

The Third Man Factor

*Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
—But who is that on the other side of you?
-T.S. Elliot*

Briefing

Some suit from god-knows what department has pulled you from your regular assignment to be a courier for a State's evidence package. They pulled rank, and your boss is spooked. It's hush-hush. What's weird is that they gave you the address to a biomedical storage company and a note. "Cylinder. Do not open." On the back are what you figure must be GPS coordinates. What the hell is this?

This contemporary Delta Green scenario is an introduction for 1 to 2 new players. It is designed for use with the new rules from the Agent's Handbook. It can be adapted for the 90s era of play with a few changes. The mission is designed as a road-trip (literally and figuratively) through Delta Green country where they will confront the unnatural, or in this case, share a seat right next to it. Further conflicts (outlined below) can elicit the tone and paranoia of Hitchcock's "North by Northwest." However, the central mystery is "The Cylinder" and the mysterious Third Man.

The Truth

Inside this metal cylindrical canister the is brain of former DG agent, "Shackleton" reported deceased on an opera in 1996. After a botched mission, his brain was scooped out by the Mi-Go, placed in the container to be taken to the stars, but a Delta Green raid canceled that trip. The canister was recovered by Majestic-12 only to go missing during the merger and re-legitimization of the two rival agencies. He was left on the shelf, as it were.

A few days ago, the canister's whereabouts crossed the desk of Program handler, Frank from Accounting. Frank wanted to avoid faction politics, so he activated two friendlies with no knowledge of the conspiracy. After collecting the canister, agents will drive all night and return it to a Delta Green research group.

The Third Man

What no one knows is that Shackleton has undergone a transformation inside the cylinder. Aware all these years, he developed unnatural powers of telepathy and mental projection. When the agents retrieve the canister they will receive a static shock, bonding with and waking Shackleton.

Shackleton yearns for freedom, but can never have it. He can only interact through the mind and visions. He has become an invisible presence both hindering and helping, of which agents will slowly become aware.

Shackleton is unnatural and dangerous, but should be sympathetic. Build empathy by having Shackleton ask about their bonds and lives. If they engage back, he will share that he hasn't really

"been anywhere for quite sometime;" he yearns to travel, looking wistfully into the night sky. This should play out like a back and forth role-play, slowly ratcheting up sanity tests and tension until someone finally breaks.

The revelation that Shackleton is inside the canister causes a Sanity test (1/1d6+1). Looking inside to find a human brain also requires a test (0/1d4). Shackleton becomes hostile and will unleash mental attacks on the agent.

The Mi-Go

The Mi-Go become alerted as Shackleton expends psychic energy to communicate. They intend to recover their lost passenger and take him on his long overdue voyage, beyond the stars. They will first try to collect him by sending a protomatter construct called Mr. Noyes to collect him. If he fails they will go themselves.

The Mi-Go will destroy anyone in their way. In their view Shackleton is their property and responsibility. They must take him someplace where only they can care for him. This is in part true, but the nature of that care is beyond knowing to Shackleton or the agents.

The Competition (Optional)

The agents are unlikely to be the only one's looking for the canister. If you don't want the scenario to just be focused on the agents and the Third Man, here are options for antagonists.

Old Enemies

As the intel came in, Frank asked his assistant, agent Grant to quietly into the matter for him. While gathering what little he could, he tipped off former MJ-12 scientist and die-hard now working in the private sector, Dr. Plumber. Plumber sees an opportunity to extract profitable technology from the canister. He sends mercenaries to acquire it and bring it to a company safe house. Plumber's history and former roll in MJ-12 is left up to the Handler. He could make a worthy recurring nemesis in future operas.

PISCES

PISCES becomes alerted to the canister's existence. The Insects from Shaggai hope it will yield valuable intel on Delta Green. They send one agent to intercept and retrieve the object. PISCES does not want to draw attention, so their operative, Agent Kent, will appear to help the agents until he can abscond with the canister. If you like you could have him show up and help them escape Kent. He would have the upper hand on the inexperienced agents except he is unaware of Shackleton.

Shackleton's telepathy detects the Shan puppeteer and will warn agents of the danger. Should Kent get ahold of the canister, Shackleton will drive the agents to fight. If Kent is killed, then the Shan will attempt to possess an agent. It will attack the mind forcing sanity checks as it eats away at the memories of a Bond, thus forcing the agent to Bond with the Insect from Shaggai. Shackleton's telepathic abilities can attack it's willpower, but there should be huge psychological consequences. If the Shan's willpower is reduced to zero, Shackleton destroys it in a psychic backlash.

Conclusions

The scenario is straightforward, but the destination can vary, especially if you integrate the Competition. Shackleton had no intention of being handed over to the Program for study. He will use his abilities to convince agents to not turn him over. If he becomes desperate, then he will try to drive an agent to their breaking point, then control them and escape. If all seems hopeless he may plead for the mercy of death.

He will not want to go with PISCES or Dr. Plumber and his associates. Shackleton's connection to the agents is strong enough that he may try to lead them to the safe house and attempt a rescue. It may be too late if they wait for backup or a full Delta Green cell.

He is rightly terrified of the Mi-Go. They did this to him and their intentions are unknowable and alien. Depending on how things pan out though, he could resign himself to this fate. Attempting to run away from all parties is impossible. The Mi-Go will eventually find him without protection and take him and anyone with him to someplace beyond the stars.

Given these alternatives he may agree to return to Delta Green's custody. His mental state and decisions fall to the Handler. In the end, the scenario boils down to these possible endings: Shackleton is returned to Delta Green custody for further study; the Competition (PISCES or Dr. Plumber) acquire the canister and exploit the technology; the Mi-Go reclaim the cylinder and possibly add an agent's brain to their collection; or the canister is destroyed ending Shackleton's suffering.

STATS

SHACKLETON: THE THIRD MAN

STR - CON - DEX - POW 19 INT 11 CHA 15

HP 1 Willpower 19

Skills: Bureaucracy 40%, Persuade 50%, HUMINT 67%, Unnatural 50%

Attacks: Attacks using Unnatural, Manipulation 1/1d8 SAN, POW defends.

Notes: Shackleton is a brain in a can. He's not hard to hit. The canister is bullet proof, but if opened he will be an easy kill. If his willpower is reduced to zero, his consciousness becomes inert.

Projection: Shackleton mentally projects himself into the agent's senses. He appears, next to them as if he was always there. They must make a Sanity Test (0/1d6). Successes ignores him as a passing figment, or at the GM's prerogative normalize his presence, pushing his otherness out their minds. Failure means they realize how unnatural he is and are shocked and sent reeling.

Manipulation: Shackleton can use the Unnatural to mentally attack and briefly control senses or motor functions of the target. Roll 1d4, reduce willpower by this amount and dictate the actions equal to the roll. This power can rewrite Shackleton into the target's story, creating a permanent Bond. When you attack, Shackleton spends 1d4 Willpower. If successful the result creates a bond with the player at that level. No other bonds are affected. This is a huge disadvantage, because all Sanity rolls become more damaging and dangerous.