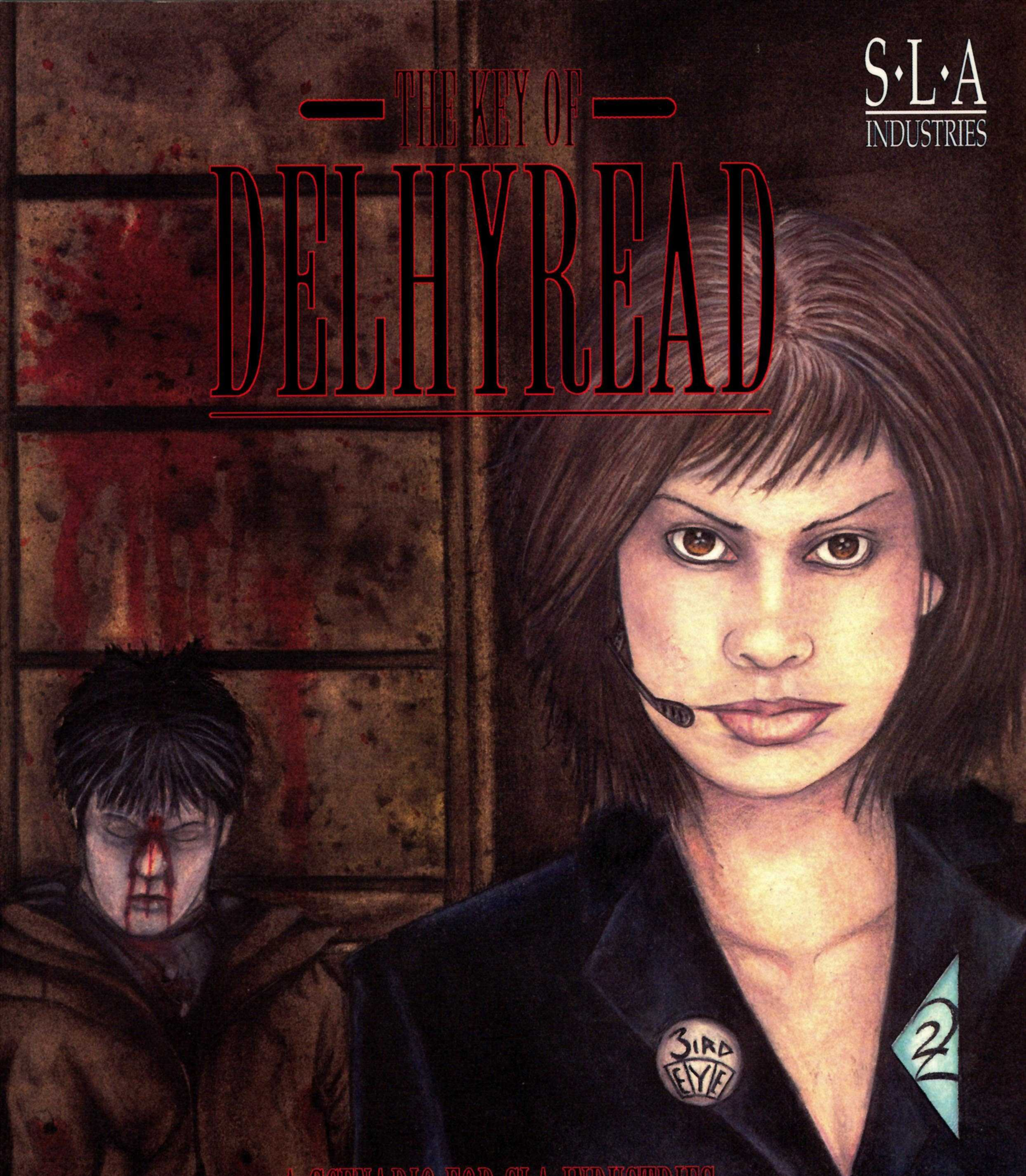
S·L·A
INDUSTRIES

THE KEY OF DELHYREAD



A SCENARIO FOR SLA INDUSTRIES

BY LIAM WICKHAM

High amongst the towers and rooftops, the storm gathered force.

"Do you know why I have done this?" The voice was unpleasant, a harsh rasp. Rain lashed across the dark alleyway into the yellow, catlike eyes of the figure looming over the terrified boy. *"An eye for an eye,"* he shouted. *"You called me... traitor? I call you liar!"* Thunder shook the buildings to their core, and the tall man smiled wryly. *"Shout all you like. This is MY domain. None of your bastard children shall be allowed to seed their bitter thoughts in the minds of the blind."*

The rain became stronger, falling with enough force to sweep dirt and debris in waves down the alley and onto the streets. He turned to the broken boy on the alleyway floor. *"You. Brat. You see the truth, now? You are mine, and so is that seed you carry. No more tears! You knew this would happen. He could not protect you in the lion's den. He lied to you. He lies to everyone."*

Lightning struck into the alley, arcing down beside the buildings. *"Temper, temper."* Again, an ironic smile twitched across his face.

Suddenly, the boy writhed onto his belly and tried to crawl off down the alley, to get away, to get to safety. The man looked down at him with a hint of genuine amusement. *"Where are you going?"* Moving smoothly, the man leaped at the child, landing on his heels, his full weight crushing down onto the boy's ankles. A shrill scream of pain filled the alley, only to be drowned by yet another peal of thunder. The child trembled, and looked round at his captor.

"Now, where were we? Ah yes. An eye for an eye. Open your eyes, boy. Thank you. Now hold still, and this won't hurt a bit."
A large clawed hand grabbed a tuft of hair, and pulled the boy's head back...

The storm quieted and the rains slackened as the man straightened and let the boy collapse silent onto the ground. Ruined holes gaped from the child's skull, where eyes had been. The tall man lifted his head to the dark sky and let the rain wash blood from his face.

"Born in a storm..."

He swallowed the last remnants of the boy's vision and walked deep into the alley to be engulfed by darkness. Only the fading trail of his deep, growling laughter remained.

THE KEY OF DELHYREAD

AN ADVENTURE FOR SLA INDUSTRIES

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Prologue

"It started quietly enough; a smile across the dance floor, casual conversation at the bar, a taxi on the way home, not-so-casual sex on the kitchen floor. I mean, how was I supposed to know she was a friggin' DarkNight Infiltrator? She didn't turn around and say 'Hey, guess what?', you know? What, was I supposed to be psychic or somethin'? Give us a break. It wasn't my fault what happened. She did my head in. I couldn't help myself, could I?"

I watched him twisting in his chair. What a wreck he was, what a waste of life. All that education and training. Dear oh dear. This nasty little man had made a complete mess of everything, and there was no room for manoeuvre. I sighed.

"Well, Mr. Jasper. I suppose we'll have to fix this little problem, won't we?"

He kept clenching his fists, one at a time. I followed a bead of sweat which was washing a trail from his greasy black hair down to his mud-caked chin. What a mess. I stayed on the other side of the desk. God, the smell alone dictated that decision, believe me. The last thing I needed was odour de toilette ruining my appetite. He started talking again and I noticed how his left eye flinched every time he looked at me. Why was he grinning so stupidly? God, was I going to have to listen to him again?

"...yeah? So that's OK, isn't it?"

"Hmmm? What were you saying?"

"I was saying that we should just forget the whole thing, yeah? I mean, it's not like I meant to do it or anything. I was brainwashed and all that, y'know? Come on, be a mate."

He smiled again. A 'mate'. What a nauseating thought. I smiled back. He looked reassured by it, and so he should, the credits I spent on it. Yes, it's a truly

professional business smile for all those special occasions. Pity he was so low on the scale of importance. Still, it's always nice to be appreciated.

"Well, let me think. I could just drop the whole matter and let you go." Big eyes lit up like a stupid dog. "But I'm not going to. Sorry." Ah yes, much more like it—pitiful drooping brow, hopeless dropped jaw. All those tears building up. Ah, this job is a real buzz sometimes. "You see, I'm afraid you've rather gone and been a bit of an embarrassment, and Mr Slayer doesn't like that very much. So, you understand, I can't just let you stand up and walk away from this one. But I'm sure you wouldn't really want to, would you? You look like a man of honour to me, not the sort to back down from taking responsibility for your actions. Am I right?" He hung onto my every word, nodding. I wished he'd put his tongue back in. "Yes, so there you have it. Sorry about this, no hard feelings, but..."

With one swift, corporate motion, I levelled my Chopper at his head and pulled the trigger. His eyes widened, much to my satisfaction, as the high-pressure packet of wire smoothly cut the top of his head off. Just above the level of his eyes. Picture the scene, me in my designer suit, him in his leathers and T-shirt. The impact on the ground was a slop more than a squelch, sweet music to my ears. I'm so very lucky to work for Mr Slayer.

One more squalid security risk eliminated, one more successfully completed contract. I was so happy then, so very happy.

After that?

Oh, you know, pressure of work, too many drugs, not enough credits, that kind of thing. That's why you're here listening to this. See, I want to know what he found and where it is now. I think it's worth something to certain people I know, and therefore it's worth something to me and therefore it's also worth something to you. This is one of those private little BPNs, if you know what I mean.

Well, okay, but don't think too long. A group of sensible, ambitious Ops like yourselves should be very wary of turning down opportunities like this one. Anyway, you know where I am. Oh, one more thing—discretion, my friends, is the key to the big bonuses in this city. Good, good, see you tonight then. Bye.

Oh yes. They'll do nicely. Very nicely indeed.

A Word To The Wise

This scenario is designed for SCL 10 characters, and—because so much of the plot is dependent on the actions of the various NPCs—for players who are relatively quick on the uptake. As the GM, you will almost certainly face some special challenges thrown up by your players, such as having to cope with all the characters taking a long Gauss Train journey to Meny to follow up a lead they think they've uncovered.

If the players are taking forever to work out what's going on, or they get diverted looking in all the wrong places, feel free to use the **Uncertainty Principle**—or, in other words, freeze all the action that's going on in the background until they catch up. You *could* have the characters always stuck one step behind the action, so that all the players ever get to see is bullet-ridden corpses and bloodstained furniture, but it's not as much fun as having them locked in a running firefight with Menace through the passages and alleys of Downtown, or making them nervously trail the Ex-War Criminals through the sewers.

You may also have some troubles with character power levels. You can compensate for this by making your NPCs more competent. **Competence** is a measure of a non-player character's skill with weapons, experience in combat and terrain, and evasion tactics. You assign a Competence rating to the NPC. That rating then acts as a bonus to all the NPC's attacks, a penalty to all PC attacks against the NPC, and, if you're feeling particularly evil, as a bonus to all the NPC's weapons PENs and armour PVs. One bonus of the Competence system is that it allows you to use lethal non-player characters who look harmless because they have little or no equipment. No PC can ever have or gain a competence rating without immediately (and permanently) becoming an NPC. As a rough guide for this scenario, look at the character with the highest SCL and give all NPCs a Competence of 1 for each number the SCL is above 10—so if the highest-ranking PC is SCL6, every NPC has 4 Competence.

Introduction

Welcome to SLA Industries. As the GM, you have a real job on your hands. The players can do whatever they like, take on any BPN that comes along. Hell, they might not even like the sound of this one. Well, you're just going to have to make sure they choose it then, aren't you? Try setting up all your kit and then hitting them with a few things that they really dislike. Leave them in the crib for *hours* before the corporate approaches them. Get them really irritated in a bar and then say, "Oh by the way, there's this guy in the bar staring at you. Maybe he wants to have a chat. In fact, he's just smiled at you so it's either that or you've scored with a suit." Something ought to get them going. If not, well, just slip it to them sneakily. Have them get it through a friend of Midley's at the BPN hall.

This is a big one for any Ops, no matter how experienced. It's treacherous and paranoid, and there are even big guns in it. What more could they ask for? Admit it, you don't really want to make the DarkNight agents weedy just so your lot can blast them, 'cos that's not the point—you want them to run screaming so they have to use their brains a bit, right? Good. So, here's what's going down...

Jason "well you don't really need to know that now, do you?" **Midley** (SCL 4C) is an Internal Affairs agent with a particularly career-orientated mind. He lives for his job. He wakes up every morning with a big cheesy grin on his face because he knows how good he looks. His suit is shiny, his shoes are sleek, his hair is combed flat. He's a SLA Industries dream come true, a genuine success story. In five short years, he's made it from paper-shuffling to traitor-spotting, and he's damn good at it. He's got a reputation as a cruel, evil-minded bastard and that's the way Internal Affairs ("I work for Cloak Division") agents make it big. He's got a nice flat in Uptown and his credit rating is so good that he might even buy himself a nice shiny Augustus any day now as a present to himself.

Thing is, he's also greedy. He wants it all and he wants it now. He can't just sit around waiting for the credits to roll in, he needs to make a few on the side. He's not alone in this. In fact, Mr. Slayer approves of such loyalty to Progress, even if sometimes that can mean a slight bias on the actions of his agents. Mr. Midley knows he has to be careful—he has a reputation to uphold—so when he finds out something to his credit advantage, he makes sure he picks only the most naive Ops to help him out. That way he can always have them killed if anything goes wrong and anyway, who's going to listen to SCL10 losers?

Derek Jasper (SCL 9B, deceased) was a quiet loner. He didn't do very well for himself because he had problems with his hygiene and other Ops tended to keep away from him. He got credits by sorting out minor sewage problems and doing long-winded investigations. He liked to go out and try to pull, but he was a bit too ugly (and far too smelly) to have much success.

When **Charlene** came along, it was a dream come true. So many nights in Virtual, playing in the reality booths. Friday night was his favourite. He didn't much care that the others smirked at him; how else was he supposed to get his kicks? The Mass wouldn't let him in, even after he'd had a shower. And one night, flushed with excitement after gaining a new high-score on Blitzing Babes, he saw her across a smoke-filled room. They only had eyes for each other; love at first sight.

She was beautiful: slim and buxom, just like Madame Gaylia on Friday nights. She asked him to take her home and kissed him in the taxi. It was a night he'd remember for the rest of his life—about a month and a half. During that blissful period, she gave him everything he had ever wanted from a woman (sex and food). He was in Nirvana. He stopped going out to work and lost weight. He even shaved.

They were always together, and they talked continuously of those things nearest to both their hearts, guns and arcade games. A perfect match. On the occasions that he asked her of her past, her eyes would glaze and fill with pain and she'd say "Oh Dezzy, don't ask about that, not now." It was enough that she was an Op, like him. She went out a few times, to "clear up a few things". When she asked him to take a parcel to a warehouse, he thought it was strange, but he was in love. Wouldn't you have done the same?

It was only when he was looking at the parcel on the next seat in the taxi that his natural curiosity won. Well, jealousy, anyway—was it a box of Karma roses for a beloved? He had to look. He carefully unwrapped the package and found a heavy box made of some weird metal. He opened it and there, on a velvet cloth, was a long, thin key. It was gold and highly polished, with all sorts of weird serpents and birds wrapped around it. The end of the key was so simple, just a few blocks, that he could have broken into the safe (or whatever) with a coat hanger. Reassured, he shrugged, put it back, wrapped it up and finally dropped it off in the

locker she'd told him about. When he got back to the flat, she'd gone out, leaving a note saying "Need some pizza. Back soon."

So he waited—for hours—until he became so worried that he phoned up the Shivers and asked them to look out for her. The knock on his door at midnight was such a relief... at least until he saw a suit in the vid screen. Was she OK? Had she been hurt? Catastrophe. The suit told him that she'd been killed, shot by an Op while trying to escape under the city. What could it mean? By the time Internal Affairs searched the warehouse, the package had disappeared. Poor old Derek was devastated. He'd been sleeping with the enemy, duped by DarkNight. Early the next morning, he found himself sitting across a desk from the guy with the shiny teeth. Not a good day in the life of Derek Jasper.

Derek was duped by **Wildcat**, a cool killer hired by DarkNight to find and transport an artefact off-planet. All she had to do was find a safe place to stay and use as a base for a bit of undercover work. She accomplished this with a minimum of difficulty. Whenever Derek was knocked out by the drugs she put in his food, she would go off to explore Uptown's seedier bars. She found the rogue Ebon **Garland** in the HookerCrooker Bar and they ended up doing some deals. He eventually gave her the box and she passed over some Glyphs. They were both happy with the arrangement.

On the way back, a Shiver patrol spotted her but she managed to lose them. Aware that she could be identified if she tried to deliver the goods, she decided to risk Derek hiding the package until she could pick it up. She'd also had a credit-spinning thought—why send the box off-planet when she could hold it down here and raise the market-price? They wouldn't dare cross her and they knew she would die rather than blab. Yeah, hide it in a locker somewhere and go make a few contacts Downtown, spread the word there was an auction going down. She loped off to make the deals and a bunch of keen Slops came along and blasted her away. Oh well.

When Internal Affairs went looking for the package yesterday, they found a ripped-up room with the security guard laying quietly in a pool of blood. Investigation postponed until a BPN is posted, by order of Midley. That's why he's hunting around for a suitable bunch of Ops. They've got to be fairly stupid, but also fairly well-equipped for the job. He knows that hardened Ops would ask for a lot more than he's willing to pay out, and would also be suspicious of being offered a BPN. Here's the deal:

Midley has a BPN ready, prepared through Station Analysis ("for that extra bit of privacy"). Details follow:

Colour Code – Yellow
Minimum SCL – 10
Contact Dept – Internal Affairs
Locate and retrieve stolen SLA Industries property. Contact Mr. Midley 101 926 106749 for further details. Undercover work may be necessary.
BPN Number – IAX1768045/DT
Training Package Recommended – Any
Station Analysis – X
Consolidated Bonus Scheme – 350₡/Op
SCL Increase – 0.2

Midley is carrying the BPN himself because he wants to pick the Ops who go on this job. Without thinking, he's written in 'Internal Affairs'; if questioned, he'll mutter about sacking a secretary and say that the stupid girl meant Cloak Division. If they really push it, he'll re-write it himself. If the players don't make a fuss about it though, keep quiet. Midley knows that the key in the box fits the description of a relic stolen from Central's Ancient History Museum a week ago. He has not yet informed the museum of his discovery and does not intend to, either. He can make a fast credit or two if he can send the key to his friends in Orienta and have them sell it on the Shifting Bazaar. It's a tight play, and he could go down in flames for this one, which is why he needs as little publicity as possible. In the files of the interview with Jasper, he included no speculation as to the nature of the key and made sure that the description was highly suspect. Nobody should recognize it... that's what he hopes, anyway.

Midley will be hanging around wherever the Ops are when they finally surface for the day, and will spot them a mile off. They look the type, right? So he will try to make conversation, buy them drinks, make sure that they're happy. Then he will tell them a story—or at least part of it, depending on how you feel—very similar to his rant in the Prologue. He won't tell them that he wants the key for himself, but he will hint that secrecy is of the essence, that SLA security is at risk and that they wouldn't want the media getting hold of this story now, would they? He won't tell them the key came from the museum either, but he will tell them, with great pride, exactly how he sliced Derek's head off. See first section for more details.

If they decide to go for it straight away, he will hand them over the BPN and wish them luck. He will tell them that they're the only Ops in on this and there

More about: Garland and the HookerCrooker

When Garland the Ebon discovered that SLA Industries was a lot darker than it claimed to be, he began a series of personal vendettas against certain scientists and high-ranking personnel whom he held responsible for certain events that he won't talk about. He has been extremely careful to cover his tracks and remains uncaught and unsuspected so far. He always travels in disguise—even on normal BPN missions—and this means that he is practically unidentifiable by other Ops.

The HookerCrooker Bar is a notorious troublespot in Uptown, populated by the seedier SLA Industries employees. It is here that information can be bought and sold for the right price. Everybody knows that Cloak Division agents are watching and taping their every move, which is why the music is loud, the windows are blacked-out and the lights are low. Extra precautions include anti-bug systems, counter-surveillance software and a reassuringly large number of exits. The fact that the bar is allowed to continue operating is rather disturbing, but presumably SLA Industries benefits more than it suffers by carefully watching those who frequent it. Green Ops should avoid the place, as should keen crimebusters. Wildcat had found Garland here months ago and planned the whole operation in one sitting.

Garland is a member of the Jewel Brigade, a squad of three Ebons and three Shaktars who have made a respectable name for themselves. Garland has never shared his information with any of them and they know nothing of his personal goal—to topple SLA Industries by killing those employees who spread lies and corrupt minds. Quite a job. He is loyal to 'the Truth', whatever that is. Garland has had a fairly mundane career, but is now at SCL 4B.1, having managed to avoid stirring up any real corporate interest into his activities. He is quite rich, thanks to prudent saving, and he often throws all-Ebon parties. Here he tries to spot likely recruits, but he is over-cautious and so far has not found a single Ebon he totally trusts. He's being afflicted with Dream Demons, but doesn't feel like becoming Necanthrope any more.

Garland is not likely to be discovered by the Ops, but he may come in useful during future missions as his work is discrete—he rushes in, kills his target and rushes out again. The job he did for Wildcat was in return for some incredibly ancient glyphs—treasure indeed, even if nothing compared to the Key. Be warned, Garland is very dangerous indeed.

Garland

SCL 4B.1 *Age: 49*
Height: 1.83m *Weight: 69.2kg*

STR 9
DEX 10
DIA 8
CONC 12
CHA 8
PHYS 11
KNOW 10
COOL 10
HITS 19

FORMULAE 13
FLUX 65
(with 30 more in his interdermalised Deathsuit, and a further 20 in flux gems)

Rifle 8
Pistol 7
Hide 8
Sneak 8
Track 8
Disguise 6
Read Lips 7
LockPicking 8
Streetwise 5
SLA Info 7

Blast 16
Blue Thermal 16
Communication 17
Detect 12
Enhancement 13
Healing 14
Illumination 14
Protect 18 (and his Deathsuit is maximised)
Reality Folding 14
Red Thermal 9
Telekinesis 13

Equipment:
Lots of the best—including a full suite of Ebon equipment, a pair of Blitzers (one holds HESH, the other AP) with a stack of ammo, and loads and loads *of White Noise.*

2. The Slightly Smaller Picture

or

So what do we do now then?

Below is a limited calendar of events. Any *italic* text is for the use of the **GM ONLY** and is not to be made available to the Ops until they discover it for themselves in due course:

July 3rd		Wildcat moves in with Derek Jasper.
Aug 5th		*Garland steals Key.*
Aug12th		*Garland meets Wildcat; exchange made.*
Aug 13th	19:16	Wildcat sends Derek to Rollerball Warehouse.
	20:23	Wildcat killed and traced back to Derek Jasper.
Aug 14th	08:23	Derek terminated by Jason Midley.
	09:00	Midley prepares BPN and goes looking for Ops.

Therefore Aug 17th, 23:59 is the bonus deadline.

Please note the absence of any material about factories being blown to pieces. Midley made this one up on the spot to help the Ops underestimate the importance of the Key.

There's a lot of research that can be done straight away. Computer Use Skill is needed to access the following pieces of information from Third Eye News archives (available to SCL 10 upwards). These will provide info as follows:

A. **On Derek**—only one interesting news item, dated April 14th, 903SD, which lasts for twenty seconds. Derek is seen standing triumphantly over the bodies of three Greater Carriens which had sneaked into the sewers below Suburbia. He waves his FEN AR around and grins stupidly. Ugly Rank 5—nothing much you can do about that. The reporter gets it over with quickly and moves on to adverts.

No news of Derek's demise is available, of course.

B. **On 'Wildcat'/Charlene**—nothing.

C. **On Jason Midley**—"that information is presently above your security access level. Would you like to continue your search?" 'No' is the correct option to select here. Answering 'Yes' will rapidly lead to a squad of Midley's tame Internal Affairs agents knocking on the door and asking awkward questions. If this happens, Jason Midley will be out of town and unavailable for verification or interview. Things could turn nasty if the Ops are foolish enough to say anything unflattering.

D. **On the break-in at the Warehouse**—scenes of the dead guard, throat cut. Cut to the kicked-in doors, move inside to reveal boxes upturned and trampled, lockers prised open. A crow-bar has snapped in two and is discarded beside the doors. Shivers keep the area clear of curious locals as only they can. The murderers got away unseen and speculation is rampant—it could be anyone.

The address is: 12A Rollerball Warehouse Complex, Level 2, Far-Town Industrial Bank, Obarski Sector, Suburbia. Lots of things stolen, but who knows what? Obviously the manager should have a list, but he's been in a drunken stupor for weeks.

E. **On stolen keys**—a broad sweep of news reports will reveal that there has indeed been an ancient relic stolen—see above, to read out if applicable. However before this is discovered, it should be borne in mind that there are approximately 346 keys reported stolen each hour in Mort City, and so to spot the Key of Delhyread will take many Diagnose skill rolls and Concentration rolls. Remember that the theft took place 9 days ago = 74,000 lost/stolen keys. This list, if checked thoroughly, will take about 100 hours to go through. Every half hour make a Computer Use skill roll. If successful, knock 2dl0 hours from that total. Every two hours, make a concentration roll—if it is failed, the Op has to take an hour break.

If the Ops have some good ideas, like "let's check museums" or "let's forget news reports and go ask at Slayer's Crib if there are any BPNs for stolen keys?" then fine, they can find out quite quickly. If they go looking for a BPN on the Key they will discover the following item:

SCL Requirement – 10
Colour Code – Yellow
Contact – Department of Archaeology
An ancient relic—a priceless Key of Ebon origin—has been stolen from the Ancient History Museum in Central.
Contact Dr. Phil Simpson on 382 4545 63928.

BPN Number – ARch57304KER
Training Package – Investigation/Any
Third Eye News – X
CBS – 1000₤ per Squad
SCL Increase – 0.2

Upon contacting Dr. Simpson, they will be told about the burglary and that two separate Ebons have so far been murdered trying to find the culprit, with their Ebb-mutilated bodies dumped in Downtown. He will suggest contacting **Shiver Officer Gursom**, Shiver Command, Arkwright Sector, Downtown—the unlucky woman who found the bodies. This lead is a dead end—the corpses are fairly spectacular, but do not really reveal anything much more than is already known. The Ops can find out that the Ebons were **Halo** and **Crane**, SCL 9B and 8A respectively. Apparently the primary cause of death was burning.

> *"Freaked me out, I mean you don't see shit like that often, do you? Have you ever been there just after someone's been burned to death? Like the smell, man, can you remember that smell? It's like you want to be sick and you don't ever want to eat fruit again. It's a buzz."*

If the Ops are really keen and explore the museum, they will see the skylight and that night's events described to them as detailed in Chapter 1. They will find themselves in the midst of a Dark Lament building site, and the investigation will be severely hampered by the noise and dust. Any Ebon trace is long gone by now.

Time-Keeping

Remember, everything the Ops do is going to take time. Make sure you keep a good record of what time it is, because things are happening while they're mucking around.

Rollerball Warehouse Complex

The real lead will come when they visit the Rollerball Warehouse Complex. The Shivers will still be there, with everything ready to be fingerprinted, etc. The give-away is the broken crow-bar, as it is a Forensics dream come true. The whole place is covered with prints, hair, clothing fragments etc. but the crow-bar has some blood on it—belonging to the moron who used it and smashed his finger up hitting a locker. Scene of crime investigation by the Forensics team has already identified the thief, and a file on him is available for the Ops if they want it—just ask the Shivers, but *nicely*:

Billy "the Skid" Sernickech

Age: 19
Hair Colour: Black Eye Colour: Brown
Height 1.78m Build: Slight
Usual Clothing: Jeans, leather jacket with KT insignia, cap
Address: Homeless

Background:
Birth – 5 yrs: foster home
5 yrs – 12 yrs: foster home
12 yrs – present: street gangs
Criminal Record:
895 SD assorted burglaries (minor) – 6 months
897 SD assorted burglaries (minor)
        assault on Shiver officer – 1 year
899 SD suspected armed robbery
        suspected member of Krosstown Traffic
901 SD stabbed three civs
        assault on Shiver officers
        fencing stolen goods – 10 years (total)
903 SD break-out of Shiver Containment Unit

Present Location: Downtown
Status: Wanted Criminal – Recapture and present to Shiver HQ 671N
Armed: Knife

"Skids rule, 'cos we're so cool, Yeah!"

Billy is affiliated to Krosstown Traffic, and is followed around by seven juvenile '**Skids**'. As gangs go, the Skids are actually not *that* weak—just low on numbers. Standard stats and weapons follow:

Skills	Skid Rank	Billy Rank
Unarmed Cbt	2	4
Pistol	3	5
Blade 1-H	2	4
Running	4	5
Streetwise	5	6
Drive M'cycle	3	6
Sleight	4	4
Intimidation	2	4
Hits	12	16
Armed:	Knife	MAC Knife
	CAF Cold Shadow	KK20 Panther
	Flak Vest	Flak Vest

More about: Billy the Skid

Billy grew up as part of a normal Downtown family: his mother and father were both in jail for 90% of his childhood, his foster parents unemployed, his older brother arrested when Billy was three for killing three pals after an argument involving drugs, his friends hanging around street corners and beating up anybody who came along and looked weedy.

From the age of six, Billy was moved from home to home as a result of his repeated tendency to commit burglary and shop-lifting. He joined a gang, the Feelgoods, when he was nine and learnt how to use a gun. He ran away from his foster home for good about then and moved in with the gang in a condemned block of flats. After a number of successful robberies, he gained a reputation and formed the Skids, winning affiliation to KT.

He got cocky and was eventually caught and jailed for ten years at the age of 17. That might have been the end of Billy's rather dubious rise, but he was lucky enough to escape with forty-three other KTers in 903SD during the now-famous Fundworth Penitentiary breakout. Fourteen Shiver guards and two hundred and sixty-three prisoners lost their lives.

Billy has watched a lot of old gangster movies and fancies himself as a wise guy. He tries to talk like an old mobster and the rest of the Skids have to take on names like 'Johnny Sixfinger', 'Mac the Knife' and 'Toni Guhanti'. They don't seem to mind though, and everybody likes pizza and spaghetti. Billy is very unstable and often throws violent fits if things don't go his way, especially when KT veto a plan that simply isn't up to scratch.

Despite everything, Billy is no fool. He knows how to lead others, when to reward and when to punish, who to promote and who to throw out. He just tends to forget about Forensics, mainly because he doesn't understand it in the slightest. His right-hand Skid at the moment is Sal Slanorski, a psychopathic knife expert (Blade 1-H 7, Pistol 2). None of the members are complete idiots—Billy threw out all the genuine morons—but they are all extremely violent, and entirely disinterested in other people's health. Their goal is to become full members of KT and hang around with the likes of 'Big Bry' and 'Smiling Dan', maybe even meet Brent Hurrel himself. The Ops may spoil their ambitions.

Toni: "Hey Billy, you wanna pizza?" Billy: "Yeah sure, Toni. Don't pass on the anchovies or there'll be hell to pay, you got it?" Toni: "I got it Billy, don't worry." Billy: "Did I say I was worried? You make me sad, Toni. You trying to break my balls?" Toni: "Billy, Billy, I don't break nobody's balls, especially not yours. You are like a father to me Billy, I love you more than I love my brothers." Billy: "That's right Toni, you're a good boy. Go get me my pizza." Toni: "Right away, Billy." Mac: "I'll come with you mate, time to collect some protection money..."

Krosstown Traffic

Anyone with even a bit of Streetwise has heard of KT. They have tens of thousands of full members and nominal control over a good swathe of Downtown. There's no point in going into Downtown with guns blazing, presuming that the Ops want to come out alive, anyway. The core of KT hangs out in Heartland, four 25-level-tall interlinked tower blocks that rise out of Lower Downtown. They venture into Suburbia to show how tough they are and then sneak back, loaded down with booty (hopefully), or perhaps with an initiation killing accomplished.

Heartland is huge. The big HQ centres are down on level 15, but Billy the Skid and his bikers are affiliates, not resident in Heartland, and are based a fair distance away, and up on Level 5. Through the steeply descending access tunnels and spiralling roadways, the journey is dark and claustrophobic. Hundreds of minor roads burst out of main arteries and wrap around the collapsing tenements of Downtown to form depressingly squalid high streets for the assorted fast food chains and supermarkets. It is one of these precariously supported veins that Billy and the Skids took from the Rollerball, before looking over the prizes in the safety of their Den above the MightyMince Supermart, 1324 Hilda St., Lossan Sector L5.

The Den is actually three large storerooms filled with beanbags, sofas and vid screens, as well as a fridge full of beers and Kross Krisps. Stolen goods litter the room and one of the items may be the box with the Key in it.

Billy's attitude has always been "Kill a Slop, make a buck", so you can guess what his reaction to a raid on his den would be. If things go badly, he'll leap out of a window to a fire escape and run for help. If this happens, the Ops have about two minutes to catch him before he finds the nearest gang and they help him out.

Closest are **The Slashers**, 25 Juve KTs with **Gripper**, their leader. He has same stats as Billy, but he is armed with a CAF R7 Wild Boar and has Rifle Rank 4. They aren't that far away, and can be on the scene, if they need to be, in a matter of a couple of minutes or so—near enough to cause trouble for the Ops.

How to find Billy

There are several ways to go about catching up with Billy and his gang. Some of these are likely to be more effective than others.

A. Ask the Shivers: they patrol these levels all the time and the sight of eight bikers rushing away from APCs in pursuit last night will have aroused suspicion. Last known sighting was at the other end of Hilda St. "They just kind of vanished up the street and we lost 'em, but they've got to be there somewhere". In fact, the bikes are round the back of the MightyMince Supermart, where all the garbage is kept. A back entrance leads into the stairs which go straight to the Den. Nobody can ever be bothered to stand guard and there's not even a door at the top of the stairs. The stairs are very creaky though, so this may be a problem if the Ops try to sneak up.

B. Go undercover, dress up as Traffic members, infiltrate a gang and try to find out through careful confidence-gaining tricks and stuff. Yeah, that'll be fun. Unfortunately, the Key will have been sold about three months beforehand. A Streetwise individual knows how fast items swap hands in Downtown. It usually takes less than a day to shift anything.

"Who did you say you were? Yeah? Then how come you're wearing a 'Mr. Slayer Rules OK' smiley badge?"

C. Rush in fully-equipped, blast the nearest KT punks, take one alive, beat them up until they blab (which won't take very long) and then grab a taxi over to Billy's place and lob a few grenades in. All very impressive until you remember that Ops engaged in full combat with gang members are quite conspicuous and the message will get around very quickly indeed.

Krosstown Traffic gangs will start to follow the taxi and eventually will stop it and blow it to pieces. Two hundred gang members should be enough. If the Ops get out and run it'll be even more fun. They might even get taken alive and tortured to death.

"But you can't do that to us! It's just not fair, we're the good guys..."

In other words, the optimum tactic is to dress like weedy civs, carry easily concealed weapons and no armour, don't tell the taxi driver what they're up to (and he will ask, they all do). Remember to make sure he stays around to pick them up again (in desperation, they could always steal a motorbike), and try not to make very much noise, just in case other gangs decide to drop in on the Skids to see what's going on.

Please remember one thing: Downtown is not a nice shiny place. Every time they step out of a taxi or Gauss station, the Ops will be plagued by pimps, whores, beggars, pick-pockets, murderers, religious nuts and fast-food mopeds. Everybody smells and looks ill. The air is unclean and unpleasant, and the Ops will not like being there. They will also not fit in very well unless they have Streetwise and maybe a bit of Disguise. But, as the GM, remember that most of these Ops grew up here, unlike the players, so they should have some clue; be nice to them or they'll die much faster than you (and they) expected.

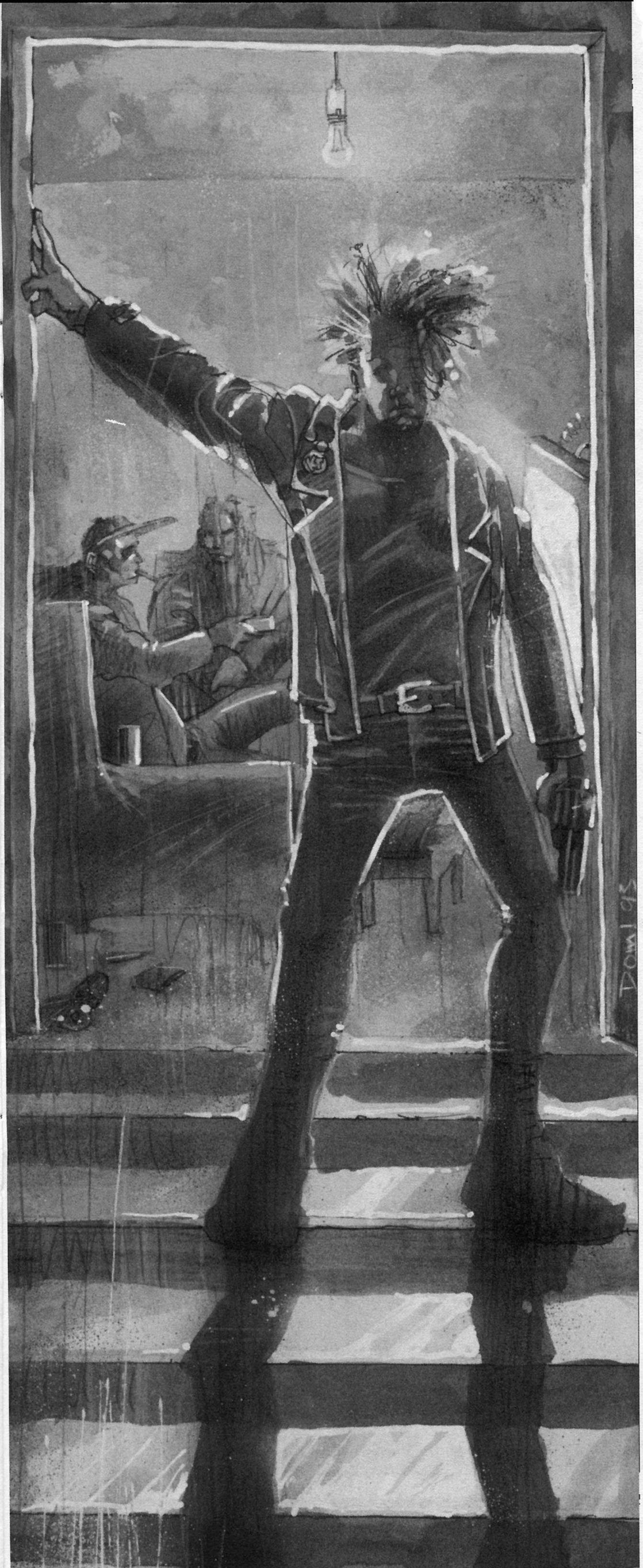
"Oh, please sir, just a few uni for a poor war hero. What do you mean, do I take Cred cards?'"

What's Billy good for?

For a start, there's a warrant (along with a finder's reward of 300₵) out for his arrest. Then there's the fact that Billy is trying to sell the Key, and if they get there in time, he won't have got rid of it yet. That is extremely unlikely however, as Fat Roger, a KT Black Marketeer, is going to buy it off Billy for a ridiculously low price (600₤). So, really, Billy is only good for being the one who knows where Fat Roger's 'shop' is. Still, the others know too, so don't get too upset if they blast him away. Oh yes, Billy makes a good target, too.

Here's that timetable again. This time, the way that events will pan out if the Ops do nothing is included:

Aug 13th **21:18** Billy and his Skids steal the Key, etc.
23:55 IA search warehouse for Key.
Aug 14th **01:16** Billy reaches his Den and calls up Fat Roger on Level 16.
09:00 Midley tries to find Ops for his BPN.
09:15 Fat Roger calls Billy and offers deal.
11:23 Billy goes down to FR and sells Key.
16:32 Fat Roger phones various contacts and puts the word out that he has a relic.
18:16 DarkNight Infiltrators intercept messages and report to Rufus (at 22:23)
20:33 Menace (a Brain Waster) contacts Fats and buys the Key for 13,000₤.



23:49 DarkNight hits FR. He draws a gun and is killed. They go after Menace.

Aug 15th **01:00** FR found by KT, who swear to get his killers.

09:00 Menace hides out in Downtown and tries to find out where the Chest is.

12:00 DarkNight Infiltrators found by Krosstown Traffic and killed.

12:20 Menace killed by a Serial Killer, Switchblade. SB leaves the Key.

12:26 Third Eye News, hot on the trail of SB, find Menace, his 14th victim today. The World of Progress sees the box.

12:32 Curator phones Shivers and squad sent out to recover Key. DarkNight control contacts Rufus and sends another squad. Third Eye wander around the area and try to find SB. Midley sees the news and begins to erase his files, cursing.

12:45 DarkNight agents arrive just before Shivers. A fire-fight ensues... Key may well be won by DNight if Ops aren't around. The Key is raced to a shuttle waiting above Cannibal Sector Four.

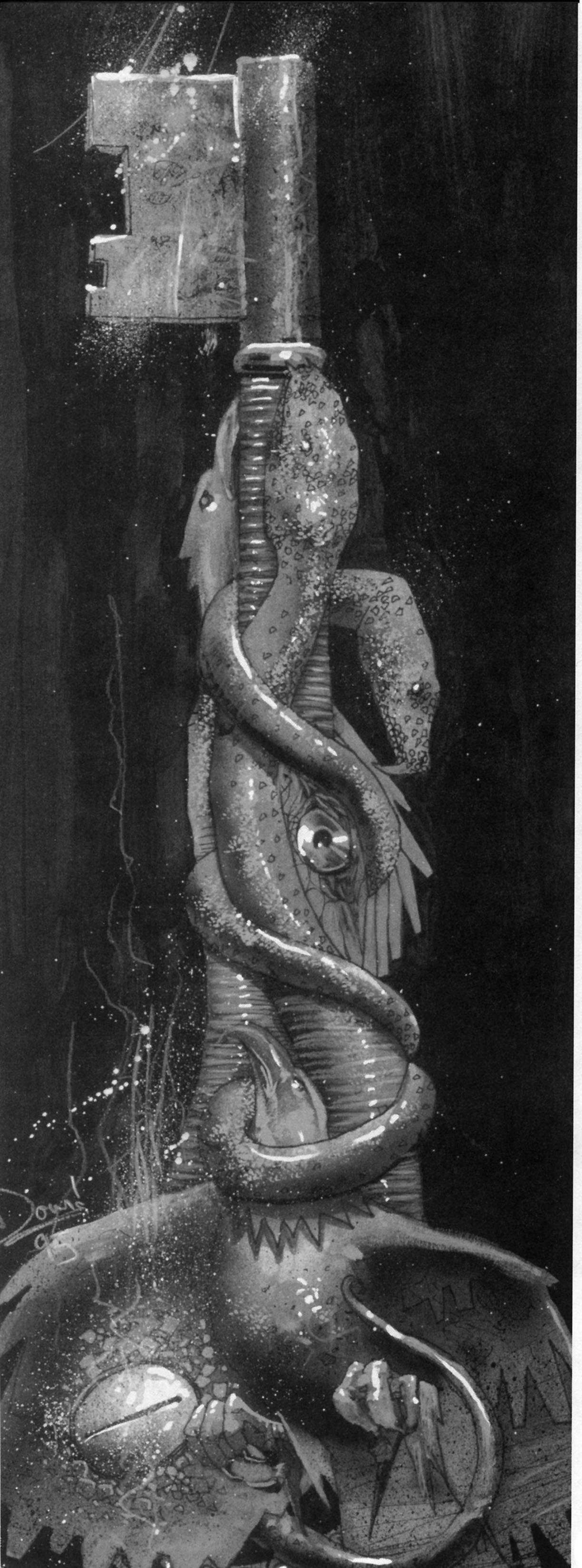
16:56 DarkNight agents reach the shuttle and the Key is taken to Rufus off-planet.

The above timetable is the most likely chain of events. Other things may well happen, at your discretion, but this is the general pattern of events.

Quite what happens to the Ops and what plan they adopt is up to them. If they decide to tell Midley that the Key is from the museum, he'll cut all contacts and let them get on with it, but they will pick up the 1000₵ from the museum as a reward. Unfortunately, he will also curse loudly and plague their careers with whatever he can throw at them. If they choose to take the Key back to Midley he will honour their agreement and pay up; they should be able to earn that time bonus, too.

More about: Rufus

A bearded nutter, a man on the edge of reality, a drugged-up loon who's spent a little too much time talking to Mr. Pharmaceutical, Rufus is an extremely laid-back dude. He's seen it, done it and bought the plastiscythe. Rufus may appear to be a useless junkie, but he's actually one of the most successful dealers in stolen goods in the World of Progress. He talks about drugs all the time, he sits around and appears to do nothing all day, but in reality he's always planning the next big heist and the best way to shift it afterwards.



He's so easy-going that you'd never suspect he was so indifferent to the suffering he causes others. As long as he can light up the next Beat spliff or drop a bit of Personal Interest, he's a happy man.

Rufus lives in a spacecruiser which travels the World of Progress, delivering and collecting all manners of illegal cargo. He'll take children, Shatter and alien sex-toys in one batch, then return a few weeks later with two hundred Shaktarian slaves. He takes no personal interest in what travels with him; he leaves that to his crew. Meanwhile he makes the connections, bathes in his BubblyBath and watches the vid screen for new scoops.

Rufus is very well-protected. His home is a small battle-class cruiser, and it can take considerable punishment. His crew is made up of feral Ebons, Brain Wasters and rogue Frothers and they are paid extremely well to make sure everything goes smoothly. Rufus hardly ever leaves the ship; people come to him. It's not that he's the richest man in the World of Progress, it's just that he will carry any cargo, any at all, and that makes him invaluable.

When the Chest was snatched from a heavily guarded hillfort on Viluria, Rufus knew he had made it into the big league. No expense spared, he hired the best DarkNight agents to track the whereabouts of the Key. Wildcat found it on Mort after twelve long years of searching, and now she's gone missing. Betrayed by her and KT, Rufus actually lost his temper for once and paid big bucks for a Strike Team to go retrieve the Key, just as soon as he found out his old pal Fat Roger was two-timing. You just can't trust anyone these days, you know.

Rufus badly wants that Key and he'll spend millions of creds to make sure he gets it. Just because it's rescued once, it doesn't mean that he won't try again. However, he is painfully aware that he has to be at least a bit careful, as there will be so many other groups going for it.

"So, here we are, wheeling and dealing. That's so cool. Wheeling and wheeling and wheeling. It's been a really beautiful week. You should see those stars, man. They're amazing on Alice. Oh man, you can't touch Alice. Except for a Fusion Tab, of course, but that's an entirely different story. Yeah, anyway, I've got a whole bunch of gorgeous alien artworks here. Yeah, real ancient, conflict war stuff. Worth a planet. Dude, you wanna make me an offer I can't refuse? Hey, that is one extremely refusable motherfucker of an offer..."

3. August 14th—a Bad Day to be Fat

or

The Joys of Downtown

Fat Roger, the KT Black Marketeer:

Relevant times are:

Aug 14th: **11:23** Fat Roger receives Key.
20:33 Key sold to Menace.
23:49 DarkNight hit the place.

When the Key arrives, Fats is very confused. He knows it's precious metal and probably really old, but he has no idea what it is or what it's worth. He throws some petty cash at Billy and tells him it's fake gold, then grabs his volumes on jewellery, especially off-planet stuff. After a couple of frustrating hours, he finds a reference to the Key of Delhyread and realizes what he's got in his suddenly sweaty hands. He phones a few pals and spreads the news among the Ebon and off-world dealers.

"I like to eat. It calms me."

Fats is both rich and opulent. His home is a large storehouse, filled with stolen computers, washing machines and the like. Behind certain large steel doors are assorted drug manufacturing plants. KT work here for Fats and make themselves a lot of money.

Menace comes in at some point with a large case of cash (13,000ū) and takes the key away. Fats locks the money away in his safe and is a happy man. He's not as happy as Menace is.

Rufus will hit the place with an unusual strike force. He's more used to espionage and sneaking around, and so the Infiltrators assembled for this have been thrown together from off-planet, backed up by some tame DarkNight ex-War criminals. They are up against 33 Props (roughly parallel to Shivers) plus a few technicians. Fat Roger won't be much use. What actually happens is that Rufus's team burst into the complex, guns blazing, grab Fats and ask politely where the Key is. He tells them that unfortunately he's sold it to Menace and then he rummages around for the address. At this point another 20 KT members rush in (stats as the Skidders) and Fat Roger pulls a gun on the leader of the Strike Force. Mistake. A minute or so later the place is deserted (except for corpses) and Rufus's bunch are on the trail of a Brain Waster.

Strike Force:

Five Espionage Agents armed with an assortment of grenades as well as DN74s. They are wearing Flak Jackets, and have all appropriate combat skills at 4 or 5, according to your preferences.

Six DarkNight Infiltrators (the same stats as the similar team on page 27) with an assortment of SLA guns and armour (typically FEN 204s or 700s and HARD armour).

Three ex-War Criminals (stats and combat skills between 10 and 13; see page 27 for names & details) wearing DarkNight-enhanced Crackshot, armed with FEN Warmongers, stacks of grenades, a couple of SP Vibro Discs and DPB Flick Scythes, and a Sledge-hammer. They're tough, and pumped up with Shatter.

"Oh, will you feel that rush—yeah, smother me in violence."

It is unlikely that the Props will stand much chance, as the Agents will chuck in a couple of handfuls of frag grenades then riot canisters (stolen off Shivers), and wait for the Props to run out rubbing their eyes. Any who do stay behind to protect Fats will be gunned down or sliced into a few pieces by the nutty ex-War Crims as they rush in to finish off any survivors. One of the human Infiltrators is in charge and will question Fats before blowing his head off. It's actually stupid of Rufus to work this way—he could have just bought the damn thing. Thing is, he thought that Fats and KT were double-crossing him along with Wildcat, so he wanted to teach them a lesson. He even made sure his squad left a note telling them so. *Loser.*

More about: Fat Roger

Even as a little kid, Fat Roger was overweight. He just couldn't help it. A Chocbloc here, a TreacleTreat there; the calories just mounted up. He couldn't move very quickly, so he tended to watch the vid a lot, and read a lot of books. Jewels and treasures fascinated him, and by the age of ten he had read all the reference works he could get his chubby little hands on. When he found a small curiosity shop stuffed with fantastic oddities, he discovered heaven. Pocket money was never enough, so

he began to steal, first from his family and then from shops and even occasionally from strangers. His lust for beautiful things just continued to expand—along with his waistline—until he was forced to grudgingly turn to robbery and burglary. He sold the ugly items he got hold of so that he could afford to hire other kids to do the criminal bit for him and help him get more pretty things. Eventually became so successful that he was approached by KT and offered a job working as one of their 'Traffickers'.

Fat Roger is not a particularly happy man. He moves slowly and ponderously while his mind races ahead through logbooks, accounts and customer lists, straining to improve his margins and fetch in extra profit. He has been known to smile occasionally—when an antique he has been hunting for is finally retrieved, for instance—but generally he just exists in a haze of despondency, bored to tears by his job but aware that it is something he is very good at.

He earns enough to buy the items he wants and the storehouse he works from is also his home, stuffed in with all his valuables. He worries to himself about security, but never says very much to anybody. He spends each day making out orders and delivery notes, sending KTers to fetch whatever he wants to shift, and then pushing the merchandise to whichever shop or stall can sell it. In the backrooms of the storehouse KT produce drugs, but he stays out of that side of the business, other than to cream a small amount from the profits in rent and security.

Fat Roger has been working for KT for twenty-three years and has grown so colossal that two Props are paid to push him around in a specially built trolley. He hums to himself when he worries, which is the bulk of the time. When the Strike Force hit the warehouse, Fat Roger will not make any sudden moves at first, but will hide behind steel crates. When he is found, he is pushed to his office and will, as noted above, go for a gun in one of the drawers when the reinforcement burst in. What a senseless waste of human life.

"Oh, I see. Hmmm. Well, I suppose you hold the balance of power at present. So, what is it you said you wanted? Oh, well, that's a pity. No, please don't do that. The item you require has been sold. I'm terribly sorry. Who? Ah, well, I'd have to check my books. Yes, in my office. Over there. You'll have to push me. Yes, here in this drawer. Now, let me see. Ah. Here it is—BLAMBLAMBLADDAMADDADAM! Yiiaaaarrgghhhhhhhhhh."

Other Things Going Down

August 14th is one of those days when it's good to stay in bed. It's the day Midley goes looking for Ops, it's the day lots of Props die, and it's the day when loud, boorish PCs will find themselves to be rather unpopular.

Those Ops who get as far as Billy may like to go find Fat. He's on Level 16 of beautiful Downtown and is well-protected, under normal circumstances. It may pay to be a little discreet as the Ops get near to the factory. Taxis don't go there; they'll go to about Level 11 in this area and then simply refuse to go on. This will mean the Ops have to negotiate the broken walkways, drop shafts, stairwells and other glorious features of Lower Downtown (along with dirt, noise, crying, smog, sewage, beggars, criminals, whores, serial killers—remember them?)

"How come you're so clean, then? Wouldn't be like a Slop or anything now, would you? Prove it! Let me have a look in your wallet and I'll leave you alone. Hey! Let me down from here you bastards!"

That could be the most dangerous part, because asking a civ "Hey, mind telling me where I can find that nice Fat Roger chap?" is declaring open season on Ops. A good idea would be to force any surviving Skids to take them there on the bikes. That would be sensible. However, it's highly unlikely that the Ops thought of picking up the Drive Motorcycle Skill, isn't it? Taking a Skid in a taxi is about as lethal as anything else; the taxi driver will drop the Ops off, grab the nearest pay phone and let every HQ within a mile know what's going down. Game over.

Eventually, it may be that the Ops are spying on this large storehouse, two floors in height, covered in corrugated metal, etc. Nothing particularly out of the ordinary. If they're in time, Props will be standing around looking tough. Remember, down this far it's extremely dark, even by day. Street lamps glow yellow and white all around (but fail to provide much illumination) and the approaches to this place are either roadblocked by wrecked lorries or are patrolled by Props. It's always night-time on Level 16, and there is continual dirty, slimy drizzle from all those lovely walkways that make up the levels above. To look up is to see wire mesh pavements, precariously balanced spiralling roadways, glimpses of lights in flats and tenements through the millions of steel and plastic girders supporting this whole rotten pack of cards.

See it like this: sit in the middle of a large open space and drop ten billion tons of steel girders, meshing and concrete on top of yourself. When you look up, what do you see? Not a lot, right? Lots of ridiculous angles and broken beams, collapsed buildings, swaying towers, vast cracked gridwork platforms which are supposed to separate the levels but subsided three hundred years ago. Lower Downtown is like this—a God of Steel and Concrete had too much Slosh one day, and threw up badly. Another way of seeing what happened is to imagine a really badly built poverty housing area in New York, then to jump up and down on it a lot with a lot of heavy machinery, put a big slab of concrete and steel meshwork all over the top of it, with unreliable lighting attached to the underside, add a few slimy access tunnels, roadways and stairwells, and then start again with another dodgy housing project. Jump on this too, and repeat until the original level is a few miles under the ground. There you have it. Downtown: serial killer heaven, cartographer's nervous breakdown.

> *"Duck! Oh, too late. Sorry about that. Uh, do you want a hand?"*

If there were any survivors of the visit to the Den, KT will know where the Ops are heading for and will send reinforcements. A few hundred probably. This may interfere with the Strike Force, but probably won't bother them too much. CAF guns are really a bit underspec'ed when you're a ex-War Criminal on combat drugs. The Ops won't see it in quite the same way—particularly if they did the sensible thing and left their armour behind—so best they keep their heads down. That shouldn't be too hard; the panorama is filled with fallen girders, burnt-out vehicles, concrete support columns stretching up out of sight and twisted street-lamp remains from the days of the 'Blow the Glow' motorcycle racing game.

So, the Ops will see Props changing guard, maybe a few hundred KTers hanging around. They may even see Menace, if they're in time—a good DIA or CONC roll may mean they spot the box he's carrying and they can go off and follow him. Otherwise, they'll have to find a way in to see Fat, or wait until DarkNight hits (maybe even getting involved in the fight) and rummage through the remains until they find the discarded register of transactions. Menace's address will be there, logged to the Key: "GloomCity Arcade Hall, Turkey Junction, Markham Sector Level 23".

> *"Turkey Junction? What kind of frigging name for a place is that, then?"*

4. A Bad Day to be a DarkNight Agent

or

Brain Waster Paté

August 15th

Important Times:

01:00	KT alerted to DN hit on Fat.
09:00	Menace starts trying to find chest.
12:00	DN Strike Team killed by KT.
12:20	Menace killed by Switchblade.
12:23	Menace found by Ruby Mulligan of Third Eye News.

Things get a bit hectic after the Strike Force hits Fat Roger. KT aren't too pleased, and the gang leaders send word around that Rufus and DarkNight were behind it. It's then open day on DarkNight converts—bodies start appearing (and disappearing) all over their territory. Ops will hear the news when they happen to be walking past an open window and see the vid screen, anytime between 04:00 and 11:00, depending on what they're up to.

How to deal with Menace

If the Ops try to follow Menace they will have to be good. He has useful skills: Hide 7, Sneak 6 and, perhaps most importantly since he'll be on his bike, Drive Motorcycle 7. They can try taking him out, in which case they'll get a good fight, because he's a Brain Waster who went rogue from SLA Industries due to rather unfortunate activities involving murder and sexual assault. He didn't wait to be asked to leave.

Overwhelming force would be a good policy. Any other option gives him the opportunity to fight back, which would be messy. Following him back to his hideout is safe too; he's far too delighted with the Key to worry about anybody trailing him. He will reach his hide-out at 22:16 Aug 14th and stay there, so the Ops could spy through his open window and watch him as he unscrews the Key and looks unpleasantly happy with himself. He will then put it under his bed and go to sleep.

More about: Menace

This is one sick psycho. Menace grew up in the usual isolated environment, taunted by other Ebons, bullied by the stronger Brain Waster kids, learning to use his Ebb powers to their most destructive potentials. As the other kids were blowing animals to bits and burning down rich Ebon's homes, Menace developed a need for more perverse thrills. He would kidnap young Ebons and torture them for hours, disposing of their bodies after they had been severely disfigured. Never caught, he eventually joined SLA Industries and carried on with human children. He did well in the Company and was soon admired by his fellow Ops as a tough and reliable motherfucker. When, after many years of sexual assaults and horrible mutilations, two of his friends caught him in bed with a corpse, he was forced to kill them and run for Downtown. That was five years ago and ever since he has been hunted by the remainder of his all-Waster squad, the Dark Angels.

Menace became interested in the Key as soon as he heard about the Tomb being discovered. He knew the old legends and what it would mean if the Chest could be found. When Fat Roger phoned him, he was overjoyed; at last he could find the Chest and have revenge on both the Ebons who had deserted him and the Dark Angels who had driven him away. Rather insanely, he spread the news of his purchase to several dodgy characters. Some of them happened to be DarkNight traitors who knew what a certain Rufus was after, but that news doesn't make it back to his apartment until after Switchblade has dropped by. If the serial killer misses, there's always DarkNight to have a go. The vid screen advert for the Key is an added problem, but not one which Menace has to worry about anymore.

Menace to his four brothers: "Hey, you should check out the taste of a good broiled human, not bad! What, d'ya think I'm joking? Shit man, taste this and tell me I'm wrong. You want a bucket? You sick or somethin'? Hold on there, your guts need a good clean out anyhow. What a wimp. How about the rest of you? Hey, nice one, try the brain. You! Come over here, you're next. Yeah, climb in and stop crying, don't want to lose all that salt, adds to the taste, ha! That's it, here let me help. See, not too bad, eh? Oh, a bit hot? Well never mind, let me do something about the pain. Make it worse, ha ha! Pass the spleen round, plenty more where that came from. Nothing like a good old family get-together. Right, bruvs?"

Menace

SCL 7 (lapsed) *Age: 28*
Height: 1.85m *Weight: 62.2kg*

STR 8
DEX 10
DIA 9
CONC 9
CHA 7
PHYS 9
KNOW 9
COOL 8
HITS 21

FORMULAE 8
FLUX 45
(with 20 more in his Deathsuit)

Rifle 7
Pistol 8
Auto/Support 7
Martial Arts 6
Hide 7
Sneak 6
Drive Motorcycle 7
Streetwise 5
SLA Info 3

Blast 13
Blue Thermal 8
Communication 3
Detect 6
Enhancement 9
Healing 11
Illumination 6
Protect 13 (and his Deathsuit is maximised)
Reality Folding 8
Red Thermal 11
Telekinesis 5

Equipment:
Deathsuit over an ECM Body Suit
FEN AR with 100 rounds of HEAP
Jolt Glove (substitute a Gash Fist if you need to)
Vibrosabre
Drug Injectors loaded with KickStart Plus
Finance Chip Scanner
EnviroScanner

"Hey, you with the dodgy eye make-up, eat my heeeiiiiiiiiiiiugghhhhhhhhh.....!"

To Kill A Brain Waster

09:00 Menace will wake up, grab the box, piss in the sink and look over the Key again. He will then start phoning places for rumours of where the Chest is. Any Op watching the vid will start hearing reports that the brutal killer Switchblade is operating deep in Markham sector. Menace shot out his vid screen months ago, so he will be completely unprepared for what comes in through his window in a few hours time.

10:30 Vid reports everywhere of KT on the rampage for a DarkNight squad somewhere in their territory.

> *"Look at those gang members going down under the blades of these ruthless killers. I don't know about you, but this is turning me on."*

12:00 Live footage of hundreds of KT bikers racing after some armoured humans on foot. Explosions, gunfire, bikers ripped apart by HESH and HEAP; scenes of carnage are everywhere. A few of the gang are caught and killed. More bikers appearing from everywhere, along with Props carrying bigger guns. Smoke grenades hide the small group and when it clears, there are bodies everywhere. The count includes 10 dead DarkNight agents. There is no sign of the ex-War Crims. This takes place almost directly above Menace, 3 levels up.

12:20 Switchblade swings in through Menace's open window and says "Hello!". Combat is joined. Unfortunately, Switchblade is fairly dangerous as mad killers go. He's after aliens and he's come equipped—with an AGB Chopper and a DPB Gash Fist. In the first three seconds, Menace finds his head and neck lacerated by wire, and then he discovers a fist in his face. Before he can prepare any kind of defence, he is pummelled to the ground by the maniac and, in all probability, has his head totally destroyed. The Ops could change that, of course.

If the players do save Menace—or, in fact, save Switchblade—their act of kindness will not go unpunished, as either will turn on the Ops immediately given a chance. If the fight drags on, the PCs might even find themselves still engaged in a running battle when **Ruby Mulligan** turns up at 12:26 with her camera crew. If they're behind the times, the various other forces involved will all congregate on the apartment at about 12:45.

More about: The Key of Delhyread

In the halls of the Tas-Tuo on Static, the learned whisper that during the beginnings of the World of Progress, there was much that was discordant within the Universe. While it formed a coherent structure, many insanities were released to scatter and proliferate. The Ebons were the first to attempt to recapture the Traumas, as they became known, so as to gain Knowledge. As so often happens, the Ebons went too far and were too successful. Those who kept their sanity wrote down what they had experienced and learned, and others translated them as glyphs of power, which could be used to rip apart a being's mind and perhaps even its very existence. So dangerous were these glyphs and diaries considered that they were placed into a chest and locked forever with the Key. Then the Key and the Chest were separated and all reference to the Traumas removed. Naturally some Ebons took exception to such a judgement, and set about trying to find the glyphs.

Many thousands of years passed before the Chest was found. A privateer stumbled upon it while exploring a ruined world of wastelands. He was tracked by other power-hungry Ebons, who killed him and took it for themselves. They spent the next hundred years fruitlessly searching for the Key. Eventually they too were killed, by a gang of humans who wanted the Chest for financial reasons. The gang in turn were betrayed and murdered by business associates, and the chest continued to pass regularly, and somewhat fatally, around the criminal fraternity for centuries, but the Key remained hidden. It wasn't until 886SD that Dr. Simpson discovered the tomb of Carnage, a reviled BrainWaster who slaughtered hundreds of Ebons, that the Key itself was found.

The tomb was located far from civilisation, in the icy wastes of Czaria. A strange local condition meant that Flux was absorbed from the surroundings into the earth, an experience which produced agony in Ebb users. Already deep below the surface, Dr. Simpson and his team cleared a wall of bones and skulls to reveal the entrance of Carnage's tomb. Getting to the coffin proved costly in terms of life, but Dr Simpson and the remaining members of his team made it out with the corpse. The Key was clutched in the corpse's hands, and as soon as he realised what he'd found, Dr. Simpson claimed it for his prestigious museum. The Ebon authorities were initially unaware of what had been uncovered and when they realised the importance of the find they sent appeals to the Curator, asking for it to be hidden once more. Their pleas fell on deaf ears. Rufus is the latest owner of the Chest and at last, after so long, the Key is up for grabs. The stakes are incredibly high.

From Dr Simpson's notes: *"We followed the map as closely as possible and finally managed to locate the correct position. Conditions are extremely harsh, and the drain in this area produces constant pain. We rested for several hours to plan, but felt no better for it. The Flux deficit in this area is intense. Our Ebons turned back two days ago, and now I can see why, as they would never have survived this. Food is short, so the Ops will be unhappy, but there is plenty of water and mining equipment, and their strength will not suffer much. I have sent out two scouts to examine conditions on the other side of the bone wall. They have not yet returned. The tomb is reputed to be heavily trapped, so if they do not come back, I shall feel confident that I have read the map correctly. Finding corpses would serve well to highlight danger.*

"Excellent news. Only one of the scouts returned. The other is dead, killed by a blade trap in what must be the tomb's antechamber. Using her information, I should be able to calculate a successful approach to the corpse. The Ops have cleared a path for us, and the tomb should be easy to penetrate.

"I have to admit to a certain respect for the Brain Waster. The agony as he built this area must have been immense; there seems little doubt that he was insane. Even after all this time, his wards were extremely effective. Five died before we made it to the sarcophagus, which was in the shape of a strange dark altar. The first Op to touch it died screaming, as did the second and third, but the fourth, who also had to be forced, was unharmed and we managed to remove the lid. The corpse was surprisingly well-preserved, and held a small box in its hands, which I shall examine later. A thoroughly satisfactory result. When the plunderers come, let the dead Operatives announce to all and sundry that SLA Industries, once again, has proven superior."

Third Eye News—The bigger the body count, the better the ratings

One of Third Eye's best Downtown reporters, Ruby Mulligan has been roaming these levels since she was a child, and even KT leave her alone. They know she's good for getting them high-profile footage and that's

good for their business and their egos. Thus, she has a reputation for getting the top stories and making hundreds of on-the-scene scoops. In truth, KT usually tell her if something big is going down and she'll normally be there before they are. They get to be on the vid and she gets her three minutes of prime-time footage. Everybody's happy.

Ruby *really* doesn't like Serial Killers. In fact, her parents were killed by that old villain Bane Root twenty years ago, and she had to grow up in a run-down hostel for deprived teenagers. It was there that she learnt how to survive the flash-floods, pimps and murders. She may not be the best-educated reporter in the World of Progress, but she's got what it takes to make it in and out of Downtown alive.

She's currently trailing a sicko who's been targeting aliens for the past three days. So far, he's accounted for 45 of them (and only one survivor, who is in intensive care). She's seen movement in the lower levels and now she's down on 23, trying to find out what is going on. Thanks to helpful starry-eyed tenants, she's managed to follow the trail of bodies to Turkey Junction, where three collapsed dual carriageways have crushed the upper levels of a squalid collection of high-rise blocks and an old train station, long-forgotten. She found the 13th kill of the day smashed to a pulp in one of the blocks, and excitement has reached fever-pitch due to the fact that Switchblade—as Ruby has named him (which is actually a mistake, as he uses his fists)—has been spotted climbing up the fire-escape of one of the blocks. Hot on his trail, live on Channel 22, it's Ruby and her intrepid (if reluctant) camera crew, racing up there after him.

More about: Ruby

She's twenty-four and already one of the most famous Downtown reporters after just three years with Channel 22 (*"we bring the news to you"*). Her mouth is renowned for its ability to never stop moving, and audiences love to see her running after killers and corrupt officials. Her most successful catch was the Gripper Sect, a cognate of fifteen Serial Killers who had been eradicating Civilians in their hundreds all over Downtown. She finally cornered the survivors after an exciting firefight in Hugh's Pizzarama Pad, where she managed to interview the leader (Gibbering Jack) and then shot his brains out on air when he made some lewd suggestions. The ratings soared, and the scene was repeated many times on 'Best Of' shows. She followed this up with the dramatic rescue of forty kidnapped SLA employees being held in a section of disused sewers. She convinced the kidnappers to release all but two of the poor saps before a team of Ops went in and blew them away.

More recently Ruby has been trying to expunge the restless ghosts of her past by tracking down serial killers whenever they appear. It is well known that much of her manic behaviour is due to having witnessed the slaughter of her parents by Bane Root so many years ago, and not being able to do anything about it. She deals with this irrational guilt by hunting murderers down and accompanying Ops for the final showdown, live on Channel 22. It's good for ratings and even better for her conscience.

Ruby cannot stop talking. She always has a story to tell, and it's usually about KT or psychopaths. She knows the streets like the back of her hand (Streetwise 8) and the streets know her, too. She is well liked by the gangs and organizations, as she gives them good publicity and plays the game. She's not particularly corrupt, she's just a professional. Many times, they have actually saved her from certain doom, rushing in at the critical moment to snatch her out of the claws of death. Camera crews are usually left behind, much to her controller's endless disgust. Ruby frankly prefers working alone anyway.

At first glance, Ruby does not stand out from the crowd. She is average human height, quite thin and pale, with short brown hair and large brown eyes. Her stare is penetrating, however, and her eyes sparkle with life. She lives for the moment, cannot understand the concept of embarrassment and feels happiest sprinting down collapsing tunnels after dangerous weirdos. The camera crews that everyone hates draw straws and the losers get Ruby...

> *"There he is, there he is! Faster you clowns, let's see the whites of his eyes. Viewers, even if we've got to use Frank our soundman for bait, we'll nail this threat to public security on Channel 22!"*

Making the News

Any Ops who happen to be watching what's going on or who are racing to the scene may get there in time to save Menace, or even to kill him first. If he encounters them, Switchblade will turn on the Ops if there are any non-humans in the group, or run for it if not and then only fight if cornered. Ruby won't reach Menace until about three minutes after Switchblade has made

mincemeat of his brains, but the ratings on 22 are going through the roof. If the Ops are around, she'll offer them large amounts of money for chasing the killer and letting her get the showdown on camera. Third Eye will transmit them a contract worth 300 creds per Op. Midley will not be happy—he wants things kept quiet—but this kind of media coverage is a break the squad shouldn't mess up.

While Menace is being filmed and Ruby is chatting excitedly about the mess, she will sit on the box. When she stands up to keep up the chase for Switchblade, she knocks the box over and the Key falls out. The crew leaves without bothering to tidy it up or even really noticing it. The Ops may at this point grab the Key, etc. Any Ops who are unfortunate enough to still be wandering around aimlessly will see the news on the nearest vid screen. If their luck is in, that means they'll hear where the Key is and what's going down.

More about: Switchblade

One of the major problems with being homeless or isolated is that psychos use you for slaughter practice. Tens of thousands of frequent killers operate in Mort City alone, using the dark alleys and networks of tunnels to travel the lengths and breadths of Downtown and sometimes even Suburbia. Serial killers tend not to hit Uptown, as they'd die rather rapidly, but there have been a few hopefuls over the last hundred years. The problem has slowly worsened, until now the Shivers and Ops wage constant war on sociopaths and other lunatics.

Unfortunately, there are millions of potential killers, just needing that extra cue to flip and grab a knife. It is very easy to go missing in Lower Downtown and never be found; it counts as natural causes, in fact. Upper Downtown is better-protected, but even so, obsessives and genocidal maniacs abound. The problem is that once a killer begins, s/he may not kill again for another month or even a year. Of course, some will try to fill their daily quota, but the vast majority just live normal lives and kill only when they know they can get away with it. This is why there are so many unsolved murders—resources are too limited to deal with such a vast problem.

Switchblade is an Obsessive, choosing to kill non-humans because "they make me puke". Not a great reason, but he hadn't seen it on the vids yet, so he thought he'd give it a go. **Real name:** John Franklin. **Age:** 32. **Goal in life:** to get off with the Sleek Maiden (a Contract Killer). **Probability of Succeeding:** 0%.

Poor old John is quite a recluse, and not very good at communicating. He spent three years in Honnibroke Institute for the Mentally Deranged after eating his next-door neighbours, but was released back into the community last year on a rehabilitation programme. Making fine progress, he killed his psychiatrist, escaped into Downtown and decided to make a niche within the serial killer community. The break came when he found an Op who had just been killed and managed to swipe his equipment before the Shivers came to recover it. Now he is a very dangerous psycho who just wants to get on the vid and say, 'Hi Mom'.

Switchblade

Age: 32
Height: 1.89m *Weight: 69.7kg*

STR 8
DEX 7
DIA 5
CONC 6
CHA 3
COOL 7
HITS 16

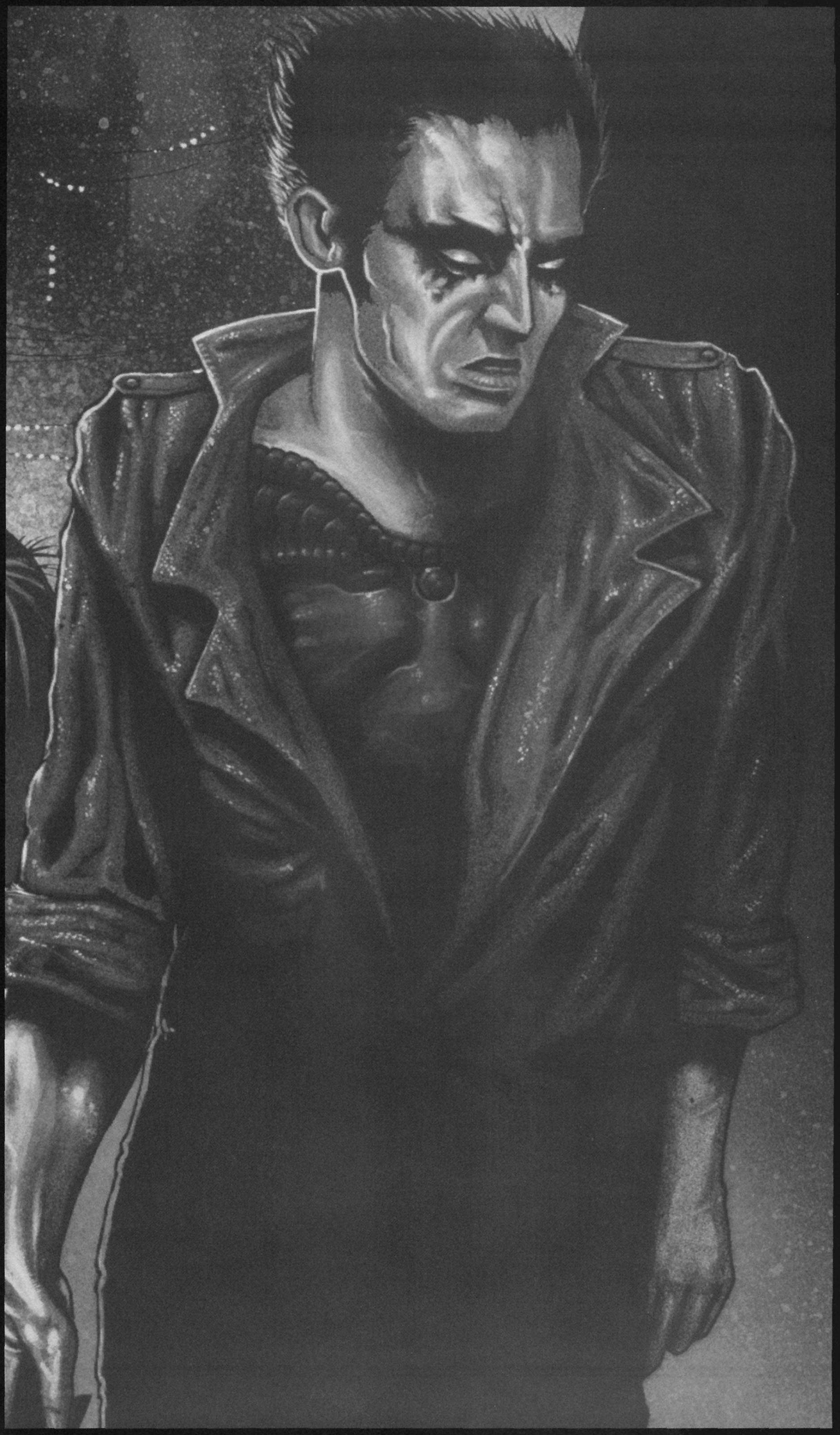
Unarmed 6
Pistol 5
Blade 1-H 8
Running 5
Climb 6
Tracking 3
Detect 5
Survival 4
Streetwise 6

Equipment:
Chopper (with 6 wirepacks)
Gash Fist
long, grimy coat over equally grimy Body Blocker

Living On Video

The Curator of the Ancient History Museum has been watching the chase and he can't believe his eyes, but there it is. He immediately phones the Shivers and tells them where the Key is. They send a couple of APCs as close as they can and then race there on foot. At the same time, three SCAF pilots are alerted and fly over. They'll get there about 12:45.

DarkNight Infiltrators—who are pretty thin on the ground right now, after KT's extremely vicious retaliation—see the news and those who know about



Rufus contact him; he organizes another squad to retrieve the Key, and sends a shuttle to Cannibal Sector Four to await their arrival. Bear in mind that these people have been dedicatedly hunted for most of the night; they are tired and low on ammo. Now they know where the Key is, they are guided to the scene by Civilian Convert guides, who will not take part in combat. They'll get there around 12:45 too.

Assuming things went as planned, at 12:45 Ruby is tracing Switchblade through the dark and dingy corridors of Turkey Junction and across precarious walkways; so she will not be in a position to film the fire-fight until she starts hearing loud explosions. It will take her (and any Ops with her) about five minutes to return to the spot.

Midley now knows he's doomed if he doesn't act fast, so he wipes out the interview with Derek Jasper and starts weaving some convenient lies about where he was at the time. From now on, unless they have the Key for him (and have not been filmed taking it), the Ops will not be able to contact him at all. He is out of play as far as they are concerned. Future vengeance will start after a few months, when everything has cooled down a bit.

If the Ops saw the Key on the Vids too, they will also arrive at Turkey Junction at the same time as everyone else—hold the action to wait for them if you have to. If they fought with Menace they probably didn't find the Key; if they did, have Ruby film it, and then everyone will converge on them instead. Either way, all the different groups should end up coming together unless the Ops have been really, really clever.

DarkNight and Shivers and Ops —Oh My!

This could be a bit lethal for your average Shiver patrol. The three APCs will reach the scene about two minutes after the SCAFs were shot down by the new DarkNight squad as they attempted an approach on GloomCity Arcade Hall. It takes about the same amount of time for the two opposing groups to make it to the base of the building and reach the fire escapes, and after that all hell breaks lose.

Under the cover of pillars, rubble, railings and fire escapes, the Shivers will do their best to fight back against trained killers. There are now 5 Infiltrators with good weapons and armour (but not much ammo) and the 3 ex-War Criminals (who have been rounded up again) in the new DarkNight team. They will be up against 30 standard Shiver Troops who are armed with Browbeater Gauss Rifles and wearing Body Blocker. Oh dear, best the Shivers keep their heads down and live to fight another day. Any brave Shiver who attempts a frontal charge will be severely disappointed—Body Blocker Armour doesn't like to be hit by the kind of guns and blades that Rufus's friends happen to be carrying. Still, they only have three frags, four smoke and two blast grenades between them.

> *"Oh my god, did you see that? Where did his legs go? Oh. Maybe they can sew them back on."*

Basically, the Shivers will die if they try to advance. Meanwhile the Strike Force will move up to the room where the Key is. Ops may want to engage them in combat sometime around now. They can attack from above if they didn't go with Ruby, otherwise they'll have to exchange shots from nearby fire escapes. Menace's room is ten storeys up.

After the first minute the Shivers will signal their Base for help and a Red BPN will immediately be issued. Also, three more APCs filled with Dispersal Shivers will be on route, as well as five SCAFs. This lot will take ten minutes or so to arrive, by which time the Key will have been 'retrieved' and the Strike Force on its way. That's unless they've been delayed by the Ops.

The DarkNight Team will disappear fast, guided by the two Converts who've been hanging around to lead them to the Cannibal Sector, down shafts and sewers. The Converts have also stashed some ammo for the team at the start of the sewers. The journey will take a few hours and will be dangerous, but they know how to bypass the lower levels of Downtown and go through the many holes in the Wall. Ops will be able to track them quite easily by the dead bodies of pigs and cannibals, not to mention Shivers and any KT biker who comes along. KT will call off the chase after they see that the Shivers have become involved.

Shivers will be called back from the Team and instead, as stated above, a Red BPN may attract rival Ops. If the players catch any DN people alive, they'll get a reward of 150₵ for each one, and if they get the Key and hand it in, they'll get 1500₵ and a 0.3 SCL increase (plus the 1000₵ reward from the university, and any cash from dealing with Ruby). If they go this route, they won't be able to cash in Midley's (largely fraudulent) BPN, and they'll really, really piss him off, but Dr. Simpson will bear them in mind for his next expedition—whether that's a reward or a punishment is up to you, of course.

More about: the Strike Team

Rufus has paid well for the best team he can find. Even though none of them have worked together before, they are all professionals and know how to do their job. The leader is an ex-Op, Fungus, (used to be SCL 6B.1) who sold out to DarkNight and disappeared from sight. He's been raiding and killing for money for some time now, and is a born leader (Leadership 8). The four other human Infiltrators are Reefer (obviously, these are codenames), Lowdown, Callous and Frog. The Converts are anonymous civilians under the command of Fungus, and little good in a fight. The ex-War Criminals are complete Shatter addicts: Behemoth, The Warmonger and Ribcage. They know each other by reputation and look forward to mass slaughter together. They have become quite good friends as a result of this assignment. The Strike Force is mean and ruthless; no negotiation, nothing personal, it's just a job they're being paid to do.

> *Behemoth to The Warmonger: "D'ya see that Prop over there. Well, watch this. Yeah!" The Warmonger to Behemoth: "Oh yeah? See that Prop hiding behind that crate? BLAM! Alright." Ribcage to nobody much: "Nyuhhhhh nyuhhhhhhhhhh nyuhhhhh uhhhhhhh!"*

Infiltrators (Fungus, Reefer, Low, Callous, Frog)

STR 8 (Fungus 9)
DEX 10
DIA 8
CONC 7
CHA 7 (Fungus 9)
COOL 10
HITS 15 (Fungus 18)

Unarmed Combat 7
Pistol 8
Blade 1-H 7
Throw 5
Running 9
Climb 9
Sneak 7
Detect 8
Hide 6
SLA Info 4
Rival Company Info 4
Demolitions 6
Streetwise 6

Equipment: HARD armour, BLA 046M Blitzer with HEAP rounds, VibroSabre, Blaze (already active), Shatter, KickStart Plus, Honesty, forged SCL cards

Ex-War Crims (Behemoth, Warmonger, Ribcage)

STR 13
DEX 13
DIA 10
CONC 10
CHA 10
COOL 11
DMG BONUS 6 (Thanks to Shatter)
HITS 26

Unarmed 11
Pistol 12
Rifle 12
Auto/Support 13
Hammer 2-H 13 (Ribcage has a Sledgehammer)
Throw 9
Sneak 13
Hide 12
Running 10
Detect 10
Marksman 10
All other skills at 6-10
Good Luck 6
Equipment: Crackshot (Customized, +2PV, +5ID all locations), FEN 24 Warmonger loaded with HESH (WarWorld-only issue, ROF5, Range 27m, Clip 40, Cal 11.35mm, HESH Dam 18, Pen 2, AD 5), Power Claymore, Shatter (already active), Blaze (already active), 2x Kickstart Plus drug injector systems, Grenades (Frag, Blast, & Smoke)

NEW SKILL: HAMMER 2-H. Hammers have been popular as cheap weapons since before the Conflict Wars; in essence, they are a heavy lump of hard metal at the end of a long ceramic shaft. Anything else is just refinement. Strength is a very important factor of Hammer weaponry, and a good damage bonus can turn these weapons into mighty implements of destruction; Sledgehammers add *double* damage bonus to DMG and AD for combat-trained users.

SLEDGEHAMMER. Skill: Hammer 2-H. Although the sledgehammer is only 1.5m in length, the weight of the head—a 30lb chunk of steel—makes two-handed use vital for this weapon. Sledgehammers are violent-looking weapons with an aura of psychotic menace. They can be used to break down doors or walls as easily as to smash ribs and crush skulls (2 rounds, if door not reinforced). An oscillation unit set just below the head adds to the damage, and has a 5000-hour life span. Combat-grade Sledgehammers are quite rare. DMG 6, PEN 3, AD 8, COST 500₵

5. Cannibal Sector Four

or

May Your Fire-Pit be Ever Glowing

Heading back towards the surface with the Key, the DarkNight Team will reach Level 10 and cross over through a sewer breach into Cannibal Sector Four after various unpleasant crawls. The converts are very efficient at this sort of thing and have had plenty of practice. However, Ruby has heard that there is a shuttle which has been sighted on the upper levels of the Cannibal Sector and if the Ops are with her she will let them grab a ticket over. Otherwise, the Ops will have to follow them through sewers and the like and be attacked by rats and ambushed by DarkNight death-trap devices at every turning. Killing the two (admittedly quite weedy) Convert guides would ruin the squad's plans completely.

The one thing that is most likely is that Ruby will find them first. She's good, and she has a feel for this kind of suicidal scoop. If the Ops land with her, they'll be wandering around the Sector, searching any large building that looks like it could hold a shuttle.

Unfortunately, most buildings are very dangerous, for two reasons. Firstly, they are all collapsing. Secondly, most of them contain families of cannibals. If the Ops see smoke, they may like to bear in mind that cannibals always keep the home fire burning. Disturbing a family is quite dangerous, as they will attack in large bands and not stop until they've eaten the Ops and camera crew. An average family is made up of about eight children and six adults. On their own, a single band is pretty pathetic competition for any squad of Ops. However, once a fight starts, hundreds of families nearby will try to find out what's going on and the usually silent streets will become filled with dark shadows, trying to stay out of the dim light filtering down from above. Time to beg the Third Eye camera chopper for an emergency evacuation and call it a day if that happens.

Sneaking around will eventually have a result. Ops who are good will notice movement down a wide open street, and they'll recognize the jogging remnant of the Strike Team: one of the Converts, two of the new Infiltrators including the leader, and the original three ex-War Crims (who have been having quite a good time). They still look worryingly fit, keen and ready for action. Fungus is carrying the Key. They may well notice the camera lights and start firing. If this happens, Ruby and her crew will film the whole thing and the Ops will be able to hear bits of her narration through the sheets of 17mm and HESH:

> *"... the blood and gore ... there's two more down—should we retreat? ... sideways into her face and then another one smack into her belly... so, anyway, time to run..."* and so on, depending on what is happening.

A fire fight will involve the Ops having to fight their way across open roadways, dark side-alleys and over rubble and the unsupported remains of walls. The Team will not just sit there and exchange bullets—they have to reach the shuttle and they will lay down a 'suppressing' fire and then run for it. They have only a few clips of ammo left now and are radioing for assistance. Unfortunately, the shuttle crew need to avoid pinpointing their precise location, and can't break radio silence, so they can't tell the Team that help is already on its way. Ten minutes away—if you run like hell—is the shuttle, and as the Team sit there lobbing grenades at the players, five more agents are on their way to help out. However, they will be spotted by the Third Eye camera chopper and Ruby will tell the Ops what's going down and where the shuttle has to be.

Shivers don't do mercy missions in the Cannibal Sectors, but there's a strong possibility that all those Operatives glued to the vid screen back home will be waiting for the first sign that the squad are going to get their butts kicked. If things look bad, some would-be heroes might consider charging out to save the day. If Ruby had to hire different Ops, it may be the players who find themselves being all heroic.

If the Ops do save the day on their own, they will be media heroes for about an hour and stand around doing gore photos and image shots. This is where the Op with the best looks and personality will be named as Channel 22 Hero of the Hour. Ruby might even kiss him/her on the cheek before leaving. If the Ops fail, Ruby will film their pathetic attempts and then ridicule them live on Channel 22. The shame.

If the shuttle makes it out, then Rufus will have the Key transported to him via foldship. There's not really much chance that this could be stopped once the shuttle has escaped the grip of Mort. With the Chest and Key together, Rufus will become extremely rich. An Ebon consortium will buy them for 300 million credits and open the chest. But that's another story...

6. Winning and Losing

or

Sorting out the Mess

Many different things could happen. Here's a quick run down:

1. The Ops rescue the Key from Fat Roger before anything else happens

Not very likely. If it does happen, Midley pays up if they can make it back without KT wiping them out. Midley will be delighted and will try to put more work their way in the future (some of it actually of a legal nature, too). They may also be able to collect some cash if they have returned Billy in one piece.

2. The Ops kill Menace and then take the Key back to Midley

As (1) above, but add DarkNight to the list of dangers on the return journey.

3. The Ops take the Key back to the museum

They'll collect the museum's reward as payment. Midley will hate them forever.

4. The Ops hold onto the Key and try bribing Midley

He tells Cloak Division that the Ops are traitors, as they're the ones who stole the Key from the museum. Cloak Division will agree. Oops.

5. The Ops kill loads of baddies, get media coverage, stop DarkNight escaping, etc

An assortment of possible rewards to be cashed in, and maybe even some sponsorship. The Key, at this point, will have to go back to the Museum. See (3).

6. The Ops fail and get depressed

Go to the pub. It's only a game.

7. The Ops all die horribly

As (6) above.

Note that Midley's BPN is technically illegal—after all, he made it up himself—but he'll manage to organize not only the money as promised, but also the SCL increase, if the squad are successful. All the other deals and rewards are entirely legitimate.

Other Things to Think About

This is a very dangerous scenario and one in which death looms close. However, SLA Industries pay Ops to risk their lives and do not expect them to chicken out or blast away with HESH. The company expects intelligent action, using lethal force only when necessary. It is possible for the characters to end up being chased by DarkNight ex-War Criminals (please bear in mind that these nutters are extremely dangerous), hundreds of bikers and a serial killer, but then again, it's equally possible for them to take out Menace using a truck and take the Key back to Midley without ever having fired a shot (except at the Skids perhaps, if they were feeling keen).

Midley is quite a high-ranking member of Internal Affairs. As a happy man, he'll make a useful patron, giving the Ops juicy BPNs and calling in the odd favour or two. As an enemy, he will keep them spied upon and filmed, and any misdemeanour will be ruthlessly exposed. If they just plain fail pathetically, he'll simply refuse to even think about them again unless they push him—a dangerous tactic.

Campaign Extensions and Other Plotlines

Once the dust has settled, and your Ops are busy panting in exhaustion from the hell you've just put them through, make sure that you hit them hard. To help follow up with a swift one-two, here are some possible plot extensions that you may like to consider:

The Hunt for the Chest

This would involve going off-world and following a trail of murder and deceit within the heart of SLA Industries. Rufus would be the main target of investigation and his agents would attack the Ops at every opportunity, trying to mislead or kill them. A BPN would need to be issued, but any investigation would be hampered by Rufus's extremely thorough

cover-ups. The source of information could be any captured DarkNight agent who has been kept alive despite suicide pills and assassination attempts. Without such assistance, no progress will be made and indeed Rufus will be an unknown element to the characters. They may also come across Garland if they investigate further. This guy is pretty lethal, but prefers to stay unseen and out of the limelight, for obvious reasons. He will know that they have been trying to find him and so will be incredibly hard to contact. If they can arrange a neutral meeting-place he may even talk to them. Then again, he may just kill them.

"I see, you want information. And what do you offer me? No, creds are not needed. I seek information. Come back when you have some. What kind? Anything which undermines SLA Industries. Think you can dig that deep? Are you sure you really want to? Oh, so you all have guns, how impressive. See those eight Frothers over there? And the five Ebons at that table? Yes, well now, let's not talk about you having an advantage. Best you go home and think about why you bothered wasting my time. Good night."

The Hunt for Switchblade

If Switchblade managed to escape from Ruby and any Ops nearby, he'll still be on the loose, slaughtering alien lifeforms even as you read this. Therefore the existing BPN for his termination should be incentive enough, but Ruby may well be there chivvying the squad along. Any Ops wishing to track him down will find that they are always ten minutes behind the wily murderer. He knows Downtown well, and he spends a long time before a kill planning escape routes. The emphasis here will be on hit-and-run followed by pursuit by Shivers and the Ops across rooftops and down sewers. Like most serial killers, Switchblade attacks when the odds are in his favour and the element of surprise is certain. He will not stand and fight six Ops—he will pick them off one by one just as soon as he can. Especially if they are aliens. With his recent media coverage, he may well be able to recruit a small cognate around himself, which could prove a nasty surprise for any Ops thinking that they were sneaking up on a lone lunatic.

"Can we follow him up that chute do you think? I mean, I know it might be dangerous and everything, but think of the coverage I can get you! I mean, we'd be on live for sure—I can guarantee it! Yeah, maybe you should go first, you're the Ops after all. Aww go on, just for me."

Ruby as a Patron

If the Ops did well for Ruby and her camera crew, they will have gained a Reputation with Media Staff and this is always good news. Also, if Ruby took a shine to any or all of them, she'll seek them out for future sewer jaunts and killer hunts. This is a great source of income and excitement, as Ruby is well known on Channel 22 for her seriously dangerous reports. She will grab the Ops' contact number and make sure they get a chance to make it big in front of the camera. This is good for them and great for her. If the Ops did not impress Ruby, forget it.

"Hi there gang, it's me, Ruby, coming in and coming over and over again. It's a big one; control yourselves. Drop everything and get to the helipad on top of your block and we'll come get you. Right, see you in... oh, okay, what it is. Yeah... well, it's a beautiful media event babes, this is the one which will make you stars. Dangerous? Hey, when isn't it? Real life interferes with your brains, gang. Sure it's dangerous. What is it exactly? Oh you know, the usual 'grab some weapons, go find a serial killer who's run out into Cannibal Sector One' affair. Nothing too lethal, right? Hey, you thought this job would be easy? Come on, see you up there on the roof in five. I'll buy ya dinner. What d'ya mean it's too much? You want me to quote you on that? Great, see you in a blink. Oh yeah, better wear your best armour, friends. Later."

Midley as a Patron

It may well be that the Ops cashed their BPN in. If so, Midley will hunt them out for further BPNs, making sure that they know he's doing them some big favours. He will use them for protection of agents, investigation of corporate corruption, undercover surveillance, and basically prepare them for an eventual job with the vigorously denied Internal Affairs. If the Ops let him down, they will never directly hear from him again, but life may well become a lot more inconvenient.

"Would you consider taking a BPN on today? Are you sure you're not too busy? Oh, you're too kind. Perhaps if I faxed it through and you could tell me what you think? You really are are too kind. It's nothing too taxing, but I would like it to be kept between the two of us. I'm sure you knew that ; you're an intelligent woman. Just that it involves an Extermination Warrant and you know how these missions can be blown out of proportion by the media? Marvellous."

Krosstown Traffic

If the Ops made any KT friends, then they have a rich new source of information when it comes to investigation in a large swathe of Mort. It is much more likely that the Ops were unfriendly to the bikers, so they'll need to be very careful next time they enter KT territory. If Billy survived, he will hunt the Ops down, using any vid screen appearances by the Ops to pinpoint their location. If Billy was killed, maybe his Skids, or even his brothers, might come along and show the Ops it's not clever to mess with KT. Being chased into a dead-end by several hundred extremely angry bikers is always good fun...

> *"Yeah, I know him. See that bar next to Hungry Joe's? Check it out and maybe you'll be lucky. Hey, next time bring watches, the market's flooded with guns. Seeya."*

Internal Affairs

The Ops may have noticed that the officially-denied Internal Affairs department issued the initial BPN and this may lead to them becoming interested in Midley. They may try to discover what he's up to. They may even be put under surveillance if Midley was caught by his superiors before he could destroy all the evidence (GM's discretion). Any Ops seen to be helping him would be at the mercy of a suspicious IA and they will find strange people following them and cameras tracking their movements. A good bit of paranoia should ensue.

> *"Of course we're being watched, that's the nice Shivers making sure we're okay. How reassuring."*

The Consortium

There may be Rufus, but what about the shadowy Consortium who want to buy the Key and Chest for so much money? Obviously such creds can buy people and the Ops may be approached to go find the Key, maybe even to go find Rufus (with the Consortium's help) and extract the Chest in person. The Consortium may take direct action to grab the Key now that Rufus has let them down so badly (if he has). If the Key is back in Central, they will try to gain access to the museum a few weeks after the initial fiasco. Ops may be hired as guards for a couple of weeks and so be there when the raid takes place. The Ops may even grab a BPN afterwards to go hunting the thieves again. Plenty of scope for off-world adventuring.

DarkNight and KT

The gang does not like DarkNight at the moment, thanks to Rufus. They will continue to weed out suspected traitors and publicly dispose of them. Ruby will realise that this is big and if she could film the killings, or even convince certain Ops to pull a DarkNight captive out alive, this could be very good. Ops could talk to KT with Ruby's help, and try to complete hundreds of outstanding BPNs calling for the capture/termination of known DarkNight Agents. Big, big bucks.

KT will rebuild what was Fat Roger's drug business after a week or so, but they will have moved it deeper into their territory and taken on tougher Props. Any attempt to bust them again will be rather more difficult than it was last time.

The Revenge of...

Switchblade's buddies, Rufus, Krosstown Traffic, Menace's buddies, etc. Let's face it, the Ops are bound to have pissed someone off, perhaps even a whole lot of people, so turn it into a terrifying deathchase, with lots of running down long corridors in deserted factories and so on. Use your imagination.

> *"Back and forth, back and forth, who would ever thought that a big guy like your Shaktar friend would have slept so quietly? It must be the hook and chain that did it. Who's next?"*

And finally...

Anything else involving any of the people the Ops met. The Ops might end up with any one of a number of miscellaneous missions, such as:

- Shiver Captain Gursom putting work their way
- Trying to discover who Menace really was
- Going back to Fat Roger's old home and doing some surveillance
- Hunting down a Switchblade Copycat
- Being asked to go back to Cannibal Sector Four to do some mapping

The possibilities are endless. If things didn't work out quite how we suggested, assorted villains and other members of the (supposedly dead) cast may still be around. They've all got their own plans, styles and personal inclinations. It could be the PCs fit in nicely. Maybe Rufus's Strike Squad left Fat Roger alive, for example. He's really bored, and Rufus may have given

him some inspiration. Fats might track the PCs down and try to persuade them to go after certain "worthless little trinkets" for him in return for information, a vital object, stolen equipment or even the live return of a beloved parent, sibling or spouse. There's so much to do and so little time...

With all the wandering along dark alleys and down sewers, it may be that you, as the GM, will find it necessary to come up with some random encounters. Personally we say lean back, close your eyes and just have a little faith in Mr Slayer's vision. He'll let you know if it's time to have a pack of carnivorous pigs, panicked by a Mutant Carrier, charge out at the Ops. He'll tell you when that wall has had just enough of being shot at and feels like it's time to fall majestically on top of the Operatives hidden behind it. You just need some faith. For sure, throw the odd random encounter in, but please, generate it in your head, because that's where SLA Industries controls you the most. Your mind belongs to Mr Slayer, and don't ever think you'll be threatened by all that horrible, worrying freedom again. There's no need to worry, though. Follow orders, work hard, stay faithful to the company and we know you'll be happy. Put your trust in Mr Slayer and his visions of Progress, and he won't let you down.

You can find SLA Industries on the Web. For SLA info, check out: http://www.nightfall.co.uk or http://www.hogshead.demon.co.uk or why not try the SLA Industries mailing list? Send a blank email to: station-analysis-subscribe@topica.com to join.

IT'S ABOUT TIME

An ancient Ebon artefact, the Key of Delhyread, has been spectacularly stolen from one of Mort's most prestigious museums, and everyone wants in. DarkNight, Krosstown Traffic, Third Eye News, Cloak Division and various other maniacs are all in the race. Retrieving it is going to be tough.

The Key of Delhyread is a frenetic scenario for the SLA Industries role-playing game. Although designed for starting characters, its fast-paced blend of intrigue, murder, investigation and media manipulation will challenge the ingenuity and courage of experienced players and newcomers alike. Full NPC bios and stat boxes, detailed descriptions of all important locations, extensive timelines, interesting new rules innovations and other goodies will give GMs everything they need to run the scenario smoothly, with the minimum of fuss and preparation. When the dust settles, the large cast of NPCs and extensive aftermath notes will provide you with a solid basis for an enduring campaign backdrop – if the characters survive, that is!

NIGHTFALL GAMES

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For two or more players

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Requires the SLA Industries main rule book (ISBN 1-899749-23-3) for play. Front cover picture by Rik Martin. Rear cover picture by Stuart Beel.