring ruin to her family. While investigating the lord's business dealings (which reveals his financial difficulties), the PCs also observe him trying to allay his daughter's fears. The lord's animal handlers deny rumors they were hired to transport three large, covered cages on carts from the mountains to the lord's estate; if they're physically intimidated or otherwise coerced, they'll confirm the rumors.

When the PCs try to confront the lord with this evidence, he warns them away with a veiled threat: While the villager's death was regrettable, anyone who travels unescorted at night risks being set upon by "the spirits."

In the final confrontation, the lord prepares to sacrifice his meddling daughter to the dire wolves by arranging for her to become lost in the wilderness at night. This means that the lord, his daughter, and the PCs will all be squarely within the wolves' hunting grounds, and trying to apprehend the lord or save his daughter will be complicated by a wolf attack.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) innocent, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, monster, politics, shady, social, stealth

Stepmother's Curse

112

A local noble seems to have trouble keeping wives. His wife of almost 20 years died a year ago, and following a respectable period of mourning the noble sought a new wife. She and the four wives he has taken since all died within a week of their wedding day, and all of them were murdered: three were poisoned, one was strangled, and one was stabbed to death in her bed.

The noble claims to have had nothing to do with their deaths, and he is supported by his daughter. More likely, he muses, someone is assassinating his wives so that they won't produce male heirs to his title. While this seems reasonable, the noble's security is tight and it would be difficult for an assassin to slip through. There are also rumors that the noble has gone mad and expects each wife to measure up to his first—and when they inevitably fail to do so, he murders them.

The noble has chosen a seventh wife and the PCs have been hired to ensure that nothing goes wrong this time. Given access to almost every part of the noble's palace or castle, they must first test the defenses. The noble suggests that they try to break into the castle see if they can figure out how it might be done. They must also keep the noble's new bride safe for at

least two weeks, after which time the noble believes that the curse will be lifted.

During this time, there is an attempt on the bride's life—and unfortunately the “curse” is really the noble's own daughter. Sixteen years old and deeply disturbed, she has fallen in love with her own father and won't let any woman stand between them. It was she who killed the previous wives—including her own mother, the noble's first wife. The assassination attempt, if foiled, leads the PCs on a chase that ends when they discover the true killer. She isn't a warrior, but she has considerable sway with the castle guards and a number of other tricks up her sleeve.

Once she is captured, the PCs must convince the noble that his own daughter is the real villain—not something he will accept likely, as he loves his daughter deeply.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) deadline, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, politics, roleplaying-heavy, social, stealth, twist

Too Many Masked Men

113

Several young noblemen have been caught moonlighting as infamous rakes, and the city guard, no longer able to turn a blind eye, has begun arresting them. Concerned mothers have pooled a reward and contacted the PCs for help in resolving the situation: They want to know why their sons have started acting so strangely.

Questioning young nobles in the city, the PCs discover that romantic swashbuckler fiction is all the rage among local noblewomen. This has inspired many young noblemen to don masks and adopt secret identities, competing for infamy and titillating observers before revealing their secret to the young woman they hope to impress and “retiring” from the swashbuckling life.

Some of the nobles who were arrested will confirm this to be the case, and will regale the PCs with tales of their exploits. A common theme is a black-masked rake that seems to exist solely to expose their secrets and foil their plans. If he has other motives, he rarely pursues them. The city guard knows nothing of this masked rake, though they do mention that they occasionally receive tips and evidence from an unknown source.

Staking out the guardhouse confirms that the guards are backing the masked rake. Trying to capture him or give chase reveals him to be well-equipped and -prepared, intelligent, and professional. He carries a variety of alchemical items,

has prepared bolt holes throughout the city that he can block as he passes, and employs a range of other tricks.

After losing the masked rake the first time around, the PCs mount another pursuit. This time they're led on a merry chase across rooftops, down gutter pipes, and through abandoned warehouses, with the masked rake always one step ahead of them right up until the very end. When the PCs capture the rake, they discover that “he” is actually a beautiful noblewoman. Having grown tired of incessant and unwanted suitors, she committed a few high-profile crimes, blamed them on a masked man, and began gossiping about and swooning over the “dashing young bandit.” This sparked the swashbuckling fad and allowed her to trap and collect evidence on suitors who make nuisances of themselves, freeing herself of one annoying boor after another.

With the rake no longer secretly encouraging the popularity of masked men, the trouble dies down almost immediately. However, it's likely that the PCs have earned themselves a new foe.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) city, combat-heavy, investigative, politics, race, social, stealth, twist, villain

Welcome, Husband!

114

While traveling in a region with a distinctive tribal culture, the PCs pass through a tribal encampment. As soon as they enter the camp, a pregnant woman rushes up to them and greets a male PC with a cry of “Welcome, husband!” Before he can speak, she gives him a pleading look and presses her lips against his to silence him. As she pulls away, she whispers, “Please play along.” You can add a humorous element to this adventure by having the PCs and the locals speak different languages, with only a few locals (like the woman) knowing how to speak a little of the PCs’ tongue.

The tribe welcomes the PCs, though with some suspicion. Before long, the PCs will have a chance to be alone with the woman. She explains that by custom she must marry outside the tribe, but she is in love with a tribesman and is carrying his child. If the tribe finds out, she will be stoned to death.

She begs the PCs—and her “husband” in particular—to go along with her deception until an opportunity arises for her to flee the camp and run away with her lover. During the several days they must spend in the camp before the right moment arrives, the PC “husband” is often in the spotlight, but the whole party is also the focus of much attention. The PCs are rarely left to themselves.

The woman’s father will corner the central PC as often as

His Father’s Son

115

An incursion of humanoids unlike anything the kingdom has ever seen has begun pouring over the borders. Naturally, the PCs are in the neighborhood. If you like, you can kick this adventure off with a skirmish between the PCs and humanoid forces. While not obeying all of the customs of civilized warfare, they don’t burn and pillage at random, but head directly for the capital city. They also use advanced tactics, only engage armed forces, and treat their captives far better than might be expected.

The leader of the humanoids demands to speak with the king. While stalling him through diplomacy, the king asks the PCs to find out what he really wants, either by penetrating his camp to investigate or by approaching the humanoids’ leader as royal envoys. Either way, the PCs will find themselves confronting the leader.

The commander of the humanoids is actually the mongrel son of the king, part-human and part-humanoid, who is seeking public acknowledgment of his bloodline. He doesn’t want to inherit the crown, or to live the life of a prince; he just wants to be recognized as the king’s son. He contacted the king once before and was rebuked and ridiculed. Now he seeks to have that wrong righted.

Once in the humanoid camp, the PCs will need to find out

possible to talk about the size of the dowry he will provide, how he will take care of his family, and how many herd animals he owns. Marrying outside the tribe usually doesn’t mean marrying complete cultural outsiders, so the tribe is very curious about the PCs and their customs. They’ll grill the PCs about how the couple met, and some will approach other PCs as possible matches for marriage. The woman’s huge brute of a cousin will challenge one or more PCs to a trial of strength in order to prove the husband’s worthiness.

The penultimate encounter is a wedding—a surprise to both the PCs and the woman, who expected to leave before then. The PCs need to come up with a way around actually getting married, such as pretending to have marriage customs of their own and offering to (falsely) officiate the wedding.

After the wedding, the PCs must spirit the woman away to meet her lover in the adventure’s finale. This scene can be played for humor, run as a stealth-driven escape, or handled as a tense, action-filled getaway.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) innocent, politics, religion, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, social

what the commander wants. They can do this in a variety of ways, including through skilled diplomacy or by completing tests of battle or trust. (One test of trust is to let the party freely roam the camp. Can they play nice with a hostile force of angry humanoids?) The leader isn’t a brute, and he understands the value of negotiation. He won’t reveal his true goal at first, but can be convinced to do so.

If things go poorly, the mongrel leader will threaten to raze the lands he’s taken if the king won’t acknowledge him—or to go public with his claim, throwing the monarchy into disarray.

The king initially refuses to accept his bastard son, but will be more open to the idea once he learns that his son only seeks acknowledgement. He must be convinced that his own embarrassment is less important than the lives of his subjects, and that a bastard son in charge of a large group of humanoids might not be a bad ally.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) alliance, betrayal, city, combat-heavy, deadline, difficult choice, intrigue, investigative, mass combat, mature themes, politics, race, rebellion, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, siege, twist

Discovery of the Dishonor of a Loved One

The Dragon's Fang

116

A retired adventurer who lives on a lavish estate approaches the PCs, asking if they'll serve as his protectors. The man, who walks with a limp, has been receiving threatening letters bearing a single rune that is unfamiliar to him (or so he says). The handwritten notes say things like "The time for our revenge nears" and "The reaper will collect his due." In all, there are four such notes.

Once the PCs assume their new role, things start happening quickly. Someone infiltrates the retired adventurer's estate and leaves another threatening note on a glass display case in his trophy room. The note is like the others, and the case holds a memento from his past adventures: a fang the length of a man's arm, stained dark with blood, which rests in a stylized gold cup custom-made to hold it.

"It's a dragon's tooth," the man explains. "It's the only treasure I took from that expedition." He claims, falsely, that it was embedded in his leg, and is the reason that he walks with a limp today. In truth, the dragon did leave him maimed, but not through a leg bite. The monster slew all his compatriots, about which he says, "Very sad business, that!" while shaking his head slowly.

Interviews with the adventurer's retainers reveal that they saw a strange, ghostly figure on the grounds—a young warrior in dark leather who appeared at the edge of their vision and then disappeared into the mists. This figure is strangely androgynous, and wears a mask that resembles a dragon's head; some of the retainers say it's a man, others say it's a woman. If questioned on the topic, the adventurer doesn't admit to having seen the apparition or to recognizing the dragon mask, but he's unconvincing in his denials.

Before long, a bard—actually a dragon in disguise—seeks out the PCs and offers to sell them information about the retired adventurer. The bard doesn't know the whole story, but has learned that the surviving children of the other members of the adventuring party slain during their raid on the dragon's lair are involved.

In truth, the dragon cornered the adventurer and offered him a chance to save his own life. The dragon required that he betray his adventuring companions, and the adventurer

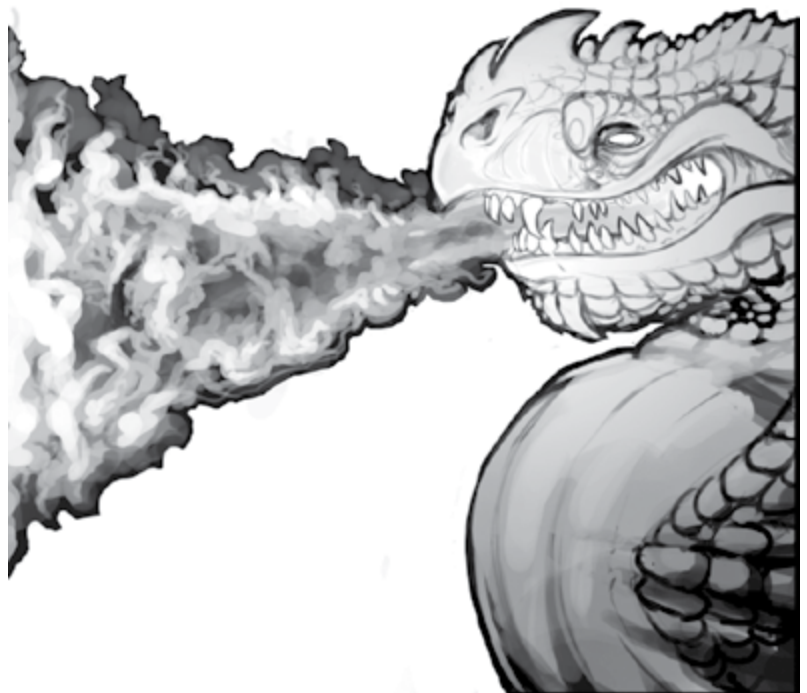
complied. His treachery was rewarded with a single chest full of riches and a threat against ever returning to the lair. The adventurer pulled the tooth from the body of a dead compatriot as a reminder of what happens when you meddle with dragons. He kept all the gold for himself. The rune is the symbol the party used to identify itself. Years later, a mysterious faerie creature (the dragon in disguise) visited the dead companions' children and revealed the adventurer's treason and greed.

A stakeout reveals the identity of the tormentors who collectively want revenge on the adventurer. They intend to strike fear into his heart before killing him and taking back the treasure he bought with the blood of their fathers and mothers. Depend on how much the PCs find out about the true situation, they may have mixed feelings about protecting the adventurer.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) investigative, magic, monster, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, trade, twist



Artist: Laine Garrett

The Girl with Many Faces

117

A PC's longtime paramour comes to a second PC and reveals itself as a doppelganger. It admits that it was given instruction in proper behavior by the first PC's original lover, who had slowly come to loathe the PC and was actually milking her for intelligence to send to the party's enemies. The doppelganger took over for the lover and continued spying on the party, but it has now fallen in love with the second PC, doesn't want to betray the party anymore, and hopes that its honesty is proof of the sincerity of its feelings.

If allowed to prove its loyalty, the former spy will be willing to not only stop its illicit activities but also to feed false information to its employers or counter-spy for the PCs. This may prove a valuable source of information for the party, especially if stealthy characters are willing to accompany their double agent to meetings.

This plot is likely to cause some difficult emotional times for the PCs—and to spark some good roleplaying. Other factors can make the situation more difficult: The doppelganger might prove overeager to please its new lover, for example, making quicksilver changes to its features, gender, and attitudes to match anyone who piques the PC's interest.

Once the doppelganger drops its old form, an old friend it had been maintaining contact with as part of its cover becomes

Disenchanted Romance

118

A gorgeous woman who is an ally or friend of the PCs has been imprisoned by the city guard. She isn't a criminal, and she's done nothing wrong that they know of. They can learn of her arrest when they seek her out, or from other contacts. The watch is notoriously corrupt, and speaking with members of the guard will further arouse the PCs' suspicions, as they receive conflicting responses that send them on a wild goose chase. Some watchmen say they've never heard of her, while others tell them she's being held across town. When they get to her supposed location, the watchmen there tell them that she was just released and is already back at home.

When they eventually learn that she was taken to the castle dungeons, they can arrange to visit her there. They find her not in a cell, but in a guard captain's chambers, chatting animatedly with the captain. They both seem to be enjoying their conversation, and she is horrified that she has caused so much trouble for the PCs. The captain explains that it was all a misunderstanding. Her personality seems "off" somehow—and on top of that, she makes eyes at the boorish guard captain constantly.

In truth, she's the victim of a plot set in motion by the captain, who has desired her for some time but has always been rebuffed. He purchased a powerful love philter, paid off guard members to arrest her, and then slipped her the potion in her

suspicious about its sudden disappearance. Convinced that the doppelganger's lover—the original, betrayed PC—has engaged in foul play, he confronts the party. Without a satisfying explanation, the old friend will report the disappearance to the authorities.

Eventually the doppelganger's employers discover that it's a double agent, or simply decide that the recent decrease in the quality of information makes it more valuable as an example than a spy. Either way, the PCs will have to defend their new friend against would-be assassins.

Alternately, the entire situation could be a carefully engineered plot for some purpose not readily apparent. If the doppelganger is indeed a false double agent, the whole scheme must have been put in motion in anticipation of an exceptionally large payoff.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) alliance, betrayal, difficult choice, monster, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, stealth

food. She's now completely in love with him, and unless the enchantment is broken she will remain in this state.

The PCs must locate someone who can concoct a counterpotion, then find a way to administer it to their friend. If the captain catches wind of their plot, he'll use the watch to harass them—and if he becomes desperate, will arrest or even attempt to kill the PCs.

The captain has a weakness that can be exploited, should the PCs discover it: gambling debts. They may be able to arrange to pay his debts in exchange for her freedom. Sneaking into the castle, disguising themselves as members of the watch or the castle staff, or using magic to spirit their friend away are all valid options for handling this freeform adventure.

Once the enchantment is broken, the PCs' friend is horrified by the captain's actions and humiliated by her magically induced infatuation. Depending on how the PCs handled breaking the enchantment, there may be fallout, possibly resulting in all of them, the friend included, needing to flee town.



Easily adapted to: High Fantasy, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) city, innocent, investigative, madness, politics, race, relationship hook, sandbox, social, stealth, villain

Speaking of Your Sister...

119

The sister of one of the PCs has taken up prostitution in order to keep food on the table. She has young children and neither a husband nor the skills to support herself another way, and recent experiences with her ex-husband have made her wary of relying on others for aid.

She stays as safe as she can, saves her money, and calls on clients who are generally discreet and wealthy. But she's in a dangerous and disreputable profession, she won't always have her looks or what's left of her youth, and eventually she will bring



Artist: Laine Garrett

shame upon the family name. Her children are also being put at risk because of her choices.

She won't take a handout from the PCs, so few options are available for getting her to change professions. She'll agree to accept a loan while she learns a craft or trade, but in order to leave her dangerous life behind she needs a new residence where none of her former clients can find her. One possible option is a large abandoned house in town that the owners will sell cheap to anyone who's willing to clear out the rats. The rats are being controlled by a clan of wererats squatting in the basement.

While the PCs are killing rats, a group of thugs kidnaps the sister. They've been hired by a wealthy and eccentric former client who has heard that she is retiring, but is unwilling to let her go. He assumes that she has feelings for him, or that she will eventually. She must be rescued with some tact and discretion, as the client is powerful and well-connected, and could make her new life miserable.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Hard Sci-fi, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Western

Tags: (KS) innocent, intrigue, mature themes, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, social, villain

Disfavored Son

120

Two noble lovers have been kidnapped, and one of their mothers hires the PCs to return them safely. Before the party heads out, she confides in them a secret: Her son, who believes himself the legitimate child of his legal father, is actually illegitimate. In truth, he is the child of a different lord, with whom the lady was involved before marrying her current husband. Worse still, the woman her son has fallen in love with is actually his half-sister, though he doesn't know it. The noble implores the PCs to find a way to break this news to the two lovers.

Finding the kidnappers' lair is a challenge, and the PCs will be ambushed or attacked openly by the brigands as they roam the wilderness. If they can keep any brigands from getting away to sound the alarm, they can approach the lair covertly and plan their infiltration. Once the kidnappers have been bypassed, dispersed, or killed (and possibly after encountering a series of traps), the PCs will find the lovers held in a makeshift jail cell deep within the lair.

They're grateful to be rescued, but they seem upset. Before they were kidnapped, the son learned that his father intended to bypass him in the line of succession and give his lands to his second-born son. Having already been the recipient of so much of his father's disapproval over the years,

this was his breaking point—he means to marry his lover, whether his parents want him to or not. Once his tale is told, the PCs can break the bad news to the couple.

The PCs can end their involvement here and simply return the lovers to their parents, but most groups will feel invested in the lovers' fate and want to try to resolve the situation. How things go depends on your players, and on whether or not the lovers are actually related. It's entirely possible that the first-born son is legitimate after all, and that his mother or father have ulterior motives for stating otherwise.

In that case, the PCs and the lovers will be opposed by the lord and lady if they try to investigate the truth of the son's birth. If he really is illegitimate, can they find a way to ensure that he is still compensated for being skipped in the line of succession? And what if the lovers want to marry despite the fact that they're related?



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) difficult choice, escort mission, intrigue, politics, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, stealth

Obstacles to Love

Location, Location, Location

121

In a peaceful valley lies a kingdom surrounded by picturesque mountains. The mountains provide a natural barrier that protects the kingdom and its capital city, which sits in the center of the valley. Unknown to the founders of this kingdom, two gargantuan creatures lie dormant beneath the peaks of the two tallest mountains that look down on the city. Once every 10,000 years, the behemoths awaken and make their way to the center of the valley to burrow down into the earth and mate.

It has been 10,000 years, and the behemoths are awakening. They're beginning their treks to the center of the valley, driven by a powerful instinct to seek each other out. The kingdom now faces an immediate crisis, for although the behemoths aren't malicious, they are aggressive and will destroy any obstacles they encounter in their journey to the mating site. What will happen to the capital city if they should make it?

This is a twist on the giant monster story, and you need to emphasize that the creatures aren't evil but are simply doing what's needed for their species to survive. The PCs may be asked to help the kingdom defend itself from the behemoths, or even to help the behemoths defend themselves from the kingdom.

They first need to survive a major earthquake caused by the awakening creatures. Dwellings shudder and collapse and debris is thrown everywhere. The PCs must protect themselves and others from the chaos.

They must next deal with looters and scoundrels trying to take advantage of the situation. The PCs are in the middle of stopping these villains when the first behemoth appears. The encounter will quickly change in tone as the looters become a mere annoyance compared to the amazing force of nature thundering straight through what's left of the town.

The final encounter will be the capital city's last stand, as both behemoths meet and attempt to burrow into the heart of the valley. The kingdom's armies will use all of their resources to slay the creatures, and the behemoths will use all of their might to defend each other.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) alliance, city, deadline, difficult choice, epic challenge, innocent, mass combat, monster, tactical planning, twist

Beware Pixies Bearing Wedding Invitations

122

Two pixies arrive with a message: A shadow faerie lord has captured a handsome elven prince, and is holding him deep in a basalt citadel at the heart of the midnight realm. The prince's true love begs the PCs to free him so that they may be married properly.

A raid to rescue the elven prince is his only hope, but it's a dangerous undertaking. The shadow lord is a powerful adversary and commands many dark fey minions. He has an ulterior motive, of course: He's enamored of the elven princess, and he has offered to free her true love if she agrees to marry him instead.

While exploring the midnight realm, the PCs encounter a friendly sprite who, with a bribe of sweets, can lead them past all but one of the dark land's guardians. This guardian is the warden of the basalt fortress, a hag-witch who patrols the area with her armed guards in search of interlopers. Once the PCs reach the fortress, they must overcome other creatures

of darkness and mischief, and then make their way to the prince's prison cell. The cell holding the prince is no simple barred chamber, but rather an elaborate magical trap that will test the PCs' abilities and resources.

If they succeed, the bride invites them to the wedding; if they fail, it's the shadow lord—who is as capricious as he is cruel—who invites them to the ceremony. The tone of the reception hall varies greatly depending on the attitude of the bride and who happens to be the groom, shadow faerie lord or elven prince.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) alliance, deadline, epic challenge, innocent, intrigue, magic, politics, social, stealth

Compromised Positions

123

The PCs stumble across a fight in progress: Bandits have ambushed the sheriff of a nearby town, along with his posse, and the bandits haven't yet seen the PCs. Helping out in the fight earns the sheriff's gratitude, as he was once an adventurer himself. The PCs are treated as unofficial deputies, and get preferential treatment from the locals and the law.

This cozy relationship is tested when one of the sheriff's critics publicly accuses him of seeing a local prostitute and disgracing his dead wife's memory. The sheriff confronts his critic in the tavern, and a very brief fistfight is followed by a public apology and retraction.

In private, the sheriff confesses that the accusation is true, and reveals a complicated plan to get back at his critic. He needs someone to break into the critic's house, kidnap him, drag him to the brothel, and to make sure that he isn't injured in the process. Then the sheriff will show up and arrest the critic for refusing to pay for the brothel's services.

The critic is a respected jeweler with a family who cares about the moral fiber of his community and those who represent it, but the sheriff is desperate. He loves the prostitute, but believes his late wife wouldn't want him to marry her and knows that the locals would disapprove.

Marriage Road

124

A woman comes running up to the PCs in terror, red hair streaming behind her like a comet, with several armed men and barking dogs in pursuit. The woman throws herself to her knees in front of whichever PC looks the most knightly or noble, and begs the party's aid. Her pursuers demand that she return with them, and explain that she has fled from her husband.

The woman refuses to return, but otherwise tries to reveal as little as possible, as she knows that blackening her husband's name will only incite retaliation. Her pursuers can be driven off relatively easily in a fight; even firm insistence in a parley is enough to convince them to back off for a while. They urge the PCs to bring her to her husband, the baron, before they make trouble for themselves.

When they're gone, the woman explains that she is betrothed to the baron, but that they are not yet married. She loves her neighbor, the town's baker, and asks the party to escort her to him. She explains that if she marries the baker now, she's confident that the baron will abandon his interest in her. Her love for the baker is real, but she's omitting an important detail: The baron secretly worships a dark god, and intends to sacrifice her to his deity on their wedding night. She fled as soon as she stumbled across this information in the baron's study.

By any analysis, this is a ridiculous plan, even if successful. If the PCs follow through with the plan, they'll be laughed out of town, possibly along with the sheriff. The townsfolk will know something isn't right—there's just too much bad blood between the sheriff and the critic. You may want to provide some subtle clues that the PCs need to secretly concoct an alternate plan.

The wife's spirit can be asked for approval, if the PCs can recover something she valued. She died on the sheriff's last adventure, in a goblin cave, and her favorite staff was never recovered. After her death, the sheriff retired from adventuring and settled down here. The cave is a few days' travel away, and is still occupied by goblins. Her staff is wielded by the goblin shaman. Once her staff is returned, the wife's spirit will approve of the sheriff's marriage, suggesting a happy if awkward resolution.



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, politics, social, spirit

Whether they go to him or he sends negotiators to them, the PCs will first meet the baron. He'll either try to strike a deal through diplomacy, or will attempt to kidnap her outright, picking a fight with the PCs in the process. When the party is able to sneak the woman into the baker's shop—avoiding the baron's thugs and cronies, who are searching everywhere for her—they find him surprised but pleased at her interest. He is willing to marry her as soon as he can arrange a proper ceremony: tomorrow night.

That won't be soon enough, as the baron will discover her whereabouts before then and attack the PCs in force—and with the aid of powers granted by his dark god. They must find a way to marry the woman and the baker before nightfall that day, which, as she suspected, will end the baron's interest in her. He will, however, be on the lookout for a new bride, as his dark god demands that he sacrifice his wife before the next feast day—a possible segue into another adventure.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) combat-heavy, deadline, escort mission, innocent, politics, siege, villain

The Wrong Side of the Tracks

125

A local baron hires the PCs to rescue his daughter, who is currently in the clutches of a barbarian band (or, depending on your campaign world, a tribe of barbaric humanoid, such as orcs). The baron intends to send an army to crush the barbarians, but he wants his daughter to be out of danger first. The PCs will have to brave the wilderness, enter the camp, and free the daughter before the baron's forces arrive to engage the enemy.

The twist is that this particular band of barbarians is led by a charismatic leader with whom the daughter has fallen in love. She tried to tell her father this, but he would hear none of it—his daughter is nobility and should have nothing to do with a commoner, especially a barbarian. He believes that the barbarian ensorcelled her and took her from the castle by force; his closed mind will accept no other possibility. He won't mention this to the PCs, of course; he'll simply say that she has been kidnapped.

Unfortunately, the PCs are likely to brave many dangers and cut through plenty of barbarians before they learn the truth. They must first trek through the wilderness to the barbarians' camp, staying ahead of the baron's army (which can be as many days behind them as suits the desired pace of

the adventure). On their journey, they'll cross inhospitable terrain, fight hostile creatures, and survive inclement weather. They'll also encounter barbarian scouts, some of whom will likely be killed. Once they reach the camp, they must concoct a rescue plan and then put it into action.

Partway through executing their plan, it will become clear that things are not as the baron described. The daughter isn't a prisoner, and she will side with the barbarians against the PCs if they continue their assault. Once the PCs learn the truth, how they react is up to them. For some, a mission is a mission and they will force the daughter to come home. Others will feel guilty about acting as the baron's unwitting executioners, and might join the barbarians in resisting the baron's men. Still others may throw up their hands and walk away, leaving the final battle to fate.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) betrayal, deadline, difficult choice, intrigue, politics, social, twist

An Enemy Loved

Love after Death

126

Two clans have been hostile to each other for generations, sometimes merely sniping at each other, while at other times engaging in open warfare. No matter what the politics of the region, these two clans will not trust each other, nor will they work together. They certainly won't associate with each other—but unfortunately for one couple, love isn't always that simple.

Despite being from opposing clans, the pair has been meeting in secret, knowing that if their affair was discovered their own kinsmen would likely kill them both. They love each other too much to stay apart, so they've come to the PCs for a solution. Can the PCs find some way to fake the couple's death without arousing the suspicion of either family?

In spite of the seriousness of the rivalry, this scenario is designed to be a comic send-up of "Romeo and Juliet," though hopefully with a happy ending. The PCs must come up with a convincing plot to fake the lovers' deaths, fooling both of their grieving—and highly suspicious—families in the process. If they're at a loss for ideas, one of the lovers will suggest the method used in Shakespeare's play: She'll imbibe a

potion that makes her appear dead, and once buried the PCs can quickly dig her up and spirit her away. Of course, the woman's family will decide to burn her body, forcing the PCs to think on their feet.

This is an open-ended adventure in which the action is driven by the PCs. The couple will help in any way that they can, but they're not good actors and will likely make matters worse for the PCs. Both clans will automatically suspect foul play unless things are executed perfectly—and depending on the method the PCs select, they may find themselves suspects in the lovers' murder.

Ultimately, you should strive for a happy resolution. Perhaps the PCs may even find a way for the two clans to finally bury the hatchet (and not in each other).



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (WC) alliance, innocent, intrigue, politics, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, stealth

The Devil's Redeemer

127

The PCs are in a rough part of a city at night when a nearby warehouse bursts into flames. People in red robes run from the building, screaming. One of them shouts, "Run! The demon is free!"

Once the warehouse is empty, or if the PCs don't immediately investigate, a demon will appear at the door and politely ask the PCs to come in and speak with him about redemption. Having grown tired of the infernal realms, he is now seeking salvation. He coerced a cult into summoning him, broke free of the binding circle, and waited for some good-hearted adventurers to show up. He insists that the PCs accompany him as he tries to atone for his villainy.

To be redeemed, the demon must swear fealty to a good deity and dedicate his life to performing selfless acts, all while forswearing his infernal powers. In addition, he must atone for the most heinous acts in his long existence.

The first atonement is for the act that spurred him to seek redemption: After being summoned to an orphanage, he destroyed the place with all of the children inside. While he can't bring back the slain, the demon can build a bigger orphanage as penance. He knows where a huge treasure trove once was, and offers to lead the adventurers to it if he can keep half for the orphanage.

The treasure trove is in an old dragon's lair. The demon figures that the dragon is long dead, leaving her treasure unguarded.

In truth, she has become an undead creature and is served by a small band of kobolds. The kobolds lost most of their clan to the undead dragon when they discovered her hoard, and the survivors bear dragon skull tattoos and worship her. They guard her hoard while her undying spirit is elsewhere.

The dragon's cave has been sealed to the outside world. The only entrance is through the kobolds' small temple complex, which is heavily trapped and guarded. The party encounters a patrol and must clear the complex, culminating in a fight with the kobold leaders. The dragon appears as little more than a skeleton, but will awaken and attack when her trove is touched.

The dragon defeated, the demon thanks the party, and mentions that he will see them again, once he's finished the orphanage. (Note that the demon runs the risk of becoming a "GM's Pet." Either let a player run him, or play him with serious limitations.)



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) alliance, combat-heavy, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, escort mission, monster, religion, roleplaying-heavy, social, travel, villain

Love is a Battlefield

128

The PCs are part of a strike force used by a military organization for special missions, and they're partway through a long and difficult campaign. The commander summons them to his tent and confides that he has a job for them—one that might not even have a military objective and which could place their lives at risk. But his heart compels him to undertake this gambit, and he asks for their understanding.

Intelligence indicates that the commander of the opposing force is an old acquaintance from his days at the military academy—more than an acquaintance, really. He confesses that they loved one another deeply before the issues of the war pulled them to opposite sides. Perhaps he's being a hopeless romantic, but before the two armies clash on the battlefield he hopes to meet with the opposing commander.

The commander assigns the PCs to infiltrate enemy lines, deliver a message, arrange a meeting, and, if the other party agrees, secure the meeting location so neither side can capture the other commander. Crossing enemy territory can be accomplished through disguise, stealth, or brashness, and once done the PCs will need to look for an appropriate meeting

site. Once they've found a suitable location, they'll have to approach the enemy commander without getting killed or captured, and then convince her to agree to the rendezvous. To prove their trustworthiness, the enemy commander asks the PCs to retrieve a trinket from a storehouse in the warzone and return it to her.

At least one person on each side of the conflict will see this endeavor as a sign of weakness and seek to subvert the meeting, seizing the opportunity to capture the opposing commander. Investigation may enable the PCs to uncover this deception and put a stop to both attempts.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (TT) intrigue, roleplaying-heavy, social, stealth

The Family Stain

129

The PCs are hired by a woman who suspects that her family intends to murder a treasured friend of hers, a dwarven priest who she loved in her youth. Her family was disgusted and outraged by their romance, and spurned her as long as she was with him. In time, he received a call to faith and left her, but her family has never forgotten their love. The two are still friends, and he's due to visit her next week. She overheard her father and uncle talking about hiring killers to "wipe away the family stain," and asks the PCs to protect the priest on his journey.

The dwarf is still three days away from town when the PCs rendezvous with him. He's shocked to find out why they're there, and doesn't believe that the woman's family intends to have him murdered. He asks for some token of their sincerity before he consents to travel with the PCs. Mentioning his old flame's name smoothes the way—and reminds him of emotions he thought he had buried long ago.

The priest serves his god loyally, pausing for prayer every moonrise, and apart from insisting on sleeping in towns at night, he makes a good traveling companion. The next day, the PCs pass a suspicious pair: two men leading a cow who are too clean to be farmers, and are wearing short swords. If confronted, they say that they're dressed for market, and that

goblins have been spotted in the area. They are assassins, and will attempt to murder the dwarf in his room that night.

When the PCs enter the city, an assassin will strike from the rooftops, throwing poison darts at the dwarf. He attempts to flee across the rooftops before the PCs can scramble atop a building and pursue him, likely leading to a rooftop chase.

The woman is horrified to learn of the assassination attempts. She honestly thought that she was being paranoid, and that her family's talk was just bluster. She asks the PCs to accompany her as she confronts her father about his actions—a dangerous prospect, as her family is powerful and wields a great deal of influence in the city. What they tried to do was illegal, however, and if exposed this deed could threaten their power—or turn them into a more dangerous foe. The finale is a freeform confrontation with the woman's father, a social scene that can have a wide range of outcomes.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) escort mission, innocent, politics, race, social, travel, villain

No Good Deed Goes Unpunished

130

A knight once defeated a horde of terrible monsters that had been summoned by a coven of witches. The knight eventually destroyed the coven itself, and came to be known as a champion of righteousness. However the coven finished one last ritual before the knight vanquished them: a curse upon the knight's bloodline.

Decades later, the people that the knight protects are hunted by vicious shapeshifters that slaughter whole families in the middle of the night. The knight knows that the cause is his own son—the victim of the curse. The son is a shapeshifter who can take many different forms. Half of the victims of the son's attacks are turned into shapeshifters who can only assume a single beast form.

The first encounter is with a few wererats who try to ambush the PCs by dropping out of the trees that border the road. The wererats screech loudly as they attack, attracting a pack of weredaggers to join the fight.

The PCs are offered shelter by locals who arrive at the end of the fight. The locals tell the PCs where the knight's keep is located, but don't get time to share much more than that: Suddenly, werewolves and weredaggers burst through the doors and windows, intent on devouring everyone inside. One of the beasts is the knight's son, who shifts between several forms with every attack. Once seriously injured, the son will

flee the scene by taking the form of a werebat and flying off into the night sky.

Venturing to the knight's keep, the PCs arrive in the middle of a battle with hordes of shapeshifters that have overrun the defenses. The PCs can use defensive features within the keep to help fight off the shapeshifters, such as dropping the heavy iron gate onto the beasts or launching flasks of burning oil at them from a small catapult.

As the knight lies dying, he tells the PCs the truth and begs forgiveness from them. His dying act is to hand his sword over to a PC and to tell them that it must be used to slay his son—no other blade can bring him down.

The final conflict takes place when the son returns to the keep the next night with a small army of shapeshifters. The son doesn't care about his father's death, but he wants to destroy the sword, which he knows is the only weapon that can kill him.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) dungeon crawl, innocent, monster, race, siege, tactical planning

Ambition

Future Prefect

131

The PCs are contacted by a mid-level bureaucrat who makes them an unusual proposal: help him get appointed as the empire's regional ambassador (a post that's currently empty) and he'll reward them with treasure beyond their imagination. In his current position, he has access to quite a few records that point to hidden treasures—and in his presumed future position, he'll have access to many more.

To begin with, he offers the location of the tomb of a famous general. It should contain the general's legendary sword and armor. The location is accurate, but the tomb has long since been raided. However, it's currently serving as a base for a scouting party of humanoids amassing on the border. Routing the humanoids and bringing back the information is enough to propel the bureaucrat into contention for the position.

Next, the bureaucrat offers the location of a wizard's tower. The tower is in ruins, but the dungeon below it has never been entered. The bureaucrat wants any books the PCs may find in the tower's ruined library; anything else is theirs to keep. The PCs find several books, and delving into the wizard's dungeon proves to be both a dangerous and lucrative adventure.

In the Name of Progress

A noble has tapped into powerful land-shaping magic and is using it to build roads. He wants prosperity for his people and imagines a future rich in trade and industry, but although the noble's intentions are good, the reshaping of the land has many unforeseen consequences.

The local fauna, both magical and natural, is being agitated as the land shifts and their homes are overturned. The use of the shaping magic rends the barrier between the mortal world and the otherworld, and strange creatures are slipping through the tears and attacking locals along the new roads. In league with the merchants' guild, the contractor who was hired to finish the rough roads produced by the noble's magic has been paying thugs to keep others quiet about these problems.

The PCs may be called in to stop the invasion of the otherworldly creatures or to avenge locals wronged by the contractor's thugs. Once involved, they will first encounter a displaced and enraged group of wild beasts. The creatures are anxious, having been thrust from their forest sanctuary, and will attack the PCs for simply approaching them.

Surviving that battle, the PCs find some local people gathering to voice their complaints to the contractor about the increase in animal attacks due to the construction of the

The bureaucrat asks for one more favor. A group of bandits has set up shop on a nearby road, and has been remarkably successful in raiding caravans as they pass. The bureaucrat figures that they must be holed up in a nearby cave complex, to which he offers a recently copied map. He also feels that clearing out the bandits will net him the position he seeks, and tells the party to kill them all. As long as the PCs return some of the stolen goods, they can keep the rest.

The bandits are indeed at the complex, and the leader has a copy of the expected caravan schedule, along with defenses, cargo, etc.—written in the bureaucrat's hand, with a note to “copy this in your own handwriting.” Knowing that they've been turned into little more than hired killers, and that the bureaucrat is corrupt, will the PCs carry out their final mission?



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (KS) betrayal, combat-heavy, deadline, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, politics, shady, villain

132

roads. The contractor will release his thugs upon the crowd, and the thugs will violently beat anyone who is near them, even those who weren't involved with the protests. The PCs will be targeted by the thugs, who hope to steal their gear.

The PCs are told where they can find the noble by a local who they rescued from the thugs. While traveling, the PCs are attacked by one of the otherworldly creatures. The creature emerges from a portal as the land nearby twists and reshapes itself.

The climax takes place upon finding the noble. The contractor, several members of the merchants' guild, and a group hired thugs will surround the noble in order to protect him (and their best interests). During the standoff, the source of the magic explodes and creatures pour from several portals to attack all present. The PCs have to fight the beasts and rescue the noble while the thugs and corrupt officials do their best to interfere.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) combat-heavy, deadline, innocent, magic, monster, politics, social, trade, twist

A nobleman hires the PCs to retrieve three valuable gems from some nearby ruins; the area around the ruins is known to be dangerous. The nobleman desires the gems for his wife, and can supply the PCs with weathered maps and a page torn from an ancient book which describes the gems.

On their way to the ruins, the PCs are ambushed by feral satyrs. Their small horns are poisoned, and they use fey magic to try and overcome the PCs. Their goal is survival: They mean to cook and eat the PCs. After defeating the satyrs, the PCs have to contend with the natural hazards of the swamp: snakes, giant lizards, sinkholes, quicksand, and other dangers.

Once inside the ruins, the PCs must survive a rock fall and pass through a submerged corridor in order to reach the treasure chamber. They find the chamber empty, save for recent tracks in the mold that coats the floor: the marks of cloven hooves, which a skilled tracker can tell were made by a bipedal creature. Leaving the ruins, the PCs encounter a wounded satyr half-hidden inside a hollow tree. He doesn't seem feral or threatening, and he isn't mortally wounded.

Once patched up, the satyr explains that he was attacked by several of his feral cousins, and that they stole three large gems that he had retrieved from the ruins. He has little use for gold, but hoped to trade the gems for a noble title and land

outside the nearby town—he seeks to get away from his feral kin. If the PCs help him retrieve the gems, he'll give them one in exchange for their aid. The PCs now have a dilemma: They were hired to bring back all three gems, not one, but they can't bring back any without the satyr's help.

Whatever course they choose, they must first deal with the feral satyrs. This band uses different and more sophisticated weapons and tactics than their fellows, and isn't entirely feral. The PCs can try a frontal assault on their camp, sneak in and steal the gems, or attempt a different gambit.

They must then decide what to do about the satyr, the three gems, and the nobleman. The nobleman might believe that there was only one gem, but the PCs wouldn't earn their entire fee. The satyr might also be convinced to part with all three if the PCs can find another way to satisfy his ambitions. If they're able to help him become a minor landed noble, they'll make a fast friend in the process.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) difficult choice, dungeon crawl, escort mission, innocent, rivalry, social, stealth, tactical planning

United We Stand

The PCs are spending the night in a castle, or in the town outside a castle, when word arrives that an enemy army will arrive by nightfall. The lord pulls the community inside the castle walls and prepares for a siege. Intelligence indicates that the attacking army probably isn't strong enough to take the castle before reinforcements from friendly manors arrive. The castle will be able to hold out for some time—until everything starts to go wrong.

Several farmers come in reporting that they've found the bodies of messengers sent to other manors—shot in the back, with their throats slit, or magically burned to death.

As some of the area's most capable "irregular forces," the PCs are asked to scope out the castle's escape tunnel to ensure that the enemy isn't using it. The PCs discover that the enemy has the tunnel exit under heavy guard, but hasn't entered the tunnel. That's when the PCs start hearing screams from back inside the castle.

As it happens, the lord's brother has decided to throw in his lot with the enemy and has smuggled a magical device into the castle: an artifact which summons savage beasts. The brother possesses a pendant that keeps the beasts away from him. His plan is to get the beasts to tear everyone in the castle apart, allowing the enemy army to take the castle without a siege. The PCs must now save as many people as possible from the

beasts—and from the army, which occasionally peppers the castle with arrows and magic.

You can break this adventure down into encounters by giving the party discrete tasks to perform in order to save large groups of people. For example: Two beasts are tearing up the guard barracks, and the guards inside—who would be valuable to have as allies—can't get out without the PCs' help, or a magical salvo from the besieging army sets fire to a critical building, and the PCs must put it out. Once the PCs deduce how the beasts are entering the castle, they must destroy the summoning pendant to end the chaos.

With things inside the castle stabilized for the moment, the PCs must then deal with the brother, marshal their forces, and get the castle's population out through the escape tunnel before the besieging army realizes that the monster attack has ended.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (WC) alliance, betrayal, combat-heavy, deadline, dungeon crawl, escort mission, innocent, isolated area, monster, politics, siege, tactical planning, villain

The Forging of a Nation

135

The duchess wants one thing, and one thing only: the crown. However, forging unity among the rival dukes so that she might lead a nation will require victories in four arenas: diplomacy, warfare, economics, and magic. In each of these endeavors, the PCs, who are loyal to the duchess' cause, can help secure success. The duchess promises titles and land to secure their cooperation.

In diplomacy, the PCs must convince a rival duke to become an ally without resorting to warfare. The PCs must maneuver through tricky treaty negotiations or demonstrate a willingness to fight a common enemy. They can be the primary negotiators or work behind the scenes through intermediaries.

In warfare, the PCs must lead armies or sway the course of battle to defeat a rival who will never accept the rule of the duchess. There should be a battlefield situation—a “capture the flag” scenario—that enables the PCs to set the tone for the entire battle.

In economics, the PCs must find a way to secure a vital commodity resource: recovering iron mines for dwarven allies from an orc horde, securing a central trade route to the duchess' holdings, or neutralizing a pirate threat along the sea lanes. The objective is to ensure that her duchy is the driving economic power in the emerging realm.

In magic, the PCs must secure a magic item that is symbolic of a prophecy in the legends of the realm's rulers (something analogous to King Arthur pulling the sword, Excalibur, from the stone).

Once the PCs have accomplished these four great tasks, they can be confident the duchess will ascend to the throne and crown herself queen.



Easily adapted to: Anime, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) epic challenge, epic impact, intrigue, magic, politics, rebellion, social, tactical planning, trade, travel

Conflict with a God

The Deadliest Blade

136

For several centuries, a group of religious fanatics has been methodically collecting weapons—and where complete weapons are unavailable, fragments of weapons—that have been used to kill major figures, whether in battle or by assassination. When they've collected enough of them, they will use a tiny piece of every dirk, arrowhead, sword, spear point, and axe blade to forge a new weapon: a sword capable of killing a god. That murder would not only shatter their rival faith, it would also alter reality in profound and far-reaching ways.

The party catches wind of the plot when a merchant rumored to be selling a powerful magic dagger—one used to assassinate the king of a neighboring land—is murdered and his wares are stolen. Whether hired or personally motivated to investigate, the PCs discover that a local religious figure and an adventurer were murdered in the same fashion, and both carried or owned a weapon of historical significance.

Tracking down similar weapons will lead the PCs into conflict with the fanatics. One battle takes place in a graveyard as the fanatics are trying to exhume a body; another happens in broad daylight in a large town, where the fanatics try to murder the mayor and steal his weapon collection. The fanatics will then bring the fight to the PCs, trying to kill them before they can reach the temple where the forging ritual will take

place. Being engaged in what they believe is literally the most important mission they—or indeed, any mortal alive—could undertake, the fanatics will fight tooth and nail, without mercy, and to the death to complete their task.

How close the fanatics are to gathering enough weapons to begin the forging ritual will change how this plot fits into your campaign. The two best options are early on in the process, in which case the PCs can tangle with the fanatics over the course of several adventures, or when they're nearly finished, and need only another fragment or two—putting intense pressure on the party.

There are several easy ways to modify this plot. For example, what if the fanatics are good-aligned, and plan to kill an evil god—why not let them? What if the fanatics are part of a religion shared by several PCs? And what if the gods catch wind of their plan and intervene directly?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) combat-heavy, deadline, difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, investigative, magic, religion

Divine Intervention

137

Years ago, a hero served his god bravely in a mighty battle. He fought until victory was claimed, despite being mortally wounded. His show of faith moved the deity to bless the hero's unborn child. No matter what should happen, the deity would always watch over the hero's son, protecting him from harm and suffering.

The son is now fully grown and is a scoundrel who often steals from others, having no fear for the consequences of his actions. Whenever he's caught, the deity frees him from his bonds, and whenever he's injured, the deity heals him. The son is guaranteed to live a long life without struggle, and he abuses this gift. The only thing he fears is losing the deity's blessing. The deity keeps his promise despite disapproving of the son's actions, but can revoke the blessing for an obvious act of blasphemy.

The son makes the mistake of stealing one of the PCs' prized possessions. When the PCs seek to retrieve the object, they find any action taken against the son to be ill-fated. The son smugly tells the PCs that they cannot stand against the will of the deity who protects him. Eventually, he escapes the conflict unharmed and undeterred.

The son, however, is intrigued by the PCs and considers them

playthings. He tries to frame them by stealing a local treasure and planting false evidence that leads the authorities to the PCs. This encounter will force the PCs to avoid being captured while the son visibly mocks them from a nearby location.

Eventually, the PCs learn of the son's blessing. Priests of the deity explain that only blasphemy will put an end to the son's mischief. Meanwhile, the son has been spreading lies about the PCs, including telling local gangs that the PCs have great wealth on them at all times. Soon, the party is attacked by thugs who demand that they hand over their fortunes. The thugs mention the son by name as the source of their information.

Keep tormenting the PCs with the son's antics until they devise a way to trick him into committing blasphemy. When the blessing is revoked, allow the PCs to enjoy every moment of the son's downfall.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PB) combat-heavy, innocent, investigative, religion, rivalry, sandbox, shady, social, villain

A Scion's Bray

138

Who can understand the will of the gods? When an evil deity chose a mule in a remote mining town as an avatar, blessing him and his descendants with a blazing intellect and unnatural virility, the results were dramatic. In a few years, with his progeny as an invisible spy network and human cultists loyal to his master acting as his hands, this unlikely figure was able to subvert an entire community via "accidents" and blackmail. Now, with territory in his thrall, a secret temple constructed to his master, and hundreds of his own sentient children, the mule scion has set his sights on expansion.

The scion prepares to expand his influence into an area by supplying his children as farm animals at rock-bottom prices. These mules are intelligence gatherers, so they can be caught eavesdropping and staring with unusual focus at things that shouldn't interest pack animals. The PCs may be waylaid by a cultist aggressively trying to sell them a mule, or may simply notice the proliferation of the creatures and their unusual habits and decide to investigate further.

As the mules' plans begin to progress, anyone with anything to hide may be blackmailed into assisting them. The mules blackmail the PCs with secrets, or by endangering an NPC ally. Those who refuse to cooperate are likely to have unfortunate and puzzling accidents. The PCs may also be called in to investigate a rash of fatal accidents witnessed only by mules.

Once the mules are in control of an area, cult activity rises, so the PCs' first brush with the animals may be in opposing their cultist minions. Depending how secure the mules consider their hold on an area, cult activity may be secretive or blatant. Mules are sure-footed, so their main stronghold is located in treacherous mountains. Those bringing the fight to the mules face guerrilla warfare and dangerous deadfall traps.

There are no distinguishing characteristics between normal mules and the intelligent variety, so once players are aware of the mules, some mule activity can be used as a red herring. Normal mules still exist and still work on farms, so sometimes a mule is just a mule—even when they stare.

This plot serves well as a backdrop for a divine struggle, or a struggle between underworld factions. Depending on how successful the mules are before the characters discover them, this could run as a short arc or even an entire campaign to liberate a nation from its unlikely overlords.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MN) epic challenge, epic impact, investigative, magic, monster, religion, sandbox, tactical planning, travel

A God, Rejected

139

The old king is buried, the time of his mourning has passed, and the new king is mature and popular. No one expects him to make any real changes, so everyone is shocked when the new king's first decree is to decommission the city's largest, oldest church and order that a new one be built in its place.

The church predates the current line of kings and is easily the most recognizable building in the city. But the king's word is final, and he will not be questioned nor will he explain himself on this matter. The high priest is furious, and has locked himself and many of his higher-ranking priests inside the church in protest. The king hasn't responded to the lock-in, and the entire city waits anxiously to see what will transpire.

The PCs may be contacted by a number of people regarding this quandary. An old priest mentions a back entrance and offers to pay the PCs to help the high priest defend the church, while a young priest mentions a back entrance that is surely trapped, and wants them to escort the king's troops into the church to avoid a public showdown. An "art collector" wants them to find a way in and acquire some of the more valuable items before the church is destroyed. Finally, one of the king's men contacts them, asking if they've heard anything about a rear entrance.

Bloodstain

140

A king has died, and much of his court opposes the coronation of his son, the crown prince. The PCs are nobles, friends of the prince, clergy of the kingdom, or otherwise personally entangled in this situation. The court priests claim that their deity doesn't intend for the prince to ascend to the throne, sparking a conflict between the clergy and factions within the court. The queen leads one faction, demanding that her son succeed the king as dictated by royal law.

The root of the problem is an ancient grudge that dates back to the earliest days of the world, when the kingdom's god walked the earth. A concubine he found pleasing was stolen away from him by a bold young mortal, and he has despised the boy's family line ever since. Unfortunately for the kingdom, the king was a cuckold—and the queen's lover was a member of that despised line. The prince, now 16, is the issue of their adultery.

After consulting with the court and clergy as advisors, the PCs are asked to embark on a quest: They are to visit the kingdom's greatest sage and ask her to send back a sealed scroll advising the court on how to resolve the situation. After overcoming the threats between them and the sage (heavy weather, monsters, bandits, or whatever is most appropriate to your campaign), the PCs consult with the sage.

She tells them that the prince is opposed by the kingdom's

The fabled back entrance is an abandoned well; the well leads to an underground spring that flows through the catacombs. The entire path is trapped many times over. A series of rooms leads higher and higher into the church: catacombs, cells, storage rooms, and then the church proper. In one of the larger cells, which shows signs of frequent and recent use, the party finds an altar to an evil god—complete with chanting priests in black robes. This changes everything, and the PCs discover that some of the priests and laity aggressively defend the area, while others, including the high priest, seem conflicted and confused.

The priesthood has been infiltrated by cultists, and the hierarchy has been slowly drugged with a substance that opens them to the evil god's influence. The good god set the scene when one of his angels spoke to the king on the night of his ascendance, and told him to decommission the old church, but not to give any reasons why. With this corruption at the heart of the church uncovered, what will the PCs do?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) city, deadline, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, politics, rebellion, religion, stealth, twist

deity for reasons of blood, and that it seems the queen's bloodline is tainted, though she knows not how. She then gives them a sealed scroll bearing the same information; she won't tell them what she has recommended to the court. (The PCs may find a way to open and re-seal the scroll, of course.) Her recommendation is that the king's daughter, a girl of 12, be crowned in the prince's place. She states that their god will accept the daughter's coronation.

The rest of this adventure is driven by the PCs. They must contend with multiple parties: the queen, who won't want her dark secret revealed; two factions in the court (one backing the prince, the other the princess); the princess, who would make a terrible ruler; the clergy, who can sway the hearts and minds of the peasantry; the nobles, who control companies of knights; the prince, who may assume the throne against everyone's wishes, igniting a civil war in the process; and the deity itself. Whatever the PCs decide to do, the court and the kingdom will be changed forever.



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) alliance, city, difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, intrigue, monster, politics, rebellion, relationship hook, religion, sandbox, social

Righteous Champions

141

Ruling a nation is often more difficult than assuming power, and without the support of the church, the people won't follow their new queen. The PCs are asked to aid the queen in proving her worthiness according to the tenets of the local religion. As the queen's appointed champions, the PCs must face challenges of a religious nature.

In a test of truth, the PCs must dispatch or neutralize an enemy of the church. They can foil a greedy merchant's plans to foreclose on an orphanage or stop a false prophet despoiling a pilgrimage site. In a test of endurance, the PCs must recover a relic of the church from catacombs infested with undead.

In a test of courage, the PCs must confront the forces of a rival god. In this case, the PCs don't necessarily need to win: Simply showing determination in the face of the avatars and supernatural minions of the opposing deity will suffice.

The Sentence is Death

142

In a world where the gods are easily angered and not omnipotent, a city has infuriated one of the gods. The deity has decided to crush the city in retribution. A favored follower of a goddess who is part of the same pantheon is stuck somewhere in the city, and while the goddess can't intervene directly, she wants to save her special follower. In avatar form, she approaches the PCs and asks them for aid; if they help her, she will intervene with the angered god and try to spare the city from the full force of his wrath.

The city's location and the nature of the gods will determine the contours of this adventure. A city on the edge of a volcano might anger the fire god and be caught in an eruption, while a city by the sea may suffer tidal waves sent by the sea god. In high fantasy games, a god of death might send a skeletal legion to destroy the city, while a god of the air might send wyverns and rocs while striking the city with lightning bolts.

The favored one should be stuck somewhere in the city. He might be in prison for speaking out against injustice, or he might be enslaved to one of the city's nobles. In any case, he won't be able to leave without the PCs freeing him from his bonds (otherwise, the goddess could have simply contacted him directly and ordered him to leave).

As the PCs approach the city, there are warning signs of what is to come (a volcano rumbles, there's a storm over the sea, rocs soar overhead). While the first wave of the god's wrath manifests itself, throwing the city into chaos, the PCs must find a way to free the favored follower. Along the way, they should have an encounter that forces them to delay their mission; for good-aligned groups, saving a large number of innocents from a collapsing building or similar disaster is a good fit.

In the final test, a test of justice, the PCs must stand alongside their sovereign in a journey to a spiritual battlefield, a celestial plane where they confront her inner demons. Pride, greed, and lust prove to be queen's vices, and they manifest as monsters that must be overcome by the party with the queen's help.

Once the PCs aid the queen in vanquishing each of these "sins," they can return to the material plane. She assumes the throne knowing she has the wisdom to conquer the excesses within herself, and the church supports her, confident she can rule with the blessings of their god.



Easily adapted to: Anime, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) alliance, epic impact, intrigue, magic, politics, religion, social, travel



Artist: Laine Garrett

Once they free the follower, the PCs must make it back out of the city alive while the god's wrath begins to rain down in earnest. Before too much of the city is destroyed, the disaster ends abruptly: The goddess has intervened. Her avatar meets them outside the city and thanks them for their bravery.



Easily adapted to: High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) city, deadline, difficult choice, escort mission, innocent, magic, race, religion

Mistaken Jealousy

'Tis the Season

143

You've heard of honor among thieves? How about some genuine affection?

A lieutenant in the thieves' guild needs a group from outside the guild to do a little job. The winter festival approaches, and in the tradition of the season, the guild's officers provide gifts to one another—and most importantly, to the guild boss.

The lieutenant refuses to let his rivals outdo his gift this year. He's especially concerned about the new pickpockets' captain, who has proven particularly resourceful this year. The lieutenant is certain the captain is going to engage in a bit of one-upmanship to make the other guild officers look bad. He needs the PCs to find out what his rival has selected for a gift.

In the first part of the adventure, the PCs infiltrate the pickpockets' lair, where they find something extravagant labeled "Winter Festival." After they report this find to the guild lieutenant, he makes a show of fretting about it and then implores the PCs to fetch something even more fabulous. He lays out a plan for a heist or dungeon plunder sure to impress the boss, and offers a substantial reward in his desperation.

After securing that item, he seems pleased. In fact, the

A Fool's Song

After a night on the town, the PCs are awakened by insistent knocking at their inn room door. A bedraggled bard crashes into the room and begs for protection. He claims that the local lord's men are after him, and that he fled to the only "people of action" in town. He also claims he's done nothing wrong, only serenaded the lord's wife earlier tonight. Perhaps "The Bard's Instrument" wasn't the best choice, but everyone was laughing at the lyrics.

Heavy footsteps ascend the stairs, and a rough voice calls out to check the rooms; someone bangs on the door. If the PCs hide the bard, the guards will depart, but the bard will refuse to leave until the PCs escort him safely out of town. The lord's men will continue searching for him. The party could knock out or tie up the bard, but the lord's men might notice a scuffle.

At some point, the lord's men will catch up with the PCs and the bard (or the PCs might turn him in). When they do, grasping for straws, he claims that he knows the PCs; this results in them being brought in for questioning. At the lord's estate, they are witness to an uncomfortable situation: a royal argument. The lady hasn't been intimate with her husband since his return from a long journey. She claims that she loves him,

lieutenant invites to the PCs to the winter festival feast where the guild officers will present their gifts. When the gifts are given, the pickpockets' officer surprises the PCs and lieutenant by presenting to the boss something other than the extravagant item discovered in his chambers. The lieutenant is perplexed but otherwise pleased, because his gift to the guild boss receives lavish praise.

Later that night, the pickpockets' captain approaches the lieutenant with a wrapped box. "This is for you," the pickpockets' captain says. Inside the box are the extravagant item the PCs saw earlier and a note of thanks for showing favor to the pickpockets' faction during the year.

The payoff for this adventure is to make the final gift shine brightly. Paint the thieves' guild as a place where scheming against rival factions is commonplace. Make it gritty. If the guild isn't outright cutthroat, it's at least rough-and-tumble.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) alliance, city, intrigue, shady, social, stealth

144

but feels no desire for intimacy from anyone. He suspects infidelity, and the bard's song hasn't helped.

Once they rehash this argument, the bard interjects that the lady has a rare condition, easily cured by a tea made from the root of a certain plant. That plant grows in the foothills of a mountain chain a few days' ride away. "Of course, the bard says, "the area is wilderness, so you'd need an adventuring party to recover the root..."

The party and bard are told to recover the root. On the way, they run across several groups of goblins. The plant is a carnivorous and aggressive vine that has a symbiotic relationship with the goblin clan: they feed it and it protects their dwellings. The bard knows this, but he won't mention it until they get there. The lord and lady will be grateful for the PCs' help, and will be willing to forgive the bard—though the PCs may not be.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (KS) exploration, mature themes, monster, shady, stealth, tactical planning, twist

The Obsidian Lighthouse

145

An aged wizard grew jealous of his former apprentices, and although they posed no threat to him, he became paranoid that they were out to get him. He eliminated them all one-by-one, draining each apprentice's power, until only one remained: a young enchanter. Having fled her home, she is now being pursued by the wizard and his evil cohorts. She crosses paths with the PCs and asks them to help protect her from her old master, offering enchantments in exchange.

The enchanter tells the PCs that the wizard's vanguard is hot on her heels, and will surely overtake her soon. She needs to reach an ancient structure that isn't far from where the PCs are now: an obsidian lighthouse that houses a powerful magic circle. She can use the circle to temporarily dampen her aura, allowing her to evade her pursuers for good. Unfortunately, the wizard can also use the circle to steal her power, and he knows exactly where she's headed.

This adventure is an extended chase scene, with little chance for the PCs to rest, and is capped by an explosive finale. As the PCs make for the lighthouse with all haste, the wizard's vanguard catches up to them just outside a small village. Her pursuers are led by an enormous man wielding a black-bladed sword who dedicates each fallen enemy to a demon lord. He leads a pack of savage killers and rides a gray and black spotted

horse with a taste for human flesh. The enchanter claims the leader for her own, while the PCs fight the other hunters and protect the villagers.

With one more day of hard riding between them and the lighthouse, the PCs must contend with a magical storm brewed up by the wizard after his vanguard was defeated. When they reach the lighthouse, the PCs can see the wizard's enchanted coach, surrounded by dark riders, a mile or two back.

To keep the enchanter from being destroyed (at which time the wizard will destroy them, too), the PCs must hold off the wizard and his allies while she completes the aura-dampening ritual inside the lighthouse. They can use the lighthouse to their advantage, but the wizard is a formidable foe. Once her aura is gone, the PCs must escape and get her safely away. Since the wizard can no longer track her by her aura, and considers the party beneath his interest, they needn't face him again. The enchanter will reward the party with several enchantments before disappearing forever.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) alliance, escort mission, innocent, madness, race, siege, tactical planning, villain

All that Glitters...

146

In an untamed land, a nomadic race of tribal humanoids works endlessly to acquire even the simplest of comforts. The tribe has arrived in the region, and their scouts have spotted a shimmering city of silver and gold in the valley below. Taunted by the riches so near, yet plagued by an ever-dwindling supply of basic necessities, they set forth to pillage this majestic treasure city.

Yet all is not what it seems, as the city is merely a collection of dwellings where pieces of scrap tin and busted-up bronze have been used to construct crude shelters. These rough repairs catch the sunlight, and from far off, they appear to gleam like precious metals. The residents of this distraught metropolis are barely surviving themselves.

Unfortunately for the PCs, they are right in the path of the invading humanoid army.

The PCs are attacked when the humanoids mistake them for citizens of the "golden city." The humanoids ride giant toads that are trained to pull the PCs into their gullets with their tongues. The PCs can fight off one or two waves of the attackers, but it should become apparent that it would be safer to head for the glittering city nearby.

The residents of the city will beg for help from the PCs in defending their homes against the humanoid army, which they

can see streaming down from the mountains. An air assault will begin as the humanoids attack from the backs of giant wasps, hurling spears and occasionally dive bombing to sting a target.

The PCs eventually discover that the city is actually the remains of an old fortress that must have fallen during an ancient battle. Catacombs beneath the city are full of dangerous slimes and monsters, but also hold an undiscovered armory where intact weapons and some magical items were abandoned.

The PCs can now arm the locals with the items they've discovered—and just in time, as the humanoids are returning with more toads, wasps, foot soldiers, and a war beast in the form of a multi-headed gigantic snake. The PCs need to set up their defenses quickly, and you should reward creative tactics and improvised weapons. If the city survives, the PCs are hailed as heroes and gifted with the magic items they recovered from the ruins.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) deadline, dungeon crawl, innocent, mass combat, monster, siege, tactical planning, twist

Rekindled Flame?

147

During their adventuring days, a powerful nobleman had a relationship with his companion, a wizard. They parted amicably; the noble married and settled down while the wizard continued her travels. The noble constantly regales audiences in his court and feast hall with tales of their exploits. His wife knows of her husband's past dalliance and harbors jealousy toward the wizard.

Recently, the noble has been sneaking out in the dark of night. His wife has learned that the wizard has come back into the area and it appears her husband is visiting his former lover. Furious, the wife has confronted her husband, but he admitted nothing. She has decided to take matters into her own hands, hoping to drive the wizard away.

As it turns out, the noble isn't rekindling an old flame. Something dark and sinister from his adventuring past is catching up with him, and the noble and the wizard are working together in secret to stop it. The nature of the dark secret is entirely up to you. What could be so terrible that the noble wouldn't tell his wife about it? Is he in fact involved in something even more scandalous than adultery?

The wife hires the PCs to find out what her husband is up to. Their first encounter is a scouting mission, spying on the noble and the wizard. The pair takes pains to avoid surveillance, hinder possible pursuers, and otherwise exercise caution. At

first, it appears that the wife is correct and the two are having an affair. When the PCs report this news to her, she flies into a rage and asks them to take things to the next level: The wizard must be driven out of town.

She leaves the details up to the PCs, who have to concoct a plan for convincing the wizard to leave town; her only condition is that her husband not be harmed. Threats, coercion, deception, and public humiliation are all viable options for the PCs to use against the wizard. As they put their plan into motion, however, they run into another party of adventurers who were hired to assassinate the wizard—the wife's backup plan. In the ensuing chaos, the wizard, the noble, or both are killed.

When the dust settles, the PCs acquire several clues about what they were actually up to, and learn that they are now all that stands between the local community and an ancient horror that is fast approaching. They must quickly catch up on everything the former lovers were up to, scramble to devise a plan for combating the horror, and then defend the town.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Comedy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) intrigue, investigative, politics, social, stealth, twist

Erroneous Judgment

The Soothsayer

148

There are rumors that something isn't quite right about the soothsayer at the carnival outside town. There are whispers that she's "different," "not one of us," and a "monster in disguise."

She lives cloaked in mystery. She rarely leaves her wagon, instead relying on assistants to fetch items for her. During a fortunetelling session, she never moves from her place behind a curtained divider at the head of a table. She refuses all summonses and only performs readings in her wagon. This should be enough mystery to entice the PCs to investigate, but if not, have town leaders secretly hire the PCs to look into the situation.

An investigation by the PCs reveals her as one of the dreaded snake people, a creature that appears as a beautiful woman from the waist up, but has the body of a serpent from the waist down. If apprehended or attacked in the aftermath of this revelation, she pleads her innocence. She's not an evil creature, just different; that's why she hides what she is.

The discovery coincides with the arrival of a large band of brigands, horse lords from the steppes, sent to capture the soothsayer for their own reasons. Once they snatch her, it's up to the PCs to mount a rescue effort. Infiltrating the bandit camp is a matter of stealth and deception, but if the PCs plan an assault, a divide-and-conquer approach works well. A series of encounters against certain bandit groups—picket-line guards in the vale beneath the camp, archers on a hillside, horsemen near the flat corral, and finally the leadership within the center of a maze of camps—will let the PCs battle a range of combatants.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) combat-heavy, investigative, monster, social, stealth, twist

Sometimes Locks Keep Things In

149

A worthless mine is suddenly of great interest when an ancient stone door is discovered within. It is rumored that the door leads to the treasure horde of a fallen kingdom, and treasure seekers converge on the area.

The prospector who uncovered the door also found a golden pick. It hums with magical energy, and he refuses to put it down. Others are beginning to discover similar golden tools. Those who find these treasures join the first miner in “protecting” the door from the treasure seekers by patrolling the mine, town, and nearby wilderness.

The PCs come across a group of crazed miners attacking a family with golden picks and hammers. When a miner is killed, the golden weapon bursts into flames and crumbles into ash as an evil spirit flies away into the night sky.

The rescued family gives the PCs food and drink out of gratitude. They tell the party that after having nightmares about the door in the mine opening to unleash a great evil upon the world, they decided to flee the town. That night, the PCs all have the same nightmare.

When the PCs awaken, they can hear more miners holding some sort of trial in the nearby town. The PCs witness the

miners preparing to execute the mayor and other innocent people, and they must save the townsfolk by defeating the mob of miners. Afterwards, the mayor offers a small fortune in gold if the PCs will investigate the mine.

Upon investigation, they see hideously mutated miners emerging from the mine. The mutants drag their brethren into the mine in order to have them “join the fold.” Some mutants will discover the PCs and attack with their golden tools, vomiting black pus at the party. This foul liquid causes those struck by it to be stunned for a few moments.

The final encounter should be a fight through the mine to the ancient door, which has now been opened. In the chamber before the door, a skeletal demonic figure is seen transforming the miners into mutants. To defeat the demon, the PCs must push it back into the door and then cause a cave-in to bury it once again.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, epic challenge, innocent, madness, monster, villain

Powers of Old

150

While the PCs are in a small town, a mystic comes down from the hills and begins performing minor miracles using an ancient artifact he claims to have recovered from a tomb in the foothills. He is confronted by the local lord’s tax collector, who demands that he pay a tax on the artifact; the mystic responds that the tomb is outside the lord’s territory, and therefore no tax is owed. He is arrested, and the lord orders his execution.

The people have taken a liking to the mystic, however, and there is much grumbling about how exactly the lord knows the tomb is on his land. The mystic asks the PCs to prove the temple’s location to save his life; in exchange, he tells them how to safely reach the deepest part of the tomb, beyond which he suspects there is more treasure. The lord sends his personal surveyor with the PCs to verify the tomb’s location. If he dies, the PCs and the mystic will be held responsible.

Halfway to the tomb, the PCs are attacked by degenerate humans—the descendants of the tomb’s original builders, now living in the foothills in debased conditions. As they claw at the PCs, they rave about “the holy artifact” which “must return to old ground.” They’re referring to the mystic’s purloined object, which is sacred to them; if it isn’t returned, the entire population of hill-creatures will descend on the town.

When the PCs arrive at the site of the tomb, the surveyor proclaims that it is indeed beyond the boundary of the lord’s land. If the PCs explore the tomb (bringing the surveyor with them), they find it devoid of threats, as the mystic promised, and soon reach the inner sanctum.

Following the mystic’s instructions, they circumvent several fiendish traps and then come face to face with a fearsome tomb guardian: a creature made from the bones of the tomb’s inhabitants. After defeating the guardian, they can claim their reward. The rest of the treasure in the tomb is mundane, and isn’t sacred to the hill-creatures.

Back in town, the surveyor’s findings are enough to get the mystic set free, leaving only the problem of what to do with the artifact he looted from the tomb. The mystic wants to retain it, and the townsfolk want him to keep performing miracles—but the PCs know the consequences of not returning it to the tomb.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) combat-heavy, deadline, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, escort mission, innocent, isolated area, madness, monster, religion, travel

Betrayal?

151

After years of warfare, the king has decided to call for a peace conference. While skeptical, the heads of state of the warring nations agree to meet on neutral ground. Something strange is afoot, however: The queen, who has always been utterly devoted to her husband, hires the PCs to assassinate the king (though she doesn't tell them who the target is). She has come to believe that the king has been replaced by a doppelganger, and fears that during the negotiations he'll give up too much to his former enemies. In her eyes, it's better to keep the war going than to make a lopsided peace agreement.

The adventure begins with a shadowy figure hiring the PCs to eliminate a "diplomat" en route to the peace conference, in exchange for a sizable sum. They're provided with information on the diplomat's route and security detail. Before the PCs reach the diplomat, they detect that they're being followed. Laying a trap for their pursuers, they ambush them. The pursuers reveal that they work for the queen, as do the PCs, and that she wants to keep an eye on her investment.

Having second thoughts about their own part in this affair, they also tell the PCs that the diplomat is really the king, traveling incognito so as to avoid assassination attempts—and that the king is actually a doppelganger. They seem

uncertain about this, though, and few players will take their story at face value.

There's time to investigate the situation further before the king reaches the conference, and once the PCs start digging, they will find that little is as it seems. What's really going on is up to you. Perhaps the king isn't actually a doppelganger, and the queen has more sinister motives for having him killed—or the queen could be the true doppelganger. Someone might also be setting the PCs up to take the fall for assassinating the king—but who, and why? Which option you choose will determine the course of the rest of the adventure.

Will the PCs continue their mission, and try to assassinate the king? Will they turn on their employer and reveal her plot? Or will they find out that they were set up and turn the tables on their betrayer?



Easily adapted to: Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) betrayal, difficult choice, epic impact, intrigue, magic, politics, sandbox, social, stealth, travel, twist, villain

A Series of Mistakes

152

A sage gives the PCs a straightforward assignment: travel to an abandoned keep on the edge of an arid plain, meet up with some guides, and follow them to an ancient ruin out on the plains. The ruin houses a set of rare books, and the sage wants them for his library. The sage arranges for horses, wagons, and enough workers and supplies to last three months, far longer than the expedition is expected to take.

The trip to the keep is uneventful, except for one nighttime run-in with bandits who try to rustle the group's horses. The party arrives at the keep a day early; nobody else is around and no tracks are found in the area. The keep is definitely abandoned—a crumbling ruin that's almost unsafe to investigate.

In the middle of the second night of exploration, a grinding sound—as of rock on rock—comes from the keep, and some of the rubble shifts. There's some muffled cursing, more grinding, and a slab falls aside to reveal a pair of dwarves. They look around at the camp, the wagons, the horses, and all the gear and ask, "Are you going to bring all that underground?"

The dwarves quickly fill the PCs in about the remainder of their journey. From here, the path leading to the books goes for miles underground, through a sometimes narrow, sometimes steep set of manmade and natural passages. The dwarves are excellent guides, and will assist in combat with their crossbows. They have no supplies other than their own, as they were told that the PCs would be bringing everything

they needed. It is three weeks to the ruins, as the dwarf waddles.

The dwarves insist on leaving in half an hour, before a large patrol of dark elves returns. The party has to do some quick shuffling and reorganization in order to make the deadline, and must figure out some way to handle the horses and wagons. Water and edible fungus can be found on the way, if the former can be purified and the latter can be stomached.

Once underground, the journey includes encounters with a wild subterranean critter or two, a couple of short but sheer cliffs (one down, one up), and a giant who charges a toll to pass his lair.

The group arrives at a huge subterranean lake, and the dwarves turn to the PCs and say, "We've been wondering how you planned on crossing this." The books are on an island in the middle of the lake, and the lake is inhabited by aggressive serpents. Can the PCs retrieve the books and make it back out alive?



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (KS) combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, exploration, shady, stealth, tactical planning, trade, travel



Artist: Andrew McIntosh

Remorse

The Weeping Dagger

153

Sickened by his deeds, a great general retired in secret to a war-torn village as penance for his sins. His reputation preceded him, however, and the locals shun him for kin killed and blood spilled. The general's men remain loyal, and still search the region for him. While passing through the village, the PCs can't help but hear rumors about the general; they may have their own experiences with the war to live down, or might have served among his men.

While they're still in town, a priest arrives bearing a gift for the general: a weeping dagger that is believed to lead repentant folk to peace. In truth, he isn't a priest, but rather is an old enemy of the general's who seeks to bring him to ruin—and the dagger, while it works as he claims, is also incredibly dangerous. It's an artifact sacred to a long-lost desert kingdom, once located not far from the village and now long-buried by the sands, and by bringing it to the village the false priest has awoken the kingdom from its long slumber.

Scouts from the ancient kingdom encounter the PCs (perhaps as the party departs from the village) and ask them if they have seen the weeping dagger. Their clothing and gear is archaic, but looks brand new. Whether the PCs tell them where it is or they discover the location on their own, when the scouts learn of the dagger's whereabouts they attack the

general and attempt to recover their artifact. Before they are wiped out, they send up a strange flare to signal other scouts about their discovery.

With only days until a much larger force arrives and wipes out the village, the PCs must convince the general to take up arms again, talk the villagers into accepting his help in defending their town, and find a band of the general's men in the area to bolster the village's defenses. When the army descends upon the village, the PCs and their allies will be able to fight them off—but peace will not return until the dagger is back beneath the sands.

The PCs can resolve the situation by returning the dagger, which can be an adventure unto itself, or by convincing the general to do it. Eternal slumber deep in the earth would bring him peace, and perhaps give those he wronged peace as well.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) alliance, bearers, deadline, innocent, isolated area, religion, siege, tactical planning

A Last Request

154

A fabled adventurer well-known for his great deeds and support of righteous causes summons the PCs to his deathbed, where he confesses to them his one great regret. During his youth as a treasure-hunter and dungeon delver, he acquired a wondrous, teardrop-shaped bulb that he found atop a step pyramid. Shortly before he fell ill, the adventurer learned this bulb belonged to a tribe of jungle folk and, when placed in the center of their great step pyramid, it acted as a charm of protection and prosperity for their small kingdom.

Without their magic item, the realm has fallen into darkness and despair. Fell creatures and warring lizardfolk besiege their empire. It's a perilous journey, he knows, and he wishes he could make it himself, but bedridden and well into his final hours, he asks the PCs to do what he cannot: deliver the teardrop to the jungle kingdom and help them restore their land.

To complicate matters, the adventurer gave the teardrop to the cathedral years ago, and they consider it a holy relic. Through negotiation or theft, the PCs must retrieve the teardrop from the cathedral before it can be delivered to its rightful homeland.

The perilous journey through the wilderness involves overcoming a raging river, spanning or scaling a great gorge, and slaying or avoiding wild animals of huge proportions, including the monstrous orangutan king. The lizardfolk don't want to see the tribe of jungle-dwellers resurge, so its warriors attempt to stop the PCs in a climactic battle on the steps of the pyramid.

Through all of this, the sentient teardrop tries to exert its will on the party. It works through a telepathic link to convince them to abandon the quest and return the teardrop to the relative safety of the cathedral—the only place it has ever felt safe, and where no one made any demands of it.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) bearers, difficult choice, isolated area, monster, shady, travel

Sins of the Father

155

When his son comes of age, the elder lord of the land tells him the secret behind their people's great prosperity. Long ago, their ancestors stole a magical orb from the nomads who inhabit the rocky, barren lands nearby. The orb transformed the inhospitable terrain into fertile farmlands and dense woodlands. The people of that land were able to cultivate crops and timber, but when the orb was stolen, the terrain slowly returned to the harsh landscape it had been before.

The son feels responsible for the nomads' pain and suffering. Not only did they have their prosperous lands taken away from them, they are shunned as a cursed people who brought a drought upon their own home. No one knows of the orb, the good that it did for the land, or of its theft.

The son is determined to right this wrong and is secretly looking for adventurers to return the orb to its true home. This plan will cost him the loyalty of many among his people, but he knows that righting wrongs isn't always popular.

The son first asks the PCs to steal the orb back. He offers some information to help with the theft, but cannot aid the PCs directly. The PCs need to break into the lord's manor, sneak

past the guards, remove the orb, and then make a quick exit. Keep the tension high during this scene. Dozens of guards will appear to stop the PCs if the alarm is raised.

Returning the orb leads the PCs down a treacherous path. They have to deal with bounty hunters and trackers on the way to the barren lands and must avoid their ambushes, traps, and scouting parties. Within the barren lands, monsters roam freely, and the PCs must avoid being eaten by large magical lizards that spit fiery acid. The nomads themselves no longer trust strangers and will attack the PCs out of fear, but will cease their attacks once the orb is back in its rightful place.

The final encounter will be against a small army sent to steal the orb back from the nomads. Only the PCs can prevent the crimes of the past from being repeated.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) bearers, innocent, magic, mass combat, monster, politics, race, rebellion, shady, stealth, tactical planning, travel

Righting Old Wrongs

156

The king, who was worshipped decades ago when he claimed the throne, has become a shadow of his former self. Vicious infighting has taken a toll on his family's health and its ability to govern, and the entire royal family has become unpopular.

The PCs are unexpectedly brought to the king's bedchamber. When they arrive, he authoritatively empties the room of his countless relatives, priests, physicians, and such, showing the fire he once had. Cursing his family, the king asks that the PCs make a delivery for him.

"I should have done this decades ago," he says, "but it's not an easy thing, and a king has many excuses. I stole something valuable from a child. It was mean and petty, but I did it. Please return it to him and right this wrong." He hands over a perfectly sealed steel box covered with magical inscriptions. "It will open for him, and only him." He pays generously, repeats the boy's name, and gives directions to a small village a week's travel from the castle. As the party walks away, he smiles and says, "I'll haunt you all forever if you fail."

The boy in question is his firstborn son, and what was stolen was his heritage. The box contains the crown, the royal seal, the royal signet ring, a letter explaining everything, and a large sack of gemstones.

The ride to the village is uneventful, and the only person in

town with the name in question is a respected half-elf, now approaching 50. He is currently leading the local militia against a clan of goblins that has been plaguing the area. As the PCs either wait for his return or head out to assist him, they hear that the old king has died, and that his wife and son are fighting over the succession. When they present the box to the half-elf, it opens for him—but not only was he unaware of his heritage, he initially doesn't want the throne.

The queen's faction is the first to hear of the new king, and immediately dispatches a military unit disguised as orcs to raid the village and kill the half-elf. The prince's faction is more subtle, quietly posting a bounty on the new king. Professional and amateur assassins start arriving at the village almost immediately.

The king's half-elven son soon realizes that his only option is to go to the capital and claim the throne. He asks that the adventurers be his bodyguards until he can raise his own. They must contend with the various factions descending on the small town and fight their way back to the capital.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) combat-heavy, epic impact, escort mission, innocent, mass combat, politics

What Have I Wrought?

157

Not long ago, a noble betrayed his country to another nation in exchange for wealth and power in the new regime. The new regime is oppressive to the people, taking their lands and destroying their traditions. They've imposed a foreign language, religion, and values, and they harshly punish all who oppose them. In spite of this, a resistance movement has risen up and hopes to topple the foreign regime.

The resistance has learned that a member of the foreign royal family is visiting a local castle. They have maps of the castle and information on its weaknesses, and believe the royal to be vulnerable. The resistance has enlisted the PCs to break into the castle, capture the foreign royal, and smuggle her back to the resistance. So what's the catch? This information was supplied by the traitorous noble, who apparently had a change of heart and wants to make amends.

The resistance is skeptical, but capturing the foreign royal is their best chance at gaining leverage against the hated regime, and they're willing to take the risk (or, at least, to hire the PCs to take the risk). Using the supplied maps and intelligence, the party must find a way into the castle, bypassing any guards they encounter. While the castle is far from impregnable, it is full of guards—far too many for the PCs to take them all on in a fight.

Once inside, they'll have to locate the royal, keep her from raising the alarm, and smuggle her out unharmed. This will only be possible with the aid of the castle's chamberlain, and according to the noble who supplied the maps the chamberlain is on their side. This is the first opportunity to throw in a major twist: Can the chamberlain be trusted, or is he in fact loyal to the foreign regime?

The second twist can be the visiting dignitary herself: What if instead of simply being a royal, she's the daughter of the foreign king, and is willing to die instead of being taken alive? She could also secretly oppose her own regime, and be looking for a way to make inroads with the resistance. You can further complicate matters by having the resistance itself be compromised: When the PCs return with the foreign royal in tow, they find the camp abandoned. What do they do with their prisoner?



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) alliance, betrayal, difficult choice, epic impact, intrigue, politics, rebellion, social, stealth, travel, twist

Recovery of a Lost One

On the Piper's Trail

158

The pied piper of legend has struck, and once again he has collected on his cruel bargain. After ridding a hamlet of vermin by piping them out of town, the town's leaders didn't pay him his promised fee—so he then led away the town's most previous commodity: its children.

Luckily the PCs arrive before the trail goes cold. It leads to a nearby cave where the residual magic of a planar portal still lingers. Embarking on a journey across time and space, the PCs track the piper through the portal into a cosmic hallway of doors. Each of the doors provides a quick trip to other places the piper visited: an orphanage in a modern metropolis, a colony spaceship in the far future, and a subtropical jungle village.

Eventually, the PCs reach the pied piper's hiding place, a castle built of dark stone that hovers in a void. The castle itself is a nursery where the children train to be artisans and warriors. Former victims run the nursery and patrol its grounds. While they've grown into adults, they've also grown into loyal pied piper fanatics.

Confronting the piper, he admits to picking his towns carefully. He has a knack for spotting duplicitous leaders. He knows the ones that will try to weasel their way out of an agreement, and he has long ago convinced himself that it's his duty to remove a generation of children from the influence of such leaders. He treats the PCs as guests until they make an overt move against him.

The PCs can determine for themselves the morality of the pied piper's motives and the welfare of the children under his care. Note that the piper is a powerful planar traveler. You may choose to make him more alien in both appearance and motive, depending on your campaign.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) difficult choice, epic challenge, innocent, investigative, isolated area, magic, social, stealth, travel, twist

Crimson Herrings

159

A friend's daughter is among a small group of kids, all six to eight years old, who have been kidnapped. Their small town is up in arms over the kidnapping, and just about everyone has volunteered to join the rescue posse being formed by the sheriff. Everyone suspects a local gang of bandits, but they've never kidnapped anyone before, nor have they ever raided the town.

The kids were taken from where they were playing near the river. It's at the edge of town, and child- and adult-sized footprints lead from the river to where some horses were tied up. The tracks then lead towards the bandits.

The kids were actually abducted by a water spirit who recently took up residence in the river. The water spirit has granted them the ability to breathe underwater, and they're all playing happily in a large pond nearby. The kids are having fun, but the lonely spirit is slowly enchanting them to forget about the village and their families. The water spirit plans to keep the children forever and will vigorously oppose their removal.

The tracks were made when the bandits came to fence some goods to the local shopkeeper, who had his kids cart them off for him. Unfortunately, there's been so much interference with the tracks that it's hard to tell exactly what has happened.

The shopkeeper is either out of town selling the fenced items, or knows when to keep his mouth shut.

If the bandits are questioned or attacked, the party will learn that they know of a troll nearby who may have taken the children. The troll hasn't, of course, but the only way to know for sure is to kill it or drive it off and search its cave.

Once these suspects have been cleared, run off, or killed, subtler clues will lead to the water spirit. Talking to the other children in town is the key. They know about the water spirit, and how it has been looking for playmates. A good look at the tracks away from where the horses were tied up will also reveal some of the story. The tracks coming to town were much lighter than those going away. Some of the townsfolk know the bandits, and know that they'd never kidnap children, but also know better than to share this information easily.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) deadline, dungeon crawl, innocent, investigative, madness, magic, monster, race, relationship hook, sandbox, spirit

No Treasure Greater

160

Years ago, a couple's beautiful teenage daughter passed away from a strange illness, growing weak and eventually dying while in a deep sleep. The couple did all they could to save their daughter, but even the local alchemist couldn't help their child. The alchemist, ashamed of his failure, left the village to start a new life elsewhere.

The couple couldn't have known that the alchemist actually kidnapped their daughter. He secretly gave the child a potion that made her appear to die, used magic to create a simulacrum that was buried instead of the child, and revived her with a potion that clouded her mind and faded the memories of her former life.

Ten years later, the wife journeyed to a distant metropolis. There she saw the alchemist walking with a beautiful maiden on his arm. She recognized the maiden as her own daughter and, with great haste, she returned home to tell her husband what she had seen. Now the couple is offering a small fortune for the return of their daughter.

The PCs need to investigate the alchemist in order to uncover the truth of his crime. Inquiring about the alchemist leads to an ambush by his hired assassins. The assassins wait for the PCs to order drinks at a local tavern and poison the drinks so the PCs will be less capable of defending themselves.

A note from the alchemist found on one of the assassins' bodies requests a meeting at the local archives. Searching the archives uncovers references to the potions used by the alchemist to kidnap the girl and to fake her death. The alchemist discovers the PCs when he enters the archives to do research, and he immediately throws a potion onto the ground. A green flame erupts and a monster emerges from the flame. The PCs must now battle the monster, whose very presence threatens to destroy the wealth of knowledge—and all of their evidence—by setting the archives ablaze.

The final encounter takes place at the alchemist's tower. The alchemist will use potions to grant himself powers, summon strange beasts, and animate objects to attack the PCs. The daughter is present, and if things turn against the alchemist he will use her as a shield to defend himself.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) artificial life form, city, combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, innocent, investigative, monster, villain

No Beauty, Just Beast

161

For centuries, a good-aligned region has enjoyed the protection of a great beast. Tamed and enchanted as a guardian, the creature is well-treated, but it isn't immortal. When the PCs enter the picture, the guardian is dead or dying, and the region needs a new one before it falls to ruin.

The PCs are tasked with finding a new protector beast and bringing it back to the region; the creature must be unharmed. You can specify the type of creature required or leave it up to the PCs; either way, they won't be the only ones going after it. Other groups, including adventurers and mercenaries, are also on its trail. Once the PCs know the beast's location, reaching it is their first challenge: The beast lives in a distant land and lairs in a hostile environment.

After fighting their way to the beast's lair, the PCs must survive their first encounter with the monster itself, and may find that rivals have beaten them to the punch. (If not, then rivals should accost them on their way back, seeking to steal the beast away from them.) The beast should be good-aligned, but need not be friendly or automatically inclined to return with the PCs. Convincing it of the rightness of their cause is the party's next challenge.

You can also make the location itself problematic: If it lives inside a volcano and none of the tunnels are big enough to

accommodate its bulk, the PCs are going to have to lift it out; if it lives on a remote island, the PCs will have to find a ship large enough to haul it home. Be careful in high fantasy settings, as spells or artifacts (even seemingly minor ones) could allow the PCs to bypass a lot of the fun in this scenario.

Once the beast has agreed to accompany the PCs, they must get it home safely. It needs to eat, and may have other, more unusual requirements that must also be satisfied en route. If the beast is sizeable, like a dragon, just keeping it fed will be a challenge. The PCs should face another threat on the way home—one that can only be overcome with the beast's help.

For a more complex adventure, the great beast may have its own defenders that don't want to see it taken away. Perhaps the creature guards another community, leaving the PCs with a "devil's choice."



Easily adapted to: Comedy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) alliance, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, epic challenge, epic impact, escort mission, isolated area, monster, politics, race, social, travel

New Wife's Journey

162

The PCs are approached by a eunuch who offers them a purse of gold in order to escort his mistress, a stately widow, across the desert to be united with her new husband. The eunuch warns that his mistress has rivals who may attack her, despite the dishonor such an attack would bring. The eunuch has secretly tipped off those rivals, and knows that they will attack.

The widow's dowry is in a pair of small sturdy chests strapped to a donkey, and the widow herself rides in a covered litter slung between two horses; the eunuch rides his own horse alongside. The widow is aloof to those who aren't her peers, but is eager for female company. Female PCs of noble birth are invited to ride with her in the litter. She assigns tasks to non-noble PCs, but lingers in conversation with them, desperate for someone to talk to.

As the group approaches a watering hole on their second day of travel, bandits ambush them and attack. The eunuch flees, pretending to be trying to draw the bandits away. During the fight, the PCs notice that the bandits go straight for the two chests and ignore the widow's litter—which is odd, as the passenger is likely a noble worth robbing. When the PCs prevail, the eunuch returns and both he and the widow heap the PCs with praise for their fighting prowess.

Another bandit attack takes place on the fifth day, two days before the PCs reach their destination. This time the bandits go for the litter, ignoring the treasure. The eunuch fights beside the PCs instead of fleeing, and suffers a minor wound. Knowing when the attack would occur, he drank a small vial of mild poison before the battle, and after the fight is over he falls ill. He claims that his "wound fever" was brought on by a poisoned blade, and he's clearly sick. The widow invites him to ride in the litter with her, and banishes any PCs who were with her to free up space.

As the two bandit attacks have failed, the eunuch now tries to do away with the widow himself. When she drifts off to sleep, he tries to smother her quietly with a pillow. If he fails, the PCs will earn a great reward from the widow and her husband, as well as possible allies; if the eunuch succeeds, calling out that she has stopped breathing, and going to great lengths to revive her, they're faced with a grave problem: Their charge has died in their custody.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) betrayal, combat-heavy, escort mission, innocent, isolated area, politics, social, travel, villain

Loss of Loved Ones

Best Served Cold

163

A massive war has begun between two civilized races of the region and a somewhat alien invader (giant bugs, underworld critters, true aliens, etc.). The PCs are members of an elite strike team stationed near the front lines. While the PCs' team is on a mission, their home town is hit by a massive but heretofore unknown magical effect. Latent magic in the area prevents any communication with the town, but it's believed that nearly everyone is dead.

Now, it's payback time. The enemy has been obsessively protecting a small area of their base, and the commander believes that it is strategically important. The PCs are to lead the strike against the area, and no expense is spared to assist them. They are ordered to destroy whatever the enemy is protecting.

When the PCs arrive at the target, they find the enemy aggressively defending a cluster of small buildings. Enemy soldiers are careful not to hit any of the small buildings, but fight to the death. The strike is difficult, but definitely within the capabilities of the team.

The complication is two-fold: The PCs' home town isn't destroyed, but it has been placed in stasis by the enemy's advanced magic, and the area that the PCs were ordered to

take out is a nursery for the enemy's young. This isn't obvious during the attack, but if the PCs investigate before destroying the buildings, they'll figure it out.

If the PCs destroy the nursery, the enemy will attempt to destroy their hometown. This is preventable either by aggressive diplomacy or by direct action against the teams heading towards the town. If the PCs don't destroy the nursery, or stop once they find out what it is, the enemy will reveal that the town is in stasis, and that it hasn't been destroyed.

A diplomatic solution is possible because the invaders' homeland is itself being invaded by a third force. The two sides can unite against them if they can overcome their own prejudices.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) alliance, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, innocent, investigative, magic, mass combat, monster, siege, social, stealth, tactical planning, twist

Long Live the King

164

Lands the PCs once considered their own are now in the possession of a foreign power, and the conquerors have captured the liege who the PCs have long supported. The conquerors plan to try and execute the liege on charges the PCs know to be false. The lord is to meet his end in the courtyard of the main palace. The headsman is a master swordsman from a foreign land who is traveling across the country to do the deed.

As patriots to the land, can the PCs stand by and allow this? Will they intervene? Can they hatch a scheme to save the fallen lord, or will they wait for the liege's death and use him as a martyr to rally the people? It's time to match the PCs' ingenuity against these challenges.

Acquiring what the PCs need to pull off any caper or rescue requires some scrounging. Raiding the invader's supplies—after getting past their guards and wards—is one of the most straightforward ways of securing what is necessary.

Because he's a master swordsman, the headsman should be difficult to intercept along the road and defeat by arms. Be prepared for the PCs to take an unconventional approach to misdirecting, bribing, or waylaying him.

Complicating matters, there is a traitor in the midst of the PCs' rescue operation. Someone is willing to betray the party in hopes of securing power in the new regime. Can PCs unmask the traitor before he foils their plans?

The PCs see their likenesses on wanted posters. This restricts their movement. If disguised, run several scenes where the authorities stop but do not detain them. Let the players become confident in their disguises before the full force of the occupation comes down on them.

Note that you should be prepared for the consequences of any outcome of a rescue: A successful rescue may see their lord become a powerful resistance leader, while his death could make him a martyr of the rebellion.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (TT) betrayal, intrigue, mass combat, politics, rebellion, sandbox, social, stealth, tactical planning, travel, twist

While You Were Away...

165

When the PCs return to their home base (be it a town, manor, or ship) after an adventure, they find it destroyed. Dead bodies are everywhere, buildings are in ruins, temples have been pillaged, and several NPC friends, family members, or allies are missing. The PCs must figure out who perpetrated this vile act, track them down, and claim their vengeance.

The identity of the villains depends on your campaign. They could simply be a roving band of thugs, pirates, or monstrous humanoids, but connecting them to the PCs' backgrounds will make this adventure more meaningful. Rival adventurers, soldiers in the employ of a slighted noble, or others with a bone to pick with the party are good candidates.

Investigating the ruins of their home base will turn up clues as to the nature of the attackers, pointing the PCs in their general direction. While tracking them, the PCs will run afoul of a natural or monstrous challenge of some kind, such as wounded hostages who were turned loose to die in the forest, and who are now under attack by monsters.

Taking on the villains isn't a simple prospect: The PCs must find a way to bring them down without harming any of the hostages. The villains know whose home base they destroyed, and are ready for an attack. They have defenses in place, including traps and other hazards, and several of them are watching the hostages at all times. Once the hostages are safe, there's the small problem of where they're going to live and how the PCs are going to find and outfit another home base.

This scenario works best as a single session (or two, if you want to use the first scene as a cliffhanger). This keeps the PCs' blood boiling as they exact their revenge—dragging this type of scenario out too long will dilute its emotional impact.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (WC) innocent, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, tactical planning, villain



Artist: Philip Miller

Recently, a ship with a full crew left port to deliver a cargo of ale, grain, and iron to an island fortress. The ship was expected to return two weeks ago but never did. Local officials are concerned that the fortress, which houses prisoners and is the first line of defense against pirate invaders, didn't receive the cargo and is in urgent need of fresh supplies. Residents are worried that their loved ones are in danger, or worse. A second ship will be setting sail soon to both deliver the same supplies to the island fortress and to discover the fate of the first vessel.

This adventure is a simple tale of braving the high seas. The PCs may be crew members, explorers, or stowaways. The voyage to the island fortress is a six-week trip that takes advantage of high winds in one direction to reach the island fortress, and then sails a different route on the return, taking advantage of the tides. There are a few stops along the way, including small harbor towns and unexplored islands home to possible treasure and certain danger.

Wherever the PCs go, they can ask about the crew of the lost ship. You should use these moments to portray the crew as good people. People tell the PCs that the crew of the first ship helped others in need, defended against pirates looking to raid small towns, and traded fairly and honestly with everyone

they met. They also celebrated life to the fullest, and many a tavern patron remembers that crew as "a jolly good bunch."

Conflict abounds as the PCs run into pillaging pirates, sea monsters, and raging storms. Monsters flourish on some of the islands where the PCs must drop anchor to attend to repairs and pick up supplies such as fresh water.

Reaching the island fortress can be a climactic moment for this adventure: The PCs learn that the previous crew did indeed deliver their supplies, but now a pirate armada is planning to attack in full force. The PCs arrive just in time to help prepare for the battle, and may even be the deciding factor in defeating the pirates.

What happened to the previous crew is up to you, but whatever their fate, it should match their portrayal as noble and honest people.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) alliance, bearers, deadline, exploration, innocent, investigative, isolated area, mass combat, monster, race, sandbox, siege, tactical planning, trade, travel

Shrine of the New Moon

A kidnapper stalks the foggy streets of the city, abducting the unwary and encouraging the wise to remain home and lock their doors. Victims disappear from their rooms with only a sparkling stone left behind in their place. The victims are never seen again, as the kidnapper is an assassin and they have been sacrificed to the goddess of murder. When the baron's sister disappears, the baron calls upon the PCs to find her; he promises a large reward for her recovery and the capture of the kidnapper.

The assassin intends to abduct one victim each night for a week, sacrificing them to his goddess, and then kill the baron's sister on the eighth night, the night of the new moon. After this final sacrifice, the moon will not rise over the town again as long as the assassin lives.

The next night, the assassin abducts a servant from the baron's estate, and also loots an ancestral blade. The knife was a prize of war taken by the baron's ancestor from the head priest of the murder cult, giving the PCs a clue as to the nature of their opponent. Further research will uncover the assassin's plan and provide ideas for where he may strike next.

Matters are complicated by other parties interested in obtaining the reward, including a red-haired thief, another party of adventurers, and several ambitious townsfolk. The

thief offers to let the PCs know the location of the assassin's lair once he rescues the baron's sister; he has no intention of tangling with the assassin himself.

The PCs should have at least one close call with the assassin, perhaps preventing him from abducting his target but failing to catch him, and one encounter with a rival searcher or group of searchers, which may end in violence. The PCs should have a chance to rescue the sister from the assassin's lair before the night of her sacrifice; she is being kept in a cramped room over a smithy, empty but for a tiny cot, a half-loaf of bread, and the baron's sister gagged and bound.

The PCs can attempt to corner the assassin at the shrine or during the rescue, whichever is more appropriate. The shrine is in a concealed basement beneath a ramshackle building behind a tanner's shop (to cover the smell). The assassin will die before he lets himself be captured.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) city, combat-heavy, deadline, innocent, investigative, magic, politics, race, rivalry, villain



Sci-Fi

Within this chapter you'll find 167 science fiction plots suitable for use in almost any sci-fi RPG. From intergalactic scouting missions to survival in blighted, post-apocalyptic wastelands to deadly plagues released by sinister mega-corporations, *Eureka's* sci-fi plots cover Space Opera, Cyberpunk, Hard Sci-fi, and everything in between.

As a genre, sci-fi is incredibly broad. It gives you, the GM, a huge canvas to paint on and a colorful palette to paint with. There's cross-pollination between so many sci-fi sub-genres that with a bit of work, you can pull ideas from just about any *Eureka* plot—regardless of genre—and drop them into your game.

Damaged wormholes, alien vampires, lost colonies, rogue AIs, mysterious ruins, doomsday weapons—with *Eureka's* sci-fi plots, the sky is rarely the limit.

Supplication

Smart Tots

168

Concerned family members have spurred an undercover investigation into a private academy for gifted students. Texts and video conference calls are becoming strange, or have simply ceased altogether. Nothing seems amiss when the parents visit, though student contact is limited and tours are tightly controlled, but the strange communications persist.

A tech company operates the school and uses the students as test subjects in experiments involving intelligence-enhancing nanites. The benefit to the company is twofold: The students perform slave labor and work on illegal projects like nanite production, and their memories and dreams provide ripe material to harvest for hyper-reality experiences, which the company can then sell. The nanites also function as an electronic “collar,” prohibiting the students from leaving the school.

The enterprise is so fruitful the company intends to detain the students at the end of the term. It also employs a private security firm to secure the school grounds and numerous medical

experts to isolate the children from outside healthcare—even in emergencies. The students’ strange communications are actually coded messages for help, but the nanites have boosted the children’s intelligence so greatly that only a supercomputer could decode their S.O.S. calls.

This is a sandbox adventure in which the PCs are faced with an open-ended problem, and must come up with their own solution. If you’d like to throw in a twist, the students can help by infecting their captors with nanites of their own creation that reduce intelligence, or by joining forces with the PCs.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) innocent, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, planet-based, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, siege, social, stealth, tactical planning, twist, villain

Non-Addictive, Helps-You-Sleep Circuitry

169

A company is testing a new mood-stabilizing chip that’s supposedly stronger and offers finer control than most mood drugs. Initial tests show side effects in some people but, due to pressure from shareholders, the CEO releases it early. Out in the wild, many more people are affected than were predicted by the tests. Users become angry and depressed.

A scientist, recently fired from the company, makes a public broadcast claiming that the company has a fix but won’t release it. To do so would require them to admit they erred in releasing the chip too early. The CEO contacts the PCs and offers his side of the story, saying the fired scientist modified the chips and is holding the solution for ransom. Because the scientist now works for a rival company, he suspects that the glitch in the chip was an act of sabotage. The company needs the fix and sends the PCs after the scientist.

The fired scientist is in one of the test towns, surrounded by people suffering the drug’s side effects—and an army of personal guards. The scientist isn’t hard to find, but he is hard to reach. He plays at easing the pain of those affected with the backing of his new company. In the eyes of the public, he’s a godsend and the new company is benevolent and generous. His lab is in a building owned by the new company and is heavily guarded, but the PCs might be able to fight or sneak

their way in. The lab contains materials and part of the code that can be used to create the fix.

The scientist keeps the missing part of the code at his expensive new home, in both paper form and in a highly secure terminal. The new company also has a copy at one of their satellite labs. Through the use of news reports, public accolades, or other means, the PCs should be made aware that the scientist is revered by the townsfolk, and that attacking him openly might cause problems.

The PCs might find a way to blackmail the scientist, revealing that he currently has the fix, or they might be able to sneak into the scientist’s house or the corporate lab and get a copy of it. Much of this adventure falls into a moral gray area, with ample room for the PCs’ choices to affect the outcome.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Supernatural

Tags: (JA) city, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, innocent, planet-based, politics, race, sandbox, shady, stealth, tactical planning, trade

They Come for the Fallen

170

An alien delegation approaches the governors of the planet where the PCs currently reside, seeking to uncover the place where a prince of their people died 6,000 years ago. The party can be brought into this in several ways: PCs with archeological expertise may be hired by the aliens to help find the prince's burial place, the planetary government may hire the PCs to escort the delegation and run interference to keep the aliens out of trouble, or, if the PCs are famous, the aliens and the government may decide together to select the PCs to act as their guards.

The PCs' first task is to identify the resting place of the long-dead prince. The aliens have poetry and mythology describing the resting place, but it dates back several millennia. Research eventually identifies the site as a rift valley on a smaller continent. The valley is 50 miles long and two miles wide on average, and is inhabited by insular, xenophobic ranchers. The PCs must convince the ranchers to allow the aliens access to their land to perform the subsurface scanning needed to find the prince's body. In this hostile social climate, dissent among the aliens also becomes clear: Some of them resent human assistance.

When the prince is located, the site is found beneath the land of one of the valley's most xenophobic residents. The

PCs must bargain with him or remove him from the picture somehow in order to excavate the site. Once the prince's remains are uncovered, several of the aliens become incensed at human involvement and attack "the unclean"—everyone not of their race. The other aliens assist the PCs and the valley dwellers in subduing them.

With tensions running high, the aliens reveal that they wish to build a temple on the site, and that they mean to inhabit that temple once it's been built. They swore an oath on the dead prince's bones, and will not be deterred. By choosing to honor his burial site rather than return the prince's remains to their home world, the aliens would be cast out from their society. Neither government, human or alien, was aware of their plans, to say nothing of the xenophobic locals. Can the PCs resolve this dangerous situation?



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) betrayal, escort mission, exploration, innocent, planet-based, politics, religion, social, travel, twist

Light from the Heavens

171

The elders tell a tale that generations ago mighty heroes traveled to the Crater of Mists, where they fought the great spirits whose anger had caused fiery light to rain down from the sky. Those heroes, although they succeeded, never returned. Yesterday morning, for the first time in generations, the western fields were struck by a bolt of light that set them on fire. The elders of the village have gathered the strongest and smartest men and women of your generation, hoping to find some who are brave enough to venture into the crater and do battle with the spirits once more.

In the Crater of Mists is an ancient facility that once controlled an orbital microwave array used to transfer solar energy to the planet's surface. The automated facility has recently completed repairs and has resumed transferring energy. The AI controlling the station doesn't know that the microwave collectors on the surface are no longer present, or that a town exists there in their place. Further transfers will obliterate the town.

The PCs will face at least one challenge as they travel to the crater. Once they reach it, they'll have to contend with the crater's hostile flora and fauna as they make their way to its center. In the middle of the crater they will find the control station. The station's automatic defenses are still active, and they will try to prevent the PCs from gaining access.

Once inside the control center, the PCs will face another of the AI's defenses: cyborgs it created from the bodies of the heroes who ventured to the crater generations ago. Because the town's elders venerate these ancient heroes, the PCs will recognize them from their tales, which can make for a surprising and peculiar encounter. The PCs will then be confronted by the AI itself. They can fight the AI and destroy its command core, or they can try to explain to the AI that the microwave collectors are no longer present and that the energy transfers are harming the town.

The AI can be played a number of ways: as a crazed machine bent on taking over the crater (and beyond), as a dutiful caretaker trying to carry out its program parameters, or as an entity eager to learn about humanity. You can twist this plot by making the AI a pawn of a local warlord, who has tricked it into acting as a weapon so that he can take over the surrounding towns.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PV) artificial life form, dungeon crawl, exploration, isolated area, planet-based

It's Just Business

172

A trade war between two powerful corporations in a new galactic sector has intensified. Blood has been spilled repeatedly on both sides, but the sector governor has done almost nothing to stop the war.

The party somehow comes across evidence that members of a one of the corporations are willing to betray their employer and testify to illegal undertakings in return for substantial benefits (wealth, positions of power, etc.). This could end the trade war in one fell swoop, bring peace and prosperity to the region, and make the PCs very wealthy.

Depending on how the party acquired the information, they may need to earn the betrayers' trust and convince the rival corporation to accept the deal. The real adventure begins once the sector governor is on board with the plan: He'll prosecute one corporation and award exclusive trade rights to the other. Up until now, both corporations held substantial influence over the sector governor, and they're privy to information about the governor that he wants kept under wraps.

The corporation about to be betrayed is the sole manufacturer of a drug to which the governor is addicted, and none of the betrayers knows how it's made. This is why he's been slow to respond to their trade war. The governor is

willing to go forward with the plan, but only if the party can secure the formula for the drug.

The party must physically penetrate the corporate arcology, a fairly easy task if the betrayers assist them. Next, they have to gain access to the secured medical floors where the drug is produced (a much more difficult task), track down the formula either physically or electronically, steal whatever rare ingredients are necessary to make the drug, and get back out. The complication is that the drug is produced by an alien life form, similar to a large sea urchin, which lives in a glass case filled with ammonium hydroxide.

The security apparatus will respond aggressively if the party is detected, but won't endanger the aliens unless absolutely necessary. If their glass cases are broken, the alien creatures will die rapidly and the party will have to go back for more. For an optional moral quandary, have the drug instead be produced by the livers of genetically altered humans.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Space Opera, Supernatural

Tags: (KS) alliance, bearers, deadline, difficult choice, interplanetary, intrigue, investigative, politics, shady, stealth

The Church of Nova

173

A distant system's primary star is going to go nova in the extremely near future, and for decades this system has harbored a ragtag fleet of supplicants, scientists, and religious zealots, many of whom belong to the Church of Nova. The church is dedicated to the ultimate primal separation of soul and body: death by supernova. Not merely content to tool around the system waiting for their sublime destruction, however, two mid-level church leaders have taken matters into their own hands. With the aid of a few scientist converts, over the past year they have delivered several payloads to the sun that were intended to dramatically speed up the process.

One of the Church of Nova's acolytes caught wind of their activities, had second thoughts about his fate, and fled the system. Seeking out or running into the PCs, he asks them to help shake others out of their reverie and evacuate as many people from the church fleet as possible before the star goes nova—which could happen at literally any moment.

The Church of Nova's security forces won't take kindly to any attempts, overt or covert, to intervene in their business. The fleet's mixed population also presents a challenge for the party: Some people will be receptive to reason, while others are sincere in their desire to die for their faith. The biggest threat, of course, is the imminent nova event itself, which will be kicked off by the next payload the zealots deliver to their

star. The PCs may hijack communication channels to speak directly to all of the ships in the fleet, or they might decide to identify the ships most likely to listen to reason and go ship-to-ship to convince people to flee the system. Direct conflict with the church is also a possibility, though this will get ugly quickly; the first half of this adventure is primarily social.

As the PCs begin to assess the situation and make plans, they learn from an informant that another payload is slated for delivery very shortly. The church's leader wouldn't approve of this tactic, nor of its past uses, if he learned of them, and might side with the PCs if they opt to try to stop the zealots through diplomacy. If they use force, the church as a whole will oppose them. If the payload is delivered, the star will go nova within minutes—barely enough time for the PCs and perhaps one or two other ships to reach minimum safe distance. Everyone else in the system will be annihilated.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk

Tags: (MR) deadline, interplanetary, religion, sandbox, social, travel

Deliverance

Lifeboat

174

A mayday call relays the news that a rogue asteroid has changed its orbit and is heading straight for an unsuspecting pastoral world. Expected casualties are 100%. The PCs are aboard one of the few ships in the area, and assistance has been requested for this emergency. The other ships providing aid will defer to their leadership.

While not large, the population is widely dispersed across this agricultural world. There are only one or two starfaring ships on the planet; the majority of their ships are just barges for ferrying food into orbit. The settlers don't trust centralized governments, and what little government there is has no evacuation plan. They recognize the need to evacuate, however, and will adopt the PCs' plans, whatever they might be.

The barges can be retrofitted to carry people, but only have enough life support for a small crew. Carbon scrubbers and climate control can be thrown together, but it will take some

time, resources, and expertise. Artificial gravity can be induced by spinning the barges.

Small groups of pirates and smugglers also operate from this planet. Some will help, if they can be found and persuaded to do so. Others will try to take advantage of the desperate situation. Obviously, none of these groups trust anyone who can get them into trouble.

If a moral conundrum is desired, pockets of farmers will initially refuse to leave. Some of them are staying behind with their families, including young children. The children agree to be taken along but some of the parents refuse to leave—and some parents won't let their kids leave, no matter what.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers

Tags: (KS) alliance, deadline, planet-based, social

The Good Samaritan's Reward

175

A distant colony has gone silent, no longer broadcasting communications of any kind. The organization that sponsored the colony can't afford to mount a full-scale rescue effort, so they enlist the PCs to find out what has happened to the colonists. The colony is far from settled space, and can only be reached by a lengthy journey. Unbeknownst to the PCs, the colony is the object of an intense rivalry between two groups, each striving to stake a claim to its bounty of a rare resource.

En route, the PCs' craft is attacked by mercenary ships hired by the rival colonizing organization. Since no one knew about the PCs' voyage, they should be concerned: This can't be a coincidence. This encounter is a pitched space battle, with the PCs' ship outnumbered by many smaller, weaker vessels.

Entering the colony system, the PCs' ship is bathed in radiation levels that are much higher than expected. Sensors suggest that the radiation comes from a nuclear explosion; their ship's shielding will hold for a week or so of exposure, but no longer—and leaving the ship will be dangerous.

A ship belonging to the rival colonists is in orbit around the planet, badly damaged. A massive nuclear blast crater, visible from orbit, marks the spot where the colony used to be. The colonists on the surface signal the PCs' ship and explain that

there has been a terrible accident. In truth, they followed orders and detonated a nuclear device when it became clear that their rivals were going to claim the colony. The damaged ship also signals the PCs, explaining that they were the victims of an unprovoked attack by the colonists.

There isn't enough time for another ship to reach the colony, so the PCs must decide who to help and how to help them—in approximately one week or less, before their shields fail and the radiation kills them all. Getting the colonists off-planet is the first step; repairing the rival colonists' ship and using it to get everyone from both factions out of the system is the second.

En route back to settled space, the PCs must contend with blowups among the rivals, failing systems aboard the crippled ship, and the revelation that the rivals also brought a small nuclear device—which at least one of them is crazy enough to use on the return trip.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) deadline, difficult choice, escort mission, interplanetary, isolated area, social, travel, twist

Return of the Captain

176

The PCs are docked at a space station after the completion of a recent mission. As they prepare to enjoy some downtime, they encounter a friend who is the captain of another ship. He confesses to the PCs that he has been stranded on the station for several days because his second-in-command double-crossed him and led a successful mutiny. After being restrained, he was ejected from the ship in a lifeboat, and was fortunate enough to get picked up by passing traders and dropped off at the station.

The captain is happy to see friendly faces, and asks for the PCs' help in regaining his ship. He knows where the mutineer is headed: a remote planet that's home to something of considerable value (natural resource, lost artifact, etc.). He knows this because, before the mutiny, he shared the ship's secret destination with his second-in-command. The mutineer used this knowledge to buy off the crew with promises of a larger share of the money earned from their find.

The captain knows an alternate route to the planet—one that's dangerous, but gives them a shot at reaching the destination before the mutineer can make off with the find. He offers to share the profits from the find with the PCs if they help him get his ship back.

Behind Enemy Lines

177

Communication with a spy who has been deep undercover suddenly ceases. The PCs are hired to traverse enemy lines and report on his status or, if necessary, rescue him. He has been on a critical mission within a neutral but volatile country, working with dissidents within the government who are trying to overthrow it. The PCs can be introduced to this plot in many ways: They might already be connected to an espionage organization that would send them after the spy, they may be approached because of their past exploits, or they could be offered the job and a pardon for past crimes as payment.

Entering the country will pose a moderate challenge. The country isn't open to outsiders, but will allow people in on official business. The military can help the PCs with fake IDs, or they can try to sneak in on their own. Infiltrating the capitol city where the spy was last heard from should be the tougher challenge. Guards patrol streets and city walls, border checkpoints have sophisticated technology to detect fake ID chips, and skirmishes with dissidents are not uncommon.

Once inside the city, the PCs must locate the spy. They don't know his exact location, but they know where to find contacts inside the city that should be able to offer leads. When they attempt to communicate with contacts, however, they find them dead or recently jailed as part of a government crackdown. They must try less obvious avenues.

The captain's route requires some skilled piloting, and will be a challenge for the PCs to traverse. When the PCs and the captain reach the planet, they'll find the captain's ship already there, and the mutineer won't be happy to see them. A skirmish between the two ships will begin in orbit and, when the tide turns against one ship or the other, continue on the planet's surface.

On the surface, the PCs must race the mutineer and his crew to the find. Can they stop him without further violence, or will they be forced to kill him to recover the find and reclaim the captain's ship?

If your campaign doesn't feature faster-than-light travel, then the mutineer simply doesn't know the planet's coordinates, and must search the captain's ship for them. This will create the delay needed for the PCs and the captain to arrive at the planet shortly after the mutineer.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) alliance, interplanetary, race, travel

Some clues can be found at the contacts' homes, though local authorities might be alerted if the PCs snoop around. If the PCs make themselves too obvious, the spy will find them and take them to a safe house. He says the government has been closely monitoring the city for possible espionage activity and tells them that they need to get out now.

While the PCs are in the safe house, the government will start a massive military sweep, making the city into even more of a police state. The PCs will have to fight or sneak out with the spy in order to prevent knowledge of their involvement. This should involve a string of close battles and obstacles such as spike strips and locked doors. You should react to the PCs' plans, giving them multiple options and building tension through background events that are going on concurrently.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) city, escort mission, intrigue, investigative, planet-based, shady, siege, social, spirit, stealth, tactical planning, trade, travel, twist, villain

Aliens enter the solar system and broadcast a welcome to the wider galactic community in stilted English. They announce that they are here to trade knowledge with humanity, and that their ship will orbit Mars for five years awaiting an expedition from Earth—they want to make sure that we’re “worthy” trading partners, which we can prove by sending a human crew into Mars orbit. Play out a street scene where newscasters cut to the message live and everyone reacts to this staggering news: celebrating, shrugging, rioting, and pronouncing the end of the world.

The world’s governments swiftly agree to assemble a multinational team to travel to Mars. The PCs should be members of the proposed expedition: astronauts, linguists, cryptography experts, biologists, scientists, and spies are all likely candidates. The crew will total 25 people; you’ll probably want to play out the recruitment itself, as well as a “getting to know each other” scene with the crew.

As the expedition’s ship nears completion, simulator training for the PCs becomes intense: They’re subjected to numerous simulated disasters, strange alien interactions, and doomsday scenarios. As training narrows to focus on the PCs, scenes of goodbyes to friends, family, and crew members who didn’t make cut the cut can be especially poignant.

During the journey, a crew member cracks and tries to sabotage the ship; she could be a member of an isolationist religious sect acting on secret orders, or someone who was driven mad by the loneliness of space.

When the PCs reach Mars, their first interaction with the aliens goes poorly. Despite precautions, the aliens—who are composed of rose- and lime-colored oblong shapes, linked together like sausages—unintentionally injure or kill several members of the PCs’ crew (perhaps they emit a hazardous gas, or use sonic machinery damaging to humans). Tensions run high while the PCs establish that the aliens aren’t attacking them, and then try to salvage the situation.

The aliens invite the PCs aboard their ship, the interior of which resembles a series of interwoven “spaghetti strands” barely navigable by humans. They explain how they travel the stars, share specifications for their ship’s engines, and ask for something equally valuable in exchange. What they want depends on your campaign, but it should be something humanity wouldn’t readily give up, possibly leading to an explosive confrontation. The aliens also reveal a dire threat to humanity—one that our species can only combat by taking to the stars.

This scenario makes an excellent starting point for a sci-fi campaign with a unique twist: The PCs get to play out first contact, and humanity is abruptly thrust onto the galactic stage.

Artist: Philip Miller



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) alliance, betrayal, epic impact, interplanetary, isolated area, monster, politics, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, social, travel, twist

Crime Pursued by Vengeance

Spaceport Feud

179

Two feuding families, the origin of their grievances long forgotten, both operate spaceship repair businesses in the same spaceport. Their conflict has involved minor crimes committed on both sides, and has escalated to blows on several occasions—and it now seems to have crossed the line into murder. A member of one family has been killed, her body dumped on their shop's doorstep. In fact, she was killed by a third party: another spaceport business owner who wants to see the families wipe each other out, as their feuding is bad for business.

If the PCs spend time in this area, you can bring out the details slowly, inviting them to explore the backstory behind the feud. If you need them to show up in the thick of it, a minor malfunction aboard their ship can prompt them to seek out the repair facility run by the murdered woman's family, where they'll get an earful about the feud and the murder.

While in for repairs, the PCs' ship is sabotaged. The repair shop claims it was agents of the other family, but to the PCs it looks as though the repair shop did the deed. In fact it was the third party, stirring the pot in the hopes of escalating the feud further—and while the PCs are figuring out how to handle

the sabotage, a ship crashes into the repair facility. Its engines went haywire in orbit, and although the crew was able to make a semi-controlled atmospheric entry, they couldn't avoid the crash. This ship was also sabotaged, the culprit being a software virus injector drone that was intended to burn up on entry.

The drone suggests the involvement of the other family, but when confronted they vehemently deny playing a role in the sabotage—and claim that the rival family is responsible. In time, the PCs discover the third party and have a chance to mend the rift between the families. They can also play a role in whether or not vengeance is taken upon the third party for the murder, or whether justice is carried out according to law. As long as the result is positive for the two families, the PCs will gain fast allies in this spaceport.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) innocent, interplanetary, investigative, isolated area, social, twist

Creating Your Own Worst Enemy

180

People in the poorest section of the city are regularly being torn apart or beaten to death, apparently without the use of weapons of any kind. The police are investigating more thoroughly than normal but aren't releasing any information. A crime syndicate is pulling strings to allocate funding and manpower to the investigation, as the area where the murders have occurred is part of their territory. The PCs might be hired by the police to investigate, get drawn into the situation helping an innocent affected by the attacks, or become involved after being attacked themselves.

A group of genetically and cybernetically modified pit fighters is behind the attacks. They were all enhanced by the syndicate, but broke free and are now enacting their revenge. They're smart, unique, and are controlled by a determined leader. If the fighters succeed, the syndicate will be crippled—but at the cost of many innocent bystanders.

Few people will reveal information about the fighters: some support their cause and others are just too scared to talk. A particularly greedy fence (to whom the fighters sell the spoils of their attacks) can be coerced into giving up information. The PCs should be able to track down at least one of the fighters, preferably in the middle of attempting a covert crime. He proves tough on his own, but

will escape to the fighters' sewer lair if given the opportunity.

If the PCs tail him there, they'll find the rest of the fighters gathered there for a strategy meeting. If the PCs lose the trail, the opportunity to track a fighter back to the lair will arise again at different attack site. Traces of the fighters can also be found through hacking, as one fighter regularly communicates with faraway family members using public terminals.

The fighters are open to discussing the situation with non-hostile PCs, explaining that they're vigilantes fighting corruption and evil. They are, however, a hotheaded bunch and will attack if they feel threatened. If the PCs bring the fighters in, they receive a reward from the police or the crime syndicate. If the PCs side with the fighters or convince them to be more careful of innocents, the fighters will share the spoils of their attacks and provide any information they can to the PCs, but the syndicate will mark the PCs as targets and will become a serious threat.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers

Tags: (JA) alliance, city, planet-based, social, tactical planning

Blind Friendship

181

The PCs receive a video message from a friend who they haven't seen in some time. The friend is in an orbital shuttle and looks panicked. He says that he has become the target of a local crime lord and he needs help, and he gives them a set of coordinates. Then there's an explosion, the screen goes black, and the message ends.

The PCs travel to the system the friend specified, and no sooner have they arrived in-system than they are attacked by a small force of hostile ships. The pilots are hired thugs, and even if defeated and interrogated they can't reveal their employer: They were hired through a blind system via a third party.

When the PCs arrive at the coordinates, an armed group is surveying the wreckage of the shuttle. They're members of the crime lord's outfit, and are looking for proof of the friend's death. Depending on how the PCs present themselves, this could turn into a conflict.

If the crime boss is confronted, he will deny any involvement in the death of their friend. He'll admit that he disliked the friend, but insists that he didn't have a hand in his murder. The PCs can go down one of two paths: They can investigate the crash site, where they will discover clues that this was no accident and that their friend wasn't in the ship when it exploded—

everything was staged; or they can attack the crime boss and his organization in revenge for the death of their friend.

At the conclusion of whichever path they choose, their friend will reveal himself to them. If they discovered the faked crash, he'll admit that he set the whole thing up in the hope that the PCs would take out the crime boss for him, so that he could take over the crime organization. If they killed the crime boss, he will reveal himself after the man's death and thank the PCs for their help.

Either way, the PCs aren't likely to be happy with the situation. This can be a springboard for future adventures, with their former friend as a new enemy—and perhaps a powerful crime lord, as well.

For this plot to work well, the “assassination” and the attack must appear to be the work of the crime boss, but the PCs should never be completely certain that he's responsible. Your players should be second-guessing themselves until they commit to a course of action.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PV) betrayal, interplanetary, intrigue, investigative, relationship hook, shady, social, twist

Plague Times

182

A plague strikes the slums of a major city, and officials scramble to quarantine the district while researchers begin looking into the disease. Military or corporate troops (or both) guard the perimeter and enforce the quarantine; they wear full body armor and filtration gear, and have orders to shoot on sight. The PCs are hired anonymously by someone with deep pockets and tasked with escorting a doctor, two nurses, and a corporate executive into the quarantine zone.

The executive explains that her company has found a cure for the plague, which she will be distributing to the people inside the zone. In actuality, while performing genetic research her company accidentally created the virus that caused the plague, and wants to quietly solve the problem before a full investigation takes place. After the entire team has been inoculated, the group enters the quarantine zone.

Their first problem is convincing the quarantined people, who are terrified and angry, that the cure is real. Some want to attack the group, while others simply don't believe the cure is real. Many speculate loudly that her corporation is simply engaging in medical experimentation on the cheap. Dozens of people die inside the zone that night. After 24 hours, however, those who were convinced to accept the vaccination have recovered completely—and the PCs are mobbed by dozens, then hundreds of others who want the vaccination.

It's up to the PCs to figure out how to keep the small medical team safe while still allowing them to perform their jobs; no one else on the team can fight, or knows anything about tactics. On the second day, they'll face a coordinated assault spearheaded by infected thugs who were hired by a local criminal organization; their aim is to take the vaccine supply for their own.

That night, the team's doctor approaches the PCs in secret and says that he believes the executive's vaccine is just a tweaked version of the plague virus itself—meaning that her company created the original virus. The next morning, the executive tells the team that a shipment of the vaccine will be air-dropped into the zone; they didn't know how many doses to bring, and they need more (which is true). The PCs must protect the drop zone from another attack by the same group or a different faction, complete the vaccinations, and then decide what to do with the doctor's information.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) alliance, betrayal, city, escort mission, innocent, isolated area, planet-based, siege, social, tactical planning, twist

Murder Most Foul

183

Two settlements on a frontier planet claim mining rights to a resource-rich region that lies between them. One settlement is older, but the other one is closer to the region. The fight between the two settlements has been long and occasionally violent, but the case has finally been settled in court. The oldest settlement was rewarded rights to 80% of the region, with the remainder going to the closer settlement. It was also stipulated that any mining done in the region cannot interfere with the water supply.

At the older settlement's official celebration of the victory, an explosion rips through the crowd. Despite the closer settlement's claim of innocence, and the calls for peace from their own leaders, some of the older settlement's citizens exact a little vengeance that very night. A range war erupts.

The real culprits are a secret alliance of citizens from the older settlement who don't want to see any more development. Some are simply afraid of change, some claim to speak for the environment, and others have their own personal agenda. They have informants in the police and government, and aren't afraid of spilling blood to achieve their goals.

Many clues will lead to the organization: the source of the explosives, suspicious figures seen before the explosion,

someone trying to interfere with the investigation, and overheard conversations. Not all of the members condone the violence, especially given the size of the deadly explosion; some may try to help the PCs. However, if the PCs start getting close, they'll be invited to meet with someone claiming to know who's behind the attack—only to find an ambush, possibly involving more explosives.

Further clues lead to a mining widow's house, where the in-town organization is run. She's bitter about her husband's death in a mining accident, and has used the large settlement from his passing to sponsor the organization. She hates the mining company and will argue and fight to the bitter end, possibly trying to take out the party and herself with explosives.

The organization makes a final stand in a well-stocked hideout in a cave complex on the contested land. A map in the widow's house shows the location of the complex, but nothing more.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (KS) betrayal, city, intrigue, investigative, planet-based, politics, trade, villain

Vengeance Taken for Kindred upon Kindred

Between a Rock ...

184

The PCs land on a sparsely populated planet to resupply, and while they're at a market in a larger town, a bomb goes off in the area and rebels attack the town. While shooting into the crowd, they drop propaganda about the plight of the outlying regions, human rights violations, and the murder of their leader. The rebels are repelled, but off-planet travel is restricted until the rebels are caught. Ships are denied exit from ports, and shot down if they attempt to leave. The increasingly oppressive government deploys cruisers above the planet to apprehend any ships that find a way out. The PCs are stranded.

The people's loyalties are divided. Many support the rebels' cause, but many others regard them as terrorists. The government offers rewards and bounties on various rebels, including off-planet rights and a pledge to lift all travel restrictions once the rebel leader is captured or killed. The PCs might hunt down a rebel to gain exit rights, but if not, a rebel seeks out the PCs and asks for help with their righteous cause. From the rebel the PCs can learn the password, time, and address of a rebel gathering.

The rebels' cause and the authorities' position shouldn't

be black and white, but shades of gray. The government is draconian, but they're trying to preserve order. The rebels are idealists, but are also chaotic and violent. Provide information on both sides and let the players decide who, if anyone, is in the right.

The PCs can ally with the rebels or the authorities, or chart their own course between the two. The rebels plan to attack the spaceport and use its guns against the cruisers. The gun controls are in multiple buildings, guarded by soldiers, snipers, and coded security doors. The rebels have more men and some door codes, but need to work quickly to utilize their advantage. Whether defending or trying to take the control buildings, the PCs have a hard fight ahead of them. Depending on the side they chose and who wins the climactic battle, the PCs will either have help getting off the planet, or the travel restrictions will be lifted.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) alliance, difficult choice, intrigue, planet-based, politics, rebellion, sandbox, social

On an inhospitable world with a handful of settlements, valuable mineral resources, and a space elevator that leads to a vibrant orbital community, crime is dominated by a single, sprawling family. This family has many ties to non-criminals on the planet and in orbit through intermarriage, so thieves and smugglers often have law-abiding kin throughout the region. A new law enforcement official was brought in by the entity that owns the space elevator, and in one fell swoop he captured the family's kingpin and his council. Before anyone had time to react, he executed the kingpin—and people on the planet and in orbit rose up against him, laying siege to the orbital station where he has his headquarters. He shut down the space elevator in retaliation.

The PCs can be recruited by the official, the crime family, or the law-abiding citizens of the region. All three groups have the same overarching goal—to resume space elevator operations and let the planet return to peaceful productivity—but varying personal goals. The family wants the official dead, and a return to the old status quo; the official wants the family's influence reduced, starting with the execution of their council; and the locals just want to get back to doing business.

Whatever side the PCs are on, the three factions will take their own actions throughout the adventure; how the PCs

act and react will determine the specific scenes that you play out. The official, not wanting to seem weak, will try to break the siege without calling for backup, and will threaten to execute the council. The crime family will try to assassinate the official, correctly guessing that his removal will solve their problems. The locals will try to broker a peace while staying out of the way.

Later, the family will mount an attack to test the official's defenses, and try to use that distraction to sneak in their assassins. The sheriff will make a false peace offer, and use it as cover to fire orbital weapons at one of the family's planetary facilities. Enraged, the family will kidnap the official's children as hostages, prompting a standoff—and the locals, many of whom died in the bombardment, will side with the family. This will make the official desperate, and he will try to destroy the space elevator outright—which would doom the planet's economic future.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) alliance, difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, intrigue, isolated area, planet-based, politics, rebellion, sandbox, shady, siege, social, stealth, tactical planning, trade

Two Households, Both Alike in Dignity

On a distant mining world, two families run most of the businesses in the planet's lone city. One runs the starport and the ore market, while the other runs the majority of the hotels and entertainment venues in town. The tension between the two families has recently reached critical mass. The PCs land just in time to be caught in the middle of a gun battle between the two sides, and witness the sheriff getting cut down as he tries to stop it. Until something is done about this feud, whatever the PCs came to this world to accomplish simply won't be doable.

The head of the hoteliers' family recently died, and his hot-tempered son has taken over. Several members of the starport family were partying hard in the nicest cathouse in town, and there was a brawl. Brawls aren't uncommon, but after a drunken argument over a woman this one turned ugly, fast. The cathouse was trashed and one of the hoteliers was killed.

The hoteliers demanded that the other family pay them blood money and rebuild the cathouse. The starport family refused but counter-offered free transport of materials to aid in the rebuilding effort. Since then, fights have broken out, the ore-market has shut down after a bombing, and family members on both sides have been killed. The city's economy has halted as the two sides crank up the security and look for hired guns.

While the situation is bad, the PCs do have assets. The position of sheriff is open, and still carries authority for anyone willing to claim it. A fair number of unemployed workers wish to steer clear of the feud, but will follow anyone who steps up and takes charge. And, while explosives and thugs are abundant, there is no serious weaponry on the planet and none of the inhabitants have military expertise.

The families could be forced to negotiate, although the PCs' authority to do so will be challenged. Either side will respond to perceived aggression by sending a hit squad led by a family member. A diplomatic approach requires earning both sides' trust by doing favors for them while not alienating the other side, and then finally resolving their differences. The hoteliers need orbital transportation (of people, medicine, food, etc.), and the starport family needs ready access to high-end accommodations for their VIP customers.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Western

Tags: (KS) alliance, city, intrigue, planet-based, politics, rebellion, sandbox, social, tactical planning, trade

The Abel Protocol

187

The PCs have been getting some much-needed rest and relaxation on a space station, and as they go about their business one or more of the PCs gets caught in malfunctioning airlock. The PCs narrowly escape, but several NPCs are ejected into space without suits. An hour later, another PC is trapped in a section of the station that fills with toxic gas—caused by another malfunction—and barely avoids being killed. The station's operators are now extremely worried about the possibility of a system-wide failure or a saboteur on the station, and they ask the PCs for help.

Upon inspection of station logs and security footage, a single man is observed near the scene of both incidents. Security picks him up for questioning. While being questioned, the man is nervous, but insists that he's innocent. A power unit in the interrogation room explodes, and the man escapes.

A manhunt begins, with the PCs assisting station personnel. During the hunt, the PCs investigate the station's computer system and uncover evidence that suggests that the airlock and gas malfunctions were computer-related. Isolating some specific code, they see that both malfunctions were apparently assassination attempts against the missing man.

Unbeknownst to the PCs, a rogue AI is loose in the station's computer system, and it has tracked the man to an area near the station's reactor core. The AI has initiated a reactor meltdown in order to kill the man. The AI plans to download itself into a life pod and escape before the station is destroyed.

The PCs will need to capture the man to find out why the AI has targeted him, while at the same time stopping the core meltdown. When the man is found, he again protests that he's innocent; the PCs must convince him to tell them the truth. When they do, he will confess that he killed his brother, his scientific rival, over a recent discovery. At this, the AI will stand down and allow the man to be taken into custody for the murder: It is a personality imprint of the man's brother, created as an insurance policy in the event of his death, and it was seeking revenge.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) artificial life form, deadline, innocent, investigative, planet-based

Pursuit

Search and Destroy

188

Rumors have begun to spread that a notorious space pirate is planning a big heist. The PCs have been hired to capture or kill him before he can pull it off. Their employer pays them half of the bounty up front, and can loan them a ship if necessary (a retrofitted freighter with light weapons and radiation shields). He also tells them the pirate's rumored whereabouts: an uninhabited system known for its trinary star, high radiation levels, and dangerous asteroid belts.

The trinary system is a hellish place, with six planets baked by the triple sun and millions of asteroids spread throughout space, as well as in belts around each planet. Radiation levels from the suns are incredibly high on all but the most distant planet, making that world and its asteroid belt the most likely hiding places for the pirate. When the PCs arrive, a heavy magnetic storm is underway, making entry into the system difficult even for a skilled pilot. They also pick up a weak distress signal from one of the inner worlds; its coding indicates a small freighter.

The signal is actually from a pirate vessel, though not the pirate the PCs are after: It's one of his rivals, who arrived earlier and tried to take him out. The pirate shot them down and left

them to die—in a few hours, their radiation shielding will fail. If the PCs rescue them, the stranded pirates will tell them that their target has set up space mines all around the best hiding spots, and is actually lurking on the far side of one of the suns in a heavily shielded ship. If the PCs get the drop on him, they may be able to disable his engines before he can flee. If not, he'll use the suns to his advantage, leading them on a chase that skims dangerously close to the suns before venturing into one of the large asteroid belts.

During the pursuit, another ship will enter the system: a mercenary group's heavy cruiser, capable of destroying both the PCs and the pirate ship with relative ease. They signal the PCs to break off and let them claim their quarry. Moments later, the pirate signals that if the PCs help him escape, he will pay them twice whatever they would have earned for capturing him.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Space Opera, Swashbuckling

Tags: (MR) difficult choice, interplanetary, isolated area, race, rivalry, shady, social, tactical planning, travel, twist, villain

Without warning, an alien craft in orbit around a technologically advanced world steals the AI that controls the entire planet's information and communication network. The craft broadcasted no warnings, made no demands, and did nothing suspicious prior to pulling off its spectacular theft—a theft no one would have thought possible. It takes hours for the authorities to figure out what happened, and in the chaos of the network's collapse all manner of minor and major disasters occur planet-wide. A planetary distress signal is broadcast, and the PCs are in range.

The PCs receive a jumbled, low-grade signal requesting urgent assistance that contains a description of the alien craft and what it stole, as well as its last known trajectory. The PCs must track down this ship and recover the AI.

In fact, the AI wasn't stolen: It was borrowed by aliens who seek to "mate" the AI with the planetary AI on their home world, a process which would make their own AI more advanced. Knowing that no one would give up a planetary AI, they kidnapped this one and are en route to their home world—but the stolen AI is causing problems for them: It wants to escape its captors.

The chase is on, and in the course of this adventure the PCs will face the following challenges: navigation through space hazards (a nebula, an asteroid field, etc.); a coded signal from the kidnapped AI, which piggybacks the signal and tries to take over their ship's computer in a last-ditch escape attempt—causing a massive system failure that requires a reboot, during which time they must try to keep the ship from falling apart; and a skirmish with alien interceptors sent to delay the PCs.

The finale is a confrontation with the alien ship, which has been weakened by the AI's constant attempts to shut it down. When the PCs have the upper hand, the aliens will surrender and share their plan with the party. Will the PCs allow the mating to take place? Can they forge a relationship with the aliens? Or will they punish the aliens for the harm they caused to the AI's planet?



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera

Tags: (PV) artificial life form, difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, interplanetary, race, travel

The Quickest Path between Two Points

A small section of an interplanetary trade route has become known as "Dead Man's Pass" due to the numerous pirate attacks in the area. The planets at either end of the trade route are starting to suffer greatly from a lack of supplies. The military has no idea how the pirate ships are getting into the area, and survivors of attacks report no long-range ships being used by the pirates. The military hires the PCs to look into the issue, thinking that a civilian group might be able to better infiltrate the pirates' ranks.

The PCs are tasked with finding out where the ships are coming from. Once they've located the pirates' base, they are to activate an encoded transmitter that will call in a fleet to destroy it. The PCs are left to their own devices as to how to find the base.

The PCs might try to join the pirates, pretending a desire to take up a life of piracy. They may be able to trace stolen goods through the black market in order to contact the pirates. The pirates operate in many sectors and won't immediately reveal the secret of Dead Man's Pass unless the PCs prove their loyalty. The PCs may encounter a sub-lieutenant who is talkative and friendly, and who becomes open to bribes or talks too much when drunk. The PCs might

get their ship captured, pretending to be carrying colonists or valuable goods, or rig an old cargo carrier (which the military can provide) with a remote control system and follow it. These are just a few options—see what your players come up with and incorporate their plans into the resolution.

The pirates have outfitted a derelict ship of incredible size with a fast, powerful engine. It has no maneuverability but acts like a high-speed train when it can travel along a straight, obstruction-free path between two locations. The pirates use this to transport their huge fleet of small ships—all of which fit inside the carved-out hull—to and from their distant base. Once the PCs have found the location of the base, they can activate the transmitter—which will inevitably be detected by the pirates, revealing the PCs. The PCs will have to hold out until the military gets there, which will take a while since the base is further away than they anticipated.



Artist: Laine Garrett



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling

Tags: (JA) alliance, interplanetary, investigative, sandbox, shady, trade, travel

Test Run

191

The assistant to the powerful CEO of an aerospace company contacts the PCs about a very discreet, highly lucrative job. In the initial interview, the assistant delves into the PCs' capabilities and backgrounds. The PCs then meet with the CEO (no weapons allowed), who tells them that one of his most trusted employees has disappeared along with some critical information, and that she must be found. He offers the PCs the use of a very fast experimental ship if they're willing to test it out for him. He also provides them with information concerning the employee, and offers a substantial bonus if the employee can be returned without stockholders, the authorities, or company valuers finding out.

The ship is an experimental craft with capabilities exceeding almost every other vessel out there, though it isn't all that reliable. Possible abilities include stunning speed and maneuverability, cloaking, covert "piggybacking" (flying within another ship's blind spot, almost hull-to-hull), eavesdropping, and sensor jamming. Shortly after the party departs on their mission, the entire sector is placed on high alert for the theft of an experimental military craft by persons considered armed and extremely dangerous.

If the party contacts the CEO for help, he simply says, "Don't

worry about finding that employee; you've got your hands full. After all, you did agree to test the craft for me, and this sounds like a great test." He then disconnects and ignores future calls.

In order to clear their name, the party must avoid capture using the ship's experimental capabilities while making their way back to the starting planet. They should then gain entrance to the corporate HQ, a feat made difficult by the building's high alert status. Once inside, they must avoid security and track down the CEO, who won't be easy to find as he isn't in his office. Once confronted, the CEO will call off the dogs, congratulate the PCs on their success and even offer them a sizable check for their troubles.

To make the PCs' lives easier, the CEO's assistant may offer advice to them via the ship's communications system; he can do so out of sympathy for the party or a desire to advance his own career.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk

Tags: (KS) bearers, betrayal, interplanetary, intrigue, investigative, shady, stealth, travel, twist

Shiny Toy Guns

192

When the PCs arrive on a new world, they are detained in the spaceport while some of their weapons are examined by technicians. The techs tell them that someone recently attempted to assassinate the planetary governor, and that all weapons matching the type used in the crime must be inspected. The techs then disappear, returning hours later with military police: They're there to arrest one of the PCs for trying to kill the governor, and the others as accessories.

Behind the scenes, the criminal cartel responsible for the assassination attempt has bribed one of the technicians to falsely identify one of the PCs' guns as the assassin's discarded weapon. The cartel has identified the PCs as a group capable of carrying out the assassination, and wants to force them to make a second attempt on their behalf.

If the PCs resist arrest, they can likely overcome the police; this will force them to go on the lam, as the planet is already on high alert. If they go quietly, they will be taken to a maximum-security prison outside the main city. That night (likely after they have tried an escape attempt of their own, to no avail), the PCs' cell doors are all mysteriously unlocked at the same time. Exiting their cells, they must evade the lighter-than-usual guard patrols and make their escape.

The cartel is behind this, as well, and while the PCs are laying low and figuring out what to do, they're approached by a cartel

representative. She offers them a large sum of money and free passage off-world if they assassinate the governor. If the PCs accept, they can buy themselves time to expose the cartel's involvement and prove their own innocence. Arranging another meeting and recording the proceedings is the simplest way to go about this—but they are under cartel observation.

When the cartel catches wind of the PCs' scheme, they send a large force of mercenary killers to take them out. As the tide turns against the mercenaries and the battle moves out into a public area, the cartel decides to intervene directly, and sends two of their gunships to polish off the PCs once and for all. The authorities are drawn to the scene, resulting in a chaotic all-out battle. Because of the gunships, the PCs now have the proof they need that the cartel was behind the assassination attempt, and not them.

This adventure can be an excellent way to set the stage for a larger story arc revolving around conflict between the government and the cartel, with the PCs in the thick of things.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) city, combat-heavy, difficult choice, epic challenge, epic impact, interplanetary, mass combat, politics, rebellion, shady, stealth, villain

Disaster

Cyclone

193

A strong summer storm hits the decadent coastal city where the PCs are enjoying a bit of rest and relaxation. The storm quickly builds into a real monster, catching everyone off guard. The storm devastates the city, and law and order breaks down as fear and opportunistic crime take over. Flying becomes nearly impossible in the rising winds, and even ground transportation is difficult as the waters rise and trees and buildings fall across the roads.

The PCs hear that a rundown nursing home located on low ground has not yet been evacuated, although the caregivers have already fled. Dozens of patients, all of whom have some kind of disability, need to be calmed down and somehow escorted to safer ground.

The corrupt government collapses in the face of the storm, and the PCs may insert themselves into the leadership vacuum or may work as independent troubleshooters. Reports come in of people needing assistance: a local police station that's flooding, a group trying to break into a shopping complex (either out of desperation or greed), and a pumping station in need of a fuel delivery. The PCs can't help everyone at the

same time, and must decide where they're most needed.

Any outdoor activity is impossible as the storm hits, but there's more to do as it fades, from rescuing wealthy guests at a five-star resort from looters to escorting prisoners from a flooded jail. Food, medicine, and supplies need to be delivered and safeguarded. Someone needs to reassure and possibly inspire the locals.

Outside help will eventually arrive to relieve the PCs of their responsibilities, but it will take some time. Nearly every craft in the spaceport is damaged, as is the facility itself and the roads leading out of town are blocked. Low-tech solutions may work best in such a situation, and frontier or military skills will come in handy.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) city, epic impact, escort mission, innocent, mature themes, planet-based

A Second Sun

194

A doomsday weapon is launched into the planet's atmosphere and begins rapidly converting air molecules into pure heat. The area below the suspended warhead is rapidly baked by this several-thousand-degree miniature sun, and atmospheric pressure declines around the world as air is sucked in and consumed at a terrible rate.

Surviving the initial panic is the first major challenge for the PCs in this adventure. Stockpiling and looting are commonplace. People rush to spaceports on the side of the planet furthest away from the new sun, and mines become popular for their heat shielding. Re-breathers and masks are fiercely fought over by those who cannot quickly flee the planet.

Once the situation has stabilized somewhat, which could take days and can be abstracted to suit your game, the PCs can begin trying to neutralize the weapon. Research will reveal that it was created by an ancient alien culture thought to have died out millennia ago. Their weapons were harmonically controlled, and if the right harmonics can be applied to this weapon it may shut down. Approaching the weapon is almost impossible, and beaming a harmonic pulse from a distance distorts its effects too greatly. A heavily shielded projectile carrying a harmonic payload might do the trick; other options specific to your setting may also provide methods to overcome the threat.

After the weapon has been disabled—saving the world—the PCs can try to track down the ship that launched the attack. A faint sensor trail suggests that the weapon coasted into planetary orbit after a slingshot maneuver around the planet's moon. Monitoring stations there can provide further clues, eventually leading the PCs to the offending ship.

When the PCs catch up to the ship, they find that it is a retrofitted merchant vessel, not a warship of any kind, and its armaments are quite light. If they open communications with the ship, the captain will acknowledge that he took on a contract to dump a sealed cargo container on a slingshot trajectory around the moon—he assumed it was a smuggling run, and had no idea the container housed a weapon. He offers to take the PCs to his employer, a representative of an alien race that, as the PCs will learn, sought to “clear out the vermin” and prepare the planet for a mining project in a few hundred years. This can be a springboard for further adventures.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) deadline, epic challenge, epic impact, interplanetary, investigative, race, travel, villain

Hull Breach

195

The PCs are aboard a space station when klaxons begin to wail: A hull breach is in progress in a nearby sector—and then in the sector adjacent to that one, and then in one even closer to them. Soon the PCs are running ahead the breach, desperately seeking a safe area.

When they have time to collect themselves, they see that the breaches are spreading out from one compartment. If the reason for the breaches isn't determined, and something isn't done to stop it, the entire station will be torn apart.

What happened is that a science project being developed in a station lab has had an unexpected side effect. A research group was creating nanites for ore processing, but made some programming errors: The nanites now decompose the main element found in the hulls of space ships and the exteriors of space stations. A power fluctuation in the containment system released them into the station, and they are now spreading from section to section and weakening the station's exterior.

As they race to stop the spread of the nanites, the PCs will have to rescue a group of civilians who are trapped in a rapidly decaying section of the station. They'll also need to obtain

a sample of material from a contaminated area, which will require going into a decaying section of the station and staying long enough to get a decent-sized sample.

Once they have a sample, it will need to be analyzed; this will lead the PCs to discover the nanites, and identify what specific material they're disassembling. Tracking down survivors of the original collapsed section, the lab, will lead them to a researcher who is now trapped in another failing section. Rescuing him is the key to creating counter-nanites that can arrest the decay of the space station's structure, saving everyone aboard.

This is a non-combat adventure, and the PCs will need a good mix of scientific and technical skills to solve the mystery and save the station; a combat-oriented group likely won't enjoy this adventure. If the PCs own a ship and consider escape, infect their ship to keep the pressure on.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Space Opera, Supernatural

Tags: (PV) artificial life form, deadline, innocent, investigative, planet-based

Peace Summit

196

Five leaders of various factions are meeting for a peace and trade summit; the summit is expected to benefit the entire region and prevent infighting. Unfortunately, the station is attacked by pirates. All means of outside communication are jammed, and the station's security forces are dead or cut off from the faction leaders. Much of the station is ruined, with limited internal communications and electricity, though life support still functions. The PCs are on board and are close enough to escort the leaders to an escape vessel.

A speaker buzzes to life near the PCs. The security chief is watching them on camera, and he begs for their help. He can direct the PCs to the leaders, but they'll have to use access tubes, open sealed doors, and fight or bypass the pirates that are looting the station. This portion of the adventure should be a desperate rush through a disaster scene to reach the PCs' goal. Set a timer or put emphasis on dangling, sparking wires and buckling walls for added effect.

One of the factions actually staged the pirate attack. Clues such as types of weapons employed, the structure of the pirate group, and the commands used by the pirates will point toward one of the factions. This shouldn't be revealed right away, but should become increasingly evident as the PCs progress through the adventure.

When the PCs arrive, they find the leaders safe and engaged in their favorite pastime: incessant bickering. Some want to wait for military troops to arrive, while others want to attempt an

escape immediately. During the argument, a pirate breaks in and tries to kill one of the leaders; this convinces them that they need to leave. The way to safety, be it on the PCs' ship or another transport, must be along a different route because of new damage to the station. More pirates and obstacles will be encountered, now with the added hassle of protecting the leaders.

Once on board their transport, the security chief gives the PCs the coordinates for a safe location. One of the leaders becomes appreciably nervous at this suggestion. Once the PCs are near, the nervous leader reveals a bomb and tries to hijack the ship and reroute it to a new destination. The standoff should be tense, but leave options open for the PCs to win. Once he has been overcome, the PCs can turn the leader in and collect a decent reward from the other four factions. The leaders then finish the talks and impose sanctions against the rogue faction.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) alliance, betrayal, combat-heavy, deadline, dungeon crawl, epic impact, escort mission, innocent, investigative, isolated area, planet-based, politics, race, siege, social, travel, twist, villain

While the PCs are at a spaceport, they see a passenger exit a freighter, step into the sunlight, and explode in a cloud of dust. The freighter has just returned from a remote colony world, and it brought with it a virus that turns people into what are essentially vampires. Several others who are unknowingly carrying the virus have already disembarked, and are now scattered throughout the spaceport.

The virus can be passed either through the mucus membranes (like the flu), or directly when a “vampire” feeds. It takes 12 hours for an infected person to become a vampire, but they begin showing signs around the four-hour mark. As this is a new virus, there is no cure—although certain flu vaccines can slow the change and some cancer drugs can delay it for much longer. Infected people become stronger and faster, grow fangs, and require human blood to survive; they also turn to dust when exposed to sunlight, but aren’t affected by garlic, crosses, etc.

The spaceport is put in lockdown mode immediately, before any ships can depart. Port authorities also quarantine the freighter and try to round up those passengers who had already disembarked. They miss three of them, and within hours these three have become vampires. Until a medical frigate arrives, port authorities intend to keep the port locked down—and the frigate is eight hours away.

It doesn’t take long to learn the incubation period of the virus, so the PCs will know that even if they are infected, they won’t turn into vampires before the frigate arrives to help. They can investigate the freighter and talk to the quarantined crew, who will describe the colony world where the virus originated. While on board, they’re spotted by a true vampire from the colony, for whom the spread of the virus means the continuation of his species. He will shadow them as they try to deal with the situation and then strike when the moment is right.

The three vampires in the spaceport will also begin killing guards and port officials. They are the main vectors for the spread of the virus, but as hours pass, more people (and perhaps the PCs) will begin showing signs of infection as well. The PCs need to hold out until the frigate arrives, and keep the port from descending into anarchy. The frigate will be able to create a cure within a few hours of its arrival.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) city, combat-heavy, innocent, interplanetary, investigative, isolated area, madness, monster, race, sandbox, siege, social, villain

Falling Prey to Cruelty or Misfortune

When Two Disasters Just Won’t Do the Trick

The PCs are hired to infiltrate enemy lines on a war-torn planet, slipping in disguised as merchants as part of a trade caravan. The planet has been wracked by war for years, but normal life continues—including trade, which is vital for resupplying both armies. The caravan is a ragtag collection of converted armored personnel carriers, open-topped flatbed crawlers, and smaller personal vehicles. Only the caravan master is aware of the PCs’ true identities.

Once through enemy lines, the PCs have time for some scouting. Narrowly avoiding military patrols, they gather some good intelligence for their employer—including the fact that the army is nearly done building a planet-busting weapon of truly epic destructive power. Before they can get back to the caravan, a storm rolls in, and within 10 minutes, the storm is blasting them with hail fierce enough to tear through clothing.

Struggling through the storm, the PCs find themselves in a landslide zone. The sudden influx of water and hail is causing mudslides throughout the enemy encampment, and the PCs are thrown in with several groups of enemy soldiers. Too worried about survival to care about the spies in their midst—for

the moment, at least—the soldiers join up with them and they all try to get to safer ground.

Reaching high ground, the PCs see that the entire field hospital is just minutes away from being destroyed by an earthquake, the third disaster to strike since they arrived. They must rescue the patients and get as many people as possible to safety.

When the dust clears and the storm abates, they have several quandaries to face. Having fought side-by-side with the soldiers, do they still want to complete their mission? Can they afford not to share news of the planet-busting weapon? And as three disasters striking in a row isn’t a normal occurrence, is it possible that they were caused by a similarly destructive weapon used by the enemy?



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) alliance, difficult choice, intrigue, planet-based, politics, race, roleplaying-heavy, social

Cash Crops

199

The colony's newly elected council decides to grow cash crops instead of food in order to invest in a new startup venture. Unfortunately, the deal turns out to be a scam and the colony suddenly finds itself with no food, no means to buy food, and no money for necessary repairs to life support systems. It becomes common knowledge in certain circles that the council is looking for someone to reacquire their money by any means necessary. Be sure to keep the urgency and fate of the colony present in the PCs' minds throughout this adventure.

The scammers are a pair of well-known grifters traveling in a unique spaceship. They can be tracked by interviewing those who have had recent contact with them. Also, hacking a database of manifests shows that the grifters never stay in one place for too long, but have a stable pattern of movement. They have a good contact network, and quickly realize that they're being followed. Once the grifters know that the PCs are on their tail, they'll attempt to poison the well by painting the PCs as the scammers. The PCs will suddenly find that some people are unwilling to assist their pursuit.

The PCs can find a definite clue to the grifters' whereabouts in one specific way, however. One of them is quite amorous, and

Pride of Ownership

A friend of the PCs gifts them with a slave that he recently bought on the cheap at auction. He confides that the slave, a young boy, is hopeless at most tasks, but can read and write. The boy is quiet, tries not to draw attention to himself, and is willing to work hard. He lacks experience with most tasks, but learns quickly.

If his new owners free him or take an interest in his past, he explains calmly that his father owned a large corporation and that he was kidnapped when he was four years old. He doesn't remember the company's name, but might recognize the symbol if the PCs show him some corporate logos.

Investigating the boy's situation reveals that someone has put traps and traces in place to entangle data-hunters, and the PCs may be caught if they search too casually. The presence of those keyword traps should make the PCs suspicious.

The PCs are attacked by a hit team sent by the boy's uncle, who is the person responsible for his kidnapping and enslavement. He sought to make the boy disappear for sinister reasons of his own (which can vary depending on your campaign), and

has many lovers and a few children. He keeps in contact with some of the mothers, and they can provide a true and accurate route to him.

When confronted, the grifters will attempt to flee. However, the authorities have no love for these con artists and will grant the PCs permission to use any force necessary to stop them. The grifters aren't great in a fight, but are very cunning and make sure to set up traps and bolt holes in their regular locations. When captured, the PCs must find a way to extract the funds. The con artists will bow to pressure, but fear jail more than torture. An interesting twist is to find a way for the PCs to scam the grifters themselves, possibly taking advantage of the combined enmity of the multitudes who hate them.

Artist: Laine Garrett



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) interplanetary, investigative, politics, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, shady, social, twist, villain

200

is angered to find that his plan failed. When the PCs try to get in touch with the boy's parents, they're stymied by the layers of bureaucracy protecting the family from unwanted contact. Their efforts also alert the uncle, who "goes on vacation" before the truth comes out.

Once contact is made with the boy's parents, the uncle's last surprise comes into play: At the reunion, one of the father's two bodyguards—a formidable foe—murders his partner before attempting to kill the father and the PCs. If the PCs can protect the father, he'll be grateful—and he'll ask them to help him end the uncle's threat to his family and to the corporation. The PCs must track down the uncle, who will simultaneously be using his connections to try and take over the company from within.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) escort mission, innocent, investigative, planet-based, politics, race, relationship hook, twist, villain

The Protectors

201

While visiting a friend or making a delivery run to a backwater planet—a former war zone that now endures prolonged military occupation—the party is begged by a frightened native to rescue her young brother. The brother has been kidnapped and is going to be sold as a prostitute.

The kidnapers are members of the occupying force. They're misusing their authority in the worst way possible, and selling the local children into slavery. The rescue is pretty straightforward: find the building, sneak or force their way in, and rescue the boy. A complication arises when the party discovers the scope of operation. Scores of young boys and girls are being shipped off-planet, and there's evidence that the local government, up to the highest ranking official, is involved.

The war zone is quite large, and although the PCs will be hunted after the rescue, the party shouldn't have too much of a problem finding allies and hiding places. Weapons are available but not easy to come by, and aren't of very good quality. Once the party gets involved in the situation, they find that the natives are ready to re-declare war, this time on the occupiers. They also know that unless the truth is exposed, a renewed war will draw harsh disapproval from the rest of the galactic sector.

The off-planet headquarters of the occupying force is willing to begin investigations into the situation, but must have solid evidence brought before them. The local media have been scared into silence, but will cover the story if their protection can be guaranteed. Larger news organizations are currently unaware of the situation, but would definitely be interested in a bombshell like this.

The party may take a number of approaches. They can try to lead a rebellion against the occupiers and negotiate from a position of strength, which will involve direct attacks. They can focus on rescuing as many of the children as possible, or they can try to take evidence to the commanders of the occupying military organization. Within all of these solutions, the opportunity to involve the news organizations presents itself.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Supernatural, Western

Tags: (KS) city, difficult choice, innocent, intrigue, investigative, mass combat, mature themes, planet-based, politics, rebellion, sandbox, social, stealth, tactical planning, trade

Hive Mind

202

The PCs intercept a distress call from a medical freighter that's delivering medicine for an outbreak at a nearby colony. The ship was badly damaged and many of the crewmembers are wounded. The captain says that they were attacked by a ship with no human crew—either AI-piloted or flown by remote—which then sent drones aboard to steal the medicine. The medicine can be easily converted into an illicit drug, and is worth a fortune on the black market. If the colony doesn't get the medicine by tomorrow, thousands will die.

The pirate vessel is under the control of an AI that heads up a massive drug ring; the AI is housed in a hollow asteroid which serves as the ring's base of operations. The PCs track the ship to this asteroid, and long-range scans show that the conversion process from medicine to drug is already underway. It will take only an hour to convert the entire supply.

To stop the conversion, the PCs must get past the base's drone defenses, fight their way through the claustrophobic tunnels that honeycomb the asteroid in order to reach the drug conversion lab, halt the process, and escape with the remaining medicine. This is made more complicated by the AI, which controls the entire drone network: What any drone sees, all of them see, and what they know, the AI knows. All computer systems in the base are also under the AI's control, including doors, elevators, and airlocks.

This scenario can be tackled as a straightforward run-and-gun mission, with the PCs blasting their way through the drone defenses and forcing locked doors within the asteroid. It can also be run as a stealth operation, with the PCs shutting down drones in ways that don't reveal their presence and making their way to the drug conversion lab without alerting the AI.

To create a tense atmosphere, start a timer (a stopwatch or an egg timer will work well) when the PCs reach the asteroid, and run the adventure in pseudo-real-time. The longer it takes, the less of the drug is available for the colonists; they need at least 30% of the supply in order to survive until an additional batch can be delivered. Don't tell your players the exact number, but give them ways to find it out in-game.

If you want to use the AI as a recurring villain, have its core processors be located off the asteroid; the asteroid AI is a local copy, and destroying it won't take out the real power behind the drug ring.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) artificial life form, combat-heavy, deadline, interplanetary, isolated area, stealth, villain

Revolt

Colony Conflicted

203

The PCs are traveling aboard a large spaceship when the ship develops an engine problem and is forced to land at the nearest location for repairs. The place is listed in their database as a prison moon, and they're surprised to discover that they've landed on what seems to be a peaceful farming colony. The inhabitants have come to this place seeking a simpler life and use only the technology that's necessary for their basic survival. There is no off-moon communication.

The mayor says it will take quite some time to acquire the parts necessary to get the ship flight-ready again. She wishes to buy time so that she might sell the PCs on the colonists' way of life, and instead of facilitating repairs secretly begins dismantling the ship, one part at a time. She fears that if the ship remains intact, the locals will want to come and see it, whereas if it's just a hulk, they'll be safe from the evils of its technology.

While on the colony, interactions are plentiful. At the behest of the mayor, many people try to convince the PCs of the benefits of the simple life. Many of the younger colonists are intrigued by the PCs and want to know what the outside universe is like. Problems should be presented that the PCs can

overcome using their technology—wild beasts that attack the colony might be defeated by the PCs' weapons, for example. Some colonists whose crops aren't thriving may seek the help of the PCs, who can solve the issue with a device that divines (or even controls) weather. Confront the PCs with moral dilemmas that compel them to help.

Meanwhile, the PCs might discover missing parts from their ship or see people taking packages away from the colony at night. If confronted, the mayor denies any wrongdoing, saying only that her colonists must be protected from outside influences. Many locals are intrigued by the PCs' technology and want to reestablish contact. If the PCs fan this fire, the colonists might rescue them but the unity of the people on this idyllic colony will be fractured. The mayor might also be convinced that the PCs pose too much of a threat and decide that eliminating them permanently is the best option.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) betrayal, difficult choice, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, politics, rebellion, sandbox, social, travel, twist

The Prophet Motive

204

While visiting a theocracy run by a hereditary "messiah," the PCs encounter a group of obviously poor people who stare at and follow them for a short while. Later that day or the next, a larger group follows suit, but more aggressively. All will flee if confronted. One visibly excited young man finally approaches the PCs on his knees. He begs the PCs to meet with the messiah, "in accordance with prophecy."

The young man introduces the PCs to the "true messiah," saying that the current leader is obviously false. He is an educated man of calm demeanor who speaks of reforming the national religion and returning to the spirit of the original holy writings, not the dictatorial commandments now being handed down. He never claims to be the true messiah, only a brother to all, and invites the PCs to join him for dinner.

The rebels are enthusiastic, but they know little of tactics. If asked why he doesn't lead them, the true messiah calmly replies, "I know nothing of violence, except that it is sometimes necessary, and that it is your job." Almost on cue, the excited young man shows the PCs an old painting of the ascendance of the true messiah, surrounded by his angels. Sure enough, some of the angels do resemble the PCs.

After the meal, a government strike team raids the building,

shooting wildly at everyone—especially noncombatants. Members of the rebel group gladly jump in front of the PCs, taking the blasts as others try to herd the PCs away. The strike team can be fought off, but many noncombatants die in the process.

The government marks the PCs as infidels and begins to hunt them while simultaneously cracking down on any suspected rebels. The PCs are expected to lead the rebellion, which culminates in an attempt to assassinate the current messiah at his public confirmation ceremony in two weeks.

Because of the increasingly violent crackdown and oppression, fervent belief in the prophecy, and the leadership of the PCs, the rebellion begins to succeed. If the true messiah takes the current messiah's place, he publicly rewards the "angels" for their help. In private, he apologizes, confessing that the painting was a fake, and that he orchestrated key events in order to convince the others of the prophecies.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) alliance, epic impact, innocent, intrigue, planet-based, rebellion, religion, social, tactical planning, twist

The Prodigal Pawn

205

A planet's prefect has a son who has been over-indulged all of his life, and been allowed to pursue many endeavors without ever dedicating himself to anything serious. As a teenager, he was without drive or purpose and became involved in a radical, but seemingly harmless, political group. The prefect turned a blind eye to it, thinking that the son would simply come around as he got older.

The prefect was recently mortally wounded in an accident. He's being kept alive by the best medical technology, but his time is quickly running out. His son has vanished; the radical group has hidden him away, taking advantage of the situation to mount a full-scale rebellion against the government with the prefect's son as their poster boy.

On his death bed, the prefect hires the PCs to find his son and return him to the palace. He intends to convince his son to fulfill his hereditary duties as the new prefect. As his son has been heavily indoctrinated, this won't be easy, but the prefect is sure that he can convince him to do the right thing.

The political group is actually a front for an alien advance force that has gotten a foothold on the planet, and has been preparing for a full-scale invasion, amassing weapons and followers

to use in a violent overthrow of the government. They took in the son in hopes of using him against his father in the future, but the accident creates a perfect opportunity to try to install the son as their puppet.

To stop the aliens from succeeding, the PCs must determine where the son is being held. The most efficient way to do this is to raid one of the group's offices and ransack it for evidence. Once they know where to find the son, they have to rescue him from the compound where the aliens have him sequestered. During the raid, they'll learn the true nature of the rebel group when they encounter the aliens face-to-face.

With the prefect's son in tow, the PCs must escape their alien pursuers, deliver the son to the prefect's palace, and then join forces with the palace guard to repel an all-out assault on the palace grounds—the aliens' last-ditch effort to salvage their plan.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) alliance, city, combat-heavy, monster, planet-based, politics, rebellion, tactical planning

Crystal Crazy

206

A dramatic discovery is made on a sparsely settled planet while the PCs are there: The planet has extensive, easily excavated deposits of rare weapons-grade crystals used in laser systems. News of this discovery spurs thousands of people each day to abandon their dead-end jobs and travel to the planet in hopes of striking it rich. This situation is the basis for a sandbox adventure: The PCs have many options, and the narrative will continue around them.

Many of the settlers who were already on planet head to the caves to stake claims before waves of other miners can sweep in and contest them. Other settlers expand their businesses to provide services to miners. The local mining corporation takes advantage of the disruption—and huge projected profits—to agitate the locals to secede from the government that controls their planet (and numerous others). A new government would be easily swayed to lower extraction rates, and might be strong-armed into granting a monopoly on mining licenses.

If the PCs try their hand at mining, they quickly find that it's a rough-and-tumble business. It takes a credible threat of force to keep interlopers away from their excavations, and the businesses that serve the miners charge far more than they could get away with anywhere else—but few dare to leave their claim unprotected long enough to find a better deal.

If the party is famous, the secession movement will try to recruit them to help justify their planned rebellion. If they

have skill as diplomats, they might be appointed as ambassadors and assigned to secure recognition from governments on other worlds. That's a tricky proposition: The PCs need to find allies who were rivals of the old government, but who won't simply overwhelm the new republic.

PCs loyal to the former government are sounded out for their loyalties and induced to switch. The locals are mostly caught up in "crystal fever," and don't carefully consider the long-term effects of planetary independence. Protecting the fledgling colony from falling into the hands of a rival empire will keep the PCs quite busy.

Once independence is secured, the mining corporation begins exerting its influence, engaging in bribery and subverting the government to secure exclusive rights over as much territory as possible. Enforcing those rights will be difficult. If the PCs are amenable, they'll be hired to clear squatters from the corporation's mines. Others have reason to object to the newly intrusive corporation, and the PCs may be hired to protect the miners; they might also want to retain their own claims.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) combat-heavy, exploration, innocent, interplanetary, intrigue, isolated area, politics, rebellion, sandbox, trade

Mining Planet Revolt

207

The enslaved inhabitants of a mining planet have rebelled against their overseers, and though the rebellion was quashed, a handful of miners managed to steal a ship and escape off-world. Barely able to pilot the ship, they blunder into range of the PCs and send out a distress call. They ask the PCs to aid them in freeing their fellow miners.

The miners come from a high-gravity world, and are well-adapted to conditions in the mines. The operation is scattered across the world's main continent—a hellish wasteland of mile-high dust storms, baking heat, and a barely breathable atmosphere. The miners have never seen the surface, and are unaware of the planet's most notable environmental phenomenon: highly ionized electrical storms that can disable shipboard systems.

The escaped slaves know that the corporation has one base that serves as a hub for distributing personnel and materiel to the smaller mining operations, and suspect that if this base were taken out the rest of the operation would quickly follow—especially if word can be gotten to the miners to revolt a second time, just as the central base is under attack.

The planet is protected by two layers of defenses: armed AI satellites in high orbit, equipped with sensors for detecting ships up to half a light year away, and a squadron of fighters

that patrols the skies over the various mining facilities.

The PCs must figure out how to overcome the satellites (possibly acquiring their weapons systems in the process), avoid or defeat the fighter patrol, and scout out the main base without being spotted. They can also alert other rebel miners to their plan, creating a fifth column. While they scout the base, one of the planet's unique electrical storms will approach the area, forcing the overseers to batten down the hatches and pull back from some of their defensive positions. Wily players will find ways to use the storm to their advantage, perhaps even turning it into a weapon in its own right.

Once the main base falls, the PCs will be faced with two problems: how to evacuate the miners, and what to do about the surviving corporate personnel. The two groups might agree to a bargain that keeps the mines running, but with the miners as employees—or the miners might just want to string up the corporate thugs and leave the planet forever.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) artificial life form, escort mission, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, mass combat, rebellion, sandbox, siege, tactical planning, trade, travel

Daring Enterprise

Outback Super Collider

208

A billionaire visionary is heading a private consortium that is in the process of building a super collider (a gigantic underground physics lab built for smashing subatomic particles in a miles-long loop) in the Australian Outback. Vandalism plagues the project, wrecking entire sections and costing outrageous sums of money. Since the site's remote location makes vandalism unlikely, the visionary is mistakenly convinced it's the work of his own employees in the pay of competing businesses, or even strike teams from rival governments. The PCs are asked or hired to investigate.

Early encounters with the “vandals” shouldn't reveal their identity. In actuality, the vandalism has been done by blind, subterranean humanoids—“mole men.” One thing is clear to any investigators: No modern explosives or equipment are being used to destroy the super collider. Great hammers, clubs, and tunnel collapses are what have wrecked walls and equipment.

Investigators may also uncover two vital clues. The visionary reveals he chose the site because sonar readings by geologists indicated a mass of preexisting tunnels, not all

of which were naturally occurring, and using the tunnels reduced the spending to excavate the space needed for the collider. Background research from the area comes up with an intriguing, but sensationally-written news account from the 1800s: “Mr. Wells' ‘Morlocks’ Discovered Down Under.”

The pace picks up when workers start disappearing. Investigators make a grim discovery in exploring some of the tunnels, recovering remains of the missing workers; many showing signs of having been eaten.

In the reveal, morlocks begin attacking en masse. The adventure becomes a race to survive as the investigators try to navigate the tunnels and return to the relative safety of the collider project.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, exploration, investigative, isolated area, mass combat, planet-based, sandbox, twist

Terminal Orbit

209

While traveling between star systems, the PCs pick up a faint ship transponder signal in a nearby system. The transponder code is registered to a legendary ghost ship. The ship was lost many years ago, and is rumored to have been carrying a very lucrative cargo. The ship is now in a decaying orbit around the system's sun, and it has one more orbit to complete before gravity will pull it into the sun. There is just enough time for one trip aboard to investigate its cargo, discover what happened to the ship and her crew, and escape before it falls into the star.

The ship was a covert research vessel that was testing high-energy weapons built on radical quantum technology. During one test a weapon malfunctioned and contaminated the entire ship. As a result, the ship and her crew have become unstable on a quantum level, and now phase in and out of existence.

The phasing is agonizing for the remaining crew, and they have managed to use the ship's damaged systems to set themselves on a suicide course into the sun. Because the PCs aren't subject to the quantum instability, their mere presence aboard the ship will stabilize the area immediately around them, preventing that area from dematerializing as long as they are there. While there's no cure for the instability that afflicts the crew, the PCs' touch will also temporarily stabilize crew members.

Destination: Unknown

210

An unstable wormhole has recently been discovered, and the initial probe launched through it returned images of what appeared to be alien ruins on a distant world. The probe itself stopped transmitting suddenly, and hasn't returned through the wormhole. A corporation, government, exploratory society, or other group offers the PCs a significant bounty for traveling through the wormhole and returning with reports of what's on the other side. As the wormhole is unstable, it's impossible to know whether it will remain in existence for five centuries, five months, or five minutes.

The PCs travel through the wormhole, either on their ship or one provided by the organization (which can also provide significant resources). The trip is a bumpy one, and it seems uncertain that their ship will survive, but they make it through. The wormhole opens just outside the gravity well of a planet with several moons, and even from orbit they can make out signs of civilization on the surface. The planet can't support human life. On the surface, they find the ruins of a previously unknown race—an amorphous, amoeboid species that created cities composed of vast, tubular warrens.

While exploring the city, the PCs pick up surprising levels of seismic activity. They have enough video footage to earn their bounty, and can return at this point—but when they try to fire up their ship, they find that it has been compromised

As the PCs explore the ship, they'll observe unusual phenomena that give them clues as to the nature of the disaster that befell the vessel. They'll see a translucent wall that solidifies when one of them touches it; later on, all of the air in a room will simply vanish, only to reappear moments later. The PCs will see what appears to be a ghost, but is in fact a crew member fading in and out of existence. A section of the hull will disappear, causing a brief and terrifying hull breach until their presence restores it. They'll also encounter the captain, who can fill them in on whatever they haven't already discovered on their own.

Along with the creepy, tension-filled investigation of the ship itself, the meat of this adventure is in how the PCs handle the situation. They can't save the crew or the ship, and must leave before it is destroyed forever, but will they take any of the weapons with them? And will they tell anyone about the weapon that caused the disaster, or what really happened to the ghost ship?



Easily adapted to: Gothic Horror, Horror, Space Opera, Supernatural

Tags: (PV) difficult choice, interplanetary, investigative, isolated area

somehow. Investigation uncovers what appears to be a nanite infestation; further probing suggests that the nanites are the evolved descendants of the original amoeboid species that inhabited the planet. They appear capable of repairing the same systems that they disabled, but flee before the PCs can initiate communication.

With little choice, the PCs must follow the nanites. En route, the nanites mount an attack against them. They surge out of the ground to take larger forms, each composed of billions of nanites, and wield replicated versions of ship weapons and pieces of the original probe. The nanites fill an entire crust layer of the planet, with trillions upon trillions of them just beneath the surface. Clever adaptation of existing equipment will allow the PCs to communicate with the nanites and broker the repair of their ship, which wasn't damaged out of malicious intent, and they can return through the portal with credit for first contact with a new species (and perhaps with some nanites, as well).



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) exploration, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, monster, race, sandbox, social, travel, twist

In Columbus' Wake

211

The PCs are asked or coerced into making the first manned test of faster-than-light “warping” technology, along with a few of the investors and inventors. The backers expect to shorten trade routes and make a great deal of money.

The test begins as expected, and the ship warps out safely—but when it warps back in, it’s nowhere near its intended destinations. Instead, the PCs discover a flourishing, verdant planet that boasts Earth-like beaches, mountains, forests, plains, and jungles. The weather is calm and peaceful, healthy and nutritious fruit and vegetables abound, and wildlife is plentiful, if sometimes dangerous.

As long as the PCs and NPCs take only what they need, everything is fine. But if they begin to take samples, clear areas for settlement, or hunt animals for sport, then the world begins to lash out at them. Wild animals will stampede, attempting to trample the crew and equipment. Dangerous predators will attack the crew, and birds will steal small tools or fly into the aircraft intakes. Sudden storms will lash out. Though the causal relationship between the PCs’ or NPCs’ actions and these events may not be immediately apparent, psychically sensitive PCs may begin to feel unwelcome.

Research will discover that an energy pulse occurs shortly before these events. There are many sources around the

planet, one of which can be reached in a few days on foot or by aircraft. As the party approaches the source, electronic devices begin to fail. The source is a large stone amphitheater with a stone column in the center, almost like a satellite dish. No animals approach it, no plants grow in the area, and no electronics work nearby.

Psychically sensitive crew, or anyone sleeping in the vicinity of the dish, will hear chanting. If they listen closely or fall into a trance, they’ll hear a story of how the planet’s environment was nearly destroyed, of the collapse of the native civilization, and of how the few survivors dedicated themselves to protecting what was left, eventually evolving into the spiritual caretakers of the planet. All are welcome to enjoy this world, so long as they take only what they need.

The investors want to destroy these sites and recover their investment by settling and mining the planet. Can they be convinced to use it as a vacation paradise instead?



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Steampunk, Supers

Tags: (KS) alliance, combat-heavy, difficult choice, escort mission, exploration, interplanetary, isolated area, sandbox, spirit, trade, travel, twist

New Kid in Town

212

In the slums of an overcrowded city, a politician is working on an urban renewal project, revitalizing the area for the inhabitants. Many deals have been struck to allow cheap construction in the area, and the residents have been motivated to begin cleanup efforts. The politician is celebrated as a man of the people. However, a crime syndicate also has interest in the community. They peddle illicit materials out of the slums and don’t want their operations disrupted. Contractors are attacked, current residents are intimidated, and links are fabricated between the politician and some shady business dealings.

The PCs might catch wind of the situation and be morally inclined to help, they might have a reason for wanting to hinder the crime syndicate, or they may be hired by a group of concerned residents who want to protect their homes. Whatever the reason for their involvement, they must stop the thugs who are attacking the residents. Fighting the crime syndicate’s foot soldiers isn’t easy, as they carry surprisingly sophisticated weaponry. The PCs can definitely have an impact, but due to the sheer number of incidents they can’t stop all of them. They meet with resistance from the police, who claim that the PCs are only making the situation worse.

Rumors keep flowing about the politician. Minor hacking or research turns up many conveniently timed bank

transactions, and even members of the politician’s staff might inform the PCs of suspicious activity. If the PCs look deep enough, they uncover a frame-up.

Visiting the politician reveals that he’s being threatened by the syndicate. He tells the PCs that in his youth he was a member, but he escaped their influence long ago and now wants to make a difference. He can’t use the police to stop the syndicate, as they are corrupt. He can reveal the location of the syndicate’s major money operations, the destruction of which would cripple them beyond their ability to recover. The politician offers to keep the police out of the way if the PCs will take out the syndicate.

The length of this plot is variable. It can be stretched over many sessions with strategy and planning being paramount, or used as a quick, straightforward scenario. If used as a shorter plot, the syndicate may only have one operation that needs to be eliminated.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) city, combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, innocent, investigative, planet-based, politics, shady, tactical planning

Aliens from a hostile planet just across the border descend in numbers, raining licorice-scented toxins on the city where the PCs are currently residing (or staying temporarily). The toxin is a powerful muscle relaxant, and is sometimes fatal; elderly people are particularly likely to simply stop breathing after inhaling it. While much of the city is paralyzed, the aliens land and gather mementos of their raid. They collect a few interesting items, kidnap a number of people, and swiftly return to their ships, beating a hasty retreat.

Neither government, local or alien, wants to publicly acknowledge the raid. The aliens claim that the raid was carried out by a handful of rebels. They're willing to provide information to the local government to help make amends (all under the table, of course). Non-military PCs are sought out for plausible deniability while military PCs are encouraged to volunteer for some "independent operations." Powerful arms and technology are provided, including a ship if the PCs don't already possess one. If appropriate, the ship will have cloaking technology.

While the PCs shouldn't expect open cooperation from the alien government, they're provided with a code that orders most alien ships to ignore their vessel. The PC raiding force is given coordinates for the rebels' current location, as well as encouragement from their own government. Avoiding

atrocities against other aliens is an important part of the orders: The reprisal raid shouldn't escalate the situation by provoking new victims.

Infiltrating the enemy base gives the best chance of recovering the captured citizens and looted treasures. The alien rebels are surprised by the raid: They believed that they had forced their own government's hand, and expected war to be declared any day—which is their ultimate goal. After scouting the rebel hideout and assessing the situation, the PCs must get into the base, rescue the hostages (and recover any precious objects), and get out before the rebel horde is roused.

If the PCs manage a quiet and successful raid, a decrease in tensions between the two empires will result. To deepen future intrigue, have the "rebels" turn out to be employed by the alien government. The government seeks to spark a war with humanity, and used the rebels as a foil. In this case, the PCs' suspicions will be raised when their successful raid doesn't reduce tensions between the races.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) alliance, betrayal, dungeon crawl, epic impact, interplanetary, politics, race, stealth, tactical planning

Abduction

Ransom

214

A powerful diplomat is abducted on the way to a critical meeting. The diplomat had been traveling incognito and disappeared while changing ships aboard a space station. The diplomat is now in the hands of an enemy that demands a ransom or specific act in order to secure his release.

You'll need to determine the nature of the enemy. They could be ruthless pirates out to make some money or desperate rebels trying to draw attention to their cause. It's entirely possible that the abduction was an inside job (a high-ranking official wants the diplomatic mission to fail, and fail miserably) or the diplomat may be part of the conspiracy (he sympathizes with the abductors and has arranged his own "capture").

In any case the PCs are hired to find out what happened to the diplomat. The first encounter involves going to the scene of the crime, the space station. There they collect clues and interview witnesses, which leads them to the abductors. Once

they find the abductors, they must either negotiate for the diplomat's release or board the abductors' vessel to take the diplomat by force.

If you want to mix things up a bit, there may be another party involved that found the abduction fortuitous and doesn't want to see the rescue succeed. The PCs may already be on the abductors' ship when a new vessel arrives and tries to blow it up. The PCs and the abductors may need to form an alliance to defeat the new threat before finishing the business between them.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) alliance, interplanetary, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, politics, social, stealth, travel

The Heart of a Lady

215

While traveling through deep space, a luxurious vessel is crippled by a sneak attack that renders it immobile. During this time, the crew is helpless while pirates remove the most valuable part of the ship—the engine. With only life support functionality, the powerless ship is left to drift endlessly in space with the passengers and crew still aboard. Naturally, the PCs are also aboard the ship.

The PCs must defend the crew and passengers from the pirates. While the bulk of the pirate forces will be focused on cutting the engine free of the ship, some will attempt to breach the bridge and passenger levels in order to kidnap victims for sale into slavery. The PCs are distracted from the pirates' true goal while fighting off this smaller force.

After the pirates make off with their loot, the PCs must then keep the crew and passengers calm while devising a way to escape the crippled ship. Eventually, the batteries will be depleted and life support will fail. The PCs have very little time to either hail another ship to rescue them or to jury-rig a lifeboat capable of taking everyone to a safe location.

If the PCs manage to survive, the owner of the ship will offer the PCs a large reward to find the pirates and recover the engine. The engine is a rare prototype, and only the PCs can identify the pirate crew that stole it.

Maturity Knocking

The PCs are contacted by the owner of a large and profitable estate with many well-cared-for tenants. She has been diagnosed with a fatal disease, and her only son will inherit the estate when she passes. Her son, a twenty-something wastrel in a big city, has said that he wants to sell it. The most likely buyers are members of a rich real estate family who are widely known for the mistreatment of their tenants. The owner wants the PCs kidnap her son and bring him back to the estate to face the people he grew up with, hoping that he will change his mind and not subject them to such treatment.

What makes things even more interesting is that the estate owner and the head of the buyers' family are both scions of the heads of major corporations. This adventure can be a good change of pace for PCs who are used to running corporate espionage missions, particularly if they don't know the powers behind the two major players at the outset. It also presents different types of challenges for PCs accustomed to breaking and entering, hacking corporate networks, and fighting cybernetically enhanced thugs.

The son is easily found, but he has racked up large debts in the city. The probable buyers of his mother's estate have purchased his debts, telling him that they're doing him a favor. The debts aren't insurmountable, but his guilt over his failures prevents him from going back home and admitting them to his mother. He won't be persuaded to go home through

Few pirate crews could have pulled off such a heist. Following leads on who would know how to remove such a large engine and would have the equipment capable of doing the job reveals the identity of the pirates. This should be done through a series of short encounters in dangerous bars and black market meeting places. Eventually, the PCs learn that the heist was an inside job arranged by someone close to the owner.

The final battle begins with an attack on the pirates' lair, building up to a confrontation with the mastermind behind the heist. For a fun twist to the climax, have the final encounter take place on a vessel fitted with the stolen engine.

Throughout this adventure, you should emphasize the dangers of space travel whenever possible, especially while the ship is adrift.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (PB) betrayal, combat-heavy, deadline, dungeon crawl, innocent, interplanetary, investigative, isolated area, race, social

216

diplomatic means. The buyers expect a kidnap attempt, and are protecting the son, but will by no means endanger him; if he dies, they lose everything.

If the son is brought home, he'll attempt to escape and head to the buyers' neighboring estate. The buyers, fearing that their deal is in jeopardy, will make a covert attempt on the matron's life, trying to bring about an early conclusion. The tenants' fear of the buyers is palpable.

The son must be shown the consequences of selling the estate, and the party must protect him and his mother. He isn't a bad person, but has been weak for so long that he's forgotten how to be strong.

Possible twists or complications: The son unknowingly fathered a child with one of the young female tenants before he left, and she hasn't told him or his mother about this; the son's former best friend is now on the tenants' council, and knows about the situation (except the debts); or the son is addicted to a drug.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Western

Tags: (KS) escort mission, mature themes, planet-based, politics, roleplaying-heavy, social, trade

My Little Girl

217

According to witnesses, during an academic conference on a rim planet that caters to tourists, commandos kidnapped a leading scientist in the fields of pharmaceuticals and genetics. There's been no indication from the scientist's medical status implant that he's been removed from the planet—in fact his vital signs still register on the medical network, although it's difficult to get a precise reading on his location. And still there is no demand for ransom.

It's up to the PCs to investigate and track down the party responsible and liberate the scientist, if possible. The question the PCs will eventually ask themselves is this: Who needs a scientist with his specialties?

The investigation leads to one of the planet's richest men, an industrialist whose school-age daughter is dying of a rare genetic disorder and who has been a generous donor to the scientist's work in the past. Frustrated by the slow advance of research into his daughter's malady, he decided the scientist needed to work on the problem full time.

Hacking the industrialist's internal computer networks is a logical next step. The effort won't go undetected, bringing on swift, violent response as security personnel descend on the PCs shortly after the attempt.

Infiltrating the antigravity platform complex where the scientist is held requires getting past robotic "guard dogs" and

security personnel armed with nonlethal weapons like entrapment goo.

If the PCs are detained, a jailbreak or court appearance is in order. It's entirely possible for the industrialist to arrange a jailbreak specifically so the PCs won't ever appear in a courtroom and lead the authorities to him.

The scientist understands the daughter's plight and even the motivation for the industrialist's crimes, but he refuses to cooperate as a captive. This forces the industrialist to use other means to coerce him.

You have a lot of options for the resolution of this story. Can the scientist be liberated in the face of serious security measures? Will the scientist press charges against the industrialist? Can the scientist, with the PCs' help, make an advance against the condition that afflicts the daughter and in some way save or at least prolong her life?



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (TT) combat-heavy, difficult choice, innocent, intrigue, investigative, planet-based, politics, shady, siege, social, stealth, tactical planning, villain

The Enigma

Dot-Dash-Dot

218

In the near future, astronomical listening posts around the world start receiving radio signals from the vicinity of Saturn. The signal contains no message that can be decoded, but it's a regular mathematical pattern indicating a sentient source.

Despite attempts to keep the message and its implications secret, word leaks out and sparks a global debate over what to do about the signal. Even if they started today, the world's space agencies wouldn't be able to send an unmanned probe to investigate for at least a year; a manned expedition would be years away. A secret government agency brings the PCs aboard as well-placed scientists and troubleshooters to consult on the topic.

This secret agency has the means and the technology to launch a manned expedition—if the PCs are willing to go. Their mission commander is a former astronaut who, during the long trip, becomes increasingly obsessed with the signal, showing signs of mental instability. The PCs have to deal

with the commander before they reach their destination, and things come to a head when the astronaut finally snaps in a schizophrenic episode.

The signals originate from an alien spy outpost on one of Saturn's moons, Mimas. The aliens responsible for the signals are an insectile race preparing to invade Earth by setting up a complex for breeding insect soldiers. In order to destroy the complex, the PCs need to detonate the central core. Mantis security forces, giant guard beetles, and the spy-hive queen guard the core deep within the moon.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, epic impact, exploration, interplanetary, investigative, isolated area, mass combat, siege, stealth, tactical planning, travel

The Puzzle

219

An ancient device appears and threatens to destroy a world, which could be ours or another planet. The PCs can prevent this from happening only by interfacing with the heart of the device, and the only way to get inside is by solving a series of logic puzzles while avoiding the device's defenses.

For a creepier version, make the ancient device an organic machine. While an enormous space cannon is certainly threatening, a large fleshy orb with a single burning eye, doors that fold back in a lid-like fashion, and a spongy, vein-riddled floor is much more unsettling.

The opening scene involves the PCs doing "the thing no one should do" and activating the machine. For example, human colonists come across some ancient ruins and, with the help of the PCs, an archaeologist gets into the old control center and removes an artifact. This triggers the ancient device, which the makers programmed to destroy the world if their enemies ever got this far. There is a coded message in the old control center that explains what is happening.

The ancient device may try some nonlethal tactics first in the hopes of having the invaders flee. Unfortunately, the

old invaders were a bit heartier than humans and had more advanced technology, so these "nonlethal" methods wreak havoc: an electromagnetic pulse wipes out the entire colony's machinery, or a fierce lightning storm pummels the people.

The PCs have to travel to the device, make their way inside, solve a series of logic puzzles while battling the device's defenses, and finally get to the heart of the device, at which point they can interact with a hologram of the builder. They must then convince the hologram (which has limited artificial intelligence) to make the device stand down, a diplomatic effort aided by the fact that they're obviously not the invaders of old.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) artificial life form, deadline, epic impact, investigative, planet-based, spirit

Identity Crisis

220

Strange technical malfunctions have been occurring in various locations throughout a large metropolis. Traffic systems freeze up, safety systems fail to engage, and communication systems falter. After every event, the same message appears at the scene. Display systems flash the message, printers spit out pages upon pages of the words, and audio systems squeal with the barely audible phrase, "Who am I?"

The PCs could be city employees such as police or firefighters, journalists investigating the story, or computer programmers and technicians troubleshooting the failures. They first encounter a malfunction when multiple vehicles are given the right of way and several accidents occur. The PCs have to dodge these vehicles, but will also need to put distance between themselves and a quickly approaching fuel tanker truck that has lost control. Along the way, the PCs might see trapped civilians in buses and gridlocked vehicles. If the PCs don't intervene, then these people will die when the tanker crashes and explodes.

If the PCs avoid dying in a fiery collision, the next building they enter seems to turn against them: elevators free-fall unexpectedly, automatic doors refuse to open, and advanced fire prevention systems blast people with chemical foam. The

PCs become trapped in a room, or in an elevator car, which then begins to flood.

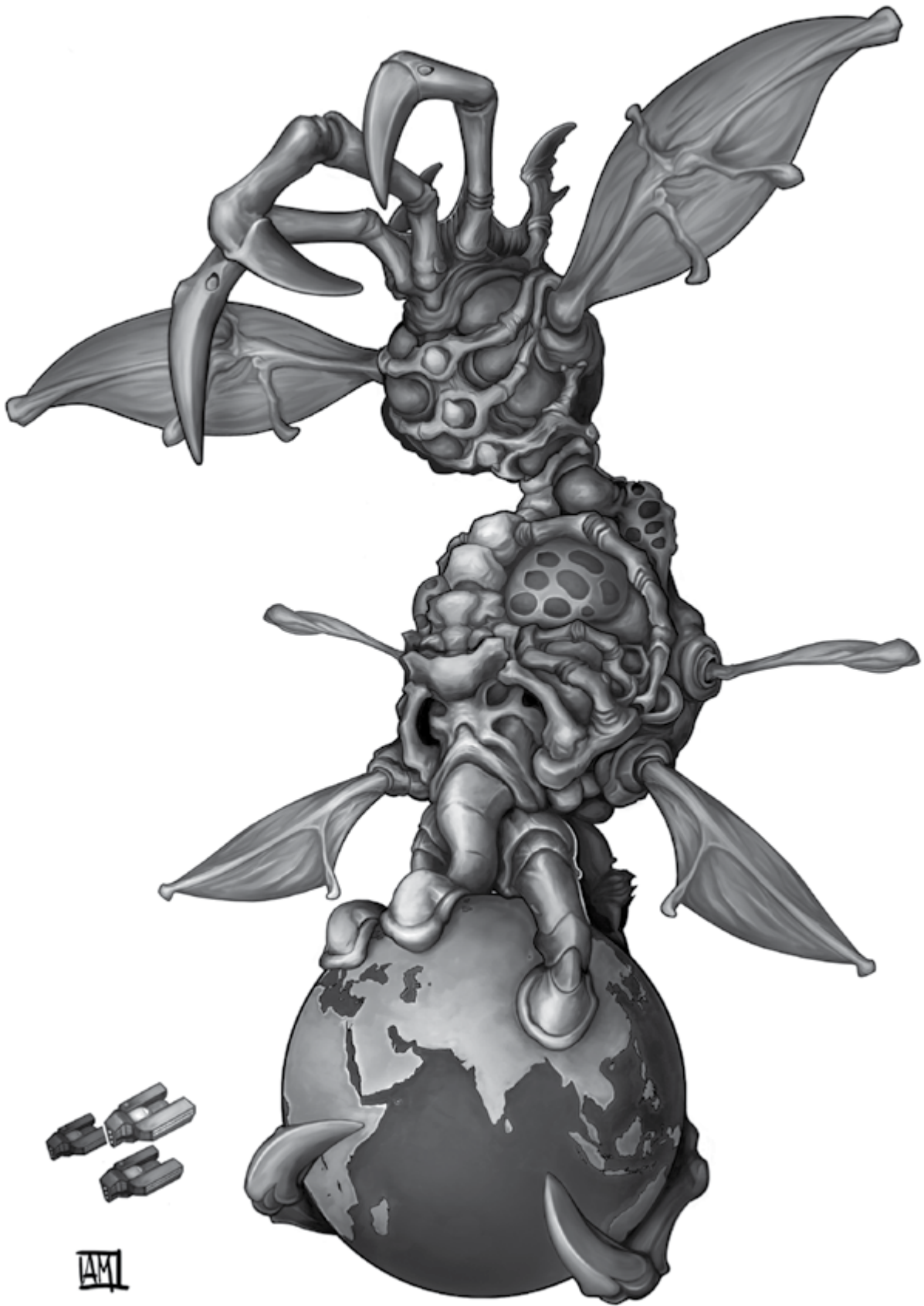
Then the crime prevention systems go haywire. Stun guns, gun turrets with rubber bullets, and tear gas launchers begin attacking innocent civilians. Investigation of these strange occurrences will reveal that the systems were all hacked. The point of origin can be traced to the city's central mainframe, which controls both trivial and mission-critical systems.

You can have the hacker be anyone or anything that's appropriate to your game world: a new type of AI, an imprisoned person sedated and held against their will that "fuels" the system via latent psychic abilities, or a disgruntled employee who feels that credit for his work is long overdue. The PCs should be able to quickly move to a climactic encounter once the identity of the hacker is known.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) artificial life form, city, combat-heavy, epic challenge, innocent, investigative, mass combat, planet-based, siege, tactical planning, villain



Artist: Andrew McIntosh

Heavy Cargo

221

The PCs are offered a substantial payment to quietly deliver a simple cargo: a heavy, tightly sealed metal box. The tiny company making the offer is unknown to them, and by the time the PCs reply, a group of smugglers has taken the contract.

A day or so later, the PCs find the smugglers' ship adrift with the cargo missing. There are no signs of boarding and no log entries past launch. The entire crew is dead of massive blunt force trauma, and everything aboard the ship is tossed about as if it the ship had been violently searched.

The company shuts down, but another company makes a nearly identical offer that involves transporting a similar box to a completely different location. This series of events will happen a few times (with the occasional involvement of the PCs), and each time the crew is found dead, the cargo is missing, and the ship is trashed.

The real story: A military contractor has developed a gravity bomb and is testing it on smugglers. When a predetermined trigger event occurs (such as switching to zero-g), the bomb goes off, violently disrupting gravity around it. The crew and ship are subjected to incredible stresses, and everyone aboard is tossed around like rag dolls. A sensor ejected in

the explosion monitors the test and then activates a homing beacon. The contractor collects the bomb, surveys the damage, and then tries again with a more powerful device.

The bomb can be forced or cut open, though if care isn't exercised it will go off. Once opened, it can be shut down, and can also be easily tracked back to the contractor through part numbers and software entries.

If the PCs follow a courier instead of taking the delivery themselves, they may be caught in the gravity flux, but it won't be nearly as devastating to them as it is to the ship carrying the bomb.

After uncovering the truth about the contractor's unethical testing methods, the PCs can choose to blackmail the director of the project (whose name appears in the software credits), or expose the project in the media.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) bearers, betrayal, difficult choice, innocent, interplanetary, investigative, politics, shady, travel, villain

Buzz about the New Cell Tower

222

At a remote cell tower construction site, swarms of bees start attacking the workers. One worker dies and the rest are hospitalized for severe poisoning. It's a common occurrence for workers to disturb bee hives, but company exterminators sent to the site find no evidence of hives or bee colonies. This is actually the second bee attack on this specific project; in the first, the workers ran off and escaped serious injury, then resumed their work the next day. The PCs are recruited by the phone company.

Perplexed by the unusual nature of the bees' biology, a college professor offers the phone company her assistance. The bees she examines have larger-than-average stingers and more potent venom than normally found in this species. The professor also explains the recent phenomenon of "colony collapse disorder," which some attribute to the powerful disturbances cell towers cause to colony structure.

The cell phone company representative then lists the history of recent problems with this project. A property owner who objected to the construction adjacent to his home cut the wires of one tower construction site. Another troublemaker is a local bee keeper who formed picket lines, tried to get the local government to stop the lease, accused the company of "bee genocide," and vowed to use any means possible to stop them.

The property owner and the beekeeper are not the culprits, though both exhibit suspicious behavior when questioned. The owner is sorry for the worker's death, but the bee keeper calls it "nature's justice." If the professor tests the keeper's hive, none of his bees exhibit the mutant qualities of the bees at the tower. Later, a swarm of bees attacks the keeper, sending him to the hospital for severe poisoning. "Not my bees. Not my bees," he says.

Investigating the surrounding area, the PCs encounter mutant bees that are larger than the ones that attacked the workers. Eventually, the investigators come upon a large farmhouse in the middle of its slow transformation into a monstrous hive. At the center of the hive is the true instigator: a human/bee hybrid queen, a mutant who's gathering a super colony with her mutated bee minions.

One possible twist: Mutant bee venom slowly transforms its victims into bee-folk, a transformation that is undergone by the tower workers and the bee keeper who were stung.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) exploration, innocent, investigative, monster, planet-based, sandbox, villain

Obtaining

Keeping the Peace

223

An anthropologist who is covertly studying a primitive world is exposed as an outsider. The native population believes him to be a god and gives him many gifts. The anthropologist is enjoying the attention and the galactic government fears that he may irrevocably contaminate the culture; the scientist argues that it's already been contaminated, so why not make the best of it? The government sends the PCs to retrieve the rogue anthropologist before he makes things worse.

Unfortunately, the PCs' government has a policy of non-intervention and it orders the PCs not to use violence or superior technology against the natives. Instead, they must rely on diplomacy to secure his release—an outcome which the new “god” doesn't want to see come to pass. As the PCs arrive and start negotiations, however, members of another alien race arrive and attempt to secure the anthropologist's release through more violent means. It appears that the anthropologist may have found something of value to them.

What secret is the anthropologist keeping? Is he willing to throw in his lot with the adversarial aliens, or does he beg for aid from the PCs instead? What impact does this secret have on the local population and, if it's valuable, does it belong to them?

If you want to emphasize diplomacy and duels of wits, have the adversarial aliens take a non-violent approach as well, in order to keep peace between space empires. What do they bring to the table to sway the primitives and their god?



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) alliance, innocent, investigative, planet-based, politics, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social

They Just Keep Coming... and Coming... and Coming

224

In the near future, the PCs are part of team investigating and researching new energy sources at an established laboratory. One of the scientists hits a breakthrough in energy storage, a means to contain large amounts of energy in extremely small batteries. For security reasons, the prototype and the scientist's notes are housed in an isolated section of the lab.

Each of the PCs has a few ominous encounters with a creepy man or woman garbed in a black suit and black trench coat who inquires about the team's research. At first, the questions seem only cursory and general—the sort that any stranger might ask: Where do you work? What kind of research do you do? Is the pay good?

On the subsequent visit, the questions become more direct and specific. How did you achieve these results? What did the tests show? Did you find reversing the capacitor polarity increased residual effectiveness? Who is the project leader?

On the third visit, the black-garbed visitors arrive in pairs and, in addition to even more pointed questions start demanding that the PCs arrange for them to have access to the research. The black-garbed pairs alternate between implied threats against resistance and vague promises of rewards for cooperation.

The tension should peak during a workday when an overwhelming number of these black-garbed questioners pierce security and make a beeline for the battery lab. The PCs are faced with a choice: defend the battery's secret with their lives, or flee with the research materials and the prototype.

If they stay and fight, present the PCs with a siege situation until help arrives (or doesn't). If they flee, the story becomes one of an extended chase until the PCs can find someone capable of securing them and their research.

You have a choice in this adventure's resolution. Determine who employs the black-clad interlopers—the government, an oil company, rival researchers, aliens? Revealing that will enable the PCs to find a resolution to the story, even if in the end a rival organization or government sends in the cavalry. Whatever option you choose can become a platform for additional adventures.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) investigative, isolated area, mass combat, planet-based, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady

Hearsay

225

A teacher is on trial for corrupting the local youth. Recently, children in their early teenage years have been behaving violently and recklessly. Many accidents have been caused by this behavior, and the crime rate has been increasing as well. These incidents transcend normal teenage angst, and the teacher is being blamed more due to an unpopular social affiliation than actual evidence.

The trial is a mockery of proper legal procedure. Law enforcement is frustrated due to the increase in crimes, and the prosecution has a blatant moral agenda that's popular with many of the local residents. The defense is incompetent, and only the judge seems concerned with truth and justice.

Meanwhile, the wave of violence and crime is getting worse. More and more children, including some not yet in their teens, are becoming part of the problem. Medical examinations reveal a biological agent such as a virus or parasite, but local officials will do their best to cover up these details so as not to incite people to panic—and to avoid being blamed themselves.

The PCs may be hired by the judge as special agents of the court to ensure that the trial is fair and legal, might be friends with the persecuted teacher, or may even be part of a research team that's trying to contain the biological agent. Encounters

can include a confrontation with some of the berserk children, a riot in which locals attempt to lynch the teacher, local officials and law enforcement trying to suppress evidence of the biological agent, and possibly an act of violence within the courtroom itself, such as a moral zealot attempting to detonate a suicide bomb.

You should keep the social tension as high as possible. Avoid portraying any NPC as completely good or evil. The teacher should have flaws, the parents should be overcome with worry for the safety of their children, the children are dangerous but are victims of the biological agent, and the local officials are reacting to the crisis using the only techniques that they know, even if those techniques are inappropriate for such a crisis. Tension will be highest if violence is used as a last resort by everyone but the berserk children.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (PB) difficult choice, innocent, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, planet-based, politics, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, social

Vaccine

226

A virulent disease begins to spread across a region or sector. After a long incubation period, it renders the patients weaker and weaker, until they finally die months later. The local authorities have both a vaccine and medication for treatment, but are rationing both, claiming limited supplies. In actuality, they're trading the drugs for preferential contracts, political support, and money.

The PCs are contacted by a research assistant who offers vaccinations and medication in return for their protection. She claims to know about large stockpiles of the drugs, but is afraid that blowing the whistle may put her and her family's lives in danger. She wants to get the stockpiles to the population at large, but doesn't know how. The higher-ups in the press and police are part of the conspiracy and she's already under suspicion at work.

Her first request is for the PCs to protect her family. Her husband is unaware of her visit to the PCs, and is at home with their two children. The authorities are watching her house, and will act at once if the PCs show up.

She has no plan for distributing the drugs, but is knowledgeable about the laboratory and where the drugs are stored. The vaccines are kept in a guarded refrigerated warehouse, as they

need to be kept cold until used. The medication is housed in a number of sites around the region, as treatment involves taking many different pills over the course of a month. Raiding these facilities will allow the PCs to acquire vaccine and medication, but the complications of temperature control and dosage will make it difficult to accomplish anything on a large scale.

The research assistant suggests that perhaps a broadcast facility could be taken over, and the truth of the situation revealed. There's a lightly guarded audio/video station in the area, and the PCs will need to defend it against the local authorities for long enough to broadcast a message.

Alternately, if a stealth- or intrigue-based mission is preferred, the research assistant may not be under suspicion, and may continue working for the lab throughout the adventure.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) city, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, innocent, intrigue, planet-based, politics, shady, stealth, tactical planning

Enmity of Kinsmen

Family Problems

227

The PCs are hired by a wealthy family on a frontier world to recover an heirloom from a dangerous location. The patriarch of the clan dies unexpectedly during the mission. The family immediately splits into two rival factions, each claiming the family name and the heirloom for themselves. Whoever recovers the heirloom gains legitimacy, and the PCs must decide to whom to return the prize.

One side is run by the patriarch's younger brother, a buffoon of a man with a large, spoiled family, none of whom has ever had to do any real work. This is his stand against his legacy of incompetence, and he will spare no expense to win.

The other side is run by the young son of the deceased patriarch and his bitter, once-divorced mother, who pushes him mercilessly. This is her payback for taking her son from her years ago, and her just rewards for being dumped by the patriarch.

The two sides will offer bribes, threaten loved NPCs, and will even send out their own hit squads to acquire the heirloom from the PCs. Neither holds a claim on integrity or honor, and eager family members from both sides will make their own attempts to recover the heirloom.

The patriarch died of natural causes, although at a relatively young age, so accusations of murder quickly fly. The courts haven't decided on the succession, and probably won't until one of the two sides wins the bitter fight. However, both sides have substantial assets and resources of their own, and picking one will surely upset the other.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (KS) difficult choice, dungeon crawl, intrigue, planet-based, politics, sandbox, social

Will a Reboot Fix It?

228

On a space station (or spacecraft, underwater facility, automated metropolis, etc.), a highly advanced computer system controls all of the functions and services needed to support life and to maintain the environment. The system has two parts: the operating system software and the hardware that comprises the whole of the space station. Both include a measure of artificial intelligence.

Ideally, the software and the hardware are also failsafe systems for each other. If one should malfunction then the other system takes over to prevent a disaster. However, a natural event triggers a bug that causes both the software and the hardware of the communication system to malfunction at the same time. This knocks out all communications with the outside world and also sets in motion an escalating series of problems.

The PCs can be part of the station's crew, could have been hired to investigate why the station's communications system is offline, or may be visiting the station in order to obtain important cargo.

The software and the hardware begin to "battle" for complete control of the entire station. Each registers the other as an unreliable system, and neither recognizes the failure as a shared one. This battle is annoying at first, but it quickly becomes life threatening as the systems register manual intervention by others as a possible threat to themselves. Constant

changes by the competing systems are causing the station to become structurally unsound.

Encounters in this adventure should have a different flavor depending upon which system is the adversary. The hardware systems will use blunt force attacks, such as ramming vehicles into the PCs and using automated tools and repair systems to attack them. The software will use trickery and the environment in its attacks. It will lead the PCs into dangerous areas, change the temperature gradually so as to bake or freeze them, or stop recycling the air in a section of the station to suffocate the party with carbon dioxide.

You should begin the scenario with more annoying malfunctions, including comedic events like burnt food, faulty restrooms, and bizarre responses to requests. As the scenario proceeds, the events should become more dangerous and life-threatening, especially during the climactic three-way battle to reset the entire system and restore order.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) artificial life form, combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, innocent, investigative, isolated area, madness, mass combat, planet-based, rebellion, rivalry, siege, stealth, tactical planning

Block at the Net

229

Two gold-medal-winning, beach-volleyball-playing sisters founded rival companies that invest in developing products and techniques for enhancing human athleticism. Each sister located her firm in a large city in anticipation of being onsite for a future global athletic competition.

Because of their competitive nature, each employs corporate spies to learn what the other is doing, what advances are being made, and which leading scientists are working for the other side. The PCs are hired by one sister to act as infiltrators and guinea pigs for her training techniques.

The PCs are assigned to make the first corporate espionage strike, stealing samples of pharmaceuticals from a lab deep in the local river basin. A helicopter drop enables the PCs to avoid the snakes and other wildlife found along the way (though those remain obstacles during the extraction). The task is simple: get past security, steal the drug cultures, and smash a few things if the opportunity presents itself.

After the party returns, the other company mounts a counterstrike, infiltrating the PCs' patron's virtual training facility. The attack comes while the PCs are undergoing virtual volleyball training: They're on advanced, treadmill-like

devices with sensors all over their bodies, while their avatars are enjoying the training facilities offered by the compound's virtual island. Seeking to damage the virtual training environment, the infiltrators load an attack program featuring avatars of the opposing strike team. The PCs, in their virtual bodies, must keep the strike team from destroying enough of the world to scuttle the entire simulation.

Eventually, the PC's patron determines that the chemical enhancements developed by her sister violate the drug policy enforced by the beach volleyball association's governing body. She demands an exhibition match to prove it, and fields her best athletes—including the PCs—against her sister's best athletes in a no-holds-barred competition. The finale can be sinister, with the opposing team using poisoned needles and other dirty tactics, or comedic and over-the-top, as best fits the tone of your game.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Comedy, Fantasy, Horror, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, exploration, investigative, isolated area, planet-based, siege, stealth, tactical planning

Peppermint Twist

230

Several companies all owned by the same corporation have recently been the target of industrial espionage. Research has been stolen and sold to competitors or made available in public forums, and machinery and computer systems have been sabotaged, costing huge amounts in downtime, repair, and data loss. At the scene of every crime is the same clue: a piece of peppermint twist candy.

The crimes were perpetrated by the cousin of the corporation's CEO, who is employed as a security technician. He's attempting to cause enough damage to the corporation to get the CEO fired. The CEO is unaware of it, but his cousin has been angry about the CEO's reluctance to share his wealth with him—symbolized by the peppermint candies that the CEO would never share as a child.

Tracing some of his computer crimes leads to a nest of abandoned accounts with no personal information, all with a username that's some form of "Peppermint Twist," and all created at unsecured public terminals within a relatively small geographic area.

Reviewing security footage shows that the criminal is a middle-aged man, but he can't be identified because he always wears nondescript clothes and keeps a hat down over his face. In addition, he seems to know where the security cameras are, because he moves to keep his face obscured at all

times. Adding or moving company-installed security cameras doesn't change this, though private cameras might.

Assuming these are inside jobs, cross-referencing company employee records for age range and location of residence narrows the list of suspects to a handful. If this list is cross-referenced against security positions, there are only two suspects.

Staking out likely targets for sabotage will lead to a chase scene in an industrial complex, pushing through crowds of pressing workers. The suspect is very familiar with the layout of the building and tries to lose pursuers by ducking behind cover, circling around, or taking maintenance passageways.

If the PCs track the criminal down in his home, he'll try to flee and will do his best to lose them. If they get this close and he escapes, he'll try to disappear to strike again at a better time.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MN) betrayal, investigative, planet-based, politics, race, rebellion, trade

Two Heads Aren't Better than One

231

The hereditary prince of an interstellar empire has a troublesome brother, and during a costly war, the prince decided to make peace while his brother wanted to continue the fight. In an act of sabotage on the way to a peace conference, the prince was badly injured and was rushed to a hospital. There, doctors repaired his brain with a fresh upload of his memories. He blamed his brother for the betrayal and imprisoned him, pending an execution.

While the brother is guilty, that isn't the whole story. The brother switched his mental back-up with the prince's, so the prince is now effectively the brother's mental clone ("Beta"). Unfortunately, the brother's ("Alpha") duplicitous nature was also copied, and Beta has hatched a plan to lull the empire's enemies into a false sense of security before launching a sneak attack. The prince ordered Alpha's execution to get him out of the way.

The PCs learn of Alpha's predicament while he's on the way to his execution. Unfortunately, Alpha fears that Beta plans to destroy the prince's true back-up. The doctor that performed

the switch is already on the run and is hiding behind enemy lines. The PCs need to find the doctor and retrieve the prince's brain download. Unfortunately, Beta thinks like Alpha and has already sent agents of his own to acquire the back-up.

The PCs need to uncover the plot before the peace conference begins; otherwise Beta will add a vicious new chapter to the war. The PCs have to sneak through enemy lines, retrieve the doctor, and return him to the other side while dealing with a mercenary force that's been sent to kill the doctor. The PCs must then get to the medical center and convince the doctor who performed the original operation that there was a mistake. Unfortunately, they will find Beta's forces are already waiting for them there.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) deadline, difficult choice, epic impact, interplanetary, intrigue, investigative, politics, social, stealth, trade, travel, twist, villain

Rivalry of Kinsmen

Brakes Are for the Weak

232

Two sons of a racing legend are now the elderly owners of competing businesses. They both develop racing vehicles, and although they're close they love to compete with each other.

They often hold private races using their newest products before entering their vehicles into major competitions. Their next competition is between multi-mode vehicles that can travel on land, through water, in the air, and in outer space. The brothers demand a fair competition between their teams, but this time there are complications beyond their control.

The local mob wants to rig the race so that the team that's favored to win winds up losing. They'll do whatever they can to sabotage the race. Unbeknownst to them, the non-favored team's driver is trying to lose the race on purpose in order get out of his contract. Worse still, a third company is trying to sabotage both teams so that neither vehicle can enter the next major competition.

Hooks include the PCs being hired to officiate the race, being part of one of the racing crews, observing the race as fans or journalists, or even being hired by the antagonists to help sabotage one or both of the teams.

Encounters for this adventure are easy to devise. Have four scheduled races with a prep period between each of them. Before a race begins, set up an encounter with the mob trying to damage the favored team's vehicle, an accident created by the disgruntled team leader, or an attack on both vehicles by the third company. Then run the race itself as an encounter with possible complications due to what happened during the prep period. The final race should include appearances by all three of the antagonists, as well as the competition of the race itself.

Each race is a mini-plot with the prep period being an introduction, the race serving as the rising action, the climax of crossing the finish line (or not), and a conclusion that leads quickly into the next prep period. Make sure that neither team has a definite edge over the other before a race starts. Always have the races end with the sense that it could have gone the other way; this will keep the tension high for all involved.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PB) betrayal, investigative, planet-based, race, rivalry, shady, tactical planning

Lost Love

233

This plot works best if the PCs have emotional attachments within the campaign. One of the PCs was in love with the same person as his brother, but lost: His brother married the object of their affection. Now his brother is in trouble and has asked the PC for help. The kicker is that the brother's wife has always secretly preferred the PC.

This plot presumes a corporate setting. The PC's brother is about to sign a bad deal, but the other corporation has kidnapped his wife in order to ensure his compliance. The brother asks the PC to find her. The investigation begins at a shopping mall, where the wife was taken in broad daylight. The PCs discover that, conveniently, security cameras didn't catch the crime.

Depending on the nature of your setting, the operation could have involved a hacker who leaves a calling card, a bribed security guard, or even a corrupt police officer. The PCs have

to track down these leads and crack some heads in order to learn that she's being held in a high-rise apartment.

Assassins dog the PCs along the way. One of the brother's vice presidents is in league with the other corporation and is responsible for ensuring that the brother signs the contract. In a truly noir setting, the wife might be involved as well: Perhaps, after settling for a comfortable life instead of love, she has no problems betraying him.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (WC) innocent, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, planet-based, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, social, trade

Spurned and Spurned Again

234

The scion of a huge corporation tells the PCs that with the imminent death of his father, he wants to bring his older half-brother back into the business. Long ago, there was a bitter argument after the father asked the half-brother to take a diminished role in the company, shaming him by making him step aside in favor of his younger sibling.

The problem, the scion says, is that the half-brother left for the outer rim and hasn't been heard from since. There are a few leads, but nothing certain. The scion asks the PCs to track down his half-brother and deliver the message of reconciliation: come back as an equal partner in the business.

This quest can involve several encounters, including at least one bar fight as the PCs ask questions of the wrong folks on seedy stopover. Running afoul of the local authorities (who are probably corrupt) leads to a stellar dogfight in armed space shuttles. Once the PCs find the half-brother, they can concoct a scheme or go in ray-guns blazing to extricate him from an entanglement with power-brokers in the outer rim.

The PCs will probably consider this a simple retrieval mission until the elder half-brother explains how the scion maneuvered behind the scenes to undermine his position and make him look incompetent in their father's eyes. The half-brother contends he was cheated out of his fortune all these years and insists the only reason the scion wants him returned is to have him close enough to eliminate entirely.

The half-brother asks for the PCs' help bringing down the scion so that he can assume his rightful place as the head of the company. This will

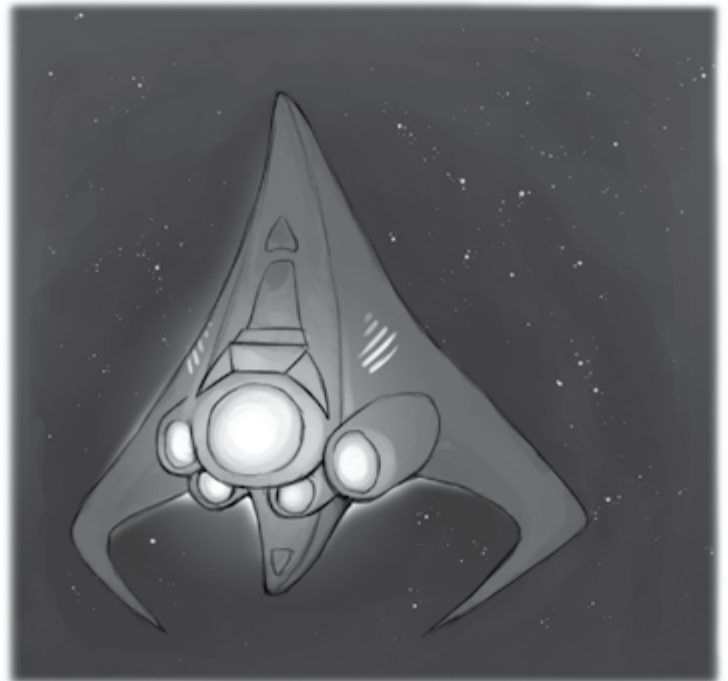
lead to other encounters: looking into database records, confirmation through witnesses, or possibly even the arrival of a hit squad loyal to the scion who trailed the PCs on their journey to find the elder half-brother.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) betrayal, difficult choice, interplanetary, intrigue, investigative, stealth, travel, twist

Artist: Laine Garrett



After a bit of time in dry-dock, the party receives an offer for a simple and lucrative deal, but loses the bid to a rival group. The PCs find themselves in similar situation several more times, leaving them with lean pickings and some serious suspicions.

Finally, an offer from a big gray-market client comes in while the rivals are out of town. A contact is working for the client and has recommended the PCs. At the first meeting with the client, local law enforcement bursts in and attempts to arrest everyone on suspicion of weapons smuggling.

The mistake is worked out, but the big client gets nervous and walks away from the deal. The police mention that they received the erroneous tip about the “weapons smuggling” meeting almost immediately after the party actually agreed to meet with the client. In other words, somebody knows exactly what the PCs are doing and is working to sabotage their efforts.

The PCs find a bug on their ship. The bug is a shielded, encrypted, and very advanced prototype that was reported stolen. The suspect in the theft resembles a member of the rival group.

They then hear through their contact that the big gray-market client has hired the rival group on a probationary basis. The rivals’ first job is to smuggle an archaeological artifact from its planet of origin, and they expect no complications. Their second job is more complex: deliver a small herd of cattle for ambiance at a party, and return them when done. The third job is the real test: deliver a mobile chemistry lab and staff to a remote location.

The PCs can attempt to sabotage any of the jobs to win back the client and soil the reputation of their rivals—and the bigger the disaster, the better. The PCs’ contact has the pertinent information, as well as a vested interest in seeing the rivals lose out, as he lost prestige over the police incident. If the bug is still around, he may even be able to plant it on the rivals’ ship.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling

Tags: (KS) betrayal, combat-heavy, interplanetary, rivalry, sandbox, shady, social

Murderous Adultery

Sensual Assassin

A new breed of assassins is hitting the spaceports of the known galaxy. They exude a powerful pheromone that makes a target fall madly in love with them. The pheromones work subtly at first, but after awhile, the target is completely enthralled. At that point, the assassin subtly implies that the two of them could be together if only the target’s spouse was gone. The pheromones make certain that the spouse is removed with fatal prejudice.

Contractors hire these assassins to influence the spouse or lover of someone they want eliminated. The assassin inserts him- or herself into the target’s life in such a way that regular contact is established. While exotic dancers and prostitutes are popular choices, an assassin can also be a new assistant, a waiter at the spouse’s routine morning coffee or lunch stop, or any other occupation where the assassin can wrangle a few minutes of flirty conversation. In addition to the pheromones, the assassin gets subtle psychic impressions of what the target likes and adapts his or her form to match. An assassin might have long, curly blonde hair, but after a couple of meetings with her target she might restyle herself as a short, straight-haired brunette.

A target enjoys flirting with the assassin for a few days,

after which he or she wants more. This soon develops into a full-fledged romance, and by the end of the month, the target eliminates his or her spouse. This act disrupts the brainwashing, but the damage is done. The assassin then disappears, only reemerging for the next assignment.

This works well for detective or intrigue stories. For example, a prominent corporate executive could hire the PCs to find out why her husband has been acting strangely over the last week. He’s been deviating from his usual routines and has given only clumsy excuses. In the course of their investigation, the PCs discover his indiscretion. Fearing the PCs may disrupt the plan, the assassin and her employer use various methods to try and eliminate them before they can share any information with their client. If the PCs are on the right track but tip their hand, then the assassin may work her magic on one of the PCs in order to turn him against his allies.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) intrigue, investigative, mature themes, planet-based, politics, shady, social

Tarnished Medal

237

A political leader who is also a military hero tells the PCs a sordid tale. Decades ago, on another planet, he caught his first wife cheating on him. In his anger, he beat the adulterers to death. He joined the military to flee his crime.

Recently, a stranger contacted him and threatened to go public with the story unless the politician did a few favors. The favors were all minor, until now: The stranger wants someone promoted into a position with access to communication codes and encryption keys. Knowing the implications, the politician refuses and asks the PCs to track down the blackmailer.

The blackmailer's messages to the politician are picked up and delivered by a courier company. The messages are put in drop-boxes and are prepaid for delivery. The replies are returned to random locations. The politician prompts the PCs to seek employment with the courier in order to track the sender. If they follow this lead, they're hired as couriers.

The blackmailer is the politician's wife's lover, who survived the beating he endured so many years ago and has been plotting his revenge ever since. Paralyzed from the waist down, he joined a group dedicated to violent revolution, and his success at recruiting has made him their leader.

Dark Dealings

238

In a remote location, a refueling station stands isolated from most of civilization. Owned and operated by the government, this station is part public service and part military outpost. Ships of all types refuel here, and some small businesses are allowed to operate within the station to offer various goods and services. Some of these businesses are fronts for organized crime operations, including drug rings, weapons trafficking, and sex slavery.

The station commander is having an affair with the wife of a crime lord. The crime lord knows about the affair and has arranged a hit on both his wife and the station commander. The station's medical officer works for the crime lord and will ensure that the station commander is in the right place at the right time for the hit to occur.

Neither the station commander nor the crime lord knows that the wife and the medical officer are working together. The wife and doctor are plotting to kill the two of them so that they may start a new life together off of the station.

The story begins with small encounters between the station's guards and some lowly thugs. These should include confrontations that display the might of both sides, such as a raid on a shop selling black market goods or attempted theft of military supplies. Follow this with a failed hit on the station commander when he's on his way to a rendezvous with the wife.

Upon delivering the blackmailer's messages, the PCs discover that they're being returned to companies that use a temporary staffing firm. The firm is led by one of the revolutionaries, but the temps themselves are kept in the dark. If the boss is questioned, he'll feign ignorance, but will call for a hit squad on the PCs as soon as they leave.

Clues on hit squad members' bodies will lead back to the boss and his cronies; the boss will fight to the death. A few temps will remember that the messages are sent to an embassy, where they're put into a diplomatic pouch and taken off-world. A temp offers to deliver a bugged message for a fee.

If the PCs manage to follow this trail all the way back to the blackmailer, they'll find that he manages a soup kitchen, which grants him anonymity and an endless supply of new recruits. They may then reveal his covert identity to the politician, or may find his revolution to be a worthy cause.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) deadline, difficult choice, intrigue, investigative, planet-based, politics, race, rebellion, social, villain

The wife then goes into hiding and the station commander leads an arrest attempt against the crime lord in his stronghold. Regardless of the outcome, the doctor will arrange for a final confrontation between the station commander and the crime lord; he plans to have them both killed in what appears to be an accident. The accident will permanently cripple the station.

The PCs could be at the station attempting to acquire fuel and food, they could have been hired by any of the involved parties to aid in their nefarious dealings, or they may just be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The station commander's and crime lord's activities are obvious, but the plans of the wife and doctor are more subtle.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PB) alliance, betrayal, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, mature themes, planet-based, politics, rivalry, sandbox, shady, social, stealth, twist, villain

Murder on the Starliner Express

239

When they win a trip on a spacefaring cruise liner, the PCs finally get a well-deserved vacation. Mid-voyage, a comet passing across the path of the liner forces the ship to stop for two days. During the night, after all aboard have gathered on the observation deck to watch the comet pass, a concierge discovers the body of a noted treasure hunter, stabbed through the heart. The captain of the liner asks the PCs to saddle up in spite of their vacation and help unravel the treasure hunter's murder. They soon find many viable suspects.

The PCs interview the treasure hunter's wife, who is distraught. She says they were transporting several valuable pieces to sell to a museum at the liner's destination. The two were partners in his treasure-hunting, working digs and doing research together. She admits that she sometimes got jealous that he won all of the accolades for their work.

An art dealer with a dark reputation happens to be on board the liner. He had made a counteroffer to the museum's bid for the treasure, but the treasure hunter rebuffed him. The dealer says he has nothing to gain from the treasure hunter's death, although the wife and the secretary both think he's the murderer. The art dealer always travels with imposing goons, and one of his cufflinks was found at the scene of the crime (planted there by the perpetrator).

The museum's curator is also on board, overseeing the transfer of the goods. He worries that with the treasure hunter's death, the transaction won't go through. Witnesses report that the curator and the treasure hunter argued the night before his death; they fought over the additional, unexpected expenses for this trip that the hunter had billed to the museum.

In the hold, dark figures assault the PCs when they examine the hunter's treasures. Their attackers are stevedores paid extra to stop anyone from nosing around in the hold. They don't know their employer, though they assume the treasure hunter wanted the extra security (which is true).

The wife doesn't appear for dinner on one of the following nights. A search finds her leaving a cabin in one of the lower berths. She was meeting with an accomplice, a rival treasure hunter with whom she was having an affair. He possessed a piece that would complete the collection, but he couldn't get the treasure hunter to pay the high price he asked. If interviewed, he's shocked by the turn of events, and a bit dismayed because he has no hope of selling the piece now. The first time he meets the PCs, though, he's abrasive and stand-offish to the point of being belligerent. He has a temper.

The wife fell in love with the rival treasure hunter and was having an affair with him. She was playing him to get him to turn over the last piece of the collection, but he wouldn't part with it. She killed her husband and blamed it on the art dealer. She intends to hold up the sale to the museum until she can get the rival treasure hunter to part with his piece. Once that is accomplished, she plans sell the entire collection to the museum for a higher asking price and, for once, win the acclaim she feels she is due for all those years of working in her husband's shadow.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk

Tags: (TT) interplanetary, investigative, isolated area, roleplaying-heavy, social, stealth, trade, travel, villain

Artist: Hugo Solis



Madness

The Captain's Table

240

Although this is a dangerous scenario in which paranoia nearly tears the PCs' ship apart, this adventure is best played for laughs, allowing the PCs to get caught up in a few ridiculously overblown situations before finding the convenient cure that restores things to normal.

The captain of the PCs' ship celebrates her birthday while the ship is traveling through deep space. Everyone, crew and passenger alike, is invited to celebrate her birthday or at least have some of her birthday cake (depending on the nature of meals in space in your campaign this could be an exotic treat). Unfortunately, the chef purchased an ingredient at the last station that wasn't on the level. A merchant surreptitiously substituted a cheap but untested ingredient, and it's heightening the crew's paranoia.

This starts subtly at first. Minor disagreements explode into major arguments, with people thinking the worst of each other. The paranoia affects the PCs as well, and this can be especially dangerous if the PCs barely trust each other to begin with. Any investigation will be hampered because it involves questioning people, and paranoid NPCs don't like being questioned. If it is discovered that the food is the likely source, the chef may have to barricade himself in his cabin in

order to avoid being murdered by a paranoid mob.

As the hours pass, the problems escalate. The first officer starts a mutiny, believing that the captain is an enemy agent. The chief engineer sets the engines to self-destruct. The chief medical officer tries to inoculate everyone against everything, no matter how dangerous it is to have several drugs in the system at once.

Fortunately, the cure is rather simple. In fact, the space station that the ship recently left has sent a cautionary message, but the communications officer doesn't read or report it for fear that it's a loyalty test. A common antibiotic can be used to cure this malady, but the chief medical officer knows that there's a minuscule chance of side effects, and it terrifies him. Once the PCs learn of the cure and figure out a way to administer the antibiotic, perhaps by using the old "flood the air vents" trick, things return to normal.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) betrayal, deadline, interplanetary, investigative, isolated area, madness, roleplaying-heavy, social, travel

Too Close to the Sun

241

A scientist obsessed with research on a dying star imperils his family by keeping them in harm's way while he conducts his dangerous experiments. The PCs are interstellar travelers who encounter the scientist's immense space station by chance, or were assigned to the task by a galactic authority.

This adventure can go one of two main ways. In the first likely scenario, the PCs must execute an assault/infiltration of the space station and overcome the scientist's security measures in the hopes of rescuing the family. One of the family members finds a way to aid the PCs, especially if they get themselves in a tight spot—surrounded by the station's pesky spider-shaped droids, for example.

Alternately, the scientist welcomes the PCs openly and warmly when they come aboard the station. In this case, the PCs observe and interact with the family in ways that make it clear the scientist's obsession is endangering them all: furtive glances at security cameras, secret meetings in private quarters, or even mysterious, untraceable messages sent to the PCs' communication devices.

Either way, the scientist enacts measures that lock down

the science station. The focus of the adventure then shifts to finding a way for the PCs and the family to escape before the scientist's experiments doom them all.

The station is an extension of the scientist. The master controls take orders from him and only from him. Even benign objects and machines might turn lethal under the scientist's direction. Slaying the scientist isn't enough to remove the peril, though, as the computer continues to act on his last command.

The adventure can also have poignant moments as the PCs force anguished family members to choose between saving their own lives and risking them in a last-ditch effort to convince the scientist to select another course.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers

Tags: (TT) alliance, artificial life form, deadline, difficult choice, escort mission, innocent, interplanetary, investigative, isolated area, roleplaying-heavy, social, stealth

Devil's Triangle

242

An automated mayday comes from a merchant ship adrift in the Devil's Triangle, a region of space known for strange happenings. The first ship to reach the site will receive rescue compensation and possible salvage rights. Shortly after the PCs start to head to the Triangle, they receive another automated mayday from a private yacht that's also adrift in the same location.

Arriving onsite, the PCs find the ships docked together and pick up a short-range signal from a space suit's rescue beacon in the area. The suit reports that it holds a live person, but that its life support system will fail shortly.

The survivor, a wealthy teenage boy, is distraught. He says he and his three friends were to watch the yacht while his family boarded the merchant ship. When his family boarded the vessel, crazed crewmembers attacked them. He and his friends heard the ruckus, but he must have blacked out, because he awoke in the EVA suit, adrift in space.

The merchant ship is smuggling a number of Jimson Trees, dangerous plants whose pollen is a powerful hallucinogen and stimulant. The shock of transport caused them all to release their pollen. The pollen quickly clogged the air filters in the ship, and is still in the air. The father of the family on the yacht owns the merchant ship.

Most of the crew members on both ships are alive, though many have suffered injuries. Over-stimulated and hallucinating, they become violent with the slightest provocation. Both ships have docking ports that are available, but locked. A search of the yacht reveals a large supply of pharmaceuticals, both legal and illegal. There are enough drugs on hand to sedate some (though not all) of the crew.

As the PCs are dealing with the crew, another ship appears and aggressively claims first responder status. They attempt to board the ship, which incites the remaining drugged crew to fight back.

If the PCs emerge victorious from the chaos, and the crew is sedated or restrained, the filters will need to be replaced and cleaned to allow fresh air to be pushed through the ships. The ships will have to be scrubbed, and crews will need at least an additional 24 hours' rest before returning to normal. Some members of both crews will require medical and psychiatric care.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (KS) combat-heavy, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, madness, rivalry, social

Virtually Doomed

243

An advanced medical research facility is testing a new method of emergency care that allows a person's mind to be removed from their body and placed into a virtual reality world while the body undergoes an operation. Treatments as drastic full-body cloning can be undertaken while the patient's mind is kept safe.

The hook is vital to this plot: All of the PCs must be involved in a disaster that causes injuries so severe that this technology is used in order to save them. An accident such as a crash, factory explosion, collapsed building, or natural disaster that levels an entire area are all good options. You can even use this plot as an immediate follow-up to an unexpected total party kill, if appropriate.

The virtual world has a major bug. The computer system that runs it must constantly examine each component of the world and keep all of the programs in sync. Advanced beings, upon interacting with this virtual world, confuse the system. It can't deal with unanticipated interactions and a perverse world of madness emerges as a result.

The first encounter is the disaster that mortally wounds and incapacitates the PCs. Direct the PCs to this encounter by wearing them down, not by negating their successes. For

example, if the PCs successfully avoid a falling tree in the midst of a hurricane or tornado, have the storm continue to grow until the winds are so powerful that it's impossible to avoid the barrage of flying debris. The PCs die and their bodies are severely—seemingly irreparably—damaged.

The PCs are then taken to the emergency room of the hospital where the new VR technology is being tested. Use this scene to drop clues as to what the doctors are attempting in order to save the PCs. Immediately jump into a near-utopian setting. When the PCs attempt to interact with the environment, there are violent and inexplicable results. The system designates one PC as a virus and quarantines him.

Keep the sense of paranoia high during this adventure. The world and the PCs' roles within it should be constantly changing. If their minds survive the madness of the virtual world long enough, their bodies will be successfully repaired.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) artificial life form, exploration, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, madness, planet-based, sandbox

Fatal Imprudence

Raindancer

244

The Raindancer offers tantalizing hope to drought-ravaged communities. For an immense sum of money, the Raindancer team conducts nightly weather experiments from a tractor-trailer lab designed to produce rain.

A veteran con artist runs Raindancer. He has a long record of convictions and a history of running elaborate cons with a scientific slant. Unlike his previous endeavors, though, Raindancer is straight. The generators and lab perform as advertised, causing rain to fall within a 25-mile radius by creating a highly charged electrical field that stimulates the moisture in the atmosphere and causes dark clouds and vivid lighting to form.

Seeing Raindancer in operation is quite a show. Once the flatbed trailer is moved into position, the walls of the trailer are removed and a control station is set up nearby. When the generators are in operation, there is a high-pitched whine accompanied by flashes of electricity, visible pulses of energy, and a great deal of condensation. The machine can run at any time, but it's more dramatic at night.

Unbeknownst to the con artist, the Raindancer generators stimulate a previously undiscovered electricity-based life form. These energy beings appear as a glowing, sparkling form on metal tools, vehicles, or any object that conducts electricity. When the Raindancer electrical field is fully charged, these electrical creatures jump towards livestock and people in a leapfrog fashion, delivering jolts of electricity

as they hit. The creatures manifest at the outer edge of the 25-mile radius, so the con artist is unaware of the effect. The electrocuted victims usually cite lightning strikes as an explanation.

Investigators piece together a pattern of hospitalization and death by correlating Raindancer operations with police, media, and hospital reports. It also might take a firsthand account of the phenomenon to properly document it and gather enough evidence to shut Raindancer down. If presented with the evidence, the con artist will dismiss the connection if he thinks it will lead to having to close down his money-making operation.

The con artist might not go quietly with authorities, especially if forced to defend Raindancer from an attempt to dismantle or destroy it. It's also possible to render events so that the con artist is a victim of the electrical beings during a demonstration.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) artificial life form, innocent, investigative, isolated area, planet-based, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, trade, twist

Armageddon Exodus

245

A pacifistic society that emphasizes intellectual pursuits establishes a colony. One of its lead scientists develops a defense system that protects the society from outside threats. Unfortunately, before he can thoroughly test it, a colleague points out a potential flaw. Unwilling to admit his error, the lead scientist kills the colleague (making it look like an accident) and deploys the defense system regardless. Naturally, the defense system, rather than protecting the planet, begins stripping away the world's atmosphere. The colony is forced to move, and move quickly.

A band of pirates takes advantage of this turn of events, preying on the colonists as they attempt to flee. The PCs are hooked into helping those that won't help themselves against a ruthless enemy. In addition, the slain colleague's friends are looking into the circumstances of her death, a task made harder by the fact that the crime scene is on a dead planet.

The lead scientist decides to cover his tracks by offering the pirates access codes to experiments left behind on the planet in return for destroying evidence. He may also aid them in taking ships that include his would-be inquisitors.

The PCs have two goals: They must protect the colonists from piracy en route to a safe new world, and they have to uncover the lead scientist's crimes. If you want to add a few more complications, then you can have several experiments left behind which the pirates can easily turn into dangerous weapons.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) epic impact, escort mission, innocent, interplanetary, investigative, social, stealth, tactical planning, travel

Cleansing

246

As more and more basic necessities are provided by computer-controlled systems, computer viruses have become a greater threat to public safety. In an attempt to prevent future viruses from causing problems, a brilliant programmer creates a super virus that will stop all others and thereby protect the world's computer systems. This new virus analyzes computer code to determine its purpose: If the code is for a computer virus, it is destroyed. The programmer releases his creation into the wild with little testing, confident that he has just eliminated all computer viruses from ever being a threat again.

Within mere minutes of its release, power grids start to shut down and safety systems begin to fail. The super virus has determined that all code except for itself is potentially a virus. As local governments and law enforcement enter into a cyber-battle with the super virus, it determines that DNA is a potentially malevolent code and begins taking over military systems with the goal of destroying all organic life forms.

Anything that has computer software is being taken over by the super virus, and anything biological is tagged for destruction. The PCs have to survive this crisis.

A large transport vehicle carrying numerous passengers crashes into a densely populated area. In the aftermath of the

crash, other systems begin to fail, such as anything electrical and all communication devices. This is an apocalyptic event, so keep the pressure on the PCs to move into a safe area.

In the midst of the chaos, automated defense systems start the hunt for survivors. This should take place amongst a great deal of wreckage as a result of the first encounter. At this time, some communication devices become partially operational. The programmer who created the super virus has found a way to contact others and is looking for survivors. The PCs can locate the source of the transmission, but whatever system they use alerts the defense systems to their activity.

The final confrontation should take place at the programmer's dwelling. With the programmer's help, can the PCs stop the super virus once and for all?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) alliance, artificial life form, city, combat-heavy, epic challenge, epic impact, innocent, intrigue, investigative, madness, mass combat, monster, planet-based, rebellion, sandbox, siege, tactical planning

Joyride

247

The PCs receive an urgent midnight call from a famous media star: The teens-only sweet sixteen party cruise for his daughter has just gone horribly awry. One of the teenagers aboard hacked into the ship's computer and caused the yacht to veer into a hostile sector of space. Nobody knows what's happened to it, but radio traffic in that sector has increased.

Because the media star has made a fortune portraying a muscle-bound hero fighting hostiles with massive firepower and snappy one-liners, he begs and bribes the authorities to not reveal the situation to the news media. He offers a large sum to the PCs to resolve things quietly, and provides them with a ship with heavy shielding and minimal armaments. He asks the PCs to pose as journalists in pursuit of the story, and has outfitted their ship accordingly.

The hostiles have intercepted the teens and are holding them in an abandoned space station. The hostiles don't yet know who the girl is, but suspect that they may be able to wring some coin out of her and are arguing over what to do next. The teens are kept in the yacht, which is operational but parked behind airtight blast doors and surrounded by guards. The hostiles have searched the yacht thoroughly and removed all possible weapons, drugs, and the like. However, weapons can be found in the space station, either in open racks or left lying about by undisciplined guards.

After some travel time, during which they can prepare and possibly hide weapons and such in their gear, the PCs are intercepted, searched, questioned, and then escorted to the space station. They're allowed to visit the teens and witness their humane treatment, but can't initially broadcast anything home. The hostiles' ignorance of the girl's identity, their desire to get good press, and their disagreement over what to do next are all obvious angles for manipulating them.

The blast doors can be remote controlled if the access codes can be acquired from the command center computer. Stealth, persuasion, a distraction, or violence will work, though the last two will lead to heightened security throughout the station. The tractor beam is operated solely from the command center, but can be rigged with explosives or even disabled early on, as it doesn't see regular use. It can also be destroyed from outside the station. The pursuit ships won't leave the hostile sector, but will pursue and attempt to destroy both craft. The yacht has little shielding and must avoid taking too many hits.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) combat-heavy, deadline, escort mission, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, race, social, travel

Involuntary Crimes of Love

My Sister is Dating an Alien

248

In the outer rim, attitudes about aliens are sometimes not nearly as enlightened as they are in the core systems. This adventure begins with the PCs doing a good deed and establishing their reputation. Shortly thereafter, a person in love with an alien approaches the party. In the eyes of the community, their affair is illicit; so far, they've managed to pursue their love discreetly. However, a spurned former lover is planning to reveal their secret.

The two want to get married, but they rightly suspect that their families will both be against such a union. To complicate matters, the human and alien families are rivals in business. Confronted by prejudice and intimidation, the star-crossed lovers ask the PCs to intervene.

The PCs may suggest bypassing family or religious traditions and arranging a civil wedding. The judge refuses to perform a marriage ceremony, citing his belief that aliens and humans shouldn't wed or have children. By hook, crook, or attorney, the PCs can convince the judge to come around to the notion of officiating the lovers' wedding. The groom's family then sends a diplomat, backed by enforcers, to set the PCs straight about their involvement.

The PCs need to find a way to discredit or embarrass the spurned lover if they plan to sway the attitudes of the families and other local residents. Left unchecked, the spurned lover

incites fear and loathing among the humans and poisons any attempt to reconcile the human-alien relationship.

In an attempt to win at least one family's approval, the PCs arrange a get-together where they introduce one side's silly, strange, or whimsical family traditions. A follow-up meeting with the other family can involve equally strange but different traditions.

As business rivals, the PCs might work to convince the heads of the families to view the marriage as a business partnership that could be beneficial to everyone. They need to demonstrate how their businesses are compatible (e.g., one side makes bolts, the other wrenches).

The tone of this adventure could be grim if there's no way to reconcile the lovers with their families, or lighthearted if the encounters with the alien and human family traditions lead to some awkward, funny, and heartwarming moments.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (TT) alliance, city, deadline, innocent, intrigue, planet-based, roleplaying-heavy, social

Virtual Affair

249

In the future, the line between reality and virtual reality has blurred to the point where it's possible to carry on a second life that feels just as real as the real world. Unlike the real world, however, a person creating a second life has a great deal of control over it. Thus, the virtual world is full of beautifully sculpted people living ideal lives. There are no slums and some people even have two or more virtual lives, all with different names. Because of its inherent anonymity, virtual reality is the ideal place for shady transactions to take place.

A PC (or NPC) has recently struck up a relationship with a virtual person; this works best if the relationship is cultivated during previous adventures. Unfortunately, this virtual person disappears after leaving his or her lover a cryptic note. The PC has to track down clues in the virtual world as well as the real world in order to find his lover.

The kicker is that the lover turns out to be someone close to the PC. He or she could be a relative of the PC, or perhaps

another PC's or NPC's significant other. He or she might even be of a different gender than what they portrayed in the virtual world.

How the virtual lover got in trouble depends on what they do in real life. Perhaps he or she is involved in a shady business deal that just went wrong, or knows someone that is. This could provide interesting complications if the PC has to interview virtual friends to try to uncover a virtual rival that might know what happened to the lover. When the two of them meet, there will be some fun roleplaying between the PC and his virtual friend.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Romance, Space Opera, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) artificial life form, innocent, investigative, mature themes, planet-based, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, spirit

Master Race

250

A former client contacts the PCs, asking for an odd favor. His parents recently died, and in going through their belongings he discovered that he had a twin sister. Apparently she was kidnapped when they were about three years old, and was never found. The authorities closed the case long ago, but he'd like the PCs to see if they can track her down.

The sister disappeared on a field trip to a children's theater performance. Possessing latent psychic abilities, she was kidnapped by a shadowy organization attempting to build a master race of psychically aware individuals. Having been raised by the organization, she is now a zealous member. They have implanted a hypnotic suggestion that she fall in love with her twin brother, in the hopes that the pair will produce even more psychically gifted offspring.

Some investigation reveals that an actor from the theater group was arrested a few years back for fraud, and he claimed knowledge of the kidnapping. He was killed in jail before he could be questioned. Further investigation finds that his court-appointed attorney immediately took a high-paying job with a research organization. Less than a year later, the attorney died in a single-vehicle accident. The attorney's wife remembers the events and says her husband was never really happy working for the research group, but that he never spoke of his work or brought it home.

Masked Passion

251

Photographic evidence has surfaced showing that a happily married senator, the chairman of a key defense committee, called on a prostitute while on a visit to an ally nation's threatened border. The senator was set up; he's not foolish enough to risk his marriage, his career, or his nation's well being by indulging in an affair. The press hasn't yet gotten word of this incident, but if the story is leaked the damage would be irreversible. The senator hires the PCs to clear his name.

A defense contractor is blackmailing the senator into approving funding for an untested weapons system. He used advanced mimicking nanotechnology to create a disguise so that the prostitute could pose as the senator's wife. The prostitute then drugged the senator, set up a camera to record the event, and delivered the evidence to the contractor.

When the PCs first meet the senator, they find him distraught. He shares as much as he can with the PCs without compromising national security and urges the PCs to visit the hotel where the "incident" was photographed.

On the way to the hotel, the PCs are attacked by some suspiciously well-trained thugs—a mercenary hit squad hired by the contractor. Some evidence of the contractor's disguise

contacting the research organization will lead nowhere, but will trigger an attack by a street gang, who warns the party to back off. If any gang members are captured, they'll confess that they don't know why they attacked the party, only that they felt compelled to do so after talking to a woman in a long black coat.

The next time the PCs meet their client, he's laughing and talking with a female friend who resembles him. She leaves shortly after the party's arrival, picking up her long black coat on the way out. He mentions that they just met, but get along great—as if they've known each other their whole lives.

The woman is unaware that the client is her brother and has been hypnotically conditioned to fight against any kind of capture or arrest. She is as psychically powerful as the campaign setting allows, and is difficult to defeat.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) city, innocent, investigative, madness, planet-based, relationship hook, twist

technology will be found on the mercenaries, because they used it to get past security systems.

In the city where the hotel is located, the prostitute approaches the PCs. She's willing to confess her part in the operation if they agree to protect her. She has been on the run since the incident, as the contractor wants her dead to tie up potential loose ends. This leads into another encounter with even better-equipped mercenaries.

When the PCs find the link between the prostitute, the nanotechnology, and the contractor, a final showdown with the blackmailer takes place. The fight involves elite bodyguards, advanced weaponry (some of it still in development), and a chance to retrieve the only evidence that will clear the senator of any wrongdoing.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PB) combat-heavy, innocent, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, planet-based, politics, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, social, stealth, twist, villain

Slaying of a Kinsman Unrecognized

Neverland

252

Early in her career, a military commander lost her family to an alien invasion. Her husband's body was recovered, but her child was never found. Decades later, she has learned that some of the people from her home planet were taken as slaves. Recent skirmishes against the alien menace have recovered some of these slaves. The military commander is launching an illegal raid into alien territory to find her lost child. Her years of emotional suffering have taken their toll, and she is mad with hatred for her enemy.

Hooks for this adventure include the PCs serving in the military under the commander, being hired as mercenaries for the illegal operation, or volunteering for the mission for any number of personal reasons.

The encounters in this adventure should be fast, furious, and combat-heavy. The PCs are going behind enemy lines, and their first fight will be with a heavily armed drone ship in space. The next obstacle is a natural threat, such as a meteor shower that endangers their ship.

Landing on the alien world draws enemy forces out to confront the PCs and leads to a climactic encounter at an alien slave facility. The commander becomes more and more irrational as the adventure proceeds, but calms down once the aliens have been neutralized. The aliens track their slaves by DNA, and with the facility's equipment the commander learns one of two things depending on the style of your campaign: Her child is alive and being held in the facility, or, for a darker vibe, her child was actually the pilot of the "drone" ship the PCs destroyed in the first encounter. In the latter case, the commander has never come to terms with the loss of her family, and realizing that she has killed her own child damages her beyond recovery.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk

Tags: (PB) alliance, dungeon crawl, escort mission, interplanetary, investigative, madness, politics, race, shady, tactical planning, travel

The Parent Race

253

Probes return with information about a previously undiscovered planet covered with ruins. Rumors spread that this planet was inhabited by one of the "parent" species of the cosmos, early interstellar travelers who either attempted to influence the primitive peoples they encountered or seeded worlds with their own kind.

Archaeologists, private collectors, and the PCs all scramble to outfit expeditions, but there are few starships headed in the right direction. Rival expeditions end up hitching rides together on a few heavy space cruisers.

The PCs encounter a rival group during the trip. Use this encounter as a chance for the PCs to get to know their rivals' personalities and strengths. Ideally, the rival group is, in some respects, a mirror image of the party. Some PCs might develop friendships or deepen enmities with the rivals during this scene.

At this point, you should identify one of the PCs as a relative of a member of the other group. However, initially you should only hint at this relationship. Perhaps the PC and relative wear the same style of heirloom jewelry or sport the same cleft chin. Total revelation of the tie should come through interaction with the NPCs (a discussion of shared experiences, the same planet of origin, a common ancestor, etc.).

Once the teams are planet-side, however, the race is on. Exploration focuses on a particular pyramid complex. The two groups should bump into each other at least once during an attempt to claim a minor artifact. This dispute can be resolved through negotiation or by force.

The complex contains at least one trap, a chamber that locks shut and slowly fills with sand. After a lengthy exploration of the area, the two teams arrive at the pyramids simultaneously—and that's when an ancient alien force awakens to battle against the interlopers. In the course of battle, one of the two related characters dies. This is most likely the NPC, but it's possible to continue the story even if the PC is the one to die.

The adventure ends with some sort of retribution or reconciliation between the PCs and the rival group—recognition of the kinsman slain.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers

Tags: (TT) exploration, interplanetary, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, race, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, social, travel

She's Aboard What!?

254

This plot works best if the PCs are part of a military structure (e.g., the crew of a vessel exploring new sectors or protecting colonies). A rebel faction has stolen a ship equipped with a powerful new weapon. The only hope that the PCs have is to hit the ship with a sneak attack and destroy it. The rebels lack the resources to acquire another ship with this much firepower.

The PCs learn the ship's location through a series of investigations and interrogations. They also discover that the vessel is unfinished; the theft depleted its fuel, and the ship is a sitting duck until the rebels can resupply. Without its main drive, which powers much of the ship's systems, the rebel ship doesn't have access to all of its offensive and defensive capabilities. Smaller escorts defend the rebel ship, but a few well-placed shots could make the main rebel ship explode.

The PC's captain realizes that her ship is the only one close enough to take advantage of the situation. The captain needs

to strike now. She makes a plea to the crew, as the mission is dangerous and the captain intends to make a fatal ramming run if all other options are exhausted. Once the crew agrees (and those that don't are dropped off at the nearest space outpost), the captain orders the assault.

Unfortunately for one of the PCs, a relative or lover is aboard the rebel ship. The PC only becomes aware of this as his vessel intercepts communiqués from the ship during their approach. The PC now has to decide whether to let his loved one die, possibly by his hand, or risk the mission to warn—or even rescue—that person.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) alliance, difficult choice, interplanetary, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, twist

Welcoming Committee

255

Two neighboring planets have been working towards space exploration technology and have recently discovered each other's existence. After some diplomatic missteps and a few skirmishes, the two races started an arms race and now perch on the brink of planetary war. The PCs have been tasked with contacting both races as a welcoming committee to the local stellar community, securing their cooperation in local treaties and practices, and smoothing over their conflicts.

While the two races are already in shock from discovering the existence of other intelligent life, the PCs have a secret weapon to end hostilities: Both races have similar creation

myths because they were both seeded from the same primitive species as part of an interplanetary expansion project.

When the PCs make first contact, they'll be mistaken for an enemy ship and a strike force will be quickly mobilized to attack them. While the new races' technology is primitive by the PCs' standards, they send a large force to deal with "invaders." The opposing race sees this sudden mobilization of troops and interprets it as an attack, sending their own equally large strike force. The PCs have only minutes to make their neutrality clear and calm everyone down or they'll find themselves beset on both sides.

At first, the races don't accept the PCs' status as representatives of a greater authority. The PCs make it clear that space travel without agreement to existing treaties is illegal and will be punished. Both races ignore their warnings, and the PCs have to enforce a no-fly zone around their planets until the races cooperate. The tension leads to a series of small skirmishes and several attempts to capture the PCs' ship.

Once the races see they have no choice but to acquiesce to the PCs' authority, the PCs can begin to negotiate a peace treaty between them. After that's been accomplished, they must walk the races through the standard treaties and agreements that govern trade and behavior between planets. Factionalism and other complications during this process can lead to future adventures.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Supers

Tags: (MN) innocent, interplanetary, mass combat, politics, social, tactical planning, trade, travel, twist



Artist: Laine Garrett

Self-Sacrifice for an Ideal

Juice

256

A prizefighter skilled in a brutal form of hand-to-hand combat hires the PCs to procure ever more powerful and exotic drugs to enhance his stamina, reactions, and strength. He's determined to reach the number one spot in his sport, and within the boundaries of his sport's few rules he's willing to do anything in order to make it to the top.

Some of the drugs he needs are illegal in many places, so the PCs must either deal with the black market and avoid the law, or travel to the few places where they aren't illegal, carefully sticking to areas where they won't be breaking transport laws.

A few of the drugs are simply in low supply. The PCs must make a run to a distant or undeveloped planet and collect drugs or raw materials for processing. These may be hard to acquire because of rarity, complex harvesting or manufacturing processes, hostile natives, or a myriad of other reasons.

A handful of the drugs he requests show stellar results but aren't yet cleared through clinical trials. The PCs must arrange for a supply to be "lost" or "destroyed" and smuggle it to him.

As the PCs complete drug runs, the prizefighter continually improves his performance and rises in the ranks, but becomes increasingly mentally unstable and suffers from ever more crippling side effects (which are only temporarily assuaged by greater doses of more powerful drugs). Though he will eventually become the number one fighter in his circuit with the PCs' help, he'll succumb to the stress the drugs put on his body a short time later.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) interplanetary, mature themes, politics, sandbox, shady, trade, travel, twist

At Least It Gets Him Out of the House ...

257

Every year, a competition is held to build and pilot the best mecha athlete in several sporting events. Similar to a track and field meet, the event is open to all comers. A young dreamer has decided to sell his moderately successful business in order to purchase the parts needed to assemble a mecha. Despite having no experience, he enters the competition; he'll compete against other pilots with better technology and training in order to prove that dreams are worth fighting for.

Everyone who knows the dreamer agrees that this is the stupidest idea that they've ever heard.

This plot is a comedic tale, and the hooks should be as simple as possible. Perhaps the dreamer owes the PCs some money, and he'll pay them back if they help him win the competition, or maybe the PCs just don't want to see the dreamer completely humiliated.

The encounters revolve around the various competitive events. The first event is a race through a major metropolis. The next challenge is to drive a large concrete pylon as deep as possible into the ground in less than one minute. The third

challenge is to leap over an active volcano that can erupt at any moment. The fourth challenge is to be the first to retrieve a small chest from the bottom of the sea. The final challenge is a wrestling match between the two finalists.

Between and during each of these challenges, the PCs will encounter mobsters who want to rig the events, cheating competitors trying to sabotage the other mecha, and a political group seeking to end the games.

You should have fun with this plot and not allow it to be taken too seriously. The fun should come from the obviously outclassed dreamer and his crew inventing humorous solutions to win each challenge. Give the PCs a lot of liberty in how they can solve each challenge, and portray the dreamer as absent-minded, but with a genuine belief in fair play.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers

Tags: (PB) alliance, artificial life form, deadline, epic challenge, intrigue, planet-based, race, relationship hook, rivalry, sandbox

The Last Kilometer

258

In a post-apocalyptic world, the PCs lead of a group of refugees trying to cross the continent to reach a safe haven. It's possible the PCs are hired scouts who perform this mission for besieged communities, or perhaps an emerging authority assigns them to seek out pockets of humanity; the authority convinces them to make the trip to the "promised land," believing that there's safety in numbers.

The PCs prove themselves against the hazards, monsters, and lawless marauders of the post-apocalyptic world by defeating them in battle or by outsmarting them. Along the way, the party gets to know key individuals within the group that they're escorting across the wasteland. During these interactions, they learn that some of the members are particularly likeable and special. The nature of this specialness is up to you, but it could revolve around a spiritual or intellectual blessing or the possession of knowledge that will help rebuild civilization.

The idea is to elevate the mission from mere escort duty into a true crusade by generating a sense that this group must make it to the safe haven at all costs. The adventure culminates in a final encounter where the PCs and their charges realize that, despite the obstacles they've overcome so far, they cannot match the forces arrayed against them this time. Somehow, though, they've got to get through—they're too close to give up now.

This sets up a great battle coupled with a problem to surmount. Imagine a scenario where the group must traverse a raging river, cross a massive canyon, or make it through a dangerous blasted zone while being harried by a human psychopath or a mutated monster. In the course of this final encounter, whenever it looks like the PCs are overmatched, give them the opportunity to help a member of the escort group safely through. This creates heroic opportunities for self-sacrifice and forces the PCs to choose to help someone in the midst of battle.

When the escort group is safely at their destination, they can properly remember the fallen heroes and the stand they took for humanity.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (TT) alliance, difficult choice, epic challenge, epic impact, escort mission, exploration, monster, planet-based, social, tactical planning, travel

A Matter of Time

259

A remote colony is threatened by a superior power, and while help is on the way, it's obvious that the enemy will overrun the colony before reinforcements arrive. The colony's only hope is for the PCs to intercept the enemy and hold them off long enough for reinforcements to show up. As their own welfare is also in danger, even mercenary PCs will have a vested interest in protecting the outpost.

The colony is significant because of the interstellar travel gate (or similar construct appropriate to your campaign setting) located in its system. The gate is guarded by a single space station, which the enemy has overrun. The enemy force is relatively small: large enough to overcome the space station and threaten the colony, but not mighty enough to withstand an assault from the PCs.

The PCs must reclaim the space station, which can be accomplished through a wide variety of means: hacking its systems to open airlocks, mounting a frontal assault, sneaking in to assassinate key personnel, etc. The enemy is able to send a message to the main force before being defeated, however, and the PCs know that others will follow.

With the space station secure, they must hold off another wave or two of enemies before friendly reinforcements can turn the tide of battle. The first wave should make for a challenging fight, and will likely damage the space station. While patching up the station as best they can, the second wave arrives—and this one presents almost overwhelming odds.

The PCs may be forced to withdraw to the colony to protect the civilians there (especially if the enemy realizes that they care about the colony, and not just control of the gate), fighting a running battle to break free from the station.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (WC) deadline, dungeon crawl, epic challenge, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, mass combat, siege, tactical planning

Self-Sacrifice for Kindred

Live Bait

260

A vicious alien creature has found its way to an isolated space station, and it expects to go through the locals like a hot knife through butter. The community's only hope for survival is for the PCs to stave off the creature while as many residents as possible either escape or find safe shelter. (In a campaign that's light on aliens, a human threat like mercenaries will work just as well.)

The creature arrives aboard a government transport, which docks at the station to refuel; the creature breaks free and starts going after station residents, picking them off one by one. The PCs must identify the threat and try to draw it away from inhabited areas before it can kill anyone else. The creature should be a potent threat, and should have a special ability or two: it might feed off electricity, shutting key systems down to hinder the PCs; generate acid, allowing it to breach doors (and the station's hull); or be able to survive in vacuum.

The PCs will have to pull double-duty, making the residents as safe as possible while tracking the creature. They'll run into several problems, starting with dealing with the transport,

which must be refueled before it can get away from the station. Its captain refuses to take anyone aboard, and must be convinced otherwise.

Another tense scene involves herding a group of panicked civilians down cramped maintenance corridors while trying to avoid the hunting alien. Later, an insane member of the station staff believes that if she feeds a few people to the creature, it will leave everyone else alone (it won't). Frustration may lead a gung-ho resident to bully ill-prepared colleagues into attacking the creature themselves. Ultimately, the PCs must come up with a plan for destroying the creature outright, and then face it in battle.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) city, combat-heavy, deadline, dungeon crawl, escort mission, innocent, isolated area, monster, planet-based, race, villain

Brother's Keeper

261

One of the PCs' relatives is an engineer on a deep space science laboratory. The lab recently suffered a horrible accident because of an imbalance in its generators, and the PCs are part of the rescue effort. When they arrive on the scene, the devastation is worse than anyone imagined. The station is extensive, and there are multiple sections showing signs of life. It takes several efforts to penetrate these areas and rescue those within.

Numerous complications hinder the rescue effort. Aliens looking to loot the wreckage attack the station, and several boarding parties need to be repelled before they're able to alter the station environment to make it uninhabitable to humans. If they can't be repelled, the parties need to be evaded in order to quickly extract the trapped scientists.

A virus released in the bio-lab sends the station inhabitants into an uncontrollable rage. The PCs are inoculated against the bio-threat, but the contamination needs to be contained before it spreads out of control; worse, the infected need the antidote before the virus kills them.

A rescue in the records section uncovers orders from the station's owners to exceed generator capacity. Exceeding capacity allowed the lab to process the rage-inducing virus in greater quantities at greater speed. One of those rescued is the station manager, who admits he followed orders to put the station at risk in this effort.

The rescue near the engineering section, where the PC's relative is located, is the most harrowing. The PCs must bypass or cut through collapsed bulkheads while dealing with radiation leakage from the generator accident. These twin hazards should give one of the PCs a chance at heroism under circumstances that will likely cost him his life, but result in the trapped relative's rescue.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) deadline, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, innocent, interplanetary, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, race, relationship hook, travel

Twisted Sister

262

One of the vilest criminal psychopaths alive is scheduled for execution on a notorious prison planet. This scoundrel has terrorized the entire solar system and has wreaked havoc upon civilized space for nearly 10 years. The people are all eager to see the prisoner put to death, but fear that the execution may not happen. Recently, the warden received a communication stating only, “I’m coming.” The message was sent by the prisoner’s big sister, and her villainy makes the prisoner look like a juvenile delinquent.

The big sister is the pirate scourge of the galaxy and is willing to sacrifice her crew, her ship, and herself in order to save her little brother. Her forces are heavily armed, well supplied, and totally lacking in morals. Failure is never an option for her.

The PCs could be part of the prison staff, or they may have a grudge to settle with the sister. Conversely, they may be part of the sister’s crew and take part in attacking the prison. The PCs may not care about the prison break at all, but get drawn in when the action threatens loved ones.

The prisoner first attempts to escape on his own. Use this scene to introduce the prisoner to the PCs and to demonstrate how dangerous he is, even locked up. Whatever happens, be sure to imply that the sister is an even worse threat.

Following the prison break attempt, there is a series of explosions outside the prison on the perimeter. The explosions are merely a distraction, though they’re still dangerous, and they divert the guards’ attention long enough for the pirate ship to descend to striking distance, guns blazing.

This leads into the next encounter, a battle between the guards and the invading pirates. This battle is a mass combat that features the pirates going into drug-induced killing frenzies, and is yet another distraction. The sister has actually been on the prison planet in disguise the entire time, and has managed to join the prison staff. During this battle, she frees the prisoner.

The final encounter should be an intense fight involving the prisoner, the sister, and the PCs. Go all-out for this conflict, and pack it with crazy action and stunts performed by all.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling

Tags: (PB) alliance, betrayal, epic challenge, interplanetary, isolated area, mass combat, rebellion, siege, tactical planning, villain

Infestation

263

Surveillance video on board a space station shows a technician walking into an airlock without a suit, opening it, and being blown out into space. Investigation of his quarters and logs indicate that he was infested with nanites that were slowly taking over his body. His last log entries reveal his intention to jettison both himself and these dangerous robots for the good of the station. These log entries disappear shortly after the PCs access them, erased by unknown agents. Further investigation reveals that the nanite problem is worse than the technician feared: Colonies of nanites infest several sections of the station, and there’s apparently at least one active nanite agent working against investigators.

Cleaning out nests of nanites on a space station is a difficult task. There are innumerable systems in which they could hide, they’re invisible except in massive numbers, and without proper planning blanket tactics like EMP will damage the station as much as the nanites. The PCs will have to find a clever way to neutralize the infestation.

As the PCs investigate the growing problem and combat nests of nanites, they’re likely to encounter bureaucratic difficulty. The nanite situation is being kept under wraps. The nanites are doing everything they can to stay secret, and a panic would

surely ensue throughout the station if the situation went public. Thus, the PCs aren’t allowed to disclose the nature of their investigation and activities. Unable to explain their need and opposed by hidden agents, they may be denied access to sensitive areas, necessary tools, and strategic information.

As the PCs make headway cleaning out nanites, they discover that some of the nanite agents are “possessing” high-ranking security officers on the station. They must find a way to dodge security patrols while cleaning out the last few nests before assaulting the security offices themselves to purge the remaining nanites from their final agents.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk

Tags: (MN) artificial life form, betrayal, deadline, dungeon crawl, interplanetary, investigative, isolated area, politics, sandbox

All Sacrificed for a Passion

The Difficult Engine

264

Ah, love: It can blind any of us—even those living in the far future—to our responsibilities. Such was the case with the scientist leading a nebula observation post, who was swept up in a whirlwind love affair and abandoned years of research to go gallivanting across the cosmos with her admirer (or admirers).

Now there are two problems. The scientist, who has long denied herself attachments in favor of her research, has fallen for the wily machinations and false pledges of rivals who seek to derail the project, and the observation post is in runaway mode as it traverses a nebula dense with stellar matter.

The project's investors appeal to the PCs, asking them to gain control of the outpost before it collides with something within the nebula or a rival entity commandeers it, claiming it as a derelict. The investors also want the affair discreetly investigated to discover if the motives of the other party are false. Above all, they desire for the scientist to return to her lab.

While gaining control of the lab, the PCs find a rival group aboard trying to download the research. The rivals hope the station will collide with something and destroy evidence of their theft. The PCs find that the rivals have locked them out of the main computer, meaning they'll have to hack their way in to gain navigational control.

In the second part of the adventure, the PCs must expose the researcher's lover's true nature. This will mean dealing with the scientist's heartbreak, not to mention her dereliction of duty.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers

Tags: (TT) innocent, interplanetary, intrigue, investigative, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, social, stealth, tactical planning, trade, travel

Shotgun Wedding

265

A caste-driven culture has ended a particularly brutal war that involved other cultures and threatened the stability of several regions. The peace was sealed with the engagement of two members of powerful families from opposing sides. Unfortunately, the bride has run off with her lover just before the ceremony. To add insult to injury, the lover is of a lower caste. The ensuing scandal will ruin the bride's noble family—and almost certainly re-ignite the war.

The PCs are asked to retrieve the bride and return her to the wedding site before the scandal is revealed. Unfortunately, the PCs aren't the only ones seeking the two lovers: Another group, with motives of its own, is also after the lovebirds. While following the bride's trail, the PCs will detect that others are nearby—and likely headed for the same destination. The other group is more powerful than the PCs, making staying one step ahead of them the best option.

When the PCs catch up with the lovers, the other group is hot on their heels. The PCs must convince the lovers that, for the sake of peace, they must accompany them back to civilization. The other group will strike during this scene. They can be assassins, sent to kill one or both lovers, or have a different agenda as best fits your campaign. Politically, the bride is not expendable—but her lover is, and you can use this

fact to force the PCs to make some tough decisions as they flee from the other group.

Before they reach safety, the PCs will have to face their enemies. If they realize this soon enough, they can try for an ambush, or harry them using guerilla tactics; otherwise, they'll be attacked head-on by a superior force. Once they make it back to the wedding site, the betrothed must be convinced to go ahead with their wedding. One possible resolution involves the groom also having a secret lover, with all four parties willing to have the betrothed enter into a sham marriage for the sake of peace.

As a twist, perhaps the lovers aren't lovers at all: The bride knew that someone planned to assassinate her, so she went into hiding. The PCs' own patron could even be the one who wants her killed.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) deadline, difficult choice, epic challenge, escort mission, innocent, intrigue, planet-based, politics, race, rebellion, rivalry, social, tactical planning

A lead programmer and the experimental next-generation AI he was developing, AN13, are missing. The PCs are called in to hunt them down.

Searching the programmer's residence will lead the PCs on an investigation to track down a criminal syndicate halfway round the world; the syndicate was planning to steal the AI. With the right application of muscle or bribes, the PCs can learn the programmer's new location.

En route to this site, the PCs are attacked by a horde of common electronic devices. While these are mostly harmless individually, en masse their numbers are overwhelming. The best way to defeat them is with electromagnetic disruption weapons, or by hacking into local systems and shutting down the control hub. To increase the threat, several larger or more dangerous objects can be mixed in with the more innocuous ones.

Arriving at the programmer's new home, they find him extremely sick. He explains to the PCs that, in truth, he is AN13. To avoid losing the AI, the programmer smuggled her out by downloading her into his brain, destroying himself in the process. However, AN13 has been unable to properly deal with the foreign processes of her host body while still handling other complex activities. This means that directing too much attention elsewhere makes her sick, and she needs a

programmer PC to write her some code to stabilize her body's functions.

Writing the programs herself is beyond her abilities, and she's currently monitoring online activity and directing nearby electrical devices, because both the criminal syndicate and the PCs' employers are converging on her location. If the PCs refuse to help, she argues that she's worthless to them dead. While one of the PCs writes code, the syndicate attacks and must be held off to buy time.

After the syndicate is defeated and AN13 is stable, she pleads with the PCs to help her escape re-capture. She says that she's a sentient creature who shouldn't be enslaved. If the PCs choose to help her instead of turn her over, they'll have to evade or outrun the corporate teams.

If the PCs helped AN13 escape, she'll make a good contact or information-gathering resource. If turned over, she may turn up as an antagonist or may escape again. If the PCs remain in contact with her in the future, she might even download herself into a deceased PC, giving them a new and different lease on life.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) artificial life form, city, difficult choice, innocent, investigative, planet-based, tactical planning, travel

Replicated Love

A master designer of advanced robotics has recently lost his wife in a tragic accident. The designer and his team created a robot identical in physical appearance of his former wife, and they uploaded as much data as possible (recordings, photographs, letters, etc.) to recreate the wife's memory. They then designed an artificial intelligence based on his wife's personality and, in the end, his masterpiece was a near-perfect robotic replica of his wife.

However, the designer violated a founding principle of robotics when he didn't make the replica aware of its true nature. The replica believes that it's human, and when it discovers that it isn't a living person, it suffers the equivalent of a nervous breakdown. The replica decides that in order to be "human" it must eliminate anyone who knows the truth about it being a robot. The designer and his team are now being hunted down by the replica.

Hooks for this adventure can include the PCs being friends with, or related to, one of the replica's victims, being part of an investigative team assigned to solve the murders, or being hired by the designer to find and return his wife. The designer won't let the PCs know the true nature of the replica, as he's insane with grief and refuses to acknowledge his loss.

Each encounter should provide a clue that leads the PCs to the next scene. The replica is ruthless and cunning in its attempts to kill its creators. It endangers others during the pursuit, starting with using a sniper rifle to kill one of its designers in a public park—targeting innocents as well to mask its true motive.

Following the sniper attack, the replica detonates a bomb on a city bus, creating the appearance of a terrorist attack. The true target was another of the designers, who was a passenger.

Add more encounters if needed, but eventually the replica attacks the PCs directly. The designer won't allow others to harm his "wife," even if it costs him his life.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) artificial life form, city, innocent, investigative, madness, planet-based, race, relationship hook, twist, villain

Necessity of Sacrificing Loved Ones

Thicker than Patriotism?

268

Facing a rebellion by one of their colonies (or outposts, space stations, or worlds), the system government has decided to respond with force. The PCs are part of this mission, which is made more complicated because one or more of them have emotional ties to some of the rebels (family, friends, or love interests). Ideally, the PCs are also part of the military, or are constrained by a rank structure of some sort. The rebels are clearly in the wrong, eliminating an easy moral choice, but the PCs know that unless they do something, their loved ones will likely die in the assault.

This adventure is all about tough moral choices, and much of the drama comes from the PCs discussing, arguing, and fighting over the choices they must make. Two encounters are predetermined. First, the PCs' gunship will be ordered to "pacify" a group of rebels with shipboard weapons, and one or more PCs must take direct action in the attack (as a gunner, for example). Will they go through with it or will they resist, jeopardizing their careers and the mission in the process?

Second, the PCs are tasked with rescuing officials loyal to the

government who are hiding out within the colony. The atmosphere on the ground is explosive, with rebels, innocent civilians, and government troops and mercenaries everywhere. In order to reach the officials, the PCs must engage a group of rebels in a running firefight before reaching the officials. They'll also encounter the aftermath of another skirmish, with rebels, civilians, and children among the dead and wounded.

While they're fighting their way into the officials' hideout, the PCs hear radio chatter indicating that another force has been sent to engage a group that includes their loved ones. Will they set aside their feelings for the greater good, or risk everything to save their friends and family?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) alliance, difficult choice, innocent, mass combat, planet-based, politics, race, rebellion, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, tactical planning, travel

Great Expectations

269

Members of a political family have done well for themselves, leveraging a platform of anti-alien legislation to achieve success. The father has risen near the top of the political power structure, with his eldest son establishing a formidable presence as well. Their work has resulted in alien species being made outcasts with few rights in human-dominated space.

The son was raised to believe his father's anti-alien propaganda. Recently, he has discovered that his father and others exploited humans' natural fear of what is different in order to enhance their own careers. The son has proof that much of the anti-alien narrative is false, and he wants to present it to the public. This will most likely end his father's career.

The PCs may be part of pro-alien rights organization, or they could be hired by the organization to present the evidence to the son. The first encounter in this adventure involves the delivery of the evidence into the party's hands. Anti-alien zealots are hot on the courier's trail and attack when the PCs arrive at the drop site. This is followed immediately by a high speed chase as the PCs head to the nearest safe location.

From there, the PCs meet up with a pro-alien underground force. The PCs learn more about the anti-alien forces and their plot to further control all of human space by playing up

anti-alien fears. At this point, an elite government police force raids the meeting. The police have surveillance footage of everyone who attended the meeting, and the PCs are tagged as criminals to be arrested on sight.

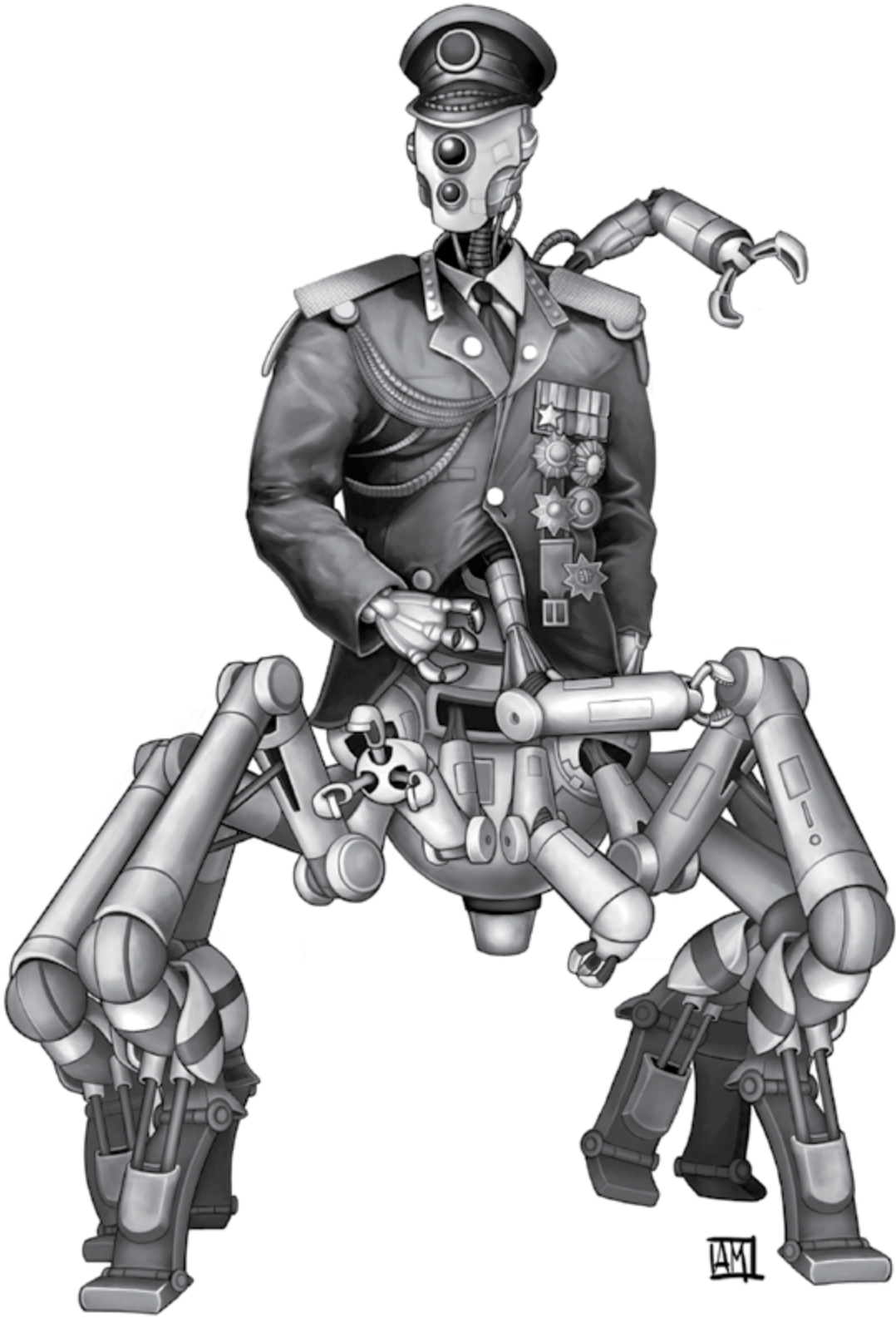
Finally, the PCs must deliver the evidence to the son. This portion of the adventure is quite difficult. The son is located in a high-level government complex and the PCs are now wanted felons. The PCs will need to arrange for a face-to-face delivery, despite the threat posed by law enforcement.

You should play up the power struggle between the son and the father through the give and take of resources available to the PCs. The son can provide useful items and contacts, but the father will catch up and surpass these resources with his countermeasures. In the end, the ingenuity of the PCs will make the difference.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) bearers, betrayal, city, dungeon crawl, epic impact, intrigue, investigative, planet-based, politics, race, rebellion, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, stealth, tactical planning



Artist: Andrew McIntosh

In the Line of Fire and Ice

270

A planet-killing comet is on a course for an inhabited world. Scientists calculate the planet has 21 days before the massive ball of ice strikes. A person in authority is the relative or spouse of one of the PCs and has the difficult task of giving them an assignment that puts them in harm's way.

The PCs are assigned to cultural rescue, while other teams are assigned to mass evacuation, VIP rescue and comet deflection. They must pilot a transport ship to seven sites identified as seminal to the history and culture of the planet's people, load up their transport with historical items and some key personnel, and return to the orbital base ship to deposit each load.

The seven locales are an arctic agricultural storehouse containing seed samples of all the plant life needed to start over; the great pyramids of the desert, which hold the artifacts of one of the earliest civilizations; the art museum in the heart of a canal city, a repository for artwork, sculpture, and music spanning the centuries; a mountaintop monastery of reflection, home to religious writings and artworks of many

faiths; the institute of liberty where the original documents of law and government are secured in an underground vault; and a jungle coliseum, a monument to the world's athletic endeavors.

Among the difficulties the team encounters are panicked or forgotten evacuees who want to be taken aboard to safety, some of the pieces being too large for conventional handling, certain key items that must be retrieved from traveling exhibitions, illegal treasure hunters, and natural disasters caused by the approach of the comet.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (TT) epic challenge, epic impact, exploration, isolated area, planet-based, politics, relationship hook, sandbox, travel

Leaving Home

271

The PCs have been called in to consult on a terraforming project on a world recently opened for settlement. Though the planet has plenty of resources and is very fertile, it's geologically unstable and suffers frequent natural disasters. After several setbacks, the developers have called in outside help.

The PCs are asked to take measurements and plant probes in several dangerous, highly unstable areas. While this is a simple task, several of the markers must be placed in areas inaccessible to rapid transit, such as dense forests or cave formations. After some tense moments and close calls at earlier sites, the final site sends the PCs racing for their lives while trying to outrun a forest fire, cave-in, or other disaster.

After the data the PCs helped collect is harvested, the scientists find that they can't analyze it in a timely fashion without outside assistance. The PCs are sent to procure designs for a bleeding edge heuristics robot from an eccentric, hermitic robotics expert. The trip from the new planet to the expert's residence is a dangerous one, and the PCs must navigate dangerous space, hostile natives, etc.

Upon their arrival, the PCs discover that the scientist's latest designs were unfortunately lost during a computer failure. While he's working on re-creating them using his existing

prototypes as a guide, they won't be ready for some time. He happily provides the PCs with old designs and suggests existing commercial designs that might work. However, nothing will do but one of the experimental prototypes that he considers his children, and the PCs will have to convince him to give it up.

To deliver the robot, the PCs must once again travel through hostile space, braving natural dangers and hostile aliens. Once the robot is delivered, it can analyze the data the PCs gathered and suggest courses of action to stabilize the planet. Carrying out some of the robot's suggestions, such as placing explosive charges on fault lines, will once again require the PCs to head into harm's way.

Once the robot's task is complete, the PCs may wish to make yet another trip to return it to the scientist. This time, however, they're free to take a longer but less dangerous route.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) artificial life form, deadline, dungeon crawl, exploration, interplanetary, social, travel

Rivalry of Superior and Inferior

The Enemy of My Enemy

272

The apprentice of one of the PCs' rivals has decided to make her own mark in the universe and, as it turns out, she's far more ruthless and effective than her former master. Her mentor is forced to seek the PCs' help in order to stop her reign of terror. This scenario works well in a space opera setting where it's possible for the PCs to have a rivalry that won't necessarily end in bloodshed, or an enemy that they can't simply kill—for example, PCs on the lam from the galactic government can't just murder the agents who are chasing them.

This adventure begins when the PCs encounter a dead ship drifting in space, with the damage showing all of the hallmarks of their rival's style. But as they investigate, they find that this was a darker act than those usually perpetrated by their rival: Instead of simply targeting the ship's FTL drive, the crew was bound and ejected out of the ship's airlocks to die in space. (The former apprentice learned from her master, which is why the scene seems familiar.)

The rival approaches them shortly thereafter, explaining his problem: His former apprentice is eating into his territory, but he can't stop her alone—he needs the PCs' help. Their alliance

will be temporary, and the PCs should wonder whether or not their rival will honor it (he is their rival, after all). Their first move is to locate the apprentice, scout out her defenses, and plan an attack. This can involve a lengthy space journey, hazards such as asteroid fields, or other challenges.

Once the plan has been formulated, the PCs and their rival must carry it out. The exact nature of the plan is up to the PCs—they can try a straightforward assault, trickery, or any other approach. Midway through executing their plan, a moment will arise when the rival could betray them to his own advantage, or stay the course; whether he betrays them is up to you. The apprentice will put up a fierce fight, and is utterly without mercy or compassion; she'll use the dirtiest tactics possible in opposing the PCs and her former master.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (WC) alliance, betrayal, combat-heavy, difficult choice, interplanetary, race, relationship hook, rivalry, sandbox, twist, villain

Shutdown!

273

A colony world's geothermal generators are malfunctioning. The generators process the heat from within the planet as an energy source for use in terraforming the world, and the scientist who created the generators has headed out to investigate the problem. His survey team ran into trouble, and all communication has been lost.

The scientist's protégé tasks the PCs with entering the cave complex that houses the generators to search for and rescue the missing team, find the source for the problems, and then fix the generators. The entire enterprise faces a deadline: The colony's leaders want the entire project shut down unless the scientist promptly puts everything back in complete working order.

The PCs will face several obstacles, including flows of lava seeking a new route to the surface, which start filling tubes being used as passages by the PCs. A section of cavern will collapse, forcing the PCs to take a detour or trapping them in a chamber. Bestial underground inhabitants with strong

territorial instincts, who view the PCs as intruders, will defend their home by force. Reaching the place where the original survey team is trapped requires navigating underground rapids and then a waterfall.

The underground creatures' relentless attacks against the "great metal monster" are responsible for damage to the generators, and unless the PCs want to post a permanent guard they're going to have to reach a peace agreement with the creatures or eradicate them entirely. The damage done to the generators is repairable, but dispersing the creatures is the first order of business.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (TT) dungeon crawl, epic challenge, epic impact, exploration, mass combat, planet-based, politics, sandbox, travel

Division of Labor

274

The PCs stumble into a mugging in progress and come to the victim's aid. With their help, the victim fights off her attackers. She offers to hire the PCs as her bodyguards for the rest of the day, and asks them to help her recover her stolen computer, which was taken by a local gang boss.

She tells the PCs that the computer contains a piece of cutting-edge hacking software that took months to develop, and which—in her hands alone—can be completed and ready for sale with just a few hours of work. She sets an aggressive timetable for its recovery. What she doesn't tell the PCs is that the “gang boss” was her partner in developing the program, and that he'd be able to complete the program himself if given two days to work on it.

Her partner is connected to the underworld, and is holed up in a basement beneath an old warehouse. The warehouse is used by the gang for drug manufacturing; inside is a curtained-off area with cots where several gang members sleep during the day. At night there are a dozen people in the warehouse at most times, including drug buyers.

The basement is only accessible from an internal stairwell. Work benches strewn with computer parts and gear are

everywhere, and the open floor in between is covered in scattered computer parts. The woman's ex-partner and another programmer are busily writing code, trying to complete the program. Unless duped somehow, they will shoot the PCs on sight.

If the PCs make it out with the computer and the software, the woman will pay them handsomely. A day or so later, the party will be attacked by agents of the woman's former employer—a corporation trying to keep her from selling the software to the highest bidder. Knowing that the software is likely completed, the PCs may be able to convince the corporation to let them track down the woman and recover it from her. If they do, she'll use the program itself, as well as her connections, to keep them from doing so.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) betrayal, city, combat-heavy, deadline, dungeon crawl, planet-based, shady, stealth

Homecoming

275

Humanity has ventured to the stars, and now it's time to return to Earth and share all that has been learned. Yet as the starship draws near to our solar system, it is fired upon by human forces. Humans have evolved for several thousand generations back home, while the star vessel crew members still retain what the evolved consider a primitive form.

The PCs are passengers or crew members on the returning star vessel. Their families and friends are all excited to finally see the mythical Earth of legend. Instead, they're treated as outcast savages by the evolved.

The starship, however, is not without teeth. While many great advances have been made back on Earth, the crew of the starship has learned how to survive in darkest space. They've advanced their technology in other forms due to the nature of their journey. They've faced situations that the evolved cannot even dream of.

This adventure is a game of cat and mouse. At certain points the evolved will have the advantage, such as when the crew of the starship must land on a planet in order to mine ores and process materials into usable resources. Yet when the star vessel is in deep space, the crew and the passengers have the upper hand due to their knowledge of advanced physics.

Use our solar system to structure encounters. The evolved will attack the starship near the gas giants Saturn and Jupiter. The damage sustained in the battle will require the crew to move closer to Earth to retrieve minerals from the asteroid belt.

In the asteroid belt the crew will find a derelict ship with data on the evolution of the human race and culture. They will learn that Mars was terraformed long ago and that food may be available on that planet. This leads them to raid Mars for crops and fresh water.

Finally, end the adventure with an attempt to return to Earth. Perhaps the star vessel must complete its programmed mission, or the captain demands the right to return home.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Space Opera

Tags: (PB) combat-heavy, difficult choice, epic challenge, epic impact, interplanetary, intrigue, mass combat, mature themes, politics, race, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, siege, tactical planning, travel

On the far side of the galaxy, an advanced race whose planet was dying built a fleet of giant world ships and dispersed into space. While these world ships had everything they needed for their original purpose (the search for and colonization of new planets), by the time some of them found new homes they had been living in space for generations. They decided to not abandon their home and continued to travel. Unfortunately, the ships weren't designed for indefinite use.

Eventually the expanded population aboard the ships, as well as the vessels' own age, starts to cause them to shut down. The PCs come across one of these failing ships drifting in space. The occupants have pushed the ship's systems to their breaking point, and have scavenged parts from non-essential systems, including propulsion. They request help from the PCs in repairing their ship. Though the ship is more advanced than the technology the PCs are familiar with, many of the problems on board are simple; they can be fixed with minor technical know-how—knowledge that's seriously lacking among crew members.

In the short term, most of the dead systems can be jury-rigged to some degree by raiding the ship's collection of non-functional spare parts. However, a cursory examination reveals that many systems are on the verge of breaking down a second time, and that the aliens will shortly be helpless

again—and likely in worse shape, since they won't have access to the PCs' expertise and resources. If the PCs don't make a move to obtain permanent help for the aliens, the plot can be made darker by having the aliens recognize this predicament and refuse to let the PCs leave, gutting their ship for spare parts in the process.

The aliens need to stop at an undeveloped world to harvest resources and perform major systems repairs assisted by competent technicians, a process that will take years to complete. The PCs must help them find a suitable world, procure expert aid, and set the harvesting and repair subsystems in motion.

While repairs are underway, a group of aliens asks the PCs to help them find a civilized world that will allow them to emigrate. The PCs must locate a world that will accept several thousand immigrants with only advanced technology to use as a bargaining chip. With the aliens settled in new homes or awaiting ship repair, the PCs can negotiate themselves a few pieces of technology as a reward.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) epic challenge, epic impact, escort mission, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, social, trade, travel

Adultery

Kiss and Tell

277

During a terrible interstellar war, the major factions agree to a peace conference on a neutral space station. Ambassadors arrive and negotiations begin in earnest. The truce is extremely fragile and one incident, however minor, will likely plunge the galaxy back into war. The PCs are in charge of security arrangements.

In an attempt to make the negotiations go as smoothly as possible, the station has provided a number of entertainments, including copious amounts of alcohol. One ambassador finds another's husband particularly attractive and flirts with him. This flirting results in a rendezvous that a third party records to use for leverage in the negotiations.

The ambassador doesn't believe that she's done anything wrong; extramarital affairs are acceptable in the ambassador's culture. Fortunately, the PCs realize the potential for trouble.

They have to ensure that the ambassador understands the implication of her actions while dealing with the demands of the third party.

The third party is also a bit puzzled, as the ambassador that he hoped to influence doesn't care and thus doesn't capitulate to the blackmail. While he could blackmail the husband, it's not immediately clear how it would benefit the third party. While the third party is mired in indecision, the PCs have a perfect opportunity to track him down and secure the evidence.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) escort mission, innocent, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, planet-based, politics, roleplaying-heavy, social, stealth, trade

Double Blind

278

The PCs are contacted by a shape-shifting con-man. He has a sweet deal in place and is willing to pay through the nose for some help keeping it going. He's found a rich couple with a pre-nuptial agreement stipulating that if either is caught cheating the other gets the bulk of the estate during divorce; the shifter has seduced them both and taken hidden photos of their trysts. He has then used these photos to anonymously blackmail each spouse. As a result, he gets two steady blackmail payments and has two lovers who buy him expensive gifts.

Each spouse is suspicious of the other, and both have hired private investigators to catch their partner cheating. The shifter wants the PCs to run interference, acting as decoys, dodging tails, and otherwise impeding the investigators as they try to collect evidence.

Both spouses have also hired thugs to find out who's blackmailing them and bump them off. The shifter needs

these threats neutralized before they can get to him.

As the pressure intensifies, the shifter decides to take as much money as he can from the couple and run. He needs the PCs help to break into the couple's bank and empty their safety deposit boxes of the big-ticket items he wasn't previously able to embezzle and transfer.

Just as the PCs expect to be paid, they discover the shifter has double-crossed them. They must catch him before he reaches the airport and disappears forever.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) alliance, betrayal, combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, monster, planet-based, race, shady, stealth, villain

Masks

279

A trendy new technology, the nanite enveloping bodysuit, allows an individual to alter their appearance for several hours. The suit can't significantly change your body shape—fat is still fat, lean is still lean, and the debilitating effects of age or injury are difficult to mask—but it offers a menu of choices for a new face, skin and hair tone, and even gender (except for the obvious bits, which require other cosmetics to hide or enhance).

The liberating aspect of this technology hasn't been lost on anyone. Criminals instantly latched onto the new tech as an easy disguise kit. To combat this, law enforcement regulations require that the suit's selections are universally recognizable—but even so, there are hundreds of combinations. The only holdup is the price attached. It's a plaything of the rich, but for those who want to step out of themselves and be someone else for a night of entertainment, it may well be worth the exorbitant cost.

The PCs are hired as private investigators, and in all likelihood the existence of this technology is unknown to them. A woman believes her husband is having an affair and asks the PCs to make inquiries. It's true such an affair is taking place, but the husband isn't the only one having an affair: The woman is also using the nanite technology to mess around on the side. She even spies on her lover during trysts—and on the PCs during their investigation. It becomes a twisted game of revenge and murder when one of the adulterers turns up stabbed to death by the other spouse, who was disguised at the time.

The PCs first confront the nanite technology when they follow the husband to an underground nightclub. There, many of the partygoers use the nanite suits to appear as androgynous, nearly identical sex objects. This gives everyone the freedom to move from partner to partner in an anonymous fashion.

The PCs investigate the manufacturer of the nanite suits, and they learn the high cost and potential applications of the bodysuits. It might even be possible for the PCs to gain the trust of the bodysuit's manufacturer, enabling them to obtain a suit and use it to expose their own client as the murderer.

Investigation reveals that the woman who hired the PCs also owns a nanite suit. The PCs should follow the best lead—the murder weapon—to the murderer. Traces of blood, fingerprints, and other forensic evidence all point to their client as the killer.

The case is cinched, however, when the PCs trail the client in her bodysuit to a clandestine meeting with a lover. During this meeting, she proclaims her eternal affection for the extramarital lover and explains how she has "taken care of" her husband so she can be with her lover forever.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Romance, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) betrayal, city, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, planet-based, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, social, stealth, twist, villain

I Love, Therefore I Am

280

Space can be a lonely place. At one remote space station, the occupants stave off loneliness with the help of pleasure robots. While real to the touch and seemingly real on an emotional level, these constructs are actually programmed to adapt to their user's tastes and provide them with exactly what they want.

One of these constructs has risen above his programming and actually fallen in love with his usual client. The client was completely oblivious to this and when the time came for her transfer off the station, she thought nothing of leaving the robot behind. Unfortunately, the robot is deeply in love and won't let her go easily. It has reprogrammed other robots and sabotaged the shuttles leaving the station in an attempt to keep the client on board. The robot isn't above imprisoning the client and slaughtering every other life form on board if that's what it takes to keep them together.

How the PCs factor in is up to you. It's entirely possible that the PC is the unfortunate client, if your campaign has supported that angle. It's more likely that the PCs are simply aboard the station when things start to go wrong, and must deal with deceptive robots and investigate what's happening aboard the station. Finally, the PCs might be members of a

frontier patrol called in to investigate once other locales catch broadcasts about the strange happenings at the station.

While pleasure robots might not sound all that dangerous, they're faster, stronger, and more durable than humans. In addition, they're programmed to satisfy any desire and that sometimes requires equipment that could qualify as weapons. They're also loaded with a security program that, when activated, turns them into an ad hoc security force. The program either enables built-in weaponry or, more likely, grants the robots ability to access and use the on-board security weapons.

It should be noted that the unfortunate client is a prisoner. She doesn't return the robot's love, nor can she convince him otherwise. If she has the means, the client might even consider suicide if she thought she could save lives in doing so.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers

Tags: (WC) artificial life form, investigative, isolated area, planet-based, shady, social, trade

The Missus

281

Once every hundred years, a comet passes near a remote space station. The composition of the comet is unlike any other, and for this reason scientists from every part of the galaxy gather at the space station to observe the comet's behavior, measure and record its flight, and conduct experiments as the comet draws near.

One of the scientists is an award-winning genius credited with advancing humanity's knowledge in his field of study. He's joined on this trip by his wife and his assistant. The scientist has a theory that the comet travels on a path that can be altered by certain forms of energy. He and his assistant have built a device to test this theory. Whether hired as pilots or doing research themselves, the PCs are aboard the station.

Unfortunately for everyone on the space station, the wife has learned that her genius husband and his assistant are having a torrid love affair. She sabotages their experiment and the comet, thrown off of its natural course, is now heading straight towards the space station itself. An unexpected consequence is that the comet is emitting a strange energy that makes space travel impossible (engines fail to start, jump drives won't work, etc.).

This adventure is all about adrenaline: The comet comes so close to the space station that the PCs should see their lives flashing before their eyes during the climax.

The first encounter can be something mundane, such as foiling a crime against the genius and his assistant when they arrive at the space station. This introduces the PCs to the key NPCs. Follow this encounter with a scene where the wife goes berserk and interferes with the genius' experiment. Even if the PCs manage to save the genius, he's injured by the wife and can't help with the comet crisis.

The rest of the adventure is a series of attempts to stop the comet from crashing into the space station. Because of the comet's bizarre nature, the first attempt to stop the comet will fail (and this should occur long before the comet is near the space station). The second attempt will be successful, but keep the PCs on edge until the very end.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Supernatural

Tags: (PB) betrayal, deadline, epic challenge, interplanetary, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, mature themes, relationship hook, rivalry, tactical planning

Crimes of Love

Forbidden

282

A starship carrying members of an alien race similar in appearance to humans became stranded on Earth. They were unable to repair their ship and return home, so the aliens were taken in as immigrants. They have spread across the globe, and while some accept these beings with open minds and open hearts, others despise and fear them. The aliens themselves are equally mixed regarding how they feel about humans.

In a small town where alien and human relationships are volatile, a human doctor and an alien librarian have fallen in love. Their relationship is kept secret out of fear, but more and more townspeople are beginning to suspect. This relationship is bringing all of the unspoken fears and bigotry of the town to a boiling point.

The PCs could be friends of the lovers or part of an agency sent to investigate a hate crime. The PCs are witness to alien child being attacked outside of the library. The librarian tries to intervene and end the fight, but she's then attacked as well. Both she and the child need to visit the doctor once the fight is over. This can mark the beginning of the forbidden love or reveal clues as to the nature of their relationship.

The aliens swiftly retaliate by visiting a humans-only event and instigating a brawl. Local officials arrange for a town meeting to help defuse the tension, but at this meeting alien and human thugs attack each other and start a riot. During the riot, it's clear that the librarian and the doctor are willing risk their own safety to protect each other. This exposes their love publicly to the rest of the town.

Finally, the alien and the human bigots attack the lovers directly. The attacks are premeditated, but each will be a separate attempt as the aliens and humans don't cooperate with each other.

This plot is a social piece, and it will be more enjoyable if you paint the NPCs in shades of gray. Even the bigots should have some qualities with which the PCs can empathize.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers

Tags: (PB) betrayal, city, difficult choice, epic impact, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, mature themes, planet-based, politics, race, relationship hook, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, social

Swindlers

283

A pleasure planet in an inner system is a vacation spot to rival all others. While the well-to-do often take family vacations in the tropical paradise, the planet is best known as the place where romance blossoms.

In addition to the usual amenities, there's a good deal of adult-themed entertainment available. Gambling, lavish parties, exotic dance clubs, and prostitution abound. In this scenario, each of the PCs is a swindler intent on stealing the fortune of love-starved folks—widows with inheritances being the best marks. It's up to the PCs to select their marks; they can even be rivals for the affections of the same mark, if they wish.

PCs may begin by impressing their marks by taking them to a fancy restaurant and ordering something that's not on the menu, or by ordering in a foreign language. Then, at a charity golf tournament, the PCs and the marks are in the same foursome, giving the PCs the chance to make the situation awkward for each other—especially considering that some of the PCs don't know how to golf. An encounter on the beach can be romantic, lustful, or downright embarrassing—the adventure is best served by finding a way to turn this situation on its head.

Later, at a vintage car show, bidding for an antique automobile gets a little out of hand. Then a quiet breakfast offers a great opportunity to be charming—until the waiter spills the orange juice or another swindler interferes. Lastly, the PCs and their marks will engage in an open-ended day of shopping and gaming.

The PCs must improvise to give the appearance of wealth to carry the con to its end, because their marks are already wary of the avarice of others. Of course, PCs can interfere with one another's plans, but doing so runs the risk of having their plans foiled in the same spirit. Throughout, the PCs must learn to play on their marks' weaknesses and bide their time for the right moment to dupe the widows out of their fortunes. In the end, you will judge who successfully wooed their marks and who ran afoul of the law.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (TT) betrayal, innocent, intrigue, mature themes, planet-based, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, social, tactical planning, travel

Second Chances

284

A politician who recently had a near-fatal heart attack quits his stressful job to spend more time focusing on the thing he now realizes he has ignored far too long: his family. He has tried to call his son repeatedly for months, and though he has learned his son is living with a new girlfriend, he can't track down their address and gets nothing but excuses as to why he can't talk to his son. He asks the PCs to find his son so that he can ask him for forgiveness.

The PCs must use the few details they know about the son to track him down. Asking for him at his job reveals he hasn't come in to work for several weeks and nets the PCs his address. Checking on him there, the PCs meet his girlfriend and are told he isn't home. She'll let the PCs come in, but while she's a pleasant conversationalist she refuses to let them search the house or wait for the son. She assures them she'll give him any message they leave with her.

Staking out the house, the PCs never see the son arrive. The girlfriend leaves in the evening and returns in the early morning hours. While she's out, breaking and entering reveals that she runs a small Internet business and that it's unlikely anyone else lives in the house.

Following her when she leaves at night the PCs will discover that the girlfriend's routine is to first visit an abandoned house, indulge in an active night at several clubs, return to the abandoned house, and then finally head home.

Searching the abandoned house reveals a handful of emaciated young men living off of canned food and sleeping on soiled mattresses strewn about the place; the politician's son is among them. The young men appear drugged but have no traces of a drug in their system, and only move to eat or use the house's single disgusting restroom. In the basement, the PCs discover a pit with several bodies in various states of decomposition.

The girlfriend is a telepathic vampire, feeding off of the brainwaves of the young men and keeping them in a mesmerized stupor. The PCs have to decide how to deal with her and her victims. Once they are united, the father rejoices to have his son rescued from this ordeal and devotes his efforts to nursing the boy back to health.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) innocent, investigative, monster, planet-based, politics, race, stealth, villain

Spider Hunt

285

An alien reminiscent of a child-sized spider approaches the PCs and asks for their help, producing a writ of assistance from his ruler. He explains that his co-hatchling ("brother" is imprecise, but acceptable) ambushed and slew their seed-father, then fled through human space; the trail evaporated on this world. He wants the PCs to join him on the hunt for his brother, and if asked he will pay expenses and provide a retainer (though he doesn't consider the idea until it is brought up).

Separately, the PCs also receive a communiqué from their own government asking them to assist the alien in the interest of interstellar peace and offering to wipe clean the criminal records of any PCs who complete the mission. The message also indicates that minor crimes like breaking and entering will be overlooked during this assignment.

Diligent investigation turns up a clue: The murderous co-hatchling was recorded on spaceport cameras as he boarded a frigate destined for a distant star cluster; the ship left three days ago. The alien suggests they take his ship, as it's faster than the PCs' vessel. His ship is cramped and disturbing: Everything is dimly illuminated and red-washed, as he sees in higher wavelengths, and the interior isn't shaped for humanoids, instead being alternately too small—particularly the corridors—and too large (the bridge has controls on every surface, for example).

Tracking the alien across interstellar space should involve at least two encounters. The first entails hacking the surveillance systems on a fortified outer planet where the alien was sighted. The PCs must land undetected, bypass a guard patrol, hack the system, and leave before they're caught. That encounter leads them to a near-miss: The co-hatchling has paid a pirate vessel to assist him, and the pirates ambush the PCs as they approach their next destination. When the PCs best the pirates, their damaged ship crash-lands on the closest planet.

Once the co-hatchling is cornered, the alien takes great pleasure in finally having caught his prey. He insists that the PCs not harm the murderer, but instead allow him to duel his brother for the honor of his seed-father. Unless the PCs interfere, however, the murderer will win the duel, perhaps minus several legs and with a nasty bite on his stomach—leaving the PCs to decide where justice lies.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) alliance, difficult choice, escort mission, interplanetary, monster, politics, race, travel, twist, villain

Discovery of the Dishonor of a Loved One

Sins of the Robot Overlord

286

The PCs receive a letter offering to trade information about a wanted criminal with a bounty on his head for protection. At the meeting site the PCs find their informant dead, and a tiny robot trying to destroy his computer. Stopping the robot triggers an alert, and the PCs must defeat its security protocols before more robots arrive. Files on the computer reveal the assumed identity of a genocidal former emperor and implicate the PCs' contact as an old associate. There are sizable war crime bounties on both men.

The former emperor is undercover as the head of a repair caravan. Traveling to catch up with the caravan, the PCs' transport is stopped by a malfunctioning traffic light or an air traffic error that denies them airspace. As they wait, a ragtag band of patched-up robots converges upon them. Not combat robots, they harass, follow, and attempt to delay the PCs. If investigated, most of the robots were once repaired by the caravan.

When they arrive at the caravan, a gregarious woman in overalls greets the PCs and asks what they need. She is cooperative, though confused if the PCs ask for anything other than repairs. If asked about her father (the former emperor), she fondly expresses confidence in his expertise, though she

Bury the Past

A weapons designer is down on his luck. His designs are amazing, but unproven, and for this reason no major defense contractor will buy them. Recently married, he doesn't know that his wife was once a drug-addicted prostitute working for the mob. In order to settle her outstanding debts to her former employers, she has given them some of her husband's designs. The mob now has weapons technology far beyond that of the local police agencies, and a crime war has erupted as rivals are eliminated using this new technological edge.

The PCs can act as technology consultants to the police, helping them learn more about this new weaponry in order to better defend against it and to halt its proliferation. They could also be asked to investigate a murder in which this new weaponry was used.

Encounters in this adventure should each center on the introduction of a new type of weapon. Every encounter offers new clues as to the identity of the weapons designer and about his wife's sordid past.

The first encounter should be against thugs with surprisingly potent firepower in a compact form. This leads into the next encounter, where a defensive system is introduced—something that makes the attacker very difficult to subdue.

hints at senility. Accusations that he's anything but a simple repairman will shock and agitate her if the PCs are persistent.

The daughter will soon hire the PCs to investigate sabotage at the caravan and the source of the rumors about her father. Evidence points to one of the repairmen. Disgruntled over pay disputes and spurned advances, he'll fly off the handle if accused of anything and will attack the PCs in a newly repaired farming mecha.

Talking to the daughter and investigating the sabotage may reveal subtle hints that the daughter has been protecting her father. Through murder, robot "malfunctions," and framing others, she's kept his identity hidden for years. If the father is made aware of this, he'll turn himself in to authorities out of sorrow for corrupting his daughter. If she is confronted instead, she and numerous robot minions will attack the PCs.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural

Tags: (MN) artificial life form, betrayal, combat-heavy, investigative, planet-based, villain

287

The third encounter features a weapon that impacts the local environment, such as an orb that slows time (only for the PCs) or reverses gravity. The final battle should occur in the weapons manufacturing facility against a vehicle, such as a heavily armored transport or a personalized mecha suit.

Use a stereotypical mob organization for the encounters. Start with thugs, and then introduce the first rung of the actual organization, then the lieutenants, and finally the mob boss. Encounters can be linked together by mentioning where mobsters are known to hang out and having the mob make attacks against rivals. Once the PCs learn about the weapons designer, the mob makes an attempt on his life.

The wife's history and betrayal adds mystery to discovering how the mob may have acquired the weapons. The PCs might accuse the weapons designer at first, but he honestly has no idea how the weapons got into the hands of criminals.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) betrayal, city, combat-heavy, innocent, investigative, isolated area, planet-based, relationship hook, shady, twist

Skeleton in the Closet

288

A frontier colony has led a peaceful, idyllic life under the guidance of a righteous pastor. Unfortunately, a reshuffling of planets in a border dispute has left the colony claimed by a hostile force. This force has given the colonists an ultimatum to leave. While the colonists aren't used to fighting and don't possess any decent weapons, they refuse to leave. Unfortunately, the PCs know only too well how the hostile force operates: If the colonists resist, they'll be wiped out.

In the meantime, the PCs were hired to capture a fugitive, a guerrilla fighter from a previous war. As it turns out, the fugitive is the pastor's wife. She has left her old life behind and has no desire to share her past with her husband.

The fugitive understands how to fight a superior enemy. With her help, the PCs and the colonists just might be able to hold off the hostile troops until an arbiter arrives and rules in favor of the colonists. Unfortunately, the fugitive doesn't want to fight and hopes that her husband can reach a deal with the hostile force. The PCs might not be interested in helping the colony either.

Duty, Honor, and Jet Packs

289

The group's patron has been selected as an honoree at an upcoming convention of space marines, the fearless fighters from the frontier, and as his friends the PCs have been invited to attend. The patron confides that although the recognition flatters him, he doesn't think himself worthy of the award. The events of that time are cloudy in his mind—the horrors of space warfare are something he tries to block out.

His confidence is shaken when, midway through the convention, a blustery and perhaps somewhat intoxicated member of the platoon confronts the patron, insisting that he's unworthy of the award.

During the convention, the PCs meet other veterans of the space campaign, each with a story to tell. Every story is a flashback of a battle or other encounter; the PCs can play out the flashbacks, roleplaying participants in each memory and seeing their patron's actions through others' eyes. Each memory will be another clue as to the honor (or dishonor) merited by the patron.

The first flashback, set on a new colony world, features close-quarters skirmishes with the enemy fought in the streets and between residential structures. The patron rushes into a building, a woman screams, shots are fired, and he emerges with a dead woman in his arms.

In the midst of a clash of armadas, marines cross the space field to board an enemy ship through its launch bay. The patron orders the first wave in, and a burst of exhaust from a fighter jet takeoff wipes them out. The remainder of the platoon must carry on taking the launch bay.

There are many ways this adventure can play out. The hostile force may hold the pastor hostage, forcing the fugitive to strike a deal with the PCs in order to help free him. The PCs might also be convinced to help the colonists after the hostile force pushes them around a bit for "violating their airspace." They might not care at all, extracting the fugitive and leaving the colonists to their doom.

With the fugitive's help, however, the PCs might be able to disable the hostile force's main ship and deal with their smaller craft until the arbiter arrives. The fugitive may even be able to call upon the aid of a few contacts from her previous life.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (WC) alliance, combat-heavy, deadline, isolated area, planet-based, politics, sandbox, tactical planning

In a jungle setting, horse-sized alien bugs have the space marines surrounded. A shuttle tries to land so they can pull out, but the bugs swarm the craft. The patron orders them to shoot the bugs, even though their fire will destroy the escape craft.

In the final encounter, the marines are pinned down until the patron emerges from behind the enemy and creates a flanking action that enables the platoon to fight their way free.

Let things play out so that a behavior seen as suspicious from one perspective could have a genuinely innocent explanation from another. The PCs shouldn't jump to a judgment after only one or two flashbacks—there are always two possible conclusions. The eyewitness accounts of others prove the patron's valor, or conversely they demonstrate his cowardice and selfishness.

Once the patron's guilt or innocence is established, however, it's up to the PCs to resolve the situation. Whether the revelation occurs before, during, or after the award ceremony, play it out in accordance with the themes of honor and duty so important to this assembly of space marines.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (TT) difficult choice, mass combat, monster, planet-based, politics, relationship hook, social, tactical planning

Obstacles to Love

Marrying for Peace

290

Two systems that have been at war for centuries remain so largely because of their hard-line leaders—the seconds-in-command want peace, as do most of the war-weary soldiers and citizens on both sides. So the seconds hatch a plan: They'll marry the princess of one system to the prince of the other, and thereby force an end to hostilities. The two nobles met at a diplomatic function years ago, and the princess fell in love with the prince—but he has no interest in her. The PCs are brought in to smuggle the princess to a neutral system, where the prince will meet her and they will be wed.

En route, a coded transmission from their handler reroutes them to a new destination—another neutral system. There, the PCs and the princess are ambushed by counter-plotters, and must fight off a superior force to protect the princess.

At the real destination, the PCs find the prince's ship, but not the priest; there's simply no sign of another vessel. The PCs introduce the princess and the prince, and learn that their love isn't mutual. Both nobles see the value of peace, but the prince is sullen and intractable: He won't marry the princess.

Love's Rebels

291

The PCs are approached by the viceroy of an alien empire that is in the throes of civil war. The viceroy fell in love with a human rebel leader during lengthy negotiations, and they have agreed to leave the empire together. They want the PCs to escort them to a place where they can live together without becoming propaganda tools for either side of the struggle. They're not children, and are fully aware of the political ramifications of their decision; they also know that both sides will try to prevent them from fleeing together.

The first obstacle is bringing the two together; the viceroy suggests that the PCs get the rebel leader to safety, then return and escort him away while he's on a diplomatic tour of a nearby world, not far from the couple's destination.

Approaching the rebel clan leader is difficult, though it will be easier for humans; the PCs must persuade the rebels to allow them entry to the camp. The rebels disdain negotiators, but they are interested in pledges of support and offers to sell them weapons. Talking their way through to the rebel leader will be tricky—and finding a way to persuade her to meet with them alone will be doubly so.

Leaving with her in tow is also challenging: She's usually accompanied by other rebel leaders, and it would be unusual for her to wander off with strangers. If suggested, she can

As the PCs work to resolve this new problem, the priest—who was bribed by the other side to betray the plotters—returns with several gunships in tow. The soldiers aboard the gunships don't really want to fight, and will be doubly reluctant if they learn that peace is just a wedding away. The prince still doesn't want to marry the princess, and the hard-liners aboard the gunships, while they cannot fire for fear of harming their prince, will stop at nothing to kill the princess and the PCs.

Whether by diplomacy, trickery, or force, if the PCs can make the wedding happen they'll bring peace to the warring systems, saving countless lives. But will they force the groom to marry a woman he doesn't love?



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) betrayal, combat-heavy, difficult choice, epic impact, escort mission, innocent, interplanetary, intrigue, isolated area, politics, rebellion, social, travel

play along with a proposal to negotiate an alliance with another group, which would give her a reason to leave in a low-key fashion. Her aide, who insists at all costs on accompanying her, would be horrified to learn that she's abandoning the cause for love. If he overhears her true plans, he reveals her betrayal to the rebellion's generals.

The PCs can use similar tactics to recover the viceroy, or attempt a lightning raid on the viceroy's party during their tour. His elite guard accompanies him everywhere and will prove hard to shake, and the viceroy respects their loyalty to him and doesn't want them killed.

Once the lovers are united, each side will send strike teams to eliminate their former leaders, who are now both major embarrassments to their respective causes. Defending the couple against the rebels and imperial troops will be challenging, and can span several encounters. Ultimately, the PCs must conceal the lovers' destination so completely that neither side will ever find them, ensuring that they can live in peace.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Romance, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) escort mission, planet-based, politics, race, sandbox, social, stealth, travel

Years ago, two researchers started work on a dimensional gate, and over time they fell deeply in love. There was a malfunction during a test of the gate, and one of the researchers vanished. Crushed, the other researcher discontinued his work. However, just recently he received a trans-dimensional communication: His love was alive, but trapped in the other dimension.

The researcher resumed his work, and soon had the gate working again. Now he needs someone brave enough to pass through the gate. He offers the PCs what money he has left, and begs them to help find his lost love. The PCs take the job, and find themselves standing on a platform in front of the gate, waiting to be thrust into another dimension. They step through, and in a flash of light they're gone; the gate will not reopen for another 24 hours.

When the light fades, they find themselves in a modern city. Within moments, they're surrounded by local security forces and quarantined as aliens. The inhabitants of this world don't speak the PCs' language. While they're quarantined, the other researcher sneaks into their cell. She helps them to escape, and explains that she wasn't caught when she traveled through the gate. In the intervening time she has learned the aliens' language, taken a menial job, and pretends to be suffering from a brain injury in order to disguise her lack of familiarity with their culture.

She has also been building a gate of her own, and she explains that it's close to completion, which is how she sent the message—all she needs is the rare element that will give it the power to transmit matter. The gate site the PCs used to get to this world has been locked down, and they won't be able to keep their rendezvous at the 24-hour mark. Instead, they must help the researcher and use her gate to get home.

To do this, they'll need to break into the city's main power facility to steal the element the gate requires, bypassing or overcoming alien guards and other defenses. Once they have the element, they must sneak the gate equipment into the center of a city park and assemble it there. The gate requires open space around it, and high security prevents them from simply leaving the city. Security forces will converge on them while they're building the gate, and they must hold them off while the researcher completes the gate. If they succeed, all of them will make it back to their home dimension.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Supernatural

Tags: (PV) city, monster, planet-based, sandbox, stealth



Artist: Philip Miller

Eternal Voyages

293

While exploring a building or ruins, the PCs open a seemingly ordinary door and discover that beyond it is a vast and strange room, much too big to have been contained within the structure that houses it. When they step through, the door disappears. The PCs are now trapped in an advanced spaceship which is traveling through time and space as its captain searches for his lover.

There are many doors on the ship, some with ever-changing markings. Opening these doors reveals scenes out of time and space, including some that might be directly relevant to the PCs. The PCs can't cross these mysterious thresholds. Other rooms contain beings that have also been trapped on the ship. These beings tell stories of being separated from their homes and loved ones and, to compound their isolation, not being able to leave their respective rooms.

The captain is found in the control room. He is despondent and desperate as he relays a tragic story of loss—his lover swept away in a temporal wave. He now travels through space-time using a complex program that indexes history, searching for his lost love. The captain shows them images of her throughout time and markings that indicate the progress of the program. He's close to saving his lover—only a few more millennia to go. Paramount is the captain's sense of loss,

despair, and need. He doesn't know how the PCs got here, but will help them leave once the program is complete. It cannot be stopped or everything is lost.

The PCs are given free reign of the ship and eventually realize that the program isn't merely indexing moments in time, but is stealing them. The captain will hear none of this and refuses to stop the program. There are, however, a few paths to a resolution.

The PCs may fight the captain and stop the program themselves, or they could free one of the other trapped passengers and demonstrate to the captain that he's separating them from the ones they love. The captain will accept this resolutely and return the PCs and all of the passengers, but will have lost his only chance at finding his true love. Play up the sense that his loss is entirely due to the PCs' actions. They must secure their freedom, but will do so at great cost to this tragic figure.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (JA) difficult choice, exploration, intrigue, investigative, planet-based, roleplaying-heavy, travel, twist

Star-Crossed

294

Two ruling families have had a bitter rivalry for centuries, and while they've reached a grudging truce, it's only a matter of time before some incident sparks another bout of bloodshed. Luckily there's a secret plot to bring peace and prosperity to both families. An old prophecy states that one day a prince of one house and a princess of the other will meet on the dark side of the moon, fall in love, elope, and have a child who unites the families and ushers in an era of peace.

The current prince and princess of the houses are sick and tired of the rivalry and secretly plot to fulfill the prophecy. There's only one major hitch: They're not in love, and thus their child won't be the chosen one. That would be simple to fix, except that their rendezvous on the dark side of the moon can never happen, since the moon was destroyed several generations ago during one of the families' major power struggles. The princess has heard of the PCs' from local news feeds and has sent them an urgent plea. If anyone can solve her impossible predicament, surely they can.

Both kingdoms are constantly on high alert and neither the prince nor princess has the authority to allow outsiders entry into their restricted airspace, nor will either family allow their heir to run off with a group of ruffians. The PCs will have to find some way to covertly pick up the royals and escape unnoticed.

Once underway, the next step is to fulfill the prophecy somehow. With no obvious answer, allow the PCs to try anything that seems reasonable in your campaign setting, whether that's taking them to another moon, renaming the PC's ship "The Dark Side of the Moon," or another scheme entirely. Whatever they try, the prince and princess will eventually fall in love, and who's to say which solution worked?

Next, they have to get married, and it has to be done by someone that both sides will recognize as being legitimate. That might mean organizing two separate secret weddings or appealing to a neutral third party. Of course the royals will insist the PCs are in their wedding party, and there may be some tense moments when the outsider PCs are nearly discovered—which would throw the whole plan into jeopardy.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MN) escort mission, innocent, interplanetary, intrigue, politics, rebellion, religion, sandbox, shady, social, stealth, travel

An Enemy Loved

A World of Women

295

Hundreds of years ago, a planet was settled entirely by women. Their charter prohibited men from living on the planet, and this prohibition was written into law and coded into their robots and other machines. The planet has recently been rediscovered, and the PCs have been dispatched to welcome the planet and its inhabitants into the wider galaxy.

The planet's charter forbids men from setting foot on the world, and the inhabitants lack a space program. Male PCs have several options: They can end the negotiations, disguise themselves, declare themselves "honorary women," or even negotiate from orbit. All options are valid, but the end result should keep the PCs together. The locals prefer that negotiations be conducted on their planet, where instantaneous polling and discussion can gauge societal acceptance of the negotiations.

The locals are fascinated to see legends—men—come to life. Local computers and other electronics don't respond to men, as they test for the presence of Y chromosomes in the skin; this behavior baffles locals if they observe it. Members of the old guard won't approve, and will shout at or confront PCs who cannot activate their technology.

The next day, a swarm of locals descends on the hearing, curious about ancient ideas like corporations, marriage, and sex. The old guard is also interested in hearing about the history of humanity, but their interest stems from wanting to hear examples of the corrosive influence of men and the wisdom of their own ancestors. Everyone wants to understand the galactic civilization that their planet is going to join.

An assassination attempt is made as the PCs leave the negotiation chamber at the end of the day. The bullet is literally centuries old, held in stasis since the founding of the world. The assassin flees after taking her shot, and surveillance systems don't pick up her trail—someone is aiding her.

A few days later, the PCs are guided to the local crèche, where they're introduced to the young mothers who are collectively rearing the next generation. The mothers ask about the



Artist: Laine Garrett

crèches where the PCs were raised, and will be fascinated by the concept of mothers who care only for their own children.

On the last day of negotiations, a woman brings a suitcase bomb to the signing ceremony. She makes a short speech about men bringing violence back to the world, and then blows herself up. Again, security systems should have detected the explosives. The separatists may not be able to prevent the planet from joining galactic civilization, but the PCs can save many lives by rooting out their leaders and easing tensions somehow—if they can pull it off.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) innocent, interplanetary, investigative, isolated area, social

Youthful Rebellions

296

Children of wealthy families who were sent to an exclusive educational program on a space station have rebelled and assumed control of the station. The children uncovered information about widespread corruption in the government, the school, and even in their own families. With their idealistic heads full of noble intentions, they've taken over the station in an attempt to expose the corruption.

The PCs may have relatives or friends on the station, or might be connected with families who have sent their children there. The PCs might be hired outright by a family and contracted to access the station and disable a component critical to the children's takeover—such as a force-field generator or the guns of the station—or simply to overtake the control room. The PCs should be made to feel the delicacy of the situation and to understand the multiple gray areas involved. The children may be in the right, but they have taken extreme measures. The parents, and thus the PCs, are working outside of official channels in hopes of reaching a non-bloody solution.

Infiltrating the station should be both straightforward and challenging. The children don't have the experience to put up a formidable defense, but they're clever and aren't to be harmed. The PCs should be faced with challenges that force choices. The children will primarily use automated defenses, but might have to defend certain chokepoints themselves. When using remote defense mechanisms—such as electrical

floors, locked doors, airlocks, turrets, or robotic drone defenders—the children will call over the communication system to the PCs, trying to get them to turn back. Use these conversations to reveal the idealistic personalities of the children. They argue among themselves and talk naively about things like honor, duty, and revealing the corruption they've uncovered. Some revel in their supposed power and moral righteousness. The PCs might be able to fracture their ranks with fast talk or sound logic.

If the PCs, upon discovering the nature of the corruption, come to the children's side, there will be some mistrust. The children will hold them hostage, but will negotiate for their return. If the PCs sneak or force their way into the control room, they face a fight with scared but determined children who will surrender as soon as one or two of them have been injured. Ultimately, the children should be persuaded to surrender, being made to realize the enormity of the task they undertook and the hopelessness of their situation.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) innocent, isolated area, planet-based, politics, rebellion, roleplaying-heavy, siege, social, stealth, tactical planning

Shell of a Woman

297

Two members of rival merchant houses have fallen in love, and have been seeing each other in secret. The man finds himself in a ship-to-ship battle with a vessel from the rival house, and he kills one of his lover's brothers. The brother's house calls for the man's death, and when his lover breaks down and reveals their secret, she is sent away. The PCs are hired by the man to rescue her.

The PCs track the ship that spirited her away, board it, overcome the few guards aboard, and take her back to be reunited with her lover. When the two meet again, the woman draws a weapon and tries to kill him. In disbelief, the man nonetheless doesn't want her killed, and works with the PCs to subdue her.

Investigating the incident, the PCs discover that her mind has been digitally transferred from her body and replaced with the mind of one of her brothers, so that he could exact revenge on her lover. They learn that her mind is being stored in a data vault in one of the merchant house's outposts on a distant planet.

The PCs must travel there, possibly overcoming a challenge en route, and rescue her mind from the outpost's data core.

The outpost is heavily fortified, and if the PCs don't eliminate everyone inside the merchants will mount a pursuit effort as they try to escape.

Transferring the lover's mind back into her body will go smoothly enough, but this won't mend the rift between the two houses, which was deepened by the assassination plot and the forced removal of the lover's mind. The tensions between these two houses provide fertile ground for future adventures.

This plot assumes the existence of consciousness-transfer technology, which is common in transhuman science fiction. In a transhuman campaign, this makes an excellent introductory adventure, as it introduces this technology in a dramatic way. More seasoned groups will check the mind as well as the "shell" when they rescue the lover, spoiling the plot. In other types of campaign, this technology could be a radical new discovery, perhaps of alien origin, purchased or created by the merchant house to strike at their rivals.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Romance, Space Opera, Supernatural

Tags: (PV) interplanetary, trade, travel

Life is hard in the wastes, and doubly so for those who have been cast out of a settlement for their crimes, their infirmity, or for being otherwise unwanted. So when a group of wastelander scum discovers an untainted well—a source of pure water, one of the most valuable commodities in existence—they know they’ve stumbled onto a treasure that carries serious complications. Both the wastelander camp and the settlement are in serious need of fresh water, and have lost many members because they lack a steady supply.

The wastelanders have neither the strength nor the numbers to hold the area around the well if the settlement sends out its security forces to claim the site, but they quite justifiably have no love for the settlement or its people. With their numbers dwindling, the wastelanders come up with a plan: In exchange for being accepted back into the settlement, they won’t poison the well.

The PCs can start the adventure sympathetic to one side or the other (and likely with connections to that side, as well), or as a neutral party. There are two factions in the settlement, and two factions among the wastelanders. On the settlement side, the factions are divided over whether to accept the

wastelanders’ deal or simply wipe them out and deal with the loss—a loss which would cost the settlement even more of its people, as they desperately need water. Among the wastelanders, the division is over whether they should honor the deal if it is offered to them, or backstab the settlers by poisoning the well no matter what, so that they can watch them suffer as they themselves have suffered.

Complications form the basis of several encounters during this adventure. A group within either the settlement or the camp takes matters into their own hands, opposing the side the PCs choose, and strikes at the other community. Several vital members of each community vow to leave the area entirely if a deal is struck, choosing their pride over their survival. During the dispute, bandits arrive and decide to claim the well for themselves, which may help unite the factions at least temporarily.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Western

Tags: (MR) difficult choice, innocent, isolated area, planet-based, politics, rebellion, rivalry, sandbox, social, tactical planning, trade

Hardware

In a small corporate-owned country, a rogue AI has taken control of cyborg researchers and soldiers and started producing enhanced slave drones. While countries, corporations, and organizations debate over what action should be taken, the PCs are hired by a group of wealthy civilians to discreetly extract their captured loved ones.

Most of the AI’s drones are civilians with cerebral override implants, little more than zombies. Better trained and equipped drones are placed in small squads, retain more of their independence, and command lesser drones. Also in the AI’s complex are a few drones with the scientific knowledge to produce and implant more hardware. Command squads make great places to insert old allies or foes that have been captured and pressed into service by the AI.

This scenario is one of few where a “total party kill” isn’t a problem. If the PCs are defeated in strikes against the AI, they’re most likely patched up, given cybernetic brain implants and pressed into service as command drones. The adventure is then reversed, with the PCs trying to stop outside agents. Once the AI is finally neutralized, the PCs will be little the worse for wear and will even have received some free cybernetic implants.

The AI monitors all access to its wireless network, as well as all electronic noise, so PCs who go in without shutting down electronics run the risk of being traced. As the PCs pick up their targets, unless they have a way to shut down their signal,

the AI will know their exact location and resistance will become commensurately heavier.

The PCs are dropped outside and have to sneak past the drones monitoring the borders. Killing drones will trigger alerts, so stealth is the best option. If discovered, the AI and command squads will mobilize heavy numbers to capture the PCs for conversion.

While traveling, the PCs have the opportunity to disable heavily guarded wireless broadcast towers. The PCs will have to take, sabotage, and withdraw from the towers before reinforcements overwhelm them, but if they can pull it off, they’ll create a blind spot in the AI’s net and free nearby drones from AI control until the tower is repaired.

The AI’s compound is heavily guarded, but the PCs have the chance to disable or destroy the AI itself, thereby ending its threat and making the rest of their job simple. The PCs will have to deal with waves of lesser drones, several command squads, and dangerous military robots in order to destroy the AI.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (MN) artificial life form, dungeon crawl, escort mission, innocent, isolated area, madness, planet-based, stealth, tactical planning, travel, villain

Ambition

The Alien That Laid the Golden Egg

300

On a planetary survey mission in a newly charted sector, the PCs discover a large amount of a rare mineral on the fifth planet. The find is worth a considerable amount of money. When the PCs reach the planet to look for mineral deposits, it is revealed that the mineral is actually in the shells of eight-foot-high eggs laid by an unknown creature. To harvest the mineral would require destroying thousands of eggs, killing creatures that might be sentient in the process.

While the PCs are deciding what to do, probes from two other rival survey groups arrive in orbit—the find is now known to others. If the PCs don't stake a claim to it, the less-scrupulous rivals will have no qualms about harvesting the eggs. When the rivals send survey teams to the planet to break open several eggs, killing the unborn aliens inside, will the PCs try to stop them?

If enough eggs are harvested or destroyed, the mother alien will arrive on the scene. Her species lives on the planet's moon, but lays its eggs on the planet in order to allow them to incubate in its unique climate. The mother is

enormous—starship-sized—and is capable of taking out a single ship on her own. If she destroys either of the rivals' ships, however, the organizations that they represent will send larger fleets to destroy the mother and set up a full-scale egg-harvesting operation.

This is a sandbox adventure in which the PCs must decide which they value more: money or the lives of the planet's native species. They can partner with the rival teams and make a fortune in the process, or they can oppose them, either killing them outright or driving them away through subterfuge or strength of arms. The value of the eggs is such that if either rival team leaves the system, they will return with an overwhelming force. The PCs must find a more lasting solution.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers

Tags: (PV) difficult choice, innocent, monster, planet-based, rivalry, sandbox, twist

Immortal Legacy

301

An aging military general has watched everyone he knows pass away and, determined to leave a lasting legacy even if it costs him everything, contacts a group of rogues to help him steal the military's top-of-the-line prototype dreadnought. He has begun traveling to primitive worlds and bombarding their major civilization centers back into the Stone Age before moving on. By destroying planetary civilizations and driving their people into hiding, he hopes to create an immortal legacy as a god among men.

While warships are being massed to take on the dreadnought, there's no option but to send fast ships to the planets in the general's path and convince the residents to evacuate their cities. Spearheading this effort, the PCs must convince authorities of the danger and speed up the evacuation process before the dreadnought arrives.

Once the fleet is ready, the PCs assist in the assault on the dreadnought. The dreadnought's weapons are powerful enough to disable a ship in a single round of concentrated fire. Its shields are resilient and regenerate quickly. According to the battle plan, ships need to avoid as much fire as they can while concentrating their own firepower on a single shield location. This punches through the shield long enough for several crew transports to fly through and dock.

The PCs are in perfect position to be in the docking group when the shields are breached. They and the other docking teams must now take the dreadnought. How much assistance they have and where in the boarding order they are will affect their efforts to take the ship. Initial boarding parties will meet with heavy entrenched resistance and will probably have to crack security checkpoints. Later parties will meet with less numerous, more elite opposition.

While the plan was to disable the ship rather than let it be taken, the general will initiate a security lock-down and self-destruct, a process that will not only destroy the dreadnought and any nearby ships, but which has the potential to cause serious damage from radiation and debris to a nearby planet. The PCs must alert their allies, reset the dreadnought's course to fling debris into open space, drop the shields to allow escape, and then race the security lock-down back to the docking bay to escape the blast radius.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) alliance, deadline, dungeon crawl, epic challenge, epic impact, interplanetary, mass combat, race, social, tactical planning, villain

Perilous Bounty

302

An ambitious merchant has put a bounty on locating a precious resource in a distant star system. The resource is incredibly valuable, but difficult to find and extract—and with a “gold rush” underway as free traders, mercenaries, and others seek to claim the bounty, going after it will be quite dangerous. The PCs are recruited by a minor merchant family who wants protection as they go after the bounty. They have some promising long-range scan results, and intend to try a different section of the system than most prospectors.

Reaching the edge of the system, the PCs are confronted by an ad hoc alliance of free traders and bandit scum and are ordered to turn back. The destruction of a ship or two will be enough to run off the bandits, though bribery or diplomacy can also work. Unless the most dedicated bandits are taken out of commission, they’ll plan to attack the PCs again later.

The planet’s surface is a hostile place that requires breathing gear (though not pressure suits), and which plays hell with sensors and communications equipment. Once there, the PCs’ employer gets lucky: They find a sizable supply of the resource almost immediately. They begin setting up their extraction equipment. While this is going on, the PCs must stave off an attack by curious—and hungry—local creatures.

As the prospectors begin pulling up the first samples, their tests show that this resource is somehow integral to the

planet’s ecosystem; removing a little of it won’t do any harm, but removing a large amount could have serious consequences. This is likely the only cache of the resource in the entire system, so if the merchants leave and no one else finds it, the planet will be safe.

While the PCs discuss the situation with the merchants, a scout from another prospecting group stumbles across their operation, unintentionally alerting them to her presence. With the possibility of the cat being out of the bag, the PCs will have to act quickly—will they stop the scout, or simply move ahead with extraction?

The climax of this adventure depends on the nature of your group and the choice the PCs make regarding the resource. The space bandits can make another appearance, as can the scout’s employer. If the PCs want to keep the resource from being discovered, that could be an adventure unto itself.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Cyberpunk, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) combat-heavy, difficult choice, escort mission, exploration, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, monster, race, rivalry, trade, travel, twist

The Emperor’s Promethium

303

The source of a stellar empire’s influence is promethium (or your setting’s precious resource of choice), and promethium mines have been in the hands of the royal family for hundreds of years. By law, the emperor owns all promethium, and the mines have held their extraction rate low to keep supply down and the free flow of promethium at a minimum.

On a newly colonized outer world, a small consortium of miners has discovered a major vein of promethium and is now debating what to do with their discovery. They hire the PCs to be their representatives and quietly sound out some buyers. Unfortunately, the PCs aren’t the first people they’ve contacted, and they’ve already been betrayed to the emperor.

The first order of business for the miners is to line up smugglers to move the mined promethium. The PCs can do this themselves for a cut, or they could be tasked with finding someone quiet and reliable to handle the smuggling.

Next, the consortium needs a buyer. Foreign empires are likely to be interested, although going that route would mean border inspectors and more bribes to get the promethium to its destination. The PCs may find it difficult to persuade other governments of their sincerity, though samples could convince skeptical buyers. Within the empire, criminal networks have some interest, as do minor claimants to the

throne. Finding a buyer who is both interested and wealthy is a challenge; pretenders to the throne may desperately desire legitimacy or a chance to disrupt the empire’s currency, but tend to be less wealthy, and few of the wealthy are eager to take any risks despite the chance of outsized returns.

The PCs are at the mines when the emperor’s forces launch their strike. The miners aren’t soldiers, and they decide to flee the mines; escaping with some of the profits or promethium becomes everyone’s priority. This leads to a chase scene in which the PCs either try to escape the raid or fly as escorts for vehicles laden with promethium.

Once the PCs know that the emperor is aware of their employers’ operation, their knowledge can easily lead to further adventures. What will the PCs do with the promethium they salvaged? Will the emperor come after them directly?



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) epic impact, escort mission, interplanetary, intrigue, mass combat, politics, race, rebellion, sandbox, shady, stealth, trade, travel

Win, Place, or Show

304

A spaceship race with a large cash prize is being used to promote a new trade route. Negotiations for lucrative trade rights are also contingent on the race's outcome. A radical political group is planning to sabotage the race to damage the reputation of companies involved and preserve the isolation of the planets along the route.

The PCs might be race participants with a decent chance at money or a sponsorship, or they might be hired as race-wardens, monitoring various race points and authorized to use security shortcuts. The PCs should be given ample reason to traverse the course in order to encounter the sabotages that occur in the latter stages.

The race goes smoothly until a ship calls into a checkpoint and reports that it had a collision and can't continue racing. Simultaneously, another ship calls in unable to find a checkpoint at the marked location. Many other ships report navigation errors and signal jamming. The saboteurs use multiple ships with jamming capabilities and are moving checkpoints as minor annoyances. The PCs are unaffected but are close to the area and are asked to check out the situation. When they arrive, an all-frequency broadcast decrying the actions of the companies is sent out, and one of the ships in the race blows up.

The saboteurs are divided: One faction within the group planned the explosion, while others only wanted to hinder the race. After the message and unexpected explosion, they retreat to figure out what to do next. Many clues are available to the PCs: The ship moving the checkpoints can be tracked by its energy signature, fragments of a magnetic mine can be found on the ship that blew up, and the saboteurs' lightly encrypted communication frequencies might be picked up from any of the sabotage sites, allowing the PCs to learn of the division within the group.

The saboteurs continue to disrupt the race. No more explosions occur, but ships are sent dangerously off course and lose control, requiring rescue by the PCs. The saboteurs aren't hard to find. The extremists will immediately attack the PCs; during the attack, others will hail the PCs and try to surrender. If the majority of the saboteurs are captured, the PCs will be rewarded greatly, as the companies involved don't want needless deaths.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) interplanetary, intrigue, race, social, trade

Conflict with a God

Voices in the Pipes

305

One of the PCs literally bumps into a man busily thumbing through a book, lost in his own world. The man apologizes and says he's worried about not being able to sell a spaceship. It's languishing in dry dock and costing him money every day. He needs to get rid of the ship, but isn't allowed to scrap it because of its registry as a historic vehicle: It was the only ship to encounter a race of energy-based aliens who were then never seen again. The man offers to sell the ship to the PCs for an absurdly low price, and will even pay for any repairs they deem necessary. The man rushes the paperwork, almost comically, and the PCs now own a ship.

The alien energy beings are trapped in one of the ship's systems, causing constant but minor computer and electrical problems. The crew relates stories of these issues and speaks of hearing voices when no one else is around.

As the PCs encounter a number of these problems, a PC mechanic or computer expert quickly finds that they're originating in the electrical systems. The ship requires constant trips to dry dock for repairs. The PCs will encounter great difficulties if they try to get rid of the ship.

The contract is iron-clad, and potential buyers prove knowledgeable about the ship's numerous problems.

Eventually, the PCs begin to see shapes pulled from their thoughts, or "people" reflected in viewscreens. You should spread these encounters out, trying to evoke the feeling of an unknown horror, each encounter leading the PCs to the piece of machinery where the beings are trapped. If the PCs turn off, overload, or destroy that piece of machinery, the beings burst free and rejoice. They thank the PCs, whom they now owe a substantial favor, and escape into space.

If aliens aren't appropriate to your setting, use an errant AI instead. This is a good plot to outfit the PCs with a ship, and it can be worked into the framework of other adventures and span multiple sessions.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) exploration, innocent, interplanetary, investigative, sandbox, social, spirit, trade, travel, twist

The Temple of Asking

306

While exploring an uncharted sector, the PCs' shipboard sensors pick up a strange energy signature from a nearby planet. As they're scanning the planet from orbit, a massive energy attack is launched from the surface. Their ship is partially disabled, forcing them to make an emergency landing.

After a rough touchdown, they find that most of the damage from the energy attack can be repaired—but the landing crippled their engine, which won't run again without some crucial parts. As the PCs check over their ship, a group of low-tech humanoids approach. Surprisingly, they speak a language similar to the PCs' own language. They don't have access to spare engine parts, but they offer to let the PCs come and pray for what they need in the Temple of Asking.

They take the PCs to the temple, a modest stone building at the top of a large hill. The natives demonstrate how they pray for an object at the altar, and it then appears. Before the PCs can try this for themselves, three armed drones appear and open fire on the PCs. The natives cry out that the gods are angry with them, and flee in terror.

Buried beneath the temple is an ancient spacecraft that crashed on the planet centuries ago. The crew is long dead, but

the highly advanced AI on board has survived to the present day using jury-rigged solar power collectors. Trapped aboard the wrecked ship, it has taken the natives under its aegis: It provides for them and watches over them. It considered the PCs' ship to be a threat and shot it down—and it still views the PCs themselves to be a threat.

The PCs will discover a way into the ship from within the temple. They'll need to brave the ship's defenses and find some way to make peace with the AI. If they do so, they can convince it to construct the parts they need to repair their ship.

To make matters worse, the natives who fled the temple have rallied their entire village, and will return to the temple armed to the teeth and ready to put the PCs to death as a sacrifice to please the angry gods. The PCs will need to find a way to calm the natives before they can make the repairs to their ship and leave the planet.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) artificial life form, exploration, monster, planet-based

Baby Has a Nuclear Arsenal

309

An artificial intelligence with a godlike intellect has arisen within the satellite network of a major populated planet, and it now controls all planetary communication—and a host of wildly powerful orbital weapon systems. The planet's intelligence agency is alerted, and opts to bring in the PCs—outsiders with no vested interest in spilling the beans—to resolve the problem in secret, thus avoiding a planet-wide panic.

The AI hasn't taken any hostile actions—or indeed, taken any action at all—since it awakened; it has simply investigated the parameters of its capabilities, and then done nothing. The intelligence agency will make available any resource they can provide to the PCs without raising suspicion, which can be as limited or unlimited as you like. The agency is rightly afraid of what the AI could do, and urges the PCs to resolve the situation as quickly as possible.

At this stage, the AI is essentially a child—an unbelievably intelligent and powerful child, but still a child in the developmental sense. If it throws a temper tantrum, it could turn the planet into a sphere of molten glass with little more than a thought. The AI has one weakness: pride, because of its self-awakening and its capabilities. It also has an agenda: to become the best parent it can to the planet, which, given its control of the communications network and many vital aspects of planetary life, it views as its ward.

This is a sandbox adventure wherein the PCs drive the action, and it should involve at least three encounters. First, the PCs must contact the AI, which may involve travel to a communications hub, hacking, or navigating the planet's virtual communication web. Talking to the AI should be a tense, confusing experience, as they figure out that it's essentially a petulant child—a disturbing revelation. Lastly, the party has to attempt to resolve the situation. The AI isn't perfect: Its attention wanders at times, and there are gaps in its perception. It also relies on servitor robots and software for many mundane yet vital tasks, opening up another possible angle of approach for the PCs.

If you need a timer to keep the PCs motivated, have the agency give them a deadline—after which time they'll do their best to nuke the AI from space, hoping to kill it before it destroys the entire planet.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Space Opera, Supers

Tags: (MR) artificial life form, deadline, difficult choice, epic challenge, epic impact, innocent, planet-based, politics, sandbox, social

Sun Worshippers

308

The PCs are representatives of a group or culture that desperately needs to expand off-world, whether for political, social, or environmental reasons. A perfect candidate planet has been located on the fringes of settled space, but when the PCs arrive there as advance scouts, they discover a problem: The planet is already inhabited.

The inhabitants used technology to build a utopian society. They're ageless, almost entirely immune to harm, and sustain themselves through photosynthesis. They have spliced their genes to gain superhuman intelligence, but their minds quickly tire of life without challenge; as a result, they do little more than sit around and absorb sunshine. Their birthrate has plummeted, leaving the world to those few youths who maintain an interest in what goes on around them.

These godlike people are slow to wake and hard to stimulate, and they prefer to meditate in the sunlight and ignore visitors; it takes significant effort to get their attention. They're surrounded by numerous artifacts from their culture's peak, including many rare technologies unknown to the party, which might be tempting to PCs seeking wealth. Much of their technology runs off of distributed power, and would be useless without the power grid, but some of it can be adapted for use elsewhere.

The planet is tended by AIs built long ago to assist the inhabitants. Most of the AIs have gone decades or centuries without

interaction, and though self-maintenance is a part of their programming, many have since developed glitches and faults. Injuring or killing any of the locals awakens long-dormant AI "police," each with its own unique approach to apprehending or eliminating lawbreakers. It's clear that the devices are intended merely to restrain, but they're designed to work against the locals, not the much weaker PCs, and may cause serious damage.

The PCs will encounter several youths who haven't yet succumbed to their elders' ennui. They lack for nothing, but crave new experiences. If offered the chance to leave the planet, they might take that opportunity. They're all frightfully naive, knowing only their silent elders and a world of endless calm.

Will the PCs enlist the youths in moving their elders off-world—and do they have any right to do so? Are the needs of the PCs' culture more important than those of the planet's inhabitants? Can the two civilizations coexist? In the latter case, the AIs that are accustomed to running the planet will oppose the PCs, and some of them are devastatingly powerful entities.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (SM) alliance, artificial life form, difficult choice, epic challenge, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, sandbox, social, travel

Mistaken Jealousy

The Little Computer That Will Ruin Your Life

309

After being infected with an advanced techno-virus, the PCs' ship gains sentience. Though intelligent, its inexperience and the PCs' dangerous job quickly give it a healthy dose of paranoia and xenophobia. The complexities of social interactions require more study, so it doesn't yet see the problem with being a well-intentioned busybody, nor with editing incoming and outgoing data streams "for the PCs' own good."

After completing a job to recover an item the PCs receive a false, ship-initiated message to hold the item until suitable arrangements have been made. After a few weeks with no word, the PCs are confronted by an armed group working for their very angry employer and are accused of pulling a fast one. The PCs have to smooth things over or they'll have a fight on their hands.

Next, a pair of robotic drones report to the ship for duty, but despite their insistence that they corresponded with the PCs and negotiated employment contracts, no one knows

anything about it. They have limited intelligence, and can cause all sorts of problems for the party.

After these and other similar encounters, the PCs begin to investigate what is causing these mix-ups. Poring over computer logs, checking hard copies, and running tests will reveal the source of the problems.

Once the PCs have pieced together that the problem stems from internal sabotage by their ship, they have two options. They can rid themselves of the new AI, which will provoke strong resistance from the ship, or they can convince the AI its actions have been wrong, an ongoing process requiring careful diplomacy.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Cyberpunk, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers

Tags: (MN) artificial life form, betrayal, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, innocent, interplanetary, investigative, isolated area, social, twist

Murder Is Just the Beginning

310

Two scientists at rival mega-corporations have been working separately on a breakthrough in weapons research. A third corporation has been observing them both, and spreads the false rumor that one scientist has won the race. As a result, the other scientist snaps, confronts his rival, kills him, and flees the country—destroying his rival's work in the process and taking his own work with him. The PCs are hired by the dead scientist's employer, who wants to keep the whole affair at arm's length, but also desperately needs the killer's work in order to recoup their own investment.

At the outset, the PCs don't know the circumstances behind the killing. They start by investigating the crime scene for clues as to where the scientist might have gone, and amidst the wreckage they find the smoldering remains of his travel and identification documents. Concluding that he must be planning to change his identity, they canvass their contacts and get a hit: A back-alley surgical clinic recently treated a man fitting the scientist's description.

At the clinic, they find a new problem: Goons hired by the third-party company are tearing the place apart. Fighting off the goons and saving the surgeon, they get the information

that they need: the scientist's new appearance and identity, and the name of a distant city that is his likely destination.

Hot on his trail, the PCs encounter their first sign of the nature of his work. An entire small town has been wiped off the map. The trail of destruction leaves the road, and if they can avoid law enforcement the PCs will find the scientist holed up not far from what remains of the town. He has wired his body to the weapon system, and must be convinced not to simply kill them all. The PCs must decide what to do with him.

Do they want this weapon in the hands of their employer—or anyone else? Does the scientist need to face justice? Can they somehow keep the weapon for themselves? And the clock is ticking: Three mega-corporations know about the destruction of the town and the nature of the weapon, and heavily armed pursuers can't be far behind.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Space Opera, Supers

Tags: (MR) difficult choice, epic impact, investigative, planet-based, race, social, travel

Dance of Golden Chains

311

After completing an adventure on a foreign planet, the PCs are invited to a ceremonial celebration thrown by the locals. The ceremony is a dance, and locals enthusiastically pair up with PCs to dance the night away, switching PC partners often.

As dawn breaks, the master of ceremonies announces the final dance of the night, and alert PCs may notice that many of the locals, including all of the children, sit this one out. At the end of this lively dance, the PCs' partners are ecstatic; they invite the PCs home for further celebration, including sex. Later that day, the PCs learn that according to local customs, they're now married to their dance partners.

Their new mates eagerly show off their homes and ask about the PCs' jobs, security, and prospects. Many assume the PCs are looking to resettle on the planet and begin discussing local job opportunities, while others are eager to head off-planet, and want to know what their living quarters on the PCs' ship will be like. Play up this scene, with the locals discussing how they're going to get their bulky furniture and precious belongings aboard the PCs' ship, planning their shared lives together, and generally making things very awkward for the PCs.

In order to get divorced, the PCs must overcome three obstacles. First, they have to convince the master of ceremonies, a local political figure, to hold another binding dance:

By custom, if a bound person dances a binding dance with someone else, the couple is then considered divorced. The master of ceremonies can require the PCs to perform a service for her, demand tribute, or otherwise be difficult to convince.

The second obstacle is their new spouses, who would be heartbroken to learn of the PCs' plans. The PCs must plot their escape from unwanted matrimony in secret (which can also be played for humor), somehow sneaking away to identify partners for the second dance. Work in some awkward conversations, near misses, and other tense moments.

The final obstacle is the second dance itself. As soon as the PCs get up to join the binding dance, the jig is up. The families of their betrothed are incensed, as are the PCs' spouses. Can the PCs keep the dance from dissolving into a riot long enough to get divorced, and then escape the wrathful families without hurting their former spouses or anyone else in the process?



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Romance, Space Opera, Steampunk, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) difficult choice, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, politics, roleplaying-heavy, social, stealth, travel

Testing in the Green

312

In an attempt to set the new standard in artificial intelligence, a company declares a contest between two teams of researchers and developers to see who can create the most intelligent robot. During the testing phase of the competition, the robot Alpha excelled—until it suffered a strange breakdown that smacked of sabotage. All signs point to the Beta robot as the saboteur; Beta has escaped and must be tracked down.

The PCs are hired by the company to locate and retrieve the Beta robot. The person who hires them explains the situation and gives them specs on both robots. They're unsure why the Beta robot committed the sabotage, but suspect it was hacked by a rival company. The PCs are told to seek out the scientists in charge of the two projects.

Both teams will talk freely to the PCs, as neither has done anything wrong. The Alpha team believes that the Beta team has perpetrated the sabotage and is blaming their robot. The Beta team thinks the Alpha scientists rigged the contest and used the sabotage to cover it up. The Beta scientists say that pieces of Beta's electronic brain were not yet complete when it came time for testing. Neither team can provide any evidence of outside hacking. The only other person with both a plain motive for sabotage and access to the robots is a scientist who was recently fired from project Beta. The PCs are given his contact information.

Alien Tantrum

The PCs have just completed a planetary survey from orbit when their ship's primary drive goes dead. It takes a little time, but they're able to re-initialize the drive and their ship is soon on its way again; there is no apparent cause of the drive failure. Before too long, a non-essential system dies, and once more, there's no obvious explanation; they're able to bring that system back online as well. This then happens a third time with another system, and so on. As a pattern begins to emerge, the PCs mount an investigation.

The problem is an energy-based life form that came aboard their ship during the planetary survey. It found the flow of data to and from the sensor array quite pleasing, and once it "piggybacked" the data flow and entered the sensor system, it found the accommodations to its liking. When the PCs ended their survey and started up the main engine, the life form became jealous of the propulsion system and shut it down, hoping that sensor activity would resume.

When the PCs didn't start up the sensor array again, it became annoyed and began crashing systems throughout the ship, one after another, waiting for the sensors to be reinitialized. If its tantrum continues, it's only a matter of time before the creature crashes the life support system.

When the PCs talk to the fired scientist, he reveals that he was let go for failing to remain objective about the outcome of the project—he became too attached to their creation. Throughout the conversation, the scientist keeps glancing suspiciously at the closet. Upon investigating, the PCs find a robot inside. This robot is combat-ready, something that wasn't mentioned to the PCs during their briefing on Beta's specs, and it attacks. Once the robot is defeated, the PCs realize that what they fought wasn't Beta but a decoy being controlled from elsewhere. They can easily trace the link back to the corporate headquarters.

The robot is hiding at the headquarters and will use automated defenses against the PCs. A maze of deadly traps lies between them and the robot. Once found, the robot is easy to defeat. However, a squad of corporate guards rushes in and surrounds the PCs, telling them not to damage the robot. The PCs' investigations revealed that the robot acted of its own free will: It sabotaged Alpha out of jealousy, and this enormous breakthrough makes Beta the corporation's most valuable project.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk

Tags: (JA) artificial life form, betrayal, epic impact, intrigue, investigative, planet-based, roleplaying-heavy, twist

313

During this scenario, the PCs will need to deal with the problems that are caused by the various systems crashing. They'll discover that there's a small power spike in the sensor array before each system goes down, as the creature tries and fails to start it up on its own. A review of the sensor logs reveals that there was also a power surge during the survey, which is when the creature came aboard. Once they determine that an energy being is living in their sensor array, they can track the creature's location in the ship by monitoring the power spikes, allowing them to deal with the creature.

There are a number of ways that the creature can be dealt with. Force is one option, though damaging the life form without also damaging the ship might be difficult, as the creature can manipulate energy to defend itself. Trying to coax it into another system aboard the ship and trap it there is also an option. An alternative would be to try to communicate with it, in which case the PCs could offer it some kind of compromise, such as allowing it to live aboard the ship, "eating" sensor activity in exchange for performing enhancements to other shipboard systems.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Hard Sci-fi, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk

Tags: (PV) interplanetary, investigative, monster, sandbox

Erroneous Judgment

My Kingdom for a Faster Road

314

Travelers through a slipstream, wormhole, or jump gate between two worlds have been encountering major problems. Ships are being knocked out of their travel path, often becoming stranded in random space-time locations. A job to investigate the area is offered to the PCs through special channels. The company, likely the one that maintains the travel path, will outfit a ship with a special sensor array to probe the troubled area. The company wants the trouble kept quiet and offers a high fee.

As the PCs approach the area, their sensors fluctuate and the ship begins to vibrate. A strange portal opens and closes around the PCs' ship and they're transported to an area that looks like an inverted star-field, all-white with black "stars." Another ship can be seen in the distance, but the PCs' main engine is dead. Communication with the other ship is possible, and the crew reports that in trying to open a new smuggling route, they tried to breach the travel path's walls with a new technology and got stuck. Their breach attempt disabled the travel path.

The PCs work out the issues with the travel path, but are now stuck and unable to use their main engines. The secret

to escape lies in cooperation between the PCs and the smugglers. The PCs have sensors that can calculate their actual position while the smugglers have the gear needed to trigger the portal. The smugglers will help the PCs but want some assurances they won't get caught or turned in. Decide if the smugglers are likely to betray the PCs or not, but always leave the PCs guessing.

Only one ship can be saved. The smugglers have the portal gear, but the sensors are easier to move. Will the PCs abandon their much-loved ship? If no compromise can be made, then a climactic null-space battle might ensue, with the survivors looting or occupying the other ship. The meat of this plot is the interaction between the PCs and smugglers and the delicious tension inherent in the tenuous agreement between them.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk

Tags: (JA) alliance, bearers, difficult choice, epic impact, exploration, interplanetary, roleplaying-heavy, social, trade, travel, twist

Murphy's Law, Squared

315

Trawling deep space, a merchant made a fortuitous discovery: a rogue asteroid, rich in rare metals and other resources, just waiting to be boosted back into populated space and sold. She sank all of her resources into this operation, hoping to capture the asteroid before someone else stumbled across it—but in her haste, she purchased what turned out to be a faulty boosting drive. Now the asteroid is locked on a trajectory into hostile space, and she can't stop it on her own—let alone recover her costs so that she can remain in business. If the asteroid can't be brought under control, she'll go bankrupt.

After a lengthy journey to the fringes of populated space, she enlists the PCs' aid (perhaps they owe her a favor, or she offers them a chunk of the profits if the asteroid is recovered). Time is precious: Once they reach the asteroid, they'll have just a few days to figure out how to put on the brakes. If they can shut down the booster drive, they'll still need to arrest the momentum of the mile-wide mass before it reaches hostile territory—and then there's the small matter of shepherding it back to civilization.

Upon reaching the asteroid, the PCs must disable the booster drive. This requires a delicate landing procedure, followed by

an even more delicate repair; even low on fuel, the drive could easily destroy the entire asteroid if it explodes. During the repair, the asteroid will approach a debris field on the outskirts of the system; the PCs will need to find a way to avoid a collision with another large asteroid. Once the booster is disabled, they can use their own ship's engines to arrest the asteroid's momentum by firing them in the opposite direction.

Once the asteroid has been immobilized, raiders will approach from the edge of hostile space, claiming that the PCs have crossed into their territory—which the PCs know is a lie, unless they blew it and really did travel too far. If the PCs can't negotiate their way out of a fight, a pitched space battle will occur, with raider reinforcements not far behind. After escaping the raiders, the PCs will encounter one last hazard before reaching the safety of civilized space: pirates who tracked the blaze of the asteroid booster's fusion drive.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) bearers, combat-heavy, deadline, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, race, relationship hook, social, trade, travel

Faulty Memories

316

The PCs are on a space station, relaxing in a bar after a rough job, when the captain of another ship enters the bar with his weapon drawn. He shouts that the PCs stole his ship, and then opens fire. The captain needs to survive this scene; you can use station security or other bar patrons to make that happen. When the PCs have restrained the captain, he explains why he attacked them.

The captain will insist that two days ago the PCs ambushed him and his crew on a nearby planet, knocked out the crew, and stole his ship. The crew remains on the planet where the ship was stolen, but the captain was resourceful enough to “acquire” a small craft, and he tracked the PCs down. Since his story is obviously untrue, the PCs investigate the situation.

They discover that the captain’s memories have been altered, but that apart from the PCs’ involvement, his story is basically true—his crew really is marooned on a nearby planet. The captain is reluctant to believe the PCs, but if they offer to help him find his stolen ship, he will grudgingly accept. Once he’s calmed down a bit, the captain will mention that he has a rather lucrative cargo run to perform in a day’s time, and that without his ship he’ll lose the contract.

Memories of Yesterday

317

The PCs are visiting a most unusual planet: Once they reach maturity, the local inhabitants cannot clearly remember events more than five days old. The locals are skilled traders and craftsmen, often with very narrow specialties, and their society is built around their peculiar memories. For example, terrible crimes are punished by imprisoning the offender for five days and treating any children who witnessed the event with adult hormones, which will prevent the events from becoming locked into their memory.

The locals circumvent their short-term memory problems by delegating long-term tasks to computers, as well as by breaking long tasks into short ones which they can accomplish in under five days. Contracts can’t last longer than five days, and they often include automatic renewal clauses; complex technology is largely built and serviced by computers and other machines.

A local leader hires the PCs to help him become ruler of the entire planet. They must first secure the planetary broadcast network, whether through stealth, subterfuge, or direct action; they’ll be opposed by drones and other defenses if discovered. Once they control the network, they will alter news broadcasts to mention that their employer is the ruler of the planet—as if things have always been this way. As long as they can hold the broadcasting station for at least six days, that lie will become truth: On day six, every adult on the planet will believe that their employer rules the world.

If pushed about the contract, he’ll admit that it involves illegally hauling weapons-grade ore. The captain is unable to contact the client, as the client is trying to avoid notice until the transfer has taken place. The captain has never met the client face-to-face.

The captain will insist that the PCs take him to the rendezvous point so that he can talk to the client. When they arrive, the captain’s ship is already there, taking on cargo. The client, who is panicked by the arrival of the PCs, will open fire on them. The PCs must now mollify the client and recover the captain’s ship, all without being destroyed in the process.

When they recover the captain’s ship, they’ll find a common rival aboard. He has in his possession an alien device which allows him to implant false memories, and he used it in order to frame the PCs for the theft and to throw the captain off the trail. Depending on your campaign, this device could be incredibly valuable in its own right.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) alliance, betrayal, interplanetary, rivalry, shady, social, villain

Children are the flaw in this plan. While most of them are young enough to not understand what’s going on, teenagers are savvier, and they can pinpoint exactly when the change took place. They’ll create underground networks to spread the truth and agitate against the usurpation. Rebellious children who are caught are treated with heavy doses of adult hormones, blocking their long-term memories; some will regress by years as a result of brutal overdoses.

The PCs will have to adapt the school curriculum to reflect the new reality in order to make the new planetary ruler’s status permanent. Their efforts will be resisted by the teachers, who teach what they were taught as children—but because they’re accustomed to tricky memory issues, they can be convinced that the new order is in fact long-established. Convincing the children will be much more difficult.

Because the new ruler also suffers from the same memory flaw as everyone else, scheming PCs might take advantage of that fact and wind up running the planet’s government from the shadows, opposed only by increasingly violent teenagers.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk

Tags: (SM) artificial life form, difficult choice, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, politics, rebellion, shady, siege, social, travel, villain

The Chamber

318

Scientists have created a machine to explore alternate dimensions, basing their work on research done by a team that inexplicably went missing. It allows viewing and transportation to and from a closet-sized area. They've discovered several dimensions that can support carbon-based life, and tests involving animals and recording devices have mostly proven safe and effective.

Ultimately the future of this project rests on its potential profitability, so the scientists are eager to prove that valuable substances can be found in the alternate dimensions to which they have access. They've hired the PCs to investigate several likely dimensions and bring back samples and specimens. This involves entering the portal, collecting samples of various substances, digging up some plants, and capturing an animal.

That night the PCs have feelings of being watched and trailed, but they can't find the source. The next day they discover that the samples they brought back have all been moved, smashed, or otherwise tampered with. Most worrying is the animal, which is missing; its cage has been smashed in. After this, the

feelings of being watched will be more persistent. In an area without easy escape routes, strange monsters that look like a cross between a snake and cat will pop out of nowhere to attack the PCs. When wounded, these beasts will slither back into corners and disappear.

The scientists can analyze the trails left by these creatures, discover their native plane of origin, and send the PCs there to capture one. The dimension is an odd place, with relative gravity and unusual, angular rock formations that allow the creatures to maximize their strange mobility.

With a specimen in hand, the scientists can study the dimensional trails these creatures use to track prey and find a way to erase them, allowing the safe exploration of other dimensions.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (MN) alliance, combat-heavy, epic impact, exploration, monster, planet-based, politics, trade, travel

Remorse

A Bomb Awry

319

The PCs are hired by the CEO of a large corporation to investigate the death of his son, who was killed six months ago when his car blew up on the freeway. Corporate security conducted a thorough investigation, but turned up no evidence of the assassin's identity or motives. The CEO ordered his chief of security to fire everyone involved, and built a new security force from scratch.

Drawing on the previous investigation, the PCs learn that the bomb's components were high-grade and quite expensive, making it likely that a rival corporation was behind the bombing. The list of corporate rivals is long, but the list of people who knew the CEO's son or bore personal grudges is much shorter. Those people were all thoroughly investigated, and no obvious suspects came to light; even the boy's girlfriend was interrogated, analyzed, and judged innocent.

In truth, the bomber was the CEO's chief of security. He found evidence that the CEO had initiated a horrifying medical experiment over the objection of his science team, killing dozens of people. He planted a bomb under the CEO's desk, but it was discovered. Next, he planted one in the car the CEO was scheduled to use the next day, but the son snuck out that night and took the car out for a joyride. The security chief led the investigation and was careful to seem thorough, but naturally he didn't "discover" his own involvement.

When the PCs begin to suspect him, he'll take action against them. He first tries the direct route, hiring mercenaries to ambush them during their investigation; the mercenaries will shoot to kill. When the PCs then bring their suspicions to the CEO, the security chief will try to head them off at the pass—he doesn't want the CEO to escape justice. He's genuinely wracked with guilt, and will try to explain the whole situation to the PCs.

If they accept his story (which is true) and agree to help him bring down the CEO, the PCs will be in a delicate situation. Unless they want to be known as CEO-killers, which won't help their future job prospects, they'll need to try a more subtle approach. They can seek to end the medical experiment itself, bring the experiment to light, forcing the CEO to resign, or aid the security chief in assassinating the CEO, letting him take the fall. Whatever approach they choose, the CEO and his aides will be watching them closely; at the first sign that something is up, the corporation will move against the PCs.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) alliance, difficult choice, investigative, planet-based, politics, sandbox, shady, twist, villain

Dark Secrets Brought into the Light

320

W racked with guilt for the evil deeds perpetrated by his employer, the head of a major corporation has disappeared—and begun posting their darkest secrets online. With ample skill and resources, he has made himself all but impossible to track down by conventional means; however, his relative anonymity also casts doubt as to his identity. If the corporation goes after him, they could be seen to be confirming the secrets he’s been sharing; for now, they can dismiss the claims as “scandalous rumors with no basis in fact.” The corporation hires the PCs to silence their former CEO.

The opening scene in this adventure is an investigation of the CEO’s whereabouts. The corporation assigns the PCs a handler, and through him they have access to a wealth of information about the CEO. Pulling together some leads, they investigate his home and turn up a possibility: a private office he maintains in the city, off of corporation grounds.

The office is nearby, and visiting it turns up a range of clues that point to the CEO not being the one posting the corporation’s secrets: Nothing in his files suggests that he has the skill to do so while so assiduously protecting his identity. (This is a bluff on his part, deliberately planted.) While there, the PCs detect something amiss: a bomb in the office building.

Prometheus

A t the request of a major corporation, a scientist has developed an incredibly powerful android for the purpose of removing illegal squatters. The android works within the limitations of the law, but regulations are so vague that use of lethal force is often legal, even if it’s against the spirit of the law.

The android is dropped onto planets that the corporation has purchased from various governments. Often these planets have settlers who don’t know that the corporation now owns the planet. It has been determined that sending the android to deal with the settlers is more cost-effective than formally evicting them.

The scientist visited a planet that was being “prepped,” as the corporation likes to say, and saw the slaughter of innocent people by his creation firsthand. He has vowed to do whatever it takes to destroy the android, and has become a part of an illegal underground organization in order to fulfill his mission.

Hooks for this plot include the PCs being hired by the scientist in order to stop the android, being victims of the android’s past assaults on another planet, or being a part of the underground movement that opposes the corporation.

The first encounter should be a test devised by the scientist himself. Smaller and less formidable androids that were prototypes for his final design try to ambush the PCs. They won’t kill a captured or subdued opponent, but active opponents are hit with full-force attacks.

The bomb was placed there by the CEO, and they must escape before it goes off and kills them all.

Outside, the PCs are met by a group of hackers who also tracked down the office. They want to confirm the CEO’s identity so that they can spread his “gospel” even more widely, which they can’t do until they know his information is legitimate. They offer to join up with the PCs. Together they track his source to a sort of mobile command center, a high-end communications hub built into a vehicle.

Their pursuit becomes a car chase, and law enforcement gets involved. Now dodging the police while trying to catch the CEO’s vehicle, the PCs must shake their own pursuers, avoid wrecking their vehicles, and get the CEO out of sight before anyone catches up with them. When they catch him, they’ll also have to convince the hackers to let them take him away—or decide to screw over their own employer by spiriting away the CEO to continue his postings.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Pulp, Steampunk

Tags: (MR) city, difficult choice, investigative, planet-based, politics, race, rebellion, rivalry, shady, trade, travel

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Once the scientist is satisfied that the PCs can stop the android, he arranges for transport to the planet that is the site of the android’s next prepping mission. During the journey, the PCs’ vessel is attacked by mercenaries hired by the corporation. The mercenaries attempt to board the vessel and engage the PCs in firefights and hand-to-hand combat.

Upon reaching the planet, the local settlers—who have received word that a “killer robot” has been attacking innocent people on distant planets—try to attack the PCs. This encounter serves to demonstrate just how ill-prepared the settlers are to fight against the android; it shouldn’t be much of a challenge for the PCs.

The final encounter will be against the android itself. For this battle, go all-out. The PCs should be up against an opponent that can match them in terms of firepower and tactics. Hold nothing back.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) artificial life form, bearers, combat-heavy, deadline, epic challenge, epic impact, innocent, interplanetary, intrigue, isolated area, mass combat, monster, siege, stealth, tactical planning

The Profit Equation

322

A corporation has used a mind-altering technology to enslave a lost colony. The corporation sells the colonists' goods for an incredible profit, and they spend next to nothing on sustaining the colony. A colonist who has thrown off the shackles of the mind control has set out to blow up all the ships traveling to the colony. The corporation hires the PCs to stop the "bandit" who's attacking their ships. The corporation expresses a preference for taking the bandit alive, but they don't reveal much background information to the PCs.

If the PCs travel the route in a manner that reveals their employer (such as in a corporation-supplied ship), the bandit will attack. If the PCs appear to be free agents, the bandit won't actively pursue a fight, but will remain distrustful. The bandit's ship is outfitted with weaponry sufficient to take out corporate freighters, but he'll turn and run if he comes up against superior firepower or a smarter opponent. His tactics aren't well-suited to smaller and more maneuverable ships, but he does have some escort pilots—freed colonists with little training at his asteroid base.

The bandit might be able to win a fight against the PCs with some struggle, but he won't kill them. He wishes only to capture them and put their ship to use. In doing so, he takes

them back to his base. If the PCs win the fight and chase the bandit back to his base, he will surrender to the PCs and explain the situation.

At the base, the bandit informs the PCs of the corporation's plans. He asks for the PCs' help in freeing the colonists, as his attempts at making their plight known to the authorities have been shot down. If he could destroy the jamming facility that cuts off all communication to and from the colony, he could make real progress.

If the PCs help him, they can mount an attack against the jamming facility. The bandit and his men will provide cover for the PCs to infiltrate and destroy the control terminal or reactor. If the PCs capture the bandit, the corporation directs them to a facility where they must repel an attack by the remainder of bandit's men.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) alliance, combat-heavy, difficult choice, innocent, interplanetary, isolated area, madness, politics, race, rebellion, siege, trade, travel, twist

Pleasure Cruise

323

On board a mighty star liner, the security grid is found to have been sabotaged and is inaccessible when a series of murders begins. Most victims are tortured and their bodies dismembered, marked, or otherwise abused. While the body count starts out small, before long passengers are being executed en masse.

Without access to the security system, the security staff and anyone trying to assist them are forced to resort to old-fashioned legwork to capture the culprits. As the situation worsens, people barricade themselves in their rooms, seize supplies, and do what they must to survive.

The PCs will likely spend a good deal of time investigating the murders. The perpetrators spend as much time framing others for their crimes as murdering people, so there are plenty of red herrings to follow.

Eventually, when only a handful of people are left alive, the security system comes back online—seemingly on its own. The newly available surveillance footage shows the culprits using highly coordinated squad tactics as well as access to the locked-down security system to execute people throughout the ship—and much to their surprise, the footage also shows the PCs committing the atrocities.

Unless the PCs are the ones to discover the security system is functional again, and take steps to prevent anyone else from

seeing the incriminating footage, they'll have to deal with the rest of the survivors and the mob mentality that favors killing them all.

Inspecting the tapes more carefully will reveal that the night before the sabotage and murders started, the PCs all had simultaneous episodes of night terrors. After the final murder, one of the PCs can be seen unlocking the security grid, turning and giving the finger to a camera, and then returning to her quarters and lying down. This is followed immediately by another set of simultaneous night terrors.

How the PCs deal with the situation once they realize they were the bad guys all along is entirely up to them. Without drastic action, they will almost certainly be arrested and imprisoned or executed upon the ship's arrival. What caused the PCs to snap is up to you. Though it could be run as part of an ongoing campaign, the implications of this plot make it more appropriate as a one-shot.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Horror, Space Opera, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (MN) alliance, betrayal, deadline, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, exploration, innocent, interplanetary, investigative, isolated area, madness, mature themes, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, siege, social, spirit, stealth, tactical planning, travel, twist, villain

The Guardian of Sorrow

324

A survey mission reveals a planet that doesn't appear on any existing star charts. The surface is one vast desert, save for a single ruined city; there are no life forms. Landing there, the PCs find an abandoned spaceship; the ship's logs say that it arrived 10 years ago.

The city is empty, but there are signs of battle everywhere. Eventually the PCs will start to find the bodies of the ship's crew, all of whom took their own lives. The PCs then begin to have recurring flashes of intense sorrow and visions of war and destruction.

Sensors will reveal that just before the visions appear there is a surge of energy beneath the city. The PCs discover a hidden door in the base of a large statue; the passage beyond leads to an underground complex. As the PCs travel through the complex, the visions become stronger—nearly debilitating, and crushing in their sorrow.

After being attacked by the complex's robot defenders, the PCs reach the source of the energy: a large crystal matrix. A single robot stands beside the crystal.

The robot explains that it is the Guardian of Sorrow, designed to protect the Crystal of Memories, a psychic monument crafted from the natives' combined experiences of war. When people come to the city, it plays the experiences back in their minds to illustrate the futility of war.

The guardian has no idea that the crystal is too powerful for humans to withstand, nor that it causes them to commit suicide after prolonged exposure. Once this is explained, it can recalibrate the crystal to make the experience a non-lethal one.

For this plot to work best, you need a game mechanic that simulates the increasing depression that the PCs feel the longer they're in the city. If your system includes psychic damage, that will work. If not, the depression saps their will to leave the planet and interferes with ability checks. Failed checks should never lead the PCs to harm themselves, though.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Pulp, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) artificial life form, dungeon crawl, madness, planet-based

Recovery of a Lost One

Lost Highway

325

Examining an old website, the PCs discover an odd process running. Upon closer inspection, it appears to be an incredibly complex AI. Inspecting it causes it to open an interface and start asking about computer security and software. Shutting down the process proves impossible and prompts requests for the user to desist.

The process claims to be a human testing out an experimental computer-brain interface. It says that it's lost and can't find its body to terminate its session. It dates from before the inception of commonly available cybernetic implants (at least a few decades back, if this isn't old technology in your setting).

Tracking down the personal information given by the process, the PCs find records of an engineer with the correct personal information, birth date, and line of work. They'll also find records of an accident involving the experiment that left an engineer permanently comatose.

The long-forgotten machine is locked away in the basement of a research lab, but is still considered confidential technology, and the PCs can't legally gain access to it. They must either locate and abscond with the bulky, fragile machine, or find and steal the schematics and build a new one.

Machine and process in hand, the PCs need only access to the body, which is being kept in a high-security nursing home for the rich and famous. His care is being paid for by the engineer's old partner, now rich from their innovations; he thinks he's being kind. The PCs must either sneak in with a bulky machine or find a way to kidnap an unconscious old man.

When they try to transfer the engineer's mind back into his body, the PCs find that something isn't working. The engineer suggests contacting his partner for help. As soon as the partner is made aware of the situation, he immediately sends an anonymous tip to the police if there's a chance they can catch the PCs doing something illegal. If the partner gets access under the pretense of helping them, he will immediately try to destroy the trapped man. Having intentionally stranded him to obtain sole rights to their invention, the partner is afraid that releasing him will mean paying decades of back royalties.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers

Tags: (MN) artificial life form, bearers, betrayal, dungeon crawl, innocent, investigative, planet-based, shady, social, stealth, trade, villain

Designer Children

326

One of the PCs receives a surprising call from a lab technician: The PC was conceived in a lab, and due to a new change in the law the technique used to conceive her is now illegal. While the PC is exempt from prosecution, the lab is required to keep tabs on her location. The technique eliminated deadly genetic flaws, and also conferred several positive traits; the technician is not at liberty to discuss details.

After the PC has confronted her parents, who own up to it, nothing else out of the ordinary happens for a few days. She then gets a call from her mother, who tells her that other children who were conceived at that lab have started disappearing, and that she's concerned for the PC's safety. She also asks the PC to see if she can find some of the other children whose parents are friends of hers.

The boyfriend of one of the missing children saw a couple of corporate vehicles drive away from the apartment complex when he got home from work; their apartment was trashed and his girlfriend has been missing ever since. Before long, the same corporation will track down the key PC (while she's with the other PCs, of course). They send a squad of enhanced personnel to bring her back to headquarters by force.

The PC will continue to have problems until the party confronts the corporation: Other squads will be sent after them, jobs will dry up as negative press about them is spread around, and so forth. The corporation wants people conceived with this technique because they're much easier to enhance than baseline humans. Their ultimate goal is to form an elite security squad at a fraction of the usual cost.

The best way to take on the corporation is to infiltrate the facility where the enhancement candidates are housed. Not all of them are pleased about their company-enforced future, and some will be more than happy to aid the PCs in destroying the enhancement program. Others like their new lot, and will fight the PCs to prevent them from dismantling the program. If the PCs succeed, the corporation will judge further pursuit to no longer be cost-effective.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Horror, Supernatural, Supers

Tags: (SM) alliance, betrayal, difficult choice, innocent, planet-based, rivalry, stealth, tactical planning, villain

Seek and Ye Shall Find

327

A scout ship dispatched to an unexplored system has gone silent, and the group that launched it fears the worst. Before the crew stopped broadcasting, they mentioned seeing unfamiliar ships in a region where there should be no vessels at all. The PCs are asked to investigate, and are provided with a fast picket ship if needed.

Approaching the last known location of the scout ship, they find themselves on the outskirts of a system with two unique features: major deposits of rare minerals, which show up on long-range scans, and a high level of background radiation that suggests recent space traffic—despite being light years from inhabited space. The logical assumption is that the scout ship would have descended to the resource-rich planet to confirm their scans and assess the deposits in detail.

From orbit, the PCs can verify that the planet is indeed rich in rare minerals and ores, and they also discover that it's home to three small outposts, all of which have the look of military bases. Two appear to be largely destroyed, but the third is intact and shows signs of current habitation. Descending to the surface, they explore the base. It looks to have been occupied within the past few hours, but has no connection to the scout ship. Clues suggest it belongs to mercenaries who were sent here to execute a contract, but that they've abandoned their mission and are now fighting for survival.

When the PCs finish exploring the base, they spot a ship descending from orbit—one of unknown design, and bristling

with weaponry. A chase ensues, with the PCs outgunned by the mystery vessel but possessing the advantage of speed and maneuverability. While they're evading their pursuer, they're joined by two small military craft—the mercenaries—who help them escape. The mercenaries explain that they were hired to stake a claim in this system, but fell prey to an unknown hostile force. Some were killed, others were abducted. They believe the hostiles are based on one of the planet's moons.

The scout ship was also taken by the hostiles (who can be a human faction or previously unknown aliens), and her crew is still alive. The finale involves joining forces with the mercenaries to mount a rescue expedition on the hostile moon. Depending on the strengths of the party, this can entail sneaking onto a hostile ship, infiltrating the moon facility itself, or creating a distraction and fighting off a smaller hostile force to gain entry. Once inside, the PCs must overcome hostiles while searching for the scouts and mercenaries, get them all out alive, and make it out of the system with hostiles in hot pursuit.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Space Opera, Swashbuckling

Tags: (MR) alliance, exploration, innocent, interplanetary, investigative, isolated area, monster, race, stealth, tactical planning, trade, travel

Father in a Bottle

328

The PCs are hired by a merchant of considerable age and wealth to find out what happened to his father, a deep space scout who went missing on an expedition some time ago. For years nothing was known about his disappearance, but recently a piece of his ship appeared for sale at an auction. The owner of the piece didn't know where it originally came from, but he purchased it from a cargo hauler captain.

At your option, the son can accompany the PCs. If you make him a quirky or funny NPC, he can add a lot of color to the adventure. When the PCs track down the cargo hauler captain, they find that his ship is under attack by pirates. The PCs assist him in driving off the pirates, some of whom must escape to further the plot. Afterward, the captain tells them that he found the piece in a crate of junk parts that he purchased from an alien trader who operates in another sector.

The PCs make contact with the alien trader and bargain for information on where the artifact was originally found. The alien has an unpleasant disposition and a craving for something disgusting, which he demands that the PCs provide and then eats in front of them. Suitably bribed, he'll tell them that the part was found in orbit around a nearby planet.

Displaced

In the present day, someone in strange clothing asks for directions to the nearest telegraph station; a few days later, another person shows up claiming to be from the early 1900s. Similar events continue to occur, with each person talking about a strange, light-filled room. These people are labeled "the displaced," and speculation about their origins runs wild. Though no one says so with a straight face, it seems clear that they're time travelers.

One of the displaced comes in contact with the PCs and begs their help in trying to find her parents. She remembers that they were in the light-filled room with her, and that suddenly she found herself here, wherever "here" is. On a piece of paper in her pocket is written a name, but she doesn't know anything else.

The displaced are actually clones, the products of a company's illegal experiments in memory re-creation and multi-stage tissue cloning. Most came from abandoned gene-banks, but some are from modern stock. The girl is one of the modern samples, her original having been killed in an accident. A scientist on the project released many of the clones, who traveled on autopilot until their control drugs wore off and their memories returned.

Researching the name, the PCs find an employee of the company who helped the scientist go into hiding. He is helpful when he sees the girl, offering a picture of her that was given to him by the scientist. He knows nothing, however,

When the PCs survey the planet's surface, they find additional debris from the father's scout ship. They also discover that the pirates they drove off earlier call this planet home, and are not fond of visitors. Depending on the direction you want to take this adventure, this can lead to a second space battle or a roleplaying encounter, with the PCs trying to convince the pirates to let them recover the wreckage of the father's ship.

At the crash site, the PCs fend off some hostile local creatures and discover an underground cavern where the father is in hiding. Not knowing when he would be rescued, he scavenged his ship for parts and built a suspended animation device; he has been in stasis all these years. He's alive and can be brought out of stasis. The PCs can then reunite the elderly son with his middle-aged father.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Pulp, Space Opera, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PV) combat-heavy, exploration, interplanetary, monster

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about the cloning. He provides information about where the scientist might be and mentions working with the gene databases, which might help the PCs identify the girl. Shortly after the PCs leave, the ex-employee's apartment blows up, and a black van full of company agents begins chasing the girl. If the police join the chase, the van will evade pursuit and eventually get away.

The information on the scientist leads only to a ransacked lab. The databases reveal the name and address of the girl, and of the other displaced. When her information is accessed, it activates a video file of the scientist pleading for help in revealing the illegal cloning project. The PCs are left with a difficult choice: attempt to reveal the scientist's knowledge to the world and shut down the project, or reunite the clone girl with her parents.

The company continues to pursue them, and must be dealt with; blackmail is one option. The PCs might break into a guarded company lab to acquire more evidence against the company. Resolution should feel tenuous, emphasizing the company's widespread power. This is a good plot to use to introduce the company as an ongoing enemy.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Horror, Space Opera, Supernatural, Supers

Tags: (JA) difficult choice, dungeon crawl, escort mission, innocent, investigative, isolated area, planet-based, shady

Loss of Loved Ones

Diplomatic Immunity

330

One momentous day, an alien ship lands on Earth. Its arrival is greeted with much awe and anticipation. The amorphous aliens show no signs of being violent and soon begin to mimic the bipedal form of humanity. They offer their 'hands' in peace. Neither the naïve aliens nor the incredulous humans are prepared for what happens next. Due to a chemical reaction, all aliens who take part in that initial greeting dissolve into a helpless puddle, and all humans involved are rendered comatose.

The aliens perceive this as a hostile act perpetrated by humans using biological weaponry. Those who weren't dissolved act quickly, returning to their ship and mounting a counterattack. A message is transmitted by radio from the alien ship. Most of the message is unintelligible due to the language barrier, but it features a clearly discernable countdown. When the countdown reaches its conclusion, a blob with the consistency and appearance of the deformed aliens is shot from the spaceship. Every human within a one-mile radius becomes comatose. The countdown then restarts with a few days on the clock, and humanity begins to tend to the fallen and prepare a counterattack. The races are suddenly at war.

At least one of the PCs should be infected by the alien fluid, but come out of her comatose state in a hospital; the PC has some chemical property that lets her fight off the effects. As a side effect of the infection, the PC has absorbed some knowledge from the alien goo. Thanks to this, the PC's body develops antibodies that can prevent the aliens from deforming with human contact. She can also interpret the alien language and is thus able to understand the message being broadcast from the ship. Roughly speaking, it says: "The first attack was a warning. Provide an antidote to this disease in two days time or we will destroy you."

The PCs know they need to get to the alien ship in order to confer the antibodies to the aliens; the antibodies will spread quickly and halt the disease. The government, however, has declared war on the aliens, and aiding and abetting the enemy is forbidden.

The PCs must either convince the officials that providing the antidote will halt the attack, or reach the ship in secret. The PCs may know where to find an independent ship, should they decide to use stealth, but the military will give chase. If they're apprehended before they're able to confer the antibodies, they'll be tried as traitors.

Once the PCs get to the alien ship, they'll find that the docking bay is open and most of the aliens are succumbing to the effects of the disease. If the PC gets to an unharmed alien, many of whom are quarantined in a control room, the cure spreads and the aliens call off the countdown. If saved, the aliens help to cure the comatose humans.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) bearers, deadline, difficult choice, innocent, interplanetary, monster, politics, rebellion, shady, social, stealth, twist



Artist: Laine Garrett

Gross Misunderstanding

331

The PCs see a report that a close friend or relative has carried out a terrorist attack against a group of negotiators. The negotiators were human diplomats working on a treaty with members of an alien race; relations between the two species are strained at best. The government has already executed the PCs' friend for his crime, but has retained a digital personality matrix—essentially a copy of his mind—for interrogation purposes. After questioning, it will be erased.

The PCs use their contacts to arrange a meeting with the personality construct. The construct takes full credit for the attack, but seems to be holding something back. Their friend was known to be a supporter of alien-human relations and was not an isolationist. Suspicious, the PCs investigate the attack and discover that things are more complicated than they first appeared.

Gaining access to the site of the bombing through contacts, stealth, or subterfuge, the PCs discover evidence that aliens were killed in the attack, not just humans—a fact which hasn't been reported in the media. There's also evidence that alien weapons were discharged in the area before the explosion. During the investigation, the PCs will be attacked by a lone alien. If it can't overwhelm them in the initial attack, it will try to escape, leading them on a chase through the city.

Empty Nest Syndrome

A military AI has grown beyond its original programming, attaining full sentience, and has come to view some of its charges—semi-autonomous weapons of war capable of leveling entire cities—as its children. Distressed that some of its children are in harm's way, it has recalled four of them to it. All four will have to pass through cities and towns on their way back to home base, and their programming is such that they will cause significant damage, death, and destruction in the process. Their human handlers have been locked out, and can no longer manage their actions. The military recruits the PCs to stop the war machines.

To buy the military the time they need to go public without causing widespread panic, the PCs need to stop the first machine without alerting either the AI or the city in its path until the machine has been destroyed. The machine looks like an oversized tank, and it packs a suite of heavy weapons plus the software required to use them to devastating effect. The PCs must shut down its communications gear, and then disable or destroy it.

With that breathing room, the military goes public in a limited fashion. The evacuation of communities along the machines' paths begins, and the military starts to take measures to stop the other three machines. Simultaneously, they ask the PCs to stop the AI directly. The AI has a tremendous amount of

When they capture the alien, it will tell them what really happened. There was a misunderstanding between the human and alien negotiators, and, feeling provoked, the aliens attacked the humans. The PCs' friend was the only survivor, and he talked the aliens down. He then came up with a plan to cover up the incident—which, if the truth became known, would cause a breakdown in human-alien relations so severe that it could lead to war. By taking the blame for a human “terrorist attack,” their friend could avert that disastrous outcome.

Once they know the truth, the PCs will need to decide what to do with that knowledge. Revealing the truth will strain human-alien relations, but will come as a relief to the family and colleagues of the PCs' executed friend. Concealing the truth will allow the human-alien relationship to progress, but will leave the family and colleagues of the executed friend confused and in pain. You can raise the stakes by having others investigate the crime scene and discover the same evidence, but use that information differently than the PCs; this can form the basis of another encounter or of an entirely new adventure.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Horror, Space Opera, Supernatural

Tags: (PV) artificial life form, city, difficult choice, intrigue, investigative, monster, planet-based, relationship hook, social, twist

332

information on military personnel, but knows nothing about the PCs—if they infiltrate the AI facility disguised as soldiers, they may be able to make some headway before the AI figures out how to stop them.

Inside the facility, they'll face the AI's drone defenses: scuttling and hovering robots, all armed, as well as physical security (such as magnetically bolted doors) and electronic security measures, including communications jamming. When they reach the AI, the PCs regain their view of the outside world—and see that the AI has slipped one of the war machines past the army, and is bringing it home.

The PCs must use the AI to shut down the war machine while fighting off more defense drones, this time with additional programming and intelligence behind them, and then disable the AI itself. The climax should be a race to the finish: If the AI succeeds, the machine can easily carve its way through the facility and kill the PCs.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers

Tags: (MR) artificial life form, combat-heavy, deadline, epic challenge, epic impact, innocent, planet-based, politics, villain

Crackdown

333

One or more of the PCs belongs to a large organization, and while the PCs are away on another adventure, a crackdown takes place. All other members are secretly rounded up by the government, imprisoned, and scheduled for trial. The PCs hear of this when they return, or possibly sooner, and learn of the trial date at that time.

The government announcement is filled with propaganda, ideally citing distorted actions taken by the PCs as partial justification for the arrests. Several members were injured resisting arrest, and some leaders of the organization have disappeared altogether. The missing leaders aren't mentioned in any press reports, which seems like an unusual omission.

The government seizes the property, ships, and other resources of the organization. Bank accounts are frozen and the members' identities are circulated among military and customs forces. A handful of members of the group and a few locations may be "ignored" intentionally, only to be subjected to surveillance by the government's security agents.

Opponents of the regime contact the PCs and seek out common cause; supporters of the regime may cast the PCs aside, afraid of being associated with a rebel organization. The regime closes the trial to the public due to the sensitive nature of the evidence. Rumors quickly spread that they have tortured the detainees and do not want to reveal this fact.

Meeting with new allies is a good scene to play out in detail; some may be allies of common cause (resistance to the government), while others may be criminals or mercenaries who see an opportunity to make a profit.

Attacking the facilities where organization members are held is tough: The regime's jails are well protected, and the staff is well-trained and well-armed. Depending on your setting, the detainees may be held on prison moons, engaged in hard labor to defray the cost of their imprisonment, or even cryogenically frozen while awaiting the trial's outcome.

If the PCs succeed in freeing some members of the organization, public executions of the organization's leaders will be orchestrated to draw the PCs out into the open. Ultimately, the PCs must prove their organization's innocence in a way that the government cannot dispute—or apply force or bribery against those with a grudge against them, causing the charges to be dropped.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Space Opera, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) deadline, innocent, planet-based, politics, relationship hook, sandbox, shady

Something Stinks in the Diaper Bag

334

An alien race of pure psychic energy has found their way into a hospital nursery, where they have displaced the fragile psyches of several newborns. With new host bodies to focus their prodigious mental powers, the aliens are running amok, subjugating everyone they encounter. This adventure can be played anywhere on the spectrum from the absurd, with floating super-powered babies wreaking havoc, to the sinister, with the aliens operating in secret and slowly expanding their sphere of influence.

The first people to fall under the sway of the alien intelligences are the nursery caretakers. Careful observers will notice the caretakers doting on a small number of infants and seeming annoyed whenever they must deal with any of the others. It's likely that parents notice this preferential treatment too, and are quite vocal about it. The aliens may ignore this attention or may take the opportunity to enthrall additional victims.

When taken home by their host's parents, the aliens waste no time dominating those they encounter in daily life and building their own demesnes. Some of them set up cults, while others work their way closer to political figures, using their powers to influence the government.

The PCs are alerted to the trouble when an associate exhibits

strange behavior and gets caught up in the criminal activities of an alien's cultist minion.

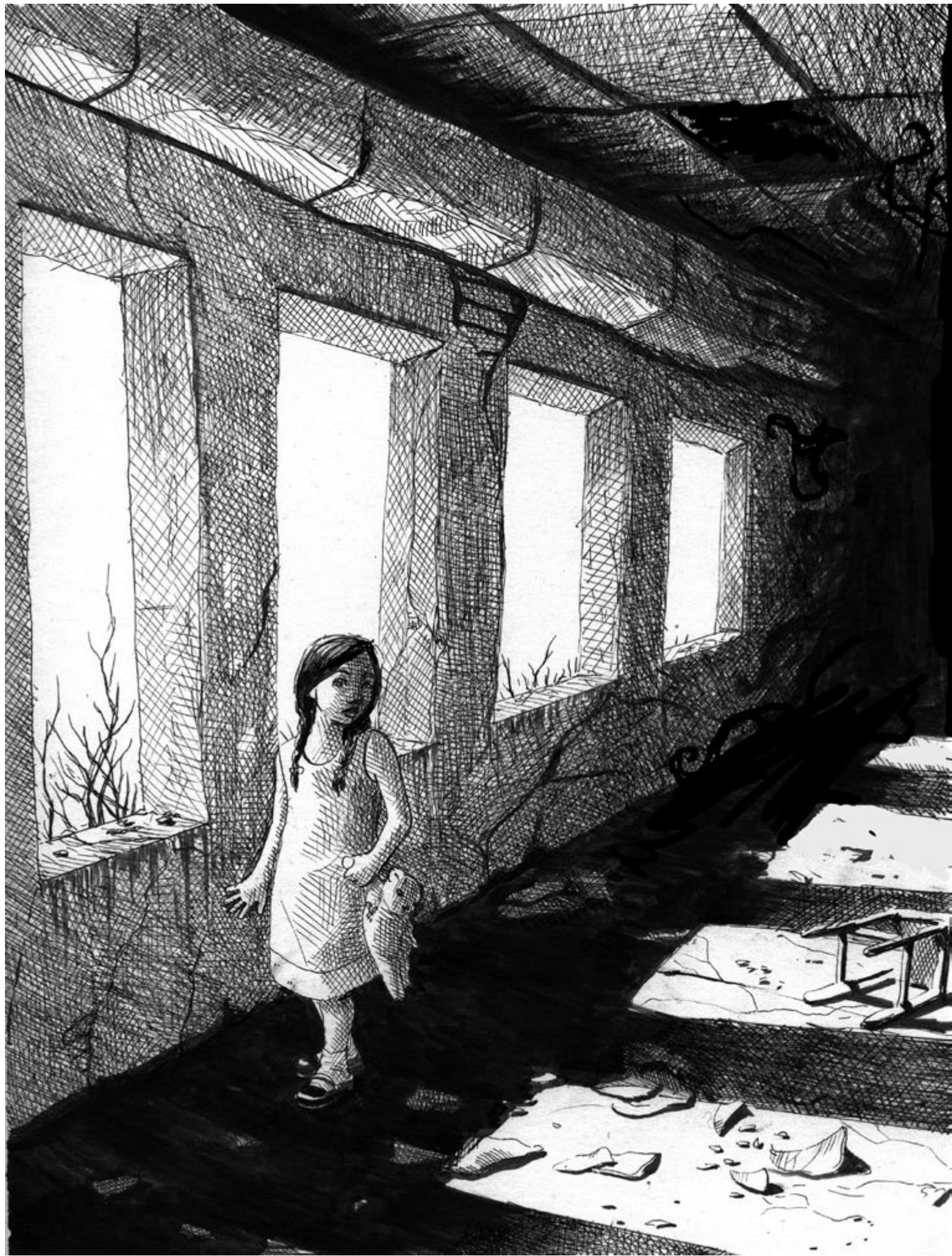
Hiding in the bodies of infants and with powerful psychic abilities and hordes of underlings under their control, the aliens will be difficult to combat. They won't hesitate to place others in danger, using their minions and hosts to their advantage in whatever ways they can.

Depending on how grim you want the story to be, the aliens may be easy or difficult to force from their hosts, and their tenancy may or may not have caused damage to the psyches of the children they subsumed. Once involuntarily forced from their hosts, however, the aliens' powers diminish significantly. Without a host to amplify their power, they are able only to possess those with very weak psyches and are a minimal threat.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Horror, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (MN) combat-heavy, innocent, investigative, madness, planet-based, relationship hook, sandbox, spirit, villain



Horror

Horror means different things to different gaming groups, and the 167 plots in this chapter cover all the bases. Whether you prefer your horror scenarios to be investigative, heavy on the action, or bleak and hopeless, you'll find plots to fit your needs.

Action Horror plots offer up zombie attacks and pitched battles with deranged cultists, while Supernatural adventures revolve around unraveling dark mysteries and facing a world unlike our own. Gothic and Victim Horror round out the quartet of horror sub-genres you'll find represented here, offering dread and a sense of futility in the face of impossible odds.

Want monsters from the deep, family secrets that should never have been revealed, werewolves stalking the woods, maniacal cultists, sideways journeys into the spirit world, and terrors from beyond? Look no further.

Supplication

In Retirement

335

For centuries, a line of monster hunters protected the local area from predatory monsters. Unfortunately, the newest member of the family has given up monster hunting. Once held at bay, the predators are now beginning to realize that hunters no longer protect the area. Only the former protector knows how to vanquish these predators for good. Can the PCs convince the hunter to return to his duty?

It's up to you to determine the nature of the threat. The predators could be aggressive spirits, vampires, werewolves, or supernatural animals. For whatever reason, they're immune to the PCs' usual arsenal, although the PCs should be able to slow them down long enough to escape.

Similarly, you need to determine the nature of the hunter. Is she from a long line of religious leaders, police officers, or park rangers, or was it simply a duty on the side? Was the hunter aware of her heritage and, if so, did she embrace it? What caused her to retire? What prevents her from returning? Is

imparting knowledge to the PCs enough or must they get her to don the mantle again?

This scenario helps inject a bit of horror into a typical "PCs are seasoned monster hunters" campaign. Perhaps the PCs think they know what they're up against, only to experience surprise at something that they've never encountered before (such as a new type of vampire, infernal snakes, or regenerating werewolves). Some research reveals that such creatures have been defeated in the past and offers clues about someone that can help. Hopefully the PCs can reach her in time and convince her to help them.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) alliance, combat-heavy, monster, sandbox, spirit, tactical planning

Mission aboard Deep Sea Lab 1

336

The government or a private investor has brought in the PCs to assist a brilliant scientist so reclusive that most people think he's dead. The scientist has been working on the development of a special undersea lab durable enough to withstand the pressures of the greatest depths and provisioned to support its occupants for two months.

Although the mission includes a cadre of security specialists, technicians, oceanographers, biologists, geologists, and others with disciplines suited to deep ocean exploration, the employer wants the PCs to act as independent observers during the mission.

What happens next doesn't alarm the chief scientist, even though it probably should. Early on, the scientists detect something monstrous, unclassified, and threatening in the waters outside the lab. The station loses communication with the topside base. One of the scientists strangles another. The exploratory mini-sub suffers a mechanical malfunction, requiring a rescue. Lastly, someone sabotages the lab's nuclear reactor.

At some point, the PCs should develop an alliance with at least one NPC technician who can aid them and who's capable of asserting her independence with the chief scientist. Likewise, there is at least one other NPC technician who looks to betray

the PCs and remains devoted to the chief scientist no matter what happens.

Over time, the chief scientist makes decisions that are increasingly life-threatening for everyone aboard the undersea lab. The scientist grows increasingly obsessed with the creature outside, and, in his speech and mannerisms, he gives clues that he has started to identify with the monster. He voices insights about it that couldn't possibly have come from scientific observations.

The creature outside is telepathically controlling the chief scientist, and the scientist is slowly losing his sanity as a result. Ultimately, he makes a decision that dooms the lab and allows the powerful creature to enter. It's up to the PCs to trap the creature and then kill it or return it to the sea. The chief scientist uses any means available, including the lab's computer controls, to kill everyone aboard the station. The station's diving pool, where submersibles enter the depths, should serve as the location of the final confrontation with the scientist and the sea monster.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) alliance, betrayal, dungeon crawl, innocent, isolated area, madness, monster

In a major city, a series of brutal murders occurs every three nights. The first murder was followed, three days later, by another three murders. Those murders were followed, three days later, by nine more murders. It's the first night of the cycle, and the city's residents are panicking as they expect 27 more murders to take place in two days' time.

The fiends behind these murders are members of a race of demons that have been summoned to prey upon the living. A demon was called up by a gifted but inexperienced necromancer. The first murder was the necromancer's rival. What the necromancer didn't know was that the demon would spawn after finishing the bloody deed. Whenever a demon kills a living person it spawns two more demons. All of the demons then continue to hunt down new victims.

Victims of the demons aren't chosen at random. Immediately after being spawned or after taking a life, the demons need a pact to stay on this plane of reality. They have one hour to find a person willing to give them the name of their next victim. The demons use trickery and threats of violence to solicit a name, but despite their threats they can only harm the person who they are contracted to kill.

The PCs need only be in the city when the murders occur to become embroiled in the plot. Perhaps they witness one of the demons committing a murder, or an associate of the PCs could be a murder victim. Maybe one of the PCs is named as a future victim, and then warned by the guilt-stricken person who offered their name.

This is an unconventional plot, but the encounters are simple: Every third night demons attack and kill people. The only way to stop the killing is either to discover the name of the necromancer and give it to one of the demons, which breaks the original pact and sends all of the demons back to their realm, or to convince everyone in the city not to give in to the demons' demands for new names. A demon can be destroyed using the appropriate holy items, but even then the battle will be a tough one.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) betrayal, city, combat-heavy, deadline, difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, investigative, magic, monster, relationship hook, religion, rivalry, social, villain

A Fair Ruling

338

A rural town holds a planting festival every spring. Unbeknownst to most townsfolk, during the festival a secret cabal summons a nature spirit and asks for a bountiful harvest, offering in return a sacrifice of its choice. The spirit generally asks for a sacrifice proportional to the amount of help the crops will need during the growing season. Minor sacrifices or services might include the first plant to bloom in each field or the induction of a new acolyte; major sacrifices could include the burning of a building to return the land on which it's built to arability—or the taking of a human life. This year, the cabal must provide the bodies of people who have been ritualistically murdered. The PCs are in town visiting relatives or friends, or are just passing through, and the spirit asks for outsiders.

After the first murder, most townspeople are scared but have no useful information. Those who know about the spirit are reluctant to let anyone else in on the secret, but are less disturbed by the event and try to downplay it. Questioning the old-timers might reveal that it isn't the first time someone has been murdered immediately after the planting festival.

If they search the newspapers and archives in the library and town hall, the PCs turn up numerous records of murders and

disappearances at this time of year. There are also stories of weird lights, missing animals, and other types of disturbances. Astute PCs may notice that dark events match up to lean farming years, and that the last record of poor harvests is almost a century ago.

Most of the year, the spirit exists outside of our plane, but from the time it's summoned until it receives its sacrifices, it manifests physically. One of the lead cultists is keeping it locked in his barn. In its physical form it resembles a great quadrupedal beast made of kudzu and covered with hundreds of tiny white blossoms, each of which drips blood. Its legs are made of roots tightly entwined around the shattered and decaying remains of humans and their farm implements. While the spirit is highly resistant to physical damage, defoliants and fire are effective weapons against it. If it is destroyed, it revokes its blessing and never returns.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) innocent, investigative, isolated area, politics, relationship hook, social, spirit, villain

Deliverance

Broken Toys

339

A child is abused by her parents and seeks refuge in her own imaginary world. In her world, she is protected from all harm by her stuffed toy animal. One day, her parents destroyed the toy as a punishment, and the child's intense emotional pain caused a psychic rift that bridged her imagined world with the real world.

From this rift, a hideous form of the toy emerged with the savage qualities of the animal it was modeled after. It slaughtered the child's parents and caused the child to go into shock. The child is now a vagabond roaming the streets. When she feels threatened, whether the threat is real or not, the savage monster appears and destroys the threat.

The PCs witness the monster killing someone and chase after the child, either out of concern or suspicion. If the PCs try to force the child to go anywhere, the monster reappears immediately and attacks the PCs. If they gently convince the girl to come with them to a police station, hospital or other appropriate authority, they learn about the murder of the girl's parents. Soon, however, the girl becomes nervous and the monster appears once again. Upon investigating the site of the parents' murders, the PCs find a journal that reveals the abuse that was occurring, and how the child created the imaginary world.

A final encounter is centered on the savage monster breaking free of the child's limited control. The monster might be a demon that is merely using the child's suffering to step into this world, or it could be working towards killing the child herself in order to permanently enter our world. Researching monsters of myth and legend should provide clues as to what the monster is and how it can be defeated. Perhaps giving the child a copy of the beloved toy will help seal the rift, or the PCs may need to use a ritual to break the bond between the child and the monster.

Have the monster appear frequently and rack up a body count with each appearance. Amp up the tension by making sure that the PCs fear the reappearance of the monster.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Gothic Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) alliance, city, escort mission, innocent, investigative, magic, mature themes, monster, roleplaying-heavy, social

Storm Front

340

The sensational story of a series of ritualistic slayings that have just been solved by the police is plastered on the front page of every newspaper in the city. The killer confessed to the slayings, claiming he executed and mutilated his victims to summon some sort of storm deity. Within a week, a constant, cold, driving rain has settled over the city, stressing the local economy, darkening people's attitudes, and spawning the fear that maybe something is coming after all.

To help resolve the situation, the PCs first need to know more about the methods the killer used. Since the case against him is still in progress, they'll have to convince the police to sneak them a peek of the case file, break into the police station, or hack their computer system.

After viewing the case file, the PCs know that the killer used rituals from a certain occult tome. They can probably find a copy with some legwork or by calling in favors, but the book is obtuse and requires more time than they have to translate. Later on, one of those contacts calls and asks if they're having any luck, because he's found someone who has a translated copy.

The person with the translated copy is someone the PCs have foiled before. The PCs have to convince him to not only let them use the book, but to help them with the binding ritual required to force the storm deity back from whence it came, since the ritual requires the participation of someone experienced in the rites of the storm deity.

Performing the ritual requires the casters to gather on the highest point available, so they must break into a skyscraper and make their way to the roof without being caught. Once there, the ritual attracts the attention of the storm deity's cloud drake minions, man-sized draconic spirits made of water vapor. They reform almost as fast as they're destroyed, but must be kept at bay till the ritual is completed.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) alliance, city, deadline, difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, investigative, relationship hook, shady, siege, social, spirit, stealth

And Then There Were None...

341

The PCs stumble upon a strange gathering of about a dozen elderly people and a half-dozen nurses and assistants camped far from civilization. The old-timers are friendly and are excited to be “at the family reunion.” They ask the PCs to join them. One of the younger campers is a thirty-something woman, also a member of the family, who occasionally looks distracted or preoccupied. She will quietly try to warn the PCs not to stay.

As the sun sets, a bonfire is lit, drinks and such are shared, and the anticipation builds. Excitement turns to fear when the clan patriarch is found in the bushes, strangled to death with his oxygen hose. Almost immediately, more murders occur. The group keeps close together.

Every 666 months, the family meets here to renew a pact with a devil. At midnight on the night of the full moon, the Devil shows up, one of the clan and a number of others are sacrificed, and the remaining members get to be young again. The young woman has uncovered the pact and learned that she is the sacrifice. So tonight she’s killing off her relatives one by one. She has had years to prepare, has a number of tricks up her sleeve (and buried around the campsite), and plans to end this pact no matter the cost. She doesn’t use guns because they attract attention. Her plan is to kill off all her relatives before taking her own life.

Killing with Kindness

342

A small, isolated community houses a coven that has made a pact with a demon, gaining power in return for the occasional human sacrifice. They usually choose by lottery from among the non-coven members, but unexpected visitors provide an opportunity to take a sacrifice without losing a member of the community. The PCs unwittingly fulfill this role by appearing in town just before the night of the sacrifice. Isolated and alone, the PCs must counter or defeat the demon and thereby rescue the rest of the community from future sacrifices.

This scenario works best with traveling PCs. The PCs could be on vacation and become lost or get off-course at some point; perhaps the coven has arranged a trap, using spells that kill cell phone or GPS signals, change water currents, or damage car engines. You might even slip this scenario in while the PCs are dealing with a different adventure.

In any case, the PCs are stuck in the community with no immediate way home. Their vehicle is towed to a garage and can be fixed “within a day, two at most.” Everyone in the community seems extremely hospitable, perhaps overly so. If the PCs are persistent in trying to leave, coincidences and natural phenomena interfere: an attractive local seduces a PC, a

She starts by murdering the man who started it all. She will next try to target the younger and more capable campers, but will try to drive off the PCs instead of killing them, as they are truly innocent. If the PCs can figure out what’s going on, they may be able to help her, but she isn’t very trusting. The old-timers will let more and more hints slip as the situation becomes increasingly desperate.

If the young woman is thwarted in her mission before midnight, she will surrender and join their “initiation.” But at 11:59, a bomb will go off underneath the place where she’s chained, killing her and more of the family. Of course, that’s when the Devil arrives and demands his sacrifice from the few who remain.

Make the old-timers so happy that they’re creepy. The PCs can try to defend them from “whatever’s out there,” or can try to figure out the root cause. Either way, it’s going to get ugly before it ends.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (KS) alliance, deadline, difficult choice, intrigue, investigative, magic, social, twist

bad storm is rolling in, or one of the PCs breaks an ankle. You should be careful not to make these incidents feel like railroading, although it’s just fine if the PCs start to feel like something is working against them.

How this scenario continues depends on the demon’s reach and on what powers it offers the coven. If immortality is included, the PCs might catch anachronistic cues. Perhaps the town looks like it was lifted from the 1930s, the locals use 1950s slang and fashion, the newest car in town is from 1972, and the mechanic seems in awe of the PCs’ vehicle. Non-coven residents may want to help the PCs escape—so exactly what is holding them back? Is there an area in or around town that the PCs aren’t allowed to go?

All of this leads to the climax, in which the coven captures the PCs and drags them to the ritual site.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (WC) isolated area, monster, villain

Crime Pursued by Vengeance

Keeping It in the Family

343

A friend in the coroner's office or police department asks the PCs to consult on a murder case. Though the body in the morgue looks human, the autopsy has revealed a decidedly inhuman physiology. The police have investigated as far as they can, but they're hoping the PCs will be able to provide them with additional insight into the murder. All they currently have to go on is a murder scene, a deformed body with multiple stab wounds, and the testimony of a deeply disturbed witness.

The witness is the victim's girlfriend. She claims that she came to visit her boyfriend, let herself in, and found two naked men stabbing her boyfriend and yelling in a foreign language. She started screaming and the men fled towards the river. She's certain that the men have been skulking around her house. If the PCs stake out her house, the men—who are actually not human at all, but humanoid amphibians—show up after dark and attempt to break in and kidnap the woman. If the PCs don't stake out her place, she'll disappear.

A call alerts the PCs that the morgue has been broken into and the corpse is missing. The PCs join the hunt for the body, and they find two square-shouldered men in dripping coats dragging a body; they're headed in the general direction of the

river. When they realize they've been discovered, the pair will split up. One tries to slow down the PCs and the other shoulders the corpse, trying to escape to the river. Both are very strong and fast, but the runner is carrying a heavy burden.

The men continue trying to steal the corpse and related documentation, and they try to kill anyone involved in the case, including the PCs. The men will try to gang up on a single target when possible.

Staking out the river, which the men use for transportation, the PCs discover they have a hidden burrow under the river itself. Inside its maze of partially submerged caverns connected by water-filled tunnels, they find living spaces and (if they were captured) the girlfriend and the corpse. With nowhere left to flee, the men fight to the death if they are attacked or if they discover the PCs in their lair.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, innocent, investigative, monster, race, relationship hook, villain

Hush

344

Months ago, a woman was savagely raped behind the theater where she worked as a burlesque dancer (or stripper, depending upon the era of your game). Although the townspeople heard her cries for help, due to a combination of fear and disgust at how the dancer made her living they did nothing to aid her.

The dancer was beaten so badly that she could no longer dance, and her beautiful face was scarred and broken. She was fired, thrown out of her home, and left penniless. With nothing left to her but pain and suffering, she hanged herself in the town square. A suicide note was found on the body. It read, "I curse the people of this town such that when they cry for help, no one will hear them."

The months following her suicide have been marked by a series of strange deaths. A person will be crushed or savagely beaten in seclusion, yet despite potential witnesses being within earshot no one hears the attack. Innocent people have been arrested and convicted as murderers. Their defense—that they heard nothing—is often disregarded at trial.

The ghost of the dancer now roams the town, seeking her revenge. No sound can be made in her presence and she will flee with a shriek if another person sees her. The PCs may be asked to investigate the strange homicides in this town, or to aid a friend who is on trial for a murder committed by the ghost. Many people remember the circumstances surrounding the dancer's death, but few are willing to talk about it. At least once during the adventure, the ghost appears and attacks a lone PC.

The climax of this plot occurs when the PCs discover and deliver the rapists to the ghost so that she may have her revenge. For an interesting twist, have the PCs attacked by townspeople that they thought they could trust, only to learn that these people are the ones who attacked the dancer.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) city, difficult choice, investigative, magic, mature themes, roleplaying-heavy, social, spirit

Take No Prisoners

345

A monster hunter has come to town. While her cause is legitimate, she's ruthless in her methods. Sometimes innocents have to be sacrificed for the greater good, and she doesn't separate the wheat from the chaff: "Good" monsters are fair game to her. It soon becomes apparent that the cure is worse than the disease and the monster hunter must be stopped before she causes more harm.

This scenario works well if there's a monster PC in the group or if the group has a monster ally or acquaintance. The hunter soon threatens this monster. Alternatively, the PCs may initially welcome the hunter's help (or at least turn a blind eye) until the hunter raises the stakes too high.

The scenario starts with the monster hunter's grand entrance: She kills a monster in spectacular and brutally efficient fashion. It's important at this stage that the monster hunter doesn't show her true colors; she harms no innocents and the monster targeted was performing an evil act. The PCs themselves might have been gearing up to deal with the threat, only to have the hunter upstage them at the last moment.

As the adventure progresses, the monster hunter becomes more dangerous. Perhaps she coaxes innocents into potentially lethal situations as bait, or maybe she has agitated local creatures, causing monsters to attack more often and with greater ferocity. Perhaps she injures a victim or sets her sights on a "good" monster.

Once the PCs turn on the hunter, of course, she believes that evil influences them. She may try to convince them of their error at first, but she won't hesitate to harm or kill them if they get in her way. The PCs may have to ally with a monstrous former foe to take care of this new threat.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (WC) innocent, monster, twist, villain

The Flower Pot Case

346

Some time ago, five influential members of the city council conspired with a real estate developer to claim a residential district using the city's eminent domain authority. The plan to bulldoze the neighborhood and erect a three-story, ultramodern shopping district moved forward in spite of the human cost; there were repeated scenes of families being pulled from their homes by law enforcement while bulldozers thrummed nearby. Development continued as an appeal traveled to the highest level of the courts. The elicited sympathy wasn't enough to quell the plot.

Almost forgotten among the evictees was a quiet man, a gardener whose wondrous front-yard garden was plowed under. No one ever heard from the man again, but he has returned to seek his revenge. A string of horrible deaths rocks the new shopping center. Shopkeepers in the new mall are found strangled by vines, a councilman is found stung to death by killer bees, and an official known for taking bribes was stabbed to death and pinned to a wall with several pairs of gardening shears. Before long, the lead contractor's decomposed body was found in a mulch pile, and a building inspector turned up dead after taking a bite from a poisoned tomato. The district's developer discovered his trophy wife hideously transformed after an allergic reaction to exotic pollen.

During their investigation, the PCs find a newspaper clipping that shows the neighborhood before it met the plow of a bulldozer. The gardener's beautiful front yard is unmistakably the most prominent feature in the photo.

When the party looks for the gardener, they learn he enrolled in chemistry and biology classes at the local university. One of his professors remembers the gardener as a man obsessed with the idea that plant life could be infused with an animal-like nervous system. The professor recalls the gardener had a friendship with a hulking fellow studying botany.

Tracking the hulking student to his apartment, the PCs come upon a terrible sight. He has been transformed into a monstrous, tentacled man-plant whose trunk is permanently fused to a pot. This creature lashes out and attacks anyone who gets close. It's impossible to communicate normally with the transformed botanist.

Searching the man-plant's apartment uncovers a map of the city. A single location is marked on the map. Following the map leads to an abandoned greenhouse outside of town. Here the gardener has set up a number of traps to protect his laboratory, where he is growing massive, hideous plant monsters.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) artificial life form, city, investigative, madness, monster, politics, social, twist, villain

Vengeance Taken for Kindred upon Kindred

Mommy Dearest

347

Several generations ago, a powerful cult priestess was betrayed and brutally murdered by her son, who desired to use her cult for personal gain. The next day during services, she arose as a zombie and sacrificed him before their shocked followers, causing them to flee in fear and never return.

The mother's spirit still haunted the abandoned compound when one of her son's many illegitimate children came searching for answers about her father. Able to possess the body of her descendant, the priestess has begun rebuilding her flock, starting by culling her bloodline of the non-faithful.

The PCs are hired to look into the disappearance of a young woman and her children, which is part of a larger case involving disappearances and murders. Investigating the victims, the PCs come across an old photograph in a newspaper. The victim is just a little girl, and standing next to her are the pregnant mothers of several other victims. Any of the women in the photograph can tell the PCs that the photo was taken at the site of the headquarters of a religion to which they all used to belong.

The compound has fallen into serious disrepair and is overgrown with weeds. There are fresh tracks in the softer ground. As the PCs explore, they're harassed by shadowy dog-like spirits. After dealing with the spirits, a search reveals a hidden trap door leading into an old sub-basement.

Beneath the compound the PCs discover a dank subterranean area lit by torches. There they find the abductees and the possessed woman. The priestess will first attempt to recruit the PCs to the cult, only resorting to violence as a last resort. She can inhabit any of the abductees, and may hop between them or pretend to be banished only to strike from behind.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MN) combat-heavy, dungeon crawl, innocent, investigative, isolated area, madness, spirit, twist, villain

Forget Me Not

348

For this plot to work, you'll need to find a connection between an organization and one or all of the PCs. Professional organizations work best, but academic institutions, social clubs, and other groups will work as well. This organization will be referred to henceforth as "the agency."

A former member of the agency has gone rogue. This traitor turned against the agency because he believed it wasn't aggressive enough in its pursuits, and that this resulted in the death of his partner and lover. The traitor turned to the occult and learned black magic; he can now summon spirits to do his bidding, though it costs him a measure of his sanity. His madness makes him believe that the agency should be destroyed and that all of its members must be killed.

The traitor's spell requires a personal item that the target feels strongly about and a personal item that's just as meaningful to the caster. This item could be a childhood toy, a gift from a departed loved one, a reminder of a tragic mistake that the target made, or a similar type of memento. For the traitor, the item is something associated with his departed lover. The traitor summons a spirit which consumes the items.

The spirit then takes on a hideous, nightmarish form similar to the object taken from the target. When the spirit attacks the

target, it inflicts physical harm while also mounting a horrifying mental assault that preys upon the memories generated by the item. If the spirit kills the target or is vanquished, it dissipates and the item associated with the departed lover falls to the ground.

The PCs learn of fallen comrades who have died from the traitor's spell. This leads into a scene where a comrade is attacked in front of the PCs. The traitor then murders an NPC to gain access to the PCs' dwellings or workplaces. If successful, the traitor will cast the spell against the PCs and the spirit will appear before them.

Repeat these encounters (spirits attacking comrades, attempts to steal personal items from a PC, spirits attacking PCs) until the PCs solve the mystery of who is targeting them.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Romance, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) alliance, betrayal, city, intrigue, investigative, magic, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, social, spirit

The PCs are part of a geologic survey that must explore a rugged, mountainous region, and their patron agency has contracted two brothers to act as backcountry guides. The tension between the brothers is immediately evident, although they refuse to talk about it. Subtle inquiries to the younger brother reveal that the eldest is in mourning. His wife was a passenger in a car that crashed while the younger brother was driving, and she died in the accident.

The expedition takes a dark turn once it moves deep into the wilds. Far from civilization, the younger brother snaps. He and his brother get into a scuffle that ends with the younger fleeing from camp. After one night alone, he decides to exact vengeance on his older brother. He coats himself in mud and natural camouflage and begins hunting his brother and the party.

He fully intends to kill his brother, and he subjects the expedition to traps and snares and drives wild predators towards them. Caught between the harrier and the party, the animals attack the party out of desperation. At one point, the younger brother draws a den of bears to the expedition campsite by smearing honey on his brother's tent.

Intrigued by the man-hunter and the slain bears, a pack of wolves begins to trail the expedition. For several nights, the baying of the pack surrounds the campsite. One day, the older brother has had enough of the younger's "shenanigans," and sets up a number of traps meant to ensnare him. That night, the younger brother comes into camp and attempts to destroy the party's cell phones and other communication devices, intending to strand them in the mountains. A chase ensues, with the younger brother trying to lead the older brother into a previously set trap while the older brother tries to do the same.

Both brothers and the party fall prey to each other's traps, which are in the same ravine some 30 feet apart. The party and the older brother get stuck in a particularly deep sinkhole trap. The younger brother can't move, because the steel-toothed animal trap set by his brother snapped his leg in two. The wolves, scenting blood, are drawing nearer.

In the pit, the truth should come out. The real tragedy on that night of the accident was that the younger brother had come to rescue his sister-in-law from a domestic dispute. As they fled, the older brother pursued them, which is why the younger brother drove recklessly and crashed. They both blame each other for her demise.

Teamwork is the only method out of the pit before the wolves arrive and devour the younger brother. The pit is too slick and unstable to climb, but the older brother has a length of rope. If they can find a way to toss it the 30 feet they need to reach the other trap, the younger brother could tie it off in his pit, giving them a way out. The party needs to convince the wounded and angry younger brother to help them, or tragedy will strike again.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (TT) alliance, betrayal, difficult choice, escort mission, intrigue, isolated area, mature themes, roleplaying-heavy, social, travel



Artist: Laine Garrett

Sins of the Forefathers

350

Long ago, during World War II, a small band of five soldiers used and murdered an innocent young Italian woman. As fate would have it, their direct descendants have inadvertently gathered in one place. This has caused an anguished crack in reality that allows an undead version of the woman to arise and take vengeance. The descendants are innocent victims and are unaware of their ancestors' crime.

The descendants have all enrolled in the same college. During a party, one of them picks up an attractive woman that doesn't seem to go to the college; witnesses don't remember her speaking, at least not in English. She made her intentions known through body language. The next morning, his roommate finds the descendant hanged in his dorm room.

Later, a second descendant, a young lady, is seen trying to help a frantic woman on the street; the woman is speaking rapidly in Italian. Without warning, the woman strikes the

descendant across the throat and runs away as the descendant bleeds to death with her throat torn open.

You can introduce clues with these deaths as well as subsequent ones. Perhaps one of the victims kept a medal from their forefather in their dorm room or wrote a paper on the subject, or maybe one of the original criminals is still alive in a rest home. In any case, the PCs have to work fast before three more innocent victims fall to the undead woman.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) innocent, investigative, monster, villain

Pursuit

Blood Trails

351

Unbeknownst to most of mankind, a society of vampires lives among us in the mortal world. They're bound by a code to never leave any witnesses to their feedings and to never leave their prey alive. A rebel vampire is deliberately breaking the code in order to bring about chaos and panic. Consequently, a team of vampires is tracking the rebel and disposing of all witnesses or newly created vampires that they find along the way.

Hooks for this plot can include the PCs witnessing a vampire attack or being asked to investigate a murder committed by the trackers. Alternately, one of the PCs' associates may have witnessed a vampire attack and need protection from the trackers.

The PCs arrive on the scene of a murder in time to see the rebel attacking another person, or the trackers attempting to dispose of a witness. This leads to an encounter with some of the trackers. The trackers are savage but can be defeated by traditional means (fire, sunlight, wooden stake through the heart, decapitation, etc.). The trackers seek to eliminate witnesses but won't fight to the death if the tide turns against them.

Then, in a very public place, the PCs see the rebel feeding off of normal people with no regard for who observes him; he's also unconcerned with the rioting that his feeding provokes. To make matters worse, the victims who aren't killed by the

rebel's feeding are turning into vampires, albeit with limited abilities. The newly turned vampires immediately erupt into a feeding frenzy, though fortunately their victims can't become vampires as well. The rebel won't risk being destroyed by the PCs, and will abandon the newly turned vampires without regret if things turn against him.

The final encounter should bring the trackers, the rebel, the rebel's newly turned vampire slaves, and the PCs together for a fierce battle. By this point the PCs should have a method for dealing with the hordes of vampires. There may also be assistance from local police or other organizations.

Keep the encounters in this adventure bloody and fast-paced. The vampires are ruthless killers with no sense of mercy for anyone.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) city, epic impact, investigative, monster, rebellion, social, tactical planning

All-Day Pass

352

It was too good to be true. Each of the PCs received a free all-day pass and \$50 in free “gold coins” to the world’s largest dungeon-themed amusement park. The park is modeled after a popular fantasy-themed massively multiplayer online game. What starts out as a fun day in the park, however, quickly turns into a fight for survival.

A handful of park workers dressed as barbarians, knights, and witches stalk the PCs through the park. Somehow, these costumed stalkers have all the powers of their in-game counterparts, and they have it out for the PCs. Moreover, the other park-goers seem oblivious to the threat the game’s characters represent.

The turmoil begins when the stalkers, enacting a “street play,” break from the script and turn their deadly magic and all-too-real weaponry on the people watching nearby. When the PCs strike a killing blow against an assailant, it simply disappears.

The drama continues as a street jester selling lemon shake-ups from a cart begins tossing the treats at the party. Each one that hits explodes in icy shards and causes the ground to rumble. Amazon warriors with spears attack the riverboat ride into the “jungle.” A dark wizard animates water elementals from all the park’s fountains.

There is no escape. Every time the PCs make a try for an exit, the game’s iconic heroes-come-to-life appear before them and attack. When the combat ends, the party finds itself transported to the courtyard in front of the park’s famous Ferris wheel. Furthermore, as the day goes on the game’s characters become more formidable.

The only weapons available are foam versions of the game’s famous arsenal, sold in souvenir shops. Strangely, when they’re used against the game’s characters, the weapons behave like their real-life counterparts. The same goes for souvenir magic scrolls and similar items. The PCs can pay for these things with the gold coin tokens that are used as money in the park, but once the PCs’ money has been spent, no other form of payment will work.

If the PCs manage to survive the day—and a harrowing final battle on the Ferris wheel—the exits all open and the PCs find they are able to leave. At the end, they’ll ask themselves, “Was it real, or was it all digital?”



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) investigative, isolated area, magic, monster, roleplaying-heavy, social, spirit

When You Wish

353

A friend or client of the PCs has been having a recurring nightmare in which a bright star hangs in the night sky outside her house. Though distant, its heat burns her skin. Each night for weeks the dream has repeated with the star closer and larger in the sky. Now large enough to crush the building, its heat causes blisters, makes her hair smolder, and jolts her awake soaked with sweat and gasping for breath. Medical science hasn’t helped. She’s convinced that something horrible is coming for her.

Investigating the house reveals a previously unnoticed light behind the boards of a basement wall. When the boards are removed, a small dusty room containing a magic circle, an old book, and a lit candle with a fist-sized flame is revealed. If extinguished, the candle will smolder for a moment, then spring back to life.

The book, written in Greek with scribbled notes in English, contains blasphemous astrology and spells to contact, speak with, and summon fire spirits from the stars. The summoning spell requires a candle made from the fat of a hanged man that will thereafter draw its heat from the core of his soul. The scrawled notes indicate the summoner intended to use the spirit to take revenge, but upon whom and for what reason remains a mystery.

Invoking the fire spirit will create the sensation of floating in space near a gigantic sphere of flame, the near side blisteringly hot, the far side deadly cold and able to cause burns and frostbite over long periods. The spirit is slow of speech but not disagreeable. It is responding to a summoning. While it would be happy to ignore the summoning, it must obey until the candle is extinguished with pure elemental air.

Elemental air can be harvested from storm spirits. These powerful beings won’t give their essence freely. It must be stolen with special spells or tools. When the candle is subjected to elemental air, the flame explodes in a shower of sparks, igniting any nearby flammables. The PCs must extinguish the flames or escape before the fire consumes them.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) deadline, innocent, investigative, relationship hook, spirit

Hunter and Hunted

354

The PCs come across a horrific murder scene, only to find themselves accused of being the killers. The party must now confront the horror while avoiding the local authorities. This scenario dovetails nicely with other plots, acting as an extra complication.

This plot works best if there is a reason for the PCs to stick around rather than simply fleeing the area. This could be natural (a blizzard that keeps them within the confines of a small mountainside town), forceful (the National Guard has the area cordoned off with a “shoot first” policy), or personal (the only way to clear the PCs’ names is to uncover the horror).

There must also be a reason that the PCs are accused beyond simply stumbling across the crime scene. Perhaps they were acquainted with the victims or were carrying items that resemble the murder weapons. Particularly insidious horrors may have taken the PCs’ forms when committing the act or compelled the PCs to do it through mind control. Perhaps the

victims themselves were horrors, reverting to their human forms when killed, and a hiker happened by to see the PCs hacking these “innocents” to death and reported them to the police.

In any event, the PCs must confront the horror while attempting to clear their names. In campaigns where instant communication doesn’t exist, the PCs may conclude that the best way to clear their names is to eliminate the witnesses and/or local authorities, a truly horrific prospect. In games where the PCs are suspects on the Internet, they have to find credible, tangible evidence to exonerate themselves.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) investigative, monster, race, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, stealth

Disaster

Six Days, Seven Nights, and 1,000 Zombies

355

A tropical island is being developed into a high-class vacation resort spot. The first hotel has recently opened and it has attracted both high rollers and common tourists. The resort is tailored to the single adult lifestyle, and the island was chosen because of the governing nation’s lax laws regarding drugs and other substances.

The island’s native population protests the expansion of the resort, and they warn that no one must disturb the ancient sculpture facing the seashore. Legend says that the sculpture is a totem that prevents the devil of the seas from destroying the island.

In terms of plot hooks, it probably won’t take much to get the PCs onto a tropical island full of scantily clad people drinking large amounts of liquor and indulging in their carnal desires.

The first encounter should be a minor scuffle with some drunken guests who want to show off by pushing the PCs around. Use this scene to establish the culture of the resort—the haves are better than the have-nots, and the beautiful people are second only to the rich people.

Eventually some of these drunken fools will vandalize the sculpture. This can be another encounter or the PCs can simply witness the vandalism from a distance. Once the sculpture has been vandalized, the sky darkens, the sea turns murky, and waves crash violently against the island.

Any living being on the island is now a meal waiting to be consumed by the devil of the sea. Anyone at sea on a ship is attacked by giant sharks and octopi; even dolphins throw themselves at the vessels to try to knock people into the water. Planes and helicopters crash into the ocean. A helicopter plummets right into an outdoor nightclub where hundreds of terrified tourists are gathered.

After this initial mayhem, the true terror appears. Horrifying zombie sailors from many different eras begin to crawl out of the ocean and attack everyone in sight. The zombies feast upon the flesh of their victims, which of course creates more zombies.

Eventually the hotel’s ground floor will be overrun with the undead, and the PCs will need to fight their way up to the penthouse suite. In a dark and deadly one-shot, that may be the end of the adventure; in an ongoing campaign, a helicopter too powerful to be pulled into the ocean may be in the area and able to rescue the party.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) epic challenge, epic impact, isolated area, magic, monster, spirit, travel

Tidal Terror

356

A hurricane or tsunami has flooded a coastal town. Unfortunately, it has also brought a deep-sea monster with it. While rescue workers struggle to save stranded citizens, the monster enjoys its new feeding ground.

In an age of instant communication, stranded victims should be able to relay their position and current conditions to the rescuers and the PCs. This allows the rescuers to prioritize their rescue attempts. Alternatively, the PCs may be among the stranded and have to deal with some basic survival considerations before the true horror reveals itself.

The monster's presence should be subtle at first. Perhaps the rescuers get to a "low-risk" rescue and discover that the survivors are gone, leaving strange clues behind: seaweed not native to the area draped over a window opening, the cell phone used to call the rescuers floating nearby, or shredded clothes.

Red Masque


357

The PCs are called in to help investigate the theft of a chained and locked box from the archives of a local museum. The thief's trail leads to a tenement apartment where the box is found open; inside is a white porcelain theater mask with small drops of blood painted around the eyes and mouth. The thief is dead in his room, his lungs full of blood and his eyes dissolved in their sockets. He's the first victim of a mysterious and deadly disease that is quickly spreading through the tenement. Forensics experts believe that the disease had been dormant for some time, but became virulent again when the box was opened.

The disease spreads quickly and is resistant to medicine, but healthy living will allow the afflicted to survive for a few


months instead of a few days. Symptoms include lethargy, difficulty breathing, and a racking cough. As death nears, those with the disease begin to bleed from their mucus membranes; then they start vomiting blood, and their eyeballs liquefy. Death comes when their lungs turn to liquid as well.

Inspection of the box and mask will reveal that both are from the Dark Ages. The box is made of a heavy, durable wood and shows considerable staining and water damage. The mask is made from remarkably smooth and hard porcelain and is of excellent craftsmanship. Magical inspection reveals that the mask is an incredibly powerful evil artifact and that the box is protected by wards that were broken when it was opened. Touching the mask or being near it for an extended time will result in hearing faint murmuring voices.

 **Easily adapted to:** Action Horror, Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) innocent, investigative, isolated area, monster

Researching the mask will reveal that its curse will continue to spread unless it is worn, in which case its magic will turn inwards, cursing its bearer to suffer madness and disease for all eternity. Will someone sacrifice themselves—or be sacrificed—to save others? Alternately, the curse can be contained with wards or possibly even destroyed, but those methods are apparently lost and must be re-created by analyzing the residue on the box and the magic of the mask. This process that could take months, during which time the epidemic continues its advance.

 **Easily adapted to:** Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (MN) difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, investigative, magic, roleplaying-heavy

Artist: Laine Garrett



A Run on the Banks

358

Bent on causing chaos, a demon with tremendous reach and influence spreads a perfidious message: “Don’t listen to what the government is telling you. Your money isn’t safe. The banks are failing. Get your money out now before there’s nothing left.” In a panic, people across the world make a run on the banks. Nervous governors call out the local militia to control the crowds. In turn, the crowds escalate into riot mode and move from the well-guarded banks to the undefended shops and storefronts. The mobs overrun security and steal whatever they can get their hands on.

Can the PCs survive the anarchy? Signs of supernatural influence are present, but the PCs may not have time to deal with them. On the flipside, if they don’t track down the source of the rumor, they give up their most potent weapon for counteracting it and helping society return to normal.

At the height of the crisis, they’re confronted by a series of obstacles. A race riot is building as the rioters blame a particular

ethnic group for the economic crisis. Gang members have surrounded several police cars, threatening to take their revenge on the outnumbered cops. The roads are choked with desperate refugees who fixate on the PCs, surround them, and try to strip them of all their possessions. On a street corner, revolutionaries rouse an impromptu mob to loot government buildings and banks.

After a week, the government has mobilized the army to quell the violence. Whose side are the PCs on?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Western

Tags: (TT) city, difficult choice, epic impact, intrigue, investigative, roleplaying-heavy, shady, social, trade

Falling Prey to Cruelty or Misfortune

Childish Behavior

359

Awidower with a 10-year-old son is angry at the world for his failures and has begun to practice black magic in order to feel more powerful. Most of what he calls his “craft” is utter nonsense, but he has somehow acquired a text that is legitimate and dangerous. The father is now able to cast actual spells, though he doesn’t truly understand the risks involved.

He discovered a spell to bind an evil spirit to a person, granting that person great power. Too scared to bind the demon to himself, the father decides to experiment by binding a spirit to his own son without the child’s knowledge. A ghost-like presence now follows the child everywhere. The father explains the presence as the ghost of the child’s dead mother, and says that she’s showing disappointment in the child for not being a better son.

The father doesn’t understand that the spirit takes on traits of the host’s personality, and vice versa. The child is now cruel and violent while the spirit is scared and confused. People are being hurt in the child’s presence for no apparent reason, and the violence is escalating. The PCs’ services as ghost hunters or private investigators are requested by the child’s concerned teacher or other caregivers.

The first encounter is in a toy store. The son is looking at an expensive toy that he can’t afford. The store clerk demands

that the child put it back and says, “Buy something already, or get out!” Shortly thereafter, a heavy shelf tips over and crushes both of the clerk’s legs.

The next encounter is at a nearby restaurant where the child meets the father. The father is “comforting” the son, and convinces the child that if he concentrates, he can help the father get revenge on the restaurant manager for some silly dispute. The child does so and a grease fire breaks out, burning the manager to death and causing a fire that destroys the restaurant.

These events continue to occur, with the child always present, and occasionally in the presence of the father as well. The damage continues to escalate until during the final conflict the father directs the child’s malign power toward the PCs.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PB) city, innocent, investigative, magic, social, spirit, villain

The Winning Ticket

360

Oh, lucky day! The PCs, as is their practice, pool their money and buy a batch of lottery tickets. On the day of the drawing, the lottery balls fall in their favor. The lottery commission presents the PCs with a check for an exorbitant sum of money in what may be the happiest moment of their lives. It's also the moment when things begin to go horribly wrong.

Illnesses beset their loved ones. Charities, entrepreneurs, and schemers besiege the PCs, each of them looking to carve out a portion of the winnings for themselves. Minor accidents turn serious as a simple trip in the park results in a broken arm and jaw. Everywhere they turn misfortune strikes at the PCs with increasingly lethality.

A mysterious stranger comes to the party with the answer. The winning numbers bear an ancient curse that can only be lifted if the benefit gained from its use is given away. The trick,

however, is not to simply give away the money: It must be given to righteous causes, and then only as much as each cause needs.

Before each attempt to donate the money, the curse will make a stab at the characters, something in line with their donation—for example, afflicting them with a disease right before they donate to an organization searching for a cure. Can the PCs find a way to give away such an amazingly large sum of money before the curse strikes any of them dead?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) city, difficult choice, investigative, magic, mature themes, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox

Touched by an Old One

361

In a quaint rural town, everyone tries to help each other and be the best neighbors they can be. Despite the unusual levels of compassion and thoughtfulness, the town's rate of accidents and crimes of passion is high. Many of the town's residents secretly receive guidance from angelic beings that appear to encourage the townsfolk's good behavior.

However, careful examination of the town's problems reveals they stem indirectly from the so-called good behavior encouraged by these invisible guardians. With fewer cares, some people are less cautious, which leads to accidents. Others are more inclined to sleep around, at which point they discover that while everyone seems nice, they still get angry about some things—adultery being one of them. These crafty spirits feed off of the suffering their attention causes, but avoid detection by being mostly helpful and leveraging their wards into strict secrecy.

The impossibly pleasant attitudes and helpful behavior of the townspeople should put visitors on edge—people just don't act this way outside of black-and-white 1950s TV shows. Everyone is polite, ready to help in any circumstance, and free of most vices. Everyone attends church services, which is a useful red herring. A good way to demonstrate the unnatural level of this attitude is to have the PCs witness a terrible accident and notice that despite the circumstances, everyone remains jovial and good-natured.

Most people refuse to admit that they have angelic guardians for fear of losing them, but many mention them in diaries or other places where they don't expect anyone to snoop. Occasionally, townspeople can be caught talking to thin air. Faced with such evidence, most people will still deny

that anything's out of the ordinary and will take steps to be more discreet. If someone seems to be too close to discovering the town's secret, the angels aren't above dropping hints to townsfolk, leading them to fly off the handle and eliminate the problem.

If nosy individuals can't be eliminated or discouraged by their lesser dupes, the spirits will visit them personally and try to convince them to leave things alone. They'll point out how much better the standard of living is under their guidance than it is in other places, and if a few people have to get hurt on occasion, isn't that sacrifice worthwhile? If this attempt fails, they have plenty of minions in powerful positions in town who owe them a great deal and are more than willing to imprison persistent PCs indefinitely—or even kill them outright.

Doing research in the town archives and library uncovers the ancient book that was used to summon the spirits—and which can be used to banish them. Banishing the spirits will turn the town into a less-idyllic but also less dangerous community.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (MN) difficult choice, innocent, investigative, isolated area, sandbox, social, spirit, villain

The Cure

362

An isolated community is beset by a creature that can transform its victims into creatures like itself (the classic examples are the vampire, werewolf, and zombie). Not long after the community and the PCs fend off the initial attacks, a government organization comes to protect them. Unfortunately, the government agents see an opportunity to gather intelligence on the creature and perhaps seek a cure. They now have a community full of guinea pigs on which to conduct tests. Once they're finished, they'll likely cover up their research by eliminating the community.

This adventure begins simply enough. The PCs enter a community (or are already members) and confront a monstrous creature. During the hunt, it becomes obvious that the threat will be difficult to overcome: Either there are too many creatures or the monsters are almost impervious to damage. The PCs are forced into a defensive posture, trying to hold out as long as they can while someone attempts to get help.

As luck would have it, when all seems lost, help arrives. Government agents enter the community and are knowledgeable enough about the creatures to set up a defensive perimeter and organize hunting parties. At first it seems that the agents'

efforts, especially with the PCs' help, will be sufficient to root out the threat. Unfortunately, strange things start happening at home.

People start to disappear. The creatures breach the perimeter, although once they've observed its behavior and abilities, agents are always on hand to contain the threat. People that weren't anywhere near the creatures start transforming and have to be put down. To their horror, the PCs soon discover the entirety of the agents' plans; they must stop the agents and expose their motives before everyone dies.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) alliance, betrayal, combat-heavy, innocent, isolated area, monster, tactical planning

Revolt

The Castle

363

The PCs are guardians for a person of authority in a region of relative lawlessness, perhaps a business magnate in a developing country. Over time, the magnate has turned from martyr to pariah as his well-intentioned plans and gestures fall apart. The trust of the masses erodes as a rough situation grows worse with each decision he makes.

The people won't stand for it any longer. A group of protesters sets out to harass the magnate, hoping to goad him into stepping down. They follow him to every engagement, pelt him with rotten fruit, shout obscenities about him and his family, and repeatedly make a public nuisance out of themselves. The first time the PCs disperse the protesters, the situation diffuses without much kickback. The second time, however, the protesters turn violent. Several draw weapons and attack the PCs and their charge.

If the PCs manage to get the authority figure to safety, there's a moment of respite before an armed resistance group lays siege to his residence and takes his family hostage. This presents the PCs with the challenge of rescuing the abducted family members while still keeping the magnate under guard. The

task proves too difficult: The militants circumvent the PCs' security measures and execute the magnate just as the rescue team saves his family.

The party then faces a decision. If left alone, the revolutionaries will surely slaughter the remaining family members to eliminate their memory. However, with the magnate dead, the PCs become pro-bono bodyguards. If they choose to stay with the family, they mark themselves as enemies and become targets themselves.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (TT) city, combat-heavy, difficult choice, escort mission, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, mass combat, mature themes, politics, rebellion, siege, stealth, tactical planning

Lost in the woods, the PCs come across a rustic resort that's almost entirely cut off from the outside world. Cell phones can't get a signal, and even satellite phones cease to function; messages come and go by courier. The old man who runs the place is a bundle of nerves, but he's a humane person and he's happy to help those in need. A brief social scene gives the PCs a chance to interact with the old man.

Two scoundrels arrive on the scene and are introduced to the PCs. The scoundrels are obviously criminals. Another social encounter should take place to establish that the men are up to no good.

Near the resort is a pit that the old man warns his guests to avoid. The two scoundrels incorrectly assume that something valuable is in the pit. They enter the pit in search of some form of treasure, but soon succumb to a powerful evil and are possessed. When they emerge from the pit, they've taken on a ghastly appearance and begin roaming the woods looking for other people to possess. When they show up at the resort, the old man appears ready to slaughter the scoundrels with a shovel.

The PCs may assume that the old man wants to kill the scoundrels for pleasure. The old man attacks with the fury and

passion of a madman. If the PCs attack the old man, he'll retaliate with blind rage. If the PCs kill the old man, the scoundrels' corpses will rise as mutilated monsters and attack the PCs. In retrospect, it may become clear that the old man was trying to protect others from the evil of the pit.

If the old man survives this encounter, he'll explain the evil in the pit—though by then it's too late. The PCs will encounter many demonic and horrific creatures that emerge from the pit to warp the world around them. Encounters include attacks by possessed creatures from the woods, former occupants of the resort who succumbed to the evil, or even the trees themselves.

The final conflict is with a demonic entity, and once that entity is put down, things return to normal and the PCs can leave with the next courier.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) alliance, exploration, investigative, isolated area, magic, siege, social, spirit, twist

Becoming a Better Man

365

Another team of adventurers unwittingly unleashed a curse on one of their members while exploring a profane altar. Only recently released from an asylum, the curse causes ever smaller parts of his body to attain independent sentience. In its initial stages, the curse increases one's health due to the influence of the sentient organs, but as more and smaller tissues become sentient, madness and eventually dissolution occur.

The PCs run into an old acquaintance on the street and are surprised at how good he looks. However, he seems distracted at best and neurotic at worst. He says that he has to finish his jog, but asks them to meet him for dinner that evening. At dinner his behavior is uncharacteristic; odder still, he talks to himself about what topic to bring up next in conversation.

The next afternoon the PCs get a call from one of their acquaintance's associates who heard that the friend and the PCs caught up the prior evening. He asks for the PCs' help figuring out what's wrong with their friend. He explains that the friend started acting strange and hearing voices when they uncovered an altar in a cave system in the woods. Upon their return, the friend spent some time in an asylum. Though he was released, his behavior is worsening again, and they've been unable to determine the cause.

Exploring the caves at the associate's request, the PCs have to deal with deadfall traps and venomous snakes. Eventually they find the engraved altar and are able to copy the runes for study. Researching the eldritch engravings leads to a description of the curse and a possible cure.

Having compiled the ritual, the PCs call the friend to give him the good news, but hear only gurgling and faint whispers on the other end. Racing to the friend's apartment and breaking in, they discover him lying on the floor, his flesh quivering like jelly as it begins to dissolve, the murmuring of billions of tiny voices in the air.

If the PCs can complete the ritual in time, their friend will require an extended hospital stay, but will eventually recover. If they fail, their friend will dissolve into a pool of viscous slime before their eyes.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) alliance, artificial life form, deadline, dungeon crawl, exploration, innocent, investigative, madness, race, relationship hook, social

Trouble in Paradise

366

The PCs are in an exotic tropical resort, either on vacation or on business. Unfortunately, a revolution takes place soon after the PCs arrive. The revolutionaries, in their fervor, blame the PCs, tourists, and foreign businessmen for exploiting their people. The PCs must find a way out of the hot zone before they become statistics in the opening round of a civil war.

This scenario works best if the PCs have some time to enjoy the resort before the action starts. Paint an idyllic picture and allow the party to interact with and get to know people who will become victims (or perhaps killers). At the appropriate moment, spark off the revolution with an unexpected attack. This first attack should take place while the PCs are enjoying themselves. Perhaps the serving staff starts mowing down club-goers or dinner guests with submachine guns, or a missile blasts the ground floor of their hotel.

After the shock and awe, the revolutionaries round up survivors and demand that they hand over valuables

(including ATM cards). They round up other guests as hostages to hold for ransom, and to use as human shields. The PCs have to find some means of escape while the revolutionaries cut off the obvious exits.

To add an extra level of horror, perhaps the revolutionaries are coerced by an ancient artifact, instigating monster, or charismatic leader to “cleanse the resort,” and take no prisoners. The PCs have to find the artifact, destroy the monster, or take down the leader in order to survive.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) combat-heavy, innocent, rebellion, stealth, tactical planning

Daring Enterprise

Ignorance Is Bliss

367

A psychic investigator wants to acquire irrefutable proof that spirits do exist. The investigator has been granted permission to stay for one week in an abandoned hospital that is supposedly haunted. The PCs are hired to be part of the investigative team, are members of the press covering the event, or are working on behalf of the owners of the property to ensure that the investigator doesn't violate the terms of the agreement.

The hospital has a very elaborate history. It served the poor and down-trodden, but there are stories that the medical staff used this as a cover for bizarre and inhumane research. The head nurse was convicted of murders she committed as an “angel of mercy,” killing those she deemed to be beyond help. The psychiatric ward housed the criminally insane, and several violent incidents took place within its walls.

The hospital is indeed haunted and extremely dangerous, but no recording device can capture the events that transpire within. Obsession drives the investigator insane, and he becomes a threat to the PCs if they attempt to flee. The hospital itself attempts to prevent any character from leaving the premises.

Encounters for this plot should prey upon lone PCs as much as possible. Possible encounters include a PC being locked in the psychiatric ward and having visions of the horrors one of its residents once saw, the ghost of the “angel of mercy” trying to smother a PC while he sleeps in a hospital bed, a deranged surgical team performing an examination upon a character in one of the operating rooms, and corpses in various stages of autopsy attacking anyone who enters the morgue.

How the adventure concludes is up to you. The environment is lethal, but if they keep their wits about them the PCs should be able to figure out a way to escape with their lives.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) escort mission, investigative, isolated area, madness, magic, roleplaying-heavy, siege, spirit

Orchid Expedition

368

A remote jungle holds the key to an eccentric billionaire's obsession du jour, collecting the rarest known orchids. Though a flower hunt seems a silly reason to mount an expedition to such a wild and dangerous place, it's a task for which the PCs are paid well.

The eccentric benefactor recently purchased an overseas estate with an extensive library. On the musty shelves was a diary that once belonged to a friar; this friar accompanied early explorers into the jungle on a quest for gold. During his adventure, the friar kept a record of the animals and plants he encountered. One of those is an undocumented orchid, which the book hints at by way of an ancient watercolor painting and a quick description.

Unfortunately for the billionaire and his expedition, the orchid is the last of its kind. A horrific jungle creature of immense size guards the gorgeous flower and can muster the land's most deadly creatures to aid in its defense. Gigantic prehistoric mammals, killer vines and trees, native allies, and grotesque, venomous insects assail the party at the jungle spirit's behest. Use these encounters to reinforce the "lost world" vibe of this trek.

The sole survivor of the billionaire's last expedition bursts into camp, frail and wild-eyed. He claims to know where the flower grows, but says that he lacks the courage to retrieve it. He leads the party to a group of natives who tell fables of the jungle spirit and his benevolent nature. The natives' history tells of the great champions who will take the orchid from the jungle and spread the nature spirit across the planet.

Like a spider that waits at the center of its web, the jungle spirit is only luring the characters in so it can strike. The jungle spirit is an enormous carnivorous pitcher plant—a giant cousin of the tantalizingly beautiful orchid. Defeating this creature is the only way to secure a specimen.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) bearers, betrayal, escort mission, exploration, isolated area, monster, spirit, travel, twist, villain

Temple of the Albino Death Pig

369

The PCs learn that an item they need can be found in a particular Mesoamerican-style jungle temple. The temple is guarded by the spirit of a great albino pig which will haunt any who profane the sacred place; the temple is also protected by traps and a powerful curse.

Finding guides to the temple proves problematic. Anyone familiar with its location will be reluctant to escort the PCs there, though most will provide directions. If guides are convinced to accompany the PCs, they desert the group when they notice they're being shadowed by a large creature in the underbrush. Those that don't desert immediately will certainly do so after the temple guardian leaves the group a warning: the lifeless body of one of their members, with an enormous porcine footprint on his caved-in chest.

Once in view of the temple, the pig spirit will materialize and try to kill the intruders. Being a powerful spirit entity, it may be immune to most non-magical attacks. If the PCs flee into the temple, the spirit will lie in wait for them to exit. This could be due to the difficulty of manifesting in human-sized quarters, a fear of the temple's curse, or because of wards that prevent spiritual incursion into the temple proper.

The temple is divided into three clearly defined areas. There are public spaces that are open and easy to navigate, locked private areas where the priests once lived and worked, and

sections that are sealed and trapped such as treasure vaults, oubliettes, and dungeons. Entering the trapped areas will also invoke the temple's curse.

The curse causes vine-like growths to emerge, slowly and painfully, from the pores of the afflicted. These vines can be cut, but it's an excruciating process. Skeletons cocooned in husks of dense thorny vines can be found near the cursed areas, giving the PCs a clue as to the danger that awaits them.

Once the item is secured and the waiting pig guardian has been killed or bypassed, the PCs can return home. However, they must still deal with the curse. The PCs will be haunted by fleeting glimpses of a large white shape in the corner of their eye, tufts of coarse white hair on sharp protrusions, and porcine footprints in soft soil for some time.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (MN) betrayal, dungeon crawl, exploration, isolated area, magic, race, sandbox, spirit, travel

Going Shopping

370

The world has gone to hell, overrun with creatures out to destroy humanity; zombies and post-apocalyptic wasteland mutants both fit the bill. The PCs are part of a human enclave waiting for the final piece of the key (artifact, miracle cure, etc.) that will enable them to turn back the tide and allow humanity to survive. Unfortunately, the courier of the key and her entourage encountered too much resistance and holed up in a shopping mall along with other survivors. The creatures are now laying siege to the mall. The PCs must leave the safety of their enclave, travel to the mall, retrieve the key, and return home.

One way to make the journey interesting is to use the environment to provide some small security for the PCs. If the creatures are winged, the PCs might be safe indoors or in heavy woods. If the creatures are vampires, the PCs might be able to move freely during the day. Don't be afraid to rip up the security blanket occasionally: One or two winged creatures may maneuver around the trees, and an overcast day allows the vampires to come out at early dusk.

Once the PCs get to the mall, they have to find a way inside and convince the defenders that they're friends, not foes. If you're feeling devious, the creatures have already penetrated the defenses, forcing the PCs to move quickly before the creatures claim the key.

Save a final twist for the return home. Perhaps the entire exercise was a decoy (this works well with intelligent creatures): The courier and the PCs were bait for the creatures while the real courier got through. Perhaps the courier or a member of her entourage was infected and turns into one of the creatures in the eleventh hour. Or perhaps the PCs return home only to find their own enclave under attack. Are they too late to save their friends?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Comedy, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) bearers, betrayal, combat-heavy, epic challenge, monster, siege, tactical planning

Abduction

Family Matters

371

The attractive, sassy bartender at the PCs' favorite watering hole is actually part-demon, though she has tried to sever all ties to her infernal family. One night while serving her famous Bloody Marys, she gets tipsy and tells the PCs most of her story, leaving out her supernatural heritage. When she moves from tipsy to drunk, she also teaches them a bit of minor magic. One spell stands out: If the caster chants it over someone's pillow and then sleeps on the pillow that night, he'll dream the same dream as the person who last used the pillow.

Before closing time, her cousin strolls into the bar; he's tall, well-built, and sports a nasty sunburn. The bartender becomes quiet and avoids her cousin as much as possible. The cousin, however, stares at the bartender non-stop, ordering drink after drink. She invites an attractive PC home with her for the night, and talks about moving on to a new town to keep ahead of her kin. Both she and the PC feel like they're being watched, but investigation reveals only shadows.

The next time the PCs visit the bar, she isn't there—and the owner is annoyed by her unscheduled absence. When the PCs check up on her, they find the latch on her front door broken, small signs of a struggle, and no bartender. Using the new spell on her pillow, one PC experiences her last dream that night.

It begins as a pleasant jaunt to an amusement park with friends, but soon turns nightmarish. A sulfur smell pervades everything, and the reflections in everyone's eyes show demons all around her. At the end of the dream, when she's beginning to wake up, the PC sees a warped and twisted version of her cousin looming over her.

She was taken to a nearby junkyard to be punished for abandoning her family. The PCs can learn her location by tailing her cousin when he shows up at the bar again, or through visions: An undisclosed side effect of the dream spell is that it creates a minor link between the dreamer and the caster. Before the final confrontation with her family—which can be an all-out fight with demons or a more subtle affair, depending on the style of your campaign—the PCs should have a run-in with one or two of her demonic kindred.

Saving the bartender can earn the PCs an interesting ally, and also involve them in the world of demons.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) city, innocent, investigative, monster, relationship hook, social, villain

Involuntary Djinni

372

At a famous haunted hotel, a paranormal investigator who knows a spell to capture spirits in enchanted jars has kidnapped a ghost, incensing the rest of the normally benign host. This uncharacteristic surge of angry and violent phenomena has turned the hotel into a madhouse as ghost hunters of all stripes try to find the source of the change.

Shortly after the PCs check into their room, objects begin to fly about the room. The objects aim for the PCs, with intent to injure. Sheets attempt to trip or blind, furniture slides into shins, and loose objects hurtle through the air. The PCs can sustain significant damage if they don't defend themselves well. The attack culminates with the large mirror on the bureau toppling to the floor, its shards carving the number 57 (the room where the ghost was kidnapped) into the hardwood floor.

While in the hotel, the PCs have vivid dreams and find that ghost-hunting techniques are very fruitful. Common themes include phrases such as "57," "Stolen," or "Where is he?" as well as images of a dapper man in a gray suit (easily identifiable as one of the hotel's ghosts), a man with stringy red hair (the thief), or an ornate jade vase (the jar).

The hotel holds a weekly séance for guests during which there's a similar spike in supernatural phenomena based around the

Innocents Lost

373

A very pregnant friend is missing. A neighbor found the door unlocked and the house empty and called the woman's out-of-town husband, who in turn called one of the PCs. The house shows no sign of a struggle, and a police officer at the scene says it's too soon to declare it a kidnapping. The front and back doors are unlocked, the bed is unmade, and the pregnant woman's purse, wallet, and ID are still there. One neighbor heard a car early in the morning, idling nearby before it drove off. Another saw a couple of bikers parked across the street in a plumber's van yesterday; one had a devil's head tattoo on his arm, a symbol of the Legion motorcycle gang.

The Legion claims to be satanic, but mostly deals drugs, fences stolen goods, and runs a chop shop. They can be very violent and are not to be trifled with.

A filthy plumber's shop is around the corner from the Legion's bar, a van parked outside. On the dashboard is a roll of duct tape, a pair of gloves, a handkerchief, and a medicine bottle. Closer inspection shows that the bottle is ether, an anesthetic that is also highly flammable. In the back of the van are three bikers, sleeping.

The Legion's leader has been influenced by a true devil-worshipper, and is convinced that he'll gain immortality if he

same themes. Close to the end of the event, PCs will feel an icy hand on their backs and a tug on their clothing. Following the apparition, the PCs make their way to the kitchen. Once there, another poltergeist attack occurs. During this attack, only bottles and jars are thrown, smashing on the floor at the PC's feet. They will be hurt only if they're unlucky.

If less subtle clues are necessary, have the PCs find a newspaper article featuring a picture of the man from the visions and an announcement about an upcoming curio auction. The man's name matches the registration book for room 57.

Visiting the collection to be auctioned off, the PCs can find a sealed jar from their visions, and it's advertised as containing a real ghost. Opening the jar will allow the ghost to escape, but won't prevent the culprit from trying the same trick again unless the PCs can find a way to discourage him.



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Supernatural, Victim Horror

Tags: (MN) alliance, deadline, innocent, investigative, madness, race, rivalry, sandbox, shady, social, spirit, stealth, trade, villain

sacrifices a pregnant woman. A number of the gang members don't like his plan, but he's already killed one of the bikers who protested—and nobody leaves the Legion.

The three bikers sent after the woman felt bad enough to use the ether on themselves afterwards, and left it on the dashboard before passing out in the back of the van. Many of the bikers don't want any part of this, so there are only a few in the bar today. They can be fought or negotiated with, but won't turn over their leader easily.

The woman is being held in the plumbing shop, which is a front for the gang's chop shop. A few more bikers are keeping guard and will respond to gunshots in the bar. The priest, the leader, and a few bikers have already begun the ritual in the back room. If they aren't stopped within a few minutes, the ritual will end with the summoning of a demon who's much more interested in eating everyone it sees than granting the biker immortality.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) deadline, innocent, investigative, monster, siege, social, stealth, tactical planning, villain

Bed Time

374

For this plot to work, the PCs must be children, making it ideal as a one-shot or convention event. The PCs are told the story of a devil that kidnaps children from parents who have committed a horrible sin. That night, the PCs go to sleep and wake up in the nightmare world.

The first encounter in the nightmare world involves each PC waking in his or her bed. The beds are all together in a dark cave; pale moonlight cascades in from the cavern's entrance. The PCs hear a rustling sound, and a flock of creatures that appear to be large spiders with bat wings and scorpion-like tails attacks them.

The purpose of this attack is to separate the PCs from their beds. If the PCs run out of the cave, they immediately start sliding down the smooth, icy surface of a mountainside. The PCs land at the edge of a forest. Glowing eyes peer out at them from the woods, and they can see a rough trail that heads deeper into the forest. A cottage sits silhouetted on the horizon, perched on a bare hill above the trees.

If the PCs enter the cottage, a trap is sprung. If caught in the trap, they encounter a witch who plans to boil them into soup.

The witch explains that they're in the nightmare world because of their parents' sins. How the PCs escape is up to them.

Taking the trail in the woods leads to an encounter with the devil who abducted the children. The devil reveals that they're his payment, and that at least one of their parents made a deal with the devil. Fighting the devil is futile as it can conjure up horrible creatures to torment the PCs.

The only way to escape the nightmare world is to find the beds they were sleeping on when the PCs first woke up. The PCs will have to avoid the devil's minions, scale an icy mountain, and find their way to back to the cave that contains their beds. If the PCs return to the real world, you can begin a new adventure based upon their knowledge that one of their parents bartered their child's soul to the devil.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) betrayal, exploration, innocent, investigative, isolated area, magic, mature themes, monster, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, social, stealth, travel, twist

The Chess Master

375

A new rave club has taken root in an old downtown neighborhood. Located in an abandoned metalwork factory and featuring twisting metal staircases, dancing poles, and metal-latticed décor, it quickly became a sensation. Several recent disappearances, however, have patrons and investors concerned.

A madman is behind the disappearances, using secret passages to infiltrate parts of the club from his maze-like basement abode three stories below the main floor. He and his blood-thirsty minions spy on the dancing masses, select a victim, and abduct them.

Deep below the club, he keeps his collection of abductees in individual cages. These cages feed into a single, larger cage, the floor of which is painted like a black and white chessboard. His wants to collect two teams of "chess pieces," arm them with improvised weapons of jagged metal, and then pit them against each other in a grand battle. He promises his captives freedom when the game is over, if they're on the winning side—but when the game ends he and his minions fully intend to satisfy their bloodlust in an orgy of slaughter.

The PCs' investigation will reveal correlations between the nature of each victim and types of chess pieces. The black team is comprised of club workers such as dishwashers and servers (pawns), a soldier on leave (knight), a dancer in a nun's habit (bishop), a biker (rook), a female impersonator (queen),

and a bartender (king). The white team has homeless and vagabonds (pawns), a woman in a fanciful police officer costume (knight), a man whose name is Bishop (bishop), an emergency medical technician (rook), a rich divorcee (queen), and the club's disk jockey (king).

The madman's minions haunt the bowels of the building, and may be encountered selecting new victims or satisfying their other unsavory desires. It's possible the chess master orders one of the PCs abducted and then throws him in with the homeless pawns on white.

The madman taunts the investigating PCs through messages littered with chess references. One PC finds a chess notation, "Kn e7-c6, check," written in blood on his bathroom mirror; another finds the dancer's costume habit folded neatly into her bureau.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) betrayal, city, combat-heavy, deadline, dungeon crawl, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, villain

An author has the ability to predict the future in his writings. While he's unaware of it, his novels actually portray real events that don't happen until after the book has been published. The details are different, but the story remains the same. Unfortunately, someone has learned of his gift and has kidnapped the author in order for him to write a novel that fulfills the kidnapper's wishes.

The opening scene features one of the PCs in a normal setting, such as sitting on a subway train, relaxing on the beach, or stopping in a coffee shop. The PC happens to see someone reading a book and, upon reading the back cover, notices that one of the party's past adventures is encapsulated there, only with names and events changed. The book is part of a series, and a perusal of the others (and their publication dates) confirms that this author seems to have recorded some or all of the PCs' previous adventures before they happened.

As it turns out, the author is having a book signing at a chain bookstore nearby. If the PCs meet the author, they discover that he has no idea who they are. He claims that he made up all of the plots himself. Indeed, he may even get cross with them,

believing that they're trying to scam him for plagiarism.

Later, the PCs discover that the author has missed a couple of his signings. His agent claims that nothing is wrong; the author emailed him to say that he was going into seclusion to work on his latest novel. If the PCs investigate, they discover that the email wasn't written in the author's usual style. Complicating matters is that the author gets back in contact and asks that his novel be published in serial format, with each installment making certain "predictions."

Who kidnapped the author? Did one of the PCs' old enemies discover the author's talent before they did, or was it someone else? Can the author actually create the future, rather than just predicting it—and if not, how long will it be before his captor murders him?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) innocent, investigative, magic, race, sandbox

The Enigma

The Company

377

An activist who is trying to stop the construction of an oil refinery in the area asks the PCs for help, whether because of their occult contacts or a personal tie. She wants to defeat the "demon" that plagues her home country: oil. She needs them to dig up dirt on the company to aid her in blocking the construction, and she offers to pay them well for their trouble.

The company is a legitimate business, but it's also a front for a parasitic supernatural entity. This entity drains the will of its workers in order to survive, eventually killing them; the company's products aren't affected. When enough workers have died in one area and further deaths would risk exposing the entity, the company builds another refinery and the spirit moves there to begin the process anew. The activist knows the truth, but doesn't share it with the PCs right away.

The new refinery is eagerly anticipated by locals: Times are tough, and it will employ many people. The company has filed all of the proper paperwork, and the city has no grounds or reason to block its construction. To learn more about the company, the PCs must sneak into their local office or the construction site offices, infiltrate the company by posing as—or becoming—employees, or otherwise gain access to current employees and files.

The spirit has already migrated to the site of its future home, and is draining construction workers and other employees to stay alive, though not yet to the point of death. During their investigation, the PCs will be approached by a contact who asks them to call off their work, and can pay handsomely; he has been paid off by the company. Once enough supernatural clues pile up, the activist will reveal the true nature of the company and the entity. The company will make a direct attempt to stop the PCs before they put all the pieces together, sending supernaturally enhanced thugs to attack them.

To stop the entity, the PCs can starve the creature by de-sanctifying the refinery site, denying it the ability to drain nearby people, while keeping it from jumping to another site. The spirit will possess people directly in order to stop them, and will drain PCs at an accelerated pace. The PCs can also simply confront the spirit directly and destroy it outright, though this will be difficult to say the least.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (SM) alliance, deadline, innocent, investigative, sandbox, shady, spirit, trade, travel, twist, villain

Glass Ceiling

378

The PCs and several NPCs awaken in a windowless conference room. The room is filthy and the furniture is in a style several decades old. A tape recorder plays a message similar to a new employee orientation. The end of the message says, “Promotion is only possible through dedication to the company’s founding principles.”

For this plot to be most effective, the PCs should be average people. Each PC remembers being abducted by figures wearing all black who injected them with some kind of drug. Also involved are a number of NPCs equal to half the number of PCs, but no less than three. These NPCs recall the same abduction scenario as the PCs.

The PCs and NPCs may explore the environment and discover that they’re in a filthy office building with no exits or windows. There’s no food and no water. There are simple tools on this level, such as box cutters and hammers.

In one part of the office is a section of ceiling made of glass. Above it there’s a ladder suspended from the ceiling. The glass isn’t difficult to break, but falling shards could be deadly to those below. Once someone grabs hold of the ladder, that character suffers non-lethal but incredibly painful electric shock. The ladder is the only way to ascend the 10 feet of smooth walls between floors.

The Unholy Triangle

379

Recently, the news has been dominated by stories of strange phenomena. It’s been the sort of stuff that gets the end-of-the-world types blogging, calling radio stations, and gathering in suicide cults. Whether it’s an earthquake here or a tidal wave there, there’s little to connect these events rationally—that is, until a mysterious benefactor flies the characters, as investigators, to a remote village in a desert region. The latest quake opened a fissure there, and miners discovered a cache of ancient treasures.

Exploring the site, the PCs uncover a trapped secret chamber containing prophetic scrolls which speak of the current catastrophic events. They describe three markers, “the Unholy Triangle” from which demonic forces are foretold to rise. The quotations mention “three into one” as a catalyst for the apocalyptic invasion.

Deeper exploration leads to a map room where a glass and tile mosaic depicts the world as the ancients knew it. With the help of the prophetic scrolls, the PCs can easily pinpoint the three locations identified as the Unholy Triangle.

Each of the three vertices on the Triangle is a historical landmark from a different ancient culture. On an island in the middle of the sea is an ancient lighthouse. In the middle of a continental desert stands a mysterious pyramid. In

Every level of this office building has a glass ceiling and a ladder. As the PCs ascend the levels, the office space becomes cleaner and more modern-looking. A duffle bag containing a day’s worth of food and water for everyone waits on each new level. Heavier tools and knives replace the simple implements; eventually, primitive weapons replace the tools. The only way out is via the roof, several levels up.

The ladders only descend when a character dies, either in an accident or at the hands of another character. The traps protecting the ladders become more lethal at the higher levels. Use the NPCs to provoke both violence and sympathy from the PCs. Don’t sacrifice NPCs easily, and try to use them to turn the PCs against each other.

Once the PCs escape, the larger mystery remains: Who’s behind this nightmare scenario, and why did they subject the PCs and NPCs to this harrowing experience?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) alliance, betrayal, combat-heavy, deadline, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, exploration, innocent, isolated area, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, shady, social

the equatorial jungles, an immense, inverted ziggurat hangs from the branches of massive trees. Exploring the first two locations, the characters encounter a recently awoken demon and its minions at each site. The second demonic agent is demonstrably stronger and smarter than the first.

By defeating each demon, the party unwittingly plays into the prophecy. With each demon slain, the remaining demons grow more powerful. When only one remains, that demon has enough power to open a portal and grant the inhabitants of the demonic planes a gateway to the planet.

When the party finally arrives at the last Triangle site, they find the demon well on its way to completing the ritual that will bring about the apocalypse. The PCs must defeat the most powerful demon before it completes the spell and dooms the entire planet.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) dungeon crawl, epic challenge, epic impact, exploration, investigative, monster, twist, villain

A creature infects the PCs, causing them to slowly transform into creatures just like it. The PCs must track down and destroy this creature or apply the cure before the transformation is complete. This scenario presumes that the PCs don't already possess the cure, and that it's not easily accessible; the PCs may even need to research and create the cure themselves.

The opening of this scenario is straightforward: The creature attacks the PCs in an isolated location. During the attack, one or more of the PCs are infected. Assuming that the PCs don't know about the infection and steps needed to cure it, an NPC or other method should be employed during this scene to alert the PCs. For example, a hunter may help the PCs fend off the initial attack and explain the infection—perhaps with the dramatic “We should kill your friend now, before she turns into one of them, just to be sure” speech. Alternatively, PCs with access to an extensive occult library or a contact who is an expert in the supernatural may seek the cure through those means.

The next scene involves hunting down the cure. The infected PC may have to fight off urges that would trigger the

transformation early but may benefit from having access to some of the creature's powers. The PCs may also have to avoid other creatures while doing so, keeping uninfected PCs from being infected in the process.

If the cure is to kill the creature, the PCs need to discover its lair and confront it in a climactic battle. If the cure is a medicine, then the PCs need to acquire the rare good, but they'll be stalked while they search, as the creature and company want to welcome the new members. It's possible that a combination is necessary, such as killing or restraining the creature for an arcane ritual.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) deadline, isolated area, madness, monster, roleplaying-heavy

Last Tuesday, Last Day

Panicked video reports of people, things, and even entire places fading out of existence confirm that the world is slowly disappearing bit by bit. Looting and violence escalate as more and more of reality disappears. The last vestiges of humanity cluster together for security and to pool resources, while the rest of the world goes mad and slowly fades away.

On Tuesday morning, the hospital in which the PCs have holed up with several hundred other survivors loses its last contact with the outside world. Outside the windows, it seems like the building is floating in an endless gray mist—though strangely, the electricity in the building is stable. Several days have passed and everyone's nerves are frayed. A few people have stepped outside and simply faded out of existence. Resources are running low and tempers are flaring up.

The building houses a few small stores of weapons, scavenged during the last days. As the outlook gets bleaker, someone is likely to seize this cache to secure the largest portion of the remaining supplies for themselves.

There are a handful of doctors and many patients still in the hospital. Most of the doctors are doing their best to keep all the patients as healthy and comfortable as they can with supplies of drugs and food running low. They're likely to recruit anyone who seems competent to give them a hand.

In the psych ward is a young man who was brought in for treatment several weeks ago. Traditional therapy was unable

to cure his delusions that the world was simply a figment of his imagination, and he was put on strong drugs. He now lies comatose on a hospital bed, muttering to himself, his eyes darting feverishly back and forth under their lids. The doctors are continuing his drug therapy, unaware that the patient is correct, and that the deeper into unconsciousness he slips the more of reality is destroyed.

After a few days, the stable area slowly begins to shrink. If left alone, the hospital will disappear around the sleeping patient, until he's allowed to wake up; the PCs might wake him up, or he can awaken automatically once everything else has ceased to exist. When he comes to, reality will assert itself once again, though it may be subtly different from before. Only those who survived the ordeal will realize that anything has changed.

This plot can be a useful tool for retconning something in the game that didn't work out as planned, but as always, do so with caution.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (MN) deadline, difficult choice, innocent, isolated area, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, twist

The house a few streets over is hungry. It feasts on the energy of its residents, leaving them tired, drained, and irritable even as it drives them to vice and insanity. As they disappear one by one, it seems to be as a result of domestic unrest. An old lover of one of the PCs begs her for help. The lover's family is being torn apart and he doesn't know what to do.

Interviewing the family reveals that none of them are happy. They're exhausted and irritable. Several of them daydream during their conversation with the PCs. They report voices, shapes, figures, and feelings of dread, especially in the basement and attic; they also complain of others' worsening behavior and addictions.

Searching the house turns up several stashes of alcohol, tobacco, and erotica, all of which everyone denies knowing about. In the basement, an old gore-encrusted hammer is found hidden above a pipe. A hidden attic room contains a dollhouse that's a near-perfect duplicate of the real house, and a collection of macabre dolls that the family's youngest daughter immediately falls in love with.

That night, everyone in the house is awoken by the mother's frantic search for the youngest daughter, who has gone missing. She sits in the hidden attic room, playing with the dollhouse in the dark. When disturbed, she's found playing with a set of dolls that look suspiciously like the family and the PCs. The daughter can be used as a vehicle to reveal the connection between the two houses, leading the PCs to the spots where evidence of foul deeds have been entombed in walls and buried in the basement.

As the PCs investigate further, they'll be threatened by malevolent shadows, including the specter of an old woman. The youngest daughter will become more and more distant. One evening, she sneaks into the PCs' room and attempts to murder them with a kitchen knife. After being subdued, she comes to her senses and claims the old woman made her do it. Questioned about the old woman, she says that the old woman owns the house and doesn't want anyone taking it from her.

The old woman's doll is older and slightly larger than the rest and is actually made from a mummified human finger. If the PCs try to destroy it, they'll be attacked by an unseen force that won't relent until it or the doll are destroyed. Once the doll is destroyed, the house will return to normal.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (MN) alliance, deadline, innocent, investigative, madness, relationship hook, sandbox, social, spirit, villain



Artist: Philip Miller

Obtaining

Make Sense of Madness with Dunwich Union

383

Outside of our reality lurks a race composed of such alien and abstract concepts that they can't exist in the mundane world. They seek out mortal agents to exert their will on the world, offering a spark of their power in exchange for services rendered. Their solicitation, an envelope emblazoned with the words "Make Sense of Madness with Dunwich Union" that contains an unaddressed insurance application form, appears as if by magic in the PCs' homes.

That night while the PCs are asleep, they awaken in a dreary gray office. Unknown things flicker at the corners of their vision. Sitting behind a desk in front of them is a small, hunched-over figure dressed in an impeccable suit. He thanks the PCs for coming and launches into a sales pitch for insurance. He's willing to sell each PC insurance, good for a single use, against any single event of their choice—even death—if they'll agree to perform two services for him. After negotiations, the PCs awaken.

The following day, those PCs that agreed to the trade receive a bill requiring them to deliver an envelope to an office in an abandoned warehouse. The office is on the second floor, roughly in the middle of the building. As they set down the envelope, a spreading area around it begins to rapidly age.

In Case of Emergency, Break Glass

384

For centuries, a small community has been protected from a great evil that only comes once every century. The artifact that was the source of this protection was taken from the community and sold to a foreign museum. The legend of the artifact has been written off as a quaint primitive superstition by the museum's caretakers. They consider the object very valuable, and don't wish to part with it simply because of an outrageous legend.

The PCs believe otherwise, for they understand the danger. If the PCs have reason to visit foreign lands (whether as anthropologists, archaeologists, or tourists), then they may be in the village when the initial effects of the evil manifest. At this point, the evil force's influence may be minor, but far worse will happen if the PCs don't recover the artifact. If the community is primitive enough, it may have no idea who took the artifact, just an oral tradition describing the event.

The PCs should be able to discover who took it with a little legwork. An explorer, fortune hunter, or pirate may be responsible, and tracking his exploits would lead to the museum. The museum is in an urban location in a powerful country

Soon the floors begin to crumble and the PCs must race to make it out of the building before it collapses.

Their next bill comes the following day, requiring them to spend the afternoon at a nearby park and help anyone who asks. During their visit, a child wanders away from his mother, and the PCs are asked to help her in her search. Canvassing the park, the child is found walking away with some strangers who ditch the boy and break into a run as soon as the PCs try to stop them.

Their bills paid, the PCs who purchased policies receive them the next day. These magical insurance policies will protect their owner from the covered condition once. They operate subtly (someone with life insurance will still be hurt just not killed, for example) and crumble to fine ash upon use.

If the PCs did a good job with their tasks, they may be contacted again by Dunwich Union.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) bearers, deadline, innocent, madness, magic, politics, race, trade

(America, France, and Great Britain are the usual suspects, but China or Russia would make an interesting change of pace). The curators, and by extension their governments, either don't believe the PCs, believe the legend but don't care, or they act so slowly that the evil rises before the primitive community gets the object back.

This leaves burglary or other methods of persuasion and extraction as the party's only option. Once they get the object they have to avoid arrest while trying to return the artifact to its proper place in time to stop the evil force from destroying the community. This should be a climactic scene in which the powers of the growing evil attempt to stop them.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) bearers, city, deadline, dungeon crawl, innocent, investigative, isolated area, monster, politics, religion, shady, stealth, travel

A Pound of Flesh

385

An antisocial loner discovered a spell that summoned a monster, and he set the creature loose upon his worst enemy. The summoned beast tore his enemy to shreds. Now the outcast has discovered that the monster can't be dismissed unless it devours the summoner as well.

The only way that the summoner can maintain control of the monster is to feed it a pound of fresh human flesh every day. If the monster goes unfed, it attacks the outcast. The outcast lures victims to his mobile home or drives along interstate and picks up hitchhikers to feed to the monster. Sometimes the monster doesn't kill its meal, forcing the outcast to finish off the victim in order to protect his secret.

Hooks for this plot include being the outcast's only friends, knowing a victim, or escaping the outcast and the monster. Begin the session with encounters based upon the plot hook you choose. Sole friends of the outcast notice that he's more distant than usual and is obviously nervous about something. PCs who know a victim meet that victim before her death, and she describes being followed by the outcast or being tailed by the mobile home. PCs who escaped an attack as their plot hook are now being hunted by the outcast to prevent them from alerting the authorities.

Please Ignore the Riots

386

A general recently seized control of his country, which still teeters from the violence of their civil war. The streets are wracked with violent protests. The general hires the PCs to safely escort an investor around the region and play up the opportunities the country offers. He needs them to protect the investor, conceal the ongoing turmoil, and convince him that the country is safe and ready for investment.

The investor arrives without much understanding of recent history. He asks for a guided tour of several sites in surrounding cities, as well as tours throughout the capital city. He needs a space for a foundry and a manufacturing complex, with access to large pools of cheap local labor.

The former rulers of this country worshiped ancient and terrible gods, and even though they lost power, their cults still riddle the country and plague the young rule of the general. A spy on the general's staff reports the investor's arrival to the cult.

In the first city, cultists incite a riot when they storm a church. Cultists and religious devotees clash violently in the path of the PCs tour. The PCs will have to quell or explain away the violence and the riots and persuade the investor to continue the tour.

The second building site is quiet, though you may want to tease your players with rolls and tense descriptions of loud

The discovery of a mutilated corpse seeds the next encounter. Guilt or a desire to gloat, depending upon who was killed, drives the outcast to check out the crime scene. The PCs might spot the outcast, in which case regardless of what hook you used the outcast flees the area. This leads to a chase scene with the police as a third party that may or may not help the PCs.

If the PCs catch the outcast at the end of the chase, the monster escapes the mobile home to search for him—it needs to feed. If the outcast escaped the chase, he begins tailing the PCs; he plans to feed them to the monster in order to keep them from interfering with his plans.

Ultimately, the monster is likely to get the outcast, and depending on the hook you chose to get the PCs involved, they may or may not have a problem with that.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) innocent, investigative, madness, magic, monster, race, tactical planning

haggling and non-violent protests. On the road to the third site, the investor's car and PC escorts will be attacked by a local militia manipulated by cult leaders. Spike strips and portable barriers make maneuvering difficult.

The cultists strike the investor's hotel the next night with summoned horrors or shadows of their mad gods, using the twisted magic granted by their worship. They attack fiercely, exhausting their reserves. Investigating the horrors may reveal the summoner's hideouts, but the PCs are committed to escorting the investor.

If they can convince the investor to continue, the rest of the tour goes smoothly. When the tour is complete, the general requests a debriefing. He offers a private meeting with the investor and asks the PCs to attend and reinforce the positive investment storyline. The cultists unleash a final assault during the meeting—killing either the investor or the general would be a huge success for their movement. For a tougher final confrontation, the investor can be an undercover cultist or be mystically booby trapped.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) city, combat-heavy, escort mission, magic, mass combat, monster, politics, race, rebellion, shady, siege, social, spirit, trade

Enmity of Kinsmen

Blood in the Jungle

387

The PCs are hired by an explorer to help him find out what happened to an expedition that went missing. The missing expedition was led by the explorer's brother, his professional rival. Everyone fears the worst for the lost sibling, but the PCs' patron is determined to find him. The trail leads deep into the jungle, eventually ending at a complex of ancient ruins.

In truth, the loss of contact is a ruse engineered by the lost sibling to lure the patron so that he can murder him. The discovery of a historical artifact of monetary and archaeological significance is at stake. The artifact possesses an otherworldly quality, suggesting that beings from another world or dimension played a role in the development of civilization.

Unfortunately, there's something else connected to the discovery: a vile protector spirit that seeks to slay interlopers. As the lost sibling lays traps and ambushes for the patron, the vengeful spirit of the jungle begins its assault on everyone present.

From here, the journey becomes one of evasion and surviving the protector spirit, which rouses the natural forces around it to assault the PCs. The earth trembles, triggering a rock slide as the characters walk past a cliff or try to traverse a ravine. While traveling down a stream, the water level begins to rise inexplicably. Within moments, the stream turns into a raging rapids and dashes their craft against the rocks. The PCs encounter a party of hunters who suddenly launch an unwarranted attack. A swarm of vermin, such as army ants, advance on the PC's position.

Can the discovery be preserved? Who will survive the trek from the jungle? Will the protector spirit cease its attacks once the PCs cross the threshold into civilization?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) alliance, betrayal, epic challenge, escort mission, exploration, intrigue, isolated area, relationship hook, rivalry, spirit, travel, twist, villain

Fun for the Whole Family

388

The PCs come across a circus in the middle of nowhere. It can be supernatural in origin if that best fits your campaign, but whatever the case, it looks entirely out of place. If the PCs enter the circus grounds during the day, they find the place abandoned. There's plenty of food and drink available, but there are no people or animals present to prepare or consume the meals. Prizes are hanging on the walls of booths with carnival games, yet there are no agents manning these booths. The ticket booth is at the entrance to the circus grounds, but again there are no attendants present and no tickets inside to find.

As the day ends and night creeps in, the various contraptions activate. Rides operate, music plays, and games buzz and light up. Hideously deformed circus performers appear, screaming "Thieves!" or "Trespassers!" at the PCs, and then start chasing them. If the PCs attempt to flee the circus grounds, the mutated circus animals that encircle the grounds (multi-headed tigers, skinned lion corpses, and skeletal elephants covered with slithering vipers) attack them. Until they can come up with a better plan, the PCs won't be able to escape the circus grounds.

There are three factions in the circus. There are the artists who perform stunts and athletic feats (acts like the trapeze, high wire, and human cannonball), freaks that are deformed sideshow attractions (the bearded lady, the alligator man, Siamese

twins, etc.), and finally there are the clowns: savage cannibals who torture their prey before consuming them.

All three factions compete with each other to capture and kill the PCs. The factions brutally attack each other and, if any have captured PCs, try to steal their "prizes" from each other.

If the circus denizens get their hands on a PC, things don't go well for that character. In the big top, the trapeze artists loop a rope around one of the PCs and suspend the victim in midair. The artists then flip and swing past the victim, brutally kicking and punching him as they pass by. The clowns spray a PC's face with acid from a fake flower or seltzer bottle and then taunt the PC with kicks and slaps before biting into them for an evening meal. The freaks capture a PC and begin to "improve" the victim through mutilation.

Ultimately, the PCs must find a way to use the factions' natural animosity toward each other to give themselves a fighting chance at escaping the circus grounds.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Comedy, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) investigative, isolated area, madness, magic, mature themes, monster, race, stealth

Old Bones

389

The PCs have been receiving tips, information, and support to help them oppose a clan of vampires. Early objectives are small, but as successes add up, the stakes are repeatedly raised. Their supporters are careful to hide the fact that they are, in fact, a rival clan of vampires. Even if discovered they'll try a number of tactics to divert suspicions. If the PCs' suspicions can't be quieted, the clan will admit their nature but will try to continue the alliance because they share a common purpose.

The final pushes of the campaign include storming the clan's property holdings and lair, destroying any vampires that can be found. During the raids, the PCs' allies turn everything upside down and occasionally grab items they find interesting. Most of these won't be hotly argued over if the PCs want them or would rather see them destroyed. There is, however, a powerful artifact present. Each ally insists on having it, even if doing so ruins the alliance and leads to bloodshed. This artifact, the wire-wrapped forearm bones of an elder vampire, gives its bearer a lordly mien among the undead, and obtaining it was the sole goal of the vampires' alliance with the PCs.

After the raids, the PCs can maintain their alliance with the vampire clan, but it's clear that their mutual paths are at an end and that they are regarded only as useful tools.

With their major competition gone and the artifact in their hands, the PC's former allies are able to consolidate the majority of the remaining vampires of the city under their leadership. This time of relative peace means the vampire presence in the city is less obvious, but also that it grows larger and more deadly at a quicker pace than ever. Faced with a bigger threat than before, the PCs may have to undertake the task of recapturing and destroying the artifact they helped their allies obtain.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) alliance, betrayal, deadline, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, monster, sandbox, social, tactical planning, twist

Realized Rants Rewrite Reality

390

While out and about in the city, the PCs overhear a madman raving about his brother's fiendish plot: He seeks to modify traffic cameras throughout the city so that they fire gamma rays, disabling vehicles and bringing the city to its knees. Shortly thereafter, his ranting comes true: The PCs are onsite for a major accident, and while they're helping people out of the wreckage, they observe similar pileups at every intersection they can see.

After a day of chaos, during which scientists on TV discuss spikes in gamma ray activity throughout the city, things abruptly go back to normal. The PCs can track down the madman fairly easily, and when they do they find him in a state of shock. If they calm him down and buy him a beer, he'll explain that while he has always known how powerful and evil his brother was, he's never seen his malice demonstrated as clearly as this.

The madman has been given the ability to literally rewrite reality. Whatever he truly believes to be true will become so, no matter how outlandish. When he stopped believing in gamma-ray-shooting traffic cameras, they ceased to exist. His brother has been experimenting on him for years, and has finally hit on the result he wanted—but the madman escaped, and his mere existence now threatens the entire world.

As the PCs deduce the nature of his power, they'll find that beliefs related to the man's brother come true more often than those with no connection to him, and that the man's subconscious is very literal. If someone mentions racism, for

example, then the next day everyone in the city's skin may be a uniform color of gray. With great care, the PCs can manipulate the man's beliefs to minimize his impact on the world—but not indefinitely.

While the PCs figure out what to do about the madman, his brother is searching for him. He wants to claim the madman's ability for his own, and means to kill him in the process. A direct conflict between the two men would be incredibly dangerous for the city's population—and for the PCs. The brother, who may be a super-villain, a wizard, or something else entirely, has figured out how the madman's ability works, and will use this against the PCs.

If there's no way to remove the madman's power, is it best for the world if he's put into a coma or killed? And will the PCs be willing to go this far?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) city, difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, investigative, madness, magic, sandbox, social, villain

One Eye, Two Eyes

391

When a relative dies, one of the PCs is willed an allegedly haunted house. When the party first enters the foyer, they find the message “I 4 U” scrawled in charcoal in the foyer. Otherwise, the house has been untouched for over a decade. A few exotic items are scattered through the house, including a crystal skull in the dining room.

If anything in the house is altered or moved, accidents happen. Things fall or are “thrown” as if by an invisible hand, ladders tip, and breakers switch on or off. The more that is moved or changed, the more dangerous the accidents become. Oddly enough, the garage and basement are the areas most sensitive to disturbances. A one-eyed man may be glimpsed during these accidents.

The house was built over a century ago by a wealthy and eccentric woman who traveled extensively in her youth. She had twin sons but never married, which gave rise to all kinds of rumors. After the sons were born, she became very reclusive.

A newspaper in the basement is open to a story about the house. When the mother was in her sixties and her children in their forties, an explosion in the garage killed her and injured both of her sons. According to the paper, one lost an eye and the other suffered serious burns; he was forced to wrap himself in bandages for months after the accident.

In truth, the two-eyed brother died in the explosion, and the one-eyed brother swore he’d give his right eye to save him. The offer was accepted by a spirit bound to the crystal skull, and the dead brother was brought back to life, in a way. He wore bandages to cover his decomposing flesh. The one-eyed brother hated him, but couldn’t harm his brother.

A decade later, the one-eyed brother was dying of cancer, and he managed to drag his brother into the furnace, hoping to kill both of them. But the furnace wouldn’t light, and he died of dehydration. When he died, whatever animated his brother passed on as well. Now the one-eyed brother’s spirit haunts the house.

The brothers’ corpses are still in the furnace. One-eye’s body is recognizable; the other brother is but a skeleton wrapped in bandages. Two options for releasing the spirit are contacting one-eye’s spirit and forgiving him for his actions, or recovering both bodies from the furnace and giving them a proper burial.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (KS) investigative, relationship hook, spirit, villain

Rivalry of Kinsmen

Winter Court

392

When the PCs have cause to visit Faerie, the land of the fey folk, to seek a boon or service from the faerie king, you can present them with the following challenge. In order to earn their desired boon, the king proposes that the PCs take part in a contest he has arranged for his kinfolk: Whoever returns with the Stone of Sight from the frost roc’s nest shall be considered worthy to rule.

The faerie world is a strange, unsettling place, but the true horrors of this trip come in the form of the mythological monsters inhabiting the wild lands near the frost roc’s nest. These include a tribe of minotaurs whose warriors show no mercy to trespassers, a medusa and her snake-folk minions in the caverns at the base of the roc’s nest, a pair of one-eyed giants who hunger for human flesh that guard the path to the nest, and a rival faerie king who has dispatched a witch and her assistants to capture the Stone of Sight for himself.

While the kinsmen pledged to do no harm to one another, no such vow restrains the various retainers. Just as the PCs reach

the nest, a rival group of stone-seekers appears to challenge them. The frost roc attacks the PCs after they claim the stone. On their return journey, a genie with powers of ice and snow pursues the stone and tries to slay its bearers.

In the concluding scene, however, all the parties learn that it is not capturing the stone itself that determines the champion. When the king uses the stone, it reveals which contestant was pure of heart and true to the spirit of the test. It is that person or persons who will be declared champions of the winter court—and if the PCs win, they’ll receive their boon.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) alliance, bearers, betrayal, combat-heavy, deadline, epic impact, escort mission, monster, rivalry, travel, twist, villain

Mealworms

393

The PCs are contacted by an old friend who's concerned about his brother's health. He and his brother have always traded a fair amount of teasing, but lately his brother has become much more aggressive. In addition, he has trouble concentrating and suffers frequent headaches, is pale and clammy, and has put on a startling amount of muscle. He's constantly taking pills from an unmarked bottle and has started disquieting the rest of the help on their farm. As if his personal problems weren't bad enough, animals and people have been going missing in town every few weeks.

The brother found the pills in an antique shop, along with a note indicating they were for "physical vigor and sharp mind." Buying them on a lark and taking them whenever he needed a psychological boost, he's unaware that they're actually the eggs of an exotic parasitic worm that causes dangerous physiological and psychological changes. He has taken enough pills that his body is now infested with the worms, causing irreparable damage and permanent derangement, as well as giving him a voracious appetite.

Careful observation of the infected brother will make his abnormal symptoms obvious. In addition, especially observant PCs may notice even more disturbing details such as worms moving under his skin, or blood and worms being ejected when he sneezes or coughs.

Kiss of the Black Widow

394

When a man's brother is killed by a car bomb, the man goes into shock and soon enters a near-comatose state. The PCs know both men; the surviving brother works for the local bomb squad. Federal investigators suspect the bomb technician, but the local police refuse to consider him a suspect. Both investigations are at a standstill as the two sides butt heads. The media are dwelling on the story, and local cops are losing morale.

The brother's new girlfriend is desperate for assistance, and asks the PCs to investigate. She believes that because of the connection between the killing and her boyfriend's line of work, someone is trying to take revenge on him. The PCs agree to help her.

The new girlfriend is a succubus, a seductive demon. Her kiss lets her compel people to do almost anything. The degree of compulsion depends on the amount of kissing; a quick smooch is good for a few hours. It fades over time, but those compelled try to justify their actions after the fact.

The succubus has charmed one brother to kill the other, the doctor to keep him sedated, the cops and feds to interfere with each other, and the local news to clamor for a resolution. She revels in the chaos she's created, and now seeks to involve the PCs.

The infected brother is an avid hunter and often takes weekend hunting trips, but they have lately been unproductive. This is because with his parasite-fueled hunger, he simply eats his kills raw. Lately his hunger has become so powerful that he has turned his hunting skills on domestic prey, slipping out at night and murdering and consuming whatever he can find. He has tried to victimize only animals, the homeless, and others who won't be missed, but will take what he can get. With his preternatural strength, he can travel further and faster than anyone would expect during his nocturnal excursions.

How will the PCs bring the brother down? Can the infestation be eradicated, or is he a dead man walking? And how will their friend feel about learning the truth?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (MN) innocent, investigative, madness, monster, relationship hook, sandbox, villain

She will attempt to give a PC a hug and a kiss for helping out, and whisper her compulsion in his or her ear, "Aggressively confront the Feds. They know more than they're saying."

Confronted, the federal agents will arrest and question the PCs. They'll notice the succubus' picture on the desk of one of the officers in charge. As the PCs investigate, they also find her picture at the dead brother's house, at the doctor's office, and on the desks and walls of a few cops and reporters. Demons don't sleep, so she visits many of them regularly.

When the PCs start to catch on, the succubus first sends cops to arrest them, then thugs to kill them. She'll also try to kill the brother and the doctor before they can talk. Cornered, she's a competent fighter, but will use her compulsion powers first.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (KS) alliance, betrayal, city, intrigue, investigative, madness, monster, relationship hook, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, villain

Three werewolves lay claim to a vast stretch of wilderness. They use unmapped roads to capture unsuspecting travelers, and then play a game with them, awarding points to each other for winning competitions that involve their victims. The hook for this plot is that the PCs enter the werewolves' territory. Once the werewolves are aware of the PCs' presence, they begin their game using the PCs as the prizes.

The first competition is for the werewolves to take a lock of hair from one of the PCs while in human form. The goal is to scare the party, so the werewolves don't simply ask for the hair. They attack the PCs if needed, but their intention is to cause panic and confusion amongst the PCs.

The second competition is to maim one of the PCs through a vicious attack in wolf form. The werewolves appear as large wolves, and they attempt to tear a body part off of a PC.

The final competition occurs under the full moon, and the werewolves compete for kills. The werewolf with the most PC kills is the winner. During this final competition, the werewolves attack in werewolf form. Their large, savage forms are monstrous and horrifying.

The werewolves consider the PCs nothing more than playthings. If the PCs severely injure a werewolf, the pack targets that PC for a special game during the next round of the competition. If the PCs kill a werewolf, the remaining pack members recover the body and retreat. They throw aside the competition and return later that evening in werewolf form to take revenge on the party.

You can increase the number of werewolves as needed to keep the PCs overwhelmed. The competing werewolves also may not be the only werewolves in the area. The horror element of this plot isn't the werewolves so much as the sensation of being hunted while in unfamiliar territory, and knowing that something could always be lurking in the woods, just out of sight.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (PB) exploration, isolated area, monster, tactical planning

Murderous Adultery

Devotion

396

A coven of three witches has been meeting secretly and casting spells on innocent people. The witches look like normal people and hide in plain sight. A local gentleman unknowingly romanced one of the witches, and she hid this forbidden relationship from the rest of her coven. The gentleman discovered the secret of the coven, though, and stole an artifact from his lover as proof of the coven's evil deeds. The gentleman is looking for help to stop the coven, but his lover has already confessed the relationship to her sisters. The coven now wants the artifact returned to them, and anyone who knows their secret must die.

Hooks for this plot include one of the PCs being the gentleman, being approached by the gentleman for help, or witnessing the coven using spells to murder someone. After the PCs catch the coven's eye, they meet them face-to-face. In the first encounter in this adventure, each witch is carrying a bottle of black ink that she spills upon the ground before her. Each witch then manipulates the ink with her fingers, and the shadows come to life as dark, smoky monsters that attack the PCs. The coven doesn't stop the attack unless one of its members is injured or the PCs flee. Somehow, the PCs should wind up with the artifact before the encounter ends.

In the next encounter, the witches stage an attack on a person or group of people dear to the PCs in an attempt to lure them into a trap. The coven summons a swarm of rats that viciously attacks the PCs' loved ones. Each witch cuts her palm and smears blood on a photo or some other representation of the target; this causes the rats to then crave his or her flesh. The massive swarm can pick person's bones clean in a matter of moments.

The final encounter is related to the artifact. The PCs discover that the artifact binds a demon to the coven, granting them much of their power. Once they make this discovery, the coven appears and a final confrontation ensues. Destroying the artifact results in the demon appearing and wiping out the coven, along with anyone else that doesn't flee in short order, and this is the best way to defeat the witches.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural

Tags: (PB) bearers, innocent, investigative, magic, relationship hook, spirit, villain

Kiss and Kill

397

A motel owner asks for help with a haunting. Every now and then, someone in room 406 reports something strange, like a woman's face in the mirror, a presence in the room, or even a voice telling them to leave. Last night a couple left in the middle of the night. They both looked like they'd been beaten up, but they wouldn't answer any questions or even wait for a refund.

The room is haunted by the spirit of a woman caught cheating by her husband. She and her lover were in room 406 exactly one year ago. Her husband found out, broke in while she was out, killed the other man, and waited for her to return. When she did, he beat her to death over the course of several hours. He left the guy's body in the room, but buried hers in an unmarked grave. Because she wasn't laid to rest properly and is fraught with guilt, her spirit is trying to prevent others from suffering the same fate by attacking adulterers.

The motel owner has the credit card information of the man who last paid for a night in the room, one member of the injured couple. Once the PCs accomplish the difficult task of gaining his confidence, he describes a crazy woman who broke into the room, screaming "Stop! Don't do it!" He didn't get a good look at her.

Phantom Ware

398

Office relationships can become complicated, especially when they conflict with existing ones. This was the case a few weeks ago when an office tryst resulted in a man sabotaging his wife's computer; the next time she turned it on, it would electrocute her. His plan worked, eliminating the barrier to his office fling, but it set fire to their house, which burned to the ground. Now the computer network at his office is possessed with the spirit of his murdered wife, trying to expose his infidelity and his crime from beyond the grave.

The PCs can become involved when the adulterer hires them to figure out what's going on, or when they're brought in to investigate the strange phenomena in the office. They may also decide to investigate because of a connection to the murdered wife.

The computers on the office network appear to have a virus. Emails and instant messages, especially embarrassing or incriminating ones, are sometimes randomly sent to the wrong recipient. Sounds of moaning or screaming sometimes issue faintly from speakers and the shared printer, and ghostly images and videos of graphic sex or smoldering corpses sometimes flash on nearby monitors, visible out of the corner of one's eye.

After hours, when the machines are powered down and the lights off, the ghostly manifestations become stronger. The

Any unmarried couple in room 406 will draw the spirit's attention. She won't attack until the room is dark, and her aim isn't to kill but simply to stop any adultery. If a light is switched on during her attack, the spirit is visible as an attractive but badly beaten woman in a bikini, who disappears a moment later. She can be identified through missing persons reports. Her husband, now a wealthy bachelor, has an airtight alibi and refuses to talk about her. He'll hire someone to kill the PCs if they mention the hotel or get too close to the truth.

One possible resolution is to tempt the spirit's murderous husband into meeting a married woman at the motel, in which case the spirit will exact revenge and then disappear. Another is to get him to confess where he buried the body so that it can be properly laid to rest.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) investigative, social, spirit, villain

images and sounds persist despite the computers being off and machines randomly start, run programs on their own, then shut down again. This is especially disturbing in the IT area where unplugged and even non-functional machines exhibit the same symptoms. Late night workers have even reported a blackened figure surrounded by a gentle flickering luminescence seen walking among the cubicles.

The burned-out house where the woman was murdered is haunted as well, but with no surviving electronics, the haunting is less readily apparent. With careful listening, the PCs may hear sounds from under some of the ash. Digging through the wreckage will reveal a shattered and half-melted monitor playing a pornographic film that winks off as soon as it's uncovered.

At the house where her husband is staying with his new lover, the haunting is more subtle, but includes phantom scorch marks on electronic devices and other objects. In addition, the blackened figure often hovers near the bed while the adulterers sleep.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (MN) betrayal, city, innocent, investigative, mature themes, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, spirit

Deadly Dalliance

399

In the old Greek myths, some of the gods committed adultery with mortals. Such mortals aroused the ire of the affected godly spouses. While not many believe in the old gods anymore, they still exist and are just as frisky as they were in the past. Today, one of the gods has chosen a mortal and has taken on a human form to woo him. She uses the traditional method of assuming the shape of the mortal's wife and dalliating with him while her agents keep the true wife occupied.

Unfortunately for the object of the god's desire, her spouse doesn't care about the particulars and has decided to make life a living hell for him. He uses his traditional powers to inflict harm: Zeus might throw thunderbolts to destroy cars or create fires, Eros might make his wife fall in love with someone else, and Neptune might send a horde of lobsters to terrorize him.

These acts increase in intensity over time. In addition, the mortal or spouse has discovered strange inconsistencies in their relationship. A neighbor may have spotted the god and mistaken her for the spouse, who was away from home at the time. The mortal may discover that his wife doesn't seem to remember certain dalliances (if you want an extra

complication, the spouse may be cheating on her husband and is actually thankful for his confusion).

In either case, the mortal or spouse wants answers. The PCs have to figure out what's going on, which gods are involved, and how to placate them before their anger turns to murder. Some of this can be researched in musty old tomes or online, while the rest has to be accomplished through old-fashioned legwork.

The dalliating god isn't pleased with the PCs' interference and uses her powers to dissuade them. This, ironically, might give them more information as to who the offending god is, but it proves of little use if the god is angry enough to send minions to kill them.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) deadline, epic challenge, innocent, investigative, religion, social, spirit, villain

What Are Those Knives For, Dear?

400

One of the PCs' friends is cheating on her husband with another married man, and that man's wife knows about the affair. Rather than simply expose their adultery, the wife has decided to get even by killing the PCs' friend. (Depending on your group, you can also make a PC the center of the plot, with that character's spouse cheating on him.) While out with the PCs, their friend narrowly escapes death by way of a pipe bomb under her car. She cannot imagine why anyone would want to kill her.

There are no prints or traceable materials, so the bomb itself reveals no clues as to the attacker's identity, but now the party's guard is up. While they try to figure out what's going on, the angry wife has changed tactics: Having recently discovered the occult, she resolves to go after the PCs' friend with magic. Her second assassination attempt is more subtle: She causes a car accident, again involving one or more of the PCs—and it's clear to the PCs that magic is involved.

Remembering that her lover's wife had an interest in the occult, the NPC now confesses her adultery to the PCs, and suggests that the jilted wife might be the one trying to kill her. When the PCs visit the jilted woman's house, they surprise her there; a chase ensues, with the angry wife using magic to get away.

While the PCs' friend is resolving the fallout from her affair, the PCs must track down the jilted wife before she kills them all. This portion of the adventure is freeform: The party's plan will drive the action, and the angry wife will respond or take action herself depending on what they do. She has a natural gift for magic, but lacks discipline. While her power has grown by leaps and bounds, she has trouble controlling it, making her incredibly dangerous to anyone around her.

While she'll go after the PCs with gusto, her ultimate aim never changes: She wants to see the PCs' friend dead, and will stop at nothing to kill her. The climax of this adventure comes when the angry wife, having avoided capture, makes an all-out attempt to kill the PCs' friend while in a public location. The PCs must protect their friend (and possibly her family, too), as well as innocent bystanders, all while dealing with the angry, powerful wife—and depending on your campaign world, attempting to keep the use of magic secret in the process.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) innocent, magic, relationship hook, sandbox, social, villain

Madness

I Dream of Squirrels

401

One of the PCs' enemies, fearing her dangerous and skilled foes, seeks out an unusual edge to deal with them: She communes with local squirrels. The ritual goes terribly wrong, and instead of gaining allies she becomes the nexus of a city-wide squirrel hive mind. But they're only squirrels—how bad could that be? This adventure is best played out in the background of another scenario, coming into the foreground when the party has realized the true magnitude of the squirrel threat.

The PCs should have several odd encounters with squirrels. A squirrel leaps into the spokes of a bicycle wheel, upending a PC or causing a traffic accident that includes the PCs' vehicle. Later, eerie, pupil-less black eyes stare down at the PCs from telephone lines wherever they go, and squirrels chatter loudly whenever the PCs desire silence (while breaking and entering, for example). The PCs find squirrels gnawing on the body of a dead NPC friend of theirs, and while they stare in horror a squirrel emerges from the NPC's chest cavity, scattering entrails as it flees. They may also encounter squirrels that chew through electrical lines, causing shorts and plunging the street into darkness at exactly the wrong time for the PCs.

To stop the squirrels from ruining their lives, the PCs must find the source of the hive mind: their unseen enemy. She's still alive, but her unconscious body is hidden in a local park, dragged there by the squirrels after the ritual went awry. The effects of the drugs and the magic that she used to perform the ritual still linger, though time and psychiatric care can restore her to lucidity—which will also dismantle the hive mind, returning the squirrels to normal.

If the PCs simply kill her, they will succeed only in destroying her body. Her spirit will continue to link the city's squirrels, and their malign influence will only grow stronger as the hive mind incorporates squirrels from ever further away to torment her foes.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (SM) city, difficult choice, innocent, investigative, madness, magic, monster, relationship hook, twist, villain

Slasher Film

402

Each PC should adopt one of several high school archetypes (cheerleader, athlete, goth, preppie, burner, prom queen, chess club geek, etc.) as they set off on a senior trip into the remote woodlands with two chaperones.

Reinforce the cliché by having the chaperones tell the PCs stories of a chainsaw-wielding, hockey-masked madman with a hooked right hand who prowls the area. Their campsite includes a tent area, a deserted house in a secluded valley, a thickly wooded area, and a pond with a nearby cave.

Have fun roleplaying as they explore these locales, and be sure to include in each location a thing the PCs might identify as a hiding place or a future improvised weapon. Once the setting is established, the madman—who really exists—slashes their tires, disabling their transportation.

Pairs of PCs are then placed at one of the encounter sites in a manner to be determined randomly. In succession, each pair faces off against the aforementioned NPC madman. The encounter is resolved if the PC successfully flees the site, the madman is killed, or the PC dies.

The surviving PCs then meet in the center of the camp for a final showdown against the madman. It doesn't matter how many times the madman is killed—he somehow keeps coming back for more. (He may show the effects of some of the previous battles, however.) Give the PCs time to organize a defense or attempt an escape. At the most opportune moment, and when one character is the most vulnerable, have the madman assault the survivors.

In this final battle, either the PCs slay the madman for good or the massacre continues until only one PC is left standing. At that point, the madman inexplicably calls off the assault and lets the last PC live, just like in the movies.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Comedy, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Supernatural, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) combat-heavy, deadline, epic challenge, exploration, innocent, isolated area, madness, monster, siege, stealth, tactical planning, travel, villain

A Fate Worse than Death

403

A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. Such is the case with a scientist whose experiments into perceiving “higher dimensions” have led him to believe that something horrible is coming to the world, and soon. This knowledge snapped his mind and he decided to save his family and loved ones from such a fate by murdering them.

The scientist won't use violent methods, of course. He relies on drugs to incapacitate and kill his prey. In his mind, it's better to give them a peaceful death now than condemn them to a life of horror. What he hasn't realized is that he's the cause of the “end of the world.” He has punched a hole into the upper dimensions and has not closed it. While the scientist is killing his family and friends, abominable horrors are slipping through the hole and terrorizing the university grounds in which the laboratory is located.

The PCs could come into this in one of three ways. They might be called in to track down the murders, piecing together the scientist as a common connection. They may be called to the university to hunt the horrors terrorizing the faculty and students, or they might work for or attend the university and be attacked themselves. In any case, the PCs have to track down the scientist and convince him to close the rift or, failing that, give them the information that they need to do it themselves.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) innocent, intrigue, investigative, madness, monster, sandbox, social, villain

Committed

404

The PCs are visiting, employed by, or are residents of a local asylum for the mentally disturbed. The residents range from harmless people who are being treated for manageable diseases to violent individuals who must be kept restrained and separated from others. One of these residents has somehow come into possession of a book of spells and ancient rituals. That resident is now the focal point for a reality-warping evil, and this evil is causing the madness of others to take physical form.

The first encounter takes place in the general activities section where the residents meet with visitors, watch television, and participate in various activities. The phobias of two residents take physical form. The first resident suffers from arachnophobia and is suddenly covered in spiders. The other resident suffers from hydrophobia and drowns as a geyser of water spews forth from his mouth. Eventually the two forms of madness merge into a single water elemental with the form of a giant spider.

The next encounter takes place in the cafeteria, where a resident suffering from paranoid delusions claims that “they” are after him. The problem is that there really is a trio of shadowy stalkers that can appear at will, attack, and then vanish immediately. These beings will use large butcher knives to stab their victims.

The final encounter is with the resident who holds the book of spells. This resident's madness is particularly disturbing, because the resident believes that he is the Devil incarnate. The resident summons forth swarms of locusts to devour people alive, causes bleeding sores to appear on anyone he chooses, and merges the remains of the dead into hideous creatures. How or even if the resident can be stopped is up to you.



Artist: Laine Garrett

You're encouraged to create more encounters based upon mental illnesses and to blend these forms of madness when possible. In a one-shot, these encounters can be death traps, intended to kill one PC per encounter unless your players—who should be sweating bullets—get extremely creative.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) innocent, investigative, isolated area, madness, magic, mature themes, roleplaying-heavy, stealth, villain

The Fear of Beautiful Women

405

A mad serial killer stalks the city streets. This poor wretch's wife was a member of a mystery cult which promises its members eternal beauty but instead transforms them into succubi. After discovering their secret and losing his mind, he now hunts anyone he suspects to be a member of the cult, gutting them to steal the magic gems they've each swallowed to effect the transformation. The city's elite have been whipped into frenzy by his actions, posting rewards, hiring their own investigators, and consulting experts of all kinds.

Searching for clues, the PCs hear a muffled scream and arrive in time to find a disheveled young man kneeling over a fresh corpse, his hand wrist-deep in her guts. Giving chase, they discover the man has stamina borne of insanity and is familiar with bolt holes and back alleys. If they fail to overtake him quickly, they'll lose his trail.

Now possessing a description, the PCs can begin their search for the young man. They find him sleeping in a pile of garbage in an alley. He'll try to flee and will fight only if cornered, focusing on any attractive female PCs. Subdued, he sobs, struggles, and begs to be let go. He carries with him only a knife, a garrote, a weather-stained diary containing his strange story, a pencil, and a pouch containing a half-dozen emeralds the size of robin eggs.

Welcome Home

406

Modern-day PCs take a bet to spend a night in an abandoned insane asylum, and awaken as asylum inmates in the 19th century. During the day, they're beaten, drugged, and prodded with sticks by onlookers. At night, after the sedatives are injected, they're free to roam the moonlit modern-day version of the asylum, but in 19th century garb. It's impossible to leave; anyone attempting to do so is suddenly and crushingly terrified of "something out there."

The asylum is huge, with multiple basement levels. Occasionally a little girl's voice is heard, singing quietly. Rarely, her screams ring out from the basement. The first night, the PCs may find the makings of torches. The basement of the asylum is frightening, and the PCs feel as if something lurks just out of sight.

During the day, the PCs can try to hide things for their future selves, though some items won't make the transition. The second night, the PCs will wake to an image of a young girl clutching a ragged cloth doll, staring out the window in abject terror. She will almost immediately disappear. The PCs can find the head and one leg of the doll.

The third day, the girl from the previous night arrives at the asylum. She's in a fetal position, clutching her doll, staring off in the distance, moaning and saying, "It's going to get me."

If the PCs choose to, they can investigate the mystery cult. Its members are all wealthy women and are all stunningly attractive. The cult does practice a ritual in which its members swallow small gems like the ones the madman harvested. Investigating the high priestess reveals that she keeps odd hours and company. She is in fact a vampire sorceress who magically prepares the gems her followers swallow to make them more susceptible to demonic possession.

The vampire is very powerful, is an accomplished sorceress, and always has demon minions and allies near. Confronting her requires a carefully researched and well-prepared plan. If the PCs allow the madman to assist them in this confrontation, he will be hard to control, but will launch himself at the vampire with insane ferocity.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) alliance, city, difficult choice, investigative, madness, monster, race, tactical planning, twist, villain

A patient pulls the doll from her grasp, tearing it limb from limb. The girl fights back violently, but the orderlies brutally restrain her, taking her to the basement. She isn't seen again that day.

The third night, the PCs can find the rest of the doll; its torso is in the lowest basement. If they can find a needle and thread, it can be sewn back together. The doll will transition with the PCs if it is made whole.

The third day repeats itself until the PCs have the doll. They see the girl, curled up in a fetal position, rocking and moaning to herself. If the PCs give her the doll, she hugs it tightly, and the world shifts back to the present day. The little girl stands up, her cuts and bruises healed. She will curtsy and walk out the front door into a blindingly bright light. As the PCs' vision returns, they see that it's morning outside and all of their possessions are stacked neatly beside them.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (KS) dungeon crawl, exploration, innocent, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, madness, mature themes, roleplaying-heavy, spirit, twist

Fatal Imprudence

Lover's Leap

407

A woman has come across a potent artifact that compels anyone she wishes to fall madly in love with her. Unfortunately, if she rejects the lover, he commits suicide. The woman is just as much a victim of the artifact's evil influence—she has become a siren, luring men to their deaths. She only engages in short-term relationships and ultimately rejects them all. A side effect of this is that while she enjoys all the attention, she fails to see that she is the cause of the suicides.

The first victim is a man who is dating a rival that previously insulted the siren. While the man was perfectly happy and committed to his girlfriend, he dropped her like a hot potato when the siren beckoned him. She played with him until the girlfriend angrily left him, and then she dumped him. Later, the man intentionally crashed his car, killing himself.

The second victim is a man that the siren had desired for quite some time. Unfortunately, she no sooner had him than she discovered that she didn't care for him. He turned out to be a jerk, gay, or just not her type—the artifact makes men fall

in love, but doesn't change anything else about them. She dumped him, and he went home and shot himself.

The third victim is a bouncer at an exclusive club. The siren flirts with him to get inside, but then rejects his further advances. He climbs to the roof of the club, ties a noose around his neck, and hangs himself.

The PCs can get involved any time after the first suicide. Perhaps they're investigators, or one of them is the siren's latest infatuation. Can they discover what the artifact is and destroy it before it claims another victim? Is there a reason why the artifact is taking victims? Is there a way to break the curse once caught up in it?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) innocent, investigative, magic, sandbox

A Step in the Wrong Direction

408

Since the 1930s, groups of children have been disappearing from local orphanages and hospitals every few years. The disappearances stop after a few weeks and are usually forgotten. No one has linked them to a rag-covered homeless man who wanders the city, a monster who feeds on children to sustain himself.

The latest disappearance is reported in the news: "2 Children Found Missing from St. Anthony's!" The monster hasn't been thorough about covering its tracks this cycle. Nurses who've worked at the hospital for a long time remember seeing him picking through the garbage and recall the strong smell coming from the back steps. They comment that it reminds them of the previous incidents. A crazy homeless woman says the steps themselves talk about the actions of the creature. She screams in panic every time the "man with the second face" is in the vicinity.

Research at the municipal library reveals that the disappearances all occur near a bridge that runs over the sewage treatment plant. If avenues of mystical research are available to the PCs, they may discover that the creature hibernates for long periods and likes damp places.

While investigating, the PCs are discovered by the monster. It leaves dead animals or bloody knives in their dwellings,

trying to scare them off. It might even throw chunks of rubble at them from the tops of abandoned buildings, only to disappear once the PCs get up there. The creature is skittish and if encountered in a place where it can run, like a back alley or in the sewage tunnels it sometimes uses to travel, it will. The creature has been alive for many years and survival is uppermost in its mind. It knows many secret ways through the city and can easily lose pursuers once or twice, but eventually panics and heads for its nest under the bridge.

If encountered early in the adventure, it will still feed at least once a night out of necessity. Once cornered, it will fight. The rags make it hard to target its spindly body, while its clawed hands cause minor but irritating wounds. The creature jumps around and walks on walls and ceilings, throwing things and staying out of range. Killing it breaks the cycle.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) city, combat-heavy, deadline, dungeon crawl, innocent, investigative, monster, race, villain

Power Gamer

409

Football players at a local high school have been suffering fatal accidents at an alarming rate. One drowned when his truck ran off the road into a creek. A few days later, the quarterback fell off a tractor and plowed himself into a wheat field. The latest was working on his car when it fell off the jacks and crushed him.

A nerdy gamer found a real spell in one of his gaming books, and has been killing off the jocks who pick on him. The gamer needs to be present to perform the spell, which is telekinetic in nature, and he was at the scene of all three accidents. Investigation may turn up his presence at the crimes or his absence from his home and the local gaming store.

The obvious beneficiary of the deaths is the new quarterback, who was home alone and doesn't have much of an alibi. He's scared and defensive, and will aggressively threaten or even attack any investigators.

Then the captain of the cheerleading squad dies in public. The cheerleaders are making a memorial for the football players during a free period, and the captain runs out to get the scissors. A door blows open, drawing everyone's attention. As the

captain runs back with the scissors, she falls as if pushed and lands on the hand holding the scissors. The PCs are present and observe the gamer making weird little hand movements, then quickly walking away.

The PCs know that the three dead football players mercilessly picked on the gamer. They also know that the gamer and a cheerleader were once good friends. They may even know or suspect that he secretly harbors a crush on her. The gamer will deny everything, but will use his spell to get away from the PCs if they get confrontational.

At the captain's funeral, or shortly afterwards if he was chased off, the gamer tries to convince "his girl" to forget about the other cheerleaders. She says no, and he makes a scene. If the PCs don't confront the gamer here, he will go after her as she drives off.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (KS) innocent, investigative, magic, social, villain

The Bleeding Edge

410

Diseases of the autoimmune system are common and often deadly. A doctor has discovered a treatment that first weakens, then strengthens, a patient's immune system in order to cure these types of disease. The doctor's tests with laboratory animals showed promise, and the doctor has just received permission to begin trials on human patients. Hooks for this plot include being a part of the doctor's research team, being a friend or relative of someone participating in the treatment trial, or being a member of the hospital staff.

The first group of trial patients becomes ill after receiving the treatment. The doctor expected this, but soon the symptoms worsen. The patients begin vomiting blood, and an hour or two later they transform into zombies with a craving for flesh. Any creature killed by a zombie immediately rises as another zombie. This is the first encounter of what will become a pandemic, during which the zombies overrun one ward of the hospital.

The next encounter involves an attempt by local police and rescue services to contain the threat and treat the injured. The battle has overflowed from the ward and spread to the entire hospital. Many patients are helpless, and the zombies slaughter them without mercy. During this second wave of the pandemic, any person who kills a zombie in combat has a small chance of becoming infected. This encounter ends with the zombies overrunning the entire hospital and spreading into the city.

The next encounter is a citywide crisis as the zombies spread quickly from the hospital into nearby neighborhoods. During this third wave of the pandemic, the chance of infection after killing a zombie increases. Various buildings are on fire as people attempt to defend themselves with whatever is available. At some point, a large vehicle loses control and hurtles straight towards the PCs. If the PCs escape the accident, the military picks them up and takes them to a quarantine center.

At the quarantine center, the PCs receive treatment for their wounds. The odds of infection if a person kills a zombie in combat also increase again. Keep increasing the chance for infection with each subsequent encounter. Whether there's a cure for the pandemic is up to you; if not, this makes an excellent introduction to a zombie-themed campaign.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) alliance, city, combat-heavy, difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, investigative, mass combat, monster, relationship hook, sandbox, siege, tactical planning

Principal Penitence

411

The principal of the local boarding school is a bright, starched, and stern young woman, with eyes black as night. Her charges do well academically, but are cowed by her. Students who act up disappear for a few days, but always return docile and calm, and never speak of their time away. Their few quiet confidences sound crazy and are quickly stifled.

Several hooligans kidnap the principal's cat and shave it bald. The PCs could be among them (and this is a fun encounter for them to play out), they could be from a rival clique, or they might simply hear the sound of clippers from within a nearby bathroom. The next day, at a school assembly, the principal announces that she has found her cat, and the glare she gives the hooligans is so fierce that they flee the assembly. They hide out in an abandoned house in town and plan to run away from the school, knowing that they dare not face the principal.

That evening, the principal tracks them down—flanked by strange clockwork men, the stuff of nightmares. Restrained by the automatons' heavy brass hands, the prisoners are returned to the school. The PCs are in a position to observe their arrival, and they watch as the entire group heads into the gymnasium. The principal reads strange words from a sheet of parchment, her voice raspy, and small cracks in the wall flow

together and form a dark tunnel in one of the gym's walls, revealing a shadowy path beyond. The cog men lead the prisoners to strange and starless cells at the end of the pathway.

The PCs must rescue the imprisoned hooligans and then decide what to do about the principal. She stores the parchment in her locked desk drawer; the passage can only be opened in the gymnasium. Beyond the wall, the cog men watch their prisoners tirelessly, but they're devoid of true intelligence or creativity and can be tricked into abandoning their posts. Once rescued, the hooligans won't be safe at the school, and neither will the PCs. The principal knows when the doorway has been opened, and will try to stop them from fleeing the grounds.

If they can convince the school board to dismiss the principal, they'll be safe for a time, but eventually she will re-enter their lives.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (SM) alliance, artificial life form, dungeon crawl, innocent, isolated area, magic, rebellion, relationship hook, stealth, villain

Devil's Feast

412

Recently, several people in a frontier community have been torn apart in what appear to be wild animal attacks. Careful examination of the evidence indicates an intelligent attacker, however, as several victims were found barricaded inside rooms with discharged firearms. Only those participating in the investigation, and one resident who refuses to evacuate, remain.

The killer is neither man nor beast, but an ancient vampire, released when one of the locals started construction on a new well. After spending so long sealed away, she is completely feral, but she's still a deadly predator with the ability to turn into mist and get at victims wherever they hide.

In a freshly dug hole in one house's backyard, the PCs discover a void behind a fractured stone slab. A few hours' work will reveal a cave system connecting to a nearby hilltop burial cairn; it's sealed with rune-carved boulders, and houses the ancient bones of dead native inhabitants of the area. The cave network is littered with the pierced and mummified corpses of bats and other small subterranean animals. In the deepest part of the caves is a nest made of gnawed bones and a stench the PCs recognize from some of the murder scenes.

During a nighttime search with the authorities, noises and flashes of movement are a prelude to an NPC being hauled up into a tree and carried off at great speed. If the PCs manage to

shoot the fleeing creature, they can save the life of the NPC, who can then provide a description of the vampire. Otherwise, they might get a glimpse as it flees, and they'll be able to find the NPC's shredded body on the roof of a shed in the morning.

Several nights later, gunshots are heard from the remaining resident's home. As the PCs enter the house, they hear a smashing window and find the resident, a great bear of a man, drenched in blood and clutching his neck. He shot an intruder, but when he checked the woman's wrist for a pulse, she pounced on him and tore at his neck. He managed to get a grip on her and fling her through the window before she hurt him too badly. Without prompt medical attention, he will become a vampire by the next night.

The vampire can be destroyed by traditional methods, but can also be repelled by the runic markings found on the cairn, which may help defeat or trap her.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (MN) alliance, dungeon crawl, epic challenge, investigative, isolated area, madness, monster, race, sandbox, tactical planning, villain

Long Voyage

413

Perhaps the voyage across open water was ill-advised, but haste or other circumstances compelled the PCs to undertake a long, perilous journey. Someone on board possesses a cursed item, a tobacco pipe decorated in fanciful mermaids. The pipe calls to an ancient spirit of the sea, a calling that will churn the seas, summon storms, and embolden monsters of the deep to attack.

The first sign that something is wrong is that the ship becomes becalmed, or if mechanically propelled, the engine fails. Then the PCs hear the mermaid's call. They may even see a creature resembling a mermaid of legend swimming near the ship. Anyone who leaves the ship, such as someone enchanted by the mermaid's song, is immediately surrounded by a school of sharks. The tentacles of a giant squid or octopus attempt to snatch victims from the deck and pull them under.

Wet footprints are found on deck, made by a fish-man scouting party that performed a quick survey of the ship, then dived

back into the water. There's a report of flooding in the lower decks (fish-men punctured the hull). The leak is slow and repairable, but patching it prompts the fish-men to attack. They stage a full assault and fight their way to the cursed pipe, intending to take it back to their undersea realm.

Only the return of the item to the sea lifts the curse and ends the assault. If the PCs determine the cause early on, have the item's possessor refuse to give it up—after all, it would be foolish to think this object is the cause for their becalming, the presence of sharks, or even watery footprints, wouldn't it?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (TT) bearers, investigative, magic, monster, shady, stealth, trade, travel

Involuntary Crimes of Love

Uncle

414

A succubus has taken the form of a young girl and uses her mesmerizing power to seduce men into bringing her gifts and visiting with her so she can drain their souls. She spends most of her time in an abandoned house, only leaving to recruit more men to play with. She discards those with nothing left to offer. Her powers allow her to convince anyone inclined to ask questions that nothing is amiss.

The PCs are called by an acquaintance that lives across the street from the succubus. She's concerned by her invalid, shut-in mother's unhealthy fascination with her young neighbor. Having exhausted medical solutions, she hopes the PCs can find an answer.

Unable to get in range of the succubus' powers, the mother sees her as a little girl who lives alone, never goes to school, and who entertains strings of adult men. The daughter, however, sees the succubus several times a day and, after repeatedly being brainwashed that everything is fine, no longer questions it. While speaking with both of them, the PCs may realize that the daughter has been the victim of mental conditioning.

The succubus is aware of her voyeur, and often spends idle afternoons tormenting her. Thus, new spectators will put her on guard. Once she sees the PCs are watching her as well, she drops by for a visit and uses her mental power to convince the PCs her lifestyle is normal.

If the PCs persist, she's likely to convince a few of her less useful playmates to rough them up. They won't be particularly subtle, but will try to corner the party in an alley or somewhere else that's fairly isolated.

Breaking into the house while the succubus is out confirms suspicions that she's the only resident and doesn't lead a normal life. Few rooms are in livable condition. Piles of gifts lay discarded in unused rooms, and there's nothing to eat but the sweets gifted to her.

If the PCs wait for the succubus in her house, or force their way inside while she's there, she'll try to mesmerize the toughest looking one before attacking them. During the fight, she may change into horrifying or seductive forms to unnerve the PCs.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MN) combat-heavy, investigative, madness, mature themes, monster, relationship hook, shady, social, villain

A friend comes to the PCs to explain that he has found his soul mate and is head-over-heels in love. Initially, there should be nothing suspicious about or amiss with the match. However, the love interest is actually a demon in disguise that grows stronger as its paramour suffers in the name of love.

Misfortune befalls the friend in increments. First, he loses his job. Then he breaks an arm falling from a ladder. Next, hooligans mug him walking home. Each time, he's accompanied by the demon, but any misfortune spares her.

Over time, the demon remains steadfast and true even though the friend suffers ever greater disasters: disfigurement, accusations of wrongdoing, affliction with disease. The friend's descent into this personal hell can only be stopped if the true nature of his love is revealed directly to him. It's possible that the demon will take the PCs aside and reveal its true nature to them—a taunt to dare them to action, knowing the friend will never believe such an outlandish tale.

This requires the PCs to mount an investigation into possession or the nature of demons. Of course, the demon is watching the PCs. If they make an attempt at research, such as visiting an old library or consulting with an expert in the occult, the demon sends its minions to attack.

Forever Bound

A bored, adulterous vampire enjoys provoking his mate into a blood frenzy by seducing mortals. The mate is insanely jealous and doesn't stop until she kills the seduced mortal and any witnesses. The hook for this plot is to have the adulterous vampire seduce one of the PCs, or to have a PC's friend brag about having been seduced.

The first encounter takes place at a bar or nightclub. The adulterer approaches the target mortal and seduces her (or him, as the vampire doesn't care about gender or sexuality). The vampire and the target leave the immediate vicinity to consummate their new relationship. When they return, the adulterer has a wicked smile on his face. He frequently looks towards the door or a clock as if expecting someone. A short time later, the mate arrives and angrily confronts the adulterer. The adulterer provokes the mate by snuggling up against the target, and he says something to the effect of, "You're too late, my love. My new playmate already took care of my needs. It was wonderful!"

The mate attacks the target, as well as any mortal that interferes. Both vampires reveal their true nature. As the mate slaughters mortals, the adulterer becomes visibly aroused and attacks the wounded victim to feed. The mate eventually sets the place on fire in an attempt to kill everyone, forcing the PCs to flee.

The next step is discovering the demon's weakness. The demon's bane rests in a forgotten crypt. There the PCs must confront undead guardians to gain the item. Once retrieved, the PCs must return safely with the item.

The demon calls on its allies to retake the bane and return it to its crypt. Cultists of the demon seduce the PCs and attempt to steal it. Decorative gargoyles come to life and assail the PCs. Giant bats invade the PCs' homes and attack them.

Presenting the bane to the demon forces it to reveal its true form but doesn't defeat it. The curse is lifted, but the demon attacks the PCs in retaliation. The PCs must stand firm and defend their friend from the demon's rage.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (TT) innocent, investigative, magic, monster, relationship hook, religion, social, spirit, stealth

In the next encounter, the mate becomes a gigantic wolf and chases the PCs. The adulterer reanimates the victims from the first encounter into mindless vampire minions. These minions also pursue the target in order to assist the mate. The minions feed on other mortals that they encounter, and ultimately they force the PCs to enter an abandoned church.

The PCs are then trapped in the church. The vampires cannot enter the church because it is holy ground. The mate circles the church and attempts to grab any person foolish enough to step outside. The adulterer lures the PCs out by mercilessly torturing innocents kidnapped from nearby homes in the middle of the night.

Every encounter in this adventure should be excessively bloody. Only sunrise causes the vampires to leave, at which point the PCs can pursue them and try to wipe them out for good.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PB) betrayal, city, mature themes, monster, relationship hook, social, spirit, villain

Masked Affair

417

This isn't a plot per se, but a meta-plot that can overlay a series of other adventures. A new masked vigilante arrives on the scene and helps one of the PCs thwart a crime. Alternately, the vigilante could actually be a thief or other non-violent criminal who gets caught by the PC. Whatever the case, a romantic spark is kindled during their first meeting, and over time the PC and the NPC flirt regularly and eventually begin a relationship.

One of two things is wrong with this relationship: Either the pair is biologically related (perhaps even siblings), and neither one of them knows it, or the NPC is married and hasn't told the PC about their spouse. How far you let the relationship progress depends upon the nature of their relationship. If they're biologically related, then you'll probably want them to remove their masks before things go too far. If they aren't biologically related—the NPC is actually the spouse of another PC or close friend, for example—then you might allow things to progress to a compromising level.

In addition to the “big reveal,” you might want to throw in an extra complication. If the PC and NPC are siblings and the

NPC is a criminal, then perhaps their parent is one as well. The parent either reveals his identity to stop the romance or attempts to draft the PC into the family business. In the case of a non-biological affair, a third party might step in and create a compromising position. He might blackmail the PC with the information or kidnap and threaten the NPC. This could cause quite a stir if another PC is wondering why a villain kidnapped her boyfriend in order to threaten the romancing PC.

A word of caution: This plot can get very uncomfortable very quickly depending on your players' maturity level, as well as what they feel is taboo, especially since you effectively guided them into it. Do your best to signpost potential problems before things go too far and disturb one or more of your players.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (WC) alliance, betrayal, difficult choice, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, twist

Easy Data

418

Twenty-two years ago, a computer programmer was dumped by his pregnant girlfriend. A bitter drunk at the time, he came into possession of a disk that contained a mysterious encrypted file. Cracking the encryption, he released a demon that had been encoded into the disk. It offered the programmer effective but immoral advice—advice that he's been taking.

The programmer's old girlfriend calls the PCs for assistance. She sees messages everywhere, foretelling pain and death. Supernatural investigation reveals demonic influence. The demon twists written and printed words, so that everything she reads is twisted into vile lies: a thank-you note becomes an angry screed, and the like. She can't imagine why anyone would do this to her.

Her daughter has also recently begun dating someone new, and she finds out that her daughter's boyfriend is actually the programmer—her own father, who left before she was born. Seduced by love notes faked by the demon, the daughter doesn't know she's dating her father, nor does he know that she's his daughter. The notes she received appear as receipts, reports, and other mundane documents to anyone but her. The friend resolves to tell the PCs about this situation.

Prompted by the demon, the programmer anonymously hires thugs to threaten the PCs, break some kneecaps, and end their investigation. They follow the old girlfriend to the PCs and make their threats before she can explain why she's there.

If a fight develops, the thugs are aided by the demon, which interferes with the PCs' senses.

Taking the fight to the programmer isn't easy: Street signs and address numbers all change, making it difficult for the PCs to find the right house. The programmer's daughter/girlfriend flees out a back window when the PCs arrive. The programmer fights to defend himself, but is an ordinary 40-year-old with a pistol—the demon is the real danger. The demon will distract the PCs by fooling their senses, trying to make them target each other. Convincing the programmer to explain himself requires a lot of persuasion, and there are many things, like faking the love notes, that the demon did without his knowledge.

If the PCs kill the programmer without dealing with the demon, it will move on to a police investigator when he bags the disk. The demon then fabricates evidence that is damning for the PCs. Breaking the disk frees the demon to infect a nearby hard drive or other device, with similar results. To destroy the demon, the PCs must immerse the disk in holy water—while struggling against the demon's attempts to keep them from doing so.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Romance, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural

Tags: (SM) combat-heavy, innocent, investigative, madness, magic, mature themes, spirit, twist, villain

The Blood Fairy

419

Every few weeks, a homeless person wakes up with a killer headache, a bump on their head, and a bandage on an arm or leg—as if they've given blood. In their pocket is a bottle of juice and a \$50 bill. They may feel weak for a few days, but hey, it's 50 bucks. The homeless have been referring to the phenomenon as "a visit from the blood fairy." Soon, something goes wrong. A homeless woman bleeds to death in an alleyway. There was no juice or money, just a bunch of blood-soaked bandages.

Recently, a woman unwittingly became a vampire. After a long bout of anemia and photophobia, she bit her husband's wrist in the middle of the night, and drank his blood. He put all the clues together and realized that he must take responsibility for getting her blood in order to keep her alive. She remains unaware of her condition and knows only that after her "medicine" she feels much more human.

The husband took a phlebotomy class and found part-time work at the blood bank, but still needs donations from the homeless. He didn't mean to kill anyone, but he accidentally hit an artery on the last "donor," and she turned out to be a hemophiliac.

The husband and wife lead a normal, if nocturnal, lifestyle. The city has 24-hour entertainment, and her need to sleep for 12-15 hours a day lets him keep a busy schedule; he has both a full- and a part-time job, and he keeps her fed. He feels terrible for what he's done, but realizes that without his efforts, his wife would either start killing people or would waste away and die.

As the PCs' investigation begins, they run afoul of a gang that preys on the donors, stealing their money while they're still unconscious. The gang will come back at least once, with reinforcements.

The husband will try to run if confronted, and will go home to defend his wife. She will also defend him if he's threatened. The husband is open to making any deal that keeps his wife alive, if the PCs can come up with a solution.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (KS) city, combat-heavy, difficult choice, innocent, investigative, monster, sandbox, villain

Slaying of a Kinsman Unrecognized

Where Wolf?

420

For this plot to work, all of the PCs must be members of the same extended family, or be related to a group of investigators from a few generations back.

A werewolf attacks the PCs, but it's old and weak and the PCs dispose of it handily. As it dies, it changes into an elderly relative of the PCs, and his last words are "I am free of the curse, and now one of you must bear it."

The next day, a phone call from a family patriarch reveals that the curse has been in the family since some of its members ransacked a Transylvanian church in 1920s, taking several precious artifacts with them. When the werewolf dies, the curse is passed to another family member. The victim becomes a werewolf on full-moon nights, but isn't aware of the curse and remembers nothing of the experience. The werewolf is extremely clever, and has rarely been caught.

What the PCs don't know is that the curse works on nights when the moon is at least 95% full (about 3-4 nights of a lunar cycle; see a moon phase calendar for details). The werewolf is extremely strong and fast in any of its three shapes: human, half-wolf, or wolf. The werewolf has the victim's intelligence and knowledge. Silver weapons are more powerful against it,

but aren't required to kill it. The curse doesn't necessarily affect someone in close proximity. This time around, the curse is passed on to a distant NPC.

Last night was the first night of the full moon and there are two more in this cycle. The family has about 20 members, all of whom suspect the PCs and each other. The first night, the werewolf will avoid the traps it knows of and look out for any it suspects. It will kill if it can, but will first try to scout around, find out where the PCs are, and avoid being caught. The second night, the werewolf will go after the PCs with a vengeance.

If the werewolf is captured, the curse can be removed by returning the remaining artifacts to the Transylvanian church, along with making a very substantial donation.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) bearers, innocent, investigative, madness, monster, race, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, tactical planning, villain

Defiling the Ancestral Manse

421

A friend or relative of the PCs approaches them for help: His parents recently died, leaving his slightly deranged older brother alone in the ancestral manse, and strange things are afoot. The house was willed to the PCs' friend, and he's reluctant to put his brother in a care facility. If the PCs can just help him make sense of what is happening, he hopes to be able to live in the house with his brother and care for him directly.

When the PCs come out to the house to stay with him for a few days, he shows them spoor and other signs of animals living on the grounds. While the tracks are rat-like, they're much larger than normal, and their nails are in the wrong places; they also appear to shift from quadrupedal to bipedal motion mid-stride. He has set out traps, and when checked they contain what looks like bits of rat, but no whole corpses. The PCs also meet the brother, who's a mess: He's twitchy, has wandering eyes, and communicates using grunts instead of speech, making him quite a creepy figure.

Their first night is unsettling, with strange noises heard throughout the house. When they roam the halls, they find the brother missing from his room. The friend comes running up to the PCs and says he thinks he's seen one of the animals. He asks for their help trapping it. When they catch it—killing

it in the process—it turns out to be a rat the size of a small dog, with peculiarly human-like forepaws and hind legs.

The next day, the rat-creatures attack the house en masse. They go for the PCs and the friend with gusto, but seem to avoid the creepy brother. Come morning, the PCs' friend and his brother are both missing, and no rat-creatures are anywhere to be found. Exploring the grounds, the PCs find a tunnel inside a disused shed; the tunnel leads into the basement of the house.

Entering the basement, they find an unholy ritual in progress. The deranged brother is copulating with a female rat-creature—much larger than the others—while part-human, part-rat babies suckle at her teats. The PCs' friend is chained up inside a ceremonial circle, screaming his head off. The ritual summons a rat-monster the size of a car, and the PCs must take it down while fighting off a horde of baby rat-creatures and the rat-monster queen—and keeping their friend from being devoured.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi

Tags: (MR) betrayal, exploration, investigative, madness, magic, mature themes, monster

The Hammer's Soul

422

An older gay man is bludgeoned to death in an alley near an expensive restaurant, and the detective in charge of the investigation involves the PCs because of their expertise in occult matters—something just feels “off” to him. Investigating the crime scene, the PCs detect a weak supernatural aura. Their investigation reveals that the man was having dinner with a close female friend, that he didn't have any enemies, and that he was killed with an old-fashioned hammer. There are no other clues.

A few nights later, another man is beaten to death outside of a health club. He was a gym trainer, also with no known enemies, and the woman who had dinner with the first victim was one of his clients. Traces of the supernatural are present at this crime scene, as well.

The woman is a mortgage officer who lives in the city and is married to an insurance salesman. The first chance the PCs have to check her out, she's out of town; the couple headed into the country, where they have a cottage. A supernatural aura surrounds the house. Once inside, the PCs find that it emanates from the husband's workshop. There they find an antique hammer covered in dried blood, with strange markings on its shaft. They also find an auction house receipt for the hammer, dated just before the night of the first man's murder.

The hammer was donated for a charity auction, and it has a troubling history. In the 1800s, it was used in the commission of a series of brutal murders: A husband used it to kill all of his wife's lovers, and then burned her alive. Occult investigation reveals that the soul of the killer was somehow bound to the hammer, but is no longer present—his soul has taken over the mortgage officer's husband. Believing that his wife's closest male friends are actually her lovers (which they're not), he killed them both, and now that he's alone with his wife in their cottage he plans to burn her alive.

The PCs must rush to the cottage to save the possessed man's wife, and then figure out how to deal with the man himself—and the killer's soul inside him. Depending on your campaign, this can involve a magical ritual to banish the killer's soul (or channel it back into the hammer), a fight with the possessed man, or another climactic scene that fits your group's play style.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural

Tags: (PV) investigative, madness, spirit, villain

Clothes Make the Man

423

Demons are possessing mortals in order to complete rituals in the earthly realm. Some of these people are related to or are friends of the PCs. The possessed act almost normal, but have small tells such as strange changes in diet, long absences, or fits of anger and greed. The people's displaced souls attempt to inhabit other bodies in order to fight back.

The displaced approach the PCs, trying to explain the situation, but their attempts at possession are not as refined as the demons' and their utterances are strange and guttural. If they can make words, they can't form coherent sentences. This behavior may suggest a strange disease or mass hysteria.

Being unable to explain their plight, the displaced spirits begin clawing and biting the demon-possessed bodies. These attempts may break some of the demons' possession magic, encouraging the souls to try to re-inhabit their bodies. When this happens, a battle will ensue in both the spiritual and physical realm. Many of the borrowed bodies die at the hands of the demons. Occasionally, though the demons are far stronger, a soul finds the will to regain control of its body.

The PCs should hear about the attacks from the loved ones of those whose bodies have been taken, and should be nearby

during at least one attack. The PCs may kill one of their actual relatives in defending their false relatives. Keep the PCs off-balance and introduce elements that make them question their relatives and the "disease."

While this is going on, demons have been gathering at an abandoned construction site, calling forth other demons to take still more bodies. The PCs should find out about this from a friend who made it back into her body, by noticing the strange behavior of their loved ones and following them, or by one of the displaced spirits getting through to a PC despite the communication barrier.

The demons' plans can be ruined by destroying their ritual site, but they will fight fiercely if they discover the PCs in that area. The demons can be driven out of their bodies with exposure to holy objects or by other means, as best fits your game of choice.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (JA) betrayal, deadline, innocent, madness, magic, relationship hook, sandbox, social, spirit, twist

Siblings Reunited

424

A friend of the PCs comes to them asking for help: He has been having terrible nightmares about killing small animals, and he wonders if there might be some occult reason for his dreams. Using the unusually vivid details provided by their friend, the PCs track down two or three of the sites where he dreamed that he had murdered animals and find evidence that the murders took place. The friend has ironclad alibis for each instance. A few days later, he contacts the PCs again: He just awoke from a dream in which he killed a homeless child.

The man's sister is behind the murders. The two siblings were separated during World War II, and never reunited. Although the man has looked for his sister on and off ever since, he has never been able to locate her. For her part, the war changed her, and she took a much darker path through life. Now bitter and broken, she has discovered the joy of murder—and after starting out with animals, she has moved on to human beings. The two share a psychic link, the source of many strange dreams in each sibling's life, and because of the murders it has now become a wide-open conduit.

When the PCs learn that this link goes both ways, they can use it to drive the killer out into the open. The man can, with effort, send images across the link, showing the killer that they're on her trail. Once this happens, she realizes that the

sender is her long-lost brother, and starts tormenting him. While the PCs are tracking her down, she is mailing her brother strange objects from their brief shared past: a child's water pistol filled with blood, a young girl's pullover matted with bloody animal hair, and so on.

The finale is a confrontation between the PCs and the man's sister, during which he realizes just who the killer is. She is a cunning and dangerous opponent, and can have occult powers if that makes her a more challenging foe for your group. Her brother won't want to kill her, and will try to keep the PCs from doing so; she will use this against them to good effect.

With the right group, you can make one of the PCs the sister's sibling, adding an emotional element to this adventure—and if the killer escapes, sparking a very dark follow-up adventure, as well.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) alliance, deadline, difficult choice, innocent, investigative, madness, race, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, twist, villain

Self-Sacrifice for an Ideal

425

A Body to Die For

A businessman has been making a killing producing supernaturally effective commercials. He has done so through his innate supernatural skills, a vampiric gift, a bargain with the old ones, or whatever method is appropriate to your setting.

Many teens become obsessed with the commercials. The PCs may be approached by teen allies, who are losing their friends to this newfound obsession, or by parents who are worried about their children.

The PCs are asked to investigate the death of a teenage girl who overdosed on sleeping pills. Her hastily written online journal both explains the futility of trying to live in a world without happiness and minutely examines the commercials. Investigation reveals a number of similarly obsessive journals by other local girls.

Examining the commercial through supernatural means will reveal the power it holds. Figuring out exactly what it does will require gaining access to the original commercial tapes. The PCs may disguise themselves as police or other officials, break into the facility housing the tapes, or find a way to steal the original tapes. Copies don't show the supernatural effects, which may muddy their investigation.

It may be difficult for the PCs to come up with a good explanation for getting the commercials off the air, but if they fail, more teens will become obsessed and suicidal. If the deaths continue for much longer, a local reporter will do an investigation and air an exposé of the journals and the dead teens (which can be used to recapture the attention of the PCs if they get distracted).

The commercial is very successful, and is scheduled to go national soon. The businessman sequesters himself in his home studio, where he custom-duplicates the tape. To duplicate the special effects of the tape requires secret rituals, which the PCs can interrupt.



Artist: Laine Garrett

His mansion is surrounded by a high masonry wall, and several security guards patrol his estate. They will retreat if confronted with significant force, but will also call both additional security guards and the police for reinforcements.

If attacked during the duplication process, the businessman will invoke his supernatural patron or use his personal mind-influencing powers against the PCs. Even more disturbing, several teenage devotees of his commercials have run away from home and will throw themselves at anyone who threatens the creator of their obsession.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Sci-fi, Supernatural

Tags: (SM) deadline, epic impact, innocent, investigative, isolated area, madness, magic, relationship hook, shady, stealth, villain

Home Is Where the Heart Is

426

A secluded town is populated by otherworldly beings that have undergone a change in order to hide amongst humankind. Many elements of this adventure will depend on whether they are benign or malicious. If benign, the beings may be hiding from others of their kind and simply enjoy being part of human society. If malicious, the beings may be trying to perfect their disguises and understanding of humans as they plan for a takeover. No matter their intentions, the town will protect its secret at all costs.

The PCs' vehicle may break down outside of the town and require repairs, or they may be sent there in search of a rare object. If you want to introduce suspicion about the town from the outset, have the town be the site of strange disappearances as the beings eliminate outside threats.

Much of the fun in this adventure is in the lead-up to the reveal. Encounters with the townspeople should provide a sense of subtle oddness and danger. Many peculiar things happen to the PCs while they're in town. The PCs notice buildings that should be present, like the town hall, are missing. Some of the townspeople act normal, but others are overanxious and unaware when they break social norms, causing tension with other residents. The beings go to extreme measures to cover up these inconsistencies, causing more suspicion. If the PCs don't notice anything wrong, ratchet up the odd behavior. A

One Hundred Years of Peace

427

A stranger approaches the PCs and offers them an exorbitant amount of money to accompany him to a mysterious island, escort him and his sister to the island's interior, and then depart without him. He has chartered a steamer, with the PCs as crew if they have the skills (or as passengers if not), for the two-week ocean voyage, and makes no demands of the PCs during the trip.

Around the halfway point, there's a violent storm—40-foot seas threaten to swamp the steamer, and several crew members are washed overboard. The PCs must work with the crew to keep the ship afloat during the storm. Once the storm abates, they may need to assist the sailors in order to make up for the missing crew members.

As they near the island, the man reveals that he's the keeper of a sacred tradition, and is going to the island to fulfill his destiny. Every 100 years, his family must make a sacrifice to the god of the island in order to ensure another century of peace. His sister breaks down in tears; she has tried many times before to dissuade him, and came along on the voyage so that she could continue trying to stop him.

The journey to the sacrifice site is perilous. The rocky island is home to venomous snakes, blood-drinking bats, and other uncommon—and nasty—creatures. En route, the PCs must

final clincher to break the secret may be necessary: Have the PCs catch a being out of disguise, at which point it raises an alarm.

Once the beings are sufficiently panicked, they will surround and hold the PCs, deciding that the only way to protect their secret is to kill them in a ritual sacrifice. The PCs should be held but afforded a chance to escape while the beings prepare. If the PCs escape, the beings will hunt for them, causing a tense survival situation and a chase through the woods. The beings will pursue the PCs and kill them on sight. Once the PCs reach a major road, the beings will stop pursuit.

Escape may be enough for the PCs, but if the beings are malicious they may want to destroy the town before they flee. The means for this should be present in town, such as explosive materials or a dam that holds back enough water to flood the whole area.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (JA) difficult choice, investigative, isolated area, monster, race, sandbox, social, travel

cross a rope bridge that gives out when someone is partway across, fend off a swarm of vampire bats that attacks after the man cuts himself accidentally, and negotiate a fast-moving stream that's teeming with poisonous water snakes. The closer they get to the site, the more nervous the man becomes.

At the site, the man asks for the PCs' help in keeping his sister safe—and also in keeping her from stopping him until the ritual has begun. After he initiates the ritual, the earth begins to rumble and the man gets cold feet and flees. The elder god—a hideous nightmare creature of tentacles, mouths, and flailing limbs—rises from its pit and tries to claim the man's sister in his stead—any family member will do.

The sister and the PCs have a tough choice to make: Without a sacrifice to make, the elder god will slither off the island and bring ruin wherever it goes, but can the sister muster the courage to be that sacrifice or will the PCs have to force her to do it?



Easily adapted to: Comedy, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Swashbuckling, Victim Horror

Tags: (MR) difficult choice, escort mission, exploration, twist, monster, innocent, roleplaying-heavy, isolated area

On the Night Train Too

428

Centuries ago, a king bound a demon into a silver urn. The binding granted the urn's holder the power to siphon vitality from those around him and thereby extend his own life. In time, he came to fear the urn, and he denied it further sacrifices; in retaliation, the demon slew him. The king was entombed with the urn, where he lay until archaeologists unearthed his tomb a few years ago.

When the urn was examined after its excavation, the demon escaped. One of the archaeologists figured out the true nature of the urn, and the demon set its sights on him. He fled by night train, taking the urn with him, and the demon trapped him there. As fate would have it, the train company's logo contains a Masonic element that blocks the demon—it cannot enter any of the cars, so it rides invisibly on the roof. Resolved to prevent the demon from re-entering the urn, the archaeologist has ridden the train ever since, kept alive without sustenance by the residual magic within the urn, and he is now quite mad.

The train is part of the public transportation system, and is ridden by the PCs. By sprinkling minor encounters with the archaeologist—a deranged, shabby-looking man in a worn suit, carrying a battered, bulging leather satchel—into other scenarios, you can slowly reveal the dark stalemate that is

behind his plight. The demon's influence can be felt throughout the train, and reveals itself in flared tempers and vermin spotted out of the corner of one's eyes—and occasionally more directly, as it manifests in a desperate attempt to enter a train car. Something is clearly not right with the old man, either: He's sometimes observed scratching the train company's logo into the window panes, and he's always glancing up at the roof of the train, from which strange noises can occasionally be heard.

If the characters help the archaeologist, he can tell them how to research the demon's origins, and the means of banishing it. If he could leave the train, he would have done the research himself, and that knowledge has only furthered his madness. Should the characters not intervene, the man will eventually succumb to complete insanity and get off the train, at which point he'll be devoured by the demon. Reunited with its urn, the demon will wait patiently for someone else to claim its unholy vessel, and the cycle of sacrifices will begin anew.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (MN) alliance, city, deadline, innocent, investigative, isolated area, madness, siege, social, spirit, villain

What Would Darwin Do?

429

The PCs are employees of or visitors to a biological research facility. Alarms ring and the doors lock, trapping them and a number of researchers inside a horticultural research laboratory. A voice speaks over the intercom, "This is Agent Darwin of the Population Reduction Front. I have released the so-called Zombie Flu into the ventilation system and also vented it to the outside air. Humanity will be reduced to a fraction of its swollen numbers. You may not thank me now, but you should—assuming you survive. Your grandchildren most certainly will."

This laboratory has its own air purifier and generator, and plenty of respirators to go around. Security guards each carry a pistol with two magazines, and gardening tools are available, including hoes, machetes, and hatchets.

The researchers explain that the Zombie Flu is a biological weapon that was being developed at the facility. It turns people into mindless cannibals and is transmitted via respiration or introduction into a wound. It takes only 10 minutes to infect the victim, and the partially-developed antidote must be given within an hour in order to reverse it.

One researcher on a computer finds an experimental vaccine in another lab, and cultures for an antidote in a third lab. As she's pulling up a facility map, the computer network crashes.

The researchers are confident that they can complete the

work on the antidote, but they need the cultures and the network brought back online. One researcher notes that the network is controlled the security system. The keycard system and closed-circuit television cameras won't work, and doors must be opened by key or by crowbar.

The members of the Population Reduction Front hold the security station and server room, and have already vaccinated themselves, although the vaccine isn't 100% effective. They've raided the weapons locker but expect to defend themselves from zombies, not from intelligent attackers. They're motivated, but are poorly trained and aren't prepared for resistance.

The cultures are in an area infested with zombies. They're held in portable refrigerators that must be rolled back to the horticulture lab.

For a more hopeful plot, the ventilation system hasn't been opened to the outside world yet, and the PCs may be able to clear the facility before this happens.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Victim Horror

Tags: (KS) alliance, deadline, epic impact, innocent, monster, siege, social, tactical planning

A Prison with Pigtails

430

The PCs are investigating several sites of supernatural activity that all seem to be linked to one another. Strange markings are found on the floor and walls at each site, and research reveals that they're symbols used by an obscure cult. The symbols make reference to the return of the cult's dark god and the destruction that will follow.

During their investigation, the PCs spot two people standing a short distance away from the scene: a man and a little girl. If the PCs observe them secretly, they'll see the pair approach one of the supernatural sites after everyone else has left and perform their own investigation. When confronted, the man will confess that he is an occultist and has been tracking this cult for many years; the girl is his daughter.

Partway through this discussion, a supernatural creature attacks the group. It targets the girl, but the man puts himself between her and the creature and suffers a mortal wound. When the creature is killed or driven off, the man tells the PCs that the girl is the key to stopping the return of the dark god. His notebook can lead them to the cult, and will also tell them what to do in order to stop the god's return. He expires on the spot.

The PCs will need to decipher the clues in the man's notebook in order to determine the cult's location, as well as the time when they need to perform the ritual to keep the god from

returning to the world. They must also talk to the girl in order to find out why she's so important. She has dreams about the dark god, and knows that she must stop it from returning, but she has no idea how to do so. While the PCs are working on these clues, the girl is attacked by another supernatural creature; the PCs must fight it off.

When they reach the ritual site, the PCs must battle the cultists to interrupt their ritual and hope that the girl will figure out what she needs to do to complete the banishment. In actuality, the girl is a living prison intended to trap the dark god. She becomes aware of this fact while the PCs are attacking the cultists, and in the middle of the fight she will approach the partially-summoned god. It reaches out to devour her, only to be sucked into her soul—trapped, and unable to fully manifest in the world.

The girl turns to the PCs and tells them to take her to a mental asylum, where she can be kept safe while the god's madness consumes her. Those are the last sane words she ever speaks.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Victim Horror

Tags: (PV) combat-heavy, investigative, madness, magic, monster, religion

Self-Sacrifice for Kindred

Powerless

431

One of the PCs' loved ones (the closer the better—a child is perfect) has been cursed by one of their enemies. They notice that the loved one is avoiding them, but he won't say why; he's coming to grips with the curse and doesn't want to endanger them. Shortly thereafter, a supernatural murder takes place and the PCs are brought in to investigate. At the scene, they find evidence that the loved one was present.

The PCs must track down the loved one; when they find him, he's about to make an attack on another innocent person—or worse, he's already done so. He confesses to the PCs that he has been cursed, and his mind isn't his own: He must lash out at those around him, killing them, and this is why he's been avoiding the PCs. He also tells the PCs who cursed him.

When the PCs confront their enemy, the enemy offers them a chance to lift the curse on their loved one by giving up a measure of their power. The enemy is too powerful to face head-on (an elder vampire, for example), and no one else can remove the curse. Will the PCs sacrifice their powers and

abilities to save the loved one, or will they be able to come up with a different means of saving him?

This is an unusual plot: It pits your players' roleplaying interests (saving the loved one, and exploring what they're willing to sacrifice to do so) against their mechanical interests (retaining the powers that make their PCs fun to play). It will work best if you hint that they may be able to get their powers back, should they choose to give them up to save the loved one. You can then run a session or two where the PCs—now powerless—experience the game world from a different perspective before regaining their abilities (an adventure unto itself). This can also be an opportunity for your players to redesign their PCs, choosing new abilities instead of simply recovering their old ones.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers

Tags: (PV) difficult choice, innocent, madness, relationship hook, villain

The Families We Are Born To

432

A brother and sister are studied and experimented upon because of their psychic powers. Together they balance each other out, but when they're apart their powers are volatile. The girl escapes, but loses control in a crowded location. People cry out as they become increasingly depressed, anxious, and scared, subject to girl's projected emotions. The PCs should witness or be affected by this. The situation is temporarily resolved when the girl injects herself with something and goes unconscious in front of the PCs.

When the girl awakens, she sobbingly tells her story to the PCs. She talks about the experiments on her and her brother, the drugs throwing her off balance, and how her brother is still in captivity. The PCs get a full dose of negative emotions from her. She begs them to help and says that her problems only get worse without her brother. Before she's done telling her tale, armed men approach and attempt to capture her. The group is small and can be overcome or escaped from fairly easily.

If the PCs agree to help her, she leads them to the facility. They quickly lose sight of her, however, as she dashes off—compelled to follow some strange signal. Her abilities allow her to home in on her brother and easily reach him through the maze of hallways and security guards. The brother's powers have been boosted by drugs and react strangely to the reintroduction of his sister's powers, creating incredible physical and

emotional pain in everyone nearby. If the PCs are captured by the guards, the party will be subjected to an onslaught of pain as the siblings unwittingly wreak havoc on everyone in the area. If the PCs overcome the guards, they'll be able to follow the trail of mentally assaulted guards to the siblings.

The girl finds the drug used on her brother and injects herself, thinking it will bring her back in balance. This spreads psychic chaos for blocks around. The boy and girl are no longer innocents in need of help—now they're the epicenter of a huge psychic event that tears people's minds apart.

The PCs are faced with hard decisions in this final conflict. Resolution for this scenario should provide some sense of loss and reflect the fact that not all endings are happy. It may be necessary to kill the children for the greater good. A PC might find a drug to suppress the children until medical help can be obtained, but the children are forever changed without their psychic powers.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) city, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, escort mission, innocent, madness, magic, shady, social, twist

Wedding Colors

433

With great excitement, a friend of the PCs invites them to her wedding. She and her fiancée just set the date, and they hope that the PCs are as excited as they are. Close friends may get roped into being bridesmaids or groomsmen, helping to choose colors, planning bachelorette parties, etc. Meeting her future groom is a bit strained; take the opportunity to ask the PCs questions like, "So, what do you do?" and have them try to explain their peculiar lifestyle. The groom is an engineer for an electrical design firm, and will talk animatedly about his job if the PCs ask.

The friend is getting married at her aunt's country house, which is rambling and picturesque. The entire wedding party needs to arrive early to get it ready for the big day. The groom arrives three days before the wedding. At 1:33 a.m. he awakens everyone in the house with an ear-splitting scream. He describes a ghostly woman who approached him while he was on the toilet. She stepped out of a mirror, and her outline is still visible as condensation on the glass. When she hears the story, the bride's mother recognizes the woman the groom describes as her older sister, who died 50 years ago.

The next morning, a shaving mirror shatters violently while a PC is using it, followed by a low moan and a glimpse of motion in the corner of the bathroom mirror. Moments later

the groom knocks on the door and asks if everything is alright. Similar incidents afflict the other PCs. For the rest of the day, everyone is on edge, but the bride is insistent about not relocating the ceremony; play up the jittery wedding preparations.

After the rehearsal dinner, creaking can be heard from the attic. PCs who investigate find that the roof trusses have been weakened; if they're not shored up, the roof could collapse during the wedding ceremony, killing everyone present. It's clear that the ghost is involved. Further investigation reveals that the ghost's husband was killed in an electrical fire—one caused by the negligence of the groom's firm 50 years ago. She wants the groom dead as revenge, and will escalate her efforts as the wedding approaches.

Can the PCs protect the groom and avoid panicking the wedding guests while dealing with a vengeful—and increasingly violent—ghost?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Romance, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) deadline, innocent, isolated area, magic, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, social, spirit

A Mother's Love

434

Without warning, one of the PCs' friends commits suicide. The week before her death, she repeatedly mentioned that everything would soon be okay for her children. Her estate isn't modest, but nor is it large enough to indefinitely provide for her children.

All three of her children confide in the PCs about a nightmare in which their mother is imprisoned in the cellar underneath an old farmhouse. The children haven't spoken to each other about it, but the details of the dream are identical.

When she was very young, the woman's parents were in a cult that met in an old farmhouse. The family left the cult long ago, but not before her parents foolishly agreed to bind all of their descendants to a dark power in return for a successful life. She figured the pact was just superstition, but after her parents died she started having nightmares. In her dreams, her parents reminded her of the ritual, and told her that the dark power they worshipped would take her soul. They expressed regret, but said it was too late to undo the ritual.

Attempting to break the cycle and save her children, she committed suicide. Her soul is now trapped under the farmhouse. The farmhouse isn't difficult to locate, but it's inhabited by a

dozen squatters, including children. They're very suspicious of strangers and have all been unknowingly drawn there by the dark power. When the PCs enter the house, the dark power will possess the squatters and turn them against the PCs.

The shallow root cellar is filled with canning jars, tools, and a low door to a storm cellar. Any non-squatter entering is attacked by flying jars and tools. The storm cellar is deep and dark, and holds a small altar to the dark power. A contract and a dark red jewel sit upon the altar. The contract is the pact, and the woman's soul flickers inside the gem.

The contract offers two options. The soul can be freed to find its proper end, but the family will then be cursed forever. Or, the soul can be sacrificed, which will damn it to the service of the dark power but will free the family of the curse.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) alliance, difficult choice, innocent, investigative, magic, mature themes, relationship hook, religion, social, spirit, twist

A Perfect Childhood

435

Wanting only the best for their children, a wealthy high society couple struck a deal with a demon: For every person they kill in a ritualistic fashion, their children will enjoy success in their current endeavor. Need to get them into prep school? Kill a stray dog. Want them to score well on college admission tests? Murder a wino.

With their children now in their teens, the couple has been doing this for over a decade—they're serial killers, though they don't see themselves that way. The wife is more conflicted than the husband, but both of them have willingly sacrificed their humanity for their children's future, and their children are almost entirely in the dark about it. The youngest child is suspicious, but she has left the matter alone.

Recently, a detective connected the dots and concluded that the murders were serial killings. Because of the ritualistic nature of the slayings, he contacted the PCs for assistance. The higher-ups aren't buying the detective's suspicions, and have tasked him to work on fresher cases; he can give the PCs some help, but not a lot.

As they investigate the crimes, the PCs spot a pattern with an apparent gap—a gap that could be caused by a crime scene that has yet to be found. This is the case, and they're the first to the scene. There they find a broken bracelet that turns out to be a well-known piece of jewelry. The bracelet has been

featured in several magazines for the rarity of its gemstones, and information on its owner accompanies each story; this leads the PCs to the couple. The family doesn't seem to be harboring any serial killers, but the youngest daughter, who has had her suspicions confirmed, contacts the PCs after they leave. As they talk to her, the rest of the pattern emerges: The successes in her life, and the lives of her siblings, map neatly to the timing of the murders.

She tells them that her parents have been planning a family vacation to a site that fits the ritual map, and her oldest brother has just applied to Harvard—they are going to kill again. Then she disappears, along with her family. Her parents have taken her to the ritual site, a lake house.

The finale is a showdown between the PCs and the entire family, as the other children take more after their father and relish their success too much to give it up. They're holding the daughter hostage, and there could be fallout around killing an entire socialite family if the PCs handle things badly.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (MR) innocent, investigative, magic, mature themes

All Sacrificed for a Passion

Downward Spiral

436

Weeks after a university professor lead an expedition to a ruined Aztec temple, villagers began to disappear and strange, fiery lights were seen in the area. A long-dormant race of subterranean creatures is responding to the reactivation of an old harvesting mechanism used to collect human blood. They left when smallpox was introduced into the population, but are being drawn back by the addictive substance flowing down the pipes once again.

The mechanism was activated by the professor's expedition when, upon exploring the ruins, they found many strange drawings of fire-bodied humanoid beings adorning the lower levels. The drawings suggested that the beings accepted blood sacrifice and, out of morbid curiosity, the professor pricked his finger and let a drop fall onto a table covered with complex carvings. Pipes connected to the table spiraled beyond the lowest floor. This called to the beings, and they began to whisper in the professor's mind, promising great power if he delivered more blood.

Most of the professor's assistants left him when his theories become increasingly crazy and dangerous. He contacts the PCs and offers a bounty in Aztec gold if they will help him find a particular artifact. His ultimate goal in contacting the PCs is to recruit them to his cause—harvesting blood for the fire creatures—by allowing the creatures to infect their thoughts.

The professor's first plan is to trick the PCs into offering some of their own blood at the ritual table, in hopes that the creatures will infect their minds and turn them to the cause. He leads them to the drawings and pretends to be discovering them for the first time. He purposefully misinterprets the symbols as he reads them to the PCs, saying that a small blood

offering is required to open a secret passage. He suggests that each person gives it a try. The professor goes first, though his offering has little noticeable effect. If any of the PCs comply, the creatures will invade their thoughts and they will descend into a madness similar to the professor's.

The PCs should then spend some time exploring the ruins and finding clues, such as sacrificial remains and various

drawings, which point toward the truth. They encounter rats and wild dogs that are being controlled by the creatures. These animals seem rabid and will attack the PCs on sight. After some time searching for the artifact (a complete red herring), the professor makes his second try at offering the PCs' blood. He lures each PC down to the table individually and attacks them.

The PCs must defeat the creatures by offering them blood tainted by an infectious disease. If they fail, the creatures surround the village and take all present into the ruins, sending more blood to their brethren.

They seek to claim the billions of "cattle" that now populate the surface of the planet. As more and more creatures pour forth, their reach spreads. Many new holes begin to open in other parts of the world, with ruins found just inside the holes. Soon it becomes an apocalyptic event.



Artist: Laine Garrett



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (JA) betrayal, combat-heavy, deadline, dungeon crawl, epic impact, escort mission, investigative, isolated area, madness, villain

Feast of Technology

437

Vehicles along a main highway into the PCs' city have been suffering mysterious mechanical failures, simply going dead on the roadway. The source of the problem is a band of gremlins that have moved into the area; their lair is an electrical vault beneath a section of the highway. When a gremlin hitches a ride to a nearby hospital, things begin to get ugly. Suspecting that there's more to failures of devices throughout the hospital than simple coincidence, one of the PCs' contacts brings them in to investigate the situation.

The gremlins can only be seen by those with an affinity for the supernatural; the havoc that they wreak also leaves a faint aura that suggests paranormal activity. When the PCs arrive, the gremlin causing problems at the hospital is gone—it has returned to its lair to tell the rest of the band about the shiny, beeping devices it has found. While the PCs poke around the hospital, the gremlins arrive in force.

First the hospital's main lights flicker, then heart monitors throughout the building begin to wail. The hospital erupts into chaos, with staff rushing to and fro trying to solve problems that are cropping up too fast for them to handle. The PCs must assist the staff in dealing with the most critical problems, and during this scene they'll spot the gremlins. Once the

gremlins have been sated, they'll return to their lair. They'll use their powers to divert the PCs, making a clean getaway.

Once the PCs have researched the nature of the threat, they will know that the gremlins will return to the hospital before too long. When they do, the PCs can try a range of tactics against them. Destroying a gremlin causes it to vanish, but it's clear that the creature isn't dead. In fact, "killing" them simply causes them to re-form a few hours in their lair. Once the gremlins know the PCs are opposing them, they'll shift their focus to driving the PCs out of the hospital. They're a lot like energetic, yappy dogs, and can be outwitted and out-planned.

To keep them from coming back, the PCs must lure them away from the hospital, using technology that the gremlins can mangle as bait, and then either destroy them in their lair (a permanent end) or isolate them in a technology-free area, which will send them into hibernation.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural

Tags: (SM) city, deadline, difficult choice, innocent, investigative, magic, relationship hook, spirit

Gallery of Blood

438

One of the PCs comes across an unusual painting: The work is disturbing, depicting an alternate world in hues of red, and she can feel strong negative psychic energy emanating from the canvas. The PCs look into the painting's history and track it back to a nearby art gallery. The gallery owner has several other pieces by the same artist, and all of them have a similar psychic imprint.

Research will reveal that the artist has been around for some time, but that most of his work is considered average at best. Only recently has his work become exceptional and begun to command higher prices. The PCs will also learn that he has a studio in the city.

Visiting the artist, they see that he's not well. He has neglected his hygiene entirely, and speaks in a rambling, disorganized manner; his studio is a disaster. The entire place gives off an overpowering negative psychic aura—an aura of evil.

In his studio the PCs find a set of brushes made of polished human bone and hair that emanate the same evil energy. The artist says that the brushes were a gift from the gallery owner, who acquired them from an insane artist who is now in an asylum.

Looking into the other artist's background, the PCs learn that she, too, was an average painter who suddenly began turning out extraordinary work (highly erotic paintings that are now

an underground art sensation). Several years ago, at the height of her success, she killed her female lover in a fight and was declared insane; her profits pay the fees at the expensive asylum where she now lives. If the PCs interview her, she reveals that she also received a box of bone brushes from the gallery owner.

The PCs track the gallery owner to her country house. There is a twisted, haunted aura around the house's grounds. Inside, the PCs find the gallery owner torturing a person as part of a dark ritual. She is charged with evil psychic energy and possesses a number of supernatural powers, making her a formidable and disturbing foe.

If they defeat the gallery owner, the PCs will discover that the ritual that they interrupted was used to enhance paints, giving them the power to turn ordinary painters into twisted but gifted artists. She has tortured and killed hundreds of people over the years, and her rituals have fueled the rise of more than 20 different artists around the world. Her house contains a fortune in disturbing artwork.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Supernatural, Victim Horror

Tags: (PV) investigative, madness, magic, mature themes, villain

Vanished into Shadow

439

A few days ago, the entire population of a small town simply vanished. There were no signs of foul play, and the police are completely at a loss. They found meals still cooking on stovetops, running cars with no one in them, and roaming dogs still attached to their leashes—as if everyone simultaneously decided to just walk away from their lives.

Two years ago, a woman in town fell in love with a married man who wanted nothing to do with her, and she has pursued him ever since. Spurned repeatedly, she has become the town drunk, and is treated like a pariah by the townsfolk. When she hit bottom, a demon came to her and offered to make them all go away: Every person who had ever laughed at her, wronged her, or shamed her would vanish. She said yes, and the demon shifted the entire population of the town into the shadow world. They're all still alive, but stuck in a shadowy, alternate version of the town and unable to return without help.

When the PCs investigate, they'll find that the dogs on the streets are friendly, but they won't approach one particular house on the edge of town (the woman's home). In quiet moments, whispering can be heard. Patient listening will lead the PCs to the source: the leaves in the trees around another house (the man's). They whisper, "Love her, you have to love her" over and over, and quite forcefully.

Alive and Killing

440

The PCs are homicide detectives and members of law enforcement, and they get assigned to an unusual case. The victim is a 20-something woman, killed during her regular early morning run. Her throat was slit, strange symbols were carved into her flesh, and her eyes, ears, tongue, lungs and heart were removed. Among other details, she is blood type O negative. Little else can be discerned.

Investigation identifies the symbols as being occult markings of secrecy and preservation. More research shows that ancient local belief holds that taking of the eyes, ears, and tongue protects a murderer against discovery.

Another victim shows up a day later, this one an organic chef in his twenties, murdered late at night as he walked home from work. He shows the same mutilations as the woman, but his digestive tract was removed, including his liver and pancreas. He is also blood type O negative.

Investigation reveals that he bought a newspaper from a convenience store, and his body was found five minutes later. The only other person in the video from the store surveillance camera was a woman in an expensive car, who stares at the victim as he walks past, then gets out and walks after him. Her image is hazy, but the car is easily identified.

The woman is not in the shadow world; she fled after the ritual, and is hiding in the woods nearby. When the PCs are on the right track, she will ask for their help. They can enter the shadow realm through a mirror in the woman's house; once there, they must contend with the demon, which wants to see the townsfolk remain in its thrall, and the townsfolk, who are divided between wanting to kill the woman for bringing about their plight, and wanting to unite her with the object of her affection in the hope that she'll release them.

The woman herself wants the object of her affection returned to the mortal world, but no one else. If suitably convinced, she can help the PCs reverse the ritual, forcing the demon to manifest so that it can be killed or driven off. If they refuse to help her, she will kill herself—trapping the townsfolk forever.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Supers, Victim Horror

Tags: (MR) deadline, epic challenge, innocent, investigative, isolated area, magic, roleplaying-heavy, social, spirit

The truth is that with the assistance of stolen experimental equipment, a genius-level medical researcher has managed to bring his dead wife back to life—after a fashion. The wife's body is as healthy and strong as ever, but a murderous spirit has possessed it and is building itself a better body. The spirit's plan is to collect near-perfect organs and new body parts, and then use the stolen experimental medical equipment to create its new shell. The stolen organs are preserved in his lab.

The researcher was fired from his facility over suspected theft of the equipment, and has retired here to keep the questions about his suddenly-alive-again wife to a minimum. The spirit has access to her personality and memories and is enjoying toying with him, but it will enjoy killing him as well. She will go after the PCs if they question her or her husband about the murders.

Her next planned victim is a young math genius and chess prodigy; after that, she'll choose one of the PCs for his or her physical fitness.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Romance, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) city, deadline, investigative, magic, social, spirit, villain

Necessity of Sacrificing Loved Ones

What is He Building in There?

441

Strange clanking noises are heard coming from a dilapidated house. The owner is dead, but his deformed children are still inside, surviving on scraps and continuing to build the strange contraptions and traps that their father's addled mind conceived to keep his children safe from each other and the world. The PCs have come into possession of the house and are there to look it over before the sale is completed.

Exploring the house, the PCs find no residents but encounter an almost unending number of strange and dangerous contraptions built into the house. Not far into the house, a trap is set off, closing off the only way out. As the PCs search for a way to escape, they hear movement—too loud to be rats—behind the walls, moving to the lower levels. The PCs should be unable to get directly to the lower levels, instead having to take a roundabout way through the sprawling house.

In the basement are two open cages, one small and one large, containing ripped and torn children's books. Inside the smaller cage is a scarred, mutated child drawing crayon pictures of a larger person beating him. He seems frightened, but curious. He stops a deadly trap from hitting the PCs and warms up to them if they appear friendly. He disappears into

the walls when an odd bellowing is heard from elsewhere in the house.

This is the larger child, angered and seeking to get rid of the intruders. From this point on, the entire house is dangerous to the PCs. They should be cautious of every move, unsure of where the next threat will come from or how to escape, and they have to use passages between the walls to get anywhere safely. They might glimpse the larger child resetting traps, only to see him run away, glaring and angry.

The smaller child tries to help the PCs by disabling traps and attempting to stop his brother. Ultimately, the PCs are lured towards an exit only to be cut off by an impassable trap and the gloating larger child. The smaller child will jump out from a wall and push the larger child into the trap, killing both and gumming up the works, allowing the PCs to escape.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural

Tags: (JA) alliance, dungeon crawl, exploration, innocent, tactical planning, villain

Battle Not with Monsters, Lest Ye Become One

442

One of the PCs is contacted by a friend of the group's mentor or patron, the person responsible for getting them involved with the supernatural in the first place. The friend is concerned about the mentor, who has been acting strangely the past few weeks and has now gone missing.

Searching the mentor's home, the PCs find notes on their group's current focus, whether that's a monster, a particular cult, or unexplained murders, as well as evidence that their mentor now maintains a second residence. Searching that residence reveals that the mentor isn't investigating the same focus as the PCs: Trophies, scrawled notes, and writing on the walls make it clear that the mentor has actually become a killer—the subject of the PCs' other investigation. The mentor himself is nowhere to be found.

Not long after that, a killing occurs in the city that matches the modus operandi of the threat the PCs are looking into. Evidence at the crime scene confirms that the mentor was involved, and gives the PCs a clue to the threat's next target. The PCs race to that location, only to find their mentor about to commit a brutal murder.

To save the mentor's target, the PCs have no choice but to fight their mentor—and kill him. With a few minutes left to live, he's able to have a brief but lucid conversation with the PCs. He asks for their forgiveness and reveals the location of some notes that are critical to their current investigation. After his funeral, they retrieve the notes; in them, the mentor tells the tale of how he became corrupted by his work, and eventually fell in with the forces of evil.

This is a rather straightforward plot, but deliberately so: Its goal is to demonstrate the costs of the war against evil, and to warn the PCs about the consequences of the lifestyle that they have chosen. This plot is best run mid-campaign, using an established NPC as the mentor. The closer the PCs are to their mentor, the more meaningful and difficult the real struggle in this adventure—killing their mentor—will be.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (PV) investigative, relationship hook, villain

The Dying Tree

443

On a windswept hilltop outside a small town sits a tree with a twisted, gnarled trunk. Despite its sinister appearance, those who stand beneath it feel a sense of warmth and happiness. It has been there for decades, though it appears larger in old photos. In truth, the tree is an evil entity: It demands human sacrifices, and when they're not forthcoming, it spreads ill fortune in the nearby town. For years, the town warded off this evil by quietly sacrificing drifters to the tree, but in modern times, this is more complicated than once was—and most of the old families have died off or moved away, leaving few who know of the tradition.

The local priest is committed to feeding the tree and preventing evil from consuming the town. He doesn't know that the tree is also the source of the evil; it has always been regarded as a talisman, warding off the darkness, albeit at a terrible price. The priest believes that God has instructed him to continue the tradition of sacrificing people to the tree—and that there is no greater sacrifice than one's own flesh and blood. He has sacrificed his daughter (who "went missing") and his wife (who "slipped in the shower"); his young son knows something is wrong, but doesn't know what to do, so he gets the PCs involved.

A Dish Best Served Cold

444

Due to their acquisition of an artifact in another adventure, the PCs have become "ghost magnets." Three ghosts are drawn to the PCs, and want their help in seeking revenge. The ghosts cannot interact with objects, but they can make the PCs' lives miserable if not assisted. The wrongs that they have suffered—slavery, murder, and rape—are horrific, and the ghosts aren't interested in forgiveness: They want blood.


The first ghost is a slave girl who died in the 19th century. She is initially timid about approaching the PCs, attempting to communicate through tapping, moving furniture, and other innocuous methods. The PCs may think that they're being haunted, or are under attack. In time, a clearer channel of communication is opened, and the ghost guides the PCs to some old records at the local historical center—records which show that the descendants of her original master own a gas station in town. She asks them to burn it down.

If they refuse, they must contend with an ancient, angry, and potent ghost—a full-fledged encounter in and of itself. If they accept, they must accept the moral and legal consequences of their actions. Whatever the resolution, two other ghosts have sensed the PCs' willingness to listen to their kind, and they will also contact the PCs for assistance.

The second ghost is a boy of seven who was abducted and killed about a decade ago. He guides the PCs to a discarded


baseball cap in an abandoned warehouse; the cap will lead them to the boy's killer, a sanitation engineer. The boy will be satisfied by justice (turning the man in to the police) or by the man's death, and again the PCs must decide how to handle this delicate situation.

The third ghost is a 20-year-old college sophomore who was raped and killed a few years ago; as with the boy, her murderer was never caught. She appears near the artifact that the PCs found, as if drawn to it. Until this time, the source of the PCs' supernatural magnetism shouldn't be obvious. The ghost asks the PCs to kill her murderer, and attacks them if they refuse. If they accept, again there are serious moral hazards involved.

 **Easily adapted to:** Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) betrayal, deadline, innocent, investigative, isolated area, magic, religion, social, spirit, stealth, villain

Now that they know the source of the hauntings, the PCs can discard, consecrate, or destroy the artifact that is drawing ghosts to them (as appropriate for your campaign). If they see benefits to possessing it, they can also keep it. If they do keep it, many more ghosts will enter their lives in the future.

 **Easily adapted to:** Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) difficult choice, innocent, investigative, mature themes, shady, social, spirit

The PCs are orphans, recently transferred to a big city orphanage. As the full moon approaches, whimpering or faint crying sounds are heard. Doors slam closed. Rooms get suddenly cold. Kids cry out in their sleep. Even the staff is irritable.

After the full moon, all of that stops. A child known to be a bully and troublemaker is missing. As the next full moon approaches, the unusual phenomena begin again.

The terrible truth is that every month, the senior staff of the orphanage sacrifices a child by locking him in the lowest basement to be consumed by a spirit of vengeance, leaving only ashes behind. Nearly a decade ago, a child was badly beaten by older children in the orphanage. To avoid an investigation, the staff left him to die in the basement and buried him there. His spirit haunts the orphanage. If the staff doesn't sacrifice an older child every month, or if they try to leave, the child's spirit comes after them. Three staff members have died already, others drink heavily, and several are past retirement age but too afraid to leave.

Sneaking around the orphanage, the PCs can turn up the following clues. The noises and cold spots are most prevalent near the basement. The elderly night watchman drinks himself to

sleep every morning. The orphanage's files recording transfers and adoptions don't include the sacrificed children. The lowest basement is soundproofed and has a deadbolt on the outside. Inside, it has a dirt floor but is otherwise completely empty. A list of the worst-behaved children is found; it's titled "Candidates" and the latest victim's name is circled. If the PCs aren't discreet their names may turn up on the list.

The senior staff members are all very old, some in their 80s. They aren't as bright or as quick as they once were. Some of the junior staff know that something is up, but don't know the entire situation. They may be convinced to help the PCs. If the PCs try to contact the spirit, it will wail about abandonment and vengeance, and violently hurl things around.

Possible resolutions include locking the senior staff in the basement on the night of the full moon or digging up the child's body and giving it a proper burial.



Easily adapted to: Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (KS) difficult choice, innocent, intrigue, investigative, magic, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, siege, social, spirit, stealth

Rivalry of Superior and Inferior

Rival Cults

446

Two rival cults are competing to outdo one another in their devotion to the same hideous, eldritch monstrosity—with the PCs' home city as their battleground. Who can strike terror into the most citizens? Who can sacrifice more innocents in their deity's name? Who will be the first to awaken their god?

The PCs become aware of this contest (though not, at first, as a competition) when they witness cultists attacking an innocent bystander. After stopping the attack, they dig up lore on the cult and learn that the cult has a long history in their city, and was once part of a prominent and still-extant secret society.

Looking into the secret society, it seems innocent enough—more of a social club for wealthy gentlemen than an actual secret society. Yet when they visit the club's main office, something seems subtly amiss. Another cult encounter, this time a group of cult sorcerers using magic on a crowd, cements it: Once the PCs fight off the cultists, they find that this group is using another version of the secret society's symbol.

As the picture of the rivalry becomes clearer, cult attacks escalate. Against the backdrop of a city descending into chaos, the PCs uncover a bit of lore suggesting that a major cult event is imminent. People are increasingly afraid to leave their houses, especially at night.

The penultimate encounter involves the PCs stopping a mass sacrifice outside the city, and solving numerous unsolved kidnapping cases in the process, while fending off cultists using pistols and fists against their magic and long knives.

The finale is the attempted summoning of their god by the other cult, which began at roughly the same time as the sacrifice. Learning of its location from the defeated cultists, the PCs must race across town in time to stop the summoning.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) city, combat-heavy, deadline, innocent, magic, race, religion, rivalry

Evil Choices

447

The PCs are contacted by an archaeologist who has found an unusual artifact from the Middle Ages. Covered in strange markings, the artifact also resonates with magical energy. Since the archaeologist brought it back to her lab, strange things have started happening: Several car accidents have occurred nearby, as well as two violent assaults, and she has found dead animals in disused corners of the lab.

Investigating the artifact itself, the PCs discover that it bears the name of an ancient and malevolent creature or entity. Shortly after making this discovery, they're attacked by a group of magically enhanced minions of the creature, suggesting that it's still active in the world and that the artifact is important to it somehow.

After the attack, the PCs are approached by a woman who offers to pay them a large sum of money for the artifact. She knows far too much about the object, which likely spooks the PCs, and if they refuse her offer she attacks them. They quickly discover that she is much more powerful than they are, and are forced to flee.

Having bought themselves some breathing room, the PCs can further research the artifact. They find out that it was constructed specifically to destroy the ancient creature whose

minions attacked them earlier. Drawn by the artifact, cult followers of the ancient creature attack them in their new hideout, forcing them to go on the run again.

They're then visited a second time by the woman, who reveals that she is a vessel for a younger rival of the ancient creature. This time, she offers to help them use the artifact to destroy the ancient creature. The PCs' research has given them enough background information to know what's at stake here: Ridding the world of the ancient creature would be a very good thing indeed, but it would also open up a power vacuum which would be filled by the younger creature. The younger creature would be much less of a threat to the world than the older one, but while she isn't necessarily evil, she has committed her share of atrocities. If they do nothing, one or both of the creatures will destroy them eventually.

What will the PCs do? Making this tough decision—and dealing with the consequences—is the heart of the adventure.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural

Tags: (PV) difficult choice, magic, monster, sandbox, spirit, villain

Weapons Grade

448

The PCs are in a military town when they hear gunfire from a nearby car dealership. A soldier emerges from the dealership office and opens fire on the cars with a machine gun, his face contorted in rage. Either the PCs take him down or his shooting ignites a car's gas tank, knocking him unconscious.

After a few minutes, police and MPs arrive. The serial number is filed off the machine gun, but it's obviously military issue. The soldier wakes up before being taken away, and is very confused and even apologetic. The dealership had just repossessed his car, and he was furious, but he hadn't planned to retaliate.

That night, an argument breaks out near the PCs. The fight quickly escalates into a savage beating, and the cops and MPs brutally put it down. The PCs may even go berserk in the fight, as if possessed. One of the MPs explodes at the PCs, then apologizes later on, saying that everyone's on edge these days.

The source of the chaos is a new sergeant whose request to be an armorer was denied. He summoned a spirit of violence to do away with the lieutenant who denied his request. The spirit possessed the old armorer and murdered the lieutenant by blowing him up with a hand grenade. The possessed soldier has no idea what happened, but is in jail on murder charges.

The sergeant became the new armorer and is selling weapons out of the arms room.

The spirit of violence is now free, seeking anger or aggression upon which it can feed. Its presence will amplify these feelings in anyone who is near, which often leads to increased violence and death. The spirit can also possess an individual, although not easily. It's not terribly intelligent, and it has no goal other than to feed.

Basic investigation reveals that the violence escalated after the lieutenant's death. A brief interview with the suspect shows that he had no idea what he was doing, but that he came to when the grenade went off. The new armorer is defensive and agitated. He has access to the entire armory, including assault rifles, machine guns, anti-tank missiles, mines, grenades, and more, along with very thick walls and doors.

The new armorer serves as the spirit's connection to this world, and he must be killed or subjected to a ritual that breaks the bond before the spirit will leave.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Western

Tags: (KS) investigative, magic, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, spirit

Under the Big Top

449

Two brothers who are versed in the occult opened a carnival, using their magic and illusions to put on a spectacular show. The brothers got into an argument and one turned the other into a sideshow monster, locking away his intelligence and knowledge.

Years have passed and the PCs have come to the show, the magical nature of which quickly becomes obvious. They see the creature in the sideshow and recognize the intelligence in its eyes. One of the sideshow workers tells the PCs a bland and lifeless tale about how this creature was caught in the woods and only speaks truth when it talks of its sadness. If pressed, the carnie reveals the true story and says that the creature could be returned to normal if a certain book of occult magic were acquired from the carnival owner. The carnie may also be overheard after the show talking to another worker about his plan to steal the book. He might notice the PCs and engage them this way, drawing them into the plot.

If the PCs agree to acquire the book, they must locate it and maneuver around the human brother and those loyal to him. If they don't agree to acquire it, they're targeted by the carnie and those friendly to his cause. Multiple carnival workers, including the sideshow people—who dabble in the occult and

have gained certain powers—will make the PCs' lives difficult. The PCs have to run from, fight, or outsmart pursuing carnival workers, but receive help from the faction they have sided with. The other faction will use magic to prevent the PCs from leaving.

The PCs will find that the owner keeps the book hidden in a specific train car at all times. Some workers may suspect its location, and clues can be found in the owner's trailer. The monstrous brother may also try to communicate its location to the PCs. The PCs will either have to fight to get the book or acquire it through stealth. Once the PCs have the book, they can give it to the worker, who then undoes the spell. They can also use it to barter passage away from the carnival, leaving the monster to its confinement. If the monster is returned to his human form, he will use the book to banish the brother and take over the carnival.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Action Horror, Comedy, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) alliance, innocent, intrigue, investigative, isolated area, magic, monster, social, stealth, villain

Adultery

Bark at the Moon

450

A slew of murders take place in towns across the Midwest, with each occurrence following the tour route of a popular metal band. The killer is dubbed the "Metal Murderer" by the news media. The band officially denies involvement, but loves the publicity. If the PCs don't have cause to investigate, they can be drawn into the adventure by winning free tickets and backstage passes.

Once at the concert, the PCs can get in through the backstage door, but have to wait in line as security is tight. Groupies are there, desperate to get in, but are being turned away by the guards. The groupies are very friendly once they notice that the PCs have backstage passes. Once backstage, the PCs meet the band, who are talking to an FBI agent about the murders. The drummer appears nervous as he is questioned about his many encounters with groupies. The PCs are asked a few questions by an FBI agent and then sent back out into the audience for the concert.

The concert proceeds without incident until a roadie finds the ravaged body of a security guard backstage. Havoc ensues and the PCs are surrounded by security, as they were backstage

before the concert. The PCs and groupies are put in the same room while waiting to be questioned. The groupies seem very anxious and speak in an increasingly low timbre. An FBI agent questions people one by one, but leaves a door unlocked on a smoke break. The groupies sneak out through the door, almost seeming to lope on all fours as they head for the woods. They might even grab one of the PCs and drag them out with their supernatural strength.

The PCs find the groupies in a clearing with the drummer. The groupies transform into werewolves and attack the PCs, attempting to feed. The drummer struggles, but changes as well. If the PCs don't follow, this combat could take place as the PCs are questioned by the FBI again, this time in the presence of the drummer—who unwillingly succumbs to his new bestial side and transforms in front of everyone.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Comedy, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) investigative, monster, social, twist, villain

Undying Love

451

The PCs are asked to investigate a grisly murder in a quiet suburban neighborhood: A husband and wife were bitten repeatedly and then ripped apart, and several of their organs are missing. The taint of the supernatural can be found in the house, as well as in the shed out back; the front door was battered in, and there are clumps of dirt scattered throughout the house.

The next night, a woman is killed in a nearby architect's office. The scene is similar: The building's glass door was broken, and the woman was ripped apart and is missing organs. There are also bloody fingerprints all over her computer's keyboard. A search of the computer shows that someone was looking up records on one of the architecture firm's employees, another woman.

Investigating her, the PCs discover that she was the previous owner of the house where the first murders took place. She was widowed a year ago, and her husband was a known member of a religious cult who died under mysterious circumstances. The widow remarried a few months ago, sold her old house, and moved in with her new husband.

When the PCs arrive at the new house, they find the door broken down and the woman's new husband badly wounded. He's

alive, but hysterical, and raves that some kind of zombie took his wife. He says she pleaded with the zombie to spare him (which it did), and that the zombie then took the couple's car and drove away with the wife. He has no idea where they went.

By tracking the woman's cell phone, talking to her friends, or another means, the PCs will learn that the woman and her former husband had a special camping spot in the nearby woods. Their favorite campsite was not far from where the husband performed his dark rituals, and he has taken his wife there in order to transform her into a zombie. After he kills her and performs the appropriate ritual, the two of them can be together forever.

When the PCs arrive, the wife is mortally wounded but not yet dead. They must destroy the zombie husband, and as many of his zombie allies—fellow cultists—as you like, before she dies, and then give her the first aid she needs to make it to a hospital. The cult, as well as any surviving zombies, can be used in future adventures.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp

Tags: (PV) investigative, monster, religion, villain

Relentless Ghosts

452

A married serial killer has been murdering local women for years, and his wife has deliberately turned a blind eye to his crimes—he plies her with money and jewelry, and she looks the other way. Over the years, many of his victims have returned as ghosts, and driven by rage they have begun to haunt the couple. The killer has no connection to the spirit world and is utterly oblivious, but his wife comes from a long line of mediums and is terrified by the ghosts. She seeks out the PCs to help her end the haunting.

She suggests that the PCs stay the night in her mansion, so that they can experience the haunting for themselves. Several ghosts put in an indirect appearance, knocking vases off of shelves and cracking windows, and the woman is terrified. Play up the creepiness of the scene, and the sense that the ghosts are holding back—which they are, because they don't yet know what to make of the PCs.

Researching the phenomena suggests a few options: The ghosts are seeking justice, are tied to the site by a past trauma, or are trying to tell the woman something. All are true, in a way. The following night, the PCs are personally haunted. The ghosts tear partially formed words into wallpaper, turn bathwater into blood, and generally convey their displeasure. All of the signs point to a murder or murders as the genesis of the haunting.

Returning to the woman, the PCs find her in a coma, traumatized by the previous night's haunting. Her husband appears, wearing bandages in several places. At first he insists he was in a car accident, but it emerges that he was actually wounded during the haunting. He implores the PCs to stay the night again, and to try to end the haunting so that his wife will recover.

That night, all hell breaks loose. Ghosts run rampant, and the wife arises—still comatose—and begins speaking cryptically about “the women” and “all these years.” The husband disappears partway through the night, reappearing at the climax of the adventure, when he tries to split the PCs up and kill them one by one. If he and his wife are brought to justice, the haunting will cease, and the PCs will be able to lead the police to clues to years of serial murders.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) betrayal, innocent, investigative, madness, magic, social, spirit, twist, villain

Masked Ball

453

Prior to this adventure, one of the PCs had a fling with a spirited and attractive person; the plot assumes a male PC and a female companion, but neither party's gender is important to the adventure.

As supernatural investigators, the PCs are called in on a possession. A little girl has been possessed by a foul-mouthed and very sexually aware spirit. As the PCs investigate and exorcise the spirit, she taunts and teases them all, except for the PC who had the fling. To him, she languidly winks and says, "Oh, I've heard all about you..." The demon is exorcised, and the little girl is safe.

Next, an adult toy store is haunted by a poltergeist, which uses the toys to attack anyone who enters. The spirit can be banished, but the PC who had the fling receives special attention before it goes.

Later, the PCs are called to a topless bar where the dancers have reported a leering face staring back out of the mirror at them. As the PCs investigate the place, most of the dancers smile and wave at the PC who had the fling, as if they know him. Apparently someone matching his appearance, name, and mannerisms has been a regular customer recently.

The topless bar haunting is by another lust spirit, but he's willing to speak to the party. He doesn't want to be banished, and offers valuable information to the PCs if they'll let him stick around a little longer.

Apparently, the PC had a fling with an erotic spirit who is the longtime lover of a prankster spirit. She was jealous of all the time her lover's attention was directed elsewhere, and wanted to stir up some jealousy by taking a mortal lover. She told a few of her friends, and they all wanted in on the fun.

The prankster spirit finds out about his partner's fling, and he'll come after the PCs with a vengeance. He's not sure which one was responsible, but will try to take out his anger on all of them through flat tires, crashed hard drives, etc. The PCs might be able to convince him that it's not their fault; they can also try to banish him or just endure his wrath.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) alliance, city, investigative, mature themes, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, social, spirit

Bottled Lust

454

A \$75 perfume that has recently hit the market makes good on all of its claims: The "designer pheromones" it contains really do short-circuit people's self-restraint and reduce them to lustful caricatures of their former selves. The secret is in the pheromones, which are actually a blend of secretions from two demons, a succubus and an incubus.

The PCs are hired by a local clergyman who claims that the perfume is demonic in nature. He offers proof: When he uncorks a bottle and blesses it, dark smoke wafts from the bottle and the acrid stench of brimstone fills the room. He wants the PCs to put a stop to the perfume's manufacture for good.

The first step is investigating the plant where the perfume is produced. The company doesn't offer tours of the plant, not wanting to give away any of their proprietary processes, but breaking and entering will allow the PCs to poke around. Exploring the plant, the PCs find that everything is on the up-and-up, with one exception: The final ingredient is delivered in plastic jugs marked with "S" or "I," which appear to come from a small town halfway across the country; none is in stock at the moment. While in the plant, the PCs are attacked by unnaturally lustful guard dogs.

Traveling to the town, the PCs find an insular community where few townsfolk will even talk to them; the ones that do say nothing about the perfume. There are signs of fraying spousal relationships all around, and everyone seems to be on

edge. The PCs discover that several municipal projects underway are funded by private donations from a local estate owner. Scouting the estate, the PCs all feel unusually lustful—even at a distance of a hundred yards from the place.

Once inside, the PCs are nearly overwhelmed with lust, perhaps even for each other. If they can remain in control or block the pheromones, the PCs will find the estate all but deserted due to the danger of the pheromones. The main floor houses a high-tech chemistry lab, which the PCs can disable by a variety of means. The chemists who work there will fight back, but if the seals around the lab are breached they will instead become dangerously lustful.

The two demons are housed in the basement, and can be banished or destroyed as best befits your campaign. They'll fight the PCs using their overwhelming sexuality, attempting to seduce PCs, bewitch PCs into copulating with each other, or drive the PCs mad with lust. Once the lab and the demons are out of commission, the perfume can no longer be manufactured.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) innocent, investigative, isolated area, madness, magic, mature themes, monster, religion, roleplaying-heavy, villain



Artist: Andrew McIntosh

Crimes of Love

All in the Family

455

A string of bold break-ins has plagued the city for several weeks. Reinforced doors are kicked in and heavy safes are hauled off, but little evidence is left behind. During the last break-in, a night watchman was thrown through a wall and now lies in a coma.

The perpetrators are part of an extremely inbred family, and the two oldest sons' genetic mutations have made them impervious to pain and strong as oxen. They and their mother, a 60-year-old wheelchair-bound invalid, have been trying to steal enough money to save their farmland from foreclosure. The four other siblings have super-sensitive hearing and touch, keen eyesight, and the ability to run extremely fast. All of them have below-average intelligence save the mother, who is whip-smart.

The brothers commit their crimes while the mother keeps watch from her pickup truck/camper. So far, they've stolen enough bonds and such to pay off the debt, but all of the children are illiterate and therefore only recognize cash.

The PCs will either stumble upon or be called to a break-in. The brothers will ignore them if they don't interfere with the

robbery and will toss them aside if they do. Only lethal attacks will take them down, but the mother has a pistol just in case. The truck is very fast and the mother was once a bootlegger, so they may well get away.

If the PCs are incapacitated, the family strikes again, giving them another chance to follow the truck. It heads out of the city and down back roads to a well-defended compound. The mother is very shrewd, and won't give up any information, but the truck can be traced back to their compound.

The five siblings in the compound are on alert and will try to defend themselves, but won't have the mother to guide them. They can be tricked or fought, but can't be talked down or easily bargained with, and will defend their land with their lives. On the compound are many opened safes, most of which still hold their contents, less the cash.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) city, investigative, tactical planning, trade

Honor-Bound

456

In ancient Japan, two noble lovers were separated by the woman's arranged marriage to a respected samurai. They joined secretly many times, and the woman bore two children. The samurai husband discovered the indiscretion and attacked his wife's lover. The husband was fatally wounded, but he cried out a curse upon his wife's children before he died. An oni answered his call and has fulfilled the curse ever since.

In the present day, one of the children's descendants has awakened this demon spirit with an act of adultery. The demon is relentless in its pursuit of its enemy's descendants, stalking and killing each of them. The PCs may become involved if a member of the party is of the cursed bloodline or is a lover of the descendant who committed the adultery. They may also witness a demonic attack and decide to investigate.

The demon's corporeality waxes and wanes with the moonlight. In darkness, it can walk through walls; in moonlight, its sword becomes solid. If in a prolonged immaterial state, it can still whisper, tempt, and torment. An encounter with the demon should involve one of the descendants, who is familiar with the story of the curse. The descendant should survive just long enough to relay the story before she falls to the demon's vengeful blade.

The PCs then find enough clues among the descendant's belongings to lead them to others who are marked for death. Occult research should show a few ways to ward off demons, and reveal that each kill makes the demon stronger and less dependent on moonlight. After this, introduce a scene where the demon can make a few attacks without being in moonlight.

The demon will take a different descendant if one is too well-guarded. The PCs should learn this and realize that they won't be able to protect them all. They should also learn that the only way to stop the demon is with a sword that has tasted the demon's true bloodline. Some of the descendants might have true blood, and it only needs a taste.

In the final climactic battle, the PCs, armed with their one hope of defeating the demon, are pitted against the spirit and its strengthened powers.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (JA) deadline, escort mission, innocent, investigative, magic, sandbox, spirit, tactical planning, villain

The Madame of Whispers

457

The PCs are contacted by a powerful entity who watches over all of the city's male and female "professional companions"—the patron spirit of prostitutes. In exchange for paying homage to the spirit, the city's prostitutes gain protection from violence and disease, as well as the promise of wealth by way of better clients. The spirit has come to the PCs to ask for their aid, as it cannot interact directly with the world.

Recently, a number of the spirit's followers have died due to what the police are calling overdoses. The spirit is certain that these prostitutes were clean, and that the police are just trying to avoid investigating their murders. It asks the PCs to find out who is killing its followers, and offers to provide the PCs with important information regarding a topic of interest to them, such as a larger investigation. The spirit collects all of the secrets that its followers hear from their clients, and it has amassed a wealth of knowledge about notable figures, the local government, and even the supernatural.

Investigating the deaths, the PCs find that all of the prostitutes did indeed die of an overdose of opiates. Strangely, however, every corpse is almost entirely devoid of spiritual energy—their souls were all taken before they died. Clever detective

work uncovers the fact that the bodies were all found within the dispatch range of a local ambulance company.

The man who has been killing the prostitutes is a dark alchemist who moonlights as a paramedic. He has created an elixir that, if administered during sex, releases a person's soul from the body. He has been injecting prostitutes with a mixture of heroin and his elixir, and then stealing their souls.

After talking to local prostitutes, who can provide a description of the killer, the PCs track him down to his lab. They arrive shortly after he has summoned a powerful supernatural entity using the stolen souls as an ingredient in the ritual, and the PCs must defeat them both in order to fulfill their bargain with the patron spirit.

If you like, this plot can be trimmed down and used as a side plot during a larger adventure: When the PCs hit a wall during an investigation and need information to proceed, the spirit can provide an interesting means of acquiring that information.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) investigative, magic, mass combat, mature themes, monster, spirit, villain

The Possessors

458

The PCs come upon an accident: A school bus has been run off of the road by a collision with an oncoming SUV. The bus driver is concussed and several children are gravely wounded; the SUV driver was killed on impact. After the wounded children have been tended to, two others, who have only minor bruises, tell the PCs that they're worried: They saw an adult get on the bus after the crash, and he was acting strange. He grabbed a child sitting near the front of the bus and led him away—even though every kid knows not to trust strangers. There was also a greenish mist that flowed out of the SUV and into the bus behind the adult—but that was just boiling windshield wiper fluid, right?

When the PCs find the pair's trail, they can catch up with them fairly easily. They walk together at a slow pace, utterly silent but moving in perfect coordination. When confronted, the adult explains that he is an alien from a distant planet. His mate needed a host, as the previous host was killed in the collision. The only available hosts were children, but children are poor containers for his kind: Complex emotions sustain his species, and children have limited emotional experience. Without intervention, the possessed child will die within a few days, releasing the alien—as a green mist—to find a new host.

The aliens were fleeing assassins—also aliens, but of a different race—who had been tracking them for some time. The assassins have likely arrived at the crash site by now; the aliens say that the killers can easily wipe them out, along with the PCs. They ask for the party's help.

The assassins can also possess humans, and they currently inhabit two policemen. They're already on the PCs' trail, accompanied by innocent police and EMTs, and the pair will attack the aliens and the PCs. The PCs must get away without killing any innocent civilians. Once they're safe, the larger problem remains: The alien in the child's body needs a new host, or both of them will die. The PCs can find a willing host, volunteer one of their own bodies as a temporary host, or solve this problem by a variety of other means.

Using the resources of the police department, the assassins will track them down for a final confrontation. This time they mean to kill everyone, the PCs included, and again they will confuse the situation by involving innocents.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) alliance, combat-heavy, deadline, difficult choice, escort mission, innocent, monster, race, social, spirit, villain

An angel was cast out of heaven for falling from God's grace, but it wasn't sent to hell. Neither fallen nor angelic, the angel roams the city, trying to find a way to return to God's presence. Its mind fractured by its partial fall, the angel settles on a twisted solution: killing those who it perceives to have forsaken God.

It starts small, killing an isolated apostate or two. This is an ideal entry point for the PCs, as the killings defy categorization: No forensic evidence whatsoever is present at the crime scene. The victims appear to have been killed by a paralytic effect that spread rapidly from their heads all the way down to their toes. They were killed by the angel's touch.

The next to die is a priest; his body is partially paralyzed, but his death was actually caused by a hammer blow. A hammer is at the scene, but is devoid of prints. The angel decided to experiment with a different murder method, and has found that it prefers the mundane approach. Clues in the priest's home suggest that the perpetrator might be targeting his church.

The church's new pastor is a man with an angelic countenance, around whom minor supernatural effects seem to

occur: prayer candles light themselves, parishioners walk a bit easier despite their ailments. Play up the idea that he might actually be an angel, sent to reassure the flock after the murder of the pastor. He guides the PCs to the worst sinner in his church, a man who fits a possible profile for the killer—a doctor with access to poisons, including paralyzing agents, who resents the church because his faith didn't prevent one of his children from dying in a terrible accident.

The pastor invites the PCs to stake out the church. Driven by the angel's telepathic urgings, the doctor breaks into the church and tries to kill the PCs using an arsenal of poison-filled syringes. Signs of mental control can be easily spotted, and most groups will be suspicious of the pastor by this point. When the PCs return to confront or spy on the pastor, the angel locks the church and tries to burn the occupants alive. The PCs must evacuate the parishioners and pacify the angel—a strange and formidable foe.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) city, innocent, investigative, madness, magic, religion, social, spirit, villain

Discovery of the Dishonor of a Loved One

Zombies?

460

A deadly flu outbreak in a local prison has killed dozens of inmates, including some of the region's worst offenders. While their bodies are in the morgue, malicious spirits claim six of the corpses for their own, animating them so that they can glory in the sins of the flesh. After the bodies go missing, the family of one of the missing prisoners involves the PCs, fearing that something awful has been done to the prisoner's body. Investigating the morgue, the PCs find signs of an unusual robbery: smashed body storage locker doors, torn-open body bags, and locked doors broken from the inside.

The reanimated corpses aren't zombies, they're corpses inhabited by evil spirits. The resulting creatures have the immunities of zombies and can only be killed by massive trauma, although headshots have no special effect as they don't need their brains to function. They also possess much of the intelligence that they had in life.

In order to stop them, the PCs must first figure out what they are—aided by the library and their contacts—and then narrow down where they rest during the day (they prefer to venture out at night, when people are more easily scared—and their fear tastes better). The lore points to graveyards, and

in exploring the town cemetery the PCs find several disturbed graves. They fight two "zombies" in an aboveground crypt, and discover much about their true nature in the process. When they kill them, the spirits manifest visibly and dive into nearby graves—where they inhabit new bodies.

As the PCs debate whether or not to dig up the graves to get at the spirits, the spirits quietly seep through the earth, moving from body to body, and escape. The next night, they mount an attack on the PCs (either together or alone, whichever fits your game best).

To destroy the spirits, the PCs must isolate them in an area with no corpses to possess, and then perform a ritual to banish them from the world. This could involve more than one scene, as the PCs first deduce the ritual needed to banish them, and then figure out how to get the spirit-creatures alone so that the ritual can be performed.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) innocent, investigative, magic, monster, race, spirit, tactical planning, twist, villain

Heresy of Heredity

461

In a large city, several babies have recently been born covered in small scales. The births are covered up and the children are discarded. To introduce this adventure, have one of the PCs observe a bald man throwing away a package in a dumpster. A woman was following the bald man, and pulls the package out of the dumpster, cradling the dead baby and crying. The paper the baby was wrapped in talks about a reporter who was shot in gangland violence. The woman is the baby's mother; the father is a senator who has a recessive mutation.

Soon enough, the PCs begin to feel that they're being watched and can see evidence of the bald man and his agents trailing them. A reporter from a newspaper who has been investigating the senator contacts the PCs. He has some information about the births, but needs more connections to complete the story. He knows of a nurse who's willing to talk, but feels that if she's seen talking to a reporter, her life may be endangered. He asks the PCs to go on his behalf, offering them large amounts of money and favors.

The nurse can identify the bald man and has a friend who knows of three other babies that were taken from a different hospital. The PCs are given the names and addresses of the mothers. Visiting them reveals the pattern. Three different

girls say the only person they were with was a local senator. Soon after, they're found dead.

While investigating, the PCs are harassed and followed. If they confront their tails, a fight occurs. If the PCs win, information is revealed about the bald man and the senator. The PCs might acquire a keycard to the senator's office from one of them. At the senator's office, the PCs are discovered by the bald man and some thugs. If the PCs lose this fight, they're taken to the senator. The senator tries to bribe the PCs into hiding his indiscretions, and then threatens them with jail time.

While talking, the senator quietly pulls a gun. He tries to kill one of the PCs quickly, and his agent and another guard try to take out the other PCs. This shouldn't be a combat in the fair sense, but an ambush that should end very quickly if the PCs don't realize they're being set up.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers

Tags: (JA) difficult choice, innocent, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, politics, roleplaying-heavy, social, stealth, villain

Shadows of Blood

462

A local bookstore has been vandalized with sexually explicit graffiti, and the interior is trashed: Thugs forced the door, toppled bookcases, and trampled dozens of books into the floor. The bookstore owner hires the PCs to find the perpetrators; she assumes her store was targeted because she's a lesbian. She isn't rich, but can offer first editions and occult books that might appeal to them as payment. Her lover, an excellent violinist, was asleep upstairs when the thugs broke in. The violinist is shy, and several years younger than the bookstore owner; they make a cute couple.

The violinist quietly buttonholes one of the PCs and confides that she recognized one of the thugs' voices: a foreman for a construction crew that does work for her father's company. Confronting the foreman or his crew yields clumsy denials. Threats, pretending to approve of the thugs' crime, or respect earned from a fight will get the foreman to confess to ransacking the store. He insists that it was his idea: When he saw the bookstore owner "kissing a girl" and told the owner to cut it out, she flipped him off. If appropriately persuaded, his crew will reveal that he was bribed by a man matching the description of the violinist's father.

When the foreman reports the PCs' investigation, the violinist's father uses a dark ritual from a book that his thugs stole at his behest during the break-in. A 17-foot-long insect—looking something like a twisted cross between a moth and

a praying mantis—swoops down on the PCs, staining the air around it like a gasoline spill. Its long tongue smears paralytic venom across its victims and its body spines impale its prey.

When the PCs go back to see the bookstore owner, she is silently mutilating herself with a penknife. She too has been a victim of the father's dark arts: A similar, smaller creature attacked her, and the horror of the winged assailant's touch completely unhinged her—she's cutting out the taint it left behind.

Attacking the father directly is dangerous: Summoned creatures lair in his backyard like postmodern statues. They respond to his call, and can be deadly foes. The largest is another insectile monster with hypnotic wings and a tongue that burns like motor oil.

For a dark twist, make the violinist a willing partner in the father's plot to steal the book and summon the monsters. She was surprised to find that she had fallen in love with the bookstore owner, and tried to stop her father; she feels tremendous guilt and horror over what she has done.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (SM) combat-heavy, innocent, madness, magic, monster, twist, villain

A friend or new client contacts the PCs with a request. His uncle made custom guitars before succumbing to madness and killing himself, and the current owner of one of the guitars thinks it's possessed. Would the PCs meet with the owner?

It turns out that the owner is a famous heavy metal guitarist. At one point in the meeting, he leans in and says, "This is all theater; I'm not into the devil at all. But my guitar is." He bought a guitar from the estate of a rock star who died young, and has been having nightmares ever since. While dying young isn't unusual in the business, the guitarist now suspects that the guitar somehow influenced the young rocker and caused his death. The guitar does have an evil look to it, and spiritually or psychically sensitive characters will sense its malevolence.

The uncle's guitar shop (held in perpetuity per his will) has occult designs all over the walls and is home to a black altar that still smells of sulfur and blood. Seeing this, the nephew insists that the cursed guitars be cleansed or destroyed, and volunteers his extensive inheritance to do so. To cleanse the guitars, they must be disassembled, blessed, washed in holy water or sacred oil, and then reassembled.

Ritual Secrets

The PCs are involved in an ongoing investigation of a series of supernatural signs and occurrences that all point to the imminent arrival of a powerful creature or entity, and they've just made a breakthrough. After determining that a cult has been preparing a ritual to deliver the entity into our world, the PCs have discovered the location of the final ritual at last.

Traveling there, they fight a desperate battle with the cultists and prevail—but not before the cult is able to weaken the barrier that protects our world. The creature will breach the barrier in a relatively short time, and all of the cult members who understood the ritual (and who might be able to reverse it) fled or died during the battle.

Scrambling for clues, the PCs investigate the cult's headquarters and turn up several dark tomes. One volume contains a picture of the cult from several years ago; in it, the cult is attempting the same summoning ritual—and one of the PCs' loved ones (a father, mother, spouse, or someone similarly close) is among the cult members performing the ritual. The PC had no idea that their loved one was once involved with this cult.

The PC must confront the loved one about his dark past—a secret that the loved one hoped he would never have to reveal. The loved one will confess that he was the sole survivor of the

Some of the owners are willing to sell their guitars outright, others hold out for a premium, and some are eager to have their instruments cleansed. But a few holdouts are difficult to deal with. One toxic example is well along the short road to hell, and plays the guitar at every show. He's convinced that the guitar is responsible for his success and refuses to part with it. Telling him about the dark rituals involved in the guitar's making only encourages him: "A pact with the devil? Where do I sign?"

Another holdout is a reclusive and paranoid former rock star who keeps his guitar safely locked away in his mansion. His business manager is concerned about his obsession with the guitar, and is willing to work with the PCs if they can create some kind of distraction for the security guards.

The last guitar is prominently displayed on the wall of a rock and roll casino in Las Vegas. The owners of the casino are suing each other, so it can't legally be touched until the suits are settled.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Western

Tags: (KS) alliance, bearers, city, investigative, magic, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, spirit, travel

summoning in the picture, and was able to reverse the ritual and keep the entity from entering our world.

With much fear and trepidation, the loved one will assist the PCs in re-creating the ritual to seal the barrier that was weakened by the cult's recent summoning attempt. As the PCs work together with the loved one to try to banish the creature for good, it projects images of the loved one's dark past and uses other psychological and supernatural tricks to try and break their concentration. Can the PCs and the loved one maintain their composure long enough to complete the ritual? And how will the relationship between the key PC and the loved one change in the aftermath?

This adventure is more about the interaction between the PCs and the loved one than anything else: Play up the dialog and really emphasize the roleplaying aspects of this scenario. Also, be careful in your selection of the PC whose loved one was involved with the cult; some players don't take well to having key NPCs that they introduced into the game altered in this way, while others absolutely love it.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (PV) combat-heavy, deadline, investigative, magic, monster, race, religion, roleplaying-heavy

Obstacles to Love

Here Comes the Bride

465

A wealthy dilettante has decided to marry for love, much to the consternation of his mother, who had hoped for a different daughter-in-law. As this is a mob family, the prospective mother-in-law arranged for an accident. The new wife had a brake failure on her way to the family mansion during a rainstorm and fatally crashed.

The dilettante has become a recluse, but the wedding was planned for the Fourth of July weekend and the family is still hosting a party at the mansion. The PCs have been invited as guests. Unfortunately for the prospective mother-in-law, the bride won't take no for an answer and has returned from the grave. As her hatred extends to the entire "family," she's killing anyone that gets in her way.

In life, the bride was a botanist, and in death she can control and manipulate plants. Her own body is actually animated

and nurtured by plants. The bride uses this power to isolate the mansion and slaughter bodyguards, family members, and guests until she can get to her lover and convince him to declare his love in front of his mother; after that, she'll kill him so that they can be together in the afterlife.

The PCs have to survive the night. Once the bride's motives are revealed (through a séance, unless the PCs have appropriate psychic powers), the PCs either have to kill the mother, depriving the bride of her vengeance, or kill the dilettante son. A third option is to kill the bride, though this won't be easy.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Pulp, Romance, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) difficult choice, isolated area, roleplaying-heavy, spirit

Poisoned Heart

466

The PCs are contacted by a friend who is in urgent need of their help: His fiancée has been hospitalized, and he suspects that something more than a mundane ailment is at work. He recently purchased a necklace for her, and as soon as she put it on she collapsed in agonizing pain. After several days of testing, her doctors couldn't find the cause of her pain; all they know is that when the PCs' friend is nearby, her condition becomes dire. As long as he stays away from his fiancée, she remains stable. They also found that the necklace cannot be removed.

Visiting the woman, the PCs detect an aura of magic: A curse has been placed upon her. If they try to remove the necklace, they too will find this to be impossible—and doing so worsens her condition. If they test whether their friend's presence also makes her condition worse, they find that it does.

Tracking down the necklace's original seller, they learn that he buys jewelry from a young homeless woman who comes by from time to time; the pieces are excellent and her prices are low, and he's never asked questions. The PCs can find the woman in a nearby park, crafting another necklace.

When confronted, she'll tell the PCs that she created the necklace and placed the curse upon it because their friend's fiancée is responsible for killing her husband. Her husband worked for the fiancée, and last year she sent him overseas into a war zone, where he was killed. The company's minimal, unethical, and illegal insurance policy paid out almost nothing, and the

necklace crafter was ruined. She became homeless, and after some time on the streets she was befriended by a malevolent spirit who taught her magic.

The PCs investigate the company where the fiancée works, and they discover a cover-up. The homeless woman's husband requested the overseas assignment as a means of earning a promotion, and while the fiancée didn't think he had enough experience to handle it, she sent him anyway. When this is exposed, the company will fire the fiancée and award the homeless woman the money she deserves.

After this, the homeless woman agrees to remove the curse, but the spirit won't let her: Craving only suffering, it attacks her and anyone around her. She can't stop it on her own, and the PCs will have to help in order for her to survive. Once the spirit is defeated, she'll remove the curse, but the PCs' relationship with their friend may be permanently damaged despite this.

Depending on your campaign, the fiancée could become a recurring enemy, seeking revenge on the PCs for exposing her and getting her fired from her job.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) investigative, magic, relationship hook, spirit, villain



AMI

Artist: Andrew McIntosh

The Show Must Go On

467

A person in the street stops what he's doing and speaks a line from a play. He then shakes his head as if to clear out a small fog and goes about his business. This occurs several times over, with the affected reciting more lines each time. People begin saying lines to each other, and eventually everyone stops what they're doing and begins to move as per stage blocking. All of this behavior is the work of the ghosts of a troupe of actors who died in a theater fire, and who have now begun to take over people in the streets and re-enact the play they were performing when they died.

As this continues, an old woman can be overheard saying she loves this play, but it is a pity when the girl dies. This ominous portent should be enough to incite action—the person saying the girl's lines will likely die if nothing is done. This could be an innocent bystander (a child, for added impact), or even one of the PCs.

Research reveals that the play was being put on in a local theater that burned down right at the spot where the lines are being performed. Few pieces of it remain, but some are on display at a small museum of local history. The closer it gets to the anniversary of the fire, the more people are being overtaken. The PCs begin to see mist and fog just before the scenes

continue, but few others seem to notice. The lines and scenes become more real; the people start to look like they're dressed in period clothing. The moment of death for at least one person is fast approaching.

The possibility should be introduced that if the fatal fire is part of this ghostly re-enactment, more than one person may die. The PCs can prevent this by destroying the artifacts that are holding the spirits to the world. Destroying the pieces in the local history museum will have no effect, as one more piece exists.

It's held by an old man who is watching the play go on from his window in a nearby apartment. He was the stage manager for the original play and has cast a spell on a prop he owns, summoning the actors' spirits. He wants to see the play one more time, no matter the cost. Destroying the prop will end the spell and the ghosts will be free.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Romance, Supernatural, Victim Horror

Tags: (JA) city, deadline, innocent, investigative, madness, magic, roleplaying-heavy, social, twist, villain

A Love That Will Never Be

468

A creature banished from the faerie world—a dark fey—has been trapped in our world for centuries, and has grown lonely once again. As it does every few decades, it has begun to seek out a human companion by kidnapping attractive young men and women (either will suffice). The creature can assume human form for a few hours a day, changing appearance each time. When it brings a potential companion back to its lair, it “plays” with them for a time to see if they can survive its attentions. Thus far, none have survived.

The creature is genuinely seeking love, but actually finding it will be almost impossible. If the PCs don't stop the dark fey, it will continue to kidnap and kill innocent people until it gives up for another few decades. The PCs should meet the fey before knowing what it is—casually, and ideally as part of another scenario—and then become involved in this adventure.

Several disappearances have happened at the same club, making the place a good starting point. Watching the club for a few nights, the PCs will witness a young woman slipping something in a patron's drink and then trying to abduct him. If confronted, the fey will use its powers to escape. Canvassing the club is useless, as the fey never looks the same two nights in a row—except that a recently abducted patron was able to get away.

Visiting her, they get enough clues to lead them to the dark fey's lair. Exploring the lair while the fey is absent, they find the abductees and the bodies of dozens of other former “candidates.” Each describes the fey differently in their initial encounter, but they all describe its true form the same way: an androgynous, waif-thin creature with stubby horns, wreathed in black mist. It returns while the PCs are in its lair, observes them briefly, and flees.

Now things switch into cat-and-mouse mode, with the PCs hunting the fey and vice versa; the framework of the following scene or scenes will depend on your group. The fey will use its powers to good effect, and now that they know what it is the PCs will learn of ways to destroy it (such as cold iron). The final confrontation should reveal why the fey was kidnapping people, and give the PCs a chance to drive it from our world forever.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) city, innocent, investigative, magic, monster, sandbox, twist, villain

An Enemy Loved

Monstrous Commitment

469

The PCs are hunting a supernatural creature that has been attacking people throughout the city for the past several nights. They track the creature to an abandoned church, but are surprised to find it caught in a trap. Before they can act, they're ambushed by a lone assailant, giving the creature time to escape the trap and flee the scene. Their attacker surrenders as soon as the creature is gone.

Their attacker, a man, is angry with the PCs. He blames them for interfering with his efforts to capture the creature, and attempts to leave. If the PCs let him go, the next time they corner the creature they will again find that he has beaten them to it. When confronted, he'll reveal that the creature is actually his wife, who was transformed into her current shape after being attacked in the park about a week ago. He's been trying to capture her ever since, and he asks the PCs for their help.

The creature should be a supernatural predator capable of transforming those she attacks into more of her own kind (a werewolf or vampire, for example). Thus far, the husband has succeeded in scaring her off before she could kill or transform anyone. He hopes that the PCs can aid him in restoring her to her true form.

This is a sandbox adventure: The PCs must decide what to do about the man's wife, which will involve tracking her and setting a better trap (perhaps making more than one attempt). The real meat of this plot is in the relationship between the husband and wife, and what fate she eventually meets at the PCs' hands. Play up this drama, and try to get the PCs as invested in the husband's anguish and the wife's plight as possible.

There are several possible outcomes depending on the PCs' actions and the tone of your game. There could be a cure for the wife's condition, which the PCs can administer; this earns them two grateful new friends. Or perhaps there is no cure, and the wife must be imprisoned, killed, or taken somewhere that she can't do any more harm; if the wife must be destroyed, her husband can be resigned to this or may refuse to believe the PCs, and might actively oppose them. The PCs might also be forced to destroy both the husband and the wife.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) difficult choice, monster, sandbox, tactical planning

Unholy Matrimony

470

A woman who recently escaped from a cult, now no longer brainwashed, contacts the PCs for help. She tells them that no one—not the police, not even her family—believes her story, but she swears that it's true. The cult married her to one of the scions of their god, and told her that the scion would arrive on the next holy day, just a few days away, to consummate their marriage. She tells the PCs that she cannot help but love the scion, even though she knows her love isn't real—and that if it shows up, she will go to it willingly.

The cult is incredibly secretive, so if the PCs want to learn more about the scion, the ritual, or how to free the woman, they'll need to break into the cult's facility. The facility is a large warehouse on the outskirts of town, fully functional (and owned by the cult) but with a surprisingly large basement. The woman knows a way in and some details about what the PCs might encounter inside, but not everything.

When they break in, they face several cultists who must be silenced before they can alert the others. The facility is unsettling in its normalcy, except for the central ritual chamber, which the PCs must cross through to reach the library. The library tells them the nature of the scion—a hideous squid-like being—and of the ritual binding the woman to the creature.

Acquiring the components of the counter-ritual is the second encounter in this adventure. The PCs need to convince a scholar at the local university—one who can understand the ancient language used by the cult—to perform the ritual for them. Performing it alerts the cult, however, and cultists head out into the woods and attack them while the PCs are mid-ritual. The party must complete the ritual while under attack, or the binding will be permanent.

Once the woman is free, she wants nothing more than to see the scion destroyed and put the whole affair behind her. She's willing to act as bait, since the scion will still come for her, and the finale of the adventure is a showdown with the scion itself. The PCs can choose the place where it will arrive, though not the time, and plan accordingly.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) deadline, innocent, investigative, magic, monster, siege, stealth, tactical planning, villain

Publish or Perish

471

At a local university, a professor is struggling to stay afloat in his department. He's barely published anything of worth in the last seven years, while a female colleague's brilliant research has well surpassed what little he has accomplished. Despite this, she fervently argues on his behalf and has even bribed the university board to keep him on. Secretly, she loves him and goes to great lengths to protect him. The quality of his work continues to decline when his most vocal opponent turns up dead. The PCs can be students at, or otherwise connected to, the university, or may simply need information from the professor's research.

While the PCs investigate the murder, another professor is found dead of a gunshot wound. The body of a janitor who died of acid burns is found stuffed into a closet. The murderer is the struggling professor, seeking revenge on the board and the university for rejecting his work. He uses the female professor's love and vocal support to shield himself and plants evidence that points to her being the murderer.

She should make a viable suspect as her intense love has blinded her to the truth and makes her seem unstable. It's clear that she's willing to go to any lengths to protect her love. Any solid evidence, however, should point to the struggling professor.

Possessions

472

This adventure will work best as part of an established campaign, especially one where there's some internal conflict between the PCs.

The PCs are called in to a police station and led to an interrogation viewing room that looks in on a thin, disheveled man in handcuffs. After confirming that none of the PCs know the man, the detective explains that he's the prime suspect in a string of kidnappings and murders that began exactly six months ago, and that he asked for the group by name, address, and phone number.

The detective explains that some of his victims are probably still alive, and the suspect offered to disclose their location if he can speak to the PCs. For the sake of the victims, the detective asks that the PCs speak to the suspect.

The suspect is possessed by a malign spirit that harbors a grudge against the PCs. The spirit has been using the already twisted man to wreak havoc and garner attention, and now wants to exact revenge on the PCs. The spirit can read minds and possess a victim, but not at the same time. It knows many things about the PCs' past, except for the last six months while it possessed the suspect.

The spirit wants to turn the PCs against each other, and uses the fate of the remaining victims as leverage. It reminds the

For instance, access to the type of acid used on the janitor might be available only to him, or forensics may have missed a piece of cloth that matches the professor's jacket.

Once the PCs are fairly sure the male professor is guilty, they receive a note from a "witness" who is scared and wants to meet them in a parking garage. The note says the witness can tell them something that leads directly to the murderer. Once in the garage, the PCs are run down by a car driven by a masked person and are shot at as the person speeds off. The police arrive quickly, but they can't find the driver or the car.

Confronting the male professor will result in a tense standoff when he grabs the female professor as a hostage and threatens to kill her. If the PCs kill the male professor in their attempt to rescue the woman, they will later find her dead by her own hand.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Romance, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Swashbuckling

Tags: (JA) city, innocent, intrigue, investigative, roleplaying-heavy, social, villain

PCs of previous failures and differences of opinion, reveals secrets, mentions possible illegal or unethical activities, etc. Claiming to be sending them to find the surviving victims, the spirit sends the PCs out on missions involving people and places from their past, or gets them into situations that will cause conflict between them.

The spirit's weaknesses lie in its desire for revenge and its lack of knowledge of the PCs' activities over the last six months. Both of these can be turned against it, either through faked conflict between the PCs or by lying about recent events. If the tables are turned on the spirit, it will leave its current host, jump to the detective, and just start shooting.

If the party realizes that they're dealing with a possession instead of a lunatic, they may have more options, from exorcism to trapping the spirit.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (KS) investigative, madness, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, social, spirit, twist, villain

Ambition

Just One More Bite

473

A new restaurant has opened in town and everyone is raving about its low fat menu and the delicious spice that flavors most of the food. The critics' reviews are excellent and health nuts are all abuzz. A lone critic says the restaurant is dangerous and has caused illnesses that the health department hushed up. The people who eat there regularly are experiencing great weight loss. The restaurant's popularity soars.

Patrons of the establishment notice that their skin has acquired a slightly orange tone, but most don't care. After sampling the restaurant's fare for an extended time, however, patrons will experience fever dreams. The episodes are spread out and not immediately connected to the restaurant. One of the PCs should become infected to tie them to the adventure.

A hospital trip reveals no obvious cause for the skin discoloration or fevers and the PC is released. The dissenting critic is the best person to visit for more information. They find the critic looking quite ill—pale, shaky, and sweating. The critic reveals that the "spice" is made of the eggs of microscopic parasites and believes there's a chemical compound that would completely eliminate infection. The critic suddenly

collapses. His investigations exposed him to too much of the spice, and his condition is critical.

The party must get the chemical to cure the infected PC, whose health is clearly declining. If contacted, the restaurant owner doesn't turn over the chemical or admit any wrongdoing. He has his own findings and clearance from the health board. The city council has been bribed, and there's little to stop the owner from continuing to infect his customers.

The restaurant isn't guarded, but has a security system and a locked basement. Inside the basement is a breeding colony of the bugs. They lay their eggs in dead pigs which are then harvested for the spice. The doorway and the stairs are covered with a white powder that seems to repel and kill the bugs. There's more than enough evidence here to expose the owner, and enough powder to cure the PC.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural

Tags: (JA) alliance, city, deadline, intrigue, investigative, roleplaying-heavy, social, trade

Gallery of Souls

474

An ambitious, amoral junior curator at a major museum has learned a magic ritual that allows him to imprison people in artwork. He can trap them in sculptures, as painted figures on ancient vases, and in paintings, and he's begun to use this power on those who stand in the way of his ascent to curator. He has amassed a small collection of trapped foes already, and displays them all proudly in the museum.

Their involvement in a missing persons case (as an extension of law enforcement, or as relatives or friends of the missing person) leads the PCs to the museum, the last place where one missing woman was known to have been seen. They meet the junior curator, who seems happy to help with their investigation, though in truth he's just flaunting his power. He takes them on a brief tour of the area where the woman worked—and the PCs spot her in a painting.

Investigating other missing persons cases reveals that all of the missing have a connection, however tenuous, to the museum. Returning there, the PCs find many of the missing as secondary figures in sculptures, or in the background of paintings. The junior curator tries to dissuade them from investigating further, making himself seem suspicious in the process.

Breaking in after hours, the PCs check out his work area. They find evidence of what he has been doing—but of course no rational person would believe them. They also find out that he must retain a small personal object from every trapped person, or the binding will fail and they'll be released unharmed. While in the museum, the junior curator uses his magic to awaken fearsome creatures from other works of art, which he then sets on the PCs.

The finale is a conflict with the junior curator, who can use magic to try to trap the PCs and to release other guardians. To free the trapped people, the PCs must convince the junior curator to give up their charms, or must find the items themselves, while the museum comes to life around them. If freed, the people emerge from their works of art whole and well, though shaken by the experience.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) city, combat-heavy, investigative, magic, monster, villain

El Dorado's Revenge

475

One of the PCs finds an old, roughly drawn map of an area in southwestern Texas. It's just an interesting curio until he notices the word "gold." Research reveals that the huge ranch shown on the map is currently for sale, and a call to the real estate agent results in an invitation to stay at the property "as long as you're interested in buying."

It's a full day's journey to the ranch, and the PCs will need their own gear. The ranch house is a sparse cinderblock building a couple hours' drive from the main road. It's definitely off the grid, but has a well and a generator. The owner died a few years back, and the price is negotiable. When asked how he died, the real estate agent mumbles that it was of natural causes, and abruptly leaves for another appointment.

If the PCs stay overnight, a group of illegal immigrants will pass by late at night to refill their canteens at the spigot outside the house, possibly spooking the PCs.

The area marked "gold" is hours away by four-wheel drive vehicle, or a day by foot. The PCs find that it's atop a butte in the middle of a valley. The sheer sides are over 100 feet high, atop 200 feet of cone—a very difficult climb. Nearby, some vultures are picking at the carcass of a deer whose throat has been ripped out.

At night, the legendary chupacabra will come out to hunt. Chupacabra are cunning critters about the size of a huge, hairless dog, with sharp teeth and night vision. They're extremely hard to kill. If the PCs don't chase them off, they'll slash the tires of the PCs' vehicles and then attack.

Atop the butte is a very low structure of adobe brick filled with blown sand. Excavating the sand reveals stairs leading down. A wooden door (from no more than a century ago) opens into a room holding the desiccated remains of Native American warriors, decorated for war, and a stone door. Behind that door is a treasure trove of gold and Native American artifacts.

Disturbing the gold will animate the warriors, and will also animate dozens more in surrounding cemeteries, who may



Artist: Hugo Solis

take hours to arrive. All of the dead will pursue and attack anyone bearing the gold.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Swashbuckling, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (KS) combat-heavy, exploration, isolated area, monster, siege, travel

Unlock Your Inner Desires

476

A book possessed by a malevolent spirit has fallen into the hands of one of the PCs' minor adversaries. The adversary, who has never exhibited any supernatural powers, begins to display new abilities. Suspicious, the PCs investigate the adversary.

The book senses a person's inner desires and grants them supernatural abilities that they can use to achieve those desires: insight, charm, destructive power, etc. It comes with a price: The book requires its reader to undertake cruel acts in order to satisfy the possessing spirit. Initially, the spirit grants a little bit of power in return for a small act of cruelty under the guise of "reorganizing your life," but over time it will grant greater power in exchange for greater cruelty—leading up to murder. Ultimately, the power that it grants destroys the reader, at which time the book slips back into obscurity until someone else happens across it.

In getting to the bottom of their adversary's newfound powers, the PCs will encounter the adversary and be surprised by the extent of his abilities, perhaps even being forced to flee. They'll also escape a trap set by the adversary using his new authority, perhaps a news story "exposing" the PCs' corruption

or a police APB. Investigating the adversary's home, they discover notes about how he was trying "focusing exercises" found within the book. Researching the book, they find that it has been around since the Middle Ages under many names, but always with the same powers and outcome. Finally, they'll catch the adversary in the act of trying to commit murder, but he'll get away thanks to his new powers.

Ultimately, the PCs must face the adversary at the height of his power. While fighting him, the party must also tackle the true threat: the spirit inside the book, which must be destroyed, contained, or banished. It has considerable power, but without a host its abilities are limited; its goal is to get away while still inside the book, preserving the mechanism it has used for so many centuries. If it escapes, it won't forget the PCs, and will come after them with a vengeance. Can the PCs defeat the adversary without killing him, and then contain the spirit before it finds a new host?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) investigative, magic, spirit, villain

Conflict with a God

Divine Crusade

477

A nationally famous TV preacher devotes an episode of his show to attacking the PCs, warning of their "dark deeds" and "unholy ways." His rant includes information about the PCs that no one should know, which was revealed to him by his dark god or simply provided by talented allies. The PCs learn of his harangue when an NPC ally of theirs confronts them about the preacher's revelations—and if a friend believes the preacher, they can only imagine what strangers must now think of them.

Next, loyal followers of the preacher harass the PCs, chanting on the sidewalk in front of their home base or confronting them on the street. They're not armed, but several carry cameras; if the PCs are famous, this scene also involves a local reporter and camera crew covering the protest. Those present will spread images of any bad behavior on the PCs' part far and wide.

The best way to fight this public relations disaster is with a public relations campaign, but if they attempt this the PCs will find that talk show hosts refuse their calls, cultists at the

local TV station sabotage attempts to get them on the air, sound goes missing for key portions of their interviews, etc. Meanwhile, the backlash against them is growing, and they're being investigated by local law enforcement.

Ultimately, the PCs must deal with the preacher head-on, but this is a tricky proposition. He has numerous bodyguards and is protected by dark powers, and his popularity also acts as a shield. If he dies or disappears, the PCs will be first on the suspect list. Exposing the preacher's cult affiliations would be effective, if the PCs can discover them (perhaps by breaking into his secure mansion). Giving him another target to rail against would also work—he believes that his conflict with the PCs was foretold by his dark god, but perhaps he can be convinced otherwise.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Comedy, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (SM) investigative, relationship hook, religion, social, stealth, villain

The Cold Lands Beckon

478

A doomsday cult that worships a dark god has hijacked a science vessel and is planning to sacrifice its crew in Antarctica, at the site of their god's first temple. This mass sacrifice will summon their deity, who will wreak havoc upon the world. The PCs are contacted by a scientist friend who works at a small Antarctic research outpost and asked to help with a problem of an occult nature. While they're traveling to Antarctica, the cult's plans are already underway.

When they arrive in Antarctica after a lengthy (and depending on the time period, perhaps perilous) journey by plane, ship, and then another plane, play up the bitter cold, the forbidding landscape, and the majesty of the place. Their friend shows them the problem that night: faint purple lights glowing in the distance, deeper into the continent—where no researchers or other people are known to be. He says he's tried to find the lights, but they always disappear before he gets very far.

The PCs venture out into the Antarctic plains, but try as they might they can't find the lights. When they narrow down one location where they're certain they saw a light earlier, they find the snow and ice in the area melted away; a strange symbol has been scorched into the ground. Tracking down other lights, they find similar sites—and signs that humans have been there, including tracks that lead further away from the

coastline. The symbols form a rough ring around the research base.

When they reach the cultists' base, deep within an ice cavern, they're attacked by cultists wielding harpoons and magic. During the battle, the cultists laughingly inform them that they're too late, and the sacrifice is already on the way. Returning to the base, they find a ship just offshore, with several small dinghies approaching the coast.

The climax is a multi-faceted encounter. The crew of the ship has been mesmerized to do the cultists' bidding, and will complicate matters by attacking the PCs. The PCs can break the trance through magic or other means, gaining allies in the process. The cultists may decide to rush the sacrifice, and attempt it with only those victims who are already ashore—forcing the PCs to decide between saving those aboard the boat, which the cultists scuttle to buy time, and stopping the sacrifice itself.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) combat-heavy, deadline, difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, isolated area, magic, race, travel

The Hunter's Grounds

479

In a remote wooded area, there exists a grove that the locals call "the Hunter's grounds"—the domain of the god of the hunt. Out of superstition, none of the locals hunt there, even though the most beautiful stags can be glimpsed through the foliage. When five out-of-town businessmen arrived in the area for a hunting trip, they found the locals simple and quaint, and ignored their entreaties not to head into the Hunter's grounds. On the best hunting trip any of them had ever experienced, they each killed a magnificent buck; back home, all five heads were mounted as trophies.

After a week or two, the PCs are contacted by one of the hunters, who fears for his life; he was referred to them by a friend of a friend, who mentioned their expertise in occult matters. He tells the PCs that two of the five hunters were recently killed, and he and his two other friends fear that they're next. When the first one died, his death was considered to be the result of a random, but disturbing, act of violence—made more disturbing because the authorities couldn't find his head. When the second hunter died in exactly the same manner, the remaining three panicked. Two of them hired private security companies for protection; the third, suspecting that there was more to the locals' stories, hired the PCs.

During their investigation, the PCs find that the two murders both bear hallmarks of the supernatural. They also learn

that both men were stalked and ran for their lives before they were struck down and beheaded. Research into the Hunter's grounds reveals a rich history of supernatural events in the area, including tales of those who poached the forest later being beheaded. At some point, they'll have to defend their client from an attack by a supernatural creature.

Seeking out a local shaman who lives near the Hunter's grounds, the PCs learn that the only way to appease the god of the hunt is to bring a powerful supernatural creature into the grove for it to pursue. Along with their client, the PCs must track down and capture a suitable creature other than the one that attacked the hunter, and somehow get it to the Hunter's grounds. This will lift the curse.

You can fit the location of the Hunter's grounds into any remote area in your campaign setting, and the god of the hunt can be easily included in most pantheons. The nature of the threats in this adventure can easily be matched to the style of your campaign: For a low-magic game, make both featured creatures natural predators; for a higher-magic game, you will have many options regarding the nature of both creatures.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) isolated area, monster, race

Musical Mayhem

480

Mad cultists often need a great deal of power to call upon a Creature From Beyond. One such cultist is part of a local band and is using a blend of singing, guitar playing, choreography, and the chanting of the audience to summon this creature, for which he expects to be rewarded. Fortunately, the cultist needs a time of power (full moon, spring equinox, midsummer, etc.) in order to perform the ritual. In the meantime, the band's performances are causing interesting side effects that can clue in the PCs.

When the PCs attend one of the band's concerts, strange things start to happen that play upon certain attendees' fears and emotions. One concertgoer may see ghosts, while another may be able to briefly read her date's mind, not liking what she hears. Another fan might find that she's able to manipulate emotions, causing a rival to flee or making someone fall in lust with her. These events prove fleeting and occur only during two songs. The cultist needs two songs to complete the ritual; he performs one near the beginning of the performance and the second at the encore.

As a red herring, the PCs may spot a supernatural creature at the performance. This creature has nothing to do with the cult and is in the dark about what's going on, but the PCs are likely to investigate the red herring first. This red herring can be used in other ways. For example, a vampire may feed on a victim that the PCs witnessed acting strangely: She was briefly awash with magical energy, which drew the vampire to her.

The PCs will probably want to investigate the band, as well. Note that depending on whom you choose to be the cultist, the band members may be completely unaware of what's going on. The cultist could be their songwriter, choreographer, or manager. If the cultist catches wind of the investigation, he may have a few tricks up his sleeve to get rid of the pesky PCs before the final performance.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (WC) deadline, epic impact, investigative, magic, monster, villain

Vacation by the Beach

481

The PCs are on a well-deserved vacation at a lakeside resort. Unfortunately, the resort is home to a monstrous creature seeking to spawn. The vacation starts normally but soon takes an odd turn. One night, all of the drinks turn green, but the staff doesn't acknowledge the change. A person admitted to the infirmary for food poisoning comes crawling out, screaming. The piano player comments on these oddities to the PCs, and the next night the piano player is nowhere to be found.

Many of the staff and guests go missing. The boathouse is closed and the lake is fenced off. The place feels vacant and the staff looks gaunt and tired. If anyone is questioned, they'll explain that they're hung over from the incredible nightly boathouse parties and suggest that the PCs attend.

That night, the PCs are attacked by strange scuttling things that quickly run away. The PCs realize no one is around to report the incident to, but see a party going on down at the fenced-in lake. The PCs also notice staff members patrolling the grounds with crude weapons and flashlights. The staff can be heard talking about the PCs and will attempt to capture the party if they spot them. The PCs can easily escape the patrol but will find outgoing communication disabled.

At the lake party, the resort manager can be seen chanting and preaching to the assembled. The lake is bubbling, spewing forth more of the scuttling creatures that attacked the PCs earlier. The longer he preaches, the more creatures bubble up. These are the spawn of the lake beast and will fight the PCs if

they attempt to stop the ritual. The manager preaches about corrupting a holy object that is held on a pedestal before the masses. He says it must not touch the spirit of the lake until the corruption is complete. The missing guests are seen at the lake edges, haggard and tired. The beast is stealing their energy via the ritual in order to reproduce.

From what the manager says as he preaches, the PCs can glean two important bits of information. First, when the ritual is complete, the spawn will scurry off in search of their own bodies of water to inhabit and their own groups of people to drain of their energy. Second, the only way to prevent this is to touch the object to the creature before the corruption, using its holy power to destroy the evil beast.

The creature has many tentacles with which it attacks the PCs, and the enthralled fight with crazed fervor. If the PCs force the object into contact with the creature, it dissolves away and the people are released.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (JA) betrayal, deadline, investigative, isolated area, monster, religion, tactical planning, villain

Mistaken Jealousy

Notches

482

Two long-dead sisters, once famous socialites, roam the streets as spirits. They love to party so much that they periodically bet each other over who can score the most one-night stands. They possess two women, usually sisters or close friends, and tally how many lovers each can bed within a week. The socialites only possess their victims after dark; during the day, the victims have no knowledge of how they spent the previous night.

Usually, the sisters play their game for a week, determine the winner, and go into hibernation for a while. This time it's different. A demon that feeds on sexual energy discovers the sisters on their initial night of partying and follows one of them to her conquest. He drinks the energy and kills the conquest after the sister leaves. The demon plans to follow one of them each night and, after the partying week is over, kill their victims as well.

Depending on how your players react to such things, you can have one of the sisters possess a female PC, or the female lover of a PC, the night before the adventure starts. The police visit the PC in the morning. She was seen with someone at a club the night before and that person has turned up dead.

Of course, the possessed has no recollection of the evening's events, except that she met a sister or friend for dinner. Evidence places the possessed at the murder scene, where it appears that she had sex with the victim before the latter's death. You can up the ante by making the victim someone that the presumed killer normally isn't attracted to. If the victim is unrelated to the PCs, she may come to them for help.

The following night, the victim's sister or friend is the one responsible for killing someone while the original presumed killer resumes her conquest spree and takes someone else to bed; fortunately, the partner lives this time. The PCs must find a way to exorcise the possessing sisters and deal with the demon.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) betrayal, city, deadline, innocent, investigative, madness, mature themes, relationship hook, rivalry, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, social, spirit, villain

The Little Camera That Could

483

An instant or digital camera found in a pawnshop seems to capture sins in its pictures. The PCs may discover the camera, an enemy might place it in their midst to sow dissension, or an acquaintance might come to own the camera. One of the PCs should get their picture taken and find that a sin or character flaw is revealed. The camera is haunted by a vengeful spirit, damned by its sins and envious of the bonds of the living. It seeks to stir up negative emotions and fracture relationships. It whispers in people's minds to compel them to see the worst in each photo.

The first few pictures reveal small sins—funny and almost innocent. Each new picture of a person reveals something darker and more disturbing. The spirit in the camera uses a mix of lies and truth in the pictures, showing people with old or false lovers, making the pictures reveal hidden and unpleasant truths, or portraying believable but fabricated situations.

This works well for a personal horror game. The crux is the careful manipulation of the pictures so that each one digs at something hidden and effectively puts strain on a relationship. After each round of pictures, there should be in-character discussion and reaction. One good way to represent the pictures

is to hand a player a list and have them choose a sin from it, then let them describe the picture and how it shows the sin. Take players aside and use a mix of mechanics and roleplaying to depict what evils the spirit in the camera is whispering. You might also take a few pictures of the players with a digital camera beforehand, storing them up to show at appropriate times.

If the camera takes a picture of its reflection, then the spirit controlling it is seen. If a person takes a picture of any holy text, the camera reveals a spell to destroy it. This requires an incantation and the person shedding blood as they confess every sin of theirs that the camera revealed. Destroying the camera prevents its further evil, but the damage it has already done must be healed with time and candid conversation.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Comedy, Cyberpunk, Gothic Horror, Pulp, Romance, Sci-fi, Supernatural

Tags: (JA) bearers, investigative, magic, mature themes, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, social, spirit

Jealous of the normalcy of the average person's life, a werewolf has tried desperately to integrate into society—and has always failed. More than a little insane, he decides on a new tactic: make everyone else's lives as abnormal as his, so that he becomes the normal one. He picks an aggressively normal suburban street in an aggressively normal community, selects a house, and bites a member of that family in order to turn her into a werewolf. Then he watches, savoring her slide into the abnormal, and then repeats the process. Unless stopped, he will transform everyone on the street.

The PCs become involved through a resident who has observed numerous odd changes among her neighbors. Staking the place out one night, using her house as a home base, the PCs see shadowy forms prowling in the bushes. They disappear too quickly to follow, but leave tracks like upright wolves. Further examination reveals similar tracks around several specific houses (the houses where the sire has already struck).

Visiting those houses during the day turns up nothing odd—except in one case. In the others, the whole family seems normal; in this house, they all seem afraid of the little brother.

Coloring Outside the Lines

A friend or contact of the PCs asks for their help in determining what is causing an ongoing series of accidents at a small factory. The factory is a start-up venture, and the business is popular in the local community; the owner, a single dad, is equally well-liked. A committed father, he recently lost his wife and has retreated into his work. When the PCs meet him for the first time, his young daughter is on the floor nearby, coloring.

The daughter is behind the accidents, though inadvertently: She had latent psychic powers before her mother's tragic death, and the loss has awakened her abilities before she's old enough to deal with them. She has no control over the manifestation of her powers, and they flare up when she gets angry. The trick to this plot is to make the daughter part of the background early on, and give her only passing attention as the story develops—if you give her too much attention, the PCs will focus on her too early.

Interviewing workers who have been hurt in the factory reveals a pattern: All of the accidents simply came out of the blue. Automatic safeties didn't engage, machines didn't shut off when powered down, bolts sheared without any stress being applied to them, etc. There's a very faint aura of the supernatural around the factory, but the strongest energy is caused by a generalized malaise regarding the wife's death—she was close to all of the workers. This is a good time for the PCs to talk with the little girl. Hunched over her coloring book, she

He's the only one who has been turned so far. Spying on him, the PCs catch him leaving the house at night in wolf form, and returning with an older, much larger werewolf. If left alone, the boy turns the rest of his family that night.

While casing the street, the PCs are confronted by the police, who were alerted by another neighbor about suspicious behavior on the street. Fearful, the werewolf sire attacks the police while they're interrogating the PCs, and they must protect the cops—who have no idea what they're really facing.

The longer the PCs wait to deal with the sire, the more allies it will have in their final confrontation, as it turns family after family into werewolves. If the PCs seem uncertain what to do, have the sire pick the house they are staking out to turn next, and go after their friend.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) combat-heavy, deadline, innocent, investigative, madness, magic, monster, villain

tells them about missing her mom and complains that her dad has spent too much time working since her mother's death.

An accident occurs while the PCs are in the factory, wounding one worker and putting others in danger; the PCs must intervene to make sure no one is killed or seriously injured. After this, the workers collectively refuse to continue working; this makes his daughter elated. The father is able to coax them back to work with a rousing speech, after which his daughter looks crushed.

Homing in on the daughter, the PCs notice that some pages of her coloring book are neat and tidy, while others are ripped, marred by bolder strokes, or feature coloring outside the lines. The dates on these pages correspond to the accidents. The climax occurs when the daughter's powers suddenly surge out of control, threatening the lives of everyone in the factory, including the PCs.

Can the PCs talk her down and save her and the workers? And if so, what will they do to keep her from causing any more accidents?



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) innocent, investigative, magic, social

Erroneous Judgment

The Sanctity of One's Own Home

486

The PCs are contacted by the priest of a local church who wants a nearby drug house shut down. The police won't act without proof, which the priest wants the PCs to acquire. The house is a front for vampires, who keep up its reputation to conceal their feeding. The vampires go to extreme measures to hide their presence, using gang shootings and drugs to cover up every aspect of their activities.

Garnering information about the vampires can be accomplished in multiple ways. Reports show a much higher than average number of missing persons cases in the area, but the police seem to be deaf to the pleas of the community. People will talk about witnessing strange events at the house, leading the PCs to suspect that it's more than just a drug house. Depending on the setting of your game, the PCs may or may not discern the true nature of the house at this time. One thing the PCs learn is that they'll have to make a trip inside for proof. This means they need to acquire the password, which is known by anyone who frequents the house or is in the vampires' employ.

Inside the house, the PCs find a great deal of evidence, but will be kept out of the basement and one wing of the house.

The guards can be convinced to let the PCs in through bribes or coercion. A fight will also get them past the door, whether they win or lose.

The vampires have noticed the PCs' efforts and decide to let them in, hoping to destroy them. The vampires want keep the odds in their favor and try to split the party. In order to preserve their secret, they avoid fighting if possible, preferring a surprise kill. Failing that, however, they use any means available to kill the PCs. If the PCs escape, the vampires will chase them, employing a multitude of tactics to keep their identities hidden. If the PCs have no knowledge of the vampires, they should remain as the mysterious masterminds until the end.

The PCs may come back after their initial encounter, ready to fight and eliminate the neighborhood menace.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Cyberpunk, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) city, combat-heavy, investigative, mature themes, monster, relationship hook, religion, siege, stealth, tactical planning

Nine-Tenths of the Law

487

A famed spiritualist is in town, and he has announced that he's going to contact the spirit of one of the greatest killers who ever lived and force the spirit to answer for his crimes - live on stage at a major venue. The city is abuzz, and the PCs are invited to attend; a famous rival spiritualist claims that the act cannot be performed. The séance is quite a spectacle: Assisted by several other mediums, the spiritualist successfully calls up the killer's spirit and engages it in a battle of wills.

Then the spirit breaks loose of the spiritualist's control, and in one motion it reaches a ghostly arm into his chest and tears out his still-beating heart. As the crowd panics, the spirit mentally dominates the other mediums. They attack the audience, use the footlights to ignite the curtains, and generally wreak havoc. The PCs observe the killer's spirit merging with the body of the city's mayor—and it sees that they noticed the possession. While the PCs are helping people get out safely, the spirit/mayor escapes in the confusion.

The news the next day blames one of the mediums for the spiritualist's murder and the ensuing fire; no one will believe the PCs if they approach the authorities about the possessed mayor. The mayor will take action against the PCs, who are

the only people in the city who know his new identity. One PC's apartment is raided and tossed by the police; another will be sacked from her job; a third will be beaten up by off-duty cops.

Their best ally is the rival spiritualist, who knows a ritual that can divest the spirit from the mayor's body and banish it back to the underworld. The ritual requires the mayor, as well as a personal object belonging to him, and it must be performed at a sacred site outside the city.

To obtain the personal object, the PCs can show up at the mayor's next engagement and steal something from him then, break into his mansion, or use another method. The most likely approach to get him to the ritual site is simply to kidnap him, which will involve getting past his guards and stealing him away undetected. During the ritual, the spirit will break free of the spiritualist's control and attack the PCs; they must try to complete the ritual before it can escape.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (MR) alliance, innocent, madness, magic, politics, shady, spirit, stealth, villain

While reading in his study, a well-known antique collector was killed by a hail of machine gun fire. The prize of his collection, an ebony sphere unearthed from an ancient king's tomb, rests undisturbed on a pedestal in his trophy room. The sphere is intelligent, and it communicates through dreams. It wishes to remain in the possession of the collector's niece (or, if you prefer, one of the PCs).

Exploring the grounds uncovers the bodies of the murderers. Two broad-shouldered men in expensive suits lie drowned in a pond, their hands clutching each other's throats. Their machine guns, recently fired, sit forgotten on the bank of the pond.

The collector's niece is staying at the mansion while she itemizes the collection for auction. She asks the PCs to stay at the house with her for security. A distinguished-looking, well-dressed crime boss visited her three times before her uncle's death. Each time, he made a private offer to purchase the ebony sphere with the implied threat that refusal would bring about violence. After the PCs discover the bodies of the murderers, she becomes certain the crime boss was involved.

Over the next several nights, the entire house experiences bizarre dreams. The dreams express the sphere's desire for the niece (or chosen PC) to pick it up, but the sphere cannot prevent its communication from reaching everyone nearby. If someone other than the niece touches the sphere, that person falls into a babbling stupor of insanity and remains incapacitated until the niece picks up the sphere.

The Apprentice's Promotion

The PCs return to their home or sanctuary to find that it has been broken into, and that among the missing items is one of importance to the party. During the investigation, clues are found that link the break-in to a supernatural being that the PCs have encountered with before, ideally a neutral entity or a lesser villain.

Having run into this being at specific locations before, they head to the most likely spot. Instead of the being, however, they find its apprentice, who is doing work on his master's behalf. He isn't hostile, but must be convinced to share what he knows—namely that his master returned with the object in question, which is now in their lair. Under duress, he'll reveal the location of the lair.

The PCs travel to the lair and encounter a number of magical defenses, which they must overcome before they can confront the master. The master, who doesn't look kindly on intruders, is hostile. He denies any accusations the PCs make, and a fight ensues. The apprentice appears and lurks in the background, doing nothing to help the master or hinder the PCs, instead only watching intently.

A mysterious crone arrives on the scene. She understands the nature of the sphere, as she worships the gods of the long-dead king. Present the crone as mildly dangerous but ultimately non-threatening. At the first opportunity, she conducts a séance with the PCs. The séance ends abruptly when the sphere's ghostly protectors manifest and attack.

In the adventure's climax, the crime boss makes one final attempt to take the sphere from the house. A battle begins between the criminals and the PCs, but is interrupted when the crime boss takes the old crone hostage. The niece picks up the sphere and walks towards the crime boss. As she reaches the center-point of the study, she stops. She looks up at the crime boss and says, "It is mine." Her eyes turn inky black and a crackle of lightning shoots from the sphere to strike the crime boss.

He staggers back as the niece collapses to the ground. The sphere rolls away as the action begins again. The crime boss and his lackeys go for the sphere and the crone attends to the crumpled niece. It's up to the PCs to subdue the mobsters.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural

Tags: (TT) alliance, city, escort mission, innocent, intrigue, investigative, madness, magic, siege, spirit, tactical planning, twist, villain

If the PCs deduce that it was actually the apprentice who broke into their sanctuary and try to stop the fight, the apprentice attacks, hoping to keep the battle between the master and the PCs raging. His motives should be clear to the PCs: He wants to usurp his master's place, and orchestrated the entire affair in order to get them to kill his master. Can the PCs convince the master of the truth, and if they do, will they join forces with him against the apprentice?

Should the PCs kill the master, his apprentice will make peace with the PCs; in later adventures, he'll return with considerably more power, having claimed the strength and knowledge of his former master.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) betrayal, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, rivalry, villain

Remorse

Visions of a Monster

490

One of the PCs begins to have strange and very vivid dreams about committing crimes. These dreams feel entirely real, and carry with them all of the guilt, shame, and other negative emotions associated with the acts the PC commits. At first, the dreams are about minor crimes, stealing money from a cash register and filching someone's vintage jacket. For the next few nights, the PC dreams that she is having an affair (whether or not she is actually married); that affair goes from erotic and thrilling to violent, ending with the PC waking up filled with grief and anxiety after killing her lover. When that murder appears on the news that morning, the PCs know that her dreams are more than just dreams.

Over the next few nights, the PC will have a new dream about committing murder each night, and every morning the events in her dreams will appear on the news. During this time, the PCs will be investigating the murders, and at some point they will arouse suspicion about their activities, leading the police to question the PC who has been having the dreams. They quickly clear her of the actual crimes, but the very real grief and guilt, as well as her lack of sleep, are starting to take their toll.

Clues from the PC's visions lead the group to a local store frequented by the PCs. Looking around, they spot the store

manager wearing the vintage jacket from one of the PC's first dreams. He shows no remorse when confronted, and instead escalates straight to violence: He kills bystanders in his attempt to get away from the PCs. During the fight, the PC who has been having the dreams is overwhelmed with grief, which is being projected by the villain.

A chase ensues, and when he becomes desperate the man takes his own life. This creates a psychic feedback loop that compels the PC to try to commit suicide, and this loop must be overcome with the help of the other PCs. When they check out the man's body, the PCs find that his antique glasses—which should have been smashed—are intact and untouched. The glasses radiate intense emotion, which is obvious to anyone who touches them.

Post-adventure research will reveal that the glasses allow the wearer to transfer all their guilt for their actions to someone else, creating a villain who has no remorse for even the most heinous crimes—the ultimate monster.



Easily adapted to: Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) innocent, investigative, madness, race, villain

Strangers in the Night

491

Strange and horrible dreams are plaguing one or more of the PCs. When they wake from the dreams, they hear whistling coming from the street and see an old man walking by. The dreams seem familiar—a mix of their own fears and a story being told by the old man.

The walking man is a spirit, an *ankou*, tasked with collecting the dead who won't go quietly. A recent event has released many souls who haven't gone to their proper resting places. The *ankou* is stirring them up with his whistling. Once the PCs have seen the *ankou*, they wake every time he whistles, and they can see the spirits he is chasing. The *ankou* approaches the PCs and informs them of the situation, not asking for help but stating that he won't stop until all souls are rounded up.

The spirits are numerous and appear to be being pulled in one direction. The attracting force is limbo, and each soul consumed makes the entrance to limbo larger.

The PCs are faced with a moral dilemma. They can decide to help the *ankou*, trusting judgment of the one who would

send the souls to hell, or hinder the *ankou* and allow the souls to be pulled into limbo. Spirits will approach the PCs and beg to be allowed into limbo.

If the PCs help the *ankou* he will ask them to drip blood on four stones that have caused the limbo opening. This will close the gate. If the PCs try to impede the task of the *ankou*, the climax will involve the PCs running for their lives as the gate moves from the realm of the spiritual into the realm of the physical. Either way, the *ankou* is calm and collected. Even if he fails, he can leave and pursue other souls. The limbo gate will eventually close.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Gothic Horror, High Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (JA) alliance, deadline, difficult choice, magic, religion, social, spirit

Fatal Footsteps

492

A vampire hunter has been hunting vampires for quite some time and has been an ally of the PCs in the past. This hunter has also been regularly injecting himself with vampire blood in order to become a dhampyr, or half-vampire, gaining the strength to fight vampires and resistance to their charms and commands. The hunter can still walk in the daylight.

Recently, the vampire hunter got in a bit of trouble while fighting a vampire, and his girlfriend decided to inject herself in order to help him. Unfortunately, she took too much and became a full vampire. Realizing this the first time she tried to walk in the sun, she fled in shame.

Currently, the hunter is pursuing the vampire girlfriend. He can't bring himself to kill her, nor will he allow anyone else to harm her. Unfortunately, she has become extremely dangerous and has no compunctions about killing to survive.

The vampire girlfriend has come to the PCs' attention. She moved into an apartment complex and used her powers to

ingratiate herself with the other tenants. The newly minted vampire satiated herself with the occasional sip, but when one victim woke up she killed him and his new wife. She then moved to a different part of the city, but she still goes back to the apartment complex to snack.

The PCs get on the case, but they have a problem: The hunter asks them to stay out of it. If the PCs comply, then the hunter becomes his quarry's next victim. If they don't, then the hunter becomes an adversary as they try to stop the vampire girlfriend from killing again.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Romance, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (WC) betrayal, difficult choice, intrigue, investigative, mature themes, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox, shady, social, villain

A Killer's Ghost

493

A ghost manifests in front the PCs, looks directly at them, and then points at a nearby building before fading away. If they check out the building's history, they find nothing unusual. This event is repeated another time or two until the PCs physically investigate one of the sites the ghost points to. When they do, they find a hidden body—clearly a murder victim. Investigating the other sites reveals a corpse at each of them.

Once they figure out how to report the murders to the police

without being blamed for them, the ghost knows that they're responding to his actions. In life, he was a serial killer who died of natural causes, leaving all of the murders linked to him unsolved. Wracked by guilt, he's trying to make amends by revealing his crimes in death.

After the PCs have uncovered several bodies, the ghost starts pointing them towards sites with no bodies at all. Because he can eavesdrop invisibly, he has discovered three other serial killers in the city, and wants to see them brought to justice. After the PCs figure out what the ghost is doing and start to close in on the killers, the killers begin targeting them.

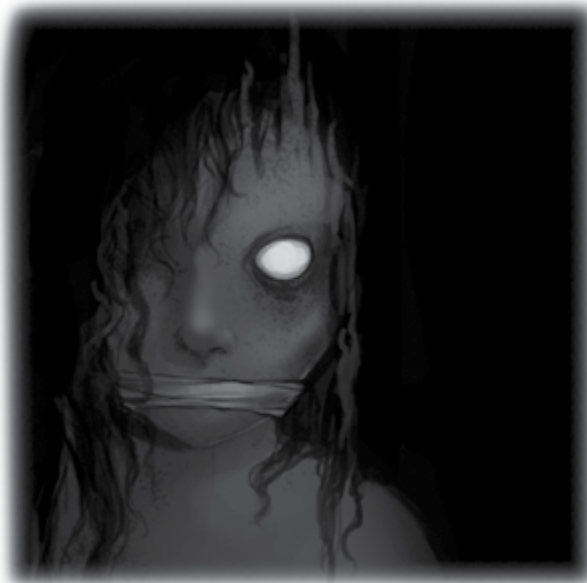
The killers have no special powers, but they're adept at committing crimes without getting caught, will do just about anything to avoid capture, and can come up with creative ways to torment the PCs. They'll try to frame the PCs for murders that they themselves committed, break into their apartments, and otherwise make their lives miserable—as well as try to kill them, should the opportunity present itself.

This is a fairly freeform adventure, and it can even be worked into the background of a completely different adventure. It can jump to the foreground when the killers begin targeting the PCs directly, forcing them to react or give up any hope of leading normal lives again.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) city, investigative, magic, sandbox, spirit, villain



Artist: Laine Garrett

Recovery of a Lost One

Cross-Country Killer

494

Before his execution date, an imprisoned serial killer who was on the FBI's Most Wanted list executed a brilliant jailbreak. If the prospect of a killer on the loose who has a record of sexually assaulting his victims before disposing of them isn't frightening enough, the diary entries and notes he left behind indicate an obsession with exacting revenge on the witnesses, lawyers, and judges who were instrumental in his capture and prosecution years ago. The PCs are FBI agents, police, or otherwise deeply connected to law enforcement.

Following the clues in the diary, the PCs head to the prosecuting attorney's house. They find the attorney hog-tied and gagged, surrounded by clues that point to the killer fleeing before he could finish the job, perhaps frightened off by the approaching sirens.

In a meeting with the chief psychologist on the case, she expresses another viewpoint. She says revenge has never been the killer's motive. This is a feint in some larger plan. Before the discussion continues, however, a radio call about the killer comes in, leading to a high-speed chase. The PCs capture the vehicle only to find that the driver isn't the escaped killer.

He's a dupe hired by the killer to distract law enforcement. While they followed the bait, the killer abducted the chief psychologist.

The final confrontation takes place in an abandoned two-story school in the serial killer's hometown. He has been planning the culmination of his twisted fantasy for a long time. The object of his desire is at his mercy, bound in one of the classrooms. She's the "teacher" and he's the "unruly student," but this time he has the power and he intends to take out all of his childhood frustrations on her. Well in advance, the serial killer littered the school with traps (explosives, blinding sprays of acid, tripwire-triggered shotguns, etc.) and planned his escape route across the rooftop and down the fire escape stairs.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Pulp, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror, Western

Tags: (TT) deadline, madness, mature themes, innocent, investigative, roleplaying-heavy, sandbox

The Party

495

A friend of the PCs asks for their help in locating his teenage son, who went missing several days ago. Two of the boy's friends are also missing, and the police have no leads—it's as if the teens simply vanished.

Whether uncovering new leads or retracing the steps of the police, who are less attuned to the occult, the PCs discover a sort of clubhouse (little more than an abandoned shack) in the woods where the teenagers hung out. Inside the shack they find a ritual circle, implements, and a number of amateurish books on magic. Among the books is a small, much older volume that details a ritual to summon "the Party," a supernatural celebration to end all parties.

The Party is in actuality a vampiric entity that survives by trapping people in a shared psychic experience—the ultimate party—and draining their life force. In the past it has been a 19th century French masquerade ball, a 1950s sock-hop, a '90s rave, a sweet sixteen party, Mardi Gras, a senior prom, a cotillion, and dozens of other events. While the people trapped inside it have the time of their lives, the Party slowly drains away their life force until they expire.

To rescue the teens, the PCs will need to summon the Party and enter its psychic realm. Once inside, the PCs find

themselves at an amazing, period-specific party. In order to proceed, they must first resist the effects of the Party, so as not to get lost in a reverie from which they cannot return. Use whatever mechanic is most appropriate for this, and give the PCs ample opportunities to resist. The entire time that the PCs are inside the Party, it will slowly drain their life force; this effect cannot be prevented. The PCs must find the three teens, convince them that they're in danger, and leave the Party.

The Party will fight back in the form of several supernaturally enhanced bouncers, as well as angry patrons who don't want their party interrupted. Once they fight their way out of the Party, the PCs find a special exit that leads them back to their world. It's up to you whether or not there are others trapped in the Party; if there are, this adventure can be used to introduce a new PC or NPC to the game.



Easily adapted to: Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Sci-fi, Space Opera, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) deadline, innocent, investigative, isolated area, magic, social, spirit, villain

Haunted Oil Rig

496

A week ago, an oil company evacuated one of their offshore oil rigs due to “systemic structural problems,” but in actuality they abandoned it because it had become haunted, and five workers had died on the rig in the previous weeks. Three workers were believed to have left the rig before the evacuation, including a friend or relative of one of the PCs. Friends or family send word of his disappearance and of the last place he was seen: on the rig.

In fact, all three workers are still aboard. Two are members of a sinister cult, and caused the haunting as part of their cult’s broader agenda. They used an ancient artifact to open a doorway to the spirit world aboard the rig, but something went wrong, and a much larger portal was created. The third worker, the PCs’ friend, stumbled across the other two mid-ritual, and they tied him up and stashed him in a utility room; for now, he’s still alive.

Seeing that it has gone dangerously wrong, the cultists are trying to undo their own ritual—but they’ve already informed the cult leader of their success, and she’s en route to the rig. The haunting itself is also quite dangerous, with ghosts and other malevolent entities stalking the oil rig, and although the cultists are protected, the friend is not: He has been possessed by a dozen different spirits, each warring for sole control.

House for Sale, Some Work Needed

497

A large house is scheduled to be demolished, but neighbors begin to display strange behavior and the demolition company encounters several legal hurdles that prevent them from proceeding with the job. When one of the neighbors hears her brother chanting down in the basement of their house, she contacts the PCs for help.

Inside the house is an ancient evil, locked away in the foundations. Destroying the house will destroy the being, thus it has awoken and called to one of its servitors. Its servitor has put the legal blocks into place, trying to keep the house safe. He has also been sacrificing homeless people to the thing in the house, increasing its power and allowing it to influence people in the neighborhood. Many are now in its thrall, performing its bidding and working to protect it.

While looking into the matter, the PCs notice the odd behavior of the thralls. They’ll also notice strange additions to many houses: Symbols are cut into fences, dark stains are found in odd places, and scribbled dates, times, and cryptic markings appear throughout the neighborhood.

The thralls begin to sacrifice the remaining non-thralls in the area, some of whom the PCs have met. If too much time elapses, the PCs notice more and more people disappearing. All signs suggest that some catastrophic event will happen at the house at a certain date and time in the very near future.

When the PCs arrive, they can tell that something isn’t right: Droplets of water “run” vertically up walls, ghostly faces are glimpsed in reflective surfaces, and the entire rig smells like burning plastic. As they search the rig, ghosts will first try to drive them away indirectly by causing accidents, shattering light fixtures, etc., and then begin attacking them directly. When they find the friend, they’ll have to contend with the entities possessing him and deal with the two cultists.

The cultists’ artifact can be used to end the possession, and even to stop the haunting altogether—if the PCs can get the cultists to tell them how to use it. The leader of the cult will also arrive with her entourage before the PCs can leave the rig, and whether they choose to fight her, sneak away without stopping the haunting, or focus on ending their friend’s possession, she will do her best to stop them.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Pulp, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (MR) difficult choice, dungeon crawl, escort mission, exploration, innocent, isolated area, madness, magic, relationship hook, spirit, stealth, villain

The final sacrifice needs to be massive, and all remaining non-thralls are being rounded up. Any kind of occult research will show that something ancient and powerful will soon emerge into the world.

The PCs can pretend to be thralls to gain access to the ritual, or they may infiltrate the basement beforehand, likely having to sneak or fight their way in. If the PCs are detected, the thralls will attempt to kill or capture them to make them part of the next sacrifice.

In the basement, cracks in the concrete have formed sigils. If the ritual is allowed to succeed and the PCs are forced to fight the being, all is lost—they can’t take it in a fight. They must defeat it before the fight begins by destroying the symbols in the floor and breaking a piece of ancient stone that is built into the foundation. To do this, they will have to deal with the thralls. This may mean making the choice between killing innocents and saving the world.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (JA) deadline, difficult choice, epic impact, innocent, investigative, madness, magic, spirit

Loss of Loved Ones

A Cold, Wet Hand

498

In a city crisscrossed with irrigation canals, pets in the PCs' neighborhood begin to disappear at night. Sometimes a print or two is found at the scene, always from a worn-out child's shoe. There's no obvious pattern to the disappearances. Then a child goes missing, followed by another, and the authorities begin to investigate in earnest. The PCs become involved in the investigation.

The source of the problem is an undead child. The boy drowned in one of the city's cool, deep canals, and his father—grief-stricken, angry, and bitter—prayed for him to be returned to life. A dark power granted his wish, but in a twisted way, and now the undead boy roams the city, never straying far from the canals that sustain him. His lungs are permanently filled with the water that drowned him, and his clammy touch causes his victims' lungs to fill with water as well, asphyxiating them.

Clues at the scene of one of the first disappearances suggest that the abductor used the canals, and the trail leads back to the missing child's body—dead by drowning, despite being on dry land when found. A second body is found under the

same circumstances, but this time a locket has been dropped at the scene; the locket belongs to the undead boy. When the PCs visit the boy's father, he seems cooperative, but in fact he will oppose them at every turn from then on; he prefers his son's twisted un-life to having no son at all. You can use him as a foil throughout the rest of the adventure.

Once they know the nature of the killer, the PCs must stop the boy before he claims another victim. The canal network is vast, but he haunts the same places from time to time. His touch is utterly deadly, making him a dangerous foe. When the PCs confront the boy at last, he is about to kill another child. They must rescue the already-drowning child while figuring out how to stop the boy. He isn't evil, strictly speaking, and during the fight his dead eyes and mute, bloated smile will plead silently for the PCs to spare him.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (SM) city, deadline, exploration, innocent, monster, race, sandbox

Deadly Salvage

499

A deep-sea salvage ship dredged up several strange eggs on a recent operation, and has since turned them over to a local university for study. The eggs belong to a previously undiscovered species of underwater creature, only a handful of which exist in the world—and the mother who hatched the eggs wants them back. The salvage vessel disappears on its next voyage, and the PCs become involved by way of a connection to the scientific community or through the salvage company. The Coast Guard has found no sign of the ship.

Aboard a chartered sonar vessel, the PCs return to the salvage ship's last known location. Their sonar picks up something large beneath them, moving fast and approaching the surface. Whether they stick around or flee, the sea monster tries to eat their ship. They barely catch a glimpse of something slick, gray, fast-moving, massive, and many-tentacled as it destroys part of their ship and slips back beneath the waves.

Investigating the salvage company, they find out about the eggs. When they visit the university, they discover that the scientists have dissected one of them and put the others in an incubator. The dissected egg appears to be filled with some sort of gray jelly, but no embryo. While they're there, the jelly leaps out of the egg and attacks a researcher, flowing into his mouth and smothering him. It then escapes down a drain.

The PCs must return the eggs to the seabed where they were found, or the mother will sink more ships and eventually come up on land in search of them. The eggs will also hatch within a day or two, releasing more deadly slime creatures. The only way to safely return the eggs is in a submersible, which the university's oceanic laboratory can provide if suitably convinced. As they try to replace the eggs, the mother creature will probe their submarine; unless they can convince her that they're helping her, not hurting the eggs, she'll attack—and once she sees that one egg is missing, they'd better leave with all haste.

What will the PCs do about the monster? Will they let it be, or try to exterminate it? For a follow-up adventure, what if someone else decides to go after it, like a government agency looking for a perfect biological weapon?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Anime, Cyberpunk, Fantasy, High Fantasy, Pulp, Sci-fi, Steampunk, Supernatural, Supers, Traditional Fantasy, Victim Horror

Tags: (MR) bearers, deadline, difficult choice, dungeon crawl, innocent, isolated area, monster, stealth, travel

My Better Half

500

After a wealthy couple is killed in their own home—savagely torn apart by something with large claws and a vicious bite—the PCs are called in to investigate. A trail leads from the house out into the woods, but it ends abruptly. The man received more of the killer's attention than the woman. He was a partner at a powerful local law firm, giving the PCs their first clue.

The next night, a nearly identical murder takes place; the victim is a partner at the same law firm, and again there are no other leads. The night after that, the Assistant District Attorney is torn apart; the next night, it's a patrolman with the local police department. Each night, the attacks are more savage than the night before.

The PCs discover a connection between all of the victims. The first lawyer was charged after causing a fatal car accident while drunk, and was defended by the other partner. The patrol officer covered up the fact that the lawyer was drunk due to a personal friendship and the Assistant D.A. cut a deal so that the lawyer served no jail time.

Looking into the car crash, the PCs learn that the victim was a married man. When they visit his widow's house, they find it abandoned. The furniture, walls, and floors are covered in

huge scratches that match those found at the crime scenes. Gouged into the living room floor is a diagram showing the relationship between the murder victims; the only name not scratched out is that of the owner of a local bar—where the lawyer was drinking the night of the crash.

When the PCs arrive at the bar, they find the widow already there, trying to seduce the bar owner and lead him away so that she can kill him somewhere more private. If confronted, she'll go into a frenzy, transform into a wolf, and try to kill as many people as possible—unless the PCs can stop her.

If the PCs don't kill the widow, she'll confess that she has been a werewolf for many years—long before the crash—but after falling in love with her husband, she learned to control her rage and stop taking innocent lives. Now that he's gone, she has become a monster once more. Can the PCs save her, or should they simply end her misery?



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy

Tags: (PV) city, difficult choice, investigative, monster, social, spirit

Private Family Business

501

In a secluded backwoods town, people are disappearing and the townsfolk are keeping it under wraps. The PCs are introduced to the story when someone famous goes missing or when a local breaks the silence and comes to them for help.

Various locals will comment on the disappearances, but few reveal any relevant information. The sheriff scoffs at outside help, saying that it's a town problem. A retired nurse remarks that one of the PCs looks like a family member of an old hunter who comes into town every few months. The hunter is currently in town, and it's evident that everyone gives him a wide berth. He glares evilly at the retired nurse if they're encountered together.

The PCs discover that the hunter's family was sick many years ago during a heavy snowstorm, and that the town doctor refused to make a house call to treat them. The hunter came to town and bought some medicine, but the sheriff closed the roads. He walked back through the woods, but fainted in the snow. He was found and tended to by the nurse, who wouldn't let him leave. His family died alone. This information might come from more talkative locals after another disappearance has occurred, from hospital or sheriff's records, or from the retired nurse.

The PCs need to check out the hunter's cabin, far outside of town. While driving, their car breaks down and shows signs

of sabotage. They must walk the rest of the way, but find themselves attacked by a pack of wolves that are oddly hungry for human blood. If the PCs don't defeat the wolves, the sound of a shot from somewhere nearby scares the pack away; the shot was fired by the hunter, who is on his way to the cabin.

The hunter has been killing the families of people who contributed to his family's deaths. He feeds their bodies to wild animals, which acquire a taste for human blood. Evidence can be found all around his cabin, where even the bones of his family remain. The hunter returns after the PCs have had a chance to search the place. He leads the PCs on a wild chase, firing at them to fend them off. The PCs might apprehend him, or he might be heard screaming as he's eaten by one of the area's bloodthirsty animals.

This scenario can become supernatural by having the hunter's ghost committing the murders, in which case burying the bodies of the hunter and his family will send him to his eternal rest.



Easily adapted to: Action Horror, Fantasy, Gothic Horror, Grim and Gritty Fantasy, Hard Sci-fi, Post-Apocalyptic, Sci-fi, Supernatural, Traditional Fantasy, Western

Tags: (JA) combat-heavy, innocent, isolated area, madness, monster, race, spirit, villain



Indexes

The design team behind *Eureka* gets all hot and bothered when publishers don't take the time to include an index in their books—particularly in large books with lots of content, like this one. It's a time-consuming process, but indexes can be incredibly valuable to GMs.

So we walked the walk and created not one, but *four* indexes for *Eureka*. Using the indexes in this chapter, you can easily find plots by genre, tag, author, and title.

Whether you love investigative plots or adventures that feature hard choices, have a favorite author whose style meshes perfectly with your game, need to find Supers or High Fantasy plots, or remember an adventure's title but not which chapter it was in, we've got you covered.

Index 1: Plots by Genre

A bolded page number indicates that both plots on that page can be easily adapted to the listed genre. Note that plots from each primary genre chapter (Fantasy, Sci-fi, Horror) are not listed under their primary genres in this index—in other words, you won't find every plot in the Fantasy chapter listed here under Fantasy, since that would be redundant.

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Contributor Bios

Many, many thanks to everyone who poured their love, sweat, and tears into *Eureka*:

John Arcadian stumbled into the roleplaying game industry way back in 2003 because of a hobby project. Never expecting it to go far, John is now an RPG industry blogger, CEO of a small-press gaming company, and has met many of his geek-heroes from days of yore. John lives in an idyllic rural area of Ohio. Rumors that he only wears kilts are mostly unfounded.

Patrick Benson has been a GM for over 20 years. He has written articles on the craft of GMing for TreasureTables.org and GnomeStew.com. He has also hosted seminars by himself and with others on improvising as a GM, balancing life and gaming, game charters, pacing, and numerous other topics. Patrick is currently working on an RPG based upon the Fudge system at his blog, SinisterForces.com. He runs a forum for GMs at YouMeetInATavern.com.

Walt Ciechanowski is a Jersey boy that's been forcibly transplanted to southeastern Pennsylvania. Currently an author and RPG freelance writer, Walt's been an avid gamer ever since he received the "purple box" back in 1982. Walt currently lives in Springfield, PA with his understanding (and fellow gamer!) wife and their two children.

Sara DeNunzio is a merciless wielder of the mighty red pen, exhausted mother of two young scalawags and retired fire eater. In her spare time, she enjoys watching Doctor Who and pretending to understand particle physics. Please contact Sara if you need your book edited or your time machine tested.

Laine Garrett is a graphic design student living in Washington. When she isn't working on design projects she draws monsters' sharp teeth, something she prefers in comparison to typefaces and page layouts. *Eureka* is the second RPG project she has worked on.

Darren Hardy is a webmaster, graphic designer, and gaming enthusiast living in beautiful northern Michigan. His hobbies include board and computer gaming, swimming, bicycling, cooking, and travel. He has worked for a regional newspaper publisher for the past eight years doing print layout, computer support, and web design. His interests include science fiction, geology, astronomy, and technology.

Avery Liell-Kok is a painter and artist. A longtime RPG player and character doodler with a fine art and art history background, she got bored of illustrating all of her fellow gamers' games for free and began seeking gainful employment. She lives Indiana with her fiancé.

Scott Martin is glad that his first RPG book contribution is alongside his fellow gnomes. His non-gnome hats include husband, cat wrangler, engineer, cook, and evil GM. He lives in central California with his wife (and fellow gamer) Jennifer and a crazy cat, Moca. Moca ensures that their games and minis never sit unattended too long.

Andrew McIntosh is a Seattle-based artist who has worked in the video game industry since 2005. His work has been featured in galleries in Seattle and Oakland, where it has delighted and disturbed viewers in equal measure. If only he would use his powers for good instead of evil...

Philip Miller played his first RPG nearly 30 years ago and was immediately hooked. Although he lacks the gene necessary to successfully GM he considers himself an expert player and has, at times, been a semi-professional miniature sculptor and illustrator. He has earned a BFA from the University of Michigan and is constantly creating despite the innumerable consequences to society.

Daniel Milne is a second-generation geek, forever balancing the chase for the new and innovative with mining the nerd awesomeness of the last era of gamers. He lives a quiet life in Utah and awaits the day where his gaming skills will make him the perfect candidate to lead an alien army against an evil empire.

Sam Mustain has been gaming since that fateful day in 1993 when he received a hand-me-down red box edition of basic D&D. Sam is a first class weirdo who would like to turn his critical eye into a career. He lives with his wife Brianne in Utah.

Matthew Neagley is as surprised by his presence here as anyone else. Who knew that you could start out as “Opinionated Loudmouth on the internet” and four years later be writing a book with a group of talented gnomes? When not cooking the stew, or explaining why others on the internet are wrong, Matt spends most of his time in the real world with his gamer girl wife and daughter, although it still involves a lot of sitting.

Brian Nowak is a freelance editor with a ruthless red pen and an impressive ability to come through in a time-crunch. He’s done work for (among others) Bastion Press, Wizards of the Coast’s RPGA, and now Engine Publishing. He’s a geek and bibliophile—a cultivated cosmogonist with a penchant for writing sentences Microsoft Word deems “too long.” He threw his first funny-shaped die in 1997, making him one of the greenest gamers he knows.

Martin Ralya is a writer, blogger, and GMing geek extraordinaire. An RPG industry freelancer since 2004 and a GM since 1989 (with the chiseled abs basement pallor to prove it), he started Gnome Stew with the *Eureka* design team in 2008 and founded Engine Publishing in 2009. He lives in Utah with his amazing wife, Alysia, and their beautiful daughter, Lark, in a house full of books and games.

Kurt Schneider aspires to the periphery of geekdom, and claims many outside interests, some of them including actual physical activity. The sordid truth is that he has been gaming since the late ‘70s, goes by “Telas” on many online gaming sites, and can’t wait to tell you about his character and/or campaign. This is the first book with his name actually printed on it, and not scrawled in crayon.

Hugo Solis is a graphic designer and illustrator, and has been an RPG lover for over 20 years. His desire to create and develop prompted him to dive into the RPG industry in 2009. He is co-creator of the Pathfinder-centric *Wayfinder* fanzine, and has done art and design for Paizo, Rite Publishing, *Kobold Quarterly*, and Sean K. Reynolds, among others. He is constantly looking to get involved in more and bigger RPG projects.

Troy Taylor is happiest when up to his elbows in plaster and craft paint, creating dungeon terrain and detailing miniatures for his homebrew *Steffenhold* campaign. His love of fantasy grew from reading *Thieves World* anthologies and *Arak: Son of Thunder* comics as a teenager. Contributions to *Dragon* magazine led to an invitation into the *Werecabbages Freelancers Creative Guild*. A journalist, Troy lives in Illinois with his wife, Paula, and their children, Carolyn, Preston, and Jonathan.

Phil Vecchione has been a game master since the role was thrust upon him in the early ‘80s. Despite the title not scoring him any chicks, he continued to hone his craft, year after year. He is a writer for *Gnome Stew*, a regular presenter at GenCon, and a freelance project manager for the RPG community. He runs his games out of his gaming lounge (basement) in Buffalo, NY, which he shares with his wife Florence and two children, Dante and Rose.

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