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year's Gen Con™

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Complex"**

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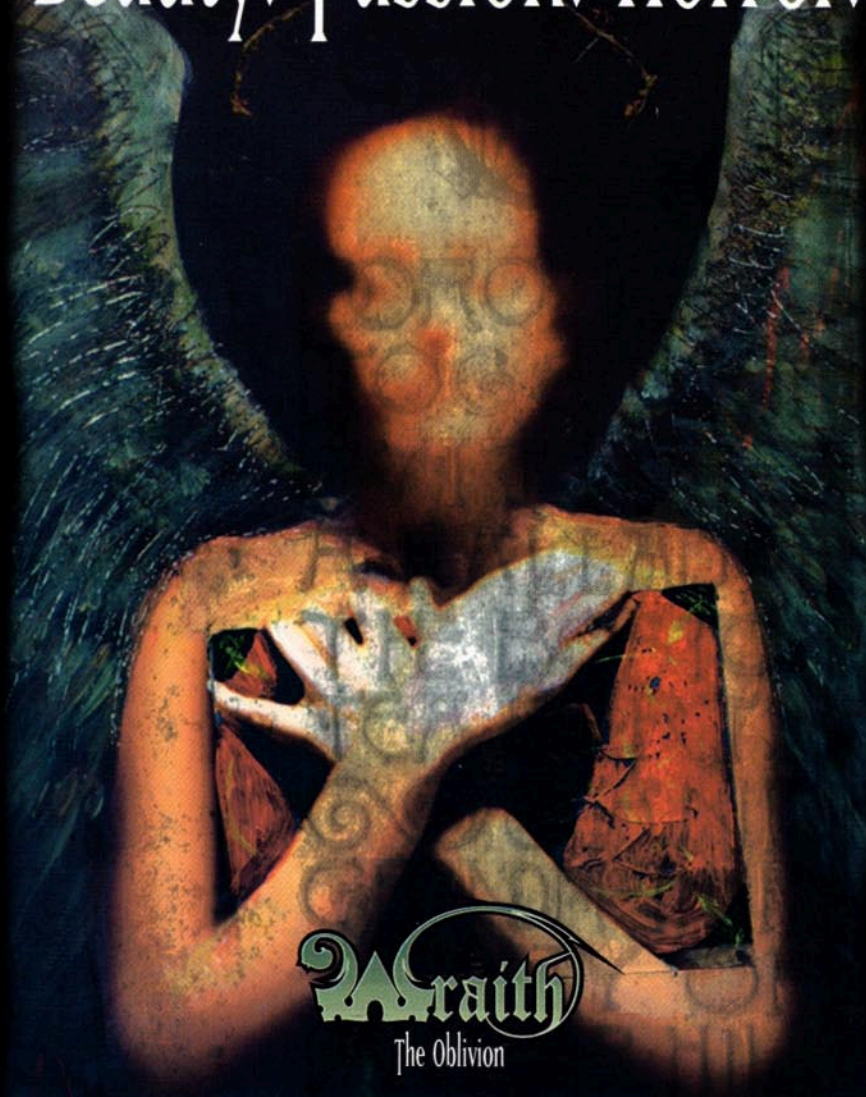
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Issue #29
Volume V • Number IV

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by Douglas Seacat
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Vampire: the Masquerade*

Strange Vistas

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Complex

by Jonathan Tweet
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*Fiction from the world of
Paranoia.*

The Edge

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A GenCon recap, plus columns and reviews.

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Art Director Matt Wilson brings a dark future nightmare to life for the cover of our 29th issue. Hunters or hunted? With a group like this, one can never be sure.

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Declaration of Independence

The staff of SHADIS is determined
to keep this publication independent
and bringing our readers the best
coverage of the gaming industry
available.

Although the Alderac
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SHADIS, publishes game systems
and supplements, SHADIS will not
become a house organ.

Our policy — written in stone — is
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limited to one full page ad per issue. In
addition, articles relating to AEG
games will be limited to two issues per
year — not to exceed a combined total
of fifteen pages for both issues. (That
works out to 15 pages per 672
published pages of SHADIS.)

This policy actually penalizes AEG
for being associated with SHADIS
rather than having an unfair advantage
over other companies. We hope this
policy demonstrates our determination
to keep SHADIS truly independent. Q

Editorial

The Cons of August

It's the first issue post-GenCon, and as the editor of a gaming magazine I am therefore legally obligated to hang this editorial on a GenCon theme. Sorry — that's the law.

~*~*~

AEG, publishing leviathan that it is, brought all nine employees and partners to GenCon; since it was a convention, we ended up four to a hotel room. I had dibs on the floor, but ended up having to share it with a fifth person. Don't tell the hotel — they get antsy about more than four to a room, as if it could be avoided at a gaming convention.

~*~*~

Booth setup was also a classic con story, since the box containing our booth was driven up to the Canadian border before anybody at the delivery company noticed that Milwaukee was, in fact, at the southern end of Wisconsin. Several of us, then, had an impromptu day off instead of setting up the misplaced booth, and got to watch the NASA "Possible Ancient Life On Mars" press conference instead.

~*~*~

The nicest surprise was the sudden arrival, midway through the con, of a gorgeous plaque from the RPGA awarding SHADIS their "Favorite Game Magazine" Gamers' Choice Award. All of us at the magazine were pleasantly amazed, and I got to have my picture taken with the plaque when the dealer floor opened Saturday. (Don't worry, folks, I always look like that before noon.) On behalf of the whole magazine staff — thanks, RPGA!

~*~*~

As usual, the con was too big to cover completely. The Edge has news and photos from the dealer floor — August is the traditional time to release new products — but we don't have anything on the gaming itself, which is the best reason to go. If you were there, you know what you played; if you weren't, make hotel reservations now.

~*~*~

The part of the con which most impressed me: FASA was running a *Shadowrun* "election" at GenCon. They've been setting this up since the spring; evidently there was some malfeasance in the last United Canadian and American States

election in the *Shadowrun* timeline, and they spent half a year tracking the makeup election in real-time, with election day and the inauguration right after one another at the beginning of the con. A couple of adventure supplements gave characters some inside dirt on the elections, and postcards inside the supplements let the players "absentee vote." One of the personalities running for president was a dragon, Dunkelzahn. Now, if you've got gamers voting for office, and a dragon is in the running, of course he's going to win, so FASA was going to be able to set up GenCon as a victory lap for the wyrm, right?

Well, they suckered us. Yes, the dragon won in a walk; everybody was pretty sure of the results when the back issue of last month's SHADIS had a *Shadowrun* ad for "Portfolio of a Dragon: Dunkelzahn's Secrets." What we didn't know was the format. You see, persons unknown assassinated the victorious dragon on Inauguration Night, and the sourcebook contains his will (among other things). On Thursday night, the first night of the con, FASA posted notices of the assassination everywhere, and their employees whipped out their T-shirts: "Due to unforeseen circumstances, Wyrms Talk [Dunkelzahn's TV show] will be canceled for the 2058 season." Even people who don't play *Shadowrun* (like myself) were intrigued, and had to have the product — the definition of a brilliant marketing shtick.

~*~*~

This was SHADIS's fourth consecutive GenCon, and to celebrate, we gave out several thousand free copies of Issue #28 (as that issue's "Dirk" mentioned). Even though we've been around for four years now, there were still lots of people who had never heard of us. Help us out, OK — force this copy on your gaming buddies when you're done with it, would you? Spread the word.

~*~*~

The best part of GenCon, though, was getting to meet face-to-face with people I've only known through the mail. I got to meet for the first time some of the writers I've been corresponding with for years — and with some people who are likely to bring us new cartoons. Watch the back of the magazine carefully: you never know what might pop up back there....

—D. J. Trindle

Skybox and Psi-cops: An Interview With Walter Koenig

Walter Koenig has been a television and movie actor for over thirty years. He is best known as Ensign Pavel Chekov on the original *Star Trek* series, and in subsequent *Trek* motion pictures. He also has a recurring role on *Babylon 5* as the ruthless psy-cop Bester, and has been involved in numerous theatrical projects, including *The Boys of Autumn* with fellow *Trek* alumnus Mark Leonard.

Mr. Koenig appeared at this year's Gen Con in Milwaukee to promote Fleer/Skybox's new *Star Trek* card game.* He graciously took time out of his busy schedule to talk briefly with SHADIS about the game, about life after *Star Trek*, and about the particulars of the characters he's played.

SHADIS: Let's start with the card game. Besides the obvious connection to *Star Trek*, what interested you in the game, and how did you become involved with its promotion?

Walter Koenig: Originally, I became involved in the game because I am a card collector. I had a good rapport with the people at Skybox, and they were passing me along some of the stuff that was coming out. That established the relationship. More importantly though, I like the game. I like the whole sense of playing out the episodes, and of mixing and matching the episodes [that the game's format provides]. You have one episode, and you can bring in characters from another episode. I like the fact that you can acquire cards, and although the cards may be different from what you have, they still have value when playing the game. Nothing goes to waste.

*We would be remiss if we did not mention that Fleer's *Star Trek* CCG is based upon the original series, and is not connected in any way with Decipher's *Star Trek: The Next Generation* CCG.

S: That's true of most CCGs. Have you played other collectible card games before?

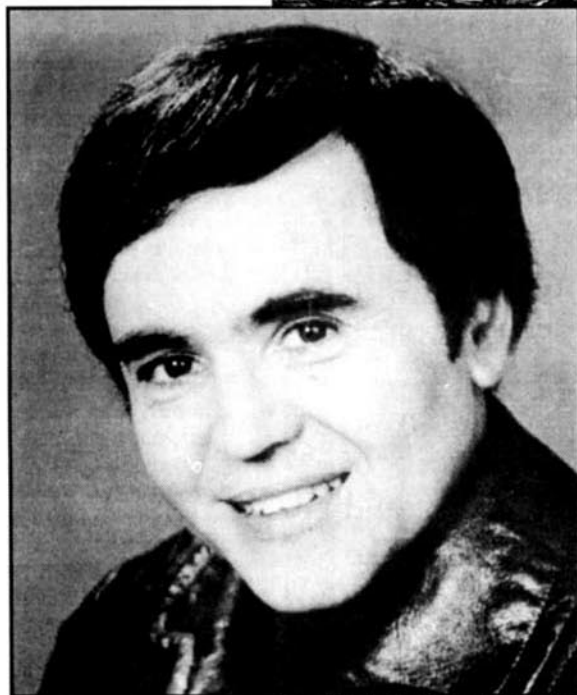
WK: I really haven't. This is the first one, and I'm finding it great fun. I haven't mastered them by any means, but I'm certainly finding them stimulating. You can play on several different levels; the more intimate you become with the rules, the more diverse the game can become.

S: You said you've been collecting cards. What sorts of collections, and what sorts of cards?

WK: As a kid, I collected baseball cards, but I also collected non-sports cards. [Nowadays], I collect strictly non-sports cards. With the exception of *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5*, I collect only art cards. I wouldn't collect photograph cards at all.

S: You mentioned your two best known TV roles there — there's been a lot of comparisons among SF fans between *Babylon 5* and *Star Trek*. As someone who is uniquely situated to comment on both of them, what do you see as the differences and similarities (if any) between the two?

WK: I don't see too many similarities, other than the fact that both series require that you give yourself the license to imagine, and to try and redefine the parameters of what reality is. You must suspend your disbelief. That's part of the nature of the genre they both occupy, I suppose. I also think that, to some degree, both *Star Trek* and



"I don't like playing cardboard cut-outs; I want my characters to have depth and quirks and interesting nuances. You don't get that with black and white, only with shades of grey. People are the product of environment or of their genes, and that can make them do terrible things sometimes, but that doesn't make them wholly evil."

Babylon attempt to address topical political and sociological issues. I always thought that was meritorious on the part of *Star Trek*, and I think that [*Babylon* creator] Joe Straczynsky shares that social awareness. He instills a very deeply-held belief system, which I happen to agree with, into the storyline, and that connects somewhat with what we were doing on *Star Trek*.

S: How did you get involved in *Babylon 5*?

WK: Joe Straczynsky has seen me do theatre, and knew my work on *Star Trek*. We had a mutual friend; I met him through Harlan Ellison initially. He volunteered to help back a play that I was mounting in Los Angeles (*The Boys of Autumn*). I didn't even come to him, he just saw what we were doing and gave us the money unsolicited, which was really remarkable. He wrote a part for me on *Babylon*, but I became ill and I wasn't available. When I had recuperated, he wrote a new role for me, Bester, which really turned out for the best.

S: Tell us about Bester. He's not a nice guy, obviously...

WK: (Quickly) But not necessarily a bad guy! (Laughs). After the first episode, I thought he was a villain. As the character has been written, progressively his persona has expanded to something more than just a black hat. I don't like playing cardboard cut-outs; I want my characters to have depth and quirks and interesting nuances. You don't get that with black and white, only with shades of grey. People are the product of environment or of their genes, and that can make them do terrible things sometimes, but that doesn't make them wholly evil. Bester's like that. He's imperious. He can be hostile. He sometimes goes to great lengths to get what he needs to do done. But he's not evil, and I certainly don't see him as overtly malevolent.

S: How much leeway do the producers give you in playing Bester?

WK: Interestingly, Joe and I were in complete agreement with the way Bester should be played. The show is Joe's baby, and he's very involved in all aspects of it. You would think that that would cause problems for an actor. Sometimes [in a situation like that], there are contradictions within a given character — parts that seem like they're awkward, that they're imposed on the character, that don't seem like they belong. But it's all so organic [with Bester] that even though we don't speak about it — we truly appear to be on the same wavelength with the character. And I think that's marvelous.

I added one thing, a physical thing, that I guess isn't evident to 99 percent of the people who watch the show. And I did ask [Straczynsky] if he

had any objections to it, and he said he hadn't. I give Bester a frozen hand. Nobody's ever aware of that, that his left hand doesn't open. I did that in order to bring out this imperious attitude in the character. I wanted to lay an underlying hostility on him as much as I could. (Smiles). It helps that everyone else is six-foot three on the show; then I can stand up next to them and freely use whatever Napoleonic personality traits that I may have.

[The hand] also gives him one more handicap that he has to overcome, and makes him that much more determined, as a character. It's part of what makes him an overachiever. It's never written in the script, though, and that makes thing interesting. In one case, I was wearing a spacesuit and gloves. I asked Joe if I could take off the gloves, and he said "no, not really." The plot demanded I keep it on. So when you see me onscreen in the suit, I've got that hand in my pocket.

S: Any bit of Chekov in Bester?

WK: None. They're completely different characters.

S: So how would the two of them deal with each other, if they met?

WK: (Smiles) I don't think Chekov could stand up to Bester. He really wouldn't be much of a challenge.

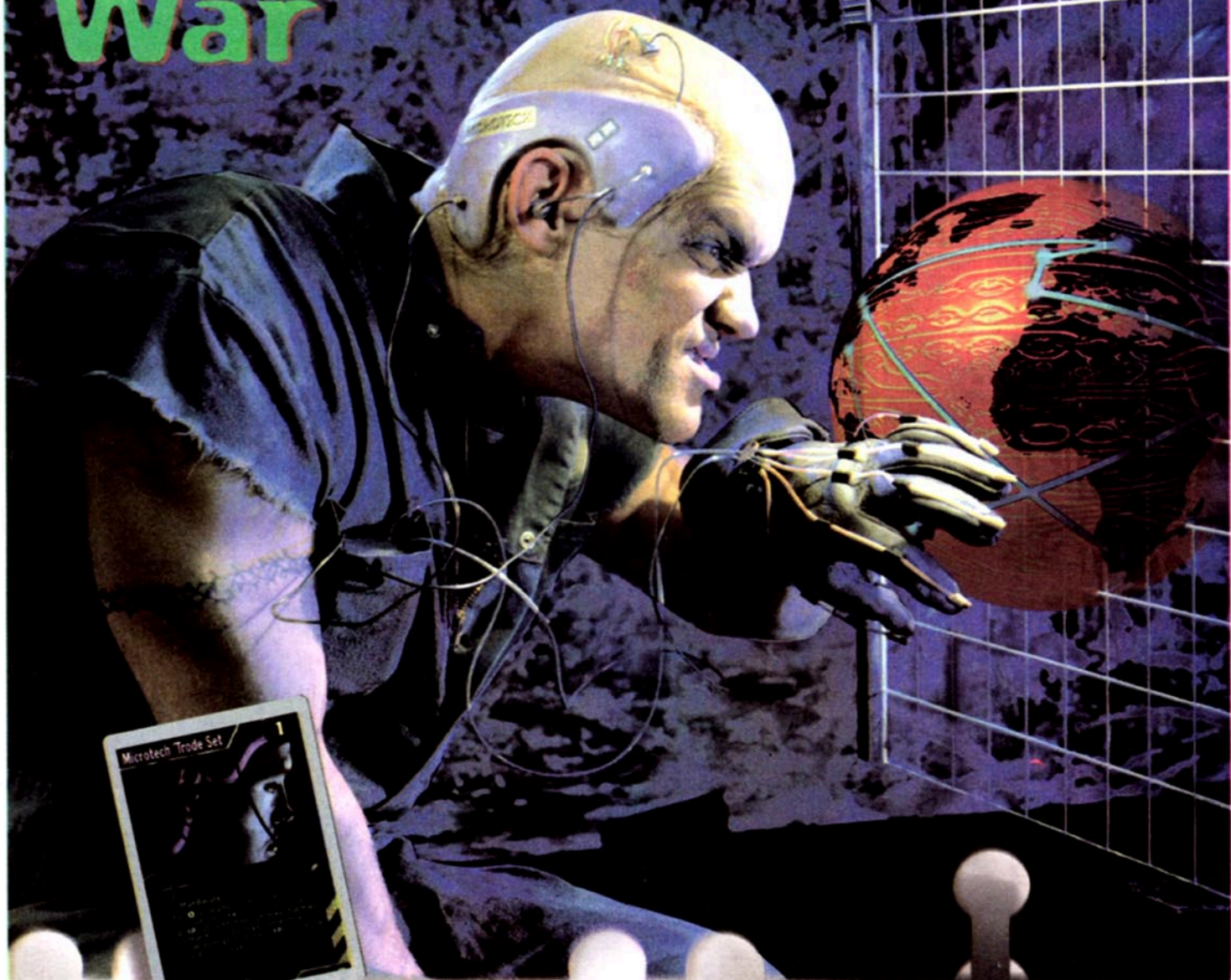
S: You had mentioned *The Boys of Autumn* earlier, which you worked on with Mark Leonard. What's different about acting in the theater than acting on television or in the movies?

WK: Well first of all, when you're doing theater, you tend to play characters who are written more three-dimensionally. Unless it's a walk-on, you've got a role that's sustained over two, two-and-a-half hours. So there's more to explore there, just in the written words. Secondly, there's that wonderful period of rehearsal, when you have the luxury of helping to build the character and finding all the little quirks. You're establishing a rapport with the other performers while that's going on, which you don't have in television. In television, if you're lucky, you sit around a table and read through the words once, then go onto the sound stage and shoot it. The only rehearsal on the sound stage is when you blow a line and do it over.

There's also that wonderful quality of interaction with a live audience. It's an "on the edge" kind of feeling, no second chances. And when there's something like comedy involved, it's very gratifying to hear the response to what you do.

I think theater acting is the true test of an actor's talent, which is innate. Television and motion picture acting is a test of technique, which

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An Interview With Walter Koenig

is learned. I'm not trying to put that down. You need technique in order to function effectively as a performer, to put down the same feelings and the same emotions over and over again. It brings a consistency to each take that allows different angles to be cut together. That's something that's really a consequence of training, of just doing it until you've got the experience down.

S: So what's next on your agenda?

WK: Well, I'm definitely doing more episodes of *Babylon 5*. I'm slated to do four this next season. I've also had an inquiry about guest-starring in the pilot to a television series from England called *Legend*, I believe. That would go in November.

I also have an outline for a television series called *Alien in Wonderland* that I've been trying to sell, which was inspired by George [Takei], Jimmy [Doohan], Nichelle [Nichols] and myself. It's not *Star Trek*, we won't be playing *Star Trek* characters, but we would be principals on the show. It's a very off-the-wall, Monty Python-style program; the closest thing I could compare it to, I suppose, would be Douglas Adams' work.

Away from television I've had some conversations with an editor from Starline publishing, and they're interested in having me do a science fiction novel. Right now, we're trying to determine what exactly the subject matter will be, but I'm excited about it. Then there's a *Star Trek* CD ROM game that they've been talking to me about.

S: CD ROMs... a project like that blurs the line somewhat between movies and games, and makes interaction with the audience more of a reality. How does one approach the production of something like that?

WK: Not all that differently. I did another called *Maximum Surge* awhile ago. We shot that with a 35mm camera, we shot backgrounds with a blue screen, we shot in a cave. Except for the fact that I talked to the camera — or to the "player" that the camera was supposed to represent — it was very much like making a movie.

S: Would the *Star Trek* game involve Chekov, or something else?

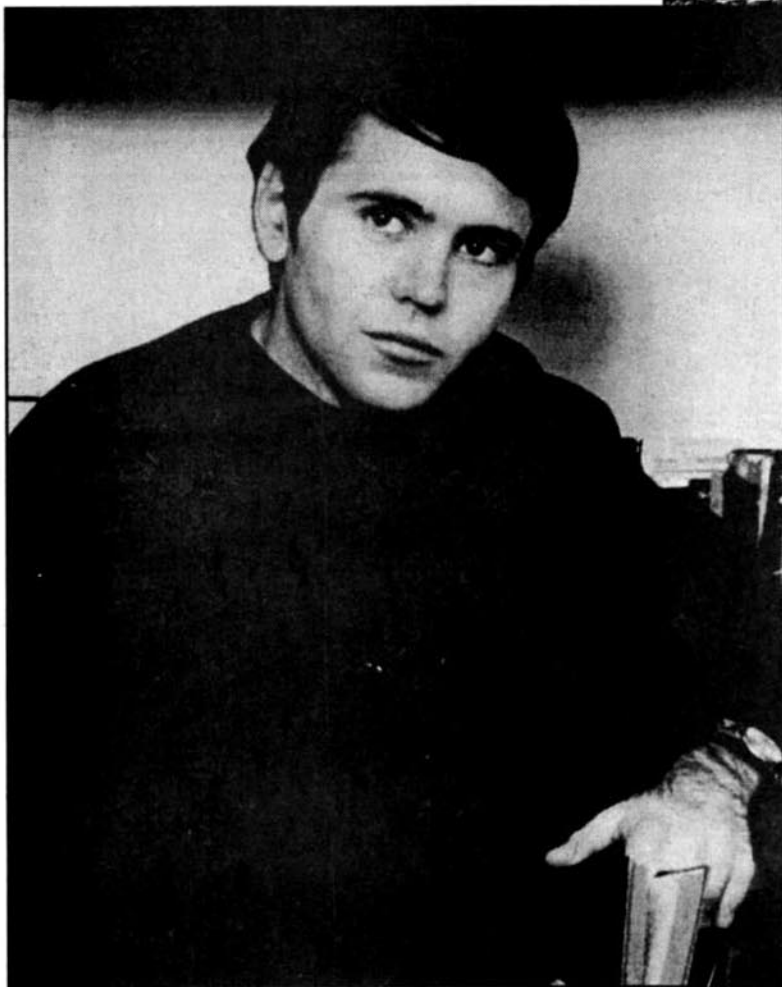
WK: Yes, it'd be Chekov. I think the project involves three of us. But the deal hasn't been made, and we're still in the negotiations stage, so I really can't say anything officially.

S: We're running short on time here, but we've gotta ask: would you consider

doing Chekov again? In a movie or on one of the television shows?

WK: I wouldn't say 'no' out of hand. I turned down the *Generations* offer the first time, even though it involved a not-inconsiderable amount of money. There was nothing there that I hadn't done before, and I didn't see the point. They asked me to come in, and I made some suggestions, which they included in the script. That made things easier. Unfortunately, they excluded them once it was shot, and everything that I had suggested was edited out. I can't believe that that was Machiavellian, I think it was just a matter of cutting what was most expeditious. They wanted the picture to be a designated length, and the stuff I had done was really not indigenous to the story and was the easiest to excise.

But would I do it again? I suppose, if there was something worthwhile there. But I don't really anticipate that anymore. I really feel that my active participation as a character in *Star Trek* is over. ☐





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Espionage in RPGs

A Guide to Real-Life Spies

Espionage is defined as the gathering of information in one country by another country, utilizing people (spies), remote intelligence gathering equipment, and any other means necessary. Usually, the actions of the spy are illegal, and thus must be performed secretly. Also, other facets of covert warfare are considered part of espionage, particularly sabotage and assassination.

Espionage in Real Life

Real espionage is a lot more boring and unfulfilling than in roleplaying — much of it involves research, number crunching, and the collection of vast quantities of esoteric information. For every agent in the field, there are a hundred analysts and administrators sitting behind desks. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of valuable information and insight to be gained by understanding how real intelligence organizations operate.

Glossary

The jargon of the espionage business is probably already familiar to the average reader, learned from spy movies and books. However, here are a few tidbits of information and less common terms:

Activate: To order a dormant agent to begin actively searching for and obtaining vital information.

Brush Contact: When spy wishes to pass over documents to his or her contact, a meeting is set up where the two casually brush against each other, and the contact is given the information. Another way of doing it is where the spy drops the package into a garbage can or leaves it on a park bench, and a contact, walking some distance behind the spy, picks it up within a few seconds.

Cell: This is a small group of operatives working in enemy territory, frequently with little or no contact with other cells (in order to keep the whole operation safe if one cell is betrayed).

Desk: The department in an intelligence agency devoted to a specific country or portion of a country; the section devoted to Mexico would be the Mexican Desk, and so on.

HUMINT: Human Intelligence, or information gathered by agents in the field. This is probably the most important source of intelligence, but is also the most vulnerable to double agents and betrayals.

Insertion: Dropping a disguised agent into enemy territory.

Intelligence: Raw information gathered. At times, little if any of it is of critical importance on its own. *Military intelligence* is information on troop movements, battalion sizes, equipment, and so on. Operational intelligence regards what officers will be in charge of what units, and when senior commanders will be away from their posts; during the preparations for D-Day, it was discovered that General Rommel, the commander of the German forces in Normandy, would be in Berlin for his wife's birthday and thus unable to command his troops.

Strategic intelligence regards whether a country will go to war over one issue but not another, and how friendly it is with its neighbors. *Geographical intelligence* is the compiling of accurate maps of every country in the world, including ordinary road maps as well as diagrams of military bases. Before the advent of satellite photography, the Soviets would routinely misdraw the maps they supplied other countries, so that a city would appear on the map several miles from its actual location.

by
John W.
Baichtal

Artwork by
Steve
Bryant

No, not the
further
adventures
of Carl
Larson, but
real Real
Spies.

Political intelligence is data surrounding a country's politics, giving the agency an opportunity to manipulate elections and so forth. Industrial intelligence is information on a country's economic output, what raw materials it can produce, and

what it needs to import.

PHOTINT: Information gathered from photographs, whether they be taken by ordinary cameras, spy planes, or satellites.

Propaganda: Information, whether true or false, used to damage the enemy's morale. Propaganda comes in three flavors: *black propaganda*, which is made to look like it actually originated from the enemy itself (like a radio message supposedly from Headquarters telling men on the front that their President or other leader has fled the country, expecting imminent defeat). *White propaganda* is information clearly coming from the enemy, but that still attempts to convince enemy soldiers and civilians to give up; in World War II, the Japanese employed Tokyo Rose, an English speaking woman who would daily extol the G.I.s to give up their cause. Finally, there is *gray propaganda*, which is where the source is not apparent, but where the information, as anonymous as it is, causes a loss of heart among the populace. An example of gray propaganda would be rumors started by agents in the enemy country that their soldiers were performing dastardly atrocities overseas.

Security Check: When an agent reports in by radio, a code word is normally spoken to let headquarters know that all is well and that he or she has not been captured and forced to transmit false information. Such a check is a security check. However, the system only works as long as the agent always remembers to insert the code word and the home base knows when to give up the agent for lost and not just assume he or she forgot the code word. In World War II, when British spies were captured and ordered to report back that they were safe, they were often chastised by their superiors for "forgetting" their code word.

SIGINT: Intelligence gathered from intercepted radio transmissions.

Types Of Spies

For the purpose of this section, the word *spy* will be used to refer to any employee of an intelligence agency, even those who do not actually participate in the covert gathering of intelligence. The following are the most common sorts of spies:

Advisor: Agents, many of them with military backgrounds, who are sent into enemy territory to covertly train and equip rebel forces. The U.S. has long favored this tactic, and during the Cold War sent many teams of advisors into third world Communist countries. It was Cuban military advisors who facilitated a Communist coup in Grenada which prompted the U.S. invasion in 1983.

Assassin: Hired guns, neither as common nor as heavily utilized as depicted in movies and spy novels. Simply put, to kill an enemy leader is an invitation to have your own leader assassinated in



A Guide to Real Spies

revenge. Most often, the target of an assassination is a traitor or exiled dissident from the country ordering the hit. Even rarer than the typical assassin is the triggerman who actually assassinates more than one target; many assassins are captured or killed at the scene of the crime.

Condemned Spy: This is a ploy utilized successfully by Sun Tzu, one of the earliest military geniuses in history. A spy deemed useless was fed large quantities of false information, then sent into enemy territory and allowed to be captured. When interrogated, the hapless spy would divulge reams of false and misleading information, leading the enemy into critical mistakes.

Counterintelligence: Operatives whose sole mission is to seek out and neutralize enemy spies. One or more counterintelligence officers serve at each embassy, searching through visa applications for discrepancies or the faces of known spies. They are trained in every possible technique for preventing critical information from getting into enemy hands. The FBI is the primary counterintelligence agency in the U.S.

Cryptanalyst: Code breakers. Every military and embassy in the world uses codes to prevent unauthorized personnel from reading the messages. Every intelligence agency has people hard at work cracking those codes. This is an extremely important job; in World War I, the intercepted and decoded Zimmermann Telegram, which suggested an alliance between Germany and Mexico to attack the U.S., paved the way for American participation in the war.

Thirty years later, during World War II, U.S. cryptanalysts broke the sophisticated Japanese code called Purple, allowing American forces to ambush the Japanese fleet at Midway and destroy it and further facilitated the assassination of the seniormost Japanese naval officer after information on his flight itinerary was intercepted.

Data Analyst: The gathering of huge reams of raw data. Much of it is not in itself valuable, such as stock market listings or information that could be found in an almanac, but it gives an agency a clearer idea of the conditions in the other country; data analysts are needed to put all the pieces of the puzzle together.

Forward Observer: A spy, perhaps a soldier, who infiltrates past enemy lines during times of war to locate targets, such as fuel dumps and armories, for future attack. Sometimes, the location of the target is radioed back to an artillery unit and an attack takes place immediately, under the eyes of the observer.

Hacker: Undoubtedly the newest addition to intelligence agencies, the hacker's job is to break into enemy databases, tap into computerized networks, and create paralyzing computer viruses.

Industrial Espionage: The theft of critical

technology like nuclear weapons by countries which lack it. Also, private companies steal trade secrets from each other by infiltrating the competition.

Infiltrator: A parachuted or otherwise inserted agent expected to perform missions while disguised as a travelling salesman or tourist (as opposed to a native of the country recruited for espionage). Sometimes the spy is expected to be able to pass as a native, or as a citizen of an allied nation. In times of war, it is often easier to use female or older male infiltrators because the sight of a healthy young man not in uniform might arouse suspicion.

Mata Hari: An agent, usually female, who seduces important officials and listens to their pillow talk, convinces them to turn traitor, or otherwise acquires whatever information they have. Mata Hari was a notorious courtesan and a lousy spy who worked for whatever government would give her money. Though not the best example of this type of agent, she is certainly the most well-known.

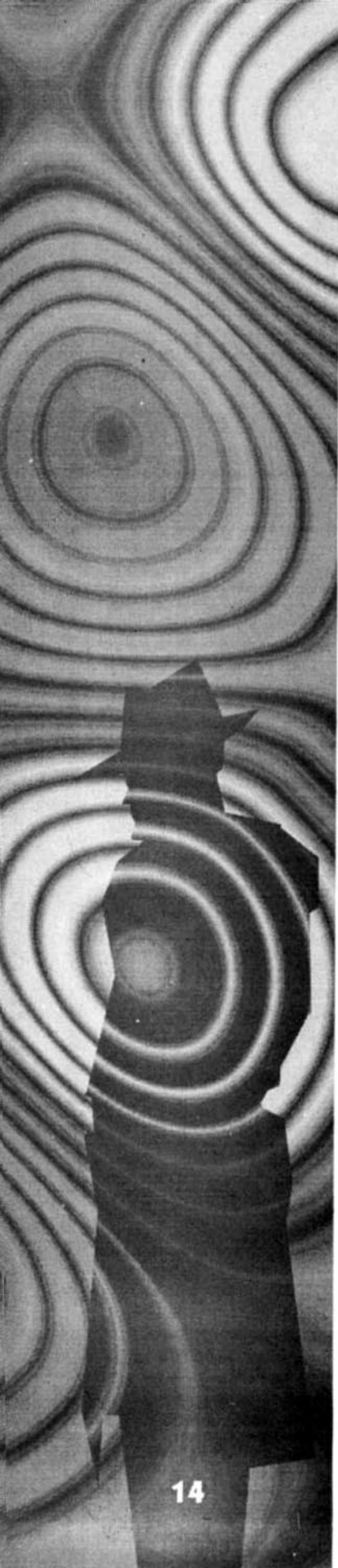
Mole: A spy, usually fanatically loyal to his or her country, who gets a job in the enemy's intelligence agency and works his or her way up the ranks to a position where false information, propaganda, and sabotage can wreak havoc. Often the mole must play the role of an ordinary citizen for many years, so it takes an agent of exceptional loyalty and fortitude to hold such a position.

Political Spy: An agent who manipulates enemy politics by supporting some leaders and harming others. Every dirty trick in the book is used to fulfill this goal, including scandals, propaganda, blackmail, even assassination.

Propaganda Specialist: Using information to affect the enemy's morale has been a factor in war since the first rock was chucked. The propaganda officer's job is to disseminate information in such a way that the enemy civilians, soldiers and leaders lose heart. See the Glossary section for more information on propaganda.

Recruiter: An agent, usually a member of the staff of an embassy, who is constantly on the lookout for new turncoats. The agent is often assigned a target, possibly a diplomat, and attempts to find out whether he or she is having any financial difficulties, disagrees with his or her country's policies, or has any personal habits that would make him or her susceptible to blackmail. The recruiter is also on the lookout for the occasional yahoo who finds espionage exciting and would be willing to sell out his country for the fun of it.

Rogue: The most dangerous type of spy, either a double agent or a spy-for-hire. These agents are considered extremely risky and difficult to control, and often end up getting liquidated once the risk outweighs the profit.



Saboteur: An agent inserted into an enemy country, usually during time of war. Much the same as an infiltrator, the saboteur attempts to blend in with the populace and find a likely target to blow up — an ammunition dump, for instance. In countries where there is strong dissident movement that the agency has contacted, the saboteur is often met at the infiltration site by the rebels and given a hiding place — perhaps even a native identity. The most notable recent instance of trained saboteurs performing a mission would be the sinking of the Greenpeace flagship, the *Rainbow Warrior*, by French agents.

Satellite Ops: An important job, though one not conducive to exciting roleplaying. The satellite technician pores over photos to discover how many tanks are in division A, how many missile launchers are in brigade B, etc.

Scout: A soldier in a unit like the SEALs or Green Berets, whose job is to scout out enemy territory in preparation for an invasion. This role is only mentioned here because its primary mission is to gather intelligence, much like that of a "real" spy.

Sleeper: An agent who is, by all intents and purposes, an ordinary citizen — with has a spouse, 2.5 kids, a dog, and a house with a white picket fence. However, he or she is really a spy whose purpose is to stay hidden until needed. The sleeper could become activated in order to get critical information out of the country, or to provide sanctuary to a spy. Often a sleeper performs light intelligence work like watching ships enter and leave port and writing their names down, or reporting when large bodies of troops leave an army base for a military exercise. However, most often they do nothing but wait for the day when they will be activated.

Sneaker: Essentially a burglar. Rather than turning traitor, or working his or her way into an intelligence agency to spy on it, the sneaker simply breaks into a building and photographs or steals critical documents.

Support Agent: A person living in the enemy country whose role is to help other spies with money, shelter, and other assistance. The support agent never does anything illegal, or handles classified information, or does any spying on his own. Thus, he or she is rarely convicted of anything espionage-related except in the most ruthless and totalitarian societies.

Surveillance Agent: This job involves remotely monitoring important personages, buildings, and so on. Techniques for this include laser microphones, tiny bugs, the monitoring of cordless phone, cellular phone, and radio messages, and even installing cameras and other gadgets.

Technical Specialist: An agent in charge of deciding what the spy needs and finding the right stuff for the job. All of the fun gadgets popularized

in James Bond films probably don't exist, but quite a few of the less flashy ones do, like surveillance and communications equipment disguised as ordinary items. The technical specialist arranges for the dispensation of such equipment.

Traitor: Simply put, a person with access to secrets who has decided for whatever reason to sell or give them to the enemy.

Types Of People Who Become Spies

Not everyone is the right sort of person for this line of work, and even fewer of those qualified have any interest in such a position. Usually, the people sincerely interested in being a spy will seek out an agency and offer their services. The basic types can be broken down as follows:

Adventurers: People who do it for the excitement. They realize that they have the opportunity and skill to steal information for their own or another country, and do so for the fun and excitement they think they will have. Adventurers are notoriously hard to control because they often don't care about money or status, and spy only as long as it amuses them. They are also frequently difficult to detect, because their lifestyles change very little (no sudden influx of cash to explain) and seldom show any outward signs of anti-establishment sentiment. An example of this sort of spy would be the "Hanover Hackers", a West German ring of hackers who offered their services to the Soviets once they realized they could access U.S. military databases via modem.

Blackmail Victims: A good way to force a diplomat or government worker to become a spy — photograph him (or her) doing something he doesn't want anyone to find out about. For example, if the target is having an affair, photos could be taken of the rendezvous and used to force him to deliver secrets. If he is living a clean life, a liaison can be staged by slipping him a drugged drink and photographing him with a prostitute or "mistress". The victim would be contacted, showed the photograph, and ordered to deliver a certain number of documents or the pictures would be delivered to family members, friends, employers, and so on.

Once an individual makes his first delivery of classified information, the meeting is usually photographed, and the picture used to force the spy to continue — the alternative is to surrender and hope for total disgrace and a short prison term. Once the blackmail victim keeps on delivering, more photos are taken, until the spy is hopelessly entrapped.

Dissidents: A person who secretly hates the country he or she serves. Some want to see another sort of government take power, and others simply want to harm those in authority. Dissidents —

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A Guide to Real Spies

along with those who simply did it for the money — made up most of the native Russians working for the CIA.

Ideologues: Some of the most successful and dangerous spies around. Ideologues can seldom be bought or suborned, require no payment beyond seeing "their" side benefit, and can stay under cover for long periods of time with little or no contact from their employers. A spy-for-pay would seldom wait 20 years to begin making money the way an Ideologue would.

The most devastating use of ideological spies came during the Cold War, when devotees of Communism would remain in the West for years — even decades — before making their move. The Rosenbergs are the most significant example of this sort of spy. On the down side, true ideologues are hard to come by. Not every society or philosophy engenders the right sort of fanaticism. You're unlikely to see someone so enamored with free-market capitalism that they would be willing to devote their whole life to infiltrating and spying on the enemy.

Communism, on the other hand, has produced this sort of sentiment because its manifesto is one of improving mankind and making the world into a utopia. Such idealism is the perfect fulcrum for ideologue spies. Enough people in the right places believed the communist message so that many, many secrets were passed on to the Soviets. However, with the bankruptcy of communism so apparent, the governments of the West probably don't need to worry too much about the KGB as much these days.

Losers: People in the defense or intelligence communities who have hit hard times or run into debt. Sometimes they are recruited by enemy intelligence agencies, but often they knock on an embassy door and volunteer whatever secrets they have access to. The rationalization for their betrayal is simple: desperation for money. Sometimes, the person is financially sound, but has had other difficulties, like being passed over for a promotion or chastised by their supervisor once too often. This category of spy almost never has any real success at stealing secrets, and is considered extremely undependable.

Mercenaries: Perhaps the most untrustworthy sort of spy, an operative whose only interest is money, and who changes allegiance to wherever the pay is best. The most successful spy-for-hire in recent memory was John Walker, who knocked on the front door of the Soviet embassy and offered his services. Over a period of seventeen years, Walker provided enough intelligence for the Soviets to decipher an estimated one million US military messages.

The easiest way to detect this sort of spy is to look for unusual spending activity. In fact, a law was recently proposed where CIA employees



would have to allow their finances (bank accounts, investments, and so on) to be monitored so that a large influx of money could be observed.

Spies In Roleplaying

As in all RPGs, the primary ingredient in espionage games is fun. If it's no fun, don't do it — realism at some point must play second fiddle to pure enjoyment. Thus, role-played espionage missions may not necessarily resemble "real" ones, and these tips should not be treated so fastidiously as to overwhelm everyone's good time.

The first thing the game master must determine is what genre to set his or her espionage campaign in. You can have espionage adventures in any genre you can name — imagine a devilish plot with spies and derring-do set in the France of the Three Musketeers, or in ancient Egypt, or outer space in the far future, or Victorian London — the possibilities are limitless. Most often, however, espionage RPGs are set in the present day, since the bulk of spy fiction (books as well as movies) are located there.

The characters will have to select the sort of role they would like to play in the team. Obviously, the skills should be evenly balanced so there are not too many or too few of any one sort of character. The most exciting types of spies would probably be the assassin, infiltrator, rogue, saboteur, sneaker, and surveillance agent, simply because these spies actually get to do interesting stuff. However, any of the others would do fine, depending on what ratio of roleplaying to combat the players desire. The reasons for the PCs becoming agents will probably be limited to patriotism, money, and/or excitement.

The following are some exciting elements of espionage fiction (and real life) that could add flavor to spy campaigns:

Infiltration: The party will have to be inserted into enemy territory. This can be accomplished by submarine, hang glider, SCUBA gear, helicopter, parachuting from a high-flying plane (perhaps a Stealth bomber), or through normal commercial transportation, using forged documents. The flashier and more dramatic, the better. Furthermore, there should always be a danger involved, with the GM playing up the suspense and tension of setting foot on enemy soil without any sort of backup.

"Roleplaying": Once the party has been inserted into enemy territory, they must blend in with the populace and assume some sort of role which will not draw too much attention. The idea is to accomplish the mission's objectives, not get arrested or engage in a blazing firefight with the local police. The GM should carefully note any PC slip-ups in this department and judge whether his or her cover has been blown.

One fun way to get the players involved in roleplaying would be to have them infiltrate an American organization whose people have a distinct accent like surfers or hillbillies. This lets the players draw on their own mimicking abilities rather than just assuming that their character "would know how to talk".

The Raid: In campaigns where roleplaying is heavily stressed and combat is minimal, it might be satisfactory for a group of PC spies to stride into a large dinner party, chat with the guests, then sneak upstairs and photograph the secret missile plans. However, many gamers find the deadly danger of a battle more enjoyable. Consequently, the best opportunity for a little gunplay would be when the party has reached their objective and must get past sentries, guard dogs, minefields, and, of course, the arch-villain and his or her henchmen. If the party's primary goal is sabotage or some other form of covert warfare, then the GM will have ample opportunity to fit in a little combat.

Extraction: Even once the mission has been completed, there is the little matter of getting out of enemy territory before the police and army arrest the party — or worse. This should always be an exciting, dangerous journey: imagine a group of saboteurs dashing for the rendezvous location, wind swirling through the night, helicopters buzzing overhead, searchers crashing through the forests with dogs and flashlights. For extra effect make the party's ride be late, or have a personal enemy of the PCs pursue them past the border, intent on destroying them no matter what.

Conclusion

The spy genre has always had a great popularity, because the characters use different qualities than conventional warriors; guile, acting ability, subtlety, suave repartee. Imagine John Rambo striding into an embassy reception wearing a tux, with orders to find out from a diplomat whether General A is going to take command of Unit B. He may be able to mow down a whole squad of soldiers, but he would be helpless in this situation.

Avid roleplayers particularly enjoy the genre because in effect they are playing the part of roleplayers — people whose survival depends on the ability to play a character that would blend into the enemy. That's a job that no musclebound hulk could accomplish.

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The Case of the Missing Player

Solving the problem of gamer absenteeism

GM: "...Sigurd, your muscles groan as you slowly hack and climb your way up the slime-covered pit. When you reach the top, you tie the rope from around your waist to a tree and in a few minutes everyone is back at the surface, dirty and bloody, but with your prize. As you look around at the swamp you emerged into, you realize you are hopelessly lost.

"Okay, this is a good point to call it quits. We'll stop here and continue next week. I'll have the experience points figured out by then, and you guys will be able to..."

Player One: "Uh, I've got this Tae Kwon Do tournament next week, I can't make it."

GM: (sighs) "Okay, we'll take a week off and pick up the week after."

Player Two: "Hey, I've got to visit my grandparents in Montana that week."

Player Three: "And I've got to house-sit my mom's Dachshund."

GM: "Aargh! Okay, three weeks! We'll try again in three weeks!"

Player Four: "Uh, guys...?"

Does the above conversation sound familiar? Let's face it, blessed rare are the gaming groups that have consistent, regular attendance by all their players. This becomes particularly true with older group members who have to deal with jobs, spouses, and other responsibilities. What's the answer? Wait until all the players can play? Of course not. In fact, the absence of a player can lead to choice opportunities for the Game Master to enhance his story.

Solutions for Rare Player Absences

There are many options for the GM when a player cannot make a game session. The first is to let another player play the character. This is tempting for the GM because he does not have to take responsibility for the character, or figure out a way to get him out of the story for the evening. However, this solution is not suggested! First, it causes the absent player great anxiety as he imagines the surrogate taking great risks with his character or just rolling poorly. If anyone should be rolling the dice to determine the character's fate, it should be by the creator.

Second, it's disruptive for the party to now be dealing with Mike-Dax instead of Jadzia-Dax. The characterization of the character will be inconsistent if not mildly stereotypical or pejorative of the absent player's style. No matter how the character is played, no matter how much trust the absent player has in the surrogate, the absent player will be unhappy with the turn of events.

Another possibility is zombification. This is when the GM takes over for the player and runs the character as an NPC for a session. The absent player can take comfort in the fact that as an NPC, the character has immunity from harm (if the GM is merciful). The character becomes passive, silent, tends to stand in the back and only acts upon the suggestions of the other characters, much as a "hireling" would behave. The GM can, on occasion, use the character to make suggestions to the others when the party seems bogged down or indecisive. Now this is acceptable for the once in a great while absence, but still isn't mak-

by Robert
Baldwin

Artwork by
Pete Garcia

ing the most of the moment. Let's look at some more creative outlets.

The first is *scut work*, a less-than glamorous name for very important tasks for the temporary NPC character. One example of scut work is maintenance. Spaceship repairs from the last battle or selling recently-acquired booty can leave the party's hands free for more entertaining pursuits. Another possibility is research. Tracking down those strange runes on the amulet at the library can be an excellent excuse for the absent character to wander off while the rest of the party interrogates the professor of the occult and his living paperweight. Use the player's absence as a way to get through the slower parts of the story.

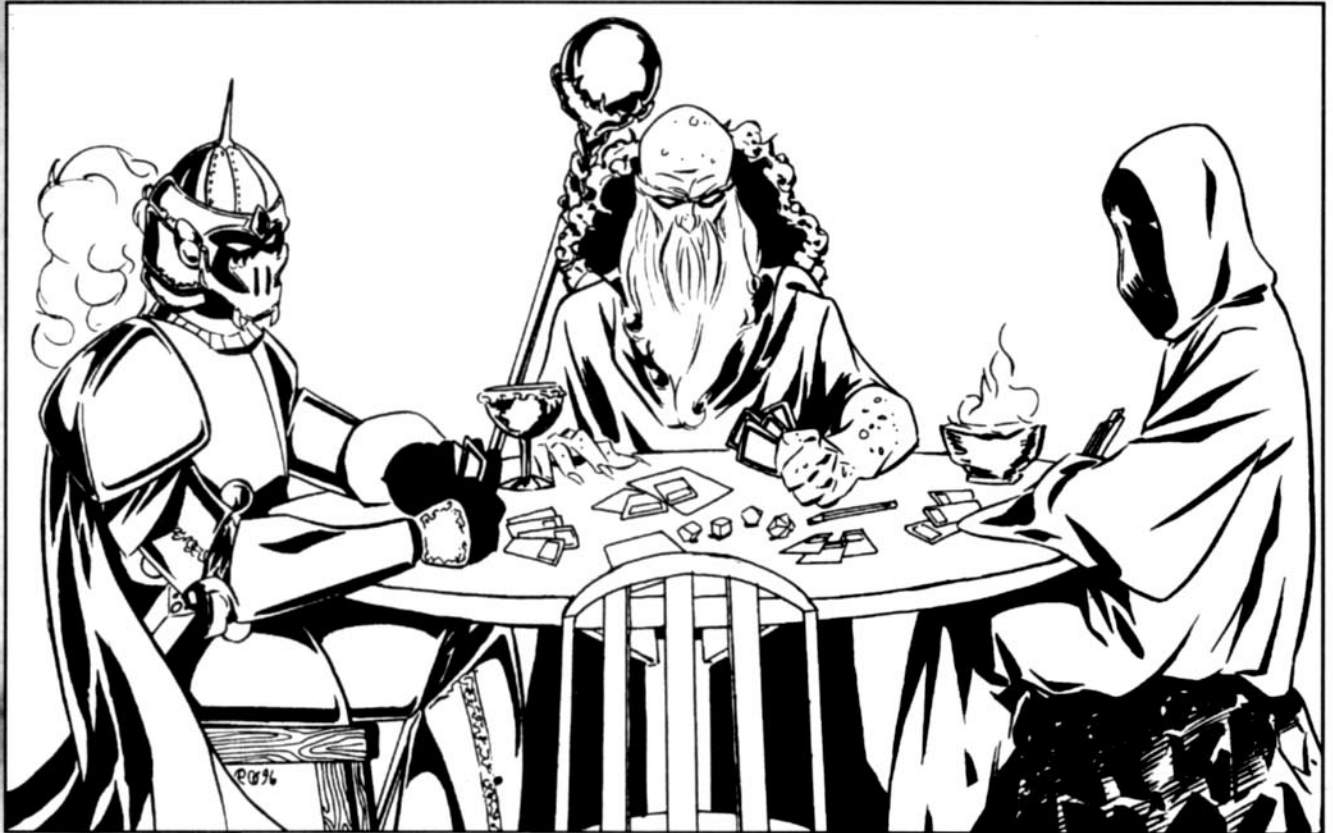
A second use of an absent player is *plot device*. The obvious "McGuffin" is to have the character kidnapped, and have the players rescue him in that game session. The next game session (when the absent player is back) the entire group can clean the clock of the offending villain. Or better yet, have the character disappear, only to appear during the next gaming session, his entire memory a blank and his only clue a strange scrap of cloth with an arcane symbol on it.... The absence could be the impetus for an entire story arc in itself.

The Guest Star

The best way to explain the Guest Star technique is with an example. My spouse (love ya honey!) likes to role-play now and then. Illness, exercise, dreaded shift work, other responsibilities and general disinterest have kept her from our regular gaming sessions. Now how do you, the GM, handle the player who is more absent than present? Do you ban her from the game, citing this as the cause? Of course not. You use her as a Guest Star.

To continue with the above example, my spouse played Desiree, a callous city thief. Desiree showed great disinterest in the party, who regularly disrupted her livelihood, but had a soft spot in her heart for the "hard luck cases." Desiree would put the party up when they were in town, maybe do an quick job or two for them; but when the action started getting hot, she would head for the hills (usually taking a chunk of the party's treasure with her).

When the party headed off on their "epic quest," Desiree secretly followed, surreptitiously assisting them, even foiling an ambush on one occasion. In gaming terms, she was the perfect character for the rarely-present player. Shifty, streetwise characters are one of the best Guest



How to Solve Player Absentees

Stars, as their attitudes don't make them prone to "team spirit," but their skills can be invaluable when they're around.

Other possible Guest Stars include:

Droids: Droids are always being left behind on the ship for one reason or another (see *Scut Work*, above). However, a Droid could always disobey his master's orders and head out after the party, particularly if he suspects that they are in trouble. Particularly stubborn droids could also follow their own agenda or ideas (such as delivering secret messages to hermits on desert planets...)

Another country's agents: Also known as "Felix Lightner Syndrome." If you're CIA, he's MI5, and vice versa. Another country's agent is always turning up, following a similar path to an identical goal. Not always the most helpful PC either, particularly if you're MI5 and he's KGB...

The Enigmatic Stranger: Good for horror or superhero campaigns, the Guest Star is a mysterious, often supernaturally powered figure out to surreptitiously assist the party, feed them plotlines, or just lend that helping fist now and then. Enigmatic Strangers are often equipped with powers such as invisibility, extra-dimensional teleportation, and flowing capes.

The Intelligent, Talking Magical Item: Hey, don't laugh, it works! The magic item Guest Star is great for the rarely-there player. Make sure the magic item is useful so the party will keep an object that seems to express its opinion seemly at random. Examples of this are an amulet that produces light continuously (solving the "how many torches left" issue) or detects magic. Summoned golems and dancing swords let the Guest Star participate in combat, if he's got the inclination.

Campaign Suggestions

The Guest Star is a good technique for the infrequent individual, but what if the entire group is less than reliable? Believe it or not, this group can work, if the correct campaign is chosen. The wrong campaign can just lead to you, the GM, becoming highly frustrated and possibly prematurely ending the game. Let's look at what works best for the "floating group."

Urban campaigns: Cities (past, present, or future) are great campaign locations on their own, particularly with a rich and well-developed setting, but are also perfect for floating groups. The strength comes in the GM's ability to "shuffle" players in and out of the storylines without having to invent implausible rationales for a character's absence. This strength of urban campaigns doesn't have to be limited to cities, but any campaign

where there exists a regular setting that occurs in every game session (such as a spaceship or military base).

Episodic campaigns: One of the worst things that can happen is when the player who, since he wasn't there last session, is forced to sit out a portion of the gaming session until the GM can work him in (if ever). This is waste of the player's time and leaves him pretty frustrated and feeling punished for his previous absence. While this may seem a tremendous restriction on the GM's storytelling ability, the episodic campaign (where each gaming session comprises an entire story) is easier on the GM, and more rewarding to the players involved.

Genre specifics: While certain types of campaigns are better for the floating group, certain genres of games are better suited to the floating group as well. In superheroic campaigns, the rotating cast is a genre staple, not just a strength. Games that de-emphasize group cohesion work better for the floating group. This may seem counter-intuitive for GM's, who have been taught all along to create some "group concept" to tie the PC's together, not to strive so hard for this.

An excellent example of this type of game is *Vampire: the Masquerade*, where the real challenge for the Storyteller is to get all the players together for a session. Another, very different, example is *Robotech* by Palladium Games, where the party can play members of the RDF, thwarting Xentraedi or Invid plots each session, then returning to the base when they're done. In both cases, each PC belongs to the larger group, but is not a required participant in each game. (Don't assume, however, that other games by the same publisher works as well as games that do. *Werewolf: the Apocalypse* and *Rifts*, both done by the same publishers respectively, are examples of bad games to run for the floating group).

Conclusion

Few things can be more frustrating to a GM than an absent player, but with the proper flexibility, absenteeism can be turned into a positive campaign element. The key to dealing with absenteeism is pre-planning, both for the session and the long-term campaign. Talk to your players before you begin a campaign to get an idea of what kind of commitment you can expect from them, and communicate your expectations of them. Insist that players who will be absent give you some advance warning; not only is it helpful to you, but it's just good manners. While not all absences can be predicted, having a few on-hand strategies for dealing with absenteeism guarantees a smoother-running, more enjoyable session for everyone. 

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The Beauty of the Slums

Dark streets no matter what time of day. The smell and sight of garbage and debris. Shadowy prowlers that at best seek only your wallet or purse. These are the charms of the slums, and in its coarse environs can often be found the greatest of adventures.

No matter what the genre, the slums of a city exist. There is always a place where the poorer elements of society are forced to huddle together, where life is an everyday struggle for survival.

Such a depressing area is fraught with danger — not only for its inhabitants but also for strangers venturing on its streets. In fantasy games, the beggars prowl about like giant rats that lurk in the sewers. A modern-day horror game has that stumbling figure more menacing than any man could be. And even when man has reached the stars, the dim corridors of the space station are host to alien thugs and con men.

So why is it that players, who realize they take a risk walking the slums, often find themselves exploring its twisted streets? The answer is simple: nowhere else in a city or town can such a wide variety of goods, peoples and encounters be found.

Sure, the marketplace may sell the choicest del-

icacies or star rubies from Antares. But the prices are high, and the pickings slim. Head down to the slums and find the black market; anything and everything is for sale, including items that the players have never imagined. Here you will find strange cursed amulets, the map to a lost gold mine, or word on who lives in the old abbey on the hill. Tongues wag at the show of a coin, and men may be bought for their strong arm and weak soul.



needy. All shades of human (and other!) existence can be found here, from the just to the despicable, from the rich who prowl in search of sordid pleasures in obscurity to the poor condemned to live here by lack of coin.

by Joseph
Johaneman

Artwork by
Stacy Drum

a loving
look at
the
seamier
side of
the urban
jungle

A thief is forced to haunt the slums to learn more tricks of the trade. That crazy old man living in squalor may just hold the final words to a desperately sought incantation. And what happens when the naive pilot falls for the pretty wench at the bar?

Where else but the slums would the characters discover the plot by the city's underworld to loot the wealthy districts? Would they search for the orphaned son of a king out in the wilderness? No, he is to be found, ironically living amid filth in a seedy back alley.

Has the neutrino capacitor been taken off the station, or is it still in the hands of the gang that prowls the slums, bragging about their catch? There is plenty of adventure to be found in the slums.

A dull day in the city? Why not offer the town council your hand in weeding out the bad lot of the slums? Your boss acting mysterious and taking late night trips to a ramshackle building in the worst part of the city? Why not follow him?

What follows is a brief description, by no means complete, of some of the unusual things, denizens, and sites that can be discovered in the lower city. All the entries are somewhat vague so as to be tailored to any campaign. Each is listed by genre and intended to help gamemasters in their invention of adventure.

Fantasy

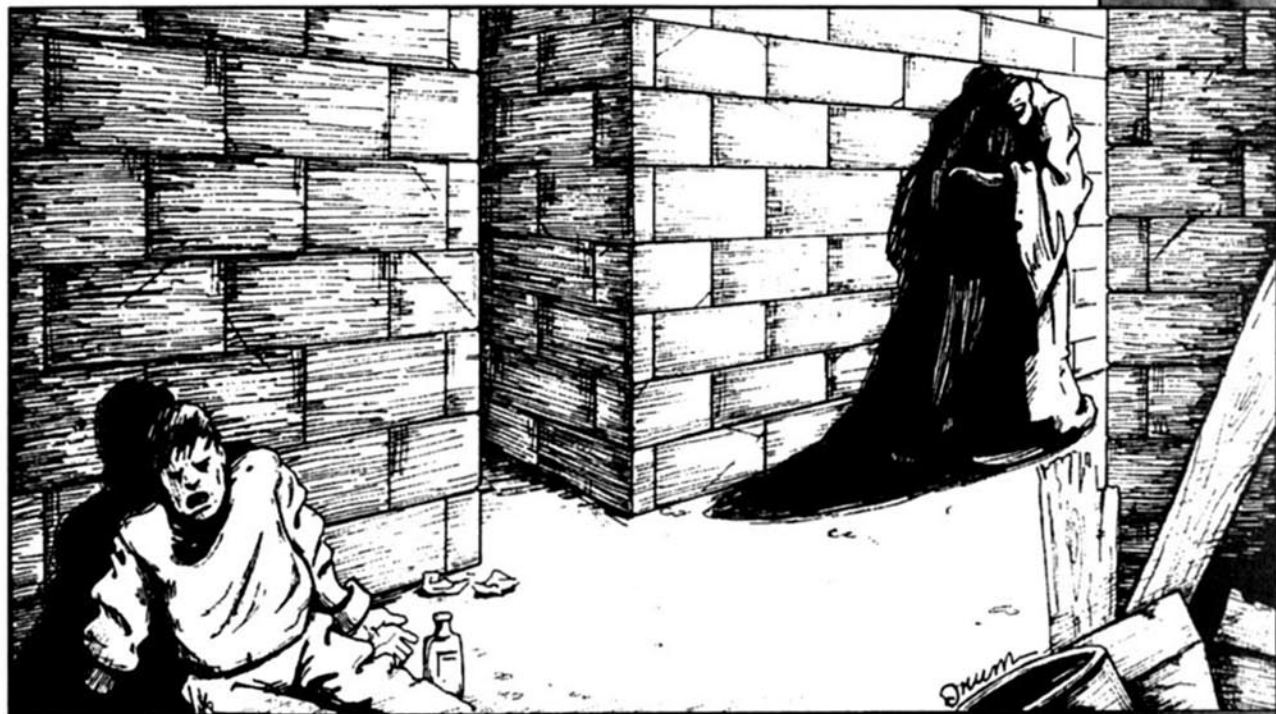
Things: Stolen goods from all over the city, ranging from jewelry and finery to a few torn pages of a mage's spellbook. Black market wares, substandard merchandise and unnatural products (cursed items, stolen holy relics, and necromantic/sorcerous paraphernalia).

Denizens: An assortment of beggars,



ranging from the truly pathetic to the sickly crafty. Prostitutes and panderers catering in the flesh. Starving artists desperate to prove their worth. Petty thieves seeking to waylay a person for

buildings tucked away from sight. Restaurants where the food on the table is too fresh and familiar (where did that waiter go?).



money. Small creatures seeking to waylay a person for food. The sick and the dying in beds. Unscrupulous merchants peddling and selling to suckers and fools.

Sites: Polluted wells and grimy sewer grates. Bars and dens of iniquity offering all sorts of vice. Abandoned guild halls that closed due to poor times. Hidden alleys that may lead to strange kept gardens. The secret meeting sites of beggar lords and thieves' dens.

Horror

Things: Corpses, not necessarily human or animal, lying on the street in various states of decay. Strange markings on the wall, perhaps graffiti or something more. A scrap of a letter or book revealing some hint of the danger to come.

Denizens: Crazy bums drinking household cleaner and cheap wine. Grungy street poets who whisper weird verses. Gangs of toughs who protect their turf from anything. Serial killers desperate to encrimson their blades. Vampires prowling the streets for easy prey. And of course, alligators in the sewers.

Sites: Hole in the wall bars and crack houses. Warrens of giant rats. Voodoo shops that offer gris-gris and magic candles. Sinister-looking old

Sci-Fi

Things: Weird alien technology that may have been stolen, abandoned or left to be purposely discovered. Black market hardware. The remains of outdated robots and machinery that can yield parts for experiments. A getaway grav car still idling as the criminals are inside pulling a heist.

Denizens: Shady sellers of the latest computer virus. The spies and underworld contacts of a hundred worlds. Time travellers dumped off in the bad part of towns. Crazy inventors bent on world conquest.

Sites: Small dirty cubicles filled with glassy-eyed hackers. Alien slaveblocks promising the living cargo of the galaxy. Stores that sell hazardous waste to the highest bidder. An underground communications center from the city's previous inhabitants.

So there is the beauty of the slums. On any evening, a person can find some reason to draw him deeper into the web of adventure lurking about the dark streets of a city. After all, what's the life of a player character without a little low-brow danger?

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Anatomy of a Haunting

"Real life" ghosts to enhance your campaign

As Janet opened the door, a chill ran down her spine. The aura of ruin filled her senses as she looked over the entrance before her. Through the darkness, she saw an empty room, a blanket stuffed in one corner. There weren't any chairs covered in bedsheets or cobwebs stretching from wall to wall. It was an ordinary room, dark and musty, but no ghosts. She took a step in and it struck her — something was just not right...

It was then that the door slammed shut behind her.

Ghosts exist in the stories of every culture and are an undeniable part of our own myths. Unfortunately, in many role-playing games, they are reduced to yet another bad guy to be fought and destroyed. Few ghost stories contain any actual fights with the ghost. More often, the ghost is left alone or exorcised. It is the encounter itself, the terror involved in meeting a spirit from the grave, that makes the ghost story a recurring part of our mythology.

The haunting — while perhaps not as exotic as a mummy or a vampire — is part of almost every human culture and as such, can instill terror in the bravest of people. The key is tapping into that horror through realistic hauntings. This article uses information from parapsychology to explore the world of ghosts and hauntings.

Parapsychology

Parapsychology is a relatively recent field developed to study the paranormal, including hauntings, psychic powers and other unexplained phenomena. They do not study UFOs, vampires or werewolves. Parapsychologists are trained foremost in the art of deception so that they can bet-

ter recognize fakes. Therefore, a parapsychologist in a campaign would have a good chance of seeing through sleight of hand attempts, detecting pickpockets, noticing tricks and traps and identifying different types of hauntings and psychic powers. It would be considered overall to be a difficult discipline.

Clairvoyants and Psychokinetics

The classifications of psychic powers used by parapsychologists is important to understanding how the living may interact with hauntings. The important powers in terms of this article are clairvoyants and psychokinetics, as well as latent abilities, which may work differently in your game universe. Latent abilities are psychic powers that an individual is not aware of and has not taken control of.

Clairvoyants are attuned to the spiritual plane. They can locate people from touching something the person used a lot, see spirits and auras, and sometimes look into the future. Their powers of detection are great, but latent clairvoyants will mostly see things they don't want to detect, such as feeling the pain of a friend, seeing the future death of a loved one, or viewing the ghost of a relative who has just died.

Psychokinetics, also known as telekinetics, are able to affect matter, moving it and shaping it to their will. Some are limited to affecting the temperature of things while others can only move small objects. Latent psychokinetic individuals tend to create poltergeist activity when they are under great duress.

by Justin
Schmid

Artwork by
Brad
McDevitt

"Few ghost stories contain any fights with the ghost... It is the encounter itself, the terror involved in meeting a spirit from the grave, that makes the ghost story a recurring part of our mythology."

Types Of Hauntings

Before exploring the different locales that hauntings can take place, it is important to understand the types of hauntings that can occur. The classifications used have been altered slightly from the parapsychological text in which they were found.

There are three basic types of hauntings: Ghosts, Apparitions and Poltergeists.

Ghosts

Ghosts are sentient, and thus the rarest of the three kinds of hauntings. These are the spirits of the deceased who, for whatever reason, have not left this world. As such, they are often intelligent, resourceful and powerful individuals. Some ghosts are able to possess people for limited periods of time for whatever purpose. They are most often invisible to the living (except clairvoyants who are able to see them), appearing for limited times only when certain people come close. To do so, they must use energy from around them, making the area they inhabit drop rapidly in temperature. They can become corporeal for a very limited time, but this drains them terribly and sometimes creates a frost on the ground around them. In both cases, they only become visible for individuals who they believe can help them, or clairvoyants.

There are three distinct kinds of ghosts: ignorant, impassioned and fearful. Ignorant ghosts are the spirits of those who do not realize they are dead. These souls are very likely to interact with humans as if they were alive and will be quite distraught when people run in fear. The best way to get rid of an ignorant ghost is to calmly explain to it that it is dead and should move on.

Impassioned ghosts are here for a special purpose. This is the most common kind of spirit in most role-playing games, since it offers the most roleplaying possibilities. The ghost's goal could be to protect a loved one from danger, to prevent a location from being destroyed, or to actually perform some deed. As the ghost is no longer corporeal, it probably will require some aid in this respect (i.e.: the player characters). Once their task is completed, they cease to haunt this world.

Fearful ghosts are the most dangerous spirits one can encounter. They know they are dead and but want to change that. They work to restore themselves by either possessing someone with a weak



Setting the Mood for Ghostbusting

spirit that they can conquer, or causing evil so that their spirit remains restless. In any case, they are cunning and vicious. Thankfully, they are also extremely rare.

Apparitions

Likened to tape recordings, apparitions are psychic recordings. There is no intelligence to them and they are not interactive. A clairvoyant sometimes triggers them when they enter the area, but occasionally normal people can see them. The apparition will usually appear as a ghostly recreation of a dramatic moment, such as a violent murder or a loud argument, and will most likely last only a minute or two. Some apparitions are more mundane, involving a person walking by or an individual simply standing.

Apparitions can be photographed. Getting rid of one requires stronger psychic energy to erase the recording. Sometimes the energy dies away when the event the apparition is tied to is resolved, though this is not common.

Poltergeists

Poltergeist, which means playful spirit, is not in fact a spirit at all. According to a recent theory, they are manifestations of latent psychokinetic abilities in individuals under extreme stress, most often teenagers. They are nevertheless part of this discussion, as they are linked with ghosts in most mythologies.

Usually, poltergeist activity is not dangerous, involving books falling off of shelves, furniture being moved and lights turning on and off. Occasionally, however, things get dangerous and burn marks appear on furniture, water pours from ceilings onto people, and items are thrown across the room at people. While such activity is usually random, enemies of the focus individual (around whom most of the activity occurs) will often suffer the brunt of any damage that occurs.

Exorcisms to rid a household of a poltergeist usually add stress to the situation and exacerbate the problem. The real key is to de-escalate the situation and allow other avenues for dealing with stress and possibly developing the latent psychokinetic abilities of the individual in question. Control of these powers will eliminate poltergeist activity.

Atmosphere

The atmosphere of a haunting adventure is crucial to its success. While there are many physical and psychological tricks to presenting the horror,



such as candles for lighting and spooky mood music, perhaps the most important key is the description of the location the characters are investigating. The location should be at least a dozen years old, preferably a hundred or more. Hauntings are usually linked with some ancient event and ghosts are usually from another time, though modern hauntings are possible. In any case, an older location gives the aura of decay, which is important to any haunting adventure. Overgrown bushes, peeling paint and rotting wood contribute to such an aura.

If the haunting is a ghost, the personality of that ghost should be represented through the location. If it is an angry ghost haunting a house, the floors will be treacherous and danger will lurk everywhere. Similarly, if the ghost is sad, grays will predominate and a sullen aura will cover the location.

The aura of a hauntings by an apparition should link with the apparition itself. For example, if the apparition is of a child killed brutally by its father, some trace of the child's existence should remain, such as a ball or a teddy bear. Picking up this item could trigger the apparition. Poltergeist activity, as noted above, will tend to occur in locations of high stress. This could be a conservative home where a rebellious teenager is being repressed or in a business office where multi-million dollar deals are made. In these cases, the poltergeist activity creates the atmosphere of the adventure. If the poltergeist is dangerous, perhaps a knife flying from nowhere will evoke the right feeling in the characters. If not, books dropping from shelves at tense moments will intensify the excitement.

For a great article on using physical and psychological techniques to create an aura of horror, see the article "Up Against the Wall, Suckers!" by John Tynes in SHADIS Presents #19.5.

Haunted Places

While most ghost stories take place in haunted houses, hauntings can afflict business buildings, parks and even boats. The locale of your haunting will affect the mood of the adventure. If you want a bone-chilling investigation, a house will work nicely since it is a familiar setting that will set the player's imaginations rolling. Buildings in general are more useful for investigations of bizarre happenings without an inherent danger. Parks and graveyards, like houses, are frightening locales, but the open air allows easy escape which may be impossible in the house. So be sure to make it a fog-clouded night when they go exploring, preferably during the new moon when it's darkest.



Setting the Mood for Ghostbusting

Ghost ships provide intense adventures where escape is impossible and the terror peaks, but tension like this should be reserved to a single isolated adventure or it ruins the genre.

Haunted Houses

The haunted house is best known to those of us who have lived with an abandoned house down the street, windows boarded up, creaking sounds escaping from within. When dealing with a haunting in a house, the characters should have to spend some time inside. This is easily done if they live there, but if they just walk in and out, the effect of being trapped will be lost. There is a tale of the two vagrants who found refuge in an abandoned home only to be awakened in the middle of the night by the sound of a ghost screaming. One jumped from the second story window and the other escaped alive. This is the kind of horror you want in your adventure. Sleeping over-night is a good way to keep the characters in the house.

If they are cautious about staying too deeply inside a possible haunted house, have it start raining and put the only dry room in the center of the building. Easy escapes could be boarded up or treacherous to use with rotten floorboards. This is why older houses are more useful — in a new home those kinds of dangers would be out of place and would confuse players rather than adding to the atmosphere.

If the ghost is not some evil creature, there is no fear, since the players figure their characters are not in any real danger. To create a false sense of peril, then, one must take further steps. When exploring the house, minor frights can be used to add to the effect. Encountering rats in the basement or mice scurrying by in the middle of the night works well and is not inherently dangerous — just disconcerting. Creaking sounds that give the impression of someone walking toward works as well, as old houses tend to make strange sounds when they settle. The actual encounter with the haunting might take place hours after the players arrive, or if you feel like building tension, days later — just when they're about to leave in frustration. The encounter should rise from nowhere, perhaps when they are investigating some other minor detail. Have the ghost appear right over the character's heads or right next to them. This is a good time for fear checks.

The resolution of a haunted house adventure should resolve the haunting in some way. Either it ends or it continues with newfound strength and perhaps moves its focus to the characters. There have been cases of families moving into haunted

houses, only to find the ghost following them when they moved away. This adds the horror of dealing with the spirits.

Ghost Ships

A ghost ship provides a kind of terror unmatched in any land-locked adventure. Unlike houses or parks, the characters are completely trapped aboard with the ghost and must resolve the situation there and then. These adventures should be both terrifying and personal. Perhaps the ghost is someone the character knows. Or maybe the ghost is a former passenger on the ship who was killed by the crew and now seeks vengeance upon all inhabitants. Poltergeist activity during a long trip after food supplies have run out will make things even worse.

The key to dealing with a haunted ship should lie in its history, in some location deep within the hull, or perhaps in a spot in the sea it happens to pass over. This forces the characters to explore the ship and delve into its past — very, very quickly. While down below, odd shifts in the movement of the boat may heighten paranoia while strange noises will certainly excite the players' imaginations. Again, use of animals such as rats can be justified in larger vessels, and birds circling overhead can be used to signal some approaching danger.

While being stuck aboard a ghost ship can be terrifying, encountering one on the open seas may make more sense in an adventure. In this case, the desire to explore a drifting empty ship will draw the characters into more than they bargained for. In this case, the cause of the haunting should definitely be found aboard the ship. This is also one case in which the characters might find decomposed corpses lolling about in various creepy locations.

However if you are after more of a mystery, it might be better for the characters to find no trace whatsoever of the crew or passengers. In our own world there have been many cases of ships found drifting, empty and with no apparent cause for the crew to abandon them. This kind of discovery could be very disturbing if they later found a haunting in the middle of the sea where the crew were all killed.

Resolving a ghost ship crisis will be difficult, as the characters will most likely concentrate on escape. This is simply solved by making escape impossible. If the characters should get away, say to a Coast Guard vessel in the vicinity, a storm a few days later could force them to abandon ship and take refuge on — guess what happens by. This kind of forced return intensifies the horror as the characters realize they have to solve the mystery or they will never escape.

Graveyard Hauntings

Graveyards are natural locations for hauntings. In fact, many call them haunting grounds. The final resting place of the dead is a natural place for spirits to hang out, as ancient tradition held that a restless spirit was bound to the place of their burial. However, many graveyards are treated as nothing more than scenery without character. This is completely unlike the way a haunted graveyard should seem. Looming oak trees should make the brightest day dark and gloomy, and bizarre gravestones should adorn the ground, making running through a hazardous affair. Why have clean rows and paths through the grounds when you have a labyrinth of sagging tombs? Escape from an open area is too easy; it should seem as if the characters are trapped in a world of death, where the exit is difficult to find and the journey is full of stones and low-lying branches that force you to watch where you're running and not what's following you.

The actual haunting of a graveyard is most likely to be in the form of an impassioned or fearful ghost, though an apparition could be present. Poltergeist activity is rarely found around, unless there is a groundskeeper who really hates his job. The kind of haunting will affect how you present the graveyard. If the ghost is impassioned, there will be a sense of order to the confusion on the grounds. For example, the graveyard home to a ghost seeking to be with his true love (or at least have his body interred with hers) would have many "Beloved wife of..." on the tombstones and other such romantic gestures. The ghost's grave would have no inscriptions, but a rose growing behind it and a tree nearby could have a carving of a heart with the ghost's initials and someone else's in it.

Graveyard hauntings are rarely resolved, since few people visit graveyards for very long and if something frightful is discovered, they leave and never return. This is why ghosts haunting this locale will most likely be frustrated and desperate for help, perhaps to the extent of forcing the characters to help them by trapping them in the graveyard. Possessing one of the characters is another possibility. In any case, this should be one haunting the characters may wish to forget (and that's okay if they had a good time being scared).

Ghostbusting and Exorcisms

Most of us have learned about ghost-busting from the movie *Ghostbusters*. In fact, the producers of that film researched actual ghost-busting with real parapsychologists, and some of the ele-

ments of the movie are real. Apparently ghosts that become corporeal do leave behind a substance known as ectoplasm (which is said to be sticky and gross), though there is no device for capturing ghosts, and the methods demonstrated in the movie bear no relation to real parapsychological activities.

A real parapsychologist would look into the history of the haunting and the individuals involved, and try to use mediums and clairvoyants to access the ghost directly. These techniques are not tried and true, but they work in some cases; the parapsychologist can often learn the probable cause of the haunting and try to help the ghost move on, erase the apparition or eliminate the poltergeist's activity. In this sense, the ghost is not captured or even destroyed, but simply freed from this world.

Exorcisms have also been featured in the movie industry, and again in real life they are not quite as successful. An exorcism will have a varying effect depending upon the cause of the haunting, the type of haunting, the individuals involved and whether or not they believe. A ghost haunting may be exorcised if the ghost is religious, but not if it is a fearful ghost — that kind will only be enraged by the attempt to get rid of him. Apparitions may be erased by an exorcism, provided all present believe strongly in the faith of the exorcist. Poltergeist activity may be eliminated through an exorcism, provided the focus individual is a strong believer, but otherwise, the activity will only worsen as stress rises.

For More Information

If you would like to learn more about ghosts, hauntings and parapsychology, please check out the following books:

Various authors, *Foundations of Parapsychology*. Boston; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986.

Fodor, Nandor. *The Haunted Mind: A Psychoanalyst Looks at the Supernatural*. New York: Helix Press, 1959.

Green, Andrew. *Ghost Haunting: A Practical Guide*, London: Gamstone Press Ltd, 1973.

MacKenzie Andrew. *Hauntings and Apparitions*. London: Heinemann, 1982. 



Strange Vistas

The Heroes of Alpha Complex

by Jonathan Tweet

A Paranoia...uh...Thing.

Based on the *Paranoia* and *TORG* RPGs published by West End Games.

Her narrow face lit by the blue light of the video screens, Lia-B-LTY turned a dial, flipping from one surveillance camera to another. She'd patched into the security system in the warehouse, and each camera showed nothing but another view of the empty warehouse: shelves upon shelves of powders, pills, and syrups kept in drums, bins, and jugs. In this warehouse were stored the hopes, dreams, and good times of the citizens of Alpha Complex, all in the form of easily consumable meds. In the forgotten maintenance area behind the warehouse, Lia had found a perfect place for her illicit experiments.

Satisfied that the Computer had not detected her, and that no Troubleshooters were on their way to fill her body with little holes, she turned the dial and brought back the image that really mattered to her. On the screen, colorful little lizards cavorted in the luscious, misty undergrowth of some distant rain forest. As a member of the Sierra Club, she'd heard and read about these creatures for years. The machinery she used to find them was a little beyond her understanding, so she wasn't sure what part of the world she was looking at, but all that mattered to her is that she'd found them.

"I knew they still existed," thought Lia. "And if they come through all right, then soon we will be able to go *there*! We'll be able to get Outside in an instant. And once I get one of those cute little iguanas, I'll be the star of the Sierra Club."

Lia flipped the switch on the Transporter, and it hummed to life. Two upright metal poles vibrated and glowed, and in the large

space between them, the air grew hazy, like a video screen fading out. The large mass of wires and gauges and tubes that composed the heart of the Transporter shook arrhythmically. Lia crossed her fingers for good luck. She hadn't been able to force the secrets of the Transporter out of Oppen-I-MER before she'd killed him, but she was pretty sure she knew how to work the thing. And she was sure that she deserved to use the device more than he. Oppen would probably have used it to get to work on time; Lia had greater plans.

Lia looked back at the lizards in the undergrowth. She selected a playful iguana cavorting among the miniature ferns. By manipulating a few dials under the screen, she caused cross hairs to fix on it, and then she pushed the blue button. Holding her breath and folding her hands in front of her, she turned to the side, waiting for the little lizard to appear between the two glowing poles.

The thing from the screen appeared, and Lia turned white. She looked back at the video screen, where the other creatures were looking about for their vanished fellow. "Could those miniature ferns actually be fern trees?" thought Lia. "Could the little lizard on the screen really be... *that*!?"

"I don't believe I've eaten one of your kind before," said the fifteen meter long carnosaur, hunched over and pressed against the ceiling. Of course, to human ears, it sounded more like "RAAR-ARGH!!"

Lia had intended to use the escape hatch in case Troubleshooters came looking for her, but it proved just as handy for escaping a dinosaur. As she was crawling through an air

duct under the meds warehouse and back toward her laboratory in R&D, she asked herself whether she had shut the Transporter down. The sound of metal ripping interrupted her thoughts, and the air duct vibrated. The thing was finding its own way out of the maintenance room. Lia decided it would be better not to think about whether the Transporter was on. Instead, she popped a Blissful Ignorance med and crawled on.



Harvey-R-ABT-2 walked quietly through the dense fog. A strange smell hit his nose, but before he could identify it, he heard footsteps. He spun and fired, his laser drawing a red beam through the mist. He heard boxes being knocked over and the patter of pills falling to the concrete floor, and then a red beam swept through the mist at him. Harvey dived for cover behind a dark shadow that looked like a forklift and landed in a pile of something warm and squishy. It smelled like Hero's High-Energy Breakfast, but he gritted his teeth and stayed where he had cover. He aimed over the forklift and fired a few more times in the direction of his unseen enemy and then flipped on his hand com. "Annie! Annie! I've found them and I think I've got them pinned. Get over here!"

Through the fog, Harvey could see more flashes of red laser coming his way, and above his head he heard the sizzle as the beam burned into the shelves. Annie's voice came over the com. "I'm heavily engaged with another group of traitors. I think I hit one or two. You get over here."

MIKO %

The Heroes of Alpha Complex

of exclamations poured forth. "Yow ow ow! Intense!" "Oh yeah!" "Right in the face! I'm in pain!" "Do it again! Do it again!" "Wow! This is better than coals between the toes!"

Annie looked over at Harvey while she detached something from her belt. "If they liked that," she said, "they'll love this." She pulled the pin and tossed the grenade into the mass of squirming lizard creatures. Annie fell flat on the floor, and Harvey followed her example.

The greenish traitors were still babbling. "Intense! Intense!" "Never felt anything like this before." "Ow ow ow ow." "Blew my hand clean off!" "Hey, what's this thing?"

KA-BOOM!!

Annie and Harvey didn't find much evidence on the traitors. When Annie found she couldn't pry their masks off, she said, "Why do you suppose these weirdos would glue themselves into their costumes?"

Harvey didn't say anything, but he knew the answer. He recognized geckos when he saw them. Still, he wondered why the Old Reckoning books hadn't mentioned geckos' ability to speak, or their masochistic

tendencies.

Harvey eyed the spears the geckos had been using. They were made out of plant, and he thought about how good one would taste. "Better take one of these back to HQ," he said, picking up the least damaged spear. His stomach grumbled.

Harvey and Annie headed back toward the entrance to the warehouse, through the maze of bins, crates, and shelves. The mist blocked the light so badly now that Annie pulled out her flashlight to help them find their way. Strange noises came out of the mist from all directions, but liberal application of laser blasts deterred anything from approaching them. As they walked on, a familiar odor came through the fog. The trudged on and found another large pile of brown mess.

"Look, more Tasty Mushy Surprise!" said Harvey. The glint of metal caught the light from Annie's flashlight. "There, what's that?"

Harvey used the spear to fish a dented, bent up laser pistol out of the Tasty Mushy. He saw the notches cut in the handle of the pistol, one for every time Harvey-1 had been shot at and not killed.

"It's Harvey-1's," said Harvey, his throat

tightening, "Looks like we found him" He remembered the endless, joyful hours of playing "Guess Who" with Harvey-1 and the other four Harveys. The game would never be the same without Harvey-1. "Who could do this to someone?" said Harvey, his voice tense. "I mean, drowning a man in Tasty Mushy — the horror."

The carnel standing behind them and drooling said, "Didn't I eat the two of you yesterday?" Of course, to human ears it sounded more like "RE-ARRRG!" Harvey and Annie spun around, pistols pointing up at the noise. Out of the mist loomed a gigantic, two-legged creature with rows of giant, needle-sharp teeth.

"A death bot!" screamed Annie, whose vocabulary did not include the word "animal." She continued her spin the other 180 degrees and put into practice a technique that they'd never taught her in Troubleshooting Academy: running like hell.

"An iguana!" yelled Harvey, delighted. He'd seen pictures of these things in the old books, and he knew they were harmless unless attacked. "Oh joy, oh joy, a real live iguana!" he thought. In a flash, he realized he'd finally be able to figure out what a stupid "inch" was. The books said iguanas could reach 70 "inches" in length, but no one knew what an "inch" was. Now, using this iguana as a standard, he'd finally be able to figure it out! From the tip of the toothy snout to the tip of its spiked tail, this thing was about 15 meters, 15 meters is 70 inches, so one "inch" had to be about...

CHOMP!

Annie-2 heard crunching and munching behind her in the mist. She pointed her laser backward, upside down over shoulder so she wouldn't have to turn around, and fired. **zap zapzapzap-zzzz... beep! beep! beep! beep!** The pistol was malfunctioning, and Annie let it drop. At an intersection of aisles between endless shelves, Annie stopped, panting, trying to get her bearings. She was sure she'd been here before, and she began to worry that she was hopelessly lost.

Suddenly one of those costumed traitors came charging out of the mist ahead of her. Annie darted down a corridor between high shelves of metal bins on either side. She was ten meters down the aisle when she saw a wall ahead — dead end. She turned and saw the traitor still charging, his stick in his hands. Annie took the only escape route left; she dropped her flashlight and started climbing. At the top of the shelves were rows of large,

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open, metal bins. Annie pulled herself into the first bin, and her hands and knees sank in with a rustling sound. Meds. Squinting in the dark, she could see the familiar red lozenge shapes of Lifties. Briefly she remembered the time she'd made the mistake of taking six Lifties at once, the time that she had found herself spinning through a huge void where she'd traded unintelligible but exceedingly funny jokes with the Computer for an eternity or two. The scrabbling sound of claws on metal pulled her from the memory. The pointed stick of her pursuer appeared over the edge of a bin two meters away, then his masked head, then the rest of him. Annie tried to stand up, but the pills shifted underneath her and kept her from getting her foot.

"In the name of Lanala, the Liver of Life," the thing hissed, raising its stick threateningly. "I skewer you, foul user of dead things. Hah ha ha ha — GULP!" Annie had thrown her only available weapon at the laughing creature, a handful of Lifties, and he'd swallowed the ones that had hit his mouth.

"Your puny pebbles bounce off my mighty scales! I revel in my victory and call out to my siblings in triumph. Hah ha ha ha — GULP!" Another handful of Lifties. "Stop that, smooth-skin. Can't you see that I'm reveling! Have you no respect for revelry? Why, I should skewer you... and stop squirming around like that!" Annie smiled; she wasn't moving. "Why, I'll say," said the traitor, wavering back and forth, "this is one of the more intense revelries I've ever reveled." The traitor tittered and put one hand on the top of his skull, as if making sure it was still there.

"Like it?" asked Annie. She gestured at the endless supply of Lifties and said, "Help yourself." The traitor dropped to all fours and began scooping up the Lifties in its beaky mouth.

Twenty minutes later, when Annie dragged the drooling, moaning, blank-eyed traitor into HQ, her superior Pedro-I-MEX-1 asked, "What with this thing?"

"It's having an intense experience," said Annie-R-FUN-2.



"Computer? It's Pedro-V-MEX-1, reporting as you requested."

VERY GOOD. PEDRO-V. I TRUST YOU FIND YOUR NEW QUARTERS IN THE VIOLET SECTOR TO BE SATISFACTORY.

"Very satisfactory, Computer! I am greatly

honored by the promotion!" ("Though I wish they'd cleared out the corpse of my ex-boss before I got there," thought Pedro.)

HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE DISTURBANCES IN THE MED DISTRIBUTION FACILITIES IN J-SECTOR?

"Yes, Computer, I have, and I am, of course, very worried." ("Very worried that I'm going to get thrown into the mess," thought Pedro.)

VERY GOOD. YOUR PREVIOUS SUPERIOR SEEMED UNABLE TO HANDLE THE PROBLEM. THAT'S WHY I DECIDED IT WAS TIME TO GET SOME NEW BLOOD, A FRESH START ON THE PROBLEM. I TRUST YOU WILL DO BETTER THAN HE DID.

"Certainly, Computer. I know a talented scientist in Research and Development who is already working on the problem." ("And maybe I can arrange for her to take the heat when things go wrong," thought Pedro.)

VERY GOOD. PEDRO. REPORT BACK WHEN YOU HAVE DEVELOPED A WAY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM.



On the door hung a sign saying
Food Additive Testing
Volunteers Needed!
Walk Right In!

Lia-B-LTY-1 always put that sign on her R&D laboratory when she needed some privacy, and the project she was working on for Pedro-V was just the kind of thing that could get her up to Indigo clearance, so she didn't want any interference.

Inside, Lia and Pedro were sitting in front of a large video screen. To one side was a shiny new Transporter, Lia's latest "invention."

"There, do you see him?" said Lia. "He just killed that dinosaur with a pointed piece of metal." Lia adjusted dials under the screen and the image came into sharper focus. Pedro-V saw a man, or what looked like a man, standing by a giant, scaled, winged lizard. The creature looked something like the dinosaurs that were tearing up J Sector. Reports said they were shrugging off lasers and grenades,

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The Heroes of Alpha Complex

ripping through metal walls like they were paper, crushing combat bots underfoot, and gobbling up Pedro's best men. If Lia's plans to deal with the dinosaurs didn't come through, Pedro didn't know what he would do, other than turn in a combination resignation and last will and testament, in sextuplicate for him and his clones. He pushed the thought of that particular piece of paperwork out of his head and looked back at the video screen.

A flat length of metal stuck out of the creature's head. The man, or man-like thing, had one foot on the dinosaur's head and was trying to pull the metal weapon out of its head. The slayer had two curving horns on his head and some kind of reddish veil over his cheeks and mouth. As the picture came into righter focus, however, Pedro saw that it was indeed a man. The horns were part of a helmet, and the veil was actually curly hair. He wore a scaly, sleeveless shirt, and legs and bare arms bulged dramatically.

"That hair on his face, and those bulges," said Pedro. "He hardly looks human. A mutant of some kind?"

"Yes, those bulges, mmm," replied Lia, licking her lips and staring glassy-eyed at the

screen.

"So, Lia, are we...Lia. Hey, I'm talking to you!"

"Wha-? Oh, yes? What were you saying?" she said dreamily.

Pedro sighed and said, "Does this man come from the same part of the world as the dinosaurs?"

"Oh, no. This is a different part of the world. You know, I still don't have much control over where the Transporter scans, and I'm not sure where any of this is taking place. But I can tell you that know how to deal with dinosaurs there. I've been watching them, and they seem to be quite adept at dispatching the pests. Pedro looked back at the bulgy man and the fallen beast. The man was still trying to pull the sword out of the creature's skull. "Do you think you can call him and some of his fellows here? Do you think it would be a good idea?"

"Oh yes," said Lia, looking back at the screen intently as the man's muscles tensed and relaxed rhythmically. "I think it would be a very good idea."

The hero on the video screen rested a

moment and casually scratched his furry loincloth.

"Do it," said Pedro. "Bring a few of their warriors here, and we'll let them deal with the dinosaurs."

"An excellent idea, Pedro," said Lia. "I'll start with this fellow."

As the Transporter came to life, Pedro called in a security detail. Better safe than sorry. When the security officers were ready, Lia flipped the "two-way video" switch.

"Hello, mighty Troubleshooter," she said.

Derg the Viking heard the disembodied, female voice, and looked around. Up in the air was the image of a woman like he had never seen before. She had clear skin, without pimples, scars, pox pits, or wrinkles. Her blond hair was... shiny. It had been washed!

"I have come to offer you a deal, mighty Troubleshooter," said the floating face, and then it smiled. Derg was stunned. She had all her teeth. It could only be Lady Ardinay herself, reasoned Derg. He shifted to the left in a futile attempt to block the Lady's view of the dragon. It had been one of the nicer dragons in Aysle, and Lady Ardinay was no



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longer as gung ho about killing things as she had once been.

"I Derg!" said Derg, pounding a fist resoundingly against his chest so that the scales of his armor rattled. "What you want from Derg?"

"Derg, I need you to kill some dinosaurs for me," said the woman. "Do you think you can do it?" Derg had no idea what a "die-no-sore" was, but he had no doubt that he could kill them. He was also delighted to see that Lady Ardinay was back to her old self, soliciting hired swords for hits.

"Derg can do it!" he said, beaming. "What you give Derg?"

The magical vision looked off to one side and moved her lips, as if talking to an invisible companion, and then turned back to Derg. "If you help us, Derg, you will be a hero of Alpha Complex, and all the rewards of heroism will be yours!"

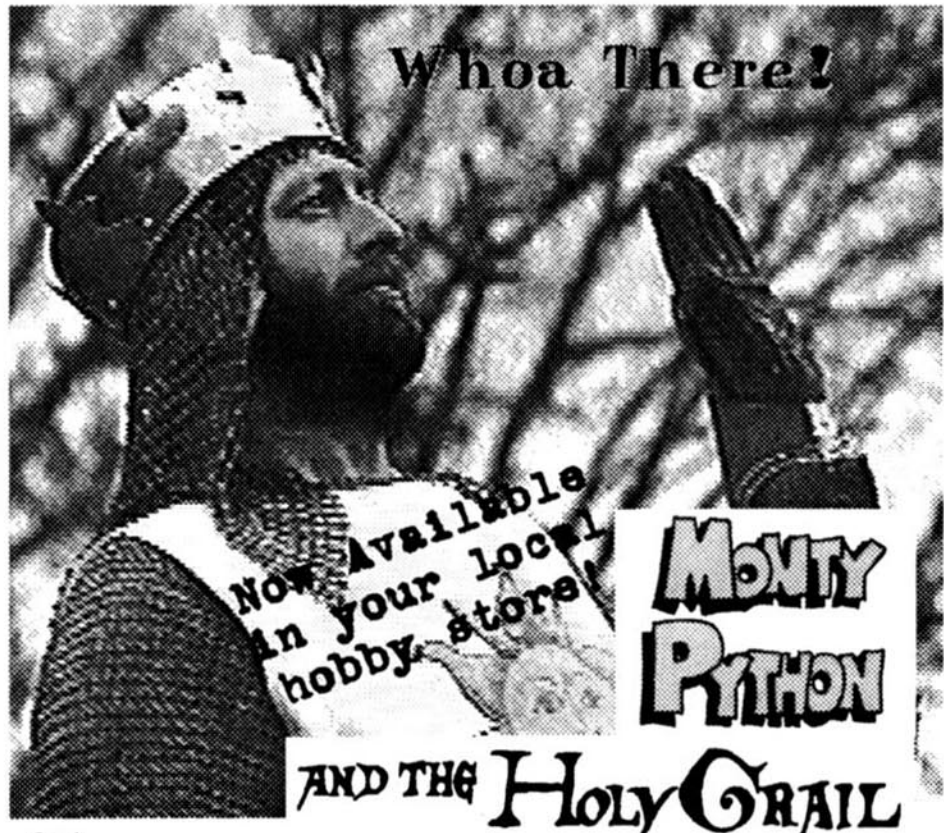
Derg didn't know what all that meant, but if he asked for an explanation, Lady Ardinay might think he was dumb. He knew that doing hits for Lady Ardinay always used to entail big rewards, and he had a big reward in mind that he intended to offer her, so he replied, "Derg say 'yes'!"

With that, the magical, floating image wavered and disappeared. Derg looked around, expectantly, and then ran over to the dragon's head and, with renewed determination, yanked his sword out. Suddenly the world went hazy. "Ooh," said Derg, holding his head, "this like when Derg drink Dwarven thunder-boulder ale." The next thing Derg knew, he was standing under the glaring light of a strange room, with a dozen scrawny people standing around him.

Derg looked at the assembled crew. The women, all the women, had washed their hair within the past few days. They all had perfect skin. Lady Ardinay was here, and she wore a skirt. She had shaved legs! Derg thought (if that action could be attributed to Derg) that he would like it here in the palace of Lady Ardinay. The men, all the men, had hollow chests, peasant clothes, and the shaved faces of slaves. Derg's smile widened. He would definitely like it here.

"Where die-no-things? Derg kill! Then Derg take his prize!" He managed a toothy grimace and leered at Lady Ardinay.

A handful of the peasants led him to J-Sector.



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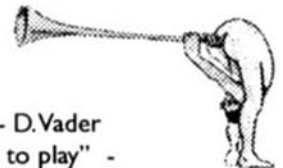
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The Heroes of Alpha Complex

"Computer. It is Pedro-V-MEX-1 reporting."

YES, PEDRO-V-MEX-1?

"We've secured a number of warriors from Outside, and they have been assigned to the various dinosaurs that have invaded J-Section. Once they have eliminated the dinosaurs, we shall integrate them as loyal citizens into Alpha Complex."

EXCELLENT. PEDRO. KEEP ME INFORMED.



As he walked toward the deserted cafeteria, Will-O-WSP looked back to be sure that the two "specialists" were keeping up with him. The normal-size one, Sir Nood, looked like a bot, completely covered in reflective, silvery armor. The clank of his footsteps reverberated down the hall. Could he be an honorary bot? Like a bot, he didn't have a clearance color. The short one was called Culpa. He was really short; must have been pulled out of the vats too early. He wore blue, but his loose clothes didn't seem like any official uniform that a Blue-clearance officer or Troubleshooter would wear. And even though he was a Blue, he seemed to take orders from the tall one.

Both their weapons were cleverly disguised as long, flat strips of metal. Will didn't like having them, or anyone else he didn't understand, walk behind him.

Both of them came from some place called "L." When he'd asked why they didn't have a triple-letter address, Pedro-V had said that the answer to that was classified. Fine. All the more reason not to trust them. And these two were specialists in dealing with "dragons."

"What are 'dragons'?" Will had asked. "I'm sorry, but that information is not available at this time," Pedro had said.

Will came to the side entrance of the cafeteria foyer and waved his hand over the entrance pad. The door hissed open, and he stood to one side, pointing into the foyer.

"Sir Nood-L, Culpa-B-L, the 'dragon' is in here. This is the foyer, and the large doors to the left lead to the cafeteria. The 'dragon' tore through the rear and apparently ate from some of the food vats. My superiors suggest you deal with it before it recovers."

Sir Nood and Culpa walked gingerly into the foyer. Culpa whistled and Sir Nood nodded his head agreeably as they looked around. This was their typical behavior when they tried to seem relaxed in the face of

danger. Behind them, Will said, "I must report back now. Good luck to you. This area has been evacuated, so don't worry about bystanders. Just come back the way I showed you when you are done." The door slid shut, and Sir Nood and Culpa heard rapid footsteps fading quickly in the distance.

"Verily, Culpa, mine goode Dwarf," said Sr. Nood, lifting the visor of his helmet, "let us see anon this dragone that we are to slay."

Culpa crossed his arms, tapped one foot, and looked up at Sir Nood.

"Nood, you idiot, the next time you start talking to people floating in the air, and start bragging about slaying the 'olde wyrm of Anderghast,' I'm going to point out, rather loudly, just how old that old wyrm was!"

"Dost thou doubt mine veracitie or mine prowess with arms?" said Sir Nood, straightening his spine and lifting his shoulders proudly, his armor clattering.

Culpa stopped tapping his foot, glared a little harder. "I'm just saying that 'old' didn't begin to describe the wyrm of Anderghast. The 'arthritic wyrm of Anderghast,' or the 'geriatric wyrm of Anderghast,' or maybe the 'geezerly wyrm of Anderghast' would have been more accurate. The thing would have

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DEATH BY STARLIGHT



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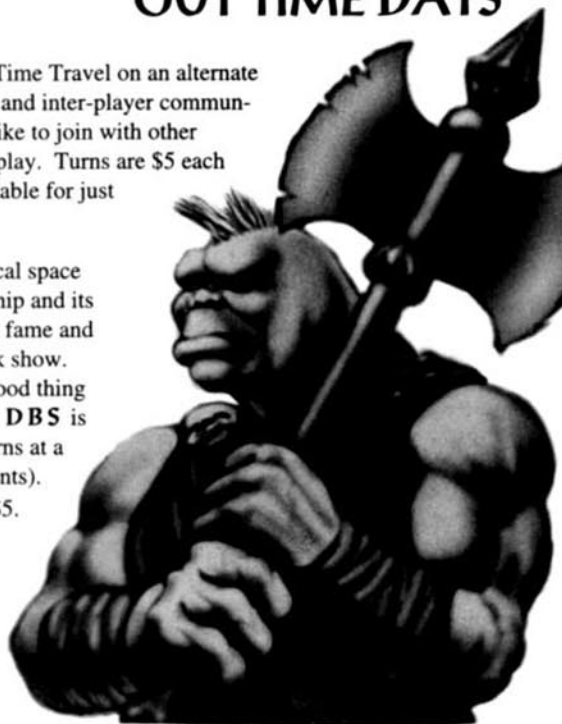
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OUT TIME DAYS



crawled into its own grave if it hadn't been too senile to find its way out of its lair."

"Aye, thou speakest ye truth, mine goode friende. Therefore have we to this place come, here to further our reputation as fierce and fearsome warriors."

"Here to see just what a dragon looks like... from the inside!"

"Thy mocking words bounce like feathers off ye impenetrable armor of mine honor. Let us look upon yon dragon and prepare us a plan for to slay it anon." Nood's helmet kept him from hearing Culpa behind him, mumbling something about "ye impenetrable armor of thy brain."

Sir Nood strode to a door that led to the cafeteria. With his long sword upright before him, Sir Nood stood at the edge of the door. He had learned how these magic portals operate and he held his hand ready to pass over the dark design on the wall. "Art thou at ready, mine goode Culpa?" said Nood. Culpa, crouching behind Nood and peering around him, said, "Ready." The door hissed open.

"Dost thou see it, Culpa?" said Sir Nood, standing in the doorway and peering into the misty room. "Mayhap hath it heard our approach and fled in well-warranted fear."

Culpa gulped and pointed into the mist. "Mayhap it's that gigantic thing charging full speed at us out of the fog." Hunched over to keep from hitting its scaly head against the ceiling, smashing polystyrene tables underfoot, batting chairs and tables to either side with its spiked tail, the carnol bounded toward them. "The door!" screamed Culpa. "Close the door you idiot!"

"Forsooth, mine friende, thou hast indeed struck upon a most judicious stratagem," said Sir Nood, slamming his mailed fist against the red **CLOSE** button. The door slid slowly shut and closed a moment before the beast reached them. A disappointed roar shook the floor underneath Nood's and Culpa's feet.

"The dragon seems to have recovered rather nicely from its bout with food poisoning," said Culpa. He clambered onto a hollow metal box with a flapping lid on top and sat there.

"Aye," said Sir Nood, leaning against the wall. "Ye beaste hungers like unto a hounde ere ye hunte."

Culpa drew his sword and held it horizontally in front of him. He imagined plunging it all the way to the hilt into the dragon's side. He put his left hand against the blade where it met the hilt. That's where the surface of the scales would be. He moved his

hand slightly down the blade, away from the hilt. That's where the scales would end and the skin would begin. He moved his hand a litter farther. That's where the skin would end, and the muscle would begin. He moved his left hand as far as he thought the muscle would last, to see how much blade would reach to the vitals. Just past the back of his left hand glinted the very tip of the sword. Culpa sighed and looked over at Sir Nood. "Boss," he said. "You know those sick days that I've been saving up?"

Nood didn't respond. He was holding his thumb and forefinger apart, representing the length of the dragon's teeth. He held these fingers up to his arm, with the forefinger aligned with the top of the armor, and the thumb pointing into the center of his forearm. He repeated this maneuver on his legs, belly, chest, and head. The frown on his face drooped further each time. As Nood was trying to figure out just how far those teeth would go through his helmet and skull, Culpa said, "CHOMP!" All the plates of Nood's armor clattered together and his visor fell down as he jumped two inches. Rather, he would have jumped two inches if he hadn't been wearing a hundred pounds of armor.

"Zounds! Mine heade," Nood said, trying to massage the top of his skull through his helmet.

"Uh, Boss," said Culpa, kicking his feet idly, "if we're really going to go through with this plan, I think it's time you knew the truth about my part in that mermaid affair. Remember that unfortunate incident back in Lower Brouggle?"

"Ye mermaid affaire?" said Nood, flipping his visor back up.

"Bad news, dying with a guilty conscience," continued Culpa. "I figure I ought to tell you the truth before we go any further."

Sir Nood looked down, stroked his chin, and looked back up at Culpa. "Thou meanest that night when I... when she... when thou broughtest me ye drink..." said Nood. He drew his sword. Culpa looked left (a distant door that led to unknown, labyrinthine corridors), right (the doors with the dragon behind them), behind him (a row of colorful boxes and mirrors against a wall, but no hiding places), and back to Nood. Nood was walking toward him, holding the hilt of the sword behind him in the air, and pointing the sword at Culpa's left eyeball. With each step, Sir Nood remembered another detail of the mermaid affair, an evening that he had tried to shove out of his memory. "And when ye ponie entered ye room... remember what thou didst say... and dost thou remember ye bodie painte?! All cometh clear now."

"Look behind you, Boss!" shrieked Culpa, scrambling down the far side of his perch and backing up.

"Thou dost think I have ye brain of a turnip to fall for a simpleton's ruse," said Sir Nood, grimacing. "Thou hast used that trick on me too often."

"Fine," said Culpa, stopping, setting his fists on his hips, and smiling. "Don't look behind you. I'm sure you can hear whether there's anything behind you even though you've got ten pounds of low-test steel on your head..."

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Meanwhile, the Wolf-Spider was cast through a planar rip created by the explosion, and he remains lost on an unknown plane. The Queen of Chaos' soldiers converged upon the site in an attempt to capture the

parts of the *Rod*, but the Wind Dukes of Aaqa intervened and magically scattered the pieces across the world.

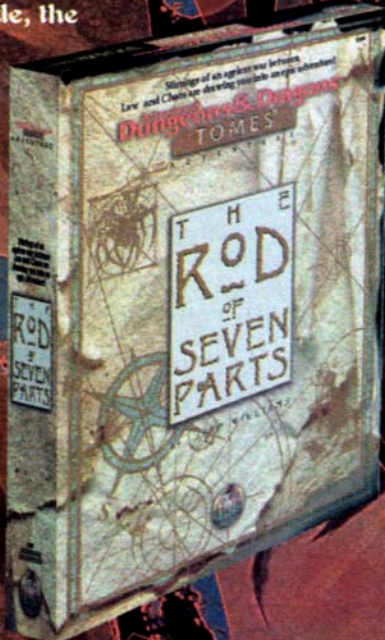
"Ever since that time, agents of the Queen have been ordered to seek out the *Rod* at any cost. It is rumored that if she regains all the parts, she can use the reconstructed *Rod* to find the Wolf-Spider and return him to her side, whereupon the wars will begin anew."

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The Black Curtain Theater

An adventure for White Wolf's Vampire: The Masquerade

The Premise

A member of the Sabbat has taken control of a troupe of Kindred actors known as the Black Curtain Theater (BCT) and, unknown to them, plans to use it as a recruitment tool. The primary culprit is a Toreador *antitribu* named Claire Rosewood, drawn to the idea of a vampiric theater. She eliminated the old director and assumed his place, producing more "radical" plays. These are designed to test the appetites of local Kindred, looking for recruits who might be biased against the Camarilla or who could support Sabbat philosophies. Once these individuals have been marked, the her pack and a second combat ready pack proceed to recruit as many targets as possible before moving on to the next city. Those playing this story will soon be targetted for abduction.

Background of the Black Curtain Theater

The BCT owes its origins to a young Toreador in Chicago nicknamed the "Sage". This brilliant dilettante decided the best way to assure true immortality would be to sponsor other artists, and consequently Embraced several Kindred illegally, without asking permission of Prince Lodin. One of his progeny was Godwin, then a brilliant but elderly theater director with a crippled body and failing health. Godwin created a private underground theater named the Black Curtain, and embraced several young up-and-coming actors (also illegally). The group put on a variety of difficult and experimental productions (lavishly funded by the Sage), all to be shown to a select audience. Along with mortal favorites, the audience occasionally included other Kindred (mostly Toreador), who were careful to preserve the secret of the Theater lest Lodin discover them and put them to death. Otherwise, the coterie remained

isolated from contact with other Kindred.

After Lodin's death, these young Toreador began to emerge from their collective shell. Word of their plays trickled to other Kindred. Mr. Godwin and his troupe received much praise for their innovative work, and it appeared his status within the clan would rise accordingly. This was particularly impressive considering the reputation of Chicago's Toreador as nothing but Poseurs. Here was a true Artiste, willing to stretch the bounds of his medium. Unfortunately, his troupe also came to the attention of Claire Rosewood, a daring Toreador *antitribu* of the Sabbat. Claire enjoyed sneaking into Elysium and other cultural centers in Camarilla territory under the guise of a curious neonate. She did this primarily as a secret joke, to thumb her nose at the foe, but in doing so she stumbled upon the Black Curtain Theater. Seeing them perform sparked an idea to turn the group to Sabbat use. Accordingly, she sought and attained permission from the Archbishop of Toronto (her pack's home city) to capture Godwin and take his place. With the help of her pack, she has turned the BCT into a touring production with an insidious hidden agenda: weeding out weak-minded neonates and converting them to Sabbat.

Chapter One: A Night at the Theater

Scene One: The Invitation

The first scene should take place in a public place where the PCs usually congregate: A bar, mall, segment of Elysium, it doesn't really matter. Claire, Valasky, and Lucas have already scouted the local Kindred hangouts (and consulted existing Sabbat spies keeping tabs on the city), and have decided to invite the players to a production.

by Douglas
Seacat

Artwork by
Stacy Drum

With the fall of
Prince Lodin,
Chicago is no
longer the
Camarilla strong-
hold it once was...

The Black Curtain Theater and friends:

There are three Kindred actors at the core of the BCT — Kelly Grove, "Cage", and Thomas Barber, all Toreador (see stats in Appendix 1). Being neonates and previously unconnected with the Camarilla, the actors are naive and have no knowledge or suspicion of the Sabbat. Claire has impressed them, and they have accepted her as a new member, but being blood-bound to Godwin, who sired them, the actors are worried about him. But they have not voiced these feelings to each other, and have not attached Claire to his disappearance. They like the idea of traveling to new cities and gaining a wider audience. At this point, they are anxious to meet others of their kind.

The troupe also includes two ghouls, Sarah Hilton and Tom Jones. They serve as bit players and stagehands for the productions, and are generally considered second-class citizens in the troupe. Jones, however, has begun noticing the odd occurrences around the BCT, and holds key information to the resolution of the adventure.



At some point in the evening, the players will be approached by a member of the Black Curtain Theater. This will either be Kelly Grove, Cage, or Thomas Barber, depending upon the location and the nature of the PCs — Kelly if the PCs frequent Elysium or other "civilized" public forums, Thomas Barber if the locale is the "tougher" or Anarch-related, Cage if the guests have at least one attractive woman among them. The contact troupe member will have been told about the PCs by Claire Rosewood, under the pretense that the BCT wants more Kindred audience participation to spread the fame of the production.

The PCs will be presented with fancy written invitations to a play on the following evening, and the contact person will do his/her best to persuade them to come. If the players are hesitant, they will be told that these are special VIP tickets, which are free, and include an invitation to a special cast party afterwards. Also, they will receive hints that the themes and subject matter are of particular interest to Kindred, and that the troupe has had good success in other cities. GMs are encouraged to use whatever approach they think will work best to arouse the players' curiosity.

Scene Two: *Hamlet in the Eye of the Tempest*

The players will find the Theater located in a small and inconspicuous playhouse in a run-down area of the city. There are no signs or posters outside the playhouse to indicate a production (char-

acters wary enough to investigate prior to arrival will discover no mention of them in any advertising.) Outside is a line of an odd assortment of people. Most of them are too well dressed for the neighborhood, but do not seem nervous or concerned.

The BCT hires a small private security force in each town to ensure that no trouble ensues during the play, and that outsiders are kept away. Several of these individuals can be spotted at the doorway, as well as near the parking lot. Either Cage, Thomas Barber, or Claire will wait just inside the single entrance and allows entry only to those who have been specifically invited, along with a few guests. Perceptive PCs (Alertness plus Perception, difficulty 7) will notice that those in line are paying a high price (\$60 each) for tickets. When the players get to the door, they will be greeted with particular enthusiasm and friendliness, and reminded about the cast party afterward. They will be told to come backstage after the last act.

Despite the obscure nature of the playhouse and its surroundings, the BCT has surprisingly elaborate sets, costumes, lighting, and props. They have been well funded by the Sage and all their equipment is top-notch. The name of the BCT derives from a thick black velvet curtain which is used in every production. After a short wait getting seated (the playhouse is very small and cramped), the play will begin. If the players speak to the mortal audience, they will find them to be

fanatic theater fans with eclectic tastes. They are enthusiastic to see this secret performance, and there are rumors that the production is illegal in some obscure way. (Maybe one of the performers is wanted by the law, or they are funded by the Mafia, etc.)

The Play is titled *Hamlet in the Eye of the Tempest*, written by Claire as a bizarre blend of Shakespeare's works (the Bard contains easy Kindred metaphors). Her messages are not very subtle, but she has gone to some pains to conceal the meaning, not wanting to directly violate the Masquerade. The cast will include: Hamlet (played by Thomas Barber), Ophelia (played by Kelly Grove), Prospero (played by Cage), and several small supporting roles including Ariel, Laertes, and Caliban (played by various cast members, including Sarah Hilton).

In this dark play, Hamlet is Prince of Denmark, and his wife is Ophelia. His parents (the king and queen) have been slain by the machinations of King Prospero, who is his uncle. Hamlet is approached by the sprite Ariel, who is a rebellious slave of Prospero, an evil wizard of great power, and told of the murders. While Hamlet tries to decide what to do, Ophelia comes under the sway of Prospero, who tricks her into drinking a magical elixir three times, thus gaining absolute power over her. Prospero manages to trick Hamlet into drinking the elixir twice before he is warned by Caliban, a savage sent by Ariel. Caliban reveals that he was a slave but has broken free of Prospero's magic by casting aside all the customs and habits of civilization, the meaningless rules and restrictions which made him easy prey.

Caliban entreats Hamlet to abandon his conventional moral beliefs and thus free himself. Ariel arrives and informs Hamlet that even if he frees himself, the only way to save Ophelia (who has violated her vows and bedded with Caliban) will be to attack Prospero in his sleep, kill him, and eat his body, thus attaining his magical power. This they accomplish in a horrific feast, where Hamlet, Caliban, Ophelia and even Ariel all become cannibals, but thus free themselves and become lords of their kingdom. Although blood and vampires are never brought into the fiction, the Kindred parallels (themes of incest, the blood bond, rebellion and diablerie) are clear and strong.

Unknown to the PCs, Claire and Valasky will be watching them from a hidden vantage, looking for signs of potential Sabbat sympathy. Both will use Aura Sight to gauge reactions. It is possible that a highly perceptive PC may notice they are being watched, but GMs should avoid creating suspicion at this time. They may interpret Claire's attention as attraction, for instance. Since the play is nicely done, the players should be distracted. The black curtain will fall at the end of the play to a standing ovation by the fans. Afterward, the GM should find a way — as unobtrusively as

possible — to determine the way each character may have felt about the themes in the play.

Scene Three: Getting to Know the Troupe

Backstage, the PCs will be asked to attend a cast party (the ghouls will be noticeably excluded from most conversation). All of these young Kindred are interested in meeting others of their kind. This party may take place in the back room of a local bar, or perhaps a coffee shop. The atmosphere is casual and warm, and the GM should play the troupe in such a way that they are well received by the PCs.

Claire will make an appearance at the start of the party and thank the PCs for attending, but leaves early, claiming a busy schedule. This scene can be played at whatever depth the GM wishes, but is intended for the PCs to get to know the cast, and hopefully come to like them. Even Thomas Barber is in a good mood this evening. Those who ask the right questions may learn that the BCT is under new direction, and just started touring other cities. To keep the conversation from concentrating on Claire and the disappearance of Godwin, GMs should focus instead upon the difficulty these neonates had when Lodin was Prince of Chicago and they had to operate in secrecy.

The party should go late, and the PCs will have lost track of time. When they leave, it is only an hour from sunrise, and the sky is visibly lightening. This will prompt them to make haste for their havens, and probably split up to go their separate ways. GMs should be creative if this doesn't seem likely. For instance, to discourage Kindred from staying at the same house, remind a PC that one of his romantic partners (perhaps from his herd or allies) is waiting to meet him. If possible, something like this should be arranged ahead of time to minimize suspicion. As the Kindred leave, the members of the BCT will ask them to come to the next night's performance, again for free.

Scene Four: Dawn Rendezvous With the Panders

Marc Sivak (see sidebar, pg. 51) has been informed by Claire about the group, and told of potential targets. His pack will be watching from a distance, waiting for them to split up. They will follow someone who is alone, and attack him when he is far enough away from his friends that he can't call for help. The GM should take the targeted player to a separate room to play out this scene, or arrange for the player to stay after the others have left, whichever is more convenient.

Who should the GM capture? There are a variety of answers. Theoretically, this should be someone with Sabbat sympathies, as seen from the play. (Which can mean anything from a strongly rebellious streak to low humanity or a tendency toward cruelty and violence. Another good choice is if

Richard Balterhouse (The Sage)

Richard Balterhouse is a Ninth Generation Toreador, and the founder and patron of the Black Curtain Theater (among other artistic endeavors), as well as being the sire of the former (and now disappeared) director, James Godwin. The Sage will make a brief appearance in the story, after a member of the group has already disappeared. He is on the trail of Godwin, wondering why the neonate disappeared without notifying him. Doing so, he will himself be abducted unless the players step in.

Should the group save the Sage during the course of the adventure, he could be a worthwhile contact. He is also a neonate, but well respected within his clan, and he has befriended Toreador primogen in several cities (including Annabelle Triabelle in Chicago). No stats are included in this adventure, but GMs wishing to keep him on should feel free to give him whatever attributes he or she feels is appropriate.

The Transition Pack

There are three members of a Toronto Sabbat pack who are involved in the BCT intrigue: Claire, Valasky, and Lucas. The others are still in Toronto, waiting to see if Claire's experiment will pay off.

Claire Rosewood

Claire Rosewood is the *Toréador antitribu* who has usurped the Black Curtain Theater. She is not an actress, her primary art being morbid painting. However, she fancies herself a talented playwright, and was a theater buff in her mortal days. Her work is good, if melodramatic and gruesome. She hopes to use the BCT to increase Sabbat strength while simultaneously depleting the foe.

This necessitated turning Claire's established pack into a nomadic pack, which most of the others (including their Lasombra leader) are not thrilled about. They eventually agreed, knowing that this would gain them status. Claire has enjoyed working with the BCT more than she anticipated. She likes writing the plays and seeing them produced, and has encouraged Thomas Barber to collaborate with her writing. She has used her morbid artistic talent to improve the props and stage decorations. During the play she uses her *Auspex* to watch the audience for Kindred and gauge their reactions to the carefully chosen themes of the play.

any of the PCs have committed Diablerie. Perhaps the best choice is someone who has been blood-bound or Dominated against their will. Such manipulation can show up in an aura, and may have been seen by Claire.) It's possible the best target won't be alone, in which case the GM should choose someone else, or arrange to separate the Kindred as mentioned above. Pragmatically, the GM may choose to attack a PC whose player hasn't been very involved in the game, or who has missed game sessions. Whomever is abducted isn't going to be able to play in the game as much, and so it is best if the player is similarly uninvolved.

Sivak's group have experience at this, and work efficiently. Sivak will approach the PC from the front, acting drunk and stumbling into him. At the same time, the rest of the Pander pack will converge from all sides. Two will grab the PC's arms as Sivak pulls out twin revolvers and points them point-blank in his face. The PC will be told to take it easy and cooperate and everything will work smoothly. While Sivak speaks these soothing words, another Pander (one with a high Potence and Melee skill) will come up behind the PC and slam a stake into his heart, thus immobilizing him.

It's possible a skilled PC will be able to turn this encounter into a decent fight. The GM should play this out, and let the PC try to come up with a creative way out of the situation. However, there should be little chance of a single Kindred avoiding an ambush by an entire Sabbat pack. Eventually, he'll be subdued, staked, then dragged into a nearby alley where a Cadillac with a large trunk waits for them. En route, one of the Panders will notice they are being watched by a startled mortal at the mouth of the alley. This is Alvin Grower, a paralegal on his way to work early. The Panders will jump on him and thrash him thoroughly, leaving him unconscious and presumed dead. They toss the abductee into the trunk, and the Cadillac roars off to reach an underground garage before dawn.

Chapter Two: A Case of Missing Persons

Scene Five: A Quick Head Count

It shouldn't take long the next night for the group to figure out that they are one member short. This may happen as they arrange to go to the next night's play. If they opted to forego the experience, the GM should improvise another reason for them to get together, or have someone else notice the disappearance (a good choice is a Contact, Ally, or Retainer who urgently needs to speak to the missing PC). They could discover that the PC never made it home the previous night, or the GM could suggest the possibility of being caught in the sunrise.

If the players are inclined to paranoia (as most players are) they should suspect the BCT. If they're already attending a performance, they may decide to interrogate the cast backstage afterward. If not, they may decide to make another visit to the Theater. Since the cast is honestly ignorant, questions will reveal nothing, and may even arouse some righteous indignation on their part. It is possible that Claire will also be questioned, but she will reveal nothing. She is a consummate liar, and was honestly not involved in the previous night's abduction (although she knew it would happen). Even her aura will not show any perceptible deception, unless a PC scores exceptionally well on a reading (four successes or more), and asks the right questions (determined through role-playing).

Should the players ignore the disappearance, let them. Their friend will continue on the path to Sabbat recruitment while they wait. As stated before, the process can be reversed, but the further the target goes, the larger chance of lasting damage to his mind and soul (*Derangements* and loss of Humanity, respectively).

Resourceful players may pursue other lines of investigation, which should be played in full. Creative investigation may reveal some clues, although there isn't a lot to work with. If someone decides to trace the most likely path taken by the missing person, they may come upon the abduction scene, and see signs of struggle. The Spirit's Touch (*Auspex* 3) may reveal the fight, but will not provide much information about the assailants. A glimpse of the getaway car may be possible. Use of *Animalism* on nearby rats, and stray dogs and cats may give similar information, and at least let them know how many "people" were involved in the abduction. Animals will complain of the unnatural and disturbing nature of all those involved.

Scene Six: A Sage Arrives and Asks Questions

This is an optional scene, to be played if the players returned to the BCT. As the players leave the Theater, they pass a determined and sharply dressed man headed the other direction, accompanied by a large man dressed as a chauffeur. This is Richard Balterhouse, often referred to as the "Sage", and his ghoulish retainer. He seems angry and will push by the players, ignoring them. If the players wait and see what happens, they will see the Sage enter the backstage offices, and start an argument with the cast. Claire will have already been warned by Lucas Hall (watching from outside) of his arrival, and will have left through the back door, avoiding the argument.

Despite warm greetings by the cast, the Sage begins by demanding to know why they've decided to move to a different city, and what has possessed them to abandon Godwin, their rightful director and sire. This sends the cast into confused

An Adventure for Vampire

protest, claiming that it was Godwin's idea, and that he had personally given them a new director. The Sage will demand to know who is sponsoring the production. Bewildered, the cast will answer they thought he was. They will repeat that Godwin and Claire are old friends from St. Louis and that it's all okay. The Sage will mention Godwin has never even been to St. Louis, and decide he'd better speak with Claire immediately.

Immediately, the Sage and his driver will leave the Theater in a foul mood, and will not be responsive to questions from the players. He will promise to speak with them later, once he's checked into the matter. The players may decide to question the cast again, and can learn the relationship between the BCT and the Sage. They will express confusion about how the plays have been funded if the Sage was left out of the loop. [Players skilled in such matters, using Finance, Computers, and Investigation, may be able to check into this. This should be a difficult extended role, and would take some time — probably better spent elsewhere. But success would indicate the money originating in an anonymous trust managed by an investment firm in Toronto. For those in the know, Toronto is definitely Sabbat territory.]

Scene Seven: The Abductee Learns What's Good For Him

This is another optional scene, designed to allow the abducted player some time (albeit of an unpleasant sort). If the person playing the character isn't present, this scene can be skipped. It is still useful for the GM to keep in mind what's happening to the victim as time advances.

After an uncomfortable night stuffed in a cold trunk, staked and beaten, the victim will awaken in a damp underground room with concrete walls and pipes lining the ceiling. He will be bound, still injured, and low on blood. Inside the room with him is Mark Sivak and two members of his pack. The others can be heard in a larger room just outside, and there is only one exit. Needless to say, escape is nearly impossible. Mark Sivak is experienced, and will not look a victim directly in the eye, thus avoiding Domination. Further, he will punish any detected use of Presence.

Sivak will give the standard Sabbat spiel, about how this is the only way, as harsh as it may seem, to free the PC from the slavery of the Camarilla. He will explain the radical steps required to break a pawn free of his master, and that this will be a baptism of blood and redemption. Sabbat vampires are free of the constraints of the Camarilla, able to be themselves. There is no need for a Masquerade, or to feign humanity. They are something higher and mightier, etc., etc. If possible, this conversation will include specific arguments gathered from the initial reconnaissance by Claire and Valasky. (For example, if the target has an obviously domineering sire, or if his aura shows

signs of a Blood Bond, etc.) Sivak will explain how Sabbat Kindred cannot be blood bound, and can break such bonds through a special ceremony. (GMs interested in playing this to the hilt should refer to *The Player's Guide to the Sabbat*, an invaluable reference.)

Likely the PC in question will not want to hear all this propaganda, but they don't have much choice. Sivak will not brook insolence, and may stake the target to shut him up. Should the PC cooperate and seem interested, Sivak will be pleased and less hostile, but will not otherwise alter the induction procedure. Before this gets too tiring, Sivak will stop, stake the target, and leave, muttering something about "gathering some of your new brothers." He and his pack (with the exception of a single sentry) will spend the rest of this evening kidnapping more recruits from the mortal population. They can be reached via pager by the sentry at any time, should the PCs be ahead of schedule. However, since there are almost no clues leading to the location of this basement (it was chosen at random), this is unlikely.

It should be noted that although it causes delays in game-play to take one of the characters aside for scenes like this, it's a good way to produce automatic suspense. As they wait for the GM to return, they wonder what happened to their missing friend, and may spend the time speculating and trying to come up with a plan.

Scene Eight: A Visit to the Hospital

Showing surprising tenacity, Alvin Grower survived the attack, but is in intensive care under police guard in one of the local hospitals. The police are curious about the vicious nature of the assault, and are awaiting for Grower to regain consciousness to question him. They think the attack may have been connected to organized crime.

The most likely way the players will discover this is the newspaper. The story of an early morning assault can be found in one of the local newspapers (not on the front page, since such violent acts are common in the World of Darkness). The article will mention the intersection where the incident occurred, and observant PCs will realize it is on the route taken by the missing character. If none of the PCs are inclined to read the newspaper, they can be informed by Thomas Barber. Barber didn't like the accusations leveled at his friends, and thinks the story may be related. He'll suggest the PCs check it out, in order to see that the BCT wasn't involved.

Interrogating the witness will prove challenging. The location of the hospital isn't listed, there is a police guard outside his door, and Alvin is in poor condition to answer any questions. This shouldn't deter a clever group of PCs, though. Discovering the hospital won't prove difficult, given the players have some investigative skills. There are people (admitting nurses, ambulance

Lucas Hall

Lucas Hall is a Lasombra, the progeny of the leader of the pack, a young but ambitious man who is very competent in combat but also intelligent and devious. Lucas is expected to help in case of a serious problem, and is well equipped and armed. He can be reached via cellular phone by Valasky at any time. During performances, Lucas is often positioned unobtrusively in the BCT itself, sometimes in the audience but more often hiding in the rafters or backstage.

Lucas, in the guise of a Brujah from out of town, often scouts the Kindred bars and hangouts in a city prior to the arrival of the BCT, in order to mark the neonates, Caitiff, Anarchs, and other young malcontents. Those who seem promising are invited to a play. Should Claire be discovered, it is Lucas' primary duty to get her and Valasky out of the city and back to Sabbat territory. He will fight fiercely to do so, but destruction of his foes is not his first concern. Lucas is authorized to coordinate efforts with the combat oriented pack, which is expected to cover their escape.



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Valasky Derudivich

Valasky Derudivich is a Tzimisce of Claire's pack. He has a strong friendship with her, and is one of the few members who supports her plan. He will not play a major role, but is important for several reasons. First, he was involved in Godwin's capture, and used Vicissitude to adopt his guise long enough to introduce Claire to the rest of the actors before "retiring on an extended sabbatical to take care of personal issues and recharge his creative energies". Since that time, Valasky is responsible for keeping an eye on Claire, mostly for her own safety. The pack knows she is playing a dangerous game. Valasky is never far from Claire, although he remains unobtrusive. He watches the audience using Auspex during the plays and gives his opinions about potential targets. He is in regular contact with the rest of the pack, who could be called into the region on short notice if there was warning of upcoming trouble.

drivers, the reporter who wrote the story) who know where Mr. Grower is recuperating. Most of these people can be convinced to divulge the information given some incentive, or through judicious use of vampiric Disciplines.

Similarly, sneaking into the hospital room will require a little effort, but can be accomplished. The single police officer watching the room isn't terribly vigilant (he doesn't think his ward is in danger), and general hospital security is laughable. But the GM should encourage PCs to take proper precautions and provide whatever obstacles he/she feels are appropriate to the intrusion.

The most effective way to revive Alvin Grower will be feeding him vampiric vitae in order to accelerate his healing (thus effectively turning him into a ghoul). One blood point will revive him, in weakened condition, while three will make him completely lucid, and heal most of his internal injuries. With six blood points, he can be healed entirely. However, this is a severe breach of the Masquerade (consequences to be determined by the GM, perhaps impacting after the scenario is finished).

What does Alvin know? Not a great deal, unfortunately. Most of his attention was focused on the horror of the situation. It's all a blur. His horror will be magnified if the abductee or Sivak's pack demonstrated supernatural powers during the encounter. However, questioning will reveal he does remember the make of the car they drove. Just when the players have given up and are ready to leave, Alvin will remember them mentioning taking their victim to a cemetery in two nights (making it tomorrow night by now), but he doesn't know which one.

Scene Nine: Burial at the Cemetery

The next evening, Sivak's group will take the abductee to a nearby cemetery, which has been chosen specifically for this purpose. The victim will revive to Marc Sivak seated comfortably on a tombstone with a shovel in his hands, in front of a row of open graves. Valasky can be visible as an ominous figure standing just behind Sivak, with his arms crossed, looking very serious, and betraying some Tzimisce disfigurements (like extended fingers and fingernails, and spurs protruding from his elbows, poking through his jacket). The abductee is no longer staked, but is once again nearly starving from lack of blood.

Sivak will taunt the PC, telling him he is about to undergo a rare privilege: the chance to be reborn as a true vampire. If the PC mouths off, Sivak will be surprisingly forgiving, saying something along the lines of, "You may hate me now, but in a week's time, we will be brothers." He will then say, "It's time for you to meet those who will join you in your new life. Bring them!" From nearby, the rest of Sivak's pack will drag out a group of bound and terrified mortals, the details to be

decided by the GM. Here Sivak will show cruelty in an old Sabbat game. He will tell the captives that he is feeling generous, and will release the first one to stand and leave. Whomever takes him up on this offer (the PC is not eligible) will be immediately shot and killed the second they try to flee. Sivak will proclaim he/she was not strong or brave enough to join them.

At a quick signal from Sivak, the pack descends on the mortals, draining and then Embracing them in a macabre feast. Valasky may join in, but will keep an eye on the PC in case Sivak needs help with him. Sivak will not allow the PC to interfere. The PC should roll a frenzy check from the sight of so much blood and feeding. Sivak will be greatly amused if he frenzies, and will allow the



PC to take part in the feast. Once this is finished, the mortal victims will be dropped into the graves waiting for them. The PC will have most of the blood drained from him, and thrown into a grave. All of the new "recruits" will be buried, and Sivak's pack will take vigil to wait for the strongest to claw their way to the surface, driving them mad and stripping them of all humanity. Knowing it may take hours, Sivak and Valasky will leave to take care of covering up certain evidence left by the abductions.

A note on a rescue: the abductee is a bit ahead in the chronology compared to his friends. The GM will need to decide at what point in the process the PCs will try to rescue their friend. Since this may vary depending on how they handle themselves in the next chapter, it is a good idea to play this scene out in full, ending it as the abductee is buried. The timing of the rescue should take place right after Sivak and Valasky have left, while the abductee has been freshly buried. However, if the PCs delay too long, they may arrive after the recruits have emerged, and been taken by Sivak to a nearby enclosed tomb for brainwashing. It's entirely up to the GM. Even in this case, the abducted PC isn't completely lost, but they will likely suffer from Derangements and possibly permanent loss of Humanity from the trauma.

Chapter Three: Digging Up Some Old Friends

Scene Ten: Another Disappearance

Not all GM's will opt to include this scene, but it can be used for two purposes. First, if the PCs were unsuccessful in investigating the witness, it gives them another opportunity to find their missing friend. Secondly, it gives the group a second objective (other than rescuing the abductee) with a possibly greater reward should they be successful.

If the PCs have already learned about the cemetery lead, they are likely to search them immediately at the next nightfall. The GM should arrange to stall them with an external issue for the first few hours of the evening. This is where characters with Allies, Contacts, Retainers, or even a Mentor can be useful. Any of them may have a small problem, or simply demand a meeting with one or more of the PCs, and brushing them off will require some time.

The Players will be contacted by Kelly Grove, Cage, and Thomas Barber. It seems that the Sage has disappeared, and the three are frantic. He vanished shortly after speaking with Claire, who seemed very shaken by recent events. She thought that the BCT is being used by someone within the city as a scapegoat, and plans to cancel further shows and move on.

The actors don't know what to do: Claire was very convincing, and they find it hard to doubt her, but at the same time, the Sage raised questions which they can't ignore. It should be remembered that the Sage is the "father" of their line, being Godwin's sire. All of them are bothered by ambivalent feelings on the subject. If the PCs can give them some direction, they will appreciate it. GMs can use them as potential allies for later confrontations. They are not combat oriented, but could provide just enough support in a conflict to make the difference. Should the group decide to confront Claire at this time, they will not be able to find her. (She is desperately trying to figure a way out of the situation, and is in conversation with Lucas Hall and Valasky. The arrival of the Sage has greatly increased the risk of Camarilla discovery. Claire is deciding if she can salvage the BCT, or if she should take the new recruits and flee back to Toronto — after ordering Sivak to kill the BCT actors.)

If they need more clues, the ghoul Tom Jones can serve as a perfect foil. The stagehand/bit player has been watching the peculiar circumstances around the Theater for weeks, and has been trying to muster the nerve to tell someone. Tom will arrive and mention that "someone" has been sneaking around the performances ever since Claire joined, and that he thinks she has been meeting with this person regularly. Once he overheard her saying something about "Mulberry", but he didn't know what it meant. He thinks that might be the name of the shadowy stranger. In truth, this is the name of the cemetery where Sivak's pack is initiating recruits.

Scene Eleven: Dead Man's Party (Who Could Ask for More?)

The danger of the cemetery is highly variable. It could turn into a stealth mission if the PCs are cautious enough, or an all-out deadly brawl if they aren't. Also, the GM should adjust the various factors to suit the power and capability of the PCs.

As mentioned in Scene Nine, the abductee and various mortals have been buried, and most of Sivak's pack are standing vigil to wait for them to emerge. The fresh nature of the graves is obvious, and the Players can presume foul play. They may also assume the Sage is buried here, but that is not the case. He's been torpored and put in the nearby tomb until the Sabbat can decide what to do with him.

The objective in this scene is straightforward: the PCs want to dig up their friend and save him. However, there are many ways the PCs could go about this, and creativity is encouraged. They may wish to distract Sivak's pack and get them to abandon their vigil, or they may engage them in combat directly. If they fight Sivak's pack, they had better take care of them quickly or Sivak will get a call and return to help them, along (perhaps) with Lucas Hall and Valasky (although these two

The Combat Pack

Aside from Marc Sivak, individual members of this pack will not be detailed. Instead, a generic template will be provided, and numbers should vary according to the strength of the part (ideally, they should be more than capable of handling any one or two PCs, but not necessarily capable of taking on the entire coterie). The pack is not expected to interact with the PCs in any way save combat. They serve a direct function: capturing targets for recruitment and passing them through the horrors of induction.

Marc Sivak

Marc Sivak is a proud Pander (a coalition of Sabbat Caitiff), and has encouraged others of his "clan" to join his pack. They are a rough and combat ready group of Panders and the occasional Malkavian, whose madness Marc endures as long as they back him up in combat and can follow commands when given. His group is still relatively new, but they show promise. They enjoy capturing Camarilla scumbags and submitting them to Sabbat rituals.

Marc is a fanatic loyalist to the Sabbat, and he longs to prove himself to the sect and earn honor for the Panders. He chafes at being ordered around by Lucas Hall, who is both less experienced and only recently turned nomad. Marc can sometimes be exceptionally cruel in his treatment of recruits, but he considers this the only way to ensure they do not revert to their former selves. He has no fear of death, and has tried to instill this in his fellow pack-mates.

are more interested in getting Claire safely away).

Even without Sivak's personal attention, the scene could become extremely nasty. The graveyard is full of soon-to-be Sabbat, all insane and frenzied, and digging them up will not snap them out of it. They are likely to attack anything that moves, including the abductee, who has been clawing his way up through the earth for at least an hour or two. For a more dramatic and frightening scene, the GM could have the new Sabbat spring from the earth right after the PCs have vanquished Sivak's pack.

What the PCs do with the other recruits is up to them, but these people are not likely to become "normal" Kindred, even if rescued. They will suffer permanent derangements and low Humanity. It might be best to "put them out of their misery", although this is left to the GM. The PC abductee, as mentioned, will probably recover given some time and perhaps a little therapy. If the actors are present, they will immediately demand that the cemetery be searched for signs of the Sage.

Scene Twelve: On the Vengeance Trail

In theory, Scene Eleven could be the end of the story. If the GM has had enough excitement, he can decide Claire and her pack have fled the city, using the cemetery conflict as a distraction to get safely away. Optionally, the GM may wish to play out the PCs finding and hunting them down. They can be found back at the BCT, getting their belongings together and making ready to leave. The ghoul Sarah Hilton accidentally interrupted them; her body is still on the premises. At the GM's option, Marc Sivak could be here (perhaps with other pack members who were not waiting at the cemetery) to intercept the PCs, giving Claire time to flee. Depending upon how situations have unfolded up to this point, she may still try to keep the BCT under her direction. (This would only happen if the PCs had focused entirely upon recovering the abductee, and didn't ally themselves with the BCT cast or try to rescue the Sage.) More likely, she will consider the mission blown (although not unsuccessful since she has already added numerous recruits to the Sabbat), order Sivak's pack to kill the actors, and flee ASAP.

Stopping and destroying Claire should be extremely difficult. If the PCs wait too long to recover from their fight at the cemetery (including hunting for a few hours), she will be gone. If they immediately rush to overtake her, they are likely to be weakened and thus ill-prepared to face Claire's packmates Valasky and Lucas Hall. Most likely she will escape, and could become a recurring foe, or perhaps the target of a second story to try to track her down and bring her to justice. One exception to this will be if, after the cemetery, the players wisely decide to enlist outside aid from the rest of the city's Kindred. If they have adequate

proof of Sabbat involvement, the elders will throw their weight behind the effort and Claire may be stopped. Even here, the PCs will need to work swiftly. Should the players rescue their friend, free the BCT cast, and save the Sage from diablerie, they should consider themselves successful and fortunate. They will have gained good potential allies in Chicago and throughout the Toreador community. It is even possible that Godwin is still alive somewhere (perhaps in torpor), and can be restored to his place as Director of the restored BCT.

Appendix I: NPC Stars

Kelly Grove ("The Innocent")

Clan: Toreador

Sire: James Godwin

Generation: 11th

Nature: Gallant

Demeanor: Caregiver

Concept: Actress

Embrace: 1988 (Born 1967)

Apparent Age: Early 20's

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Acting 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Empathy 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 2, Etiquette 2, Melee 2, Music 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1

Knowledges: Computer 1, Finance 1, Medicine 2, Politics 1

Disciplines: Presence 1, Celerity 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1 (Juan Teguero: "connected" fan), Fame 1, Herd 2, Mentor 1 (Richard Balterhouse), Resources 1

Virtues: Conscience 5, Self Control 2, Courage 3

Humanity: 9

Willpower: 5

Image: Kelly is a cute girl, 5' 5" tall, with a curvaceous build. She has reddish brown hair, and was pale-complexioned even before the Embrace. Her face has a light dash of freckles, and her expression is animated and usually cheerful.

Role-playing Hints: You are an extroverted person, a woman who laughs and smiles easily, but would never be considered ditz. You still enjoy "life" very much and are a curious person. You love to party. Recently, you have started to miss the sun and other aspects of daily life, but remain excited about immortality (as long as you don't think about the potential cost to your soul).

Russ 'Cage' Stacey ("The Star")

An Adventure for Vampire

Clan: Toreador

Sire: Kelly Grove

Generation: 12th

Mortal Concept: Actor

Nature: Bon Vivant

Demeanor: Gallant

Embrace: 1993 (Born: 1968)

Apparent Age: 20's

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Acting 3, Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Dodge 1 Empathy 2, Intimidation 2, Leadership 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Animal Ken 2, Drive 1, Etiquette 2, Melee 1, Music 3, Stealth 1

Knowledge: Linguistics 1 (Spanish), Occult 2, Literature 2

Disciplines: Presence 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 3, Resources 3, Fame 2

Virtues: Conscience 2, Self Control 4, Courage 3

Humanity: 6

Willpower: 6

Image: Cage is a brash young actor with reasonably good looks. He fancies himself a ladies' man, and has a cocky confidence which often works in his favor. He stands 5' 11" tall, and has dark brown hair and eyes. Cage is a thin man, and his face betrays somewhat fragile features

Role-playing Hints: You get along with people very well, in a confident easy-going manner. You are much more approachable than Thomas, your rival, and know it. You treat people with courtesy and respect, but don't mind joking around if they seem to have a sense of humor. In particular, you have an eye for the ladies, and will zero in on any attractive women as soon as politely possible. More than your peers, you enjoy your new vampiric existence, and don't miss being alive at all.

Thomas Barber ("The Cynic")

Clan: Toreador

Sire: James Godwin

Generation: 11th

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Curmudgeon

Concept: Actor

Embrace: 1985 (Born: 1957)

Apparent Age: Late 20's

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 1, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Acting 4, Alertness 1, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Melee 3, Stealth 1, Survival 1, Written Expression 4

Knowledges: Computer 2, Finance 1, Investigation 1, Linguistics 1 (Spanish), Politics 1, Science 1, Literature 3

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Presence 1, Celerity 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2 (Chuck Ruddy/film actor, Jen Barber/Ex-wife & lawyer), Contacts 1 (Theater), Fame 2, Resources 3

Virtues: Conscience 3, Self Control 3, Courage 5

Humanity: 7

Willpower: 6

Image: Thomas is a tall (6' 2") African-American actor, weighing 195 pounds. While not particularly handsome, he has strong features and good stage presence. He's in excellent physical shape, and moves with poise and confidence. He dresses casually when not on-stage, in ripped jeans, an old leather jacket and faded T-shirts. His most common expression is a cynical smirk.

Role-playing Hints: You're extremely cynical, and make fun of people when you first meet them. You don't like fakers, or people who flaunt their wealth. However, when caught in a good mood, or when around people you accept, you can be a very funny guy. Joke around and try to make other people laugh, preferably at the expense of someone else. You know you're probably the best thing going in the BCT, and are thus very confident, but you do not brag about your abilities as an actor or writer.

Claire Rosewood

Clan: Toreador *antitribu*

Sire: Pollard

Generation: 11th

Mortal Concept: Morbid Painter

Nature: Visionary/Manipulator

Demeanor: Architect

Embrace: 1968 (Born: 1940)

Apparent Age: 20's

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Acting 2, Alertness 1, Brawl 1, Dodge 3, Empathy 4, Leadership 2, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 1, Melee 2, Painting 4

Knowledges: Computer 1, Finance 1, Linguistics 3, Occult 2, Theater 3, Writing 3



Disciplines: Auspex 2, Celerity 2, Fortitude 1, Presence 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 4, Fame 2 (her art, under the name Virginia Rose), Pack Status 3, Resources 3, Sabbat Status 1, Double Identity 2

Virtues: Callousness 3, Instincts 3, Courage 3

Path of Cathari: 5

Willpower: 7

Note: Due to her high Manipulation and Subterfuge, Claire is often able to believe her own lies, and is thus difficult to catch even using Aura Sight (Auspex 2).

Image: Claire is a strikingly beautiful woman, being 5' 8" tall and possessing an excellent figure. She has long light brown hair which reaches half-way down her back, and pale green eyes. She dresses in business-like but revealing attire, such as high heels, short skirts and low-cut blouses.

Role-playing Hints: You are an extremely complicated woman, capable of adopting any number of guises to further your cause. For now, you play the role of a devoted director, who has thrown herself with full enthusiasm into the Black Curtain Theater, trying to surpass the excellent work done by your predecessor. You are brimming with energy, and are very supportive of the cast members (except for Sarah Hilton, who doesn't deserve the honor of participating). You are also cultured in other arts, and can speak intelligently on many subjects.

Lucas Hall

Clan: Lasombra

Sire: Thomas Espinoza

Generation: 9th

Mortal Concept: Bodyguard

Nature: Director

Demeanor: Loner

Embrace: 1984 (Born: 1953)

Apparent Age: Early 30's

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4.

Talents: Alertness 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 2, Leadership 2, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 3, Firearms 4, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Knowledges: Finance 2, Linguistics 2, Medicine 4, Occult 3, Science 3

Disciplines: Celerity 1, Domination 1, Obfuscate 1, Obtenebration 2, Potence 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Pack Status 4, Resources 3, Sabbat Status 2

Virtues: Callousness 3, Instincts 4, Courage 4

Path of Power and the Inner Voice: 6

Willpower: 7

Notes: Although he enjoys his Potence, Lucas isn't stupid; if he has a chance to shoot a foe a few times before engaging in melee, he will gladly do so, preferably at a distance and from cover.

Image: Lucas is a big man, although this isn't immediately apparent since he dresses conservatively, often in suits or an expensive jacket. He is 6' 2" tall but also wide and thickly built. He has short black hair and is clean shaven. He keeps a beeper in his belt, a cellular phone in his pocket, and a revolver in a shoulder holster.

Role-playing Hints: You will keep the background unless forced to reveal yourself in order to protect Claire and Valasky. At that point, you will not be interested in conversation. You hate all members of the Camarilla, and do not feel such filth is worth recruiting into the sect. All the same, you will keep your priorities and fight foremost to allow Claire to escape.

An Adventure for Vampire

Valasky

Clan: Tzimisce

Sire: Lajos

Generation: 10th

Mortal Concept: Surgeon

Nature: Deviant

Demeanor: Bravo/Conformist

Embrace: 1951 (Born: 1912)

Apparent Age: Varies

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Talents: Acting 3, Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Empathy 2, Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 3, Fleshcrafting 4, Melee 4, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Knowledges: Finance 2, Linguistics 2, Medicine 4, Occult 3, Science 3

Disciplines: Animalism 3, Auspex 3, Fortitude 2, Potence 1, Vicissitude 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Pack Status 4, Resources 3, Sabbat Status 2

Virtues: Callousness 4, Instincts 3, Courage 4

Path of Caine: 7

Willpower: 8

Image: Valasky's extensive use of Vicissitude has left him with no specific appearance. Most commonly he adopts strong square features, and a large physical frame (6' 2" tall, 215 pounds). He likes to let others underestimate his intelligence by adopting the look of a bruiser. Consequently, he usually wears dark heavy clothes, including an overcoat. Valasky never travels without a 9mm tucked away somewhere, and he keeps a policeman's billy club in his overcoat. Naturally, if he were pretending to be someone else, his appearance would change drastically.

Role-playing Hints: Valasky usually plays the role of the strong silent type, backing up Claire, Lucas, or even Marc Sivak with brooding intimidation. When speaking, his voice is slow and somber, and betrays both intelligence and education. Everyone who knows him (including all involved Sabbat) are somewhat fearful of this enigmatic vampire.

Marc Sivak

Clan: Pander (Caitiff)

Sire: Unknown

Generation: 11th

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Bravo

Embrace: 1964 (Born: 1940)

Apparent Age: Early 20's

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 2, Intimidation 4, Leadership 3

Skills: Drive 3, Firearms 2, Melee 4, Repair 2, Security 2, Stealth 1, Survival 3

Knowledges: Law 2, Linguistics 1, Occult 2

Disciplines: Auspex 1, Celerity 2, Fortitude 2, Potence 2, Presence 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 1, Pack Status 5, Resources 2, Sabbat Status 1

Virtues: Callousness 4, Instincts 4, Courage 4

Path of Cathari: 7

Willpower: 7

Image: Marc looks much like the other members of his pack (see below) in dress and equipment. He is actually a bit short (5' 8" tall) but very stocky and muscular, and his body is riddled with tattoos. He is completely bald, but keeps a well groomed goatee. Dangling from his left ear is a cross upon which a struggling serpent has been crucified. Marc is fond of blatantly displaying his vampiric nature to Camarilla Kindred, finding it discomfits them, and often greets such with fangs out, eyes glowing, and claws extended.

Role-playing Hints: As mean and nasty as you wanna be. You are Sabbat through and through, and for you that means being an openly vampiric lord of the earth. You are pleased to be given the chance to turn Camarilla maggots into proper soldiers, and hope they die gloriously in upcoming Sabbat sieges as cannon fodder.

Pander Template

Most of Marc's pack is composed of fellow Panders, the unified Caitiff of the Sabbat (at the GM's discretion they could also include Brujah and Ventrue *antitribu* who admire the Pander cause). They have focused upon physical and combat skills and disciplines, but there is variety in their makeup (GM's can get as creative as they want). Most are aggressive, violent, and fearless. At the same time, Marc is an intelligent and capable leader, and he has forced his group to learn how to cooperate in combat situations. Also, since the pack is operating in enemy territory, they rarely strike to annihilate a foe, even when not recruiting. They are willing to retreat, hide, and regroup if confronted with serious opposition.

Clan: Pander

Sire: Varies

Generation: 12th-14th

Nature: Bravo, Rebel, Deviant, Bon Vivant, etc.

Demeanor: Bravo

All Physical Stats: 3



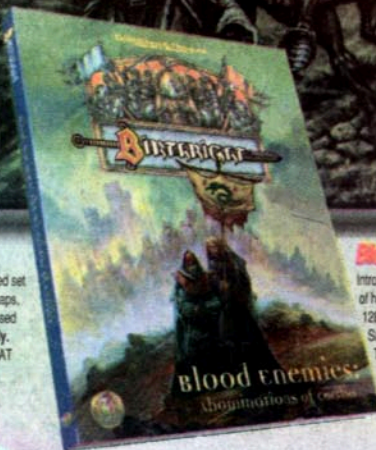
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Social: 2

Mental: 2 (but Wits 3)

Talents: Alertness 2, Brawl 3, Intimidation 2, Streetwise 2

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 2, Melee 3, Security 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1

Knowledge: Law 1, Occult 1, Linguistics 1

Disciplines: 6 points among Celerity, Fortitude & Potence, with some Animalism or Protean.

Image: Like most Sabbat packs (Panders in particular) these guys dress similarly, and look very much like a punk street gang: spiked leather jackets, ripped jeans, combat boots, earrings, other jewelry, pins and shirts from various hard-core Goth and industrial bands. These boys mean business, and carry a wide assortment of knives, chains, bats, pistols, shotguns, wooden spikes, and a big canister of gasoline for good measure. They drive around in a large Cadillac (nice big trunk for abductions), and several motorcycles.

Note to the GM: It may seem that between Claire's people and Sivak's pack, there are an impossibly large number of Sabbat involved in this story, and that the characters don't have a chance against them. That's the point! The characters are not expected to fight both Sabbat packs in outright combat and destroy them. PCs taking this tactic are in for a short unlife, at least if the GM plays them well. The story should be run such that the players need to use strategy and caution to succeed, and they must keep in mind their true objectives: saving their friend, and helping the innocent members of the BCT. Once discovered, Claire and her people will flee at first opportunity to Toronto, and the combat pack will escort them to stall opposition. They will attack *en masse* only if the players are foolish enough to try to destroy them all.

Appendix 2: Alternate Scenarios

1) It is possible that Valasky may join the BCT as a fourth Kindred actor (under the alias Dante Higgins), since he enjoys adopting personas and finds the plays enjoyable. In this case, the other members would likely be uncomfortable around him as an outsider, but would try to make him welcome, particularly as he is a talented (if not classically trained) actor.

In any interactions with the players, Valasky would try not to draw attention to himself, being neither overly friendly nor entirely aloof. He would adopt the persona of a moody and somewhat arrogant actor, a bit anal retentive but witty and devoted to his craft. He will be enthusiastic about the opportunity to be with a group like the

BCT, and hopes to prove himself as a worthy addition. The GM should be careful about running this scenario since "Dante" is bound to draw immediate suspicion as a newcomer to the group. This may provide too early of a lead and clue, particularly since Dante, unlike the other actors, knows the truth. While he is a veteran Sabbat and thus not likely to fold under even harsh interrogation, powers such as *Auspex* or *Domination* could too early reveal that he is not whom he claims to be.

2) A more radical option would be if, after the first hints of discovery, Claire decides to recruit the members of the BCT directly into the Sabbat, feeling that their cover has been blown so the operation is finished, yet not wanting to lose these Toreador with whom she has worked so closely. Perhaps she has decided the BCT will become a purely Sabbat production, to be moved to New York or another Sabbat city and increase her fame among her twisted *antitribu* clan members.

The PCs here may also try to rescue them as well. This scenario could be suggested if the PC group are too small to have one of their number kidnapped. The scenario could run very similarly except with one of the actors being the first to disappear. (Cage would be the best choice, since he likes being a vampire and doesn't understand the big problem with feeding or why anyone would regret their condition. Very Sabbat-minded.)

3) The recruited and mind-washed PC could approach one or more of the other characters and try to convince them to join of their own volition, stating how happy he is to have been selected. In this condition, if they tried to apprehend him for "treatment" or were violently against the suggestion, he would evade them, perhaps with the help of one or both of the Sabbat packs. Perhaps as his first test of loyalty, the recruited PC would be told to help destroy his old friends: an opportunity for rich role-playing and dramatic combat.

4) The entire story could be run with the PCs starting as mortals. There is no reason why the BCT couldn't be turned to finding good targets for traditional Sabbat recruitment. In this case, the Players might need to be rescued by the actors or other Camarilla Kindred, and would have to decide which sect to join. A mortal campaign would be much more horrific and therefore suspenseful, but also leaves the PCs in a much more powerless situation. Further, the Sabbat rituals for inducting new members are effective most of the time. In order to give the PCs some free choice, something would have to go wrong with the recruitment. (The most critical stage being, of course, burial after the Embrace and being forced to claw out in a deranged frenzied state, thereby being stripped of all Humanity.)

HEAVY GEAR

Trust No One

Introduction

Welcome to the Heavy Gear universe, set in the far future where humanity is thinly spread across the great void. Interstellar travel is possible, but altogether unpleasant, time-consuming and very costly. Colonized planets are isolated for centuries. Imagine a distant world where great empires have been established. A world where humanoid vehicles protect the human soldiers within. Welcome to Terra Nova, the savage, sun-scorched world that humanity's hardest pioneers call home.

Heavy Gear is the newest science fiction universe by Dream Pod 9. It is also the name of the first game set in that universe. The first few Heavy Gear game books recount the recent events on Terra Nova, one of the first planets outside the Sol system to be colonized by Man. The year is 6132. Technology has advanced by leaps and bounds, but unpleasant historical circumstances have limited its expansion. Colonists often found out — the hard way — that high tech equipment tends to break down over time, so they preferred to use a mix of high and low tech.

As our story opens, Terra Nova has just defeated an invasion force from Earth, intent on reclaiming their "lost" colony. The invaders fled, but nobody can offer an explanation as to why they chose to reappear after such a long silence. After forming a short-lived alliance to fight off the Earth forces, the military forces of the North and the South (political alliances similar to the East and West coalitions of the Cold War days) are restless again. Raiding, frontier wars, etc. Something's going on... but nobody seems to know what. Are you bold enough to find out?

This adventure is the second part of two linked scenarios. Each adventure is designed to be run separately, but both are tightly intertwined. We have not depicted any established group on Terra Nova as the "bad guy," allowing individual GMs to use characters from any region they wish. For simplicity's sake, we describe the characters as though they were from the Northern Guard. Gamemasters should feel free to change anything necessary to work this adventure into their game.

What has Happened

If you played part one, *Gaia's Vengeance* (see SHADIS #28), you do not need to read this section.

The characters are debriefed about their last mission en route to their new drop site when an air transport arrives to resupply them.

Last week, the personal secretary of Brigadier Gibbons, Cynthia James, was kidnapped by a band

of rovers identifying themselves as Gaia's Vengeance; they demanded a ransom of 10 million marks. Colonel James, Cynthia's father, responded by ordering a squad of Gears to rescue his daughter from the rover encampment in the Westridge Trench. The planned rescue encountered a snag when a severe storm in the area made the original drop site unacceptable. This probably saved the Gear pilots' lives.

With the change in drop site, the Gear pilots unknowingly avoided an ambush set for them. Cynthia had devised a plan where she and her father could blackmail several million marks out of the military. With some changes suggested by Colonel James, they proceeded with the "kidnapping" and prepared to ambush the rescue team. The Gear team was able to take Gaia's Vengeance by surprise, approaching the camp from the opposite side. After a furious battle with Cynthia and her men, the Gear pilots discovered several clues that led them to believe that the kidnapping had

...

Written by
Jeff
Mackintosh

...

Art by
Ghislain
Barbe

...

been a ruse. Immediately after the confrontation with Gaia's Vengeance, Colonel James disappeared into the Badlands.

Sequence 1: The Quest

Outline

The situation is very bad. A treasonous plot has been uncovered and it involves at least one high ranking officer, Colonel James, who has disappeared deep into the Westridge Trench.

Game Notes

After the failed blackmail attempt, James and a group of mercenaries hijacked a military air transport and fled. Radar tracked the aircraft deep into the Westridge Trench before they lost it in the mountains. Military Police are en route, but are not expected to arrive for several hours. They fear

indicated by the presence of Bricklayers, Groundhogs and Prairie Dogs with three Elan jeeps and a Camel. If the characters open fire, the vehicles will scatter and immediately open communications with the characters, pleading for them to cease fire. They will state that they are a work crew making their way to their job site. The men will try to cooperate with the characters as much as possible, but have not seen James.

This part of the scenario is mostly descriptive and should be offered to the characters as an opportunity to roleplay their characters and interact with one another. It can also be used by the GMs as an opportunity to remind their players that not everything should be shot at, and that "you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

Equipment

Characters

2 Groundhog Pilots: all relevant skills 1

1 Groundhog Pilot: AGI +1, all relevant skills 1

2 Prairie Dog Pilot: all relevant skills 1

1 Stone Mason Pilot: AGI +1, all relevant skills 1

10 workers (rookie Infantry 8 with 9 mm handguns, 2 having 7 mm rifles)

Objective

The characters are to follow James' trail through the mountainous terrain. Remember, despite the occasional tracks, tracking James and his men should be challenging.

Potential Complications

James thinks he is being followed and orders a Strike Cheetah to stay behind (AGI/PER +1, all combat skills 2). He will strike from hiding, waiting until the characters are almost on top of him before blasting away with his RFB.

Sequence 2: It Hits the Fan

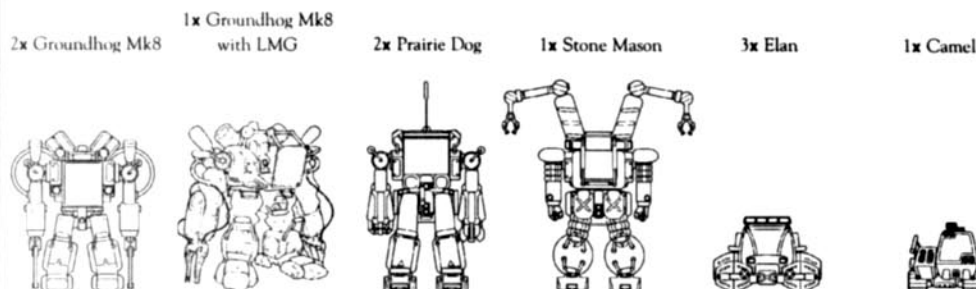
Outline

The characters find James and his men. And a whole lot more.

Game Notes

The characters hear sounds of battle a few hundred meters ahead. When they investigate, they see Northern Gears engaged with a smaller group of raiders, apparently Desert Wolves by their markings. Behind the battle, near a cave entrance, the characters can see James climbing into a Black Cat and moving in to aid the Northern Gears.

Ground Crew



those precious hours will allow James to slip through their fingers and get away. Consequently, the characters are sent in with orders to arrest James on charges of high treason.

The characters are transported to the last known location of James' air transport. Once there, they will try to spot the landed aircraft and track James and his men. Luckily, after a brief search, the characters are notified that James' aircraft has been found and they will be landing shortly. If the characters are in airdroppable Gears, have them jump.

Once on the ground, the characters will have to do their best to track James and his men. This would have been a problem, but James was picked up by a group of Gears and the heavy vehicles sank into the ground with each step, leaving large "footprints" in the sand. The characters arrive right before a wind storm can rage through the Trench. At various points, the trail disappears as they move over rocky terrain, but the characters should be able to follow it.

Along the way, the characters will spot a column of vehicles to the south, moving parallel to them. They do not appear to be a military unit, as

Part II: Trust No One

Behind him, they can see a large stash of military equipment. Off to the other side, the group of Gears previously encountered watches the battle from hiding. As the battle intensifies, the worker Gears slip into the cave and begin raiding James' supplies, loading the Camel up with various military crates.

The Desert Wolves had discovered James' stash of equipment and decided to "salvage" it, but were surprised by his sudden appearance. They are fighting a diversionary battle, drawing as much attention away from the worker Gears as possible. The Dartjägers will use their high speed and excellent off-road maneuverability to race around, blasting away with their LRP's, creating as large a diversion as possible. The Warrior will deal with anyone who notices the raiding Gears and attempts to intervene. The Long Fang will concentrate on taking James' team out. The rest of the raiders will concentrate on getting as much equipment in as little time as possible.

If attacked, the raiders will take what they have and run. They know that whoever chases them will likely return to the fight and when they do, the raiders will turn back as well and grab some more. They are not in this fight to end lives, they are here to appropriate some stolen military equipment. Once they feel they have grabbed enough, they will leave as fast as possible.

James and his men are furious. They intend to destroy their attackers and get away to safety. James' men will do everything they can to end this fight as fast as possible. They have no intention of taking prisoners.

The characters must decide what to do. Do they go after James and arrest him for his crimes? Do they stop the Desert Wolves from stealing military equipment (and evidence)? The situation is a mess.

Once James realizes he is going to be captured or killed, he will turn into the cave. If the characters follow, they will find the hatch of his Gear open and see James turn a corner, running deeper into the cave system. The characters must leave their Gears behind if they intend to follow him.

As the characters move deeper, the humidity will rise rapidly and they will hear sounds of rushing water. James is near the breaking point. He will start to ramble as he runs forward, stopping to periodically take a shot at the characters.

If the GM wants him to become a recurring villain, he should not have James tell the characters everything. He is a bright man and still in control. He will tell the characters that they have not seen the last of him and will leap into an underground waterfall, a part of the MacAllen cave system. Somehow, he will survive the fall to surface again.

If the Gamemaster would prefer not going to use him as a recurring villain, he has reached his breaking point. Suddenly, everything has fallen

apart and he has nowhere to turn. He will fight to the death or until captured. If he is made prisoner and if the characters press him for information, he will reluctantly tell them about his life, his plans and how they spoiled everything. It's over.

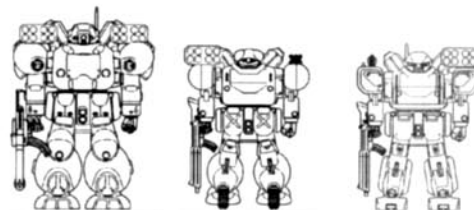
Equipment

Desert Wolves: Any vehicles not destroyed in the previous encounter, plus:

1x Long Fang
Black Mamba

2x Dartjägers

1x Warrior



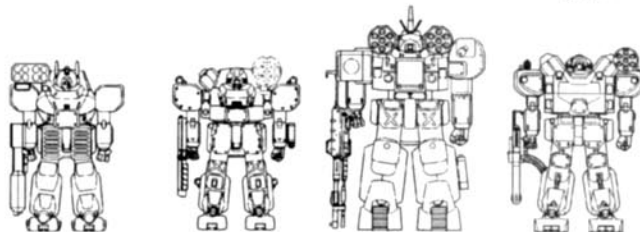
Gaia's Vengeance

1x Black Cat

1x Cheetah

1x Den Mother

2x Jaguar



Characters

1 Long Fang Black Mamba Pilot +2 AGI/PER, all combat skill 3

2 Dartjäger pilots +2 AGI/+1 PER, all combat skills 2

1 Warrior pilot +1 AGI/PER, all combat skills 2

Any of the characters that survived the previous encounter

1 Cheetah pilot +2 AGI/PER, all combat skills 2

1 Den Mother pilot +1 PER, all combat skills 2

2 Jaguar pilots +1 AGI/PER, all combat skills 2

Colonel Mikhail James +1 AGI/+3 PER, all combat skills 3

Colonel Mikhail James

Mikhail James was born in Canterbury, NLC, to Natalie and Donovan James, a tabloid journalist for the Northern Inquirer. While the Inquirer concentrates on the lives of trideo stars, Donovan

made his living writing conspiracy theories. He often wrote about someone's death being a major military cover-up. The problem was that Donovan was not making these theories up, at least in his mind. Donovan saw a conspiracy in every event and Mikhail grew up in this paranoid, conspiracy-riddled environment.

As Mikhail entered his late teens (in cycles), he began to resent his father seeing a shadowy cabal behind everything and everyone, even his friends. At the age of 21, he enlisted in the army to get away from him. His father was beside himself when he found out, but his pleas fell on deaf ears and Mikhail entered basic training.

Once in the military, Mikhail demonstrated an extreme aptitude for leadership and was quickly transferred to the Officer's Training Program. It was here that Mikhail met Natasha Fedorov, a beautiful, sharp woman who immediately captured Mikhail's heart. They married a year after they graduated from the OTP.

Later, during the height of the Judas Syndrome (TN 1904), Mikhail, now a Captain in the Northern Guard, learned he was to become a father. Mikhail began to worry. The North and South were in an escalating Cold War that was leading to open conflict and he was going to bring a child into that. He feared for the safety of his unborn child. Soon thereafter, Mikhail was approached by Southern agents who offered him a very large sum of money for some military secrets. Mikhail refused, but he soon had reason to reconsider his decision.

One season after Mikhail was approached by the South, Natasha was honorably discharged from duty, for reasons still unknown to him. Suddenly, the income of his family was cut in half with a child on the way. The South's offer suddenly became very appealing. He arranged a meeting and the trade was made. A cycle later, the South fielded a test-bed prototype of an Ultra Heavy Rail Gun, very similar to a design that the North had been working on. Also, a discreet account in a Westphalian bank appeared under the name Donovan Fedorov.

As TN 1905 approached, he looked forward to the birth of his daughter. He did not have to wait long; on 1 Winter, Natasha went into labor. Mikhail rushed his wife to the hospital and waited patiently for his daughter to arrive. Two hours after Natasha was taken into the delivery room, a doctor approached Mikhail. He was informed that his daughter was quite well, but his wife had died of complications during childbirth.

Mikhail was devastated by the loss and began to brood. Death in childbirth was so rare as to be almost impossible. Slowly, his mind formed a picture of what had really happened. The North had learned of Mikhail's betrayal and sent him a warning by killing his wife. It was obvious.

Over the next few cycles, Mikhail began to plot his revenge. In TN 1913, the tool of Mikhail's vengeance arrived. Earth invaded Terra Nova. Mikhail was only too eager to turn on his fellow Terra Novans, whom he saw as having turned on him already. He wanted a better life, away from all their conspiracies and treachery. Earth was the key.

On TN 1917, when Earth forces signed the Treaty of Westphalia and left the planet, Mikhail knew they would be back. He knew they were merely regrouping and would return with a larger force. He would be prepared when they did. He began to build a secret army, men and women who he knew were Earth sympathizers and loyal to him. Those who knew of his treason during the invasion either joined his private army, or were hunted down as "enemies of the state."

Mikhail, now a Colonel, has made use of his position, "losing" shipments in various locations throughout the Western and Great White Deserts, to be retrieved by his army, Gaia's Vengeance. Cynthia, his daughter, has been at his side the entire time, using her position as personal secretary to Brigadier Gibbons to further aid her father. Together, they lead Gaia's Vengeance, Mikhail with a cold, cunning tactical mind and Cynthia with her inspirational persona. That was, until recently.

Potential Conflicts

Reinforcements arrive for the Desert Wolves or for Gaia's Vengeance.

Debriefing

Regardless of whether or not James is captured, the characters are questioned thoroughly and may even testify in court. If James was captured, he will regain his composure and reveal nothing. His trial will be swift and his punishment harsh. The characters' involvement in James' life is over. If he escaped, there will be many unanswered questions, until James returns. It is only a matter of time before the characters run into him again.

Depending on how much James revealed before the end, the characters will have a few questions rolling around in their heads.

- How did the Desert Wolves learn of the equipment stash?
- Where did the Desert Wolves disappear to?
- Why did James do this?
- Were all the members of Gaia's Vengeance dealt with or are there more?
- How many more are there?
- Where is James now?
- What is he planning?

If James got away, he provides a great deal of potential for further adventures. 



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Fair Play

Lights: The PCs visit a medieval fair. They can compete at archery, jousting, knife throwing, story telling, showy magic, quarterstaff bouts on a log over a mud pit, etc. There is at least one contest suitable for each PC, and some of the prizes are quite valuable. Alert PCs might notice some smelly monks in long robes and deep, dark cowls in the audience at almost every event.

Camera: The PCs frequently find themselves playing against NPC adventurers, all from the same party. The two parties are equally powerful and, since the contests are strictly nonlethal, the GM can play to win. PCs or NPCs watching an event might place bets, help their friends with a little magic, form cheering sections, etc. The NPCs are as diverse, creative, and unpredictable as any group of PCs, so anything is possible.

Action: The fair ends when a small army of smelly humanoids throw off their monk disguises and begin to loot and burn. They probably take a few hostages, just to keep things interesting. Defeating them requires the combined forces of the PCs, the NPC adventurers, and any other interesting NPCs that you want to include.

Fredrich Passow

Medieval Mobsters

Lights: The party is in a tavern.

Camera: A city guard enters the tavern and sits nonchalantly. The bartender announces that there has been some sort of special occasion and that "drinks are on the house". Suddenly, the bartender is killed by a mysterious poison dart. It came from somewhere in the bar, but where?

The guard at the table seems panicky. He looks around the bar, then runs out. If any characters from the party give chase, the guard will run for his life. If caught, he pleads over and over again that he didn't kill anyone.

Action: A renegade city guard has been forcing the bar owner/bartender to pay "protection" money. In response, the owner has hired a private investigator to keep an eye on things, by posing as a customer. He's sitting in the corner, far behind the party, nibbling a stalk of celery.

The arrangement: when the bartender sees the

renegade guard enter, he says the code phrase: "Drinks are on the house" to alert the investigator, but the P.I. is not really a P.I. He is, in fact, a leading crime-boss for the group that runs the protection racket in this town. He's been watching the renegade guard anyway, because the guard quit the group, and now seems to be muscling in on its turf. He shot the poison dart (through his cleverly disguised blowgun) to kill the barkeep, to scare the guard out of the business, and possibly frame him for the murder.

Alex Strang

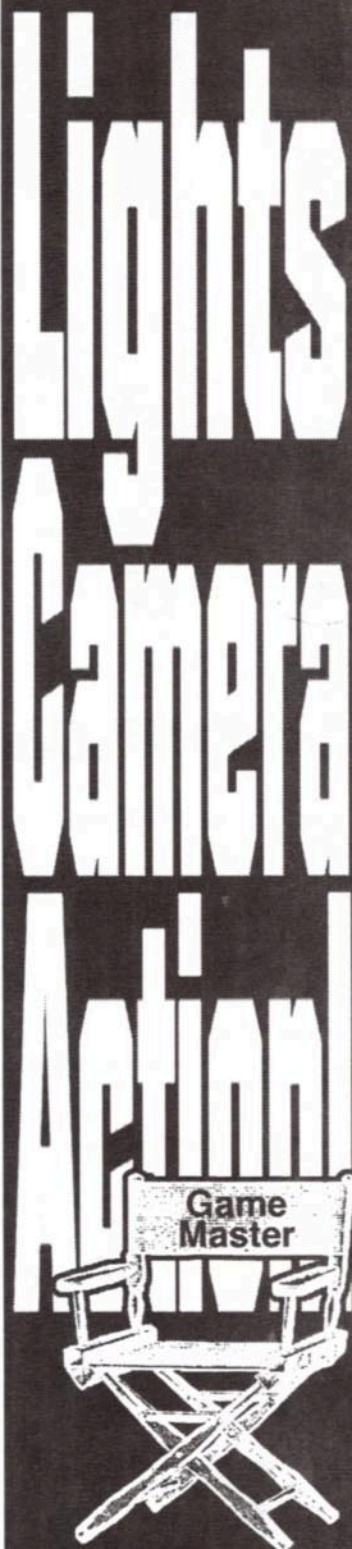
All That Glitters...

Lights: This scenario is set up for a fantasy setting, but can easily be adapted for use in other settings. The PCs somehow come into possession of an obviously magical item. It should resemble "common" special items like wands or rings. Any spells or items that detect magic items will tag the item as magical. None of the PCs can identify it, even by magical means, so they have to visit a mage or magically gifted shopkeeper.

Camera: The PCs either have never visited this person before, or have not hired him/her often, but he/she charges them a fair price to identify it. When the owner of the item tries to use it, however, it doesn't work as expected. (It's best if this can happen during a fierce battle.) The owner of the item can ask other mages to identify it, but none of them will be able to help. When the PCs return to the mage, he/she discovers a rune or other feature that he/she missed before, and identifies it as a different item for a higher price. The item, again, will fail to function. The PCs will need to return to the mage, who discovers a new feature each time they return (as well as charging increasingly higher prices).

Action: The object has been masked by the mage by a spell of his/her creation. The item may be mundane but fashioned to resemble a magic item, or it may be magical but its powers were suppressed by the spell. The mage may be hoping the PCs will give him/her the item in disgust, so he/she can run the scam again. Alternatively, he/she may admit to the scheme if "coerced" and offer the group the real, unadulterated item (which is quite useful) if they go on a quest or perform some service for the mage.

Harold Tessmann III



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The Divine Sibyls

Apollo's Ancient Oracles and How To Use Them In Role-playing

Prophecy is the ability to see divinely inspired visions of future events. It was widely believed that prophets in the ancient world could foretell the outcomes of important events, such as wars and impending disasters. Many religions had temples dedicated to the Gods where prophets called oracles could be consulted; these oracles would go into ecstatic trances and the deities' voice would speak through them. The ecstatic state could be induced by drinking the blood of a sacrificial animal, ingesting herbs, inhaling the smoke of a sacred wood, or one of many other ways, depending upon the particular religion.

The Greek god Apollo, as well as being the god of the sun, was also the god of prophecy and divination. He had many shrines where people came to consult him via his prophets — the Sibyls. The Sibyls were priestesses, usually middle-aged women, who resided in caves, which were said to be the seat or throne of Apollo. The tradition of the Sibyls is believed to have arisen in western Asia, where verses by prophets known as Sibyllai were well known. The original name "Sibyl" may have referred to an oracle who lived near Troy and gave prophecies in the form of riddles, but eventually it was used as a general term and given to a number of different women. There were at least ten of these divine Sibyls spread throughout the Mediterranean, in locations such as Egypt, Libya, Persia and Tibur (Tivoli, Italy).

The prophecies of the Sibyls were treated with great importance and they were consulted on many matters by heads of state. Their exploits appear as historical circumstance and also as mythology.

The Song of Cumae

One of the most famous Sibyls was the Sibyl of Cumae, who lived in a cave underneath the

Temple of Apollo at Cumae near Naples, Greece. The Sibyl's cave (or *dromos*) was essentially a long gallery which ended in a small room. Beyond that lay a chamber where the Sibyl would sit on her throne and proclaim her oracles. The gallery contained numerous shafts to let beams of light in; these shafts also caused numerous echoes in the cave. The Sibyl would chew on laurel leaves (sacred to Apollo) and be fumigated by the smoke of the burning leaves to reach her ecstatic state.

There is a story of a particular Sibyl who was loved by Apollo. The god offered her anything, and she asked him to let her live as long as there were grains in a handful of sand. He obliged — but she forgot to also ask for eternal youth. She grew progressively older and more withered until she had hardly any form at all. Finally she was shut in a bottle which was hung at the shrine and would only answer "I want to die" to any question put to her.

Another version of the legend states that she was granted eternal life on the condition that she never see her native soil again. She moved to Cumae to become the Sibyl, but was sent a letter from her homeland sealed with clay. The sight of the clay violated the terms of the agreement and she died.

A Sibyl was also said to have lead the Trojan hero Aeneas to the entrance of the Underworld so he could seek the advice of his father's ghost. She told him to take the Golden Bough, a name for mistletoe, to ensure his safe passage through the underworld.

The Delphic Pythia

A particularly famous Sibyl resided at the Temple of Apollo, built in the 6th century BC beneath the cliffs of Mount Parnassus at the holy site of Delphi. Legend had it that Apollo had slain

Written and
illustrated by
**Tonia
Walden**

the huge Python of Mount Parnassus and the Temple was built over the serpent's lair in honor of the god. Snakes were symbols of wisdom, and it may be for this reason that Apollo bestowed the gift of prophecy on a priestess, the Pythia (Pythoness), who took up residence at Delphi as the oracle. This area may have originally been sacred to a female deity, and was taken over by the followers of Apollo.

The temple at Delphi was originally a hole in the ground through which volcanic vapors passed, vapors which presumably had some sort of intoxicating effect. In the grip of delirium people were said to speak prophecies. But sometimes the mania overtook them, and they leapt into the volcanic hole — lost forever.

Eventually, the priests (who could see the benefits of having a permanent prophet installed there) instigated a more civilized procedure. A Pythia was chosen who had to be pure and had to agree to inhale the "sacred breath" (or *pneuma*) willingly. The priestess, seated alone in a forbidden area of the temple, would breathe in the vapors. She would fall into a trance, and utter phrases and moans in a prophetic delirium. People who came to visit her never saw her face and only heard her disembodied voice echoing through the cavern. The words she uttered were often cryptic and obscure, so the priests

would copy down everything she said and interpret her utterances by turning them into verses.

The Pythia was apparently quite popular, and visitors had to draw lots to consult her. A fee was also charged to anyone who wished to speak with her. Petitioners often made prior offerings to Apollo to ensure they would receive a favorable response from the oracle.

The Sibylline Books

Many of the Sibylline prophecies were written by priests onto palm leaves (although some Sibyls were said to only give their predictions orally). The transcriptions of these sacred words eventually became books of prophecy or Sibylline books. Most of the Sibyls in the Mediterranean area produced such books at one time or another. The

books were considered very valuable because they could be taken away and consulted when there was no way of seeing the Sibyl directly. A certain set of these books also became important during the introduction of Greek religion to the Romans.

In Rome, only priests and magistrates could interpret the sacred laws and disclose the will of the gods. Consulting the Sibylline books — which had been brought to Rome and became important in the state's political and religious functions — were a method of doing this.

The story goes that Amalthea, the Sibyl of Cumae, offered a collection of prophetic books to Tarquinius (the last king of Rome) for the exorbitant price of 300 gold pieces. He refused, and she burnt three of the nine books. Twelve months later, she offered him the remaining six books without changing the price. Once again he refused, and she burnt another three. This panicked him into buying the last three at the original asking price.

These Sibylline books were kept at Rome in the temple of the Capitol, and were looked after by fifteen special priests. The books described how the Romans could gain the favors of foreign gods (Greeks and Orientals) through special sacrifices and rituals. The Roman senate instructed people to consult the books in times of crisis such as war and invasion. In addition, temples to gods were erected and new holy days were proclaimed on the books' advice. The temples to the Greek gods Demeter, Dionysus and Kore were constructed in an attempt to gain divine aid to alleviate a famine in 496 BC. The Sibylline Books were destroyed by fire in 83 BC.

The Sibyl as a NPC

These examples should give GMs enough background ideas to create a similar sort of prophet for their own campaign settings. They could stick with the original setting of ancient Rome or Greece, but with a bit of adjustment to local gods and customs, the Sibyl could be transported to a fantasy setting. GMs should consider the influence that the Sibyl's religion has in their campaign setting, which could lead to several strong story ideas.

For example, if the Sibyl's religion is only one of the many established forms of worship, the introduction of a divine prophet may be a means of gaining more converts, offerings and power. However, if the Sibyl's religion is already the dominant religion, her prophecies could be very influential. If it is a only a newly introduced religion, it could meet resistance and even persecution from already established religions. A Sibyl could very easily be labeled a witch.... A mystic religion that bases its actions around the utterances of a Sibyl-like figure could also exist in a present-day setting (where they would most likely be viewed with suspicion as a "crank cult"), or in futuristic settings, where they may be the basis of a religion on



A Prophetic NPC

another planet or even a religious dictatorship.

Another factor the GM could consider is whether the priests interpreting the Sibyl's words are acting in good faith. The Sibyl was a source of influence and power for the church over the State and it would be easy for the priests to manipulate the Oracle to suit their own purposes. The Sibyl could request valuable offerings, temples and more priests for the church. The word of the Sibyl — interpreted through the wrong priest — could influence leaders' decisions to declare war, or condemn certain groups of people as "enemies of the state". If the priestess is sincere and not a fake, she may realize her words are being twisted and may seek aid to rectify the corruption that is occurring: enter the PCs.

The Sibyl could be encountered by chance in a mysterious cave, during a deliberate consultation, or even as an attempt to procure a book of Sibylline prophecies. The Sibyl need not necessarily have an entourage of priests with her, and could act as an lone individual if need be. In whatever situation the characters meet her, the encounter should be eerie, with the Sibyl's unnatural voice echoing through a dark cavern, speaking of the future in cryptic verses.

Story Ideas

Family Feud

A new Oracle has been chosen from the ranks of the priestesses and she must travel to the temple where she will take up residence. Church guards are to escort her on the long journey to the temple, but halfway there they are attacked and killed by bandits. The priestess is not found and since no ransom demands have been made, she is presumed dead. The party has been asked to investigate on behalf of the Temple or the priestess' family.

The priestess was actually attacked by the soldiers of a prestigious family, who made it look like a bandit attack. Their daughter was also among those in line to take up the position of Oracle and by dispatching her rival, they hoped she would be elevated to the prestigious rank of Oracle (which has many accompanying social and financial benefits).

When their soldiers attacked the church guards, the priestess went into a trance and started speaking in tongues. This scared the men and they refused to kill her, believing they may suffer retribution from her God. They have hidden her and the party must discover the plot and rescue her.

Cassandra

The Gods may give the gift of prophecy but they were also quick to curse those who offended them. For example, Cassandra was a prophet who was blessed with the power of true prophecy, but because she spurned Apollo, he cursed her. Her

predictions, though accurate, would never be believed by those who heard them.

The party could meet a Cassandra-like figure who is being laughed out of town for being a crank (or worse, chased out of town for being a witch). She has been trying to warn the townsfolk that the neighboring country is going to launch an invasion force, but no one will believe her. One of the party seems immune to the curse and believes her — can they convince someone in a position of power to take the prophecy seriously and stop the invasion?

Another version of this type of prophet could be a young girl who is accused of witchcraft. She tried to tell a local merchant not to take a sea voyage because she saw his death in a dream. He ignored her and was lost at sea. This is not the first time she has foreseen a local's death and she also has the uncanny ability to predict storms. The villagers think she must be to blame for the merchant's death by witchcraft, otherwise how could she have known? If the party comes to her aid, they will discover she has a gift for prophecy and they could help her find another seer to help her develop her Sibyl-like talents.

The Lost Books

The Sibylline books could be considered a valuable commodity in any age, either as a rare antiquity or as a magical manuscript. The original books might not have been destroyed by the Sibyl (who instead burnt fake copies to trick the king into paying the high price). The six "lost books" were kept by a special cult of priests who have preserved them with special techniques of science or magic. This cult could have survived many hundreds of years and are thoroughly dedicated to ensuring the survival of the books.

Perhaps someone has heard of rumors of the books' existence or a fragment of writing at an archaeological site may suggest that they still exist. A museum or collector may hire the party to find the books for their historical value, or a magician or occult aficionado could want them for the prophecies and rituals they contain. Conversely, a head of state may be mentioned detrimentally in the books (causing the nation's downfall, etc) and may want them found and destroyed.

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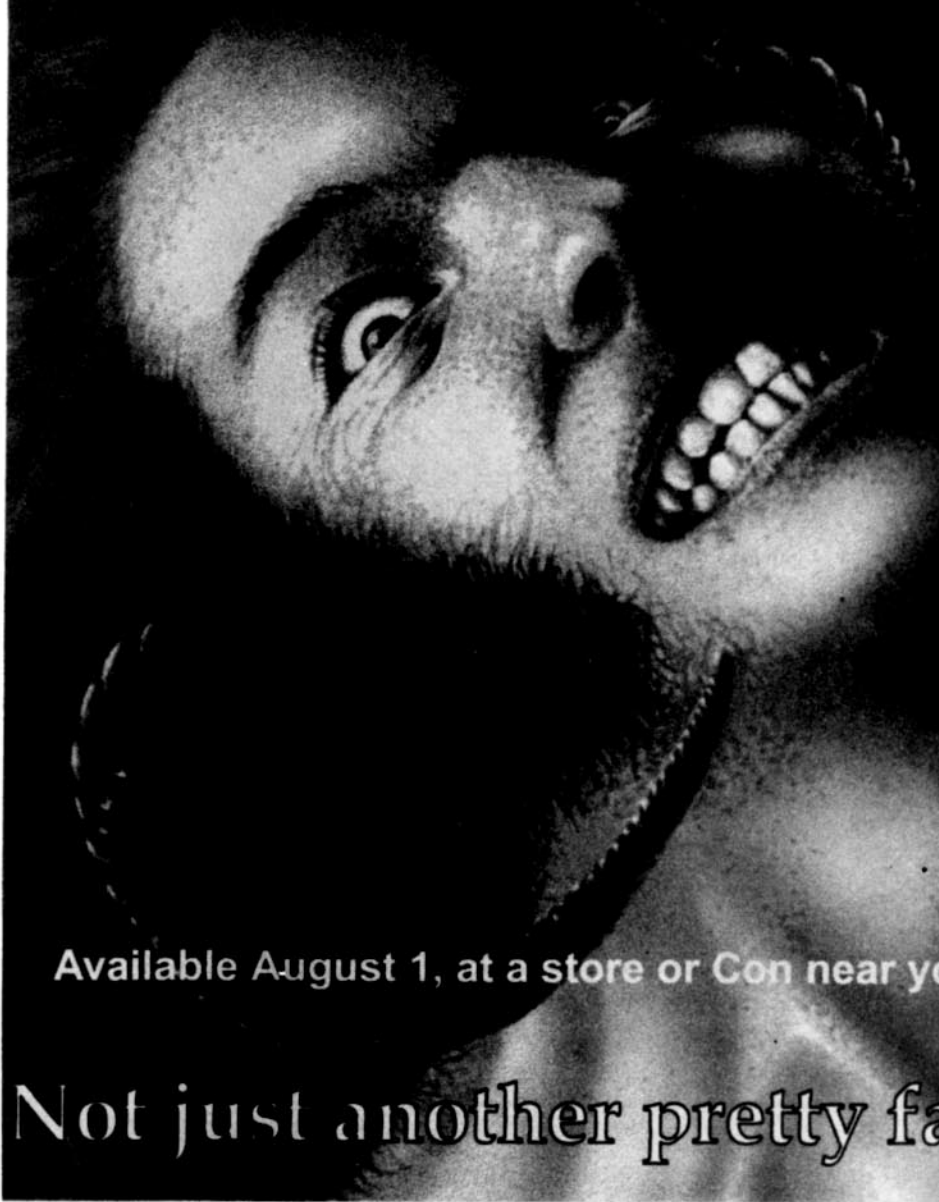
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OF GODS AND MEN

Centuries have passed since the Gods departed.
The realms are at the brink of chaos and war.
Out of this decaying peace a new hope is born.

Some with the power of Gods now walk the realms.
But out of the many, only a few may ascend.
Only the greatest will become part of the story.



Art by Chris Arneson

Available August 1, at a store or Con near you.

Not just another pretty face





THE EDGE

NEWS, REVIEWS, AND MORE...

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NAVIGATING THE EDGE



Check it out!



Matt Staroscik was
here.



Pay attention, there
may be a quiz.



John Wick was
here.

THIS AND THAT



"You must chill! You must chill!"
— John Cusack, *Say Anything...*

There is a trend in our industry that a lot of gamers are unwilling to talk about. Most people outside the industry who have heard of RPGs tend to see gamers in a fairly negative and stereotypical light: unwashed, lacking in social skills, obsessed to the point of mania with the games — you know the image. The perceived "dorkness" of RPG fans has been a constant part of role-playing's image, and yet is often cast aside or brushed under the rug. Gamers tend to immediately bristle at the mention of "RPG dorks" and most role-players resent the judgmental opinions of those who have never touched an RPG. In that way, gaming is not unlike computer programming or *Star Trek*, two other hobbies/careers/pastimes that suffer under the distorted perceptions of others.

But to simply dismiss the stereotype out of hand, as many gamers do, ignores a nagging problem that the industry has always had. Like any hobby, there are people who take gaming too seriously, and the impressions they leave do a lot of harm to an otherwise wonderful pastime.

The worst aspects of it tend to surface as a sort of ultra-competitiveness. You can find symptoms of it quietly hovering beneath the edges of the hobby. Everybody's had the nightmarish experience of encountering a fellow gamer who's got a 400th level paladin, and wants to compare him point by point to everyone else's character. Conventions abound with chest-beating trash-talkers that make Deion Sanders look like Emily Post. At GenCon, I passed a twelve-year-old on a crying jag because someone twice his age felt the need to utterly crush him during a *Magic* tournament. Like it or not, this sort of thing is part and parcel of the gaming industry. To deny that is to deny plain fact, and ignores a root cause of its bad image among non-gamers.

So where does this sort of thing start, and what can we do to stop it? Here is where people start getting into trouble. For many, the answer is simply "Well, games attract people like that," or "Gamers never have a grip on the real world." Such explanations are not only untrue, they're dangerously stereotyping, and the vast majority of gamers suffer because of it. For me, the cause lies in the different ways people approach gaming, and what they each hope to gain from the experience.

Gaming is, by its very nature, competitive.

Role-playing, while ostensibly "cooperative", grew out of wargaming, and thus has always had combat (and the "win/loss" stigma that combat implies) as an integral part of the experience. Computer games thrive upon player improvement and on "pushing the envelope" further than before. And anyone who thinks CCGs aren't competitive has spent too much time amongst the Amish.

In this aspect, gaming is much like professional sports. With the right attitude and a healthy sense of perspective, it makes gaming a lot of fun: it allows people to blow off steam and spend a few fun-filled hours with people whose company they enjoy. On the other hand, if left unchecked, it can develop into something nasty. People with low self-esteem and/or a need to prove themselves to others can use gaming to boost themselves up at the expense of others. And gaming, unlike professional sports, doesn't require a lot of practice and devotion to become heavily involved in.

The solution to this problem lies in the way individuals approach gaming, and as such, depend upon individuals to change their way of thinking. We need to remember sometimes why people play games in the first place, and what presumably attracted all of us to gaming in the first place — it *looked like fun*. Role-playing, card gaming and computer games always had the enjoyment of those who played them at heart. And we can all keep that in mind, we can do a lot to eliminate the negative stereotypes plaguing the hobby we love so much.

Bob Vance

CONTEST UPDATE!
WE FINALLY HAVE A WINNER FOR OUR "DUNGEON CRAWL" CONTEST PUBLISHED LO THESE MANY MONTHS AGO. HAROLD TESSMANN OF DEARBORN HEIGHTS, MI, CORRECTLY IDENTIFIED THE GALLOWS, PENTAGRAM, AND STABLE AS THE THREE FALSE ICONS. CONGRATULATIONS HAROLD; YOUR BOX OF GOODIES IS ON ITS WAY! AND THANKS TO ALL THE READERS WHO SENT IN THEIR GUESSES.

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BY LESTER SMITH

WEASEL GAMES #7

ORIGINALLY APPEARING IN *POLYHEDRON* MAGAZINE, "WEASEL GAMES" HAS NOW FOUND ITS WAY TO THE PAGES OF *SHADIS*. THIS IS THE LAST OF THREE INSTALLMENTS TO DEAL WITH WEASELS IN ROLE-PLAYING. LESTER SMITH IS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE DESIGNER OF TSR'S MONUMENTAL HIT, *DRAGON DICE*.

TROUBLING FRIENDS

Sure, Hollywood gives Oscars for best supporting actor. But everybody knows that the starring role is where it's really at. And when was the last time you found a secondary character in a novel more memorable than the protagonist or chief villain? We naturally identify with primary characters, so practiced authors make them the most vivid. In part, this fixation on stars is just the way we are hard-wired: we each play the lead role in our own life's saga, so it's only natural for our player characters to each want the spotlight when we role-play.

But in role-playing sessions, PCs are almost always called upon to function as a team — at least if they want to survive. Fortunately, we can have the best of both worlds, if we are careful. We can play cooperatively, while still allowing a bit of the self-glorifying weasel in our characters. The trick is knowing how much is enough, and how much is too much.

Here's a tip: if you're playing a weasel and you're the

only one having fun, it's too much. All too often, inexperienced or selfish players get their jollies from wreaking havoc with a campaign, and all they accomplish is to make themselves a pariah.

It's a special temptation for thief characters, who frequently feel the need to put one over on those cocky fighters and self-important mages by lifting some item from them. As discussed in last month's column, that sort of action is potentially destructive, because players of the victims are likely to feel personally violated. But if the resulting conflict is role-played seriously, it can add depth to a campaign, facing the PCs with a choice between breaking up or apologizing and forgiving, thereby forging deeper bonds of friendship.

Of course, while it is natural for thieves to bring conflict to a party, there is nothing preventing other characters from generating their own dramatic tension.

I am reminded, for example, of a merchant's son that one of my best friends played in an old *The Fantasy Trip* campaign. My buddy Jim put a lot



of background thought into the character from the beginning. He had decided that Markus was the son of a merchant from across the sea, and just before the campaign's start, he had been sent on his first trade voyage in command of one of his father's ships, but the crew had mutinied and stolen cargo, ship, and all, leaving the young man adrift in a dinghy. Now his major goals in life were to earn enough money to make up for the cargo he had lost and, if possible, to find and punish his wayward crew.

That history lent the character a lot of personality. But it didn't stop there. Once the campaign started, Jim decided that his character had a distinct dislike for mine. I was playing Jaston Mikelson, a stolid, unimaginative warrior whose sense of duty had earned him a captaincy in the city guard, but who wasn't bright enough to go any higher. Jim didn't tell me that Markus despised Jaston; only the GM was in on the secret.

War boomerangs are powerful arms in TFT, especially when used by someone possessing the Missile Weapons talent, as Jim's merchant did. But Jim is legendary for his poor luck when rolling dice.* Frequently then, when Jaston was involved in combat with an enemy — typically outnumbered, because he had a tendency to rush in without thinking — a boomerang would come flying past him unexpectedly and strike his foe. Time after time after combat Jaston would pat his

merchant friend on the back and praise him soundly for his help.

It wasn't until the campaign's end, when our party members were all being rewarded by some great

king for all the good they had done that I learned that Markus had been trying all along to hit my character and had simply failed his roll each time, accidentally striking Jaston's foes instead. As my guardsman solemnly accepted his reward from the king, I noticed Jim becoming increasingly agitated, and when Markus's turn to be lauded came, he laid his head on the table and sobbed in character, "I've been trying to kill you the whole time, but you just wouldn't die!"

I was stunned at the revelation, the moreso given that I was very much into the mindset of my rather thick-witted PC. But also, keeping in character, I rested a hand on Jim's shoulder, saying as fervently solemnly as possible, "Now that you see the error of your ways, how can I do anything but forgive you?"

For me, it was the the best way to rub it in.

Sure, a lot of the reason the campaign is memorable to me is the comical nature of Markus's failed attempts at treason. But in the process, he character became unforgettable. He stands out in my memory as an individual personality, and to be honest, he is probably the only reason I remember my own character Jaston, an otherwise completely forgettable figure.

What made the conflict work, of course, was the depth of friendship between Jim and me. Even though his character had been attempting to betray mine, I remained confident of Jim's amity toward me. And it was his confidence of my affection toward him that made him feel free to take a chance with the characters. The end result was an intensely gratifying role-playing experience. I highly recommend such treachery between true friends.

* Once, in another campaign, when our group had infiltrated a villain's fortress by hiring on as guards, Jim's PC and another had worked out a wonderful plan to get through a guarded door. Jim had been assigned to guard the door with an NPC, and he stood polishing his sword so that it would be right at hand when his companion showed up to help take out the NPC guard. The other PC came wandering by, pretending to be drunk, and when the NPC stepped forward to challenge him, Jim's character struck at the poor guard from behind. But in a once-in-a-lifetime series of worst-possible die rolls, he not only missed the guy, he hit his fellow PC instead...for maximum damage...and broke his sword off in his buddy's ribs...thereby killing his compatriot and disarming himself all at once!

WARBENDING

THE NEW STUFF

INDUSTRY
NEWS AND
RELEASE
DATES FROM
THE SHADIS
STAFF

EXPLORING (AHEAD) NEW FRONTIERS WITH XXXENOPHILE

XXXenophile is a new and decidedly different sort of CCG from cartoon legend Phil Foglio. Based on the adult comic book of the same name, XXXenophile plays as a combination CCG parody/X-rated brainstorming session; players arrange a series of cards ranging from the erotic to the truly bizarre in differing positions on the table in an attempt to "pop" them and score points. The first player to reach one hundred points wins the game. 270 cards comprise a full set of XXXenophile, but they're all rare, so there's no collation problems. Starter decks run for \$9.95, Boosters for \$2.25. A website has been set up at www.xxxenophile.com, containing FAQs and other material concerning the game. It's available now at fine, family-oriented game stores near you.

And no, it's not for kids.

ATLAS GOES OVER THE EDGE A SECOND TIME

Atlas Games has announced the release of a second edition of the *Over the Edge* RPG, penned by Atlas perennials Jonathon Tweet and Robin D. Laws. The cult-classic game of bizarre conspiracies and decadent obsessions has undergone a revision, changing the combat rules and revamping the layout. Scheduled for release this September, the 240 page rulebook will retail for \$25.00.

FENG SHUI: THE HITS JUST KEEP ON COMING

Daedalus Games has hardly been sitting on its keester when it comes to their *Feng Shui* RPG line. With two products already on the market, plans are afoot for two more before the end of the year. *Back for Seconds*, a book on enemies and allies, and *Thorns of the Lotus*, the sourcebook on the hideous Lotus-Eaters, are both due by the end of the year. Each book promises to deliver new spells, schticks and character types, as well as more history and background information on the world of *Shadowfist*. Let it never be said that these boys don't support their product lines.

NOVEMBER OR BUST FOR IN NOMINE

"It goes in November or somebody dies." So promises Steve Jackson Games about their much-delayed, highly anticipated *Good vs. Evil* RPG, *In Nomine*. "We now have the manuscript in shape and the team in place to finish the project off," says managing editor Scott Haring. Besides the nature of the role-playing universe (players portray angels and devils battling for the fate of mankind), very little is being said about *In Nomine*'s system. It will definitely not be part of the GURPS system, although GURPS conversion rules will be included. This makes it the first "new" RPG release from Steve Jackson since *TOON* came out 12 years ago.

REBIRTH OF SCAPEGOAT

For those of you wondering what happened to *The End*, have no fear. After a series of unforeseen delays, Scapegoat Games is up and running again, and promises a big relaunch of its product line soon. Its RPG *The End* will be given an expansion and make-over for its re-release early next year, followed quickly by a series of supporting supplements. For *The End*, it seems, things are really just beginning.

NEW EDITION OF CHILL MARKS MAYFAIR'S RETURN TO RPGS

After several years spent focusing on board and collectible card games, Mayfair has announced its return to the role-playing industry with a new version of the classic *Chill* RPG. The company cites "increased interest in *Chill* generated by the Mayfair Website," coupled by fan mail and fan websites, as the principal reason behind the move. Like many RPGs these days, the new *Chill* will revolve around a continuing story arc, involving the resurrection of *SAVE* and its continuing efforts to battle the unknown. A secretive, "final climax" of the story arc is promised several years down the road, with hints and clues to be planted among the RPG supplements, websites, and newsletters. *Chill* fans stay tuned.

A NEW AGENDA FOR NETRUNNER

Proteus, the first expansion set for *WotC's Netrunner CCG*, is scheduled for release sometime this fall. A forgotten card fort left over from a war between two rival corporations is rediscovered, and its disturbance creates an unprecedented level of power. *Proteus* contains 150 new cards, available in 15 card Boosters of mixed Corporation and Runner cards, at a suggested retail price of \$2.95 apiece.

THE EMPEROR'S NEW DOS

Holistic Design Inc. has announced a change in the company producing its *Emperor of the Fading Suns* computer game, from Gametek to Segasoft. "Segasoft is a very good match for us," Holistic Design President Andrew Greenberg said. "It has more than enough talent to help us make this an exceptional game."

Emperor of the Fading Suns is based upon HDI's *Fading Suns* RPG, and will be available this Christmas. It is designed to run with Windows '95 and DOS. The lead developer, Ed Pike, has also worked on Microprose's *Machiavelli*, the *Prince* and New World Computing's *Hammer of the Gods*.

THE X-FILES FINALLY HITS CCGS

NXT Games has announced the release of *The X-Files* CCG, based on the monster hit television show. Players will each direct a team of FBI agents trying to solve an enigmatic "X-File" case, using a variety of different cards to aid your endeavor. The object is to identify your opponents' X-File, while keeping yours from being discovered. The set contains 354 cards containing images from the first three seasons of the TV show. Starter Decks (60 cards apiece) will retail for \$9.50 each, while 15 card Booster Packs will go for \$2.99 each.

A FIRESTORM SWEEPS CYBERPUNK 2020

R. Talsorian's venerable *Cyberpunk* RPG is the latest system to introduce an earth-shattering "event" into its milieu. *Firestorm*, a two-book compendium due for release this fall and winter, details an apocalyptic scenario for the Dark Future that promises to "change everything" in anticipation of the release of the 3rd edition rulebook sometime next year. Two companies bidding on a third touch off *The Fourth Corporate War*, a Darwinian struggle between the Powers-That-Be that could destroy the world.

The first sourcebook, *Stormfront*, is due for release in October and will retail for \$18.00. It focuses on the early stages of the war, and provides information on the people, places, and events involved in the conflict. It also provides rules for underwater technologies and warfare, as well as an outline of the covert "sniping" that takes place when *Cyberpunk* companies decide to have at it. The second sourcebook, *Shockwave*, is due in February, and will presumably detail the climactic events of the conflict. Details on *Shockwave* are sketchy, but R. Talsorian promises that some fundamental changes will take place before the release of the big third edition sometime late next year. Like so many games these days, *Cyberpunk* looks to shake its product line up considerably in the next few months. Brace yourselves.

EVEN
MORE
NEWS

INTERPLAY GAMES ANNOUNCES 360 DEGREE AD&D ACTION GAME

Interplay Production has announced a huge line-up of AD&D-based computer games this year, including the first ever to use the *Descent*™ 3D engine. *Forgotten Realms: Descent into Undermountain* will run on the same 3D engine from Parallax Software that made the original *Descent* a tremendous hit. "This is the first game that combines action with RPG character development aspects," said Interplay AD&D division director Feargus Urquhart. "We're very proud of it." *Descent into Undermountain* will present characters and situations key to the game's *Forgotten Realms* setting, as well as including multi-player support and split screen play/map viewing. It will be available for MS-DOS and Windows '95 based PCs this October.

In addition to *Undermountain*, Interplay is releasing two more AD&D-based games, *Blood and Magic* and *Dragon Dice*. *Dragon Dice* is based, of course, upon the successful dice game of the same name. All 112 dice from the original game will be available in the computer, and in addition players will have "free rein to create their own worlds, characters and armies," according to Interplay. It will be available for MS-DOS and Windows '95 and is scheduled for release in early 1997. *Blood and Magic* is another *Forgotten Realms* game, and like *Undermountain*, will utilize specific characters from that setting. Players must utilize 28 different figures from the history of the *Forgotten Realms* in order to advance their armies through their opponents and capture the enemy's homeland. Touted as "the first original AD&D computer game to be released in over a year and a half," *Blood and Magic* will be available for MS-DOS, Windows '95, MacPlay for PowerMac and all compatible systems. It is scheduled for release this December.

NEWS

IN THE TRENCHES

LESSON SIX: YOU WILL NEVER FIND A MORE WRETCHED HIVE OF SCUM AND VILLAINY

BY BRYAN WINTER
(DOOMTROOP@AOL.COM)

IN THE TRENCHES IS A MONTHLY ARTICLE DEDICATED TO THE GAME RETAILER. EACH MONTH WE WILL PROVIDE READERS WITH METHODS TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, STORE APPEARANCE, SALES TECHNIQUES, AND PROFITS! BRYAN WINTER IS THE DESIGNER OF THE DOOMTROOPER AND KULT CARD GAMES, AMONG OTHER PRODUCTS, AND HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN GAMING FOR ALMOST 20 YEARS. HIS OPINIONS ABOUT RETAILING AND THE CURRENT GAME MARKET ARE HIS ALONE, AND NOT THOSE OF SHADIS MAGAZINE OR ITS PROPRIETORS.

Well, it's the post-Gen Con issue of SHADIS, so I'm going to devote this month's offering to gamer Nirvana, and the most important trade show of the year. Don't let the folks at GAMA fool you. Gen Con is the place to be. This is the show that every manufacturer attends, and they all wait for this show to unveil their big plans and new goodies. Sure, there are tons of consumers getting between you and Those In The Know, but for every major game company with a busy booth, there are 10 lesser companies and a host of upstarts, and usually you can find some real gems to take back home if you do a little hunting.

Except this year. And you have no one to blame but yourselves.

This year, the gems were *everywhere*, lying around waiting to be picked up. Why? Because most companies — big and small — were showing "new" role-playing, board and miniature game products that many gamers saw for the first time. Why? Because retailers and distributors never showcased these "new" products in their stores and ordering books. Why? Because they were so busy this year worrying about card games.

Most of those "new" products had been released months ago.

Hey, it's understandable. You have to pay attention to the big movers. But that is no excuse to completely ignore profits. I realize I'm starting to sound like a Ferengi here, but that's how every retailer should think. Always look for the big bucks.

On the other hand, the game companies themselves had one of their best years ever.

Yes, it's true. The fact is that many game companies sold more products on *Thursday* (historically the worst sales day) than last year's *Sunday* (historically one of the best sales days). Think about that. Consumers were *hungry* for new products. I spent a lot of time talking with

manufacturers (which I always like to do) and the number one sentence almost all of them heard this year was, "Hey! I didn't know this was out!" Typically, this was followed by a rolling of the eyes from the other side of the display table and the frustrated response, "Yep, it's been out for months."

This was even more disappointing (from the point of view of a "retail analyst") because there really wasn't that much to get excited about at Gen Con this year. Sure, there were some good things. A company called Pinnacle Entertainment had a cool new game called *Deadlands*. Atlas Games had one of the best stand-alone card games to come down the pike in years with *Lunch Money*. But mostly it was "more of the same". That didn't stop manufacturers from moving a ton of product. Perhaps there is a lesson to be learned.

Maybe the real lesson of Gen Con this year was that when it comes to a game, the size of the ad campaign doesn't matter, nor does the clout of the parent company, or even the name under the cover art. What does count is the basic law of supply and demand. But this time, I'm going to give that law a twist. Usually, you wait for demand, and then you supply it. When it comes to games, you can't have demand until you *first* supply. Most games don't have ad campaigns. Your customers won't buy what they simply don't know about.

Game companies (well, most of them) really don't want to sell directly to consumers. When a player buys a game directly from them, it means that player's store is not stocking their products. It also means that every player who sees an older product for the first time at Gen Con equates to dozens or hundreds more who won't see it at all. That is bad news, especially when the product is not that old. They don't want to sell directly. Lately, they have no choice.

This is especially true with the *real* money-makers — game supplements. Adventures and supplements to existing RPGs are enormous profit-makers. They are easy to sell; you usually already know who will buy them. But only if you supply them.

☐ Earthdawn

☐ Cybergeneration

☐ Call of Cthulhu

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PICTURES FROM THIS YEAR'S GEN CON GAMING FAIR

BOOTH RUNNERS AT HOLISTIC DESIGN QUIETLY DISCUSS WHETHER THEIR LOGO CAN BE USED FOR AN IMPROMPTU WHEEL OF FORTUNE GAME



THUNDERING HERDS OF GAMERS STRETCH OFF INTO THE SUNSET. TOTAL NUMBER? NO MAN CAN SAY. (BUT 35,000 SEEMS TO BE THE ACCEPTABLE GUESS.)



THE GOOD PEOPLE AT PINNACLE GAMES GRIMACE AND SQUIRM AS THEY ARE FORCED TO ENDURE THE INCREASINGLY RIDICULOUS DEMANDS OF OUR PHOTOGRAPHER. (SAID PHOTOGRAPHER WAS SHOT DEAD BY A MYSTERIOUS GUNMAN SEVERAL SECONDS AFTER THIS PICTURE WAS SNAPPED).



THE NXT GAMES BOOTH IS STRANGELY SILENT AFTER A GOVERNMENT RAID "IN THE INTERESTS OF NATIONAL SECURITY" CONFISCATES EVERY COPY OF THE NEW X-FILES CCG.



THAT'S FIT TO PRINT

"NO, NO I COULDN'T
POSSIBLY ACCEPT...
WELL, OKAY."

TSR DEMONSTRATES ITS
AWESOME SUPERNATURAL
POWERS BY SHRINKING GAMERS
TO THE SIZE OF DICE.

FANS CHEERFULLY PARTAKE IN A
BATTLETECH TOURNAMENT
UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYE OF
THE JADE FALCONS'
"ENTERTAINMENT DIRECTOR."

UNFAZED BY THEIR NEW CONDITION,
VICTIMS OF TSR'S AWESOME
SUPERNATURAL POWERS OCCUPY ONE OF
THE CON'S MANY MINIATURE CASTLES AND
BEGIN PLOTTING A BLOODY, HORRIBLE
REVENGE.

EDGE NUMBER SEVEN

OUR FEATURE PRODUCT THIS MONTH IS **VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE**, WHITE WOLF'S HORROR RPG THAT CAUSED A BIT OF A STIR WHEN IT HIT BACK IN 1991. SINCE THAT TIME, WHITE WOLF HAS GROWN TO BECOME ONE OF THE LARGEST COMPANIES IN THE INDUSTRY, WITH CARD GAMES, COMPUTER GAMES AND EVEN A SHORT-LIVED TELEVISION SHOW ON FOX TV. SO HOW GOOD IS THE GAME LYING AT THE HEART OF IT ALL? WE PUT THE QUESTION TO OUR RESIDENT ANGST BOY, ROB VALUX

A storytelling game of personal horror...the RPG that brought character and imagination back into the industry... a pretentious *angstklutch* for self-important goths... Pick a comment, any comment. They've all been used to describe *Vampire: the Masquerade* at one point or another. Whatever its faults or merits, you can't say it hasn't been a lightning rod for discussion. People have called it everything from the greatest RPG of all time to a work of pure unadulterated evil. Its honesty has been praised in the same breath that its arrogance is condemned. Its constant emphasis on role-playing contrasts to the breaking point with power gamers who can use it to create transcendently obscene godlings as PCs.

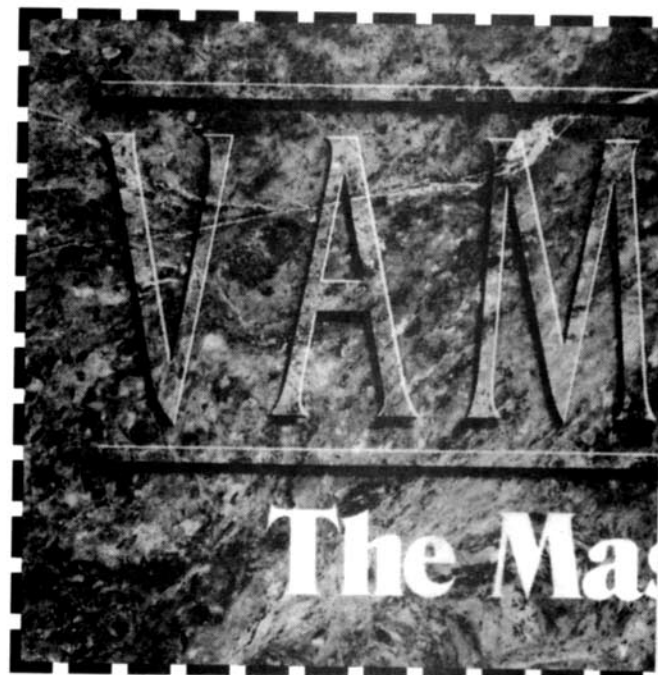
Needless to say, it's a bit of a minefield. And I didn't even mention the sex parts.

Much of the controversy, however, isn't based so much on *Vampire* itself as on the way it has been received. Its phenomenal success — and the way it turned the industry on its ear when first released in 1991 — has clouded its merits as a simple RPG. The struggling young company that produced it has become a publishing giant, and subsequent products they've released have been unable to duplicate the same ground-breaking power of the original, despite obvious efforts to the contrary. (It's very difficult to swallow claims of staying on the "cutting edge" from a company in bed with Aaron Spelling). Therefore, as time goes on, it becomes more and more difficult to remember just how great the game itself is.

Vampire's primary genius lies in its approach to horror, and the way it gets away from the "PC as Purina Monster Chow™" motif of other horror RPGs. The characters here aren't fearless vampire killers, or other "normal" humans battling against

the horrors of the night. Instead, they are themselves vampires, powerful members of a secret undead society hidden from prying eyes. Forced to survive on human blood, they must struggle with the horrifying truths of their condition while simultaneously weaving their way through the sinister Machiavellian plots of their fellow "Kindred."

This basic set-up produces an atmosphere unheard of in other RPGs. The characters are far more powerful than almost any human or group of humans they may encounter, yet they cannot hope to match the older and much more powerful vampires invariably occupying the same area. Combat is therefore eliminated, or at least deemphasized considerably. Instead, players must outthink their opponents if they want to get anything done, relying on verbal sparring, sharp observance, and sheer guts to meet their goals.



Character development and player interaction take center stage, and success is measured not by how many bodies pile up, but in how the PCs grow and change in response to their environment.

Then there's the much ballyhooed "inner demons" factor. As vampires, the players must hunt humans and drink their blood in order to survive. There is an inner "Beast" which subsists on that need and drives the characters to greater and greater acts of depravity as time goes on. The character must undergo a constant struggle with this Beast, feeding it enough to slake its desire, but

never letting it gain the upper hand. Commit too many depraved acts, and the Beast takes over forever; you become a raving monstrosity under control of the GM from then on.

The inner demons factor does facilitate the sort of pretentious gothic moaning that the game has become infamous for, and can reduce the fun-factor of a given session to the point of nil. But more importantly, it shifts the horror emphasis of the game from "what will this horrible monster do to my hapless PC?" to "what might I do to this hapless NPC?" The external threat is made internal, which again stresses character and individual action over simple slugfests. It also has the effect of preventing the more slaughter-oriented players from going completely off the deep end — which is critical in a game where PCs are so powerful. "Waxed the whole bar, did you? Well, sorry, you can't come down from that

godlings aside, it keeps the characters evenly balance while allowing for a great deal of variety and depth. Skill rolls are determined by the number of points you have in the appropriate attribute and/or skill, rolled against a difficulty number. The number of time you roll that number or higher, the more successful you'll be. Combat is fast and furious, although rarely fatal considering what the characters are, and the experience system is tied firmly to the game's overall theme of character and role-playing.

To be sure, much of *Vampire's* atmosphere has its origins elsewhere, and praising it on that merit alone is dangerous. There is a large chunk of other writers in there, particularly Anne Rice, whose *Interview With the Vampire* seems almost tailor-made for the game. *Interview's* success was the first widespread break from the model set by *Dracula*, and neatly encapsulates the "humanity within the monster" theme that *Vampire* thrives on. The game owes a large debt to Rice, and to other authors like her; calling its world and the themes it embodies a ground-breaking piece of genius is simply untrue, and performs a disservice to the writers on whom it so obviously draws.

Vampire's strength, however, lies not in its use of other material, but in the way it has created a viable gaming framework where that material can come to life. *Vampire* players quickly learn that being a monster is much more complicated than first appears, and that a high price must be paid for the tremendous powers and astounding abilities their characters can exercise. Can one maintain a sense of ethics while being forced to kill innocents? Can one transcend the gruesome necessities of vampirism and use its advantages for positive ends? It's quite difficult for a game to present such conflicts without becoming either overly complicated or too dependent upon GM whims. *Vampire* does it. And it does it in a way that is simple, effective, and very entertaining. If their ideas aren't always ground-breaking, the way they present them to us certainly is.

And in the end, that's more than enough for the product to earn its place in RPG history. After all the pretension, after all the gothic moaning, after all the bungled Aaron Spelling TV shows, there's still a great game lying at the heart of it all. A game that really has changed the industry, in many good and lasting ways. Whatever its faults, *Vampire: the Masquerade* has accomplished what few others have done, or even tried to do. In one flash, it pushed the envelope of role-playing in a new and enriching direction, and for that, we should all be thankful.



berserk rage, and the Prince has put a contract out on your head. Hand over your character sheet and kiss your undead butt good-bye..." Such advantages easily overwhelm the more theatrical downsides to its presence. And only the most nihilistic group of players will let its gloomy trappings overwhelm their campaign.

Vampire's system is another triumph, a great means of promoting player balance and character emphasis. Skill and attributes are determined on a point attribute system — starting characters are allotted a set amount of points to assign to their various abilities. Transcendently obscene

REVIEWS

BY KEN CARPENTER

CASTING CALL

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Lost Treasures

B2: THE KEEP ON THE BORDERLANDS (Rob Vaux)

Gary Gygax wrote this now-classic module for the Basic Dungeons and Dragons set over fifteen years ago. Which means that, like its precursor B1, it's a dungeon crawl. Gygax, however, takes a very segregationist attitude towards this particular dungeon crawl that makes it very quirky — and thus more memorable. "The world is a spooky place," the module's background tells us, "and the forces of mankind must remain ever vigilant if they are to keep All Things Mean and Oogy from overwhelming us." Thus, a stout keep has been built on the edge of the untamed wilderness to protect the forces of Good from whatever waits beyond. The place has become a marshalling ground for all those stout adventurer-types who thrive on going out into the wilderness and kicking some monster booté. Stout adventurer-types... like the PCs. And luckily for them, just beyond the reaches of the keeps patrols lie the Caves of Chaos, a breeding ground for some of the nastiest humanoid tribes this side of Tolkien.

The keep itself is described in detail, and ideas for role-playing opportunities within its walls are sprinkled liberally throughout. The nifty thing about the module, though, are the Caves of Chaos that lies beyond it. There are eleven different caves, each leading to a different complex of tunnels. These tunnels support one tribe from every damn humanoid in the book — orcs, goblins, kobolds, the whole lot — plus an undead cult, a minotaur, and a really cranky owlbear throw in for good measure. None of the tribes overlap; each one sticks to its own particular cave and doesn't mingle with its neighbor. Which gives the PCs an "eeny-meeny-miney-moe" approach to their assaults that doesn't exist anywhere else. You can kill orcs in session A and kobolds in session B without worrying about any spill over.

"What was Gary thinking?" you ask. I don't know. *Keep on the Borderlands* was designed with beginners in mind, and may seem quaint to experienced role-players. But that quaintness grows on you as you read through it, and the mix and match quality of the dungeon leaves an impression that's hard to ignore. For a Basic D&D nostalgia trip, there's very little that can match it.

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BUSHIDO

When editors examine manuscripts, one of the most important factors to be considered is what is called a "voice of authority." In other words, the editor asks, "Does the author know what he's talking about?" Take a little walk through the pages of *Bushido* and you'll be convinced that the authors knew exactly what they were talking about.

The game takes place in the world of feudal Japan, with players taking the part of samurai, ninja magicians, and other legendary figures. Depending upon the groups' whim, they can participate in the pseudo-historical conflicts of medieval Nippon, or do battle with the fantastic creatures and mysterious spirits of "mythic" Japan. The rulebooks provide plenty of background and support material for both sides of that equation, allowing GMs to mix and match the historic and the mythic to fit their particular tastes.

Bushido must be one of the most thoroughly researched role-playing games that I've ever encountered. The authors have a strong understanding of Japanese culture and history, and thoroughly infuse the text with their knowledge. Yes, the system is number heavy and cumbersome, but the detail in explaining Japanese culture, ideology, philosophy and history is unparalleled in the industry (except for *GURPS: Japan* which is also a brilliant work). It did not, however, achieve the sort of product support it needed to become successful. GMs should be prepared to create adventures or campaigns themselves (with help from the rulebook), rather than search out any published material. But if you ever plan to run a game involving samurai, ninja or kitsune, you've got to go through those bargain bins to find a copy of *Bushido*. It literally wrote the book on Asian role-playing.

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Two players can play the "Wilderness Game" if, between them, they have one *Wilds of Doom*. (\$19.95)

• **Doom Cubes** (Booster Sets)

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A WORLD OF DARKNESS, 2ND EDITION

• A SOURCEBOOK FOR VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE

• PUBLISHED BY WHITE WOLF

• WRITTEN BY MARK CENZYK, BEN CHESSELL, RICHARD DANSKY, GRAEME DAVIS, JAMES ESTES, ALEX HAMMOND, ANGEL MCCOY, DEENA MCKINNEY, JAMES MOORE, LUCIEN SOULBAN AND RICHARD WATTS

• \$18.00

• REVIEWED BY ROB VAUX

Camarilla. Sabbat. Inconnu. Lupines. Changelings. Whatever the hell is in East Asia. Five continents. Two hundred countries. Five billion people. And 160 pages to cover it all. You certainly can't blame *A World of Darkness* for having no scope.

An ambitious attempt to cover the length and breadth of White Wolf's *World of Darkness*, this sourcebook of the same name is something of a double edged sword. It touches on every area of the globe, giving a brief overview of the supernatural denizens in each nook and cranny. With the notable exception of India, no part of the world is overlooked, and almost every significant country has at least a little bit written on its undead population. But at the same time, "a little bit" is really all that's given, and detail is often sacrificed in favor of an all-encompassing comprehensiveness.

This, presumably, is a deliberate act on the part of the publishers. The first edition of *A World of Darkness* received a great deal of criticism for being incomplete. It gave information on a few areas — notably England and Jordan — but failed to include so much of the world that the name became a joke. The second edition attempts to redress those grievances, and to that extent, the product succeeds. Ten different chapters cover every conceivable spot where the Kindred might be found, from Helsinki, Finland to Melbourne, Australia. A few areas (such as Great Britain and Egypt) are given special attention, but no place is left entirely unmentioned.

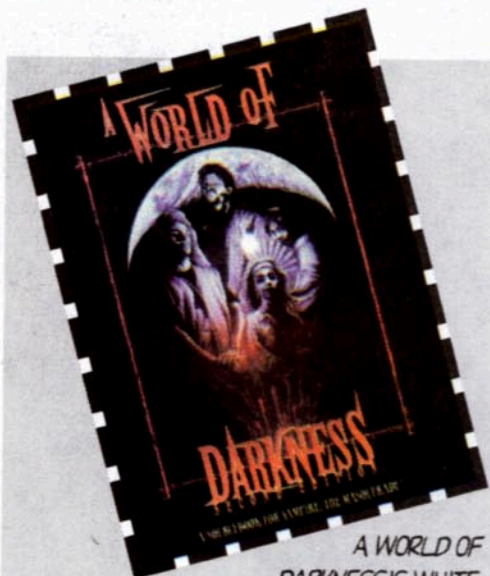
To be sure, this is primarily a *Vampire* product, and the Kindred are given the lion's share of the space. *Changeling* or *Werewolf* players looking for insight on their respective races are in for a grave disappointment. For fans of *Vampire*, however, there are a plethora of tantalizing tidbits to incite the imagination. The final fate of Prince Mithras of London, the Camarilla's toehold in Sabbat-held New York, and more shadowy hints of what exactly lies in wait on the Asian mainland — A

World of Darkness is full of bits of information like this.

Anyone expecting more than such "bits," however, is in for a big let-down. The sheer scope of the information and the limited space in which to present it keep *A World of Darkness* from being anything more than an overview. Most countries have a paragraph or two dedicated to them, the largest cities get likewise, and the general political situation of each area is made clear. Other than that, players are on their own, and many might find such "superficial" coverage frustrating.

So with that in mind, is *A World of Darkness* worthwhile? Absolutely. By providing such a wide overview, it permits GMs to tailor their individual campaigns to fit the "official" specifications. Anywhere a Storyteller wants to place his group can be facilitated with *A World of Darkness*. This is not a product for lazy GMs, looking for an instant *Fill In the Blank By Night* to run their campaign for them. It is a useful guide for GMs who want a little help in either creating their own city, or running an adventure some place other than the *By Night* supplements produced thus far.

Vampire players willing to take suggestions and run with them will find no end of story threads here to help them along. Understanding that, and knowing that the book concerns itself solely with overviews and not details, will increase its usefulness considerably. *A World of Darkness* promises the globe, and to a great extent, it delivers, as long as you don't mind the short version of it. So when do we find out what's in Calcutta, folks?



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GAME PREVIEWS

ONE OF THE BEST PARTS ABOUT GEN CON IS SEEING ALL THE NEWEST GAMES. THERE ARE ALWAYS DOZENS OF NEW RELEASES, BUT PERHAPS EVEN MORE TANTALIZING ARE THE SNEAK PREVIEWS THAT SHOW UP EVERY YEAR. IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES WE'LL TELL YOU WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT HOT UPCOMING GAMES FROM WHITE WOLF, CHAMELEON ECLECTIC AND R. TALSORIAN GAMES. DIG IN!



BUBBLE GUM CRISIS RPG

It's 2032. Mega-Tokyo stands on the ruins of the original city, which was destroyed years ago in the Second Great Kanto Earthquake. Rebuilding the city so quickly was only possible with the help of cyborg workers, known as Boomers, developed by the powerful Genom Corporation. But corruption in the Genom boardroom is causing chaos in the streets as the world's largest corporation uses any means at its disposal to advance its hidden agenda.

Now, a group of vigilantes known as the Knight Sabers works to thwart Genom's plans. Using powered armor and advanced weapons technology, the Knight Sabers are on a mission to reclaim the streets...

Bubble Gum Crisis is a classic eight-part anime series, which should be available for rent at better video stores everywhere. It spawned two other series, *The AD Police Files* and *Bubble Gum Crash*. It's near-future cyberpunk, with lots of motorcycles, orbital lasers, cyborgs, explosions, cops, and women with big guns.

R. Talsorian Games will be releasing the *Bubble Gum Crisis* RPG in September. It will be a slick looking book, using original Japanese artwork. RTG is working closely with the Japanese to ensure that the game not only looks its best, but is also full of official BGC information. Fans, whether they are gamers or not, will be lining up for this one. RTG is also planning on releasing *Bubble Gum Crash* and *Armored Defense Police* sourcebooks, too. Perhaps better still is the *Bubble Gum Plus* book, which will bring to light official BGC material from the vaults of the Japanese production crew. Release dates have not yet been scheduled for the sourcebooks, however.

The BGC line is based on the Fuzion RPG engine, which is a hybrid of RTG's *Interlock* and Hero Game's *Champions* systems. Fuzion games can be run at several levels of complexity, depending on the needs of the scenario. On one extreme there are three stats; on the other there



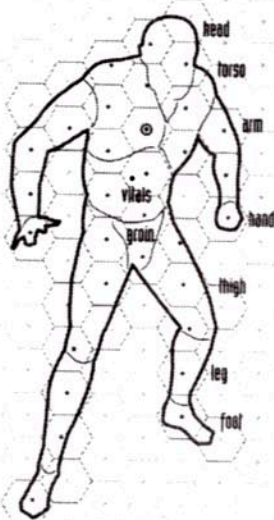
are ten. Characters are built with points instead of die rolls, and there are both d6 and d10-based task resolution rules. The Fuzion system is designed to be compatible with 4th Edition *Champions*, *Mekton*, and *Cyberpunk*. You can test-drive the ultra-simple Fuzion variant with the *Mega Tokyo Combat Scuffle* minigame, which you should be able to pick up for one buck or less at better game stores. In other RTG news, the *Ninja High School* RPG is on the way! A tie-in comic is expected to launch simultaneously. No release date has yet been set.

THE BABYLON PROJECT

The *Babylon Project* is the name for the *Babylon 5* licensed RPG. It's being developed by Chameleon Eclectic, the publishers of *Millennium's End*, one of the best modern-day RPGs ever. The *Babylon Project* will, of course, be set in the science fiction universe of the *Babylon 5* TV show, and will provide information on the running the show's characters, conflicts, and settings in an RPG format. According to Chameleon Eclectic representatives, the rumors of *The Babylon Project's* engine being based on cards rather than dice are utterly unfounded; in fact the game uses a system which has been described as "FUDGE-like." The system uses more stats than most RPGs today, having sixteen in four categories. Besides the usual suspects (Strength, Agility, etc.) you'll find gems like Finesse and Xenoralation.

The *Babylon Project*, like all B5 products, has to be approved by The Man, series creator J. Michael Straczynski. It's JMS's vision you see when you watch the television show, so it's great having him oversee the production of the RPG. It looks like *The Babylon Project* will be both a terrific sourcebook for B5 fans, and a must-have for sci-fi gamers. Release is scheduled for October.

THE BABYLON PROJECT



EXILE

Exile is White Wolf's upcoming sci-fi RPG. No release date has been announced yet, and the materials our agents procured were very preliminary. More than one person was heard speculating that White Wolf rushed out the *Exile* preview rules in order to show something against *Fading Suns*, which is currently its most obvious competition. Whatever White Wolf's reasoning, their booth was packed all weekend with people who wanted a glimpse of the future.

Most of *Exile*'s setting is still a closely-guarded secret, but the playtest rules did have almost 20 pages of information on the politics, technology, and races that will be found in the game. There were also embryonic character creation and task resolution systems. Here's a quick summary —

The game world is split between the Hegemony, a collection of 700 civilized star systems, and the Grange, the lawless space beyond. Your character used to be a citizen of the Hegemony, but has recently been exiled. Your offense? Perhaps you are a criminal, or a political dissident; perhaps the government of your world is just trying to meet its quota. Kicked off your home world and forced out of the Hegemony, you have to make the best of things in your new life as an Exile.

While most *Exile* games look as if they'll take place in the Grange, little information about it is currently available. Instead, White Wolf's preview covers the Hegemony and the factions that comprise it.

The Hegemony is a collection of Syndics, which are smaller governing bodies. Each Syndic has its own sphere of influence and "feel," rather like the Clans in *Vampire*. The following Syndics are listed in the *Exile* preview:

- Androgyne, artistic near-humans with strong mediation skills.
- Sark Sauron, pragmatic reptilian beings.
- Starborn, a line of humanity optimized for life in space.
- Armada, the stellar navy that defends the Hegemony.
- Diplomatic Service, the Hegemony's espionage agency.
- Bak'Sakusa, warrior spiritualists.
- Common Weal, steeped in tradition and ruled by aristocracy.
- Pax Republica, born of a bloody revolution by idealists and intellectuals.
- Consortium, the key figure in the galactic economy.



- Cartel, where greed and fear are the building blocks of interstellar organized crime.
- Zae Zarandt, anti-technology monks.
- Voidians, a religious Syndic who believe that individuals shape their own reality.
- Trancers, hedonists whose Syndic has been forced underground.

The game system used in *Exile* is not the familiar Storyteller system. Instead, the attributes — Vigor, Coordination, Presence, Expression, Reason, and Intuition — are rated from 1 to 100. Skills are rated on the same scale, and are grouped according to the controlling attribute. Task resolution is a simple roll-under system, but with a twist; the higher you roll — while remaining under your skill number — the better you perform. For each 10 points you produce on a successful roll, you gain one "success." For example, if you have a Zero G skill of 55, and you produce a roll of 50, you have 5 successes that you can use to embellish your task. Successes can be burned, singly or as a group, for things like calling a shot.

Even though *Exile* doesn't use the Storyteller System, it still has White Wolf written all over it. During character creation you are expected to think about your family, your history, the reason for your exile, your political affiliation, and your character's drives. There are freebie points to spend, and background options to buy. Storyteller System fans will find enough familiar about *Exile* to quickly grow accustomed to it.

Overall, *Exile* is one of the most-anticipated upcoming releases, at least among the people clustered around the booth at GenCon. It's still too early to tell just what the final product will look like, but it sure looks like the White Wolf crew are on to something.

PREVIEWS

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FADING SUNS

- PUBLISHED BY HOLISTIC DESIGN INC.
- WRITTEN BY BILL BRIDGES AND ANDREW GREENBERG
- \$25.00
- REVIEWED BY JOHN WICK

One of the reasons I wanted to be a Literature Major was the tales of King Arthur and his knights. Ever since I picked up *A Boy's King Arthur* when I was just knee-high, I've been enamored with knights, quests, damsels in distress and the tragic tales of passion and duty. *Fading Suns* may look like a science fiction game, but deep in its heart, it has the same passion for those romantic tales as I do, which deserves a tip of the hat from me to the authors, Bill Bridges and Andrew Greenberg.

If the names sound familiar, its because Bridges and Greenberg were responsible for a whole lot of the good stuff that came out of White Wolf the last few years. They left the "bleeding edge" last year to join up with Holistic Design and from there, came up with a game of political intrigue, treachery and hard core science fiction. When I first heard about it, I thought it would have shadows of *Dune*, but I was very mistaken. *Fading Suns* feels much more like *Pendragon* than Herbert's classic. It also feels a lot like a White Wolf game in its format, which is a good thing. It's organized, clear and concise about its terminology, and easy to understand. The beginning of the book is filled with background material, and a glossary of both game and world terms for reference. Character generation is a breeze and (again) strikes me as a mixture of both *Pendragon* and the Storyteller system. Characters are created from one of the three classical social classes of feudalism: Lords (those who rule), Merchants (those who buy and sell) and the clergy (those who pray). Aliens (those who differ) are also included. Once a player has chosen a social class, they then choose a house and start divvying up skill points.

The system uses a little trick I've never seen before. Skills and Attributes are on a d20 system, and when you roll, you try to roll under your Skill or Attribute. However, the higher you roll without going over, the more Success Points you get to add special effects to your success. A character with a higher skill not only has a better chance of success, but also has a better chance of getting the results he wants than someone who is not as experienced in a skill. Quite clever.

When it comes to handling space travel, Bridges and Greenberg have done their reading. Space travel is one of the most difficult things to handle in a role-playing game, especially if you are

going to be writing up a "hard science fiction" setting like *Fading Suns*. After all, space travel (in reality) is uncomfortable, takes a long time and is quite dangerous. The use of jump gates is a common way to handle the problem, but Bridges and Greenberg have added a twist. When mankind first reached out to the stars, the jump gates were there waiting for him. Created from an alien technology we can't hope to understand, the jump gates immediately became a source of conflict for the faithful back on Earth. After all, if there's life out there, that means that we aren't the center of the universe as many terran religions dictate. So what do you do when your faith gets challenged? You do what the early Christians did: assimilate the challenge.

The ecstatic emotions that run through a human body as they pass through a jump gate has caused a major religious movement on Earth, giving birth to a new religion. Of course, this religion has gone through the ringer (just as all early religions do), but its followers are still around, worshipping the memory of their martyr who brought them "the truth."

Fading Suns has something for everyone. It is science fiction, set in a universe of feudal warfare, giving it a ring of familiarity to those who are only familiar with the high fantasy genre. It also has enough "hard tech" to make the Niven fans out there smile quietly to themselves. And it has a hint of enigmatic mysticism for all of us who think that there's more to the universe than what we can prove.

I liked *Fading Suns* a lot. If it feels a little bit like a White Wolf product, that's because Bridges and Greenberg were part of the soul that made some of the best WW products so great. Fans of their efforts will not be disappointed, and if you aren't familiar with their work, you should check it out.



HOLISTIC
DESIGN'S NEW RPG
FADING SUNS

REVIEWS

SIX-GUNS AND SORCERY

- A SOURCEBOOK FOR CASTLE FALKENSTEIN
- WRITTEN BY EDWARD BOLME, JIM PARKS, DEREK QUINTANAR, MARK SCHLIMANN, JAMES CAMBIAS, ERIC FLOCH, ANGELA HYATT, BARRIE ROSEN, AND CHRIS WILLIAMS
- PUBLISHED BY R. TALSORIAN GAMES
- \$20.00
- REVIEWED BY JANE ST. CLAIRE

I expected *Six-Guns and Sorcery* to be a sourcebook on the Wild Falkensteinian West, and I was glad to find out that it's much more than that. Like all sourcebooks for the *Castle Falkenstein* line, *Six-Guns* is written in a format unlike any other used in the role-playing industry. Readers are taken directly into the world through the eyes of Tom Olam, a man who was once part of our own world who was "Spellnapped" into a world of the 1800's where cabalistic magic and pulp science fiction are in full force. Each book chronicles his adventures through the world, with rules listed in sidebars and isolated text boxes.

Six-Guns details Tom's adventures in America, a Falkenstein America where the Freemasons secretly run the U.S.A., where Voodoo is the religious choice of the Orleans Free State, and where Sam Houston is President of the Lone Star Republic of Texas. There's cowboys and Indians (the Twenty Nations Confederation) and Norton I is the revered Emperor of the Bear Flag Empire of California.

Tom's journey begins on the East Coast where he meets up with the alternate incarnation of his hometown, New York. In the Big Apple, he discovers the iron grip the Freemasons have on America (including rules for magick and faeries in a land very unfriendly to foreign supernatural activity), and gives a whole slew of background information on the Robber Barons, the Pinkertons, American High Society, Railroads and one very big Canadian lumberjack.

Next, Tom speeds off to Washington, D. C. where he encounters the United States Secret Service (a lot like those two guys from *Wild, Wild West*), including a huge listing of the United States Armed Forces, and then heads down south into Voodoo controlled New Orleans.

After further adventures, Tom finally heads off West. Now, I'm not saying that all the stuff that happens before he heads out West is immaterial, because it isn't. It's fascinating, well organized material. However, only half of the book actually takes place in the west, and that's what I bought it for. The rest of it was a pleasant surprise, but I was on pins and needles waiting for information on all those guys hanging out on the frontier. I wasn't disappointed in the quality of the work, but I was a bit disappointed in the quantity. I wanted a whole lot of Wild West stuff, and as I mentioned above, only half of the book is devoted

to the American frontier.

But if I had a problem with the quantity, I certainly didn't have a problem with the quality. Like all *Falkenstein* books, *Six-Guns* is heavily researched and well thought out. Logical progressions are important when presenting "alternate history" campaigns, and when the author doesn't have a strong grasp on what actually happened, he can't present believable alternatives. The authors of *Six-Guns* did their homework, and it shows.

Tom Olam's passages through the Twenty Nations are written with a voice of authority. The understanding of the meanings in Native American religion and magic is present. Moving further West provides us with Tom's adventures with Wyatt Earp and his creepy buddy Doc Holliday, along with a full section on a new kind of sorcerer, "the Spellslinger" (which I can't wait to add to my own *Falkenstein* campaign). "Silver Fever" is the current epidemic that's spreading across the West, and Tom gives us a whole page dedicated to how prospectors changed the face of the American frontier.

And then there's Emperor Norton and his good friend Sam Clemens. Clemens is written with a dry, sardonic sense of humor that's a riot to read (kudos to whoever was in charge of this section), and the Emperor of California is both hilarious and touching.

Overall, *Six-Guns and Sorcery* is a must to any *Castle Falkenstein* GM, and definitely worth a look-see to anyone running a wild west campaign. While I would have preferred there be more Wild West, the information provided gives the reader a strong understanding of America at that time, which puts the west in a perspective that is often missing from many "wild west" campaign settings. A lot of people fled the eastern seaboard in search of a new start. *Six-Guns* gives some intriguing (if "alternate") reasons why.



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TOP TEN THINGS DIRK LEARNED AT GEN-CON

10 - YOU REALLY CAN'T FIT 200
PEOPLE INTO A RAMADA SINGLE.

9 - ACCORDIONS AND RENAISSANCE
BANDS SHOULD BE MUTUALLY
EXCLUSIVE.

8 - WHACKING THE TOWEL
DISPENSERS WITH YOUR REPLICA
PLYWOOD-AND-FOAM SWORD IS A GOOD WAY TO GET HURT.

7 - CABS WILL NOT STOP IF YOU SHOUT "HALT, EVILDOER!"

6 - "THE GOOD MECH LOLLIPOP" WILL NOT IMPRESS THE FASA PEOPLE.

5 - THE "FULLY FUNCTIONAL" PHASER YOU'VE BEEN TINKERING WITH SHOULD BE LEFT AT HOME.

4 - BRIAN SNÖDDY DOES NOT THINK HIS NAME IS FUNNY.

3 - CONSTANTLY QUOTING MONTY PYTHON WILL NOT IMPROVE KENZER'S SALES.

2 - BRETT FAVRE JOKES DO NOT GO OVER WELL WITH THE LOCALS.

AND THE NUMBER ONE THING DIRK LEARNED AT GEN-CON ...

1 - MAGIC CARDS CANNOT BE CONSUMED FOR SUSTENANCE.



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