

protodimension magazine



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CONTENTS

4 In The Blackest Darkness

An Encounter Table
by Eric Fabiaschi
for Conspiracy Rules

6 Neverwhere, by Neil Gaiman

A book review
by Mitchell Schwartz
A book to use as inspiration

8 Harvester of Eyes: Silver

Screen, Scarlet Slasher

A short investigation
by Phil Ward
for Dark Conspiracy (3rd edition)

20 Under My Bed

Poetry
by Peyton Bisaillon

21 A Dream for All Ages

A scenario for the
Ghost of a Chance setting
by Lester Smith and Nick Davis
for D6xD6 RPG

24 Don't Tell My Mother I'm

a Deep Sea Diver

(She Thinks I'm a Piano Player in a
Whorehouse)
by Craig Stanton
for your horror

35 Close Quarters Firepower

Nothing like a shotgun
by Lee Williams
for Conspiracy Rules!

37 Courier

Familial fiction
by Shae Davidson
for mood setting or something else

41 The Woods Around The Cabin

An adventure script
by Tim Bisaillon
for Horror Rules

48 Beyond The Silver Threshold

A supernatural horror adventure encounter
by Clint Staples and Eric Fabiaschi
for Call Of Cthulhu

51 Explosives for Dark Conspiracy

Having a blast
by Jason D. McEwan
for Dark Conspiracy

53 Getting by Day to Day

More odds and ends
by Jason D. McEwan
for Conspiracy Rules!

54 De Oppresso Liber

Team building special forces
by Jason D. McEwan
for Conspiracy Rules!

55 Roll Out!

Heavy duty law enforcement careers
by Jason D. McEwan
for Conspiracy Rules!

56 Turning Up the Heat

Field expedient munitions
by Jason D. McEwan
for Dark Conspiracy

57 Jida, the Realm of the Gumiho

A proto-dimension add-on
by Jason D. McEwan
for Dark Conspiracy

58 TP-82 Survival Weapon System

Self-protection in a dark, dark, place
by Lee Williams
for Dark Conspiracy

59 The Shattered Hole

An adventure encounter
by Eric Fabiaschi
for Call of Cthulhu Any Era

62 New Proto-Dimension: Lae

A tempting proto-dimension
by Scott McClenaghan
for Dark Conspiracy



IN THE BLACKEST DARKNESS

An Encounter Table

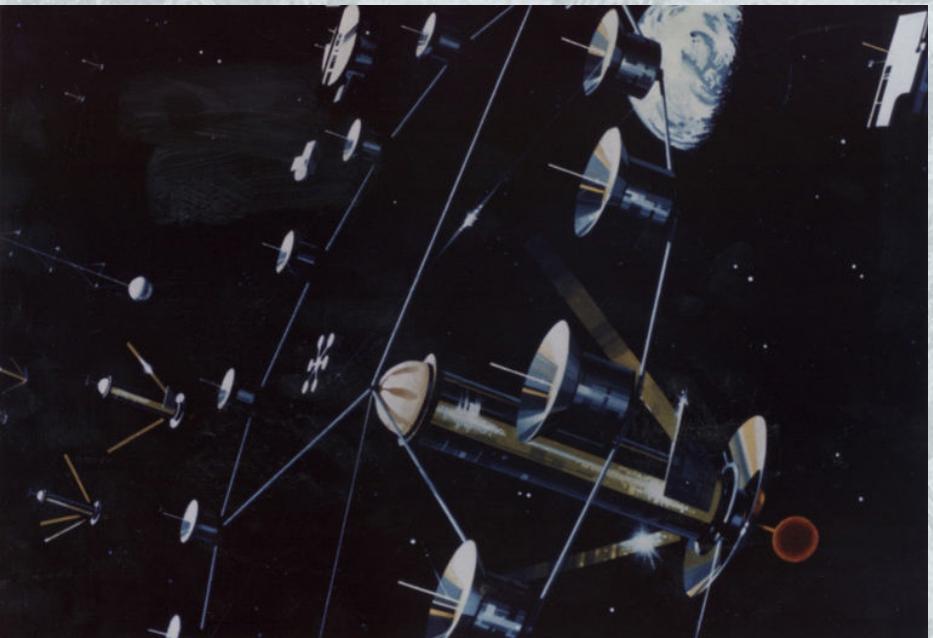
by Eric Fabischi

FOR CONSPIRACY RULES

WITH THE OUTWARD expansion of mega corporations in the world of Conspiracy Rules many colony worlds have fallen through the cracks of the incredibly staggering distances involved. There have been many anomalies and strange phenomenon that astraughts, adventurers, and explorers have discovered after returning years and sometimes decades later to these settlements sometimes they come under the effects of alien presences and monstrous cults that have sprung from the alien darkness out in the

blackness and voids of space. Many times there are strange influences just waiting and watching for life forms evolved enough to prey on to venture into the range of these horror's influence.

Here then is a quick random table of possible things that might be encountered when your heroes and PC's remake contact with lost and distant colonies out in the void. So here's a random encounter table to help move your Conspiracy Rules adventures .



Space Encounter Table, roll 1D20:

1 The colony has come under the influence of a weird alien artifact and has begun to resemble an insect hive in society and behavior. There are strange twisted secrets within its walls.

2 A colony of ancient Old Earther religious zealots thought long extinct are practicing ancient rites in full splendor and including among its ranks human sacrifice. Could an ancient alien power have taken over?

3 Weird alien artifact now sits in the middle of the colony and there are strange energy readings echoing out now from the colony. Where are the colonists? And why have all of the structures of the colony vanished?

4 A group of never before seen aliens is now living alongside the colonists and colonists have mutated in unexpected ways. What's happening with the colony.

5 A single ancient giant sized planetary silver sphere is in deep orbit around the colony and there are aliens down on the surface instead of the humans. Why and what has happened to the colonists?

6 Towering ancient Lovecraftian deity statues, as large as skyscrapers, dot the landscape. There are now hundreds of scattered villages across the surface of the planet and the colony is there alongside it all. What has happened and why are there strange life form readings at the edge of the system.

7 The colony has set up an incredible unexpected power source of alien origin and generating far more power than it needs. Who or what is taking the extra power.

8 There are far more colonists than was originally settled upon the planet. The life form readings are strange and slightly mysterious. There is a slightly sinister air about the place as well.

9 An ancient monolithic giant flying saucer hovers above the colony. There are weird structures northwest of the colony and the colony is broadcasting several messages back and forth to the saucer. What is going on?

10 A giant sky scraper sized ruby sits next to the colony. There are weird power readings coming from under the colony and several strange stone altars around the place scattered about. The PC's receive weird telepathic dreams. They dream of ancient dragons and strange treasures deep within the mantle of the planet.

11 Strange and weird radio signals issue from the planet's surface and rage across the spectrum. The colony is empty and very quiet. The place is a ghost town and not a single soul is around. A single strange crystal stands in the center of the colony. All of the colonists have ascended into their next evolutionary state but who has 'helped' them? What other strange artifacts have been left behind.

12 A pulsing beacon of stellar signals echoes into the black void where the colony once stood. There are 1d10 alien life forms crawling across the remains and ruins of the colony. What does it mean?

13 A strange field surrounds the colony & time as well as space seems affected. What does it mean? The colonists move about in another local time space continuum. Radio signals and communications bounce off the field. It looks like you'll have to go down there. The colonists are completely unaware of your star ship's presence.

14 Weird circling lights orbit around the colony and a strange arrangement of standing stones has been arranged around the place. Strange readings come from the standing stones.

15 The colony has thousands small robots and mechanisms crawling across its surface. They don't conform to any known designs that have been created on Earth. Whose are they? And then the signal comes in!

16 The entire colony is covered in sub zero temperatures and frozen ice. There are snow hills across the colony. Wait those are no hills!

17 There are seventeen small stone pyramids each about 40 meters high on the outskirts of the colony and there are weird underground structures below the surface of the world.

18 The atmosphere surrounding the colony is filled with strange microscopic creatures that will shred a man in seconds and yet the colonists are completely unaware of their presence.

19 There is now a huge twenty kilometer block of alien silver metal takes the place of the colony in question. It radiates light and heat out into space. Where did the colonists go.

20 The colony has been replaced with an equal number of Grey aliens and a massive saucer which hovers over the remains of the colony.

This is simply a small sampling of the weirdness that may be encountered in the blackness of space in the gulf of interstellar distance.

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spacecolony2.jpeg>

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mooncolony.jpg>



NEVERWHERE, BY NEIL GAIMAN

A book review

by Mitchell Schwartz

A BOOK TO USE AS INSPIRATION

STUMBLED ON *NEVERWHERE* recently, although it was written originally in 1996. *Neverwhere* was produced as a TV series for the BBC and novelized immediately afterward, both by Neil Gaiman. They are slightly different; Gaiman included in the novel scenes that were too difficult to produce for television. *Neverwhere* tells the tale of perfectly nice young Scottish gentleman, Richard Mayhew, working his way up in the financial world of London when he stumbles (almost literally) onto a hidden world – London Below.

London Below is made of forgotten and leftover pieces and places – an alleyway, an enclosed courtyard, a hospital deserted for decades, unused sub-basements, subway stations, sewers, various tunnels, now forgotten and unused – and clearly a bit of magic as the paths do not all seem to connect, and are not always there. Its inhabitants range from humans to monsters; some have peculiar, magical abilities. People, once they fall into Neverwhere, become unnoticed and highly forgettable to our normal mundane world – many are street people, to whom normal people pay little attention anyway. Richard Mayhew joins this world when he kindly assists a girl from Neverwhere, Door, who is wounded and bleeding. The next day, he tracks down an ally she sends

his to find, walking from our world into the edges of London Below to find him. When he returns to work after a weekend, his co-workers have forgotten who is, and were moving his desk off to storage; his bank card stops working, and his apartment is being rented to someone else – Richard has become part of London Below, a world ignored by normal London (London Above).

The story unfolds from Richard's point of view. This allows the reader to experience the peculiarities of London Below, as well as Richard's shock of being cut off from the reality that he knows.

The venues were inspiring. On the roof of a building is an old man who raises and sells pigeons. When they leave, they take a different route that seems to defy gravity and logic – they come out in a different building (reminding of dimensional doors). Most of the venues feel grimy and forgotten. Running through the subway is what appears to be an out of service train, with all its windows blacked out; inside it is the court, office, and home of an Earl whose fief is the subways (Earl's Court is a London subway stop); the train travels nonstop; when hungry, the earl sends a few attendants out to a vending machine. And cars are fitted out like rooms in a medieval

PROTODIMENSION MAGAZINE

NEVERWHERE, BY NEIL GAIMAN

castle... shaped like subway cars. One character lives in an unused subway station and treats the protagonist to lunch at a table on the platform, ignoring the expresses that charge by a few feet away every few minutes. Others set up shop in the dank basement of an unused, Victorian era hospital that no one has gotten around to tearing down.

Neverwhere works particularly well in London, where history has provided several centuries of buildings in various layers, and places to be forgotten. Door's family, with a special ability to open doors, has a special house of copies of rooms from various centuries – a Victorian study, a Georgian breakfast room, a 1920s bathroom - physically located miles apart; they moved between the rooms through pictures of the room. At one point, Door remarks that she found some Roman soldiers still encamped outside Londinium. And always layers and layers below – somewhere else – Knightsbridge (below Knightsbridge, of course) – a bridge over a lower Thames haunted by... something that takes the occasional pedestrian; and an abbey of black friars (under Blackfriars, of course) guarding an artifact.

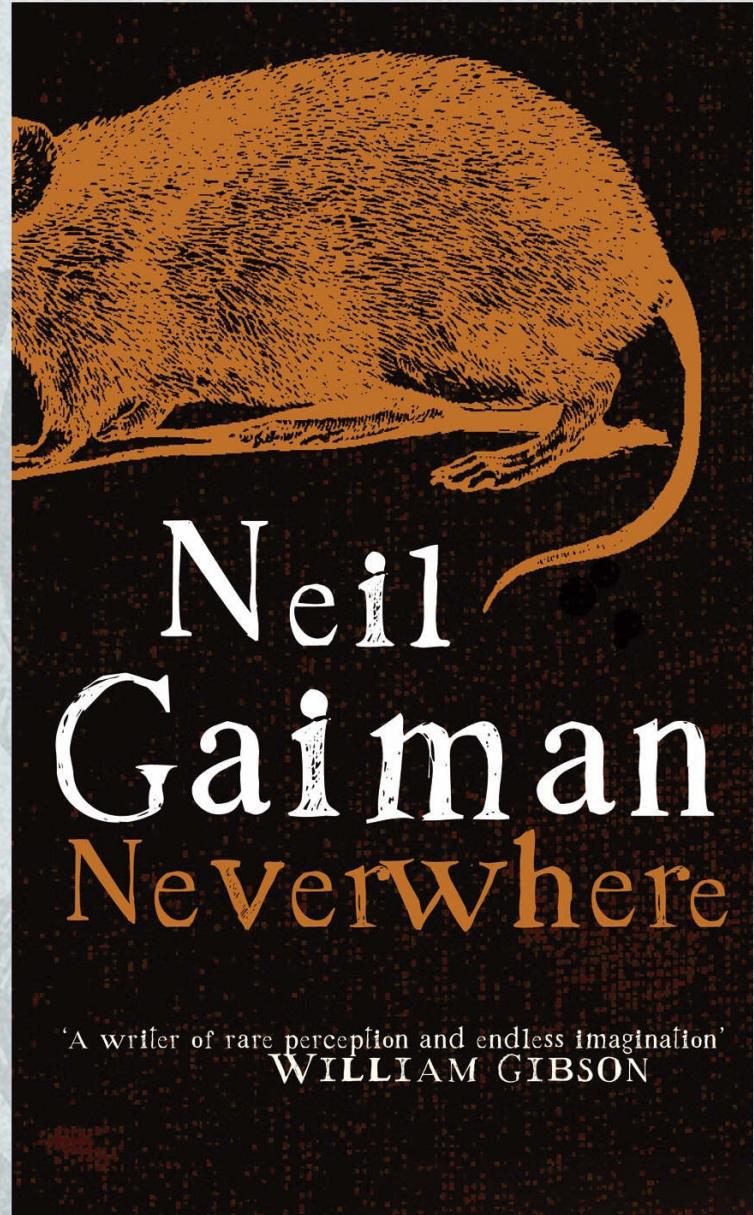
Neverwhere includes the Floating Market, which reappears every few days in a different location – in the basement of Harrod's one night, aboard HMS *Belfast*, anchored quayside in the Thames a few days later. The market sells everything from literal trash to magic items, food to bodyguards.

There are hints that there are similar cities below under other major, long lasting cities. One character returns having been far away for a while (but there is no real hint about how one travels from city to city in the world below; presumably you would hitch a ride in your unnoticed state; that can be left as an exercise for interested GMs).

To me, there was something ... 'other' about *Neverwhere*; a feel very much that there may be a lot going on around you that was ... out of your ken, if you were to pay attention to it (and so, most people don't). It had a touch of the supernatural without being heavy-handed about it. That sense is what reminded me of *Dark Conspiracy*.

Immediate Use: These pieces of the past can be copies in small proto-dimensions, complete with inhabitants, with links to where they had been connected in the real world. The more than human characters can become darklings of various flavors. And the Beast of London makes for a fine critter for a climactic confrontation.

For my money (or time, since I got both book and video from the library), the book is the better telling. The video is wonderful since almost all of it was shot in various live locations rather than a studio set, but the scope of what can be produced in a book wins out.



[Neverwhere at Amazon.com](#)

HARVESTER OF EYES: SILVER SCREEN, SCARLET SLASHER

A short investigation

by Phil Ward

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY (3RD EDITION)

SILVER SCREEN, SCARLET Slasher is a Dark Conspiracy adventure set in **Austin, Texas** for Minion Hunters with some experience. It could be placed anywhere where the weather makes a Drive in Movie business viable and could be altered for use as an introductory encounter.
It is part of the longer Harvester of Eyes Series.

REFEREE'S INTRODUCTION

Corpses have been turning up across Austin, young people dead from heart attacks, seemingly scared to death. The victims are always found in abandoned lots, usually inside their locked cars, with tracks from dozens of vehicles, junk food debris, and oddly one nearby wall always painted white.

The victims were lured in by a trendy new pastime for young mikes; the **Pop Up Drive in Movie**. Hankering after the golden era of the 1950's and 1960s, youths with spare cash are converging on secret locations and enjoying classic Hollywood movies the way they were meant to be seen, from the back seat of a car.

One Pop-Up Drive In is run by **Cedric Escobar**, a horror film buff determined to make something of himself. He bought an antique **film projector** in a **Neuovo Laredo** flea market the **Duende Mercado**, repaired it, and played the film on its reels. The projector was actually a piece of Dark Tek, ET technology designed to open a window into a nearby proto-dimension; **The Hunt**. Unfortunately for Cedric the occupants looked back.

Now Cedric shows movies across the city, draining the energies of his audience to fuel the projector and open a gate large enough to send them to the proto-dimension beyond, **The Hunt**, where **phobivores** prey on their fear. He keeps their personal effects and sells the corpses into Austen's medical black market. Unfortunately for Cedric, his last victim had an emergency medical beacon (see **New Gear** q.v.) and he was forced to leave them behind. Enter the Minion Hunters.

DARK TIMES FOR TEXAS

Texas was hit hard by the great droughts of the early 2000's; many farms collapsed and were bought out by agricorps. The great depression forced many people away from their farms and onto the open road, traveling to more prosperous states. Those left are fiercely tough and independent, they don't brook with anybody trying to take what's

theirs. Dark Texas is a Stand Your Ground, Castle Doctrine, high noon sort of a place.

Beyond the cities, much of Texas is outlaw, with highway law enforcement contracted out to the **Texas Rangers LLC**, who patrol the main roads and rarely trouble themselves to go beyond. There are large demongrounds in the boondocks, and one entire township has disappeared into a sink hole or been partly swallowed by a proto-dimension. Along the **great border fence** with Mexico, desperate refugees cross the Rio Grande while predator drones vector in National Guard units to arrest and sometimes just execute them.

In the cities the corporations have the politicians in their pockets, and the Texas State Medical Board aka “The Death Board” controls medical care and supplies under the National Healthcare Act of 2009. Oil is still Texas T, but these days, the fields of thirsty bird rigs have been replaced with Hydraulic Fracturing, and if the oil corps pump dangerous waste into the ground to get the oil out, who cares.

DARK AUSTIN

The state seat has seen better days; most of the beautiful people and their money have moved to more prosperous cities, but Austin is still keeping it weird...

There is a large corporate presence, mostly local offices dealing with production and shipping to and from Mexico, not the glittering corporate headquarters of the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex.

The film and music festivals are smaller but still going, and Austin still supports a few family owned businesses, the mega corporations don't control everything.

Of course the city also has its dark side, smugglers, bootleggers, Coyotes, corruption, organ-leggers, all vying for a little piece of the American Dream or at least trying to escape the American Nightmare.

ACT I: THE SETUP

The first act is usually used for exposition, to establish the main characters.

PLAYERS INTRODUCTION

Three different introductions are provided; for the less motivated player, a traditional **Patron** who hires them for an investigation, the

Empathic Nightmare for those with Foreboding skill and for the self-motivated; the **Weekly World News** story.

THE PATRON

Lilly Cazadores (“It's my professional name, I'd been working for ten years when we divorced”) is a freelance reporter specializing in celebrity muck raking and paparazzi photography. She has a reputation for digging up dirt. This time however she has stumbled across something much darker and more serious, Lilly needs help to track it down, and she comes to the PC's.

“There's been more than one murder, but the security corps are only sniffing around now a rich, insured kid is dead. The others were ballot men and street kids, and they deserve justice too. There's an underground drive in theatre, it pops up an abandoned lots outside the secure zone every week or so and shows horror movies, and that's where they died.”

THE DARK TRUTH

Lilly is an Igor serving the dark lord who claims The Hunt as his own. Her master is not ready for his lair to be exposed to the world, and Cedric risks attracting attention, therefore he must be disposed of; who better than a group of Hunters.

NPC: LILLY CAZADORES

Experience:	Veteran
Attributes:	6, Charisma 8
Skills:	5, Bluff 7, Interrogate 7, Bribery 7
Initiative:	4
Gear:	Stylish Clothes, high quality digital camera, various audio recorders and notebooks, cell phone, personal Taser, .38 airweight revolver
Likeness:	Kathleen Turner in <i>VI Warshawski</i>
Motivation:	Queen of Spades (ruthless), 8 diamonds (greedy)

EMPATHIC NIGHTMARE

Choose the PC with the highest **Foreboding** skill, or the highest empathy if there are none, and read or paraphrase the following:

"A hunter's moon hangs high over the parking lot, turning everything silver, like an old film. Cars are scattered across the lot, muscle cars with chrome fins, inside each teenagers with gel-slicked hair, puffball skirts, buckets of popcorn and cups of beer. All staring transfixed at the blank white wall of the abandoned 3M Plant."

"A killer stalks the lot, boiler suit and mask, machete dripping blood, a severed head in the other hand. His next victim runs between the cars, trying handles and banging on windows. Her cries for sanctuary go unheeded, they can't hear her. As she pleads at a window, the killer slowly rises behind her, turns her round and slashes across her face with a clawed glove. The teens in the car cackle with glee as they watch the death on the big screen in front of them, not seeing her blood trail slide down the window."

When the nightmare ends, the character hears the news on the radio, read the following in your best Jack Killian voice:



K-HUN Radio News

"This is K.H.U.N. the honey monster bringing you all the news that's fit to hear from the K-Hun airship riding high above Boston. Another young life was tragically cut short today after a young man entered the wrong part of the city and was set upon by ne'er do wells and hoodlums. The Taurus Security are chasing down leads, and expect to have the culprit in custody very soon. Remember, it's called the Out-Law for a reason, stay safe and secure inside the metroplex zone."

"In other local news, fans are mobbing the Barton Creek Square mall for a chance of seeing Taylor Lautner Junior and his new fiancée as they open his new fashion store."

THE DARK TRUTH: K-HUN

Radio is still important in Dark America; cable and fibre may not reliably span the distances between cities, but broadcast can. K-Hun is one small radio arm of the Mexican media conglomerate TNI. K-Hun delivers the messages its corporate masters want you to hear.

WEEKLY WORLD NEWS

Mix this story in amongst the normal hooks found in a copy of the Weekly World News and let the hunters go!

WEEKLY WORLD NEWS

My Movie Nightmare Trapped Inside the Silver Screen!

KEITH MARVIN'S NIGHTMARE began when he took his date to a cineplex, he found himself drawn through the screen, and drawn into a fight for survival against the slasher on screen. His girlfriend did not survive the horrifying encounter, and now Mr Marvin is fighting for his life in an Austin ICU.

See The Weekly World News full sized handout at the end of this article

THE DARK TRUTH

Mr Marvin was not at the local Cineplex, he was actually at a secret cinema showing, and he went alone. See "Legwork: The Survivor" q.v.

LEGWORK: SCENE OF THE CRIME

The players may want to take a look at the last crime scene, converting a generic Government, Law Enforcement or Journalist contact into a solid one will net the hunters the scene of the crime, photos and perhaps the investigating officer's case file. Failing that a reasonable bribe to a civilian data entry clerk, will do the same.

AT THE SCENE

The crime scene is a large vacant lot in Ambition Park, a once innovative industrial zone on the southern edge of the secure zone of Austin, in Ambition Park. One block north and Taurus Security LLC cruisers protect good consumers and ensure the ballotmen don't make too much noise. One block south, narco gangs rule, and pan handlers swarm like flies around rich kids trying to score.

At the scene, they may find the following clues:

Observation [AVG]: The scene has been cleaned, there's no blood, no broken glass and the large flat wall of the vacant 3M plant has been sand blasted clean of white paint. The local taggers have barely begun to cover it back up again, **Trauma Scene Cleanup LLC**'s work at its finest. They have however missed a small number of ticket stubs.

THE FLYER

A cheaply printed lurid flyer, covered in purple prose, advertising "THE FRIGHT OF YOUR LIFE", "CLASSIC HORROR MOVIES IN 4D!", "ALL FOR ONLY TEN DOLLARS", "food and beer extra".

TRAUMA SCENE CLEANUP LLC

Trauma Scene Cleanup LLC. (A division of **Brunner Scientific Services**) is a small company of specialized cleaners used to clean crime scenes after the security services have released them. After all, who wants to clean their own husband's blood off the wall, or explain to the next tenant what that suspicious stain under the bed is, let alone re-hanging blown open doors.

Scuttlebutt has it that TSC have a special projects division which cleans up crime scenes *before* the Security Services arrive.

Foreboding [AVG]: There is a feeling of pain and fear here, somebody was hurt badly and died.

Dimension Walking [AVG]: The wall between dimensions was broken here, somebody or something stepped between worlds.

LEGWORK: TALKING TO THE POLICE

Ambition Park is one of the cities low priority areas and as such it is policed by **Taurus Security (Texas) LLC** a wholly owned subsidiary of Taurus Holdings NC, the higher value contracts usually go to the **Texas Rangers LLC**. As above, bribery, or converting a generic contact to a solid one will get the Hunters the following information:

• This is the third murder, but there was one earlier survivor, Keith Marvin, currently

undergoing psychiatric evaluation at Austin State hospital.

• No bodies were recovered for the first two, their medical telemetry bracelets recorded a catastrophic drop in blood pressure and heart rate, but when EMT's arrived, the monitors had been removed and the wearers were nowhere to be found.

• Taurus Security are investigating, but have no further leads.

LEGWORK: TALKING TO REPORTERS

Talking to a reporter, an expensive liquid lunch, or an exchange of information could net the hunters the same information as talking to the police, as well as:

• There have been more disappearances amongst the less well off, but of course Taurus doesn't care.

LEGWORK: THE SURVIVOR

Players may find **Keith Marvin**, the victim from the weekly world news story above, currently recuperating from his injuries in the **Austin State Hospital**, an asylum.

After regaining consciousness and giving a statement to a Taurus detective, his story of being pulled through the cinema screen into another world and chased around by the film's villain was enough to remand him for psychiatric evaluation.

His doctors believe he had a psychotic break, and have him on some fairly strong drugs, making him difficult to talk to, but the players should be able to tease his story out, or hear it from a doctor. He went to the Cinema, and was drawn through the screen and into the movie, then chased around by the villain (pick a horror movie of your choice). He barely escaped with his life, severely injured, and then his medical bracelet automatically called EMT's to his location.

He can tell the players about **Secret Slasher Cinema** and point them towards The Food Truck q.v.



Exhibit B: The Ticket

The Ticket Stub

THE TICKET STUB

The grubby remains of a ticket stub “Admits One” partly torn through, like you’d get at a carnival or a particularly retro Cineplex.

Observation [DIF]: A Secret Slasher Cinema flyer where the clean-up crews missed it, probably stuffed into a drain grate.

LEGWORK: FINDING THE DRIVE IN

Players should be able to find the next showing of the drive in easily enough; by talking to cinema fans, friends of previous victims, or even the survivor above. All will eventually direct them to a food truck, where cinema buffs can buy tickets and learn the location of the next show, although never the name of the movie because that’s a *surprise*.

THE FOOD TRUCK

Food trucks are a common sight in Austin, serving cheap, hot and mostly safe food to the proles, you don’t want to know what’s in them, but they taste much better than fifteen year old FEMA emergency rations. The truck was once painted up with movie star faces, but they’re now mostly obscured by gang graffiti.

Large paper mugs of **Pale Grain Ale**(tm) are 5 Dollars a pop, as are the “meat” Tacos, they’re hot, greasy and full of vegetables, so surprisingly healthy.

One of Cedric’s crew works the hot plate, while the other serves, keeping a brisk trade going. Ten dollars will get the players the next movie location on a cheaply copied flyer with lurid images and purple prose. See **The Flyer** above.

The queue to the van is full of kids wearing a panoply of fashions, chrome punks wearing fifties hair and vintage clothes rub up against cosplayers dressed up as their favourite horror stars and jump-suited proles who managed to scrape up the ticket price.

ACT 2 – RISING ACTION

Typically depicts the protagonists attempt to resolve the problems initiated in the first act.

THE SECRET SLASHER CINEMA

Cedric’s pack are a group of similar-minded youths who relish the violence and power The Hunt brings them. They select a location a couple of weeks in advance, then promote their cinema by word of mouth, social media and handbills. On show night they use spray paint to prepare their screen, then set up their food truck, generator and speakers, then wait for the rich kids to roll in. Then the fun really begins.

This showing of the Secret Slasher Cinema will take place in a multi-story car park in an Austin business park. Cedric figures he can use the multi-story to fit more customers in, and more customer mean more prey for the hunt.

SETTING UP THE CINEMA

Assuming the minion hunters check out the site in advance, they’ll find a group of young street kids cleaning it up, clearing the rubbish, getting rid of scrub and undergrowth, and finally spray-painting the wall of a nearby office white.

Most of the kids come on foot or by the bus, and Cedric pays cash in hand after the gig, so the hunters can’t ambush him early. They may be able to get a description of him, or even a burner cell number, but let’s face it, the investigation is no fun, if they don’t get to see the projector at work!

THE CURTAIN GOES UP

On the evening, the food truck arrives first, setting up and waiting for customers to arrive. A ticket costs ten bucks, and it’s considered rude

NPC: CEDRIC ESCOBAR

Murderous Projectionist

Experience:	Experienced
Attributes:	5
Skills:	4, Slug Weapon (<i>Pistol</i>) 7, Armed Martial Arts (<i>Small Blade</i>) 6
Initiative:	3
Gear:	STI 10mm Pistol (q.v.), +2 Spare Magazines, Soft Body Armour (1pt Abdomen, Chest), Bowie Knife, The Projector q.v.
Likeness:	A young Robert Davi
Motivation:	Ten of Clubs (extremely violent): Escobar has sent nearly twenty young people to the Hunt, and revels in watching (and recording) their deaths. He will happily kill anybody who threatens him, but has enough control to wait till he has the advantage.

Physical Description: A handsome young man, dressed in antique pants and shirts, or perhaps a snappy suit, Escobar does not look like a killer.

not to buy some food or beer. The real meat tacos are actually quite good!

The staff will be dressed at least vaguely appropriately for the film, so clever players may realise which movie is showing, of course their characters might not know without a History [DIF] check, or a hobby of last century cinema. The clientele may be cosplaying characters from past horror movies... this may cause difficulties later when the players are trying to gun down proto-dimensional creatures who happen to look very similar.

Cars are lined up in the scrub ground between the car park and the “screen” as well as along the front edge of the multi-story.

Once the clients are in place, and the tickets are sold, Cedric brings up the projector van and steps out to introduce the movie. He is appropriately costumed, having spent the week hunting through flea markets and thrift stores. He'll usually give a short speech about the film and its place in cinema history, then run back

to the van and start it up. The audience whoops and hollers, then settles down to watch the movie.

Choose a horror movie you know well, that's what's showing this week. The audience settle down quickly, and apart from the odd bit of noise as the crew move back and forth taking orders, it's a civilised showing.

THE STAFF

Cedric's staff/accomplices are a mixed groups of jaded film buffs and street gangers, they sell food and drink, check the tickets, and run the equipment – apart from the projector. See Cedric's Typical Pack Members.

THE CLIENTELE

The clientele are a mix, the proles will be riding in a cheap car, dressed in a mix of chromepunk fashion, or horror movie cosplay. Mikes have decent cars

and thriftshop or home-made costumes and the odd Gnome will have a very expensive restored car that they treat like shit, and hand tailored era-accurate clothing that they'll probably give to the servants when they grow tired of this new hobby.

If the Minion Hunters mistake them for a **Phobivore** (see **New Darkling Races** q.v.) on the rampage, some of them will shoot back and some will just run.

AT THE MOVIES

During the first act, the projector is just warming up, it feeds off the emotions and fear of the audience, as they get scared by each jump in the movie.

Players may make a Human Empathy [DIF] or Darkling Empathy [AVG] to notice the energy flowing towards the projector, and if they fail a Willpower [EASY] check then they find their own willpower under attack.

Make a check of the Projector's Willpower Drain skill of 10 plus it's Psi of 5, minus the players Willpower. If the projector succeeds, reduce the victim's willpower by -1. -1. Only one point is drained from any one person, as there are so many victims present to fuel the projector.

Once enough willpower has been drained, the projector is fed and has enough energy to project a gate over a car.

The gate opens at the end of the second act, normally at the darkest part of the movie, before the heroes rise to meet their greatest challenge. Cedric chooses a car off to one side, where the rest of the audience is less likely to notice anything strange. Of course if the players are in the audience, then it really should be their car that goes through!

If the players are split up, all the better if one group is chased on screen, and the other is trying to release them.

As the movie finishes, nobody is likely to notice if one car is delayed and doesn't move off as fast as the

NPC: CEDRIC'S TYPICAL PACK MEMBER

Experience:	Experienced
Attributes:	6
Skills:	4, Slug Weapon (<i>Pistol</i>) 5, Armed Martial Arts (<i>Small Blade</i>) 6, Unarmed Martial Arts 4
Initiative:	2
Gear:	A Saturday Night Special (q.v.) plus one spare magazine or a handful of spare rounds, a switch blade or large knife, street clothes or costume. They may wear soft body armor under their costume (AP 1, chest and Abdomen)
Likeness:	A young Robert Davi
Motivation:	5-8 Clubs, Diamonds 3-6, all of these people want money and a better life, and they're not afraid of using violence to get it, in fact some really want an excuse

Physical Description: A motley crew of all shapes and sizes, these young punks will be dressed in street clothes if encountered elsewhere, but on show night, they will be in a variety of horror themed costumes.

NPC: SECRET CINEMA GOERS

Experience:	Novice / Experienced
Attributes:	5
Skills:	2/4, Slug Weapon (<i>Pistol</i>) <3, Unarmed Martial Arts 1/2
Initiative:	1 / 2
Gear:	The clothes they stand up in, their vehicle, a cell phone, some cash and maybe a cheap handgun, a Taser or a knife.

others, Cedric or one of his gang will move to the car to ensure that there are no medical bracelets summoning help. Usually the victim only flat lines when the Phobivore deposits them back in this dimension, so he has plenty of time.

LEAVING EARLY

Of course players being players, they may realize what's happening, and try to rush the projection van. Cedric

NEW PROTO-DIMENSION: THE HUNT

The hunt is a borderland, near to the earth but just a step away. It mirrors our own earth very closely, but it is always night there, a dark, still night where the sound of a pack of hunting dogs (or big cats, or wolves, etc.) can be heard in the distance. There may be a ground fog obscuring footing and snarling roots waiting to track the unwary, but the inhabitants are all predators, and they can see you perfectly.

ENTER THE HUNTERS

When the players enter The Hunt, they find themselves in a mirror of their own earth, in the same place that they started.

The lot is dark - even though the cinema screen is still lit - and the buildings of the city look faded and abandoned, there are no human sounds in the distance, and the sound of the movie is muted as if underwater. A strong thread of empathic energy can be seen coming from the projector van, through the screen, and then up into the dark sky of the hunt. In the distance a handful of similar threads can be seen rising up from Austin.

The other cinema fans are still there, shades sat in darkened cars, munching colorless popcorn and

turns the Projector on at least one of them, and throws them into The Hunt. Any players not gated, will see their companion on screen, being chased through the movie.

INTERLUDE

gazing raptly at the big screen.

The players will be unable to communicate or interact with them in any way, they exist

only as shadows in this dimension. Their car doors are locked, and the occupants ignore the characters. Only blocking the cinema screen will result in a look puzzlement and craning their head to one side.

ENTER THE OTHER HUNTERS

The film showing has now changed, and instead of "teen actress de jour", it is the players being hunted by the slasher! As they stare up at the flickering screen, like a moth drawn to the flame, while behind them the camera focuses on the slasher rising up behind them, drawing his arm back to strike.

HE'S BEHIND YOU!

The player is being hunted by the inhabitants of this proto-dimension; a slasher, a member of The Huntsman's immortal pack. If more than one player came through, split them up, and send a different slasher after each of them.

NEW DARKLING RACE: THE PHOBIVORES

Strength:	10	Education:	1	Move:	2/8/15/30
Constitution:	12	Charisma:	1	Skill/Dam.:	6 / 1D10
Agility:	5	Empathy:	6	Hits:	25 / 50
Intelligence:	5	Initiative:	4	# Appearing:	1 or 2D6

Special: Consider the Phobivores to have Body Armour 1 all over. If the proto-hunter has had time to stalk its prey, it will appear as its foes worst fear, and may cause a Fear Check (see Conspiracy Rules, p107) when it first appears.

The Hunt is not uninhabited, the Dark One who frequents this place has his hounds, empathic predators who feed on the fear and pain of any creature drawn into their dimension. They are generally solitary hunters, but the beacon-like signature of the Projector has drawn several of them to the vicinity, eager for prey.

They are always tough to kill, and skilled in both stealth and dimension walking, allowing them to pop up wherever their prey runs or hides.

Phobivores are quite empathic, and can track their prey by the scent of their fear. A Phobivore often appears as the greatest fear of its prey, in this case, they have absorbed the fears of many cinema goers, and each appears as a cinema villain.

SLASHERS

Choose any of the following horror movie archetypes to chase the PC's around, or create your own, the stats are almost identical, but the methods of killing vary.

The Mask

A boiler suit, a simple white hockey mask, and a selection of farm tools/killing implements. Likes it's pretty to think they've killed it, before getting back up and killing again.

The Glove

Announces its presence by running the blades of its gloves along metal, likes to think it has a sense of humor.

The Demon

Pale white with nail-wracked flesh, this hunter terrorizes at its prey by spouting philosophy.

The Xeno

Hunter, Chameleon, parasite, whichever form it takes, it is always lethal.

Alien Hunter

Armed with lethal "energy" weapons and a variety of blades, this off-world safari hunter takes pleasure in its trophies of the most dangerous game on earth; man.

Murder Cop

Give some people a badge, and they think they're untouchable, this hunter might just be right. Uses an enormous non police issue revolver, which never runs out of bullets.

The Cyborg Soldier

A battle rifle in one hand, and a shotgun in the other, this hunter is unstoppable and implacable, it rarely uses dimension walk to get ahead of its prey.

GETTING OUT OF THE HUNT

Whilst experienced minion hunters may be able to Dimension Walk themselves home, others will find it more difficult, although several different possibilities exist:

- Destroy the projector in The Hunt, the resulting explosion may cause problems in the real world, but at least the investigators will be home.
- It's possible that facing your fears, i.e. killing the Phobivore chasing you may send you home, on the other hand it might not.
- Finally, stepping back through the silver screen. Of course the GM may make it a bit more difficult by requiring a weapon taken from a Phobivore to cut through the thick membrane between the dimensions...

HELP ON THE OUTSIDE

Of course if there are players outside the proto-dimension, then they try to destroy the projector on this side, see **Destroying the Projector**, q.v.

PROTODIMENSION MAGAZINE

ACT 3 – CLIMAX

In which the plots of the previous acts are all resolved.

DESTROYING THE PROJECTOR

Destroying the projector should be reasonably hard, emptying a magazine into it might do the job, or it might just ooze... *bleed* oil onto the floor and keep projecting, even though the reel is flapping free. Setting fire to the van may also do the job.

The effect of course, is up to the GM, it might close the gate, and draw the trapped prey back from The Hunt. It might explode and release all the empathic energy it's stored so far, dragging a couple of Pack Members through into the real world, rich with succulent prey waiting to be terrorised. It might make the gate permanent...

THE PROJECTION VAN

The projection van is Cedric's business and his home, it was once a Winnebago Nomad Camper, but with the projector welded into one side window and slowly growing to encompass the rest of the van it is living technology.

(See "DarkTek – The Projector")

Assuming that they don't burn it first, the players may find evidence that Cedric lives here, half eaten fast food, a mattress, a large collection of clothes, etc.

Further investigation will turn up a trash bag full of the belongings of each of his victims; clothes, money, mobile phones credit cards, etc.

REVENGE OF THE SON OF THE SLASHER

Of course returning to Earth is not the end of it, at the GM's discretion a number of complications may have arisen, add all three, and you have the perfect recipe for chaos and players escaping into the night.

SLASHER ESCAPE

Several of the phobivores have made the jump from The Hunt across to our dimension, and are making their way through the viewers, killing and reveling in joy. Stopping them will be complicated by film goers and staff in costume...

THE LOCALS ARE RESTLESS

Cedric didn't pay off the local chapter of the **Barrio Azteca** streetgang, or perhaps he didn't pay them *enough*. They've turned up and are steaming their way through the filmgoers. Add a disagreement with an escaped slasher.

POLICE SQUAD

Taurus security's liability lawyers have realized that allowing more of their clients to die just outside their secure zone may lead to expensive suits. A tactical team supported by a Mercedes-Cimex TPz Lobo Police command vehicle enters the lot and makes as many arrests as possible with shock batons, tasers and plenty of flex-kuffs. They've put stinger strips on the road, but there aren't enough of them to surround the place.

ROLL CREDITS

GM's should award the following at the "successful" conclusion of the investigation:

- 1xp for Surviving
- 1 xp for nailing Cedric
- 1xp for destroying the projector
- 1xp (max) for anyone who manages to kill a Slasher

A couple of days after the Secret Cinema has been stopped, a Taurus Security Spokesperson releases the following statement:

TAURUS DETECTIVES STOP SPREE KILLER

For Immediate Release - March 2nd

AUSTIN TEXAS: Taurus Detectives were involved in a firefight with a spree killer in an Austin Industrial Estate, two officers were slightly wounded in the line of duty, and the murderer succumbed to self inflicted wounds.

"This is a win for these officers, a win for Taurus and a win for Austin", said Mike Valley, Taurus LLC spokesperson "a dangerous criminal has been removed from the streets due to the action of these brave Detectives."

Taurus LLC is the largest contractor of Law Enforcement Services in the Texas State Area.

For More Information ring 1-800-Taurus or search Taurus Security

Press Contacts:

Mike Valley (M.Valley@Taurus-Austin-Police.
leo)

Taurus Communications Officer

Taurus Head Quarters

PO Box 689001

Austin, Texas 78768-9001

FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

There are several chains of investigation that could lead the players onwards.

REAPERS

Cedric was an enterprising young man, and he has contacts with a number of local medical firms who will accept the corpses from him. Checking his cell phone, the hunters will find that on every Secret Cinema night, he phoned the same number.

It turns out to be the office number of **Stack and Pole Medical Services**, a local private ambulance service. Stack and Pole feature in the next investigation “**Red Market**”.

EMPATHIC THREADS

An extremely skilled dimension walker, well equipped for survival in the hunt might try to trace the empathic threads back from the projector, through the hunt and onwards. They pass through several proto-dimensions each with a higher discontinuity until they reach the lair of a Great Dark One.

THE FLEA MARKET

Somebody is selling Dark Tek just over the Mexican border in the “free” city of Nuovo Laredo, of course crossing the border will be interesting, and getting back even harder. Even Hunters will find the narco-syndicate controlled free town a rough place, and the Goblin Market – The **Duende Mercado** is rough even for Novo Laredo

NEW GEAR

HI TEK - MEDICAL TELEMETRY BRACELET

An offshoot of the craze for fitness monitors amongst Mikes and Gnomes, this high end medical gear monitors a number of vital statistics and can alert medical services that the wearer is in need of assistance.

They vary from simple ECG monitors with a cell-phone on a chip, to sophisticated high end models with built in GPS, that draw power from the wearers motion (or blood), with on board doc-in-the-box functionality, and perhaps even micro-defibrillators and auto-injectors to keep the wearer alive in the event of trauma!

Weight: 0.1 kg

Cost: \$250 - \$2,500 (S/C)

DARK TEK - THE PROJECTOR

The Projector takes up most of the rear of Cedric’s van, an amalgamation of vintage cinema projector, and Dark Tek. This bulbous mass of flesh and glass, polyps and reels, projects not only film, but a Dimensional gate. When activated, it gives the user/owner Dimension Walk 10, but only to The Hunt.

User Cost: Detection 50, Control 1

Weight: 250 kg

Cost: N/A (-/-)

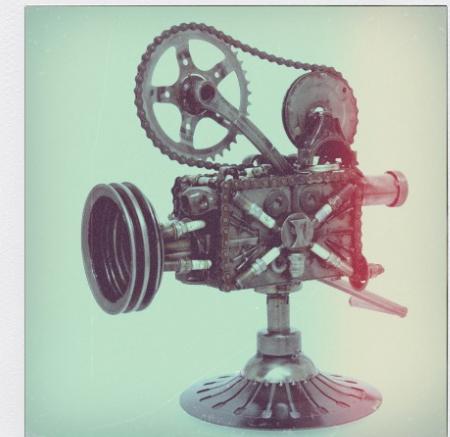


Exhibit A: The Projector

PROTOTIMENSION MAGAZINE

NEW WEAPONS

STI PERFECT 10 (AUTOMATIC PISTOL)

STI Perfect 10								
Ammo	ROF	Dam	Pen	Bulk	Mag	Recoil		
						SS	Brst	Rng
10mm ACP	SA	2	1-Nil	1	14/17	3	—	15

A double stack tactical pistol in 10mm, made by the famous Texas Workshops of STI international, this high end pistol was designed for SWAT Teams and Military end users but found many fans amongst rich gun owners. There is a small under barrel rail, suitable for flashlights, lasers and other small accessories.

Weight: 1.2 kg.

Price: \$2,600 (R/S)

Mag: 14+1 box or 17+1 box



SATURDAY NIGHT SPECIALS

Saturday Night Specials								
Ammo	ROF	Dam	Pen	Bulk	Mag	Recoil		
						SS	Brst	Rng
Lorcin L22 (.22LR)	SA	-1	Nil	1	9+1	3	—	15
Raven P-25 (.25ACP)	SA	1	Nil	1	6+1			
Bryco 380 (.380ACP)	SA	1	Nil	1	6+1			
JA-NINE (9MM Para)	SA	1	Nil	1	10/12 +1			

One of many cheap pistols that can be had for only a few hundred dollars, these cheap pot metal weapons are underpowered and often unreliable, but they're better than a zip gun!

Specific models include the Lorcin L22 (.22 LR), Raven Arms P25 (.25 ACP), the Bryco 380 (.380 ACP) and the Jiminez Arms JA-NINE (9mm).

Weight: 0.75 - 1.0 kg.

Price: \$50-300 (S/C)



TOP STORIES

My Movie Nightmare Trapped Inside the Silver Screen!

Keith Marvin's nightmare began when he took his date to a cineplex, he found himself drawn through the screen, and drawn into a fight for survival against the slasher on screen. His girlfriend did not survive the horrifying encounter, and now Mr Marvin is fighting for his life in an Austin ICU.

Would you like to know more? >>

Big Foot seen in Austin Holiday Hilton

Bigfoot has been seen alive and well for the first time in twelve months after his last appearance in Novo Laredo last year. One of our readers snapped a shot of the reclusive giant as he used the vending machine outside an Austin Holiday Motel last night.

Would you like to know more? >>

Minutemen slay Chupacabra

"Normally we patrol for illegal aliens, but this little fella looks like he came from another planet!" said Chad Owens of the Texas Minutemen volunteer border patrol, as he posed alongside the corpse of the dead goat sucker with his hunting rifle.

Would you like to know more? >>

My Executed Husband returned from the dead to kill me!

One woman's nightmare came true, as her mass murdering husband reappeared from the dead and tried to kill her in her trailer park home this weekend.

Would you like to know more? >>

Satellite Launch

Clooney-Kutcher Technology Associates Today launched the third in their new constellation of communications satellites from their private launch facility in Curaçao. When the constellation is complete, a company spokesman said that international phone calls would become up to 50% more reliable and 25% cheaper.

Would you like to know more? >>

My Radio is Possessed!

Read one woman's nightmare as her radio speaks to her in the voice of the devil! Her local numbers station has been taken over by a mellifluous voice which promises to tell her the truth behind the news and then lies...

Would you like to know more? >>

ALIENS ARE COMING

Be the first to know, sign up now!

MOST POPULAR

- Poisoned Medical Supplies
- Organ Thefts in San Antonio
- Fish Men Attack Oil Rigs
- The Best Rifle for defence against aliens!

MOST COMMENTED

- Are Chupacabra coming over the border from Mexico? – 1570 Comments
- Robots Trucks kill again? – 1231 comments
- Do "Death Boards" Run our hospitals? – *ERROR 0 Comments*
- Does Frakking cause sinkholes? – 1001 comments

Advertisement

Pale Grain Ale

It's the taste of Texas
Pale Grain Ale is a registered trademark of Sky Valley Brewery

HOT LINKS

- Top 10 Mexican Wrestlers you must see! – *LightningFeed*
- See Inside photos of Taylor Lautner Jr's Secret Tijuana Wedding – *Paparazzi.mx*

Advertisement

Drink at **Whitman's** Bar
Where nobody knows your name and nobody cares!



UNDER MY BED

Poetry

by Peyton Bisaillon

Under my bed,
there are monsters lurking,
waiting for me to roll out and snatch me
away.

Under my bed,
there is an inter-dimensional portal,
waiting to take me to another time and
another place.

Under my bed,
dust bunnies live and roam,
they claim every morsel of food that slips
under for their own.

Under my bed,
is where I store everything and anything,
It's my own bag of holding and memories
last forever.

Under my bed,
I can see the stars twinkle like diamonds in
the sky,
and when I reach out to touch them they
disappear like fireflies.

Under my bed,
there is a kingdom of elves,
They constantly march around and sing
songs at the top of their lungs.

There is a world that awaits under my bed,
and it's one place I would rather be,
then in the cold gray world outside.

A DREAM FOR ALL AGES

A scenario for the Ghost of a Chance setting
by Lester Smith and Nick Davis
FOR D6xD6 RPG



Scenario by:
Design: Nick Davis
Development: Lester Smith

N THIS ADVENTURE, a group of strangers wake in a hospital morgue, to discover that there are horrors far worse than death.

ACT I: A COLD RECEPTION

The heroes of this adventure need not know one another before it starts. They meet as newly departed spirits in the basement morgue of St. Elmo's General Hospital.

Give the characters time to introduce themselves and to share whatever information they care to about their former lives and the manner of their deaths. As Game Host, feel free to add visual details about their ghostly appearance: the scorch marks of electrocution victims, the dripping ectoplasmic "water" from the clothing of drowning victims, and so on. Also allow some time for the characters to explore the room and experience their new ghostly condition—their inability to manipulate physical objects by hand, as if even fabric were made of solid stone; the way ghosts can move in a blink from one spot to another in line of sight; and the workings of whatever ghostly powers the players may choose to employ.

Exploring the room, the characters can each locate their own dead body. One might be beneath a sheet on an examining table, its skull opened and the brain lying

in a stainless steel bowl. Another might be nothing but ashes in an urn next to the morgue's incinerator. Others can be locked in cooler drawers, or resting in body bags on the floor. Let the fashion of each character's death serve as a guide to that body's condition.

After the players have finished their introductions and exploration, when the action begins to lag, move on to the next event: the arrival of Dr. Leonard Vincent. (See his stats at the end of this adventure.)

THE DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW

The steel door of the morgue flies open (outward into a basement hallway) and Dr. Vincent marches in. He strides quickly to one of the character's bodies, sets down his medical bag, pulls out a huge syringe of glowing yellow liquid, and injects it through the roof of the mouth into the body's skull. Then clicking a stopwatch, he stares intently at the body, muttering "Come on. Come on, damn you!"

The character who owns the body is suddenly drawn into it. The eyes fly open, and the body arches its back agonizingly, trying to draw in a breath. Moments later, it gives a rattling gasp and relaxes; the ghost exits the body and is free once again.

Dr. Vincent checks the pulse, pulls up an eyelid, listens to the chest with a stethoscope, then sighs and says, "Okay. Formula 665 failed. That means 666 must be the

one." Grinning, he gathers his equipment and marches back out of the room, heading down the hallway to an elevator.

Note: If the characters use their ghostly powers to interact with the doctor, from his bag he pulls his spectral goggles and electroplasmic pistol and begins attacking. Obviously, he is aware that ghosts exist and has come prepared for their interference.

ACT II: A FAIRLY GENERAL HOSPITAL

Whether the characters quietly follow the doctor when he leaves or alert him to their presence and are forced to flee, in the basement hallway they find three other doors, besides the elevator and the emergency stairwell beside it. One door leads to a laundry room, one to a boiler and electrical room, and one to a janitorial storage room.

The stairwell leads upward seven floors, though all doorways are locked. All but the seventh have a window, however, through which the ghosts can travel by line of sight. The seventh-floor door is of solid steel. By the same token, the elevator requires a key to access the seventh floor. Oddly, the sixth floor is entirely unlit. A sign on the stairway door and another in the elevator announce that floor six is closed for renovations.

The Game Host is invited to invent any encounters desired for floors one through six, using the following guidelines.

- 👽 Floor one contains a normal hospital reception (closed for the night) at one end and emergency room at the other.
- 👽 Floor two is a surgical floor, currently unoccupied and only dimly lit.

- 👽 Floor three contains a maternity ward and a nursery, filled nearly to capacity.
- 👽 Floor four has an intensive care unit at one end and a post-surgery unit at the other.
- 👽 Floor five is marked as a quarantine unit.
- 👽 Floor six, as mentioned, is dark. Everywhere lies evidence of construction, although from the dust and rust, none of it new. Apparently no one has worked on this floor in months. Sounds filtering down from above, however, include the hum of much powerful machinery.

ACT III: NOT-SO-GENERAL PRACTICE

Assuming the characters find a way onto floor seven, they are met with a hellish scene. It consists of one immense open room, the ceiling supported by girders, around which are arranged a maze of medical machinery and operating tables containing countless bodies, some dead and in various states of decay, some yet clinging to life, most mutilated and dismembered. The air is cold as a meat locker, and the stench of dead flesh, embalming fluid, and other chemicals fills the air.

In the exact center of the room lies a withered woman connected to a bizarre collection of machines. She is alive, but only in the most technical sense. Her heart is visibly a turbine pump rising out of her sternum. A vast bellows wheezes air into and out of the chest cavity below. Her bowels are splayed from her abdomen into a series of glass containers shaped like Egyptian funerary urns and filled with an assortment of colored chemicals. A re-purposed dialysis machine pumps another rainbow combination of liquids through her veins, along with blood from a pegboard covered with IV packs. And amid it all, automated exercise equipment and electrodes keep her limbs and other muscles moving in a slow, twitching cadence accompanied by the crackle of static.

Next to the bed stands Dr. Vincent, smoothing the woman's brittle yellow-white hair with one hand.

MAD DOCTOR

Focus:

6

Name: Dr. Leonard Vincent

Gender: Male

Age: Middle-aged

Attributes: ~~Brawn~~ Grace
Will Wits

Focused Skills: Medicine, Computers, Second Language: Latin, Second Language: Ancient Greek; Shooting

Unfocused Skills: Command, Persuasion, Vehicle: Auto

Special Abilities: Spectral goggles allow him to see ghosts; electroplasmic pistol acts as Large Pistol against creatures of electroplasm

Notes: Once a dedicated man of medicine, pressing its frontiers for the good of humankind (and for his own glory and wealth), Dr. Vincent became obsessed with obtaining immortality for himself and his wife Chantal. Determined to halt her aging, he began secretly dosing her with experimental drugs, leading ultimately to her current state. Naturally, he began turning to other subjects for his experiments, which also led to his discovery of ectoplasmic existence and development of his goggles and gun. Though not evil in the sense of causing harm for harm's sake, the doctor is utterly selfish, which has ultimately driven him mad.

"I've found it, Chantal," he says, "the elixir to make us live forever. So death can never part us." With that he prepares to inject a fiery red serum into one of the many IVs connected to her.

What happens next depends upon the characters' actions, or their inaction.

- If the characters make the doctor aware of their presence, he pauses long enough to flip a series of switches on a console near him, and a crackle of electricity jolts all of the bodies spread about the room. These rise en masse to attack the ghosts. As dead or largely dead things themselves, these butchered corpses are capable of affecting both the living world and the ghostly one. Their numbers are virtually endless, but fortunately they are slow. (See their stats below.) While these things and bits of things occupy our heroes, the doctor has enough time to inject the woman with the serum and prepare to do the same to himself.
- If instead the characters contact the woman through Dream Walk (or perhaps Speak Living), they are all immediately drawn into her nightmare through the connection of their own ghostly telepathy. She dreams that she is in the center of a tangle of dead thorn trees on a bitter winter night, impaled upon the trunk of the largest at the forest center.
- On the other hand, the characters might choose to do nothing but simply watch the doctor inject her and prepare to inject himself.

In any event, the results are virtually the same. Whether woken by the ghosts or by the serum, the woman suddenly lurches to a sitting position, opens her eyes, and screams. Fiery light blazes from her eyes and mouth, lighting the room in lurid hues of blood. Her endless scream shatters all the glass in the room,

spraying shards and chemicals in every direction. The many mutilated bodies and parts scattered about the room lurch to life and begin grappling with anything that moves—including other living corpses.

Worse, the tangle of tubes, wires, and entrails spread from her torso all take on an animation of their own, turning her to a hideous multi-tentacled monstrosity. With these multitudinous "limbs," she lifts the doctor from the floor and begins squeezing the life out of him. Over the horrible sound of her shrieking, the characters can hear his bones crack, and before their eyes, he ruptures like an overcooked sausage, dripping blood and other fluids from every orifice.

A vortex of hellish red mist begins to swirl around the woman and the doctor, and they begin to sink into it. At the same time, a soft white light dimly glows above them through the ceiling.

If the characters merely watch as the woman pulls the doctor "through the floor" to hell, the white light above fades away before they can enter it. If, on the other hand, they seek to help her leave her body behind, the white light accepts them all, as her lifeless carcass drags him to the nether regions like an anchor.

Meanwhile the cleansing flames of a chemical inferno scour the seventh floor, destroying the remaining animated corpses and all other evidence of the doctor's terrible experiments.

THE CAST

Mad Doctor: Dr. Leonard Vincent.

Mrs. Mad Doctor: Chantal Vincent.

Various Body Parts: Shout out pretty much anything and one of these bits is likely to respond.



MRS. MAD DOCTOR

Focus: 2

Name: Chantal Vincent

Gender: Female

Age: Don't ask

Attributes: Brawn Grace
Will Wits

Focused Skills: Crush with Wires and Tubing and Entrails

Unfocused Skills: Dream, Suffer, Wheeze

Special Abilities: Once wakened, she can animate anything connected directly to her body, as well as scream hellishly loud and long

Notes: Chantal Vincent married the doctor in obedience to her parents' wishes, and in order to provide for their old age. They died in a plane crash immediately after her wedding.

VARIOUS BODY PARTS

Focus: 8

Name: Shout out pretty much anything and one of these bits is likely to respond.

Gender: Various

Age: Various

Attributes: Brawn Grace
Will Wits

Focused Skills: Crawl (half normal speed), Kick, Leave Slimy Trail, Slap, Squeeze, Stink, Twitch

Unfocused Skills: Moan, Write, Vehicle: Various

Notes: These body parts cannot be organized into any sort of coherent fighting force.

DON'T TELL MY MOTHER I'M A DEEP SEA DIVER

(She Thinks I'm a Piano Player in a Whorehouse)

by Craig Stanton

FOR YOUR HORROR

BREVIS SAT IN the sunshine and slipped into reverie.

He could hear his brothers calling for him from the deck above – ‘Ant? Ant? Where are you?’ – and rising over them all, his mother’s querulous note – ‘Anthony? Come and get your lunch! But he was slipping away. By the waterline of the boat he readjusted his goggles, sucked in a gulp of air through his snorkel and ducked once more below the surface.

Down here, all was silence and green sunlight. It was like moving through clarified honey, feeling suspended and warm. Below him was an outcrop of rock from which grew a crazy forest of coral trees, a mass of growths that looked like fantastic antlers, each point aflame with the rainbow nibbling of tiny multi-coloured fish. He moved closer, further down.

He had found a way to creep in amongst the branches, mindful to not scratch his skin on their sharp surfaces. Down here there was a cache of shells, anemones withdrawing from yellow and red blooms to bloody puckers of flesh, rolling masses of tea-colored sea grass. Above him the boat hung suspended, its patched and barnacled hull pulsing slowly in the roll of the waves, with a circus tent of sunbeams piercing through the green on all sides.

With his air running out, he readied to surface again, up from the cool to the lazy warm. For the first time he looked around him, not just up and down: through the moving rays of light, the green went on in all directions, endless and ever darker. His foray had been tentative, exploring the boat, tracing the anchor line, finding the coral; a little adventurer’s map that had kept him in a safe realm. Now he saw the vast expanse of night-black beyond the green and it alarmed him just how much of it there was. He turned quickly. Behind him it was the same – an endless dark. And there, beyond the light, he saw the Shape. It moved towards him effortlessly, faster underwater than anything should be able to move and larger than it had a right to be. It swiped by, deterred by his coral cage, but he saw it looking at him, its black, soulless eye, lifeless and cold. Dead, and yet...

'Mr Brevis?'

He jumped like he'd been stabbed with a cattle prod.

'Whoa! Hey, Mr. Brevis! Steady on! Are you okay?'

Brevis squinted upwards with his one good eye; before him stood a tall young man, blonde-haired and broad-shouldered, in slacks and a polo-necked shirt. His face was lined with concern, as he placed a steady hand on Brevis' arm. Brevis felt his heartbeat begin to wind down. He nodded.

'Yeah. Yeah,' he said. 'Sorry. I zoned out; I was just...'

...dreaming.

The hand patted his shoulder, stiffly.

'Okay,' the young man said, 'well, just letting you know that we'll be ready to head off in about ten minutes, alright?' The concerned face again, which Brevis was beginning to dislike. He cast about with his hand on the bench beside him.

'Can I help with something?'

'Can't find my stick,' muttered Brevis, trying to locate it before Mr Helpful...

'Here you go – you must've dropped it' The warm grey plastic handle pressed into his hand. Brevis nodded his thanks, not making eye contact. He sat forward, staring ahead across the sprawl of bobbing boats before him.

'So, which one is us again?' he said. The young man stepped back and raised an arm indicating to his right.

'Bay 6; Pier 1,' he declared by rote. 'See where Dr Telfer and Mr Bergmann are? Just down the path from them. Her name's the *Sea Witch*'

Brevis could see Telfer and Bergmann in their stupid garish shirts talking to a pretty brunette in shorts and an overshirt with the sleeves rolled up. At first, he thought that was who the young man had named but then he realized what he'd meant.

'I'm Dean, the captain, by the way. Look, I have some last-minute things to get – do you need anything else while...'

'No. No, I'm fine,' Brevis cut him off sensing the fellow's discomfort in the carer's role as akin to his own unease at being fussed over. 'You get on with what you need to do. Dean.' He lurched to his feet, steadyng himself with the hated hospital stick and began his stiff march to the boat. The marina was alive with the rising day. The mash of boats at anchor splashed and sucked and plopped, reeking of diesel and salt. The sky above was full of gulls and the snapping of flags and bunting. Cars gleamed in the parking bays nearby and a cafe somewhere was

filling the air with the fumes of coffee and fried fish. Telfer turned at his approach and cast his megawatt smile with its hint of gold at him.

'Ah, Mr Brevis! How are we feeling? Let me introduce you to our tour coordinator - Nicole.'

Brevis fumbled his cane momentarily and finally extended his hand to the young woman who stepped forward. She was even more breath-taking at close quarters: honey-tanned skin, green eyes with an intelligent light and a sprinkling of freckles across her nose and cheeks. Blonde streaks, sea-dyed into her long dark locks, gave her an outdoors-y air and she moved with muscular grace.

'Welcome aboard Mr Brevis,' she smiled warmly, 'looks like we've arranged a great day for your trip.'

'I certainly hope so,' Telfer cut in. 'I'm a man who likes to get his money's worth.' Behind his dark sunglasses, Telfer's eyes were unreadable, but Brevis could feel the alpha-male tension cutting through the marina air like blood in the water. The million-dollar smile had frozen to his fake-tan face. Brevis turned towards the wharf.

'I'd better start in,' he said, 'at the pace I move, it'll take forever. *Sea Witch*, right?'

'That's the one, Mr Brevis,' said Nicole. She darted a glance at Telfer then slid alongside him, taking his free arm. 'Let me show you the way.'

Brevis sneaked a look back at Telfer as they moved off. The smile had vanished to be replaced by a sour grinding of his jaw; he ripped his 'phone from his pocket and angrily stabbed a button, turning away to growl at some hapless peon. Bergmann watched dispassionately, knuckles flexing on the handle of the small briefcase he carried, then sucked the last of the Coke from the can he was holding before crushing it and tossing it into the water between two moored yachts.

The *Sea Witch* was no small cruiser. It had an upper deck surrounding the pilot's cabin and the main level was equipped with an angler's chair and two racks for holding rods. A central bay in the middle of the main deck contained a viewing port for looking down at the ocean bed below. She was bright and glaring white in the cool morning sunlight, enough to tax the vision in Brevis' remaining eye. He stumbled at the gangplank.

'Whoops! Hey, I gotcha,' Nicole helped him over the railing and let him rest against the gunwale.

'Nice ride,' Brevis caught his breath. He felt Nicole watching him. 'I'm sorry – it's been awhile since I messed about with boats and stuff...'

'So, what's your story?' She rested her hip against the railing next to him. Brevis turned his head to look at her.

'The official term is DCS 2 - Second Stage Decompression Sickness; more generally known as...'

'...The Bends, yeah,' she finished for him. 'Wow! What: were you in an accident or something?' Brevis sighed and shook his head.

'Nothing that I can remember. They pulled me out of the water a little over 60 kilometres from here. I came up too quick: blood vessels exploded in both my eyes; I had an aneurysm; nitrogen narcosis killed my spine and paralyzed both my legs. I spent ages in a hyperbaric chamber; more time in surgery. They saved one eye; the other one's glass. 40% hearing loss in one ear... the list goes on.'

He hefted his walking stick, moved it to his other hand, resting it between them.

'The worst though, is the memory loss. I forgot everything: who I was; what I was; where I was. I had scraps: my ID connected me to a local dive club I'd recently joined; some people there knew me but not too well. I'd spoken of my previous dives with them but nothing personal. No car, no house...bits come back to me now and then, but only in flashes...'

'But you're walking again,' Nicole cut in gently. 'That's gotta be better, huh?'

'Yeah,' Brevis hauled himself back onto his feet. 'They told me that was a miracle. I'll be dancing in no time!'

'How's it going, Mr Brevis?' Telfer spoke from behind him. 'I was thinking why don't we get you up on the top deck so you can get a better view of the proceedings? Huh? We'll get that ol' memory kicking in again just like new.' Behind him Bergmann stepped gingerly over the side of the boat using the briefcase on the railing to steady himself.

'Can you get him up there on your own, Nicole? Bergmann can assist you if you like.' Telfer flashed the toothy, golden grin again.

'No worries,' answered Nicole. 'C'mon Mr Brevis: there's a set of stairs forward.' Telfer chuckled

expectantly behind them as they moved off, goofing with Bergmann.

'...And the pointy end? That's the bow.'

Something told Brevis that he was quoting from a movie, but he couldn't remember which one. Something about a dog...?

'When do we leave?' he asked Nicole.
'As soon as Dean casts off, we're gone.'



Once they hit the twenty-kilometer mark out in open water, they had to stop. Bergmann was copiously sick.

On the bridge, Nicole sifted through the contents of the *Sea Witch*'s first aid kit while Dean eased the lid off a bottle of ginger beer, releasing the fizz to reduce its effect upon the big man's system.

'What am I looking for again?' said Nicole.

'Cinnarizine,' Dean answered, 'small white plastic bottle, tied to a tin of crystallized ginger with a rubber band.'

'Got it.' Nicole slammed the kit shut and stood up, looking down at the main deck through the rear window. Bergmann was hanging over the gunwale, kneeling in a pool of sick; beside him Telfer was standing with his hands on his hips, smoking a cigar and talking loudly to the sick man. Occasionally, he prodded Bergmann's backside with his toe. Dean let some more fizz out of the bottle.

'You know,' said Nicole, 'for a doctor, this guy Telfer's not very sympathetic. You notice how he always asks Mr Brevis how he is, but never waits for an answer?' Dean looked down at the two men below.

'I didn't,' he said. 'But maybe we just assume all doctors are sensitive – there have to be some who are crap at it.'

'Hm. Well I'm glad he's not my doctor, that's all.'

'Whatever. All I know is that he's paid us big bucks to take him out to whoop-whoop, mid-week, at the end of the season just when we need it the most. Let's

just keep our professional faces on and get to the end of this.' Opening the bridge door, he tucked the ginger beer under his arm and reached out for the medication in Nicole's hand. She began to relinquish it but pulled her hand back at the last second.

'Why are we out here? Where is he taking us exactly?' Dean sighed and leaned against the door jamb.

'I don't know,' he said. 'Dr Telfer said that returning to where Brevis had his accident was part of some therapy routine to help get his memory back. It's psycho-babble, and I'm not interested. All I want is to get home this evening and get paid. Meds?' Nicole handed over the pills.

'I don't know,' she said crossing her arms, 'I just don't trust guys who wear loafers without socks...'

Dean paused, then rolled his eyes at her and left, slamming the door after him. On the main deck he strode quickly to Bergmann's side, walking easily with the pitch and roll of the boat. Telfer turned to him, puffing smoke from his cigar.

'What's wrong with him? Huh?' Dean gave him a sidelong glance and dropped his cures on the seat next to Bergmann's briefcase. He turned to grab a bucket from near the angler's chair and hung it over the gunwale to fill it.

'He's just seasick, Dr Telfer,' he said, 'happens randomly. Some people are more susceptible than others; some people are immune. I've known guys who've worked the sea for forty years, never had a problem, then – bam! Spewing their guts up for no reason at all.'

Bergmann groaned. Dean lifted a flap on the stern wall of the decking and punched a button: the diver's gate slowly lowered and he sluiced the pooling vomit out into the ocean, clots of yellowish bile roiling out to crowd in their wake. He threw the bucket into the corner of the deck as the gate raised itself once more.

'Okay, Mr Bergmann,' he said, 'let's get you up.'

Bergmann's swarthy skin had greyed to the color of a steak that had outstayed its welcome. Flecks of sick speckled his goatee and swung in lanyards down to

his garish red-and-white shirt and golden neck chains. Dean set his feet and hoisted the large man up from the decking to drop onto the bench that ran the length of the boat. Bergmann clung to the seat as if his life depended on it.

'What'd you do to me?' he croaked, his eyes rolling in their sockets.

'Easy, Mr Bergmann,' said Dean, 'you're just seasick, that's all. Listen: I need you to try and drink some of this; get some fluids back into you.' He handed the ginger beer to Bergmann, twisting the top off the bottle. Bergmann eyed Dean suspiciously then took a quick pull at the drink. Suddenly, he twisted around and spat into the sea.

'What's this shit?' he said thickly, glowering at Dean.

'It's ginger beer,' said Dean trying to be conciliatory, 'It's flat, so that you can drink it a little easier. Don't try to take too much at once: when you can take some without feeling too nauseous, I can give you something to make you feel better.' He picked up the *Cinnarizine* from next to the briefcase; Bergmann's hand went out to rest on the 'case as he did so.

'Jus' gimme the shit and let's get it over with,' he reached out for the pills but Dean moved away.

'They're no good to anyone if you just spew them up again,' he said. 'Let me know when you're able to keep down some of the ginger beer.' Telfer blew a pall of smoke over them from behind.

'Yeah, Bergmann: suck it up. Christ! I don't pay you to lie around in your own puke.'

'I'll see if I can find you something to wear,' said Dean. 'In the meantime, try to focus on the horizon: you'll feel better. And Dr Telfer,' he took the doctor by the elbow and turned him around, 'maybe you could take that smoke away and let him get a breath of fresh air. Here: check the glass bottom – see if you can see a fish.' He scooped up the bucket and headed back to the bridge. Telfer scowled after him and then peered tentatively down through the plexiglass hull section: dozens of tiny silver fish were greedily gulping the ropy strings of vomit that hovered there. He recoiled sharply.

'Shit!'



On the upper foredeck, Brevis sat in solitude, shaded by the flapping awning overhead. The boat had stopped and he relaxed into the roll and pitch of the waves, enjoying the sound of them slapping against the hull. No-one had come to tell him what had happened, but months

in hospital had given him valuable lessons in patience: an explanation would come in due course.

On all sides, the ocean spread out, shimmering in the sunshine, blue-green and easy-rolling. Off to starboard, a couple of gulls skimmed the waves searching for scraps; glints of light sparkled like stars off the chrome deck railing, blindingly intense. Brevis watched the scene with a sense of detachment. He felt that this kind of view should be familiar to him, part of his experience as a former diver, but he distrusted it. This was a scene from a travel brochure, a TV show, a thousand summer holidays – everyone could relate to this; it wasn't personal. He found himself testing his reactions, not sure of their truth.

At times he felt that his past life was like the parts of a complex mechanism hidden at the bottom of a muddy pool. Putting it back together was a blind process, made more difficult for not knowing what the pieces were, and groping for them was aimless and frustrating. He felt that if he could just find the first bit, the rest would come together almost instinctually...

Nicole appeared suddenly at the top of the stairs.

'Sorry about this Mr Brevis,' she said, 'Mr Bergmann has become seasick and we're trying to sort him out. We should be back underway soon.' She flourished a bottle of champagne and an empty flute: 'Champagne to pass the time?' Brevis shook his head and lifted a hand.

'Not for me,' he said, 'not with my medication. But don't let me stop you.' Nicole paused then sat down next to him on the bench. The cork popped out into the waves and soon Nicole was sipping her drink.

'Normally, I wouldn't be drinking at work,' she said, 'but not every day at work am I getting a seasick client out of his spew-stained slacks. Cheers!' She gulped at her glass and turned to look at her companion.

'Bergmann doesn't strike me as much of a nurse. You have much to do with him in hospital?' Brevis nodded, watching the sea.

'About four weeks ago, one of the regular nurses who helped in my physical therapy class had an accident on the way to work. Nice guy. Mike. 'Bit of a gym pig from what I could gather but that only meant he had no trouble tossing us cripples about. Anyway, they had to let him go and Bergmann stepped in to help.' He shrugged.

'Looks a bit like a gangster,' said Nicole. 'That stud in his ear has got to be a carat at least.'

'Two,' said Brevis. 'He lost it in a fight with one of the patients once and kicked up a stink until it was found. Head nurse told him not to wear it to work anymore.' Nicole whistled softly and drained her drink. She turned to regard Brevis.

'So: how is the whole "trip down Memory Lane" thing going?' Brevis smiled and nodded.

'Fits and starts,' he said. 'I had a bit of a breakthrough back at the marina before we left. A flashback to what might have been my first time snorkeling as a kid. Bits and pieces about my Mum, a holiday somewhere. My first name's Anthony and apparently, when I was a kid, my brothers used to call me "Ant"..."

'I get it,' Nicole cut in, "for short", right?' Brevis looked confused.

'I mean, "brevis"; it's Latin or something. Means "short", right? Kind of a joke?' The sound of the waves beating against the hull grew louder in his ears; somewhere inside him a fundamental piece of the mechanism locked into place. Fumbling through the muddied waters of his memory the lines of his past began to take form ... and it wasn't looking pleasant.

'Sorry,' said Nicole, beside him, 'bad joke: forget I said anything. Look, I'd better be getting back – lunch isn't going to sort itself out.' She slipped away down the stairs.

Not "Ant", thought Brevis; not anymore. 'Hated it when he was a kid; used to hit kids who called him that. But "Tony", that worked much better. "Tony Short"; aka "Shortie". Currently going by the name "Brevis".

Bad joke.



Getting up the stairs was fairly simple with Nicole's assistance; getting back down by himself was a different situation altogether.

He dropped his hated stick down to the lower deck then sat down on the top stair. Gripping the stainless steel railings on either side, he began to ease himself down on his backside, one step at a time. He was almost to the bottom when he felt the boat slow down once more to a stop. A few seconds later he heard rapidly approaching footsteps; Dean appeared, his face a mask of anxiety.

'Hi,' said Brevis, 'it was getting a bit lonely up there; thought I'd see what's happening with you guys.'

Dean gulped a few times and tried to catch his breath.

'God! Mr Brevis – I thought you'd fallen overboard! When I saw you'd gone...!'

'Ease down, Captain. I'm not completely hopeless. Although I don't know what I was gonna do when I hit the deck; I was going to cross that bridge when I got there.'

Dean snatched the grey walking stick from the decking and began to help Brevis to his feet.

'Wait,' said the invalid, 'I'll have to catch my breath before we do this next bit.'

'Sure, sure. Take all the time you need.' Dean handed over the stick then leaned against the deck railing. He cocked his head towards Brevis.

'So: you're a diver. "Were", that is. I mean...' Brevis waved his hand.

'Definitely "Ex-", is what I am. "Former". "Used to be".' Dean winced and ran a hand through his blonde curls.

'Anywhere I would know?' Brevis leant his head back against the superstructure behind him and narrowed his gaze towards the horizon.

'Not that I remember,' he said, 'but I've been told a list of places that – hopefully - I'll recall someday: Red Sea; Cayo Largo; Yapp; Truk Lagoon; Devil Reef; Million Dollar Point...'

"Devil Reef"?' interjected Dean, 'I haven't heard of that one.'

'That makes two of us, then,' said Brevis, 'It's just a name to me. Although, thinking about it, I think it had something to do with gold...' He trailed off. In his mind he had a sudden flash of Telfer's teeth. He shook his head to quell the image.

'Whatever.' He dismissed the thought. 'Shall we...?' Dean sprang into motion, helping Brevis to stand and easing him along the companionway. Telfer's voice floated towards them:

'...talking to this woman once. She didn't tell me she had a glass eye; it just came out in the conversation. Get it? "Just came out"? He chuckled, delighting in his own self-satisfied mirth.

'Charming,' muttered Brevis, through clenched teeth.

'Ah, Dean!' Telfer swung towards them as they reached the main deck. 'We seem to have stopped again. Explanation?' Nicole appeared from the galley with a tray of lobster covered with cling film. Her cocked eyebrow echoed Telfer's question.

'No problem, Dr Telfer,' said Dean looking pointedly at Nicole, 'I just had to help Mr Brevis down from the poop deck.' Nicole rolled her eyes and set her tray down on the deck's table.

'Well, just as long as we get to where we're supposed to be, I guess that's okay' Telfer puffed at his cigar expansively and smiled. 'Next time perhaps, you can let Mr Bergmann assist with Mr Brevis and you can stick to your driving?' He waved dismissively at Bergmann who sat grimly against the aft gunwale, ridiculous in a pair of ill-fitting wet-suit bottoms and a grey *Sea Witch* "Crew" T-shirt that

exaggerated his powerful arms as much as it exposed his hairy paunch. He glared at Telfer and swigged his ginger beer.

'No problem, Dr Telfer,' said Dean helping Brevis to sit down, 'we'll have plenty of time.' He nodded to Brevis and set off to the bridge once more. A few minutes later the engines roared into life.

'Lunch anyone?' Nicole said brightly.



Brevis sat alone in the sunshine and closed his eyes. While Nicole tidied up after the meal, Telfer and Bergmann went to the back of the boat and pored over the contents of Bergmann's briefcase. In his mind Brevis began to sort out the myriad facts that had begun to assert themselves as part of his past, locking into place around that first crucial piece which had surfaced. The recall was sharp and insistent and he surrendered himself to its siren call.

He remembered floating in the inflatable raft with Telfer, all their gear packed and ready to go. The sky was dark above, tinged by the first dim light of dawn. A storm was in the offing, its wall of rain washing away the view of the northern coastline like a Japanese ink painting. The sea around them was calm and gently rolling; Brevis took a deep breath and relaxed into the moment. He loved these quiet fresh times, out on the water.

Telfer, on the other hand, was in a foul mood. He busied himself with the heavy backpacks and kept checking the map and compass, craning his neck to stare upwards into the increasingly cloudy skies.

'Is that them?' he said sharply.

'Telfer, you'll know when they're here. Just shut up and relax will you?' Telfer grunted and began kicking the packs into line again.

'Stupid, goddam' hillbilly hicks,' he muttered. He raised his voice to address Brevis: 'that's it: no more. This is one customer that gets cut from the list. First time and last...'

'No arguments here,' said Brevis. 'There are bigger fish in the sea.'

As usual, they had each made their separate ways to the lonely seaside village; they'd pretended to hook up – hail fellow, well met – as wandering diving fanatics, searching for fabulous dives off the beaten track. In other places, they'd posed as surf bums, when the diving was bad but the waves were good. They'd set out to sea, established a rendezvous for the 'plane and then contacted the customer.

They'd both been put off by the township and its people. The marks of ignorance, poverty and desperation were written large all over the main street. Old men watching from their porches wearing nothing but their underwear; huddles of children, dirty and ill-clothed, who probably knew more about cooking methamphetamine than they knew about how to read. All of them stamped with traces of degeneracy, from a vague, idiot blankness about the eyes to a series of hideous malformations which Brevis found genuinely distressing. They also had the one thing which had marked them as a potential market in the eyes of some bigger fish higher up the food chain – the raw, gaping need for oblivion; the imaginary ticket out of this dead-end hell-hole.

Brevis had camped out on the beach as he often did, keeping himself to himself and maintaining the pretence of his assumed cover; Telfer, always the high roller (if only in his own mind), chose the local hotel. Soon he was bitching about it to Brevis every day.

'Honest-to-God bedbugs, Shortie! Fuck! The room's alive with them! Next time, I swear, there's gotta be five stars, or it's no deal...'

Brevis only met the customers once, late at night in the lee of an upturned lobster boat that hadn't been in the water in an age. They were just kids, maybe twenty-five years at most, and affecting a gangster culture that had yet to make its way this far up the coast. The leader gave off all the signs that he was punching way above his weight and had no clue what he was doing. Telfer did most of the talking while Brevis sat to one side and kept watch. The kid's face had the appearance of having partially melted off, blotches of violent red contrasting with a rough cartilaginous yellow: Brevis had spent his time wondering

if the kid was a burns victim, or if this was some expression of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. The others stayed deep in their hooded tops, poking the kid occasionally and whispering terse reminders. They hit a sticking point with the money.

'So: cash or credit?' said Telfer. 'Only kidding guys – it's always cash.' And it was an old joke from Telfer which was beginning to grate on Brevis.

'We'll have the money. Soon.' The kid responded. 'Do you have the stuff on you? Here?' The other figures all tensed noticeably; the blood was in the water. Telfer smirked and airily waved his cigarette.

'That's not how it works, kiddo,' he flashed his smile; 'we see the green first and then you get your blow.' He took a long drag and regarded the sullen group with his appraising stare.

'We're not gonna have any trouble here, are we? I mean, I'm not just sitting on my dick, am I? Wasting my time?' he flicked his cigarette out onto the beach. 'It's not like I'm short of customers, you know.' The kid waved his flabby hands, conciliatory.

'No sir. No – it's all good' the trite phrase sat poorly in his mouth. 'We'll have it for you. Here; tomorrow night.' Telfer eyed him narrowly as he lit another smoke. The group went into another huddle.

'Eight, lookit,' quoted the kid, emerging, 'we don't want no trouble. If you like, you can take Constance here. Like, back to yo' room, fo' ... y'know, whatever...' One of the others stepped forward with some prodding from the rest; she tossed back her hood and stood revealed as a skinny pubescent girl, all elbows and knees in jeans and a pink tank top, goggle-eyed and pearl-skinned, except where she was marked by some type of raw, flaking eczema. Telfer inhaled sharply and started coughing. Brevis stepped in.

'Forget that,' he said roughly, turning Constance around and pushing her gently but sharply back to the others, 'just be back here with the cash, same time tomorrow. Just you – none of these others. If we see anyone else, you won't see us. If you're late, we leave and that's the last you hear of us. If you don't have the cash, that's it – all bets are off. Clear?'

It took a beat for his words to penetrate the kid's skull, but the cretin nodded and breathed some words of acquiescence whilst backing away. A minute later the group of lugubrious youths hunched their way across the sand, back into the rotting shadows of the town.

'Christ!' spat Telfer. 'Next time: five star and hookers; an' I'm talking Playboy Mansion quality, not skanky, white trash, meth-heads...!'

As it turned out, the kid had listened well and showed up the next day as directed. He carried a trio of large, bulky backpacks with him that were obviously heavy. Brevis, waiting in the shadows down the beach with the inflatable raft, saw Telfer fling his cigarette to the sand and throw his arms wide in anger. He watched as Telfer crouched to investigate the packs, then stand and wheel around in frustration. The kid was pleading supplicatory. Brevis pressed the button on his walkie-talkie.

'Talk to me, Telfer: are we okay?'

'Fuck no, we are not okay!' Telfer's agitation buzzed through the handset, distorting the reception. 'This fucker doesn't have the cash. Instead, he's got us three bags of some kind of fucking jewellery!'

'Jewellery? What kind?'

'Oh, I don't know, Tiffany's latest range? What the fuck do you mean "what kind"? Beads! Trinkets!' Brevis took a deep breath.

'I mean, is it real? Not costume?'

'No man, it's fucking gold, from what I can tell, but there's a ton of it. And I do mean a ton!'

Brevis considered the options.

'Take it,' he said, 'bring the first two bags over; when you've got the third, tell him where the shit's buried. If the stuff's not gold, then he's someone else's fishbait.' He clicked off.

He got the raft ready and loaded the first two packs that Telfer heaved over. Brevis was surprised by the weight; they were kid's backpacks, like the kind they took to school, complete with graffiti scrawls in pen and black marker. He threw the first one into the raft and lashed it down; he heaved the second one upright and unzipped it, checking the contents. Inside was a complex jumble of metal objects, intricate and shining in the dim light of phosphorescence from the surf. Some were linked in chains; others seemed to be crowns almost. He grabbed one small item that fell clear of the tangle: it was about the size of a walnut and seemed to be a ring of complex design. With no other recourse in the dark, he bent his head quickly and bit it: an impression of his teeth was left in the metal. Good enough for now, he thought and hefted the bag into the raft with the first one. After tying it down he turned to see how Telfer was getting on.

As he took possession of the third pack, Telfer pointed out the patch of sand where Brevis had been camping; the kid lurched suddenly towards it, arms flung wide, and started digging, as if the drugs buried there were oxygen and he was an astronaut who'd lived a month in space with a slow leak.

Telfer dragged the last bag over.

'Fuckin' junkies,' he spat, 'I'm tellin' you, that's the worst thing about this job.'

They jumped into the surf, one on either side of the raft, and set a course through the waves, out to the sea beyond Devil Reef, to await their rendezvous with the smugglers' plane...



The rattling of oyster shells in a glass bowl of melting ice and lemon slices brought Brevis back.

'Sorry,' said Nicole, 'I was trying to do this without bothering you.'

'Never mind,' said Brevis. 'It's about time I started living in the real world again.' At the back of the boat, he could see Telfer and Bergmann talking with their backs to him, Telfer sketching out some grand plan with the torn off claw of a lobster. Not taking his eyes off them he said:

'So Nicole, when you're not being the crew of the *Sea Witch*, what is it you do?' Nicole steadied a stack of dishes and smiled.

'Well, on-again, off-again, I'm trying to complete my PhD. Marine biology. It's partly how I met Dean.'

'So that's how you spotted the "Brevis" gag? All those taxonomy classes?' Nicole's expression took on a quizzical cast.

'What're you getting at?' she asked.

'Just that, you should be able to tell a sea-cucumber from a shark. And you're traveling with a school of the worst kind.' Nicole followed his gaze to where the two men stood laughing. She looked back at Brevis.

'How bad is it?'

'I don't know. Bad.'

'What do I do?'

'Stay calm,' he said, 'get to a radio and call the Coastal Patrol. Hopefully they'll get here before things go pear-shaped.'

Nicole reached into her pile of dishes and pulled a steak knife from the cutlery basket. This she slipped into her boot, pulling her sock over it to hide it from view.

'Dean's cabin has a radio,' she said, 'I'll use that.' She hefted up the dishes and went down into the lower deck. Telfer left Bergmann's side and sauntered over to Brevis.

'Well, Mr Brevis,' he said showing all of his teeth, 'I think it's time you got some exercise. Why don't you come over here to the window and see if you can spot a fish.' So saying, he hauled Brevis to his feet and dragged him over to the railing that surrounded the Plexiglass viewing portal through the bottom of the *Sea Witch*. Brevis clung to the rail and tried to steady himself while Telfer leaned in close, conspiratorial. The smile vanished.

'I'm getting sick of this, Shortie. Let's cut the crap and get down to it. What have you done with the gold?'

'Gold?' Brevis played dumb, and for time. Telfer grabbed him sharply and hissed in his ear.

'Don't dick me about, Shortie. You can only play the poor Bends victim for so long before it gets real old, and I've just about had enough. Here: see if this jogs your memory.' He pulled something from his pocket and held it up for Brevis to see. It was about the size of a walnut and seemed to be a kind of ring. It was crafted from three different shades of gold and made to look like a sea anemone, cunningly wrought to appear as if the delicate tentacles were being stirred by an ocean current. On one side of the band, he could clearly see the indentations made by his teeth.

'Okay,' he said looking Telfer in the eye, 'let's say I do remember this piece. What about it?'

"What about it?" Telfer pulled Brevis close, close enough for him to see the dangerous light in his eyes, "What about it?" I'll tell you "What about it". It's you. Going everywhere; talking with all of our contacts. Getting this stuff back together. People dead – people who paid for this shit – and your fingerprints all over it. You're toxic, Shortie. Poison. You're making a mess and some of it is splashing onto me and my reputation.' He relaxed his grip on Brevis' shirt front, letting him slump against the railing once more.

'I've got *Jefé* all over my ass like you wouldn't believe. We brought him a problem when we brought him all this gold, but he respected us and he dealt with it, selling it off; moving it on. Lucky for us it was enough to cover the drugs, but then you go off the reservation – *loco* – tracking this shit down; buying it back; stealing it when they wouldn't sell; Jesus! *Killing people* 'cause they melted it down.' Telfer grabbed the back of Brevis' head and spoke directly in his ear:

'It took awhile to work out what was going on. But *Jefé* has the resources to track this kind of shit down. And it's bad, Shortie; real bad. We have customers out there afraid to do business because they think *Jefé* has some whack-job following his deals and ganking his clients. And you know who gets to clean up this mess? Yeah: yours truly. What? You think I let Buddy here follow me around 'cause I dig his cologne? Think again.' He gestured towards Bergmann.

'Here: you suck on this while I tell you what I think,' he tucked the gold ring into Brevis' breast pocket. 'I think you have the rest of this junk tucked away on a reef out here somewhere. So you and I are gonna find it and bring it back up and then I'm gonna hand the lot over to *Jefé* along with your fucked-up head, *capice*? How do you like that, huh? Now you wait here while I talk to the Captain.' He turned to go, smacking the back of Brevis' head. The blow caught him off-guard and there was a sudden clattering sound. He looked down into the waters below: there, rolling across the see-through hull, was his glass eye, skimming over the ocean deeps.



Telfer walked onto the bridge, followed shortly thereafter by Bergmann. Dean, startled, looked over his shoulder at them and then back at his instruments to complete his course correction.

'Hey, Dr Telfer,' he said, 'I was just about to come and let you know that we're only a few minutes away.'

'Excellent, excellent,' said Telfer he sidled towards the control console and leaned over it, his hands behind his back. 'You know what bugs me? It's how technology always changes. I mean, look at this stuff here: dials, levers, whistles, bells. It's all changed since my day. I mean, you don't even have a compass here.'

Dean reached forward and flicked up a panel.

'There it is,' he said indicating the instrument below, 'It's still necessary, but we rely on the GPS a lot more nowadays.'

"GPS", huh? Telfer whistled. I mean, that's what I'm talking about: it's always change, change, change. These days it takes me three months to get used to my new mobile 'phone and, just when I make friends with it at last, the new model comes out and I'm back to the drawing board.'

'Well, you don't have to get the new model, you know,' Dean kept his gaze leveled at the horizon. Telfer smiled at him.

'Well, well, Mr Bergmann,' he said, 'what do we have here? I do believe that our good captain is something of a Luddite, despite his

hi-tech ship and his gadgets and doo-dahs,' he slapped the cover back down over the compass. 'What's your opinion of plastic, Captain?'

'What do you...? Hey!' Bergman had stepped forward and used a cable tie to lash Dean's right hand to the wheel.

'What are you doing?' he turned back to Telfer. Telfer cocked his pistol.

'Pointing a gun at your head, Captain,' he said pressing the muzzle into Dean's forehead. 'I'd suggest you let Buddy here, finish his work. Keep both hands on the wheel please.' He stepped back. Bergmann quickly lashed Dean's other hand to the steel rim of the ship's wheel.

'Look,' said Dean, 'I don't know what this is about. If you want the boat take it: she's insured; just let me and Nic' go...'

'Where's the fun in that?' Telfer cut in, 'I've got some plans for little Nicky, but sadly, they don't include you.'

As Dean heaved against his restraints, the plastic bag came down over his head from behind. Telfer rested against the control console while Bergmann taped the bag closed, holding Dean away from anything that he might used to rupture the quickly-misting plastic, one hand placed on his chest. Dean sank to his knees, his feet slipping on the floor beneath him; he heaved at the restraints around his wrists but his exertions became ever more feeble. Finally he slumped sideways to the floor, the cloudy plastic inflated around his head like a grotesque bubble.

'Bye,' said Telfer into his face.

Bergmann was looking around the cabin, neatly folding down the end of the gaffer tape.

'Where do you think he keeps the sea-sickness stuff?' he said. Telfer snorted.

'Maybe you should have asked before snuffing him,' he spat turning to the ship's controls. 'Why don't you go and deal with the rest of the "crew" and stop your griping?'

'But I don't feel so hot...'

'Buddy, your gut and its current condition are so far down on my list of priorities at the moment that it's safe to say I won't be getting around to it. *Ever*. Now will you - *please* - piss off and do what you're supposed to do?'

Bergmann glowered at Telfer and, tucking the excess cable ties in his pocket, stepped through the door of the bridge cabin. Telfer stopped him as he was closing it behind him:

'Just make sure you leave some for me, okay?'

Bergmann slammed the door quickly and stomped off; minutes later, as he cut the engines, Telfer could hear Nicole's screams welling up from below decks. He smirked and started to cut Dean's hands free from the wheel.



Bergmann came out onto the deck with a sour look on his face, rubbing his belly. He looked around the boat until his eye caught Brevis, sitting up against the gunwale next to his briefcase. A slow, grim smile spread across his features. He put out a hand to steady himself on the deck railing and closed the distance between them.

'Y'know what, Shortie?' he said, 'I hated every minute I spent in that shithole of a hospital.' Brevis looked up at him with his good eye, his hand over the other. He sighed.

'Sorry to hear that, Buddy,' he answered. 'What? Pay not good enough?'

Bergmann grabbed Brevis by the shirt front and hauled him upwards, slamming him against the back of the angler's chair.

'Yeah, it was shit,' he said, 'picking your arse up whenever you fell over; fetching and carrying for you; emptying your *fucking bedpan...*' his hand began to squeeze Brevis' throat tighter and tighter. 'Time to get me some payback.'

Brevis choked and tried hitting Bergmann's arm but it was no use; all he succeeded in doing was to drop the

gold ring from his hand. The clatter as it hit the deck attracted Bergmann's attention. He bent down, keeping Brevis pinned, and scooped the jewel off the floor. He stared at it for a few seconds then slowly, deliberately, began to force the ring into Brevis' ruined eye socket, twisting it steadily until the blood flowed.

There was a sudden meaty sound, like a cleaver hitting a chopping block. Through the pain, Brevis stared at Bergmann's confused face looking downwards to where a large multiply-barbed spike neatly divided the words "Sea" and "Witch" emblazoned across his chest.

'What the fu...?' he muttered bloodily. He staggered a few steps before heeling sideways and over the edge of the boat with a splash. Behind him at the doorway to the belowdecks area, Nicole let the line play out a little before letting go of the spear-fishing gun. It bounced across the decking and snagged in the railing. She grimaced and slumped against the doorframe, blood dripping from the swelling bruise of her face.

Brevis collapsed to his knees and gingerly tried to ascertain the damage to his missing eye. Bergmann had managed to grind the ring in good, wedging it tightly. It was stuck fast. He tugged it slowly then decided to leave it be: it might at least stop anymore blood flowing. He tried to stand but ended up falling back against the divers' gate. Nicole staggered over towards him.

'No, no, no!' Telfer's voice rang out from the bridge doorway above them, 'you have *not* ganked my button man!' He began walking down to the main deck and as he did so, a shot rang out. Nicole jerked spasmodically and fell to the ground.

'This is really starting to annoy me,' Telfer spat and raised the pistol as he stopped in front of Brevis. 'At this point I'm wondering if *Jefé* wanted you "dead or alive", in which case "dead" works fine for me.' Brevis coughed and squinted up at Telfer.

'I'm guessing that "dead without an explanation" is going to hurt you more than "dead with", he said 'so why don't you put down the gun for a bit and let's talk.'

Telfer's jaw ground as he mulled this over; finally he raised the pistol and took his finger off the trigger.

'Right,' he said, 'spill it.' Brevis swallowed convulsively trying to ignore the pain where his eye used to be.

'Did you ever ask yourself how much all that gold was worth?' he stared hard at Telfer. 'Conservative figures are about four, four-and-a-half million. That's factoring in the artistic value but *before* you consider that no-one knows how it was made. It's technically impossible to do some of the things these pieces are doing. You didn't think about any of this did you?'

'So I'm not the clever one. What of it?'

'Next question: did you stop to think about where those retard got it from? Huh? No, you didn't. And that's so like you Telfer – you're a good soldier, just going with the current. But you never stop to see which way the wind is blowing. They stole it Telfer; it wasn't theirs to give.'

'Old news, Shortie. That had to have been the case any way you slice it. I knew that. So what?'

'So they pissed off some big fish. You don't buy one week's worth of hard partying for four million bucks, not least with someone else's money. They paid for it though.' He coughed again.

'Whaddaya mean "paid for it"?' But Brevis changed tack.

'Know what I did after that job?' he continued. 'I went on holiday; took some time off with *Jefé*'s blessing. Went to China; travelled the Yangzi; went overland to Guangdong. They picked me up there.'

'They'?

'Heavies; Chinese nationals; not military. They tied me to a chair and threw me into a concrete cell. They beat the crap out of me every day for what must have been weeks. No questions; just the heavy stuff. Finally, they dragged me out to a helicopter in the dark of night and flew me to some kind of private estate. Big money, big power: private army kind of power. They took me to see the owner: Chinese guy; spoke English well. He showed me what they had done to those kids; was *doing* to them – some of them were still alive and they were keeping it that way. He told me that I had taken "sacred objects" from the thieves and that I was to get them back. He said that if any of them had been damaged then my life was forfeit; if I couldn't recover the pieces legitimately and quietly, then his operatives would take over.'

'This is bullshit! *Jefé* would have known about someone like this...' Brevis chuckled and then winced through the pain.

'*Jefé*? You think Paco Muñoz, petty Brazilian drug lord, knows about this guy? This is *so big*, Telfer; it's *huge*. This Chinese guy probably lets *Jefé* continue his operation just to bring in pocket money for his twenty

wives. I saw what his operatives did to the ones who wouldn't let me buy back the gold: they were all "that's my girlfriend's favourite bauble – no way dude" and then it was "accidents", "regrettable incidents" and "death by misadventure". Did you hear about what they did to Cartwright after he melted the shit down?' Telfer eyed Brevis uneasily.

'Yeah' he muttered. 'I did.'

'Yeah, and no-one took responsibility, although Cartwright had more than a few enemies who would've if they could've. And each time someone got offed, next day there'd be a piece of jewellery in my hotel room, wherever I was in the world. That, or a bar or two of gold. It got so that just moving around became a pain in the arse so I came here and stashed it. All of it.'

'What? All of it? Four million buck's worth of gold?'

'Yep. Just down there,' Brevis pointed over the side of the boat, 'but take my word for it: it's not worth it.' Telfer showed his teeth.

'Not for you maybe.' Brevis shook his head wearily.

'You're not listening to me,' he said, 'It all has to go back to where it came from. There was just one piece left to get and you brought it back for me.' Telfer's head jerked back in surprise. Brevis pointed to his eye.

'You got this from Muñoz, yeah? He told you it would jog my memory or some such crap, right? He sold you to them, idiot. He gave you up. They got to him and he got rid of you *and* the gold in one move.' Telfer's face darkened.

'That's bullshit,' he said pointing the pistol once more at Brevis.

'No it's not,' Brevis shook his head, 'they told me you were coming. They told me that you would bring the last piece.'

'Who the fuck are "they"?' Telfer put both his hands on the pistol grip.

'You know, I never met Buddy before,' Brevis ignored him, 'but I know his reputation: quick, clean kills; lo-tech, no mess, no fuss. I figured he'd have one of these in his kit to hide any evidence. What do you think it is? Incendiary? Phosphorus, maybe?' He held up the grenade so that Telfer could see it, could see that the pin had been pulled and that it was only prevented from exploding by his holding down the safety lever. Telfer's face paled and he held up a hand, palm outward.

'What say,' continued Brevis, 'you toss the gun into the drink?' Telfer held up the gun, allowing it to swing by the trigger guard from his index finger. Brevis' one good eye narrowed.

'How much fuel do you think there is left on board?' he said. 'At least enough to get us back to port, I figure. And then there's propane for cooking and the scuba tanks...'

'Shit,' spat Telfer and threw the gun over the side. 'Good soldier,' smiled Brevis. With his remaining strength, he tossed the grenade forward towards the bridge. It ricocheted off the gunwale and clattered across the decking, spinning around wildly before bouncing down the stairs to the galley below.

'No!' screamed Telfer diving after it and tripping over Nicole's body as he did so. Brevis flipped up the plastic cover next to where he lay and punched the button for the diver's gate. As it lowered, he relaxed backwards with it and slid headfirst into the water...



The warm water enfolded him gently; it was like slipping into a pool of clarified honey. Above him he could see the silhouette of Bergmann, rapidly reducing due to the attentions of several sharks. The pristine white hull of the *Sea Witch* hung serenely suspended overhead, rolling in the pitch of the waves and suddenly haloed by a circus tent of orange and red beams, piercing the deep blue of the sea on all sides. He lazily rolled to face downwards.

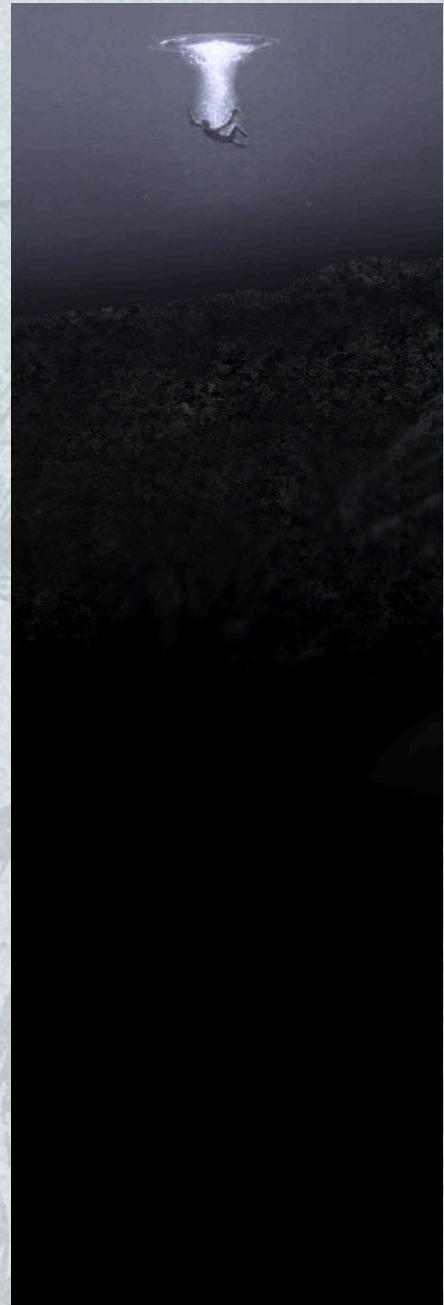
Below him he could see the outcrop of rock growing more distinct as he drew near. This part of the reef had died off years ago and, where once there had been an abundance of life, everything was now covered in a greenish-brown shroud of deep-sea mold, fuzzy, blurring all the sharp edges. This included the remnants of the antler-coral forest, reduced to a pinnacle of dead limbs, grasping claws paralysed while groping upwards to enfold something. Nestled amongst them he could see the three titanium cases which he'd brought with him on his last trip here.

At that time, one of those cases had slipped as he maneuvered them in, tumbling off the outcrop and fading slowly into the depths. He'd pursued it, hoping that it might have fallen into a niche somewhere not too far down. He'd searched for almost an hour before he saw the Shape, the thing that had terrified him into racing for his boat, knowing it was faster than him, knowing there was no hope, making him bite clean through his respirator in his fear. The thing that had almost caused him to kill himself two years ago.

He was not surprised to see the case returned to the other two; just as he was not really surprised to see the gold show up wherever he had stayed around the world. Blood pulsing in his ears, he wriggled slowly between the dead coral trunks and floated within their taloned grasp.

Before he knew it the Shape was there, enormous in the depths as if it had always been there, which, he guessed, must have always been the case. Its scope, its sheer size was bewildering, incomprehensible. He stared in awe as his oxygen failed, gazing deep into its massive, dead-black eye, seeing only his own ruined reflection floating within it like a transient dream. He felt no terror now, only an all-encompassing tiredness, a sense of relief that his task was now finished, a joy in having reaped his reward.

He was still conscious when it began eating his face off...



CLOSE QUARTERS FIREPOWER

Nothing like a shotgun

by Lee Williams

FOR CONSPIRACY RULES!



THE COLT DEFENDER Mark 1 was a multi-barrel shotgun originally designed by Robert Hillberg in the 1960s and built in prototype form by Colt. Hillberg's idea was to provide a weapon for military and law enforcement use that could fire as quickly as a semi-automatic, but without the extra expense and complexity of such a mechanism.

The final version of the weapon was available in 4 variants. The first variant was a simplified one, with no special features. The second variant incorporated a barrel selector on the rotating striker on the hammer. This allowed the shooter to select any one of the eight barrels. This meant that the weapon could be loaded with a variety of ammunition and the shooter could select the most appropriate round for the given situation. The third variant contained a receptacle for a canister of tear gas between the barrels. Pressing the trigger on the fore grip allowed the shooter to spray the target with tear gas, giving him a non-lethal option. The final, fourth variant had both the barrel selector and the tear gas canister. A removable buttstock was available.

Despite plenty of high-level support for the weapon, including the President, the Defender was never put into production. However, in the world of Dark Conspiracy the design was taken up by small company G&N Ordnance (former Minion Hunters) and is once again available to those who know where to ask.

The principle is also seen in various home-brewed weapons, although these ghetto knock-offs are not to be trusted unless you have no choice...



Ammo	ROF	Dam	Pen	Bulk	Mag	Recoil		
						SS	Brst	Rng
20 gauge shot C	DAR	7	Nil	4	8i	3*	—	20
20 gauge shot M	4	1	Nil	4	8i	3*	—	20
Grenade	SS	B:4	Nil	4	1	2	—	15

*If multiple barrels are fired at once, add the Recoil ratings and deduct 1 from the total.

Weight: 4 kg.

Price: \$1,400 (-/R)



No REASON

Familial fiction

by Shae Davidson

FOR MOOD SETTING OR SOMETHING ELSE

CLAN BELLARMINO. IT wasn't a family like the others. A family would be too refined, too stable. Clan Bellarmino had an edge, like the drunk who keeps shouting after the rest of the room has gone quiet. "Feral" was the word one Don used. Sometimes the families had to do things that were distasteful, but the Bellarminos were too quick for blood.

Like what happened to that crooked cop in St. Louis. Either too crooked or not crooked enough. One morning the sun rose to find him lashed to the flag post in front of the post office. Upside down. No head. It was the kind of butcher's trick everyone knew had come from the Bellarminos, but they managed to wipe the blood off their trail and no one was ever charged. That one made all the papers; decent people had ignored the list of cut-up whores and numbers runners who ended up with their hands broke.

Even when they tried to play nice Clan Bellarmino scared people. The families gave to charity, gave to the church, made certain the people in the neighborhood stayed warm in winter. They celebrated and married. They're just like the royals in old Europe, from what I remember in school. But the Bellarminos never fit in. They were always like the vicious dog that's too nice to its master. Everyone could smell the blood on their money, and even in suits sipping champagne they looked like some

grunts you'd hire to beat up scabs. The other families steered clear of them. They didn't get hustled for territory, but they also didn't get invited to the spring banquet at the Waldorf either.

That's why I just sat in the chair, staring at the Don on that cold Friday afternoon in December. It was hard grey outside, rain and snow beating against the window so hard that his office looked like a cave. He'd just put a locked briefcase on his desk and asked me to deliver it to Clan Bellarmino. He didn't use the name—just an address—but I knew the run down old house by the lake was their lair.

"It's a simple task."

"I'm sorry, sir. I . . . was just trying to remember the neighborhood."

He smiled and nodded, lightly tapping a finger on the leather case. "A simple favor—one you can take care of at your leisure, in fact. Make the delivery in the next two days. I know you'll be discreet."

I bowed my head quickly, a formality to give me a moment to think. "Thank you for placing such trust in me, sir. I'll make the delivery and return with the response."

Normally I wouldn't mention a response, but I was trying to feel out exactly what we were doing. I knew I could never open the case, and that my

discretion was really a tendency not to ask too many questions, but I hoped he would slip and give some hint.

"No response, Tommy, only a delivery," he responded, nodding slowly to indicate that the interview was over.

I hit the street clutching the slender briefcase against my side. The Don was right. It was a simple job, but one that was probably sensitive enough to guarantee a thick wad of cash and some time to myself afterwards. I mulled things over as I walked back to my apartment, cars throwing out waves of cold slush and couples huddled against the sleet. Just about a week 'til Christmas and the world looked grey and cold. I could finish the job over the weekend and catch a ride on a southbound train on Monday. With any luck I'd be spending the holiday at a beach on the Gulf. Watching a lady struggle to light a cigarette in the storm, I made my peace with the job.

I decided to make the delivery early the next morning. That would give me the rest of Saturday and all day Sunday to get the bad taste out of my mouth before I picked up my cash first thing on Monday morning. It would also give me tonight to unwind. Dinner and some music, a couple of drinks, and a few hours of not having to think about the Bellarminos.

People were stacked like firewood at the club. The storm hadn't kept them away—it had made them more desperate to get out, to find some kind of life and warmth. Everyone was there. As I scanned the room from my little table crammed by the kitchen door I saw all the best people, and even a couple of the Dons who were in town. No Bellarminos, though. They were squatting in that pile of a house, enjoying the darkness.

Looking out my window as I got dressed the next morning I saw that the sleet and snow had stopped. The sky was a sunless grey, and there were almost no cars on the street. I could slip out to the Bellarmino mansion and be back by lunch. The briefcase sat beside my bed as a finished dressing. A simple brown suit and my old raincoat. No heat today, I decided. Spooking the Bellarminos would be more trouble than a gun would be worth.

A taxi dropped me off about a block and a half from the mansion. This was the old part of town where the meat barons had lived, but good people avoided it now. The huge old homes reminded folks of the slaughterhouses that had built the city and of the mud and blood that was under the lights and parties. Two of the old packing plants were still open, and most of the old houses had been subdivided into apartments for workers. The Bellarmino house, though, sat on a

huge lot, surrounded by bare trees and a low brick wall. The clan had bought the surrounding houses to keep neighbors from getting too close.

A pig of a man huddled in the little gatehouse beside the long driveway. His face was pink and expressionless, and he just jerked his head in the direction of the house when I held up the case and said, "Don Parisi." I didn't see any other guards as I trudged up the long path, although I caught sight of someone glancing from one of the mansion's dark windows. Just before I reached the steps to the porch the front door opened and a wiry man stepped out to greet me. He was thin, with pock marks on his face, and he didn't try too hard to hide the gun he had under his jacket.

"Don Parisi sends a gift to the Bellarmino Family," I explained as I stopped at the bottom of the stairs. He gave a weak smile and motioned for me to enter the house. The inside of the house was dark and moldering, with a kind of warmth that made my skin crawl. It was too dark to see much beyond the doorway, although pools of lamplight from open doors cast odd shadows in the hallway.

It took me a moment to realize that the scarecrow was holding his arm out to take my raincoat. Too sociable for the Bellarminos, I thought as I handed over the raincoat, probably a way to spot people with guns. Overall the lack of muscle surprised me. Most families would have a polite but firm welcoming committee ready to meet any outsider. No doubt Clan Bellarmino's reputation kept away most intruders.

I kept a firm grip on the briefcase as my coat disappeared into a small closet and the thin man led me along the hallway. Normally his smiling silence would have gotten on my last nerve, but it gave me a chance to listen to the rest of the house. A few faint voices drifted from a room upstairs, empty laughter and the ticking of an old clock filled the hall. My guide stopped suddenly before a small sitting room and spoke for the first time.

"Got a cigarette?" His voice cracked like he'd been out of practice talking. A shaking hand raised slightly near his side; he gave a friendly smile that looked too leering. I nodded and handed over a pack and my Zippo. He fumbled a bit trying to get the light, then shoved the pack of cigs back of me so he could concentrate, brushing against my hand. His was too lost in what he was doing to notice that I wiped my hands on my jacket.

And I was too nervous to realize I'd just been played. After getting a couple of good puffs he motioned for me to wait in the sitting room,

his strained voice lost again. It was small—about ten by ten—with two overstuffed armchairs sitting on a cold hardwood floor. Bare bulbs burned in two sconces, and a small round window high in the wall let in a little sunlight. As soon as I plopped down in a chair scarecrow gave me a friendly smile and jerked the door closed. I could hear a bolt sliding into place as I jumped toward the door.

I stepped to the center of the room to size up the situation. The little calm bit of me—the bit that keeps things in check when things go wrong or you need to clean up someone else's mess—said to wait it out. They probably tossed me in here until the Don was ready to accept the gift.

The other bit of me—the bigger bit that was telling my stomach it was in a circus—wanted out. No gun and no lighter. The last bit was clever. Most people don't think about the havoc you can cause with a little flame and a determined mind. I could probably stand on a chair to reach the window, but it looked too small to wiggle through. The wall sconces could be promising, but I'd electrocute myself trying to rig something. Anyway, the Bellarminos were probably watching me, ready to cut the power if I tried anything. I sat back down with the briefcase resting on my knees, waiting to see what would come next.

Near silence. The door muffled the ticking of the hall clock, but I could hear the quarter hours. Almost an hour and a half after getting trapped I heard the floorboards in the hall creak. A long pause, someone waiting and listening, then another faint creak as they moved away. I waited another hour, my eyes on the door.

The longer I waited the more I realized it was a trap. I didn't know what Clan Bellarmino had against the Parisi, but they'd tricked the Don into sending someone—a courier—me. Maybe it wasn't even a beef against the Parisi Family. The Bellarminos could be venting their rage at another competitor, drawing in someone from a different family to use as an example, a warning. Every nasty, bloody, possibility crawled through my mind. No matter how much I tried to quiet things, I kept seeing myself like that cop in St. Louis.

I told myself I was overreacting. The Bellarmino boss was probably out, and they were just holding me until he returned. That thought gave me a little comfort, and I let myself run with it. That would explain the light muscle I'd seen: his entourage of goons traveled with him, or had been sent out to take care of some dark business before Christmas. Soon I'd hear cars on the long driveway and the door would be thrown open, the Bellarmino Don offering an oily fake apology.

A daydream that I turned over in my mind as the clock outside chimed away the time. I was lying to myself like I'd lie to a broad at the theater. The Bellarminos hated outsiders, and there was no sense in them keeping one around the mansion—locked up or not. The sun was fading out the window, and the two wall lamps turned the room an ugly yellow. I prowled around the room again looking for any gimmick that could get me out.

I don't know if they heard me or if it was part of the plan all along. I was looking at one of the lamps when the lights went cold. It was pitch black outside, and going from looking straight into the glare of the light to being in a cave threw me off. I stumbled back and fell over one of the chairs, then felt my way into the one farthest from the door. Not a trace of light, not even a line under the door.

Up all night, staring in the direction of the door. They stopped the clock just to get inside me head, leaving me sitting there with my ears straining to catch any sound. Floorboards creaking overhead from someone on the second floor; faint footsteps outside; a gust rattling the window. Every new sound threw off my train of thought, made my heart race.

The chill that comes in the last hours of the night hit me first, just before the window turned grey. The furniture took shape: a chair knocked out of place, the briefcase forgotten on the floor. My discretion was gone, killed off by a cold need to survive. I decided to see what was behind the trap, to see if it would give me any idea how to play the situation. It was a cheap leather briefcase—the kind you'd use for a drop or that a clinging mom would get for her son's first day of high school. The locks were more like clasps.

Empty. I shook the case, scratched at the inside of the compartment. Nothing. Don Parisi knew what was going to happen then. There was no reason to take it personally at this point. What shocked me, though, was that there was some kind of connection between the two families. The Bellarminos hated everyone, and the other families returned the sentiment. I'd seen the Don joke about Clan Bellarmino. He'd joke with the boys and put on a big laugh, but there was fear in his face. It was gallows humor.

The clock chimed a little after sunrise. Hunger was making me woozy and the lack of sleep the night before kept me fading in and out. I heard a loud conversation echoing from the room upstairs sometime in the afternoon, and footsteps racing around the halls. Definitely movement outside my door, and someone stomping down the staircase. The sounds helped me get my bearings again.

The lights flared on and the scarecrow who'd trapped me threw open the door. A punk with a drawn gun stood beside him, partially shielding a mountain of a man. Fancy suit, but not cut quite right for his size and shape, pale skin that looked jaundiced in the electric lights.

"Don Parisi sends us a holiday gift," he said as one of the goon shifted nervously from foot to foot.

I had to play this calm, go along until I could see what was happening. "He sends his warmest Christmas wishes to the Bellarmino Family."

The goon looked like he was going to be sick, but he kept his gun on me. A sick smile flickered on the don's face when I said "warmest." He stood staring at me for a few moments before asking my name.

"Tommy Giancola."

"You think we're animals, don't you, Tommy?" he asked as he wedged himself through the door. "I promise you, though, the Bellarmino Family is just like the others. We all want the same thing. Do you know what it is?"

"Power," he continued. "You may think people want money, politics, respect, women—but they're all just expressions of the same drive. The real question is how to get what you want."

"I know the stories you've heard about us, and that you and your friends think I'm some mad dog that needs to be put down before its sickness spreads. Those stories are just petty jealousy finding a voice. You understand that, Tommy? The other families hate us because we know how to get what we—what they—want."

He may have been on top of the mountain in his own eyes, but the shabby digs I'd seen during my visit didn't hint at the power the Don was describing. He came closer and motioned to the overturned chair, raising his eyebrow on a sickening pleading sort of way. I nodded and the don stooped with a grunt to right it before sitting down and waving his hand to the other seat.

"They hate us because we all know how to get real power, but the Bellarmino Family is only one not afraid to do it. They play with dope and muscle and shuffle money around and tell themselves they're succeeding, but in their hearts they know these are just games. We have real power: the kind of power that makes the saints weep."

His eyes flicked to the door. His queasy thug looked like one of those kids at the amusement park who's trying to keep his lunch in his stomach to impress his friends. The beanpole who'd tricked me

into the room hissed some words in his ear—something about "in or out."

"The other families hate us," the don continued after wiping his jowls with a rag of a handkerchief, "and they fear us enough to leave us alone. We don't hold any illusions about respect. We leave them to their entertainments, and they stay out of our business. Every winter though, on the shortest day of the year, they send a sign of their . . . fealty. This year Don Parisi chose the gift and you, my dear boy, had the honor of delivering it. A wondrous gift, in fact, one that will insure our growth and success in the coming year"

He cocked his head slightly and the others stepped into the room. The green one had pulled himself together enough to do his job, but I could swear there was a tear in his eye. Scarecrow had some sort of silk bag or hood in his hands.

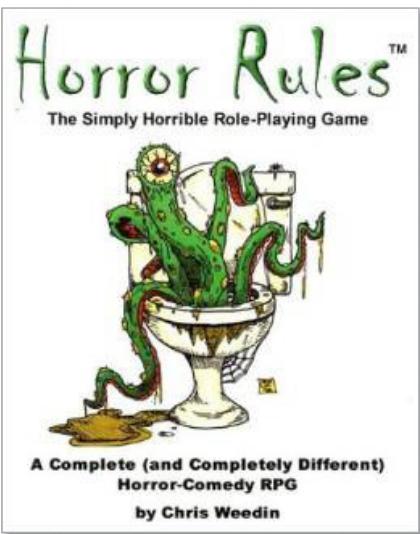
"Tommy," Don Bellarmino asked, "have you ever seen blood burn?"



BKM-93

THE WOODS AROUND THE CABIN

An adventure script
by Tim Bisaillon
FOR HORROR RULES



HORROR RULES is a role playing game of horror by Chris Weedin for Cruicfiction Games. The cost is a mere \$17.99 US and worth every penny. The style of game can be played could be very dark or very lightheartedness; like a teenage slasher flick or a Scooby Doo Where Are You? episode as well.

STORY

While spending a weekend getaway at a remote cabin in the woods, the characters get mixed up in alien invasion. Before the sun comes up not only will our players be knee deep in alien invaders, but also deal with bigoted Bigfoot hunters and/or a clan of cannibalistic rednecks.

SETTING

A cabin in the woods, anywhere US/Canada. It is owned by an uncle of one of the players.

HOT SPOT 1: GAS STATION

As the players pull into this quaint little rest stop to fuel up and buy a propane tank as well as some snacks. They encounter a group of rednecks. One of them is infatuated with a player and tries to make contact.

HOT SPOT 2: THE CABIN

A beautiful cabin situated around a lovely lake. Though, the players have to drive around the lake to get to the remote location. The road is rough one and players will see other cabins along the way to get there.

HOT SPOT 3: THE LANDING SITE

The beautiful mountain fed lake is serene on the surface but underneath on the lake bed is where the UFO sits.

HOT SPOT 4: INSIDE THE UFO

This is where the players are taken and then processed for the journey back to Hu' umm.

GOAL: HUNT/ESCAPE

Players uncover an alien invasion is underway and must deal with the Greys. Also elude Cannibalistic rednecks as well as a group of drunken U-Tubing hunters.

CHARACTER LIMITS

All the characters are friends/related in some way.

No labcoats or VIPs.

STYLE OF PLAY

Twilight Zone. Basically, things are not what they seem as the cold truth is uncovered in a plot twist or two or three thrown in for good measure.

CAST:

These two supporting characters (The NPCs) will likely come across and be helpful. Either saving a player or two from harm or offering sound advice.

Name:	Brad Breed
Char Type:	Action
Occupation:	Police Officer
BLK:	2
BRN:	2
COR:	3
WIL:	2
Health:	6
Grip:	6
Move:	5
Skills:	Detection 5 Gun 4 Watchfulness 4
Description:	5'10, 220lbs has black hair and brown eyes. He has been on the force for ten years now and has never encountered anything strange.
Brief:	Is a hometown boy who lived and breath the woods in the area, he knows the player's uncle very well since they go fishing together and drink some beers now and then.
Weapons & Equipment:	Gun, police vest, shotgun, first aid kit

Name:	Perchance Noth
Char Type:	Regular Joe
Occupation:	Reporter
BLK:	2
BRN:	3
COR:	3
WIL:	3
Skills:	Detection 4 Sweet Talk 3 Medical 3
Description:	Perchance stand 5'11 and about 145 lbs and very pretty. She is dressed in a business woman's suit and wears horned rimmed glasses.
Brief:	Perchance is investigating the story of the camper's disappearance.
Weapons & Equipment:	Pen, notepad, tablet, taser

BAD GUYS:

Name:	Greys
COR:	4
Fighting Skill:	Laser Gun or Melee
Damage:	Light
Health:	40
Weak Spot:	5 (Water)
Move:	9
Grip:	Scare
Description:	Greys are small humanoid beings. They stand 4" tall and have long slender arms. Huge black eyes
Vulnerabilities:	Water
Skills:	Sneak 9, Watchfulness 9, Gun 6
Powers:	
Name:	ROBOT
COR:	5
Fighting Skill:	Melee
Damage:	Heavy
Health:	100
Weak Spot:	5 (water)
Move:	6
Grip:	None
Description:	Is a huge mechanical beast, the type you see in the 1930's old sci-fi movie serials.
Vulnerabilities:	Water
Skills:	HTH 12, Melee 10, Technical 5
Powers:	

WALK ONS

Walk Ons are considered Monster fodder, NPCs to be killed in the process of the adventure.

Mike Ramsey – Sasquatch Hunter. Vaporized by a Grey in Event 6

Rick "The Grip" Gripperman – Sasquatch Hunter. Vaporized by a Grey in Event 6

Derek Grimes – Cameraman. Dissected by a Grey in the UFO in Event 7

CHAIN OF EVENTS:

1. **Stop n Shop** – The players are heading up to a cabin for a weekend get away. Along the way there they stop for gas, propane tank and other items. This is where they will meet up with Momma Moon, Honeybear Hank, Sweetpea Sugar and Uncle Smoke. As a character is looking around make the players roll a Watchfulness check and if they make it they will see Sweetpea Sugar standing in an eye staring at them. While inside the store Sweetpea Sugar will approach on of the PC and inquire what they are doing. Sweetpea will make a comment that they “sure lookin’ mighty purdy”. She will try and lure a party member outside to kidnap. This is only a red herring but could be part of the story if the GM feels inclined to throw them into the mix.
2. **CNW News Crew** – Turning off the highway and onto Mislaid Road. They see a news van on the side of the road with a news crew talking with a farmer. The talk is about cattle rustler and missing cattle. The news reporter questions the farmer about the rustlers being an old wild west thing but the farmer tells it continues to happen to this very day. This is where Sheriff Brad Breed is as well since he is parked on the side of the road. He had given his “no comment” to the media but sticking around because Perchance is pretty.
3. **Bigfoot Hunters** – A big monster truck emerges from the woods and onto the road in front of the party. A duo of Bigfoot hunters are out on a drunken joy ride. They stop and warn the PCs to be on the look out for Bigfoot and tell them of the strange things that are happening in the woods. A camper disappeared two weeks ago, and a family two week before that. They claim

it's Bigfoot. They give the PCs their cell number to call in case of a sighting.

4. **Cabin In the Woods** – The scenic cabin over looking the lake is in secluded section. A lodge with an open kitchen and sitting area and four private beds and an upper loft to store stuff in as well. Time for the players to settle in and enjoy the sights.

5. **Peek A Boo** – During the night a bright light can be seen in the the woods. Turns out to be drunken Sasquatchers out on a joy ride or it could be the red necks coming to claim their prize. Additionally could be all they wanted to do was to scare the city slickers silly by having one dress up in a Bigfoot costume.

6. **Peek A Boo II** – This time it's the actual Aliens. A player or two sees something outside their bedroom window. The Greys attack with a stun gun and takes our players captive.

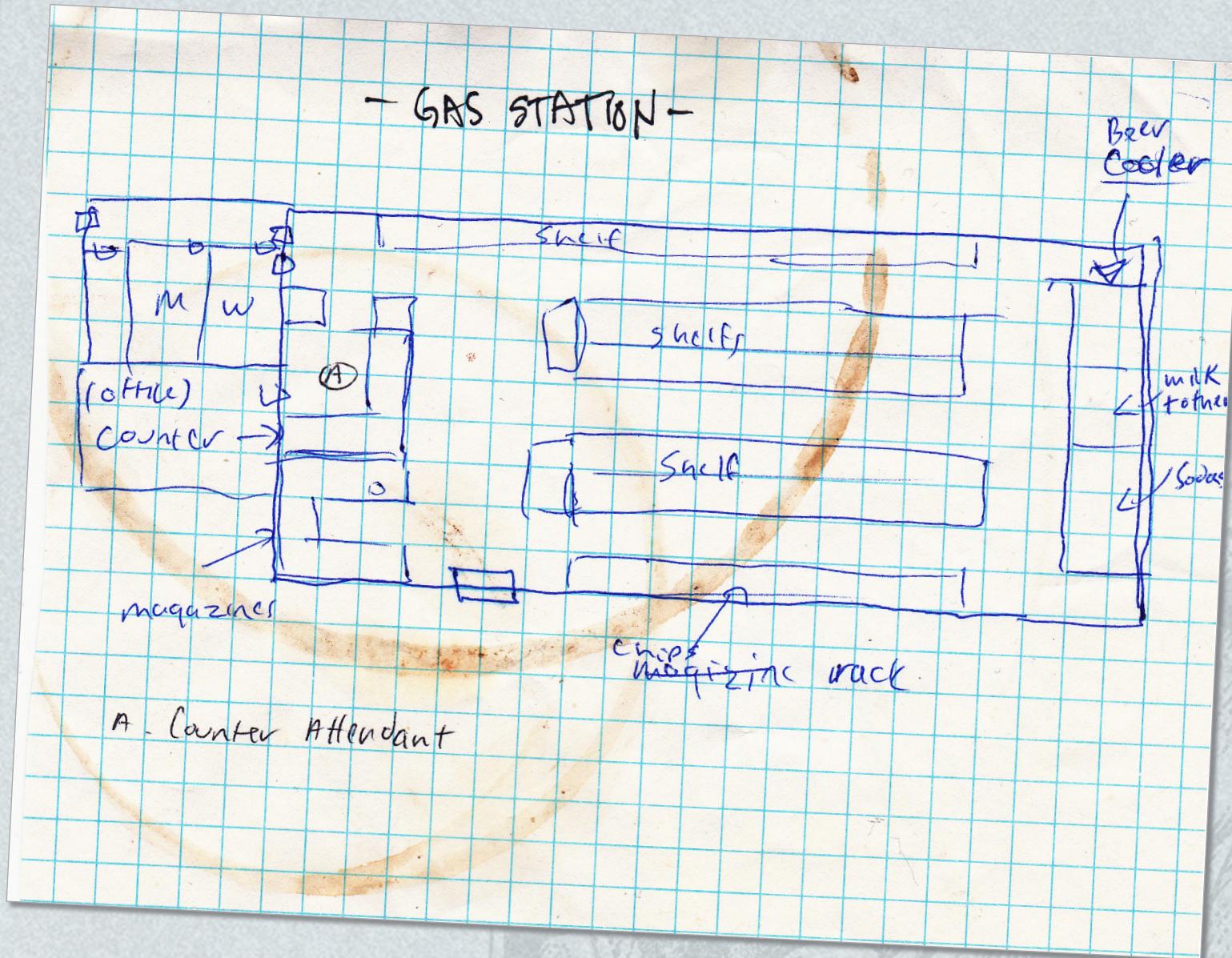
7. **Probed** – Players awaken in the belly of the saucer. In the saucer they in a holding cell, a Grey peering at them, looking over three dimensional holographic images of their bodies and pointing to the spleen. Licking his lips. In the cell with them is Perchance Noth, Derek Grimes is lying on a table on the other side of the saucer. A huge robot is in the centre of the room keeping guard.

8. **Escape** – Players battle the Greys and realized they are in the bottom of the lake.

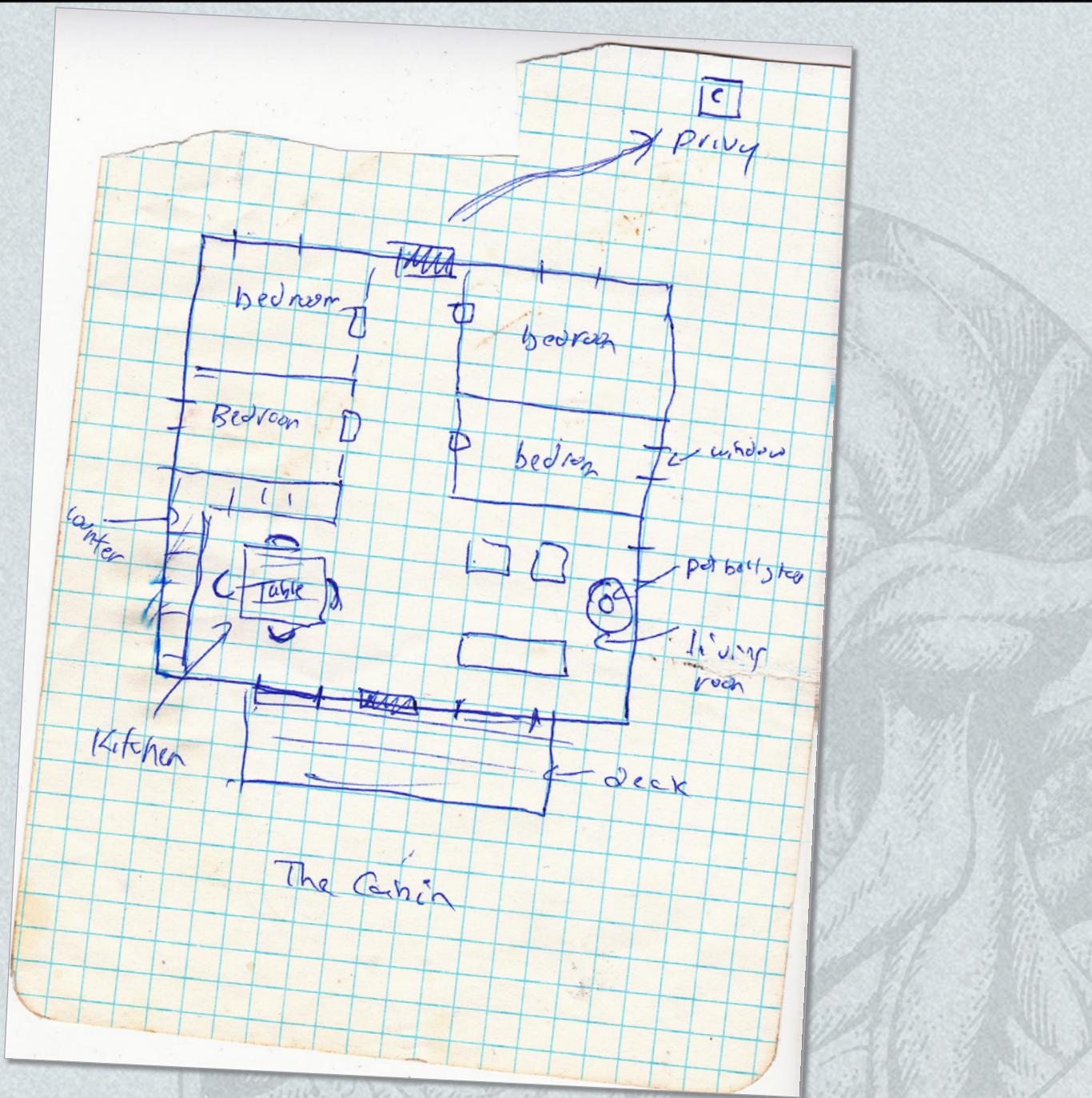
9. **On the Shore** – The UFO ascends from the water and to the heavens



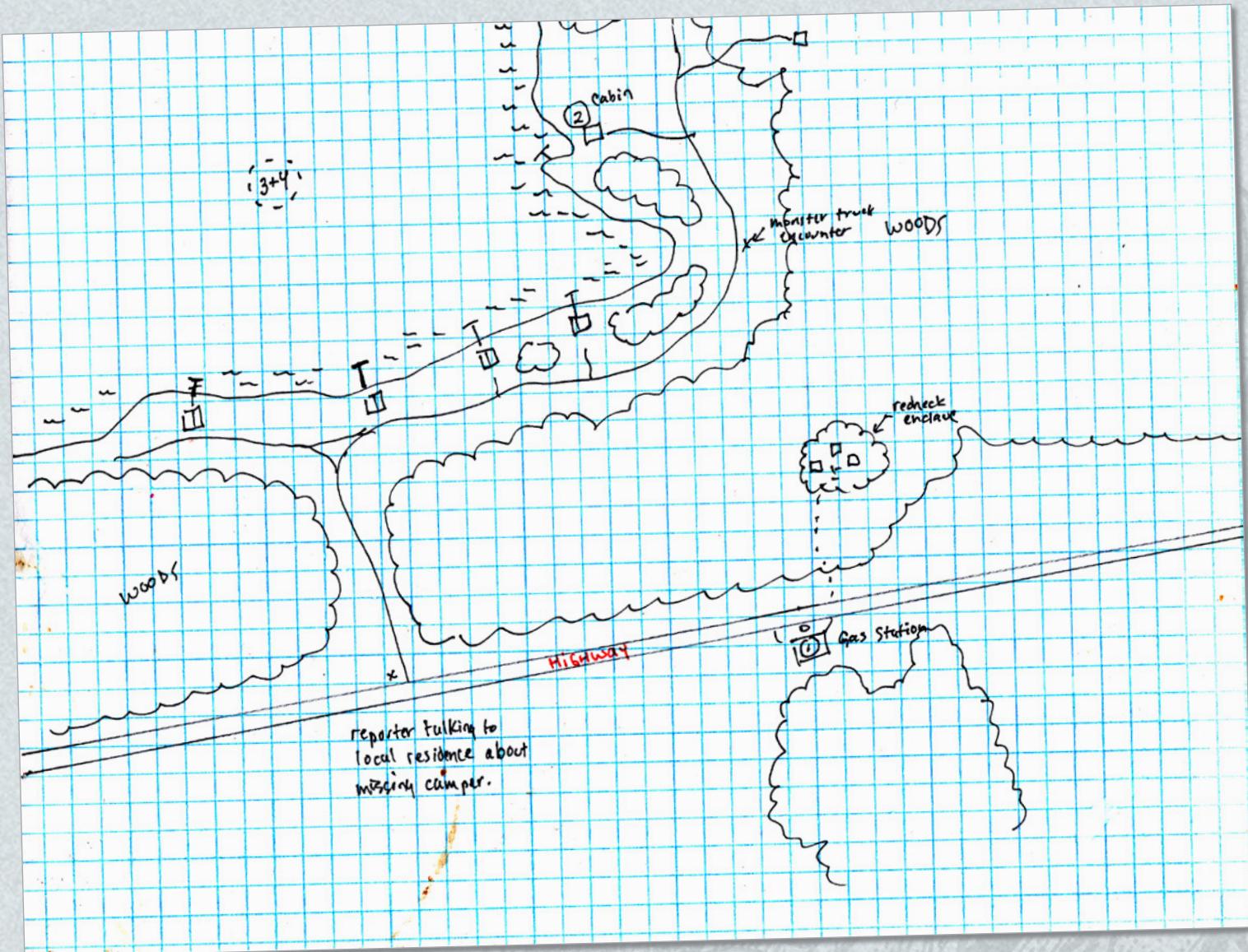
HOT SPOT 1: THE GAS STATION



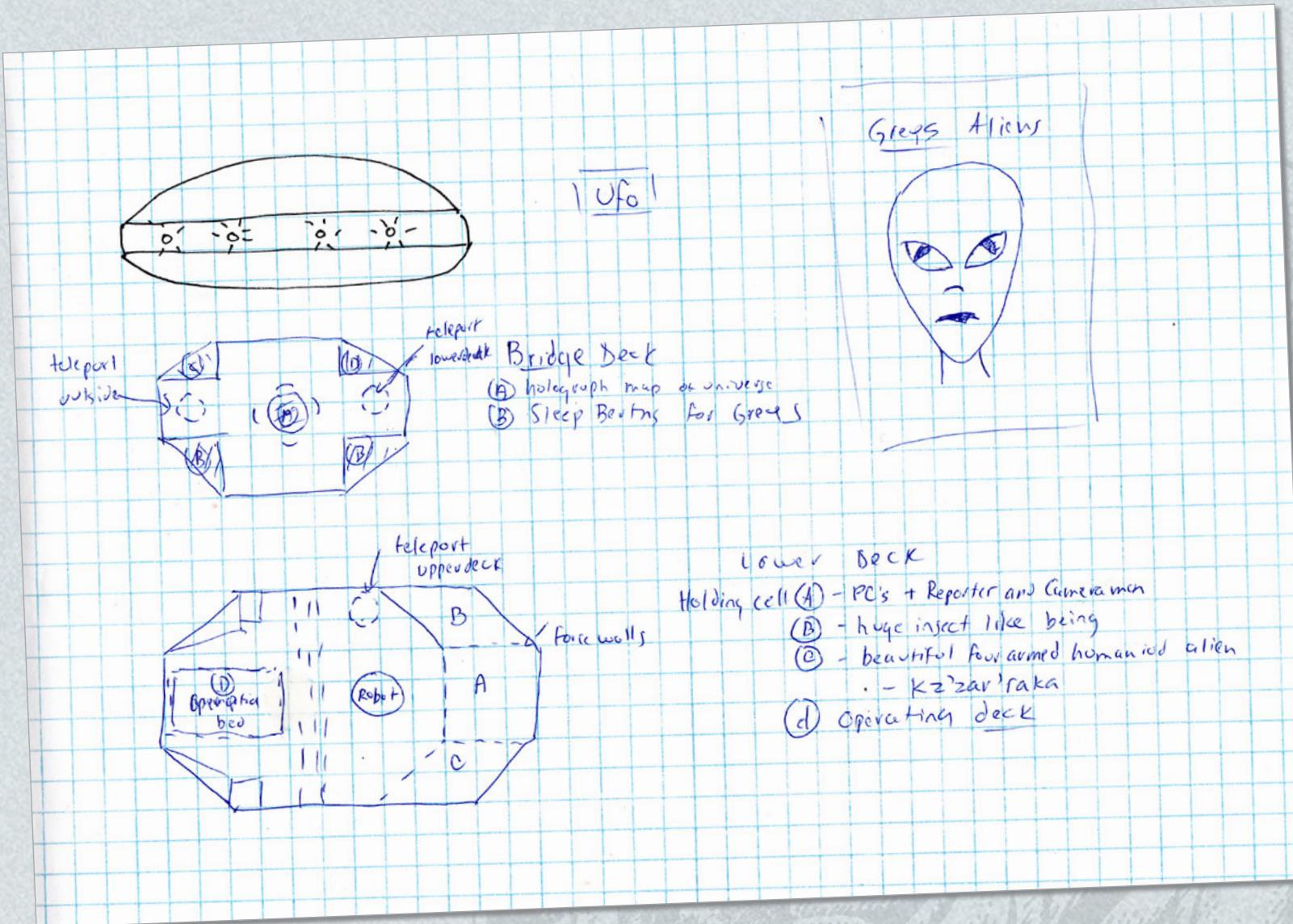
HOT SPOT 2: THE CABIN



HOT SPOT 3: THE LANDING SITE



HOT SPOT 4: INSIDE THE UFO



BEYOND THE SILVER THRESHOLD

A supernatural horror adventure encounter
by Clint Staples and Eric Fabiaschi
FOR CALL OF CTHULHU

Monsters by Clint Staple

Adventure by Eric Fabiaschi

A short short modern horror adventure encounter involving some of the more dangerous and sanity threatening minions from the New England Guide To The Mythos By Clint Staples From Skirmisher Press.

SITTING ON A shelf in a back water museum in a small New England Town is a terrible secret surrounding a centuries old Pictish artifact taken by Viking raiders in the 6th century. This silver artifact is part of ancient hoard containing ancient secrets including the location of a legendary monster god thing and its Viking warrior servants. Discovered in Nova Scotia and taken back to the small New England town museum of your choice. This piece has been stolen and is now up on the auction block. The theft has activated a strange curse summoning back the brine drenched ghosts and guardians of the god thing to slain whomever comes in contact with the artifact. Now it is a race against time as the silver artifact passes from hand to hand spreading its blood curse to those who would defy the ancient god serpent monster. The thing who even now feeds upon the souls of those its minions slay in its name. There have been eight victims of the drowned Viking king and his warriors so far. The police seem helpless to stop the trail of bloodshed.

The three inch long silver plaque is covered over with a plethora of Pictish ideograms and symbols of power denoting the power of ancient god thing of the Picts the so called Sea Wyrm. A sea beast of incalculable power and horror that once fed upon the souls of Pictish sorcerers and priests alike. That was until the coming of Viking King and his band of warriors who, through trickery and betrayal, laid hands on the silver hoard. Thus they sealed their fate and were bound by a blood curse to serve the Sea Wyrm for all eternity.

The last person to handle the item is Lowell Henderson, a local historian and antique dealer. He's been found slain in his west side



home by neighbors who found the beloved historian with multiple stab wound and the police are at a loss. The players are called in to help identify strange symbols and whirls found made with his blood. Mr. Henderson has a book underneath some splintered book shelves which might offer a clue about the legend of the silver plaque called 'Viking Mysteries and Legends of Nova Scotia - An Account of the Supernatural Myths and Legends Of Vikings In The New World'. This book was written by Mr. Henderson's great grand father who tangled with the so called 'Drowned Kings and Warriors of Old'. The book goes on to describe that the Drowned Kings are servants and victims of the supernatural evil of the Sea Wyrm forever tied spiritually to the thing for all time due to the curse.

Henderson was trying to trace down the 'whirl map' made up of the mystic symbols on the plaque that lead to the supernatural realm of the sea wyrm! But the drowned kings ended his life before he could open a gateway to the sea wyrm's realm and so lift the curse. The silver plaque is part of a cursed Pict hoard of stolen silver artifacts and booty. The hoard bares a blood curse upon it for the terrible evil done for its possession whose betrayers fled to the New World but whose souls were pledged to the Sea Wyrm.

They serve the thing beyond the grave even now and for all eternity.

The small silver plaque has been stolen by one of the neighbor's children who found the body. The magick of the blood curse compelled little Jimmy Throghu to take the shiny silver plaque because of its incredible shiny and supernaturally intricate design. The ghostly undead Viking warriors things are even now on their way.

Tracking down little Jimmy shouldn't be too hard at all as a dangerous and horrid storm of supernatural aspect moves into the neighborhood surrounding the Throghu household. The storm increases as the Veil between worlds begins to thin and the warriors move in.

The Sea Wyrm for Call of Cthulhu

STR	85
CON	60
SIZ	80
INT	20
POW	30
DEX	12
HP	85

Armour: 8 points of scaly skin

Move: 4 / 12 Swimming

Damage Bonus: +9d6

Weapons: His Majesty may bite each round, unless it is attempting to initiate a Grapple. Ongoing Grapple checks do not prevent His Majesty from biting.

Bite – 60%, 2d8+ Damage Bonus, If a target is bitten and survives, His Majesty will attempt a STR vs. STR roll to pull the unfortunate victim into its coils to Grapple, and 'Crush'.

Crush – His Majesty can automatically Crush each round that it maintains a grapple on an individual. It can also automatically Grapple any object, including boats with Hit Points up to $\frac{1}{2}$ its SIZ. Use the Vehicle table on p. 285, of 'Call of Cthulhu, 6 th edition, as a guide for judging the Hit Points for Marine craft. A ship that is 'Crushed' sustains half of the rolled damage bonus each round. When all of the ship's Hit Points are gone it breaks up and begins to sink.

Swallow Whole – On a special or critical hit a target that is size 20 or smaller may be swallowed whole, in which case it takes half More details on this monster can be found on Clint Staples blog [here](#).



A supernatural rip between worlds has been created. A schism has been created leading to the storm lashed sea world where the Wyrm waits to claim its latest victim's soul. The PC's must return the silver Pict plaque to the world of the Wyrm in order to end the curse. Or the bloodshed will continue or worse will happen.

Returning the silver plaque to the realm of the Sea Wyrm will end the blood curse for now but there are many other artifacts from the hoard of the 'Drowned Kings' still circulating out in the world. The cycle of blood shed and supernatural slavery won't simply end with the saving of one or two lives. The PC's may have only seen the tip of the supernatural iceberg.

For Call of Cthulhu the silver plaque is an artifact of the Draugr of Woden-lithi with deep ties to a particularly disgraced clan of these undead sorcerer warriors. Who have been reduced down though legend into merely undead viking warriors. These things are something far more dangerous with ties to the Sea Wyrm and a deep as well as abiding blood curse upon them.

SOURCES

Viking Mysteries and Legends of Nova Scotia - An Account of the Supernatural Myths and Legends Of Vikings In The New World

This book is the vanity press creation of Dr. D.D. Henderson from 1919 from his deep studies of the Pictish hoards taken from the wilds of some of the isle settlements surrounding Norway taken by the Vikings and certain artifacts found in Nova Scotia.

It contains the accounts of mythological legends concerning the dealing of the Vikings with the Draugr of Woden-lithi, Nodens, Odin, and the god thing known as the Sea Wyrm. The book is part archaeological journal, part occult treatise, and part sea account chronicling the author's journey into the world of the supernatural and his confrontation with the Sea Wyrm. There were only twenty three copies at the time of pressing. Only four remain in the world.

Spells Within The Viking Mysteries

The book contains some very intricate spells drawn from antiquity mapped and steeped in deep symbolic language of the original author's view of the occult. There are spells such as call/dismiss Draugr of Woden-lithi, Contact Nodens, Call Odin, Bless Blade, Contact Sea Wyrm, Create Doorway To The Realm.



Undead Sorcerer Warriors for Call of Cthulhu

STR	28
CON	25
SIZ	16 [for bloated/gigantic add +4d6]
INT	17
POW	20
DEX	15
APP	2
HP	21 [for bloated/gigantic add half of the rolled 4d6 for greater SIZ]
Armour:	Dead Flesh 3 AP + 1d10 – Skin Charm
Move:	7
Damage Bonus:	+2d6 or +3d6 depending on SIZ
Weapons:	Witchbronze Blessed Keening Blade [Enchanted with Enchant Cane] 90%, 1d10+1 Damage + damage bonus.

Skills:

Astronomy 80%, Cthulhu Mythos 51%, Hide 55%. Antideluvian History, 50%, Mining 80%, Bronzesmithing 90%, Occult 84%, Sneak 69%

Spells:

Augur, Black Binding, Bless Blade, Cause/ Cure Blindness, Call Nightgaunt, Contact Nodens, Death Spell, Evil Eye, Dominate

You can also find out more about these supernatural sorcerer things right over [here](#).



EXPLOSIVES FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

Having a blast

by Jason D. McEwan
FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

Creighton looked at Anna, "Honey please use care with these items, we can close that gate or vaporize ourselves." Anna played with the block," So this is C-4?" "Anna please pickup that canvas bag."

This is to expand the explosives in the Dark Conspiracy world. First to compare Relative Explosive Force (or Factor): One kilogram of C-4 has a DP of 6. C-4 is roughly 1.4 times the REF of TNT, so 1kg of TNT has a DP of 4. Now we can compare other explosives for their DP as well as the various sizes of TNT blocks. TNT is the explosive such charts are based around. Here is a sampling of 1kg DP ratings, except det cord, which is per meter. The actual individual charges will be laid out later. A “*” indicates one of the explosives from the rules.

Emulsion explosives are plasticized Ammonium Nitrate. 80% dynamite is

<i>Black Powder</i>	DP1.2
<i>ANFO</i>	DP 2
<i>“Emulsion” Explosive</i>	DP2
<i>Det Cord*</i>	DP3
<i>80% Dynamite</i>	DP4
<i>Military Dynamite*</i>	DP4
<i>Tetryl</i>	DP5
<i>C4, Comp A, B, etc.*</i>	DP6
<i>60% Dynamite</i>	DP3.6
<i>40% Dynamite</i>	DP2
<i>Extrudable</i>	DP6

used to set off ANFO charges. Military dynamite is an RDX mix that isn't set off by fire or bullets.

Black Powder

Used in early firearms and engineering. Further details will be in ammunition.

ANFO

This is sold in 23kg bags or is mixed in bulk on site. Cost whether bagged or in components is \$7.50 per kg.

Emulsion Explosive

Replacing dynamite in civilian use, emulsion explosives only have a shelf life of one year. It is sold by the cartridge (these resemble tube of cookie dough) or the bag. Cartridges weigh 1 kg.

40% Dynamite

This nitroglycerin based explosive has been in civilian use for decades. Flame and bullets can set dynamite off. The percent rating is how much nitroglycerin is in the explosive/filler mix ratio. Weight is per case of military dynamite, cost is \$500 per case of 10.

60% Dynamite

A little more powerful civilian explosive, very popular where allowed by law. Weight is per military dynamite, cost is \$650 per case of 10.

80% Dynamite

A still more powerful explosive used as a cheaper alternative to adding charge boosters. Weight is per military dynamite, cost is \$800 per case of 10.

Military Dynamite

This is actually an RDX based explosive device. Rifle fire will not set it off, only another explosion. Weight and cost is in the rules.

Extrudable Explosive

These are packaged in caulking tubes and use a caulking gun to deploy in cracks, odd surfaces. Cartridge tubes come in .2kg, .5kg, 1kg, 2kg weights. Price is \$25, \$35, \$50, \$75 each. Packaging is 12 tubes per box of .2kg,.5kg and 8 tubes for 1kg, 6 tubes for 2kg, weight is the tubes, the box is cardboard. Weight is 2.4kg for .2kg tube case, 6kg for .5kg tube case, 8kg per 1kg tubes, 12kg for the 2kg tubes. Cost per case is \$200 for .2kg, \$400 for the .5kg, \$300 for 1kg, \$375 for 2kg tubes.

Datasheet

This is an example of a flat, moldable explosive that can be cut with scissors. Civilian variant is orange or red, military is olive. Two 10meter versions are made, a 10 square meter sheet and a10m long, 7.5cm wide tape with one adhesive side, both are 6.25cm thick. Each 20cm (roughly 1ft.) is .5kg for formulas. Weight is 5kg, cost is \$250.

M10 Universal Destructor:

This is a multiple sized Male Part Thread (MPT) adapter that can fit a variety of ordinance fuse wells. It contains .1kg of Comp A as a booster charge, one end takes a blasting cap. The M10 converts shells and bombs into booby traps and demolition charges. Weight is .26kg, cost is \$15. A case of 50 weighs 29kg, cost is \$600.

Demolitions Multi-Tool

A multi -tool for explosives, the pliers end is a crimper for caps. Weight is 0.6kg, cost is \$95.



GETTING BY DAY TO DAY

More odds and ends

by Jason D. McEwan
FOR CONSPIRACY RULES!

GETTING BY DAY TO DAY

Marcy dug rapidly through the dumpster when a voice said, "Here". Looking up at the pretty Asian woman, Marcy almost missed the black duffle that had been tossed in front of her. Anna added a pouch of field wipes, "There's a couple of wool blankets, some clothes and a few canned goods." Marcy cringed, afraid of what she might have to do for this bounty. A larger man appeared at the alley, "Don't worry, it's NSA."

PERSONAL ITEMS:

Clothing

Basic temperate clothing, BDU's, a summer suit all consist of a long sleeved shirt, pants, undergarments. Weight is about 1kg, halve this for tropic/ desert clothing. Cost varies due to fashion and status, \$20- \$1200.

Foot wear, Light

This includes sandals, sneakers, loafers, dress shoes. Weight is between .25-.5kg, cost is from \$5-\$1200.

Boots, Combat

All leather military boots, there are similar civilian boots for fashion and outdoor activities. Weight is 1.8kg for modern, 1.7 for Vietnam era versions, cost is \$85 for both.

Boots, Desert

Nylon uppers and suede "Shwartzkopf" boots. Weight is 1.5kg, cost is \$65

Boots Jungle

Light weight canvas or nylon and leather boots. Weight is 1.6kg

Accessories

Belts, suspenders, blousing straps for BDU's, wallet, purse or pouches, etc. Weight is .1kg to .25kg, costs \$15-\$250.

Jacket, Field

Comes in a variety of camo and colors. Good to 50 degrees F, 40 degrees F with a 1kg liner. Weight is 2kg, jacket with liner costs \$70.

Jacket, Light

A wind breaker or rain jacket. Good to 50 degrees F, weight is .5kg and cost varies to \$10 to \$100.

Jacket, Medium

A coat good to 45 degrees F, weight is 2kg, cost is \$25 to \$275.

Jacket, Winter:

This coat is 4kg, good to 20 degrees F, cost is \$30 to \$300.

Concealed Carry Vest

Cut to cover a variety of holsters with a lot of pockets inside and out. Weight is .5kg, cost is \$75. There is a jacket version, 1kg and \$135.

Brand Names

Fads and fashion, along with status allow prices to soar above the values listed.

OTHER ITEMS:

Blanket, Wool

Very popular with veterans, outdoorsmen, also purchased by megacorps for the proles. Protects against cold up to 40 degrees F. Weight is 2kg, Price is \$25.

Knife, Swiss

A multi-function knife made in a variety of sizes for over a century. Weight is N/A, cost is \$20-\$85.

Multi-Tool

Folding pliers with several functions. weight is .25kg, cost is \$85.



DE OPPRESSO LIBER

Team building special forces
by Jason D. McEwan
FOR CONSPIRACY RULES!

ANNA WIPE AWAY her tears as she waited for the doctor's call. She had found Creighton's duffle while getting clothes ready for his hospital discharge, that last time had been too close!. Opening the duffle she found his old beret, some photos of Creighton and her cousin Derek on some island somewhere. She clenched his beret tightly to her chest and sniffled, "These old jungle boots, jean, underwear, shirt.....belt, holster." Without a thought she gently put the beret in her bag and picked up the packed clothes.

For Special Forces career modifications in the various categories after "All Special Forces" just add the following:

Special Forces:

Prerequisites: Prior service, rank E-5,

First Term

Primary Skills:

Both Enlisted and Officers: Instruction 2, Language 2, Liaison 1, Tactics 1

Subsequent Terms

Skills:

Add: Heavy Artillery (A-Team camps could have 105MM guns), Heavy Guns

A-teams have job slots, weapons, engineering, intelligence, medical, communications, leadership. Leaders were a Captain, Lieutenant. Each of the other job slots have two NCO's. Skills should reflect the job. In Dark America, green berets train guard and reserves and occasionally do counter terrorist duty under Homeland Security. Overseas they train foreign forces on the latest and older U.S. weapons, Sometimes they are "sheep dipped" to act as mercs. Agents can call on the teams for a variety of tasks. Green berets and other operators make valuable assets in the war against the Dark.

A good game bibliography would be *Twilight 2000* V2.2, Steve Jackson Games **GURPS 3rd Ed. Special Ops** goes into

history and details. Wikipedia has Group locations and other information.

PUTTING A LITTLE MORE DETAIL INTO THE CAREER...

Green berets have job slots, most of these can be extrapolated from the previous careers—Medic, Engineer and Intelligence. Communications and Weapons will need to use the following. These specializations seem skill heavy, but represent intense training and no hobby skills that term.

Communications NCO: Communications 3, Computer Use 1, Electronics 0, Forward Observation 1, Sensors 1

Weapons NCO: Autogun 1, Heavy Artillery (*Mortar*) 1, Heavy Gun 1, Grenade Launcher 1, Slug Weapon (*Pistol*) 1, Slug Weapon(Rifle) 1, Squad Weapons 1,

Medical NCO: Add to the army enlisted medical package: Perception 3, Medical(*Surgery*) 1. The surgery skill is specialized, towards combat injuries.



ROLL OUT!

Heavy duty law enforcement careers
by Jason D. McEwan
FOR CONSPIRACY RULES!

JONATHAN BRADLEY READIED his M4 as his team stacked at the front door, the Vine Street Ripper was getting taken down,"3.....2.....1 GoGoGo!" Each team hit their assigned zones, "Team 1 clear!" The radio crackled, "Team 2 clear!" Jon pointed at the open door,"Basement, go!"

Jon Bradley's team "stacked" again to prepare for entry, "Go now!" The tunnel in the basement wall seemed to radiate darkness, Might have to call Creigh for this...."

SWAT

Prerequisite: Prior term as any Law Enforcement or Government Agent, STR+AGL+CON =16+, Certain Elite units require 18+ i.e. FBI regional SWAT is 16+, HRT is 18+

All First Term

Skills: Slug Weapon (*rifle*) 1, Slug Weapon (*pistol*) 1, Grenade Launcher 0, Thrown Weapons 0, Armed Combat 1, Unarmed Combat 1, Observation 1

Counterterrorist

Prerequisite: Special Forces or Elite SWAT career and special assignment roll.

First Term

Skills: Slug Weapons 2, Parachute 1, Unarmed Combat 1

Subsequent Term

Skills: Use career skills.



TURNING UP THE HEAT

Field Expedient Munitions

by Jason D. McEwan

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

WATCHED CREIGHTON AND Derek assemble these devices from a couple of old gas cans while Anna covered the old building with rifle. “Are you guys sure about this?” Creighton’s grin was matched by Anna’s frown, “Sure! It’s in the field manual. I also trapped the rear entrance with a couple of old 81MM WP rounds.” I knew to check my Mossberg and get ready for action.

Since DC was a Twilight 2000 system, there is not a lot of flame weapons, also a surprising amount of gear has been glossed over. This is my attempt to rectify this. I hope this helps PC’s combat certain critters and nests. These are hasty devices, fougasse devices are very labor intensive and not included.

M4 Burster

This device spreads the fuel into the air to be ignited. One end takes an electric blasting cap, the other has a coupling to fit two or more together. The M4 uses .08kg of Tetryl explosive. Weight is .6kg, cost is \$20. A case of 20 weighs 23kg, cost is \$450.

M4 Thickener

This is a powdered mixture used to make flamethrower fuel and field flame expedient munitions. This is mixed at 2% of the amount of fuel. The M4 thickener is packed in 1kg cans, 10 kg cans, 15kg bags, cost is \$10 per kg.

M49 Trip Flare

Often used to insure ignition of flame devices. The M49 can illuminate a 300m radius for 55 seconds. Weight is .28kg, cost is \$25.

C:5 B:5

Sand Bags

For ease, these are the commercial ones used for traction or weight. Weight is 35kg, cost is \$10.

M2A1 Ammunition Can

This pattern is used for the 5.56N as well. Waterproof olive drab can weighs 2.3kg and costs \$15.

20L Jerry Can Device

Thickened fuel with an M4 burster, 7M of det cord, two electric caps. Usually a fixed device due to it’s burst radius. Weight is 25.1kg, cost is per components. Damage is per the burning fuel rules.

C: 22m B: 22m

Ammo Can Bunker Bomb

Improvised to destroy armored vehicles or knock out bunkers. Usually a .50cal/ 5.56N can, 4 liters of fuel, 1.7m det cord, 3m time fuse with a non electric cap and an M60 pull igniter, 1 M49 flare or WP grenade. Weight is 7.13kg, cost is per components. Damage is per fuel, if in range, the WP damage is inflicted upon the target as well.

C: 8 B:8

Vertical Flame Barrel

These are the largest field expedient flame weapon. A 220L/55 Gallon barrel, 200L fuel, 4.4L thickener, 30M det cord, 2 or 3 M4 bursters, 2 electric blasting caps, 6 sandbags(35kg each). Weight is 22.6kg, cost is per components.

C:30 B:30

Horizontal Flame Barrel

This variant uses everything above with 60M det cord. Weight is 235.6kg, cost is per components.

C:50 B:50



JIDA, THE REALM OF THE GUMIHO

A proto-dimension add-on
by Jason D. McEwan
FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

JIDA, THE REALM OF THE GUMIHO

THE ORCA STOPPED at what seemed to be a pristine forest. Anna jumped out dressed in her finest paramilitary clothes and a concealed carry vest. She looked up at Creighton wearing multicam BDU's with new master sergeant stripes and his green beret. One recalled vet and a private contractor looked up as a pair of palanquins, servants, and medieval infantry approached from a dirt path. A man and women in rich robes stepped from the enclosed litters. "I believe the minister and his wife have arrived." Anna adjusted her sling and Creighton quietly took his M4A1 off safety.

There are several Splinterlands, known collectively as "Jida" in Korean, the realm of Earth gods and other beings. The one here is the realm of the gumihos, and resembles Qing China, Joseon Korea, and medieval Japan. Originally humans were brought here to maintain breeding stock, human females were introduced to prevent too much inbreeding. Each realm has a king, the actual power is with the Dowager Queen and her court ladies who are gumihos as a council of elders. Human court ladies are not on the council, but are treated as equals. The enforcement of gumiho edicts and laws is through female spies and police, actual military positions are a male career. One major difference in these human imperial courts and their historical counterparts is the ban on eunuchs, which would defeat the reason humans were brought to this Jida. The gumiho and humans of Jida destroyed the Dark Lord and its forces trapped when the gates closed centuries ago. Jida is sending a handpicked group of gumihos to study Earth technology. In

the course of this mission minion hunters and government contacts were established. When the Dark was made aware of the Gumiho Jida gates being reactivated, forces were sent to try and regain control. The gumiho in turn used their contacts to request aid. RoK and U.S. special forces and equipment was sent in, Minion Hunters also responded. PC's can be current or reactivated military or "private contractors". The gear sent will be light vehicles, small arms, older helicopters. Jida weapons were matchlock muskets, swords, bows, spears. Swords are Chinese style jian(broadsword), gum(similar to the katana).

Creighton watched Anna swinging a gum to test its balance, then turned to back to his students, "Now this is the M16A2...." Anna easily picked out who was human, the gumihos all seemed to have a different "feel" to them, "We will now use the live fire range to qualify on the 9MM pistol." Anna stopped short, why could she feel gumihos? She began to sense thoughts and emotions.

Human women who were gumihos or possess the gumiho genes may start to assimilate to Jida and become gumihos, increasing Psi and gaining the gumiho racial package. This must be stopped or reversed by leaving Jiha before the process is complete. If the PC becomes a gumiho, they are subject to the 1000 year assimilation and no longer subject to aging roles.

Anna frowned at Creighton and Soo In, "I'd rather risk the change than leave you in the land of foxxie ladies!" Soo In sighed, "If you don't return home for a time you will have to watch your husband grow

Type: Splinterland

Discontinuity: 0

Assimilation: Nil for most humans, 2 for female humans with Gumiho genes, former (earth assimilated) Gumihos

Technology: Far East/Oriental medieval

old and die. Wait for several days to return and trust in Creighton!"

There are several Dark Lords either competing to control Gumiho Jiha or testing their servants and weapons.

Twilight 2000 V2.2, Merc 2000 will really shine for these scenarios.

ADVENTURE SEEDS:

- Doctors and other medical personnel may contend with one particular Daemon: Gaxi Sonnim, The Goddess of Small Pox. While they fight the plague, a team will have to find and stop the daemon.
- A Mk IV Steriliord is approaching a village filled with refugees.
- Cobra people and igors have infiltrated the capital. Committing acts of terror while kidnapping gumihos.
- MIB's are attempting to gain an igor to incite a rebellion.
- A hellfire is released, this is truly horrific in old Asian towns.



TP-82 SURVIVAL WEAPON SYSTEM

Self-protection in a dark, dark, place

by Lee Williams

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

FAMED COSMONAUT ALEXEI Leonov came up with the idea of a special wilderness survival weapon for space crews that made emergency landings far from populated areas. The previously carried Makarov pistol was not thought to be suitable for such a task. Limited production of the TOZ-82 survival weapon (also known as TP-82) began in 1982, and it was first issued to the crew of Soyuz T-6, launched into orbit in June of that year. Manufacture officially ceased in 1987 as it was thought enough had been made to fulfil requirements. It was routinely issued to Russian-launched space missions until 2007. It is believed that current Russian space missions do not carry these weapons into space.

In *Dark Conspiracy* of course, things may be very different...

The TP-82 is a manually operated, break-open triple-barreled weapon made in the shape of a large pistol. Two smoothbore barrels are chambered for 32 gauge shotgun shells and located side by side. The lower barrel is rifled, and chambered for modified 5.45x39 ammunition. It has a single

trigger and two exposed hammers. The right hammer fires the right-hand barrel, while the left hammer is switchable between the left-hand and the bottom rifled barrel. A lever below the barrel switch operates the barrel lock; to break the gun open for reloading push that lever to the left. The pistol grip is slotted at the bottom to accept the shoulder stock, which is a specially designed machete in a reinforced sheath that serves as a butt-pad when attached to the gun.

Ammunition for the TP-82 included a 5.45x39 SP-P cartridge with specially designed soft-point bullet, and two types of 32 gauge shells in brass cases – SP-S with red signal flares and SP-D with birdshot. Standard ammunition load was 11 rounds of 5.45mm SP-P ammunition, 10 SP-D shot shells and 10 SP-S flares. These were packed into soft pouches attached to the weapon's sling, along with a canvas holster for the gun and the sheath for machete / stock.



TP-82 (SHOTGUN)



TP-82 Survival Weapon System

Ammo	ROF	Dam	Pen	Bulk	Mag	Recoil		
						SS	Brst	Rng
32-gauge	SS	3	Nil	3	21	3	—	20
5.45S	SS	3	1-Nil	3	11	2	—	25

With stock fitted Bulk is 5 and listed Ranges are increased by 5 metres.

Weight: 1.7 kg.
Price: N/A (-/-)



THE SHATTERED HOLE

An adventure encounter

by Eric Fbiaschi

FOR CALL OF CTHULHU ANY ERA

"Pleasure to me is wonder—the unexplored, the unexpected, the thing that is hidden and the changeless thing that lurks behind superficial mutability."

—H.P. Lovecraft

THIS ADVENTURE LOCATION encounter takes place after a violent and chaotically unnatural storm in the area. Trees are fractured, incredibly violent winds ripped apart chunks of Earth, minor floods seem to take bits of the landscape. A brand new sinkhole has appeared in the area and strange things begin to happen in the local neighborhoods and surrounding homes. Odd deaths, cattle mutilations, and strange disappearances all begin to happen.

All of this activity centers on the sink hole itself. Investigation into the place reviews a weird clay and slimy rime of earth and soil. The hole itself is a four hundred foot drop into the Earth.

Strange echoes and weird sounds come out of the hole at night and a quick trip down into the Earth will reveal strange stone like formations reminiscent of ruins or oddly cut blocks of stone. But the age of the stone will make this impossible for no living sentient recorded during the time period could have made these things. The frequency of the odd incidents and accidents will increase as weird winds and weather continues for 1d8 days.



A search of the sink hole and will reveal a strange cavern like structure toward the back of the back of the cavern. There are strange weird striations over some of the rock. A search of the tunnel reveals some very disturbing broken pieces of metal like rock that laboratory tests will reveal to be millions of years old. And some strange fossilized holes deep in the soil of the sinkhole. Bits of fossilized wood, dinosaur tracks, and odd bones will be found as well all leading to a deep pit that falls thousands of yards into the interior of the Earth. Cut in stone this pit is very odd with deep grooves cut into the sides of it making the whole affair look artificial.

There are hundreds of odd and weird fossilized bits of material around the area. Investigation of the cavern structure will be troubling because it seems almost artificial. There is a regularity to all of the stone work within. A search of the area will reveal hundreds of odd dinosaur like skulls of an unknown variety which will have a disturbingly human aspect to them. Each one is accompanied by fragments of skeletons shattered and broken now a part of the cavernous and Earthen floor here. There is a giant stone slab that is a full two 100 feet across and wide. The slab is strangely made and almost seems like its been carved by some ancient intelligence. There is a growing feeling of dread about the area and a coying sadness hangs in the air. The weight of ages seems to play on the investigator's minds. That's when the air in the cavern becomes deathly still. Not even the sound of human breathing can be heard. Then there is an odd hollow whistling sound. It chills you to the bone.

Suddenly the air around the investigators grows odd and the investigators will have a hard time breathing. Bits of debris will begin to whip around and odd bits of metal will be uncovered by the strange and violent activity in the air. A dexterity check will enable one of the investigators to grab one of the objects before they take 1d6 point of damage from the flying debris. They will be filled with an indescribable dread and feelings of strange and hostile violence. They have 1d4 rounds to leave the area before the real horror of this place becomes evident. A pod of three Flying Polyps will present themselves from deep within the Earth and kill every last investigator present.

Every instinct of the investigators will tell them to run but by that time it will be too late.

These polyps have been down here trapped for millions and millions of years. They are not at the peak of their power and soon the wards of the Great Race will cause another violent storm to occur





The flying polyps were a] horrible elder race of half polypous, utterly alien entities... They were only partly material and had the power of aerial motion, despite the absence of wings... [They exhibited] a monstrous plasticity and ... temporary lapses of visibility... [S]ingular whistling noises and colossal footprints made up of five circular toe marks seemed also to be associated with them.

—H. P. Lovecraft,
"The Shadow Out of Time"

FLYING POLYPS

Strength: 50

Con: 25

Size: 50

Int: 14

Pow: 15

Dex: 12

Move: 8/12 Flying

AV Damage Bonus: +5d6 for wind blast only

Weapons: Tentacle 85% Damage 1d10;
Windblast 70% db lower by 1d6 per 20 yards distance

Armor: 4 points plus invisibility

Spells: None

Sanity loss: 1d3/1d20

All other powers and abilities apply from pages 140 and 141 of the CoC 5.6.1 edition (pages 158-159 CoC 6 edition)

Illustration by Ruud Dirven

and a shattering of the local time space will happen causing lightning to take the cavern prison complex and burying it temporarily beneath the once again after the investigators happened upon it. The PC's may gain 1d4 points of sanity knowing that the horror has been held at bay temporarily for the moment until the stars are right.

If they were quick and grabbed a remnant of the prison bars that once held the Polyp a metallurgical laboratory analysis will reveal some very shocking revelations. Analysis of the metal shows that it is an alloy made of copper, zinc, and small percentages of nickel, lead, and iron created millions of years ago. Scholars, scientists, and other authorities will scoff at these findings and may try to destroy these samples taken by the characters should they get the chance or they may be lost.

NEW PROTO-DIMENSION: LAE

A tempting proto-dimension

by Scott McClenaghan

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

**lae [lay] (Gaelic “allure”):
(verb) to attract or tempt
by something flattering or
desirable**

OVERVIEW

Lae is a place of rejuvenation so becalming and blissful that many who have visited it have forgotten how to return to their waking lives and so never do.

It is an empathic place and so it is something unique to each visitor; a reflection of his dreams.

Some see pink and orange skies; warm and cozy, rich with the smell of jasmine.

Some hear music, forgotten since their childhood, and played exactly as they remember it.

All feel a pattern of soothing vibrations and warmth, massages which heal the soul.

And the healing is real. If one stays long enough, it is total. The living can regenerate. Bones can heal. Limbs can reform. Even vision and hearing can be restored. Cancers can be sifted out. Sanity can be restored as synaptic pathways are repaired. As well as (most) addictions can be broken.

If one stays long enough.

But the place itself is addictive, and it lulls you to sleep. And each minute you sleep makes it even harder to wake up; harder to leave. It is a test of willpower for all within it, and to those who have left yet feel tempted to return.

It is said that the positive energy which is responsible for the healing effects of the place is the result of so many empathically addicted travelers who have been lulled to sleep by the place and allowed their life force to wither away into the proto-dimension.

Lae is infinite in three dimensions and its spatial fabric curves back in on itself in the shape of a torus. (So travel

Name:	Lae
Type:	Halfland
Discontinuity:	0
Assimilation Effect:	2



Bubble girl - Lae by Patch Silver



in one direction will return a traveler to his point of origin faster than another direction).

MECHANICS

ARRIVING IN LAE

There are no known portals or gateways to Lae. It is reached by empathic sorcerers using the Dimension-Walk ability. It is said that other empathic creatures of great power also know ways into and out of the proto-dimension. Astral travel to Lae is possible but an astral traveler is not subject to the benefits or risks of the dimension (although his silver cord can be cut).

HEALING IN LAE

Within seconds of arriving, a traveler begins to form an empathic bubble around himself; a little pocket in the proto-dimension like a nest. This is involuntary, like breathing. This is how Lae heals all who enter it. And while travelers are being healed, they sleep; waking only if their Willpower permits it.

Scratches are healed immediately.

Each hour spent in Lae improves a single hit location by one wound level if the traveler succeeds at an Average intensity CON test. Slight wounds to all hit locations are also healed at the end of any hour.

If a traveler spends an entire day healing, damage to all hit locations is healed. If he succeeds at an Average intensity CON test, he may also recover from one of these conditions: blindness, deafness, dismemberment, physical illness, or paralysis. If he is healed in this way, he becomes addicted to the proto-dimension (see below).

Or instead, if he succeeds at a Difficult intensity CON test, he may recover from one of these conditions: terminal disease, mental disease, cancer, poison, radiation sickness, organ failure, or a physical or mental addiction (other than an addiction to Lae). As above, if he is healed in this way, he becomes addicted to the proto-dimension (explained below).

ADDICTION TO LAE

Staying in Lae brings the risk of addiction which is checked when the traveler attempts to leave.

The base chance for addiction is:

Traveler Modification Table

Condition	Intensity Modification
Traveler has urgent business outside of Lae or dependents that rely on him.	Decrease intensity by one stage of difficulty.
Traveler is not yet healed.	Increase intensity by one stage of difficulty.
Traveler has failed at least one Willpower test during an attempt to leave Lae.	Increase intensity by one stage of difficulty.
Traveler is addicted to Lae.	Increase intensity by one stage of difficulty.
Traveler has been here a week or longer (and has never been here this long before).	Decrease intensity by one stage of difficulty.
Traveler has been here a month or longer (and has never been here this long before).	Decrease intensity by one stage of difficulty.
Traveler has been here a year or longer (and has never been here this long before).	Decrease intensity by one stage of difficulty.

25% per day spent + 1% per additional hour - (Willpower Asset x 2)

However if any physical or mental conditions are healed here (other than damage to hit locations) then addiction is **automatic**.

Addicted characters find it harder to leave Lae and if they return home, they must make an Average intensity Willpower test once a week to resist the urge to return (if possible). If a character resists the temptation for a month, he can make Average intensity Willpower tests once per month. If he resists for a full year, he need not make any more tests (although if he returns, he again becomes addicted).

LEAVING LAE

It is an Average difficulty Willpower asset test to leave the proto-dimension, modified as follows:

A traveler may attempt to leave any time after entering the dimension. If he fails that check, he must wait an hour before checking again (he has fallen asleep). If he fails a second time, he must wait a full day before checking again. Successive checks DOUBLE the amount of time he must wait before attempting to leave as the traveler drifts in and out of sleep rather than concern himself with the affairs of his home dimension.

Example: A sorcerer with no family ties enters Lae for the first time and attempts to leave after an hour (by which time he is fully healed) but he fails his Average intensity Willpower test. He tries again in an hour (a Difficult intensity test now) but fails that as well. Now can't try again for a full day.

If he becomes addicted during that time, the next test is at Formidable intensity (otherwise still Difficult), and if he fails it, he'll need to wait two more days before retrying.

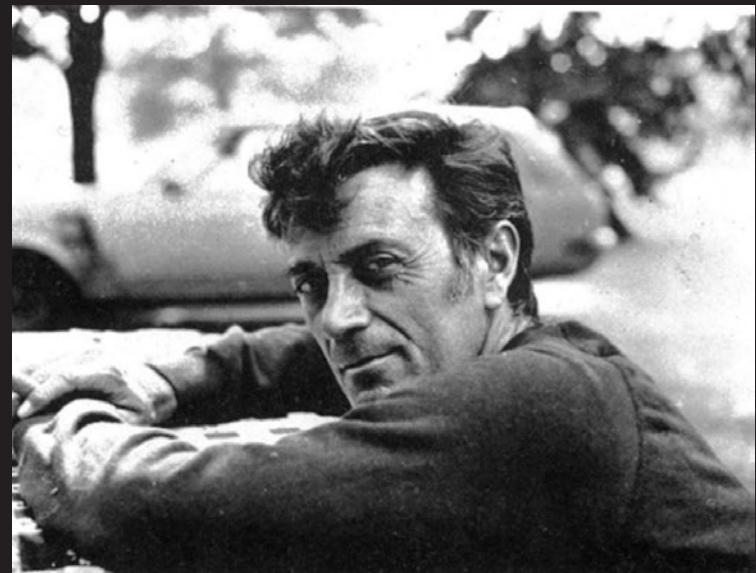
Note, creatures cannot starve in this dimension (they will always heal), but they can grow old and die, sacrificing their empathy to the collective of the proto-dimension.



protodimension magazine



FRANK FRAZETTA



<i>Born</i>	Frank A. Frazetta February 9, 1928 Brooklyn, New York
<i>Died</i>	May 10, 2010 (aged 82) Fort Myers, Florida, U.S.
<i>Nationality</i>	American
<i>Education</i>	Brooklyn Academy of Fine Arts
<i>Known for</i>	Illustration, painting, sculpting
<i>Awards</i>	Chesley Award (1988, 1995, 1997) Hugo Award (1966) Spectrum Grand Master of Fantastic Art Award (1995)
<i>Source:</i> Wikipedia	