# NUMENÉRA



### THE HIDEOUS GAME

BY MONTE COOK





### THE HIDEOUS GAME

This low-combat, investigation-heavy scenario is presented in the format first showcased in *Weird Discoveries*. We call this format the "instant adventure," as it is designed to be run with just four or five minutes of prep time. *The Hideous Game* is written for use at GenCon 2015, and GMs running it at the convention should read the whole thing rather than taking advantage of the low-prep nature.

#### Credits

Writer/Designer Monte Cook

**Creative Director** Shanna Germain

Editor/Proofreader Ray Vallese

Graphic Designer Bear Weiter

Artists Florian Devos, Dreamstime.com, Patrick McEvoy, Ben Wootten

**Cartographer** Christopher West

Monte Cook Games Editorial Team Scott C. Bourgeois, David Wilson Brown, Eric Coates, Gareth Hodges, Mila Irek, Jeremy Land, Laura Wilkinson, Marina Wold, George Ziets

© 2015 Monte Cook Games, LLC

Numenera and its logo are trademarks of Monte Cook Games, LLC in the U.S.A. and other countries. All Monte Cook Games characters and character names, and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are trademarks of Monte Cook Games, LLC. One unique aspect of instant adventures is the keys. These

are not necessarily literal keys—they are elements of the adventure that can be placed in different

points in the scenario, depending on where the player characters go and what they do. For example, a key might be an object found in a cabinet or in an NPC's pocket. If the PCs never look in the cabinet but do negotiate a trade with the NPC, then the GM simply decides that the object is with the NPC. This allows the adventure to continue even if the characters miss a clue or never visit a certain location.

#### **BRIEF SUMMARY**

Weird inhuman creatures are playing a mysterious game of torture and murder, and the PCs must put a stop to the next round before more people perish.

#### DETAILS

This scenario takes place entirely in Qi, the largest city in the Steadfast of the Ninth World. If desired, it could—easily enough—be placed within any large city. Unlike many Numenera scenarios, *The Hideous Game* does not involve exploring ancient ruins to scavenge technology or wandering in the wilderness to discover impossible locations. It takes place within the safe confines of the largest known city, the very place where one can find the Order of Truth and the Amber Pope himself.

The slidikin are inhuman creatures that appear to be playing a sort of game among themselves. The details of the game are

Slidikin enjoy leaving their puzzle traps around to be found. It's part of the Hideous Game. unknown, but they involve kidnapping, theft, torture, and murder.

The motives of the slidikin are impossible to decipher. That is not the point or

goal of this scenario. They are as inhuman as any beings the PCs are ever likely to meet. Do the slidikin see humans with nothing but contempt? We don't know. Perhaps humanity is held in high regard, and that's why they are the stakes of the slidikin game. And what about that game? Is it a competition? Is there a winner? What's the prize?

The PCs will never learn the answers to these questions, and though that might be frustrating, mysterious, and terrifying, they'll just have to deal with it. Their only goals are to stay alive and to prevent as much harm as they can. In that way, the slidikin are like a terrible storm. What makes the wind blow and the lightning strike? The PCs probably don't know that, either, but they can still struggle to survive and be useful during its raging onslaught.

Events begin one night as the PCs hear muffled cries. Investigating, they find a man named Calvan Desenis in an elaborate





torture device. If they rescue him, they learn that he was kidnapped by mysterious figures and placed here. He spent the day in captivity and can probably lead the characters to the cellar where he was held.

If the PCs investigate the cellar, they find clues suggesting that someone was making fancy invitations. Shortly thereafter, they hear rumors of people being invited to an event that will occur in a few days at a place called Liach's Square. They can investigate some of the invitees (although little can be learned from the people) or the square itself, where workers hired by mysterious employers are installing devices. A bit of technical probing reveals that these devices will seal off the exits to the square.

On the day of the event, if the PCs do not intervene, the slidikin will cruelly murder thirteen innocents in the square, in full view of anyone in the area.

#### SALIENT POINTS

- Calvan Desenis was kidnapped, held in a cellar for much of the day, and then placed in an elaborate torture device by the slidikin.
- The cellar has clues as to what the slidikin are about to do: send out invitations to an event that will take place in three days' time.
- Invitees are selected at random (or seem to be, to human sensibilities).
- The site of the event has only three exits, and workers secretly hired by the slidikin are unknowingly building force field projectors to seal them off.
- When the invitees arrive, the slidikin will torture and kill them in broad daylight.

#### STARTING POINT

The PCs enjoy a night of recreation, food, and drinks in a place called the Revelry. They aren't necessarily there as a group, but they are at the very least acquainted with one another, and maybe a few of them arrived together. However, they all leave around the same time—very late at night, many hours after darkness has fallen.

#### THE WRAP-UP

When the event is over, so is the scenario. Hopefully, the PCs have stopped the slidikin somehow.



#### **KEYS**

This scenario has two keys. One is an object, and the other is an event.

Slidikin puzzle trap. This small object shifts and changes, but a character can also intentionally shift and change it through concentration and experimentation. Someone can "solve" the puzzle by comprehending what shape and color the puzzle wants to be (the "goal" or solution changes every fourteen hours). If a PC tries to solve it and succeeds at a difficulty 6 Intellect-based roll, the puzzle remains static until the current fourteenhour period is over, at which point it begins shifting again. If a PC solves the puzzle three times in a row, she sees a brief holographic projection of a slidikin and a diagram of its physiology. For that character, the difficulty of attacks against a slidikin is reduced by one step. If anyone ever attempts to solve the puzzle and fails, he sees a brief holographic projection of such disturbing content that he suffers 6 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor), and the difficulty of all tasks is increased by one step until the points are restored.

**Slidikin tail.** At this point, one PC notices that a cloaked figure begins to follow them. The PC usually spots the figure when he or she is alone. It never gets too close and excels at disappearing into the crowd or into shadow. This is meant to be menacing, but never confrontational.

There is no pen in the cellar because slidikin write with their obscenely long fingers.

#### Motivating the PCs:

Sometimes, simply intriguing the players or appealing to their good natures isn't enough to motivate the characters to action. If this is the case, have a PC's close friend or relative receive one of the mysterious invitations. Or, if you need to be even more drastic, have it come to a PC.

#### MAN IN PERIL

G

One or more of the PCs hears a muffled sound, a bit like a cry for help, but it's difficult to discern clearly. Investigating means simply peering down a nearby alley, where they see someone in a niche along a building wall. A man—bloody, drenched in sweat, and terrified—stands at a precarious angle. Thin metal wire is wrapped around his body in places so tightly that it breaks the skin, and the wires extend to various areas in the walls around him, almost like he's caught in a spider's web. The wires all lead to some kind of device suspended in their skein, positioned directly in front of the man's face. Something sharp protrudes from the device. It seems clear that if the man moves much, he will activate the device. There are also wires wrapped around his neck, suggesting that even a shout from his throat might trigger it.

He's not up for much conversation, obviously, until he's freed. Freeing him without triggering the device is a difficulty 7 Speed-based task. Disabling the device is a difficulty 6 Intellect-based task. It's also possible to brace something in the path of the projectile, but whatever is used must be able to take a serious blow.

If the device is triggered, it fires a metal shard, automatically hitting whatever's in front of it and inflicting 10 points of damage. If it hits the man, who currently has 4 health, it kills him instantly.

If the PCs dismantle the device, they can cobble together a level 4 detonation cypher that explodes in an immediate radius, inflicting 4 points of damage from a pressurized burst.

The man is Calvan Desenis, an accountant who was kidnapped on his way to work that morning by "people with chalky skin who spoke with many different voices, sometimes all at once." He was blindfolded while being moved to a new location but smart enough and familiar enough with the layout of Qi—that he thinks he knows where he was taken: a cellar in the very bottom level of the city.

The only other thing he can offer about his captors is that they spoke of "invitations for the next round of the Hideous Game," beginning soon.



#### THE CELLAR

The building is abandoned. The cellar has its own entrance, with a short set of steps leading down to it. The door is locked with a level 3 lock.

The cellar of the disused building has obviously seen recent use. Although it's mainly full of old crates and barrels (mostly empty), there is also a wooden chair with some cast-off ropes around it and a makeshift table of crates and planks. Atop this table are twenty-three sheets of paper and a half-empty ink bottle (but no pen). The ink and paper are of very high quality.

If the KEY is here, it is amid the paper and ink on the desk.



On the street outside the cellar entrance, a young girl hides in a doorway and watches. This is Kala (level 2, stealth as level 4, running as level 3). She watches for potential victims to rob, and signals her brother Urlan (level 3; Armor 1) and his friend Grath (level 3) to move out to attack likely targets.

Kala watches the PCs, but unless they look weak in strength or numbers, she does not signal her brother. However, PCs looking around might see her hiding in the doorway. If she's spotted, she runs. If caught, she might be intimidated into telling her story—what she's doing in the alley and why—although she won't help anyone apprehend or harm her brother. But more important, if asked, she can relate that six figures in cloaks have been coming and going from the cellar for the last two days. She knows nothing about them, but they were "creepy."

#### RUMORS OF INVITATIONS

The PCs hear rumors that various people around the city are receiving invitations to a mysterious event that will take place in Liach's Square in three days' time. No one seems to know who sent the invitations or why the recipients were chosen, but people are certainly intrigued.



#### INVITED GUEST: THELIAN MYASTRE

Thelian is an actor currently performing a moderately sized role in a play called *A Bit* of *Revenge* at the Rivermore Theater. He is a pompous, self-important effete whose ego overshadows his talent. He doesn't know anything about the source of his invitation, but he's sure that it involves honoring up-and-coming people of importance in Qi. If asked, he happily shows the PCs his invitation, but he will not part with it under any circumstance.

Reveal Show 'Em A to the players.

•

•

#### INVITED GUEST: YOULAN THE SEAMSTRESS

Youlan is a middle-aged woman of simple means. She has no idea what the invitation is about, but she is thrilled at the possibilities. If asked, she eagerly shows the PCs her invitation, and if they convince her that it's a trap or a trick, she can be talked into giving it to them.

Reveal Show 'Em A to the players.

#### THE EVENT

The day of the event, people are gathered in Liach's Square to see what will happen. As the appointed time approaches, anyone without an invitation is shooed out by one of six well-dressed human men (level 3; each carries a hidden buzzer; hired to keep the uninvited out of the square, but they know nothing else). These men then take up positions at each of the three street exits and let the invitees in. When all thirteen guests have entered the square, the force field projectors activate, sealing off the street exits.

In the middle of the square is a table draped in white cloth, on top of which are thirteen crystal sculptures, each about the size of two fists. Anyone touching a sculpture suffers 6 points of damage from an electrical discharge.

Four slidikin are hidden around the square in cloaks. They won't reveal themselves unless the force fields have been activated or there is a disturbance that significantly interferes with their plan. In the former case, they begin killing the invitees while people watch. In the latter case, they intervene to stop the disturbance (probably the PCs) as quickly as possible.

Reveal Show 'Em B to the players.

C

#### LIACH'S SQUARE

Located in an affluent residential neighborhood, the small square is enclosed on all sides by several apartment buildings. Three large entryways between the buildings provide access to the square from the city.

The only way in or out of the apartment buildings is through doors that lead into the square.

During the days leading up to the event, workers install mysterious numenera devices on both sides of each street exit. If questioned, they are closed-mouthed. The workers have a perfectly legal permit to build in the square. They don't know what the machines do or who their employers are (and they don't care). They just know they're getting a nice payment.

The devices are level 6 force field projectors. When installed on both sides of an exit and activated, each device produces a transparent force field that lasts for twenty minutes.

If the object KEY is here, it is hidden next to one of the projectors.

**GM Intrusion:** If the PCs do anything illegal while in Qi—like sabotage the installed devices in Liach's Square—or cause any kind of major disturbance, it's likely that they draw the attention of the Zhev peacekeeping automatons.

If you have time, read "More Details" on the next page for information and ideas to enhance this scenario.

#### MORE DETAILS

Qi, page 148 Zhev, page 268 Durkhal, page 149

Slime lurker: level 4,

health 30

Speed defense as level 3;

Read this section if you have time. If necessary, skim the section on Qi in the *Numenera* corebook to refresh your memory about the city.

#### LOWER QI

Qi is built on a number of different levels, with the upper classes living on the higher levels, and the lower classes living on the darker, lower levels. The early part of this scenario is likely to take the PCs into the lower regions of the city. This is where the cellar is located, and where they might encounter some muggers (or at least their lookout). Many of these places never see sunlight, and the air is choked with dust and soot. The buildings are made of grime-covered bricks. On the lowest level, many of the buildings have cellars and dank basements.

Pipes wind their way through the lower regions, carrying water to the upper levels and taking away sewage and waste. Creatures called slime lurkers by the locals dwell in and around the pipes on the lower levels, preying upon people and animals. The sudden appearance of a slime lurker would be a good GM intrusion in this part of town.

#### **UPPER QI**

The upper levels of Qi are well lit and filled with beautiful spires and lovely homes. Towers for airship and balloon docks are everywhere. The Zhev patrol the streets and sweep vagrants and other undesirables to the lower city. This all becomes more evident the closer one comes to the Durkhal, the city complex that includes the Amber Pope's holy palace.

#### THE SLIDIKIN

The GM should do all that she can to make the slidikin as inhuman, strange, and downright creepy as possible. Every move and gesture is a threat of violence, like a razor held disturbingly close to one's throat. Or eyeball.

When slidikin move, it is with an odd, disjointed rhythm, as if they're not entirely in sync with the flow of time everyone else experiences. Their limbs don't seem to obey the laws of reality, suddenly turning around "backward" to easily climb the wall of a building behind them while the slidikin's body still faces forward.

When the creatures speak, they do so with more than one mouth at a time, saying more



THE HIDEOUS GAME



than one thing, sometimes not always in the same language. When they attack, they make disturbing threats along the lines of, "I will show you what your own brain looks like, a piece at a time," or "I will lick your eyeballs when you're dead."

#### **RESEARCH AND INQUIRIES**

Unless the PCs have access to something like the datasphere, they are unlikely to find any knowledge of the slidikin or anything called "the Hideous Game." However, if they go to the Durkhal, speak with the Aeon Priests, and succeed at a difficulty 5 task to convince the bureaucrats that they are legitimate, after hours of talking to various people they are finally introduced to Thuari Dennilan, an Aeon Priest who knows the basics of the slidikin and has at least heard of the Hideous Game. She tries to find out everything the PCs know about it and offers to reward them if they learn more and bring her the information. The reward grows even bigger if they can stop whatever plans the slidikin have in Qi, for the creatures certainly mean the people of the city harm.

#### THE PCs GO TO THE AUTHORITIES

No one in the city has heard of the slidikin other than the Aeon Priest Thuari Dennilan. Anyone the PCs try to speak with will likely brush them off unless they provide concrete details or evidence. At best (a difficulty 4 persuasion task), the characters can get assurances from a human representative of the Zhev that there will be some kind of Zhev presence at the event in Liach's Square.

#### USING THIS IN A CAMPAIGN

The PCs might be recuperating in Qi after an arduous expedition or visiting on other business unrelated to any of these proceedings. The events of *The Hideous Game* are over quickly, and it's possible that the characters' actions (investigation, mostly) might coincide with the elements of another adventure taking place in the city at the same time.

#### FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Players who have been paying attention will realize that there were six slidikin at the beginning of the scenario, but only four make an appearance at the end. This means that even if the PCs took care of the slidikin in Liach's Square, at least two more are still out there. The Hideous Game will continue. Where and when will the slidikin appear again? There might not be any way to predict what the creatures will do, but PCs who choose to track them might uncover their next sadistic, horrific, and likely elaborate plot. Thuari Dennilan: level 4, all historical knowledge as level 5, all combat actions as level 2; has at least one defensive cypher



#### **SLIDIKIN**

Motive: The game

Movement: Long

other tools.

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Health: 22

Skulking from shadow to shadow, the slidikin dwell on the fringes of human society. They are bizarre creatures, their origins a complete mystery. While one might pass as a human from a distance, their chalk-white skin, lack of eyes or nose, and far-too-many mouths ensure that a close examination would prove them otherwise. In people's rare, brief, furtive, and frankly disturbing interactions with slidikin, they have made passing references to "the hideous game." This seems to be an incongruous competition among slidikin (and only slidikin) that involves dark deeds—theft, kidnapping, mutilation, and murder. (It likely involves other things as well, but no one knows what they are, focusing only on those activities that affect humanity.)

5 (15)

Slidikin hate memora (Ninth World Bestiary page 83) and vice versa, but no one knows why. Slidikin also appear to be terrified of philethis.



GM Intrusion: The slidikin runs away and around a corner. If the character follows it, the creature is gone. Is there a secret door? Did it disappear into the shadows? Did it climb up to the roof? It's nowhere to be seen. Modifications: Speed defense and stealth as level 6
Combat: Slidikin are likely to use weapons in combat, although they never wear armor, preferring to remain agile rather than encumbered.
Interaction: Talking with a slidikin can be infuriating. No matter what the situation, the slidikin, with its multiple, grating, whispered voices, speaks with

Environment: Human villages and towns

outlandish contempt for whomever it encounters, as if it knows a great many things that everyone else does not. It finds odd things (like physical threats) humorous, and many normal concepts (like justice or revenge) incomprehensible. It never tells anyone the nature of the game or anything of its own nature.

Use: A man stumbles out of a dark alleyway toward the PCs, blood running down his face. "The mouths," he whispers hoarsely. "The mouths." If the characters examine him, they see that his eyelids have been sliced off. He says that men—at least, he thought they were men at first—grabbed him the day before and held him in a dank cellar overnight, bound and gagged. They giggled and whispered among themselves the whole time. Then they mutilated him with knives and left him in the alley. He gives a frantic, fevered description of a slidikin.
Loot: A slidikin very likely carries 10100 shins and a cypher as well as a variety of knives and some poisons, knockout drugs, lockpicks, and

#### × 8 ×



Α Due to your lovely demeanor and gracious activities of the past year, we humbly request the honor of your delightful presence in Jiach's Equare on the ninth day of this month, at the exquisite time when the sun is highest above the glistening spires of glorious Qi. At this time, we hope to celebrate your value and place in the beautiful world we all have the good fortune to share.



























## NUMENERA GLIMMERS

Numenera Glimmers are inexpensive PDF-only products that allow us to respond to fans' desires for new material on the fly and let us delve deeper into the Ninth World, covering unusual and specialized topics that might not find a home in a larger publication.

Whether you're looking for new adventures and character options, Ninth World lore and culture, a cache of numenera devices, or just something a little weird, the datasphere has got you covered.

