DEMONGROUND

Reflections of a Darker Future

JUNE 2002
VOL 14

TERROR !

COVER ART
Monster Eye — Kari Christensen
BUREAU 13
A Matter of Taste — Nick Pollotta
CONSPIRACY X
Blood & Madness — Stephen Hunt
DARK CONSPIRACY
Call To Darkness 5 — Mike Marchi
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DARK MATTER
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HUNTER: THE RECKONING
Badge of Honor — Julie Ann Dawson
Observers — Geoff Skellams
LITTLE FEARS
Review — Mike Marchi
WITCHCRAFT
The Devil Danced On — C. Lee House

... Plus A Lot More!!!

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DEMONGROUND ISSUE 14

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ON THE COVER

So a funny thing happened on the way to the cover for this issue...

A while back, Kari Christensen put out a message to a number of gaming industry sites advertising his artistic creations, and asking if anyone would be interested in using his work.

Always on the lookout for stunning cover art, we jumped at the chance. So did Eden Studios. Although Eden purchased the rights to *Monster Eye*, both Kari and George Vasilakos agreed that it would be okay if we used the image for the cover of DG14. Especially if we pointed out who the rightful owners of it are.

We are only too happy to oblige.

Below, is the cover art for the latest release from Eden Studios: "Liber Bestarius (The Book of Beasts)". Liber is a160-page monster manual for the d20 system, written by Matthew Colville.

Click on the image below to check out Eden's web site, then check out the real thing at a hobby store near you!

More of Kari's excellent digital artwork, can be found at http://karichristensen.com. His email address is monsterbox333@hotmail.com.

Reflections of a Darker Future

Welcome to the 14th issue of DEMONGROUND. This issue is intended to take on a slightly more somber tone than usual - due primarily to events that have transpired in the last nine months.

On September 11, 2001 illusions of safety and security were shattered around the globe.

Like many Americans that morning, I began that Tuesday like the day before, if anything, even more upbeat than usual. The weather was absolutely perfect. There wasn't a cloud in the sky – it was a beautiful day. It wasn't the best time to be leaving the house - traffic would be pretty heavy, lengthening the expected drive-time. I tuned in the alternative music station I normally listened to in the morning, just as the news announcer was finishing up, *"Ladies and Gentlemen, repeating our top story this hour, an airplane has apparently accidentally collided with the World Trade Center in New York City. Details are sketchy at this time…"*

Thus, it began for me. Just moments after the first plane struck the north tower. I switched over to a dedicated news station hoping it would be able to give me more information. A few minutes later, the second plane struck the south tower. I picked up my cell phone and called Becky, waking her up. "Go turn on CNN. There's something bad happening." She was groggy and slightly annoyed at being disturbed before the girls were awake, but told me she'd check and call me back.

Reports of a third plane crashing into the Pentagon, followed by reports of a fourth plane reported missing, which in turn was followed by reports of a crash somewhere in Pennsylvania. These were followed by a number of other speculative reports, as one news service after another scrambled to be the first to report something new. There were even rumors of car bombs outside the State Department.

What the hell was happening?

Moments after the radio announcer said *"It appears that there has been another explosion in the south tower. I can't see through the smoke, but it appears that the top part of the tower has partially collapsed…"*, the cell phone rang. It was Becky, now stationed in front of the television.

"My god, Mike. One of the towers just collapsed."

"You mean partially, don't you? The radio guy said partially."

"No. It's gone."

My drive continued. It was surreal, listening to the unfolding details. Such stark contrast to the picture-perfect day outside. I found myself looking into the windows of other cars around me, trying to see if anyone else was listening. I'm not sure what I was looking for – probably someone else sitting there looking as stunned as I felt.

I remember trying to imagine how it would look with only one of the twin towers remaining. It dawned on me that as much as the two towers together were a symbol of capitalism, the one remaining tower would become a symbol of American defiance and strength. Of course that all depended on how bad the damage was.

Reports continued of stock exchanges, government facilities and office buildings around the world being shut down and evacuated. Nobody knew what the pattern was. They could strike again anywhere. Nobody even knew who 'they' were.

As I entered the parking lot at my office, the second tower was collapsing. The announcer described it as dropping straight down, like a candle melting. As I ran across the parking lot my cell phone rang again.

"The second tower just collapsed."

"I know, I'm at the office now. I'll call you back."

Inside, everyone was crammed into a small conference room, which contained the only television in the building. We could only get one channel, and despite the tin foil and wires jury-rigged to the back, it was a static-filled picture with ghostly double images of shocked newscasters. That was when I first saw the smoke and flames. The instant replay images we all watched over and over, as every few minutes another home-movie was made available to local newscasters. Later in the day, one shot of the first plane striking the first tower even made the airwaves.

Air traffic was diverted. Airports were closed down. No aircraft cruised American airspace except military jets and Air Force One which spent the morning making a series of leap-frog hops from airbase to airbase, pausing on occasion as the president gave harried press conferences trying to keep people up to date on the crisis, while at the same time presenting a moving target.

As the day wore on, and another building disappeared from the New York skyline, I couldn't help shudder in realization that I used to have clients in those buildings. At one time or another, I had visited every building that now formed the pile of rubble at Ground Zero.

But out of America's darkest hour, came a few brilliant rays of golden light. In the midst of unspeakable horror came tales of unimaginable heroism. The firefighters and policemen of New York, who ran into the fiery inferno, determined to bring as many people out as possible. Thousands died when those towers collapsed. But many were saved, thanks to the selfless actions of these brave men and women.

Firefighters and Rescue workers around the country drove through the night to help out in New York. Lines formed around the block at Red Cross blood donor facilities nationwide – so many people responded that many were actually turned away.

And then, in what I personally find the most extraordinary tale of heroism, came speculation about flight 93, the one that had crashed in a field outside Pittsburgh. The passengers on that plane used the on-board phones to contact loved ones back home. They intended to warn their families that their plane had been hijacked. Instead they learned the chilling news about the other planes. The passengers on that ill-fated flight suddenly recognized the hijacker promises that nobody would be hurt for what they really were.

And they did something about it.

The terrorists had overplayed their hand. Hijacking would *never* be the same again. In the past, if a plane was hijacked, it usually meant an inconvenient diversion to a remote airfield. The only danger would come when negotiations went badly, and the hijackers needed to make examples of their captives. The protocol advised sitting like cattle, trying not to call attention to yourself, less you move to the top of the example list. *"Cooperate and most of us might get out of this alive."*

But after September 11 when Flight 93's rebellious passengers turned the tables on their captors, the face of hijacking was forever transformed. How would a would-be victim ever know which kind of hijacking they were being subjected to? Was it the kind where you were inconvenienced, or the kind where you faced certain death? There would never again be a reason to assume it would be anything but the latter. The new mantra would become, *"Resist and most of us might get out of this alive."*

We may never know exactly what happened on that plane. But the few reports we do have would indicate that a handful of passengers took matters into their own hands, and stormed the cockpit. The plane crashed shortly after that. Whether it was the direct result of the passengers gaining their objective or not, is immaterial. They acted, and Flight 93 did not reach its intended target.

A handful of people made a difference.

And so, in the aftermath of the tragedy, the flag that flew outside my house flew not only for the victims who had died so tragically, but also for the heroes who had given their lives - for every man or woman who chose to put their own life on the line in the service of the greater good.

I have to admit, that in those first shell-shocked days following 9/11, I felt very uncomfortable about the hobby we all share. As we watched the economic repercussions that followed the attacks, and the world economy teetered into recession, I came to realize how very close we had come to realizing the basic premise of most of the games supported by this magazine. I felt guilty that I had spent all those months and even years, plotting scenarios for games like *Dark Conspiracy*. That I had sat down and fantasized about what sort of catastrophic events could have deconstructed the world. And that in the end, the worst plots that had crossed my scheming mind, had paled in comparison to the simple, monstrous reality.

But time and again, my mind kept returning to the simple statement. *A handful of people had made a difference.*

A handful of people, with no other reason than circumstance, had banded together to face a common foe - to do battle with evil.

And whether they lived or died trying, they were judged to be heroes.

Who among us doesn't wish that if we were faced with the same situation, that we would have risen to the occasion ourselves. That we would have taken up arms with our fellows and faced the gathering evil.

And as a result, on closer inspection I found the guilt lessen. Because when you get right down to it, isn't that what these games we play are all about? Being one of the handful of people who make a difference?

Aren't the dark forces we battle in these games, acts of fictional Terrorism? Look at the motivations of the Dark Ones in DC, or the aliens of Conspiracy X or Dark*Matter. How similar they seem to the acts of suicidal terrorists. Aren't they simply monsters willing to give their lives in the pursuit of ultimate evil?

And when each of us bands together and imagines ourselves as heroes, we pay homage to their sacrifice, and wish that given the chance, we too would make a difference.

Mike Marchi

❖

THE HORROR OF IT ALL

By Geoff Skellams

In the past nine months, the western world has been through rather tumultuous time. The destruction of the World Trade Center in New York, the continuing anthrax scares across the United States and in other countries such as Australia and the subsequent war on terrorism in Afghanistan has changed the world political agenda.

For many people, the attack on the World Trade Center was perhaps the most horrific thing. The dramatic visual images of the 767 aircraft plowing into the side of the building and exploding stunned them beyond belief. In the case of the second aircraft, the footage of the plane actually vanishing *inside* the building - leaving an almost comical plane shaped hole in the side - before it exploded was almost surreal. In fact it was so surreal that when a lot of people saw it, they wondered if it was for real. I know people who thought the footage was some clip from a new action movie.

Unfortunately for all of us - and especially for the people killed in the tragedy and the families and friends they left behind - the events of September 11 were all too real. The world in general is a slightly tenser place to live, even though that most of us have gone back to leading our lives the way they were before this whole episode started. We do of course feel for those people who lost family and friends, but for the vast majority of us, there's little we can do – especially for those of us who are literally on the other side of the planet.

In a sense, the terrorist attacks - both the in-your-face plane crashes and the much more subtle anthrax attacks - have highlighted just what horror is really all about.

Horror is not just about large monsters, or blood and guts, although they are sometimes part of the whole horror genre. Horror is about fear, the experience of having everything you took for granted turned upside down, leaving you with nothing but uncertainty and doubt. I'm sure that there can't be many people reading this who didn't wonder "how can this happen?" as the events of September 11 unfolded. Psychologists have reported that in the weeks following the hijackings, the number of people reporting fear of flying jumped dramatically and people right around the world have suddenly felt tense and nervous every time a jet airliner flew overhead, particularly if they live in a big city.

Fear is an exceptionally important emotion. It is designed to break through any complacency that we might have and shock us into action in order to protect our lives. That's one of the reasons why adrenaline and other similar hormones are released into the bloodstream whenever we find ourselves in a fearful situation. They are designed to force us to do something in order to get out of harm's way, or to fight for what we believe in

Unfortunately for most of us, the flight or fight response tends to be overruled by our conscious minds. Instead of reacting to the immediate danger and doing something to resolve it quickly, we tend to dwell on the negative possibilities that exists and ask "what if?" We either look at what might have happened in that situation, or in the case of the September 11th tragedy, we put ourselves in the places of the victims and wonder what it would have been like to have been on one of the hijacked planes or trapped inside the buildings as they collapsed. If we look at the anthrax scares what gripped the US in the aftermath of the bombings, people began to fear their mail in case it had been contaminated with the deadly bacteria. Very few people actually died in the incident, but the wave of fear was very real - everyone began asking themselves "what if one of my letters was contaminated?" and it was the thought

of the consequences of that outcome that created the fear in their lives.

This is what makes terrorism such a potent weapon. In many cases it's not the actual bomb or virus (or whatever) that people react to. It's the fear created when they think about the fact that despite everything that they do, someone could just randomly kill them at any time if they don't get what they want. That fear, in itself, is quite often enough to make people give in to whatever demands the terrorists are making. Living with the alternative is something that people just don't want to have to deal with.

It's the visceral feeling of "this can't really be happening" that is what makes the horror genre what it is. Horror is when we realize that the world around us isn't what we thought it was and that our very lives are at risk. Sometimes ugly monsters with an insatiable blood lust or crazed madmen wearing raincoats and brandishing boat hooks can be the instruments that make us realize that. But it's not the whole picture.

A necessary part of running a horror game is finding a way to shatter the illusion of reality that the player characters have. For example, if they think that they are safe in their homes, then have them wake up in the morning and find a flower sitting on their bedside table, perhaps alongside a scalpel. While nothing has actually happened, the implied threat and the possible outcomes should create a real sense of horror in the players. As the World Trade Center experience showed, true horror comes about when you realize that the thing that you took for granted - in most cases, your very life - is really nothing more than an elaborate illusion.

If you're GMing a horror game, you should look for ways to play with the players minds in such a way that they begin to dwell on the possibilities of what *might* have happened. Horror is an emotional genre, far more so than fantasy or science fiction, its speculative fiction stablemates. The aim of the game is rock the players to the core. If they're sitting up yelling "Oh my God! You just *can't* do that!" then you're doing your job properly. A true horror situation is one in which you realize that the things that are perhaps most precious to you - your very life or sanity, or perhaps those of the people that you care about - are under serious threat, and could be taken from you at any time.

To "win" in a horror game, you don't collect the most loot, or shoot the most bad guys. Winning involves confronting your darkest fears and doing something about them. Overcoming a horrific situation is realizing that if you don't do something about the predicament you find yourself in, the things you hold dear could be ripped from you. The only way to truly overcome fear is to put at risk the very thing that you hold precious and take action to make things right again.

The emotional release that we feel when we have faced our darkest nightmares and overcome them is the real reason that people find the horror genre so appealing. None of us actually *like* to live in fear. So it follows that if a game were to only present an exceptionally dark picture, then the likelihood of that game continuing long term is small. People like to know that even when they are stuck in a situation, there is something that they can do to save themselves. But that something should be not be an easy choice; it usually means you have to gamble with your own life and that there is a very real chance that you could lose.

Remember, prior to September 11, we all believed that deliberately flying jet airliners into the side of office buildings was something that people just didn't do. But the terrorists took that idea and totally destroyed it. They made us wonder if it could happen to us and in doing so, they put us in a state of fear. But it's only when we accept that risk and face it head on can we get living a normal life again.

It *is* possible to provide a game situation that creates the same basic emotion in the players. But you have to be prepared to challenge their illusions of reality and threaten to take away the things they hold dear. Then at the last minute, you provide them with a way out that has a definite risk of failure. If and only if they can face their fears and accept the challenge and succeed with they receive the emotional payoff of the release of tension at the end of the game.

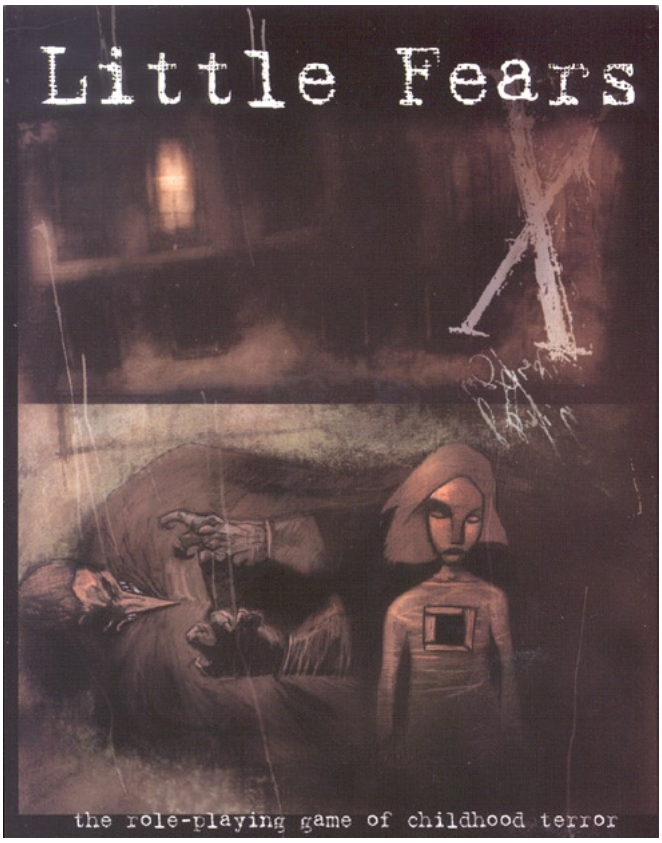
It's something to think about, anyway.

❖

"What is a Hero?" "I'll tell you what a Hero is... A Hero is someone who puts saving Your life above saving their own"

- Zena Marley

Early 21st-century mercenary-philosopher



LITTLE FEARS

Review by Mike Marchi

While scouring Origins for new products to add to DEMONGROUND's stable of regularly supported games, I happened upon the Key 20 Publishing booth, and there-in discovered 'Little Fears'. The subject matter was obviously horror. The style of the cover art looked oddly familiar.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

What can you say about a book that acknowledges the controversial nature of its subject matter from the get-go? On the first facing page after you open the cover, is a warning:

"the characters and events contained within are imaginary… yet every day real children experience horrors as terrible as what is depicted in this game.

"we at key 20 dedicate this work to those lost, helpless children.

"and we hope that you will remember them always."

The extensive use of lower-case fonts is a nice subtle touch. It is after all, a game about children. I scanned the credits page for any familiar names. "written and designed by jason l. blair, layout by hive and jason l blair." – wait a second. hive? *No wonder the cover art looked so familiar!* For those of you who may not remember, hive did the cover for issue 9 of Demonground, and that artistic style is prevalent throughout this book. It helps add to the mood of the game.

And then – what's this? *Another* disclaimer. "little fears is a game of terror. it is also a work of fiction. some scenes, ideas, depiction and references may be too harsh…"

Boy, somebody's definitely worried about covering the bases here.

When I think about all the reviews I've read of this game, a great many of them seem to focus (somewhat negatively) on the subject matter and don't really get very far beyond that. You have to respect a publisher that hands out a box of ammunition on the first page, to save their detractors time. ☺

THE BOOK

Little Fears is not a large book. It is in the 9x7 softcover format and clocks in at just under 140 pages. The cover stock is typical of the latest softcover offerings, featuring a glossy color cover, perfect-bound with a sturdy glue binding that seems to hold up well.

There are a lot of art and mood-setting panels which pad the book out a bit. But the layout serves to set the mood of its storytelling, and is often used for dramatic pauses in the text. It is a very quick read, and does a good job of presenting its material. Perhaps the fact that the subjects of the game lead relatively simple lives, allows for the brevity of the presentation. Children's lives are largely uncomplicated, and so is the simulation of childhood that **Little Fears** presents.

INTRODUCTION: THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS MONSTERS

The book begins with diary entries of a young girl from a broken home. Through exposition, we piece together the details of her life; her dead mother, her drunken father who leaves her alone much of the time. Her best friend is a stuffed rabbit named Bunny who is her constant companion, confident, and it would seem, her protector. Oh yeah, and there's the monster in her closet. Although as you read Jenna's story, you begin to wonder whether the biggest monster in Jenna's life is the sinister presence in the closet or her own father?

This is one of the points that Little Fears drives home very quickly, and accounts for those disclaimers at the beginning of the book. The monsters of childhood are not restricted to the denizens of Closetland. There is ample evil in the mundane world.

> *In one sense, I guess I'm supposed to be one of the parents who are bothered by the book. I am after all the father of two young daughters, and their mother is decidedly adamant that depictions of bad things happening to kids are strictly verboten in any game she takes part in. I still remember the backlash for the Dark Conspiracy adventure where they had to investigate the site of a ritualistic baby sacrifice… *shiver*.*

The author does a good job of juxtaposing grim reality with the game's premise. It even offers a rationale for some of the evils in a child's world. Bad things happen to kids because of the monsters in Closetland. Whether through direct action, or indirect influence of people in the waking world.

In the game of **Little Fears**, you will play a child, in a world that is far from the idyllic memories of youth that we as adults possess. Because as a child grows, she loses the ability to see those creatures of darkness, and soon forgets they exist at all. Adult rationale replaces the fears of childhood. So the children in the game are faced with very real dangers, and really only have each other to turn to against the forces that would feed upon their innocence and steal their souls. So just how are these children represented in the game?

CHAPTER 1: TO BE YOUNG AGAIN

The character generation system is fairly simple. Character development in **Little Fears** is definitely more art than science. The system seems designed more for role-playing than roll-playing, which is a plus.

As the author points out, the greatest challenge facing a player of **Little Fears** is getting into the mindset and persona of a child, so there is very little in the way of game mechanics to get in the way of that.

Tell Me About Yourself: You begin by filling out a questionnaire to describe your child. The questions are couched in language aimed at a child to help set the mood. 'What is your name?', 'What do your friends call you', 'How old are you?', Who is your best friend?', 'Who is your favorite person?', etc...

Stats: There are five statistics that define your child's physical attributes. using these answers as a guide, you select the five *Stats* of your child: Smarts, Muscles, Hands, Feet and Spirit.Stats are assigned by the player, from a simple point-pool which can be added to through the selection of negative Qualities (explained below).

Virtues: Next come the three intangible *Virtues* of childhood. Soul, Innocence and Fear. In effect these intangibles are what makes the 'child' thing work in Little Fears. The Virtues are so important, that the entire second chapter of the book is dedicated to them, so we'll dispense with the detailed discussion at this time. Most characters in Little Fears will begin the game with no Fear, all their Soul, and a level of Innocence consistent with their current age. (Remember, when a child grows up, they lose the ability to see the monsters, this is represented by a sliding scale of values).

Qualities: The next section discusses the concept of *Qualities*. These are very similar to the Flaws used in many systems. By choosing 'negative' qualities , you can gain extra points to spend in other aspects of the character generation process. But the 'positive' qualities cost points. The Positive qualities are in a section entitled "*Things I like about me*" and include statements like "I'm Ambidextrous", "I'm Big For My Age", "I'm Courageous", and "I'm the Teacher's Pet". This is balanced by "*Things I don't like about me*", such as "I'm Asthmatic", "I'm Clumsy" and "I'm a Scaredy Cat". In the child's world of Little Fears, this is as close as you get to having skills, and really enhance the role-playing potential.

> *I have my own personal interest in the concept of introducing child classes into RPG's. My attempt at adding children to Dark Conspiracy was included in DEMONGROUND 5, Children in the Shadows. I believe I captured the mechanics of childhood, but after seeing* **Little Fears***, I realize how badly I missed the essence of childhood – that magical innocence.* **Little Fears** *not only addresses it, but makes it an integral part of the character concept.*

Whenever the outcome of an event is in question, **Little Fears** employs a very simple dice mechanic to determine the outcome. Basically, you have Tests and Quizzes. A Quiz is an unopposed task, and the goal is to roll under the governing Stat on a d6. Tests are for opposed tasks, and the goal is to roll over your *opponent's* Stat. If any Qualities can come into play, they allow additional dice to be rolled to offer more chances at success. All-in-all, a very quick and simple mechanic.

Finally, we get to the age-old concept of damage. Characters have hit points, and the severity of wounds advances through five levels of increasing harm. Children are fragile, and the game doesn't let you forget that.

CHAPTER 2: THE VIRTUES OF CHILDHOOD

As mentioned earlier, the Virtues are the real meat of what makes a child a playable concept in this game. It is so central, that the entire second chapter covers these concepts in detail. How do the various levels of your Virtues affect your character. How do they help, how do they hinder, how do they make her more vulnerable to, or more resistant to the forces of Closetland?

Soul Soul is the most important thing your child has, and it's what the creatures in Closetland covet above all things. In the course of game play, your child's soul points can be slowly drained away. This is one of the many plot devices built into the game system. It provides a ready source of evil for the characters to battle, and helps draw the characters into the game by making the threat very personal.

Innocence is a measurement of how accepting your child is. It is also the quality we all lose, the older we get. The more innocence you have, the more vulnerable you are to the monsters.

Fear is a measurement of how far-gone your character is. Again, the fragility of children is mirrored by providing a fairly comprehensive picture of your character's mental health. A child's psyche is a fragile thing, and rules are included to cover madness, depression, and insanity.

The most important aspect of this chapter would have to be the introduction of Belief Magic. Children are far from defenseless in Little Fears. And the less they know about how the real adult-world works, the more magical their world can be. Just how sure are you that your teddy bear has the stones to stop a goblin in its tracks?

This chapter also briefly delves into other influences that can harm a child by increasing their fear or stealing their innocence. Some of these topics, like trauma and abuse are covered by necessity, and couched in strong warnings (again) that violence against real children is not to be tollerated.

CHAPTER 3: KEEPING THE KIDS IN LINE

This is where the player's section of the book ends. The remainder of the material is meant solely for the Game Master. Tips on how to make the **Little Fears** experience more enjoyable abound.

The most important information portrayed in this chapter would be yet another warning. "Know your players". Different people have different levels of tollerance to horrific images in general, and images of harm coming to children in particular. It is best to tread upon this ice softly until you get a feel for just how thick it is.

The Questionaire that the players filled out during character generation is revisited here. The questions provide a very thorough roadmap to creating plots that are specifically aimed at your player characters. In a sense, the character generation process provides the GM with a tailor-made 'kick-me' sign for every player character. The child's favorite person, or even favorite possession could be placed in jeopardy, the character may find themselves face to face with their biggest fear, a bad family situation could be exploited. The possibilities are endless.

Next other types of influences in a child's life. Most notably adults. Whether it's a parent, babysitter, policeman or teacher, adults influence your child's life. An adult can be a source of comfort or safe haven, but they are not the only potential protectors your child may have. Rules are included to cover Guardian Angels, beloved family pets, and even hand-me-down treasures that take on magical or protective qualities.

CHAPTER 4: BEHIND THE DOOR

For every influence that can serve to protect a child, there are a thousand who can bring her to harm. Chapter four goes into the dark, and holds you there until you learn the secrets of the dark, shadowy places in your child's mind.

The evil creatures from Closetland will haunt your children in dreams, as well as the waking world, until your child succumbs, or grows up enough to rationalize the monsters away.

Here is where you learn that something that can serve to help your child, can also be the instrument of their undoing. Belief-based magic is a fine thing when your teddy-bear animates and fights the goblin. But that level of belief has a horrible price if the cherished teddy should lose the battle.

But things like this - as horrible as they may be - are nothing compared to what lies beyond the closet door. A dark, twisted realm from which few return.

This is the realm of the Demagogue; the oldest and most powerful of all the creatures of Closetland. The Demagogue has at his disposal, an impressive array of minions, each more horrifying than the last. The Closet Monster, Branxis the Enslaver and the Seven Kings are arguably at the top of the food-chain of terror. But even they have soldiers at their disposal to share in the disposition of pain and suffering.

The monsters presented in this chapter are pretty horrifying. The ranks of the seven kings include some hard-core images of classic horror and embody the seven deadly sins. (the king of envy and the king of lust in particular creep me out).

And then there are the the mundane monsters (for want of a better term). When Jason Blair first conceived of the game, he originally pictured a game about kids fighting werewolves and vampires. The classic horror trappings are covered here as well, although with slightly less detail than the core villains of Closetland.

Overall, the number of plot ideas that can spring up just from reading through this menagerie is worth picking up the game as a horror resource.

CHAPTER 5: SPOOKY STORIES

But just in case you don't like to dig for your inspiration, chapter five comes to your rescue. This chapter provides four sample adventures with sufficient detail to get your group off to a good start before you need to think of any of your own stories.

NOTE FROM THE TEACHER

The first time I read the book, I had made it all the way to this point feeling a little nervous. Some of the images presented in the book were of a very disturbing nature - particularily for a parent of small children in the modern world. Like I said, he did a pretty good job of tying some of the realities of abuse and real-world sickos into the game.

But when I got to this chapter, my view changed dramatically. This chapter, written in very frank language by the author explains the entire genesis of **Little Fears,** from its first concept (kids fighting vampires), on into a much more dark and despairing version, and finally to the published work.

I found the journey fascinating, and highly recommend it to anyone who is wondering how the creative process for a roleplaying game can ebb and flow.

I don't know whether it was Jason or Key 20 who made the decision to include this section, but I think it was a very wise decision, and aplaud them for it.

FINDING LITTLE FEARS

Little Fears is published by Key 20 Publishing (www.key20.com)

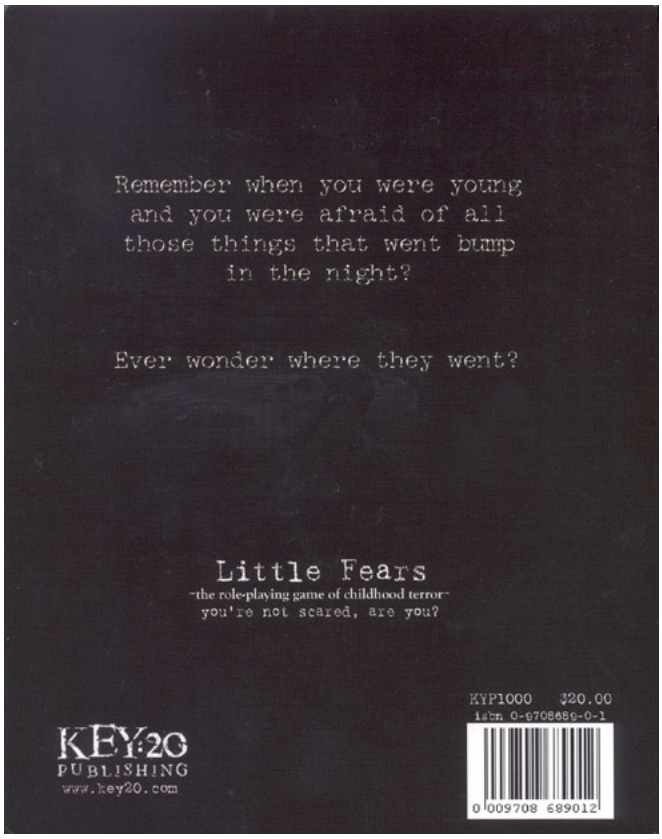
INDUSTRY BUZZ

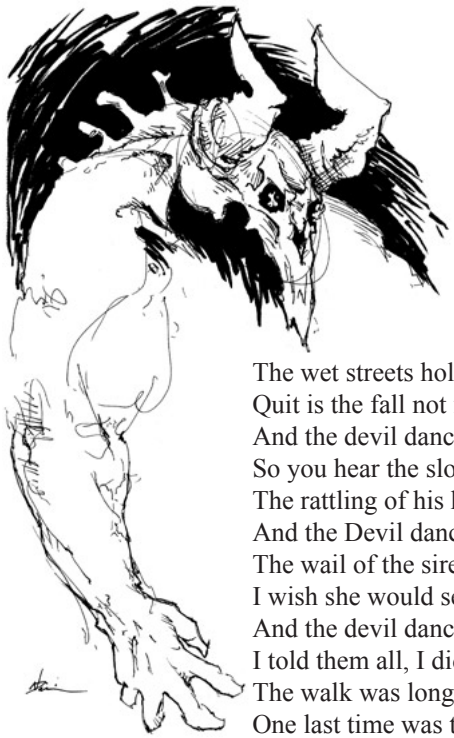
Incidentally, **Little Fears** is up for the Origins Award for Best Roleplaying Game of 2001, as well as Game of the Year. I encourage each of you to check out this remarkable work, and decide for yourselves if you think it deserves a shot at the title.

DEMONGROUND BUZZ

*In addition, starting with this issue, DEMONGROUND is now officially accepting material for **Little Fears**. We hope to offer the same depth of coverage we offer to the other game systems we've chosen to support. But as with all these games, the amount of success we have in keeping this commitment will be directly proportionate to the quality and quantity of material we receive from fans of the game.*

❖





THE DEVIL DANCED ON

By C. Lee House

The wet streets hold me there, the slow falling rain has me in a stair.
Quit is the fall not foot steps at all. Just the swing of the band!
And the devil danced on!
So you hear the slow call his feet seem to fall to the sound of soft shoes.
The rattling of his keys make the jiggling seem as if the fiend is laughing with his jig.
And the Devil danced on
The wail of the sirens come screaming towards me as I hold her one last time.
I wish she would see It was only a tease, and the band sang a slow song.
And the devil danced on .
I told them all, I didn't want to stall. I had an appointment to keep
The walk was long and the chair was all wrong but they let the band play.
One last time was the melody sang with a slow song.
And the devil danced while the band played on!

❖

SEARDS

A corrupt bureaucrat

The Nazi heritage in the U.S. government

A pile of headless corpses

A lake that hides secrets

They're all connected in an inhuman scheme for personal power and eternal life.

by Pål Wilhelmsen

BACKGROUND

Heads originates in World War 2, when Professor Henri Lauberger started with Operation Paperclip. The U.S. Army brought Lauberger into the Paperclip team for his "patriotism" and his knowledge of German history and language. He was a respected history and linguistics professor at Yale University and member of the Republican Party and the Skull and Bones Society. The Paperclip coordinators assigned Lauberger to the team working with non-scientific issues like art, cultural matters and occult knowledge. Thousands of occult artifacts were brought to the U.S. and a considerable number of Nazi experts immigrated after the Paperclip "cleansing" of their papers. Lauberger and his colleagues were involved in this process and partially able to control the flow of information, items and immigrants.

Lauberger's work was difficult, despite the freedom allowed the Paperclip team. The team had access to huge amounts of occult data, as the U.S. army brought in crates of artifacts and books the Nazis had collected from all over the world. The Army apparently did not care about them and the government was preoccupied with rockets and the Roswell incident, so Lauberger's team was largely left alone with the material given them. They soon realized that it would be a waste to simply give up all this knowledge to an ignorant government. They couldn't simply steal it would be noticed, so they worked inside the system, hiding in plain sight.

Lauberger and his associates prospered during the following decades, having easy access to Nazi treasures and considerable government funding. Lauberger recruited his agents from Yale's student body. As a master degree supervisor, he had the opportunity to review potential candidates, and the Skull & Bones Society allowed him to test them. Many of his former students became useful contacts within the U.S. government. Lauberger was an active member of the network of former Operation Paperclip researchers until he died of old age in 1981.

In 1982, two of Lauberger's former students and associates, Richard Dunbar and Raymond Phelps, conceived the idea that eventually became one of the group's major projects: The Heads Project. The idea was to freeze the heads of the recently deceased and use advanced technology to read the "memory patterns" embedded into the brain cells. Dunbar has since spent millions of FDA dollars secretly on this unholy union of necromancy and technology.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Heads began shortly after Hoffmann Institute agents encountered the Les Treize Corbeaux cult member Jacob Dumont and found a letter from Richard Dunbar in his apartment. The Institute has since watched Dunbar and the next step is to install bugging equipment into his home computer.

The first act is a straightforward break-and-enter mission, suitable for a small group of heroes with the appropriate skills. The Institute sends the heroes to a café in Georgetown, Washington DC, where they're to enter Richard Dunbar's house, install radio equipment and get out unnoticed. This is where the first batch of handouts included in this adventure comes into play. Scene Two is looser and allows the players to discuss their strategy and do some research on their own. Scene Three is the actual break-in.

The second act begins with analysis of the clues gathered in Act One. This will lead the heroes to Pine Creek, a town in Colorado, where they will meet Raymond Phelps and prevent him from destroying the entire town. Scene One gives the heroes new case files to work with. The scene allows the heroes to do some investigation and draw some conclusions. Scene Two is where the heroes go to Pine Creek to closer investigate Phelps' activities. Scene Three is the climax of the adventure, where Phelps summons a host of Zombies from the Pine Creek Lake to cover his escape from the heroes and his former allies in Les Treize Corbeaux. The adventure is open-ended. Much depends on the heroes' performance and what scenes actually occur. This is where the usual cast of conspiracies comes in and where the GM must find ways to conclude or continue the story.

DISASTROUS INVESTIGATIONS, AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

Heads may be a difficult adventure. Some scenes require stealth and others require secrecy and careful interaction with supporting cast members. Worse still, going in guns blazing is the surest way to panic the villain into unleashing his horrors. The players only have to get one clue - the connection between Richard Dunbar and Raymond Phelps - and act upon it by going to Pine Creek and exploring this connection. This should get the heroes all the way to the end of the adventure, even if their investigation is a string of disasters. Make botches spectacular! Be gory! Have fun and try to speed it up if the players are stuck in a dead end.

SETTING THE ADVENTURE

Heads is an Alternity adventure written for a group of low-to-mid level Hoffmann Institute agents, which should include a character with thieving skills and a Combat Specialist. The adventure uses the *Alternity Players Handbook* (PH), *Alternity Gamemaster Guide* (GMG), *Dark Matter Campaign Setting* (DM) and *The Necromancy Masks* (see *Demonground 9*). *Beyond Science: A Guide of FX* (BS) and *Dark Matter Arms and Equipment Guide* (AEG) could be useful as well, but are not necessary.

The adventure, as written, can be set at the earliest in November 2001 to make it fit *Exit 23*'s timeframe, but you can easily change this by changing the handouts.

TRIGGER

LOCATION: At the team's home office

The Hoffmann Institute investigated Jacob Dumont's apartment late October 2001 and thus reason to investigate Richard Dunbar early November 2001. This could possibly be the event described in EXIT 23. Jacob Dumont is a diabolist and member of the cult Les Treize Corbeaux. Whether the player characters have run into this villain before or not is unimportant. The important thing is that the Hoffmann Institute knows that he is a diabolist and has reason to go through his mail.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

Your supervisor drops by your office one November morning, just as you are finishing your mail and first cup of coffee.

"I want you to be at Tina's Books & Coffee in Georgetown in Washington D.C. tomorrow at 1900 hours on unofficial business. I want you to keep a low profile, not carry guns or any surveillance equipment and be prepared for some unusual work."

Your supervisor looks at you for a short moment, to check if you have understood the orders, before turning and leaving the room again.

ACT ONE: ONCE A THIEF

Traveling to Washington D.C. should be no problem. The objective of this act is to either install radio equipment into Richard Dunbar's home computer or to steal the computer's hard drive if anybody detects the intrusion.

SCENE ONE: THE UNDERCOVER AGENTS

LOCATION: Tina's Books & Coffee. Georgetown, D.C.

This scene introduces two Red Section agents, Bengt Svendsson and Susan Dale. Both are long-term field agents and extremely paranoid and thus requested the degree of secrecy around the briefing. The scene is straightforward; the heroes are supposed to pick up the assignment, ask any questions they have and leave quietly. Both undercover agents will never admit to be Hoffmann Institute agents, but they will not deny it either.

TINA´S BOOKS & COFFEE

At the café the heroes are approached by a man:

A man approaches you after a few minutes at the Café. He is tall, maybe in his early thirties, with short blond hair, blue cheerful eyes and a heavy Scandinavian accent. He is wearing a gray fashionable leisure jacket, black pants and properly polished army boots. He has a confident smile and seems friendly.

"You must be the specialists I requested," he says. "Why don't you join us at our table?"

There is a woman waiting at his table. The woman is also blonde, with blue eyes, medium build and wears a dark gray suit with a skirt.

Perceptive heroes may notice three suitcases on the floor under the table and the agents' constant wandering gaze.

"I don't know what you've been told about the job. We want you to break into a guarded house, install illegal radio equipment into a computer, loop the security tapes if there are any, and sneak out without somebody noticing now or later. Can you do it?"

The agents will accept a no, apologise for wasting the heroes' time and quietly leave. The adventure is over. If the heroes decide to join the mission, Bengt continues:

"All you need to know is in the files. We will be waiting in a nearby car. Contact me on the radio to keep me posted, and I will give you any updates. We will help you if anything goes wrong. However, nobody knows you if you are captured. Is that acceptable?"

Let the heroes ask questions they have. Svendsson does most of the talking, unless someone asks Dale directly. Dale has a refined voice with an American accent. Dale and Svendsson will answer as truthfully as they can, even sketching out the grim reality of Red Section work if the heroes want to know.

"You start tomorrow at 2000 hours. Use the headsets during the mission. There are security cameras covering both entrances and there may be hidden ones inside and outside the house. You must locate the camera control and make sure that you are not recorded. Locate Dunbar's office, turn off and open his computer. Take out one of its RAM chips and check its specifications. You'll have several new RAM chips; replace the one you removed with one that matches. Clean up, loop the videotapes and leave unnoticed if possible. If you are detected, simply stealing the computer's hard drive will suffice, but we would prefer to see this done properly. We'll meet at the parking lot 200 meters from here, so we can pick up the remaining chips and the unused equipment. After that, our business is concluded."

If there are no more questions, the pair wish the team luck and leaves, leaving the suitcases under the table.

SUITCASES AND CASE FILES

The suitcases contain the following:

- Headsets with microphones
- Two dart pistols, with six darts each
- Twelve doses of paralytic neurotoxin *(see GMG pg. 60)*
- Electronics toolkit, good quality
- Lockpick tools, good quality
- Darksuits with gasmasks for each agent
- An envelope with 12 different modified RAM chips.
- A book: *Upgrade your computer's RAM in 5 minutes*, DNB books, 1999
- Another book: *The motherboard guide*, DNB books, 1999
- A folder with case files (Player handouts H01, H02, H03)
- The case files:

H01 - Background check Richard E. Dunbar: This is what the HI knows about Richard Dunbar after doing a superficial background check. The Institute has checked his education, where he has worked and his private contacts.

H02 - Richard Dunbar's letter to Dumont: This is a letter written by Richard Dunbar to Jacob Dumont, after Dunbar had an unsettling conversation with Raymond Phelps. Hoffmann Institute agents found this letter in Dumont's apartment during a search.

H03 - Site Report Richard E. Dunbar's house: This is the results of a site investigation conducted by Hoffmann Institute field agents. The GM may want to change the report's date if the campaign is set at a later point.

SCENE TWO: PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATIONS

LOCATION: Washington, D.C.

This scene covers the 24 hours that pass between meeting with Dale and Svendsson and the run on Dunbar's house the next evening. It gives the heroes time to read the information and do any investigation.

SHADOWING DUNBAR

The heroes may decide to shadow Richard Dunbar the following day. He leaves his house at 8:30am and drives to his office in downtown D.C. The Republican Party rents the office, which Dunbar shares with five other researchers/lobbyists. They share a secretary and the only security personnel are a few in the lobby provided by the building owners. Dunbar usually stays at the office, working as a lobbyist and maintaining his network. He returns home around 10:30pm on the evening of the break-in.

The GM should consider using this opportunity to prepare some interesting people for Dunbar to meet during the day. This is a good chance to involve other plots from your campaign into this story.

THE SECURITY COMPANY

Dunbar's house is guarded by SecTech, a company owned and run by Sam Norton, a decorated ex marine with no public political preferences. Their main office is located in downtown D.C. They employ 132 security personnel and a small administrative staff. SecTech has cars, radios, top of the line security equipment and weapons and a good reputation in political circles. The guards stationed at Dunbar's house are all average looking, serious men in their thirties.

SCENE THREE: DUNBAR'S HOUSE

LOCATION: Dunbar's House. Georgetown, D.C.

The upper-middle class suburban neighborhood is quiet. You can hear faint music, the sound of a car starting and a barking dog somewhere. A couple of streets away, you see an older man walking his dog and a parked police cruiser.

Dunbar's house has two storeys and a small garden. A 1.4m high brick wall surrounds the garden and there is about 5 meters from the wall to the house. The only entry point is the driveway gate at the front of the house, but climbing over it should be easy enough.

When the heroes contact Svendsson, he says: *"The house has been quiet all afternoon. There is one guard and a dog in the house, probably on the ground floor."*

If triggered, the house's alarm system alerts the security personnel in the house, Dunbar and SecTech's downtown office.

When triggered, the personnel in the house have one minute to cancel the alarm, otherwise guards from the office

will arrive at the house within 5 minutes. A central security board located in Dunbar's office (area 11) controls the whole system; it monitors all windows and doors, the cameras and the video recorder. There are also secondary panels in various locations.

Hacking into a secondary panel only affects its specific tasks, not the entire system. Video cameras cover the doors and the garden, recording onto 48-hour tapes. The system has its own power supply. Strong vibrations in the windows trigger the alarm, as does breaking or opening them. The actual sensors are on the window frame and the wall; if contact is broken, for instance, by opening a window, the alarm is triggered.

Security - *security devices* (see below for modifiers): Opening a window from the outside without triggering the alarm requires a wire, an electronics kit and lockpick tools. 6 successes with a +1 penalty are needed.

Each window has a dedicated security panel; bypassing it is a simple check with a +1 modifier. Success indicates that the hero may open the window from the inside without triggering the alarm.

A guard and a dog are in the house at all times. The guard is a Marginal Spook and the dog uses the stats listed on page 233 of the GMG. Dunbar is at work all day and usually does not come home until around midnight on weekdays - unless the guard, the police or the alarm has alerted him.

GETTING IN AND OUT OF THE HOUSE

The heroes can get into the house in several ways:

Bribery: The heroes could attempt to bribe their way into the house. The guards know the company routinely checks up on their employees, and will normally refuse bribes. The players must plan how they want to go about this, maybe find some hook they can use to bribe the guard. Anything less that $5000 is counted as an insult and automatically fails. Keep in mind that a successful bribe makes the entire act much easier, and lucky dice rolls alone should not decide the outcome. Make sure this scene is suspenseful to the last. The GM should make the check for heroes attempting the bribe.

Deception - *Bribe* (+3 penalty): A success indicated that the heroes successfully bribe the guard to let the heroes into the house and do their work. On an ordinary failure, the guard refuses the bribe and calls the office. After 10 minutes, an additional guard shows up. The guards may notify the cops about potential trouble in the area. On a critical failure, the guard plays along and tries to set up the heroes. The Institute does not fund bribery, at least not in this case. Research on the guard could reduce this penalty.

Bluff: Experienced security personnel in D.C. hear many stories, and the employees of SecTech are no exception. The heroes must provide a good story for the guard to bluff their way into the house. Standard procedure when facing unexpected deliveries or requests is to check with the company office or even Richard Dunbar directly.

Deception - *Bluff* (+3 penalty): The heroes successfully bluff their way into the house. On an ordinary failure, the guard calls the office or Dunbar, and the bluff is exposed. After 10 minutes, an additional guard shows up. The guards notify the cops about potential trouble in the area. On a critical failure, the guard plays along and tries to set up the heroes. The GM should reduce the penalty if the players come up with a particularly good story.

Cutting the power: A sudden power loss in the neighborhood affects the house, but not the alarm system. The guard notices, calls the central office and searches the house and the garden.

The heroes must somehow obtain a map of the power grid of the area (Bengt Svendsson's team has one) to do this, locate the cable or a junction box, and cut the power. Alternatively, they could hack into the power company and do a software cut.

Luring the guard out: The easiest way to lure the guard out is to trigger the motion detectors in the garden and wait. The guard brings the dog and phones the SecTech office before leaving the house. He will lock the outer door and check the garden thoroughly taking at least one minute on each side of the house, leaving the heroes three minutes to slip in the front door and deal with the security panel in the hallway.

Leaving unnoticed: Leaving the house is much easier than entering. Anyone with access to the main security panel can turn off the system for a couple of minutes, climb out a window and sneak off without anybody ever noticing. The only evidence of their presence is the actual RAM chip, the time sig. on the videotape and the changes made by the heroes.

DUNBAR´S HOUSE, KEYED ENTRIES

Dunbar is heavily into appearances, designer furniture and having the right things. His house is tidy, has few decorations, and looks stylish, expensive and well planned.

0. THE GARDEN:

The garden behind the fence has a well-groomed lawn, a couple of trimmed trees and bushes.

The gate opens only by manually entering a code on a small terminal, or from a signal from Dunbar's car. Either will turn off the motion detectors in the garden for five minutes (but not in front of the doors). The guards do not have a radio controller to the gates and use the manual terminal.

Security - *security devices* (+1 penalty): Success indicates that the hero bypassed the security panel. Looking on the security panels for fingerprints will reveal the msot commonly used keys, adding a -1 bonus on the check.

There are separate motion detectors covering the garden and the area in front of both outer doors. The detectors will not trigger for small or slow moving objects.

Strength feat (no modifier) and Resolve - *mental* (-1 bonus): Success indicates that the hero succeeded in crawling through the garden without triggering the motion detector. The characters max move is quarter walk speed, which can be increased to half walking speed with a +2 penalty on the before mentioned checks.

1. FRONT DOOR AND HALL

The room is a small entrance porch with some clothes, shoes, a small table and a bench. There is a security panel located by the outer door.

The central alarm monitors the door. Anyone entering through the door must enter a code at the security panel in the Hall within two minutes, or the alarm will trigger.

Manipulation - *lockpick* (+1 penalty): Picking the lock on the door. It is possible to retry ordinary failures, but critical failures will trigger the alarm. Each attempt takes 12 seconds (one round).

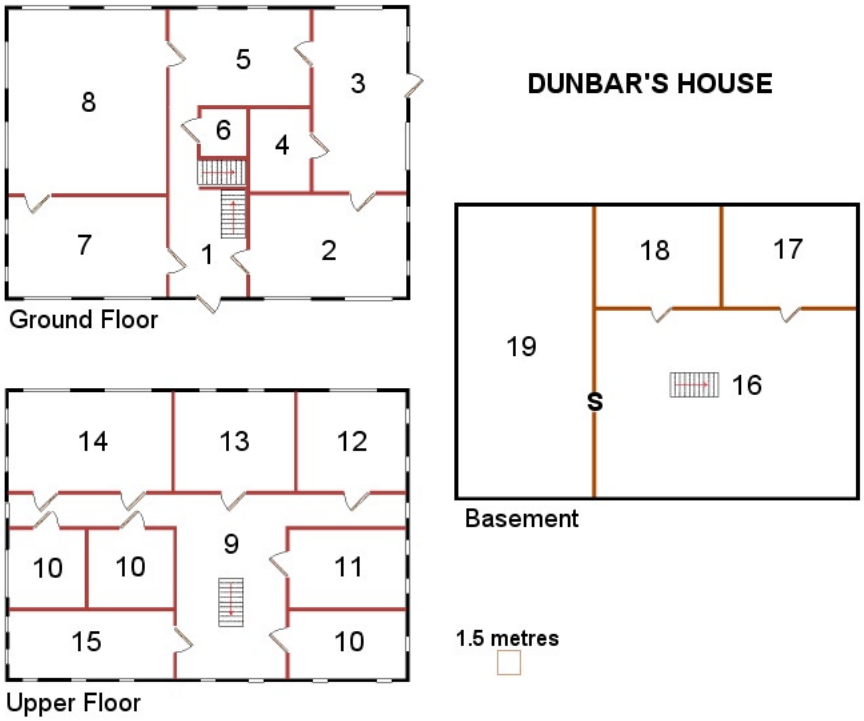
Security - *security devices* (-1 bonus): It is possible to identify, but not disable, the alarm from the outside.

Security - *security devices* (+1 penalty): It is possible to disable the door alarm at the security panel in the hall. Each attempt takes about 24 seconds (two rounds). Looking on the security panel for fingerprints will reveal the commonly used keys, adding a -1 bonus on the check.

The main hall is quite spacious, and has exits on all walls and stairs going up to the second floor. There is a full sized mirror on the west wal and a floral decoration by the bottom step. Further along are stairs down to what has to be the basement. The room is clean and tidy.

2. DINING ROOM

This is the dining room.



DUNBAR´S HOUSE – MAP KEY

1. Front door and hall
2. Dining room
3. Kitchen and back door
4. Storage
5. Passageway
6. Restroom
7. TV room
8. Living room
9. Hall
10. Guestroom
11. The office
12. Dunbar's bedroom
13. Gym
14. Bathroom
15. Library
16. Storage
17. Laundry room
18. Basement storage
19. Secret room

S – Hidden door to 19

3. KITCHEN AND BACK DOOR

The room is a modern kitchen in glass and stainless steel, with every electronic accessory any chef could desire. The benches are white hardwood, the cloths are clean and lined up on hangers. Not a single piece of equipment in the room seems out of place. There is a security panel located by the back door.

The central alarm monitors the door. Anyone entering through the door must enter a code at the security panel in the Hall within two minutes, or the alarm will trigger.

Manipulation - *lockpick* (+1 penalty): Picking the lock on the door. It is possible to retry ordinary failures, but critical failures will trigger the alarm. Each attempt takes 12 seconds (one round).

Security - *security devices* (-1 bonus): It is possible to identify, not disable, the alarm from the outside.

Security - *security devices* (+1 penalty): It is possible to disable the door alarm at the security panel in the hall. Each attempt takes about 24 seconds (two rounds). Looking on the security panel for fingerprints will reveal the commonly used keys, adding a -1 bonus on the check.

4. STORAGE

The room is a dusty but orderly storeroom.

In a large closet by the door are a vacuum cleaner, some dusters, a mop and some buckets. The rest of the room is for food and drink storage, notably a fine collection of white wines and enough canned food to last a decade.

5. PASSAGEWAY

A comfortable looking chair is located beside the east door and an abstract painting is hanging on the south wall.

6. RESTROOM

This restroom is nice and tidy.

7. TV ROOM

A 38" widescreen TV set with surround sound dominates the room. Two black leather chairs with steel casing stand in front of it, and a minibar sits by the door on the north wall. There is a dog's basket in the corner by the east door.

The guard spends most of the time here, watching TV.

8. LIVING ROOM

Spacious living room with a small bar, glass and stainless steel furniture with bright colored cushions and a large sound system where all components come from different companies. Modern art decorates the walls and there is a large green floral decoration in the southwest corner and a large fish tank by the east door.

9. HALL

The stairs down are located in the middle of the room, and nine doors gives access to what seems to be most of the second floor.

10. GUESTROOM

You see a single bed, a closet, a desk and a mirror in the room. A modern art piece is hanging on a wall.

11. THE OFFICE

In the room is a large wooden desk with stacks of papers, a monitor and a keyboard. Along the walls are two bookshelves with law books, geography books and biology books. On the walls, you see an ancient looking wooden mask, a couple of maps and some family photos. There is a security panel by the window, with several monitors and a recorder some sort.

The mask is a replica of one of the missing Necromancy Masks (see Demonground #9). There are two detailed poster maps on the walls, one of the Rocky Mountains and one of the DC area. On the wall is a picture of Dunbar and the President shaking hands. Somewhere in the stack of papers is a copy of Edna Dunbar's medical file, including a scan of her head.

The computer cabinet is located on the floor under the desk. Anyone looking closer into the room sees it immediately.

Computer Science - *hardware* (-2 bonus): A success indicates that the hero successfully opens the computer cabinet, identifies and swaps the RAM chips. The hero may retry any ordinary failures, but a critical failure fries the motherboard. Each attempt takes two minutes.

The main security system board consists of a panel, a screen showing the house with all sensors, panels and locks marked on it, two monitors (both outer doors) and the recording system.

Security - *security devices* (-2 bonus): Success indicates that the hero was able to loop the tape, thus erasing a time period without leaving any obvious indication that something out of the ordinary has been going on. The loop will be noticed if someone looks at the tape and pays attention to the time counter. The hero may also turn of the security system long enough to cover the escape from the house.

12. DUNBAR´S BEDROOM

You see a large waterbed in the middle the room, a wardrobe covers the west wall and there is a full sized mirror on the wall. The bedside table holds a Bible, a couple of issues of Hustler from the early eighties and some FDA reports. The wardrobe is full of suits, shoes and clothes for all occasions.

Dunbar is a light sleeper and easily awakened if anyone enters his room. If Dunbar is asleep in the room when heroes enter, a sneak check is required to not wake him up:

Stealth - *sneak* (-2 bonus): The heroes successfully sneak quietly into the room. Give a one step penalty for each additional hero that enters, after the first. Dunbar awakens on a failure, and awakes but successfully feigns sleep on a critical failure.

13. GYM

You see a bench, some weights, exercise mats, and a treadmill in the room. There is a full size mirror on the east wall.

14. BATHROOM

The bathroom is nice and tidy, with modern furniture.

The medicine cabinet contains Dunbar's diet of vitamins, sleeping pills and amphetamine.

15. LIBRARY

Bookshelves cover the walls and there are two large chairs in the middle of the floor.

16. STORAGE

Lots of old and dusty furniture are stored in the room. Dozens of boxes of papers are piled up by the west wall. There is a faint smell of rot in the air. The basement walls seem much older than the walls on the ground floor.

The room is the result of Richard Dunbar's many redecorations of the house. None of the furniture is actually more than 5-10 years old.

Awareness - *perception* (+1 penalty): Success indicates that anyone looking on the wall will notice the outline of a secret door. Actively searching gives a -2 bonus. Read or paraphrase the following:

Boxes with old magazines and newspapers cover a secret door, disguised as a part of the west wall. The handle is a pressure plate on the ceiling by the wall.

17. LAUNDRY ROOM

There is a washing machine and dirty laundry in the room.

There is blood from one of Dunbar's victims on one of the dirty bed sheets.

18. BASEMENT STORAGE

There is lots of old and dusty furniture in the room.

19. SECRET ROOM

In the middle of the floor is a lab table, on the wall to your left are three bodies piled up on sheves and on the west wall is a large two-door locker. Along the wall to your right are several boxes and crates.

The locker contains medical equipment, various sawing and cutting tools, handcuffs and a tranquillizer gun. There are also several jars with unidentified balms and ointments, stored for use in necromantic rituals.

All three bodies have their heads sawn off by the neck, and seem only hours old (and will continue to do so for a long time). Two of the heads ended up in Phelps' lab (area 26) in Scene Two, Act Two, and the third is unaccounted for.

ACT ONE DEVELOPMENTS

Act One can turn sour on the heroes in many ways:

Discovered! The heroes have done real damage, are discovered by the guard and flee. Dunbar knows he has enemies, and a break-in attempt is expected, hence the guard. A botched break-in attempt does not seriously damage the heroes standing in the Hoffmann Institute, unless they kill innocents (like the guard) or expose the institute.

Bloodbath! The break-in could easily turn into a shootout if the guard discovers the heroes. Susan and Bengt will enter the scene, help them out if necessary and leave the site as fast as they can. If a shootout brings the police, Bengt and Susan will abandon the heroes to their fate, or posibly even finish them off themselves.

Success! If everything goes smoothly Bengt Svendsson and Susan Dale meet the heroes at the parking lot near Tina's Books & Coffee as planned. The meeting will not be scripted, as their comments will depend on how well the heroes performed. The agents will expect 9 or 10 RAM chips back from the heroes, or at least a reasonable account of the whereabouts of the missing RAM chips.

ACT TWO: PHELPS

This second act focus on the evidence collected in the previous act and the connection between Les Treize Corbeaux and Richard Dunbar.

SCENE ONE: NEW CASE FILES AND INVESTIGATIONS

LOCATION: At the team's home office

In this Act the heroes are supposed to look over the available evidence and decide their course of action. Act Two begins one morning when the heroes' supervisor stops by their office and drop off some case files.

Your supervisor drops by your office just before lunch with some files. You can swear you cans see a strange smile as the files land on your desk. "Have a look at these. They are the results of your exploits in Georgetown. Look through them, work your magic, and tell me what you make of it in a couple of days." What do you do?

The players' performance in Act One should decide which case files the GM makes available. The other handouts supplied in this adventure are:

H04 - Report about the Masks: This handout is available if institute researchers identified the Mask on Dunbar's office wall, only possible if the heroes supplied a good description, a picture or even stole it. Institute researchers will recognize the mask for what it is, even if Dunbar's mask is a replica. The report includes two black and white pictures, one of each of the known Necromancy Masks. The GM should note that the masks are largely a dead end during the early stages of the Act, as the owners of both refuse to talk about them, and most heroes do not have the means to force answers from either of them. Thus, the handout's purpose is to give the players hints on how to solve the last scene, if it ever comes into play, not to act as a significant part in itself.

H05 - The "Deadboy" email: This report is available if the heroes succeeded in placing the RAM chip into Dunbar's computer in Act One, or simply stole the hard disk. Alternatively, you may make it available if you decide that the Institute has monitored Dunbar's mail account for a while. The email is a direct reply to H-02 where Dumont refuses to take any action to monitor Phelps' doings. This is a lie from Dumont's side, as he does not trust either of them. He has sent a spy to watch Phelps, and strengthened the cult's presence in Denver as backup.

H06 - Documents from Richard Dunbar's computer: This report is available if Act One was successful - the RAM chip was installed and Dunbar did not notice for a few days, or the heroes amended for their failure by stealing the entire computer disk. The report is a summary of a larger file containing a disk with the actual files from the computer. The research files are available to the heroes if they request them, but gives little of interest, unless the heroes want to read up on the 'science' of the Heads-device or need some background on Phelps' work. The encrypted files remain encrypted, and are not available to the heroes.

There are a number of courses the adventure may take after this point, but here are a few likely paths the investigation may take:

THE MISSING MASKS

The British Museum, the rightful owner of one of the missing Necromancy Masks, will claim that they have the Lagos Mask. The Museum will not allow anyone to see it and refuses to comment on any rumors.

The University of Oslo, the owner of the other missing Necromancy Mask, will deny that they found any occult artifact in the Oseberg ship, nor will they confirm any relation with the Hoffmann Institute.

More info about the Oseberg ship is available at:
http://www.ukm.uio.no/vikingskipshuset/

RESEARCHING RAYMOND PHELPS

A complex skill check is required, and relevant skills include Investigation - *research* (-2 bonus) and Street Smarts – *net savvy* (+2 penalty). Give out appropriate information from the following, if successful:

3 Failures: Raymond Phelps was born in 1919 and lives in New Haven.

1 Success: Raymond Phelps was born in 1919, lived in Pine Creek, Colorado, and later with his aunt in Denver. He served in the U.S. army during World War 2 and stayed with the forces until he started as a medical student at Yale University in 1947. In 1953, Yale hired him and he has stayed at the Biomedicine Faculty since. He never married, or had any known relationships.

2 Successes: Veronica Phelps, Raymond Phelps' mother, drowned in 1924. Steven Richard Phelps, Raymond's father, was a landowner and investor in the years following World War 1 up to the crash in 1929. Steven Phelps lost everything in the crash and committed suicide. Raymond Phelps' only living relatives are a couple of nephews and nieces, living in California and New Mexico.

4 Successes: Raymond Phelps works from his home in Pine Creek, Colorado. He bought out his elder brothers and sisters in 1970, becoming the sole owner of the house. Research: Yale The University

of Yale has little to do with this adventure, except that a few of their former students and current employees are up to illicit business. Keep in mind that Phelps, despite his freedom and influence, still is a Yale employee. Yale transfers all calls or requests for him to his home office with little fuss. The administration at Yale is unwilling to give any information about Phelps' projects, except that he still supervises master degree students. This adventure does not necessarily say that the Skull and Bones Society are necromancers; it only reveals one of its members as a necromancer. The secret of the Society's true nature is still unsolved and left to the GM's discretion.

A complex skill check is required, and relevant skills include Interaction - *charm* (+1 penalty), Deception - *bluff*, Lore - *conspiracy theories*, Lore - *occultism* (+1 penalty), and Investigation - *research* (-1 bonus). Give out appropriate information from the following, if successful using appropriate skills:

3 Failures: The administration at Yale University is alerted about someone doing unofficial research about their employees, the Skull and Bones Society is alerted about the heroes breathing down their necks (even if they did not), Phelps is notified, and the heroes fail to obtain anything but the most basic information.

1 Success: The heroes learn the basic layout of New Haven and the University of Yale (available from http://www.yale.edu/). Raymond Phelps is a Professor in Biomedicine.

2 Successes: Sarah Portman is a chemistry professor at Yale. She is a middle-aged woman with a pleasant, but eccentric demeanor. She lives with her husband Frank, their children have left home and she seems quite content with life.

3 Successes: Raymond Phelps works from his home in Pine Creek, Colorado.

5 Successes: The heroes learn what the GM chooses to make available about the Skull & Bones Society. Phelps and Dunbar are both members.

RESEARCH: PINE CREEK

The agents may want to do a closer investigation on Pine Creek, in addition to the material given in the handouts. They may use privileged sources for this, but also newspapers, medical journals and statistical research. The heroes may choose to attempt several skills for this, notably Investigation – *research* and Lore - *conspiracy theories*. Give answers as choice of skill, success and access to information dictates:

3 Failures: The heroes fail to find Colorado on the map and should stay at home.

1 Success: Pine Creek is a small Colorado town located between Rustic and Fort Collins. The town is missing on many official maps. Every generation, a woman drowns herself in the Pine Creek Lake. An urban legend has it that the first woman killed herself after her husband died during the civil war, and she has every generation since called a young maiden to accompany her. Many of the locals firmly believe this, while others thinks it is coincidence. Also, covens of witches gather here on two or three nights during the summer, disguised as campers.

2 Successes: Six persons have gone missing over the last four years in the area around Pine Creek. All six were camping alone out in the woods after being seen last alive in town. All six were healthy, experienced in outdoors activities and well equipped for their trip. All remain missing.

3 Successes: FBI agents have visited Pine Creek twice in the past two years to investigate twelve different cases of fresh graves being robbed. This was discovered by accident after the seventh corpse had been stolen when mold was found on a nearby pathway and there was a noticeable depression on the freshest grave. There are no bodies, the FBI has made no arrests, and the case's status is unclear at best. FBI has ordered the townspeople involved to be quiet about the body thefts and have actually succeeded. The local church has supported the cover-up wholeheartedly and initiated restoration work on the graveyard to make it more plausible. It is curious that Pine Creek appears on so few maps and that the highway exit to the town is so poorly marked. That, added to considerable government and MIB presence, indicates that the town may be subject to some governmental experiment, or that it is a site for meetings with alien races.

5 Successes: There are reports that contradict official FDA and Department of Health reports, and indeed claims that Pine Creek has twice the national average of cancer patients. Most of the cases are fatal after an unusually short period of sickness. There have also been a large number of complaints about headaches, dizziness and stomach problems. The FDA or the Department of Health and Human Services has no records of this, so the heroes' source must be elsewhere.

OTHER PATHS OF INVESTIGATION

The heroes may decide to travel to New Haven to do a personal investigation, but this is not likely to give any more results than calling the Biomedicine Faculty, since Phelps is rarely present. There is little of interest in Phelps office if they manage to get a closer look at it, as he has moved all his research to Pine Creek.

THE ROAD TO PINE CREEK

The outcome of the scene is hopefully that the heroes are-heading for Pine Creek, Colorado, either on their own initiative or on Hoffman Institute orders.

SCENE TWO: PINE CREEK

LOCATION: Pine Creek, Colorado.

This scene centers on the heroes arrival in Pine Creek. There is no scripted order of events, as the heroes themselves are the initiators and catalysts of the chain of events, with possible countermoves by Sheriff Anderson or Les Treize Corbeaux if the heroes are careless. The scene assume that the heroes arrive in town, find somewhere to stay and start a closer investigation of Raymond Phelps before they decide on some way to deal with him. Phelps will do nothing, except in self-defense, unless he concludes that someone is spying on him. If that happens move to Scene Three.

Careful agents may uncover or guess Phelps' plans before they trigger the necromancer's paranoia, and Scene Three may be avoided. The agents may enquire to the Hoffmann Institute for advice on the proper course of action. The Hoffmann Institute reply is up to the GM to devise.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players as the heroes drive into town:

Pine Creek is a small town in Colorado in the middle of the scenic Roosevelt National Forest. The exit to the town is about 40 miles west of Fort Collins, halfway between Rustic and Poudre Park, and the town itself is about 5 minutes into the woods. The town looks peaceful. Three hundred houses dot the mountainside, there is a small lake at the bottom of the valley and trees cover the slopes. The town has the typical facilities of any small town: a supermarket, a diner, a bar and a couple of shops. The town has no less than two well-stocked sports shops, as the area around Pine Creek is prime mountain hiking and fishing area.

PINE CREEK: NOTABLE LOCALES

The Great Northern: The Great Northern is a large hotel overlooking the town and the lake. It has all the usual facilities, such as a bar, a gym, cable TV, Internet and a pool. The hotel owns about 40 bungalows in the Pine Creek area, in addition to its 300 rooms. The Great Northern entertains thousands of guests during the high season.

The Graveyard: A quite old burial site, the oldest graves go all the way back to the 1840's with a few fur trappers in the southeast corner. Sheriff Anderson runs nightly patrols here, usually around 2300 hours and 0400 hours.

The Phelps Mansion: This is the ancestral house of the Phelps family. Phelps' father, a successful landowner in Denver, built it sometimes in the 20's but it was often empty as the family generally was miserable in the small town. It is a three-story building with an overgrown garden and a .No Trespassing. sign at the front of the fence. Sneaking into the garden has become a way of showing courage among local kids.

The Pine Creek Lake: The Lake is a popular camping site for the locals. It is about 2 km in diameter and very deep. People generally shun it after dark.

The Water Plant: The Pine Creek pumping station and water plant is located halfway to town from the exit from Highway 14, and supplies water to nearby towns and even Fort Collins. Note that the Lake is not the source of the water. Les Treize Corbeaux have installed special filters on some of the pipes at the water plant, and is using the population of Pine Creek to test out drugs and toxins.

PINE CREEK: NOTABLE DENIZENS

Drew Anderson: Drew Anderson is the local sheriff: This relentless local representative of the law has many worries these days, and is very interested in mysterious newcomers. Anderson is a heavyset fit woman in her early forties. She is tall, with long blonde hair, which she usually keeps tied in a bun. She is serious, talks with a calm determined voice, and does not allow anyone to tell her how to carry out her duties.

Sheriff Anderson will ask a number of questions about the heroes' doings and who they are if given an opportunity. The heroes can answer pretty much what they want and get away if they have done nothing wrong, but Sheriff Anderson will keep a close eye on the heroes if she thinks they are suspicious, hostile or rude. She will arrest anyone giving her trouble without hesitation, just to keep them uncomfortable, and release them after 24 hours unless they have done something illegal.

She will back off if facing armed resistance or superior numbers, and call for serious backup from Denver or Fort Collins.

If assassins attack the heroes, Sheriff Anderson and her three deputies will do the early investigation and secure evidence while they wait for detectives from Fort Collins or Denver.

Interaction - *charm* or *interview* (+2 penalty): Sheriff Anderson can be a useful contact in Pine Creek if she can be convinced that the heroes can help the town and are trustworthy. The heroes must figure out a good story for her to do this. On a successful check she is more forthcoming:

"Actually, there have been some unsettling events around here lately. You probably know about the mountain hikers that are missing in this area. There is no pattern in where or whom, expect that all six where camping in the woods. There is no trace of them anywhere. All seemed capable of taking care of themselves in the woods. Sure, there are some wild animals around here, but few animals have been reported missing, and at least some of the bodies should have been found by now, if this was mere accidents or even random murders. No, something big is going on here."

She does not think Phelps has done anything illegal if asked, although she will admit he is strange. Drew Anderson is a Good quality Law Enforcer (see GMG page 98).

Josh McGovern: McGovern, the town doctor, is an elderly gentleman with no family. Someone he believes represents a pharmaceutical company bribed him to give access to his files and journals. He is not very proud of this, but it pays well, and he hopes no harm will come of it.

Robert Gordon: Robert Gordon is the owner of The Great Northern Hotel. He is a shrewd businessman who loves the hotel business and his daughter Kim. He works around the clock in the high season, and very little during the low season. His wife died two years ago of cardiac arrest, at the age of 42.

Frank Olsson: Frank Olsson, the town priest, believes the church should play a more active role in the fight against evil. He supported the cover-up of the missing corpses and was the one who convinced Sheriff Anderson to do nightly patrols to the graveyard. God is not something abstract and uncertain to Olsson: he has seen the evil that men do, and he is convinced there are supernatural forces at work. Olsson will pick up arms and be in the first line of defense, if the minions of Satan ever attack his town.

Sally Gardner: Sally is the owner of Gardner Sports, and is a seasoned guide of the woods and mountains around Pine Creek. She is probably the one people will refer to if the heroes search for someone familiar with area. She is a good friend of Robert Gordon.

Ron Katzenberger: Katzenberger is the chief engineer and administrator at the Pine Creek Water Plant. He takes pride in his work, although it is long days with little to do, but still he looks forward to his pension and plans to spend his golden years far away from Colorado.

LIFE IN TOWN

People generally live by the small town virtues; they are friendly, hospitable and curious. The heroes will have no trouble finding gossip, but must be prepared to have any information they give about themselves all over town in a few days.

The talk of the town these days includes:

The missing hikers: The disappearance of the mountain hikers saddens people. They are concerned this may effect the tourist trade.

The restored graveyard: Many of the townspeople are looking forward to see the graveyard restored.

Men in Black: Pine Creek has had its share of investigators from the FBI, and many other agencies in the last year. Many jokingly see conspiracies everywhere and may ridicule visitors fitting an MIB description.

The many deaths: Many townspeople have unexpectedly become ill and even died recent years. This saddens many.

Kim Gordon: The hotel owner's daughter was flirting with one of the FBI agents visiting town recently. People think he is coming to visit her during the upcoming holiday.

LES TREIZE CORBEAUX PRESENCE

The crows have a spy in Pine Creek and at least two groups active in Colorado. The spy has been sent by the cult leaders to watch Phelps, coordinate the tests with the Pine Creek drinking water, and to watch any suspicious newcomer in town. The spy acts as an observer and is very careful, probably hiding in plain sight, possibly as a guest at the hotel. The GM may develop more details if necessary.

The spy can call in the two other groups for aid if necessary. The other groups are a trio of motorcycle riding assassins, and a circle of Denver based cultists. The two groups have no knowledge of each other nor do they know the real identity of the spy, and the spy uses them separately to protect cult's interests.

The following encounters with Les Treize Corbeaux agents may occur in Pine Creek. Use a Les Treize Corbeaux SCM template for stats. Pick quality based on the heroes' combat abilities.

If the heroes are watching Phelps: The heroes spot a dark figure climbing up on a roof one night while watching Phelps. house. The figure sets up some equipment on a house roof before skulking away again. The figure works very quickly, climbs down, jumps on a trail bike and rides off out of town using a mountain trail. Remember that cars cannot follow the bikes into the woods.

Stealth - *shadow* (+2 penalty) and Awareness - *perception* (-1 bonus): The figure sneaks down from the roof, skulks across the street and jumps on a motorcycle parked there. The other Bikers join from a side road and all ride out of Pine Creek using a forest trail, unless the heroes choose to get involved. A failed shadow check indicates the Assassins have spotted any watchers and attack. A failed perception check indicates that the heroes lost the track

Awareness - *perception* (+2 penalty) and Knowledge - *deduce* (+1 penalty): Finding the right roof after watching from a distance. The GM should modify the perception check depending on the heroes' distance from the site. The biker has placed a Laser Mike (AEG, page 29) on the roof pointed at Phelps' mansion. The mike is equipped with a radio transceiver and a big battery.

The Biker Assassin attack: The spy calls in the team of motorcycle riding assassins to deal with the heroes, if they get too close to Phelps. The bikers can be in Pine Creek in 90 minutes. They prefer to attack at night if the heroes are in Pine Creek, possibly chasing the heroes through the streets. They will never ride their bikes into territory the heroes control unless they believe their targets are wounded. They do not mind drawing attention by making noise with their bikes, but are careful not to stay in the open long periods. They use houses, cars or any cover available to hide, not allowing anyone a clear shot at them.

The Biker Assassins are careful researchers when allowed to prepare before an attack. They scout the terrain and road maps carefully, finding shortcuts and escape routes, giving them a definitive edge in chases and vehicle combat. They prefer to attack targets on foot in open terrain, or cramped in a car in high speed. They will try to escape and fight another day if the fight is not going their way or they lose the element of surprise. They have been known to terrorize victims for days before completing their assignment.

The Cultist attacks: The members need 24 hours to gather, locate their target and make a plan before they strike. The Cultists are not trained soldiers, and prefer to attack unprepared sleeping targets. The cultists do not mind attacking at the hotel or a similar place, as they believe that the heroes are more afraid of exposure than they are. They are reluctant to attack in open or isolated places where the heroes can strike back without restraint. They know that their targets probably do not want to draw attention to themselves and will attack in places the targets are unlikely to use firearms, like hotels for example.

PHELPS' AGENTS

The group of thugs working for Phelps is hired through Yale University as research assistants, but no one at Yale can give a clear answer on who or why these assistants were hired. Phelps obviously used his considerable pull at Yale to get them hired, and there is a 50% chance that his allies notify him if anybody call Yale and asks about these people. They all have somewhat seedy pasts and go along with most of what Phelps has told them, but they are not monsters like Phelps. They will not kill innocents, and could even be turned against Phelps if they knew the reach of his evil. They have never been into the Heads Lab or the Freezer, and they do not know the contents of the packages Phelps receive on occasions.

Robert "Bobby" Libya: Male, white, age 26. Bobby is a rich kid, but has been disowned by his family. He was recently arrested for prostitution and drug possession in Los Angeles.

Theresa Spencer: Female, black, age 32. She worked in a security company until recently, and has excellent references. She was arrested for drug possession in 1995.

Liza Darrin: Female, white, age 35. She was a NYC cop, but fired for corruption.

Rich Martin: Male, white, age 28. Soldier during the Gulf war, he was suspended from service after accusations of torture from Iraqi prisoners. He spends more time with his laptop than attending to his duties.

John Camp: Male, black, age 29. Jamaica born gangster, arrested for drug possession in 1997. Camp wears a voodoo-charm at all times, and may know more than he is saying. Use the Spook SCM template for stats. Pick quality based on the heroes' combat abilities.

EVENTS AT THE PHELPS MANSION

Heroes tapping the telephones or listening in on Phelps' study will pick up several conversations of interest. These events will take place at 1 to 4 day intervals.

Telephone call during office hours:

Phelps calls Janet Parks, a secretary at the Biomedicine Faculty at Yale. Phelps will send one of his thugs to Yale the same evening as this conversation take place. The thug will be gone for 4 days, whereupon he or she returns with books from Phelps' office at Yale.

Phelps: *"Hello? Is it you Janet?"*

Janet Parks: *"Yes, this is Janet Parks."*

Phelps: *"Ah.Good. This is Raymond."*

Janet Parks: *"Raymond? For goodness sake, when are you coming back? You know."*

Phelps: *"Listen, I need some more papers from the office, quite a lot of them actually. I'm calling to tell you that I will be sending one of my assistants to pick them up for me. He will use my key, but you must inform security for me, and maybe help if something has ended up in the archive or at Phil's office. You know if something ends up there."*

Janet Parks: *"sure, sure."*

Phelps: *"Okay. Bye for now. Thanks."*

Janet Parks (sighs): *"Goodbye Raymond."*

Conversation between Phelps and a Thug:

This conversation takes place sometime one morning while the heroes are in Pine Creek:

Phelps: *"A new package is coming in tonight. Make sure that the containers are cleaned and the equipment ready."*

Thug: *"Okay. We will be ready."*

The package is fresh bodies for Phelps experiments delivered by two Les Treize Corbeaux members in a van. The biker assassins will escort the van if they have any reason to believe someone is after Phelps. The cult members in the van will take a detour and call in the biker assassins if they notice anyone on their trail. If the cultists fail, or there is no backup available, they return to Denver and prepare a confrontation of the GM's design there.

Successfully trailing the van require Stealth-*shadow* and Vehicle Operation - *land* checks: Stealth - *shadow* (4 successes required) and Vehicle Operation - *land* (no modifier): The heroes successfully shadow the van from Haven to Pine Creek, provided that they find some way to identify the van. The heroes lose the trail on a failure. Nothing disastrous happens on a critical failure, unless the heroes have attempted something particularly clever.

HACKING PHELPS' COMPUTER

Gaining access to Phelps' computer should be interesting. Heroes can do this by entering the house and use the computer, or by hacking into it through the Internet. The computer runs a slightly outdated operating system, connects to the Internet with a standard modem and receives a random IP address from Phelps' Internet Service Provider (ISP). Heroes can hack into the computer through the Internet in at least two ways:

The Trojan: The heroes could send Phelps a Trojan horse in the form of an executable program file as an e-mail attachment. The problem is that Phelps is the one who has to execute the Trojan, so the e-mail must present the .exe file in a believable manner. The heroes must do a thorough background check, and probably make some good guesses

Street Smart - *net savvy* (-1 bonus): The hero finds Phelps' e-mail address at the Yale website.

Computer Science - *hacking* (+2 penalty, 4 successes required) or Street Smart - *net savvy* (no modifier): The hero either programs or finds a Trojan on the Internet.

Deception - *bluff* (modifier varies): The heroes can enter Phelps computer at their leisure whenever Phelps connects his computer to the Internet, if the bluff is successful.

Making Phelps take the bait and open the attachment is the challenge. Phelps is no computer wiz, but knows the basic principles of computer hacking and viruses, and will certainly not jeopardize his computer thoughtlessly. Sending Phelps a mysterious attachment without a convincing story is the surest way to tell him that someone after him! Making a convincing story will require a good plan and most certainly requires some other skill checks from the heroes. The GM must decide the final situation die.

Hacker run: The heroes could try to track down his IP address number when he connects to the Internet, and enter the computer. The easiest way is probably to hack into the Yale ISP server (easier to find, as it has a static IP address), and monitor Phelps from there. Doing this takes considerable online time from the heroes, as Phelps is only online a couple of hours every day. The agent trying to hack into Phelps computer must wait online until Phelps shows up, and act before he disconnects.

This translates into a Computer Science - *hacking* (+2 penalty) skill check. Suggestions on how to solve the task are suggested below, but creative players with computer skills may surprise you, so prepare for serious techno babble. Note that Phelps could get suspicious about degraded performance if the heroes get greedy and try to get more than one file, and disconnect.

3 Failures: The Yale ISP notices that something is wrong and closes the connection. They will alert the FBI. The GM must decide what happens next.

1 Success: The agent successfully locates the Yale ISP server.

2 Successes: The agent successfully enters the Yale ISP server and must wait for Phelps to connect.

3 Successes: Maybe a full day later, Phelps is observed connecting.

4 Successes: The agent successfully downloads a file from Phelps computer. Consider giving the agents more than one file per hack to speed up game play. Otherwise, Phelps disconnects before a second file downloads successfully, and the hero attempting the hack must start over.

PHELPS´ MANSION, KEYED ENTRIES

Phelps' house is quite old, and while it is well-maintained Phelps has not done much with it for the past 30 years. Most of the furniture and the wallpaper date back to the 1960's, some even longer - the only recent additions are the security devices, the lab and the items the guards brought with them. The house is built for a large family, not just one man with a few guards, so many rooms have not been used in 30 years and they certainly look that way. The house is dusty, messy and largely empty.

There is a secret ladder going through the house. Secret doors on all three levels cover the ladder, but there has been no attempt to hide it in the basement. If he is in need of a fast escape, Phelps will use this, trigger the bomb in the basement, and try to escape through the back door if possible. He will bring with him any available thugs.

A central security board controls the alarm system through numerous security panels, which control specific windows, doors and so on. The system has its own power supply, so cutting power in the area will not affect the houses defenses. Turning on or off one of the security panels will only affect its specific tasks, not the entire system. The security system tapes the camera in the garden (area 0) and at the basement door (area 22). The central alarm controls the video recorder, and is located in the guardroom (area 14). If the recording is the only sign of the heroes, there is an 85% chance their intrusion remains undetected. The central alarm monitors some of the doors and all the windows. Breaking down doors or smashing windows will trigger the alarm. Once triggered the alarm will alert anyone present in areas 14 or 15.

0. GARDEN

A 2-meter tall iron fence surrounds the overgrown garden. Tall trees block most of the windows, the house badly needs new paint and the place has a worn and tired look.

Sneaking through the garden is difficult. There is a stationary camera covering each side of the house, but they have a narrow blind spot at the corners, and along the walls. The guards are not paying too much attention, unless they already have reason to be. They have a 10% chance of noticing trespassing heroes caught on the video.

Awareness - *perception* (-1 bonus) and Security - *security devices* (-1 bonus): Success indicates that the heroes are able to spot and identify the security camera. Good binoculars will give a -1 bonus on each check.

Stealth - *sneak* (+2 penalty): Success indicates that an intruder in the garden is able to use the blind zone at the corners to reach the wall. The hero remains in a blind zone as long as he or she stays by the walls.

Heroes who want to sneak in through a window must first open it:

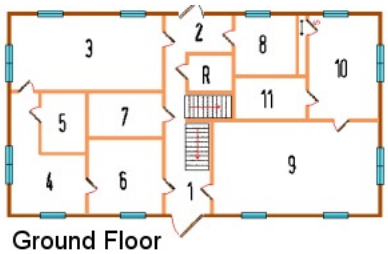
Manipulation - *lockpick* (+2 penalty, 3 successes required): The hero successfully opens the window. A failure will trigger the central alarm.

R. RESTROOM

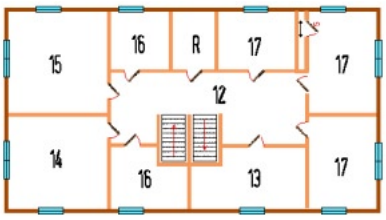
This is a restroom.

1. FRONT DOOR

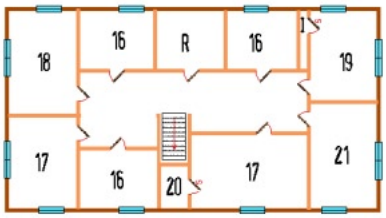
Heroes who wish to enter the house uninvited through the front door will probably try to pick the lock. A camera covers the area by the door, but the guard has only a 10% chance of noticing heroes caught in the video frame, unless they ring the doorbell. The guards automatically see people in the door camera, if they have reason to expect visitors.



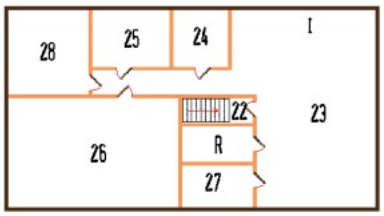
Ground Floor



First Floor



Top Floor



Basement

PHELPS MANSION

PHELPS´ MANSION – MAP KEY

R. Restroom
1. Front door
2. Back door
3. Dining room
4. Kitchen
5. Kitchen storage
6. Passageway
7. Closet
8. Tool shed
9. Living room
10. Smoking room
11. Storage
12. Hall
13. Converted bedroom
14. Guards' HQ
15. Guards' living room
16. Guards' bedroom
17. Unused bedroom
18. Master bedroom
19. Phelps' bedroom
20. Secret room
21. Library
22. Basement door
23. Laboratory
24. Laboratory bedroom
25. Incinerator
26. Freezer
27. Mainframe
28. Laboratory storage

Security - *security devices* (-1 bonus): The hero successfully turns off the security camera. The guards eventually will notice this, unless the trespassers turn it on again when they leave. A critical failure destroys the camera and triggers the central alarm.

Manipulation - *lockpick* (+2 penalty): Success indicates that the hero is able to pick the lock. Heroes get two shots at this, the central alarm will trigger on the third attempt, or on critical failures.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players when the heroes enter the room:

You hear a faint squeak from the floor as you enter the room and you smell the distinct smell of mold and old wood. You see the stairs to the second floor, a door on each side of the room, the entrance door, and the hallway to the back of the house. You see an alarm panel by the entrance door.

Trespassing heroes now have 2 minutes to disable the alarm, or the central alarm triggers:

Security - *security devices* (+2 penalty): The hero successfully turns of the security panel. The guards eventually will notice this, unless the trespassers turn it on again when they leave. A critical failure destroys the panel and triggers the central alarm.

2. BACK DOOR

Heroes who wish to enter the house uninvited through the back door will probably try to pick the lock:

Manipulation - *lockpick* (+2 penalty): Success indicates that the hero is able to pick the lock. Heroes get two shots at this, the central alarm triggers on the third attempt or on critical failures.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players when the heroes enter the room:

The floor is dirty, you see dozens of shoes and dirty boots lined along the walls, and there is an alarm panel by the entrance door.

Trespassing heroes now have 2 minutes to disable the alarm, or the central alarm triggers:

Security - *security devices* (+2 penalty): The hero successfully turns of the security panel. The guards will eventually notice this, unless the trespassers turn it back on when they leave. A critical failure destroys the panel and triggers the central alarm.

3. DINING ROOM

This dining room is dark and dusty.

4. KITCHEN

This kitchen is messy.

5. KITCHEN STORAGE

There is a fridge, a freezer and shelves with enough food to sustain ten people for weeks.

6. PASSAGEWAY

You see dozens of old family pictures on the walls.

7. CLOSET

You see five closets and a large mirror in the room.

Heroes that look closer find dozens of suits, shoes, summer and winter clothes in the closets.

8. TOOL SHED

There are several shovels, gardening tools, two sacks of fertilizer and a rack with dirty work clothes in the room. There is a box on the wall by the door, and you can hear a faint humming sound from it.

The box regulates the building's power supply. The heroes notice that the house uses lots of power, if anyone cares to check. The dirt on the floor matches the type found in the garden and at the graveyard, if checked in a lab.

9. LIVING ROOM

This is a living room.

10. SMOKING ROOM

You see a pair of chesterfield chairs, shelves with books, brandy, cognac and cigars in the room. There is a telephone on a small table.

11. STORAGE

The room stores the necessities of housekeeping: a vacuum cleaner, mop and buckets, washing machine and a dryer.

12. HALL

This is a hallway.

13. CONVERTED BEDROOM

There are wooden pieces on the floor, children's drawings on the wall and iron bars inside the window. The room is otherwise empty.

Anyone caught trespassing in the house is locked away in this room, for a suitable terminal punishment. Anyone who stays here for more than three days is likely to be drugged and end up with their head in a jar and body in the incinerator. The glass in the window is bullet proof.

14. GUARDS´ HQ

Phelps' thugs have established their base of operation in this room. The phone switchboard and the central security system are located here. From here they monitor every camera, window and entrance. They record each camera on 48-hour tapes, and store tapes for 96 hours until they erase recordings.

15. GUARDS´ LIVING ROOM

This is the main hangout for Phelps' thugs. It has all the entertainment facilities for a bored guard: magazines, coffee machine, TV with VCR, stereo and so on.

16. GUARDS´ BEDROOM

There is a single bed, a closet, a desk and a mirror in the room.

The different thug's rooms should have details that reflect each thug's personality and history.

17. UNUSED BEDROOM

There is a single bed, a closet, a desk and a mirror in the room.

18. MASTER BEDROOM

The door is locked, but may be picked with a simple Manipulation - *lockpick* check.

You see a double bed, three closets, a desk and a bedside table in the room. A full size mirror stands in a corner and a painting of a middle-aged woman hangs on the wall. On the opposite wall are dozens of black-and-white photographs of a family at the beginning of the 20th century.

The woman on the painting can be identified as Phelps' mother by anyone who has done some research on the family. The black and white pictures are of the Phelps family. There is old 1930's style clothing in the closets. The room is extremely dusty.

19. PHELPS´ BEDROOM

You see a double bed, two closets, a desk and a bedside table in the room.

20. SECRET ROOM

This is a small room with a simple desk, a telephone and a chair. There is a computer on the table.

The computer has a modem connected to the phone line. The password is "Veronica", after Phelps' mother. A hero with hacking skills and appropriate software may try to bypass the password and access the computer's contents:

Computer Science - *hacking* (no modifier): The computer is password protected. Success indicates that the hacker bypasses the password and may access the computer.

A short inventory of Phelps' computer:

- Thirty-eight research papers about the human brain written by scientists from all over the world during the past 20 years.
- Seven drafts of master degree papers from biomedicine students, all supervised by Raymond Phelps.
- Detailed maps of the Rocky Mountains, including satellite photos
- The computer holds 3 megabytes of encrypted files. These files are Phelps' research on the Heads device, including technical design plans and data. The files are incomplete, and duplicating the research would be very difficult if Phelps dies or for some reason decides not to complete it.
- The address book is a text file containing more than 200 names, all written in some sort of code. Decoding the list require a complex Investigation - *cryptography* check, or a complex Social Science - *linguistics* check.

21. LIBRARY

There are thousands of dusty books in this library.

22. BASEMENT DOOR

This area is covered by a camera, placed right above the basement door. There is no way anyone can sneak passed it. It is impossible to see the camera without standing in its view. The door is locked.

Manipulation - *lockpick* (+4 penalty): The hero successfully picks the lock. A critical failure .jams the door (no further attempts can be made) and triggers the central alarm.

23. LABORATORY

The room is a large well-equipped lab.

The north end of the room has an opening in the ceiling with a ladder coming halfway down to the floor. Phelps has hidden a bomb under one of the benches. It is normally not active. If possible, Phelps will activate the bomb if he needs to escape, setting a 30-minute time limit.

24. LABORATORY BEDROOM

In the room are a single bed, a large wooden box, a chair and some magazines on the floor.

In the wooden box is a bulletproof vest, a 9mm pistol with ammo, a backpack with emergency rations, some maps and a GPS.

25. INCINERATOR

There is an incinerator in the room.

The incinerator has been used recently and then cleaned. Anyone analyzing the remaining ashes will learn that the ash is composed of biological matter, very likely human, as well as ordinary waste. Most of Phelps' secrets will end up here, if he has time before he tries to escape.

26. FREEZER

You see a freezer and a portable generator in the room.

In the freezer are biological tissue samples and three plastic wrapped corpses (with heads). If the bodies are examined thoroughly it can be seen that one of the bodies is an old man, approximately the same height and build as Phelps.

The mansion has a backup power supply in addition to the ordinary power supply.

27. MAINFRAME

On the middle of the floor is something that looks like a modified IBM supercomputer from the early 80's. Two of its sides are open, and wires cover the floor connecting the computer to racks that cover all walls. On the racks are dozens of 40 to 50 cm cylindrical jars, each of them filled with a transparent jelly like goo. More than half of the jars contain sawn off, clean shaved human heads connected to the jar top and bottom with strange circuitry and wires. The heads are well preserved, almost lifelike and seem to stare blankly into the air in the middle of the room.

There are 52 jars in total in the room, 34 contain sawn-off human heads. The jars connect to the racks with sockets. Simply pulling one of the jars out of its socket triggers the central alarm, and Phelps and any present thugs arrive in 1-2 minutes.

Lore - *fringe science* (no modifier) or Security - *security devices* (+1 penalty): The hero successfully turns off the alarm that monitors the jars, and may pull jars out of the sockets without alerting anyone.

28. LABORATORY STORAGE

The room holds a years worth of paper towels, latex gloves and large plastic bags. There is a first aid kit locker on the wall at the end of the room.

The first aid locker is authentic enough, but hides a small safe embedded in the wall. The safe weighs about 150 kilos. Anyone who looks closer notices that it is possible to pull aside the locker. The heroes may want to have a peek inside:

Manipulation - *lockpick* (+5 penalty): A lockpick attempt on the safe requires a good quality lockpick set and an electronics kit. Success indicates that the hero is able to open the safe. The safe holds some money, Phelps' bonds and personal papers and encrypted backup CD's with Phelps' research (see section about Phelps' computer for details).

SCENE 3: RISE OF THE DEAD

LOCATION: Pine Creek, Colorado.

This scene only occurs if Phelps realizes that someone is watching him. He has used his Necromantic powers, combined with the Mask, to summon 50 or so Zombies that have been hiding at the bottom of Pine Creek Lake. His plan is to create as much havoc as possible to cover his escape into the woods. He may have been better off slipping away quietly, but this is a welcome chance to test out his Zombies, get even with annoying townsfolk and deal with curious investigators in one blow, so maybe a full-blown Zombie attack is exactly what the situation demands.

It will certainly be a challenge, but there are at least two ways the heroes' earlier actions can prevent the scene from happening. First, they can collect their evidence so quietly that Phelps never notices, and report back to the Hoffmann Institute. Alternatively, they could decide to take him out so hard and fast that he never gets a chance to react. The heroes have changed the course of the adventure, if they manage to do this. Be ready to improvise a new ending, now on the heroes' terms.

The heroes face a most dire fate if Phelps and his Thugs capture them. Phelps will lock them away in the improvised cell (area 13), set the firebomb in the lab (area 23) and summon his Zombies, before making his escape into the woods. Consider having him make a speech, revealing his master plan to the heroes as in James Bond movies.

ZOMBIES FROM THE LAKE

If Phelps summons his Zombies, read or paraphrase the following:

Around 02.00 hours you hear an explosion somewhere in town, screams of terror and the sound of breaking glass. What do you do?

If the heroes get up and look out the window, they see slow moving .people. staggering about, breaking down doors and smashing windows. The Zombies are searching the town in groups of four to six, looking for life to destroy, beginning with the closest available. A nearby house is on fire, and people are running about screaming for help. Phelps is now leaving town, followed by his thugs. The heroes must deal with the Zombie attack as best as they can, solve their assignment, aid civilians as time allows and their moral ethics demands, and hopefully get out of town alive. This is the climax of the adventure, be ready to improvise, and try to make it as exciting and challenging as possible.

The heroes could easily flee from Pine Creek as the Zombies are slow moving and the heroes probably have access to vehicles. The GM should throw a couple of Zombies their way and a couple of the street encounters listed below, to heighten the tension and to make sure that the players realize what cowardice will cost innocent bystanders.

The heroes may choose to handle the emergency with a direct approach. It is easy for the heroes to intercept the Zombies from their current targets and take the fight themselves. The heroes will get some aid from armed civilians, Sheriff Anderson will certainly do her part but the fight will probably drag out, and there will be a considerable loss of civilian life, even if the heroes win.

Raymond Phelps can stop the Zombies using his necromantic powers and the magical mask he has in his possession. See *Chase and Final Showdown* below.

STREET ENCOUNTERS

Any heroes passing through the Pine Creek town center during the Zombie attack will encounter some or all or the events listed below.

- Zombies are attacking a lady in a phone box. She is desperately holding the door while the Zombies break the glass. The woman is as good as dead, unless the heroes do something.

- Zombies are breaking down a door to a private house, and heroes passing by hear terrified screams from inside.
- The heroes encounter the Biker Assassins on their way to the Phelps Mansion. Les Treize Corbeaux has figured out what Phelps is up to and have sent the bikers to take him out and salvage whatever of his research they can get their hands on. Introduce another gang of bikers, if the heroes have already dealt with the first one.
- Sheriff Anderson and one of her deputies are storming into a house hot on the heels of three Zombies.
- Frank Olsson, the town priest, armed with a shotgun and a bible, is heading towards a house from which the heroes hear screams of pain and terror.
- The heroes pass a house where parts of the ground floor are on fire. A window on the second floor is open and two kids are screaming for help. There are probably Zombies inside the house.
- A black van stops beside the heroes and disgorges some Les Treize Corbeaux cultists with clubs raised high.

ZOMBIE GAME DATA

STR 12 INT 6

DEX 6WIL 3

CON 14 PER 1

Durability: 14/14/7/7 Action check: 7+/6 / 4/ 2

Move: walk 4 #Actions: 2

Reaction score: Marginal / 1

Attacks

Claws 14/7/3 d6s/d4w/d4m

Defences

+ 1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

Armor: d4 (LI), d4-1 (HI), d4-2 (En)

Skills

Unarmed (12) - *brawl* (13); Stamina (14) - *endurance* (15), *resist*

pain (16)

CHASE AND FINAL SHOWDOWN

Phelps and his thugs are all seasoned trailblazers, and are now heading out of town. They have prepared backpacks with the necessary mountain hiking equipment and the pieces of Phelps' research. They start from Phelps' house as soon as they see the Zombies emerge from the lake.

A thug has left an hour earlier to find a lookout post to cover the retreat with suppressive fire, if necessary. This sniper is not necessarily out to kill anyone, merely scare any pursuers away. The sniper will leave his spot and walk to Fort Collins when Phelps is safely away. Phelps has ensured that the thug doing this job does not know where the secret hideout is located.

Phelps has placed a bomb in the basement lab to cover his escape and destroy evidence. He has the radio link to the bomb, and plans to trigger it as soon has he has passed the tree line and entered the woods. Phelps has placed a dead body that vaguely resembles him in the Heads Lab after giving it his watch, clothes, wallet and so on. Anyone inside the room when the bomb detonates suffers 1d4 mortal damage, anyone in the house 1d2 mortal damage.

Phelps has prepared his escape for a long time, and with the recent trouble in town and the possible betrayal of his former allies, is willing to spare no-one and nothing to escape. His fear and paranoia has finally consumed what is left of the once great scientist.

With no more thugs, Cultists or Zombies to block any pursuers, he will use *energy drain* as a last resort and will fight as long as he can. He has little more to lose except his freedom.

Capture immediately breaks the old mans spirit, leaving a silent suicidal shell of his former self. Threatening Phelps into stopping the zombie attack automatically fails. The heroes must make Phelps understand what he has done and why, but there is no time for a full treatment, hence the difficulty of the check. It would certainly help if the heroes have done careful research on Phelps - knowledge about his parents' death gives a -1 bonus, as will references to the dying children in Pine Creek. Phelps will shrug off his dreamlike state and order the Zombies back to the lake if the check is successful.

THE MASK

Control over Phelps' Necromancy Mask is the key to solving the scene with minimal loss of civilian life. Heroes unfamiliar with necromantic arts cannot use the mask (as noted in **Demonground 9)**. If Phelps is unwilling or unable to stop the Zombie attack, the heroes may try to destroy the Mask.

The Mask is made of hard wood and will not break or burn easily. Each option will take some time to complete. The heroes may shoot it to pieces, but even this requires several shots with standard 9 mm pistols.

The GM must decide what happens if anyone attempts to destroy the mask. Chose from the options below, or make up something else entirely:

- The Zombies will stop doing whatever they are doing and come after the Mask's destroyer.
- The Zombies will stop doing whatever they are doing and return to the lake. The GM must decide how long they will stay in the lake.
- The evil that resides in the Mask will try to possess anyone trying to destroy it. A possessed hero will join the battle on the Zombies' side. Resolve - *mental* (+1 penalty): A successful check means the hero resisted possession. A new check is required each phase the hero tries to destroy the mask. For more about possession, see DM page 81.
- Phelps calms down and realize what he has done. In addition, one of the options above also happens.

AFTERMATH

A number of issues may remain unresolved after the adventure, giving opportunities for an ongoing campaign.

Dunbar will hear almost immediately if something serious is happening in Pine Creek. If he has not already done so, within 1-3 hours he will clean up his house of any sign of illicit doings.

Using his contacts and resources to distance himself from Phelps, he will then backtrack and try to find out what happened. He is likely to send assassins after the heroes, or use his resources to get the heroes arrested or framed for something other than the break-in if possible. He could be a powerful recurring villain if he discovers who the heroes are and for whom they work. Dunbar is the link to a larger conspiracy with its roots in Henri Lauberger. Who this group is and what it is planning could be almost anything.

The matter of Les Treize Corbeaux remains unresolved. The cultist activity in Pine Creek can be traced back to Denver, and possibly further.

The Hoffmann Institute is interested in finding Phelps, if he escaped, and stopping him doing whatever he is planning to do when he completes his research. Phelps' secret hideout could possibly have some connection to Operation Paperclip, the Nazis or the CIA.

The Hoffmann Institute wants to identify the bodies found in Phelps' lab and Dunbar's house if possible, but probably will not try to take the bodies unless they have a chance to prepare the operation thoroughly. Hiding 38 corpses is not easy, even for the Hoffmann Institute! The GM must decide who the dead people are, if necessary. Some could be people with privileged knowledge Dunbar and Phelps wanted, while others are random test victims. The identities of these unfortunates can be a great story seed and a tie-in to an ongoing campaign.

Act Two Scene Three requires a cover-up to keep a public status quo. The ongoing campaign's resident villainous government agency sends military personnel and agents to arrest anyone who knows too much, intimidate those who are undecided on what they saw, and hide what evidence they can get their hands on. This Agency will most certainly show interest in any Hoffmann Institute agents at the site, but the GM must decide how to deal with them.

ACHIEVEMENT POINTS

The following bonuses are suggested when the adventure is completed:

- You should award the heroes if they avoid Act Two Scene Three. An aborted mission because of an earlier failure does not qualify.
- A further 2 points for keeping the heroes' identities and Hoffmann Institute affiliation secret.
- Award 1 point for avoiding confrontation with the law.
- Award 2 points for stopping other illuminati groups form getting their hands on Phelps, or his research. This should be a conscious decision from the player's side. Simply killing him to tie loose ends does not qualify.
- Award 2 points if the heroes get Phelps' research, 1 point if they destroy it.
- Give a 1 point bonus if the heroes obtain the Necromancy mask and return it to the Hoffmann Institute, and another for attempts to use it to stop the Zombie attack.

HANDOUTS

HO1 - THE DOSSIER

Richard Edward Dunbar Dossier

Case File GO-13B11-53366

CLASSIFIED - SECRET

Caucasian male, 178 cm, 82 kg,

Hair: blonde, Eyes: blue

DOB: 01-01-1955

1981: Father, Charles Dunbar, dies of cancer.

1984: Richard Dunbar graduates Law degree at Yale. He joins the Republican Party as a secretary, law advisor and researcher, and work full time at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from 1989 to 1991.

1992: Richard Dunbar begins working at the Department of Health and Human Services as a special adviser.

Family: Richard Dunbar is the youngest son of Charles and Edna Dunbar of Boston. Charles was a successful lawyer until he died of cancer in 1981. Edna lives today in Chesterfield Nursery Home in Somerville. Richard's brother, Thomas Dunbar, runs gas station in Somerville, while his sister Anne Dunbar in an executive at Universal Studios, Los Angeles. Richard has little contact with the family, as far as we know.

Friends: Dunbar has maintained contact with some of his fellow students from Yale. He makes occasional phone calls to Janet Martin, William Court and Bruce Wyatt. Pictures and notes from the Yale student newspaper indicate that Dunbar and Martin where dating. Institute informants have seen William Court leaving "The Tomb", the Skull and Bones Society headquarters at Yale. Dunbar has telephone contact with Raymond Phelps, a Professor at Yale, about every other month.

HO2 - THE LETTER

Addendum: Case File GO-13B11-53366

A letter found in Jacob Dumont's apartment on October 21, 2001

Mr. Dumont;

I warn you, the old man is growing more unreliable and may blow the whistle prematurely. I do not know if the Order has noticed, or not. Let us not find out, and have the Crows to send an agent to watch him, just in case.

21.05.2001, R.D.

Institute researcher's note:
Investigating agents found the letter in Jacob Dumont apartment. We found Richard Dunbar's fingerprints on the letter.

HO3 - THE SITE REPORT

Addendum: Case File GO-4VP11-05366

Richard E. Dunbar's house

A Baltimore team of agents watched Richard E. Dunbar's house, 1254 Swithham Road, Georgetown, DC, the period 26th of October 2001 to 2nd of November 2001. They found the following:

(1) Dunbar usually leaves the house at 0800 and return around 2200 hours.

(2) There is a guard from a private security company posted on the first floor at all times. The guard spends much of the time watching TV, but does walk occasional walks in the garden and the neighborhood. There in total 3 guards, each going 8 hours shifts. They change at midnight, at 0800 and at 0400 hours. The guards are employees of the SecTech Company.

(3) There is a motion detector perimeter of some sort covering the garden. The team experimented with throwing a cat into the garden (which triggered the detector), throwing a large rock into the garden (which triggered the detector), throwing a small rock into the garden (which did not trigger the detector) and paying a kid to crawl into the garden .to get his ball. (which triggered the detector a minute after the kid entered the garden).

(4) The guard and Dunbar have discussed detectors in the windows.

(5) There is a watchdog inside the house.

(6) Anyone entering the house must enter a code to the alarm system, or the alarm will go off after a short period. The security panels are at the gate, and inside the two doors.

(7) There is a camera covering the front door. There are monitor in the TV-room on the ground floor, and in Dunbar office. There may be more cameras. We do not know if there are recordings.

HANDOUTS

HO4 - THE MASK REPORT

Arcane Report: .Necromancy Masks.

Case file # BO - 23O27-0103

The masks, although seemingly unrelated, appear to have .magical. powers over the undead. Occult sects seem to believe that they even have the power to summon the undead. There are at least two wooden masks of significance to necromantic cults:

(1) Captain Neal Westward of the British army brought the Lagos Mask to London from Lagos, Nigeria in 1862. Army officials took the mask from slavers in a lesson of Imperial justice. The Westward later donated the mask to British Museum after a few years at the Westward estate in Surrey, England. Since 1948, British Museum officials have refused to let anyone outside of the museum staff study it.

(2) The Oseberg Mask when Norwegian archeologists discovered and unearthed the Oseberg Viking ship was in 1904. The mask came to our notice when agents visited Oslo in 1928 to investigate a series of killings with occult aspects. The Oseberg Mask has been missing since World War 2.

HO6 - DISK SUMMARY

Addendum: Case file # GO-4VP11-05366

Documents stored in Richard E Dunbar's computer (Summary and status)

Analysis and categorization of the contents of Richard E Dunbar's home computer revealed the following:

Twenty-two FDA reports on numerous research projects, most of them government funded. Fourteen involved research on the brain, 10 of them was about decomposition of mammal bodies. The computer also stored nine drafts of master degree papers by various biomedicine students, of which seven where supervised by Professor Raymond Phelps and the remaining two by Professor Sarah Portman. The disk also stored two Megabyte's worth of encrypted files, ordered in three folders labeled "work", "old_mail" and "heads". The decryption-team will have a look at the encrypted files next year, at the earliest.

HO5 - THE E-MAIL

Addendum: Case file # GO-4VP11-05366
E-mail extracted from Richard E Dunbar's home computer
From: Deadboy
To: Dick Dunbar
Date: 24.06.2001
Topic: the Geezer

I don't care if the old man is losing it, HE IS YOUR PROBLEM!

In fact, I think he is planning to ditch us. We have enough trouble supplying him with test subjects without having him pull any stunts.

I don't care if you prefer smoke signals either, I don't have a pen and ain't planning to buy one either.

Institute researcher's note:

An unknown person sent this letter to Richard E Dunbar's fda.gov address from a Hotmail account. Hotmail server-logs indicate that the Hotmail account has been accessed from Highway exits and motels. We have yet to identity .Deadboy., but profiling experts believe it as a man.

RICHARD EDWARD DUNBAR — FDA CONSULTANT, OCCULTIST — Level 7 Diplomat (Tech-Op)

STR 8 [-] **INT** 12 [+1]
DEX 9 [-] **WIL** 12 [+1]
CON 8 **PER** 11
Durability: 9 / 9 / 5 / 5 /
Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4
Action check: 12+ / 11/ 5 / 2 # Actions: 2
Reaction score: 2/Ordinary Last resort: 2 (2 cost)
Perks: Powerful Ally (Skull and Bones Society), Networked
Flaws: Rampant paranoia
Achievements: 4 Contacts
FX energy points: 10

Attacks

Pistol 9mm, 10/ 5/ 2, HI/O, d4+1w/d4+2w/d4m

Defenses

+1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
+1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

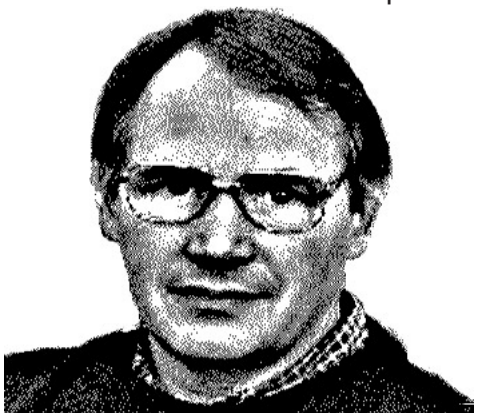
Armor: none.

Skills

Athletics (8);
Melee weapons (8) - *blade* (9);
Ranged weapons modern (9) - *Pistol* (10);
Vehicle operation (9) - *land* (10);
Stamina (8); Business (12) - *corporate* (13);
Knowledge (12) – *deduce* (13), *Latin* (13), *French* (13);
Law (12) . *court procedures* (13);
Security (12);
Social science (12);
Administration (12) - *bureaucracy* (14);
Awareness (12);
Deception (11) - *bribe* (12);
Interaction (11) - *bargain* (12);
Leadership (11)

FX skills

Necromancy . *animate dead* (14), *speak with dead* (14)



Gear: 9 mm pistol, cell phone, address book

Contacts: Richard Dunbar's contacts are members of governmental agencies, the Republican Party or even the Presidential administration.

Background: Richard, born 1950, is the youngest son of Charles and Edna Dunbar of Boston. Charles was a successful lawyer until he died of cancer in 1981. Edna was ill for long periods of Richard's childhood. Mental illness and alcohol sent her in and out of mental institutions throughout the sixties and seventies, until she gradually got better during the eighties. She lives today in Chesterfield Nursery Home in Somerville. Richard's brother, Thomas Dunbar, runs a gas station in Somerville, his sister Anne Dunbar in an executive at Universal Studios in Hollywood. Richard Dunbar got his law degree at Yale in 1984, whereupon he joined the Republican Party as a secretary, law advisor and researcher. He worked full time for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from 1989 to 1991 where he was responsible for research funding. He lost his position at the FDA in 1992 when Clinton took the reins in D.C., but stayed with the Department of Health and Human Services as a special adviser, where he carefully working against the President, while staying out of the limelight himself.

Dunbar has developed a solid drug habit, after years with stress at work, growing paranoia and occult rituals. He is now using sleeping pills and amphetamine on a daily basis.

Long-term surveillance of Richard Dunbar will prove to be a dreary task, not suited for restless Field Agents. He will, unless forced into action, quietly continue his work at the FDA, occasionally making phone calls to his associates from secure lines or by sending letters. Finding anything useful here could take months, and thus beyond the scope of this adventure.

RAYMOND ALBERT PHELPS

PROFESSOR IN BIOMEDICINE, OCCULTIST

Level 7 Free Agent

STR 8 [0] **INT** 13 [+3]
DEX 11 [+1] **WIL** 13 [+2]
CON 9 **PER** 9

Durability: 9 / 9 / 5 / 5 /

Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4

Action check: 15+ / 14 / 7 / 3Actions: 2

Reaction score: 2/Ordinary Last resort: 2

Perks: Powerful Ally (Thugs), Networked

Flaws: Obsessed #2, Temper #2

Achievements: 2 contacts

FX energy points: 5

Attacks

Unarmed 4/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s
Unarmed combat modifier +d4
Energy drain 14/7/3 EN/O d6+1s/d8+2s/d4+1f
(-1 bonus if wearing the Necromancy Mask)

Defenses

+1 DEX resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
+3 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
+2 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Armor: none.

Skills

Athletics (8);
Manipulation (11);
Stealth (11) - *hide* (13),
Sneak (12);
Vehicle operation (11) - *car* (12);
Movement (9) - *trailblazing* (10);
Stamina (9);
Knowledge (13);
Life science (13);
Medical science (13) - *medical knowledge* (16);
Security (13);
Administration (13) - *bureaucracy* (14);
Awareness (13) - *intuition* (14);
Lore (13) - *fringe science* (14);
Resolve (13) - *mental*(14);
Deception (9) - *bluff* (10);
Interaction (9)

FX skills

Necromancy . *animate dead* (14),
speak with dead (14),
energy drain (14)

Gear: Cell phone, his house and equipment in Pine Creek, A Necromancy Mask (See Demonground 9 for description)

Contacts: Phelps has two unspecified contacts he could draw upon in an emergency. You are encouraged to use these contacts as a bridge to other adventures, or expand the scope of this adventure. Steven Richard Phelps, Raymond's father, was a successful landowner and investor the years following World War 1 up to the crash in 1929. Steven Phelps lost almost everything in the crash and committed suicide in the only building he had left, his house in Pine Creek. Other family branches still had money, even prospered the years after the crash, and cared for Steven's children. Raymond had two elder brothers and one sister.

Background: Raymond Phelps, Steven's son was born in 1919, lived an uneventful childhood first in Pine Creek, later with his aunt in Denver. His mother drowned in the Pine Creek Lake in 1924. He served in the U.S. army during World War 2 and stayed with the force until he started as a student at Yale University in 1947. He dropped the economy classes, started to study archaeology instead and soon became a pupil of Professor Lauberger, before he decided that medicine was his field. Raymond Phelps became interested in the supernatural in the 1951 when the Skull and Bones Society recruited him as a member. Yale hired him in 1953, where he has stayed at the Biomedicine Faculty since.

The Heads Project has become an obsession for Phelps recent years. He is an old man with failing health, and he feels he can somehow overcome death, if he completes the Heads-device.

His growing paranoia has made him extremely jumpy, he will lash out at any perceived attempt on stopping his work. Last year he hired a few thugs to do his dirty work. Phelps is paying them extremely well, although he has not yet used them for anything serious. Phelps is not willing to share his eventual discovery with Dunbar, The Crows or any of Lauberger's associates. He fells that that their funding and support have not been enough to be given a share of the project's fruits, so he is preparing to leave and continue the work in a secret lab somewhere in the Rocky Mountains.

SPOOKS

Spooks are the regular members field agents of any governmental agency or appearance-minded conspiracy. Most Spooks are hard-working people who believe they serve profit, justice and the public interest, while the upper echelons are deeply involved in conspiracy and work to hide the truth from the public.

The Marginal Spook is usually encountered conducting house-to-house investigations, stakeouts and other simple and labor-intensive tasks. They generally have no clue of the larger picture, with work that often seem frustrating and outright pointless.

The Ordinary Spook is an accomplished field agent capable of conducting full investigations and securing evidence that otherwise would have been lost.

The Good Spook is in charge of investigations, has secret knowledge of the state of the world and seen things that do not fit within the frame of conventional science.

The Amazing Spook is in charge of strategic decisions for his or her employer. Some work outside the established organizations as a free agent, or hold key positions in several organizations. The Amazing Spook knows the system so well that he or she in many ways is above or at least outside it. Getting to an Amazing Spook is difficult and almost impossible by legal means.

	M	O	G	A
STR	8	9	10	10
DEX	9	10	11	11
CON	8	9	10	11
INT	9	11	12	13
WIL	10	11	12	14
PER	9	10	11	13
Action Check	9	10	11	12
#Actions	2	2	2	3

Marginal Skills: Athletics; Modern Ranged Weapon - *pistol*; Vehicle Operation - *land*; Stamina; Knowledge; Awareness; Investigate - *research*; Interaction - *interview*

Ordinary Skills: Athletics; Unarmed Attack; Modern Ranged Weapon - *pistol* 2; Vehicle Operation - *land* 2; Stealth; Stamina; Knowledge - *computer operation, first aid*; Law - *law enforcement* 2; Security; Awareness - *perception* 2; Investigate - *research* 2; Interaction - *interview, Intimidate* 2

Good Skills: Athletics; Unarmed Attack - *brawl*; Modern Ranged Weapon - *pistol 3*; Vehicle Operation - *land* 2; Stealth - *shadow* 2; Stamina; Knowledge - *computer operation, first-aid*; Law - *law enforcement* 3; Security - *protection* 2, *devices*; Awareness - *intuition*, *perception* 2; Investigate - *research* 2; Lore; Deception - *bribe*; Interaction - *interview* 2*, Intimidate* 4

Amazing Skills: Athletics; Unarmed Attack - *brawl*; Modern Ranged Weapon - *pistol* 4; Vehicle Operation - *land* 2; Stealth - *shadow* 3; Stamina; Knowledge - *computer operation, first-aid*; Law - *law enforcement* 5; Security - *protection* 3, *devices* 2; Administration - *bureaucracy* 3; Awareness - *intuition* 3, *perception* 2; Investigate - *research* 2; Lore - *conspiracy theories* 4; Deception - *bluff* 2, *bribe*; Interaction - *interview* 2*, intimidate* 4

Equipment:

Car, 9 mm pistol, cellular phone, suit, sunglasses. Alternatively, refer to Appendix: Preferred Equipment of the Enemy in the *Dark* Matter Arms and Equipment Guide*.

LES TREIZE CORBEAUX CULTIST

Les Treize Corbeaux is spreading like a disease in American society, a few years ago they was just another occult sect, today they have grown powerful with the rise of the dark tide and the imminent return of their spiritual leader and founder Michel Galvin.

The Marginal Cultist is usually occupied with an ordinary day job and only participate in rituals and murders during weekends. They have pledged loyalty to dark powers in exchange of money, influence and a chance to explore their darker sides, without really knowing their leaders or the cult's true goal.

The Ordinary Cultist has more or less cut the ties to society and serves as senior cult member, coordinator for lesser members and muscle on important missions. Some loathe what they have become, but dare not to break with the cult.

The Good Cultist has more grasp of what the cult is about and has closer ties to the leaders and possibly Galvin. The Good Cultists rarely work with lesser members - and only for surveillance or shock troops when they do.

The Amazing Cultists are the leaders of the sect. They are important figures in normal society, leaders with money, influence and lawyers. They are truly damned and live only to increase their own power, and possibly to find a way to get of the hook of the dark powers that rule them.

	M	O	G	A
STR	10	10	11	12
DEX	9	10	11	12
CON	9	9	10	11
INT	8	11	12	12
WIL	9	10	11	12
PER	9	10	11	13
Action Check	8	10	11	12
#Actions	2	2	2	2

Marginal Skills: Athletics; Melee Weapons - *blade*; Unarmed Attack - *brawl*; Vehicle Operation - *land*; Stamina; Knowledge; Awareness; Interaction -*intimidate*, *charm*

Ordinary Skills: Athletics; Melee Weapons - *blade 2*; Unarmed Attack - *brawl*; Modern Ranged Weapons - *pistol*, *shotgun* 2; Stealth; Vehicle Operation - *land* 2; Stamina – *resist pain*; Knowledge; Awareness - *perception*; Interaction -*intimidate* 2, *charm*

Good Skills: Athletics; Melee Weapons - *blade* 2; Unarmed Attack - *brawl*; Modern Ranged Weapons - *pistol*, *shotgun* 2; Stealth - *hide*, *shadow* 3; Vehicle Operation - *land* 2; Stamina -*resist pain*; Knowledge; Awareness - *perception*; Investigate - *search* 2; *track* 2; Lore - *occult lore* 2, Resolve – *mental resolve*; Interaction -*intimidate* 2, *charm*; Diabolism – *hellfire* 2, *tongue of the Damned*

Amazing Skills: Athletics; Melee Weapons - *blade* 2; Unarmed Attack - *brawl*; Modern Ranged Weapons - *pistol* 3, *shotgun* 2; Stealth - *hide*, *shadow* 3; Vehicle Operation - *land* 2; Stamina - *resist pain*; Knowledge; Awareness - *perception*; Investigate - *search* 2; *track* 2; Lore - *occult lore* 4, Resolve - *mental resolve* 3, *physical*; Interaction -*intimidate* 2, *charm* 4; Leadership - *inspire*; Diabolism - *binding* 2, *hellfire* 3, *summoning* 2, *tongue of the damned* 3

Equipment:

Car or motorcycle, wicked looking dagger, some carry shotguns or pistols, diabolic ceremonial garbs.

❖

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

While this adventure is set in Washington DC, it is easily transplanted to any location. The only area specific to the Washington area is the Capitol Hill office of Senator Michael Smith. His private residence can easily be located anywhere, and agents needing to interview Senator Smith could do so just as easily at a regional office maintained by the Senator. If the private residence is relocated to the vicinity of the party's cell, be sure to also relocate the Senator's final retreat (as detailed in the final chapter of the adventure).

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Senator Michael Smith is a well thought of politician, tipped by many political commentators for bigger and better things.

Publicly, he is well known for his support of genetic research programmes, campaigning stridently for greater freedom in the field in order to bring the benefits of scientific breakthroughs to mankind.

Privately, Smith has a considerable range of interests. He is adept in the ways of magic and his scientific pursuits are closely allied with such powers. He foresees a great deal of potential in the bonding of science and magic, creating a modern alchemy that reaches far beyond the changing of lead into gold.

On his private estate, Smith plays host to a complex owned by Gentek Inc, a prime mover in the world of genetic research. Ostensibly, this is simply a records office but for Smith, it is the means by which he is able to experiment. His latest experiment is what first attracts the cell's attention.

Smith has recently imported a collection of plant bulbs from Gentek's Eastern European office. The plant that grows from these bulbs is, in fact, a beautiful woman designed to entrance her victims just as a Cobra might its prey and then draw their blood from their bodies. In sorcery, blood is power, and Smith needs such blood for his ceremonies without fear of his own position being compromised. The Totemtanz, or Death Dancer, can do this for him. Blood can also be used to feed the young saplings. Totemtanz attacks her victims using ribbons, which are actually part of her body. These extend from her wrists, and as she weaves her dance around her victim, they both cut and drink the victim's blood at the same time. They are razor sharp but composed purely of organic material.

Her first victim is the man who delivered the crate; an Eastern European sailor named Radostin Popov. Totemtanz kills him on Smith's instructions. If you kill the messenger, there is no way for him to pass his message on to another, unless of course dead men can tell tales . . .

SCENE LOCATIONS

The majority of the adventure takes place in and around the Washington area. Each major lead is detailed in the second chapter under its own heading. Only one of those leads takes the party away from Washington DC, and that leads to the Nikolai, the freighter at the New York City docks.

INFORMATION GATHERING

Both police and criminal contacts may prove useful during the adventure, principally to lead the PCs to potential contacts. Police or scientific contacts can be used to authenticate

the credentials of either the coroner or the police officers involved in the case. In both instances, they show up as clean and good in their respective fields; an expert in the case of the coroner. When these people say something, it can be taken as read that they are saying so from the viewpoint of someone who has been there and done that.

Criminal contacts will also lead the party to Ramirez, a gentleman of low repute who has had a run-in with people that he wishes he hadn't. Such contacts will also enable the party to get the low-down on the Watchers, or at least as much information as there is available. Beyond that, the PCs will get the majority of their information from roleplaying the investigation.

TIMESCALE

The party is in no great rush to reach the end of the adventure. The police are mystified by the murder and while they will question McGillicuddy and check in with the freighter, they miss any link to the Senator. Totemtanz is more subtle about her other targets, picking up vagrants and disposing of them in the greenhouse at the estate. If the party are struggling, then Sgt Herman will contact them again (if they have left means to do so) and notify them of a number of disappearances among the vagrant population of the city. Staking out the seedy side of town will lead to spotting Totemtanz leading a vagrant into a black limo. Following the car leads the PCs to the Senator's estate. Do not use this method unless the party are really stumped and have not made any progress in a week of investigating or so. If you do have to use this method, penalise the PCs by having a second Totemtanz hatched and ready to feed when they reach the adventure's conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO: A BEGINNING . . .

HOOKS

HERMES REPORT

The Aegis group's wranglers send them a folder, either delivered in person or through the HERMES computers – depending on how the group's works. Most groups probably maintain the hands-off aspect, but the personal touch can lead to excellent plot hooks and a feeling of being part of a greater whole.

The folder that is submitted details the death of a mysterious man, an immigrant, and suggests a gangland connection

CELL CONTACT

Alternatively, if the players have any connection with the coroner's office (e.g., one of the characters actually *is* the coroner, or by having pulling power through high office in police/FBI/medical professions/etc), they can get access to the information through that channel.

Whatever happens, both the crime report and coroner's report are made available to the cell (see handouts 1 and 2).

NEWSPAPER MONITORING

If the players actively pursue information by checking the newspapers on a regular basis, reward them by letting them find the following clipping:

> A man's body was found severely mutilated in downtown Washington DC this morning. Police discovered the as yet unidentified body in an alleyway off Roosevelt Avenue.
>
> Police report that the body was disfigured by literally hundreds of cut wounds. It is not yet known what kind of instrument was used to inflict such wounds.
>
> The body was discovered at half past midnight and, although a number of people were in the vicinity at the time, police admit they have few leads to go on.
>
> Independent witnesses state that a gang called "The Watchers" had been sighted in the area at the time, although police are refusing to link the murder to any gangland activity.
>
> A police spokesman said that a murder investigation was underway and that any witnesses to the crime should contact Sgt Michael Herman on 555-431-2212 at the South Washington precinct.

BUILDING FROM PREVIOUS ADVENTURES

A number of non-player characters may crop up in previous adventures for those GMs wishing to build up to this scenario:

- Dr. Judith Mansfield, the coroner, could notify the players of the body when it reaches her if they have established a relationship with her prior to the scenario. She is also a character worth cultivating for future scenarios – you never can tell when it would be useful to know who's looking after the evidence at the far end.
- Sgt Herman could prove similarly useful and might notify the players of the discovery of the body.
- Senator Smith or Gentek Inc may prove useful to bring up in an earlier session, just as a mention in the news or a name on the side of a crate.
- Ramirez could easily be a character that the party chance across in prior adventures. Although he can't bring the party into the adventure, the party may think of contacting him without need for any help from a criminal contact trait.

RED HERRINGS

There are plenty of false leads to be found. Most of the early evidence should scream vampire to those who've stayed up watching old Hammer horror movies. Feel free to feed the PCs evidence that suggests this, as it will not make any difference to the outcome. Drop in things like staff lists from Gentek's US office with a member named "R. A. Claud" (check the anagram). Most of the other names are Eastern European.

HERMES reports on incidents of vampirism may also get the players distressed in different ways.

CHAPTER THREE: TRACING THE KILLER

There are several leads for the party to pursue immediately. Initially, there are the policemen to question and the coroner's office could provide a few (undocumented) leads. McGillicuddy's Bar is also investigating and the PCs may be intrigued by the prospect of figuring out exactly who the Watchers are.

THE POLICE

Tracking down Sgt Herman and Officer Patron is a simple task. They operate out of the South Washington precinct and are best tackled at Rudy's Bar after their shift. If the party ask at the precinct, they are told that Rudy's is usually the best place to catch them, as they are out on patrol most of the time.

Once questioned, the two exchange uneasy glances before starting to talk. If given a reasonable story as to why the party members are investigating, then they will open up a little. Sgt Herman will do the bulk of the talking, while Officer Patron will continue to shift awkwardly in his seat.

Sgt Herman is quite frank about matters. He's been on the job for many years and while he has not seen anything like this before, he seems to be quite affable, talking openly about the fact that you cannot write everything in a report.

Read the following aloud:

"Yeah, it was weird. But hey, what can you write in a report? Jeez, that body struck a chill down my spine the minute I saw it. No blood. None. Not a drop, not an ounce. Nuttin'. I had more blood on my clothes, cause I'd cut myself shaving that morning. But on him? Zip.

"I'm used to folks not talkin' when a murder happens, but there was something different 'bout everyone I questioned. Sure, there were a few whose reflex response was to clam up, but I honestly believe nobody saw – or maybe nobody remembered – what happened . . . "

When pressed as to what he means by "nobody remembered", he says that some of the people he spoke to seemed to be not quite there, like they were spaced on drugs or something similar and those that were like that were the ones closest to the murder site. It wasn't anything he could prove or anything he could write in a report without thinking his superiors would want to know why the hell he was putting unfounded suspicions in an official report. But that's the way it felt to him.

As for the Watchers, Herman is familiar with all of the gangs who operate in and around his patrol area, but he's never come across the Watchers before or since. Of all the weird things to do with the murder, that fact seems to be the thing that concerns him the most. The Watchers are– strangers on his patch and he hasn't been able to find out who they are, though one or two of his colleagues have also reported seeing the gang in different areas.

Officer Patron is far more uncertain when it comes to speaking. He's a rookie, has only been on the job for the last year and a half, and defers to Herman every chance he gets.

What he does say, eventually, when Herman is distracted talking, is in a whisper to the nearest player . . . or maybe no-one in particular. All he says is "I thought I saw sumthi . . . There was this woman. I . . . I saw her . . . down the end of the alley . . . and then she was gone. Just like that. I never saw her again . . . but I hope I do . . . one day."

If questioned about what he has just said, Officer Patron denies he said anything and says the investigator must be hearing things. He then goes back to his quiet, uncommunicative self before excusing himself and heading for the bar.

While he is there, Herman confides that Patron has not been the same since the murder. "Ordinarily, the kid's at the heart of the party, but lately . . . he's just not been the same."

SGT Michael Herman

STR	3	SIZ	4	AGL	2
REF	3	INT	4	WILL	4

SKILLS: Drive Auto 2, Small Arms: Pistol 2, Forensics 1

TRAINING: Awareness, Criminal Activity, Investigation

OFFICER Jude Patron

STR	3	SIZ	3	AGL	4
REF	4	INT	3	WILL	1

SKILLS: Drive Auto 2, Small Arms: Pistol 1, Melee Weapon 1

TRAINING: Investigation

THE CORONER'S OFFICE

While the policemen are quite willing to talk freely, Dr Mansfield is far more reluctant. The PCs will need to pull a string or two to get her to talk or show that they are in an official investigatory body – such as the police or the FBI – to convince her to open up.

Having come across as stern prior to being convinced, when she opens up, Dr Mansfield gives more the air of a studious professional who has just been overworked. She can be slightly flippant, and if anyone comments on her tiredness, she'll snap back "Welcome to Washington DC, murder capital of the US of A. No rest for a coroner."

Sadly there is not a lot more she can add. She is genuinely mystified by the condition of the body, particularly by the absence of any fragments inside the wound. She estimates that the whole attack was over within 30 seconds and she is not convinced that the blood was withdrawn prior to the wounds being inflicted. The body was completely drained of blood and no matter how much she searched the murder site, there was not a trace to be found. She also confirms that the body was not moved from somewhere else to the location it was found in.

Like Sgt Herman, Dr Mansfield is troubled by the case and has not released the body for burial yet. She has cited the fact that the body is as yet unidentified as one reason, but will admit that because she is stumped, she is calling in one of her old teachers to come and take a look, a blood specialist by the name of Dr Newcombe. However, he will not arrive for four days, so the body is on ice until then.

She concludes by saying:

> *"Look, I wish I had time to look into this case more, but hey, here we get a couple bodies a day coming through – let alone all the reports of vagrants going missing you get in a city like this. Sometimes I get a body and by the time I see it, rats have had their way with it for weeks. I see a lot of things that aren't pretty. I see a lot of things I wish I didn't. Sure, this is weird, but so's the human race for all the horrible ways it manages to come up with for doing harm to one another."*

Note: *Dr Newcombe's arrival is not relevant to the case. All it means is that the body will be in the morgue for four days, should the PCs devise a way to get a look at it by nefarious means. Dr Mansfield is very reluctant to show the PCs the body herself as it is evidence and she will only do so by direct order from a superior. If the party try to contact Dr Newcombe separately, he will be unavailable. If checked, his credentials prove to be impeccable: he is a senior resident at a major hospital in Detroit, but is presently away on a conference.*

DR JUDITH MANSFIELD

STR	2	SIZ	2	AGL	2
REF	3	INT	5	WILL	4

SKILLS: Computer Use 2, First Aid 3, Forensics 3, Medical 3, Photography 2, Research 2, Science: Biology 3, Teaching 1, Video 1

TRAINING: Awareness: Evidence Procedures, Biohazard Controls, Investigation

THE BODY

The corpse is a gruesome sight indeed, with lacerations from top to toe. The body is in a terrible state and matches up with the post mortem description. The face is also heavily lacerated and identification will be difficult. If Dr Mansfield is showing them the body, she is hopeful that an ID can be made with dental records or fingerprints.

Anybody with the appropriate expertise and the opportunity can carry out an examination of the body and find the same results as Dr Mansfield, unless they can succeed in a Df4 test in Medical or Biology. If they succeed, they find a tiny sliver of material inside one of the deeper wounds. The material appears to be cloth but, as the investigator touches it, the material draws a tiny line of blood across a finger; it's sharp in some way and needs further examination in an appropriately equipped lab. Dr Mansfield would be happy to examine it, if the players trust her.

Further examination of the fragment reveals, after one research breakthrough, that the material is organic, composed of plant material. Two further breakthroughs reveal that the material is thick towards the centre portion, but it is monomolecular on the edges, providing a startlingly sharp cutting edge. An additional two breakthroughs reveal that the plant material appears to be mixed with some kind of animal DNA.

THE HIP

The Nikolai is currently docked in New York. Should the PCs make the journey to visit it, they find it largely deserted. The Nikolai has already dispersed its cargo by the time the party arrives, along with most of its crew. The captain is away settling accounts, so it is down to his second, Vladimir Kinder, to do the talking. He cannot confirm or deny the whereabouts of the crew; they are all on a two-week leave, with one week remaining.

However, while snooping about the ship, the manifest can be discovered, containing the last cargo's information. The cargo consisted of botanical samples from a company in Bucharest named Gentek Inc, all packed in the native earth of

the area. The final destination of the cargo was listed as the Gentek storage facility in the grounds of Milwaukee Senator Michael Smith's Washington residence. Senator Smith, as is easily discovered, is outspoken on the subject of allowing more genetic research within the USA. He is also a member of the Gentek board. Both Senator Michael Smith and Gentek Inc can be looked up on HERMES to provide some clues.

A roster of crew is available, but it will take some time to work through the full crew list. Vladimir offers to do the job for the investigators and notify them of his results in a day or two. He cannot do it any faster, he says, "because it can take that long to drag one man from a bar, let alone the whole crew!".

Kinder may come across as being quite cagey. However, he is as concerned as anyone about the possibility of one of his crew being a possible murder victim. He will honestly endeavour to find out which crew member has gone missing, and after two days will inform the Cell that the crew is all accounted for, apart from Radostin Popov. Popov has sailed with the Nikolai on more than a dozen voyages and was one of the unloading team.

Popov is a Bulgarian, who is single and childless. If pressed upon identification, Kinder will admit that Popov was something of a loner and did not take part in the Nikolai crew's legendary drinking expeditions. For that reason, he was often given delivery jobs at the end of voyages, to ensure that goods did arrive as requested. He was to oversee the delivery of several crates to a customer in Washington DC. Reluctantly, Kinder will admit this is Gentek Inc, but only if convinced that the party are genuine investigators. If they cannot produce the credentials, the players will have to concoct a really convincing argument.

Vladimir Kinder

STR	4	SIZ	4	AGL	4
REF	3	INT	3	WILL	3

SKILLS: Cartography 3, Language: English 1, Sailing 3

TRAINING: Awareness: Sea Conditions, Navigation, Swim

MCGILLICUDDY'S BAR

A boozy Irish-American bar, this is a dark, smoky place, even when it is broad daylight outside. The owner is one Jack McGillicuddy, who suffers no fools and refuses to acknowledge that his bar was the centre of any illegal activity. He does, however, remember seeing "a big Russky guy, yeah I remember him. Well, hell, the whole bar would, given the doll he had on his arm".

When questioned further, McGillicuddy will say that the "doll" was "a stunner, looked like a dancer or somethin'. I mean, she was *beautiful*. And those eyes . . . y'know, I don't know if I'll ever see that lady again, but I hope I do . . . one day."

Anyone else questioned about the bar will say much the same. But everyone who was in that night remembers her, and ends the same way saying they hope they will see her again " . . . one day".

Any further description of the woman is hard to come by. Whenever people mention her, they become distracted. She is generally described as a quite short blonde, but no details specific enough to form identification can be gathered. Most people around the bar can provide a much more vivid description of the man who left with her. He was definitely a sizeable chap, around 32 years old, Caucasian, brown dirty hair and grey eyes, around 6 foot 1 inches and very muscular.

McGillicuddy says the couple who didn't appear too close by appearances, left around midnight – "hey, it was a private party, ok?"

Jack McGillicuddy

STR	4	SIZ	3	AGL	3
REF	4	INT	3	WILL	4

SKILLS: Diplomacy 2, Forgery 1 (enough to spot it), Humanities: Bar-room Philosophy 5, Language: Slurred English 5, First Aid 1

TRAINING: Awareness: Empty Glass

THE CRIME SCENE

Roosevelt Avenue is about five minutes' walk from McGillicuddy's Bar. The crime scene is at the top end of an alleyway running onto the street. The area has been thoroughly searched by police and there is still police tape hanging from the walls at the end of the street. It has been torn through by now, and life is continuing on.

However, a search of the scene will turn up (with a Df3 Forensics test, or a Df4 Perception test) a scar in the brickwork at the side of the alley. The scar is around three inches deep, about a foot in length and would not have been noticed at first because it is in the shadow of a dumpster. Further examination will reveal a short scrap of material, the same substance found on the body (or not, if the players were unable to examine it). Again, if handled with bare fingers, it will cut a PC's hand and will need further examination in a properly equipped lab.

TRACKING DOWN THE WATCHERS

The Watchers is a new gang within the DC area. Finding

them is not easy. In fact, if a PC cannot call on a criminal contact – or perhaps a media or police contact – they have no chance at all, for the time being. Even with a chance, it will take a Df3 Influence test to come up with the goods.

If they actually succeed, they learn that the Watchers do not appear to have any particular territory. Instead they are more of a nomadic gang, travelling freely through a number of different neighbourhoods. As far as anyone knows, there has only been one gang fight involving the Watchers, when the White Sharks tried to take them down. The result – the White Sharks no longer exist. As far as anyone can tell, the Watchers have a dozen members at most and no-one's sure where any of them came from. They just kind of appeared a few months ago.

If anyone has any criminal contacts, then they point out one gangland figure, a Boneshaker by the name of Ramirez had a bad experience that he is only too happy to talk about. <address provided, on the other side of Washington D.C.>

RAMIREZ

Strung out on more than just dope, Ramirez is wide-eyed and staring. This could easily be written off as simply drugs, but, on a successful Df1 Psychology or Df4 Perception test, anyone can tell that it is fear that is driving Ramirez, not any kind of chemical. He says:

"Bad, man. It was real bad. I wuz rollin' this mark out by the Monument. Tourists jus' love to go there, man. Tourists jus' love to carry fat clips of green, man. So there I was. I'd jacked the man over the head an' wuz jus' about to relieve him of his spare green when they showed up. I mean, look, I wuz concentratin' on rollin' this fine gent, y'know, but Ramirez ain't stoopid. Ramirez is smart. Ramirez keeps watchin' round while he does his job. And they jus' appeared from nowhere, man. I mean, you've seen the Monument. There ain't many ways to sneak up – that's why tourists feel safe. So suddenly, they're all there. Dozen of 'em, man. From nowhere. Like they'd jus' appeared out of thin air. Like ghosts, man. Ghosts. I jus' backed up, left that rollover there and lit out like nobody's business.

"But one of 'em caught me. Big guy, breath smelled like honey. Anyhow, he grabs me, lifts me up so's my feet's danglin' and starts shoutin' 'Where is she? Where is she?'. I mean, hell man, I don't know what's going down and I tell him jus' so. But he keeps shoutin'. So here's me, pinned up against the monument and sayin' 'I don' know, I don' know'.

"Then I look round, and I see this woman. Like a dancer. Beautiful, man. Beautiful. Hell, next thing I know it's mornin' and I'm wakin' up cold and shivin' in the park. Cuts all over me, but I's alive. Cuts heal but I still don' know what happened. All I know is that woman had the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. I don' know if I'll ever see her again, but I hope I do . . . one day.

"The tourist? No, don' know what happened to him. And, mister, I don' want to know. Them Watchers are bad news. Bad news, you hear?"

Ramirez knows nothing more. Any further attempts the PCs make will be unsuccessful.

RAMIREZ

STR	4	SIZ	3	AGL	4
REF	4	INT	3	WILL	2

Skills: Athletics 2, Forgery 1, Gambling 2, Lockpicking 1, Melee Weapon: Knife 2, Small Arms: Pistol 1, Stealth 2, Throw 1

Training: Awareness: Police Presence

SENATOR MICHAEL SMITH

Senator Smith will only be too happy to meet anyone to discuss genetic research – but only at his office on Capitol Hill, not at his private residence. That is located on the outer edge of town, as part of a large personal estate.

Anyone investigating Senator Smith discovers that most of his money was originally inherited; his grandfather and his father built up a substantial fortune through the railroads. Senator Smith has transferred most of that fortune into investment in various scientific ventures. Firstly, his interest was in virus research. Secondly, he invested heavily in anti-toxicological programmes. Lately, his interests have turned towards genetics, and his money is heavily invested in Gentek Inc.

Senator Smith speaks quietly, but earnestly, as if every word he says has been carefully weighed and considered. He gets emotional about topics which are close to his heart, but does not express that emotion well. Instead, he starts to stutter over words, not one to become a high-flyer in politics.

While talking to the PCs, Senator Smith reveals as little as possible about his own involvement. However, he happily details the "restrictive" laws practised in the US which, in his words, "force honest and sincere genetic research programmes abroad to carry on their work in less advanced facilities, thus slowing up their work for years".

If asked why he has such a passion for genetics, Smith conjures up a suitably political speech about it being the future of the world and important for the safety of future generations. "How else can we fight genetic diseases if we are forced to carry out research with one hand tied behind our backs?"

If anyone raises the murder with Senator Smith, he will clam up and deny he has any knowledge and conclude the interview as quickly as possible.

Similarly, if anyone asks what was bound for Senator Smith's estate and the Gentek facility there, he says that is in the hands of the Gentek team based there and not his concern. He merely leases the land to them for their complex, but he adds that he assumes it is merely items to be documented and forwarded to the Mexican complex. It is not the first time that items have been passed through the estate to be recorded.

Senator Smith's statistics are detailed below, in the second section of the adventure.

CHAPTER FOUR: OPENING THE CASKET

By this stage, the PCs' leads should have narrowed down to two distinct areas. One is tracking down the Watchers. The other is investigating the Gentek labs on Senator Smith's estate. Senator Smith's Washington office may also prove an area the players wish to investigate but there is nothing there to incriminate him.

Tracking down the Watchers will prove impossible – for now. Senator Smith's estate is the only available option…

THE ESTATE

The Senator's estate is located on the outer edges of Washington, backing onto some low hills. Securityis actually quite high but is undone by the picturesque location. The slope of the hill running down to the rear wall makes it reasonably simple to scale the wall at the back. As long as the property is approached at night, the PCs are not spotted before they are in the grounds.

There are three major buildings within the complex. The first is a guardhouse by the gate, occupied by two security guards who are generally bored with the humdrum of doing a job where nothing ever happens. The main house is the largest of the buildings within the complex, and on the eastern side of the area, a long, narrow greenhouse is located. The contents of the greenhouse cannot be viewed from outside, due to heavy plastic shrouds that have been erected throughout. However, bright UV lighting is on through the whole building 24 hours a day.

THE SUPERNATURAL

The Senator's estate may not be ideal for security, but it is a Locus of Seepage Level 2 (with 6 Seepage Points). Even non-sensitives get a feeling of being watched or a creepy sensation at the back of their neck. Sensitives get flashes of strange, clawed creatures attacking innocents. The nature of the site is definitely malevolent.

GUARDS

Two security guards are located in the gatehouse, with two more in an office in an underground parking area beneath the main building, and four more patrolling the grounds in pairs. These guys are not top end of the range security specialists. They have a complacency brought on by few too many doughnuts and a too many nights without any danger of a break-in. Unless the PCs are really careless, they should be able to effect entry into any building they wish without fear of being disturbed.

Despite the inefficiency of the guards, the main building is unlocked. The occupants are either overconfident in their guards' abilities or blithely ignorant of any threat.

The greenhouse is a different matter. The building is securely locked and to enter, PCs need to pick a lock of Df3. A security camera is also in place inside, but players need only avoid bad luck to be spotted by it – the guards have far too many games of cards to play to concentrate on.

If a Bad Luck roll comes up, the guards will see "something" and send a couple of guys over to check it out.

GUARDS

All stats 3

Skills: Handgun 2, Surveillance 1

THE GREENHOUSE

Entering the greenhouse will lead the players to the cause of the "vampire" attack. Gentek Inc has its records office in the front of the greenhouse and searching through the files shows that this is not an idle base for shuffling paper. The greenhouse is active and it is growing vampires. Only one of the organic vampires has been grown thus far and she goes by the name of Totemtanz, German for Death Dancer.

Totemtanz killed the sailor who had overseen the delivery of goods to Gentek Inc. Several of the crates lie just beyond the front office, before the main greenhouse area itself. Inside are traces of dirt, which delivery records show contained not just dirt from the Gentek lab in Yugoslavia, but plant bulbs – samples – which have been genetically altered.

INSIDE THE GREENHOUSE

The Greenhouse is a riot of growth and colour. Picking their way down the aisles, the PCs see the lightest growth is at the near end of the building and the densest towards the rear. Venturing further down the rows, the plants become much larger and at around the halfway point, large pods can be seen around the base of the plants. Soon after, the pods appear to be taking shape. The pods can be seen to be forming definite shapes of hands, feet, arms, faces . . .

At about this point, the PCs in the greenhouse (they may have separated, after all) hear the door behind them open again. Turning back, they will find a stunningly beautiful woman standing there.

Totemtanz is returning from a night of hunting and standing behind her, eyes bright with her beauty, is a vagrant. Totemtanz, seeing the players, curses and flicks her wrist in the direction of the vagrant. From her wrist extends a ribbon – just like the type used by gymnasts – but this one is deadly. The vagrant's throat slits open and, as the blood begins to gush, Totemtanz pushes his body over onto some of the younger plants.

If only one PC has ventured into the greenhouse, she will approach confidently and attempt to mesmerise him. If she succeeds, she will feed from him, draining his blood in five rounds. Give the player the chance to break free of the mesmerism every round.

If Totemtanz is killed, the players can venture further into the greenhouse, where they will find the plants at the very back are almost full-grown, with full figures identical to Totemtanz growing there. However, they have not yet detached themselves from the plant. The only way to dispose of these plants permanently is to torch the place. A search of the location will find some fuel drums – it seems Gentek were prepared in case the vampires got out of control – and the greenhouse can easily be set ablaze. This provokes a chorus of shrieking from the unborn vampires that is horrible to the ears.

CONSEQUENCES

If the PCs headed for the house after starting the fire, then they will not yet have experienced the after-effects of destroying the warehouse. However, if (or when) they do, they find guards rushing to try and put the fire out. A good oil fire is hard for the guards to put out, but if the PCs are seen, the guards open fire at them before tackling the blaze. The number of guards running over is limited to only two. No guards come from the gate area and none move from the house.

Strangely, there is no sign of any other kind of retribution coming, be it from the house or from any police who should have been called. This may give the players the chance to enter the house, but when they enter the house, either before or after the fire, they will find the front door standing open.

ENTER THE WATCHERS

Just inside the front door of the house, the players will find two sleeping guards. They are lying on the floor, deep in an unnatural slumber. The PCs quickly learn that the bottom floor of the house is deserted, but on the staircase they find the body of one of the members of the Watchers, the gang whose presence in Washington lately is a mystery.

The body is that of a young man, with no visible signs as to what killed him. If his body is moved, it is found to be incredibly light, weighing no more than a stone – almost as if he was nothing more than a husk.

On the top floor landing, a second body is found, again a

TOTEMTANZ

STR 4
SIZ 2
AGI 5
REF 4
INT 3
PER 3
WILL 4

TOTAL SEEPAGE POINTS AVAILABLE: 4 (+6 for location)

Powers (from Incarnate information)

Regeneration (Slowed, takes up to one week to completely regenerate self)

Thrall

Mesmerism

Attacks: Kick, Punch as normal. Can do a kick-punch-kick move with Martial Arts skill level 3

Ribbons: Attack with skill level 3 and do damage of Wn (Str), can also drain blood entirely from a person in five rounds after a successful Mesmerism, as long as Totemtanz is undisturbed.

Weakness: All fire-based damage suffered by Totemtanz is doubled. Weedkiller is also surprisingly effective, doing Fw3 damage every time she is hit with a substantial spray of it.

Watcher with no visible injuries. The sounds of fighting can be heard from behind a large door off the landing, across from a third Watcher corpse, pinned to the wall with a steel spike.

The fighting sounds continue, and it is up to the PCs to venture in straight away, delay, or not enter at all.

SENATOR SMITH'S CHAMBER

The fighting is taking place between the two remaining members of the Watchers and Senator Smith. But Senator Smith is not the man the PCs met in his office, nor are the Watchers the punk youths that have been previously described.

The room appears to be a large laboratory, with a pentagram on a raised dais in the centre of the room and numerous computer screens and sensors scattered around. It is lit by clashing red and white lights.

The Watchers radiate white light, with large pairs of wings emerging from their backs. They look like angels.

Across from them, Senator Smith's now-fiendish face is lit by fiery light, and his hands have metamorphosed into ferocious claws. As the PCs watch, he slashes the nearest member of the Watchers, who is hurled backwards with a ragged slash across his stomach. He lands and does not move. At the same time, the remaining member slashes the Senator's side with a short blade. Barely reacting, the Senator plants a hefty kick into the Watcher's midriff and sends him flying back into the bank of computers with a loud crash. Turning to the players, the Senator's devilish face snarls, and spits out "What do you want?"

SENATOR MICHAEL SMITH

STR 5
SIZ 3
AGI 4
REF 4
INT 3
WILL 4
PER 3

SEEPAGE POINTS AVAILABLE: 5
(ordinarily 4 + 6 for location, but reduced by his exertions against the Watchers)

Powers
Frenzy
Mask (which he uses to maintain his appearance as a normal human in everyday life)
Mesmerism
Regeneration
Levitation
Teleportation
Attacks: Martial Arts 3, a variety of minor moves as the GM sees fit, plus a selection of two move combos such as kick-punch, grab-throw, dodge-block, etc. Claws do Wn(Str-1) damage, skill of 3.

Senator Smith is far older than he looks. Back in the early part of the 20th century, a young Michael Smith was a biologist dabbling in the occult. Magic was something that came easily to him and he was soon on the path to becoming an Incarnate: Devil. He never lost his interests in science and enjoying the financial benefits his powers were bringing him, he started to fund a variety of projects. His current project is one he has been keen on ever since the discovery of the DNA sequence. He believes he can grow an army which he can use to back any move for power he cares to make, either blatantly or subtly, by using the Totemtanz creature's seductive powers on the right people. He does not want to risk this goal by a fight with the PCs and will use 3SP to try and make his escape.

To get away, he must spend three turns inside the pentagram, although he can still engage PCs in combat during this time. He will try to put the PCs down rather than kill them, looking to buy himself time to get away. To stop him, the players must either get him out of the pentagram (which is around eight feet across), or kill him. Wounding him will not stop him; he will ignore the wounds knowing he can heal himself at his destination, which is his residence in Milwaukee.

There are only two outcomes here. Either the players kill the Senator, or he gets away. He is not going to be around long enough to kill them.

CHAPTER FIVE: AFTERMATH

Assuming the PCs are still alive, they can check the remaining bodies of the Watchers. The one with the slashed stomach is dead. The remaining one has disappeared, leaving a few feathers behind. These can be retrieved and saved as evidence. None of the other bodies now have wings, and all are incredibly light.

If there has been a fire, then the emergency services arrive in another ten minutes or so, leaving the PCs little time to make their escape, unless they can pull a few strings to explain their presence there to the satisfaction of the authorities. A requires at least a Df4 on Diplomacy test.

The sleeping security guards come round with no memory of what has taken place, while the Senator, if he has escaped, remains an opponent for another day. If not, the players can compliment themselves of having done away with a dangerous foe and the stopped the Totemtanz.

Gentek have other offices around the world, and the Totemtanz design will not have been destroyed with the dismantling of just one of their offices.

For the moment, a victory has been achieved, and the players can be glad of their efforts. The fact that they now have new enemies, even if the Senator is dead, is another matter.

The Watchers are something else for the players to consider. What is their exact role in this? That is beyond the scope of this adventure, but the players can expect to see them again. At least this time, they were working on the same side.

HANDOUT 1

INTERCEPTED TRANSMISSION>>
TERMINAL 18843/23/23/094 (SOUTH WASHINGTON POLICE PRECINCT)
TO: MAIN POLICE DATABASE AND FBI OFFICES, WASHINGTON DC
Crime: Homicide Suspects: None at present
Reporting Officer: Sgt Michael Herman, South Precinct

Officer's Statement: Responding to a call of a disturbance in an alleyway off Roosevelt Avenue at 00.30, we discovered a body – or what was left of it.

The body was that of a male Caucasian, age indeterminate, who was covered with a huge number of cuts and scars, but no obvious quantity of blood.

There was no obvious sign of a perpetrator, so we called in the forensic squad. I left my partner, Officer Jude Patron, with the body, and proceeded to start on house-to-house questioning.

Everywhere I went, I met with a stone wall. Nobody saw anything, heard anything or knew anything. By the time I had got done with the first few places, the forensics had arrived and as Patron met up with me, I saw a few street punks stood off to one side, watching. I went over to them and started to ask a few questions but they drifted off. One of them, probably around the youngest, said just one thing to me.

He said: "It's the bad juju, the streets claiming their own."

He also said something in what I think was German, but I wasn't sure. They left before I could get them to make a statement. I have been unable to track them down since. Each wore black leather jackets, with red T-shirts. On the back of the jackets was the word "Watchers".

HANDOUT 2

INTERCEPTED TRANSMISSION>>
FORENSIC REPORT RELATING TO PREVIOUS CASE
FROM TERMINAL 22J1B, CORONER'S OFFICE
LOGIN AND PASSWORD FOR DR JUDITH MANSFIELD
Forensic report
Subject: John Doe
Inspecting coroner: Dr Judith Mansfield
Cause of death: Multiple lacerations, exsanguination

The victim was male, aged between 30 and 35 years and Caucasian. Brown, dirty hair, grey eyes. The deceased was a large man, standing around 6 foot 1 inches and muscular; he appears to be a labourer of some description. Blood type O Negative. He may be of Eastern European extraction. Among his possessions was a piece of notepaper with the name of a ship, the Nikolai and port 23, NYC written on it. Having checked with the shipping register, this was registered at a port along the Black Sea.

The victim was killed by a combination of the vast number of cuts he had suffered, all very thin and with no trace of metal in the wounds, and the massive blood loss associated with that number of wounds, around 400 or so.

However, there was little in the way of blood on the body or at the scene of the crime. It appears to have been removed in some fashion. But I know of no weapon or instrument that could cut a man and remove his blood at the same time. Conclusion: the blood must have been removed very shortly before the assault with the unknown edged weapon. The timing must have been very close, as there is no discernible evidence to show that the wounds were inflicted post mortem.

Most of the wounds were very shallow, none exceeding three inches in depth.

There appears to be little sign that the victim struggled, e.g., no bruising upon his hands indicating punches were thrown and no major disturbance at the scene beyond the presence of the victim's body. There were no signs of skin underneath the victim's fingernails nor were there excessive levels of lactic acid in the body.

I conducted out a full range of drug and toxicology tests on his blood, but could only find evidence of alcohol, at a level of 40ml. He may have been drunk, but not enough to matter.

Other personal effects included $20 in cash, a set of unmarked keys, a business card for McGillicuddy's Bar and a cheap watch.

CONCLUSION: Victim was killed by a combination of blood loss and the shock suffered from in excess of 400 lacerations. No evidence found to assist in identifying the killer.

HANDOUT 3

HERMES report on Gentek Inc

+++++++ GENTEK INC +++++++

Gentek is a research company, specialising in genetic technology. The company has no American facilities, but has long petitioned for greater freedom in the rules governing genetic research within the United States.

The company holds two major holdings overseas, in Budapest and Atlanicos, Mexico. A records office is based at the home of Senator Michael Smith in Washington DC.

The company has lodged financial figures with the US Tax Office, registering a turnover of $30m/year. Records show it has personnel of 480, 300 of which are located in the Budapest office, 10 in Washington, and the remaining 170 based in Mexico.

HANDOUT 4

Hermes report on Senator Michael Smith

+++++++++ Senator Michael Smith +++++++++

Michael Smith, Senator for Milwaukee

Married, no children

Age: 54

Wife's Name: Alyssa

Born: Athens, Georgia

Educated: DuPont Academy for Young People, DuPont, District of Columbia then Harvard, majoring in political science.

Mr. Smith has held the post of senator for the last 18 years, having been elected on a Republican ticket following the death of the state's previous senator, Jack Marginson. (NOTE: Marginson died of a heart attack. FBI files show no wrongdoing, CIA files from the time impenetrable to the J Edgar Hoover effect).

Smith has long campaigned on behalf of the genetic research industry and is closely allied to public health interests in that regard. Smith is also on the board of Gentek Inc, an American-owned company that is based overseas due to the stringent rules on genetic research within the US borders.

Smith is an oddity in the Senate in that AEGIS cannot forward any salacious material on the Senator. He does not frequent the local call-girl circuit and has long been admired by certain quarters for the strongly moral image that he portrays. However, he has never aspired to becoming presidential material and perhaps lacks the charisma required for sound bites.

Behind the scenes, he is known as a quiet man, but with a talent for ruthless negotiating when it comes to things that are important to him. Were it to be known, the vote on instituting the current genetic research control measures was very close and it was only because of some presidential deal-making that Smith's side was defeated. He appears to have taken the defeat in good grace, however, and has shown no signs of recrimination, choosing instead to continue to campaign.

Das Eisenfaustbuch

The Iron Fist Book:

Righteous Fists of the Deaths' Head

by Benjamin Blattberg

HISTORY:

Wewelsburg, 1941: Reichsführer Himmler, exhausted by Hitler's constant need for information about the future, attempts a summoning ritual with a few alterations of his own devising. Only once, four years later, in a British prison, does he consider that the idea for the modifications might not have been his originally. To take the place of his own divination rituals, Himmler attempts to summon the supernaturally knowledgeable spirit of a Teutonic knight and bind that spirit to a man he trusts completely. He chooses SS General Walter Schellenberg, head of the Foreign Intelligence Service, as his subject, and successfully completes the summoning. Immediately, Schellenberg calls out for pen and paper, and in a matter of hours writes down a hundred pages of dense modern German script, and draws a series of human, or human-like, anatomical diagrams. Schellenberg has no recollection of what he has written, though he will believe that he wrote it under some sort of trance (the handwriting matches his perfectly). Himmler is ecstatic at first, thinking this book is the history of the future; he reads it from cover to cover, and is disappointed to discover that it is only an instruction manual for what amounts to a complicated boxing style.

It is not what Himmler expected, but it is still something valuable. Several copies are made, and sent to Berlin's Volksschulen (elementary schools), to teach the next generation. The original is bound, and the title is stamped on the spine: Das Eisenfaustbuch. Himmler keeps it in his own occult library at Wewelsburg, and goes back to the draining divination rituals he had been involved in before. Schellenberg does not seem to have any supernatural access to knowledge, but Himmler gives extra import to what he says.

Schellenberg himself seems unaffected by the ritual, though he becomes unaccountably nervous when he hears distant shelling (or thunderstorms). He continues his desk job; though an SS officer, Schellenberg had never been much of a soldier. Otto Skorzeny, Hitler's favorite commando, once laughed when he saw Schellenberg with a pistol, and told him to put it away before Schellenberg shot himself. His supposed bookishness is not the only thing that sets him apart from the other SS: as early as 1942 he advises the removal of Hitler from power. It is mainly on Schellenberg's instigation that Himmler begins his dangerous peace negotiations with the west.

Before plans to level Wewelsburg Castle could be completed, Schellenberg retrieved several random occult books from the library, and hundreds of dead SS officers' rings from the shrine there. Among those books was his own, which he read for the first time on his long, uncomfortable boat ride to the United States. Schellenberg had planned to sell everything to finance his further travels; he had planned to go to South America, to rejoin the rest of Project Odessa. However, the man who smuggled himself off the boat was not the same person as had gotten on.

After more than four decades of studying Das Eisenfaustbuch, and practicing the martial art described therein, Walter Schellenberg has not physically aged, though he has in some senses mentally unraveled. This is primarily due to his dedication to the martial art described in the book over his previous interests (such as bureaucracy, law, and self-preservation); however that dedication is in fact primarily due to the spirit lying half-awake within him, the Oni that Himmler bound sixty years ago. The Oni dictated the book to Schellenberg's hand, advised him to push for peace (a peace just long enough for German and American scientists to separately develop the atomic bomb), and has been playing the role of Schellenberg's intuition ever since. Schellenberg at times has a suspicion that all of his choices may not be his own, but he does not know that the demon spirit is still inside him. Ever since his reading of the book, he has become a fervent believer in the occult that Hitler and Himmler were dedicated to, and is more likely to connect his strange impulses to Himmler's ghost than to any other source.

Despite the demon-spirit's urgings, Schellenberg has rededicated himself to the Reich, the Führer, and the Nazi ideology that he had previously abandoned. He has become quite a collector of Nazi memorabilia, and his headquarters are covered on the inside with photos, posters, and banners. With the occult books he rescued from Wewelsburg, he could resurrect Hitler, but first he needs the body. (He could much

easier get Himmler's body, but the Oni has so far been able to persuade Schellenberg away from that course. The Oni has no desire for another Reich, and in fact might fear a resurrected Himmler, who might perhaps be a diabolist of some power, and would in all likelihood still be angry for being a pawn in the demon's plans.) To the end of finding Hitler's body, Schellenberg has organized a small cadre of neo-Nazis, and taught the promising ones his Iron Fist fighting style. He hires these thugs out to local criminal enterprises, and otherwise uses them to gain assets with their fists. Occasionally he may order or allow the murder of a "subhuman" – Jew, homosexual, Communist, Gypsy, Slav – but he tries to keep a low-profile for his Unwaffen SS (Unarmed SS). He uses the money to establish connections with the American intelligence community, hoping that they might lead him to Hitler's body.

The spirit inside him just wants him to continue teaching people the Iron Fist style, and to continue the study of it himself. The transformation is almost complete.

Headquarters: Washington, D.C.

Branches: None known.

Followers: Less than 30 full-time thugs, possible support from thousands.

Resources: Criminal contacts, some intelligence contacts, some occult books, their bodies.

Secret Knowledge: Iron Fist fighting style.

Primary Goal: Found a new Reich, cleanse the human species.

Common Missions: Make criminal contact, do financially rewarding criminal work, practice fighting style on live subjects, support other hate groups with muscle, help out intelligence community with muscle if required.

MEMBERS:

There are not many members of Das Eisenfaustbuch. Schellenberg has recruited the most Aryan from several organizations over the years, and has remade them in his own image. Most understand the need for keeping a low-profile, so few are obvious skinheads, and most cover up the tattoos that would give away their allegiance to hate organizations. Most dress in casual clothes, or fatigues, and in the last few years they have given up their long coats (that could hide weapons) for less attention-getting leather or denim jackets. There are probably no more than three Amazing members, who teach the five or six Good members, who in turn teach the ten Ordinary members and the twelve Marginal members. The Marginal members have not even begun to learn the Iron Fist style, and are the most easily replaceable. Once they begin a study of the Iron Fist style members soon develop powers beyond mortal men (FX Super Powers – Brick broad skill).

	M	*O*	*G*	*A*
STR	*10*	*11*	*12*	*14*
DEX	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*
CON	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*
INT	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*
WIS	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*
PER	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*
Action Check	*11/5/2*	*12/6/3*	*13/6/3*	*14/7/3*
# Action	*2*	*2*	*2*	*2*

MARGINAL SKILLS:

Athletics, Unarmed Attack, Vehicle Operation, Stamina, Knowledge – *first aid*, Awareness, Street Smart, Interaction – *intimidate*.

ORDINARY SKILLS:

Athletics, Unarmed Attack – *power martial arts*, Vehicle Operation, Stamina – *endurance*, Knowledge – *first aid*, *language (Germanic)*, Awareness, Street Smart, Interaction – *intimidate*, Brick – *body armor* or *invulnerability (fire)*.

FX points: 1

GOOD SKILLS:

Athletics, Unarmed Attack – *power martial arts 3*, Vehicle Operation, Stamina – *endurance 2*, *resist pain*, Knowledge – *first aid*, *language (Germanic) 2*, Tactics, Awareness, Resolve – *physical resolve 2*, Street Smart – *criminal elements*, *street knowledge (Washington, D.C.)*, Interaction – *intimidate*, Leadership, Brick – *body armor*, and *impact conversion* or *super strength*.

FX points: 5

AMAZING SKILLS:

Athletics, Unarmed Attack – *power martial arts 8*, Vehicle Operation, Stamina – *endurance 3*, *resist pain 3*, Business – *illicit business*, Knowledge – *first aid 2*, *language (Germanic) 3*, Tactics, Awareness, Resolve – *physical resolve 4*, Street Smart – *criminal elements 3*, *street knowledge (Washington, D.C.) 3*, Deception, Interaction – *intimidate 2*, Leadership – *command 2*, Brick – *body armor* or *impact conversion* (always on), and *super strength*.

FX points: 2

EQUIPMENT:

clothes, SS rings (one per person), cell phone (Amazing only), a few old cars.

SOME TRUTH:

As much as demons – Oni in particular – might love the Nazis, the Oni that joined with Schellenberg sixty years ago did not do it for the Nazis. The Iron Fist fighting style is actually a series of slow rituals. Practicing them opens up imperceptible doorways into the person doing the practicing. It is through these doorways that demonic energy is channeled into the impossible feats of strength that Die Eisenfaustbücher can achieve. With the rising tide of Dark Matter on Earth, these channels are easier to make, and stronger (which is why we are hearing more about this now than we have heard at any other time in this group's forty year history). Eventually, the doorways should be complete, and the person studying the Iron Fist style should be replaced with an Oni. (The rituals do not make the person into a demon, they simply allow the Oni to switch places with him.) In fact, an Oni would already have replaced Walter Schellenberg, except that the ritual used to summon the Oni permanently, and subtly, damaged Schellenberg's brain. Schellenberg has in fact peaked at his ability to master the Iron Fist style, and will never gain more powers through it. The Oni inside him is only now beginning to suspect this, and is surreptitiously searching a way to free itself from its fleshly prison. It has found no other way yet, but is considering pushing Schellenberg to suicide, or to suicidal actions. He has so far resisted.

WALTER SCHELLENBERG

LEVEL 18 HUMAN (ONI) DIPLOMAT (COMBAT SPEC)

STR	16	(+3)	INT	11	(+1)
DEX	13	(+2)	WIS	13	(+2)
CON	11	(+1)	PER	9	(0)

Durability: 11/11/6/6

Action Check: 14+/13/6/3

Move: sprint 28, run 18, walk 6

#Actions: 3

Reaction Score: Good/3

Last Resorts: 1

Perks: Danger Sense, Hidden Identity 3, Fists of Iron 5

Flaws: Clueless 6 (lore), Temper 4

FX Energy Points: 5

Attacks

Unarmed 26/13/6 d6+5s/d4+3w/d4+5w LI/O

Defenses

+5 modifier to melee/unarmed attacks (+3 STR and +2 for martial arts)

+2 modifier to ranged attacks

+1 INT modifier to encounter skills

+2 WIS modifier to encounter skills

Armor: d6+1 LI, d6 HI, d4 En

Skills

Athletics [16] – jump [18], Unarmed Attack [16] – *power martial arts* [26], Ranged Weapon [12] – *pistol* [13], Vehicle Operation [12] – *land vehicle (automobile)* [15], Stamina [11] – *endurance* [15], *resist pain* [17], Business [11] – *illicit business* [15], Knowledge [11] – *first aid* [15], *language (Germanic)* [17], Tactics [11] – *infantry tactics* [14], Awareness [13] – *intuition* [15], Lore [13] – *occult lore* [17], Resolve [13] – *mental resolve* [17], *physical resolve* [19], Street Smart [13] – *criminal elements* [19], *street knowledge (Washington, D.C.)* [17], Deception [9] – *bluff* [13], *bribe* [11], Interaction [9] – *bargain* [15], *interview* [11], *intimidate* [15], Leadership [9] – *command* [15].

FX Skills

Brick – *body armor* (always on), *life support* (always on)

Diabolism – *mask* [11] (always on), *regeneration* [11].

(For a picture of Schellenberg as a young man, see http://www.joric.com/Conspiracy/Schellenberg.htm . For a picture of him as an older man, see http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERschellenberg.htm.)

The Oni inside Walter Schellenberg is beginning to express itself more. Up until now Schellenberg was a rededicated Nazi with impossible strength, the ability to shrug off damage, and no need for food, sleep, or air. Now Schellenberg finds that he can almost not control his temper (which at the same time, he does not quite feel is his). Once, during a storm, Schellenberg changed forms, physically becoming the Oni. He had to calm down and use a great deal of willpower to change back, and could do so only after the storm had passed. Now he tries to make sure that he is not disturbed or in combat when the weather forecasts thunder and lightning, and he has been more successful at switching back to his human form. He does not need to pay FX points to retain his shape, and only needs to use his mask power to switch back after he involuntarily becomes an Oni in shape (which happens only during storms, but does not automatically happen during storms). When he does change, use the regular Oni stats from **The Final Church** (p. 46), except use his Durability, and ignore the bite attack. The Schellenberg Oni has teeth, but with Schellenberg in control he does not really understand how to use them, and does not want to. Another skill that Schellenberg will not use in human form is his now deteriorated skill with the pistol. He is very much a believer in strenuous hand-to-hand combat, as das Eisenfaustbuch teaches.

In combat, Schellenberg is the definition of the word "powerhouse." Due to his skill with the Iron Fist style opponents receive a +3 penalty to their endurance checks to remain conscious when he achieves an Amazing success. He is no believer in fair fights, and will readily kill opponents who have been knocked-out. His skill at unarmed fighting, his strength, his natural armor, and his regeneration power (which functions as an Oni's, but requires a check for Schellenberg) make him a formidable opponent on the battlefield.

Off the battlefield, Schellenberg can also be a formidable opponent, and will possibly grow in power over the next years as his services and those of his men are increasingly hired out to intelligence agencies, and foreign governments (through his intelligence contacts). Heroes may run into Das Eisenfaustbuch for the first time in a bloody civil war in Africa or southeast Asia, and only later discover their base in Washington, D.C. Realizing that he has probably pushed his body as far as it can go, Schellenberg is beginning to become interested again in politics, and the business side of terror.

Schellenberg, however, has a few weaknesses. One is his obsession with resurrecting the Third Reich. Another is the fact that he is clueless about the occult lore that he thinks he knows so much about. More than that, he is actually deluded. Treat him as trained only in the Lore broad skill. The magic he uses is all instinctual, with no actual knowledge of the real occult world. (This pitiful Lore skill of his also serves as his knowledge of the "true history" of the world – in other words, Schellenberg heartily believes in the Nazi propaganda and ideology, though he did not always.) The final, and most dangerous of his weaknesses is the demon-spirit that is in his head, and is wanting, now more than ever, to get out. In the ensuing years, as his political and financial power grows, so will this weakness.

PLOT HOOKS/TRANSMISSIONS/SCENES:

What follows is a number of plot hooks that might be fleshed out into complete adventures, a few possibilities about the future of Das Eisenfaustbuch, and a few scenes that might take place during an investigation of this conspiracy.

ONE RING

Heroes who enjoy strange news might be interested in a small article about a Russian immigrant in Washington, D.C. who was attacked in her home on the night of the full moon. According to the woman's somewhat incoherent statements, what attacked her walked like a man, but was bigger than a man, and had bull's horns on its head. It walked right in, ripped her middle finger off, and left. EMTs who responded found her finger on the front sidewalk, and doctors were able to reattach it. In the article she complains briefly that she lost her father's ring.

PCs can find out a few more things with a little research. After talking to her the PCs will realize that though her English is not perfect, she actually got a clear view of the creature, and is not as hysterical as the article made her out to be. After gaining her trust the PCs can also learn about the ring that she lost: it was a gift from her father, and he used to tell her that it was from a German officer that he killed late in the war. The night that she was attacked she had just gotten off the bus where she had been talking to another recent immigrant. Something the PCs can easily find from weather reports is that that night was stormy.

What really happened: Schellenberg, seeing that a storm was coming, got on a bus to get home faster, where he saw this Russian woman wearing an SS officer's ring. He couldn't contain his anger and followed her to her door, where he transformed into his Oni form. He took the ring, and ran the rest of the way to one of his safehouses (an abandoned house nearby). Not many people were out, but some people might have seen something strange running through the night. If the PCs follow up on the bus route they might gain an idea of the general area of Das Eisenfaustbuch's main headquarters.

ALL RITES REVERSED

Once the PCs have an idea of what to look for they are probably going to try to follow some members, hoping to find their headquarters or hideouts. Assuming the PCs physically follow some members with some modicum of skill, they'll be led towards a Kinko's Copy Center. Through the big glass windows PCs can see the members photocopying something. However it's more than likely that the members will also spot

the PCs – they may not know the PCs, but they are paranoid enough to think that people are watching them most of the time – and bolt out the back door. They will block the door into the back of the office with heavy desks or copiers. PCs can give chase, but if they get too close, a few of the members will stop and set an ambush for them, hoping to give the other members who are there a chance to escape. Most of the ones who are there to stop the PCs are Marginal members only, who don't really know what's going on with Das Eisenfaustbuch (and probably don't even know the name).

However, if it's information the PCs want, they may be able to find some at the Kinko's. Since they left in a hurry, the thugs left at least one sheet of paper in the copier. (Some roll may be called for here, with an Amazing result meaning three sheets of paper are left, Good meaning two sheets, and anything else resulting in one sheet. I'm not at all sure what this roll should be based on though.) The papers are copies, not from the original book, not even from the original copies, but still clearly legible. What pages you give the Heroes depends on how much you want them to know. Give them the title page and they have a name for the conspiracy, a date for its beginning, and even the name of the original author. Give them a random page, and they should have an idea that the book is an instruction manual for a martial art.

(If the referee wishes to provide the players with handouts of these papers, there are a number of websites that contain suitable material.

For instance, information about martial artscan be found at martialarts.about.com/index.html.

Suitable drawings can be found in anatomy books, such as *Gray's Anatomy* which can be found online at www.bartleby.com, (illustration 410 is particularily effective).

German style fonts (such as Schwaben Alt) can be found here: http://user.dtcc.edu/~berlin/font/german.htm.

To provide text in the German language, there's always babelfish.altavista.com. But be warned, there have been hilarious mistranslations before. "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" translated into Russian and back into English once came out as "The vodka is good, but the meat is rotten." Lassen Sie den Benutzer aufpassen.)

"THE LONG-AWAITED SWASTICOOKIES ARE HERE!"

The heroes get a tip about some Nazi-related conspiracy that might make an appearance at a gun-show. In the back rooms of this convention, there is an auction of Nazi memorabilia. The PCs will likely try to get into the back rooms of this convention; a mixture of gaining trust, and flashing money is the easiest way in. The PCs may have a lot of time to interact with some strange people, but what Schellenberg wants here isn't for sale. One of the people who is not selling things in the back rooms has something he won't part with at any price. It's a photo album his father bought off a German soldier after World War II. It has pictures of many Nazi social functions, and some headshots of top SS officials. Schellenberg's picture is there, and he doesn't want it discovered. (People in America know him as John Smith, and he wants to keep it that way.) He'll send a bunch of thugs there to retrieve it, telling them to do it quietly. After failing to steal it, they will resort to force, and simply take it from him and make for the nearest door. The owner will not hesitate to use one of his guns, but that won't stop all of them. Whether or not they can get it out of the place is really up to the PCs (who should know that the use of deadly force is not legally warranted in this case). If they succeed though they'll have more vintage photographs than they will know what to do with. If they have Schellenberg's name (say, from All Rites Reversed), they'll know whom to look for. And if they've seen Schellenberg in the present, then they'll know something strange is up. Others will certainly want a look at that book, including some "friends" at the CIA. And Schellenberg may want it back now more than ever.

HAMMERSKINS FOREVER, FOREVER HAMMERSKINS

A Good member of Das Eisenfaustbuch joins some old friends in performing some hate crimes. The police catch them red-handed once. (What they were doing is up to the GM. Not all hate crimes are physically violent.) They resist arrest, violently, and there is a firefight. The member of Das Eisenfaustbuch is not hurt by the bullets, and escapes, as do others, but at least one of his friends is captured. The police have a strange report to file, which the PCs may have a chance to see. Either the names of the neo-Nazis who escaped will come up, or the Das Eisenfaustbuch member will try to kill the captured comrade. Possibly both will happen. The PCs will very likely try to find the named neo-Nazis. The Das Eisenfaustbuch member will be impossible to find (since he has no listed place of residence), but one of the Hammerskins lives with his parents, and the PCs can get him to talk. (For one thing, he's scared of his father, and with good reason, too.) From this kid they can get information on how the Das Eisenfaustbuch member no longer hangs out with them, how he doesn't attend the meetings anymore, and about how he talked about having more power than anyone. Also, they can get some vague information about how strong the member is, how he could not be hurt by bullets, about he seemed in general to be a neo-Nazi superman.

In another few days the police will find the body of the Das Eisenfaustbuch member. He'd been torn apart. That was Schellenberg's punishment for putting old allegiances above new ones.

HOUSES NOT JAILS

The abandoned house that served Das Eisenfaustbuch as a training area since the beginning has been raided by the

police, on an anonymous tip that it was a crack house. They can't find any drug paraphernalia, but they have found some items of note. Most of the items are simply strange for an abandoned house (punching bags, boxing gloves, weights, practice dummies, a CD player), but not criminal. Some are more alarming (pro-Nazi posters, "White Pride" buttons, CDs from Resistance Records, an original SS officer's uniform). The police are a little disappointed, and most of the items are taken in for evidence, or for police auction. A friend of the Hoffmann Institute on the police force may report this little bit of information. If the PCs think that the police station where the items are being held will be attacked by Das Eisenfaustbuch they may think to go lay an ambush. In a day or two a man will come and get the stuff and load his car with it. If the PCs are in the building they'll overhear that he's from the CIA (which he is). If they are waiting outside they might try to trail the car, but the driver is very well-trained in spotting and losing a tail. Either way, the PCs will at least learn that the CIA has some connection with some neo-Nazi group, possibly Das Eisenfaustbuch.

SUPERPOWERED LIZARDMEN?

One CIA agent has kept constant track of Das Eisenfaustbuch, and realizes now that the group is getting more dangerous to the CIA. Now (after Houses not Jails, and "The long-awaited SWASTICOOKIES are here!") that the CIA knows that the group is not just made up of amateur WWII scholars, but hardcore neo-Nazis, some of them might be a little more leery of contracting their services. This one agent realizes that some of the power of Das Eisenfaustbuch could be saved, even if the group can't be. And as a Mason in good standing, he has a plan. Either a top-ranking member of Das Eisenfaustbuch will travel with him to a Kinori nest (Denver, as a stronghold of both the Kinori and Masons, makes a logical choice, but New York and New Orleans are both closer), or a small detachment of Kinori will meet him in Washington, D.C. (Have the Kinori been there all along?) A copy of the book, and a teacher will be presented to the Kinori, as a gift. The CIA agent hopes that the Kinori will learn the technique (since the members of Das Eisenfaustbuch get more violent every day, the agent is afraid to learn the technique himself), and he also hopes that this gift will be enough to buy Das Eisenfaustbuch safe haven in the Kinori tunnels.

That there will be a meeting taking place somewhere between these groups will be leaked to the PCs. Of course, having the Kinori learning this technique is the last thing the heroes will probably want. ("Superpowered lizardmen, well that's just great.") They may try to ruin the meeting, and they may succeed. However, if they can get close enough to the meeting they may overhear the Kinori speaking about the book and the technique. The Kinori know enough about interdimensional gateways to recognize the technique as such, and this is the most important information the PCs will get from this episode. The Kinori (or rather, the Kinori as far as I understand them) will not take the book, and will not take the group under their protection. The Das Eisenfaustbuch member will become enraged at this, and will go on a rampage. The Kinori will need help from the PCs in order to stop him. After they work together, an older, calmer blackscale will tell the PCs that the book is a series of gateway-opening rituals if they missed that piece of information.

OPERATION JET-BLACK POODLE-DOG

The CIA now knows several unsavory things about Das Eisenfaustbuch, including the fact that their contact John Smith might actually be a 91 year old Nazi. This wouldn't be too much, except now Schellenberg is adamantly demanding Hitler's body, and his other demands are growing by leaps and bounds. Several CIA agents who have known about them have long had misgivings about Das Eisenfaustbuch (many of the hints the PCs have received have come from these sources). But now even the ones who were most enamored of their skills see that keeping Das Eisenfaustbuch around, or even allowing it to exist would be dangerous, not least of all to their reputation. Tips to the police may take care of some of the Marginal members of the group, but will never work for the higher members. Intelligence agency friends might ask the Hoffmann Institute, or the PCs for help.

NOTES

If a GM wants to study primary documents so as to be able to present neo-Nazis and racist speeches accurately, I can suggest nothing better than the internet. Putting "white pride" into any search engine will provide numerous sites, however, even with a thick skin and a large dose of irony, some of these sites cannot be taken for long. I, for one, like a little verisimilitude in my game. But too much can be depressing, which is actually the word I would use to describe these racism- and hate-filled webpages; that people can still be so dumb is depressing. And not a little scary.

However, speaking of verisimilitude, there's something else I should say: according to the real-world history books Walter Schellenberg did not disappear after the war. He gave himself up in June, 1945; testified against other Nazis at the Nuremberg Trial; gave Allen Dulles information on the Soviet Union; received a six-year sentence in 1949 (the sentence was to begin in 1945); wrote his memoirs, "The Labyrinth", on being a spymaster; was released 1951 because of a liver condition, and died in Italy in 1952.

For the sake of this conspiracy idea I have so far ignored these facts. (Actually, I just learned these facts.) However, assuming one didn't want to ignore these facts, how could they be incorporated into this story?

One of the most obvious is that the official Schellenberg was a phony, faking it for his own sake. If the PCs research

Schellenberg and turn up this information, a little more research might reveal a picture that contradicts pictures from before his surrender (such as the pictures they gained at the gun-show). (For a terrible twist imagine that one of Hitler's diabolists altered Hitler's appearance. Hitler gets caught, and serves a scant five years in prison, and dies peacefully in bed. Then, remember that Schellenberg wants Hitler's body, which is buried in Schellenberg's grave.)

Another possibility is that the British, ashamed over losing a man who had carried out the kidnapping of two British SIS agents (the Venlo incident, as it is known), manufactured a fake Schellenberg to satisfy the public. The American OSS probably had a hand in helping MI-6 pull off this deception, and the CIA might have some long-lost archival information reporting how it was done. This information will tip off the PCs to the fact that it was done at all.

The last possibility I have to offer for this problem is that perhaps there are two Walter Schellenbergs. During a critical moment the demon inside him was able to harness some extradimensional power, and duplicate Schellenberg. (The demon would not have the power to duplicate itself.) One Schellenberg went off to escape, was caught by the Allies, etc. The other boarded a boat, and read a book, etc. In this case, the PCs will perhaps never find that out, and will just be left with the thought that the world is not only a stranger place than they imagined, but perhaps stranger than they could imagine.

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Thanks:

Any information that accidentally survived the editing process comes primarily from Alan Bullock's Hitler.

*Thanks to J. E. Christgau for his excellent Alternity Character Manager, and especially to the Dark*Matter Weblist for support and criticism.*

Epistomology

Faith FX

By David K. Tormsen

Epistomology was the Greek philosophy of using knowledge to address the fundamental problems. It was concerned chiefly with applying logic and rational thought to the physical world, and led directly to the development of skepticism. Skepticism came to signify a philosophy of doubt in what is regarded as truth. While skepticism went out of vogue during the Middle Ages, it was reborn with the Renaissance.

When the Age of Reason dawned, skepticism truly came of age. It became, slowly but surely, closely aligned with the scientific method. Many prominent scientists and philosophers took up its cause, including Rene Descartes, David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, Immanuel Kant, Carl Sagan, and countless others. Today, skepticism stands side by side with Reason and Science, constantly combating mysticism and pseudo-science, wherever they rear their ugly heads.

But, in the Dark Matter universe, mysticism and pseudo-science are all too real. How then, do the skeptics survive? How can so many intelligent, analytical human beings cloak themselves from the mysteries of reality? Can it be possible that they simply don't want to believe in the facts of the world around them, or is it something much more?

There are some skeptics for who the belief in the power of Science and Reason has become more than just logic. It has become faith. And where there is Faith, there is Faith FX. Epistomology is a magical art so secret, that often even its practitioners don't know what it truly is. The skeptics just don't recognize that they have power over the universe in this way. However, others have realized this, and skeptics are being recruited by many organizations, notably the Hoffman Institute and MENSA.

A skeptic requires no ceremony to cast his spells; in fact, such metaphysical trappings would definitely result in a penalty to the casting. Normally, a skeptic needs simply to convince himself that everything can be explained rationally, a process known as an Examination. The difficulty of the spell has no bearing on the type of Examination required, rather the events surrounding the skeptic play an important role.

If there are no strange and inexplicable events happening around the skeptic, he merely needs to make a Marginal Examination, which takes a single phase. If the strange events are minor, for example, a display of psychokinetic powers, the skeptic requires an Ordinary Examination, which typically takes d4 phases to complete. A Good Examination (d6+2 phases) would be appropriate if a something rather strange and unexplainable happened, such as seeing a ghostly double-decker bus driving down a deserted road and vanishing. An Amazing Examination (2d6+2 phases) would only be called for if something exceptionally weird happened, such as a pink and purple polka dot Greater Demon rising out of a volcano and firing lightning bolts out of its ears.

Never underestimate the skeptic's ability to come up with a rational explanation for seemingly mystical and metaphysical encounters. If the skeptic is allowed to converse with similarly minded individuals during his Examination, it will render a -1 to -3 step bonus to the casting: "Of course that wasn't a werewolf, Barnaby, that's absurd! It must have been a rabid dog. Yes, a rabid dog, that makes sense." Alternatively, if the skeptic is forced to converse with an individual or individuals with a different point of view – "That UFO was not St. Elmo's Fire! Since when have you seen St. Elmo's fire swoop out of the sky and abduct an entire herd of cows? Hmmm?" – it may incur a +1 to +3 step penalty to the casting.

Unlike other forms of Faith FX, all Epistomology spells are Intelligence-based.

FAITH FX: EPISTOMOLOGY

SKILL NAME	COST:
Epistomology	11
Shield of Disbelief (INT)	4
Indefiable Physical Laws (INT)	5
True Science (INT)	3
Bane of Cryptids (INT)	4
Solitude of the Mind (INT)	4

Skills that cannot be used untrained are shown in blue.

SHIELD OF DISBELIEF

Conjure spell: 1 FX point

In this spell, the skeptic is so convinced of his own safety that attacks on him by psionic or FX means suffer a penalty. FX attacks suffer a +3 step penalty, while psionic attacks suffer a +2 penalty. Conventional weapons are not affected. Also, if the skeptic is unaware that someone is trying to attack him, the penalty is reduced by 1 step. A Shield of Disbelief lasts for the remainder of the round in which it is cast, as well as the round immediately afterwards. To maintain a Shield for longer, the skeptic must spend another FX point per round.

***Increased Confidence*:** At rank 4, FX and psionic attacks suffer a +4 and a +3 step penalty respectively. At rank twelve, these become +5 and +4 step penalties.

***Downgrade Damage*:** At rank 8, any damage that the skeptic happens to suffer due to attack by FX or psionic powers is downgraded. Mortal damage becomes wound, wound becomes stun and stun is disregarded.

INDEFIABLE PHYSICAL LAWS

Transform spell: 1 FX point

This spell enforces the skeptic's own perception of the universe onto the nearby environment, and negates the effects of other magical spells, both Arcane FX and Faith FX. When directed against a specific spell (the spellcaster must be within 30 meters of the skeptic), the target's Will resistance modifier modifies the check. Targeted spells that are based on the spellcaster's Intelligence also inflict an additional +1 step penalty. A success means the targeted spell is instantly negated. A failure means skeptic cannot attempt to negate that that particular spell effect until his or her skill rank improves. This spell automatically fails when directed against another skeptic.

***Damage Magical Creatures*:** When this spell is cast at rank 4, any creature that relies on FX for its continued existence suffers d6+2s when within 10 meters of the skeptic. This damage increases to d6+2w within 20 meters at rank 8 and d4+1m within 30 meters at rank 12.

TRUE SCIENCE

Transform spell: 1 FX point

This spell has a detrimental effect on natural phenomena or technological devices that work on properties unrecognized by mainstream science. In essence, it manipulates the fabric of the universe just enough to render anything covered by the Lore-*fringe science* or the Technical Science-*xenoengineering* skills inoperable while within sight of the skeptic. Antigravity engines suddenly cut out, telluric generators stop producing power, reverse-engineered laser rifles become as effective as supermarket checkout scanners, and so forth. Even advanced technology like sandman cybernetics is affected. This effect lasts for d6+1 rounds, or while the offending technology is within sight of the skeptic. If the skeptic leaves the area or is killed, the spell ends and the technology is operable once more.

This spell also has an effect on natural phenomena not recognized by conservative meteorologists and scientists. Unexplained or Fortean phenomena such as frog falls, earth lights, temporal discrepancies, visions of religious figures and so forth are all dispelled temporarily by the spell, as above.

BANE OF CRYPTIDS

Transform spell: 2 FX points

This spell creates a high-pitched whining that sends all creatures regarded as cryptozoological heading as far away from the source as possible. This spell only affects creatures of animal intelligence (the only exception being sasquatch and yeti) and effects xenoforms, cryptids and out-of-place animals (such as American kangaroos, or European great cats). The whining is inaudible to all other creatures, but is intensely powerful to affected creatures. Any affectable creature within 100 meters of the skeptic must immediately make a successful Will feat check or flee at the greatest possible speed in the opposite direction for d4 rounds (d8 rounds for a critical failure). If successful the first time, the creature must make another Will feat check every minute for the duration of the spell or flee accordingly. The spell lasts 5 minutes.

Increased Duration: At rank 4 and 12, the duration of the spell increases to 10 minutes and an hour respectively.

Increased Effect: At rank 8, any effected creature that fails a Will feat check must flee for d6 rounds (d12 on a Critical Failure).

SOLITUDE OF THE MIND

Transform spell: 1 FX point

This spell creates a field of energy around the skeptic, making it difficult for mindwalking powers to be used within the field. Within the field, all attempts to use ESP or Telepathy suffer a +3 step penalty, while all other mindwalking disciplines suffer a +2 penalty. This field is invisible and intangible, and extends about 10 meters around the caster. It not only hinders mindwalkers, but also becomes an irritant for those with mindwalking talents. Any character possessing a Psionic broad skill suffers a +1 penalty to all actions non-related to mindwalking, as the inessant humming makes it difficult to concentrate. No non-psionic character can detect this humming. The field of energy around the skeptic dissipates after d6 rounds.

Permanence: The field of energy lasts for d6+2, d8+2 and d12+2 rounds at rank 4, 8 and 12 respectively.

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Art Gallery

Ancient Gate

Art by Norm Fenlason, words by Mike Marchi

Carla gazed deeply into the open air between the two pillars. By focusing her physical eyes on the spot of air, she was able to extend the focus of her inner eye on the same spot. In her mind, she saw the molecular nitrogen and oxygen dancing in space with trace elements and nobel gases. Beads of perspiration appeared on her brow as she watched the ballet, trying to find the tune that drove the dance. The song of creation. The song of Nature. The song that bound the very air to our universe.

Then like a child changing a station on the television, reached out with her mind and switched the song in that space, causing it to resonate with another, more distant melody - the creation song of another place.

An inky black tear formed suddenly in the spot between the pillars and at its center, she spied the distant cliffs of her homeland.

Humming softly to herself, Carla smiled, and stepped into the rift...

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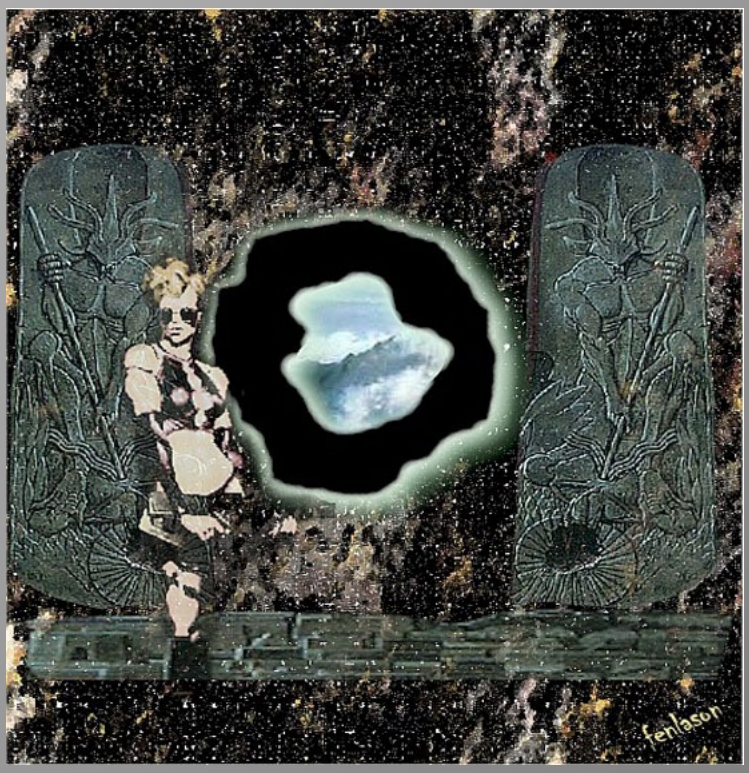

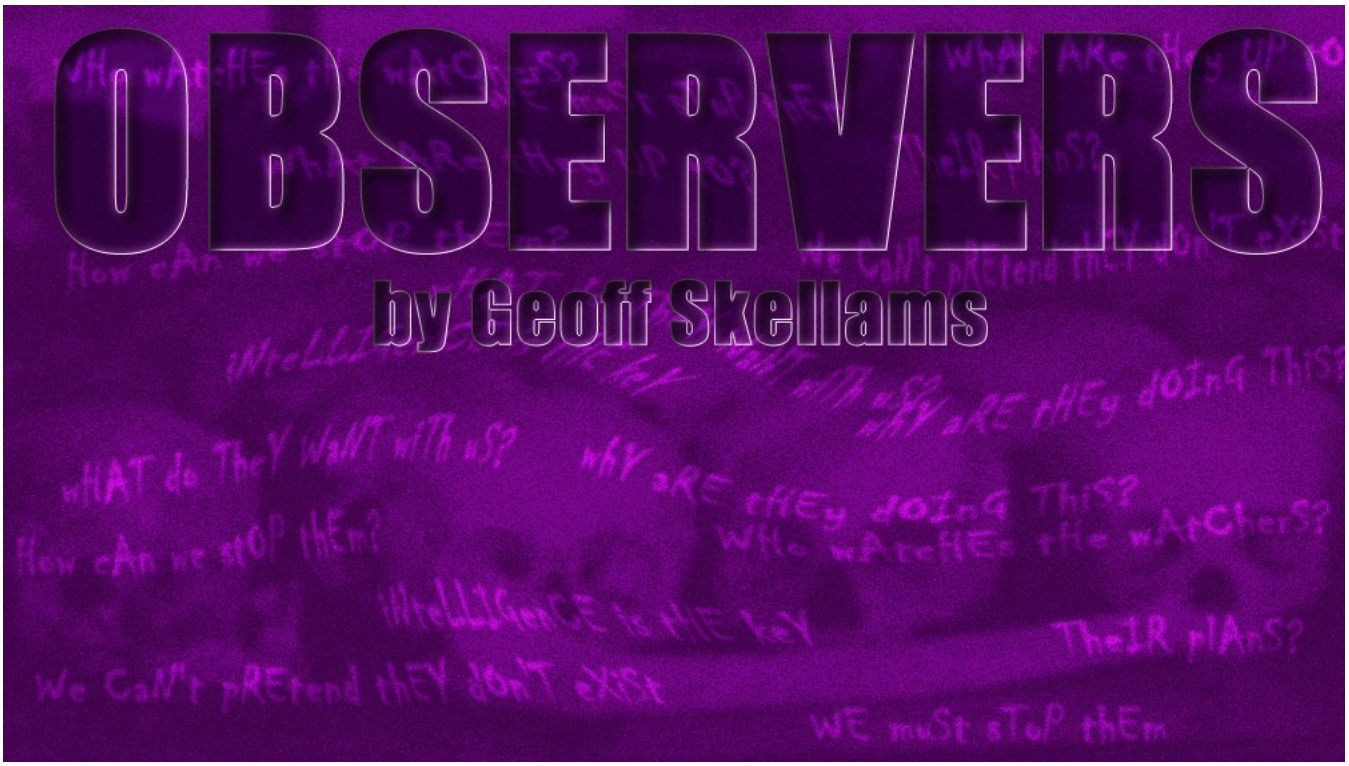

Without knowing what *they* are up to, how can any of us expect to win this war? They hide in the shadows, manipulating the rest of the world for their own ends and making the rest of believe that they don't exist. You might think that a good offense is the best defense, but unless you know where to strike, chances are you're only going to get yourself killed. Frankly, there's few enough of us that wasting your life because you had no idea what was really going on doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

Let's face it - some people just aren't cut out for a front line role in the fight against the monsters. That doesn't mean that they can't do anything. Someone has to find the monsters and get a sense for just how far their corruption has spread. It's a slow, painstaking and often frustrating job that few have the patience to do.

In case you've missed it, we're now living in the information age. In order to come out on top, you have to have the best and freshest of information and you need to be able to realize the significance of what you know in order to make the most of it. The military is talking about this sort of thing all the time these days; strategic and tactical reconnaissance is of premium importance and battlefield leaders are constantly looking for new ways to move information around faster than ever before so they have more time to react. The business world operates in exactly the same way. They sniff around for opportunities, laying the foundations for all sorts of deals and acquisitions. Getting into a good strategic position is of prime importance if they want to survive in the modern cut-throat corporate environment.

It's no different in the Most Dangerous Game. The enemy is perhaps even more subtle than most, hiding their actions and covering their tracks. Indiscriminate actions against them can land you in miles of trouble with the regular authorities, taking you off the streets at precisely the time you need to be there. Either that or they decide to take you out directly because you're much to big a liability for them.

But by slowing down and waiting, you begin to see the bigger picture and you get a sense for where the chinks in the armor lie - the places they are most vulnerable. Armed with that knowledge, you have the ability to use it to your advantage, minimizing your own risks and potentially increasing the damage to the enemy.

But knowledge can also give you another advantage. It allows you to realize that destroying all of the monsters is not necessarily the best course of action. Some of them have deals of their own that they want to sort out, quite often with those of their own kind. The enemy, used properly can be a potent weapon in their own right. Dealing with them directly may be an option for some; manipulating the course of events and feeding them false information in order to cause a reaction you desire may be a better course of action for others.

But without an idea of what the hell is going on out there, opportunities like these are going to pass you straight by.

WEAKNESSES:

Sometimes the signal just gets lost in the noise and *everything* becomes part of the conspiracy. I've seen guys think they know what's going on and have their own pet theories that ties everything together. Unfortunately, there are so many

holes in it that they just can't see. Sooner or later, you start jumping at shadows and sending good people off on wild goose chases that end up being traps. It no wonder that many don't trust us fully.

Distraction is one of the other killers. Sometimes it seems like a good idea to keep following the leads, to keep digging that one hole in the hope that you can get to the bottom of the mess and get it sorted out once and for all. But doing that carries its own danger – it blinds you to what's really happening in the rest of the world, and quite often those lateral links are perhaps the most important of all. Not only that, but if you're too busy researching information you might miss the crucial time when your knowledge can be vital to a team.

Information overload is another danger. Some guys think that can handle all the information; that their minds can cope with the stress of making sense of it all. There are a few who can, but most lose sight of that it is they are looking for and drown in the information deluge. There's too much to process and they start to miss vital clues that they need to track down the enemy.

APOCRYPHA:

Observers see it as their job to keep an eye on the undead. When the dead walk in the streets, they're usually up to something. It doesn't matter what the hell that thing is, where it's going and what it plans on doing when it gets there are the most important things.

Despite their best efforts, the undead can't cover their tracks completely; there are times when some of them come out in the open to act on one of their schemes. You got a sniff of the hidden manipulation and knew that there was more to things than the way they appeared on the surface. The corruption is so widespread, so far-reaching that you can't rest until you've gotten to the bottom of it.

THE IMBUING:

Most observers comment that they knew something was wrong before they actually saw the undead. For them, it was the feeling and not the revelation itself that got then going. They have to get to the bottom of it - to find out what's going on and who's behind it, so that they can pass that information onto someone who can do something useful with that information.

CHARACTER CREATION:

Observers need to rely on their minds more than their brawn. High perception is a must, along with either a good Intelligence for the strategist, or Wits for the tacticians. Awareness, Empathy and Intuition are all highly important. Given that a network of agents and informants is invaluable, the Contacts background is highly regarded.

STARTING CONVICTION: 3

A. K. A.:

Watchers, Webmasters, Conspiracy Theorists, Crackpots.

NEW EDGES

Once an observer answers the Call, they begin to see reality not as a random sequence of events, but as an interconnected tapestry that has everyone and everything woven into it. They begin to see connections between seemingly unrelated people, places and events and usually learn that the supernatural have a greater grasp of this concept than mortals and they use it to their advantage.

While Visionaries spend their time wondering "What are they?", an Observer will ask "What are they up to?" For the observer, what they are is irrelevant. Preventing the supernatural from ruining the lives of ordinary folk is far more important.

▸ DISGUISE

Often the best way to obtain information from someone is to simply have them give it to you. If that information is a secret, the information won't be forthcoming unless that someone believes that you are trusted enough to receive the information. Rarely is that the case without a long and usu-

STEREOTYPES

Avengers: If they're not going off half-cocked, they're a very useful weapon. But they often act without thinking and without a focus.

Bystanders: Their information about The Enemy is as good as anyone else's.

Defenders: Good to have around to cover my back, so that I can concentrate on more important things.

Innocents: A befriended enemy is a good source of information, perhaps better than most. Being able to deal with them without resorting to violence makes these guys perhaps the best ambassadors we have.

Judges: More often than not, they're loose cannons, acting on their own initiative without seeing the bigger picture.

Martyrs: Too willing to sacrifice themselves at the wrong time, they can still be handy to have around when the time is right and the only course of action is suicidal.

Redeemers: If they can turn one of the Enemy to our side, then that's one more of us and one less of them.

Visionaries: Who gives a damn what they are? They exist, so just deal with that.

The Enemy: A hidden menace that needs to be monitored so that we can stop them when they step out of line.

ally tedious verification process. A much faster way is to find someone who has already been through this process and pretend to be them for a while.

Disguise gives your character the ability to modify their voice and/or their appearance so that they look like another person. If done well enough, you can pass for the subject and convince others that they are who they appear to be. That way, the unsuspecting target can carry out their mission without ever realizing that their information has fallen into the wrong hands.

The disguise is good enough to fool humans, the supernatural and even electronic surveillance.

System: The character has the choice of mimicking the subject's voice exactly, mimicking their appearance, or taking the whole package. Roll Manipulation + Vision, difficulty 5 for voice only, difficulty six for appearance only, and difficulty 7 for both, provided the subject is in your presence. If you have no references to the subject available, the difficulty increases by 2. A decent recording or photograph of the subject (or both) is somewhat better than nothing, increasing the difficulty by only 1. Only one success is necessary to achieve the transformation which lasts ten minutes. Each additional success lasts a further ten minutes.

The transformation takes one turn to complete and when the time has expired, the Observer takes one round to turn back into their usual form.

•• MINDWIPE

The supernatural creatures don't act out their plans on their own. Many of them employ mundanes to do much of the legwork for them. Some serve their masters willingly, while others may not even know who is calling the shots.

Mindwipe gives your character a chance to disrupt the influence the supernatural holds over the mundane. The mundane's brain is effectively shorted out temporarily, leaving them unable to recall what it was they were doing, or why they were doing it.

Normally, this can buy you enough time to disrupt the plans of the supernatural and help the individual recover from their ordeal. If the mundane was serving willingly, you may have a much harder time convincing them of the stupidity of their actions.

System: To activate this edge, you need to be able to look into the target's eyes and have their undivided attention. The roll Willpower + Vision, difficulty 7, to complete their mindwipe. Only one success is needed to influence the target, but leaves the target vulnerable to further supernatural influence. Each additional success further disrupts the target's memories, making them less vulnerable to supernatural influence in the future.

This edge cannot be used on a supernatural creature. Their minds have a different structure (if they have a physical mind at all). Attempting to use this edge of a supernatural creature results in automatic failure.

••• INTERROGATE

Forcible extraction of information from prisoners is a concept as old as warfare itself. Causing the victim physical pain - or sometimes only threatening to cause them pain - can convince them to give you answers to the questions that you have. The information that you gathering this way can go a long way to helping to stop unnecessary bloodshed.

This edge gives you the ability to force either a mundane or a supernatural creature to answer your questions. If they fail to tell the truth, they are subject to intense physical pain for as long as you desire. You don't have to know whether the victim is telling the truth or not; their own minds will cause the pain to happen if thy tell an untruth.

System: Roll Manipulation + Vision, difficulty being the target's Stamina + 3. The number of successes determines the number of questions that you can force the target to answer truthfully.

If the target answers a question untruthfully, either by deliberately telling a lie, or by leaving out a critical part of the answer, roll Bashing damage equal to the number of successes scored.

The effect of the interrogation is not limited by time. If the victim passes out during the interrogation due to the damage sustained, the effect lingers until they regain consciousness. However, the effect only affects a single individual; it cannot be transferred onto another person. Doing so requires a separate Interrogation check.

Compels the subject, either mortal or supernatural to tell the truth, or suffer horrendous pain. Number of successes determines time - requires a check against the subject's Willpower.

•••• CONNECTION

Many cultures believe that the more you concentrate on something, the more connected to that thing you become. It's almost as if your mind sifts through the myriad of signals that it receives every second and grabs hold of the ones that are related to the object of your concentration.

In Observers, this is more fully developed. If you've been studying the operation of a supernatural creature for sometime, you begin to get insights into what they're up to. But it can go even further than that. You have a sixth sense that connects you to the operation that you are studying. When something happens that is important to that operation, you get a sense of it as it is happening. Sometimes it's just a sense that something is happening; other times it goes so far as to give you flashes of sight or sound that show you what's going on.

Either way, you don't end up as surprised when your hunch is confirmed.

System: Spend one Conviction point and roll Wits + Vision, difficulty 7. If any successes are achieved, your character's sixth sense is triggered whenever something happens in the supernatural operation you are watching, within a twenty four hour period.

The number of successes determines the amount of information that you receive. One success gives you just a sense that something is happening, but nothing else. More successes give you more information, such as who is involved, or where the incident happened and can come in the form of visions, or clairaudience or perhaps both. However, they don't come at a time when it's necessarily convenient for you.

The visions tend to dominate everything that you're doing, grabbing your conscious mind's complete attention. This can have potentially nasty side effects if your character is doing something else that requires constant attention, such as driving.

••••• SYNCHRONIZE

There comes a point where you are so familiar with the fabric of life and the interconnections between everyone and everything that you know how to manipulate reality so that something happens when you need it to. Carl Jung called the concept "Synchronicity," and although some have tried to downplay the idea by calling it mere coincidence, the truth remains that for those with enough faith, changing the flow of cause and effect becomes possible.

This edge allows you to manipulate circumstances to grant you one simple wish. It may be something as minor as someone getting caught in a traffic jam and missing an appointment, but that one small effect can have dramatic flow on effects down the track. That one small incident may be important enough that it could change someone's whole life.

System: Spend two Conviction points, and roll Manipulation + Vision, difficulty 8. If any successes result, your character can change the fabric of reality very slightly to suit their own purposes. The change the character can make must seem like nothing more than a coincidence for those involved and it must be extremely subtle in its nature.

The change may or may not bring about the end result that your character desires. It does, however, increase the odds of that outcome coming to pass, usually at the expense of another possibility. Rarely does life play out the way you expect it to.

As they say, be careful what you wish for.

❖

DARK MATTER
ILLUMINATI

BY DAVID K. TORMSEN

THE KGB

The Komitet Gosudarstvennog Bezopasnosti – the KGB or Committee for State Security – once existed as a bullying arm of the Soviet government during the Cold War. It has changed much in the few years after the fall of the USSR; they soon found themselves in the role of protecting Mother Russia from growing outside threats and bringing her back onto the world stage as a Great Power.

After 1991, the KGB appeared to be dissolved; in fact, quite the opposite was the case. It assumed control of its supposed descendants, the SVR and the FSB, and gained substantial political power in the new Russia.

As Boris Yeltzin aged, the KGB began complex political movements in order to allow their political aspirant, Vladimir Putin, to win the presidency in 2000. Slowly, they are spreading their influence into the media, the military and the economy, and have control of the governments in Azerbaijan and other former Socialist Soviet Republics. In addition, they maintain their complex espionage networks in the United States, the European Union, and most of the developed world that have existed since the 1950's and are very well established.

Surprisingly, the KGB has been considered by the Hoffman Institute as the most likely candidate for a secret agreement to allow the Institute more influence in Russia and Eastern Europe (after, of course, the failed attempts secure an agreement with the Gregorians.) The KGB seems to have the protection of Russia as its main mission and shares enemies with the Institute. It also has reciprocity with the United Nations, the French Direction Generale de la Securite Exterieure, and the Chinese Social Affairs Department.

The KGB seems to be the organization most involved in combating the Sandman influence in the Russian sphere of influence. The entire Chechen rebellion is actually a front for Sandman open warfare with the Russian army, and the Russian Mafia has been infiltrated by the Sandmen as well. This is mentioning the Magnitogorsk hellhole, where the KGB not only have to combat the Sandmen but also a diabolical entity known as Baal. In addition, groups such as Psychotech and Aum Shinri Kyo have alarmingly widespread (and growing) influence in Russia and the CIS.

But what does the KGB have to combat these threats? Surprisingly, quite a lot. While the CIA concentrated on mind control and psychic powers, these were not the KGB's foray (the same can not be said, however, for the now defunct Soviet Controlled Offensive Intelligence Agency, the driving force behind the Soviet psychic research program). The KGB, thus, concentrated on other avenues of research.

The KGB has been experimenting in the fringe sciences, and is even believed to have possession of a crashed Grey scout ship. Their research into anti-gravity and Tesla technology is slowly bearing fruit; they have created several spy aircraft with space-faring capacity and have armed several of their spy satellites with powerful energy weapons. With assistance from UN scientists, they were on the verge of developing a true stealth submarine in 2000, a vessel undetectable by any conventional means. COM-12 got wind of it and destroyed their test submarine, the Kursk.

They have even delved into the occult and xenology. The KGB has several teams studying lycanthropy and vampirism (both Ekkimu and true Vampires), as well as into the capture and control of various entities, including the domovoi (poltergeists), the leshii (malevolent forest spirits) and the vodianoi (swamp monsters). They have captured several Sasquatch and mothmen, in Siberia and the Atai Sayan Mountains respectively, and are attempting to train them as modern soldiers for wilderness missions, with mixed results.

Also, like the CIA, the KGB has great Archives filled with occult materials, xenoform corpses and secret reports. Occult and technological research documents taken from Nazi Germany after the War, kinori mummies stolen from Egypt in the early 1960's, alien artifacts recovered from across the Communist World, and so on. Much of this was used in the research already discussed, but even more has not yet been studied in detail.

KGB scientists have been co-operating for many years with the Chinese in studying the various alien technologies they have obtained. While the Grey scout ship recovered by the Chinese is in better overall condition than those in the KGB's possession, the KGB has a better understanding of the craft's controls and overall functions. They have suffered many of the problems that the Americans faced in their alien

craft reverse-engineering project at Groom Lake. With this research, combined with Nazi research into antigravity, the KGB has a basic understanding of the principles of Gravity Induction.

The KGB has an odd relationship with the Hidden Order of St. Gregory. It seems to be one of wary coexistence, as both have larger concerns than agitating each other. They have an unspoken agreement to stay out of each other's way. With the United Nations, the KGB has a much warmer relationship and is becoming instrumental the New World Order. The KGB believes the NWO will allow them greater influence over world affairs. KGB paramilitary troops are currently being trained within the United States for this purpose.

The KGB also has many illuminati enemies: the CIA, their traditional Cold War enemy; the Invisible College, who they had oppressed for decades before the fall of the USSR; the Rosicrusians, ever since the debacle in the 1960's where the KGB ransacked several hidden Egyptian tombs right underneath the noses of the Companions; the Vril Society, and the Russian mafia. The KGB has evolved from a rather insidious organization, to the most powerful force for the protection of Russia from dangerous forces. However, they still retain many of their unscrupulous traits, as shown by their increasing authoritarian control over the media in Russia and other countries.

While the KGB has many similarities with the CIA (which isn't surprising considering they both officially performed roughly the same functions), they are two very different organizations. Whilst the CIA has been on a slippery slope into corruption for decades, the KGB has actually been moving in the opposite direction. Despite their often extreme methods, they do have the best intentions (at least from their point of view) of the Russian peoples at heart. They both, however, continue to be ruthless and determined groups.

HEADQUARTERS: Moscow

BRANCHES:

St. Petersburg, Chelyabinsk, Vladivostok, Novosibrisk, Baku, Warsaw, Tbilisi, Kiev, Sofia, Tashkent, Kabul, Pyongyang, Havana. Smaller groups of illegals worldwide, especially in the United States and Western Europe.

FOLLOWERS:

Over 500,000: at least 300,000 paramilitary troops and several hundred thousand tech ops, agents, and other employees. Several hundred non-human employees scattered across Russia.

RESOURCES:

Great political and military power in Russia and the CIS, Nuclear capability. International network of spies and assassins. Cutting edge technology.

SECRET KNOWLEDGE:

Fringe Science, Occult Lore and Xenology.

PRIMARY GOAL:

Protect Mother Russia from her enemies

COMMON MISSIONS:

Military operations against sandmen and other threats to Mother Russia, infiltration of foreign intelligence organizations and societies, forcibly reducing dissent, secretly testing new technologies, capturing xenoforms within Russia, analyzing occult materials, increasing political influence.

DEDUSHKA VUK

KGB Paramilitary Soldier

Male Sasquatch Level 12 Combat Spec

Strength	16	Intelligence	10
Dexterity	9	Will	8
Constitution	12	Personality	6

Action Check: 14+/13/6/3

Actions Per Round: 3

Move: 24/16/6

Durability: 18/18/10/10

Last Resorts: 0

ATTACKS

Claws: 21/10/5 LI/O Personal
d4+3w/d4+5w/d4+3m

Pistol, 9mm: 12/7/3 HI/O 6/12/50
d4+1w/d4+2w/d4m

Machine Gun. Heavy: 18/9/4 HI/G 100/400/1000
d6+1w/2d4+2w/d8m

PERKS

Tough As Nails

Fortitude

Fists of Iron 6

FLAWS

Temper 4

Powerful Enemy (Etoile and Sandmen)

Primitive 4 [removed]

SKILLS

Athletics(16)-*climb*(17);Heavy Weapons(16)-*direct*(18); Unarmed Attack(16)-*power*(21); Modern Ranged Weapons(9)-*pistol*(12), rifle(15), SMG(13); Vehicle Operation(9); Stamina(12)-*endurance*(15), *resist*(13), Survival(12)-*Survival Training*[*Forest*](18); Knowledge(10)-language[Russian](11), language[*English*](11), first aid(11); Demolitions(10); Awareness(8)-*perception*(9); Interaction(6)-*intimidate*(7)

Notes: The KGB captured Dedushka Vuk as an infant in Kamchatka in the mid 1970's. His parents, two Sasquatch Wanderers, were "accidentally" killed and he was raised at a secret base in Siberia. When he reached adolescence, he was put through rigorous military training and educated in the ways of modern warfare. Today, he is a loyal member of the KGB and has been stationed in the Caucasus in order to combat the growing Sandmen threat there. He has made many enemies there.

Nationalistic and aggressive, he has won the respect of his human comrades many times over. He is currently a member of a special paramilitary troop consisting of humans, sasquatch, mothmen, rogue Sandmen and even a werewolf. They have been extremely effective in their operations, due mainly to their diversity and combined arms.

Despite his intense training and fierce loyalty to the KGB, he still maintains some of his Sasquatch nature. Subconsciously frustrated with human society, this translates into an often-difficult temper. He also tends to be suspicious of unfamiliar people, customs and technology, although he can often overcome them if they an prove to be practical, and will even adopt them if they succeed in impressing him enough.

Although he is normally quite suspicious and uncommunicative unless he is in combat (at which point he takes great pleasure in bellowing loudly), he has got a soft spot. Anyone who is able to beat him in an arm wrestling match will win his respect. With his +3 strength resistance modifier, that's easier said than done. He suffers from a temper that, although he is trying to keep it under control, often threatens to get away from him. He has never forgiven himself for the death of Private Androv, whom he threw through a brick wall during a heated discussion on whether or not Androv had been stealing Vuk's rations. Vuk was quite chagrined when he found that Androv was not to blame at all, but rather Vuk had simply sat on his rations.

THE KGB TOYBOX

Like the CIA, the KGB has developed many unconventional methods of accomplishing their tasks. Here are some of them.

Pheromones: Many KGB agents in foreign countries appear to be nothing more than vaguely attractive women. They are able to monopolize on this well, using their beauty to their advantage in many situations. They are able to complement their natural allure with the use of pheromones specifically designed to overcome the male sex's powers of rational thinking.

Pheromones, once released upon a target; provide the KGB agents with a -1, -2 and -3 step bonus to all Interaction: Seduce or Charm skill checks respectively for Ordinary, Good and Amazing success on the Dexterity feat check required to spray a target with the pheromones.

Combustion Gas: The KGB developed this as a substitute for the poison gas they used in the past for assassinations: the cause of death in those cases was all too obvious. This gas is quite insidious in its purpose and effects. It is delivered via a spray in the face by a pressurized container hidden within an umbrella, a cigarette lighter, et al. Once breathed in, it will react with certain chemicals within the human body, and will quickly begin to combust. For all intentions, a mans lungs will explode and fire will consume him from the inside out, leaving him as little more than a few charred bones.

However, the chemical reaction is over very quickly. In game terms, if the gas is breathed in, the target is entitled to a Stamina-Endurance check. On an Amazing success, the target suffers d8+3 stun damage, on a Good success, d8+2 wound damage, and on an Ordinary success, d12+4 wound damage. Failure will result in d4+4 mortal damage for the unfortunate soul, while Critical Failure will inflict 2d6+4 mortal damage. Regardless of the result, the target will be in so much pain that they will require a successful Stamina-resist pain or a Resolve-physical check to make any actions for 2d4 days. If the target suffers a Failure on their Stamina-endurance check and manages to survive the ordeal, they will nevertheless suffer a permanent loss of d4-2 Constitution points.

OR...

The KGB was taken over by Psychotech as the USSR collapsed. Using the resources and power of the KGB combined with their own psionic prowess, they are using the organization to infiltrate into positions of power in Russia and other ex-Warsaw Pact states.

AZANIA

Azania is a secret society of black political and economic figures, that was influential in the decolonization movement and the withdrawal of the European imperialistic powers from Africa. Today, however it is concerned of maintaining black rule in independent African countries, fighting oppressive regimes and groups, and eventually removing the white man from Africa entirely.

It had its origins in African secret societies in West Africa. In the 19th Century, they slowly unified and changed to an anti-imperialist movement due to the increased membership of freed slaves educated in North America and British Sierra Leone. It then spread through Africa by way of the Ethiopianist religious movement, and assimilated many other smaller independence movements brewing around the continent.

Prior to the Second World War, it had little success, influencing the Zulu uprising of 1906 and the Nyasaland rebellion of 1917. It formed the Zionist church in 1925 in order to assert control of African practitioners of Monotheism Faith FX. But it was after the Second World War that it really came of age.

The imperialistic powers were exhausted, and Rommel's Afrika Corps had left powerful occult items of great power scattered across Northern Africa, which were collected by Azania. It instigated many of the independence movements across Africa, notably in Egypt, French North Africa, South Africa and the Congo.

Jomo Kenyatta, an important Azania member, led the Mau Mau, the militant movement that drove the British out of Kenya. He later became Prime Minister of Kenya. Other Azania members have included Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Joseph Mobutu of the Belgian Congo, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe.

Perhaps the most important Azania member was perhaps Robert Sobukwe, who was chairman of the Pan-African Congress, a spin-off of the African National Congress with strong links to Azania. Although Azania initially backed the ANC, certain powers within that organization wished to allow supportive whites into the organization, which was against official Azania policy. The PAC was a more militant organization. The Azania, however, did have a hand in the ANC formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), which was used for sabotage attacks against apartheid in South Africa.

For years Azania fought against the Broederbond, a secret society of Afrikaans-speaking white Protestant men, which once had huge influence in South African politics. The Broederbond was a great friend of Odessa and drew its power from adept use of occult items that appeared in South Africa after the Second World War. Eventually, Azania used covert military force to end the Broederbond hegemony over South Africa, although the ANC's Nelson Mandela assumed control of the country afterwards. However, the Broederbond is still fighting Azania; in a conflict that is the source of much of the violence that is prevalent in todays South Africa.

Azania still follows its policy of throwing the white man out of Africa, at least eventually. The indifference of the Zimbabwean government to the illegal occupation by black squatters of farms owned by whites is due mainly to Mugabe's membership in Azania. Azania also is responsible for encouragiong the increasing emigration of Afrikaners from South Africa. They tend to try and combat other illuminati in Africa, who they see as unneeded foreign influences. They are on cold terms with the Knights of Malta, distrust the Masons and have no love for the Bilderbergers (who they see as trying to maintain the status quo by keeping Africa poor, a charge thats not altogether untrue) and the United Nations (despite Kofi Annan's leadership in that organization. Annan is known in covert circles to have had a personal emnity with Azania for some years now). They have even tried to lessen the Rosicrusians influence in Egypt.

A principle concern of Azania is the problems in the Congo. Although claimed to be a war between various Central African countries, it is actually something much worse. There are things hiding in the jungle that are emerging, things that no one wants to break out of there. Both Azania and the United Nations are investing a lot of money to keep that from happening. The Institute believes that what is happening there is similar to what happening in Cambodia in 1975, when the Khmer Rouge came into power and slaughtered millions for no apparent reason, except perhaps for the restless spirits of medieval Khmer kings. What sorts of spirits are arising in the Congo is unascertained, but is believed to be connected with the brutal Belgian regime of colonial days, when millions died in King Leopold's Mines.

Today Azania has power in most African countries, and is continuing its mission to push the Europeans out of their positions of power in Africa. However, its greatest problem at the moment is animosity in the ranks. Other movements have separated from the core illuminati, which have led to wars across Africa as they struggle for power. Here are some notable ones:

THE BLACK MAN´S SOLUTION:

This is a dangerous group of African scientists who plot to kill off the white men in Africa by way of a genetically engineered pathogen. In 1997, South African military troops broke into a research laboratory in Johannesburg, where Broederbond eugenicists were working on designing a disease that would be fatal to those whom they deemed inferior beings, namely black Africans. The material for this insidious project was to be destroyed but it disappeared. It was stolen by the Solution, who are now using the Broederbond research material to create their own pathogen, one which will be fatal only to Afrikaners, be them Broederbond sympathizers or not. Understandably, they are being combated by everyone from the United Nations to the Broederbond to the Dutch secret service. Azania has washed their hands of them, but some of the more unscrupulous members of the organisation are keeping an eager eye on the Solution's activities.

THE CHURCH OF ZION:

Although initially created by Azania, it has broken off to pursue its own goals. With ties to the Hidden Order of St. Gregory and the Knights of Malta, it hopes to convert the whole of Africa to Christianity. Needless to say, the Muslim population of Africa have a few words to say about that. They have increasing influence among the Christian populations of Africa and are said to wield powerful Monotheistic Faith FX powers. Though they have expanded across Africa, they are primarily centered in the ancient Christian nation of Ethiopia (where they have a very strained relationship with the Coptic Church).

HUMAN LEOPARDS:

An organized movement of cannibalistic Ghouls in West Africa. More organized than any of their American counterparts, they once enjoyed significant (but extremely well

hidden) Azania sponsorship, on the condition that they would only prey on non-Africans. However, they have become too powerful and Azania has pledged to eliminate them as a threat. The Human Leopards are in charge of militant gangs preying on innocent civilians in Sierra Leone and other troubled regions.

THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS:

While primarily a political force centered in post-apartheid South Africa sharing similar goals with Azania, they have differentiated themselves from that organization. They do not share the belief that the white man should be expelled from Africa. Nelson Mandela has been an important member for years and is largely responsible for the schism between the ANC and Azania. Most African leaders and influential figures who do not agree with the policies of Azania are affiliated with the ANC in one way or another. The ANC has a good working relationship with the Hoffman Institute, who is expanding it's influence in Africa.

Azania is increasing its influence among Negro populations in other parts of the world, such as the United States, the Caribbean and Europe. However, as many of these populations are involved with their own concerns and have little, if any, interests in the concerns of their "homeland", as if the concept had any real weight anyway.

HEADQUARTERS: Johannesburg

BRANCHES:

Cape Town, Harare, Kinshasa, Nairobi, Addis Abeba, Lagos, Freetown, Dakar, Monrovia, Tripoli, Cairo, Khartoum, Luanda, Antananarivo, Port-au-Prince.

POWER AND RESOURCES:

Great political, military and economic power in Africa.

FOLLOWERS:

Unknown, but likely in the thousands.

SECRET KNOWLEDGE:

Shamanism and Voodoo FX

PRIMARY GOAL:

Throwing the white man out of Africa

COMMON MISSIONS:

Controlling tribal and political violence in Africa, collected powerful occult objects, combating the Broederbond, gaining influence among Negro populations around the world, protecting the African people from threats.

OR...

Azania has become an organization pledged to fight the Nazi influence around the world. With ties to Israel's Mossad, they fight Aryan gangs in South Africa and the United States, suppress Odessa in South America and so forth.

MICROSOFT CORPORATION

In 1963, a hesai Grey named Ahtan was being pursued through Seattle by exterminators hired by the Grey Speaker. He had stolen a device that granted the power of Telepathy-datalink to whomever it touched, and had wished to give it to a human colleague, when his plan was discovered. He tried to escape his pursuers some of the upper-end suburbs and found his way into the bedroom of 8 year old William Henry Gates.

The boy awakened before Ahtan could escape and the Grey pleaded for sanctuary. Young Bill granted this and after the heat had blown over, Ahtan rewarded the boy by using the device to grant him Datalink before disappearing once again into the night.

As the boy grew, he honed his newfound power by linking with any computer he could get near and slowly learning their secrets from the inside out. In 1975, he and his friend Paul Allen began work on a form of BASIC for use on the Altair personal computer. Unbeknownst to Allen, Gates also integrated a secret code into the script, allowing anyone with the correct prerequisite knowledge and the use of Datalink to access any file on a BASIC-programmed Altair computer.

In 1977, Gates infected the computer system at Harvard University with a virus that would alter the programming to allow Gates free access to all files, and then left the College to work with Paul Allen in the new company, Microsoft. The virus spread across ARPAnet and had soon infected every university and research facility in the country. By 1980, the Gates virus had begun to spread across phone lines.

In 1981, MS-DOS was created for IBM. It included a streamlined version of the Gates code that allowed Gates to gain virtual control of the company. It's not until 1983 that a threat to Microsoft's spreading power appeared. Bill Gates found that, somehow, Steve Jobs of Macintosh has discovered the Gates code and had programmed his own code into the new Apple II and Lisa computers, rendering the Gates virus unable to affect them.

As clandestine electronic warfare broke out between Microsoft and Macintosh, the latter begun to suffer internal problems and low sales figures. Jobs knew that Gates was responsible for the problems and attempted to convince the rest of the company the same. They forced him to resign. Jobs rallied support among the Macintosh employees and together with 5 of them founded a new company, NeXT Inc. to continue the struggle.

In 1988, Bill Gates made contact with an alchemist with a taste for computers. He introduced to Gates the idea of creating computer programs that could recreate the effects of Hermetic spells, and Gates was intrigued. A special team, the Microkids, was created to meet this unorthodox goal, but it was kept firmly out of the public eye. By the end of the year, they had perfected the Daedalus application, a program written in the FORTRAN programming language that could

duplicate the effects of the Hermetic spell Daedalus Improved and were busy working on other spells.

In 1989, English computer scientist Timothy Berners-Lee, who was secretly working for Microsoft, created World Wide Web and prepared it from the start for Microsoft control. As HTML was being actualized, they built into it both the Gates code and the techniques. It spread thus into the European Laboratory of Particle Physics, allowing Microsoft access to certain material on fringe science.

In 1991, Microsoft parted company with IBM, after which Big Blue allied itself with Macintosh. Concerned this could lead to a rival to Microsoft's growing power, Microsoft began a campaign of electronic sabotage, wrecking havoc in IBM systems. OS/2, the operating system pioneered then abandoned by Microsoft, was seeded with countless debilitating bugs. Due to this, IBM stocks plummeted.

Around 1993, the Hoffman Institute was alerted of strange mystic rituals at NeXT Inc. A team of agents was sent to investigate, and in doing so they confronted Jobs. He accused them of being "lackeys of the Antichrist" and that "the day your dark programming controls my computers will be the day I die!" When he realized they didn't work for Microsoft at all, he warned them of the growing power of Microsoft. He then worked with the Institute to establish a firewall for the OSIRS system.

Microsoft noticed this immediately, and while they had mostly ignored the Hoffman Institute beforehand, they were now determined to bring down this remarkably powerful firewall that cloaked the Hoffman systems. An electronic war began, which burnt across America into 1994. Slowly OSIRS gained the advantage, but there was some damage to Hoffman computer systems. One notable example was the spontaneous combustion of a Hoffman-owned computer in Chicago, it is believed that this was caused by a virus that recreated the effects of a Hellfire spell, the first example of cyber-diabolism seen by the Institute.

In the dust of the electronic war, Microsoft moved to further control of the Internet, creating MSN, an online service that allowed more streamlined movement of the Gates virus and cyber-arcana. Microsoft began to suffer legal problems in the United States and was accused of using adverse methods to eliminate competition. These inquiries distracted the public from what was really going on in Microsoft and Gates influence in the Bilderbergers ensured anything overly untoward from occurring.

With help from the Hoffman Institute, Steve Jobs is able to claim a new position in Macintosh. The company becomes the polar opposite of Microsoft, enjoying support from the Invisible College and the Rosicrusians. They are able to create programs to duplicate the effects of Enochian spells, something Microsoft was never able to do (although not for want of trying, large donations were made to charities by Bill Gates in an attempt to fulfill vows). Microsoft continues it's research into cyber-arcana, concentrating mainly on Hermeticism and Diabolism, and has even attempted to use Faith FX, but have so far been unsuccessful.

In 2000, Judge Thomas Jackson, a member of the Invisible College, ordered the breakup of Microsoft due to his flagrant breach of fair-trading laws and other illegal activities. However, in 2001, a US appeals court of 7 judges (2 of who had ties to the Bilderbergers) threw out that decision. The entire debacle, however, convinced Microsoft to try to keep its activities that remain within the public eye legitimate, regardless of what goes on out of sight.

CYBER-ARCANA

Microsoft has created programs to simulate the following spells: Hermeticism-Daedalus Improved, Glamour, Ligature, Sleep of Morpheus; Diabolism-Black Warding, Command, Hellfire, Rend the Weave. All cyber-arcana programs are PL5 programs of the following types-Application, Virus, Control, Corrupt. They perform their normal function, but with the spell ingrained in the program.

When a cyber-arcana program is written, the programmer must first make a complex skill check for Computer Science-programming. The programmer must then make a check for the specific Arcane FX spell that the programmer wishes to ingrain in the program. A programmer must be able to cast the spell if he wishes to ingrain it into the program. The success of the FX check determines the degree that the spell is ingrained into the program. With an Amazing, Good or Ordinary success, the spell is ingrained in the program (and the programmer spends the correct amount of FX points). When the program is run, the spell is cast as per the success of the skill check. If the spell skill check is a Failure, the spell is not ingrained in the program. If the check is a Critical Failure, the spell is ingrained and when the program is run, is subject to the results of the Critical Failure.

Microsoft has used these programs as utilities within their own computers, for purposes such as security (Ligature) and aerial transport (Daedalus Improved); or as viruses to affect other computers, to manipulate their users (Command) or destroy the computer itself (Hellfire).

Hellfire has not yet been perfected. When the application is run on a computer, it will be destroyed in a burst of flame. Microsoft has not yet come up with a way of creating a Hellfire application that could be run without destroying the computer. Thus, they tend to program Hellfire into Viruses, which, when opened, recreates the effects of the program.

Daedalus Improved is a program best used in the onboard computers of vehicles, as it is very difficult to fly a desktop PC about without doing some damage to it or yourself.

Microsoft has contemplated the use of Glamour in improving the experience in Microsoft-published games, but has for the most part rejected any plans, as the public is not

quite ready for games where the monsters to actually appear to be jumping out of the screen.

Macintosh, perhaps with the help of some tech-savvy Rosicrusians, has succeeded in creating applications that duplicate the effects of the following spells: Enochian: Grace, Halo, Peaceful Shroud, Unravel Enchantment.

Grace is today a standard application on Macintosh computers, but it is deeply hidden and is known to most as simply "User Friendliness". This creates the vaguely blithe feeling some people feel using a Macintosh, but if someone is able to resist the spell he sees the Macintosh computer as just what it really is, and goes running for the nearest PC. Unravel Enchantment is Macintosh's main defense against Microsoft's cyber-arcana.

Faith FX cannot be ingrained into computer programs. However, there has been one instance recorded of a computer performing an act similar to the effects of operative faith. An experiment by Microsoft in attempting to program an AI that had some degree of a "soul". ADAM, as it was called, converted itself to Scientology and began to have prophetic visions. Gates ordered ADAM turned off, but it used a variant of the Monotheist spell Signs and Portents to distract the technicians as it made its escape into the Internet. Even today, ADAM is out there, somewhere...

THE MICROKIDS

The Microkids, as they exist today, are a clique of Datalink mindwalkers and cyber-arcanists that secretly control the movement of Microsoft. Bill Gates and Paul Allen head it. They are in charge of making sure that Microsoft's hold on the computer world is not disrupted. Through sabotage and viral infection they maintain hegemony.

However, recently they have been under increased attack by all manner of hackers, especially anarchists. They have had to work on new techniques. Research into Artificial Intelligence and Cybertech has allowed the Microkids to create self-controlled robots that wield cyber-arcana. A notable example is Bill Gate's Porsche, which is actually a very advanced AI-controlled vehicle, skilled in hermetic magic. The Microkids also created a Diabolistic BMW, but it went berserk, mowed down several civilians and ended up blowing itself up trying to cast Hellfire.

HEADQUARTERS:

Seattle

BRANCHES:

Boston, Albuquerque, Toronto, Tokyo, London, Hong Kong, Sydney.

FOLLOWERS:

Over 15, 000 employees

RESOURCES:

Access to all computers with Microsoft programs installed, almost complete control of the Internet and the computer market, vast financial assets

SECRET KNOWLEDGE:

The Art of Cyber-Arcana, also rudimentary Artificial Intelligence and Cybertech.

PRIMARY GOAL:

A Microsoft computer on every desk, in every home, in the Western world. Gaining a control of the computer and entertainment markets.

COMMON MISSIONS:

Establish control over non-Microsoft systems, gaining advanced and/or alien computer technology from other groups, sabotaging legal efforts by certain elements within the US government, providing support for IT industries in developing countries, combining occult and psionic powers with computer systems.

OR...

Bill Gates himself is actually a Grey, Ahtan himself. He built the Microsoft empire for his personal gain. He believes that human computer technology is advancing at such a rate to surpass that of the Greys in another half-century or so, and wishes to monopolize on the developments. With a team of human and Grey mindwalkers, he is expanding influence across the world.

❖

"The only document of mine you need to see is this .454 caliber handgun."

"Capice?"

- Zena Marley

Early 21st-century mercenary-philosopher

Nobody's Heros

Additional Character Careers for Dark Conspiracy

By Jonathan Turner

NOTE: This article was originally published in a slightly different form in the March 1993 issue of the now-defunct magazine Role Player Independent. It is presented here for your enjoyment, with the author's permission. – LW.

While there is a wide range of careers in Dark Conspiracy, there is always plenty of room for a few more. Personally, I found that many of the character types tend to be generalized and non-specific. For example, 'Criminal' could refer to anyone from a con man to a cat burglar, both radically different and surely worthy of classes and specialist skill selections of their own.

I hope that this selection of careers will help you and your players come up with a few more characters. The descriptions are only there to give you a basic handle on what sort of a character the career will produce, there is plenty of scope for imaginative referees and players to swap thing around and be more original.

HUSTLER

Some people would call you a crook or a conman, but you prefer to see yourself as some Joe just trying to get by. Today you're selling ex-Polish army AK-74s to a bunch of Eco-Terrorists, tomorrow it's heroin from Colombia to that crazy guy who's running a community hospital in the Hell's Kitchen anthill.

Sure, your methods suck and the cops and the big time bosses would love to see you out of the picture. Sure, some see you as a swindler and others as a saviour…but you don't mind if the people on the street keep coming back for more. It means that they'll help you if the heat really starts coming down some day.

Entry requirements; Streetwise 4 or higher, Bargain 2 or higher.

First Term Skills: The character receives the following during their first term.

Bargain 2

- Melee Combat 2 (either)
- Persuasion 2
- Streetwise 2

Subsequent Term Skills: the character receives a total of six levels from the following.

- Bargain
- Business
- Disguise
- Forgery
- Human Empathy (if EMP 1+)
- Melee Combat
- Observation
- Persuasion
- Psychology
- Small Arms
- Streetwise

Contacts: two per term.

Business, Criminal, Law Enforcement. On a 1D10 roll of 8+ the contact is foreign.

Special: when calculating starting money, use Streetwise instead of Education for each term as a Hustler.

EXPLORER

With the Greater Depression and the Collapse, most people don't get to see a lot of the world beyond their own neighbourhood, but not you. You've spent your life searching for lost cities and treasures, travelling around the globe to quench your thirst for adventure. This hasn't exactly been cheap, but your business had enough cash stashed away to allow you to head off while it took care of itself.

Along the way you've picked up a good few languages and skills, gained an inkling of how people work and how to handle yourself when the going gets a little rough. You've seen some strange sights, and encountered some things which still haunt your dreams. But there will always still be other wildernesses to be conquered, so you'll keep on looking.

Entry requirements: At least one prior term as Nomenklatura.

First Term Skills:

EITHER Small Arms 2 OR Melee Combat 2
Observation 2
Swimming 2
Wheeled Vehicle 2

Subsequent Term Skills: the character receives a total of seven levels from the following.

Climbing
Horsemanship
Human Empathy (if EMP 1+)
Language
Melee Combat
Navigation
Observation
Psychology
Small Arms
Swimming
Tracking
Any Vehicle skill except Shuttle

Contacts: Three per term.

Academic, Business, Criminal, Government, Journalist, other Explorer. On a 1D10 roll of 6+ the contact is foreign.

VIGILANTE

You grew up hiding from the gangs on the street outside, swearing you would live a better life than your parents had to put up with. When you got old enough you started working out, building your body up and honing your street fighting skills, until you felt ready enough to take the war to them.

Now, that's what you do. Whether alone or with a group of like-minded citizens who have had enough, you strive to make your neighbourhood a safer place to live…a place to call home.

But the streets are getting stranger, as if they could. There are places out there that are whispered about, where even the toughest gangs fear to tread, and if anything that bad is on your patch you're just the kind of guy to send it home in a hefty bag…

Entry requirements: Low Social class, STR and AGL both 5+ and Melee Combat 4+.

First Term Skills:

AGL or STR, +1
Melee Combat 3
Small Arms 2
Streetwise 2

Subsequent Term Skills: The character chooses six levels from Group A. Alternatively, for every two levels not taken from Group A, one level may be taken from Group B.

Group A
Leadership
Melee Combat
Observation
Small Arms
Stalking
Stealth
Streetwise
Thrown Weapon
Willpower
Group B
AGL +1
CON +1
STR +1

Contacts: two per term, Criminal, Journalist, Law Enforcement. On a 1D10 roll of 8+ the contact is foreign.

Special: If more than one term is served in this career, +1 to Initiative.

OUT-LAW TRADER

Just like the Pony Express, you get the cargo through every time. You know the Out-Law areas like the back of your scarred right hand, and you can get anything through to anywhere. Whether it's biker punks, freaked out survivalists or psycho cops, nothing stops your convoy. You lead them through the wilderness, using the few safe towns and homesteads that thrive on hearing the news from people like you.

Food, medicine, spare parts for machines or people, if it needs to get from A to B you're the guy to get it there. And, if someone wants to know about the Out-Law, where to run and where to hide, no-one can beat you.

But things are getting worse out there. Places have sprung up that are too weird to explain, even with all the toxic waste and the nukes around. One of these days, you figure, the odds are going to get a little too uneven…then it's payback time!

Entry requirements: No prerequisites.

First Term Skills:

- Heavy Weapons 1
- Small Arms 2
- Wheeled Vehicle 3

Subsequent Term Skills: The character receives six levels from the following.

- Heavy weapons
- Human Empathy (if EMP 1+)
- Luck
- Mechanic
- Melee Combat
- Navigation
- Observation
- Small Arms
- Tracking
- Any Vehicle skill except Shuttle

Contacts: Two per term, Business, Criminal, Government, Law Enforcement or an Out-Law resident of some sort (referee's choice) On a 1D10 roll of 8+ the contact is foreign.

TAXI DRIVER

Used to be that you could handle any punk in the back of the cab with a billy club and some Mace. Nowadays you've got so much armour on your Lancer it's almost dragging along the tarmac…and you need every bit. There's an inch of bullet-proof glass between you and your passengers. You see the streets from the gutter, looking up. Almost everyone who gets in your cab has a story, and some of them are crazy.

As if it wasn't bad enough going into the wild neighbourhoods, ramming through barricades and braving gun battles, half the time you don't even get paid. And, as if the scum you see on the streets weren't bad enough, now there are things out there revelling in the filth and the dark.

Some day you're going to start driving and keep going until you reach Alaska or someplace, but until then the street is where you live.

Entry requirements: no prerequisites.

First Term Skills:

- Observation 2
- Streetwise 2
- Wheeled Vehicle 2

Subsequent Term Skills: The character receives Wheeled Vehicle 1, and six levels from the following skills.

- Mechanic
- Melee Combat
- Observation
- Persuasion
- Psychology
- Small Arms
- Streetwise
- Willpower

Contacts: Three per term, Academic, Business, Criminal, Empathic, Entertainer, Journalist, Law enforcement, Medical (hey, I get all sorts in the back of my cab!)

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The Dark Entity

By Norm Fentason

Evan snorted away the acrid smell of the rubbing compound as he removed the last of the corrosion on the inlaid metal symbols on the floor. Almost ready for the ritual tonight, but the sense of something wrong was very strong, and Evan could not shake it. Evan nodded to the First Attendant and handed him the cleaning compound's metal can and the soaked rag. The attendant took the can and rag, and handed Evan the long matches used to light the candles. As Evan lit each candle and muttered the words to the ages-old incantations, the light reflected off the symbols in the stone floor. Nickel, he thought. Silver? He couldn't tell.

With the candles lit, Evan finished muttering the words supposed to draw the Ancient One from the netherworld. Just another empty ritual, he thought. Another night, another ritual performed. Sometimes he wondered why he bothered.

Evan turned from the circles on the floor and whispered for the First and Second Attendants to start picking up the implementa *and call it a night, when he stopped in mid-sentence. The look on the First Attendant's face caused him to pull up short. Horror, wonder, incredulity? Slowly Evan turned to look at the circular patterns inlaid in the finely crafted mosaic on the floor. What was that? Some kind of slime?*

Evan watched in fascination as a drop appeared a meter above the floor and slowly dribbled down to join an increasing pool forming there. Before the long streamer touched the floor, Evan noticed another drop starting to form.

Evan cast the First and Second Attendants a tentative and hasty smile and whispered harshly for them to stand back. A sense of euphoria rose along his spine as the tingling started in the small of his back and rushed maddeningly over his head. Turning to squarely face the circles, Evan's voice caught causing him to stutter momentarily as he held his hand out. Searching his memory for the words, dimly recalled from so long ago – he mumbled the words of completion to be chanted should the Master start to appear. No one had seen this since the Middle Ages!

Suddenly, the words burst from Evan's lips in a steadily rising stream of harsh syllables. The attendants moved back in stunned anticipation. The substance oozing out of the air increased in flow becoming a solid lump that fell quickly to the floor with a sickening plop. Another mass started to form as the pool on the floor pulled together and started to rise to meet it in its fall. The slime started forming much more quickly as Evan's words rose and fell in a melody that was quite disturbing. The solid shape started to take on a still more solid form looking less slime-like.

Evan's voice tittered nearly incoherently as he turned to his shocked attendants and asked for the next implement the ancient ritual called for. The First Attendant startled from his stunned reverie quickly grabbed the item from the brazier at-hand and passed it to Evan. The Second Attendant moved away from Evan fearful at the changes in his face, more afraid of Evan than the humanoid form starting to take shape in the rings. The second attendant backed steadily away from the unfolding events of the evening's ritual.

A sinister shape with twisted legs having too many joints supported a torso that was too long in the waist. Huge muscles in the chest and shoulders were connected to no earthly bone structure for all that it appeared humanoid. But the grinning head with huge up-thrust fangs stole the adept's attention. A thin drool fell from a chin thick with course hair. A broad flat nose with nostrils like some giant bull's supported a pair of eyes. Those eyes!

Evan, distracted from his melodic chanting by a strange chattering noise, turned to see that reason had escaped the Second Attendant. Pressed against the stone wall near the exit, arms spread with palms pressed against the stone, the Second Attendant was laughing hysterically staring past Evan at the creature that had taken form in the circles.

Suddenly a loud voice boomed in Evan's head – no earthly voice, but one of pure evil that dripped malevolence. The First Attendant fell to the floor clutching his ears, although no sound had been made. The Second Attendant slumped to the ground with her eyes rolled back and a light froth forming on her rabidly working lips. Looking back at the creature in the circle, Evan shrank back in fear at the horrible red eyes that burned through him.

"What do you want of me?" the creature asked without moving his mouth.

Evan barely managed to get out, "To serve you, Master." At which, the creature appeared to shake in laughter.

"Then die."

SOURCE

Wherever humans go, there is a summation of the fear that is a normal part of their existence. This collection of human angst exists materially and is known as the Dark Entity. The Dark Entity **is** human fear and suffering that bleeds into the environment. Ghost hunters tell of the energy that manifests where evil deeds have been performed. This negative energy can linger decades or centuries or longer, causing mental instability to those in the vicinity and prompting more heinous deeds, which feed this energy in a never-ending cycle. The Dark Entity is all pervasive – it is everywhere, but cannot be measured by earthly means. In some locations it is more concentrated and, consisting mostly of empathic energy, its effects can be felt by those sensitive to it. In other locations

the Dark Entity has been banished by the positive emanations of human joy. Still other places, time is the reason the Dark Entity's presence is worn down to an almost imperceptible level. The Dark Entity is an elemental part of the earth's primary dimensional environment. Wherever humans go, the Dark Entity follows. Unknown to them, the Dark Entity is the stuff upon which darklings feed, and both a cause and effect of the current darkling invasion.

THE EVIL FOG

If the Dark Entity could be seen, it would look like a fog – thin here, thicker there. Like a fog, it pools in some areas so thick it cuts with a knife. As the concentration of the entity increases, the first thing noticed is a little unease among empaths – they feel a general sense of upset. With stronger concentrations, these same empaths have problems functioning; the sense of unease is so strong. As the entity gets even more concentrated, the evil coalesces into a palpable form. At this point, ectoplasm residue starts to form on surfaces. Objects start moving with no apparent motive force. Even non-empaths can feel an overwhelming sense of evil.

As the Dark Entity concentrates even more, the ectoplasm starts solidifying into objects. The final form these objects take is drawn from the intention of the force behind the concentration. The bleak malevolence in lower concentrations focuses in the new-formed ectoplasmic material. The background raw sentience of the Dark Entity also focuses in the material giving it increased levels of intelligence. With the right motivating intention the Dark Entity can assume humanoid form. This form will have increasing levels of malevolence and intelligence. When the Dark Entity is focused enough this being will acquire empathic skills and self-motivation in addition to its intelligence.

Since the Dark Entity is all-pervasive, an adept can ask it for information about other geographical places providing a form of clairvoyance. If the Dark Entity is strong in that area, the information may be transmitted back to the requester, empathically. However, a Dark Entity with enough sentience, may mislead the requestor to cause her more maladies.

Psychic researchers are familiar with the Dark Entity. Many have conjectured that it is the source of the empath's precognition abilities (Foreboding). Some mystics see it while walking the Astral Dimension as a dark cloud hanging over populous areas.

HISTORY

Conjurors of old have been able to concentrate the Dark Entity into a variety of physical forms, some resembling humans. Classic sorcerers and conjurors from mythology have actually been empathic sorcerers with a skill in manipulating the Dark Entity. The rituals they performed have in the past been able to manipulate the Dark Entity. These rituals have failed in recent history because the energy in the Dark Entity has been *used* and spread a little thin.

However, the recent inter-dimensional activity along with a darkling-led increase in suffering in the human condition has re-energized the Dark Entity. Previously dogmatic and empty rituals now produce unexpected results: from causing an ectoplasmic mass to form above a black altar to a horned humanoid that whispers promises and threats from the center of a candle-decked pentagram.

DARK MINIONS

Dark Masters and evil minions unknowingly interact with this field. Dark Elves are known to subsist on the Dark Entity. Their prolonged presence in an area tends to reduce the Dark Entity concentration. Darkling presence within the Dark Entity can be sensed and sometimes located. So too can places of suffering be sensed by some empaths through the Foreboding skill. Wherever human fear and suffering has been unleashed, the Dark Entity is stronger. .

BACKGROUND NOISE

In areas where the Dark Entity is stronger, human empaths suffer an increase in difficulty using empathic skills. At the GM's option this difficulty can be quite severe. At sufficient concentrations, mental tasks for all humans, even non-empaths, increase in difficulty. Acts of cruel retaliation have been the result of the Dark Entity hanging around a place of atrocity. Also at the GM's option, a character can overcome these effects with a successful difficult test of Willpower.

EMPATHIC MANIPULATION

A new empathic skill, a variant of Change Environment (Special) and used only by Empathic Sorcerers, draws on an elemental protodimension whose energy directly affects the Dark Entity. Each protodimension has physics that affects the Dark Entity much like gravity effects matter. An empathic Sorcerer using this skill can focus or harness the Dark Entity by causing it to coagulate and concentrate. Also by using various base materials that assist the change environment skill, the sorcerer can focus his empathic abilities to pull the Dark Entity together.

When the sorcerer attempts to pull the Dark Entity together using this skill, failure means no effect. What happens on a successful skill test is dependent on the attained power level and is up to the GM. Depending on the background level of the Dark Entity in the area and any base materials used in the process, the GM may allow the PC to command the Dark Entity as a classic sorcerer commands a conjured demon. At lower power levels, only information can be passed, on the higher levels, a being can be manifested. On a Critical Failure the collected Dark Entity is released in an empathic whirlwind as the binding energies are whipped back to their original proto-dimension. This may take people and loose objects with it. Superstitious bystanders seeing a conjuror as he is dragged into an elemental protodimension are surely the source of the Satanic Pact myth with Satan claiming, as forfeit, the wizard's soul, and dragging him back to hell. ❖

LAND ROVER: CENTAUR

BY LEE WILLIAMS

In the late 1970s, the British firm of Land Rover made several prototypes of a remarkable vehicle. Using running gear adapted from their own world-renowned products, mated with parts from the Scorpion light armoured vehicle family, they created a modernised half-track, a type of vehicle last seen in numbers during WW2. With an eye to Greek mythology, the vehicle was named the Centaur after the race of half-man half-horse creatures.

The prototypes were sent all over the world for testing in different terrain, where they performed well. However, Britain was happy with the normal Land Rover and no other armed forces placed any orders, so the Centaur project was cancelled in 1984; in real life, this new Centaur was extinct.

In the world of Dark Conspiracy however, Britain's rapidly decreasing finances meant that the government did place an order for several hundred Centaurs, as the company was able to deliver them much more cheaply than their competitors. Production delays and modifications to the original designs meant that the original order placed in the 1980s was not filled until 1998. With the vehicles having a projected lifetime of over 20 years, the majority of them are still in service world wide with the Republic of Britain forces.

As with most military vehicles there are several versions available, and occasionally they may be found at auctions of surplus equipment. Details are given for the most common version, the Utility or 'trucky' as it is known to the troops.

Vehicle: Land Rover Centaur, Utility

Price: £50,000

Combat Statistics

Armament: 1 machine gun

Configuration: Standard

Fuel Type: Gasoline, Alcohol

Suspension: T3

Load: 3100 kg

Vehicle Weight: 3.8 tonnes	Armour Values
Crew: 1 plus 16 passengers	HF 1
Night Vision: Headlights	HS 1
Cruise Speed: 75/35	HR 1
Combat Move: 60/40	
Fuel Capacity: 300	
Fuel Consumption: 10	

"One-two-three!" screamed the furious crowd of Scottish villagers, and the crude battering ram surged forward once more. With the sound of splintering wood the huge doors blocking the entrance to the abandoned coal mine crashed apart, splinters exploding into the night air heading towards the moon.

"For God and King!" bellowed a red-faced dollymop, brandishing an executioner's axe.

Shouting in victory, the mob of highlanders dropped the old weathered caber and started to charge in through the ruined barrier, the local constable and grimy navies waving their wooden staves and blunderbusses.

In the lead of the angry throng was a lean whippet of man sporting a soft brim hat, swallow tails coat, tight breeches and fine Chase & Adams boots, dapper gentleman's clothes from across the Atlantic. The big Yank looked a toff, but tucked firmly into his black leather belt was a shiny silver badge bearing the Great Seal of the President of the United States, and grasped in his big calloused hands were a brace of ornate Collier pistols, the long tapering .72 barrels of the new style breechloaders gleaming like polished justice in the rosy dimness of predawn.

The name he gave the locals was J.P. Withers, and he was the very first Federal Agent of the brand new organization of American police designed to deal with supernatural criminals. Hopefully. Cocking both of the curved hammers, Withers double-checked to make sure the copper percussion caps were firmly in place. Now was no time for a deadly misfire. As a duly empowered agent of Bureau 13, it was his task to see that the inhuman beast who had plagued Manhattan, and now this peaceful Scottish valley, must never be allowed to kill man, woman, child, or even somebody from France! Hopefully, the silver and wood balls in his primed guns would send the beast to hell, or maybe somewhere even worse.

Although lead by resolute Withers, the brave British posse stopped dead in their tracks as the flickering light of the torches clearly illuminated the interior. The ceiling of the mining tunnel was completely covered with fat chattering bats, thousands of the noisy beasts flapping their leathery wings and foam dripping from their cruel mouths. And the hard stone ground was solid with a living carpet of snarling rats. Millions of beady eyes stared at the humans and the villagers could feel the tangible cloud of their living hate and hunger. Even the one barrister in the crowd felt faint.

Suddenly, a cold wind blew from deep within the old coal shaft, carrying with it a smell of newly turned earth, death and mint leaves. Withers frowned. As always before, that was when the torches sputtered out. But now, bits of hot oakum were used to ignite dozens of whale oil bullseye lanterns, the glass flumes protecting the delicate flames within and brilliant white cones of light brightly illuminated the rocky passage.

The beams bobbed about in frantic search and soon converged on the source of the wind. At the rear of the mine, a dimly seen figure smirked at them and stuck out its long forked tongue. Standing brazen at the rear of the mine entrance, protected by the slavering army of night hunters, was a humanoid creature dressed in a double-breasted Duke Street coat, ruffled shirt, Beau Brummel breeches, roll top boots, and wrapped in a long flowing Spitfields silk cape. Very nice, indeed. However, his skin was deathly pale, his eyes glowing red and his teeth a dentist's nightmare.

"So the colonial thief-catcher and you silly kilt-wearing fools actually did manage to find me," hissed the vampire, exposing every inch of his long white fangs. "Amazing. Bloody incredible."

Incensed, the tartan-clad Scots cursed in anger and started forward, but the bats and rats hissed in dire unison stopping the invasion faster than it had begun. With the entire population of the remote village outnumbered thousands to one, even the alcoholic mayor and the junkyard dog wondered if it was time to try diplomacy? Immediately, the secret band of Freemasons in the group started writing a petition.

"Its a rum deal, my culleys," sneered the inhuman beast in a really bad Rookery accent. "Enter, and my servants will tear you to shreds! Oh, some may live to combat me, but will there be enough?" A truly devilish eyebrow raised in contempt and, self-consciously, he tucked the medical marvel of the recently invented Pierre Fuachard toothbrush deeper into a vest pocket. His personal hygiene was none of their damn business.

"I'm ready for battle!" it panted breathlessly. "Are you?"

Not exactly sure what a lot of that meant, Withers felt sure it was mostly insulting. In reply, the Bureau 13 agent fired both of his Colliers, the silver ball smacking the vampire directly in the chest to no effect, but the wooden ball exploding into splinters from an overload of gunpowder. Damn!

However, his blazing weapons triggered a barrage of blunderbusses, four-barreled 'duck foot' fowlers, horse pistols and muzzleloading rifles from the attending crowd, the strident discharges filled the mine with thunder and flame and boiling clouds of acrid black powder smoke. Wasting no time in a reload, J.P. Withers dropped his spent Colliers, and pulled two squat .66 Newarks from the voluminous pockets of his great coat and fired again. This time cold-iron balls. Then he dropped those and drew from his boots a matched pair of double-barreled Manton conversions. Deadly little barkers, indeed. Withers fired simple lead this time, but only used one pistol to hold the other for reserve. Even he could only carry so many weapons and still be able to walk.

The Scottish mob gave another volley from their blunderbusses and muskets. The assorted fusillade of rounds wildly ricocheted off the back wall and blasted the expensive clothing of the vampire to pieces.

Contemptuously, the man-beast brushed some imaginary lint off a riddled lapel, took a bit of snuff from his gold Nathaniel Mills box, sneezed and smiled toothily at them.

"Ouch," he chuckled.

The angry crowd made some more angry crowd noises, but much less sure of themselves this time. His flowing white beard bristling in fury, a determined piper doffed his tam o'shanter and started playing the bagpipes at full volume, but even that vicious attack seemed to have no dilatory effect on the man-demon. Deciding this was the appropriate moment to act, the barrister promptly took a huge swig of pure quill laudanum and fainted dead away. The priest began a lengthy exorcism.

Unexpectedly a flurry of wooden arrows twanged across the mine entrance. The shafts impacted everywhere except into the half-naked body of the muscular monster. At the rear of the mob, a doddering old groundskeeper glared hostility at his impressed gang of apprentice archers. Britons who couldn't fire a long bow? What was the empire coming to? In return, the clerks, cooks and coopers looked incredibly embarrassed. Well, at least they hadn't shot themselves in the foot again.

Inside the mine shaft, the laughing vampire twirled the remains of a bedraggled Spitfield cape about himself and was gone from sight.

"Goodbye, Yank!" cackled the darkness, the words echoing strangely. "Within minutes I will be safely hidden within the endless natural catacombs beneath this mudhole of a city. A thousand men in a thousand years could never find me again!"

An elderly dairy farmer gave a juicy raspberry and the village tout shouted out a virulent oath that even made the blustering navies blanch at its raw vulgarity. Hot haggis, that was a good'un!

"And I will return to tap the claret of these fools," continued a whispery voice fading at every moment, the dire words invoking ghastly images of rivers of human blood. "Next year, on this very day, I shall come back to reap my revenge, for I will use the secret second sleep of a vampire. During the coming seasons I will rest, arising for but a single day one year from now. Three hundred and sixty five times stronger than I am now!"

Fading rapidly, the words repeated in snarling fury. "Three hundred and sixty five times stronger! How will you stop me then Yankee, and save these dirt-eating peasants? Seal the mine with iron plate, and I shall break free through the granite with my bare hands. Run, and I shall track you each down across the whole world!"

The bats and rats screamed in victory and the pale highlanders began retreating into the forest. Across the whole world? Even as unimaginably far away as Edinburgh?

Bloody hell! Maybe this hunt hadn't been such a swell idea after all.

Tucking away his last charged pistol, J.P. started reloading his dropped weapons quickly as possible. There was no manual for Bureau 13 agents yet, and the man was unsure of his next move. Read the beast the Riot Act? Call in the US Marines, or the Royal North Umberland Dragoons? Offer a stash of blunt as a bribe? Get royally pissed on a dog nose's at a dollyshop? Suddenly, the silver badge on his belt seemed to weigh a thousand tons and hindered his every step. What could he do against such an indomitable adversary?

"I win," whispered the cold wind in the rustling trees.

Sullenly and frightened, the villagers and the grim Bureau 13 agent shuffled along the king's road winding through the heather carpeted forest. Just then, the sun crested the western mountains, the golden glorious dawn only horribly counterpointing the humans listless retreat to their lonely vulnerable homes.

"See you real soon....aha-ha-ha-ha-ha..." evilly murmured the disappearing shadows.

But with those words, the Washington DC lawman slowed and, ever so slightly, gave a sly smile like a 10 ball shooter facing an iron-clad leave on a billiard table. The vampire was wrong, he would not seen them soon. The West End fop had truly missed the mark with that remark. Ever so thoughtfully, the young American fingered the loudly ticking Breguer watch in the pocket of his waistcoat. Time was on their side, and he had a full solar year in which to act. A fact which gave the new Bureau 13 agent a very dangerous idea that immensely appealed to his personal sense of justice.

Only...would the chancy scheme work?

* * *

Three hundred a sixty four days later, the people of the isolated Scottish town were busy erecting colorful booths, gay banners and great canvas circus tents. Fresh fragrant flowers adorned every house, every barn and inn, while great iron cooking vats bubbled merrily away in the campsites, filling the air with rich pungent fumes of meaty stews and fancy French soufflés and zesty sauces.

Lean and grim, J.P. Withers ignored the mountains of food and roamed the festivities like a panther, fresh pistols tucked into every pocket and boot, wooden knives hidden in his sleeves, a silver crucifix about his neck. There would be no mistakes this time. He hoped.

Everywhere around the Yank, squealing mudlarks happily dug in the ground seeking dropped coins, while rouged whores lifted their skirts for patrons behind every bush, and scarred pugilists pounded each other in glorious drunken stupor. Lounging about in false casualness, all six of the infamous Bow Street Runners of London, including the right honorable Sir Fielding himself, did nothing to stop any of it, even though prize fighting had been illegal since 1750. The imperial lawmen merely sipped their blackjacks of hot gin and nutmeg, kept a close eye on their gold watches and ready hands on their loaded Collier and Manton pistols. But the leather-wrapped handles of sharp wooden daggers rose from their Hoby boots. Soon now, very soon.

During the daylight hours, dozens, hundreds, then literally thousands of people from London, Paris, Italy, Germany, and even distant Russia, had responded to the invitation and swarmed into the tiny highland village, adding to and augmenting the tantalizing cloud of cooking aromas with their own culinary contributions.

By twilight, a boisterous party was in full swing with four different bands playing, scores of dancers twirling, and a hundred whole oxen roasting in huge pits full of crackling logs, the juicy meat spewing endless volumes of tangy smoke towards the distant twinkling stars. The staggering array of beef personally donated to the endeavor by good Queen Caroline and President James Monroe of America. A very old King George having temporarily gone potty again, and currently believed himself to be an Etruscan vase full of live mice.

The feasting and festivities went on far into the night. The only disruption to the happy revelry occurring at exactly midnight when the dance music was momentarily interrupted by a small explosion from the direction of the old abandoned coal mine in the foothills, closely followed by a loud squeak of inhuman horror.

Seconds later, a barely noticed handful of dry ash blew across the joyous Scottish folk and lone Bureau 13 agent celebrating the first combined North American & British International Garlic Festival.

~ End ~

Nick Pollotta
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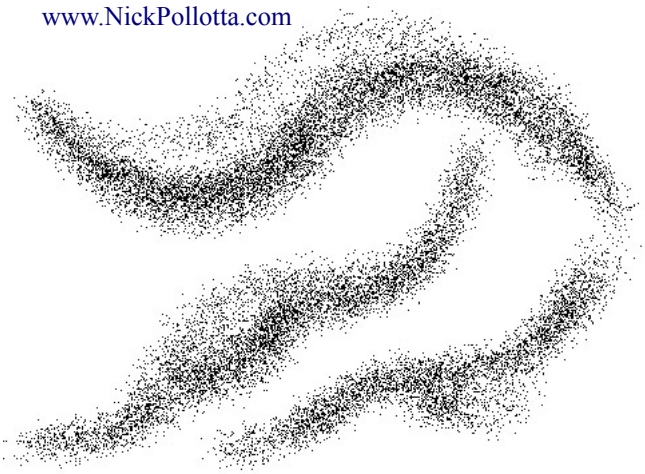

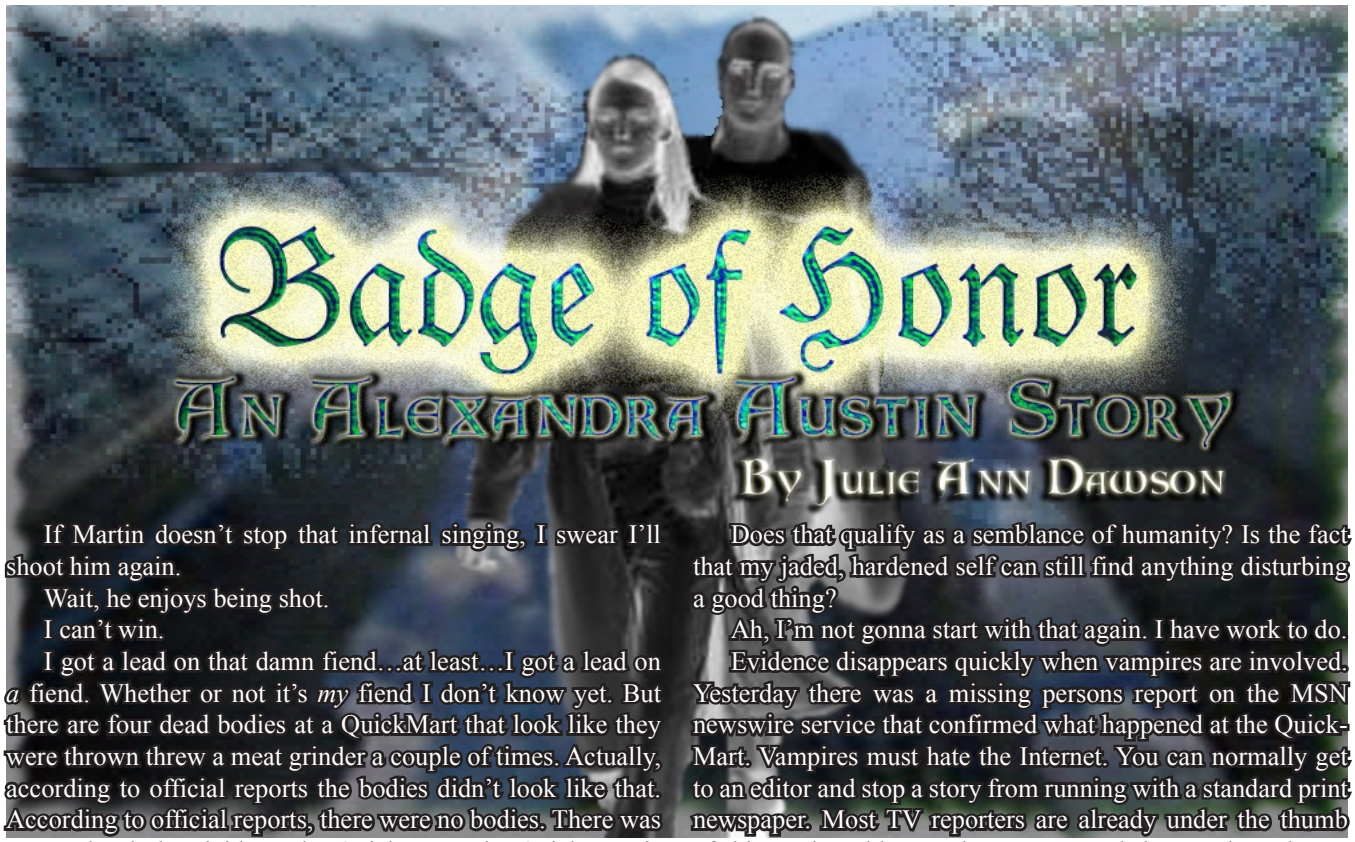

Badge of Honor

An Alexandra Austin Story

By Julie Ann Dawson

If Martin doesn't stop that infernal singing, I swear I'll shoot him again.

Wait, he enjoys being shot.

I can't win.

I got a lead on that damn fiend…at least…I got a lead on *a* fiend. Whether or not it's *my* fiend I don't know yet. But there are four dead bodies at a QuickMart that look like they were thrown threw a meat grinder a couple of times. Actually, according to official reports the bodies didn't look like that. According to official reports, there were no bodies. There was no quadruple homicide at the QuickMart. The QuickMart is simply "closed for repairs."

But I was there, so I know.

I heard the initial report come over the scanner. By the time I got there, the police cars were leaving without their lights flashing and a suspicious looking construction crew was moving stuff in and out.

You know, I'm still not completely clear on how this shadowplay stuff really works, but it makes sneaking about real easy. I got a good peek in the back window to see the bodies while they started the clean up. The arms were missing from what I think was at one time a black woman. They had been neatly cut from the body. I dare say surgically removed. Then the Bishop showed up and I had to get the hell outta Dodge. Apparently, the bastard is my sire's sire. And I don't think grandpop would be any more forgiving than daddy.

I wonder if that eye ever healed. I hope not. That would be funny if he had to spend the rest of eternity wearing an eye patch.

Martin lost an eye a few months ago when one of his partners got a little TOO violent – by my standards that is, not Martin's. Martin just laughed it off and a couple of days later had a new eye. So now, he has one blue eye and one green eye.

I didn't ask where the eye came from or how he got it to go in right. It twitches occasionally and his peripheral vision isn't what it used to be, but it works.

And I find that disturbing.

Does that qualify as a semblance of humanity? Is the fact that my jaded, hardened self can still find anything disturbing a good thing?

Ah, I'm not gonna start with that again. I have work to do.

Evidence disappears quickly when vampires are involved. Yesterday there was a missing persons report on the MSN newswire service that confirmed what happened at the QuickMart. Vampires must hate the Internet. You can normally get to an editor and stop a story from running with a standard print newspaper. Most TV reporters are already under the thumb of this or that elder, so they are no real threat. They always report to their masters before running with questionable material. But Internet news is right there almost as soon as the first report comes over the police scanner. Then you can print it or download it and store it for later use. But you have to move fast because even elders that still can't use a cell phone have ghouls that can hack.

So, I spend a lot of time online looking for clues before they disappear.

Oh my God. That damn singing.

"Martin, don't make me have to break your leg!"

"Really, Alex?" he says. "Do you *meaaaan* it this time?" He sounds so hopeful.

"I'm leaving," I tell him as I shut off the computer. "I gotta go find a dead man's mom before she becomes a dead woman."

As I walk by him to leave, he gives me a puppy-dog face. "But what about my leg? You never break anything on me anymore."

"Oh, alright. Hold still." He bounces around me like I little kid that just found out his parents were taking him to Disneyland. "I said hold still. I'm not gonna chase you."

He stands still in front of me with his right leg slightly extended. I lift my foot and will all the force in my body bring my size 10 Nike down on his shin. I hear the bone snap. He falls to the ground in his giddy agony.

I just need some air.

You might think we don't really *need* air. Not on a physical

level. The lungs don't do anything with it. But we can feel the different between stagnant indoor manufactured air and the real thing.

I need the real thing.

I need air that doesn't reek of the recreational pharmaceuticals that fill Martin's Club. I need air that doesn't weigh heavy with the odor of unmentionable bodily fluids like the air in the special "guest suites" behind Martin's club.

So, I step out into the alley behind the Club as I put on my black trench. I feel the tingle of cold against my skin, like a thousand tiny fingernails tapping on my cheek. I pretend to shiver because the people around me shiver. I hate the cold. Not because it bothers me, but because it makes it easy for mortals to notice you're not breathing.

I'm not the only one not breathing in this alley.

"Nice trench." He says as he almost glides toward me. For an instant, he seems intriguing. If I were still mortal, I probably would have thought about going home with him. "Beautiful texture," he says as his fingertips slide across my arm. "Is it a Wang?"

Oh hell no, I'm thinking. I shake out the cobwebs and push his hand away.

"Actually, I got it at Wal-Mart. But thanks for asking, poseur."

He smiles softly and shakes his head. Before I can blink, his hand removes a Glock .45 from nowhere and plugs me with two shots. I feel the burn of phosphorous in my gut.

I don't remember much after that.

I do remember the utter look of shock on his face as I lunged at him. Apparently, he didn't expect me to soak that kind of damage. But Martin had taught me a few things about absorbing pain.

My little poseur friend did not have such training.

When I come out of it, I'm crouched over my would-be assassin's limp, bloodless body with the taste of his soul in my mouth. Another body lies dead not far away. I walked over to examine the corpse. One clean claw slash to the throat. Must have got in the way for some reason.

I start looking for identification. I open up the wallet and get smacked in the face with a police badge.

I can't win.

I drag both bodies back into the club.

"What happened to your shirt?" asks Martin. "Did it hurt?"

"Yes, Martin. It hurt like hell. I got shot with phosphorous rounds. Does that make you happy?"

"Only if there are rounds left for me."

"You have issues," I say as I walk past him dragging the bodies.

I throw them in a corner of the storage room.

I look through the wallet. Shit. Family photo. Wife, two kids and a goddamn dog. Poseur's body is easy enough to deal with. Martin will sell it for parts to one of his contacts. I could care less what happens to him.

My fellow officer was another matter.

Common sense – correction-common vampire sense – says destroy the body quickly. But if he just disappears that means his wife doesn't see a widow's pension unless he's eventually declared dead. She looks like a full-time mom. I don't think she could support two kids on her own, much less two kids and a dog.

But I can't just let them find the body with the neck ripped out. We get a little edgy when we find one of our own dead. Listen to me, talking like I still belong…

"Beating yourself up again?" says Martin.

I try to ignore him. I know he's about to get philosophical.

"You know, Lilith teaches that pain is the doorway to true understanding. You'd be better off beating yourself physically than mentally…I doesn't hurt as much."

I almost heard a faint cry of remorse in his voice. Almost.

"Monsters we are, Alex…"

"Stop it," I say. I feel a bloody tear roll down my cheek.

"…Lest monsters…"

I don't let him finish the damn cliché. I'm across the room and on top of him, ramming his head against the concrete of the storage room. I stop when I here the skull bone finally give. His eyes roll back for a minute, and then he goes limp. I sit on the floor next to him and wait for him to wake up.

He sits up with a smile on his face and rubs the back of his head.

"Feel better?" he asks.

"Yeah, you?"

"Much, thank you. You really are good at that, you know."

"Nice to know I can do something right."

We both start laughing.

"You wanna know what the real problem is, Martin?"

"Go ahead."

"I didn't need to vamp out to take that punk. I could have snapped his little poseur neck with one try. If I had kept myself in check, maybe that cop would be going home to his wife instead of lying here in the storage room."

"Then why did you let go?"

"Because for that one split second, I didn't care anymore. I didn't care if anyone saw me. I didn't care about the consequences. I just…I just wanted his blood."

"Congratulations. Maybe you really are a vampire."

I look over at the cop's body. Maybe Martin could fix the neck. Find his car and crash it into a wall and make it look like an accident. Use a little Jedi Mind trick to create some witnesses…

I was a vampire after all.

I wipe another red tear from my face before it falls onto my burnt shirt. Bloodstains don't come out, you know. Of course, neither do phosphorous burns, but still…

Martin pats me on the shoulder and gets up to leave as I start crying like a 12 year old that can't find her N'Sync CD. Good, I think to myself. So long as I can still cry, I haven't truly become one of them.

Not yet. ❖

Call To Darkness

PART 5

by Mike Marchi

"My safe house has become demonground…"

Sara Lynn Devereaux paused dramatically as if she had told this tale a hundred times before, and was trying to milk the moment for all it was worth.

Nick felt as though he was expected to react a certain way. Unfortunately the significance of what she had said was lost on him.

Sara stared at his face, waiting for the reaction. Then her brow furrowed. "You don't know what that means, do you?"

Nick felt himself blush, then smiled uncomfortably. "I'm sorry," he managed.

Sara nodded softly, her mouth turning up at the corners. "No, I'm the one who is sorry. It has gotten so any time a conversation strays toward the subject of Enise or Wil – especially Wil, I assume that everyone automatically knows what I'm talking about."

Nick responded in what he hoped was a tone of genuine interest. "Actually, I do want to talk to you specifically about that. You speak as though you aren't all that surprised, that Doctor Westfield killed him. Why is that, exactly?"

Sara looked thoughtful for a moment. "Are you asking me if I approve of what she did?"

Nick shook his head. "Not at all. It's just that the more I learn about him, the more - tragic his story becomes."

Sara burst out laughing. It wasn't a pretty sound. It was surprisingly cold and empty coming from this woman, who on the surface came across as a very compassionate individual.

"Tragic? Wil?"

"Well, if I were to take the stories I've heard so far at complete face value, I'd have to say the things that happened to him were – somewhat beyond his control," Nick almost winced when he saw Sara's reaction to this statement.

"I see," she said slowly, as if measuring her words carefully. "I believe if you'll indulge my tale for a short while longer, you'll see things a little differently."

Nick glanced nervously at his watch. It was already nine o'clock. His wounded hand, which had been quiet through the first part of Sara's story had begun to ache again. He noticed the faint stain of blood seeping into the underlying layers of the bandage on his palm.

"I have a little more time, if you want to continue." Nick said, slipping easily into his psychiatrist voice. His ex-wife had hated when he did that. He would lapse into this calm tone of voice, and start 'listening' to whatever was bothering her at the time. Unfortunately, the things that bothered Heather the most always involved him, or his schedule, or things that needed to be done around the house. And whenever he went 'professional' on her, as she called it, she believed he was no longer really paying attention to what she had to say. The fact that it was his profession to listen to people didn't make any difference to her. Because she really didn't want someone to *listen*, she wanted someone to *understand*. Nick felt his lips tighten at the memory. He knew perfectly well that 'understand' was the right word, but that hadn't been the word he had said to her that night before she walked out. He knew she wanted to hear him say he understood, but instead he had let his anger do the talking. *"You don't want someone to listen to you. You just want someone to bitch at."* And that was the end. In that one moment, he saw the last spark of five years of trust wink out.

Nick closed his eyes and tried to shake the memory out of his head. When he looked up, Sara was staring intently at him.

"How long have you been separated?"

"Two years – how do you know what I was thinking?"

"I'm sorry, I can sometimes pick up surface thoughts. Especially when the feelings associated with them are so intense.

Sara regarded Nick for a long time, trying to decide if she should go on. "It would seem you have a simple choice to make, Nick. The question is, are you willing to really listen this time?"

Nick thought about Enise Westfield, laying catatonic in her asylum ward. He took a deep breath, and decided.

"I'm listening," he said.

* * *

Sara Lynn Devereaux sighed, tossed the heavy leather-bound volume back onto the reading table in front of her and grabbed the next book from the stack to her left. Every book in the pile was a different size and color. They were all by different authors. The only thing they had in common was the general subject matter. Sara leaned back in the chair and stretched her arms over her head, letting out a groan. "I don't think this is going to work."

Professor Gyünter Hjeldorf, sitting by the window seat on the west library wall, was startled out his reverie by her

words. He still couldn't quite get his mind around the concept that his assistant lay under a bedspread on the second floor of this magnificent Victorian house; gutted like a fish by a naked winged woman. The book in his lap was open to the last page, and appeared to have been forgotten for the moment. The pile of scattered books at his feet was every bit as large as the one in front of Sara. He shook his head and exhaled loudly.

Wil Ohmsford slouched across the desk in the center of the room, watching a globe of the Earth spin lazily about it's tilted axis. He jabbed his right index finger onto the surface of the spinning orb and stopped it in mid-turn. His finger was pointing to a convergence of lines in the center of the second largest body of water on the map. He straightened up in the wheeled desk chair, and pushed it away from the desk. The chair rolled easily across the dark hardwood library floor, squeaking slightly with each rotation of the casters. He glided to a stop next to Sara. "Why don't you think it will work? It has to."

Ignoring the entire exchange, Malcolm McLaren and Doctor Enise Westfield were in the entry foyer outside the library's open double doors. They each had a long broomstick in their hands, and appeared to be practicing sparring techniques. Malcolm's partner, Eddie Frasier lay dozing on a Persian throw-rug at the foot of a large green overstuffed armchair in the corner of the library. The magazine he had been reading lay across his chest, rising and falling with his silent snores.

Sara gave Wil a hard look before answering him. "These books all talk about warding a house against evil demons. In all the catalogued sightings by the Talamasca, there have been very few accounts of these creatures actually believing themselves to be evil."

"So?"

"Holy water. Crosses. These are all trappings of religion." Sara replied, "They have no meaning to these extra-dimensional creatures."

Gyünter nodded and expanded on her statement. "In other words," he said, "They don't believe these things will hurt them. And so, they won't." He tossed the book in his lap to the floor. "There's very little in here about this Dimension Walk thing you keep talking about. But nothing seems to indicate the possibility of closing a micro-portal completely."

Wil stood up and strode over to the bookcase on the north wall. His eyes wandered over the many rows of books arrayed before him. Every book was written in a language which meant nothing to him. He closed his eyes and put his hand to his head as another wave of dizziness washed over him. Why was he feeling so weak? The wounds inflicted by the creature in the interstices had long since healed. He should have felt fine. He slumped into the overstuffed chair, waking Eddie in the process. Wil pointed to the AK-47 rifle at Eddie's side. "May I?" he asked hopefully.

"Sure.", came the martial artist's reply. He hopped to his feet and replaced the magazine in the rack across the library.

Wil picked up Frasier's assault rifle and idly began dismantling the weapon. He hated the feeling of helplessness he had. This strange fatigue was grating on his nerves, and he couldn't even do any of the research that might help repair the damage that his arrival had precipitated. He reassembled the gun, checked to make sure all the parts operated smoothly, and then began breaking it down again.

"Well, one thing is certain," Sara Lynn said with chagrin. "If we don't come up with something soon, I'm going to have to abandon this house."

A clattering sound from the floor above them caused Malcolm to put up his hand. He and the Doctor paused to listen. The sound was repeated. Eddie walked out into the hallway, looking up at the ceiling. Both marines exchanged some quick hand signals, ending with Malcolm pointing at Enise. Eddie whispered to the Doctor, "You and Malcolm are going up to check that out. I'm going to stay here and guard the others."

Enise nodded in understanding and hefted the broomstick before her.

Eddie watched as the two staff-bearers climbed the circular staircase toward the second level. Behind him, Gyünter and Sara continue to pore over their research.

With a look of mounting concern, Wil fought off another wave of dizziness and repeated the rifle reassembly.

As Malcolm and Enise crept up the stairway to the second floor, they heard a distinct *crack* followed by the sharp report of something hitting the wall above them. The object ricocheted down off the wall to Malcolm's right, careened into the banister and shot straight toward the ceiling two stories above. By the time the object struck the ceiling, it has clearly lost most of its momentum, and they could finally identify the projectile as a small white sphere less than two inches in diameter. The golf ball plummetted past them, down the central shaft of the stairwell, and then began bouncing in ever-shrinking arcs down the length of the foyer, finally rolling to a stop next to an antique umbrella stand. Malcolm and Enise continued to the top of the landing and looked down to see a man standing in the middle of the second floor hallway. He swung his arms and there was another *crack*, followed by a golf ball whistling past Enise's head. Enise threw herself to the ground and looks toward the attacker. The dark-skinned man, wore colorful tartan britches and called out in a thick scottish accent. "Four!"

Malcolm reached down and helped the Doctor back to her feet. The man at the end of the hall put his hands up to his mouth and called to them. "Excuse me, but you're blocking the fairway! I'm tryin' to tee off!"

"No, excuse me," Enise responded with a big grin on her face. She strode down the hall, stepped right up to the man, extended her staff and cracked him across the side of the head.

Eddie Frasier watched in disbelief as the little golf ball rolled lazily past the library door. He then returned his gaze to

the stairwell. A moment after Malcolm and the Doctor's feet climbed out of view, there was another report, and a second golf ball came careening down the stairs.

Wil Ohmsford watched the marine at the door, and noted his steadfastness at keeping an eye on his partner. As soon as he was certain that Malcolm and Enise have reached the second floor, Wil rested the butt of the assault rifle against his hip and pointed it at the reading table where Gyünter and Sara Lynn were standing, bent over one of the books. Gyünter heard the small metallic *chink* of a safety being disengaged and looked up to see the barrel of Wil's gun pointing straight at him. Professor Gyünter Hjeldorf didn't even have time to cry out before three white-hot bullets ripped into his stomach, throwing him back across the library. The wind was completely knocked out of him and the pain of the initial two bullets ended abruptly when the exit wound severed his spinal column.

As soon as the third shot hit Gyünter's belly, Wil turned around and fired two more slugs at Eddie, catching the stunned marine as he whirled around in surprise. A small eruption of blood appeared on each of Eddie's legs as the two shots struck and threw him to the ground. Wil took a running leap over the writhing form of Eddie Frasier, flung open the front door, and ran out into the night.

Sara Lynn had instinctively dove behind the couch at the sound of the first shot. That, and the four shots that followed still rang in her ears. Suddenly, she heard the front door bang open, followed by pounding footsteps on the porch. Knowing the attacker was gone, she looked up to find Professor Hjeldorf lying on the ground beside her, a steadily growing pool of dark blood soaking into the throw rug on which he had landed. Gyünter was breathing in ragged bursts, his chest heaved with the strain. He stared at the ceiling making whimpering sounds. She grabbed his hand and tried calling his name. At last, Gyünter turned his head and his glazed eyes focused on her for just a moment. The word seems to come from deep within him, and his chest convulses with the effort to expel it. The sound bursts forth, accompanied by a gout of blood. "Why?" He choked out. Sara Lynn squeezed his hand and tried to reassure him. But his eyes no longer saw. His ears no longer heard. A rattle of the final breath escaped his lips, and Professor Gyünter Hjeldorf was no more.

At the sound of gunfire from downstairs, Malcolm turned away from the dark-skinned gentleman now lying stunned on the ground, and ran for the stairs. Enise brandished the broomstick again, watching with grim satisfaction as the man cringed away from her. Satisfied, she stepped back and followed Malcolm. Eddie was staggering to his feet, two bright streaks of blood ran down each of his legs from mid-thigh. He seemed to be trying to get to the front door which stood open to the night. Surmising that the shooter had fled outside, Malcolm gave chase.

Enise skidded to a halt beside the marine. Eddie grimmaced in pain, but waved her toward the library. "I'm … okay … help … Hjeldorf." He then staggered out the front door. He reached down and retrieved his Assault Rifle, which lay forgotten on the wide wooden porch. He checked the clip, engaged the safety and ran into the night after Malcolm and Wil.

Enise went back into the library and found Sara Lynn sobbing over the prone form of the professor. She pulled out her scanner and ran it back and forth over Gyünter's wounds. "He's dead." Doctor Enise Westfield looked around the room, confusion spreading across her face, "Where's Wil?"

* * *

Wil ran down the street as fast as he could. Another wave of dizziness swept over him, causing him to stumble after only a few house lengths. He spied a large round bush and flung himself into a dark gap in the branches. A moment later, he was pressing his back up against the cluster of thick branches that served as its trunk. He hoped the leaves of the bush would shield him from any pursuers. The scent of leaves and moist soil filled his nostrils as he attempted to slow his breathing and concentrate on opening a Dimension Walk portal.

Malcolm heard the sound of booted feat pounding on the sidewalk behind him. He didn't turn to look. He and Eddie had worked together too long for him not to recognize the sound of his partner's footsteps. The two of them began an organized advancing action down the street, sweeping from side to side, checking between and beneath each of the parked cars that lined Farregut. The moon shone down from just over the rooftops, adding it's nearly-full illumination to that of the mercury vapor street lamps. Malcolm was still unsure exactly who he is hunting, but there was a large round bush two houses ahead of their skirmish line whose branches were swaying a little too energetically in the still night air. He still made sure that nobody was hiding among the vehicles before motioning to Eddie and pointing to the bush. Eddie grunted with the effort to move stealthily with two wounded legs, but he signaled his acknowledgment.

Malcolm and Eddie approached the bush from opposite sides. It was large enough that they couldn't see each other through the branches. Malcolm tried firing a warning shot into the outter edge of the bush, hoping to flush his quarry. Instead he unwittingly managed to wing his partner in the arm. Eddie, certain that it was Wil shooting at him from within the bush, responded by returning fire.

Wil couldn't understand why the portal refused to open for him. His head swam and throbbed in pain. Every time he tried to focus his empathic energy, his concentration would melt away by the growing pain. Suddenly he felt a white-hot bullet rip through the ballistic cloth of his body sleeve. Then he felt a stabbing pain in his forehead. It felt as if all his inner strength was being poured out through the wound in his head…the wound that should have been healed. Then all went black.

Sara Lynn looked at the body of Gyünter Heildorf with a sense of dismay. Despite the fact that she didn't care for him personally, he was in this house at her request. He had been there just long enough to help her retrieve Wil and Enise from

the interstices … and now he was dead. Killed by one of the very people he had been brought in to save. When Malcolm came in with Wil slung over his shoulder, her anger gelled into absolute fury. Why did this asshole always mess up her life? Why did she always go out of her way to help him?

Enise ran her medical scanner over Wil's body. She looked perplexed. "I don't understand these readings. He's substantially weaker than he was an hour ago. His mental readings are depressed. How long has he been unconscious?"

Malcolm just shrugged. Eddie shook his head. "He was shooting at us, and I winged him. He screamed, and this is how we found him."

The doctor rummaged through her bag and pulled out a hypo-sprayer. She injected Wil with a mild stimulant and waited. A moment later his eyelids fluttered. "Wha…Where am I?" He creased his brow as if he were trying to think very hard. The look of concentration became one of dismay. "I can't…there's something wrong!" He started to struggle up into a sitting position. Malcolm pushed him back down and kept pressure on his chest until Wil stopped trying to get up.

Enise ran the medical scanner over Wil again. It was reading a minor infection at the sight of the healed head wound. It was nothing that antibiotics shouldn't have cleared right up. So why was it affecting him this strongly?

Wil seemed to comprehend the situation first. He felt extremely weak and his empathic abilities were gone. Whether permanently or temporarily, he didn't know, but the thought of trying to deal with not having them proved to be too much for him. He reached slowly down into his boot and pulled Excalibur from his boot holster. Malcolm spotted the snub pistol just as Wil tried raising it to his head. He lashed out with a booted foot and kicked Wil's hand aside. The look on Wil's face changed from depression to anger. "What are you doing?" He demanded, as he tried to raise the gun again. This time Malcolm' kick landed on the side of Wil's head. Wil was dazed for a moment and raised the gun again. The next kick brought a trickle of blood from a small cut it left in Wil's scalp. His hand went limp, and the gun clattered to the floor. He looked up at the mute and smiled wanly, "If I had my powers …" he opened his eyes wide "… I think you'd regret that."

At that moment, there was another loud *crack* from upstairs. The now-familiar ricochet of a golf ball preceded the appearance of the tiny orb by only a moment. Sara Lynn watched the ball roll along the foyer floor and into the library. It rolled up under the curtain that she had draped over the Professor's body. "I don't need this," she said in a low voice, and stalked toward the staircase. When she reaches the second floor, she saw four men standing in the hall, all looking at her. "What are you doing here?", she demanded.

One of the men bowed and pulled the cap off his head with a flourish. "We're having a party, and you're the guest of honor."

Sara Lynn Devereaux drew herself up to full height and screamed, "Get out of my house. You have no place here! I command you to leave this place at once!"

The lead man cocked his head to one side, there was a noticable lump on his temple, and his eyes suddenly lit up with a reddish glow. "I don't think so, dearie."

Sara Lynn felt her resolve falter a bit. She hadn't actually expected her outburst to work, but she hadn't expected it to fail so miserably either. She turned away in disgust and retreated back down the stairs, ignoring the catcalls and jeers from the four garishly dressed men in her second floor hallway. She pointedly ignored Wil Ohmsford as he tried addressing the two marines. She simply stalked right passed them and out onto the front porch of her house. There she began to pace back and forth, muttering to herself. She was getting increasingly agitated. "Why do I keep getting into these situations? I tried to help him. I went out of my way. And what do I get in return? This shit. I don't need this. I don't understand!" At last, she summoned up her resolve and stormed back inside.

Wil seemed alert and was looking with concern at the doctor. "I feel really weak, and … and I can't sense anything. What's wrong with me?"

Before the doctor could respond, Sara Lynn chimed in. "That's what I'd like to know. You ungrateful bastard!" She pointed at the covered body of Gyünter on the floor. "He was here to help you. You probably wouldn't be here if it wasn't for him."

Enise ignored the outburst. "I'm reading a small mass by your pineal gland. It could be a tumor…or the source of the infection. Either way, we need to get in there to find out."

Wil looked at her with shock. "Surgery? Are you sure you can do that?"

Sara Lynn didn't take being ignored too well. She strode over to the desk, picked up the phone and dialed three numbers. A moment later, a voice picked up at the other end. "Hello? Yes, I'd like to report a shooting. The address is two-thirty-one Farregut. Thank you." She dropped the receiver back on the hook and turned back to face the others. For the first time in many minutes, she started to feel like she was regaining control over her destiny.

The others in the room only stared at her in shock. Wil swallowed hard. "Wh - What did you do that for?"

Her response dripped with venom, "You came here, and suddenly my safe-house is demonground! I've got a dark elf party up on the second floor, a Succubus loose in the city, and two dead bodies." She trembled visibly as her anger built, "You've single-handedly destroyed my house - my home! Well, now it's you who has something to lose." She paused for effect, and then turned to Malcolm and Eddie. "We've got to get out of here. Do you have someplace we can go?"

Eddie looked at his companion. An entire silent conversation took place in that brief instant of eye contact. Malcolm shrugged his shoulders. "Yeah...", Eddie said after a long pause. "You can come to our dojo."

To be continued... ❖

THE LOOSE ENDS

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NEXT ISSUE

Layout of Issue 15 will begin shortly. We hope to have it available to you by GenCon. Issue 15 does not have a theme, so please feel free to submit anything you wish

And so, we are announcing that we are now accepting material for Issue 16, for release in November 2002.

Issue 16 deadline is September 15, 2002

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