

Murder in the



Footlights!

A Basic Roleplaying Pulp Adventure by Troy Wilhelmson



A BRIEF NOTE

This short adventure was originally written for a promotional magazine Chaosium was working on in 2007. Due to size limitations, this adventure was of necessity rather brief. The author would have gladly added subplots and red herrings if space allowed. Any perceived brevity is an artifact of it's original intent.

While the original project was cancelled we are happy to share this material with you, the Chaosium.com audience. Thank you for your continued support. Enjoy!

The Chaosium

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Similarities between people, places, or things within **Murder in the Footlights!** are purely coincidental.

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MURDER IN THE FOOTLIGHTS!

Introduction

Murder in the Footlights is a short Pulp Basic Roleplaying adventure suitable for two to four investigators of normal to heroic experience. Character types that are suitable for the adventure would be Detectives, Reporters, Photographers, wealthy Dilettantes with connections in big city politics, or even a low-powered Pulp Age Super Hero. Other character types can work just as well, but it will be up to the Game-master to determine how the Investigators get caught up in this caper.

The Sanity rules are used in this adventure, but you can opt to ignore them altogether.

Keeper Information

The year is 1936, and the world is in turmoil. America is still in the grips of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Japanese forces are invading China, and Hitler has just been elected Chancellor of Germany.

However, most American citizens are simply looking for some entertainment to keep their minds off the troubles of the day. Radio,

movies, and vaudeville are the cure for the doldrums, and in early October in the city of Boston no act is more popular than the magician and mesmerist The Great Raspini! His show has been selling out for over two months, and he has no bigger fan than Mayor Murphy's daughter, Rose, who has seen the show eight times in the past two weeks - and The Great Raspini has noticed.

Unbeknownst to Rose, Raspini is on the lookout for a suitable sacrifice for an ancient god he discovered in the writings of a mad Italian monk. Lured by the promise of learning true magic and not just stage tricks, Raspini set out to find his prey.

Two nights ago after the show, Raspini found Rose in the lobby and struck up a conversation asking if she would like a backstage tour. Rose immediately accepted, and he led her behind the velvet curtains. Once in the privacy of the empty stage, Raspini chloroformed the poor girl and had his dull-witted henchman, Otto, carry her down into their secret sanctuary below the stage where they could prepare her for their unspeakable rites.

When his daughter didn't come home after the show, Mayor Murphy called on the Investigators to find his beloved Rose. When asked why he didn't just use the police, who are at his disposal, he reminded the Investigators that Rose has been in the papers enough lately with her carousing and fraternizing with rather dubious men. The Mayor would like to keep this quiet and hopes the Investigators can find his missing daughter. The only other information that he gave was that she was wearing a green velvet dress the last time he saw her.

The Vaudeville Theater

Having asked several questions around the theater (and being told that the prop room is haunted), the Investigators have gained access to the backstage area of the building. Having searched around the stage scenery and through the dressing rooms, the last place to look is down under the stage in the prop room.

Player Start

Read the following aloud to the players:

The old wooden door opens with a soft creak as you blindly fish around in the moldy darkness for the light switch only to discover the lights are out. Bringing forth your flashlight, you see rows of shelves throughout the small room. Crates, furniture, and decorations are scattered in chaotic organization that only the staff would know. With some hesitation you enter the dank room.

Raspini has spread the story of the haunting of the prop room for many years and has set several startling traps to give the illusion that there may be a ghost in residence among the props. As the Investigators move through the room, use encounters A-E found below. Let the players take their time in here, and play up the atmosphere of the haunted theater.

If the Investigators search for any objects, here is a list of items they find that might prove useful:

- ✦ Wooden Sword
- ✦ Greek Shield
- ✦ Candelabra
- ✦ Small Chest
- ✦ Ceramic Vase
- ✦ Butterfly Net
- ✦ Wooden Cane
- ✦ Opera Glasses
- ✦ Oil Lamp
- ✦ Wooden Stool
- ✦ Fake Harp
- ✦ Plaster Boulder

- A. The Bat – As the Investigators cross this area of the shelves, they can make a **Spot** roll to notice the hidden tripwire near the floor. If they miss it, a large bat swoops down at them making a terrible hissing noise (caused by the pulley on the fly line). Have them all make a Sanity roll (0/1). When they get a better look at it, they will realize it is rubber but very well made.
- B. The Skeleton - As the Investigators cross this area of the shelves, they can make a **Spot** roll to notice the hidden tripwire near the floor. If they miss, a skeleton will suddenly lunge out of a cabinet and grab at them! Have the players roll for **Sanity** (0/1D2). Of

course, upon closer inspection they will see that the skeleton is made out of papier-mâché.

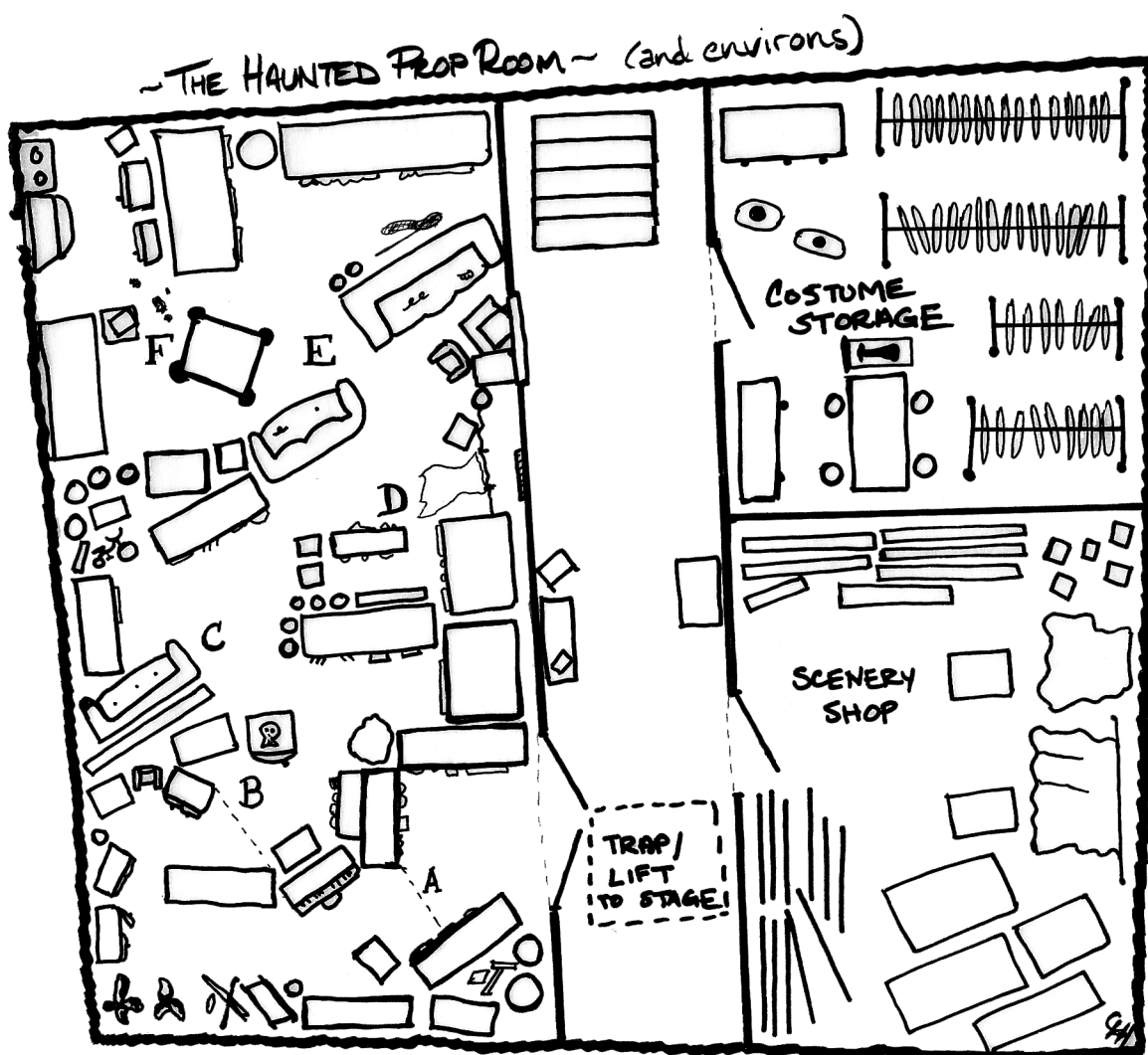
C. A Scream – As the Investigators continue to make their way through the collection of props, the players can attempt a **Listen** roll. If they are successful, the characters will hear a faint scream, which seems to emanate from within the far wall of the room.

D. The Ghost – As the Investigators come around a corner, they see a floating ghost directly ahead of them! Have them roll for **Sanity** (0/1D2). When they shine a light on

it, they discover it is really a sheet hanging on a string near an air vent.

E. A Clue – Have the Investigators make a **Spot** roll. If successful, they discover a small piece of green velvet snagged on a nail.

F. A Path – The Investigators can make a **Spot** roll at this point to notice some oily tracks leading to the back corner of the room. A **Track** roll will show that there are two separate tracks here, one of an average-sized man and one of a man who must be at least seven feet tall!



By following the tracks, the Investigators come to an Egyptian sarcophagus pushed up against the wall. When they open it, they will find it empty. If they feel around on the inside, they can attempt to make a **Sense** roll. If successful, they feel a small button barely raised above the gilded surface. Once pressed, the back opens inward, leading into a dark tunnel.

The Tunnel

Read aloud to the players:

The sarcophagus opens to reveal that part of the brick wall has been broken apart, exposing a sewer tunnel leading deep into the darkness. The smell of filth assaults your senses as the sound of scurrying creatures fills your ears.

As the Investigators shine their flashlights into the tunnel, they can see a hoard of large rats running about. A successful **Listen** roll enables them to hear a muffled laugh and a scream coming from deep within the tunnel.

The PCs must now walk down the tunnel with the rats. If they make a **Stealth** roll, the rats ignore them. If not, the rats attack.

Rat Swarm (10 packs)

Weapon: Bite 50%, damage 1D3

Special Rules: A character can Dodge a Rat Swarm but cannot parry an attack. A successful Difficult attack against a pack will kill one rat and chase the others away.

Once the Investigators are past the rats, they find the end of the tunnel, which has been covered by an old, black velvet stage curtain. A successful **Listen** roll reveals more of the laughing coming from beyond.

The Antechamber

Read aloud to the players:

Drawing back the curtain, you see a small chamber made of old bricks and mortar. Several wooden crates line the room, and on the west wall is a large, filthy bed. The imprint on the mattress must belong to a man nearly eight feet tall! At the far end of the room on the eastern wall is a rusted iron door that sits slightly ajar. You realize that the source of the voices comes from beyond!

A cursory search of the chamber reveals only the bed, and a dirty plate and cup stashed underneath. However, if the Investigators make a successful **Spot** roll they will find a blasting cap for dynamite.

With a successful **Listen** roll near the door, the Investigators hear the following:

“Now, my dear, everything is set in motion. During tonight’s performance you will be raised through the stage floor directly above us, strapped tightly to a detonation device of my own design! Of course, your father will pay the ransom I have demanded, but by that time it will be too late! You and all of the audience in this theater shall be my sacrifice to Baal! No longer will I simply be a performer of parlor tricks. No! I shall be a real sorcerer! With real magic at my disposal! After the world witnesses my performance tonight, they will bow before me, The Great Raspini, as a god!”

The Inner Sanctum

Read aloud to the players:

The door opens with a loud creak revealing a large, damp chamber. The floor of the room has split in two, creating a wide chasm filled with rank seawater. A narrow wooden bridge is the only way across. Once again the walls are lined with wooden crates, only these are stamped with red letters spelling "TNT." A wooden table with various tomes and devices sits near the north wall. Against the eastern wall is a brass and steel device festooned with various gears, gauges, and sparking electrical wires. Gagged and tied to this same contraption is a young woman in a green velvet dress who can only be the Mayor's daughter. The Great Raspini stands before her, reciting his master plan. Towering over this scene is a massive specimen of a man who has one hand on a large copper switch set into the wall.

The Investigators can attempt Stealth rolls to get into the room unheard. If they are successful, Raspini will continue to deliver his master speech, only wishing to hear himself talk. When they get to the bridge, they must make another successful **Stealth** roll in combination with an Agility roll to get safely and silently across. The Investigators may find it strange that Otto does not seem to notice them.

As soon as the Investigators make their presence known, Raspini will turn and yell, "Otto, dispose of them!" Otto will close in for melee as Raspini makes some final adjustments to the machine.

If the Investigators decide to cross the bridge, they will need to make a successful **Agility** roll or slip and fall into the water below (a Swim roll must follow, or they will be swept under and be lost).

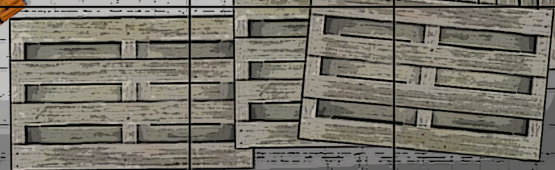
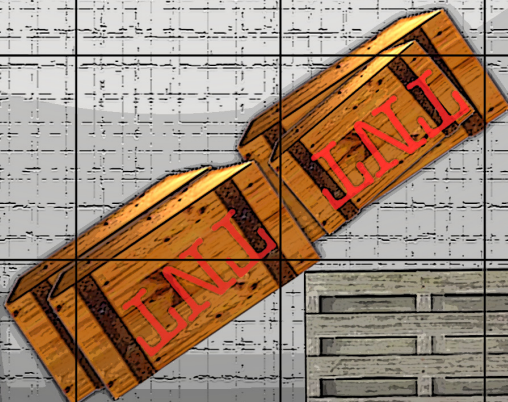
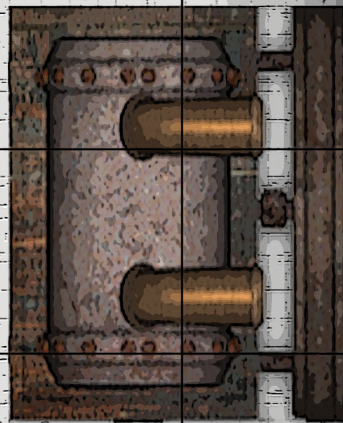


Otto

If gunfire erupts in this chamber, the Investigators would be wise to aim carefully. If a gunshot misses, roll a percentile. On a 99-100, the dynamite will explode, engulfing the entire room. The investigators can make a Luck roll to "black out" and find themselves washing up onshore near Boston Harbor.

As the Investigators encounter Otto, it will become fairly obvious that he is actually some kind of zombie raised by Raspini.





Otto, Zombie Servant

STR 17 CON 17 SIZ 15 INT 6
DEX 8 APP 3 EDU - POW 1

Move: 6

Hit Points: 16

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Armor: None, but impaling weapons do 1 point of damage, and all others do half rolled damage.

Weapon: Bite 30%, 1D3+1/2 db (bleeding)

Fist 25%, 1D3+db (crushing)

Sanity Loss: 1/1D4

Once the Investigators have dealt with Otto, Raspini will see that his plan has been foiled. He will quickly run to the wall switch and yell, "You may have stopped me this time, but you have yet to see the last of The Great Raspini!" With that, he throws the switch, causing a generator to begin and the gauges to slowly rise. "Once the generator reaches 3000 volts, this entire block will go up like a Fourth of July rocket!" Then Raspini vanishes in a puff of smoke!

The Investigators have three real-time minutes to disable the machine. They must make two successful Repair: Mechanical rolls and one Repair: Electrical roll to stop the machine. They also have the option of releasing Rose and running for their lives, but the building will still explode. It is up to the Investigators to decide what to do. If they run out of time, follow the same rules as if a gunshot has gone wild (see above).

Wrapping Up

If the Investigators are successful in stopping Raspini's plot, they will discover an ancient book written in Italian sitting on the table with several undecipherable notes scribbled on some pages nearby. Raspini himself will escape and thus can easily become a recurring villain that

Gamemasters can use within their own campaigns.

The Great Raspini, Magician

STR 15 CON 14 SIZ 14 INT 14
DEX 17 APP 12 EDU 12 POW 15

Move: 10

Hit Points: 14

Damage Bonus: +1D4

Armor: None

Attacks: Medium Revolver 35%, 1D8 (impaling)

Skills: Disguise 80%, Etiquette 65%, Fast Talk 80%, Fine Manipulation 80%, Insight 55%, Perform: Magic 85%, Sense 65%, Sleight of Hand 95%, Spot 65%, Stealth 70%, Throw 50%

Spells (If The Great Raspini actually succeeds in his quest for power): Curse of Sorcery (3), Muddle (3), Sorcerer's Armor (4), Summon Demon (1), Witch Sight (3).

