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CHALLENGE 47

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

MEGATRAVELLER®

Two Small Steps

Charles E. Gannon

SHADOWRUN™

Digital Grace

Michael A. Stackpole

TWILIGHT: 2000™

Albania

Adam Geibel

CADILLACS & DINOSAURS™

The Horror Below

Frank Chadwick



MARK SCHULTZ
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D-A-R-K CONSPIRACY



**An Ancient Horror
Grips the Earth**



YELLOW JOURNALIST

Sure I'm proud of what I do! Okay, I print a lot of trash. But have you stopped to wonder why? With the new world order, the news has become more of a business than ever before, and with the corps pumping out their carefully tailored view of reality at noon, six, and ten, there isn't a lot of room left for unbiased reporting anymore.

But some of us still believe in a free press. Only problem is, we're not independently wealthy, so we can't compete head to head for the public's attention. But if we intermix the real news with stories about Hitler's ghost—bingo!—we've got a market. We've gotta make a buck if we're going to stay in business to report what the corps would like to sweep under the rug.

But there's another reason for printing the trash with the truth. Lean a little closer. Have you heard what happened to Dallas' independent, *The Liberty Bell*? That's right—it burned, staff and all. But it wasn't because a gas main blew, like they claim. No, the *Bell* made itself too visible, jammed full of fact, with no camouflage, and somebody had 'em iced. The rest of us have learned. You have to disguise things to keep from drawing the big boys' attention.

With the blunted panic of a dreamer, the man stopped and turned. He was certain he was being followed, but the moon-streaked street stretched emptily behind him, its sidewalks bare. Across the way, a clock tolled the hour from the tower of a marble-fronted building. Moonlight gleamed silver on the words above its door, "Dayton Federal Savings and Loan." Moon-shadows from its columned portico lay still against its stone face.

But on his side of the street, the shadows moved. They twitched and slid from alley to doorway, hollow to hollow. He sensed the movement and spun to confront it, backing warily into the door of a shuttered shop. The shadows froze. A chill settled in his guts.

A mere dozen feet away, the shadow of a trash can seemed to widen as a crouching figure leaned out and raised its head. A pallid face revealed itself to moonlight, eyes glistening feverishly, thin lips stretched in a feral grin. Its teeth seemed unnaturally long. Slowly, the figure crept forward. A score of other shadows did the same.

The man ran, but the air seemed suddenly thick as water. He felt as if he were running in slow motion and the chase seemed to take hours. Behind him the stalkers closed the distance in long, graceful strides. The pool of yellow light under the streetlight down the block seemed to promise safety. If only he could reach the light, the man told himself, perhaps he would be safe. His ragged lungs strained, and his sluggish legs pumped to drive him closer to the light.

The first dark figure caught him and bore him to the ground, the rest close behind. Dozens of rough, long-nailed hands seized his limbs and tore at his clothing. He tried to remain face down, tried to curl up and protect himself, but the hands rolled him over to face his captors and stretched his limbs in four



directions. A fist locked in his hair and pulled his head back painfully, baring his throat. Cold, hard fingers clenched his neck, choking off his breath. He could feel his veins distend with the blocked circulation.

Then sharp teeth tore his throat, splashing blood across the sidewalk. In horror, he listened to the creatures lap it up, as his vision faded.

Hadyn sat up in bed with a cry. Reflexively, he felt his throat: It was whole. Just a dream, then, but so real. He stumbled to the bathroom, switching on the TV along the way. He splashed water on his face, then under his arms and across his chest to wash away his sweat's stink. Then he sat on the edge of the tub until a wave of weakness and dizziness passed.

Padding into the kitchen, he opened the refrigerator and got a can of beer. He drank half of it with the refrigerator door open, enjoying the cool air and the glow of the light. Returning to bed, he sipped the rest of his beer and let the TV's chatter wash over him, soothing his nerves.

He had just begun to doze off when an announcement caught his attention: "This is Mike McDowell for WGIN News, Peoria. Tonight's top stories: Governor Jeakins threatens the CLU from his hospital bed, Chrysler sells downtown St. Louis to Tojicorp, and a Dayton reporter claims blood-sucking cannibals stalk his city. All this, and more, after these messages."

Hadyn stared blankly at the TV for a minute, then he picked up the phone and dialed. "Hunter, this is Hadyn. Yeah, I know what time it is. Listen, if you haven't unpacked yet, don't bother. We've got to go to Dayton, Ohio. Something bad's going down there, maybe worse than Iowa City. I'll be over in half an hour to explain." Numbly, he set the receiver down.

"No rest for the weary," he mumbled.



MYSTIC

You think you know the answers, don't you? The world's a mess, and you're going to do something about it. But if you're going to fight, you have to know who our enemies are, and you don't have the slightest inkling.

You thought the feds were corrupt, but the megacorps have levered them out of power in most places, and now they call the shots. So now the feds look pretty good, and the corps are the baddies.

Or maybe it's all those crazy tin-pot dictators, each one with his finger on one kind of button or another: nuclear, chemical, biological, and some stuff even creepier than that.

Not even *close*. Those are *symptoms*, not the disease.

I can sense the disease, feel it spreading through the arteries and nerve bundles of the world. It's dark, cold, cruel, and absolutely relentless. And it thinks.

It's easier to sense every day. Its sulphur-stinking footsteps are everywhere, and it leaves a trail of horrors behind it a blind man couldn't miss.

Laugh, if you like. If we're going to work together, what you see will make the laughter die in your throat.

I guarantee it.



ASTRONAUT

No, you've never met me before, but I know you. I heard all about that little job you pulled against Aquadyne in Florida.

Easy, easy.

There's no reason for violence—I'm not corporate heat. Believe me, if I were, I wouldn't be talking to you—I'd be shooting at you from a safe distance.

So what do I want? Well, I'd like to join you on your current, um, "mission." You're planning to check out a UFO sighting near Casper, Wyoming, I believe. Well, NASA has a strong interest in this particular report. As a result, I can offer you a great deal of assistance. For one thing, I've got contacts. For another, I've got a trunk full of high-tech equipment. All you have to do is let me come along so I can file a report when it's all over.

Sure, you call the shots. I have no problem with following your lead. You people have proven yourselves, and I'd never think of changing a winning combination.

So what do you say? Is it a deal?

A SHADOW ACROSS THE LAND

In the very near future, chaos reigns. Run-away population growth, diminishing resources, and human apathy have taken their toll. Megacorporations have slipped the reigns of national regulation and wage an economic war. The superpowers have collapsed from inertia and economic decay. Some federal republics still exist—in name. But individual states have stepped forward to fill the vacuum of power, and where they fall short, local governments take up the slack. The result is a political crazy quilt of bizarre laws and practices. What is the custom in one locale may well get you shot in another.

But people still try to piece it all together. Sometimes they're feds. Sometimes they're members of the free press. Sometimes they're concerned citizens with more savvy than most. But always, they have to walk softly, because thousands of people disappear everyday, people who simply know too much. People who know that Earth has been invaded.

Who Are the Invaders?

The first of the invaders arrived millennia ago, and they have been manipulating us ever since, always working behind the scenes to shape our development to their own ends. They depend on our own baser instincts to achieve their goals. And sometimes they take a more active hand. Because of their subtle influence, no event in human history can be called truly ours—none can be viewed as above suspicion of the invaders' taint.

Those who know about the invaders call them the Dark Minions or Darklings. The Darklings are horrific creatures that prey upon our race. They usually work individually, but sometimes cooperate toward a common goal, giving credence to the theory that they labor for even more sinister masters.

The Darklings are the embodiment of our worst nightmares: They are the basis of our legends of vampires, trolls, werewolves, zombies, and demons. They are the fey folk of fairy legend, the evil creatures of all our myths. And they are cruel beyond imagining.

Where Do They Come From?

The Darklings have been with us for so long that it may be pointless to wonder about their origins. They are obviously not native to Earth. Humans share a natural heritage with other Terran creatures. The Darklings share no heritage with us but one: They mirror the darkest reaches of the human soul. But they do not spring from the Earth. Possibly they originate from dimensions beyond those we perceive.

What Do They Want?

The Darklings crave human suffering and amuse themselves with our ruination. Throughout history, they have encouraged cruelty and savagery, ruthlessly stamping out every peaceful civilization and provoking us to war. But to their frustration, our troubles have also prompted in us traits of honor, self-sacrifice, courage, and faithfulness.

To some extent, their frustration is a result of their own cross-purposes. They push us toward a dispassionate, calculating disregard for human life and the animal species that share our world, but they also relish our pain and horror. As a result, they have often engendered cold intellect where they would prefer terror, or caused bonds of human fellowship in suffering where they would prefer our selfish disunity.

How Do We Fight Them?

To battle the Darklings' power, we must recognize the nature of our struggle. First, we must understand that the bulk of humanity does not even know the invaders exist. The majority who do know of them are their servants. That leaves only a scattering of us who actively oppose them. Like the Darklings, then, we must use secrecy as our greatest weapon. Fortunately (in one sense), the world has become a chaotic welter of political states, corporate entities, and citizens' groups struggling for power in an increasingly complex environment. Often, we can strike and then retreat into the chaos before the Darklings respond. For now, though, we cannot hope to defeat the invaders utterly; we can only slow the insidious progress of their plans, fighting to preserve our humanity in the process.



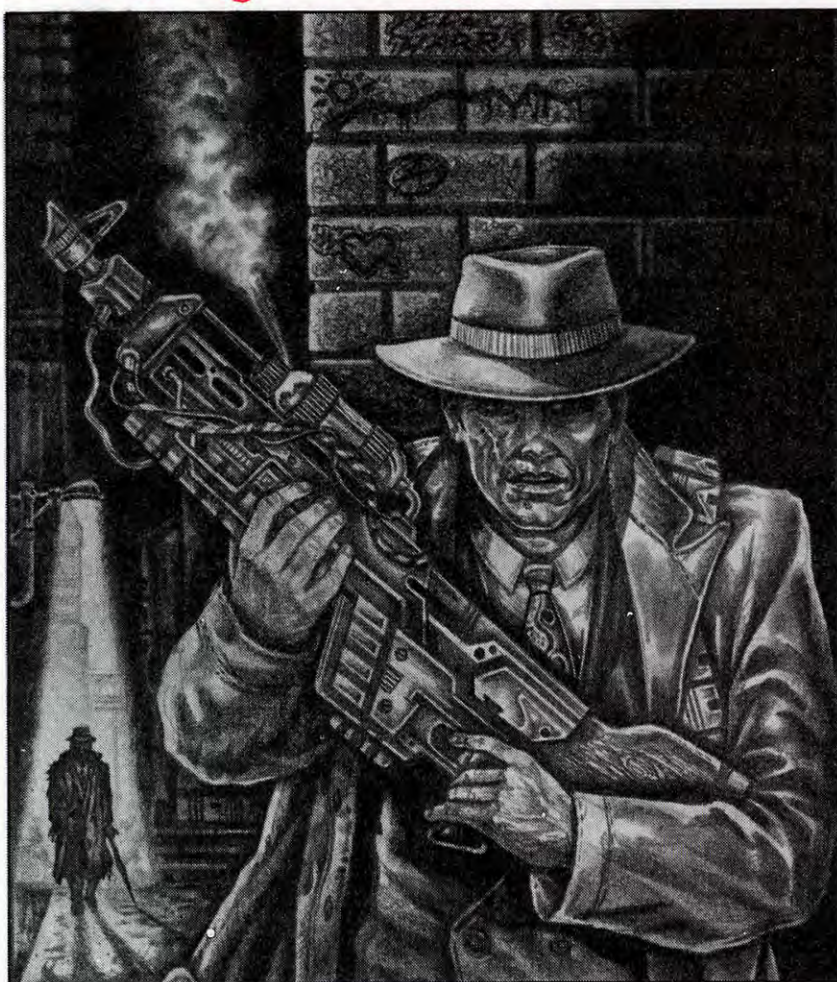
COMPUTER EXPERT

I know it sounds crazy. I was working at my console on a thorny problem, and I just couldn't see a way through it. I was so frustrated it got to the point that I couldn't even hit the right key, so I just leaned back and closed my eyes to relax and unwind. All of a sudden, I was inside the computer. I don't know how else to describe it. I could "feel" the computer's configuration, and I could "see" a bottleneck in the data. My fingers were still on the keyboard, punching away, but my new consciousness was inside the calculus of the problem, walking the endless spirals of those mathematical knots.

Since then, I've experienced the same thing again and again. I've even reached from my console, through the telephone network, and into other computers. And I've found and touched a few others like me out there.

But there's something else. There's another sort of sentience in the network. I don't know what it is, but it isn't human, and I'd swear it isn't computer.

It's something alien.



MERCENARY

Years back I spent my time mostly in Africa, hiring out for brushfire wars, training locals, sometimes smuggling guns. I spent one winter in Cambodia, but I liked southern Africa the best. Sometimes I got money from the US. Other times I lived off the land or taught martial arts in the cities. There were flush times, and there were lean.

These days the brushfire wars are dangerous—the big guys don't watch them as closely and they can get out of hand. So now I do mainly smaller, covert operations, mostly in the States. I work with private eyes, independent reporters, local police, and occasionally even someone from a federal office like the FCC.

Mostly, I work with small arms, sometimes with explosives. But when the feds join in, half the time I end up with some gizmo nobody ever heard of. I'm building quite an arsenal, even if 90% of it is illegal. And some of the things I've ended up dropping have made my hair stand on end.

I'm a mercenary, but that's because I've got to eat. If I had money of my own, I'd do this for free, because there's some pretty awful things out there, and they *need* killing.

DARK CONSPIRACY—THE GAME

Dark Conspiracy is more than just an environment—it's a roleplaying game of the near future. But what sort of game? What do you get for your money?

A Proven System

Dark Conspiracy uses GDW's **Twilight: 2000** second edition game system, so it has a *great* game system going for it—probably the most comprehensive, yet referee-friendly, product on the market. From the career/experience-based character generation system, to the original task resolution procedure, to the rapid-fire combat system, this game has it all.

But not only does the system ensure a solid mechanical framework—it also provides a number of ready-made expansion possibilities. All vehicles, weapons, and equipment from **Twilight: 2000** are usable with **Dark Conspiracy**, so a wide range of support is already available. And if you own those equipment handbooks, you won't have to cough up another \$10 down the road.

Finally, if you already own or play **Twilight: 2000** or **Cadillacs & Dinosaurs**, picking up the new game mechanics will be a breeze—so much so that character cross-overs from those two games or **Merc: 2000** are easy.

A Fascinating Environment

The world of **Dark Conspiracy** is not much different from our own in many ways. It is the near future, but with every negative trend in today's world accelerated and every positive trend reversed. It is a dark world, haunted not only by humanity's greed and cruelty, but also by an ancient, otherworldly horror that threatens humanity's final fall to chaos and despair.

Technology is neutral, providing both sides with new means of meeting their goals. Efficient ultraviolet sun blockers allow vampires (or the creatures people call vampires) to travel abroad during daylight. But backpack UV lasers give vampire hunters a weapon with much more reach than just a clove of garlic or vial of holy water.



Cities are nightmarish warrens of dark, winding alleys and lurking danger. Corporations own large tracts of urban sprawl, the inhabitants supported at subsistence level in return for their voting rights being signed over to the corp. In the center of the largest cities, though, are areas where even the corporations' hired muscle dare not venture.

American industry is devoted almost exclusively to the manufacture of military weaponry, which it exports to the Third World. Almost all consumer goods are imported: those for the dwindling elites from Germany and Japan, those for the teeming, poverty-stricken masses from Russia.

But it is not a world without hope. Evil is powerful, but not supremely so. Human courage and ingenuity still have the strength to turn back the tide of darkness.

Comprehensive Coverage

Detailed background and referee support are included on the level you've come to expect from GDW.

- Ancient myths and legends of supernatural beings are explored.

- Descriptions of the Darkling races provide the basis for many exciting adventures by themselves.

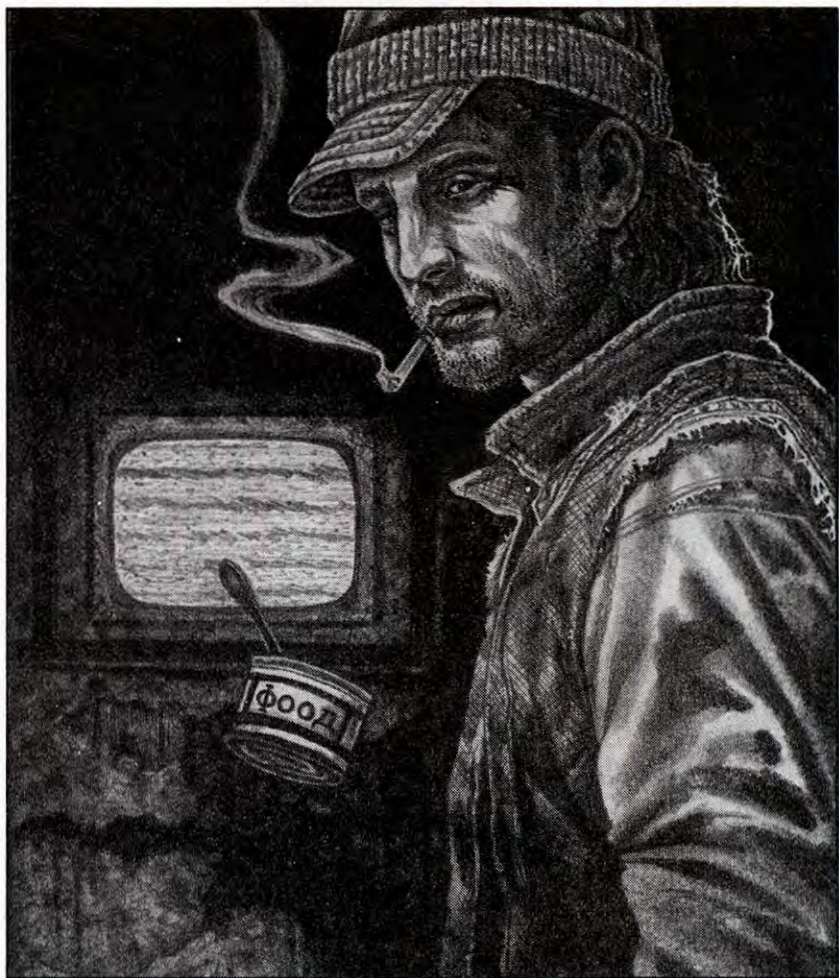
- Character generation provides players with a vast array of careers and backgrounds that will shape their talents and weaknesses—everything from the cultured and educated elites of the big corporations to the destitute, but street-wise, “proles” are possible.

- Unusual equipment and exotic weaponry abound, lavishly illustrated and rated for the **Twilight: 2000** combat system.

- The world of **Dark Conspiracy** is presented in gripping detail: the dark, urban centers of the industrialized world, the nearly deserted countryside covered by sprawling machine-tended corporate farms, the chaotic battlefields of Eastern Europe and the Third World.

It's a bizarre blend of the old and new, of super-science and unspeakable horror. It's a world of exciting challenges, lurking terror, and constant danger.

And it's waiting for you.



PROLE

I've got a really *swell* life.

I get three squares a day, nothing but the best in genuine gourmet Russian Army combat rations, thanks to the generosity of the corp.

I've got my own one-room apartment, six feet by eight feet, fully furnished, again through the generosity of the corp.

I get to sit here all day, watching corporate sponsored TV. No charge.

Once a week, I get to go shopping in the corporate store down the block. I get credits to spend just for sitting here, minding my own business, letting the corp use my proxy vote in the elections.

I can spend the credits on whatever I like, assuming the store's got any left. Mainly I buy clothes. Funny how quickly these jumpsuits wear out when you're just sitting around.

And you guys want to rescue me from this care-free existence?

Okay, you talked me into it.

Lead on.

And now
I have this feeling
I'm being followed.

The roleplaying game of modern horror.
Coming in February 1991 from GDW.



US \$3.50

CHALLENGE 48

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming



TWILIGHT: 2000™

Barbados

Loren K. Wiseman

MEGATRAVELLER®

Blue Eyes

Charles E. Gannon

GURPS®

Holdup

David L. Pulver

GDW
GAMES

Zombies of the Bayou

By Frank Chadwick

The following bestiary encounter information may be used as background to generate **Dark Conspiracy** adventure ideas. **Dark Conspiracy**, the new roleplaying game of modern horror, releases next month from GDW.

Louisiana State Office
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Federal Building
Baton Rouge, LA

To: Director, Southeast Regional Office
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Federal Building
Atlanta, GA

From: Special Agent In Charge, Louisiana State Office
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Federal Building
Baton Rouge, LA

Re: Autopsy Report, Special Agent Demarko

Enclosed please find a variety of documents relating to the autopsy of Special Agent Rita Demarko. I am sending copies of X-rays and photographic negatives under separate cover.

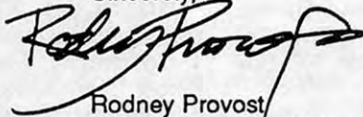
After reviewing the autopsy results, as well as those notes of Special Agent Demarko's investigation which we were able to recover, it is my considered opinion that substantial additional resources should be devoted to this case. As this office has neither the human resources nor the budgetary authority I believe necessary to adequately and expeditiously pursue all the leads, I am requesting that the regional office provide the additional personnel and fiscal resources. This may mean a fairly dramatic shift of priorities, but I believe that the evidence fully warrants this course of action.

Furthermore, I would request that the Justice Department explore the legal ramifications of our involvement in this case. Although Special Agent Demarko's death certainly provides us with an opening for our investigation, it is my suspicion that our inquiry will soon lead us far beyond the death of one agent. Even after all those responsible for Demarko's death have been found, I cannot help but think we will wish to continue our investigation. Now is the time to begin assembling a legal brief justifying it.

Question for the justice department: Do the dead have a right to remain dead? Can we argue that involuntary reanimation is a violation of their civil rights? We may be able to put together a 14th Amendment brief.

I am sure that this will receive your immediate attention, and I look forward to your reply and any further instructions you may have for this office.

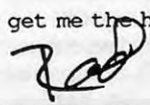
Sincerely,


Rodney Provost
Special Agent In Charge

Sid,

I want about 150 machines down here or I want **out**, and I mean **right now**! I read the autopsy report half a dozen times, and I still don't know what the hell's going on. But I do know that I popped two more of these things prowling around my quarters last night. I had to reload the Python **twice** before the last one went down. It took 11 shots. Eleven wadcutters from a .357 Magnum, Sid! No stinking pension is worth this.

You get me some help, Sid, or you get me the hell out of here.



Bayou Zombies

# Appearing	Attack	Move	Init	STR	AGL	Skill	Damage	Hits
1D6+2	100%	10/20	3	8	4	4	1D6	20/40

Bayou zombies are reanimated corpses taken over by a parasitic animal which is able to cause limited movement in the host body. The typical life span of such a parasite is two to three weeks, at the end of which time the parent organism expires, and hundreds of larvae migrate out of the host and become semidormant in the ground. The larvae will invade the corpses of dead animals, but they have a fairly brief life span in lower animals and seldom reach sufficient size to reproduce. Only parasites which mature in animals with considerable brain mass, such as humans, can reproduce.

This particular parasite is native to the Caribbean Basin, particularly the western half of the island of Hispaniola.

While animating a body, the organism will make every effort to kill additional humans and drag off the bodies to serve as hosts for its offspring. Attack is by means of clumsy blows and attempts to choke. Individual zombies are relatively easy to evade, and they are usually dangerous only in considerable numbers (or when their attack is totally unexpected).

Only head hits have any effect on bayou zombies.

DARK CONSPIRACY™

Office of the Coroner, East Baton Rouge Parish

Page 27 of 28

CONCLUSIONS

Although considerable postmortem decomposition had taken place by the time of the examination, the presence of massive subcutaneous hematoma accompanied by fractured tracheal cartilage and a shattered hyoid apparatus indicate death by strangulation, although whether this was accomplished manually or with a ligature cannot be determined. Time of death calculations are complicated by a number of factors (including the presence of a parasitic biota unknown in any of this office's literature), but the extent of putrefactive decay indicates death to have occurred approximately eight to 10 days prior to the examination.

Of considerable interest was the presence of a parasitic organism, also deceased, in the corpus of the deceased. This organism expired due to massive trauma resulting from the passage of four or more 00 buckshot pellets through the cranial region of the host. As the most differentiated and specialized tissues present in the parasite were concentrated in the host's cranial region, this examiner has concluded that that is the center of the organism's nervous system.

The organism seems to secrete a substance that slows the onset of putrefactive decay in the large muscle tissues of the host, although how long the muscle cells can continue to function without nourishment is a matter for speculation. Two specialized tendrils replacing the optic tracts indicates that the organism can evidently make use of the host's optic tissues until decay destroys them (something which had not yet occurred in the body under examination). It is unknown whether the parasite is able to use the otic organs in a similar fashion.

Gunshot damage to the host cranium was too extensive to permit any conclusions regarding how the parasite gained entry to the body.

By way of general summary of the autopsy results pertaining to the parasite, it appears to have extended tendrils throughout the host's body, all linked to a central tissue cluster in the host's cranial region. These tendrils have largely supplanted nerve tissue in the host. The near total absence of nerve tissue in the host leads to the speculation that the parasite subsists off such tissue, and the possible conclusion that once the nerve tissue in a host is exhausted the parasite will either expire or move to another host. This researcher is inclined to believe the former for several reasons:

1. The delicate nature of the organism and its profound intermingling with the host makes it difficult to imagine a situation in which it could remove itself from the host without suffering massive damage.

2. The organism does not appear to have any means of locomotion independent of the host. It appears to generate electrical charges with which it stimulates muscle action in the host and thus causes movement. Without the muscles of the host to stimulate, however, it would be immobile.

3. Its placement in the host strongly suggests that it has grown in place, gradually consuming and supplanting nerve tissue. Speculation as to a complete life cycle suggests some sort of out-migration of larvae, spores, or similar offspring once the organism reaches maturity. Dissection was unable to isolate any tissues identifiable as reproductive, but the personnel involved were understandably reluctant to remain in contact with the body for any length of time, and examination was necessarily hurried.

The organism sustained considerable additional trauma as a result of gunshot wounds to the arms and torso, but none of these were, in the opinion of the examiner, fatal. In the case of the host's left arm, the damage was sufficient that the organism almost certainly lost the ability to provide muscular stimulation and thus cause movement. Thus, although damage to the extremities may be sufficient to deprive the organism of mobility, it is likely that only a direct hit to the skull will kill the parasite.

Frozen tissue sections were sent via courier to the Centers for Disease Control, Harvard Medical School, and the World Health Organization Parasitology Section in Geneva. By order of the coroner, the body was then cremated.



James D. Tibideau
Chief Medical Examiner,
East Baton Rouge Parish

Special Bestiary Issue

CHALLENGE 52

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Twilight: 2000™

Safari

Legion G. McRae

MEGA Traveller®

Contact: Hhkar!

Michael R. Mikesch

Star Trek™

Ferengi

James P. Gee

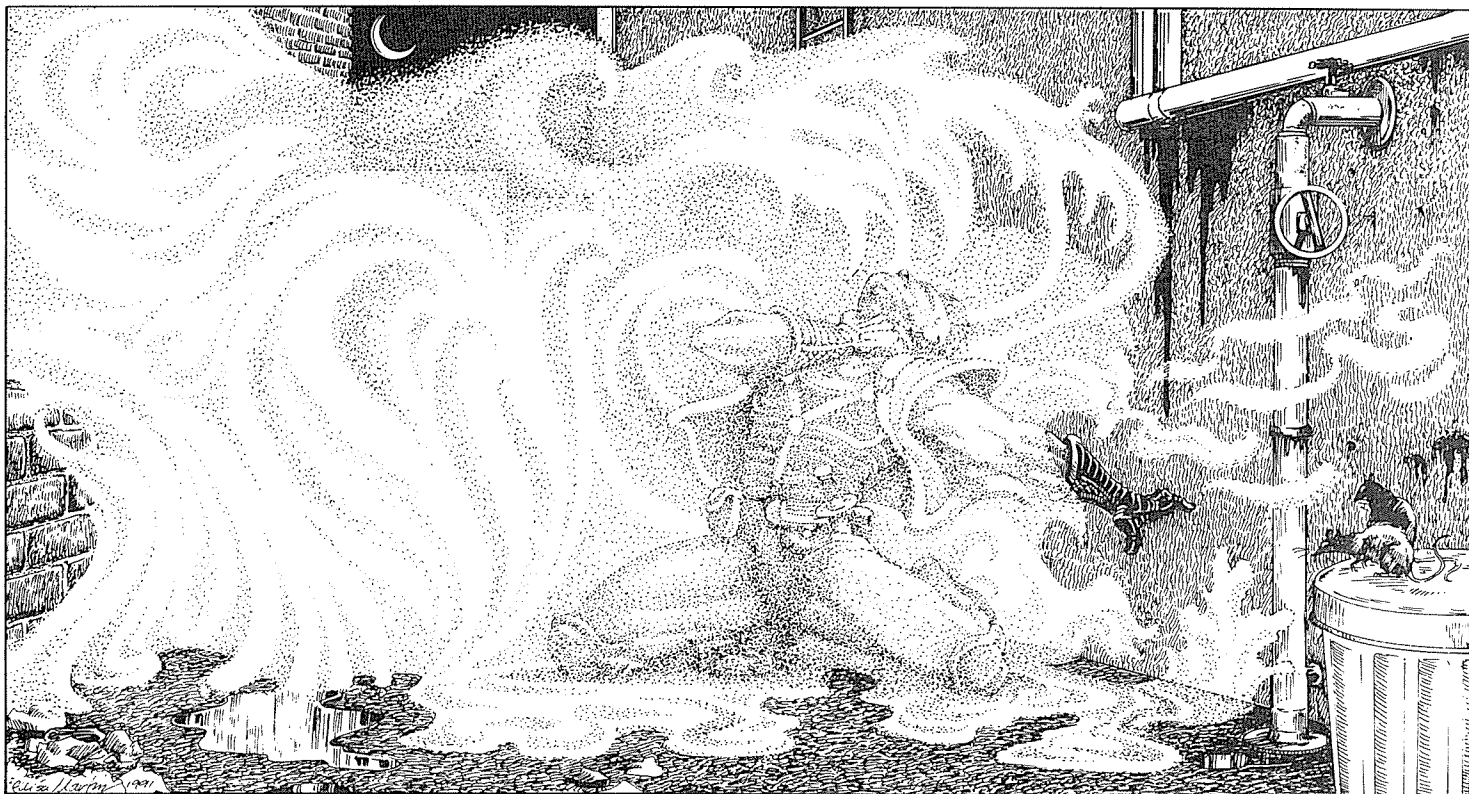
GDW
GAMES



Things That Go Bump in the Night

By Lester W. Smith

One of the most important themes of **Dark Conspiracy** is that everything changes, continually. Consequently, players ought to find their characters facing new plots, new creatures, new challenges every time they play. It is in that spirit that we present to you the following trio of new beasts for use in your **Dark Conspiracy** adventures.



Deathmist

# Appear: 1	Initiative: 3	Agility: 4
Attack: 80%	Strength: —	Skill/Dam.: —/1D10
Move: 5	Constitution: —	Hits: —

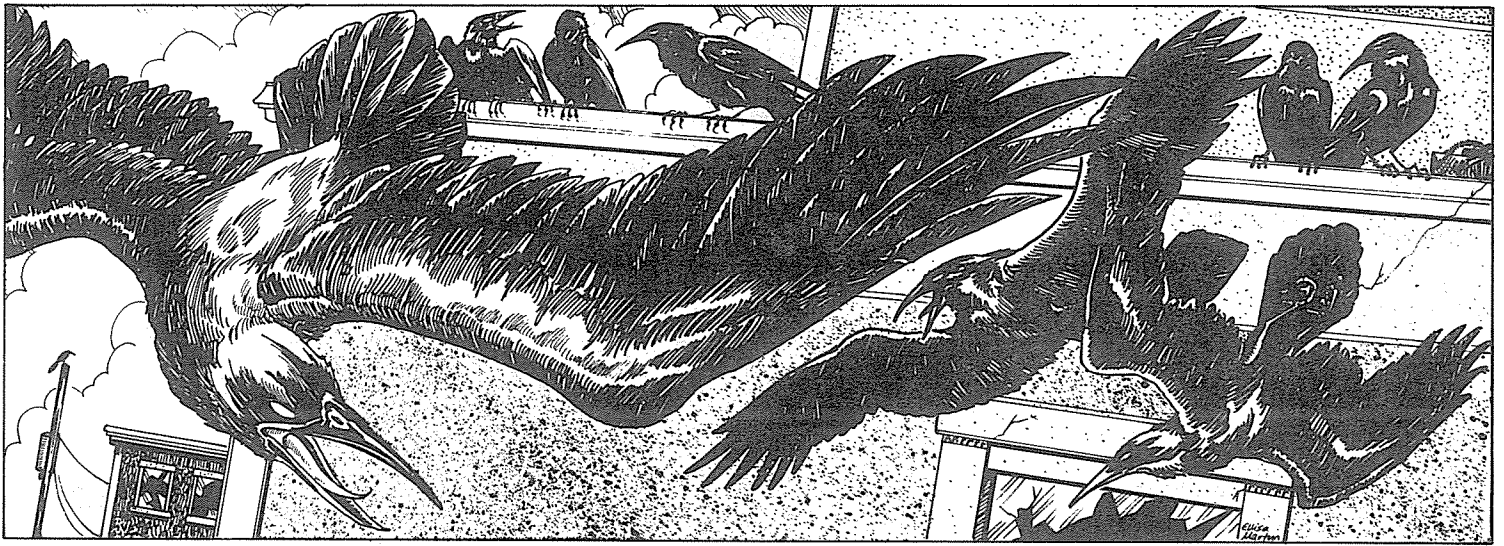
In appearance, deathmist looks much like any thick fog, but it is actually a semisentient, semicohesive creature. It is white in color, sometimes with streaks of sooty gray or dingy yellow swirling within, and it often has a slight odor of sulphur. Deathmist hangs easily upon the air, propelling itself by extending pseudopods and drawing its bulk slowly forward. A typical deathmist will easily fill an area eight to 10 meters in diameter.

Wind direction and speed strongly affect a deathmist's movement. For that reason, the creatures prefer to lurk in still air, such as inside buildings or in dead-end alleys. If they can get upwind of their prey, however, they can use the air currents to move more quickly than normal.

A deathmist attacks living creatures by entering their breathing passages, then solidifying to choke off their air supply. As the victims die, the deathmist feeds off their waning life force. (Treat the attack as strangling—page 79 of the **Dark Conspiracy** rules—except that armor has no effect.)

A deathmist cannot be harmed by normal weapons; they pass right through them. Heat can destroy deathmists, however. Normal sunlight burns one off within one minute, and a raging fire in half that time. Bonfires and torches can hold one at bay, and even a cigarette lighter or a match is sufficient to make a deathmist's Initiative rating drop by one point (extra lighters or matches do not cause any additional loss, however). The best defense against deathmist is generally to run away from it.

The creatures are native to a multitude of proto-dimensions, most of which they have scoured of all other life forms. Occasionally, they find their way through a dimensional portal into our world, where they enjoy a terrible, if brief (just until sunup) period of glutting their hunger.



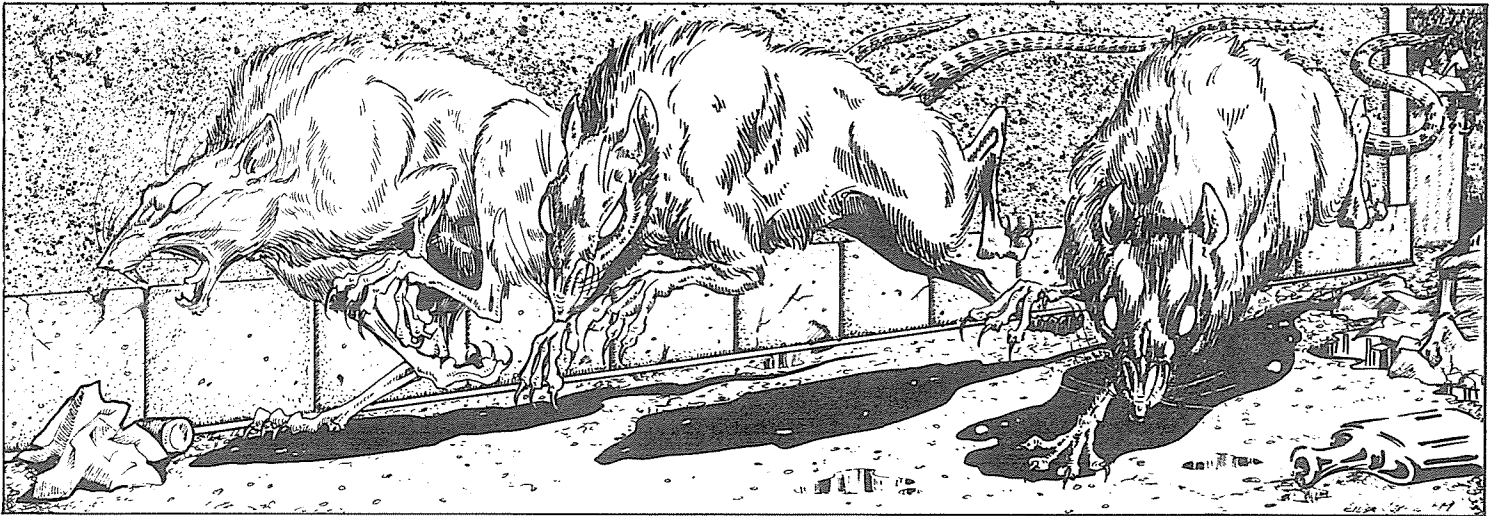
Needlebeaks

# Appear: 1D6	Initiative: 4	Agility: 6
Attack: 40%	Strength: 1	Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6*
Move: 15/30/60	Constitution: 2	Hits: 3/5

*Halved on any attacks not specifically versus the eyes.

One of the results of the Earth becoming a nastier place to live has been that many normal animal types have adapted to become more aggressive. Such is the case with what have commonly come to be called needlebeaks. Needlebeaks are apparently a new species of raven, one that is faster and more durable than normal, and which specifically targets the eyes of its victims.

Treat attacks by needlebeaks as aimed attacks against the head (a Difficult level task). If for some reason a needlebeak cannot attack the eyes (they are covered by goggles, for instance), it will still attempt to attack the head, but its damage rating is halved. Only if the target's entire head is covered will a needlebeak attack other hit locations. In such a case, it will generally give up and fly away instead.



Seekers

# Appear: 1D6+2	Initiative: 5	Agility: 8
Attack: 85%	Strength: 2	Skill/Dam.: 4/1D6
Move: 12/24/48	Constitution: 2	Hits: 3/6

Some of the Dark Races such as morlocks and dark elves have taken to breeding gigantic rats and training them to track prey in the same way as bloodhounds. Among the Dark Minion hunters who have encountered them, the common term for these rats is "seekers." Seekers are not only *much* larger than normal for rats (some mass as much as greyhounds), they are also much more intelligent. Fortunately, very few of them exist, and they do not seem to reproduce as quickly as normal rats. Otherwise, they might take over the world on their own. Ω

CHALLENGETM 53

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

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Twilight: 2000TM

Naval Rules

Mitch Berg

MegaTraveller

Wet Navy

Terrence R. Molnes

ShadowrunTM

Maiden Run

Craig Shesley

GDW





A Grisly Harvest

By Eric W. Haddock

Parents told their children to stay away from the house on White Chapel Lane. Strange things went on there, and strange people visited. Strangest of all, there seemed to be a lot of package delivery—the type of packages a hearse might deliver....

The frequency of missing persons cases in the United States has increased drastically lately. People fear that no streets of any city are safe to walk during the day or night—no class of person is immune to abduction. At the height of this paranoia, an entrepreneur has started a very successful agency to find missing people—the Missing Persons Location Agency.

The MPLA is essentially a large private detective agency, with a large staff of private investigators who accept any cases having to do with disappearances of any sort. The agency has had a large pool of cases to choose from and has quickly become overloaded. Its success rate is phenomenal, even considering the high number of disappearances lately—and now there's a branch office in almost every city with a population of 80,000 or more.

One person finds the MPLA's success story a little too good to be true, and he contacts one of the player characters. "Something has to be done to stop MPLA," he says.

If only it was that simple for the PCs. If only the MPLA were the only thing to stop....

VIDEOTAPE

A whistle blower calling himself "Stan" contacts a PC, insisting that MPLA is committing illegal acts. The PC contacted should be someone who could potentially do something about the situation (police or other law enforcement), someone who has access to public media (reporter or celebrity), or a gnome. Stan will ask to meet the PC, and will bring a videotape with him to the meeting.

The tape shows the parking lot of a supermarket, with a closeup of a red Yugo parked in the lot, then a closeup of an elderly man walking what would appear to be his grandson out to the car. A black van is parked next to the Yugo, with the panel door of the van facing the passenger door of the car. The man and boy reach the car, and the boy waits for his grandfather to unlock the car door for him. Suddenly, the van door opens, and hands reach out to grab the boy and drag him in. The door shuts immediately, and the van squeals out of the parking lot. The camera zooms in on the license plate of the van—DXO1039. That segment stops, and the next shows the same van parked in the local MPLA office parking lot. As the camera rolls, someone holds up a state department of transportation card that shows that the van with the licence plate DXO1039 is owned by Jason Peters. The registration card is replaced by a clipping from a newspaper section dealing with local businesses. That clipping announces that Jason Peters has been named the new director of the local MPLA office.

Stan will admit that he made the tape and that he's tried to find the boy who was kidnapped—with no luck. He also tried to warn the grandfather, but the elderly man suffered a stroke a few days after the kidnapping and died shortly thereafter. The parents of the boy divorced and relocated to different

coasts of America, so the grandfather was named legal guardian. The FBI has been looking for the parents since the boy's abduction, but has been unable to find them.

Stan is not willing to take the tape to the police or media—or to testify in any investigation. His greatest fear is being identified as the one who filmed the "Turik abduction," as that, he is certain, will get him killed. About the only thing he will say about himself is that he used to be a janitor at a local office building and that he heard about MPLA's activities from a fellow janitor. That janitor was killed in a car crash, and Stan vowed to carry on the crusade. Thus far he has managed to suppress his fear in light of the importance of his task, but now he feels that he has done enough, and he would like someone else to take over.

REFEREE'S INFORMATION

If the PCs are able to check police or media files, they will find out that the missing boy is five-year-old William Turik—a mathematical genius who used to compete for prizes awarded for feats of calculation. MPLA did in fact kidnap the child.

MPLA is a front organization that kidnaps people to harvest organs—particularly brain tissue—for use in electronics. Turik was kidnapped by MPLA, then taken to a house on White Chapel Lane and killed. His brain was used for experimentation—it was divided up into slices, which were put into highly advanced computers to increase their processing speed.

MPLA also kidnaps the children of rich families, then accepts the job of searching for those same children. After waiting a couple of months and charging many thousands of dollars, MPLA will "solve the crime" and release the child—thus earning its apparent legitimacy and its high rate of success. Victims of the kidnappings usually report that they were taken to a house in the country, told that they were being held for ransom, then rescued by MPLA agents some weeks later.

MPLA's numerous private investigators follow people to discover the best time to catch them, and thugs and criminals do the dirty work. MPLA is very careful to disassociate itself from the crimes. One time, however, the organization slipped up, and the thugs forgot to switch the front license plate on the van that abducted the Turik boy. Unfortunately for the MPLA, Stan was already on its trail and captured the incident on film.

If the PCs give the tape to the authorities, an investigation will follow, and MPLA will stop what it is doing for about a week. During that time, however, no one will be able to talk to or find MPLA Director Jason Peters. His office will inform any callers that he is on vacation and cannot be reached. If the PCs get his address (he's unlisted in the phone book) and stake out his house, there will be no activity while the PCs are there.

Jason Peters killed the first janitor by tampering with his car. He knows about Stan as well and has had him followed for some time. He was about to have Stan killed (in a seeming accident) when Stan complicated the matter by handing the videotape over to the PCs. When the authorities investigate MPLA, Jason will be forced to forgo subtlety and have Stan violently murdered. It's this murder which makes one or more of the PCs have a particularly bad nightmare.

BAD DREAM

The character with the highest combination of Foreboding and Human Empathy should have the following nightmare on the night that Stan is killed. If several characters have the same Foreboding plus Human Empathy total, they will share the same nightmare.

Read the following to those having the nightmare:

You've come to visit someone in an apartment high-rise complex, but you're not sure who or why. You arrive at the apartment, number 1039, and knock on the door. It swings open from the force of your knock. Inside, Stan is busily typing something on his computer, apparently unaware of your presence.

Suddenly, a harsh purple-pink light shines through an open window near Stan, accompanied by a low growling sound. The light is very bright and harsh—you can barely make yourself look toward the window it's coming from.

Stan stops typing and looks up. The growling becomes louder, and the harsh light more intense. Stan gets up and goes to the window—he apparently can hear the growling but is not aware of the light.

You call out to him, but he doesn't hear you.

As he approaches the window, the light become brighter.

Soon, all you can see is the light, as bright as the sun, burning into your eyes. Suddenly silhouetted against the light is the form of some animal, something resembling a small bear or large cat. The growling turns into a frantic, high-pitched squeal, and the form lunges at Stan. The light disappears.

The dream image begins to fade, and all you are left with is the sound of chewing coming from the apartment, and a strange, oily smell carried on the light breeze from the open window.

Stan, of course, is dead. Although Stan refused to give out his address (he left a post office box registered under a false name and address), the PC who had the dream will recognize the apartment complex. If the PCs go there the next day, they will find what's left of Stan's body. A large part of his chest seems to have been removed—yet there is only a small amount of blood on the carpet and on Stan himself. Stan's face is frozen in an expression of horror, and his skin shows just the lightest trace of a pink hue.

The PCs will undoubtedly want to call in the police at this point. An examination by police investigators or by a doctor PC will reveal that Stan's organs were torn from his body with unknown instruments, but not surgically removed. Animal bites cannot be ruled out.

The Mystery of the Eerie Phantom Cats

By John Coffin

"They look like giant house cats, and they can be as large as panthers. Some are two feet across at the shoulders," says author and naturalist Di Francis, who has been on the track of the beasts in England for the past 15 years.

Francis, author of *Cat Country*, claims she's heard so many eyewitness accounts that she's become fascinated with capturing one.

"A forest ranger was eating his lunch in his automobile when a large, black panther-like feline emerged from the brush and circled his car," she recalls.

The ranger says the beast stood on its hind legs and peered into the car, its face only a few feet away from the window. He said the golden-eyed beast bared its large, white fangs before running off.

Later, he checked the prints, and they were of no known cat species, large or small, Francis explains. Eyewitness accounts describe the monster cats as "highly intelligent and very elusive."

There are photos of the mysterious monster cats, and naturalist Trevor Beer says reports of the animals go back over 100 years.

Some experts believe they are hybrids of common household cats and native wild cats.

Still others, like Beer, believe they are the offspring of panthers that escaped from Victorian menageries in the late 1800s.

But there are still others who believe the cats are supernatural creatures, pointing to accounts given by witnesses who claim they've driven right through large cats that mysteriously appear and disappear in the road.

"This would explain why the animals are said to mysteriously vanish into thin air so often, and why they are rarely photographed," offers David Farrant, president of the British Psychic and Occult Society.

But one prominent British expert goes so far as to say the monsters are either a "mutant species or even dangerous ghosts roaming the countryside."

This article (reproduced in part here) originally appeared in the July 2, 1991 issue of The Sun.

Stan's apartment is in a nice area of town, yet is simple and spartan. If the PCs search his apartment after calling the police, all they will discover is that Stan has been working as a freelance reporter for a tabloid called *Voice of Reason*, where he mostly wrote about ghosts and haunted houses.

If the PCs go back to the apartment during the night or if they search the apartment before they call the police, they will learn that in addition to the MPLA, Stan was also investigating a house on White Chapel Lane that is said to be haunted. He has gathered some basic information:

- The house is owned by a law firm that pays taxes on the property. It refuses to give out the name of the owner, claiming that the house is part of a trust and that certain things need to be settled in court before the owner's name can be made public.

- Neighbors' stories differ on whether or not the house is occupied. The grounds are not maintained at all, and most people think it to be vacant. Some people say that they've seen vans enter the driveway at night and leave just before dawn.

- Many people report that during the night, a low moan comes from the house, and occasionally strange pinkish lights are seen in the windows.

HUNTING TRIP

Within two days of Stan's death, one of the PCs will be approached by Laurie Hiller, an Englishwoman. The PC contacted should be a member of the police or other law enforcement, someone who has access to public media (reporter or celebrity), or a gnome.

Hiller explains that she has been following the trail of a pack of animals hunting livestock in England, and she recently learned that the cats are now in the United States. In fact, she says, two cases of livestock death in the county the PCs are in fit the MO of the cats from England. Hiller produces a newspaper article that explains what has been going on in her native country.

Hiller suggests that the cats are the product of some kind of experiment, and that the animals might be bred to be used as weapons by the government or by a multinational corporation. She is intent on capturing one of the cats for examination and needs help.

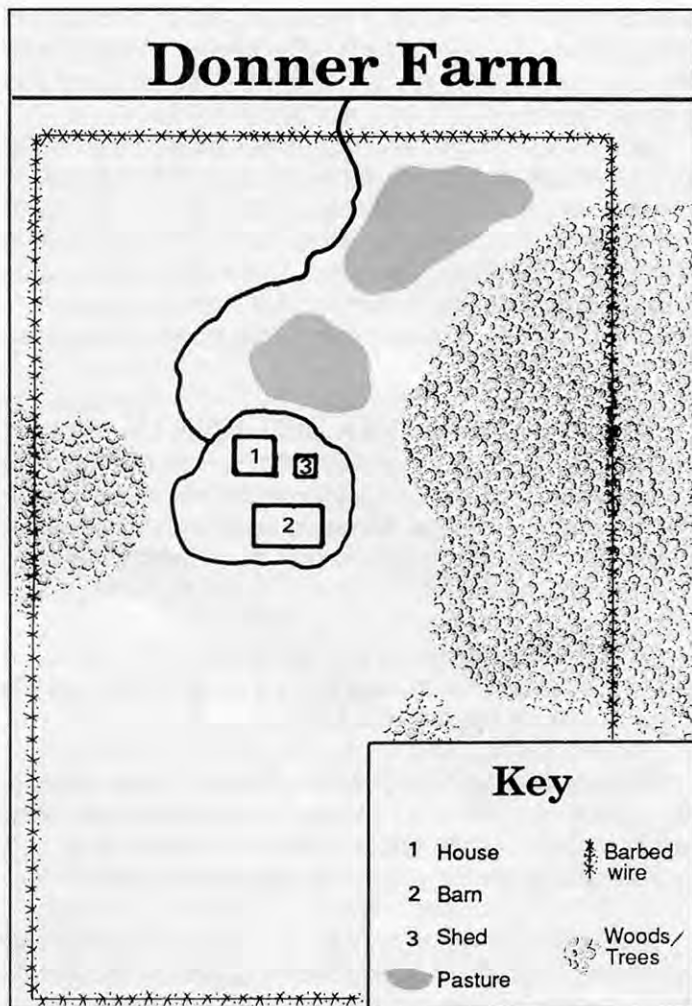
Hiller's explanation follows. Read her tale to the players. If one of the PCs is a federal agent or law enforcement, don't read the last paragraph.

These cats are dangerous! They're bigger than anything normal—two feet across at the shoulder. They're powerful too—able to leap from the ground through a second-story window.

The tracks I've studied show that the cats are released at a certain point, then run through the country hunting livestock, particularly cattle and sheep. A few people have also been killed.

The cats apparently only attack at night. What's really unusual is that they don't eat their prey—they just kill it and leave the corpse.

Their tracks always lead back to the point at which they started, but there are no other tracks like from a truck or other vehicle. In fact, there aren't any other tracks at all.



I need some helping hands in snaring one of these things so we know what we're up against.

I've already asked your government for help, but they're too shorthanded, and your local law enforcement didn't believe me.

Hiller claims to be a housewife with a large inheritance who's been bothered by stories of the cat attacks and decided to take action. If the PCs check her out, they'll find that she's properly registered with immigration. If the PCs have the right contacts, they'll learn that there really is a Hiller who just received a large inheritance.

Hiller says that according to the pattern the cats follow, the next farm to be attacked will be the Donner farm, about 20 miles outside of town. She says she's already asked the Donners' permission to set up traps on their property.

Hiller has tranquilizer darts, two nets, five bear traps and other assorted hunting gear from England, plus a tranq rifle and portable cage she bought in America. Each net could hold one cat if the animal is injected with tranquilizer immediately after being trapped.

If the PCs come up with a logical plan, Hiller will go along with it. Otherwise, she will suggest that they lock all the livestock in the barn, then set traps around the barn for the cats. The Donners will help with whatever plan the group agrees on. They are emphatic, though, that their livestock be corralled safely in the barn. If one of the characters is a gnome and offers to buy any animals killed, then the Donners

will consent to having their livestock remain outside and unprotected. The Donners will seem understandably tense through the proceedings, and will not invite the party into their home.

During the night, PCs will experience a strange series of events. An ideal method of leading the players through these events is to talk to each privately; an alternative is to write or photocopy the information before the game begins, then hand out notes during the game. Before the game starts, secretly note who has Willpower skill and who does not—those with the skill will experience different events than those without.

NO WILLPOWER EVENTS

Read the following events to those who do not have Willpower skill, at approximately one-hour intervals. These events coincide with the events listed in Willpower Events, below. After relaying these events to the players, proceed to The Pounce, below.

As you look around, watching carefully for cats, you suddenly see one just a few meters away from you! It is slinking around, moving with total silence.

You hear a faint growling nearby. You can't quite tell where it's coming from, but it is definitely close. It's a sharp, clear sound that sends chills up your spine. The rest of the sounds of the night fall silent to the low, hungry moans from the cats.

You don't know where the cats are, but you can suddenly feel their presence. They've surrounded you and your comrades like Indians around a wagon train. You get the unmis-

takable feeling that they are going to attack soon, and all at once. Despair hits you as you wonder whether you'll survive.

If the player characters fire on the cats at any time during these events, the animals will flee. The bullets or tranq darts fired will apparently pass through the cats, striking anything on the other side. PCs with Willpower skill will not see the cats at all.

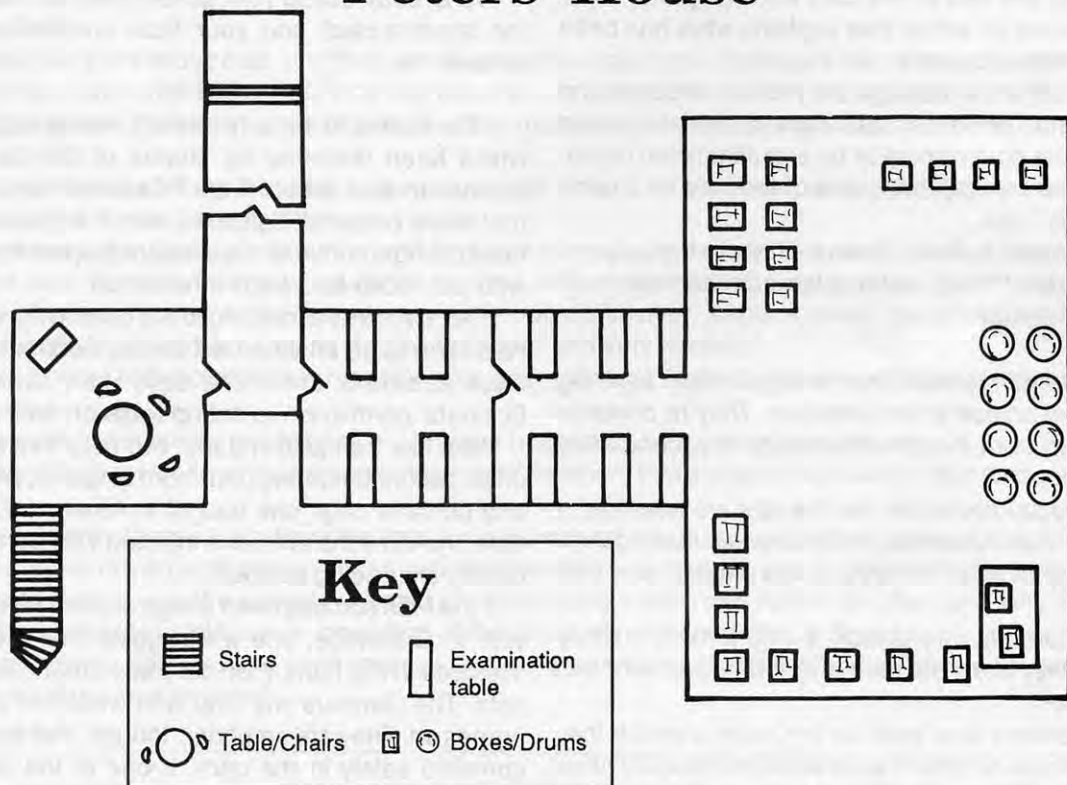
WILLPOWER EVENTS

Read the following events to those who do have Willpower skill, at approximately one-hour intervals. These events coincide with the events listed in No Willpower Events, above. After relaying these events to the players, proceed to The Pounce, below.

While you watch for cats, you see a pair of glowing yellow eyes looking right at you. The eyes are off in the distance, but they're definitely there. Just as quickly as they appear, they are gone. You see another pair at another location, bobbing and weaving between the trees at the edge of the farm. Just as suddenly, all the eyes disappear and the night is as dark as ever.

The eyes return, only much larger and brighter. They lurk on the edge of the farm, among the trees. This time, you are certain that the eyes are looking right toward you—looking right into your soul. You look back at them, and for a moment you're filled with the impression that the eyes are like the coals that fuel hell's fires—evil and eternally bright. Even when you blink or turn away, you feel as though the eyes are looking through your skull and into your mind, reading your

Peters' House



thoughts and invading your soul. You can't help looking away, and when you turn back, the eyes are gone.

The following is experienced by the character (or characters, if there is a tie) with the highest Empathy attribute:

You hear heavy breathing, and at first you think one of your friends is in trouble. But you realize that there is another source to the heavy panting in the air. You can't tell where it's coming from, but it's very close. It's as if you are standing in the jaws of the beast as it looks down on you. The panting becomes louder and more pronounced—soon, it's loud enough to drown out the voices of your friends. You find yourself shouting to hear your own voice over the constant, evil sound.

THE POUNCE

After the events listed above, six cats will attack the PCs. Hiller and the Donners will duck out of sight as soon as the attack begins. (The number of cats may be adjusted according to the size of the party to ensure that the characters have a fighting chance but that the battle is close.) If the group is in the barn, the cats will rush the barn and attempt to crash through the wooden planks of the wall. If the group is in the house, the cats will try to jump through the windows. If the group is outside, the cats will seemingly appear out of nowhere, suddenly surrounding the party.

The cats will try to make three successful attacks on each PC. Once a character is stunned or has his Initiative reduced to 0, attacks against him will stop. The cats will leave when all the characters are stunned or at Initiative 0, or when the cats have made three successful attacks against each character, whichever comes first. Anyone trying to track the cats through the countryside will lose them within minutes.

The cats are the product of genetic engineering by one of Jason Peter's contacts. He has borrowed them to get rid of the PCs and to see how they do against armed humans.

Any PCs not incapacitated by the cats will enjoy only a short reprieve—then the Donners and Hiller will suddenly turn their weapons against them. Unconscious PCs will be taken by van to the house on White Chapel Lane, where they will wake up in the storage room after an hour. PCs who escape may track the group to their destination.

AN URBAN FARMHOUSE

Jason Peters' uses the house on White Chapel Lane as a chop shop for bodies, harvesting internal organs and selling them to his clients. A doctor on his payroll does all the dirty work.

The house is located at the end of a new line of houses—to the east is fresh dirt and vacant plots where a few foundations have been laid and a few walls constructed. The house, in effect, stands alone.

The building appears to be a standard two-story suburban house with rather expensive furnishings. However, it hides a series of tunnels and added rooms, which are accessed through the basement door.

Freight Elevator: Through a tunnel is an elevator leading to a small dock a few blocks away from the house. The tunnel is a few hundred meters long. The elevator is used to carry

Cats

The statistics and attack methods for the cats are the same as those listed on page 191 and 192 of **Dark Conspiracy** for large cats, with the following exceptions:

Appear: 6 (or more, depending on party size)

Attack: 100%

Move: 15/45/70

Skill/Dam: 8/3D6

Hits: 20/40

Special: The cats hunt in packs, led by a pack leader. This leader has the same physical attributes as the rest, but has the ability to project an empathic attack on its prey. This attack has a line of sight range and allows the projector to instill a sense of paranoia and fear among its victims. The direct effect on the target is a series of visions and sounds which instill fear and panic on the prey, thus slowing reactions. *In game terms the effect is that each person attacking one of the cats does so at one less Initiative point than normal.* If a character's Initiative drops to 0, he is too stricken with panic to attack. But since such a character is effectively incapacitated, the cats will make no effort to attack him.

The cats also have Dissolution skill (see page 210 of **Dark Conspiracy**) that enables them to escape any physical trap or net. They will use this skill to breach any barrier the PCs might have set up, and this skill plus their speed will enable them to seemingly vanish in mid-air.

The cats will make every effort to retreat to prevent capture. If a cat is incapacitated, one or more other cats will drag the wounded one away.

Description: These cats resemble huge black panthers. Their shoulders are indeed two feet across, and their teeth as proportionally long. Their eyes are a brilliant yellow and seem to glow from any angle.

bodies and equipment to the basement level.

Examination Room: The room is filled with tables for examining corpses, plus jars and containers of harvested organs.

Weapons Trunk: Inside this trunk are four G3 battle rifles and five Colt Kraits. There is no ammo here.

Storage Room: Excess corpses are kept here. A door connecting the storage room to the examination room can be opened from either side. The storage room, kept at freezing temperature, contains a row of tables—it is on these tables that the characters awake. They have been left alone by a careless guard who assumed they were dead.

Lounge: This area serves as a place for Peters to discuss business matters. It includes a large-screen TV, VCR and rack of tapes of popular movies.

If the characters search the farmhouse after regaining consciousness, they will eventually enter the lounge, where Peters is meeting with a customer from Chicago. One bodyguard is also present.

Laurie Hiller (Experienced NPC)

Hiller was sent by Jason Peters to lure the PCs into the cat trap. Hiller's instructions are to help the PCs whenever she can, then take out any PCs the cats don't incapacitate. After the attack, she is to call in a nearby van to collect the bodies, then report to Peters. Hiller is armed with a Colt Krait (see page 281 of **Dark Conspiracy**).

Donners (Experienced NPC)

The Donners are imposters—the real Donners were killed and their bodies taken to Peters' house for harvesting. Their instructions are basically the same as Hiller's. The two thugs are armed with Colt Kraits.

JASON PETERS (Experienced NPC)

When encountered in the basement of his house, Peters is armed with a Colt Krait and will not hesitate to shoot anyone he sees in his basement and doesn't recognize. He wears a Kevlar vest.

If outnumbered five to one (or more), he will attempt to flee down the elevator tunnel and leave his bodyguard to fight for him. If taken alive, Peters will not say anything and will depend on his lawyers to get him out.

Peters' Bodyguard (Elite NPC)

Peters' bodyguard, named Günter, is an Elite NPC with Initiative 6 and Strength 8. He carries a G3 rifle (page 291 of **Dark Conspiracy**) with four clips of ammo. His instructions are clear enough—shoot anyone the boss doesn't like. This includes, of course, people who burst into the basement.

As soon as he sees the PCs, he'll run to a table, dragging Peters along with him, tip it over and use it as cover (add one level of difficulty when trying to hit him or Peters). The table is made of heavy metal and has an armor value of two.

Günter will only attempt to surrender if he's about to die. Otherwise, he'll keep shooting until he's out of ammunition, then will attempt to rush the PCs with his knife drawn.

Chicago Connection

The customer from Chicago is actually a Dark Minion. He will use his Dimension Walk ability to escape if he is let out of sight even briefly, or if he is threatened or found out. Anyone trying to establish empathic contact with him will instantly realize that he is a Dark Minion. Although his race is difficult to determine, he radiates evil. He has a total of 50 hit points, and is immune to the effects of stun grenades and tear gasses.

If the referee desires, the dimensional portal the darkling opens to escape can remain open just long enough for the PCs to try to follow the darkling. Of course, the proto-dimension used may not be exactly the perfect environment for humans....

If the PCs enter the room with stealth, they will overhear the following:

"I'm about to fulfill the rest of the agreement all at once. I'm even calling in another doctor to help with the harvesting. You should have 80 more in two weeks, plus a pretty constant supply for the future."

"I would very much like to see that. Your work has been exemplary to date. I and those I represent would be very interested in supporting a method that creates a constant flow of product."

The rest of the conversation is essentially small talk, with a few words about arranging truck schedules.

If the PCs attack or do not enter the room with stealth, Peters and the bodyguard will try to fight. The customer will show no fear, yet will make no hostile action and will surrender instantly. On the table is an order form for a total of 136 brains, with a notation that half of the merchandise has already been delivered.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

If Peters is taken alive, the authorities will have no trouble convicting him based on the organs they find in the storage room and the weapons in the trunk. If the Chicago customer gets away, he will certainly be back to attempt to salvage Peters' operation or seek revenge.

Characters should receive two experience points for surviving and one Initiative experience point for the combat they went through. Ω



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Your Own Worst ENEMY

By Lester Smith

To the world at large, Abraham Sylvester is known only as a reclusive billionaire (albeit one with a propensity for open-handed donations to charity). But a select few individuals know Sylvester as one of Earth's most cunning opponents to the Dark Ones. The player characters belong to that latter group. They are each acquaintances or employees of Sylvester, people who have worked with him in the past to uncover Darkling plots and thwart them. The PCs have come to respect and trust Sylvester completely. Now he has called them all together to help him on a new investigation. He has stumbled upon a black market in infants, located in Miami, and has asked the group to meet him there to check it out.

When the adventure opens, the PCs have just completed their travel to Miami. They gather at their host's hotel suite for dinner and talk the case over with Sylvester, then go to bed with plans to get started in the morning. But evil dreams disturb their sleep, and when they awake the next morning, they find Sylvester missing. What's worse, they are all spattered with blood, and they discover that an elderly couple was murdered during the night in this very hotel.

With no other leads to follow for solving the mysteries they face, the PCs begin pursuing the black market. Each day takes them closer to its heart, but each night finds more murders and evil dreams.

Soon, the PCs are ambushed by a group that turns out to be Dark Minion hunters. A note the hunters carry—signed by Sylvester—states that the PCs have been taken over by the Dark Ones. From that point on, the cycle continues: The PCs grow closer to the criminal ring; they continue to have evil dreams; innocents continue to die; and more hunters come to kill them.

The secret to the mystery lies in two main plots. The first involves the cobra people and their black market ring. The

other involves dark elves who kidnapped Sylvester and are toying with the PCs. The dark elves are committing the murders, but they have captured an ET device that puts the PCs into a deep sleep, during which incriminating evidence can be planted on them. To further torture the PCs, they have replaced Sylvester with a changeling who is out recruiting hunters to destroy them, which is, in a way, a third plot.

Ideally, the PCs will solve both mysteries: They will find the lair of the cobra people, and they will catch the dark elves in their act. Of course, they may instead decide that they really have been taken over by the Dark Ones and simply destroy themselves.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

To run this adventure, the referee will need to keep track of three different courses of events: the PCs' investigation of the Miami black market in babies, the dark elves' taking every opportunity to do murder and blame it on the PCs, and the changeling's sending hunters after the PCs. Keeping track of these things is not as difficult as it might seem. Basically, the referee should concentrate on the PCs' progress toward solving the Miami black market mystery, then insert episodes from the other two courses as opportunity arises. Most of the explanation that follows involves the black market mystery. But first, two short sections detail how to graft the dark elves' murders and the Dark Minion hunters' attacks onto the course of that investigation.

Note that Abraham Sylvester is a very rich man, and his employees (Silvers and Randall) are authorized to use that wealth in a good cause. As a result, the PCs should have no lack of whatever equipment they need. Really exotic equipment might take some time to be delivered, however.

THE DARK ELVES' MURDERS

At one point in their past, Sylvester and the PCs thwarted the plans of a band of dark elves in New York City. Those creatures have been plotting their revenge ever since. Recently, six of them captured a sleep projecting device in a raid on some humanoid ETs, and they came up with a plan for vengeance on the PCs. According to that plan, these six followed Sylvester, waiting for him to gather those people together again. Once that group had rejoined, the dark elves used the sleep projector to immobilize the PCs while they kidnapped Sylvester and murdered some innocents with the PCs' own weapons. Then, while two of the dark elves took Sylvester to a safe place where they could create a changeling version of him and then slowly torture him to death, the remaining four continued to follow the PCs, waiting for another opportunity to put them all to sleep again and implicate them in another murder. They plan to continue this for as long as they can get away with it.

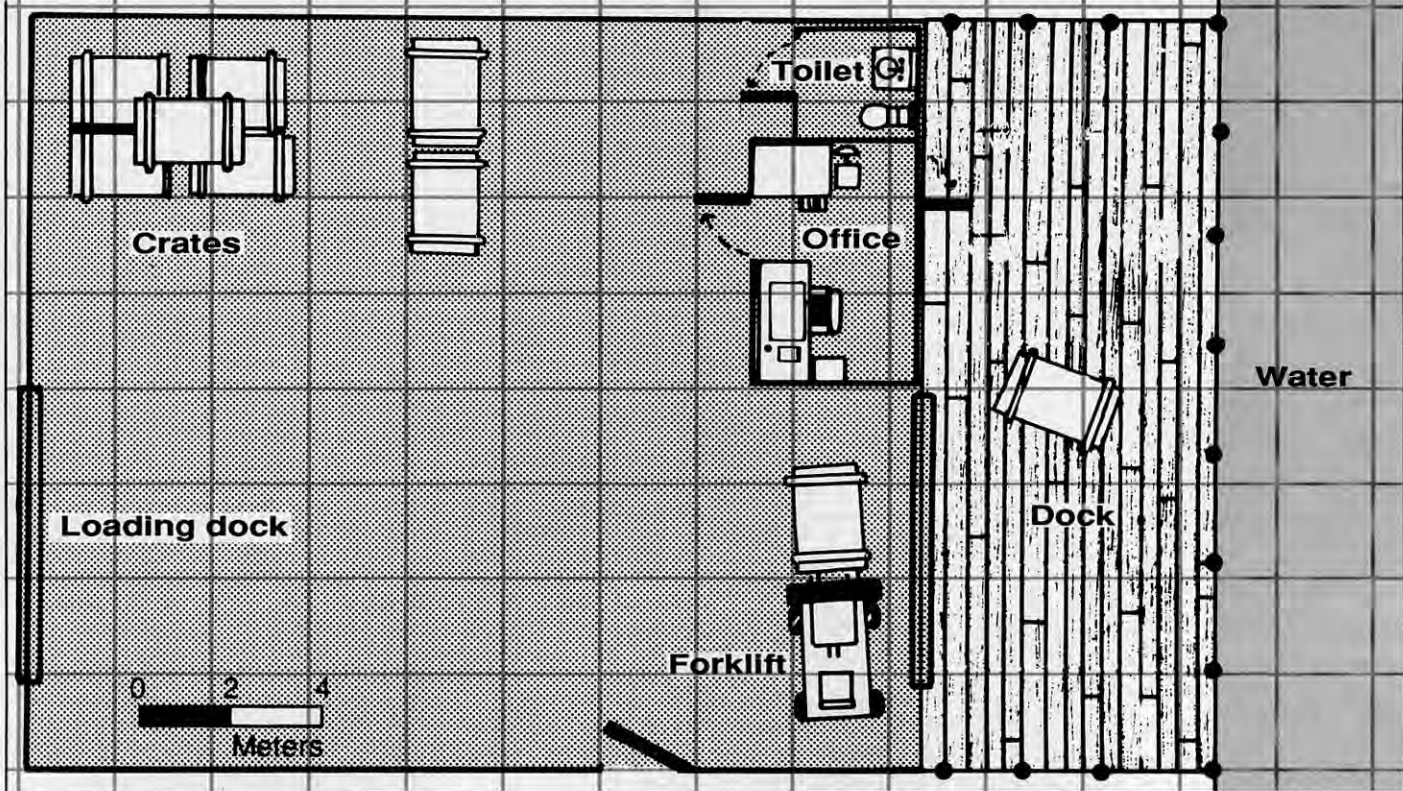
As has been explained, the PCs all arrive in Miami one evening, meet at dinner and discuss the black market case with Sylvester. The adventure actually begins on the next morning, when the PCs wake up fully dressed, with blood spattered on their clothes and with Sylvester missing. A search of the suite reveals no bodies—to all appearances, there has been no violence in the suite. Further investigation of the hotel reveals that an elderly couple staying on the floor above were brutally murdered in their sleep. (Of course, if the PCs investigate without cleaning themselves up first, they are likely to be the primary suspects.)

All the PCs can remember of significance from their talk with Sylvester the night before is that he wanted them to contact Lenny the Stoooge at the Green Flamingo Bar and Grill in downtown Miami. Following up on this lead will take several days. During that time, the four dark elves with the sleep projector will be tracking them, waiting for other opportunities to put the PCs to sleep, borrow their weapons and murder more innocents nearby. (The referee should use his imagination for determining who these innocents are, based upon the PCs' location at the time.) How successful the dark elves are will depend on what precautions the PCs take (guards set, etc.). The referee should consider



Geer

The Cobra People's Warehouse



the dark elves as having a Stealth rating of 8 in their attempts to put the PCs to sleep. (Other stats for the dark elves are included on page 220 of the game rules.)

If the PCs are canny enough, they may eventually catch the dark elves at their game. If Sylvester is still alive by then, any dark elves that survive the encounter will gladly trade Sylvester for their own freedom.

Sleep Projector

This device looks like an overly large bullhorn (nearly one meter in length). It projects subsonic sound waves that lull mammalian targets into a sleep so deep that they can be moved about quite freely with no danger of waking. Targets that are awake at the time the device is turned on them can remain awake if they succeed at a Difficult test of Willpower or Constitution (whichever is higher). Add +1 to the die roll for each hour beyond 20 that the target has remained awake. Victims of the device wake naturally after sleeping a number of hours equal to 14 minus their Constitution rating.

The sleep projector has a range of 50 meters and projects in a cone 25 meters wide at its furthest end. Its effects can be projected through glass (such as a win-

dow, which is how the dark elves typically use it), but the cone's length and base diameter are halved as a result. The device has been designed as a disposable model; it has enough energy for 16 uses and cannot be recharged.

CHANGELING PLOT

While four of the dark elves plague the PCs, the other two have taken Sylvester and are creating a type I changeling replica of him (see pages 215-16 of the game rules for changeling details). That process will take them one day to complete. On the second day, the changeling begins to contact Dark Minion hunters of Sylvester's acquaintance and recruits them to come hunt the PCs, claiming that the PCs have been taken over by the Dark Ones and are now Dark Minions themselves. Also on the second day, the dark elves begin torturing Sylvester to death. It will take them four days to kill him (each day he receives six wound points, and he heals none back).

On the evening of that second day, the first group of hunters arrives in Miami and begins looking for the PCs. Each day thereafter, another group of hunters arrives as well. How soon any of these hunters find the PCs depends upon how

skilled they are and how many days they have spent looking. The referee should roll an Average test of the group leader's skill level once each day, subtracting one from the die roll for each day spent in Miami after the first (make a mark next to each group each additional day that group is in town). If the test is successful, the group finds the PCs and attacks. If unsuccessful, the group gives up for that day and tries again on the next. If more than one group discovers the PCs on the same day, the attacks will come separately. In each case, the referee should decide when the attack occurs based upon the PCs' actions for the day and what seems dramatically appropriate.

Note that whenever the PCs defeat a group of hunters, they will find evidence revealing that the group has been sent by Sylvester and that Sylvester believes the PCs have become Dark Minions. (This evidence might be a note in the pocket of a hunter's body, the explanation of a hunter taken captive, or the curse of a routed group.) In any case, the purpose of these encounters is to give the PCs more evidence that they have been taken over and to add some excitement to the course of their black market investigation.

COBRA PEOPLE PLOT

Solving the cobra people plot actually involves no great mystery. Basically, a nest of cobra people has infiltrated the local criminal underground and taken control by the simple expedient of converting that underground's leaders to worshippers. Only those leaders know that cobra people run the show now—the rank and file of the underground think things are going on as always, except for the increased traffic in black market babies. That increase is, however, disturbing enough criminals to make the PCs' job a little more easy than normal.

All that is involved in solving this mystery, then, is legwork. The PCs find a contact, convince him to talk, and thereby learn the name of another contact one step closer to the top of the underground's hierarchy. From there they continue to the next step up, and so on, until they are given the location of the underground's headquarters, in a warehouse on the waterfront. Once there, the PCs will encounter the cobra people.

The PCs can effectively meet with only two people per day, given the time spent asking around for those people, travelling from location to location, and conducting the meeting. (If the PCs make an Outstanding Success at their roll during an interview, however, they may meet with another person that day.) The referee is encouraged to play these meetings out.

The stages of revelation are as follows.

Stage One: Lenny the Stooge

During his dinner with the PCs their first night in Miami, Sylvester told them he had set up a meeting with Lenny the Stooge—a local confidence man and part-time stool pigeon—at the Purple Flamingo Bar and Grill the next evening at 6 p.m. When the PCs get to the Purple Flamingo, they find Lenny easily enough. Getting him to reveal the name of someone one step higher in the organization (Mamma Andrews) requires a bribe of \$10 and an Average test of Bargain, Interrogation, Persuasion or Human Empathy. If these fail, an additional bribe of \$30 will do the trick.

Stage Two: Mamma Andrews

Mamma Andrews appears to be a street person, and she typically hangs out on the square in what used to be downtown Miami

(before the megacorps moved downtown Miami to Miami Beach). Actually, she is a bookie. A bribe of \$20 and an Average test of any of the skills mentioned above will get Mamma to reveal the name of someone higher up (Weasel Willy). If these tests fail, an additional bribe of \$50 will bring success.

Stage Three: Weasel Willy

Weasel can be found hanging out at the Loop D Loop club, a strip joint on the west edge of town. He is of mixed Cuban and Irish blood, and considers himself quite a ladies' man. He works as a pimp, and will constantly interrupt himself to proposition any women in the PCs' group. Weasel wants \$100 to give the PCs the phone number of someone more "in the know" about the criminal scene in Miami (Sam Weisenthal), but an offer of \$75 and an Average test of any of the skills mentioned above will loosen his tongue. So will serious threats of physical violence, but they will also bring an automatic Dark Minion hunter attack today, as Weasel will begin spreading the news of the PCs around town.

Stage Four: Sam Weisenthal

Weisenthal is the person who answers when the PCs call the phone number Weasel gave them. He is a small-time pusher with contacts in the headquarters of Miami's criminal underground. For \$150, he will pass the PCs' names along to his supplier (Ace). For \$250, he will guarantee that they get a call back within 12 hours from the time he takes payment. A Difficult test of Bargain will drop each price by \$50. But first, Weisenthal has to see the money, which means the PCs have to meet him. He sets up a meeting at an abandoned convenience store in a deserted residential area of town. Weisenthal shows up for that meeting on a motorcycle. He is half an hour late (he has been scoping the PCs out). As Weisenthal rides away with their money, he tells the PCs they had better have a good reason for wanting to see the bosses, if they expect to get past Ace.

Stage Five: Ace

Weisenthal's contact is a woman who simply goes by the name "Ace." She calls the PCs at their hotel room exactly 12 hours from the meeting time Weisenthal originally set with the PCs, and asks what they want with the top brass. Convincing her to set up

DARK CONSPIRACY

a meeting requires a test of Streetwise, Act/Bluff, Bargain, or Persuasion, and the referee should set the difficulty of the skill by the exact argument the PCs make. Don't make the tests too easy. If all else fails, an offer of \$1000 will pique her interest enough to set up a meeting for midnight at the warehouse where the cobra people are nesting.

ENCOUNTERING THE COBRA PEOPLE

When the PCs arrive at the abandoned warehouse from which the cobra people run Miami's criminal underground, they find themselves outnumbered two-to-one by guards and lieutenants. The lieutenants insist on frisking the PCs, and they collect any weapons the PCs are carrying. Then the PCs are ushered inside.

Three cobra people are nesting here; one of them comes forward to question the PCs about their purpose in seeking the meeting. (See page 216 of the game rules for a description of the cobra people, noting particularly their disguise abilities.) After a few moments, regardless what the PCs say, the interrogator hisses, "You lie! You die!" Immediately, the cobra people all extend their fangs and attack (begin combat at phase 5, which is the cobra people's Initiative rating). Most of their cronies stand by and watch to make sure none of the PCs escape, but several prepare to advance on the PCs, to make sure the cobra people need only deal with one PC at a time.

But the dark elves are not about to be robbed of their prey so easily. As soon as phase 4 begins (the dark elves' Initiative rating), the four of them who have been following the PCs step through the door and sweep their sleep projector across one side of the room, being careful not to hit the PCs. Half the guards and lieutenants fall asleep (providing a ready source of weapons for the PCs), and the dark elves leap into the fray.

STACKING THE DECK

Ideally, the combat should work out so that the cobra people and their cronies are all defeated, and the dark elves then

either turn to battle the PCs or run off, depending upon how badly they have suffered in the fight. If the PCs are losing at some point during the battle, however, the referee has a natural trump card to swing the balance in the other direction. That is, by this time a group of Dark Minion hunters has unmasked the Sylvester changeling. Word has gone out that the PCs have most likely *not* been taken over by the Dark Ones, but have been the victims of a hoax. Consequently, a group of hunters has been shadowing the dark elves who have been shadowing the PCs, and this group shows up to help the PCs out (although, undoubtedly, the PCs' first thoughts will be that even more enemies have now arrived, given the hunters' earlier attacks).

REVELATION

Once the battle is over, the referee should assume that there are enough clues lying about (sleeping cronies to be interrogated, hunters to be questioned, black market bookkeeping records to be read) to pretty much solve all of the mysteries the PCs have faced. If any of the dark elves survive to be questioned, they also reveal the spot where Sylvester is held. Assuming that the PCs have made the best use of their time in tracking down the cobra people and that they are quiet in their approach to the dark elves' hideout, they will be able to rescue Sylvester while he remains alive.

Naturally, given the tangled nature of the experience they have all just been through, they will all undoubtedly be ready for a vacation—at Sylvester's expense, of course.

ABRAHAM SYLVESTER

Abraham Sylvester is a billionaire who devotes his money and energy toward redressing the wrongs in his world. A carefully groomed, middle-aged man of average height and weight, Sylvester has a quiet but forceful personality and a passion for justice. Sylvester is no stranger to violence and is well able to hold his own in a fight.

Experience: Veteran

Attributes: 6; Charisma 7, Empathy 4

Skills: 5

Initiative: 4

CHANGELING SYLVESTER

It looks just like Sylvester, but it isn't

him. It's a type I changeling acting in his place. Those who know Sylvester best can sense that something is wrong, but not enough to put their finger on anything specific.

Experience: Veteran

Attributes: 6; Charisma 6, Empathy 5

Skills: 5, including Darkling Empathy

Initiative: 4

LENNY THE STOOGES

Lenny is a skinny, oily little man with beady eyes, a pencil moustache and a nasal voice. He tends to dress in stained white cotton suits. Lenny will do nearly anything for a buck, as long as he doesn't have to expose himself to any real danger. He carries a switchblade for defense, but has never really used it, relying on whining to get him out of trouble.

Experience: Novice

Attributes: 5

Skills: 2

Initiative: 1

MAMMA ANDREWS

Mamma Andrews looks like every ancient bag lady the PCs have ever seen. But that's just a disguise. Mamma has a comfortable apartment in a respectable part of town, one she keeps well furnished with her earnings as a bookie. In her bag, Mamma carries a billy club and a sawed-off shotgun (311-R), for use when customers get too pushy.

Experience: Experienced

Attributes: 5

Skills: 4

Initiative: 3

WEASEL WILLY

Willy is a cocky young pup of above average height and better than average looks. He makes his living as a pimp and considers himself God's gift to the ladies. Willy likes being pushy and obnoxious to those he deals with. He carries an HS .22 pistol in a shoulder holster for those times when his pushiness generates a violent response.

Experience: Novice

Attributes: 5

Skills: 2

Initiative: 1

SAM WEISENTHAL

A battle-scarred man in his mid forties, Sam Weisenthal likes to project the image of a Hells Angel sort of biker,

though he has never actually belonged to any biker group. He is a quiet, icy-eyed man, and has made his living selling drugs for over two decades. Weisenthal carries a length of chain (treat as club) and a DE .357 Magnum pistol for self protection, but he is wise enough not to use them unless he has no choice.

Experience: Experienced

Attributes: 5

Skills: 4

Initiative: 3

ACE

A small, lithe Oriental woman in her late twenties, Ace is one of the cobra people's lieutenants and worshippers. She is a tough street fighter, but knows that the best armament is lots of allies at your back, so she seldom actually leaves the warehouse where the cobra people nest. Ace is the only one of the cobra people's cronies with an experience rating of Veteran. She carries a Colt Krait for self-defense.

Experience: Veteran

Attributes: 6

Skills: 5

Initiative: 4

HUNTER GROUPS

Basic statistics for the groups that come looking for the PCs are as given below. The referee should arm them randomly to make each group seem different, but all will carry melee weapons of some sort, and the leaders will carry small arms.

Group 1: One Experienced leader, seven Novice followers.

Group 2: Two Experienced leaders, five Novice followers.

Group 3: One Experienced leader, three Experienced followers, one Novice follower.

Groups 4+: One Veteran leader, two Experienced followers, two Novice followers.

COBRA PEOPLE'S CRONIES

Ace (see above) is the only Veteran-level follower of the cobra people. All the others are Experienced and carry concealed M1911 A1 pistols. Ω

This adventure served as the basis of the GenCon '91 RPGA event for Dark Conspiracy.

CHALLENGE 55

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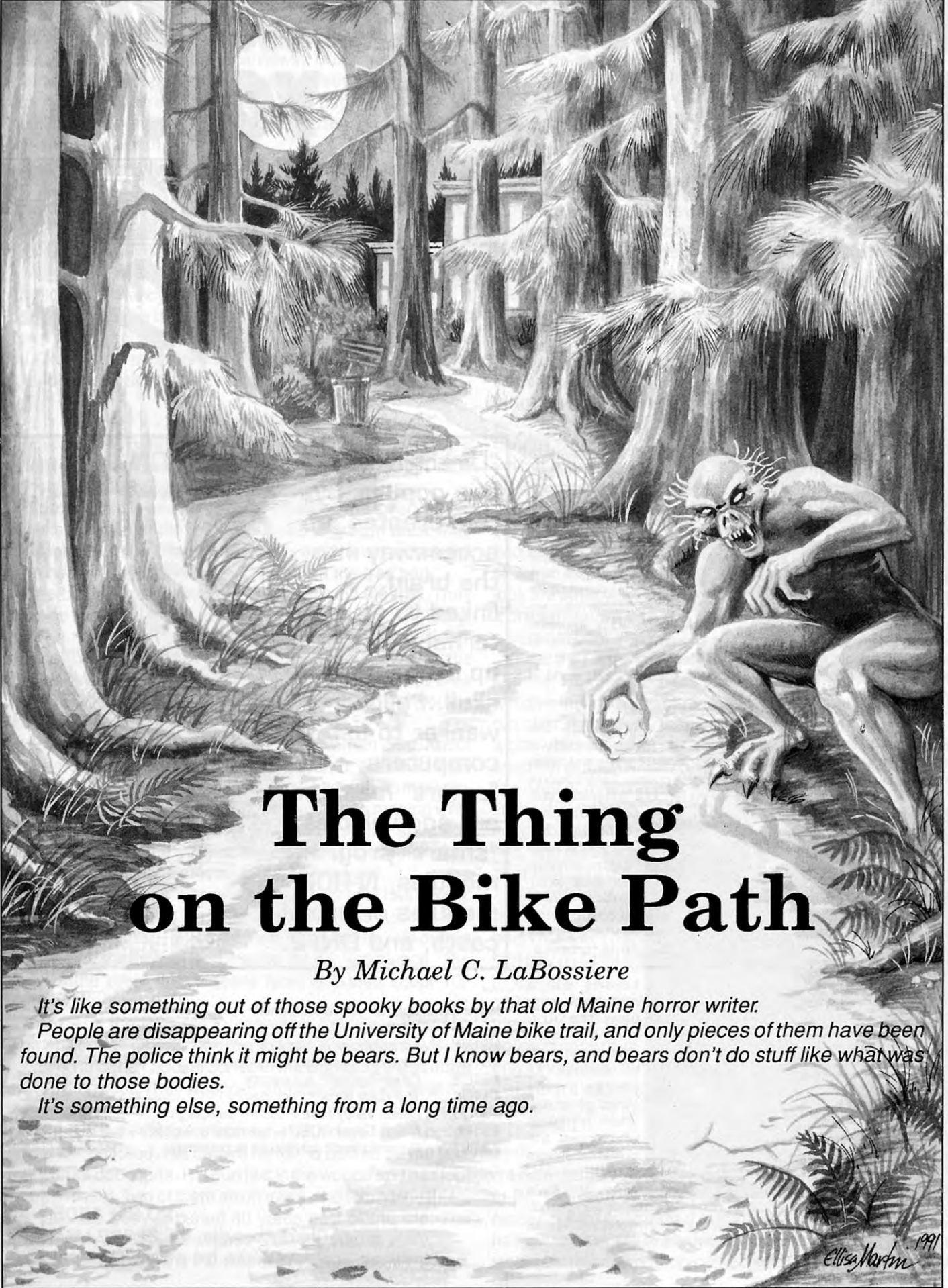
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The Thing on the Bike Path

By Michael C. LaBossiere

It's like something out of those spooky books by that old Maine horror writer.

People are disappearing off the University of Maine bike trail, and only pieces of them have been found. The police think it might be bears. But I know bears, and bears don't do stuff like what was done to those bodies.

It's something else, something from a long time ago.

Elisa Martin 1991

Two young women recently vanished while running on the University of Maine bike trail. In these times the story would normally be unremarkable (maybe a mention on the local news). But one of the young women is the daughter of megastar Ashley Cameron. This fact has made the disappearance front page news. Articles note that three area youths disappeared four days earlier on the same bike path.

Ashley Cameron would like to hire the PCs to help locate her daughter. She will pay their transport, housing and expenses, plus \$100-\$200 a day (exact pay depends on reputation and what they accomplish). A large reward is promised for her daughter's safe return.

A creature of the Darkness has awakened from its century-long dormancy and has begun preying on people it encounters on the bike trail. The trail is located between Old Town and Orono, two small towns. The University of Maine (at Orono) is a mid-sized campus (about 10,000 students) and is located at one end of the trail.

KILLINGS

The map indicates where the thing has killed or will kill. It is left to the referee when the first killing occurred, but each subsequent killing will occur at four-day intervals.

Spot 1: This is where the thing attacked the local youths. An examination of the area will reveal a broken buck knife (snapped in half). Torn bits of clothes are strewn among the pine needles, and dried blood decorates the tree bark.

The bodies are buried about 300 yards off the trail. They have been torn to bits. Perhaps the most horrible thing is that their heads are unharmed, except that their faces have been meticulously removed, as if by a surgeon. Locating the clothes and knife will be rather hard, since the bike trail area is large and the police have no idea where the youths vanished.

Spot 2: This is where the two young women died. About 360 yards back in the woods, a shattered Walkman tape player and a bloody running shoe are hanging from a tree. Both belong to the women Janet Cameron was running with. Their bodies are buried about 50 yards from the shoe and tape player. Like the youths, their bodies have been mutilated horribly and their faces carefully removed.

Spot 3: The incident here will occur after play has begun. Two UM runners will be attacked here. One runner, Will Carter, will be killed, and the other, Tom Malone, will outrun the thing but will be driven insane by his experience. The body of the other runner (sans face) is buried about 100 yards north of the trail.

Spot 4: If the PCs fail to intervene, four days later two animal control officers will be killed. Their faces will be removed and their bodies buried in the woods 50 yards north of the killing spot. Their weapons and flashlights will be at the attack site.

Spot 5: If the PCs fail to intervene, four days later a police officer will be killed. His car will be found parked on the bike trail with its door open. His gun lies in the woods and has four shots missing. Two of them are in trees, and two hit the thing. His faceless body is buried 80 yards east of the site. The body is horribly broken—worse than the others.

Other Killings: If the PCs fail to intervene, the killings will

continue. They will start to occur in the residential areas or at the university if the bike trail is closed. There will be a killing every four days, until the thing is stopped.

DARK CONSPIRACY

MAD RUNNER

As noted earlier, one victim, Tom Malone, will survive his encounter with the thing. He will run screaming from the trail one night into Old Town, where a police officer will eventually catch him. He will be taken to the Bangor Mental Health Institution (BMHI) for treatment, as he will be in a state of profound shock.

The PCs may learn about the incident from the media, from local residents or from police.

If the PCs talk to the officer who picked Malone up, Wayne Edgecomb, he will describe how the young man came running down the road. "He was screaming, and his eyes were as wide as saucers. He was running like the devil himself was behind him. When I caught up with him, he was yelling about something eating his friend and something about a woman's face falling off. He was a real mess, I tell you. I hope those shrinks can do something for him." The officer doesn't know any more, but he suspects something bad is going on. If he thinks the PCs are acting to stop the situation, he won't interfere with them and will be willing to look the other way. If he suspects that they are involved in a more sinister way, he will keep a careful eye on them. He is a Veteran beat cop.

If the PCs visit the BMHI, they may be able to meet with Malone. He will be semicoherent and will be able to talk. He will give the following story: "Will and I were on a cool-down run after speedwork. Since there were two of us and Tom is a black belt in Akido, we weren't too worried. Will spotted a beautiful woman runner up ahead working a cramp out of her leg. I felt something was wrong, but couldn't tell why at the time. Will ran up ahead. When he got to her....she....it....grabbed him...and...her...its....face fell off. It tore into him, and blood was everywhere. I don't remember anything after that until the cop stopped me."

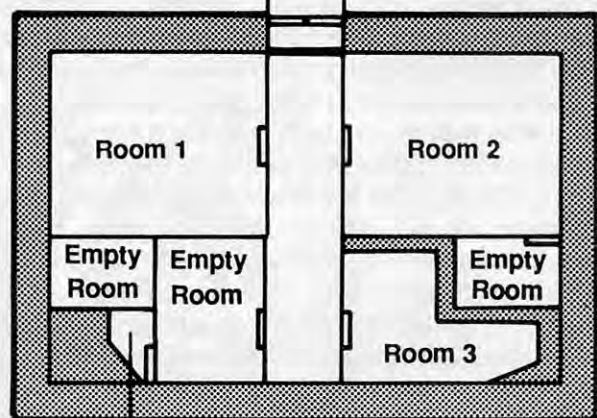
If Tom is shown a picture of the missing Janet Cameron (either in the newspaper or a photo), he will scream, "That's her! That's it! That's the thing that killed Will!" This will drive him into a highly disturbed state, and the PCs will be forced to leave.

Based on Malone's story, the police will be able to find his friend's body. For the PCs to get a look at the body at the police coroner's in Bangor will be difficult. The coroner will only reveal that a body has been found. Local officials will insist that it was the bears and that the animal control people will take care of the problem shortly.

MYTH

Local residents or officials at some point will direct the PCs to Dr. Thomson at the university. Dr. Thompson is an avid reader of American Indian mythology, and the events on the trail will remind him of a local legend. He will tell the following story (similar information can be garnered from the library,

Bomb Shelter



Generator Room

but less detail will be given, and it will take a while to find the information):

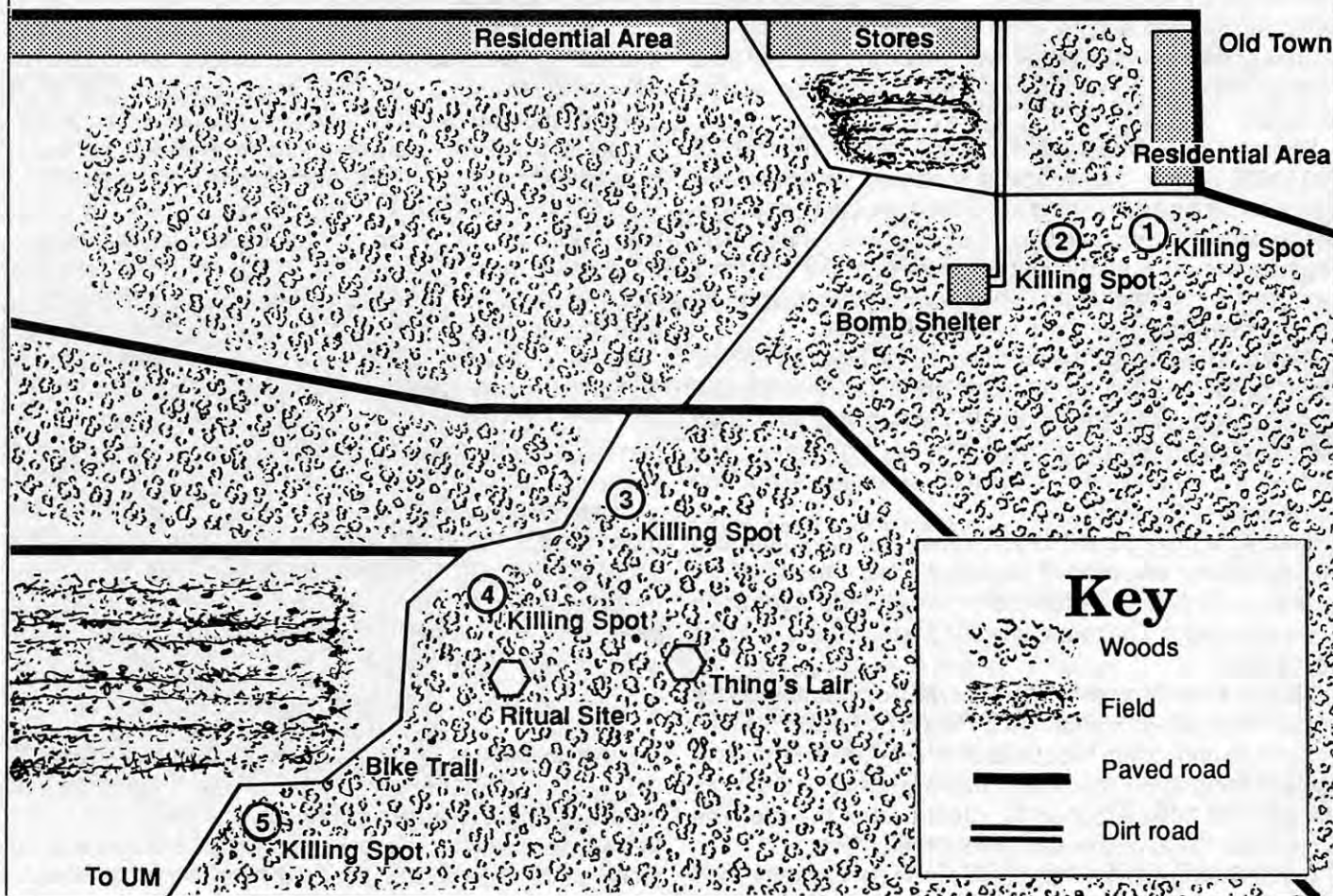
According to the legend, two great stars fell from the sky into the woods. The creatures of the woods fled the area, and the people were alarmed by all this. One of the tribe's warriors and a French trapper named La Roup went to investigate these star stones. The two men did not return that night. Soon after, a hunter was killed and was found without his face.

Four days later, another killing occurred, and four days later, another. Finally, two warriors were attacked. One was killed, and the other was badly wounded. He said it was La Roup that attacked him. He said that he had put an arrow through La Roup's chest, but he had not died. Four days later, another death occurred.

Twelve days and three deaths later, a stranger came to the tribe. He was called "Sky Eagle" by the tribe, and he said that he had come to slay the monster that plagued them. Sky Eagle had magical arrows that shown like the sun and a knife as bright as the stars.

He hunted La Roup, and fought him and cut off his face with his knife. After doing this great deed, Sky Eagle departed, but he left five arrows and a knife with the shaman. According to the legend, La Roup would arise every century to look for his face. If he was slain with an arrow and had his face removed with the knife each time until the arrows ran out, La Roup would be gone forever.

Bike Trail Area



ARROW

Dr. Thompson will tell the PCs that he knows an old shaman of the Penobscott tribe who might know more about what is going on. The shaman lives on Indian Island, a reservation near Old Town. It can be reached via a two-lane bridge. The inhabitants are suspicious of outsiders, and there may be trouble with some of the young men (treat as gangers for skills—they will be armed with knives). If the PCs are with Thompson, they will have no trouble.

The shaman is a very old man and is nearly blind and deaf.

He will listen to the PCs' story carefully, asking intelligent questions to find out what they know and believe. If he believes it is appropriate, he will say to them: "You have been brought here on purpose. The thing that hunts the woods is back again. There has always been a warrior to stop it with Sky Eagle's arrows and knife. This warrior has been a shaman or a son of a shaman. My son was killed in the Vietnam War, and his son died in Iraq. My granddaughter died in a laboratory explosion. So you have been brought here to fight it."

He will go to a locked cabinet and take out a cloth-wrapped box. Within it is an arrow with a glowing head and a knife with a glowing blade. The shaman will say, "These are the weapons of Sky Eagle. You must pierce the thing with the arrow and then remove its face with the knife."

He will give the arrow to the PC with the highest Emp and Bow skill (Bow skill taking precedence). The knife will go to the PC with the highest Emp and knife combat ability (knife combat ability taking precedence). He will bless them in his native language as they leave.

The arrow and knife are made out of a non-Terran metal. An Average roll using Physics or something like Metallurgy will reveal that the metal has some rather odd properties, but is not harmful to humans. A Difficult task roll will indicate that the metal is not native to earth. The metal is machine-tooled. The arrow shaft is a metal like aluminum, and the knife has ceramic grips. But they test as being over 500 years of age.

Unknown to the PCs, the metal of the weapons will draw the thing to them, whether they are in the woods hunting it or inside a building in town.

FINISH

If the PCs kill the thing, Ashley Cameron will pay them a cash reward. If they fail, Thompson (if he survives) will attempt to recover the arrow and knife (the thing cannot touch them) and will try to destroy it after getting some help. The exact results are up to the referee. If the thing is not killed, it will continue to kill at least once every four days and will range further on its hunts.

LOCATIONS

The following locations may be of importance to the player characters in their investigation.

Bike Trail

The paved bike trail is about the size of a one-lane road. Some spots are bumpy, but it is well maintained.

Refer to the Bike Trail Area Map for the specific area layout. Residential areas along the path are one-family houses and apartments, most in good condition. The store section consists of a YMCA, video rental store, hardware store, and food store (Doug's Shop & Save). Fields along the

The Thing

Strength: 18

Education: 1

Move: 3/10/20/35

Constitution: 15

Charisma: 1

Skill/Dam: 7/7

Agility: 6

Empathy: 8

Hits: 20/40*

Intelligence: 3

Initiative: 5

Appear: 1



Special: Animal Empathy 6, Human Empathy 8, Project Emotion 7, Project Thought 8, Willpower Drain 4.

**It does not suffer double damage from head hits, heals very rapidly and cannot be killed by most standard weapons. See below for details.*

The thing is a vile and horrible beast

which exists only to feed on its victims. It can project thought and empathy. In order to generate an illusion of being human, the thing needs a human face. It must be taken from a victim and treated on the rack for four days. After that, the thing can use it for a number of days (it can take the face off while it sleeps) equal to the victim's empathy score. After that, the face disintegrates. While wearing a face, the thing can look like the person whose face it has stolen and even talk like them. However, it has none of their memories.

After killing, the thing will sleep for four days. If it is wounded, it will kill until it is healed and then will sleep. If it is disturbed while sleeping or during the day, it can fight, but its abilities are cut in half.

Under its illusions, the creature looks like a slime-covered corpse of a human. There is no flesh on the face, only a layer of slime over the bone. The eyes are sunk back in the skull and are dim red points which glow like hellish embers. Around the edge of the face are writhing tentacles, which look like maggots. These tentacles are used to hold a stolen face in place. It strikes with its clawed hands and fanged jaws, and can fight like a human in combat and can grapple and so forth.

It takes damage from normal weapons, and if it is "killed" by them, it will dissolve into a puddle of putrid fluid, which will seep into the ground. It will reform two days later, with all abilities and stats at half normal. After it kills, it will regain points at a rate of one point of ability/attribute per point of empathy of the victim (this is one point in every ability/attribute per point of empathy). If it is wounded, it will heal one wound level for every point of empathy the victim has. It cannot heal naturally. The thing suffers no loss of Initiative from damage, and does not suffer from things like shock and unconsciousness from combat effects.

The thing can be killed permanently by weapons which can destroy its entire physical body: nuclear weapons, napalm, molecular acid and so forth. Since it is unlikely that the PCs will nuke Maine or get a fighter bomber, they will have to rely on the arrow and knife. A hit by the arrow will instantly render it unconscious for 1-3 minutes. During this time, it can be killed permanently by removing its stolen face with the knife and then removing its real face. When this is done, it will permanently dissolve, as will the weapons.

The creature is from a vile and corrupt dimension that borders our own. It came here via a vessel made out of the stones in its lair and in the ritual site. The craft was constructed by the ability of another creature which did not survive the breakup of the craft in Earth's atmosphere.

path are university fields in which experimental crops are grown. The woods have various ski /running/mountain bike trails running through them.

Bomb Shelter

The old bomb shelter was damaged in an accident while it was serving as a women's prison. The new bomb shelter is really a corporate lab site, but locals still call it the bomb shelter. The new building has two-meter-thick concrete walls and steel doors with a complex electronic lock, and is topped with a thick layer of soil. The bomb shelter is empty during the day and filled with workers during the day.

The lock can be picked, but the task is Difficult and requires an electronic lock-picking kit. If they are caught breaking in, the PCs may be in for some jail time for breaking and entering, and trespassing. If they walk up during the day, they can enter but will be asked to leave since it is a work area. If the PCs get obnoxious, the police will be called. If the PCs run into corporate people, they will be suspected of being industrial spies and treated accordingly.

Nothing evil is going on here, but the bomb shelter can be a useful sidetrack. One way to lead the PCs on a wild goose chase is to sow rumors that the corporation has been involved in shady activities, or have an oddly behaving worker make them curious.

The interior of the bomb shelter is dark and unfinished, and smells strange.

Generator Room: The generator is currently off, but is fueled and can be started. Starting it will cause the light to come on (including the outside lights—this will attract attention).

Room 1: This room contains various boxes and fixtures. A dark red stain is on the floor, and a strange smell fills the air. The stain is actually an industrial chemical, but looks like blood. The strange smell is a mix of chemicals and building materials.

Room 2: This room is filled with boxes. One box is stained red and contains many bones. The red stuff is an industrial chemical spilled on the box, and the bones are

cattle bones (for lab work with bone structures).

Room 3: Various metal structures have been set up in the room and appear to be frames designed to hold computer equipment. A sharp knife, coated with a dark red dried fluid is halfway under a terminal frame (an Easy task to spot, but make it seem like an accomplishment). The knife was used to apply a glue to the frames and was forgotten by a worker.

Ritual Site

The ritual site is where the thing prepares its faces. It is located near the mountain bike path. Both animals and people feel this location to be a "bad place" (the intensity of the feeling will be in proportion to the sensor's empathy).

The ritual site has many sick-looking pine trees and two large rocks. The rocks are not of any kind native to Maine and are in fact not native to earth. A person with Geology skill will notice the oddness of the rocks with an Easy roll and can tell they are not native to earth on a Difficult roll (Average with proper equipment).

Between the rocks is a drying frame. Four wooden poles are driven into the ground, and strange markings (in blood) are on them. Between the poles are the faces of some of the victims. They are linked to the poles by strips of skin and held by thorns of wood. The faces are oddly fresh, and while flies buzz the area, none approach the poles.

If the PCs do not find the area, a student will, and the police will be alerted. Officials will remove the remains and close off the area. Naturally, the media will be present.

The PCs will only have access to the site if they go at night or if they have the status to get in. If the PCs investigate at night, the thing may be there putting on a face, taking one off, or preparing one. It will attack the PCs if it is present. If it is not there, it will sense the PCs if they touch the stones, poles or faces, and will rush to the site.

Thing's Lair

Like the ritual site, the lair exudes a palpable evil. Only here it is much, much stronger.

The area around the lair is devoid of normal animal life. Particularly large and vile-looking insects, some with too many legs and strange fluids leaking from them, buzz and crawl around the moldy trees close to the lair. The trees and insects get viler the closer they are to the lair, but the area very close to the lair is devoid of nearly all life.

Two rocks in the lair glow with a sickly yellow-green color at night—they are similar to the rock at the ritual site. Anyone with Geology skill or any native of the area will notice that the rock is not native to Maine. An Easy roll by someone with Geological skill will reveal that the rock is not native to North America, and an Average roll will reveal that the rock is not of terrestrial origin. A Difficult roll using Geology, Physics or Chemistry and the proper equipment will reveal that the rock does not seem to be native to the known solar system. The rock emits a form of radiation that damages the DNA of living things spending a considerable amount of time around it.

Next to the rocks is a scooped out pit in the ground. It is lined with human bones, bits of clothing, and various slimes, molds and fungi. The pit glows very dimly, in a color similar to the rocks. A close look will reveal a sprinkling of rock dust over the area. The creature "sleeps" in the pit during the day, with a layer of slime-covered bone and cloth to keep it hidden from the light. At night, the area will be empty. Ω

Dr. Carl Thompson

Attributes: Strength 5, Constitution 5, Agility 4, Intelligence 8, Education 8, Charisma 3, Empathy 4.

Skills: Instruction 9, Computer Operation 3, Chemistry 2, Physics 10, Foreboding 2, Small Arms (Rifle) 2, Melee Combat (Unarmed) 2.

Dr. Thompson is a 30-year-old physics instructor at UM. He is originally from Maine and went to school at MIT. He could be teaching at a much better school, but sensed that he should stay in Maine, at least for a while. He is a good person—he desires to see the side of right triumph and is not adverse to taking a hand in it. He is well liked by his students and the other faculty members.

While physics is his main focus, Thompson has been drawn to American Indian myths all his life. While not much of a fighter, he does hunt and works out with a karate class at the YMCA once a week. He owns a small car, a Marlin .30-06 bolt action, and a Mossberg M500.

Thompson is an average-looking man, about six feet tall, with sandy brown hair and beard. He wears glasses and favors corduroy pants and oxford shirts.

Special Holiday Issue!

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Gnawlings

By Charles E. Gannon

A hacker PC comes across a strange message late one February night, while hopping from one datanet to the other, searching for interesting goings-on. The hacker had just wormed inside the FedNet for a quick look-see when he stumbled across this transmission.

...now warrants a Stage III alert, due to evolution of pattern. All 17 missing persons were solitary out-of-towners. All had been staying in MetroCenter on business. Rate of disappearances is 0.89 per night (17 disappearances over the course of 19 days). Assuming that all these disappearances have a similar cause, this indicates a *daily* phenomenon. On no single day has more than one individual been reported as missing. The two nights on which no report was received may indicate either:

1. A disappearance did not take place, perhaps because of circumstances preventing such an occurrence. Or:

2. Any individuals disappearing on these nights have no associates to report them as missing.

Formally requesting immediate dispatch of limited special team to this station to facilitate formal investigation.

My best to all at the Shop.

Code 98-234-01B. Wild Weasel, Station Operative, New Orleans Metroplex. Awaiting your response.

After a short wait, the PC is rewarded by a reply from the other end of the data pipeline:

"Counter Code: 23-356-BB5. Octagon, Jr. Operations Coordinator, Langley HQ.

>Accessing...

>Reciprocal transmission approved...

Negative your request for limited special team, Wild Weasel. Operational assets overtaxed. Your observations and report duly noted and taken under advisement. Continue with primary mission. Disappearances are deemed secondary priority and will be investigated as resources permit.

Octagon

This adventure is set in New Orleans, and can be used as a complement to other **Dark Conspiracy** adventures there or as a stand-alone piece. If the characters have already had some run-ins with the Dark Ones in the Big Easy, this can be a reprise of their earlier visit. If they haven't been to New Orleans before, referees can use this adventure to lure them into this favorite Dark Minion haven.

If mere big-heartedness is not enough to get the PCs to head to the Big Easy, then any number of additional incentives are possible. Perhaps a regular contact puts the group in touch with distraught parents offering a reward for information concerning the fate of their daughter, Joanna Danske, who has been missing for 12 days

Or maybe an employment broker who works by modem offers the group a job to investigate the disappearances. The MetroCops of the Big Easy are excluding the Louisiana State Police from the investigation. As a result, the LSP is willing to hire some independent help to look into the matter and report their findings confidentially to State Police Chief Tremaine in Baton Rouge.

WELCOME TO N'AWLINS, LOOZ-YANA

The Greater Depression caused a tremendous influx of rural persons into New Orleans, desperately seeking jobs. Thus, although outsiders are still not welcome, the primary point of prejudice is based on an individual's economic wherewithal, not geographic origins.

The affluent MetroCenter of the city in-

cludes the French Quarter, Garden District and surrounding areas. The French Quarter has been restored to its antebellum glory (although Bourbon Street has retained a small measure of its seedy, decadent charm). Reproduction Packards vie with horse-drawn carriages and Mazda Firefly ragtops for dominance of the cobblestone streets. On Bourbon Street, bodystockings compete with bodices and bustles in the ongoing contest to make the most anachronistic fashion statement.

Beyond the affluent MetroCenter regions and the Mike-town districts that surround them, the poverty of the inhabitants becomes increasingly abject. However, February is Mardi Gras season, so visitors will find themselves in the midst of a jarring mix of riotous festivity and impoverished desperation. Emotions are changeable among all but the upper classes, and a local's celebratory attitude can change into homicidal frenzy as a result of even the slightest (or imagined) provocation.

Locals (who refer to their state as Looz-yana and their city as N'awlins) are accustomed to out-of-towners and are ever-mindful that their economy still depends largely upon the steady influx of cargo from the outside world. Also, Mardi Gras is the United States' biggest, longest, wildest, open party—held along the hopelessly crowded length of Bourbon Street—and it is still well-attended by the corporate elite who can afford the airfare and accommodations.

Cross-country travel is risky at best for those heading to New Orleans since the city is bracketed by Out-Law areas and Demogrounds. River travel down the Mississippi is an option (albeit a time consuming one). New Orleans is still a major seaport, and both airports are still operating (although the Lakefront Airport now primarily serves as a vertiport for helicopter and VTOLs).

The PCs will be able to find affordable housing in Mike-Town, just outside the megacorporate Dreamland that dominates the MetroCenter.

PUBLIC SOURCES

Although the characters may want to explore a number of sources when it comes to beginning their investigation, the following are the most likely (and ultimately, the most productive).

Scan the Local Newsfaxes from the Past Month: This task will take one person a single day (and larger numbers of researchers proportionately shorter amounts of time). There will be nothing much to learn here, besides the fact that the local police are *quite* sure that there are 17 missing persons unaccounted for over the past 19 days. However, they don't seem to be will-

For more adventure in New Orleans...

Referees may wish to use this adventure in conjunction with the recently released **New Orleans** adventure module. The background information included in that book (detailing the size and population of the New Orleans metroplex, as well as travel and weather details) can greatly aid the referee in setting the scene for "Gnawlings," whether "Gnawlings" is used as a sequel or a prequel to the action in the **New Orleans** module, or as a separate, red herring plot line.



ing to say very much about it, nor are they willing to disclose any of the names of the missing persons.

All public statements have been issued by the Vieux Carre (French Quarter) Metropolitan/Corporate Joint Force Precinct. Since these statements are coming from a specific precinct (rather than Metro HQ), the police must have reason to suspect that the disappearances (or whatever is causing them) is situated in the French Quarter.

Talk to Police: The Joint Task Force is a hodgepodge of corporate security forces and metro police—and neither side seems too happy about this forced fusion of law enforcement agencies.

As a result, the cops—whether municipal or private—have a sour and decidedly unfriendly attitude. If the PCs try to get information about the disappearances, they will be told in direct—and tactless—terms to mind their own business. On a particularly bad interpersonal reaction roll, the desk officer might decide to dedicate a couple of his less conscientious (and meaty) patrolmen to making some trouble for the PCs. This could involve anything as obvious as a little breaking-and-entering at the PCs' place back in Mike Town, to a little roughing-up when the bulls are off-duty.

If the PCs are particularly polite and affable, they will only be growled at a bit—and will receive the distinct impression that the entire disappearance problem is being backburned and treated as a minor disturbance. Use of Human Empathy, or an extraordinary success with an Interrogation or Psychology task roll, will leave the PCs with the impression that the municipal cops aren't happy about the low priority this case has been given and that this is the doing of the megacorporate brass.

The bottom line is that the police will not surrender any information. They will be particularly careful not to reveal the names of the missing persons, nor the places where they had been staying, the specific reasons they were in New Orleans, or any other pertinent details.

However, judging from their reaction, it is clear that the police *do* have all this information available to them.

If the player characters are very persistent, and very affable, one detective (originally from Duluth) lets it slip that he found the last victim's wallet and credit cards in a dumpster at the corner of Bourbon Street and Orleans Avenue. He considers this the most interesting clue yet: Obviously, if the missing persons have been abducted, the perpetrators are not motivated by financial gain. There have been no ransom demands at all, and now there's evidence that the perpetrators (if there are any perpetrators) don't even bother to use a perfectly good card for credit fraud.

Data Break-in on the Police Department Files: A break in will not be an easy task, requiring many hours of patiently weaving through a daunting set of codeword checkpoints and counter-intrusion defensive programs. The player characters will find the task easier if they attempt it during the day, when the computer system is cluttered with other users and memory-intensive activities: With serving time slowed down, a hacker has more response time to contemplate and defeat the defenses he encounters. Also, a clever hacker may be able to get piggybacked into the system by disguising his intrusion within a legitimate, active data interface, such as a fax line, modem hookup or car-to-base shortwave data nets.

Once in, the PCs will find it relatively easy to access the complete file on the case of the 17 missing persons. Most surprising is the lack of material and the fact that there is currently no detective assigned to the case. The police are keeping records but are not acting on them. Attached electronic memos talk about the questionable authenticity and unconfirmable nature of the missing person reports. The megacorporate security view seems to be that until someone shows up dead, this case is likely to be a wild goose chase in pursuit of people who may have simply decided to skip town. Memos by the MetroCop chief suggest that he doesn't agree with this line of reasoning but that he's compelled to admit that the precinct's law enforcement assets are already spread critically thin.

The 17 missing persons are from diverse cities and backgrounds. In fact, the only linking factors seems to be that they were all staying in upper-class neighborhoods of MetroCenter (known as Dreamland), they were all out-of-towners, and they were all travelling alone. The police file includes their home addresses, next of kin, known activities just before they disappeared, stated reason for being in New Orleans, etc.

News Media Contacts in the City: If any of the PCs are connected with the media or can put on a convincing (and documented) act that they are "vacationing reporters," the PCs will find some of the local newspeople helpful.

In general, members of the local media are more than a little displeased with the police, having gotten nothing but "no comment" and "we're looking into it" statements. They do know the names of nine of the missing persons, however, since the family/friends of these individuals called the news agencies when they learned that the police weren't being particularly aggressive about the investigation.

The newspeople also know where the missing individuals were staying, the kinds of business they were in, etc. According to

DARK CONSPIRACY

those who called in, none of the nine missing persons were at all likely to simply disappear on an adventurous (or harebrained) lark. Each of the individuals was a clear-headed, capable businessperson who had travelled to New Orleans on important, career-related matters.

CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES

After pursuing the above sources of information, the PCs should have at least a partial (and possibly, a complete) list of the missing persons. However, the easily available information on these persons does not produce any clear leads. In any crime (which this *looks* like, but that hasn't been proven yet), there is usually some noteworthy aspect or variable shared by victims, some commonality in either time, place, association, etc. So far, none is obvious.

Of course, the player characters have only accessed the *public* information on these individuals. A number of confidential sources of information exist on all individuals: tax returns, medical records, credit card activity, bank statements, communication activity, etc.

Accessing these confidential data sources requires success at difficult (and highly illegal) tasks. Referees who want to add a little extra action to the adventure are encouraged to make the *key* data source (communication activity) inaccessible by computer hacking. Instead, the records are not online, but are either stored in a communication-isolated computer (not connected to any phone lines) or as hard copy only (in a file cabinet, vault, etc.).

In this event, the player characters will have to conduct a break-in to get the necessary records. This break-in should involve an actual (or narrowly avoided potential) run-in with security forces. Adjust numbers, armament and skills according to those in the player character party, bearing in mind that night watchmen are rarely up to commando standards. (Experienced, handguns, Initiative 3 is about the best they're likely to encounter).

Communication Activity: The best (and most conclusively revealing) source of confidential data is the missing individual's communications activity while in New Orleans.

The hard way of getting that data is by breaking into the telecommunications company that handles New Orleans phones (and vidtext, etc.).

The *much* easier way is to hack into the databases of the respective hotels at which the individuals stayed and call up their communications charges (which list phone numbers dialed, etc.). These communications records show a wide variety of activity, but there is one common factor: On the night of their disappearance, 12 of the individuals called the same phone number. It is usually the last—or next to last—number that they called. If the player characters decide to call that number (a public phone might be a wise precaution), they will find it answered by a cheery voice that announces, "Ole N'awlins Cookery. How can I help you?" If they decide to try to track the number electronically (requiring an easier hacking job into the telecommunications company's database), they will discover the same information (but spend several hours and risk detection by the company's defensive anti-intrusion programs).

A third way PCs could get this information is to (somehow) access transaction data on the credit cards owned by the missing persons. About 50% of them indicate that the card holder purchased a meal at the Ole N'awlins Cookery the evening they disappeared.

Note: If the PCs only have the limited list of missing persons from the local media, they will discover that six of the individuals' communications records indicate the Cookery's phone number, and five show credit card purchases at the same establishment.

PASS ME THAT GUMBO

The Ole N'awlins Cookery is located on Orleans Street, just off Bourbon—not far from where the police detective said he found the last missing individual's wallet. The cookery is a modest, homey place with a plain electric sign and a long reputation for good food. A little research will indicate that it came under new ownership just over a year ago after its previous owner died of a heart attack.

The cookery is famed for its local cuisine, including gumbo, cajun dishes of all types, Creole, and alligator sausage. Out back—nestled in between the old brick buildings—is an open-air courtyard where cressets hold live torches and giant fern fronds emerge from the shadows like dim green claws. The player characters can observe the cookery from a nearby watching post or actually eat there in order to get a closer look. Either way, they will notice nothing very unusual.

The owner—Roland Clersault—is a friendly fellow with a big belly and a bigger Cajun accent. Out in the courtyard, a small, heavy man—almost a dwarf—plays the banjo, murmuring melodies of how much he

loves Nawlins. Judging from his dark glasses and groping uncertainty when reaching for his tall-necked beer, it would seem that he is blind.

The PCs may be misled by a few suspicious-looking types at corner table, apparently closing some shady deal, etc. But nothing of any real importance will happen until closing time, if the PCs hang around that long. The owner (who has long since asked the characters to address him as "Rollie") will seem to have struck up quite a lively conversation with a fellow who came in alone toward the end of the evening. As closing time approaches, Rollie will also try to get the PCs to pay up and say goodnight—even as he's buying the other fellow a round on the house. If the PCs are unwilling to depart—or if they insinuate themselves into Rollie's conversation with the lone fellow at the bar—the evening will end on a pleasant, affable note, with Rollie ushering them all out after about half an hour. However, any individual who's looking for it (or who succeeds at a Average Interrogation or Psychology task roll) will sense that Rollie's congeniality became more superficial after the player characters failed to leave when first given their bill.

If the PCs *do* leave shortly after Rollie presents the bill, they will be in for a shock when they get the late update edition of the next day's newsfax: The lone fellow's picture is on the front page. It seems that he is now the 18th missing person. Surprise, surprise.

NOW WHAT?

The player characters should have enough information to be fairly sure that Roland Clersault is involved in the disappearances and that any abductions probably take place in or near the Ole N'awlins Cookery. What they decide to do about it is another matter:

Attack: Not too bright an idea. The cookery is right in the middle of megacorporate Dreamland—local security is pervasive and no-nonsense. If the PCs start a fire, it is very unlikely that they will live to finish it. Also, upon returning to the cookery (assuming they want to get inside first) they'll find that Rollie is somewhere "in the back"—not an easy target this time.

Catch Rollie In the Act: This won't work either—everything seems to be in order. No matter how long the PCs watch and wait, it's just the "same old same old" at the Old N'awlins Cookery.

Confront Rollie With the Truth: This will certainly get a big laugh out of Rollie—who will only believe the PCs to be serious after they repeatedly insist that he's a kidnapper. Once he believes them to be serious, he will ask them—quietly, politely, but firmly—to leave. Or he'll call the cops.

If the PCs are frustrated, that's fine—they ought to be. They can't see it just yet, but any of these tactics are sure to bear fruit—very soon now.

CAN'T YOU SMELL THAT SMELL?

The PCs are correct—Rollie is involved in the disappearances. Since he enjoys a skill level of 8 in Human Empathy, he has no problem discerning that the characters are now suspicious of him and mean to end his activities. Of course, if they attack or confront him directly, he won't need his empathic powers to know what's going on. In the event that the group runs a stake-out on the cookery, he will wait three days. After that time, he must act, for he needs to resume his abduction of unsuspecting people in order to satisfy the appetites of his primary clientele.

Immediately after attacking or confronting Rollie, or after another day of staking out the cookery, the PCs will return to their lodgings. It is after midnight, and they are tired. One or more should still be awake—awake enough to have a chance to detect the approach of some most unwelcome visitors.

If the PCs are in a large, commercial building, the first warning of the visitors' approach will be sound—they'll come in through the large ventilator shafts. If the lodging is in a smaller building (such as a five-story apartment building or converted private home), the first warning will be smell—they'll come in through the sewer connection.

Either way, any character who is awake may attempt to detect the visitors *before* they arrive on the scene (the task is Average if sound is the first warning, Difficult if it is smell).

Either way, the player characters will find themselves confronted by four morlocks (they will enter via in-room ventilation ducts if in a large building or crash down the door in a smaller one). The air will be pervaded by a pungent stench as the squat, broad-limbed creatures shamble forward, slaving and muttering: "Gnawlings! Fresh gnawlings!" They attack with a gustatory smacking of lips.

Two of the morlocks are armed with .357 Magnums, the other two with hatchets. If the PCs were not surprised, it shouldn't be a long fight. However, just as the combat is resolving (the morlocks apparently *had* been counting on surprise), the characters will note a fifth morlock hanging back throughout the fight. On a Average Observation roll, any character may recognize this individual as the blind, banjo-playing dwarf from the cookery. He will toss a curse at the player characters—"Damn gnawlings!"—and scuttle away.

DARK CONSPIRACY

The PCs can try to hit him with gunfire (or whatever), but the little fellow gets away. If the PCs don't run after him in hot pursuit, you can always urge them on with the sound of approaching sirens: All that gunfire was sure to awaken *somebody*. Anything the PCs leave in the room will be confiscated by the police—who will be waiting to ask them some very pointed questions, when and if they return to their lodgings. If the PCs have been foolish enough to leave behind any records of their research into the disappearances—particularly any that indicates their flagrant violations of confidentiality statutes—the police will put out an all-points bulletin on the group.

Though hot on the heels of the banjo-playing morlock, the player characters can't quite get to him before he darts into the crowd that jams the length of Bourbon Street. Loud music, drunken laughter and gaudily costumed celebrants are all part of the Mardi Gras revels. The morlock—still looking like a dwarf in sunglasses—capers into the midst of the crowd, attracting attention with his antics. If the player characters try to do anything to him at this point, the crowd would overwhelm them (and likely tear them apart).

Eventually, the little monster works his way to the center of the street, and during a brief moment when there is a break in the crowd, he heaves up one of the manhole covers and drops down into the sewer.

A taunting laugh echos up after him, obviously meant for the PCs' ears: "Stupid gnawlings!"

INTO THE UNDERWORLD

A cluster of concerned revelers is pointing the PCs (and their slightly visible weapons) to some of the local police—hard-eyed security cops who heft their M16A2s and start coming forward. The PCs will have to jump in after the morlock or give up the chase.

If they enter the sewers, the PCs will note the same thick, powerful stench that presaged the attack of the morlocks—only much stronger down here. The sewers are very primitive, with a great deal of quasisolid matter underfoot that makes running and breathing equally difficult. However, this revolting ooze also reveals the path of the morlock, whose splay-footed tracks are quite evident.

As the PCs are following the tracks through a number of twists and turns, for a distance of about half a dozen city blocks, the referee might decide that this is a great time to spring a random encounter on the group. Perhaps an alligator, or an insectoid ET out on a completely unconnected errand.

The PCs will eventually emerge into an open area (roughly 20 meters by 20 meters),

lit dimly by a shaft of light from overhead. Judging from the clutter of equipment, crude sleeping pallets and extraordinary stench, this would seem to be a warren of morlocks. Gear for as many as 20 or 25 is strewn about. But at the present, only 11 are visible. And they seem to be listening to someone shouting at them from the top of the shaft of light.

If the PCs enter immediately, they will enjoy a round of surprise. If not, one of the morlocks will thrust his flat nose higher into the air and roar accusingly in the direction of the group. Unless the PCs want to retrace their steps through the sewers (and possibly straight into the arms of the local security forces) the group is going to have to fight this one out.

The 11 morlocks (the banjo player is not among them) are Experienced NPCs with Initiative 4 for purposes of combat. They are armed as follows: Two have clubs; three have hatchets; three have some kind of average-small handgun (.38 Special, .22 High-Standard automatic, etc.); two have more lethal handguns (.357 Magnum revolver and 19mm HP-35); and one has a 9mm Uzi submachinegun.

This should be a short, sharp firefight at murderously close range. The morlocks are not expecting the PCs so soon, and so will not have any ambush prepared. Although the player characters may take some hits, the fight should be pretty one-sided in favor of the humans.

In the last few moments of the battle, the PCs will hear a dull clank overhead. At the same time, the light from above will go out. But there are innumerable small fires burning down in this subterranean chamber—enough to dimly illuminate the walls. Scribbled on the side of the wall in bold block letters, old graffiti probably left by a long-dead sewer worker—ironically proclaims, "Welcome to N'awlins!" Alongside the legend, a stick figure is seen waving. (So this is why the morlocks call the humans "gnawlings.") The basic artwork has apparently been changed recently—by barbarous hands not accustomed to human lettering. Written in dried blood, the words have been amended to read: "You're Welcome to the GNawlings!" Predictably, a shorter, stocky stick figure has been added to the simple picture, apparently "gnawing" on the human's leg.

As the group reads this perverse graffiti, there is a moment of collective silence—enough to allow them all to hear a faint hissing overhead. And maybe, just maybe, detect the smell of gas.

LIKE ANY GOOD SHOW, IT ENDS WITH A BANG

A quick examination allows the PCs to determine that the hissing is coming from

the same place the light had come from earlier; at the top of a narrow (and now dark) overhead shaft—probably a way back to the surface.

It's only a few meters to the top of the shaft, which is sealed with a smallish manhole cover. Just below the surface level, the player characters will discover two gas mains—severed and leaking at a disconcerting rate. A reasonable guess would be that the group has about two minutes before the gas achieves sufficient density in the lower chamber to be ignited by the small fires. It is doubtful if the group could put out all the little fires in time or remain conscious that long—people with Constitutions of 3 or less will already be feeling light-headed and a bit disoriented.

But getting out won't be too pleasant either. Overturning the small iron shaft cover requires a Difficult test of Strength. Once this is accomplished, the PCs will discover that they are in the middle of the ferns at the rear of the cookery's interior courtyard. As soon as the first individual is halfway out of the shaft, the banjo-playing morlock and his loyal lackey Rollie will open up with a warm welcome from their respective weapons—a pistol-gripped Mossberg 500 shotgun and an old M3A1 greasegun. Rollie is an Experienced NPC with an Initiative of 3. The morlock is a Veteran NPC with an Initiative of 5 (he was the overall leader of this little den of murderers).

At first, this may seem like a turkey shoot—with the player characters on the receiving end. But once the PCs manage to get even *one* individual out who is also able to fire, their superior skills should begin to change the tide of battle. Eventually, the player characters should defeat Rollie and the banjo-playing morlock—with just enough time to start dragging any wounded group members away from the cookery as fast as panic-driven legs allow. The player characters will be halfway to Bourbon street when a blast bounces them off the pavement, shattering windows and overturning parked cars. A quick glance to the rear shows that the the cookery itself is an inferno, and from behind it, a great gout of flame rises up into the sky.

Somewhere out on Bourbon street, hushed silence gives way to a growing cacophony of deafening cheers and celebratory hoots. After all, it's only right to show proper appreciation for such a splendid Mardi Gras fireworks display. Ω

Introductory Scenarios Special Issue

CHALLENGE 57

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

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Westward Ho!

Daniel Acre



GDW

Patron

Monsters walk the Earth? Sure.

Vampires? Right.

Werewolves? Uh-huh.

Creepy things that go bump in the night? Tell me another one. I need the laugh.

I mean, this is the kind of stuff that you read in the supermarket checkout line while you're waiting your turn, right? As far as I'm concerned, the only monsters are the smug fat cats at the top of the corporates who give themselves dividends and raises every year while slashing my pay. "Budget cutbacks," they call it. Every year they make it harder to live, while grabbing more and more of the money. And there's nothing I can do about it, or anyone I know, for that matter. But I've got to keep working—there's no government handout for the unemployed anymore.

Those are the real monsters. Maybe the street thugs might qualify too, but at least I can understand them. They're just trying to survive. Just like me.

Then this character from a horror movie invites me to dinner and tells me that monsters are after me. Pardon me if I'm a little cynical about the whole affair. The real world has no place for "monsters."

But what if he's right?

By Craig Sheeley

This introductory scenario for **Dark Conspiracy** is intended for use as a campaign beginning and aid. It acquaints the PCs with some of the lesser-known facts of the world of 2013 and gives them a solid reason for becoming monster-hunters instead of staying with their nice, safe jobs. This article also includes optional rules concerning the cost-of-living and wages in 2013.

The adventure begins when each PC receives a letter printed on very expensive paper. Each letter reads:

Dear friend,

You don't know me, and I scarcely know you, but it is essential that we meet. Please accept my invitation to the most elaborate dinner that you have ever eaten. The time is tomorrow night, at eight p.m., at my house.

It is vital to your well-being and continued lifespan that you attend, for I have information which can assist you in the crisis that will soon interrupt your life.

Sincerely,

Rheinhold Weissmann

Inside each letter is a crisp \$100 bill. The address on the back of the sheet indicates an area a few kilometers beyond the boundaries of the city.

If any of the PCs do not wish to attend, they are visited at home (or whatever they

call their residence) at 6 p.m. the next day. The visitor is a hard-looking cabbie, with a cab that looks like it went to Bastogne with Patton and could demolish tanks by driving through it. "You gotta dinner engagement," he says in answer to queries. "I was sent to take ya there. Step it up—we gotta drive ahead of us." If any PCs still resist, they will miss the dinner party, and Weissmann will contact them later with the information.

Weissmann's house is an enormous, multistory, Gothic mansion—dark, foreboding, a few of its ground-floor windows lit. The wrought-iron gates open automatically, and the PCs drive down the long, gravel road to the house. The terrain lining the road might as well be Demonground, choked with wild and strange vegetation that moves and gropes in the wind as if alive. When they reach the house, the PCs have to find their own way to the front door, lit as it is by a single bulb.

Anyone trying to read the house with Human Empathy gets a much different emotional picture than the outward appearance. The house is somewhat lonely, but the single person in it is alive, and strangely cheerful and vibrant. No taint of Darkness falls across the house or its grounds.

The doorbell (a real bell with a real pull-rope) is answered by an immaculately attired butler—black tie, tails, freshly polished and buffed face. A do-

mestic 'bot—one of the most expensive exports to come from the Land of the Rising Sun. The robot takes the PCs' wraps and escorts them in to the drawing room. There, they are served drinks by a masterpiece of robotics in French maid costume.

Precisely at 8 p.m., the butler conveys the PCs into the dining room. Along the way, they see that the house is spotless and immaculate, if a bit dark, labyrinthine and truly Gothic. The robots move flawlessly, navigating with machine vision—their eyes glow red if seen in low light. So do the eyes of some of the suits of armor standing at attention at corners and in hallways. Apparently Weissmann has specialized roboservants for security, too. And their polished medieval weapons don't look like blunt replicas.

The dining room is a massive hall at the center of the mansion, the great hall. There the PCs meet their host.

A CROOKED MAN IN A CROOKED HOUSE

Rheinhold Weissmann suffers the effects of advancing age. He appears to be confined to a wheelchair, a solid motorized contrivance of severe styling. He is dressed in evening dress, his thin gray hair combed back and his cadaverous face wrinkled into a skeletal smile. When he speaks to his guests, his English is good, but his accent is



NUNIS.91

a blend of upper-class British and German. He introduces himself, then addresses each PC by name. Then he signals for the meal to begin. He wasn't exaggerating when he promised a lavish dinner. The long table is laden with real food, dishes ranging from the everyday to the incredibly exotic. Only after he and his guests have stuffed themselves does he open discussion to the subject of why he invited them to his house.

"Within a period of a month," he says "all of you will be collected and your brains removed to become part of an alien thinking machine, a biocomputer. I could not in good conscience allow you to die without knowing your fate." He pauses for a moment to observe their reactions. With a sly, evil smile, he continues. "You doubt me. I am not surprised. If I did not know the things that I know through personal experience, I would suspect my own sanity."

"For many years, I have devoted my time to the solution of mysteries—and I have uncovered many things that man is deliberately not meant to know. Did you know there is a tunnel through nowhere that takes you from Stonehenge to the pyramid of Cheops? Or that Easter Island is merely a doorway to a sunken island topped by structures that defy description and imagination? Or that the creatures that built these places, and many more like them, are very real and walk the earth yet again? The horrors of what co-exists with our fragile world are enough to blast a man's mind forever."

Weissmann cackles, looking like something out of a horror film, suitable for institutionalization. "There are monstrous, inhuman intellects behind this. The government knows of them, and knows of their plans to destroy the entire human race. But they are inefficient and stupid. And too many officials have already been compromised, corrupted and replaced by things from the other side. Fools." He laughs, then sobers abruptly. "And you, my friends, are the next victims of this dark conspiracy."

If any PC tries to threaten or attack Weissmann, the robot butler moves to protect his master (Strength 12, Initiative 6, Skill/Dam. 5/1D6+6, 3 points of armor at all locations). Weissmann listens to the PCs' protests and rebuttals, then dismisses them with a head-shake. "Proof of my words will come to you. When you go about your daily business, be wary. You shall see the tools of the enemy, following you, watching you.

Already, they are moving to isolate you from the world. Your positions and jobs are becoming less important; your replacements are being readied. When you are taken, you will not be missed.

"You cannot escape this crisis. How might you deal with it? You could go to the authorities and tell them what I have told you. You might even be able to point out your watchers. At best, your stories will be ignored. At worst, you will be sent for psychiatric help—and that would surely seal your fate—you'd disappear one night, and the institution would cover with lies.

"You could heed my warning and prepare for their attack. I do not know the agency they will use or the method of their strike. But they are overconfident, uninventive and arrogant. Use this against them! Turn their trap upon them and trap them in turn!

"Or you could run, attempt to escape the doom they have laid upon you. They would find you, for their hold is even stronger away from this nation.

"And if they get you, you will live through the ultimate violation of having your living brain removed from its case, feeling your thoughts and memories disintegrating as they slice your tissue into wafers, then the agony of connection to the other scattered intellects of the machine, conscious only of the fact that you were once individuals. A fair slice of eternal damnation." He lapses into silence, concentrating on his brandy.

If the PCs decide to leave, he does not offer any resistance, nor does he appeal to them again. "If you change your mind, contact me at this number," he calls out as they leave. His robot butler hands out business cards that read "Rheinhold Weissmann, Professional Adventurer and Solver of Unsolved Mysteries."

If, instead, the PCs decide to listen to his advice and fight their unknown foes, he smiles again and nods sagely. "You have made the right choice."

He says he does not know how the Minions will strike, or whom they will employ, or when, or where. "Those are things you must find out on your own," he says. "Watch for them. Watch for people who follow you, who ask too many questions, who loiter in your vicinity. If you can, take pictures of them and send the photographs to me. I have friends who can try to identify them.

DARK CONSPIRACY

Once you have recognized the watchers, turn the tables and follow them! Find out who gives them their orders and we can crush them! My resources are at your disposal if you need them.

"Beware, though—things are not always as they appear! The most innocent person could be a tool of the enemy. They use humans for their diabolical purposes—people subverted through money, blackmail, brainwashing or worse. They may even try to subvert *you*. Do not listen to promises of wealth, power or influence. They tried to subvert me, to buy me out, some years ago. I declined. If you wish to see how, the head of their messenger is preserved on the wall in the den." If the PCs wish to check his story out, the butler will escort them. Weissmann's den at first glance seems perfectly ordinary—lined with bookshelves, furnished with heavy, overstuffed chairs, etc. But it also features the mounted heads of a bloodkin Vampire, an insectoid ET and one of the Cobra People.

PLAN OF ACTION

To save themselves, the PCs must somehow uncover the plot against them. They can find out who's watching them and trace the plot to the ambulance service and then to the coroner (see below). Or they can play a waiting game and hope to ambush the Minion's forces (the thugs or the ambulance crews) when they make their move. Or they can assault the ambulance service and destroy the threat before it strikes (actually only a temporary setback), etc.

Weissmann can't really help them, but he counts as a high-level government and civil contact for purposes of obtaining information, thanks to his extensive contacts. Also, if the PCs need equipment that's hard to come by, Weissmann can deliver, on loan.

WATCHERS

Each PC is being watched. Nearly every hour of the day, someone—or something—watches them, tracking

Jobs in Dark Conspiracy

Most of the workers in **Dark Conspiracy** are owned by the corporations, the megaconglomerates that control over 90% of the world's resources and production.

The PCs are probably mikes—middle-class workers—either working for corporations or working independently. The former—wage slaves—are guaranteed payment for their time and energy, as long as they do their jobs. Of course, most of their pay goes to compensate the corporates for housing, medical care, etc. True mikes, the independents, have more disposable wealth but more things that they have to spend it on.

Wage slaves receive wages equal to their Education times \$125 per month. This is take-home pay. Actually, they are paid much more, but they also have corporate-provided housing in Mike-Town, medical care covering sickness and injury (but not repeated combat wounds—if a wage-slave ends up coming in with too many gunshot/knife/shrapnel wounds, the corporate investigators are going to have plenty of questions). In return for these wages and benefits, the corporations expect the wage-slave to work 40 hours a week, every week, except for two weeks of paid holiday leave.

Needless to say, wage-slaves have obligations that get in the way of adventuring and chasing Dark Minions. PC careers appropriate to wage-slaves are attorney, civil engineer, commercial pilot, computer operator (with Computer Operation 6 or less), construction worker, factory worker, federal law enforcement, government agent, manager, mechanic, medical doctor, merchant marine, paramedic, professor, psychiatrist, public employee and state/local law enforcement. All military occupations (including astronaut) might as well be treated as wage-slaves—the military has stricter regulations about doing one's job than the corporates. The occupations astronaut, attorney, civil engineer, commercial pilot, manager, medical doctor, professor, psychiatrist and all military officers receive \$300 per month times their Education or highest applicable skill, whichever is higher.

True mikes are different, eking out a living with their wits. These people are frequently free-lancers, hiring out to whoever has money. They earn Education or highest applicable skill (whichever is higher) times \$500 per month. PC careers appropriate to true mikes are athlete, bodyguard, bounty hunter, clergy, computer programmer (with Computer Operations 7+), criminal, entertainer, gambler, journalist, martial artist, mechanic, medical doctor, mercenary, merchant marine, mystic, paramedic, parapsychist, politician, private investigator, professor and psychiatrist. Other true mike roles aren't as lucrative—cyborg escapee, drifter, environmentalist, ganger, homeless, prisoner and psychic test subject careers only earn \$200 per month per point of Education/highest relevant skill.

Not that the life of a true mike is any easier than the life of a wage-slave. True mikes have to do a lot of work, and their wages aren't as certain as those guaranteed to wage-slaves. Each month, true mikes must see what they have earned, a test vs. Education or highest applicable skill. The task is Average for mikes who have spent a great deal of time at their jobs without significant time lost adventuring (say, no more than one week that month). For mikes who have devoted all their time to work, the task is Average. For mikes who have spent too much time away from the job (over 10 days that month), the task is Difficult. A successful roll means the mike has earned the normal amount. An outstanding success doubles the normal amount. Failure means the mike has earned half the normal amount. Critical failure means the mike earned nothing that month!

Nomenklatura careers are special—it's assumed that the gnome automatically lives at Exec level or higher and has complete insurance, and the gnome's "earnings" are represented by the money available at the beginning of each adventure.

them. When they return home, the referee should make an Average Observation roll for each adventurer. Failure indicates that the PC has spotted an innocent party. Success indicates that a PC has spotted his watchers.

Sometimes the watchers are electronic. If the PCs search their homes and belongings, they find electronic surveillance devices (bugs) everywhere—in their clothes, in their vehicles, in every room. The bugs are well-hidden, requiring a thorough search (a Difficult Observation task, which becomes Easy if the searcher has bug-detecting tools.)

If a PC tries to follow one of his watchers, he must first avoid those watchers—trying to follow the watchers while they're watching is useless. Losing the watchers is a Difficult Stealth task. Trailing the watchers after losing them is a Difficult Stalking task.

An easier way to track the watchers is to have someone else follow them! Following the watchers is an Easy Stalking task if they're watching someone else (but if one of the watched PCs wants to follow someone else's watchers, he'll have to shake off his own first).

The watchers rotate in shifts, with two assigned to each PC at all times. They always keep in touch with someone—calling in on a hand-radio at 15-minute intervals. When they knock off their shift, the watchers are relieved by other watchers or, in some cases, merely trust the electronics for surveillance. Each relieved pair goes to a warehouse/garage on the outskirts of Dreamland, entering through employee doors (or garage doors if driving a vehicle). They stay about half an hour, then leave separately in different vehicles. Trailing a watcher from the warehouse leads the follower to the watcher's residence.

Confronting the watchers is dangerous. They are Experienced NPCs armed with concealed 9mm pistols (use M9 Beretta stats) and one-shot dart pistols (ROF: SS Dam: 1p4 Pen: Nil Blk: 0 Mag: 1i SS: 1 Brst: — Rng: 5) that fire tranquilizer darts (treat as poison—**Dark Conspiracy**, page 101—but the victim is knocked out for 15—Constitution minutes instead of killed). If the PCs capture and interrogate one of the watchers, they discover that he is just a professional security operative (read: thug

for hire), hired to trail the PCs. That's the limit of the NPC's involvement in the affair. The watchers have been given a radio frequency to report on the PCs' status every quarter-hour. Monitoring the frequency reveals little—the voice on the other end of the line is laconic in the extreme. A radio-direction-finder triangulation can find the location of the voice on the other end, although the sporadic and limited broadcast makes it tougher than usual (an Average Task instead of an Easy one). The location is the building housing the RXPro Ambulance Service.

Research reveals that the warehouse/garage the watchers report to is the headquarters of a private security firm, quite legal and aboveboard. Those at the security agency don't know why they've been hired to follow the PCs; all they know is that the money's good and paid in advance. A sizeable bribe, accompanied by a successful Difficult Persuasion roll, can convince the firm's manager to reveal that they're working for RXPro Ambulance Service. A successful penetration of the firm's computer (a Difficult Computer Operation task) will reveal the same information.

RXPRO

The ambulance service is located in a small building located in Miketown. It specializes in emergency pickups and body removal, and has a contract with the city government for police extraction (i.e., picking up corpses). The employees are thoroughly human, but corrupt—they're paid a lot of money to respond to certain calls, certify them D.O.A. and deliver them to the city morgue.

The service's dispatch is monitoring the PCs' movements and reporting them via computer to an unidentified person or agency.

The employees are Experienced NPCs who will not respond favorably to a bunch of snooty people asking questions. If the PCs press too much, the employees will be told to capture them right there! The employees have standard stun guns and clubs, as well as lots of medical tape and sedatives to keep people pacified.

EVIL PLAN

The coroner at the local morgue is really a humanoid ET in a good disguise. He has several bands of thugs,

all carefully trained and brainwashed, stashed around the city. Each group has weapons that contain injectors—the knives have hollow blades, the guns shoot hollow bullets (with Nil Pen, no matter what caliber), etc.—for a drug that puts the victim in a sort of suspended animation. This drug was originally used by the aliens to survive the long timespans spent in interstellar travel). Unless the victim is killed immediately by the weapon, the drug goes to work and suspends the victim for 24 hours. The suspended victim is alive and somewhat aware (very groggy), but cannot move at all. Metabolism and heart rate decrease to almost nothing, and no oxygen is needed for the next 24 hours—the PC survives on what is already in the bloodstream.

Once drugged and apparently dead, victims are picked up by the RXPro ambulances and brought to the morgue. There the alien coroner does an "autopsy" and removes the brains, not caring that the victims still have enough awareness to feel the operation. The documentation recording the death from violence is then made out, and the bodies are disposed of—while the brains are shipped off to join a mental chorus in a biocomputer.

THE STORY BEHIND THE PLOT

The PCs' part in this mess is not coincidence. The plot to involve them was actually cooked up by Weissmann as a method of solving a problem which arose:

Some years ago, Weissmann accidentally contacted the living computer Legion (Weissmann thought the name appropriate for a multiple-personality intellect) and befriended it. Ever since, Legion has supplied Weissmann with information about its alien masters (the personalities of Legion have no cause to love the aliens and have many reasons to hate them), becoming an invaluable tool in Weissmann's private war on the Minions.

Only a month ago, Legion contacted Weissmann with bad news. The aliens plan to upgrade Legion, making the computer more powerful and diverse, by adding more brain-circuits to the matrix. The consequences for Legion were grave—it feared such disruption of the carefully balanced personality

DARK CONSPIRACY

matrix that it would not be able to reintegrate and would cease to exist as distinct if combined entities.

Weissmann couldn't allow this—he could not afford to lose Legion, an event which would utterly cripple his attacks on the Minions. So, if the aliens wanted new victims to add to their computer network, he and Legion would pick them—the most resistant, most independent spirits they could find, while still maintaining the lie of random selection. Legion pretended to agree with the upgrade and dutifully suggested the PCs to the aliens for the augmentation.

The real problem was that neither Legion nor Weissmann knew what sort of agency would be employed to perform the actual task of acquiring the new donors and removing their brains. In order to discover this, Rheinhold had to take the prospective donors into his confidence and enlist them to help thwart the Dark Minions' plan. In doing so, he could uncover and destroy the aliens' plans and possibly acquire some new and active help, allowing him to expand his operations.

If the PCs survive the danger, Weissmann has an offer for them. He will provide them with \$4000 per month, plus equipment (only when needed, and then only as a loan). In return, the adventurers agree to his tasks, which can range from haring off to check out the validity of a tabloid headline to doing battle with hellish hordes of Dark Minions.

RHEINHOLD WEISSMANN

Rheinhold Weissmann is an old man. Once he was of middling height and preternatural thinness. Now he is largely confined to his wheelchair, and is wrinkled and bent with age. His hair is nothing more than a ring of white extending from ear to ear—his face is drawn and skull-like, the dark planes of his bone structure emphasizing his bright, fevered eyes.

Weissmann is obsessive. His one goal in

Cost of Living

The cost of living varies in **Dark Conspiracy**, depending on life-style.

The lowest rung of life is *street living*—it costs \$100 per month, and the character looks like and lives like street scum, without a roof over his head. Next up is *slum living*, which costs \$200 per month. The character lives in condemned buildings, coexisting with rats and roaches. *Mike living*, living in Mike-Town, costs \$500 per month. *Exec living* costs \$3000 per month and lands the character in low-rank Dreamland (or similar surroundings). The highest rank is *CEO living*. It costs \$25,000 per month and is best explained by TV shows starring Robin Leach.

Life-styles cover food, clothing and shelter, plus a few home luxuries like basic entertainment (perhaps a pocket CD for street living and whole holothaters for CEO living). Extras like transportation and insurance come out of the character's pocket.

Vehicle costs are detailed in **Dark Conspiracy**. Maintenance on vehicles typically costs 2.5% of the list cost per year, with occasional breakdowns that can run to 10% of the car's cost (at the referee's discretion)! Yugos and Tovarishes are prone to suffering such breakdowns.

Wage-slaves have corporate insurance, but true mikes have to provide their own. Medical insurance costs up to \$1500 per month—\$500 for base accident insurance (not covering combat wounds), another \$500 for health insurance and \$500 for "extraordinary" insurance (this is in addition to base accident coverage and does cover combat injuries). So why get insurance? Because it covers 80% of the costs involved in accident, injury and sickness.

Medical costs range from the trivial to the colossal. Combat injuries rank near the top. Medical care costs \$400 per day—double this if the injury is critical. Healing from a serious wound costs \$2000 (five days, assuming that the character is in a hospital), and healing from a critical wound costs \$6400.

life is to ferret out and destroy the creatures that are trying to take over the planet. His knowledge on the subject is considerable, thanks to his past experiences and his friendship with the alien computer Legion. Through Legion, he controls a great deal of wealth and hidden power.

Weissmann is confident in his intellect, his power and the sanctity of his mission. He comes across as being even more fearsome and ghoulish than his enemies. This is only a front—he is more human than most people.

Weissmann provides a solid information source, a base of operations and funding for those actively engaged in the war against the Dark Minions.

Level: Elite

Attributes: 3; Intelligence and Education 9

Skills: 6; Observation 9, Willpower 10, Foreboding 8

Initiative: 5

Motivation: *Heart Jack:* Weissmann is a very wise man, tempered by his years of wandering the darker corners of human (and other) society. He realizes that humanity must fight or die and that most of humanity wouldn't understand. *Spade Ten:* Weissmann is very determined to succeed. The alternative is unacceptable. Ω



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The Only Good Monster is a Dead Monster

General Rockard was one of those guys who generated rumors—rumors that couldn't be proved or disproved because if he even sneezed, it was top secret. He'd been a hitter since 'Nam, a sniper.

He graduated from there to ultrasecret dirty work—assassination, sabotage, government-sanctioned terrorism and insurrection. If it was violence you needed, Rockard could provide. He always took the toughest jobs, the suicide missions. Of course, no one ever wanted to work with him. To his credit, he didn't lose very many men, but a lot of them came back in pieces.

If he'd been a Viking, they'd have called him a berserker. The running gag was that he was a few rounds short of a full magazine. I'm not real surprised that he's still around. Someone watches out for children and crazy people.

But imagine my shock when he contacted me. That's like being called to dice with death. I might not win, but the game won't be boring.

This adventure is for 2-6 players. At least one PC must be military or ex-military, preferably special forces, force recon or sniper. The group should also include at least one psychic—either PC or NPC.

A PC is contacted secretly by General Rockard, who requests a meet with the adventurer and any friends he has that are known for hunting Dark Minions. He promises a good time (in Rockard's parlance, that means a desperate battle) and \$10,000 per soldier for a "little job."

Rockard will agree to meet the PCs at a place of their choosing. He'll show up at the appointed place and time, in dress appropriate to the venue. He looks like an aging Hercules, complete with a fierce, mad gleam in his blue eyes, and his face bears many small scars. His only weapon is a COP .357 backup gun.

As soon as the general is alone with the adventurers, he will take a penlight-like device from his pocket and turn it on, pointing it at a wall or other neutrally colored surface. It is a small image projector, and it displays an aerial photograph of a small, unidentified island, a tropical one to judge from the foliage.

"Awright, troops, listen up," he barks. "You're here because you know about the monsters, the ones the government says don't exist. We know better." He pauses and grins. "Either that, or the money sounded good."

He explains that the island, a former US military installation, now houses an enemy base. The installation was abandoned back in the '90s during budget cutbacks. A satellite photo suggested that it had been recently reoccupied by someone—or something.

"I took a team in," Rockard recounts, "and I was the only one to come out. I don't remember much. The psych boys say I may never remember; a sanity block of some kind. The brass said forget it; I said no way. No one and nothing beats General Rockard." The opposition is crafty. But they're easy to identify—they're monsters. Never trust a monster—shoot it! It's you or them." He grinds his teeth with rage, jaw muscles standing out and face reddening with fury.

Rockard explains that the enemy has converted the armory into a lab and is building something there. He wants to know what they're up to—and stop it.

Entry for the mission will be by boat and extraction by chopper. The group will travel by foot, and should be in and out within 24 hours. Rockard tallies up the equipment the PCs have—he'll provide any extra gear needed—and asks them to meet at a nearby bus terminal in 24 hours. "Keep your gear concealed, boys and girls," he admonishes. "This is a secret mission." He pulls out a wad of cash, \$1000 per adventurer. "A little seed money for gear."

The general leaves quickly and loses any followers within a half-mile, vanishing before their eyes. If psychic characters try to probe the general, Human Empathy reveals a deep hatred pulsing inside him—the general hates, hates, hates monsters. He's not suicidal, but he'd go pretty far to kill them. His intellectual thoughts are on the mission. Stage Three and up success (enabling the psychic to read the general's subconscious) is confusing. It's as if the general has a dual personality. There's an inhumanly cold and intense overmind, a superego (by Freudian terms), controlling him with exact mechanical precision, but underneath lies a seething, patho-

logical mire of pure aggression, directed (at the moment) at monsters. The general is a walking weapon; there's very little humanity left to him.

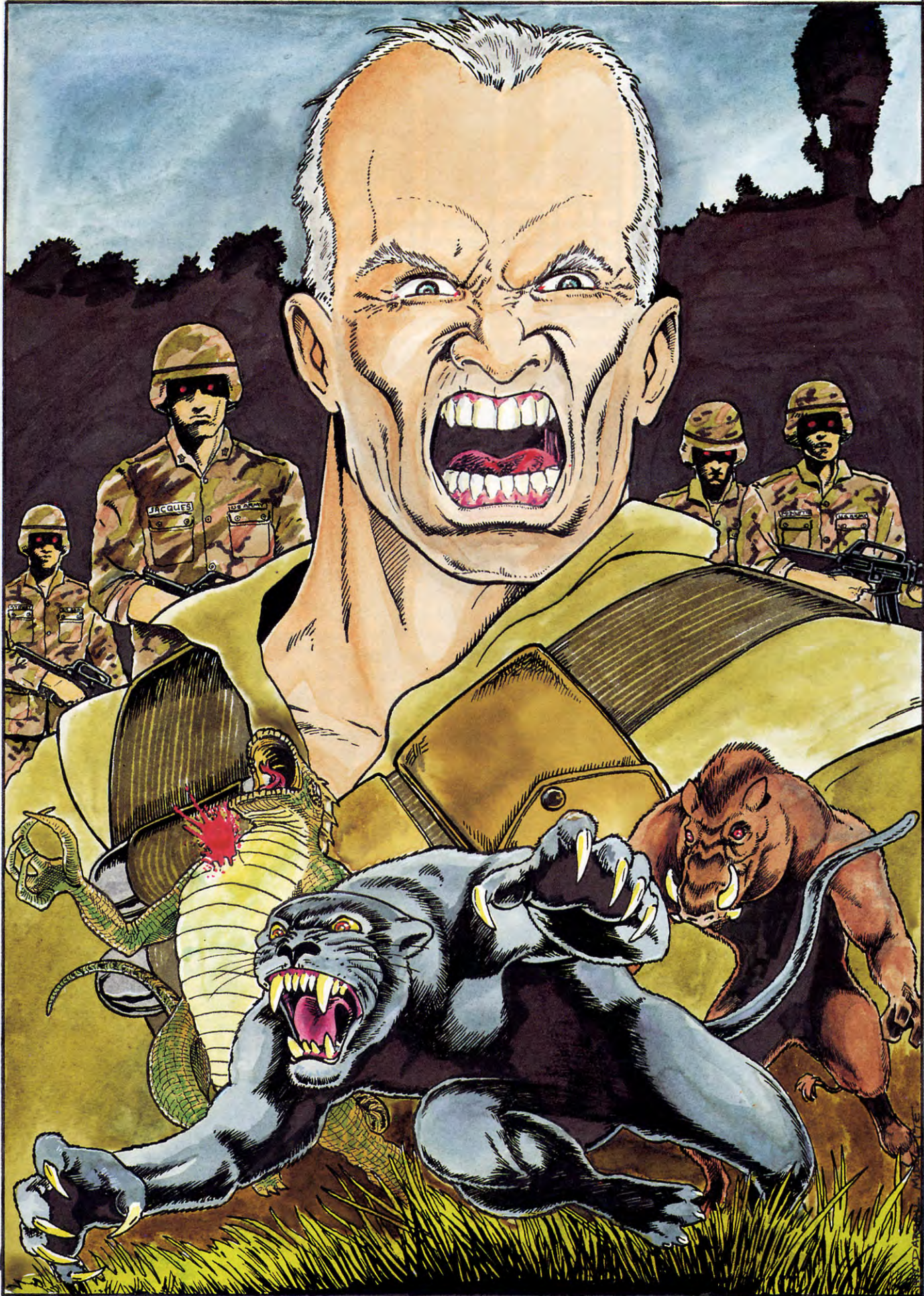
PREPARATIONS

The adventurers have 24 hours to get ready for a jungle plunge. They can use the time to buy new gear, research the mission, or just rest up and get ready.

Any new gear they buy has to be readily available (which normally means legal) because there isn't time to arrange to meet with most contacts—the corner mechanic is okay, but calling a friend at the Pentagon to ship you a tank is out.

Researching the mission is interesting. Comparing the general's memory of the island with the thousands of small islands dotting the globe is a lengthy process, made slightly easier by the fact that it had a US base on it. Still, several islands could fit the bill, all in the South Pacific, all small and insignificant, all devoid of any interesting information. If the adventurers try to tap their military network contacts, reactions range from stunned incredulity ("I didn't know about this!") to resignation ("So Rock-Hard's going on another safari? Have fun, and make sure your insurance covers gunfire.") to concern ("Rockard's 100% nuts. Watch your back.").

One contact has useful information: "Rockard is completely on his own on this venture. He's supposed to be in recovery in an institution. You know the last time he went there, he disappeared? So did all his men. Then he pops up, fresh as a daisy and looking like nothing happened. And he remembers nothing, nothing at all! Going back is an obsession with him—he wants to find out what happened."



ISLAND EXPRESS

At the appointed hour, a bus pulls up at the terminal. The sign on it reads "Island Express," and the uniformed driver is General Rockard. Once outside the city, Rockard turns the vehicle off the main road and drives carefully up a rutted side road for 10 minutes. When firmly out of sight, he stops the bus. "Everybody off! Unload and check your gear. I've got additional gear for you, and you need familiarization training."

Rockard unloads several bulky bags from the cargo compartment as the PCs line up. At least one of his bags is field equipment for any PCs who don't already have it. It's a standard US field kit, as outlined in *Twilight: 2000*—a set of jungle fatigues and poncho, combat webbing, pack, shelter half, two canteens, sleeping bag, flashlight, personal medical kit, kevlar flak vest and kevlar helmet, for a total weight of 20 kilograms. He has a set of IR goggles for everyone; a crate is full of grenades for those who want them; and one bag holds a half-dozen plastic-wrapped rifles with five magazines each.

Issuing the rifles to the PCs, Rockard explains, "This is the XM22 AIW, the most advanced combat rifle in the world. It's experimental and extremely lethal. Each clip holds 50 rounds. It's a simple weapon, easy to shoot, so I expect you to be experts by the time you finish 50 rounds! Furthermore, you'll find instruction manuals that teach field-stripping and maintenance. Study them!" He assists the PCs in learning how to use the rifles, glancing at the sky occasionally.

After an hour of practice and drill, an airplane passes low over the party, its huge wingtip props rotating to become VTOL rotors, and touches down nearby. The plane's markings have been hastily obscured with spray paint, but the stenciled notations on its skin mark it as military as surely as any insignia.

The plane's crew is a pair of tight-lipped soldiers. They speak only to give instructions, and the crew compartment is closed for the 10-hour journey (the airplane refuels in mid-air three times).

Rockard settles the adventurers in and spends the rest of the time sleeping, dropping off as soon as he hits the seat. Smart PCs do the same. Ex-military types know that this is the last uninterrupted rest they'll have for some time. Curious adventurers can look out the windows and watch the ground slip away to ocean as the plane flies west—but this gets boring after awhile.

Ten hours out, the intercom barks for the general. He goes forward to the cockpit for a minute, then returns to address the PCs. "We're maneuvering to drop us off at sea. Get your gear and be ready." He opens a side door as the airplane slows to hover over a ship, a tramp freighter by the looks of it. When the plane is only about six feet off the deck, he jumps out. "Follow me!" He lands on the deck and rolls to his feet without effort, then catches any PCs who aren't used to jumping, setting them on their feet.

A ship's officer greets the party and leads them belowdeck to a set of small staterooms. "We'll be in position to launch you by tomorrow night," he declares. "Please remain in your cabins and don't go up on deck."

The PCs spend the next night and day cooped up in their cabins. Finally, it's time. Rockard tells them to gather their gear and follow him. They go down into the hold, which is filled with a maintenance bay and aircraft elevator, complete with a transport heli and a *Comanche* attack chopper. The aft section of the ship features a ramp and clamshell doors, obvious from the inside. A hovercraft, armed for war, rests on the ramp. Rockard flings his two duffle bags into the crew compartment and boards. As soon as the party is aboard, the stern of the ship opens and the hovercraft shoots out into the darkness.

"Awright, get yourselves ready to go," Rockard orders, beginning to remove items from his own bags. "It's not a long trip, and as soon as the hover runs up on the shore, we bail out. And remember this: They'll be monitoring Frequency One—the emergency freak. The pickup signal is 'Ford, Dodge, Chevy.' That'll call in the choppers—don't use it unless I'm out of action. Repeat the signal at two-minute intervals, and they'll home in on your signal."

Rockard slings on a heavy, solid backpack, belts on an oversized buttpack, crams every voluminous pocket with gear, grenades, and ammunition, drapes two bandoleers over his flak jacket (one loaded with launcher grenades, the other loaded with ammo clips), fits on a holster holding a Wildey .457, straps on a steel helmet and takes up an M21 rifle modified to carry an M203 PI grenade launcher underneath. Shortly thereafter, the hover stops and the forward ramp opens—Rockard must be hauling more than 70 kilos, but he moves out as if unhindered by the weight. As soon as the adventurers have moved out of the hover, it reverses its engines and slips off the shore. The group is alone.

THE NIGHT HAS EYES

The sound of the ocean breeze whistling through the palms, the heavy scents of hot-house flowers and the tepid temperature confirm that the island is tropical. The darkness is nearly complete since there is no moon. Only starlight provides any visibility. "IR goggles," the general murmurs. Once the adventurers put on their goggles, they see that the general has a powerful IR flashlight. He leads the way into the jungle, proceeding along a game trail. "We need to find a good place to wait, out of sight, until dawn. I think I've got just the place."

An eerie, wolfish howl echoes through the jungle, answered by caws, screeches, chirps and ratcheting sounds. Jungle veterans recognize most of the sounds, but some utter-

ances in the chorus are unnatural. The unnatural howl seems to have been the signal for nocturnal activity. It is not repeated, but the adventurers are now plagued by rustling noises in the underbrush and a constant stream of jungle noises.

To increase tension, the referee should roll 1D10 at random intervals and announce to a PC that he sees/senses movement nearby. If any of the PCs open fire, Rockard rounds on them and hisses furiously, "What do you think you're doing?! If you give away our position, we're all dead. Or worse. Unload that piece and put it on safety if you can't control it!" He looks at the rest of the group. "As a matter of fact, that's not a bad idea. Clear your chambers and safety everything! Use hand weapons only." He slings his custom-built combi-weapon and draws a machete from the side of his pack. "We use extreme silence from here on out."

As the strike group winds its way along the game path, the PCs feel eyes on them. Something is watching them. They know it. Characters with Foreboding can sense the danger, like a cold, carnal breath ghosting past them on the humid tropical air. If a psychic uses Human Empathy, he feels malice all around, like a ring of excited hatred. It's tenuous, not capable of being pinned down. And it's stronger, so much stronger, ahead. In the direction of the target installation. If a psychic uses Animal Empathy, the impression is many times worse. There are animal things, not real animals, out there in the jungle. They roam, prowling the pathways, slaving and lusting for the taste of human flesh. The effect is overwhelming—have the psychic roll 1D6 against his Initiative. If the roll is over the Initiative score, the psychic is reduced to a frightened, whimpering mass. Once the psychic contact is broken, the fear retreats—but does not disappear completely.

Note: The Moreau creatures are instinctively using their Project Emotion powers to reach out and terrify their prey. This is reinforced by the power projected from the aliens' lab ahead.

DANCES IN THE DARK

Seemingly unaffected by the trepidation which haunts the other adventurers, Rockard leads the way through the jungle to a small clearing nestled beneath a grove of tall, thick trees. "We camp here until 0500," he announces. "Get some rest while you can." He strings a hammock between two trees, climbs in and drops off instantly, his M21/M203 combo across his massive chest. The sounds that spooked the PCs earlier have followed them here, and the night is full of menace. Even those characters who don't have Foreboding feel like something terrible is about to happen—those with Foreboding feel it more intensely.

The PCs may try to catch a few hours of sleep (it's about 2300 hours by the time they reach the

clearing). Their sleep is haunted by nightmares, if they can sleep at all. Those who don't sleep may be tempted to leave the camp.

If one of the PCs decides to snoop around bit or answer a call of nature, a panther-form (a Moreau creature) leaps from a nearby tree branch. A successful Average Observation or Foreboding skill roll warns the PC before the attack, allowing him to try to avoid the creature's leap. Two combat phases after the panther-thing attacks, a lizard-thing scuttles from behind some undergrowth and joins the party. Roll 1D6 for each creature. On a 4-6, the creatures attack each other instead of the adventurer, fighting over the food! Awake PCs can hear the scuffle and respond immediately, running out to help. If they take more than one turn to knock out or kill the creatures, Rockard arrives and practically breaks the pair in half with heavy hammerblows. He then returns to his sleep.

If the PCs want to do some reconnaissance or go hunting, they can easily find their way to the installation with the maps the general provided. It's only three kilometers away, an hour's walk in the dark and unfamiliar terrain. The area houses a collection of dingy buildings, slowly crumbling under the assault of tropical conditions, and sagging fences. There are no lights, no movement, no sound—but the adventurers know something watches, waiting for victims to move into its traps. Everyone who looks at the base buildings is spooked by the utter certainty that they're being eyeballed right back.

If some foolhardy PC wants to test the defenses, he can approach without incident—until he reaches the fence. Then, he suddenly feels weak and dizzy. Roll 1D6. If the result is greater than Con+2, the PC is unconscious. If the result is less than his

Con+2, the PC stumbles to the ground, but can crawl away. If he doesn't get four meters from the fence by the beginning of the next combat round, he must again roll against his Constitution. Other PCs may dash out and grab a fallen character, but must move swiftly!

What the PCs have encountered is a stunner field, which extends all around the base at a radius of 50 meters, emanating from the buildings. Any living being checks for unconsciousness once per combat round spent in the field.

If the PCs fire upon the base, the buildings will be unaffected—as if the fire is spent somewhere else. Firers suffer the penalties of making noise: If they fire off more than a single burst at any time during the night, the noise will attract 2D6 Moreau creatures within one minute (two combat turns).

If the PCs go hunting, they match their Tracking skills against the Moreau creatures. It's certain that they'll run into some of the creatures—the question is whether the creatures surprise the PCs or vice versa. If the adventurers roll more points below their Tracking skill than the creatures (use the most skilled adventurer; the task is Average), the adventurers find the creatures and gain surprise. If not, the creatures surprise the adventurers! One to three creatures show up, and the party's on.

RUDE AWAKENING

As the darkness begins to pale, the Moreau creatures retreat, leaving the jungle and returning to the compound—PCs watching the objective buildings see at least 50 of them slouch out of the foliage and pass through the fence gate without ill effects. They all go to building 2, entering through the doorless portal. Once the creatures are inside, the installation returns to

its lifeless state.

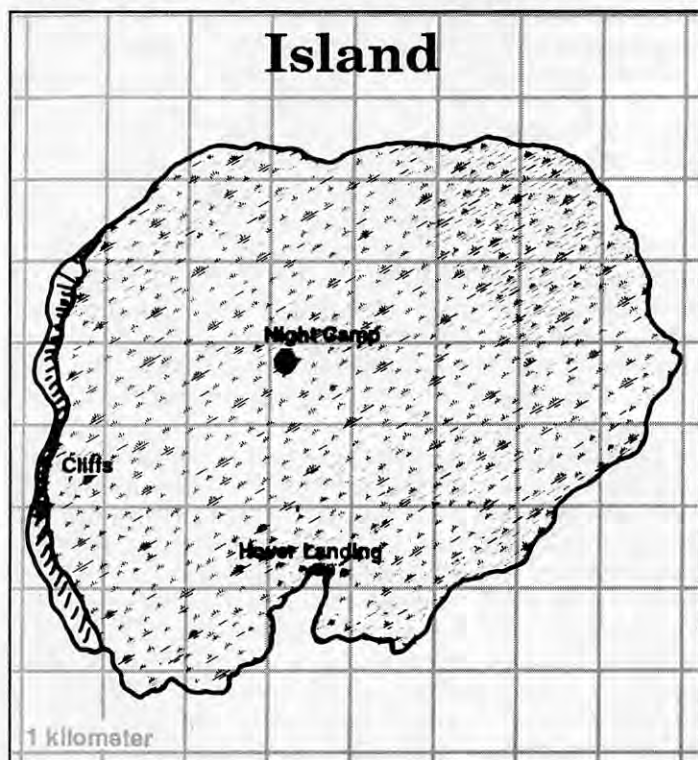
nels are stealthy—hearing or seeing them at the tunnel entrances is a Difficult Observation task. The soldiers know exactly where the PCs are and will attempt to ambush them. A successful Average Observation roll keeps the observing PCs from being ambushed. At any rate, they have a firefight on their hands.

Meanwhile, Rockard has roused the PCs in camp. He has a special job for the psychic character. "Use your powers. Look for them. Feel 'em?" The psychic can't miss—the installation radiates menace and anger like a lighthouse. "What I want you to do is fool 'em," the general says. "Jam 'em. Think of the beach. Whatever you do, keep thinking of the beach. Your thoughts'll decoy 'em to the waterfront, away from us." He's right—the psychic will quickly feel the tendrils of hate shift slightly and head toward the ocean.

The general signals to the others to follow him. Walking in starts out easy. Except for the psychic—he is under a ferocious mental bombardment and has to struggle to maintain the image of the beach. Four successful Project Thought (or EMP, whichever is higher) rolls are needed to screen the party all the way to the objective. If one of them is failed, the party comes under attack at that point (if the first roll is failed, the party only gets 25% of the way to the target; if the second roll is failed, the party only gets halfway to the target, and so on). If the failure is catastrophic, the psychic is stunned, and his powers nullified until the installation is destroyed! If the psychic fails and the party is attacked, or if the party fires off any weapons or makes any other extremely loud noises, it is attacked by single snipers.

The attackers look normal US soldiers. The first one doesn't attack as he wanders out of the foliage. He is tense and ready to fight, but he lowers his weapon slightly as the general calls to him by name. "Jacques! I thought you were a goner! Relax, men, it's one of my old command. Come on, soldier, form up! We can use the extra firepower." Psychics probing the soldier with Human Empathy will reveal the truth immediately: There's no emotion in Jacques, only an overriding impulse to kill. There is no humanity in him at all—like he's some sort of machine. And the adventurers are his targets. If no-one blasts Jacques, he fires at the psychic, taking everyone by surprise and getting off a free shot. If the PCs shoot at Jacques, they get a free shot instead. If Jacques is wounded, the adventurers will see machine pieces cyborged into him.

Another squad of soldiers shows every few minutes (every 1D6 minutes), ambushing the party—successful Difficult Observation rolls detect the soldiers before they attack. There seems to be a large supply of them. Rockard is furious. He recognizes every soldier as one of his old men, and allows no retreat, blowing up the ex-troopers—and any cover they happen to



If the PCs attempt to dash through the fence and follow the creatures, they find that the fence's paralyzing defenses are still operative—the creatures are immune somehow. If the PCs show themselves while the creatures are around, the herd will turn and assault the human interlopers.

The next wave of security will appear from tunnel entrances beyond the outer perimeter of the installation. The PCs will not be close to these entrances unless they manage a successful Luck roll. The soldiers coming out of the tun-

be behind—with HEDP grenades as the party advances.

FINAL COUNTDOWN

When the adventurers reach the base perimeter, they are stymied by a pair of machinegun nests, set up in buildings 2 and 4, which fire as soon as the PCs reach the edge of the clearing. The stunner field is still up, restricting passage to the installation. The MG nests are really well dug in—only a die roll of 1 will hit them with a weapon. The soldiers manning the MGs are wearing level 2 armor.

While pinned down by the MG nests, with more cyborg soldiers coming up behind, the general braces himself behind a tree and barks, "Get ready to cover me! I'm gonna make a dash for it!" As he peeks around the trunk to eyeball the situation, a burst of fire hits him in the face and chest. He recoils, seemingly stunned but not badly hurt. His armor protected him from the bullets—almost. Part of his face is torn and bleeding, exposing a metallic skull beneath the skin. A single silvery eye stares out, its color contact cover hanging on the remains of the skin covering the eye socket. He glares at any PCs staring at him. "What are you staring at, soldier? Get back to your posts! I'm going in!"

The PCs have to make a decision: Do they shoot the "monster," or do they provide him with cover fire as he moves out across the perimeter? If they shoot at him, he twists and dodges, trying to avoid their fire and the MG bursts, setting off smoke grenades as he goes. If the general is critically wounded, he chokes, "I'm carrying a nuke. Get out of here—it's set to go off 10 minutes after my heart stops." This news should motivate the characters to leave with great swiftness.

If the PCs instead provide Rockard with cover fire, he charges straight into the MG nest, passing through the stunner field as if it wasn't there, until he runs right up into the nest. There is a melee of limbs and weapons, then the general moves on inside the building. A couple of minutes later, the characters' radios crackle with a message from him: "Bug out! Pull back! I've found the entrance to their lab, and I'm setting the fireball. Get away and call for the pickup!"

The PCs will have to fight their way through at least one more squad of cyborgs before they get clear of the area. A successful Average Observation skill roll allows the adventurers to ambush the cyborgs. Otherwise, the cyborgs will find them.

The helicopters arrive in the nick of time to rescue the adventurers, and they see a nuclear mushroom cloud rising from the island as they fly away. Within hours, the PCs are winging their way home, each carrying their \$9000 payment, which the captain of the freighter gives them from Rockard. The adventurers may keep all the gear the general provided—if they walked out with it, they deserve it—including the hi-tech rifles.

GENERAL ROCKARD

Strength: 12

Archery 4

Heavy Weapons 8

Melee Combat (Unarmed) 10

Small Arms (Pistol) 8

Small Arms (Rifle) 10

Thrown Weapon 6

Constitution: 12

Climbing 8

Parachute 8

Swimming 9

Agility: 9

Acrobatics 5

Demolitions 6

Stealth 9

Intelligence: 7

Navigation 5

Observation 7

Stalking 5

Tracking 5

Motorcycle 5

Wheeled Vehicle 5

Heavy Vehicle 4

Willpower 8

Education: 5

Medical 4

Charisma: 5

Instruction 5

Interrogation 6

Languages:

French 4

Spanish 3

Vietnamese 3

Leadership 6

Luck 4

Empathy: 2

Load: 72 kg

Unarmed Damage: 12

Initiative: 7

Cyborg Armor: 1 point on head, chest, both arms. He wears regular armor and helmet, too.

The last time he came to drive the monsters off this island, Rockard didn't get away for almost a decade. The aliens caught him and his men, and turned them into cyborgs. They underestimated his willpower—he instinctively forced his "programming" on the computer that was implanted in his head and escaped.

Back in the States, he learned that he was officially "dead" and not trusted by his old service. So he went rogue, declaring himself a free agent and dedicating himself to the destruction of "monsters." Since he has extensive contacts in militaries the world over, he has access to a great deal of expertise and equipment, as long as it's done on the sly.

The general's mind is a constant battle between the cold logic of the brain computer and the fanatic hatred of his natural emotions—the only thing the alien mind control operations did was unhinge his grasp on reality. (Snipers and special ops usually live in a partial fantasy world of their own, believing in a personal invulnerability and godlike omnipotence. It's part of the job.)

As a cyborg, Rockard has a few notice-

able differences from the rest of humanity. He routinely accomplishes strength feats no human could match; he can go for days with only a half hour of sleep per day, he doesn't sweat very much; and he eats less than he would were he all flesh and bone. He tends to use a great amount of deodorant because the nano-organisms in his skin give off a sickly-sweet dead smell, like rotting flesh.

Rockard is a super-character. He'll always survive (as long as the referee wants him to), even reappearing after the nuclear explosion—he hid beneath an embankment, and his machinery protected him from the rads.

If the PCs acted like good soldiers, followed orders and generally displayed bravery, he'll keep them in mind for other missions and generally keep track of them. He's a good stock NPC to throw into high-firepower situations where the PCs need help. He hates "monsters," and will always be willing to kill them.

MOREAU CREATURES

Strength: 5

Constitution: 5

Agility: 7

Intelligence: 3

Education: 1

Charisma: 4

Empathy: 5

Initiative: 4

Move: 2/8/18/40

Skill/Dam: 5/2D6+2

Hits: 10/30

Appear: 1D6/2

Special: Project Emotion skill at level 5, Tracking at level 8.

These creatures are not humans that have been turned into animalistic life forms, but animals that have been geneered up to humanoid life forms! They are (for the most part) vicious, insanely attacking any human who doesn't smell like an alien or a cyborg.

CYBERSOLDIERS

Strength: 8

Constitution: 7

Agility: 8

Intelligence: 3

Education: 5

Charisma: 3

Empathy: 1

Initiative: 5

Move: 3/10/18/35

Skill/Dam: 7/7

Hits: 20/30

Appear: 1 or 4

Special: Small Arms and Heavy Weapons level 6, Tracking level 5. Armed with M-16A2s, kevlar jackets, nylon helmets, two HE and one smoke grenades. One-fourth are armed with an M203 GL (four HE and two smoke grenades). Each has three M16 magazines. Each has one level of armor on the torso and head.

The cybersoldiers show up in singles or squads of four, as appropriate. Ω

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CHALLENGE 59½

**APRIL
FOOLS
ISSUE**



By Adam Gettel

I hate Mondays. Take today, for instance: A lifetime ago, was it only a few minutes?—I stumbled like a zombie into the bathroom, intent on my morning ritual. I flipped back the toilet lid and nearly got a faceful of needles.

This...thing...jumped out of the stool and slamdanced around the bathroom like a ping-pong ball on coke. All I could do was try to avoid becoming its breakfast.

Finally, I got my little friend securely wrapped up in a towel. And now I'm ready to call the gang, the FBI and the local liquor store—but not necessarily in that order.

It's early morning and a lone player character stumbles to the bathroom. During the night something malevolent has gurgled up into the toilet, patiently floating...waiting.... It's a Bloat, and it isn't pretty.

Most encounters with Dark Minions and their ilk occur out

in the world, when the adventurers are at least somewhat prepared to face horror. Rarely are the PCs challenged when and where they are the most vulnerable, immediately after waking up and in the supposed safety of their home. Or maybe after a party or night of drinking, during a lunch hour, or in someone else's dwelling.

The beastie opposition should be tailored so that the meeting isn't overwhelmingly one-sided. (For example, instead of a Bloat, the resident of the bowl could be a leech, rat, giant cockroach, snake or baby alligator.) The player character will be in a state of undress (e.g., two pieces of underwear, cartoon-printed pajamas, or naked as the day he was born). He will start the encounter at a slightly reduced Initiative (at least two levels below his regular Initiative, with a minimum of Initiative 1). The character's regular Initiative returns as soon as the action begins, since being attacked by a small, nasty homicidal pincushion first thing in the morning is more electric than any cup of coffee.

WHAT'S BEHIND THIS DOOR?

Most bathrooms have a linen closet, hamper, mirror, shelves, sink with a cabinet below it, standard toilet bowl with the toilet's water closet behind it, bathtub with showerhead and faucets, and shower curtain or glass shower door. The toilet lid can be open, closed or broken. A vent and fan draw off the steam into the dwelling's central venting system.

The linen closet, shelves and sink cabinet generally hold an assortment of generic or gender-specific items—towels, toilet paper, soap, razors, shaving cream, scissors, rubbing alcohol, band-aids, medicines, combs, hand mirrors, cosmetics, hairspray, muscle and moisturizing creams, cleaning supplies, plungers, portable radio etc.

A power switch generally activates lights over the mirror and on the ceiling, as well as an electrical socket.

ALTERNATIVES

When the Bloat attacks, the PC will basically have three options—annihilate the little bugger, capture it or just try to get away. Do not allow the player much more real time than game time to think! This is a situation where imagination is the best guideline for player and referee alike.

Get Me Out of Here! Running away merely puts off dealing with the inevitable. The PC will have to go home sometime, and the Bloat will be waiting.

I Got It! In the ensuing fight, the character will scramble for whatever he can use to nail this critter. The referee will have to determine the effectiveness of any attempt to capture the Bloat. For example, is the towel big and thick enough to trap the little bugger?

Kill It, Kill It! The Bloat's capabilities make it a formidable

opponent in a small enclosed space, as it can bounce off of the walls like a maniacal pinball. The effectiveness of expedient weapons is a subjective decision of the referee. Will the bright blue cleaning fluid be toxic to the bloat? A fast swat might just send the portable radio head-on into the Bloat as the critter makes its leap out of the bowl, sending both beastie and electronics back into the water for a shocking resolution.

Help Me! The worst-case scenario is that the character is stuck by the Bloat and rendered helpless until somebody arrives to unpluck it. If that somebody isn't friendly, the PC could be in for a worse turn of luck.

If the PC "wins," questions will begin to brew as soon as he's had a chance to calm down. How did the critter get in the toilet? Is it somebody's warped idea of a joke? Revenge tactic? Combination of bad luck and worse plumbing? And what will the PC do with the critter now that the dust has settled?

BLOATS

Bloats are amphibious creatures about the size of a human fist, housed in a leathery black shell and covered on all sides with tough, barbed spines which are about four centimeters long. For statistics and additional information on Bloats, see page 190 of *Dark Conspiracy*.

LEECHES

To down-scale the opposition in this scenario, the referee may use a somewhat less formidable an opponent than the Bloat—a parasitic slug known as a Leech. It is unknown whether the Leech is a new alien lifeform, a genetically engineered creature, or a variation or deliberate mutation of the insectoid alien.

The Leech measures 0.3 to 0.5 meters in length and 0.15 meters in diameter. It resembles an overgrown terrarium garden snail, with slimy gray skin, two eye stalks, and three 0.3-meter-long chitinous tendrils above a toothless mouth.

The Leech is a very intelligent creature that uses human hosts to interact with society and achieve its unfathomable goals and missions. After entering the human body, it attaches itself, via its tendrils, to the host's spine, "hotwiring" itself to the host's central nervous system. In this configuration, it can access to 95% of the host's thoughts, acquired knowledge and skills.

Infestation by a Leech short-circuits the host's freewill and increases the host's necessary caloric consumption. Other symptoms of infestation are sluggish, almost jerky body movements and a less social demeanor—both signs of the creature's difficulty in relating to human society.

Humans can theoretically recover from infestation by a Leech, though no recoveries have been known to date.

Leech

Strength: 3/as host

Constitution: 6

Agility: 1/ (as host-1)

Intelligence: 8

Special: Darkling Empathy.

Education: 2/as host

Charisma: —/(as host-1)

Empathy: 4

Initiative: 4

Move: 2

Skill/Dam: 5 (as host)/1D6

Hits: 3/10 (+host)

#Appear: 1

Statistics for infesting creature are listed in parentheses. In preinfestation form, the creature attacks to enter host body. Ω

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By David Schuey

The adventure begins when the PCs notice a clipping in a national tabloid concerning the Voodoo Warriors. If any PCs are reporters, they will be assigned to investigate the story.

The area in question is North St. Louis County, near the airport and the McDonnell-Sukhoi Corporate Enclave. The Voodoo Warriors' territory is a dark,

foreboding place, littered with totems and voodoo graffiti. The PCs will have no trouble getting there, but once they arrive, they will stick out like a sore thumb.

The PCs will encounter a number of gang outposts. Referees should set the experience level of these gang members as is appropriate to the abilities of the PC party. Weapons should be clubs, knives, bows and arrows, and small pistols, at most. The gang members will act neutral toward the PCs at first, but will soon become either friendly or confrontational, depending on the PCs' skills in setting them at ease.

It requires an Average test of Charisma to earn enough of the gang members' trust and respect for them to divulge their history.

If the PCs cannot befriend the gang members, the youths will try to take the PCs' firearms and any vehicles they have. If the PCs try to stand in their way, the gang will become violent and engage in Melee Combat (Armed). When they have lost 50% of their original number, the youths will break and run. At least one gang member will escape to tell the tale to Rickee Dokunda, the leader.

If the PCs succeed at the task, the youths will have little to say about raising the dead, but they will explain the history of the gang, from its roots in Haiti, as they know it.

The Voodoo Warriors came into existence when a group of Haitian refugees migrated up from Florida to Missouri. They were only seeking a quiet place to live and were eventually overrun by a younger, more violent gang. The two melded, the younger Haitians seeing this as the only method of survival and the gang members enticed by the voodoo religion of the new recruits. Along the way, the gang changed its name from the Death Warriors to the Voodoo Warriors. Dokunda is of the first generation of the mixing of the two gangs. He ascended to power early through charisma and a mysterious connection with Baron Samedi.

AMBUSH

When Dokunda hears of the PCs' arrival, he will set up an ambush at the cemetery. He knows the PCs will go there eventually looking for him. Everyone does.

The cemetery has long been abandoned. It is full of rolling hills but has been cut in two by a now unused stretch of highway. The grass in the cemetery is dead, the trees almost so. A thick hedgerow lines the east side, a tangle of thorns and dead bushes. The entire area seems to be suffering from some kind of wilting disease.

On a high hill on the south side of the property is a ramshackle house, obviously unused since before the turn of the century. It is painted a faded, sickly green, and its doors are literally falling off their hinges.

Most of the tombstones are broken or overturned. One headstone should draw the PCs' attention. It is very ornate and is still intact. And it has been decorated by wreaths of chicken bones and human skulls. Lit

candles rest on its many levels.

Nothing will happen if the PCs just wander around the grounds. If they enter the house, the gang will try to burn it down with the investigators inside.

If the PCs come within 50 meters of the ornate headstone, 1D6x6 members of the gang will quietly rise from covered and camouflaged burrows. One-fourth of them will be armed with primitive firearms, one-fourth with blowguns (each tipped with a small coating of the microorganism that creates yellow zombies), and one-half with assorted melee weapons. Dokunda will be behind the ornate headstone and will direct fire from there through hand signals. If the battle seems to be going badly, 1D10 yellow zombies will appear from the hedgerow to the east. The PCs must check for infection by the zombies and the blowguns.

If Dokunda is killed or wounded during the battle, or if the gang members seem to be losing ground, Baron Samedi will suddenly appear in front of the headstone. He will laugh loudly and savor the anguish of his servants. He will say nothing to the PCs, but will point and laugh at them. If anyone tries to shoot him, he will use Dissolution to take half damage from the bullets and in the next phase will use Dimension Walk to escape, laughing all the while.

After their encounter with Baron Samedi, the gang members will disperse, except Dokunda, who will fight to the death.

DARK CONSPIRACY

Gang Claims to Raise Dead

ST. LOUIS—Rumor has it that a St. Louis gang can bring the dead back to life.

Rickee Dokunda, leader of the Voodoo Warriors, would neither confirm nor deny the rumor that the gang has learned the secret of raising the dead. The gang claims to worship the voodoo god of the graveyard, Baron Samedi. And Dokunda did attest that "the baron reveals many mysteries to those who serve him well."

"He appeared to us and told us that we were his chosen ones in the new age," Dokunda said. "We are honored to have been selected."

When asked to quantify how many people had been brought to life, Dokunda replied, "Numbers are not important."

Dokunda dresses with uncharacteristic style for a ganger. "We pride ourselves on our appearance," he explained. "An ancient order like ours should do no less."

One of the oldest cemeteries in the city lies in the gang's territory. Perhaps that's why Samedi has bestowed his favor on the group.



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RESOLUTION

Everyone who saw Samedi will experience dreams for the next several weeks concerning the death of a loved one. The loved one will almost invariably come to life at an opportune moment and make a grab for the PC. Some dreams will deal with deaths of friends and family in the future, always ending the same way.

Anyone infected with the yellow zombie bacteria will experience hallucinations and waking dreams, according to the effects detailed in **Dark Conspiracy**.

RICKEE DOKUNDA

Strength: 5 **Education:** 3 **Move:** */*/
Constitution: 6 **Charisma:** 8 **Skill/Dam:** */
Agility: 6 **Empathy:** 4 **Hits:** 12/33/22
Intelligence: 6 **Initiative:** 4 **# Appear:** 1

Special: Skills as per ganger NPC, but +2 to each.

Samedi appeared to Dokunda some time ago and proclaimed him a chosen disciple. Dokunda shared this news with the rest of the gang, and someone leaked it to the press. Samedi has since appeared to Dokunda on a number of occasions, giving him orders to increase his territory and meld with other gangs. Gang members who do not go along with the acquisitions simply disappear. Dokunda is now quite insane and will remain faithful to the end.

BARON SAMEDI

Strength: 8 **Education:** 5 **Move:** 3/9/16/32
Constitution: 7 **Charisma:** 8 **Skill/Dam:** 8/2D6
Agility: 5 **Empathy:** 12 **Hits:** 35/60
Intelligence: 8 **Initiative:** 6 **# Appear:** 1

Special: Has Dissolution and Dimension Walk at full Empathy value.

Baron Samedi's proto-dimension is a hideous one to behold. If any PCs should manage to dimension walk to it, they will certainly die if they cannot escape immediately.

All water in the proto-dimension is contaminated by the yellow zombie microorganism and is undrinkable. The world has the look of having been a technologically advanced civilization at one time, with skyscrapers and highways, but has obviously been in ruins for many years. From every building and alley can be heard the moaning and hideous noises of all forms of undead. Most are yellow zombies, beings who have been kidnapped from Earth and other proto-dimensions by Baron Samedi's disciples.

Samedi literally feeds off the suffering and despair of the people of this world, so he travels far and wide, initiating new cults to supply him with energy. He is cunning, but is a slave to his appetites.

His plan for the Voodoo Warriors is subtle and unreservedly evil. By controlling the Voodoo Warriors and helping them to take over other rival gangs, Samedi seeks to control the world's distribution of illegal drugs. When this goal has been reached, he will introduce a "new" drug, one which causes a tingling sensation in the extremities, hallucinations, and ultimately, waking nightmares and death. The drug is, of course, a slow-acting version of the yellow zombie microorganism. Samedi hopes to distribute the new drug to millions of people simultaneously, and he relies on humans' distrust of one another to ensure its unhindered use.

For the time being, the gang has orders to send any reluctant recruits to the proto-dimension, where they are thrown into a huge pool teeming with rotting corpses and a high concentration of the Yellow Zombie microorganism. Ω

CHALLENGE™ 61

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*Heavy
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NELSON

Out of the DEPTHS

The old house had been in my friend's family for generations. I remember her telling me all the dark stories about it and the side of her family that owned it. I always thought they were just stories. But now she and her husband are missing, and strange tidings are afoot.

One of the PCs is contacted by an old friend, Jake Calderon, who reports that a friend of his recently vanished from her home along the Maine coast. Calderon is familiar with the PCs' interest in the mysterious, and he would like their help. He is staying at a hotel on the coast, near Ellsworth, Maine. It is about an hour from Bangor, which has an international airport. At the referee's discretion, Calderon may be able to provide the PCs with some aid (air fare, etc.).

Calderon can provide the following information: His friend, Dianne Wellston, and her husband, Kevin, are missing. Dianne is a software designer, and Kevin is a successful artist. Calderon reported them missing four days ago, when he went to visit their home outside of Sandport and found it empty. The local police sent an officer to investigate. There were no signs of a forced entry or struggle, and nothing was missing from the house (Dianne's computer equipment is worth a great deal, as are Kevin's works of art). However, clues indicate that the couple did not leave voluntarily (food was found in the microwave, lights were left on, the door was unlocked, etc.).

Calderon says he probably would have left the investigation to the police, except for two incidents. First, the day after he reported his friends missing, the local

paper reported that a lobster boat had been found adrift, with no one on-board. The traps tended by the boat's owner are located off from the Wellstons' house, and the boat was found adrift nearby. The police and coast guard have no clues.

Second, Calderon says he saw something very strange, "vaguely man-shaped, but wrong-looking" in the water near the house two days after he reported the disappearance. He only saw it for a minute, then it vanished beneath the water.

LEGENDS

This part of the coast has a rather dark history. The town librarian and the curator of the local museum can provide all the information given below. Others, especially the older locals, will know bits and pieces of the legends.

Indian Legend: According to one Indian legend, a band of young hunters who went to swim in the ocean were attacked, and all but one were slain by evil spirits that rose from the sea. The survivor fled back to his tribe and told about what had happened. The brother of one of the slain hunters, who was a great warrior, led a group of warriors to the site of his brother's death. According to the legend, "The warriors did battle for three days and nights against the evil sea spirits, until they were vanquished and driven back through the hole in the ocean from which they had come." According to the legend, a group of watchers was formed to await the return of the evil sea spirits.

Abandoned Vessel: A sailing vessel was seen in 1698 adrift off the coast, near what is now Massachusetts. A group of English soldiers boarded her and found no one aboard. According to a journal kept by the officer in charge, there was no sign of a struggle on the ship. He suspected that the crewmembers had been stricken with a plague and had cast themselves into the ocean in their mad-

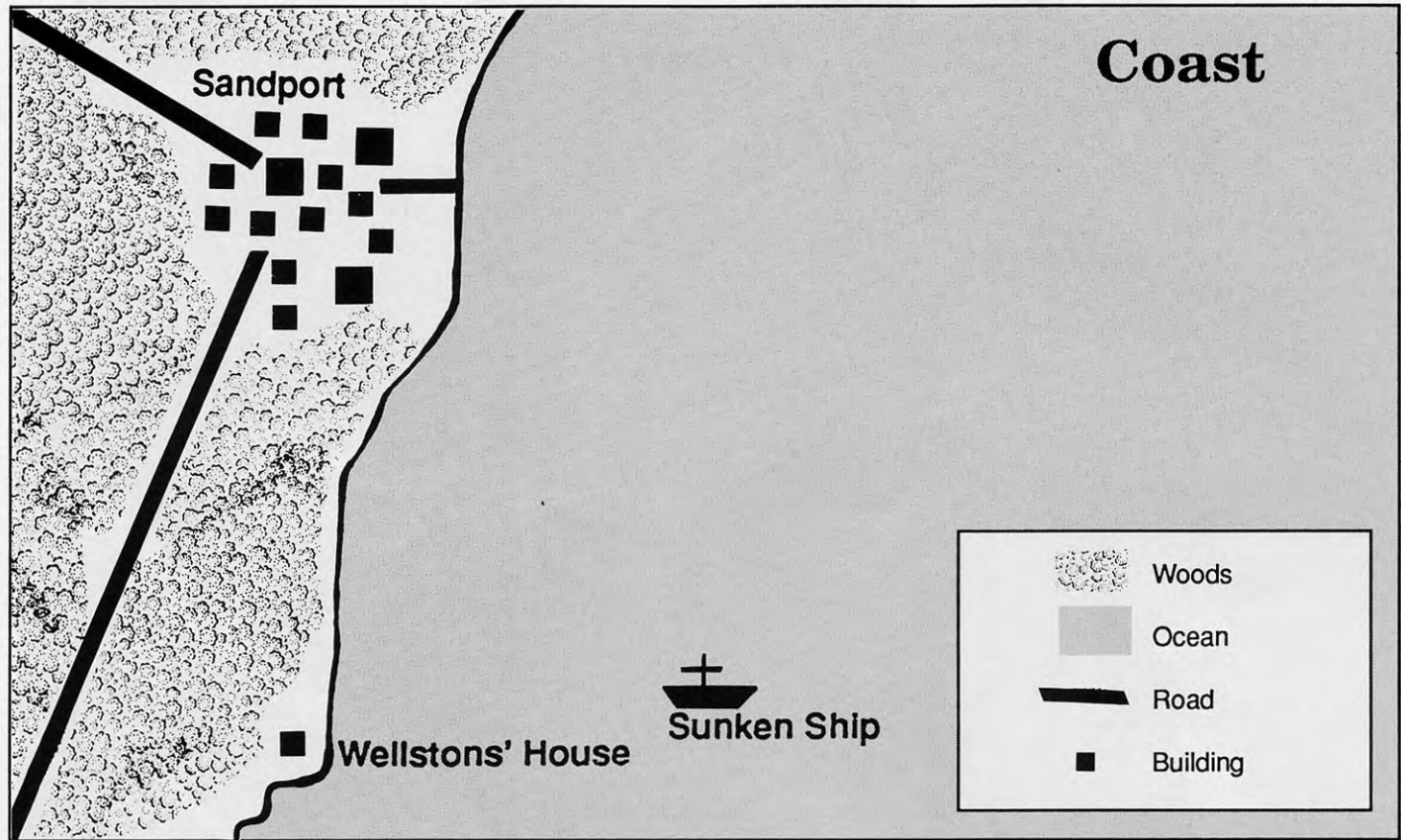
ness. The ship's log book gave no indication of what happened. The last entry noted that the ship was nearing a section of coast "where the Indians watch the sea." The captain also writes that one of the sailors saw a mermaid on the night watch.

Captain Blake: The next chapter in the dark reputation of the area opened with the construction of a house on the coast by Captain Blake in 1885. Blake had been a sea captain for years and had visited many strange places. According to the rumors of the day (taken from surviving journals and diaries), Blake came to Maine to avoid some trouble he had gotten into in Massachusetts. The more superstitious locals suspected that Blake was in league with the devil, while others thought he was involved in smuggling or piracy. Nearly everyone found Blake rather odd and disturbing. After 1885, journals begin to mention disappearances in neighboring towns, as well as strange sightings in the ocean. There are numerous references to a mysterious ship that would come in the night and leave before dawn. According to the journals, Blake died in 1891, but no account is given of how he died. If the PCs are persuasive, the librarian or curator will reveal that Blake was killed when a group from town attacked the mysterious ship when it appeared near Blake's home. The people set the ship on fire and smashed holes into its side until it sank into the depths. Blake was on-board. According to legend, Blake's dying words were, "Fools! You may kill me, but death will come to this land! Death will come from the sea!" A short while after the ship sank, a bright flash was seen from beneath the ocean. All the odd occurrences stopped after Blake's death.

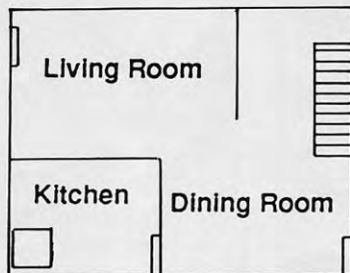
Murder/Suicide: Blake's brother, Donald, later took possession of the house. He was well regarded by the townspeople, despite their original fears. He died peacefully in 1924, and the

*By Michael C.
LaBossiere*

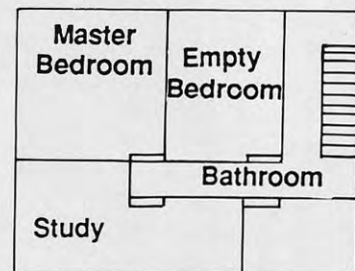




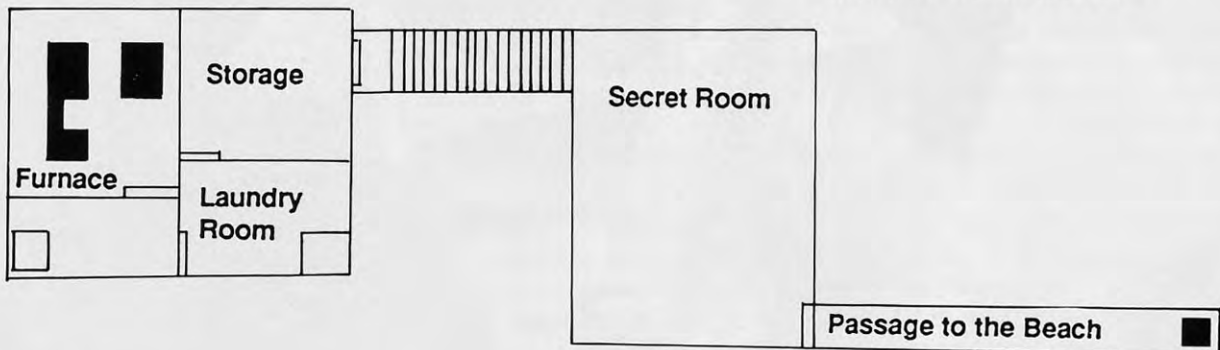
First Floor



Second Floor



Basement



house remained empty until 1930. Then it was rented out for the first time, and it was periodically inhabited by tenants until 1982, when the man renting the house hung himself in the laundry room after shooting his wife. After that, the house remained empty, and people took to calling it the "haunted house."

FACTS BEHIND THE LEGENDS

A very old dimensional gateway to a proto-dimension is located on the sea floor off the coast.

Indian Legend: The young Indian hunters were killed by a group of beings from the proto-dimension, the ampharks, who went through the gate by accident. The Indian warriors killed many of the creatures, and the rest fled into ocean and were pursued by the Indians in their canoes. The Indians saw the gateway in the ocean and watched in shock as the beings passed through the portal.

Abandoned Vessel: The ampharks later learned the operation of the portal and came through to hunt terrestrial life. A group of them encountered the vessel mentioned above and killed the crew.

Captain Blake: Captain Blake eventually encountered these creatures and persuaded them not to kill him. In return for his life and for various other "benefits," he offered them his aid. The mysterious ship carried materials and equipment the beings wanted but could not manufacture in their own dimension. Unfortunately for the beings, when the townspeople sunk the mysterious ship, it came to rest on top of the gateway and damaged it, closing off access to this dimension. The bright flash of light mentioned in the story was given off by the damaged gate.

Murder/Suicide: The incident of the man shooting his wife and hanging himself was completely unrelated to the other accounts.

Present: The inhabitants of the proto-dimension determined how to construct their own portal. They opened one near the original gateway on day the Wellstons were reported missing. Since time flows differently in their dimension, and they live longer than humans, they thought Blake might still be alive. Instead of finding Blake, they encountered the Wellstons and killed them. Then they attacked the lobster boat that was found adrift. Calderon saw one of them in the

Ampharks

Strength: 13	Education: 2	Move: 3/9/16/32
Constitution: 11	Charisma: 3	Skill/Dam: 7/2D6
Agility: 6	Empathy: 9	Hits: 30/60
Intelligence: 7	Initiative: 4	#Appear: 2D6

Special: Amphibious. Darkling Empathy, Human Empathy, Project Emotion, Project Thought and Willpower Drain. Some have the ability to dimension walk.

The ampharks ("amphibious sharks") are a race from a primarily liquid proto-dimension. They evolved from a highly empathic carnivore that used its empathic abilities to confuse and deceive its prey.

The creatures average about 2.1 meters in height, and have pale gray skin and white underbellies. Their eyes are pure black, and they have gill slits in their throats. Their hands and feet have three taloned digits, and their mouths are very large, with multiple rows of shark-like teeth. Ampharks have vestigial fins on their backs, and some are born with small (useless) tails. They are amphibious.

Ampharks derive their sustenance from both physical and mental sources. They need to consume large amounts of meat, but they also need to "feed" upon the fear and suffering of other beings.

The empathic disturbances generated by fear and suffering also afford ampharks great pleasure—the greater the fear and suffering, the greater the pleasure.

Ampharks are somewhat contradictory in their nature. On one hand, they are masters of subtle attacks, and they enjoy elaborate plans geared to generate fear. For example, they excel at capturing people from boats or buildings without leaving any signs (their empathic abilities come in very handy here).

On the other hand, ampharks are also bloodthirsty killers, and often go into killing rages and lose all reason. During such berserk phases, they attack their opponent with their claws and teeth, ignoring their weapons and carefully laid plans.

In their own dimension, tribes of ampharks are constantly at war with one another over limited resources. The few dimensional portals that exist are often the center of conflicts.

Ampharks have recently mastered the art of constructing dimensional portals. Prior to constructing their own, they used those that a vanished race developed and left in their proto-dimension. Incursions of ampharks into Earth's dimension may well account for many sea and coast mysteries and legends.

The ampharks are skilled in biology and genetic engineering. They are known to extensively employ living organisms as tools, weapons and vehicles.

Animator Slime Skeleton/ Animator Slime Zombie

The ampharks have engineered an organism that has limited telekinetic powers. When placed on a skeleton or within a corpse, the organism can animate the bones or body to do its master's bidding.

Animator slime skeletons and zombies are identical to other "normal" animators.

However, they are vulnerable to agents that harm living organisms that the other animates are immune to (like poisons).

The slime animators are generally used to generate fear and are employed in battle as cannon fodder. The slime itself is very resistant to damage from bullets and knives (being slime), but is easily killed by fire and poison. It must be kept moist.

water, but (fortunately for him) he was not noticed.

SANDPORT

The coastal map details the section of the Maine coast where the adventure takes place. The sunken ship is the mysterious vessel that the townspeople sank. It lays atop the original portal. Beside it is the new portal which was recently constructed on the ocean floor.

The town consists of mostly residential areas, but it has a general store, a sporting goods/fishing supply store and a small hotel. A small port section now serves only lobster boats.

Sandport has a population of about 1000. Many of the inhabitants commute to work in Bangor, and the rest are lobstermen. The locals are friendly, but are wary of strangers. Two of the older inhabitants (Bert and Jim) love to tell tall tales to any non-Mainers they encounter.

Sandport has three police officers, Experienced NPCs armed with M9s and Mossberg M500s. Most of the inhabitants do not own weapons and are not trained fighters. About 40% of the adult locals have hunting weapons or home defense weapons (mostly shotguns, hunting rifles and pistols). They should be treated as Novice NPCs in combat situations. Six locals have military experience and count as Experienced NPCs. Two of these have AR-15s; two have hunting rifles; one has a shotgun; and the other has a S&W Model 29/16.5.

HAUNTED HOUSE

The Wellstons inherited the house, which has been in their family for generations. Skeptical of the rumors of ghosts and goblins, they decided to make the house their home. The building is a well-built, New England coastal-style house. But something about it looks a bit spooky even during the day.

The house can be reached by a very rough, single-lane road that runs from the main road and through the woods. The Wellstons' Range Rover II is parked beside the house (the gas tank is 80% full). Police tape is strung across the doors, and signs indicate that the area is under police investigation. The police are not guarding the place, however, so it would be easy for the PCs to examine it.

Living Room: The living room con-

tains expensive, comfortable furniture. Several of Kevin's paintings, worth \$3000 to \$5000, hang on the walls. They are primarily of nature scenes, but one depicts a horror straight from the pages of H. P. Lovecraft.

Dining Room: The dining room contains a solid oak table, a china cabinet and so forth.

Kitchen: The kitchen is equipped with the latest in cooking devices. There is food in the microwave, and two opened sodas are on the counter.

Master Bedroom: This is an expensively decorated room, with nice dressers, etc. A black powder pistol (an original) is hung on the wall.

Study: This room contains several bookcases, with books on art, Eastern mysticism, computer software design and so forth. A custom-made computer (40 MB RAM, 800 MB hard drive), with a full range of peripherals (printer, modem, etc.) is equipped with a CompuAID (see **Darktek Sourcebook**, page 29). The hard drive contains numerous newly written applications which would be worth quite a bit to the right buyer.

Basement Storage: This room contains various boxes and trunks. The room smells of damp sea air, but the proximity to the ocean makes this not unexpected. A Difficult skill check using Observation will reveal a mark on the floor. If the mark is examined, it will be found to be ocean salt, as if salt water had dried on the spot. Once the mark is found, and Easy check using Observation will reveal a trail of salt to the wall, where the door to the secret room is located. If the trail is followed to the door, finding the unlocking mechanism will be an Easy task using Observation.

Secret Room: The stairs leading to the secret room are solid oak planks, but they have become slimy in the damp air. The smell of the sea is very strong on the staircase, but it is underlain by a foul odor. The secret room is dimly lit with odd seaweed-like plants growing on the ceiling. (An examination by a botanist will reveal that they are no known species of plant.) The greenish glow of the plants reveals a gruesome site—human bones and tattered clothes are strewn about the floor, and blood is everywhere.

A torn-up wallet reveals the identity of one of the "bodies" as Kevin. The other victim is obviously his wife. If a PC examines the remains, sharp teeth marks on the bone

will be evident. If a doctor or forensics expert makes an examination, he will say some kind of animal chewed on the bones. If the examiner knows anything about shark bites, he will say it looks a lot like a shark bite, but a very odd one.

Passage to the Beach: The passage slopes down and is filled with water at the far end. The interior is slimy, and small fish and crabs infest it. The far end has a trap door to the beach. It is disguised with a layer of barnacle-covered stone and seaweed.

EVENTS

Events on days 1-3 occur prior to PC involvement. The rest of the events will occur in the order presented, unless the PCs intervene. Because the PCs may respond to events in a wide variety of ways, details are left to the referee.

Day	Event
1	Wellstons reported missing.
2	Lobster boat found adrift.
3	Calderon sees something in the ocean.
4	Second lobster boat found adrift. No sign of the crew. (Attacked by three ampharks, one in a shell suit—see page 37.)
5	Sightseeing boat found adrift by coast guard after failing to return during the day. No sign of the crew or passengers (about 40 people). (Attacked by 10 ampharks, two in shell suits.)
6	Coast guard vessel found adrift by lobstermen, who tow it to Sandport. No sign of the crew. (Attacked by six Ampharks, one in a shell suit.)
7	Three shredded bodies found in a home in Sandport.*
8	Four shredded bodies found in a home in Sandport.*
9	Ten mysterious killings occur in homes in Sandport.*
10	The sunken vessel rises from the depths and docks at Sandport. Skeletons and monsters spill from the vessel, killing everyone in town.

*The inland raiding group initially consists of three ampharks. The number will increase if resistance is encountered.

DEAD FROM THE SEA

Initial attacks reveal to the ampharks that beings from other proto-dimensions

Origins/GenCon Preview Issue!

CHALLENGE 62

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092

DARK CONSPIRACY



Curiosity is one of our species' best developed traits. It is likely that curiosity led our ancestors out of the warm seas and later from the safety of the trees. Our curiosity is still with us, and it may well lead us to great things. Of course, it is said that curiosity killed the cat. Now that I have seen what curiosity can lead to, I think that cat got off easy.

The human thirst for knowledge. Who knows what gleaming heights it may lead us to—or what dark abyss.

Dr. Carl Sands, SRI Director (early 21st century)

This adventure is set in the environs of the Special Research Institute (SRI), a scientific institute assigned to study and devise counters to the Dark Minions. The PCs may be in or near Columbus, Ohio, when the trouble begins, may be brought to Columbus by a contact, or may hear a strange report on the news and decide to investigate. Or the PCs may be known by reputation and contacted by SRI. If the PCs have government, law enforcement, scientific or academic contacts connected to SRI, they may be invited to Columbus to provide SRI with data on their experiences with paranormal activities. Each invited person will receive a round-trip plane ticket, plus a room at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Columbus.

While a great deal of Ohio is no longer under control by the forces of law and order, Columbus is still fairly stable. The presence of the Ohio State University (OSU) and such high-tech institutes as Batelle Memorial have ensured the survival of Columbus as a viable entity. Some areas, especially those between Ohio State and downtown, are fairly bad, but not too much worse than in the 1990s.

Columbus Airport is still in operation. Ohio State is in good shape but is considerably smaller than in the 1990s. If the PCs need to purchase equipment, they can find several army surplus stores, martial art supply stores and sporting good stores in the area. If they have the money and connections, they may have access to Ohio State's computer network or science facilities. Of course, Columbus is still the fast food and beer capital of the Midwest, so the PCs will have no trouble in that area.

By Michael C. LaBossiere

VAMPIRES OF COLUMBUS

The first hint of anything out of the ordinary is a story in the local newspaper, which reports that the bodies of two OSU students were found in a drain-pipe by the OSU baseball field. The tiny, old car that belonged to one of the young men was found abandoned. Friends of the youths report that they were last seen leaving a local bar with two young women.

If the PCs investigate, friends of the young men will reveal that they met two women in the bar and left with them. One of the friends will say that the men looked dazed, almost hypnotized, "but that was probably just from the beer." If the PCs examine the bodies or get access to the reports, they will learn that the bodies have been drained of blood.

What has happened is that several bloodkin vampires have made Columbus their hunting ground. There will be several more feedings over the next few weeks, with similar stories in each case. (See page 214 of *Dark Conspiracy* for details on bloodkin vampires.)

BLOODKIN INCIDENT

While the PCs are at SRI, a group of college students are taking a tour of the institute. As the students pass through the security check, one of them is revealed to be a Dark Minion by the security scanner. The entity is a bloodkin vampire masquerading as a sorority girl.

The bloodkin vampire actually ended up at SRI by accident, ignorant of SRI's true purpose. It now realizes that SRI poses a threat and uses its empathic abilities to warn its companions, who will contact a group of Dark Minions.

The bloodkin does its best to escape, using the students as cover (especially those easily influenced by its feigned appearance). But the guards and robots (and PCs, if they choose to become involved) are able to kill it before it can get away.

The incident may receive some news coverage. However, SRI has deals with many news services to keep things quiet.

UFO

A local tabloid reports that a flying saucer landed in Tuttle Park, near the OSU campus. If the



PCs investigate, they will find several people who will admit to seeing strange lights in the area. If they use a Geiger counter at the reported landing site, the PCs will find that the radiation levels are higher than normal. They will also find the crisped and highly radioactive remains of several squirrels stuck to the trees. And they may discover two sets of abnormally deep bootprints leading out of the park. The prints seem to start out of nowhere, as if the walkers came from the sky. In fact, a UFO did land in the park, and it dropped off two cyborgs to aid the bloodkin vampires.

CYBORG ATTACK I

One alien cyborg will recon SRI, breaking in at night and examining the facilities. It manages to enter the building, and it kills two guards and a technician. Eventually, it ends up in the biological research room, where Dr. Helen Harnst kills it. The stress of the alien cyborg attack triggers a temporary transformation (see Dr. Helen Harnst, page 80), and Harnst destroys the surprised being. She then blacks out and honestly cannot remember what happened. The responding guards find Harnst unconscious on the floor, with the remains of the trashed cyborg scattered around her.

CYBORG ATTACK II

The second alien cyborg targets the PCs for its attack. It needs more information, but is afraid to enter SRI, so it plans to capture personnel and interrogate them. The cyborg will observe the PCs for a few days and wait for the ideal time to strike. It is not averse to killing any bystanders, but will try to minimize its "visibility." Exactly what happens is left to the PCs and referee, but killing the adventurers off would certainly cut the adventure short.

Alien Cyborgs

Strength: 10	Education: 4	Move: 3/10/18/35
Constitution: 7	Charisma: 2	Skill/Dam: 7/7
Agility: 8	Empathy: 1	Hits: 25/50
Intelligence: 4	Initiative: 6	#Appear: 1

Special: Internal armor value of 1.

Equipment: Berreta M92S with a spare clip, MP-7 with two spare clips.

DEATH OF THE VAMPIRES

The local newscast reports an incidence of violence at a local bar. According to the report, a woman attempted to drag two sorority girls from a bar. When three men tried to interfere, she apparently killed two of them and severely wounded the third, using a razor or extremely sharp knife. The woman then proceeded to drag the two girls out of the bar. They were not seen again.

If the PCs investigate, they may be able to find out the following: The autopsies of the bodies reveal that they were cut by razor-sharp organic material, similar in composition to human nails, but with some very odd chemicals and structural anomalies. The two men apparently died of very rapid blood loss, "almost as if it had been pumped out of them."

If the PCs talk to the person who has been hospitalized, they can see that he has thin, but deep, cuts on his arms and throat. He describes what happened: "I was at the bar, when this older lady grabbed the two chicks me and my buddies were talking to. We went to stop her, but she grabbed Dave's throat, and he went pale and collapsed. Bill went down next, and she got hold of me. Her grip was like being burned and getting a bunch of really deep paper cuts at once. It was awful, dude."

What really happened is that the transformed Dr. Harnst went hunting the bloodkin vampires. She found them and killed them, and took out a few innocent bystanders in the process. She didn't intend to kill the others, but could not help herself.

KILLINGS

Harnst's new biology requires her to consume human blood to stay alive. At first, she lives off of SRI's medical blood supply. Then she is forced to go out on the hunt. Her kills make the news. In each case, the victim is slashed and drained of blood. Each killing is more brutal and savage than the last. SRI asks the PCs to investigate the killings. It is up to the referee what the PCs learn. Harnst sets up a false trail leading out of the state and recommends that the PCs follow it. But while the PCs are on a wild goose chase, she is taking over SRI.

QUEEN

Eventually, Harnst's empathic powers enable her to take control of SRI. She has the robots disabled



(since they would attack), and she uses the place as her base. The willpower-drained personnel follow her orders and even kill (or die) for her.

It is up to the PCs to stop Dr. Harnst. She does her best to keep the PCs from guessing what has happened, but she becomes increasingly sloppy as her hunger begins to take her over completely.

FINISH

If the PCs defeat Dr. Harnst and retake SRI, Nightwatch (a local, covert Dark Minion-hunting group) is heavily in their debt, and they can expect a great deal of support from the group. If the PCs fail, Harnst will plague Columbus for months, until a Nightwatch team takes her out.

ENVIRONS

SRI is located northwest of the Ohio State campus. The area once contained some poultry science buildings and empty fields. Also in the vicinity are residential and commercial buildings, and a park-like area containing an artificial lake.

Residential Areas: These areas consist of apartment buildings and private homes for people associated with SRI or the university.

Commercial Areas: The commercial areas consist of small stores (drug stores, bookstores, etc). There are also several support industries for SRI (mostly small- to mid-sized manufacturers).

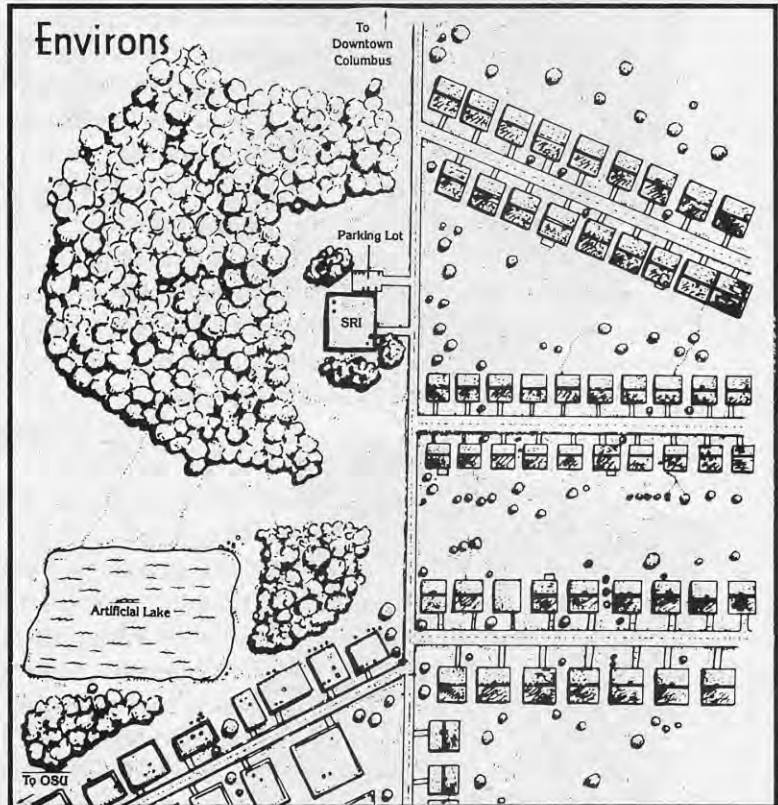
Artificial Lake: The lake is used as a reservoir as the rivers in the area are unsafe.

SPECIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

SRI has been in operation for three years. It was constructed after a private corporation purchased the land (which was very inexpensive due to the damage caused by student riots and the financial difficulty of OSU).

Publicly, SRI is devoted to high-tech research in the areas of space sciences, weapons technology and exotic biological research. More specifically (and secretly), SRI is dedicated to researching the Dark Minions and their technology, and in developing weapons and equipment to be used against them. SRI is closely connected with Nightwatch.

The SRI building is a brick and granite structure which would not look out of place on a college



campus. The institute's exterior door requires an ID check. Interior doors require an ID check and code. Some areas have more stringent security, as detailed below.

A total of 40 administrators, technicians and scientists work for SRI. They are highly skilled in their area of expertise, but are considered Novices in combat. Six security guards are on duty at any time. Four are Veteran NPCs, and two are Elite. They are armed with G-11s and M9s, and they wear Kevlar vests.

Two Kraus Maffei-Deere GB-2000s patrol the area. They are programmed to recognize and attack certain known Dark Minion races. A RamTech Roboguard-III, available for special situations, is also programmed to recognize and attack Dark Minions. The robots are also programmed to deal with more conventional intruders. Linked to the institute's CPU and regularly monitored, they can be controlled from the institute (access codes and ID checks required, of course). They have been programmed to warn unarmed humans before engaging them, but will attack Dark Minions instantly.



Ground Floor

Lobby/Security: The tastefully decorated lobby includes a security desk with built-in monitors, door controls and ID checker/maker. All the equipment is computer-controlled and requires ID checks and access codes. Thermal and sound-echo sensors can tell humans from nonhumans. The detection of a nonhuman sounds alarms and puts the institute on full alert (Roboguards and human guards respond).

Labs: Each lab has a security door (ID card and a thumbprint scanner). The interior of each lab is filled with high-tech equipment. The commercial work of the institute is done in these rooms.

Offices: Each office contains a desk, terminal and so forth. The scientists, administrators and techs who are in the commercial section have their offices here.

Computer: The computer is a highly advanced model and is linked to various terminals in the building. The room has a security door which requires an ID card, code and a thumbprint scan.

Power Plant: This room contains SRI's backup power plant. The door requires an ID card and code.

Storage: The outer doors require an ID card, code and thumbprint scan. The large lift plate is used to transport large or heavy items to the second floor.

Second Floor

The second floor is where the high-security work is done (including Nightwatch). The elevators to this floor require IDs and codes to operate.

Biological Research (BR): Work done on biological or quasi-biological (e.g., nanotechnology) material is conducted in this environmentally controlled laboratory. The room is airtight and has a carefully controlled atmosphere. Stored in a special freezer unit (which requires ID card, code and thumbprint to open) are several samples from Dark Minions and other odd creatures.

Airlock: The airlock is used to preserve the integrity of the BR room. It requires an ID card, code and thumbprint to operate. A safety feature prevents both doors from being open at once.

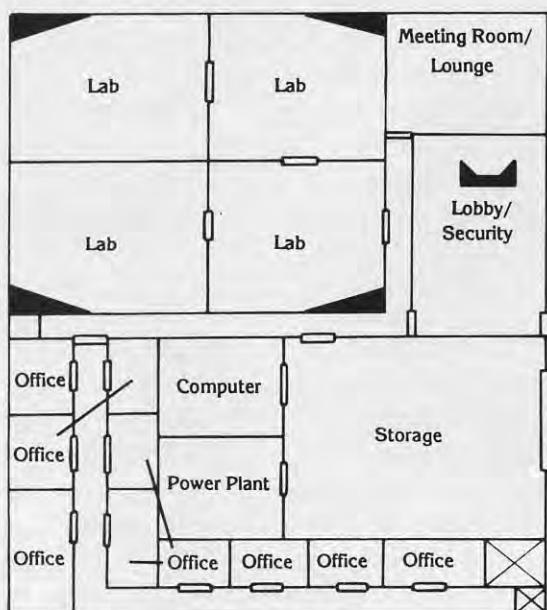
Labs: These are similar to the labs on the first floor, except the equipment is even more advanced. One lab is used for Dark Minion research and contains several pieces of DarkTek (in security containers requiring a special electronic key and a code).

Offices: These are the offices for the scientists, techs and administrators who work on this floor. They are similar to the offices on the first floor.

Special Storage: Anything needing special storage conditions is kept in a compartment here.

Production/Heavy Equipment: This room contains the equipment needed to fabricate prototypes, and special tools and equipment.

SRI Ground Floor



DR. HELEN HARNST

Strength: 3 Constitution: 4 Agility: 4
Intelligence: 8 Education: 9 Charisma: 3
Empathy: 2 Initiative: 1 # Appear: 1

Skills: Vehicle Use (Wheeled) 2, Willpower 4, Biology 7, Chemistry 7, Medical 6, Computer Operation 2, Instruction 2.

Dr. Harnst is obsessed with her hatred of the Dark Minions. Her best friend was killed by Dark Minions several years ago, and she swore to avenge his death. She came across a DarkTek device that resembled human nanotechnology experiments in many ways, and with it she has been working on a virus to retaylor her body to more effectively fight the Dark Minions. Cells from the recently killed bloodkin vampire provided her with the breakthrough she needed. Unfortunately, her experiment has gone



horribly awry, and she is being transformed into something inimical to humans and Dark Minions.

Dr. Harnst keeps a log of her activities. She writes of having an inspiration regarding the DarkTek device after a particularly vivid nightmare. The next part of the log details her attempts to develop a viral reconstructor to alter the human body. The log ends with descriptions of increasingly vivid nightmares, followed by new insights.

The device Dr. Harnst was working with is actually an intelligent organism from a Dark dimension. Its function is to convert life forms of other dimensions into forms suitable for its masters' uses. It sent Harnst the nightmares that provided her inspiration. Once it had the bloodkin cells (similar to those of the creatures of its dimension) it enabled Harnst to produce the viral tailors, which worked far faster and were far more radical than she expected. Her transformation is in four stages:

Stage I

Strength: 5 Constitution: 6 Agility: 6
Intelligence: 8 Education: 9 Charisma: 5
Empathy: 4 Initiative: 2 # Appear: 1

Skills: Vehicle Use (Wheeled) 2, Willpower 4, Biology 7, Chemistry 7, Medical 6, Computer Operation 2, Instruction 2, Melee Combat 2.

Harnst reaches this stage a week after her analysis of the bloodkin vampire. She is increasingly aggressive but still in control. Under stress, there is a 60% chance that she will shift to stage two and then black out, with no memory of the shift.

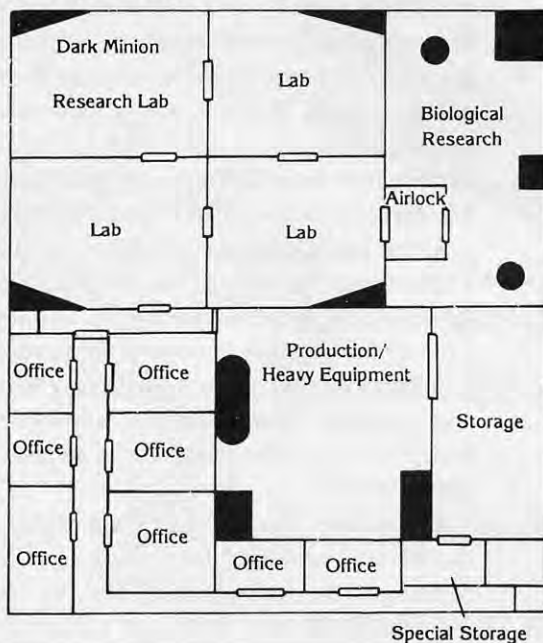
Stage II

Strength: 9 Constitution: 8 Agility: 7
Intelligence: 7 Education: 7 Charisma: 7
Empathy: 6 Initiative: 2 # Appear: 1

Skills: Vehicle Use (Wheeled) 2, Willpower 4, Biology 7, Chemistry 7, Medical 6, Computer Operation 2, Instruction 2, Melee Combat 4, Human Empathy 1, Project Emotion 1, Project Thought 1, Willpower Drain 1.

Harnst reaches the second stage a week after the first. She is very violent and in danger of losing control. She is unstable since the viruses are restructuring her brain. Her hands have altered enough to be treated as knives in combat.

SRI Second Floor



Stage III

Strength: 11 Constitution: 11 Agility: 8
Intelligence: 7 Education: 7 Charisma: 8
Empathy: 7 Initiative: 3 # Appear: 1

Skills: Vehicle Use (Wheeled) 2, Willpower 4, Biology 7, Chemistry 7, Medical 6, Computer Operation 2, Instruction 2, Melee Combat 5, Human Empathy 3, Project Emotion 3, Project Thought 3, Willpower Drain 3.

Harnst enters this stage a week after the second. She is almost completely inhuman. It is at this stage that she kills the two bloodkin vampires. Harnst now drains blood through her hands, via the modified structures in her palms and fingers. She heals like a bloodkin vampire.

Stage IV

Strength: 11 Constitution: 11 Agility: 8
Intelligence: 7 Education: 7 Charisma: 10
Empathy: 9 Initiative: 3 # Appear: 1

Skills: Vehicle Use (Wheeled) 2, Willpower 4, Biology 7, Chemistry 7, Medical 6, Computer Operation 2, Instruction 2, Melee Combat 6, Human Empathy 6, Project Emotion 6, Project Thought 6, Willpower Drain 6.

Harnst is completely inhuman. Her only thoughts are to control as many people as possible and to feed. Ω

Origins/GenCon Issue

CHALLENGE 63

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming US \$3.50

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Dark Angel of the Night

Robert James Christensen

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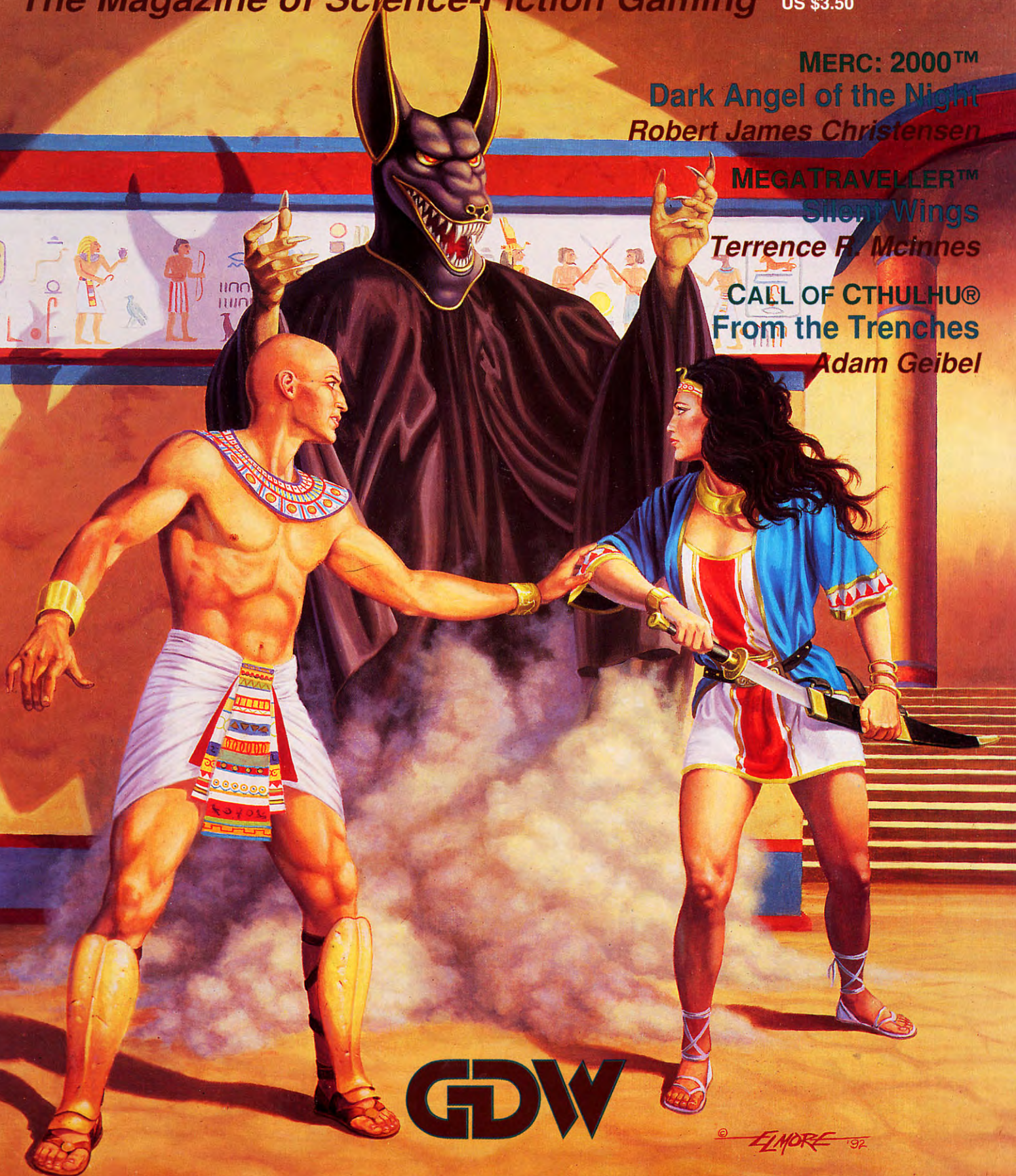
Silent Wings

Terrence R. McInnes

CALL OF CTHULHU®

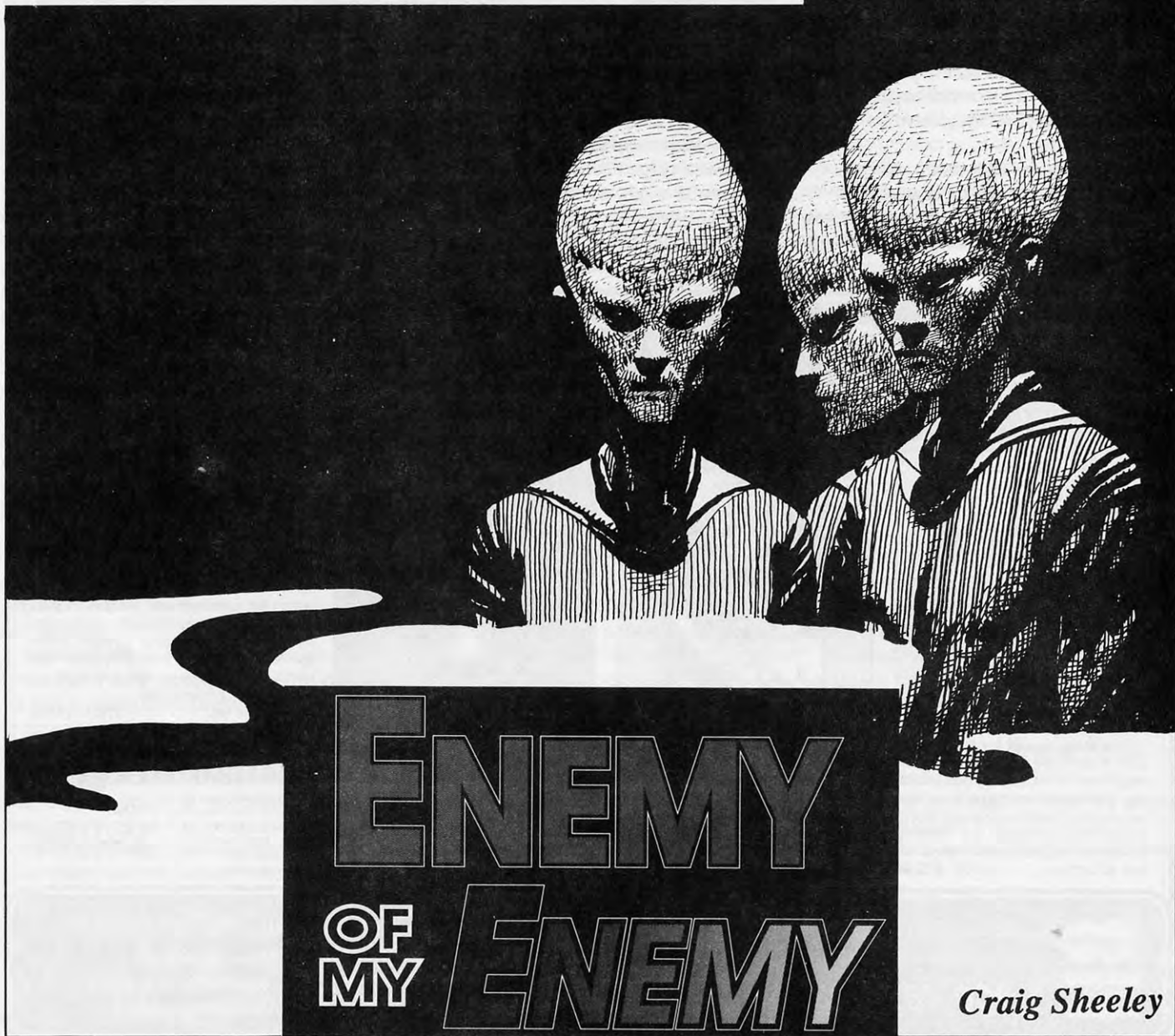
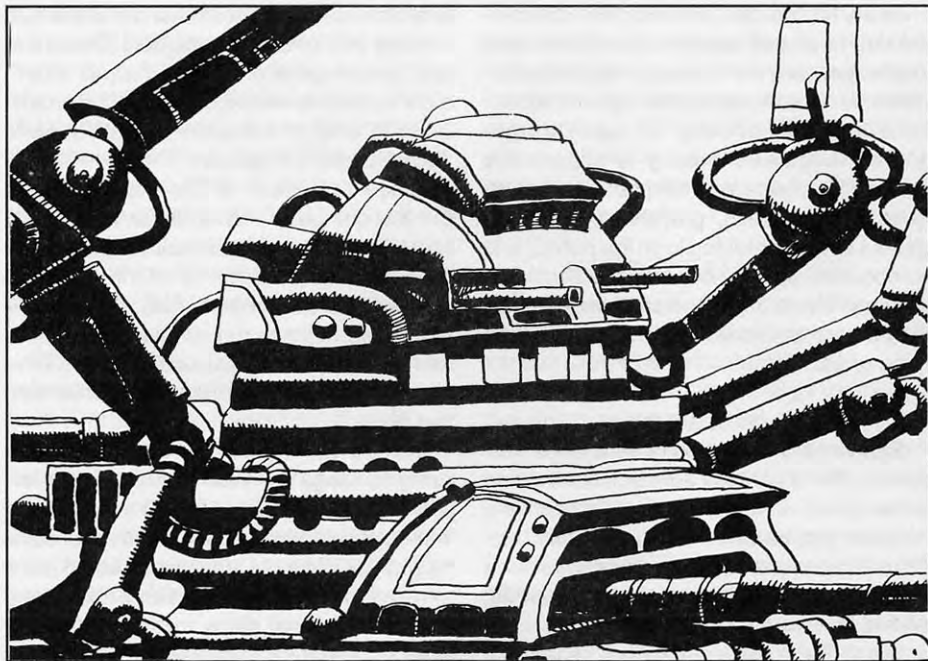
From the Trenches

Adam Geibel



GDW

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Craig Sheeley



local farmer reports a flying saucer passing overhead a few nights ago. As he stood watching, red bolts, like big Roman candles, suddenly shot up from the ground beneath it. The saucer then flew off to the southeast.

If the PCs have government or law enforcement contacts, they may be "leaked" inside information about the sighting. If they work for the government (agents, astronauts, military reservists and fed/state/local law enforcement careers), they may be contacted directly by government authorities. Or they might even be driving by during the night and see the show for themselves.

BATTLEFIELD

The site is about 14 kilometers from the outskirts of the city, in the middle of some wooded rural terrain. The land is full of hills and rocks, and has reverted to its natural wooded tangle. The adventurers will need an off-road vehicle like a Hummer, pickup truck, Range Rover or off-road cycle to get through, and a brush-cutter on the front of the vehicle would be nice. It takes the adventurers an hour and a half to plow through the 2 kilometers of underbrush to reach the site.

The battlefield is just that. It was once a grove of trees. But now the trees have been cleared out in a 60-meter radius—sheared through at ground level and stacked neatly to one side. Whatever cut the trunks didn't leave any marks—the cut ends are completely smooth, almost polished. The clearing is marred by ugly craters, ranging in size from one to several feet across and up a foot deep. The craters appear to have heat-fused earth. They are angled away from the center of the clearing. Unidentifiable shards of scorched metal surround the larger craters.

The place smells. Bad. The odor of cooked meat—rancid cooked meat—fills the still air, as well as the sting of ozone and the stink of hot metal. Empaths can almost taste a lingering taint of fear and shock. Corpses—pieces of corpses, anyway—are scattered around each crater. The body parts come from dead humanoids. Not humans—these creatures are more slender, with pale skin, and three fingers and a thumb on each hand. They were wearing pale blue clothing of some unidentifiable fabric. All the limbs are scorched at the free ends.

The center of the clearing boasts two interesting features: a big crater 10 meters in diameter, located about 15 meters northeast of the center point, and a 10-meter cube of silver metal, studded with crystals, at the exact center. The cube is still and cold. It weighs about 4000 kilograms (it's largely hollow) and seems to have no entrances, seams, controls, decorations or

even patterns among the crystals. The crystals range in size from thumbnail to platter and appear to be integral parts of the metal—there are no seams between metal and crystal. No tool the PCs have will dent the metal or score the crystals. The big crater is not surrounded by body parts or metal shards; there is no lip of fused soil surrounding it like the others. It's like a hole in the ground—a perfectly round hold in the ground. And there's something at the bottom of the hole. It looks like a cross between a robot, a ground car, and a kid's toy tank. There are big arms with six-fingered gripping hands, a few arms tipped with sharp crab-claws, blackened weapons nozzles projecting from a pylon-mounted "head" turret, all arranged on a sloped-metal hull/body sitting atop the melted remnants of a caterpillar track system. The arms are frozen in place, and the whole bizarre (and faintly menacing) thing is motionless.

MACHINE LANGUAGE

Just when the adventurers are convinced that the machine is dead and harmless, it speaks! "Do you intend to destroy me?" It waits for an answer. "Yes," is an incorrect answer. The machine also interprets weapons pointed at it as a hostile act, and hostiles are to be destroyed. If the PCs offend it, the machine aims its weapons at them with blinding speed. If the PCs make no threats, the machine asks, "Are you allies of the Ziv?" If the adventurers ask who or what the Ziv are, the machine projects a hologram of a humanoid ET and identifies it as a Ziv.

If the adventurers answer that they are not allies of the Ziv, the machine says, "I am a Mark III LFDU. The Ziv are my enemy. I have been sent to destroy their base here." It extrudes several gadget-tipped arms. "I can detect their base. It is not far away. I require your assistance to restore myself to operational status. At present, my motive capability has been destroyed. I require replacement parts and raw materials, as well as transport to a place of temporary safety where I can effect the needed repairs. I await your assistance."

The adventurers now have several options:

They can try to destroy the Mark III (which degenerates into a firefight). They really don't stand much chance against this armored killing machine.

They can try to pump it for more information. It answers a few quick questions, then states that information transfer would better be accomplished in an area of safety. (See Input-Output, below.)

They can run away (leaving the referee high and dry on how to get them back into the adventure) and perhaps report the thing to the authorities. (See Government Involvement, below.)

Or they can try to assist it directly. (See C⁴, Ltd., below.)

INPUT-OUTPUT

If the adventurers ask Mark III some pointed questions, here are some of the answers it gives.

Where did you come from? Another world, apparently in a different space-time continuum.

What is your world like? Not like this one. Other details are irrelevant to the mission.

What is your mission? To find and destroy the Ziv base detected during the space-time transfer.

How did you get here? The Ziv have a space-time transfer device that enables them to transfer matter and energy between worlds. (The device is the large metal cube in the middle of the clearing. Activating the cube is possible, but Mark III believes that activation will only restore the door to its own world. It does not know how to set the cube otherwise.)

Who or what are you? I am a Mark III LFDU. (The Mark III does not explain that LFDU stands for lifeform destruction unit.)

Are you going to kill us? No. That is not part of the mission programming. The purpose of the mission is to destroy the Ziv and their base, then return to origin point to reinforce the battle there.

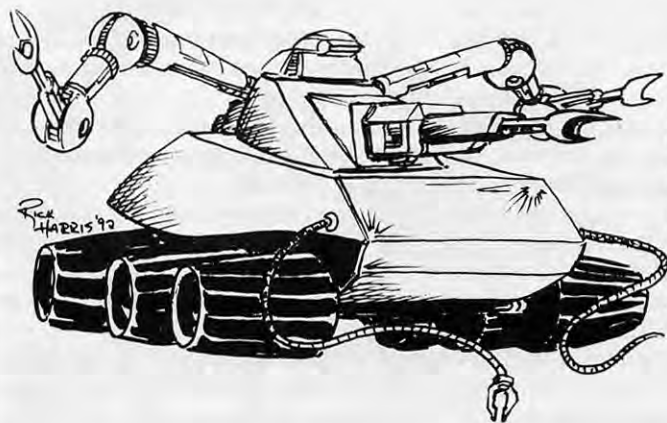
Who or what are you battling on your world? That information is irrelevant to this mission.

Mark III has no intention of revealing anything useful about itself or its world to these living creatures. In return, it desires books (electronic if at all possible) about the social, political and military situations of Earth. If the adventurers are actually trusting enough to provide it with such data, they deserve to have Mark III return someday to their dimension—with some of its bigger cousins.

C⁴, LTD.

If the adventurers want to assist the Mark III on their own, they have to find the materials it needs and find a way to move it. The Mark III can repair its minor injuries itself, if provided with metal and silicon. Restoring its minor systems to full function requires about an hour. Replacing its motive system takes longer. It needs something like a truck chassis and drive train, and specifically requests a caterpillar-tread drive train, something only found on military vehicles and heavy construction vehicles. The cybertank weighs about 2500 kilograms and would take a tank-transporter, a flatbed equipment mover or some other heavy-duty load lifter to transport it. Just moving it requires a winch that can drag about three metric tons. Transporting it takes a JumpAbout VTOL, a heavy helicopter or a ground vehicle on

Mark III (Vehicular Robot)



The Mark III is the size of a car and is treated as a vehicle in combat. When the "crew" servos or sensors ("sights") are destroyed, the Mark III cannot shoot. When the engine is destroyed, it cannot engage in any activity, but it can be repaired. When the brain is destroyed, the Mark III is dead and beyond repair. The Mark III has several energy beams and can use weapons it has picked up. It can use as many weapons simultaneously as it has "crew" servos, at different targets. Because the Mark III is considered a vehicular robot, it cannot be engaged in melee combat; it *can*, however, conduct melee attacks versus living creatures and nonvehicular robots.

Cruise Speed: 120/70
Com Move: 30/25
Fuel Cap: NA
Fuel Cons: NA

Skills: Heavy Weapons 6,
Melee Combat (Unarmed) 8,
Observation 3, Small Arms
(Rifle) 10, Unarmed Combat
Damage 1D6+1
Wt: 1.5 tons
Crew: 0 (Robot Initiative: 5)
Night Vision: Radar, thermal
imaging

Damage Record

"Crew" Servos: ☐ ☐ ☐
Sensors (Sight/Vision): ☐ ☐
Main Energy Gun: ☐ ☐
Secondary Energy Gun 1: ☐
Secondary Energy Gun 2: ☐
Traverse: ☐
Engine: ☐
Brain (Hit on "Ammo" Hits): ☐
Suspension: Minor damage ☐ Immobilized ☐

Weapon Data

Weapon	Round	Rng	Damage	Pen
Main gun	—	200	20	10/5/1/0
Secondary gun	—	30	10	2/1/0

scale with the Orca 2.5-ton truck or larger.

Where are the adventurers going to find all this heavy stuff? The most logical place to turn would be to a construction company, where heavy equipment would be concentrated and more easily available than stealing it from the military (always a chancy operation).

However, the player characters know of another place where heavy equipment is in use in the city where the campaign is based. The Cafer Concrete Construction Company, Ltd. (C⁴), one of the largest construction conglomerates in the US, is busy with one of its massive "urban renewal" jobs, destroying immense amounts of inner-city slum and replacing the buildings with cheap, low-rent high-rises intended for Mikes and the more economically stable poor. "Homes for the homeless" is C⁴'s motto. No matter whose home is bulldozed in the process. Once hired by a city, C⁴ regards "imminent domain" as an ongoing process; only Dreamland is safe from its rapacious advance.

In reality, C⁴ is one of the more clever insectoid ET plots. It is entirely under insectoid ET control, and its purpose is to build breeding pens for human cattle. The low-rent high-rises are connected to insectoid ET nests, and the ETs are sure that no one will miss the nobodies who take up residence. But that's material for other adventures.

At present, C⁴ presents the most logical

target for the adventurers' need for heavy equipment. C⁴ uses platoons of earth-movers, bulldozers, wrecking balls, trucks, etc. These vehicles are kept in a central vehicle park at the center of the devastation that used to be poor but thriving neighborhoods, protected from vandals and thieves by a four-meter-high, electrified mesh fence tipped with barbed wire (5D6 damage to entire body from touching it; armor does not defend), patrolled by armored guards and monitored by motion sensors and low-light cameras.

These sensors are monitored by computer; the machine alerts guards to the presence of unauthorized movements larger than a dog.

In game terms, the computer-operated detection net has an effective Observation skill of 14.

The guards are Veteran NPCs; they wear RamTech close assault armor and carry M16A2 rifles with underslung M203 grenade launchers (beanbag and teargas loads only). They patrol in armored electric golf carts (treat as Zil Tovarisch for damage and armor) to improve their mobility. These guards consider themselves lucky to have a job that is as steady and pays as well as this one, and they are fairly loyal. They know that the cost of vandalism and theft comes out of their paychecks; they also know that the company has no problems with them using their M16s quite freely.

If the guards run into something they can't handle, they call for reinforcements. There are about 40 guards on duty each night. If a platoon of assault troops can't handle a problem, they have a last (and most expensive) resort—activating the RamTech Roboguard IV kept near the guard house. Anything the Roboguard can't handle will attract attack helicopters with Hellfire missiles.

If the adventurers can sneak past the vehicle park's defenses, it's no real problem finding a transporter rig with a small bulldozer already loaded onto it (this fits both their requirements: something to transport Mark III and a replacement tracked motive system).

Hot-wiring the tractor is an Easy: Electronics job. Driving it requires Vehicle Use (Heavy Vehicle) skill, although it can be crudely piloted without the skill. From there it's just a matter of outdistancing the guards, who are frantic at the thought of about \$250,000 rolling out of the vehicle park and their pockets.

Once provided with the motive system, the Mark III can repair itself and be restored to full function in 12 hours.

GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT

If the adventurers wish to report the Mark III to the authorities, they can go through government or military contacts, or the police. Going through contacts is a much safer

process, as it means telling people you already know and more-or-less trust (and vice versa). Going to the police gets the adventurers a swift visit (within 12 hours) from grim-faced men wearing mirror-shades and three-piece black suits, who take the adventurers "downtown" and interrogate them for hours about their encounter.

If the PCs alert the authorities, official action is very swift. Military helicopters are scrambled within minutes of the PCs' contact, and land at the site within a half-hour of the alert.

The choppers are loaded with heavily armed troops in black chemical gear; the adventurers are herded over to a chopper and interrogated.

The adventurers are immediately informed that they are "off the case." If the PCs alerted the government through their contacts, it is an Average: Persuasion task to convince the Blue-Boys to let them assist. ("Blue-Boys" is slang for agents of Operation Blue Book, which has been reopened as the primary government agency for dealing with alien phenomena and threats.) Otherwise, such persuasion attempts are Difficult tasks.

The government agents plan to co-operate with the Mark III. They fully agree to provide it with replacement parts (the drive train from an LAV-75) and assist it in attacking the humanoid ET base. However, they have no intention of letting this piece of technological treasure trundle off to its home dimension. I

nstead, they want to dismantle it to learn its secrets, and they plan to keep the Dimension Walk cube, as well!

Official involvement simplifies the job of transporting the Mark III and supplying it with replacement drives since the government is picking up the tab.

The assault on the ET base is easier with official involvement, too, since the government is sending in a platoon of elite Special Forces commandos, a formation of attack helicopters and a platoon of hover tanks (duly impressing the warmachine with the destructive capability of the indigenous lifeforms of Earth). (See Completing the Mission, below.)

Official involvement will change the Mark III's attempt to escape (see Return Home, below).

COMPLETING THE MISSION

Once repaired, the Mark III insists on going to destroy the ET base. It knows the location and can detect something of the defenses.

"They have no force-fields in operation," it tells them. "They should be easy to destroy, even with primitive weapons. I intend to destroy them now; if you wish to assist, I will

wait two hours for you to prepare yourselves for battle."

The ET base is located 21 kilometers from the city, nestled in a valley between wooded hills. It's a simple layout, resembling a prison camp.

There's a 300-meter square of five-meter-high fence, the corner fenceposts tipped with remote weapons mounts of some sort; a smooth, almost liquid-surfaced metallic dome about 40 meters in diameter and 10 meters tall; rows of prefab plastic huts—they look like, and are, cheap backyard sheds; and a 50-meter clear area separating the dome from the huts, with all buildings at least 10 meters from the fence. There appears to be no entry/exit point in the fence, marking aerial transport as the main way in or out.

Men wander aimlessly about the far end of the enclosure. Or they used to be men. Now they're monsters, changed by grafting and viral mutation to animalistic creatures, Moreau weres, their minds destroyed by experimentation and pain.

If the PCs and Mark III have government military assistance, modify the humanoid ET base as follows: The center posts of the fence have guns, too, and the fencepost guns are all death-ray cannon, not handheld models!

A flying saucer is present at the base, with an Armor Factor 10. It powers up on Phase 3 of the first combat turn. Once powered, it has Armor Factor 60 force-fields and a combat move of 150 near the ground—in uncluttered airspace, it has a Combat Move of 1500! After all, Mach 10 maneuvers are no problem to UFOs. It carries a death-ray cannon. In addition to the floater troops, the ETs deploy six warbots (**DarkTek Sourcebook**, page 84) on the first phase following the opening shot.

ATTACK

The Mark III has no stomach for subtlety. It charges down from the nearest hill crest (the crests are about 500 meters from the fences), weaving through the trees, firing at the weapons on the corner posts before they can respond.

Then the ETs counterattack. An iris opens in the top of the dome, and two-man floater pods pour out, carrying humanoid ETs armed with hand-portable death rays, like the ones mounted on the corner posts.

Floater pods are detailed in **DarkTek Sourcebook**. For purposes of play, treat them as unarmored flying vehicles. All "wing" hits are treated as "no effect," indicating a lack of penetration. Floater pods have one crewmember who is busy flying the pod, one passenger who can shoot, one Engine damage box—fragile, aren't they?—and a Combat Move of 10.

These manned pods come out in pairs,

two pods every other phase, and attack the Mark III. If the PCs start picking the pods off, then one-third of the pods concentrate on the adventurers.

As if the ETs weren't enough trouble, the experimental subjects riot once the fence is breached. Most of them just want to get away and won't attack the PCs unless they're in the way. A few of them want to feed, and human flesh sounds good! Treat them as Experienced NPCs with doubled hand-to-hand damage.

The Mark III intends to destroy the dome. It has an Armor Factor of 10 and can sustain 200 damage points. Once the dome is destroyed, the ETs flee, flying off on their floater pods. The Mark III picks off as many as it can.

RETURN HOME

After the attack draws to an end, the Mark III wants to return home via the metal cube dimension doorway. It heads back to the doorway cube at full speed or demands to be taken there if it's been immobilized again. If this request is refused, it threatens to detonate its power core in a 100-megaton explosion. And it will, too, if it can't return to its dimension—a 100-meg blast would put paid to plenty of lifeforms, it figures. A good trade-off.

If the PCs notified the authorities, the Mark III contacts the PCs and informs them that its nuclear-fusion power core will eventually self-destruct if they don't assist it to return to its own dimension. (This is not the exact truth—the power-core could explode, but it would be a deliberate act.) The adventurers will have to sneak into a well-defended military base and get Mark III to the Dimension Walk cube, which is stored at the same base.

MARK III STERILOID

Steriloids are detailed in GDW's **Dark Races** (pages 61-65). These machines were made for one purpose, and that one purpose has now become to destroy all life. They do it very well. So well, in fact, that they are loathe to leave an area until they've seared it to slag.

Fortunately for the adventurers, this particular steriloid has a one-track mind on its assignment to kill the humanoid ETs and destroy their base. It will return to its dimension after accomplishing this, without lingering to vaporize the PCs! It has work to do on its own planet, since it was called from the middle of a big battle to destroy the humanoid ETs. Still, the steriloids now know of another way to Earth, a place overrun with life. And their primary function is the eradication of life.

They'll be back. Ω

CHALLENGE 64

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming US \$3.50

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SHADOW OVER NEW BRUNSWICK

When you arrive in the small farming town of New Brunswick, all you can think about are a bed and a hot meal. The accommodations in the barn aren't exactly a bed, and the food isn't exactly hot, but it's better than nothing. When the entire population of the town disappears without a noise, you get that sinking feeling that something horrible is about to happen.

This adventure is designed to add zest to a cross-country journey. New Brunswick can be located in any rural setting, most likely in the Midwest. When the PCs arrive there, they want only to find a place to stay. This is harder than it sounds, since the inhabitants of little farming towns in these Dark times are not very friendly to strangers. The PCs will find few people around in the late afternoon, but they can try talking to the senile old man in front of the general store, the storekeeper, the sheriff and several farmers. They also run into Jack Ranier and his gang of ruffians. They ridicule the PCs and warn them that strangers aren't wanted in this town so they had better clear out if they want to stay healthy. Before the situation escalates to the point of violence, the gang members saunter off, throwing insults and threats over their shoulders.

As the PCs continue their search for a place to stay, they meet up with someone who mentions that Mrs. Daniels may be willing to put them up for the night. The Daniels place consists of 10 acres of unpromising fields next to an old Agricorn field. All that is left of the field is bedrock and chemical sludge left from strong synthesized fertilizers. Mrs. Daniels has a rather pretty daughter (age 17) and a young son (12), both of whom are rather excited to see strangers. Mrs. Daniels is more reserved, however, and will only give the PCs a place in the barn in return for a couple hours of labor (milking cows, chopping wood, etc.). An Average: Bargaining test will reduce the number of work hours to one apiece. No roll, no matter how good, will make Mrs. Daniels take money instead of work.

IN THE DARK OF THE NIGHT

After finishing their work and finally snuggling down into the itchy hay, the PCs find that they

cannot sleep. The hay is too uncomfortable, or the horse is making too much noise, or there are bugs in the straw tickling their skin. An Average: Empathy roll will reveal that this insomnia is unnatural, and a Difficult: Foreboding test will reveal that something very bad is about to happen.

Eventually, one of the PCs may wander outside for a breath of fresh air or to look for a more comfortable place to sleep. Once outside, the PC notices that the door to Mrs. Daniels' house is wide open. The PCs will no doubt quickly search the house and find it empty. The family is gone. If they call for help or go to look for help, they discover that the entire town is empty. Televisions are still on where people fell asleep in front of them, perhaps somewhere a bath is still running or even a cigarette is still smoking in its ashtray. Play up on the bizarre aspect of this scene, and the PCs will be jumping out of their skins.

Finally, just before sunrise, the PCs hear the report of a gun. If they follow the sound, they find Ranier and his little gang standing around a body. A semi-truck is parked beside them, and the body looks to be that of the driver. He has been shot execution-style, once through the back of the head. The PCs can now have a little gunfight, if they are so inclined. If captured, none of Ranier's men will talk. They show frightening military discipline under fire and are obviously too skilled to be just an ordinary gang.

After the gun battle is over, the PCs hear the sound of a screen door closing from one of the houses nearby—one they found empty earlier. By the time they get to the house, they meet only a very irate owner, who wants to know why he has been woken up in the middle of the night. He says he didn't hear any gunfire and will you please go away—don't you know what time it is? There is a similar response from other residences, as all the citizens of New Brunswick seem to have magically reappeared.

DARK MINION PLOT

The Dark Minions (you can pick your favorite group) are testing a new device called the Dreamaker. This device generates horrible dreams in its victims and kills them instantly through terror. It is based on a bio-computer and is ca-





pable of independent motion and thought. When it was delivered just outside of New Brunswick, it was expected that all the inhabitants would soon be dead. However, Thomas Kaseko (the senile old man who spends his afternoons sitting in front

of the store) is an empath, and he protected his own mind, as well as the minds of those around him. Kaseko is truly senile and does not think well during the day, but once he goes to sleep and his subconscious takes over, he comes alive. Kaseko's powers are very great, but the Dreamaker was stronger.

Kaseko realized he would be overpowered, so he contacted the people of the town through their subconscious, and they marched out to fight the Dreamaker. Once the Dreamaker saw them coming, it realized it was doomed unless it could raise a physical defense. So it drew on the townspeople's own dream energies, which (now that they were so close physically) were very strong. With this energy, it raised up illusions of physical beings that look and feel so real that they can scare a person to death. The illusions are very powerful, but they cannot leave the Agrifield—the Dreamaker lacks the power to project them that far.

So the battle has continued every night for several weeks now. The people go to sleep; the Dreamaker attacks; and Kaseko raises them up to do battle. The Dark Minions have now sent a few of their agents disguised as hoodlums and criminals into town—Ranier and his gang. These punks assumed that the PCs would fall victim to the Dreamaker, so they did not attack them outright when they came into town. Besides, the Dark Minions ordered them not to interfere in the activities of the Dreamaker. The Dark Minions want to ensure that it is properly tested.

THE MORNING AFTER

The dawn will find the PCs wondering what happened during the night, and they will no doubt spend the rest of the day trying to find out. They have a variety of options.

The PCs may want to question Mrs. Daniels. If they approach her house, they notice after a few minutes that her daughter, Lucy, is not around. If the PCs ask where she is, Mrs. Daniels thinks a moment and then says that Lucy went away to college. The longer she is questioned, the more she will stick to this story. If anybody presses her, Mrs. Daniels will get very defensive and act offended.

The PCs may try to follow the tracks of the nighttime wanderers (an Average: Tracking task). They might find tracks coming out the back doors of various houses and leading across the fields to the old Agricorp field. The field is full of tracks, as

MRS. DANIELS

Mrs. Daniels was with the original group forced out of the little town of Brunswick by the Agricorps. Her husband frequently spoke out about the Agricorps and their takeover and how things would be different after the town was bought out, no matter what the corp promised. He disappeared one night and was found dead a week later, apparently killed by a group of criminals fleeing west. The police and the Agricorp assured Mrs. Daniels that the criminals were in custody and would get everything they deserved. Mrs. Daniels had to do the best she could, and this has made her tough. Still, she has a soft spot for hard luck cases, and this prompts her to take the PCs in.

Experience: Novice

Attributes: 5

Skills: 3

Initiative: 2

THOMAS KASEKO

Kaseko was quite a hero in his day. He has several medals from his time in the army, and he was a skilled, though rather unknown, baseball star after that. After his wife died 10 years ago, he lost his will to go on living, but his body is too tough to let him die. He just sits on the porch of the store, watching the people go by, until he can't remember anything because he doesn't want to. When the Dreamaker woke him from his sleep, his Empathy skills came alive. At night, he is as coherent and bright as when he was young. But like everybody else in New Brunswick, as soon as he wakes up, he is back to his old self and doesn't even remember the night before (except as a dream).

Kaseko is an empath of incredible ability, and some of the things he does are not governed by the basic rules. The Dreamaker contacts him by trying to kill him with his fears, and he channels his Project Thought and Emotion powers back through the Dreamaker to all the other people the Dreamaker is contacting. Once the Dreamaker ceases to contact him, he cannot contact anybody else. Fortunately, the Dreamaker hasn't figured this out yet (nor is it likely to get a chance).

Experience: Veteran

Attributes: 6. Intelligence 8, Empathy 5

Skills: 4. Willpower 5, Project Emotion 7, Project Thought 7

Initiative: 6 (asleep), 1 (awake)



though all the people of New Brunswick came out and had a town meeting. Lucy Daniel's body is half buried in the sludge. Unless the PCs specifically search the area, it is a Difficult: Observation test to notice her. If an autopsy is performed, it will be apparent (after a Difficult: Medical test) that she died of heart failure. She was slain by her own nightmares.

The PCs may also try to break into people's homes. Many locals are out farming during the day or performing other chores. So if the PCs are careful, they should be able to get into several homes. After a careful search, they can discover mud tracks on some floors leading up to bedrooms. And every home sports dirty clothes, covered with mud and sometimes blood, shoved in the back of closets or under beds. The mud is from the field, and the blood is from scratches and wounds caused by falling down or battling physically with the Dreamaker.

Interviewing the townspeople will produce nothing but obvious lies that even the liars themselves don't seem to believe. The use of the Human Empathy skill will tell the PCs that these people are repressing the truth, and that right now they don't know what is true and what is not. Psychology skill can be used to a similar effect (Average difficulty).

All the townspeople act a little confused and very angry at being questioned about such silly things. Even if the PCs find some way of proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that something is going on, the citizens will deny it.

MARAUDERS

At about noon, a band of nomad marauders drives into town in two dune buggies (use the stats for the Range Rover II). They call themselves the Dust Devils. Except for a few jeers and insults, they are not aggressive and will avoid fights if threatened.

The Dreamaker is getting desperate, and has called out to nearby marauders for help. Lacking Kaseko's protection, they were unable to fight off the Dreamaker's attempts to plant suggestions in their minds through their dreams, and they are now under its control.

The Dreamaker is losing its battle against the townspeople. It is getting weaker, and its weapons are fewer. Many of the townspeople have defeated their nightmares and are no longer afraid. This allows the citizens to lend support to their friends and gang up on the illusions.

SHERIFF

Ralph Hobbs has been the elected sheriff of this town for five years. He gets paid by the town, but he also has his own farm on the side. He is only here to organize resistance to nomad marauders and to keep everybody in line. He often carries a pistol and a shotgun.

If the PCs approach him, Hobbs will be sympathetic to the PCs' fears, but totally unhelpful.

Experience: Experienced

Attributes: 5

Skills: 3; Small Arms (Pistol) 5

Initiative: 3

TOWNSPEOPLE

New Brunswick is based off the population of an original town simply called Brunswick. This town was bought out by an Agricorp (choose your favorite) which promised that all the farmers could stay on their land, only now the Agricorp would buy all the crops instead of somebody else. This turned out not to be true. The people almost started a riot until they saw all the security the Agricorp had hired for just such an emergency. Now they live here, on a dusty little patch not more than 50 miles from their old fields, which have long ago been used up by the Agricorp and turned into chemical wastes.

Experience: Novice

Attributes: 5

Skills: 3

Initiative: 2

DEADLY DREAMS

The PCs may decide to spend a second night in town and try to solve the mystery. As the dusk fades into night, doors begin to creek open all around town—the locals are coming out. If the PCs try to stop one of the travellers from going to the field, they will be violently attacked—the people will do anything to get to the field once Kaseko has called them.

If the PCs follow the townspeople to the field (or wait for them there), they will see a large brain with insect legs rising from the sludge. In a circle around the brain are horrific figures that only dreams could envision. Boys stand across from giants; girls square off with giant insect larva; and adults face horrific creatures and people too numerous to count. An old man growls as he closes in on a Nazi, while an old woman fights with Death himself.

Back from the fighting stands Kaseko. He no



longer looks senile. His dull, flat eyes sparkle; his broken old body stands tense, ready to spring; and his bored, featureless face is twisted into a snarl of concentration. Kaseko will not like being interrupted and will be impossible to talk to during the fray.

Empaths will be going crazy at this point. A Difficult: Empathy roll will indicate that the monsters are illusions. Another Difficult roll reveals that all the citizens are contributing to the growth of these illusions through the Dreamaker even as they try to destroy them. An Average roll will tell the PCs that Kaseko is in control of the situation and that he is helping the citizens with his talents.

DARK MINION AGENTS

Jack Ranier and his four followers are Dark Minion agents disguised as a band of hoodlums which has settled down in this little town. By day, they make a nuisance of themselves, but by night, they kill anyone who causes too much trouble. They might harass the PCs when they first arrive in town and give warnings about how the PCs don't want to stay here overnight—it simply isn't "healthy." Gang members carry a mixture of Beretta M92Ss, Mossberg M500 shotguns and Uzis. The referee may adjust their numbers, skills or firepower to give the group a challenge.

Experience: Experienced

Attributes: 5

Skills: 6

Initiative: 4

DUST DEVILS

These kind, country gents are all young, a little wild and psychotic. They come mostly from bankrupt homes (all too common in the country) and are angry and embittered toward the world. Now they make a living with their fists and guns. There are five of them, all carrying Uzis. The referee may adjust their numbers, skills or firepower as needed.

Experience: Experienced

Attributes: 5

Skills: 3

Initiative: 3

NIGHTMARE ILLUSIONS

Abilities are discussed in the Combat section.

Experience: Veteran

Attributes: None. They take 20 points of damage to kill.

They have perceived physical attributes well above 10

Skills: Attack 4

Initiative: Equal to that of the mind that created them

Any PCs with Willpower skill can enter into combat with the citizens.

COMBAT

Fighting illusions with one's mind is not quite the same as fighting real opponents. To make a successful attack against an illusion, make an Average: Willpower roll or a one-fourth roll against Intelligence (whichever is greater). This represents the strength of your mind and your ability to realize that you are only fighting your own fear.

If you are fighting somebody else's nightmare and you make a successful roll, you have given them moral support, and their attack this round does twice as much damage. After a successful attack, damage is figured by rolling a 1D6 and adding your Willpower (if any).

The illusions do damage straight to your torso. This is only perceived damage, and it disappears as soon as the fight ends (unless, of course, you're dead).

The quick-kill rule doesn't apply here.

The illusion has an Attack skill of 4, which is reduced by the target's Willpower. Thus, a character with a high enough Willpower can become immune to the illusions' attacks. Every hit causes 1D6 damage. Note that a nightmare can only attack the person from whose mind it is drawn. So if you have defeated your own nightmare, you won't be under attack from the nightmares of others.

However, there is always lingering doubt. Every time the Dreamaker shows you the nightmare again, you must make an Average: Intelligence roll, or you are again vulnerable to attack. If you make the roll, the illusion simply grabs and snarls at you harmlessly and eventually melts away into nothing as your mind dismisses it.

Two combat turns after the PCs arrive, the Dust Devils come through the hole in the Agricornp's old fence and start firing at the crowd. They are very careful not to hit the Dreamaker. The PCs must now deal with this new threat so the battle can go on.

After six combat turns (assuming nothing has gone wrong), the citizens finally defeat the Dreamaker. The Dust Devils become confused and run away. The citizens immediately return home and go to sleep.

CARRYING ON

The following morning, the residents of New Brunswick remember nothing of the strange events



that occurred during the previous night, not even Kaseko.

If the PCs again ask Mrs. Daniels what happened to her daughter, she looks very sad and replies that she is dead. If asked how she died, Mrs. Daniels will reply that she isn't exactly sure—some sort of accident. She remembers nothing else.

This adventure leaves many questions unanswered. Solving these mysteries can lead to a host of other adventures. Who has made this thing? Why do they want to kill people in this way? Why don't they just attack? Why did they continue to fight a losing battle in New Brunswick? From what brains is the Dreammaker/bio-computer made? Will there be later developments and improvements on this prototype? Do these Dark Minions want to unleash any other dream technology on the world? What will happen to Kaseko? Was all of this a test to draw him out? What do these Dark Minions think of the PCs now? Will they attack or torment the PCs through their own nightmares?

DREAMAKER

This device is a green, glowing brain the size of a horse, with eight long insect legs.

It is very intelligent, though it can have trouble with abstract thought.

The Dreamaker takes 3D6 damage each combat turn from sunlight and can use its legs to burrow into the ground. Its body is soft, but it takes 50 points of damage to kill it (the various levels of wounds having little effect). Each leg takes 10 points before snapping in half (assume all hits affect the main body unless aiming specifically for the legs).

Despite its great strength, the Dreamaker is nearly helpless in hand-to-hand combat due to a lack of effective limbs or weapons.

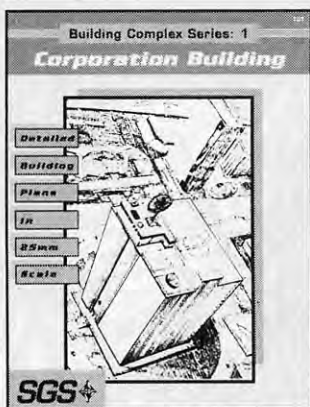
Experience: Veteran

Attributes: Intelligence 8, Strength 8, Empathy 7.

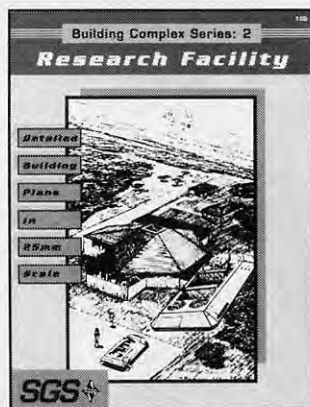
Skills: None. It has the powers previously described

Initiative: Illusions are made at Initiative 6; all other activity is performed at Initiative 1 Ω

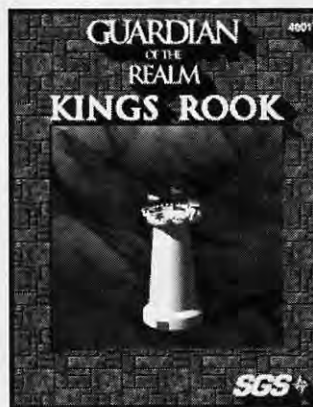
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DARK HALLOWEEN

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SCARECROW

The adventure is ideal to run when the PCs think they are about to go on a hard-earned vacation. In this case, they have decided to go out into the untainted country and spend a weekend at a nice place, far away from the creatures of evil. This can be arranged by having a patron provide them with a free stay as a reward. Sadly, they will get no rest on this vacation, only more horror.

The PCs will be staying at the Contented Cow, which is a replica of an old-style farmhouse (except for the fact that it has dozens of bedrooms). It is located in an area of the country that has not been overly affected by pollution. It is a rather nice place, with various tame farm animals to add to the ambiance. There is even an old-fashioned scarecrow out in the field. The land itself is surrounded on two sides by a river, and a canal has been dug, making the area into an island (to keep out the riffraff). Access to the island is via a bridge, which has one gate that is kept locked at night. There are four other houses on the island. Only one is occupied—the other three are owned by corporations.

The first day of their stay will be enjoyable, and the PCs will get a chance to relax. Not so on the next day.

A STORY

If the PCs are curious about the place, the old handyman, Carl O'Donald (a former enlisted man who is an Experienced NPC and has a Colt Ar-15 in his room), will tell them of its dark history. According to legend, a group of Indians were massacred on this spot by another tribe. The dying Indians are supposed to have cursed the ground so that none would be able to live here. Shortly afterward, or so the story goes, the tribe that had perpetrated the massacre vanished, leaving only a deserted village.

ANOTHER STORY

While the PCs are outside, they will see a middle-aged woman, Betsy Carter (a Novice NPC with no weapons), working in her lawn next door. She will wave

to them. If they stop to chat, she will tell them how happy she is that nice people have finally moved in next door, adding that the last group of people who owned the land were "odd, you know, spooky—like there was something not quite right about them." If asked what happened to them, she will say that one night she heard gunfire ("Probably a fight over drugs. They all looked like they were on something."), and the next day the house was deserted. The police investigated, but found nothing. The land was eventually sold to a development company which made it into the farm setup. She doesn't know anything more about what happened, but will speculate for as long as the PCs are willing to listen.

MURDER

The first night of the PCs' stay, there will be an intensive thunderstorm, complete with loud thunder and flashes of lightning. One bolt will strike an old tree in the yard and split it open. The next morning, another guest—James Cocil, an innocuous businessman from North Dakota—will be found murdered in his room. The room is on the first floor, and the window has been smashed in. There are muddy footprints on the floor leading to and from the window. The man appears to have been strangled. If the body is inspected by someone with Medical skill (an Average task), it will be clear that the marks on the neck are not those of human hands. Examination at a medical facility will reveal tiny bits of hay in the victim's neck, as if he were strangled by hands of straw.

A dead cow will also be found in the morning, with most of its major organs gone. This is the result of "Tamara's" need to feed (see below).

If the PCs try to call the police, they will find that the phone lines are dead. Anyone going to check out the bridge will find that it has been destroyed (the noise of the explosion was covered by the thunder). The river has also swollen to dangerous proportions. Anyone attempting to swim across must make a Difficult check of Swimming or be swept away and possibly drowned. There are no boats on the island, although a raft could be made by tearing apart part of a



wooden structure. Getting across safely would require a Difficult check of Vessel Use (Boat) skill.

WITNESS

If the PCs become involved in the situation, a young boy will come up and tug on one of the PCs' pant legs. He will say, "I was scared by the thunder, and I looked out the window. I saw the scarecrow." At this point, the boy's mother will pull him away from the PCs. She will not want him around them and will keep a careful eye on him. The boy saw the scarecrow walking across the field to the building. He will be killed that night if the PCs don't solve the mystery.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

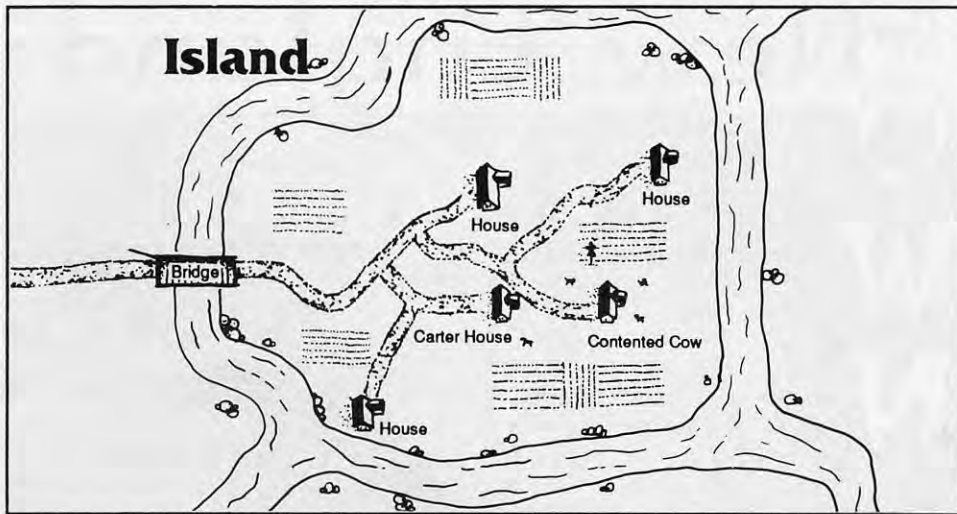
The house on the land prior to the farmhouse was owned by a group of dark elves. They used it as a cover for their assumed identities as humans. The dark elves were discovered by a group of Minion hunters who put an end to their cruel activities in a brutal, but effective, manner. Two dark elves, posing as husband and wife artists (The Windflowers), have recently arrived at the Contented Cow to gain revenge on humanity for the deaths of those killed on the site. They will stay at the Cow until they have killed everyone, then they will burn the place to the ground. But they will not do any of this directly. Rather, they will use animator spirits. Being dark elves, they will try to kill the humans in the most horrible and frightening ways their twisted and evil minds can think up. All the while, they will be playing the role of terribly frightened artists and will be given to faking hysterical attacks when bodies are found.

FINISH

The "Windflowers" will continue their attempts until everyone has died or until they are thwarted. If the PCs save the day, they will be welcome at the Contented Cow anytime, for free. Of course, they may wish never to return.

NPCS

Twenty guests are staying at the Contented Cow. Ten of these are adult men, all unarmed Novice NPCs. Nine are adult women, eight of them unarmed Novice NPCs. One woman is a vacationing security guard (see page 176 of the rules), who has an S&W Model 36. If the PCs don't take charge, she will. The 20th human guest is Billy Barnes, the boy who talked to the PCs. There are six men on staff who are unarmed Novice NPCs and seven Novice NPC women.



"Tamara Windflower"

Strength: 5 **Education:** 6 **Move:** 3/10/20/35
Constitution: 4 **Charisma:** 10 **Skill/Dam:** 7/4
Agility: 9 **Empathy:** 9 **Hits:** 10/20
Intelligence: 8 **Initiative:** 4

Special: Dimension Walk.

"Tamara" is a Dark Elf posing as a human artist. Like virtually all of her race, she considers inflicting pain and suffering on humans an enjoyable pastime. While she poses as a somewhat spacey artist (she lived in California for several years and has the role down pat), she is actually a vicious, cruel and sadistic killer. She is, however, actually quite talented as an artist.

Equipment: She is far too intelligent to carry any obvious items of DarkTek. Instead, she carries a Walther PPK, and she has a Ingram M10 .45 hidden in her art kit. She has a Animator Generator.

Animator Generator: This particular device is in the shape of an ornate ring with a jet-black stone. It can generate animators of the sort used to animate hands, skeletons and so forth. This device requires a number of hours equal to the highest attribute of the animator (for example, it would take nine hours to create a zombie animator). The animator generated by the ring is loyal to the one who generated it and will obey simple orders. Each animator has a lifespan in days equal to the empathy rating of the creator, after which time, it dissipates. Using the device is extremely draining.

User Cost: **Feed:** 1 per hour spent generating the animator

Wt.: Negligible

Price: N/A (—)

"Jason Windflower"

Strength: 6 **Education:** 4 **Move:** 3/10/20/35
Constitution: 5 **Charisma:** 8 **Skill/Dam:** 7/4
Agility: 7 **Empathy:** 7 **Hits:** 10/20
Intelligence: 6 **Initiative:** 4

Special: Dimension Walk.

"Jason" poses as "Tamara's" husband and plays the role of an angst-ridden artist. He dresses in black, smokes cigarettes and is given to long bouts of disturbing poetry about the meaninglessness of life. Like his "wife," he is a cruel and sadistic being who revels in the opportunity to make humans suffer. Of course, most of his poems are about human suffering.

Equipment: He has a M9 Beretta and a Ingram M10 .45 in his luggage.

Animated Scarecrow

Strength: 2 **Education:** 1 **Move:** 3/9/18/25
Constitution: 2 **Charisma:** 1 **Skill/Dam:** 6/1D6
Agility: 6 **Empathy:** 1 **Hits:** 5/10
Intelligence: 1 **Initiative:** 5 **#Appear:** 1

An animated scarecrow is a scarecrow that has been infused with an animator. Depending on the material the creature is made out of, it may be extremely vulnerable to fire.



New England Town



The PCs are driving through a small New England town on their way to some other place when they encounter a police road block. There are two police cars and four officers (use the beat cop NPC stats on page 173 of the basic rules) armed with M9 pistols and AR-15s. They are stopping all cars and searching them carefully. When the PCs reach their turn, one of them will recognize Officer Jennifer Hansen (she went to high school with the PC, and they were friends for a while), who tells the PC the following: "It's the oddest thing. Old Roger Colwin passed away recently. He's the guy who wrote those horror movies a while back. His funeral was set for the other day, but they found the church broken into and his body gone. Roger was going to be buried with all his jewelry, and it's worth quite a bit. The chief thinks someone stole the body. The family's offering a good-sized reward to anyone who solves the case." If the PCs are interested, she tells them to go see the chief.

MEETING THE CHIEF

The police station is an old house that also serves as the city offices. There are a total of 12 officers in the town. The chief, Dale Chipman, is a likable man in his mid forties who speaks in a heavy New England accent. Use the stats for a beat cop for him, but add 1 to the leadership rating. He carries an M9 pistol.

Chipman's story is the same as that of Officer Hansen, except he adds that the body was probably stolen out of the town church, where it was kept before the funeral. If the PCs ask about what the police found, he says they didn't find any useful clues. If a PC with Psychology skill makes an Average roll, he becomes aware that the chief is holding something back. If the PCs are able to persuade him into talking, or if he thinks he can trust them, he tells them that the footprints of large dogs or wolves were found around the church. He also says this isn't the first disappearance of a corpse—there have been six other such disappearances from the church and the local funeral parlor. In most of the cases, the tracks of large dogs or wolves were found in the dirt near the buildings.

CHECKING FOR CLUES

If the PCs decide to check out the church, they find numerous prints that seem to be of large dogs or wolves. If a

PC with Tracking skill checks the tracks carefully (and passes an Average test of the skill) he learns that while the tracks are dog like, they were made by human-sized creatures walking on two legs.

The door to the church has been forced open. With a successful Average check using Observation skill, a PC spots a log in the nearby bushes. The log was apparently used as a battering ram. There are some hairs caught on the log. If they are analyzed at the nearest hospital (about a 20-minute drive), they turn out to be from no known creature.

If the PCs try to follow the tracks, they lose them when they reach the tar road.

TO CATCH A CROOK

If the PCs don't come up with a plan, the chief will say, "Well, I guess we could always have somebody die, then hide in the church to catch the crook." After getting permission from Harvey Carnnet, he will then have the local paper post that Harvey has died and that he will be buried with his valuable collection of antique scrimshaw. Harvey, of course, will go into hiding prior to the announcement. The PCs, the chief and one other officer will hide in the church and wait for something to happen.

Slightly after midnight, those in the church will hear something sniffing around outside, then they will hear scratching at the door. As they turn to watch the door, a pack of New England ghouls (see below) will burst through the windows to attack. If more than half the ghouls are wounded or a quarter of them are killed, they will flee into the night. If the PCs pursue, they will see the ghouls head into the graveyard. Since it has rained recently, the ghouls will leave tracks in the mud that are easy to follow. These tracks will lead up to a stone slab (it weighs 50 kilograms). If the slab is removed, a narrow tunnel into the darkness will be visible, and a horrid stench of decay will waft forth. The ghouls will be waiting in ambush in their warrens and will fight to the death.

If the PCs do not go along with the chief's plan, or if they come up with one of their own, the results are left up to the referee.

GHOUL WARREN

The ghouls consist of tunnels large enough for human-sized creatures and larger chambers. They are unlit and smell like a well ripened grave.

Entrance: The entrance consists of a tunnel shorn up with wood and slabs of stone.

Chamber 1: This chamber, like the

others, is shorn up with logs, stone slabs and hunks of coffins. Animal bones are strewn about. The younger ghouls use this area. Four younger ghouls are initially present.

Chamber 2: This chamber is used by the older ghouls. There is a mix of animal and human bones (all well gnawed) on the floor. There are initially five older ghouls present.

Chamber 3: This chamber is used by the ghoul leader. All the bones in the chamber are human. Many of the bones have been pressed into the walls in patterns, and Colwin's jewelry has been inserted among the bones. There are seven pieces of jewelry, ranging in value from \$5000 to 25,000.

FINISH

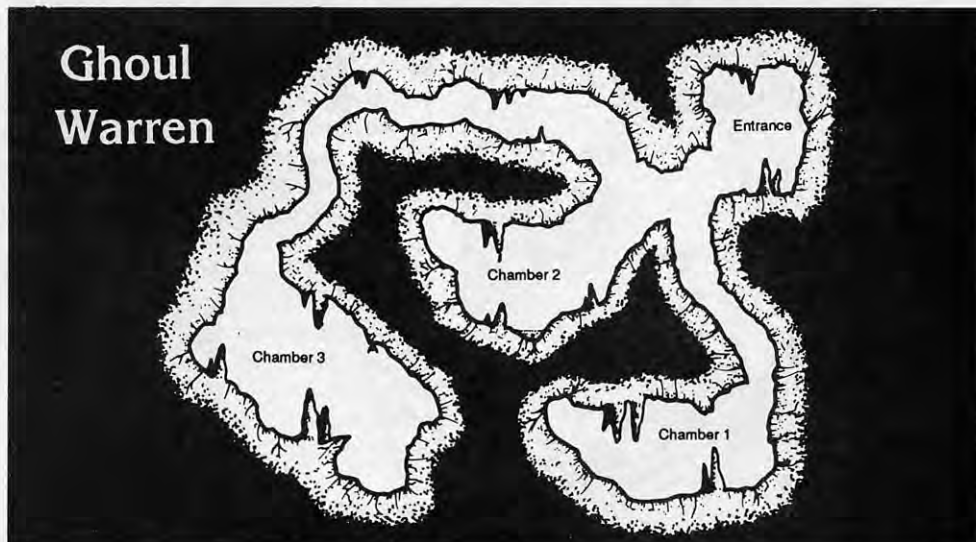
If the PCs kill the ghouls, the chief will be extremely pleased and will become a useful contact. He has several good

friends in the FBI and will be sure to tell them how the PCs helped him out.

If the PCs return the jewelry, they will receive a reward of \$15,000 from Colwin's daughter, who came to town for her father's funeral. She will also be grateful for their help. She has contacts in the movie industry and has inherited her father's wealth (it runs in the millions), and she may be willing to become a patron for the PCs in their fight against the Dark.

If the PCs keep the jewelry, Colwin's daughter will thank them for solving the mystery and may be willing to become their patron, unless, of course, she learns that they have stolen her father's jewelry. In such a situation, she will have them arrested.

If the ghouls defeat the PCs, more will come into the area, and they may well eventually overrun the town, making it into another stretch of Demonground.



New England Ghoul

Strength: 9	Education: 1	Move: 5/10/18/35
Constitution: 12	Charisma: 1	Skill/Dam: 7/1D10
Agility: 6	Empathy: 1	Hits: 18/36
Intelligence: 4	Initiative: 5	#Appear: 2D6

New England ghouls are loathsome beings that hail from another dimension. In their home dimension, they live underground and feed primarily on dead organisms. Those that have arrived on earth have continued their old habits, but they have found that they have a taste for dead humans. They generally prefer to gather already dead bodies, but they are not adverse to killing. They will, however, let a corpse age a bit before feasting on it. Given their feeding habits, they are generally found near graveyards, funeral homes and hospitals.

These ghouls are intelligent, but they are not known to use any form of technology—though they will use tools and are skilled at constructing underground lairs. They have been known to deal with humans, primarily exchanging valuables they have stolen in return for bodies.

Younger ghouls have statistics one less in each category (except Move and #Appear), and their skill is 6. Damage remains 1D10. Each group of ghouls will be made up of half younger ghouls and half adult ghouls. There will also be a leader, who will have stats one higher in each category (except Move and #Appear, which will always be 1) and a skill level of 9.

THE BET

At some point the PCs will be short on cash and looking for a quick source of money. They will come across an ad that attracts their attention: The person placing the ad claims to have a real haunted house that no one can stay in for a full night without fleeing in terror. The owner is so sure of this that he is willing to match any amount of money at

5 to 1 odds (for each dollar the person puts up, he'll match it with five).

If a PC calls the number listed in the ad, a woman answers the phone, saying, "Haunted House Enterprises. How may I help you?" If the PCs want to place a bet, she will tell them that there will be an event this weekend, and that they are to come to the office to make arrangements.

If the PCs go to the office, they will find it to be well appointed, with several secretaries and officers. The PCs will be asked to have a seat while they fill out forms and sign liability waivers (which makes Haunted House Enterprises (HHE) responsible for nothing that happens to the PCs while they are in the house). Once the forms are completed, the PCs can place their bets. HHE accepts cash, money orders and major credit cards. It does not accept personal checks from first-time customers.

A LITTLE CHECKING

If the PCs decide to check up on HHE, they will find it to be entirely above-board. It began 10 years ago when the company's founder, Nathan Paskin, inherited the house from his uncle. The house has always had a dark reputation, and several people have been killed or committed suicide within its walls (none since HHE has taken over, however). Further checking will reveal several news stories about the house and the business. Most of the photos and films show terrified people fleeing the house. There are, however, no photos of the inside (no cameras or other recording devices are allowed inside).

HAUNTED HOUSE

The house is a very frightening structure, its windows like the eyes of an empty skull. Looking at it gives rise to a feeling of fear in people. This is all the result of cleverly concealed images and patterns in the paint of the house that have been carefully designed to trigger a fear response. A roll against one quarter of a person's Observation skill (if they announce they are examining the house carefully) will reveal these patterns. The rooms inside the house also have similar modifications. Everything is set up in an extremely subtle manner to disturb the human psyche. These modifications make people edgy and nervous. Further, the lighting is set up so that it always seems like things are moving in the corner of one's vision. The same roll is required to spot the modifications inside as the roll required to spot the exterior modifications. If these modifications are spotted and the HHE representative is told about them, he will say that they are the work of the spirits. Since there is no way to prove that HHE is guilty of modifying the house (there are, in fact, no records of such modifications being made), there is little the PCs can do. HHE will not refund their bet, and if they leave, they lose.

The house's windows and external door are equipped with sensors which set off extremely loud sirens if someone



attempts to open them once the event is in progress. There are also infrared cameras set up around the house. All of these systems are run by a respected security company.

Basement: The basement is dark and smells of old mold and mildew.

Storage Area: This area contains a portable generator and two cans of fuel for it.

Furnace: This area contains the furnace, water heater and so forth. The furnace is kept running.

First Floor: The first floor includes five rooms:

Kitchen: The kitchen is stocked with food and has slightly outdated, but usable, appliances.

Dining Room: The dining room has a large oak table with a dark spot on its surface, with a knife mark in the center. The HHE representative will say that Martin Jones killed his wife on the table (this is true). The walls of the room are decorated with animal heads. The heads seem somehow wrong (they have also been modified), and the lighting makes them seem to move when they are viewed from the corner of the eye.

Living Room: This room is well furnished and has deep shadows which seem to move.

Bathroom: A standard bathroom. The pipes have been set to produce eerie gurgling noises.

Laundry Room: A standard laundry room.

Second Floor: The second floor contains bedrooms and a bath.

Bedrooms: Each bedroom has two single beds, a dresser, desk and so forth. The floorboards have been set to creak when walked on. The rooms are also lit so that it appears that shadows move around. The trees near the house have been grown so that they scrape against it when the wind blows.

Bathroom: This is a full bath, set up like the downstairs bathroom.

THE EVENT BEGINS

Early in the evening of the day they are to stay in the house, the PCs will be picked up by an HHE employee in a van. There will be three others in the van—a bloodkin vampire posing as a beautiful model who needs the money to revive her career, a corporate security guard named Bruce Huntington (use the stats on page 176 of the basic rules), and an eco-warrior named Jill Weston (use the stats on page 174). She is posing as a college student seeking tuition money, but she is actually trying to get enough money to purchase black market explosives to blow up a chemical factory.

The PCs will be taken to the house, where they will be searched for cameras and weapons. All such items will be taken for safe keeping. The PCs and NPCs will be joined by an HHE representative, who will conduct them into the house, then leave. He will go to an area behind a clump of trees, where an underground chamber is concealed.

During the course of the evening, the HHE representative, a highly empathic human (treat as skill level 9), will use his Project Emotion ability to instill fear into each individual, and Project Thought to motivate them to flee. The power level of these tasks is generated as normal, but with an additional +1 modifier per hour spent in the house (due to its horrific environment).

The empath will use his abilities to create images of ghosts and moving objects in the minds of those present. He will, however, be extremely careful not to allow anyone to come to harm.

THINGS GO WRONG

During the night, the PC with the highest Empathy rating will get a strange feeling. Immediately afterward, the images and fear will increase in intensity, and they will become horrible and disturbing.

The bloodkin vampire masquerading as a participant has killed the HHE representative. It will continue to generate fear in the participants, wanting to feed on their fear before killing them and consuming their blood. It will continue until it is stopped, or until it kills or drives everyone away.

Dealing with the bloodkin will be extremely difficult. The only available weapons are the knives in the kitchen, and pieces of furniture and the fuel in the basement, which could be used to create molotov cocktails.

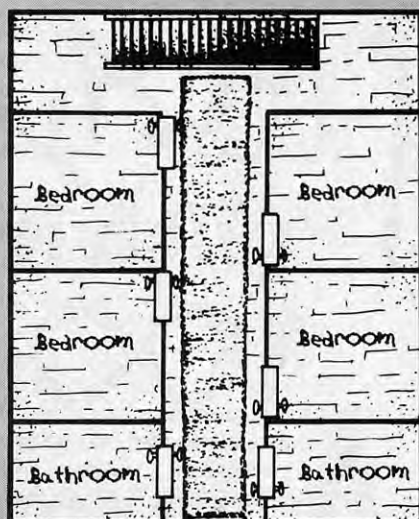
FINISH

If the PCs flee the house, they will lose the bet. The bloodkin will eventually join the HHE staff and feed on those participating in future bets. More of its kind will eventually infiltrate and take over HHE and turn the house into their feeding ground.

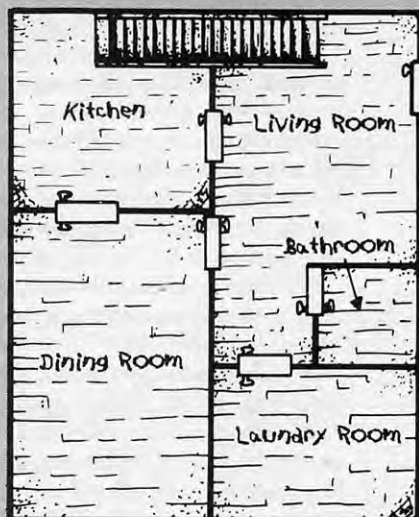
If the PCs expose the bloodkin and drive it away or kill it, they will be lavishly rewarded by HHE for their actions (and to keep their mouths shut). They may even be hired to keep watch over the house so something like this doesn't occur again.

If the PCs talk, HHE will lose business, and the PCs will be targeted by any Dark Minions who pay close attention to the human news services. Ω

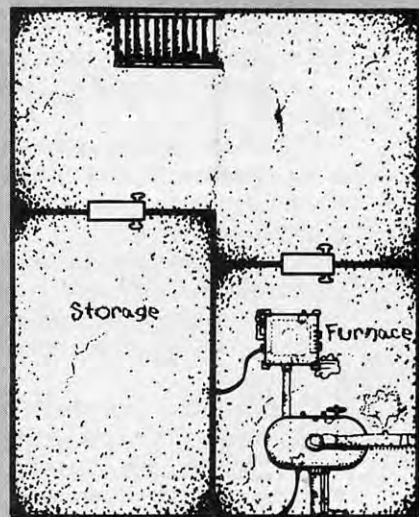
Haunted House



Second Floor



First Floor



Basement

IT PLAYS with its food

A spatter of static blurred the video image for a moment and then faded away, leaving a clear view of the room—tumbled furniture, two sprawled bodies and one little girl. She was staring up in the camera, her arms wrapped tightly around a lanky, orange cat.

Pintada, the senior remote operator, grunted. "Seen enough, Sarge?"

"Yup. Bring it back out."

Pintada hunched over the small control unit and swiveled the control rods. The video angle rotated away from the girl, centered on an open doorway and headed toward it.

From the other side of that doorway, I could hear the electric whine of the whirligig's central rotor. Then the little robot helicopter angled around the door jamb and slowly floated toward us. Pintada stopped the hoverdrone in mid-air, reached under it and snapped off its electric motor. The rotos stopped, and it fell into his assistant's waiting hand. Behind me, I heard Pulaski readying the entry team.

I shook my head. "Not yet, Stosh."

Pulaski looked at me, surprised. "What gives, Sarge? It's clean, ain't it?"

I shrugged, opened my mouth to respond.

Pintada sneered and jerked his head in my direction. "Typical ghostbuster burnout syndrome—they start seeing ghosties everywhere."

Pulaski snarled at the bandy-limbed remote operator. "Watch your mouth, Pinty. And watch your terms. Sergeant Graymoor is a special phenomena investigator."

Pintada nodded unenthusiastically. "Right. Like I said, he's a ghostbuster. Well, go right in Sarge. The poltergeists are waiting." Pintada moved back and swept an inviting hand toward the doorway. I went in.

There's something about a Dark Minion crime scene that sets it apart from all others. It seems crazier, somehow. Even



By Charles
E. Gannon

humans who are whacked out on angel dust or icedrops evince a method to their madness.

This was one of those crazier-than-crazy scenes. The radio was still on, but the music—crushrok, as offered up by

the Velvet Hammerheads, I think—was laced with static. Amidst the tangle of tilted chairs, fallen lamps and smears of blood, the little girl stood silently. One hand was cinched tightly around the tabby's abdomen, and the other was coiled out of sight, supporting the spine. The cat stared at me silently, flicking its tail occasionally in my direction.

I approached the two of them slowly. "I'm Detective Graymoor. The police are right outside. We're here to protect you and find out what happened."

She kept looking at me—somber brown eyes that didn't blink. Shock, probably.

"Are you all right, honey?"

Nothing.

"Can you tell me your name?"

Still no response.

"What about your Mom? Can you tell me where she is?"

Once again, no response—despite the fact that her mother's feet were clearly visible, sticking up from behind an overturned easy chair. Its upholstery was mottled with blood.

Okay, one last try. "Can you tell me what happened here?"

She lowered her eyes and hugged her cat. It would have been nice if she had responded, but it wasn't necessary. Anyone with eyes could tell what had happened.

The perpetrator had come in through the window. And I don't mean that he had wriggled in over the sill—I mean he came *through* the window.

The mother had apparently been having a drink at the counter next to that very same window—an empty shotglass lay on the floor. The perpetrator apparently had clambered across the counter to attack the woman—bright red blood was all over the Formica.

The woman had stumbled back against the small refrigerator, and the perp had fallen to the side, overturning the sofa. Judging from the bloodstains, the mother had vaulted the little fridge and ran to the night table. I took a few steps deeper into the apartment to get the rest of the picture.

Mom had yanked open the night table's top drawer and pulled out a gun, turning just in time to unload into the perp, who had charged across the room to resume his attack. He must have cut her at least once, as she had fallen back onto the bed. More blood was smeared across the sheets.

Judging from the darker blood splattered against the opposite wall—and the bullet holes in the plaster—she had hit him with a pretty fair-sized cannon, probably a .357 magnum. The impact of the slugs had spun the perp around and sent him crashing into the night table.

Mom had used that one spare second to roll to her feet on the other side of the bed. She must have been emptying the gun into him when he came diving at her; they went over the back of the easy chair together.

She had lost the gun during the scuffle. The gun had fallen...somewhere. I didn't see it near the body.

I walked over and looked at her. Pretty, probably about 32 going on 70. But there wasn't much of Mom's upper body left. The perp had grabbed a handful of sternum and yanked—hard.

Must have been his last act, though—there were four exit wounds in his back. The size of the wounds suggested that Mom was fond of lead hollowpoints, one of which is more than enough to stop any normal attacker. But there was nothing normal about this guy.

His clothes were in tatters, and his hair was frayed, receding and patchy, sort of like you find on year-old corpses. He hadn't bled too much either, and the color of his blood was unusually dark—so dark that it was hard to imagine how it could have carried enough oxygen to sustain him. Of course,

maybe it didn't have to. Most disturbing of all was the strangely contemptuous grin on his face, as if everything, even his own death, had been a source of unbearably wry amusement.

I wandered over to the window, shards of glass crunching underfoot, and called the all-clear. Out in the hall, booted feet thumped toward the doorway.

I stared out the window, past the jagged glass. The skeletal towers of the metrosprawl climbed toward a gray-green sky. Some view.

As Stosh came through the doorway, I studied the room again, looking for the mother's gun. She had to have fired the shots right as the perp ripped out her chest. Which meant that it *had* to be lying near the bodies. Which meant....

Even as I was turning, I heard the cat hit the floor with a hiss. I was too late. My Wildey-Wolf .475 was still clearing the holster as I watched the little girl draw a bead on me, a huge grin on her face. The kid had been holding Mom's gun behind the cat. It was a S&W Slimline Snubnose Special. And the hammer was falling.

The blast hit my ears at the same instant the slug slammed into me.

I felt myself folding over and flying backward as I brought up the Wildey-Wolf. Squeezed the trigger and kept squeezing. Didn't feel myself crash back into the counter, but I did see the girl do a mid-air somersault, a red rooster-tail of blood cartwheeling after her. She fell and did not move.

Then I realized I couldn't breathe. Stosh was shouting, but I couldn't hear him over the sudden roar of static from the radio. Darkness seemed to be cutting off my peripheral vision, and my head felt very heavy. As it drooped forward, I saw the cat, hiding behind Pintada's legs, purring, staring at me in amber-eyed amusement. Then it flicked a whisker and sauntered out of the room. Ω

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Trick or Threat

By Craig Sheeley

were sleeping in their clothes, with equipment and identification, are missing all equipment and personal effects (wallets, watches, etc.). Those who went to sleep wearing glasses still have them on. (Be ruthless about the PCs' clothing—ask them what they were wearing when they went to sleep, then hold them to it!)

The bedrooms are spartan, each holding a couple of pieces of random furniture—one has a dressing table and chair, another has a nightstand with bowl and pitcher, and the other has an old portable wardrobe. The light fixtures are bare light bulbs on the ceilings



Remember when Halloween pranks were limited to tipping over outhouses, soaping windows, decorating trees with toilet paper and so on?

Times have changed. So have Halloween pranks.

The information presented in this article is for the referee's use only.

This scenario makes a perfect introduction to **Dark Conspiracy**. It tends to work best if the PCs have no knowledge of each other; there's nothing like being stranded in a strange situation with a bunch of total strangers to heighten the tension and feelings of alienation.

A few NPCs are a must to fill out the cast of this little psychodrama.

RUDE AWAKENING

After a good night's sleep, the PCs finally rouse themselves, to discover a very strange thing: They're not where they were when they went to sleep.

Refer to the map. The characters are in the rooms marked K, two beds to a room. If there are more than six characters, some will be sleeping two to a bed.

The first thing the characters are going to notice is that their bedrooms are chilly—around 50 degrees Fahrenheit. If they puff, they can see their breath. Everyone is sleeping on old metal-frame, king-sized beds, with flower-print cotton pillowcloths over feather pillows, and covered with linen and cotton sheets and assorted blankets and quilts. All the characters are attired in whatever they were wearing when they went to sleep. Those who

with cords hanging down. Both walls and ceilings are covered with mismatched swatches of very old and faded wallpaper. Each bedroom has a closet—one closet is totally empty, one has some old newspapers wadded up in the corner and the third has a cardboard box with some clothing in it. The clothing (just enough to decently cover those PCs and NPCs who regularly sleep in scant attire) consists of worn old castoffs—bib overalls, jeans, a couple of large flannel work shirts in colorful plaids, etc.

The newspapers are old Kansas City papers, dated back into the late 1970s. The most recent headlines trumpet the Iran Hostage Crisis and President Jimmy Carter's response.

The lights do not work—there seems to be no electricity in their circuits. There

is plenty of light, from the early morning sunlight slanting in through the windows. The bathroom (room L) has old flush fixtures, but there is no water in the commode or water lines. Careful, or just tidy, characters will notice that there is dust on everything, sometimes up to a centimeter thick. And there are no footprints on the floors, at all.

WE'RE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE

Looking out the windows, the characters can see that they're on the second story of a house located in a rural setting. The fields grow high with frost-

windows covering regular panes, like the ones upstairs. A shattered and gutted television set sits against the south wall. Drag marks on the floor, under the dust, show where other pieces of furniture were moved out of the house, taken through the front door of room F. If the dust is greatly disturbed, large stain markings can be seen on the floor in patches. Sloppy varnish jobs? Or, judging from the dull red-brown hue of the stains, old blood?

If someone carefully examines the fireplace—like peering up into the flue—he finds the flue wedged shut with an old but still serviceable poker.

few matches left in it, a tattered cookbook, an old dishrag, some toothpicks, an old plastic bottle half full of liquid dishwashing detergent. If someone thinks to look behind the stove, he finds an old steak knife in somewhat useful shape—it's still sharp. A back door from the house is at the south end of Room I. The door is locked and bolted from the inside.

Room J: Room J was a sitting and sewing room. An old, defunct sewing machine still sits there, its stand bolted to the floor. The closet floor is littered with decaying scraps of cloth. Several spools of nylon thread can be found



browned grass, and trees are ablaze with the last remnants of colorful leaves. There is frost on the grass, and the windowpanes fog if breathed on.

After the characters come to grips that something is very strange here, they can go to the stairs to examine the other floors of the house. The attic is a lonely place, with only a couple of empty cardboard boxes in it. The first floor is another matter.

Room G: The stairs lead down into room G, an old living room. The derelict status of the room shows that the house is obviously abandoned—there are only a few pieces of furniture left, and they're all but destroyed. The fireplace looks like it hasn't been used in years, and the hardwood floor is thick with the dust that covers every surface. The windows are still in good shape, storm

Room F: Room F is nothing more than an entryway with a hall closet. This closet holds an old pair of rubber work boots. The front door is locked and bolted from the inside, and it is a solid panel of wood.

Room H: Room H is, or was, a dining room. It still has a large old wood dining table in it, too heavy to carry off and too solid to chop up. A pair of chairs still sit at it; they fall apart as soon as any real weight is placed on them. A calendar on the wall proclaims the month to be October 1983—30 years ago.

Room I: Room I is a compact kitchen, once fitted with makeshift modernization—the gas stove must surely date back to the 1960s, and the sink was probably installed before then. The cabinets and cupboards are bare but for a little trash—a used matchbook with a

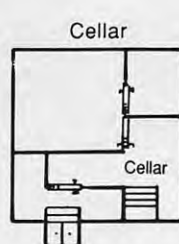
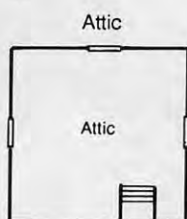
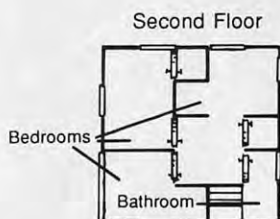
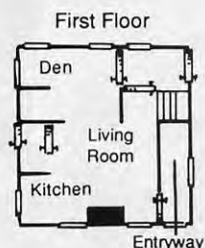
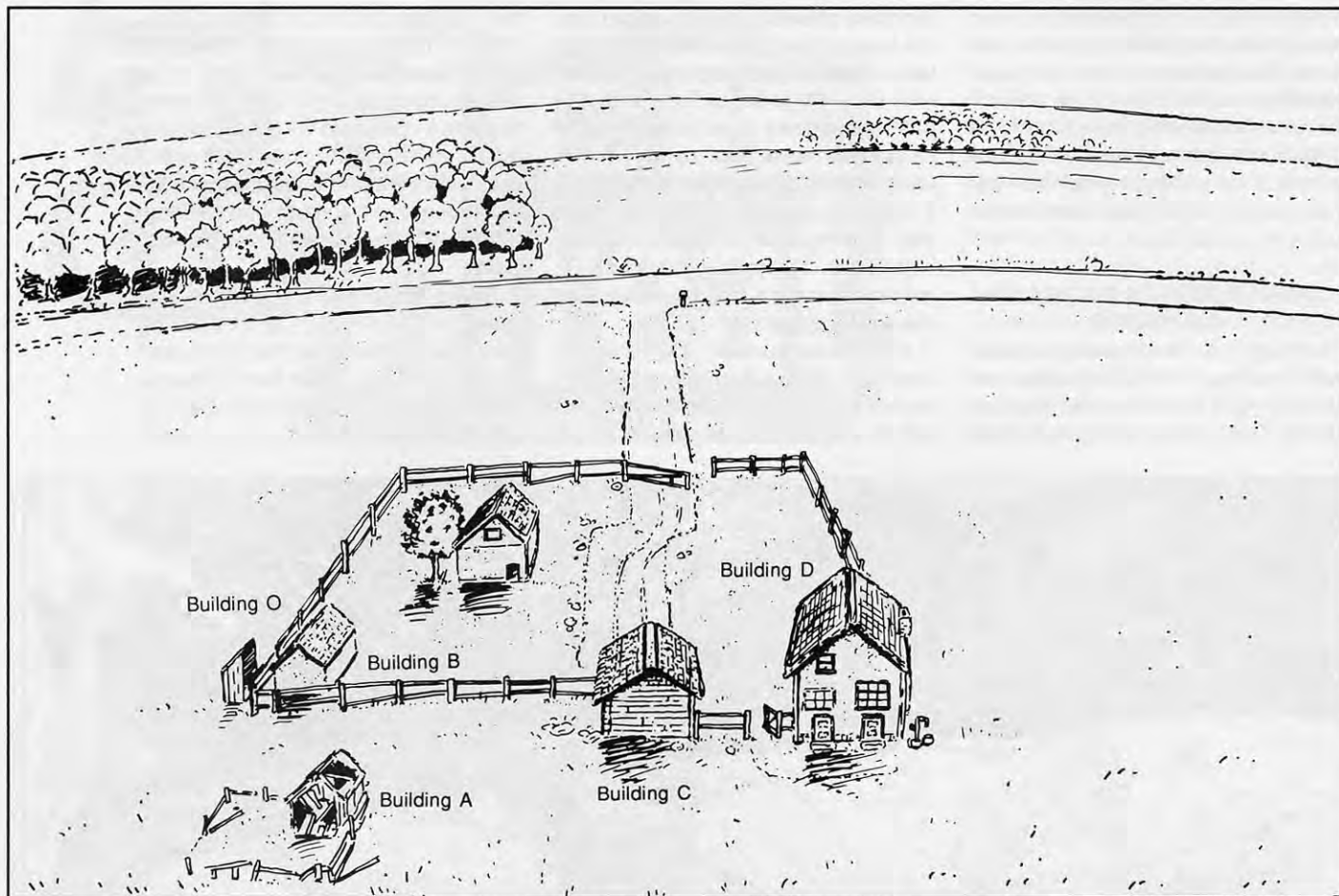
there, along with a rusty pair of large scissors.

Cellar: The cellar is typically dark, dank and gloomy. A brace of shelves lined with dusty glass jars sit against the east wall of room N; the jars are filled with rotted canned vegetables and fruit. The large room of the cellar contains an old propane furnace, neglected into uselessness.

SO WHERE ARE WE?

When the characters go outside the house, they discover that the air is cold, in the low 40s. The knee-high grass is wet with frost melting in the new sunlight. The sky is wonderfully clear and brightly blue, something few people see in the world of **Dark Conspiracy**.

The characters are without food and



0 2 4 6 8 10 meters

water. There is an old water pump sited near the back door to the house; after an extended period of hard pumping, the pump groans and yields up water. For a number of pumps, the water is dirty and rusty, but eventually the pump's rust is cleared and the water turns clean. It is very cold and tastes strange to city folks used to sanitized, chemically fortified recycled water.

There are five wooden outbuildings near the house; three are within the fence. The fence itself is visible for all the vines and bushes that have overgrown it.

Building O: Building O's function is obvious to anyone with country upbringing—its shape declares it to be an outhouse. It hasn't been used in a while, thankfully.

Building A: Building A is a dilapi-

dated wreck, falling apart where it stands, its fence broken.

Building B: Building B is an old, small workshop. An anvil still remains bolted to its ancient stump mounting there, and some old cans on the shelves hold mechanical odds and ends (old nails, screws, bolts, nuts, staples, etc.). It is clear that there were once tools here, and electrical lines still run from the pole in the yard to the shop, but the tools are gone now and there's no power. Someone with sharp eyes and a willingness to search the workshop can discover an old crowbar hanging from one of the ceiling rafters.

Building C: Building C is a garage—fresh tire tracks lead from its closed doors through the grass to the gravel drive! But the doors, both the double doors and the normal entrance, are

locked from the inside! If the characters wish to try to break in, they can force the doors (requiring bruised shoulders and two people with a combined STR of 15+). Or they can pry the doors open (requiring STR 6+ and either the poker from the fireplace or the crowbar from the workshop). Or they might break in through the dusty old glass-paned window.

There's a car inside the garage. Sitting on the dirt floor is a spotless, mint-condition, green 1954 Studebaker with creme hardtop. The car looks like it's been under a glass dome in a museum somewhere—it's even freshly waxed. If the characters examine it, they find the following facts: There are no keys anywhere in the car or garage. The engine is just as spotless and clean as the rest of the car, and there are no fluids in the

engines! The glove compartment contains current maps of Missouri and Kansas, a small First Aid kit, a working flashlight and registration for the car in the name of Roger Huxley, born March 15, 1937. The plates are current 2013 plates, registered in St. Louis. The trunk (which can be reached by taking down the back seats) contains a spare tire (also immaculate), a lug wrench and a jack. The gas tank is empty, bone-dry. Yet there are grass-blades and gravel stuck in the tire treads, which shows that the car has been driven recently—the grass is still wet.

Building D: Building D is a barn, a large, two-story affair with a hay-loft. It's in fairly good shape, its walls and roof covered with corrugated aluminum sheets. Inside, the place is musty with the smell of old hay. There are few artifacts, save an old spade, a dull hand-scythe, a hay-hook (sort of like an oversized fishhook with no barb attached to a transverse handle—a valuable tool for loading hay and a vicious weapon). All these are buried under a pile of rotting hay. Also, a tin bucket hangs from a nail on one of the loft walls.

GOING TO TOWN

The terrain around the farmstead is almost wild. The fields are heavily overgrown with grass. The woods across the gravel road to the north are thick and have started encroaching on the fields to the south. The browned leaves from the trees coat the road and have drifted into the fields on the chilly north-west wind. About 300 meters to the east, a single line of trees cuts across the fields, interrupted only by the road. A bridge at that point indicates the presence of a stream, which the woods follow.

To the west, the fields stretch over a hill—atop the ridge some 400 meters away, a human figure can be seen standing motionless. On closer examination, it turns out to be a tattered scarecrow, standing in the middle of the field. A flock of big black crows rises, squawking, from the scarecrow as the characters approach. The crows circle the characters once, complaining raucously, then fly across the road to nearby trees. The stream is a dark place, overshadowed by trees bent by wind and weather. Fanciful imaginations might even see something menacing in the shape of the trees, picturing gaunt limbs grasping, seeing gnarled and fearful faces in the knots and nubs of old wood and bark. Empathic characters (Empathy 4+ or Foreboding 3+) feel uneasy

when they even look at the treeline from a distance. The closer they get to the stream, the less comfortable they feel about it.

The gravel road shows some signs of traffic. To the east, the road dips down into lowlands overshadowed by ominous-looking woods. If the characters follow the road in this direction, go to the Tricks and Treats section and look up the Demonground encounters.

If the characters go west on the road, after about 1.5 kilometers, they find a two-lane blacktop road, headed north. Another four kilometers brings the characters to a small town. The ancient, faded city limits sign identifies it as the town of Charity. The population listing can't be read.

CHARITY

Charity is not a ghost town; that much can be seen immediately. It is one of those little places that can be missed if one is travelling at high speed and blinks, but there are people there, and livestock—chickens, cattle and barking dogs. In all, the little town consists of about a dozen houses, nine of which appear to be occupied, a couple of businesses (a blacksmith and a doctor's office of some kind) and a general store-cum-restaurant. Not many people are about, but most of those seen are clustered around the general store. The entire scene would look quite archaic, except that the general store has a solar cell array and a very large TV antenna on the roof.

The townspeople stare quite a bit at the characters as they approach—considering that the characters are marching in wearing mismatched castoffs and sleepware, this is excusable. But they seem friendly enough, if a little wary. The townspeople appear to be normal ruralites, thin and worn by their arduous life, dressed in patched and serviceable farm clothing—overalls, denims, linens, cotton shirts, straw and leather hats, and so on. If the referee wants to give the players a clue, or just make them nervous, he can mention that none of the townspeople seem to be fat, or even overweight. And none of them are armed.

The owner and proprietor of the general store, a tired-looking lady named Phyllis, genuinely welcomes the characters in. Despite her appearance, she is a whirlwind of energy with a broad Ozarks accent, chattering away. She wants to know who the characters are, how they came to Charity, where they're going and so on. In the course of the conversation, she answers a few ques-

tions about Charity, too. The town, she says, just sort of gets along. Folks are friendly here and help one another out. On occasion, Jack will make a run to the big city upstate and fetch some needed things back—parts for the electronics, tools, medicines for Doc, etc. What about the raiders that are always in the news, the outlaws who roam the countryside? Phyllis says they don't bother the people of Charity. Any cars in Charity? None that run—just not worth the time to get parts. Horses work better. Any horses that can take the characters back to civilization? That question gets a laugh from the audience, gathered to eavesdrop on the conversation. The only horses and beasts of burden hereabouts are needed to help get the crops in—if the crops aren't gathered, the townspeople don't eat over the winter! 'Course, old Jack might be making a run up to the big city in a week or so; they could ride with him and his wagon. Or they could hike 20 miles east up the road, hook up with I-44 and try to hitch a ride back to St. Louis. Phyllis offers to get word to the mysterious travelling Jack that there are some people wanting a ride. Old Jack, she explains, is a hermit, living in the hills out nor'-east, and is hard to find, even for the locals.

If the characters describe the farm where they woke up, the locals recoil in horror (and listen with extreme interest). Even the cheerful Phyllis looks solemn. And no one will tell the characters the reason for the reaction.

If the characters want to explore the town some more, they can. The blacksmith's shop is a strange place, a converted auto garage with a forge and anvil installed. The smith is a huge, ugly man with a misshapen face—he identifies himself as Smitty and is quite friendly, if not too bright, willing to show off his considerable skill with his craft. His young apprentice, a dour, thin-faced youth, watches disapprovingly from the background.

The doctor's office is an old storefront, where Doc has set up his examination and operating room. His facilities are frighteningly primitive, but he seems to get results. Doc is a short, thin stick of a man, with white hair where he has any. He spends most of his time lounging around at Phyllis' general store.

The rest of the people in the town appear to be women and children. The menfolk, they explain, are off working the fields and gathering the crops. The women are busy with chores, and the children, all under the age of 10 years,

play their simple games. The houses are shabby looking, but well kept. Almost all of them sport jack-o'-lanterns, celebrating the Halloween season. These carved pumpkins are very well made, and their faces are uniformly horrifying and grotesque.

If the characters ask to stay in the town until Jack can be reached, they are told that there's no room; the only houses and buildings left are being lived in, and the other buildings are cannibalized shells, usually missing a wall. No, the best spare shelter hereabouts is the old farm. Phyllis is willing to give the characters some food and essentials to tide them over. She waves off payment or promises of payment. "Just being neighborly," she says.

Should an empathic character try to read the emotions and thoughts of the townspeople, he gets the same general readings of intense curiosity, restraint and a sharp, unfocused anticipation. Treat the townspeople as having a Willpower of 5.

TURNING ON THE FEAR

So much for the introduction to the area. Past this point, the adventure ceases to have a linear timeline. The referee must decide the best possible way to spring the frights and terrors surrounding the characters. The stage is set.

The characters are only about nine or 10 miles from the major highway I-44, but they don't know that. They've been removed from their familiar surroundings and possessions, and placed in a house that is reputed to be haunted. In order to maximize the fear angle, the referee needs to get them separated, plaguing each with spooky events that only certain characters can perceive, so that each thinks the other is going nuts. Note-passing is a must at this point.

The characters are actually the victims of a hideous practical joke, a contorted and lethal Halloween "trick or treat." The townspeople are actually dark elves (remember, they're all thin, right?), even the children. They've ventured forth from their caves near the Demonground (the stream near the house flows from there) to enjoy their gruesome prank. Smitty, the blacksmith, is actually a smart, short ogre (STR 18, INT 3—a real ogre genius!). The elves lied when they said there were no vehicles—they have a pair of working pickup trucks, and the '54 Studebaker in the Huxton house garage works quite well, if you know how to command the animator spirit that makes it move. They have horses, too, including some horses

from their own proto-dimension—these hell-horses are fierce and deadly opponents, with Skill/Dam: 5/4D6. And they do have arms. There are enough knives for all the dark elves, several swords, two 12-gauge pump shotguns (treat as Mossberg 500s) with 20 rounds of ammo each, three Colt Python 20/3 pistols with 30 rounds of ammo each, and a Marlin .30-06 rifle with a scope and 50 shells.

The plot is to try to frighten the characters by spooking them with the tricks listed below, and then kill them off one by one, making sure the others find the dead.

TRICKS AND THREATS

You may want to use NPCs as the victims of many of these "tricks," for obvious reasons.

Black Dog: One of the female characters or NPCs (preferably an NPC) is targeted by a barghest. The devil dog practices its usual tricks, casting an image of following its prey into the target's mind, howling in the distance and mentally making sure only the target can hear it—in general, terrifying the hapless victim. Once the victim is alone and helpless, the barghest uses its Dimension Walk ability to go to its victim and tear her apart. The hellish hound then Dimension Walks with the mauled body to leave it on the scarecrow's stand, to be pecked on by the ptero-ravens and their ilk. The footprints of the huge hound show only near the stand, leaving no rational explanation of how the dog and body got there. This is a good trick to use to frighten the rest of the party, and it is practically impossible to stop, which is why an NPC is best for the target victim.

Birds: Everywhere the characters go, those ugly black crows are nearby, cawing and cackling in their fashion, flitting overhead and dogging the characters' steps. Should one of the characters get angry and throw anything at them—rocks, pine-cones, verbal abuse—the birds single him out as their prey.

They are more than birds—they are twisted parodies of ancient birds from an evil proto-dimension, the ptero-ravens (**Dark Races**, Volume 1, page 79). They can command other birds to do their bidding, and if they catch their selected enemy out alone during the day, they order a swarm of birds to attack! Treat the bird swarm like a bat swarm (**Dark Conspiracy**, page 189). And the cursed reptile-birds will continue to order such an attack any time they can get their target alone (or with only one other person), in the open,

during the day. All the while, the proto-avians hang back and laugh in their crowish way.

The ptero-ravens are also great spies and inform the dark elves of the characters' activities.

Headless Horseman: One of the dark elves has a fondness for the old legend of Sleepy Hollow. Each night, he gallops past the Huxton house on his black horse, hoping that some brave soul will come out and follow him east down the road, toward the old bridge. Using Thought Projection, he leads one of the characters astray down the road, past the bridge. Then he rides his horse toward his victim, emphatically urging the target character to flee ahead in terror. He chases his victim to the bridge, then flings a jack-o'-lantern Molotov cocktail to splash the character with burning gasoline!

Banshee's Call: A banshee (**Dark Conspiracy**, page 220) wails from the stream, coming at night to one selected victim, attempting to drive the subject mad with terror, calling the character down to the stream to kill him.

Ogre Feast: Smitty's hunger gets the better of him. He lurks outside the Huxton house, hiding in the old shed (building A), waiting to ambush and carry off someone who comes out to use the outhouse. That unfortunate is to be his dinner. After roasting the victim in the forge, he consumes his kill and has his dark elf apprentice use his Dimension Walk ability to take the gnawed bones back to the Huxton farm and dump them into the outhouse's cesspit.

Doctor, Doctor!: Doc uses his empathic abilities to make one of the characters think he's sick and run off alone (without telling anyone) to see the doctor. Doc's specialty is vivisection, and he prefers no anesthetic. The remains of the dead victim will be placed (via Dimension Walk) in the old oven at the Huxton house.

Water Horse: One evening, around twilight, the characters see a brilliant white horse near the stream. If they attempt to capture it or approach it, the horse seems a trifle skittish but friendly, eventually allowing itself to be mounted. Once a person is on its back, it kicks into a run, neighing wildly, and plunges into a deep pool in the stream to attempt to drown its unwary rider. The horse is an each-uisge, a variant of the fuatha (**Dark Conspiracy**, pages 221-222).

Demonground: About 400 meters north of the road, the stream flows out of a big cave in the side of a cliff. The cave is solid Demonground, and looks it, surrounded by misshapen trees and

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GDW

**A teenage
girl disappears
at the local mall.
Police investigators log her
as a possible runaway,
but something darker
may be lurking beneath
the incident.**

One of the player characters has been contacted by a close friend, Trudy Forrest, who lives in the suburbs of Atlanta. Trudy's teenage daughter, Shareen, has disappeared, and Trudy wants the adventurers to find out what happened. She cannot offer very much, but will agree to pay all the player characters' expenses during the search.

According to Trudy, Shareen was getting ready for a party one Friday evening. At 6 p.m., she went to the local shopping mall, Park Forest Towne Center, to buy some hair mousse. When Shareen did not return that evening, Trudy assumed she had gone directly to the party. But the next day, she didn't come home, and none of her friends had seen Shareen at the party. The police investigated, but found nothing. Shareen has been logged as a possible runaway, and the authorities have gone on to more important cases.

GATHERING INFORMATION

There are several sources the players can check for reports on Shareen's disappearance: the local police, the *Atlanta Constitution* news service, her friends and the shopping mall management.

Local Police

The adventurers can get the incident report from the local police, but it doesn't say much more than Trudy's account. The investigating officer, Detective Carter, isn't very optimistic about the chances of finding Shareen Forrest: "This kind of thing happens all the time. We simply don't have the resources to search for every kid who goes missing."

News Service

The *Atlanta Constitution* has an on-line news service available via modem, with all the paper's back issues for the past few years. Less high-tech investigators can go to a library and look at microfilms. There are hundreds of missing person reports from all over the Chatatanta metroplex, but an Easy: Intelligence task roll will reveal that over the past year, nearly a dozen missing persons were last seen at the Park Forest Towne Center mall. The news database will also mention that the former security chief of the mall, J. R. Bedford, resigned six months ago for unknown reasons.

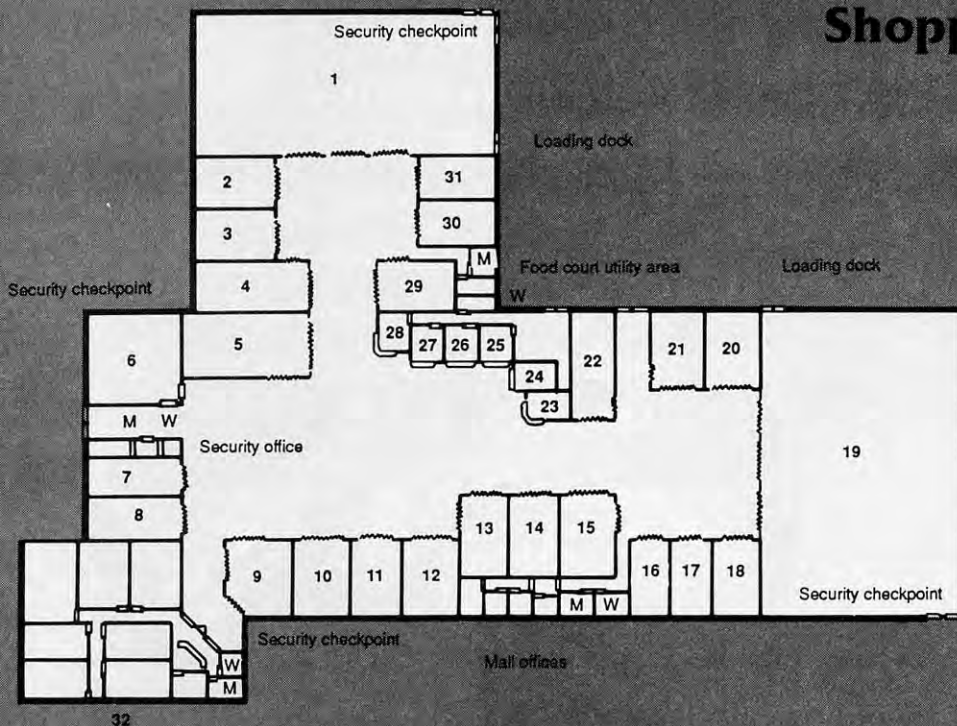
Shareen's Friends

Trudy can give the PCs the names of some of Shareen's friends. Most of them are students at Ted Turner High School. After school, they can be found hanging around at the mall. The kids will be reluctant to talk with an adult; a Difficult: Act/Bluff or Persuasion roll is required to get anything useful. Most of them know nothing, but one girl, Deenie Kelly, recalls that she saw Shareen at the mall the night she vanished: "Like, Shareen's, you know, buying some mousse, okay? And so, I ask if she's, like, going to the party. And she says yeah, but first, you know, she wants to check out some new clothes at Pen-Mart, right? But she never showed up."

An adventure by James L. Cambias



Shopping Mall



- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 Pen-Mart (department store) | 12 Wal-Dalt Books | 22 PowerJam (music) |
| 2 Elite Feet (women's shoes) | 13 Vacant | 23 Sushi Shak (sushi) |
| 3 Lester's Games (games and toys) | 14 In Step (women's shoes) | 24 Mucho Macho (Mexican food) |
| 4 Shoe Warehouse (shoes) | 15 Chic Mystique Boutique (clothing) | 25 Chicken King |
| 5 Pharmatek (drugstore) | 16 Loren's Sharper Trend (gadgets and gifts) | 26 Soy 'n' Krill |
| 6 Cap'n Wally's (restaurant) | 17 Vacant | 27 Vacant |
| 7 Michelle's Maternity Fashions | 18 Hair To Stay (hair styling) | 28 Frozen Fun (desserts) |
| 8 Iguana Republic (clothing) | 19 Sears-GUM (department store) | 29 On with the Shoe (shoes) |
| 9 Pro-Tech (athletic shoes) | 20 Ladyslipper (shoes) | 30 Vacant |
| 10 S&S Software Shack | 21 Tech Center (electronics) | 31 Fun Zone (arcade) |
| 11 Alexandra's Secret (lingerie) | | 32 Holo-Scope Super 7 Cineplex |

Shopping Mall Management

The manager of Park Forest Towne Center is Nathan Heem. Heem likes to talk about how his mall is the heart of the community, a modern version of the old town square. But questions about the disappearances provoke a much less friendly response: "There is no evidence that any of those missing people actually disappeared here at the mall. Our security is first rate. If you continue spreading rumors about this center, you will face legal action. I have no further comments at this time."

Mall Security Guards: If the PCs try to get information from the mall security guards, it will require a Difficult: Persuasion roll to get any answer other than, "I can't comment about that." On a successful roll, a guard will tell the investigators to check with Joe Bedford, "but don't tell anyone I said so."

Bedford

Joe Bedford was security chief at the

Park Forest Towne Center until a year ago, when he resigned to become a private investigator. Today he lives and works in a seedy old motel in the decaying heart of Atlanta.

When the PCs initially contact him, he will be suspicious (he fears that they are agents of SoProDev, the corporation that owns the mall). But if the investigators seem sincere enough, he will show them his secret files.

Bedford has collected clippings and notes about 14 missing person cases which involved the mall. All have occurred within the past year. There seems to be no connection among the cases. The victims are all ages, all ethnic groups and both genders. "The only thing I can see is that these people were at the mall," says Bedford. "Something in there is making people disappear. Of course, SoProDev doesn't want anyone to find out about that—they've been working hard to keep this covered up."

Bedford can give the PCs a detailed

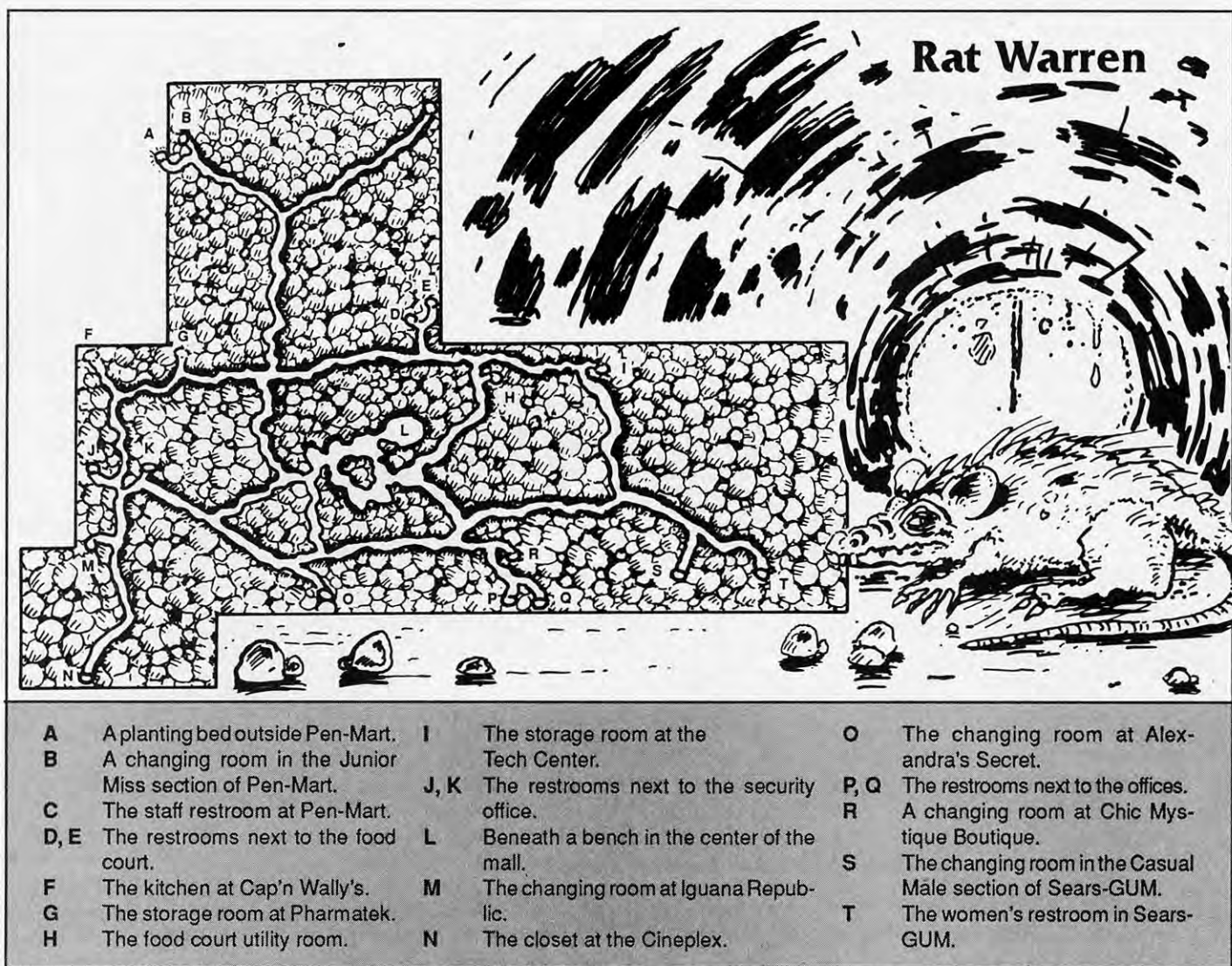
description of the mall's security systems (see below) and can provide them with a keycard, which he "borrowed" before leaving. The card will allow access to the mall and will prevent the security droid from reacting to the party.

WARNING

Once the player characters have done some snooping around, they will receive an anonymous postcard in the mail, bearing the message: "Stop meddling where you aren't wanted. Someone might get hurt." If the PCs continue their investigations, they will get a second note: "Leave town or die."

Nathan Heem is behind these threats, as he doesn't want any word to get out about the disappearances. After the second note, he will pay a group of gang members to beat up the PCs. (Use the standard Ganger NPC from the rulebook.)

Heem will make sure the gang attack cannot be traced back to him.



PARK FOREST TOWNE CENTER

Park Forest Towne Center is owned and operated by the SoProDev corporation. The mall contains the usual mix of stores and is identical to thousands of other malls across America.

Security

To enter the mall, shoppers must pass through one of the security checkpoints. These are manned by a pair of guards who screen out gang members, panhandlers and anyone who is drunk or obviously drugged. There are metal detectors set up at each checkpoint, and no guns or large knives are allowed in. A backup team of three guards waits in the security office.

When the mall is closed, all the entrances are sealed by steel doors, with Armor Value 6. They are controlled by a Maxiguard Multilock system, which opens for authorized palm prints or keycards. It recognizes the prints of all the security guards and the mall manager. Each store manager has a keycard. The shopping center is locked from

12:30 p.m. to 6:30 a.m.

The stores have folding chain-link steel gates. Most have no additional security, but the two department stores, Pen-Mart and Sears-GUM, have beam alarms covering the entrances.

At night the mall is patrolled by a Kraus Maffei-Deere GB-1000 guardbot. It can visually recognize the security guards, manager and anyone who displays a keycard; all others are considered intruders. The robot will tag intruders with its paint marker gun and will alert the mall alarm system to call the police. If attacked, it will use its tear gas canisters. It does not react to anything with a smaller mass than 30 kilograms.

RATS IN THE MALL

A group of super rats have taken up residence beneath Park Forest Towne Center. They use tunnels to capture humans, snatching people from changing booths and rest rooms. They eat some of the captives and give the rest to the humanoid ETs for their horrid purposes.

There are 16 super rats in the colony. Most carry knives, but three go armed with minisaws, two have zip guns, and one has an ET sonic stunner. (Minisaws and stunners are described in **DarkTek**; if that is unavailable, substitute machetes and a stun gun.) Four are unarmed.

The rats are clever and will remain hidden as long as they can. But if intruders get into their tunnel network, the rats will attack, fighting to the death to protect their secret.

Rat Warren

The super rats have dug a labyrinth of tunnels beneath the mall, with secret passages giving them access to many of the stores. Fortunately for the player characters, the rats have not bothered to set any booby traps in the tunnels, as they are confident they will not be discovered.

Entrances: There are 20 entrances to the rat warren. All are cunningly concealed, requiring a Difficult roll against Observation or Tracking to find—but

only if a careful search of the location is made. See the Rat Warren map.

Down Under: The tunnels are about three feet in diameter and are unlit. Humans can only crawl or wriggle through them in single file, and it requires a full action to turn around. The tunnels twist and turn, so the maximum visibility is three meters. Because the tunnel walls are soft dirt, they do not channel the force of an explosion, so the effects of explosives are resolved normally. Gas or flamethrower bursts will be channeled by the tunnels, doubling their range.

Beneath the center of the mall are nine large chambers, each about three

meters across and two meters tall. Humans can move and fight normally in these rooms. Three captives (including Shareen) are tied up in these chambers, waiting to be eaten by the rats. The bones and possessions of a half-dozen people litter the floor, along with a couple of bodies the rats haven't finished dining upon.

AFTERMATH

Once the player characters have found the rat warren and rescued the captives (assuming they survive), Heem will stop sending them anonymous threats and instead will offer a bribe of \$10,000 to avoid any unpleasant pub-

licity. But he and SoProDev will still bear a grudge against the PCs.

Trudy and Shareen will, of course, be eternally grateful, and the Atlanta Metro police will probably take a favorable view of the characters' activities in the future.

Of course, any surviving rats will remember, too.

JOSEPH R. BEDFORD

Level: Veteran.

Skills: Computer Operation 5, Interrogation 4, Melee Combat (Unarmed) 6, Melee Combat (Armed) 4, Observation 6, Small Arms (Pistol) 4, Small Arms (Rifle) 2, Streetwise 4.

Initiative: 4.

Physical Description: Bedford is a large, beefy man with crew-cut gray hair. His demeanor is bland and expressionless, from years of police work. Bedford is 43 years old.

Motivations: *Heart King:* Bedford is a man of honor, who believes that protecting the public is more important than maintaining the company's image. When he learned that SoProDev was concealing the disappearances, he resigned in protest. *Club 9:* Bedford is not afraid of a fight, and he frequently tries to solve problems with force. In combat, his goal is usually to disarm or subdue opponents without harming them. This does not apply to nonhuman monsters. Ω

Super Rats

Super rats are discussed in some detail in **Dark Races Compendium, Volume I**. A condensed version of that material is given here.

The super rats are the product of genetic engineering experiments gone awry. They are about the size of a dog (10 to 15 kilograms) and have human-level intelligence. Super rats are evil, vicious creatures who dwell in the shadows, preying on unwary humans.

Strength: 2	Education: 2	Move: 5/10/20/40
Constitution: 5	Charisma: 1	Skill/Dam.: 3/2
Agility: 7	Empathy: 3	Hits: 4/6
Intelligence: 4	Initiative: 5	# Appear: 1D6

Special: Super rats have a 75% chance of knowing how to use human weapons. They have Small Arms (Rifle) 4 and Thrown Weapon 6.

Super rats will seldom take on a human in melee combat, preferring to snipe at them from a distance or attack from behind. They are sadistic and utterly without mercy.

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The Royal Martian Geographical Society wishes to inform the public that its quarterly publication devoted to Victorian Era roleplaying is now available on Earth. Each thirty-two page issue contains:

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- DSF406 **ANSAR:** 2 Advancing (Laser rifle), 2 firing (VRF AP rifle)
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An attempt to prove the existence of other dimensions goes horribly awry and frees an evil that threatens the entire city of Columbus and the surrounding area.

WINDOW

This adventure is intended for a group of three to seven moderately experienced characters. It takes place in Columbus, Ohio. If the PCs have good reputations and useful skills, they can be hired to assist on the project in varying capacities. PCs who are skilled in electronics or computers, or who have high Empathy ratings, will easily be hired by the project director. PCs with other skills may be involved through friends.

BACKGROUND

This information can be easily acquired by the PCs, through a little research or through conversations. Some of it might already be known to them. For example, Dr. DeLang's "fall from grace" would be known to a person connected to academic circles:

Once-famous physicist, Dr. Charles DeLang, completed a radical work on multidimensional physics. In his work, *Many Worlds*, he argues for the existence of dimensions that are accessible to our own world. This in itself was not too radical, but Dr. DeLang went on to argue that these other dimensions were often inhabited, and the inhabitants of these dimensions had visited our dimension. These last claims destroyed the last vestiges of DeLang's already weakened credibility in the scientific community. He died in mysterious circumstances three weeks after being removed from his position at M.I.T. on the grounds of mental instability. One of DeLang's students, Joe Sincilli, was

convinced that not only was DeLang perfectly sane but that he was right. Sincilli was able to convince a colleague at Ohio State University to allow him to use the Special Projects Workshop to test the doctor's theory. Sincilli did not have the funds to do the work on his own. Amazingly, he was contacted by a noted psychic who had read Dr. DeLang's work. She provided him with the funds he needed, and his work got under way. It is generally believed that the project is intended to contact the spirits of the dead, at least according to a *National Inquisitor* article.

The following information will be more difficult to obtain and would require talking with someone who knows about the project:

The project is not intended to contact the dead at all. According to Dr. DeLang's equations, there are numerous dimensions bordering our own. The project is intended to confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis that these other dimensions exist. Various computer and electronics experts have been brought in to work on it, as have several reputed experts in parapsychology and psychic research. Rumor has it that a machine is being built that will enable a person to "see" into these other dimensions.

REFeree's INFORMATION

Dr. DeLang's equations are correct. There are, in fact, other dimensions that are accessible to our own dimension. Naturally, the Dark Minions would prefer that this was not generally known. They were especially worried that Dr.

DeLang would work out enough of the mathematics to enable humans to construct machines enabling them to enter these other dimensions. Because of these factors, the Dark Minions undertook a (successful) campaign to discredit him and finally murdered him.

The student is building a machine with the capacity to augment human empathic abilities in such a way that a human will be able to sense the presence of these other dimensions and even be able to gain some perceptions of them. The psychic plays the role of a typical "New Age nut-cake" but is actually a committed opponent of the Dark Minions who uses her image as protective camouflage.

SPECIAL PROJECTS WORKSHOP

The Special Projects Workshop is located near the campus of Ohio State University. It is funded by OSU and several private investors, and is used by OSU students, professors and independent researchers. It was developed to provide a place for more eccentric projects to be worked on. While there have been some impressive failures, there have been several spectacular successes (including a revolutionary new processing chip and a more effective laser system). Unknown to most of the investors, the workshop is affiliated with several anti-Dark Minion groups and often provides them with workspace and equipment. The building is frequented by a wide variety of very odd people, ranging from absent-minded professors to ex-bikers working on more

of the MIND





SHADOW HOUNDS

#Appear: 1D6 Initiative: 5 Agility: 6
 Attack: 95% Strength: 19 Skill/Dam: 8/4D6
 Move: 10/20/40 Constitution: 20 Hits: 30/60

Special: Shadow hounds are treated as having an overall body armor value of 1. They do not suffer double damage from head hits. They also have the ability to project emotions (fear).

Shadow hounds are tiger-sized predators from a dimension accessible to our own. In terms of appearance, shadow hounds have a thick, convoluted hide with various growths on it. Their heads are elongated and have very large nostrils. Their eyes see into the infrared and ultraviolet parts of the spectrum, giving them excellent vision under nearly all conditions. They have two rows of teeth in their maws. They have four legs, each of which terminates in a bony, hoof-like structure. Shadow hounds are fair swimmers but are nearly incapable of climbing objects. They are voracious animals and hunt in packs. They will attack virtually anything they think they can eat and seem to be devoid of any fear. They are capable of digesting nearly any terran organic material (and are very fond of human flesh). This fact has led human scientists who have studied captive specimens to conclude that they may have evolved on Earth or may have been genetically engineered to enable them to hunt on Earth. They can be trained by those with adequate skills (if trained from birth) and are occasionally used as guard and hunting animals by Dark Minions.

efficient engine designs.

The building is a reinforced concrete structure (to contain those nasty explosions) with solid metal doors. The outside of the structure was painted by the workshop director's daughter and her art friends. It was done in a variety of styles, from Grateful Dead to Neon Madness to Cubist. The effect is actually quite attractive from an aesthetic standpoint.

Power Plant/Mainframe: The SPW's independent power supply and its own mainframe are located here. Both were built at the SPW. They look a bit odd but work very well. The mainframe is known as "Buckeye Dude," for obscure reasons.

Storage/Work Area: This area is used primarily as storage, but large projects are often worked on in here.

Work Area 1: This area is equipped for mechanical work. There is a constant buzz of power tools, and bright flashes from welders and cutting torches illuminate the room. Virtually any standard mechanical tool can be found here, and if it can't be found, someone can build it.

Work Area 2: This area is equipped for electrical work. Various beeping and flashing machines line the walls, and the smell of solder fills the air at all times. Virtually any standard and many nonstandard pieces of electrical equipment are in the work area, and anything else that is needed can be quickly built.

Work Area 3: This area contains the computer work stations. The room is filled with a variety of SPW-built computers, as well as some shelf models. There are always people taking apart terminals (often while others are trying to work on them) and modifying the equipment. There are numerous running jokes about the whole system will spontaneously come to life someday.

Work Area 4: This area is set aside for special projects. The only project currently using the room is the project to test DeLang's theories. The room contains all sorts of equipment, as well as the dimensional scanner. There is always at least one person in the room or near the door (when work is not being done, someone is assigned to discreetly guard the room).

DIMENSIONAL SCANNER

The dimensional scanner is a very large device that looks almost like a vehicle. The operator climbs inside and sits in the chair, and the top section of the device is lowered over him. The scanner is linked to several equipment

banks and has its own computer and backup computer.

The device acts as an augmentation device for certain empathic capacities. Specifically, it enables the operator to perceive other dimensions as if he were actually present. The device does actually open up a pathway to the dimension from the operator's mind. This means that empathic attacks can be sent along the pathway (in either direction). However, physical travel through the pathway is not possible (this is beyond current human technology).

The device is used by the character making an Empathy success check (as per page 55-56 of **Dark Conspiracy**). This roll is made as follows: 1D6+Empathy=power level. The operator has the option of boosting the power of the device. The level of boosting is added to the power level. It can be boosted up to 6. Each boost requires a task roll against the operator's Constitution. A failed roll results in unconsciousness for a number of hours equal to the power level.

Power Level

Level	Result
1-5	Operator can view the dimension the device is in and can sense the presence of other dimensions. Gates within 10 metersxpower level can be detected.
6-11	Operator can view another dimension vaguely. Gates within 20 metersxpower level can be detected.
12-17	Operator can view another dimension clearly, and beings within sight range can be seen clearly. Gates within 40 metersxpower level can be detected.
18-23	As above, plus the operator can communicate with beings in the dimension. Gates within 80 metersxpower level can be detected.
24-29	As above. Gates within 160 metersxpower level can be detected.
30-32	As above. Gates within 320 metersxpower level can be detected.

The operator can shift his area of view up to 100 metersxpower level away from the point where the machine is located.

Viewing range is the normal sensory range for the operator. The range for detecting gates is measured from the area of view.

Pre-Action: Dimensional scanners are very rare (as of the adventure, only one exists). While the scanner is being constructed (the actual building will take two months, while the theory and design took years to develop) what occurs is up to the referee. The PCs' work on the project can provide them with money and equipment for their other activities against the Dark Minions.

First Use: Once the scanner is complete, it will be tested. The first person to test it should be Ralph Digg. Digg will get into the device, and the various connections will be made. The machine will be powered up, and Digg will report that he can see the room around him and will describe what is occurring. He will then say he will try to scan for another dimension. The machine will hum and emit a faint aura. Digg will report that he can see something and that he is increasing the power. He will suddenly scream, go into convulsions and lose consciousness. He will remain in a coma for 1D6 weeks and afterward will have no memory of what happened to him after he went to turn up the power.

Second Use: Despite the failure of the first attempt, the team should not be discouraged. The device will be carefully rechecked. A week after the first attempt, a second NPC, Carlos Sands, will volunteer to try the device. He will climb into it, and the device will be activated. He will immediately report being able to see the room and will say that he is going to increase power. He will then report that he can dimly sense something like an open space. He will turn up the power again and report that he can now make out a large, open area that looks like the area around the SPW, but without any structures present. He will describe the area as dark and shadowy. He will turn up the power again and report that he can sense a presence nearby. He will turn up the power again and report that he can make out a shape that is vaguely man-like in appearance. He will then report he is turning up the power again. He will suddenly cry out, convulse and struggle, then lose consciousness. He will be out for one to six hours.

A VISITOR FROM BEYOND

Unbeknownst to everyone on the team, Sands' body has been taken over by a denizen of the dimension that the scanner was tuned to. The disturbances created by the device attracted one of the inhabitants of the dimension, and as Sands increased the power, the being was able to contact Sands and pass through the machine into his body. At

the same time, Sands' "spirit" was sent into the denizen's dimension and is trapped there. The brain activity recording devices will record this occurrence as follows: At first, Sands' brain will be highly active, then all activity will cease (as if brain death had occurred). This momentary cessation of brain activity will be followed by a recording of brain activity that is radically different from any ever before recorded of Sands. If the PCs examine these records, this may tip them off to the fact that something is wrong. If confronted, "Sands" will say that the machine may have permanently altered his brain. He pretends to be horrified by what the records show.

The entity in Sands' body has access to some of Sands' memories and skills, enough to enable it to speak English and act at being a human. It is also familiar with Earth's dimension. Its knowledge is a bit out of date since it was forced out of this dimension and back to its own over 200 years ago.

Once it regains consciousness, it will feign amnesia and ask lots of questions. It will insist that the machine not be used and will have persuasive arguments to back up its position. It does not want anyone else using the machine because it is afraid that contact would be made with Sands. It will sabotage the machine if necessary, but will only destroy it as a last resort.

The PCs should have a difficult time figuring out that Sands' body is possessed. The being will account for any odd behavior by appealing to its feigned amnesia or by making reference to possible nerve damage. The exact details of the PCs' penetration of the deception is left to the referee (the procedure for detecting changelings would be a good guideline).

A DARK GATE OPENS

The thing possessing Sands' body will use the workshop to construct a device to locate a dimensional portal built by its kind centuries ago on Earth. It will take it a day to construct the device. It will kill a homeless person and remove part of his nervous system to get some essential parts for the device. When completed, the device will be a black, rectangular box with a liquid crystal screen which indicates the direction of the nearest dimensional portal (which is the one it is looking for). The device has a range of 10 kilometers. The interior is an odd mixture of electronic parts, computer circuits and nervous tissue preserved in a slimy gel. The device is powered by standard batteries, but the

JOE SINCILLI

Level: Experienced.

Skills: 4; Melee Combat (Armed) 4, Melee Combat (Unarmed) 2, Small Arms (Pistol) 3, Pickpocket 2, Streetwise 2, Vehicle Use (Motorcycle) 3, Physics 7.

Physical Description: Sincilli is slightly taller than average and has short black hair. He works out regularly and is in good physical condition. He favors a jacket and tie while teaching and wears athletic clothing while working on the project.

Personality: Sincilli is the student of Dr. DeLang who is running the project. He is obsessed with testing his mentor's theory and will let almost nothing stand in his way. However, he is a very religious man and will not engage in what he considers to be immoral activity for any end. His dedication to DeLang is primarily a result of the fact that DeLang sponsored him for a college education. Prior to college, Sincilli was a member of one of Boston's more dangerous gangs. He still has a combat knife and Colt M1911A1 from his gang days and still knows how to use them.

RALPH DIGG

Level: Novice.

Skills: 2; Psychology 2, Willpower 1, Computer Operation 4, Human Empathy 3.

Physical Description: Digg is a tall, thin man who favors Oxford shirts and worn-out jeans. He wears very thick glasses. His hair is long and is generally worn in a pony tail.

Personality: Digg is a likable young man who is majoring in computer science at Ohio State. He is heavily into mysticism and occult studies, but more because he is curious than because he takes it seriously. He is rather brave and borders on being foolhardy. He is always willing to try something new for a thrill. His Empathy rating is 4.

CARLOS SANDS

Level: Novice.

Skills: 2; Climbing 3, Vehicle Use (Wheeled) 3, Willpower 1, Biology 2, Foreboding 2, Human Empathy 5.

Physical Description: Sands is of average height and medium build. His hair is dark brown and brown eyes. He favors T-shirts with ecology slogans on them. He is majoring in biology at Ohio State.

Personality: Sands is a very outgoing individual, and he is well liked by nearly everyone. He is a hard worker in school and always fulfills his promises. He is somewhat cautious by nature, but has a very strong desire to know about his special gifts, and he will take great risks to find out more about them. His Empathy rating is 6.



BODY STEALERS

Strength: * Education: 3 Move: *
 Constitution: * Charisma: 8 Skill/Dam: *
 Agility: * Empathy: 8 Hits: *
 Intelligence: 8 Initiative: * #Appear: 1

*As per victim

Special: Willpower Drain, Human Empathy, Project Emotion, Darkling Empathy, Possession.

There are 13 of these entities in existence in their portion of their home dimension. Their dimension was originally much larger and inhabited by many types of beings, but a terrible war fragmented the dimension and left many of the inhabitants trapped in these fragments. Most of them died, but many with special empathic powers continued to exist. These body stealers can exist without a physical body in their home dimension and can attack other intelligent living things to steal their bodies. The body that a body stealer tries to possess must be within the body stealer's dimension or in direct contact with it (e.g., via the dimensional scanner).

The Possession attack works as follows: The entity must get a stage of success equal to or greater than the target's original Willpower score on the Power Level Table (page 56 in **Dark Conspiracy**). For example, a body stealer would need a stage three success to take control of a body whose owner had a Willpower of 3. They can use Willpower Drain to make their job easier, of course.

The victim becomes disembodied and trapped in the body stealer dimension. The body stealer has limited access to the victim's memories, but cannot use the victim's skills. A body stealer that is killed outside of its dimension while in a stolen body is permanently destroyed, while one that has a body destroyed within its dimension will be able to try again. Body stealers see humanity solely as a source for bodies.

organic parts require bathing in the slimy gel. It has a three-week supply made. The gel can be made by humans, once it has been analyzed chemically.

It will take the thing in Sands' body 10 days to find the gateway. The gateway is located in a wooded and abandoned section of West Virginia (a two- or three-hour drive from Columbus). The long, unexplained trips it will make searching for the gate may make the PCs suspicious.

It will take the thing three days to reactivate this gate, and it will camp in the woods and not return to the SPW. During this time, it will have to kill six people for "parts" and will steal electronic equipment. There will be news reports of the six killings. The trash papers will have headlines like "Brainy Killer Steals Minds," "Ghost of Neurosurgeon has Returned to Kill, says Psychic" and so forth. The more reputable papers and news services will report the killings and note the fact that parts of victims' nervous systems were removed prior to their deaths. According to the autopsy reports, the removal work was done by someone with a great deal of surgical skill.

STONES

The dimensional portal consists of four stones arranged in a square. The stones are black and seem to absorb the light. They are nearly perfect cubes. The interior of each cube contains an array of bizarre circuits, many of which look like living things. The parts from the victims have also been incorporated into the cubes to replace damaged circuits. A person with an Empathy rating of 1 or higher will be able to sense the location of the mechanism to open a cube. The exterior material of each cube is very damage resistant (it would require antivehicle weapons to breach a cube).

The stones feature prominently in local legends. According to these legends, evil spirits came from a land of darkness and built the stones as a doorway to their land. These evil spirits stole away people and brought them into the land of darkness. When these people returned, they were not the same. The evil spirits plagued the land for a year until the local tribes banded together, driving them back into their dark land, and a great shaman closed the doorway.

What really occurred was that a human with a very high Empathy rating who had the ability to "see" into other dimensions contacted the dimension and was taken over like Sands was

centuries later. The thing controlling that person used the body to construct a gateway and lured people through it, where they were taken over by others of its kind. Eventually, the tribes got together and killed the possessed people, and their shaman, who had great empathic abilities, was able to shut the gate. The entities outside the gate died with their stolen bodies, since they could not exist without them in this dimension. Those few that escaped back home were disembodied as their stolen bodies died of thirst.

HOUNDS IN THE NIGHT

The thing's first attempt to open a gateway to its home dimension will fail. Instead, the gate will open to another dimension, and six shadow hounds will be released. They will go on a killing spree until they are destroyed. The attacks of the shadow hounds will make the news. Survivors will report horrible shapes that seemed vaguely like large hounds tearing people apart before their eyes.

The hounds will hunt each night, with each hound hunting in its own area. During the day, they will hole up in abandoned buildings. Naturally, the PCs will want to get involved. If the reports of the attacks are checked, it will be found that they are occurring in an expanding circle. Naturally, the gateway is at the center of the circle. The opening of the gate will give people who have an Empathy rating of 1 or higher bad dreams, and those with Foreboding skill will sense that something is wrong. The degree of success will determine what amount of information is acquired. The exact information revealed is left up to the referee.

BODY SNATCHING

The second time the thing opens the gate, it will locate its dimension. It will contact its fellows and inform them of its plans. It will then set out to capture humans alive and bring them through the gateway to provide bodies for its fellows. It will continue this until all 12 of its fellows have bodies, and then it will close down the gate, leaving the helpless spirit of Sands trapped there.

The disappearances will be noted in the local news. The details of the snatchings and any PC investigations are left to the referee.

The entity will act in an intelligent manner and will do its best to avoid being caught or leaving evidence. However, it is pretty much a stranger to Earth's dimension and will be ignorant about many things (like how advanced human forensic technology is), which

may lead it into trouble.

If the entities are unchecked, they will begin a campaign of subtle evil. Their style is to take control of areas by gaining control of key people. Control may be gained of the person through conventional means (bribes, blackmail and so forth) or by bringing them into the entities' dimension and stealing the person's body. The entities live to do evil and gain extreme pleasure and satisfaction by doing evil for evil's sake. Like many other Dark entities, they actually draw some sustenance from the pain, suffering and horror of others. They are also big on revenge, so if any of the 13 entities escape, they will eventually return for vengeance.

FINISH

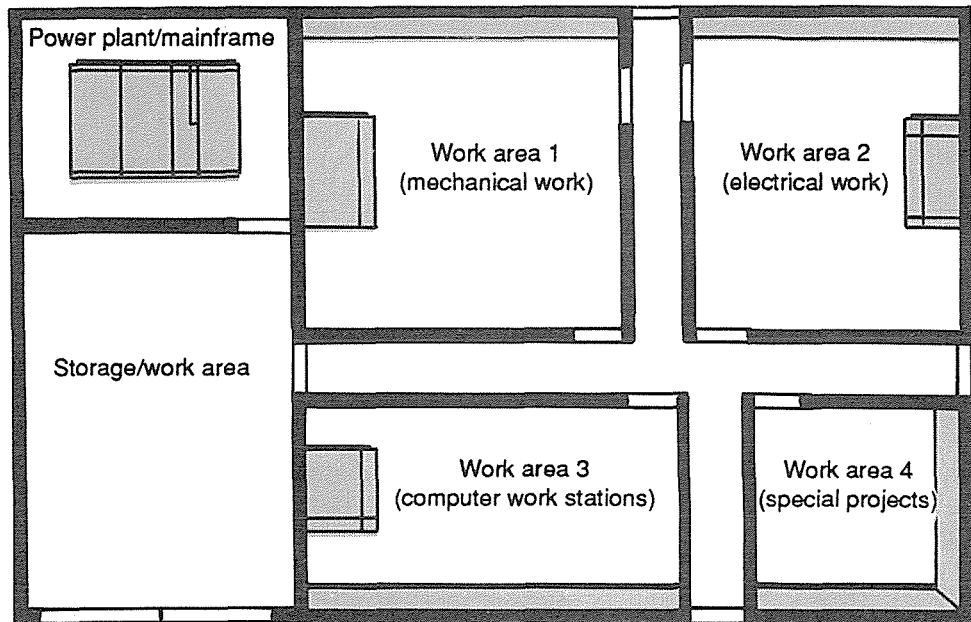
If the 13 entities have been killed (by destroying their stolen bodies while they are outside of their home dimension), the PCs have won a major victory. If some of them escape but their gate is destroyed, they will begin building a new one (this will take years to do) and will be looking for a chance for revenge. If some of them escape but their gateway is undestroyed, they will move the gate to a secure location. They will then seek revenge against the PCs.

Unfortunately, any humans who had

their bodies stolen will be trapped in the entities' dimension. They will be unable to take over another body or their own, unless they have the ability to do so (which most

humans don't). Of course, the next research project at SPW might be to find a way to get the people back, but that is something left for the future. Ω

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We were surprised
to receive radio
transmissions from
the Out-Law section
of West Virginia.
After All, we didn't
think there were any
people left there
since those things
moved in.

ROAD WORK

By Michael C. LaBossiere

This adventure takes place in Ohio and West Virginia and is intended for a group of Experienced PCs. The characters are hired to bring supplies and equipment to a group of human survivors in Demonground-infested West Virginia. In actuality, the PCs are being lured into an elaborate Dark Minion trap.

PLAYER BACKGROUND

The following information can be made available to the players. The exact amount revealed and how the players become aware of it are left to the referee's discretion:

The state of West Virginia has recently fallen almost entirely Out-Law, with little or no federal authority present in most areas. Even local authority has diminished or vanished entirely. Because of the horrible conditions, most people have left West Virginia for better areas. However, people fleeing the state often reported that others were unable to leave, for whatever reason. In order to substantiate these claims, a small military force led by Captain Daniel Jeffreys entered West Virginia. Contact was lost several hours after the force entered West Virginia, and no one expected to hear from Jeffreys or his men ever again. Naturally, it came as quite a surprise when two weeks after contact had been lost, Jeffreys came out of West Virginia with news of a large group of survivors.

REFEREE

West Virginia is now infested with Dark Minions. Those who could flee did so as fast as their mode of transportation could carry them. Those who didn't make it out died, or worse. There is no federal, state or local authority left intact in most of West Virginia.

It is, overall, a really bad place to be.

Captain Jeffreys' expedition was attacked by Dark Minions and their allies when they entered Demonground. Most of the force died in battle, but several soldiers, including the captain, were taken alive. Most of these soldiers died in horrible Dark Minion experiments, but Jeffreys and Sergeant Slade Miller were kept alive. Their brains were altered by Dark Minion surgery, and they were sent out to lure others into the Dark Minion trap.

Once Captain Jeffreys returns, he will begin recruiting assistance and raising money to purchase equipment and supplies for the "survivors." His recruiting efforts will be geared at those who

have fought the Dark Minions or at least know about them. Jeffreys may contact the PCs if he knows about them or if other people he has contacted know about them. Or the PCs may see one of his ads.

Jeffreys has chosen Columbus, Ohio, as his base of operations. He has acquired an empty warehouse in the downtown area and is using it as his staging area. He will conduct interviews of potential recruits in a small office in the warehouse. During the interviews, he will make subtle hints about strange things being on the loose in West Virginia and will attempt to draw information from the interviewee. If Jeffreys believes that a person knows about the Dark Minions, he will hire him for the job. Naturally, the interviews should be run so that all the PCs get hired.

The exact amount each recruit is paid for the mission depends on his skill, experience and reputation. Jeffreys is willing to give some up-front money for equipment or whatever might be needed. He will also promise bonus money.

Jeffreys will give a rough description of the mission to those he interviews, but only those actually hired get the full story. Jeffreys will tell the people he has hired that they will be taking several truckloads of equipment and supplies to a large group of survivors who are holding out in West Virginia. He says that he intends to give them the means to keep on living. He also says that this is the first step in reclaiming West Virginia.

Of course, the actual purpose of the mission is to lure people who oppose the Dark Minions to their deaths, and to bring supplies and equipment to the Dark Minions in the West Virginia Demonground.

CONVOY

The convoy consists of two HMMWVs with mounted M60 machineguns, one Orca 2½-ton truck configured to carry passengers, and two Kenilworth Pile-driver semitrailer tractors hauling enclosed trailers. Most of the trailers' cargos consist of mundane items like building material, food, medical supplies and so forth. There are also weapons in the trailers' cargos. One of the trailers has a box containing 10 M16A2s (the box is labeled as containing AR-15s), 20 30-round clips and 300 rounds for each weapon. Another box contains 10 Ingram M10 .45s (the box is labeled as containing propane canisters), 20 clips and 200 rounds for each weapon. Another box containing an M2HB and four belts is labeled as containing a stove. A box labeled as containing pipes actually

Dark Conspiracy



LAZ

contains eight M136s. The last box of weapons is labeled as containing 10 Mossberg M500s and 100 rounds per gun, which is exactly what it contains. Only the captain and the sergeant know what is in the mislabeled boxes.

NPCs can be used to fill out the convoy. They will be mostly Experienced and Veteran NPCs. There will be no Novice NPCs.

The NPCs will be well armed, and most will have had some experience with Dark Minions.

COLUMBUS TO MARIETTA

The trip from Columbus to Marietta will take two to three hours, depending on the speed of the convoy. The highway between the two cities is in fair condition and is maintained on a semi-regular basis. There has been some trouble recently on Ohio's less-patrolled highways from groups of people attacking tractor trailers to loot them for food and other supplies. Some of these people have almost no other way to survive, but others are in it for the loot and the thrill. Naturally, the PC convoy will be attacked by one such group. They will assume anything worth guarding with two machinegun-armed Hum-

mers is worth stealing and will strike on a deserted stretch of highway, near an overpass.

The attacking group will consist of two subgroups:

The first subgroup includes six people on dirt bikes. The bikes can be treated as Apaches and the riders as Biker NPCs. They are armed with Colt Pythons.

The second subgroup consists of eight people in a beat-up pickup truck. The truck can be treated as a Chrysler Conestoga 5/4-ton pickup truck. The people can be treated as Ganger NPCs. Two of them are armed with Marlin .30-06 bolt-action rifles, and the rest are armed with Mossberg M500s. The size of the group can be modified in accordance with the numbers of people in the convoy.

The bikers cruise the highway, looking for victims. Once they spot the convoy, they will radio the others in the truck. The driver of the truck will drive to an overpass and set up an ambush. Once the ambush is in place, the bikers will begin to attack the convoy.

If the convoy makes it past the overpass, the ambushers will get back in the truck and set off in pursuit. The attack-

ers will not kill more people than they need to in order to capture the trailer trucks. They are primarily after the cargo, not thrills. They will break off the attack if the convoy seems to be too much for them (taking heavy casualties will do the trick). If the attackers take the convoy, the survivors will be looking at a long walk, and the captain or sergeant will have to start over. If they do not, what happens next will be up to the PCs. Of course, another "survivor" from Jeffreys' expedition (a changeling this time) could make an appearance.

If the convoy makes it past the attackers, it will encounter no further difficulty. Once they get within 10 miles of Marietta, the PCs will be back in a well-patrolled area.

MARIETTA

Marietta is a town of 22,000, located at the intersection of the Ohio and Muskingum rivers. In this part of the country, the lack of reliable land transport routes has led to a revival of river transport. A variety of craft ply the rivers, and Marietta has thrived because of this, becoming an important small port. Since Marietta wants to stay prosperous, the city has invested in river patrol boats (a force of six, with Veteran crews). And because West Virginia is infested with human outlaws and worse, Marietta maintains a paramilitary force of 50 people. The force consists of 10 Novice, 30 Experienced, 9 Veteran and one Elite NPC. They are armed with M-16A2s and are equipped with jeeps. There is also US Regular Army force of 20 soldiers, including 16 Experienced, 3 Veteran and one Elite NPC. The force has two two-man M60 crews and one 60mm mortar crew. The rest of the force is armed with M16A2s. The soldiers are assigned to guard the bridge to prevent any unwanted intrusions from West Virginia.

Several members of the paramilitary force have been into West Virginia since it "fell," and they may be a useful source of information. Some of those who have been into West Virginian Demonground have their doubts about the town Jeffreys claims to have found, but they will only express such doubts if the PCs get to know them.

Inspection: The PCs' convoy will be checked by members of the paramilitary force upon entering the town, but the inspection will be cursory, since Jeffreys is known by the checkers.

While the vehicles are being given the once-over, a bedraggled old man will stagger up to the lead vehicle and start shouting at the top of the lungs:

Captain Daniel Jeffreys

Level: Veteran.

Skills: Small Arms (Pistol) 5, Small Arms (Rifle) 4, Vehicle Use (Wheeled Vehicle) 4, Computer Operation 2, Leadership 4, Interrogation 2.

Initiative: 4.

Physical Description: Jeffreys is a medium-sized man with dark brown hair and brown eyes. He is of average appearance and is in his early 30s. His eyes often have a faraway look to them, as if he is seeing or hearing things that others cannot.

Personality: Jeffreys' normal personality is that of a dedicated officer and a decent person. However, he has been "reprogrammed" by the Dark Minions. They have altered his brain and have implanted several devices that enable them to control him and use his senses. He is unaware of what has happened to him (it has been erased from his memory), and as far as he knows, he is bringing supplies to help a town full of desperate people. The devices and modifications ensure that the Dark Minions will be able to control his every action, should they so desire.

Equipment: M9 pistol with two clips, M177 carbine with four clips, Kevlar vest, Steri-Med personal medical kit and individual tactical radio.

Sergeant Slade Miller

Level: Experienced.

Skills: Small Arms (Pistol) 3, Small Arms (Rifle) 4, Vehicle Use (Wheeled Vehicle) 3, Leadership 2.

Initiative: 3.

Physical Description: The sergeant is a tall, thin man with light brown hair and brown eyes. He has a glassy look, and he seems cold and distant.

Personality: The sergeant really doesn't have a personality any more. The Dark Minions worked on him first and didn't quite get it right. He is basically a remote-controlled organic robot.

Equipment: M9 pistol with two clips, M177 carbine with four clips, Kevlar vest, Steri-Med personal medical kit and individual tactical radio.

"You're all dead men if you go across the bridge! There is only death over there! If you go, you'll end up dead!"

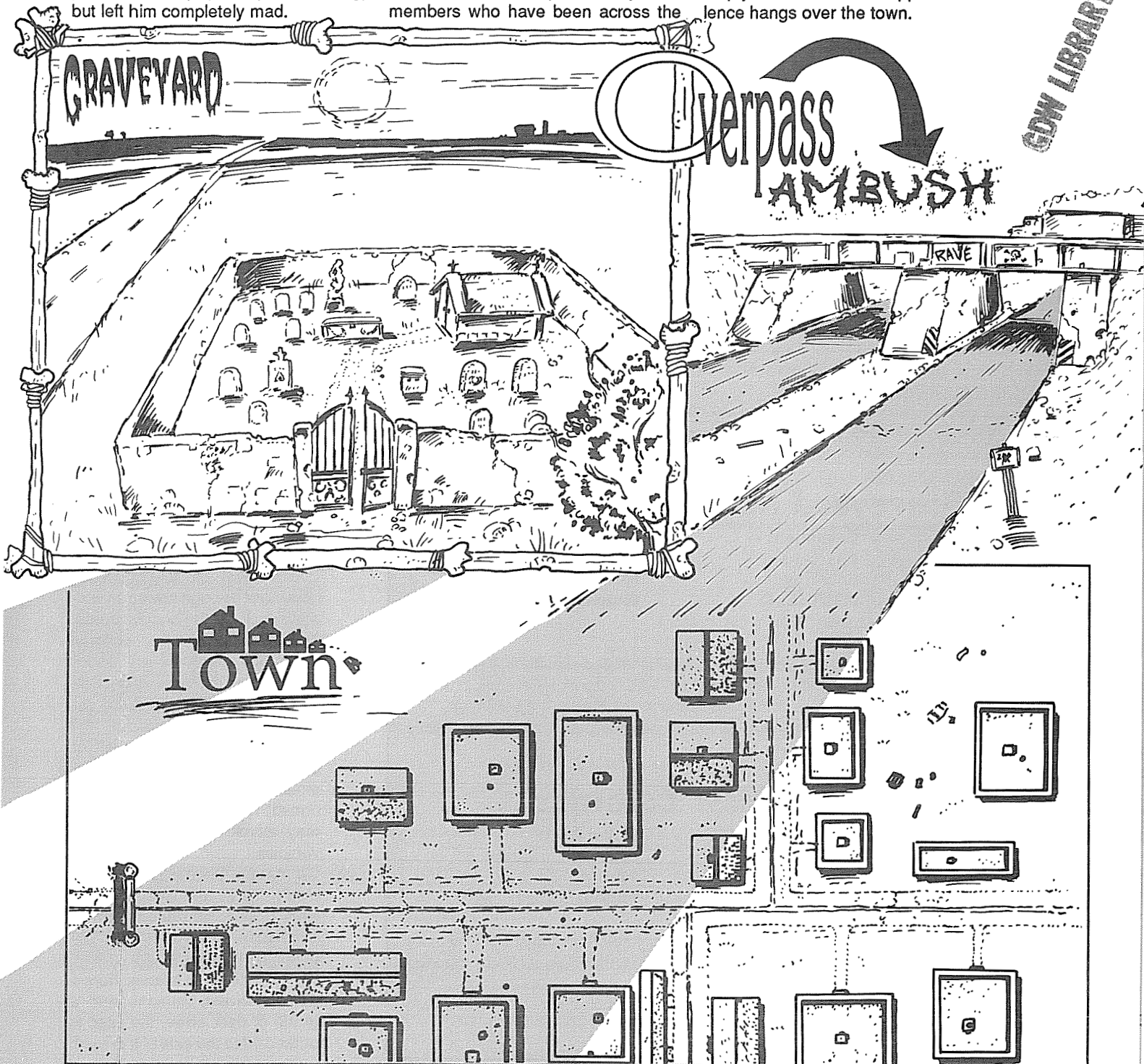
He will end his tirade in a whisper: "Or worse, you'll end up like them," he will say, pointing at the captain and sergeant. He will then wander off, yelling out nonsense. If the PCs follow him, he will not say anything else that makes sense. If the PCs ask about him, they will be told that he is some crazy man who swam across the river from West Virginia one night. He is actually an escapee from the Dark Minions. Their experiments on him developed his empathic talents (especially Foreboding) but left him completely mad.

Delay: A mixup in the authorization to use the bridge will force the PC convoy to stay the night in Marietta. The problem will be cleared up around noon the next day, and the convoy will be able to depart then. The delay will give the PCs a chance to talk with some of the local people. Most people in the city are nervous about West Virginia. Several can tell tales about seeing strange lights or shapes across the river late at night. Those who have actually been across the river recently have darker tales. If the PCs are sufficiently persuasive, they may be able to get some stories out of the few hunters and paramilitary force members who have been across the

river. They have stories about human outlaws which they will willingly tell, but they also have tales of strange things they have seen lurking in the woods and moving about in the abandoned buildings of Williamstown. All of them agree that most of West Virginia is a bad place to be.

WILLIAMSTOWN

Williamstown is a small town located on the West Virginia side of the bridge. It is now abandoned. The streets are empty of all but bits of wind-blown paper. The buildings have a haunted, empty look to them. An oppressive silence hangs over the town.



Graveyard Mist

Strength: —	Education: 1	Move: 5
Constitution: —	Charisma: —	Skill/Dam: —
Agility: 4	Empathy: 8	Hits: —
Intelligence: 4	Initiative: 3	#Appear: 1

Special: Immune to most weapons, animation ability.

The Graveyard Mist is a sentient gaseous entity that is native to a number of proto-dimensions. It looks like a thick, gray fog. Shapes seem to twist and move within it, and many of them will suggest faces to human observers. An average-sized Graveyard Mist will cover an area of up to 100 meters in diameter and will be about four meters thick.

Graveyard Mists move by a form of self-telekinesis. Being material entities, they are affected by such factors as wind speed and direction. Strong winds will slow them down (or speed them up), and very strong winds can actually destroy them by breaking up their bodily integrity.

Graveyard Mists have no physical attack. They are too tenuous to do any harm. However, they have a special ability to animate the bodies of the dead. They can animate and control up to their Empathy rating in Graveyard Mist skeletons, or half that number in Graveyard Mist zombies. The Graveyard Mist animates the skeletons and corpses by infusing them with parts of its body. It can then manipulate the bones or bodies by a modified use of its means of movement. Because of its method of animation, it can only animate organic material. The animation process takes a half-hour for a skeleton and an hour for a zombie.

Graveyard Mists are not affected by most standard weapons. However, they can be driven off by things like flamethrowers or small explosions (which cause them pain). They can be pushed away or destroyed by strong winds, wind machines, large explosions with powerful shock waves and so forth.

While they need to derive some material sustenance (they can absorb blood and other fluids slowly), Graveyard Mists feed primarily on fear. They use their animated minions to frighten people so that they may feed upon the emotional output. They prefer to reside in places where they can acquire dead things to animate and places where they can generate maximum fear. Graveyards satisfy these two preferences nicely, so Graveyard Mists tend to be found in them (hence the name).

Some authorities have speculated that the Graveyard Mist is related to the Deathmists (see Challenge 52, page 32). However, there is no conclusive evidence to support this claim.

Graveyard Mist Skeletons

Strength: 2	Education: —	Move: 3/9/18/25
Constitution: 1	Charisma: —	Skill/Dam: 5/1D6
Agility: 7	Empathy: —	Hits: 4/5
Intelligence: —	Initiative: 4	#Appear: See below

Special: One level more difficult to hit in fire combat.

Graveyard Mist skeletons are very similar to "normal" animated skeletons, but they are a bit weaker. Graveyard Mist skeletons must remain within the body of their creating Graveyard Mist to remain animated. If they leave the body, they will de-animate. The number of Graveyard Mist skeletons present cannot exceed the creating Graveyard Mist's Empathy rating.

Graveyard Mist Zombies

Strength: 7	Education: —	Move: 2/8/15
Constitution: 5	Charisma: —	Skill/Dam: 5/2D6+1
Agility: 2	Empathy: —	Hits: 15/30
Intelligence: —	Initiative: 1	#Appear: See below

Graveyard Mist zombies are very similar to "normal" animated zombies, but they are a bit weaker. Graveyard Mist zombies must remain within the body of their creating Graveyard Mist to remain animated. If they leave the body, they will "de-animate." The number of Graveyard Mist zombies present cannot exceed half the creating Graveyard Mist's Empathy rating.

Graveyard Mist: The road the convoy will take goes past a graveyard. The people in the lead vehicle of the convoy will see a gray, foggy mist obscuring the road ahead. The mist spreads out over the graveyard, obscuring it. Dark shapes will be visible moving out into the road. As the convoy gets closer, the nature of the things blocking the road will be evident.

The road is blocked by eight skeletons that have been animated by a Graveyard Mist. The Graveyard Mist recently came through a dimensional portal and is making its way toward Ohio. It is not associated with the Dark Minions who are controlling Jeffreys and the sergeant.

ENCOUNTERS IN WEST VIRGINIA

The town the convoy is heading to is 80 miles from Williamstown. The road to the town is rather narrow and is in poor condition. Since the terrain is mountainous, the road goes up and down, and there are many hairpin turns. Wrecks often mark places where a driver's skill or luck ran out. Except for an occasional abandoned shack or trailer, the area is empty wilderness. The territory borders very closely on several areas of Demonground. The noise of the convoy may well attract unwanted attention.

Check for an encounter every half hour, or more often if the convoy is very noisy. A roll of 9 or 0 on 1D10 indicates an encounter. Roll 1D6 to see what has been attracted by the convoy.

Roll Encounter

- 1 **Needlebeaks:** These nasty birds swoop down into any open vehicles and through any open windows to get at the people inside. If the convoy is stopped for a break, the creatures will attack anyone outside the vehicles. See Challenge 52, page 32, for details.
- 2 **Dogs:** When the people left or died in this section of West Virginia, many dogs were abandoned. They have gone feral and may attack humans outside of vehicles.
- 3 **Chimeras:** Chimeras have recently come to the West Virginian woods, feeding on the ample deer population. They will attack humans in the open.
- 4 **Animated Auto:** A leftover from a battle between humans and a group of dark elves, the auto is parked off to the side of the road.

A broken skeleton (human) lies in front of it. Once the convoy goes past, it will start up and attack them by ramming. The car is a Chrysler LeBoeuf.

5 *Igors:* These four Dark Minion lackeys are armed with double-barreled shotguns (treat as Savage 311-Rs). They have a battered pickup (treat as a Chrysler Conestoga) for transportation. They are servants from a group of Minions not aware of the plans of the group Jeffreys is serving, so they will try to kill everyone in the convoy.

6 *Cows or Horses in the Road:* The road is blocked by a group of cows or horses that have gone wild. The animals must be removed from the road for the convoy to continue (there may well be other creatures stalking the cows or horses that wouldn't mind adding a little human flesh to their diet).

TOWN

The town is located at the bottom of a large hill. As such, the PCs will have a good view of the town as they head toward it. They will be able to see people moving about in the town and will see armed men on the perimeter. The road

to the town has a gate made of logs across it, with several men stationed at it—actually six Igors armed with pump shotguns (treat as Mossberg M500s).

The convoy will be greeted at the gate by those stationed there. The men will smile at the PCs, but an Average task roll using Psychology will reveal that there is something sinister about the men.

As the convoy enters the town, the PCs will see people walking the streets. If the PCs are observant (an Average roll using Intelligence) it will be evident that there is something wrong with the people.

A Difficult roll against Intelligence or an Average roll against Psychology will reveal that the peoples' expressions of joy are not sincere and that there is an emptiness to their eyes, as if they were puppets.

These 30 people have, in fact, had all their Willpower drained and are being forced to serve as decoys.

Once the convoy reaches the center of the town, the characters will be met by the town leaders. They appear to be three handsome men and a beautiful woman. Two of the men are actually bloodkin vampires. The other man and the woman are actually dark elves. The bloodkin vampires are unarmed, but the two dark elves are armed with

Walther PPKs. They will try to use Persuasion and their empathic abilities to capture the PCs and NPCs alive. If resistance is offered, the Dark Minions will flee and have their Igors deal with the problem. There are 20 Igors armed with a variety of hunting weapons (Ruger .22 semiautomatics, Marlin .30-06 bolt actions, Savage 311-Rs, and Mossberg M500s). The Igors are not terribly brave and will flee if things go bad, unless their masters stay to inspire them. The Igors have four beat-up pickup trucks, and the Dark Minions a GDM Ariel to escape in (the car is concealed in a garage).

CONCLUSION

If the PCs defeat the Dark Minions and their allies, they will be able to rescue the people in the town. The humans were captured from towns in human-inhabited parts of West Virginia and from neighboring states. If the player characters search the town, they will find little out of the ordinary. The main Dark Minion base is located in a series of underground caverns 40 miles from the town.

If the player characters are defeated, they will be taken to the Dark Minion base and subjected to horrible experiments. The exact details are left to the referee. Ω

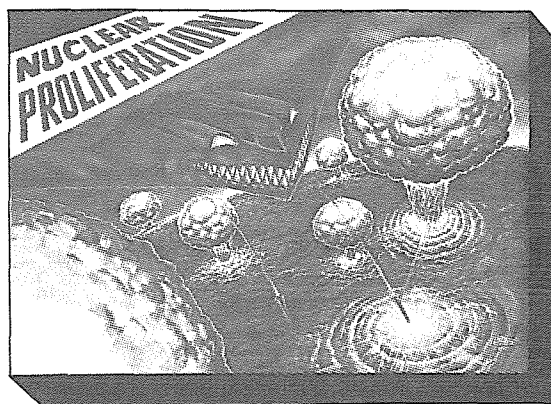
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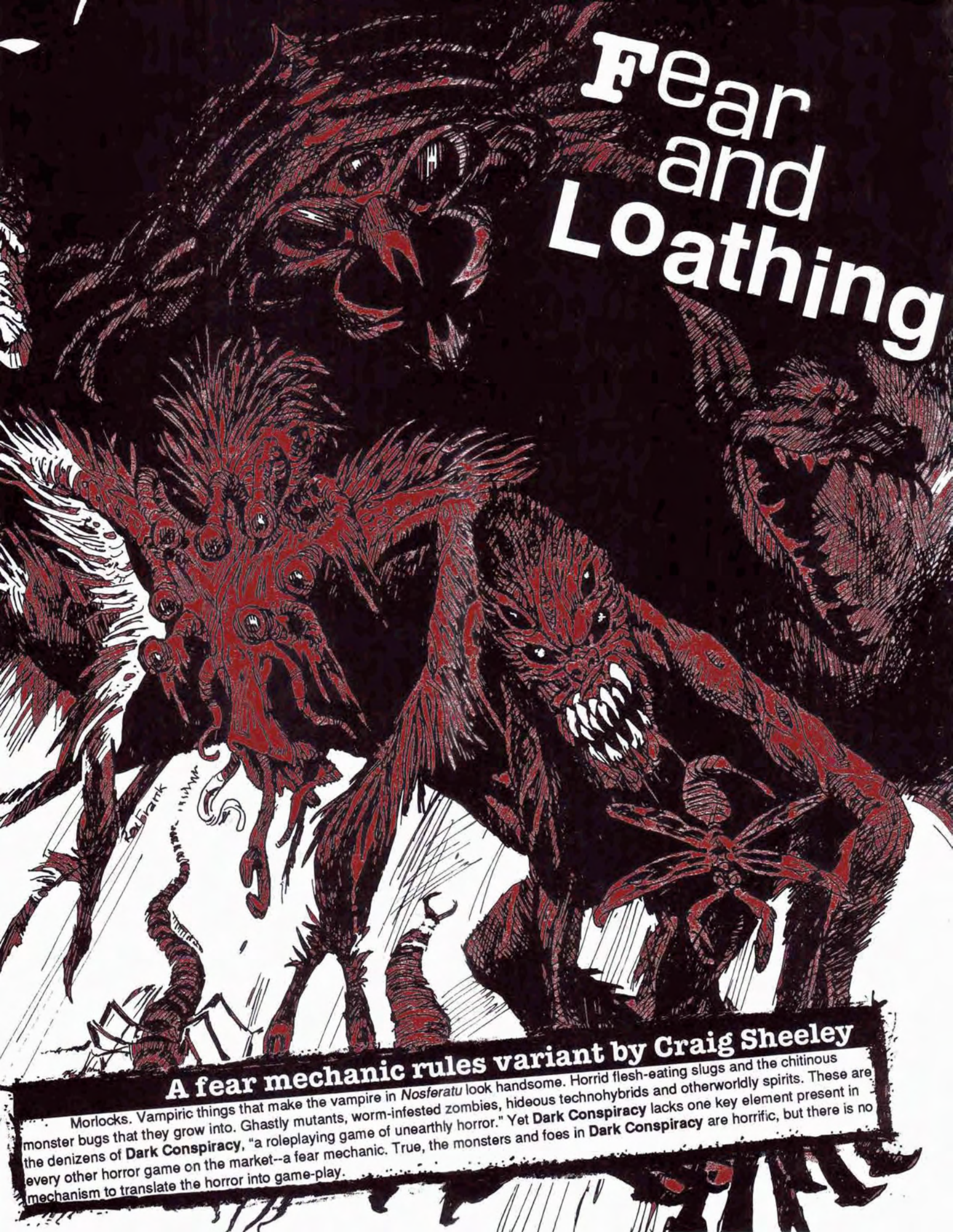
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Fear and Loathing

A fear mechanic rules variant by Craig Sheeley

Morlocks. Vampiric things that make the vampire in *Nosferatu* look handsome. Horrid flesh-eating slugs and the chitinous monster bugs that they grow into. Ghastly mutants, worm-infested zombies, hideous technohybrids and otherworldly spirits. These are the denizens of *Dark Conspiracy*, "a roleplaying game of unearthly horror." Yet *Dark Conspiracy* lacks one key element present in every other horror game on the market—a fear mechanic. True, the monsters and foes in *Dark Conspiracy* are horrific, but there is no mechanism to translate the horror into game-play.

There *are* rules for panic (page 77): "This is not blind panic which sends them screaming away, but which rather causes them to freeze momentarily." This panic is caused by wound damage or surprise. Nothing supernatural here; this reaction is instinctive, the "fight or flight" response warring with intellect.

There are also rules for active fear protection; many Dark creatures can project fear or other emotions through Project Emotion. This means that the emotion is imposed from outside. It is an effective weapon, not a response.

But horror means a reaction from within, a situation arising from a person's own fears and phobias. It is not voluntary, or imposed from without, and it runs much deeper than merely being startled. It is the gut-wrenching, brain-paralyzing chill that sticks hearts in the throats, the "blind panic which sends them screaming away." And it's lacking in **Dark Conspiracy**. Certainly, a good referee and good roleplayers can create it, feel the chill and enjoy the suspense—until the Initiative count starts. Once the combat sequence is begun, horror usually goes out the window. Few roleplayers have the dedication to stick to the situation and roleplay panic when a chance comes up for them to strike back.

For example, take the following situation: The characters are out in a deserted town, at night, looking for something that has already killed several people (NPCs, naturally) in a particularly gruesome fashion, but in such a way that the killer's identity remains a mystery. In short, the PCs don't have the foggiest idea what they're looking for.

They skulk onward, ever aware that they're terribly vulnerable to attack, and they don't even know what (or who) might attack them. A sliver of a moon is all that lights the scene, and the PCs' flashlights seem terribly inadequate to illuminate the empty houses around them. They feel more and more uneasy, certain that there are eyes watching them.

The referee, feeling whimsical, has the killer join the procession at the rear, shuffling along behind the rear-guard. Sooner or later, someone looks back and sees it, a creature that is clearly not human, not even terrestrial, an alien thing that would put fear into an alien skull-collector from *Predator*. What happens?

In a real-life situation, plenty of adrenaline would start flowing, and a lot of psychological and instinctive reactions would flood the minds of the people so involved, hampering or overwhelming intelligent thought. In *Call of Cthulhu*, the characters would be making Sanity rolls right and left. In *GURPS*, it would be time for a Fear Check, at a nasty minus (about -5), with various embarrassing and inconvenient consequences.

In the game of **Dark Conspiracy**, the characters were surprised, so there's a panic check, which the average character (PC or NPC) has a 33% chance of passing without incident. And if the panic check is failed, the only response is that those who failed seek cover. No fear, no horror, no real panic, just a measured military-style response to sudden attack. Which is fine in a military situation such as **Twilight: 2000**, but fails to fit the bill in a "game of future horror."

TERROR TEST

When characters run into a situation that should inspire terror, they test to determine their reactions. This is a standard skill check, based on Initiative (representing the character's conditioned responses to perceived threats) or Willpower (representing the character's self-control), whichever is higher. *This test is in addition to the panic check, if the characters are surprised/ambushed.* The difficulty of the test is determined by the ghastliness of what they're facing: Discovering a deadly spider crawling up one's arm, or being menaced by a psycho-killer brandishing a bloody weapon, etc., would be Easy difficulty; the object of fear is easily identified and not really too terrible. (So why do victims in bad cinema always panic and run screaming? Because they have Initiative 1 and no Willpower skill, usually.)

Facing a werebeast, its muzzle dripping gore from its last victim, being gripped by a yeti, encountering a barghest or tentacular ET, and so on, would be an Average difficulty test.

These things are scary, but more-or-less identifiable.

A close encounter of the worst kind—being gripped by a bloodkin troll, at the mercy of an oni or other dæmon, surrounded by hordes of insectoid grubs or even bumping into one of the Dark Masters in person (think of going toe-to-toe with Cthulhu to get an idea of this level of fear)—is a Difficult test. The key is the utter alien reality of the terror faced, the ultimate fear of the unknown. Fear retreats before intelligence, and knowing what you face reduces fear.

CONSEQUENCES

The results of a terror test are interpreted as follows:

Outstanding Success: Such characters immediately get a free action—if they are already in the combat sequence and in a phase where they act, they get another action to specifically respond to the menace, even if they've already acted in that phase. No terror here.

Success: The character may act as normal. There's fear, but the character has controlled it.

Failure: Such characters are terrified. They may not take any offensive actions until they have controlled the fear (see below). They may run away, move to cover or defend themselves in melee combat. No skills (except the appropriate Melee Combat skill used in defense) may be used until such individuals have controlled their own fear.

Catastrophic Failure: Such characters have lost control of their actions. They may run away, faint, huddle into a whimpering ball or even lapse into gibbering insanity (the referee and such player should work together to determine a character's exact reaction). These characters may not do anything effective except, perhaps, run away. No skills may be used, and they may attempt to control their own fear, but it's more difficult (see below).

CONTROLLING FEAR

If a character fails a terror test, he may attempt to deal with the fear and regain control in later phases. When a terrified character gets a chance to act (taking into account actions lost if startled by a panic check), the character may test to control the fear. This is done as a regular terror test, but at one level of difficulty easier than the test that caused the fear in the first place—for instance, a Difficult test becomes Average, and an Average test becomes Easy. Easy tests stay Easy. Apply the results of this test as those from a standard terror test (above). So it is possible to snap back to violent action after a brief scare (if an Outstanding Success is rolled), or lose it completely (a Catastrophic Failure).

Characters suffering the effects of a Catastrophic Failure on a previous test attempt to control their fear at the difficulty first encountered (i.e., a Difficult test remains a Difficult test, an Average test remains Average, etc.).

THERE IS HOPE

If this optional rule is used, give a specific experience point toward Willpower advancement to any character who managed an Outstanding Success on a terror test. In addition, give a specific experience point toward Willpower advancement to any character who was subjected to a terror test and subsequently saw the menace defeated ("So, they *can* die! Next time, I'll know better!").

With this rule, Willpower is even more important in **Dark Conspiracy** than ever. Particularly with the new Initiative Experience Costs introduced in the **Dark Conspiracy PC Booster Kit**.

Enact the terror test at your option. I find that it makes for a much more challenging game, since the players can't always count on their characters to act with complete cool and courage any more. And it's amusing to see a high-Initiative combat monster go goo-goo while the strong-willed pacifist calmly stands firm. Ω

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You are in a small, deserted town at night. A cold, disturbing wind howls through the empty streets, carrying a strange yellow dust through the air. The fine powdery substance clings to everything, including your clothes and skin, but you do not breathe it.

You walk without volition down the dusty streets. Ahead is a person lying in the street. You walk up to him. He lies on his stomach, his leather jacket and jeans coated with the yellow dust. You turn him over, and you are startled to see that the left half of his face has been clawed away, clear to the bone. His chest cavity has been hollowed out—little more than bone and skin are left.

An envelope is in his hand. You pick it up and read it. It is addressed to Walter Stone, 1198 Court St., Phoenix, AZ. Suddenly, the envelope fills with blood, and you drop it in horror.

Then you notice that the corpse, although obviously dead for at least a day, is bleeding. The one remaining eye flicks open, and you try to jump back, but his bony arm whips out and grabs your shoulder before you can react. His one-eyed gaze holds you motionless for seconds that seem like hours. "Help us," he rasps, then falls into death and decay. As you stand up, you notice that your shoulder is covered with mud. Looking closer, you realize that it is blood many days old. Then you awaken.



Walter lives in the crowded, cluttered mike-town of southwestern Phoenix. His neighborhood consists of narrow, two-story houses, almost identical in appearance, crowded together as if to conserve space. Nonetheless, individual housing is a modest yet prominent symbol of status in a world where the majority of the population is too poor to afford such a luxury.

When the PCs show up on Walter's doorstep, there will be nobody home. That's because Walter left to visit his brother in Blitzville the evening of the dream.

There are two ways to find out Walter's whereabouts.

The neighbor across the street—a frizzy-haired, middle-aged woman named Bernice—knows where he went and would be happy to tell anyone who asks *politely*. She will get suspicious if the characters are rude or too probing in their questions.

If the PCs are daring (or stupid), they can break in and see what they can find. Unless they are very careful, there is a 50% chance that Bernice will spot them and call the cops. Inside the home, the PCs will find a calendar on the wall. The day of the dream is marked "go home"

with an arrow running through the next five days.

The real evidence is on the kitchen counter. It is an envelope—the same envelope from the dream! The dreaming PC will have no trouble recognizing it. The return address is Frank Stone, 866 Forsythe Road, Blitzville, IN. Inside is an invitation to a family reunion at his brother's house scheduled to take place today.

WELCOME TO BLITZVILLE

Blitzville is a quiet little town 40 miles southwest of the Indianapolis metroplex, with a population of only 3000. The only industry that keeps this place on the map is the CX Agricorp, responsible for tons of wheat every year.

The town has no airport, so the PCs will have to fly to Indianapolis, then rent a car and drive to get there. It is suggested that the PCs not arrive in Blitzville until early evening, giving them little time to make themselves comfortable or harass the Stones. If they insist on a tight schedule, delay their flight or give them car trouble.

The people here are very uncomfortable with outsiders. They will act very nervous and cautious when dealing with

Dusted

BY Dan Snuffin

Blitzville, Indiana is about to be in big trouble. The Dark Ones are going to open a portal to another dimension, releasing horrible creatures to victimize the population and take over. One night, the PC with the highest Foreboding skill has the dream related above. Blitzville is future Demonground, and the PC has foreseen this disaster in his dream. Walter Stone is significant in that he is to be the first victim of the skinless ones.

NOBODY'S HOME IN PHOENIX

If the PCs obtain Walter's phone number through information and try to give him a call, there will be no answer. The PCs will have to travel to Phoenix to find him. (A unique and colorful description of dark future Phoenix can be found in Michael A. Stackpole's novel, *A Gathering Evil*.)



the PCs. Drive this resentment home by making the PCs stop for gas in town (after all, it's a long drive), forcing them to deal with the locals. If the PCs do anything in town, they will be constantly watched unless they are accompanied by a local (like Frank).

Frank Stone lives in a modest, one-story brick home on the west edge of town with his wife and teenage daughter. There are a number of old cars scattered in the overgrowth at the back of the house, most of them pieces of junk.

If the PCs knock on the front door, Walter will answer. At this point, the dreamer should make an Average test against Empathy. If he succeeds, he will recognize Walter as the "dead" man in his dream, and if he does not make a Difficult test versus Willpower, he will faint.

Generally, the referee will have to rely on his judgment to handle this situation, using the NPC's motivations as a guide. If the PCs reveal that they followed Walter to Blitzville because of a dream, Walter and Frank will both take it as some sort of joke. When the two realize that the PCs are serious, Walter and Frank will both become very stern

and may ask the PCs to leave, depending on how the encounter has gone up until that point, especially if they revealed the full details of the dream. Both should remain skeptics, at any rate.

Regardless of how the encounter goes, soon the PCs will have to call it a night. The Roadside Inn in the middle of town is as generic as its name. The rooms are very basic, but the price is very modest.

Unless the PCs do something to get themselves in trouble, nothing will happen until noon the next day.

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER?

At noon, the Dark Ones will open a gate between Earth and the alien dimension. This gate just happens to open in the field, about 50 feet away from Frank Stone's home.

About 12:15, a fine yellow dust will appear in the air around town, sticking and settling on most everything. The warm breeze that carries it comes from the west. Before the PCs are able to investigate this phenomenon, they will bump into a terrified Frank Stone and his family in a old, dark green pickup. He will stop with a skid, jump out and con-

front the characters, logically blaming the mysterious strangers in town.

When he realizes that the PCs don't really know what's going on, he will calm down a bit and tell them what happened.

"We were sittin' in the house when boom! we were hit by a big dust storm of this yellow dust. We didn't know what was goin' on.

"We were lookin' out the window, trying to figure it all out, and we saw this thing. It was like a man with no skin and no eyes. And then there was another one coming from the field headin' this way, and we knew we had to get out of the house, so we ran out to the truck.

"But Walter didn't make it. He took the rifle, and shot one of the things as the family was getting in the truck. But then he lost his glasses, and one came around the corner and started ripping him up." He starts to cry.

Meanwhile, the dust is accumulating. The PCs may notice that while the dust coats everything, it does not get in their eyes or choke them. It will make breathing a little difficult, as if they were at a high altitude. The dust will be notably absent from any water within sight, not even lying on the surface. Visibility will be limited, and all ranged combat will be conducted at one difficulty level higher, with range limited to 30 meters.

If asked, Frank will tell the PCs that the wind and dust were coming from the field out behind his place. He will want to be part of any attempt to get the things, and the PCs should realize that they will need his influence in the town if they want any cooperation. Frank's wife will drive the truck away, and Frank will want to get some guns, ammo and possibly some help—if the referee feels they need it.

WHERE WORLDS COLLIDE

Everything in sight is completely coated with yellow dust, making Frank's neighborhood look almost completely unfamiliar—like an alien landscape. The warm winds that carry the dust are stronger here. The townspeople will be completely stunned, their facial expressions molded in awe and horror.

As they approach Frank's home and the gate, they will encounter 1D6 skinless ones. Another 2D6 skinless ones will be prowling around Frank's place. From there, the party will be able to locate the gate by following the dimensional winds.

It is important to play up the horror of the skinless ones. Let them maul one of the townspeople who freaks out. Use the limited visibility to suggest that there

are many more of the creatures just out of sight, appearing and disappearing as they move in and out of view.

The gate is a rectangular "door" of "moving" blackness seven feet high, four feet wide and three inches deep set in the field. The winds howl as they are funneled through this portal. Empathic characters will be able to feel its energy, as well as the "residue" of the malignant entity that created it.

Furthermore, everyone will be forced to fight the skinless ones if they plan on sticking around for any length of time. There will be 2D6 creatures in the vicinity of the gate. There is a 50% chance each combat turn that another skinless one will come through the gate.

CLOSING THE GATE

There are two ways to close the gate.

First, the characters can block the Earth end of the gate, preventing anything from getting through. Unless the blockade is sturdy, this will be a temporary solution at best.

The hard way to close the gate is to go through it and destroy the control mechanisms on the other side. Those who pass through the gate will feel cold, accompanied by a tingling sensation and goosebumps. The whole experience will be slightly disorienting for those not used to dimensional travel. To reflect this, all rolls will be conducted at one difficulty level higher for one combat turn after they emerge on the other side.

The alien dimension is like a desert of yellow dust dotted with alien sand structures that resemble sandstone arches. There will be 2D6 skinless ones present on the other side, with a 50% chance per combat turn that 1D6+2 more will arrive.

This side of the gate has the same dimensions described above. The appearance is much different, though. Green veins bulge around the edges of the dimensional slab, leading to a large organic generator behind it. The generator is an eight-foot-high mound of green, slimy flesh with jagged bones protruding from it at all angles. It pulsates like a giant heart.

Despite its enormous size and appearance, the generator is actually a very sensitive piece of equipment, and it will take only 10 points of damage before it shuts down and the gate collapses. The PCs will have to figure out how to destroy it and still get back home. (Timed explosives are great!) If anyone is trapped in this dimension, they are as good as dead unless they have a Dimension Walk skill.

CLEANING UP

If the PCs succeed in closing the gate, the only task left is to hunt down the remaining skinless ones wandering around town. The PCs will have the gratitude of the citizens of Blitzville.

SKINLESS ONES

Strength: 8
Constitution: 8
Agility: 5
Intelligence: 3
Education: 1
Charisma: 10
Empathy: 1
Initiative: 3
Move: 2/8/15/30
Skill/Dam.: 6/2D6
Hits: 15/30
Appear: 1D6

The skinless ones are humanoid in form, but have a clear, viscous fluid that surrounds their bodies instead of skin. This makes their insides clearly visible. Their anatomy is obviously alien. They possess no apparent muscles, and display strange organs and pulsing veins, all having a sickly red color. The color of the insides and the shiny fluid that covers their bodies makes it look as if they are bleeding.

Their limbs are gaunt, and their hands and feet end in large claws. They use their claws to rip out the organs of humans which they use to decorate their bodies. (They do not understand why humans would hide such wonderful things under such a dull covering!) They also do not understand that humans need their organs, and they desire humans for their organs the same way humans desire minks for their hides.

The native dimension of these creatures is characterized by a fine yellow dust that clogs the air and makes up the ground. This dust sticks to anything except fluids, which seem to repel it. Thus, it does not stick to the skinless ones.

Any portal that is opened to this dimension will be marked by the large concentration of dust. The constant winds of the alien dimension will carry this dust through any open portal and into the air.

The skinless ones have the ability to solidify this dust into any shape they desire using unique mental facilities. This solidification process takes one minute for every kilogram of mass of the desired object. These objects are very strong and not easily broken.

When encountered, they will use this ability to create small rock-like spheres that they throw with deadly accuracy. (Skill Level: 7, Damage: 1D6. Throw Range: 32 meters. Note that the dust

clouds do not reduce the range of this attack.) This form of attack takes two actions to complete—one action to create the rocks and another to throw them. They also use this ability to form the alien structures of their dimension.

These beings take double damage from fire, which dries them out. However, due to the unique nature of their "skin," their bodies do not catch fire. The skinless ones have never seen fire before and are likely to ignore its effects until one of their number is killed by it.

FRANK STONE

Frank is 5'7". He has blond hair and can often be found in oil-stained clothing. He has a long, thin scar on his left forearm.

Level: Experienced

Skills: Mechanic 7, Small Arms (Rifle) 5.

Initiative: 3

Motivation: *Club Queen:* Frank is very stubborn, and once he has made up his mind it is very difficult to get him to change it or convince him that he is wrong. A first impression will last forever in Frank's mind. *Heart 10:* Frank gets along very well with people if they don't make a bad first impression. He is well liked in Blitzville.

Weapon: Marlin .30-06 bolt-action sporting rifle.

WALTER STONE

Walter is a thin man in his 40s with wispy brown hair and a dense mustache. He likes to dress as casually as circumstances allow, and will be in jeans and a T-shirt during the adventure. He is virtually blind without his glasses.

Motivation: *Heart 5:* As an investment banker, Walter must deal with many people, and thus is generally friendly in attitude. *Diamond 5:* Of course, Walter also values money as much as he values friends, which creates interesting conflicts.

TOWNSPEOPLE

Four townspeople will accompany the characters and Frank to the farm. The first three are Novice NPCs armed with Marlin .30-06 bolt-action rifles. The last is Jon Dinnerstein, a war veteran and thus an Elite NPC. He will be carrying an M16 assault rifle and a knife. It is suggested that the referee use Jon to balance combat and provide support for the PCs. (Dinnerstein will approach the PCs after the adventure, offering to help them in their battle against the Dark Minions. The PCs can put him down as a contact, and he will be available to show up in future adventures.) Ω

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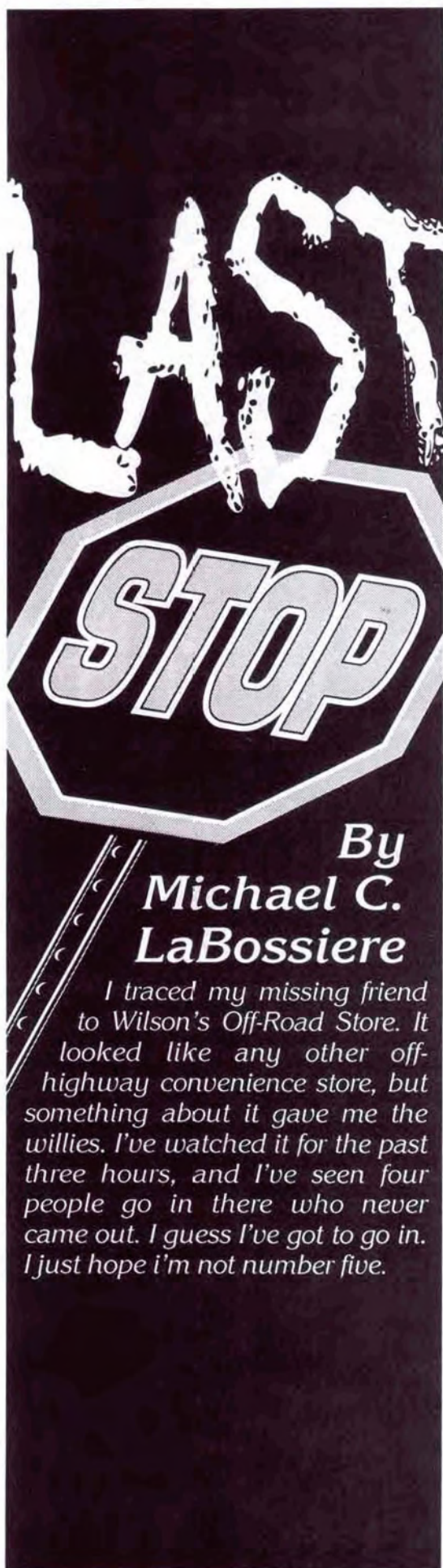
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By
**Michael C.
LaBossiere**

I traced my missing friend to Wilson's Off-Road Store. It looked like any other off-highway convenience store, but something about it gave me the willies. I've watched it for the past three hours, and I've seen four people go in there who never came out. I guess I've got to go in. I just hope I'm not number five.

This adventure can be set almost anywhere that has functioning highways. A group of insectoid extraterrestrials has taken over an off-highway convenience store and is using it as a base for scientific experiments on humans. The aliens capture travellers who they deem fit for their experiments and who can be captured with minimal risk. It is up to the PCs to expose the aliens' operation and put a stop to it.

A friend or relative travelling to visit one of the PCs calls from a pay phone in Slaterville. After telling the PC how long he (or she) has left to travel, he says he is going into the store to buy some coffee. This is the last the PC hears from him. When the person fails to show up, the PCs are likely to want to investigate.

INVESTIGATION

If the PCs decide to go looking for the missing friend/relative, they will find the following information at each source they check.

State Police: The state police will report that a vehicle matching the missing person's was found. If the PCs investigate, they will find that it is not the friend/relative's vehicle. The police will list the person as missing, if he has been gone over 24 hours. An officer will say to the PCs, "I'm sorry. We do all we can, but there are so many missing people these days that we're swamped. Off the record, we've been hearing some odd stories about Slaterville. You might want to look there. If you find something out, don't hesitate to give us a call."

Morgues/Hospitals: If the PCs check these places, they will find a few people who match the missing person's description, but he won't be in any of these places.

Trucker Grapevine: If the PCs check the local highway rumor mill (by going to a trucker bar, for example), they will, provided they get the truckers to talk, learn that there have been an unusual number of disappearances in and around Slaterville. Many of the truckers say they now avoid the place, but others say it's just a rumor, nothing more. If the PC's friend/relative was the sort of person who would be remembered (very attractive, very odd-looking, etc.), one of the truckers might remember seeing him going into Wilson's Off-Road Store.

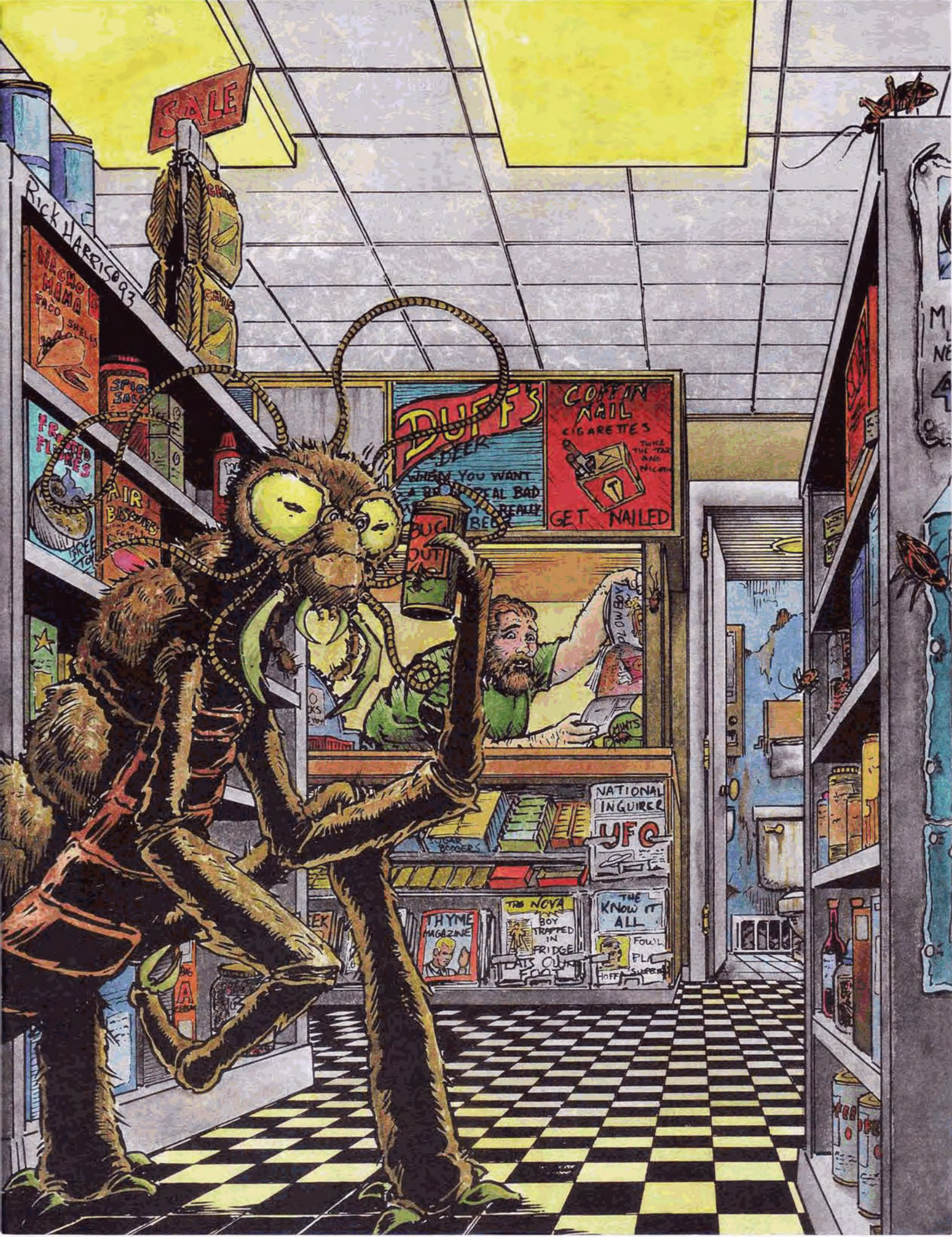
SLATERVILLE

Slaterville is a typical off-highway town. It consists primarily of gas stations, convenience stores, motels, hotels and truck stops. Due to the current conditions in the US, the town is surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, and most of the buildings are made of reinforced concrete. Slaterville is fairly peaceful since it is on a functioning highway, but there have been occasional raids by outlaws and gangs. Most of the time, these people drive into town, throw a few Molotov cocktails at the buildings, shoot up some signs and leave.

Virtually everyone who lives in the town works in one of the businesses. There are few children, and they all go to school in a nearby community since Slaterville doesn't have any schools. It also lacks a police station, fire department and post office. It does have a few mailboxes, however. The people are fairly suspicious of outsiders, but they are usually polite since their livelihood depends on the highway travellers who stop for food and fuel.

If the PCs ask about the missing person, no one will remember seeing him. If the PCs ask about the disappearances, the local people will either claim to have heard nothing about them or say that they are unfounded rumors. Successful use of Human Empathy or Psychology skill (the task is Average) will reveal that the locals are aware that something is wrong and that they are lying to the PCs. They are actually aware of the disappearances but are unwilling to say anything out of fear of losing business. Most will do their best to obstruct the PCs (by refusing to sell them food, gas or lodging) or mislead them (by saying that the disappearances really took place in nearby Carterville), provided it does not put them in any danger. Some may aid the PCs if they are convinced that the PCs can handle the situation without ruining the town's reputation. The average people in town are just that, average, and are Novice NPCs. They should not (unless enraged to mob action) be of great hindrance or help to the PCs.

Unfortunately for the player characters, there is a group of Igors who are employed by the aliens. Most of them work at the store, but others are under cover at other businesses. These Igors look for victims and occasionally take people (from their motel rooms, for example). They also have their eyes open for any suspicious individuals (like the PCs). If they become suspicious of the PCs, they will try to drive them away (by harassing them, vandalizing their vehicle, etc.). If



they think the PCs are getting too close to the truth, they will attempt to kill the PCs.

WILSON'S OFF-ROAD STORE

The store looks like almost any other off-highway convenience store/gas station on the surface, but beneath it is a den of alien evil. The owner of the store, Bubba Wilson, was captured by the aliens, and he offered to let them use his store as a base of operations and to aid them in their activities if they would let him live. The aliens agreed and soon set up shop under his store. They have been harvesting humans for their experiments and food ever since.

All the rooms in the store are monitored by hidden TV cameras (a Difficult: Observation task to spot) which are linked to a viewer in the aliens' living area. There will always be an alien watching the viewer.

Pumps: A bank of standard fuel pumps, including diesel. The pumps are full-service (which is very odd in these times), but the gas prices are as low as self-serve. The full-service routine gives the Irgors a chance to look into the vehicles to see how many people are present. There will be at least two Irgors working the pumps at all times.

Ice: A sign on the ice machine indicates that it is out of order.

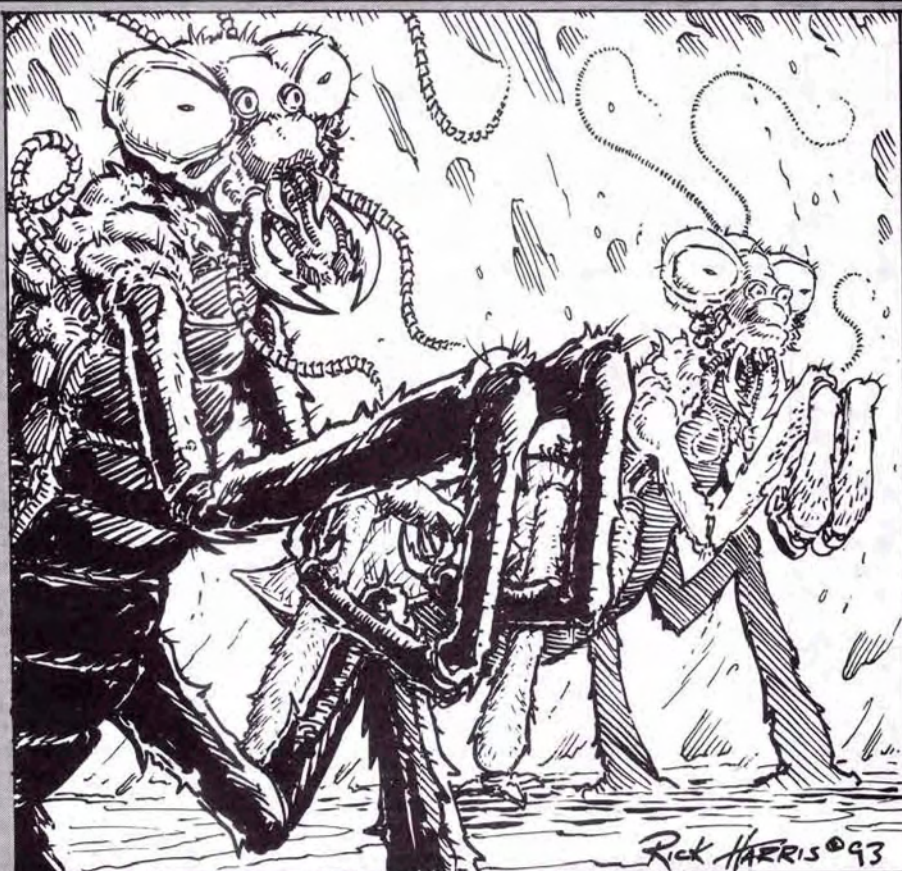
Store: The interior contains the usual overpriced snack foods, drinks and so forth. Astute PCs (those who make an Average: Observation roll) will note that the shelves are set up so as to block the view of the interior of the store from the outside.

Office: The office has the service window (bulletproof) behind which always sits one bored-looking Igor. The office contains some old, tattered furniture, as well as the safe. The safe contains a surprising amount of money, as well as items of jewelry, watches and so forth. Many of these items can be traced to various missing individuals. There is a locked trap door hidden under the stained rug. Spotting it is a Difficult task using Observation skill.

Restrooms: The restrooms are fairly nasty: stained seats, damp floors and so forth. The walls have thick panels set in them (soundproofing) which seem odd. Set into each room's floor is a trap door. A door can be spotted by making a Difficult: Observation skill roll. When the aliens wish to capture a victim, they lock the bathroom door using an electric locking mechanism. They then unlock the trap door, and the victim falls through it. The door is then unlocked to ready it for the next victim. If the victim

avoids falling into the trap (a Difficult task using Agility if the person is not expecting trouble, Average if he is), an alien will enter via the trap door to attack. Only one alien can enter a bath-

room, due to its small size. If the victim is especially troublesome, the Irgors will rush to help. The aliens generally take their victims at night and select victims who are alone or groups when they are



Type II Insectoid ETs (Chiikaga)

Strength: 6
Constitution: 6
Agility: 4
Intelligence: 6
Special: Armor value 1

Education: 6
Charisma: 1
Empathy: 2
Initiative: 4

Move: 4/12/20/30
Skill/Dam: 7/1D10
Hits: 20/40
Appear: 1D6

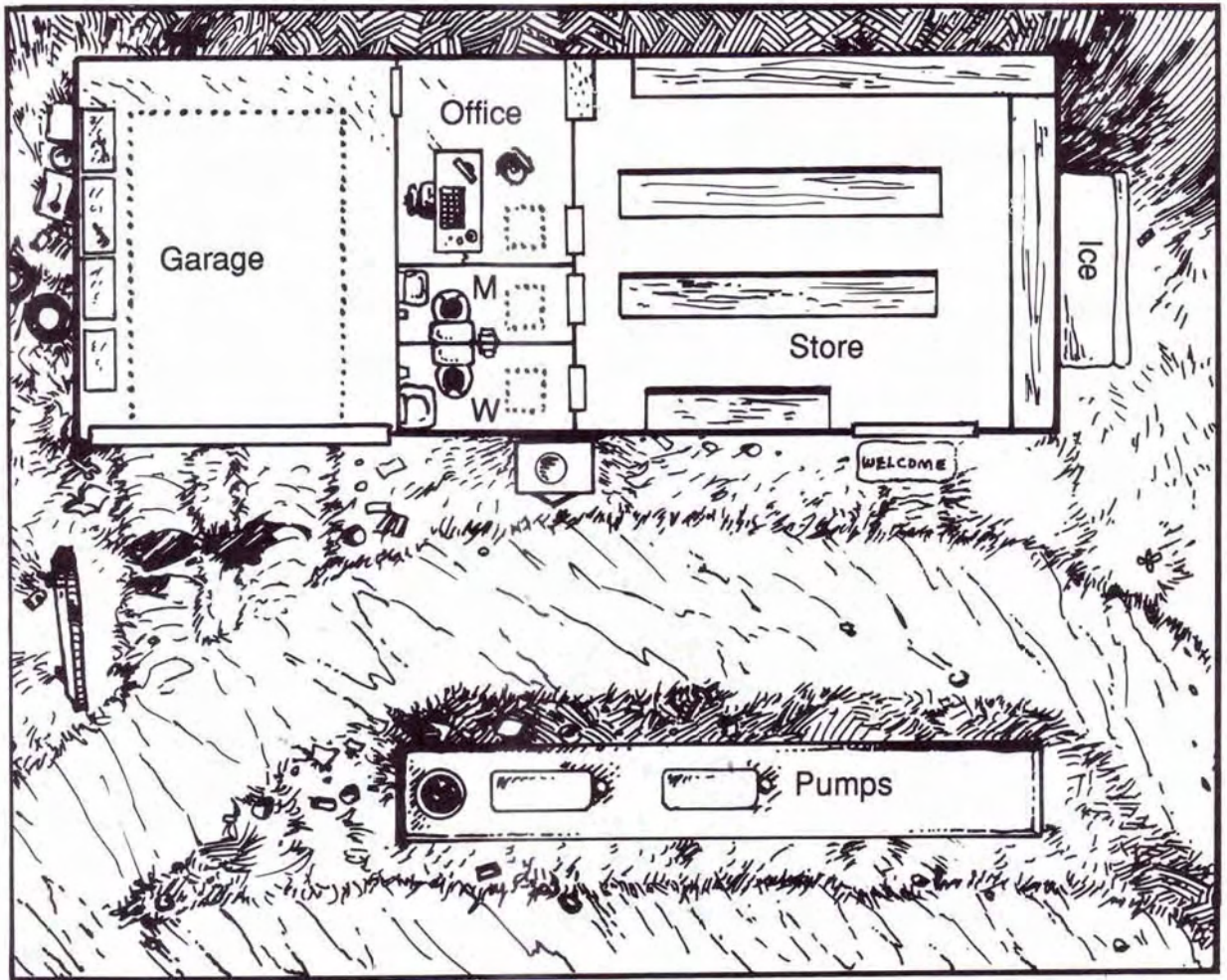
The Type II insectoid ETs, known as Chiikaga (what their name for themselves sounds like in English), are related to the more common insectoid ETs. They are not as advanced as their cousins, but are physically tougher. Like their cousins, they consider humans an excellent source of food. Unlike their cousins, they see that humans are potentially useful and desire to find an effective way of using humans as troops.

Chiikaga inevitably live underground when on Earth, typically under an abandoned or conquered human structure. They build primarily with organic materials that they process themselves. Their lairs are very unpleasant places for humans to be, for they are vile and coated in slime (which keeps the organic walls fresh).

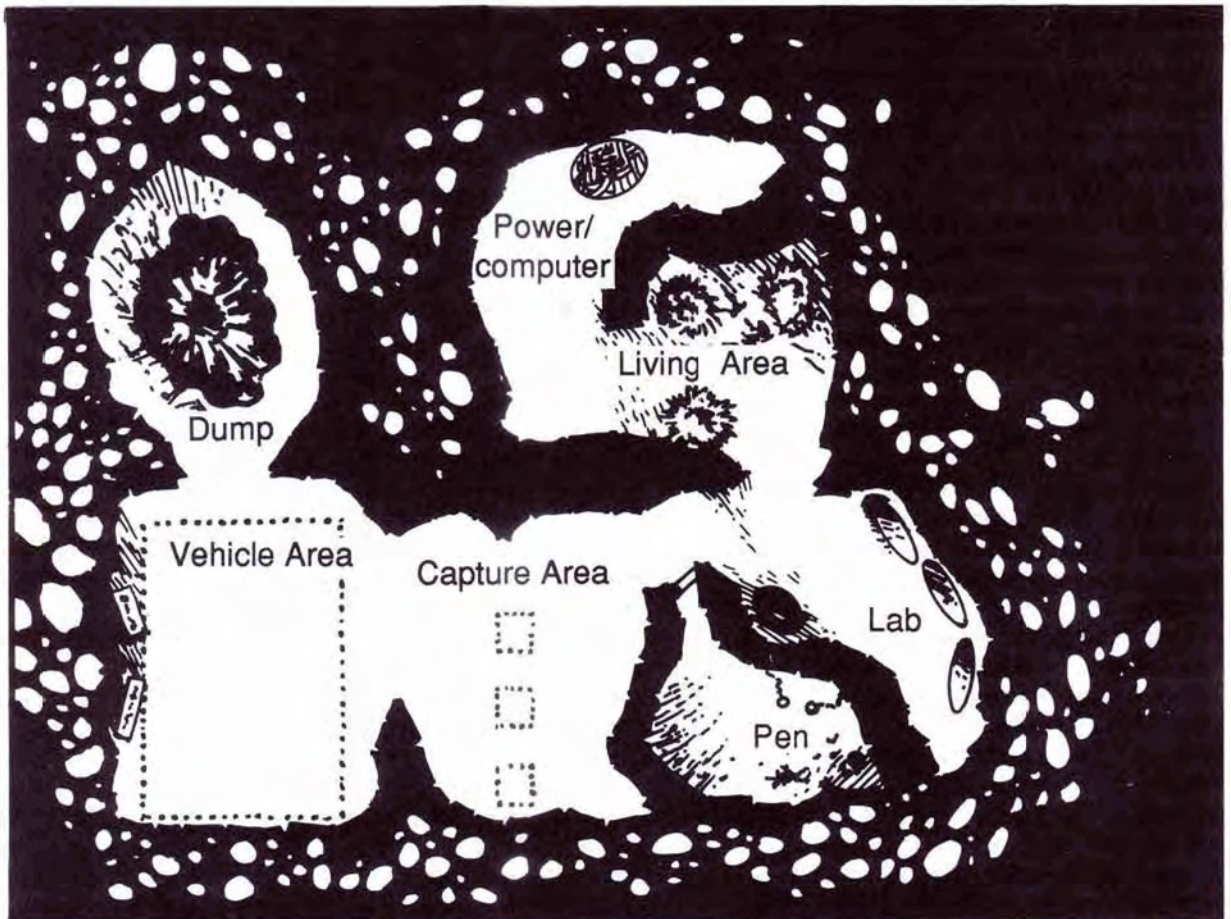
While they are Dark Minions, they are hostile to their insectoid cousins and have fought wars with them in the past, generally over the issue of who gets to exploit and feed on various populations of other worlds. These hostilities have continued on Earth. Unlike their cousins, the Chiikaga are not well established on Earth. So far, they only have a few secret outposts in human cities and towns, and they have yet to become involved in corporate activity to the degree their cousins have.

Physically, the Chiikaga are horribly repulsive to humans. They walk on four legs, while using two arms for manipulation. Their bodies are composed of hard, chitin-like material which oozes a thick slime at all times. Their heads are rather small (the brain is in the main body), and they have a wicked array of biting, grinding, sucking and chewing organs. They also have two main eyes that detect only motion and a set of smaller eyes that are as good as human sight. Their only redeeming feature is that they can be killed.

WILSON'S OFF-ROAD STORE



BENEATH THE SURFACE



confident they can capture all of the victims at once. They also avoid taking the obviously wealthy or powerful, since that will draw undue attention.

Garage: The garage is a greasy, oily mess with tools scattered about. Service is terrible here and is likely to leave the vehicle worse off than when it was brought in. The garage contains a hidden lift plate (a Difficult task to spot using Observation) that is used to lower victims' vehicles for disposal. The lift is operated by a control box set into the wall. Unlike the rest of the place, the box looks new (an Average; Observation task to notice this). There are always at least two Igors here, generally smoking cigarettes and drinking beer.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The subsurface was hollowed out by the aliens using their advanced technology. The walls are made of a thick, chitin-like material and are coated with a slimy, foul-smelling substance. The place is dimly lit with red lights, and an alien scent pervades the air.

Vehicle Area: This is where the vehicles end up that are lowered from the garage. There are tools in the room for cutting and disassembling vehicles. The Igors are quite good at dismantling the cars. The parts of the victims' vehicles are taken into the dump and disposed of.

Dump: The aliens, aware of the amount of waste material (bodies, vehicle parts) their operation would generate, dug a pit to dispose of it. The dump is a deep shaft dug in the earth with reinforcing poles of alien material set into its wall. The pit is about 10 meters deep and contains human bones, rotting corpses, auto parts and small scurrying creatures not of this earth which feed on the remains. The dump site smells of gasoline, oil and rotted flesh.

Capture Area: This is where the victims end up if they fall through the trap doors. The victims fall onto soft, squishy material which cushions their fall. There will be at least one armed alien per victim present to subdue the humans. A subdued human is stripped naked and dragged into the pen.

Pen: The walls of the pen are composed of the thick, slimy chitin-like material. The door is made of steel and is set into the walls. It is kept locked and is guarded by an alien at all times. There are currently six people here, including the missing person the PC is looking for. The people are in terrible condition due to the terror of the situation and the fact that the aliens don't

feed their captives. At the referee's discretion, some of the victims may have been modified: grafted limbs, surgical modifications, cyborg parts, etc.

Lab: This chamber is filled with weird-looking, semi-organic DarkTek laboratory equipment. It is here that the aliens conduct their experiments on humans. Their research is aimed at producing a human-based fighter to use in their battles with other ETs. They are working with grafting cloned organs and limbs from their own race to humans, as well as cyborg modifications. So far, they have been unable to produce a controllable fighter. Most of them went mad and had to be destroyed. At the referee's discretion, the lab might contain one or more such experiments. These beings would be as likely to attack the PCs as the aliens if freed.

Living Area: This is where the aliens sleep and feed. The aliens feed primarily on the brains and central nervous systems of higher animals (including humans), and they prefer their meals as fresh as possible (alive). The PCs may run into the aliens while they are feeding, which would be a horrible scene to witness.

Power/Computer: This room is a horrifying tangle of partially living computer and power plant components, some of which were once part of human beings. The computer is not terribly advanced or powerful, and is used primarily to store data from the experiments.

RESOLUTION

The aliens will continue to operate and expand their operation (by taking over more businesses and houses) unless they are stopped. If the PCs defeat them, they will abandon their operations in Slaterville for a while, but will eventually try again. If any of the aliens escape, they will rejoin others of their kind and seek revenge. If all of them are killed, a four-being team will be sent in to determine what happened, and they may learn of the PCs' involvement and seek revenge. Those the PCs rescue will be quite grateful (once they recover) and may be able to aid the PCs later.

The referee may wish to continue the action by having one of the aliens' more dangerous experiments escape. It would then be up to the PCs to track the person down and stop him. The individual would have various grafted limbs, as well as cyborg parts, making him a dangerous opponent. While the person would be insane, he would possess a great deal of cunning.



Igors

There are 15 Igors in the town. See page 176 of **Dark Conspiracy** for details. They are armed with a mix of knives and handguns, and six have shotguns. They are cowards on their own or if outgunned, but are "brave" when they outnumber and outgun their victims.

Bubba Wilson

Level: Experienced.

Skills: Small Arms 4 (Pistol), Small Arms 5 (Rifle), Forgery 4, Streetwise 4, Vehicle Use 4 (Wheeled Vehicle).

Physical Description: Wilson is an obese man with a scraggly beard and a balding head. His eyes constantly move about, as if he is always looking for something. He always seems slightly nervous, as if he is being watched.

Personality/Notes: Wilson is a former cop who left the department just before coming under investigation. He then returned to full-time management of the convenience store he owned. Greedy, selfish man, Wilson was only too glad to work for the aliens. They abducted him when he was in the woods burying an elderly woman who didn't have as much cash on her as Bubba would have liked. He is utterly without scruples and will do anything to further his own profit and enjoyment. He is generally in the store at night, so he can loot the bodies of the aliens' victims.

Weapons: S&W Model 29/16.5 (always carried under his jacket), Mossberg M500 (kept in pickup or in the office when he is there). Ω

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ICE. ICE, Baby

A Dark Conspiracy adventure by Michael C. LaBossiere

Everybody thought it was an instance of the infamous "Down-East" humor when a lobster man radioed us that there was a large iceberg and several smaller 'bergs in the area. The captain broadcasted an "iceberg warning" over the ship's intercom, and we all had a good laugh. We stopped laughing when a chunk of ice punched a hole in the hull, and the ship began its descent into the Atlantic.

This adventure is set off the coast of Maine and embroils the PCs in an invasion attempt by beings from an alien dimension. This adventure is fairly difficult, and the party should contain mostly experienced PCs. The party can also be beefed up with NPCs as needed.

At the start of the adventure, the PCs will be on a relaxing, all-day cruise along the Maine coast. This cruise can be paid for by the PCs (about \$75-100 per person) or can be a gift from someone the PCs have benefited. The first part of the cruise will be enjoyable and includes a seafood feed (lobster, clams, etc.) as well as whale watching (there are still a few left around Maine, which strictly enforces its tough environmental laws).

On the way back to the port, night will fall, and it will become chilly. Those familiar with the area will say it's colder than usual. Two hours from port, those on deck will see a bright flash (like lightning) in the distance. About an hour from port, a lobster man will radio the ship and say that he has sighted a large iceberg in the area, as well as several smaller, fast-moving 'bergs. The captain, thinking it's a joke, will broadcast the transmission over the intercom. While everyone is having a good laugh, what appears to be a fast-moving chunk of ice will smash into the ship and pierce its wooden hull. The captain will stop laughing and send out a frantic Mayday.

DEATH IN THE WATER

The stricken vessel will begin taking on water immediately, and those on deck will see the "ice" move away from the ship and then strike it again. This should clue them in that all is not right. The "ice" is in fact a Yesqi. It will continue to attack the boat until it sinks it (this will take 20+1D10 minutes from the first attack). After sinking the ship, it will pursue any lifeboats in the water, and after that, it will pursue any individual humans in the water.

While the creature is attacking the vessel, the ship's four lifeboats (each capable of holding six people safely) can be lowered over the side (on the side the Yesqi is not attacking, or it may smash into them).

Luckily for those on board, there is a nearby island with a working lighthouse on it. Its beacon is easily visible. Rowing to the island will take about 20 minutes if two skilled and strong rowers are rowing in each boat. Fortunately, the local current pulls objects toward the island.

The exodus to the island should be handled by the referee in such a manner as to stimulate fear and excitement, and kill off some NPCs. Descriptions of this sort should be used: "The light of the lighthouse reveals a scene of terror: You can see, for an instant, the terrified faces of those behind you as something smashes into their boat. Mercifully, darkness quickly cloaks the scene. On the next pass of the light, you see only wreckage and torn bodies borne by the waves...." The PCs should have a frightening close call, but should be allowed to reach the island, provided they don't do anything really stupid (like trying to attack the creature from a lifeboat).

REACHING THE BEACH

The surviving boats will soon find themselves being pulled toward the island. The current will draw the boats toward a particularly rocky section. Nearby is a safer area. Beaching the boat in the safe section is an Average task using the Vessel Use (Boat) skill. If this roll fails, the boat will be pulled toward the rocks, and a Difficult: Vessel Use (Boat) skill roll will be required. If this roll fails, the boat is smashed on the rocks, and those on-board are tossed into the sea. Those in the sea must make a Difficult roll using their Swimming skill to reach the shore safely. If the roll fails, a character must make another Difficult: Swimming roll to avoid being bashed up against the rocks (inflicting 2D6 damage). The next turn, the char-

acter may attempt to reach shore again. Those on shore or in the boats may attempt to help those in the water (the exact effects are left up to the referee).

The Yesqi will attempt to pursue the survivors, but it, too, must avoid being smashed on the rocks (it should be treated as having a Swimming skill of 10). If it is smashed against the rocks, it cannot attack the next turn and must escape them (a Difficult skill check, failure resulting in being stuck another turn). It also takes damage from being bashed against the rocks (its greater bulk results in it taking 4D6 damage).

If the survivors reach land, they will be safe from the Yesqi, which cannot leave the water. It will remain in the area as long as the survivors are in sight (unless they are shooting at it, of course). If the survivors move inland, where it cannot see them, it will swim around the island, waiting for them.

BAXTER ISLAND

The island is located about two miles off the Maine coast. It is a rather small island, and has only a few scraggly pines and some beach grass on it. Most of it consists of weather- and sea-worn granite. Located on top of a small hill is a lighthouse which was originally placed in the 1800s to warn ships of a series of granite "almost islands" that lay just beneath the surface in the area. These "almost islands" are somewhat of an anomaly, and their existence has not been adequately explained. Each "almost island" has a bell buoy on top of it, and their eerie tolling can be heard on the island. According to local legend, the bells are rung by those who have died in the sea.

Dock: The dock is a heavy-duty, wooden dock, designed to handle vessels as large as Coast Guard cutters (the water is fairly deep off the dock, which is why it is there).

Shack: The shack is locked and contains several cans of fuel, a tool box, an old bicycle, some old boots and rain gear.

Road: A worn-down and rutted dirt road. It was built when the lighthouse was constructed.

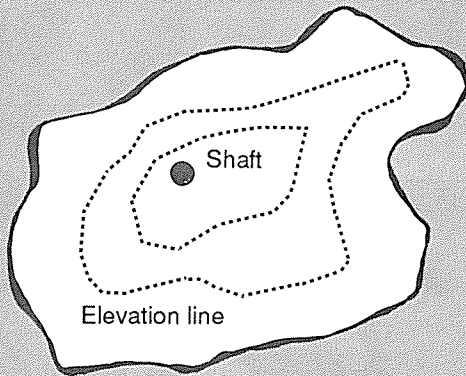
Trails: With the decline of the environment, virtually all unpolluted places have become of interest to people. The Maine government added the trail in the late 1990s, and they have been maintained with some degree of regularity ever since.



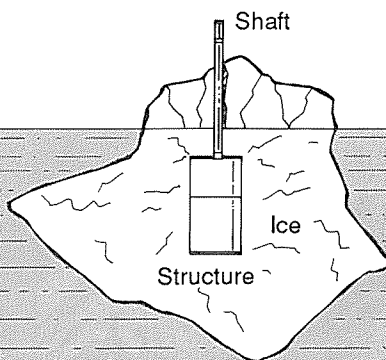
STEVE
BRYANT
© 1994

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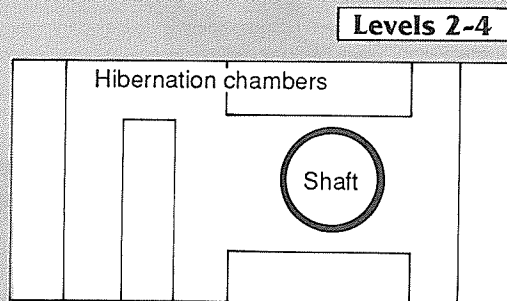
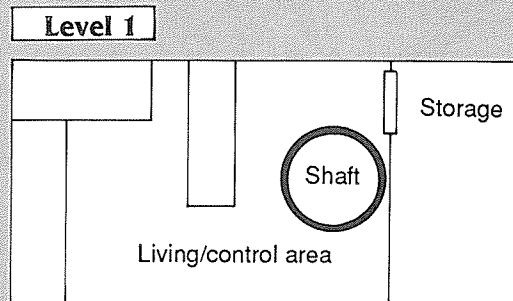
Iceberg Surface



Iceberg Sideview



Structure Interior



LIGHTHOUSE

The lighthouse consists of the actual lighthouse and a house for the lighthousekeeper. The house was added in the early 1920s when a married man took over the job. It was inhabited until 1964 when the lighthouse was automated. The house is locked and boarded up, and the lighthouse is locked.

Porch: A worn-down porch, complete with a swinging seat.

Living Room: Contains dusty and cobwebbed furniture, which was left when the lighthouse was automated.

Kitchen and Dining Room: The kitchen has a wood-burning stove and a gas stove. There is still wood present, as well as a few old cooking implements. The sink will produce water (although it tastes funny) from the old tank, which is still about half full.

Bedrooms: The bedrooms are dusty, but do contain usable furniture.

Bathroom: A working bathroom with an old style toilet (gravity flush).

Closet: Contains an old, much patched, heavy, yellow raincoat.

Storage: Contains almost a century's accumulation of junk: old furniture, toys, boxes of magazines, broken appliances and so forth. Also contains boxes of spare parts for the lighthouse and fuel for the generator.

Lighthouse Interior: The bottom floor of the lighthouse is taken up primarily by a generator and a very large fuel tank. There is a radio set up on a table here. Unfortunately, water has leaked onto it, rendering it inoperable. Access

to the lighthouse is via a very steep spiral staircase. The top floor has large glass windows and affords an excellent view of the area (at night, the view is limited to what the light reveals). There is an old flare gun hanging on a nail, as well as a pair of old binoculars on a small table.

UNWELCOME GUESTS

About an hour after the survivors reach the island, another group of survivors will arrive. These people are from a drug-running vessel which was attacked by a Yesqi and sunk. There will be a total of three survivors from the drug runner (four were killed by a Yesqi when the boat was sunk). These people are detailed below.

THE ICEBERG COMETH

About an hour after the drug runners arrive on the island, the light from the lighthouse will reveal a very odd sight. The light will sweep across what can only be a very large iceberg which appears to be being pulled by the current toward the island. The sweeping light will also reveal that a large black cylinder is sticking out of the iceberg. Smaller shapes (the Yesqi) swarm about the iceberg. If the iceberg is kept under observation, when the light swings by, those watching it will be able to see dark shapes moving about on its surface. Suddenly, there will be a bright flash from the iceberg in the darkness, and the top of the lighthouse will explode in a ball of fire (killing anyone there). Shortly afterward, the light of the moon will reveal dark shapes flying from the iceberg to the island.

ATTACK

The dark flying shapes are Galacians which are on their way to attack the island and kill everyone on it. The first attack will consist of four Galacians. If these do not succeed, the remaining Galacians will join the attack. The Galacians use icebergs as vessels of sorts. The 'berg entered Earth's dimension via a massive gate. Unfortunately for the Galacians, the iceberg, which was supposed to enter Earth's dimension in the antarctic along with the other invasion vessels, ended up in the ocean off the coast of Maine due to a freak gate accident. During the course of the accident, the iceberg was fragmented and lost its propulsion system as well as several other structures. All that remains is a single hibernation structure.

The surface of the iceberg is ice. Protruding from the ice is a two-meter-wide shaft made of metal. The outside

of the shaft has a ladder on it. The structure is embedded in the ice.

Shaft: The shaft is hollow, with sliding doors set on each level of the structure. The top has a double-paneled door on top to keep out rain, etc. None of the doors are locked, and they can easily be opened and closed using a single large button.

Living Control Area: This is the area in which the eight conscious Galacians live and work. The interior consists of semi-organic-looking controls which are quite odd looking. The interior is lit with a dim red light (which is the light of their proto-dimension's dying sun). Lying on one "table" are several maps etched on very strong metal foil. These maps are of Earth and several proto-dimensions. The maps are also covered with symbols. If the maps are turned over to a government or other powerful entity, the language will be translated, and it will be learned that there is a large-scale invasion of Earth's arctic regions by the Galacians.

Levels 2-4: Levels two through four contain hibernation chambers. The Galacians evolved from creatures with life cycles which involved their being frozen or dried out or both for long periods of time. Since the Galacians' trip to Earth took them through many proto-dimensions and has taken years of travel time through these spaces, the Galacians rotate their crews in and out of hibernation. The hibernation chambers consist of what appear to be panes of thick glass held together by the internal organs of a whale. The hibernation chambers are extremely cold and dry. Each chamber holds 34 "freeze dried" Galacians. They look even more horrifying when freeze dried, what with organic tubules piercing their hides and various things moving over the bodies, checking them for damage. The freeze-dried Galacians and the hibernation equipment are extremely vulnerable to flame. It takes two full days for a Galacian to be restored to normal from a freeze-dried state.

ACTION

The conscious Galacians will attack those on the island and attempt to secure it as a base of operation. They will do all in their power to keep their freeze-dried brethren safe from attack. Their first order of business is to secure the island. This amounts to killing all the humans on it. They will then begin awakening their frozen brethren. Once the revival process is started, they will cause the exterior of the structure to heat up. It will melt through the ice and come to

rest on one of the "almost islands" with the shaft protruding from the water. They will then destroy the rest of the iceberg as much as possible and let the chunks drift away.

Once established on the island, the invaders will begin to head inland, looking for fresh meat (humans). Some of the passengers from the cruise vessel will advocate talking to the arriving Galacians. Naturally, they will be slaughtered when they go out into the open.

The captain will want to keep as many people alive as possible, and he will want to warn the people on the mainland as to what is going on. The drug runners' leader will decide to fight the aliens. After all, they probably won't buy any drugs, and if everybody is dead, he'll be out of business. What the PCs want to do is, of course, up to them.

RESOLUTION

If the Galacians succeed in killing

Yesqi

#Appear: 1

Attack: 90%

Move: 13/25/50

Initiative: 1

Strength: 30

Constitution: 30

Agility: 2.

Skill/Dam: 4/3D10

Hits: 80/160

Special: Yesqi are treated as if their bodies have an armor value of 2 (the shell). Their exposed head, limbs and tail have no appreciable armor.

Yesqi appear to be giant sea turtle-like creatures with whitish shells that look like dirty ice. In their native climate (arctic seas), this shell serves as excellent camouflage. Their limbs are webbed like Terran turtles, but they have massive, razor-sharp claws that Terran turtles lack. Their mouths are also filled with jagged teeth. A Yesqi has between two and four rows of teeth, depending on their size and age. Their snouts also bear a horn-like structure which they use to impale their prey. This horn is also useful in punching holes in wooden-hulled boats. Yesqi are strict carnivores, and they can eat almost anything, thanks to the bacteria that reside in their digestive system.

While Yesqi are not particularly intelligent, they can be trained with suitable applications of force and reward when they are young. They are often employed by the Galacians, who raise them in large numbers and use them as war beasts.

Galacians

Strength: 13

Constitution: 16

Agility: 3

Intelligence: 6

Education: 1

Charisma: 2

Empathy: 1

Initiative: 3

Move: 3/9/15/30

Skill/Dam: 7/2D10

Hits: 25/50

#Appear: 1D6

The Galacian race evolved from a particularly vicious arctic predator. Like the earthly polar bear, this predator was adept at moving across the ice as well as swimming in the icy water. This predator was also a remarkable survivor. The climate in which it lived was plagued with periods of cold so extreme that almost nothing could survive in it. During such times, these creatures would enter an extreme form of hibernation, from which they would emerge months or years later. Over the course of time, the Galacians evolved into an intelligent race and spread out across their home world. The modern Galacians have six limbs—two of them have hands, and the other four end in bear-like paws with sharp talons. Their heads are large and have four eyes set in them (two in front and one on either side of the head), and they have powerful jaws with sharp teeth. Their bodies are covered with a thick, fur-like material.

For thousands of years, their culture thrived until their sun, already in its decline, began to fade even faster. The Galacians were a resourceful race, and having had discovered technological dimensional travel, the leaders decided on an exodus from their dying realm to a new dimension. Their scouts reported that Earth would be an excellent place to settle, so they set out constructing the ice vessels that would bear them on their journey.

Unfortunately for both the Galacians and humanity, a Dark One entered their world, and a tyrant arose who served it. This tyrant took the existing ice vessels for himself and his followers. Leaving the remaining Galacians to die, he set sail with his fleet to invade Earth's dimension for his new lord. Virtually all of the Galacians of the invasion fleet are Dark Minions and are servants of the Dark One who took over their home dimension. A few are secretly opposed to the Dark One, but are too afraid to act. Their home dimension is now a hell of ice in which horrible, imported beings and a few insane Galacians dwell.

everyone off, they will use the island as a base and raid the coast (while carefully concealing the location of their base). They will also attempt to get in contact with their fellows in the arctic regions of the Earth. If the Galacians are unopposed, they will eventually be able to take over several islands along Maine's coast, and their fellows will eventually take much of Earth's arctic regions as their own. If the PCs (or other survivors) escape and warn the mainland, the island will be investigated. This will result in a military attack on the Galacians, which will wipe them out. If the maps in the living/control area are found, there will be military operations in the arctic regions against the Galacians that will eventually succeed. The PCs may be brought into the action, if desired.

NPCs

Captain Rich Molderson: Molderson is a reserve naval officer who lives in Maine. During the summer, he earns extra money running a tour boat

operation with his sister. He is extremely dedicated to the United States, despite its current condition. He will consider the Galacians to be invaders (and rightly so) and will do all in his power to stop them.

Molderson is a man in his mid-forties, still in good shape, with only a few gray hairs. He has a short, neatly trimmed beard and piercing gray eyes.

Level: Veteran.

Skills: As per Veteran NPC. Heavy Weapons 2, Leadership 5, Navigation 7, Mechanic 2, Observation 4, Swimming 5, Small Arms (Pistol) 4, Vessel Use (Ship) 4, Vessel Use (Boat) 2, Willpower 3.

Initiative: 4.

Equipment: M9 with two clips.

Crewmembers (3): These two women and one man are experienced sailors and are all naval reserve enlisted personnel. They have served with Molderson for years and will follow his orders.

Level: Experienced.

Skills: As per Experienced NPCs,

plus Mechanic 2, Heavy Weapons 3, Melee Combat (Armed) 3, Navigation 1, Swimming 4, Vessel Use (Ship) 5, Vessel Use (Boat) 4.

Equipment: Knife.

Passengers (20 NPCs, plus the PC group): These are normal people who went out for a cruise and ended up in a nightmare. They may be employed in many ways. For example, some can serve as victims to demonstrate the cruelty of the Galacians, others can panic and foul up the PCs' plans, and some may even be able to aid the PCs.

Level: Novice.

Skills: As per Novice NPCs. Some might have certain specialized skills.

Equipment: Some may have cameras.

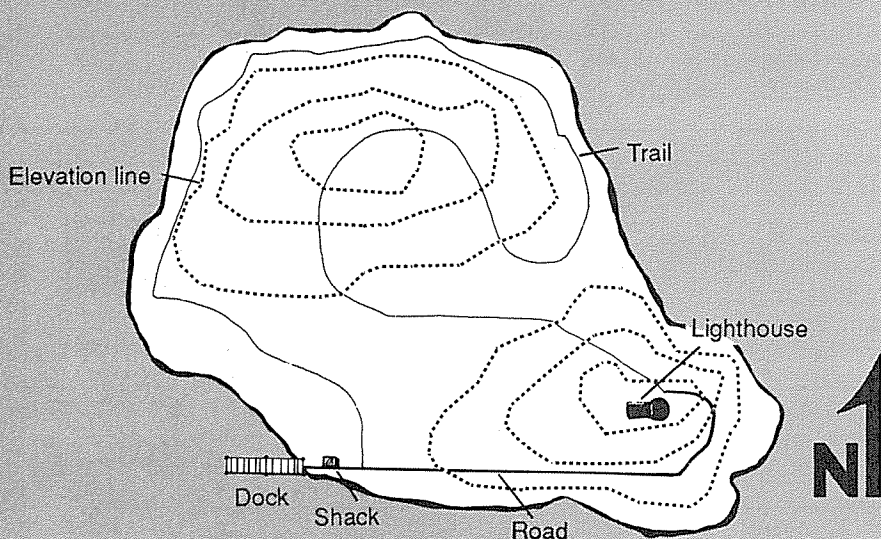
Harold Ramis: Ramis, a Maine native, is a former member of the US military who was badly injured during an attempted mutiny by his military unit (they were being used by their Dark Minion commanding officer as a Gestapo like force). He was the only survivor of the attempt and is convinced that the army is still looking for him (they aren't, but the Dark Minions are). With his perceived criminal status, his only option for employment was crime, and he has taken it up with military precision. Because of his past and his current occupation, he is extremely suspicious, almost paranoid. However, enough of his sense of decency remains that he will join with the PCs against the Galacians, providing he has a guaranteed escape route once it's all over. He may be willing to join the PCs, if they impress him.

Ramis is a tall, well-muscled man with numerous scars on his arms and chest and one on his face. He always looks as if he needs a shave. His outfit generally consists of a pair of worn jeans, old hiking boots, a camo shirt and a worn jean jacket.

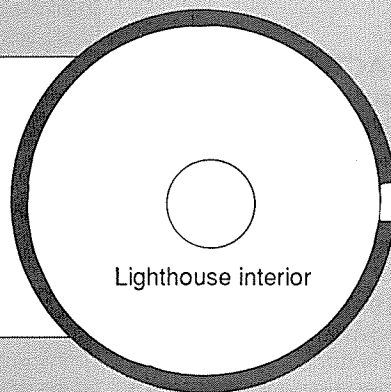
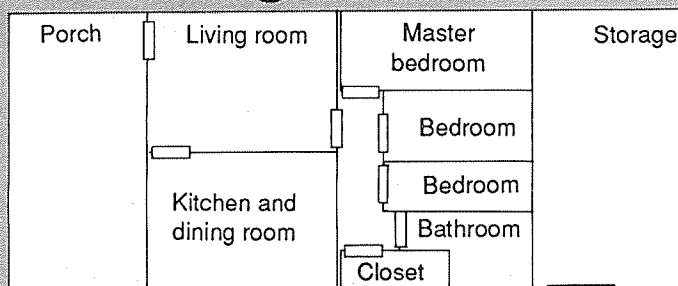
Level: Veteran.

Skills: Melee Combat (Armed) 6,

Baxter Island, Maine



Lighthouse



Air Disk

Air Disk: This device is basically a small "flying saucer" that is driven by an advanced, but conventional, battery-power system. Lift is provided by small, high-powered air jets. The control systems are very simple and can be easily handled by a human, though they are a bit oversized. An air disk is designed to carry one Galacian and his equipment. Because Galacians are much heavier and larger than humans, an air disk can transport up to four humans, provided their weight does not exceed the capacity of the disk.

Cruise Speed: 35

Com Move: 5

Fuel Cap: 50

Fuel Cons: 5

Price: N/A (—/—)

Night Vision: None

Fuel Type: Advanced Battery

Load: 300 kg (–10% speed per additional 30 kg)

Veh. Wt.: 300 kg

Crew: 1 Galacian (or 300 kg of humans)

Armament: None

Ammo: N/A

Min. Runway, Takeoff: 0 m

Min. Runway, Land: 0 m

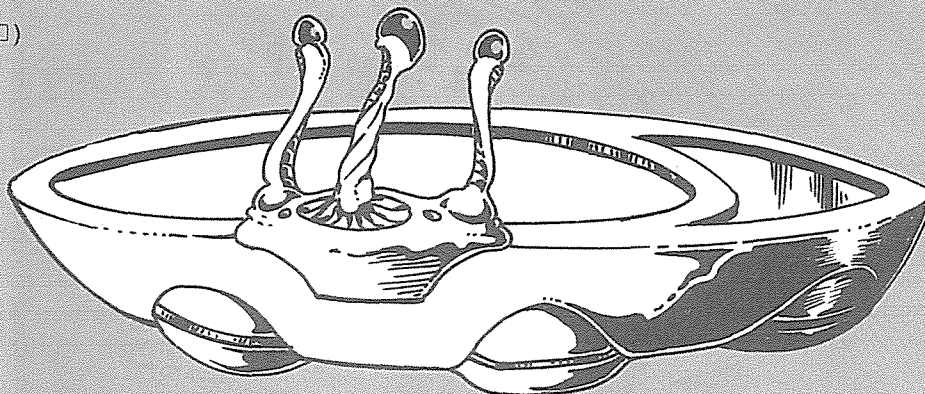
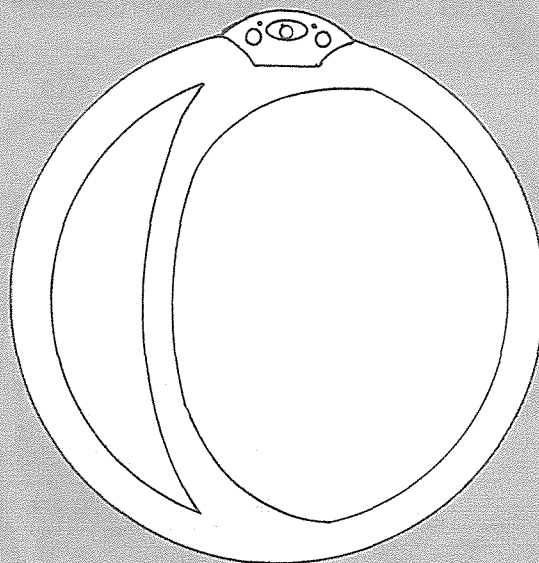
Damage Record

Crewmembers: Pilot ☐

(Human Pilot ☐)

(Human Passengers: 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐)

Engine: ☐



Small Arms (Pistol) 6, Small Arms (Rifle) 6, Swimming 1, Vessel Use (Boat) 6, Streetwise 6, Computer Operation 2, Leadership 4.

Initiative: 4.

Equipment: Desert Eagle (.44) with two clips, Uzi with two 32-round box magazines, combat knife.

Drug Runners (2): Ben Wisman ("Benny"), Alice Thompson ("Viper") These two (a man and a woman) were recruited by Ramis from the Hell Hounds gang in New York City. They are rather brutal individuals and are adept at personal violence. They respect and fear Ramis and will obey his orders.

Level: Experienced.

Skills: As per experienced NPCs, plus Stealth 6, Streetwise 7 and Vessel Use (Boat) 2.

Equipment: AKR with two magazines, combat knife.

WEAPONRY

The Galacians employ a variety of weapons that are different in appearance than human weapons, but are very similar in function. A human using these weapons (or a Galacian using a human-hand weapon) uses them at one skill level lower than normal due to their different size and slightly different configuration (Galacians are larger and use two eyes to aim, unlike humans, who

use one). These weapons are as follows:

Handgun: Treat as a .44 magnum Desert Eagle.

Rifle: Treat as a XM7 Storm Gun.

Rocket Launcher: Treat as a LAW 80.

Six of the Galacians are armed with rifles and handguns, while two are armed with handguns and rocket launchers. The warrior Galacians (these Galacians are actually medical personnel in charge of the hibernating ones) are equipped with actual DarkTek, supplied by their Dark Lord. The support personnel, however, retained standard weaponry due to the current scarcity of DarkTek. Ω

Action/Reaction

A Dark Conspiracy adventure by Christopher Ziegler

PCs usually spend their minion hunting days searching out evil, and then blowing that evil into tiny little pieces. They go to the problem and eliminate it. But this time, the problem is coming to them.

Run this adventure preferably right after your characters are finishing off another adventure. They will be low on ammo, probably wounded in some way, and certainly not prepared to deal with a terror campaign against them. This adventure also becomes much more thrilling if it takes place at night.

The PCs are heading home after another successful mission against the forces of evil. They probably split up into small groups or go off alone back to their homes. Now that each character is isolated, the assassins strike.

If the character lives in an apartment or other structure, he will be attacked by two stalkers (**Dark Races**, page 86). Stalkers are used for assassination operations by Dark Lords, and do their job extremely well. When the PC opens the door and flips the switch, nothing happens. His room is dark. No matter how much fiddling with the light, nothing will happen. Make a Difficult: Foreboding roll. If successful, the character will sense something in the room with him, just before the door closes—and locks. From the outside. If unsuccessful, the PC probably pulls out a flashlight and makes his way over to the fuse box. Then the flashlight sparks and goes out. Maybe the character steals a glimpse of an inky black claw smashing the bulb with a silvery black dagger, just before the door closes and locks.

Now the PC is locked in his room,

in near-total darkness. He should be terrified, or at least apprehensive, as he has no idea what he is dealing with. Enhance the atmosphere by telling the PC that the only sound is his own frantic breathing. The stalkers choose that moment to attack.

The stalkers will attempt to kill the PC silently and quickly, using their darkness daggers to murder their foe. This will be a desperate fight for the PC, as firearms will be more of a liability than an asset. Remember, the PC can barely see what he's shooting at, so most shots will hit the furniture (unless he has a starlite scope or other vision device, in which case he will see the stalkers clearly). This will be a melee fight, with knives and fists. The PC will probably win, as there are only two stalkers, and the character may be able to get in a lucky shot with a pistol. If either stalker is seriously wounded, they will both use Dimension Walk to escape, leaving the character bloody, bruised, and shaken.

ATTACK OR ENTRENCH

When contacting the rest of the survivors, the PCs will find that everyone else was attacked. This was not a random incident. The Dark Lords have noticed this particular group of humans has a habit of ruining Dark operations. Their first successes could be flukes, but now the Dark Lords are convinced it is deliberate. So the Dark Ones sent an assassination team of stalkers combined with a few loyal humans to make sure the PCs never interfere with them again.

The characters will likely be worried now. What should they do? Most PCs will be confused about being on the receiving end of an attack and will act accordingly. Popular opinion usually will run to entrenching, get-

ting everyone together and poking guns out of windows. Any PC with antiterrorism experience will realize this is not a good idea, as it would provide the enemy with a fixed target to destroy at leisure. If the characters insist on this, their building will be hit by an RPG fired by an Igor as he jumps into a car and scurries away. He will lead the party on a merry chase through the city (make many Vehicle Use (Wheeled Vehicle) rolls to keep up with him) and eventually to the old Manchester Street Parking Garage. See Stand Up and Fight Like a Minion, below.

If the characters decide to rove around together looking for their would-be assassins, they will find nothing. They have no idea what to look for or where to look. Have everyone make an Average: Observation roll to discover that a car has been following them since they left. It makes no hostile actions toward them but merely follows them no matter where they head. Driving rolls may be made to shake the trail. When the PCs stop, the car speeds up and drives past. PCs recording and checking the license number find that the car was destroyed in the 2004 collapse of the Manchester Street Parking Garage. If the PCs decide to check out the garage, see Stand Up and Fight Like a Minion, below. Nothing more will happen until night.

THEY'RE BACK

The PCs will be attacked at night again, whether they are alone or in a group. They will be attacked by two stalkers if alone and by 1D6 stalkers if grouped. In addition, a human Igor will accompany them, armed with a tranquilizer gun. While the stalkers keep everyone busy fighting in the dark, the Igor will discreetly tranquil-

**Just because you're paranoid
don't mean they're not after you.**

ize a key NPC or a special PC and haul him out to his car (which, incidentally, is the same one that has been following them). The stalkers will continue fighting until one is seriously wounded, and they will then use Dimension Walk to disappear. Now the characters notice that one of their number is missing.

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO TRACE THIS CALL...

As the characters decide what to do next, the phone rings. The character answering hears a chilling, bone-grating voice rasp, "If you ever want to see (missing PC or NPC) again, come to the Manchester Parking Garage at midnight...or else." The caller laughs and hangs up quickly. So, of course, the PCs gear up and march outside to head for the parking garage. But the stalkers are not stupid. The key element of victory is defining the battle on your own terms, and the stalkers adhere fiercely to that principle. Instead of allowing the characters to catch them in the garage in a stand-up-shoot-em-up battle that they will almost certainly lose, the stalkers will attack the characters when they are at their least ready—the moment they set foot out their door.

The PCs will be attacked by two stalkers who wait until their Igor across the street starts firing. The Igor is armed with an Uzi with five clips. Once the PCs start to shoot at him, the stalkers will leap on them from behind. The stalkers will fight only until the PCs manage to shoot one of their number, then they will flee. The Igor, if not dead, will jump into his car and speed off—right toward the Manchester Street Parking Garage.

STAND UP AND FIGHT LIKE A MINION

The stalkers' plans have gone somewhat awry. They had planned to get rid of the characters already, but now have decided the PCs are too powerful. The stalkers are planning to report back to their respective Dark Lord, but they have one more trick they will try.

By now, the characters should be zooming off to the garage. Whether



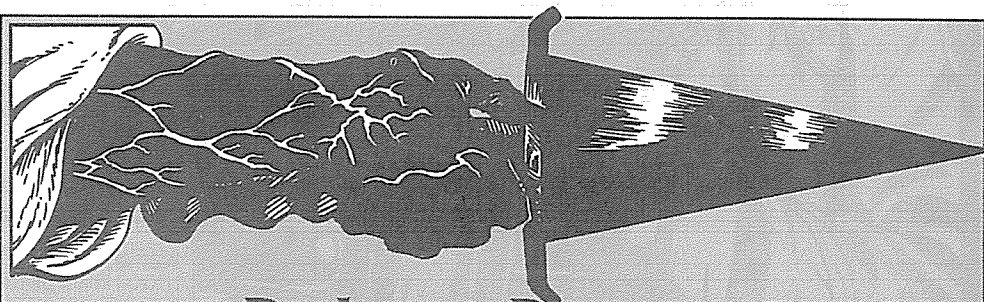
Stalkers

Strength: 12	Education: 1	Move: 3/10/20/35
Constitution: 8	Charisma: 1	Skill/Dam: 5/7 or by dagger
Agility: 10	Empathy: 6	Hits: 20/30
Intelligence: 6	Initiative: 5	Appear: There are 1D8+2 total stalkers in the mission

For more details on stalkers, see **Dark Races Sourcebook**, pages 86-87.

Igors

As stock NPCs, **Dark Conspiracy**, page 176. There are as many Igors as PCs. Two have Vehicle Use (Wheeled Vehicle) at level 6. They are armed with Uzis, .45s and knives.



Darkness Daggers

The favorite weapon of the stalkers, the darkness dagger penetrates armor as if it didn't exist to inflict piercing wounds. It has a short armed melee range, +2 to-hit modifier and does 1D10+1/2 STR damage.

Stalkers are immune to fire, lightning, oxygen-deprivation or poison. It is one level more difficult to hit a stalker in poor light, which is why they're always attacking at night. For more details on the stalker weapons, see **Dark Races Sourcebook**, pages 86-87.

they're following the Igor or desperately trying to save their friend, they're driving right into the stalkers' final trap.

Built in 1997 during a lean construction period but an explosive commuter era, the Manchester Street Parking Garage was destined to fail from the beginning. Shoddy workmanship, poor materials and inept planning combined to make the structure extremely hazardous. On March 13, 2004, the structure collapsed right in the middle of rush hour, killing hundreds. The cause of collapse was never proven, despite rumors of sabotage and terrorism. It is also interesting to note that March 13 was a Friday. Whatever the cause, the collapse was a disaster. The building was judged too unstable to enter. Paramedics and EMT teams risked their own lives anyway looking for a way in, but no openings were to be found. So they simply waited outside, hearing the anguished screams and pleas for rescue that filtered out for hours. The eerie glow from the fires inside created a hellish spectacle. After 24 hours, the property was condemned, and no teams were ever sent in to retrieve bodies or look for survivors. The entire area around the ruin collapsed financially as residents flocked to more pleasant parts of town. Manchester Street soon became an Anthill. Those living there say they still hear the screams of those who were crushed and burned while rescuers stood helpless outside.

The PCs should know all this, and the depression in the area is almost palpable as the characters speed toward it. Finally, there it looms. It is not hard to imagine the abhorrent sight that night in 2004. But the PCs can see a glimmer of light from deep within the structure, and the Igor who abandons his car and scuttles toward a tiny crack that would have gone unnoticed. PCs can follow him in, in which case he will fight, or choose their own way toward the beckoning pinpoint of light. The structure settles and creaks as they clamber around inside. Perhaps truly evil referees could have someone come across a charred skeleton, frozen in

an eternal scream. No matter what route, the PCs find the source of the light. A cavern formed when the upper deck crashed down at an angle on the lower. The site is ringed with smashed and broken cars, skeletons hiding underneath them. The entire area is fire-blackened, and a faint charnel stench lingers. Coupled with the constant threat of collapse, this should make even the most hardened characters claustrophobic!

Their friend is hanging upside-down over a hole in the floor that seems to go down for miles. A vile smell wafts up from this pit. The light is a pulsing blue gateway, in front of which the remaining stalkers are standing, along with all their Igor servants. The stalkers will fight the PCs one last time, inflicting as much damage as possible, then stepping back toward the gate. One salutes the PCs, and all the remaining stalkers slip through the gate. The dimensional portal slips shut behind them. The PCs and the Igors are left to fight it out. Or so they thought.

DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

As soon as the last stalker is safely through the gate, the Igors draw their weapons. But the would-be firefight is interrupted by an ominous rumbling noise. Dust sifts down from the ceiling, and the loose objects shake. Then, ever so slowly at first, chunks of the concrete ceiling start to fall. The Igors look at each other in terror and run for the exit. Unfortunately, it collapses just as they are going through. It seems the rest of the garage will soon follow suit.

The party should be in a frenzy now, with a 20-year-old ruin collapsing in on them, surrounded by those who died violent deaths, and their friend hanging over a stinking,

seemingly bottomless pit. In actuality, the pit is the only exit remaining. It is a 20-foot drop to the bottom, but the rope the prisoner is hanging on will, if unwound, reach to the bottom. PCs may lower themselves down, but quickly, as the garage is rapidly going to pieces. Once at the ground below, they find themselves in a sewer leading for miles. To hurry them along, perhaps some rubble may fall down the shaft, nearly striking them. The characters can drag themselves along the sewers until they find a ladder, which will let them up into the open air. Those evil referees can spoil the moment of triumph by having them covered with leeches.

AFTERMATH

Though the PCs have fought off the assassins for now, they ultimately have put themselves in greater danger. The Dark Lords are now certain of the PCs' involvement, and next time, they will send something they feel is capable of making the PCs' lives miserable—if short. Until then, the PCs can go back to fighting the Dark Ones, but maybe, just maybe, a little less sure of themselves. Ω



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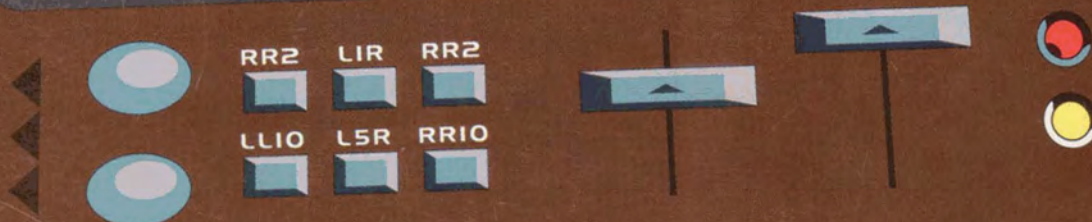
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Globules

A Dark Conspiracy adventure
by Michael C. LaBossiere

Horror emerges from the strangest and most unexpected places these days. Who would ever have suspected that a nightmare could ooze forth from a small Maine town? But it did. Who knows what goes on in other, similar areas? Perhaps a nightmare waiting to happen lies next door to us all.

T

his adventure is for a medium-sized group of PCs. They need not be very experienced, but this scenario is not very suitable for a group of beginning PCs.

The adventure is set in a small town in Maine which is the site of a strange invasion by aquatic globular creatures that have intruded into Earth's dimension in search of host bodies through which to work their terrible schemes. Matters are complicated by the fact that the US government seems to be engaged in a deal with these beings. It is up to the PCs to uncover the truth of the situation and deal with the invaders and their unwitting allies.

REFEREE'S BACKGROUND

Malign beings with terrible purposes running through their alien minds have broken through into our world, spreading suffering and terror. One such group has pierced the veil between the worlds and taken control of the small town of Middle View, Maine. By themselves, these beings are all but physically helpless. Unfortunately, they can enter into symbiotic relations with other life forms and make use of these host bodies to work their terrible plans.

On the first day of the invasion, three queen globules dimension walked and ended their journey in a small Maine pond. After recovering from their ordeal, they produced their offspring—a total of 60 globules. These globules were discovered by Dianne Nicholl, who was visiting her sister's farm. Dianne did not recognize them as an alien life form and thought they were some sort of illegally dumped toxic material. Luckily for her, the queens and their offspring were dormant at this time. The next day, the globules awoke and used their empathic powers to lure Dianne's sister, Joan, into their pond, and she was promptly taken over. Dianne, having left the day before, told a friend of hers in the EPA, Lynn Parsons, about what she had found, and her friend went to investigate, but was soon taken over. Within a matter of days, all 60 globules had hosts taken from the townspeople. These hosts began fortifying Joan's farm and accumulating weapons. Joan, a TV scriptwriter, created the cover story that a TV movie was being filmed at her farm, and there would be plenty of roles for the local people. With that cover in place, the hosts were able to do just about anything without arousing suspicion.

Twenty days after the first batch, the

Dark Conspiracy

queens produced 60 more globules, and over the next few days, 60 more townspeople became hosts, and six people who stumbled onto the situation were killed. Since the police had been taken over, as well as local news reporters, there was no mention or investigation of the disappearances.

Sixty days after their arrival, the queens produced three more queens, and 20 days later, they produced 120 globules. Over the next week, 120 more townspeople had taken up their new roles as globule hosts, and 10 more were killed for learning too much.

Finally, 20 days after the last batch, 120 more globules were produced, and over the next three days, 75 more people became hosts, and 12 people were killed when they learned what was going on. At the end of those three days, the town was completely under the control of the globules, and all those of no use as hosts (about 230 children and senior citizens) were killed and fed to the queens.

The presence of these beings did not go unnoticed among the Dark Minions in the region. One powerful Dark Minion, a *dæmon* (see *Dark Conspiracy*, page 216) who had taken the role of a government official, decided to use the globules as his own soldiers. It contacted the globule queens and told them they could serve it or be destroyed. They agreed, and the *dæmon* ordered government troops to the town. The official story for the public and troops is that a medical quarantine is being enforced; the story for the officers is that they are helping out some friendly ETs. In reality, the *dæmon* is using the unwitting troops to protect the globules from outside interference until it is ready to act.

GETTING THE PCS INVOLVED

Late one night, during a thunderstorm, one of the PCs will hear frantic knocking at his door. Opening the door, the PC will find one of the group's contacts, a biologist named Harvey Weems, and Dianne Nicholl. Both will stagger into the house, their faces pale and haggard. Once they have settled down a bit, they will tell their tales.

Dianne will explain how she found some odd globules floating in her sister's pond. She told a friend about it, who went to investigate and never returned. Later, when Dianne tried to enter the town, she was stopped by soldiers and told to turn back. Later, she snuck in and saw the people in the town doing odd things: making strange structures, fortifying the buildings and so on. She will also say that the people acted strange, as if they were on drugs or something. She will tell the PCs that as she was sneaking out, she was captured by the military, interrogated and locked up with several other people, including Robert Donalds, a well-known investigative telejournalist who was reported missing a week ago. She will finish by saying that Weems freed her and the other prisoners, and they have been on the run since. The others, she will say, went their own ways.

Dr. Weems will say that he was assigned by the government for what he was told would be an opportunity to work with a group of friendly ETs. After working in the town a week, his studies revealed that the "ETs" were humans who were infested by alien life forms, apparently against their wills and not volunteers as the official story had it. When he reported his findings to the commanding officer, the officer turned out to know all about it. Weems will say that he was then taken out to be "merged." Because of his appearance, the guards did not judge him a threat, and they were quite surprised when he attacked and overpowered them and then fled, pausing only to free the others.

Weems will implore the PCs for aid in freeing the town from the yoke of the alien masters. He will also tell them that he

thinks the troops are, for the most part, unaware of the true nature of the situation, although there is no way of knowing how many of them have been taken over.

Weems will also tell the PCs all he knows about the aliens: They are, in their natural form, globules of a gelatinous material with highly complex nervous systems. In this form, they are physically helpless. However, they are capable of entering the bodies of host organisms and taking control of their nervous systems. He doesn't know how many there are or if they can be removed from the host without harm to the person. He does know that they are very protective of a farm (which Dianne will recognize as her sister's farm) and that they all visit it once a day. As far as he knows, none of them have left the area. He will finish by saying that what finally made him realize what was wrong was that there were no children or older people left in the town.

If the PCs decide to help Weems, the ball is in their court. If they decline, they will read in the paper that a prominent biologist (Weems) was killed in a car wreck while driving home from work. In any case, the PCs will see on TV that investigative reporter Robert Donalds was killed in a car wreck while on assignment.

ACTION

The PCs will probably want to enter the town and scope out the situation. Since the town is more or less surrounded by woods, it would be fairly easy to get into town via the woods (which are not currently patrolled) for PCs willing to hike several miles through thick woods. The woods are the home of a pack of wolves. These wolves, which would normally not attack humans unless extremely provoked, have become disturbed due to the empathic emanations of the globules and may attack humans in the woods (if the wolves end up in town somehow, they will go berserk and attack any host in sight).

Once the PCs get into town, they will have to contend with military patrols as well as the hosts. The globules do not constantly scan the area, so if the PCs are careful, they should be able to avoid being detected. Of course, if they are detected, they will be hard-pressed to escape. The hosts will not pursue them out of town, but the military will. The military will also contact the police, who will be looking for them, and the *dæmon* in charge will send out Igors to kill the PCs. If the police or military capture the PCs, they will be locked up in the basement of the high school. If the Igors or hosts get them, they will end up dead or as hosts. Also, if the PCs are detected, security will be stepped up, and if it is suspected that the PCs came via the woods, soldiers will be assigned to patrol the woods in pairs.

RESOLUTION

If the PCs go to the government, they may be able to persuade an official that something is fishy with the town. If they succeed, the military will intervene and wipe out the globule invasion. Of course, it may turn out that the official they contact doesn't believe them (and the PCs may be locked up) or is actually in league with the *dæmon* (and the PCs may be locked up or killed).

If the PCs contact other organizations (such as the police or national guard), these groups will be loath to act against the federal government and will require a great deal of evidence and persuasion before acting. However, given the reduced power of the federal government and the increased independence of local authority, such intervention is not entirely out of the question.

If the PCs decide to go it alone, it will be them against a very substantial force. They may be able to get some of the

soldiers on their side, but it is likely that they will be up against hundreds of hosts on their own. In the PCs' favor, however, is the vulnerability of the farm. It is, after all, far from town and located near the woods. If the PCs hit the farm fast and hard, they may be able to kill the queens (and hence all the globules) before any large forces arrive. If an attack on the farm fails, or if the hosts are warned of such an attack, they will double or triple the guard and have hosts paroling the woods nearby.

If the PCs are defeated, or abandon the mission, 20 days after they are contacted by Weems, the hosts will complete

their portals and pools, and queens and globules will be brought through at an alarming rate. These queens will be loaded into special trailers and taken to various other ponds and lakes throughout the nation. These globule enclaves will be carefully observed by agents of the dæmon to ensure that the globules don't get any ideas of their own. In a short while, many small towns will be taken by the globules. Eventually, there will be enough of them for the dæmon to take over substantial sections of the country. The exact details and impact of this expansion are left to the referee.

If the PCs kill the queens, the surviving hosts will be

Middle View

I-95: The highway is operating normally, although there is always a highway patrol car with one officer in it in the area (treat as a beat cop). This officer is assigned to keep an eye on the ramps. One of the assigned officers has a brother in town whom he has not heard from, and he is suspicious of the situation. He will allow the PCs to get in if they can persuade him.

Ramps: Each ramp is closed off with construction barriers, and they are marked with construction signs. However, anyone who looks will see no signs of construction. If someone approaches the barriers, the police officer will radio the military, then try to persuade the intruders not to do anything. The bottom of each ramp is guarded at all times by four soldiers armed with M-16s. These soldiers will order people to leave and threaten them with legal action or incarceration if they refuse. Some of the guards are suspicious of what is going on and may talk to the PCs (and may even let them in). Other guards have been taken over, and they will deal with the PCs harshly and may kill them if only controlled soldiers are present.

Local Roads: The roads in town are generally used only by the hosts. Those that lead into (and out of) town have concrete construction barriers blocking them, and beyond the barriers there are two soldiers (who will react like those assigned to the ramps) guarding each road.

Middle View: Middle View is located between Portland and

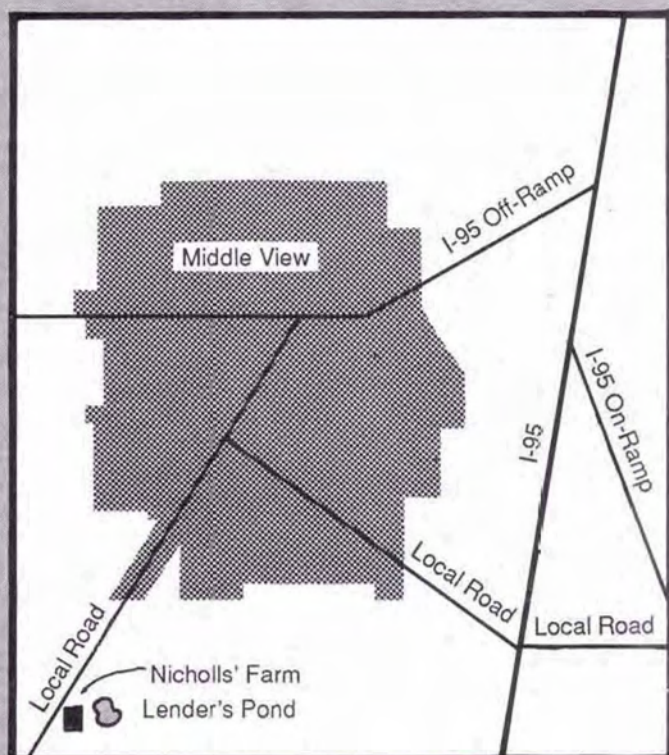
Freeport, and prior to the invasion, it was a nice place to visit. While lacking the stores and nightlife of Portland, and the L.L. Bean of Freeport, Middle View was the home of the Ice Cream Dream, which produced and sold the best ice cream in North America. Now, all the small shops (including the Ice Cream Dream) are closed.

The 40 soldiers of the military contingent are using the high school as their base. The gym has been filled with cots, and the cafeteria is used as a mess. The office is serving as the command post for the operation and the shop building as the motor pool. The soldiers patrol the town roads—their orders are to keep anyone from getting in and anyone from leaving. The soldiers patrol in groups of four and are under strict orders to stay away from the townspeople. They are also under orders to stay away from the Nicholls' farm (they have been told that the disease originated in the farm's pond). If the PCs are encountered, they will be left alone (the soldiers will assume they belong in the town) unless they cause trouble or are recognized as outsiders. If they are caught, they will be locked up in the basement of the high school, along with about four other people (reporters, who are Novice NPCs).

A "medical contingent" of 10 "doctors" is present in the town. They are actually Igors who serve the demon. These people are set up in the local motel. They go about the village and pretend to be running tests and administering medicine for the benefit of the soldiers, who think they are enforcing a medical quarantine. Any conversation about medicine by a person who knows about medical matters (some degree of Medical skill) will reveal very quickly that these people are not doctors (of course, those who make the discovery will be exposed as outsiders and will soon be attacked or locked up).

The remaining townspeople who are hosts spend their time preparing. They are constructing odd structures about town. These structures come in two sorts: The first are wall-like structures. These will be joined together to form what amount to above-ground pools. These pools will be used as breeding areas for the queens. The other structures are part of what will be a very large dimensional portal through which hundreds of queens and globules will travel once the pools are finished for them.

The soldiers have been told that the illness has made these people somewhat insane, and that's why they build the structures. The hosts are careful to do odd things when around the soldiers (the demon suggested this to them) so the soldiers will buy the story. Of course, the empathic abilities of the globules are very helpful in deceiving the soldiers. If the hosts spot the PCs, they will know they do not belong in the town (via the globules' empathic abilities). If there are soldiers nearby, the hosts will turn the PCs in; if not, they will either kill them or take them to the pond and turn them into hosts. Needless to say, gunshots will attract a patrol of soldiers.



stunned by the empathic shock of the deaths for 10 minutes (they will fall to the ground and flop about like dead fish). Afterward, they will stand up. Some will wander about the town aimlessly; others will engage in insane behavior; still others will set out in pursuit of the PCs. However, 24 hours after their last feeding, the globules will perish, freeing their hosts. The survivors will be severely traumatized and will be in need of help for some time before being able to return to semi-normal lives. Middle View will more or less cease to exist, as most people will leave, and there are no children left. In a few years, the ramps will be closed and the town abandoned. Some of the former hosts may decide to take up the war against the Dark Minions, and they will all be grateful to the PCs and will aid them whenever possible. Many of them, especially those forced to kill their own children, will never recover. The daemon in charge and its minions will flee, leaving no trace behind.

The incident will lead to a series of covert investigations in the US government, some of which will turn up human criminals, but a few will unearth Dark Minions. The PCs may be involved in such operations at the referee's option. The globules will eventually enter Earth's dimension yet again at some time and try again.

NPCs

Wolves

#Appear: 2D6 **Initiative:** 5 **Agility:** 8
Attack: 80%* **Strength:** 4 **Skill/Dam:** 6/1D10
Move: 15/30/60 **Constitution:** 3 **Hits:** 3/5

*Due to their agitated state.

Special: Diving attack. See page 200 of *Dark Conspiracy*.

Soldiers (32)

These are army combat troops. While they are loyal to their commanding officer and the US, many of them are suspicious of the situation and are not entirely convinced that they are enforcing a quarantine. Those soldiers with doubts may aid the PCs. Six of the soldiers have been taken over by globules and three have vanished (assumed AWOL, they were actually killed by the hosts for various reasons).

Level: Experienced.

Skills: As per Experienced NPCs, plus Observation 5.

Armament: M9, M16A2. For vehicles, they have jeeps and heavy trucks.

NCOs (4)

The NCOs are Veteran soldiers, and some are combat veterans. They are more suspicious than the younger enlisted men and don't buy the quarantine story at all, but are less prone to aid the PCs. However, if they learn the true nature of the situation, they will aid the PCs.

Level: Veteran.

Skills: As per Veteran NPCs, plus Observation 5, Interrogation 4 and Leadership 6.

Armament: M9, M177.

Officers (3)

Except for the commanding officer, all of the officers are young and college educated. They have been told that they are protecting a group of friendly ETs and that they should expect all sorts of odd events. They believe that they have to protect the ETs from Dark Minion attacks (they will think the PCs are Dark Minions). The officers are not very suspicious since what they see is consistent with the story they were told, and they are not at all likely to help the PCs without some dramatic proof.

Level: Experienced.

Skills: As per Experienced NPCs, plus Observation 4, Interrogation 3 and Leadership 5.

Armament: M9.

Igors (10)

These are servants of the daemon who are posing as doctors to maintain the facade of the quarantine. Anyone with Medical skill who speaks to them or observes them for a while will realize that they are not doctors. They are typical Igors, with all that implies.

Level: Experienced.

Armaments: Concealed silenced .22 (treat as High Standard .22), Ingram M10 .45 (carried in "medical" equipment) with suppressor.

Hosts (435)

The hosts are normal people who are controlled by the globules. Most of them are Novice NPCs. See the description of the globules for more details.

Armament: Guards will have hunting rifles or shotguns, while others will have concealed knives or pistols.

Dark Minions

Captain John Hennesey (Lesser Daemon)

Strength: 12 **Education:** 6 **Move:** 4/8/30/50
Constitution: 9 **Charisma:** 7 **Skill/Dam:** 7/1D10
Agility: 6 **Empathy:** 8 **Hits:** 15/30
Intelligence: 6 **Initiative:** 5 **#Appear:** 1

Skills: Melee Combat (Unarmed) 7, Small Arms (Pistol) 4, Small Arms (Rifle) 4, Observation 6, Psychology 3, Willpower 8, Computer Operation 2, Act/Bluff 7, Interrogation 6, Language (English) 6, Human Empathy 5, Project Emotion 5, Dimension Walk 7.

Physical Description: "John's" true form is that of a hairless, jet black humanoid with red gleaming eyes, a mouth filled with silvery teeth, and no nose. It is a limited shapeshifter and can assume the likeness of virtually any humanoid of its height. Its current form is that of a healthy, middle-aged man with short black hair and blue eyes.

Personality/Motivation: Being a lesser daemon (a race, or rather type of race, related to the daemon in *Dark Conspiracy*), "John" is a creature of evil whose main motivation is to acquire power and use that power for its own enjoyment. This enjoyment consists of causing others to suffer. Its preferred mode of inflicting suffering is via military operations or personal combat. The race of lesser daemons it comes from is a very militaristic race, and hence it is suitable for the role it is playing in its daemon master's plans. Its master is wisely staying out of the action and will not be encountered during the adventure. Oddly enough, it has some form of twisted concern for its soldiers (it sees them as fellow warriors, though of a very inferior sort) and will kill any globule that takes over one of its soldiers (unfortunately killing the soldier in the process). When playing the role of the captain, it acts like a strict officer, a role it can play very well.

Armament: M9.

Globule Queen

Strength: 2 **Education:** 1 **Move:** 1 (water only)
Constitution: 3 **Charisma:** 1 **Skill/Dam:** N/A
Agility: 1 **Empathy:** 10 **Hits:** 10/20
Intelligence: 4 **Initiative:** 1 **#Appear:** 1-6

Special: Human Empathy 5, Project Emotion 5, Project Thought 5, Willpower Drain 5. One in 10 queens can dimension walk.

The globule queens look like large, gelatinous spheres containing what looks like a mixture of plants and internal organs from various animals. The globule queens evolved from creatures which dwelled in a section of a proto-dimension that consisted primarily of shallow, stagnant ponds and swamps full of decomposing vegetation and animal carcasses. These creatures evolved the ability to produce buds which would break away and drift until they contacted another organism. The buds would attempt to take control of the organism's nervous system and, if successful, they would bring back the organism to the queen and kill it by shorting out the victim's nervous system. Eventually, the buds evolved into intelligent life forms with the ability to control other organisms. The queens also had the ability to manipulate the minds of other beings for both offensive and defensive purposes. With these abilities, the globules soon came to dominate their section of the proto-dimension. Unfortunately for the other life forms, the globules regarded them only as potential hosts or food, and eventually the globules were masters of a desolate wasteland, virtually devoid of all life but their own. These vile things would have soon died off if it were not for the intervention of a Dark One who saw them as potential instruments by which it could generate fear and suffering. Its minions brought in helpless creatures for the globules to use, and it altered some of the queens so that they could dimension walk and spread terror and suffering into other dimensions.

Globule queens are very vulnerable to drying out (it kills them) and toxic agents in the water they occupy (they filter

oxygen through their outer membranes). They are also vulnerable to normal attacks (bullets, knives, etc.)

Each queen produces 20 globules every 20 days. These globules remain dormant for one day and then become active. Every 60 days, a queen produces another queen, but no globules. Twenty days after its production, a new queen produces 20 globules, and 60 days later, it produces another queen, and so forth. An individual queen dies after producing six queens. The globules' main task is to care for the queens by providing them with food. The modern globules do not kill their hosts (this would kill the globule) but bring the queens food. The queen globules in turn feed the globules. If a globule fails to feed for 24 hours, it will perish, freeing any host it might be controlling.

Globule

Strength: 1	Education: 1	Move: 1
Constitution: 1	Charisma: 1	Skill/Dam: N/A
Agility: 1	Empathy: 5	Hits: 1/2
Intelligence: 3	Initiative: 1	#Appear: 20-120

Special: Human Empathy 2, Project Emotion 2, Project Thought 2, Willpower Drain 2.

Globules appear as small (basketball-sized) globes of gelatinous material. Visible within the translucent jelly are what appear to be strips of green lace and black marbles. When dormant, the creatures are harmless and immobile. When active, their internal "organs" swirl about inside.

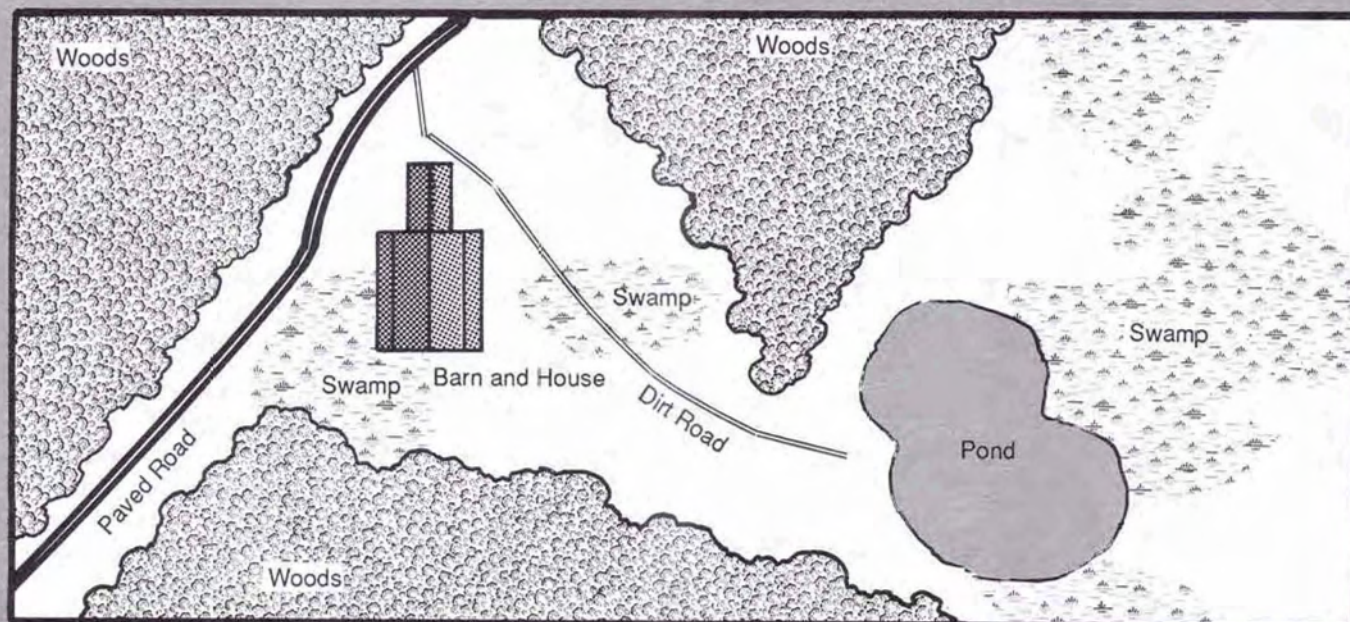
These beings are extremely dangerous because of their ability to take control of a host organism. The takeover

Farm Area

Barn and House: Originally the farm was a working dairy farm, but for the past 20 years, it has been used only as a house. The structures are typical of New England, with the barn attached to the house. The windows of the house have been boarded up, with only firing slits remaining. There will be at least 10 hosts, all armed (a variety of civilian-grade weapons, mostly hunting rifles and shotguns) in the house at all times. Half of the occupants will be awake at any given time. Joan Nicholl and Lynn Parsons are both present here.

Pond: The pond was dug by John Lender when the farm was built, and it has been known as Lender's pond ever since.

The pond has been surrounded with concrete wall, and there are always at least 10 hosts (armed mostly with hunting rifles and shotguns) guarding it. A metal ladder goes into the pond. Beside it are several shelves and a water hose. If the pond is observed, the PCs will see people arriving at the pond, stripping down and climbing in. When they emerge, they will hose off, redress and leave. If the pond is attacked, all of the hosts in town will drop what they are doing and head for the pond via the fastest way possible, pausing only to grab weapons. They will fight fanatically to protect the pond because the six queens are present in it.



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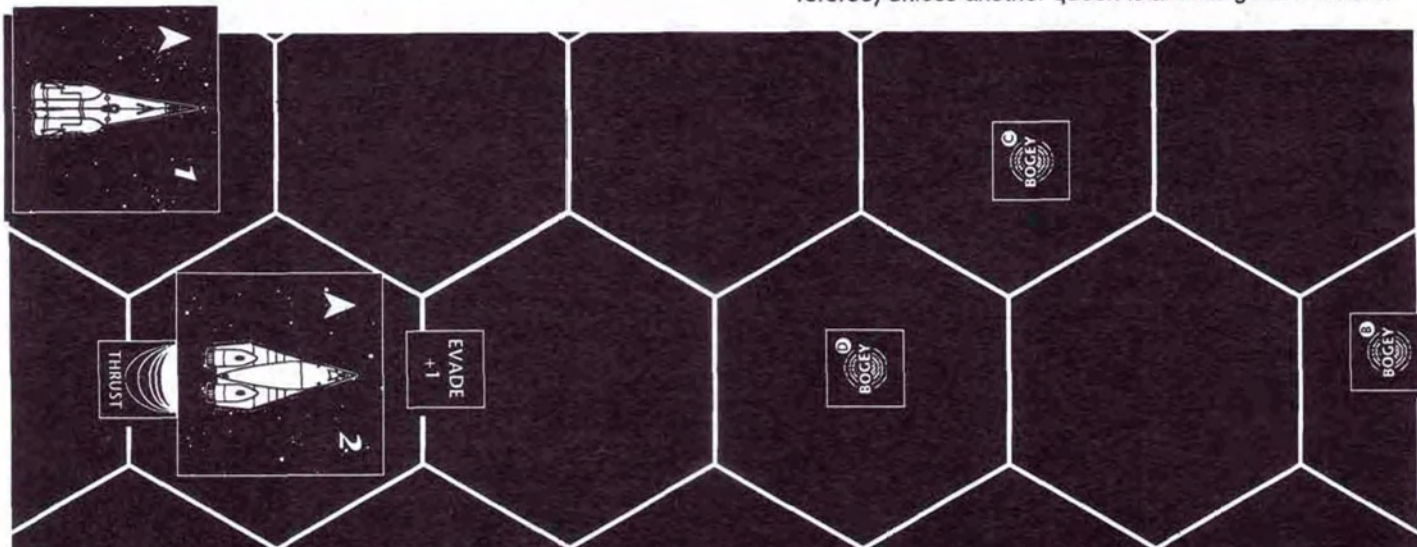
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procedure is as follows: The host must be in the water with the globule (the queens generally use their Willpower Drain and Projection abilities to lure victims). The host must be drained of all willpower (again, the queen usually does this). The globule must be in direct contact with the victim for at least five minutes. The victim is entitled to a Difficult skill check against his Constitution to see if his immune system rejects the attempt. If this roll succeeds, the victim is not taken over on that attempt, but the globule may attempt another takeover. If a globule is interrupted or fails to take the victim over, the victim suffers no physical harm. If the takeover succeeds, the globule gains complete control over the victim's body, memory and skills.

The globule merges with the victim's body after the takeover. This makes it difficult to tell a controlled person from a noncontrolled person. The victim's mind remains conscious and active, but completely helpless. If a host is freed, the experience may have a disturbing effect psychologically (the exact impact is left up to the referee).

Like the queens, the globules are vulnerable to drying out and to toxins. When they are in the host body, they drain a great deal of its water, so hosts drink an abnormal amount of fluid. The globules, being spread all through a host's body, cannot be removed by surgical techniques. However, they can be killed by exposing the host to toxic agents, etc. that may kill the globule (it has only a 1 Constitution) and not the host. The death of the globule frees the host. If a host is injured, the globule is not harmed (it is so diffused). However, if the host is killed, the globule will die with it.

Finally, as has been noted, globules must feed once every 24 hours or perish. The death of a queen has a profound impact on the globules it produced (empathic shock), putting them into a comatose state for 10 minutes. Afterward, the globules will behave oddly (exact behavior left up to the referee) unless another queen is alive to guide them. Ω



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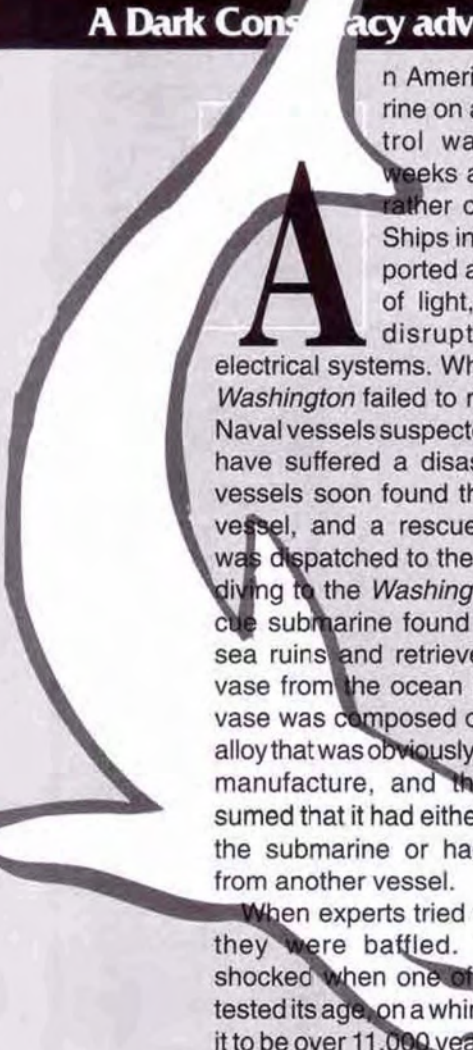
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Way Down Atlantis

A Dark Conspiracy adventure by Michael C. LaBossiere Art by Bradley K. McDevitt



An American submarine on a routine patrol was lost two weeks ago during a rather odd incident. Ships in the area reported a bright flash of light, as well as disruption of the electrical systems. When the USS *Washington* failed to report in, US Naval vessels suspected she might have suffered a disaster. Search vessels soon found the shattered vessel, and a rescue submarine was dispatched to the area. While diving to the *Washington*, the rescue submarine found vast undersea ruins and retrieved a golden vase from the ocean bottom. The vase was composed of a complex alloy that was obviously of advanced manufacture, and the navy assumed that it had either come from the submarine or had been lost from another vessel.

When experts tried to identify it, they were baffled. They were shocked when one of the experts tested its age, on a whim, and found it to be over 11,000 years old. Once its age was verified and verified yet again, a shockwave went through the scientific community. News of the discovery soon reached the press, who billed it as a discovery from the lost continent of Atlantis. The site of the discovery was soon swarming with those seeking Atlantis (or just its legendary gold). To prevent the site from being sacked or damaged, the scientific community pressured the UN into placing the area under its protection. The funds were soon raised to conduct a thorough exploration, and the famous Leviathan Deep Operations Company was selected to do the job. Much of the funding was provided by Stephen Jordan, a reclusive and eccentric millionaire who is best known for funding various famous undersea operations.

Because of his experience (and the fact that he donated the vast majority of the money), he was selected as project director.

The PCs may be brought into the adventure in many ways. Characters with experience in deep operations or archaeology may be hired by LDO or assigned by one of the involved governments or universities. Other PCs may be hired as computer operators, electronic experts, mechanics or security experts. Those hired will be told that possibly artifact-laden ruins have been found (which may or not be of fabled Atlantis) and that the mission is to survey the area and recover material and artifacts for examination. They will also be told, in the strictest terms, that this is a scientific expedition and not a looting spree. Theft and destruction will simply not be tolerated. LDO has also been hired by the United States to recover as much of the *Washington* as possible, especially any surviving nuclear weapons.

REFeree'S INFORMATION

Thousands of years ago, a Dark Minion race, the Domsquids, entered earth's dimension and constructed a base from which they could exploit the native life, including humans. These beings caused a great deal of suffering, and their activities gave rise to many legends of sea monsters and provided a basis for some of the legends of Atlantis. Fortunately for humanity, the Domsquids' gateway mechanism suffered a terrible accident, resulting in the death of most of the Domsquids. The few survivors were scattered in a hostile world and were never able to regain their lost power.

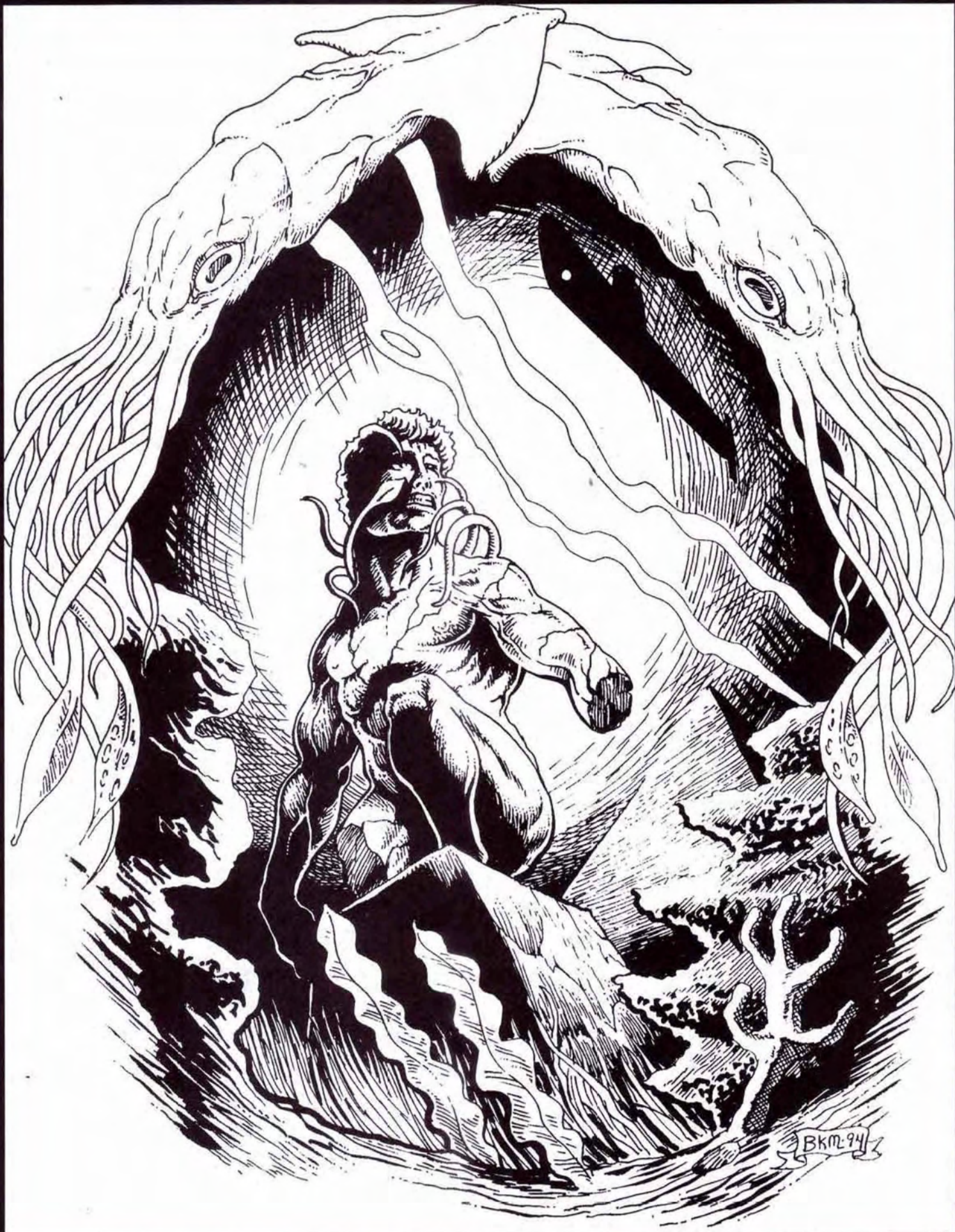
Now, thousands of years later, a US submarine has blundered near the Domsquids' pyramid gateway. The metal hull of the vessel triggered the gateway mechanism, re-

leasing thousands of years of stored energy. The release tore the *Washington* apart and generated the electrical disruption which affected the ships in the area. The rescue submarine found the twisted and melted hull of the *Washington*, as well as a vase from the Domsquid ruins (the vase was not affected, because the energy was channeled toward the *Washington* and away from the ruins). The rescue submarine detected substantial amounts of radiation in the area (from the *Washington's* reactor), and the government assumes that the *Washington* suffered a nuclear accident of some kind.

Stephen Jordan learned of the events through his connections and decided to become involved. In fact, he is actually a Domsquid, and his support of underwater exploration has been due to his desire to find the base of his ancestors so that he might reopen the gateway for his people. To that end, he has funded the current mission and is confident that he has found his goal.

INITIAL SURVEY & RECOVERY OPERATIONS

Prior to the commencement of the Atlantis expedition, LDO will conduct an initial survey of the area and undertake the recovery of as much of the *Washington* as possible, using the *Leviathan* submarine (Cousteau class) and four *Minnows*. LDO will recover several large sections of the *Washington's* hull, and they will be brought to the United States for examination by experts. The initial survey will turn up a few more metal artifacts, and an initial map of the area will be made. The LDO survey will also determine that the area is safe enough (in terms of radioactivity) for a long-term operation. The referee may wish to have the PCs participate in this operation, so as to introduce the PCs to the LDO



LDO Base Director Sally King

Level: Experienced

Skills: Small Arms (pistol) 3, Mechanic 2, Swimming 9, Vessel Use (submarine) 7, Vessel Use (PSS) 5, Electronics 2, Willpower 6, Business 6, Computer Operation 3, Leadership 7

Initiative: 3

Physical Description: King is a tall woman with short black hair streaked with gray. She appears to be in her mid forties.

Personality/Motivation: King is the LDO base director for this operation, and as such she is considered the captain of the sea base, with all the associated authority. She has been working for LDO since its beginning, and her inspired leadership has helped make LDO what it is today. Her loyalty is to LDO and the people on her team. While she is not aware of the extent of the Dark Conspiracy that threatens earth, she has brushed against it on occasion. She will be in favor destroying the gate.

Equipment: Wildey Wolf with two clips.

Leviathan Captain John Briggs

Level: Veteran

Skills: Heavy Weapons 2, Melee Combat (unarmed) 2, Small Arms (pistol) 2, Swimming 5, Vessel Use (submarine) 7, Navigation 4, Willpower 5, Computer Operation 3, Leadership 6

Initiative: 4

Physical Description: Briggs is a tall, heavy-set man with short gray hair. He appears to be in his mid 50s and is in excellent physical condition.

Personality/Motivation: Briggs is a former United States Navy officer who was forced to leave the US Navy under circumstances that he will not discuss. The incident involved the infiltration of the US Navy by Dark Minions, and Briggs, though innocent of wrongdoing, was forced to resign his commission. Briggs became an alcoholic soon after and went on a spiral of decline that ended when LDO hired him. Once he was back in command, he returned to being his old self, a highly competent officer. Since he hates Dark Minions, he will be all for destroying the gate. Briggs is currently the captain of the *Leviathan*.

Dive Leader/Security Chief Jake Fortran

Level: Veteran

Skills: Melee Combat (unarmed) 4, Melee Combat (armed) 4, Small Arms (pistol) 6, Small Arms (rifle) 6, Swimming 9, Vessel Use (submarine) 4, Vessel Use (PSS) 7, Demolitions 2, Willpower 4, Language(English) 4

Physical Description: Fortran is a short, wiry man with dark hair. He constantly has a pleasant expression on his face, especially when he is in the water.

Personality/Motivation: Fortran is a political refugee from a Third World country whose secret police he once worked for. When his father recently passed away in prison, thus breaking the government's hold on him, he escaped the country by swimming out to a passing vessel and requesting asylum. The ship was an LDO vessel, and he was hired soon after. He has been with LDO ever since. He is suspicious of people he does not know (since they might be secret police from his former country), but conceals it under his genuinely pleasant demeanor. His wife is a computer programmer for LDO, and he chose his new name for her.

Equipment: Fortran always carries a dive knife.

Calvin Heltner

Level: Novice

Skills: Swimming 7, Vessel Use (submarine) 3, Forgery 3, Psychology 4, Computer Operation 6, Act/Bluff 4, Bargain 5, Persuasion 6

Physical Description: Heltner is a tall, thin man with blond hair. He has a carefully trimmed beard. When he looks at anything or anyone, it strikes perceptive individuals that he is looking for people's price tags.

Personality/Motivation: Heltner has been assigned to the project to look after the interests of the various sponsoring corporations. His loyalty is to money and power, and he is completely amoral. He is a good enough actor to come across as a friendly and concerned individual, and he seems easy to talk to. He uses this ability to learn individuals' secrets and weaknesses so that he might use them to his advantage. While he is a master of emotional violence, he has no taste for physical violence. Everyone on the project knows he is present to watch the corporate money, but he is competent enough that they tolerate it. He will be all for keeping the gate open, provided it doesn't endanger him or his profits.

people and familiarize them with deep sea operations. If so, the PCs should be given the chance to face a crisis or two. For example, one of the *Minnows* may suffer a systems failure, and the PCs may have to locate and rescue it. During the initial survey, the pyramid should not be found, and there should be no Dark Minion encounters. Once the initial survey and recovery operations are completed, LDO will begin setting up the sea base.

RUINS SITE

The ruins are located in a deep section of the Atlantic ocean. The exact location is left up to the referee so that the adventure can be integrated into the referee's campaign. The LDO will have at least one frigate-sized vessel on the surface at all times to keep unauthorized vessels outside of the area (with force, if necessary). There will also be various scientific and support vessels in the area, including the LDO command ship. This vessel, a converted supertanker, was used to carry the sea base to the site. The LDO submarine *Leviathan* has also been assigned to the project.

The sea floor of the site is very rough, as if it were subject to a tremendous upheaval or a massive explosion of some kind. Visible amidst ancient slabs of rock and protruding from the muck are badly damaged ruins of various structures. Strange fish dart among the ruins, and the entire area seems somehow alien and frightening to human observers. Most people will think that the structures look somehow "wrong" but will not be able to describe exactly what it is about them that makes them so.

LDO SEA BASE

The LDO sea base is constructed of highly advanced materials and is designed to handle immense amounts of pressure. Those assigned to the base will be brought down gradually, to acclimate their bodies to the pressure. In order to return to the surface from the base, people must undergo several hours of decompression to avoid severe injury or death. The interior of the

structure is actually quite comfortable. The atmosphere of the base contains a special gas which replaces the nitrogen of air (and it doesn't make people talk like Donald Duck).

Deck One

Sub Docks: There are two submarine docks on the base—one for personal and the other for cargo—which can be used by any sub with the right docking mechanism (all LDO submarines are so equipped). These ports also serve as air locks and have a safety feature which prevents both the external and internal doors from being open at the same time.

Prep Area: This area contains the cargo handling equipment, as well as six personal submarine suits (PSSs). See details in the equipment section.

Mini-Sub Bay: This is the bay for the base's mini-sub, and it can also function as an airlock, with the same safety feature as the larger docks.

Storage: This area is currently used to store supplies and the survey drones. As artifacts are found, they will be stored here.

Lab/Repair: This area has been refitted as a lab and has been equipped with all that is needed to clean and examine artifacts. Some of the standard repair stations are still in place.

Engineering Deck One: This area contains the base's nuclear powerplant, life-support equipment and so forth. The room is open to the second level and is kept locked, both mechanically and electronically, to prevent accidents.

Deck Two

Quarters: Each room is designed to hold two people in comfort and four in less comfort. Each room is equipped with bunks and other space-saving furniture.

Kitchen: The food preparation and consumption area.

Rec: The recreation area contains entertainment consoles as well as exercise equipment.

Engineering Deck Two: The engineering section which has catwalks extending around the equip-

Archaeologist Dr. Jennifer Taggart

Level: Experienced

Skills: Melee Combat (unarmed) 2, Small Arms (pistol) 3, Small Arms (rifle) 3, Swimming 3, Observation 2, Archeology 8, Biology 2, Computer Operation 4

Initiative: 3

Physical Description: Dr. Taggart is a muscular woman of moderate height, with light brown hair and brown eyes. She appears to be in her mid thirties.

Personality/Motivation: Dr. Taggart earned her college tuition in the military, and she stays in shape and gets to the firing range once in a while. She doesn't particularly like people, unless they are dead and part of some archeological find. Her consuming passion is to go down in archeological history, and she sees this find as a golden opportunity to do so. Because of this, she will oppose anything that might damage the site.

Equipment: She has a Walther PPK hidden in her laptop's carry bag.

Stephen Jordan (Domsquid)

Strength: 2 **Education:** 8 **Move:** 10

Constitution: 2 **Charisma:** 3 **Skill/Dam:** 7/1D6

Agility: 8 **Empathy:** 10 **Hits:** 6/12

Intelligence: 8 **Initiative:** 6

Skills: Melee Combat (unarmed) 4, Small Arms (pistol) 4, Small Arms (rifle) 4, Swimming 4, Vessel Use (submarine) 4, Forgery 5, Psychology 3, Computer Operation 2, Business 7, Animal Empathy 5, Human Empathy 5, Darkling Empathy 5, Project Emotion 6, Willpower Drain 4

Physical Description: The host body the Domsquid currently occupies is that of a middle-aged man with brown hair, blue eyes, and a beard. The body is in good shape. Treat as a Veteran NPC.

Personality/Motivation: Jordan is a Domsquid. It is descended from the small group of Domsquids that survived the destruction of the base. Jordan is 174 years old and has been through many bodies. Hence, it is very experienced at playing the role of a human. It has been funding undersea expeditions for years in the hope of finding the ancient gateway its people constructed. Over the years, Jordan has developed some human characteristics, but is still is a Domsquid and considers humans primarily as hosts. It has no qualms about doing anything at all to ensure the opening of the gate.

Other NPCs

The PCs can replace those NPCs whose jobs they are qualified to perform.

Name	Job	Experience Level (Combat)	Affiliation
Dr. Justin Welson	Medical doctor	Novice	LDO
Janet Terez	Diver (PSS)	Novice	LDO
Dave Hastings	Diver (PSS)	Novice	LDO
William Schact	Diver (PSS)	Experienced	LDO
Carol Jones	Diver (PSS)	Novice	LDO
John Jones	Diver (PSS)	Novice	LDO
Pam Olson	Mini-sub pilot	Novice	LDO
Rick Olson	Engineer	Experienced	LDO
Carl Keffer	Engineer	Novice	LDO
Tia Smith	TOR operator	Experienced	LDO
Sherry Wickett	TOR operator	Experienced	LDO
Nathan Dregga	TOR operator	Experienced	LDO
Anne Weyman	TOR operator	Experienced	LDO
Ty Wescott	Programmer	Novice	LDO
Dr. Henry Smith	Archaeologist	Novice	Harvard
Dr. Sarah Dieter	Archaeologist	Novice	Oxford
Dr. Diane Townsend	Archaeologist	Novice	Harvard
Dr. George Slade	Archaeologist	Novice	Harvard

Domsquid

Strength: 2 **Education:** 8 **Move:** 10
Constitution: 2 **Charisma:** 1 **Skill/Dam:** 7/1D6
Agility: 8 **Empathy:** 10 **Hits:** 6/12
Intelligence: 7 **Initiative:** 6 **#Appear:** 1

Special: Empathetic skills: Human Empathy 5, Animal Empathy 5, Darkling Empathy 4, Project Emotion 3, Willpower Drain 3, "possession" ability.

Domsquids ("dominator squids") were a race that evolved from a small, squid-like parasite that inhabited a proto-dimension that is primarily water. The Domsquids look like small squids (10-centimeter body, tentacles 20 centimeters long) with oversized "heads." Two of their tentacles end in sharp, bony protrusions which are hollow, and two others end in scalpel-sharp cutting edges. The other tentacles have bony ridges and spurs on them. Physically, Domsquids are weak and would have been long ago destroyed if it were not for their ability to take control over other life forms.

Domsquids take over a host as follows. First, the Domsquid will attempt to stun the potential host if it is conscious. A Domsquid that strikes a target can release an electrical charge once every six hours that acts like a Martin Dynatech Pacifier Stun Gun. If the target loses consciousness, the Domsquid will use its sharp-tipped tentacles to inject the victim with a paralytic agent (requires a Difficult: Constitution roll to resist) which will last 30 minutes.

The Domsquid will then slit open the victim's body and enter. It will attach itself to the victim's spinal column and cardiovascular system, extruding a tentacle into the victim's brain, and will disconnect its higher functions chemically (basically a lobotomy). This process takes about 20 minutes. When it is complete, the host body is under the Domsquid's complete control.

A Domsquid can leave a host by detaching itself and cutting its way out—this process takes about a minute. The Domsquid has no access to the host's memories or skills. The Domsquid is unharmed by damage to the host body that does not also reach it (the exact details of this is left to the referee). However, since the Domsquid is tied into the host's nervous system as well as its cardiovascular system, it will be affected by drugs and toxins the host is exposed to. The host body retains its physical capabilities (Strength, Constitution and Damage), while the Agility of the body can be no higher than the Domsquid's own Agility while the Domsquid is controlling it.

Domsquids are extremely difficult to detect in a human host if the Domsquid is experienced, but they are easily detectable by X rays and other medical means. Removing a Domsquid surgically is a Difficult task using Medical skill (this assumes that the Domsquid is unconscious). Simply killing the Domsquid will also kill the host body. Restoring the host to normal is possible using advanced surgery and biochemical treatments. Such a restoration requires the proper equipment and is a task that is rolled against one-fourth of the surgeon's Medical skill.

The Domsquids had an advanced civilization in their home dimension and eventually developed gateways that enabled them to reach other dimensions. They went in search of new knowledge (they are extremely curious) and new host bodies.

Domsquids are evil, and they consider most other life forms only as potential hosts. Like Ampharks, they derive great pleasure from the suffering of other beings, though they do not require it like the Ampharks do.

The race of Domsquids became nearly extinct when an incredibly virulent viral disease was brought back from another dimension. This virus killed the entire Domsquid race within weeks of the initial exposure. Though the disaster that befell the Domsquids' gate on Earth wiped out nearly all terrestrial-based Domsquids, it did prevent the virus from reaching Earth.

There are still other isolated enclaves of Domsquids in other proto-dimensions.

ment, but no floor on this level.

Control Center: This room contains the base control systems as well as the remote stations for operating the various drones. There are four telepresence operation stations (TOSs) (**Darktek**, page 89) and six standard control stations (TV screens, joysticks and buttons). Three of the TOSs are used to control probe/repair TORs (**Darktek**, page 88), and one is used to control a recovery/construction TOR (**Darktek**, page 89). The other six are used to control underwater probe drones (UPDs), which can also be computer directed.

The control center also contains the base's weapons locker (under-sea piracy is rare, but it has happened, and LDO never takes any unnecessary risks). The locker contains four M9 Berettas, two MP-7s and one Armalite AR-12 Stormcloud, as well as spare clips and ammunition. The locker has both mechanical and electronic locks, the keys for which are kept by the watch officer and the LDO base director (Sally King). The base's hull is strong enough to sustain small arms fire, but not all the equipment is.

ON THE JOB

Once all personnel are on site, the exploration will begin in earnest. The plan is to use the UPDs to make a photo map of the area, and this initial survey is to be followed by a finer exploration of promising areas using TORs and PSSs. The initial survey, which will involve the laying down of a luminescent marking grid and light arrays, is expected to take about a week, and the rest of the exploration will take months or longer. LDO is willing to keep the operation going as long as the money keeps coming in.

EVENTS

The initial survey and associated grid laying will be extremely tedious. Fortunately, the following events will liven things up for the PCs.

Giant Squid: During the course of the survey, contact with a computer-operated UPD will be lost. A check of its film records on the base will reveal that

the last image recorded was of a looming black shape blocking its camera array. Naturally, those PCs able to operate PSSs or the mini-sub will be given the task of investigating. Be sure to describe just how dark it is and just how many big and hungry things could be lurking there. The UPD will be found lying on the bottom, its camera array buried in the mud, with some sort of particularly ugly fish stuck in its water jet intake. Removing the fish and cleaning off the array will put the drone back in operation.

A short while later, contact will be lost with another UPD in a similar fashion. This time, when the PCs are sent to investigate, they will find the crushed drone lying on the ocean floor, near a large mound of debris. The debris conceals a hungry giant squid which has been drawn to the area by the lights and activity. The squid will consider the arriving PCs its next meal. It will pursue them back to the base if they escape and will wait outside to attack anything that comes out, unless it is killed or driven off. If the PCs do not come up with a plan, the LDO base director (Sally King) will send out a UPD loaded with explosives to blow it up. Once the squid is dealt with, operations will continue.

Damaged Warhead: After the squid problem has been solved and the survey has restarted, a UPD will find a metallic cylinder protruding from the muck of the bottom. The PCs will be dispatched to examine the item. When they arrive, they will find it to be a slightly damaged torpedo from the *Washington*, which will turn out to have a nuclear warhead. When informed of the situation, the government will ask LDO to salvage it for them, and the PCs will be told to bring it to the sea base so it can be brought to the surface on the next cargo run by the *Leviathan*.

Statue: While the PCs on the survey team are going about their business, they will uncover a life-sized, elaborate golden alloy statue of a squid-like being (a Domsquid) atop the back of a human figure. The human figure, which is missing an arm and a foot, is on all fours and

has a look of hopeless fear on its face. The squid thing looks positively sinister and will make almost everyone who sees it uncomfortable, except Stephen Jordan (who will rejoice at its discovery) and Archaeologist Dr. Jennifer Taggart (who sees it as her chance at fame). (See NPC descriptions for more information.)

The PCs will be directed to bring the statue into the base, where it will be tested and examined. It is made of the same material as the vase and is over 11,000 years old, if not older. The examination will

also reveal that the statue is coated with a complex chemical substance that has kept it free of muck and plant growth. Speculation will run rampant as to the origin of the statue and as its meaning.

UPD DOWN

The survey area will gradually extend outward until it encompasses the area in which the pyramid structure is located. One of the UPDs will approach the buried pyramid too closely and be shorted out by another discharge from the pyramid, which has been building up

Giant Squid

#Appear: 1 **Initiative:** 2 **Agility:** 5
Attack: 60% **Strength:** 40 **Skill/Dam:** 3/4D10
Move: 8/15/30 **Constitution:** 25 **Hits:** 75/150
 See **Dark Conspiracy**, page 198-199, for full details.

Hell Sharks

#Appear: 1 **Initiative:** 5 **Agility:** 5
Attack %: 95% **Strength:** 20 **Skill/Dam:** 7/2D10
Move: 13/25/50 **Constitution:** 22 **Hits:** 25/50
Empathy: 2
Special: Empathetic detection ability.

These creatures are horrid, shark-like beings which are even more vicious than the worst Terran sharks. They are shark shaped, but have what appear to be plates of armor on their bodies. They are jet black on their dorsal side and dark gray on the ventral side, and their eyes are dull red in color. Hell Sharks will attack any living being that they detect. Their empathetic ability enables them to detect living creatures within two kilometers. Because of this ability, they will not eat anything that is not alive (unlike Terran sharks, which have been found with beer cans and license plates in their stomachs). They will, however, attack things (like PSSs) with living beings inside.

Pseudo Squids

#Appear: 1 **Initiative:** 3 **Agility:** 6
Attack %: 90% **Strength:** 40 **Skill/Dam:** 4/4D10
Move: 8/15/30 **Constitution:** 35 **Hits:** 60/120
Empathy: 4
Special: Empathetic detection ability, Project Emotion 2.

Pseudo Squids look very much like Terran squids, except they have a partial shell covering their main body, and their tentacles have bony ridges and spurs instead of suckers. Pseudo Squids are more intelligent than Terran squids, and they possess the empathetic ability to detect living things within four kilometers. They are also capable of projecting emotion, but this is limited to creating fear (used to frighten threatening organisms) or a feeling of safety (used to lull prey). Pseudo Squid attacks are handled like normal squid attacks. However, Pseudo Squids have a taste for humans and will deliberately attack humans in the water or on deck.

Cousteau-Class Submarine

Just before the economic collapse, the United States Navy contracted with Bath Iron Works (BIW) in Maine to produce a nuclear-powered, water jet-propelled submarine. BIW completed three of the power plants and propulsion systems before the navy canceled the contract. Luckily for BIW, LDO purchased the plants and propulsion system, and ordered three submarines built using them (the *Cousteau*, the *Leviathan*, and the *Behemoth*). Each vessel is equipped with docking ports that match those on the LDO sea bases, as well as two *Minnow*-class minisubs. The vessels are also equipped with extremely advanced sensor equipment, including military-grade sonar, and are capable of operating at extreme depths due to the special reinforced alloy hull. The vessels are used in a variety of roles—mobile undersea bases, underwater cargo vessels, underwater cranes, etc.

Displacement: 2400

Fuel Type: Nuclear

Cruise Speed: 15 knots

Propulsion: Water jet

Armament: None

Minimum/Optimum Crew: 10/60

Minnow-Class Minisub

The *Minnow* class minisub is a standard, two-person, deep-water minisub. The minisub has an extremely strong hull, and its diving/performance capacity exceed that of mainline military submarines. *Minnows* are equipped with two medium manipulators and two small manipulators, as well as a light array, camera and sample basket. Power and life support are good for eight hours of operation. The minisub looks very much like a small jet fighter with stubby wings.

Cruise Speed: 5/5

Price: \$960,000 (R/R)

Fuel Cap: 220

Armament: None

Fuel Cons: 5

Length: 1

Fuel Type: Battery Pack

Draft: 1m

Config: Flush Deck

Speed: 3

Tonnage: 10

Turn: 4

Hull Armor: 2

Pumps: 1

Waterline Armor: 2

Night Vision: White light spotlights

Propulsion: Water jet

Load: Personal gear, can carry 3000 kg

Size: 1

Minimum/Optimum Crew: 1/2

Damage Record

Full Speed: 10

Dead in Water: 10

Sunk: 10

Personal Submarine Suit (PSS)

A PSS is an armored suit constructed out of advanced alloy materials that enable a person in a PSS to operate at depths of 400+ meters. A PSS includes a complete, self-contained life-support system with air and power for six hours, a distress beacon, a 75-kilometer radio and lights. The suit's arms and legs are servo-equipped, and the arms can lift almost 100 kilograms each. Each suit comes standard with a propulsion system (including depth control) that can propel the suit at a cruise speed of 2/2. Some models replace one manipulator arm with a specialized tool arm. Such modifications are custom built. A PSS, with its advanced servo system, is actually easier on its operator than a Hardsuit. A PSS operator can use his PSS for CONx30 minutes before becoming exhausted. Like the Hardsuit, all AGL and STR-based tasks are increased one level in difficulty while using a PSS (of course, crude brute strength operations will be much easier in a PSS). A PSS has an armor value of 2.

Wt: 100 kg

Price: \$200,000 (R/R)

since the discharge that destroyed the *Washington*. The discharge will generate a bright flash of light, which will be observed by another UPD in the area. The discharge energy is from the pyramid's energy generation systems (primarily hydroelectric and thermal). Normally, this energy would be focused and used to power the pyramid's systems and generate the proto-dimensional gateway. However, the ancient accident severely damaged the focusing controls, and now the pyramid discharges its stored energy whenever any large metal object gets within range. Fortunately, due to the damage to the pyramid, the collection rate is rather slow, and the PCs will not have to worry about another major discharge.

The PCs will be sent out to recover the missing drone and will find it lying on the ocean floor. Its casing seems to be melted in places, and the camera and light lenses are cracked. There are also many dead and dying sea creatures in the area. Visible in the distance will be a faint blue glow. This glow will also be noticed by one of the UPD operators, who will inform the LDO base director (Sally King). She will ask the PCs to investigate the glow.

PYRAMID

The pyramid is partially covered with stones, but unlike the stones, the pyramid is free of any muck or plant growth. Several of the stones on it seem slightly melted, as if they were exposed to great heat. The exposed parts of the pyramid are obsidian black, and arcs of blue energy dance fitfully across the exposed surface. If the surface of the pyramid is touched by a PSS arm or a sub or drone manipulator, there will be a bright flash of blue light, and the touching device will experience a brief but frightening loss of power. Those in manned vessels touching the pyramid will experience mild but painful shocks. Since the pyramid is partially buried, the PCs will not be able to gain entrance to it. It will prove resistant to cutting torches, lasers and small explosive devices, should the PCs try these methods.

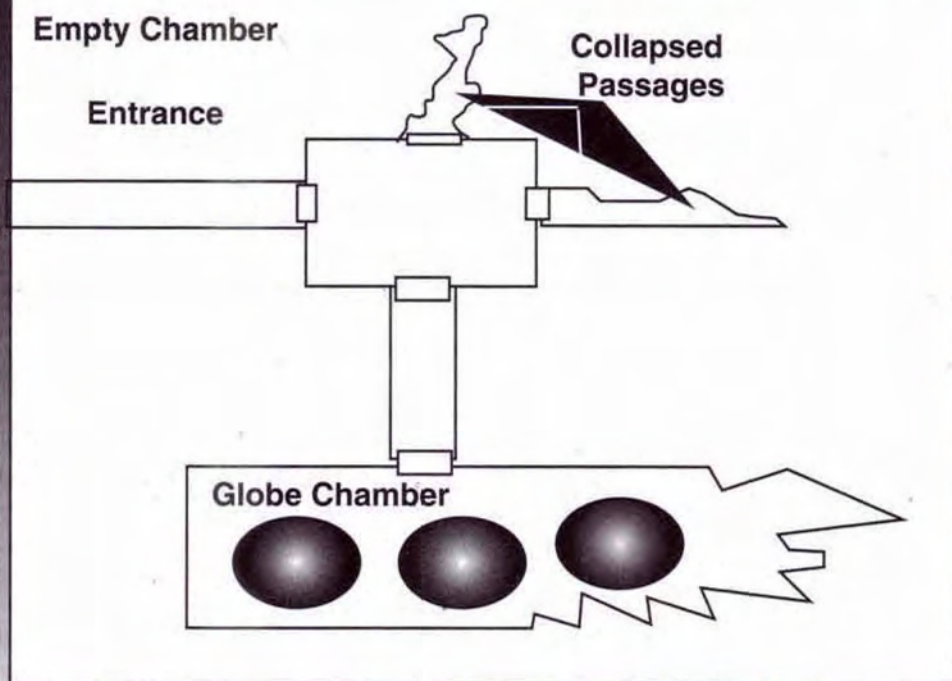
The PCs will be contacted by the LDO base director (Sally King) and asked to map out the area, then to return to the base with their data. Once the PCs return, the data and film will be downloaded for examination.

EXCAVATION

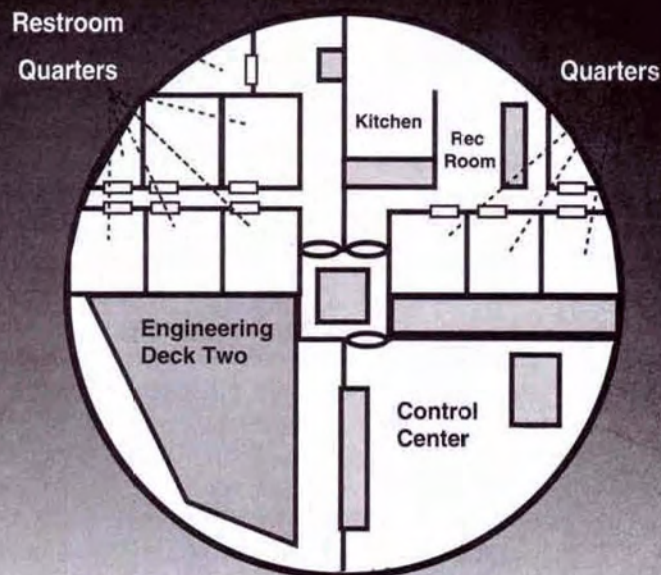
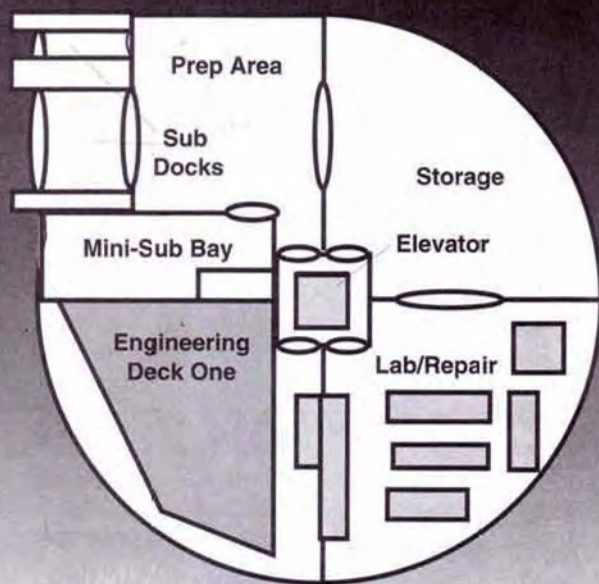
After the data is examined, Jordan will suggest that the pyramid structure be dug out from under the rubble for examination. If asked about the danger from the discharges, he will recommend that a grounding device be attached to the pyramid to drain off the charge harmlessly. He will make arrangements for heavy equipment to be brought in, as well as more lights.

The equipment will be brought in over the next few days, and the first piece set up will be the drainer. The drainer will work perfectly and prevent the dangerous discharges from threatening the crew. During this time, various teams from the base will be going over the exposed areas of the pyramid. Jordan will join in himself and will spend his time looking for a way into the pyramid, which he won't be able to find since

Pyramid Interior



LDO Sea Base



Legend

- Water Tight Hatch
- Normal Door
- Machinery
- Controls/Equipment

it is buried. Once all the equipment comes in, the pyramid will be excavated. Three of the sides of the pyramid will be found to have three entrances, and the fourth side is blank. The three entrances are set up with one at the top of the pyramid side and the other two an equal distance from the top entrance and from each other. All of the entrances except one will be found to end in collapsed passages. The one intact entrance leads to the area detailed on the map.

Once the pyramid is excavated and the entrances exposed, Jordan will lead a team into the interior of the pyramid. He will know for sure at this point that it is the pyramid gateway mentioned in the myths of his race, and he will begin planning how to reopen the gate to his race's home dimension. During the investigation, he will urge the humans not to touch or harm anything and will be willing to use force if necessary (and cover it up as an accident). Once he reaches the globe chamber, he will be aware of the presence of the survivors and begin making plans to awaken them and provide them with hosts.

PYRAMID INTERIOR

Entrance: The three-meter-wide entrance tube is made of the same black material as the exterior, and is large enough to admit a UPD or PSS. Any metallic object passing down the tube will be encased in harmless blue sparks that will extend out from the walls. The passage ends in a semi-transparent swirling field of bluish energy, which will resist if pushed, but can be forced through.

Empty Chamber: This water-filled chamber is empty, but the walls are illuminated by a pale red glow and are adorned with odd markings that look like writings and mathematical symbols of some kind.

Collapsed Passage: These areas may be entered via the energy fields at their ends, but they terminate in collapsed sections.

Globe Chamber: The field to this chamber will prove particularly resistant. The interior is suffused with

a pale red light, and the walls are plain, except for a silver strip running along the walls about a meter from the floor. Taking up most of the chamber are three spheres that are made of the same sort of material as the pyramid. One of them has been pushed forward by the collapsed section. This sphere has a thin line running all the around it, and the bottom has broken silver connectors that were attached to the floor. If the globe is pried open with a tool, the interior will be found to contain a thick reddish fluid, numerous silvery protrusions, and the remains of a Domsquid. All that are left of the remains are the bony parts. If the remains are brought back and examined (Jordan will permit this, but will not like it), they will be found to be the remains of no known terrestrial life form. The other two globes contain Domsquids in stasis, and these globes cannot be opened with anything short of explosives or Darkling Empathy. Jordan, who has Darkling Empathy, will be able to free them.

THE DOMSQUID'S PLANS

After the initial exploration of the pyramid's interior, Jordan will return alone and awaken the Domsquid survivors. After he informs them of the situation, they will tell him how to reactivate the gateway, and they will demand host bodies. Jordan will first make arrangements to have the equipment he will need to reopen the gate brought in. He will order several specially modified generators and have them shipped to the site, as well as a variety of electronic equipment. Since it is his money and most of the equipment could be used in the operation, no one will question what he is doing. Once these arrangements are made, he will have the interior of the pyramid pressurized.

Once the interior is pressurized, he will lure Dive Leader/Security Chief Jake Fortran into the globe chamber on some pretext. He will use a paralytic gas on Fortran, and one of the Domsquids will take over his body. The pair will then select another member of the crew and bring him in for the other Domsquid.

While the ancient Domsquids do not speak human languages, they will use their empathetic abilities to get by. Dr. Taggart is not very talkative, and they will select a quiet crew member for the second host, so this should not give them away.

Over the next few days, the trio of Domsquids will undertake repairs on the pyramid's control systems and will attach the generators to the pyramid. They will be very careful not to be caught, and will use their intelligence and empathetic abilities to the fullest. Given the amount of equipment that will be on and in the pyramid, it is unlikely that anyone will be able to tell what is going on.

THE GATE OPENS

When the Domsquids' preparations are complete, Jordan will invite a delegation from the UN to view the structure. These delegates will come down on board one of Jordan's submarines. When the sub arrives at the sea base, Jordan and the two Domsquids will board it and subdue the crew and delegates with a paralytic gas. They will then steer the sub toward the pyramid.

While they are heading toward the pyramid, Jordan will trigger the gateway system, and the following will happen: The pyramid will begin to glow a faint blue color, and the strength of the glow will steadily increase. Sparks of blue energy will extrude from the pyramid, causing all mobile marine life to flee the area. The blank face of the pyramid will become outlined in blue energy, and then the surface will vanish, revealing a gateway into an alien sea. Pale red light will spill from the gate. In the distance, the ruins of various structures will be visible on the bottom of the alien sea. Dark and evil-looking shapes will be seen moving in the alien sea. The submarine will head toward the gateway and will pass through it, into the sea.

SAVING THE DAY

When the submarine passes through the gateway, the PCs should realize that something is

wrong. If they don't, the LDO base director (Sally King) will and the *Leviathan* will be called in. The PCs will be asked to board the *Leviathan*, which will be going through the gate and into the alien dimension.

The *Leviathan* will cross through the gateway and into the alien sea. Strange and horrifying life forms will be visible on the monitor, and the other submarine will be detected by the *Leviathan's* sonar. There will be ruins around the ship which appear to be centuries old. As the *Leviathan* enters deeper into the dimension, its sonar will detect that the other submarine has come to a stop.

The three Domsquids will be in a state of shock at this point, for they will have realized that their race has been extinct in this dimension for thousands of years. The PCs will be able to take advantage of this situation to close with the submarine. The captain of the *Leviathan* will suggest that the two Minnows and any PSSs be sent out to disable the submarine's drives for boarding. If the PCs are quick, they will be able to do this with little difficulty. If not, the Domsquids will regain control and attempt to flee. Their submarine is as fast as the *Leviathan*. They will lead the *Leviathan* deeper and deeper into the alien sea, and will use their empathetic abilities to call Pseudo Squids and Hell Sharks to attack the *Leviathan*. Unless the PCs board the submarine quickly, the *Leviathan* will be forced to turn back or be destroyed.

If the *Leviathan* is docked to the submarine, the PCs will be able to board it. The Domsquids will fight and will be armed with MP-7s from the submarine. However, they will eventually be killed, and the *Leviathan* will be able to tow the submarine back through the gate.

DEATH FROM BEYOND

Once the *Leviathan* returns through the gateway, the PCs will be dismayed to find that various denizens from the alien dimension have intruded into earth's sea. Hell Sharks and Pseudo Squids are loose in the water, battling it out with

terrestrial life. If the gateway is not closed soon, more and more of these beasts will come through looking for meals, and within a few days, the current dominant race of the proto-dimension, the Ampharks (see **Challenge 61**, page 35) will find the gateway and begin coming through using heavier versions of their shell suits. They will attack vessels in the area prior to heading inland.

It is likely that the PCs will want to shut the gate down. If they detach the generators, the PCs will find that the gate is drawing enough power from its own systems to keep going. Sealing the gate by piling stones on the pyramid will be a temporary solution, since the Ampharks will eventually break through. A more permanent solution will require that the pyramid be destroyed. The pyramid will prove quite resistant to conventional explosives, but the PCs might remember the nuclear torpedo that is still aboard the base.

The torpedo is damaged, but any of the drones or TORs could carry the warhead. The warhead is a five-kiloton nuclear weapon whose detonation will destroy all vessels within 4.2 nautical miles and damage all vessels within 6.1 nautical miles. As such, the PCs will want to set the timer to allow them time to escape. The warhead has a computer safety lock on it. Cracking this lock requires a roll against half the character's Computer skill if the base's computer is used, one eighth if it is not. Rigging the warhead to a UPD is an Easy task using Mechanic skill. If the roll fails, the warhead may fall off at some point. A TOR can carry it in a medium manipulator, and a PSS or minisub can also carry it. Rigging the warhead for detonation with a timer is an Average task using Electronics skill. Failing this roll may result in a late detonation, early detonation or no detonation at all. If a UPD or TOR is sent, it will have no trouble reaching the pyramid and placing the warhead. However, crewed vehicles will be attacked by predators from the proto-dimension, since they will empathetically sense the presence

of prey. Successful detonation of the warhead will destroy the pyramid as well as the ruins.

The PCs and others will want to flee the area before the explosion. The base is designed to reach the surface on its own by releasing its ballast and inflating lifting balloon. This process will take about 20 minutes, and the base can then be retrieved by the LDO vessel. If the base cannot escape (for example, Dr. Taggart sabotages the controls), those on board can escape via PSSs and minisubs, as well as via the *Leviathan*. There is also an escape pod on top of the base which can hold up to 24 people in extreme discomfort. Naturally, LDO will want to save the base if at all possible.

Most of the other human NPCs will be willing to go along with the PCs if they suggest using the warhead (and *Leviathan* Captain John Briggs will suggest it if the PCs do not). Dr. Taggart sees the gateway as a scientific gold mine and her ticket to fame, and she will do anything in her power to preserve the gate. She will begin with persuasion and will talk about the incredible economic and scientific value of the gate, not to mention the environmental impact of detonating a nuclear weapon in the ocean. Depending on the circumstances, she may be able to persuade some of the NPCs to join her. If persuasion fails, she will resort to more extreme measures, even violence.

FINISH

If the gate is not destroyed, creatures from the proto-dimension will continue to pass through it and will cause a great deal of trouble. If the Domsquids escaped with the submarine, they will begin breeding and will eventually return at some point in the future.

If the PCs close the gate with the nuclear warhead, they will have to justify their actions to the authorities. Of course, if the PCs save the UN delegates, they will be fully exonerated by the testimony of the delegates (who are extremely grateful for having been saved from a fate worse than death). The PCs will be able to use them as contacts later on. Ω

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77

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THE BEAST UNDER THE BED

By Michael C. LaBossiere
Art by Bradley K. McDevitt

"It's a time for worry, a time for dread. That scratching's not your imagination; it's not in your head. It's the beast under the bed."

Movie jingle, 1997



Centuries ago, a proto-dimension inhabited by a peaceful, advanced race was overwhelmed when evil creatures surged from adjoining dimensions through gateways. The inhabitants resisted for some time, but they eventually fell before the onslaught. The leader of the attackers, a Dark Lord, vented its anger and hatred upon the surviving beings by transforming them into vile creatures. Some of these creatures were given the power to create gateways to other dimensions, and after some time, these creatures, known now as Shadow Snatchers, discovered earth.

Prior to the start of the adventure, a small group of Shadow Snatchers found its way into earth's dimension and began hunting for prey. Since these creatures are fairly weak, they choose to go after sleeping children. They will have taken a dozen victims from a small town before the PCs are brought in to investigate.

It is intended that the disappearance of the children be an event that is out of the ordinary for the town. As such, while the town may be set anywhere, it should be far from Demon Ground and should be a peaceful, quiet town (one of the few left in Dark Time America). The town should have a population of about 6000-8000 people and will have only a small police force and not much in the way of exotic supplies and equipment.

GETTING THE PCS INVOLVED

While children have gone missing at an alarming and frightening rate in America since the late 20th century, the disappearance of 12 youngsters from a peaceful and previously safe small town, apparently from their own bedrooms, will be noted by the press. The PCs may well come across the story in a national newspaper (way in the back, of course) while looking for signs of Dark Minion activity. In any event, one of the PCs will be contacted by a friend from school whose daughter has vanished. The friend is a woman the age of the PC whose husband was killed last year when he was caught in a riot in New York. She will offer the PCs plane or bus fare to the town.

Once the PCs arrive, the woman, Jill Clayton, will tell them that four days ago her daughter, Cynthia, began complaining that she heard noises from under her bed and that she was frightened. Naturally, Jill attributed the noise to Cynthia's imagination, and when Cynthia continued to complain and refused to sleep in her room, Jill punished her. The next night, Jill will say between sobs, Cynthia simply vanished. If the PCs suggest that she might have run away, Jill will show them that all of Cynthia's clothes and shoes are present, and so is her favorite doll.

INVESTIGATION

If the PCs decide to check on the other disappearances, they will learn that in each case the children had no reason to run away, that the children all claimed there was something under their beds, and that all the children who vanished left behind their toys and clothes (except what they were wearing). The disappearances occurred one after the other, and they were one to four days apart. If an

empathetic character gets close to one of the beds, they will feel a faint empathetic presence if they achieve a stage two success (use the PC's empathy score—there is no willpower adjustment). The presence is vague, and the character will not be sure what it is. The presence will be stronger from the beds of children who have disappeared more recently, and Cynthia's bed will radiate a very strong presence. The presences will gradually fade over the course of time and will be gone a month after the date the child vanished from the particular bed. Other than the empathetic trace, there is nothing to be found in the rooms that is out of the ordinary.

If the PCs decide to find out if there is a child in town complaining about hearing things under his or her bed, they will learn that John Rodriguez, son of Mary and Will Rodriguez, has told his parents that something is under his bed. Mary will tell the PCs that her son has never lied to them, and the PCs will find John to be a serious young boy (9 years old) who is very interested in science. He will describe to the PCs that he hears a faint humming noise first and that it is followed by a faint blue light that comes from under his bed. After this, he says he can hear a faint whispering noise, but he can never make out what is being said. He says that when the noise starts, he can't move or scream. If the PCs suggest that they wait in John's room, the parents will agree but will insist that John stay with them in their room.

THE BEAST STRIKES

Once night falls, John will go to his parent's room, and the PCs will wait in his room. Mary has to get up early to drive to her teaching job at the university, so the family will go to sleep early. The night will go by without event for the PCs. When the time that Mary was supposed to get up comes and goes, the PCs will probably want to check on the family. The PCs will find the parents fast asleep and will have a hard time waking them. John will be no where in sight, and the parents will be distraught and panicked when they realize he is gone. During the night, the Shadow Snatchers came and took John from the room. Using their empathetic powers, they kept his parents from waking up and were able to take him with relative ease. If an empathetic PC checks the bed and gets a basic success using his empathetic score, he will detect a very strong empathetic presence. A stage two success will reveal that a gateway is present which could be passed through and that it will remain open for the next 20 hours (see the description of the Shadow Snatchers below for the details). The gate is located "in" the floor, under the bed. It is visible as a bluish, hairline circle. If the PCs choose to pass through the gate (and can do so) they will end up in the proto-dimension of the Shadow Snatchers. The person guiding the PCs through the gate will know how much time is left before it closes (24 hours from its creation—give the PCs at least 16 hours of time).

If the PCs choose not to go through the gate, the Shadow Snatchers will continue to take children until they have taken 24 in all or until they are stopped by the PCs or somebody else. If the PCs do not pass through the gate John vanished through, they will have more opportunities as the Shadow Snatchers continue to take children.

INTO THE WASTELAND

When the PCs pass through the gateway, they will end up in bleak proto-dimension. Unlike many proto-dimensions, the physical features of this realm are sensible through normal human senses. Stretching out, in all directions from the PCs' point of entry, is a vast desert of thick, gray ash. Protruding from the ash are bits of whitened bone, hunks of rubble and twisted pieces of metal. The sky above is gray, with a faint reddish tinge, and the air is thick and foul, with the scent of fires long burnt out and bodies long decayed. The area radiates a feeling of utter desolation and hopelessness. Behind the PCs lies the faint blue outline of the gate, and ahead of them lies a worn trail through the ash which leads to the foreboding and dismal

ruins of some shattered structure.

Gate: The gate area contains the currently active gate as well as signs of 12 other areas of activity (marks in the ash). In this proto-dimension, distances are about one tenth of what they are on earth, so while the gates open up far apart on earth, their entrances in this dimension are close. For example, the gate in one house may be a hundred feet from another gate on earth, but the gates in the proto-dimension would only be 10 feet apart. There are several human skeletons scattered about in the ash. Shortly after the PCs arrive, the skeletons' bones will join, forming a horrid amalgamation which will attack the PCs until it is destroyed or the PCs are killed (or flee back through the gate). The Skeletal Bundle was placed there to keep other Shadow Snatchers from the gateways; the Shadow Snatchers do not expect any humans to come through the gate.

Trail: This trail has been made by the Shadow Snatchers going to and from the gateways they created. If the PCs check the trail, they will see clear signs that bodies have been dragged along it, and they will also find a few bits of clothing (from the children) along the way.

Ruins: The ruins appear to be of a large, steel and concrete building of advanced manufacture, which has apparently been blasted apart by some terrible force. Though the broken walls are blackened and melted in places, some of them still bear markings, which seem to be writing. Scattered about in the ruins are shattered and blackened bones, bits and pieces of melted and smashed equipment, and other debris. The ruins are a place favored by Skaraks, and the PCs should be assailed by one or more at an opportune time. They hide amidst the rubble, waiting for things to kill and devour. Since the main staple of the Skarak diet is other Skaraks and occasional scraps from the Shadow Snatchers, they will welcome some fresh meat (the PCs). The trail ends at the entrance to the underground, which is a partially covered shaft.

RUINS UNDERGROUND MAP

Entrance to the underground is gained via what appears to be the remains of an elevator shaft. Cables are fused to the sides of the shaft top, which will allow the PCs to climb down (an Average test of Agility) the 20-foot shaft. The underground was obviously once a well-built structure, but it now looks as if it had been through an earthquake. The walls are shattered in many places, and soil has spilled in through widening cracks in other areas. Despite the devastation, in some places, the concrete and steel walls are nearly intact, and bear markings and the remains of various pieces of equipment. The underground is extremely dark, and will feel very cold and evil to the PCs, and they will hear faint whispering noises at all times.

Guard: The Shadow Snatchers keep a trained Skarak chained here. Its chain allows it to get to the entrance, but no further. If it senses the PCs, it will howl horribly and leap to the attack. There is a 30% chance that it will be asleep and will not notice the PCs unless they make a lot of noise or shine a light on it.

"Living" Area: This is where the Shadow Snatchers dwell when they are not out doing evil. There will be 11 Shadow Snatchers present when the PCs arrive. Unless they have been warned by the Skarak, they will be asleep until the PCs do something to alert them (noise or any light will wake them).

SKELETAL BUNDLE

Strength: 12	Education: 1	Move: 2/8/15/30
Constitution: 12	Charisma: 1	Skill/Dam: 5/4D6
Agility: 4	Empathy: 1	Hits: 12/24
Intelligence: 1	Initiative: 4	#Appear: 1

See below for more on Skeletal Bundles.

Prison: This room is fairly intact and still contains some burnt furniture as well as scattered human bones. The missing children are chained to pieces of the metal furniture, which prevents them from escaping. The chains can be cut or unlocked with the keys kept by the leader of the Shadow Snatchers. Most of the children are catatonic, but John will still be alert, as will Cynthia (though they are both terrified), and they will help the PCs with the other children. Most of the children will have to be carried out, which may pose the PCs with a challenge.

Leader: The leader of the Shadow Snatchers dwells here. The room contains furniture that is fairly intact, as well as a variety of broken weapons, pieces of body armor and a collection of damaged plastic coated maps which show the area as it was hundreds of years ago. The leader will be asleep, unless the PCs woke up the guard or the Shadow Snatchers in the living area.

Vault: Access to the vault is via a heavy, metal door. The door bears a variety of precisely arranged markings (which are unreadable by the PCs) which have been badly scratched by the Shadow Snatchers. Set into the door is a silver metal plate. If a PC with an Empathy rating over 2 touches the plate, the PC will feel a faint tingle

and will "hear" words in an alien language in his mind. The locking mechanism is an empathetic device which will scan the PC's mind. The creators of the vault built it in the hopes that a non-Dark Minion race would someday find it and would be able to use the information contained within it. The mechanism will only open to non Dark Minions (it can detect the taint of Darkness inherent to Dark Minions). The door will then swing open and a bright, white light will spill out from the vault.

The walls of the vault are lined with storage boxes which contain artwork, artifacts and an extensive collection of records in a variety of mediums (plastic-paged books, what appear to be optical disks and so forth). There are also machines in the vault that can display the information (once they are powered). The items are all relics from the culture which was wiped out by the invading Dark Minions. When the beings realized they were doomed, they stored their cultural artifacts, history and information about the invaders in vaults in secure buildings throughout their world. The artifacts are various items of art as well as technological items, including four laser weapons.

The records detail the history of the race and how the invaders found and destroyed their world. The records would be of great use to Minion Hunters (once they are translated, a process that will take some time) since they contain information about various Dark Minions as well as scientific data on proto-dimensions, empathetic abilities and gates. Of course, getting the material out, along with the children, in the short time the PCs have may be a bit of a challenge.

ACTION/FINISH

Once the PCs get into the underground, they are bound to wake up the Shadow Snatchers. The Shadow Snatchers will, of course, do their best to kill the PCs. If the PCs free the children and get out, any surviving Shadow Snatchers will pursue them and will persist until all the PCs or Shadow Snatchers are dead. They will even pursue the PCs through the gate. If the PCs are able to get away before the Shadow Snatchers can pursue them, they Shadow Snatchers will use their empathetic abilities to locate the PCs, and will send Skaraks after them until they are stopped or the PCs are killed. If the PCs wipe the Shadow Snatchers out, they will be free to go, and the town will be safe from the menace of the Shadow Snatchers. Of course, there are still many more Shadow Snatchers left, and others may plague the PCs at some point in the future, or the PCs may seek to return to the proto-dimension in search of more information.

Of course, if the PCs are unable to return through the gateway, they will be trapped in the proto-dimension until they are rescued, killed (or worse), or find a way out. There are many other ruins in the dimension, and the PCs may be able to find a working Dimension Walk device to bring them home (or perhaps to someplace worse!).

LASER WEAPON

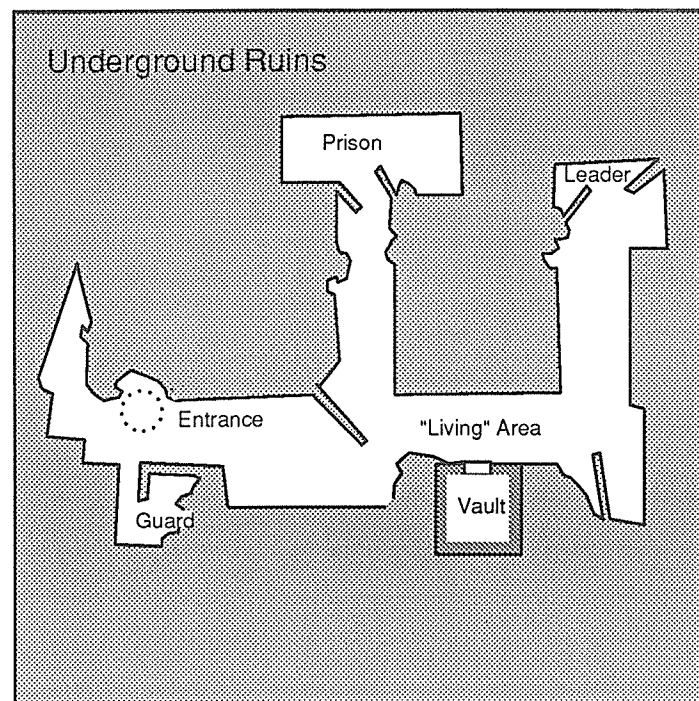
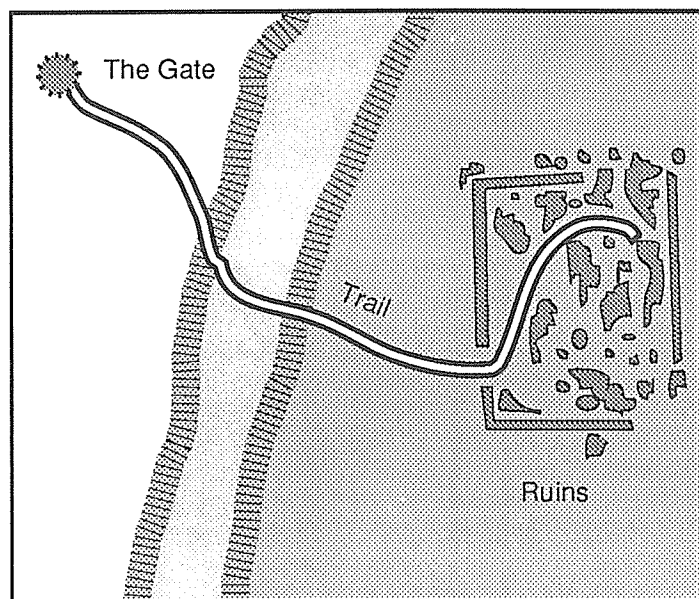
The laser weapon developed by the proto-dimensional inhabitants to fight the Dark Minion invaders is a oversized pistol weapon which has a removable battery pack that serves as its power supply. The design of the weapon indicates that the beings who manufactured it had hands very similar to humans, through their fingers were longer and slimmer. However, humans can use the weapons with ease. The power packs for the weapon are extremely powerful batteries which far surpass human technology at this time. These batteries can be recharged in two hours if a special recharger is built (a Difficult task in Electronics) to match their power requirements. Unlike current human laser weapons, these weapons fire single, high-energy pulses.

Ammo: —

Wt: 2 kg (pistol 1 kg, battery 1 kg)

Mag: A battery is good for 26 shots per charge

Price: NA (—/—)



Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	Rng
Laser weapon	2	5	3	2	45

Continued on page 47.

Continued from page 42.

SHADOW SNATCHER

Strength: 3 Education: 1 Move: 2/8/15/30
Constitution: 4 Charisma: 1 Skill/Dam: 3/2
Agility: 5 Empathy: 3 Hits: 4/8
Intelligence: 2 Initiative: 3 #Appear: 3D6

Special: Darkling Empathy, Project Emotion, Project Thought, Human Empathy (all at a level equal to empathy rating). Vulnerability to light.

Human legends from all cultures have stories of beings that come in the dark of night to steal children and take them away to a horrid land from whence they never return.

Not all of these legends are based on the activities of Shadow Snatchers (see, for example, the Boogie Man in **Dark Races** Volume I), but many of the legends are. These horrid beings feed upon the fear and suffering of other beings, as well as their flesh. Since these beings are physically inferior to adult humans, they prefer to prey upon human children.

These beings are not terribly intelligent, but possess an evil cunning which makes them quite dangerous. Due to the malign warping of their original beings, these creatures are evil and exist only to feed upon the fear and flesh of others, and their vague memories of the previous wholesome existence only makes them worse in their malignity.

Physical Description: Shadow Snatchers are jet black, emaciated humanoids with long fingers and toes. Their eyes glow a faint bluish color, and their mouths are filled with small, needle-sharp teeth. They are rather tall, standing at slightly under two meters, but are very light (they weigh under 50 kilograms). Their bodies are hairless and are devoid of any characteristics of gender.

Light Sensitivity: Shadow Snatchers are extremely sensitive to radiation and especially light. Exposure to direct sunlight or other extremely bright light sources inflicts 2D6 points of burn damage per phase, and laser weapons inflict four times their listed damage. Thermite and white phosphorous explosions inflict damage as they do to Bloodkin Vampires. Normal artificial lighting conditions do not harm them, though they find it painful. As such, these creatures will never willingly enter areas of bright light.

Getting a Victim: Once a Shadow Snatcher Leader has found a victim and created a gate, the Shadow Snatchers will pass through the gate and use their empathetic abilities to keep the child asleep or keep him from crying out or moving (they use Project Emotion and Project Thought to do this). They then attempt to establish a link with the child so they can bring the child through the gate. Each night that the Shadow Snatchers attempt to establish a link, the referee should roll 1D6—(the victim's Willpower+ Empathy) and add it to the previous night's roll. When the total reaches 6, the link is established, and the Shadow Snatchers take the child through the gateway. Shadow Snatchers will give up if they do not get a positive result after two nights. Once the victim has been taken into the Shadow Snatcher world, he will be kept captive and his fear fed upon by the Shadow Snatchers. Eventually, most victims will become comatose or catatonic (though fear-induced insanity) and will no longer be of use to the Shadow Snatchers except as meat.

Combat: Shadow Snatchers are fairly weak in combat and prefer to rely on their empathic abilities to avoid having to fight. If forced into combat, they will fight (poorly) with their claws and fangs.

SHADOW SNATCHER LEADER

Strength: 4 Education: 1 Move: 2/8/15/30
Constitution: 6 Charisma: 1 Skill/Dam: 7/1D6
Agility: 8 Empathy: 8 Hits: 8/16
Intelligence: 6 Initiative: 4 #Appear: 1

Special: Empathic Abilities: Gate Creation Ability, Animation Ability, Darkling Empathy, Human Empathy, Project Emotion. Vulnerable to light.

Shadow Snatcher Leaders are more powerful and intelligent versions of Shadow Snatchers and appear as larger, heavier-built Shadow Snatchers. These beings were leaders and individuals with powerful empathic abilities prior to the Dark Minion intrusion. They were transformed by the Dark Lord into twisted monstrosities. Each group of three to 18 Shadow Snatchers will have one leader. These creatures retain a large portion of their original intellects and memories, which makes them even more dangerous than their lesser brethren. While they are completely insane by human standards, they are very cunning and intelligent.

Abilities: In transforming beings into Shadow Snatcher Leaders, the Dark Lord imbued them with special empathic abilities that would enable them to work their evil. Shadow Snatcher Leaders have the ability to "see" through the dimensions and sense the empathic auras of other beings. They use this ability to locate their victims in other dimensions before creating a gateway to gain access to them. This ability works as follows: The leader rolls a human or Darkling empathy skill check (whichever is appropriate) against each being in the sensing area. A basic success roll reveals to the leader that a sentient being is present; a stage two success or higher tells it whether the being's empathy is greater or weaker than its own empathy and allows it to recognize a being it has sensed before with a stage two success. Leaders will typically wait until they get a stage two success with their chosen victim before creating a gate to them, so they can find their chosen victim each night.

The second ability the leaders have is their capacity to generate gates. The gates they create are circles, up to two meters across. These gates produce an empathic residue for a month after they are created and can be detected by empathic individuals with a basic success roll using their empathy rating. The gates also remain active for 24 hours after they were created. These open gates can be easily recognized and used (with no roll required) by any being with Dimension Walk ability (or device). Empathic individuals can use such gates and guide others through them by getting a power level of 1, using the following formula: Power level=Empath's Empathy Rating+1D6-1 for every four hours the gate has been open.

The third ability of a leader is to animate Skeletal Bundles. The procedure for doing so is described on page 48 under "Skeletal Bundles."

SKARAK
 Strength: 16 Move: 3/9/18/35
 Constitution: 15 Skill/Dam: 7/3D6
 Agility: 7 Hits: 16/32
 Initiative: 5 #Appear: 1
 Attack%: 95%

Skaraks are horrid beings who were once friendly, semi-sentient cat-like beings whom the inhabitants of the proto-dimension kept as pets. Knowing of the love for the inhabitants of the dimension for their pets, the Dark Lord transformed these creatures into horrid, twisted monstrosities and let them slaughter hundreds of the inhabitants before it transformed the survivors into Shadow Snatchers.

These beings are slightly smaller than terrestrial tigers and appear to be horribly emaciated black cats with long, thin limbs. Their eyes glow a dim, malign blue, and their teeth and claws are obsidian black. Hairless and sexless like the Shadow Snatchers, they are malign beings who derive pleasure as sustenance from the suffering of others. Their twisted minds still retain a dim sense of the loyalty and love they once possessed, and occasionally a tribe of Shadow Snatchers will have one or more as guards (they communicate via the Shadow Snatchers' Darkling Empathy). They are ravenous carnivores and will eat any living thing, even each other.

SKELETAL BUNDLE

Strength: * Education: 1 Move: 2/8/15/30
 Constitution: * Charisma: 1 Skill/Dam: 5/*
 Agility: 4 Empathy: 1 Hits: *
 Intelligence: 1 Initiative: 4 #Appear: 1

*The scores are based on the empathy used in creating the bundle.

A Skeletal Bundle consists of a variety of bones that have been bound together and animated by a special animator spirit. These creatures are a horrible, shifting mass of bones. They move on the bony limbs that protrude from the mass and attack by slashing with jagged edged bones and bludgeoning with thick and heavy bones. Despite their apparent disorder, they can move as fast as a human. These beings are malicious and hate all living things, except the leader who created it and the leader's followers.

Creation and Attributes: Skeletal Bundles are created through the killing of other living things by Shadow Snatcher Leaders. The leader first has its followers gather up the victims whose bones will be animated, then the selected victims are tied into the mass. The Shadow Snatcher leader then slays the victims in a horrible and painful manner and uses the fear and suffering generated to create the animator spirit. This spirit will infuse itself into the bones and it will have the *marked attribute at rating equal to half the Empathy scores of the victims (all human victims count as having an Empathy of at least 1, even if their Empathies is actually 0) and will inflict 1D6 in combat for every 3 full points of Strength it has. It will have hits equal to one-half the sum of the Empathy ratings of the victims/the sum of the empathy rating of the victims. A Skeletal bundle must have at least 3 in each *-marked attribute in order to be viable (thus, the creation of a Skeletal Bundle requires victims whose Empathy total is 6 or higher). The creation of a Skeletal Bundle is one of the main rituals of a Shadow Snatcher tribe. Ω



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